LEVER CHARLES JAMES

THE CONFESSIONS OF HARRY LORREQUER — VOLUME 6

Charles Lever

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Lever C.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER XLII.
THE JOURNEY

Trevanion came at last. He had obtained my passport, and engaged a carriage to convey me about eight miles, where I should overtake the diligence — such a mode of travelling being judged more likely to favour my escape, by attracting less attention than posting. It was past ten when I left the Rue St. Honore, having shaken hands with Trevanion for the last time, and charged him with ten thousand soft messages for the "friends" I left behind me.

When I arrived at the village of St. Jacques, the diligence had not come up. To pass away the time, I ordered a little supper and a bottle of St. Julien. Scarcely had I seated myself to my "cotelette," when the rapid whirl of wheels was heard without, and a cab drew up suddenly at the door. So naturally does the fugitive suspect pursuit, that my immediate impression was, that I was followed. In this notion I was strengthened by the tones of a cracked, discordant voice, asking in very peculiar French if the "diligence had passed?" Being answered in the negative he walked into the room where I was, and speedily by his appearance, removed any apprehensions I had felt as to my safety. Nothing could less resemble the tall port and sturdy bearing of a gendarme, than the diminutive and dwarfish individual before me. His height could scarcely have reached five feet, of which the head formed fully a fourth part; and even this was rendered in appearance still greater by a mass of loosely floating black hair that fell upon his neck and shoulders, and gave him much the air of a "black lion" on a sign board. His black frock, fur-collared and braided — his ill-made boots, his meerschaum projecting from his breast-pocket, above all, his unwashed hands, and a heavy gold ring upon his thumb — all made up an ensemble of evidences that showed he could be nothing but a German. His manner was bustling, impatient, and had it not been ludicrous, would certainly be considered as insolent to every one about him, for he stared each person abruptly in the face, and mumbled some broken expressions of his opinion of them half-aloud in German. His comments ran on: — "Bon soir, Monsieur," to the host: "Ein boesewicht, ganz sicher" — "a scoundrel without doubt;" and then added, still lower, "Rob you here as soon as look at you." "Ah, postillion! comment va?" — "much more like a brigand after all — I know which I'd take you for." "Ver fluchte fraw" — "how ugly the woman is." This compliment was intended for the hostess, who curtsied down to the ground in her ignorance. At last approaching me, he stopped, and having steadily surveyed me, muttered, "Ein echter Englander" — "a thorough Englishman, always eating." I could not resist the temptation to assure him that I was perfectly aware of his flattering impression in my behalf, though I had speedily to regret my precipitancy, for, less mindful of the rebuke than pleased at finding some one who understood German, he drew his chair beside me and entered into conversation.

Every one has surely felt, some time or other in life, the insufferable annoyance of having his thoughts and reflections interfered with, and broken in upon by the vulgar impertinence and egotism of some "bore," who, mistaking your abstraction for attention and your despair for delight, inflicts upon you his whole life and adventures, when your own immediate destinies are perhaps vacillating in the scale.

Such a doom was now mine! Occupied as I was by the hope of the future, and my fears lest any impediment to my escape should blast my prospects for ever, I preferred appearing to pay attention

to this confounded fellow's "personal narrative" lest his questions, turning on my own affairs, might excite suspicions as to the reasons of my journey.

I longed most ardently for the arrival of the diligence, trusting that with true German thrift, by friend might prefer the cheapness of the "interieure" to the magnificence of the "coupe," and that thus I should see no more of him. But in this pleasing hope I was destined to be disappointed, for I was scarcely seated in my place when I found him beside me. The third occupant of this "privileged den," as well as my lamp-light survey of him permitted, afforded nothing to build on as a compensation for the German. He was a tall, lanky, lantern-jawed man, with a hook nose and projecting chin; his hair, which had only been permitted to grow very lately, formed that curve upon his forehead we see in certain old fashioned horse-shoe wigs; his compressed lip and hard features gave the expression of one who had seen a good deal of the world, and didn't think the better of it in consequence. I observed that he listened to the few words we spoke while getting in with some attention, and then, like a person who did not comprehend the language, turned his shoulder towards us, and soon fell asleep. I was now left to the "tender mercies" of my talkative companion, who certainly spared me not. Notwithstanding my vigorous resolves to turn a deaf ear to his narratives, I could not avoid learning that he was the director of music to some German prince — that he had been to Paris to bring out an opera which having, as he said, a "succes pyramidal," he was about to repeat in Strasbourg. He further informed me that a depute from Alsace had obtained for him a government permission to travel with the courier; but that he being "social" withal, and no ways proud, preferred the democracy of the diligence to the solitary grandeur of the caleche, (for which heaven confound him,) and thus became my present companion.

Music, in all its shapes and forms made up the staple of the little man's talk. There was scarcely an opera or an overture, from Mozart to Donizetti, that he did not insist upon singing a scene from; and wound up all by a very pathetic lamentation over English insensibility to music, which he in great part attributed to our having only one opera, which he kindly informed me was "Bob et Joan." However indisposed to check the current of his loquacity by any effort of mine, I could not avoid the temptation to translate for him a story which Sir Walter Scott once related to me, and was so far apropos, as conveying my own sense of the merits of our national music, such as we have it, by its association with scenes, and persons, and places we are all familiar with, however unintelligible to the ear of a stranger.

