

LEVER CHARLES JAMES

A DAY'S RIDE: A LIFE'S
ROMANCE

Charles Lever

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Charles James Lever

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CHAPTER I. I PREPARE TO SEEK ADVENTURES

It has been said that any man, no matter how small and insignificant the post he may have filled in life, who will faithfully record the events in which he has borne a share, even though incapable of himself deriving profit from the lessons he has learned, may still be of use to others, – sometimes a guide, sometimes a warning. I hope this is true. I like to think it so, for I like to think that even I, – A. S. P., – if I cannot adorn a tale, may at least point a moral.

Certain families are remarkable for the way in which peculiar gifts have been transmitted for ages. Some have been great in arms, some in letters, some in statecraft, displaying in successive generations the same high qualities which had won their first renown. In an humble fashion, I may lay claim to belong to this category. My ancestors have been apothecaries for one hundred and forty-odd years. Joseph Potts, “drug and condiment man,” lived in the reign of Queen Anne, at Lower Liffey Street, No. 87; and to be remembered passingly, has the name of Mr. Addison amongst his clients, – the illustrious writer having, as it would appear, a peculiar fondness for “Pott’s linature,” whatever that may have been; for the secret died out with my distinguished forefather. There was Michael Joseph Potts, “licensed for chemicals,” in Mary’s Abbey, about thirty years later; and so we come on to Paul Potts and Son, and then to Launcelot Peter Potts, “Pharmaceutical Chemist to his Excellency and the Irish Court,” the father of him who now bespeaks your indulgence.

My father’s great misfortune in life was the ambition to rise above the class his family had adorned for ages. He had, as he averred, a soul above senna, and a destiny higher than black drop. He had heard of a tailor’s apprentice becoming a great general. He had himself seen a wig-maker elevated to the woolsack; and he kept continually repeating, “Mine is the only walk in life that leads to no high rewards. What matters it whether my mixtures be addressed to the refined organization of rank, or the *dura ilia rasorum*? – I shall live and die an apothecary. From every class are men selected for honors save mine; and though it should rain baronetcies, the bloody hand would never fall to the lot of a compounding chemist.”

“What do you intend to make of Algernon Sydney, Mr. Potts?” would say one of his neighbors. “Bring him up to your own business? A first-rate connection to start with in life.”

“My own business, sir? I’d rather see him a chimneysweep.”

“But, after all, Mr. Potts, being so to say, at the head of your profession – ”

“It is not a profession, sir. It is not even a trade. High science and skill have long since left our insulted and outraged ranks; we are mere commission agents for the sale of patent quackeries. What respect has the world any longer for the great phials of ruby, and emerald, and marine blue, which, at nightfall, were once the magical emblems of our mysteries, seen afar through the dim mists of lowering atmospheres, or throwing their lurid glare upon the passers-by? What man, now, would have the courage to adorn his surgery – I suppose you would prefer I should call it a ‘shop’ – with skeleton-fishes, snakes, or a stuffed alligator? Who, in this age of chemical infidelity, would surmount his door with the ancient symbols of our art, – the golden pestle and mortar? Why, sir, I’d as soon go forth to apply leeches on a herald’s tabard, or a suit of Milan mail. And what have they done, sir?” he would ask, with a roused indignation, – “what have they done by their reforms? In invading the mystery of medicine, they have ruined its prestige. The precious drops you once regarded as the essence of an elixir vitæ, and whose efficacy lay in your faith, are now so much strychnine, or creosote, which you take with fear and think over with foreboding.”

I suppose it can only be ascribed to that perversity which seems a great element in human nature, that, exactly in the direct ratio of my father's dislike to his profession was *my* fondness for it. I used to take every opportunity of stealing into the laboratory, watching intently all the curious proceedings that went on there, learning the names and properties of the various ingredients, the gases, the minerals, the salts, the essences; and although, as may be imagined, science took, in these narrow regions, none of her loftiest flights, they were to me the most marvellous and high-soaring efforts of human intelligence. I was just at that period of life – the first opening of adolescence – when fiction and adventure have the strongest bold upon our nature, my mind filled with the marvels of Eastern romance, and imbued with a sentiment, strong as any conviction, that I was destined to a remarkable life. I passed days in dreamland, – what I should do in this or that emergency; how rescue myself from such a peril; how profit by such a stroke of fortune; by what arts resist the machinations of this adversary; how conciliate the kind favor of that. In the wonderful tales that I read, frequent mention was made of alchemy and its marvels; now the search was for some secret of endless wealth; now, it was for undying youth or undecaying beauty; while in other stories I read of men who had learned how to read the thoughts, trace the motives, and ultimately sway the hearts of their fellow-men, till life became to them a mere field for the exercise of their every will and caprice, throwing happiness and misery about them as the humor inclined. The strange life of the laboratory fitted itself exactly to this phase of my mind.

The wonders it displayed, the endless combinations and transformations it effected, were as marvellous as any that imaginative fiction could devise; but even these were nothing compared to the mysterious influence of the place itself upon my nervous system, particularly when I found myself there alone. In the tales with which my head was filled, many of them the wild fancies of Grimm, Hoffman, or Musæus, nothing was more common than to read how some eager student of the black art, deep in the mystery of forbidden knowledge, had, by some chance combination, by some mere accidental admixture of this ingredient with that, suddenly arrived at the great secret, that terrible mystery which for centuries and centuries had evaded human search. How often have I watched the fluid as it boiled and bubbled in the retort, till I thought the air globules, as they came to the surface, observed a certain rhythm and order. Were these, words? Were they symbols of some hidden virtue in the liquid? Were there intelligences to whom these could speak, and thus reveal a wondrous history? And then, again, with what an intense eagerness have I gazed on the lurid smoke that arose from some smelting mass, now fancying that the vapor was about to assume form and substance, and bow imagining that it lingered lazily, as though waiting for some cabalistic word of mine to give it life and being? How heartily did I censure the folly that had ranked alchemy amongst the absurdities of human invention! Why, rather, had not its facts been treasured and its discoveries recorded, so that in some future age a great intelligence arising might classify and arrange them, showing at least what were practicable and what were only evasive. Alchemists were, certainly, men of pure lives, self-denying and humble. They made their art no stepping-stone to worldly advancement or success; they sought no favor from princes, nor any popularity from the people; but, retired and estranged from all the pleasures of the world, followed their one pursuit, unnoticed and unfriended. How cruel, therefore, to drag them forth from their lonely cells, and expose them to the gaping crowd as devil worshippers! How inhuman to denounce men whose only crimes were lives of solitude and study! The last words of Peter von Vordt, burned for a wizard, at Haarlem, in 1306, were, “Had they left this poor head a little longer on my shoulders, it would have done more for human happiness than all this bonfire!”

How rash and presumptuous is it, besides, to set down any fixed limits to man's knowledge! Is not every age an advance upon its predecessors, and are not the commonest acts of our present civilization perfect miracles as compared with the usages of our ancestors? But why do I linger on this theme, which I only introduced to illustrate the temper of my boyish days? As I grew older, books of chivalry and romance took possession of my mind, and my passion grew for lives of adventure. Of all kinds of existence, none seemed to me so enviable as that of those men who, regarding life

as a vast ocean, hoisted sail, and set forth, not knowing nor caring whither, but trusting to their own manly spirit for extrication out of whatever difficulties might beset them. What a narrow thing, after all, was our modern civilization, with all its forms and conventionalities, with its gradations of rank and its orders! How hopeless for the adventurous spirit to war with the stern discipline of an age that marshalled men in ranks like soldiers, and told that each could only rise by successive steps! How often have I wondered was there any more of adventure left in life? Were there incidents in store for him who, in the true spirit of an adventurer, should go in search of them? As for the newer worlds of Australia and America, they did not possess for me much charm. No great association linked them with the past; no echo came out of them of that heroic time of feudalism, so peopled with heart-stirring characters. The life of the bush or the prairie had its incidents, but they were vulgar and commonplace; and worse, the associates and companions of them were more vulgar still. Hunting down Pawnees or buffaloes was as mean and ignoble a travesty of feudal adventure as was the gold diggings at Bendigo of the learned labors of the alchemist. The perils were unexciting, the rewards prosaic and commonplace. No. I felt that Europe – in some remote regions – and the East – in certain less visited tracts – must be the scenes best suited to my hopes. With considerable labor I could spell my way through a German romance, and I saw, in the stories of Fouqué, and even of Goethe, that there still survived in the mind of Germany many of the features which gave the color-ing to a feudal period. There was, at least, a dreamy indifference to the present, a careless abandonment to what the hour might bring forth, so long as the dreamer was left to follow out his fancies in all their mysticism, that lifted men out of the vulgarities of this work-o'-day world; and I longed to see a society where learning consented to live upon the humblest pittance, and beauty dwelt unflattered in obscurity.

I was now entering upon manhood; and my father – having, with that ambition so natural to an Irish parent who aspires highly for his only son, destined me for the bar – made me a student of Trinity College, Dublin.

What a shock to all the romance of my life were the scenes into which I now was thrown! With hundreds of companions to choose from, I found not one congenial to me. The reading men, too deeply bent upon winning honors, would not waste a thought upon what could not advance their chances of success. The idle, only eager to get through their career undetected in their ignorance, passed lives of wild excess or stupid extravagance.

What was I to do amongst such associates? What I did do, – avoid them, shun them, live in utter estrangement from all their haunts, their ways, and themselves. If the proud man who has achieved success in life encounters immense difficulties when, separating himself from his fellows, he acknowledges no companionship, nor admits any to his confidence, it may be imagined what must be the situation of one who adopts this isolation without any claim to superiority whatever. As can easily be supposed, I was the butt of my fellow students, the subject of many sarcasms and practical jokes. The whole of my Freshman year was a martyrdom. I had no peace, was rhymed on by poetasters, caricatured by draughtsmen, till the name of Potts became proverbial for all that was eccentric, ridiculous, and absurd.

Curran has said, “One can’t draw an indictment against a nation;” in the same spirit did I discover “one cannot fight his whole division.” For a while I believe I experienced a sort of heroism in my solitary state; I felt the spirit of a Coriolanus in my heart, and muttered, “I banish *you!*” but this self-supplied esteem did not last long, and I fell into a settled melancholy. The horrible truth was gradually forcing its way slowly, clearly, through the mists of my mind, that there might be something in all this sarcasm, and I can remember to this hour, the day – ay, and the very place – wherein the questions flashed across me: Is my hair as limp, my nose as long, my back as arched, my eyes as green as they have pictured them? Do I drawl so fearfully in my speech? Do I drag my heavy feet along so ungracefully? Good heavens! have they possibly a grain of fact to sustain all this fiction against me?

And if so, – horrible thought, – am I the stuff to go forth and seek adventures? Oh, the ineffable bitterness of this reflection! I remember it in all its anguish, and even now, after years of

such experience as have befallen few men, I can recall the pain it cost me. While I was yet in the paroxysm of that sorrow, which assured me that I was not made for doughty deeds, nor to captivate some fair princess, I chanced to fall upon a little German volume entitled “Wald Wandelungen und Abentheure,” von Heinrich Stebbe. Forest rambles and adventures, and of a student, too! for so Herr Stebbe announces himself, in a short introduction to the reader. I am not going into any account of his book. It is in Voss’s Leipzig Catalogue, and not unworthy of perusal by those who are sufficiently imbued with Germanism to accept the changeful moods of a mystical mind, with all its visionary glimpses of light and shade, its doubts, fears, hopes, and fancies, in lieu of real incidents and actual events. Of adventures, properly speaking, he had none. The people he met, the scenes in which he bore his part, were as commonplace as need be. The whole narrative never soared above that bread and butter life – Butter-brod Leben – which Germany accepts as romance; but, meanwhile, the reflex of whatever passed around him in the narrator’s own mind was amusing; so ingeniously did he contrive to interweave the imaginary with the actual, throwing over the most ordinary pictures of life a sort of hazy indistinctness, – meet atmosphere for mystical creation.

If I did not always sympathize with him in his brain-wrought wanderings, I never ceased to take pleasure in his description of scenery, and the heartfelt delight he experienced in Journeying through a world so beautiful and so varied. There was also a little woodcut frontispiece which took my fancy much, representing him as he stood leaning on his horse’s mane, gazing rapturously on the Elbe, from one of the cliffs off the Saxon Switzerland. How peaceful he looked, with his long hair waving gracefully on his neck, and his large soft eyes turned on the scene beneath him! His clasped hands, as they lay on the horse’s mane, imparted a sort of repose, too, that seemed to say, “I could linger here ever so long.” Nor was the horse itself without a significance in the picture; he was a long-maned, long-tailed, patient-looking beast, well befitting an enthusiast, who doubtless took but little heed of how he went or where. If his lazy eye denoted lethargy, his broad feet and short legs vouched for his sure-footedness.

Why should not I follow Stebbe’s example? Surely there was nothing too exalted or extravagant in his plan of life. It was simply to see the world as it was, with the aid of such combinations as a fertile fancy could contribute; not to distort events, but to arrange them, Just as the landscape painter in the license of his craft moves that massive rock more to the foreground, and throws that stone pine a little further to the left of his canvas. There was, indeed, nothing to prevent my trying the experiment Ireland was not less rich in picturesque scenery than Germany, and if she boasted no such mighty stream as the Elbe, the banks of the Blackwater and the Nore were still full of woodland beauty; and, then, there was lake scenery unrivalled throughout Europe.

I turned to Stebbe’s narrative for details of his outfit. His horse he bought at Nordheim for two hundred and forty gulden, – about ten pounds; his saddle and knapsack cost him a little more than forty shillings; with his map, guide-book, compass, and some little extras, all were comprised within twenty pounds sterling, – surely not too costly an equipage for one who was adventuring on a sea wide as the world itself.

As *my* trial was a mere experiment, to be essayed on the most limited scale, I resolved not to buy, but only hire a horse, taking him by the day, so that if any change of mind or purpose supervened I should not find myself in any embarrassment.

A fond uncle had just left me a legacy of a hundred pounds, which, besides, was the season of the long vacation; thus did everything combine to favor the easy execution of a plan which I determined forthwith to put into practice.

“Something quiet and easy to ride, sir, you said?” repeated Mr. Dycer after me, as I entered his great establishment for the sale and hire of horses. “Show the gentleman four hundred and twelve.”

“Oh, Heaven forbid!” I exclaimed, in ignorance; “such a number would only confuse me.”

"You mistake me, sir," blandly interposed the dealer; "I meant the horse that stands at that number. Lead him out, Tim. He 's gentle as a lamb, sir, and, if you find he suits you, can be had for a song, – I mean a ten pound note."

"Has he a long mane and tail?" I asked, eagerly.

"The longest tail and the fullest mane I ever saw. But here he comes." And with the word, there advanced towards us, at a sort of easy amble, a small-sized cream-colored horse, with white mane and tail. Knowing nothing of horseflesh, I was fain to content myself with such observations as other studies might supply me with; and so I closely examined his head, which was largely developed in the frontal region, with moral qualities fairly displayed. He had memory large, and individuality strong; nor was wit, if it exist in the race, deficient Over the orbital region the depressions were deep enough to contain my closed fist, and when I remarked upon them to the groom, he said, "'T is his teeth will tell you the rayson of that;" a remark which I suspect was a sarcasm upon my general ignorance.

I liked the creature's eye. It was soft, mild, and contemplative; and although not remarkable for brilliancy, possessed a subdued lustre that promised well for temper and disposition.

"Ten shillings a day, – make it three half-crowns by the week, sir. You 'll never hit upon the like of him again," said the dealer, hurriedly, as he passed me, on his other avocations.

"Better not lose him, sir; he's well known at Batty's, and they 'll have him in the circus again if they see him. Wish you saw him with his fore-legs on a table, ringing the bell for his breakfast.*"

"I'll take him by the week, though, probably, a day or two will be all I shall need."

"Four hundred and twelve for Mr. Potts," Dycer screamed out. "Shoes removed, and to be ready in the morning."

CHAPTER II. BLONDEL AND I SET OUT

I had heard and read frequently of the exhilarating sensations of horse exercise. My fellow-students were full of stories of the hunting-field and the race-course. Wherever, indeed, a horse figured in a narrative, there was an almost certainty of meeting some incident to stir the blood and warm up enthusiasm. Even the passing glimpses one caught of sporting-prints in shop-windows were suggestive of the pleasure imparted by a noble and chivalrous pastime. I never closed my eyes all night, revolving such thoughts in my head. I had so worked up my enthusiasm that I felt like one who is about to cross the frontier of some new land where people, language, ways, and habits are all unknown to him. "By this hour to-morrow night," thought I, "I shall be in the land of strangers, who have never seen, nor so much as heard of me. There will invade no traditions of the scoffs and jibes I have so long endured; none will have received the disparaging estimate of my abilities, which my class-fellows love to propagate; I shall simply be the traveller who arrived at sundown mounted on a cream-colored palfrey, – a stranger, sad-looking, but gentle, withal, of courteous address, blandly demanding lodging for the night. 'Look to my horse, ostler,' shall I say, as I enter the honeysuckle-covered porch of the inn. 'Blondel' – I will call him Blondel – 'is accustomed to kindly usage.'" With what quiet dignity, the repose of a conscious position, do I follow the landlord as he shows me to my room. It is humble, but neat and orderly. I am contented. I tell him so. I am sated and wearied of luxury; sick of a gilded and glittering existence. I am in search of repose and solitude. I order my tea; and, if I ask the name of the village, I take care to show by my inattention that I have not heard the answer, nor do I care for it.

Now I should like to hear how they are canvassing me in the bar, and what they think of me in the stable. I am, doubtless, a peer, or a peer's eldest son. I am a great writer, the wondrous poet of the day; or the pre-Raphaelite artist; or I am a youth heart-broken by infidelity in love; or, mayhap, a dreadful criminal. I liked this last the best, the interest was so intense; not to say that there is, to men who are not constitutionally courageous, a strong pleasure in being able to excite terror in others.

But I hear a horse's feet on the silent street. I look out Day is just breaking. Tim is holding Blondel at the door. My hour of adventure has struck, and noiselessly descending the stairs, I issue forth.

"He is a trifle tender on the fore-feet, your honor," said Tim, as I mounted; "but when you get him off the stones on a nice piece of soft road, he 'll go like a four-year-old."

"But he *is* young, Tim, isn't he?" I asked, as I tendered him my half-crown.

"Well, not to tell your honor a lie, he is not," said Tim, with the energy of a man whose veracity had cost him little less than a spasm.

"How old would you call him, then?" I asked, in that affected ease that seemed to say, "Not that it matters to me if he were Methuselah."

"I could n't come to his age exactly, your honor," he replied, "but I remember seeing him fifteen years ago, dancing a hornpipe, more by token for his own benefit; it was at Cooke's Circus, in Abbey Street, and there wasn't a hair's difference between him now and then, except, perhaps, that he had a star on the forehead, where you just see the mark a little darker now."

"But that is a star, plain enough," said I, half vexed.

"Well, it is, and it is not," muttered Tim, doggedly, for he was not quite satisfied with my right to disagree with him.

"He's gentle, at all events?" I said, more confidently.

"He's a lamb!" replied Tim. "If you were to see the way he lets the Turks run over his back, when he's wounded in Timour the Tartar, you wouldn't believe he was a livin' baste."

"Poor fellow!" said I, caressing him. He turned his mild eye upon me, and we were friends from that hour.

What a glorious morning it was, as I gained the outskirts of the city, and entered one of those shady alleys that lead to the foot of the Dublin mountains! The birds were opening their morning hymn, and the earth, still fresh from the night dew, sent up a thousand delicious perfumes. The road on either side was one succession of handsome villas or ornamental cottages, whose grounds were laid out in the perfection of landscape gardening. There were but few persons to be seen at that early hour, and in the smokeless chimneys and closed shutters I could read that all slept, – slept in that luxurious hour when Nature unveils, and seems to revel in the sense of unregarded loveliness. “Ah, Potts,” said I, “thou hast chosen the wiser part; thou wilt see the world after thine own guise, and not as others see it.” Has my reader not often noticed that in a picture-gallery the slightest change of place, a move to the left or right, a chance approach or retreat, suffices to make what seemed a hazy confusion of color and gloss a rich and beautiful picture? So is it in the actual world, and just as much depends on the point from which objects are viewed. Do not be discouraged, then, by the dark aspects of events. It may be that by the slightest move to this side or to that, some unlooked-for sunlight shall slant down and light up all the scene. Thus musing, I gained a little grassy strip that ran along the roadside, and, gently touching Blonde! with my heel, he broke out into a delightful canter. The motion, so easy and swimming, made it a perfect ecstasy to sit there floating at will through the thin air, with a moving panorama of wood, water, and mountain around me.

