

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE ADVENTURES OF
HARRY RICHMOND.
VOLUME 7

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Richmond. Volume 7

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CHAPTER XLV

WITHIN AN INCH OF MY LIFE

A single tent stood in a gully running from one of the gravel-pits of the heath, near an iron-red rillet, and a girl of Kiomi's tribe leaned over the lazy water at half length, striking it with her handkerchief. At a distance of about twice a stone's-throw from the new carriage-road between Durstan and Bulsted, I fancied from old recollections she might be Kiomi herself. This was not the time for her people to be camping on Durstan. Besides, I feared it improbable that one would find her in any of the tracks of her people. The noise of the wheels brought the girl's face round to me. She was one of those who were babies in the tents when I was a boy. We were too far apart for me to read her features. I lay back in the carriage, thinking that it would have been better for my poor little wild friend if I had never crossed the shadow of her tents. A life caught out of its natural circle is as much in danger of being lost as a limb given to a wheel

in spinning machinery; so it occurred to me, until I reflected that Prince Ernest might make the same remark, and deplore the damage done to the superior machinery likewise.

My movements appeared to interest the girl. She was up on a mound of the fast-purpling heath, shading her eyes to watch me, when I called at Bulsted lodge-gates to ask for a bed under Julia's roof that night. Her bare legs twinkled in a nimble pace on the way to Durstan Hall, as if she was determined to keep me in sight. I waved my hand to her. She stopped. A gipsy's girl's figure is often as good an index to her mind as her face, and I perceived that she had not taken my greeting favourably; nor would she advance a step to my repeated beckonings; I tried hat, handkerchief, purse, in vain. My driver observed that she was taken with a fit of the obstinacy of 'her lot.' He shouted, 'Silver,' and then 'Fortune.' She stood looking. The fellow discoursed on the nature of gipsies. Foxes were kept for hunting, he said; there was reason in that. Why we kept gipsies none could tell. He once backed a gipsy prizefighter, who failed to keep his appointment. 'Heart sunk too low below his belt, sir. You can't reckon on them for performances. And that same man afterwards fought the gamest fight in the chronicles o' the Ring! I knew he had it in him. But they're like nothing better than the weather; you can't put money on 'em and feel safe.' Consequently he saw no good in them.

'She sticks to her post,' he said, as we turned into the Durstan grounds.

The girl was like a flag-staff on the upper line of heathland.

Heriot was strolling, cigar in mouth, down one of the diminutive alleys of young fir in this upstart estate. He affected to be prepossessed by the case between me and Edbury, and would say nothing of his own affairs, save that he meant to try for service in one of the Continental armies; he whose susceptible love for his country was almost a malady. But he had given himself to women it was Cissy this, Trichy that, and the wiles of a Florence, the spites of an Agatha, duperies, innocent-seemings, witcheries, reptile-tricks of the fairest of women, all through his conversation. He had so saturated himself with the resources, evasions, and desperate cruising of these light creatures of wind, tide, and tempest, that, like one who has been gazing on the whirliground, he saw the whole of women running or only waiting for a suitable partner to run the giddy ring to perdition and an atoning pathos.

I cut short one of Heriot's narratives by telling him that this picking bones of the dish was not to my taste. He twitted me with turning parson. I spoke of Kiomi. Heriot flushed, muttering, "The little devil!" with his usual contemplative relish of devilry. We parted, feeling that severe tension of the old links keeping us together which indicates the lack of new ones: a point where simple affection must bear the strain of friendship if it can. Heriot had promised to walk half-way with me to Bulsted, in spite of Lady Maria's childish fears of some attack on him. He was now satisfied with a good-bye at the hall-doors, and he talked

ostentatiously of a method that he had to bring Edbury up to the mark. I knew that same loud decreeing talk to be a method on his own behalf of concealing his sensitive resentment at the tone I had adopted: Lady Maria's carriage had gone to fetch her husband from a political dinner. My portmanteau advised me to wait for its return. Durstan and Riversley were at feud, however, owing to some powerful rude English used toward the proprietor of the former place by the squire; so I thought it better to let one of the grooms shoulder my luggage, and follow him.