A young French viscomte was fortunate enough to obtain in marriage the hand of a singularly pretty Scotch heiress of an old family and good fortune, who, amongst her other endowments, possessed a large old-fashioned house in a remote district of the highlands, where her ancestors had resided for centuries. Thither the young couple repaired to pass their honeymoon; the enamoured bridegroom gladly availing himself of the opportunity to ingratiate himself with his new connexion, by adopting the seclusion he saw practised by the English on such occasions. However consonant to our notions of happiness, and however conducive to our enjoyment this custom be — and I have strong doubts upon the subject — it certainly prospered ill with the volatile Frenchman, who pined for Paris, its cafes, its boulevards, its maisons de jeu, and its soirees. His days were passed in looking from the deep and narrow windows of some oak-framed room upon the bare and heath-clad moors, or watching the cloud's shadows as they passed across the dark pine trees that closed the distance.

Ennuyee to death, and convinced that he had sacrificed enough and more than enough to the barbarism which demanded such a "sejour," he was sitting one evening listlessly upon the terrace in front of the house, plotting a speedy escape from his gloomy abode, and meditating upon the life of pleasure that awaited him, when the discordant twang of some savage music broke upon his ear, and roused him from his reverie. The wild scream and fitful burst of a highland pibroch is certainly not the most likely thing in nature to allay the irritable and ruffled feelings of an irascible person — unless, perhaps, the hearer eschew breeches. So thought the viscomte. He started hurriedly up, and straight before him, upon the gravel-walk, beheld the stalwart figure and bony frame of an old

highlander, blowing, with all his lungs, the "Gathering of the clans." With all the speed he could muster, he rushed into the house, and, calling his servants, ordered them to expel the intruder, and drive him at once outside the demesne. When the mandate was made known to the old piper, it was with the greatest difficulty he could be brought to comprehend it — for, time out of mind, his approach had been hailed with every demonstration of rejoicing; and now — but no; the thing was impossible — there must be a mistake somewhere. He was accordingly about to recommence, when a second and stronger hint suggested to him that it were safer to depart. "Maybe the 'carl' did na like the pipes," said the highlander musingly, as he packed them up for his march. "Maybe he did na like me;" "perhaps, too, he was na in the humour of music." He paused for an instant as if reflecting — not satisfied, probably, that he had hit upon the true solution — when suddenly his eye brightened, his lips curled, and fixing a look upon the angry Frenchman, he said — "Maybe ye are right enow — ye heard them ower muckle in Waterloo to like the skirl o' them ever since;" with which satisfactory explanation, made in no spirit of bitterness or raillery, but in the simple belief that he had at last hit the mark of the viscomte's antipathy, the old man gathered up his plaid and departed.

However disposed I might have felt towards sleep, the little German resolved I should not obtain any, for when for half an hour together I would preserve a rigid silence, he, nowise daunted, had recourse to some German "lied," which he gave forth with an energy of voice and manner that must have aroused every sleeper in the diligence: so that, fain to avoid this, I did my best to keep him on the subject of his adventures, which, as a man of successful gallantry, were manifold indeed. Wearying at last, even of this subordinate part, I fell into a kind of half doze. The words of a student song he continued to sing without ceasing for above an hour — being the last waking thought on my memory.

Less as a souvenir of the singer than a specimen of its class I give here a rough translation of the well-known Burschen melody called

THE POPE

I

The Pope, he leads a happy life,
He fears not married care, nor strife,
He drinks the best of Rhenish wine,
I would the Pope's gay lot were mine.
CHORUS.
He drinks the best of Rhenish wine.
I would the Pope's gay lot were mine.

II

But then all happy's not his life,
He has not maid, nor blooming wife;
Nor child has he to raise his hope —
I would not wish to be the Pope.

III

The Sultan better pleases me,
His is a life of jollity;
His wives are many as he will —
I would the Sultan's throne then fill.

IV

But even he's a wretched man,
He must obey his Alcoran;
And dares not drink one drop of wine —
I would not change his lot for mine.

V

So then I'll hold my lowly stand,
And live in German Vaterland;
I'll kiss my maiden fair and fine,
And drink the best of Rhenish wine.

VI

Whene'er my maiden kisses me,
I'll think that I the Sultan be;
And when my cheery glass I tope,
I'll fancy then I am the Pope.

