

Anstey F.

# The Travelling Companions: A Story in Scenes



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### CHAPTER I. *Extremes Meet*

Scene —*An Excursion Agent's Offices. Behind the counters polite and patient Clerks are besieged by a crowd of Intending Tourists, all asking questions at once.*

First Intending Tourist. Here – have you made out that estimate for me yet?

Clerk. In one moment, Sir. (*He refers to a list, turns over innumerable books, jots down columns of francs, marks, and florins; reduces them to English money, and adds them up.*) First class fares on the Rhine, Danube and Black Sea steamers, I think you said, second class rail, and postwagen?

First Int. T. I did say so, I believe; but you had better make it second class all through, and I can always pay the difference if I want to.

[*The Clerk alters the sums accordingly, and adds up again.*

Clerk. Fifty-five pounds fourteen and a penny, Sir. Shall I make you out the tickets now?

First Int. T. Um, no. On second thoughts, I'd like to see one of your short Circular Tours for the English Lakes, or Wales, before I decide.

[*The Clerk hands him a quantity of leaflets, with which he retires.*

*Enter Mr. Clarendon Culchard, age about twenty-eight; in Somerset House; tall; wears glasses, stoops slightly, dresses carefully, though his tall hat is of the last fashion but two. He looks about him expectantly, and then sits down to wait.*

Culchard (*to himself*). No sign of him yet! I *do* like a man to keep an appointment. If this is the way he *begins*— I have my doubts whether he is *quite* the sort of fellow to – but I took the precaution to ask Hugh Rose about him, and Rose said he was the best company in the world, and I couldn't help getting on with him. I don't think Rose would deceive me. And from all I've seen of Podbury, he seems a pleasant fellow enough. What a Babel! All these people bent on pleasure, going to seek it in as many directions – with what success no one can predict. There's an idea for a sonnet there.

[He brings out a pocket-book, and begins to write – "As when a – "

An Amurrcan Citizen (*to Clerk*). See here, I've been around with your tickets in Yurrupe, and when I was at Vernis, I bought some goods at a store there, and paid cash down for 'em, and they promised to send 'em on for me right here, and that was last fall, and I've never heard any more of 'em, and what I want *you* should do now is to instruct your representative at Vernis to go round and hev a talk with that man, and ask him what in thunder he means by it, and kinder hint that he'll hev the Amurrcan Consul in his hair pretty smart, if he don't look slippier!

[*The Clerk mildly suggests that it would be better to communicate directly with the American Consulate, or with the tradesman himself.*

The A. C. But hold on – how'm I goin' to write to that sharp, when I've lost his address, and disremember his name? Can't you mail a few particulars to your agent, so he'll identify him? No?

(*Disappointed.*) Well, I thought you'd ha' fixed up a little thing like that, anyhow; in my country they'd ha' done it right away. Yes, *Sir!*

[*He goes away in grieved surprise.*

*Enter Mr. James Podbury, age twenty-six; in a City Office; short, fresh-coloured, jaunty; close-cut dark hair. Not having been to the City to-day, he is wearing light tweeds, and brown boots.*

Podbury (*to himself*). Just nicked it – (*looks at clock*) – more or less. And he doesn't seem to have turned up yet. Wonder how we shall hit it off together. Hughie Rose said he was a capital good chap – when you once got over his manner. Anyhow, it's a great tip to go abroad with a fellow who knows the ropes. (*Suddenly sees Culchard absorbed in his note-book.*) So *here* you are, eh?

Culch. (*slightly scandalized by the tweeds and the brown boots*). Yes, I've been here some little time. I wish you could have managed to come before, because they close early here to-day, and I wanted to go thoroughly over the tour I sketched out before getting the tickets.

[*He produces an elaborate outline.*

Podb. (*easily*). Oh, *that's* all right! I don't care where *I* go! All I want is, to see as much as we can in the time – leave all the rest to you. I'll sit here while you get the tickets.

An Old Lady (*to Clerk, as Culchard is waiting at the counter*). Oh, I *beg* your pardon, but *could* you inform me if the 1.55 train from Calais to Basle stops long enough for refreshments anywhere, and where they examine the luggage, and if I can leave my hand-bag in the carriage, and whether there is an English service at Yodeldorf, and is it held in the hotel, and Evangelical, or High Church, and are the sittings free, and what Hymn-book they use?

[*The Clerk sets her mind free on as many of these points as he can, and then attends to Culchard.*

Culch. (*returning to Podbury with two cases bulging with books of coloured coupons*). Here are yours. I should like you to run your eye over them, and see that they are correct, if you don't mind.

Podb. (*stuffing them in his pocket*). Can't be bothered now. Take your word for it.

Culch. No – but considering that we start the first thing to-morrow morning, wouldn't it be as well to have some idea of where you're going? And, by the way, excuse me, but is it altogether prudent to keep your tickets in an outside pocket like that? I always keep mine, with my money, in a special case in an inner pocket, with a buttoned flap – then I know I *can't* lose them.

Podb. Anything for a quiet life! (*He examines his coupons.*) Dover to Ostend? Never been there – like to see what Ostend's like. But why didn't you go by Calais? —*shorter*, you know.

Culch. Because I thought we'd see Bruges and Ghent on our way to Brussels.

Podb. Bruges, eh? Capital! Anything particular going on there? No? It don't matter. And Ghent – let's see, wasn't that where they brought the good news from? Yes, we'll stop at Ghent – if we've time. Then – Brussels? Good deal of work to be done there, I suppose, sightseeing, and that? I like a place where you can moon about without being bothered myself; now, at *Brussels*– never mind, I was only thinking.

Culch. It's the best place to get to Cologne and up the Rhine from. Then, you see, we go rather out of our way to Nuremberg —

Podb. Where they make toys? *I* know – pretty festive there, eh?

Culch. I don't know about festive – but it is – er – a quaint, and highly interesting old place. Then I thought we'd dip down to Constance, and strike across the Alps to the Italian Lakes.

Podb. Italian Lakes? First-rate! Yes, *they're* worth seeing, I suppose. Think they're better than the *Swiss* ones, though?

Culch. (*tolerantly*). I can get the coupons changed for Switzerland if you prefer it. The Swiss Lakes may be the more picturesque.

Podb. Yes, we'll do Switzerland – and run back by Paris, eh? Not much to do in Switzerland, though, after all!

Culch. (*with a faintly superior smile*). There are one or two mountains, I believe. But, personally, I should prefer Italy.

Podb. So should I. No fun in mountains – unless you go up 'em. What do you think of choosing some quiet place, where nobody ever goes – say in France or Germany – and, sticking to *that*. More of a rest, wouldn't it be? such a bore having to know a lot of people!