The night was dark; he chose the roadway, and I crossed the heath, meeting an exhilarating high wind that made my blood race: Egoism is not peculiar to any period of life; it is only especially curious in a young man beginning to match himself against his elders, for in him it suffuses the imagination; he is not merely selfishly sentient, or selfishly scheming: his very conceptions are selfish. I remember walking at my swiftest pace, blaming everybody I knew for insufficiency, for want of subordination to my interests, for poverty of nature, grossness, blindness to the fine lights shining in me; I blamed the Fates for harassing me, circumstances for not surrounding me with friends worthy of me. The central 'I' resembled the sun of this universe, with the difference that it shrieked for nourishment, instead of dispensing it.

My monstrous conceit of elevation will not suffer condensation into sentences. What I can testify to is, that for making you bless the legs you stand on, a knockdown blow is a

specific. I had it before I knew that a hand was up. I should have fancied that I had run athwart a tree, but for the recollection, as I was reeling to the ground, of a hulk of a fellow suddenly fronting me, and he did not hesitate with his fist. I went over and over into a heathery hollow. The wind sang shrill through the furzes; nothing was visible but black clumps, black cloud. Astonished though I was, and shaken, it flashed through me that this was not the attack of a highwayman. He calls upon you to stand and deliver: it is a foe that hits without warning. The blow took me on the forehead, and might have been worse. Not seeing the enemy, curiosity was almost as strong in me as anger; but reflecting that I had injured no one I knew of, my nerves were quickly at the right pitch. Brushing some spikes of furze off my hands, I prepared for it. A cry rose. My impression seemed to be all backward, travelling up to me a moment or two behind time. I recognised a strange tongue in the cry, but too late that it was Romany to answer it. Instantly a voice was audible above the noisy wind: 'I spot him.' Then began some good and fair fighting. I got my footing on grass, and liked the work. The fellow facing me was unmistakably gipsy- build. I, too, had length of arm, and a disposition to use it by hitting straight out, with footing firm, instead of dodging and capering, which told in my favour, and is decidedly the best display of the noble art on a dark night.

My dancer went over as neatly as I had preceded him; and therewith I considered enough was done for vengeance. The thrill of a salmon on the gut is known to give a savage satisfaction to

our original nature; it is but an extension and attenuation of the hearty contentment springing from a thorough delivery of the fist upon the prominent features of an assailant that yields to it perforce. Even when you receive such perfect blows you are half satisfied. Feeling conqueror, my wrath was soothed; I bent to have a look at my ruffian, and ask him what cause of complaint gipsies camping on Durstan could find against Riversley. A sharp stroke on the side of my neck sent me across his body. He bit viciously. In pain and desperation I flew at another of the tawny devils. They multiplied. I took to my heels; but this was the vainest of stratagems, they beat me in nimbleness. Four of them were round me when I wheeled breathless to take my chance at fighting the odds. Fiery men have not much notion of chivalry: gipsies the least of all. They yelled disdain of my summons to them to come on one by one: 'Now they had caught me, now they would pay me, now they would pound me; and, standing at four corners, they commended me to think of becoming a jelly. Four though they were, they kept their positions; they left it to me to rush in for a close; the hinder ones held out of arms' reach so long as I was disengaged. I had perpetually to shift my front, thinking—Oh, for a stick! any stout bit of timber! My fists ached, and a repetition of nasty dull knocks on back and neck, slogging thumps dealt by men getting to make sure of me, shattered my breathing.

I cried out for a pause, offered to take a couple of them at a time: I challenged three—the fourth to bide. I was now the dancer:

left, right, and roundabout I had to swing, half-stunned, half-strangled with gorge. Those terrible blows in the back did the mischief. Sickness threatened to undermine me. Boxers have breathing-time: I had none. Stiff and sick, I tried to run; I tottered, I stood to be knocked down, I dropped like a log-careless of life. But I smelt earth keenly, and the damp grass and the devil's play of their feet on my chin, chest, and thighs, revived a fit of wrath enough to set me staggering on my legs again. They permitted it, for the purpose of battering me further. I passed from down to up mechanically, and enjoyed the chestful of air given me in the interval of rising: thought of Germany and my father, and Janet at her window, complacently; raised a child's voice in my throat for mercy, quite inaudible, and accepted my punishment. One idea I had was, that I could not possibly fail as a speaker after this—I wanted but a minute's grace to fetch breath for an oration, beginning, 'You fools!' for I guessed that they had fallen upon the wrong man. Not a second was allowed. Soon the shrewd physical bracing, acting momentarily on my brain, relaxed; the fitful illumination ceased: all ideas faded out-clung about my beaten body-fled. The body might have been tossed into its grave, for aught I knew.

