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RODNEY & &  
& & STONE

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BY A. CONAN DOYLE

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I L L U S T R A T E D

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LONDON  
SMITH, ELDER & CO.  
15, WATERLOO PLACE  
1903



## PREFACE TO THE AUTHOR'S EDITION

It might seem pedantic if the author of a historical romance were to quote the authorities which have helped him to reconstruct the age of which he writes. It would be unfair, however, not to acknowledge the obligations which I owe to Mr. John Ashton's "Social Pictures of the Beginning of the Century." Also to Jesse's "Brummell," Fitzgerald's "George the Fourth," Gronow's "Reminiscences," "Boxiana," "Pugilistica," Harper's "Brighton Road," Robinson's "Last Earl of Barrymore" and "Old Q," Rice's "History of the Turf," and Tristram's "Coaching Days."

I will not apologize for making so much of my story revolve around the prize-ring, for my opinion of that institution is sufficiently expressed in the text. It fell into deserved disrepute through the corruption which came upon the fighting men, and through the villanies of the obscene crowd of parasites and betting men who gathered round it. Already in 1804 such scenes were possible as the breaking up of the fight between "Crab" Wilson and Harrison—the first signs of

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## PREFACE

the decay which was destined to permeate the whole. But in that fighting age, when the very existence of the country depended upon the rough valour of her sons, everything which made for hardihood and endurance was of national importance, and the prize-ring, rough and brutal as it was, served at least as a correction to effeminacy, and as an object lesson in manliness.

I have added a note at the end of this volume, which gives a short account of some of the fighting-men who are mentioned in the course of the narrative, and may be of interest to those to whom the pages of "Pugilistica" are inaccessible.

A. CONAN DOYLE.

UNDERSHAW, HINDHEAD,  
1901.



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# RODNEY STONE

## CHAPTER I

### FRIAR'S OAK

ON this, the first of January of the year 1851, the nineteenth century has reached its midway term, and many of us who shared its youth have already warnings which tell us that it has outworn us. We put our grizzled heads together, we older ones, and we talk of the great days that we have known ; but we find that when it is with our children that we talk it is a hard matter to make them understand. We and our fathers before us lived much the same life, but they with their railway trains and their steamboats belong to a different age. It is true that we can put history-books into their hands, and they can read from them of our weary struggle of two and twenty years with that great and evil man. They can learn how Freedom fled from the whole broad continent, and how Nelson's blood was shed, and Pitt's noble heart was broken in striving that she should not pass us for ever to take refuge with our brothers across

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the Atlantic. All this they can read, with the date of this treaty or that battle, but I do not know where they are to read of ourselves, of the folk we were, and the lives we led, and how the world seemed to our eyes when they were young as theirs are now.

If I take up my pen to tell you about this, you must not look for any story at my hands, for I was only in my earliest manhood when these things befell; and although I saw something of the stories of other lives, I could scarce claim one of my own. It is the love of a woman that makes the story of a man, and many a year was to pass before I first looked into the eyes of the mother of my children. To us it seems but an affair of yesterday, and yet those children can now reach the plums in the garden whilst we are seeking for a ladder, and where we once walked with their little hands in ours, we are glad now to lean upon their arms. But I shall speak of a time when the love of a mother was the only love I knew, and if you seek for something more, then it is not for you that I write. But if you would come out with me into that forgotten world; if you would know Boy Jim and Champion Harrison; if you would meet my father, one of Nelson's own men; if you would catch a glimpse of that great seaman himself, and of George, afterwards the unworthy

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King of England ; if, above all, you would see my famous uncle, Sir Charles Tregellis, the King of the Bucks, and the great fighting men whose names are still household words amongst you, then give me your hand and let us start.

But I must warn you also that, if you think you will find much that is of interest in your guide, you are destined to disappointment. When I look over my bookshelves, I can see that it is only the wise and witty and valiant who have ventured to write down their experiences. For my own part, if I were only assured that I was as clever and brave as the average man about me, I should be well satisfied. Men of their hands have thought well of my brains, and men of brains of my hands, and that is the best that I can say of myself. Save in the one matter of having an inborn readiness for music, so that the mastery of any instrument comes very easily and naturally to me, I cannot recall any single advantage which I can boast over my fellows. In all things I have been a half-way man, for I am of middle height, my eyes are neither blue nor grey, and my hair, before Nature dusted it with her powder, was betwixt flaxen and brown. I may, perhaps, claim this : that through life I have never felt a touch of jealousy as I have admired a better man than myself, and that I have always seen all things as

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they are, myself included, which should count in my favour now that I sit down in my mature age to write my memories. With your permission, then, we will push my own personality as far as possible out of the picture. If you can conceive me as a thin and colourless cord upon which my would-be pearls are strung, you will be accepting me upon the terms which I should wish.

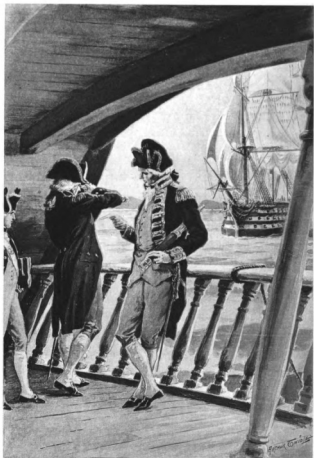
Our family, the Stones, have for many generations belonged to the navy, and it has been a custom among us for the eldest son to take the name of his father's favourite commander. Thus we can trace our lineage back to old Vernon Stone, who commanded a high-sterned, peak-nosed, fifty-gun ship against the Dutch. Through Hawke Stone and Benbow Stone we came down to my father, Anson Stone, who in his turn christened me Rodney, at the parish church of St. Thomas at Portsmouth in the year of grace 1786.

Out of my window as I write I can see my own great lad in the garden, and if I were to call out "Nelson!" you would see that I have been true to the traditions of our family.

My dear mother, the best that ever a man had, was the second daughter of the Reverend John Tregellis, Vicar of Milton, which is a small parish upon the borders of the marshes of Lang-











*The blockading squadron*

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stone. She came of a poor family, but one of some position, for her elder brother was the famous Sir Charles Tregellis, who, having inherited the money of a wealthy East Indian merchant, became in time the talk of the town and the very particular friend of the Prince of Wales. Of him I shall have more to say hereafter; but you will note now that he was my own uncle, and brother to my mother.

I can remember her all through her beautiful life, for she was but a girl when she married, and little more when I can first recall her busy fingers and her gentle voice. I see her as a lovely woman with kind, dove's eyes, somewhat short of stature it is true, but carrying herself very bravely. In my memories of those days she is clad always in some purple shimmering stuff, with a white kerchief round her long white neck, and I see her fingers turning and darting as she works at her knitting. I see her again in her middle years, sweet and loving, planning, contriving, achieving, with the few shillings a day of a lieutenant's pay on which to support the cottage at Friar's Oak, and to keep a fair face to the world. And now, if I do but step into the parlour, I can see her once more, with over eighty years of saintly life behind her, silver-haired, placid-faced, with her dainty ribboned cap, her gold-rimmed glasses, and her woolly

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shawl with the blue border. I loved her young and I love her old, and when she goes she will take something with her which nothing in the world can ever make good to me again. You may have many friends, you who read this, and you may chance to marry more than once, but your mother is your first and your last. Cherish her, then, whilst you may, for the day will come when every hasty deed or heedless word will come back with its sting to live in your own heart.

Such, then, was my mother; and as to my father, I can describe him best when I come to the time when he returned to us from the Mediterranean. During all my childhood he was only a name to me, and a face in a miniature hung round my mother's neck. At first they told me he was fighting the French, and then after some years one heard less about the French and more about General Buonaparte. I remember the awe with which one day in Thomas Street, Portsmouth, I saw a print of the great Corsican in a bookseller's window. This, then, was the arch enemy with whom my father spent his life in terrible and ceaseless contest. To my childish imagination it was a personal affair, and I for ever saw my father and this clean-shaven, thin-lipped man swaying and reeling in a deadly, year-long grapple. It was not until I went to

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the Grammar School that I understood how many other little boys there were whose fathers were in the same case.

Only once in those long years did my father return home, which will show you what it meant to be the wife of a sailor in those days. It was just after we had moved from Portsmouth to Friar's Oak, whither he came for a week before he set sail with Admiral Jervis to help him to turn his name into Lord St. Vincent. I remember that he frightened as well as fascinated me with his talk of battles, and I can recall as if it were yesterday the horror with which I gazed upon a spot of blood upon his shirt ruffle, which had come, as I have no doubt, from a mischance in shaving. At the time I never questioned that it had spurted from some stricken Frenchman or Spaniard, and I shrank from him in terror when he laid his horny hand upon my head. My mother wept bitterly when he was gone, but for my own part I was not sorry to see his blue back and white shorts going down the garden walk, for I felt, with the heedless selfishness of a child, that we were closer together, she and I, when we were alone.

I was in my eleventh year when we moved from Portsmouth to Friar's Oak, a little Sussex village to the north of Brighton, which was recommended to us by my uncle, Sir Charles Tre-

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gellis, one of whose grand friends, Lord Avon, had had his seat near there. The reason of our moving was that living was cheaper in the country, and that it was easier for my mother to keep up the appearance of a gentlewoman when away from the circle of those to whom she could not refuse hospitality. They were trying times those to all save the farmers, who made such profits that they could, as I have heard, afford to let half their land lie fallow, while living like gentlemen upon the rest. Wheat was at a hundred and ten shillings a quarter, and the quartern loaf at one and ninepence. Even in the quiet of the cottage at Friar's Oak we could scarce have lived, were it not that in the blockading squadron in which my father was stationed there was the occasional chance of a little prize-money. The line-of-battle ships themselves, tacking on and off outside Brest, could earn nothing save honour; but the frigates in attendance made prizes of many coasters, and these, as is the rule of the service, were counted as belonging to the fleet, and their produce divided into head-money. In this manner my father was able to send home enough to keep the cottage and to pay for me at the day school of Mr. Joshua Allen, where for four years I learned all that he had to teach. It was at Allen's school that I first knew Jim Harrison, Boy Jim as he has always been called, the



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nephew of Champion Harrison of the village smithy. I can see him as he was in those days with great, floundering, half-formed limbs like a Newfoundland puppy, and a face that set every woman's head round as he passed her. It was in those days that we began our lifelong friendship, a friendship which still in our waning years binds us closely as two brothers. I taught him his exercises, for he never loved the sight of a book, and he in turn made me box and wrestle, tickle trout on the Adur, and snare rabbits on Ditchling Down, for his hands were as active as his brain was slow. He was two years my elder, however, so that, long before I had finished my schooling, he had gone to help his uncle at the smithy.

Friar's Oak is in a dip of the Downs, and the forty-third milestone between London and Brighton lies on the skirt of the village. It is but a small place, with an ivied church, a fine vicarage, and a row of red-brick cottages each in its own little garden. At one end was the forge of Champion Harrison, with his house behind it, and at the other was Mr. Allen's school. The yellow cottage, standing back a little from the road, with its upper story bulging forward and a crisscross of black woodwork let into the plaster, is the one in which we lived. I do not know if it is still standing, but I should think it

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likely, for it was not a place much given to change.

Just opposite to us, at the other side of the broad, white road, was the Friar's Oak Inn, which was kept in my day by John Cummings, a man of excellent repute at home, but liable to strange outbreaks when he travelled, as will afterwards become apparent. Though there was a stream of traffic upon the road, the coaches from Brighton were too fresh to stop, and those from London too eager to reach their journey's end, so that if it had not been for an occasional broken trace or loosened wheel, the landlord would have had only the thirsty throats of the village to trust to. Those were the days when the Prince of Wales had just built his singular palace by the sea, and so from May to September, which was the Brighton season, there was never a day that from one to two hundred curricles, chaises, and phaetons did not rattle past our doors. Many a summer evening have Boy Jim and I lain upon the grass, watching all these grand folk, and cheering the London coaches as they came roaring through the dust clouds, leaders and wheelers stretched to their work, the bugles screaming and the coachmen with their low-crowned, curly-brimmed hats, and their faces as scarlet as their coats. The passengers used to laugh when Boy Jim shouted at them, but if they could have read his

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big, half-set limbs and his loose shoulders aright, they would have looked a little harder at him, perhaps, and given him back his cheer.

Boy Jim had never known a father or a mother, and his whole life had been spent with his uncle, Champion Harrison. Harrison was the Friar's Oak blacksmith, and he had his nickname because he fought Tom Johnson when he held the English belt, and would most certainly have beaten him had the Bedfordshire magistrates not appeared to break up the fight. For years there was no such glutton to take punishment and no more finishing hitter than Harrison, though he was always, as I understand, a slow one upon his feet. At last, in a fight with Black Baruk the Jew, he finished the battle with such a lashing hit that he not only knocked his opponent over the inner ropes, but he left him betwixt life and death for long three weeks. During all this time Harrison lived half demented, expecting every hour to feel the hand of a Bow Street runner upon his collar, and to be tried for his life. This experience, with the prayers of his wife, made him forswear the ring for ever, and carry his great muscles into the one trade in which they seemed to give him an advantage. There was a good business to be done at Friar's Oak from the passing traffic and the Sussex farmers, so that he soon became the richest of the vil-

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lagers ; and he came to church on a Sunday with his wife and his nephew, looking as respectable a family man as one would wish to see.

He was not a tall man, not more than five feet seven inches, and it was often said that if he had had an extra inch of reach he would have been a match for Jackson or Belcher at their best. His chest was like a barrel, and his forearms were the most powerful that I have ever seen, with deep grooves between the smooth-swelling muscles like a piece of water-worn rock. In spite of his strength, however, he was of a slow, orderly, and kindly disposition, so that there was no man more beloved over the whole country-side. His heavy, placid, clean-shaven face could set very sternly, as I have seen upon occasion ; but for me and every child in the village there was ever a smile upon his lips and a greeting in his eyes. There was not a beggar upon the country-side who did not know that his heart was as soft as his muscles were hard.

There was nothing that he liked to talk of more than his old battles, but he would stop if he saw his little wife coming, for the one great shadow in her life was the ever-present fear that some day he would throw down sledge and rasp and be off to the ring once more. And you must be reminded here once for all that that former calling of his was by no means at that

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time in the debased condition to which it afterwards fell. Public opinion has gradually become opposed to it, for the reason that it came largely into the hands of rogues, and because it fostered ringside ruffianism. Even the honest and brave pugilist was found to draw villainy round him, just as the pure and noble racehorse does. For this reason the Ring is dying in England, and we may hope that when Caunt and Bendigo have passed away, they may have none to succeed them. But it was different in the days of which I speak. Public opinion was then largely in its favour, and there were good reasons why it should be so. It was a time of war, when England with an army and navy composed only of those who volunteered to fight because they had fighting blood in them, had to encounter, as they would now have to encounter, a power which could by despotic law turn every citizen into a soldier. If the people had not been full of this lust for combat, it is certain that England must have been overborne. And it was thought, and is, on the face of it, reasonable, that a struggle between two indomitable men, with thirty thousand to view it and three million to discuss it, did help to set a standard of hardihood and endurance. Brutal it was, no doubt, and its brutality is the end of it; but it is not so brutal as war, which will survive it. Whether it is logical

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now to teach the people to be peaceful in an age when their very existence may come to depend upon their being warlike, is a question for wiser heads than mine. But that was what we thought of it in the days of your grandfathers, and that is why you might find statesmen and philanthropists like Windham, Fox, and Althorp at the side of the Ring.

The mere fact that solid men should patronize it was enough in itself to prevent the villainy which afterwards crept in. For over twenty years, in the days of Jackson, Brain, Cribb, the Belchers, Pearce, Gully, and the rest, the leaders of the Ring were men whose honesty was above suspicion; and those were just the twenty years when the Ring may, as I have said, have served a national purpose. You have heard how Pearce saved the Bristol girl from the burning house, how Jackson won the respect and friendship of the best men of his age, and how Gully rose to a seat in the first Reformed Parliament. These were the men who set the standard, and their trade carried with it this obvious recommendation, that it is one in which no drunken or foul-living man could long succeed. There were exceptions among them, no doubt—bullies like Hickman and brutes like Berks; in the main, I say again that they were honest men, brave and enduring to an incredible degree, and a credit to

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the country which produced them. It was, as you will see, my fate to see something of them, and I speak of what I know.

In our own village, I can assure you that we were very proud of the presence of such a man as Champion Harrison, and if folks stayed at the inn, they would walk down as far as the smithy just to have the sight of him. And he was worth seeing, too, especially on a winter's night when the red glare of the forge would beat upon his great muscles and upon the proud, hawk-face of Boy Jim as they heaved and swayed over some glowing plough coulter, framing themselves in sparks with every blow. He would strike once with his thirty-pound swing sledge, and Jim twice with his hand hammer; and the "Clunk—clink, clink! clunk—clink, clink!" would bring me flying down the village street, on the chance that, since they were both at the anvil, there might be a place for me at the bellows.

Only once during those village years can I remember Champion Harrison showing me for an instant the sort of man that he had been. It chanced one summer morning, when Boy Jim and I were standing by the smithy door, that there came a private coach from Brighton, with its four fresh horses, and its brass-work shining, flying along with such a merry rattle and jingling, that the Champion came running out with

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a half-fullered shoe in his tongs to have a look at it. A gentleman in a white coachman's cape—a Corinthian, as we would call him in those days—was driving, and half a dozen of his fellows, laughing and shouting, were on the top behind him. It may have been that the bulk of the smith caught his eye, and that he acted in pure wantonness, or it may possibly have been an accident, but, as he swung past, the twenty-foot thong of the driver's whip hissed round, and we heard the sharp snap of it across Harrison's leather apron.

“Halloa, master!” shouted the smith, looking after him. “You're not to be trusted on the box until you can handle your whip better'n that.”

“What's that?” cried the driver, pulling up his team.

“I bid you have a care, master, or there will be some one-eyed folk along the road you drive.”

“Oh, you say that, do you?” said the driver, putting his whip into its socket and pulling off his driving-gloves. “I'll have a little talk with you, my fine fellow.”

The sporting gentlemen of those days were very fine boxers for the most part, for it was the mode to take a course of Mendoza, just as a few years afterwards there was no man about town who had not had the muffers on with Jackson.



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Knowing their own prowess, they never refused the chance of a wayside adventure, and it was seldom indeed that the bargee or the navigator had much to boast of after a young blood had taken off his coat to him.

This one swung himself off the box-seat with the alacrity of a man who has no doubts about the upshot of the quarrel, and after hanging his caped coat upon the swingle-bar, he daintily turned up the ruffled cuffs of his white cambric shirt.

"I'll pay you for your advice, my man," said he.

I am sure that the men upon the coach knew who the burly smith was, and looked upon it as a prime joke to see their companion walk into such a trap. They roared with delight, and bellowed out scraps of advice to him.

"Knock some of the soot off him, Lord Frederick!" they shouted. "Give the Johnny Raw his breakfast. Chuck him in among his own cinders! Sharp's the word, or you'll see the back of him."

Encouraged by these cries, the young aristocrat advanced upon his man. The smith never moved, but his mouth set grim and hard, while his tufted brows came down over his keen, grey eyes. The tongs had fallen, and his hands were hanging free.

"Have a care, master," said he. "You'll get pepper if you don't."

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Something in the assured voice, and something also in the quiet pose, warned the young lord of his danger. I saw him look hard at his antagonist, and as he did so, his hands and his jaw dropped together.

“By Gad!” he cried, “it’s Jack Harrison!”

“My name, master!”

“And I thought you were some Essex chaw-bacon! Why, man, I haven’t seen you since the day you nearly killed Black Baruk, and cost me a cool hundred by doing it.”

How they roared on the coach.

“Smoked! Smoked, by Gad!” they yelled.

“It’s Jack Harrison the bruiser! Lord Frederick was going to take on the ex-champion. Give him one on the apron, Fred, and see what happens.”

But the driver had already climbed back into his perch, laughing as loudly as any of his companions.

“We’ll let you off this time, Harrison,” said he. “Are those your sons down there?”

“This is my nephew, master.”

“Here’s a guinea for him! He shall never say I robbed him of his uncle.” And so, having turned the laugh in his favour by his merry way of taking it, he cracked his whip, and away they flew to make London under the five hours; while Jack Harrison, with his half-fullered shoe in his hand, went whistling back to the forge.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WALKER OF CLIFFE ROYAL

So much for Champion Harrison! Now, I wish to say something more about Boy Jim, not only because he was the comrade of my youth, but because you will find as you go on that this book is his story rather than mine, and that there came a time when his name and his fame were in the mouths of all England. You will bear with me, therefore, while I tell you of his character as it was in those days, and especially of one very singular adventure which neither of us are likely to forget.

