

EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON

**«MY NOVEL» –
VOLUME 03**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

«My Novel» – Volume 03

«Public Domain»

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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BOOK THIRD

INITIAL CHAPTER

SHOWING HOW MY NOVEL CAME TO BE CALLED "MY NOVEL."

"I am not displeased with your novel, so far as it has gone," said my father, graciously; "though as for the Sermon—" Here I trembled; but the ladies, Heaven bless them! had taken Parson Dale under their special protection; and observing that my father was puckering up his brows critically, they rushed forward boldly in defence of The Sermon, and Mr. Caxton was forced to beat a retreat. However, like a skilful general, he renewed the assault upon outposts less gallantly guarded. But as it is not my business to betray my weak points, I leave it to the ingenuity of cavillers to discover the places at which the Author of "Human Error" directed his great guns.

"But," said the captain, "you are a lad of too much spirit, Pisisstratus, to keep us always in the obscure country quarters of Hazeldean,—you will march us out into open service before you have done with us?"

PISISSTRATUS (magisterially, for he has been somewhat nettled by Mr. Caxton's remarks, and he puts on an air of dignity in order to awe away minor assailants).—"Yes, Captain Roland; not yet a while, but all in good time. I have not stinted myself in canvas, and behind my foreground of the Hall and the Parsonage I propose hereafter to open some lengthened perspective of the varieties of English life—"

MR. CAXTON.—"Hum!"

BLANCHE (putting her hand on my father's lip).—"We shall know better the design, perhaps, when we know the title. Pray, Mr. Author, what is the title?"

MY MOTHER (with more animation than usual).—"Ay, Sisty, the title!"

PISISSTRATUS (startled).—"The title! By the soul of Cervantes! I have never yet thought of a title!"

CAPTAIN ROLAND (solemnly).—"There is a great deal in a good title. As a novel reader, I know that by experience."

MR. SQUILLS.—"Certainly; there is not a catchpenny in the world but what goes down, if the title be apt and seductive. Witness 'Old Parr's Life Pills.' Sell by the thousand, Sir, when my 'Pills for Weak Stomachs,' which I believe to be just the same compound, never paid for the advertising."

MR. CAXTON.—"Parr's Life Pills! a fine stroke of genius. It is not every one who has a weak stomach, or time to attend to it if he have. But who would not swallow a pill to live to a hundred and fifty-two?"

PISISSTRATUS (stirring the fire in great excitement).—"My title! my title!—what shall be my title?"

MR. CAXTON (thrusting his hand into his waistcoat, and in his most didactic of tones).—"From a remote period, the choice of a title has perplexed the scribbling portion of mankind. We may guess how their invention has been racked by the strange contortions it has produced. To begin with the Hebrews. 'The Lips of the Sleeping' (Labia Dormientium)— what book did you suppose

that title to designate?—A Catalogue of Rabbinical Writers! Again, imagine some young lady of old captivated by the sentimental title of 'The Pomegranate with its Flower,' and opening on a Treatise on the Jewish Ceremonials! Let us turn to the Romans. Aulus Gellius commences his pleasant gossiping 'Noctes' with a list of the titles in fashion in his day. For instance, 'The Muses' and 'The Veil,' 'The Cornucopia,' 'The Beehive,' and 'The Meadow.' Some titles, indeed, were more truculent, and promised food to those who love to sup upon horrors,—such as 'The Torch,' 'The Poniard,' 'The Stiletto'—"

PISISTRATUS (impatiently).—"Yes, sir, but to come to My Novel."

MR. CAXTON (unheeding the interruption).—"You see you have a fine choice here, and of a nature pleasing, and not unfamiliar, to a classical reader; or you may borrow a hint from the early dramatic writers."

PISISTRATUS (more hopefully).—"Ay, there is something in the Drama akin to the Novel. Now, perhaps, I may catch an idea."

MR. CAXTON.—"For instance, the author of the 'Curiosities of Literature' (from whom, by the way, I am plagiarizing much of the information I bestow upon you) tells us of a Spanish gentleman who wrote a Comedy, by which he intended to serve what he took for Moral Philosophy."

PISISTRATUS (eagerly).—"Well, sir?"

MR. CAXTON.—"And called it 'The Pain of the Sleep of the World.'"

PISISTRATUS.—"Very comic, indeed, sir."

MR. CAXTON.—"Grave things were then called Comedies, as old things are now called Novels. Then there are all the titles of early Romance itself at your disposal,—'Theagenes and Chariclea' or 'The Ass' of Longus, or 'The Golden Ass' of Apuleius, or the titles of Gothic Romance, such as 'The most elegant, delicious, mellifluous, and delightful History of Perceforest, King of Great Britain.'" And therewith my father ran over a list of names as long as the Directory, and about as amusing.

"Well, to my taste," said my mother, "the novels I used to read when a girl (for I have not read many since, I am ashamed to say)—"

MR. CAXTON.—"No, you need not be at all ashamed of it, Kitty."

