

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**"MY NOVEL" —
VOLUME 01**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон
"My Novel" — Volume 01

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

«My Novel» — Volume 01

BOOK FIRST

INITIAL CHAPTER

SHOWING HOW MY NOVEL CAME TO BE WRITTEN

Scene, the hall in UNCLE ROLAND'S tower; time, night; season, winter

MR. CAXTON is seated before a great geographical globe, which he is turning round leisurely, and "for his own recreation," as, according to Sir Thomas Browne, a philosopher should turn round the orb of which that globe professes to be the representation and effigies. My mother having just adorned a very small frock with a very smart braid, is holding it out at arm's length, the more to admire the effect. Blanche, though leaning both hands on my mother's shoulder, is not regarding the frock, but glances towards PISISTRATUS, who, seated near the fire, leaning back in the chair, and his head bent over his breast, seems in a very bad humour. Uncle Roland, who has become a great novel-reader, is deep in the mysteries of some fascinating Third Volume. Mr. Squills has brought the "Times" in his pocket for his own special profit and delectation, and is now bending his brows over "the state of the money market," in great doubt whether railway shares can possibly fall lower,—for Mr. Squills, happy man! has large savings, and does not know what to do with his money, or, to use his own phrase, "how to buy in at the cheapest in order to sell out at the dearest."

MR. CAXTON (musingly).—"It must have been a monstrous long journey. It would be somewhere hereabouts, I take it, that they would split off."

MY MOTHER (mechanically, and in order to show Austin that she paid him the compliment of attending to his remarks).—"Who split off, my dear?"

"Bless me, Kitty," said my father, in great admiration, "you ask just the question which it is most difficult to answer. An ingenious speculator on races contends that the Danes, whose descendants make the chief part of our northern population (and indeed, if his hypothesis could be correct, we must suppose all the ancient worshippers of Odin), are of the same origin as the Etrurians. And why, Kitty,—I just ask you, why?"

My mother shook her head thoughtfully, and turned the frock to the other side of the light.

"Because, forsooth," cried my father, exploding,—"because the Etrurians called their gods the 'AEsar,' and the Scandinavians called theirs the 'AEsir,' or 'Aser'! And where do you think this adventurous scholar puts their cradle?"

"Cradle!" said my mother, dreamily, "it must be in the nursery."

MR. CAXTON.—"Exactly,—in the nursery of the human race, just here," and my father pointed to the globe; "bounded, you see, by the river Halys, and in that region which, taking its name from Ees, or As (a word designating light or fire), has been immemorially called Asia. Now, Kitty, from Ees, or As, our ethnological speculator would derive not only Asia, the land, but AEsar, or Aser, its primitive inhabitants. Hence he supposes the origin of the Etrurians and the Scandinavians. But if we give him so much, we must give him more, and deduce from the same origin the Es of the Celt

and the Ized of the Persian, and—what will be of more use to him, I dare say, poor man, than all the rest put together—the AEs of the Romans,—that is, the God of Copper-money—a very powerful household god he is to this day!"

My mother looked musingly at her frock, as if she were taking my father's proposition into serious consideration.

"So perhaps," resumed my father, "and not unconformably with sacred records, from one great parent horde came all those various tribes, carrying with them the name of their beloved Asia; and whether they wandered north, south, or west, exalting their own emphatic designation of 'Children of the Land of Light' into the title of gods. And to think" (added Mr. Caxton pathetically, gazing upon that speck on the globe on which his forefinger rested),—"to think how little they changed for the better when they got to the Don, or entangled their rafts amidst the icebergs of the Baltic,—so comfortably off as they were here, if they could but have stayed quiet."

"And why the deuce could not they?" asked Mr. Squills. "Pressure of population, and not enough to live upon, I suppose," said my father.

PISISTRATUS (sulkily).—"More probably they did away with the Corn Laws, sir."

"/Papae!/" quoth my father, "that throws a new light on the subject."

PISISTRATUS (full of his grievances, and not caring three straws about the origin of the Scandinavians).—"I know that if we are to lose L500 every year on a farm which we hold rent-free, and which the best judges allow to be a perfect model for the whole country, we had better make haste and turn AEsir, or Aser, or whatever you call them, and fix a settlement on the property of other nations, otherwise, I suspect, our probable settlement will be on the parish."

