

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE ORDEAL OF
RICHARD FEVEREL.
VOLUME 1

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CHAPTER I

Some years ago a book was published under the title of "The Pilgrim's Scrip." It consisted of a selection of original aphorisms by an anonymous gentleman, who in this bashful manner gave a bruised heart to the world.

He made no pretension to novelty. "Our new thoughts have thrilled dead bosoms," he wrote; by which avowal it may be seen that youth had manifestly gone from him, since he had ceased to be jealous of the ancients. There was a half-sigh floating through his pages for those days of intellectual coxcombray, when ideas come to us affecting the embraces of virgins, and swear to us they are ours alone, and no one else have they ever visited: and we believe them.

For an example of his ideas of the sex he said:

"I expect that Woman will be the last thing civilized by Man."

Some excitement was produced in the bosoms of ladies by so monstrous a scorn of them.

One adventurous person betook herself to the Heralds'

College, and there ascertained that a Griffin between two Wheatsheaves, which stood on the title-page of the book, formed the crest of Sir Austin Absworthy Bearne Feverel, Baronet, of Raynham Abbey, in a certain Western county folding Thames: a man of wealth and honour, and a somewhat lamentable history.

The outline of the baronet's story was by no means new. He had a wife, and he had a friend. His marriage was for love; his wife was a beauty; his friend was a sort of poet. His wife had his whole heart, and his friend all his confidence. When he selected Denzil Somers from among his college chums, it was not on account of any similarity of disposition between them, but from his intense worship of genius, which made him overlook the absence of principle in his associate for the sake of such brilliant promise. Denzil had a small patrimony to lead off with, and that he dissipated before he left college; thenceforth he was dependent upon his admirer, with whom he lived, filling a nominal post of bailiff to the estates, and launching forth verse of some satiric and sentimental quality; for being inclined to vice, and occasionally, and in a quiet way, practising it, he was of course a sentimentalist and a satirist, entitled to lash the Age and complain of human nature. His earlier poems, published under the pseudonym of Diaper Sandoe, were so pure and bloodless in their love passages, and at the same time so biting in their moral tone, that his reputation was great among the virtuous, who form the larger portion of the English book-buying public. Election-seasons called him to ballad-poetry on behalf of the Tory party.

Dialer possessed undoubted fluency, but did tittle, though Sir Austin was ever expecting much of him.

A languishing, inexperienced woman, whose husband in mental and in moral stature is more than the ordinary height above her, and who, now that her first romantic admiration of his lofty bearing has worn off, and her fretful little refinements of taste and sentiment are not instinctively responded to, is thrown into no wholesome household collision with a fluent man, fluent in prose and rhyme. Lady Feverel, when she first entered on her duties at Raynham, was jealous of her husband's friend. By degrees she tolerated him. In time he touched his guitar in her chamber, and they played Rizzio and Mary together.

"For I am not the first who found
The name of Mary fatal!"

says a subsequent sentimental alliterative love-poem of Diaper's.

Such was the outline of the story. But the baronet could fill it up. He had opened his soul to these two. He had been noble Love to the one, and to the other perfect Friendship. He had bid them be brother and sister whom he loved, and live a Golden Age with him at Raynham. In fact, he had been prodigal of the excellences of his nature, which it is not good to be, and, like Timon, he became bankrupt, and fell upon bitterness.

The faithless lady was of no particular family; an orphan

daughter of an admiral who educated her on his half-pay, and her conduct struck but at the man whose name she bore.

After five years of marriage, and twelve of friendship, Sir Austin was left to his loneliness with nothing to ease his heart of love upon save a little baby boy in a cradle. He forgave the man: he put him aside as poor for his wrath. The woman he could not forgive; she had sinned every way. Simple ingratitude to a benefactor was a pardonable transgression, for he was not one to recount and crush the culprit under the heap of his good deeds. But her he had raised to be his equal, and he judged her as his equal. She had blackened the world's fair aspect for him.