Emerging at length from the thickly wooded plain, I began the ascent of the Three Rock Mountain, and, in my slackened speed, had full time to gaze upon the bay beneath me, broken with many a promontory, backed by the broad bluff of Howth, and the more distant Lambay. No, it is *not* finer than Naples. I did not say it was; but, seeing it as I then saw it, I thought it could not be surpassed. Indeed, I went further, and defied Naples in this fashion: —

“Though no volcano’s lurid light
Over thy bine sea steals along,
Nor Pescator beguiles the night
With cadence of his simple song;

“Though none of dark Calabria’s daughters
With tinkling lute thy echoes wake,
Mingling their voices with the waters,
As ‘neath the prow the ripples break;

“Although no cliffs with myrtle crown’d,
Reflected in thy tide, are seen,
Nor olives, bending to the ground,
Relieve the laurel’s darker green;

“Yet – yet – ”

Ah, there was the difficulty, – I had begun with the plaintiff, and I really had n’t a word to say for the defendant; and so, voting comparisons odious, I set forward on my journey.

As I rode into Enniskerry to breakfast, I had the satisfaction of overhearing some very flattering comments upon Blondel, which rather consoled me for some less laudatory remarks upon my own horsemanship. By the way, can there possibly be a more ignorant sarcasm than to say a man rides like a tailor? Why, of all trades, who so constantly sits straddle-legged as a tailor? and yet he is especial mark of this impertinence.

I pushed briskly on after breakfast, and soon found myself in the deep shady woods that lead to the Dargle. I hurried through the picturesque demesne, associated as it was with a thousand little

vulgar incidents of city junketings, and rode on for the Glen of the Downs. Blondel and I had now established a most admirable understanding with each other. It was a sort of reciprocity by which I bound myself never to control *him*, he in turn consenting not to unseat *me*. He gave the initiative to the system, by setting off at his pleasant little rocking canter whenever he chanced upon a bit of favorable ground, and invariably pulled up when the road was stony or uneven; thus showing me that he was a beast with what Lord Brougham would call “a wise discretion.” In like manner he would halt to pluck any stray ears of wild oats that grew along the hedge sides, and occasionally slake his thirst at convenient streamlets. If I dismounted to walk at his side, he moved along unheld, his head almost touching my elbow, and his plaintive blue eye mildly beaming on me with an expression that almost spoke, – nay, it did speak. I ‘m sure I felt it, as though I could swear to it, whispering, “Yes, Potts, two more friendless creatures than ourselves are not easy to find. The world wants not either of us; not that we abuse it, despise it, or treat it ungenerously, – rather the reverse, we incline favorably towards it, and would, occasion serving, befriend it; but we are not, so to say, ‘of it.’ There may be, here and there, a man or a horse that would understand or appreciate us, but they stand alone, – they are not belonging to classes. They are, like ourselves, exceptional.” If his expression said this much, there was much unspoken melancholy in his sad glance, also, which seemed to say, “What a deal of sorrow could I reveal if I might! – what injuries, what wrong, what cruel misconceptions of my nature and disposition, what mistaken notions of my character and intentions! What pretentious stupidity, too, have I seen preferred before me, – creatures with, mayhap, a glossier coat or a more silky forelock – ” “Ah, Blondel, take courage, – men are just as ungenerous, just as erring!” “Not that I have not had my triumphs, too,” he seemed to say, as, cocking his ears, and ambling with a more elevated toss of the head, his tail would describe an arch like a waterfall; “no salmon-colored silk stockings danced sarabands on *my* back; I was always ridden in the Haute École by Monsieur l’Etrier himself, the stately gentleman in jackboots and long-waisted dress-coat, whose five minutes no persuasive bravos could ever prolong.” I thought – nay, I was certain at times – that I could read in his thoughtful face the painful sorrows of one who had outlived popular favor, and who had survived to see himself supplanted and dethroned.

There are no two destinies which chime in so well together as that of him who is beaten down by sheer distrust of himself, and that of the man who has seen better days. Although the one be just entering on life, while the other is going out of it, if they meet on the threshold, they stop to form a friendship. Now, though Blondel was not a man, he supplied to my friendlessness the place of one.

The sun was near its setting, as I rode down the little hill into the village of Ashford, a picturesque little spot in the midst of mountains, and with a bright clear stream bounding through it, as fearlessly as though in all the liberty of open country. I tried to make my entrance what stage people call effective. I threw myself, albeit a little jaded, into an attitude of easy indifference, slouched my hat to one side, and suffered the sprig of laburnum, with which I had adorned it, to droop in graceful guise over one shoulder. The villagers stared; some saluted me; and taken, perhaps, by the cool acquiescence of my manner, as I returned the courtesy, seemed well disposed to believe me of some note.

I rode into the little stable-yard of the “Lamb” and dismounted. I gave up my horse, and walked into the inn. I don’t know how others feel it, – I greatly doubt if they will have the honesty to tell, – but for myself, I confess that I never entered an inn or an hotel without a most uncomfortable conflict within: a struggle made up of two very antagonistic impulses, – the wish to seem something important, and a lively terror lest the pretence should turn out to be costly. Thus swayed by opposing motives, I sought a compromise by assuming that I was incog.; for the present a nobody, to be treated without any marked attention, and to whom the acme of respect would be a seeming indifference.

“What is your village called?” I said, carelessly, to the waiter, as he laid the cloth.

“Ashford, your honor. ‘T is down in all the books,” answered the waiter.

“Is it noted for anything, or is there anything remarkable in the neighborhood?”

"Indeed, there is, sir, and plenty. There's Glenmalure and the Devil's Glen; and there's Mr. Snow Malone's place, that everybody goes to see: and there's the fishing of Doyle's river, – trout, eight, nine, maybe twelve, pounds' weight; and there's Mr. Reeve's cottage – a Swiss cottage belike – at Kinmacreehy; but, to be sure, there must be an order for that!"

"I never take much trouble," I said indolently. "Who have you got in the house at present?"

"There's young Lord Keldrum, sir, and two more with him, for the fishing; and the next room to you here, there's Father Dyke, from Inistioge, and he's going, by the same token, to dine with the Lord to-day."

"Don't mention to his Lordship that I am here," said I, hastily. "I desire to be quite unknown down here." The waiter promised obedience, without vouchsafing any misgivings as to the possibility of his disclosing what he did not know.

To his question as to my dinner, I carelessly said, as if I were in a West-end club, "Never mind soup, – a little fish, – a cutlet and a partridge. Or order it yourself, – I am indifferent." The waiter had scarcely left the room when I was startled by the sound of voices so close to me as to seem at my side. They came from a little wooden balcony to the adjoining room, which, by its pretentious bow-window, I recognized to be the state apartment of the inn, and now in the possession of Lord Keldrum and his party. They were talking away in that gay, rattling, discursive fashion very young men do amongst each other, and discussed fishing-flies, the neighboring gentlemen's seats, and the landlady's niece.

"By the way, Kel," cried one, "it was in your visit to the bar that you met your priest, was n't it?"

"Yes; I offered him a cigar, and we began to chat together, and so I asked him to dine with us to-day."

"And he refused?"

"Yes; but he has since changed his mind, and sent a message to say he 'll be with us at eight".

"I should like to see your father's face, Kel, when he heard of your entertaining the Reverend Father Dyke at dinner."

"Well, I suppose he would say it was carrying conciliation a little too far; but as the adage says, *À la guerre–* "

At this juncture, another burst in amongst them, calling out, "You 'd never guess who 's just arrived here, in strict incog., and having bribed Mike, the waiter, to silence. Burgoyne!"

"Not Jack Burgoyne?"

"Jack himself. I had the portrait so correctly drawn by the waiter, that there's no mistaking him; the long hair, green complexion, sheepish look, all perfect. He came on a hack, a little cream-colored pad he got at Dycer's, and fancies he's quite unknown."

"What *can* he be up to now?"

"I think I have it," said his Lordship. "Courtenay has got two three-year-olds down here at his uncle's, one of them under heavy engagements for the spring meetings. Master Jack has taken a run down to have a look at them."

"By Jove, Kel, you 're right! he's always wide awake, and that stupid leaden-eyed look he has, has done him good service in the world."

"I say, old Oxley, shall we dash in and unearth him? Or shall we let him fancy that we know nothing of his being here at all?"

"What does Hammond say?"

"I'd say, leave him to himself," replied a deep voice; "you can't go and see him without asking him to dinner; and he 'll walk into us after, do what we will."

"Not, surely, if we don't play," said Oxley.

"Would n't he, though? Why, he 'd screw a bet out of a bishop."

"I 'd do with him as Tomkinson did," said his Lordship; "he had him down at his lodge in Scotland, and bet him fifty pounds that he could n't pass a week without a wager. Jack booked the bet and won it, and Tomkinson franked the company."

"What an artful villain my counterpart must be!" I said. I stared in the glass to see if I could discover the sheepish-ness they laid such stress on. I was pale, to be sure, and my hair a light brown, but so was Shelley's; indeed, there was a wild, but soft expression in my eyes that resembled his, and I could recognize many things in our natures that seemed to correspond. It was the poetic dreaminess, the lofty abstractedness from all the petty cares of every-day life which vulgar people set down as simplicity; and thus, —

"The soaring thoughts that reached the stare,
Seemed ignorance to them."

As I uttered the consolatory lines, I felt two hands firmly pressed over my eyes, while a friendly voice called out, "Found out, old fellow! run fairly to earth!" "Ask him if he knows you," whispered another, but in a voice I could catch.

"Who am I, Jack?" cried the first speaker.

"Situating as I now am," I replied, "I am unable to pronounce; but of one thing I am assured, — I am certain I am not called Jack."

The slow and measured intonation of my voice seemed to electrify them, for my captor relinquished his hold and fell back, while the two others, after a few seconds of blank surprise, burst into a roar of laughter; a sentiment which the other could not refrain from, while he struggled to mutter some words of apology.

"Perhaps I can explain your mistake," I said blandly; "I am supposed to be extremely like the Prince of Salms Hökinshauven —"

"No, no!" burst in Lord Keldrum, whose voice I recognized, "we never saw the Prince. The blunder of the waiter led us into this embarrassment; we fancied you were —"

"Mr. Burgoyne," I chimed in.

"Exactly, — Jack Burgoyne; but you're not a bit like him."

"Strange, then; but I'm constantly mistaken for him; and when in London, I 'm actually persecuted by people calling out, 'When did you come up, Jack?' 'Where do you hang out?' 'How long do you stay?' 'Dine with me to-day — to-morrow — Saturday?' and so on; and although, as I have remarked, these are only so many embarrassments for me, they all show how popular must be my prototype." I had purposely made this speech of mine a little long, for I saw by the disconcerted looks of the party that they did not see how to wind up "the situation," and, like all awkward men, I grew garrulous where I ought to have been silent. While I rambled on, Lord Keldrum exchanged a word or two with one of his friends; and as I finished, he turned towards me, and, with an air of much courtesy, said, —

"We owe you every apology for this intrusion, and hope you will pardon it; there is, however, but one way in which we can certainly feel assured that we have your forgiveness, — that is, by your joining us. I see that your dinner is in preparation, so pray let me countermand it, and say that you are our guest."

"Lord Keldrum," said one of the party, presenting the speaker; "my name is Hammond, and this is Captain Oxley, Coldstream Guards."

I saw that this move required an exchange of ratifications, and so I bowed, and said, "Algernon Sydney Potts."

"There are Staffordshire Pottses?"

"No relation," I said stiffly. It was Hammond who made the remark, and with a sneering manner that I could not abide.

“Well, Mr. Potts, it is agreed,” said Lord Keldrum, with his peculiar urbanity, “we shall see you at eight No dressing. You’ll find us in this fishing-costume you see now.”

I trust my reader, who has dined out any day he pleased and in any society he has liked these years past, will forgive me if I do not enter into any detailed account of my reasons for accepting this invitation. Enough if I freely own that to me, A. S. Potts, such an unexpected honor was about the same surprise as if I had been announced governor of a colony, or bishop in a new settlement.

“At eight sharp, Mr. Potts.”

“The next door down the passage.”

“Just as you are, remember!” were the three parting admonitions with which they left me.

CHAPTER III. TRUTH NOT ALWAYS IN WINE

Who has not experienced the charm of the first time in his life, when totally removed from all the accidents of his station, the circumstance of his fortune, and his other belongings, he has taken his place amongst perfect strangers, and been estimated by the claims of his own individuality? Is it not this which gives the almost ecstasy of our first tour, – our first journey? There are none to say, “Who is this Potts that gives himself these airs?” “What pretension has he to say this, or order that?” “What would old Peter say if he saw his son to-day?” with all the other “What has the world come to?” and “What are we to see next?” I say it is with a glorious sense of independence that one sees himself emancipated from all these restraints, and recognizes his freedom to be that which nature has made him.

As I sat on Lord Keldrum’s left, – Father Dyke was on his right, – was I in any real quality other than I ever am? Was my nature different, my voice, my manner, my social tone, as I received all the bland attentions of my courteous host? And yet, in my heart of hearts, I felt that if it were known to that polite company I was the son of Peter Potts, ‘pothecary, all my conversational courage would have failed me. I would not have dared to assert fifty things I now declared, nor vouched for a hundred that I as assuredly guaranteed. If I had had to carry about me traditions of the shop in Mary’s Abbey, the laboratory, and the rest of it, how could I have had the nerve to discuss any of the topics on which I now pronounced so authoritatively? And yet, these were all accidents of my existence, – no more me than was the color of *his* whiskers mine who vaccinated me for cow-pock. The man Potts was himself through all; he was neither compounded of senna and salts, nor amalgamated with sarsaparilla and the acids; but by the cruel laws of a harsh conventionality it was decreed otherwise, and the trade of the father descends to the son in every estimate of all he does and says and thinks. The converse of the proposition I was now to feel in the success I obtained in this company. I was as the Germans would say, “Der Herr Potts selbst, nicht nach seinen Begebenheiten” – the man Potts, not the creature of his belongings.

The man thus freed from his “antecedents,” and owning no “relatives,” feels like one to whom a great, a most unlimited, credit has been opened, in matter of opinion. Not reduced to fashion his sentiments by some supposed standard becoming his station, he roams at will over the broad prairie of life, enough if he can show cause why he says this or thinks that, without having to defend himself for his parentage, and the place he was born in. Little wonder if, with such a sum to my credit, I drew largely on it; little wonder if I were dogmatical and demonstrative; little wonder if, when my reason grew wearied with facts, I reposed on my imagination in fiction.

Be it remembered, however, that I only became what I have set down here after an excellent dinner, a considerable quantity of champagne, and no small share of claret, strong-bodied enough to please the priest. From the moment we sat down to table, I conceived for him a sort of distrust. He was painfully polite and civil; he had a soft, slippery, Clare accent; but there was a malicious twinkle in his eye that showed he was by nature satirical. Perhaps because we were more reading men than the others that it was we soon found ourselves pitted against each other in argument, and this not upon one, but upon every possible topic that turned up. Hammond, I found, also stood by the priest; Oxley was *my* backer; and his Lordship played umpire. Dyke was a shrewd, sarcastic dog in his way, but he had no chance with me. How mercilessly I treated his church! – he pushed me to it, – what an *exposé* did I make of the Pope and his government, with all their extortions and cruelties! how ruthlessly I showed them up as the sworn enemies of all freedom and enlightenment! The priest never got angry. He was too cunning for that, and he even laughed at some of my anecdotes, of which I related a great many.

“Don’t be so hard on him, Potts,” whispered my Lord, as the day wore on; “he ‘s not one of us, you know!”

This speech put me into a flutter of delight. It was not alone that he called me Potts, but there was also an acceptance of me as one of his own set. We were, in fact, henceforth *nous autres*. Enchanting recognition, never to be forgotten!

"But what would you do with us?" said Dyke, mildly remonstrating against some severe measures we of the landed interest might be yet driven to resort to.

"I don't know, – that is to say, – I have not made up my mind whether it were better to make a clearance of you altogether, or to bribe you."

"Bribe us by all means, then!" said he, with a most serious earnestness.

"Ah! but could we rely upon you?" I asked.

"That would greatly depend upon the price."

"I'll not haggle about terms, nor I'm sure would Keldrum," said I, nodding over to his Lordship.

"You are only just to me, in that," said he, smiling.

"That's all fine talking for you fellows who had the luck to be first on the list, but what are poor devils like Oxley and myself to do?" said Hammond. "Taxation comes down to second sons."

"And the 'Times' says that's all right," added Oxley.

"And I say it's all wrong; and I say more," I broke in: "I say that of all the tyrannies of Europe, I know of none like that newspaper. Why, sir, whose station, I would ask, nowadays, can exempt him from its impertinent criticisms? Can Keldrum say – can I say – that to-morrow or next day we shall not be arraigned for this, that, or t'other? I choose, for instance, to manage my estate, – the property that has been in my family for centuries, – the acres that have descended to us by grants as old as Magna Charta. I desire, for reasons that seem sufficient to myself, to convert arable into grass land. I say to one of my tenant farmers – it's Hedgeworth – no matter, I shall not mention names, but I say to him – "

"I know the man," broke in the priest; "you mean Hedgeworth Davis, of Mount Davis."

"No, sir, I do not," said I, angrily, for I resented this attempt to run me to earth.

"Hedgeworth! Hedgeworth! It ain't that fellow that was in the Rifles; the 2d battalion, is it?" said Ozley.

"I repeat," said I, "that I will mention no names."

"My mother had some relatives Hedgeworths, they were from Herefordshire. How odd, Potts, if we should turn out to be connections! You said that these people were related to you."

"I hope," I said angrily, "that I am not bound to give the birth, parentage, and education of every man whose name I may mention in conversation. At least, I would protest that I have not prepared myself for such a demand upon my memory."

"Of course not, Potts. It would be a test no man could submit to," said his Lordship.

"That Hedgeworth, who was in the Rifles, exceeded all the fellows I ever met in drawing the long bow. There was no country he had not been in, no army he had not served with; he was related to every celebrated man in Europe; and, after all, it turned out that his father was an attorney at Market Harborough, and sub-agent to one of our fellows who had some property there." This was said by Hammond, who directed the speech entirely to me.

"Confound the Hedgeworths, all together," Ozley broke in. "They have carried us miles away from what we were talking of."

This was a sentiment that met my heartiest concurrence, and I nodded in friendly recognition to the speaker, and drank off my glass to his health.

"Who can give us a song? I'll back his reverence here to be a vocalist," cried Hammond. And sure enough, Dyke sang one of the national melodies with great feeling and taste. Ozley followed with something in less perfect taste, and we all grew very jolly. Then there came a broiled bone and some devilled kidneys, and a warm brew which Hammond himself concocted, – a most insidious liquor, which had a strong odor of lemons, and was compounded, at the same time, of little else than rum and sugar.

There is an adage that says “in vino Veritas,” which I shrewdly suspect to be a great fallacy; at least, as regards my own case, I know it to be totally inapplicable. I am in my sober hours – and I am proud to say that the exceptions from such are of the rarest – one of the most veracious of mortals; indeed, in my frank sincerity, I have often given offence to those who like a courteous hypocrisy better than an ungraceful truth. Whenever by any chance it has been my ill-fortune to transgress these limits, there is no bound to my imagination. There is nothing too extravagant or too vainglorious for me to say of myself. All the strange incidents of romance that I have read, all the travellers’ stories, newspaper accidents, adventures by sea and land, wonderful coincidences, unexpected turns of fortune, I adapt to myself, and coolly relate them as personal experiences. Listeners have afterwards told me that I possess an amount of consistence, a verisimilitude in these narratives perfectly marvellous, and only to be accounted for by supposing that I myself must, for the time being, be the dupe of my own imagination. Indeed, I am sure such must be the true explanation of this curious fact. How, in any other mode, explain the rash wagers, absurd and impossible engagements I have contracted in such moments, backing myself to leap twenty-three feet on the level sward; to dive in six fathoms water, and fetch up Heaven knows what of shells and marine curiosities from the bottom; to ride the most unmanageable of horses; and, single-handed and unarmed, to fight the fiercest bulldog in England? Then, as to intellectual feats, what have I not engaged to perform? Sums of mental arithmetic; whole newspapers committed to memory after one reading; verse compositions, on any theme, in ten languages; and once a written contract to compose a whole opera, with all the scores, within twenty-four hours. To a nature thus strangely constituted, wine was a perfect magic wand, transforming a poor, weak, distrustful modest man into a hero; and yet, even with such temptations, my excesses were extremely rare and unfrequent. Are there many, I would ask, that could resist the passport to such a dreamland, with only the penalty of a headache the next morning? Some one would, perhaps, suggest that these were enjoyments to pay forfeit on. Well, so they were; but I must not anticipate. And now to my tale.

