

reckless companions—ahem!—Two-Bottle Pontifex. . . . Two-Bottle Pontifex—such was my appetite for port-wine at that period! I am now never allowed by Mrs. Pontifex—alas!—even to taste the—ahem!—the beverage.”

“This,” said Mr. Broughton, affectionately caressing one of the decanters, “is a bottle of 1820. I sincerely wish, Leonard, that I could entertain the hope of bequeathing you a few dozens in token of regard to my old pupil. But I have not more than enough for my own use, always supposing that I reach the allotted time of three score years and ten. It is generous still, this wine.” He poured out a glass, and held it to the light. “Mark the colour; refresh yourself with this bouquet; taste the noble wine.” He suited the action to the “recommendation.” “What a combination of delight for all the senses at once! Nature never raised a sweeter colour—a more divine fragrance—a more Olympian taste than she has united—”

“Under Providence, brother Broughton,” said Mr. Pontifex, shaking his head.

“United in this one glass of the finest wine ever grown. How my good grandfather, the Bishop—whose piety was only equalled by his taste for port—would have enjoyed this moment! The day before he died his chaplain, on pouring him out his single glass—the Bishop was then too feeble for more—said, ‘We shall drink, my lord, in a better world, a more delicious wine.’ He was a learned and sound divine, but young, and with a palate comparatively untrained. ‘We cannot,’ said the good old Bishop. ‘Better wine than this is not to be had.’”

“The next decanter,” he went on with a sigh for the good Bishop’s memory, “is a bottle of 1834. I do not know aught how to sing its praises. After what I have said of 1820 I would only say—

O matre pulchritudinis pulchrior!

You shall taste it presently. Thirteen years later we come to 1847. What a year for port! and to think that it should be followed—that year of generous and glorious vintage—by the year of rebellion and social upheaving! As if Heaven’s choicest blessings were altogether thrown away upon ungrateful man! The last is a bottle of 1850, now four years in bottle and still a little too full. The four bottles do not make altogether a bottle a head—nothing to your old days, Pontifex—but we three are advanced in years, I am sorry to think, and the boys have been trained in a different school. Perhaps a better one.”

“And now,” he resumed, looking round with smiles twinkling in his eyes and playing over his jolly red face, “a Toast. The health of Leonard—our brave lad who has come home from the wars with medals and honours which make us all proud of him. It was in his room, my dear boy, that you first read the wars of antiquity told in heroic verse. It was here that your ear and your heart became attuned to the glorious aspects of heroism, and the din of battle. Remember, when you have some of your own, that nothing succeeds like putting a boy through the good old mill of Homer and Virgil. You were educated by me for your work, not by cramming yourself with a bundle of scientific facts, which they would persuade us is what soldiers want, but by the deeds of the great men of Greece and Rome. You have not forgotten Diomedes, I hope.”

“No, Sir,” said Leonard. “Nor Sarpedon, nor the cowardly Paris, nor Turnus, nor Nisus and Euryalus—not any of them. Who can forget the jolly old battles?”

“When I was a schoolboy,” Mr. Pontifex said, solemnly, “I once fought a battle with another boy in which, I remember, I was worsted, owing to the superior strength of my antagonist. This breach of rules was subsequently discovered by the master of the school, and I was summoned before his presence. As I had nothing to say in—ahem!—vindication of the offence, I was instantly condemned to be—ahem!—in fact—beaten! The necessary preliminaries having been performed, they proceeded to search for the rod, an instrument which was kept for that purpose under wet straw in the garden. When this had been found, I sustained a most fearful infliction.”

We all laughed at this graphic reminiscence of a school battle and its consequences, and Mr. Broughton bade us charge our glasses and begin the “21.” Mr. Pontifex grew more solemn as well as paler under the influence of the port as the evening went on, and Mr. Broughton more purple in the face, more jolly, and more animated. I had frequently seen this opposite effect of wine upon both clergymen. After the second bottle, the wine passed chiefly from one to the other, because the Captain had already exceeded a double ration and Leonard was moderate in his libations.

In the course of the evening, the Perpetual Curate of St. Faith’s pronounced an eulogium on the world generally, on those who know how to enjoy life, and on the good things life has to give. It was in the middle of the last bottle, and his face was a deep purple, while Mr. Pontifex, perfectly white, sat with his long upper lip grown half an inch longer, and the solemnity of Rhadamanthus upon his brow.