MR. SQUILLS (who, it must be remembered, is an enthusiastic Free-trader). "You have only got to put more capital on the land."

PISISTRATUS.—"Well, Mr. Squills, as you think so well of that investment, put your capital on it. I promise that you shall have every shilling of profit."

MR. SQUILLS (hastily retreating behind the "Times")- "I don't think the Great Western can fall any lower, though it is hazardous; I can but venture a few hundreds—"

PISISTRATUS.—"On our land, Squills?—Thank you."

MR. SQUILLS.—"No, no,—anything but that; on the Great Western."

Pisistratus relaxes into gloom. Blanche steals up coaxingly, and gets snubbed for her pains.

A pause.

MR. CAXTON.—"There are two golden rules of life; one relates to the mind, and the other to the pockets. The first is, If our thoughts get into a low, nervous, aguish condition, we should make them change the air; the second is comprised in the proverb, 'It is good to have two strings to one's bow.' Therefore, Pisistratus, I tell you what you must do,—Write a book!"

PISISTRATUS.—"Write a book! Against the abolition of the Corn Laws? Faith, sir, the mischief's done! It takes a much better pen than mine to write down an act of parliament."

MR. CAXTON.—"I only said, 'Write a book.' All the rest is the addition of your own headlong imagination."

PISISTRATUS (with the recollection of The Great Book rising before him).

—"Indeed, sir, I should think that that would just finish us!"

MR. CAXTON (not seeming to heed the interruption).—"A book that will sell; a book that will prop up the fall of prices; a book that will distract your mind from its dismal apprehensions, and restore your affection to your species and your hopes in the ultimate triumph of sound principles—by the sight of a favourable balance at the end of the yearly accounts. It is astonishing what a difference that little circumstance makes in our views of things in general. I remember when the bank in which Squills had incautiously left L1000 broke, one remarkably healthy year, that he became a great alarmist, and said that the country was on the verge of ruin; whereas you see now, when, thanks

to a long succession of sickly seasons, he has a surplus capital to risk in the Great Western, he is firmly persuaded that England was never in so prosperous a condition."

MR. SQUILLS (rather sullenly).—"Pooh, pooh."

MR. CAXTON.—"Write a book, my son,—write a book. Need I tell you that Money or Moneta, according to Hyginus, was the mother of the Muses? Write a book."

BLANCHE and my MOTHER (in full chorus).—"O yes, Sisty, a book! a book! you must write a book."

"I am sure," quoth my Uncle Roland, slamming down the volume he had just concluded, "he could write a devilish deal better book than this; and how I come to read such trash night after night is more than I could possibly explain to the satisfaction of any intelligent jury, if I were put into a witness-box, and examined in the mildest manner by my own counsel."

MR. CAXTON.—"You see that Roland tells us exactly what sort of a book it shall be."

PISISTRATUS.—"Trash, sir?"

MR. CAXTON.—"No,—that is, not necessarily trash; but a book of that class which, whether trash or not, people can't help reading. Novels have become a necessity of the age. You must write a novel."

PISISTRATUS (flattered, but dubious).—"A novel! But every subject on which novels can be written is preoccupied. There are novels of low life, novels of high life, military novels, naval novels, novels philosophical, novels religious, novels historical, novels descriptive of India, the Colonies, Ancient Rome, and the Egyptian Pyramids. From what bird, wild eagle, or barn-door fowl, can I

"Pluck one unwearied plume from Fancy's wing?"

