



BARNABY PALMS; THE MAN WHO  
"FELT HIS WAY."

[From Blackwood's Magazine.]

There is a golden volume yet to be written on the first struggles of forlorn geniuses in London—magnificent, miserable, ennobling, degrading London. If all who have suffered would confess their sufferings—would show themselves in the stark, quivering squalor in which they first walked her streets—would paint the wounds which first bled in her garrets—what a book might be placed in the hands of pride!—what stern, wholesome rebukes for the selfish sons of fortune!—what sustaining sweetness for the faint of spirit!—It is true, the letters might be of blood—the tales of agony and horror—of noble nature's looking serenely, with the hungry fox gnawing their bowels—of disappointment sinking to despair—of misery, dreaming of, and wooing death; and then how many pretty shifts to mask a haggard face with smiles—how many self-denials—how many artifices to hide a nakedness from laughing scorn! Nor would the tone be all of wretchedness. No; beautiful emanations of the human heart, the kindest ministrings of human affections would sweeten and exalt many a sad history. How often should we find the lowly comforting the high, the ignorant giving lessons to the accomplished—the poor of earth aiding and sustaining the richly-dowered!

Barnaby was in London; but not our heart bounds as we declare it—not to add to the number of splendid vagabonds, now thrust from her thresholds to sleep in the market place, and now dining off plate cheek and jowl with my lord. Barnaby was speedily warm, as in wool, in the house of Messrs. Nokes and Styles; and with the combined wisdom and delicacy of a spider, began to feel his way to the fables of his employers. Nokes was a man of brass, Styles a string of willow. Assured of this, Barnaby immediately felt the propriety of bowing to the one, and bending to the other.

"Look at the lazy brute,—he doesn't draw a single pound," remarked the observing Nokes, as one evening, standing at his warehouse door, he contemplated the progress of a passing waggon.

"Not half a pound, sir," chimed in Barnaby; "and yet, I doubt not, he eats his share of corn and hay. But this it is to be, as one may say, in partnership with those who will pull."

"Right Barnaby," and the countenance of Nokes darkened as he watched the easy going animal.

"They who will work, may work. Will Mr. Styles be here to-day?"

It is our hope that the query of Barnaby was unconsciously coupled with his profound views of the distribution of labor, that he had innocently let fall a spark on the train of Nokes' smothered feelings. If, on the contrary, the conflagration were premeditated, the moral incendiary must have glowed at the flattering proof of his success; for Nokes was all but suffocated. The blood rushed to his face, retreated, rushed on, came back, presenting unto Barnaby as fine an exhibition of "humours and spirits" as that recorded by the learned Peireskins, who at the cost of some words, set forth the usual lesson he acquired through "an augmenting glass or microscope," showing how a certain plebeian animal "setting himself to wrestle with a flea, was so incensed that his blood ran down from head to foot, and from foot to head again!" Wise Peireskins! true philosopher who from the bickerings of small despised animals extracteth better wisdom, learneth surer self-government, than the unthinking million carry from a dog-fight, yea from a bull-bait. (Reader, when thou shalt behold a Nokes bursting with envy, hatred, and uncharitableness, think of the learned lord of Peiresk and his little monitor—ponder, and let thy soul be instructed.)

"Lack-a-day, I'd quite forgot; 'tis Epsom races," continued Barnaby, in self-reproval of his unnecessary question, the face of Nokes again suddenly resembling a chemist's bottle by candlelight. "Epsom races," repeated the speaker, in a tone that left nothing

further to be advanced on the subject. And Nokes evidently judged the words to be conclusive; for feeling, like a patriot at a public dinner; more than he could express, with a wisdom rarely exhibited on such occasions, he spoke not at all. He merely jerked out his watch; and, at a glance, calculated that two hours at most he should be looked for to join his friends at whist.

Mr. Styles, in addition to his love of horse flesh, had a passion for the rural and picturesque. He kept a country house, under whose hospitable roof Barney was wont at times to eat a Sabbath meal, having previously attended his inviter to the parish church. It was a sight to melt the thoughtless youth of Bridewell to behold Barney during service. There he was, pinned to the side of his employer; now seeking out the lessons of the day, now, with open mouth and staring eyeballs (an expression of features not disgraceful to any tombstone), out-singing a numerous Sunday school, shrilly piping in the gallery. It is true, the clerk would cast a look of bitterness; but then, it was avowed that Barney never opened his mouth, that the poor man did not feel shaken on his throne.

"A most comfortable sermon, Barney," remarked Styles, with an air of interrogation. "Most comfortable."