It was strange to see Jim with his uncle and his aunt, for he seemed to be of another race and breed to them. Often I have watched them come up the aisle upon a Sunday, first the square, thick-set man, and then the little, worn, anxious-eyed woman, and last this glorious lad with his clear-cut face, his black curls, and his step so springy and light that it seemed as if he were bound to earth by some lesser tie than the heavy-footed villagers round him. He had not yet attained his full six foot of stature, but no judge of a man (and every woman, at least, is

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one) could look at his perfect shoulders, his narrow loins, and his proud head that sat upon his neck like an eagle upon its perch, without feeling that sober joy which all that is beautiful in Nature gives to us—a vague self-content, as though in some way we also had a hand in the making of it.

But we are used to associate beauty with softness in a man. I do not know why they should be so coupled, and they never were with Jim. Of all men that I have known, he was the most iron-hard in body and in mind. Who was there among us who could walk with him, or run with him, or swim with him? Who on all the country-side, save only Boy Jim, would have swung himself over Wolstonbury Cliff, and clambered down a hundred feet with the mother hawk flapping at his ears in the vain struggle to hold him from her nest? He was but sixteen, with his gristle not yet all set into bone, when he fought and beat Gipsy Lee, of Burgess Hill, who called himself the "Cock of the South Downs." It was after this that Champion Harrison took his training as a boxer in hand.

"I'd rather you left millin' alone, Boy Jim," said he, "and so had the missus; but if mill you must, it will not be my fault if you cannot hold up your hands to anything in the south country."

## THE WALKER OF CLIFFE ROYAL

And it was not long before he made good his promise.

I have said already that Boy Jim had no love for his books, but by that I meant school-books, for when it came to the reading of romances or of anything which had a touch of gallantry or adventure, there was no tearing him away from it until it was finished. When such a book came into his hands, Friar's Oak and the smithy became a dream to him, and his life was spent out upon the ocean or wandering over the broad continents with his heroes. And he would draw me into his enthusiasms also, so that I was glad to play Friday to his Crusoe when he proclaimed that the Clump at Clayton was a desert island, and that we were cast upon it for a week. But when I found that we were actually to sleep out there without covering every night, and that he proposed that our food should be the sheep of the Downs (wild goats he called them) cooked upon a fire, which was to be made by the rubbing together of two sticks, my heart failed me, and on the very first night I crept away to my mother. But Jim stayed out there for the whole weary week—a wet week it was, too!—and came back at the end of it looking a deal wilder and dirtier than his hero does in the picture-books. It is well that he had only promised to stay a week, for, if it had been a month, he would have

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died of cold and hunger before his pride would have let him come home.

His pride!—that was the deepest thing in all Jim's nature. It is a mixed quality to my mind, half a virtue and half a vice : a virtue in holding a man out of the dirt ; a vice in making it hard for him to rise when once he has fallen. Jim was proud down to the very marrow of his bones. You remember the guinea that the young lord had thrown him from the box of the coach ? Two days later somebody picked it from the roadside mud. Jim only had seen where it had fallen, and he would not deign even to point it out to a beggar. Nor would he stoop to give a reason in such a case, but would answer all remonstrances with a curl of his lip and a flash of his dark eyes. Even at school he was the same, with such a sense of his own dignity, that other folk had to think of it too. He might say, as he did say, that a right angle was a proper sort of angle, or put Panama in Sicily, but old Joshua Allen would as soon have thought of raising his cane against him as he would of letting me off if I had said as much. And so it was that, although Jim was the son of nobody, and I of a King's officer, it always seemed to me to have been a condescension on his part that he should have chosen me as his friend.

## THE WALKER OF CLIFFE ROYAL

It was this pride of Boy Jim's which led to an adventure which makes me shiver now when I think of it.

It happened in the August of '99, or it may have been in the early days of September; but I remember that we heard the cuckoo in Patcham Wood, and that Jim said that perhaps it was the last of him. I was still at school, but Jim had left, he being nigh sixteen and I thirteen. It was my Saturday half-holiday, and we spent it, as we often did, out upon the Downs. Our favourite place was beyond Wolstonbury, where we could stretch ourselves upon the soft, springy, chalk grass among the plump little Southdown sheep, chatting with the shepherds, as they leaned upon their queer old Pyecombe crooks, made in the days when Sussex turned out more iron than all the counties of England.

It was there that we lay upon that glorious afternoon. If we chose to roll upon our right sides, the whole weald lay in front of us, with the North Downs curving away in olive-green folds, with here and there the snow-white rift of a chalk-pit; if we turned upon our left, we overlooked the huge blue stretch of the Channel. A convoy, as I can well remember, was coming up it that day, the timid flock of merchantmen in front; the frigates, like well-trained dogs, upon the skirts; and two burly drover line-of-battle

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ships rolling along behind them. My fancy was soaring out to my father upon the waters, when a word from Jim brought it back on to the grass like a broken-winged gull.

“Roddy,” said he, “have you heard that Cliffe Royal is haunted?”

Had I heard it? Of course I had heard it. Who was there in all the Down country who had not heard of the Walker of Cliffe Royal?

“Do you know the story of it, Roddy?”

“Why,” said I, with some pride, “I ought to know it, seeing that my mother’s brother, Sir Charles Tregellis, was the nearest friend of Lord Avon, and was at this card-party when the thing happened. I heard the vicar and my mother talking about it last week, and it was all so clear to me that I might have been there when the murder was done.”

“It is a strange story,” said Jim, thoughtfully; “but when I asked my aunt about it, she would give me no answer; and as to my uncle, he cut me short at the very mention of it.”

“There is a good reason for that,” said I, “for Lord Avon was, as I have heard, your uncle’s best friend; and it is but natural that he would not wish to speak of his disgrace.”

“Tell me the story, Roddy.”

“It is an old one now—fourteen years old—and yet they have not got to the end of it.



## THE WALKER OF CLIFFE ROYAL

There were four of them who had come down from London to spend a few days in Lord Avon's old house. One was his own young brother, Captain Barrington; another was his cousin, Sir Lothian Hume; Sir Charles Tregellis, my uncle, was the third; and Lord Avon the fourth. They are fond of playing cards for money, these great people, and they played and played for two days and a night. Lord Avon lost, and Sir Lothian lost, and my uncle lost, and Captain Barrington won until he could win no more. He won their money, but above all he won papers from his elder brother which meant a great deal to him. It was late on a Monday night that they stopped playing. On the Tuesday morning Captain Barrington was found dead beside his bed with his throat cut.

"And Lord Avon did it?"

"His papers were found burned in the grate, his wristband was clutched in the dead man's hand, and his knife lay beside the body."

"Did they hang him, then?"

"They were too slow in laying hands upon him. He waited until he saw that they had brought it home to him, and then he fled. He has never been seen since, but it is said that he reached America."

"And the ghost walks?"

"There are many who have seen it."

## RODNEY STONE

“Why is the house still empty?”

“Because it is in the keeping of the law. Lord Avon had no children, and Sir Lothian Hume—the same who was at the card-party—is his nephew and heir. But he can touch nothing until he can prove Lord Avon to be dead.”

Jim lay silent for a bit, plucking at the short grass with his fingers.

“Roddy,” said he at last, “will you come with me to-night and look for the ghost?”

It turned me cold, the very thought of it.

“My mother would not let me.”

“Slip out when she’s abed. I’ll wait for you at the smithy.”

“Cliffe Royal is locked.”

“I’ll open a window easy enough.”

“I’m afraid, Jim.”

“But you are not afraid if you are with me, Roddy. I’ll promise you that no ghost shall hurt you.”

So I gave him my word that I would come, and then all the rest of the day I went about the most sad-faced lad in Sussex. It was all very well for Boy Jim! It was that pride of his which was taking him there. He would go because there was no one else on the country-side that would dare. But I had no pride of that sort. I was quite of the same way of thinking as the others, and would as soon have thought

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of passing my night at Jacob's gibbet on Ditchling Common as in the haunted house of Cliffe Royal. Still, I could not bring myself to desert Jim ; and so, as I say, I slunk about the house with so pale and peaky a face that my dear mother would have it that I had been at the green apples, and sent me to bed early with a dish of camomile tea for my supper.

England went to rest betimes in those days, for there were few who could afford the price of candles. When I looked out of my window just after the clock had gone ten, there was not a light in the village save only at the inn. It was but a few feet from the ground, so I slipped out, and there was Jim waiting for me at the smithy corner. We crossed John's Common together, and so past Ridden's Farm, meeting only one or two riding officers upon the way. There was a brisk wind blowing, and the moon kept peeping through the rifts of the scud, so that our road was sometimes silver-clear, and sometimes so black that we found ourselves among the brambles and gorse-bushes which lined it. We came at last to the wooden gate with the high stone pillars by the roadside, and, looking through between the rails, we saw the long avenue of oaks, and at the end of this ill-boding tunnel, the pale face of the house glimmered in the moonshine.

That would have been enough for me, that

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one glimpse of it, and the sound of the night wind sighing and groaning among the branches. But Jim swung the gate open, and up we went, the gravel squeaking beneath our tread. It towered high, the old house, with many little windows in which the moon glinted, and with a strip of water running round three sides of it. The arched door stood right in the face of us, and on one side a lattice hung open upon its hinges.

"We're in luck, Roddy," whispered Jim. "Here's one of the windows open."

"Don't you think we've gone far enough, Jim?" said I, with my teeth chattering.

"I'll lift you in first."

"No, no, I'll not go first."

"Then I will." He gripped the sill, and had his knee on it in an instant. "Now, Roddy, give me your hands." With a pull he had me up beside him, and a moment later we were both in the haunted house.

How hollow it sounded when we jumped down on to the wooden floor! There was such a sudden boom and reverberation that we both stood silent for a moment. Then Jim burst out laughing.

"What an old drum of a place it is!" he cried; "we'll strike a light, Roddy, and see where we are."

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He had brought a candle and a tinder-box in his pocket. When the flame burned up, we saw an arched stone roof above our heads, and broad deal shelves all round us covered with dusty dishes. It was the pantry.

"I'll show you round," said Jim, merrily; and, pushing the door open, he led the way into the hall. I remember the high, oak-panelled walls, with the heads of deer jutting out, and a single white bust, which sent my heart into my mouth, in the corner. Many rooms opened out of this, and we wandered from one to the other—the kitchens, the still-room, the morning-room, the dining-room, all filled with the same choking smell of dust and of mildew.

"This is where they played the cards, Jim," said I, in a hushed voice. "It was on that very table."

"Why, here are the cards themselves!" cried he; and he pulled a brown towel from something in the centre of the sideboard. Sure enough it was a pile of playing-cards—forty packs, I should think, at the least—which had lain there ever since that tragic game which was played before I was born.

"I wonder whence that stair leads?" said Jim.

"Don't go up there, Jim!" I cried, clutching at his arm. "That must lead to the room of the murder."

## RODNEY STONE

"How do you know that?"

"The vicar said that they saw on the ceiling—— Oh, Jim, you can see it even now!"

He held up his candle, and there was a great, dark smudge upon the white plaster above us.

"I believe you're right," said he; "but anyhow I'm going to have a look at it."

"Don't, Jim, don't!" I cried.

"Tut, Roddy! you can stay here if you are afraid. I won't be more than a minute. There's no use going on a ghost hunt unless—— Great Lord, there's something coming down the stairs!"

I heard it too—a shuffling footstep in the room above, and then a creak from the steps, and then another creak, and another. I saw Jim's face as if it had been carved out of ivory, with his parted lips and his staring eyes fixed upon the black square of the stair opening. He still held the light, but his fingers twitched, and with every twitch the shadows sprang from the walls to the ceiling. As to myself, my knees gave way under me, and I found myself on the floor crouching down behind Jim, with a scream frozen in my throat. And still the step came slowly from stair to stair.

Then, hardly daring to look and yet unable to turn away my eyes, I saw a figure dimly outlined in the corner upon which the stair opened. There was a silence in which I could hear my

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poor heart thumping, and then when I looked again the figure was gone, and the low creak, creak was heard once more upon the stairs. Jim sprang after it, and I was left half-fainting in the moonlight.

But it was not for long. He was down again in a minute, and, passing his hand under my arm, he half led and half carried me out of the house. It was not until we were in the fresh night air again that he opened his mouth.

“Can you stand, Roddy?”

“Yes, but I’m shaking.”

“So am I,” said he, passing his hand over his forehead. “I ask your pardon, Roddy. I was a fool to bring you on such an errand. But I never believed in such things. I know better now.”

“Could it have been a man, Jim?” I asked, plucking up my courage now that I could hear the dogs barking on the farms.

“It was a spirit, Rodney.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I followed it and saw it vanish into a wall, as easily as an eel into sand. Why, Roddy, what’s amiss now?”

My fears were all back upon me, and every nerve creeping with horror.

“Take me away, Jim! Take me away!” I cried.

I was glaring down the avenue, and his eyes

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followed mine. Amid the gloom of the oak trees something was coming towards us.

"Quiet, Roddy!" whispered Jim. "By heavens, come what may, my arms are going round it this time."

We crouched as motionless as the trunks behind us. Heavy steps ploughed their way through the soft gravel, and a broad figure loomed upon us in the darkness.

Jim sprang upon it like a tiger.

"*You're* not a spirit, anyway!" he cried.

The man gave a shout of surprise, and then a growl of rage.

"What the deuce!" he roared, and then, "I'll break your neck if you don't let go."

The threat might not have loosened Jim's grip, but the voice did.

"Why, uncle!" he cried.

"Well, I'm blessed if it isn't Boy Jim! And what's this? Why, it's young Master Rodney Stone, as I'm a living sinner! What in the world are you two doing up at Cliffe Royal at this time of night?"

We had all moved out into the moonlight, and there was Champion Harrison with a big bundle on his arm, and such a look of amazement upon his face as would have brought a smile back on to mine had my heart not still been cramped with fear.



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"We're exploring," said Jim.

"Exploring, are you? Well, I don't think you were meant to be Captain Cooks, either of you, for I never saw such a pair of peeled-turnip faces. Why, Jim, what are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid, uncle. I never was afraid; but spirits are new to me, and——"

"Spirits?"

"I've been in Cliffe Royal, and we've seen the ghost."

The Champion gave a whistle.

"That's the game, is it?" said he. "Did you have speech with it?"

"It vanished first."

The Champion whistled once more.

"I've heard there is something of the sort up yonder," said he; "but it's not a thing as I would advise you to meddle with. There's enough trouble with the folk of this world, Boy Jim, without going out of your way to mix up with those of another. As to young Master Rodney Stone, if his good mother saw that white face of his, she'd never let him come to the smithy more. Walk slowly on, and I'll see you back to Friar's Oak."

We had gone half a mile, perhaps, when the Champion overtook us, and I could not but observe that the bundle was no longer under his arm. We were nearly at the smithy before Jim

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asked the question which was already in my mind.

“What took *you* up to Cliffe Royal, uncle?”

“Well, as a man gets on in years,” said the Champion, “there’s many a duty turns up that the likes of you have no idea of. When you’re near forty yourself, you’ll maybe know the truth of what I say.”

So that was all we could draw from him ; but, young as I was, I had heard of coast smuggling and of packages carried to lonely places at night, so that from that time on, if I had heard that the preventives had made a capture, I was never easy until I saw the jolly face of Champion Harrison looking out of his smithy door.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PLAY-ACTRESS OF ANSTEY CROSS

I HAVE told you something about Friar's Oak, and about the life that we led there. Now that my memory goes back to the old place it would gladly linger, for every thread which I draw from the skein of the past brings out half a dozen others that were entangled with it. I was in two minds when I began whether I had enough in me to make a book of, and now I know that I could write one about Friar's Oak alone, and the folk whom I knew in my childhood. They were hard and uncouth, some of them, I doubt not; and yet, seen through the golden haze of time, they all seem sweet and lovable. There was our good vicar, Mr. Jefferson, who loved the whole world save only Mr. Slack, the Baptist minister of Clayton; and there was kindly Mr. Slack, who was all men's brother save only of Mr. Jefferson, the vicar of Friar's Oak. Then there was Monsieur Rudin, the French Royalist refugee who lived over on the Pangdean road, and who, when the news of a victory came in, was convulsed with joy because we had beaten Buonaparte, and shaken with rage because we

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had beaten the French, so that after the Nile he wept for a whole day out of delight and then for another one out of fury, alternately clapping his hands and stamping his feet. Well I remember his thin, upright figure and the way in which he jauntily twirled his little cane ; for cold and hunger could not cast him down, though we knew that he had his share of both. Yet he was so proud and had such a grand manner of talking, that no one dared to offer him a cloak or a meal. I can see his face now, with a flush over each craggy cheek-bone when the butcher made him the present of some ribs of beef. He could not but take it, and yet whilst he was stalking off he threw a proud glance over his shoulder at the butcher, and he said, " Monsieur, I have a dog ! " Yet it was Monsieur Rudin and not his dog who looked plumper for a week to come.

Then I remember Mr. Paterson, the farmer, who was what you would now call a Radical, though at that time some called him a Priestley-ite, and some a Fox-ite, and nearly everybody a traitor. It certainly seemed to me at the time to be very wicked that a man should look glum when he heard of a British victory ; and when they burned his straw image at the gate of his farm, Boy Jim and I were among those who lent a hand. But we were bound to confess that he was game, though he might be a traitor, for

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down he came, striding into the midst of us with his brown coat and his buckled shoes, and the fire beating upon his grim, schoolmaster face. My word, how he rated us, and how glad we were at last to sneak quietly away.

“You livers of a lie!” said he. “You and those like you have been preaching peace for nigh two thousand years, and cutting throats the whole time. If the money that is lost in taking French lives were spent in saving English ones, you would have more right to burn candles in your windows. Who are you that dare to come here to insult a law-abiding man?”

“We are the people of England!” cried young Master Ovington, the son of the Tory Squire.

“You! you horse-racing, cock-fighting ne'er-do-weel! Do you presume to talk for the people of England? They are a deep, strong, silent stream, and you are the scum, the bubbles, the poor, silly froth that floats upon the surface.”

We thought him very wicked then, but, looking back, I am not sure that we were not very wicked ourselves.

And then there were the smugglers! The Downs swarmed with them, for since there might be no lawful trade betwixt France and England, it had all to run in that channel. I have been up on St. John's Common upon a

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dark night, and, lying among the bracken, I have seen as many as seventy mules and a man at the head of each go flitting past me as silently as trout in a stream. Not one of them but bore its two ankers of the right French cognac, or its bale of silk of Lyons and lace of Valenciennes. I knew Dan Scales, the head of them, and I knew Tom Hislop, the riding officer, and I remember the night they met.

“Do you fight, Dan?” asked Tom.

“Yes, Tom; thou must fight for it.”

On which Tom drew his pistol, and blew Dan's brains out.

“It was a sad thing to do,” he said afterwards, “but I knew Dan was too good a man for me, for we tried it out before.”

It was Tom who paid a poet from Brighton to write the lines for the tombstone, which we all thought were very true and good, beginning—

“Alas! Swift flew the fatal lead  
Which piercéd through the young man's head.  
He instantly fell, resigned his breath,  
And closed his languid eyes in death.”

There was more of it, and I dare say it is all still to be read in Patcham Churchyard.

One day, about the time of our Cliffe Royal adventure, I was seated in the cottage looking round at the curios which my father had fastened

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on to the walls, and wishing, like the lazy lad that I was, that Mr. Lilly had died before ever he wrote his Latin grammar, when my mother, who was sitting knitting in the window, gave a little cry of surprise.

“Good gracious!” she cried. “What a vulgar-looking woman!”

It was so rare to hear my mother say a hard word against anybody (unless it were General Buonaparte) that I was across the room and at the window in a jump. A pony-chaise was coming slowly down the village street, and in it was the queerest-looking person that I had ever seen. She was very stout, with a face that was of so dark a red that it shaded away into purple over the nose and cheeks. She wore a great hat with a white curling ostrich feather, and from under its brim her two bold, black eyes stared out with a look of anger and defiance as if to tell the folk that she thought less of them than they could do of her. She had some sort of scarlet pelisse with white swansdown about her neck, and she held the reins slack in her hands, while the pony wandered from side to side of the road as the fancy took him. Each time the chaise swayed, her head with the great hat swayed also, so that sometimes we saw the crown of it and sometimes the brim.

“What a dreadful sight!” cried my mother.

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“What is amiss with her, mother?”

“Heaven forgive me if I misjudge her, Rodney, but I think that the unfortunate woman has been drinking.”

“Why,” I cried, “she has pulled the chaise up at the smithy. I’ll find out all the news for you;” and, catching up my cap, away I scampered.