CHAPTER XLIII.
THE JOURNEY

It was with a feeling of pleasure I cannot explain, that I awoke in the morning, and found myself upon the road. The turmoil, the bustle, the never-ending difficulties of my late life in Paris had so over-excited and worried me, that I could neither think nor reflect. Now all these cares and troubles were behind me, and I felt like a liberated prisoner as I looked upon the grey dawn of the coming day, as it gradually melted from its dull and leaden tint to the pink and yellow hue of the rising sun. The broad and richly-coloured plains of "la belle France" were before me — and it is "la belle France," however inferior to parts of England in rural beauty — the large tracts of waving yellow corn, undulating like a sea in the morning breeze — the interminable reaches of forest, upon which the shadows played and flitted, deepening the effect and mellowing the mass, as we see them in Ruysdael's pictures — while now and then some tall-gabled, antiquated chateau, with its mutilated terrace and dowager-like air of bye-gone grandeur, would peep forth at the end of some long avenue of lime trees, all having their own features of beauty — and a beauty with which every object around harmonizes well. The sluggish peasant, in his blouse and striped night-cap — the heavily caparisoned horse, shaking his head amidst a Babel-tower of gaudy worsted tassels and brass bells — the deeply laden waggon, creeping slowly along — are all in keeping with a scene, where the very mist that rises from the valley seems indolent and lazy, and unwilling to impart the rich perfume of verdure with which it is loaded. Every land has its own peculiar character of beauty. The glaciered mountain, the Alpine peak, the dashing cataract of Switzerland and the Tyrol, are not finer in their way than the long flat moorlands of a Flemish landscape, with its clump of stunted willows cloistering over some limpid brook, in which the oxen are standing for shelter from the noon-day heat — while, lower down, some rude water-wheel is mingling its sounds with the summer bees and the merry voices of the miller and his companions. So strayed my thoughts as the German shook me by the arm, and asked if "I were not ready for my breakfast?" Luckily to this question there is rarely but the one answer. Who is not ready for his breakfast when on the road? How delightful, if on the continent, to escape from the narrow limits of the dungeon-like diligence, where you sit with your knees next your collar-bone, fainting with heat and suffocated by dust, and find yourself suddenly beside the tempting "plats" of a little French dejeune, with its cutlets, its fried fish, its poulet, its salad, and its little entre of fruit, tempered with a not despicable bottle of Beaune. If in England, the exchange is nearly as grateful — for though our travelling be better, and our equipage less "genante," still it is no small alterative from the stage-coach to the inn parlour, redolent of aromatic black tea, eggs, and hot toast, with a hospitable side-board of red, raw surloins, and York hams, that would made a Jew's mouth water. While, in America, the change is greatest of all, as any one can vouch for who has been suddenly emancipated from the stove-heat of a "nine-inside" leathern "conveniency," bumping ten miles an hour over a corduroy road, the company smoking, if not worse; to the ample display of luxurious viands displayed upon the breakfast-table, where, what with buffalo steaks, pumpkin pie, gin cock-tail, and other aristocratically called temptations, he must be indeed fastidious who cannot employ his half-hour. Pity it is, when there is so much good to eat, that people will not partake of it like civilized beings, and with that air of cheerful thankfulness that all other nations more or less express when enjoying the earth's bounties. But true it is, that there is a spirit of discontent in the Yankee, that seems to accept of benefits with a tone of dissatisfaction, if not distrust. I once made this remark to an excellent friend of mine now no more, who, however, would not permit of my attributing this feature to the Americans exclusively, adding, "Where have you more of this than in Ireland? and surely you would not call the Irish ungrateful?" He illustrated his first remark by the following short anecdote: —

The rector of the parish my friend lived in was a man who added to the income he derived from his living a very handsome private fortune, which he devoted entirely to the benefit of the poor around him. Among the objects of his bounty one old woman — a childless widow, was remarkably distinguished. Whether commiserating her utter helplessness or her complete isolation, he went farther to relieve her than to many, if not all, the other poor. She frequently was in the habit of pleading her poverty as a reason for not appearing in church among her neighbours; and he gladly seized an opportunity of so improving her condition, that on this score at least no impediment existed. When all his little plans for her comfort had been carried into execution, he took the opportunity one day of dropping in, as if accidentally, to speak to her. By degrees he led the subject to her changed condition in life — the alteration from a cold, damp, smoky hovel, to a warm, clean, slated house — the cheerful garden before the door that replaced the mud-heap and the duck-pool — and all the other happy changes which a few weeks had effected. And he then asked, did she not feel grateful to a bountiful Providence that had showered down so many blessings upon her head?

"Ah, troth, its thrue for yer honour, I am grateful," she replied, in a whining discordant tone, which astonished the worthy parson.

"Of course you are, my good woman, of course you are — but I mean to say, don't you feel that every moment you live is too short to express your thankfulness to this kind Providence for what he has done?"

"Ah, darlin', it's all thrue, he's very good, he's mighty kind, so he is."

"Why then, not acknowledge it in a different manner?" said the parson, with some heat — "has he not housed you, and fed you, and clothed you?"

"Yes, alanah, he done it all."

"Well, where is your gratitude for all these mercies?"

"Ah, sure if he did," said the old crone, roused at length by the importunity of the questioner — "sure if he did, doesn't he take it out o' me in the corns?"

CHAPTER XLIV.
A REMINISCENCE OF THE EAST

The breakfast-table assembled around it the three generations of men who issued from the three subdivisions of the diligence, and presented that motley and mixed assemblage of ranks, ages, and countries, which forms so very amusing a part of a traveller's experience.

