

Borrow George

Lavengro: The Scholar, The Gypsy, The Priest



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The Gypsy, The Priest**

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PREFACE

In the following pages I have endeavoured to describe a dream, partly of study, partly of adventure, in which will be found copious notices of books, and many descriptions of life and manners, some in a very unusual form.

The scenes of action lie in the British Islands; – pray be not displeased, gentle reader, if perchance thou hast imagined that I was about to conduct thee to distant lands, and didst promise thyself much instruction and entertainment from what I might tell thee of them. I do assure thee that thou hast no reason to be displeased, inasmuch as there are no countries in the world less known by the British than these selfsame British Islands, or where more strange things are every day occurring, whether in road or street, house or dingle.

The time embraces nearly the first quarter of the present century: this information again may, perhaps, be anything but agreeable to thee; it is a long time to revert to, but fret not thyself, many matters which at present much occupy the public mind originated in some degree towards the latter end of that period, and some of them will be treated of.

The principal actors in this dream, or drama, are, as you will have gathered from the title-page, a Scholar, a Gypsy, and a Priest. Should you imagine that these three form one, permit me to assure you that you are very much mistaken. Should there be something of the Gypsy manifest in the Scholar, there is certainly nothing of the Priest. With respect to the Gypsy – decidedly the most entertaining character of the three – there is certainly nothing of the Scholar or the Priest in him; and as for the Priest, though there may be something in him both of scholarship and gypsyism, neither the Scholar nor the Gypsy would feel at all flattered by being confounded with him.

Many characters which may be called subordinate will be found, and it is probable that some of these characters will afford much more interest to the reader than those styled the principal. The favourites with the writer are a brave old soldier and his helpmate, an ancient gentlewoman who sold apples, and a strange kind of wandering man and his wife.

Amongst the many things attempted in this book is the encouragement of charity, and free and genial manners, and the exposure of humbug, of which there are various kinds, but of which the most perfidious, the most debasing, and the most cruel, is the humbug of the Priest.

Yet let no one think that irreligion is advocated in this book. With respect to religious tenets I wish to observe that I am a member of the Church of England, into whose communion I was baptized, and to which my forefathers belonged. Its being the religion in which I was baptized, and of my forefathers, would be a strong inducement to me to cling to it; for I do not happen to be one of those choice spirits ‘who turn from their banner when the battle bears strongly against it, and go over to the enemy,’ and who receive at first a hug and a ‘viva,’ and in the sequel contempt and spittle in the face; but my chief reason for belonging to it is, because, of all churches calling themselves Christian ones, I believe there is none so good, so well founded upon Scripture, or whose ministers are, upon the whole, so exemplary in their lives and conversation, so well read in the book from which they preach, or so versed in general learning, so useful in their immediate neighbourhoods, or so unwilling to persecute people of other denominations for matters of doctrine.

In the communion of this Church, and with the religious consolation of its ministers, I wish and hope to live and die, and in its and their defence will at all times be ready, if required, to speak, though humbly, and to fight, though feebly, against enemies, whether carnal or spiritual.

And is there no priestcraft in the Church of England? There is certainly, or rather there was, a modicum of priestcraft in the Church of England, but I have generally found that those who are most vehement against the Church of England are chiefly dissatisfied with her because there is only a modicum of that article in her – were she stuffed to the very cupola with it, like a certain other Church, they would have much less to say against the Church of England.

By the other Church, I mean Rome. Its system was once prevalent in England, and, during the period that it prevailed there, was more prolific of debasement and crime than all other causes united. The people and the government at last becoming enlightened by means of the Scripture spurned it from the island with disgust and horror, the land instantly after its disappearance becoming a fair field, in which arts, sciences, and all the amiable virtues flourished, instead of being a pestilent marsh where swine-like ignorance wallowed, and artful hypocrites, like so many Wills-o'-the-wisp, played antic gambols about, around, and above debased humanity.

But Popery still wished to play her old part, to regain her lost dominion, to reconvert the smiling land into the pestilential morass, where she could play again her old antics. From the period of the Reformation in England up to the present time, she has kept her emissaries here, individuals contemptible in intellect, it is true, but cat-like and gliding, who, at her bidding, have endeavoured, as much as in their power has lain, to damp and stifle every genial, honest, loyal, and independent thought, and to reduce minds to such a state of dotage as would enable their old Popish mother to do what she pleased with them.

And in every country, however enlightened, there are always minds inclined to grovelling superstition – minds fond of eating dust and swallowing clay – minds never at rest, save when prostrate before some fellow in a surplice; and these Popish emissaries found always some weak enough to bow down before them, astounded by their dreadful denunciations of eternal woe and damnation to any who should refuse to believe their Romania; but they played a poor game – the law protected the servants of Scripture, and the priest with his beads seldom ventured to approach any but the remnant of those of the eikonolatriy – representatives of worm-eaten houses, their debased dependents, and a few poor crazy creatures amongst the middle classes – he played a poor game, and the labour was about to prove almost entirely in vain, when the English legislature, in compassion or contempt, or, yet more probably, influenced by that spirit of toleration and kindness which is so mixed up with Protestantism, removed almost entirely the disabilities under which Popery laboured, and enabled it to raise its head and to speak out almost without fear.

And it did raise its head, and, though it spoke with some little fear at first, soon discarded every relic of it; went about the land uttering its damnation cry, gathering around it – and for doing so many thanks to it – the favourers of priestcraft who lurked within the walls of the Church of England; frightening with the loudness of its voice the weak, the timid, and the ailing; perpetrating, whenever it had an opportunity, that species of crime to which it has ever been most partial – *Deathbed robbery*; for as it is cruel, so is it dastardly. Yes, it went on enlisting, plundering, and uttering its terrible threats till – till it became, as it always does when left to itself, a fool, a very fool. Its plunderings might have been overlooked, and so might its insolence, had it been common insolence, but it – , and then the roar of indignation which arose from outraged England against the viper, the frozen viper, which it had permitted to warm itself upon its bosom.

But thanks, Popery, you have done all that the friends of enlightenment and religious liberty could wish; but if ever there were a set of foolish ones to be found under heaven, surely it is the priestly rabble who came over from Rome to direct the grand movement – so long in its getting up.

But now again the damnation cry is withdrawn, there is a subdued meekness in your demeanour, you are now once more harmless as a lamb. Well, we shall see how the trick – ‘the old trick’ – will serve you.

CHAPTER ONE

BIRTH – MY FATHER – TAMERLANE – BEN BRAIN – FRENCH PROTESTANTS – EAST ANGLIA – SORROW AND TROUBLES – TRUE PEACE – A BEAUTIFUL CHILD – FOREIGN GRAVE – MIRRORS – THE ALPINE COUNTRY – EMBLEMS – SLOWNESS OF SPEECH – THE JEW – SOME STRANGE GESTURES

On an evening of July, in the year 18-, at East D-, a beautiful little town in a certain district of East Anglia, I first saw the light.

My father was a Cornish man, the youngest, as I have heard him say, of seven brothers. He sprang from a family of gentlemen, or, as some people would call them, gentillâtres, for they were not very wealthy; they had a coat of arms, however, and lived on their own property at a place called Tredinnock, which being interpreted means *the house on the hill*, which house and the neighbouring acres had been from time immemorial in their possession. I mention these particulars that the reader may see at once that I am not altogether of low and plebeian origin; the present age is highly aristocratic, and I am convinced that the public will read my pages with more zest from being told that I am a gentillâtre by birth with Cornish blood¹ in my veins, of a family who lived on their own property at a place bearing a Celtic name, signifying the house on the hill, or more strictly the house on the *hillock*.

My father was what is generally termed a posthumous child – in other words, the gentillâtre who begot him never had the satisfaction of invoking the blessing of the Father of All upon his head; having departed this life some months before the birth of his youngest son. The boy, therefore, never knew a father's care; he was, however, well tended by his mother, whose favourite he was; so much so, indeed, that his brethren, the youngest of whom was considerably older than himself, were rather jealous of him. I never heard, however, that they treated him with any marked unkindness, and it will be as well to observe here that I am by no means well acquainted with his early history, of which, indeed, as I am not writing his life, it is not necessary to say much. Shortly after his mother's death, which occurred when he was eighteen, he adopted the profession of arms, which he followed during the remainder of his life, and in which, had circumstances permitted, he would probably have shone amongst the best. By nature he was cool and collected, slow to anger, though perfectly fearless, patient of control, of great strength; and, to crown all, a proper man with his hands.

With far inferior qualifications many a man has become a field-marshal or general; similar ones made Tamerlane, who was not a gentillâtre, but the son of a blacksmith, emperor of one-third of the world; but the race is not always for the swift, nor the battle for the strong, indeed I ought rather to say very seldom; certain it is, that my father, with all his high military qualifications, never became emperor, field-marshal, or even general: indeed, he had never an opportunity of distinguishing himself save in one battle, and that took place neither in Flanders, Egypt, nor on the banks of the Indus or Oxus, but in Hyde Park.

Smile not, gentle reader, many a battle has been fought in Hyde Park, in which as much skill, science, and bravery have been displayed as ever achieved a victory in Flanders or by the Indus. In such a combat as that to which I allude, I opine that even Wellington or Napoleon would have been heartily glad to cry for quarter ere the lapse of five minutes, and even the Blacksmith Tartar would, perhaps, have shrunk from the opponent with whom, after having had a dispute with him, my father engaged in single combat for one hour, at the end of which time the champions shook hands and retired, each having experienced quite enough of the other's prowess. The name of my father's antagonist was Brain.

¹ 'In Cornwall are the best gentlemen.' —*Cornish Proverb*.

What! still a smile? did you never hear that name before? I cannot help it! Honour to Brain, who four months after the event which I have now narrated was champion of England, having conquered the heroic Johnson. Honour to Brain, who, at the end of other four months, worn out by the dreadful blows which he had received in his manly combats, expired in the arms of my father, who read the Bible to him in his latter moments – Big Ben Brain.

You no longer smile, even *you* have heard of Big Ben.

I have already hinted that my father never rose to any very exalted rank in his profession, notwithstanding his prowess and other qualifications. After serving for many years in the line, he at last entered as captain in the militia regiment of the Earl of – , at that period just raised, and to which he was sent by the Duke of York to instruct the young levies in military manœuvres and discipline; and in this mission I believe he perfectly succeeded, competent judges having assured me that the regiment in question soon came by his means to be considered as one of the most brilliant in the service, and inferior to no regiment of the line in appearance or discipline.

As the headquarters of this corps were at D- the duties of my father not unfrequently carried him to that place, and it was on one of these occasions that he became acquainted with a young person of the neighbourhood, for whom he formed an attachment, which was returned; and this young person was my mother.

She was descended from a family of French Protestants, natives of Caen, who were obliged to leave their native country when old Louis, at the instigation of the Pope, thought fit to revoke the Edict of Nantes: their name was Petrement, and I have reason for believing that they were people of some consideration; that they were noble hearts, and good Christians, they gave sufficient proof in scorning to bow the knee to the tyranny of Rome. So they left beautiful Normandy for their faith's sake, and with a few louis d'ors in their purse, a Bible in the vulgar tongue, and a couple of old swords, which, if report be true, had done service in the Huguenot wars, they crossed the sea to the isle of civil peace and religious liberty, and established themselves in East Anglia.

And many other Huguenot families bent their steps thither, and devoted themselves to agriculture or the mechanical arts; and in the venerable old city, the capital of the province, in the northern shadow of the Castle of De Burgh, the exiles built for themselves a church where they praised God in the French tongue, and to which, at particular seasons of the year, they were in the habit of flocking from country and from town to sing —

‘Thou hast provided for us a goodly earth; thou waterest her furrows, thou sendest rain into the little valleys thereof, thou makest it soft with the drops of rain, and blessest the increase of it.’

I have been told that in her younger days my mother was strikingly handsome; this I can easily believe: I never knew her in her youth, for though she was very young when she married my father (who was her senior by many years), she had attained the middle age before I was born, no children having been vouchsafed to my parents in the early stages of their union. Yet even at the present day, now that years threescore and ten have passed over her head, attended with sorrow and troubles manifold, poorly chequered with scanty joys, can I look on that countenance and doubt that at one time beauty decked it as with a glorious garment? Hail to thee, my parent! as thou sittest there, in thy widow's weeds, in the dusky parlour in the house overgrown with the lustrous ivy of the sister isle, the solitary house at the end of the retired court shaded by lofty poplars. Hail to thee, dame of the oval face, olive complexion, and Grecian forehead; by thy table seated with the mighty volume of the good Bishop Hopkins spread out before thee; there is peace in thy countenance, my mother; it is not worldly peace, however, not the deceitful peace which lulls to bewitching slumbers, and from which, let us pray, humbly pray, that every sinner may be roused in time to implore mercy not in vain! Thine is the peace of the righteous, my mother, of those to whom no sin can be imputed, the score of whose misdeeds has been long since washed away by the blood of atonement, which imputeth righteousness to those who trust in it. It was not always thus, my mother; a time was, when the cares, pomps, and vanities of this world agitated thee too much; but that time is gone by,

another and a better has succeeded; there is peace now on thy countenance, the true peace; peace around thee, too, in thy solitary dwelling, sounds of peace, the cheerful hum of the kettle and the purring of the immense angola, which stares up at thee from its settle with its almost human eyes.

No more earthly cares and affections now, my mother! Yes, one. Why dost thou suddenly raise thy dark and still brilliant eye from the volume with a somewhat startled glance? What noise is that in the distant street? Merely the noise of a hoof; a sound common enough: it draws nearer, nearer, and now it stops before thy gate. Singular! And now there is a pause, a long pause. Ha! thou hearest something – a footstep; a swift but heavy footstep! thou risest, thou tremblest, there is a hand on the pin of the outer door, there is some one in the vestibule, and now the door of thy apartment opens, there is a reflection on the mirror behind thee, a travelling hat, a grey head and sunburnt face. My dearest Son! – My darling Mother!

Yes, mother, thou didst recognise in the distant street the hoof-tramp of the wanderer's horse.

I was not the only child of my parents; I had a brother some three years older than myself. He was a beautiful child; one of those occasionally seen in England, and in England alone; a rosy, angelic face, blue eyes, and light chestnut hair; it was not exactly an Anglo-Saxon countenance, in which, by the bye, there is generally a cast of loutishness and stupidity; it partook, to a certain extent, of the Celtic character, particularly in the fire and vivacity which illumined it; his face was the mirror of his mind; perhaps no disposition more amiable was ever found amongst the children of Adam, united, however, with no inconsiderable portion of high and dauntless spirit. So great was his beauty in infancy, that people, especially those of the poorer classes, would follow the nurse who carried him about in order to look at and bless his lovely face. At the age of three months an attempt was made to snatch him from his mother's arms in the streets of London, at the moment she was about to enter a coach; indeed, his appearance seemed to operate so powerfully upon every person who beheld him, that my parents were under continual apprehension of losing him; his beauty, however, was perhaps surpassed by the quickness of his parts. He mastered his letters in a few hours, and in a day or two could decipher the names of people on the doors of houses and over the shop-windows.

As he grew up, his personal appearance became less prepossessing, his quickness and cleverness, however, rather increased; and I may say of him, that with respect to everything which he took in hand he did it better and more speedily than any other person. Perhaps it will be asked here, what became of him? Alas! alas! his was an early and a foreign grave. As I have said before, the race is not always for the swift, nor the battle for the strong.

And now, doubtless, after the above portrait of my brother, painted in the very best style of Rubens, the reader will conceive himself justified in expecting a full-length one of myself, as a child, for as to my present appearance, I suppose he will be tolerably content with that flitting glimpse in the mirror. But he must excuse me; I have no intention of drawing a portrait of myself in childhood; indeed it would be difficult, for at that time I never looked into mirrors. No attempts, however, were ever made to steal me in my infancy, and I never heard that my parents entertained the slightest apprehension of losing me by the hands of kidnappers, though I remember perfectly well that people were in the habit of standing still to look at me, ay, more than at my brother; from which premisses the reader may form any conclusion with respect to my appearance which seemeth good unto him and reasonable. Should he, being a good-natured person, and always inclined to adopt the charitable side in any doubtful point, be willing to suppose that I, too, was eminently endowed by nature with personal graces, I tell him frankly that I have no objection whatever to his entertaining that idea; moreover, that I heartily thank him, and shall at all times be disposed, under similar circumstances, to exercise the same species of charity towards himself.

With respect to my mind and its qualities I shall be more explicit; for, were I to maintain much reserve on this point, many things which appear in these memoirs would be highly mysterious to the reader, indeed incomprehensible. Perhaps no two individuals were ever more unlike in mind

and disposition than my brother and myself: as light is opposed to darkness, so was that happy, brilliant, cheerful child to the sad and melancholy being who sprang from the same stock as himself, and was nurtured by the same milk.

Once, when travelling in an Alpine country, I arrived at a considerable elevation; I saw in the distance, far below, a beautiful stream hastening to the ocean, its rapid waters here sparkling in the sunshine, and there tumbling merrily in cascades. On its banks were vineyards and cheerful villages; close to where I stood, in a granite basin with steep and precipitous sides, slumbered a deep, dark lagoon, shaded by black pines cypresses, and yews. It was a wild, savage spot, strange and singular; ravens hovered above the pines, filling the air with their uncouth notes, pies chattered, and I heard the cry of an eagle from a neighbouring peak; there lay the lake, the dark, solitary, and almost inaccessible lake; gloomy shadows were upon it, which, strangely modified, as gusts of wind agitated the surface, occasionally assumed the shape of monsters. So I stood on the Alpine elevation, and looked now on the gay distant river, and now at the dark granite-encircled lake close beside me in the lone solitude, and I thought of my brother and myself. I am no moraliser; but the gay and rapid river, and the dark and silent lake, were, of a verity, no bad emblems of us two.

So far from being quick and clever like my brother, and able to rival the literary feat which I have recorded of him, many years elapsed before I was able to understand the nature of letters, or to connect them. A lover of nooks and retired corners, I was as a child in the habit of fleeing from society, and of sitting for hours together with my head on my breast. What I was thinking about, it would be difficult to say at this distance of time; I remember perfectly well, however, being ever conscious of a peculiar heaviness within me, and at times of a strange sensation of fear, which occasionally amounted to horror, and for which I could assign no real cause whatever.

By nature slow of speech, I took no pleasure in conversation, nor in hearing the voices of my fellow-creatures. When people addressed me, I not unfrequently, especially if they were strangers, turned away my head from them, and if they persisted in their notice burst into tears, which singularity of behaviour by no means tended to dispose people in my favour. I was as much disliked as my brother was deservedly beloved and admired. My parents, it is true, were always kind to me; and my brother, who was good nature itself, was continually lavishing upon me every mark of affection.

There was, however, one individual who, in the days of my childhood, was disposed to form a favourable opinion of me. One day, a Jew – I have quite forgotten the circumstance, but I was long subsequently informed of it – one day a travelling Jew knocked at the door of a farmhouse in which we had taken apartments; I was near at hand sitting in the bright sunshine, drawing strange lines on the dust with my fingers, an ape and dog were my companions; the Jew looked at me and asked me some questions, to which, though I was quite able to speak, I returned no answer. On the door being opened, the Jew, after a few words, probably relating to pedlery, demanded who the child was, sitting in the sun; the maid replied that I was her mistress's youngest son, a child weak *here*, pointing to her forehead. The Jew looked at me again, and then said: 'Pon my conscience, my dear, I believe that you must be troubled there yourself to tell me any such thing. It is not my habit to speak to children, inasmuch as I hate them because they often follow me and fling stones after me; but I no sooner looked at that child than I was forced to speak to it – his not answering me shows his sense, for it has never been the custom of the wise to fling away their words in indifferent talk and conversation; the child is a sweet child, and has all the look of one of our people's children. Fool, indeed! did I not see his eyes sparkle just now when the monkey seized the dog by the ear? – they shone like my own diamonds – does your good lady want any – real and fine? Were it not for what you tell me, I should say it was a prophet's child. Fool, indeed! he can write already, or I'll forfeit the box which I carry on my back, and for which I should be loth to take two hundred pounds!' He then leaned forward to inspect the lines which I had traced. All of a sudden he started back, and grew white as a sheet; then, taking off his hat, he made some strange gestures to me,

cringing, chattering, and showing his teeth, and shortly departed, muttering something about 'holy letters,' and talking to himself in a strange tongue. The words of the Jew were in due course of time reported to my mother, who treasured them in her heart, and from that moment began to entertain brighter hopes of her youngest born than she had ever before ventured to foster.

CHAPTER TWO

BARRACKS AND LODGINGS – A CAMP – THE VIPER – A DELICATE CHILD – BLACKBERRY TIME —*MEUM* AND *TUUM*– HYTHE – THE GOLGOTHA – DANEMAN’S SKULL – SUPERHUMAN STATURE – STIRRING TIMES – THE SEA-BORD

I have been a wanderer the greater part of my life; indeed I remember only two periods, and these by no means lengthy, when I was, strictly speaking, stationary. I was a soldier’s son, and as the means of my father were by no means sufficient to support two establishments, his family invariably attended him wherever he went, so that from my infancy I was accustomed to travelling and wandering, and looked upon a monthly change of scene and residence as a matter of course. Sometimes we lived in barracks, sometimes in lodgings, but generally in the former, always eschewing the latter from motives of economy, save when the barracks were inconvenient and uncomfortable; and they must have been highly so indeed, to have discouraged us from entering them; for though we were gentry (pray bear that in mind, gentle reader), gentry by birth, and incontestably so by my father’s bearing the commission of good old George the Third, we were not *fine gentry*, but people who could put up with as much as any genteel Scotch family who find it convenient to live on a third floor in London, or on a sixth at Edinburgh or Glasgow. It was not a little that could discourage us: we once lived within the canvas walls of a camp, at a place called Pett, in Sussex; and I believe it was at this place that occurred the first circumstance, or adventure, call it which you will, that I can remember in connection with myself: it was a strange one, and I will relate it.

It happened that my brother and myself were playing one evening in a sandy lane, in the neighbourhood of this Pett camp; our mother was at a slight distance. All of a sudden, a bright yellow, and, to my infantine eye, beautiful and glorious, object made its appearance at the top of the bank from between the thick quickset, and, gliding down, began to move across the lane to the other side, like a line of golden light. Uttering a cry of pleasure, I sprang forward, and seized it nearly by the middle. A strange sensation of numbing coldness seemed to pervade my whole arm, which surprised me the more, as the object to the eye appeared so warm and sunlike. I did not drop it, however, but, holding it up, looked at it intently, as its head dangled about a foot from my hand. It made no resistance; I felt not even the slightest struggle; but now my brother began to scream and shriek like one possessed, ‘O mother, mother!’ said he, ‘the viper! – my brother has a viper in his hand!’ He then, like one frantic, made an effort to snatch the creature away from me. The viper now hissed amain, and raised its head, in which were eyes like hot coals, menacing, not myself, but my brother. I dropped my captive, for I saw my mother running towards me; and the reptile, after standing for a moment nearly erect, and still hissing furiously, made off, and disappeared. The whole scene is now before me, as vividly as if it occurred yesterday – the gorgeous viper, my poor dear frantic brother, my agitated parent, and a frightened hen clucking under the bushes – and yet I was not three years old.

It is my firm belief that certain individuals possess an inherent power, or fascination, over certain creatures, otherwise I should be unable to account for many feats which I have witnessed, and, indeed, borne a share in, connected with the taming of brutes and reptiles. I have known a savage and vicious mare, whose stall it was dangerous to approach, even when bearing provender, welcome, nevertheless, with every appearance of pleasure, an uncouth, wiry-headed man, with a frightfully seamed face, and an iron hook supplying the place of his right hand, one whom the animal had never seen before, playfully bite his hair, and cover his face with gentle and endearing kisses; and I have already stated how a viper would permit, without resentment, one child to take it up in his hand, whilst it showed its dislike to the approach of another by the fiercest hissings.

Philosophy can explain many strange things, but there are some which are a far pitch above her, and this is one.

I should scarcely relate another circumstance which occurred about this time but for a singular effect which it produced upon my constitution. Up to this period I had been rather a delicate child; whereas, almost immediately after the occurrence to which I allude, I became both hale and vigorous, to the great astonishment of my parents, who naturally enough expected that it would produce quite a contrary effect.

It happened that my brother and myself were disporting ourselves in certain fields near the good town of Canterbury. A female servant had attended us, in order to take care that we came to no mischief: she, however, it seems, had matters of her own to attend to, and, allowing us to go where we listed, remained in one corner of a field, in earnest conversation with a red-coated dragoon. Now it chanced to be blackberry time, and the two children wandered under the hedges, peering anxiously among them in quest of that trash so grateful to urchins of their degree. We did not find much of it, however, and were soon separated in the pursuit. All at once I stood still, and could scarcely believe my eyes. I had come to a spot where, almost covering the hedge, hung clusters of what seemed fruit – deliciously-tempting fruit – something resembling grapes of various colours, green, red, and purple. Dear me, thought I, how fortunate! yet have I a right to gather it? is it mine? for the observance of the law of *meum* and *tuum* had early been impressed upon my mind, and I entertained, even at that tender age, the utmost horror for theft; so I stood staring at the variegated clusters, in doubt as to what I should do. I know not how I argued the matter in my mind; the temptation, however, was at last too strong for me, so I stretched forth my hand and ate. I remember, perfectly well, that the taste of this strange fruit was by no means so pleasant as the appearance; but the idea of eating fruit was sufficient for a child, and, after all, the flavour was much superior to that of sour apples, so I ate voraciously. How long I continued eating I scarcely know. One thing is certain, that I never left the field as I entered it, being carried home in the arms of the dragoon in strong convulsions, in which I continued for several hours. About midnight I awoke, as if from a troubled sleep, and beheld my parents bending over my couch, whilst the regimental surgeon, with a candle in his hand, stood nigh, the light feebly reflected on the whitewashed walls of the barrack-room.

Another circumstance connected with my infancy, and I have done. I need offer no apology for relating it, as it subsequently exercised considerable influence over my pursuits. We were, if I remember right, in the vicinity of a place called Hythe, in Kent. One sweet evening, in the latter part of summer, our mother took her two little boys by the hand, for a wander about the fields. In the course of our stroll we came to the village church; an old, grey-headed sexton stood in the porch, who, perceiving that we were strangers, invited us to enter. We were presently in the interior, wandering about the aisles, looking on the walls, and inspecting the monuments of the notable dead. I can scarcely state what we saw; how should I? I was a child not yet four years old, and yet I think I remember the evening sun streaming in through a stained window upon the dingy mahogany pulpit, and flinging a rich lustre upon the faded tints of an ancient banner. And now once more we were outside the building, where, against the wall, stood a low-eaved pent-house, into which we looked. It was half filled with substances of some kind, which at first looked like large grey stones. The greater part were lying in layers; some, however, were seen in confused and mouldering heaps, and two or three, which had perhaps rolled down from the rest, lay separately on the floor. ‘Skulls, madam,’ said the sexton; ‘skulls of the old Danes! Long ago they came pirating into these parts; and then there chanced a mighty shipwreck, for God was angry with them, and He sunk them; and their skulls, as they came ashore, were placed here as a memorial. There were many more when I was young, but now they are fast disappearing. Some of them must have belonged to strange fellows, madam. Only see that one; why, the two young gentry can scarcely lift it!’ And, indeed, my brother and myself had entered the Golgotha, and commenced handling these grim relics of

mortality. One enormous skull, lying in a corner, had fixed our attention, and we had drawn it forth. Spirit of eld, what a skull was yon!

I still seem to see it, the huge grim thing; many of the others were large, strikingly so, and appeared fully to justify the old man's conclusion that their owners must have been strange fellows; but, compared with this mighty mass of bone, they looked small and diminutive like those of pigmies; it must have belonged to a giant, one of those red-haired warriors of whose strength and stature such wondrous tales are told in the ancient chronicles of the north, and whose grave-hills, when ransacked, occasionally reveal secrets which fill the minds of puny moderns with astonishment and awe. Reader, have you ever pored days and nights over the pages of Snorro? – probably not, for he wrote in a language which few of the present day understand, and few would be tempted to read him tamed down by Latin dragomans. A brave old book is that of Snorro, containing the histories and adventures of old northern kings and champions, who seemed to have been quite different men, if we may judge from the feats which they performed, from those of these days; one of the best of his histories is that which describes the life of Harald Haardraade, who, after manifold adventures by land and sea, now a pirate, now a mercenary of the Greek emperor, became king of Norway, and eventually perished at the battle of Stamford Bridge, whilst engaged in a gallant onslaught upon England. Now, I have often thought that the old Kemp, whose mouldering skull in the Golgotha of Hythe my brother and myself could scarcely lift, must have resembled in one respect at least this Harald, whom Snorro describes as a great and wise ruler and a determined leader, dangerous in battle, of fair presence and measuring in height² just *five ells*, neither more nor less.

I never forgot the Daneman's skull; like the apparition of the viper in the sandy lane, it dwelt in the mind of the boy, affording copious food for the exercise of imagination. From that moment with the name of Dane were associated strange ideas of strength, daring, and superhuman stature; and an undefinable curiosity for all that is connected with the Danish race began to pervade me; and if, long after, when I became a student I devoted myself with peculiar zest to Danish lore and the acquirement of the old Norse tongue and its dialects, I can only explain the matter by the early impression received at Hythe from the tale of the old sexton, beneath the pent-house, and the sight of the Danish skull.

