

tion is whether it is all quite true, whether ships, and men, and material exist anywhere except in Lord Clarence Paget's speeches. Sir John Pakington, in his capacity of First Lord in Opposition, is inclined to question that; that is to say, he does not believe the men are not there, or the ships, or the stores, but he alleges that they cannot be put to use. There are the men, he says, but they are never at hand when wanted; there are the ships, only they can neither sail nor sail; and there are the guns, but they burst. Of course, as the natural and fitting depository of every whisper of discontent and every non-official criticism, he makes out some part of his case. . . . A very great though clumsy organization is supplied with almost limitless means of building ships, which it has the strongest official interest in building well, and very little interest in building cheaply. The natural result will be as an average very dear ships and very good ships, and that we cannot but think will, in the event of war, be found to be the case in England. The nation has not reached its ideal, but is as near to it as any other nation, is tending under criticism closer towards it, and is obtaining meanwhile a fleet strong enough to meet any call worth the cost of providing against. Expense and delay, not failure of out-turn, are the characteristic faults of the British Admiralty.

#### A PERILOUS JOURNEY.

'There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortunes—'

So says the sage, and it is not to be gainsayed by any man whom forty winters have chilled into wisdom. Ability and opportunity are fortune. Opportunity is not fortune; otherwise all were fortunate. Ability is not fortune, else why does genius slave? Why? But because it missed the opportunity that fitted it.

What I have—self, position, independence—I owe to an opportunity for exercising the very simple and unpretending combination of qualities that goes by the name of ability. But to my story.

My father was a wealthy country gentleman, of somewhat more than the average of intelligence, and somewhat more than the average of generosity and extravagance. His younger brother, a solicitor in large practice in London, would in vain remonstrate as to the imprudence of his course. Giving freely, spending freely, must come to an end. It did; and at twenty I was a well-educated, gentlemanly pauper. The investigation of my father's affairs showed that there was one shilling and sixpence in the pound for the whole of his creditors, and of course nothing for me.

The position was painful. I was half engaged to—that is, I had gloves, flowers, a ringlet, a *carte de visite* of Alice Morton. That, of course, must be stopped.

Mr. Silas Morton was not ill-pleased at the prospect of an alliance with his neighbour Westwood's son while there was an expectation of a provision for the young couple in the union of estates as well as persons; but now, when the estate was gone, when I, Guy Westwood, was shillingless in the world, it would be folly indeed. Nevertheless I must take my leave. 'Well, Guy, my lad, had job this; very bad job; thought he was as safe as the Bank. Would not have believed it from any one—not from any one. Of course all that nonsense about you and Alice must be stopped now; I'm not a hard man, but I can't allow Alice to throw away her life in the perversity she would have to bear on your wife; can't do it; wouldn't be the part of a father if I did.'

I suggested I might in time.

'Time, sir! time! How much? She's nineteen now. You're brought up to nothing; know nothing that will earn you a sixpence for the next six months, and you talk about time. Time, indeed! Keep her waiting till she's thirty, and then break her heart by finding it a folly to marry at all.'

'Oh! Alice, my dear, Guy's come to say "Good bye" to me, see, with me, that his altered position compels him, as an honourable man, to give up any hopes he may have formed for the future.'

He left us alone to say 'Farewell'—a word too hard to say at our ages. Of course we consulted what should be done. To give each other up, to bury the delicious past, that was not to be thought of. We would be constant, spite of all. I must gain a position, and papa would then help us.

Two ways were open: a commission in India, a place in my uncle's office. Which? I was for the commission, Alice for the office. A respectable industrial scholar; a position not to be despised; nothing but cleverness wanted; and my uncle's name, and no one to wait for; no liver complaints; no Sepoys; no sea voyages; and no long separation.

'Oh, I'm sure it is the best thing.'

I agreed, not unaturally then, that it is the best.

'Now, you young people, you've had time enough to say "Good-bye," so be off, Guy. Here, my lad, you'll need something to start with,' and the old gentleman put into my hands a note for fifty pounds.

'I must beg, sir, that you will not insult—'

'God bless the boy!—Insult? Why I've danced you on my knee hundreds of times. Look you, Guy—and the old fellow came and put his hand on my shoulder—it gives me pain to do what I am doing. I believe, for both your sakes, it is best you should part. Let us part friends. Come now, Guy, you'll need this; and if you need a little more, let me know.'

'But, sir, you cut me off from all hope; you render my life a burden to me. Give me some definite task; say how much you think we ought to have; I mean, how much I ought to have to help Alice—I mean, Miss Morton—in such a position as you would wish.'

Alice added her entreaties, and the result of the conference was an understanding that if within five years from that date I could show I was worth 500*l.* a year, the old gentleman would add another 500*l.*; and on that he thought we might live for a few years comfortably.

There was to be no correspondence whatever; no meetings, no messages. We protested and pleaded, and finally he said—

'Well, well, Guy; I always liked you, and liked your father before you. Come to us on Christmas Day, and you shall find a vacant chair beside Alice. There, now; say "Good-bye," and be off.'

I went off. I came to London, to one of the little lanes leading out of Cannon Street. Five hundred a year in five years! I must work hard.

My uncle took little notice of me; I fancied myself a harder than the rest, and paid me the same. Seventy-five pounds a year is not a large sum. I had spent it in a month before now, after the fashion of my father; now, I hoarded; made clothes last; ate in modest, cheap, little cookshops; and kept my enjoying families from absolute rust by a weekly half-price to the theatres—the pit.

