

GEORGE MEREDITH

BEAUCHAMP'S
CAREER.
VOLUME 1

George Meredith
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Beauchamp's Career – Volume 1:

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George Meredith Beauchamp's Career – Volume 1

CHAPTER I THE CHAMPION OF HIS COUNTRY

When young Nevil Beauchamp was throwing off his midshipman's jacket for a holiday in the garb of peace, we had across Channel a host of dreadful military officers flashing swords at us for some critical observations of ours upon their sovereign, threatening Afric's fires and savagery. The case occurred in old days now and again, sometimes, upon imagined provocation, more furiously than at others. We were unarmed, and the spectacle was distressing. We had done nothing except to speak our minds according to the habit of the free, and such an explosion appeared as irrational and excessive as that of a powder-magazine in reply to nothing more than the light of a spark. It was known that a valorous General of the Algerian wars proposed to make a clean march to the capital of the British Empire at the head of ten thousand men; which seems a small

quantity to think much about, but they wore wide red breeches blown out by Fame, big as her cheeks, and a ten thousand of that sort would never think of retreating. Their spectral advance on quaking London through Kentish hopgardens, Sussex corn-fields, or by the pleasant hills of Surrey, after a gymnastic leap over the riband of salt water, haunted many pillows. And now those horrid shouts of the legions of Caesar, crying to the inheritor of an invading name to lead them against us, as the origin of his title had led the army of Gaul of old gloriously, scared sweet sleep. We saw them in imagination lining the opposite shore; eagle and standard-bearers, and gallifers, brandishing their fowls and their banners in a manner to frighten the decorum of the universe. Where were our men?

The returns of the census of our population were oppressively satisfactory, and so was the condition of our youth. We could row and ride and fish and shoot, and breed largely: we were athletes with a fine history and a full purse: we had first-rate sporting guns, unrivalled park-hacks and hunters, promising babies to carry on the renown of England to the next generation, and a wonderful Press, and a Constitution the highest reach of practical human sagacity. But where were our armed men? where our great artillery? where our proved captains, to resist a sudden sharp trial of the national mettle? Where was the first line of England's defence, her navy? These were questions, and Ministers were called upon to answer them. The Press answered them boldly, with the appalling statement that we had no navy

and no army. At the most we could muster a few old ships, a couple of experimental vessels of war, and twenty-five thousand soldiers indifferently weaponed.

We were in fact as naked to the Imperial foe as the merely painted Britons.

This being apprehended, by the aid of our own shortness of figures and the agitated images of the red-breeched only waiting the signal to jump and be at us, there ensued a curious exhibition that would be termed, in simple language, writing to the newspapers, for it took the outward form of letters: in reality, it was the deliberate saddling of our ancient nightmare of Invasion, putting the postillion on her, and trotting her along the high-road with a winding horn to rouse old Panic. Panic we will, for the sake of convenience, assume to be of the feminine gender, and a spinster, though properly she should be classed with the large mixed race of mental and moral neuters which are the bulk of comfortable nations. She turned in her bed at first like the sluggard of the venerable hymnist: but once fairly awakened, she directed a stare toward the terrific foreign contortionists, and became in an instant all stormy nightcap and fingers starving for the bell-rope. Forthwith she burst into a series of shrieks, howls, and high piercing notes that caused even the parliamentary Opposition, in the heat of an assault on a parsimonious Government, to abandon its temporary advantage and be still awhile. Yet she likewise performed her part with a certain deliberation and method, as if aware that it was a part

she had to play in the composition of a singular people. She did a little mischief by dropping on the stock- markets; in other respects she was harmless, and, inasmuch as she established a subject for conversation, useful.

Then, lest she should have been taken too seriously, the Press, which had kindled, proceeded to extinguish her with the formidable engines called leading articles, which fling fire or water, as the occasion may require. It turned out that we had ships ready for launching, and certain regiments coming home from India; hedges we had, and a spirited body of yeomanry; and we had pluck and patriotism, the father and mother of volunteers innumerable. Things were not so bad.

Panic, however, sent up a plaintive whine. What country had anything like our treasures to defend? countless riches, beautiful women, an inviolate soil! True, and it must be done. Ministers were authoritatively summoned to set to work immediately. They replied that they had been at work all the time, and were at work now. They could assure the country, that though they flourished no trumpets, they positively guaranteed the safety of our virgins and coffers.

