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WINE.

"Oh! thou invisible spirit of wine!—if thou hast
no name to be known by, let us call thee—*Devil!*"
SHAKESPEARE.

Some eighteen months, or two years ago I was doing my duty to my country and myself on board His Majesty's frigate the *Astræ*, by undergoing seventeen games of chess per diem, with our first Lieutenant, and filling up every pause with merriment at the continuance of these piping times of peace. We had been cruising some months in the Mediterranean, chiefly for the amusement of two dandy cousins of an honourable Captain, whom we picked up at Malta, basking like two yellow, over ripe gourds in the sunshine. We had touched at most of the ports of the Ionians, where cyprus may be had for paying for; and where *fadettes* are held by hands as far as their coquetish folds are black and lustrous. We had done due service to the state, by catching agues, snipe shooting in the Albanian marshes; listening to five-year-old operas screeched by fifty-year-old prime donnas; by learning to swear by Saint Spiridon, and by Klephtic votives. We had spouted in the school of Homer, and shouted at Lepanto; poured libations on the grave of Anacreon; and voted the Leucæan leap a trifle, compared with a Leicestershire fence!

At length, one beautiful evening, one of those twilight of chrysolite and gold, such as poets dream of, and the Levant alone can realize, (having been for three preceding days, not "spell bound" but "calm-bound among the clustering *Cyclades*," it was the pleasure of our noble Captain and his cousin to drop anchor in the Bay of —, (I have reasons of my own for not being more explicit) where after swearing the usual number of oaths at the quarantine officers, and the crews of the Venetian and Turkish traders, who make it part of their religion to give offence to the blue jackets, where offence can be given with impunity, I had the satisfaction to find myself, at about seven o'clock, *à terre*, seated at the mess of His Majesty's gallant —, doing as much justice to the roast beef of old England, as if we had not been within a days sail of the Island of the Minotaur. It was indeed refreshing to listen to the king's English, in its own accents; to eat of the king's sirloin, in its own gravy; and to join in the jargon of horse flesh, in its own slang;—to hear the names of Newmarket, White's, Tattersalls, Ellen Tree, and Fanny Kemble, familiar in their mouths as household words; to throw off, in short, for an hour or two, the tedium of professional existence. A bumper of port appeared as palatable in a climate where the thermometer stood at 80 degrees in the shade, as amidst the clammy fogs of the cold North; and at length after a liberal indulgence in Hudson's best, (only the more relished because the richest Turkey tobacco, and a pipe of cherrywood was in the hands of every soldier in the garrison) proposals were made for a bowl of "Gin-Punch!" Lord Thomas Howard a lieutenant in the —, had announced to be a masterhand in the scientific brew; and the very name of gin punch affords, in the fatherland of Achilles, a sort of anticlimax, which there was no resisting. The materials were brought. The regimental bowl, in which Pictou himself is recorded to have plunged the ladle; lemons from the islands redolent of romance and poetry; and a bottle of Hodge's best, redolent of Holborn Hill, appeared in an orderly array as though we had been supping at Limmer's.

"Are you a punch drinker?" inquired my neighbour, Captain Wargrave, with whom, as a school fellow of my elder brother's, I had quickly made acquaintance.
"If I may venture to own it, no!" said I.
"I have swallowed too much punch on commission in the course of my life."
"I judged as much from your looks," replied Wargrave, who had promised to see me on board the frigate. "If you want to get away from these noisy fellows, we can easily slip off while Lord Thomas and his operations engage their attention."
And in compliance with the hint, I soon found myself snatching with him, arm in arm

on the bastions of —. We had an hour before us for the Captain's gig was not ordered till eleven; and, in order to keep an eye at once on the frigate and on the shore, we sat down on an abutment of the parapet, to gossip away the time; interrupted only by the measured tramp of the sentinels, and enjoying the freshness of the night air, perfumed by jessamine and orange blossoms, proceeding from the trellised gardens of the government house. As I am not ambitious of writing bad Byron, my readers must allow me to spare them the description of a night in Greece. A lieutenant of H. M. S. the *Astræ*, and a captain of H. M. S. the —, may be supposed to entertain Hotspur's prejudice against ballad-mongers!

"There seem to be hard-going fellows in your mess," said I, to Wargrave, as he sat beside me, with his arms folded over his breast.
"Thornton, a understand, carries off his two bottles a day, like a Trojan; and the fat major who sat opposite to me, made such play with the Champagne, as caused me to blush for my squeamishness. For on my own part, I should be well content never to exceed a couple of glasses of good claret. Wine affects me in a different way from most men. The more I drink, the more my spirits are depressed. While others get roaring drunk, I sit snoring and despairing; and the next day my head aches like an artilleryman's."

