

## LEAVES FROM A PROPHET'S NOTE-BOOK.

## (I)

Few emotions of the human mind are more enviable than those which attend the young prophet sitting down to write his first prophecy. If the school of the prophets which bore him has systematically ignored the subject of composition and tenderly kept its disciples in the dark as to what possibilities herein lay before them, then the condition of his mind borders simply upon ecstasy. Let us take a case from experience: On a certain day of the week, if not of the month, after a substantial breakfast—calculated to fortify him in his onslaught on Tartarus—he brings to the conflict all things that he deems needful, which are as follows:—Several dozen of well-selected pens, hard and soft, broad and fine; inks of all colors of the rainbow and several intermediate shades, reinforced by the pint bottle of black in the cupboard; blotting paper sufficient to counteract a deluge; cotton spools and a packet of needles, by which to connect his thoughts when registered, and a goodly store of white foolscap, with reserve forces in stacks on the floor, in sight and ready for instant use. His table is broad and flat, like that which was conducive to the inspiration of Dickens (and which, probably, the great man used to expand his feet upon), his paper of the finest and most enticing quality—like that of Dumas, when tempting himself to write: while by his side lies a packet of chocolate cremes—as used by some other warrior of the quill to repel physical exhaustion. Having thus marshalled his forces, and now being at liberty to consider the situation, our hero, with a silent invocation to the ghosts of all great preachers—lights his pipe.

A good beginning, certainly; favorable to the development of the imagination and reasoning powers, if not pre-supposing them both! Then he pronounces that *all is ready*.

Presently the solemn reverie dissolves. He returns to "the natural world," and ponders for a subject upon which to relieve himself of the bursting pressure of brilliant ideas that by this time threatens to overwhelm his soul. A thousand present themselves—at least by name—each clamoring for treatment; but so tempting are they all that he cannot decide upon any, until suddenly he recollects, "Ass that I am!—a blue pencil! For notes, ideas and rough copy, how could I expect to do anything without a blue pencil?" Accordingly having despatched one of his six-footed (pardon, *six-foot*) young stalwarts (for we presume he has, ages ago, found it is not good to be lonely) to purchase, at any cost, a true blue lead pencil, from the most reliable house in town, he re-fills his pipe, dispels frivolous thoughts and returns once more to "the spiritual world." He is waiting for his necessary "environment" to become complete.

At last the true blue arrives, with a most carnal-looking small bill attached for costs, and once more, like the historic British tar, he declares that he is "ready, aye ready."

Reader, at such a moment the inexpressible virtues of tobacco appear. Picture the scene: The self-control that is necessary to keep such forces back, to hold them in check! Those itching fingers! That resolute grasp upon the literary poniard! That heaving bosom and surging brain! That burning pen, "mightier than the sword," leveled to attack the extended reams! The manicolored ink—the broad table—the chocolate! Wherefore this delay? There is "silence deep as death." Then, metaphorically, the trumpet sounds. *Hmc illi fumi*,—that is the meaning of these fumes, dear friend.

By the way, speaking of tobacco as an article of warfare—"It will prove, I fear, another instance of disregarded warning," says the Commissariat-General to the British forces in his late report, "but nearly a month ago, in view of the impending hostilities with Russia, I prayed the Government to take the precaution of shipping to the seat of war several million of military pipes (clay, of course, though corn-cobs for the officers), for use in the hour of battle—in fact on the occasion of a possible second Balaklava. I urged it to impress, by proclamation, upon the non-smokers the inconsistency of their considering the welfare of their own stomachs rather than that of their country, and even went so far as to urge the authorities to enforce compliance, at least upon the field, on pain of death. My letter, however, brought no reply." It must have miscarried.

But to return to our hero. What is his position now that several hours have elapsed since last we met him? *He is ready to commence*. The more we observe his bearing the more convinced of this do we become—from the same source of observation it is difficult to believe more. The facts still confront one another. From different standpoints he viewed his spiritual enemy—*e. g.* from the sofa, from the arm-chair, from the table, whence he finally manœuvred to the floor. He has done more: He has tried the effect of three different brands of narcotic ammunition upon the spiritual constitution; and three chapters of a novel have been expended with no more effect than so much blank cartridge. He feels dispirited. What is to be done?

Let us not despair, however, for see, like the great sea-serpent, he moves! He is NOT an island. And see now how, grimly rising, cerulean-hued pencil in hand, despite all obstacles in his path, he *numbers his first page*! (A wail comes up from the foe).

Bravo, brother; this is a real step forward! Stay, it is not all! By a supernatural effort and a masterly stroke of intuition (for he has not yet the faintest notion what the *subject* will be), he *names his sermon*; (A second wail) in bold and flowing hand, and lo, *procumbit lumi*, he falls from the chair exhausted. Verily, "the pen is mightier than the sword."