

MARY LEE or The Yankee in Ireland

BY PAUL PEPPERGRASS, ESQ. CHAPTER XV. WEEKS BEGINS TO DEVELOP HIMSELF.—THE HARDWRINKLE'S—ROBERT HARDWRINKLE'S ULTIMATE DESIGNS ON MARY LEE.—LETTERS FROM CONSTABULARY OFFICER.

"Come in," said Weeks, glancing over his shoulder at the tall, dark form of his cousin, Robert Hardwrinkle, standing in the doorway. "Come in; I'm not engaged."

"Thank you," said his host, creeping softly in, and closing the door noiselessly behind him. "I thank you; I merely called, as my good mother's request, to inquire for your health. She always fears, poor creature, you're not well when you don't come down to join us in family prayer."

"Well, can't say I'm sick, exactly," responded Weeks, throwing up his feet on the back of a chair, and offering his companion a cigar, which the latter modestly declined. "Can't say I'm sick, though I ain't got quite clear of that confounded wedding scrape yet. But the fact is, my dear fellow, I dread these almighty long prayers of yours—I do, really."

"Is it possible?" "A fact; I feel a sorter out of place like, sitting down there in the family circle—well, kinder green, you know. Why, it's just like this—I ain't accustomed to it exactly; business men in the States ain't got time to pray, as you do here in the country."

"Ah, but, my dear Ephraim, you should make time, for prayer is indispensable to salvation. You cannot please God without it."

"O, prayer is a very good thing, I allow," said Weeks, slowly pulling his cigar, and beating off the smoke with his hand. "It's an excellent thing for those who can attend to it; but it don't suit men in trade to spend whole hours at prayer, and neglect their business."

"Ah, but you can attend to both, if you only try."

"Why, we do try. We read the Bible, and go to meeting three times on the Sabbath; that's about as much, I reckon, as could reasonably be expected."

"Perhaps so. The people of New England, I'm informed, have acquired a great reputation for sanctity."

"Certain, and deserve it too, take the hull of them on an average. There's the women, for instance, and the farmers, and the country folk all round—they're all church-going people, and do most of the praying, while the merchants and traders are busy at their commercial pursuits. Well, it's just like this: one class of our people does the praying, and the other does the trading—kind of makes it easy, you know, on both; so that, take them on the hull, they're a very religious people."

"Ah, but, my dear Ephraim, that thing of halving the worship of God is forbidden by the rules of the holy gospel. Every creature is bound to worship God, and pray to Him always—in season and out of season."

little reflection, "will you permit me to ask you one question?" "Certainly, my dear fellow; why not? Ask as many as you please. Ain't you my cousin?"

"I hope you won't be offended, or think me impertinent, Ephraim. You're my mother's sister's child, you know, and it's but natural I should feel a lively interest in your welfare, spiritual and temporal."

"Of course, I'm your mother's sister's child—well!" "Well, it's merely this. Do you really believe in the existence of God? Now, answer me candidly. It's rather a strange question, but no matter. Do you believe in that dogma?"

"Yes, sir," replied Weeks, thrusting his hands into his pockets and shaking up the silver. "Yes, sir, I believe that—no mistake about it."

"The Lord be praised for it," exclaimed his pious cousin, turning up his eyes. "I'm thankful you haven't fallen yet into the lowest depth of the abyss. I really feared, Ephraim, from your manner of speaking, you were an atheist."

"No, sir; I believe in two things firmly, and no living man can make me change that belief. I believe in the existence of a first cause, and the perfectibility of man."

"And is that all?" "That's all, sir—that's the length and breadth of my creed."

"And how, think you, is man to be perfected?" "Why, by reason, science, and experience. That's about all he needs—ain't it?"

"And what of religion?—shall it take no part in his perfection?" "Well—yes, guess it might help some; that is, if he'd only keep clear of those darned isms, and adopt some sensible kind of religion for himself. The worst thing in the world, cousin, for a business man, is to have any thing to do with the details of religion. They sorter cramp him, you know. Let him lay down a broad platform like mine, and stand upon it flat-footed—that's the way to get along in trade."