In the presence of that world, so different to him now, he preserved his wonted demeanor, and made his features a flexible mask. Mrs. Doria Forey, his widowed sister, said that Austin might have retired from his Parliamentary career for a time, and given up gaieties and that kind of thing; her opinion, founded on observation of him in public and private, was, that the light thing who had taken flight was but a feather on her brother's Feverel-heart, and his ordinary course of life would be resumed. There are times when common men cannot bear the weight of just so much. Hippias Feverel, one of his brothers, thought him immensely improved by his misfortune, if the loss of such a person could be so designated; and seeing that Hippias received in consequence free quarters at Raynham, and possession of the wing of the Abbey she had inhabited, it is profitable to know his thoughts. If the baronet had given two or three blazing dinners

in the great hall he would have deceived people generally, as he did his relatives and intimates. He was too sick for that: fit only for passive acting.

The nursemaid waking in the night beheld a solitary figure darkening a lamp above her little sleeping charge, and became so used to the sight as never to wake with a start. One night she was strangely aroused by a sound of sobbing. The baronet stood beside the cot in his long black cloak and travelling cap. His fingers shaded a lamp, and reddened against the fitful darkness that ever and anon went leaping up the wall. She could hardly believe her senses to see the austere gentleman, dead silent, dropping tear upon tear before her eyes. She lay stone-still in a trance of terror and mournfulness, mechanically counting the tears as they fell, one by one. The hidden face, the fall and flash of those heavy drops in the light of the lamp he held, the upright, awful figure, agitated at regular intervals like a piece of clockwork by the low murderous catch of his breath: it was so piteous to her poor human nature that her heart began wildly palpitating. Involuntarily the poor girl cried out to him, "Oh, sir!" and fell a-weeping. Sir Austin turned the lamp on her pillow, and harshly bade her go to sleep, striding from the room forthwith. He dismissed her with a purse the next day.

Once, when he was seven years old, the little fellow woke up at night to see a lady bending over him. He talked of this the next day, but it was treated as a dream; until in the course of the day his uncle Algernon was driven home from Lobourne cricket-

ground with a broken leg. Then it was recollected that there was a family ghost; and, though no member of the family believed in the ghost, none would have given up a circumstance that testified to its existence; for to possess a ghost is a distinction above titles.

Algernon Feverel lost his leg, and ceased to be a gentleman in the Guards. Of the other uncles of young Richard, Cuthbert, the sailor, perished in a spirited boat expedition against a slaving negro chief up the Niger. Some of the gallant lieutenant's trophies of war decorated the little boy's play-shed at Raynham, and he bequeathed his sword to Richard, whose hero he was. The diplomatist and beau, Vivian, ended his flutterings from flower to flower by making an improper marriage, as is the fate of many a beau, and was struck out of the list of visitors. Algernon generally occupied the baronet's disused town-house, a wretched being, dividing his time between horse and card exercise: possessed, it was said, of the absurd notion that a man who has lost his balance by losing his leg may regain it by sticking to the bottle. At least, whenever he and his brother Hippias got together, they never failed to try whether one leg, or two, stood the bottle best. Much of a puritan as Sir Austin was in his habits, he was too good a host, and too thorough a gentleman, to impose them upon his guests. The brothers, and other relatives, might do as they would while they did not disgrace the name, and then it was final: they must depart to behold his countenance no more.

Algernon Feverel was a simple man, who felt, subsequent to his misfortune, as he had perhaps dimly fancied it before,

that his career lay in his legs, and was now irrevocably cut short. He taught the boy boxing, and shooting, and the arts of fence, and superintended the direction of his animal vigour with a melancholy vivacity. The remaining energies of Algernon's mind were devoted to animadversions on swift bowling. He preached it over the county, struggling through laborious literary compositions, addressed to sporting newspapers, on the Decline of Cricket. It was Algernon who witnessed and chronicled young Richard's first fight, which was with young Tom Blaize of Belthorpe Farm, three years the boy's senior.

Hippias Feverel was once thought to be the genius of the family. It was his ill luck to have strong appetites and a weak stomach; and, as one is not altogether fit for the battle of life who is engaged in a perpetual contention with his dinner, Hippias forsook his prospects at the Bar, and, in the embraces of dyspepsia, compiled his ponderous work on the Fairy Mythology of Europe. He had little to do with the Hope of Raynham beyond what he endured from his juvenile tricks.

A venerable lady, known as Great-Aunt Grantley, who had money to bequeath to the heir, occupied with Hippias the background of the house and shared her candles with him. These two were seldom seen till the dinner hour, for which they were all day preparing, and probably all night remembering, for the Eighteenth Century was an admirable trencherman, and cast age aside while there was a dish on the table.