First came the "haute aristocratie" of the coupe, then the middle class of the interieure, and lastly, the tiers etat of the rotonde, with its melange of Jew money-lenders, under-officers and their wives, a Norman nurse with a high cap and a red jupe; while, to close the procession, a German student descended from the roof, with a beard, a blouse, and a meerschaum. Of such materials was our party made up; and yet, differing in all our objects and interests, we speedily amalgamated into a very social state of intimacy, and chatted away over our breakfast with much good humour and gaiety. Each person of the number seeming pleased at the momentary opportunity of finding a new listener, save my tall companion of the coupe. He preserved a dogged silence, unbroken by even a chance expression to the waiter, who observed his wants and supplied them by a species of quick instinct, evidently acquired by practice. As I could not help feeling somewhat interested about the hermit-like attachment he evinced for solitude, I watched him narrowly for some time, and at length as the "roti" made its appearance before him, after he had helped himself and tasted it, he caught my eye fixed upon him, and looking at me intently for a few seconds, he seemed to be satisfied in some passing doubt he laboured under, as he said with a most peculiar shake of the head — "No mangez, no mangez cela."

"Ah," said I, detecting in my friend's French his English origin, "you are an Englishman I find."

"The devil a doubt of it, darlin'," said he half testily.

"An Irishman, too — still better," said I.

"Why then isn't it strange that my French always shows me to be English, and my English proves me Irish? It's lucky for me there's no going farther any how."

Delighted to have thus fallen upon a "character," as the Irishman evidently appeared, I moved my chair towards his; and finding, however, he was not half pleased at the manner in which my acquaintance had been made with him, and knowing his country's susceptibility of being taken by a story, I resolved to make my advances by narrating a circumstance which had once befallen me in my early life.

Our countrymen, English and Irish, travel so much now a days, that one ought never to feel surprised at finding them anywhere. The instance I am about to relate will verify to a certain extent the fact, by showing that no situation is too odd or too unlikely to be within the verge of calculation.

When the 10th foot, to which I then belonged, were at Corfu, I obtained with three other officers a short leave of absence, to make a hurried tour of the Morea, and taking a passing glance at Constantinople — in those days much less frequently visited by travellers than at present.

After rambling pleasantly about for some weeks, we were about to return, when we determined that before sailing we should accept an invitation some officers of the "Dwarf" frigate, then stationed there, had given us, to pass a day at Pera, and pic-nic in the mountain.

One fine bright morning was therefore selected — a most appetizing little dinner being carefully packed up — we set out, a party of fourteen, upon our excursion.

The weather was glorious, and the scene far finer than any of us had anticipated — the view from the mountain extending over the entire city, gorgeous in the rich colouring of its domes and minarets; while, at one side, the golden horn was visible, crowded with ships of every nation, and, at the other, a glimpse might be had of the sea of Marmora, blue and tranquil as it lay beneath. The broad bosom of the Bosphorus was sheeted out like a map before us — peaceful yet bustling with

life and animation. Here lay the union-jack of old England, floating beside the lilies of France — we speak of times when lilies were and barricades were not — the tall and taper spars of a Yankee frigate towering above the low timbers and heavy hull of a Dutch schooner — the gilded poop and curved galleries of a Turkish three-decker, anchored beside the raking mast and curved deck of a suspicious looking craft, whose red-capped and dark-visaged crew needed not the naked creese at their sides to bespeak them Malays. The whole was redolent of life, and teeming with food for one's fancy to conjure from.

While we were debating upon the choice of a spot for our luncheon, which should command the chief points of view within our reach, one of the party came to inform us that he had just discovered the very thing we were in search of. It was a small kiosk, built upon a projecting rock that looked down upon the Bosphorus and the city, and had evidently, from the extended views it presented, been selected as the spot to build upon. The building itself was a small octagon, open on every side, and presenting a series of prospects, land and seaward, of the most varied and magnificent kind.

Seeing no one near, nor any trace of habitation, we resolved to avail ourselves of the good taste of the founder; and spreading out the contents of our hampers, proceeded to discuss a most excellent cold dinner. When the good things had disappeared, and the wine began to circulate, one of the party observed that we should not think of enjoying ourselves before we had filled a bumper to the brim, to the health of our good king, whose birth-day it chanced to be. Our homeward thoughts and loyalty uniting, we filled our glasses, and gave so hearty a "hip, hip, hurra," to our toast, that I doubt if the echoes of those old rocks ever heard the equal of it.

Scarcely was the last cheer dying away in the distance, when the door of the kiosk opened, and a negro dressed in white muslin appeared, his arms and ancles bearing those huge rings of massive gold, which only persons of rank distinguish their servants by.

After a most profound obeisance to the party, he explained in very tolerable French, that his master the Effendi, Ben Mustapha Al Halak, at whose charge (in house rent) we were then resting, sent us greetings, and begged that if not considered as contrary to our usages, we should permit him and his suite to approach the kiosk and observe us at our meal.