"I'm a wicked creature, if I would not have given a guinea for Nokes to have heard it. Did you observe sir, how that gentleman with the scarlet face and powdered head was moved? Pray, sir, who is he?"

"Humph! He's newly retired among us, Barney; I-I forget his name; but they tell me he has in his time been a great player."

"No doubt, sir; no doubt. Every word of the preacher seemed to enter him like a bodkin. A great player, poor wretch. Surely, sir, he can't have made all his money by playing?"

"Every penny Barney." "He keeps a coach," cried Barney, in a modulated tone of polite amazement.

"A house," added Styles, "that did belong to the member of the county; a town mansion, and a shouting box."

"And all won by playing? Mercy upon us. The devil offers great temptations; moralized Barney.

"Say what we will of him, Barney," responded Styles, with exemplary liberality towards a fallen foe; "say what we will of him, I am afraid the devil is no fool."

"And—and"—asked Barney, with a face somewhat uncolored from its first rigidity, "what may the gentleman have most played?"

"I can't exactly tell, but I believe principally low parts; such as footmen, clowns and country boys."

"Parts. I mean games? Chicken hazard; short whist; roulette; rouge-et-noir; or"—and Barney for some seconds continued the inventory, with a knowledge of the subject, quite extraordinary as unexpected.

"Games. Understand me, Barney; I tell you the man is an actor, a stage player."

Barney could not subdue a look of disappointment: in a moment, however, he returned to the subject. "Actor or not, I am sure he must have played. La, sir, did you see him when the doctor thundered at gaming?" Truth to say, Styles was one of those profound sleepers who can sometimes snore at Jove's best bolts; "Ha, as I said, I'd sell a guinea cheap, so that Mr. Nokes had heard it."

Styles looked meaningly at Barney, drank off a glass of port, clasped his fingers, glanced a moment at his left shoe, and then, as a magpie turns his head, lifted his cheek enquiringly towards Nokes's well-wisher. "Gaming, sir, isn't it a sort of murder?" Styles nodded: "wives and babes are killed by it. Isn't it a kind of arson, such capital houses are destroyed by it?" Styles nodded twice. "Isn't it the worst of robberies, for the most innocent, most pains-taking, most upright of partners may be made beggars by it?" Styles responded to the last query by a long succession of nods. "Then, sir, and saving your presence, I must say again, and here Barney emptied his glass, as seeking courage for the avowal "I would have given

five guineas had Mr. Nokes been, with us at church this day."

"What do you mean, Barney?" asked Styles, with the look and tone with which folks usually address a ghost. "What do you mean?"

"Why, sir, this I mean," and Barney drew his chair in confidential proximity to his master, "this I mean; I must say it, I can't help it, but, sir, I don't like whist clubs." And an emphatic blow upon the table made the glasses leap at the aversion of the speaker.

"No more do I," replied Styles; and in the reply proved himself the master of a most difficult science, the art of saying very much in very little. Now, whether the wise was more than usually subtle, or whether the devotion of Barney had suddenly softened his employer, certain it is, that Styles rapidly became an altered man. He who was usually silent and timid, became loud and self-asserting; inveighing, in good round terms, against the arrogance and imprudence of Nokes, and upbraiding himself for his pusillanimous deference to his dissipated partner.

"I have been a fool long enough, Barney," insinuated the modest Styles; an assertion which his no less diffident hearer ventured not to deny. "Yes, yes; I have too long given the reins out of my own hands; have been a nobody in the firm." Barney shrugged his shoulders and leered acquiescence. "A nobody, worse than nobody, a block-head, a nincompoop, an ass," Barney with great moral courage, bowed to the justice of every epithet. "But," exclaimed Styles for the twentieth time, rising at the accomplished number, "I'll be so no longer, I'll!"

We have not the slightest doubt that a most beautiful peroration was, at this moment, destroyed, barked down, by a yelping little spaniel, unhappily for oratory, lying with extended fore paws beneath the chair of Styles; the whole weight of the speaker coming suddenly upon the left leg of Kitty, she howled and barked with a persevering vigour truly feminine; her pain and helplessness were not lost upon a sister; for Madge, a terrier bitch, sprang from an opposite corner, and, in an instant, almost joined her teeth in the neck of the wounded. "Did you ever see such a fury?" asked Styles with a hopeless look, pointing at the ravenous Madge. The appeal was too much for the sensibility of Barney, who, the exclamation struck from him by a higher shriek on the part of Kate, roared out, "D—that Nokes," at the same time aiming an ineffectual kick at the dog. Styles smiled at the oath. Barney moved by the sufferings of the dog, and a blow upon his own shin against the chair, dragged forth the combatants Styles tugged at the spaniel, whilst Barney, with the wisdom of the cockpit, placed the tail of the terrier between his teeth. At this picturesque moment, the servant bawled in at the door—

"Mr. Nokes." Down, with terrible force, came the grinders of Barney, the terrier quitted the hold, and tearing out of the room, ran yelling close by Nokes, some time her unsuspecting namesake.