MY MOTHER (proceeding).—"Were much more inviting than any you mention, Austin."

THE CAPTAIN.—"True."

MR. SQUILLS.—"Certainly. Nothing like them nowadays!"

MY MOTHER.—"Says she to her Neighbour, What?"

THE CAPTAIN.—"The Unknown, or the Northern Gallery'—"

MR. SQUILLS.—"There is a Secret; Find it out!"

PISISTRATUS (pushed to the verge of human endurance, and upsetting tongs, poker, and fire-shovel).—"What nonsense you are talking, all of you! For Heaven's sake consider what an important matter we are called upon to decide. It is not now the titles of those very respectable works which issued from the Minerva Press that I ask you to remember,—it is to invent a title for mine,—My Novel!"

MR. CAXTON (clapping his hands gently).—"Excellent! capital! Nothing can be better; simple, natural, pertinent, concise—"

PISISTRATUS.—"What is it, sir, what is it? Have you really thought of a title to My Novel?"

MR. CAXTON.—"You have hit it yourself,—'My Novel.' It is your Novel; people will know it is your Novel. Turn and twist the English language as you will, be as allegorical as Hebrew, Greek, Roman, Fabulist, or Puritan, still, after all, it is your Novel, and nothing more nor less than your Novel."

PISISTRATUS (thoughtfully, and sounding the words various ways).—"My Novel!—um-um! 'My Novel!' rather bold—and curt, eh?"

MR. CAXTON.—"Add what you say you intend it to depict,—Varieties in English Life."

MY MOTHER.—"My Novel; or, Varieties in English Life"—I don't think it sounds amiss. What say you, Roland? Would it attract you in a catalogue?"

My uncle hesitates, when Mr. Caxton exclaims imperiously.—"The thing is settled! Don't disturb Camarina."

SQUILLS.—"If it be not too great a liberty, pray who or what is Camarina?"

MR. CAXTON.—"Camarina, Mr. Squills, was a lake, apt to be low, and then liable to be muddy; and 'Don't disturb Camarina' was a Greek proverb derived from an oracle of Apollo; and from that Greek proverb, no doubt, comes the origin of the injunction, 'Quieta non movere,' which became the favourite maxim of Sir Robert Walpole and Parson Dale. The Greek line, Mr. Squills" (here my father's memory began to warm), "is preserved by Stephanus Byzantinus, 'De Urbibus,'

[Greek proverb]

Zenobius explains it in his proverbs; Suidas repeats Zenobius; Lucian alludes to it; so does Virgil in the Third Book of the Aeneid; and Silius Italicus imitates Virgil,—

"Et cui non licitum fatis Camarina moveri."

"Parson Dale, as a clergyman and a scholar, had, no doubt, these authorities at his fingers' end. And I wonder he did not quote them," quoth my father; "but to be sure he is represented as a mild man, and so might not wish to humble the squire over-much in the presence of his family. Meanwhile, My Novel is My Novel; and now that, that matter is settled, perhaps the tongs, poker, and shovel may be picked up, the children may go to bed, Blanche and Kitty may speculate apart upon the future dignities of the Neogilos,—taking care, nevertheless, to finish the new pinbefores he requires for the present; Roland may cast up his account book, Mr. Squills have his brandy and water, and all the world be comfortable, each in his own way. Blanche, come away from the screen, get me my slippers, and leave Pisistratus to himself. [Greek line]—don't disturb Camarina. You see, my dear," added my father kindly, as, after settling himself into his slippers, he detained Blanche's hand in his own,—"you see, my dear, every house has its Camarina. Alan, who is a lazy animal, is quite content to let it alone; but woman, being the more active, bustling, curious creature, is always for giving it a sly stir."

BLANCHE (with female dignity).—"I assure you, that if Pisistratus had not called me, I should not have—"

MR. CAXTON (interrupting her, without lifting his eyes from the book he had already taken).—"Certainly you would not. I am now in the midst of the great Oxford Controversy. [The same Greek proverb]—don't disturb Camarina."

A dead silence for half-an-hour, at the end of which—

PISISTRATUS (from behind the screen).—"Blanche, my dear, I want to consult you."

Blanche does not stir.

PISISTRATUS.—"Blanche, I say." Blanche glances in triumph towards Mr. Caxton.

MR. CAXTON (laying down his theological tract, and rubbing his spectacles mournfully).—"I hear him, child; I hear him. I retract my vindication of man. Oracles warn in vain: so long as there is a woman on the other side of the screen, it is all up with Camarina."

