



EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON

THE CAXTONS

PART IV

2008 – All rights reserved
Non commercial use permitted

PART IV.

CHAPTER I.

I was always an early riser. Happy the man who is! Every morning, day comes to him with a virgin's love, full of bloom and purity and freshness. The youth of Nature is contagious, like the gladness of a happy child. I doubt if any man can be called "old" so long as he is an early riser and an early walker. And oh, youth!--take my word of it--youth in dressing-gown and slippers, dawdling over breakfast at noon, is a very decrepit, ghastly image of that youth which sees the sun blush over the mountains, and the dews sparkle upon blossoming hedgerows.

Passing by my father's study, I was surprised to see the windows unclosed; surprised more, on looking in, to see him bending over his books,--for I had never before known him study till after the morning meal. Students are not usually early risers, for students, alas! whatever their age, are rarely young. Yes, the Great Book must be getting on in serious earnest. It was no longer dalliance with learning; this was work.

I passed through the gates into the road. A few of the cottages were giving signs of returning life, but it was not yet the hour for labor, and no "Good morning, sir," greeted me on the road. Suddenly at a turn, which an over-hanging beech-tree had before concealed, I came full upon my Uncle Roland.

"What! you, sir? So early? Hark, the clock is striking five!"

"Not later! I have walked well for a lame man. It must be more than four miles to--and back."

"You have been to--? Not on business? No soul would be up."

"Yes, at inns there is always some one up. Hostlers never sleep! I have been to order my humble chaise and pair. I leave you today, nephew."

"Ah, uncle, we have offended you! It was my folly, that cursed print--"

"Pooh!" said my uncle, quickly. "Offended me, boy? I defy you!" and he pressed my hand roughly.

"Yet this sudden determination! It was but yesterday, at the Roman Camp, that you planned an excursion with my father, to C----- Castle."

"Never depend upon a whimsical man. I must be in London tonight."

"And return to-morrow?"

"I know not when," said my uncle, gloomily; and he was silent for some moments. At length, leaning less lightly on my arm, he continued: "Young man, you have pleased me. I love that open, saucy brow of yours, on which Nature has written 'Trust me.' I love those clear eyes, that look one manfully in the face. I must know more of you--much of you. You must come and see me some day or other in your ancestors' ruined keep."

"Come! that I will. And you shall show me the old tower--"

"And the traces of the outworks!" cried my uncle, flourishing his stick.

"And the pedigree--"

"Ay, and your great-great-grandfather's armor, which he wore at Marston Moor--"

"Yes, and the brass plate in the church, uncle."

"The deuce is in the boy! Come here, come here: I've three minds to break your head, sir!"

"It is a pity somebody had not broken the rascally printer's, before he had the impudence to disgrace us by having a family, uncle."

Captain Roland tried hard to frown, but he could not. "Pshaw!" said he, stopping, and taking snuff. "The world of the dead is wide; why should the ghosts jostle us?"

"We can never escape the ghosts, uncle. They haunt us always. We cannot think or act, but the soul of some man, who has lived before, points the way. The dead never die, especially since--"

"Since what, boy? You speak well."

"Since our great ancestor introduced printing," said I, majestically.

My uncle whistled "Malbrouk s'en va-t-en guerre."

I had not the heart to plague him further.

"Peace!" said I, creeping cautiously within the circle of the stick.

"No! I forewarn you--"

"Peace! and describe to me my little cousin, your pretty daughter,--for pretty I am sure she is."

"Peace," said my uncle, smiling. "But you must come and judge for yourself."

CHAPTER II.

Uncle Roland was gone. Before he went, he was closeted for an hour with my father, who then accompanied him to the gate; and we all crowded round him as he stepped into his chaise. When the Captain was gone, I tried to sound my father as to the cause of so sudden a departure. But my father was impenetrable in all that related to his brother's secrets. Whether or not the Captain had ever confided to him the cause of his displeasure with his son,--a mystery which much haunted me,--my father was mute on that score both to my mother and myself. For two or three days, however, Mr. Caxton was evidently unsettled. He did not even take to his Great Work, but walked much alone, or accompanied only by the duck, and without even a book in his hand. But by degrees the scholarly habits returned to him; my mother mended his pens, and the work went on.

For my part, left much to myself, especially in the mornings, I began to muse restlessly over the future. Ungrateful that I was, the happiness of home ceased to content me. I heard afar the roar of the great world, and roved impatient by the shore.