Then the people, rather ashamed, abused the Press for unreasonably disturbing them. The Press attacked old Panic and stripped her naked. Panic, with a desolate scream, arraigned the parliamentary Opposition for having inflated her to serve base party purposes. The Opposition challenged the allegations of Government, pointed to the trimness of army and navy

during its term of office, and proclaimed itself watch-dog of the country, which is at all events an office of a kind. Hereupon the ambassador of yonder ireful soldiery let fall a word, saying, by the faith of his Master, there was no necessity for watch-dogs to bark; an ardent and a reverent army had but fancied its beloved chosen Chief insulted; the Chief and chosen held them in; he, despite obloquy, discerned our merits and esteemed us.

So, then, Panic, or what remained of her, was put to bed again. The Opposition retired into its kennel growling. The People coughed like a man of two minds, doubting whether he has been divinely inspired or has cut a ridiculous figure. The Press interpreted the cough as a warning to Government; and Government launched a big ship with hurrahs, and ordered the recruiting-sergeant to be seen conspicuously.

And thus we obtained a moderate reinforcement of our arms.

It was not arrived at by connivance all round, though there was a look of it. Certainly it did not come of accident, though there was a look of that as well. Nor do we explain much of the secret by attributing it to the working of a complex machinery. The housewife's remedy of a good shaking for the invalid who will not arise and dance away his gout, partly illustrates the action of the Press upon the country: and perhaps the country shaken may suffer a comparison with the family chariot of the last century, built in a previous one, commodious, furnished agreeably, being all that the inside occupants could require of a conveyance, until the report of horsemen crossing the heath at a gallop sets it

dishonourably creaking and complaining in rapid motion, and the squire curses his miserly purse that would not hire a guard, and his dame says, I told you so!—Foolhardy man, to suppose, because we have constables in the streets of big cities, we have dismissed the highwayman to limbo. And here he is, and he will cost you fifty times the sum you would have laid out to keep him at a mile's respectful distance! But see, the wretch is bowing: he smiles at our carriage, and tells the coachman that he remembers he has been our guest, and really thinks we need not go so fast. He leaves word for you, sir, on your peril to denounce him on another occasion from the magisterial Bench, for that albeit he is a gentleman of the road, he has a mission to right society, and succeeds legitimately to that bold Good Robin Hood who fed the poor.—Fresh from this polite encounter, the squire vows money for his personal protection: and he determines to speak his opinion of Sherwood's latest captain as loudly as ever. That he will, I do not say. It might involve a large sum per annum.

Similes are very well in their way. None can be sufficient in this case without levelling a finger at the taxpayer—nay, directly mentioning him. He is the key of our ingenuity. He pays his dues; he will not pay the additional penny or two wanted of him, that we may be a step or two ahead of the day we live in, unless he is frightened. But scarcely anything less than the wild alarm of a tocsin will frighten him. Consequently the tocsin has to be sounded; and the effect is woeful past measure: his hugging of his army, his kneeling on the shore to his navy, his implorations of

his yeomanry and his hedges, are sad to note. His bursts of pot- valiancy (the male side of the maiden Panic within his bosom) are awful to his friends. Particular care must be taken after he has begun to cool and calculate his chances of security, that he do not gather to him a curtain of volunteers and go to sleep again behind them; for they cost little in proportion to the much they pretend to be to him. Patriotic taxpayers doubtless exist: prophetic ones, provident ones, do not. At least we show that we are wanting in them. The taxpayer of a free land taxes himself, and his disinclination for the bitter task, save under circumstances of screaming urgency—as when the night-gear and bed- linen of old convulsed Panic are like the churned Channel sea in the track of two hundred hostile steamboats, let me say—is of the kind the gentle schoolboy feels when death or an expedition has relieved him of his tyrant, and he is entreated notwithstanding to go to his books.