Mrs. Doris Foray was the eldest of the three sisters of the

baronet, a florid affable woman, with fine teeth, exceedingly fine light wavy hair, a Norman nose, and a reputation for understanding men; and that, with these practical creatures, always means the art of managing them. She had married an expectant younger son of a good family, who deceased before the fulfilment of his prospects; and, casting about in her mind the future chances of her little daughter and sole child, Clare, she marked down a probability. The far sight, the deep determination, the resolute perseverance of her sex, where a daughter is to be provided for and a man to be overthrown, instigated her to invite herself to Raynham, where, with that daughter, she fixed herself.

The other two Feveler ladies were the wife of Colonel Wentworth and the widow of Mr. Justice Harley: and the only thing remarkable about them was that they were mothers of sons of some distinction.

Austin Wentworth's story was of that wretched character which to be comprehended, that justice should be dealt him, must be told out and openly; which no one dares now do.

For a fault in early youth, redeemed by him nobly, according to his light, he was condemned to undergo the world's harsh judgment: not for the fault—for its atonement.

"—Married his mother's housemaid," whispered Mrs. Doria, with a ghastly look, and a shudder at young men of republican sentiments, which he was reputed to entertain. "'The compensation for Injustice,' says the 'Pilgrim's Scrip,' is, that in

that dark Ordeal we gather the worthiest around us."

And the baronet's fair friend, Lady Blandish, and some few true men and women, held Austin Wentworth high.

He did not live with his wife; and Sir Austin, whose mind was bent on the future of our species, reproached him with being barren to posterity, while knaves were propagating.

The principal characteristic of the second nephew, Adrian Harley, was his sagacity. He was essentially the wise youth, both in counsel and in action.

"In action," the "Pilgrim's Scrip" observes, "Wisdom goes by majorities."

Adrian had an instinct for the majority, and, as the world invariably found him enlisted in its ranks, his appellation of wise youth was acquiesced in without irony.

The wise youth, then, had the world with him, but no friends. Nor did he wish for those troublesome appendages of success. He caused himself to be required by people who could serve him; feared by such as could injure. Not that he went out of the way to secure his end, or risked the expense of a plot. He did the work as easily as he ate his daily bread. Adrian was an epicurean; one whom Epicurus would have scourged out of his garden, certainly: an epicurean of our modern notions. To satisfy his appetites without rashly staking his character, was the wise youth's problem for life. He had no intimates except Gibbon and Horace, and the society of these fine aristocrats of literature helped him to accept humanity as it had been, and

was; a supreme ironic procession, with laughter of Gods in the background. Why not laughter of mortals also? Adrian had his laugh in his comfortable corner. He possessed peculiar attributes of a heathen God. He was a disposer of men: he was polished, luxurious, and happy—at their cost. He lived in eminent self-content, as one lying on soft cloud, lapt in sunshine. Nor Jove, nor Apollo, cast eye upon the maids of earth with cooler fire of selection, or pursued them in the covert with more sacred impunity. And he enjoyed his reputation for virtue as something additional. Stolen fruits are said to be sweet; undeserved rewards are exquisite.

The best of it was, that Adrian made no pretences. He did not solicit the favourable judgment of the world. Nature and he attempted no other concealment than the ordinary mask men wear. And yet the world would proclaim him moral, as well as wise, and the pleasing converse every way of his disgraced cousin Austin.

In a word, Adrian Harley had mastered his philosophy at the early age of one-and-twenty. Many would be glad to say the same at that age twice-told: they carry in their breasts a burden with which Adrian's was not loaded. Mrs. Doria was nearly right about his heart. A singular mishap (at his birth, possibly, or before it) had unseated that organ, and shaken it down to his stomach, where it was a much lighter, nay, an inspiring weight, and encouraged him merrily onward. Throned there it looked on little that did not arrive to gratify it. Already that region was a

trifle prominent in the person of the wise youth, and carried, as it were, the flag of his philosophical tenets in front of him. He was charming after dinner, with men or with women: delightfully sarcastic: perhaps a little too unscrupulous in his moral tone, but that his moral reputation belied him, and it must be set down to generosity of disposition.

