ROBERT BIRD

SHEPPARD LEE, WRITTEN BY HIMSELF. VOL. II (OF 2)

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Bird R.

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Содержание

Robert Montgomery Bird
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BOOK IV (continued)

CONTAINING ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE FOLLY OF BRINGING UP CHILDREN

CHAPTER IV.
THE MISER'S CHILDREN

It will scarcely be supposed that, with the passion of covetousness gnawing at my heart, I had space or convenience for any other feeling. But Abram Skinner had loved his children; and to this passion I was introduced, as well as to the other. At first I was surprised that I should bestow the least regard upon them, seeing that they were no children of mine. I endeavoured to shake off the feeling of attachment, as an absurdity, but could not; in spite of myself, I found my spirit yearning towards them; and by-and-by, having lost my identity entirely, I could scarcely, even when I made the effort, recall the consciousness that I was *not* their parent in reality.

Indeed, the transformation that had now occurred to my spirit was more thorough than it had been in either previous instance; I could scarce convince myself I had not been born the being I represented; my past existence began to appear to my reflections only as some idle dream, that the fever of sickness had brought upon my mind; and I forgot that I was, or had been, Sheppard Lee.

Yes, reader, I was now Abram Skinner in all respects, and I loved his children, as he had done before me. In entering his body, I became, as I have mentioned repeatedly before, the subject of every peculiarity of being that marked the original possessor: without which, indeed, the great experiment my destiny permitted me to make of the comparative good and evil of different spheres of existence, must have been made in vain. What my prototype hated I was enforced to hate; what he loved I found myself compelled in like manner to love. While moving in the bodies of John H. Higginson and I. D. Dawkins, I do not remember that I experienced any affection for anybody; which happened, doubtless, because these individuals confined their affections to their own persons. Abram Skinner, on the contrary, loved his children; which I suppose was owing to their being the worst children that ever tormented a parent. He loved them, and so did I; he pondered with bitterness over the ingratitude of their tempers, and the profligacy of their lives, and I – despite all my attempts to the contrary – did the same. I forgot, at last, that I was not their parent, and my feelings showed me that I was; and I found in the anguish that attacked my spirit, when I thought of them, one of the modes in which Heaven visits with retribution the worshipper of the false god of the country. When the votary of Mammon has propitiated his deity, let him count the children he has sacrificed upon his altar. Avarice, as well as wrath, sows the storm only to reap the whirlwind.

I am growing serious upon this subject, but I cannot help it. This portion of my history dwells on my remembrance with gloom; it keeps me moralizing over the career of my neighbours. When I see or hear of a man who is bending all his energies to the acquisition of a fortune, and is already the master of his thousands, I ask, "What has become of his sons?" or, "What *will* become of them?"

With the affection for the children of Abram Skinner that took possession of my mind, came also a persuasion, exceedingly painful, that they were a triad of graceless, ungrateful reprobates; and, what was worse, there was something whispered within me that much, if not all, the evil of their lives and natures, was owing to the neglect in which their parent, while engrossed with the high thought of heaping up money, had allowed them to grow up. The consequences of this neglect I felt as if it had been my own act.

The first pang was inflicted by the girl Alicia, and I felt it keenly – not, indeed, that I had any particular parental affection for her, as doubtless I should have had, had she not run away so opportunely. On the contrary, a vague recollection of my amour, and the inconstancy of her temper, caused my feelings in relation to her to assume a very peculiar hue; so that I regarded her with sentiments due as much to the jilted lover as the injured father. But what chiefly afflicted me was the hint she had given in the postscript of her letter, warning me of the fatal call to be made upon me, within two months' space, to render up an account of my guardianship, and surrender into the hands of that detestable Sammy Wilkins, my late cousin, the rich legacy of her aunt Sally, which,

being chiefly in real estate, I – or rather my prototype before me – had, without anticipating such a catastrophe, managed so prudently that it was now worth more than double its original value. The thought filled me with such rage and phrensy, that, had she been twice my daughter, I should have rewarded her with execrations.

My quondam uncle, Mr. Samuel Wilkins of Wilkinsbury Hall, who, it seems, received the girl as well as he afterward did his daughter's husband, thought fit to pay me a visit, a week after my transformation, to confer with me on the subject; and receiving no satisfaction, for I was in a rage and refused to see him, sent me divers notes, proposing a reconciliation betwixt myself and his daughter-in-law; and these being cast into the fire, I received, in course of time, a letter from his lawyer, or his son Sammy's, in which I was politely asked what were my intentions in relation to settlement, and so forth, and so forth.

I received letters from the damsel also, but they went into the fire like the others; and my rage waxing higher and higher as the time of settlement drew nigh, I set myself to work to frame such a guardian's account as would materially lessen the amount of my losses.

But all was in vain; the married Alicia was at last of age, and all I could do was to fling the matter into the lawyers' hands, so as to keep the money, the dear money, in my own as long as possible.

My reader may think this was not a very handsome or reputable way of treating a daughter; but he must recollect I was in Abram Skinner's body. The matter was still in suit when I departed from my borrowed flesh; but I have no doubt the execrable Samuel Wilkins, Jr. got possession of the legacy, as well as ten times as much to the back of it.

But this, great as was the anguish the evil inflicted, was nothing to the pangs I suffered on account of the two boys, Ralph and Abbot. On these I showered – not openly, indeed, for I was crabbed enough of temper, but in my secret heart – all the affection such a parent could feel. But I showered it in vain; the seeds of evil example and neglect had taken root; the prospect of wealth had long since turned brains untempered by education and moral culture, and the parsimony of their parent only drove them into profligacy of a more demoralizing species; they were ruined in morals, in prospects, and in reputation; and while yet upon the threshold of manhood, they presented upon their brows the stamp of degradation and the warrant of untimely graves.

The younger, Abbot, had evidently been a favourite from his childhood up, his temper being fierce and imperious, yet with an occasional dash of amiableness, that showed what his disposition might have been, if regulated by a careful and conscientious parent. He possessed a fine figure, of which he was vain; and being of a gay and convivial turn, there was the stronger propensity to dissipation, and greater fear of the consequences. These were now lamentable enough; he was already beyond redemption – a sot, and almost a madman.

The elder brother was a young man, to all appearance, of a saturnine mood and staid habits; but this was in appearance only. He was the associate of the junior in all his scenes of frolic, and an actor in others of which, perhaps, Abbot never dreamed. A strong head and a spirit of craft enabled him to conceal the effect of excesses which sent his brother home reeling and raging with drunkenness. I knew his habits well; and I knew that, besides being in a fairer way to the grave – if not to the gallows – he was a hypocrite of the worst order; his gravity being put on to cover a temper both fiery and malicious, and his apparent correctness of habits being the mere cover to the most scandalous irregularities. He was a creature all of duplicity, and wo to the father who made him such!

The scene in the dying chamber of their father they never forgot, though, perhaps, I might have done so. It drove the younger from all attempts at pretended regard or concealment of his profligacy, and was, I believe, the cause of his final ruin. He absconded, out of mere shame, for a week, and then returned to put a bold or indifferent face upon the matter, and to show himself as regardless of respect as restraint.

The other, after concealing himself in like manner for a few days, came to me, apparently in great contrition of spirit, and almost persuaded me that his brutal conduct on that eventful evening

arose rather from grief than joy. He had been so much affected by my death, he assured me, as scarce to know what he did when swallowing a glass of brandy his brother gave him; that, he declared with half a dozen tears, had set him crazy, and he knew not what he had done – only he recollected something about going to the chamber, where, he believed, he had behaved very badly; for which he begged my forgiveness, and hoped I would not think his conduct was owing to any want of affection.

I had proof enough that the villain was telling me falsehoods, and I knew that if either should, in a moment of soberness and compunction, breathe a single sigh over my death-bed, he was not the one. In truth, they were both bad; both, perhaps, irreclaimable; but while the conduct of Abbot gave me most pain, that of Ralph filled me with constant terror. Nothing but the daily excitement of speculation and gain could have made tolerable an existence cursed by incessant griefs and forebodings. It may be supposed that I frequently took the young men to task for their excesses. I might as well have scolded the winds for blowing, or the waters for running. It is true that Ralph heard me commonly with great patience, and sometimes with apparent contrition; but at times a scowl came over his dark features that frightened me into silence; and once, giving way to his fierce temper, he told me that if there was any thing amiss or disreputable in his conduct, it was the consequence of mine; that I, instead of granting him the means for reasonable indulgence, and elevating him to the station among honourable and worthy men to which my wealth gave him a claim, and which he had a right to expect of me, had kept him in a state of need and vassalage intolerable to any one of his age and spirit.

As for Abbot, this kind of recrimination was a daily thing with him. I scarce ever saw him except when inflamed with drink; and on such occasions he was wont to demand money, which being denied, he would give way to passion, and load me with reproaches still more bitter of spirit and violent of expression than those uttered by Ralph. Nay, upon my charging him with being an abandoned profligate and ruined man, he admitted the fact, and swore that I was the author of his destruction; that my niggardliness had deprived him of the opportunities that gave other young men professions and independence; that I had brought him up in idleness and ignorance, and, by still refusing him his rights, was consigning him to infamy and an early grave.

