Allen Grant

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Содержание

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CHAPTER XV. A DOOR OPENS

Another year had passed, and Colin, now of full age, had tired of working for Cicolari. It was all very well, this moulding clay and carving replicas of afflicted widows; it was all very well, this modelling busts and statuettes and little classical compositions; it was all very well, this picking up stray hints in a half-amateur fashion from the grand torsos of the British Museum and a few scattered Thorwaldsens or antiques of the great country houses; but Colin Churchill felt in his heart of hearts that all that was not sculpture. He was growing in years now, and instead of learning he was really working. Still, he had quite made up his mind that some day or other he should look with his own eyes on the glories of the Vatican and the Villa Albani. Nay, he had even begun to take lessons in Italian from Cicolari – counting his chickens before they were hatched, Minna said – so that he might not feel himself at a loss whenever the great and final day of his redemption should happen to arrive. The dream of his life was to go to Rome, and study in a real studio, and become a regular genuine sculptor. Nothing short of that would ever satisfy him, he told Minna: and Minna, though she trembled to think of Colin's

going so far away from her – among all those black-eyed Italian women, too – (and Colin had often told her he admired black eyes, like hers, above all others) – poor little Minna could not but admit sorrowfully to herself that Rome was after all the proper school for Colin Churchill. 'The capital of art,' he repeated to her, over and over again; must it not be the right place for him, who she felt sure was going to be the greatest of all modern English artists?

But how was Colin ever to get there?

Going to Rome costs money; and during all these years Colin had barely been able to save enough to buy the necessary books and materials for his self-education. The more deeply he felt the desire to go, the more utterly remote did the chance of going seem to become to him. 'And yet I shall go, Minna,' he said to her almost fiercely one September evening. 'Go to Rome I will, if I have to tramp every step of the way on foot, and reach there barefoot.

Minna sighed and the tears came into her eyes; but strong in her faith and pride in Colin, strong in her eager desire that Colin should give free play to his own genius, she answered firmly with a little quiver of her lips, 'You ought to go, Colin; and if you think it'd help you, you might take all that's left of my savings, and I'd go back again willingly to the parlour-maiding.'

Colin looked at the pretty little pupil-teacher with a look of profound and unfeigned admiration. 'Minna,' he said, 'dear little woman, you're the best and kindest-hearted girl that ever

breathed; but how on earth do you suppose I could possibly be wretch enough to take away your poor little savings? No, no, little woman, you must keep them for yourself, and use them for making yourself – I was going to say into a lady – but you couldn't do that, Minna, you couldn't do that, for you were born one already. Still, if *you* want *me* to be a real sculptor, I want *you*, little woman, just as much to be a real educated gentlewoman.' Colin said the last word with a certain lingering loving cadence, for it had a good old-fashioned ring about it that recommended it well to his simple straightforward peasant nature.

'Well, Colin,' Minna went on, blushing a bit (for that last quiet hint seemed half unintentionally to convey the impression that Colin really possessed a proprietary right in her whole future), 'we must try our best to find out some way for you to go to Rome at last in spite of everything. You know, meanwhile, you've got good employment, Colin, and that's always something.'

'Ah yes, Minna,' Colin answered with his youthful enthusiasm coming strong upon him, 'I've got employment, of course; but I don't want employment; I want opportunities, I want advice, I want instruction, I want the means of learning, I want to perfect myself. Here in London, somehow, I feel as if I was tied down by the leg, and panting to get loose again. I like Cicolari, and in my own native untaught fashion I've done my best to improve myself with him; but I feel sadly the lack of training and competition. I should like to see how other men do their work; I should like to pit myself against them and find out whether I really am or

am not a sculptor. Let me but just go to Rome, and I shall mould such things and carve such statues – ah, Minna, you shall see them! And the one delight I have in life now, Minna, is to get out like this, and talk it over with you, and tell you what I mean to do when once I get at it. For you can sympathise with me more than any of them, little woman. I feel that you can realise my longing to do good work – the work I know I'm fitted for – a thousand times better than a mere decent respectable marble-hacking workman like Cicolari.'

Poor little Minna! She sighed again, and her heart beat harder than ever. It was such a privilege for her to feel that Colin Churchill, with all that great future looming large before his young imagination, still loved her best to sympathise with him in his artistic yearnings. She pressed his arm a little, in her sweet simplicity, but she said nothing.

'You see,' Colin went on, musingly, for he liked to talk it all over again and again with Minna, 'art doesn't all come by nature, Minna, as most people fancy; it wants such a lot of teaching. Of course, you've got to have the thing born in you to begin with; but you might be born a Pheidias, it's my belief, Minna, and yet, without teaching, the merest wooden blockhead at the Academy schools would beat you hollow as far as technicalities went. Look at the dissecting now! If I hadn't saved that five pounds that Sir William gave me for carving the group on the mantelpiece, I should never have known anything at all about anatomy. But just going in my spare time for those six months to the anatomy

class at the University College Hospital – why, it gave me quite a different idea altogether about the human figure. It showed me how to clothe my bare skeletons, Minna.'

'I never could bear your going and doing that horrible dissection, all the same, Colin,' Minna said with a chilly little shudder. 'It's so dreadful, you know, cutting up dead bodies and all that – just as bad as if you were going to be a medical student.'

'Ah, but no sculpture worth calling sculpture's possible without it, I tell you, Minna,' Colin answered warmly. 'Why, Michael Angelo, you know – Michael Angelo was a regular downright out-and-out anatomist. It can't be wrong to do like Michael Angelo, now can it? That was a man, Michael Angelo! And Leonardo, too, he was an awful stickler for anatomy as well, Leonardo was. Why, every great sculptor and every great painter that ever I've read of, Minna, had to study anatomy. I suppose the Greeks did it, even; yes, I'm sure the Greeks did it, for just look at the legs of the Discobolus and the arms of the Theseus; how the muscles in them show the knowledge of anatomy in the old sculptors. Oh yes, Minna, I'm quite sure the Greeks did it. And the Greeks! well, the Greeks, you know, they were really even greater, I do believe, than Michael Angelo.'

'Well, Colin,' Minna answered, with the charming critical confidence of love and youth and inexperience, 'I've seen all your engravings of images by Michael Angelo, and I've seen the broken-nosed Theseus, don't you call him, at the Museum, and I've seen all the things you've sent me to look at in the South

Kensington; and it's my belief, Rome or no Rome, that there isn't one of them fit to hold a candle any day to your Cephalus and Aurora, that you made when you first came to London; and I should say so if the whole Royal Academy was to come up in a lump and declare your figures weren't worth anything.'