Will you not own that the working of the system for scaring him and bleeding is very ingenious? But whether the ingenuity comes of native sagacity, as it is averred by some, or whether it shows an instinct labouring to supply the deficiencies of stupidity, according to others, I cannot express an opinion. I give you the position of the country undisturbed by any moralizings of mine. The youth I introduce to you will rarely let us escape from it; for the reason that he was born with so extreme and passionate a love for his country, that he thought all things else of mean importance in comparison: and our union is one in which,

following the counsel of a sage and seer, I must try to paint for you what is, not that which I imagine. This day, this hour, this life, and even politics, the centre and throbbing heart of it (enough, when unburlesqued, to blow the down off the gossamer-stump of fiction at a single breath, I have heard tell), must be treated of men, and the ideas of men, which are—it is policy to be emphatic upon truisms—are actually the motives of men in a greater degree than their appetites: these are my theme; and may it be my fortune to keep them at bloodheat, and myself calm as a statue of Memnon in prostrate Egypt! He sits there waiting for the sunlight; I here, and readier to be musical than you think. I can at any rate be impartial; and do but fix your eyes on the sunlight striking him and swallowing the day in rounding him, and you have an image of the passive receptivity of shine and shade I hold it good to aim at, if at the same time I may keep my characters at blood-heat. I shoot my arrows at a mark that is pretty certain to return them to me. And as to perfect success, I should be like the panic-stricken shopkeepers in my alarm at it; for I should believe that genii of the air fly above our tree-tops between us and the incognizable spheres, catching those ambitious shafts they deem it a promise of fun to play pranks with.

Young Mr. Beauchamp at that period of the panic had not the slightest feeling for the taxpayer. He was therefore unable to penetrate the mystery of our roundabout way of enlivening him. He pored over the journals in perplexity, and talked of his

indignation nightly to his pretty partners at balls, who knew not they were lesser Andromedas of his dear Andromeda country, but danced and chatted and were gay, and said they were sure he would defend them. The men he addressed were civil. They listened to him, sometimes with smiles and sometimes with laughter, but approvingly, liking the lad's quick spirit. They were accustomed to the machinery employed to give our land a shudder and to soothe it, and generally remarked that it meant nothing. His uncle Everard, and his uncle's friend Stukely Culbrett, expounded the nature of Frenchmen to him, saying that they were uneasy when not periodically thrashed; it would be cruel to deny them their crow beforehand; and so the pair of gentlemen pooh-poohed the affair; agreeing with him, however, that we had no great reason to be proud of our appearance, and the grounds they assigned for this were the activity and the prevalence of the ignoble doctrines of Manchester—a power whose very existence was unknown to Mr. Beauchamp. He would by no means allow the burden of our national disgrace to be cast on one part of the nation. We were insulted, and all in a poultry-flutter, yet no one seemed to feel it but himself! Outside the Press and Parliament, which must necessarily be the face we show to the foreigner, absolute indifference reigned. Navy men and red-coats were willing to join him or anybody in sneers at a clipping and paring miserly Government, but they were insensible to the insult, the panic, the startled-poultry show, the shame of our exhibition of ourselves in Europe. It looked as

if the blustering French Guard were to have it all their own way. And what would they, what could they but, think of us! He sat down to write them a challenge.

He is not the only Englishman who has been impelled by a youthful chivalry to do that. He is perhaps the youngest who ever did it, and consequently there were various difficulties to be overcome. As regards his qualifications for addressing Frenchmen, a year of his prae-neptunal time had been spent in their capital city for the purpose of acquiring French of Paris, its latest refinements of pronunciation and polish, and the art of conversing. He had read the French tragic poets and Moliere; he could even relish the Gallic-classic—'Qu'il mourut!' and he spoke French passably, being quite beyond the Bullish treatment of the tongue. Writing a letter in French was a different undertaking. The one he projected bore no resemblance to an ordinary letter. The briefer the better, of course; but a tone of dignity was imperative, and the tone must be individual, distinctive, Nevil Beauchamp's, though not in his native language. First he tried his letter in French, and lost sight of himself completely. 'Messieurs de la Garde Francaise,' was a good beginning; the remainder gave him a false air of a masquerader, most uncomfortable to see; it was Nevil Beauchamp in moustache and imperial, and bagbreeches badly fitting. He tried English, which was really himself, and all that heart could desire, supposing he addressed a body of midshipmen just a little loftily. But the English, when translated, was bald and

blunt to the verge of offensiveness.