Such was Adrian Harley, another of Sir Austin's intellectual favourites, chosen from mankind to superintend the education of his son at Raynham. Adrian had been destined for the Church. He did not enter into Orders. He and the baronet had a conference together one day, and from that time Adrian became a fixture in the Abbey. His father died in his promising son's college term, bequeathing him nothing but his legal complexion, and Adrian became stipendiary officer in his uncle's household.

A playfellow of Richard's occasionally, and the only comrade of his age that he ever saw, was Master Ripton Thompson, the son of Sir Austin's solicitor, a boy without a character.

A comrade of some description was necessary, for Richard was neither to go to school nor to college. Sir Austin considered that the schools were corrupt, and maintained that young lads might by parental vigilance be kept pretty secure from the Serpent until Eve sided with him: a period that might be deferred, he said. He had a system of education for his son. How it worked we shall see.

CHAPTER II

October, shone royally on Richard's fourteenth birthday. The brown beechwoods and golden birches glowed to a brilliant sun. Banks of moveless cloud hung about the horizon, mounded to the west, where slept the wind. Promise of a great day for Raynham, as it proved to be, though not in the manner marked out.

Already archery-booths and cricketing-tents were rising on the lower grounds towards the river, whither the lads of Bursley and Lobourne, in boats and in carts, shouting for a day of ale and honour, jogged merrily to match themselves anew, and pluck at the lining laurel from each other's brows, line manly Britons. The whole park was beginning to be astir and resound with holiday cries. Sir Austin Feverel, a thorough good Tory, was no game-preserve, and could be popular whenever he chose, which Sir Males Papworth, on the other side of the river, a fast-handed Whig and terror to poachers, never could be. Half the village of Lobourne was seen trooping through the avenues of the park. Fiddlers and gipsies clamoured at the gates for admission: white smocks, and slate, surmounted by hats of serious brim, and now and then a scarlet cloak, smacking of the old country, dotted the grassy sweeps to the levels.

And all the time the star of these festivities was receding further and further, and eclipsing himself with his reluctant serf Ripton, who kept asking what they were to do and where they

were going, and how late it was in the day, and suggesting that the lads of Lobourne would be calling out for them, and Sir Austin requiring their presence, without getting any attention paid to his misery or remonstrances. For Richard had been requested by his father to submit to medical examination like a boor enlisting for a soldier, and he was in great wrath.

He was flying as though he would have flown from the shameful thought of what had been asked of him. By-and-by he communicated his sentiments to Ripton, who said they were those of a girl: an offensive remark, remembering which, Richard, after they had borrowed a couple of guns at the bailiff's farm, and Ripton had fired badly, called his friend a fool.

Feeling that circumstances were making him look wonderfully like one,

Ripton lifted his head and retorted defiantly, "I'm not!"

This angry contradiction, so very uncalled for, annoyed Richard, who was still smarting at the loss of the birds, owing to Ripton's bad shot, and was really the injured party. He, therefore bestowed the abusive epithet on Ripton anew, and with increase of emphasis.

"You shan't call me so, then, whether I am or not," says Ripton, and sucks his lips.

This was becoming personal. Richard sent up his brows, and stared at his defier an instant. He then informed him that he certainly should call him so, and would not object to call him so twenty times.

"Do it, and see!" returns Ripton, rocking on his feet, and breathing quick.

With a gravity of which only boys and other barbarians are capable, Richard went through the entire number, stressing the epithet to increase the defiance and avoid monotony, as he progressed, while Ripton bobbed his head every time in assent, as it were, to his comrade's accuracy, and as a record for his profound humiliation. The dog they had with them gazed at the extraordinary performance with interrogating wags of the tail.

Twenty times, duly and deliberately, Richard repeated the obnoxious word.

At the twentieth solemn iteration of Ripton's capital shortcoming, Ripton delivered a smart back-hander on Richard's mouth, and squared precipitately; perhaps sorry when the deed was done, for he was a kind-hearted lad, and as Richard simply bowed in acknowledgment of the blow he thought he had gone too far. He did not know the young gentleman he was dealing with. Richard was extremely cool.

"Shall we fight here?" he said.

"Anywhere you like," replied Ripton.

"A little more into the wood, I think. We may be interrupted." And Richard led the way with a courteous reserve that somewhat chilled Ripton's ardour for the contest. On the skirts of the wood, Richard threw off his jacket and waistcoat, and, quite collected, waited for Ripton to do the same. The latter boy was flushed and restless; older and broader, but not so tight-limbed and well-set.