"You are fortunate," said Wargrave dully.
"Fortunate?" cried I. "I wish I could appreciate my own luck!—I am voted the sulkier dog unharmed, whenever it is my cue to be jolly; and after proving a wet blanket to a merry party over night, I am ready to shoot myself with the headach and blue devils next morning. If there be a fellow I really envy, it is such a one as Thornton; who is ready to chime in with the chorus of the 36th stanza of Nancy Dawson between his two last bottles and keeps his head and legs an hour after all the rest of the party have lost theirs under the table."

"I fancy Thornton is pretty well seasoned; saturated like an old claret hogshead!"
"Envious old! From time immemorial, odes have been edited to petition the gods for an insensible heart. When I turn lyricist, it will be to pray for an insensible stomach! 'Tis a monstrous hard thing, when one hears the trollying of a joyous *chanson à boire* or *trinkled*, under the lime-trees of France or Germany, to feel no sympathy in the strain save that of nausea. There is something fresh and picturesque in the mere sound of 'the vine—the grape—the cup—the bowl!' It always appears to me that Bacchus is the universal divinity, and that I alone am exempted from the worship. Think of Lord Thomas's gin-punch, and pity me!"

Wargrave replied by a vague unmeaning laugh; which led me to conclude that my eloquence was lost upon him. Yet I continued.

"Do you know that, in spite of the prevalence of the Bacchæan idolatry, I think we hardly give honour due to the influence of wine. It has ever been the mania of mankind to ascribe the actions of their fellow creatures to all motives but the true; but if they saw clearly and spoke honestly, they would admit that more heroes have been made by the bottle than the sword."

Have you any personal meaning in this tirade?" suddenly interrupted my companion, in a voice whose concentration was deadly.

"Personal meaning?" I reiterated. "Of what nature?" And for a moment I could not but fancy 'hat poor Wargrave had taken a deeper share in the Chateau Margoux of the fat Major than I had been aware of. A man rather touched by wine is sure to take fire on the most distant imputation of drunkenness.
"I can scarcely imagine, Sir," he continued in a voice, however, that savoured of anything rather than inebriety, "that any man acquainted with the misfortunes of my life should address me on such a subject?"
"Be satisfied, then, that your indignation is groundless, and most unreasonable," said I, still doubtful how far I ought to resent the un-

graciousness of his demeanor; "for, on the word of a gentleman, till this day, I never heard your name. Your avowal of intimacy with my brother, and something in the frankness of your manner that reminded me of his, added to the hilarity of an unexpected reunion with so many of my countrymen has induced too sudden a familiarity in my demeanour; but, in wishing you good night, Captain Wargrave and a fairer interpretation of the next sailor who opens his heart to you at sight, allow me to assure you that not a shadow of offence was intended in the rhapsody you are pleased to resent."

"Forgive me?" exclaimed Wargrave, extending his hands nearly his arms towards me. "It would have afforded only a crowning incident to my miserable history, had my jealous soreness on one fatal subject produced a serious misunderstanding with the brother of one of my dearest and earliest friends."

While I frankly accepted his apologies and offered hand, I could detect, by the light of the moon, an expression of such profound dejection on the altered face of Wargrave—so deadly a paleness—a haggardness—that involuntarily I repeated myself on the wall beside him, as if to mark the resumption of a friendly feeling. He did not speak when he took his place; but after a few minutes' silence I had the mortification to hear him sobbing like a child.

"My dear fellow, you attach too much importance to an unguarded word, handsomely and satisfactorily explained," said I, trying to reconcile him with himself. "Dismiss it from your thoughts."

"Do not fancy," replied Wargrave, in a broken voice, "that these humiliating tears originate in anything that has passed between us this night. No! The associations recalled to my mind by the rash humour you are generous enough to see in its true light, are of far more ancient date, and far more ineffaceable nature. I owe you something, in return for your forbearance. You have still an hour to be on shore," he continued, looking at his watch. "Devote those minutes to me, and I will impart a lesson worth ten years' experience; a lesson of which my own life must be the text—myself the hero!"

There was no disputing with him,—no begging him to be calm. On his whole frame was imprinted the character of an affliction not to be trifled with. I had only to listen, and impart, in the patience of my attention, such advice as the truly miserable can best appreciate.