Champion Harrison had been shoeing a horse at the forge door, and when I got into the street I could see him with the creature’s hoof still under his arm, and the rasp in his hand, kneeling down amid the white parings. The woman was beckoning him from the chaise, and he staring up at her with the queerest expression upon his face. Presently he threw down his rasp and went across to her, standing by the wheel and shaking his head as he talked to her. For my part, I slipped into the smithy, where Boy Jim was finishing the shoe, and I watched the neatness of his work and the deft way in which he turned up the caulks. When he had done with it he carried it out, and there was the strange woman still talking with his uncle.

“Is that he?” I heard her ask.

Champion Harrison nodded.

She looked at Jim, and I never saw such eyes in a human head, so large, and black, and wonderful. Boy as I was, I knew that, in spite of



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that bloated face, this woman had once been very beautiful. She put out a hand, with all the fingers going as if she were playing on the harpsichord, and she touched Jim on the shoulder.

"I hope—I hope you're well," she stammered.

"Very well, ma'am," said Jim, staring from her to his uncle.

"And happy too?"

"Yes, ma'am, I thank you."

"Nothing that you crave for?"

"Why, no, ma'am, I have all that I lack."

"That will do, Jim," said his uncle, in a stern voice. "Blow up the forge again, for that shoe wants reheating."

But it seemed as if the woman had something else that she would say, for she was angry that he should be sent away. Her eyes gleamed, and her head tossed, while the smith with his two big hands outspread seemed to be soothing her as best he could. For a long time they whispered until at last she appeared to be satisfied.

"To-morrow, then?" she cried loud out.

"To-morrow," he answered.

"You keep your word and I'll keep mine," said she, and dropped the lash on the pony's back. The smith stood with the rasp in his hand, looking after her until she was just a little

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red spot on the white road. Then he turned, and I never saw his face so grave.

"Jim," said he, "that's Miss Hinton, who has come to live at The Maples, out Anstey Cross way. She's taken a kind of a fancy to you, Jim, and maybe she can help you on a bit. I promised her that you would go over and see her tomorrow."

"I don't want her help, uncle, and I don't want to see her."

"But I've promised, Jim, and you wouldn't make me out a liar. She does but want to talk with you, for it is a lonely life she leads."

"What would she want to talk with such as me about?"

"Why, I cannot say that, but she seemed very set upon it, and women have their fancies. There's young Master Stone here who wouldn't refuse to go and see a good lady, I'll warrant, if he thought he might better his fortune by doing so."

"Well, uncle, I'll go if Roddy Stone will go with me," said Jim.

"Of course he'll go. Won't you, Master Rodney?"

So it ended in my saying "yes," and back I went with all my news to my mother, who dearly loved a little bit of gossip. She shook her head when she heard where I was going, but she did not say nay, and so it was settled.

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It was a good four miles of a walk, but when we reached it you would not wish to see a more cosy little house : all honeysuckle and creepers, with a wooden porch and lattice windows. A common-looking woman opened the door for us.

"Miss Hinton cannot see you," said she.

"But she asked us to come," said Jim.

"I can't help that," cried the woman, in a rude voice. "I tell you that she can't see you."

We stood irresolute for a minute.

"Maybe you would just tell her I am here," said Jim, at last.

"Tell her! How am I to tell her when she couldn't so much as hear a pistol in her ears? Try and tell her yourself, if you have a mind to."

She threw open a door as she spoke, and there, in a reclining chair at the further end of the room, we caught a glimpse of a figure all lumped together, huge and shapeless, with tails of black hair hanging down. The sound of dreadful, swine-like breathing fell upon our ears. It was but a glance, and then we were off hot-foot for home. As for me, I was so young that I was not sure whether this was funny or terrible ; but when I looked at Jim to see how he took it, he was looking quite white and ill.

"You'll not tell any one, Roddy," said he.

"Not unless it's my mother."

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"I won't even tell my uncle. I'll say she was ill, the poor lady! It's enough that we should have seen her in her shame, without its being the gossip of the village. It makes me feel sick and heavy at heart."

"She was so yesterday, Jim."

"Was she? I never marked it. But I know that she has kind eyes and a kind heart, for I saw the one in the other when she looked at me. Maybe it's the want of a friend that has driven her to this."

It blighted his spirits for days, and when it had all gone from my mind it was brought back to me by his manner. But it was not to be our last memory of the lady with the scarlet pelisse, for before the week was out Jim came round to ask me if I would again go up with him.

"My uncle has had a letter," said he. "She would speak with me, and I would be easier if you came with me, Rod."

For me it was only a pleasure outing, but I could see, as we drew near the house, that Jim was troubling in his mind lest we should find that things were amiss. His fears were soon set at rest, however, for we had scarce clicked the garden gate before the woman was out of the door of the cottage and running down the path to meet us. She was so strange a figure, with some sort of purple wrapper on, and her big,

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flushed face smiling out of it, that I might, if I had been alone, have taken to my heels at the sight of her. Even Jim stopped for a moment as if he were not very sure of himself, but her hearty ways soon set us at our ease.

"It is indeed good of you to come and see an old, lonely woman," said she, "and I owe you an apology that I should give you a fruitless journey on Tuesday, but in a sense you were yourselves the cause of it, since the thought of your coming had excited me, and any excitement throws me into a nervous fever. My poor nerves! You can see for yourselves how they serve me."

She held out her twitching hands as she spoke. Then she passed one of them through Jim's arm, and walked with him up the path.

"You must let me know you, and know you well," said she. "Your uncle and aunt are quite old acquaintances of mine, and though you cannot remember me, I have held you in my arms when you were an infant. Tell me, little man," she added, turning to me, "what do you call your friend?"

"Boy Jim, ma'am," said I.

"Then if you will not think me forward, I will call you Boy Jim also. We elderly people have our privileges, you know. And now you shall come in with me, and we will take a dish of tea together."

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She led the way into a cosy room—the same which we had caught a glimpse of when last we came—and there, in the middle, was a table with white napery, and shining glass, and gleaming china, and red-cheeked apples piled upon a centre-dish, and a great plateful of smoking muffins which the cross-faced maid had just carried in. You can think that we did justice to all the good things, and Miss Hinton would ever keep pressing us to pass our cup and to fill our plate. Twice during our meal she rose from her chair and withdrew into a cupboard at the end of the room, and each time I saw Jim's face cloud, for we heard a gentle clink of glass against glass.

“Come now, little man,” said she to me, when the table had been cleared. “Why are you looking round so much?”

“Because there are so many pretty things upon the walls.”

“And which do you think the prettiest of them?”

“Why, that!” said I, pointing to a picture which hung opposite to me. It was of a tall and slender girl, with the rosiest cheeks and the tenderest eyes—so daintily dressed, too, that I had never seen anything more perfect. She had a posy of flowers in her hand and another one was lying upon the planks of wood upon which she was standing.

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"Oh, that's the prettiest, is it?" said she, laughing. "Well, now, walk up to it, and let us hear what is writ beneath it."

I did as she asked, and read out: "Miss Polly Hinton, as 'Peggy,' in *The Country Wife*, played for her benefit at the Haymarket Theatre, September 14th, 1782."

"It's a play-actress," said I.

"Oh, you rude little boy, to say it in such a tone," said she; "as if a play-actress wasn't as good as any one else. Why, 'twas but the other day that the Duke of Clarence, who may come to call himself King of England, married Mrs. Jordan, who is herself only a play-actress. And whom think you that this one is?"

She stood under the picture with her arms folded across her great body, and her big black eyes looking from one to the other of us.

"Why, where are your eyes?" she cried at last. "I was Miss Polly Hinton of the Haymarket Theatre. And perhaps you never heard the name before?"

We were compelled to confess that we never had. And the very name of play-actress had filled us both with a kind of vague horror, like the country-bred folk that we were. To us they were a class apart, to be hinted at rather than named, with the wrath of the Almighty hanging over them like a thundercloud. Indeed,

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His judgments seemed to be in visible operation before us when we looked upon what this woman was, and what she had been.

“ Well,” said she, laughing like one who is hurt, “ you have no cause to say anything, for I read on your face what you have been taught to think of me. So this is the upbringing that you have had, Jim—to think evil of that which you do not understand! I wish you had been in the theatre that very night with Prince Florizel and four Dukes in the boxes, and all the wits and macaronis of London rising at me in the pit. If Lord Avon had not given me a cast in his carriage, I had never got my flowers back to my lodgings in York Street, Westminster. And now two little country lads are sitting in judgment upon me!”

Jim’s pride brought a flush on to his cheeks, for he did not like to be called a country lad, or to have it supposed that he was so far behind the grand folk in London.

“ I have never been inside a play-house,” said he; “ I know nothing of them.”

“ Nor I either.”

“ Well,” said she, “ I am not in voice, and it is ill to play in a little room with but two to listen, but you must conceive me to be the Queen of the Peruvians, who is exhorting her countrymen to rise up against the Spaniards, who are oppressing them.”



## PLAY-ACTRESS OF ANSTEY CROSS

And straightway that coarse, swollen woman became a queen—the grandest, haughtiest queen that you could dream of—and she turned upon us with such words of fire, such lightning eyes and sweeping of her white hand, that she held us spellbound in our chairs. Her voice was soft and sweet, and persuasive at the first, but louder it rang and louder as it spoke of wrongs and freedom and the joys of death in a good cause, until it thrilled into my every nerve, and I asked nothing more than to run out of the cottage and to die then and there in the cause of my country. And then in an instant she changed. She was a poor woman now, who had lost her only child, and who was bewailing it. Her voice was full of tears, and what she said was so simple, so true, that we both seemed to see the dead babe stretched there on the carpet before us, and we could have joined in with words of pity and of grief. And then, before our cheeks were dry, she was back into her old self again.

“How like you that, then?” she cried. “That was my way in the days when Sally Siddons would turn green at the name of Polly Hinton. It’s a fine play, is *Pizarro*.”

“And who wrote it, ma’am?”

“Who wrote it? I never heard. What matter who did the writing of it! But there are

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some great lines for one who knows how they should be spoken."

"And you play no longer, ma'am?"

"No, Jim, I left the boards when—when I was weary of them. But my heart goes back to them sometimes. It seems to me there is no smell like that of the hot oil in the footlights and of the oranges in the pit. But you are sad, Jim."

"It was but the thought of that poor woman and her child."

"Tut, never think about her! I will soon wipe her from your mind. This is 'Miss Priscilla Tomboy,' from *The Romp*. You must conceive that the mother is speaking, and that the forward young minx is answering."

And she began a scene between the two of them, so exact in voice and manner that it seemed to us as if there were really two folk before us: the stern old mother with her hand up like an ear-trumpet, and her flouncing, bouncing daughter. Her great figure danced about with a wonderful lightness, and she tossed her head and pouted her lips as she answered back to the old, bent figure that addressed her. Jim and I had forgotten our tears, and were holding our ribs before she came to the end of it.

"That is better," said she, smiling at our laughter. "I would not have you go back to

## PLAY-ACTRESS OF ANSTEY CROSS

Friar's Oak with long faces, or maybe they would not let you come to me again."

She vanished into her cupboard, and came out with a bottle and glass, which she placed upon the table.

"You are too young for strong waters," she said, "but this talking gives one a dryness, and——"

Then it was that Boy Jim did a wonderful thing. He rose from his chair, and he laid his hand upon the bottle.

"Don't!" said he.

She looked him in the face, and I can still see those black eyes of hers softening before the gaze.

"Am I to have none?"

"Please, don't."

With a quick movement she wrested the bottle out of his hand and raised it up so that for a moment it entered my head that she was about to drink it off. Then she flung it through the open lattice, and we heard the crash of it on the path outside.

"There, Jim!" said she; "does that satisfy you? It's long since any one cared whether I drank or no."

"You are too good and kind for that," said he.

"Good!" she cried. "Well, I love that you should think me so. And it would make you happier if I kept from the brandy, Jim? Well,

## RODNEY STONE

then, I'll make you a promise, if you'll make me one in return."

"What's that, miss?"

"No drop shall pass my lips, Jim, if you will swear, wet or shine, blow or snow, to come up here twice in every week, that I may see you and speak with you, for, indeed, there are times when I am very lonesome."

So the promise was made, and very faithfully did Jim keep it, for many a time when I have wanted him to go fishing or rabbit-snaring, he has remembered that it was his day for Miss Hinton, and has tramped off to Anstey Cross. At first I think that she found her share of the bargain hard to keep, and I have seen Jim come back with a black face on him, as if things were going amiss. But after a time the fight was won—as all fights are won if one does but fight long enough—and in the year before my father came back Miss Hinton had become another woman. And it was not her ways only, but herself as well, for from being the person that I have described, she became in one twelvemonth as fine a looking lady as there was in the whole country-side. Jim was prouder of it by far than of anything he had had a hand in in his life, but it was only to me that he ever spoke about it, for he had that tenderness towards her that one has for those whom one has helped. And she helped

## PLAY-ACTRESS OF ANSTEY CROSS

him also, for by her talk of the world and of what she had seen, she took his mind away from the Sussex country-side and prepared it for a broader life beyond. So matters stood between them at the time when peace was made and my father came home from the sea.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PEACE OF AMIENS

MANY a woman's knee was on the ground, and many a woman's soul spent itself in joy and thankfulness when the news came with the fall of the leaf in 1801 that the preliminaries of peace had been settled. All England waved her gladness by day and twinkled it by night. Even in little Friar's Oak we had our flags flying bravely, and a candle in every window, with a big G.R. guttering in the wind over the door of the inn. Folk were weary of the war, for we had been at it for eight years, taking Holland, and Spain, and France each in turn and all together. All that we had learned during that time was that our little army was no match for the French on land, and that our large navy was more than a match for them upon the water. We had gained some credit, which we were sorely in need of after the American business; and a few Colonies, which were welcome also for the same reason; but our debt had gone on rising and our consols sinking, until even Pitt stood aghast. Still, if we had known that there never could be peace between Napoleon and

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ourselves, and that this was only the end of a round and not of the battle, we should have been better advised had we fought it out without a break. As it was, the French got back the twenty thousand good seamen whom we had captured, and a fine dance they led us with their Boulogne flotillas and fleets of invasion before we were able to catch them again.

My father, as I remember him best, was a tough, strong little man, of no great breadth, but solid and well put together. His face was burned of a reddish colour, as bright as a flower-pot, and in spite of his age (for he was only forty at the time of which I speak) it was shot with lines, which deepened if he were in any way perturbed, so that I have seen him turn on the instant from a youngish man to an elderly. His eyes especially were meshed round with wrinkles, as is natural for one who had puckered them all his life in facing foul wind and bitter weather. These eyes were, perhaps, his strangest feature, for they were of a very clear and beautiful blue, which shone the brighter out of that ruddy setting. By nature he must have been a fair-skinned man, for his upper brow, where his cap came over it, was as white as mine, and his close-cropped hair was tawny.

He had served, as he was proud to say, in the last of our ships which had been chased out of

## RODNEY STONE

the Mediterranean in '97, and in the first which had re-entered it in '98. He was under Miller, as third lieutenant of the *Theseus*, when our fleet, like a pack of eager fox hounds in a covert, was dashing from Sicily to Syria and back again to Naples, trying to pick up the lost scent. With the same good fighting man he served at the Nile, where the men of his command sponged and rammed and trained until, when the last tricolour had come down, they hove up the sheet anchor and fell dead asleep upon the top of each other under the capstan bars. Then, as a second lieutenant, he was in one of those grim three-deckers with powder-blackened hulls and crimson scupper-holes, their spare cables tied round their keels and over their bulwarks to hold them together, which carried the news into the Bay of Naples. From thence, as a reward for his services, he was transferred as first lieutenant to the *Aurora* frigate, engaged in cutting off supplies from Genoa, and in her he still remained until long after peace was declared.

How well I can remember his home-coming! Though it is now eight-and-forty years ago, it is clearer to me than the doings of last week, for the memory of an old man is like one of those glasses which shows out what is at a distance and blurs all that is near.

My mother had been in a tremble ever since



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the first rumour of the preliminaries came to our ears, for she knew that he might come as soon as his message. She said little, but she saddened my life by insisting that I should be for ever clean and tidy. With every rumble of wheels, too, her eyes would glance towards the door, and her hands steal up to smooth her pretty black hair. She had embroidered a white "Welcome" upon a blue ground, with an anchor in red upon each side, and a border of laurel leaves; and this was to hang upon the two lilac bushes which flanked the cottage door. He could not have left the Mediterranean before we had this finished, and every morning she looked to see if it were in its place and ready to be hanged.

But it was a weary time before the peace was ratified, and it was April of next year before our great day came round to us. It had been raining all morning, I remember—a soft spring rain, which sent up a rich smell from the brown earth and pattered pleasantly upon the budding chestnuts behind our cottage. The sun had shone out in the evening, and I had come down with my fishing-rod (for I had promised Boy Jim to go with him to the mill-stream), when what should I see but a post-chaise with two smoking horses at the gate, and there in the open door of it were my mother's black skirt and her little

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feet jutting out, with two blue arms for a waist-belt, and all the rest of her buried in the chaise. Away I ran for the motto, and I pinned it up on the bushes as we had agreed, but when I had finished there were the skirts and the feet and the blue arms just the same as before.

“Here’s Rod,” said my mother at last, struggling down on to the ground again. “Roddy, darling, here’s your father!”

I saw the red face and the kindly, light-blue eyes looking out at me.

“Why, Roddy, lad, you were but a child and we kissed good-bye when last we met; but I suppose we must put you on a different rating now. I’m right glad from my heart to see you, dear lad; and as to you, sweetheart——” The blue arms flew out, and there were the skirt and the two feet fixed in the door again.

“Here are the folk coming, Anson,” said my mother, blushing. “Won’t you get out and come in with us?”

And then suddenly it came home to us both that for all his cheery face he had never moved more than his arms, and that his leg was resting on the opposite seat of the chaise.

“Oh, Anson, Anson!” she cried.

“Tut, ’tis but the bone of my leg,” said he, taking his knee between his hands and lifting it round. “I got it broke in the Bay, but the

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surgeon has fished it and spliced it, though it's a bit crank yet. Why, bless her kindly heart, if I haven't turned her from pink to white. You can see for yourself that it's nothing."

He sprang out as he spoke, and with one leg and a staff he hopped swiftly up the path, and under the laurel-bordered motto, and so over his own threshold for the first time for five years. When the post-boy and I had carried up the sea-chest and the two canvas bags, there he was sitting in his armchair by the window in his old weather-stained blue coat. My mother was weeping over his poor leg, and he patting her hair with one brown hand. His other he threw round my waist, and drew me to the side of his chair.

"Now that we have peace, I can lie up and refit until King George needs me again," said he. "'Twas a carronade that came adrift in the Bay when it was blowing a top-gallant breeze with a beam sea. Ere we could make it fast it had me jammed against the mast. Well, well," he added, looking round at the walls of the room, "here are all my old curios, the same as ever: the narwhal's horn from the Arctic, and the blowfish from the Moluccas, and the paddles from Fiji, and the picture of the *Ça Ira* with Lord Hotham in chase. And here you are, Mary, and you also, Roddy, and good luck to

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the carronade which has sent me into so snug a harbour without fear of sailing orders."

My mother had his long pipe and his tobacco all ready for him, so that he was able now to light it and to sit looking from one of us to the other and then back again, as if he could never see enough of us. Young as I was, I could still understand that this was the moment which he had thought of during many a lonely watch, and that the expectation of it had cheered his heart in many a dark hour. Sometimes he would touch one of us with his hand, and sometimes the other, and so he sat, with his soul too satiated for words, whilst the shadows gathered in the little room and the lights of the inn windows glimmered through the gloom. And then, after my mother had lit our own lamp, she slipped suddenly down upon her knees, and he got one knee to the ground also, so that, hand-in-hand, they joined their thanks to Heaven for manifold mercies. When I look back at my parents as they were in those days, it is at that very moment that I can picture them most clearly: her sweet face with the wet shining upon her cheeks, and his blue eyes upturned to the smoke-blackened ceiling. I remember that he swayed his reeking pipe in the earnestness of his prayer, so that I was half tears and half smiles as I watched him.

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"Roddy, lad," said he, after supper was over, "you're getting a man now, and I suppose you will go afloat like the rest of us. You're old enough to strap a dirk to your thigh."

"And leave me without a child as well as without a husband!" cried my mother.

"Well, there's time enough yet," said he, "for they are more inclined to empty berths than to fill them, now that peace has come. But I've never tried what all this schooling has done for you, Rodney. You have had a great deal more than ever I had, but I dare say I can make shift to test it. Have you learned history?"

"Yes, father," said I, with some confidence.

"Then how many sail of the line were at the Battle of Camperdown?"