Such controversies between us were common, and perhaps expedited the fate that was in store for him, as well as his brother. I thought in my folly to punish, and at the same time check his excesses, by denying him all supplies of money, and by refusing to pay a single debt he contracted. A deep gloom suddenly invested him; he ceased to return home intoxicated, but stalked into and out of the house like a spectre, without bestowing any notice upon me. The change frighted me; and, in alarm lest the difficulties under which he might be placed were driving him to desperation, I followed him to his chamber, with *almost* the resolution to relieve his wants, let them be what they might.

The absence of intoxication for several days in succession had induced me to hope he had broken through the accursed bondage of drink, were it only from rage and shame. But I was fatally mistaken. As I entered the apartment I saw him place upon the table a large case-bottle of brandy, which he had just taken from a buffet. He looked over his shoulder as I stepped in, and, without regarding me, proceeded to pour a large draught into a tumbler. His hand was tremulous, and, indeed, shook so much, that the liquor was spilt in the operation.

I was shocked at the sight, and struck dumb; seeing which he laughed, with what seemed to me as much triumph as derision, and said, "You see! This is the way we go it. Your health, father. Come, help yourself; don't stand on ceremony."

"*I*, Abbot!" said I, as he swallowed the vile potion; "have you neither respect nor shame? I never drank such poison in my life!"

"The more is the pity," muttered the young man, but rather as if speaking to himself than me; "I should have had the sooner and freer swing of it."

"You mean if it had killed me, as it is killing you," said I, pierced by the heartlessness of his expression. "Oh, Abbot! a judgment will come upon you yet!"

He stared me in the face, but without making a reply. Then pushing a chair towards me, he sat down himself, and deliberately filled his glass a second time.

"Abbot! for Heaven's sake," said I, wringing my very hands in despair, "*what* will tempt you to quit this horrid practice?"

"*Nothing*," said he; "you have asked the question a month too late. Look," he continued, pointing my attention again to his hand, shaking, as it held the bottle, as if under the palsy of age; "do you know what that means?"

"What does it mean?" said I, so confounded by the sight and his stolid merriment (for he laughed again while exposing the fruit of his degrading habit) that I scarce knew what I said.

"It means," said he, "that death is coming, to make equitable division betwixt Ralph and Alicia – unless the devil, after all, should carry them off before me; in which case you can build an hospital with your money."

He swallowed the draught, and then, leaning on the table, buried his face between his hands.

The sarcasm was not lost upon me, and the idea that he was about to become the victim of a passion from which he might be wrested by a sacrifice on my part, greatly excited my feelings.

"I will do any thing," said I; "*what* shall I do to save you? Oh, Abbot! can you not refrain from this dreadful indulgence? What shall I do?"

He leaped upon his feet, and eyed me with a look full of wildness.

"Pay my debts," he cried; "pay my debts, and make me independent; and I —*I'll try*."

"And what," said I, trembling with fear, "what sum will pay your debts?"

"Twenty thousand —*perhaps*," said he.

"Twenty thousand! what! twenty thousand dollars!" cried I, lost in confusion.

"You won't, then?" said the reprobate.

"Not a cent!" cried I, in a fury. "How came you to owe such a sum? Do you think I will believe you? How could you incur such a debt? What have you been doing?"

"Gambling, drinking, and so forth, and so forth, twenty times over."

He snatched up the bottle, and, locking it in the buffet, deposited the key in his pocket. Then seizing upon his hat, and stepping to where I stood, transfixed with grief and indignation, he said, – "You won't take the bargain, then?"

"Not a dollar, not a dime, not a cent!" said I.

"Not even to save my life, father?"

"Not a dollar, not a dime, not a cent!" I reiterated, incapable of saying another word.

"Farewell then," said he, "and good luck to you! It is a declaration of war, and now I'll keep no terms with you."

Then giving me a look that froze my blood, it was so furiously hostile and vindictive, he struck his hands together, rushed from the house, and I saw him no more for nearly a fortnight. I saw him no more, as I said; but coming home the following evening from the club, I found my strong-box broken open and rifled of the money that I left in it.

The sum was indeed but small, but the robbery had been perpetrated by my own son; and the reader, if he be a father, will judge what effect this discovery produced upon my mind. In good truth, I felt now that I was the most wretched of human beings, and was reduced nearly to distraction.

But this blow was but a buffet with the hand, compared with the thunder-bolt that fate was preparing to launch against my bosom. I cursed my miserable lot; yet it wanted one more stroke of misfortune to sever the chain with which avarice still bound me to my condition.

CHAPTER V.
THE FATE OF THE FIRSTBORN

On the eleventh day after the flight of Abbot, whom all my inquiries failed to discover, as I was walking towards the exchange, torn by my domestic woes, and by a threatened convulsion in stocks, which concerned me very nearly, I met one of my companions of the club, who, noting my disturbed countenance, drew me aside, and told me he was sorry I had got my foot into the fire; but the club had last night taken the matter into consideration, and agreed to stand by me, if it were possible.

All this was heathen Greek to me; and I told my friend I was in no trouble I knew of, and wanted no countenance from anybody.

"I am very glad to hear it," said he; "but what are you doing with so much paper in the market? That's no good sign, you'll allow!"

I started aghast, and he proceeded to inform me that he had himself seen two of my notes for considerable amounts, and had heard of others; and, finally, that he had just, parted with the president (an intimate friend of his) of a bank not a furlong off, who had asked divers questions as to the state of my affairs, and admitted there was paper of mine at that moment in the bank.

I was seized with consternation, assured him all such notes must be forgeries; and running with him to the bank, demanded to see any paper they had with my name to it. They produced two different notes for large amounts, which I instantly declared to be counterfeit; and then ran in search of others.

The hubbub created by this declaration was great, but the tumult in my mind was greater. A horrid suspicion as to the author of the forgeries entered my soul, and I became so deadly sick as to be unable to prosecute the inquisition further. My friend deposited me in a coach, and I was carried to my home, but in a condition more dead than alive. My suspicions were in a few hours dreadfully confirmed by my friend, who returned with the intelligence which he had acquired. The forger was discovered and arrested – it was the elder brother, Ralph Skinner.

Words cannot paint the agony with which I flew to the magistrate's office, and beheld the unfortunate youth in the hands of justice; but what was my horror to discover the extent and multiplicity of his frauds. The number of forgeries he had committed in his parent's name was indeed enormous; and it seems he had committed them with the intention of flying; for many of his guilty gains were found secreted on his person. But even after so much had been recovered, the residue to be refunded was appalling. The thought of making restitution drove me almost to a phrensy, while the idea of seeing him carried to jail, to meet the doom of a felon, was equally distracting. My misery was read on my face; and some one present, perhaps with a motive of humanity, cried out,

"Why persecute the young man? Here is his father, who acknowledges the notes to be genuine."

"Ah," said the magistrate, "does he so? Why, then we have had much foolish trouble for nothing."

I looked at the amount of the forgeries, a list of which some one put into my hands.

"It is false," I cried; "I will not pay a cent!"

I cast my eyes upon Ralph. He reached over a table behind which he stood, and waved his hand to and fro, as if, had he been nigh enough, he would have buffeted me on the face. His look was that of a demon, and he spat the foam from his lips, as if to testify the extremity of hatred.

"Let him go," I cried; "I will pay it all!"

"You can undoubtedly do so, if you will," said the magistrate, who had marked the malice that beamed from the visage of the young man; "but do not dream that that will discharge the prisoner from arrest, or from the necessity of answering the felony of which he now stands accused, before a court and jury. The extent of the forgeries, and the temper displayed by the accused, are such, that he must and shall abide the fruits of his delinquency. He stands committed – officer, remove him."

I heard no more; my brain spun round and round, and I was again carried insensible to my miserable dwelling.

CHAPTER VI.
THE CATASTROPHE OF A TRAGEDY OFTEN PERFORMED ON THE GREAT STAGE OF LIFE

It may be supposed that the misery now weighing me to the earth was as much as could be imposed upon me; but I was destined to find, and that before the night was over, that misery is only comparative, and that there is no affliction so positively great that greater may not be experienced. In the dead of the night, when my woes had at last been drowned in slumber, I was roused by feeling a hand pressing upon my bosom; and, starting up, I saw, for there was a taper burning on a table hard by, a man standing over me, holding a pillow in his hand, which, the moment I caught sight of him, he thrust into my face, and there endeavoured to hold it, as if to suffocate me.

The horror of death endowed me with a strength not my own, and the ruffian held the pillow with a feeble and trembling arm. I dashed it aside, leaped up in the bed, and beheld in the countenance of the murderer the features of the long missing and abandoned son, Abbot Skinner.

