

# VARIOUS

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# Содержание

THE MANAGING PARTNER	4
THE MOUNTAIN OF THE CHAIN AND ITS LEGEND	13
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

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**THE MANAGING PARTNER**

She is neither your partner, nor ours, nor anybody else's in particular. She is in general business, of which matrimony is only a department. How she came to be concerned in so many concerns, is a mystery of nature, like the origin of the Poet—or rather of black Topsy. The latter, you know, was not born at all, she never had no father nor mother, she was not made by nobody—she *grewed*; and so it is with the managing partner, who was a managing partner from her infancy. It is handed down by tradition that she screamed lustily in the nurse's arms when anything went wrong, or as she would not have it; and this gave rise, among superficial observers, to the notion, that Missy was naturally cross. But the fact is, her screams were merely substitutes for words, like the inarticulate cries by which dumb persons express their emotions. When language came, she gave up screaming—but not managing. She did not so much play, as

direct the play—distributing the parts to her companions, and remaining herself an abstraction. If she was ever seen cuffing a doll on the side of the head, or shaking it viciously by the arm, this was merely a burst of natural impatience with the stupid thing; but in general, she contented herself with desiring the mother of the offender to bestow the necessary chastisement. Her orders were usually obeyed; for they were seen to proceed from no selfish motive, but from an innate sense of right. This fact was obvious from the very words in which they were conveyed: You *should* be so and so; you *should* do so and so; you *should* say so and so. Her orders were, in fact, a series of moral maxims, which the other partners in the juvenile concern took upon trust.

As she grew up into girlhood, and then into young-womanhood, business multiplied upon her hands. She was never particular as to what business it was. Like Wordsworth, when invited in to lunch, she was perfectly willing to take a hand in 'anything that was going forward;' and that hand was sure to be an important one: she never entered a concern of which she did not at once become the managing partner. In another of these chalk (and water) portraits, we described the Everyday Young Lady as the go-between in numberless love affairs, but never the principal in any. This is precisely the case with the young lady we are now taking off—yet how different are the functions of the two! The former listens, and sighs, and blushes, and sympathises, pressing the secret into the depths of her bosom, turning down her conscious eyes from the world's face, and looking night and

day as if she was haunted by a Mystery. She is, in fact, of no use, but as a reservoir into which her friend may pour her feelings, and come for them again when she chooses, to enjoy and gloat over them at leisure. Her nerves are hardly equal to a message; but a note feels red-hot in her bosom, and when she has one, she looks down every now and then spasmodically, as if to see whether it has singed the muslin. When the affair has been brought to a happy issue, she attends, in an official capacity, the busking of the victim; and when she sees her at length assume the (lace) veil, and prepare to go forth to be actually married—a contingency she had till that moment denied in her secret heart to be within the bounds of possibility—she falls upon her neck as hysterically as a regard for the frocks of both will allow, and indulges in a silent fit of tears, and terror, and triumph.

But the managing partner is altogether of a more practical character. She no sooner gets an inkling of what is going forward, than she steps into the concern as confidently as if any number of parchments had been signed and sealed. She is not *assumed* as a partner (in the Scottish phrase), but assumes to be one, and her assumption is unconsciously submitted to. To the other young lady the bride-expectant goes for sympathy, to this one for advice. And what she receives is advice, and nothing but advice. The Manager does not put her own hand to the business: she dictates what is to be done; she carries neither note nor message, but suggests the purport of both, and the messenger to be employed; she repeats the moral maxims of her childhood

—You should be so and so; you should do so and so; you should say so and so. Sometimes she makes a mistake—but what then? she has plenty of other businesses to attend to, and the average is sure to come up well. In philosophy, she is a decided utilitarian; bearing with perfect never-mindingness the misfortunes of individuals, and holding by the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