'GENTLEMEN OF THE FRENCH GUARD,

'I take up the glove you have tossed us. I am an Englishman.

That will do for a reason.'

This might possibly pass with the gentlemen of the English Guard. But read:

'MESSIEURS DE LA GARDE FRANCAISE,

'J'accepte votre gant. Je suis Anglais. La raison est suffisante.'

And imagine French Guardsmen reading it!

Mr. Beauchamp knew the virtue of punctiliousness in epithets and phrases of courtesy toward a formal people, and as the officers of the French Guard were gentlemen of birth, he would have them to perceive in him their equal at a glance. On the other hand, a bare excess of phrasing distorted him to a likeness of Mascarille playing Marquis. How to be English and think French! The business was as laborious as if he had started on the rough sea of the Channel to get at them in an open boat.

The lady governing his uncle Everard's house, Mrs. Rosamund Culling, entered his room and found him writing with knitted brows. She was young, that is, she was not in her middleage; and they were the dearest of friends; each had given the other proof of it. Nevil looked up and beheld her lifted finger.

'You are composing a love-letter, Nevil!' The accusation sounded like irony.

'No,' said he, puffing; 'I wish I were!'

'What can it be, then?'

He thrust pen and paper a hand's length on the table, and gazed at her.

'My dear Nevil, is it really anything serious?' said she.

'I am writing French, ma'am.'

'Then I may help you. It must be very absorbing, for you did not hear my knock at your door.'

Now, could he trust her? The widow of a British officer killed nobly fighting for his country in India, was a person to be relied on for active and burning sympathy in a matter that touched the country's honour. She was a woman, and a woman of spirit. Men had not pleased him of late. Something might be hoped from a woman.

He stated his occupation, saying that if she would assist him in his French she would oblige him; the letter must be written and must go. This was uttered so positively that she bowed her head, amused by the funny semi-tone of defiance to the person to whom he confided the secret. She had humour, and was ravished by his English boyishness, with the novel blush of the heroic-nonsensical in it.

Mrs. Culling promised him demurely that she would listen, objecting nothing to his plan, only to his French.

'Messieurs de la Garde Francaise!' he commenced.

Her criticism followed swiftly.

'I think you are writing to the Garde Imperiale.'

He admitted his error, and thanked her warmly.

'Messieurs de la Garde Imperiale!'

'Does not that,' she said, 'include the non-commissioned officers, the privates, and the cooks, of all the regiments?'

He could scarcely think that, but thought it provoking the French had no distinctive working title corresponding to gentlemen, and suggested 'Messieurs les Officiers': which might, Mrs. Culling assured him, comprise the barbers. He frowned, and she prescribed his writing, 'Messieurs les Colonels de la Garde Imperiale.' This he set down. The point was that a stand must be made against the flood of sarcasms and bullyings to which the country was exposed in increasing degrees, under a belief that we would fight neither in the mass nor individually. Possibly, if it became known that the colonels refused to meet a midshipman, the gentlemen of our Household troops would advance a step.

Mrs. Calling's adroit efforts to weary him out of his project were unsuccessful. He was too much on fire to know the taste of absurdity.

Nevil repeated what he had written in French, and next the English of what he intended to say.

The lady conscientiously did her utmost to reconcile the two languages. She softened his downrightness, passed with approval his compliments to France and the ancient high reputation of her army, and, seeing that a loophole was left for them to apologize, asked how many French colonels he wanted to fight.

'I do not WANT, ma'am,' said Nevil.

He had simply taken up the glove they had again flung at our feet: and he had done it to stop the incessant revilings, little short of positive contempt, which we in our indolence exposed ourselves to from the foreigner, particularly from Frenchmen, whom he liked; and precisely because he liked them he insisted on forcing them to respect us. Let his challenge be accepted, and he would find backers. He knew the stuff of Englishmen: they only required an example.

'French officers are skilful swordsmen,' said Mrs. Culling. 'My husband has told me they will spend hours of the day thrusting and parrying. They are used to duelling.'

'We,' Nevil answered, 'don't get apprenticed to the shambles to learn our duty on the field. Duelling is, I know, sickening folly. We go too far in pretending to despise every insult pitched at us. A man may do for his country what he wouldn't do for himself.'