At length, one evening, my father, with some modest hums and ha's, and

an unaffected blush on his fair forehead, gratified a prayer frequently urged on him, and read me some portions of the Great Work. I cannot express the feelings this lecture created,--they were something akin to awe. For the design of this book was so immense, and towards its execution a learning so vast and various had administered, that it seemed to me as if a spirit had opened to me a new world, which had always been before my feet, but which my own human blindness had hitherto concealed from me. The unspeakable patience with which all these materials had been collected, year after year; the ease with which now, by the calm power of genius, they seemed of themselves to fall into harmony and system; the unconscious humility with which the scholar exposed the stores of a laborious life,---all combined to rebuke my own restlessness and ambition, while they filled me with a pride in my father which saved my wounded egotism from a pang. Here, indeed, was one of those books which embrace an existence; like the Dictionary of Bayle, or the History of Gibbon, or the "Fasti Hellenici" of Clinton, it was a book to which thousands of books had contributed, only to make the originality of the single mind more bold and clear. Into the furnace all vessels of gold, of all ages, had been cast; but from the mould came the new coin, with its single stamp. And, happily, the subject of the work did not forbid to the writer the indulgence of his naive, peculiar irony of humor, so quiet, yet so profound. My father's book was the "History of Human Error." It was, therefore, the moral history of mankind, told with truth and earnestness, yet with an arch, unmalignant smile. Sometimes, indeed, the smile drew tears. But in all true humor lies its germ, pathos. Oh! by the goddess Moria, or Folly, but he was at home in his theme. He viewed man first in the savage state, preferring in this the positive accounts of voyagers and travellers to the vague myths of antiquity and the dreams of speculators on our pristine state. From Australia and Abyssinia he drew pictures of mortality unadorned, as lively as if he had lived amongst Bushmen and savages all his life. Then he crossed over the Atlantic, and brought before you the American Indian, with his noble nature, struggling into the dawn of civilization, when Friend Penn cheated him out of his birthright, and the Anglo-Saxon drove him back into darkness. He showed both analogy and contrast between this specimen of our kind and others equally apart from the extremes of the savage state and the cultured,-- the Arab in his tent, the Teuton in his forests, the Greenlander in his boat, the Finn in his reindeer car. Up sprang the rude gods of the North and the resuscitated Druidism, passing from its earliest templeless belief into the later corruptions of crommell and idol. Up sprang, by their side, the Saturn of the Phoenicians, the mystic Budh of India, the elementary deities of the Pelasgian, the Naith and Serapis of Egypt, the Ormuzd of Persia, the Bel of Babylon, the winged genii of the

graceful Etruria. How nature and life shaped the religion; how the religion shaped the manners; how, and by what influences, some tribes were formed for progress; how others were destined to remain stationary, or be swallowed up in war and slavery by their brethren,--was told with a precision clear and strong as the voice of Fate. Not only an antiquarian and philologist, but an anatomist and philosopher, my father brought to bear on all these grave points the various speculations involved in the distinction of races. He showed how race in perfection is produced, up to a certain point, by admixture; how all mixed races have been the most intelligent; how, in proportion as local circumstance and religious faith permitted the early fusion of different tribes, races improved and quickened into the refinements of civilization. He tracked the progress and dispersion of the Hellenes from their mythical cradle in Thessaly, and showed how those who settled near the sea-shores, and were compelled into commerce and intercourse with strangers, gave to Greece her marvellous accomplishments in arts and letters,--the flowers of the ancient world. How others, like the Spartans; dwelling evermore in a camp, on guard against their neighbors, and rigidly preserving their Dorian purity of extraction, contributed neither artists, nor poets, nor philosophers to the golden treasure-house of mind. He took the old race of the Celts, Cimry, or Cimmerians. He compared the Celt who, as in Wales, the Scotch Highlands, in Bretagne, and in uncomprehended Ireland, retains his old characteristics and purity of breed, with the Celt whose blood, mixed by a thousand channels, dictates from Paris the manners and revolutions of the world. He compared the Norman, in his ancient Scandinavian home, with that wonder of intelligence and chivalry into which he grew, fused imperceptibly with the Frank, the Goth, and the Anglo-Saxon. He compared the Saxon, stationary in the land of Horsa, with the colonist and civilizes of the globe as he becomes when he knows not through what channels--French, Flemish, Danish, Welsh, Scotch, and Irish--he draws his sanguine blood. And out from all these speculations, to which I do such hurried and scanty justice, he drew the blessed truth, that carries hope to the land of the Caffre, the but of the Bushman,--that there is nothing in the flattened skull and the ebon aspect that rejects God's law, improvement; that by the same principle which raises the dog, the lowest of the animals in its savage state, to the highest after man--viz., admixture of race--you can elevate into nations of majesty and power the outcasts of humanity, now your compassion or your scorn. But when my father got into the marrow of his theme; when, quitting these preliminary discussions, he fell pounce amongst the would-be wisdom of the wise; when he dealt with civilization itself, its schools, and porticos, and academies; when he bared the absurdities couched beneath the colleges of the Egyptians and the Symposia of the Greeks; when he