A week or two passed, and Minna, busy at staid Miss Woollacott's with her little pupils, saw no more chance than ever, though she turned it over often in her mind, of helping Colin on his way to Rome. Indeed, the North London Birkbeck Girls' School was hardly the place where one might naturally expect to find opportunities arise of such a nature. But one morning, in the teachers' room, Minna happened to pick up the 'Times,' which lay upon the table, and, looking over it, her eye fell casually upon an advertisement which at first sight would hardly have attracted her attention at all, but for the word Rome printed in it in small capitals. It was merely one of the ordinary servants' advertisements, lumped together promiscuously under the head of Wanted.

'As Valet, to go abroad (to Rome), a young man, not exceeding 30. Good wages. Some knowledge of Italian would be a recommendation. Apply to Sir Henry Wilberforce, 27 Ockenden Square, S.W.'

Minna laid down the paper with a sickening feeling at her heart: she thought she saw in it just a vague chance by which Colin could manage to get to Rome and begin his education as a sculptor. After all, it was the getting there that was the great

difficulty. Colin had ten or eleven pounds put away, she knew, and though that would barely suffice to pay the railway fare on the humblest scale, yet it would be quite a little fortune to go on upon when once he got there. Minna knew from her own experience how far ten pounds will go for a careful person with due economy. Now, if only Colin would consent to take this place as valet – and Minna knew that he had long ago learnt a valet's duties at the old vicar's – he might get his passage paid to Rome for him, and whenever this Sir Henry Wilberforce got tired of him, or was coming away, or other reasonable cause occurred, Colin might leave the place and employ all his little savings in getting himself some scraps of a sculptor's education at Rome. Wild as all this would seem to most people who are accustomed to count money in terms of hundreds, it didn't sound at all wild to poor little Minna, and it wouldn't have sounded so to Colin Churchill.

But should she tell Colin anything about it? Could she bear to tell him? Let him go away from her across the sea to that dim far Italy of his own accord, if he liked; it was his fortune, his chance in life, his natural place; she knew it; but why should she, Minna Wroe, the London pupil-teacher, the Wootton fisherman's daughter – why should she go out of her way to send him so far from her, to banish herself from his presence, to run the risk of finally losing him altogether? 'After all,' she thought, 'perhaps I oughtn't to tell him. He might be angry at it. He might think I shouldn't have looked upon such a place as at

all good enough for him. He's a sculptor, not a servant; and I got to be a schoolmistress myself on purpose so as to make myself something like equal to him. It wouldn't be right of me to go proposing to him that he should take now to brushing coats and laying out shirt studs again, when he ought to be sculpturing a statue a great deal more beautiful than those great stupid, bloated, thick-legged Michael Angelos. I dare say the wisest thing for me to do would be to say nothing at all to him about it.'

'Miss Wroe,' a small red-haired pupil called out, popping her shock head through the half-open doorway, and shouting out her message in her loudest London accent, 'if yer please, ye're ten minutes late for the fourth junerer, and Miss Woollacott, she says, will yer please come at once, and not keep the third junerer waitin' any longer.'

Minna ran off hurriedly to her class, and tried to forget her troubles about Colin forthwith in the occult mysteries of the agreement of a relative with its antecedent.

But when she got back to Miss Woollacott's lodgings at Kentish Town that evening, and had had her usual supper of bread and cheese and a glass of water – Miss Woollacott took beer, but Minna as a minor was restricted to the beverage of nature – and had heard prayers read, and had gone up by herself to her small bare bedroom, she sat down on the bedside all alone, and cried a little, and thought it all out, and tried hard to come to the right decision. It would be very sad indeed to lose Colin; she could scarcely bear that; and yet she knew that it was for

Colin's good; and what was for Colin's good was surely for her own good too in the long-run. Well, was it? that was the question. Of course, she would dearly love for Colin to go to Rome, and learn to be a real sculptor, and get fame and glory, and come back a greater man than the vicar himself – almost as great, indeed, as the Earl of Beaminster. But there were dangers in it, too. Out of sight, out of mind; and it was a long way to Italy. Perhaps when Colin got there he would see some pretty Italian girl or some grand fine lady, and fall in love with her, and forget at once all about his poor little Minna. Ah, no, it wasn't altogether for Minna's good, perhaps, that Colin should go to Italy.

She sat there so long, ruminating about it on her bedside without undressing, that Miss Woollacott, who always looked under the door to see if the light was out and prevent waste of the candles, called out in quite a sharp voice, 'Minna Wroe, how very long you are undressing!' And then she blew out the candle in a hurry, and undressed in the dark, and jumped into bed hastily, and covered her head up with the bedclothes, and had a good cry, very silently; and after that she felt a little better. But still she couldn't go to sleep, thinking about how very hard it would be to lose Colin. Oh, no, she couldn't bear to tell him; she wouldn't tell him; it wasn't at all likely the place would suit him; and if he wanted to go to Rome and leave her, he must just go and find a way for himself; and so that was all about it.

And then a sudden glow of shame came over Minna's cheeks, as she lay there in the dark on the little iron bedstead, to think that

she should have been so untrue for a single moment to her better self and to Colin's best and highest interests. She *loved* Colin! yes, she *loved* him! from her childhood onward, he had been her one dream and romance and ideal! She knew Colin could make things lovelier than any other man on earth had ever yet imagined; and she knew she ought to do her best to put him in the way of fulfilling his own truest and purest instincts. Should she selfishly keep him here in England, when it was only at Rome that he could get the best instruction? Should she cramp his genius and clip his wings, merely in order that he mightn't fly away too far from her? Oh, it was wicked of her, downright wicked of her, to wish not to tell him. Come of it what might, she must go round and see Colin the very next day, and let him decide for himself about that dreadful upsetting advertisement. And having at last arrived at this conclusion, Minna covered her head a second time with the counterpane, had another good cry, just to relieve her conscience, and then sank off into a troubled sleep from which she only woke again at the second bell next morning.

All that day she taught with the dreadful advertisement weighing heavily on her mind, and interposing itself terribly between her and the rule of three, or the names and dates of the Anglo-Saxon sovereigns. She couldn't for the life of her remember whether Ethel-bald came before or after Ethelwulf; and she stumbled horribly over the question whether *this* was a personal or a demonstrative pronoun. But when the evening came, she got leave from Miss Woollacott to go round and see her

cousin (a designation which was strictly correct in some remote sense, for Minna's mother and Cohn's father were in some way related), and she almost ran the whole way to the Marylebone Road to catch Colin just before he went away for the night from Cicolari's.