CHAPTER XLVI

AMONG GIPSY WOMEN

I cannot say how long it was after my senses had gone when I began to grope for them on the warmest of heaving soft pillows, and lost the slight hold I had on them with the effort. Then came a series of climbings and fallings, risings to the surface and sinkings fathoms below. Any attempt to speculate pitched me back into darkness. Gifted with a pair of enormous eyes, which threw surrounding objects to a distance of a mile away, I could not induce the diminutive things to approach; and shutting eyes led to such a rolling of mountains in my brain, that, terrified by the gigantic revolution, I lay determinedly staring; clothed, it seemed positive, in a tight-fitting suit of sheet-lead; but why? I wondered why, and immediately received an extinguishing blow. My pillow was heavenly; I was constantly being cooled on it, and grew used to hear a croon no more musical than the unstopped reed above my head; a sound as of a breeze about a cavern's mouth, more soothing than a melody. Conjecture of my state, after hovering timidly in dread of relapses, settled and assured me I was lying baked, half-buried in an old river-bed; moss at my cheek, my body inextricable; water now and then feebly striving to float me out, with horrid pain, with infinite refreshingness. A shady light, like the light through leafage, I could see; the water

I felt. Why did it keep trying to move me? I questioned and sank to the depths again.

The excruciated patient was having his wet bandages folded across his bruises, and could not bear a motion of the mind.

The mind's total apathy was the sign of recovering health. Kind nature put that district to sleep while she operated on the disquieted lower functions. I looked on my later self as one observes the mossy bearded substances travelling blind along the undercurrent of the stream, clinging to this and that, twirling absurdly.

Where was I? Not in a house. But for my condition of absolute calm, owing to skilful treatment, open air, and physical robustness, the scene would have been of a kind to scatter the busy little workmen setting up the fabric of my wits. A lighted oil-cup stood on a tripod in the middle of a tent-roof, and over it the creased neck and chin of a tall old woman, splendid in age, reddened vividly; her black eyes and grey brows, and greyishblack hair fell away in a dusk of their own. I thought her marvellous. Something she held in her hands that sent a thin steam between her and the light. Outside, in the A cutting of the tent's threshold, a heavy-coloured sunset hung upon dark land. My pillow meantime lifted me gently at a regular measure, and it was with untroubled wonder that I came to the knowledge of a human heart beating within it. So soft could only be feminine; so firm still young. The bosom was Kiomi's. A girl sidled at the opening of the tent, peeping in, and from a mufed rattle of

subpectoral thunder discharged at her in quick heated snaps, I knew Kiomi's voice. After an altercation of their monotonous gipsy undertones, the girl dropped and crouched outside.

It was morning when I woke next, stronger, and aching worse. I was lying in the air, and she who served for nurse, pillow, parasol, and bank of herbage, had her arms round beneath mine cherishingly, all the fingers outspread and flat on me, just as they had been when I went to sleep.

'Kiomi!'

'Now, you be quiet.'

'Can I stand up a minute or two?'

'No, and you won't talk.'

I submitted. This was our duel all day: she slipped from me only twice, and when she did the girl took her place.

I began to think of Bulsted and Riversley.

'Kiomi, how long have I been here?'

'You 'll be twice as long as you've been.'

'A couple of days?'

'More like a dozen.'

'Just tell me what happened.'

'Ghm-m-m,' she growled admonishingly.

Reflecting on it, I felt sure there must have been searching parties over the heath.

'Kiomi, I say, how was it they missed me?'

She struck at once on my thought.

'They're fools.'

'How did you cheat them?'