showed that, even in their own favorite pursuit of metaphysics, the Greeks were children, and in their own more practical region of politics, the Romans were visionaries and bunglers; when, following the stream of error through the Middle Ages, he quoted the puerilities of Agrippa, the crudities of Cardan, and passed, with his calm smile, into the salons of the chattering wits of Paris in the eighteenth century,—oh! then his irony was that of Lucian, sweetened by the gentle spirit of Erasmus. For not even here was my father's satire of the cheerless and Mephistophelian school. From this record of error he drew forth the grandeur of truth. He showed how earnest men never think in vain, though their thoughts may be errors. He proved how, in vast cycles, age after age, the human mind marches on, like the ocean, receding here, but there advancing; how from the speculations of the Greek sprang all true philosophy; how from the institutions of the Roman rose all durable systems of government; how from the robust follies of the North came the glory of chivalry, and the modern delicacies of honor, and the sweet, harmonizing influences of woman. He tracked the ancestry of our Sidneys and Bayards from the Hengists, Genseric, and Attila. Full of all curious and quaint anecdote, of original illustration, of those niceties of learning which spring from a taste cultivated to the last exquisite polish, the book amused and allured and charmed; and erudition lost its pedantry, now in the simplicity of Montaigne, now in the penetration of La Bruyère. He lived in each time of which he wrote, and the time lived again in him. Ah! what a writer of romances he would have been if—if what? If he had had as sad an experience of men's passions as he had the happy intuition into their humors. But he who would see the mirror of the shore must look where it is cast on the river, not the ocean. The narrow stream reflects the gnarled tree and the pausing herd and the village spire and the romance of the landscape. But the sea reflects only the vast outline of the headland and the lights of the eternal heaven.

CHAPTER III.

"It is Lombard Street to a China orange," quoth Uncle Jack.

"Are the odds in favor of fame against failure so great? You do not speak, I fear, from experience, brother Jack," answered my father, as he stooped down to tickle the duck under the left ear.

"But Jack Tibbets is not Augustine Caxton. Jack Tibbets is not a scholar, a genius, a wond--"

"Stop!" cried my father.

"After all," said Mr. Squills, "though I am no flatterer, Mr. Tibbets is not so far out. That part of your book which compares the crania or skulls of the different races is superb. Lawrence or Dr. Prichard could not have done the thing more neatly. Such a book must not be lost to the world; and I agree with Mr. Tibbets that you should publish as soon as possible."

"It is one thing to write, and another to publish," said my father, irresolutely. "When one considers all the great men who have published; when one thinks one is going to intrude one's self audaciously into the company of Aristotle and Bacon, of Locke, of Herder, of all the grave philosophers who bend over Nature with brows weighty with thought,--one may well pause and--"

"Pooh!" interrupted Uncle Jack, "science is not a club, it is an ocean; it is open to the cock-boat as the frigate. One man carries across it a freightage of ingots, another may fish there for herrings. Who can exhaust the sea, who say to Intellect, 'The deeps of philosophy are preoccupied'?"

"Admirable!" cried Squills.

"So it is really your advice, my friends," said my father, who seemed struck by Uncle Jack's eloquent illustrations, "that I should desert my household gods, remove to London, since my own library ceases to supply my wants, take lodgings near the British Museum, and finish off one volume, at least, incontinently."

"It is a duty you owe to your country," said Uncle Jack, solemnly.

"And to yourself," urged Squills. "One must attend to the natural evacuations of the brain. Ah! you may smile, sir, but I have observed that if a man has much in his head, he must give it vent, or it oppresses him; the whole system goes wrong. From being abstracted, he grows stupefied. The weight of the pressure affects the nerves. I would not even guarantee you from a stroke of paralysis."

"Oh, Austin!" cried my mother tenderly, and throwing her arms round my father's neck.

"Come, sir, you are conquered," said I.

"And what is to become of you, Sisty?" asked my father. "Do you go with us, and unsettle your mind for the university?"

"My uncle has invited me to his castle; and in the mean while I will stay here, fag hard, and take care of the duck."

"All alone?" said my mother.

"No. All alone! Why, Uncle Jack will come here as often as ever, I hope."

Uncle Jack shook his head.

"No, my boy, I must go to town with your father. You don't understand these things. I shall see the booksellers for him. I know how these gentlemen are to be dealt with. I shall prepare the literary circles for the appearance of the book. In short, it is a sacrifice of interest, I know; my Journal will suffer. But friendship and my country's good before all things."

"Dear Jack!" said my mother, affectionately.

"I cannot suffer it," cried my father. "You are making a good income. You are doing well where you are, and as to seeing the booksellers,-- why, when the work is ready, you can come to town for a week, and settle that affair."