Mrs. Culling gravely said she hoped that bloodshed would be avoided, and

Mr. Beauchamp nodded.

She left him hard at work.

He was a popular boy, a favourite of women, and therefore full of engagements to Balls and dinners. And he was a modest boy, though his uncle encouraged him to deliver his opinions freely and argue with men. The little drummer attached to wheeling columns thinks not more of himself because his short legs perform the same strides as the grenadiers'; he is happy to be able to keep the step; and so was Nevil; and if ever he contradicted a

senior, it was in the interests of the country. Veneration of heroes, living and dead, kept down his conceit. He worshipped devotedly. From an early age he exacted of his flattering ladies that they must love his hero. Not to love his hero was to be strangely in error, to be in need of conversion, and he proselytized with the ardour of the Moslem. His uncle Everard was proud of his good looks, fire, and nonsense, during the boy's extreme youth. He traced him by cousinships back to the great Earl Beauchamp of Froissart, and would have it so; and he would have spoilt him had not the young fellow's mind been possessed by his reverence for men of deeds. How could he think of himself, who had done nothing, accomplished nothing, so long as he brooded on the images of signal Englishmen whose names were historic for daring, and the strong arm, and artfulness, all given to the service of the country?—men of a magnanimity overcast with simplicity, which Nevil held to be pure insular English; our type of splendid manhood, not discoverable elsewhere. A method of enraging him was to distinguish one or other of them as Irish, Scottish, or Cambrian. He considered it a dismemberment of the country. And notwithstanding the pleasure he had in uniting in his person the strong red blood of the chivalrous Lord Beauchamp with the hard and tenacious Romfrey blood, he hated the title of Norman. We are English—British, he said. A family resting its pride on mere ancestry provoked his contempt, if it did not show him one of his men. He had also a disposition to esteem lightly the family which, having produced a man, settled

down after that effort for generations to enjoy the country's pay. Boys are unjust; but Nevil thought of the country mainly, arguing that we should not accept the country's money for what we do not ourselves perform. These traits of his were regarded as characteristics hopeful rather than the reverse; none of his friends and relatives foresaw danger in them. He was a capital boy for his elders to trot out and banter.

Mrs. Rosamund Culling usually went to his room to see him and doat on him before he started on his rounds of an evening. She suspected that his necessary attention to his toilet would barely have allowed him time to finish his copy of the letter. Certain phrases had bothered him. The thrice recurrence of 'ma patrie' jarred on his ear. 'Sentiments' afflicted his acute sense of the declamatory twice. 'C'est avec les sentiments du plus profond regret': and again, 'Je suis bien scar que vous comprendrez mes sentiments, et m'accorderez l'honneur que je reclame au nom de ma patrie outrage.' The word 'patrie' was broadcast over the letter, and 'honneur' appeared four times, and a more delicate word to harp on than the others!

'Not to Frenchmen,' said his friend Rosamund. 'I would put "Je suis convaincu": it is not so familiar.'

'But I have written out the fair copy, ma'am, and that alteration seems a trifle.'

'I would copy it again and again, Nevil, to get it right.'

'No: I'd rather see it off than have it right,' said Nevil, and he folded the letter.

How the deuce to address it, and what direction to write on it, were further difficulties. He had half a mind to remain at home to conquer them by excogitation.

Rosamund urged him not to break his engagement to dine at the Halketts', where perhaps from his friend Colonel Halkett, who would never imagine the reason for the inquiry, he might learn how a letter to a crack French regiment should be addressed and directed.

This proved persuasive, and as the hour was late Nevil had to act on her advice in a hurry.