To Hammond’s brew there succeeded one by Oxley, made after an American receipt, and certainly both fragrant and insinuating; and then came a concoction made by the priest, which he called “Father Hosey’s pride.” It was made in a bowl, and drunk out of lemon-rinds, ingeniously fitted into the wine-glasses. I remember no other particulars about it, though I can call to mind much of the conversation that preceded it. How I gave a long historical account of my family, that we came originally from Corsica, the name Potts being a corruption of Pozzo, and that we were of the same stock as the celebrated diplomatist Pozzo di Borgo. Our unclaimed estates in the island were of fabulous value, but in asserting my right to them I should accept thirteen mortal duels, the arrears of a hundred and odd years un-scored off, in anticipation of which I had at one time taken lessons from Angelo, in fencing, which led to the celebrated challenge they might have read in “Galignani,” where I offered to meet any swordsman in Europe for ten thousand Napoleons, giving choice of the weapon to my adversary. With a tear to the memory of the poor French colonel that I killed at Sedan, I turned the conversation. Being in France, I incidentally mentioned some anecdotes of military life, and how I had invented the rifle called after Minié’s name, and, in a moment of good nature, given that excellent fellow my secret.

“I will say,” said I, “that Minié has shown more gratitude than some others nearer home, but we ‘ll talk of rifled cannon another time.”

In an episode about bear-shooting, I mentioned the Emperor of Russia, poor dear Nicholas, and told how we had once exchanged horses, – mine being more strong-boned, and a weight-carrier; his a light Caucasian mare of purest breed, “the dam of that creature you may see below in the stable now,” said I, carelessly. “Come and see me one of these days, Potts,” said he, in parting; ‘come and pass a week with me at Constantinople.’ This was the first intimation he had ever given of his project against Turkey; and when I told it to the Duke of Wellington, his remark was a muttered ‘Strange fellow, Potts, – knows everything!’ though he made no reply to me at the time.”

It was somewhere about this period that the priest began with what struck me as an attempt to outdo me as a storyteller, an effort I should have treated with the most contemptuous indifference but for the amount of attention bestowed on him by the others. Nor was this all, but actually I perceived that a kind of rivalry was attempted to be established, so that we were pitted directly against each other. Amongst the other self-delusions of such moments was the profound conviction I entertained that I was master of all games of skill and address, superior to Major A. at whist, and able to give Staunton a pawn and the move at chess. The priest was just as vainglorious. "He'd like to see the man who 'd play him a game of 'spoiled five'" – whatever that was – "or drafts; ay, or, though it was not his pride, a bit of backgammon."

"Done, for fifty pounds; double on the gammon!" cried I.

"Fifty fiddlesticks!" cried he; "where would you or I find as many shillings?"

"What do you mean, sir?" said I, angrily. "Am I to suppose that you doubt my competence to risk such a contemptible sum, or is it to your own inability alone you would testify?"

A very acrimonious dispute followed, of which I have no clear recollection. I only remember how Hammond was out-and out for the priest, and Oxley too tipsy to take *my* part with any efficiency. At last – Row arranged I can't say – peace was restored, and the next thing I can recall was listening to Father Dyke giving a long, and of course a most fabulous, history of a ring that he wore on his second finger. It was given by the Pretender, he said, to his uncle, the celebrated Carmelite monk, Lawrence O'Kelly, who for years had followed the young prince's fortunes. It was an onyx, with the letters C. E. S. engraved on it. Keldrum took an immense fancy to it; he protested that everything that attached to that unhappy family possessed in his eyes an uncommon interest. "If you have a fancy to take up Potto's wager," said he, laughingly, "I'll give you fifty pounds for your signet ring."

The priest demurred; Hammond interposed; then there was more discussion, now warm, now jocose. Oxley tried to suggest something, which we all laughed at. Keldrum placed the backgammon board meanwhile; but I can give no clear account of what ensued, though I remember that the terms of our wager were committed to writing by Hammond, and signed by Father D. and myself, and in the conditions there figured a certain ring, guaranteed to have belonged to and been worn by his Royal Highness Charles Edward, and a cream-colored horse, equally guaranteed as the produce of a Caucasian mare presented by the late Emperor Nicholas to the present owner. The document was witnessed by all three, Oxley's name written in two letters, and a flourish. After that, I played, and lost!

CHAPTER IV. PLEASANT REFLECTIONS ON AWAKING

I can recall to this very hour the sensations of headache and misery with which I awoke the morning after this debauch. Baking pain it was, with a sort of tremulous beating all through the brain, as though a small engine had been set to work there, and that piston and boiler and connecting-rod were all banging, fizzing, and vibrating amid my fevered senses. I was, besides, much puzzled to know where I was, and how I had come there. Controversial divinity, genealogy, horse-racing, the peerage, and “double sixes” were dancing a wild cotillon through my brain; and although a waiter more than once cautiously obtruded his head into the room, to see if I were asleep, and as guardedly withdrew it again, I never had energy to speak to him, but lay passive and still, waiting till my mind might clear, and the cloud-fog that obscured my faculties might be wafted away.

At last – it was towards evening – the man, possibly becoming alarmed at my protracted lethargy, moved somewhat briskly through the room, and with that amount of noise that showed he meant to arouse me, disturbed chairs and fire-irons indiscriminately.

“Is it late or early?” asked I, faintly.

“Tis near five, sir, and a beautiful evening,” said he, drawing nigh, with the air of one disposed for colloquy.

I did n’t exactly like to ask where I was, and tried to ascertain the fact by a little circumlocution. “I suppose,” said I, yawning, “for all that is to be done in a place like this, when up, one might just as well stay abed, eh?”

“T is the snuggest place, anyhow,” said he, with that peculiar disposition to agree with you so characteristic in an Irish waiter.

“No society?” sighed I.

“No, indeed, sir.”

“No theatre?”

“Devil a one, sir.”

“No sport?”

“Yesterday was the last of the season, sir; and signs on it, his Lordship and the other gentleman was off immediately after breakfast.”

“You mean Lord – Lord – ” A mist was clearing slowly away, but I could not yet see clearly.

“Lord Keldrum, sir; a real gentleman every inch of him.”

“Oh! yes, to be sure, – a very old friend of mine,” muttered I. “And so he’s gone, is he?”

“Yes, sir; and the last word he said was about your honor.”

“About me, – what was it?”

“Well, indeed, sir,” replied the waiter, with a hesitating and confused manner, “I did n’t rightly understand it; but as well as I could catch the words, it was something about hoping your honor had more of that wonderful breed of horses the Emperor of Roosia gave you.”

“Oh, yes! I understand,” said I, stopping him abruptly. “By the way, how is Blondel – that is, my horse – this morning?”

“Well, he looked fresh and hearty, when he went off this morning at daybreak – ”

“What do you mean?” cried I, jumping up in my bed. “Went off? where to?”

“With Father Dyke on his back; and a neater hand he could n’t wish over him. ‘Tim,’ says he, to the ostler, as he mounted, ‘there’s a five-shilling piece for you, for hansel, for I won this baste last night, and you must drink my health and wish me luck with him.’”

I heard no more, but, sinking back into the bed, I covered my face with my hands, overcome with shame and misery. All the mists that had blurred my faculties had now been swept clean

away, and the whole history of the previous evening was revealed before me. My stupid folly, my absurd boastfulness, my egregious story-telling, – not to call it worse, – were all there; but, shall I acknowledge it? what pained me not less poignantly was the fact that I ventured to stake the horse I had merely hired, and actually lost him at the play-table.

As soon as I rallied from this state of self-accusation, I set to work to think how I should manage to repossess myself of my beast, my loss of which might be converted into a felony. To follow the priest and ransom Blondel was my first care. Father Dyke would most probably not exact an unreasonable price; he, of course, never believed one word of my nonsensical narrative about Schamyl and the Caucasus, and he 'd not revenge upon Potts sober the follies of Potts tipsy. It is true my purse was a very slender one, but Blondel, to any one unacquainted with his pedigree, could not be a costly animal; fifteen pounds – twenty, certainly – ought to buy what the priest would call “every hair on his tail.”

It was now too late in the evening to proceed to execute the measures I had resolved on, and so I determined to lie still and ponder over them. Dismissing the waiter, with an order to bring me a cup of tea about eight o'clock, I resumed my cogitations. They were not pleasant ones: Potts a byword for the most outrageous and incoherent balderdash and untruth; Potts in the “Hue and Cry;” Potts in the dock; Potts in the pillory; Potts paragraphed in “Punch;” portrait of Potts, price one penny! – these were only a few of the forms in which the descendant of the famous Corsican family of Pozzo di Borgo now presented himself to my imagination.

The courts and quadrangles of Old Trinity ringing with laughter, the coarse exaggerations of tasteless scoffers, the jokes and sneers of stupidity, malice, and all uncharitableness, rang in my ears as if I heard them. All possible and impossible versions of the incident passed in review before me: my father, driven distracted by impertinent inquiries, cutting me off with a shilling, and then dying of mortification and chagrin; rewards offered for my apprehension; descriptions, not in any way flatteries, of my personal appearance; paragraphs of local papers hinting that the notorious Potts was supposed to have been seen in our neighborhood yesterday, with sly suggestions about looking after stable-doors, &c. I could bear it no longer. I jumped up, and rang the bell violently.

“You know this Father Dyke, waiter? In what part of the country does he live?”

“He's parish priest of Inistioge,” said he; “the snuggest place in the whole county.”

“How far from this may it be?”

“It's a matter of five-and-forty miles; and by the same token, he said he 'd not draw bridle till he got home to-night, for there was a fair at Grague to-morrow, and if he was n't pleased with the baste he 'd sell him there.”

I groaned deeply; for here was a new complication, entirely unlooked for. “You can't possibly mean,” gasped I out, “that a respectable clergyman would expose for sale a horse lent to him casually by a friend?” for the thought struck me that this protest of mine should be thus early on record.

The waiter scratched his head and looked confused. Whether another version of the event possessed him, or that my question staggered his convictions, I am unable to say; but he made no reply. “It is true,” continued I, in the same strain, “that I met his reverence last night for the first time. My friend Lord Keldrum made us acquainted; but seeing him received at my noble friend's board, I naturally felt, and said to myself, ‘The man Keldrum admits to his table is the equal of any one.’ Could anything be more reasonable than that?”

“No, indeed, sir; nothing,” said the waiter, obsequiously.

“Well, then,” resumed I, “some day or other it may chance that you will be called on to remember and recall this conversation between us; if so, it will be important that you should have a clear and distinct memory of the fact that when I awoke in the morning, and asked for my horse, the answer you made me was – What was the answer you made me?”

“The answer I med was this,” said the fellow, sturdily, and with an effrontery I can never forget, – “the answer I med was, that the man that won him took him away.”

“You’re an insolent scoundrel,” cried I, boiling over with passion, “and if you don’t ask pardon for this outrage on your knees, I ‘ll include you in the indictment for conspiracy.”

So far from proceeding to the penitential act I proposed, the fellow grinned from ear to ear, and left the room. It was a long time before I could recover my wonted calm and composure. That this rascal’s evidence would be fatal to me if the question ever came to trial, was as clear as noonday; not less clear was it that he knew this himself.

“I must go back at once to town,” thought I. “I will surrender myself to the law. If a compromise be impossible, I will perish at the stake.”

I forgot there was no stake; but there was wool-carding, and oakum-picking, and wheel-treading, and oyster-shell pounding, and other small plays of this nature, infinitely more degrading to humanity than all the cruelties of our barbarous ancestors.

Now, in no record of lives of adventure had I met any account of such trials as these. The Silvio Pellicos of Pentonville are yet unwritten martyrs. Prison discipline would vulgarize the grandest epic that ever was conceived “Anything rather than this,” said I, aloud. “Proscribed, outlawed, hunted down, but never, gray-coated and hair-clipped, shall a Potts be sentenced to the ‘crank,’ or black-holed as refractory! – Bring me my bill,” cried I, in a voice of indignant anger. “I will go forth into the world of darkness and tempest; I will meet the storm and the hurricane; better all the conflict of the elements than man’s – than man’s – ” I was n’t exactly sure what; but there was no need of the word, for a gust of wind had just flattened my umbrella in my face as I issued forth, and left me breathless, as the door closed behind me.

CHAPTER V. THE ROSARY AT INISTIOGE

As I walked onward against the swooping wind and the plashing rain, I felt a sort of heroic ardor in the notion of breasting the adverse waves of life so boldly. It is not every fellow could do this, — throw his knapsack on his shoulder, seize his stick, and set out in storm and blackness. No, Potts, my man; for downright inflexibility of purpose, for bold and resolute action, you need yield to none! It was, indeed, an awful night; the thunder rolled and crashed with scarce an interval of cessation; forked lightning tore across the sky in every direction; while the wind swept through the deep glen, smashing branches and uplifting large trees like mere shrubs. I was soon completely drenched, and my soaked clothes hung around with the weight of lead; my spirits, however, sustained me, and I toiled along, occasionally in a sort of wild bravado, giving a cheer as the thunder rolled close above my head, and trying to sing, as though my heart were as gay and my spirits as light as in an hour of happiest abandonment.

Jean Paul has somewhere the theory that our Good Genius is attached to us from our birth by a film fine as gossamer, and which few of us escape rupturing in the first years of youth, thus throwing ourselves at once without chart or pilot upon the broad ocean of life. He, however, more happily constituted, who feels the guidance of his guardian spirit, recognizes the benefits of its care, and the admonitions of its wisdom, — *he* is destined to great things. Such men discover new worlds beyond the seas, carry conquest over millions, found dynasties, and build up empires; they whom the world regard as demigods having simply the wisdom of being led by fortune, and not severing the slender thread that unites them to their destiny. Was I, Potts, in this glorious category? Had the lesson of the great moralist been such a warning to me that I had preserved the filmy link unbroken? I really began to think so; a certain impulse, a whispering voice within, that said, “Go on!” On, ever onward! seemed to be the accents of that Fate which had great things in store for me, and would eventually make me illustrious.

No illusions of your own, Potts, no phantasmagoria of your own poor heated fancy, must wile you away from the great and noble part destined for you. No weakness, no faint-heartedness, no shrinking from toil, nor even peril. Work hard to know thoroughly for what Fate intends you; read your credentials well, and then go to your post unflinchingly. Revolving this theory of mine, I walked ever on. It opened a wide field, and my imagination disported in it, as might a wild mustang over some vast prairie. The more I thought over it, the more did it seem to me the real embodiment of that superstition which extends to every land and every family of men. We are Lucky when, submitting to our Good Genius, we suffer ourselves to be led along unhesitatingly; we are Unlucky when, breaking our frail bonds, we encounter life unguided and unaided.

What a docile, obedient, and believing pupil did I pledge myself to be! Fate should see that she had no refractory nor rebellious spirit in me, no self-indulgent voluptuary, seeking only the sunny side of existence, but a nature ready to confront the rugged conflict of life, and to meet its hardships, if such were my allotted path.

I applied the circumstances in which I then found myself to my theory, and met no difficulty in the adaptation. Blondel was to perform a great part in my future. Blondel was a symbol selected by fate to indicate a certain direction. Blondel was a lamp by which I could find my way in the dark paths of the world. With Blondel, my Good Genius would walk beside me, or occasionally get up on the crupper, but never leave me or desert me. In the high excitement of my mind, I felt no sense of bodily fatigue, but walked on, drenched to the skin, alternately shivering with cold or burning with all the intensity of fever. In this state was it that I entered the little inn of Ovoco soon after daybreak, and stood dripping in the bar, a sad spectacle of exhaustion and excitement. My first question was, “Has Blondel been here?” and before they could reply, I went on with all the rapidity of delirium to assure them that deception of me would be fruitless; that Fate and I understood each other thoroughly,

travelled together on the best of terms, never disagreed about anything, but, by a mutual system of give and take, hit it off like brothers. I talked for an hour in this strain; and then my poor faculties, long struggling and sore pushed, gave way completely, and I fell into brain fever.

I chanced upon kind and good-hearted folk, who nursed me with care and watched me with interest; but my illness was a severe one, and it was only in the sixth week that I could be about again, a poor, weak, emaciated creature, with failing limbs and shattered nerves. There is an indescribable sense of weariness in the mind after fever, just as if the brain had been enormously over-taxed and exerted, and that in the pursuit of all the wild and fleeting fancies of delirium it had travelled over miles and miles of space. To the depressing influence of this sensation is added the difficulty of disentangling the capricious illusions of the sick-bed from the actual facts of life; and in this maze of confusion my first days of convalescence were passed. Blondel was my great puzzle. Was he a reality, or a mere creature of imagination? Had I really ridden him as a horse, or only as an idea? Was he a quadruped with mane and tail, or an allegory invented to typify destiny? I cannot say what hours of painful brain labor this inquiry cost me, and what intense research into myself. Strange enough, too, though I came out of the investigation convinced of his existence, I arrived at the conclusion that he was a "horse and something more." Not that I am able to explain myself more fully on that head, though, if I were writing this portion of my memoirs in German, I suspect I could convey enough of my meaning to give a bad headache to any one indulgent enough to follow me.

I set out once more upon my pilgrimage on a fine day of June, my steps directed to the village of Inistioge, where Father Dyke resided. I was too weak for much exertion, and it was only after five days of the road I reached at nightfall the little glen in which the village stood. The moon was up, streaking the wide market-places with long lines of yellow light between the rows of tall elm-trees, and tipping with silvery sheen the bright eddies of the beautiful river that rolled beside it. Over the granite cliffs that margined the stream, laurel, and arbutus, and wild holly clustered in wild luxuriance, backed higher up again, by tall pine-trees, whose leafy summits stood out against the sky; and lastly, deep within a waving meadow, stood an old ruined abbey, whose traceried window was now softly touched by the moonlight. All was still and silent, except the rush of the rapid river, as I sat down upon a stone bench to enjoy the scene and luxuriate in its tranquil serenity. I had not believed Ireland contained such a spot, for there was all the trim neatness and careful propriety of an English village, with that luxuriance of verdure and wild beauty so eminently Irish. How was it that I had never heard of it before? Were others aware of it, or was the discovery strictly my own? Or can it possibly be that all this picturesque loveliness is but the effect of a mellow moon? While I thus questioned myself, I heard the sound of a quick footstep rapidly approaching, and soon afterwards the pleasant tone of a rich voice humming an opera air. I arose, and saw a tall, athletic-looking figure, with rod and fishing-basket, approaching me.

"May I ask you, sir," said I, addressing him, "if this village contains an inn?"

"There is, or rather there was, a sort of inn here," said he, removing his cigar as he spoke; "but the place is so little visited that I fancy the landlord found it would not answer, and so it is closed at this moment."

"But do visitors – tourists – never pass this way?"

"Yes, and a few salmon-fishers, like myself, come occasionally in the season; but then we dispose ourselves in little lodgings, here and there, some of us with the farmers, one or two of us with the priest."

"Father Dyke?" broke I in.

"Yes; you know him, perhaps?"

"I have heard of him, and met him, indeed," added I, after a pause. "Where may his house be?"

"The prettiest spot in the whole glen. If you 'd like to see it in this picturesque moonlight, come along with me."

I accepted the invitation at once, and we walked on together. The easy, half-careless tone of the stranger, the loose, lounging stride of his walk, and a certain something in his mellow voice, seemed to indicate one of those natures which, so to say, take the world well, – temperaments that reveal themselves almost immediately. He talked away about fishing as he went, and appeared to take a deep interest in the sport, not heeding much the ignorance I betrayed on the subject, nor my ignoble confession that I had never adventured upon anything higher than a worm and a quill.

“I’m sure,” said he, laughingly, “Tom Dyke never encouraged you in such sporting-tackle, glorious fly-fisher as he is.”

“You forget, perhaps,” replied I, “that I scarcely have any acquaintance with him. We met once only at a dinnerparty.”

“He’s a pleasant fellow,” resumed he; “devilish wideawake, one must say; up to most things in this same world of ours.”

“That much my own brief experience of him can confirm,” said I, dryly, for the remark rather jarred upon my feelings.

“Yes,” said he, as though following out his own train of thought “Old Tom is not a bird to be snared with coarse lines. The man must be an early riser that catches him napping.”

I cannot describe how this irritated me. It sounded like so much direct sarcasm upon my weakness and want of acuteness.

“There’s the ‘Rosary;’ that’s his cottage,” said he, taking my arm, while he pointed upward to a little jutting promontory of rock over the river, surmounted by a little thatched cottage almost embowered in roses and honeysuckles. So completely did it occupy the narrow limits of ground, that the windows projected actually over the stream, and the creeping plants that twined through the little balconies hung in tangled masses over the water. “Search where you will through the Scottish and Cumberland scenery, I defy you to match that,” said my companion; “not to say that you can hook a four-pound fish from that little balcony on any summer evening while you smoke your cigar.”

“It is a lovely spot, indeed,” said I, inhaling with ecstasy the delicious perfume which in the calm night air seemed to linger in the atmosphere.