"Poor dear Austin," said Uncle Jack, with an air of superiority and compassion. "A week! Sir, the advent of a book that is to succeed requires the preparation of months. Pshaw! I am no genius, but I am a practical man. I know what's what. Leave me alone."

But my father continued obstinate, and Uncle Jack at last ceased to urge the matter. The journey to fame and London was now settled, but my father would not hear of my staying behind.

No, Pisistratus must needs go also to town and see the world; the duck would take care of itself.

CHAPTER IV.

We had taken the precaution to send, the day before, to secure our due complement of places--four in all, including one for Mrs. Primmins--in, or upon, the fast family coach called the "Sun," which had lately been set up for the special convenience of the neighborhood.

This luminary, rising in a town about seven miles distant from us, described at first a very erratic orbit amidst the contiguous villages before it finally struck into the high-road of enlightenment, and thence performed its journey, in the full eyes of man, at the majestic pace of six miles and a half an hour. My father with his pockets full of books, and a quarto of "Gebelin on the Primitive World," for light reading, under his arm; my mother with a little basket containing sandwiches, and biscuits of her own baking; Mrs. Primmins, with a new umbrella purchased for the occasion, and a bird-cage containing a canary endeared to her not more by song than age and a severe pip through which she had successfully nursed it; and I myself,--waited at the gates to welcome the celestial visitor. The gardener, with a wheel-barrow full of boxes and portmanteaus, stood a little in the van; and the footman, who was to follow when lodgings had been found, had gone to a rising eminence to watch the dawning of the expected "Sun," and apprise us of its approach by the concerted signal of a handkerchief fixed to a stick.

The quaint old house looked at us mournfully from all its deserted windows. The litter before its threshold and in its open hall; wisps of straw or hay that had been used for packing; baskets and boxes that had been examined and rejected; others, corded and piled, reserved to follow with the footman; and the two heated and hurried serving-women left behind, standing halfway between house and garden-gate, whispering to each other, and looking as if they had not slept for weeks,--gave to a scene, usually so trim and orderly, an aspect of pathetic abandonment and desolation. The Genius of the place seemed to reproach us. I felt the omens were against us, and turned my earnest gaze from the haunts behind with a sigh, as the coach now drew up with all its grandeur. An important personage, who, despite the heat of the day, was enveloped in a vast superfluity of belcher, in the midst of which galloped a gilt fox, and who rejoiced in the name of "guard," descended to inform us politely that only three places, two inside and one out, were at our disposal, the rest having been pre-engaged a fortnight before our orders were received.

Now, as I knew that Mrs. Primmins was indispensable to the comforts of my honored parents (the more so as she had once lived in London, and knew all its ways), I suggested that she should take the outside seat, and that I should perform the journey on foot,—a primitive mode of transport which has its charms to a young man with stout limbs and gay spirits. The guard's outstretched arm left my mother little time to oppose this proposition, to which my father assented with a silent squeeze of the hand. And having promised to join them at a family hotel near the Strand, to which Mr. Squills had recommended them as peculiarly genteel and quiet, and waved my last farewell to my poor mother, who continued to stretch her meek face out of the window till the coach was whirled off in a cloud like one of the Homeric heroes, I turned within, to put up a few necessary articles in a small knapsack which I remembered to have seen in the lumber-room, and which had appertained to my maternal grandfather; and with that on my shoulder, and a strong staff in my hand, I set off towards the great city at as brisk a pace as if I were only bound to the next village. Accordingly, about noon I was both tired and hungry; and seeing by the wayside one of those pretty inns yet peculiar to England, but which, thanks to the railways, will soon be amongst the things before the Flood, I sat down at a table under some clipped limes, unbuckled my knapsack, and ordered my simple fare with the dignity of one who, for the first time in his life, bespeaks his own dinner and pays for it out of his own pocket.

While engaged on a rasher of bacon and a tankard of what the landlord called "No mistake," two pedestrians, passing the same road which I had traversed, paused, cast a simultaneous look at my occupation, and induced no doubt by its allurements, seated themselves under the same lime-trees, though at the farther end of the table. I surveyed the newcomers with the curiosity natural to my years.

The elder of the two might have attained the age of thirty, though sundry deep lines, and hues formerly florid and now faded, speaking of fatigue, care, or dissipation, might have made him look somewhat older than he was. There was nothing very prepossessing in his appearance. He was dressed with a pretension ill suited to the costume appropriate to a foot-traveller. His coat was pinched and padded; two enormous pins, connected by a chain, decorated a very stiff stock of blue satin dotted with yellow stars; his hands were cased in very dingy gloves which had once been straw-colored, and the said hands played with a whalebone cane surmounted by a formidable knob, which gave it the appearance of a "life-pre server." As he took off a white napless hat, which he wiped with great care and affection with the sleeve of his right arm, a profusion of stiff curls instantly betrayed the art of man.