When the managing partner is herself married, the sphere of her exertions widens, and her perfect unselfishness becomes more and more apparent. She directs the affairs of her husband, of her friends, of her neighbours—everybody's affairs, in short, but her own. She has the most uncomfortable house, the most uncared-for children, the most untidy person in the parish: but how could it be otherwise, since all her thoughts and cares are given to her neighbours? Some people suppose that ambition is at the bottom of all this; but we do not share the opinion. The woman of the world is ambitious, for the aggrandisement of herself or family is the main-spring of all her management; but *our* manager finds in the trouble she takes its own reward. The other would not stir hand or tongue without some selfish end in view; while she will work morning, noon, and night, without the faintest dream of remuneration. Again, Bottom the weaver is an ambitious character. Not satisfied with playing Pyramus—'An' I may hide my face,' says he, 'let me play Thisbe too!' And so likewise, when the lion is mentioned, he would fain play the lion in addition to both, promising to aggravate his voice in such a

way as to roar you as gently as any sucking-dove. The managing partner would shrink from this kind of active employment. She would compose the play, distribute the parts, shift the scenes, and snuff the candles; but she would take no part in the performance. This makes her character a difficult study; but though difficult, it is not impossible for those who are gifted in that way to get to the bottom of it. *Our* theory is, that the fundamental motive of the managing partner is philanthropy.

In order to understand this, we must remember that she is original and unique only in the length to which she carries a common principle in human nature. Society is full of advisers on a small scale. If you ask your way to such a place in the street, the Mentor you invoke is instantaneously seized with a strong desire to befriend you. He calls after you a supplement to his directions; and if you chance to turn your head, you will observe him watching to see whether you do take the right hand. When the opinions of two advisers, no matter on what subject, clash, mark the heat and obstinacy with which they are defended. Each considers himself in the right; and believing your wellbeing to depend upon the choice you make, is humanely solicitous that you should give the preference to him. The managing partner merely carries out this feeling to a noble, not to say sublime extent, and becomes the philanthropist *par excellence*. Philanthropy is virtue, and virtue, we all know, is its own reward—that is, we all say; for in reality the idea is somewhat obscure. Perhaps we mean that it is the feeling of being virtuous which

rewards the act of virtue, and if so, how happy must the managing partner be! Troubled by no vulgar ambition, by no hankering after notoriety, by no yearning to join ostensibly in the game of life, she shrouds herself in obscurity, as the widow Bessie Maclure in *Old Mortality* did in an old red cloak, and directs with a whisper the way of the passer-by. There is a certain awful pride which must swell at times in that woman's bosom, as she thinks of the events which her counsel is now governing, and of the wheels that are now turning and twirling in obedience to the impulse they received from her!

The managing partner manages a great many benevolent societies, but it is unnecessary here to mention more than one. This is the Advice-to-the-poor-and-needy-giving Ladies' Samaritan Association. The business of this admirable institution is carried on by the lady-collectors, who solicit subscriptions, chiefly from the bachelors on their beat; and the lady-missionaries, who visit the lowest dens in the place, to distribute, with a beautiful philanthropy, moral Tracts, and Exhortations to be good, tidy, church-going, and happy, to the ragged and starving inmates. Although these, however, are the functionaries ostensible to the public, it is the managing partner who sets them in motion. She is neither president nor vice-president, nor treasurer nor secretary, nor collector nor missionary; but she is a power over all these, supreme, though nameless. She is likewise the editor (with a sub-editor for work) of the tracts and exhortations; and in the course of this duty she mingles

charity with business in a way well worthy of imitation. The productions in question are usually received gratuitously, for advice of all kinds, as we have remarked, is common and plenty; but sometimes the demand is so great as to require the aid of a purchased pen. On such occasions the individual employed by the managing partner is a broken-down clergyman, who was deprived at once of his sight and his living by the visitation of God, and who writes for the support of a wife and fourteen children. This respectable character is induced, by fear of competition, and the strong necessity of feeding sixteen mouths with something or other, to use his pen for the Association at half-price; while he is compelled by his circumstances to reside in the very midst of the destitution he addresses, where he learns in suffering what he teaches in prosing. But, notwithstanding all this beautiful management, her schemes, being of human device, sometimes fail. An example of this is offered by the one she originated on hearing the first terrible cry of Destitution in the Highlands. Under her auspices, the Female Benevolent Trousers Society became extremely popular. Its object, of course, was to supply these garments gratuitously to the perishing mountaineers, in lieu of the cold unseemly kilt. It was discovered, however, after a time, that the Highlanders do not wear kilts at all; and the society was broken up, and its funds handed over, at the suggestion of the institutor, for the Encouragement of the interesting Mieau tribe of Old Christians in Abyssinia. The tenets of this tribe, you are aware,