MR. CAXTON (after a little thought).—"You remember the story which Trevanion (I beg his pardon, Lord Ulswater) told us the other night? That gives you something of the romance of real life for your plot, puts you chiefly among scenes with which you are familiar, and furnishes you with characters which have been very sparingly dealt with since the time of Fielding. You can give us the country Squire, as you remember him in your youth; it is a specimen of a race worth preserving, the old idiosyncrasies of which are rapidly dying off, as the railways bring Norfolk and Yorkshire within easy reach of the manners of London. You can give us the old-fashioned Parson, as in all essentials he may yet be found—but before you had to drag him out of the great Tractarian bog; and, for the rest, I really think that while, as I am told, many popular writers are doing their best, especially in France, and perhaps a little in England, to set class against class, and pick up every stone in the kennel to shy at a gentleman with a good coat on his back, something useful might be done by a few good-humoured sketches of those innocent criminals a little better off than their neighbours, whom, however we dislike them, I take it for granted we shall have to endure, in one shape or another, as long as civilization exists; and they seem, on the whole, as good in their present shape as we are likely to get, shake the dice-box of society how we will."

PISISTRATUS.—"Very well said, sir; but this rural country gentleman life is not so new as you think. There's Washington Irving—"

MR. CAXTON.—"Charming; but rather the manners of the last century than this. You may as well cite Addison and Sir Roger de Coverley."

PISISTRATUS.—"'Tremaine' and 'De Vere.'"

MR. CAXTON.—"Nothing can be more graceful, nor more unlike what I mean. The Pales and Terminus I wish you to put up in the fields are familiar images, that you may cut out of an oak tree,—not beautiful marble statues, on porphyry pedestals, twenty feet high."

PISISTRATUS.—"Miss Austen; Mrs. Gore, in her masterpiece of 'Mrs. Armytage;' Mrs. Marsh, too; and then (for Scottish manners) Miss Ferrier!"

MR. CAXTON (growing cross).—"Oh, if you cannot treat on bucolics but what you must hear some Virgil or other cry 'Stop thief,' you deserve to be tossed by one of your own 'short-horns.'" (Still more contemptuously)—"I am sure I don't know why we spend so much money on sending our sons

to school to learn Latin, when that Anachronism of yours, Mrs. Caxton, can't even construe a line and a half of Phaedrus,— Phaedrus, Mrs. Caxton, a book which is in Latin what Goody Two-Shoes is in the vernacular!"

MRS. CAXTON (alarmed and indignant).—"Fie! Austin I I am sure you can construe Phaedrus, dear!"

Pisistratus prudently preserves silence.

MR. CAXTON.—"I'll try him—

"Sua cuique quum sit animi cogitatio
Colurque proprius.'

"What does that mean?"

PISISTRATITS (smiling)—"That every man has some colouring matter within him, to give his own tinge to—"

"His own novel," interrupted my father. "/Contentus peragis!/"

During the latter part of this dialogue, Blanche had sewn together three quires of the best Bath paper, and she now placed them on a little table before me, with her own inkstand and steel pen.

My mother put her finger to her lip, and said, "Hush!" my father returned to the cradle of the AESAS; Captain Roland leaned his cheek on his hand, and gazed abstractedly on the fire; Mr. Squills fell into a placid doze; and, after three sighs that would have melted a heart of stone, I rushed into —MY NOVEL.

CHAPTER II

"There has never been occasion to use them since I've been in the parish," said Parson Dale.

"What does that prove?" quoth the squire, sharply, and looking the parson full in the face.

"Prove!" repeated Mr. Dale, with a smile of benign, yet too conscious superiority, "what does experience prove?"

"That your forefathers were great blockheads, and that their descendant is not a whit the wiser."

"Squire," replied the parson, "although that is a melancholy conclusion, yet if you mean it to apply universally, and not to the family of the Dales in particular; it is not one which my candour as a reasoner, and my humility as a mortal, will permit me to challenge."

"I defy you," said Mr. Hazeldean, triumphantly. "But to stick to the subject (which it is monstrous hard to do when one talks with a parson), I only just ask you to look yonder, and tell me on your conscience—I don't even say as a parson, but as a parishioner—whether you ever saw a more disreputable spectacle?"

While he spoke, the squire, leaning heavily on the parson's left shoulder, extended his cane in a line parallel with the right eye of that disputatious ecclesiastic, so that he might guide the organ of sight to the object he had thus unflatteringly described.