Independent of his politeness in the mode of conveying the request, as he would prove fully as entertaining a sight to us as we could possibly be to him, we immediately expressed our great willingness to receive his visit, coupled with a half hint that perhaps he might honour us by joining the party.

After a half hour's delay, the door was once more thrown open, and a venerable old Turk entered: he salaamed three times most reverently, and motioned to us to be seated, declining, at the same time, by a gentle gesture of his hand, our invitation. He was followed by a train of six persons, all splendidly attired, and attesting, by their costume and manner, the rank and importance of their chief. Conceiving that his visit had but one object — to observe our convivial customs — we immediately reseated ourselves, and filled our glasses.

As one after another the officers of the effendi's household passed round the apartments, we offered them a goblet of champagne, which they severally declined, with a polite but solemn smile — all except one, a large, savage-looking Turk, with a most ferocious scowl, and the largest black beard I ever beheld. He did not content himself with a mute refusal of our offer, but stopping suddenly, he raised up his hands above his head, and muttered some words in Turkish, which one of the party informed us was a very satisfactory recommendation of the whole company to Satan for their heretic abomination.

The procession moved slowly round the room, and when it reached the door again retired, each member of it salaaming three times as they had done on entering. Scarcely had they gone, when we burst into a loud fit of laughter at the savage-looking fellow who thought proper to excommunicate us, and were about to discuss his more than common appearance of disgust at our proceedings, when again the door opened, and a turbaned head peeped in, but so altered were the features, that although

seen but the moment before, we could hardly believe them the same. The dark complexion — the long and bushy beard were there — but instead of the sleepy and solemn character of the oriental, with heavy eye and closed lip, there was a droll, half-devilry in the look, and partly open mouth, that made a most laughable contrast with the head-dress. He looked stealthily around him for an instant, as if to see that all was right, and then, with an accent and expression I shall never forget, said, "I'll taste your wine, gentleman, an it be pleasing to ye."

CHAPTER XLV.
A DAY IN THE PHOENIX

When we were once more in the coupe of the diligence, I directed my entire attention towards my Irish acquaintance, as well because of his apparent singularity, as to avoid the little German in the opposite corner.

"You have not been long in France, then, sir," said I, as we resumed our conversation.

"Three weeks, and it seems like three years to me — nothing to eat — nothing to drink — and nobody to speak to. But I'll go back soon — I only came abroad for a month."

"You'll scarcely see much of the Continent in so short a time."

"Devil a much that will grieve me — I didn't come to see it."

"Indeed!"

"Nothing of the kind; I only came — to be away from home."

"Oh! I perceive."

"You're quite out there," said my companion, misinterpreting my meaning. "It wasn't any thing of that kind. I don't owe sixpence. I was laughed out of Ireland — that's all, though that same is bad enough."

"Laughed out of it!"

"Just so — and little you know of Ireland if that surprises you."

After acknowledging that such an event was perfectly possible, from what I myself had seen of that country, I obtained the following very brief account of my companion's reasons for foreign travel:

"Well, sir," began he, "it is about four months since I brought up to Dublin from Galway a little chesnut mare, with cropped ears and a short tail, square-jointed, and rather low — just what you'd call a smart hack for going to cover with — a lively thing on the road with a light weight. Nobody ever suspected that she was a clean bred thing — own sister to Jenny, that won the Corinthians, and ran second to Giles for the Riddlesworth — but so she was, and a better bred mare never leaped the pound in Ballinasloe. Well, I brought her to Dublin, and used to ride her out two or three times a week, making little matches sometimes to trot — and, for a thorough bred, she was a clipper at trotting — to trot a mile or so on the grass — another day to gallop the length of the nine acres opposite the Lodge — and then sometimes, back her for a ten pound note, to jump the biggest furze bush that could be found — all or which she could do with ease, nobody thinking, all the while, that the cock-tailed pony was out of Scroggins, by a 'Lamplighter mare.' As every fellow that was beat to-day was sure to come back to-morrow, with something better, either of his own or a friend's, I had matches booked for every day in the week — for I always made my little boy that rode, win by half a neck, or a nostril, and so we kept on day after day pocketing from ten to thirty pounds or thereabouts.

"It was mighty pleasant while it lasted, for besides winning the money, I had my own fun laughing at the spoonies that never could book my bets fast enough. Young infantry officers and the junior bar — they were for the most part mighty nice to look at, but very raw about racing. How long I might have gone on in this way I cannot say; but one morning I fell in with a fat, elderly gentleman, in shorts and gaiters, mounted on a dun cob pony, that was very fidgety and hot tempered, and appeared to give the rider a great deal of uneasiness.

"'He's a spicy hack you're on, sir,' said I, 'and has a go in him, I'll be bound.'

"'I rayther think he has,' said the old gentleman, half testily.

"'And can trot a bit, too.'

"'Twelve Irish miles in fifty minutes, with my weight.' Here he looked down at a paunch like a sugar hosghead.

"'Maybe he's not bad across a country,' said I, rather to humour the old fellow, who, I saw, was proud of his poney.