Culch. I don't see how we can change *all* the tickets, really. If you like, we could stop a week at St. Goarshausen.

Podb. What's St. Goarshausen like – cheery?

Culch. I understood the idea was to keep away from our fellow countrymen, and as far as I can remember St. Goarshausen, it is not overrun with tourists – we should be quiet enough *there*.

Podb. That's the place for *me*, then. Or could we push on to Vienna? Never seen Vienna.

Culch. If you like to give up Italy altogether.

Podb. What do you say to *beginning* with Italy and working back? Too hot, eh? Well, then, we'll let things be as they are – I dare say it will do well enough. So *that's* settled!

Culch. (*to himself on parting, after final arrangements concluded*). I wish Rose had warned me that Podbury's habit of mind was so painfully desultory. (*He sighs.*) However —

Podb. (*to himself*). Wonder how long I shall take to get over Culchard's manner. (*He sighs.*) I wish old Hughie was coming – he'd give me a leg over! [*He walks on thoughtfully.*]

## CHAPTER II.

### ***Podbury picks up Acquaintances***

Scene —*Courtyard of the "Grand Hôtel du Lion Belgique et d'Albion," at Brussels. It is just after table d'hôte; Podbury and Culchard are sitting on a covered terrace, with coffee.*

Podbury (*producing a pipe*). Not such a bad dinner! Expect they'll rook us a lot for it, though. Rather fun, seeing the waiters all troop in with a fresh course, when the proprietor rang his bell. Like a ballet at the Empire – eh?

Culchard (*selecting a cigarette*). I'm not in a position to say. I don't affect those places of entertainment myself.

Podb. Oh! Where *do* you turn in when you want to kick up your heels a bit? Madame Tussaud's? I say, why on earth didn't you talk to that old Johnny next to you at dinner? He was trying all he knew to be friendly.

Culch. Was he? I dare say. But I rather understood we came out with the idea of keeping out of all that.

Podb. Of course. *I'm* not keen about getting to know people. He had no end of a pretty daughter, though. Mean to say you didn't spot her?

Culch. If by "spotting" you mean – was I aware of the existence of a very exuberant young person, with a most distressing American accent? – I can only say that she made her presence sufficiently evident. I confess she did not interest me to the point of speculating upon her relationship to anybody else.

Podb. Well – if you come to that, I don't know that I – still, she was uncommonly – (*Happens to glance round, and lowers his voice.*) Jove! she's in the Reading-room, just behind us. (*Hums, with elaborate carelessness.*) La di deedle-lumpty – loodle-oodle-loo —

Culch. (*who detests humming*). By the way, I wish you hadn't been in such a hurry to come straight on. I particularly wished to stop at Bruges, and see the Memlings.

Podb. I do like that! For a fellow who means to keep out of people's way! They'd have wanted you to stay to lunch and dinner, most likely.

Culch. (*raising his eyebrows*). Hardly, my dear fellow – they're pictures, as it happens.

Podb. (*unabashed*). Oh, are they? Any way, you've fetched up your average here. Weren't there enough in the Museum for you?

Culch. (*pityingly*). You surely wouldn't call the collection here exactly representative of the best period of Flemish Art?

Podb. If you ask me, I should call it a simply footling show – but you were long enough over it. (*Culchard shudders slightly, and presently pats his pockets.*) What's up now? Nothing gone wrong with the works, eh?

Culch. (*with dignity*). No – I was merely feeling for my note-book. I had a sudden idea for a sonnet, that's all.

Podb. Ah, you shouldn't have touched those mussels they gave us with the sole. Have a nip of this cognac, and you'll soon be all right.

[*Culchard scribbles in lofty abstraction; Podbury hums; Mr. Cyrus K. Trotter, and his daughter, Maud S. Trotter, come out by the glass door of the Salon de Lecture, and seat themselves at an adjoining table.*]



Miss Trotter. Well, I guess it's gayer out here, anyway. That Reading Saloon is just about as lively as a burying lot with all the tombs unlet. I want the address of that man who said that Brussels was a second Parrus.

Mr. Trotter. Maybe we ain't been long enough off the cars to jedge yet. Do you feel like putting on your hat and sack, and sorter smellin' round this capital?

Miss T. Not any. I expect the old city will have to curb its impatience to see me till to-morrow. I'm tired some.

Culch. (*to himself*). Confound it, how can I – ! (*Looks up, and observes Miss T. with a sudden attention.*) That fellow Podbury has better taste than I gave him credit for. She *is* pretty – in her peculiar style – *quite* pretty! Pity she speaks with that deplorable accent.

[Writes – "Vermilion lips that sheathe a parrot tongue," and runs over all the possible rhymes to "tongue."]

Podb. (*observing that his pencil is idle*). Gas cut off again? Come for a toddle. You don't mean to stick here all the evening, eh?

Culch. Well, we might take a turn later on, and see the effect of St. Gudule in the moonlight.

Podb. Something *like* a rollick that! But what do you say to dropping in quietly at the Eden for an hour or so, eh? Variety show and all that going on.

Culch. Thanks – variety shows are not much in my line; but don't mind me if you want to go.

[Podbury wanders off, leaving Culchard free to observe Miss Trotter.]

Miss T. Charley writes he's having a lovely time in Germany going round. I guess he isn't feeling so cheap as he did. I wish he'd come along right here.

Mr. T. I presume he's put in all the time he had for Belgium – likely we'll fetch up against him somewhere before he's through.

Miss T. Well, and I don't care how soon we do, either. Charley's a bright man, and real cultivated. I'm always telling him that he's purrfectly splendid company, considering he's only a cousin.

Mr. T. That's so every time. I like Charley Van Boodeler firststrate myself.

Culch. (*to himself*). If Charley Van Boodeler was *engaged* to her, I suppose he'd be there. Pshaw! What *does* it matter? Somehow, I rather wish now that I'd – but perhaps we shall get into conversation presently. Hang it, here's that fellow Podbury back again! Wish to goodness he'd – (*To Podbury.*) Hallo, so you haven't started yet?

Podb. Been having a talk with the porter. He says there's a big fair over by the Station du Midi, and it's worth seeing. Are you game to come along and sample it, eh?

Culch. (*with an easy indifference intended for Miss T.'s benefit*). No, I think not, thanks. I'm very comfortable where I am.

[He resumes his writing.]

Podb. Well, it's poor fun having to go alone!

[*He is just going, when Mr. Trotter rises and comes towards him.*]

Mr. T. You'll excuse me, Sir, but did I overhear you remark that there was a festivity in progress in this city?

Podb. So I'm told; a fair, down in the new part. I could tell you how to get to it, if you thought of going.

