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PART III.

CHAPTER I.

It was a beautiful summer afternoon when the coach set me down at my father's gate. Mrs. Primmins herself ran out to welcome me; and I had scarcely escaped from the warm clasp of her friendly hand before I was in the arms of my mother.

As soon as that tenderest of parents was convinced that I was not famished, seeing that I had dined two hours ago at Dr. Herman's, she led me gently across the garden towards the arbor. "You will find your father so cheerful," said she, wiping away a tear. "His brother is with him."

I stopped. His brother! Will the reader believe it? I had never heard that he had a brother, so little were family affairs ever discussed in my hearing.

"His brother!" said I. "Have I then an Uncle Caxton as well as an Uncle Jack?"

"Yes, my love," said my mother. And then she added, "Your father and he were not such good friends as they ought to have been, and the Captain has been abroad. However, thank Heaven! they are now quite reconciled."

We had time for no more,—we were in the arbor. There, a table was spread with wine and fruit,—the gentlemen were at their dessert; and those gentlemen were my father, Uncle Jack, Mr. Squills, and—tall, lean, buttoned-to-the-chin—an erect, martial, majestic, and imposing personage, who seemed

worthy of a place in my great ancestor's "Boke of Chivalrie."

All rose as I entered; but my poor father, who was always slow in his movements, had the last of me. Uncle Jack had left the very powerful impression of his great seal-ring on my fingers; Mr. Squills had patted me on the shoulder and pronounced me "wonderfully grown;" my new-found relative had with great dignity said, "Nephew, your hand, sir,—I am Captain de Caxton;" and even the tame duck had taken her beak from her wing and rubbed it gently between my legs, which was her usual mode of salutation, before my father placed his pale hand on my forehead, and looking at me for a moment with unutterable sweetness, said, "More and more like your mother,—God bless you!"

A chair had been kept vacant for me between my father and his brother. I sat down in haste, and with a tingling color on my cheeks and a rising at my throat, so much had the unusual kindness of my father's greeting affected me; and then there came over me a sense of my new position. I was no longer a schoolboy at home for his brief holiday: I had returned to the shelter of the roof-tree to become myself one of its supports. I was at last a man, privileged to aid or solace those dear ones who had ministered, as yet without return, to me. That is a very strange crisis in our life when we come home for good. Home seems a different thing; before, one has been but a sort of guest after all, only welcomed and indulged, and little festivities held in honor of the released and happy child. But to come home for good,—to have done with school and boyhood,—is to be a guest, a child no more. It is to share the everyday life of cares and duties; it is to enter into the confidences of home. Is it not so? I could have buried my face in my hands and wept!

My father, with all his abstraction and all his simplicity, had a knack now and then of penetrating at once to the heart. I verily believe he read all that was passing in mine as easily as if it had been Greek. He stole his arm gently round my waist and whispered, "Hush!" Then, lifting his voice, he cried aloud, "Brother Roland, you must not let Jack have the best of the argument."

"Brother Austin," replied the Captain, very formally, "Mr. Jack, if I may take the liberty so to call him —"

"You may indeed," cried Uncle Jack.

"Sir," said the Captain, bowing, "it is a familiarity that does me honor. I was about to say that Mr. Jack has retired from the field."

"Far from it," said Squills, dropping an effervescing powder into a chemical mixture which he had been preparing with great attention, composed of sherry and lemon-juice—"far from it. Mr. Tibbets—whose organ of combativeness is finely developed, by the by—was saying—"

"That it is a rank sin and shame in the nineteenth century," quoth Uncle Jack, "that a man like my friend Captain Caxton—"

"De Caxton, sir—Mr. Jack."

"De Caxton,—of the highest military talents, of the most illustrious descent,—a hero sprung from heroes,—should have served so many years, and with such distinction, in his Majesty's service, and should now be only a captain on half-pay. This, I say, comes of the infamous system of purchase, which sets up the highest honors for sale, as they did in the Roman empire—"

My father pricked up his ears; but Uncle Jack pushed on before my father could get ready the forces of his meditated interruption.

"A system which a little effort, a little union, can so easily terminate. Yes, sir," and Uncle Jack thumped the table, and two cherries bobbed up and smote Captain de Caxton on the nose, "yes, sir, I will undertake to say that I could put the army upon a very different footing. If the poorer and more meritorious gentlemen, like Captain de Caxton, would, as I was just observing, but unite in a grand anti- aristocratic association, each paying a small sum quarterly, we could realize a capital sufficient to out-purchase all these undeserving individuals, and every man of merit should have his fair chance of promotion."

"Egad! sir," said Squills, "there is something grand in that, eh, Captain?"

"No, sir," replied the Captain, quite seriously; "there is in monarchies but one fountain of honor. It would be an interference with a soldier's first duty,—his respect for his sovereign."

"On the contrary," said Mr. Squills, "it would still be to the sovereigns that one would owe the promotion."

"Honor," pursued the Captain, coloring up, and unheeding this witty interruption, "is the reward of a soldier. What do I care that a young jackanapes buys his colonelcy over my head? Sir, he does not buy from me my wounds and my services. Sir, he does not buy from me the medal I won at Waterloo. He is a rich man, and I am a poor man; he is called— colonel, because he paid money for the name. That pleases him; well and good. It would not please me; I had rather remain a captain, and feel my dignity, not in my title, but in the services by which it has been won. A beggarly, rascally association of stock-brokers, for aught I know, buy me a company! I don't want to be uncivil, or I would say damn 'em—Mr.—sir—Jack!"

A sort of thrill ran through the Captain's audience; even Uncle Jack seemed touched, for he stared very hard at the grim veteran, and said nothing. The pause was awkward; Mr. Squills broke it. "I should like," quoth he, "to see your Waterloo medal,—you have it not about you?"

"Mr. Squills," answered the Captain, "it lies next to my heart while I live. It shall be buried in my coffin, and I shall rise with it, at the word of command, on the day of the Grand Review!" So saying, the Captain leisurely unbuttoned his coat, and detaching from a piece of striped ribbon as ugly a specimen of the art of the silversmith (begging its pardon) as ever rewarded merit at the expense of taste, placed the medal on the table.

The medal passed round, without a word, from hand to hand.