And thus we went on straying from place to place, at Hythe to-day, and perhaps within a week looking out from our hostel-window upon the streets of old Winchester, our motions ever in accordance with the 'route' of the regiment, so habituated to change of scene that it had become almost necessary to our existence. Pleasant were these days of my early boyhood; and a melancholy pleasure steals over me as I recall them. Those were stirring times of which I am speaking, and there was much passing around me calculated to captivate the imagination. The dreadful struggle which so long convulsed Europe, and in which England bore so prominent a part, was then at its hottest; we were at war, and determination and enthusiasm shone in every face; man, woman, and child were eager to fight the Frank, the hereditary, but, thank God, never dreaded enemy of the Anglo-Saxon race. 'Love your country and beat the French, and then never mind what happens,' was the cry of entire England. Oh, those were days of power, gallant days, bustling days, worth the bravest days of chivalry at least; tall battalions of native warriors were marching through the land; there was the glitter of the bayonet and the gleam of the sabre; the shrill squeak of the fife and loud rattling of the drum were heard in the streets of country towns, and the loyal shouts of the inhabitants greeted the soldiery on their arrival, or cheered them at their departure. And now let us leave the upland, and descend to the sea-board; there is a sight for you upon the billows! A dozen men-of-war are gliding majestically out of port, their long buntings streaming from the top-gallant masts, calling on the skulking Frenchman to come forth from his bights and bays; and what

² Norwegian ells – about eight feet.

looms upon us yonder from the fog-bank in the east? a gallant frigate towing behind her the long low hull of a crippled privateer, which but three short days ago had left Dieppe to skim the sea, and whose crew of ferocious hearts are now cursing their imprudence in an English hold. Stirring times those, which I love to recall, for they were days of gallantry and enthusiasm, and were moreover the days of my boyhood.

CHAPTER THREE

PRETTY D-THE VENERABLE CHURCH – THE STRICKEN HEART – DORMANT ENERGIES – THE SMALL PACKET – NERVES – THE BOOKS – A PICTURE – MOUNTAIN-LIKE BILLOWS – THE FOOTPRINT – SPIRIT OF DE FOE – REASONING POWERS – TERRORS OF GOD – HEADS OF THE DRAGONS – HIGH-CHURCH CLERK – A JOURNEY – MY FATHER RECALLED TO HIS REGIMENT – THE DROWNED COUNTRY

And when I was between six and seven years of age we were once more at D-, the place of my birth, whither my father had been despatched on the recruiting service. I have already said that it was a beautiful little town – at least it was at the time of which I am speaking – what it is at present I know not, for thirty years and more have elapsed since I last trod its streets. It will scarcely have improved, for how could it be better than it then was? I love to think on thee, pretty quiet D-, thou pattern of an English country town, with thy clean but narrow streets branching out from thy modest market-place, with thine old-fashioned houses, with here and there a roof of venerable thatch, with thy one half-aristocratic mansion, where resided thy Lady Bountiful – she, the generous and kind, who loved to visit the sick, leaning on her gold-headed cane, whilst the sleek old footman walked at a respectful distance behind. Pretty quiet D-, with thy venerable church, in which moulder the mortal remains of England's sweetest and most pious bard.

Yes, pretty D-, I could always love thee, were it but for the sake of him who sleeps beneath the marble slab in yonder quiet chancel. It was within thee that the long-oppressed bosom heaved its last sigh, and the crushed and gentle spirit escaped from a world in which it had known nought but sorrow. Sorrow! do I say? How faint a word to express the misery of that bruised reed; misery so dark that a blind worm like myself is occasionally tempted to exclaim, Better had the world never been created than that one so kind, so harmless, and so mild, should have undergone such intolerable woe! But it is over now, for, as there is an end of joy, so has affliction its termination. Doubtless the All-wise did not afflict him without a cause: who knows but within that unhappy frame lurked vicious seeds which the sunbeams of joy and prosperity might have called into life and vigour? Perhaps the withering blasts of misery nipped that which otherwise might have terminated in fruit noxious and lamentable. But peace to the unhappy one, he is gone to his rest; the death-like face is no longer occasionally seen timidly and mournfully looking for a moment through the window-pane upon thy market-place, quiet and pretty D-; the hind in thy neighbourhood no longer at evening-fall views, and starts as he views, the dark lathy figure moving beneath the hazels and alders of shadowy lanes, or by the side of murmuring trout streams, and no longer at early dawn does the sexton of the old church reverently doff his hat as, supported by some kind friend, the death-stricken creature totters along the church-path to that mouldering edifice with the low roof, enclosing a spring of sanatory waters, built and devoted to some saint, if the legend over the door be true, by the daughter of an East Anglian king.

But to return to my own history. I had now attained the age of six: shall I state what intellectual progress I had been making up to this period? Alas! upon this point I have little to say calculated to afford either pleasure or edification; I had increased rapidly in size and in strength: the growth of the mind, however, had by no means corresponded with that of the body. It is true, I had acquired my letters, and was by this time able to read imperfectly; but this was all: and even this poor triumph over absolute ignorance would never have been effected but for the unremitting attention of my parents, who, sometimes by threats, sometimes by entreaties, endeavoured to rouse the dormant energies of my nature, and to bend my wishes to the acquisition of the rudiments of knowledge; but in influencing the wish lay the difficulty. Let but the will of a human being be turned to any particular object, and it is ten to one that sooner or later he achieves it. At this time I may safely say that I harboured neither wishes nor hopes; I had as yet seen no object calculated to call them forth,

and yet I took pleasure in many things which perhaps unfortunately were all within my sphere of enjoyment. I loved to look upon the heavens, and to bask in the rays of the sun, or to sit beneath hedgerows and listen to the chirping of the birds, indulging the while in musing and meditation as far as my very limited circle of ideas would permit; but, unlike my brother, who was at this time at school, and whose rapid progress in every branch of instruction astonished and delighted his preceptors, I took no pleasure in books, whose use, indeed, I could scarcely comprehend, and bade fair to be as arrant a dunce as ever brought the blush of shame into the cheeks of anxious and affectionate parents.

But the time was now at hand when the ice which had hitherto bound the mind of the child with its benumbing power was to be thawed, and a world of sensations and ideas awakened to which it had hitherto been an entire stranger. One day a young lady, an intimate acquaintance of our family, and godmother to my brother, drove up to the house in which we dwelt; she stayed some time conversing with my mother, and on rising to depart, she put down on the table a small packet, exclaiming, 'I have brought a little present for each of the boys: the one is a History of England, which I intend for my godson when he returns from school, the other is.' – and here she said something which escaped my ear, as I sat at some distance, moping in a corner, – 'I intend it for the youngster yonder,' pointing to myself; she then departed, and, my mother going out shortly after, I was left alone.

I remember for some time sitting motionless in my corner, with my eyes bent upon the ground; at last I lifted my head and looked upon the packet as it lay on the table. All at once a strange sensation came over me, such as I had never experienced before – a singular blending of curiosity, awe, and pleasure, the remembrance of which, even at this distance of time, produces a remarkable effect upon my nervous system. What strange things are the nerves – I mean those more secret and mysterious ones in which I have some notion that the mind or soul, call it which you will, has its habitation; how they occasionally tingle and vibrate before any coming event closely connected with the future weal or woe of the human being. Such a feeling was now within me, certainly independent of what the eye had seen or the ear had heard. A book of some description had been brought for me, a present by no means calculated to interest me; what cared I for books? I had already many into which I never looked but from compulsion; friends, moreover, had presented me with similar things before, which I had entirely disregarded, and what was there in this particular book, whose very title I did not know, calculated to attract me more than the rest? yet something within told me that my fate was connected with the book which had been last brought; so, after looking on the packet from my corner for a considerable time, I got up and went to the table.

The packet was lying where it had been left – I took it up; had the envelope, which consisted of whitish brown paper, been secured by a string or a seal, I should not have opened it, as I should have considered such an act almost in the light of a crime; the books, however, had been merely folded up, and I therefore considered that there could be no possible harm in inspecting them, more especially as I had received no injunction to the contrary. Perhaps there was something unsound in this reasoning, something sophistical; but a child is sometimes as ready as a grown-up person in finding excuses for doing that which he is inclined to. But whether the action was right or wrong, and I am afraid it was not altogether right, I undid the packet: it contained three books; two from their similarity seemed to be separate parts of one and the same work; they were handsomely bound, and to them I first turned my attention. I opened them successively, and endeavoured to make out their meaning; their contents, however, as far as I was able to understand them, were by no means interesting: whoever pleases may read these books for me, and keep them, too, into the bargain, said I to myself.

I now took up the third book: it did not resemble the others, being longer and considerably thicker; the binding was of dingy calf-skin. I opened it, and as I did so another strange thrill of pleasure shot through my frame. The first object on which my eyes rested was a picture; it was

exceedingly well executed, at least the scene which it represented made a vivid impression upon me, which would hardly have been the case had the artist not been faithful to nature. A wild scene it was – a heavy sea and rocky shore, with mountains in the background, above which the moon was peering. Not far from the shore, upon the water, was a boat with two figures in it, one of which stood at the bow, pointing with what I knew to be a gun at a dreadful shape in the water; fire was flashing from the muzzle of the gun, and the monster appeared to be transfixed. I almost thought I heard its cry. I remained motionless, gazing upon the picture, scarcely daring to draw my breath, lest the new and wondrous world should vanish of which I had now obtained a glimpse. ‘Who are those people, and what could have brought them into that strange situation?’ I asked of myself; and now the seed of curiosity, which had so long lain dormant, began to expand, and I vowed to myself to become speedily acquainted with the whole history of the people in the boat. After looking on the picture till every mark and line in it were familiar to me, I turned over various leaves till I came to another engraving; a new source of wonder – a low sandy beach on which the furious sea was breaking in mountain-like billows; cloud and rack deformed the firmament, which wore a dull and leaden-like hue; gulls and other aquatic fowls were toppling upon the blast, or skimming over the tops of the maddening waves – ‘Mercy upon him! he must be drowned!’ I exclaimed, as my eyes fell upon a poor wretch who appeared to be striving to reach the shore; he was upon his legs, but was evidently half smothered with the brine; high above his head curled a horrible billow, as if to engulf him for ever. ‘He must be drowned! he must be drowned!’ I almost shrieked, and dropped the book. I soon snatched it up again, and now my eye lighted on a third picture: again a shore, but what a sweet and lovely one, and how I wished to be treading it; there were beautiful shells lying on the smooth white sand, some were empty like those I had occasionally seen on marble mantelpieces, but out of others peered the heads and bodies of wondrous crayfish, a wood of thick green trees skirted the beach and partly shaded it from the rays of the sun, which shone hot above, while blue waves slightly crested with foam were gently curling against it; there was a human figure upon the beach, wild and uncouth, clad in the skins of animals, with a huge cap on his head, a hatchet at his girdle, and in his hand a gun; his feet and legs were bare; he stood in an attitude of horror and surprise; his body was bent far back, and his eyes, which seemed starting out of his head, were fixed upon a mark on the sand – a large distinct mark – a human footprint..

Reader, is it necessary to name the book which now stood open in my hand, and whose very prints, feeble expounders of its wondrous lines, had produced within me emotions strange and novel? Scarcely – for it was a book which has exerted over the minds of Englishmen an influence certainly greater than any other of modern times – which has been in most people’s hands, and with the contents of which even those who cannot read are to a certain extent acquainted – a book from which the most luxuriant and fertile of our modern prose writers have drunk inspiration – a book, moreover, to which, from the hardy deeds which it narrates, and the spirit of strange and romantic enterprise which it tends to awaken, England owes many of her astonishing discoveries both by sea and land, and no inconsiderable part of her naval glory.

Hail to thee, spirit of De Foe! What does not my own poor self owe to thee? England has better bards than either Greece or Rome, yet I could spare them easier far than De Foe, ‘unabashed De Foe,’ as the hunchbacked rhymer styled him.

The true chord had now been touched; a raging curiosity with respect to the contents of the volume, whose engravings had fascinated my eye, burned within me, and I never rested until I had fully satisfied it; weeks succeeded weeks, months followed months, and the wondrous volume was my only study and principal source of amusement. For hours together I would sit poring over a page till I had become acquainted with the import of every line. My progress, slow enough at first, became by degrees more rapid, till at last, under ‘a shoulder of mutton sail,’ I found myself cantering before a steady breeze over an ocean of enchantment, so well pleased with my voyage that I cared not how long it might be ere it reached its termination.

And it was in this manner that I first took to the paths of knowledge.

About this time I began to be somewhat impressed with religious feelings. My parents were, to a certain extent, religious people; but, though they had done their best to afford me instruction on religious points, I had either paid no attention to what they endeavoured to communicate, or had listened with an ear far too obtuse to derive any benefit. But my mind had now become awakened from the drowsy torpor in which it had lain so long, and the reasoning powers which I possessed were no longer inactive. Hitherto I had entertained no conception whatever of the nature and properties of God, and with the most perfect indifference had heard the divine name proceeding from the mouths of people – frequently, alas! on occasions when it ought not to be employed; but I now never heard it without a tremor, for I now knew that God was an awful and inscrutable Being, the Maker of all things; that we were His children, and that we, by our sins, had justly offended Him; that we were in very great peril from His anger, not so much in this life as in another and far stranger state of being yet to come; that we had a Saviour withal to whom it was necessary to look for help: upon this point, however, I was yet very much in the dark, as, indeed, were most of those with whom I was connected. The power and terrors of God were uppermost in my thoughts; they fascinated though they astounded me. Twice every Sunday I was regularly taken to the church, where, from a corner of the large spacious pew, lined with black leather, I would fix my eyes on the dignified High-Church rector, and the dignified High-Church clerk, and watch the movement of their lips, from which, as they read their respective portions of the venerable liturgy, would roll many a portentous word descriptive of the wondrous works of the Most High.

Rector. Thou didst divide the sea, through thy power: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters.

Philoh. Thou smotest the heads of Leviathan in pieces: and gavest him to be meat for the people in the wilderness.

Rector. Thou broughtest out fountains, and waters out of the hard rocks: thou driedst up mighty waters.

Philoh. The day is thine, and the night is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun.

Peace to your memories, dignified rector, and yet more dignified clerk! – by this time ye are probably gone to your long homes, and your voices are no longer heard sounding down the aisles of the venerable church – nay, doubtless, this has already long since been the fate of him of the sonorous ‘Amen!’ – the one of the two who, with all due respect to the rector, principally engrossed my boyish admiration – he, at least, is scarcely now among the living! Living! why, I have heard say that he blew a fife – for he was a musical as well as a Christian professor – a bold fife, to cheer the Guards and the brave Marines, as they marched with measured step, obeying an insane command, up Bunker’s height, whilst the rifles of the sturdy Yankees were sending the leaden hail sharp and thick amidst the red-coated ranks; for Philoh had not always been a man of peace, nor an exhorter to turn the other cheek to the smiter, but had even arrived at the dignity of a halberd in his country’s service before his six-foot form required rest, and the grey-haired veteran retired, after a long peregrination, to his native town, to enjoy ease and respectability on a pension of ‘eighteenpence a day’; and well did his fellow-townsmen act, when, to increase that ease and respectability, and with a thoughtful regard for the dignity of the good church service, they made him clerk and precentor – the man of the tall form and of the audible voice, which sounded loud and clear as his own Bunker fife. Well, peace to thee, thou fine old chap, despiser of dissenters, and hater of papists, as became a dignified and High-Church clerk; if thou art in thy grave, the better for thee; thou wert fitted to adorn a bygone time, when loyalty was in vogue, and smiling content lay like a sunbeam upon the land, but thou wouldst be sadly out of place in these days of cold philosophic latitudinarian doctrine, universal tolerism, and half-concealed rebellion – rare times, no doubt, for papists and dissenters, but which would assuredly have broken the heart of the loyal soldier of George the Third, and the dignified High-Church clerk of pretty D-.

We passed many months at this place: nothing, however, occurred requiring any particular notice, relating to myself, beyond what I have already stated, and I am not writing the history of others. At length my father was recalled to his regiment, which at that time was stationed at a place called Norman Cross, in Lincolnshire, or rather Huntingdonshire, at some distance from the old town of Peterborough. For this place he departed, leaving my mother and myself to follow in a few days. Our journey was a singular one. On the second day we reached a marshy and fenny country, which, owing to immense quantities of rain which had lately fallen, was completely submerged. At a large town we got on board a kind of passage-boat, crowded with people; it had neither sails nor oars, and those were not the days of steam-vessels; it was a treck-schuyt, and was drawn by horses. Young as I was, there was much connected with this journey which highly surprised me, and which brought to my remembrance particular scenes described in the book which I now generally carried in my bosom. The country was, as I have already said, submerged – entirely drowned – no land was visible; the trees were growing bolt upright in the flood, whilst farmhouses and cottages were standing insulated; the horses which drew us were up to the knees in water, and, on coming to blind pools and ‘greedy depths,’ were not unfrequently swimming, in which case, the boys or urchins who mounted them sometimes stood, sometimes knelt, upon the saddle and pillions. No accident, however, occurred either to the quadrupeds or bipeds, who appeared respectively to be quite *au fait* in their business, and extricated themselves with the greatest ease from places in which Pharaoh and all his host would have gone to the bottom. Nightfall brought us to Peterborough, and from thence we were not slow in reaching the place of our destination.

CHAPTER FOUR

NORMAN CROSS – WIDE EXPANSE —*VIVE L'EMPEREUR*– UNPRUNED WOODS
– MAN WITH THE BAG – FROTH AND CONCEIT – I BEG YOUR PARDON – GROWING
TIMID – ABOUT THREE O'CLOCK – TAKING ONE'S EASE – CHEEK ON THE GROUND
– KING OF THE VIPERS – FRENCHMEN & WATER

And a strange place it was, this Norman Cross, and, at the time of which I am speaking, a sad cross to many a Norman, being what was then styled a French prison, that is, a receptacle for captives made in the French war. It consisted, if I remember right, of some five or six casernes, very long, and immensely high; each standing isolated from the rest, upon a spot of ground which might average ten acres, and which was fenced round with lofty palisades, the whole being compassed about by a towering wall, beneath which, at intervals, on both sides, sentinels were stationed, whilst outside, upon the field, stood commodious wooden barracks, capable of containing two regiments of infantry, intended to serve as guards upon the captives. Such was the station or prison at Norman Cross, where some six thousand French and other foreigners, followers of the grand Corsican, were now immured.

What a strange appearance had those mighty casernes, with their blank blind walls, without windows or grating, and their slanting roofs, out of which, through orifices where the tiles had been removed, would be protruded dozens of grim heads, feasting their prison-sick eyes on the wide expanse of country unfolded from that airy height. Ah! there was much misery in those casernes; and from those roofs, doubtless, many a wistful look was turned in the direction of lovely France. Much had the poor inmates to endure, and much to complain of, to the disgrace of England be it said – of England, in general so kind and bountiful. Rations of carrion meat, and bread from which I have seen the very hounds occasionally turn away, were unworthy entertainment even for the most ruffian enemy, when helpless and a captive; and such, alas! was the fare in those casernes. And then, those visits, or rather ruthless inroads, called in the slang of the place 'strawplait-hunts,' when in pursuit of a contraband article, which the prisoners, in order to procure themselves a few of the necessaries and comforts of existence, were in the habit of making, red-coated battalions were marched into the prisons, who, with the bayonet's point, carried havoc and ruin into every poor convenience which ingenious wretchedness had been endeavouring to raise around it; and then the triumphant exit with the miserable booty; and, worst of all, the accursed bonfire, on the barrack parade, of the plait contraband, beneath the view of the glaring eyeballs from those lofty roofs, amidst the hurrahs of the troops, frequently drowned in the curses poured down from above like a tempest-shower or in the terrific war-whoop of '*Vive l'Empereur!*'

It was midsummer when we arrived at this place, and the weather, which had for a long time been wet and gloomy, now became bright and glorious; I was subjected to but little control, and passed my time pleasantly enough, principally in wandering about the neighbouring country. It was flat and somewhat fenny, a district more of pasture than agriculture, and not very thickly inhabited. I soon became well acquainted with it. At the distance of two miles from the station was a large lake, styled in the dialect of the country 'a mere,' about whose borders tall reeds were growing in abundance, this was a frequent haunt of mine; but my favourite place of resort was a wild sequestered spot at a somewhat greater distance. Here, surrounded with woods and thick groves, was the seat of some ancient family, deserted by the proprietor, and only inhabited by a rustic servant or two. A place more solitary and wild could scarcely be imagined; the garden and walks were overgrown with weeds and briers, and the unpruned woods were so tangled as to be almost impervious. About this domain I would wander till overtaken by fatigue, and then I would sit down with my back against some beech, elm, or stately alder tree, and, taking out my book, would pass hours in a state of unmixed enjoyment, my eyes now fixed on the wondrous pages,

now glancing at the sylvan scene around; and sometimes I would drop the book and listen to the voice of the rooks and wild pigeons, and not unfrequently to the croaking of multitudes of frogs from the neighbouring swamps and fens.

In going to and from this place I frequently passed a tall elderly individual, dressed in rather a quaint fashion, with a skin cap on his head and stout gaiters on his legs; on his shoulders hung a moderate sized leathern sack; he seemed fond of loitering near sunny banks, and of groping amidst furze and low scrubby bramble bushes, of which there were plenty in the neighbourhood of Norman Cross. Once I saw him standing in the middle of a dusty road, looking intently at a large mark which seemed to have been drawn across it, as if by a walking stick. 'He must have been a large one,' the old man muttered half to himself, 'or he would not have left such a trail, I wonder if he is near; he seems to have moved this way.' He then went behind some bushes which grew on the right side of the road, and appeared to be in quest of something, moving behind the bushes with his head downwards, and occasionally striking their roots with his foot: at length he exclaimed, 'Here he is!' and forthwith I saw him dart amongst the bushes. There was a kind of scuffling noise, the rustling of branches, and the crackling of dry sticks. 'I have him!' said the man at last; 'I have got him!' and presently he made his appearance about twenty yards down the road, holding a large viper in his hand. 'What do you think of that, my boy?' said he, as I went up to him – 'what do you think of catching such a thing as that with the naked hand?' 'What do I think?' said I. 'Why, that I could do as much myself.' 'You do,' said the man, 'do you? Lord! how the young people in these days are given to conceit; it did not use to be so in my time: when I was a child, childer knew how to behave themselves; but the childer of these days are full of conceit, full of froth, like the mouth of this viper'; and with his forefinger and thumb he squeezed a considerable quantity of foam from the jaws of the viper down upon the road. 'The childer of these days are a generation of – God forgive me, what was I about to say?' said the old man; and opening his bag he thrust the reptile into it, which appeared far from empty. I passed on. As I was returning, towards the evening, I overtook the old man, who was wending in the same direction. 'Good evening to you, sir,' said I, taking off a cap which I wore on my head. 'Good evening,' said the old man; and then, looking at me, 'How's this?' said he, 'you aren't, sure, the child I met in the morning?' 'Yes,' said I, 'I am; what makes you doubt it?' 'Why, you were then all froth and conceit,' said the old man, 'and now you take off your cap to me.' 'I beg your pardon,' said I, 'if I was frothy and conceited; it ill becomes a child like me to be so.' 'That's true, dear,' said the old man; 'well, as you have begged my pardon, I truly forgive you.' 'Thank you,' said I; 'have you caught any more of those things?' 'Only four or five,' said the old man; 'they are getting scarce, though this used to be a great neighbourhood for them.' 'And what do you do with them?' said I; 'do you carry them home and play with them?' 'I sometimes play with one or two that I tame,' said the old man; 'but I hunt them mostly for the fat which they contain, out of which I make unguents which are good for various sore troubles, especially for the rheumatism.' 'And do you get your living by hunting these creatures?' I demanded. 'Not altogether,' said the old man; 'besides being a viper-hunter, I am what they call a herbalist, one who knows the virtue of particular herbs; I gather them at the proper season, to make medicines with for the sick.' 'And do you live in the neighbourhood?' I demanded. 'You seem very fond of asking questions, child. No, I do not live in this neighbourhood in particular, I travel about; I have not been in this neighbourhood till lately for some years.'

From this time the old man and myself formed an acquaintance; I often accompanied him in his wanderings about the neighbourhood, and, on two or three occasions, assisted him in catching the reptiles which he hunted. He generally carried a viper with him which he had made quite tame, and from which he had extracted the poisonous fangs; it would dance and perform various kinds of tricks. He was fond of telling me anecdotes connected with his adventures with the reptile species. 'But,' said he one day, sighing, 'I must shortly give up this business, I am no longer the man I was, I am become timid, and when a person is timid in viper-hunting, he had better leave off, as it is quite

clear his virtue is leaving him. I got a fright some years ago, which I am quite sure I shall never get the better of; my hand has been shaky more or less ever since.’ ‘What frightened you?’ said I. ‘I had better not tell you,’ said the old man, ‘or you may be frightened too, lose your virtue, and be no longer good for the business.’ ‘I don’t care,’ said I; ‘I don’t intend to follow the business: I daresay I shall be an officer, like my father.’ ‘Well,’ said the old man, ‘I once saw the king of the vipers, and since then –’ ‘The king of the vipers!’ said I, interrupting him; ‘have the vipers a king?’ ‘As sure as we have,’ said the old man – ‘as sure as we have King George to rule over us, have these reptiles a king to rule over them.’ ‘And where did you see him?’ said I. ‘I will tell you,’ said the old man, ‘though I don’t like talking about the matter. It may be about seven years ago that I happened to be far down yonder to the west, on the other side of England, nearly two hundred miles from here, following my business. It was a very sultry day, I remember, and I had been out several hours catching creatures. It might be about three o’clock in the afternoon, when I found myself on some heathy land near the sea, on a ridge of a hill, the side of which, nearly as far down as the sea, was heath; but on the top there was arable ground, which had been planted, and from which the harvest had been gathered – oats or barley, I know not which – but I remember that the ground was covered with stubble. Well, about three o’clock, as I told you before, what with the heat of the day and from having walked about for hours in a lazy way, I felt very tired; so I determined to have a sleep, and I laid myself down, my head just on the ridge of the hill, towards the field, and my body over the side down amongst the heath; my bag, which was nearly filled with creatures, lay at a little distance from my face; the creatures were struggling in it, I remember, and I thought to myself, how much more comfortably off I was than they; I was taking my ease on the nice open hill, cooled with the breezes, whilst they were in the nasty close bag, coiling about one another, and breaking their very hearts, all to no purpose: and I felt quite comfortable and happy in the thought, and little by little closed my eyes, and fell into the sweetest snooze that ever I was in in all my life; and there I lay over the hill’s side, with my head half in the field, I don’t know how long, all dead asleep. At last it seemed to me that I heard a noise in my sleep, something like a thing moving, very faint, however, far away; then it died, and then it came again upon my ear as I slept, and now it appeared almost as if I heard crackle, crackle; then it died again, or I became yet more dead asleep than before, I know not which, but I certainly lay some time without hearing it. All of a sudden I became awake, and there was I, on the ridge of the hill, with my cheek on the ground towards the stubble, with a noise in my ear like that of something moving towards me amongst the stubble of the field; well, I lay a moment or two listening to the noise, and then I became frightened, for I did not like the noise at all, it sounded so odd; so I rolled myself on my belly, and looked towards the stubble. Mercy upon us! there was a huge snake, or rather a dreadful viper, for it was all yellow and gold, moving towards me, bearing its head about a foot and a half above the ground, the dry stubble crackling beneath its outrageous belly. It might be about five yards off when I first saw it, making straight towards me, child, as if it would devour me. I lay quite still, for I was stupefied with horror, whilst the creature came still nearer; and now it was nearly upon me, when it suddenly drew back a little, and then – what do you think? – it lifted its head and chest high in the air, and high over my face as I looked up, flickering at me with its tongue as if it would fly at my face. Child, what I felt at that moment I can scarcely say, but it was a sufficient punishment for all the sins I ever committed; and there we two were, I looking up at the viper, and the viper looking down upon me, flickering at me with its tongue. It was only the kindness of God that saved me: all at once there was a loud noise, the report of a gun, for a fowler was shooting at a covey of birds, a little way off in the stubble. Whereupon the viper sunk its head, and immediately made off over the ridge of the hill, down in the direction of the sea. As it passed by me, however – and it passed close by me – it hesitated a moment, as if it was doubtful whether it should not seize me; it did not, however, but made off down the hill. It has often struck me that he was angry with me, and came upon me unawares for presuming to meddle with his people, as I have always been in the habit of doing.’

‘But,’ said I, ‘how do you know that it was the king of the vipers?’

‘How do I know!’ said the old man, ‘who else should it be? There was as much difference between it and other reptiles as between King George and other people.’

‘Is King George, then, different from other people?’ I demanded.

‘Of course,’ said the old man; ‘I have never seen him myself, but I have heard people say that he is a ten times greater man than other folks; indeed, it stands to reason that he must be different from the rest, else people would not be so eager to see him. Do you think, child, that people would be fools enough to run a matter of twenty or thirty miles to see the king, provided King George – ’

‘Haven’t the French a king?’ I demanded.

‘Yes,’ said the old man, ‘or something much the same, and a queer one he is; not quite so big as King George, they say, but quite as terrible a fellow. What of him?’

‘Suppose he should come to Norman Cross!’

‘What should he do at Norman Cross, child?’

‘Why, you were talking about the vipers in your bag breaking their hearts, and so on, and their king coming to help them. Now, suppose the French king should hear of his people being in trouble at Norman Cross, and – ’

‘He can’t come, child,’ said the old man, rubbing his hands, ‘the water lies between. The French don’t like the water; neither vipers nor Frenchmen take kindly to the water, child.’