"And you're quite serious, Ephraim, in avowing those shocking sentiments."

"Shocking or not, they're mine; that's a fact. Why, look here, my good friend; I have seen too much of your hair-splitting religions in New England not to know what they are by this time. Those deacons, and class leaders, and old maids, and methodical-looking crowds we see going to church every Sabbath, with their Bibles under their arms, are, in my humble opinion, a darned set of dupes and impostors, the whole concern of them. There's neither honor or honesty amongst them. By crackle, they'd cut your throat with one hand and carry the Bible in the other. No, sir, a first cause, and the perfectibility of man, or, in other words, the irresistibility of human progress, is about as much as any business man can profess to believe with safety to himself or the interests of trade."

"But is that belief sufficient to save your soul?" "Save my soul? O, that's quite another affair. If there be such things as souls, (which is now rather a disputed point,) why, the Creator, who made them, knows best how to take care of them, I presume."

at all, it was as callous as a stone. When the stranger beggar came to his door (for those of the parish knew him too well to enter his gates) he neither ordered him from his presence nor hunted his dogs on him. No, he kindly admonished the sufferer to guard against the many dangers and temptations that beset him in his mode of life, counselled him gently to beware of evil company, and then gave the shivering supplicant a religious tract to teach him resignation to the will of Heaven, or a Dispensary ticket to procure ointment for his sores. Money was his god, and he adored it. To part with a shilling, save in usury, was like rending his heart—strings. He loved it, not for the use he could make of it in giving employment to others, or in serving the interests of the parish, without loss to himself, but for the mere pleasure of seeing and feeling it with his hands. In this respect his cousin Ephraim was an entirely different man. He, like a true Yankee, was fond of money too; nay, ready to go through fire and water to obtain it; but yet he was just as ready, on the other hand, to lend it to a neighbor in a pinch, and think it no great obligation either. He valued money only as a circulating medium—as an agent to carry on trade, or acquire a position for himself in society. He was forever talking, but he sure, of dollars and cents; but still it was evident to those who happened to be at all acquainted with his disposition and habits of life, that he was by no means a mercenary man. Nor was he, like most lovers of money, envious of his neighbors' prosperity—not he; on the contrary, he was pleased to see every one thrive and do well, and ready to bid them God speed into the bargain. There was one peculiarity in him, however, which at first sight looked rather damaging to the character of an honorable man. He never scrupled taking advantage of his neighbor in speculations; because every man, he contended, should have his "eye peeled," and deserved to suffer if he hadn't. It was by sharp bargains men were made smart, and by smart men trade was made to flourish; and if it happened now and then that a few fell short of their expectations, why, the country at large eventually became the gainer. On the other hand, if his neighbor happened to "come the Yankee over him," to use a favorite expression, it was all fair in war—no neither grudging nor grumbled, but "peeled his own eye" a little closer, and went off to speculate on something else. Such were the two cousins. Both were fond of money—the one to gloat over and adore it, the other to use it as an agent to attain the objects of his pride or his ambition. But to proceed with our story.

"Merciful Heavens!" exclaimed Hardwrinkle, after a long pause, during which he seemed to have lost his speech, for he uttered not a syllable, but kept looking intently at his cousin. "Merciful Heavens! such an expression from the mouth of a Christian man—if there be such things as souls," Ephraim, Ephraim! I fear you're irrevocably lost. O, let me entreat you to pray for light and grace to dispel this darkness of unbelief. O, if you only read the word of God, join our family prayer every night and morning, and come with me thrice on the Sabbath to hear the outpourings of the faithful servants of the Lord, our dear and reverend brother, Mr. Rattletoe, he assured your eyes would be opened to the light of glory shining through at a distance."

"Say," interrupted Weeks. "The light of glory shining out to—"

"Say, hold on; I've heard all that before—could repeat it myself as slick as a deacon. There's no use in thinking to come it over me with that kinder talk. What I believe, I believe, and I ain't agoin to believe nothing else, no how you can fix it. A first cause, and the perfectibility of man, is my platform."

"Ah, too broad, my dear friend—'narrow is the way, you know."