The year passed. I went down at Christmas, and for twenty-four hours was alive; came back, and had a rise of twenty pounds in salary for the next year. I waited for opportunity, and it came not.

This jag-trot routine of office-work continued for two years more, and at the end of that time I was worth but my salary of 135*l.* per year—135*l.* a long way from 500*l.* O*h*, for opportunity! I must quit the desk, and become a merchant; all successful men have been merchants; money begets money. But to oppose all these thoughts of change came the memory of Alice's last words at Christmas: 'Wait and hope, Guy, dear; wait and hope.' Certainly; it's so easy to.

'Governor wants you, Westwood. He's sharp this morning; very sharp; so look out, my dear nephew.'

'You understand a little Italian, I think,' said my uncle.

'A little, Sir.'

'You will start to-night for Florence, in the mail train. Get there as rapidly as possible, and find whether a Colonel Wilson is residing there, and what lady he is residing with. Learn all you can as to his position and means, and the terms on which he lives with that lady. Write to me, and wait there for further instructions. Mr. Williams will give you a cheque for 100*l.*; you can get circular notes for 50*l.* and the rest in cash. If you have anything to say, come in here at five o'clock; if not good morning. By-the-by, say nothing in the office.'

I need not say that hope made me believe my opportunity was come.

I hurried to Florence, and discharged my mission; sent home a careful letter, full of facts without comment or opinion, and in three weeks' time was summoned to return. I had done little or nothing that could help me, and in a disappointing state of mind I packed up and went to the railway station at St. Dunstons. A little row with a peasant as to his demand for carrying my baggage caused me to lose the last train that night, and so the sterner at Leghorn. The station master, seeing my vexation, endeavored to console me.

'There will be a special through train to Leghorn at nine o'clock, ordered by Count Spezzato; he is good-natured, and will possibly let you go in that.'

It was worth the chance, and I hung about the station till I was tired, and then walked back towards the village. Passing a small wine-shop, I entered, and asked for wine in English. I don't know what whim possessed me when I did it, for they were unable to understand me without dumb motions, and sat down to waste away the time over a railway volume.

I had been seated about half an hour, when a courier entered, accompanied by a railway guard, two more different samples of the human race it would be difficult to describe.

The guard was a dark, savage-looking Italian, with 'rascal' and 'dandy' written all over him; big, black, bulgy, with bloodshot eyes, and thick, heavy, sensual lips, the man was utterly repulsive.

The courier was a little, neatly-dressed man, of no age in particular; pale, blue-eyed, straight-lipped, his face was a compound of fox and rabbit that only a fool or a patriot would have trusted out of arm's length.

This ill-matched pair called for brandy, and the hostess set it before them. I then heard them ask who and what I was. She replied, I must be an Englishman, and did not understand the Italian for wine. She then left.

They evidently wanted to be alone, and my presence was decidedly disagreeable to them; and muttering that I was an Englishman, they proceeded to try my powers as a linguist.

The courier commenced in Italian, with a remark on the weather. I immediately handed him the newspaper. I did not speak Italian that was clear to them.

The guard now struck in with a remark in French as to the fineness of the neighbouring country. I shrugged my shoulders, and produced my cigar case. French was not very familiar to me, evidently.

'Those beasts of English think their own tongue so fine they are too proud to learn another,' said the guard.

'Well, my dear Michael Palmucci,' began the guard.

'For the love of God, call me not by that name. My name is Alexis—Alexis Dzentool, now.'

'Oh! oh!' laughed the guard; 'you've changed your name, you fox; it's like you. Now I am the same that you knew fifteen years ago, Conrad Ferrate. Come, lad, tell us your story. How did you get out of that little affair at Warsaw? How they could have trusted you, with your face, with their secrets, I can't for the life of me tell; you look so like a sly knave, don't you, lad?'

The courier so far from resenting this familiarity, smiled, as if he had been pained.

'My story is soon said. I found, after my betrayal to the police of the secrets of that little conspiracy which you and I joined, that Poland was too hot for me, and my name too well known. I went to France who values her police, and for a few years was useful to them. But it was dull work; very dull; native talent was more esteemed. I was to be sent on a secret service to Warsaw; I declined, for obvious reasons.'

'Good! Michael—Alexis; good, Alexis. This fox is not to be trapped.' And he slapped the courier on the shoulder heartily.

'And,' resumed the other, 'I resigned. Since then I have travelled as courier with noble families, and I trust I give satisfaction.'

'Good! Alexis; good, Mich—good, Alexis! To yourself you give satisfaction. You are a fine rascal!—the prince of rascals! So decent; T

so quiet; had sold; And w; honest C; men had; from the; 'That'; as then; 'For'; hold me; his office; hence—the; makes us; 'Tell'; the best; my little; your me; 'I have'; 'Ten'; 'He who'; robbery c; he accus; I took; outburst; me all th; The g; 'That'; ago, as; strange; 'Be c; Ishman; 'How'; I was b; estate; and he; my cou; became; 'I lo; sweet c; 'Me—; dog that; killed th; him'; 'And'; 'Oh'; 'A ch; with th; are an; health; 'You'; 'I'll d; bring; hated w; his rel; 'The'; than h; nurru; loving; 'He'; 'Wh'; 'My'; 'Go'; 'Be'; bride; 'Th'; excha; 'Our; 'Pa'; 'The'; down; 'To'; future; or nev; shall; 'Wh'; would; solve; best; 'I'; risk; with; 'C'; 'Th'; 'Th'; for a; could; inter; 'Ac'; part; 'His'; 'C'; 'spea'; night; 'If'; 'I'