CHAPTER II

It is greatly to be regretted that Mr. Stirn was not present at the parson's Discourse; but that valuable functionary was far otherwise engaged,—indeed, during the summer months he was rarely seen at the afternoon service. Not that he cared for being preached at,—not he; Mr. Stirn would have snapped his fingers at the thunders of the Vatican. But the fact was, that Mr. Stirn chose to do a great deal of gratuitous business upon the day of rest. The squire allowed all persons who chose to walk about the park on a Sunday; and many came from a distance to stroll by the lake, or recline under the elms. These visitors were objects of great suspicion, nay, of positive annoyance, to Mr. Stirn—and, indeed, not altogether without reason, for we English have a natural love of liberty, which we are even more apt to display in the grounds of other people than in those which we cultivate ourselves. Sometimes, to his inexpressible and fierce satisfaction, Mr. Stirn fell upon a knot of boys pelting the swans; sometimes he missed a young sapling, and found it in felonious hands, converted into a walking-stick; sometimes he caught a hulking fellow scrambling up the ha-ha to gather a nosegay for his sweetheart from one of poor Mrs. Hazeldean's pet parterres; not infrequently, indeed, when all the family were fairly at church, some curious impertinents forced or sneaked their way into the gardens, in order to peep in at the windows. For these, and various other offences of like magnitude, Mr. Stirn had long, but vainly, sought to induce the squire to withdraw a permission so villanously abused. But though there were times when Mr. Hazeldean grunted and growled, and swore "that he would shut up the park, and fill it [illegally] with mantraps and spring-guns," his anger always evaporated in words. The park was still open to all the world on a Sunday; and that blessed day was therefore converted into a day of travail and wrath to Mr. Stirn. But it was from the last chime of the afternoon-service bell until dusk that the spirit of this vigilant functionary was most perturbed; for, amidst the flocks that gathered from the little hamlets round to the voice of the pastor, there were always some stray sheep, or rather climbing, desultory, vagabond goats, who struck off in all perverse directions, as if for the special purpose of distracting the energetic watchfulness of Mr. Stirn. As soon as church was over, if the day were fine, the whole park became a scene animated with red cloaks or lively shawls, Sunday waistcoats and hats stuck full of wildflowers—which last Mr. Stirn often stoutly maintained to be Mrs. Hazeldean's newest geraniums. Now, on this Sunday, especially, there was an imperative call upon an extra exertion of vigilance on the part of the superintendent,—he had not only to detect ordinary depredators and trespassers; but, first, to discover the authors of the conspiracy against the stocks; and, secondly, to "make an example."

He had begun his rounds, therefore, from the early morning; and just as the afternoon bell was sounding its final peal, he emerged upon the village green from a hedgerow, behind which he had been at watch to observe who had the most suspiciously gathered round the stocks. At that moment the place was deserted. At a distance, the superintendent saw the fast disappearing forms of some belated groups hastening towards the church; in front, the stocks stood staring at him mournfully from its four great eyes, which had been cleansed from the mud, but still looked bleared and stained with the inarks of the recent outrage. Here Mr. Stirn paused, took off his hat, and wiped his brows.

"If I had sum 'un to watch here," thought he, "while I takes a turn by the water-side, p'r'aps summat might come out; p'r'aps them as did it ben't gone to church, but will come sneaking round to look on their willany! as they says murderers are always led back to the place where they ha' left the body. But in this here willage there ben't a man, woman, or child as has any consarn for squire or parish, barring myself." It was just as he arrived at that misanthropical conclusion that Mr. Stirn beheld Leonard Fairfield walking very fast from his own home. The superintendent clapped on his hat, and stuck his right arm akimbo. "Hollo, you, sir," said he, as Lenny now came in hearing, "where be you going at that rate?"

"Please, sir, I be going to church."

"Stop, sir,—stop, Master Lenny. Going to church!—why, the bell's done; and you knows the parson is very angry at them as comes in late, disturbing the congregation. You can't go to church now!"

"Please, sir—"

"I says you can't go to church now. You must learn to think a little of others, lad. You sees how I sweats to serve the squire! and you must serve him too. Why, your mother's got the house and premishes almost rent-free; you ought to have a grateful heart, Leonard Fairfield, and feel for his honour! Poor man! his heart is well-nigh bruk, I am sure, with the goings on."

Leonard opened his innocent blue eyes, while Mr. Stirn dolorously wiped his own.

"Look at that 'ere dumb cretur," said Stirn, suddenly, pointing to the stocks,— "look at it. If it could speak, what would it say, Leonard Fairfield? Answer me that! 'Damn the stocks,' indeed!"

"It was very bad in them to write such naughty words," said Lenny, gravely. "Mother was quite shocked when she heard of it this morning."

MR. STIRN.—"I dare say she was, considering what she pays for the premishes;" (insinuatingly) "you does not know who did it,—eh, Lenny?"

LENNY.—"No, sir; indeed I does not!"

MR. STIRN.—"Well, you see, you can't go to church,—prayers half over by this time. You recollex that I put them stocks under your 'sponsibility,' and see the way you's done your duty by 'em! I've half a mind to—"

Mr. Stirn cast his eyes on the eyes of the stocks. "Please, sir," began Lenny again, rather frightened.

"No, I won't please; it ben't pleasing at all. But I forgives you this time, only keep a sharp lookout, lad, in future. Now you must stay here —no, there—under the hedge, and you watches if any persons comes to loiter about, or looks at the stocks, or laughs to hisself, while I go my rounds. I shall be back either afore church is over or just arter; so you stay till I comes, and give me your report. Be sharp, boy, or it will be worse for you and your mother; I can let the premishes for L4 a year more to-morrow."