Mr. T. Well, I don't see how I should ever strike that fair for myself, and I guess if there's anything to be seen we're bound to *see* it, so me and my darter – allow me to introduce my darter to you – Maud, this gentleman is Mr. – I don't think I've caught your name, Sir – Podbury? – Mr. Podbury, who's kindly volunteered to conduct us round.

Miss T. *I should have thought you'd want to leave the gentleman some say in the matter, father – not to mention me!*

Podb. (*eagerly*). But won't you come? Do. I shall be awfully glad if you will!

Miss T. If it makes you so glad as all that, I believe I'll come. Though what you could say different, after Poppa had put it up so steep on you, *I don't know*. I'll just go and fix myself first. [*She goes.*]

Mr. T. (*to Podbury*). My only darter, Sir, and a real good girl. We come over from the States, crossed a month ago to-day, and seen a heap already. Been runnin' all over Scotland and England, and kind of looked round Ireland and Wales, and now what *we've* got to do is to see as much as we can of Germany and Switzerland and It'ly, and get some idea of France before we start home this fall. I guess we're both of us gettin' pretty considerable homesick already. My darter was sayin' to me on'y this evening at *table d'hôte*, "Father," she sez, "the vurry first thing we'll do when we get home is to go and hev a good square meal of creamed oysters and clams with buckwheat cakes and maple syrup." Don't seem as if we *could* git along without maple syrup *much* longer. (*Miss Trotter returns.*) You never mean going out without your gums?

[He roars.

Miss T. I guess it's not damp here – any. (*To Podbury.*) Now you're going to be *Mary*, and father and I have got to be the little lambs and follow you around.

[*They go out, leaving Culchard annoyed with himself and everybody else, and utterly unable to settle down to his sonnet again.*]

IN AN UPPER CORRIDOR TWO HOURS LATER.

Culch. (*coming upon Podbury*). So you've got rid of your Americans at last, eh?

Podb. *I was in no hurry, I can tell you. She's a ripping little girl – tremendous fun. What do you think she asked me about you?*

Culch. (*stiff, but flattered*). I wasn't aware she had honoured me by her notice. What *was* it?

Podb. Said you had a sort of schoolmaster look, and wanted to know if you were my tutor. My tutor! [*He roars.*]

Culch. I hope you – ah – undeceived her?

Podb. Rather! Told her it was t'other way round, and I was looking after *you*. Said you were suffering from melancholia, but were not absolutely dangerous.

Culch. If that's your idea of a joke, all I can say is —

[He chokes with rage.

Podb. (*innocently*). Why, my dear chap, I thought you wanted 'em kept out of your way!

[*Culchard slams his bedroom door with temper, leaving Podbury outside, still chuckling.*]

## CHAPTER III.

### ***Culchard comes out of his Shell***

Scene — *On the Coach from Braine l'Alleud to Waterloo. The vehicle has a Belgian driver, but the conductor is a true-born Briton. Mr. Cyrus K. Trotter and his daughter are behind with Podbury. Culchard, who is not as yet sufficiently on speaking terms with his friend to ask for an introduction, is on the box-seat in front.*

Mr. Trotter. How are you getting along, Maud? Your seat pretty comfortable?

Miss Trotter. Well, I guess it would be about as luxurious if it hadn't got a chunk of wood nailed down the middle – it's not going to have any one confusing it with a bed of roses *just* yet. (*To Podb.*) Your friend mad about anything? He don't seem to open his head more'n he's obliged to. I presume he don't approve of your taking up with me and father – he keeps away from us considerable, I notice.

Podb. (*awkwardly*). Oh – er – I wouldn't say that, but he's a queer kind of chap rather, takes prejudices into his head and all that. I wouldn't trouble about him if I were you – not worth it, y' know.

Miss T. Thanks – but it isn't going to shorten my existence any.

[*Culch. overhears all this, with feelings that may be imagined.*

Belgian Driver (*to his horses*). Pullep! Allez vite! Bom-bom-bom! Alright!

Conductor (*to Culchard*). 'E's very proud of 'is English, 'e is. 'Ere, Jewls, ole feller, show the gen'lm'n 'ow yer can do a swear. (*Belgian Driver utters a string of English imprecations with the utmost fluency and good-nature.*) 'Ark at 'im now! Bust my frogs! (*Admiringly, and not without a sense of the appropriateness of the phrase.*) But he's a caution, Sir, ain't he? I taught him most o' what he knows!

A French Passenger (*to Conductor*). Dis donc, mon ami, est-ce qu'on peut voir d'ici le champ de bataille?

Cond. (*with proper pride*). It ain't no use your torkin *to me*, Mossos; I don't speak no French myself. (*To Culchard.*) See that field there, Sir?

Culch. (*interested*). On the right? Yes; what happened *there*?

Cond. Fine lot o' rabbits inside o' there – big fat 'uns. (*To another Passenger.*) No, Sir, that ain't Belly Lions as you see from 'ere; that's Mon Sin Jeean, and over there Oogymong, and Challyroy to the left.

ON THE TOP OF THE MOUND.

*Culchard, who has purchased a map in the Waterloo Museum as a means of approaching Miss Trotter, is pounced upon by an elderly Belgian Guide in a blue blouse, from whom he finds it difficult to escape.*

The Guide (*fixing Culchard with a pair of rheumy eyes and a gnarled forefinger*). You see vere is dat schmall voodt near de vite 'ouse? not dere, along my shdeek – so. Dat is vare Peection vas kill, Inglis Officer, Peection. Two days pefore he was voundet in de ahum. 'E say to his sairvan', "You dell ennipoddies, I keel you!" He vandt to pe in ze bataille: he *vas* in ze bataille – seven lance troo 'im, seven; Peection, Inglis Officer. (*Culchard nods his head miserably.*) Hah, you 'ave de shart dere – open 'im out vide, dat de odder shentilmans see. (*Culchard obeys, spell-bound.*) Vare you see dat blue gross, Vaterloo Shirshe, vere Loart Uxbreedge lose 'is laig. Zey cot 'im off and purry him in ze cottyardt, and a villow grow oudt of 'im. 'E com 'ere to see the villow growing oudt of his laig.

Culch. (*abandoning his map, and edging towards Miss Trotter*). Hem – we are gazing upon one of the landmarks of our national history – Miss Trotter.

Miss T. That's a vurry interesting re-mark. I presume you must have studied up some for a reflection of that kind. Mr. Podbury, your friend has been telling me – , [*She repeats Culchard's remark.*]

Podb. (*with interest*). Got any *more* of those, old fellow?