His uncle Everard enjoyed a perusal of the manuscript in his absence.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE, NEPHEW, AND ANOTHER

The Honourable Everard Romfrey came of a race of fighting earls, toughest of men, whose high, stout, Western castle had weathered our cyclone periods of history without changing hands more than once, and then but for a short year or two, as if to teach the original possessors the wisdom of inclining to the stronger side. They had a queen's chamber in it, and a king's; and they stood well up against the charge of having dealt darkly with the king. He died among them—how has not been told. We will not discuss the conjectures here. A savour of North Sea foam and ballad pirates hangs about the early chronicles of the family. Indications of an ancestry that had lived between the wave and the cloud were discernible in their notions of right and wrong. But a settlement on solid earth has its influences. They were chivalrous knights bannerets, and leaders in the tented field, paying and taking fair ransom for captures; and they were good landlords, good masters blithely followed to the wars. Sing an old battle of Normandy, Picardy, Gascony, and you celebrate deeds of theirs. At home they were vexatious neighbours to a town of burghers claiming privileges: nor was it unreasonable that the Earl should flout the pretensions of the town to read things for themselves, documents, titleships, rights, and the rest. As well

might the flat plain boast of seeing as far as the pillar. Earl and town fought the fight of Barons and Commons in epitome. The Earl gave way; the Barons gave way. Mighty men may thrash numbers for a time; in the end the numbers will be thrashed into the art of beating their teachers. It is bad policy to fight the odds inch by inch. Those primitive school masters of the million liked it, and took their pleasure in that way. The Romfreys did not breed warriors for a parade at Court; wars, though frequent, were not constant, and they wanted occupation: they may even have felt that they were bound in no common degree to the pursuit of an answer to what may be called the parent question of humanity: Am I thy master, or thou mine? They put it to lords of other castles, to town corporations, and sometimes brother to brother: and notwithstanding that the answer often unseated and once discastled them, they swam back to their places, as born warriors, urged by a passion for land, are almost sure to do; are indeed quite sure, so long as they multiply sturdily, and will never take no from Fortune. A family passion for land, that survives a generation, is as effective as genius in producing the object it conceives; and through marriages and conflicts, the seizure of lands, and brides bearing land, these sharp-feeding eagle-eyed earls of Romfrey spied few spots within their top tower's wide circle of the heavens not their own.

It is therefore manifest that they had the root qualities, the prime active elements, of men in perfection, and notably that appetite to flourish at the cost of the weaker, which is the blessed

exemplification of strength, and has been man's cheerfulest encouragement to fight on since his comparative subjugation (on the whole, it seems complete) of the animal world. By-and-by the struggle is transferred to higher ground, and we begin to perceive how much we are indebted to the fighting spirit. Strength is the brute form of truth. No conspicuously great man was born of the Romfreys, who were better served by a succession of able sons. They sent undistinguished able men to army and navy—lieutenants given to be critics of their captains, but trustworthy for their work. In the later life of the family, they preferred the provincial state of splendid squires to Court and political honours. They were renowned shots, long-limbed stalking sportsmen in field and bower, fast friends, intemperate enemies, handsome to feminine eyes, resembling one another in build, and mostly of the Northern colour, or betwixt the tints, with an hereditary nose and mouth that cried Romfrey from faces thrice diluted in cousinships.

The Hon. Everard (Stephen Denely Craven Romfrey), third son of the late Earl, had some hopes of the title, and was in person a noticeable gentleman, in mind a mediaeval baron, in politics a crotchety unintelligible Whig. He inherited the estate of Holdesbury, on the borders of Hampshire and Wilts, and espoused that of Steynham in Sussex, where he generally resided. His favourite in the family had been the Lady Emily, his eldest sister, who, contrary to the advice of her other brothers and sisters, had yielded her hand to his not wealthy friend,

Colonel Richard Beauchamp. After the death of Nevil's parents, he adopted the boy, being himself childless, and a widower. Childlessness was the affliction of the family. Everard, having no son, could hardly hope that his brother the Earl, and Craven, Lord Avonley, would have one, for he loved the prospect of the title. Yet, as there were no cousins of the male branch extant, the lack of an heir was a serious omission, and to become the Earl of Romfrey, and be the last Earl of Romfrey, was a melancholy thought, however brilliant. So sinks the sun: but he could not desire the end of a great day. At one time he was a hot Parliamentarian, calling himself a Whig, called by the Whigs a Radical, called by the Radicals a Tory, and very happy in fighting them all round. This was during the decay of his party, before the Liberals were defined. A Liberal deprived him of the seat he had held for fifteen years, and the clearness of his understanding was obscured by that black vision of popular ingratitude which afflicts the free fighting man yet more than the malleable public servant. The latter has a clerkly humility attached to him like a second nature, from his habit of doing as others bid him: the former smacks a voluntarily sweating forehead and throbbing wounds for witness of his claim upon your palpable thankfulness. It is an insult to tell him that he fought for his own satisfaction. Mr. Romfrey still called himself a Whig, though it was Whig mean vengeance on account of his erratic vote and voice on two or three occasions that denied him a peerage and a seat in haven. Thither let your good sheep go, your echoes, your