"I confess," said the parson, "that, regarded by the eye of the senses, it is a thing that in its best day had small pretensions to beauty, and is not elevated into the picturesque even by neglect and decay. But, my friend, regarded by the eye of the inner man,—of the rural philosopher and parochial legislator,—I say it is by neglect and decay that it is rendered a very pleasing feature in what I may call 'the moral topography of a parish.'"

The squire looked at the parson as if he could have beaten him; and, indeed, regarding the object in dispute not only with the eye of the outer man, but the eye of law and order, the eye of a country gentleman and a justice of the peace, the spectacle was scandalously disreputable. It was moss-grown; it was worm-eaten; it was broken right in the middle; through its four socketless eyes, neighboured by the nettle, peered the thistle,—the thistle! a forest of thistles!—and, to complete the degradation of the whole, those thistles had attracted the donkey of an itinerant tinker; and the irreverent animal was in the very act of taking his luncheon out of the eyes and jaws of—**THE PARISH STOCKS.**

The squire looked as if he could have beaten the parson; but as he was not without some slight command of temper, and a substitute was luckily at hand, he gulped down his resentment, and made a rush—at the donkey!

Now the donkey was hampered by a rope to its fore-feet, to the which was attached a billet of wood, called technically "a clog," so that it had no fair chance of escape from the assault its sacrilegious luncheon had justly provoked. But the ass turning round with unusual nimbleness at the first stroke of the cane, the squire caught his foot in the rope, and went head over heels among the thistles. The donkey gravely bent down, and thrice smelt or sniffed its prostrate foe; then, having convinced itself that it had nothing further to apprehend for the present, and very willing to make the best of the reprieve, according to the poetical admonition, "Gather your rosebuds while you may," it cropped a thistle in full bloom, close to the ear of the squire,—so close, indeed, that the parson thought the ear was gone; and with the more probability, inasmuch as the squire, feeling the warm breath of the creature, bellowed out with all the force of lungs accustomed to give a View-hallo!

"Bless me, is it gone?" said the parson, thrusting his person between the ass and the squire.

"Zounds and the devil!" cried the squire, rubbing himself, as he rose to his feet.

"Hush!" said the parson, gently. "What a horrible oath!"

"Horrible oath! If you had my nankeens on," said the squire, still rubbing himself, "and had fallen into a thicket of thistles, with a donkey's teeth within an inch of your ear—"

"It is not gone, then?" interrupted the parson.

"No,—that is, I think not," said the squire, dubiously; and he clapped his hand to the organ in question. "No! it is not gone!"

"Thank Heaven!" said the good clergyman, kindly. "Hum," growled the squire, who was now once more engaged in rubbing himself. "Thank Heaven indeed, when I am as full of thorns as a porcupine! I should just like to know what use thistles are in the world."

"For donkeys to eat, if you will let them, Squire," answered the parson.

"Ugh, you beast!" cried Mr. Hazeldean, all his wrath reawakened, whether by the reference to the donkey species, or his inability to reply to the parson, or perhaps by some sudden prick too sharp for humanity—especially humanity in nankeens—to endure without kicking. "Ugh, you beast!" he exclaimed, shaking his cane at the donkey, which, at the interposition of the parson, had respectfully recoiled a few paces, and now stood switching its thin tail, and trying vainly to lift one of its fore-legs—for the flies teased it.

"Poor thing!" said the parson, pityingly. "See, it has a raw place on the shoulder, and the flies have found out the sore."

"I am devilish glad to hear it," said the squire, vindictively.

"Fie, fie!"

"It is very well to say 'Fie, fie.' It was not you who fell among the thistles. What 's the man about now, I wonder?"

The parson had walked towards a chestnut-tree that stood on the village green; he broke off a bough, returned to the donkey, whisked away the flies, and then tenderly placed the broad leaves over the sore, as a protection from the swarms. The donkey turned round its head, and looked at him with mild wonder.

"I would bet a shilling," said the parson, softly, "that this is the first act of kindness thou hast met with this many a day. And slight enough it is, Heaven knows."