Like my landlord's ale, in that wig there was "no mistake;" it was brought (after the fashion of the wigs we see in the popular effigies of George IV. in his youth), low over his fore-head, and was raised at the top. The wig had been oiled, and the oil had imbibed no small quantity of dust; oil and dust had alike left their impression on the forehead and cheeks of the wig's proprietor. For the rest, the expression of his face was somewhat impudent and reckless, but not without a certain drollery in the corners of his eyes.

The younger man was apparently about my own age,--a year or two older, perhaps, judging rather from his set and sinewy frame than his boyish countenance. And this last, boyish as it was, could not fail to command the attention even of the most careless observer. It had not only the darkness, but the character of the gipsy face, with large, brilliant eyes, raven hair, long and wavy, but not curling; the features were aquiline, but delicate, and when he spoke he showed teeth dazzling as pearls. It was impossible not to admire the singular beauty of the countenance; and yet it had that expression, at once stealthy and fierce, which war with society has stamped upon the lineaments of the race of which it reminded me. But, withal, there was somewhat of the air of a gentleman in this young wayfarer. His dress consisted of a black velveteen shooting-jacket, or rather short frock, with a broad leathern strap at the waist, loose white trousers, and a foraging cap, which he threw carelessly on the table as he wiped his brow. Turning round impatiently, and with some haughtiness, from his companion, he surveyed me with a quick, observant flash of his piercing eyes, and then stretched himself at length on the bench, and appeared either to dose or muse, till, in obedience to his companion's orders, the board was spread with all the cold meats the larder could supply.

"Beef!" said his companion, screwing a pinchbeck glass into his right eye. "Beef,--mottled, covey; humph! Lamb,--oldish, ravish, muttony; humph! Pie,--stalish. Veal?--no, pork. Ah! what will you have?"

"Help yourself," replied the young man peevishly, as he sat up, looked disdainfully at the viands, and, after a long pause, tasted first one, then the other, with many shrugs of the shoulders and muttered exclamations of discontent. Suddenly he looked up, and called for brandy; and to my surprise, and I fear admiration, he drank nearly half a tumblerful of that poison undiluted, with a composure that spoke of habitual use.

"Wrong!" said his companion, drawing the bottle to himself, and mixing the alcohol in careful proportions with water. "Wrong! coats of

stomach soon wear out with that kind of clothes-brush. Better stick to the 'yeasty foam,' as sweet Will says. That young gentleman sets you a good example," and therewith the speaker nodded at me familiarly.

Inexperienced as I was, I surmised at once that it was his intention to make acquaintance with the neighbor thus saluted. I was not deceived. "Anything to tempt you, sir?" asked this social personage after a short pause, and describing a semicircle with the point of his knife.

"I thank you, sir, but I have dined."

"What then? 'Break out into a second course of mischief,' as the Swan recommends,--Swan of Avon, sir! No? 'Well, then, I charge you with this cup of sack.' Are you going far, if I may take the liberty to ask?"

"To London."

"Oh!" said the traveller, while his young companion lifted his eyes; and I was again struck with their remarkable penetration and brilliancy.

"London is the best place in the world for a lad of spirit. See life there,--'glass of fashion and mould of form.' Fond of the play, sir?"

"I never saw one."

"Possible!" cried the gentleman, dropping the handle of his knife, and bringing up the point horizontally; "then, young man," he added solemnly, "you have,--but I won't say what you have to see. I won't say,--no, not if you could cover this table with golden guineas, and exclaim, with the generous ardor so engaging in youth, 'Mr. Peacock, these are yours if you will only say what I have to see!'"

I laughed outright. May I be forgiven for the boast, but I had the reputation at school of a pleasant laugh. The young man's face grew dark at the sound; he pushed back his plate and sighed.

"Why," continued his friend, "my companion here, who, I suppose, is about your own age, he could tell you what a play is,--he could tell you what life is. He has viewed the mantiers of the town; 'perused the traders,' as the Swan poetically remarks. Have you not, my lad, eh?"

Thus directly appealed to, the boy looked up with a smile of scorn on his lips,--

"Yes, I know what life is, and I say that life, like poverty, has strange bed-fellows. Ask me what life is now, and I say a melodrama; ask me what it is twenty years hence, and I shall say--"

"A farce?" put in his comrade.

"No, a tragedy,--or comedy as Moliere wrote it."

"And how is that?" I asked, interested and somewhat surprised at the tone of my contemporary.

"Where the play ends in the triumph of the wittiest rogue. My friend here has no chance!"

"Praise from Sir Hubert Stanley,' hem--yes, Hal Peacock may be witty, but he is no rogue."