When Colin saw the advertisement, and heard Minna's suggestion, he turned it over a good many times in his own mind, and seemed by no means disinclined to try the chances of it. 'It's only a very small chance, of course, Minna,' he said dubitatively, 'but at any rate it's worth trying. The great thing against me is that I haven't been anything in that line for so very long, and I can't get any character, except from Cicolari. The one thing in my favour is that I know a little Italian. I don't suppose there are many young men of the sort who go to be valets who know Italian. Anyhow, I'll try it. It'll be a dreadful thing if I get it, having to leave you for so long, Minna,' and Minna's cheek brightened at that passing recognition of her prescriptive claim upon him; 'but it'll only be for a year or two; and when I come back, little woman, I shall come back very different from what I go, and then, Minna – why, then, we shall see what we shall see!' And Colin stooped to kiss the little ripe lips that pretended to evade him (Minna hadn't got over that point of etiquette yet), and held the small brown face tight between his hands, so that Minna couldn't manage to get it away, though she struggled, as in duty bound, her very hardest.

So early next day Colin put on his best Sunday clothes – and very handsome and gentlemanly he looked in them too – and

walked off to Ockenden Square, S.W., in search of Sir Henry Wilberforce.

Sir Henry was a tall, spare, wizened-up old gentleman, with scanty grey hair, carefully brushed so as to cover the largest possible area with the thinnest possible layer. He was sitting in the dining-room after breakfast when Colin called; and Colin was shown in by the footman as an ordinary visitor. 'What name?' the man asked, as he ushered him from the front door.

'Colin Churchill.'

'Mr. Colin Churchill!' the man said, as Colin walked into the dining-room.

Sir Henry stared and rose to greet him with hand extended. 'Though upon my word,' he thought to himself, 'who the deuce Mr. Colin Churchill may be, I'm sure I haven't the faintest conception.'

This was decidedly awkward. Colin felt hot and uncomfortable; it began to dawn upon him that in his best Sunday clothes he looked perhaps a trifle *too* gentlemanly. But he managed to keep at a respectful distance, and Sir Henry, not finding his visitor respond to the warmth of his proposed reception, dropped his hand quietly and waited for Colin to introduce his business.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' Colin said a little uncomfortably – he began to feel, now, how far he had left behind the Dook's early lessons in manners – 'I – I've come about your advertisement for a valet. I – I've come, in fact, to apply for the situation.'

Sir Henry glanced at him curiously. 'The deuce you have,' he said, dropping back chillily into his easy chair, and surveying Colin over from head to foot with an icy scrutiny. 'You've come to apply for the situation! Why, Wilkinson said, "*Mr*. Colin Churchill."' 'He mistook my business, I suppose,' Colin answered quietly, but with some hesitation. It somehow struck him already that he would find it hard to drop back once more into the long-forgotten position of a valet. 'I came to ask whether it was likely I would suit you. I can speak Italian.'

That was his trump card, in fact, and he thought it best to play it quickly.

Sir Henry looked at him again. 'Oh, you can speak Italian. Well, that's good as far as it goes; but how much Italian can you speak, that's the question?' And he added a few words in the best Tuscan he could muster up, to test the applicant's exact acquirements.

Colin answered him more quickly and idiomatically than Sir Henry had expected. In fact, Cicolari's lessons had been sound and practical. Sir Henry kept up the conversation, still in Italian, for a few minutes, and then, being quite satisfied on that score, returned with a better grace to his native English. 'Have you been out as a valet before?' he asked.

'Not for some years, sir.' Colin replied frankly. 'I went out to service at first, and was page and valet to a clergyman in Dorsetshire – Mr. Howard-Bussell, of Wootton Mandeville – '

'Knew him well,' Sir Henry repeated to himself reflectively.

'Old Howard-Russell of Wootton Mandeville! Dead these five years. Knew him well, the selfish old pig; as conceited, self-opinionated an old fool as ever lived in all England. He declared my undoubted Pinturicchio was only a Giovanni do Spagno. Whereas it's really the only quite indubitable Pinturiccliio in a private gallery anywhere at all outside Italy.'

'Except the St. Sebastian at Knowle, of course,' Colin put in, innocently.

Sir Henry turned round and stared at him again. 'Except the St. Sebastian at Knowle,' he echoed coldly. 'Except the St. Sebastian at Knowle, no doubt. But how the deuce did he come to know the St. Sebastian at Knowle was a Pinturiccliio, I wonder? Anyhow, it shows he's lived in very decent places. Well, and so you used to be with old Mr. Howard-Russell, did you? And since then – since then – what have you been doing?'

'At present, sir,' Cohn went on, 'I'm working as a marble-cutter; but circumstances make me wish to go back again to service now, and as I happen to know Italian, I thought perhaps your place might suit me.'

'No doubt, no doubt. I dare say it would. But the question is, would you suit *me*, don't you see? A marble-cutter, he says – a marble-cutter! How deuced singular! Have you got a character?'

'I could get one from Mr. Russell's friends, I should think, sir; and of course my present employer would speak for my honesty and so forth.'

Sir Henry asked him a few more questions, and then seemed

to be turning the matter over in his own mind a little. 'The Italian,' he said, speaking to himself – for he had a habit that way, 'the Italian's the great thing. I've made up my mind I'll never go to Rome again with a valet who doesn't speak Italian. Dobbs was impossible, quite impossible. This young man has some Italian, but can he valet, I wonder? Here, you! come into my bedroom, and let me see what you can do in the way of your duties.'

Colin followed him upstairs, and, being put through his paces as a body-servant, got through the examination with decent credit. Next came the question of wages and so forth, and finally the announcement that Sir Henry meant to start for Rome early in October.

'Well, he's a very fair-spoken young man,' Sir Henry said at last, 'and he knows Italian. But it's devilish odd his being a marble-cutter. However, I'll try him. I'll write to your master, Churchill – what's his name – I'll write to him and enquire about you.'

Colin gave him Cicolari's name and address, and Sir Henry noted them deliberately in his pocket-book. 'Very good,' he said; 'I'll write and ask about your character, and if everything's all correct, I shall let you know and engage you.'

Colin found it rather hard to answer 'Thank you, sir;' but it was for Rome and art, and he managed to say it.