are in several instances wonderfully similar to our own; only, they abjure in their totality the filthy rags of the moral law, which has drawn upon them the bitter persecution of the heathenish Mohammedans in their neighbourhood.

We have observed that the managing partner is impatient of another counsellor. This is a remarkable trait in her character. Even the woman of the world looks with approbation upon the doings of a congener, when they do not come into collision with her own; even the everyday married lady bends her head confidentially towards her double, as they sit side by side, and rises from the tête-à-tête charmed and edified: the managing partner alone is solitary and unsocial. This is demanded by the lofty nature of her duties. Every business, great and small, should have a single head to direct; and she feels satisfied, after dispassionate reflection, that the best head of all is her own. This makes her wish conscientiously that there was only one business on the earth, that all mankind were her clients, and that there was not another individual of her class extant.

In her last moments, and only then, this great-minded woman thinks of herself—if that can be said to be herself which remains in the world after she is defunct. She thinks of what is to become of her body, and feels a melancholy pleasure in arranging the ceremonies of its funeral. Everything must be ordered by herself; and when the last is said, her breath departs in a sigh of satisfaction. But sometimes death is in a hurry, or her voice low and indistinct. It happened in a case of this kind, that a

doubt arose in the minds of the bystanders as to the shoulder she intended to be taken by one of the friends. They looked at her; but her voice was irretrievably gone, and they considered that, in so far as this point was concerned, the management had devolved upon them. Not so: the dying woman could not speak; but with a convulsive effort, she moved one of her hands, touched the left shoulder, and expired.

*De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is an excellent maxim; but in concluding this sketch, there can be no harm in at least regretting the imperfection of human nature. If its eminent subject, instead of spending abroad upon the world her great capacity, had been able to concentrate it in some measure upon herself and family, there can be little doubt that she would have been regarded in society with less of the contempt which genius, and less of the dislike which virtue inspires in the foolish and wicked, and that fewer unreflecting readers would at this moment be whispering to themselves the concluding line of Pope's malignant libel—

Alive ridiculous, and dead forgot!

# THE MOUNTAIN OF THE CHAIN AND ITS LEGEND

The neighbourhood of Gebel Silsilis, or the Mountain of the Chain, is very interesting in many respects. After flowing for some distance through the usual strip of alluvial plain, bordered by not very lofty undulating ground, the Nile suddenly sweeps into a gap between two imposing masses of rock that overhang the stream for above a mile on either hand. The appearance of the precipices thus hemming in and narrowing so puissant a volume of water, covered with eddies and whirlpools, would be picturesque enough in itself; but we have here, in addition, an immense number of caves, grottos, quarries, and rock-temples, dotting the surface of the rock, and suggesting at first sight the idea of a city just half ground down and solidified into a mountain. On the western bank, numerous handsome façades and porticos have indeed been hewn out; and mightily interesting they were to wander through, with their elaborate tablets and cursory inscriptions, their hieroglyphical scrolls, their sculptured gods and symbols, and all the luxury of their architectural ornaments. But the grandest impressions are to be sought for on the other side, whence the materials of whole capital cities must have been removed. There is, in fact, a wilderness of quarries there, approached by deep perpendicular cuts, like streets leading

from the river's bank, which must have furnished a wonderful amount of sandstone to those strange old architects who, whilst they sometimes chose to convert a mountain into a temple, generally preferred to build up a temple into a mountain. It takes hours merely to have a glimpse at these mighty excavations, some of which are cavernous, with roofs supported by huge square pillars, but most of which form great squares worked down to an enormous depth.