His face was white and chalky, with livid stains around the eyes and mouth, the former of which were staring out of their orbits in a manner ghastly to behold, while his lips were drawn asunder and away from his teeth, as in the face of a mummy. He looked as if horror-struck at the act he was attempting; and yet there was something devilish and determined in his air, that increased my terror to ecstasy. I sprang from the bed, threw myself on the floor, and, grasping his knees, besought him to spare my life. There seemed indeed occasion for all my supplications: his bloated and altered visage, the neglected appearance of his garments and person, and a thousand other signs, showed that the whole period of his absence had been passed in excessive toping, and the murderous and unnatural act which he meditated manifested to what a pitch of phrensy he had brought himself by the indulgence. As I grasped his knees, he put his hand into his bosom, and drew out a poniard, a weapon I had never before known him to carry; at the sight of which I considered myself a dead man. But the love of life still prevailing, I leaped up, and ran to a corner of the room, where I mingled adjurations and entreaties with loud screams for assistance. He stood as if rooted to the spot for a moment; then dropping his horrid weapon, he advanced a few paces, clasped his hands together, fell upon his knees, and burst into tears, and all the while without having uttered a single word. But now, my cries still continuing, he exclaimed, but with a most wild and disturbed look – "Father, I won't hurt you, and pray don't hurt *me*!"

By this time the housekeeper Barbara, having been alarmed by my outcries, came into the chamber; and her presence relieving me of the immediate fear of death, I gave vent to the horror that his unnatural attempt on my life justly excited, and thus made the woman acquainted with his baseness.

The poor old creature, who had always loved him, was greatly affected, especially when, in reply to my reproaches, he began to talk incoherently, admitting the fact, one instant attempting to justify it by preferring some strange and incoherent complaint, and the next assuring me, in the most piteous manner, that he would do me no harm. To Barbara's upbraidings he replied with a like inconsistency; and when she reproached him for meditating violence at such a moment, while I was mourning the baseness of his brother, he paid little attention to what she said, seeming not only ignorant of Ralph's delinquency, but apparently indifferent to it.

For this reason I began to fear his brain was touched; of which, indeed, I had soon the most fatal proof; for Barbara, having led him to his chamber, came back, assuring me that he was going mad, that his mind was already in a ferment, and, in a word, that that horrible distraction which sooner or later overtakes the confirmed drinker, was lighting the torch in his brain that could only go out

with life itself. A physician was sent for: our fears were but too just, and before dawn the miserable youth was raving distracted.

The day that followed was one of distraction, not only to the wretched Abbot, but to myself; and I remember it as a confused dream. The only thing that dwells on my recollection, apart from the outcries in Abbot's chamber and the tumult in my own heart, is, that some one who owed me a sum of money, due that day, came and paid it into my hands with great punctiliousness, and that I received and wrote the acquittance for it with as much accuracy as if nothing were the matter, though my thoughts were far from the subject before me.

At eleven o'clock at night a messenger came to me from the prison, and his news was indeed frightful. The wretched Ralph had just been discovered with his throat cut from ear to ear, having made way with himself in despair.

A few moments after I was summoned to the death-bed of his brother.

I shall never forget the horror of that young man's dissolution. He lay, at times, the picture of terror, gazing upon the walls, along which, in his imagination, crept myriads of loathsome reptiles, with now some frightful monster, and now a fire-lipped demon, stealing out of the shadows and preparing to dart upon him as their prey. Now he would whine and weep, as if asking forgiveness for some act of wrong done to the being man is most constant to wrong – the loving, the feeble, the confiding; and anon, seized by a tempest of passion, the cause of which could only be imagined, he would start up, fight, foam at the mouth, and fall back in convulsions. Once he sat up in bed, and, looking like a corpse, began to sing a bacchanalian song; on another occasion, after lying for many minutes in apparent stupefaction, he leaped out of bed before he could be prevented, and, uttering a yell that was heard in the street, endeavoured to throw himself from the window.

But the last raving act of all was the most horrid. He rose upon his knees with a strength that could not be resisted, caught up his pillow, thrust it down upon the bed with both hands, and there held it, with a grim countenance and a chuckling laugh. None understood the act but myself: no other could read the devilish thoughts then at work in his bosom. It was the scene enacted in the chamber of his parent – he was repeating the deed of murder – he was exulting, in imagination, over a successful parricide.

In this thought he expired; for while still pressing upon the pillow with a giant's strength, he suddenly fell on his face, and when turned over was a corpse. He gave but a single gasp, and was no more.

The horror of the spectacle drove me from the chamber, and I ran to my own to fall down and die; when the blessed thought entered my mind, that the wo on my spirit, the anguish, the distraction, were but a dream – that my very existence, as the miser and broken-hearted father, was a phantasm rather than a reality, since it was a borrowed existence – and that it was in my power to exchange it, as I had done other modes of being, for a better. I was Sheppard Lee, not Abram Skinner; and this was but a voluntary episode in my existence, which I was at liberty to terminate.

The thought was rapture. I resolved to sally out and fasten upon the first body I could find, being certain I could be in none so miserable as I had been in that I now inhabited. Nay, the idea was so agreeable, the execution of it seemed to promise such certain release from a load of wretchedness, that I resolved to attempt it without even waiting for morning.

I seized upon my hat and cloak, and, for fear I might stumble into some poor man's body, as I had done in the case of Dawkins's, I opened my strong-box, and clapped into my pockets all the money it contained, designing to take precautionary measures to transfer it along with my spirit to the new tenement. I seized upon the loaned money that had been repaid that day, together with a small sum that had been in the box before; and, had there been a million in the coffer, I should have nabbed it all, without much question of the right I actually possessed in it. The whole sum was small, not exceeding four hundred dollars, all being in bank-bills. I should have been glad of more, but was

too eager to exchange my vile casing, with its miseries, for a better, to think of waiting till bank-hours next day.

Taking possession, therefore, of this sum, and a dozen silver spoons that had been left in pledge a few days before, I hastened to put my plan into execution. I slipped down stairs, let myself out of the door as softly as if I had been an intruder, and set out, in a night of February, to search for a new body.

CHAPTER VII.
IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT A MAN MAY BE MORE USEFUL AFTER DEATH THAN WHILE LIVING

The reflection that I possessed the power (already thrice successfully exercised) to transfer my spirit, whenever I willed it, from one man's body to another, and so get rid of any afflictions that might beset me, was highly agreeable, and, under the present circumstances, consolatory. But there was one drawback to my satisfaction; and that was a discovery which I now made, that men's bodies were not to be had every day, at a moment's warning. This was the more provoking, as I knew there was no lack of them in the world, between eighty and ninety thousand men, women, and children having given up the ghost in the natural way that very day, whose corses would be on the morrow consigned to miserable holes in the earth, where they could and would be of no service to any person or persons whatever, the young doctors only excepted.

And here I cannot help observing, that it is an extremely absurd practice thus to dispose of – to squander and throw away, as I may call it – the hosts of human bodies that are annually falling dead upon our hands; whereas, with the least management in the world, they might be converted into objects of great usefulness and value.

According to the computation of philosophers, the population of the world may be reckoned in round numbers at just one thousand millions; of which number the annual mortality, at the low rate of three in a hundred, is thirty millions – and that without counting the extra million or two knocked on the head in the wars. Let us see what benefit might be derived from a judicious disposition of this mountain of mortality – I say mountain, for it is plain such a number of bodies heaped together would make a Chimborazo. The great mass of mankind might be made to subserve the purpose for which nature designed them, namely – to enrich the soil from which they draw their sustenance. According to the economical Chinese method, each of these bodies could be converted into five tons of excellent manure; and the whole number would therefore produce just one hundred and fifty millions of tons; of which one hundred and fifty thousand, being their due proportion, would fall to the share of the United States of America, enabling our farmers, in the course of ten or twelve years, to double the value of their lands. This, therefore, would be a highly profitable way of disposing of the mass of mankind. Such a disposition of their bodies would prove especially advantageous among American cultivators in divers districts, as a remedy against bad agriculture, and as the only means of handing down their fields in good order to their descendants. Such a disposition of bodies should be made upon every field of victory, so that dead heroes might be made to repair some of the mischiefs inflicted by live ones. The English farmers, it is well known, made good use of the bones left on the field of Waterloo; and though they would have done much better had they carried off the flesh with them, they did enough to show that war may be reckoned a good as well as an evil, and a great battle looked upon as a public blessing. A similar disposition (to continue the subject) of their mortal flesh might be, with great propriety, required, in this land, of all politicians and office-holders, from the vice-president down to the county collector; who, being all patriots, would doubtless consent to a measure that would make them of some use to their country. As for the president, we would have him reserved for a nobler purpose; we would have him boiled down to soap, according to the plan recommended by the French chymists, to be used by his successor in scouring the constitution and the minds of the people.

In this manner, I repeat, the great bulk of human bodies could be profitably appropriated; but other methods should be taken with particular classes of men, who might claim a more distinguished and canonical disposition of their bodies. The rich and tender would esteem it a cruelty to be disposed of in the same way with the multitude. I would advise, therefore, that their bodies should be converted

into *adipocire*, or spermaceti, to be made into candles, to be burnt at the tops of the lamp-posts; whereby those who never shone in life might scintillate as the lights of the public for a week or two after. Their bones might be made into rings and whistles, for infant democrats to cut their teeth on.