“What good things they are,” he said enthusiastically, “to those few who knew how to cultivate their senses. Wine such as this; the meats and fruits which come in their season; music such as Laddy here can play; the poetry of those divine men who made the language of a little peninsula survive for ever to fill our hearts with wonder and delight; the beauty of women to take us out of ourselves when we are young—you have been in love, Captain?”

The Captain laughed.

“Was there ever a sailor,” he asked, “who has not been in love? And was there ever a lover like a sailor? What does the song say?” The Captain lifted up his pipe.

“And the toast—for ’twas Saturday night—Some sweetheart or wife whom he loved as his life—Each drank and he wished he could ball her—But the standing toast! That pleased the most—Was the wind that blows, And the ship that goes, And the lass that loves a sailor.”

“And the lass that loves a sailor,” echoed Mr. Broughton, to his colleague’s astonishment. “I knew you had, Captain. Catch a salt neglecting such a chance of completing his education. It did you good—own that; and it did me good, too, after the fit was over. Come, Pontifex, your wife is not here. Confess.”

Mr. Pontifex shook his head very solemnly, and made answer with many parentheses.

“It is a sad—sad reminiscence of an ardent and perhaps (in this and in one or two other particulars which I have already at various times, which you may remember, Johnnie, in the course of conversation touched upon) ill-regulated youth, that I once imagined myself—actually in love”—he spoke in a tone of the greatest surprise—“with a—a—in fact—a young person of the opposite sex, who vended perfumes, unless my memory greatly deceives me, at an establishment in the High—”

“And I daresay it was a very good thing for you,” returned his jovial brother, interrupting the further particulars of this amour. “It was for me, and no worse for the girl I loved, because she preferred somebody else, and married him. It was an education for us all. As it is now, Captain, at our time of life we may say—

Old as we are, for ladies’ love unit, The power of beauty we remember yet.

And the sight of a pretty face, like that of Celia Tyrrell—bless her!—I drink this glass of the Forty-one to her—is like the shadow of a rock in the wilderness. Age has its pleasures; they are, besides the drinking of good port, the contemplation of beautiful women and active youth. We have lived—let us sit down and watch those who are living. You, Leonard, boy,” he resumed the familiar tone of our old tutor, “you had the impudence to tell me five years ago, that you would rather help to make history than to write it. And that is what you have been doing ever since. And it does us good—us old stagers, to see you doing it.”

Presently he became more serious, and spoke from the Christian’s point of view.

A Christian scholar and a gentleman. His race is nearly extinct now. But he had his uses, and many were his virtues. When I read Robert Browning’s poem of “Bishop Blougram’s Apology,” I read for Blougram, Broughton. And yet he only touched that Right Reverend Father in a few points. Above all, a scholar; and with it, a kindly heart, a simple faith, and a robust, full nature which enabled him to enjoy all that could be got from life. He is gone now with his purple face, his short fat figure, and his dogmatic sermons. I do not like the present man—who is Earnest—so well. Nor do I love the fussiness of the new school.

The next day we called upon Mrs. Pontifex, who received Leonard as cordially as that lady could make a greeting. Nothing was said about her husband’s excesses in port the previous evening. She said that news had reached them of Leonard’s happy return; that she rejoiced at his success, which was doubtless, she was good enough to say, deserved, though she wished it had been in more Christian fields; that the army was a bad school for those who wished to be serious; and that he must specially beware of that inflation which prosperity brings upon the heart. Then she said hospitably that she proposed, after consideration, to name an early day, for Tea. Leonard laughed and accepted, leaving the day open. He always laughed, this favourite of Fortune. I do not think that festive gathering ever came off, owing to other circumstances which interfered. The Rev. John Pontifex, who was present, looking pale, and still preserving last night’s solemnity, followed up the theme opened by his wife, giving us by the way of illustration a few personal experiences, with copious parentheses.

“I observed the same dangerous tendency,” he said, “when I was standing for my degree at Oxford, on which occasion, I may be permitted to add, though I now hope, having been chastened”—he looked at his wife—“without pride, I greatly distinguished myself”—he got a fourth—“I was treated, it is true, by the examiners, with gross injustice, being required to translate passages ACTUALLY, though you may not perhaps credit the disgraceful circumstance, from the *very end* of the works both of Lucretius and Virgil! I was confronted, in fact, with the hardest portion of those authors”—Mr. Pontifex spoke with great bitterness, and in the firm belief that Virgil, writing expressly for Academical candidates, contrived his books so as to form a series of graduated exercises. “And in spite of this I obtained a place of honourable distinction. On that occasion, I confess with Repentance, my heart was greatly puffed up. It is an Event to look back upon with profound Repentance. I observed a similar temptation to pride, when I dealt my Blow at the Papacy in fifty-three theses. A copy of this work shall be sent to you, Leonard, before you go again into Popish regions. I heard, indeed, that one so-called Father (I suppose because he had no sons)—a Papistical Priest—had presumed to answer. He said he was an inquirer. So, indeed, am I—but

—but—he is a scoundrel, and will most certainly, some day,—at least, I fear so—meet with his deserts.”