CHAPTER XVI.
COLIN'S DEPARTURE

When Minna learnt from Colin that he had finally accepted Sir Henry Wilberforce's situation, her heart was very heavy. She wanted her old friend to do everything that would make him into a great sculptor, of course; but still, say what you will about it, it's very hard to have your one interest in life taken far away from you, and to be left utterly alone and self-contained in the great dreary world of London. Have you ever reflected, dear sir or madam, how terrible is the isolation of a girl in Minna Wroe's position – nay, for the matter of that, of your own housemaid, of cook, or parlour-maid, in that vast, unsympathetic, human ant-hill? Think, for a moment, of the warm human heart within her, suddenly cramped and turned in upon itself by the unspeakable strangeness of everything around her. She has come up from the country, doubtless, to take a 'better' place in London, and there she is thrown by pure chance into one situation or another, with two or three more miscellaneous girls from other shires, having other friends and other interests; and from day to day she toils on, practically alone, among so many unknown, or but officially known, and irresponsive faces. Is it any wonder that, under such circumstances, she looks about her anxiously for some living object round which to twine the tendrils of her better nature? –

it may be only a bird, or a cat, or a lap-dog; it may be Bob the postman or policeman Jenkins. We laugh about her young man, whom we envisage to ourselves simply as a hulking fellow and a domestic nuisance; we never reflect that to *her* all the interest and sympathy of life is concentrated and focussed upon that one single shadowy follower. He may be as uninteresting a slip of a plough-boy, turned driver of a London railway van, as ever was seen in this realm of England; or he may be as full of artistic aspiration and beautiful imaginings as Colin Churchill; but to her it is all the same; he is her one friend and confidant and social environment; he represents in her eyes universal society; he is the solitary unit who can play upon the full gamut of that many-toned and exquisitely modulated musical instrument, her inherited social nature. Take him away, and what is there left of her? – a mere automatic human machine for making beds or grinding out arithmetic for junior classes.

Has not humanity rightly pitched, by common consent, for the main theme of all its verse and all its literature, upon this one universal passion, which, for a few short years at least, tinges with true romance and unspoken poetry even the simplest and most commonplace souls?

Colin felt the sadness of parting, too, but by no means so acutely as Minna. The door of fame was opening at last before him; Rome was looming large upon the mental horizon; dreams in marble were crystallising themselves down into future actuality; and in the near fulfilment of his life-long hopes, it was

hardly to be expected that he should take the parting to heart so seriously as the little pupil-teacher herself had taken it. Besides, time, in anticipation at least, never looks nearly so long to men as to women. Don't we all know that a woman will cry her eyes out about a few months' absence, which to a man seems hardly worth making a fuss about? 'It's only for three or four years, you know, Minna,' Colin said, as lightly as though three or four years were absolutely nothing; and ah me, how long they looked to poor, lonely, heartsick little Minna! She felt almost inclined to give up this up-hill work of teaching and self-education altogether, and return once more to the old fisherman's cottage away down at Wootton Mandeville. There at least she would have some human sympathies and interests to comfort and sustain her.

But Colin had lots of work to do, getting himself ready for his great start in life; and he hardly entered to the full into little Minna's fears and troubles. He had to refurbish his entire wardrobe on a scale suited to a gentleman's servant – Minna was working hard in all her spare hours at making new shirts for him or mending old ones: he had to complete arrangements of all sorts for his eventful journey; and he had to select among his books and drawings which ones should accompany him upon his journey to Rome, and which should be consigned to the omnivorous secondhand book-stall. Milton and Shelley and Bohn's 'Æschylus' he certainly couldn't do without; they were an integral part of his stock-in-trade as a sculptor, and to have left them behind would have been an irreparable error; but the old

dog-eared 'Euripides' must go, and the other English translations from the classics would have made his box quite too heavy for Sir Henry to pay excess upon at Continental rates – so Cicolari told him. Still, the Flaxman plates must be got in somewhere, even if Shelley himself had to give way to them; and so must his own designs for his unexecuted statues, those mainstays of his future artistic career. Minna helped him to choose and pack them all, and she was round so often at Cicolari's in the evening that prim Miss Woollacott said somewhat sharply at last, 'It seems to me a very good thing, Minna Wroe, that this cousin of yours is going to Rome at last, as you tell me; for even though he's your only relation in London, I don't think it's quite proper or necessary for you to be round at his lodgings every other evening.' Colin took a few lessons, too, in his future duties, from a gentleman's gentleman in Regent's Park. It wasn't a pleasant thing to do, and he sighed as he put away his books and sketches, and went out to receive his practical instruction from that very supercilious and elegant person; but it had to be done, and so he did it. Colin didn't care particularly for associating with the gentleman's gentleman; indeed, he was beginning slowly to realise now how wide a gulf separated the Colin Churchill of the Marylebone Road from the little Colin Churchill of Wootton Mande-ville. He had lived so much by himself since he came to London, he had seen so little of anybody except Minna and Cicolari, and he had been so entirely devoted to art and study, that he had never stopped to gauge his own progress before, and therefore had never fully felt in his own

mind how great was the transformation that had insensibly come over him. Without knowing it himself, he had slowly developed from a gentleman's servant into an artist and a gentleman. And now he was being forced by accident or fate to take upon him once more the position of an ordinary valet.

Indeed, during the month that intervened between Colin's engagement by Sir Henry Wilberforce and his start for Rome, he wrote to his brother Sam over in America; and, shadowy memory as Sam had long since become to him, though he told him of his projected trip, and enlarged upon his hopes of attaining to the pinnacle of art in Rome, he was so ashamed of his mode of getting there that he said nothing at all upon that point, but just glided easily over the questions of means and method. He didn't want his thriving brother in America to know that he was going to Rome, with all his high ideals and beautiful dreams, in no better position than as an old man's valet.

At last the slow month wore itself away gradually for Colin – how swift and short it seemed to Minna! – and the day came when he was really to set out for Paris, on his way to Italy. He was to start with his new master from Charing Cross station, and he had taken possession of his post by anticipation a couple of days earlier. Minna mustn't be at the station to see him off, of course; that would be unofficial; and if servants indulge in such doubtful luxuries as sweethearts, they must at least take care to meet them at some seemly time or season; but at any rate she could say good-bye to him the evening before, and that was always something.

Would he propose to her this time, at last, Minna wondered, or would he go away for that long, long journey, and leave her as much in doubt as ever as to whether he really did or didn't love her?

'It won't be for long, you see, little woman,' Colin said, kissing away her tears in Regent's Park, as well as he was able; 'it won't be for long, Minna; and then, when we meet again, I shall have come back a real sculptor. What a delightful meeting we shall have, Minna, and how awfully learned and clever you'll have got by that time! I shall be half afraid to talk to you. But you'll write to me every week, won't you, little woman? You'll promise me that? You *must* promise me to write to me every week, or at the very least every fortnight.'