'I didn't tie a handkercher across their eyes.'

'You half smothered me once, in the combe.'

'You go to sleep.'

'Have you been doctor?'

The growling tigerish 'Ghm-m-m' constrained me to take it for a lullaby.

'Kiomi, why the deuce did your people attack me?' She repeated the sound resembling that which sometimes issues from the vent of a mine; but I insisted upon her answering.

'I'll put you down and be off,' she threatened.

'Brute of a girl! I hate you!'

'Hate away.'

'Tell me who found me.'

'I shan't. You shut your peepers.'

The other and younger girl sung out: 'I found you.'

Kiomi sent a volley at her.

'I did,' said the girl; 'yes, and I nursed you first, I did; and mother doctored you. Kiomi hasn't been here a day.'

The old mother came out of the tent. She felt my pulse, and forthwith squatted in front of me. 'You're hard to kill, and oily as a bean,' said she. 'You've only to lie quiet in the sun like a handsome gentleman; I'm sure you couldn't wish for more. Air and water's the doctor for such as you. You've got the bound in you to jump the ditch: don't you fret at it, or you'll lose your spring, my good gentleman.'

'Leave off talking to me as a stranger,' I bawled. 'Out with it; why have you kept me here? Why did your men pitch into me?'

'OUR men, my good gentleman!' the old woman ejaculated. There was innocence indeed! sufficient to pass the whole tribe before a bench of magistrates. She wheedled: 'What have they against a handsome gentleman like you? They'd run for you fifty mile a day, and show you all their tricks and secrets for nothing.'

My despot Kiomi fired invectives at her mother. The old mother retorted; the girl joined in. All three were scowling, flashing, showing teeth, driving the wordy javelin upon one another, indiscriminately, or two to one, without a pause; all to a sound like the slack silver string of the fiddle.

I sang out truce to them; they racked me with laughter; and such laughter!—the shaking of husks in a half-empty sack.

Ultimately, on a sudden cessation of the storm of tongues, they agreed that I must have my broth.

Sheer weariness, seasoned with some hope that the broth would give me strength to mount on my legs and walk, persuaded me to drink it. Still the old mother declared that none of her men would ever have laid hands on me. Why should they? she asked. What had I done to them? Was it their way?

Kiomi's arms tightened over my breast. The involuntary pressure was like an illumination to me.

No longer asking for the grounds of the attack on a mistaken person, and bowing to the fiction that none of the tribe had been among my assailants, I obtained information. The girl

Eveleen had spied me entering Durstan. Quite by chance, she was concealed near Bulsted Park gates when the groom arrived and told the lodge-keeper that Mr. Harry Richmond was coming up over the heath, and might have lost his way. 'Richmond!' the girl threw a world of meaning into the unexpected name. Kiomi clutched me to her bosom, but no one breathed the name we had in our thoughts.

Eveleen and the old mother had searched for me upon the heath, and having haled me head and foot to their tent, despatched a message to bring Kiomi down from London to aid them in their desperate shift. They knew Squire Beltham's temper. He would have scattered the tribe to the shores of the kingdom at a rumour of foul play to his grandson. Kiomi came in time to smuggle me through an inspection of the tent and cross-examination of its ostensible denizens by Captain Bulsted, who had no suspicions, though he was in a state of wonderment. Hearing all this, I was the first to say it would be better I should get out of the neighbourhood as soon as my legs should support me. The grin that goes for a laugh among gipsies followed my question of how Kiomi had managed to smuggle me. Eveleen was my informant when the dreaded Kiomi happened to be off duty for a minute. By a hasty transformation, due to a nightcap on the bandages about the head, and an old petticoat over my feet, Captain William's insensible friend was introduced to him as the sore sick great-grandmother of the tribe, mother of Kiomi's mother, aged ninety-one. The captain paid like a man for doctor

and burial fees; he undertook also to send the old lady a pound of snuff to assist her to a last sneeze or two on the right side of the grave, and he kept his word; for, deeming it necessary to paint her in a characteristic, these prodigious serpents told him gravely that she delighted in snuff; it was almost the only thing that kept her alive, barring a sip of broth. Captain William's comment on the interesting piece of longevity whose well-covered length and framework lay exposed to his respectful contemplation, was, that she must have been a devilish fine old lady in her day. 'Six foot' was given as her measurement.