“He tells me,” continued my companion, – “and I take his word for it, for I am no florist, – that there are seventy varieties of the rose on and around that cottage. I can answer for it that you can’t open a window without a great mass of flowers coming in showers over you. I told him, frankly, that if I were his tenant for longer than the fishing-season, I ‘d clear half of them away.”

“You live there, then?” asked I, timidly.

“Yes, I rent the cottage, all but two rooms, which he wished to keep for himself, but which he now writes me word may be let, for this month and the next, if a tenant offer. Would you like them?” asked he, abruptly.

“Of all things – that is – I think so – I should like to see them first!” muttered I, half startled by the suddenness of the question.

“Nothing easier,” said he, opening a little wicket as he spoke, and beginning to ascend a flight of narrow steps cut in the solid rock. “This is a path of my designing,” continued he; “the regular approach is on the other side; but this saves fully half a mile of road, though it be a little steep.”

As I followed him up the ascent, I proposed to myself a variety of questions, such as, where and how I was to procure accommodation for the night, and in what manner to obtain something to eat, of which I stood much in need? and I had gained a little flower-garden at the rear of the cottage before I had resolved any of these difficult points.

“Here we are,” said he, drawing a long breath. “You can’t see much of the view at this hour; but to-morrow, when you stand on this spot, and look down that reach of the river, with Mont Alto in the background, you ‘ll tell me if you know anything finer!”

"Is that Edward?" cried a soft voice; and at the same instant a young girl came hastily out of the cottage, and, throwing her arms around my companion, exclaimed, "How you have alarmed me! What could possibly have kept you out so late?"

"A broad-shouldered fish, a fellow weighing twelve pounds at the very least, and who, after nigh three hours' playing, got among the rocks and smashed my tackle."

"And you lost him?"

"That did I, and some twenty yards of gut, and the top splice of my best rod, and my temper, besides. But I 'm forgetting; Mary, here is a gentleman who will, I hope, not refuse to join us at supper. – My sister."

By the manner of presentation, it was clear that he expected to hear my name, and so I interposed, "Mr. Potts, – Algernon Sydney Potts."

The young lady courtesied slightly, muttered something like a repetition of the invitation, and led the way into the cottage.

My astonishment was great at the "interior" now before me; for though all the arrangements bespoke habits of comfort and even luxury, there was a studious observance of cottage style in everything; the bookshelves, the tables, the very pianoforte, being all made of white unvarnished wood. And I now perceived that the young lady herself, with a charming coquetry, had assumed something of the costume of the Oberland, and wore her bodice laced in front, and covered with silver embroidery both tasteful and becoming.

"My name is Crofton," said my host, as he disengaged himself of his basket and tackle; "we are almost as much strangers here as yourself. I came here for the fishing, and mean to take myself off when it 's over."

"I hope not, Edward," broke in the girl, who was now, with the assistance of a servant-woman, preparing the table for supper; "I hope you 'll stay till we see the autumn tints on those trees."

"My sister is just as great an enthusiast about sketching as I am for salmon-fishing," said he, laughingly; "and for my own part, I like scenery and landscape very well, but think them marvellously heightened by something like sport. Are you an angler?"

"No," said I; "I know nothing of the gentle craft"

"Fond of shooting, perhaps? Some men think the two sports incompatible."

"I am as inexpert with the gun as the rod," said I, diffidently.

I perceived that the sister gave a sly look under her long eyelashes towards me; but what its meaning, I could not well discover. Was it depreciation of a man who avowed himself unacquainted with the sports of the field, or was it a quiet recognition of claims more worthy of regard? At all events, I perceived that she had very soft, gentle-looking gray eyes, a very fair skin, and a profusion of beautiful brown hair. I had not thought her pretty at first I now saw that she was extremely pretty, and her figure, though slightly given to fulness, the perfection of grace.

Hungry, almost famished as I was, with a fast of twelve hours, I felt no impatience so long as she moved about in preparation for the meal. How she disposed the little table equipage, the careful solicitude with which she arranged the fruit and the flowers, – not always satisfied with her first dispositions, but changing them for something different, – all interested me vastly, and when at last we were summoned to table, I actually felt sorry and disappointed.

Was it really so delicious, was the cookery so exquisite? I own frankly that I am not a trustworthy witness; but if my oath could be taken, I am willing to swear that I believe there never were such salmon-steaks, such a pigeon-pie, and such a damson-tart served to mortals as these. My enthusiasm, I suspect, must have betrayed itself in some outward manifestation, for I remember Crofton laughingly having remarked, —

"You will turn my sister's head, Mr. Potts, by such flatteries; all the more, since her cookery is self-taught."

“Don’t believe him, Mr. Potts; I have studied all the great masters of the art, and you shall have an omelette to-morrow for breakfast, Brillat Savarin himself would not despise.”

I blushed at the offer of an hospitality so neatly and delicately insinuated, and had really no words to acknowledge it, nor was my confusion unfavorably judged by my hosts. Crofton marked it quickly, and said, —

“Yes, Mr. Potts, and I’ll teach you to hook a trout afterwards. Meanwhile let us have a glass of Sauterne together; we drink it out of green glasses, to cheat ourselves into the fancy that it’s Rhenish.”

“Am Rhein, am Rhein, da wachsen unsere Reben,” said I, quoting the students’ song.

“Oh, have you been in Germany?” cried she, eagerly.

“Alas! no,” said I. “I have never travelled.” I thought she looked disappointed as I said this. Indeed, I already wished it unsaid; but her brother broke in with, —

“We are regular vagabonds, Mr. Potts. My sister and myself have had a restless paroxysm for the last three years of life; and what with seeking cool spots for the summer and hot climates for winter, we are scarcely ever off the road.”

“Like the gentleman, I suppose, who ate oysters for appetite, but carried his system so far as to induce indigestion.” My joke failed; nobody laughed, and I was overwhelmed with confusion, which I was fain to bury in my strawberries and cream.

“Let us have a little music, Mary,” said Crofton. “Do you play or sing, Mr. Potts?”

“Neither. I do nothing,” cried I, in despair. “As Sydney Smith says, ‘I know something about the Romans,’ but, for any gift or grace which could adorn society, or make time pass more pleasantly, I am an utter bankrupt.”

The young girl had, while I was speaking, taken her place at the pianoforte, and was half listlessly suffering her hands to fall in chords over the instrument.

“Come out upon this terrace, here,” cried Crofton to me, “and we’ll have our cigar. What I call a regular luxury after a hard day is to lounge out here in the cool night air, and enjoy one’s weed while listening to Spohr or Beethoven.”

It was really delightful. The bright stars were all reflected in the calm river down below, and a thousand odors floated softly on the air as we sat there.

Are there not in every man’s experience short periods in which he seemed to have lived longer than during whole years of life? They tell us there are certain conditions of the atmosphere, inappreciable as to the qualities, which seem to ripen wines, imparting to young fresh vintages all the mellow richness of age, all the depth of flavor, all the velvety softness of time. May there not possibly be influences which similarly affect our natures? May there not be seasons in which changes as great as these are wrought within us? I firmly believe it, and as firmly that such a period was that in which I sat on the balcony over the Nore, listening to Mary Crofton as she sang, but just as often lost to every sound, and deep in a heaven of blended enjoyments, of which no one ingredient was in the ascendant. Starry sky, rippling river, murmuring night winds, perfumed air, floating music, all mingling as do the odors of an incense, and, like an incense, filling the brain with a delicious intoxication.

Hour after hour must have passed with me in this half-conscious ecstasy, for Crofton at last said, —

“There, where you see that pinkish tint through the gray, that’s the sign of breaking day, and the signal for bedtime. Shall I show you your room?”

“How I wish this could last forever!” cried I, rapturously; and then, half ashamed of my warmth, I stammered out a good-night, and retired.

CHAPTER VI. MY SELF-EXAMINATION

Our life at the Rosary – for it was *our* life now of which I have to speak – was one of unbroken enjoyment. On fine days we fished; that is, Crofton did, and I loitered along some river's bank till I found a quiet spot to plant my rod, and stretch myself on the grass, now reading, of tender dreaming, such glorious dreams as only come in the leafy shading of summer time, to a mind enraptured with all around it. The lovely scenery and the perfect solitude of the spot ministered well to my fanciful mood, and left me free to weave the most glittering web of incident for my future. So utterly was all the past blotted from my memory that I recalled nothing of existence more remote than my first evening at the cottage. If for a parting instant a thought of by-gones would obtrude, I hastened to escape from it as from a gloomy reminiscence. I turned away as would a dreamer who dreaded to awaken out of some delicious vision, and who would not face the dull aspect of reality. Three weeks thus glided by of such happiness as I can scarcely yet recall without emotion! The Croftons had come to treat me like a brother; they spoke of family events in all freedom before me; talked of the most confidential things in my presence, and discussed their future plans and their means as freely in my hearing as though I had been kith and kin with them. I learned that they were orphans, educated and brought up by a rich, eccentric uncle, who lived in a sort of costly seclusion in one of the Cumberland dales; Edward, who had served in the army, and been wounded in an Indian campaign, had given up the service in a fit of impatience of being passed over in promotion.

His uncle resented the rash step by withdrawing the liberal allowance he had usually made him, and they quarrelled. Mary Crofton, espousing her brother's side, quitted her guardian's roof to join his; and thus had they rambled about the world for two or three years, on means scanty enough, but still sufficient to provide for those who neither sought to enter society nor partake of its pleasures.

As I advanced in the intimacy, I became depository of the secrets of each. Edward's was the sorrow he felt for having involved his sister in his own ruin, and been the means of separating her from one so well able and so willing to befriend her. Hers was the more bitter thought that their narrow means should prejudice her brother's chances of recovery, for his chest had shown symptoms of dangerous disease requiring all that climate and consummate care might do to overcome. Preyed on incessantly by this reflection, unable to banish it, equally unable to resist its force, he took the first and only step she had ever adventured without his knowledge, and had written to her uncle a long letter of explanations and entreaty.

I saw the letter, and read it carefully. It was all that sisterly love and affection could dictate, accompanied by a sense of dignity, that if her appeal should be unsuccessful, no slight should be passed upon her brother, who was unaware of the step thus taken. To express this sufficiently, she was driven to the acknowledgment that Edward would never have himself stooped to the appeal; and so careful was she of his honor in this respect, that she repeated – with what appeared to me unnecessary insistence – that the request should be regarded as hers, and hers only. In fact, this was the uppermost sentiment in the whole epistle. I ventured to say as much, and endeavored to induce her to moderate in some degree the amount of this pretension; but she resisted firmly and decidedly. Now, I have recorded this circumstance here, – less for itself than to mention how by its means this little controversy led to a great intimacy between us, – inducing us, while defending our separate views, to discuss each other's motives, and even characters, with the widest freedom. I called her enthusiast, and in return she styled me worldly and calculating; and, indeed, I tried to seem so, and fortified my opinions by prudential maxims and severe reflections I should have been sorely indisposed to adopt in my own case. I believe she saw all this. I am sure she read me aright, and perceived that I was arguing against my own convictions. At all events, day after day went over, and no answer came to the letter. I used to go each morning to the post in the village to inquire, but always returned with the same disheartening tidings, “Nothing to-day!”

One of these mornings it was, that I was returning disconsolately from the village, Crofton, whom I believed at the time miles away on the mountains, overtook me. He came up from behind, and, passing his arm within mine, walked on some minutes without speaking. I saw plainly there was something on his mind, and I half dreaded lest he might have discovered his sister's secret and have disapproved of my share in it.

"Algy," said he, calling me by my Christian name, which he very rarely did, "I have something to say to you. Can I be quite certain that you 'll take my frankness in good part?"

"You can," I said, with a great effort to seem calm and assured.

"You give me your word upon it?"

"I do," said I, trying to appear bold; "and my hand be witness of it"

"Well," he resumed, drawing a long breath, "here it is. I have remarked that for above a week back you have never waited for the postboy's return to the cottage, but always have come down to the village yourself."

I nodded assent, but said nothing.

"I have remarked, besides," said he, "that when told at the office there was no letter for you, you came away sad-looking and fretted, scarcely spoke for some time, and seemed altogether downcast and depressed."

"I don't deny it," I said calmly.

"Well," continued he, "some old experiences, of mine have taught me that this sort of anxiety has generally but one source, with fellows of *our* age, and which simply means that the remittance we have counted upon as certain has been, from some cause or other, delayed. Is n't that the truth?"

"No," said I, joyfully, for I was greatly relieved by his words; "no, on my honor, nothing of the kind."

"I may not have hit the thing exactly," said he, hurriedly, "but I 'll be sworn it is a money matter; and if a couple of hundred pounds be of the least service – "

"My dear, kind-hearted fellow," I broke in, "I can't endure this longer: it is no question of money; it is nothing that affects my means, though I half wish it were, to show you how cheerfully I could owe you my escape from a difficulty, – not, indeed, that I need another tie to bind me to you – " But I could say no more, for my eyes were swimming over, and my lips trembling.

"Then," cried he, "I have only to ask pardon for thus obtruding upon your confidence."

I was too full of emotion to do more than squeeze his hand affectionately, and thus we walked along, side by side, neither uttering a word. At last, and as it were with an effort, by a bold transition, to carry our thoughts into another and very different channel, he said: "Here's a letter from old Dyke, our landlord. The worthy father has been enjoying himself in a tour of English watering-places, and has now started for a few weeks up the Rhine. His account of his holiday, as he calls it, is amusing; nor less so is the financial accident to which he owes the excursion. Take it, and read it," he added, giving me the epistle. "If the style be the man, his reverence is not difficult to decipher."

I bestowed little attention on this speech, uttered, as I perceived, rather from the impulse of starting a new topic than anything else, and, taking the letter half mechanically, I thrust it in my pocket. One or two efforts we made at conversation were equally failures, and it was a relief to me when Crofton, suddenly remembering some night-lines he had laid in a mountain lake a few miles off, hastily shook my hand, and said, "Good-bye till dinner-time."

When I reached the cottage, instead of entering I strolled into the garden, and sought out a little summer-house of sweet-brier and honeysuckle, on the edge of the river. Some strange, vague impression was on me, that I needed time and place to commune with myself and be alone; that a large unsettled account lay between me and my conscience, which could not be longer deferred; but of what nature, how originating, and how tending, I know nothing whatever.

I resolved to submit myself to a searching examination, to ascertain what I might about myself. In my favorite German authors I had frequently read that men's failures in life were chiefly owing to

neglect of this habit of self-investigation; that though we calculate well the dangers and difficulties of an enterprise, we omit the more important estimate of what may be our capacity to effect an object, what are our resources, wherein our deficiencies.

"Now for it," I thought, as I entered the little arbor, – "now for it, Potts; kiss the book, and tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

As I said this, I took off my hat and bowed respectfully around to the members of an imaginary court. "My name," said I, in a clear and respectful voice, "is Algernon Sydney Potts. If I be pushed to the avowal, I am sorry it *is* Potts. Algernon Sydney do a deal, but they can't do everything, – not to say that captious folk see a certain bathos in the collocation with my surname. Can a man hope to make such a name illustrious? Can he aspire to the notion of a time when people will allude to the great Potts, the celebrated Potts, the immortal Potts?" I grew very red, I felt my cheek on fire as I uttered this, and I suddenly bethought me of Mr. Pitt, and I said aloud, "And, if Pitt, why not Potts?" That was a most healing recollection. I revelled in it for a long time. "How true is it," I continued, "that the halo of greatness illumines all within its circle, and the man is merged in the grandeur of his achievements. The men who start in life with high sounding designations have but to fill a foregone pledge, – to pay the bill that fortune has endorsed. Not so was our case, Pitt. To us is it to lay every foundation stone of our future greatness. There was nothing in *your* surname to foretell you would be a Minister of State at one-and-thirty, – there is no letter of *mine* to indicate what I shall be. But what is it that I am to be? Is it Poet, Philosopher, Politician, Soldier, or Discoverer? Am I to be great in Art, or illustrious in Letters? Is there to be an ice tract of Behring's Straits called Potts's Point, or a planet styled Pottsium Sidus? And when centuries have rolled over, will historians have their difficulty about the first Potts, and what his opinions were on this subject or that?"

Then came a low soft sound of half-suppressed laughter, and then the rustle of a muslin dress hastily brushing through the trees. I rushed out from my retreat, and hurried down the walk. No one to be seen, – not a soul; not a sound, either, to be heard.

"No use hiding, Mary," I called out, "I saw you all the time; my mock confession was got up merely to amuse you. Come out boldly and laugh as long as you will." No answer. This refusal amazed me. It was like a disbelief in my assertion. "Come, come!" I cried, "you can't pretend to think I was serious in all this vainglorious nonsense. Come, Mary, and let us enjoy the laugh at it together. If you don't, I shall be angry. I'll take it ill, – very ill."

Still no reply. Could I, then, have been deceived? Was it a mere delusion? But no; I heard the low laugh, and the rustle of the dress, and the quick tread upon the gravel, too plainly for any mistake, and so I returned to the cottage in chagrin and ill-temper. As I passed the open windows' of the little drawing-room I saw Mary seated at her work, with, as was her custom, an open book on a little table beside her. Absorbed as she was, she did not lift her head, nor notice my approach till I entered the room.

"You have no letter for me?" she cried, in a voice of sorrowful meaning.

"None," said I scrutinizing her closely, and sorely puzzled what to make of her calm deportment. "Have you been out in the garden this morning?" I asked, abruptly.

"No," said she, frankly.

"Not quitted the house at all?"

"No. Why do you ask?" cried she, in some surprise.

"I'll tell you," I said, sitting down at her side, and speaking in a low and confidential tone; "a strange thing has just happened to me." And with that I narrated the incident, glossing over, as best I might, the absurdity of my soliloquizing, and the nature of the self-examination I was engaged in. Without waiting for me to finish, she broke in suddenly with a low laugh, and said, —

"It must have been Rose."

"And who is Rose?" I asked half sternly.

"A cousin of ours, a mere school-girl, who has just arrived. She came by the mail this morning, when you were out. But here she is, coming up the walk. Just step behind that screen, and you shall have your revenge. I'll make her tell everything."

I had barely time to conceal myself, when, with a merry laugh, a fresh, girlish voice called out, "I 've seen him! I have seen him, Mary! I was sitting on the rock beside the river, when he came into the summer-house, and, fancying himself alone and unseen, proceeded to make his confession to himself."

"His confession! What do you mean?"

"I don't exactly know whether that be the proper name for it, but it was a sort of self-examination, not very painful, certainly, inasmuch as it was rather flattering than otherwise."

"I really cannot understand you, Rose."

"I'm not surprised," said she, laughing again. "It was some time before I could satisfy myself that he was not talking to somebody else, or reading out of a book; and when, peeping through the leaves, I perceived he was quite alone, I almost screamed out with laughing."

"But why, child? What was the absurdity that amused you?"

"Fancy the creature. I need not describe him, Molly. You know him well, with his great staring light-green eyes, and his wild yellow hair. Imagine his walking madly to and fro, tossing his long arms about in uncouth gestures, while he asked himself seriously whether he would n't be Shakspeare, or Milton, or Michael Angelo, or Nelson. Fancy his gravely inquiring of himself what remarkable qualities predominated in his nature: was he more of a sculptor, or a politician, or had fate destined him to discover new worlds, or to conquer the old ones? If I had n't been actually listening to the creature, and occasionally looking at him, too, I 'd have doubted my senses. Oh dear! shall I ever forget the earnest absurdity of his manner as he said something about the 'immortal Potts'?"

The reminiscence was too much for her, for she threw herself on a sofa and laughed immoderately. As for me, unable to endure more, and fearful that Mary might finish by discovering me, I stole from the room, and rushed out into the wood.

What is it that renders ridicule more insupportable than vituperation? Why is the violence of passion itself more easy to endure than the sting of sarcastic satire? What weak spot in our nature does this peculiar passion assail? And, again, why are all the noble aspirations of high-hearted enthusiasm, the grand self-reliance of daring minds, ever to be made the theme of such scoffings? Have the scorners never read of Wolfe, of Murat, or of Nelson? Has not a more familiar instance reached them of one who foretold to an unwilling senate the time when they would hang in expectancy on his words, and treasure them as wisdom? Cruel, narrow-minded, and unjust world, with whom nothing succeeds except success!

The man who contracts a debt is never called cheat till his inability to discharge it has been proven clearly and beyond a doubt; but he who enters into an engagement with his own heart to gain a certain prize, or reach a certain goal, is made a mockery and a sneer by all whose own humble faculties represent such striving as impossible. From thoughts like these I went on to speculate whether I should ever be able, in the zenith of my great success, to forgive those captious and disparaging critics who had once endeavored to damp my ardor and bar my career. I own I found it exceedingly difficult to be generous, and in particular to that young minx of sixteen who had dared to make a jest of my pretensions.