The French and Italian philosophers, as I have learned from the newspapers, have made sundry strange, and, as I think, useful discoveries, in relation to the practicability of converting the human body into different mineral substances. One man changes his neighbour's bones into fine glass; a second turns the blood into iron; while a third, more successful still, transforms the whole body into stone. If these things be true, and I have no reason to doubt them, seeing that I found them, as I said before, in the newspapers, they offer us new modes of appropriation, applicable to the bodies of other interesting classes. Lovers might thus be converted into jewels, which, although false, could be worn with less fear of losing them than happens with living inamoratos; or, in case of extreme grief on the part of the survivers, into looking-glasses, where the mourners would find a solace in the contemplation of their own features. The second process, namely, the conversion of blood into iron, would be peculiarly applicable in the case of soldiers too distinguished to be cast into corn-fields; and, indeed, nothing could be more natural than that those whose blood we buy with gold, should pay us back our change in iron. The last discovery could be turned to equal profit, and would do away with the necessity of employing statuaries in all cases where their services are now required. But I would confine the process of petrifaction to those in whom Nature had indicated its propriety by beginning the process herself. None could with greater justice claim to have their bodies turned into stone, than those whose hearts were of the same material; and I should propose, accordingly, that such a transformation of bodies should be made only in the case of tyrants, heroes, duns, and critics.

But this subject, though often reflected on, I have had no leisure to digest properly. For which reason, begging the reader's pardon for the digression, I shall now leave it, and resume my story.

CHAPTER VIII.
SHEPPARD LEE'S SEARCH FOR A BODY. – AN UNCOMMON INCIDENT

I was provoked, I say, to think there were so many millions of dead bodies thrown away every year, for which I, in the greatest of my difficulties, should be none the better. Such was the extremity to which I was reduced, that I should have been content to change conditions with a beggar.

It was a night in February. The day had been uncommonly fine, with a soft southern air puffing through the streets; the frost was oozing from the pavement, and the flags – I beg their pardon, the bricks – were floating in the yellow mud, so that one walked as if upon a foundation of puddings. Such had been the state of things in the day; such also as late as at nine o'clock P. M.

But it was now eleven; the wind had chopped round to the northwest and northeast, and perhaps some half a dozen other points beside, for it seemed to blow in all directions, and the thermometer was galloping downward towards zero. A savage snow-storm had just set in, and with such sharp and piercing gusts of wind, and such fierce rattling of hail, that, had not my mind been in a ferment, I should have hesitated to expose myself to its fury. But I reflected that I was flying from wo and terror; and the hope of diving into some body that might introduce me to a life of sunshine, rendered me insensible to the rigours of the tempest.

Having stumbled about in the snow for a while, I began to inquire of myself whither I was going; and the answer, or rather the want of an answer, somewhat confounded me. Where was I to look for a dead body, at such a time of night? It occurred to me I had better refer to a newspaper, and see what persons had lately died in town and were yet unburied. I stepped accordingly into a barber's shop, that happened to be open, and snatched up an evening paper. The first paragraph I laid my eyes on contained an account of the forgeries of my son, Ralph Skinner. It was headed *Unheard-of Depravity*, and it blazoned, in italics and capitals, the crime, the unnatural crime of committing frauds in the name of a father.

The shock with which I beheld the fatal publication renewed my horror, and sharpened my desire to end it. I threw down the paper, without consulting the column of obituaries, and ran towards the Hospital, where, it appeared to me, I should certainly find one or more bodies which the doctors had no longer occasion for. But my visit was at a highly unseasonable hour, and the porter, being knocked out of a comfortable nap, got up in an ill humour. "Whose cow's dead *now*?" I heard him grumble from his lodge – "I wonder people can't break their necks by daylight!"

But my neck was not broken; and he listened to my eager inquiry – "whether there were no dead bodies in the house?" – with rage and indignation.

"I tell you what, mister," said he, "we takes no mad people in here, except they comes the regular way."

And with that he shut the door in my face, leaving me to wonder at his want of civility.

But the air was growing more frigid every moment, and the hour was waxing later and later. I ran to the Alms-house, not doubting, as that was a more democratic establishment, that I should be there received with greater respect. But good-breeding is not a whit more native to a leather shirt than to a silk stocking. My Cerberus here was cut from the same flint as the other; his civility had been learned in the same school, and his English studied from the same grammar.

"I tell you what, uncle Barebones," said he, without waiting to be questioned, "we takes no paupers here, except they comes with an order."

And so saying, he slapped to the door with an energy that dislodged from the roof of his den a full hundred weight or more of snow, which fell in my face, and had wellnigh smothered me.

The case began to look desperate; but the difficulty of finding what I wanted only rendered my wits more active. I resolved to run to one of the medical schools, make my way into its anatomical repositories, and help myself to the best body I could find; for, indeed, I was in such a rage of desire to be released from my present tenement, that I did not design to stand upon trifles.

I set out accordingly, with this object in view; but fate willed I should seek my fortune in another quarter.

The storm had by this time begun to rage with uncommon violence; the winds were blowing like so many buglers and trumpeters on a militia-day, and the snow that had already fallen was whisked up every moment from the ground, and driven back again into the air, to mingle in contention with that which was falling. The atmosphere was thickened, or rather wholly displaced, by the whirling particles, so that, in a short time, the wayfarer could neither see nor breathe in the white chaos around him. It was, in truth, a savage, inclement night. The watchman betook him to his box, to snooze away the hours in comfort; the lamps went out, being of a spirit still more economical than their founders, and thinking, with great justice, that the streets which could do with them, could do equally well without them; the dogs were no longer heard yelping at the corners; and the pigs – the only spectres of Philadelphia – that run squeaking and gibbering up and down the streets in the night, to vanish at early cock-crowing, provided the hog-catchers are in commission, were one by one retreating to their secret strongholds, leaving the street to solitude, the snow-storm, and me.

I plodded on as well as I could, and with such effect, that, after a quarter hour's trudging, I knew not well whither, I stopped at last, I knew as little where. Instead of being in the heart of the city, as I supposed, I found myself somewhere in the suburbs, wedged fast in a snow-drift. One single lamp, and one single wick of that single lamp, had escaped the puffs of the tempest; it shone from aloft, through the rack of snow, like a fire-fly in a fog, dividing its faint beam betwixt my frozen visage and a low open shed hard by, the only objects, beside itself, that were visible.

I perceived that I was lost; and being more than half dead with cold, I dragged myself into the shed, to shelter me from the fury of the storm, and lament the ill fate that attended my efforts.

As I stepped into the wretched hole, I stumbled over a man lying coiled up on the ground, and so exposed to the air that his legs were already heaped over with snow. There was just light enough to discern a black jug lying broken at his side, from which arose the odour of corn-juice, but by no means of the true Monongahela savour.

I was struck by the fellow's appearance; he had evidently been lying there all the evening; the stumble I had made over him did not disturb him in the least, and my hand chancing to touch his face, I found it could as marble. I perceived he was dead; a discovery that filled me with uncommon joy; for my eagerness to change my condition was such, that I only saw in him a body to be taken possession of, without reading in the broken jug, and the miserable corner in which its victim had breathed his last, the newer wretchedness and degradation upon which I was rushing. Such is the short-sightedness of discontent; such the folly of the man who deems himself the unluckiest of his species.

With a trembling hand I thrust into the pockets of the corse the money and the silver spoons I had brought with me, being so far prudent that I was resolved not to trust the transfer of such valuables to my new body to accident. This being accomplished, I uttered the wish that had thrice served my turn before.

I wished, however, in vain; I muttered the charm a dozen times over, but with no more effect than if I had pronounced it to the lamp-post. The body lay unmoved, and I remained unchanged.

I became horribly disconcerted; a fear seized me that my good angel, if I had ever had one, had deserted me; or that the devil, if it was from him I derived my power of passing from body to body, had suddenly left me in the lurch; – in a word, that I had consumed all my privileges of transformation, and was chained to the body of Abram Skinner for life.

I beat my breast in despair, and then, changing from that to wrath, I began to belabour the ribs of the dead man with all the strength of my foot, as if he were answerable for my disappointment.

Perhaps, indeed, the reader will think that he *was*; for at the third kick the corpse became animated, and to my astonishment rose upon its feet, saying, in accents tolerably articulate, though somewhat thick and tumultuous, "I say, Charlie, odd rabbit it, none on your jokes now, and none on your takin of folks up; 'cause how, folks is not half so drunk as you suppose. And so good night, and let's have no more words about it, and I'll consider you werry much of a gentleman."

With these words the corpse picked up that fragment of the jug that had the handle to it, leaving the others, as well as his hat, behind him; and staggering out of the shed, he began to walk away. I was petrified; he was stalking off with my money, and a dozen of Mrs. Smith's silver spoons!

"You villain!" said I, running after him, "give me back my property."

"I'm a free man," said the sot; "I'm no man's property. And so, Charlie, don't go for to disturb me, for I knows my way home as well as anybody."

"But the four hundred dollars and the silver spoons," said I, seizing him by the shoulders, and endeavouring to empty the pockets I had but a moment before filled. "If you resist, you rogue, I'll put you in jail."

"I won't go to jail for no Charlie in the liberty," said the man of the jug, who to the last moment seemed to have no other idea than that he had fallen into the hands of a guardian of the night, and was in danger of being introduced to warmer quarters than those he was leaving. He spoke with the indignation of a freeborn republican, who felt his rights invaded, and was resolute to defend them; and, lifting up the fragment of his jug, he suddenly bestowed it upon my head with such good-will that I was felled to the earth. He took advantage of my downfall to decamp, carrying with him the treasure with which I had so bountifully freighted him. I pursued him as well as I could, calling upon the watch for assistance, and shouting murder and robbery at the top of my voice. But all was in vain; the watch were asleep, or I had wandered beyond their jurisdiction; and after a ten minutes' chase I found myself more bewildered than before, and the robber vanished with his plunder.