One pound of snuff, a bottle of rum, and five sovereigns were the fruits of the captain's sensibility. I shattered my ribs with laughter over the story. Eveleen dwelt on the triumph, twinkling. Kiomi despised laughter or triumph resulting from the natural exercise of craft in an emergency. 'But my handsome gentleman he won't tell on us, will he, when we've nursed him and doctored him, and made him one of us, and as good a stick o' timber as grows in the forest?' whined the old mother. I had to swear I would not.

'He!' cried Kiomi.

'He may forget us when he's gone,' the mother said. She would have liked me to kiss a book to seal the oath. Anxiety about the safety of their 'homes,' that is, the assurance of an untroubled reception upon their customary camping-ground, is a peculiarity of the gipsies, distinguishing them, equally with their cleanliness and thriftiness, from mumpers and the common wanderers.

It is their tribute to civilization, which generally keeps them within the laws.

Who that does not know them will believe that under their domestic system I had the best broth and the best tea I have ever tasted! They are very cunning brewers and sagacious buyers too; their maxims show them to direct all their acuteness upon obtaining quality for their money. A compliment not backed by silver is hardly intelligible to the pretty ones: money is a really credible thing to them; and when they have it, they know how to use it. Apparently because they know so well, so perfectly appreciating it, they have only vague ideas of a corresponding sentiment on the opposite side to the bargain, and imagine that they fool people much more often than they succeed in doing. Once duped themselves, they are the wariest of the dog-burnt; the place is notched where it occurred, and for ever avoided. On the other hand, they repose implicit faith in a reputation vouched for by their experience. I was amused by the girl Eveleen's dotting of houses over the breadth of five counties, where for this and that article of apparel she designed to expend portions of a golden guinea, confident that she would get the very best, and a shilling besides. The unwonted coin gave her the joy of supposing she cheated the Mint of that sum. This guinea was a present to the girl (to whom I owed my thrashing, by the way) that excused itself under cover of being a bribe for sight of a mirror interdicted by the implacable Kiomi. I wanted to have a look at my face. Now that the familiar scenes were beginning to wear

their original features to me, my dread of personal hideousness was distressing, though Eveleen declared the bad blood in my cheeks and eyes 'had been sucked by pounds of red meat.' I wondered, whether if I stood up and walked to either one of the three great halls lying in an obtuse triangle within view, I should easily be recognized. When I did see myself, I groaned verily. With the silence of profound resignation, I handed back to Eveleen the curious fragment of her boudoir, which would have grimaced at Helen of Troy.

'You're feeling your nose—you've been looking at a glass!' Kiomi said, with supernatural swiftness of deduction on her return.

She added for my comfort that nothing was broken, but confessed me to be still 'a sight'; and thereupon drove knotty language at Eveleen. The girl retorted, and though these two would never acknowledge to me that any of their men had been in this neighbourhood recently, the fact was treated as a matter of course in their spiteful altercation, and each saddled the other with the mistake they had committed. Eveleen snatched the last word. What she said I did not comprehend, she must have hit hard. Kiomi's eyes lightened, and her lips twitched; she coloured like the roofing smoke of the tent fire; twice she showed her teeth, as in a spasm, struck to the heart, unable to speak, breathing in and out of a bitterly disjoined mouth. Eveleen ran. I guessed at the ill-word spoken. Kiomi sat eyeing the wood-ashes, a devouring gaze that shot straight and read but one thing.

They who have seen wild creatures die will have her before them, saving the fiery eyes. She became an ashen-colour, I took her little hand. Unconscious of me, her brown fingers clutching at mine, she flung up her nostrils, craving air.

This was the picture of the woman who could not weep in her misery.

'Kiomi, old friend!' I called to her. I could have cursed that other friend, the son of mischief; for she, I could have sworn, had been fiercely and wantonly hunted. Chastity of nature, intense personal pride, were as proper to her as the free winds are to the heaths: they were as visible to dull divination as the milky blue about the iris of her eyeballs. She had actually no animal vileness, animal though she might be termed, and would have appeared if compared with Heriot's admirable Cissies and Gwennies, and other ladies of the Graces that run to fall, and spend their pains more in kindling the scent of the huntsman than in effectively flying.