Concluding with that somewhat menacing and very significant remark, and not staying for an answer, Mr. Stirn waved his hand and walked off.

Poor Lenny remained by the stocks, very much dejected, and greatly disliking the neighbourhood to which he was consigned. At length he slowly crept off to the hedge, and sat himself down in the place of espionage pointed out to him. Now, philosophers tell us that what is called the point of honour is a barbarous feudal prejudice. Amongst the higher classes, wherein those feudal prejudices may be supposed to prevail, Lenny Fairfield's occupation would not have been considered peculiarly honourable; neither would it have seemed so to the more turbulent spirits among the humbler orders, who have a point of honour of their own, which consists in the adherence to each other in defiance of all lawful authority. But to Lenny Fairfield, brought up much apart from other boys, and with a profound and grateful reverence for the squire instilled into all his habits of thought, notions of honour bounded themselves to simple honesty and straightforward truth; and as he cherished an unquestioning awe of order and constitutional authority, so it did not appear to him that there was anything derogatory and debasing in being thus set to watch for an offender. On the contrary, as he began to reconcile himself to the loss of the church service, and to enjoy the cool of the summer shade and the occasional chirp of the birds, he got to look on the bright side of the commission to which he was deputed. In youth, at least, everything has its bright side,—even the appointment of Protector to the Parish Stocks. For the stocks itself Leonard had no affection, it is true; but he had no sympathy with its aggressors, and he could well conceive that the squire would be very much hurt at the revolutionary event of the night. "So," thought poor Leonard in his simple heart,— "so, if I can serve his honour, by keeping off mischievous boys, or letting him know who did the thing, I'm sure it would be a proud day for Mother." Then he began to consider that, however

ungraciously Mr. Stirn had bestowed on him the appointment, still it was a compliment to him,—showed trust and confidence in him, picked him out from his contemporaries as the sober, moral, pattern boy; and Lenny had a great deal of pride in him, especially in matters of repute and character.

All these things considered, I say, Leonard Fairfield reclined on his lurking-place, if not with positive delight and intoxicating rapture, at least with tolerable content and some complacency.

Mr. Stirn might have been gone a quarter of an hour, when a boy came through a little gate in the park, just opposite to Lenny's retreat in the hedge, and, as if fatigued with walking, or oppressed by the heat of the day, paused on the green for a moment or so, and then advanced under the shade of the great tree which overhung the stocks.

Lenny pricked up his ears, and peeped out jealously.

He had never seen the boy before: it was a strange face to him.

Leonard Fairfield was not fond of strangers; moreover, he had a vague belief that strangers were at the bottom of that desecration of the stocks. The boy, then, was a stranger; but what was his rank? Was he of that grade in society in which the natural offences are or are not consonant to, or harmonious with, outrages upon stocks? On that Lenny Fairfield did not feel quite assured. According to all the experience of the villager, the boy was not dressed like a young gentleman. Leonard's notions of such aristocratic costume were naturally fashioned upon the model of Frank Hazeldean. They represented to him a dazzling vision of snow-white trousers and beautiful blue coats and incomparable cravats. Now the dress of this stranger, though not that of a peasant or of a farmer, did not in any way correspond with Lenny's notion of the costume of a young gentleman. It looked to him highly disreputable: the coat was covered with mud, and the hat was all manner of shapes, with a gap between the side and crown.

Lenny was puzzled, till it suddenly occurred to him that the gate through which the boy had passed was in the direct path across the park from a small town, the inhabitants of which were in very bad odour at the Hall, —they had immemorially furnished the most daring poachers to the preserves, the most troublesome trespassers on the park, the most unprincipled orchard robbers, and the most disputatious asserters of various problematical rights of way, which, according to the Town, were public, and, according to the Hall, had been private since the Conquest. It was true that the same path led also directly from the squire's house, but it was not probable that the wearer of attire so equivocal had been visiting there. All things considered, Lenny had no doubt in his mind but that the stranger was a shop-boy or 'prentice from the town of Thorndyke; and the notorious repute of that town, coupled with this presumption, made it probable that Lenny now saw before him one of the midnight desecrators of the stocks. As if to confirm the suspicion, which passed through Lenny's mind with a rapidity wholly disproportionate to the number of lines it costs me to convey it, the boy, now standing right before the stocks, bent down and read that pithy anathema with which it was defaced. And having read it, he repeated it aloud, and Lenny actually saw him smile,—such a smile! so disagreeable and sinister! Lenny had never before seen the smile sardonic.

But what were Lenny's pious horror and dismay when this ominous stranger fairly seated himself on the stocks, rested his heels profanely on the lids of two of the four round eyes, and taking out a pencil and a pocket- book, began to write.