CHAPTER IX.
IN WHICH THE AUTHOR MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A PHILANTHROPIST

I should have cursed my simplicity in mistaking a drunkard for a dead man; but I had other evils to distress me besides chagrin. I was lost in a snow-storm, fainting with fatigue, shivering with cold, and afar from assistance, there not being a single house in sight. It was in vain that I sought to recover my way; I plunged from one snow-bank into another; and I believe I should have actually perished, had not succour arrived at a moment when I had given over all hopes of receiving it.

I had just sunk down into a huge drift on the roadside, where I lay groaning, unable to extricate myself, when a man driving by in a chair, hearing my lamentations, drew up, and demanded, in a most benevolent voice, what was the matter.

"Who art thou, friend?" said he, "and what are thy distresses? If thou art in affliction, peradventure there is one nigh at hand who will succour thee."

"I am," said I, "the most miserable wretch on the earth."

"Heaven be praised!" said the stranger, with great devoutness of accent; "for in that case I will give thee help, and the night shall not pass away in vain. Yea, verily, I will do my best to assist thee; for it is both good and pleasant, a comeliness to the eye and a refreshment to the spirit, to do good deeds among those who are truly wretched."

"And besides," said I, "I am sticking fast in the snow, and am perishing with cold."

"Be of good heart, and hold still for a moment, and I will come to thy assistance."

And with that honest Broadbrim (for such I knew by his speech he must be) descended from the chair, and helped me out of the drift; all which he accomplished with zeal and alacrity, showing not more humanity, as I thought, than satisfaction at finding such a legitimate object for its display. He brushed the snow from my clothes, and perceiving I was shivering with cold, for I had lost my cloak some minutes before, he transferred one of his own outer garments, of which, I believe, he had two or three, to my shoulders, plying me all the time with questions as to how I came into such a difficulty, and what other griefs I might have to afflict me, and assuring me I should have his assistance.

"Hast thou no house to cover thy nakedness?" he cried; "verily, I will find thee a place wherein thou shalt shelter thyself from snow and from cold. Art thou suffering from lack of food? Verily, there is a crust of bread and the leg of a chicken yet left in my basket of cold bits, and thou shalt have them, with something further hereafter. Hast thou no family or friends? Verily, there are many humane persons of my acquaintance who will, like myself, consider themselves as thy brothers and sisters. Art thou oppressed with years as well as poverty? Verily, then thou hast a stronger claim to pity, and it shall be accorded thee."

He heaped question upon question, and assurance upon assurance, with such haste and fervour, that it was some minutes before I could speak. I took advantage of his first pause to detail the latest, and, at that moment, the most oppressive of my griefs.

"I have been robbed," I cried, "of four hundred dollars, and a dozen silver spoons, by a rascal I found lying drunk under a shed. But I'll have the villain, if it costs me the half of his plunder, and – "

"Be not awroth with the poor man," said my deliverer. "It was a wickedness in him to rob thee; but thou shouldst reflect how wickedness comes of misery, and how misery of the inclemency of the season. Be merciful to the wicked man, as well as to the miserable; for thereby thou showest mercy to him who is doubly miserable. But how didst thou come by four hundred dollars and a dozen silver spoons? Thou canst not be so poor as to prove an object of charity?"

"No," said I, "I am no beggar. But I won't be robbed for nothing."

"Verily, I say unto thee again, be not awroth with the poor man. Thou shouldst reflect, if thou wert robbed, how far thou wast thyself the cause of the evil; for, having four hundred dollars about thee, thou mightst have relieved the poor creature's wants; in which case thou wouldst have prevented both a loss and a crime – the one on thy part, the other on his. Talk not, therefore, of persecuting the poor man; hunt him up, if thou canst, administer secretly to his wants, and give him virtuous counsel; and then, peradventure, he will sin no more."

I was struck by the tone and maxims of my deliverer; they expressed an ardour of benevolence, an enthusiasm of philanthropy, such as I had never dreamed of before. I could not see his face, the night being so thick and tempestuous; but there was a complacency, a bustling self-satisfaction in his voice, that convinced me he was not only a good, but a happy man. I regarded him with as much envy as respect; and a comparison, which I could not avoid mentally making, betwixt his condition and my own, drew from me a loud groan.

"Art thou hurt?" said the good Samaritan. "I will help thee into my wheeled convenience here, and take thee to thy home."

"No," said I, "I will never go near that wretched house again."

"What is it that makes it wretched?" said the Quaker.

"You will know, if you are of Philadelphia," I replied, "when I tell you my name. I am the miserable Abram Skinner."

"What! Abram Skinner, the money-lender?" said my friend, with a severe voice. "Friend Abram, I have heard of thy domestic calamities, and verily I have heard of those of many others, who laid them all at thy doors, as the author and cause thereof. Thou art indeed the most wretched of men; but if thou thinkest so thyself, then is there a hope thou mayst be yet restored to happiness. Thou hast made money, but what good hast thou done with it? thou hast accumulated thy hundreds, and thy thousands, and thy tens of thousands – but how many of thy fellow-creatures hast thou given cause to rejoice in thy prosperity? Truly, I have heard much said of thy wealth, and thy avarice, friend Abram; but, verily, not a word of thy kind-heartedness and charity: and know, that goodness and charity are the only securities against the ills, both sore and manifold, that spring from groaning coffers. I say to thee, friend Abram, hast thou ever given a dollar in alms to the poor, or acquitted a single penny of obligation to the hard-run of thy customers?"

My conscience smote me – not, however, that I felt any great remorse for not having thrown away my money in the way the Quaker meant: but his words brought a new idea into my mind. It was misery on the one hand, and the hope of arriving at happiness on the other, which had spurred me from transformation to transformation. Each change had, however, been productive of greater discontent than the other; and the woes with which I was oppressed in my three borrowed bodies, had been even greater than those that afflicted me in my own proper original casing. It was plain that I had not exercised a just discretion in the selection of bodies, since I had taken those of men whose modes of existence did not dispose to happiness. What mode of existence then was most likely to secure the content I sought? Such, I inferred from the Quaker's discourse, as would call into operation the love of goodness and of man – such as would cause to be cultivated the kindly virtues unknown to the selfish – such as would lead to the practice of charity and general philanthropy. I was grieved, therefore, that I had entered so many bodies for nothing; my conscience accused me of a blunder; and I longed to enter upon an existence of virtue; not that I had any great regard for virtue itself, but because I valued my own happiness. Had my deliverer chanced to break his neck while discoursing to me, I should have reanimated his corse, to try my hand at benevolence. As for being good and charitable in the body I then occupied, I felt that it was impossible: the impulse pointed to another existence.

The Quaker's indignation soon abated; he looked upon my silence as the effect of remorse, and the idea of converting me into an alms-giver and a friend of the poor, like himself, took possession of his imagination, and warmed his spirit. By such a conversion his philanthropic desires would be doubly gratified; it would make *me* happy, and, as I was a rich man, some hundreds of others also. He

helped me into the chair, and driving slowly towards the city, attempted the good work by describing the misery so prevalent in the suburbs, and dilating with uncommon enthusiasm upon the delight with which every act of benevolence would be recorded in my own bosom.

It seems that he was returning from a mission of charity in one of the remotest districts, where he had relieved the necessities of divers unhappy wretches; and, he gave me to understand, it was his purpose to make one more charitable visitation before returning home, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour and the fury of the tempest. And this visit he felt the more urged to make, since it would afford a practical illustration of his remarks, and show how doubly charity was blessed, both to the giver and receiver.

"Thou shalt see," said he, "even with thine own eyes, what power he that hath money hath over the afflictions of his race – what power to dry the tear of the mourning, and to check the wicked deeds of the vicious. He that I will now relieve is what thou didst foolishly call thyself – to wit, the most miserable of men; for he is both a beggar and a convicted felon, having but a few days since been discharged from the penitentiary, where he had served out his three years, for, I believe, the third time in his life."

"Surely," said I, "he is then a reprobate entirely unworthy pity."

"On the contrary," said the philanthropist, "he is for that reason the more to be pitied, since all regard him with distrust and abhorrence, and refuse him the relief without which he must again become a criminal: the very boys say to him, 'Get up, thou old jail-bird;' and men and women hoot at him in the streets. Poverty made him a criminal, and scorn has hardened his heart; yet is he a man with a soul; and verily thou shalt see how that soul can be melted by the breath of compassion. In this little hovel we shall find him," said the Quaker, drawing up before a miserable frame building, which was of a most lonely aspect, and in a terrible state of dilapidation, the windows being without shutters and glasses, and even the door itself half torn from its hinges.