"It is strange," at last said my father, "how such trifles can be made of such value,—how in one age a man sells his life for what in the next age he would not give a button! A Greek esteemed beyond price a few leaves of olive twisted into a circular shape and set upon his head,—a very ridiculous head-gear we should now call it. An American Indian prefers a decoration of human scalps, which, I apprehend, we should all agree (save and except Mr. Squills, who is accustomed to such things) to be a very disgusting addition to one's personal attractions; and my brother values this piece of silver, which may be worth about five shillings, more than Jack does a gold mine, or I do the library of the London Museum. A time will come when people will think that as idle a decoration as leaves and scalps."

"Brother," said the Captain, "there is nothing strange in the matter. It is as plain as a pike-staff to a man who understands the principles of honor."

"Possibly," said my father, mildly. "I should like to hear what you have to say upon honor. I am sure it would very much edify us all."

CHAPTER II.

"Gentlemen," began the Captain, at the distinct appeal thus made to him,—"Gentlemen, God made the earth, but man made the garden. God made man, but man re-creates himself."

"True, by knowledge," said my father.

"By industry," said Uncle Jack.

"By the physical conditions of his body," said Mr. Squills. He could not have made himself other than he was at first in the woods and wilds if he had fins like a fish, or could only chatter gibberish like a monkey. Hands and a tongue, sir,—these are the instruments of progress."

"Mr. Squills," said my father, nodding, "Anaxagoras said very much the same thing before you, touching the hands."

"I cannot help that," answered Mr. Squills; "one could not open one's lips, if one were bound to say what nobody else had said. But after all, our superiority is less in our hands than the greatness, of our thumbs."

"Albinus, 'De Sceletto,' and our own learned William Lawrence, have made a similar remark," again put in my father. "Hang it, sir!" exclaimed Squills, "what business have you to know everything?"

"Everything! No; but thumbs furnish subjects of investigation to the simplest understanding," said my father, modestly.

"Gentlemen," re-commenced my Uncle Roland, "thumbs and hands are given to an Esquimaux, as

well as to scholars and surgeons,—and what the deuce are they the wiser for them? Sirs, you cannot reduce us thus into mechanism. Look within. Man, I say, re-creates himself. How? By The Principle Of Honor. His first desire is to excel some one else; his first impulse is distinction above his fellows. Heaven places in his soul, as if it were a compass, a needle that always points to one end; namely, to honor in that which those around him consider honorable. Therefore, as man at first is exposed to all dangers from wild beasts, and from men as savage as himself, Courage becomes the first quality mankind must honor: therefore the savage is courageous; therefore he covets the praise for courage; therefore he decorates himself with the skins of the beasts he has subdued, or the the scalps of the foes he has slain. Sirs, don't tell me that the skins and the scalps are only hide and leather: they are trophies of honor. Don't tell me that they are ridiculous and disgusting: they become glorious as proofs that the savage has emerged out of the first brute-like egotism, and attached price to the praise which men never give except for works that secure or advance their welfare. By and by, sirs, our savages discover that they cannot live in safety amongst themselves unless they agree to speak the truth to each other: therefore Truth becomes valued, and grows into a principle of honor; so brother Austin will tell us that in the primitive times truth was always the attribute of a hero."

"Right," said my father; "Homer emphatically assigns it to Achilles."

"Out of truth comes the necessity for some kind of rude justice and law. Therefore men, after courage in the warrior, and truth in all, begin to attach honor to the elder, whom they intrust with preserving justice amongst them. So, sirs, Law is born—"

"But the first lawgivers were priests," quoth my father.

"Sirs, I am coming to that. Whence arises the desire of honor, but from man's necessity of excelling,—in other words, of improving his faculties for the benefit of others; though, unconscious of that consequence, man only strives for their praise? But that desire for honor is unextinguishable, and man is naturally anxious to carry its rewards beyond the grave. Therefore he who has slain most lions or enemies, is naturally prone to believe that he shall have the best hunting fields in the country beyond, and take the best place at the banquet. Nature, in all its operations, impresses man with the idea of an invisible Power; and the principle of honor—that is, the desire of praise and reward—snakes him anxious for the approval which that Power can bestow. Thence comes the first rude idea of Religion; and in the death-hymn at the stake, the savage chants songs prophetic of the distinctions he is about to receive. Society goes on; hamlets are built; property is established. He who has more than another has more power than another. Power is honored. Alan covets the honor attached to the power which is attached to possession. Thus the soil is cultivated; thus the rafts are constructed; thus tribe trades with tribe; thus Commerce is founded, and Civilization commenced. Sirs, all that seems least connected with honor, as we approach the vulgar days of the present, has its origin in honor, and is but an abuse of its principles. If men nowadays are hucksters and traders, if even military honors are purchased, and a rogue buys his way to a peerage, still all arises from the desire for honor, which society, as it grows old, gives to the outward signs of titles and gold, instead of, as once, to its inward essentials,—courage, truth, justice, enterprise. Therefore I say, sirs, that honor is the foundation of all improvement in mankind."

"You have argued like a schoolman, brother," said Mr. Caxton, admiringly; "but still, as to this round piece of silver, don't we go back to the most barbarous ages in estimating so highly such things as have no real value in themselves,—as could not give us one opportunity for instructing our minds?"

"Could not pay for a pair of boots," added Uncle Jack.

"Or," said Mr. Squills, "save you one twinge of the cursed rheumatism you have got for life from that night's bivouac in the Portuguese marshes,—to say nothing of the bullet in your cranium, and that cork-leg, which must much diminish the salutary effects of your constitutional walk."

"Gentlemen," resumed the Captain, nothing abashed, "in going back to those barbarous ages, I go back to the true principles of honor. It is precisely because this round piece of silver has no value in the market that it is priceless, for thus it is only a proof of desert. Where would be the sense of service in this medal, if it could buy back my leg, or if I could bargain it away for forty thousand a year? No, sirs, its value is this,—that when I wear it on my breast, men shall say, 'That formal old fellow is not so useless as he seems. He was one of those who saved England and freed Europe.' And even when I conceal it here," and, devoutly kissing the medal, Uncle Roland restored it to its ribbon and its resting-place, "and no eye sees it, its value is yet greater in the thought that my country has not degraded the old and true principles of honor, by paying the soldier who fought for her in the same coin as that in which you, Mr. Jack, sir, pay your bootmaker's bill. No, no, gentlemen. As courage was the first virtue that honor called forth, the first virtue from which all safety and civilization proceed, so we do right to keep that one virtue at least clear and unsullied from all the money-making, mercenary, pay-me-in-cash abominations which are the vices, not the virtues, of the civilization it has produced."