The Gods, sole witnesses of their battle, betted dead against him. Richard had mounted the white cockade of the Feverels, and there was a look in him that asked for tough work to extinguish. His brows, slightly lined upward at the temples, converging to a knot about the well-set straight nose; his full grey eyes, open nostrils, and planted feet, and a gentlemanly air of calm and alertness, formed a spirited picture of a young combatant. As for Ripton, he was all abroad, and fought in school-boy style—that is, he rushed at the foe head foremost, and struck like a windmill. He was a lumpy boy. When he did hit, he made himself felt; but he was at the mercy of science. To see him come dashing in, blinking and puffing and whirling his arms abroad while the felling blow went straight between them, you perceived that he was fighting a fight of desperation, and knew it. For the dreaded alternative glared him in the face that, if he yielded, he must look like what he had been twenty times calumniously called; and he would die rather than yield, and swing his windmill till he dropped. Poor boy! he dropped frequently. The gallant fellow fought for appearances, and down he went. The Gods favour one of two parties. Prince Turnus was a noble youth; but he had not Pallas at his elbow. Ripton was a capital boy; he had no science. He could not prove he was not a fool! When one comes to think of it, Ripton did choose the only possible way, and we should all of us have considerable difficulty in proving the negative by any other. Ripton came on the unerring fist again and again; and if it was true, as he said in short colloquial

gasps, that he required as much beating as an egg to be beaten thoroughly, a fortunate interruption alone saved our friend from resembling that substance. The boys heard summoning voices, and beheld Mr. Morton of Poer Hall and Austin Wentworth stepping towards them.

A truce was sounded, jackets were caught up, guns shouldered, and off they trotted in concert through the depths of the wood, not stopping till that and half-a-dozen fields and a larch plantation were well behind them.

When they halted to take breath, there was a mutual study of faces. Ripton's was much discoloured, and looked fiercer with its natural war-paint than the boy felt. Nevertheless, he squared up dauntlessly on the new ground, and Richard, whose wrath was appeased, could not refrain from asking him whether he had not really had enough.

"Never!" shouts the noble enemy.

"Well, look here," said Richard, appealing to common sense, "I'm tired of knocking you down. I'll say you're not a fool, if you'll give me your hand."

Ripton demurred an instant to consult with honour, who bade him catch at his chance.

He held out his hand. "There!" and the boys grasped hands and were fast friends. Ripton had gained his point, and Richard decidedly had the best of it. So, they were on equal ground. Both, could claim a victory, which was all the better for their friendship.

Ripton washed his face and comforted his nose at a brook, and was now ready to follow his friend wherever he chose to lead. They continued to beat about for birds. The birds on the Raynham estates were found singularly cunning, and repeatedly eluded the aim of these prime shots, so they pushed their expedition into the lands of their neighbors, in search of a stupider race, happily oblivious of the laws and conditions of trespass; unconscious, too, that they were poaching on the demesne of the notorious Farmer Blaize, the free-trade farmer under the shield of the Papworths, no worshipper of the Griffin between two Wheatsheaves; destined to be much allied with Richard's fortunes from beginning to end. Farmer Blaize hated poachers, and, especially young chaps poaching, who did it mostly from impudence. He heard the audacious shots popping right and left, and going forth to have a glimpse at the intruders, and observing their size, swore he would teach my gentlemen a thing, lords or no lords.

Richard had brought down a beautiful cock-pheasant, and was exulting over it, when the farmer's portentous figure burst upon them, cracking an avenging horsewhip. His salute was ironical.

"Havin' good sport, gentlemen, are ye?"

"Just bagged a splendid bird!" radiant Richard informed him.

"Oh!" Farmer Blaize gave an admonitory flick of the whip.

"Just let me clap eye on't, then."

"Say, please," interposed Ripton, who was not blind to doubtful aspects.

Farmer Blaize threw up his chin, and grinned grimly.

"Please to you, sir? Why, my chap, you looks as if ye didn't much mind what come t'yer nose, I reckon. You looks an old poacher, you do. Tall ye what 'tis'!" He changed his banter to business, "That bird's mine! Now you jest hand him over, and sheer off, you dam young scoundrels! I know ye!" And he became exceedingly opprobrious, and uttered contempt of the name of Feverel.

Richard opened his eyes.