With that the parson put his hand into his pocket, and drew out an apple. It was a fine large rose-cheeked apple, one of the last winter's store from the celebrated tree in the parsonage garden, and he was taking it as a present to a little boy in the village who had notably distinguished himself in the Sunday-school. "Nay, in common justice, Lenny Fairfield should have the preference," muttered the parson. The ass pricked up one of its ears, and advanced its head timidly. "But Lenny Fairfield would be as much pleased with twopence; and what could twopence do to thee?" The ass's nose now touched the apple. "Take it, in the name of Charity," quoth the parson; "Justice is accustomed to be served last;" and the ass took the apple. "How had you the heart!" said the parson, pointing to the squire's cane.

The ass stopped munching, and looked askant at the squire. "Pooh! eat on; he'll not beat thee now."

"No," said the squire, apologetically. "But after all, he is not an ass of the parish; he is a vagrant, and he ought to be pounded. But the pound is in as bad a state as the stocks, thanks to your new-fashioned doctrines."

"New-fashioned!" cried the parson, almost indignantly, for he had a great disdain of new fashions. "They are as old as Christianity; nay, as old as Paradise, which you will observe is derived from a Greek, or rather a Persian word, and means something more than 'garden,' corresponding" (pursued the parson, rather pedantically) "with the Latin—vivarium,—namely, grove or park full of innocent dumb creatures. Depend on it, donkeys were allowed to eat thistles there."

"Very possibly," said the squire, dryly. "But Hazeldeau, though a very pretty village, is not Paradise. The stocks shall be mended to-morrow,—ay, and the pound too, and the next donkey found trespassing shall go into it, as sure as my name's Hazeldean."

"Then," said the parson, gravely, "I can only hope that the next parish may not follow your example; or that you and I may never be caught straying."

CHAPTER III

Parson Dale and Squire Hazeldean parted company; the latter to inspect his sheep, the former to visit some of his parishioners, including Lenny Fairfield, whom the donkey had defrauded of his apple.

Lenny Fairfield was sure to be in the way, for his mother rented a few acres of grass-land from the squire, and it was now hay-time. And Leonard, commonly called Lenny, was an only son, and his mother a widow. The cottage stood apart, and somewhat remote, in one of the many nooks of the long, green village lane. And a thoroughly English cottage it was, three centuries old at least; with walls of rubble let into oak frames, and duly whitewashed every summer, a thatched roof, small panes of glass, an old doorway raised from the ground by two steps. There was about this little dwelling all the homely rustic elegance which peasant life admits of; a honeysuckle was trained over the door; a few flower-pots were placed on the window-sills; the small plot of ground in front of the house was kept with great neatness, and even taste; some large rough stones on either side the little path having been formed into a sort of rockwork, with creepers that were now in flower; and the potato-ground was screened from the eye by sweet peas and lupine. Simple elegance, all this, it is true; but how well it speaks for peasant and landlord, when you see that the peasant is fond of his home, and has some spare time and heart to bestow upon mere embellishment! Such a peasant is sure to be a bad customer to the alehouse, and a safe neighbour to the squire's preserves. All honour and praise to him, except a small tax upon both, which is due to the landlord!

Such sights were as pleasant to the parson as the most beautiful landscapes of Italy can be to the dilettante. He paused a moment at the wicket to look around him, and distended his nostrils voluptuously to inhale the smell of the sweet peas, mixed with that of the new-mown hay in the fields behind, which a slight breeze bore to him. He then moved on, carefully scraped his shoes, clean and well-polished as they were,—for Mr. Dale was rather a beau in his own clerical way,—on the scraper without the door, and lifted the latch.

Your virtuoso looks with artistical delight on the figure of some nymph painted on an Etruscan vase, engaged in pouring out the juice of the grape from her classic urn. And the parson felt as harmless, if not as elegant a pleasure, in contemplating Widow Fairfield brimming high a glittering can, which she designed for the refreshment of the thirsty haymakers.

Mrs. Fairfield was a middle-aged, tidy woman, with that alert precision of movement which seems to come from an active, orderly mind; and as she now turned her head briskly at the sound of the parson's footstep, she showed a countenance prepossessing though not handsome,—a countenance from which a pleasant, hearty smile, breaking forth at that moment, effaced some lines that, in repose, spoke "of sorrows, but of sorrows past;" and her cheek, paler than is common to the complexions even of the fair sex, when born and bred amidst a rural population, might have favoured the guess that the earlier part of her life had been spent in the languid air and "within-doors" occupations of a town.