When the old man left the country, which he did a few days after the conversation which I have just related, he left me the reptile which he had tamed and rendered quite harmless by removing the fangs. I was in the habit of feeding it with milk, and frequently carried it abroad with me in my walks.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TENT – MAN AND WOMAN – DARK AND SWARTHY – MANNER OF SPEAKING – BAD MONEY – TRANSFIXED – FALTERING TONE – LITTLE BASKET – HIGH OPINION – PLENTY OF GOOD – KEEPING GUARD – TILTED CART – RUBRICALS – JASPER – THE RIGHT SORT – THE HORSEMAN – JOHN NEWTON – THE ALARM – GENTLE BROTHERS

One day it happened that, being on my rambles, I entered a green lane which I had never seen before; at first it was rather narrow, but as I advanced it became considerably wider; in the middle was a driftway with deep ruts, but right and left was a space carpeted with a sward of trefoil and clover; there was no lack of trees, chiefly ancient oaks, which, flinging out their arms from either side, nearly formed a canopy, and afforded a pleasing shelter from the rays of the sun, which was burning fiercely above. Suddenly a group of objects attracted my attention. Beneath one of the largest of the trees, upon the grass, was a kind of low tent or booth, from the top of which a thin smoke was curling; beside it stood a couple of light carts, whilst two or three lean horses or ponies were cropping the herbage which was growing nigh. Wondering to whom this odd tent could belong, I advanced till I was close before it, when I found that it consisted of two tilts, like those of waggons, placed upon the ground and fronting each other, connected behind by a sail or large piece of canvas which was but partially drawn across the top; upon the ground, in the intervening space, was a fire, over which, supported by a kind of iron crowbar, hung a caldron; my advance had been so noiseless as not to alarm the inmates, who consisted of a man and woman, who sat apart, one on each side of the fire; they were both busily employed – the man was carding plaited straw, whilst the woman seemed to be rubbing something with a white powder, some of which lay on a plate beside her; suddenly the man looked up, and, perceiving me, uttered a strange kind of cry, and the next moment both the woman and himself were on their feet and rushing out upon me.

I retreated a few steps, yet without turning to flee. I was not, however, without apprehension, which, indeed, the appearance of these two people was well calculated to inspire: the woman was a stout figure, seemingly between thirty and forty; she wore no cap, and her long hair fell on either side of her head like horse-tails half-way down her waist; her skin was dark and swarthy, like that of a toad, and the expression of her countenance was particularly evil; her arms were bare, and her bosom was but half concealed by a slight bodice, below which she wore a coarse petticoat, her only other article of dress. The man was somewhat younger, but of a figure equally wild; his frame was long and lathy, but his arms were remarkably short, his neck was rather bent, he squinted slightly, and his mouth was much awry; his complexion was dark, but, unlike that of the woman, was more ruddy than livid; there was a deep scar on his cheek, something like the impression of a halfpenny. The dress was quite in keeping with the figure: in his hat, which was slightly peaked, was stuck a peacock's feather; over a waistcoat of hide, untanned and with the hair upon it, he wore a rough jerkin of russet hue; smallclothes of leather, which had probably once belonged to a soldier, but with which pipeclay did not seem to have come in contact for many a year, protected his lower man as far as the knee; his legs were cased in long stockings of blue worsted, and on his shoes he wore immense old-fashioned buckles.

Such were the two beings who now came rushing upon me; the man was rather in advance, brandishing a ladle in his hand.

‘So I have caught you at last,’ said he; ‘I’ll teach ye, you young highwayman, to come skulking about my properties!’

Young as I was, I remarked that his manner of speaking was different from that of any people with whom I had been in the habit of associating. It was quite as strange as his appearance, and

yet it nothing resembled the foreign English which I had been in the habit of hearing through the palisades of the prison; he could scarcely be a foreigner.

‘Your properties!’ said I; ‘I am in the King’s Lane. Why did you put them there, if you did not wish them to be seen?’

‘On the spy,’ said the woman, ‘hey? I’ll drown him in the sludge in the toad-pond over the hedge.’

‘So we will,’ said the man, ‘drown him anon in the mud!’

‘Drown me, will you?’ said I; ‘I should like to see you! What’s all this about? Was it because I saw you with your hands full of straw plait, and my mother there –’

‘Yes,’ said the woman; ‘what was I about?’

Myself. How should I know? Making bad money, perhaps!

And it will be as well here to observe, that at this time there was much bad money in circulation in the neighbourhood, generally supposed to be fabricated by the prisoners, so that this false coin and straw plait formed the standard subjects of conversation at Norman Cross.

‘I’ll strangle thee,’ said the beldame, dashing at me. ‘Bad money, is it?’

‘Leave him to me, wifelkin,’ said the man, interposing; ‘you shall now see how I’ll baste him down the lane.’

Myself. I tell you what, my chap, you had better put down that thing of yours; my father lies concealed within my tepid breast, and if to me you offer any harm or wrong, I’ll call him forth to help me with his forked tongue.

Man. What do you mean, ye Bengui’s bantling? I never heard such discourse in all my life: playman’s speech or Frenchman’s talk – which, I wonder? Your father! Tell the mumping villain that if he comes near my fire I’ll serve him out as I will you. Take that – Tiny Jesus! what have we got here?

Oh, delicate Jesus! what is the matter with the child?

I had made a motion which the viper understood; and now, partly disengaging itself from my bosom, where it had lain perdu, it raised its head to a level with my face, and stared upon my enemy with its glittering eyes.

The man stood like one transfixed, and the ladle, with which he had aimed a blow at me, now hung in the air like the hand which held it; his mouth was extended, and his cheeks became of a pale yellow, save alone that place which bore the mark which I have already described, and this shone now portentously, like fire. He stood in this manner for some time; at last the ladle fell from his hand, and its falling appeared to rouse him from his stupor.

‘I say, wifelkin,’ said he, in a faltering tone, ‘did you ever see the like of this here?’

But the woman had retreated to the tent, from the entrance of which her loathly face was now thrust, with an expression partly of terror and partly of curiosity. After gazing some time longer at the viper and myself, the man stooped down and took up the ladle; then, as if somewhat more assured, he moved to the tent, where he entered into conversation with the beldame in a low voice. Of their discourse, though I could hear the greater part of it, I understood not a single word; and I wondered what it could be, for I knew by the sound that it was not French. At last the man, in a somewhat louder tone, appeared to put a question to the woman, who nodded her head affirmatively, and in a moment or two produced a small stool, which she delivered to him. He placed it on the ground, close by the door of the tent, first rubbing it with his sleeve, as if for the purpose of polishing its surface.

Man. Now, my precious little gentleman, do sit down here by the poor people’s tent; we wish to be civil in our slight way. Don’t be angry, and say no; but look kindly upon us, and satisfied, my precious little God Almighty.

Woman. Yes, my gorgeous angel, sit down by the poor bodies’ fire, and eat a sweetmeat. We want to ask you a question or two; only first put that serpent away.

Myself. I can sit down, and bid the serpent go to sleep, that's easy enough; but as for eating a sweetmeat, how can I do that? I have not got one, and where am I to get it?

Woman. Never fear, my tiny tawny, we can give you one, such as you never ate, I daresay, however far you may have come from.

The serpent sank into its usual resting-place, and I sat down on the stool. The woman opened a box, and took out a strange little basket or hamper, not much larger than a man's fist, and formed of a delicate kind of matting. It was sewed at the top; but, ripping it open with a knife, she held it to me, and I saw, to my surprise, that it contained candied fruits of a dark green hue, tempting enough to one of my age. 'There, my tiny,' said she; 'taste, and tell me how you like them.'

'Very much,' said I, 'where did you get them?'

The beldame leered upon me for a moment, then, nodding her head thrice, with a knowing look, said, 'Who knows better than yourself, my tawny?'

Now, I knew nothing about the matter; but I saw that these strange people had conceived a very high opinion of the abilities of their visitor, which I was nothing loth to encourage. I therefore answered boldly, 'Ah! who indeed!'

'Certainly,' said the man; 'who should know better than yourself, or so well? And now, my tiny one, let me ask you one thing – you didn't come to do us any harm?'

'No,' said I, 'I had no dislike to you; though, if you were to meddle with me –'

Man. Of course, my gorgeous, of course you would; and quite right too. Meddle with you! – what right have we? I should say, it would not be quite safe. I see how it is; you are one of them there; – and he bent his head towards his left shoulder.

Myself. Yes, I am one of them – for I thought he was alluding to the soldiers, – you had best mind what you are about, I can tell you.

Man. Don't doubt we will for our own sake; Lord bless you, wifelkin, only think that we should see one of them there when we least thought about it. Well, I have heard of such things, though I never thought to see one; however, seeing is believing. Well! now you are come, and are not going to do us any mischief, I hope you will stay; you can do us plenty of good if you will.

Myself. What good could I do you?

Man. What good? plenty! Would you not bring us luck? I have heard say that one of them there always does, if it will but settle down. Stay with us, you shall have a tilted cart all to yourself if you like. We'll make you our little God Almighty, and say our prayers to you every morning!

Myself. That would be nice; and, if you were to give me plenty of these things, I should have no objection. But what would my father say? I think he would hardly let me.

Man. Why not? he would be with you; and kindly would we treat him. Indeed, without your father you would be nothing at all.

Myself. That's true; but I do not think he could be spared from his regiment. I have heard him say that they could do nothing without him.

Man. His regiment! What are you talking about? – what does the child mean?

Myself. What do I mean! – why, that my father is an officer-man at the barracks yonder, keeping guard over the French prisoners.

Man. Oh! then that sap is not your father?

Myself. What, the snake? Why, no! Did you think he was?

Man. To be sure we did. Didn't you tell me so?

Myself. Why, yes; but who would have thought you would have believed it? It is a tame one. I hunt vipers, and tame them.

Man. O – h!

'O – h!' grunted the woman, 'that's it, is it?'

The man and woman, who during this conversation had resumed their former positions within the tent, looked at each other with a queer look of surprise, as if somewhat disconcerted at what

they now heard. They then entered into discourse with each other in the same strange tongue which had already puzzled me. At length the man looked me in the face, and said, somewhat hesitatingly, 'So you are not one of them there after all?'

Myself. One of them there? I don't know what you mean.

Man. Why, we have been thinking you were a goblin – a devilkin! However, I see how it is: you are a sap-engro, a chap who catches snakes, and plays tricks with them! Well, it comes very nearly to the same thing; and if you please to list with us, and bear us pleasant company, we shall be glad of you. I'd take my oath upon it, that we might make a mort of money by you and that sap, and the tricks it could do; and, as you seem fly to everything, I shouldn't wonder if you would make a prime hand at telling fortunes.

'I shouldn't wonder,' said I.

Man. Of course. And you might still be our God Almighty, or at any rate our clergyman, so you should live in a tilted cart by yourself, and say prayers to us night and morning – to wifelkin here, and all our family; there's plenty of us when we are all together: as I said before, you seem fly, I shouldn't wonder if you could read?

'Oh yes!' said I, 'I can read'; and, eager to display my accomplishments, I took my book out of my pocket, and, opening it at random, proceeded to read how a certain man, whilst wandering about a certain solitary island, entered a cave, the mouth of which was overgrown with brushwood, and how he was nearly frightened to death in that cave by something which he saw.

'That will do,' said the man; 'that's the kind of prayers for me and my family, aren't they, wifelkin? I never heard more delicate prayers in all my life! Why, they beat the rubricals hollow! – and here comes my son Jasper. I say, Jasper, here's a young sap-engro that can read, and is more fly than yourself. Shake hands with him; I wish ye to be two brothers.'

With a swift but stealthy pace Jasper came towards us from the farther part of the lane; on reaching the tent he stood still, and looked fixedly upon me as I sat upon the stool; I looked fixedly upon him. A queer look had Jasper; he was a lad of some twelve or thirteen years, with long arms, unlike the singular being who called himself his father; his complexion was ruddy, but his face was seamed, though it did not bear the peculiar scar which disfigured the countenance of the other; nor, though roguish enough, a certain evil expression which that of the other bore, and which the face of the woman possessed in a yet more remarkable degree. For the rest, he wore drab breeches, with certain strings at the knee, a rather gay waistcoat, and tolerably white shirt; under his arm he bore a mighty whip of whalebone with a brass knob, and upon his head was a hat without either top or brim.

'There, Jasper! shake hands with the sap-engro.'

'Can he box, father?' said Jasper, surveying me rather contemptuously. 'I should think not, he looks so puny and small.'

'Hold your peace, fool!' said the man; 'he can do more than that – I tell you he's fly: he carries a sap about, which would sting a ninny like you to dead.'

'What, a sap-engro!' said the boy, with a singular whine, and, stooping down, he leered curiously in my face, kindly, however, and then patted me on the head. 'A sap-engro,' he ejaculated; 'lor!'

'Yes, and one of the right sort,' said the man; 'I am glad we have met with him, he is going to list with us, and be our clergyman and God Almighty, ain't you, my tawny?'

'I don't know,' said I; 'I must see what my father will say.'

'Your father; bah!' – but here he stopped, for a sound was heard like the rapid galloping of a horse, not loud and distinct as on a road, but dull and heavy as if upon a grass sward; nearer and nearer it came, and the man, starting up, rushed out of the tent, and looked around anxiously. I arose from the stool upon which I had been seated, and just at that moment, amidst a crashing of boughs and sticks, a man on horse-back bounded over the hedge into the lane at a few yards'

distance from where we were: from the impetus of the leap the horse was nearly down on his knees; the rider, however, by dint of vigorous handling of the reins, prevented him from falling, and then rode up to the tent. ‘’Tis Nat,’ said the man; what brings him here?’ The newcomer was a stout burly fellow, about the middle age; he had a savage determined look, and his face was nearly covered over with carbuncles; he wore a broad slouching hat, and was dressed in a grey coat, cut in a fashion which I afterwards learnt to be the genuine Newmarket cut, the skirts being exceedingly short; his waistcoat was of red plush, and he wore broad corduroy breeches and white top-boots. The steed which carried him was of iron grey, spirited and powerful, but covered with sweat and foam. The fellow glanced fiercely and suspiciously around, and said something to the man of the tent in a harsh and rapid voice. A short and hurried conversation ensued in the strange tongue. I could not take my eyes off this new-comer. Oh, that half-jockey, half-bruiser countenance, I never forgot it! More than fifteen years afterwards I found myself amidst a crowd before Newgate; a gallows was erected, and beneath it stood a criminal, a notorious malefactor. I recognised him at once; the horseman of the lane is now beneath the fatal tree, but nothing altered; still the same man; jerking his head to the right and left with the same fierce and under glance, just as if the affairs of this world had the same kind of interest to the last; grey coat of Newmarket cut, plush waistcoat, corduroys, and boots, nothing altered; but the head, alas! is bare, and so is the neck. Oh, crime and virtue, virtue and crime! – it was old John Newton, I think, who, when he saw a man going to be hanged, said, ‘There goes John Newton, but for the grace of God!’

But the lane, the lane, all was now in confusion in the lane; the man and woman were employed in striking the tents and in making hurried preparations for departure; the boy Jasper was putting the harness upon the ponies and attaching them to the carts; and, to increase the singularity of the scene, two or three wild-looking women and girls, in red cloaks and immense black beaver bonnets, came from I know not what direction, and, after exchanging a few words with the others, commenced with fierce and agitated gestures to assist them in their occupation. The rider meanwhile sat upon his horse, but evidently in a state of great impatience; he muttered curses between his teeth, spurred the animal furiously, and then reined it in, causing it to rear itself up nearly perpendicular. At last he said, ‘Curse ye for Romans, how slow ye are! well, it is no business of mine, stay here all day if you like; I have given ye warning, I am off to the big north road. However, before I go, you had better give me all you have of that.’

‘Truly spoken, Nat, my pal,’ said the man; ‘give it him, mother. There it is; now be off as soon as you please, and rid us of evil company.’

The woman had handed him two bags formed of stocking, half full of something heavy, which looked through them for all the world like money of some kind. The fellow, on receiving them, thrust them without ceremony into the pockets of his coat, and then, without a word of farewell salutation, departed at a tremendous rate, the hoofs of his horse thundering for a long time on the hard soil of the neighbouring road, till the sound finally died away in the distance. The strange people were not slow in completing their preparations, and then, flogging their animals terrifically, hurried away seemingly in the same direction.

The boy Jasper was last of the band. As he was following the rest, he stopped suddenly, and looked on the ground, appearing to muse; then, turning round, he came up to me where I was standing, leered in my face, and then, thrusting out his hand, he said, ‘Good-bye, Sap, I daresay we shall meet again, remember we are brothers; two gentle brothers.’

Then whining forth, ‘What a sap-engro, lor!’ he gave me a parting leer, and hastened away.

I remained standing in the lane gazing after the retreating company. ‘A strange set of people,’ said I at last; ‘I wonder who they can be?’

CHAPTER SIX

THREE YEARS – LILLY’S GRAMMAR – PROFICIENCY – IGNORANT OF FIGURES – THE SCHOOL BELL – ORDER OF SUCCESSION – PERSECUTION – WHAT ARE WE TO DO? – NORTHWARD – A GOODLY SCENE – HAUNTED GROUND – THE FEATS OF CHIVALRY – RIVERS – AND OVER THE BRIG

Years passed on, even three years; during this period I had increased considerably in stature and in strength, and, let us hope, improved in mind; for I had entered on the study of the Latin language. The very first person to whose care I was entrusted for the acquisition of Latin was an old friend of my father’s, a clergyman who kept a seminary at a town the very next we visited after our departure from ‘the Cross.’ Under his instruction, however, I continued only a few weeks, as we speedily left the place. ‘Captain,’ said this divine, when my father came to take leave of him on the eve of our departure, ‘I have a friendship for you, and therefore wish to give you a piece of advice concerning this son of yours. You are now removing him from my care; you do wrong, but we will let that pass. Listen to me: there is but one good school-book in the world – the one I use in my seminary – Lilly’s Latin grammar, in which your son has already made some progress. If you are anxious for the success of your son in life, for the correctness of his conduct and the soundness of his principles, keep him to Lilly’s grammar. If you can by any means, either fair or foul, induce him to get by heart Lilly’s Latin grammar, you may set your heart at rest with respect to him; I, myself, will be his warrant. I never yet knew a boy that was induced, either by fair means or foul, to learn Lilly’s Latin grammar by heart, who did not turn out a man, provided he lived long enough.’

My father, who did not understand the classical languages, received with respect the advice of his old friend, and from that moment conceived the highest opinion of Lilly’s Latin grammar. During three years I studied Lilly’s Latin grammar under the tuition of various schoolmasters, for I travelled with the regiment, and in every town in which we were stationary I was invariably (God bless my father!) sent to the classical academy of the place. It chanced, by good fortune, that in the generality of these schools the grammar of Lilly was in use; when, however, that was not the case, it made no difference in my educational course, my father always stipulating with the masters that I should be daily examined in Lilly. At the end of the three years I had the whole by heart; you had only to repeat the first two or three words of any sentence in any part of the book, and forthwith I would open cry, commencing without blundering and hesitation, and continue till you were glad to beg me to leave off, with many expressions of admiration at my proficiency in the Latin language. Sometimes, however, to convince you how well I merited these encomiums, I would follow you to the bottom of the stair, and even into the street, repeating in a kind of sing-song measure the sonorous lines of the golden schoolmaster. If I am here asked whether I understood anything of what I had got by heart, I reply – ‘Never mind, I understand it all now, and believe that no one ever yet got Lilly’s Latin grammar by heart when young, who repented of the feat at a mature age.’

And, when my father saw that I had accomplished my task, he opened his mouth, and said, ‘Truly, this is more than I expected. I did not think that there had been so much in you, either of application or capacity; you have now learnt all that is necessary, if my friend Dr. B-’s opinion was sterling, as I have no doubt it was. You are still a child, however, and must yet go to school, in order that you may be kept out of evil company. Perhaps you may still contrive, now you have exhausted the barn, to pick up a grain or two in the barn-yard. You are still ignorant of figures, I believe, not that I would mention figures in the same day with Lilly’s grammar.’

These words were uttered in a place called – , in the north, or in the road to the north, to which, for some time past, our corps had been slowly advancing. I was sent to the school of the place, which chanced to be a day school. It was a somewhat extraordinary one, and a somewhat extraordinary event occurred to me within its walls.

It occupied part of the farther end of a small plain, or square, at the outskirts of the town, close to some extensive bleaching fields. It was a long low building of one room, with no upper story; on the top was a kind of wooden box, or sconce, which I at first mistook for a pigeon-house, but which in reality contained a bell, to which was attached a rope, which, passing through the ceiling, hung dangling in the middle of the school-room. I am the more particular in mentioning this appurtenance, as I had soon occasion to scrape acquaintance with it in a manner not very agreeable to my feelings. The master was very proud of his bell, if I might judge from the fact of his eyes being frequently turned to that part of the ceiling from which the rope depended. Twice every day, namely, after the morning and evening tasks had been gone through, were the boys rung out of school by the monotonous jingle of this bell. This ringing out was rather a lengthy affair, for, as the master was a man of order and method, the boys were only permitted to go out of the room one by one; and as they were rather numerous, amounting, at least, to one hundred, and were taught to move at a pace of suitable decorum, at least a quarter of an hour elapsed from the commencement of the march before the last boy could make his exit. The office of bell-ringer was performed by every boy successively; and it so happened that, the very first day of my attendance at the school, the turn to ring the bell had, by order of succession, arrived at the place which had been allotted to me; for the master, as I have already observed, was a man of method and order, and every boy had a particular seat, to which he became a fixture as long as he continued at the school.

So, upon this day, when the tasks were done and completed, and the boys sat with their hats and caps in their hands, anxiously expecting the moment of dismissal, it was suddenly notified to me, by the urchins who sat nearest to me, that I must get up and ring the bell. Now, as this was the first time that I had been at the school, I was totally unacquainted with the process, which I had never seen, and, indeed, had never heard of till that moment. I therefore sat still, not imagining it possible that any such duty could be required of me. But now, with not a little confusion, I perceived that the eyes of all the boys in the school were fixed upon me. Presently there were nods and winks in the direction of the bell-rope; and, as these produced no effect, uncouth visages were made, like those of monkeys when enraged; teeth were gnashed, tongues thrust out, and even fists were bent at me. The master, who stood at the end of the room, with a huge ferule under his arm, bent full upon me a look of stern appeal; and the ushers, of whom there were four, glared upon me, each from his own particular corner, as I vainly turned, in one direction and another, in search of one reassuring look.

But now, probably in obedience to a sign from the master, the boys in my immediate neighbourhood began to maltreat me. Some pinched me with their fingers, some buffeted me, whilst others pricked me with pins, or the points of compasses. These arguments were not without effect. I sprang from my seat, and endeavoured to escape along a double line of benches, thronged with boys of all ages, from the urchin of six or seven to the nondescript of sixteen or seventeen. It was like running the gauntlet; every one, great or small, pinching, kicking, or otherwise maltreating me, as I passed by.

Goaded on in this manner, I at length reached the middle of the room, where dangled the bell-rope, the cause of all my sufferings. I should have passed it – for my confusion was so great that I was quite at a loss to comprehend what all this could mean, and almost believed myself under the influence of an ugly dream – but now the boys, who were seated in advance in the row, arose with one accord, and barred my farther progress; and one, doubtless more sensible than the rest, seizing the rope, thrust it into my hand. I now began to perceive that the dismissal of the school, and my own release from torment, depended upon this selfsame rope. I therefore, in a fit of desperation, pulled it once or twice, and then left off, naturally supposing that I had done quite enough. The boys who sat next the door no sooner heard the bell, than, rising from their seats, they moved out at the door. The bell, however, had no sooner ceased to jingle, than they stopped short, and, turning round, stared at the master, as much as to say, ‘What are we to do now?’ This was

too much for the patience of the man of method, which my previous stupidity had already nearly exhausted. Dashing forward into the middle of the room, he struck me violently on the shoulders with his ferule, and, snatching the rope out of my hand, exclaimed, with a stentorian voice, and genuine Yorkshire accent, 'Prodigy of ignorance! dost not even know how to ring a bell? Must I myself instruct thee?' He then commenced pulling at the bell with such violence that long before half the school was dismissed the rope broke, and the rest of the boys had to depart without their accustomed music.

But I must not linger here, though I could say much about the school and the pedagogue highly amusing and diverting, which, however, I suppress, in order to make way for matters of yet greater interest. On we went, northward, northward! and, as we advanced, I saw that the country was becoming widely different from those parts of merry England in which we had previously travelled. It was wilder, and less cultivated, and more broken with hills and hillocks. The people, too, of these regions appeared to partake of something of the character of their country. They were coarsely dressed; tall and sturdy of frame; their voices were deep and guttural; and the half of the dialect which they spoke was unintelligible to my ears.

I often wondered where we could be going, for I was at this time about as ignorant of geography as I was of most other things. However, I held my peace, asked no questions, and patiently awaited the issue.

Northward, northward, still! And it came to pass that one morning, I found myself extended on the bank of a river. It was a beautiful morning of early spring; small white clouds were floating in the heaven, occasionally veiling the countenance of the sun, whose light, as they retired, would again burst forth, coursing like a race-horse over the scene – and a goodly scene it was! Before me, across the water, on an eminence, stood a white old city, surrounded with lofty walls, above which rose the tops of tall houses, with here and there a church or steeple. To my right hand was a long and massive bridge, with many arches, and of antique architecture, which traversed the river. The river was a noble one; the broadest that I had hitherto seen. Its waters, of a greenish tinge, poured with impetuosity beneath the narrow arches to meet the sea, close at hand, as the boom of the billows breaking distinctly upon a beach declared. There were songs upon the river from the fisher-barks; and occasionally a chorus, plaintive and wild, such as I had never heard before, the words of which I did not understand, but which, at the present time, down the long avenue of years, seem in memory's ear to sound like 'Horam, coram, dago.' Several robust fellows were near me, some knee-deep in water, employed in hauling the seine upon the strand. Huge fish were struggling amidst the meshes – princely salmon, – their brilliant mail of blue and silver flashing in the morning beam; so goodly and gay a scene, in truth, had never greeted my boyish eye.

And, as I gazed upon the prospect, my bosom began to heave, and my tears to trickle. Was it the beauty of the scene which gave rise to these emotions? Possibly; for though a poor ignorant child – a half-wild creature – I was not insensible to the loveliness of nature, and took pleasure in the happiness and handiworks of my fellow-creatures. Yet, perhaps, in something more deep and mysterious the feelings which then pervaded me might originate. Who can lie down on Elvir Hill without experiencing something of the sorcery of the place? Flee from Elvir Hill, young swain, or the maids of Elle will have power over you, and you will go elf-wild! – so say the Danes. I had unconsciously laid myself down upon haunted ground; and I am willing to imagine that what I then experienced was rather connected with the world of spirits and dreams than with what I actually saw and heard around me. Surely the elves and genii of the place were conversing, by some inscrutable means, with the principle of intelligence lurking within the poor uncultivated clod! Perhaps to that ethereal principle the wonders of the past, as connected with that stream, the glories of the present, and even the history of the future, were at that moment being revealed! Of how many feats of chivalry had those old walls been witness, when hostile kings contended for their possession! – how many an army from the south and from the north had trod that old bridge! –

what red and noble blood had crimsoned those rushing waters! – what strains had been sung, ay, were yet being sung, on its banks! – some soft as Doric reed; some fierce and sharp as those of Norwegian Skaldaglam; some as replete with wild and wizard force as Finland's runes, singing of Kalevala's moors, and the deeds of Woinomoinen! Honour to thee, thou island stream! Onward may thou ever roll, fresh and green, rejoicing in thy bright past, thy glorious present, and in vivid hope of a triumphant future! Flow on, beautiful one! – which of the world's streams canst thou envy, with thy beauty and renown? Stately is the Danube, rolling in its might through lands romantic with the wild exploits of Turk, Polak, and Magyar! Lovely is the Rhine! on its shelvy banks grows the racy grape; and strange old keeps of robber-knights of yore are reflected in its waters, from picturesque crags and airy headlands! – yet neither the stately Danube nor the beauteous Rhine, with all their fame, though abundant, needst thou envy, thou pure island stream! – and far less yon turbid river of old, not modern renown, gurgling beneath the walls of what was once proud Rome, towering Rome, Jupiter's town, but now vile Rome, crumbling Rome, Batuscha's town, far less needst thou envy the turbid Tiber of bygone fame, creeping sadly to the sea, surcharged with the abominations of modern Rome – how unlike to thee, thou pure island stream!

And as I lay on the bank and wept, there drew nigh to me a man in the habiliments of a fisher. He was bare-legged, of a weather-beaten countenance, and of stature approaching to the gigantic. 'What is the callant greeting for?' said he, as he stopped and surveyed me. 'Has onybody wrought ye ony harm?'

'Not that I know of,' I replied, rather guessing at than understanding his question; 'I was crying because I could not help it! I say, old one, what is the name of this river?'

'Hout! I now see what you was greeting at – at your ain ignorance, nae doubt – 'tis very great! Weel, I will na fash you with reproaches, but even enlighten ye, since you seem a decent man's bairn, and you speir a civil question. Yon river is called the Tweed; and yonder, over the brig, is Scotland. Did ye never hear of the Tweed, my bonny man?'

'No,' said I, as I rose from the grass, and proceeded to cross the bridge to the town at which we had arrived the preceding night; 'I never heard of it; but now I have seen it, I shall not soon forget it!'