He shook his head gravely when he found that I could not answer him.

"Why, there are men in the fleet who never had any schooling at all who could tell you that we had seven 74's, seven 64's, and two 50-gun ships in the action. There's a picture on the wall of the chase of the *Ça Ira*. Which were the ships that laid her aboard?"

Again I had to confess that he had beaten me.

"Well, your dad can teach you something in history yet," he cried, looking in triumph at my mother. "Have you learned geography?"

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"Yes, father," said I, though with less confidence than before.

"Well, how far is it from Port Mahon to Algeciras?" I could only shake my head.

"If Ushant lay three leagues upon your star-board quarter, what would be your nearest English port?"

Again I had to give it up.

"Well, I don't see that your geography is much better than your history," said he. "You'd never get your certificate at this rate. Can you do addition? Well, then, let us see if you can tot up my prize-money."

He shot a mischievous glance at my mother as he spoke, and she laid down her knitting on her lap and looked very earnestly at him.

"You never asked me about that, Mary," said he.

"The Mediterranean is not the station for it, Anson. I have heard you say that it is the Atlantic for prize-money, and the Mediterranean for honour."

"I had a share of both last cruise, which comes from changing a line-of-battleship for a frigate. Now, Rodney, there are two pounds in every hundred due to me when the prize-courts have done with them. When we were watching Massena, off Genoa, we got a matter of seventy schooners, brigs, and tartans, with wine, food, and powder. Lord Keith will want his finger

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in the pie, but that's for the Courts to settle. Put them at four pounds apiece to me, and what will the seventy bring?"

"Two hundred and eighty pounds," I answered.

"Why, Anson, it is a fortune!" cried my mother, clapping her hands.

"Try you again, Roddy!" said he, shaking his pipe at me. "There was the *Xebec* frigate out of Barcelona with twenty thousand Spanish dollars aboard, which make four thousand of our pounds. Her hull should be worth another thousand. What's my share of that?"

"A hundred pounds."

"Why, the purser couldn't work it out quicker," he cried in his delight. "Here's for you again! We passed the Straits and worked up to the Azores, where we fell in with the *La Sabina* from the Mauritius with sugar and spices. Twelve hundred pounds she's worth to me, Mary, my darling, and never again shall you soil your pretty fingers or pinch upon my beggarly pay."

My dear mother had borne her long struggle without a sign all these years, but now that she was so suddenly eased of it she fell sobbing upon his neck. It was a long time before my father had a thought to spare upon my examination in arithmetic.

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“It’s all in your lap, Mary,” said he, dashing his own hand across his eyes. “By George, lass, when this leg of mine is sound we’ll bear down for a spell to Brighton, and if there is a smarter frock than yours upon the Steyne, may I never tread a poop again. But how is it that you are so quick at figures, Rodney, when you know nothing of history or geography?”

I tried to explain that addition was the same upon sea or land, but that history and geography were not.

“Well,” he concluded, “you need figures to take a reckoning, and you need nothing else save what your mother wit will teach you. There never was one of our breed who did not take to salt water like a young gull. Lord Nelson has promised me a vacancy for you, and he’ll be as good as his word.”

So it was that my father came home to us, and a better or kinder no lad could wish for. Though my parents had been married so long, they had really seen very little of each other, and their affection was as warm and as fresh as if they were two newly-wedded lovers. I have learned since that sailors can be coarse and foul, but never did I know it from my father; for, although he had seen as much rough work as the wildest could wish for, he was always the same patient, good-humoured man, with a smile



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and a jolly word for all the village. He could suit himself to his company, too, for on the one hand he could take his wine with the vicar, or with Sir James Ovington, the squire of the parish; while on the other he would sit by the hour amongst my humble friends down in the smithy, with Champion Harrison, Boy Jim, and the rest of them, telling them such stories of Nelson and his men that I have seen the Champion knot his great hands together, while Jim's eyes have smouldered like the forge embers as he listened.

My father had been placed on half-pay, like so many others of the old war officers, and so, for nearly two years, he was able to remain with us. During all this time I can only once remember that there was the slightest disagreement between him and my mother. It chanced that I was the cause of it, and as great events sprang out of it, I must tell you how it came about. It was indeed the first of a series of events which affected not only my fortunes, but those of very much more important people.

The spring of 1803 was an early one, and the middle of April saw the leaves thick upon the chestnut trees. One evening we were all seated together over a dish of tea when we heard the scrunch of steps outside our door, and there was the postman with a letter in his hand.

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"I think it is for me," said my mother, and sure enough it was addressed in the most beautiful writing to Mrs. Mary Stone, of Friar's Oak, and there was a red seal the size of a half-crown upon the outside of it with a flying dragon in the middle.

"Whom think you that it is from, Anson?" she asked.

"I had hoped that it was from Lord Nelson," answered my father. "It is time the boy had his commission. But if it be for you, then it cannot be from any one of much importance."

"Can it not!" she cried, pretending to be offended. "You will ask my pardon for that speech, sir, for it is from no less a person than Sir Charles Tregellis, my own brother."

My mother seemed to speak with a hushed voice when she mentioned this wonderful brother of hers, and always had done as long as I can remember, so that I had learned also to have a subdued and reverent feeling when I heard his name. And indeed it was no wonder, for that name was never mentioned unless it were in connection with something brilliant and extraordinary. Once we heard that he was at Windsor with the King. Often he was at Brighton with the Prince. Sometimes it was as a sportsman that his reputation reached us, as when his

## THE PEACE OF AMIENS

Meteor beat the Duke of Queensberry's Egham, at Newmarket, or when he brought Jim Belcher up from Bristol, and sprang him upon the London fancy. But usually it was as the friend of the great, the arbiter of fashions, the king of bucks, and the best-dressed man in town that his reputation reached us. My father, however, did not appear to be elated at my mother's triumphant rejoinder.

"Ay, and what does he want?" asked he, in no very amiable voice.

"I wrote to him, Anson, and told him that Rodney was growing a man now, thinking, since he had no wife or child of his own, he might be disposed to advance him."

"We can do very well without him," growled my father. "He sheered off from us when the weather was foul, and we have no need of him now that the sun is shining."

"Nay, you misjudge him, Anson," said my mother, warmly. "There is no one with a better heart than Charles; but his own life moves so smoothly that he cannot understand that others may have trouble. During all these years I have known that I had but to say the word to receive as much as I wished from him."

"Thank God that you never had to stoop to it, Mary. I want none of his help."

"But we must think of Rodney."

## RODNEY STONE

“Rodney has enough for his sea-chest and kit. He needs no more.”

“But Charles has great power and influence in London. He could make Rodney known to all the great people. Surely you would not stand in the way of his advancement.”

“Let us hear what he says, then,” said my father; and this was the letter which she read to him—

“14, Jermyn Street, St. James’s,  
“April 15th, 1803.

“MY DEAR SISTER MARY,

“In answer to your letter, I can assure you that you must not conceive me to be wanting in those finer feelings which are the chief adornment of humanity. It is true that for some years, absorbed as I have been in affairs of the highest importance, I have seldom taken a pen in hand, for which I can assure you that I have been reproached by many *des plus charmantes* of your charming sex. At the present moment I lie abed (having stayed late in order to pay a compliment to the Marchioness of Dover at her ball last night), and this is writ to my dictation by Ambrose, my clever rascal of a valet. I am interested to hear of my nephew Rodney (*Mon dieu, quel nom!*), and as I shall be on my way to visit the Prince at Brighton next week, I shall break my journey at Friar’s Oak

## THE PEACE OF AMIENS

for the sake of seeing both you and him. Make my compliments to your husband.

“I am ever, my dear sister Mary,

“Your brother,

“CHARLES TREGELLIS.”

“What do you think of that?” cried my mother in triumph when she had finished.

“I think it is the letter of a fop,” said my father, bluntly.

“You are too hard on him, Anson. You will think better of him when you know him. But he says that he will be here next week, and this is Thursday, and the best curtains unhung, and no lavender in the sheets!”

Away she bustled, half distracted, while my father sat moody, with his chin upon his hands, and I remained lost in wonder at the thought of this grand new relative from London, and of all that his coming might mean to us.

## CHAPTER V

BUCK TREGELLIS

Now that I was in my seventeenth year, and had already some need for a razor, I had begun to weary of the narrow life of the village, and to long to see something of the great world beyond. The craving was all the stronger because I durst not speak openly about it, for the least hint of it brought the tears into my mother's eyes. But now there was the less reason that I should stay at home, since my father was at her side, and so my mind was all filled by this prospect of my uncle's visit, and of the chance that he might set my feet moving at last upon the road of life.

As you may think, it was towards my father's profession that my thoughts and my hopes turned, for from my childhood I have never seen the heave of the sea or tasted the salt upon my lips without feeling the blood of five generations of seamen thrill within my veins. And think of the challenge which was ever waving in those days before the eyes of a coast-living lad! I had but to walk up to Wolstonbury in the war time to see the sails of the French *chasse-marées* and privateers. Again and again I have heard

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then, Champion Harrison told me how the fighting-men lived there, and my father how the heads of the Navy lived there, and my mother how her brother and his grand friends were there, until at last I was consumed with impatience to see this marvellous heart of England. This coming of my uncle, then, was the breaking of light through the darkness, though I hardly dared to hope that he would take me with him into those high circles in which he lived. My mother, however, had such confidence either in his good nature or in her own powers of persuasion, that she already began to make furtive preparations for my departure.

But if the narrowness of the village life chafed my easy spirit, it was a torture to the keen and ardent mind of Boy Jim. It was but a few days after the coming of my uncle's letter that we walked over the Downs together, and I had a peep of the bitterness of his heart.

"What is there for me to do, Rodney?" he cried. "I forge a shoe, and I fuller it, and I clip it, and I caulken it, and I knock five holes in it, and there it is finished. Then I do it again and again, and blow up the bellows and feed the forge, and rasp a hoof or two, and there is a day's work done, and every day the same as the other. Was it for this only, do you think, that I was born into the world?"

## BUCK TREGELLIS

I looked at him, his proud, eagle face, and his tall, sinewy figure, and I wondered whether in the whole land there was a finer, handsomer man.

"The Army or the Navy is the place for you, Jim," said I.

"That is very well," he cried. "If you go into the Navy, as you are likely to do, you go as an officer, and it is you who do the ordering. If I go in, it is as one who was born to receive orders."

"An officer gets his orders from those above him."

"But an officer does not have the lash hung over his head. I saw a poor fellow at the inn here—it was some years ago—who showed us his back in the tap-room, all cut into red diamonds with the boatswain's whip. 'Who ordered that?' I asked. 'The captain,' said he. 'And what would you have had if you had struck him dead?' said I. 'The yard-arm,' he answered. 'Then if I had been you that's where I should have been,' said I, and I spoke the truth. I can't help it, Rod! There's something here in my heart, something that is as much a part of myself as this hand is, which holds me to it."

"I know that you are as proud as Lucifer," said I.

"It was born with me, Roddy, and I can't help it. Life would be easier if I could. I was



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made to be my own master, and there's only one place where I can hope to be so."

"Where is that, Jim?"

"In London. Miss Hinton has told me of it, until I feel as if I could find my way through it from end to end. She loves to talk of it as well as I do to listen. I have it all laid out in my mind, and I can see where the playhouses are, and how the river runs, and where the King's house is, and the Prince's, and the place where the fighting-men live. I could make my name known in London."

"How?"

"Never mind how, Rod. I could do it, and I will do it, too. 'Wait!' says my uncle—'wait, and it will all come right for you.' That is what he always says, and my aunt the same. Why should I wait? What am I to wait for? No, Roddy, I'll stay no longer eating my heart out in this little village, but I'll leave my apron behind me and I'll seek my fortune in London, and when I come back to Friar's Oak, it will be in such style as that gentleman yonder."

He pointed as he spoke, and there was a high crimson mail phaeton coming down the London road, with two bay mares harnessed tandem fashion before it. The reins and fittings were of a light fawn colour, and the gentleman had a driving-coat to match, with a servant in dark

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livery behind. They flashed past us in a rolling cloud of dust, and I had just a glimpse of the pale, handsome face of the master, and of the dark, shrivelled features of the man. I should never have given them another thought had it not chanced that when the village came into view there was the mail phaeton again, standing at the door of the inn, and the grooms busy taking out the horses.

"Jim," I cried, "I believe it is my uncle!" and taking to my heels I ran for home at the top of my speed. At the door was standing the dark-faced servant. He carried a cushion, upon which lay a small and fluffy lapdog.

"You will excuse me, young sir," said he, in the suavest, most soothing of voices, "but am I right in supposing that this is the house of Lieutenant Stone? In that case you will, perhaps, do me the favour to hand to Mrs. Stone this note which her brother, Sir Charles Tregellis, has just committed to my care."

I was quite abashed by the man's flowery way of talking—so unlike anything which I had ever heard. He had a wizened face, and sharp little dark eyes, which took in me and the house and my mother's startled face at the window all in the instant. My parents were together, the two of them, in the sitting-room, and my mother read the note to us.

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"My dear Mary," it ran, "I have stopped at the inn, because I am somewhat *ravagé* by the dust of your Sussex roads. A lavender-water bath may restore me to a condition in which I may fitly pay my compliments to a lady. Meantime, I send you Fidelio as a hostage. Pray give him a half-pint of warmish milk with six drops of pure brandy in it. A better or more faithful creature never lived. *Toujours à toi*.—Charles."

"Have him in! Have him in!" cried my father, heartily, running to the door. "Come in, Mr. Fidelio. Every man to his own taste, and six drops to the half-pint seems a sinful watering of grog—but if you like it so, you shall have it."

A smile flickered over the dark face of the servant, but his features reset themselves instantly into their usual mask of respectful observance.

"You are labouring under a slight error, sir, if you will permit me to say so. My name is Ambrose, and I have the honour to be the valet of Sir Charles Tregellis. This is Fidelio upon the cushion."

"Tut, the dog!" cried my father, in disgust. "Heave him down by the fireside. Why should he have brandy, when many a Christian has to go without?"

"Hush, Anson!" said my mother, taking the

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cushion. "You will tell Sir Charles that his wishes shall be carried out, and that we shall expect him at his own convenience."

The man went off noiselessly and swiftly, but was back in a few minutes with a flat brown basket.

"It is the refecton, madam," said he. "Will you permit me to lay the table? Sir Charles is accustomed to partake of certain dishes and to drink certain wines, so that we usually bring them with us when we visit." He opened the basket, and in a minute he had the table all shining with silver and glass, and studded with dainty dishes. So quick and neat and silent was he in all he did, that my father was as taken with him as I was.

"You'd have made a right good foretopman if your heart is as stout as your fingers are quick," said he. "Did you never wish to have the honour of serving your country?"

"It is my honour, sir, to serve Sir Charles Tregellis, and I desire no other master," he answered. "But I will convey his dressing-case from the inn, and then all will be ready."

He came back with a great silver-mounted box under his arm, and close at his heels was the gentleman whose coming had made such a disturbance.

My first impression of my uncle as he entered

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the room was that one of his eyes was swollen to the size of an apple. It caught the breath from my lips—that monstrous, glistening eye. But the next instant I perceived that he held a round glass in the front of it, which magnified it in this fashion. He looked at us each in turn, and then he bowed very gracefully to my mother and kissed her upon either cheek.

“You will permit me to compliment you, my dear Mary,” said he, in a voice which was the most mellow and beautiful that I have ever heard. “I can assure you that the country air has used you wondrous well, and that I should be proud to see my pretty sister in the Mall. I am your servant, sir,” he continued, holding out his hand to my father. “It was but last week that I had the honour of dining with my friend, Lord St. Vincent, and I took occasion to mention you to him. I may tell you that your name is not forgotten at the Admiralty, sir, and I hope that I may see you soon walking the poop of a 74-gun ship of your own. So this is my nephew, is it?” He put a hand upon each of my shoulders in a very friendly way and looked me up and down.

“How old are you, nephew?” he asked.

“Seventeen, sir.”

“You look older. You look eighteen, at the least. I find him very passable, Mary—very

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passable, indeed. He has not the *bel* air, the *tournure*—in our uncouth English we have no word for it. But he is as healthy as a May-hedge in bloom.”

So within a minute of his entering our door he had got himself upon terms with all of us, and with so easy and graceful a manner that it seemed as if he had known us all for years. I had a good look at him now as he stood upon the hearthrug, with my mother upon one side and my father on the other. He was a very large man, with noble shoulders, small waist, broad hips, well-turned legs, and the smallest of hands and feet. His face was pale and handsome, with a prominent chin, a jutting nose, and large blue staring eyes, in which a sort of dancing, mischievous light was for ever playing. He wore a deep brown coat with a collar as high as his ears and tails as low as his knees. His black breeches and silk stockings ended in very small pointed shoes, so highly polished that they twinkled with every movement. His vest was of black velvet, open at the top to show an embroidered shirt-front, with a high, smooth, white cravat above it, which kept his neck for ever on the stretch. He stood easily, with one thumb in the arm-pit, and two fingers of the other hand in his vest pocket. It made me proud as I watched him to think that so magnificent a man, with such easy, masterful

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ways, should be my own blood relation, and I could see from my mother's eyes as they turned towards him that the same thought was in her mind.

All this time Ambrose had been standing like a dark, clothed, bronze-faced image by the door, with the big silver-bound box under his arm. He stepped forward now into the room.

"Shall I convey it to your bedchamber, Sir Charles?" he asked.

"Ah, pardon me, sister Mary," cried my uncle, "I am old-fashioned enough to have principles—an anachronism, I know, in this lax age. One of them is never to allow my *batterie de toilette* out of my sight when I am travelling. I cannot readily forget the agonies which I endured some years ago through neglecting this precaution. I will do Ambrose the justice to say that it was before he took charge of my affairs. I was compelled to wear the same ruffles upon two consecutive days. On the third morning my fellow was so affected by the sight of my condition, that he burst into tears and laid out a pair which he had stolen from me."

As he spoke his face was very grave, but the light in his eyes danced and gleamed. He handed his open snuff-box to my father, as Ambrose followed my mother out of the room.

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"You number yourself in an illustrious company by dipping your finger and thumb into it," said he.

"Indeed, sir!" said my father, shortly.

"You are free of my box, as being a relative by marriage. You are free also, nephew, and I pray you to take a pinch. It is the most intimate sign of my goodwill. Outside ourselves there are four, I think, who have had access to it—the Prince, of course; Mr. Pitt; Monsieur Otto, the French Ambassador; and Lord Hawkesbury. I have sometimes thought that I was premature with Lord Hawkesbury."

"I am vastly honoured, sir," said my father, looking suspiciously at his guest from under his shaggy eyebrows, for with that grave face and those twinkling eyes it was hard to know how to take him.

"A woman, sir, has her love to bestow," said my uncle. "A man has his snuff-box. Neither is to be lightly offered. It is a lapse of taste; nay, more, it is a breach of morals. Only the other day, as I was seated in Watier's, my box of prime macouba open upon the table beside me, an Irish bishop thrust in his intrusive fingers. 'Waiter,' I cried, 'my box has been soiled! Remove it!' The man meant no insult, you understand, but that class of people must be kept in their proper sphere."



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“A bishop!” cried my father. “You draw your line very high, sir.”

“Yes, sir,” said my uncle; “I wish no better epitaph upon my tombstone.”

My mother had in the meanwhile descended, and we all drew up to the table.

“You will excuse my apparent grossness, Mary, in venturing to bring my own larder with me. Abernethy has me under his orders, and I must eschew your rich country dainties. A little white wine and a cold bird—it is as much as the niggardly Scotchman will allow me.”

“We should have you on blockading service when the levanters are blowing,” said my father. “Salt junk and weevilly biscuits, with a rib of a tough Barbary ox when the tenders come in. You would have your spare diet there, sir.”

Straightway my uncle began to question him about the sea service, and for the whole meal my father was telling him of the Nile and of the Toulon blockade, and the siege of Genoa, and all that he had seen and done. But whenever he faltered for a word, my uncle always had it ready for him, and it was hard to say which knew most about the business.

“No, I read little or nothing,” said he, when my father marvelled where he got his knowledge. “The fact is that I can hardly pick up a print without seeing some allusion to myself: ‘Sir C.

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T. does this,' or 'Sir C. T. says the other,' so I take them no longer. But if a man is in my position all knowledge comes to him. 'The Duke of York tells me of the Army in the morning, and Lord Spencer chats with me of the Navy in the afternoon, and Dundas whispers me what is going forward in the Cabinet, so that I have little need of the *Times* or the *Morning Chronicle*."