There was no consolation for her.

The girl Eveleen came in sight, loitering and looking, kicking her idle heels.

Kiomi turned sharp round to me.

'I'm going. Your father's here, up at Bulsted. I'll see him. He won't tell. He'll come soon. You'll be fit to walk in a day. You're sound as a nail. Goodbye—I shan't say good-bye twice,' she answered my attempt to keep her, and passed into the tent, out of which she brought a small bundle tied in a yellow handkerchief,

and walked away, without nodding or speaking.

'What was that you said to Kiomi?' I questioned Eveleen, who was quickly beside me.

She replied, accurately or not: 'I told her our men'd give her as good as she gave me, let her wait and see.'

Therewith she pouted; or, to sketch her with precision, 'snouted' would better convey the vivacity of her ugly flash of features. It was an error in me to think her heartless. She talked of her aunt Kiomi affectionately, for a gipsy girl, whose modulated tones are all addressed to the soft public. Eveleen spoke with the pride of bated breath of the ferocious unforgivingness of their men. Perhaps if she had known that I traced the good repute of the tribes for purity to the sweeter instincts of the women, she would have eulogized her sex to amuse me. Gipsy girls, like other people, are fond of showing off; but it would have been a victory of education to have helped her to feel the distinction of the feminine sense of shame half as awfully and warmly as she did the inscrutable iron despotism of the males. She hinted that the mistake of which I had been the victim would be rectified.

'Tell your men I'll hunt them down like rats if I hear of it,' said I.

While we were conversing my father arrived. Eveleen, not knowing him, would have had me accept the friendly covering of a mat.

'Here 's a big one! he's a clergyman,' she muttered to herself, and ran to him and set up a gipsy whine, fronting me up to the last

step while she advanced; she only yielded ground to my outcry.

My father bent over me. Kiomi had prepared him for what he saw. I quieted his alarm by talking currently and easily. Julia Bulsted had despatched a messenger to inform him of my mysterious disappearance; but he, as his way was, revelling in large conjectures, had half imagined me seized by a gust of passion, and bound for Germany. 'Without my luggage?' I laughed.

'Ay, without your luggage, Richie,' he answered seriously. His conceit of a better knowledge of me than others possessed, had buoyed him up. 'For I knew,' he said, 'we two do nothing like the herd of men. I thought you were off to her, my boy. Now!' he looked at me, and this look of dismay was a perfect mirror. I was not a presentable object.

He stretched his limbs on the heather and kept hold of my hand, looking and talking watchfully, doctor-like, doubting me to be as sound in body as I assured him I was, despite aches and pains. Eveleen hung near.

'These people have been kind to you?' he said.

'No, the biggest brutes on the earth,' said I.

'Oh! you say that, when I spotted you out in the dark where you might have lied to be eaten, and carried you and washed your bloody face, and watched you, and never slept, I didn't, to mother you and wet your head!' cried the girl.

My father beckoned to her and thanked her appreciably in the yellow tongue.

'So these scoundrels of the high road fell upon you and robbed you,

Richie?'

I nodded.

'You let him think they robbed you, and you had your purse to give me a gold guinea out of it!' Eveleen cried, and finding herself in the wrong track, volubly resumed: 'That they didn't, for they hadn't time, whether they meant to, and the night black as a coal, whoever they were.'

The mystery of my not having sent word to Bulsted or to Riversley perplexed my father.

'Comfortable here!' he echoed me, disconsolately, and glanced at the heath, the tent, the black circle of the broth-pot, and the wild girl.