"Never mind me," said the parson, as Mrs. Fairfield dropped her quick courtesy, and smoothed her apron; "if you are going into the hayfield, I will go with you; I have something to say to Lenny, —an excellent boy."

WIDOW.—"Well, sir, and you are kind to say it,—but so he is."

PARSON.—"He reads uncommonly well, he writes tolerably; he is the best lad in the whole school at his Catechism and in the Bible lessons; and I assure you, when I see his face at church, looking up so attentively, I fancy that I shall read my sermon all the better for such a listener!"

WIDOW (wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron).—"Deed, sir, when my poor Mark died, I never thought I could have lived on as I have done. But that boy is so kind and good, that when I look at him sitting there in dear Mark's chair, and remember how Mark loved him, and all he used

to say to me about him, I feel somehow or other as if my good man smiled on me, and would rather I was not with him yet, till the lad had grown up, and did not want me any more."

PARSON (looking away, and after a pause).—"You never hear anything of the old folks at Lansmere?"

"Deed, sir, sin' poor Mark died, they han't noticed me nor the boy; but," added the widow, with all a peasant's pride, "it isn't that I wants their money; only it's hard to feel strange like to one's own father and mother!"

PARSON.—"You must excuse them. Your father, Mr. Avenel, was never quite the same man after that sad event which—but you are weeping, my friend, pardon me; your mother is a little proud; but so are you, though in another way."

WIDOW.—"I proud! Lord love ye, sir, I have not a bit o' pride in me! and that's the reason they always looked down on me."

PARSON.—"Your parents must be well off; and I shall apply to them in a year or two on behalf of Lenny, for they promised me to provide for him when he grew up, as they ought."

WIDOW (with flashing eyes).—"I am sure, sir, I hope you will do no such thing; for I would not have Lenny beholden to them as has never given him a kind word sin' he was born!"

The parson smiled gravely, and shook his head at poor Mrs. Fairfield's hasty confutation of her own self-acquittal from the charge of pride; but he saw that it was not the time or moment for effectual peace-making in the most irritable of all rancours,—namely, that nourished against one's nearest relations. He therefore dropped the subject, and said, "Well, time enough to think of Lenny's future prospects; meanwhile we are forgetting the haymakers. Come."

The widow opened the back door, which led across a little apple orchard into the fields.

PARSON.—"You have a pleasant place here; and I see that my friend Lenny should be in no want of apples. I had brought him one, but I have given it away on the road."

WIDOW.—"Oh, sir, it is not the deed,—it is the will; as I felt when the squire, God bless him! took two pounds off the rent the year he—that is, Mark—died."

PARSON.—"If Lenny continues to be such a help to you, it will not be long before the squire may put the two pounds on again."

"Yes, sir," said the widow, simply; "I hope he will."

"Silly woman!" muttered the parson. "That's not exactly what the schoolmistress would have said. You don't read nor write, Mrs. Fairfield; yet you express yourself with great propriety."

"You know Mark was a schollard, sir, like my poor, poor sister; and though I was a sad stupid girl afore I married, I tried to take after him when we came together."

CHAPTER IV

They were now in the hayfield, and a boy of about sixteen, but, like most country lads, to appearance much younger than he was, looked up from his rake, with lively blue eyes beaming forth under a profusion of brown curly hair.

Leonard Fairfield was indeed a very handsome boy,—not so stout nor so ruddy as one would choose for the ideal of rustic beauty, nor yet so delicate in limb and keen in expression as are those children of cities, in whom the mind is cultivated at the expense of the body; but still he had the health of the country in his cheeks, and was not without the grace of the city in his compact figure and easy movements. There was in his physiognomy something interesting from its peculiar character of innocence and simplicity. You could see that he had been brought up by a woman, and much apart from familiar contact with other children; and such intelligence as was yet developed in him was not ripened by the jokes and cuffs of his coevals, but fostered by decorous lecturings from his elders, and good-little-boy maxims in good-little-boy books.