[*Culchard moves away with disgusted hauteur.*]

The Guide (*re-capturing him*). Along dat gross vay, Vellainton meet Blushair. Prussian général, Blushair. Vellainton 'e com hier. I see 'im. Ven 'e see ze maundt, 'e vos vair angri. 'E say, "Eet is no ze battle-fiel' no more – I com back nevare!" Zat aidege is vere de Scots Greys vas. Ven they dell Napoleon 'oo zey are, 'e say, "Fine mens – splendid mens, I feenish dem in von hour!" Soult 'e say, "Ah, Sire, you do not know dose dairible grey 'orses!" Napoleon 'e *not* know dem. Soult 'e meet dem at de Peninsulaire – 'e know dem. In dat Shirsh, dventy, dirty dablets to Inglis officers. Napoleon 'e coaled op 'is laift vink, zey deploy in line, vair you see my shdeek – ha, ze shentelman is gone away vonce more!

Miss T. (*to Culchard, who has found himself unable to keep away*). You don't seem to find that old gentleman vurry good company?

Culch. The fact is that I much prefer to receive my impressions of a scene like this in solitude.

Miss T. *I* should have thought you'd be too polite to tell me so; but I was moving on, anyway.

[*She goes on. Before Culchard can follow and explain, he finds himself accosted by Mr. Trotter.*]

Mr. T. I don't know as I'm as much struck by this Waterloo field as I expected, Sir. As an Amurrcan, I find it doesn't come up to some of our battlefields in the War. We don't blow about those battlefields, Sir, but for style and general picturesqueness, I ain't seen nothing *this* side to equal them. You ever been over? You want to come over and see our country – that's what *you* want to do. You mustn't mind me a-running on, but when I meet some one as I can converse with in my own language – well, I just about talk myself dry.

[*He talks himself dry, until rejoined by the Guide with Podbury and Miss Trotter.*]

Guide (*to Podbury*). Leesten, I dell you. My vader – eighteen, no in ze Airmi, laboureur man – he see Napoleon standt in a saircle; officers roundt 'im. Boots, op to hier; green cott; vite vaiscott; vite laigs —

Podb. Your father's legs?

Guide (*indignantly*). No, Sare; my vader see Napoleon's laigs; leedle 'at, qvite plain; no faither – nossing.

Podb. But you just said you *had* a faither!

Guide. I say, Napoleon 'ad no faither – vat you call it? —*plume*— in 'is 'at, at ze bataille.

Podb. Are you sure? I thought the history books said he "stuck a feather in his hat, and called it Macaroni."

Miss T. I presume you're thinking of our National Amurrcan character, Yankee Doodle?

Guide. My vader, 'e no see Napoleon viz a Yankedoodle in 'is 'at; 'e vear nossing.

Podb. Nothing? What became of the green coat and white waistcoat, then, eh?

Guide. Ah, you unnerstan' nossing at all! Leesten, I dell you vonce more. My vader —

Podb. No, look here, my friend; you go and tell *that* gentleman all about it (*indicating Culchard*); he's very interested in hearing what Napoleon wore or didn't wear.

*[The Guide takes possession of Culchard once more, who submits, under the impression that Miss Trotter is a fellow-sufferer.]*

Guide (*concluding a vivid account of the fight at Hougoumont*). Bot ven zey com qvite nearer, zey vind ze rade line no ze Inglis soldiers – nossing bot a breek vall, viz ze moskets – "Prown Pesses," you coal dem – shdeekin out of ze 'oles! Ze 'oles schdill dere. Dat vas Hougoumont, in the orshairde. Now you com viz me and see ze lion. Ze dail, two piece; ze bodi, von piece; ze ball, von piece. I sank you, Sare. 'Ope you com again soon.

*[Culchard discovers that the Trotters and Podbury have gone down some time ago. At the foot of the steps he finds his friend waiting for him, alone.]*

Culch. (*with stiff politeness*). Sorry you considered it necessary to stay behind on my account. I see your American friends have already started for the station.

Podb. (*gloomily*). There were only two seats on that coach, and they wouldn't wait for the next. I don't know why, unless it was that they saw *you* coming down the steps. She can't stand you at any price.

Culch. (*with some heat*). Just as likely she had had enough of your buffoonery!

Podb. (*with provoking good humour*). Come, old chap, don't get your shirt out with *me*. Not my fault if she's found out you think yourself too big a swell for her, is it?

Culch. (*hotly*). When did I say so – or think so? It's what you've told her about me, and I must say I call it —

Podb. Don't talk bosh! Who said she was forward and bad form and all the rest of it in the courtyard that first evening? She was close by, and heard every word of it, I shouldn't wonder.

Culch. (*colouring*). It's not of vital importance if she did. (*Whistling.*) Few-fee-fee-foo-foodle-di-fee-di-fa-foo.

Podb. Not a bit – to her. Better step out if we mean to catch that train. (*Humming.*) La-di-loodle-lumpty-leedle-um-ti-loo!

*[They step out, Podbury humming pleasantly and Culchard whistling viciously, without further conversation, until they arrive at Braine l'Alleud Station – and discover that they have just missed their train.]*

## CHAPTER IV.

### Podbury is unpleasantly Surprised

Scene —*The Wiertz Museum at Brussels, a large and well-lighted gallery containing the works of the celebrated Belgian, which are reducing a limited number of spectators to the usual degree of stupefaction. Enter Culchard, who seats himself on a central ottoman.*

Culch. (*to himself*). If Podbury won't come down to breakfast at a decent hour, he can't complain if I – I wonder if he heard Miss Trotter say she was thinking of coming here this morning. Somehow, I *should* like that girl to have a more correct comprehension of my character. I don't so much mind her thinking me fastidious and exclusive. I dare say I *am* – but I *do* object to being made out a hopeless melancholiac! (*He looks round the walls.*) So these are Wiertz's masterpieces, eh? h'm. Strenuous, vigorous, – a trifle crude, perhaps. Didn't he refuse all offers for his pictures during his lifetime? Hardly think he could have been overwhelmed with applications for the one opposite. (*He regards an enormous canvas, representing a brawny and gigantic Achilles perforating a brown Trojan with a small mast.*) Not a dining-room picture. Still, I like his independence – work up rather well in a sonnet. Let me see. (*He takes out note-book and scribbles.*) "He scorned to ply his sombre brush for hire." Now if I read that to Podbury, he'd pretend to think I was treating of a shoe-black on strike! Podbury is so utterly deficient in reverence.

[Close by is a party of three Tourists – a Father and Mother, and a Daughter; who is reading to them aloud from the somewhat effusive Official Catalogue; the education of all three appears to have been elementary.

The Daughter (*spelling out the words laboriously*). "I could not 'elp fancying this was the artist's por-portrait? – portent? – no, *protest* against des-des – (*recklessly*) despoticism, and tyranny, but I see it is only – Por-Porliffymus fasting upon the companions of Ulyces."

Her Male Parent. Do it tell yer what that there big arm and leg be a-doin' of in the middle of 'em?