CHAPTER XLVII

MY FATHER ACTS THE CHARMER AGAIN

Kiomi's mother was seen in a turn of the gravel-cutting, bearing purchases from Durstan village. She took the new circumstances in with a single cast up of her wary eyelids; and her, and her skill in surgery and art in medicine, I praised to lull her fears, which procured me the denomination of old friend, as well as handsome gentleman: she went so far as to add, in a fit of natural warmth, nice fellow; and it is the truth, that this term effected wonders in flattering me: it seemed to reveal to me how simple it was for Harry Richmond, one whom gipsies could think a nice fellow, to be the lord of Janet's affections—to be her husband. My heart throbbed; yet she was within range of a mile and a half, and I did not wish to be taken to her. I did wish to smell the piney air about the lake-palace; but the thought of Ottilia caused me no quick pulsations.

My father remained an hour. He could not perceive the drift of my objection to go either to Bulsted or to Riversley, and desire that my misadventure should be unknown at those places. However, he obeyed me, as I could always trust him to do scrupulously, and told a tale at Bulsted. In the afternoon he returned in a carriage to convey me to the seaside. When I was

raised I fainted, and saw the last of the camp on Durstan much as I had come to it first. Sickness and swimming of the head continued for several days. I was persecuted with the sensation of the carriage journey, and an iteration of my father's that ran: 'My son's inanimate body in my arms,' or 'Clasping the lifeless body of my sole son, Harry Richmond,' and other variations. I said nothing about it. He told me aghast that I had spat blood. A battery of eight fists, having it in the end all its own way, leaves a deeper indentation on its target than a pistol-shot that passes free of the vital chords. My convalescence in Germany was a melody compared with this. I ought to have stopped in the tent, according to the wise old mother's advice, given sincerely, for prudence counselled her to strike her canvas and be gone. There I should have lain, interested in the progress of a bee, the course of a beetle or a cloud, a spider's business, and the shaking of the gorse and the heather, until good health had grown out of thoughtlessness. The very sight of my father was as a hive of humming troubles.

His intense anxiety about me reflected in my mind the endless worry I had concerning him. It was the intellect which condemned him when he wore a joyful air, and the sensations when he waxed over-solicitous. Whether or not the sentences were just, the judges should have sometimes shifted places. I was unable to divine why he fevered me so much. Must I say it?—He had ceased to entertain me. Instead of a comic I found him a tragic spectacle; and his exuberant anticipations,

his bursting hopes that fed their forcing-bed with the blight and decay of their predecessors, his transient fits of despair after a touch at my pulses, and exclamation of 'Oh, Richie, Richie, if only I had my boy up and well!'—assuming that nothing but my tardy recovery stood in the way of our contentment—were examples of downright unreason such as contemplation through the comic glass would have excused; the tragic could not. I knew, nevertheless, that to the rest of the world he was a progressive comedy: and the knowledge made him seem more tragic still. He clearly could not learn from misfortune; he was not to be contained. Money I gave him freely, holding the money at my disposal his own; I chafed at his unteachable spirit, surely one of the most tragical things in life; and the proof of my love for him was that I thought it so, though I should have been kinder had he amused me, as in the old days.

Conceive to yourself the keeping watch over a fountain choked in its spouting, incessantly labouring to spin a jet into the air; now for a moment glittering and towering in a column, and once more straining to mount. My father appeared to me in that and other images. He would have had me believe him shooting to his zenith, victorious at last. I likewise was to reap a victory of the highest kind from the attack of the mysterious ruffians; so much; he said, he thought he could assure me of. He chattered of an intimidated Government, and Dettermain and Newson; duchesses, dukes, most friendly; innumerable invitations to country castles; and among other

things one which really showed him to be capable of conceiving ideas and working from an initiative. But this, too, though it accomplished a temporary service, he rendered illusory to me by his unhappy manner of regarding it as an instance of his now permanent social authority. He had instituted what he called his JURY OF HONOUR COURT, composed of the select gentlemen of the realm, ostensibly to weigh the causes of disputes between members of their class, and decree the method of settlement: but actually, my father admitted, to put a stop to the affair between Edbury and me.