"You were right," said Wargrave, with a bitter smile, "in saying that, we do not allow ourselves to assign to wine the full measure of authority it holds among the motives of our conduct. But you were wrong in limiting that authority to the instigation of great and heroic actions. Wine is said in Scripture to 'quake glad the heart of man.' Wine is said by the poets to be the balm of grief, the dew of beauty, the philter of love. What that is gracious and graceful is it not said to be? Clustering grapes entwine the bow of its divinity; and wine is held to be a libation worthy of the gods. Fools! fools! fools!—they need to have poured forth their blood and tears like me, to know that it is a fountain of eternal damnation! Do not fancy that I allude to DANTE'S DRINKERS; do not class me, in your imagination, with the sensual brute who degrades himself to the filthiness of intoxication. Against vice so flagrant, how easy to arm one's virtue! No! the true danger lies many degrees within that fearful limit; and the Spartans, who warned their sons against wine by the exhibition of their drunken Helots, fulfilled their duty丁丁ly. Drunkenness implies, in fact, an extinction of the very faculties of evil. The enfeebled arm can deal no mortal blow; the staggering step retards the perpetration of sin. The voice can neither modulate its tones to seduction, nor hurl the defiance of deadly hatred. The drunkard is an idiot: a thing which children mock at, and women chastise. It is the man whose temperament is excited, not overpowered, by wine, to whom the snare is fatal."

"Only when unconscious of his intimacy," said I bluntly.

"Shakespeare makes Cassio conscious, but not till his fault is achieved."

"Cassio is the victim of a designing temper; but an ordinary man, aware of his frailty, must surely find it easy to avoid the mischief?"

"Easy, as we look upon the thing; from hence, with the summer sky over our heads, the unshakled ocean at our feet, and the mockery of the scorners unheeded; but in the animation of a convivial meeting, with cooler fluids to mislead us by example, under the influence of conversation, music, mirth, who can at all times remember how short a process it turns to poison in his veins? Do not suppose me the Apostle of a Temperance Society, when I assert, on my life, my soul, my honour, that, after three glasses of wine, I am no longer master of my actions. Without being at the moment conscious of the change, I begin to see, and hear, and reason differently. The minor transitions between good and evil are forgotten; the lava boils in my bosom. Three more, and I become a madman."

"But this constitutes a positive physical infirmity," said I. "You must of course regard yourself as an exception?"

"No! I am convinced the case is common. Among my own acquaintance, I know fifty men who are pleasant companions in the morning, but intolerable after dinner; men who neither like wine nor indulge in it; but who, while simply fulfilling the forms and ceremonies of society, frequently become odious to others, and a burthen to themselves."

"I really believe you are right."

"I know that I am right; listen: When I became your brother's friend at Westminster, I was on the foundation,—an only son, intended for the Church; and the importance which my father and mother attached to my election for college, added such a stimulus to my exertions, that, at the early age of fourteen, their wish was accomplished. I was the first boy of my years. A studentship at Christ-church crowned my highest ambition; and all that remained for me at Westminster was to preside over the farewell supper, indispensable on occasions of these triumphs. I was unaccustomed to wine, for my parents had probably taken silent note of the infirmity of my nature; and a very small proportion of the fiery tavern port, which forms the nectars of similar festivities, sufficed to elevate my spirits to madness. Heated by rise and intemperance, we all sallied forth together, prepared to riot, bully, insult. A fight ensued; a life was lost. Expulsion suspended my election. I never reached Oxford; my professional prospects were blighted and, within a few months, my father died of the disappointment! And now, what was to be done with me? My guardians decided, that in the army the influence of my past fault would prove less injurious; and eager to escape the tacit reproach of my poor wretched's pale face and gloomy weeds, I gladly acceded to their advice. At fifteen, I was gazetted in the —th Regiment of Light Dragoons."

"At least you had no cause to regret your change of profession?" said I, with a sailor's prejudice against parsonic cloth.

"I did regret it. A family-living was waiting for me; and I had accustomed myself to the thoughts of early independence and a settled home. Inquire of my friend Richard, on your return to England, and he will tell you that there could not be a calmer, graver, more studious, more sober fellow than myself. The nature of my misdemeanour, meanwhile, was not such as to alienate from me the regard of my young companions; and I will answer for it, that on entering the army, no fellow could boast a more extensive circle of friends. At Westminster, they used to call me 'Wargrave the peace-maker.' I never had a quarrel; I never had an enemy. Yet, twelve months after joining the —th, I had acquired the opprobrium of being a quarrelsome fellow; I had fought one of my brother officers, and was