It was some little crumb of comfort to Minna that he wanted her to write to him so often. That showed at any rate that he really cared for her just ever such a tiny bit. She wiped her eyes again as she answered, 'Yes, Colin; I'll take great care never to miss writing to you.'

'That's right, little woman. And look here, you mustn't mind my giving you them; there's stamps enough for Italy to last you for a whole twelvemonth – fifty-two of them, Minna, so that it won't ever be any expense to you; and when those are gone, I'll send you some others.'

'Thank you, Colin,' Minna said, taking them quite simply and naturally. 'And you'll write to me, too, won't you, Colin?'

'My dear Minna! Why, of course I will. Who else on earth

have I got to write to?'

'And you won't forget me, Colin?'

'Forget you, Minna! If ever I forget you, may my right hand forget her cunning – and what more dreadful thing could a sculptor say by way of an imprecation than that, now!'

'Oh, Colin, don't! Don't say so! Suppose it was to come true, you know!'

'But I don't mean to forget you, Minna; so it won't come true. Little woman, I shall think of you always, and have your dear little gipsy face for ever before me. And now, Minna, this time we must really say good-bye. I'm out beyond my time already. Just one more; thank you, darling. Goodbye, good-bye, Minna. Good-bye, dearest. One more. God bless you!'

'Good-bye, Colin. Good-bye, good-bye. Oh, Colin, my heart is breaking.'

And when that night Minna lay awake in her own bare small room at prim Miss Woollacott's, she thought it all over once more, and argued the pros and cons of the whole question deliberately to herself with much trepidation. 'He called me "dearest," she thought in her sad little mind, 'and he said he'd never forget me; that looks very much as if he really loved me: but, then, he never asked me whether I loved him or not, and he never proposed to me – no, I'm quite sure he never proposed to me. I should have felt so much easier in my own mind if only before he went away he'd properly proposed to me!' And then she covered her head with the bed-clothes once more, and sobbed

herself to sleep, to dream of Colin.

The very next evening, Colin was at Paris.

CHAPTER XVII. A LITTLE CLOUD LIKE A MAN'S HAND

At the Gare de Lyon, Colin put his master safely into his *coupe-lit*, and then wandered along the train looking out for a carriage into which he might install himself comfortably for the long journey. All the carriages, as on all French express trains, were first-class; and Colin soon picked one out for himself, with a vacant place next the window. He jumped in and took his seat; and in two minutes more the train was off, and he found himself, at last, beyond the possibility of a doubt, on his way to Rome.

Rome, Rome, Rome! how the very name seemed to bound and thrill through Colin Churchill's inmost nature! He looked at the little book of coupon tickets which his master had given him; yes, there it was, as clear as daylight, 'Paris, P.L.M., à Rome;' not a doubt about it. Rome, Rome, Rome! It had seemed a dream, a fancy, hitherto; and now it was just going to be converted into an actual living reality. He could hardly believe even now that he would ever get there. Would there be an accident at the summit level of the Mont Cenis tunnel, to prevent his ever reaching the goal of his ambition? It almost seemed as if there must be some hitch somewhere, for the idea of actually getting to Rome – that Rome that Cicolari had long ago told him was the capital of art – seemed too glorious and magnificent to be really true, for Colin

Churchill.

For a while, the delightful exhilaration of knowing that that very carriage in which he sat was actually going straight through to Rome left him little room to notice the faces or personalities of his fellow-travellers. But as they gradually got well outside the Paris ring, and launched into the country towards Fontainebleau, Colin had leisure to look about him and take stock of the companions he was to have on his way southward. Three of them were Frenchmen only going to Lyon and Marseille —*only*, Colin thought to himself, naively, for he despised anybody now who was bound for anywhere on earth save the city of Michael Angelo and Canova and Thorwaldsen; but the other two were bound, by the labels on their luggage, for Rome itself. One of them was a tall military-looking gentleman, with a grizzled grey moustache, a Colonel somebody, the hat-box said, but the name was covered by a label; the other, apparently his daughter, was a handsome girl of about twenty, largely built and selfpossessed, like a woman who has lived much in the world from her childhood upward. Colin saw at once, that, unlike little Minna (who had essentially a painter's face and figure), this graceful full-formed woman was entirely and exquisitely statuesque. The very pose of her arm upon the slight ledge of the window as she leaned out to look at the country was instinct with plastic capabilities. Colin, with his professional interest always uppermost, felt a perfect longing to have up a batch of clay forthwith and model it then and there upon the spot. He watched each new movement and

posture so closely, in fact (of course in his capacity as a sculptor only), that the girl herself noticed his evident admiration, and took it sedately like a woman of the world. She didn't blush and shrink away timidly, as Minna would have done under the same circumstances (though her skin was many shades lighter than Minna's rich brunette complexion, and would have shown the faintest suspicion of a blush, had one been present, far more readily); she merely observed and accepted Colin's silent tribute of admiration as her natural due. It made her just a trifle more self-conscious, perhaps, but that was all; indeed, one could hardly say whether even so the somewhat studied attitudes she seemed to be taking up were not really the ones which by long use had become the easiest for her. There are some beautiful women so accustomed to displaying their beauty to the best advantage that they can't even throw themselves down on a sofa in their own bedrooms without instinctively and automatically assuming a graceful position for all their limbs.

After a while, they fell into a conversation; and Colin, who was the most innocent and unartificial of men, was amused to find that even he, on the spur of the moment, had arrived at a very obvious, worldly-wise principle upon this subject. Wishing to get into a talk with the daughter, he felt half-unconsciously that it wouldn't do to begin by addressing her outright, but that he should first, with seeming guilelessness, attack her father. A man who is travelling with a pretty girl, in whatever relation, doesn't like you to begin an acquaintanceship of travel by speaking to

her first; he resents your intrusion, and considers you have no right to talk to ladies under his escort. But when you begin by addressing himself, that is quite another matter; lured on by his quiet good sense, or his conversational powers, or his profound knowledge, or whatever else it is that he specially prides himself upon, you are soon launched upon general topics, and then the ladies of the party naturally chime in after a few minutes. To start by addressing him is a compliment to his intelligence or his social qualities; to start by addressing his companion is a distinct slight to himself, at the same time that it displays your own cards far too openly. You can convert him at once either into a valuable ally or into an enemy and a jealous guardian. Of course every other man feels this from his teens; but Colin hadn't yet mixed much in the world, and he smiled to himself at his acumen in discovering it at all on the first trial.

'Beautifully wooded country about here,' he said at the earliest opportunity the military gentleman gave him by laying down his *Times* (even in France your Englishman will stick to his paper). 'Not like most of France; so green and fresh-looking. This is Millet's country, you know; he always works about the outskirts of Fontainebleau.'