This set him talking of the great world of London, telling my father about the men who were his masters at the Admiralty, and my mother about the beauties of the town, and the great ladies at Almack's, but all in the same light, fanciful way, so that one never knew whether to laugh or to take him gravely. I think it flattered him to see the way in which we all three hung upon his words. Of some he thought highly and of some lowly, but he made no secret that the highest of all, and the one against whom all others should be measured, was Sir Charles Tregellis himself.

"As to the King," said he, "of course, I am *l'ami de famille* there; and even with you I can scarce speak freely, as my relations are confidential."

"God bless him and keep him from ill!" cried my father.

"It is pleasant to hear you say so," said my uncle. "One has to come into the country to

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hear honest loyalty, for a sneer and a jibe are more the fashions in town. The King is grateful to me for the interest which I have ever shown in his son. He likes to think that the Prince has a man of taste in his circle."

"And the Prince?" asked my mother. "Is he well-favoured?"

"He is a fine figure of a man. At a distance he has been mistaken for me. And he has some taste in dress, though he gets slovenly if I am too long away from him. I warrant you that I find a crease in his coat to-morrow."

We were all seated round the fire by this time, for the evening had turned chilly. The lamp was lighted, and so also was my father's pipe.

"I suppose," said he, "that this is your **first** visit to Friar's Oak?"

My uncle's face turned suddenly very grave and stern.

"It is my first visit for many years," said he. "I was **but** one-and-twenty years of age when **last** I came here. I am not likely to forget it."

I knew that he spoke of his visit to Cliffe Royal at the time of the murder, and I saw by her face that my mother knew it also. My father, however, had either never heard of it, or had forgotten the circumstance.

"Was it at the inn you stayed?" he asked.

"I stayed with the unfortunate Lord Avon.

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It was the occasion when he was accused of slaying his younger brother and fled from the country."

We all fell silent, and my uncle leaned his chin upon his hand, looking thoughtfully into the fire. If I do but close my eyes now, I can see the light upon his proud, handsome face, and see also my dear father, concerned at having touched upon so terrible a memory, shooting little slanting glances at him betwixt the puffs of his pipe.

"I dare say that it has happened with you, sir," said my uncle at last, "that you have lost some dear messmate, in battle or wreck, and that you have put him out of your mind in the routine of your daily life, until suddenly some word or some scene brings him back to your memory, and you find your sorrow as raw as upon the first day of your loss."

My father nodded.

"So it is with me to-night. I never formed a close friendship with a man—I say nothing of women—save only the once. That was with Lord Avon. We were of an age, he a few years perhaps my senior, but our tastes, our judgments, and our characters were alike, save only that he had in him a touch of pride such as I have never known in any other man. Putting aside the little foibles of a rich young man of fashion, *les indiscretions d'une jeunesse dorée*, I

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could have sworn that he was as good a man as I have ever known."

"How came he, then, to such a crime?" asked my father.

My uncle shook his head.

"Many a time have I asked myself that question, and it comes home to me more to-night than ever."

All the jauntiness had gone out of his manner, and he had turned suddenly into a sad and serious man.

"Was it certain that he did it, Charles?" asked my mother.

My uncle shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish I could think it were not so. I have thought sometimes that it was this very pride, turning suddenly to madness, which drove him to it. You have heard how he returned the money which we had lost?"

"Nay, I have heard nothing of it," my father answered.

"It is a very old story now, though we have not yet found an end to it. We had played for two days, the four of us: Lord Avon, his brother Captain Barrington, Sir Lothian Hume, and myself. Of the Captain I knew little, save that he was not of the best repute, and was deep in the hands of the Jews. Sir Lothian has made an evil name for himself since—'tis the same Sir

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Lothian who shot Lord Carton in the affair at Chalk Farm—but in those days there was nothing against him. The oldest of us was but twenty-four, and we gamed on, as I say, until the Captain had cleared the board. We were all hit, but our host far the hardest.

“That night—I tell you now what it would be a bitter thing for me to tell in a court of law—I was restless and sleepless, as often happens when a man has kept awake over long. My mind would dwell upon the fall of the cards, and I was tossing and turning in my bed, when suddenly a cry fell upon my ears, and then a second louder one, coming from the direction of Captain Barrington’s room. Five minutes later I heard steps passing down the passage, and, without striking a light, I opened my door and peeped out, thinking that some one was taken unwell. There was Lord Avon walking towards me. In one hand he held a guttering candle and in the other a brown bag, which chinked as he moved. His face was all drawn and distorted—so much so that my question was frozen upon my lips. Before I could utter it he turned into his chamber and softly closed the door.

“Next morning I was awakened by finding him at my bedside.

“‘Charles,’ said he, ‘I cannot abide to think

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that you should have lost this money in my house. You will find it here upon your table.'

"It was in vain that I laughed at his squeamishness, telling him that I should most certainly have claimed my money had I won, so that it would be strange indeed if I were not permitted to pay it when I lost.

"'Neither I nor my brother will touch it,' said he. 'There it lies, and you may do what you like about it.'

"He would listen to no argument, but dashed out of the room like a madman. But perhaps these details are familiar to you, and God knows they are painful to me to tell."

My father was sitting with staring eyes, and his forgotten pipe reeking in his hand.

"Pray let us hear the end of it, sir," he cried.

"Well, then, I had finished my toilet in an hour or so—for I was less exigent in those days than now—and I met Sir Lothian Hume at breakfast. His experience had been the same as my own, and he was eager to see Captain Barington, and to ascertain why he had directed his brother to return the money to us. We were talking the matter over when suddenly I raised my eyes to the corner of the ceiling, and I saw—I saw——"

My uncle had turned quite pale with the

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vividness of the memory, and he passed his hand over his eyes.

“It was crimson,” said he, with a shudder—“crimson with black cracks, and from every crack—but I will give you dreams, sister Mary. Suffice it that we rushed up the stair which led direct to the Captain’s room, and there we found him lying with the bone gleaming white through his throat. A hunting-knife lay in the room—and the knife was Lord Avon’s. A lace ruffle was found in the dead man’s grasp—and the ruffle was Lord Avon’s. Some papers were found charred in the grate—and the papers were Lord Avon’s. Oh, my poor friend, in what moment of madness did you come to do such a deed?”

The light had gone out of my uncle’s eyes and the extravagance from his manner. His speech was clear and plain, with none of those strange London ways which had so amazed me. Here was a second uncle, a man of heart and a man of brains, and I liked him better than the first.

“And what said Lord Avon?” cried my father.

“He said nothing. He went about like one who walks in his sleep, with horror-stricken eyes. None dared arrest him until there should be due inquiry, but when the coroner’s court brought wilful murder against him, the constables came for him in full cry. But they found him fled.



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There was a rumour that he had been seen in Westminster in the next week, and then that he had escaped for America, but nothing more is known. It will be a bright day for Sir Lothian Hume when they can prove him dead, for he is next of kin, and till then he can touch neither title nor estate."

The telling of this grim story had cast a chill upon all of us. My uncle held out his hands towards the blaze, and I noticed that they were as white as the ruffles which fringed them.

"I know not how things are at Cliffe Royal now," said he, thoughtfully. "It was not a cheery house, even before this shadow fell upon it. A fitter stage was never set forth for such a tragedy. But seventeen years have passed, and perhaps even that horrible ceiling——"

"It still bears the stain," said I.

I know not which of the three was the more astonished, for my mother had not heard of my adventures of the night. They never took their wondering eyes off me as I told my story, and my heart swelled with pride when my uncle said that we had carried ourselves well, and that he did not think that many of our age would have stood it as stoutly.

"But as to this ghost, it must have been the creature of your own minds," said he. "Imagination plays us strange tricks, and though I have

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as steady a nerve as a man might wish, I cannot answer for what I might see if I were to stand under that blood-stained ceiling at midnight."

"Uncle," said I, "I saw a figure as plainly as I see that fire, and I heard the steps as clearly as I hear the crackle of the fagots. Besides, we could not both be deceived."

"There is truth in that," said he, thoughtfully. "You saw no features, you say?"

"It was too dark."

"But only a figure?"

"The dark outline of one."

"And it retreated up the stairs?"

"Yes."

"And vanished into the wall?"

"Yes."

"What part of the wall?" cried a voice from behind us.

My mother screamed, and down came my father's pipe on to the hearthrug. I had sprung round with a catch of my breath, and there was the valet, Ambrose, his body in the shadow of the doorway, his dark face protruded into the light, and two burning eyes fixed upon mine.

"What the deuce is the meaning of this, sir?" cried my uncle.

It was strange to see the gleam and passion fade out of the man's face, and the demure mask of the valet replace it. His eyes still smoul-

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dered, but his features regained their prim composure in an instant.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Charles," said he. "I had come in to ask you if you had any orders for me, and I did not like to interrupt the young gentleman's story. I am afraid that I have been somewhat carried away by it."

"I never knew you forget yourself before," said my uncle.

"You will, I am sure, forgive me, Sir Charles, if you will call to mind the relation in which I stood to Lord Avon." He spoke with some dignity of manner, and with a bow he left the room.

"We must make some little allowance," said my uncle, with a sudden return to his jaunty manner. "When a man can brew a dish of chocolate, or tie a cravat, as Ambrose does, he may claim consideration. The fact is that the poor fellow was valet to Lord Avon, that he was at Cliffe Royal upon the fatal night of which I have spoken, and that he is most devoted to his old master. But my talk has been somewhat *triste*, sister Mary, and now we shall return, if you please, to the dresses of the Countess Lieven, and the gossip of St. James."

## CHAPTER VI

### ON THE THRESHOLD

My father sent me to bed early that night, though I was very eager to stay up, for every word which this man said held my attention. His face, his manner, the large waves and sweeps of his white hands, his easy air of superiority, his fantastic fashion of talk, all filled me with interest and wonder. But, as I afterwards learned, their conversation was to be about myself and my own prospects, so I was despatched to my room, whence far into the night I could hear the deep growl of my father and the rich tones of my uncle, with an occasional gentle murmur from my mother, as they talked in the room beneath.

I had dropped asleep at last, when I was awakened suddenly by something wet being pressed against my face, and by two warm arms which were cast round me. My mother's cheek was against my own, and I could hear the click of her sobs, and feel her quiver and shake in the darkness. A faint light stole through the latticed window, and I could dimly see that she was in white, with her black hair loose upon her shoulders.

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"You won't forget us, Roddy? You won't forget us?"

"Why, mother, what is it?"

"Your uncle, Roddy—he is going to take you away from us."

"When, mother?"

"To-morrow."

God forgive me, how my heart bounded for joy, when hers, which was within touch of it, was breaking with sorrow!

"Oh, mother!" I cried. "To London?"

"First to Brighton, that he may present you to the Prince. Next day to London, where you will meet the great people, Roddy, and learn to look down upon—to look down upon your poor, simple, old-fashioned father and mother."

I put my arms about her to console her, but she wept so that, for all my seventeen years and pride of manhood, it set me weeping also, and with such a hiccougging noise, since I had not a woman's knack of quiet tears, that it finally turned her own grief to laughter.

"Charles would be flattered if he could see the gracious way in which we receive his kindness," said she. "Be still, Roddy dear, or you will certainly wake him."

"I'll not go if it is to grieve you," I cried.

"Nay, dear, you must go, for it may be the one great chance of your life. And think how

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proud it will make us all when we hear of you in the company of Charles's grand friends. But you will promise me not to gamble, Roddy? You heard to-night of the dreadful things which come from it."

"I promise you, mother."

"And you will be careful of wine, Roddy? You are young and unused to it."

"Yes, mother."

"And play-actresses also, Roddy. And you will not cast your underclothing until June is in. Young Master Overton came by his death through it. Think well of your dress, Roddy, so as to do your uncle credit, for it is the thing for which he is himself most famed. You have but to do what he will direct. But if there is a time when you are not meeting grand people, you can wear out your country things, for your brown coat is as good as new, and the blue one, if it were ironed and relined, would take you through the summer. I have put out your Sunday clothes with the nankeen vest, since you are to see the Prince to-morrow, and you will wear your brown silk stockings and buckle shoes. Be guarded in crossing the London streets, for I am told that the hackney coaches are past all imagining. Fold your clothes when you go to bed, Roddy, and do not forget your evening prayers, for, oh, my dear boy, the days of temptation are

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at hand, when I will no longer be with you to help you."

So with advice and guidance both for this world and the next did my mother, with her soft, warm arms around me, prepare me for the great step which lay before me.

My uncle did not appear at breakfast in the morning, but Ambrose brewed him a dish of chocolate and took it to his room. When at last, about midday, he did descend, he was so fine with his curled hair, his shining teeth, his quizzing glass, his snow-white ruffles, and his laughing eyes, that I could not take my gaze from him.

"Well, nephew," he cried, "what do you think of the prospect of coming to town with me?"

"I thank you, sir, for the kind interest which you take in me," said I.

"But you must be a credit to me. My nephew must be of the best if he is to be in keeping with the rest of me."

"You'll find him a chip of good wood, sir," said my father.

"We must make him a polished chip before we have done with him. Your aim, my dear nephew, must always be to be in *bon ton*. It is not a case of wealth, you understand. Mere riches cannot do it. Golden Price has forty

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thousand a year, but his clothes are disastrous. I assure you that I saw him come down St. James's Street the other day, and I was so shocked at his appearance that I had to step into Vernet's for a glass of orange brandy. No, it is a question of natural taste, and of following the advice and example of those who are more experienced than yourself."

"I fear, Charles, that Rodney's wardrobe is country-made," said my mother.

"We shall soon set that right when we get to town. We shall see what Stultz or Weston can do for him," my uncle answered. "We must keep him quiet until he has some clothes to wear."

This slight upon my best Sunday suit brought a flush to my mother's cheeks, which my uncle instantly observed, for he was quick in noticing trifles.

"The clothes are very well for Friar's Oak, sister Mary," said he. "And yet you can understand that they might seem *rococo* in the Mall. If you leave him in my hands I shall see to the matter."

"On how much, sir," asked my father, "can a young man dress in town?"

"With prudence and reasonable care, a young man of fashion can dress upon eight hundred a year," my uncle answered.



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I saw my poor father's face grow longer.

"I fear, sir, that Roddy must keep his country clothes," said he. "Even with my prize-money——"

"Tut, sir!" cried my uncle. "I already owe Weston something over a thousand, so how can a few odd hundreds affect it? If my nephew comes with me, my nephew is my care. The point is settled, and I must refuse to argue upon it." He waved his white hands as if to brush aside all opposition.

My parents tried to thank him, but he cut them short.

"By the way, now that I am in Friar's Oak, there is another small piece of business which I have to perform," said he. "I believe that there is a fighting-man named Harrison here, who at one time might have held the championship. In those days poor Avon and I were his principal backers. I should like to have a word with him."

You may think how proud I was to walk down the village street with my magnificent relative, and to note out of the corner of my eye how the folk came to the doors and windows to see us pass. Champion Harrison was standing outside the smithy, and he pulled his cap off when he saw my uncle.

"God bless me, sir! Who'd ha' thought of

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seen' you at Friar's Oak? Why, Sir Charles, it brings old memories back to look at your face again."

"Glad to see you looking so fit, Harrison," said my uncle, running his eyes over him. "Why, with a week's training you would be as good a man as ever. I don't suppose you scale more than thirteen and a half?"

"Thirteen ten, Sir Charles. I'm in my fortieth year, but I am sound in wind and limb, and if my old woman would have let me off my promise, I'd ha' had a try with some of these young ones before now. I hear that they've got some amazin' good stuff up from Bristol of late."

"Yes, the Bristol yellowman has been the winning colour of late. How d'ye do, Mrs. Harrison? I don't suppose you remember me?"

She had come out from the house, and I noticed that her worn face—on which some past terror seemed to have left its shadow—hardened into stern lines as she looked at my uncle.

"I remember you too well, Sir Charles Tregellis," said she. "I trust that you have not come here to-day to try to draw my husband back into the ways that he has forsaken."

"That's the way with her, Sir Charles," said Harrison, resting his great hand upon the woman's shoulder. "She's got my promise, and she holds me to it! There was never a better

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or more hard-working wife, but she ain't what you'd call a patron of sport, and that's a fact."

"Sport!" cried the woman, bitterly. "A fine sport for you, Sir Charles, with your pleasant twenty-mile drive into the country and your luncheon-basket and your wines, and so merrily back to London in the cool of the evening, with a well-fought battle to talk over. Think of the sport that it was to me to sit through the long hours, listening for the wheels of the chaise which would bring my man back to me. Sometimes he could walk in, and sometimes he was led in, and sometimes he was carried in, and it was only by his clothes that I could know him——"

"Come, wife," said Harrison, patting her on the shoulder. "I've been cut up in my time, but never as bad as that."

"And then to live for weeks afterwards with the fear that every knock at the door may be to tell us that the other is dead, and that my man may have to stand in the dock and take his trial for murder."

"No, she hasn't got a sportin' drop in her veins," said Harrison. "She'd never make a patron, never! It's Black Baruk's business that did it, when we thought he'd napped it once too often. Well, she has my promise, and I'll never sling my hat over the ropes unless she gives me leave."

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"You'll keep your hat on your head like an honest, God-fearing man, John," said his wife, turning back into the house.

"I wouldn't for the world say anything to make you change your resolutions," said my uncle. "At the same time, if you had wished to take a turn at the old sport, I had a good thing to put in your way."

"Well, it's no use, sir," said Harrison, "but I'd be glad to hear about it all the same."

"They have a very good bit of stuff at thirteen stone down Gloucester way. Wilson is his name, and they call him Crab on account of his style."

Harrison shook his head. "Never heard of him, sir."

"Very likely not, for he has never shown in the P.R. But they think great things of him in the West, and he can hold his own with either of the Belchers with the muffers."

"Sparrin' ain't fightin'," said the smith.

"I am told that he had the best of it in a by-battle with Noah James, of Cheshire."

"There's no gamer man on the list, sir, than Noah James, the guardsman," said Harrison. "I saw him myself fight fifty rounds after his jaw had been cracked in three places. If Wilson could beat him, Wilson will go far."

"So they think in the West, and they mean to spring him on the London talent. Sir Lothian

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Hume is his patron, and to make a long story short, he lays me odds that I won't find a young one of his weight to meet him. I told him that I had not heard of any good young ones, but that I had an old one who had not put his foot into a ring for many years, who would make his man wish he had never come to London.

“‘Young or old, under twenty or over thirty-five, you may bring whom you will at the weight, and I shall lay two to one on Wilson,’ said he. I took him in thousands, and here I am.”

“It won't do, Sir Charles,” said the smith, shaking his head. “There's nothing would please me better, but you heard for yourself.”

“Well, if you won't fight, Harrison, I must try to get some promising colt. I'd be glad of your advice in the matter. By the way, I take the chair at a supper of the Fancy at the Waggon and Horses in St. Martin's Lane next Friday. I should be very glad if you will make one of my guests. Halloo, who's this?” Up flew his glass to his eye.

Boy Jim had come out from the forge with his hammer in his hand. He had, I remember, a grey flannel shirt, which was open at the neck and turned up at the sleeves. My uncle ran his eyes over the fine lines of his magnificent figure with the glance of a connoisseur.

“That's my nephew, Sir Charles.”

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"Is he living with you?"

"His parents are dead."

"Has he ever been in London?"

"No, Sir Charles. He's been with me here since he was as high as that hammer."

My uncle turned to Boy Jim.

"I hear that you have never been in London," said he. "Your uncle is coming up to a supper which I am giving to the Fancy next Friday. Would you care to make one of us?"

Boy Jim's dark eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"I should be glad to come, sir."

"No, no, Jim," cried the smith, abruptly. "I'm sorry to gainsay you, lad, but there are reasons why I had rather you stayed down here with your aunt."

"Tut, Harrison, let the lad come!" cried my uncle.

"No, no, Sir Charles. It's dangerous company for a lad of his mettle. There's plenty for him to do when I'm away."

Poor Jim turned away with a clouded brow and strode into the smithy again. For my part, I slipped after him to try to console him, and to tell him all the wonderful changes which had come so suddenly into my life. But I had not got half through my story, and Jim, like the good fellow that he was, had just begun to forget his own troubles in his delight at my good fort-

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une, when my uncle called to me from without. The mail phaëton with its tandem mares was waiting for us outside the cottage, and Ambrose had placed the refection-basket, the lap-dog, and the precious toilet-box inside of it. He had himself climbed up behind, and I, after a hearty handshake from my father, and a last sobbing embrace from my mother, took my place beside my uncle in the front.

“ Let go her head ! ” cried he to the ostler, and with a snap, a crack, and a jingle, away we went upon our journey.