"It is a little tenement that belongeth to me," said my friend; "and here I told him he might shelter him, until I could come in person and relieve him. A negro-man whom I permitted to live here for a while did very ungratefully, that is to say, very thoughtlessly – destroy the window-shutters, and other loose work, for fire-wood, I having forgotten to supply him with that needful article, and he, poor man, being too bashful to acquaint me with his wants. Verily I do design to render it more comfortable; but in these hard times one cannot find more money than sufficeth to fill the mouths of the hungry. Descend, friend Abram, and let us enter. I see the poor man hath a fire shining through the door; this will warm thy frozen limbs, while the sound of his grateful acknowledgments will do the same good office for thy spirit."

CHAPTER X.
CONTAINING AN AFFECTING ADVENTURE WITH A VICTIM OF THE LAW

My benevolent friend, leaving his horse standing at the door, led the way into the hovel, the interior of which was still more ruinous than the outside. It consisted of but a single room below, with a garret above. A meager fire, which furnished the only light, was burning on the hearth, to supply which the planks had been torn from the floor, leaving the earth below almost bare. There was not a single article of furniture visible, save an old deal table without leaves, a broken chair, and a tattered scrap of carpet lying near the fire, which seemed to have served as both bed and blanket to the wretched tenant.

"How is this?" said the Friend, in surprise. "Verily I did direct my man Abel to carry divers small comforts hither, which have vanished, as well as the poor man, John Smith."

John Smith, it seems, was the name of the beneficiary, and that convinced me he was a rogue. I ventured to hint to our common friend, that John Smith, having disposed of those "small comforts" he spoke of to the best advantage, was now engaged seeking others in some of our neighbours' houses; and that the wisest thing we could do in such a case would be to take our departure.

"Verily," said my deliverer, with suavity, "it is not possible John can do the wicked things thou thinkest of; for, first, it is but three days since he left the penitentiary, and secondly, I sent him by my helper and friend, Abel Snipe, sufficient eatables to supply him a week; so that he could have no inducement to do a wicked thing. Still it doth surprise me that he is absent; nevertheless, we will tarry a little while, lest peradventure he should return, and be in trouble, with none to relieve him. It wants yet ten minutes to midnight," continued the benevolent man, drawing out a handsome gold watch, "and five of these at least we can devote to the poor creature."

I was about to remonstrate a second time, when a step was heard approaching at a distance in the street.

"Peradventure it is John himself," said my friend; "and peradventure it will be better thou shouldst step aside into yonder dark corner for an instant, that thou mayst witness, without restraining by thy presence, the feelings of virtue that remain in the spirit, even when tainted and hardened by depravity."

I crept away, as I was directed, to a corner, where I might easily remain unobserved, the room being illumined only by the fire, and that consisting of little besides embers and ashes. From this place I saw Mr. John Smith as he entered, which he declined doing until after he had peeped suspiciously into the apartment, and been summoned by the voice of his benefactor.

He was as ill-looking a dog as I had ever laid eyes on, and his appearance was in strange contrast with that of his benevolent patron. The latter was a tall and rawboned man of fifty, with an uncommonly prepossessing visage; rather lantern-jawed, perhaps, but handsome and good-natured. The other was a slouch of a fellow, short of stature, but full of fat and brawn, with bow legs, gibbon arms, and a hang-dog visage. He sidled up to the fire hesitatingly, and, indeed, with an air of shame and humility; while the philanthropist, laying his watch upon the table, extended his hand towards him.

"Be of good heart, friend John," he said; "I come, not to reproach thee for thy misdeeds, but to counsel thee how thou shalt amend them, and restore thyself again to the society of the virtuous."

"'Es, sir," grumbled John Smith, dodging his head in humble acknowledgment, rubbing his hands for warmth over the fire, and casting a sidelong look at his benefactor. "Werry good of you, sir; shall ever be beholden. Werry hard times for one what's been in the penitentiary – takes away all one's repurtation; and, Lord bless us, sir, a man's but a ruined man when a man hasn't no repurtation."

And with that worthy John drew his sleeve over his nose, which convinced me he was not so much of a rascal as I thought him.

"John, thou hast been but as a sinner and a foolish man."

"'Es, sir," said John, with another rub of his sleeve at his nose; "but hard times makes hard work of a poor man. Always hoped to mend and be wirtuous; but, Lord bless us, Mr. Longstraw (beg pardon – can't think of making so free to say friend to such a great gentleman), one can't be wirtuous with nothing to live on."

"Verily, thou speakest, in a measure, the truth," said my friend; "and I intend thou shalt now be put in some way of earning an honest livelihood."

"'Es, sir," said John; "and sure I shall be werry much beholden."

But it is not my intention to record the conversation of the worthy pair. I am writing a history of myself, and not of other people; and I therefore think it proper to pursue no discourses in which I did not myself bear a part. It is sufficient to say, that my deliverer said a thousand excellent things in the way of counsel, which the other received very well, and many indicative of a disposition to be charitable, which Mr. John Smith received still better; and in the end, to relieve the pressing wants of the sufferer, which Mr. John Smith feelingly represented, drew forth a pocketbook, and took therefrom a silver dollar; at the sight of which, I thought, Mr. John Smith looked a little disappointed. Nay, it struck me that the appearance of the pocketbook, ancient and ill-looking as it was, had captivated his imagination in a greater degree than the coin. I had before observed him steal several affectionate looks towards the gold watch lying on the table, which now, however, the sight of the well-thumbed wallet seemed to have driven from his thoughts entirely. Nevertheless, he received the silver dollar with many thanks, and with still more the assurance that the philanthropist would procure him employment on the morrow; and Mr. Longstraw's eyes, as he turned to beckon me from the corner, began to twinkle with the delight of self-approbation.

I was myself beginning to feel a sentiment of pleasure, and to picture to my mind the unfortunate felon, converted, by a few words of counsel, and still fewer dollars of charity, into an honest and worthy member of society, when – oh horror of horrors! – the repenting convict suddenly snatched up a brand from the fire, and discharged it, with a violence that would have felled an ox, full upon the head of his patron.

The sparks flew from the brand over the whole room, and my friend dropped upon the floor on his face, followed by the striker, who, seizing upon his cravat, twisted it tightly round the unfortunate man's throat, thus completing by strangulation the murder more than half accomplished by the below.

The whole affair was the work of an instant; and had I possessed the will or courage to interfere, I could not have done so in time to arrest the mischief. But, in truth, I had not the power to stir; horror and astonishment chained me to the corner, where I stood as if transformed to stone, unable even to vent my feelings in a cry. I was seized with a terrible apprehension on my own account; for I could not doubt that the wretch who would thus murder a benefactor for a few dollars, would have as little hesitation to despatch me, who had witnessed the deed. I feared every moment lest the villain should direct his eye to the corner in which I stood, separated from him only a few yards; but he was too busy with his horrid work to regard me; and, terrified as I was, I looked on in safety while my deliverer was murdered before my eyes.

How long Mr. John Smith was at his dreadful work I cannot say; but I saw him, after a while, relax his grasp from his victim's throat, and fall to rummaging his pockets. Then, leaping up, he seized upon the watch, and clapped it into his bosom, saying, with a most devilish chuckle and grin,

"Damn them 'ere old fellers what gives a man a dollar, and preaches about wirtue! I reckon, old Slabsides, there's none on your people will hang me for the smash. Much beholden to you for leaving the horse and chair; it makes all safer."

With these words the wretch slipped out of the hovel, and a moment after I heard the smothered roll of the vehicle as it swept from the door.

CHAPTER XI.
IN WHICH THE PLOT THICKENS, AND THE TRAGEDY GROWS DEEPER

I supposed that Mr. John Smith had taken himself away with as much speed as was consistent with the strength of his horse and the safety of his bones, and I recovered from the fears I had entertained on my own account. I crept up to the philanthropist to give him assistance, if such could be now rendered. But it was too late; he was already dead: Mr. John Smith had not taken his degrees without proper study in his profession; and I must say that his practice on the present occasion did not go far to confirm me in the love of benevolence.

Nevertheless, the appearance of the defunct threw my mind into a ferment. I had been hunting a body, and now I had one before me; I had come to believe that, if I wished for happiness, I must get possession of one whose occupant had previously been happy; and I had seen enough of the deceased to know that he had been an uncommonly comfortable and contented personage.

The end of all this was a resolution, which I instantly made, to take advantage of the poor man's misfortune, and convert his body to my own purposes. I had seen him for the first time that night; I did not remember ever to have heard his name mentioned before; and I consequently knew nothing of him beyond what I had just learned. Where he lived, who were his connexions, what his property, &c. &c., were all questions to which I was to find answers thereafter. It appeared to me that a philanthropist of his spirit and age (the latter of which I judged to be about fifty) could not but be very well known, and that all I should have to do, after reanimating his body, would be to seek the assistance of the first person I should find, and so be conducted at once to the gentleman's house; after which all would go well enough. But, in truth, I took but little time for reflection; or perhaps I should not have been in such a hurry to attempt a transformation. A little prudence might have led me to inquire into the consequences of the change, inferred from the condition of the body. Suppose his scull should prove to be broken; who was to stand the woes of trepanning? I do say, it would have been wiser had I thought of *that*– but unluckily I did not: I was in too great a hurry to think of any thing save the transformation itself; and the result was, that I had a lesson on the demerits of leaping before looking, which I think will be of service to me for the remainder of my life, as it might be to the reader, could the reader be brought to believe that that experience is good for any thing, which costs nothing.