My Uncle Roland here came to a full stop; and, filling his glass, rose and said solemnly: "A last bumper, gentlemen,—'To the dead who died for England!'"

CHAPTER III.

"Indeed, my dear, you must take it. You certainly have caught cold; you sneezed three times together."

"Yes, ma'am, because I would take a pinch of Uncle Roland's snuff, just to say that I had taken a pinch out of his box,—the honor of the thing, you know."

"Ah, my dear! what was that very clever remark you made at the same time, which so pleased your father,—something about Jews and the college?"

"Jews and—oh! pulverem Olgmpicum collegisse juvat, my dear mother,— which means that it is a pleasure to take a pinch out of a brave man's snuff-box. I say, mother, put down the posset. Yes, I'll take it; I will, indeed. Now, then, sit here,—that's right,—and tell me all you know about this famous old Captain. Imprimis, he is older than my father?"

"To be sure!" exclaimed my mother, indignantly. "He looks twenty years older; but there is only five years' real difference. Your father must always look young."

"And why does Uncle Roland put that absurd French *de* before his name; and why were my father and he not good friends; and is he married; and has he any children?"

Scene of this conference: my own little room, new papered on purpose for my return for good,—trellis-work paper, flowers and birds, all so fresh and so new and so clean and so gay, with my books ranged in neat shelves, and a writing-table by the window; and, without the window, shines the still summer moon. The window is a little open: you scent the flowers and the new-mown hay. Past eleven; and the boy and his dear mother are all alone.

"My dear, my dear, you ask so many questions at once!"

"Don't answer them, then. Begin at the beginning, as Nurse Primmins does with her fairy tales, 'Once on a time.'

"Once on a time, then," said my mother, kissing me between the eyes,— "once on a time, my love, there was a certain clergyman in Cumberland who had two sons; he had but a small living, and the boys were to make their own way in the world. But close to the parsonage, on the brow of a hill, rose an old ruin with one tower left, and this, with half the country round it, had once belonged to the clergyman's family; but all had been sold,—all gone piece by piece, you see, my dear, except the presentation to the living (what they call the advowson was sold too), which had been secured to the last of the family. The elder of these sons was your Uncle Roland; the younger was your father. Now I believe the first quarrel arose from the absurdist thing possible, as your father says; but Roland was exceedingly touchy on all things connected with his ancestors. He was always poring over the old pedigree, or wandering amongst the ruins, or reading books of knight-errantry. Well, where this pedigree began, I know not, but it seems that King Henry II. gave some lands in Cumberland to one Sir Adam de Caxton; and from that time, you see, the pedigree went regularly from father to son till Henry V. Then, apparently from the disorders produced, as your father says, by the Wars of the Roses, there was a sad blank left,—only one or two names, without dates or marriages, till the time of Henry VII., except that in the reign of Edward IV. there was one insertion of a William Caxton (named in a deed). Now in the village church there was a beautiful brass monument to one Sir William de Caxton, who had been killed at the battle of Bosworth, fighting for that wicked king Richard III. And about the same time there lived, as you know, the great printer, William Caxton. Well, your father, happening to be in town on a visit to his aunt, took great trouble in hunting up all the old papers he could find at the Heralds' College; and, sure enough, he was overjoyed to satisfy himself that he was descended, not from that poor Sir William who had been killed in so bad a cause, but from the great printer, who was from a younger branch of the same family, and to whose descendants the estate came in the reign of Henry VIII. It was upon this that your Uncle Roland quarrelled with him,—and, indeed, I tremble to think that they may touch on that matter again."

"Then, my dear mother, I must say my uncle was wrong there so far as common-sense is concerned; but still, somehow or other, I can understand it. Surely, this was not the only cause of estrangement?"

My mother looked down, and moved one hand gently over the other, which was her way when embarrassed. "What was it, my own mother?" said I, coaxingly.

"I believe—that is, I—I think that they were both attached to the same young lady."

"How! you don't mean to say that my father was ever in love with any one but you?"

"Yes, Sisty,—yes, and deeply! And," added my mother, after a slight pause, and with a very low sigh, "he never was in love with me; and what is more, he had the frankness to tell me so!"

"And yet you—"

"Married him—yes!" said my mother, raising the softest and purest eyes that ever lover could have wished to read his fate in; "yes, for the old love was hopeless. I knew that I could make him happy. I knew that he would love me at last, and he does so! My son, your father loves me!"

As she spoke, there came a blush, as innocent as virgin ever knew, to my mother's smooth cheek; and she looked so fair, so good, and still so young all the while that you would have said that either Dusius, the Teuton fiend, or Nock, the Scandinavian sea-imp, from whom the learned assure us we derive our modern Daimones, "The Deuce," and Old Nick, had possessed my father, if he had not learned to love such a creature.

I pressed her hand to my lips; but my heart was too full to speak for a moment or so, and then I partially changed the subject.

"Well, and this rivalry estranged them more? And who was the lady?"

"Your father never told me, and I never asked," said my mother, simply. But she was very different from me, I know. Very accomplished, very beautiful, very highborn."

"For all that, my father was a lucky man to escape her. Pass on. What did the Captain do?"

"Why, about that time your grandfather died; and shortly after an aunt, on the mother's side, who was rich and saving, died, and unexpectedly left each sixteen thousand pounds. Your uncle, with his share, bought back, at an enormous price, the old castle and some land round it, which they say does not bring him in three hundred a year. With the little that remained, he purchased a commission in the army; and the brothers met no more till last week, when Roland suddenly arrived."

"He did not marry this accomplished young lady?" "No! but he married another, and is a widower."

"Why, he was as inconstant as my father, and I am sure without so good an excuse. How was that?"

"I don't know. He says nothing about it."

"Has he any children?"