Across all the years how clearly I can see that spring day, with the green English fields, the windy English sky, and the yellow, beetle-browed cottage in which I had grown from a child to a man. I see, too, the figures at the garden gate : my mother, with her face turned away and her handkerchief waving ; my father, with his blue coat and his white shorts, leaning upon his stick with his hand shading his eyes as he peered after us. All the village was out to see young Roddy Stone go off with his grand relative from London to call upon the Prince in his own palace. The Harrisons were waving to me from the smithy, and John Cummings from the steps of the inn, and I saw Joshua Allen, my old schoolmaster, pointing me out to the people, as if he were showing what came from his teaching. To make

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it complete, who should drive past just as we cleared the village but Miss Hinton, the play-actress, the pony and phaëton the same as when first I saw her, but she herself another woman ; and I thought to myself that if Boy Jim had done nothing but that one thing, he need not think that his youth had been wasted in the country. She was driving to see him, I have no doubt, for they were closer than ever, and she never looked up nor saw the hand that I waved to her. So as we took the curve of the road the little village vanished, and there in the dip of the Downs, past the spires of Patcham and of Preston, lay the broad blue sea and the grey houses of Brighton, with the strange Eastern domes and minarets of the Prince's Pavilion shooting out from the centre of it.

To every traveller it was a sight of beauty, but to me it was the world—the great wide free world—and my heart thrilled and fluttered as the young bird's may when it first hears the whirr of its own flight, and skims along with the blue heaven above it and the green fields beneath. The day may come when it may look back regretfully to the snug nest in the thornbush, but what does it reckon of that when spring is in the air and youth in its blood, and the old hawk of trouble has not yet darkened the sunshine with the ill-boding shadow of its wings ?



## CHAPTER VII

### THE HOPE OF ENGLAND

MY uncle drove for some time in silence, but I was conscious that his eye was always coming round to me, and I had an uneasy conviction that he was already beginning to ask himself whether he could make anything of me, or whether he had been betrayed into an indiscretion when he had allowed his sister to persuade him to show her son something of the grand world in which he lived.

“ You sing, don't you, nephew ? ” he asked, suddenly.

“ Yes, sir, a little.”

“ A baritone, I should fancy ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And your mother tells me that you play the fiddle. These things will be of service to you with the Prince. Music runs in his family. Your education has been what you could get at a village school. Well, you are not examined in Greek roots in polite society, which is lucky for some of us. It is as well just to have a tag or two of Horace or Virgil : ‘ sub tegmine fagi,’ or ‘ habet fœnum in cornu,’ which gives a flavour to

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one's conversation like the touch of garlic in a salad. It is not *bon ton* to be learned, but it is a graceful thing to indicate that you have forgotten a good deal. Can you write verse?"

"I fear not, sir."

"A small book of rhymes may be had for half a crown. Vers de Société are a great assistance to a young man. If you have the ladies on your side, it does not matter whom you have against you. You must learn to open a door, to enter a room, to present a snuff-box, raising the lid with the forefinger of the hand in which you hold it. You must acquire the bow for a man, with its necessary touch of dignity, and that for a lady, which cannot be too humble, and should still contain the least suspicion of abandon. You must cultivate a manner with women which shall be deprecating and yet audacious. Have you any eccentricity?"

It made me laugh, the easy way in which he asked the question, as if it were a most natural thing to possess.

"You have a pleasant, catching laugh, at all events," said he. "But an eccentricity is very *bon ton* at present, and if you feel any leaning towards one, I should certainly advise you to let it run its course. Petersham would have remained a mere peer all his life had it not come out that he had a snuff-box for every day in the

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year, and that he had caught cold through a mistake of his valet, who sent him out on a bitter winter day with a thin Sèvres china box instead of a thick tortoise-shell. That brought him out of the ruck, you see, and people remember him. Even some small characteristic, such as having an apricot tart on your sideboard all the year round, or putting your candle out at night by stuffing it under your pillow, serves to separate you from your neighbour. In my own case, it is my precise judgment upon matter of dress and decorum which has placed me where I am. I do not profess to follow a law. I set one. For example, I am taking you to-day to see the Prince in a nankeen vest. What do you think will be the consequence of that?"

My fears told me that it might be my own very great discomfiture, but I did not say so.

"Why, the night coach will carry the news to London. It will be in Brookes's and White's to-morrow morning. Within a week St. James's Street and the Mall will be full of nankeen waistcoats. A most painful incident happened to me once. My cravat came undone in the street, and I actually walked from Carlton House to Watier's in Bruton Street with the two ends hanging loose. Do you suppose it shook my position? The same evening there were dozens of young bloods walking the streets of London with

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their cravats loose. If I had not rearranged mine there would not be one tied in the whole kingdom now, and a great art would have been prematurely lost. You have not yet began to practice it?"

I confessed that I had not.

"You should begin now in your youth. I will myself teach you the *coup d'archet*. By using a few hours in each day, which would otherwise be wasted, you may hope to have excellent cravats in middle life. The whole knack lies in pointing your chin to the sky, and then arranging your folds by the gradual descent of your lower jaw."

When my uncle spoke like this there was always that dancing, mischievous light in his dark blue eyes, which showed me that this humour of his was a conscious eccentricity, depending, as I believe, upon a natural fastidiousness of taste, but wilfully driven to grotesque lengths for the very reason which made him recommend me also to develop some peculiarity of my own. When I thought of the way in which he had spoken of his unhappy friend, Lord Avon, upon the evening before, and of the emotion which he showed as he told the horrible story, I was glad to think that there was the heart of a man there, however much it might please him to conceal it.

And, as it happened, I was very soon to have

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another peep at it, for a most unexpected event befell us as we drew up in front of the Crown Hotel. A swarm of ostlers and grooms had rushed out to us, and my uncle, throwing down the reins, gathered Fidelio on his cushion from under the seat.

"Ambrose," he cried, "you may take Fidelio."

But there came no answer. The seat behind was unoccupied. Ambrose was gone.

We could hardly believe our eyes when we alighted and found that it was really so. He had most certainly taken his seat there at Friar's Oak, and from there on we had come without a break as fast as the mares could travel. Whither, then, could he have vanished to?

"He's fallen off in a fit!" cried my uncle. "I'd drive back, but the Prince is expecting us. Where's the landlord? Here, Coppinger, send your best man back to Friar's Oak as fast as his horse can go, to find news of my valet, Ambrose. See that no pains be spared. Now, nephew, we shall lunch, and then go up to the Pavilion."

My uncle was much disturbed by the strange loss of his valet, the more so as it was his custom to go through a whole series of washings and changings after even the shortest journey. For my own part, mindful of my mother's advice, I carefully brushed the dust from my clothes and made myself as neat as possible. My heart was

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down in the soles of my little silver-buckled shoes now that I had the immediate prospect of meeting so great and terrible a person as the Prince of Wales. I had seen his flaring yellow barouche flying through Friar's Oak many a time, and had halloaed and waved my hat with the others as it passed, but never in my wildest dreams had it entered my head that I should ever be called upon to look him in the face and answer his questions. My mother had taught me to regard him with reverence, as one of those whom God had placed to rule over us; but my uncle smiled when I told him of her teaching.

"You are old enough to see things as they are, nephew," said he, "and your knowledge of them is the badge that you are in that inner circle where I mean to place you. There is no one who knows the Prince better than I do, and there is no one who trusts him less. A stranger contradiction of qualities was never gathered under one hat. He is a man who is always in a hurry, and yet has never anything to do. He fusses about things with which he has no concern, and he neglects every obvious duty. He is generous to those who have no claim upon him, but he has ruined his tradesmen by refusing to pay his just debts. He is affectionate to casual acquaintances, but he dislikes his father, loathes his mother, and is not on speaking terms with

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his wife. He claims to be the first gentleman of England, but the gentlemen of England have responded by blackballing his friends at their clubs, and by warning him off from Newmarket under suspicion of having tampered with a horse. He spends his days in uttering noble sentiments, and contradicting them by ignoble actions. He tells stories of his own doings which are so grotesque that they can only be explained by the madness which runs in his blood. And yet, with all this, he can be courteous, dignified, and kindly upon occasion, and I have seen an impulsive good-heartedness in the man which has made me overlook faults which come mainly from his being placed in a position which no one upon this earth was ever less fitted to fill. But this is between ourselves, nephew; and now you will come with me and you will form an opinion for yourself."

It was but a short walk, and yet it took us some time, for my uncle stalked along with great dignity, his lace-bordered handkerchief in one hand, and his cane with the clouded amber head dangling from the other. Every one that we met seemed to know him, and their hats flew from their heads as we passed. He took little notice of these greetings, save to give a nod to one, or to slightly raise his forefinger to another. It chanced, however, that as we turned into the Pavilion Grounds, we met a magnificent team of

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four coal-black horses, driven by a rough-looking, middle-aged fellow in an old weather-stained cape. There was nothing that I could see to distinguish him from any professional driver, save that he was chatting very freely with a dainty little woman who was perched on the box beside him.

"Halloa, Charlie! Good drive down?" he cried.

My uncle bowed and smiled to the lady.

"Broke it at Friar's Oak," said he. "I've my light mail phaeton and two new mares—half thorough-bred, half Cleveland bay."

"What d'you think of my team of blacks?" asked the other.

"Yes, Sir Charles, what d'you think of them? Ain't they damnation smart?" cried the little woman.

"Plenty of power. Good horses for the Sussex clay. Too thick about the fetlocks for me. I like to travel."

"Travel!" cried the woman, with extraordinary vehemence. "Why, what the——" and she broke into such language as I had never heard from a man's lips before. "We'd start with our swingle-bars touching, and we'd have your dinner ordered, cooked, laid, and eaten before you were there to claim it."

"By George, yes, Letty is right!" cried the man. "D'you start to-morrow?"



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"Yes, Jack."

"Well, I'll make you an offer. Look ye here, Charlie! I'll spring my cattle from the Castle Square at quarter before nine. You can follow as the clock strikes. I've double the horses and double the weight. If you so much as see me before we cross Westminster Bridge, I'll pay you a cool hundred. If not, it's my money—play or pay. Is it a match?"

"Very good," said my uncle, and, raising his hat, he led the way into the grounds. As I followed, I saw the woman take the reins, while the man looked after us, and squirted a jet of tobacco-juice from between his teeth in coachman fashion.

"That's Sir John Lade," said my uncle, "one of the richest men and best whips in England. There isn't a professional on the road that can handle either his tongue or his ribbons better; but his wife, Lady Letty, is his match with the one or the other."

"It was dreadful to hear her," said I.

"Oh, it's her eccentricity. We all have them; and she amuses the Prince. Now, nephew, keep close at my elbow, and have your eyes open and your mouth shut."

Two lines of magnificent red and gold footmen who guarded the door bowed deeply as my uncle and I passed between them, he with his

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head in the air and a manner as if he entered into his own, whilst I tried to look assured, though my heart was beating thin and fast. Within there was a high and large hall, ornamented with Eastern decorations, which harmonized with the domes and minarets of the exterior. A number of people were moving quietly about, forming into groups and whispering to each other. One of these, a short, burly, red-faced man, full of fuss and self-importance, came hurrying up to my uncle.

“I have de goot news, Sir Charles,” said he, sinking his voice as one who speaks of weighty measures. “*Es ist vollendet*—dat is, I have it at last thoroughly done.”

“Well, serve it hot,” said my uncle, coldly, “and see that the sauces are a little better than when last I dined at Carlton House.”

“Ah, mine Gott, you tink I talk of de cuisine. It is de affair of de Prince dat I speak of. Dat is one little *vol-au-vent* dat is worth one hundred thousand pound. Ten per cent. and double to be repaid when de Royal pappa die. *Alles ist fertig*. Goldshmidt of de Hague have took it up, and de Dutch public has subscribe de money.”

“God help the Dutch public!” muttered my uncle, as the fat little man bustled off with his news to some new-comer. “That’s the Prince’s famous cook, nephew. He has not his equal in

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England for a *filet sauté aux champignons*. He manages his master's money affairs."

"The cook!" I exclaimed, in bewilderment.

"You look surprised, nephew."

"I should have thought that some respectable banking firm——"

My uncle inclined his lips to my ear.

"No respectable house would touch them," he whispered. "Ah, Mellish, is the Prince within?"

"In the private saloon, Sir Charles," said the gentleman addressed.

"Any one with him?"

"Sheridan and Francis. He said he expected you."

"Then we shall go through."

I followed him through the strangest succession of rooms, full of curious barbaric splendour which impressed me as being very rich and wonderful, though perhaps I should think differently now. Gold and scarlet in arabesque designs gleamed upon the walls, with gilt dragons and monsters writhing along cornices and out of corners. Look where I would, on panel or ceiling, a score of mirrors flashed back the picture of the tall, proud, white-faced man, and the youth who walked so demurely at his elbow. Finally, a footman opened a door, and we found ourselves in the Prince's own private apartment.

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Two gentlemen were lounging in a very easy fashion upon luxurious fauteuils at the further end of the room, and a third stood between them, his thick, well-formed legs somewhat apart and his hands clasped behind him. The sun was shining in upon them through a side-window, and I can see the three faces now—one in the dusk, one in the light, and one cut across by the shadow. Of those at the sides, I recall the reddish nose and dark, flashing eyes of the one, and the hard, austere face of the other, with the high coat-collars and many-wreathed cravats. These I took in at a glance, but it was upon the man in the centre that my gaze was fixed, for this I knew must be the Prince of Wales.

George was then in his forty-first year, and with the help of his tailor and his hairdresser, he might have passed as somewhat less. The sight of him put me at my ease, for he was a merry-looking man, handsome too in a portly, full-blooded way, with laughing eyes and pouting, sensitive lips. His nose was turned upwards, which increased the good-humoured effect of his countenance at the expense of its dignity. His cheeks were pale and sodden, like those of a man who lived too well and took too little exercise. He was dressed in a single-breasted black coat buttoned up, a pair of leather pantaloons stretched tightly across his broad thighs, pol-

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ished Hessian boots, and a huge white neck-cloth.

“Halloa, Tregellis!” he cried, in the cheeriest fashion, as my uncle crossed the threshold, and then suddenly the smile faded from his face, and his eyes gleamed with resentment. “What the deuce is this?” he shouted, angrily.

A thrill of fear passed through me as I thought that it was my appearance which had produced this outburst. But his eyes were gazing past us, and glancing round we saw that a man in a brown coat and scratch wig had followed so closely at our heels, that the footmen had let him pass under the impression that he was of our party. His face was very red, and the folded blue paper which he carried in his hand shook and crackled in his excitement.

“Why, it’s Vuillamy, the furniture man,” cried the Prince. “What, am I to be dunned in my own private room? Where’s Mellish? Where’s Townshend? What the deuce is Tom Tring doing?”

“I wouldn’t have intruded, your Royal Highness, but I must have the money—or even a thousand on account would do.”

“Must have it, must you, Vuillamy? That’s a fine word to use. I pay my debts in my own time, and I’m not to be bullied. Turn him out, footman! Take him away!”

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“If I don't get it by Monday, I shall be in your papa's Bench,” wailed the little man, and as the footman led him out we could hear him, amidst shouts of laughter, still protesting that he would wind up in “papa's Bench.”

“That's the very place for a furniture man,” said the man with the red nose.

“It should be the longest bench in the world, Sherry,” answered the Prince, “for a good many of his subjects will want seats on it. Very glad to see you back, Tregellis, but you must really be more careful what you bring in upon your skirts. It was only yesterday that we had an infernal Dutchman here howling about some arrears of interest and the deuce knows what. ‘My good fellow,’ said I, ‘as long as the Commons starve me, I have to starve you,’ and so the matter ended.”

“I think, sir, that the Commons would respond now if the matter were fairly put before them by Charlie Fox or myself,” said Sheridan.

The Prince burst out against the Commons with an energy of hatred that one would scarce expect from that chubby, good-humoured face.

“Why, curse them!” he cried. “After all their preaching and throwing my father's model life, as they called it, in my teeth, they had to pay *his* debts to the tune of nearly a million, whilst I can't get a hundred thousand out of

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them. And look at all they've done for my brothers! York is Commander-in-Chief. Clarence is Admiral. What am I? Colonel of a damned dragoon regiment under the orders of my own younger brother. It's my mother that's at the bottom of it all. She always tried to hold me back. But what's this you've brought, Tregellis, eh?"

My uncle put his hand on my sleeve and led me forward.

"This is my sister's son, sir; Rodney Stone by name," said he. "He is coming with me to London, and I thought it right to begin by presenting him to your Royal Highness."

"Quite right! Quite right!" said the Prince, with a good-natured smile, patting me in a friendly way upon the shoulder. "Is your mother living?"

"Yes, sir," said I.

"If you are a good son to her you will never go wrong. And, mark my words, Mr. Rodney Stone, you should honour the King, love your country, and uphold the glorious British Constitution."

When I thought of the energy with which he had just been cursing the House of Commons, I could scarce keep from smiling, and I saw Sheridan put his hand up to his lips.

"You have only to do this, to show a regard

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for your word, and to keep out of debt in order to insure a happy and respected life. What is your father, Mr. Stone? Royal Navy! Well, it is a glorious service. I have had a touch of it myself. Did I ever tell you how we laid aboard the French sloop of war *Minerve*—hey, Tregellis?"

"No, sir," said my uncle. Sheridan and Francis exchanged glances behind the Prince's back.

"She was flying her tricolour out there within sight of my pavilion windows. Never saw such monstrous impudence in my life! It would take a man of less mettle than me to stand it. Out I went in my little cock-boat—you know my sixty-ton yawl, Charlie?—with two four-pounders on each side, and a six-pounder in the bows."

"Well, sir! Well, sir! And what then, sir?" cried Francis, who appeared to be an irascible, rough-tongued man.

"You will permit me to tell the story in my own way, Sir Philip," said the Prince, with dignity. "I was about to say that our metal was so light that I give you my word, gentlemen, that I carried my port broadside in one coat pocket, and my starboard in the other. Up we came to the big Frenchman, took her fire, and scraped the paint off her before we let drive. But it was no use. By George, gentlemen, our balls just stuck in her timbers like stones in a



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mud wall. She had her nettings up, but we scrambled aboard, and at it we went hammer and anvil. It was a sharp twenty minutes, but we beat her people down below, made the hatches fast on them, and towed her into Seaham. Surely you were with us, Sherry?"

"I was in London at the time," said Sheridan, gravely.

"You can vouch for it, Francis!"

"I can vouch to having heard your Highness tell the story."

"It was a rough little bit of cutlass and pistol work. But, for my own part, I like the rapier. It's a gentleman's weapon. You heard of my bout with the Chevalier d'Eon? I had him at my sword-point for forty minutes at Angelo's. He was one of the best blades in Europe, but I was a little too supple in the wrist for him. 'I thank God there was a button on your Highness's foil,' said he, when we had finished our breather. By the way, you're a bit of a duellist yourself, Tregellis. How often have you been out?"

"I used to go when I needed exercise," said my uncle, carelessly. "But I have taken to tennis now instead. A painful incident happened the last time that I was out, and it sickened me of it."

"You killed your man——?"

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“No, no, sir, it was worse than that. I had a coat that Weston has never equalled. To say that it fitted me is not to express it. It *was* me—like the hide on a horse. I’ve had sixty from him since, but he could never approach it. The sit of the collar brought tears into my eyes, sir, when first I saw it; and as to the waist——”

“But the duel, Tregellis!” cried the Prince.

“Well, sir, I wore it at the duel, like the thoughtless fool that I was. It was Major Hunter, of the Guards, with whom I had had a little *tracasserie*, because I hinted that he should not come into Brookes’s smelling of the stables. I fired first, and missed. He fired, and I shrieked in despair. ‘He’s hit! A surgeon! A surgeon!’ they cried. ‘A tailor! A tailor!’ said I, for there was a double hole through the tails of my masterpiece. No, it was past all repair. You may laugh, sir, but I’ll never see the like of it again.”

I had seated myself on a settee in the corner, upon the Prince’s invitation, and very glad I was to remain quiet and unnoticed, listening to the talk of these men. It was all in the same extravagant vein, garnished with many senseless oaths; but I observed this difference, that, whereas my uncle and Sheridan had something of humour in their exaggeration, Francis tended always to ill-nature, and the Prince to self-glori-

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fication. Finally, the conversation turned to music—I am not sure that my uncle did not artfully bring it there, and the Prince, hearing from him of my tastes, would have it that I should then and there sit down at the wonderful little piano, all inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which stood in the corner, and play him the accompaniment to his song. It was called, as I remember, “The Briton Conquers but to Save,” and he rolled it out in a very fair bass voice, the others joining in the chorus, and clapping vigorously when he finished.