Was this audacious Unknown taking an inventory of the church and the Hall for the purposes of conflagration? He looked at one and at the other, with a strange fixed stare as he wrote,—not keeping his eyes on the paper, as Lenny had been taught to do when he sat down to his copy-book. The fact is, that Randal Leslie was tired and faint, and he felt the shock of his fall the more, after the few paces he had walked, so that he was glad to rest himself a few moments; and he took that opportunity to write a line to Frank, to excuse himself for not calling again, intending to tear the leaf on which he wrote out of his pocket-book and leave it at the first cottage he passed, with instructions to take it to the Hall.

While Randal was thus innocently engaged, Lenny came up to him, with the firm and measured pace of one who has resolved, cost what it may, to do his duty. And as Lenny, though brave, was

not ferocious, so the anger he felt and the suspicions he entertained only exhibited themselves in the following solemn appeal to the offender's sense of propriety,—"Ben't you ashamed of yourself? Sitting on the squire's new stocks! Do get up, and go along with you!"

Randal turned round sharply; and though, at any other moment, he would have had sense enough to extricate himself very easily from his false position, yet /Nemo mortalium, etc/. No one is always wise. And Randal was in an exceedingly bad humour. The affability towards his inferiors, for which I lately praised him, was entirely lost in the contempt for impertinent snobs natural to an insulted Etonian.

Therefore, eying Lenny with great disdain, Randal answered briefly,—

"You are an insolent young blackguard."

So curt a rejoinder made Lenny's blood fly to his face. Persuaded before that the intruder was some lawless apprentice or shop-lad, he was now more confirmed in that judgment, not only by language so uncivil, but by the truculent glance which accompanied it, and which certainly did not derive any imposing dignity from the mutilated, rakish, hang-dog, ruinous hat, under which it shot its sullen and menacing fire.

Of all the various articles of which our male attire is composed, there is perhaps not one which has so much character and expression as the top covering. A neat, well-brushed, short-napped, gentlemanlike hat, put on with a certain air, gives a distinction and respectability to the whole exterior; whereas, a broken, squashed, higgledy-piggledy sort of a hat, such as Randal Leslie had on, would go far towards transforming the stateliest gentleman who ever walked down St. James's Street into the ideal of a ruffianly scamp.

Now, it is well known that there is nothing more antipathetic to your peasant-boy than a shop-boy. Even on grand political occasions, the rural working-class can rarely be coaxed into sympathy with the trading town class. Your true English peasant is always an aristocrat. Moreover, and irrespectively of this immemorial grudge of class, there is something peculiarly hostile in the relationship between boy and boy when their backs are once up, and they are alone on a quiet bit of green,— something of the game-cock feeling; something that tends to keep alive, in the population of this island (otherwise so lamblike and peaceful), the martial propensity to double the thumb tightly over the four fingers, and make what is called "a fist of it." Dangerous symptoms of these mingled and aggressive sentiments were visible in Lenny Fairfield at the words and the look of the unprepossessing stranger. And the stranger seemed aware of them; for his pale face grew more pale, and his sullen eye more fixed and more vigilant.

"You get off them stocks," said Lenny, disdainingly to reply to the coarse expressions bestowed on him; and, suiting the action to the word, he gave the intruder what he meant for a shove, but what Randal took for a blow. The Etonian sprang up, and the quickness of his movement, aided but by a slight touch of his hand, made Lenny lose his balance, and sent him neck- and-crop over the stocks. Burning with rage, the young villager rose alertly, and, flying at Randal, struck out right and left.

CHAPTER III

Aid me, O ye Nine! whom the incomparable Persius satirized his contemporaries for invoking, and then, all of a sudden, invoked on his own behalf,—aid me to describe that famous battle by the stocks, and in defence of the stocks, which was waged by the two representatives of Saxon and Norman England. Here, sober support of law and duty and delegated trust,—/pro aris et focis/; there, haughty invasion and bellicose spirit of knighthood and that respect for name and person which we call "honour." Here, too, hardy physical force,—there, skilful discipline. Here—The Nine are as deaf as a post, and as cold as a stone! Plague take the jades! I can do better without them.

Randal was a year or two older than Lenny, but he was not so tall nor so strong, nor even so active; and after the first blind rush, when the two boys paused, and drew back to breathe, Lenny, eying the slight form and hueless cheek of his opponent, and seeing blood trickling from Randal's lip, was seized with an instantaneous and generous remorse. "It was not fair," he thought, "to fight one whom he could beat so easily." So, retreating still farther, and letting his arms fall to his side, he said mildly, "There, let's have no more of it; but go home and be good."

Randal Leslie had no remarkable degree of that constitutional quality called physical courage; but he had some of those moral qualities which supply its place. He was proud, he was vindictive, he had high self-esteem, he had the destructive organ more than the combative,—what had once provoked his wrath it became his instinct to sweep away. Therefore, though all his nerves were quivering, and hot tears were in his eyes, he approached Lenny with the sternness of a gladiator, and said between his teeth, which he set hard, choking back the sob of rage and pain,—

"You have struck me—and you shall not stir from this ground till I have made you repent it. Put up your hands,—defend yourself."