Daughter (*stolidly*). Don't you be in a nurry, father (*continuing*) – "in the midst of some colonial? —*That ain't it —colossial* animiles fanatically – fan-tasty-cally – "why, this catalogue is 'alf foreign itself!

Female P. Never mind, say 'Peterborough' at the 'ard words —*we* shan't be none the wiser!

Daughter. "The sime-boalic ram the 'ero is to Peterborough and leave 'is Peterborough grotter – "

Male P. That'll do – read what it says about the next one.

Daughter (*reading*). "The Forge of Vulkin. Words are useless 'ere. Before sech a picture one can but look, and think, and enjoy it."

Both Parents (*impressed*). Lor!

[*They smack their lips reverently; Miss Trotter enters the Gallery.*

Culch. (*rising and going to meet her*). Good morning, Miss Trotter. We – ah – meet again.

Miss T. That's an undeniable fact. I've left Poppa outside. Poppa restricts himself to exteriors wherever he can – says he doesn't seem to mix up his impressions so much that way. But you're alone, too. Where've you hitched your friend up?

Culch. My friend did not rise sufficiently early to accompany me. And, by the way, Miss Trotter, I should like to take this opportunity of disabusing your mind of the – er – totally false impression —

Miss T. Oh, *that's* all right. I told him he needn't try to give me away, for I could see you weren't *that* kind of man!

Culch. (*gratefully*). Your instinct was correct – perfectly correct. When you say "that kind of man," I presume you refer to the description my – er – friend considered it humorous to give of me as an unsociable hypochondriac?

Miss T. Well, no; he didn't say just that. He represented you as one of the fonniest persons alive; said you told stories which tickled folks to death almost.

Culch. (*annoyed*). Really, this is *most* unpardonable of Mr. Podbury! To have such odious calumnies circulated about one behind one's back is simply too – I do *not* aspire to – ah – to tickle folks to death!

Miss T. (*soothingly*). Well, I guess there's no harm done. I didn't feel like being in any imminent danger of perishing that way in your society. You're real high-toned and ever so improving, and that's better than tickling, every time. And I want you to show me round this collection and give me a few notions. Seems to me there was considerable sand in Wiertz; sort of spread himself around a good deal, didn't he? I presume, though, he slept bad, nights. (*She makes the tour of the Gallery, accompanied by Culchard, who admires her, against his better judgment, more and more.*) ... I declare if that isn't your friend Mr. Podbury just come in! I believe I'll have to give you up to him.

Culch. (*eagerly*). I beg you will not think it necessary. He – he has a guide already. *He* does not require my services. And, to be plain, my poor friend – though an excellent fellow according to his – ah – lights – is a companion whose society occasionally amounts to a positive infliction.

Miss T. Well, I find him too chinny myself, times. Likely he won't notice us if we don't seem to be aware of him.

[They continue to inspect the canvases.]

A Belgian Guide (*who has made an easy capture of Podbury at the Hotel entrance.*) Hier now is a shdrainch beecture. "De toughts and veersions of a saivered haid." Fairsst meenut afder degapitation; de zagonde; de tirt. Hier de haid tink dey vant to poot him in a goffin. Dere are *two* haid – von goes op, de udder down. Haf you got de two? Nod yet? No?

Podbury (*shaking his head sagaciously*). Oh, ah, yes. Capital. Rum subject, though.

Guide. Yais, vary magnifique, vary grandt, and – and rom also! Dees von rebresents Napoleon in hail. De modders show him de laigs and ahums of dair sons keeled in de vars, and invide him to drink a cop of bloodt.

Podb. Ha, cheery picture that!

Guide. Cheery, oh, yais! Now com and beep troo dis 'ole. (Podbury *obeys with docility.*) You see? A Mad Voman cooking her shildt in a gettle. Hier again, dey haf puried a man viz de golera pefore he is daid, he dries to purst de goffin, you see only de handt shdicking oudt.

Podb. The old Johnny seems full of pretty fancies. (*He looks through another peephole.*) Girl looking at skeleton. Ha! Any other domestic subjects on view? (*He suddenly sees Miss Trotter and Culchard with their backs to him.*) Hal – lo, this *is* luck! I must go to the rescue, or that beggar Culchard will bore her to death in no time. (*To Guide.*) Here, hold on a minute. (*Crosses to Culchard, followed by Guide.*) How d' ye do, Miss Trotter? Doing the Wild Wiertz Show, I see. Ah, Culchard, why didn't you tell me you were going – might have gone together. I say, I've got a guide here.

Culch. (*drily*). So we perceive – a very sensible plan, no doubt, in some cases, my dear fellow.

Podb. (*to Miss T.*) Do come and listen to him, most intelligent chap – great fun. Mr. Culchard is above that sort of thing, I dare say.

Guide. Your vriendts laike to choin, yais? Same for tree as for von. I exblain all de beecture.

Miss T. You're vurry obliging, Mr. Podbury, but your friend is explaining it all just splendidly.

Podb. (*piqued*). Perhaps I had better dismiss my chap, and take on Mr. Culchard too?

Miss T. No, I'd just hate to have you do that. Keep on going round. You mustn't mind us, indeed!

Podb. Oh, if you'd rather! (*Gloomily, to Guide.*) They can do without *us*. Just show me something more in the blood-and-thunder line – no, at the other end of the room. [*They withdraw.*]

Guide. Hier is von dat is vary amusant. You know de schtory of de Tree Vishes, eh?

Podb. *Macbeth*, eh? oh, I see — *Wishes*! No, what was that?

Guide. I dell it you. (*He tells it; Podbury falls into gloomy abstraction.*) ... And inschdantly she vind a grade pig soasage at de end of her nôase. So de ole voman —

Podb. (*wearily*). Oh, I've heard all *that*. What's this one about?

Guide. Dis is galled "De lasht Gannon." You see de vigure of Ceevilization flodderin up viz de vings, vile Brogress preaks asonder de lasht gon, and in a gorner a Genius purns de vrontier bosts.

Podb. (*captiously*). What's he doing *that* for?

Guide. I ton't know. I subbose begause dey are bosts, or (*dubiously*) begause he is a Genius.

Culch. (*touching Podbury's arm as he goes out*). Oh – er – Podbury, I'm off. Going to lunch somewhere with the – ah – Trotters. See you at *table d'hôte* this evening, I suppose? Good-bye.

Podb. (*savagely*). Oh, ta-ta! (*To himself.*) And that's the fellow who said he wanted to keep out of making friends! How the dickens am I going to get through the time by myself? (*To Guide.*) Here, that's enough for one day.

Guide. If you vandt to puy som real Prussels lace for your sweedardt, I —

Podb. (*grimly*). I've no occasion for any at present, thank you.