"This was not exactly my meaning," said the boy, dryly.

"A fico for your meaning,' as the Swan says.--Hallo, you sir! Bully Host, clear the table--fresh tumblers--hot water--sugar--lemon--and--The bottle's out! Smoke, sir?" and Mr. Peacock offered me a cigar.

Upon my refusal, he carefully twirled round a very uninviting specimen of some fabulous havanna, moistened it all over, as a boa-constrictor may do the ox he prepares for deglutition, bit off one end, and lighting the other from a little machine for that purpose which he drew from his pocket, he was soon absorbed in a vigorous effort (which the damp inherent in the weed long resisted) to poison the surrounding atmosphere. Therewith the young gentleman, either from emulation or in self-defence, extracted from his own pouch a cigar-case of notable elegance,--being of velvet, embroidered apparently by some fair hand, for "From Juliet" was very legibly worked thereon,--selected a cigar of better appearance than that in favor with his comrade, and seemed quite as familiar with the tobacco as he had been with the brandy.

"Fast, sir, fast lad that," quoth Mr. Peacock, in the short gasps which his resolute struggle with his uninviting victim alone permitted; "nothing but [puff, puff] your true [suck, suck] syl--syl--sylva--does for him. Out, by the Lord! the jaws of darkness have devoured it up;" and again Mr. Peacock applied to his phosphoric machine. This time patience and perseverance succeeded, and the heart of the cigar responded by a dull red spark (leaving the sides wholly untouched) to the indefatigable ardor of its wooer.

This feat accomplished, Mr. Peacock exclaimed triumphantly: "And now, what say you, my lads, to a game at cards? Three of us,--whist and a dummy; nothing better, eh?" As he spoke, he produced from his coat-pocket a red silk handkerchief, a bunch of keys, a nightcap, a tooth-brush, a piece of shaving-soap, four lumps of sugar, the remains of a bun, a razor, and a pack of cards. Selecting the last, and returning its motley accompaniments to the abyss whence they had emerged, he turned up, with a jerk of his thumb and finger, the knave of clubs, and placing it on the top of the rest, slapped the cards emphatically on the table.

"You are very good, but I don't know whist," said I.

"Not know whist--not been to a play--not smoke! Then pray tell me, young man," said he majestically, and with a frown, "what on earth you do know."

Much consternated by this direct appeal, and greatly ashamed of my ignorance of the cardinal points of erudition in Mr. Peacock's estimation, I hung my head and looked down.

"That is right," renewed Mr. Peacock, more benignly; "you have the ingenuous shame of youth. It is promising, sir; 'lowliness is young ambition's ladder,' as the Swan says. Mount the first step, and learn whist,--sixpenny points to begin with."

Notwithstanding any newness in actual life, I had had the good fortune to learn a little of the way before me, by those much-slandered guides called novels,--works which are often to the inner world what maps are to the outer; and sundry recollections of "Gil Blas" and the "Vicar of Wakefield" came athwart me. I had no wish to emulate the worthy Moses, and felt that I might not have even the shagreen spectacles to boast of in my negotiations with this new Mr. Jenkinson. Accordingly, shaking my head, I called for my bill. As I took out my purse,--knit by my mother,--with one gold piece in one corner, and sundry silver ones in the other, I saw that the eyes of Mr. Peacock twinkled.

"Poor spirit, sir! poor spirit, young man! 'This avarice sticks deep,' as the Swan beautifully observes. 'Nothing venture, nothing have.'"

"Nothing have, nothing venture," I returned, plucking up spirit.

"Nothing have! Young sir, do you doubt my solidity--my capital--my

'golden joys'?"

"Sir, I spoke of myself. I am not rich enough to gamble."

"Gamble!" exclaimed Mr. Peacock, in virtuous indignation--"gamble! what do you mean, sir? You insult me!" and he rose threateningly, and slapped his white hat on his wig. "Pshaw! let him alone, Hal," said the boy, contemptuously. "Sir, if he is impertinent, thrash him." (This was to me.) "Impertinent! thrash!" exclaimed Mr. Peacock, waxing very red; but catching the sneer on his companion's lip, he sat down, and subsided into sullen silence.

Meanwhile I paid my bill. This duty--rarely a cheerful one--performed, I looked round for my knapsack, and perceived that it was in the boy's hands. He was very coolly reading the address, which, in case of accidents, I prudently placed on it: "Pisistratus Caxton, Esq.,--Hotel,--Street, Strand."

I took my knapsack from him, more surprised at such a breach of good manners in a young gentleman who knew life so well, than I should have been at a similar error on the part of Mr. Peacock. He made no apology, but nodded farewell, and stretched himself at full length on the bench. Mr. Peacock, now absorbed in a game of patience, vouchsafed no return to my parting salutation, and in another moment I was alone on the high-road. My thoughts turned long upon the young man I had left; mixed with a sort of instinctive compassionate foreboding of an ill future for one with such habits and in such companionship, I felt an involuntary admiration, less even for his good looks than his ease, audacity, and the careless superiority he assumed over a comrade so much older than himself.