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CASTLE – A FATHER’S INQUIRIES – SCOTCH LANGUAGE – A DETERMINATION – BUI HIN DIGRI – GOOD SCOTCHMAN – DIFFERENCE OF RACES – NE’ER A HAGGIS – PUGNACIOUS PEOPLE – WHA ARE YE, MAN? – THE NOR’ LOCH – GESTURES WILD – THE BICKER – A WILD-LOOKING FIGURE

It was not long before we found ourselves at Edinburgh, or rather in the Castle, into which the regiment marched with drums beating, colours flying, and a long train of baggage-waggons behind. The Castle was, as I suppose it is now, a garrison for soldiers. Two other regiments were already there; the one an Irish, if I remember right, the other a small Highland corps.

It is hardly necessary to say much about this Castle, which everybody has seen; on which account, doubtless, nobody has ever yet thought fit to describe it – at least that I am aware. Be this as it may, I have no intention of describing it, and shall content myself with observing that we took up our abode in that immense building, or caserne, of modern erection, which occupies the entire eastern side of the bold rock on which the Castle stands. A gallant caserne it was – the best and roomiest that I had hitherto seen – rather cold and windy, it is true, especially in the winter, but commanding a noble prospect of a range of distant hills, which I was told were ‘the hieland hills,’ and of a broad arm of the sea, which I heard somebody say was the Firth of Forth.

My brother, who, for some years past, had been receiving his education in a certain celebrated school in England, was now with us; and it came to pass, that one day my father, as he sat at table, looked steadfastly on my brother and myself, and then addressed my mother: – ‘During my journey down hither, I have lost no opportunity of making inquiries about these people, the Scotch, amongst whom we now are, and since I have been here I have observed them attentively. From what I have heard and seen, I should say that upon the whole they are a very decent set of people; they seem acute and intelligent, and I am told that their system of education is so excellent that every person is learned – more or less acquainted with Greek and Latin. There is one thing, however, connected with them, which is a great drawback – the horrid jargon which they speak. However learned they may be in Greek and Latin, their English is execrable; and yet I’m told it is not so bad as it was. I was in company, the other day, with an Englishman who has resided here many years. We were talking about the country and the people. “I should like both very well,” said I, “were it not for the language. I wish sincerely our Parliament, which is passing so many foolish acts every year, would pass one to force these Scotch to speak English.” “I wish so, too,” said he. “The language is a disgrace to the British Government; but, if you had heard it twenty years ago, captain! – if you had heard it as it was spoken when I first came to Edinburgh!”’

‘Only custom,’ said my mother. ‘I daresay the language is now what it was then.’

‘I don’t know,’ said my father; ‘though I daresay you are right; it could never have been worse than it is at present. But now to the point. Were it not for the language, which, if the boys were to pick it up, might ruin their prospects in life, – were it not for that, I should very much like to send them to a school there is in this place, which everybody talks about – the High School I think they call it. ’Tis said to be the best school in the whole island; but the idea of one’s children speaking Scotch – broad Scotch! I must think the matter over.’

And he did think the matter over; and the result of his deliberation was a determination to send us to the school. Let me call thee up before my mind’s eye, High School, to which, every morning, the two English brothers took their way from the proud old Castle through the lofty streets of the Old Town. High School! – called so, I scarcely know why; neither lofty in thyself nor by position, being situated in a flat bottom; oblong structure of tawny stone, with many windows fenced with iron netting – with thy long hall below, and thy five chambers above, for the reception of the five classes, into which the eight hundred urchins who styled thee instructress were divided.

Thy learned rector and his four subordinate dominies; thy strange old porter of the tall form and grizzled hair, hight Boee, and doubtless of Norse ancestry, as his name declares; perhaps of the blood of Bui hin Digri, the hero of northern song – the Jomsborg Viking who clove Thorsteinn Midlangr asunder in the dread sea battle of Horunga Vog, and who, when the fight was lost and his own two hands smitten off, seized two chests of gold with his bloody stumps, and, springing with them into the sea, cried to the scanty relics of his crew, ‘Overboard now, all Bui’s lads!’ Yes, I remember all about thee, and how at eight of every morn we were all gathered together with one accord in the long hall, from which, after the litanies had been read (for so I will call them, being an Episcopalian), the five classes from the five sets of benches trotted off in long files, one boy after the other, up the five spiral staircases of stone, each class to its destination; and well do I remember how we of the third sat hushed and still, watched by the eye of the dux, until the door opened, and in walked that model of a good Scotchman, the shrewd, intelligent, but warm-hearted and kind dominie, the respectable Carson.

And in this school I began to construe the Latin language, which I had never done before, notwithstanding my long and diligent study of Lilly, which illustrious grammar was not used at Edinburgh, nor indeed known. Greek was only taught in the fifth or highest class, in which my brother was; as for myself, I never got beyond the third during the two years that I remained at this seminary. I certainly acquired here a considerable insight in the Latin tongue; and, to the scandal of my father and horror of my mother, a thorough proficiency in the Scotch, which, in less than two months, usurped the place of the English, and so obstinately maintained its ground, that I still can occasionally detect its lingering remains. I did not spend my time unpleasantly at this school, though, first of all, I had to pass through an ordeal.

‘Scotland is a better country than England,’ said an ugly, bleary-eyed lad, about a head and shoulders taller than myself, the leader of a gang of varlets who surrounded me in the play-ground, on the first day, as soon as the morning lesson was over. ‘Scotland is a far better country than England, in every respect.’

‘Is it?’ said I. ‘Then you ought to be very thankful for not having been born in England.’

‘That’s just what I am, ye loon; and every morning, when I say my prayers, I thank God for not being an Englishman. The Scotch are a much better and braver people than the English.’

‘It may be so,’ said I, ‘for what I know – indeed, till I came here, I never heard a word either about the Scotch or their country.’

‘Are ye making fun of us, ye English puppy?’ said the bleary-eyed lad; ‘take that!’ and I was presently beaten black and blue. And thus did I first become aware of the difference of races and their antipathy to each other.

‘Bow to the storm, and it shall pass over you.’ I held my peace, and silently submitted to the superiority of the Scotch — *in numbers*. This was enough; from an object of persecution I soon became one of patronage, especially amongst the champions of the class. ‘The English,’ said the bleary-eyed lad, ‘though a wee bit behind the Scotch in strength and fortitude, are nae to be sneezed at, being far ahead of the Irish, to say nothing of the French, a pack of cowardly scoundrels. And with regard to the English country, it is na Scotland, it is true, but it has its gude properties; and, though there is ne’er a haggis in a’ the land, there’s an unco deal o’ gowd and siller. I respect England, for I have an auntie married there.’

The Scotch are certainly a most pugnacious people; their whole history proves it. Witness their incessant wars with the English in the olden time, and their internal feuds, highland and lowland, clan with clan, family with family, Saxon with Gael. In my time, the schoolboys, for want, perhaps, of English urchins to contend with, were continually fighting with each other; every noon there was at least one pugilistic encounter, and sometimes three. In one month I witnessed more of these encounters than I had ever previously seen under similar circumstances in England. After all, there was not much harm done. Harm! what harm could result from short chopping blows, a

hug, and a tumble? I was witness to many a sounding whack, some blood shed, ‘a blue e’e’ now and then, but nothing more. In England, on the contrary, where the lads were comparatively mild, gentle, and pacific, I had been present at more than one death caused by blows in boyish combats, in which the oldest of the victors had scarcely reached thirteen years; but these blows were in the jugular, given with the full force of the arm shot out horizontally from the shoulder.

But the Scotch – though by no means proficient in boxing (and how should they box, seeing that they have never had a teacher?) – are, I repeat, a most pugnacious people; at least they were in my time. Anything served them, that is, the urchins, as a pretence for a fray, or, Dorically speaking, a *bicker*; every street and close was at feud with its neighbour; the lads of the school were at feud with the young men of the college, whom they pelted in winter with snow, and in summer with stones; and then the feud between the old and new town!

One day I was standing on the ramparts of the Castle on the south-western side which overhangs the green brae, where it slopes down into what was in those days the green swamp or morass, called by the natives of Auld Reekie the Nor’ Loch; it was a dark gloomy day, and a thin veil of mist was beginning to settle down upon the brae and the morass. I could perceive, however, that there was a skirmish taking place in the latter spot. I had an indistinct view of two parties – apparently of urchins – and I heard whoops and shrill cries: eager to know the cause of this disturbance, I left the Castle, and descending the brae reached the borders of the morass, where were a runnel of water and the remains of an old wall, on the other side of which a narrow path led across the swamp: upon this path at a little distance before me there was ‘a bicker.’ I pushed forward, but had scarcely crossed the ruined wall and runnel, when the party nearest to me gave way, and in great confusion came running in my direction. As they drew nigh, one of them shouted to me, ‘Wha are ye, man? are ye o’ the Auld Toon?’ I made no answer. ‘Ha! ye are o’ the New Toon; De’il tak ye, we’ll moorder ye’; and the next moment a huge stone sung past my head. ‘Let me be, ye fule bodies,’ said I, ‘I’m no of either of ye, I live yonder aboon in the Castle.’ ‘Ah! ye live in the Castle; then ye’re an auld tooner; come gie us your help, man, and dinna stand there staring like a dunnot, we want help sair eneugh. Here are stanes.’

For my own part I wished for nothing better, and, rushing forward, I placed myself at the head of my new associates, and commenced flinging stones fast and desperately. The other party now gave way in their turn, closely followed by ourselves; I was in the van, and about to stretch out my hand to seize the hindermost boy of the enemy, when, not being acquainted with the miry and difficult paths of the Nor’ Loch, and in my eagerness taking no heed of my footing, I plunged into a quagmire, into which I sank as far as my shoulders. Our adversaries no sooner perceived this disaster, than, setting up a shout, they wheeled round and attacked us most vehemently. Had my comrades now deserted me, my life had not been worth a straw’s purchase, I should either have been smothered in the quag, or, what is more probable, had my brains beaten out with stones; but they behaved like true Scots, and fought stoutly around their comrade, until I was extricated, whereupon both parties retired, the night being near at hand.

‘Ye are na a bad hand at flinging stanes,’ said the lad who first addressed me, as we now returned up the brae; ‘your aim is right dangerous, mon, I saw how ye skelpit them, ye maun help us agin thae New Toon blackguards at our next bicker.’

So to the next bicker I went, and to many more, which speedily followed as the summer advanced; the party to which I had given my help on the first occasion consisted merely of outlyers, posted about half-way up the hill, for the purpose of overlooking the movements of the enemy.

Did the latter draw nigh in any considerable force, messengers were forthwith despatched to the ‘Auld Toon,’ especially to the filthy alleys and closes of the High Street, which forthwith would disgorge swarms of bare-headed and bare-footed ‘callants,’ who, with gestures wild and ‘eldrich screech and hollo,’ might frequently be seen pouring down the sides of the hill. I have seen upwards of a thousand engaged on either side in these frays, which I have no doubt were full

as desperate as the fights described in the *Iliad*, and which were certainly much more bloody than the combats of modern Greece in the war of independence: the callants not only employed their hands in hurling stones, but not unfrequently slings; at the use of which they were very expert, and which occasionally dislodged teeth, shattered jaws, or knocked out an eye. Our opponents certainly laboured under considerable disadvantage, being compelled not only to wade across a deceitful bog, but likewise to clamber up part of a steep hill, before they could attack us; nevertheless, their determination was such, and such their impetuosity, that we had sometimes difficulty enough to maintain our own. I shall never forget one bicker, the last indeed which occurred at that time, as the authorities of the town, alarmed by the desperation of its character, stationed forthwith a body of police on the hillside, to prevent, in future, any such breaches of the peace.

It was a beautiful Sunday evening, the rays of the descending sun were reflected redly from the grey walls of the Castle, and from the black rocks on which it was founded. The bicker had long since commenced, stones from sling and hand were flying; but the callants of the New Town were now carrying everything before them.

A full-grown baker's apprentice was at their head; he was foaming with rage, and had taken the field, as I was told, in order to avenge his brother, whose eye had been knocked out in one of the late bickers. He was no slinger, or flinger, but brandished in his right hand the spoke of a cart-wheel, like my countryman Tom Hickathrift of old in his encounter with the giant of the Lincolnshire fen. Protected by a piece of wicker-work attached to his left arm, he rushed on to the fray, disregarding the stones which were showered against him, and was ably seconded by his followers. Our own party was chased half-way up the hill, where I was struck to the ground by the baker, after having been foiled in an attempt which I had made to fling a handful of earth into his eyes. All now appeared lost, the Auld Toon was in full retreat. I myself lay at the baker's feet, who had just raised his spoke, probably to give me the *coup de grace*, – it was an awful moment. Just then I heard a shout and a rushing sound; a wild-looking figure is descending the hill with terrible bounds; it is a lad of some fifteen years; he is bare-headed, and his red uncombed hair stands on end like hedgehogs' bristles: his frame is lithy, like that of an antelope, but he has prodigious breadth of chest; he wears a military undress, that of the regiment, even of a drummer, for it is wild Davy, whom a month before I had seen enlisted on Leith Links to serve King George with drum and drumstick as long as his services might be required, and who, ere a week had elapsed, had smitten with his fist Drum-Major Elzigood, who, incensed at his inaptitude, had threatened him with his cane; he has been in confinement for weeks, this is the first day of his liberation, and he is now descending the hill with horrid bounds and shoutings; he is now about five yards distant, and the baker, who apprehends that something dangerous is at hand, prepares himself for the encounter; but what avails the strength of a baker, even full grown? – what avails the defence of a wicker shield? – what avails the wheel-spoke, should there be an opportunity of using it, against the impetus of an avalanche or a cannon-ball? – for to either of these might that wild figure be compared, which, at the distance of five yards, sprang at once with head, hands, feet and body, all together, upon the champion of the New Town, tumbling him to the earth amain. And now it was the turn of the Old Town to triumph. Our late discomfited host, returning on its steps, overwhelmed the fallen champion with blows of every kind, and then, led on by his vanquisher, who had assumed his arms, namely, the wheel-spoke and wicker shield, fairly cleared the brae of their adversaries, whom they drove down headlong into the morass.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EXPERT CLIMBERS – THE CRAGS – SOMETHING RED – THE HORRIBLE EDGE
– DAVID HAGGART – FINE MATERIALS – VICTORY – EXTRAORDINARY ROBBER –
RULING PASSION

Meanwhile I had become a daring cragsman, a character to which an English lad has seldom opportunities of aspiring; for in England there are neither crags nor mountains. Of these, however, as is well known, there is no lack in Scotland, and the habits of individuals are invariably in harmony with the country in which they dwell. The Scotch are expert climbers, and I was now a Scot in most things, particularly in language. The Castle in which I dwelt stood upon a rock, a bold and craggy one, which, at first sight, would seem to bid defiance to any feet save those of goats and chamois; but patience and perseverance generally enable mankind to overcome things which, at first sight, appear impossible. Indeed, what is there above man's exertions? Unwearied determination will enable him to run with the horse, to swim with the fish, and assuredly to compete with the chamois and the goat in agility and sureness of foot. To scale the rock was merely child's play for the Edinbro' callants. It was my own favourite diversion. I soon found that the rock contained all manner of strange crypts, crannies, and recesses, where owls nestled, and the weasel brought forth her young; here and there were small natural platforms, overgrown with long grass and various kinds of plants, where the climber, if so disposed, could stretch himself, and either give his eyes to sleep or his mind to thought; for capital places were these same platforms either for repose or meditation. The boldest features of the rock are descried on the northern side, where, after shelving down gently from the wall for some distance, it terminates abruptly in a precipice, black and horrible, of some three hundred feet at least, as if the axe of nature had been here employed cutting sheer down, and leaving behind neither excrescence nor spur – a dizzy precipice it is, assimilating much to those so frequent in the flinty hills of Northern Africa, and exhibiting some distant resemblance to that of Gibraltar, towering in its horridness above the Neutral Ground.

It was now holiday time, and having nothing particular wherewith to occupy myself, I not unfrequently passed the greater part of the day upon the rocks. Once, after scaling the western crags, and creeping round a sharp angle of the wall, overhung by a kind of watch-tower, I found myself on the northern side. Still keeping close to the wall, I was proceeding onward, for I was bent upon a long excursion which should embrace half the circuit of the Castle, when suddenly my eye was attracted by the appearance of something red, far below me; I stopped short, and, looking fixedly upon it, perceived that it was a human being in a kind of red jacket, seated on the extreme verge of the precipice which I have already made a faint attempt to describe. Wondering who it could be, I shouted; but it took not the slightest notice, remaining as immovable as the rock on which it sat. 'I should never have thought of going near that edge,' said I to myself; 'however, as you have done it, why should not I? And I should like to know who you are.' So I commenced the descent of the rock, but with great care, for I had as yet never been in a situation so dangerous; a slight moisture exuded from the palms of my hands, my nerves were tingling, and my brain was somewhat dizzy – and now I had arrived within a few yards of the figure, and had recognised it: it was the wild drummer who had turned the tide of battle in the bicker on the Castle Brae. A small stone which I dislodged now rolled down the rock, and tumbled into the abyss close beside him. He turned his head, and after looking at me for a moment somewhat vacantly, he resumed his former attitude. I drew yet nearer to the horrible edge; not close, however, for fear was on me.

'What are you thinking of, David?' said I, as I sat behind him and trembled, for I repeat that I was afraid.

David Haggart. I was thinking of Willie Wallace.

Myself. You had better be thinking of yourself, man. A strange place this to come to and think of William Wallace.

David Haggart. Why so? Is not his tower just beneath our feet?

Myself. You mean the auld ruin by the side of the Nor' Loch – the ugly stane bulk, from the foot of which flows the spring into the dyke where the watercresses grow?

David Haggart. Just sae, Geordie.

Myself. And why were ye thinking of him? The English hanged him long since, as I have heard say.

David Haggart. I was thinking that I should wish to be like him.

Myself. Do ye mean that ye would wish to be hanged?

David Haggart. I wadna flinch from that, Geordie, if I might be a great man first.

Myself. And wha kens, Davie, how great you may be, even without hanging? Are ye not in the high road of preferment? Are ye not a bauld drummer already? Wha kens how high ye may rise? perhaps to be general, or drum-major.

David Haggart. I hae nae wish to be drum-major; it were nae great things to be like the doited carle, Else-than-gude, as they call him; and, troth, he has nae his name for naething. But I should have nae objection to be a general, and to fight the French and Americans, and win myself a name and a fame like Willie Wallace, and do brave deeds, such as I have been reading about in his story book.

Myself. Ye are a fule, Davie; the story book is full of lies. Wallace, indeed! the wuddie rebel! I have heard my father say that the Duke of Cumberland was worth twenty of Willie Wallace.

David Haggart. Ye had better sae naething agin Willie Wallace, Geordie, for, if ye do, De'il hae me, if I dinna tumble ye doon the craig.

Fine materials in that lad for a hero, you will say. Yes, indeed, for a hero, or for what he afterwards became. In other times, and under other circumstances, he might have made what is generally termed a great man, a patriot, or a conqueror. As it was, the very qualities which might then have pushed him on to fortune and renown were the cause of his ruin. The war over, he fell into evil courses; for his wild heart and ambitious spirit could not brook the sober and quiet pursuits of honest industry.

'Can an Arabian steed submit to be a vile drudge?' cries the fatalist. Nonsense! A man is not an irrational creature, but a reasoning being, and has something within him beyond mere brutal instinct. The greatest victory which a man can achieve is over himself, by which is meant those unruly passions which are not convenient to the time and place. David did not do this; he gave the reins to his wild heart, instead of curbing it, and became a robber, and, alas! alas! he shed blood – under peculiar circumstances, it is true, and without *malice prepense* – and for that blood he eventually died, and justly; for it was that of the warden of a prison from which he was escaping, and whom he slew with one blow of his stalwart arm.

Tamerlane and Haggart! Haggart and Tamerlane! Both these men were robbers, and of low birth, yet one perished on an ignoble scaffold, and the other died emperor of the world. Is this justice? The ends of the two men were widely dissimilar – yet what is the intrinsic difference between them? Very great indeed; the one acted according to his lights and his country, not so the other. Tamerlane was a heathen, and acted according to his lights; he was a robber where all around were robbers, but he became the avenger of God – God's scourge on unjust kings, on the cruel Bajazet, who had plucked out his own brothers' eyes; he became to a certain extent the purifier of the East, its regenerator; his equal never was before, nor has it since been seen. Here the wild heart was profitably employed, the wild strength, the teeming brain. Onward, Lame one! Onward, Tamur! – lank! Haggart..

But peace to thee, poor David! why should a mortal worm be sitting in judgment over thee? The Mighty and Just One has already judged thee, and perhaps above thou hast received pardon

for thy crimes, which could not be pardoned here below; and now that thy feverish existence has closed, and thy once active form become inanimate dust, thy very memory all but forgotten, I will say a few words about thee, a few words soon also to be forgotten. Thou wast the most extraordinary robber that ever lived within the belt of Britain; Scotland rang with thy exploits, and England, too, north of the Humber; strange deeds also didst thou achieve when, fleeing from justice, thou didst find thyself in the Sister Isle; busy wast thou there in town and on curragh, at fair and racecourse, and also in the solitary place. Ireland thought thee her child, for who spoke her brogue better than thyself? – she felt proud of thee, and said, ‘Sure, O’Hanlon is come again.’ What might not have been thy fate in the far west in America, whither thou hadst turned thine eye, saying, ‘I will go there, and become an honest man!’ But thou wast not to go there, David – the blood which thou hadst shed in Scotland was to be required of thee; the avenger was at hand, the avenger of blood. Seized, manacled, brought back to thy native land, condemned to die, thou wast left in thy narrow cell, and told to make the most of thy time, for it was short: and there, in thy narrow cell, and thy time so short, thou didst put the crowning stone to thy strange deeds, by that strange history of thyself, penned by thine own hand in the robber tongue. Thou mightest have been better employed, David! – but the ruling passion was strong with thee, even in the jaws of death. Thou mightest have been better employed! – but peace be with thee, I repeat, and the Almighty’s grace and pardon.

CHAPTER NINE

NAPOLEON – THE STORM – THE COVE – UP THE COUNTRY – THE TREMBLING HAND – IRISH – TOUGH BATTLE – TIPPERARY HILLS – ELEGANT LODGINGS – FAIR SPECIMEN

Onward, onward! and after we had sojourned in Scotland nearly two years, the long continental war had been brought to an end, Napoleon was humbled for a time, and the Bourbons restored to a land which could well have dispensed with them; we returned to England, where the corps was disbanded, and my parents with their family retired to private life. I shall pass over in silence the events of a year, which offer little of interest as far as connected with me and mine. Suddenly, however, the sound of war was heard again, Napoleon had broken forth from Elba, and everything was in confusion. Vast military preparations were again made, our own corps was levied anew, and my brother became an officer in it; but the danger was soon over, Napoleon was once more quelled, and chained for ever, like Prometheus, to his rock. As the corps, however, though so recently levied, had already become a very fine one, thanks to my father's energetic drilling, the Government very properly determined to turn it to some account, and, as disturbances were apprehended in Ireland about this period, it occurred to them that they could do no better than despatch it to that country.

In the autumn of the year 1815 we set sail from a port in Essex; we were some eight hundred strong, and were embarked in two ships, very large, but old and crazy; a storm overtook us when off Beachy Head, in which we had nearly foundered. I was awakened early in the morning by the howling of the wind and the uproar on deck. I kept myself close, however, as is still my constant practice on similar occasions, and waited the result with that apathy and indifference which violent sea-sickness is sure to produce. We shipped several seas, and once the vessel missing stays – which, to do it justice, it generally did at every third or fourth tack – we escaped almost by a miracle from being dashed upon the foreland. On the eighth day of our voyage we were in sight of Ireland. The weather was now calm and serene, the sun shone brightly on the sea and on certain green hills in the distance, on which I descried what at first sight I believed to be two ladies gathering flowers, which, however, on our nearer approach, proved to be two tall white towers, doubtless built for some purpose or other, though I did not learn for what.

We entered a kind of bay, or cove, by a narrow inlet; it was a beautiful and romantic place this cove, very spacious, and, being nearly land-locked, was sheltered from every wind. A small island, every inch of which was covered with fortifications, appeared to swim upon the waters, whose dark blue denoted their immense depth; tall green hills, which ascended gradually from the shore, formed the background to the west; they were carpeted to the top with turf of the most vivid green, and studded here and there with woods, seemingly of oak; there was a strange old castle half-way up the ascent, a village on a crag – but the mists of morning were half veiling the scene when I surveyed it, and the mists of time are now hanging densely between it and my no longer youthful eye; I may not describe it; – nor will I try.

Leaving the ship in the cove, we passed up a wide river in boats till we came to a city, where we disembarked. It was a large city, as large as Edinburgh to my eyes; there were plenty of fine houses, but little neatness; the streets were full of impurities; handsome equipages rolled along, but the greater part of the population were in rags; beggars abounded; there was no lack of merriment, however; boisterous shouts of laughter were heard on every side. It appeared a city of contradictions. After a few days' rest we marched from this place in two divisions. My father commanded the second, I walked by his side.

Our route lay up the country; the country at first offered no very remarkable feature, it was pretty, but tame. On the second day, however, its appearance had altered, it had become more wild;

a range of distant mountains bounded the horizon. We passed through several villages, as I suppose I may term them, of low huts, the walls formed of rough stones without mortar, the roof of flags laid over wattles and wicker-work; they seemed to be inhabited solely by women and children; the latter were naked, the former, in general, blear-eyed beldames, who sat beside the doors on low stools, spinning. We saw, however, both men and women working at a distance in the fields.

I was thirsty; and going up to an ancient crone, employed in the manner which I have described, I asked her for water; she looked me in the face, appeared to consider a moment, then tottering into her hut, presently reappeared with a small pipkin of milk, which she offered to me with a trembling hand. I drank the milk; it was sour, but I found it highly refreshing. I then took out a penny and offered it to her, whereupon she shook her head, smiled, and, patting my face with her skinny hand, murmured some words in a tongue which I had never heard before.

I walked on by my father's side, holding the stirrup-leather of his horse; presently several low uncouth cars passed by, drawn by starved cattle: the drivers were tall fellows, with dark features and athletic frames – they wore long loose blue cloaks with sleeves, which last, however, dangled unoccupied: these cloaks appeared in tolerably good condition, not so their under garments. On their heads were broad slouching hats: the generality of them were bare-footed. As they passed, the soldiers jested with them in the patois of East Anglia, whereupon the fellows laughed, and appeared to jest with the soldiers; but what they said who knows, it being in a rough guttural language, strange and wild. The soldiers stared at each other, and were silent.

'A strange language that!' said a young officer to my father, 'I don't understand a word of it; what can it be?'

'Irish!' said my father, with a loud voice, 'and a bad language it is, I have known it of old, that is, I have often heard it spoken when I was a guardsman in London. There's one part of London where all the Irish live – at least all the worst of them – and there they hatch their villainies and speak this tongue; it is that which keeps them together and makes them dangerous: I was once sent there to seize a couple of deserters – Irish – who had taken refuge amongst their companions; we found them in what was in my time called a ken, that is a house where only thieves and desperadoes are to be found. Knowing on what kind of business I was bound, I had taken with me a sergeant's party; it was well I did so. We found the deserters in a large room, with at least thirty ruffians, horrid-looking fellows, seated about a long table, drinking, swearing, and talking Irish. Ah! we had a tough battle, I remember; the two fellows did nothing, but sat still, thinking it best to be quiet; but the rest, with an ubbubboo like the blowing up of a powder magazine, sprang up, brandishing their sticks; for these fellows always carry sticks with them even to bed, and not unfrequently spring up in their sleep, striking left and right.'

'And did you take the deserters?' said the officer.

'Yes,' said my father; 'for we formed at the end of the room, and charged with fixed bayonets, which compelled the others to yield notwithstanding their numbers; but the worst was when we got out into the street; the whole district had become alarmed, and hundreds came pouring down upon us – men, women, and children. Women, did I say! – they looked fiends, half naked, with their hair hanging down over their bosoms; they tore up the very pavement to hurl at us, sticks rang about our ears, stones, and Irish – I liked the Irish worst of all, it sounded so horrid, especially as I did not understand it. It's a bad language.'

'A queer tongue,' said I; 'I wonder if I could learn it.'

'Learn it!' said my father; 'what should you learn it for? – however, I am not afraid of that. It is not like Scotch, no person can learn it, save those who are born to it, and even in Ireland the respectable people do not speak it, only the wilder sort, like those we have passed.'

Within a day or two we had reached a tall range of mountains running north and south, which I was told were those of Tipperary; along the skirts of these we proceeded till we came to a town, the principal one of these regions. It was on the bank of a beautiful river, which separated it from

the mountains. It was rather an ancient place, and might contain some ten thousand inhabitants – I found that it was our destination; there were extensive barracks at the farther end, in which the corps took up its quarters; with respect to ourselves, we took lodgings in a house which stood in the principal street.