[He pays and dismisses him, and stands forlornly in the Gallery, while the Imperfectly Educated Daughter goes on spelling out the Catalogue for her Parents' edification.]



## CHAPTER V. Culchard has the Best of it

*Scene —Upper deck of the Rhine Steamer, König Wilhelm, somewhere between Bonn and Bingen. The little tables on deck are occupied by English, American, and German tourists, drinking various liquids, from hock to Pilsener beer, and eating veal cutlets. Mr. Cyrus K. Trotter is on the lower deck, discussing the comparative merits of the New York hotels with a fellow countryman. Miss Maud S. Trotter is seated on the afterdeck in close conversation with Culchard. Podbury is perched on a camp-stool in the forward part. Near him a British Matron, with a red-haired son, in a green and black blazer, and a blue flannel nightcap, and a bevy of rabbit-faced daughters, are patronising a tame German Student in spectacles, who speaks a little English.*

The British Matron. Oh, you *ought* to see London; it's our capital – chief city, you know. Very grand – large – four million inhabitants! [*With pride, as being in some way responsible for this.*

A Rabbit-faced Daughter (*with a simper*). Quite a little world!

[*She looks down her nose, as if in fear of having said something a little too original.*

The Germ. Stud. No, I haf not yet at London peen. Ven I vill pedder Englisch learn, I go.

The Blazer. You read our English books, I suppose? Dickens, you know, and Homer, eh? About the Trojan War – that's his *best* work!

The Stud. (*Ollendorffically*). I haf not read Diggins; but I haf read ze bapers by *Bigvig*. Zey are vary indereshtin, and gurious.

A Patriotic Young Scot (*to an admiring Elderly Lady in a black mushroom hat*). Eh, but we just made a pairrty and went up Auld Drachenfels, and when we got to th' tope, we danced a richt gude Scots reel, and sang, "*We're a' togither an' naebody by*," concluding – just to show, ye'll understan', that we were loyal subjics – wi' "*God Save th' Queen*." The peasants didna seem just to know what to mak' of us, I prawmise ye!

The Black Mushroom. How I wish I'd been one of you!

The Young Scot (*candidly*). I doot your legs would ha' stood such wark.

[*Podbury becomes restless, and picks his way among the campstools to Culchard and Miss Trotter.*

Podbury (*to himself*). Time I had a look in, I think. (*Aloud.*) Well, Miss Trotter, what do you think of the Rhine, as far as you've got?

Miss T. Well, I guess it's navigable, as far as *I've* got.

Podb. No, but I mean to say – does it come up to the mark in the scenery line, you know?

Miss T. I cannt answer that till I know whereabouts it is they mark the scenery-line. I expect Mr. Culchard knows. He knows pretty well everything. Would you like to have him explain the scenery to you going along? His explanations are vurry improving, I assure you.

Podb. I dare say; but the scenery just here is so flat that even my friend's remarks won't improve it.

Culch. (*producing his note-book ostentatiously*). I do not propose to attempt it. No doubt you will be more successful in entertaining Miss Trotter than I can pretend to be. I retire in your favour. [*He scribbles.*

Podb. Is that our expenses you're corking down there, Culchard, eh?

Culch. (*with dignity*). If you want to know, I am "corking down," to adopt your elegant expression, a sonnet that suggested itself to me.

Podb. Much better cork that *up*, old chap – hadn't he, Miss Trotter?

[He glances at her for appreciation.

Miss T. That's so. I don't believe the poetic spirit has much chance of slopping over so long as Mr. Podbury is around. You have considerable merit as a stopper, Mr. Podbury.

Podb. I see; I'd better clear out till the poetry has all gurgled out of him, eh? Is that the idea?

Miss T. If it is, it's your own, so I guess it's a pretty good one.

[Podbury *shoulders off*.

Culch. (*with his pathetic stop on*). I wish I had more of your divine patience! Poor fellow, he is not without his good points; but I do find him a thorn in my flesh occasionally, I'm afraid.

Miss T. Well, I don't know as a thorn in the flesh is any the pleasanter for having a good point.

Culch. Profoundly true, indeed. I often think I could like him better if there were less in him to like. I assure you he tries me so at times that I could almost wish I was back at work in my department at Somerset House!

Miss T. I dare say you have pretty good times there, too. Isn't that one of your leading dry goods stores?

Culch. (*pained*). It is not; it is a Government Office, and I am in the Pigeonhole and Docket Department, with important duties to discharge. I hope you didn't imagine I sold ribbons and calico over a counter?

Miss T. (*ambiguously*). Well, I wasn't just sure. It takes a pretty bright man to do that where I come from.

An Old Lady (*who is sitting next to Podbury, and reading a homeletter to another Old Lady*). "Dear Maria and dear Madeline are close by, they have taken very comfortable lodgings in Marine Crescent. Dear Madeline's frame is expected down next Saturday."

Second Old Lady. Madeline's frame! Is anything wrong with the poor girl's spine?

First Old Lady. I never heard of it. Oh, I see, it's *fiancé*, my dear. Caroline *does* write so illegibly. (*Continuing*.) "Um – um, – suppose you know she will be maimed – " (perhaps it *is* her spine after all – oh, *married*, to be sure), "very slowly" (is it slowly or shortly, I wonder?), um, um, "very quiet wedding, nobody but dear Mr. Wilkinson and his hatter."

Second O. L. The idea of choosing one's hatter for one's best man! I'm surprised Maria should allow it!

First O. L. Maria always *was* peculiar – still, now I come to look, it's more like "brother," which is certainly *much* more suitable. (*Continuing*.) "She will have no – no bird's-marks ..." (Now, what *does* that – should you think that meant "crows-feet"? Oh, no, *how* stupid of me – *bridesmaids*, of course!) – "and will go to the otter a plain guy" – (Oh, Caroline really is *too* ...) – "to the altar in plain grey! She has been given such quantities of pea-nuts" – (very odd things to give a girl! Oh, *presents*! um, um) – "Not settled yet where to go for their hangman" – (the officiating clergyman, I suppose – very flippant way of putting it, I *must* say! It's meant for *honeymoon*, though, I see, to be *sure*!) &c. &c.

Culch. (*to Miss T.*). I should like to be at Nuremberg with you. It would be an unspeakable delight to watch the expansion of a fresh young soul in that rich mediæval atmosphere!

Miss T. I guess you'll have opportunities of watching Mr. Podbury's fresh young soul under those conditions, any way.

Culch. It would not be at all the same thing – even if he – but you *do* think you're coming to Nuremberg, don't you?

Miss T. Well, it's this way. Poppa don't want to get fooling around any more one-horse towns than he can help, and he's got to be fixed up with the idea that Nuremberg is a prominent European sight before he drops everything to get there.