The day twas far gone when I saw the spires of a town at which I intended to rest for the night. The horn of a coach behind made me turn my head, and as the vehicle passed me, I saw on the outside Mr. Peacock, still struggling with a cigar,--it could scarcely be the same,--and his young friend stretched on the roof amongst the luggage, leaning his handsome head on his hand, and apparently unobservant both of me and every one else.

CHAPTER V.

I am apt--judging egotistically, perhaps, from my own experience-to measure a young man's chance of what is termed practical success in life by what may seem at first two very vulgar qualities; viz., his inquisitiveness and his animal vivacity. A curiosity which springs forward to examine everything new to his information; a nervous activity, approaching to restlessness, which rarely allows bodily fatigue to interfere with some object in view,--constitute, in my mind, very profitable stock-in-hand to begin the world with.

Tired as I was, after I had performed my ablutions and refreshed myself in the little coffee-room of the inn at which I put up, with the pedestrian's best beverage, familiar and oft calumniated tea, I could not resist the temptation of the broad, bustling street, which, lighted with gas, shone on me through the dim windows of the coffee-room. I had never before seen a large town, and the contrast of lamp-lit, busy night in the streets, with sober, deserted night in the lanes and fields, struck me forcibly.

I sauntered out, therefore, jostling and jostled, now gazing at the windows, now hurried along the tide of life, till I found myself before a cookshop, round which clustered a small knot of housewives, citizens, and hungry-looking children. While contemplating this group, and marvelling how it comes to pass that the staple business of earth's majority is how, when, and where to eat, my ear was struck with "'In Troy there lies the scene,' as the illustrious Will remarks."

Looking round, I perceived Mr. Peacock pointing his stick towards an open doorway next to the cookshop, the hall beyond which was lighted with gas, while painted in black letters on a pane of glass over the door was the word "Billiards."

Suiting the action to the word, the speaker plunged at once into the aperture, and vanished. The boy-companion was following more slowly, when his eye caught mine. A slight blush came over his dark cheek; he stopped, and leaning against the door-jambs, gazed on me hard and long before he said: "Well met again, sir! You find it hard to amuse yourself in this dull place; the nights are long out of London."

"Oh!" said I, ingenuously, "everything here amuses me,--the lights, the shops, the crowd; but, then, to me everything is new."

The youth came from his lounging-place and moved on, as if inviting me to walk; while he answered, rather with bitter sullenness than the

melancholy his words expressed,--

"One thing, at least, cannot be new to you,--it is an old truth with us before we leave the nursery: 'Whatever is worth having must be bought;' ergo, he who cannot buy, has nothing worth having."

"I don't think," said I, wisely, "that the things best worth having can be bought at all. You see that poor dropsical jeweller standing before his shop-door: his shop is the finest in the street, and I dare say he would be very glad to give it to you or me in return for our good health and strong legs. Oh, no! I think with my father: 'All that are worth having are given to all,'--that is, Nature and labor."

"Your father says that; and you go by what your father says? Of course, all fathers have preached that, and many other good doctrines, since Adam preached to Cain; but I don't see that the fathers have found their sons very credulous listeners."

"So much the worse for the sons," said I, bluntly. "Nature," continued my new acquaintance, without attending to my ejaculation,--"Nature indeed does give us much, and Nature also orders each of us how to use her gifts. If Nature give you the propensity to drudge, you will drudge; if she give me the ambition to rise, and the contempt for work, I may rise,--but I certainly shall not work."

"Oh," said I, "you agree with Squills, I suppose, and fancy we are all guided by the bumps on our foreheads?"

"And the blood in our veins, and our mothers' milk. We inherit other things besides gout and consumption. So you always do as your father tells you! Good boy!"

I was piqued. Why we should be ashamed of being taunted for goodness, I never could understand; but certainly I felt humbled. However, I answered sturdily: "If you had as good a father as I have, you would not think it so very extraordinary to do as he tells you."

"Ah! so he is a very good father, is he? He must have a great trust in your sobriety and steadiness to let you wander about the world as he does."

"I am going to join him in London."

"In London! Oh, does he live there?"

"He is going to live there for some time."

"Then perhaps we may meet. I too am going to town."

"Oh, we shall be sure to meet there!" said I, with frank gladness; for my interest in the young man was not diminished by his conversation, however much I disliked the sentiments it expressed.

The lad laughed, and his laugh was peculiar,--it was low, musical, but hollow and artificial.

"Sure to meet! London is a large place: where shall you be found?"