The rock's on the western bank are not isolated, but seem to be the termination of a range projecting from the interior of the desert; and a minor range, branching off, hugs the river to the northward pretty closely for a great distance; but those on the other side are separated by what may almost be called a plain from the Arabian chain of hills, and might be supposed by the fanciful to have been formerly surrounded by the rapid waters of the Nile. They are admirably placed for the purpose to which they were applied; and although I have not the presumption to fix dates, and say under what dynasty the quarries first began to be worked, there is no rashness in presuming that it must have been at a very early period indeed. The sandstone is excellent for building purposes—far superior to the friable limestone found lower down—and has been removed not only from this one block, but from both sides, here and there, for a considerable distance to the north. Many quarries likewise no doubt remain still undiscovered and unexplored in this neighbourhood. We found the mountains worked more or

less down as far as Ramadeh; and inscriptions and sculptures, evidently dating from very ancient times, are met with in many.

The people who inhabit the villages and hamlets of this district are not all fellahs; indeed, I question whether, properly speaking, any members of that humble race are to be found here. Their place is supplied by Bedawín Arabs of the Ababde tribe, who have, to a certain extent, abjured their wandering habits, and settled down on the borders of a narrow piece of land given to them by the Nile. The villages of Rasras and Fares, above the pass on the western bank, and of El-Hamam below, as well as the more extensive and better-favoured establishment of Silwa, with its little plain, are all peopled by men of the same race. With the exception of El-Hamam, which has a territory only a few feet wide, the cultivable land belonging to each village seems adequate to its support. They have a few small groves of palms; had just harvested some fair-sized dhourra-fields when we were last there; and had some fields of the castor-oil plant. Perhaps cultivation might be extended; a good deal of ground that seemed fitted for spade or plough was overrun with a useless but beautiful shrub called the silk-tree. Its pod, which, when just ripe, has a blush that might rival that on the cheek of a maiden, was beginning to wither and shrivel in the sun, and opening to scatter flakes of a silky substance finer than the thistle's beard, leaving bare the myriad seeds arranged something like a pine-cone.

I have called the plant useless, because vain have been the

attempts made to apply its produce to manufacturing purposes; but Arab mothers procure from the stem a poisonous milky substance, with which they sometimes blind their infants, to save them in after-life from the conscription. How strangely love is corrupted in its manifestations by the influence of tyranny! I have seen youths who have exhibited a foot or a hand totally disabled and shrivelled up, and who boasted that their mothers, in passionate tenderness and solicitude for them, had thrust their young limbs into the fire, that they might retain their presence through war, though maimed and rendered almost incapable of work.

Few plants or trees of any value grow here spontaneously. The pretty shrub called el-egl droops beneath the rocks of Silsilis over the water, accompanied sometimes by a dwarf willow; and the sandy earth, washed down the gullies on the western bank in winter, produces a plentiful crop of the sakarân—a plant bearing a seed which has intoxicating qualities, as the name imports, and which is said to be used by robbers to poison or stupify persons whom they wish to rifle at their leisure. Some colocynth is gathered here and there, and dried in the hollows of the rocks.

It is not legal, or rather not allowed in Egypt, to be in possession of arms without a permit; but throughout the whole of the upper country, it is found difficult to enforce such a regulation. Men with spears are often to be met. I saw some parties coming from Silwa armed with long straight swords, with a cross hilt. Most men are provided with a dagger fastened round

their arm above the elbow with a thong; others have clubs heavily loaded, or covered at one end with crocodile scales; and guns are not unfrequent, though powder and shot are exceedingly scarce. Our two guides, Ismaeen and Abd-el-Mahjid, had each a single-barrelled fowling-piece—value from twenty-five to thirty shillings. They were both expert shots, as we had occasion to witness when we went hare-shooting with them. In fact, with their assistance, we had hare every day for dinner during our stay. They were very chary of their powder, and only fired when pretty sure of success. For catching doves, and other small game, they had ingenious little traps.