‘You never saw more elegant lodgings than these, captain,’ said the master of the house, a tall, handsome, and athletic man, who came up whilst our little family were seated at dinner late in the afternoon of the day of our arrival; ‘they beat anything in this town of Clonmel. I do not let them for the sake of interest, and to none but gentlemen in the army, in order that myself and my wife, who is from Londonderry, may have the advantage of pleasant company, genteel company; ay, and Protestant company, captain. It did my heart good when I saw your honour ride in at the head of all those fine fellows, real Protestants, I’ll engage, not a Papist among them, they are too good-looking and honest-looking for that. So I no sooner saw your honour at the head of your army, with that handsome young gentleman holding by your stirrup, than I said to my wife, Mistress Hyne, who is from Londonderry, “God bless me,” said I, “what a truly Protestant countenance, what a noble bearing, and what a sweet young gentleman. By the silver hairs of his honour” – and sure enough I never saw hairs more regally silver than those of your honour – “by his honour’s grey silver hairs, and by my own soul, which is not worthy to be mentioned in the same day with one of them – it would be no more than decent and civil to run out and welcome such a father and son coming in at the head of such a Protestant military.” And then my wife, who is from Londonderry, Mistress Hyne, looking me in the face like a fairy as she is, “You may say that,” says she. “It would be but decent and civil, honey.” And your honour knows how I ran out of my own door and welcomed your honour riding in company with your son, who was walking; how I welcomed ye both at the head of your royal regiment, and how I shook your honour by the hand, saying, I am glad to see your honour, and your honour’s son, and your honour’s royal military Protestant regiment. And now I have you in the house, and right proud I am to have ye one and all; one, two, three, four, true Protestants every one, no Papists here; and I have made bold to bring up a bottle of claret which is now waiting behind the door; and, when your honour and your family have dined, I will make bold too to bring up Mistress Hyne, from Londonderry, to introduce to your honour’s lady, and then we’ll drink to the health of King George, God bless him; to the “glorious and immortal” – to Boyne water – to your honour’s speedy promotion to be Lord Lieutenant, and to the speedy downfall of the Pope and Saint Anthony of Padua.’

Such was the speech of the Irish Protestant addressed to my father in the long lofty dining-room with three windows, looking upon the high street of the good town of Clonmel, as he sat at meat with his family, after saying grace like a true-hearted respectable soldier as he was.

‘A bigot and an Orangeman!’ Oh yes! It is easier to apply epithets of opprobrium to people than to make yourself acquainted with their history and position. He was a specimen, and a fair specimen, of a most remarkable body of men, who during two centuries have fought a good fight in Ireland in the cause of civilisation and religious truth; they were sent as colonists, few in number, into a barbarous and unhappy country, where ever since, though surrounded with difficulties of every kind, they have maintained their ground; theirs has been no easy life, nor have their lines fallen upon very pleasant places; amidst darkness they have held up a lamp, and it would be well for Ireland were all her children like these her adopted ones. ‘But they are fierce and sanguinary,’ it is said. Ay, ay! they have not unfrequently opposed the keen sword to the savage pike. ‘But they are bigoted and narrow-minded.’ Ay, ay! they do not like idolatry, and will not bow the knee before a stone! ‘But their language is frequently indecorous.’ Go to, my dainty one, did ye ever listen to the voice of Papist cursing?

The Irish Protestants have faults, numerous ones; but the greater number of these may be traced to the peculiar circumstances of their position: but they have virtues, numerous ones; and their virtues are their own, their industry, their energy, and their undaunted resolution are their

own. They have been vilified and traduced – but what would Ireland be without them? I repeat, that it would be well for her were all her sons no worse than these much-calumniated children of her adoption.

CHAPTER TEN

PROTESTANT YOUNG GENTLEMEN – THE GREEK LETTERS – OPEN CHIMNEY – MURTAGH – PARIS AND SALAMANCA – NOTHING TO DO – TO WHIT, TO WHOO! – CHRISTMAS

We continued at this place for some months, during which time the soldiers performed their duties, whatever they were; and I, having no duties to perform, was sent to school. I had been to English schools, and to the celebrated one of Edinburgh; but my education, at the present day, would not be what it is – perfect, had I never had the honour of being *alumnus* in an Irish seminary.

‘Captain,’ said our kind host, ‘you would, no doubt, wish that the young gentleman should enjoy every advantage which the town may afford towards helping him on in the path of genteel learning. It’s a great pity that he should waste his time in idleness – doing nothing else than what he says he has been doing for the last fortnight – fishing in the river for trouts which he never catches; and wandering up the glen in the mountain, in search of the hips that grow there. Now, we have a school here, where he can learn the most elegant Latin, and get an insight into the Greek letters, which is desirable; and where, moreover, he will have an opportunity of making acquaintance with all the Protestant young gentlemen of the place, the handsome well-dressed young persons whom your honour sees in the church on the Sundays, when your honour goes there in the morning, with the rest of the Protestant military; for it is no Papist school, though there may be a Papist or two there – a few poor farmers’ sons from the country, with whom there is no necessity for your honour’s child to form any acquaintance at all, at all!’

And to the school I went, where I read the Latin tongue and the Greek letters, with a nice old clergyman, who sat behind a black oaken desk, with a huge Elzevir Flaccus before him, in a long gloomy kind of hall, with a broken stone floor, the roof festooned with cobwebs, the walls considerably dilapidated, and covered over with strange figures and hieroglyphics, evidently produced by the application of burnt stick; and there I made acquaintance with the Protestant young gentlemen of the place, who, with whatever *éclat* they might appear at church on a Sunday, did assuredly not exhibit to much advantage in the schoolroom on the week days, either with respect to clothes or looks. And there I was in the habit of sitting on a large stone, before the roaring fire in the huge open chimney, and entertaining certain of the Protestant young gentlemen of my own age, seated on similar stones, with extraordinary accounts of my own adventures, and those of the corps, with an occasional anecdote extracted from the story-books of Hickathrift and Wight Wallace, pretending to be conning the lesson all the while.

And there I made acquaintance, notwithstanding the hint of the landlord, with the Papist ‘gossoons,’ as they were called, the farmers’ sons from the country; and of these gossoons, of whom there were three, two might be reckoned as nothing at all; in the third, however, I soon discovered that there was something extraordinary.

He was about sixteen years old, and above six feet high, dressed in a grey suit; the coat, from its size, appeared to have been made for him some ten years before. He was remarkably narrow-chested and round-shouldered, owing, perhaps as much to the tightness of his garment as to the hand of nature. His face was long, and his complexion swarthy, relieved, however, by certain freckles, with which the skin was plentifully studded. He had strange wandering eyes, grey, and somewhat unequal in size; they seldom rested on the book, but were generally wandering about the room, from one object to another. Sometimes he would fix them intently on the wall, and then suddenly starting, as if from a reverie, he would commence making certain mysterious movements with his thumbs and forefingers, as if he were shuffling something from him.

One morning, as he sat by himself on a bench, engaged in this manner, I went up to him, and said, ‘Good-day, Murtagh; you do not seem to have much to do?’

‘Faith, you may say that, Shorsha dear! – it is seldom much to do that I have.’

‘And what are you doing with your hands?’

‘Faith, then, if I must tell you, I was e’en dealing with the cards.’

‘Do you play much at cards?’

‘Sorra a game, Shorsha, have I played with the cards since my uncle Phelim, the thief, stole away the ould pack, when he went to settle in the county Waterford!’

‘But you have other things to do?’

‘Sorra anything else has Murtagh to do that he cares about; and that makes me dread so going home at nights.’

‘I should like to know all about you; where do you live, joy?’

‘Faith, then, ye shall know all about me, and where I live. It is at a place called the Wilderness that I live, and they call it so, because it is a fearful wild place, without any house near it but my father’s own; and that’s where I live when at home.’

‘And your father is a farmer, I suppose?’

‘You may say that; and it is a farmer I should have been, like my brother Denis, had not my uncle Phelim, the thief, tould my father to send me to school, to learn Greek letters, that I might be made a saggart of, and sent to Paris and Salamanca.’

‘And you would rather be a farmer than a priest?’

‘You may say that! – for, were I a farmer, like the rest, I should have something to do, like the rest – something that I cared for – and I should come home tired at night, and fall asleep, as the rest do, before the fire; but when I comes home at night I am not tired, for I have been doing nothing all day that I care for; and then I sits down and stares about me, and at the fire, till I become frightened; and then I shouts to my brother Denis, or to the gossoons, “Get up, I say, and let’s be doing something; tell us the tale of Finn-ma-Coul, and how he lay down in the Shannon’s bed, and let the river flow down his jaws!” Arrah, Shorsha! I wish you would come and stay with us, and tell us some o’ your sweet stories of your own self and the snake ye carried about wid ye. Faith, Shorsha dear! that snake bates anything about Finn-ma-Coul or Brian Boroo, the thieves two, bad luck to them!’

‘And do they get up and tell you stories?’

‘Sometimes they does, but oftenmost they curses me, and bids me be quiet! But I can’t be quiet, either before the fire or abed; so I runs out of the house, and stares at the rocks, at the trees, and sometimes at the clouds, as they run a race across the bright moon; and, the more I stares, the more frightened I grows, till I screeches and holloas. And last night I went into the barn, and hid my face in the straw; and there, as I lay and shivered in the straw, I heard a voice above my head singing out “To whit, to whoo!” and then up I starts, and runs into the house, and falls over my brother Denis, as he lies at the fire. “What’s that for?” says he. “Get up, you thief!” says I, “and be helping me. I have been out into the barn, and an owl has crow’d at me!”’

‘And what has this to do with playing cards?’

‘Little enough, Shorsha dear! – If there were card-playing, I should not be frightened.’

‘And why do you not play at cards?’

‘Did I not tell you that the thief, my uncle Phelim, stole away the pack? If we had the pack, my brother Denis and the gossoons would be ready enough to get up from their sleep before the fire, and play cards with me for ha’pence, or eggs, or nothing at all; but the pack is gone – bad luck to the thief who took it!’

‘And why don’t you buy another?’

‘Is it of buying you are speaking? And where am I to get the money?’

‘Ah! that’s another thing!’

‘Faith it is, honey! – And now the Christmas holidays is coming, when I shall be at home by day as well as night, and then what am I to do? Since I have been a saggarting, I have been good for nothing at all – neither for work nor Greek – only to play cards! Faith, it’s going mad I will be!’

‘I say, Murtagh!’

‘Yes, Shorsha dear!’

‘I have a pack of cards.’

‘You don’t say so, Shorsha ma vourneen? – you don’t say that you have cards fifty-two?’

‘I do, though; and they are quite new – never been once used.’

‘And you’ll be lending them to me, I warrant?’

‘Don’t think it! – But I’ll sell them to you, joy, if you like.’

‘Hanam mon Dioul! am I not after telling you that I have no money at all!’

‘But you have as good as money, to me, at least; and I’ll take it in exchange.’

‘What’s that, Shorsha dear?’

‘Irish!’

‘Irish?’

‘Yes, you speak Irish; I heard you talking it the other day to the cripple. You shall teach me Irish.’

‘And is it a language-master you’d be making of me?’

‘To be sure! – what better can you do? – it would help you to pass your time at school. You can’t learn Greek, so you must teach Irish!’

Before Christmas, Murtagh was playing at cards with his brother Denis, and I could speak a considerable quantity of broken Irish.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TEMPLEMORE – DEVIL'S MOUNTAIN – NO COMPANION – FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE – WAY OF THE WORLD – RUINED CASTLE – GRIM & DESOLATE – DONJON – MY OWN HOUSE

When Christmas was over, and the new year commenced, we broke up our quarters, and marched away to Templemore. This was a large military station, situated in a wild and thinly inhabited country. Extensive bogs were in the neighbourhood, connected with the huge bog of Allen, the Palus Mæotis of Ireland. Here and there was seen a ruined castle looming through the mists of winter; whilst, at the distance of seven miles, rose a singular mountain, exhibiting in its brow a chasm, or vacuum, just, for all the world, as if a piece had been bitten out; a feat which, according to the tradition of the country, had actually been performed by his Satanic majesty, who, after flying for some leagues with the morsel in his mouth, becoming weary, dropped it in the vicinity of Cashel, where it may now be seen in the shape of a bold bluff hill, crowned with the ruins of a stately edifice, probably built by some ancient Irish king.

We had been here only a few days, when my brother, who, as I have before observed, had become one of his Majesty's officers, was sent on detachment to a village at about ten miles' distance. He was not sixteen, and, though three years older than myself, scarcely my equal in stature, for I had become tall and large-limbed for my age; but there was a spirit in him which would not have disgraced a general; and, nothing daunted at the considerable responsibility which he was about to incur, he marched sturdily out of the barrack-yard at the head of his party, consisting of twenty light-infantry men, and a tall grenadier sergeant, selected expressly by my father, for the soldier-like qualities which he possessed, to accompany his son on this his first expedition. So out of the barrack-yard, with something of an air, marched my dear brother, his single drum and fife playing the inspiring old melody,

Marlbrouk is gone to the wars,
He'll never return no more!

I soon missed my brother, for I was now alone, with no being, at all assimilating in age, with whom I could exchange a word. Of late years, from being almost constantly at school, I had cast aside, in a great degree, my unsocial habits and natural reserve, but in the desolate region in which we now were there was no school; and I felt doubly the loss of my brother, whom, moreover, I tenderly loved for his own sake. Books I had none, at least such 'as I cared about'; and with respect to the old volume, the wonders of which had first beguiled me into common reading, I had so frequently pored over its pages, that I had almost got its contents by heart. I was therefore in danger of falling into the same predicament as Murtagh, becoming 'frighted' from having nothing to do! Nay, I had not even his resources; I cared not for cards, even if I possessed them and could find people disposed to play with them. However, I made the most of circumstances, and roamed about the desolate fields and bogs in the neighbourhood, sometimes entering the cabins of the peasantry, with a 'God's blessing upon you, good people!' where I would take my seat on the 'stranger's stone' at the corner of the hearth, and, looking them full in the face, would listen to the carles and carlines talking Irish.

Ah, that Irish! How frequently do circumstances, at first sight the most trivial and unimportant, exercise a mighty and permanent influence on our habits and pursuits! – how frequently is a stream turned aside from its natural course by some little rock or knoll, causing it to make an abrupt turn! On a wild road in Ireland I had heard Irish spoken for the first time; and I was seized with a desire to learn Irish, the acquisition of which, in my case, became the stepping-

stone to other languages. I had previously learnt Latin, or rather Lilly; but neither Latin nor Lilly made me a philologist. I had frequently heard French and other languages, but had felt little desire to become acquainted with them; and what, it may be asked, was there connected with the Irish calculated to recommend it to my attention?

First of all, and principally, I believe, the strangeness and singularity of its tones; then there was something mysterious and uncommon associated with its use. It was not a school language, to acquire which was considered an imperative duty; no, no; nor was it a drawing-room language, drawled out, occasionally, in shreds and patches, by the ladies of generals and other great dignitaries, to the ineffable dismay of poor officers' wives. Nothing of the kind; but a speech spoken in out-of-the-way desolate places, and in cut-throat kens, where thirty ruffians, at the sight of the king's minions, would spring up with brandished sticks and an 'ubbubboo like the blowing up of a powder-magazine.' Such were the points connected with the Irish, which first awakened in my mind the desire of acquiring it; and by acquiring it I became, as I have already said, enamoured of languages. Having learnt one by choice I speedily, as the reader will perceive, learnt others, some of which were widely different from Irish.

Ah, that Irish! I am much indebted to it in more ways than one. But I am afraid I have followed the way of the world, which is very much wont to neglect original friends and benefactors. I frequently find myself, at present, turning up my nose at Irish when I hear it in the street; yet I have still a kind of regard for it, the fine old language:

A labhair Padruic n'insefail nan riogh.

One of the most peculiar features of this part of Ireland is the ruined castles, which are so thick and numerous that the face of the country appears studded with them, it being difficult to choose any situation from which one, at least, may not be descried. They are of various ages and styles of architecture, some of great antiquity, like the stately remains which crown the Crag of Cashel; others built by the early English conquerors; others, and probably the greater part, erections of the times of Elizabeth and Cromwell. The whole speaking monuments of the troubled and insecure state of the country, from the most remote periods to a comparatively modern time.

From the windows of the room where I slept I had a view of one of these old places – an indistinct one, it is true, the distance being too great to permit me to distinguish more than the general outline. I had an anxious desire to explore it. It stood to the south-east; in which direction, however, a black bog intervened, which had more than once baffled all my attempts to cross it. One morning, however, when the sun shone brightly upon the old building, it appeared so near, that I felt ashamed at not being able to accomplish a feat seemingly so easy; I determined, therefore, upon another trial. I reached the bog, and was about to venture upon its black surface, and to pick my way amongst its innumerable holes, yawning horribly, and half filled with water black as soot, when it suddenly occurred to me that there was a road to the south, by following which I might find a more convenient route to the object of my wishes. The event justified my expectations, for, after following the road for some three miles, seemingly in the direction of the Devil's Mountain, I suddenly beheld the castle on my left.

I diverged from the road, and, crossing two or three fields, came to a small grassy plain, in the midst of which stood the castle. About a gun-shot to the south was a small village, which had, probably, in ancient days, sprung up beneath its protection. A kind of awe came over me as I approached the old building. The sun no longer shone upon it, and it looked so grim, so desolate and solitary; and here was I, in that wild country, alone with that grim building before me. The village was within sight, it is true; but it might be a village of the dead for what I knew; no sound issued from it, no smoke was rising from its roofs, neither man nor beast was visible, no life, no motion – it looked as desolate as the castle itself. Yet I was bent on the adventure, and moved on

towards the castle across the green plain, occasionally casting a startled glance around me; and now I was close to it.

It was surrounded by a quadrangular wall, about ten feet in height, with a square tower at each corner. At first I could discover no entrance; walking round, however, to the northern side, I found a wide and lofty gateway with a tower above it, similar to those at the angles of the wall; on this side the ground sloped gently down towards the bog, which was here skirted by an abundant growth of copse-wood and a few evergreen oaks. I passed through the gateway, and found myself within a square enclosure of about two acres. On one side rose a round and lofty keep, or donjon, with a conical roof, part of which had fallen down, strewing the square with its ruins. Close to the keep, on the other side, stood the remains of an oblong house, built something in the modern style, with various window-holes; nothing remained but the bare walls and a few projecting stumps of beams, which seemed to have been half burnt. The interior of the walls was blackened, as if by fire; fire also appeared at one time to have raged out of the window-holes, for the outside about them was black, portentously so. 'I wonder what has been going on here?' I exclaimed.

There were echoes among the walls as I walked about the court. I entered the keep by a low and frowning doorway: the lower floor consisted of a large dungeon-like room, with a vaulted roof; on the left hand was a winding staircase in the thickness of the wall; it looked anything but inviting; yet I stole softly up, my heart beating. On the top of the first flight of stairs was an arched doorway, to the left was a dark passage, to the right, stairs leading still higher. I stepped under the arch and found myself in an apartment somewhat similar to the one below, but higher. There was an object at the farther end.

An old woman, at least eighty, was seated on a stone, cowering over a few sticks burning feebly on what had once been a right noble and cheerful hearth; her side-glance was towards the doorway as I entered, for she had heard my footsteps. I stood suddenly still, and her haggard glance rested on my face.

'Is this your house, mother?' I at length demanded, in the language which I thought she would best understand.

'Yes, my house, my own house; the house of the broken-hearted.'

'Any other person's house?' I demanded.

'My own house, the beggar's house – the accursed house of Cromwell!'

CHAPTER TWELVE

A VISIT – FIGURE OF A MAN – THE DOG OF PEACE – THE RAW WOUND – THE GUARDROOM – BOY SOLDIER – PERSON IN AUTHORITY – NEVER SOLITARY – CLERGYMAN AND FAMILY – STILL-HUNTING – FAIRY MAN – NEAR SUNSET – BAGG – LEFT-HANDED HITTER – AT SWANTON MORLEY

One morning I set out, designing to pay a visit to my brother at the place where he was detached; the distance was rather considerable, yet I hoped to be back by evening fall, for I was now a shrewd walker, thanks to constant practice. I set out early, and, directing my course towards the north, I had in less than two hours accomplished considerably more than half of the journey. The weather had at first been propitious: a slight frost had rendered the ground firm to the tread, and the skies were clear; but now a change came over the scene, the skies darkened, and a heavy snowstorm came on; the road then lay straight through a bog, and was bounded by a deep trench on both sides; I was making the best of my way, keeping as nearly as I could in the middle of the road, lest, blinded by the snow which was frequently borne into my eyes by the wind, I might fall into the dyke, when all at once I heard a shout to windward, and turning my eyes I saw the figure of a man, and what appeared to be an animal of some kind, coming across the bog with great speed, in the direction of myself; the nature of the ground seemed to offer but little impediment to these beings, both clearing the holes and abysses which lay in their way with surprising agility; the animal was, however, some slight way in advance, and, bounding over the dyke, appeared on the road just before me. It was a dog, of what species I cannot tell, never having seen the like before or since; the head was large and round; the ears so tiny as scarcely to be discernible; the eyes of a fiery red: in size it was rather small than large; and the coat, which was remarkably smooth, as white as the falling flakes. It placed itself directly in my path, and showing its teeth, and bristling its coat, appeared determined to prevent my progress. I had an ashen stick in my hand, with which I threatened it; this, however, only served to increase its fury; it rushed upon me, and I had the utmost difficulty to preserve myself from its fangs.

‘What are you doing with the dog, the fairy dog?’ said a man, who at this time likewise cleared the dyke at a bound.

He was a very tall man, rather well dressed as it should seem; his garments, however, were, like my own, so covered with snow that I could scarcely discern their quality.

‘What are ye doing with the dog of peace?’

‘I wish he would show himself one,’ said I; ‘I said nothing to him, but he placed himself in my road, and would not let me pass.’

‘Of course he would not be letting you till he knew where ye were going.’

‘He’s not much of a fairy,’ said I, ‘or he would know that without asking; tell him that I am going to see my brother.’

‘And who is your brother, little Sas?’

‘What my father is, a royal soldier.’

‘Oh, ye are going then to the detachment at – ; by my shoul, I have a good mind to be spoiling your journey.’

‘You are doing that already,’ said I, ‘keeping me here talking about dogs and fairies; you had better go home and get some salve to cure that place over your eye; it’s catching cold you’ll be, in so much snow.’

On one side of the man’s forehead there was a raw and staring wound, as if from a recent and terrible blow.

‘Faith, then I’ll be going, but it’s taking you wid me I will be.’

‘And where will you take me?’

‘Why, then, to Ryan’s Castle, little Sas.’

‘You do not speak the language very correctly,’ said I; ‘it is not Sas you should call me – ’tis Sassannach,’ and forthwith I accompanied the word with a speech full of flowers of Irish rhetoric.

The man looked upon me for a moment, fixedly, then, bending his head towards his breast, he appeared to be undergoing a kind of convulsion, which was accompanied by a sound something resembling laughter; presently he looked at me, and there was a broad grin on his features.

‘By my shoul, it’s a thing of peace I’m thinking ye.’

But now with a whisking sound came running down the road a hare; it was nearly upon us before it perceived us; suddenly stopping short, however, it sprang into the bog on the right-hand side; after it again bounded the dog of peace, followed by the man, but not until he had nodded to me a farewell salutation. In a few moments I lost sight of him amidst the snow-flakes.

The weather was again clear and fine before I reached the place of detachment. It was a little wooden barrack, surrounded by a wall of the same material; a sentinel stood at the gate, I passed by him, and, entering the building, found myself in a rude kind of guardroom; several soldiers were lying asleep on a wooden couch at one end, others lounged on benches by the side of a turf fire. The tall sergeant stood before the fire, holding a cooking utensil in his left hand; on seeing me, he made the military salutation.

‘Is my brother here?’ said I, rather timidly, dreading to hear that he was out, perhaps for the day.

‘The ensign is in his room, sir,’ said Bagg, ‘I am now preparing his meal, which will presently be ready; you will find the ensign above stairs,’ and he pointed to a broken ladder which led to some place above.

And there I found him – the boy soldier – in a kind of upper loft, so low that I could touch with my hands the sooty rafters; the door was of rough boards, through the joints of which you could see the gleam of the soldiers’ fire, and occasionally discern their figures as they moved about; in one corner was a camp bedstead, by the side of which hung the child’s sword, gorget, and sash; a deal table stood in the proximity of the rusty grate, where smoked and smouldered a pile of black turf from the bog, – a deal table without a piece of baize to cover it, yet fraught with things not devoid of interest: a Bible, given by a mother; the *Odyssey*, the Greek *Odyssey*; a flute, with broad silver keys; crayons, moreover, and water-colours; and a sketch of a wild prospect near, which, though but half finished, afforded ample proof of the excellence and skill of the boyish hand now occupied upon it.

Ah! he was a sweet being, that boy soldier, a plant of early promise, bidding fair to become in after time all that is great, good, and admirable. I have read of a remarkable Welshman, of whom it was said, when the grave closed over him, that he could frame a harp, and play it; build a ship, and sail it; compose an ode, and set it to music. A brave fellow that son of Wales – but I had once a brother who could do more and better than this, but the grave has closed over him, as over the gallant Welshman of yore; there are now but two that remember him – the one who bore him, and the being who was nurtured at the same breast. He was taken, and I was left! – Truly, the ways of Providence are inscrutable.

‘You seem to be very comfortable, John,’ said I, looking around the room and at the various objects which I have described above: ‘you have a good roof over your head, and have all your things about you.’

‘Yes, I am very comfortable, George, in many respects; I am, moreover, independent, and feel myself a man for the first time in my life – independent, did I say? – that’s not the word, I am something much higher than that; here am I, not sixteen yet, a person in authority, like the centurion in the book there, with twenty Englishmen under me, worth a whole legion of his men, and that fine fellow Bagg to wait upon me, and take my orders. Oh! these last six weeks have passed like hours of heaven.’

‘But your time must frequently hang heavy on your hands; this is a strange wild place, and you must be very solitary?’

‘I am never solitary; I have, as you see, all my things about me, and there is plenty of company below stairs. Not that I mix with the soldiers; if I did, good-bye to my authority; but when I am alone I can hear all their discourse through the planks, and I often laugh to myself at the funny things they say.’

‘And have you any acquaintance here?’

‘The very best; much better than the Colonel and the rest, at their grand Templemore; I had never so many in my whole life before. One has just left me, a gentleman who lives at a distance across the bog; he comes to talk with me about Greek, and the *Odyssey*, for he is a very learned man, and understands the old Irish, and various other strange languages. He has had a dispute with Bagg. On hearing his name, he called him to him, and, after looking at him for some time with great curiosity, said that he was sure he was a Dane. Bagg, however, took the compliment in dudgeon, and said that he was no more a Dane than himself, but a true-born Englishman, and a sergeant of six years’ standing.’

‘And what other acquaintance have you?’

‘All kinds; the whole neighbourhood can’t make enough of me. Amongst others there’s the clergyman of the parish and his family; such a venerable old man, such fine sons and daughters! I am treated by them like a son and a brother – I might be always with them if I pleased; there’s one drawback, however, in going to see them; there’s a horrible creature in the house, a kind of tutor, whom they keep more from charity than anything else; he is a Papist and, they say, a priest; you should see him scowl sometimes at my red coat, for he hates the king, and not unfrequently, when the king’s health is drunk, curses him between his teeth. I once got up to strike him; but the youngest of the sisters, who is the handsomest, caught my arm and pointed to her forehead.’

‘And what does your duty consist of? Have you nothing else to do than pay visits and receive them?’

‘We do what is required of us, we guard this edifice, perform our evolutions, and help the excise; I am frequently called up in the dead of night to go to some wild place or other in quest of an illicit still; this last part of our duty is poor mean work, I don’t like it, nor more does Bagg; though without it we should not see much active service, for the neighbourhood is quiet; save the poor creatures with their stills, not a soul is stirring. ’Tis true there’s Jerry Grant.’

‘And who is Jerry Grant?’

‘Did you never hear of him? that’s strange, the whole country is talking about him; he is a kind of outlaw, rebel, or robber, all three I daresay; there’s a hundred pounds offered for his head.’

‘And where does he live?’

‘His proper home, they say, is in the Queen’s County, where he has a band, but he is a strange fellow, fond of wandering about by himself amidst the bogs and mountains, and living in the old castles; occasionally he quarters himself in the peasants’ houses, who let him do just what he pleases; he is free of his money, and often does them good turns, and can be good-humoured enough, so they don’t dislike him. Then he is what they call a fairy man, a person in league with fairies and spirits, and able to work much harm by supernatural means, on which account they hold him in great awe; he is, moreover, a mighty strong and tall fellow. Bagg has seen him.’

‘Has he?’