Culch. I will undertake to interest him in Nuremberg. Fortunately, we are all getting off at Bingen, and going, curiously enough, to the same hotel. (*To himself.*) Confound that fellow Podbury, here he is *again*!

Podb. (*to himself, as he advances*). If she's carrying on with that fellow, Culchard, to provoke me, I'll soon show her how little I – (*Aloud.*) I say, old man, hope I'm not interrupting you, but I just want to speak to you for a minute, if Miss Trotter will excuse us. Is there any particular point in going as far as Bingen to-night, eh?

Culch. (*resignedly*). As much as there is in not going farther than somewhere else, *I* should have thought.

Podb. Well, but look here – why not stop at Bacharach, and see what sort of a place it is?

Culch. You forget that our time is limited if we're going to stick to our original route.

Podb. Yes, of course; mustn't waste any on the Rhine. Suppose we push on to Maintz to-night, and get the Rhine off our hands then? (*With a glance at Miss Trotter.*) The sooner I've done with this steamer business the better!

Miss T. Well, Mr. Podbury, that's not a vurry complimentary remark to make before me!

Podb. We've seen so little of one another lately that it can hardly make much difference – to *either* of us – can it?

Miss T. Now I call that real kind, you're consoling me in advance!

The Steward (*coming up*). De dickets dat I haf nod yed seen! (*examining Culchard's coupons*). For Bingen – so?

Culch. *I* am. This gentleman gets off – is it Bacharach or Maintz, Podbury?

Podb. (*sulkily*). Neither, as it happens. I'm for Bingen, too, as you won't go anywhere else. Though you *did* say when we started, that the advantage of travelling like this was that we could go on or stop just as the fancy took us!

Culch. (*calmly*). I did, my dear Podbury. But it never occurred to me that the fancy would take you to get tired of a place before you got there!

Podb. (*as he walks forwards*). Hang that fellow! I know I shall punch his head some day. And She didn't seem to care whether I stayed or not. (*Hopefully.*) But you never *can* tell with women!

[He returns to his camp-stool and the letter-reading Old Ladies.

## CHAPTER VI.

### Culchard makes a little Miscalculation

Scene. — *Garden of the Hotel Victoria at Bingen, commanding a view of the Rhine and the vine-terraced hills, which are bathed in warm afternoon sunlight. Under the mopheaded acacias, Culchard and Podbury are sitting smoking. At a little distance from them, are a Young Married Couple, whose honeymoon is apparently in its last quarter.*

The Bridegroom (*lazily, to Bride, as she draws another chair towards her for a foot-rest*). How many *more* chairs do you want?

Bride (*without looking at him*). I should think you could spare me one – you can hardly sit on three at once!

[After this interchange of amenities, they consider themselves absolved from any further conversational efforts.]

Podb. (*to Culch., resuming a discussion*). I know as well as you do that we are booked for Nuremberg; but what *I* say is – that's no earthly reason why we should *go* there!

Culch. No reason why *you* should go, unless you wish it, certainly. *I* intend to go.

Podb. Well, it's beastly selfish, that's all! I know *why* you're so keen about it, too. Because the Trotters are going.

Culch. (*colouring*). That's an entire mistake on your part. Miss Trotter has nothing to do with it. I don't even know whether she's going or not – for certain.

Podb. No, but you've a pretty good idea that she *is*, though. And I *know* how it will be. You'll be going about with her all the time, and I shall be shunted on to the old man! I don't *see* it, you know! (Culch. *remains silent*. A pause. Podbury suddenly begins to search his pockets.) I say – here's a pretty fix! Look here, old fellow, doosid annoying thing, but I can't find my purse – must have lost it somewhere!

Culch. (*stoically*). I can't say I'm surprised to hear it. It's awkward, certainly. I suppose I shall have to lend you enough to go home with – it's all I can do; but I'll do that with – er – pleasure.

Podb. (*staring*). Go home? Why, I can wire to the governor for more, easily enough. We shall have to stay here till it comes, that's all.

Culch. And give up Nuremberg? Thank you!

Podb. I rather like this place, you know – sort of rest. And we could always nip over to Ems, or Homburg, if it got too slow, eh?

Culch. If I nip over anywhere, I shall nip to Nuremberg. We may just as well understand one another, Podbury. If I'm to provide money for both of us, it's only reasonable that you should be content to go where *I* choose. I cannot, and will not, stand these perpetual interferences with our original plan; it's sheer restlessness. Come with me to Nuremberg, and I shall be very happy to be your banker. Otherwise, you must stay here alone. [*He compresses his lips and crosses his legs.*]

Podb. Oh, *that's* it, is it? But look here, why not tit up whether we go on or stay?

Culch. Why should I "tit up," as you call it, when I've already made up my mind to go? When I once decide on anything, it's final.

The Bride (*to Bridegroom, without enthusiasm*). Would you like me to roll you a cigarette?

Bridegroom (*with the frankness of an open nature*). Not if I know it. I can do it better myself.

Bride (*coldly*). I see.

[Another silence, at the end of which she rises and walks slowly away, pausing at the gate to see whether he intends to follow. As he does not appear to have remarked her absence, she walks on.

Podb. (*to Culch., in an undertone*). I say, those two don't seem to hit it off exactly, eh? Seem sorry they came! You'll be glad to hear, old fellow, that we needn't separate after all. Just found my purse in my trouser-pocket!

Culch. Better luck than you deserve. Didn't I tell you you should have a special pocket for your money and coupons? Like this – see. (*He opens his coat*) With a buttoned flap, it stands to reason they *must* be safe!

Podb. So long as you keep it buttoned, old chap, – which you don't seem to do!

Culch. (*annoyed*). Pshaw! The button is a trifle too – (*feels pocket, and turns pale*). Good Heavens, it – it's *gone*!

Podb. The button?

Culch. (*patting himself all over with shaking hands*). Everything! – money, coupons, circular notes! They – they must have fallen out going up that infernal Niederwald. (*Angrily.*) You *would* insist on going!

Podb. Phew! The whole bag of tricks gone! You're lucky if you get them again. Any number of tramps and beggars all the way up. Shouldn't have taken off your coat – very careless of you! (*He grins.*)

Culch. It was so hot. I must go and inform the Police here – I may recover it yet. Anyway, we – we must push on to Nuremberg, and I'll telegraph home for money to be sent here. You can let me have enough to get on with?

Podb. With all the pleasure in life, dear boy – on your own conditions, you know. I mean, if I pay the piper, I call the tune. Now, I don't cotton to Nuremberg somehow; I'd rather go straight on to Constance; we could get some rowing there.

Culch. (*pettishly*). Rowing be – (*recollecting his helplessness*). No; but just consider, my dear Podbury. I assure you you'll find Nuremberg a most delightful old place. You must see how bent I am on going there!