If you wants to be horsewhipped, you'll stay where y'are!" continued the farmer. "Giles Blaize never stands nonsense!"

"Then we'll stay," quoth Richard.

"Good! so be't! If you will have't, have't, my men!"

As a preparatory measure, Farmer Blaize seized a wing of the bird, on which both boys flung themselves desperately, and secured it minus the pinion.

"That's your game," cried the farmer. "Here's a taste of horsewhip for ye. I never stands nonsense!" and sweetch went the mighty whip, well swayed. The boys tried to close with him. He kept his distance and lashed without mercy. Black blood was made by Farmer Blaize that day! The boys wriggled, in spite of themselves. It was like a relentless serpent coiling, and biting, and stinging their young veins to madness. Probably they felt the disgrace of the contortions they were made to go through more than the pain, but the pain was fierce, for the farmer laid about from a practised arm, and did not consider that he had done

enough till he was well breathed and his ruddy jowl inflamed. He paused, to receive the remainder of the cock-pheasant in his face.

"Take your beastly bird," cried Richard.

"Money, my lads, and interest," roared the farmer, lashing out again.

Shameful as it was to retreat, there was but that course open to them.

They decided to surrender the field.

"Look! you big brute," Richard shook his gun, hoarse with passion, "I'd have shot you, if I'd been loaded. Mind if I come across you when I'm loaded, you coward, I'll fire!" The un-English nature of this threat exasperated Farmer Blaize, and he pressed the pursuit in time to bestow a few farewell stripes as they were escaping tight-breeched into neutral territory. At the hedge they parleyed a minute, the farmer to inquire if they had had a mortal good tanning and were satisfied, for when they wanted a further instalment of the same they were to come for it to Belthorpe Farm, and there it was in pickle: the boys meantime exploding in menaces and threats of vengeance, on which the farmer contemptuously turned his back. Ripton had already stocked an armful of flints for the enjoyment of a little skirmishing. Richard, however, knocked them all out, saying, "No! Gentlemen don't fling stones; leave that to the blackguards."

"Just one shy at him!" pleaded Ripton, with his eye on Farmer Blaize's broad mark, and his whole mind drunken with a sudden

revelation of the advantages of light troops in opposition to heavies.

"No," said Richard, imperatively, "no stones," and marched briskly away. Ripton followed with a sigh. His leader's magnanimity was wholly beyond him. A good spanking mark at the farmer would have relieved Master Ripton; it would have done nothing to console Richard Feverel for the ignominy he had been compelled to submit to. Ripton was familiar with the rod, a monster much despoiled of his terrors by intimacy. Birch-fever was past with this boy. The horrible sense of shame, self-loathing, universal hatred, impotent vengeance, as if the spirit were steeped in abysmal blackness, which comes upon a courageous and sensitive youth condemned for the first time to taste this piece of fleshly bitterness, and suffer what he feels is a defilement, Ripton had weathered and forgotten. He was seasoned wood, and took the world pretty wisely; not reckless of castigation, as some boys become, nor oversensitive as to dishonour, as his friend and comrade beside him was.

Richard's blood was poisoned. He had the fever on him severely. He would not allow stone-throwing, because it was a habit of his to discountenance it. Mere gentlemanly considerations had scarce shielded Farmer Blaize, and certain very ungentlemanly schemes were coming to ghastly heads in the tumult of his brain; rejected solely from their glaring impracticability even to his young intelligence. A sweeping and consummate vengeance for the indignity alone should satisfy

him. Something tremendous must be done; and done without delay. At one moment he thought of killing all the farmer's cattle; next of killing him; challenging him to single combat with the arms, and according to the fashion of gentlemen. But the farmer was a coward; he would refuse. Then he, Richard Feverel, would stand by the farmer's bedside, and rouse him; rouse him to fight with powder and ball in his own chamber, in the cowardly midnight, where he might tremble, but dare not refuse.

"Lord!" cried simple Ripton, while these hopeful plots were raging in his comrade's brain, now sparkling for immediate execution, and anon lapsing disdainfully dark in their chances of fulfilment, "how I wish you'd have let me notch him, Ricky! I'm a safe shot. I never miss. I should feel quite jolly if I'd spanked him once. We should have had the beat of him at that game. I say!" and a sharp thought drew Ripton's ideas nearer home, "I wonder whether my nose is as bad as he says! Where can I see myself?"