wag-tail dogs, your wealthy pursy manufacturers! He decried the attractions of the sublimer House, and laughed at the transparent Whiggery of his party in replenishing it from the upper shoots of the commonalty: 'Dragging it down to prop it up! swamping it to keep it swimming!' he said.

He was nevertheless a vehement supporter of that House. He stood for King, Lords, and Commons, in spite of his personal grievances, harping the triad as vigorously as bard of old Britain. Commons he added out of courtesy, or from usage or policy, or for emphasis, or for the sake of the Constitutional number of the Estates of the realm, or it was because he had an intuition of the folly of omitting them; the same, to some extent, that builders have regarding bricks when they plan a fabric. Thus, although King and Lords prove the existence of Commons in days of the political deluge almost syllogistically, the example of not including one of the Estates might be imitated, and Commons and King do not necessitate the conception of an intermediate third, while Lords and Commons suggest the decapitation of the leading figure. The united three, however, no longer cast reflections on one another, and were an assurance to this acute politician that his birds were safe. He preserved game rigorously, and the deduction was the work of instinct with him. To his mind the game-laws were the corner-stone of Law, and of a man's right to hold his own; and so delicately did he think the country poised, that an attack on them threatened the structure of justice. The three conjoined Estates were therefore his head gamekeepers;

their duty was to back him against the poacher, if they would not see the country tumble. As to his under-gamekeepers, he was their intimate and their friend, saying, with none of the misanthropy which proclaims the virtues of the faithful dog to the confusion of humankind, he liked their company better than that of his equals, and learnt more from them. They also listened deferentially to their instructor.

The conversation he delighted in most might have been going on in any century since the Conquest. Grant him his not unreasonable argument upon his property in game, he was a liberal landlord. No tenants were forced to take his farms. He dragged none by the collar. He gave them liberty to go to Australia, Canada, the Americas, if they liked. He asked in return to have the liberty to shoot on his own grounds, and rear the marks for his shot, treating the question of indemnification as a gentleman should. Still there were grumbling tenants. He swarmed with game, and, though he was liberal, his hares and his birds were immensely destructive: computation could not fix the damage done by them. Probably the farmers expected them not to eat. 'There are two parties to a bargain,' said Everard, 'and one gets the worst of it. But if he was never obliged to make it, where's his right to complain?' Men of sense rarely obtain satisfactory answers: they are provoked to despise their kind. But the poacher was another kind of vermin than the stupid tenant. Everard did him the honour to hate him, and twice in a fray had he collared his ruffian, and subsequently sat in

condemnation of the wretch: for he who can attest a villany is best qualified to punish it. Gangs from the metropolis found him too determined and alert for their sport. It was the factiousness of here and there an unbroken young scoundrelly colt poacher of the neighbourhood, a born thief, a fellow damned in an inveterate taste for game, which gave him annoyance. One night he took Master Nevil out with him, and they hunted down a couple of sinners that showed fight against odds. Nevil attempted to beg them off because of their boldness. 'I don't set my traps for nothing,' said his uncle, silencing him. But the boy reflected that his uncle was perpetually lamenting the cowed spirit of the common English—formerly such fresh and merry men! He touched Rosamund Culling's heart with his description of their attitudes when they stood resisting and bawling to the keepers, 'Come on we'll die for it.' They did not die. Everard explained to the boy that he could have killed them, and was contented to have sent them to gaol for a few weeks. Nevil gaped at the empty magnanimity which his uncle presented to him as a remarkably big morsel. At the age of fourteen he was despatched to sea.