Podb. Oh, yes, I see *that*. But then I'm *not*, don't you know – so there we are!

Culch. (*desperately*). Well, I'll – I'll meet you half-way. I've no objection to – er – titting up with you – Nuremberg or Constance. Come?

Podb. You weren't so anxious to tit up just now – but never mind. (*Producing a mark.*) Now then, Emperor – Constance. Eagle – Nuremberg. Is it sudden death, or best out of three? [*He tosses.*

Culch. Sud – (*The coin falls with the Emperor uppermost.*) Best out of three. [*He takes coin from Podbury and tosses.*

Podb. Eagle! we're even so far. (*He receives coin.*) This settles it. [*He tosses.*

Culch. (*triumphantly*). Eagle again! Now mind, Podbury, no going back after *this*. It must be Nuremberg now.

Podb. All right! And now allow me to have the pleasure of restoring your pocket-book and note-case. They did fall out on the Niederwald, and it was a good job for you I was behind and saw them drop. You must really be careful, dear boy. Ain't you going to say "ta" for them?

Culch. (*relieved*). I'm – er – tremendously obliged. I really can't say how. – (*Recollecting himself.*) But you need not have taken advantage of it to try to do me out of going to Nuremberg – it was a shabby trick!

Podb. Oh, it was only to get a rise out of you. I never meant to keep you to it, of course. And I say, weren't you sold, though? Didn't I lead up to it beautifully? (*He chuckles.*) Score to me, eh!

Culch. (*with amiable sententiousness*). Ah, well, I don't grudge you your little joke if it amuses you. Those laugh best who laugh last. And it's settled now that we're going to Nuremberg.

[Miss Trotter *and her father have come out from the Speisesaal doors, and overhear the last speech.*

Mr. Trotter (*to Culchard*). Your friend been gettin' off a joke on you, Sir?

Culch. Only in his own estimation, Mr. Trotter. I have nailed him down to going to Nuremberg, which, for many reasons, I was extremely anxious to visit. (*Carelessly.*) Are we likely to be there when you are?

Miss T. I guess not. We've just got our mail, and my cousin, Charley Van Boodeler, writes he's having a real lovely time in the Engadine – says it's the most elegant locality he's struck yet, and just as full of Amurrcans as it can hold; so we're going to start out there right away. I don't believe we shall have time for Nuremberg this trip. Father, if we're going to see about checking the baggage through, we'd better go down to the *depôt* right now. [*They pass on.*

Culch. (*with a very blank face and a feeble whistle*). Few-fitty-fitty-fitty-fa-di-fee-fee-foo; few – After all, Podbury, I don't know that I care so much about Nuremberg. They – they say it's a good deal changed from what it was.

Podb. So are *you*, old chap, if it comes to that. Tiddledy-iddlety-ido-lumpty-doodle-oo! Is it to be Constance after all, then?

Culch. (*reddening*). Er – I rather thought of the Engadine – more *bracing*, eh? – few-feedle-eedle-oodle —

Podb. You artful old whistling oyster, *I* see what you're up to! But it's no go; she don't want either of us Engadining about after her. It's Charley Van Stickinthemud's turn now! We've got to go to Nuremberg. You can't get out of it, after gassing so much about the place. When you've once decided, you know, it's *final*!

Culch. (*with dignity*). I am not aware that I *wanted* to get out of it. I merely proposed in your – (Podbury *suddenly explodes.*) What are you cackling at *now*?

Podb. (*wiping his eyes*). It's the last laugh, old man, – and it's the best!

[Culchard *walks away rapidly, leaving Podbury in solitary enjoyment of the joke. Podbury's mirth immediately subsides into gravity, and he kicks several unoffending chairs with quite uncalled-for brutality.*

## CHAPTER VII. A Dissolution of Partnership

Scene —*A Second-Class Compartment on the line between Wurzburg and Nuremberg. Podbury has been dull and depressed all day, not having recovered from the parting with Miss Trotter. Culchard, on the contrary, is almost ostentatiously cheerful. Podbury is intensely anxious to find out how far his spirits are genuine, but – partly from shyness, and partly because some of their fellow travellers have been English – he has hesitated to introduce the subject. At last, however, they are alone, and he is determined to have it out on the very first opportunity.*

Culchard. Abominably slow train, this *Schnell-zug*. I hope we shall get to Nuremberg before it's too dark to see the general effect.

Podbury. We're not likely to be in time for *table d'hôte* – not that *I'm* peckish. (*He sighs.*) Wonder whereabouts the – the Trotters have got to by now, eh?

[He feels he is getting red, and hums the Garden Scene from Faust.]

Culch. (*indifferently*). Oh, let me see – just arriving at St. Moritz, I expect. Wonderful effect of colour, that is.

[He indicates the West, where a bar of crimson is flaming between a belt of firs.]

Podb. (*absently*). Oh, wonderful! – where? (*Hums a snatch of a waltz.*) Dum-dum-diddle-um-tum-dum-dum-dum-ty-doodle; dum-dum – I say, *you* don't seem particularly cut up?

Culch. Cut up? Why should I be cut up, my dear fellow? – about what?

[*Before Podbury can explain, two Talkative British Tourists tumble up into the compartment, and he has to control his curiosity once more.*]

First T. T. Well, I 'ope we're all right *now*, Sam, I'm sure – these German jokers have chivied us about enough for one journey! (*To Culchard.*) *Not in your way, this 'at box, Sir? Don't give yer much space in these foreign trains. (They settle down and the train starts.)* Pretty bit o' country along 'ere! – puts me in mind o' the best part o' Box 'Ill – and I can't say more for it than *that*!

Second T. T. (*a little man with a sandy fringe and boiled-looking eyes*). What I notice about the country abroad is they don't seem to 'ave no *landmarks*.

First T. T. (*with a dash of friendly contempt*). What d'yer mean – no landmarks —*signposts*?

Second T. T. (*with dignity*). I mean to say, they don't 'ave nothing to indicate which is Jack's property, and which is Joe's.

First T. T. Go on – they've as much as what *we* 'ave.

Second T. T. 'Ave they? We 'ave fences and 'edges. I don't see none 'ere. P'raps you'll point me *out* one?

First T. T. There's precious few 'edges or fences in the Isle o' Thanet, as you'd know if you've ever been to Margit.

Second T. T. (*loftily*). I'm not talkin' about Margit now, I'm talkin' of 'ere, and I'll trouble you to show me a landmark.

First T. T. Depend on it they've their own ways of knowing which is 'oo's.

Second T. T. That's not what I'm *sayin'*. I'm sayin' there ain't nothin' to *indicate* it. [*They argue the point at length.*]

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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