Lenny mechanically obeyed; and he had good need of the admonition; for if before he had had the advantage, now that Randal had recovered the surprise to his nerves, the battle was not to the strong.

Though Leslie had not been a fighting boy at Eton, still his temper had involved him in some conflicts when he was in the lower forms, and he had learned something of the art as well as the practice in pugilism,—an excellent thing too, I am barbarous enough to believe, and which I hope will never quite die out of our public schools. Ah, many a young duke has been a better fellow for life from a fair set-to with a trader's son; and many a trader's son has learned to look a lord more manfully in the face on the hustings, from the recollection of the sound thrashing he once gave to some little Lord Leopold Dawdle.

So Randal now brought his experience and art to bear; put aside those heavy roundabout blows, and darted in his own, quick and sharp, supplying to the natural feebleness of his arm the due momentum of pugilistic mechanics. Ay, and the arm, too, was no longer so feeble; for strange is the strength that comes from passion and pluck!

Poor Lenny, who had never fought before, was bewildered; his sensations grew so entangled that he could never recall them distinctly; he had a dim reminiscence of some breathless impotent rush, of a sudden blindness followed by quick flashes of intolerable light, of a deadly faintness, from which he was roused by sharp pangs—here—there—everywhere; and then all he could remember was, that he was lying on the ground, huddled up and panting hard, while his adversary bent over him with a countenance as dark and livid as Lara himself might have bent over the fallen Otho. For Randal Leslie was not one who, by impulse and nature, subscribed to the noble English maxim, "Never hit a foe when he is down;" and it cost him a strong, if brief, self-struggle not to set his heel on that prostrate form. It was the mind, not the heart, that subdued the savage within him, as muttering something inwardly—certainly not Christian forgiveness—the victor turned gloomily away.

CHAPTER IV

Just at that precise moment, who should appear but Mr. Stirn! For, in fact, being extremely anxious to get Lenny into disgrace, he had hoped that he should have found the young villager had shirked the commission intrusted to him; and the right-hand man had slyly come back to see if that amiable expectation were realized. He now beheld Lenny rising with some difficulty, still panting hard, and with hysterical sounds akin to what is vulgarly called blubbering, his fine new waistcoat sprinkled with his own blood, which flowed from his nose,—nose that seemed to Lenny Fairfield's feelings to be a nose no more, but a swollen, gigantic, mountainous Slawkenbergian excrescence; in fact, he felt all nose! Turning aghast from this spectacle, Mr. Stirn surveyed, with no more respect than Lenny had manifested, the stranger boy, who had again seated himself on the stocks (whether to recover his breath, or whether to show that his victory was consummated, and that he was in his rights of possession). "Hollo," said Mr. Stirn, "what is all this? What's the matter, Lenny, you blockhead?"

"He will sit there," answered Lenny, in broken gasps, "and he has beat me because I would not let him; but I doesn't mind that," added the villager, trying hard to suppress his tears, "and I am ready again for him—that I am."

"And what do you do lolloping there on them blessed stocks?"

"Looking at the landscape; out of my light, man!"

This tone instantly inspired Mr. Stirn with misgivings: it was a tone so disrespectful to him that he was seized with involuntary respect; who but a gentleman could speak so to Mr. Stirn?

"And may I ask who you be?" said Stirn, falteringly, and half inclined to touch his hat. "What is your name, pray? What's your bizness?"

"My name is Randal Leslie, and my business was to visit your master's family,—that is, if you are, as I guess from your manner, Mr. Hazeldean's ploughman!"

So saying, Randal rose; and moving on a few paces, turned, and throwing half-a-crown on the road, said to Lenny, "Let that pay you for your bruises, and remember another time how you speak to a gentleman. As for you, fellow,"—and he pointed his scornful hand towards Mr. Stirn, who, with his mouth open, and his hat now fairly off, stood bowing to the earth,— "as for you, give my compliments to Mr. Hazeldean, and say that when he does us the honour to visit us at Rood Hall, I trust that the manners of our villagers will make him ashamed of Hazeldean."

Oh, my poor Squire! Rood Hall ashamed of Hazeldean! If that message had been delivered to you, you would never have looked up again!

With those bitter words, Randal swung himself over the stile that led into the parson's glebe, and left Lenny Fairfield still feeling his nose, and Mr. Stirn still bowing to the earth.

CHAPTER V

Randal Leslie had a very long walk home; he was bruised and sore from head to foot, and his mind was still more sore and more bruised than his body. But if Randal Leslie had rested himself in the squire's gardens, without walking backwards and indulging in speculations suggested by Marat, and warranted by my Lord Bacon, he would have passed a most agreeable evening, and really availed himself of the squire's wealth by going home in the squire's carriage. But because he chose to take so intellectual a view of property, he tumbled into a ditch; because he tumbled into a ditch, he spoiled his clothes; because he spoiled his clothes, he gave up his visit; because he gave up his visit, he got into the village green, and sat on the stocks with a hat that gave him the air of a fugitive from the treadmill; because he sat on the stocks—with that hat, and a cross face under it—he had been forced into the most discreditable squabble with a clodhopper, and was now limping home, at war with gods and men; ergo (this is a moral that will bear repetition), —ergo, when you walk in a rich man's grounds, be contented to enjoy what is yours, namely, the prospect,—I dare say you will enjoy it more than he does!