I wandered along thus for hours. Many a grassy path of even sward led through the forest, and, taking one of those which skirted the stream, I strolled along, unconscious alike of time and place. Out of the purely personal interests which occupied my mind sprang others, and I bethought me with a grim satisfaction of the severe lesson Mary must have, ere this, read Rose upon her presumption and her flippancy, telling her, in stern accents, how behind that screen the man was standing she had dared to make the subject of her laughter. Oh, how she blushes! what flush of crimson shame spreads

over her face, her temples, and her neck; what large tears overflow her lids, and fall along her cheeks! I actually pity her suffering, and am pained at her grief.

“Spare her, dear Mary!” I cry out; “after all, she is but a child. Why blame her that she cannot measure greatness, as philosophers measure mountains, by the shadow?”

Egotism, in every one of its moods and tenses, must have a strong fascination. I walked on for many a mile while thus thinking, without the slightest sense of weariness, or any want of food. The morning glided over, and the hot noon was passed, and the day was sobering down into the more solemn tints of coming evening, and I still loitered, or lay in the tall grass deep in my musings.

In taking my handkerchief from my pocket, I accidentally drew forth the priest's letter, and in a sort of half-indolent curiosity, proceeded to read it. The hand was cramped and rugged, the writing that of a man to whom the manual part of correspondence is a heavy burden, and who consequently incurs such labor as rarely as is possible. The composition had all the charm of ease, and was as unstudied as need be; the writer being evidently one who cared little for the graces of style, satisfied to discuss his subject in the familiar terms of his ordinary conversation.

Although I did not mean to impose more than an extract from it on my reader, I must reserve even that much for my next chapter.

CHAPTER VII. FATHER DYKE'S LETTER

Father Dyke was one of those characters which Ireland alone produces, – a sporting priest. In France, Spain, or Italy, the type is unknown. Time was, when the *abbé*, elegant, witty, and well-bred, was a great element of polished life; when his brilliant conversation and his insidious address threw all the charm of culture over a society which was only rescued from coarseness by the marvellous dexterity of such intellectual gladiators. They have passed away, like many other things brilliant and striking: the gilded coach, the red-heeled slipper, and the supper of the regency; the powdered marquise, for a smile of whose dimpled mouth the deadly rapier has flashed in the moonlight; the perfumed beauty, for one of whose glances a poet would have racked his brain to render worthily in verse; the gilded *salon* where, in a sort of incense, all the homage of genius was offered up before the altar of loveliness, – gone are they all! *Au fond*, the world is pretty much the same, although we drive to a club dinner in a one-horse brougham; and if we meet the *curé* of St. Roch, we find him to be rather a morose middle-aged man with a taste for truffles, and a talent for silence. It is not as the successor of the witty *abbé* that I adduce the sporting priest, but simply as a variety of the ecclesiastical character which, doubtless, a very few more years will have consigned to the realm of history. He, too, will be a bygone! Father Tom, as he was popularly called, never needing any more definite designation, was *tam Marte quam Mercurio*, as much poacher as priest, and made his sporting acquirements subservient to the demands of an admirable table. The thickest salmon, the curdiest trout, the fattest partridge, and the most tender woodcock smoked on his board, and, rumor said, cooked with a delicacy that more pretentious houses could not rival. In the great world nothing is more common than to see some favored individual permitted to do things which, by common voice, are proclaimed impracticable or improper. With a sort of prescriptive right to outrage the ordinances of society, such people accept no law but their own inclination, and seem to declare that they are altogether exempt from the restraints that bind other men. In a small way, and in a humble sphere, Father Tom enjoyed this privilege, and there was not in his whole county to be found one man churlish or ungenerous enough to dispute it; and thus was he suffered to throw his line, snap his gun, or unleash his dog in precincts where many with higher claims had been refused permission.

It was not alone that he enjoyed the invigorating pleasure of field sports in practice, but he delighted in everything which bore any relationship to them. There was not a column of “Bell’s Life” in which he had not his sympathy, – the pigeon match, the pedestrian, the Yankee trotter, the champion for the silver sculls at Chelsea, the dog “Billy,” were all subjects of interest to him. Never did the most inveterate blue-stocking more delight in the occasion of meeting a great celebrity of letters, than did he when chance threw him in the way of the jock who rode the winner at the Oaks, or the “Game Chicken” who punished the “Croydon Pet” in the prize ring. But now for the letter, which will as fully reveal the man as any mere description. It was a narrative of races he had attended, and rowing-matches he had witnessed, with little episodes of hawking, badger-drawing, and cock-fighting intermixed.

“I came down here – Brighton – to swim for a wager of five-and-twenty sovereigns against a Major Blayse, of the Third Light Dragoon Guards; we made the match after mess at Aldershot, when neither of us was anything to speak of too sober; but as we were backed strongly, – he rather the favorite, – there was no way of drawing the bet. I beat him after a hard struggle; we were two hours and forty minutes in the water, and netted about sixty pounds besides. We dined with the depot in the evening, and I won a ten-pound note on a question of whether there ought to be saffron in the American drink called ‘greased lightning;’ but this was not the only piece of luck that attended me, as you shall hear. As I was taking my morning canter on the Downs, I perceived that a stranger – a jockey-like fellow, not quite a gentleman but near it – seemed to keep me in view; now riding past, now behind me, and always bestowing his whole attention on my nag. Of course, I showed the beast

off to the best, and handled him skilfully. I thought to myself, he likes the pony; he 'll be for making me an offer for him. I was right. I had just seated myself at breakfast, when the stranger sent his card, with a request to speak to me. He was a foreigner, but spoke very correct English, and his object was to learn if I would sell my horse. It is needless to say that I refused at once. The animal suited me, and I was one of those people who find it excessively difficult to be mounted to their satisfaction. I needed temper, training, action, gentleness, beauty, high courage, and perfect steadiness, and a number of such-like seeming incongruities. He looked a little impatient at all this; he seemed to say, 'I know all this kind of nonsense; I have heard shiploads of such gammon before. Be frank and say what's the figure; how much do you want for him?' He looked this, I say, but he never uttered a word, and at last I asked him, —

“Are you a dealer?”

“Well,” said he, with an arch smile, ‘something in that line.’

“I thought so,” said I. ‘The pony is a rare good one.’

“He nodded assent.

“He can jump a bar of his own height?”

“Another nod.

“And he’s as fresh on his legs — ’

“As if he were not twenty-six years old,” he broke in.

“Twenty-six fiddle-sticks! Look at his mouth; he has an eight-year-old mouth.”

“I know it,” said he, dryly; ‘and so he had fourteen years ago. Will you take fifty sovereigns for him?’ he added, drawing out a handful of gold from his pocket.

“No,” said I, firmly; ‘nor sixty, nor seventy, nor eighty!’

“I am sorry to have intruded upon you,” said he, rising, ‘and I beg you to excuse me. The simple fact is, that I am one who gains his living by horses, and it is only possible for me to exist by the generosity of those who deal with me.’

“This appeal was a home thrust, and I said, ‘What can you afford to give?’

“All I have here,” said he, producing a handful of gold, and spreading it on the table.

“We set to counting, and there were sixty-seven sovereigns in the mass. I swept off the money into the palm of my hand, and said, ‘The beast is yours.’

“He drew a long breath, as if to relieve his heart of a load of care, and said, ‘Men of *my* stamp, and who lead such lives as I do, are rarely superstitious.’

“Very true,” said I, with a nod of encouragement for him to go on.

“Well,” said he, resuming, ‘I never thought for a moment that any possibility could have made me so. If ever there was a man that laughed at lucky and unlucky days, despised omens, sneered at warnings, and scorned at predictions, I was he; and yet I have lived to be the most credulous and the most superstitious of men. It is now fourteen years and twenty-seven days — I remember the time to an hour — since I sold that pony to the Prince Ernest von Saxen-hausen, and since that day I never had luck. So long as I owned him all went well with me. I ought to tell you that I am the chief of a company of equestrians, and one corps, known as Klam’s Kunst-Reiters, was the most celebrated on the Continent In three years I made three hundred thousand guilders, and if the devil had not induced me to sell “Schatzchen” — that was his name — I should be this day as rich as Heman Rothschild! From the hour he walked out of the circus our calamities began. I lost my wife by fever at Wiesbaden, the most perfect high-school horsewoman in Europe; my son, of twenty years of age, fell, and dislocated his neck; the year after, at Vienna, my daughter Gretchen was blinded riding through a fiery hoop at Homburg; and four years later, all the company died of yellow fever at the Havannah, leaving me utterly beggared and ruined. Now these, you would say, though great misfortunes, are all in the course of common events. But what will you say when, on the eve of each of them, Schatzchen appeared to me in a dream, performing some well-known feat or other, and bringing down, as he ever did, thunders of applause; and never did he so appear without a disaster coming after. I struggled hard

before I suffered this notion to influence me. It was years before I even mentioned it to any one; and I used for a while to make a jest of it in the circus, saying, "Take care of yourselves tonight, for I saw Schatzchen." Of course they were not the stuff to be deterred by such warnings, but they became so at last. That they did, and were so terrified, so thoroughly terrified, that the day after one of my visions not a single member of the troupe would venture on a hazardous feat of any kind; and if we performed at all, it was only some commonplace exercises, with few risks, and no daring exploits whatever. Worn out with evil fortune, crushed and almost broken-hearted, I struggled on for years, secretly determining, if ever I should chance upon him, to buy back Schatzchen with my last penny in the world. Indeed, there were moments in which such was the intense excitement of my mind, I could have committed a dreadful crime to regain possession of him. We were on the eve of embarking for Ostend the other night, when I saw you riding on the Downs, and I came ashore at once to track you out, for I knew him, though fully half a mile away. None of my comrades could guess what detained me, nor understand why I asked each of them in turn to lend me whatever money he could spare. It was in this way I made up the little purse you see. It was thus provided that I dared to present myself to-day before you."

"As he gave me this narrative, his manner grew more eager and excited, and I could not help feeling that his mind, from the long-continued pressure of one thought, had received a serious shock. It was exactly one of those cases which physicians describe as leaving the intellect unimpaired, while some one faculty is under the thralldom of a dominant and all-pervading impression. I saw this more palpably, when, having declined to accept more than his original offer of fifty pounds, I replaced the remainder in his hand, he evinced scarcely any gratitude for my liberality, so totally was he engrossed by the idea that the horse was now his own, and that Fortune would no longer have any pretext for using him so severely as before.

"I don't know, – I cannot know," said he, "if fortune means to deal more kindly by me than heretofore, but I feel a sort of confidence in the future now; I have a kind of trustful courage as to what may come, that tells me no disaster will deter me, no mishap cast me down."

"These were his words as he arose to take his leave. Of his meeting with the pony I am afraid to trust myself to speak. It was such an overflow of affection as one might witness from a long absent brother on being once again restored to his own. I cannot say that the beast knew him, nor would I go so far as to assert that he did not, for certainly some of his old instincts seemed gradually to revive within him on hearing certain words; and when ordered to take a respectful farewell of me, the pony planted a foreleg on each of his master's shoulders, and, taking off his hat with his teeth, bowed twice or thrice in the most deferential fashion. I wished them both every success in life, and we parted. As I took my evening's stroll on the pier, I saw them embark for Ostend, the pony sheeted most carefully, and every imaginable precaution taken to insure him against cold. The man himself was poorly clad, and indifferently provided against the accidents of the voyage. He appeared to feel that the disparity required a word of apology, for he said, in a whisper: 'It 'll soon furnish me with a warm cloak; it 'll not leave me long in difficulties!' I assure you, my dear Crofton, there was something contagious in the poor fellow's superstition, for, as he sailed away, the thought lay heavily on my heart, 'What if I, too, should have parted with my good luck in life? How if I have bartered my fortune for a few pieces of money?' The longer I dwelt on this theme, the more forcibly did it strike me. My original possession of the animal was accomplished in a way that aided the illusion. It was thus I won him on a hit of backgammon!"

As I read thus far, the paper dropped from my hands, my head reeled, and in a faint dreamy state, as if drugged by some strong narcotic, I sank, I know not how long, unconscious. The first thing which met my eyes on awakening, was the line, "I won him on a hit of backgammon!" The whole story was at once before me. It was of Blondel I was reading! Blondel was the beast whose influence had swayed one man's destiny. So long as he owned him, the world went well and happily with him; all prospered and succeeded. It was a charm like the old lamp of Aladdin. And this was the

treasure I had lost. So far from imputing an ignorant superstition to the German, I concurred in every speculation, every theory of his invention. The man had evidently discovered one of those curious problems in what we rashly call the doctrine of chances. It was not the animal himself that secured good fortune, it was that, in his "circumstances," what Strauff calls "die amringende Bege-benheiten" of his lot, this creature was sure to call forth efforts and develop resources in his possessor, of which, without his aid, he would have gone all through life unconscious.

The vulgar notion that our lives are the sport of accident, – the minute too early or too late, the calm that detained us, the snow-storm that blocked the road, the chance meeting with this or that man, which we lay such stress on, – what are they in reality but trivial incidents without force or effect, save that they impel to action? They call out certain qualities in our nature by which our whole characters become modified. Your horse balks at a fence, and throws you over his head; the fall is not a very grave one, and you are scarcely hurt; you have fallen into a turnip-field, and the honest fellow, who is hoeing away near, comes kindly to your aid, and, in good Samaritan fashion, bathes your temples and restores you. When you leave him at last, you go forth with a kindlier notion of human nature; you recognize the tie "that makes the whole world kin," and you seem to think that hard toil hardens not the heart, nor a life of labor shuts out generous sympathies, – the lesson is a life one. But suppose that in your fall you alight on a bed of choice tulips, you descend in the midst of a rich parterre of starry anemones, and that your first conscious struggles are met with words of anger and reproach; instead of sorrow for your suffering, you hear sarcasms on your horsemanship, and insults on your riding, – no sympathy, no kindness, no generous anxiety for your safety, but all that irritate and offend, – more thought, in fact, for the petals of a flower than for the ligaments of your knee, – then, too, is the lesson a life one, and its fruits will be bitter memories for many a year. The events of our existence are in reality nothing, save in our treatment of them. By Blondel, I recognized one of those suggestive influences which mould fate by moulding temperament. The deep reflecting German saw this: it was clear *he* knew that in that animal was typified all that his life might become. Why should not I contest the prize with him? Blondel was charged with another destiny as well as his.

I turned once more to the letter, but I could not bear to read it; so many were the impertinent allusions to myself, my manner, my appearance, and my conversation. Still more insulting were the speculations as to what class or condition I belonged to. "He puzzled us completely," wrote the priest, "for while unmistakably vulgar in many things, there were certain indications of reading and education about him that refuted the notion of his being what Keldrum thought, – an escaped counter-jumper! The Guardsman insisted he was a valet; my own impression was, the fellow had kept a small circulating library, and gone mad with the three-volume novels. At all events, I have given him a lesson which, whether profitable or not to *him*, has turned out tolerably well for *me*. If ever you chance to hear of him, – his name was Podder or Pedder, I think, – pray let me know, for my curiosity is still unslaked about him." He thence went off to a sort of descriptive catalogue of my signs and tokens, so positively insulting that I cannot recall it; the whole winding up: "Add to all these an immense pomposity of tone, with a lisp, and a Dublin accent, and you can scarcely mistake him." Need I say, benevolent reader, that fouler calumnies were never uttered, nor more unfounded slanders ever pronounced?

It is not in this age of photography that a man need defend his appearance. By the aid of sun and collodion, I may, perhaps, one day convince you that I am not so devoid of personal graces as this foul-mouthed priest would persuade you. I am, possibly, in this pledge, exceeding the exact limits which this publication may enable me to sustain. I may be contracting an engagement which cannot be, consistent with its principles, fulfilled. If so, I must be your artist; but I swear to you, that I shall not flatter. Potto, painted by himself, shall be a true portrait. Meanwhile I have time to look out for my canvas, and you will be patient enough to wait till it be filled.

Again to this confounded letter: —

"There is another reason" (wrote Dyke) "why I should like to-chance upon this fellow." ("This fellow" meant me.) "I used to fancy myself unequalled in the imaginative department of conversation,

by the vulgar called lying. Here, I own, with some shame, he was my match. A more fearless, determined, go-ahead liar, I never met. Now, as one who deems himself no small proficient in the art, I would really like to meet him once more. We could approach each other like the augurs of old, and agree to be candid and free-spoken together, exchanging our ideas on this great topic, and frankly communicating any secret knowledge each might deem that he possessed. I'd go a hundred miles to pass an evening with him alone, to hear from his own lips the sort of early training and discipline his mind went through, – who were his first instructors, what his original inducements. Of one thing I feel certain: a man thus constituted has only to put the curb upon his faculty to be most successful in life, his perils will all lie in the exuberance of his resources; let him simply bend himself to believe in some of the impositions he would force upon others. Let him give his delusions the force acquired by convictions, and there is no limit to what he may become. Be on the lookout, therefore, for him, as a great psychological phenomenon, the man who outlied

“Your sincerely attached friend,

“Thomas Darcy Dyke.

“P. S. I have just remembered his name. It was Potts; the villain said from the Pozzo di Borgo family. I'm sure with this hint you can't fail to run him to earth; and I entreat of you spare no pains to do it.”

There followed here some more impertinent personalities as clues to my discovery, which my indulgent reader will graciously excuse me if I do not stop to record; enough to say they were as unfounded as they were scurrilous.

Another and very different train of thought, however, soon banished these considerations. This letter had been given me by Crofton, who had already read it; he had perused all this insolent narrative about me before handing it to me, and doubtless, in so doing, had no other intention than to convey, in the briefest and most emphatic way to me, that I was found out. It was simply saying, in the shortest possible space, “Thou art the man!” Oh, the ineffable shame and misery of that thought! Oh, the bitterness of feeling! How my character should now be viewed and my future discussed! “Only think, Mary,” I fancied I heard him say, – “only think who our friend should turn out to be, – this same Potts: the fellow that vanquished Father Dyke in story-telling, and outlied the priest! And here we have been lavishing kindness and attentions upon one who, after all, is little better than a swindler, sailing under false colors and fictitious credentials; for who can now credit one syllable about his having written those verses he read for us, or composed that tale of which he told us the opening? What a lesson in future about extending confidence to utter strangers! What caution and reserve should it not teach us! How guarded should we be not to suffer ourselves to be fascinated by the captivations of manner and the insinuating charms of address! If Potts had been less prepossessing in appearance, less gifted and agreeable, – if, instead of being a consummate man of the world, with the breeding of a courtier and the knowledge of a scholar, he had been a pedantic puppy with a lisp and a Dublin accent – ” Oh, ignominy and disgrace! these were the very words of the priest in describing me, which came so aptly to my memory, and I grew actually sick with shame as I recalled them. I next became angry. Was this conduct of Crofton's delicate or considerate? Was it becoming in one who had treated me as his friend thus abruptly to conclude our intimacy by an insult? Handing me such a letter was saying, “There's a portrait; can you say any one it resembles?” How much more generous had he said, “Tell me all about this wager of yours with Father Dyke; I want to hear *your* account of it, for old Tom is not the most veracious of mortals, nor the most mealy-mouthed of commentators. Just give me *your* version of the incident, Potts, and I am satisfied it will be the true one.” That's what he might, that's what he ought to have said. I can swear it is what I, Potts, would have done by *him*, or by any other stranger whose graceful manners and pleasing qualities had won my esteem and conciliated my regard. I'd have said, “Potts, I have seen enough of life to know how unjust it is to measure men by one and the same standard. The ardent, impassioned nature cannot be ranked with the cold and calculating spirit. The imaginative man has the same necessity for the development of his creative

faculty as the strongly muscular man of bodily exercise. He must blow off the steam of his invention, or the boiler will not contain it. You and Le Sage and Alexandre Dumas are a category. You are not the Clerks of a Census Commission, or Masters in Equity. You are the chartered libertines of fiction. Shake out your reefs, and go free, – free as the winds that waft you!”

To all these reflections came the last one. “I must be up and doing, and that speedily! I will recover Blondel, if I devote my life to the task. I will regain him, let the cost be what it may. Mounted upon that creature, I will ride up to the Rosary; the time shall be evening; a sun just sunk behind the horizon shall have left in the upper atmosphere a golden and rosy light, which shall tip his mane with a softened lustre, and shed over my own features a rich Titian-like tint. ‘I come,’ will I say, ‘to vindicate the fair fame of one who once owned your affection. It is Potts, the man of impulse, the child of enthusiasm, who now presents himself before you. Poor, if you like to call him so, in worldly craft or skill, poor in its possessions, but rich, boundlessly rich, in the stores of an ideal wealth. Blondel and I are the embodiment of this idea. These fancies you have stigmatized as lies are but the pilot balloons by which great minds calculate the currents in that upper air they are about to soar in.”