During my wanderings one day among the rocks with Ismaeen, who had constituted himself my especial guide, I felt somewhat fatigued at a distance from the boats, and sat down to rest under the shade of a projecting rock. On all sides yawned the openings of quarries, cut sheer down into the heart of the mountain to a depth which I could not fathom from my vantage-ground. I seemed surrounded by abysses. In front, I could see the Nile whirling its rapid current between the overhanging rocks which closed up to the north; in the other direction, spread a desert plain intersected by a ribbon of bright water between two strips of brighter vegetation. Far away to the north-west, a solitary heap of mountains marked the spot where the unvisited ruins of Bergeh are said to lie.

[Transcriber's Note: A dieresis (umlaut) diacritical mark appears above the letter 'g' in the word Bergeh in the above

sentence in the original.]

Ismaeen sat before me, answering the various questions which the scene suggested. He was a fine open-faced young man, without any of the clownishness of the fellah, and spoke in a free and easy but gentle manner. He told me that he and Abd-el-Mahjid had been sworn friends from infancy; that they scarcely ever separated; that where one went, the other went; and that what one willed, the other willed. They were connected by blood and marriage—the sister of Ismaeen having become the wife of Abd-el-Mahjid. Both had seen what to them was a good deal of the world. They had driven horses, camels, sheep, goats, donkeys, as far as Keneh, even as far as Siout, for sale; and the desert was familiar to them. The salt sea had rolled its blue waves beneath their eyes; and they had been as far as the Gebel-el-Elbi, that mysterious stronghold of the Bisharee, far to the south, in the wildest region of the desert. Ismaeen, it is true, did not seem to think much of these wild and romantic journeyings. He laid more stress on having seen the beautiful city of Siout, where I have no doubt he felt the mingled contempt and admiration ascribed to the Yorkshireman when he first visits London.

Having exhausted present topics, our conversation naturally turned to the past; and I began to be inquisitive about the legends of the place. I knew there was a local tradition as to the origin of the name Gebel Silsilis—the Mountain of the Chain—passed over usually with supercilious contempt in guide-books; and I desired much to hear the details. Ismaeen at first did not seem

to attach any importance to the subject, gave me but a cursory answer, and proceeded to relate how he had sold donkeys for sixty piastres at Siout which were only worth thirty at most at Fares; but I returned to the charge, and after looking at me somewhat slyly perhaps, to ascertain if I was not making game of him by affecting an interest in these things, the young Ababde, with the sublime inattention to positive geography and record history characteristic of Eastern narrative, spoke nearly as follows:—

In ancient times, there was a king named Mansoor, who reigned over Upper Egypt and over the Arabs in both deserts. His capital city was at this place (Silsilis), which he fortified; and his name was known and respected as far as the North Sea (the Mediterranean), and in all the countries of the blacks to the south. Kings, and princes, and emperors sent messages and presents to him, so that his pride was exalted, and his satisfaction complete. He reigned a period of fifty years, at the end of which the vigour of his frame was impaired, and his beard flowed white as snow upon his breast; and during all that time, he was different from every other man, in that he had not cared to have children, and had not repined when Heaven forbore to bestow that blessing upon him. One day, however, when he was well-stricken in years, he happened to feel weary in his mind; he yawned, and complained that he knew not what to do for occupation or employment. So his wezeer said to him: 'Let us clothe ourselves in the garments of the common people, and go