"Two, a son—By the by, you must never speak about him. Your uncle briefly said, when I asked him what was his family, 'A girl, ma'am. I had a son, but—'

"'He is dead,' cried your father, in his kind, pitying voice."

"'Dead to me, brother; and you will never mention his name!' You should have seen how stern your uncle looked. I was terrified."

"But the girl,—why did not he bring her here?"

"She is still in France, but he talks of going over for her; and we have half promised to visit them both in Cumberland. But, bless me! is that twelve? and the posset quite cold!"

"One word more, dearest mother,—one word. My father's book,—is he still going on with it?"

"Oh yes, indeed!" cried my mother, clasping her hands; "and he must read it to you, as he does to me,—you will understand it so well. I have always been so anxious that the world should know him, and be proud of him as we are,—so—so anxious! For perhaps, Sisty, if he had married that great lady, he would have roused himself, been more ambitious,—and I could only make him happy, I could not make him great!"

"So he has listened to you at last?"

"To me?" said my mother, shaking her head and smiling gently. "No, rather to your Uncle Jack, who, I am happy to say, has at length got a proper hold over him."

"A proper hold, my dear mother! Pray beware of Uncle Jack, or we shall all be swept into a coal-mine, or explode with a grand national company for making gunpowder out of tea-leaves!"

"Wicked child!" said my mother, laughing; and then, as she took up her candle and lingered a moment while I wound my watch, she said, musingly: "Yet Jack is very, very clever; and if for your sake we could make a fortune, Sisty!"

"You frighten me out of my wits, mother! You are not in earnest?"

"And if my brother could be the means of raising him in the world—"

"Your brother would be enough to sink all the ships in the Channel, ma'am," said I, quite irreverently. I was shocked before the words were well out of my mouth; and throwing my arms round my mother's neck, I kissed away the pain I had inflicted.

When I was left alone and in my own little crib, in which my slumber had ever been so soft and easy, I might as well have been lying upon cut straw. I tossed to and fro; I could not sleep. I rose, threw on my dressing-gown, lighted my candle, and sat down by the table near the window. First I thought of the unfinished outline of my father's youth, so suddenly sketched before me. I filled up the missing colors, and fancied the picture explained all that had often perplexed my conjectures. I comprehended, I suppose by some secret sympathy in my own nature (for experience in mankind could have taught me little enough), how an ardent, serious, inquiring mind, struggling into passion under the load of knowledge, had, with that stimulus sadly and abruptly withdrawn, sunk into the quiet of passive, aimless study. I comprehended how, in the indolence of a happy but unimpassioned marriage, with a companion so gentle, so provident and watchful, yet so little formed to rouse and task and fire an intellect naturally calm and meditative, years upon years had crept away in the learned idleness of a solitary scholar. I comprehended, too, how gradually and slowly, as my father entered that stage of middle life when all men are most prone to ambition, the long-silenced whispers were heard again, and the mind, at last escaping from the listless weight which a baffled and disappointed heart had laid upon it, saw once more, fair as in youth, the only true mistress of Genius,—Fame.

Oh! how I sympathized, too, in my mother's gentle triumph. Looking over the past, I could see, year after year, how she had stolen more and more into my father's heart of hearts; how what had been kindness had grown into love; how custom and habit, and the countless links in the sweet charities of home, had supplied that sympathy with the genial man which had been missed at first by the lonely scholar.

Next I thought of the gray, eagle-eyed old soldier, with his ruined tower and barren acres, and saw before me his proud, prejudiced, chivalrous boyhood, gliding through the ruins or poring over the mouldy pedigree. And this son, so disowned,—for what dark offence? An awe crept over me. And this girl,—his ewe-lamb, his all,—was she fair? had she blue eyes like my mother, or a high Roman nose and beetle brows like Captain Roland? I mused and mused and mused; and the candle went out, and the moonlight grew broader and stiller; till at last I was sailing in a balloon with Uncle Jack, and had just tumbled into the Red Sea, when the well-known voice of Nurse Primmins restored me to life with a "God bless my heart! the boy has not been in bed all this 'varsal night!"

CHAPTER IV.

As soon as I was dressed I hastened downstairs, for I longed to revisit my old haunts,—the little plot of garden I had sown with anemones and tresses; the walk by the peach wall; the pond wherein I had angled for roach and perch.

Entering the hall, I discovered my Uncle Roland in a great state of embarrassment. The maid-servant was scrubbing the stones at the hall-door; she was naturally plump,—and it is astonishing how much more plump a female becomes when she is on all-fours! The maid-servant, then, was scrubbing the stones, her face turned from the Captain; and the Captain, evidently meditating a sortie, stood ruefully gazing at the obstacle before him and hemming aloud. Alas, the maidservant was deaf! I stopped, curious to see how Uncle Roland would extricate himself from the dilemma.

Finding that his hems were in vain, my uncle made himself as small as he could, and glided close to the left of the wall; at that instant the maid turned abruptly round towards the right, and completely obstructed, by this manoeuvre, the slight crevice through which hope had dawned on her captive. My

uncle stood stock-still,—and, to say the truth, he could not have stirred an inch without coming into personal contact with the rounded charms which blockaded his movements. My uncle took off his hat and scratched his forehead in great perplexity. Presently, by a slight turn of the flanks, the opposing party, while leaving him an opportunity of return, entirely precluded all chance of egress in that quarter. My uncle retreated in haste, and now presented himself to the right wing of the enemy. He had scarcely done so, when, without looking behind her, the blockading party shoved aside the pail that crippled the range of her operations, and so placed it that it formed a formidable barricade, which my uncle's cork leg had no chance of surmounting. Therewith Captain Roland lifted his eyes appealingly to Heaven, and I heard him distinctly ejaculate—

"Would to Heaven she were a creature in breeches!"

But happily at this moment the maid-servant turned her head sharply round, and seeing the Captain, rose in an instant, moved away the pail, and dropped a frightened courtesy.

My uncle Roland touched his hat. "I beg you a thousand pardons, my good girl," said he; and, with a half bow, he slid into the open air.

"You have a soldier's politeness, uncle," said I, tucking my arm into Captain Roland's.

"Tush, my boy," said he, smiling seriously, and coloring up to the temples; "tush, say a gentleman's! To us, sir, every woman is a lady, in right of her sex."