“Bravo, Mr. Stone!” said he. “You have an excellent touch; and I know what I am talking about when I speak of music. Cramer, of the Opera, said only the other day that he had rather hand his bâton to me than to any amateur in England. Halloo, it’s Charlie Fox, by all that’s wonderful!”

He had run forward with much warmth, and was shaking the hand of a singular-looking person who had just entered the room. The newcomer was a stout, square-built man, plainly and almost carelessly dressed, with an uncouth manner and a rolling gait. His age might have been something over fifty, and his swarthy, harshly-featured face was already deeply lined either by his years or by his excesses. I have never seen a countenance in which the angel and

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the devil were more obviously wedded. Above, was the high, broad forehead of the philosopher, with keen, humorous eyes looking out from under thick, strong brows. Below, was the heavy jowl of the sensualist curving in a broad crease over his cravat. That brow was the brow of the public Charles Fox, the thinker, the philanthropist, the man who rallied and led the Liberal party during the twenty most hazardous years of its existence. That jaw was the jaw of the private Charles Fox, the gambler, the libertine, the drunkard. Yet to his sins he never added the crowning one of hypocrisy. His vices were as open as his virtues. In some quaint freak of Nature, two spirits seemed to have been joined in one body, and the same frame to contain the best and the worst man of his age.

"I've run down from Chertsey, sir, just to shake you by the hand, and to make sure that the Tories have not carried you off."

"Hang it, Charlie, you know that I sink or swim with my friends! A Whig I started, and a Whig I shall remain."

I thought that I could read upon Fox's dark face that he was by no means so confident about the Prince's principles.

"Pitt has been at you, sir, I understand?"

"Yes, confound him! I hate the sight of

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that sharp-pointed snout of his, which he wants to be ever poking into my affairs. He and Addington have been boggling about the debts again. Why, look ye, Charlie, if Pitt held me in contempt he could not behave different."

I gathered from the smile which flitted over Sheridan's expressive face that this was exactly what Pitt did do. But straightway they all plunged into politics, varied by the drinking of sweet maraschino, which a footman brought round upon a salver. The King, the Queen, the Lords, and the Commons were each in succession cursed by the Prince, in spite of the excellent advice which he had given me about the British Constitution.

"Why, they allow me so little that I can't look after my own people. There are a dozen annuities to old servants and the like, and it's all I can do to scrape the money together to pay them. However, my"—he pulled himself up and coughed in a consequential way—"my financial agent has arranged for a loan, repayable upon the King's death. This liqueur isn't good for either of us, Charlie. We're both getting monstrous stout."

"I can't get any exercise for the gout," said Fox.

"I am blooded fifty ounces a month, but the more I take the more I make. You wouldn't

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think, to look at us, Tregellis, that we could do what we have done. We've had some days and nights together, Charlie!"

Fox smiled and shook his head.

"You remember how we posted to Newmarket before the races. We took a public coach, Tregellis, clapped the postillions into the rumble, and jumped on to their places. Charlie rode the leader and I the wheeler. One fellow wouldn't let us through his turnpike, and Charlie hopped off, and had his coat off in a minute. The fellow thought he had to do with a fighting man, and soon cleared the way for us."

"By the way, sir, speaking of fighting men, I give a supper to the Fancy at the Waggon and Horses on Friday next," said my uncle. "If you should chance to be in town, they would think it a great honour if you should condescend to look in upon us."

"I've not seen a fight since I saw Tom Tyne, the tailor, kill Earl fourteen years ago. I swore off then, and you know me as a man of my word, Tregellis. Of course, I've been at the ringside *incog.* many a time, but never as the Prince of Wales."

"We should be vastly honoured if you would come *incog.* to our supper, sir."

"Well, well, Sherry, make a note of it. We'll be at Carlton House on Friday. The Prince

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can't come, you know, Tregellis, but you might reserve a chair for the Earl of Chester."

"Sir, we shall be proud to see the Earl of Chester there," said my uncle.

"By the way, Tregellis," said Fox, "there's some rumour about your having a sporting bet with Sir Lothian Hume. What's the truth of it?"

"Only a small matter of a couple of thous to a thou, he giving the odds. He has a fancy to this new Gloucester man, Crab Wilson, and I'm to find a man to beat him. Anything under twenty or over thirty-five, at or about thirteen stone."

"You take Charlie Fox's advice, then," cried the Prince. "When it comes to handicapping a horse, playing a hand, matching a cock, or picking a man, he has the best judgment in England. Now, Charlie, whom have we upon the list who can beat Crab Wilson, of Gloucester?"

I was amazed at the interest and knowledge which all these great people showed about the ring, for they not only had the deeds of the principal men of the time—Belcher, Mendoza, Jackson, or Dutch Sam—at their fingers' ends, but there was no fighting man so obscure that they did not know the details of his deeds and prospects. The old ones and then the young were discussed—their weight, their gameness, their hitting power, and their constitution.

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Who, as he saw Sheridan and Fox eagerly arguing as to whether Caleb Baldwin, the Westminster costermonger, could hold his own with Isaac Bittoon, the Jew, would have guessed that the one was the deepest political philosopher in Europe, and that the other would be remembered as the author of the wittiest comedy and of the finest speech of his generation ?

The name of Champion Harrison came very early into the discussion, and Fox, who had a high idea of Crab Wilson's powers, was of opinion that my uncle's only chance lay in the veteran taking the field again. "He may be slow on his pins, but he fights with his head, and he hits like the kick of a horse. When he finished Black Baruk the man flew across the outer ring as well as the inner, and fell among the spectators. If he isn't absolutely stale, Tregellis, he is your best chance."

My uncle shrugged his shoulders.

"If poor Avon were here we might do something with him, for he was Harrison's first patron, and the man was devoted to him. But his wife is too strong for me. And now, sir, I must leave you, for I have had the misfortune to-day to lose the best valet in England, and I must make inquiry for him. I thank your Royal Highness for your kindness in receiving my nephew in so gracious a fashion."



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“Till Friday, then,” said the Prince, holding out his hand. “I have to go up to town in any case, for there is a poor devil of an East India Company’s officer who has written to me in his distress. If I can raise a few hundreds, I shall see him and set things right for him. Now, Mr. Stone, you have your life before you, and I hope it will be one which your uncle may be proud of. You will honour the King, and show respect for the Constitution, Mr. Stone. And, hark ye, you will avoid debt, and bear in mind that your honour is a sacred thing.”

So I carried away a last impression of his sensual, good-humoured face, his high cravat, and his broad leather thighs. Again we passed the strange rooms, the gilded monsters, and the gorgeous footmen, and it was with relief that I found myself out in the open air once more, with the broad blue sea in front of us, and the fresh evening breeze upon our faces.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BRIGHTON ROAD

My uncle and I were up betimes next morning, but he was much out of temper, for no news had been heard of his valet Ambrose. He had indeed become like one of those ants of which I have read, who are so accustomed to be fed by smaller ants that when they are left to themselves they die of hunger. It was only by the aid of a man whom the landlord procured, and of Fox's valet, who had been sent expressly across, that his toilet was at last performed.

"I must win this race, nephew," said he, when he had finished breakfast; "I can't afford to be beat. Look out of the window and see if the Lades are there."

"I see a red four-in-hand in the square, and there is a crowd round it. Yes, I see the lady upon the box seat."

"Is our tandem out?"

"It is at the door."

"Come, then, and you shall have such a drive as you never had before."

He stood at the door pulling on his long brown

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driving-gauntlets and giving his orders to the ostlers.

"Every ounce will tell," said he. "We'll leave that dinner-basket behind. And you can keep my dog for me, Coppinger. You know him and understand him. Let him have his warm milk and curacoa the same as usual. Whoa, my darlings, you'll have your fill of it before you reach Westminster Bridge."

"Shall I put in the toilet-case?" asked the landlord.

I saw the struggle upon my uncle's face, but he was true to his principles.

"Put it under the seat—the front seat," said he. "Nephew, you must keep your weight as far forward as possible. Can you do anything on a yard of tin? Well, if you can't, we'll leave the trumpet. Buckle that girth up, Thomas. Have you greased the hubs as I told you? Well, jump up, nephew, and we'll see them off."

Quite a crowd had gathered in the Old Square: men and women, dark-coated tradesmen, bucks from the Prince's Court, and officers from Hove, all in a buzz of excitement; for Sir John Lade and my uncle were two of the most famous whips of the time, and a match between them was a thing to talk of for many a long day.

"The Prince will be sorry to have missed the start," said my uncle. "He doesn't show before

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midday. Ah, Jack, good morning! Your servant, madam! It's a fine day for a little bit of waggoning."

As our tandem came alongside of the four-in-hand, with the two bonny bay mares gleaming like shot-silk in the sunshine, a murmur of admiration rose from the crowd. My uncle, in his fawn-coloured driving-coat, with all his harness of the same tint, looked the ideal of a Corinthian whip; while Sir John Lade, with his many-caped coat, his white hat, and his rough, weather-beaten face, might have taken his seat with a line of professionals upon any ale-house bench without any one being able to pick him out as one of the wealthiest landowners in England. It was an age of eccentricity, but he had carried his peculiarities to a length which surprised even the out-and-outers by marrying the sweetheart of a famous highwayman when the gallows had come between her and her lover. She was perched by his side, looking very smart in a flowered bonnet and grey travelling-dress, while in front of them the four splendid coal-black horses, with a flickering touch of gold upon their powerful, well-curved quarters, were pawing the dust in their eagerness to be off.

"It's a hundred that you don't see us before Westminster with a quarter of an hour's start," said Sir John.

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"I'll take you another hundred that we pass you," answered my uncle.

"Very good. Time's up. Good-bye!" He gave a *tchk* of the tongue, shook his reins, saluted with his whip, in true coachman's style, and away he went, taking the curve out of the square in a workmanlike fashion that fetched a cheer from the crowd. We heard the dwindling roar of the wheels upon the cobble-stones until they died away in the distance.

It seemed one of the longest quarters of an hour that I had ever known before the first stroke of nine boomed from the parish clock. For my part, I was fidgeting in my seat in my impatience, but my uncle's calm, pale face and large blue eyes were as tranquil and demure as those of the most unconcerned spectator. He was keenly on the alert, however, and it seemed to me that the stroke of the clock and the thong of his whip fell together—not in a blow, but in a sharp snap over the leader, which sent us flying with a jingle and a rattle upon our fifty miles' journey. I heard a roar from behind us, saw the gliding lines of windows with staring faces and waving handkerchiefs, and then we were off the stones and on to the good white road which curved away in front of us, with the sweep of the green downs upon either side.

I had been provided with shillings that the

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turnpike-gate might not stop us, but my uncle reined in the mares and took them at a very easy trot up all the heavy stretch which ends in Clayton Hill. He let them go then, and we flashed through Friar's Oak and across St. John's Common without more than catching a glimpse of the yellow cottage which contained all that I loved best. Never have I travelled at such a pace, and never have I felt such a sense of exhilaration from the rush of keen upland air upon our faces, and from the sight of those two glorious creatures stretched to their utmost, with the roar of their hoofs and the rattle of our wheels as the light mail phaeton bounded and swayed behind them.

"It's a long four miles uphill from here to Hand Cross," said my uncle, as we flew through Cuckfield. "I must ease them a bit, for I cannot afford to break the hearts of my cattle. They have the right blood in them, and they would gallop until they dropped if I were brute enough to let them. Stand up on the seat, nephew, and see if you can get a glimpse of them."

I stood up, steadying myself upon my uncle's shoulder, but though I could see for a mile, or perhaps a quarter more, there was not a sign of the four-in-hand.

"If he has sprung his cattle up all these hills they'll be spent ere they see Croydon," said he.

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"They have four to two," said I.

"*J'en suis bien sûr.* Sir John's black strain makes a good, honest creature, but not fliers like these. There lies Cuckfield Place, where the towers are, yonder. Get your weight right forward on the splashboard now that we are going uphill, nephew. Look at the action of that leader: did ever you see anything more easy and more beautiful?"

We were taking the hill at a quiet trot, but even so, we made the carrier, walking in the shadow of his huge, broad-wheeled, canvas-covered waggon, stare at us in amazement. Close to Hand Cross we passed the Royal Brighton stage, which had left at half-past seven, dragging heavily up the slope, and its passengers, toiling along through the dust behind, gave us a cheer as we whirled by. At Hand Cross we caught a glimpse of the old landlord, hurrying out with his gin and his gingerbread; but the dip of the ground was downwards now, and away we flew as fast as eight gallant hoofs could take us.

"Do you drive, nephew?"

"Very little, sir."

"There is no driving on the Brighton Road."

"How is that, sir?"

"Too good a road, nephew. I have only to give them their heads, and they will race me into Westminster. It wasn't always so. When

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I was a very young man one might learn to handle his twenty yards of tape here as well as elsewhere. There's not much really good waggoning now south of Leicestershire. Show me a man who can hit 'em and hold 'em on a Yorkshire daleside, and that's the man who comes from the right school."

We had raced over Crawley Down and into the broad main street of Crawley village, flying between two country waggons in a way which showed me that even now a driver might do something on the road. With every turn I peered ahead, looking for our opponents, but my uncle seemed to concern himself very little about them, and occupied himself in giving me advice, mixed up with so many phrases of the craft, that it was all that I could do to follow him.

"Keep a finger for each, or you will have your reins clubbed," said he. "As to the whip, the less fanning the better if you have willing cattle; but when you want to put a little life into a coach, see that you get your thong on to the one that needs it, and don't let it fly round after you've hit. I've seen a driver warm up the off-side passenger on the roof behind him every time he tried to cut his off-side wheeler. I believe that is their dust over yonder."

A long stretch of road lay before us, barred with the shadows of wayside trees. Through



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the green fields a lazy blue river was drawing itself slowly along, passing under a bridge in front of us. Beyond was a young fir plantation, and over its olive line there rose a white whirl which drifted swiftly, like a cloud-scud on a breezy day.

“Yes, yes, it’s they!” cried my uncle. “No one else would travel as fast. Come, nephew, we’re half-way when we cross the mole at Kimberham Bridge, and we’ve done it in two hours and fourteen minutes. The Prince drove to Carlton House with a three tandem in four hours and a half. The first half is the worst half, and we might cut his time if all goes well. We should make up between this and Reigate.”

And we flew. The bay mares seemed to know what that white puff in front of us signified, and they stretched themselves like greyhounds. We passed a phaeton and pair London-bound, and we left it behind as if it had been standing still. Trees, gates, cottages went dancing by. We heard the folks shouting from the fields, under the impression that we were a runaway. Faster and faster yet they raced, the hoofs rattling like castanets, the yellow manes flying, the wheels buzzing, and every joint and rivet creaking and groaning, while the vehicle swung and swayed until I found myself clutching to the side-rail. My uncle eased them and

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glanced at his watch as we saw the grey tiles and dingy red houses of Reigate in the hollow beneath us.

"We did the last six well under twenty minutes," said he. "We've time in hand now, and a little water at the Red Lion will do them no harm. Red four-in-hand passed, ostler?"

"Just gone, sir."

"Going hard?"

"Galloping full split, sir! Took the wheel off a butcher's cart at the corner of the High Street, and was out o' sight before the butcher's boy could see what had hurt him."

*Z-z-z-z-ack!* went the long thong, and away we flew once more. It was market day at Redhill, and the road was crowded with carts of produce, droves of bullocks, and farmers' gigs. It was a sight to see how my uncle threaded his way amongst them all. Through the market-place we dashed amidst the shouting of men, the screaming of women, and the scuttling of poultry, and then we were out in the country again, with the long, steep incline of the Redhill Road before us. My uncle waved his whip in the air with a shrill view-halloa.

There was the dust-cloud rolling up the hill in front of us, and through it we had a shadowy peep of the backs of our opponents, with a flash of brass-work and a gleam of scarlet.

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“There’s half the game won, nephew. Now we must pass them. Hark forrard, my beauties! By George, if Kitty isn’t foundered!”

The leader had suddenly gone dead lame. In an instant we were both out of the phaeton and on our knees beside her. It was but a stone, wedged between frog and shoe in the off fore-foot, but it was a minute or two before we could wrench it out. When we had regained our places the Lades were round the curve of the hill and out of sight.

“Bad luck!” growled my uncle. “But they can’t get away from us!” For the first time he touched the mares up, for he had but cracked the whip over their heads before. “If we catch them in the next few miles we can spare them for the rest of the way.”

They were beginning to show signs of exhaustion. Their breath came quick and hoarse, and their beautiful coats were matted with moisture. At the top of the hill, however, they settled down into their swing once more.

“Where on earth have they got to?” cried my uncle. “Can you make them out on the road, nephew?”

We could see a long white ribbon of it, all dotted with carts and waggons coming from Croydon to Redhill, but there was no sign of the big red four-in-hand.

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"There they are! Stole away! Stole away!" he cried, wheeling the mares round into a side road which struck to the right out of that which we had travelled. "There they are, nephew! On the brow of the hill!"

Sure enough, on the rise of a curve upon our right the four-in-hand had appeared, the horses stretched to the utmost. Our mares laid themselves out gallantly, and the distance between us began slowly to decrease. I found that I could see the black band upon Sir John's white hat, then that I could count the folds of his cape; finally, that I could see the pretty features of his wife as she looked back at us.

"We're on the side road to Godstone and Warlingham," said my uncle. "I suppose he thought that he could make better time by getting out of the way of the market carts. But we've got the deuce of a hill to come down. You'll see some fun, nephew, or I am mistaken."

As he spoke I suddenly saw the wheels of the four-in-hand disappear, then the body of it, and then the two figures upon the box, as suddenly and abruptly as if it had bumped down the first three steps of some gigantic stairs. An instant later we had reached the same spot, and there was the road beneath us, steep and narrow, winding in long curves into the valley. The four-in-

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hand was swishing down it as hard as the horses could gallop.

“Thought so!” cried my uncle. “If he doesn’t brake, why should I? Now, my darlings, one good spurt, and we’ll show them the colour of our tailboard.”

We shot over the brow and flew madly down the hill with the great red coach roaring and thundering before us. Already we were in her dust, so that we could see nothing but the dim scarlet blur in the heart of it, rocking and rolling, with its outline hardening at every stride. We could hear the crack of the whip in front of us, and the shrill voice of Lady Lade as she screamed to the horses. My uncle was very quiet, but when I glanced up at him I saw that his lips were set and his eyes shining, with just a little flush upon each pale cheek. There was no need to urge on the mares, for they were already flying at a pace which could neither be stopped nor controlled. Our leader’s head came abreast of the off hind wheel, then of the off front one—then for a hundred yards we did not gain an inch, and then with a spurt the bay leader was neck to neck with the black wheeler, and our fore wheel within an inch of their hind one.

“Dusty work!” said my uncle, quietly.

“Fan ’em, Jack! Fan ’em!” shrieked the lady.

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He sprang up and lashed at his horses.

"Look out, Tregellis!" he shouted. "There's a damnation spill coming for somebody."

We had got fairly abreast of them now, the rumps of the horses exactly a-line and the fore wheels whizzing together. There was not six inches to spare in the breadth of the road, and every instant I expected to feel the jar of a locking wheel. But now, as we came out from the dust, we could see what was ahead, and my uncle whistled between his teeth at the sight.

Two hundred yards or so in front of us there was a bridge, with wooden posts and rails upon either side. The road narrowed down at the point, so that it was obvious that the two carriages abreast could not possibly get over. One must give way to the other. Already our wheels were abreast of their wheelers.

"I lead!" shouted my uncle. "You must pull them, Lade!"

"Not I!" he roared.

"No, by George!" shrieked her ladyship. "Fan 'em, Jack; keep on fanning 'em!"

It seemed to me that we were all going to eternity together. But my uncle did the only thing that could have saved us. By a desperate effort we might just clear the coach before reaching the mouth of the bridge. He sprang up, and lashed right and left at the mares, who,

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maddened by the unaccustomed pain, hurled themselves on in a frenzy. Down we thundered together, all shouting, I believe, at the top of our voices in the madness of the moment; but still we were drawing steadily away, and we were almost clear of the leaders when we flew on to the bridge. I glanced back at the coach, and I saw Lady Lade, with her savage little white teeth clenched together, throw herself forward and tug with both hands at the off-side reins.

“Jam them, Jack!” she cried. “Jam the — before they can pass.”

Had she done it an instant sooner we should have crashed against the wood-work, carried it away, and been hurled into the deep gully below. As it was, it was not the powerful haunch of the black leader which caught our wheel, but the forequarter, which had not weight enough to turn us from our course. I saw a red wet seam gape suddenly through the black hair, and next instant we were flying alone down the road, whilst the four-in-hand had halted, and Sir John and his lady were down in the road together tending to the wounded horse.