"That was the origin of the notion, Richie. I carried it on. I dined some of the best men of our day. I seized the opportunity when our choicest "emperor" was rolling on wheels to propound my system. I mention the names of Bramham DeWitt, Colonel Hibbert Segrave, Lord Alonzo Carr, Admiral Loftus, the Earl of Luton, the Marquis of Hatchford, Jack Hippony, Monterez Williams,—I think you know him?—and little Dick Phillimore, son of a big-wig, a fellow of a capital wit and discretion; I mention them as present to convince you we are not triflers, dear boy. My argument ran, it is absurd to fight; also it is intolerable to be compelled to submit to insult. As the case stands, we are under a summary edict of the citizens, to whom chivalry is unknown. Well, well, I delivered a short speech. Fighting, I said, resembled butting,— a performance proper to creatures that grow horns instead of brains . . . not to allude to a multitude of telling remarks; and the question "Is man a fighting animal?"

my answer being that he is not born with spurs on his heels or horns to his head and that those who insisted on fighting should be examined by competent anatomists, "ologists" of some sort, to decide whether they have the excrescences, and proclaim them . . . touching on these lighter parts of my theme with extreme delicacy. But—and here I dwelt on my point: Man, if not a fighting animal in his glorious—I forgot what—is a sensitive one, and has the idea of honour. "Hear," from Colonel Segrave, and Sir Weeton Slater he was one of the party. In fine, Richie, I found myself wafted into a breathing oration. I cannot, I confess it humbly, hear your "hear, hear," without going up and off, inflated like a balloon. "Shall the arbitration of the magistracy, indemnifications in money awarded by the Law-courts, succeed in satisfying,"—but I declare to you, Richie, it was no platform speech. I know your term—"the chaincable sentence." Nothing of the kind, I assure you. Plain sense, as from gentlemen to gentlemen. We require, I said, a protection that the polite world of Great Britain does not now afford us against the aggressions of the knave, the fool, and the brute. We establish a Court. We do hereby—no, no, not the "hereby"; quite simply, Richie—pledge ourselves—I said some other word not "pledge" to use our utmost authority and influence to exclude from our circles persons refusing to make the reparation of an apology for wanton common insults: we renounce intercourse with men declining, when guilty of provoking the sentiment of hostility, to submit to the jurisdiction of our Court. All I want you to see is

the notion. We raise the shield against the cowardly bully which the laws have raised against the bloody one. "And gentlemen," my father resumed his oration, forgetting my sober eye for a minute—"Gentlemen, we are the ultimate Court of Appeal for men who cherish their honour, yet abstain from fastening it like a millstone round the neck of their common-sense." Credit me, Richie, the proposition kindled. We cited Lord Edbury to appear before us, and I tell you we extracted an ample apology to you from that young nobleman. And let me add, one that I, that we, must impose it upon an old son to accept. He does! Come, come. And you shall see, Richie, society shall never repose an inert mass under my leadership. I cure it; I shake it and cure it.'

He promenaded the room, repeating: 'I do not say I am possessed of a panacea,' and bending to my chin as he passed; 'I maintain that I can and do fulfil the duties of my station, which is my element, attained in the teeth of considerable difficulties, as no other man could, be he prince or Prime Minister. Not one,' he flourished, stepping onward. 'And mind you, Richie, this,' he swung round, conscious as ever of the critic in me, though witless to correct his pomp of style, 'this is not self-glorification. I point you facts. I have a thousand schemes—projects. I recognize the value of early misfortune. The particular misfortune of princes born is that they know nothing of the world—babies! I grant you, babies. Now, I do. I have it on my thumbnail. I know its wants. And just as I succeeded in making you a member of our Parliament in assembly, and the

husband of an hereditary princess—hear me—so will I make good my original determination to be in myself the fountain of our social laws, and leader. I have never, I believe—to speak conscientiously—failed in a thing I have once determined on.'

The single wish that I might be a boy again, to find pleasure in his talk, was all that remained to combat the distaste I had for such oppressive deliveries of a mind apparently as little capable of being seated as a bladder charged with gas. I thanked him for getting rid of Edbury, and a touch of remorse pricked me, it is true, on his turning abruptly and saying: 'You see me in my nakedness, Richie. To you and my valet, the heart, the body!' He was too sympathetic not to have a keen apprehension of a state of hostility in one whom he loved. If I had inclined to melt, however, his next remark would have been enough to harden me: 'I have fought as many battles, and gained as startling victories as Napoleon Buonaparte; he was an upstart.' The word gave me a jerk.

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