I gave him, without scruple, the address of the hotel at which I expected to find my father, although his deliberate inspection of my knapsack must already have apprised him of that address. He listened attentively, and repeated it twice over, as if to impress it on his memory; and we both walked on in silence, till, turning up a small passage, we suddenly found ourselves in a large churchyard,--a flagged path stretched diagonally across it towards the market-place, on which it bordered. In this churchyard, upon a gravestone, sat a young Savoyard; his hurdy-gurdy, or whatever else his instrument might be called, was on his lap; and he was gnawing his crust and feeding some poor little white mice (standing on their hind legs on the hurdy-gurdy) as merrily as if he had chosen the gayest resting-place in the world.

We both stopped. The Savoyard, seeing us, put his arch head on one side, showed all his white teeth in that happy smile so peculiar to his race, and in which poverty seems to beg so blithely, and gave the handle of his instrument a turn. "Poor child!" said I.

"Aha, you pity him! but why? According to your rule, Mr. Caxton, he is not so much to be pitied; the dropsical jeweller would give him as much for his limbs and health as for ours! How is it--answer me, son of so wise a father--that no one pities the dropsical jeweller, and all pity the healthy Savoyard? It is, sir, because there is a stern truth which is stronger than all Spartan lessons,--Poverty is the master-ill of the world. Look round. Does poverty leave its signs over the graves? Look at that large tomb fenced round; read that long inscription: 'Virtue'--'best of husbands'--'affectionate father'--'inconsolable grief'--'sleeps in the joyful hope,' etc. Do you suppose these stoneless mounds hide no dust of what were men just as good? But no epitaph tells their virtues, bespeaks their wives' grief, or promises joyful hope to them!"

"Does it matter? Does God care for the epitaph and tombstone?"

"Datemi qualche cosa!" said the Savoyard, in his touching patois, still smiling, and holding out his little hand; therein I dropped a small coin. The boy evinced his gratitude by a new turn of the hurdy-gurdy.

"That is not labor," said my companion; "and had you found him at work, you had given him nothing. I, too, have my instrument to play upon, and my mice to see after. Adieu!"

He waved his hand, and strode irreverently over the graves back in the direction we had come.

I stood before the fine tomb with its fine epitaph: the Savoyard looked at me wistfully.

CHAPTER VI.

The Savoyard looked at me wistfully. I wished to enter into conversation with him. That was not easy. However, I began.

Pisistratus.--"You must be often hungry enough, my poor boy. Do the mice feed you?"

Savoyard puts his head on one side, shakes it, and strokes his mice.

Pisistratus.--"You are very fond of the mice; they are your only friends, I fear."

Savoyard evidently understanding Pisistratus, rubs his face gently against the mice, then puts them softly down on a grave, and gives a turn to the hurdy-gurdy. The mice play unconcernedly over the grave.

Pisistratus, pointing first to the beasts, then to the instrument.--
"Which do you like best, the mice or the hurdygurdy?"

Savoyard shows his teeth--considers--stretches himself on the grass--plays with the mice--and answers volubly. Pisistratus, by the help of Latin comprehending that the Savoyard says that the mice are alive, and

the hurdy-gurdy is not.--"Yes, a live friend is better than a dead one.
Mortua est hurdy-gurda!"

Savoyard shakes his head vehemently.--"No--no, Eccellenza, non e morta!"
and strikes up a lively air on the slandered instrument. The Savoyard's
face brightens-he looks happy; the mice run from the grave into his
bosom. Pistratus, affected, and putting the question in Latin.--"Have
you a father?"

Savoyard with his face overcast.--"No, Eccellenza!" then pausing a
little, he says briskly, "Si, si!" and plays a solemn air on the hurdy-
gurdy--stops--rests one hand on the instrument, and raises the other to
heaven.

Pistratus understands: the father is like the hurdygurdy, at once dead
and living. The mere form is a dead thing, but the music lives.
Pistratus drops another small piece of silver on the ground, and turns
away.

God help and God bless thee, Savoyard! Thou hast done Pistratus all
the good in the world. Thou hast corrected the hard wisdom of the young
gentleman in the velveteen jacket; Pistratus is a better lad for
having stopped to listen to thee.

I regained the entrance to the churchyard, I looked back; there sat the
Savoyard still amidst men's graves, but under God's sky. He was still
looking at me wistfully; and when he caught my eye, he pressed his hand
to his heart and smiled. God help and God bless thee, young Savoyard!

Add yourself as a volunteer or giver, to promote the growing and diffusion of
[Biblioteca Virtual Universal. www.biblioteca.org.ar](http://www.biblioteca.org.ar)

If you take notice of any kind of mistake, or you want to make any suggestion
please visit our link www.biblioteca.org.ar/comentario