‘Yes! and felt him; he too is a strange one. A few days ago he was told that Grant had been seen hovering about an old castle some two miles off in the bog; so one afternoon what does he do but, without saying a word to me – for which, by the bye, I ought to put him under arrest, though what I should do without Bagg I have no idea whatever – what does he do but walk off to the castle, intending, as I suppose, to pay a visit to Jerry. He had some difficulty in getting there on account of the turf-holes in the bog, which he was not accustomed to; however, thither at last he got and went

in. It was a strange lonesome place, he says, and he did not much like the look of it; however, in he went, and searched about from the bottom to the top and down again, but could find no one; he shouted and hallooed, but nobody answered, save the rooks and choughs, which started up in great numbers. "I have lost my trouble," said Bagg, and left the castle. It was now late in the afternoon, near sunset, when about half-way over the bog he met a man –

‘And that man was –’

‘Jerry Grant! there’s no doubt of it. Bagg says it was the most sudden thing in the world. He was moving along, making the best of his way, thinking of nothing at all save a public-house at Swanton Morley, which he intends to take when he gets home, and the regiment is disbanded – though I hope that will not be for some time yet: he had just leaped a turf-hole, and was moving on, when, at the distance of about six yards before him, he saw a fellow coming straight towards him. Bagg says that he stopped short, as suddenly as if he had heard the word halt, when marching at double quick time. It was quite a surprise, he says, and he can’t imagine how the fellow was so close upon him before he was aware. He was an immense tall fellow – Bagg thinks at least two inches taller than himself – very well dressed in a blue coat and buff breeches, for all the world like a squire when going out hunting. Bagg, however, saw at once that he had a roguish air, and he was on his guard in a moment. "Good-evening to ye, sodger," says the fellow, stepping close up to Bagg, and staring him in the face. "Good-evening to you, sir! I hope you are well," says Bagg. "You are looking after some one?" says the fellow. "Just so, sir," says Bagg, and forthwith seized him by the collar; the man laughed, Bagg says it was such a strange awkward laugh. "Do you know whom you have got hold of, sodger?" said he. "I believe I do, sir," said Bagg, "and in that belief will hold you fast in the name of King George and the quarter sessions"; the next moment he was sprawling with his heels in the air. Bagg says there was nothing remarkable in that; he was only flung by a kind of wrestling trick, which he could easily have baffled had he been aware of it. "You will not do that again, sir," said he, as he got up and put himself on his guard. The fellow laughed again more strangely and awkwardly than before; then, bending his body and moving his head from one side to the other as a cat does before she springs, and crying out, "Here’s for ye, sodger!" he made a dart at Bagg, rushing in with his head foremost. "That will do, sir," says Bagg, and, drawing himself back, he put in a left-handed blow with all the force of his body and arm, just over the fellow’s right eye – Bagg is a left-handed hitter, you must know – and it was a blow of that kind which won him his famous battle at Edinburgh with the big Highland sergeant. Bagg says that he was quite satisfied with the blow, more especially when he saw the fellow reel, fling out his arms, and fall to the ground. "And now, sir," said he, "I’ll make bold to hand you over to the quarter sessions, and, if there is a hundred pounds for taking you, who has more right to it than myself?" So he went forward, but ere he could lay hold of his man the other was again on his legs, and was prepared to renew the combat. They grappled each other – Bagg says he had not much fear of the result, as he now felt himself the best man, the other seeming half-stunned with the blow – but just then there came on a blast, a horrible roaring wind bearing night upon its wings, snow, and sleet, and hail. Bagg says he had the fellow by the throat quite fast, as he thought, but suddenly he became bewildered, and knew not where he was; and the man seemed to melt away from his grasp, and the wind howled more and more, and the night poured down darker and darker; the snow and the sleet thicker and more blinding. "Lord have mercy upon us!" said Bagg.’

Myself. A strange adventure that; it is well that Bagg got home alive.

John. He says that the fight was a fair fight, and that the fling he got was a fair fling, the result of a common enough wrestling trick. But with respect to the storm, which rose up just in time to save the fellow, he is of opinion that it was not fair, but something Irish and supernatural.

Myself. I daresay he’s right. I have read of witchcraft in the Bible.

John. He wishes much to have one more encounter with the fellow; he says that on fair ground, and in fine weather, he has no doubt that he could master him, and hand him over to the

quarter sessions. He says that a hundred pounds would be no bad thing to be disbanded upon; for he wishes to take an inn at Swanton Morley, keep a cock-pit, and live respectably.

Myself. He is quite right; and now kiss me, my darling brother, for I must go back through the bog to Templemore.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GROOM AND COB – STRENGTH AND SYMMETRY – WHERE’S THE SADDLE? – THE FIRST RIDE – NO MORE FATIGUE – LOVE FOR HORSES – THE PURSUIT OF WORDS – PHILOLOGIST AND PEGASUS – THE SMITH – WHAT MORE, AGRAH?

And it came to pass that, as I was standing by the door of the barrack stable, one of the grooms came out to me, saying, ‘I say, young gentleman, I wish you would give the cob a breathing this fine morning.’

‘Why do you wish me to mount him?’ said I; ‘you know he is dangerous. I saw him fling you off his back only a few days ago.’

‘Why, that’s the very thing, master. I’d rather see anybody on his back than myself; he does not like me; but, to them he does, he can be as gentle as a lamb.’

‘But suppose,’ said I, ‘that he should not like me?’

‘We shall soon see that, master,’ said the groom; ‘and, if so be he shows temper, I will be the first to tell you to get down. But there’s no fear of that; you have never angered or insulted him, and to such as you, I say again, he’ll be as gentle as a lamb.’

‘And how came you to insult him,’ said I, ‘knowing his temper as you do?’

‘Merely through forgetfulness, master: I was riding him about a month ago, and having a stick in my hand, I struck him, thinking I was on another horse, or rather thinking of nothing at all. He has never forgiven me, though before that time he was the only friend I had in the world; I should like to see you on him, master.’

‘I should soon be off him; I can’t ride.’

‘Then you are all right, master; there’s no fear. Trust him for not hurting a young gentleman, an officer’s son, who can’t ride. If you were a blackguard dragoon, indeed, with long spurs, ’twere another thing; as it is, he’ll treat you as if he were the elder brother that loves you. Ride! he’ll soon teach you to ride if you leave the matter with him. He’s the best riding-master in all Ireland, and the gentlest.’

The cob was led forth; what a tremendous creature! I had frequently seen him before, and wondered at him; he was barely fifteen hands, but he had the girth of a metropolitan dray-horse; his head was small in comparison with his immense neck, which curved down nobly to his wide back: his chest was broad and fine, and his shoulders models of symmetry and strength; he stood well and powerfully upon his legs, which were somewhat short. In a word, he was a gallant specimen of the genuine Irish cob, a species at one time not uncommon, but at the present day nearly extinct.

‘There!’ said the groom, as he looked at him, half admiringly, half sorrowfully, ‘with sixteen stone on his back, he’ll trot fourteen miles in one hour, with your nine stone, some two and a half more; ay, and clear a six-foot wall at the end of it.’

‘I’m half afraid,’ said I; ‘I had rather you would ride him.’

‘I’d rather so, too, if he would let me; but he remembers the blow. Now, don’t be afraid, young master, he’s longing to go out himself. He’s been trampling with his feet these three days, and I know what that means; he’ll let anybody ride him but myself, and thank them; but to me he says, “No! you struck me.”’

‘But,’ said I, ‘where’s the saddle?’

‘Never mind the saddle; if you are ever to be a frank rider, you must begin without a saddle; besides, if he felt a saddle, he would think you don’t trust him, and leave you to yourself. Now, before you mount, make his acquaintance – see there, how he kisses you and licks your face, and see how he lifts his foot, that’s to shake hands. You may trust him – now you are on his back at last; mind how you hold the bridle – gently, gently! It’s not four pair of hands like yours can hold him if he wishes to be off. Mind what I tell you – leave it all to him.’

Off went the cob at a slow and gentle trot, too fast and rough, however, for so inexperienced a rider. I soon felt myself sliding off, the animal perceived it too, and instantly stood stone still till I had righted myself; and now the groom came up: 'When you feel yourself going,' said he, 'don't lay hold of the mane, that's no use; mane never yet saved man from falling, no more than straw from drowning; it's his sides you must cling to with your calves and feet, till you learn to balance yourself. That's it, now abroad with you; I'll bet my comrade a pot of beer that you'll be a regular rough-rider by the time you come back.'

And so it proved; I followed the directions of the groom, and the cob gave me every assistance. How easy is riding, after the first timidity is got over, to supple and youthful limbs; and there is no second fear. The creature soon found that the nerves of his rider were in proper tone. Turning his head half round, he made a kind of whining noise, flung out a little foam, and set off.

In less than two hours I had made the circuit of the Devil's Mountain, and was returning along the road, bathed with perspiration, but screaming with delight; the cob laughing in his equine way, scattering foam and pebbles to the left and right, and trotting at the rate of sixteen miles an hour.

Oh, that ride! that first ride! – most truly it was an epoch in my existence; and I still look back to it with feelings of longing and regret. People may talk of first love – it is a very agreeable event, I daresay, – but give me the flush, and triumph, and glorious sweat of a first ride, like mine on the mighty cob! My whole frame was shaken, it is true; and during one long week I could hardly move foot or hand; but what of that? By that one trial I had become free, as I may say, of the whole equine species. No more fatigue, no more stiffness of joints, after that first ride round the Devil's Hill on the cob.

Oh, that cob! that Irish cob! – may the sod lie lightly over the bones of the strongest, speediest, and most gallant of its kind! Oh! the days when, issuing from the barrack-gate of Templemore, we commenced our hurry-scurry just as inclination led – now across the fields – direct over stone walls and running brooks – mere pastime for the cob! – sometimes along the road to Thurles and Holy Cross, even to distant Cahir! – what was distance to the cob?

It was thus that the passion for the equine race was first awakened within me – a passion which, up to the present time, has been rather on the increase than diminishing. It is no blind passion; the horse being a noble and generous creature, intended by the All-Wise to be the helper and friend of man, to whom he stands next in the order of creation. On many occasions of my life I have been much indebted to the horse, and have found in him a friend and coadjutor, when human help and sympathy were not to be obtained. It is therefore natural enough that I should love the horse; but the love which I entertain for him has always been blended with respect; for I soon perceived that, though disposed to be the friend and helper of man, he is by no means inclined to be his slave; in which respect he differs from the dog, who will crouch when beaten; whereas the horse spurns, for he is aware of his own worth, and that he carries death within the horn of his heel. If, therefore, I found it easy to love the horse, I found it equally natural to respect him.

I much question whether philology, or the passion for languages, requires so little of an apology as the love for horses. It has been said, I believe, that the more languages a man speaks, the more a man is he; which is very true, provided he acquires languages as a medium for becoming acquainted with the thoughts and feelings of the various sections into which the human race is divided; but, in that case, he should rather be termed a philosopher than a philologist – between which two the difference is wide indeed! An individual may speak and read a dozen languages, and yet be an exceedingly poor creature, scarcely half a man; and the pursuit of tongues for their own sake, and the mere satisfaction of acquiring them, surely argues an intellect of a very low order; a mind disposed to be satisfied with mean and grovelling things; taking more pleasure in the trumpery casket than in the precious treasure which it contains; in the pursuit of words, than in the acquisition of ideas.

I cannot help thinking that it was fortunate for myself, who am, to a certain extent, a philologist, that with me the pursuit of languages has been always modified by the love of horses; for scarcely had I turned my mind to the former, when I also mounted the wild cob, and hurried forth in the direction of the Devil's Hill, scattering dust and flint-stones on every side; that ride, amongst other things, taught me that a lad with thews and sinews was intended by nature for something better than mere word-culling; and if I have accomplished anything in after life worthy of mentioning, I believe it may partly be attributed to the ideas which that ride, by setting my blood in a glow, infused into my brain. I might, otherwise, have become a mere philologist; one of those beings who toil night and day in culling useless words for some *opus magnum* which Murray will never publish, and nobody ever read; beings without enthusiasm, who, having never mounted a generous steed, cannot detect a good point in Pegasus himself; like a certain philologist, who, though acquainted with the exact value of every word in the Greek and Latin languages, could observe no particular beauty in one of the most glorious of Homer's rhapsodies. What knew he of Pegasus? he had never mounted a generous steed; the merest jockey, had the strain been interpreted to him, would have called it a brave song! – I return to the brave cob.

On a certain day I had been out on an excursion. In a cross-road, at some distance from the Satanic hill, the animal which I rode cast a shoe. By good luck a small village was at hand, at the entrance of which was a large shed, from which proceeded a most furious noise of hammering. Leading the cob by the bridle, I entered boldly. 'Shoe this horse, and do it quickly, a gough,' said I to a wild grimy figure of a man, whom I found alone, fashioning a piece of iron.

'Arrigod yuit?' said the fellow, desisting from his work, and staring at me.

'Oh yes, I have money,' said I, 'and of the best'; and I pulled out an English shilling.

'Tabhair chugam?' said the smith, stretching out his grimy hand.

'No, I shan't,' said I; 'some people are glad to get their money when their work is done.'

The fellow hammered a little longer, and then proceeded to shoe the cob, after having first surveyed it with attention. He performed his job rather roughly, and more than once appeared to give the animal unnecessary pain, frequently making use of loud and boisterous words. By the time the work was done, the creature was in a state of high excitement, and plunged and tore. The smith stood at a short distance, seeming to enjoy the irritation of the animal, and showing, in a remarkable manner, a huge fang, which projected from the under jaw of a very wry mouth.

'You deserve better handling,' said I, as I went up to the cob and fondled it; whereupon it whinnied, and attempted to touch my face with its nose.

'Are ye not afraid of that beast?' said the smith, showing his fang. 'Arrah, it's vicious that he looks!'

'It's at you, then! – I don't fear him'; and thereupon I passed under the horse, between its hind legs.

'And is that all you can do, agrah?' said the smith.

'No,' said I, 'I can ride him.'

'Ye can ride him, and what else, agrah?'

'I can leap him over a six-foot wall,' said I.

'Over a wall, and what more, agrah?'

'Nothing more,' said I; 'what more would you have?'

'Can you do this, agrah?' said the smith; and he uttered a word which I had never heard before, in a sharp pungent tone. The effect upon myself was somewhat extraordinary, a strange thrill ran through me; but with regard to the cob it was terrible; the animal forthwith became like one mad, and reared and kicked with the utmost desperation.

'Can you do that, agrah?' said the smith.

'What is it?' said I, retreating, 'I never saw the horse so before.'

'Go between his legs, agrah,' said the smith, 'his hinder legs'; and he again showed his fang.

‘I dare not,’ said I, ‘he would kill me.’

‘He would kill ye! and how do ye know that, agrah?’

‘I feel he would,’ said I, ‘something tells me so.’

‘And it tells ye truth, agrah; but it’s a fine beast, and it’s a pity to see him in such a state: Is agam an’t leigeas’ – and here he uttered another word in a voice singularly modified, but sweet and almost plaintive; the effect of it was as instantaneous as that of the other, but how different! – the animal lost all its fury, and became at once calm and gentle. The smith went up to it, coaxed and patted it, making use of various sounds of equine endearment; then turning to me, and holding out once more the grimy hand, he said, ‘And now ye will be giving me the Sassannach tenpence, agrah?’

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A FINE OLD CITY – NORMAN MASTER-WORK – LOLLARDS' HOLE – GOOD BLOOD – THE SPANIARD'S SWORD – OLD RETIRED OFFICER – WRITING TO A DUKE – GOD HELP THE CHILD – NOTHING LIKE JACOB – IRISH BRIGADES – OLD SERGEANT MEREDITH – I HAVE BEEN YOUNG – IDLENESS – THE BOOKSTALL – A PORTRAIT – A BANISHED PRIEST

From the wild scenes which I have attempted to describe in the latter pages I must now transport the reader to others of a widely different character. He must suppose himself no longer in Ireland, but in the eastern corner of merry England. Bogs, ruins, and mountains have disappeared amidst the vapours of the west: I have nothing more to say of them; the region in which we are now is not famous for objects of that kind: perhaps it flatters itself that it can produce fairer and better things, of some of which let me speak; there is a fine old city before us, and first of that let me speak.

A fine old city, truly, is that, view it from whatever side you will; but it shows best from the east, where the ground, bold and elevated, overlooks the fair and fertile valley in which it stands. Gazing from those heights, the eye beholds a scene which cannot fail to awaken, even in the least sensitive bosom, feelings of pleasure and admiration. At the foot of the heights flows a narrow and deep river, with an antique bridge communicating with a long and narrow suburb, flanked on either side by rich meadows of the brightest green, beyond which spreads the city; the fine old city, perhaps the most curious specimen at present extant of the genuine old English town. Yes, there it spreads from north to south, with its venerable houses, its numerous gardens, its thrice twelve churches, its mighty mound, which, if tradition speaks true, was raised by human hands to serve as the grave-heap of an old heathen king, who sits deep within it, with his sword in his hand, and his gold and silver treasures about him. There is a grey old castle upon the top of that mighty mound; and yonder, rising three hundred feet above the soil, from among those noble forest trees, behold that old Norman master-work, that cloud-encircled cathedral spire, around which a garrulous army of rooks and choughs continually wheel their flight. Now, who can wonder that the children of that fine old city are proud of her, and offer up prayers for her prosperity? I, myself, who was not born within her walls, offer up prayers for her prosperity, that want may never visit her cottages, vice her palaces, and that the abomination of idolatry may never pollute her temples. Ha, idolatry! the reign of idolatry has been over there for many a long year, never more, let us hope, to return; brave hearts in that old town have borne witness against it, and sealed their testimony with their hearts' blood – most precious to the Lord is the blood of His saints! we are not far from hallowed ground. Observe ye not yon chalky precipice, to the right of the Norman bridge? On this side of the stream, upon its brow, is a piece of ruined wall, the last relic of what was of old a stately pile, whilst at its foot is a place called the Lollards' Hole; and with good reason, for many a saint of God has breathed his last beneath that white precipice, bearing witness against popish idolatry, midst flame and pitch; many a grisly procession has advanced along that suburb, across the old bridge, towards the Lollards' Hole: furious priests in front, a calm pale martyr in the midst, a pitying multitude behind. It has had its martyrs, the venerable old town!

Ah! there is good blood in that old city, and in the whole circumjacent region of which it is the capital. The Angles possessed the land at an early period, which, however, they were eventually compelled to share with hordes of Danes and Northmen, who flocked thither across the sea to found hearthsteads on its fertile soil. The present race, a mixture of Angles and Danes, still preserve much which speaks strongly of their northern ancestry; amongst them ye will find the light-brown hair of the north, the strong and burly forms of the north, many a wild superstition, ay, and many a wild name connected with the ancient history of the north and its sublime mythology; the warm heart and the strong heart of the old Danes and Saxons still beats in those regions, and there ye will find,

if anywhere, old northern hospitality and kindness of manner, united with energy, perseverance, and dauntless intrepidity; better soldiers or mariners never bled in their country's battles than those nurtured in those regions, and within those old walls. It was yonder, to the west, that the great naval hero of Britain first saw the light; he who annihilated the sea pride of Spain, and dragged the humble banner of France in triumph at his stern. He was born yonder, towards the west, and of him there is a glorious relic in that old town; in its dark flint guildhouse, the roof of which you can just descry rising above that maze of buildings, in the upper hall of justice, is a species of glass shrine, in which the relic is to be seen; a sword of curious workmanship, the blade is of keen Toledan steel, the hilt of ivory and mother-of-pearl. 'Tis the sword of Cordova, won in bloodiest fray off Saint Vincent's promontory, and presented by Nelson to the old capital of the much-loved land of his birth. Yes, the proud Spaniard's sword is to be seen in yonder guildhouse, in the glass case affixed to the wall: many other relics has the good old town, but none prouder than the Spaniard's sword.

Such was the place to which, when the war was over, my father retired: it was here that the old tired soldier set himself down with his little family. He had passed the greater part of his life in meritorious exertion, in the service of his country, and his chief wish now was to spend the remainder of his days in quiet and respectability; his means, it is true, were not very ample; fortunate it was that his desires corresponded with them; with a small fortune of his own, and with his half-pay as a royal soldier, he had no fears for himself or for his faithful partner and helpmate; but then his children! how was he to provide for them? how launch them upon the wide ocean of the world? This was, perhaps, the only thought which gave him uneasiness, and I believe that many an old retired officer at that time, and under similar circumstances, experienced similar anxiety; had the war continued, their children would have been, of course, provided for in the army, but peace now reigned, and the military career was closed to all save the scions of the aristocracy, or those who were in some degree connected with that privileged order, an advantage which few of these old officers could boast of; they had slight influence with the great, who gave themselves very little trouble either about them or their families.

'I have been writing to the Duke,' said my father one day to my excellent mother, after we had been at home somewhat better than a year. 'I have been writing to the Duke of York about a commission for that eldest boy of ours. He, however, affords me no hopes; he says that his list is crammed with names, and that the greater number of the candidates have better claims than my son.'

'I do not see how that can be,' said my mother.

'Nor do I,' replied my father. 'I see the sons of bankers and merchants gazetted every month, and I do not see what claims they have to urge, unless they be golden ones. However, I have not served my king fifty years to turn grumbler at this time of life. I suppose that the people at the head of affairs know what is most proper and convenient; perhaps when the lad sees how difficult, nay, how impossible it is that he should enter the army, he will turn his mind to some other profession; I wish he may!'

'I think he has already,' said my mother; 'you see how fond he is of the arts, of drawing and painting, and, as far as I can judge, what he has already done is very respectable; his mind seems quite turned that way, and I heard him say the other day that he would sooner be a Michael Angelo than a general officer. But you are always talking of him; what do you think of doing with the other child?'

'What, indeed!' said my father; 'that is a consideration which gives me no little uneasiness. I am afraid it will be much more difficult to settle him in life than his brother. What is he fitted for, even were it in my power to provide for him? God help the child! I bear him no ill will, on the contrary, all love and affection; but I cannot shut my eyes; there is something so strange about him! How he behaved in Ireland! I sent him to school to learn Greek, and he picked up Irish!'

‘And Greek as well,’ said my mother. ‘I heard him say the other day that he could read St. John in the original tongue.’

‘You will find excuses for him, I know,’ said my father. ‘You tell me I am always talking of my first-born; I might retort by saying you are always thinking of the other: but it is the way of women always to side with the second-born. There’s what’s her name in the Bible, by whose wiles the old blind man was induced to give to his second son the blessing which was the birthright of the other. I wish I had been in his place! I should not have been so easily deceived! no disguise would ever have caused me to mistake an impostor for my first-born. Though I must say for this boy that he is nothing like Jacob; he is neither smooth nor sleek, and, though my second-born, is already taller and larger than his brother.’

‘Just so,’ said my mother; ‘his brother would make a far better Jacob than he.’

‘I will hear nothing against my first-born,’ said my father, ‘even in the way of insinuation: he is my joy and pride; the very image of myself in my youthful days, long before I fought Big Ben; though perhaps not quite so tall or strong built. As for the other, God bless the child! I love him, I’m sure; but I must be blind not to see the difference between him and his brother. Why, he has neither my hair nor my eyes; and then his countenance! why, ’tis absolutely swarthy, God forgive me! I had almost said like that of a gypsy, but I have nothing to say against that; the boy is not to be blamed for the colour of his face, nor for his hair and eyes; but, then, his ways and manners! – I confess I do not like them, and that they give me no little uneasiness – I know that he kept very strange company when he was in Ireland; people of evil report, of whom terrible things were said – horse-witches and the like. I questioned him once or twice upon the matter, and even threatened him, but it was of no use; he put on a look as if he did not understand me, a regular Irish look, just such a one as those rascals assume when they wish to appear all innocence and simplicity, and they full of malice and deceit all the time. I don’t like them; they are no friends to old England, or its old king, God bless him! They are not good subjects, and never were; always in league with foreign enemies. When I was in the Coldstream, long before the Revolution, I used to hear enough about the Irish brigades kept by the French kings, to be a thorn in the side of the English whenever opportunity served. Old Sergeant Meredith once told me that in the time of the Pretender there were always, in London alone, a dozen of fellows connected with these brigades, with the view of seducing the king’s soldiers from their allegiance, and persuading them to desert to France to join the honest Irish, as they were called. One of these traitors once accosted him and proposed the matter to him, offering handfuls of gold if he could induce any of his comrades to go over. Meredith appeared to consent, but secretly gave information to his colonel; the fellow was seized, and certain traitorous papers found upon him; he was hanged before Newgate, and died exulting in his treason. His name was Michael Nowlan. That ever son of mine should have been intimate with the Papist Irish, and have learnt their language!’

‘But he thinks of other things now,’ said my mother.

‘Other languages, you mean,’ said my father. ‘It is strange that he has conceived such a zest for the study of languages; no sooner did he come home than he persuaded me to send him to that old priest to learn French and Italian, and, if I remember right, you abetted him; but, as I said before, it is in the nature of women invariably to take the part of the second-born. Well, there is no harm in learning French and Italian, perhaps much good in his case, as they may drive the other tongue out of his head. Irish! why, he might go to the university but for that; but how would he look when, on being examined with respect to his attainments, it was discovered that he understood Irish? How did you learn it? they would ask him; how did you become acquainted with the language of Papists and rebels? The boy would be sent away in disgrace.’

‘Be under no apprehension, I have no doubt that he has long since forgotten it.’

‘I am glad to hear it,’ said my father; ‘for, between ourselves, I love the poor child; ay, quite as well as my first-born. I trust they will do well, and that God will be their shield and guide; I

have no doubt He will, for I have read something in the Bible to that effect. What is that text about the young ravens being fed?’

‘I know a better than that,’ said my mother; ‘one of David’s own words, “I have been young and now am grown old, yet never have I seen the righteous man forsaken, or his seed begging their bread.”’

I have heard talk of the pleasures of idleness, yet it is my own firm belief that no one ever yet took pleasure in it. Mere idleness is the most disagreeable state of existence, and both mind and body are continually making efforts to escape from it. It has been said that idleness is the parent of mischief, which is very true; but mischief itself is merely an attempt to escape from the dreary vacuum of idleness. There are many tasks and occupations which a man is unwilling to perform, but let no one think that he is therefore in love with idleness; he turns to something which is more agreeable to his inclination, and doubtless more suited to his nature; but he is not in love with idleness. A boy may play the truant from school because he dislikes books and study; but, depend upon it, he intends doing something the while – to go fishing, or perhaps to take a walk; and who knows but that from such excursions both his mind and body may derive more benefit than from books and school? Many people go to sleep to escape from idleness; the Spaniards do; and, according to the French account, John Bull, the ’squire, hangs himself in the month of November; but the French, who are a very sensible people, attribute the action *à une grande envie de se désennuyer*; he wishes to be doing something, say they, and having nothing better to do, he has recourse to the cord.

It was for want of something better to do that, shortly after my return home, I applied myself to the study of languages. By the acquisition of Irish, with the first elements of which I had become acquainted under the tuition of Murtagh, I had contracted a certain zest and inclination for the pursuit. Yet it is probable that had I been launched about this time into some agreeable career, that of arms for example, for which, being the son of a soldier, I had, as was natural, a sort of penchant, I might have thought nothing more of the acquisition of tongues of any kind; but, having nothing to do, I followed the only course suited to my genius which appeared open to me.

So it came to pass that one day, whilst wandering listlessly about the streets of the old town, I came to a small book-stall, and stopping, commenced turning over the books; I took up at least a dozen, and almost instantly flung them down. What were they to me? At last, coming to a thick volume, I opened it, and after inspecting its contents for a few minutes, I paid for it what was demanded, and forthwith carried it home.

It was a tessaraglot grammar; a strange old book, printed somewhere in Holland, which pretended to be an easy guide to the acquirement of the French, Italian, Low Dutch, and English tongues, by means of which anyone conversant in any one of these languages could make himself master of the other three. I turned my attention to the French and Italian. The old book was not of much value; I derived some benefit from it, however, and, conning it intensely, at the end of a few weeks obtained some insight into the structure of these two languages. At length I had learnt all that the book was capable of informing me, yet was still far from the goal to which it had promised to conduct me. ‘I wish I had a master!’ I exclaimed; and the master was at hand. In an old court of the old town lived a certain elderly personage, perhaps sixty, or thereabouts; he was rather tall, and something of a robust make, with a countenance in which bluntness was singularly blended with vivacity and grimace; and with a complexion which would have been ruddy, but for a yellow hue which rather predominated. His dress consisted of a snuff-coloured coat and drab pantaloons, the former evidently seldom subjected to the annoyance of a brush, and the latter exhibiting here and there spots of something which, if not grease, bore a strong resemblance to it; add to these articles an immense frill, seldom of the purest white, but invariably of the finest French cambric, and you have some idea of his dress. He had rather a remarkable stoop, but his step was rapid and vigorous, and as he hurried along the streets, he would glance to the right and left with a pair of big

eyes like plums, and on recognising any one would exalt a pair of grizzled eyebrows, and slightly kiss a tawny and ungloved hand. At certain hours of the day he might be seen entering the doors of female boarding-schools, generally with a book in his hand, and perhaps another just peering from the orifice of a capacious back pocket; and at a certain season of the year he might be seen, dressed in white, before the altar of a certain small popish chapel, chanting from the breviary in very intelligible Latin, or perhaps reading from the desk in utterly unintelligible English. Such was my preceptor in the French and Italian tongues. 'Exul sacerdos; vone banished priest. I came into England twenty-five year ago, "my dear."'

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MONSIEUR DANTE – CONDEMNED MUSKET – SPORTING – SWEET RIVULET –
THE EARL'S HOME – THE POOL – THE SONOROUS VOICE – WHAT DOST THOU READ?
– THE MAN OF PEACE – OF ZOHAR AND MISHNA – THE MONEY-CHANGERS

So I studied French and Italian under the tuition of the banished priest, to whose house I went regularly every evening to receive instruction. I made considerable progress in the acquisition of the two languages. I found the French by far the most difficult, chiefly on account of the accent, which my master himself possessed in no great purity, being a Norman by birth. The Italian was my favourite.

'Vous serez un jour un grand philologue, mon cher,' said the old man, on our arriving at the conclusion of Dante's Hell.

'I hope I shall be something better,' said I, 'before I die, or I shall have lived to little purpose.'

'That's true, my dear! philologist – one small poor dog. What would you wish to be?'

'Many things sooner than that; for example, I would rather be like him who wrote this book.'

'Quoi, Monsieur Dante? He was a vagabond, my dear, forced to fly from his country. No, my dear, if you would be like one poet, be like Monsieur Boileau; he is the poet.'

'I don't think so.'

'How, not think so? He wrote very respectable verses; lived and died much respected by everybody. T'other, one bad dog, forced to fly from his country – died with not enough to pay his undertaker.'

'Were you not forced to flee from your country?'

'That very true; but there is much difference between me and this Dante. He fled from country because he had one bad tongue which he shook at his betters. I fly because benefice gone, and head going; not on account of the badness of my tongue.'

'Well,' said I, 'you can return now; the Bourbons are restored.'