And, last of all, there was a sophistry that possessed a great charm for my mind, in this wise: to enable a man, humble as myself, to reach that station in which a career of adventure should open before him, some ground must be won, some position gained. That I assume to be something that I am not, is simply to say that I trade upon credit. If my future transactions be all honorable and trustworthy, – if by a fiction, only known to my own heart, I acquire that eminence from which I can distribute benefits to hundreds, – who is to stigmatize me as a fraudulent trader?

Is it not a well-known fact, that many of those now acknowledged as the wealthiest of men, might, at some time or other of their lives, have been declared insolvent had the real state of their affairs been known? The world, however, had given them its confidence, and time did the rest. Let the same world be but as generous towards *me*! The day will come, – I say it confidently and boldly, – the day will come when I can “show my books,” and “point to my balance-sheet.” When Archimedes asked for a base on which to rest his lever, he merely uttered the great truth, that some one fixed point is essential to the success of a motive power.

It is by our use or abuse of opportunity we are either good or bad men. The physician is not less conversant with noxious drugs than the poisoner; the difference lies in the fact that the one employs his skill to alleviate suffering, the other to work out evil and destruction. If I, therefore, but make some feigned station in life the groundwork from which I can become the benefactor of my fellowmen, I shall be good and blameless. My heart tells me how well and how fairly I mean by the world: I would succor the weak, console the afflicted, and lift up the oppressed; and if to carry out grand and glorious conceptions of this kind all that be needed is a certain self-delusion which may extend its influence to others, “Go in,” I say, “Potts; be all that your fancy suggests, —

Dives, honoratus, pulcher, rex denique regain,

– Be rich, honored and fair, a prince or a begum, – but, above all, never distrust your destiny, or doubt your star.”

CHAPTER VIII. IMAGINATION STIMULATED BY BRANDY AND WATER

So absorbed was I in the reflections of which my last chapter is the record, that I utterly forgot how time was speeding, and perceived at last, to my great surprise, that I had strayed miles away from the Rosary, and that evening was already near. The spires and roofs of a town were distant about a mile at a bend of the river, and for this I now made, determined on no account to turn back, for how could I ever again face those who had read the terrible narrative of the priest's letter, and before whom I could only present myself as a cheat and impostor?

"No," thought I, "my destiny points onward, – and to Blondel; nothing shall turn me from my path." Less than an hour's walking brought me to the town, of which I had but time to learn the name, – New Ross. I left it in a small steamer for Waterford, a little vessel in correspondence with the mail packet for Milford, and which I learned would sail that evening at nine.

The same night saw me seated on the deck, bound for England. On the deck, I say, for I had need to husband my resources, and travel with every imaginable economy, not only because my resources were small in themselves, but that, having left all that I possessed of clothes and baggage at the Rosary, I should be obliged to acquire a complete outfit on reaching England.

It was a calm night, with a starry sky and a tranquil sea; and, when the cabin passengers had gone down to their berths, the captain did not oppose my stealing "aft" to the quarter-deck, where I could separate myself from the somewhat riotous company of the harvest laborers that thronged the forepart of the vessel. He saw, with that instinct a sailor is eminently gifted with, that I was not of that class by which I was surrounded, and with a ready courtesy he admitted me to the privilege of isolation.

"You are going to enlist, I'll be bound," said he, as he passed me in his short deck walk. "Ain't I right?"

"No," said I; "I'm going to seek my fortune."

"Seek your fortune!" he repeated, with a slighting sort of laugh. "One used to read about fellows doing that in story books when a child, but it's rather strange to hear of it nowadays."

"And may I presume to ask why should it be more strange now than formerly? Is not the world pretty much what it used to be? Is not the drama of life the same stock piece our forefathers played ages ago? Are not the actors and the actresses made up of the precise materials their ancestors were? Can you tell me of a new sentiment, a new emotion, or even a new crime? Why, therefore, should there be a seeming incongruity in reviving any feature of the past?"

"Just because it won't do, my good friend," said he, bluntly. "If the law catches a fellow lounging about the world in these times, it takes him up for a vagabond."

"And what can be finer, grander, or freer than a vagabond?" I cried, with enthusiasm. "Who, I would ask you, sees life with such philosophy? Who views the wiles, the snares, the petty conflicts of the world with such a reflective calm as his? Caring little for personal indulgence, not solicitous for self-gratification, he has both the spirit and the leisure for observation. Diogenes was the type of the vagabond, and see how successive ages have acknowledged his wisdom."

"If I had lived in *his* day, I'd have set him picking oakum, for all that!" he replied.

"And probably, too, would have sent the 'blind old bard to the crank,'" said I.

"I'm not quite sure of whom you are talking," said he; "but if he was a good ballad-singer, I'd not be hard on him."

"O! Menin aeide Thea Peleideo Achilleos!" spouted I out, in rapture.

"That ain't high Dutch," asked he, "is it?"

"No," said I, proudly. "It is ancient Greek, – the godlike tongue of an immortal race."

"Immortal rascals!" he broke in. "I was in the fruit trade up in the Levant there, and such scoundrels as these Greek fellows I never met in my life."

"By what and whom made so?" I exclaimed eagerly. "Can you point to a people in the world who have so long resisted the barbarizing influence of a base oppression? Was there ever a nation so imbued with high civilization as to be enabled for centuries of slavery to preserve the traditions of its greatness? Have we the record of any race but this, who could rise from the slough of degradation to the dignity of a people?"

"You 've been a play-actor, I take it?" asked he, dryly.

"No, sir, never!" replied I, with some indignation.

"Well, then, in the Methody line? You've done a stroke of preaching, I 'll be sworn."

"You would be perjured in that case, sir," I rejoined, as haughtily.

"At all events, an auctioneer," said he, fairly puzzled in his speculations.

"Equally mistaken there," said I, calmly; "bred in the midst of abundance, nurtured in affluence, and educated with all the solicitous care that a fond parent could bestow – "

"Gammon!" said he, bluntly. "You are one of the swell mob in distress!"

"Is this like distress?" said I, drawing forth my purse in which were seventy-five sovereigns, and handing it to him. "Count over that, and say how just and how generous are your suspicions."

He gravely took the purse from me, and, stooping down to the binnacle light, counted over the money, scrutinizing carefully the pieces as he went.

"And who is to say this isn't 'swag'?" said he, as he closed the purse.

"The easiest answer to that," said I, "is, would it be likely for a thief to show his booty, not merely to a stranger, but to a stranger who suspected him?"

"Well, that is something, I confess," said he, slowly.

"It ought to be more, – it ought to be everything. If distrust were not a debasing sentiment, obstructing the impulses of generosity, and even invading the precincts of justice, you would see far more reason to confide in than to disbelieve me."

"I 've been done pretty often afore now," he muttered, half to himself.

"What a fallacy that is!" cried I, contemptuously. "Was not the pittance that some crafty impostor wrung from your compassion well repaid to you in the noble self-consciousness of your generosity? Did not your venison on that day taste better when you thought of his pork chop? Had not your Burgundy gained flavor by the memory of the glass of beer that was warming the half-chilled heart in his breast? Oh, the narrow mockery of fancying that we are not better by being deceived!"

"How long is it since you had your head shaved?" he asked dryly.

"I have never been the inmate of an asylum for lunatics," said I, divining and answering the impertinent insinuation.

"Well, I own you are a rum un," said he, half musingly.

"I accept even this humble tribute to my originality," said I, with a sort of proud defiance. "I am well aware how *he* must be regarded who dares to assert his own individuality."

"I'd be very curious to know," said he, after a pause of several minutes, "how a fellow of your stamp sets to work about gaining his livelihood? What's his first step? how does he go about it?"

I gave no other answer than a smile of scornful meaning.

"I meant nothing offensive," resumed he, "but I really have a strong desire to be enlightened on this point."

"You are doubtless impressed with the notion," said I, boldly, "that men possessed of some distinct craft or especial profession are alone needed by the world of their fellows. That one must be doctor or lawyer or baker or shoemaker, to gain his living, as if life had no other wants than to be clothed and fed and physicked and litigated. As if humanity had not its thousand emotional moods, its wayward impulses, its trials and temptations, all of them more needing guidance, support, direction, and counsel, than the sickest patient needs a physician. It is on this world that I throw myself; I devote

myself to guide infancy, to console age, to succor the orphan, and support the widow, – morally, I mean.”

“I begin to suspect you are a most artful vagabond,” said he half angrily.

“I have long since reconciled myself to the thought of an unjust appreciation,” said I. “It is the consolation dull men accept when confronted with those of original genius. You can’t help confessing that all your distrust of me has grown out of the superiority of my powers, and the humble figure you have presented in comparison with me.”

“Do you rank modesty amongst these same powers?” he asked slyly.

“Modesty I reject,” said I, “as being a conventional form of hypocrisy.”

“Come down below,” said he, “and take a glass of brandy and water. It ‘s growing chilly here, and we shall be the better of something to cheer us.”

Seated in his comfortable little cabin, and with a goodly array of liquors before me to choose from, I really felt a self-confidence in the fact that, if I were not something out of the common, I could not then be there. “There must be in my nature,” thought I, “that element which begets success, or I could not always find myself in situations so palpably beyond the accidents of my condition.”

My host was courtesy itself; no sooner was I his guest than he adopted towards me a manner of perfect politeness. No more allusions to my precarious mode of life, never once a reference to my adventurous future. Indeed, with an almost artful exercise of good breeding, he turned the conversation towards himself, and gave me a sketch of his own life.

It was not in any respects a remarkable one; though it had its share of those mishaps and misfortunes which every sailor must have confronted. He was wrecked in the Pacific, and robbed in the Havannah; had his crew desert him at San Francisco, and was boarded by Riff pirates, and sold in Barbary just as every other blue jacket used to be; and I listened to the story, only marvelling what a dreary sameness pervades all these narratives. Why, for one trait of the truthful to prove his tale, I could have invented fifty. There were no little touches of sentiment or feeling, no relieving lights of human emotion, in his story. I never felt, as I listened, any wish that he should be saved from shipwreck, baffle his persecutors, or escape his captors; and I thought to myself, “This fellow has certainly got no narrative gusto.” Now for *my* turn: we had each of us partaken freely of the good liquor before us. The Captain in his quality of talker, I in my capacity of listener, had filled and refilled several times. There was not anything like inebriety, but there was that amount of exultation, a stage higher than mere excitement, which prompts men, at least men of temperaments like mine, not to suffer themselves to occupy rear rank positions, but at any cost to become foreground and prominent figures.

“You have heard of the M’Gillicuddys, I suppose?” asked I. He nodded, and I went on. “You see, then, at this moment before you, the last of the race. I mean, of course, of the elder branch, for there are swarms of the others, well to do and prosperous also, and with fine estated properties. I ‘ll not weary you with family history. I ‘ll not refer to that remote time when my ancestors wore the crown, and ruled the fair kingdom of Kerry. In the Annals of the Four Masters, and also in the Chronicles of Thealbogh O’Faudlemh, you ‘ll find a detailed account of our house. I ‘ll simply narrate for you the immediate incident which has made me what you see me, – an outcast and a beggar.

“My father was the tried and trusted friend of that noble-hearted but mistaken man, Lord Edward Fitzgerald. The famous attempt of the year 'eight was concerted between them; and all the causes of its failure, secret as they are and forever must be, are known to him who now addresses you. I dare not trust myself to talk of these times or things, lest I should by accident let drop what might prove strictly confidential. I will but recount one incident, and that a personal one, of the period. On the night of Lord Edward’s capture, my father, who had invited a friend – deep himself in the conspiracy – to dine with him, met his guest on the steps of his hall door. Mr. Hammond – this was his name – was pale and horror-struck, and could scarcely speak, as my father shook his hand. ‘Do you know what has happened, Mac?’ said he to my father. ‘Lord Edward is taken, Major Sirr and his

party have tracked him to his hiding-place; they have got hold of all our papers, and we are lost By this time to-morrow every man of us will be within the walls of Newgate.'

"Don't look so gloomily, Tom,' said my father. 'Lord Edward will escape them yet; he's not a bird to be snared so easily; and, after all, we shall find means to slip our cables too. Come in, and enjoy your sirloin and a good glass of port, and you'll view the world more pleasantly.' With a little encouragement of this sort he cheered him up, and the dinner passed off agreeably enough; but still my father could see that his friend was by no means at his ease, and at every time the door opened he would start with a degree of surprise that augured anxiety of some coming event. From these and other signs of uneasiness in his manner, my father drew his own conclusions, and with a quick intelligence of look communicated his suspicions to my mother, who was herself a keen and shrewd observer.

"Do you think, Matty,' said he, as they sat over their wine, that I could find a bottle of the old green seal if I was to look for it in the cellar? It has been upwards of forty years there, and I never touch it save on especial occasions; but an old friend like Hammond deserves such a treat.'

"My father fancied that Hammond grew paler as he thus alluded to their old friendship, and he gave my mother a rapid glance of his sharp eye, and, taking the cellar key, he left the room. Immediately outside the door, he hastened to the stable, and saddled and bridled a horse, and, slipping quietly out, he rode for the sea-coast, near the Skerries. It was sixteen miles from Dublin, but he did the distance within the hour. And well was it for him that he employed such speed! With a liberal offer of money and the gold watch he wore, he secured a small fishing-smack to convey him over to France, for which he sailed immediately. I have said it was well that he employed such speed; for, after waiting with suppressed impatience for my father's return from the cellar, Hammond expressed to my mother his fears lest my father might have been taken ill. She tried to quiet his apprehensions, but the very calmness of her manner served only to increase them. 'I can bear this no longer,' cried he, at last, rising, in much excitement, from his chair; 'I must see what has become of him!' At the same moment the door was suddenly flung open, and an officer of police, in full uniform, presented himself. 'He has got away, sir,' said he, addressing Hammond; 'the stable-door is open, and one of the horses missing.'

"My mother, from whom I heard the story, had only time to utter a 'Thank God!' before she fainted. On recovering her senses, she found herself alone in the room. The traitor Hammond and the police had left her without even calling the servants to her aid."

"And your father, – what became of him?" asked the skipper, eagerly.

"He arrived in Paris in sorry plight enough; but, fortunately, Clarke, whose influence with the Emperor was unbounded, was a distant connection of our family. By his intervention my father obtained an interview with his Majesty, who was greatly struck by the adventurous spirit and daring character of the man; not the less so because he had the courage to disabuse the Emperor of many notions and impressions he had conceived about the readiness of Ireland to accept French assistance.

"Though my father would much have preferred taking service in the army, the Emperor, who had strong prejudices against men becoming soldiers who had not served in every grade from the ranks upwards, opposed this intention, and employed him in a civil capacity. In fact, to his management were intrusted some of the most delicate and difficult secret negotiations; and he gained a high name for acuteness and honorable dealing. In recognition of his services, his name was inscribed in the Grand Livre for a considerable pension; but at the fall of the dynasty, this, with hundreds of others equally meritorious, was annulled; and my father, worn out with age and disappointment together, sank at last, and died at Dinant, where my mother was buried but a few years previously. Meanwhile he was tried and found guilty of high treason in Ireland, and all his lands and other property forfeited to the Crown. My present journey was simply a pilgrimage to see the old possessions that once belonged to our race. It was my father's last wish that I should visit the ancient home of our family, and stand upon the hills that once acknowledged us as their ruler. He never desired that I should remain a French subject; a lingering love for his own country mingled in his heart with a certain

resentment towards France, who had certainly treated him with ingratitude; and almost his last words to me were, 'Distrust the Gaul.' When I told you awhile back that I was nurtured in affluence, it was so to all appearance; for my father had spent every shilling of his-capital on my education, and I was under the firm conviction that I was born to a very great fortune. You may judge the terrible revulsion of my feelings when I learned that I had to face the world almost, if not actually, a beggar.

"I could easily have attached myself as a hanger-on of some of my well-to-do relations. Indeed, I will say for them, that they showed the kindest disposition to befriend me; but the position of a dependant would have destroyed every chance of happiness for me, and so I resolved that I would fearlessly throw myself upon the broad ocean of life, and trust that some sea current or favoring wind would bear me at last into a harbor of safety."

"What can you do?" asked the skipper, curtly.

"Everything, and nothing! I have, so to say, the 'sentiment' of all things in my heart, but am not capable of executing one of them. With the most correct ear, I know not a note of music; and though I could not cook you a chop, I have the most excellent appreciation of a well-dressed dinner."

"Well," said he, laughing, "I must confess I don't suspect these to be exactly the sort of gifts to benefit your fellow-man."

"And yet," said I, "it is exactly to individuals of this stamp that the world accords its prizes. The impresario that provides the opera could not sing nor dance. The general who directs the campaign might be sorely puzzled how to clean his musket or pipeclay his belt. The great minister who imposes a tax might be totally unequal to the duty of applying its provisions. Ask him to gauge a hogshead of spirits, for instance. *My* position is like *theirs*. I tell you, once more, the world wants men of wide conceptions and far-ranging ideas, – men who look to great results and grand combinations."

"But, to be practical, how do you mean to breakfast to-morrow morning?"

"At a moderate cost, but comfortably: tea, rolls, two eggs, and a rumpsteak with fried potatoes."

"What's your name?" said he, taking out his note-book. "I mustn't forget you when I hear of you next."

"For the present, I call myself Potts, – Mr. Potts, if you please."

"Write it here yourself," said he, handing me the pencil. And I wrote in a bold, vigorous hand, "Algernon Sydney-Potts," with the date.

"Preserve that autograph, Captain," said I; "it is in no-spirit of vanity I say it, but the day will come you 'll refuse a ten-pound note for it."

"Well, I'd take a trifle less just now," said he, smiling.

He sat for some time gravely contemplating the writing, and at length, in a sort of half soliloquy, said, "Bob would like him, – he would suit Bob." Then, lifting his head, he addressed me: "I have a brother in command of one of the P. and O. steamers, – just the fellow for *you*. He has got ideas pretty much like your own about success in life, and won't be persuaded that he isn't the first seaman in the English navy; or that he hasn't a plan to send Cherbourg and its breakwater sky-high, at twenty-four hours' warning."

"An enthusiast, – a visionary, I have no doubt," said I, contemptuously.

"Well, I think you might be more merciful in your judgment of a man of your own stamp," retorted he, laughing. "At all events, it would be as good as a play to see you together. If you should chance to be at Malta, or Marseilles, when the *Clarence* touches there, just ask for Captain Rogers; tell him you know me, that will be enough."

"Why not give me a line of introduction to him?" said I, with an easy indifference. "These things serve to clear away the awkwardness of a self-presentation."

"I don't care if I do," said he, taking a sheet of paper, and beginning 'Dear Bob,' – after which he paused and deliberated, muttering the words 'Dear Bob' three or four times over below his breath.

“Dear Bob,” said I aloud, in the tone of one dictating to an amanuensis, – “This brief note will be handed to you by a very valued friend of mine, Algernon Sydney Potts, a man so completely after your own heart that I feel a downright satisfaction in bringing you together.”

“Well, that ain’t so bad,” said he, as he uttered the last words which fell from his pen – “in bringing you together.”

“Go on,” said I dictatorially, and continued: “Thrown by a mere accident myself into his society, I was so struck by his attainments, the originality of his views, and the wide extent of his knowledge of life – ‘Have you *that* down?’”

“No,” said he, in some confusion; “I am only at ‘entertainments.’”

“I said ‘attainments,’ sir,” said I rebukingly, and then repeating the passage word for word, till he had written it – “that I conceived for him a regard and an esteem rarely accorded to others than our oldest friends.’ One word more: ‘Potts, from certain circumstances, which I cannot here enter upon, may appear to you in some temporary inconvenience as regards money – ”

Here the captain stopped, and gave me a most significant look: it was at once an appreciation and an expression of drollery.

“Go on,” said I dryly. “If so,” resumed I, “be guardedly cautious neither to notice his embarrassment nor allude to it; above all, take especial care that you make no offer to remove the inconvenience, for he is one of those whose sensibilities are so fine, and whose sentiments so fastidious, that he could never recover, in his own esteem, the dignity compromised by such an incident.”

“Very neatly turned,” said he, as he re-read the passage. “I think that’s quite enough.”

“Ample. You have nothing more to do than sign your name to it.”

He did this, with a verificatory flourish at foot, folded and sealed the letter, and handed it to me, saying —

“If it weren’t for the handwriting, Bob would never believe all that fine stuff came from *me*; but you ‘ll tell him it was after three glasses of brandy-and-water that I dashed it off – that will explain everything.”

I promised faithfully to make the required explanation, and then proceeded to make some inquiries about this brother Bob, whose nature was in such a close affinity with my own. I could learn, however, but little beyond the muttered acknowledgment that Bob was a “queer ‘un,” and that there was never his equal for “falling upon good-luck, and spending it after,” a description which, when applied to my own conscience, told an amount of truth that was actually painful.