CHAPTER VI

If, in the simplicity of his heart and the crudity of his experience, Lenny Fairfield had conceived it probable that Mr. Stirn would address to him some words in approbation of his gallantry and in sympathy for his bruises, he soon found himself wofully mistaken. That truly great man, worthy prime minister of Hazeldean, might perhaps pardon a dereliction from his orders, if such dereliction proved advantageous to the interests of the service, or redounded to the credit of the chief; but he was inexorable to that worst of diplomatic offences,—an ill-timed, stupid, over-zealous obedience to orders, which, if it established the devotion of the employee, got the employer into what is popularly called a scrape! And though, by those unversed in the intricacies of the human heart, and unacquainted with the especial hearts of prime ministers and right-hand men, it might have seemed natural that Mr. Stirn, as he stood still, hat in hand, in the middle of the road, stung, humbled, and exasperated by the mortification he had received from the lips of Randal Leslie, would have felt that that young gentleman was the proper object of his resentment, yet such a breach of all the etiquette of diplomatic life as resentment towards a superior power was the last idea that would have suggested itself to the profound intellect of the premier of Hazeldean. Still, as rage, like steam, must escape somewhere, Mr. Stirn, on feeling—as he afterwards expressed it to his wife—that his "buzzom was a burstin'," turned with the natural instinct of self-preservation to the safety-valve provided for the explosion; and the vapours within him rushed into vent upon Lenny Fairfield. He clapped his hat on his head fiercely, and thus relieved his "buzzom."

"You young willain! you howdaecious wiper! and so all this blessed Sabbath afternoon, when you ought to have been in church on your marrow-bones, a praying for your betters, you has been a fitting with a young gentleman, and a wisiter to your master, on the wery place of the parridge hinstitution that you was to guard and pectect; and a bloodying it all over, I declares, with your blaggard little nose!" Thus saying, and as if to mend the matter, Mr. Stirn aimed an additional stroke at the offending member; but Lenny mechanically putting up both arms to defend his face, Mr. Stirn struck his knuckles against the large brass buttons that adorned the cuff of the boy's coat-sleeve,—an incident which considerably aggravated his indignation. And Lenny, whose spirit was fairly roused at what the narrowness of his education conceived to be a signal injustice, placing the trunk of the tree between Mr. Stirn and himself, began that task of self-justification which it was equally impolitic to conceive and imprudent to execute, since, in such a case, to justify was to recriminate.

"I wonder at you, Master Stirn,—if Mother could hear you! You know it was you who would not let me go to church; it was you who told me to—"

"Fit a young gentleman, and break the Sabbath," said Mr. Stirn, interrupting him with a withering sneer. "Oh, yes! I told you to disgrace his honour the squire, and me, and the parridge, and bring us all into trouble. But the squire told me to make an example, and I will!" With those words, quick as lightning flashed upon Mr. Stirn's mind the luminous idea of setting Lenny in the very stocks which he had too faithfully guarded. Eureka! the "example" was before him! Here he could gratify his long grudge against the pattern boy; here, by such a selection of the very best lad in the parish, he could strike terror into the worst; here he could appease the offended dignity of Randal Leslie; here was a practical apology to the squire for the affront put upon his young visitor; here, too, there was prompt obedience to the squire's own wish that the stocks should be provided as soon as possible with a tenant. Suiting the action to the thought, Mr. Stirn made a rapid plunge at his victim, caught him by the skirt of his jacket; and in a few seconds more, the jaws of the stocks had opened, and Lenny Fairfield was thrust therein,—a sad spectacle of the reverses of fortune. This done, and while the boy was too astounded, too stupefied, by the suddenness of the calamity, for the resistance he might otherwise have made,—nay, for more than a few inaudible words,—Mr. Stirn hurried from the spot, but not without first picking up and pocketing the half-crown designed for Lenny, and which,

so great had been his first emotions, he had hitherto even almost forgotten. He then made his way towards the church, with the intention to place himself close by the door, catch the squire as he came out, whisper to him what had passed, and lead him, with the whole congregation at his heels, to gaze upon the sacrifice offered up to the joint powers of Nemesis and Themis.

CHAPTER VII

Unaffectedly I say it—upon the honour of a gentleman, and the reputation of an author,—unaffectedly I say it, no words of mine can do justice to the sensations experienced by Lenny Fairfield, as he sat alone in that place of penance. He felt no more the physical pain of his bruises; the anguish of his mind stifled and overbore all corporeal suffering,—an anguish as great as the childish breast is capable of holding.