'Ah, indeed, does he?' the colonel responded, having only a very vague idea floating through his mind that Millet or Millais or something of the sort was the name of some painter fellow or other he had somewhere heard about. 'He works about Fontainebleau, does he, now? Dear me! How very interesting!'

Whenever people dismiss a subject from their minds by saying 'How very interesting!' you know at once they really mean that it doesn't interest them in the slightest degree, and they don't want to be bothered by hearing anything more about it; but Colin's observations upon mankind and the niceties of the English language had not yet carried him to this point of interpretative science, so he took the colonel literally at his word, and went on enthusiastically (for he was a great admirer of the peasant painter whose story was so like his own), 'Yes, he works at Fontainebleau. It was here, you know, that he painted his Angelus. Have you ever seen the Angelus?'

The colonel fidgeted about in his seat uneasily, and fumbled in a nervous way with the corner of the *Times*. 'The Angelus!' he repeated, meditatively. 'Ah, yes, the Angelus. Gwen, my dear, have we seen Mr. Millet's Angelus P Was it in the Academy?'

'No, papa,' Gwen answered, smiling sweetly and composedly. 'We haven't seen it, and it wasn't in the Academy. M. Millet is the *French* painter, you remember, the painter who wears *sabots*. So delightfully romantic, isn't it,' turning to Colin, 'to be a great painter and yet still to wear *sabots?*' This was a very cleverly delivered sentence of Miss Gwen's, for it was intended first to show that she at least, if not her father, knew who the unknown young artist was talking about (Gwen jumped readily at the conclusion that Colin *was* an artist), and secondly, to exonerate her papa from culpable ignorance in the artist's eyes by gently suggesting that a slight confusion of names

sufficiently accounted for his obvious blunder. But it was also, quite unintentionally, delivered point-blank at Colin Churchill's tenderest susceptibilities. This grand young lady, then, so calm and selfpossessed, could sympathise with an artist who had risen, and who, even in the days of his comparative prosperity, still wore *sabots*. To be sure, Colin didn't exactly know what *sabots* were (perhaps the blue blouses which he saw all the French workmen were wearing?), for he was still innocent of all languages but his own, unless one excepts the Italian he had picked up in anticipation from Cicolari; but he guessed at least it was some kind of dress supposed to mark Millet's peasant origin, and that was quite enough for him. The grand young lady did not despise an artist who had been born in the ranks of the people.

'Yes,' he said warmly, 'it's very noble of him. Noble not merely that he has risen to paint such pictures as the Gleaners and the Angelus, but that he isn't ashamed now to own the peasant people he has originally sprung from.'

'Oh, ah, certainly,' the colonel replied in a short sharp voice, though the remark was hardly addressed to him. 'Very creditable of the young man, indeed, not to be ashamed of his humble origin. Very creditable. Very creditable. Gwen, my dear, would you like to see the paper?'

'No, thank you, papa,' Gwen answered with another charming smile (fine teeth, too, by Jingo). 'You know I never care to read in a train in motion. Yes, quite a romantic story, this of Millet's; and I believe even now he's horribly poor, isn't he? he doesn't

sell his pictures.'

'The highest art,' Colin said quietly, 'seldom meets with real recognition during the lifetime of the artist.'

'You're a painter yourself?' asked Gwen, looking up at the handsome young man with close interest.

'Not a painter; a sculptor; and I'm going to Rome to perfect myself in my art.'

'A sculptor – to Rome!' Gwen repeated to herself. 'Oh, how nice! Why, we're going to Rome, too, and we shall be able to go all the way together. I'm so glad, for I'm longing to be told all about art and artists.'

Colin smiled. 'You're fond of art, then?' he asked simply.

'Fond of it is exactly the word,' Gwen answered. 'I know very little about it; much less than I should like to do; but I'm intensely interested in it. And a sculptor, too! Do you know, I've often met lots of painters, but I never before met a sculptor.'

'The loss has been theirs,' Colin put in with professional gravity. 'You would make a splendid model.'

The young man said it in the innocence of his heart, thinking only what a grand bust of a Semiramis or an Artemisia one might have moulded from Miss Gwen's full womanly face and figure; but the observation made the colonel shudder with awe and astonishment on his padded cushions. 'Gwen, my dear,' he said, feebly interposing for the second time, 'hadn't you better change places with me? The draught from the window will be too much for you, I'm afraid.'

'Oh dear no, thank you, papa; not at all. I haven't been roasted, you know, for twenty years in the North-West Provinces, till every little breath of air chills me and nips me like a hothouse flower. So you think I would make a good model, do you? Well, that now I call a real compliment, because of course you regard me dispassionately from a sculpturesque point of view. I've been told that a great many faces do quite well enough to paint, but that only very few features are regular and calm enough to be worth a sculptor's notice. Is that so, now?'

'It is,' Colin answered, looking straight into her beautiful bold face. 'For example, some gipsy-looking girls, who are very pretty indeed with their brown skins and bright black eyes, and who make exceedingly taking pictures – Esthers, and Cleopatras, and so forth, you know – are quite useless from the plastic point of view: their good looks depend too much upon colour and upon passing shades of expression, while sculpture of course demands that the features should be almost faultlessly perfect and regular in absolute repose.'

The colonel looked uneasy again, and pulled up his collar nervously. 'Very fine occupation indeed, a sculptor's,' he edged in sideways. 'Delightful faculty to be able to do the living marble and all that kind of thing; very delightful, really.' The colonel was always equal to a transparent platitude upon every occasion, and contributed very little else to the general conversation at any time.

'And so delightful, too, to hear an artist talk about his art,'

Gwen added with a touch of genuine enthusiasm. 'Do you know, I think I should love to be a sculptor. I should love even to go about and see the studios, and watch the beautiful things growing under your hands. I should love to have my bust taken, just so as to get to know how you do it all. It must be so lovely to see the shape forming itself slowly out of a raw block of marble.'

'Oh, you know, we don't do it all in the marble, at first,' Colin said quickly. 'It's rather dirty work, the first modelling. If you come into a sculptor's studio when he's working in the clay, you'll find him all daubed over with bits of mud, just like a common labourer.'

'How very unpleasant!' said the colonel coldly. 'Hardly seems the sort of profession fit for a gentleman – now does it?'

'Oh, papa, how can you be so dreadful! Why, it's just beautiful. I should love to see it all. I think in some ways sculpture's the very finest and noblest art of all – finer and nobler even than painting.'