Now, I had often occasion later to recall that aphorism of my uncle's; and it served to explain to me how a man, so prejudiced on the score of family pride, never seemed to consider it an offence in my father to have married a woman whose pedigree was as brief as my dear mother's. Had she been a Montmorenci, my uncle could not have been more respectful and gallant than he was to that meek descendant of the Tibbetses. He held, indeed, which I never knew any other man, vain of family, approve or support,—a doctrine deduced from the following syllogisms: First, that birth was not valuable in itself, but as a transmission of certain qualities which descent from a race of warriors should perpetuate; namely, truth, courage, honor; secondly, that whereas from the woman's side we derive our more intellectual faculties, from the man's we derive our moral: a clever and witty man generally has a clever and witty mother; a brave and honorable man, a brave and honorable father. Therefore all the qualities which attention to race should perpetuate are the manly qualities, traceable only from the father's side. Again, he held that while the aristocracy have higher and more chivalrous notions, the people generally have shrewder and livelier ideas. Therefore, to prevent gentlemen from degenerating into complete dunderheads, an admixture with the people, provided always it was on the female side, was not only excusable, but expedient; and, finally, my uncle held that whereas a man is a rude, coarse, sensual animal, and requires all manner of associations to dignify and refine him, women are so naturally susceptible of everything beautiful in sentiment and generous in purpose that she who is a true woman is a fit peer for a king. Odd and preposterous notions, no doubt, and capable of much controversy, so far as the doctrine of race (if that be any way tenable) is concerned; but then the plain fact is that my Uncle Roland was as eccentric and contradictory a gentleman—as—as—why, as you and I are, if we once venture to think for ourselves.

"Well, sir, and what profession are you meant for?" asked my uncle.
"Not the army, I fear?"

"I have never thought of the subject, uncle."

"Thank Heaven," said Captain Roland, "we have never yet had a lawyer in the family, nor a stockbroker, nor a tradesman—ahem!"

I saw that my great ancestor the printer suddenly rose up in that hem.

"Why, uncle, there are honorable men in all callings."

"Certainly, sir. But in all callings honor is not the first principle of action."

"But it may be, sir, if a man of honor pursue it! There are some soldiers who have been great rascals!"

My uncle looked posed, and his black brows met thoughtfully. "You are right, boy, I dare say," he answered, somewhat mildly. "But do you think that it ought to give me as much pleasure to look on my old ruined tower if I knew it had been bought by some herring-dealer, like the first ancestor of the Poles, as I do now, when I know it was given to a knight and gentleman (who traced his descent from an Anglo-Dane in the time of King Alfred) for services done in Aquitaine and Gascony, by Henry the

Plantagenet? And do you mean to tell me that I should have been the same man if I had not from a boy associated that old tower with all ideas of what its owners were, and should be, as knights and gentlemen? Sir, you would have made a different being of me if at the head of my pedigree you had clapped a herring-dealer,—though, I dare say, the herring-dealer might have been as good a man as ever the Anglo- Dane was, God rest him!"

"And for the same reason I suppose, sir, that you think my father never would have been quite the same being he is if he had not made that notable discovery touching our descent from the great William Caxton, the printer."

My uncle bounded as if he had been shot,—bounded so incautiously, considering the materials of which one leg was composed, that he would have fallen into a strawberry-bed if I had not caught him by the arm.

"Why, you—you—you young jackanapes!" cried the Captain, shaking me off as soon as he had regained his equilibrium. "You do not mean to inherit that infamous crotchet my brother has got into his head? You do not mean to exchange Sir William de Caxton, who fought and fell at Bosworth, for the mechanic who sold black-letter pamphlets in the Sanctuary at Westminster?"

"That depends on the evidence, uncle!"

"No, sir; like all noble truths, it depends upon faith. Men, nowadays," continued my uncle, with a look of ineffable disgust, "actually require that truths should be proved."

"It is a sad conceit on their part, no doubt, my dear uncle; but till a truth is proved, how can we know that it is a truth?"

I thought that in that very sagacious question I had effectually caught my uncle. Not I. He slipped through it like an eel.

"Sir," said he, "whatever in Truth makes a man's heart warmer and his soul purer, is a belief, not a knowledge. Proof, sir, is a handcuff; belief is a wing! Want proof as to an ancestor in the reign of King Richard? Sir, you cannot even prove to the satisfaction of a logician that you are the son of your own father. Sir, a religious man does not want to reason about his religion; religion is not mathematics. Religion is to be felt, not proved. There are a great many things in the religion of a good man which are not in the catechism. Proof!" continued my uncle, growing violent—"Proof, sir, is a low, vulgar, levelling, rascally Jacobin; Belief is a loyal, generous, chivalrous gentleman! No, no; prove what you please, you shall never rob me of one belief that has made me—"

"The finest-hearted creature that ever talked nonsense," said my father, who came up, like Horace's deity, at the right moment. "What is it you must believe in, brother, no matter what the proof against you?"

My uncle was silent, and with great energy dug the point of his cane into the gravel.

"He will not believe in our great ancestor the printer," said I, maliciously.

My father's calm brow was overcast in a moment. "Brother," said the Captain, loftily, "you have a right to your own ideas; but you should take care how they contaminate your child."

"Contaminate!" said my father, and for the first time I saw an angry sparkle flash from his eyes; but he checked himself on the instant. "Change the word, my dear brother."

"No, sir, I will not change it! To belie the records of the family!"

"Records! A brass plate in a village church against all the books of the College of Arms!"

"To renounce your ancestor, a knight who died in the field!"

"For the worst cause that man ever fought for!"

"On behalf of his king!"

"Who had murdered his nephews!"

"A knight! with our crest on his helmet."

"And no brains underneath it, or he would never have had them knocked out for so bloody a villain!"

"A rascally, drudging, money-making printer!"

"The wise and glorious introducer of the art that has enlightened a world. Prefer for an ancestor, to one whom scholar and sage never name but in homage, a worthless, obscure, jolter-headed booby in mail, whose only record to men is a brass plate in a church in a village!"

My uncle turned round perfectly livid. "Enough, sir! enough! I am insulted sufficiently. I ought to have expected it. I wish you and your son a very good day."