For first and deepest of all, and earliest felt, was the burning sense of injustice. He had, it might be with erring judgment, but with all honesty, earnestness, and zeal, executed the commission entrusted to him; he had stood forth manfully in discharge of his duty; he had fought for it, suffered for it, bled for it. This was his reward! Now in Lenny's mind there was pre-eminently that quality which distinguishes the Anglo Saxon race,—the sense of justice. It was perhaps the strongest principle in his moral constitution; and the principle had never lost its virgin bloom and freshness by any of the minor acts of oppression and iniquity which boys of higher birth often suffer from harsh parents, or in tyrannical schools. So that it was for the first time that that iron entered into his soul, and with it came its attendant feeling,—the wrathful, galling sense of impotence. He had been wronged, and he had no means to right himself. Then came another sensation, if not so deep, yet more smarting and envenomed for the time,—shame! He, the good boy of all good boys; he, the pattern of the school, and the pride of the parson; he, whom the squire, in sight of all his contemporaries, had often singled out to slap on the back, and the grand squire's lady to pat on the head, with a smiling gratulation on his young and fair repute; he, who had already learned so dearly to prize the sweets of an honourable name,—he to be made, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye, a mark for opprobrium, a butt of scorn, a jeer, and a byword! The streams of his life were poisoned at the fountain. And then came a tenderer thought of his mother! of the shock this would be to her,—she who had already begun to look up to him as her stay and support; he bowed his head, and the tears, long suppressed, rolled down.

Then he wrestled and struggled, and strove to wrench his limbs from that hateful bondage,—for he heard steps approaching. And he began to picture to himself the arrival of all the villagers from church, the sad gaze of the parson, the bent brow of the squire, the idle, ill-suppressed titter of all the boys, jealous of his unspotted character,—character of which the original whiteness could never, never be restored!

He would always be the boy who had sat in the stocks! And the words uttered by the squire came back on his soul, like the voice of conscience in the ears of some doomed Macbeth: "A sad disgrace, Lenny,—you'll never be in such a quandary." "Quandary"—the word was unfamiliar to him; it must mean something awfully discreditable. The poor boy could have prayed for the earth to swallow him.

CHAPTER VIII

"Kettles and frying-pans! what has us here?" cried the tinker.

This time Mr. Sprott was without his donkey; for it being Sunday, it is presumed that the donkey was enjoying his Sabbath on the common. The tinker was in his Sunday's best, clean and smart, about to take his lounge in the park.

Lenny Fairfield made no answer to the appeal.

"You in the wood, my baby! Well, that's the last sight I should ha' thought to see. But we all lives to larn," added the tinker, sententiously. "Who gave you them leggins? Can't you speak, lad?"

"Nick Stirn."

"Nick Stirn! Ay, I'd ha' ta'en my davy on that: and cos vy?"

"'Cause I did as he told me, and fought a boy as was trespassing on these very stocks; and he beat me—but I don't care for that; and that boy was a young gentleman, and going to visit the squire; and so Nick Stirn—" Lenny stopped short, choked by rage and humiliation.

"Augh," said the tinker, starting, "you fit with a young gentleman, did you? Sorry to hear you confess that, my lad! Sit there and be thankful you ha' got off so cheap. 'T is salt and battery to fit with your betters, and a Lunnon justice o' peace would have given you two months o' the treadmill.

"But vy should you fit cos he trespassed on the stocks? It ben't your natural side for fitting, I takes it."

Lenny murmured something not very distinguishable about serving the squire, and doing as he was bid.

"Oh, I sees, Lenny," interrupted the tinker, in a tone of great contempt, "you be one of those who would rayther 'unt with the 'ounds than run with the 'are! You be's the good pattern boy, and would peach agin your own border to curry favour with the grand folks. Fie, lad! you be sarved right; stick by your border, then you'll be 'spected when you gets into trouble, and not be 'varsally 'spised, —as you'll be arter church-time! Vell, I can't be seen 'sorting with you, now you are in this d'rogotary fix; it might hurt my c'r'acter, both with them as built the stocks and them as wants to pull 'em down. Old kettles to mend! Vy, you makes me forgit the Sabbath! Sarvent, my lad, and wish you well out of it; 'specks to your mother, and say we can deal for the pan and shovel all the same for your misfortin."

The tinker went his way. Lenny's eye followed him with the sullenness of despair. The tinker, like all the tribe of human comforters, had only watered the brambles to invigorate the prick of the horns. Yes, if Lenny had been caught breaking the stocks, some at least would have pitied him; but to be incarcerated for defending them! You might as well have expected that the widows and orphans of the Reign of Terror would have pitied Dr. Guillotin when he slid through the grooves of his own deadly machine. And even the tinker, itinerant, ragamuffin vagabond as he was, felt ashamed to be found with the pattern boy! Lenny's head sank again on his breast heavily, as if it had been of lead. Some few minutes thus passed, when the unhappy prisoner became aware of the presence of another spectator to his shame; he heard no step, but he saw a shadow thrown over the sward. He held his breath, and would not look up, with some vague idea that if he refused to see he might escape being seen.

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