“There’s no saying,” said I, as I pocketed the letter, “if this epistle should ever reach your brother’s hand, my course in life is too wayward and uncertain for me to say in what corner of the earth fate may find me; but if we *are* to meet, you shall hear of it. Rogers” – I said, “this you extended to me, at a time that, to all seeming, I needed such attentions – at a time, I say, when none but myself could know how independently I stood as regarded means; and of one thing be assured, Rogers, he whose caprice it now is to call himself Potts, is your friend, your fast friend, for life.”

He wrung my hand cordially – perhaps it was the easiest way for an honest sailor, as he was, to acknowledge the patronising tone of my speech – but I could plainly see that he was sorely puzzled by the situation, and possibly very well pleased that there was no third party to be a spectator of it.

“Throw yourself there on that sofa,” said he, “and take a sleep.” And with that piece of counsel he left me, and went up on deck.

CHAPTER IX. HIS INTEREST IN A LADY FELLOW-TRAVELLER

Next mornings are terrible things, whether one awakes to the thought of some awful run of ill-luck at play, or with the racking headache of new port or a very “fruity” Burgundy. They are dreadful, too, when they bring memories – vague and indistinct, perhaps – of some serious altercations, passionate words exchanged, and expressions of defiance reciprocated; but, as a measure of self-reproach and humiliation, I know not any distress can compare with the sensation of awaking to the consciousness that our cups have so ministered to imagination that we have given a mythical narrative of ourself and our belongings, and have built up a card edifice of greatness that must tumble with the first touch of truth.

It was a sincere satisfaction to me that I saw nothing of the skipper on that “next morning.” He was so occupied with all the details of getting into port, that I escaped his notice, and contrived to land unremarked. Little scraps of my last night’s biography would obtrude themselves upon me, mixed up strangely with incidents of that same skipper’s life, so that I was actually puzzled at moments to remember whether “he” was not the descendant of the famous rebel friend of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and *I* it was who was sold in the public square at Tunis.

These dissolving views of an evening before are very difficult problems, – not to *you*, most valued reader, whose conscience is not burglariously assaulted by a riotous imagination, but to the poor weak Potts-like organizations, the men who never enjoy a real sensation, or taste a real pleasure, save on the hypothesis of a mock situation.

I sat at my breakfast in the “Goat” meditating these things. The grand problem to resolve was this: Is it better to live a life of dull incidents and commonplace events in one’s own actual sphere, or, creating, by force of imagination, an ideal status, to soar into a region of higher conceptions and more pictorial situations? What could existence in the first case offer me? A wearisome beaten path, with nothing to interest, nothing to stimulate me. On the other side lay glorious regions of lovely scenery, peopled with figures the most graceful and attractive. I was at once the associate of the wise, the witty, and the agreeable, with wealth at my command, and great prizes within my reach. Illusions all! to be sure; but what are not illusions, – if by that word you take mere account of permanence? What is it in this world that we love to believe real is not illusionary, – the question of duration being the only difference? Is not beauty perishable? Is not wit soon exhausted? What becomes of the proudest physical strength after middle life is reached? What of eloquence when the voice fails or loses its facility of inflection?

All these considerations, however convincing to myself, were not equally satisfactory as regarded others; and so I sat down to write a letter to Crofton, explaining the reasons of my sudden departure, and enclosing him Father Dyke’s epistle, which I had carried away with me. I began this letter with the most firm resolve to be truthful and accurate. I wrote down, not only the date, but the day. “Goat, Milford,” followed, and then, “My dear Crofton, – It would ill become one who has partaken of your generous hospitality, and who, from an unknown stranger, was admitted to the privilege of your intimacy, to quit the roof beneath which the happiest hours of his life were passed without expressing the deep shame and sorrow such a step has cost him, while he bespeaks your indulgence to hear the reason.” This was my first sentence, and it gave me uncommon trouble. I desired to be dignified, yet grateful, proud in my humility, grieved over an abrupt departure, but sustained by a manly confidence in the strength of my own motives. If I read it over once, I read it twenty times; now deeming it too diffuse, now fearing lest I had compressed my meaning too narrowly. Might it not be better to open thus: “Strike, but hear me, dear Crofton, or, before condemning the unhappy creature whose abject cry for mercy may seem but to increase the

presumption of his guilt, and in whose faltering accents may appear the signs of a stricken conscience, read over, dear friend, the entire of this letter, weigh well the difficulties and dangers of him who wrote it, and say, is he not rather a subject for pity than rebuke? Is not this more a case for a tearful forgiveness than for chastisement and reproach?"

Like most men who have little habit of composition, my difficulties increased with every new attempt, and I became bewildered and puzzled what to choose. It was vitally important that the first lines of my letter should secure the favorable opinion of the reader; by one unhappy word, one ill-selected expression, a whole case might be prejudiced. I imagined Crofton angrily throwing the epistle from him with an impatient "Stuff and nonsense! a practised hum-bugger!" or, worse again, calling out, "Listen to this, Mary. Is not Master Potts a cool hand? Is not this brazening it out with a vengeance?" Such a thought was agony to me; the very essence of my theory about life was to secure the esteem and regard of others. I yearned after the good opinion of my fellow-men, and there was no amount of falsehood I would not incur to obtain it. No, come what would of it, the Croftons must not think ill of me. They must not only believe me guiltless of ingratitude, but some one whose gratitude was worth having. It will elevate them in their own esteem if they suppose that the pebble they picked up in the highway turned out to be a ruby. It will open their hearts to fresh impulses of generosity; they will not say to each other, "Let us be more careful another time; let us be guarded against showing attention to mere strangers; remember how we were taken in by that fellow Potts; what a specious rascal he was, – how plausible, how insinuating!" but rather, "We can afford to be confiding, our experiences have taught us trustfulness. Poor Potts is a lesson that may inspire a hopeful belief in others." How little benefit can any one in his own individual capacity confer upon the world, but what a large measure of good may be distributed by the way he influences others. Thus, for instance, by one well-sustained delusion of mine, I inspire a fund of virtues which, in my merely truthful character, I could never pretend to originate. "Yes," thought I, "the Croftons shall continue to esteem me; Potts shall be a beacon to guide, not a sunken rock to wreck them."

Thus resolving, I sat down to inform them that on my return from a stroll, I was met by a man bearing a telegram, informing me of the dying condition of my father's only brother, my sole relative on earth; that, yielding only to the impulse of my affection, and not thinking of preparation, I started on board of a steamer for Waterford, and thence for Milford, on my way to Brighton. I vaguely hinted at great expectations, and so on, and then, approaching the difficult problem of Father Dyke's letter, I said, "I enclose you the priest's letter, which amused me much. With all his shrewdness, the worthy churchman never suspected how completely my friend Keldrum and myself had humbugged him, nor did he discover that our little dinner and the episode that followed it were the subjects of a wager between ourselves. His marvellous cunning was thus for once at fault, as I shall explain to you more fully when we meet, and prove to you that, upon this occasion at least, he was not deceiver, but dupe!" I begged to have a line from him to the "Crown Hotel, Brighton," and concluded.

With this act, I felt I had done with the past, and now addressed myself to the future. I purchased a few cheap necessities for the road, as few and as cheap as was well possible. I said to myself, Fortune shall lift you from the very dust of the high-road, Potts; not one advantageous adjunct shall aid your elevation!

The train by which I was to leave did not start till noon, and to while away time I took up a number of the "Times," which the "Goat" appeared to receive at third or fourth hand. My eye fell upon that memorable second column, in which I read the following: —

"Left his home in Dublin on the 8th ult, and not since been heard of, a young gentleman, aged about twenty-two years, five feet nine and a quarter in height, slightly formed, and rather stooped in the shoulders; features pale and melancholy; eyes grayish, inclining to hazel; hair light brown, and worn long behind. He had on at his departure – "

I turned impatiently to the foot of the advertisement, and found that to any one giving such information as might lead to his discovery was promised a liberal reward, on application to Messrs.

Potts and Co., compounding chemists and apothecaries, Mary's Abbey. I actually grew sick with anger as I read this. To what end was it that I built up a glorious edifice of imaginative architecture, if by one miserable touch of coarse fact it would crumble into clay? To what purpose did I intrigue with Fortune to grant me a special destiny, if I were thus to be classed with runaway traders or strayed terriers? I believe in my heart I could better have borne all the terrors of a charge of felony than the lowering, debasing, humiliating condition of being advertised for on a reward.

I had long since determined to be free as regarded the ties of country. I now resolved to be equally so with respect to those of family. I will be Potts no longer. I will call myself for the future – let me see – what shall it be, that will not involve a continued exercise of memory, and the troublesome task of unmarking my linen? I was forgetting in this that I had none, all my wearables being left behind at the Rosary. Something with an initial P was requisite; and after much canvassing, I fixed on Pottinger. If by an unhappy chance I should meet one who remembered me as Potts, I reserved the right of mildly correcting him by saying, “Pottinger, Pottinger! the name Potts was given me when at Eton for shortness.” They tell us that amongst the days of our exultation in life, few can compare with that in which we exchange a jacket for a tailed coat. The spring from the tadpole to the full-grown frog, the emancipation from boyhood into adolescence, is certainly very fascinating. Let me assure my reader that the bound from a monosyllabic name to a high-sounding epithet of three syllables is almost as enchanting as this assumption of the *toga virilis*. I had often felt the terrible brevity of Potts; I had shrunk from answering the question, “What name, sir?” from the indescribable shame of saying “Potts;” but Pottinger could be uttered slowly and with dignity. One could repose on the initial syllable, as if to say, “Mark well what I am saying; this is a name to be remembered.” With that, there must have been great and distinguished Pottingers, rich men, men of influence and acres; from these I could at leisure select a parentage.

“Do you go by the twelve-fifteen train, sir?” asked the waiter, breaking in upon these meditations. “You have no time to lose, sir.”

With a start, I saw it was already past twelve; so I paid my bill with all speed, and, taking my knapsack in my hand, hurried away to the train. There was considerable confusion as I arrived, a crush of cabs, watermen, and porters blocked the way, and the two currents of an arriving and departing train struggled against and confronted each other. Amongst those who, like myself, were bent on entering the station-house, was a young lady in deep mourning, whose frail proportions and delicate figure gave no prospect of resisting the shock and conflict before her. Seeing her so destitute of all protection, I espoused her cause, and after a valorous effort and much buffeting, I fought her way for her to the ticket-window, but only in time to hear the odious crash of a great bell, the bang of a glass door, and the cry of a policeman on duty, “No more tickets, gentlemen; the train is starting.”

“Oh! what shall I do?” cried she, in an accent of intense agony, inadvertently addressing the words to myself: “What shall I do?”

“There ‘s another train to start at three-forty,” said I, consolingly. “I hope that waiting will be no inconvenience to you. It is a slow one, to be sure, stops everywhere, and only arrives in town at two o’clock in the morning.”

I heard her sob, – I distinctly heard her sob behind her thick black veil as I said this; and to offer what amount of comfort I could, I added, “I, too, am disappointed, and obliged to await the next departure; and if I can be of the least service in any way – ”

“Oh, no, sir! I am very grateful to you, but there is nothing – I mean – there is no help for it!” And here her voice dropped to a mere whisper.

“I sincerely trust,” said I, in an accent of great deference and sympathy, “that the delay may not be the cause of grave inconvenience to you; and although a perfect stranger, if any assistance I can offer – ”

“No, sir; there is really nothing I could ask from your kindness.” It was in turning back to bid good-bye a second time to my mother – Here her agitation seemed to choke her, for she turned away and said no more.

“Shall I fetch a cab for you?” I asked. “Would you like to go back till the next train starts?”

“Oh, by no means, sir! We live three miles from Milford; and, besides, I could not bear –” Here again she broke down, but added, after a pause, “It is the first time I have been away from home!”

With a little gentle force I succeeded in inducing her to enter the refreshment-room of the station, but she would take nothing; and after some attempts to engage her in conversation to while away the dreary time, I perceived that it would be a more true politeness not to obtrude upon her sorrow; and so I lighted my cigar, and proceeded to walk up and down the long terrace of the station. Three trunks, or rather two and a hat-box, kept my knapsack company on the side of the tramway; and on these I read, inscribed in a large band, “Miss K. Herbert, per steamer ‘Ardent,’ Ostend.” I started. Was it not in that direction my own steps were turned? Was not Blondel in Belgium, and was it not in search of him that I was bent? “Oh, Fate!” I cried, “what subtle device of thine is this? What wily artifice art thou now engaged in? Is this a snare, or is it an aid? Hast thou any secret purpose in this rencontre? for with thee there are no chances, no accidents in thy vicissitudes; all is prepared and fitted, like a piece of door carpentry.” And then I fell into weaving a story for the young lady. She was an orphan. Her father, the curate of the little parish she lived in, had just died, leaving herself and her mother in direst distress. She was leaving home, – the happy home of her childhood (I saw it all before me, – cottage, and garden, and little lawn, with its one cow and two sheep, and the small green wicket beside the road), and she was leaving all these to become a governess to an upstart, mill-owning, vulgar family at Brussels. Poor thing! how my heart bled for her! What a life of misery lay before her, – what trials of temper and of pride! The odious children – I know they are odious – will torture her to the quick; and Mrs. Treddles, or whatever her detestable name is, will lead her a terrible life from jealousy; and she ‘ll have to bear everything, and cry over it in secret, remembering the once happy time in that honeysuckled porch, where poor papa used to read Wordsworth for them.

What a world of sorrow on every side; and how easily might it be made otherwise! What gigantic efforts are we forever making for something which we never live to enjoy I Striving to be freer, greater, better governed, and more lightly taxed, and all the while forgetting that the real secret is to be on better terms with each other, – more generous, more forgiving, less apt to take offence or bear malice. Of mere material goods, there is far more than we need. The table would accommodate more than double the guests, could we only agree to sit down in orderly fashion; but here we have one occupying three chairs, while another crouches on the floor, and some even prefer smashing the furniture to letting some more humbly born take a place near them. I wish they would listen to me on this theme. I wish, instead of all this social science humbug and art-union balderdash, they would hearken to the voice of a plain man, saying, Are you not members of one family, – the individuals of one household? Is it not clear to you, if you extend the kindly affections you now reserve for the narrow circle wherein you live to the wider area of mankind, that, while diffusing countless blessings to others, you will yourself become better, more charitable, more kind-hearted, wider in reach of thought, more catholic in philanthropy? I can imagine such a world, and feel it to be a Paradise, – a world with no social distinctions, no inequalities of condition, and, consequently, no insolent pride of station, nor any degrading subserviency of demeanor, no rivalries, no jealousies, – love and benevolence everywhere. In such a sphere the calm equanimity of mind by which great things are accomplished, would in itself constitute a perfect heaven. No impatience of temper, no passing irritation —

“Where the – are you driving to, sir?” cried I, as a fellow with a brass-bound trunk in a hand-barrow came smash against my shin.

“Don’t you see, sir, the train is just starting?” said he, hastening on; and I now perceived that such was the case, and that I had barely time to rush down to the pay-office and secure my ticket.

“What class, sir?” cried the clerk.

"Which has she taken?" said I, forgetting all save the current of my own thoughts.

"First or second, sir?" repeated he, impatiently.

"Either, or both," replied I, in confusion; and he flung me back some change and a blue card, closing the little shutter with a bang that announced the end of all colloquy.

"Get in, sir!"

"Which carriage?"

"Get in, sir!"

"Second-class? Here you are!" called out an official, as he thrust me almost rudely into a vile mob of travellers.

The bell rang out, and two snorts and a scream followed, then a heave and a jerk, and away we went. As soon as I had time to look around me, I saw that my companions were all persons of an humble order of the middle class, – the small shopkeepers and traders, probably, of the locality we were leaving. Their easy recognition of each other, and the natural way their conversation took up local matters, soon satisfied me of this fact, and reconciled me to fall back upon my own thoughts for occupation and amusement. This was with me the usual prelude to a sleep, to which I was quietly composing myself soon after. The droppings of the conversation around me, however, prevented this; for the talk had taken a discussional tone, and the differences of opinion were numerous. The question debated was, Whether a certain Sir Samuel Somebody was a great rogue, or only unfortunate? The reasons for either opinion were well put and defended, showing that the company, like most others of that class in life in England, had cultivated their faculties of judgment and investigation by the habit of attending trials or reading reports of them in newspapers.

After the discussion on his morality, came the question, Was he alive or dead?

"Sir Samuel never shot himself, sir," said a short pluffy man with an asthma. "I 've known him for years, and I can say he was not a man to do such an act."

"Well, sir, the Ostrich and the United Brethren offices are both of your opinion," said another; "they 'll not pay the policy on his life."

"The law only recognizes death on production of the body," sagely observed a man in shabby black, with a satin neckcloth, and whom I afterwards perceived was regarded as a legal authority.

"What's to be done, then, if a man be drowned at sea, or burned to a cinder in a lime-kiln?"

"Ay, or by what they call spontaneous combustion, that does n't leave a shred of you?" cried three objectors in turn.

"The law provides for these emergencies with its usual wisdom, gentlemen. Where death may not be actually proven it can be often inferred."

"But who says that Sir Samuel is dead?" broke in the asthmatic man, evidently impatient at the didactic tone of the attorney. "All we know of the matter is a letter of his own signing, that when these lines are read I shall be no more. Now, is that sufficient evidence of death to induce an insurance company to hand over some eight or ten thousand pounds to his family?"

"I believe you might say thirty thousand, sir," suggested a mild voice from the corner.

"Nothing of the kind," interposed another; "the really heavy policies on his life were held by an old Cumberland baronet, Sir Elkanah Crofton, who first established Whalley in the iron trade. I 've heard it from my father fifty times, when a child, that Sam Whalley entered Milford in a fustian jacket, with all his traps in a handkerchief."

At the mention of Sir Elkanah Crofton, my attention was quickly excited; this was the uncle of my friends at the Rosary, and I was at once curious to hear more of him.

"Fustian jacket or not, he had a good head on his shoulders," remarked one.

"And luck, sir; luck, which is better than any head," sighed the meek man, sorrowfully.

"I deny that, deny it totally," broke in he of the asthma. "If Sam Whalley hadn't been a man of first-rate order, he never could have made that concern what it was, – the first foundry in Wales."

"And what is it now, and where is he?" asked the attorney, triumphantly.

“At rest, I hope,” murmured the sad man.

“Not a bit of it, sir,” said the wheezing voice, in a tone of confidence; “take *my* word for it, he ‘s alive and hearty, somewhere or other, ay, and we ‘ll hear of him one of these days: he ‘ll be smelting metals in Africa, or cutting a canal through the Isthmus of Heaven knows what, or prime minister of one of those rajahs in India. He’s a clever dog, and he knows it too. I saw what he thought of himself the day old Sir Elkanah came down to Fairbridge.”

“To be sure, you were there that morning,” said the attorney; “tell us about that meeting.”

“It’s soon told,” resumed the other. “When Sir Elkanah Crofton arrived at the house, we were all in the garden. Sir Samuel had taken me there to see some tulips, which he said were the finest in Europe, except some at the Hague. Maybe it was that the old baronet was vexed at seeing nobody come to meet him, or that something else had crossed him, but as he entered the garden I saw he was sorely out of temper.

“How d’ye do, Sir Elkanah?” said Whalley to him, coming up pleasantly. ‘We scarcely expected you before dinner-time. My wife and my daughters,’ said he, introducing them; but the other only removed his hat ceremoniously, without ever noticing them in the least.

“I hope you had a pleasant journey, Sir Elkanah?” said Whalley, after a pause, while, with a short jerk of his head, he made signs to the ladies to leave them.

“I trust I am not the means of breaking up a family party?” said the other, half sarcastically. ‘Is Mrs. Whalley –’

“Lady Whalley, with your good permission, sir,” said Samuel, stiffly.

“Of course; how stupid of me! I should remember you had been knighted. And, indeed, the thought was full upon me as I came along, for I scarcely suppose that if higher ambitions had not possessed you, I should find the farm buildings and the outhouse in the state of ruin I see them.’

“They are better by ten thousand pounds than the day on which I first saw them; and I say it in the presence of this honest townsman here, my neighbor,’ – meaning *me*, – ‘that both *you* and they were very creaky concerns when I took you in hand.’

“I thought the old Baronet was going to have a fit at these words, and he caught hold of my arm and swayed backwards and forwards all the time, his face purple with passion.

“Who made you, sir? who made you?” cried he, at last, with a voice trembling with rage.

“The same hand that made us all,” said the other, calmly. “The same wise Providence that, for his own ends, creates drones as well as bees, and makes rickety old baronets as well as men of brains and industry.’