This seemed carrying the *odium theologicum*, as well as literary controversy a little too far. Mr. Pontifex had but one weapon, the threat of his one punishment.

In the afternoon of what Celia called “the day after,” leaving the rest of the phrase to be filled up, Leonard’s Colonel called upon us. There was one thing remarkable about the Captain. He was the simplest of sailors—no retired Bo’s’n could be simpler—in his habits of thought, his speech, and his way of life. But with an officer of his own or the sister service, his manner changed instinctively. To the quite simplicity of his habitual air he added the bearing and dignity of his rank. He was, he remembered, on these occasions, a Captain of the Royal Navy, and the carpet of his dining-room became a Quarter-deck.

The Colonel came to say great things of Leonard, and said them, Leonard not being present.

“He was observed by his officers, sir, from the first. Reported on his joining at his Depot as a smart well set up lad. Found to be of superior rank and education to the men. Proved himself excellent at drill. Made a corporal first and a sergeant shortly after. And, sir, if it were not for his own interests, I should say I wish he were a sergeant still.”

“You have heard of his gallant action, I suppose,” he went on. “Nothing finer ever done. Lord Raglan sent for him, sir. He has told you that, I dare say. But he did not tell you what the chief said afterwards. It was that if he had it in his power he would have knighted him on the field of battle. He has been a credit to the regiment since the first day he joined it. We are proud of him, sir; we are proud of him, and I am happy in being able, this day, to beat up your quarters and tell you so.”

The Captain answered simply. He said that Leonard was always a brave and trustworthy lad; that for his own part he had endeavoured to make the boy think of duty above all things; that it gave him unspeakable pleasure to hear what the Colonel had said and to know that it was the truth without exaggeration; that the boy was still young, and, as yet, only at the beginning of his career. I felt proud of the Captain as he made his little speech, full of dignity and good feeling.

“At all events, he owes everything to you,” said the Colonel. “And now, will you dine with us to-morrow, you and Mr. Pulaski? It is guest night.”

The Captain accepted for both of us.

“I should like to ask,” said the Colonel, “if it is not an impertinent question—do you think there is any chance of Copleston finding out something of his family?”

“I have thought of it more than once,” the Captain replied. “His mother died in giving him birth; with the last breath she said his name was to be Leonard Copleston. ‘her husband’s name.’ It is not a very common name. To find him one would have to consult army and navy lists of five-and-twenty years ago. If we found him, what might we not find too? That his father was a scoundrel is certain to me, from the circumstances of the boy’s birth. He may be dead; he may have dishonoured the name; he may be unwilling to recognize his son—why not let things go as they have done, without further trouble? The boy bears the Queen’s Commission; he is no disgrace, but a credit to his regiment. Let us remain satisfied.”

The Colonel shook his head.

“I shall look up the lists,” he said. “And if I find out anything I will tell you first. If it is anything calculated to do Copleston harm, we will keep it to ourselves.”

Guest night at the Hundred-and-Twentieth. The table covered with the regimental plate, and crowded with officers. The Colonel has our old Captain on the right, his own guest. I sit beside Leonard. The band is playing. There is a full assemblage. The younger officers are full of life and spirits. What is it like—this world I have never seen till to-night—this world of animal spirits, laughter and careless fun? I look about me dreamily. This, then, I think, was the kind of life led by my father, Roman Pulaski, of the Imperial Guard, before Nicholas changed it for the Siberian mines. It must be pleasant for a while. These young fellows are neither creating, like artists; nor criticising, like scholars; nor working for money, like professional men; nor selling their wit and spirits, like authors; nor contriving schemes for making money, like merchants; they are simply living to enjoy things. They have had a hard time of it in India; a few of them—very few, alas!—had a hard time in the Crimea; now they are back to garrison and English life, and they are rejoicing as heartily as they fought.