"That room; that room, Barney," cried Styles, and confusedly opened the door of a closet, within which, silent as a spectre, Barney felt his way. Styles, with the suffering spaniel under his arm, seated himself in his chair; the bitch with female delicacy, squeaking little, but shaking her crushed fore-paw reproachfully in the face of the destroyer, Nokes entered; his countenance was lined and mysterious as a lawyer's written parchment; there was mischief in it though obscured by certain confusion; much malice and no little cowardice. He coughed, but strange enough, no subject seemed to present itself. Luckily, he glanced at the streaming eyes and quivering paw of Kitty. "So humph! a dog fight?"

"It's very odd," replied Styles, with the learned air of an F.R.S. "It's very odd; but though Kitty and Madge have been together these five years, they can't agree. It's very odd."

"When people can't agree," returned Nokes, and he looked a Columbus as he pronounced the moral discovery, "they had better part. Mr Styles, for these three months I have been confirmed in this opinion."

"Longer, surely longer. 'Tis two years since Mrs. Nokes had a separate maintenance."

Nokes, touched by the indelicate allusion to his domestic infelicity, in silence traced his five fingers across his brow, and said with very cold dignity, "Mr Styles, fortunately there are partnerships which may be dissolved."

"Fortunately," acquiesced Styles, stroking the head of Kitty.

"You wonder, Mr Styles, why your dogs can't agree. Perhaps I can explain; it may be, that one is sporting out of doors all day whilst the other is left at home to bark and keep house."

"What do you mean, Mr Nokes?" asked Styles, and with forced tranquility, he placed the bitch upon the hearth rug. Had an oracle put an interrogative, it could not have been more searching; more impressive.

"I mean, sir, that I have a partner in view, whose habits of business, Mr Styles," "Glad to hear it," interrupted Styles, "as I have some time contemplated a dissolution we can the sooner get rid of one another."

"No house can stand against the chance of such bets," cried Nokes. "Hundreds vanishing after hundreds."

"Bets; hundreds; No, Mr Nokes, let us keep to the truth; guinea points, sir, guinea points don't become a tradesman."

Guinea points; guinea, but as we are happily of the same mind to separate, we won't talk nonsense."

"Tisn't necessary," accorded Styles; "therefore, as we understand each other, may I not ask the name of your new partner?"

"Oh, certainly; a most industrious, pains taking young man."

"Glad to hear it," said Styles again. "I think, indeed I am sure, I have for myself just such a partner in my eye."

"I wish you all success," cried Nokes; "may I know who he is?"

"To be sure; a most business like, prudent person. But first, the name of your partner?"

"He doesn't yet know his good luck. But" and Nokes looked with the eye of a fox over a farm paling, "Can't you guess?"

"Hav'n't a notion. Yes, I think, I—"

"To be sure," cried Nokes. "Barnaby; though I hav'n't told him, Barnaby."

Styles hardly expressed a smile at the credulity of Nokes; then, with a serious air observed, "My good friend, don't count upon him. Allowing that I myself though he is quite ignorant of the fact, were not determined upon offering him a partner's share, I am sure he would not; and, forgive me, my friend; he could not join with you."

"Not," exclaimed Nokes, and his eyes glistened like brass buttons. "And why not?"

"The lad is scrupulous; he can't abide cards," said Styles.

"You mean bets squandered upon filices, replied Nokes, sarcastically.

"Pshaw; between ourselves, the young man has talked to me with tears in his eyes about your nightly whist; guinea points Nokes, guinea points."

Nokes leapt to his feet; and extending his arms, projecting his breast; and throwing back his head, cried aloud to the vacant ceiling, "Two penny. As I have a soul, Two penny."

Styles, subdued by the fervor of his partner, in a modulated tone proceeded, "I do assure you that Barnaby has always sworn to a guinea."

"A household crocodile," cried Nokes. "Ah friend Styles, had you lost as little by the last favourite?"

"As little? How much now—how much? asked Styles, with a bridling air.

"Wasn't it five hundred?"

"A hat; a single hat to Jerry White; he wore it this day at church; five hundred. Upon my conscience, and may I die a sinner, but 'twas a hat."