My father stood aghast. The Captain was hobbling off to the iron gate; in another moment he would have been out of our precincts. I ran up and hung upon him. "Uncle, it is all my fault. Between you and me, I am quite of your side; pray forgive us both. What could I have been thinking of, to vex you so? And my father, whom your visit has made so happy!" My uncle paused, feeling for the latch of the gate. My father had now come up, and caught his hand. "What are all the printers that ever lived, and all the books they ever printed, to one wrong to thy fine heart, brother Roland? Shame on me! A bookman's weak point, you know! It is very true, I should never have taught the boy one thing to give you pain, brother Roland,—though I don't remember," continued my father, with a perplexed look, "that I ever did teach it him, either! Pisistratus, as you value my blessing, respect as your ancestor Sir William de Caxton, the hero of Bosworth. Come, come, brother!"

"I am an old fool," said Uncle Roland, "whichever way we look at it. Ah, you young dog, you are laughing at us both!"

"I have ordered breakfast on the lawn," said my mother, coming out from the porch, with her cheerful smile on her lips; "and I think the devil will be done to your liking to-day, brother Roland."

"We have had enough of the devil already, my love," said my father, wiping his forehead.

So, while the birds sang overhead or hopped familiarly across the sward for the crumbs thrown forth to them, while the sun was still cool in the east, and the leaves yet rustled with the sweet air of morning, we all sat down to our table, with hearts as reconciled to each other, and as peaceably disposed to thank God for the fair world around us, as if the river had never run red through the field of Bosworth, and that excellent Mr. Caxton had never set all mankind by the ears with an irritating invention a thousand times more provocative of our combative tendencies than the blast of the trumpet and the gleam of the banner!

CHAPTER V.

"Brother," said Mr. Caxton, "will walk with you to the Roman encampment."

The Captain felt that this proposal was meant as the greatest peace-offering my father could think of; for, first, it was a very long walk, and my father detested long walks; secondly, it was the sacrifice of a whole day's labor at the Great Work. And yet, with that quick sensibility which only the generous possess, Uncle Roland accepted at once the proposal. If he had not done so, my father would have had a heavier heart for a month to come. And how could the Great Work have got on while the author was every now and then disturbed by a twinge of remorse?

Half an hour after breakfast, the brothers set off arm-in-arm; and I followed, a little apart, admiring how sturdily the old soldier got over the ground, in spite of the cork leg. It was pleasant enough to listen to their conversation, and notice the contrasts between these two eccentric stamps from Dame Nature's ever-variable mould,—Nature, who casts nothing in stereotype; for I do believe that not even two fleas can be found identically the same.

My father was not a quick or minute observer of rural beauties. He had so little of the organ of locality that I suspect he could have lost his way in his own garden. But the Captain was exquisitely alive to external impressions,—not a feature in the landscape escaped him. At every fantastic gnarled pollard he halted to gaze; his eye followed the lark soaring up from his feet; when a fresher air came from the hill-top his nostrils dilated, as if voluptuously to inhale its delight. My father, with all his learning, and though his study had been in the stores of all language, was very rarely eloquent. The Captain had a glow and a passion in his words which, what with his deep, tremulous voice and animated gestures, gave something poetic to half of what he uttered. In every sentence of Roland's, in every tone of his voice and every play of his face, there was some outbreak of pride; but unless you set him on his hobby of that great ancestor the printer, my father had not as much pride as a homeopathist could have put into a globule. He was not proud even of not being proud. Chafe all his

feathers, and still you could rouse but the dove. My father was slow and mild, my uncle quick and fiery; my father reasoned, my uncle imagined; my father was very seldom wrong, my uncle never quite in the right; but, as my father once said of him, "Roland beats about the bush till he sends out the very bird that we went to search for. He is never in the wrong without suggesting to us what is the right." All in my uncle was stern, rough, and angular; all in my father was sweet, polished, and rounded into a natural grace. My uncle's character cast out a multiplicity of shadows, like a Gothic pile in a northern sky. My father stood serene in the light, like a Greek temple at mid-day in a southern clime. Their persons corresponded with their natures. My uncle's high, aquiline features, bronzed hue, rapid fire of eye, and upper lip that always quivered, were a notable contrast to my father's delicate profile, quiet, abstracted gaze, and the steady sweetness that rested on his musing smile. Roland's forehead was singularly high, and rose to a peak in the summit where phrenologists place the organ of veneration; but it was narrow, and deeply furrowed. Augustine's might be as high, but then soft, silky hair waved carelessly over it, concealing its height, but not its vast breadth, on which not a wrinkle was visible. And yet, withal, there was a great family likeness between the two brothers. When some softer sentiment subdued him, Roland caught the very look of Augustine; when some high emotion animated my father, you might have taken him for Roland. I have often thought since, in the greater experience of mankind which life has afforded me, that if, in early years, their destinies had been exchanged,—if Roland had taken to literature, and my father had been forced into action,—each would have had greater worldly success. For Roland's passion and energy would have given immediate and forcible effect to study; he might have been a historian or a poet. It is not study alone that produces a writer, it is intensity. In the mind, as in yonder chimney, to make the fire burn hot and quick, you must narrow the draught. Whereas, had my father been forced into the practical world, his calm depth of comprehension, his clearness of reason, his general accuracy in such notions as he once entertained and pondered over, joined to a temper that crosses and losses could never ruffle, and utter freedom from vanity and self-love, from prejudice and passion, might have made him a very wise and enlightened counsellor in the great affairs of life,—a lawyer, a diplomatist, a statesman, for what I know, even a great general, if his tender humanity had not stood in the way of his military mathematics.

But as it was,—with his slow pulse never stimulated by action, and too little stirred by even scholarly ambition,—my father's mind went on widening and widening till the circle was lost in the great ocean of contemplation; and Roland's passionate energy, fretted into fever by every let and hindrance in the struggle with his kind, and narrowed more and more as it was curbed within the channels of active discipline and duty, missed its due career altogether, and what might have been the poet, contracted into the humorist.