'I find myself very well here; not bad country. Il est vrai que la France sera toujours la France; but all are dead there who knew me. I find myself very well here. Preach in popish chapel, teach schismatic, that is Protestant, child tongues and literature. I find myself very well; and why? Because I know how to govern my tongue; never call people hard names. Ma foi, il y a beaucoup de différence entre moi et ce sacre de Dante.'

Under this old man, who was well versed in the southern languages, besides studying French and Italian, I acquired some knowledge of Spanish. But I did not devote my time entirely to philology; I had other pursuits. I had not forgotten the roving life I had led in former days, nor its delights; neither was I formed by Nature to be a pallid indoor student. No, no! I was fond of other and, I say it boldly, better things than study. I had an attachment to the angle, ay, and to the gun likewise. In our house was a condemned musket, bearing somewhere on its lock, in rather antique characters, 'Tower, 1746'; with this weapon I had already, in Ireland, performed some execution among the rooks and choughs, and it was now again destined to be a source of solace and amusement to me, in the winter season, especially on occasions of severe frost when birds abounded. Sallying forth with it at these times, far into the country, I seldom returned at night without a string of bullfinches, blackbirds, and linnets hanging in triumph round my neck. When I reflect on the immense quantity of powder and shot which I crammed down the muzzle of my uncouth fowling-piece, I am less surprised at the number of birds which I slaughtered than that I never blew my hands, face, and old honeycombed gun, at one and the same time, to pieces.

But the winter, alas! (I speak as a fowler) seldom lasts in England more than three or four months; so, during the rest of the year, when not occupied with my philological studies, I had to seek for other diversions. I have already given a hint that I was also addicted to the angle. Of course

there is no comparison between the two pursuits, the rod and line seeming but very poor trumpery to one who has had the honour of carrying a noble firelock. There is a time, however, for all things; and we return to any favourite amusement with the greater zest, from being compelled to relinquish it for a season. So, if I shot birds in winter with my firelock, I caught fish in summer, or attempted so to do, with my angle. I was not quite so successful, it is true, with the latter as with the former; possibly because it afforded me less pleasure. It was, indeed, too much of a listless pastime to inspire me with any great interest. I not unfrequently fell into a doze, whilst sitting on the bank, and more than once let my rod drop from my hands into the water.

At some distance from the city, behind a range of hilly ground which rises towards the south-west, is a small river, the waters of which, after many meanderings, eventually enter the principal river of the district, and assist to swell the tide which it rolls down to the ocean. It is a sweet rivulet, and pleasant is it to trace its course from its spring-head, high up in the remote regions of Eastern Anglia, till it arrives in the valley behind yon rising ground; and pleasant is that valley, truly a goodly spot, but most lovely where yonder bridge crosses the little stream. Beneath its arch the waters rush garrulously into a blue pool, and are there stilled, for a time, for the pool is deep, and they appear to have sunk to sleep. Farther on, however, you hear their voice again, where they ripple gaily over yon gravelly shallow. On the left, the hill slopes gently down to the margin of the stream. On the right is a green level, a smiling meadow, grass of the richest decks the side of the slope; mighty trees also adorn it, giant elms, the nearest of which, when the sun is nigh its meridian, fling a broad shadow upon the face of the pool; through yon vista you catch a glimpse of the ancient brick of an old English hall. It has a stately look, that old building, indistinctly seen, as it is, among those umbrageous trees; you might almost suppose it an earl's home; and such it was, or rather upon its site stood an earl's home, in days of old, for there some old Kemp, some Sigurd or Thorkild, roaming in quest of a hearthstead, settled down in the grey old time, when Thor and Freya were yet gods, and Odin was a portentous name. Yon old hall is still called the Earl's Home, though the hearth of Sigurd is now no more, and the bones of the old Kemp, and of Sigrith his dame, have been mouldering for a thousand years in some neighbouring knoll; perhaps yonder, where those tall Norwegian pines shoot up so boldly into the air. It is said that the old earl's galley was once moored where is now that blue pool, for the waters of that valley were not always sweet; yon valley was once an arm of the sea, a salt lagoon, to which the war-barks of 'Sigurd, in search of a home,' found their way.

I was in the habit of spending many an hour on the banks of that rivulet, with my rod in my hand, and, when tired with angling, would stretch myself on the grass, and gaze upon the waters as they glided past, and not unfrequently, divesting myself of my dress, I would plunge into the deep pool which I have already mentioned, for I had long since learned to swim. And it came to pass that on one hot summer's day, after bathing in the pool, I passed along the meadow till I came to a shallow part, and, wading over to the opposite side, I adjusted my dress, and commenced fishing in another pool, beside which was a small clump of hazels.

And there I sat upon the bank, at the bottom of the hill which slopes down from 'the Earl's home'; my float was on the waters, and my back was towards the old hall. I drew up many fish, small and great, which I took from off the hook mechanically, and flung upon the bank, for I was almost unconscious of what I was about, for my mind was not with my fish. I was thinking of my earlier years – of the Scottish crags and the heaths of Ireland – and sometimes my mind would dwell on my studies – on the sonorous stanzas of Dante, rising and falling like the waves of the sea – or would strive to remember a couplet or two of poor Monsieur Boileau.

'Canst thou answer to thy conscience for pulling all those fish out of the water, and leaving them to gasp in the sun?' said a voice, clear and sonorous as a bell.

I started, and looked round. Close behind me stood the tall figure of a man, dressed in raiment of quaint and singular fashion, but of goodly materials. He was in the prime and vigour of manhood;

his features handsome and noble, but full of calmness and benevolence; at least I thought so, though they were somewhat shaded by a hat of finest beaver, with broad drooping eaves.

‘Surely that is a very cruel diversion in which thou indulgest, my young friend?’ he continued.

‘I am sorry for it, if it be, sir,’ said I, rising; ‘but I do not think it cruel to fish.’

‘What are thy reasons for not thinking so?’

‘Fishing is mentioned frequently in Scripture. Simon Peter was a fisherman.’

‘True; and Andrew and his brother. But thou forgettest: they did not follow fishing as a diversion, as I fear thou doest. – Thou readest the Scriptures?’

‘Sometimes.’

‘Sometimes? – not daily? – that is to be regretted. What profession dost thou make? – I mean to what religious denomination dost thou belong, my young friend?’

‘Church.’

‘It is a very good profession – there is much of Scripture contained in its liturgy. Dost thou read aught besides the Scriptures?’

‘Sometimes.’

‘What dost thou read besides?’

‘Greek, and Dante.’

‘Indeed! then thou hast the advantage over myself; I can only read the former. Well, I am rejoiced to find that thou hast other pursuits beside thy fishing. Dost thou know Hebrew?’

‘No?’

‘Thou shouldst study it. Why dost thou not undertake the study?’

‘I have no books.’

‘I will lend thee books, if thou wish to undertake the study. I live yonder at the hall, as perhaps thou knowest. I have a library there, in which are many curious books, both in Greek and Hebrew, which I will show to thee, whenever thou mayest find it convenient to come and see me. Farewell! I am glad to find that thou hast pursuits more satisfactory than thy cruel fishing.’

And the man of peace departed, and left me on the bank of the stream. Whether from the effect of his words, or from want of inclination to the sport, I know not, but from that day I became less and less a practitioner of that ‘cruel fishing.’ I rarely flung line and angle into the water, but I not unfrequently wandered by the banks of the pleasant rivulet. It seems singular to me, on reflection, that I never availed myself of his kind invitation. I say singular, for the extraordinary, under whatever form, had long had no slight interest for me; and I had discernment enough to perceive that yon was no common man. Yet I went not near him, certainly not from bashfulness or timidity, feelings to which I had long been an entire stranger. Am I to regret this? perhaps, for I might have learned both wisdom and righteousness from those calm, quiet lips, and my after-course might have been widely different. As it was, I fell in with other guess companions, from whom I received widely different impressions than those I might have derived from him. When many years had rolled on, long after I had attained manhood, and had seen and suffered much, and when our first interview had long since been effaced from the mind of the man of peace, I visited him in his venerable hall, and partook of the hospitality of his hearth. And there I saw his gentle partner and his fair children, and on the morrow he showed me the books of which he had spoken years before by the side of the stream. In the low quiet chamber, whose one window, shaded by a gigantic elm, looks down the slope towards the pleasant stream, he took from the shelf his learned books, Zohar and Mishna, Toldoth Jesu and Abarbenel. ‘I am fond of these studies,’ said he, ‘which, perhaps, is not to be wondered at, seeing that our people have been compared to the Jews. In one respect I confess we are similar to them; we are fond of getting money. I do not like this last author, this Abarbenel, the worse for having been a money-changer. I am a banker myself, as thou knowest.’

And would there were many like him, amidst the money-changers of princes! The hall of many an earl lacks the bounty, the palace of many a prelate the piety and learning, which adorn the quiet Quaker's home!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FAIR OF HORSES – LOOKS OF RESPECT – THE FAST TROTTER – PAIR OF EYES – STRANGE MEN – JASPER, YOUR PAL – FORCE OF BLOOD – THE YOUNG LADY WITH DIAMONDS

I was standing on the castle hill in the midst of a fair of horses.

I have already had occasion to mention this castle. It is the remains of what was once a Norman stronghold, and is perched upon a round mound or monticle, in the midst of the old city. Steep is this mound and scarped, evidently by the hand of man; a deep gorge over which is flung a bridge, separates it, on the south, from a broad swell of open ground called 'the hill'; of old the scene of many a tournament and feat of Norman chivalry, but now much used as a show-place for cattle, where those who buy and sell beeves and other beasts resort at stated periods.

So it came to pass that I stood upon this hill, observing a fair of horses.

The reader is already aware that I had long since conceived a passion for the equine race; a passion in which circumstances had of late not permitted me to indulge. I had no horses to ride, but I took pleasure in looking at them; and I had already attended more than one of these fairs: the present was lively enough, indeed horse fairs are seldom dull. There was shouting and whooping, neighing and braying; there was galloping and trotting; fellows with highlows and white stockings, and with many a string dangling from the knees of their tight breeches, were running desperately, holding horses by the halter, and in some cases dragging them along; there were long-tailed steeds and dock-tailed steeds of every degree and breed; there were droves of wild ponies, and long rows of sober cart horses; there were donkeys, and even mules: the last rare things to be seen in damp, misty England, for the mule pines in mud and rain, and thrives best with a hot sun above and a burning sand below. There were – oh, the gallant creatures! I hear their neigh upon the wind; there were – goodliest sight of all – certain enormous quadrupeds only seen to perfection in our native isle, led about by dapper grooms, their manes ribanded and their tails curiously clubbed and balled. Ha! ha! – how distinctly do they say, ha! ha!

An old man draws nigh, he is mounted on a lean pony, and he leads by the bridle one of these animals; nothing very remarkable about that creature, unless in being smaller than the rest and gentle, which they are not; he is not of the sightliest look; he is almost dun, and over one eye a thick film has gathered. But stay! there *is* something remarkable about that horse, there is something in his action in which he differs from all the rest: as he advances, the clamour is hushed! all eyes are turned upon him – what looks of interest – of respect – and, what is this? people are taking off their hats – surely not to that steed! Yes, verily! men, especially old men, are taking off their hats to that one-eyed steed, and I hear more than one deep-drawn ah!

'What horse is that?' said I to a very old fellow, the counterpart of the old man on the pony, save that the last wore a faded suit of velveteen, and this one was dressed in a white frock.

'The best in mother England,' said the very old man, taking a knobbed stick from his mouth, and looking me in the face, at first carelessly, but presently with something like interest; 'he is old like myself, but can still trot his twenty miles an hour. You won't live long, my swain; tall and overgrown ones like thee never does; yet, if you should chance to reach my years, you may boast to thy great-grand-boys thou hast seen Marshland Shales.'

Amain I did for the horse what I would neither do for earl nor baron, doffed my hat; yes! I doffed my hat to the wondrous horse, the fast trotter, the best in mother England; and I too drew a deep ah! and repeated the words of the old fellows around. 'Such a horse as this we shall never see again; a pity that he is so old.'

Now during all this time I had a kind of consciousness that I had been the object of some person's observation; that eyes were fastened upon me from somewhere in the crowd. Sometimes I

thought myself watched from before, sometimes from behind; and occasionally methought that, if I just turned my head to the right or left, I should meet a peering and inquiring glance; and indeed once or twice I did turn, expecting to see somebody whom I knew, yet always without success; though it appeared to me that I was but a moment too late, and that some one had just slipped away from the direction to which I turned, like the figure in a magic lanthorn. Once I was quite sure that there were a pair of eyes glaring over my right shoulder; my attention, however, was so fully occupied with the objects which I have attempted to describe, that I thought very little of this coming and going, this flitting and dodging of I knew not whom or what. It was, after all, a matter of sheer indifference to me who was looking at me. I could only wish whomsoever it might be to be more profitably employed; so I continued enjoying what I saw; and now there was a change in the scene, the wondrous old horse departed with his aged guardian; other objects of interest are at hand; two or three men on horseback are hurrying through the crowd, they are widely different in their appearance from the other people of the fair; not so much in dress, for they are clad something after the fashion of rustic jockeys, but in their look – no light-brown hair have they, no ruddy cheeks, no blue quiet glances belong to them; their features are dark, their locks long, black, and shining, and their eyes are wild; they are admirable horsemen, but they do not sit the saddle in the manner of common jockeys, they seem to float or hover upon it, like gulls upon the waves; two of them are mere striplings, but the third is a very tall man with a countenance heroically beautiful, but wild, wild, wild. As they rush along, the crowd give way on all sides, and now a kind of ring or circus is formed, within which the strange men exhibit their horsemanship, rushing past each other, in and out, after the manner of a reel, the tall man occasionally balancing himself upon the saddle, and standing erect on one foot. He had just regained his seat after the latter feat, and was about to push his horse to a gallop, when a figure started forward close from beside me, and laying his hand on his neck, and pulling him gently downward, appeared to whisper something into his ear; presently the tall man raised his head, and, scanning the crowd for a moment in the direction in which I was standing, fixed his eyes full upon me, and anon the countenance of the whisperer was turned, but only in part, and the side-glance of another pair of wild eyes was directed towards my face, but the entire visage of the big black man, half stooping as he was, was turned full upon mine.

But now, with a nod to the figure who had stopped him, and with another inquiring glance at myself, the big man once more put his steed into motion, and, after riding round the ring a few more times, darted through a lane in the crowd, and followed by his two companions disappeared, whereupon the figure who had whispered to him, and had subsequently remained in the middle of the space, came towards me, and, cracking a whip which he held in his hand so loudly that the report was nearly equal to that of a pocket pistol, he cried in a strange tone:

‘What! the sap-engro? Lor! the sap-engro upon the hill!’

‘I remember that word,’ said I, ‘and I almost think I remember you. You can’t be –’

‘Jasper, your pal! Truth, and no lie, brother.’

‘It is strange that you should have known me,’ said I. ‘I am certain, but for the word you used, I should never have recognised you.’

‘Not so strange as you may think, brother; there is something in your face which would prevent people from forgetting you, even though they might wish it; and your face is not much altered since the time you wot of, though you are so much grown. I thought it was you, but to make sure I dodged about, inspecting you. I believe you felt me, though I never touched you; a sign, brother, that we are akin, that we are dui palor – two relations. Your blood beat when mine was near, as mine always does at the coming of a brother; and we became brothers in that lane.’

‘And where are you staying?’ said I; ‘in this town?’

‘Not in the town; the like of us don’t find it exactly wholesome to stay in towns, we keep abroad. But I have little to do here – come with me, and I’ll show you where we stay.’

We descended the hill in the direction of the north, and passing along the suburb reached the old Norman bridge, which we crossed; the chalk precipice, with the ruin on its top, was now before us; but turning to the left we walked swiftly along, and presently came to some rising ground, which ascending, we found ourselves upon a wild moor or heath.

‘You are one of them,’ said I, ‘whom people call – ’

‘Just so,’ said Jasper; ‘but never mind what people call us.’

‘And that tall handsome man on the hill, whom you whispered? I suppose he’s one of ye. What is his name?’

‘Tawno Chikno,’ said Jasper, ‘which means the small one; we call him such because he is the biggest man of all our nation. You say he is handsome, that is not the word, brother; he’s the beauty of the world. Women run wild at the sight of Tawno. An earl’s daughter, near London – a fine young lady with diamonds round her neck – fell in love with Tawno. I have seen that lass on a heath, as this may be, kneel down to Tawno, clasp his feet, begging to be his wife – or anything else – if she might go with him. But Tawno would have nothing to do with her: “I have a wife of my own,” said he, “a lawful rommany wife, whom I love better than the whole world, jealous though she sometimes be.”’

‘And is she very beautiful?’ said I.

‘Why, you know, brother, beauty is frequently a matter of taste; however, as you ask my opinion, I should say not quite so beautiful as himself.’

We had now arrived at a small valley between two hills, or downs, the sides of which were covered with furze; in the midst of this valley were various carts and low tents forming a rude kind of encampment; several dark children were playing about, who took no manner of notice of us. As we passed one of the tents, however, a canvas screen was lifted up, and a woman supported upon a crutch hobbled out. She was about the middle age, and, besides being lame, was bitterly ugly; she was very slovenly dressed, and on her swarthy features ill nature was most visibly stamped. She did not deign me a look, but, addressing Jasper in a tongue which I did not understand, appeared to put some eager questions to him.

‘He’s coming,’ said Jasper, and passed on. ‘Poor fellow,’ said he to me, ‘he has scarcely been gone an hour, and she’s jealous already. Well,’ he continued, ‘what do you think of her? you have seen her now, and can judge for yourself – that ’ere woman is Tawno Chikno’s wife!’

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE TENTS – PLEASANT DISCOURSE – I AM PHARAOH – SHIFTING FOR ONE'S SELF – HORSE-SHOES – THIS IS WONDERFUL – BLESS YOUR WISDOM – A PRETTY MANŒUVRE – ILL DAY TO THE ROMANS – MY NAME IS HERNE – A SINGULAR PEOPLE – AN ORIGINAL SPEECH

We went to the farthest of the tents, which stood at a slight distance from the rest, and which exactly resembled the one which I have described on a former occasion; we went in and sat down one on each side of a small fire, which was smouldering on the ground, there was no one else in the tent but a tall tawny woman of middle age, who was busily knitting. 'Brother,' said Jasper, 'I wish to hold some pleasant discourse with you.'

'As much as you please,' said I, 'provided you can find anything pleasant to talk about.'

'Never fear,' said Jasper; 'and first of all we will talk of yourself. Where have you been all this long time?'

'Here and there,' said I, 'and far and near, going about with the soldiers; but there is no soldiering now, so we have sat down, father and family, in the town there.'

'And do you still hunt snakes?' said Jasper.

'No,' said I, 'I have given up that long ago; I do better now: read books and learn languages.'

'Well, I am sorry you have given up your snake-hunting, many's the strange talk I have had with our people about your snake and yourself, and how you frightened my father and mother in the lane.'

'And where are your father and mother?'

'Where I shall never see them, brother; at least, I hope so.'

'Not dead?'

'No, not dead; they are bitchadey pawdel.'

'What's that?'

'Sent across – banished.'

'Ah! I understand; I am sorry for them. And so you are here alone?'

'Not quite alone, brother.'

'No, not alone; but with the rest – Tawno Chikno takes care of you.'

'Takes care of me, brother!'

'Yes, stands to you in the place of a father – keeps you out of harm's way.'

'What do you take me for, brother?'

'For about three years older than myself.'

'Perhaps; but you are of the Gorgios, and I am a Rommany Chal. Tawno Chikno take care of Jasper Petulengro!'

'Is that your name?'

'Don't you like it?'

'Very much, I never heard a sweeter; it is something like what you call me.'

'The horse-shoe master and the snake-fellow, I am the first.'

'Who gave you that name?'

'Ask Pharaoh.'

'I would, if he were here, but I do not see him.'

'I am Pharaoh.'

'Then you are a king.'

'Chachipen Pal.'

'I do not understand you.'

‘Where are your languages? You want two things, brother: mother sense, and gentle Rommany.’

‘What makes you think that I want sense?’

‘That, being so old, you can’t yet guide yourself!’

‘I can read Dante, Jasper.’

‘Anan, brother.’

‘I can charm snakes, Jasper.’

‘I know you can, brother.’

‘Yes, and horses too; bring me the most vicious in the land, if I whisper he’ll be tame.’

‘Then the more shame for you – a snake-fellow – a horse-witch – and a lil-reader – yet you can’t shift for yourself. I laugh at you, brother!’

‘Then you can shift for yourself?’

‘For myself and for others, brother.’

‘And what does Chikno?’

‘Sells me horses, when I bid him. Those horses on the chong were mine.’

‘And has he none of his own?’

‘Sometimes he has; but he is not so well off as myself. When my father and mother were bitchadey pawdel, which, to tell you the truth, they were for chiving wafodo dloovu, they left me all they had, which was not a little, and I became the head of our family, which was not a small one. I was not older than you when that happened; yet our people said they had never a better krallis to contrive and plan for them, and to keep them in order. And this is so well known that many Rommany Chals, not of our family, come and join themselves to us, living with us for a time, in order to better themselves, more especially those of the poorer sort, who have little of their own. Tawno is one of these.’

‘Is that fine fellow poor?’

‘One of the poorest, brother. Handsome as he is, he has not a horse of his own to ride on. Perhaps we may put it down to his wife, who cannot move about, being a cripple, as you saw.’

‘And you are what is called a Gypsy King?’

‘Ay, ay; a Rommany Kral.’

‘Are there other kings?’

‘Those who call themselves so; but the true Pharaoh is Petulengro.’

‘Did Pharaoh make horse-shoes?’

‘The first who ever did, brother.’

‘Pharaoh lived in Egypt.’

‘So did we once, brother.’

‘And you left it?’

‘My fathers did, brother.’

‘And why did they come here?’

‘They had their reasons, brother.’

‘And you are not English?’

‘We are not gorgios.’

‘And you have a language of your own?’

‘Avali.’

‘This is wonderful.’

‘Ha, ha!’ cried the woman, who had hitherto sat knitting, at the farther end of the tent, without saying a word, though not inattentive to our conversation, as I could perceive by certain glances which she occasionally cast upon us both. ‘Ha, ha!’ she screamed, fixing upon me two eyes, which shone like burning coals, and which were filled with an expression both of scorn and malignity, ‘It is wonderful, is it, that we should have a language of our own? What, you grudge the poor people

the speech they talk among themselves? That's just like you gorgios; you would have everybody stupid, single-tongued idiots, like yourselves. We are taken before the Poknees of the gav, myself and sister, to give an account of ourselves. So I says to my sister's little boy, speaking Rommany, I says to the little boy who is with us, Run to my son Jasper, and the rest, and tell them to be off, there are hawks abroad. So the Poknees questions us, and lets us go, not being able to make anything of us; but, as we are going, he calls us back. "Good woman," says the Poknees, "what was that I heard you say just now to the little boy?" "I was telling him, your worship, to go and see the time of day, and to save trouble I said it in our own language." "Where did you get that language?" says the Poknees. "'Tis our own language, sir," I tells him, "we did not steal it." "Shall I tell you what it is, my good woman?" says the Poknees. "I would thank you, sir," says I, "for 'tis often we are asked about it." "Well, then," says the Poknees, "it is no language at all, merely a made-up gibberish." "Oh, bless your wisdom," says I, with a curtsy, "you can tell us what our language is, without understanding it!" Another time we meet a parson. "Good woman," says he, "what's that you are talking? Is it broken language?" "Of course, your reverence," says I, "we are broken people; give a shilling, your reverence, to the poor broken woman." Oh, these gorgios! they grudge us our very language!

'She called you her son, Jasper?'

'I am her son, brother.'

'I thought you said your parents were –'

'Bitchadey pawdel; you thought right, brother. This is my wife's mother.'

'Then you are married, Jasper?'

'Ay, truly; I am husband and father. You will see wife and chabo anon.'

'Where are they now?'

'In the gav, penning dukkerin.'

'We were talking of language, Jasper?'

'True, brother.'

'Yours must be a rum one?'

'Tis called Rommany.'

'I would gladly know it.'

'You need it sorely.'

'Would you teach it me?'

'None sooner.'

'Suppose we begin now?'

'Suppose we do, brother.'

'Not whilst I am here,' said the woman, flinging her knitting down, and starting upon her feet; 'not whilst I am here shall this gorgio learn Rommany. A pretty manœuvre, truly; and what would be the end of it? I goes to the farming ker with my sister, to tell a fortune, and earn a few sixpences for the chabes. I sees a jolly pig in the yard, and I says to my sister, speaking Rommany, "Do so and so," says I; which the farming man hearing, asks what we are talking about. "Nothing at all, master," says I; "something about the weather"; when who should start up from behind a pale, where he has been listening, but this ugly gorgio, crying out, "They are after poisoning your pigs, neighbour!" so that we are glad to run, I and my sister, with perhaps the farm-engro shouting after us. Says my sister to me, when we have got fairly off, "How came that ugly one to know what you said to me?" Whereupon I answers, "It all comes of my son Jasper, who brings the gorgio to our fire, and must needs be teaching him." "Who was fool there?" says my sister. "Who, indeed, but my son Jasper," I answers. And here should I be a greater fool to sit still and suffer it; which I will not do. I do not like the look of him; he looks over-gorgeous. An ill day to the Romans when he masters Rommany; and, when I says that, I pens a true dukkerin.'

'What do you call God, Jasper?'

‘You had better be jawing,’ said the woman, raising her voice to a terrible scream; ‘you had better be moving off, my gorgio; hang you for a keen one, sitting there by the fire, and stealing my language before my face. Do you know whom you have to deal with? Do you know that I am dangerous? My name is Herne, and I comes of the hairy ones!’

And a hairy one she looked! She wore her hair clubbed upon her head, fastened with many strings and ligatures; but now, tearing these off, her locks, originally jet black, but now partially grizzled with age, fell down on every side of her, covering her face and back as far down as her knees. No she-bear of Lapland ever looked more fierce and hairy than did that woman, as standing in the open part of the tent, with her head bent down, and her shoulders drawn up, seemingly about to precipitate herself upon me, she repeated, again and again, —

‘My name is Herne, and I comes of the hairy ones! — ’

‘I call God Duvel, brother.’

‘It sounds very like Devil.’

‘It doth, brother, it doth.’

‘And what do you call divine, I mean godly?’

‘Oh! I call that duvelskoe.’

‘I am thinking of something, Jasper.’

‘What are you thinking of, brother?’

‘Would it not be a rum thing if divine and devilish were originally one and the same word?’

‘It would, brother, it would — ’

* * * * *

From this time I had frequent interviews with Jasper, sometimes in his tent, sometimes on the heath, about which we would roam for hours, discoursing on various matters. Sometimes, mounted on one of his horses, of which he had several, I would accompany him to various fairs and markets in the neighbourhood, to which he went on his own affairs, or those of his tribe. I soon found that I had become acquainted with a most singular people, whose habits and pursuits awakened within me the highest interest. Of all connected with them, however, their language was doubtless that which exercised the greatest influence over my imagination. I had at first some suspicion that it would prove a mere made-up gibberish; but I was soon undeceived. Broken, corrupted, and half in ruins as it was, it was not long before I found that it was an original speech, far more so, indeed, than one or two others of high name and celebrity, which, up to that time, I had been in the habit of regarding with respect and veneration. Indeed many obscure points connected with the vocabulary of these languages, and to which neither classic nor modern lore afforded any clue, I thought I could now clear up by means of this strange broken tongue, spoken by people who dwelt amongst thickets and furze bushes, in tents as tawny as their faces, and whom the generality of mankind designated, and with much semblance of justice, as thieves and vagabonds. But where did this speech come from, and who were they who spoke it? These were questions which I could not solve, and which Jasper himself, when pressed, confessed his inability to answer. ‘But, whoever we be, brother,’ said he, ‘we are an old people, and not what folks in general imagine, broken gorgios; and, if we are not Egyptians, we are at any rate Rommany Chals!’

‘Rommany Chals! I should not wonder after all,’ said I, ‘that these people had something to do with the founding of Rome. Rome, it is said, was built by vagabonds, who knows but that some tribe of the kind settled down thereabouts, and called the town which they built after their name; but whence did they come originally? ah! there is the difficulty.’

But abandoning these questions, which at that time were far too profound for me, I went on studying the language, and at the same time the characters and manners of these strange people. My rapid progress in the former astonished, while it delighted, Jasper. ‘We’ll no longer call you

Sap-engro, brother,' said he; 'but rather Lav-engro, which in the language of the gorgios meaneth Word-master.' 'Nay, brother,' said Tawno Chikno, with whom I had become very intimate, 'you had better call him Cooro-mengro, I have put on *the gloves* with him, and find him a pure fist-master; I like him for that, for I am a Cooro-mengro myself, and was born at Brummagem.'

'I likes him for his modesty,' said Mrs. Chikno; 'I never hears any ill words come from his mouth, but, on the contrary, much sweet language. His talk is golden, and he has taught my eldest to say his prayers in Rommany, which my rover had never the grace to do.' 'He is the pal of my rom,' said Mrs. Petulengro, who was a very handsome woman, 'and therefore I likes him, and not the less for his being a rye; folks calls me high-minded, and perhaps I have reason to be so; before I married Pharaoh I had an offer from a lord – I likes the young rye, and, if he chooses to follow us, he shall have my sister. What say you, mother? should not the young rye have my sister Ursula?'