"Broad—that's just precisely what we want. We want a platform broad enough to cover the hull ground. We are a young nation, sir, strong, active, and ambitious, and must have room to stretch our arms east, west, north and south. Our resources are immense—inexhaustible, and we want a wide field to develop them—and that field, I take it, sir, is the liberty of conscience."

"You mean liberty to cheat and take advantage of your neighbor if you happen to be clever enough to accomplish it with impunity?"

"Why not? That's the life of trade, my dear fellow—that's what makes smart men. Hence it is the Yankees are the smartest business men in all creation. Your evangelical rules would ruin us in twelve months."

"The laws of God ruin you? Do you really mean what you say?"

"Well, look here; I speak only of our merchant and trading classes; with respect to farmers, laborers, mechanics, women and all that kinder folks, they can adopt as many rules and regulations as they please, in the religious line. It don't make any material difference, I presume, one way or other, since they ain't got no business to transact; but you might as well think of corking up the Atlantic in a champagne bottle, as expect the commerce of the States to thrive under the old, stiff, evangelical rules of our grandfathers."

"Ah, Ephraim, Ephraim, speak with respect of those holy men," said Hardwrinkle. "O, I hope and pray," he continued, again raising up his hands and eyes in pious supplication, "I hope and pray we may stand as well before the judgment seat as they did."

"Cousin Robert," said Weeks, looking sideways for a moment at the upturned face of his companion, and twirling his watch key as he spoke, "Cousin Robert, you're a very good, pious man, I reckon, and an honest man too; no mistake about that. But pious people, let me tell you, ain't always to be trusted; hold on now a minute; hold on; I'll just give you an instance in point. I knew a man once in our section of the country, named Pratt—Zeb Pratt, they called him. Zeb was deacon of the Methodist

church in Ducksville, for nearly ten years in my own time, and a real out and out Christian of the first brand. Well, he was cracked up so for his sanctity, that he went by the name of Pious Zeb, of Scrabble Hollows. Now Zeb never was known to be absent from meeting, morning, noon or night—he was punctual as the town clock. Every Sabbath morning, as the bell rang, there was Zeb crossing the Commons, with his old faded cap on his hat, and his Bible under his arm. He was president of all the charitable societies, too, in the district, attended all the prayer meetings, carried his contributions of eggs and chickens every year to the minister, distributed religious tracts to the poor—"

"O, what a treasure!" exclaimed Hardwrinkle unconsciously, interrupting the panegyric. "What a treasure! Treasure! What, Zeb Pratt? By gracious, he was the darndest old villain in all creation—he a treasure!—the old cheat; he'd swindle you out of your eye teeth. Why, the old hypocrite cleared out one morning with all the funds of the Christian Benevolent—"

"Letters for Mr. Weeks," said a servant, knocking at the door. "Hand them here," cried the latter, promptly, throwing the stump of his cigar into the grate, and snatching his feet off the back of the chair. "Ha, just what I've been expecting this whole week past—they're from that lawyer of yours, Robert."

"Of mine?" "Why, yes, of your choosing. Rather slow though for my money."

"And, please, sir, Miss Rebecca wishes to know," said the servant, "what tracts to distribute this morning, sir?"

"Tell her it don't matter a great deal which; but she might as well, perhaps, try that last package from the Home Missionary Society."

"Yes, sir." "And, William—"

"She had better take Deborah with her, and leave Judith, Miriam, and Rachael to meet Mr. Sweetsoul, the colporteur, and make arrangements with him about that Sabbath school at Ballymagahony."

"Yes, sir; and please your honor, sir, that woman is here with the three orphans from Ballymagahony."

"What woman?" "McGuinchy's wife, sir. Her husband died, if you remember, sir, last winter, of the black fever."

"And what does she want with me?"

TO BE CONTINUED.

exclaimed Pietro; "do you suppose I would carry about such a weapon for the world? I found this lying on the ground as I came along, and picked it up. See, it is silver and richly chased."

"Rather! worth many a scudo, I should say," agreed Bartolo, who had approached.