"'I'd like to see his match, that's all.' Here he gave a rather contemptuous glance at my hack.

"Well, one word led to another, and it ended at last in our booking a match, with which one party was no less pleased than the other. It was this: each was to ride his own horse, starting from the school in the Park, round the Fifteen Acres, outside the Monument, and back to the start — just one heat, about a mile and a half — the ground good, and only soft enough. In consideration, however, of his greater weight, I was to give odds in the start; and as we could not well agree on how much, it was at length decided that he was to get away first, and I to follow as fast as I could, after drinking a pewter quart full of Guinness's double stout — droll odds, you'll say, but it was the old fellow's own thought, and as the match was a soft one, I let him have his way.

"The next morning the Phoenix was crowded as if for a review. There were all the Dublin notorieties, swarming in barouches, and tilburies, and outside jaunting-cars — smart clerks in the post-office, mounted upon kicking devils from Dycer's and Lalouette's stables — attorney's wives and daughters from York-street, and a stray doctor or so on a hack that looked as if it had been lectured on for the six winter months at the College of Surgeons. My antagonist was half an hour late, which time I occupied in booking bets on every side of me — offering odds of ten, fifteen, and at last, to tempt the people, twenty-five to one against the dun. At last, the fat gentleman came up on a jaunting-car, followed by a groom leading the cob. I wish you heard the cheer that greeted him on his arrival, for it appeared he was a well-known character in town, and much in favour with the mob. When he got off the car, he bundled into a tent, followed by a few of his friends, where they remained for about five minutes, at the end of which he came out in full racing costume — blue and yellow striped jacket, blue cap and leathers — looking as funny a figure as ever you set eyes upon. I now thought it time to throw off my white surtout, and show out in pink and orange, the colours I had been winning in for two months past. While some of the party were sent on to station themselves at different places round the Fifteen Acres, to mark out the course, my fat friend was assisted into his saddle, and gave a short preliminary gallop of a hundred yards or so, that set us all a-laughing. The odds were now fifty to one in my favour, and I gave them wherever I could find takers. 'With you, sir, if you please, in pounds, and the gentleman in the red whiskers, too, if he likes — very well, in half sovereigns, if you prefer it.' So I went on, betting on every side, till the bell rung to mount. As I knew I had plenty of time to spare, I took little notice, and merely giving a look to my girths, I continued leisurely booking my bets. At last the time came, and at the word 'Away!' off went the fat gentleman on the dun, at a spluttering gallop, that flung the mud on every side of us, and once more threw us all a-laughing. I waited patiently till he got near the upper end of the park, taking bets every minute; and now that he was away, every one offered to wager. At last, when I had let him get nearly half round, and found no more money could be had, I called out to his friends for the porter, and, throwing myself into the saddle, gathered up the reins in my hand. The crowd fell back on each side, while from the tent I have already mentioned came a thin fellow with one eye, with a pewter quart in his hand: he lifted it up towards me, and I took it; but what was my fright to find that the porter was boiling, and the vessel so hot I could barely hold it. I endeavoured to drink, however: the first mouthful took all the skin off my lips and tongue — the second half choked, and the third nearly threw me into an apoplectic fit — the mob cheering all the time like devils. Meantime, the old fellow had reached the furze, and was going along like fun. Again I tried the porter, and a fit of coughing came on that lasted five minutes. The pewter was now so hot that the edge of the quart took away a piece of my mouth at every effort. I ventured once more, and with the desperation of a madman I threw down the hot liquid to its last drop. My head reeled — my eyes glared — and my brain was on fire. I thought I beheld fifty fat gentlemen galloping on every side of me, and all the sky raining jackets in blue and yellow. Half mechanically I took the reins, and put spurs to my horse; but before I got well away, a loud cheer from the crowd assailed me. I turned, and saw the dun coming in at a

floundering gallop, covered with foam, and so dead blown that neither himself nor the rider could have got twenty yards farther. The race was, however, won. My odds were lost to every man on the field, and, worse than all, I was so laughed at, that I could not venture out in the streets, without hearing allusions to my misfortune; for a certain friend of mine, one Tom O'Flaherty — "

"Tom of the 11th light dragoons?"

"The same — you know Tom, then? Maybe you have heard him mention me — Maurice Malone?"

"Not Mr. Malone, of Fort Peak?"

"Bad luck to him. I am as well known in connexion with Fort Peak, as the Duke is with Waterloo. There is not a part of the globe where he has not told that confounded story."

As my readers may not possibly be all numbered in Mr. O'Flaherty's acquaintance, I shall venture to give the anecdote which Mr. Malone accounted to be so widely circulated.

CHAPTER XLVI.
AN ADVENTURE IN CANADA

Towards the close of the last war with America, a small detachment of military occupied the little block house of Fort Peak, which, about eight miles from the Falls of Niagara, formed the last outpost on the frontier. The Fort, in itself inconsiderable, was only of importance as commanding a part of the river where it was practicable to ford, and where the easy ascent of the bank offered a safe situation for the enemy to cross over, whenever they felt disposed to carry the war into our territory.