My resolution was quickened by a step which I heard approaching along the street. "It is a watchman," thought I to myself: "I will jump into the body and run out for assistance."

I turned to the defunct.

"Friend Longstraw," said I, "or whatever your name is, if you are really dead, I wish to occupy your body."

That moment I lost all consciousness. The reader may infer the transfer of spirit was accomplished.

And so it was. I came to my senses a few moments after, just in time to find myself tumbling into a hole in the earth beneath the floor of the hovel, with Mr. John Smith hard by, dragging to the same depository the mortal frame I had just deserted. I perceived at once the horrible dilemma in which I was placed; I was on the point of being buried, and, what was worse, of being buried alive!

"I conjure and beseech thee, friend John Smith," I cried – but cried no more. The villain had just reached the pit, dragging the body of the late Abram Skinner. He was startled at my voice; but it only quickened him in his labours. He snatched up the corse and cast it down upon me as one would a millstone; and the weight, though that was not very considerable, and the shock together, jarred the life more than half out of me.

"What! old Slabsides," said he, "ar'n't you past grumbling?"

With that, the bloody-minded miscreant seized upon a fragment of plank, and began to belabour me with all his strength.

I had entered the philanthropist's body only to be murdered. I uttered a direful scream; but that was only a waste of the breath which Mr. John Smith was determined to waste for me. He redoubled his blows with a vigour that showed he was in earnest; nor did he cease until his work was completed. In a word, he murdered me, and so effectually, that it is a wonder I am alive to tell it. He assassinated me, and even began to bury me, by tumbling earth down from the floor; when, as my good fate would have it, the scene was brought to a climax by the sudden entrance of a watchman, who, running up to the villain, served him the same turn he had served me, by laying a leaded mace over his head, and so knocking him out of his senses.

It seems (for I scorn to keep the reader in suspense, by indulging in mystery) that this faithful fellow, having made a shorter nap than was warranted by the state of the night, had taken a stroll into the air, to look about him; that he had passed the hovel, and, seeing the chair standing at the door, had looked through a crack, and perceived Mr. Longstraw, with whose person and benevolent character he was acquainted, and myself – that is, my late self – warming ourselves by the convict's fire; and that, after pursuing his beat for a while, he was about to return by another way, when, to his surprise, he lighted upon the vehicle at more than a square's distance from the house; and the horse being tied to a post, it was evident he had not strayed thither. This awaking a suspicion that all was not right, he determined to pay a second visit to the hovel; and was on the way thither when I set up the scream mentioned before. Then quickening his pace, he arrived in time to witness the awful spectacle of Mr. John Smith thrusting the two bodies into the pit; which operation the courageous watchman brought to a close by knocking the operator on the head, as I have related.

What had brought Mr. John Smith back again, and why he should have troubled himself to conceal the victim of his murderous cupidity, must be conjectured, as well as the amazement with which, doubtless, he found he had *two* bodies to bury instead of one. He perhaps reflected, that the visit of his patron was known to other persons; who, upon finding his body, would readily conjecture who was the murderer; and therefore judged it proper to conceal the evidence of assassination, and leave the fate of his benefactor in entire mystery.

As it happened, his return had wellnigh proved fatal to me, and it was any thing but happy for himself. It caused him to take up his lodgings for a fourth time in the penitentiary; and there he is sawing stone, I believe, to this day, unless pardoned out by the Governor of Pennsylvania, according to the practice among governors in general. The visitation was, however, thus far advantageous to me, that it caused me to be conducted to the dwelling of Mr. Longstraw with all due expedition and care; whereas, had it not happened, I might have remained lying on the floor of my miserable tenement until frozen to death; for the night was uncommonly bitter.

As for my late body, it found its way to Abram Skinner's mansion; whence, having been handsomely coffined, it was carried to the grave, which, but for me, it would have filled three months before.

BOOK V

CONTAINING THE ADVENTURES OF A GOOD SAMARITAN

CHAPTER I.
THE PHILANTHROPIST'S FAMILY

If my first introduction to the life of the philanthropic Zachariah Longstraw (for that was his name) was attended with circumstances of fear and danger, I did not thereby escape those other evils, which, as I hinted before, might have been anticipated, had I reflected a moment on the situation of his body. It was covered with bruises from head to foot, and there was scarce a sound bone left in it; so that, as I may say, I had, in reanimating it, only exchanged anguish of spirit for anguish of body; and which of these is the more intolerable, I never could satisfactorily determine. Philosophers, indeed, contend for the superior poignancy of the former; but I must confess a leaning to the other side of the question. What is the pain of a broken heart to that of the toothache? The poets speak of vipers in the bosom; what are they compared to a bug in the ear? Be this, however, as it may, it is certain I had a most dreadful time of it in Mr. Longstraw's body; and it would have been much worse, had not the blows I had received on the head kept me for a long time in a delirium, and therefore in a measure unconscious of my sufferings. The truth is, the body which I so rashly entered was in such a dilapidated condition, so bruised and mangled, that it was next to an impossibility to restore its vital powers; and it was more than two weeks, after lying all that time in a state of insensibility, more dead than alive, before I came to my senses, and remembered what had befallen me; and it was not until four more had elapsed that I was finally able to leave my chamber, and snuff the early breezes of spring.

As soon as I began to take notice of what was passing about me, I perceived that I lay in a good, though plainly-furnished chamber, and that, besides the physicians and other persons who occasionally bustled around me, there were two individuals so constantly in attendance, and so careful and affectionate in all their deportment, that I did not doubt they were members of my new family. Indeed, I had no sooner looked upon their faces, and heard their voices, than I felt a glow of satisfaction within my spirit; which convinced me they were my very dear and faithful friends, and that I loved them exceedingly.

They were both young men, the one perhaps of twenty-five, the other six or seven years older. Both were decked in Quaker garments, the elder being uncommonly plain in his appearance, wearing smallclothes, shoe-buckles, and a hat with a brim full five inches wide, which he seldom laid aside. These gave him a patriarchal appearance, highly striking in one of his youth, which was much increased by an uncommon air of gravity and benevolence beaming from his somewhat swarthy and hollow visage.

The younger had no such sanctimonious appearance. There was a janty look even in the cut of his straight coat; he had a handsome face, and seemed conscious of it; he swung about the room at times with a strut that excited his own admiration; and any three moments out of five he might be seen before the looking-glass, surveying his teeth, inspecting the sweep of his shoulders, and brushing up his hair with his fingers. His plain coat was set at naught by a vest and trousers of the most fashionable cut and pattern; he had a gold guard-chain, worn abroad, and his watch, which, in all likelihood, was gold also, was stuck in his vest-pocket, in the manner approved of by bucks and men of the world, instead of being deposited, according to the system of the wise, in a fob over the epigastrium; and, to crown his list of vanities, he had in his shirt a breastpin, which he took care to keep constantly visible, containing jewels of seven or eight different colours. It was manifest the young gentleman, if a Quaker, as his coat showed him to be, was quite a free one; and, indeed, the first words I heard him utter (which were also the first that I distinguished after rousing from my long sleep of insensibility) set the matter beyond question. I saw him peer into my face very curiously, and directly heard him call out to his companion – "I say, Snipe, by jingo, uncle Zack's beginning to look like a man in his senses!"

These words imparted a sensation of pleasure to my breast, but I felt impelled to censure the young man for the freedom of his expressions. My tongue, however, seemed to have lost its function; and while I was vainly attempting to articulate a reprimand, the other rushed up, and, giving me an earnest stare, seized upon one of my hands, which he fell to mumbling and munching in a highly enthusiastic manner, crying out, with inexpressible joy and fervour, "Blessed be the day! and does thee open thee eyes again? Verily, this shall be a day of rejoicing, and not to me only, the loving Abel Snipe, but to thousands. Does thee feel better, Zachariah, my friend and patron? Verily, the poor man that has mourned for thee shall be now as one that rejoices; for thee shall again speak to him the words of tenderness, and open the hand of alms-giving; yea, verily, and the afflicted shall mourn no more!"

These words were even more agreeable than those uttered by the junior; and I experienced a feeling of displeasure when the latter suddenly cut them short by exclaiming, "Come, Snipe, none of thee confounded nonsense. I reckon uncle Zack has had enough philanthropy for the season; and don't thee go to humbug him into it any more. Thee has made thee own fortune, and should be content."

"Verily, friend Jonathan," said the fervent Abel Snipe, addressing the junior, but still tugging at my hand, "thee does not seem to rejoice at thee uncle's recovery as thee should; but thee jokes and thee jests sha'n't make my spirit rejoice the less."

"Verily," said Jonathan, "so it seems; but if thee tugs at uncle Zack in that way, and talks so loud, thee will do his business."

"Verily," said Abel —

"And verily," said Jonathan, interrupting him, "thee will say it is thee business to do his business; which is very true – but not in the sense of murder. So let us hold our tongues; and do thou, uncle Zachariah," he added, addressing me, "keep thyself quiet, and take this dose of physic."

It was unspeakable how much my spirit was warmed within me by this friendly contest between the two young men, and by their looks of affection. I longed to embrace them both, but had not the strength; and, indeed, it was three or four days more before I felt myself able, or was allowed by the physicians, to indulge in conversation.