To these exclamations Richard was deaf, and he trudged steadily forward, facing but one object.

After tearing through innumerable hedges, leaping fences, jumping dykes, penetrating brambly copses, and getting dirty, ragged, and tired, Ripton awoke from his dream of Farmer Blaize and a blue nose to the vivid consciousness of hunger; and this grew with the rapidity of light upon him, till in the course of another minute he was enduring the extremes of famine, and ventured to question his leader whither he was being conducted. Raynham was out of sight. They were a long way down the

valley, miles from Lobourne, in a country of sour pools, yellow brooks, rank pasturage, desolate heath. Solitary cows were seen; the smoke of a mud cottage; a cart piled with peat; a donkey grazing at leisure, oblivious of an unkind world; geese by a horse-pond, gabbling as in the first loneliness of creation; uncooked things that a famishing boy cannot possibly care for, and must despise. Ripton was in despair.

"Where are you going to?" he inquired with a voice of the last time of asking, and halted resolutely.

Richard now broke his silence to reply, "Anywhere."

"Anywhere!" Ripton took up the moody word. "But ain't you awfully hungry?" he gasped vehemently, in a way that showed the total emptiness of his stomach.

"No," was Richard's brief response.

"Not hungry!" Ripton's amazement lent him increased vehemence. "Why, you haven't had anything to eat since breakfast! Not hungry? I declare I'm starving. I feel such a gnawing I could eat dry bread and cheese!"

Richard sneered: not for reasons that would have actuated a similar demonstration of the philosopher.

"Come," cried Ripton, "at all events, tell us where you're going to stop."

Richard faced about to make a querulous retort. The injured and hapless visage that met his eye disarmed him. The lad's nose, though not exactly of the dreaded hue, was really becoming discoloured. To upbraid him would be cruel. Richard lifted his

head, surveyed the position, and exclaiming "Here!" dropped down on a withered bank, leaving Ripton to contemplate him as a puzzle whose every new move was a worse perplexity.

CHAPTER III

Among boys there are laws of honour and chivalrous codes, not written or formally taught, but intuitively understood by all, and invariably acted upon by the loyal and the true. The race is not nearly civilized, we must remember. Thus, not to follow your leader whithersoever he may think proper to lead; to back out of an expedition because the end of it frowns dubious, and the present fruit of it is discomfort; to quit a comrade on the road, and return home without him: these are tricks which no boy of spirit would be guilty of, let him come to any description of mortal grief in consequence. Better so than have his own conscience denouncing him sneak. Some boys who behave boldly enough are not troubled by this conscience, and the eyes and the lips of their fellows have to supply the deficiency. They do it with just as haunting, and even more horrible pertinacity, than the inner voice, and the result, if the probation be not very severe and searching, is the same. The leader can rely on the faithfulness of his host: the comrade is sworn to serve. Master Ripton Thompson was naturally loyal. The idea of turning off and forsaking his friend never once crossed his mind, though his condition was desperate, and his friend's behaviour that of a Bedlamite. He announced several times impatiently that they would be too late for dinner. His friend did not budge. Dinner seemed nothing to him. There he lay plucking grass, and patting the old dog's nose,

as if incapable of conceiving what a thing hunger was. Ripton took half-a-dozen turns up and down, and at last flung himself down beside the taciturn boy, accepting his fate.

Now, the chance that works for certain purposes sent a smart shower from the sinking sun, and the wet sent two strangers for shelter in the lane behind the hedge where the boys reclined. One was a travelling tinker, who lit a pipe and spread a tawny umbrella. The other was a burly young countryman, pipeless and tentless. They saluted with a nod, and began recounting for each other's benefit the daylong-doings of the weather, as it had affected their individual experience and followed their prophecies. Both had anticipated and foretold a bit of rain before night, and therefore both welcomed the wet with satisfaction. A monotonous betweenwhiles kind of talk they kept droning, in harmony with the still hum of the air. From the weather theme they fell upon the blessings of tobacco; how it was the poor man's friend, his company, his consolation, his comfort, his refuge at night, his first thought in the morning.

"Better than a wife!" chuckled the tinker. "No curtain-lecturin' with a pipe. Your pipe an't a shrew."

"That be it!" the other chimed in. "Your pipe doan't mak' ye out wi' all the cash Saturday evenin'."

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