Yet who that had ever known ye, could have wished you other than ye were, ye guileless, affectionate, honest, simple creatures?—simple both, in spite of all the learning of the one, all the prejudices, whims, irritabilities, and crotchets of the other. There you are, seated on the height of the old Roman camp, with a volume of the *Stratagems of Polyænus* (or is it *Frontinus*?) open on my father's lap; the sheep grazing in the furrows of the circumvallations; the curious steer gazing at you where it halts in the space whence the Roman cohorts glittered forth; and your boy-biographer standing behind you with folded arms, and—as the scholar read, or the soldier pointed his cane to each fancied post in the war—filling up the pastoral landscape with the eagles of *Agricola* and the scythed cars of *Boadicea*!

CHAPTER VI.

"It is never the same two hours together in this country," said my Uncle Roland, as, after dinner, or rather after dessert, we joined my mother in the drawing-room.

Indeed, a cold, drizzling rain had come on within the last two hours, and though it was July, it was as chilly as if it had been October. My mother whispered to me, and I went out; in ten minutes more, the logs (for we live in a wooded country) blazed merrily in the grate. Why could not my mother have rung the bell and ordered the servant to light a fire? My dear reader, Captain Roland was poor, and he made a capital virtue of economy!

The two brothers drew their chairs near to the hearth, my father at the left, my uncle at the right; and I and my mother sat down to "Fox and Geese."

Coffee came in,—one cup for the Captain, for the rest of the party avoided that exciting beverage. And on that cup was a picture of—His Grace the Duke of Wellington!

During our visit to the Roman camp my mother had borrowed Mr. Squills's chaise and driven over to our market-town, for the express purpose of greeting the Captain's eyes with the face of his old chief.

My uncle changed color, rose, lifted my mother's hand to his lips, and sat himself down again in silence.

"I have heard," said the Captain after a pause, "that the Marquis of Hastings, who is every inch a soldier and a gentleman,—and that is saying not a little, for he measures seventyfive inches from the crown to the sole,—when he received Louis XVIII. (then an exile) at Donnington, fitted up his apartments exactly like those his Majesty had occupied at the Tuileries. It was a kingly attention (my Lord Hastings, you know, is sprung from the Plantagenets),—a kingly attention to a king. It cost some money and made some noise. A woman can show the same royal delicacy of heart in this bit of porcelain, and so quietly that we men all think it a matter of course, brother Austin."

"You are such a worshipper of women, Roland, that it is melancholy to see you single. You must marry again!"

My uncle first smiled, then frowned, and lastly sighed somewhat heavily.

"Your time will pass slowly in your old tower, poor brother," continued my father, "with only your little girl for a companion."

"And the past!" said my uncle; "the past, that mighty world—"

"Do you still read your old books of chivalry,—Froissart and the Chronicles, Palmerin of England, and Amadis of Gaul?"

"Why," said my uncle, reddening, "I have tried to improve myself with studies a little more substantial. And," he added with a sly smile, "there will be your great book for many a long winter to come."

"Um!" said my father, bashfully.

"Do you know," quoth my uncle, "that Dame Primmins is a very intelligent woman,—full of fancy, and a capital story-teller?"

"Is not she, uncle?" cried I, leaving my fox in the corner. "Oh, if you could hear her tell the tale of King Arthur and the Enchanted Lake, or the Grim White Woman!"

"I have already heard her tell both," said my uncle.

"The deuce you have, brother! My dear, we must look to this. These captains are dangerous gentlemen in an orderly household. Pray, where could you have had the opportunity of such private communications with Mrs. Primmins?"

"Once," said my uncle, readily, "when I went into her room, while she mended my stock; and once—" He stopped short, and looked down.

"Once when? Out with it."

"When she was warming my bed," said my uncle, in a half-whisper.

"Dear!" said my mother, innocently, "that's how the sheets came by that bad hole in the middle. I thought it was the warming-pan."

"I am quite shocked!" faltered my uncle.

"You well may be," said my father. "A woman who has been heretofore above all suspicion! But come," he said, seeing that my uncle looked sad, and was no doubt casting up the probable price of twice six yards of holland, "but come, you were always a famous rhapsodist or tale-teller yourself. Come, Roland, let us have some story of your own,—something which your experience has left strong in your impressions."

"Let us first have the candles," said my mother.

The candles were brought, the curtains let down; we all drew our chairs to the hearth. But in the interval my uncle had sunk into a gloomy revery; and when we called upon him to begin, he seemed to shake off with effort some recollections of pain.

"You ask me," he said, "to tell you some tale which my own experience has left deeply marked in my

impressions,—I will tell you one, apart from my own life, but which has often haunted me. It is sad and strange, ma'am."

"Ma'am, brother?" said my mother, reproachfully, letting her small hand drop upon that which, large and sunburnt, the Captain waved towards her as he spoke.

"Austin, you have married an angel!" said my uncle; and he was, I believe, the only brother-in-law who ever made so hazardous an assertion.

CHAPTER VII.

MY UNCLE ROLAND'S TALE.

"It was in Spain—no matter where or how—that it was my fortune to take prisoner a French officer of the same rank that I then held,—a lieutenant; and there was so much similarity in our sentiments that we became intimate friends,—the most intimate friend I ever had, sister, out of this dear circle. He was a rough soldier, whom the world had not well treated; but he never railed at the world, and maintained that he had had his deserts. Honor was his idol, and the sense of honor paid him for the loss of all else.

"We were both at that time volunteers in a foreign service,—in that worst of service, civil war,—he on one side, I the other, both, perhaps, disappointed in the cause we had severally espoused. There was something similar, too, in our domestic relationships. He had a son—a boy—who was all in life to him, next to his country and his duty. I too had then such a son, though of fewer years." (The Captain paused an instant; we exchanged glances, and a stifling sensation of pain and suspense was felt by all his listeners.) "We were accustomed, brother, to talk of these children, to picture their future, to compare our hopes and dreams. We hoped and dreamed alike. A short time sufficed to establish this confidence. My prisoner was sent to head-quarters, and soon afterwards exchanged.

"We met no more till last year. Being then at Paris, I inquired for my old friend, and learned that he was living at R—, a few miles from the capital. I went to visit him. I found his house empty and deserted. That very day he had been led to prison, charged with a terrible crime. I saw him in that prison, and from his own lips learned his story. His son had been brought up, as he fondly believed, in the habits and principles of honorable men, and having finished his education, came to reside with him at R—. The young man was accustomed to go frequently to Paris. A young Frenchman loves pleasure, sister; and pleasure is found at Paris. The father thought it natural, and stripped his age of some comforts to supply luxuries to the son's youth.