At the expiration of that period I found myself growing stronger; the twenty thousand different pangs that had besieged my body, from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot, whenever I attempted to move, were less racking and poignant; and, waking from a slumber that had been more agreeable than usual, and finding no one near me save the ever faithful Abel Snipe, I could no longer resist the impulse to speak to him.

"Abel Snipe," said I.

"Blessed be thee kind voice, that it speaks again!" said Abel Snipe, devouring my hand as before, and blubbering as he devoured.

"Thy name is Abel Snipe?" said I.

"Verily and surely, it is Abel Snipe, and no other," said he; "I hope thee don't forget me?"

"Why, really," said I, "I can't exactly say, friend Abel, seeing that there has a confusion come over my brain. But art thou certain I am no longer Abram Skinner?"

At this question Abel Snipe's eyes jumped half out of his head, and they regarded me with wo and horror. I saw he thought my wits were unsettled, and I hastened to remove the impression.

"Don't be alarmed, friend Abel; but, of a verity, I think I was killed and buried."

"Yea," said Abel; "yea, verily, the vile, ungrateful, malicious John Smith did smite thee over the head with a club, so that the bone was broken, and thee was as one that was dead; but oh! the villain! we have him fast in jail; and oh! the unnatural rascal! we'll hang him!"

"Verily," said I, feeling uncommon concern at the idea, "we will do no such wicked deed; but we will admonish the poor man of the wickedness of his ways, and, relieving his wants, discharge him from bondage."

"Yea," said Abel Snipe, with an air of contrition; "so will we do, as becometh the merciful man and Christian. But, verily, the flesh did quarrel with the spirit, and the old Adam cried out to

me, 'Blood for blood,' and the thing that is flesh said, 'Vengeance on the wicked man that smote the friend of the afflicted!' But now thy goodness reproves me, and teaches me better things: wherefore I say, be not hard with the miserable man, for such is the wicked, and such is John Smith; who is now mourning over his foolish acts in the county prison. Yea, verily, we will be exceeding lenient," – and so forth, and so forth.

I do not think it needful to repeat all the wise and humane things said by Abel Snipe: they convinced me he was the most benevolent of beings, and warmed a similar spirit that was now burning in my breast, and which burnt on until it became at last a general conflagration of philanthropy. Yea, the transformation was complete; I found within me, on the sudden, a raging desire to augment the happiness of my fellow-creatures; and wondered that I had ever experienced any other passion. The generous Abel discoursed to me of the thousands I – that is, my prototype, the true Zachariah – had rescued from want and affliction, and of the thousands whom I was yet to relieve. My brain took fire at the thought, and I exulted in a sense of my virtue; I perceived, in imagination, the tear of distress chased away by that of gratitude; I heard the sob of sorrow succeeded by the sigh of happiness, and the prayer of beseeching changed to the prayer of praise and thanksgiving. A gentle warmth flowed from my bosom through the uttermost bounds of my frame, and I felt that I was a happy man; yea, reader, yea, and verily, I was at last happy. My only affliction was, that the battered condition of my body prevented my sallying out at once, and practising the noble art of charity. The tears sprang into my eyes when Abel recounted the numbers of the miserable who had besieged my doors during my two weeks of insensibility, crying for assistance.

"Why didst thou not relieve them, Abel Snipe?" I exclaimed.

"Verily," said Abel, turning his eyes to heaven with a look of fervent rapture, "I did relieve the sorrowing and destitute even to the uttermost penny that was in my pocket. Blessed be the deed, for I have not now a cent that I can call my own. As for thine, Zachariah, it became me not to dispense it, without thy spoken authority; the more especially as thy nephew, Jonathan, did hint, and vehemently insist, that thou hadst bestowed too much already for thy good, and his."

These words filled me with concern and displeasure.

"Surely," said I, "the young man Jonathan is not averse to deeds of charity?"

"Verily," said Abel, clasping his hands, and looking as if he would have wept, "the excellent and beloved youth doth value money more than the good which money may produce; and of that good he esteemeth chiefly the portion that falleth to his own lot. Of a surety, I do fear he hath an eagerness and hankering, a fleshly appetite and an exceeding strong desire, after the things of the world. He delighteth in the vanity of fine clothes, and his discourse is of women and the charms thereof. He hath bought the picture of a French dancing-woman, and hung it in his chamber, swearing (for he hath a contempt for affirmation) that it is a good likeness of the maiden Ellen Wild; and yesterday I did perceive him squeaking at a heathenish wind-instrument, called a flute, and thereupon he did avow an intention to try his hand at that more paganish thing of strings, called a fiddle; and, oh! what grieved me above all, and caused the spirit within me to cry 'avaunt! and get thee away, Jonathan,' he did offer me a ticket, of the cost of one dollar, to procure me admission into the place of sin and vanity, called the theatre, swearing 'by jingo' and 'by gemini' there was 'great fun there,' and offering to lend me a coat, hat, and trousers, so that the wicked should not know me. Yea, verily, the young man is as a young lion that roameth up and down – as a sheep that wandereth from the pinfold into the forbidden meadows – and as for charity, peradventure thee will not believe me, but he averred, 'the only charity he believed in was that which began at home.'"

These confessions of the faithful Abel in relation to the young man Jonathan, caused my spirit to wax sorrowful within me. But it is fitting, before pursuing such conversations further, that I should inform the reader *who* the faithful Abel and the young man Jonathan were.

The latter, as Abel himself informed me, was my – or, if the reader will, my prototype's – nephew, the only, and now orphan, son of a sister, who had married, as the phrase is, "out of meeting,"

and, dying destitute, left her boy to the charge of the benevolent Zachariah, who, being himself childless, adopted him as his son and heir, and had treated him as such, from his childhood up. The great wish of Zachariah was to make the adopted son a philanthropist, like himself; in which, however, he was destined to disappointment; for Jonathan was of a wild and worldly turn, fond of frolic and amusement, and extremely averse to squander in works of charity the possessions he designed applying in future years to his own benefit. Nevertheless, he was greatly beloved by his uncle; and I, who was imbued with that uncle's spirit, and destined to love and abhor what he had loved and abhorred, whether I would or not, soon began to regard him as one of the two apples of my eyes.

CHAPTER II.
SOME ACCOUNT OF THE WORTHY ABEL SNIPE

The faithful Abel Snipe, it seems (his history was told me by Jonathan), was a man whom Zachariah, some years before, while playing the Howard in a neighbouring sovereignty, had found plunged in deep distress, and making shoes in the penitentiary. To this condition he had been reduced by sheer goodness; for, being an amateur in that virtuous art of which Zachariah was a professor, and having no means of his own to relieve the woes of the wretched, he had borrowed from the hoards of his employers (the president and directors of a certain stock-company, in whose office he had a petty appointment), and thus, perforce, made charitable an institution that was chartered to be uncharitable. He committed the fault, however, of borrowing without the previous ceremony of asking – either because he was of so innocent a temper as to think such a proceeding unnecessary, or because he knew beforehand that the request would not be granted; and the consequence was, that the president and directors, as aforesaid, did very mercilessly hand him over to the prosecuting attorney, the prosecuting attorney to a grand jury, the grand jury to a petit jury, the petit jury to a penitentiary, and the penitentiary to the devil – or such, at least, would have been the ending of the unfortunate amateur, had not the philanthropist, who always ordered his shoes, for charity's sake, at the prison, been struck with the uncommon excellence of a pair constructed by Abel's hands.

He sought out the faithful maker (for sure a man must be faithful to make a good pair of shoes in a penitentiary), was melted by his tale of wo, even as the wax through which Abel was then drawing a bunch of ends was melted by the breath thereof; and shedding tears to find the poor creature's virtue so shabbily rewarded, ran to the prosecutors with a petition, which he induced them to sign, transmitted it to the governor, with a most eloquent essay on the divine character of mercy, and, in less than a week, walked Abel Snipe out of prison, a pardoned man.

The charity of the professor did not end with Abel's liberation. Enraptured with the fervour of his gratitude, touched by the artlessness of his character, and moved by the destitution to which a pardon in the winter-time exposed him, he carried him to his own land and house, fed, clothed, and employed him upon a new pair of shoes; and, discovering that he had talents for a nobler business, advanced him in time to the rank of accountant, or secretary, collector of rents, dispenser of secret charities, and, in general, factotum and fiduciary at large. Such a servant was needed by the humane Zachariah; his philanthropy left him no time to attend to his own affairs, and his nephew Jonathan had fallen in love, and become incompetent to their management.

Never was experiment more happy for subject and object: Abel Snipe was made an honest and useful man; and Zachariah Longstraw obtained a friend and servant without price. The gratitude of Abel was equal to his ability; humility, fidelity, and religion, were the least of his virtues – he became a philanthropist, like his master. He managed his affairs with such skill, that Zachariah had always pennies at hand for the unfortunate; which, it seems, had not always happened before; and, what was equally charming, the zealous Abel dived into every lane, alley, and gutter, to discover new objects of charity for his patron. To crown all, he felt moved in the spirit to profess the faith so greatly adorned by his protector; and, after due preparation and probation, appeared in the garb of peace and humility, and even went so far as to hold forth once at meeting.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.