'I am going to my people,' said Mrs. Herne, placing a bundle upon a donkey, which was her own peculiar property; 'I am going to Yorkshire, for I can stand this no longer. You say you like him: in that we differs; I hates the gorgio, and would like, speaking Romanly, to mix a little poison with his waters. And now go to Lundra, my children, I goes to Yorkshire. Take my blessing with ye, and a little bit of a gillie to cheer your hearts with when ye are weary. In all kinds of weather have we lived together; but now we are parted. I goes broken-hearted – I can't keep you company; ye are no longer Rommany. To gain a bad brother, ye have lost a good mother.'

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WHAT PROFESSION? – NOT FITTED FOR A CHURCHMAN – ERRATIC COURSE – THE BITTER DRAUGHT – PRINCIPLE OF WOE – THOU WOULDST BE JOYOUS – WHAT AILS YOU?

So the gypsies departed; Mrs. Herne to Yorkshire, and the rest to London: as for myself, I continued in the house of my parents, passing my time in much the same manner as I have already described, principally in philological pursuits; but I was now sixteen, and it was highly necessary that I should adopt some profession, unless I intended to fritter away my existence, and to be a useless burden to those who had given me birth; but what profession was I to choose? there being none in the wide world perhaps for which I was suited; nor was there any one for which I felt any decided inclination, though perhaps there existed within me a lurking penchant for the profession of arms, which was natural enough, as, from my earliest infancy, I had been accustomed to military sights and sounds; but this profession was then closed, as I have already hinted, and, as I believe, it has since continued, to those who, like myself, had no better claims to urge than the services of a father.

My father, who, for certain reasons of his own, had no very high opinion of the advantages resulting from this career, would have gladly seen me enter the Church. His desire was, however, considerably abated by one or two passages of my life, which occurred to his recollection. He particularly dwelt on the unheard-of manner in which I had picked up the Irish language, and drew from thence the conclusion that I was not fitted by nature to cut a respectable figure at an English university. ‘He will fly off in a tangent,’ said he, ‘and, when called upon to exhibit his skill in Greek, will be found proficient in Irish; I have observed the poor lad attentively, and really do not know what to make of him; but I am afraid he will never make a churchman!’ And I have no doubt that my excellent father was right, both in his premises and the conclusion at which he arrived. I had undoubtedly, at one period of my life, forsaken Greek for Irish, and the instructions of a learned Protestant divine for those of a Papist gossoon, the card-fancying Murtagh; and of late, though I kept it a strict secret, I had abandoned in a great measure the study of the beautiful Italian, and the recitation of the sonorous terzets of the Divine Comedy; in which at one time I took the greatest delight, in order to become acquainted with the broken speech, and yet more broken songs, of certain houseless wanderers whom I had met at a horse fair. Such an erratic course was certainly by no means in consonance with the sober and unvarying routine of college study. And my father, who was a man of excellent common sense, displayed it in not pressing me to adopt a profession which required qualities of mind which he saw I did not possess.

Other professions were talked of, amongst which the law; but now an event occurred which had nearly stopped my career, and merged all minor points of solicitude in anxiety for my life. My strength and appetite suddenly deserted me, and I began to pine and droop. Some said that I had overgrown myself, and that these were the symptoms of a rapid decline; I grew worse and worse, and was soon stretched upon my bed, from which it seemed scarcely probable that I should ever more rise, the physicians themselves giving but slight hopes of my recovery: as for myself, I made up my mind to die, and felt quite resigned. I was sadly ignorant at that time, and, when I thought of death, it appeared to me little else than a pleasant sleep, and I wished for sleep, of which I got but little. It was well that I did not die that time, for I repeat that I was sadly ignorant of many important things. I did not die, for somebody coming gave me a strange, bitter draught; a decoction, I believe, of a bitter root which grows on commons and desolate places: and the person who gave it me was an ancient female, a kind of doctress, who had been my nurse in my infancy, and who, hearing of my state, had come to see me; so I drank the draught, and became a little better, and I continued taking draughts made from the bitter root till I manifested symptoms of convalescence.

But how much more quickly does strength desert the human frame than return to it! I had become convalescent, it is true, but my state of feebleness was truly pitiable. I believe it is in that state that the most remarkable feature of human physiology frequently exhibits itself. Oh, how dare I mention the dark feeling of mysterious dread which comes over the mind, and which the lamp of reason, though burning bright the while, is unable to dispel! Art thou, as leeches say, the concomitant of disease – the result of shattered nerves? Nay, rather the principle of woe itself, the fountain-head of all sorrow co-existent with man, whose influence he feels when yet unborn, and whose workings he testifies with his earliest cries, when, ‘drowned in tears,’ he first beholds the light; for, as the sparks fly upward, so is man born to trouble, and woe doth he bring with him into the world, even thyself, dark one, terrible one, causeless, unbegotten, without a father. Oh, how unfrequently dost thou break down the barriers which divide thee from the poor soul of man, and overcast its sunshine with thy gloomy shadow. In the brightest days of prosperity – in the midst of health and wealth – how sentient is the poor human creature of thy neighbourhood! how instinctively aware that the flood-gates of horror may be cast open, and the dark stream engulf him for ever and ever! Then is it not lawful for man to exclaim, ‘Better that I had never been born!’ Fool, for thyself thou wast not born, but to fulfil the inscrutable decrees of thy Creator; and how dost thou know that this dark principle is not, after all, thy best friend; that it is not that which tempers the whole mass of thy corruption? It may be, for what thou knowest, the mother of wisdom, and of great works: it is the dread of the horror of the night that makes the pilgrim hasten on his way. When thou feelest it nigh, let thy safety word be ‘Onward’; if thou tarry, thou art overwhelmed. Courage! build great works – ’tis urging thee – it is ever nearest the favourites of God – the fool knows little of it. Thou wouldst be joyous, wouldst thou? then be a fool. What great work was ever the result of joy, the puny one? Who have been the wise ones, the mighty ones, the conquering ones of this earth? the joyous? I believe not. The fool is happy, or comparatively so – certainly the least sorrowful, but he is still a fool: and whose notes are sweetest, those of the nightingale, or of the silly lark?

‘What ails you, my child?’ said a mother to her son, as he lay on a couch under the influence of the dreadful one; ‘what ails you? you seem afraid!’

Boy. And so I am; a dreadful fear is upon me.

Mother. But of what? There is no one can harm you; of what are you apprehensive?

Boy. Of nothing that I can express; I know not what I am afraid of, but afraid I am.

Mother. Perhaps you see sights and visions; I knew a lady once who was continually thinking that she saw an armed man threaten her, but it was only an imagination, a phantom of the brain.

Boy. No armed man threatens me; and ’tis not a thing like that would cause me any fear. Did an armed man threaten me, I would get up and fight him; weak as I am, I would wish for nothing better, for then, perhaps, I should lose this fear; mine is a dread of I know not what, and there the horror lies.

Mother. Your forehead is cool, and your speech collected. Do you know where you are?

Boy. I know where I am, and I see things just as they are; you are beside me, and upon the table there is a book which was written by a Florentine; all this I see, and that there is no ground for being afraid. I am, moreover, quite cool, and feel no pain – but, but —

And then there was a burst of ‘gemiti, sospiri ed alti guai.’ Alas, alas, poor child of clay! as the sparks fly upward, so wast thou born to sorrow – Onward!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

AGREEABLE DELUSIONS – YOUTH – A PROFESSION – AB GWILYM – GLORIOUS ENGLISH LAW – THERE THEY PASS – MY DEAR OLD MASTER – THE DEAL DESK – LANGUAGE OF THE TENTS – WHERE IS MORFYDD? – GO TO – ONLY ONCE

It has been said by this or that writer, I scarcely know by whom, that, in proportion as we grow old, and our time becomes short, the swifter does it pass, until at last, as we approach the borders of the grave, it assumes all the speed and impetuosity of a river about to precipitate itself into an abyss; this is doubtless the case, provided we can carry to the grave those pleasant thoughts and delusions, which alone render life agreeable, and to which even to the very last we would gladly cling; but what becomes of the swiftness of time, when the mind sees the vanity of human pursuits? which is sure to be the case when its fondest, dearest hopes have been blighted at the very moment when the harvest was deemed secure. What becomes from that moment, I repeat, of the shortness of time? I put not the question to those who have never known that trial, they are satisfied with themselves and all around them, with what they have done, and yet hope to do; some carry their delusions with them to the borders of the grave, ay, to the very moment when they fall into it; a beautiful golden cloud surrounds them to the last, and such talk of the shortness of time: through the medium of that cloud the world has ever been a pleasant world to them; their only regret is that they are so soon to quit it; but oh, ye dear deluded hearts, it is not every one who is so fortunate!

To the generality of mankind there is no period like youth. The generality are far from fortunate; but the period of youth, even to the least so, offers moments of considerable happiness, for they are not only disposed but able to enjoy most things within their reach. With what trifles at that period are we content; the things from which in after-life we should turn away in disdain please us then, for we are in the midst of a golden cloud, and everything seems decked with a golden hue. Never during any portion of my life did time flow on more speedily than during the two or three years immediately succeeding the period to which we arrived in the preceding chapter: since then it has flagged often enough; sometimes it has seemed to stand entirely still; and the reader may easily judge how it fares at the present, from the circumstance of my taking pen in hand, and endeavouring to write down the passages of my life – a last resource with most people. But at the period to which I allude I was just, as I may say, entering upon life; I had adopted a profession, and, to keep up my character, simultaneously with that profession – the study of a new language. I speedily became a proficient in the one, but ever remained a novice in the other: a novice in the law, but a perfect master in the Welsh tongue.

Yes; very pleasant times were those, when within the womb of a lofty deal desk, behind which I sat for some eight hours every day, transcribing (when I imagined eyes were upon me) documents of every description in every possible hand, Blackstone kept company with Ab Gwilym – the polished English lawyer of the last century, who wrote long and prosy chapters on the rights of things – with a certain wild Welshman, who some four hundred years before that time indited immortal cowydds and odes to the wives of Cambrian chieftains – more particularly to one Morfydd, the wife of a certain hunchbacked dignitary called by the poet facetiously Bwa Bach – generally terminating with the modest request of a little private parlance beneath the greenwood bough, with no other witness than the eos, or nightingale, a request which, if the poet himself may be believed, rather a doubtful point, was seldom, very seldom, denied. And by what strange chance had Ab Gwilym and Blackstone, two personages so exceedingly different, been thus brought together? From what the reader already knows of me, he may be quite prepared to find me reading the former; but what could have induced me to take up Blackstone, or rather the law?

I have ever loved to be as explicit as possible; on which account, perhaps, I never attained to any proficiency in the law, the essence of which is said to be ambiguity; most questions may

be answered in a few words, and this among the rest, though connected with the law. My parents deemed it necessary that I should adopt some profession, they named the law; the law was as agreeable to me as any other profession within my reach, so I adopted the law, and the consequence was, that Blackstone, probably for the first time, found himself in company with Ab Gwilym. By adopting the law I had not ceased to be Lavengro.

So I sat behind a desk many hours in the day, ostensibly engaged in transcribing documents of various kinds; the scene of my labours was a strange old house, occupying one side of a long and narrow court, into which, however, the greater number of the windows looked not, but into an extensive garden, filled with fruit trees, in the rear of a large, handsome house, belonging to a highly respectable gentleman, who, moyennant un douceur considerable, had consented to instruct my father's youngest son in the mysteries of glorious English law. Ah! would that I could describe the good gentleman in the manner which he deserves; he has long since sunk to his place in a respectable vault, in the aisle of a very respectable church, whilst an exceedingly respectable marble slab against the neighbouring wall tells on a Sunday some eye wandering from its prayer-book that his dust lies below; to secure such respectabilities in death, he passed a most respectable life. Let no one sneer, he accomplished much; his life was peaceful, so was his death. Are these trifles? I wish I could describe him, for I loved the man, and with reason, for he was ever kind to me, to whom kindness has not always been shown; and he was, moreover, a choice specimen of a class which no longer exists – a gentleman lawyer of the old school. I would fain describe him, but figures with which he has nought to do press forward and keep him from my mind's eye; there they pass, Spaniard and Moor, Gypsy, Turk, and livid Jew. But who is that? what that thick pursy man in the loose, snuff-coloured greatcoat, with the white stockings, drab breeches, and silver buckles on his shoes; that man with the bull neck, and singular head, immense in the lower part, especially about the jaws, but tapering upward like a pear; the man with the bushy brows, small grey eyes replete with catlike expression, whose grizzled hair is cut close, and whose ear-lobes are pierced with small golden rings? Oh! that is not my dear old master, but a widely different personage. Bon jour, Monsieur Vidocq! expressions de ma part à Monsieur Le Baron Taylor. But here he comes at last, my veritable old master!

A more respectable-looking individual was never seen; he really looked what he was, a gentleman of the law – there was nothing of the pettifogger about him: somewhat under the middle size, and somewhat rotund in person, he was always dressed in a full suit of black, never worn long enough to become threadbare. His face was rubicund, and not without keenness; but the most remarkable thing about him was the crown of his head, which was bald, and shone like polished ivory, nothing more white, smooth, and lustrous. Some people have said that he wore false calves, probably because his black silk stockings never exhibited a wrinkle; they might just as well have said that he waddled, because his shoes creaked; for these last, which were always without a speck, and polished as his crown, though of a different hue, did creak, as he walked rather slowly. I cannot say that I ever saw him walk fast.

He had a handsome practice, and might have died a very rich man, much richer than he did, had he not been in the habit of giving rather expensive dinners to certain great people, who gave him nothing in return except their company; I could never discover his reasons for doing so, as he always appeared to me a remarkably quiet man, by nature averse to noise and bustle; but in all dispositions there are anomalies: I have already said that he lived in a handsome house, and I may as well here add that he had a very handsome wife, who both dressed and talked exceedingly well.

So I sat behind the deal desk, engaged in copying documents of various kinds; and in the apartment in which I sat, and in the adjoining ones, there were others, some of whom likewise copied documents, while some were engaged in the yet more difficult task of drawing them up; and some of these, sons of nobody, were paid for the work they did, whilst others, like myself, sons of

somebody, paid for being permitted to work, which, as our principal observed, was but reasonable, forasmuch as we not unfrequently utterly spoiled the greater part of the work entrusted to our hands.

There was one part of the day when I generally found myself quite alone, I mean at the hour when the rest went home to their principal meal; I, being the youngest, was left to take care of the premises, to answer the bell, and so forth, till relieved, which was seldom before the expiration of an hour and a half, when I myself went home; this period, however, was anything but disagreeable to me, for it was then that I did what best pleased me, and, leaving off copying the documents, I sometimes indulged in a fit of musing, my chin resting on both my hands, and my elbows planted on the desk; or, opening the desk aforesaid, I would take out one of the books contained within it, and the book which I took out was almost invariably, not Blackstone, but Ab Gwilym.

Ah, that Ab Gwilym! I am much indebted to him, and it were ungrateful on my part not to devote a few lines to him and his songs in this my history. Start not, reader, I am not going to trouble you with a poetical dissertation; no, no; I know my duty too well to introduce anything of the kind; but I, who imagine I know several things, and amongst others the workings of your mind at this moment, have an idea that you are anxious to learn a little, a very little, more about Ab Gwilym than I have hitherto told you, the two or three words that I have dropped having awakened within you a languid kind of curiosity. I have no hesitation in saying that he makes one of the some half-dozen really great poets whose verses, in whatever language they wrote, exist at the present day, and are more or less known. It matters little how I first became acquainted with the writings of this man, and how the short thick volume, stuffed full with his immortal imaginings, first came into my hands. I was studying Welsh, and I fell in with Ab Gwilym by no very strange chance. But, before I say more about Ab Gwilym, I must be permitted – I really must – to say a word or two about the language in which he wrote, that same ‘Sweet Welsh.’ If I remember right, I found the language a difficult one; in mastering it, however, I derived unexpected assistance from what of Irish remained in my head, and I soon found that they were cognate dialects, springing from some old tongue which itself, perhaps, had sprung from one much older. And here I cannot help observing cursorily that I every now and then, whilst studying this Welsh, generally supposed to be the original tongue of Britain, encountered words which, according to the lexicographers, were venerable words highly expressive, showing the wonderful power and originality of the Welsh, in which, however, they were no longer used in common discourse, but were relics, precious relics, of the first speech of Britain, perhaps of the world; with which words, however, I was already well acquainted, and which I had picked up, not in learned books, classic books, and in tongues of old renown, but whilst listening to Mr. Petulengro and Tawno Chikno talking over their everyday affairs in the language of the tents; which circumstance did not fail to give rise to deep reflection in those moments when, planting my elbows on the deal desk, I rested my chin upon my hands. But it is probable that I should have abandoned the pursuit of the Welsh language, after obtaining a very superficial acquaintance with it, had it not been for Ab Gwilym.

A strange songster was that who, pretending to be captivated by every woman he saw, was, in reality, in love with nature alone – wild, beautiful, solitary nature – her mountains and cascades, her forests and streams, her birds, fishes, and wild animals. Go to, Ab Gwilym, with thy pseudo-amatory odes, to Morfydd, or this or that other lady, fair or ugly; little didst thou care for any of them, Dame Nature was thy love, however thou mayest seek to disguise the truth. Yes, yes, send thy love-message to Morfydd, the fair wanton. By whom dost thou send it, I would know? by the salmon forsooth, which haunts the rushing stream! the glorious salmon which bounds and gambols in the flashing water, and whose ways and circumstances thou so well describest – see, there he hurries upwards through the flashing water. Halloo! what a glimpse of glory – but where is Morfydd the while? What, another message to the wife of Bwa Bach? Ay, truly; and by whom? – the wind! the swift wind, the rider of the world, whose course is not to be stayed; who gallops o’er the mountain, and, when he comes to broadest river, asks neither for boat nor ferry; who has

described the wind so well – his speed and power? But where is Morfydd? And now thou art awaiting Morfydd, the wanton, the wife of the Bwa Bach; thou art awaiting her beneath the tall trees, amidst the underwood; but she comes not; no Morfydd is there. Quite right, Ab Gwilym; what wantest thou with Morfydd? But another form is nigh at hand, that of red Reynard, who, seated upon his chine at the mouth of his cave, looks very composedly at thee; thou startest, bendest thy bow, thy cross-bow, intending to hit Reynard with the bolt just about the jaw; but the bow breaks, Reynard barks and disappears into his cave, which by thine own account reaches hell – and then thou ravest at the misfortune of thy bow, and the non-appearance of Morfydd, and abusest Reynard. Go to, thou carest neither for thy bow nor for Morfydd, thou merely seekest an opportunity to speak of Reynard; and who has described him like thee? the brute with the sharp shrill cry, the black reverse of melody, whose face sometimes wears a smile like the devil's in the Evangile. But now thou art actually with Morfydd; yes, she has stolen from the dwelling of the Bwa Bach and has met thee beneath those rocks – she is actually with thee, Ab Gwilym; but she is not long with thee, for a storm comes on, and thunder shatters the rocks – Morfydd flees! Quite right, Ab Gwilym; thou hadst no need of her, a better theme for song is the voice of the Lord – the rock-shatterer – than the frail wife of the Bwa Bach. Go to, Ab Gwilym, thou wast a wiser and a better man than thou wouldst fain have had people believe.

But enough of thee and thy songs! Those times passed rapidly; with Ab Gwilym in my hand, I was in the midst of enchanted ground, in which I experienced sensations akin to those I had felt of yore whilst spelling my way through the wonderful book – the delight of my childhood. I say akin, for perhaps only once in our lives do we experience unmixed wonder and delight; and these I had already known.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SILVER GREY – GOOD WORD FOR EVERYBODY – A REMARKABLE YOUTH –
THE ARCHDEACON – READING THE BIBLE

‘I am afraid that I have not acted very wisely in putting this boy of ours to the law,’ said my father to my mother, as they sat together one summer evening in their little garden, beneath the shade of some tall poplars.

Yes, there sat my father in the garden chair which leaned against the wall of his quiet home, the haven in which he had sought rest; and, praise be to God, found it, after many a year of poorly-requited toil; there he sat, with locks of silver grey which set off so nobly his fine bold but benevolent face, his faithful consort at his side, and his trusty dog at his feet – an eccentric animal of the genuine regimental breed, who, born amongst red coats, had not yet become reconciled to those of any other hue, barking and tearing at them when they drew near the door, but testifying his fond reminiscence of the former by hospitable waggings of the tail whenever a uniform made its appearance – at present a very unfrequent occurrence.

‘I am afraid I have not done right in putting him to the law,’ said my father, resting his chin upon his gold-headed bamboo cane.

‘Why, what makes you think so?’ said my mother.

‘I have been taking my usual evening walk up the road, with the animal here,’ said my father; ‘and, as I walked along, I overtook the boy’s master, Mr. S-. We shook hands, and, after walking a little way farther, we turned back together, talking about this and that; the state of the country, the weather, and the dog, which he greatly admired; for he is a good-natured man, and has a good word for everybody, though the dog all but bit him when he attempted to coax his head; after the dog, we began talking about the boy; it was myself who introduced that subject: I thought it was a good opportunity to learn how he was getting on, so I asked what he thought of my son; he hesitated at first, seeming scarcely to know what to say; at length he came out with “Oh, a very extraordinary youth, a most remarkable youth indeed, captain!” “Indeed,” said I, “I am glad to hear it, but I hope you find him steady?” “Steady, steady,” said he, “why, yes, he’s steady, I cannot say that he is not steady.” “Come, come,” said I, beginning to be rather uneasy, “I see plainly that you are not altogether satisfied with him; I was afraid you would not be, for, though he is my own son, I am anything but blind to his imperfections; but do tell me what particular fault you have to find with him; and I will do my best to make him alter his conduct.” “No fault to find with him, captain, I assure you, no fault whatever; the youth is a remarkable youth, an extraordinary youth, only – ” As I told you before, Mr. S- is the best-natured man in the world, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that I could get him to say a single word to the disadvantage of the boy, for whom he seems to entertain a very great regard. At last I forced the truth from him, and grieved I was to hear it; though I must confess that I was somewhat prepared for it. It appears that the lad has a total want of discrimination.’

‘I don’t understand you,’ said my mother.

‘You can understand nothing that would seem for a moment to impugn the conduct of that child. I am not, however, so blind; want of discrimination was the word, and it both sounds well, and is expressive. It appears that, since he has been placed where he is, he has been guilty of the grossest blunders; only the other day, Mr. S- told me, as he was engaged in close conversation with one of his principal clients, the boy came to tell him that a person wanted particularly to speak with him; and, on going out, he found a lamentable figure with one eye, who came to ask for charity; whom, nevertheless, the lad had ushered into a private room, and installed in an arm-chair, like a justice of the peace, instead of telling him to go about his business – now what did that show, but a total want of discrimination?’

‘I wish we may never have anything worse to reproach him with,’ said my mother.

‘I don’t know what worse we could reproach him with,’ said my father; ‘I mean of course as far as his profession is concerned; discrimination is the very keystone; if he treated all people alike, he would soon become a beggar himself; there are grades in society as well as in the army; and according to those grades we should fashion our behaviour, else there would instantly be an end of all order and discipline. I am afraid that the child is too condescending to his inferiors, whilst to his superiors he is apt to be unbending enough; I don’t believe that would do in the world; I am sure it would not in the army. He told me another anecdote with respect to his behaviour, which shocked me more than the other had done. It appears that his wife, who by the bye, is a very fine woman, and highly fashionable, gave him permission to ask the boy to tea one evening, for she is herself rather partial to the lad; there had been a great dinner party there that day, and there were a great many fashionable people, so the boy went and behaved very well and modestly for some time, and was rather noticed, till, unluckily, a very great gentleman, an archdeacon I think, put some questions to him, and, finding that he understood the languages, began talking to him about the classics. What do you think? the boy had the impertinence to say that the classics were much overvalued, and amongst other things that some horrid fellow or other, some Welshman I think (thank God it was not an Irishman), was a better poet than Ovid; the company were of course horrified; the archdeacon, who is seventy years of age, and has seven thousand a year, took snuff and turned away. Mrs. S- turned up her eyes, Mr. S-, however, told me with his usual good-nature (I suppose to spare my feelings) that he rather enjoyed the thing, and thought it a capital joke.’

‘I think so too,’ said my mother.

‘I do not,’ said my father; ‘that a boy of his years should entertain an opinion of his own – I mean one which militates against all established authority – is astounding; as well might a raw recruit pretend to offer an unfavourable opinion on the manual and platoon exercise; the idea is preposterous; the lad is too independent by half. I never yet knew one of an independent spirit get on in the army, the secret of success in the army is the spirit of subordination.’

‘Which is a poor spirit after all,’ said my mother; ‘but the child is not in the army.’

‘And it is well for him that he is not,’ said my father; ‘but you do not talk wisely, the world is a field of battle, and he who leaves the ranks, what can he expect but to be cut down? I call his present behaviour leaving the ranks, and going vapouring about without orders; his only chance lies in falling in again as quick as possible; does he think he can carry the day by himself? an opinion of his own at these years – I confess I am exceedingly uneasy about the lad.’

‘You make me uneasy too,’ said my mother; ‘but I really think you are too hard upon the child; he is not a bad child, after all, though not, perhaps, all you could wish him; he is always ready to read the Bible. Let us go in; he is in the room above us; at least he was two hours ago, I left him there bending over his books; I wonder what he has been doing all this time, it is now getting late; let us go in, and he shall read to us.’

‘I am getting old,’ said my father; ‘and I love to hear the Bible read to me, for my own sight is something dim; yet I do not wish the child to read to me this night, I cannot so soon forget what I have heard; but I hear my eldest son’s voice, he is now entering the gate; he shall read the Bible to us this night. What say you?’

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE ELDEST SON – SAYING OF WILD FINLAND – THE CRITICAL TIME – VAUNTING POLLS – ONE THING WANTED – A FATHER’S BLESSING – MIRACLE OF ART – THE POPE’S HOUSE – THE YOUNG ENTHUSIAST – PICTURES OF ENGLAND – PERSIST AND WRESTLE – OF THE LITTLE DARK MAN

The eldest son! The regard and affection which my father entertained for his first-born were natural enough, and appeared to none more so than myself, who cherished the same feelings towards him. What he was as a boy the reader already knows, for the reader has seen him as a boy; fain would I describe him at the time of which I am now speaking, when he had attained the verge of manhood, but the pen fails me, and I attempt not the task; and yet it ought to be an easy one, for how frequently does his form visit my mind’s eye in slumber and in wakefulness, in the light of day and in the night watches; but last night I saw him in his beauty and his strength; he was about to speak, and my ear was on the stretch, when at once I awoke, and there was I alone, and the night storm was howling amidst the branches of the pines which surround my lonely dwelling: ‘Listen to the moaning of the pine, at whose root thy hut is fastened,’ – a saying that, of wild Finland, in which there is wisdom; I listened and thought of life and death... Of all human beings that I have ever known, that elder brother was the most frank and generous, ay, and the quickest and readiest, and the best adapted to do a great thing needful at the critical time, when the delay of a moment would be fatal. I have known him dash from a steep bank into a stream in his full dress, and pull out a man who was drowning; yet there were twenty others bathing in the water, who might have saved him by putting out a hand, without inconvenience to themselves, which, however, they did not do, but stared with stupid surprise at the drowning one’s struggles. Yes, whilst some shouted from the bank to those in the water to save the drowning one, and those in the water did nothing, my brother neither shouted nor stood still, but dashed from the bank and did the one thing needful, which, under such circumstances, not one man in a million would have done. Now, who can wonder that a brave old man should love a son like this, and prefer him to any other?

‘My boy, my own boy, you are the very image of myself, the day I took off my coat in the park to fight Big Ben,’ said my father, on meeting his son wet and dripping, immediately after his bold feat. And who cannot excuse the honest pride of the old man – the stout old man?

Ay, old man, that son was worthy of thee, and thou wast worthy of such a son; a noble specimen wast thou of those strong single-minded Englishmen, who, without making a parade either of religion or loyalty, feared God and honoured their king, and were not particularly friendly to the French, whose vaunting polls they occasionally broke, as at Minden and at Malplaquet, to the confusion vast of the eternal foes of the English land. I, who was so little like thee that thou understoodst me not, and in whom with justice thou didst feel so little pride, had yet perception enough to see all thy worth, and to feel it an honour to be able to call myself thy son; and if at some no distant time, when the foreign enemy ventures to insult our shore, I be permitted to break some vaunting poll, it will be a triumph to me to think that, if thou hadst lived, thou wouldst have hailed the deed, and mightest yet discover some distant resemblance to thyself, the day when thou didst all but vanquish the mighty Brain.

I have already spoken of my brother’s taste for painting, and the progress he had made in that beautiful art. It is probable that, if circumstances had not eventually diverted his mind from the pursuit, he would have attained excellence, and left behind him some enduring monument of his powers, for he had an imagination to conceive, and that yet rarer endowment, a hand capable of giving life, body, and reality to the conceptions of his mind; perhaps he wanted one thing, the want of which is but too often fatal to the sons of genius, and without which genius is little more than a splendid toy in the hands of the possessor – perseverance, dogged perseverance, in his proper

calling; otherwise, though the grave had closed over him, he might still be living in the admiration of his fellow-creatures. O ye gifted ones, follow your calling, for, however various your talents may be, ye can have but one calling capable of leading ye to eminence and renown; follow resolutely the one straight path before you, it is that of your good angel, let neither obstacles nor temptations induce ye to leave it; bound along if you can; if not, on hands and knees follow it, perish in it, if needful; but ye need not fear that; no one ever yet died in the true path of his calling before he had attained the pinnacle. Turn into other paths, and for a momentary advantage or gratification ye have sold your inheritance, your immortality. Ye will never be heard of after death.

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