'The Greeks thought so,' Colin assented with quiet assurance; 'and they say Michael Angelo thought so too. Perhaps I may be prejudiced, but I certainly think so myself. There's a purity about sculpture which you don't get about painting or any other alternative form of art. In painting you may admit what is ugly – sparingly, to be sure, but still you may admit it. In sculpture everything must be beautiful. Beauty of pure form, without the accidental aid of colour, is what we aim at. Every limb must be in perfect proportion, every feature in exquisite harmony. Any

deformity, any weakness of outline, any mere ungracefulness, you see, militates against that perfection of shape to which sculpture entirely devotes itself. The coldness, hardness, and whiteness of marble make it appeal only to the highest taste; its rigorous self-abnegation in refusing the aid of colour gives it a special claim in the eyes of the purest and truest judges.'

'Then you don't like tinted statues?' the colonel put it. (He knew his ground here, for had he not seen Gibson's Venus?) 'Neither do I. I always thought Gibson made a great mistake there.'

'Gibson was a very great artist,' Colin replied, curling his lip almost disdainfully, for he felt the absurdity of the colonel's glibness in condemning the noblest of modern English sculptors off-hand in this easy, mock-critical fashion. 'Gibson was a very great artist, but I think his Venus was perhaps a step in the wrong direction for all that. Its quite true that the Greeks tinted their statues – '

'Bless my soul, you don't mean to say so! the colonel ejaculated parenthetically.

'And modern practice was doubtless founded on the mistake of supposing that, because the torsos we dig up are white now, they were white originally. But even the example of the Greeks doesn't settle every question without appeal. We've tried white marble, and found it succeed. We've tried tinting, and found it wanting. The fact is, you see, the attention of the eye can't be distracted. Either it attends to form, or else it attends to

colour; rarely and imperfectly to both together. Take a vase. If it's covered with figures or flowers, our attention's distracted from the general outline to the painted objects it encloses. If its colouring's uniform, we think only of the beauty of form, because our attention isn't distracted from it by conflicting sensations. That's the long and the short of it, I think. Beauty of form's a higher taste than beauty of colour – at least, so we sculptors always fancy.'

Colin delivered these remarks as if he intended them for the colonel (though they were really meant for Miss Gwen's enlightenment), and the colonel was decidedly flattered by the cunning tribute to his tastes and interests thus delicately implied. But Gwen drank in every word the young man said with the deepest attention, and managed to make him go on with his subject till he had warmed to it thoroughly, and had launched out upon his own peculiar theories as to the purpose and function of his chosen art. All along, however, Colin pointed his remarks so cleverly at the colonel, while giving Gwen her fair share of the conversation, that the colonel quite forgot his first suspicions about the young sculptor, and grew gradually quite cordial and friendly in demeanour. So well did they get on together that, by the time they had had lunch out of the colonel's basket, Colin had given the colonel his ideas as to the heinousness of palming off as sculpture veiled ladies and crying babies (both of which freaks of art, by the way, the colonel had hitherto vastly admired); while the colonel in return had imparted to Colin his

famous stories of how he was once nearly killed by a tiger in a jungle at Boolundshuhr in the North-West Provinces, and how he had assisted to burn a fox out in a hunt at Gib., and how he had shot the biggest wapiti ever seen for twenty years in the neighbourhood of Ottawa. All which surprising adventures Colin received with the same sedulous show of polite interest that the colonel had extended in turn to his own talk about pictures and statues.

At last, they reached Dijon, and there Colin got out, as in duty bound, to inquire whether his master was in want of anything. Sir Henry didn't need much, so Colin returned quickly to his own carriage.

'You have a friend in a *coupé-lit*, I see,' the colonel said, opening the door for the young stranger. 'An invalid, I suppose.' Colin blushed visibly, so that Miss Gwen noticed his colour, and wondered what on earth could be the meaning of it. Till that moment, to say the truth, he had been so absorbed in his talk about art, and in observing Gwen (who interested him as all beautiful women interest a sculptor), that he had almost entirely forgotten, for the time being, his anomalous position. 'No, not an invalid,' he answered evasively, 'but a very old gentleman.' 'Ah,' the colonel put in, as the train moved away from Dijon station, 'I don't wonder people travel by *coupe-lit* when they can afford it, in spite of the prohibitive prices set upon it by these French companies. It's most unpleasant having nothing but first-class carriages on the train. You have to travel with your own servants.'

Colin smiled feebly, but said nothing. It began to strike him that in the innocence of his heart he had made a mistake in being beguiled into conversation with these grand people. And yet it was their own fault. Miss Gwen had clearly done it all, with her seductive inquiries about art and artists.

'Or rather,' the colonel went on, 'one can always put one's own servants, of course, into another carriage; but one's never safe against having to travel with other people's. We're lucky to-day in being a pleasant party all together (these French gentlemen, though they're not companionable, are evidently very decent people); but sometimes, I know, I've had to travel on the Continent here, wedged in immovably between a fat lady's-maid and a gentleman's gentleman.'

Colin's face burned hot and crimson. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, in a faltering voice, almost relapsing in his confusion into his aboriginal Dorsetshire, 'but I ought, perhaps, to have told you sooner who you are travelling with. I am valet to Sir Henry Wilberforce: he is the gentleman in the *coupé-lit*, and he's my master.'

The colonel sank back on his cushions with a face as white as marble, while Colin's now flushed as red as a damask rose. 'A valet!' he cried faintly. 'Gwen, my dear, did he say a valet? What can all this mean? Didn't he tell us he was a sculptor going to Rome to practise his profession?'

'I did,' Colin answered defiantly, for he was on his mettle now. 'I did tell you so, and it's the truth. But I'm going as a valet. I

couldn't afford to go in any other way, and so I took a situation, meaning to use my spare time in Rome to study sculpture.'

The colonel rocked himself up and down irresolutely for a while; then he leant back a little more calmly in his seat, and gave himself up to a placid despair. 'At the next stopping station,' he thought to himself, 'we must get out and change into another carriage.' And he took up the 'Continental Bradshaw' with a sigh, to see if there was any chance of release before they got to Ambérieu.

But if the colonel was quite unmanned by this shocking disclosure, Miss Gwen's self-possession and calmness of demeanour was still wholly unshaken. She felt a little ashamed, indeed, that the colonel should so openly let Colin see into the profound depths of his good Philistine soul; but she did her best to make up for it by seeming not in any way to notice her father's chilling reception of the charming young artist's strange intelligence. 'A valet, papa,' she cried in her sprightly way, as unconcernedly as if she had been accustomed to associating intimately with valets for the last twenty years; 'how very singular! Why, I shouldn't be at all surprised if this was that Mr. Churchill (I think the name was) that Eva told us all about, who did that beautiful bas-relief, you know, ever so long ago, for poor dear uncle Philip.' Colin bowed, his face still burning. 'That is my name,' he said, pulling out a card, on which was neatly engraved the simple legend, 'Mr. Colin Churchill, Sculptor.'