“Easy now, my beauties!” cried my uncle, settling down into his seat again, and looking back over his shoulder. “I could not have believed that Sir John Lade would have been

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guilty of such a trick as pulling that leader across. I do not permit a *mauvaise plaisanterie* of that sort. He shall hear from me to-night."

"It was the lady," said I.

My uncle's brow cleared, and he began to laugh.

"It was little Letty, was it?" said he. "I might have known it. There's a touch of the late lamented Sixteen-string Jack about the trick. Well, it is only messages of another kind that I send to a lady, so we'll just drive on our way, nephew, and thank our stars that we bring whole bones over the Thames."

We stopped at the Greyhound, at Croydon, where the two good little mares were sponged and petted and fed, after which, at an easier pace, we made our way through Norbury and Streatham. At last the fields grew fewer and the walls longer. The outlying villas closed up thicker and thicker, until their shoulders met, and we were driving between a double line of houses with garish shops at the corners, and such a stream of traffic as I had never seen, roaring down the centre. Then suddenly we were on a broad bridge with a dark coffee-brown river flowing sulkily beneath it, and bluff-bowed barges drifting down upon its bosom. To right and left stretched a broken, irregular line of



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many-coloured houses winding along either bank as far as I could see.

“That’s the House of Parliament, nephew,” said my uncle, pointing with his whip, “and the black towers are Westminster Abbey. How do, your Grace? How do? That’s the Duke of Norfolk—the stout man in blue upon the swish-tailed mare. Now we are in Whitehall. There’s the Treasury on the left, and the Horse Guards, and the Admiralty, where the stone dolphins are carved above the gate.”

I had the idea, which a country-bred lad brings up with him, that London was merely a wilderness of houses, but I was astonished now to see the green slopes and the lovely spring trees showing between.

“Yes, those are the Privy Gardens,” said my uncle, “and there is the window out of which Charles took his last step on to the scaffold. You wouldn’t think the mares had come fifty miles, would you? See how *les petites cheries* step out for the credit of their master. Look at the barouche, with the sharp-featured man peeping out of the window. That’s Pitt, going down to the House. We are coming into Pall Mall now, and this great building on the left is Carlton House, the Prince’s Palace. There’s St. James’s, the big, dingy place with the clock, and the two red-coated sentries before it. And

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here's the famous street of the same name, nephew, which is the very centre of the world, and here's Jermyn Street opening out of it, and finally, here's my own little box, and we are well under the five hours from Brighton Old Square."

## CHAPTER IX

### WATIER'S

MY uncle's house in Jermyn Street was quite a small one—five rooms and an attic. "A man-cook and a cottage," he said, "are all that a wise man requires." On the other hand, it was furnished with the neatness and taste which belonged to his character, so that his most luxurious friends found something in the tiny rooms which made them discontented with their own sumptuous mansions. Even the attic, which had been converted into my bedroom, was the most perfect little bijou attic that could possibly be imagined. Beautiful and valuable knick-knacks filled every corner of every apartment, and the house had become a perfect miniature museum which would have delighted a virtuoso. My uncle explained the presence of all these pretty things with a shrug of his shoulders and a wave of his hands. "They are *des petites cadeaux*," said he, "but it would be an indiscretion for me to say more."

We found a note from Ambrose waiting for us which increased rather than explained the mystery of his disappearance.

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"My dear Sir Charles Tregellis," it ran, "it will ever be a subject of regret to me that the force of circumstances should have compelled me to leave your service in so abrupt a fashion, but something occurred during our journey from Friar's Oak to Brighton which left me without any possible alternative. I trust, however, that my absence may prove to be but a temporary one. The isinglass recipe for the shirt-fronts is in the strong-box at Drummond's Bank.—Yours obediently, AMBROSE."

"Well, I suppose I must fill his place as best I can," said my uncle, moodily. "But how on earth could something have occurred to make him leave me at a time when we were going full-trot down hill in my curricule? I shall never find his match again either for chocolate or cravats. *Je suis desolé!* But now, nephew, we must send to Weston and have you fitted up. It is not for a gentleman to go to a shop, but for the shop to come to the gentleman. Until you have your clothes you must remain *en retraite.*"

The measuring was a most solemn and serious function, though it was nothing to the trying-on two days later, when my uncle stood by in an agony of apprehension as each garment was adjusted, he and Weston arguing over every seam and lapel and skirt until I was dizzy with turning round in front of them. Then, just as I had

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hoped that all was settled, in came young Mr. Brummell, who promised to be an even greater exquisite than my uncle, and the whole matter had to be thrashed out between them. He was a good-sized man, this Brummell, with a long, fair face, light brown hair, and slight sandy side-whiskers. His manner was languid, his voice drawling, and while he eclipsed my uncle in the extravagance of his speech, he had not the air of manliness and decision which underlay all my kinsman's affectations.

"Why, George," cried my uncle, "I thought you were with your regiment."

"I've sent in my papers," drawled the other.

"I thought it would come to that."

"Yes. The Tenth was ordered to Manchester, and they could hardly expect me to go to a place like that. Besides, I found the major monstrous rude."

"How was that?"

"He expected me to know about his absurd drill, Tregellis, and I had other things to think of, as you may suppose. I had no difficulty in taking my right place on parade, for there was a trooper with a red nose on a flea-bitten grey, and I had observed that my post was always immediately in front of him. This saved a great deal of trouble. The other day, however, when I came on parade, I galloped up one line and

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down the other, but the deuce a glimpse could I get of that long nose of his! Then, just as I was at my wits' end, I caught sight of him, alone at one side; so I formed up in front. It seems he had been put there to keep the ground, and the major so far forgot himself as to say that I knew nothing of my duties."

My uncle laughed, and Brummell looked me up and down with his large, intolerant eyes.

"These will do very passably," said he. "Buff and blue are always very gentlemanlike. But a sprigged waistcoat would have been better."

"I think not," said my uncle, warmly.

"My dear Tregellis, you are infallible upon a cravat, but you must allow me the right of my own judgment upon vests. I like it vastly as it stands, but a touch of red sprig would give it the finish that it needs."

They argued with many examples and analogies for a good ten minutes, revolving round me at the same time with their heads on one side and their glasses to their eyes. It was a relief to me when they at last agreed upon a compromise.

"You must not let anything I have said shake your faith in Sir Charles's judgment, Mr. Stone," said Brummell, very earnestly.

I assured him that I should not.

"If you were my nephew, I should expect you to follow my taste. But you will cut a very

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good figure as it is. I had a young cousin who came up to town last year with a recommendation to my care. But he would take no advice. At the end of the second week I met him coming down St. James's Street in a snuff-coloured coat cut by a country tailor. He bowed to me. Of course I knew what was due to myself. I looked all round him, and there was an end to his career in town. You are from the country, Mr. Stone?"

"From Sussex, sir."

"Sussex! Why, that is where I send my washing to. There is an excellent clear-starcher living near Hayward's Heath. I send my shirts two at a time, for if you send more it excites the woman and diverts her attention. I cannot abide anything but country washing. But I should be vastly sorry to have to live there. What can a man find to do?"

"You don't hunt, George?"

"When I do, it's a woman. But surely you don't go to hounds, Charles?"

"I was out with the Belvoir last winter."

"The Belvoir! Did you hear how I smoked Rutland? The story has been in the clubs this month past. I bet him that my bag would weigh more than his. He got three and a half brace, but I shot his liver-coloured pointer, so he had to pay. But as to hunting, what amusement can there be in flying about among a

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crowd of greasy, galloping farmers? Every man to his own taste, but Brookes's window by day and a snug corner of the macao table at Watier's by night, give me all I want for mind and body. You heard how I plucked Montague the brewer!"

"I have been out of town."

"I had eight thousand from him at a sitting. 'I shall drink your beer in future, Mr. Brewer,' said I. 'Every blackguard in London does,' said he. It was monstrous impolite of him, but some people cannot lose with grace. Well, I am going down to Clarges Street to pay Jew King a little of my interest. Are you bound that way? Well, good-bye, then! I'll see you and your young friend at the club or in the Mall, no doubt," and he sauntered off upon his way.

"That young man is destined to take my place," said my uncle, gravely, when Brummell had departed. "He is quite young and of no descent, but he has made his way by his cool effrontery, his natural taste, and his extravagance of speech. There is no man who can be impolite in so polished a fashion. He has a half-smile, and a way of raising his eyebrows, for which he will be shot one of these mornings. Already his opinion is quoted in the clubs as a rival to my own. Well, every man has his day, and when I am convinced that mine is passed, St. James's Street shall know me no more, for it is not in



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my nature to be second to any man. But now, nephew, in that buff and blue suit you may pass anywhere ; so, if you please, we will step into my *vis-à-vis*, and I will show you something of the town."

How can I describe all that we saw and all that we did upon that lovely spring day? To me it was as if I had been wafted to a fairy world, and my uncle might have been some benevolent enchanter in a high-collared, long-tailed coat, who was guiding me about in it. He showed me the West-end streets, with the bright carriages and the gaily dressed ladies and sombre-clad men, all crossing and hurrying and recrossing like an ants' nest when you turn it over with a stick. Never had I formed a conception of such endless banks of houses, and such a ceaseless stream of life flowing between. Then we passed down the Strand, where the crowd was thicker than ever, and even penetrated beyond Temple Bar and into the City, though my uncle begged me not to mention it, for he would not wish it to be generally known. There I saw the Exchange and the Bank and Lloyd's Coffee House, with the brown-coated, sharp-faced merchants and the hurrying clerks, the huge horses and the busy draymen. It was a very different world this from that which we had left in the West—a world of energy and of strength, where

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there was no place for the listless and the idle. Young as I was, I knew that it was here, in the forest of merchant shipping, in the bales which swung up to the warehouse windows, in the loaded waggons which roared over the cobblestones, that the power of Britain lay. Here, in the City of London, was the taproot from which Empire and wealth and so many other fine leaves had sprouted. Fashion and speech and manners may change, but the spirit of enterprise within that square mile or two of land must not change, for when it withers all that has grown from it must wither also.

We lunched at Stephen's, the fashionable inn in Bond Street, where I saw a line of tilburys and saddle-horses, which stretched from the door to the further end of the street. And thence we went to the Mall in St. James's Park, and thence to Brookes's, the great Whig club, and thence again to Watier's, where the men of fashion used to gamble. Everywhere I met the same sort of men, with their stiff figures and small waists, all showing the utmost deference to my uncle, and for his sake an easy tolerance of me. The talk was always such as I had already heard at the Pavilion: talk of politics, talk of the King's health, talk of the Prince's extravagance, of the expected renewal of war, of horse-racing, and of the ring. I saw, too, that eccentricity was, as

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my uncle had told me, the fashion; and if the folk upon the Continent look upon us even to this day as being a nation of lunatics, it is no doubt a tradition handed down from the time when the only travellers whom they were likely to see were drawn from the class which I was now meeting.

It was an age of heroism and of folly. On the one hand soldiers, sailors, and statesmen of the quality of Pitt, Nelson, and afterwards Wellington, had been forced to the front by the imminent menace of Buonaparte. We were great in arms, and were soon also to be great in literature, for Scott and Byron were in their day the strongest forces in Europe. On the other hand, a touch of madness, real or assumed, was a passport through doors which were closed to wisdom and to virtue. The man who could enter a drawing-room walking upon his hands, the man who had filed his teeth that he might whistle like a coachman, the man who always spoke his thoughts aloud and so kept his guests in a quiver of apprehension, these were the people who found it easy to come to the front in London society. Nor could the heroism and the folly be kept apart, for there were few who could quite escape the contagion of the times. In an age when the Premier was a heavy drinker, the Leader of the Opposition a libertine, and the Prince of Wales

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a combination of the two, it was hard to know where to look for a man whose private and public characters were equally lofty. At the same time, with all its faults it was a *strong* age, and you will be fortunate if in your time the country produces five such names as Pitt, Fox, Scott, Nelson, and Wellington.

It was in Watier's that night, seated by my uncle on one of the red velvet settees at the side of the room, that I had pointed out to me some of those singular characters whose fame and eccentricities are even now not wholly forgotten in the world. The long, many-pillared room, with its mirrors and chandeliers, was crowded with full-blooded, loud-voiced men-about-town, all in the same dark evening dress with white silk stockings, cambric shirt-fronts, and little, flat chapeau-bras under their arms.

"The acid-faced old gentleman with the thin legs is the Marquis of Queensberry," said my uncle. "His chaise was driven nineteen miles in an hour in a match against the Count Taafe, and he sent a message fifty miles in thirty minutes by throwing it from hand to hand in a cricket-ball. The man he is talking to is Sir Charles Bunbury, of the Jockey Club, who had the Prince warned off the Heath at Newmarket on account of the in-and-out riding of Sam Chifney, his jockey. There's Captain Barclay going up to

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them now. He knows more about training than any man alive, and he has walked ninety miles in twenty-one hours. You have only to look at his calves to see that Nature built him for it. There's another walker there, the man with a flowered vest standing near the fireplace. That is Buck Whalley, who walked to Jerusalem in a long blue coat, top-boots, and buckskins."

"Why did he do that, sir?" I asked, in astonishment.

My uncle shrugged his shoulders.

"It was his humour," said he. "He walked into society through it, and that was better worth reaching than Jerusalem. There's Lord Peter-sham, the man with the beaky nose. He always rises at six in the evening, and he has laid down the finest cellar of snuff in Europe. It was he who ordered his valet to put half a dozen of sherry by his bed and call him the day after to-morrow. He's talking to Lord Panmure, who can take his six bottles of claret and argue with a bishop after it. The lean man with the weak knees is General Scott, who lives upon toast and water and has won £200,000 at whist. He is talking to young Lord Blandford, who gave £1800 for a Boccaccio the other day. Evening, Dudley!"

"Evening, Tregellis!" an elderly, vacant-

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looking man had stopped before us and was looking me up and down.

"Some young cub Charlie Tregellis has caught in the country," he murmured. "He doesn't look as if he would be much credit to him. Been out of town, Tregellis?"

"For a few days."

"Hem!" said the man, transferring his sleepy gaze to my uncle. "He's looking pretty bad. He'll be going into the country feet foremost some of these days if he doesn't pull up!" He nodded, and passed on.

"You mustn't look so mortified, nephew," said my uncle, smiling. "That's old Lord Dudley, and he has a trick of thinking aloud. People used to be offended, but they take no notice of him now. It was only last week, when he was dining at Lord Elgin's, that he apologized to the company for the shocking bad cooking. He thought he was at his own table, you see. It gives him a place of his own in society. That's Lord Harewood he has fastened on to now. Harewood's peculiarity is to mimic the Prince in everything. One day the Prince hid his queue behind the collar of his coat, so Harewood cut his off, thinking that they were going out of fashion. Here's Lumley, the ugly man. '*L'homme laid*' they called him in Paris. The other one is

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Lord Foley—they call him No. 11, on account of his thin legs.”

“There is Mr. Brummell, sir,” said I.

“Yes, he’ll come to us presently. That young man has certainly a future before him. Do you observe the way in which he looks round the room from under his drooping eyelids, as though it were a condescension that he should have entered it? Small conceits are intolerable, but when they are pushed to the uttermost they become respectable. How do, George?”

“Have you heard about Vereker Merton?” asked Brummell, strolling up with one or two other exquisites at his heels. “He has run away with his father’s woman-cook, and actually married her.”

“What did Lord Merton do?”

“He congratulated him warmly, and confessed that he had always underrated his intelligence. He is to live with the young couple, and make a handsome allowance on condition that the bride sticks to her old duties. By the way, there was a rumour that you were about to marry, Tregellis.”

“I think not,” answered my uncle. “It would be a mistake to overwhelm one by attentions which are a pleasure to many.”

“My view, exactly, and very neatly expressed,” cried Brummell. “Is it fair to break a dozen

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hearts in order to intoxicate one with rapture? I'm off to the Continent next week."

"Bailiffs?" asked one of his companions.

"Too bad, Pierrepont. No, no; it is pleasure and instruction combined. Besides, it is necessary to go to Paris for your little things, and if there is a chance of the war breaking out again, it would be well to lay in a supply."

"Quite right," said my uncle, who seemed to have made up his mind to outdo Brummell in extravagance. "I used to get my sulphur-coloured gloves from the Palais Royal. When the war broke out in '98 I was cut off from them for nine years. Had it not been for a lugger which I specially hired to smuggle them, I might have been reduced to English tan."

"The English are excellent at a flat-iron or a kitchen poker, but anything more delicate is beyond them."

"Our tailors are good," cried my uncle, "but our stuffs lack taste and variety. The war has made us more *rococo* than ever. It has cut us off from travel, and there is nothing to match travel for expanding the mind. Last year, for example, I came upon some new waistcoating in the Square of San Marco, at Venice. It was yellow, with the prettiest little twill of pink running through it. How could I have seen it had



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I not travelled? I brought it back with me, and for a time it was all the rage."

"The Prince took it up."

"Yes, he usually follows my lead. We dressed so alike last year that we were frequently mistaken for each other. It tells against me, but so it was. He often complains that things do not look as well upon him as upon me, but how can I make the obvious reply? By the way, George, I did not see you at the Marchioness of Dover's ball."

"Yes, I was there, and lingered for a quarter of an hour or so. I am surprised that you did not see me. I did not go past the doorway, however, for undue preference gives rise to jealousy."

"I went early," said my uncle, "for I had heard that there were to be some tolerable *débutantes*. It always pleases me vastly when I am able to pass a compliment to any of them. It has happened, but not often, for I keep to my own standard."

So they talked, these singular men, and I, looking from one to the other, could not imagine how they could help bursting out a-laughing in each other's faces. But, on the contrary, their conversation was very grave, and filled out with many little bows, and opening and shutting of snuff-boxes, and flickings of laced handkerchiefs.

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Quite a crowd had gathered silently around, and I could see that the talk had been regarded as a contest between two men who were looked upon as rival arbiters of fashion. It was finished by the Marquis of Queensberry passing his arm through Brummell's and leading him off, while my uncle threw out his laced cambrie shirt-front and shot his ruffles as if he were well satisfied with his share in the encounter. It is seven-and-forty years since I looked upon that circle of dandies, and where, now, are their dainty little hats, their wonderful waistcoats, and their boots, in which one could arrange one's cravat? They lived strange lives, these men, and they died strange deaths—some by their own hands, some as beggars, some in a debtor's gaol, some, like the most brilliant of them all, in a madhouse in a foreign land.

"There is the card-room, Rodney," said my uncle, as we passed an open door on our way out. Glancing in, I saw a line of little green baize tables with small groups of men sitting round, while at one side was a longer one, from which there came a continuous murmur of voices. "You may lose what you like in there, save only your nerve or your temper," my uncle continued. "Ah, Sir Lothian, I trust that the luck was with you?"

A tall, thin man, with a hard, austere face,

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had stepped out of the open doorway. His heavily thatched eyebrows covered quick, furtive grey eyes, and his gaunt features were hollowed at the cheek and temple like water-grooved flint. He was dressed entirely in black, and I noticed that his shoulders swayed a little as if he had been drinking.

"Lost like the deuce," he snapped.

"Dice?"

"No, whist."

"You couldn't get very hard hit over that."

"Couldn't you?" he snarled. "Play a hundred a trick and a thousand on the rub, losing steadily for five hours, and see what you think of it."

My uncle was evidently struck by the haggard look upon the other's face.

"I hope it's not very bad," he said.

"Bad enough. It won't bear talking about. By the way, Tregellis, have you got your man for this fight yet?"

"No."

"You seem to be hanging in the wind a long time. It's play or pay, you know. I shall claim forfeit if you don't come to scratch."

"If you will name your day I shall produce my man, Sir Lothian," said my uncle, coldly.

"This day four weeks, if you like."

"Very good. The 18th of May."

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"I hope to have changed my name by then!"

"How is that?" asked my uncle, in surprise.

"It is just possible that I may be Lord Avon."

"What, you have had some news?" cried my uncle, and I noticed a tremor in his voice.

"I've had my agent over at Monte Video, and he believes he has proof that Avon died there. Anyhow, it is absurd to suppose that because a murderer chooses to fly from justice——"

"I won't have you use that word, Sir Lothian," cried my uncle, sharply.

"You were there as I was. You know that he was a murderer."

"I tell you that you shall not say so."

Sir Lothian's fierce little grey eyes had to lower themselves before the imperious anger which shone in my uncle's.

"Well, to let that point pass, it is monstrous to suppose that the title and the estates can remain hung up in this way for ever. I'm the heir, Tregellis, and I'm going to have my rights."

"I am, as you are aware, Lord Avon's dearest friend," said my uncle, sternly. "His disappearance has not affected my love for him, and until his fate is finally ascertained, I shall exert myself to see that *his* rights also are respected."

"His rights would be a long drop and a