There having been, however, no threat of invasion in this quarter, and the natural strength of the position being considerable, a mere handful of men, with two subaltern officers, were allotted for this duty — such being conceived ample to maintain it till the arrival of succour from head-quarters, then at Little York, on the opposite side of the lake. The officers of this party were our old acquaintance Tom O'Flaherty, and our newly-made one Maurice Malone.

Whatever may be the merits of commanding officers, one virtue they certainly can lay small claim to — viz. any insight into character, or at least any regard for the knowledge. Seldom are two men sent off on detachment duty to some remote quarter, to associate daily and hourly for months together, that they are not, by some happy chance, the very people who never, as the phrase is, "took to each other" in their lives. The grey-headed, weather-beaten, disappointed "Peninsular" is coupled with the essenced and dandified Adonis of the corps; the man of literary tastes and cultivated pursuits, with the empty headed, ill informed youth, fresh from Harrow or Westminster. This case offered no exception to the rule; for though there were few men possessed of more assimilating powers than O'Flaherty, yet certainly his companion did put the faculty to the test, for any thing more unlike him, there never existed. Tom all good humour and high spirits — making the best of every thing — never non-plussed — never taken aback — perfectly at home, whether flirting with a Lady Charlotte in her drawing-room, or crossing a grouse mountain in the highlands — sufficiently well read to talk on any ordinary topic — and always ready-witted enough to seem more so. A thorough sportsman, whether showing forth in the "park" at Melton, whipping a trout-stream in Wales, or filling a country-house with black cock and moor-fowl; an unexceptionable judge of all the good things in life, from a pretty ancle to a well hung tilbury — from the odds at hazard to the "Comet vintage." Such, in brief, was Tom. Now his confrere was none of these; he had been drafted from the Galway militia to the line, for some election services rendered by his family to the government candidate; was of a saturnine and discontented habit; always miserable about some trifle or other, and never at rest till he had drowned his sorrows in Jamaica rum — which, since the regiment was abroad, he had copiously used as a substitute for whiskey. To such an extent had this passion gained upon him, that a corporal's guard was always in attendance whenever he dined out, to convey him home to the barracks.

The wearisome monotony of a close garrison, with so ungenial a companion, would have damped any man's spirits but O'Flaherty's. He, however, upon this, as other occasions in life, rallied himself to make the best of it; and by short excursions within certain prescribed limits along the river side, contrived to shoot and fish enough to get through the day, and improve the meagre fare of his mess-table. Malone never appeared before dinner — his late sittings at night requiring all the following day to recruit him for a new attack upon the rum bottle.

Now, although his seeing so little of his brother officer was any thing but unpleasant to O'Flaherty, yet the ennui of such a life was gradually wearing him, and all his wits were put in requisition to furnish occupation for his time. Never a day passed without his praying ardently for an attack from the enemy; any alternative, any reverse, had been a blessing compared with his present life. No such spirit, however, seemed to animate the Yankee troops; not a soldier was to be seen for

miles around, and every straggler that passed the Fort concurred in saying that the Americans were not within four day's march of the frontier.

Weeks passed over, and the same state of things remaining unchanged, O'Flaherty gradually relaxed some of his strictness as to duty; small foraging parties of three and four being daily permitted to leave the Fort for a few hours, to which they usually returned laden with wild turkeys and fish — both being found in great abundance near them.

Such was the life of the little garrison for two or three long summer months — each day so resembling its fellow, that no difference could be found.

As to how the war was faring, or what the aspect of affairs might be, they absolutely knew nothing. Newspapers never reached them; and whether from having so much occupation at head-quarters, or that the difficulty of sending letters prevented, their friends never wrote a line; and thus they jogged on, a very vegetable existence, till thought at last was stagnating in their brains, and O'Flaherty half envied his companion's resource in the spirit flask.

Such was the state of affairs at the Fort, when one evening O'Flaherty appeared to pace the little rampart that looked towards Lake Ontario, with an appearance of anxiety and impatience strangely at variance with his daily phlegmatic look. It seemed that the corporal's party he had despatched that morning to forage, near the "Falls," had not returned, and already were four hours later than their time away.

Every imaginable mode of accounting for their absence suggested itself to his mind. Sometimes he feared that they had been attacked by the Indian hunters, who were far from favourably disposed towards their poaching neighbours. Then, again, it might be merely that they had missed their track in the forest; or could it be that they had ventured to reach Goat Island in a canoe, and had been carried down the rapids. Such were the torturing doubts that passed as some shrill squirrel, or hoarse night owl pierced the air with a cry, and then all was silent again. While thus the hours went slowly by, his attention was attracted by a bright light in the sky. It appeared as if part of the heavens were reflecting some strong glare from beneath, for as he looked, the light, at first pale and colourless, gradually deepened into a rich mellow hue, and at length, through the murky blackness of the night, a strong clear current of flame rose steadily upwards from the earth, and pointed towards the sky. From the direction, it must have been either at the Falls, or immediately near them; and now the horrible conviction flashed upon his mind that the party had been waylaid by the Indians, who were, as is their custom, making a war feast over their victims.