'And you used to live at Wootton Mandeville?' Gwen asked,

with even more of interest in her tone than ever.

'I did.'

'Then, papa, this *is* the same Mr. Churchill. How very delightful! How lucky we should happen to meet you so, by accident! I call this really and truly a most remarkable and fortunate coincidence.'

'Very remarkable indeed,' the colonel moaned half inarticulately from his cushion.

Miss Gwen was a very clever woman, and she tried her best to whip up the flagging energies of the conversation for a fresh run; but it was all to no purpose. Colin was too hot and uncomfortable to continue the talk now, and the colonel was evidently by no means anxious to recommence it. His whole soul had concentrated itself upon the one idea of changing carriages at Ambérieu. So after a while Gwen gave up the attempt in despair, and the whole party was carried forward in moody silence towards the next station.

'How awfully disappointing,' Gwen thought to herself as she relapsed, vanquished, into her own corner. 'He was talking so delightfully about such beautiful things, before papa went and made that horrid, stupid, unnecessary observation. Doesn't papa see the difference between an enthusiast for art and a common footman? A valet! I can see it all now. Every bit as romantic as Millet, except for the *sabots*. No wonder his face glowed so when he spoke about the painter who had risen from the ranks of the people. I think I know now what it is they mean by inspiration.'

At last the train reached Amberieu. Great wits jump together; and as the carriage pulled up at the platform, both the colonel and Colin jumped out unanimously, to see whether they could find a vacant place in any other compartment. But the train was exactly like all other first-class expresses on the French railways; every place was taken through the whole long line of closely packed carriages. The colonel was the first to return. 'Gwen,' he whispered angrily to his daughter, in a fierce undertone, 'there isn't a solitary seat vacant in the whole of this confounded train: we shall have to go on with this manservant fellow, at least as far as Aix, and perhaps even all the way to Modane and Turin. Now mind, Gwen, whatever you do, don't have anything more to say to him than you can possibly help, or I shall be very severely displeased with you. How *could* you go on trying to talk to him again after he'd actually told you he was a gentleman's servant? I was ashamed of you, Gwen, positively ashamed of you. You've no proper pride or lady-like spirit in you. Why, the fellow himself had better feelings on the subject than you had, and was ashamed of himself for having taken us in so very disgracefully.'

'He was not,' Gwen answered stoutly. 'He was ashamed of *you*, papa, for not being able to recognise an artist and a gentleman even when you see him.'

The colonel's face grew black with wrath, and he was just going to make some angry rejoinder, when Colin's arrival suddenly checked his further colloquy.

The young man's cheeks were still hot and red, but he entered

the carriage with composure and dignity, and took his place once more in solemn silence. After a minute he spoke in a low voice to the colonel: 'I've been looking along the train, sir,' he said, 'to see if I could find myself a seat anywhere, but I can't discover one. I think you would have felt more comfortable if I could have left you, and I don't wish to stay anywhere, even in a public conveyance, where my society is not welcome. However, there's no help for it, so I must stop here till we reach Turin, when some of the other passengers will no doubt be getting out. I shall not molest you further, and I regret exceedingly that in temporary forgetfulness of my situation I should have been tempted into seeming to thrust my acquaintance unsolicited upon you.'

The colonel, misunderstanding this proud apology, muttered half-audibly to himself: 'Very right and proper of the young man, of course. He's sorry he so far forgot his natural station as to enter into conversation with his superiors. Very right and proper of him, under the circumstances, certainly, though he ought never to have presumed to speak to us at all in the first instance.'

Gwen bit her lip hard, and tried to turn away her burning face, now as red almost as Colin's; but she said nothing.

That evening, about twelve, as they were well on the way to the Mont Cenis, and Colin was dozing as best he might in his own corner, he suddenly felt a little piece of pasteboard thrust quietly into his half-closed right hand. He looked up with a start. The colonel was snoring peacefully, and it was Miss Gwen's fingers that had pushed the card into his hollow hand. He glanced at it

casually by the dim light of the lamp. It contained only a few words. The engraved part ran thus: 'Miss Gwen Howard-Russell, Denhurst.' Underneath, in pencil, was a brief note – 'Excuse my father's rudeness. I shall come to see your studio at Rome. G. H. R.'

Minna was the prettiest girl Colin Churchill had ever seen; but Miss Howard-Bussell had exquisitely regular features, and when her big eyes met his for one flash that moment, they somehow seemed to thrill his nature through and through with a sort of sudden mesmeric influence.

CHAPTER XVIII. HIRAM IN WONDERLAND

Just a week after Colin Churchill reached Rome, three passengers by an American steamer stood in the big gaudy refreshment-room at Lime Street Station, Liverpool, waiting for the hour for the up express to start for London.

'We'd better have a little lunch before we get off,' St in Churchill said to his two companions, 'Don't you think so, Mr. Audouin?'

Audouin nodded. 'For my part,' he said, 'I shall have a Bath bun and a glass of ale. They remind one so delightfully of England, Will you give me a glass of bitter, please.'

Hiram drew back a little in surprise. He gazed at the gorgeous young lady who pulled the handle of the beer-engine (of course he had never seen a woman serving drink before), and then he glanced inquiringly at Sam Churchill. 'Do tell me,' he whispered in an awe-struck undertone; 'is that a barmaid?' Sam hardly took in the point of the question for the moment, it seemed so natural to him to see a girl drawing beer at an English refreshment-room, though in the land of his adoption that function is always performed by a male attendant, known as a saloon-keeper; but he answered unconcernedly: 'Well, yes, she's about that, I reckon, though I dare say she wouldn't admire at you to call her so.'

Hiram looked with all his eyes agog upon the gorgeous young lady. 'Well,' he said slowly, half to himself, 'that's just charming. A barmaid! Why it's exactly the same as if it were in "Tom Jones" or "Roderick Random."'

Sam Churchill's good-humoured face expanded slowly into a broad smile. That was a picturesque point of view of barmaids which he had never before conceived as possible 'What'll you take, Hiram?' he asked. 'This is a pork-pie here; will you try it?'

'A pork-pie!' Hiram cried, enchanted.

'A pork-pie! You don't mean to say so! Will I try it? I should think I would, rather. Why, you know, Sam, one reads about pork-pies in Dickens!'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.