PARSON.—"Come hither, Lenny. You know the benefit of school, I see: it can teach you nothing better than to be a support to your mother."

LENNY (looking down sheepishly, and with a heightened glow over his face).—"Please, sir, that may come one of these days."

PARSON.—"That's right, Lenny. Let me see! why, you must be nearly a man. How old are you?"

Lenny looks up inquiringly at his mother.

PARSON.—"You ought to know, Lenny: speak for yourself. Hold your tongue, Mrs. Fairfield."

LENNY (twirling his hat, and in great perplexity).—"Well, and there is Flop, neighbour Dutton's old sheep-dog. He be very old now."

PARSON.—"I am not asking Flop's age, but your own."

LENNY.—"Deed, sir, I have heard say as how Flop and I were pups together. That is, I—I—"

For the parson is laughing, and so is Mrs. Fairfield; and the haymakers, who have stood still to listen, are laughing too. And poor Lenny has quite lost his head, and looks as if he would like to cry.

PARSON (patting the curly locks, encouragingly).—"Never mind; it is not so badly answered, after all. And how old is Flop?"

LENNY.—"Why, he must be fifteen year and more.."

PARSON.—"How old, then, are you?"

LENNY (looking up, with a beam of intelligence).—"Fifteen year and more."

Widow sighs and nods her head.

"That's what we call putting two and two together," said the parson. "Or, in other words," and here he raised his eyes majestically towards the haymakers—"in other words, thanks to his love for his book, simple as he stands here, Lenny Fairfield has shown himself capable of **INDUCTIVE RATIOCINATION**."

At those words, delivered /ore rotundo/, the haymakers ceased laughing; for even in lay matters they held the parson to be an oracle, and words so long must have a great deal in them. Lenny drew up his head proudly.

"You are very fond of Flop, I suppose?"

"Deed he is," said the widow, "and of all poor dumb creatures."

"Very good. Suppose, my lad, that you had a fine apple, and that you met a friend who wanted it more than you, what would you do with it?"

"Please you, sir, I would give him half of it."

The parson's face fell. "Not the whole, Lenny?"

Lenny considered. "If he was a friend, sir, he would not like me to give him all."

"Upon my word, Master Leonard, you speak so well that I must e'en tell the truth. I brought you an apple, as a prize for good conduct in school. But I met by the way a poor donkey, and some one beat him for eating a thistle, so I thought I would make it up by giving him the apple. Ought I only to have given him the half?"

Lenny's innocent face became all smile; his interest was aroused. "And did the donkey like the apple?"

"Very much," said the parson, fumbling in his pocket; but thinking of Leonard Fairfield's years and understanding, and moreover observing, in the pride of his heart, that there were many spectators to his deed, he thought the meditated twopence not sufficient, and he generously produced a silver sixpence.

"There, my man, that will pay for the half apple which you would have kept for yourself." The parson again patted the curly locks, and after a hearty word or two with the other haymakers, and a friendly "Good-day" to Mrs. Fairfield, struck into a path that led towards his own glebe.

He had just crossed the stile, when he heard hasty but timorous feet behind him. He turned, and saw his friend Lenny.

LENNY (half-crying, and holding out the sixpence).—"Indeed, sir, I would rather not. I would have given all to the Neddy."

PARSON.—"Why, then, my man, you have a still greater right to the sixpence."

LENNY.—"No, sir; 'cause you only gave it to make up for the half apple. And if I had given the whole, as I ought to have done, why, I should have had no right to the sixpence. Please, sir, don't be offended; do take it back, will you?"

The parson hesitated. And the boy thrust the sixpence into his hand, as the ass had poked its nose there before in quest of the apple.

"I see," said Parson Dale, soliloquizing, "that if one don't give Justice the first place at the table, all the other Virtues eat up her share."