forth into the city and the country, and hear what is said, and see what is done, and perhaps we may find matter of diversion.' The idea was pleasing to the king; and so they dressed in a humble fashion, and going out by the gate of the garden, entered at once into the streets and the bazaars. On other occasions, the bustle, and the noise, and the jokes they heard, and the accidents that used to happen, were agreeable to King Mansoor; but now he found all things unpleasant, and even became angry when hustled by the porters. He thought all the people he met insolent and ill-bred, and took note of a barber, who splashed him with the contents of his basin as he emptied it into the street, vowing that he would certainly cause him to be hanged next day. So the wezeer, afraid that he might be irritated into discovering himself, advised him to go forth into the country; and they went forth into a woody district, the king moving moodily on, neither looking to the right hand nor to the left. Suddenly, he heard a woman's voice speaking amidst the trees, and thought he distinguished the sound of his own name; so he stepped aside, and, cautiously advancing, beheld a young mother sitting by a fountain of water, dancing an infant on her knees, and singing: 'I have my Ali, I have my child; I am happier than King Mansoor, who has no Ali, no child.' The king frowned as black as thunder, and he understood wherefore he was unhappy: he had no child to play on his knee when care oppressed his heart. As he thought of this, rage increased within him, and drawing a concealed sword, before the wezeer could interpose with his wisdom, he smote the infant, crying: 'Woman,

be as miserable as King Mansoor.' Then he dropped the sword, and alarmed by the shrieks of the poor mother, thought that if he was found in that costume, the people might do vengeance on him; so he fled by bypaths, and returned to his palace.

Having been accustomed to deal death around, the murder of the infant did not prey upon his mind; but the words of the mother he never forgot. 'I am miserable, because I am childless,' he repeated every day; and he ordered all the women of his harem to be well beaten. But he was compelled to admit, that there was now little chance of his wishes being fulfilled. However, as a last resort, he consulted a magician, a man of Persian origin, who had recently arrived with merchandise in that country. This magician, after many very intricate calculations, told him that he was destined to have a son by the daughter of an Abyssinian prince, now betrothed to the son of the sultan of Damascus; but that her friends would endeavour to take her secretly down the river in a boat before the year was out, lest he might behold and covet her. The magician also asked him wherefore he had thrown away the 'sword of good-luck;' and explained by saying, that the ancestors of King Mansoor had always been in possession of a sword which brought them prosperity, and that the dynasty was to come to an end if it were lost.

Upon this, the king gave, in the first place, orders to his servants and his guards to search for the sword he had lost; but the woman, who had concealed it, thinking it might afford some clue to the assassin of her child, instantly understood,

on hearing these inquiries, that Mansoor was the man. So she vowed vengeance; and being a daughter of the Arabs of the desert, retired to a distant branch of her tribe with the sword, and effectually escaped all pursuit. Her name was Lulu; from that time forth she abjured all feminine pursuits, and became a man in action, riding a fierce horse, and wielding sword and spear; 'For I,' said she, 'when the period is fulfilled, will smite down this king who has slain my child.'

Meanwhile, Mansoor had also given orders to stretch an enormous chain across the river between the two parts of his city, so as to prevent all boats from passing until searched for the daughter of the Abyssinian prince; and this is the origin of the name of these mountains. For a long time, no such person could be discovered; but at length, when the year was nearly out, a maiden of surpassing loveliness was found concealed in a mean kanjia, and being brought before the king, and interrogated, confessed that she was the daughter of Sala-Solo, Prince of Gondar. Mansoor upon this explained the decrees of Heaven; and although she wept, and said that she was betrothed to the son of the sultan of Damascus, he paid no heed to her, but took her to wife, and in due course of time had a son by her, whom he named Ali; and he would thereafter smile grimly to, himself, and say: 'I now have an Ali, I now have a child.'

The magician, who returned about this time, being consulted, said that if the boy passed the critical period of fifteen years, he would live, like his father, to a good old age. So Mansoor

caused a subterranean palace to be hewn out of the mountain, in the deeper chambers of which, fitted up with all magnificence, he caused Ali to be kept by a faithful nurse; whilst he himself dwelt in the front chambers that overlooked the river, and gave audience to all who came and floated in boats beneath his balconies; but no one was allowed to ascend, except the wezeer and a few proved friends: [There, said Ismaeen, pointing to one of the largest excavations on the opposite side, there is the palace of King Mansoor.]

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