Not an instant was to be lost. The little garrison beat to arms; and, as the men fell in, O'Flaherty cast his eyes around, while he selected a few brave fellows to accompany him. Scarcely had the men fallen out from the ranks, when the sentinel at the gate was challenged by a well-known voice, and in a moment more the corporal of the foraging party was among them. Fatigue and exhaustion had so overcome him, that for some minutes he was speechless. At length he recover sufficiently to give the following brief account: —

The little party having obtained their supply of venison above Queenston, were returning to the Fort, when they suddenly came upon a track of feet, and little experience in forest life soon proved that some new arrivals had reached the hunting grounds, for on examining them closely, they proved neither to be Indian tracks, nor yet those made by the shoes of the Fort party. Proceeding with caution to trace them backwards for three or four miles, they reached the bank of the Niagara river, above the whirlpools, where the crossing is most easily effected from the American side. The mystery was at once explained: it was a surprise party of the Yankees, sent to attack Fort Peak; and now the only thing to be done was to hasten back immediately to their friends, and prepare for their reception.

With this intent they took the river path as the shortest, but had not proceeded far when their fears were confirmed; for in a little embayment of the bank they perceived a party of twenty blue coats, who, with their arms piled, were lying around as if waiting for the hour of attack. The sight of this party added greatly to their alarm, for they now perceived that the Americans had divided their

force — the foot-tracks first seen being evidently those of another division. As the corporal and his few men continued, from the low and thick brushwood, to make their reconnaisance of the enemy, they observed with delight that they were not regulars, but a militia force. With this one animating thought, they again, with noiseless step, regained the forest, and proceeded upon their way. Scarcely, however, had they marched a mile, when the sound of voices and loud laughter apprised them that another party was near, which, as well as they could observe in the increasing gloom, was still larger than the former. They were now obliged to make a considerable circuit, and advance still deeper into the forest — their anxiety hourly increasing, lest the enemy should reach the Fort before themselves. In this dilemma it was resolved that the party should separate — the corporal determining to proceed alone by the river bank, while the others, by a detour of some miles, should endeavour to learn the force of the Yankees, and, as far as they could, their mode of attack. From that instant the corporal knew no more; for, after two hours' weary exertion, he reached the Fort, which, had it been but another mile distant, his strength had not held out for him to attain.

However gladly poor O'Flaherty might have hailed such information under other circumstances, now it came like a thunderbolt upon him. Six of his small force were away, perhaps ere this made prisoners by the enemy; the Yankees, as well as he could judge, were a numerous party; and he himself totally without a single adviser — for Malone had dined, and was, therefore, by this time in that pleasing state of indifference, in which he could only recognise an enemy, in the man that did not send round the decanter.

In the half indulged hope that his state might permit some faint exercise of the reasoning faculty, O'Flaherty walked towards the small den they had designated as the mess-room, in search of his brother officer.

As he entered the apartment, little disposed as he felt to mirth at such a moment, the tableau before him was too ridiculous not to laugh at. At one side of the fire-place sat Malone, his face florid with drinking, and his eyeballs projecting. Upon his head was a small Indian skull cap, with two peacock feathers, and a piece of scarlet cloth which hung down behind. In one hand he held a smoking goblet of rum punch, and in the other a long, Indian Chibook pipe. Opposite to him, but squatted upon the floor, reposed a red Indian, that lived in the Fort as a guide, equally drunk, but preserving, even in his liquor, an impassive, grave aspect, strangely contrasting with the high excitement of Malone's face. The red man wore Malone's uniform coat, which he had put on back foremost — his head-dress having, in all probability been exchanged for it, as an amicable courtesy between the parties. There they sat, looking fixedly at each other; neither spoke, nor even smiled — the rum bottle, which at brief intervals passed from one to the other, maintained a friendly intercourse that each was content with.

To the hearty fit of laughing of O'Flaherty, Malone replied by a look of drunken defiance, and then nodded to his red friend, who returned the courtesy. As poor Tom left the room, he saw that nothing was to be hoped for in this quarter, and determined to beat the garrison to arms without any further delay. Scarcely had he closed the door behind him, when a sudden thought flashed through his brain. He hesitated, walked forward a few paces, stopped again, and calling out to the corporal, said —

"You are certain they were militia?"

"Yes, sir; quite sure."

"Then, by Jove, I have it," cried O'Flaherty. "If they should turn out to be the Buffalo fencibles, we may get through this scrape better than I hoped for."

"I believe you are right, sir; for I heard one of the men as I passed observe, 'what will they say in Buffalo when it's over?'."

"Send Mathers here, corporal; and do you order four rank and file, with side-arms to be in readiness immediately."

"Mathers, you have heard the news," said O'Flaherty, as the sergeant entered. "Can the Fort hold out against such a force as Jackson reports? You doubt; well, so do I; so let's see what's to be

done. Can you remember, was it not the Buffalo militia that were so tremendously thrashed by the Delawares last autumn?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.