"That's what I guessed," replied Pietro, slipping the sheath into his breast pocket; "and as no one ever claims such an article I shall take it to one of the Jews on the Rialto, and exchange it for a trinket for my Teresa." Nodding to his friends, he shouldered his basket and left the tavern, his merry whistle flying away in the distance.

"What a good fellow he is!" said the workman, looking after him. "There is not a better in Venice," affirmed Giovanni. "Old Marco is indeed fortunate to have such a son!"

"And such a daughter-in-law as Pietro is bringing him!" added Vincenzo. While those remarks were being exchanged a man, whose face was covered by a black velvet mask, entered, and sat down at an empty table. "Cyprius," was the order, uttered in a short voice.

"Per Bacco! he does not waste words," remarked Vincenzo in an undertone to his companions. "What an hour of the morning to go about masked!"

"Perhaps he is returning from a ball," whispered Giovanni; "he's a patrician, I'm sure, judging by his dress."

"He of the mask moved uneasily. "What are you staring at me for, you fellows?" he suddenly asked in an angry tone.

"No offense meant, signore," replied Giovanni. At this moment the host set down the wine before him.

"What's the news?" asked the stranger; "were there many guests at the ball at the Palazzo Pisani last night?"

"How should I know, Illustrissimo?" "What! you live two steps from the Palazzo Pisano, and pretend not to know what goes on?"

"I am too busy to interest myself in what does not concern me."

vengeance as he lay there," and Maria sank trembling into a chair, while all passed round her.

"And who was it?" they asked. "None other than Messer Luigi Guoco, Secretary to the Illustrissimo Lorenzo Loredano." On hearing this name Marco started. "Jasca turned pale upon his soul, and grant him peace for the murdered man was well known to have led an evil life."

"A good riddance, too!" exclaimed Vincenzo. "For God's sake, do not speak so loud!" urged Bartolo.

"Oh, let me be!" returned Vincenzo. "Messer Luigi, though a patrician, was none the less a scoundrel, and I should not hesitate to say so even in the presence of the council of ten."

At this moment the door was thrown open by a boy of fourteen, whose hands, face and clothes were white with flour, and who ran up to Marco crying:

"For the love of God, padrone, come home at once; the sbirri are looking for your son Pietro."

"For my son Pietro!" exclaimed old man, turning as pale as death, and starting to his feet.

"Yes, I do not know how I managed to get here, for there are two men posted at the door, while the others are searching the house."

"Impossible! There is some mistake! My son, who is the soul of honor, to be supposed capable of committing any evil action! You all know it is impossible," and Marco, a prey to deadly fear, hurried out and ran towards his shop, followed by the boy.

Marco Tascas had not exaggerated the praises of his son Pietro, who was indeed a model of youth, an indefatigable worker, honest to a fault, steady, and respected by all who knew him.

He was engaged to be married to Teresa, the valued maid of Elena Loredano, wife of the Senator Lorenzo Loredano, who was one of the members of the dread council of ten. Teresa was an orphan, the daughter of old retainers of the family in which she sewed. She was now nineteen, and one of the most beautiful girls in Venice; of that rare and delicate type of beauty peculiar to the Venetian daughters of the people, with the red-gold hair Titian loved to paint, and the clear white skin and soft dark eyes which form such a striking contrast, and which turned the heads of many a Venetian gallant of the day. Of a sweet, gentle disposition, she was as good as she was beautiful, and between her and Pietro existed a deep, true love. Her mistress, who held her in high esteem, approved of her choice, and had undertaken to provide her with a handsome dowry.

When, on festal, the young pair and old Marco glided in a gondola across the still canals into the open waters of the lagoons, no happier hearts beat under God's sky; in the translucent atmosphere of a southern spring they moved across the quiet waters, where the great barges with their tawny orange, red or yellow sails crept slowly by like gigantic butterflies with outspread wings, the fresh salt breeze from the sea fanning them like a caress till the dome and campanilli of Venice stood out against the sunset sky resembling the outlines of a dream city, and they came back under the gleaming starlight, hand in hand, wrapped in such unalloyed happiness as is rarely vouchsafed here below.

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