“You shall rue this insolence; it shall cost you dearly, by Heaven!” cried out the old man, as he gripped me tighter. ‘You are a witness, sir, to the way I have been insulted. I ‘ll foreclose your mortgage – I ‘ll call in every shilling I have advanced – I ‘ll sell the house over your head –’

“Ay! but the head without a roof over it will hold itself higher than your own, old man. The good faculties and good health God has given me are worth all your title-deeds twice told. If I walk out of this town as poor as the day I came into it, I ‘ll go with the calm certainty that I can earn my bread, – a process that would be very difficult for *you* when you could not lend out money on interest.’

“Give me your arm, sir, back to the town,” said the old Baronet to me; I feel myself too ill to go all alone.’

“Get him to step into the house and take something,” whispered Whalley in my ear, as he turned away and left us. But I was afraid to propose it; indeed, if I had, I believe the old man would have had a fit on the spot, for he trembled from head to foot, and drew long sighs, as if recovering out of a faint.

“Is there an inn near this,” asked he, where I can stop? and have you a doctor here?”

“You can have both, Sir Elkanah,” said I.

“You know me, then? – you know who I am?” said he, hastily, as I called him by his name.

“That I do, sir, and I hold my place under you; my name is Shore.’

“Yes, I remember,” said he, vaguely, as he moved away. When we came to the gate on the road he turned around full and looked at the house, overgrown with that rich red creeper that was so much admired. ‘Mark my words, my good man,’ said he, – mark them well, and as sure as I live, I ‘ll not leave one stone on another of that dwelling there.”

“He was promising more than he could perform,” said the attorney.

“I don’t know that,” sighed the meek man; “there’s very little that money can’t do in this life.”

“And what has become of Whalley’s widow, – if she be a widow?” asked one.

“She’s in a poor way. She’s up at the village yonder, and, with the help of one of her girls, she’s trying to keep a children’s school.”

“Lady Whalley’s school?” exclaimed one, in half sarcasm.

“Yes; but she has taken her maiden name again since this disaster, and calls herself Mrs. Herbert.”

“Has she more than one daughter, sir?” I asked of the last speaker.

“Yes, there are two girls; the younger one, they tell me, is going, or gone abroad, to take some situation or other, – a teacher, or a governess.”

“No, sir,” said the pluffy man, “Miss Kate has gone as companion to an old widow lady at Brussels, – Mrs. Keats. I saw the letter that arranged the terms, – a trifle less per annum than her mother gave to her maid.”

“Poor girl!” sighed the sad man. “It ‘s a dreary way to begin life!”

I nodded assentingly to him, and with a smile of gratitude for his sympathy. Indeed, the sentiment had linked me to him, and made me wish to be beside him. The conversation now grew discursive, on the score of all the difficulties that beset women when reduced to make efforts for their own support; and though the speakers were men well able to understand and pronounce upon the knotty problem, the subject did not possess interest enough to turn my mind from the details I had just been hearing. The name of Miss Herbert on the trunks showed me now who was the young lady I had met, and I reproached myself bitterly with having separated from her, and thus forfeited the occasion of befriending her on her journey. We were to sup somewhere about eleven, and I resolved that I would do my utmost to discover her, if in the train; and I occupied myself now with imagining numerous pretexts for presuming to offer my services on her behalf. She will readily comprehend the disinterested character of my attentions. She will see that I come in no spirit of levity, but moved by a true sympathy and the respectful sentiment of one touched by her sorrows. I can fancy her coy diffidence giving way before the deferential homage of my manner; and in this I really believe I have some tact. I was not sorry to pursue this theme undisturbed by the presence of my fellow-travellers, who had now got out at a station, leaving me all alone to meditate and devise imaginary conversations with Miss Herbert. I rehearsed to myself the words by which to address her, my bow, my gesture, my faint smile, a blending of melancholy with kindness, my whole air a union of the deference of the stranger with something almost fraternal. These pleasant musings were now rudely routed by the return of my fellow-travellers, who came hurrying back to their places at the banging summons of a great bell.

“Everything cold, as usual. It is a perfect disgrace how the public are treated on this line!” cried one.

“I never think of anything but a biscuit and a glass of ale, and they charged me elevenpence halfpenny for that.”

“The directors ought to look to this. I saw those ham-sandwiches when I came down here last Tuesday week.”

“And though the time-table gives us fifteen minutes, I can swear, for I laid my watch on the table, that we only got nine and a half.”

“Well, I supped heartily off that spiced round.”

“Supped, supped I Did you say you had supped here, sir?” asked I, in anxiety.

“Yes, sir; that last station was Trentham. They give us nothing more now till we reach town.”

I lay back with a faint sigh, and, from that moment, took no note of time till the guard cried
“London!”

CHAPTER X. THE PERILS OF MY JOURNEY TO OSTEND

"Young lady in deep mourning, sir, – crape shawl and bonnet, sir," said the official, in answer to my question, aided by a shilling fee; "the same as asked where was the station for the Dover Line."

"Yes, yes; that must be she."

"Got into a cab, sir, and drove off straight for the Sou'Eastern."

"She was quite alone?"

"Quite, sir; but she seems used to travelling, – got her traps together in no time, and was off in a jiffy."

"Stupid dog!" thought I; "with every advantage position and accident can confer, how little this fellow reads of character! In this poor, forlorn, heart-weary orphan, he only sees something like a commercial traveller!"

"Any luggage, sir? Is this yours?" said he, pointing to a woolsack.

"No," said I, haughtily; "my servants have gone forward with my luggage. I have nothing but a knapsack." And with an air of dignity I flung it into a hansom, and ordered the driver to set me down at the South-Eastern. Although using every exertion, the train had just started when I arrived, and a second time was I obliged to wait some hours at a station. Resolving to free myself from all the captivations of that tendency to day-dreaming, – that fatal habit of suffering my fancy to direct my steps, as though in pursuit of some settled purpose, – I calmly asked myself whither I was going – and for what? Before I had begun the examination, I deemed myself a most candid, truth-observing, frank witness, and now I discovered that I was casuistical and "dodgy" as an Old Bailey lawyer. I was haughty and indignant at being so catechised. My conscience, on the shallow pretext of being greatly interested about me, was simply prying and inquisitive. Conscience is all very well when one desires to appeal to it, and refer some distinct motive or action to its appreciation; but it is scarcely fair, and certainly not dignified, for conscience to go about seeking for little accusations of this kind or that. What liberty of action is there, besides, to a man who carries a "detective" with him wherever he goes? And lastly, conscience has the intolerable habit of obtruding its opinion upon details, and will not wait to judge by results. Now, when I have won the race, come in first, amid the enthusiastic cheers of thousands, I don't care to be asked, however privately, whether I did not practise some little bit of rather unfair jockeyship. I never could rightly get over my dislike to the friend who would take this liberty with me; and this is exactly the part conscience plays, and with an insufferable air of superiority, too, as though to say, "None of your shuffling with me, Potts! That will do all mighty well with the outer world, but *I* am not to be humbugged. You never devised a scheme in your life that I was not by at the cookery, and saw how you mixed the ingredients and stirred the pot! No, no, old fellow, all your little secret rogueries will avail you nothing here!"

Had these words been actually addressed to me by a living individual, I could not have heard them more plainly than now they fell upon my ear, uttered, besides, in a tone of cutting, sarcastic derision. "I will stand this no longer!" cried I, springing up from my seat and flinging my cigar angrily away. "I 'm certain no man ever accomplished any high and great destiny in life who suffered himself to be bullied in this wise; such irritating, pestering impertinence would destroy the temper of a saint, and break down the courage and damp the ardor of the boldest. Could great measures of statecraft be carried out – could battles be won – could new continents be discovered, if at every strait and every emergency one was to be interrupted by a low voice, whispering, 'Is this *all* right? Are there no flaws here? You live in a world of frailties, Potts. You are playing at a round game, where every one cheats a little, and where the Drogueries are never remembered against him who wins. Bear that in your mind, and keep your cards "up."'"

When I was about to take my ticket, a dictum of the great moralist struck my mind: "Desultory reading has slain its thousands and tens of thousands;" and if desultory reading, why not infinitely more so desultory acquaintance? Surely, our readings do not impress us as powerfully as the actual intercourse of life. It must be so. It is in this daily conflict with our fellow-men that we are moulded and fashioned; and the danger is, to commingle and confuse the impressions made upon our hearts, to cross the writing on our natures so often that nothing remains legible! "I will guard against this peril," thought I. "I will concentrate my intentions and travel alone." I slipped a crown into a guard's hand, and whispered, "Put no one in here if you can help it" As I jogged along, all by myself, I could not help feeling that one of the highest privileges of wealth must be to be able always to buy solitude, – to be in a position to say, "None shall invade me. The world must contrive to go round without a kick from *me*. I am a self-contained and self-suffering creature." If I were Rothschild, I 'd revel in this sentiment; it places one so immeasurably above that busy ant-hill where one sees the creatures hurrying, hastening, and fagging "till their hearts are broken." One feels himself a superior intelligence, – a being above the wants and cares of the work-a-day world around him.

"Any room here?" cried a merry voice, breaking in upon my musing; and at the same instant a young fellow, in a gray travelling-suit and a wideawake, flung a dressing-bag and a wrapper carelessly into the carriage, and so recklessly as to come tumbling over me. He never thought of apology, however, but continued his remarks to the guard, who was evidently endeavoring to induce him to take a place elsewhere. "No, no!" cried the young man; "I'm all right here, and the cove with the yellow hair won't object to my smoking."

I heard these words as I sat in the corner, and I need scarcely say how grossly the impertinence offended me. That the privacy I had paid for should be invaded was bad enough, but that my companion should begin acquaintance with an insult was worse again; and so I determined on no account, nor upon any pretext, would I hold intercourse with him, but maintain a perfect silence and reserve so long as our journey lasted.

There was an insufferable jauntiness and self-satisfaction in every movement of the new arrival, even to the reckless way he pitched into the carriage three small white canvas bags, carefully sealed and docketed; the address – which! read – being, "To H.M.'s Minister and Envoy at – , by the Hon. Grey Buller, Attaché, &c" So, then, this was one of the Young Guard of Diplomacy, one of those sucking Talleyrands, which form the hope of the Foreign Office and the terror of middle-class English abroad.

"Do you mind smoking?" asked he, abruptly, as he scraped his lucifer match against the roof of the carriage, showing, by the promptitude of his action, how little he cared for my reply.

"I never smoke, sir, except in the carriages reserved for smokers," was my rebukeful answer.

"And I always do," said he, in a very easy tone.

Not condescending to notice this rude rejoinder, I drew forth my newspaper, and tried to occupy myself with its contents.

"Anything new?" asked he, abruptly.

"Not that I am aware, sir. I was about to consult the paper."

"What paper is it?"

"It is the 'Banner,' sir, – at your service," said I, with a sort of sarcasm.

"Rascally print; a vile, low, radical, mill-owning organ. Pitch it away!"

"Certainly not, sir. Being for *me* and *my* edification, I will beg to exercise my own judgment as to how I deal with it."

"It's deuced low, that's what it is, and that's exactly the fault of all our daily papers. Their tone is vulgar; they reflect nothing of the opinions one hears in society. Don't you agree with me?"

I gave a sort of muttering dissent, and he broke in quickly, – "Perhaps not; it's just as likely *you* would not think them low, but take *my* word for it, *I'm* right."

I shook my head negatively, without speaking.

"Well, now," cried he, "let us put the thing to the test Read out one of those leaders. I don't care which, or on what subject Read it out, and I pledge myself to show you at least one vulgarism, one flagrant outrage on good breeding, in every third sentence."

"I protest, sir," said I, haughtily, "I shall do no such thing. I have come here neither to read aloud nor take up the defence of the public press."

"I say, look out!" cried he; "you 'll smash something in that bag you 're kicking there. If I don't mistake, it's Bohemian glass. No, no; all right," said he, examining the number, "it's only Yarmouth bloaters."

"I imagined these contained despatches, sir," said I, with a look of what he ought to have understood as withering scorn.

"You did, did you?" cried he, with a quick laugh. "Well, I 'll bet you a sovereign I make a better guess about *your* pack than you 've done about *mine*."

"Done, sir; I take you," said I, quickly.

"Well; you 're in cutlery, or hardware, or lace goods, or ribbons, or alpaca cloth, or drugs, ain't you?"

"I am not, sir," was my stern reply.

"Not a bagman?"

"Not a bagman, sir."

"Well, you 're an usher in a commercial academy, or 'our own correspondent,' or a telegraph clerk?"

"I 'm none of these, sir. And I now beg to remind you, that instead of one guess, you have made about a dozen."

"Well, you 've won, there's no denying it," said he, taking a sovereign from his waistcoat-pocket and handing it to me. "It's deuced odd how I should be mistaken. I 'd have sworn you were a bagman!" But for the impertinence of these last words I should have declined to accept his lost bet, but I took it now as a sort of vindication of my wounded feelings. "Now it's all over and ended," said he, calmly, "what are you? I don't ask out of any impertinent curiosity, but that I hate being foiled in a thing of this kind. What are you?"

"I 'll tell you what I am, sir," said I, indignantly, for now I was outraged beyond endurance, – "I 'll tell you, sir, what I am, and what I feel myself, – one singularly unlucky in a travelling-companion."

"Bet you a five-pound note you're not," broke he in. "Give you six to five on it, in anything you like."

"It would be a wager almost impossible to decide, sir."

"Nothing of the kind. Let us leave it to the first pretty woman we see at the station, the guard of the train, the fellow in the pay-office, the stoker if you like."

"I must own, sir, that you express a very confident opinion of your case."

"Will you bet?"

"No, sir, certainly not"

"Well, then, shut up, and say no more about it. If a man won't back his opinion, the less he says the better."

I lay back in my place at this, determined that no provocation should induce me to exchange another word with him. Apparently, he had not made a like resolve, for he went on: "It's all bosh about appearances being deceptive, and so forth. They say 'not all gold that glitters;' my notion is that with a fellow who really knows life, no disguise that was ever invented will be successful: the way a man wears his hair," – here he looked at mine, – "the sort of gloves he has, if there be anything peculiar in his waistcoat, and, above all, his boots. I don't believe the devil was ever more revealed in his hoof than a snob by his shoes." A most condemnatory glance at my extremities accompanied this speech.

"Must I endure this sort of persecution all the way to Dover?" was the question I asked of my misery.

"Look out, you're on fire!" said he, with a dry laugh. And sure enough, a spark from his cigarette had fallen on my trousers, and burned a round hole in them.

"Really, sir," cried I, in passionate warmth, "your conduct becomes intolerable."

"Well, if I knew you preferred being singed, I'd have said-nothing about it. What's this station here? Where's your 'Bradshaw'?"

"I have got no 'Bradshaw,' sir," said I, with dignity.

"No 'Bradshaw'! A bagman without 'Bradshaw'! Oh, I forgot, you ain't a bagman. Why are we stopping here? Something smashed, I suspect. Eh! what! isn't that she? Yes, it is! Open the door! – let me out, I say! Confound the lock! – let me out!" While he uttered these words, in an accent of the wildest impatience, I had but time to see a lady, in deep mourning, pass on to a carriage in front, just as, with a preliminary snort, the train shook, then backed, and at last set out on its thundering course again. "Such a stunning fine girl!" said he, as he lighted a fresh cigar; "saw her just as we started, and thought I'd run her to earth in this carriage. Precious mistake I made, eh, was n't it? All in black – deep black – and quite alone!"

I had to turn towards the window not to let him perceive how his words agitated me, for I felt certain it was Miss Herbert he was describing, and I felt a sort of revulsion to think of the poor girl being subjected to the impertinence of this intolerable puppy.

"Too much style about her for a governess; and yet, somehow, she was n't, so to say – you know what I mean – she was n't altogether *that*; looked frightened, and people of real class never look frightened."

"The daughter of a clergyman, probably," said I, with a tone of such reproof as I hoped must check all levity.

"Or a flash maid! some of them, nowadays, are wonderful swells; they've got an art of dressing and making-up that is really surprising."

"I have no experience of the order, sir," said I, gravely.

"Well, so I should say. *Your* beat is in the haberdashery or hosiery line, eh?"

"Has it not yet occurred to you, sir," asked I, sternly, "that an acquaintanceship brief as ours should exclude personalities, not to say – " I wanted to add "impertinences;" but his gray eyes were turned full on me, with an expression so peculiar that I faltered, and could not get the word out.

"Well, go on, – out with it: not to say what?" said he, calmly.

I turned my shoulder towards him, and nestled down into my place.

"There's a thing, now," said he, in a tone of the coolest reflection, – "there's a thing, now, that I never could understand, and I have never met the man to explain it. Our nation, as a nation, is just as plucky as the French, – no one disputes it; and yet take a Frenchman of *your* class, – the *commis-voyageur*, or anything that way, – and you'll just find him as prompt on the point of honor as the best noble in the land. He never utters an insolent speech without being ready to back it."

I felt as if I were choking, but I never uttered a word.

"I remember meeting one of those fellows – traveller for some house in the wine trade – at Avignon. It was at *table d'hôte*, and I said something slighting about Communism, and he replied, '*Monsieur, je suis Fouriériste*, and you insult me.' Thereupon he sent me his card by the waiter, – '*Paul Déloge*, for the house of Gougon, *père et fils*.' I tore it, and threw it away, saying, 'I never drink Bordeaux wines.' 'What do you say to a glass of Hermitage, then?' said he, and flung the contents of his own in my face. Wasn't that very ready? *I* call it as neat a thing as could be."

"And you bore that outrage," said I, in triumphant delight; "you submitted to a flagrant insult like that at a public table?"

"I don't know what you call 'bearing it,'" said he; "the thing was done, and I had only to wipe my face with my napkin."

"Nothing more?" said I, sneeringly.

“We went out, afterwards, if you mean *that*,” said he, quietly, “and he ran me through here.” As he spoke, he proceeded, in leisurely fashion, to unbutton the wrist of his shirt, and, baring his arm midway, showed me a pinkish cicatrice of considerable extent. “It went, the doctor said, within a hair’s-breadth of the artery.”

I made no comment upon this story. From the moment I heard it, I felt as though I was travelling with the late Mr. Palmer, of Rugeley. I was as it were in the company of one who never would have scrupled to dispose of me, at any moment and in any way that his fancy suggested. My code respecting the duel was to regard it as the last, the very last, appeal in the direst emergency of dishonor. The men who regarded it as the settlement of slight differences, I deemed assassins. They were no more safe associates for peaceful citizens than a wolf was a meet companion for a flock of South Downs. The more I ruminated on this theme, the more indignant grew my resentment, and the question assumed the shape of asking, “Is the great mass of mankind to be hectored and bullied by some half-dozen scoundrels with skill at the small sword?” Little knew I that in the ardor of my indignation I had uttered these words aloud, – spoken them with an earnest vehemence, looking my fellow-traveller full in the face, and frowning.

“Scoundrel is strong, eh?” said he, slowly; “*very strong!*”

“Who spoke of a scoundrel?” asked I, in terror, for his confounded calm, cold manner made my very blood run chilled.

“Scoundrel is exactly the sort of word,” added he, deliberately, “that once uttered can only be expiated in one way. You do not give me the impression of a very bright individual, but certainly you can understand so much.”

I bowed a dignified assent; my heart was in my mouth as I did it, and I could not, to save my life, have uttered a word. My predicament was highly perilous; and all incurred by what? – that passion for adventure that had led me forth out of a position of easy obscurity into a world of strife, conflict, and difficulty. Why had I not stayed at home? What foolish infatuation had ever suggested to me the Quixotism of these wanderings? Blondel had done it all. Were it not for Blondel, I had never met Father Dyke, talked myself into a stupid wager, lost what was not my own; in fact, every disaster sprang out of the one before it, just as twig adheres to branch and branch to trunk. Shall I make a clean breast of it, and tell my companion my whole story? Shall I explain to him that at heart I am a creature of the kindest impulses and most generous sympathies, that I overflow with good intentions towards my fellows, and that the problem I am engaged to solve is how shall I dispense most happiness? Will he comprehend me? Has he a nature to appreciate an organization so fine and subtle as mine? Will he understand that the fairy who endows us with our gifts at birth is reckoned to be munificent when she withholds only one high quality, and with me that one was courage? I mean the coarse, vulgar, combative sort of courage that makes men prizefighters and bargees; for as to the grander species of courage, I imagine it to be my distinguishing feature.

The question is, will he give me a patient hearing, for my theory requires nice handling, and some delicacy in the developing? He may cut me short in his bluff, abrupt way, and say, “Out with it, old fellow, you want to sneak out of this quarrel.” What am I to reply? I shall rejoin: “Sir, let us first inquire if it be a quarrel. From the time of Atrides down to the Crimean war, there has not been one instance of a conflict that did not originate in misconceptions, and has not been prolonged by delusions! Let us take the Peloponnesian war.” A short grunt beside me here cut short my argumentation. He was fast, sound asleep, and snoring loudly. My thoughts at once suggested escape. Could I but get away, I fancied I could find space in the world, never again to see myself his neighbor.

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