Indeed, the case was perplexing. Charity, like a forward, impudent baggage as she is, always thrusting herself in the way, and taking other people's apples to make her own little pie, had defrauded Lenny of his due; and now Susceptibility, who looks like a shy, blush-faced, awkward Virtue in her teens—but who, nevertheless, is always engaged in picking the pockets of her sisters—tried to filch from him his lawful recompense. The case was perplexing; for the parson held Susceptibility in great honour, despite her hypocritical tricks, and did not like to give her a slap in the face, which might frighten her away forever. So Mr. Dale stood irresolute, glancing from the sixpence to Lenny, and from Lenny to the sixpence.

"Buon giorno, Good-day to you," said a voice behind, in an accent slightly but unmistakably foreign, and a strange-looking figure presented itself at the stile.

Imagine a tall and exceedingly meagre man, dressed in a rusty suit of black,—the pantaloons tight at the calf and ankle, and there forming a loose gaiter over thick shoes, buckled high at the instep; an old cloak, lined with red, was thrown over one shoulder, though the day was sultry; a quaint, red, outlandish umbrella, with a carved brass handle, was thrust under one arm, though the sky was cloudless: a profusion of raven hair, in waving curls that seemed as fine as silk, escaped from the sides of a straw hat of prodigious brim; a complexion sallow and swarthy, and features which, though not without considerable beauty to the eye of the artist, were not only unlike what we fair, well-fed, neat-faced Englishmen are wont to consider comely, but exceedingly like what we are disposed to regard as awful and Satanic,—to wit, a long hooked nose, sunken cheeks, black eyes, whose piercing brilliancy took something wizard-like and mystical from the large spectacles through which they shone; a mouth round which played an ironical smile, and in which a physiognomist would have remarked singular shrewdness, and some closeness, complete the picture. Imagine this figure, grotesque, peregrinate, and to the eye of a peasant certainly diabolical; then perch it on the stile in the midst of those green English fields, and in sight of that primitive English village; there let it sit straddling, its long legs

dangling down, a short German pipe emitting clouds from one corner of those sardonic lips, its dark eyes glaring through the spectacles full upon the parson, yet askant upon Lenny Fairfield. Lenny Fairfield looked exceedingly frightened.

"Upon my word, Dr. Riccabocca," said Mr. Dale, smiling, "you come in good time to solve a very nice question in casuistry;" and herewith the parson explained the case, and put the question, "Ought Lenny Fairfield to have the sixpence, or ought he not?"

"Cospetto!" said the doctor, "if the hen would but hold her tongue, nobody would know that she had laid an egg."

CHAPTER V

"Granted," said the parson; "but what follows? The saying is good, but I don't see the application."

"A thousand pardons!" replied Dr. Riccabocca, with all the urbanity of an Italian; "but it seems to me that if you had given the sixpence to the *fanciullo*, that is, to this good little boy, without telling him the story about the donkey, you would never have put him and yourself into this awkward dilemma."

"But, my dear sir," whispered the parson, mildly, as he inclined his lips to the doctor's ear, "I should then have lost the opportunity of inculcating a moral lesson—you understand?"

Dr. Riccabocca shrugged his shoulders, restored his pipe to his mouth, and took a long whiff. It was a whiff eloquent, though cynical,—a whiff peculiar to your philosophical smoker, a whiff that implied the most absolute but the most placid incredulity as to the effect of the parson's moral lesson.

"Still you have not given us your decision," said the parson, after a pause.

The doctor withdrew the pipe. "Cospetto!" said he,—"he who scrubs the head of an ass wastes his soap."

"If you scrubbed mine fifty times over with those enigmatical proverbs of yours," said the parson, testily, "you would not make it any the wiser."

"My good sir," said the doctor, bowing low from his perch on the stile, "I never presumed to say that there were more asses than one in the story; but I thought that I could not better explain my meaning, which is simply this,—you scrubbed the ass's head, and therefore you must lose the soap. Let the *fanciullo* have the sixpence; and a great sum it is, too, for a little boy, who may spend it all as pocketmoney!"

"There, Lenny, you hear?" said the parson, stretching out the sixpence. But Lenny retreated, and cast on the umpire a look of great aversion and disgust.

"Please, Master Dale," said he, obstinately, "I'd rather not."

"It is a matter of feeling, you see," said the parson, turning to the umpire; "and I believe the boy is right."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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