He went unwillingly; not so much from an objection to a naval life as from a wish, incomprehensible to grown men and boys, and especially to his cousin, Cecil Baskett, that he might remain at school and learn. 'The fellow would like to be a parson!' Everard said in disgust. No parson had ever been known of in the Romfrey family, or in the Beauchamp. A legend of a parson that had been a tutor in one of the Romfrey houses, and had

talked and sung blandly to a damsel of the blood—degenerate maid—to receive a handsome trouncing for his pains, instead of the holy marriage-tie he aimed at, was the only connection of the Romfreys with the parsonry, as Everard called them. He attributed the boy's feeling to the influence of his great-aunt Beauchamp, who would, he said, infallibly have made a parson of him. 'I'd rather enlist for a soldier,' Nevil said, and he ceased to dream of rebellion, and of his little property of a few thousand pounds in the funds to aid him in it. He confessed to his dear friend Rosamund Culling that he thought the parsons happy in having time to read history. And oh, to feel for certain which side was the wrong side in our Civil War, so that one should not hesitate in choosing! Such puzzles are never, he seemed to be aware, solved in a midshipman's mess. He hated bloodshed, and was guilty of the 'cotton-spinners' babble,' abhorred of Everard, in alluding to it. Rosamund liked him for his humanity; but she, too, feared he was a slack Romfrey when she heard him speak in precocious contempt of glory. Somewhere, somehow, he had got hold of Manchester sarcasms concerning glory: a weedy word of the newspapers had been sown in his bosom perhaps. He said: 'I don't care to win glory; I know all about that; I've seen an old hat in the Louvre.' And he would have had her to suppose that he had looked on the campaigning head-cover of Napoleon simply as a shocking bad, bald, brown-rubbed old tricorne rather than as the nod of extinction to thousands, the great orb of darkness, the still-trembling gloomy quiver—the brain of the lightnings of

battles.

Now this boy nursed no secret presumptuous belief that he was fitted for the walks of the higher intellect; he was not having his impudent boy's fling at superiority over the superior, as here and there a subtle-minded vain juvenile will; nor was he a parrot repeating a line from some Lancastrian pamphlet. He really disliked war and the sword; and scorning the prospect of an idle life, confessing that his abilities barely adapted him for a sailor's, he was opposed to the career opened to him almost to the extreme of shrinking and terror. Or that was the impression conveyed to a not unsympathetic hearer by his forlorn efforts to make himself understood, which were like the tappings of the stick of a blind man mystified by his sense of touch at wrong corners. His bewilderment and speechlessness were a comic display, tragic to him.

Just as his uncle Everard predicted, he came home from his first voyage a pleasant sailor lad. His features, more than handsome to a woman, so mobile they were, shone of sea and spirit, the chance lights of the sea, and the spirit breathing out of it. As to war and bloodshed, a man's first thought must be his country, young Jacket remarked, and 'Ich dien' was the best motto afloat. Rosamund noticed the peculiarity of the books he selected for his private reading. They were not boys' books, books of adventure and the like. His favourite author was one writing of Heroes, in (so she esteemed it) a style resembling either early architecture or utter dilapidation, so loose and rough

it seemed; a wind-in-the-orchard style, that tumbled down here and there an appreciable fruit with uncouth bluster; sentences without commencements running to abrupt endings and smoke, like waves against a sea-wall, learned dictionary words giving a hand to street-slang, and accents falling on them haphazard, like slant rays from driving clouds; all the pages in a breeze, the whole book producing a kind of electrical agitation in the mind and the joints. This was its effect on the lady. To her the incomprehensible was the abominable, for she had our country's high critical feeling; but he, while admitting that he could not quite master it, liked it. He had dug the book out of a bookseller's shop in Malta, captivated by its title, and had, since the day of his purchase, gone at it again and again, getting nibbles of golden meaning by instalments, as with a solitary pick in a very dark mine, until the illumination of an idea struck him that there was a great deal more in the book than there was in himself. This was sufficient to secure the devoted attachment of young Mr. Beauchamp. Rosamund sighed with apprehension to think of his unlikeness to boys and men among his countrymen in some things. Why should he hug a book he owned he could not quite comprehend? He said he liked a bone in his mouth; and it was natural wisdom, though unappreciated by women. A bone in a boy's mind for him to gnaw and worry, corrects the vagrancies and promotes the healthy activities, whether there be marrow in it or not. Supposing it furnishes only dramatic entertainment in that usually vacant tenement, or powder-shell, it will be of service.

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