They tell me that the officer of to-day is scientific, and plays Kriegspiel. I am sure he is not braver, more genial, kinder, or more generous than Leonard’s brothers in arms of twenty years ago. I daresay even in those brainless times, even among the jovial faces around that mess table, there were some who cared about their profession, had strategic genius, and studied the art of war. At least one did. Everybody challenges the Captain. He was Copleston’s guardian. Everybody knows all about him. Then they challenged me, and had I drained all the bumpers they came offering me, my course at that table would have been brief indeed.

“Gentlemen, The Queen!”

It is the President, and then we fall into general talk.

What sort of mess would that be into which

Wassielewski was going to introduce me? A mess of peasants sitting round a fire of sticks in a forest. Instead of the Queen’s health we should drink to Poland, instead of claret we should have water, instead of a circle of faces in which the enjoyment of life—the mere fact of living—was the prevailing feature, I should see round me everywhere the grim and earnest faces of those who were looking forward sadly to defeat and death. I suppose when a man is going to be martyred he goes to meet his doom with a certain exaltation which enables him to pass through the agony of death with heroic mien. The most disagreeable part about it must be the steady looking forward to the supreme moment.

“Dreamer,” whispered Leonard, “where are your thoughts?”

“I was thinking what sort of a regimental mess I should find in Poland,” I replied, forgetting that Leonard knew nothing.

“What mess? Poland?” he replied. “What have you to do with Poland now?”

I told him in a few words. It was not the place or the time after dinner at a regimental mess to go into any heroics. Besides, I felt none—only a sad despondency at the necessity which was going to drag into the trouble one who had such a small stomach for the fight.

Leonard was agast.

“The thing is absurd, Laddy, ridiculous. You must not go.”

“I have pledged my word,” I said, “and I must. You would not have me break old Wassielewski’s heart?”

“I don’t know. It must be a tough old heart by this time. But I would rather break that than let him break your head. We will talk about it to-morrow, old boy. What with Celia’s troubles and yours it seems as if we shall have our hands full for awhile. Pray, has the Captain, by accident, any secret sorrow?”

“No,” I replied, laughing. It was beautiful to see the calm way in which Leonard faced difficulties.

“He is not engaged to Mrs. Jeram, I hope, or contracted a secret marriage with his cook? He’s not going to be tried by court martial for intoxication, is he? Really, Laddy, you have given me a shock. Are you sure there is no more behind?”

“Quite sure?”

“Good. There is going to be a move. We will get away early. I will go and see this fire-eater, and appeal to his common sense.”

It was twelve, however, before we escaped the kindly hospitalities of the mess, and the Captain came away amid a storm of invitations to dine with them again. He accepted them all in great good spirits, and became a sort of privileged person in the barracks so long as that regiment stayed in the place, dividing his time in the afternoon between the officers and the boys at play. When the regiment was ordered away he returned entirely to the boys.

(To be continued.)

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

All hail to the morn
When our King was born!
Let all voices the Anthem raise!
Let every bell
The grand chorus swell
While each heart devotion pays:
To God who gave us
His Son to save us
Let the whole nation render praise.

Oh, I love so well
The story to tell
How on Bethlehem’s plains of old,
While the city slept
The good shepherds kept
Their guard o’er the quiet fold,
All earnestly gazing
On that strange star blazing
With a lustre they scarce could behold.

With wonder and fear
Sweet strains did they hear,
And all speechless they fell to the ground,
From their far shining home
The angels had come
And the glory of God shone around!
Heaven’s arches were ringing
With the song they were singing,
And the hills did their raptures resound.

Hark! the silvery chimes
Fall of wordless rhymes,
Float out on the clear frosty air!
They rehearse once more
The sweet story of yore,
And our joy the angels still share.
Swinging and ringing
While the children are singing
Of the babe who lay in the manger bare.

For that cradle so lowly
With its burthen so holy,
A debt to the lowly we owe!
For no sweet idle fable
Was the babe of that stable,
With the dew of the night on His brow!
But the hope of a nation
And the King of salvation,
Who lives and reigns o’er us now.

Hark! how loud each bell
The chorus doth swell
On the air of the bright frosty morn.
While the bells are ringing
The children are singing
The long happy day with music they fill,
With louder ranges
Now the silvery changes
Repeat the glad anthem of “Peace and good-will.”

Ring on, sweet chimes,
Full of wordless rhymes—
Ring out on the clear frosty air!
Rehearsing once more
The glad tidings o’er,
While our joy the angels still share;
Swinging and ringing
While the children are singing
Of the babe who lay in the manger bare.

FRANK OAKES ROSE.

Dec. 25th.