"Shortly after the young man's arrival, my friend perceived that he was robbed. Moneys kept in his bureau were abstracted, he knew not how, nor could guess by whom. It must be done in the night. He concealed himself and watched. He saw a stealthy figure glide in, he saw a false key applied to the lock; he started forward, seized the felon, and recognized his son. What should the father have done? I do not ask you, sister! I ask these men: son and father, I ask you."

"Expelled him the house," cried I.

"Done his duty, and reformed the unhappy wretch," said my father. "Nemo repente turpissinus semper fait,—No man is wholly bad all at once."

"The father did as you would have advised, brother. He kept the youth; he remonstrated with him: he did more,—he gave him the key of the bureau. 'Take what I have to give,' said he; 'I would rather be a beggar than know my son a thief.'"

"Right! And the youth repented, and became a good man?" exclaimed my father.

Captain Roland shook his head. "The youth promised amendment, and seemed penitent. He spoke of the temptations of Paris, the gaming-table, and what not. He gave up his daily visits to the capital. He seemed to apply to study. Shortly after this, the neighborhood was alarmed by reports of night robberies on the road. Men, masked and armed, plundered travellers, and even broke into houses.

"The police were on the alert. One night an old brother officer knocked at my friend's door. It was late; the veteran (he was a cripple, by the way, like myself,—strange coincidence!) was in bed. He came down in haste, when his servant woke, and told him that his old friend, wounded and bleeding, sought

an asylum under his roof. The wound, however, was slight. The guest had been attacked and robbed on the road. The next morning the proper authority of the town was sent for. The plundered man described his loss,—some billets of five hundred francs in a pocketbook, on which was embroidered his name and coronet (he was a vicomte). The guest stayed to dinner. Late in the forenoon, the son looked in. The guest started to see him; my friend noticed his paleness. Shortly after, on pretence of faintness, the guest retired to his room, and sent for his host. 'My friend,' said he, 'can you do me a favor? Go to the magistrate and recall the evidence I have given.'

"Impossible,' said the host. 'What crotchet is this?'

"The guest shuddered. 'Peste!' said he, 'I do not wish in my old age to be hard on others. Who knows how the robber may have been tempted, and who knows what relations he may have,—honest men, whom his crime would degrade forever! Good heavens! if detected, it is the galleys, the galleys!'

"And what then? The robber knew what he braved. 'But did his father know it?' cried the guest.

"A light broke upon my unhappy comrade in arms; he caught his friend by the hand: 'You turned pale at my son's sight,—where did you ever see him before? Speak!'

"Last night on the road to Paris. The mask slipped aside. Call back my evidence!'

"You are mistaken,' said my friend, calmly. 'I saw my son in his bed, and blessed him, before I went to my own.'

"I will believe you,' said the guest; 'and never shall my hasty suspicion pass my lips,—but call back the evidence.'

"The guest returned to Paris before dusk. The father conversed with his son on the subject of his studies; he followed him to his room, waited till he was in bed, and was then about to retire, when the youth said, 'Father, you have forgotten your blessing.'

"The father went back, laid his hand on the boy's head and prayed. He was credulous—fathers are so! He was persuaded that his friend had been deceived. He retired to rest, and fell asleep. He woke suddenly in the middle of the night, and felt (I here quote his words)—'I felt,' said he, 'as if a voice had awakened me,—a voice that said, "Rise and search." I rose at once, struck a light, and went to my son's room. The door was locked. I knocked once, twice, thrice no answer. I dared not call aloud, lest I should rouse the servants. I went down the stairs, I opened the back-door, I passed to the stables. My own horse was there, not my son's. My horse neighed; it was old, like myself,—my old charger at Mont St. Jean. I stole back, I crept into the shadow of the wall by my son's door, and extinguished my light. I felt as if I were a thief myself.'"

"Brother," interrupted my mother, under her breath; "speak in your own words, not in this wretched father's. I know not why, but it would shock me less."

The Captain nodded.

"Before daybreak, my friend heard the back-door open gently; a foot ascended the stair, a key grated in the door of the room close at hand: the father glided through the dark into that chamber behind his unseen son.

"He heard the clink of the tinder-box; a light was struck; it spread over the room, but he had time to place himself behind the window-curtain which was close at hand. The figure before him stood a moment or so motionless, and seemed to listen, for it turned to the right, to the left, its visage covered with the black, hideous mask which is worn in carnivals. Slowly the mask was removed. Could that be his son's face,—the son of a brave man? It was pale and ghastly with scoundrel fears; the base drops stood on the brow; the eye was haggard and bloodshot. He looked as a coward looks when death stands before him.

"The youth walked, or rather skulked, to the secretaire, unlocked it, opened a secret drawer, placed within it the contents of his pockets and his frightful mask; the father approached softly, looked over his shoulder, and saw in the drawer the pocketbook embroidered with his friend's name. Meanwhile, the son took out his pistols, uncocked them cautiously, and was about also to secrete them, when his father arrested his arm. 'Robber, the use of these is yet to come!'

"The son's knees knocked together, an exclamation for mercy burst from his lips; but when, recovering the mere shock of his dastard nerves, he perceived it was not the gripe of some hireling of the law, but a father's hand that had clutched his arm, the vile audacity which knows fear only from a bodily cause, none from the awe of shame, returned to him.

"Tush, sir!" he said, 'waste not time in reproaches, for, I fear, the gendarmes are on my track. It is well that you are here; you can swear that I have spent the night at home. Unhand me, old man; I have these witnesses still to secrete,' and he pointed to the garments wet and dabbled with the mud of the roads. He had scarcely spoken when the walls shook; there was the heavy clatter of hoofs on the ringing pavement without.

"'They come!' cried the son. 'Off, dotard! save your son from the galleys.'

"'The galleys, the galleys!' said the father, staggering back; 'it is true; he said—"the galleys!"'

"There was a loud knocking at the gate. The gendarmes surrounded the house. 'Open, in the name of the law!' No answer came, no door was opened. Some of the gendarmes rode to the rear of the house, in which was placed the stable yard. From the window of the son's room the father saw the sudden blaze of torches, the shadowy forms of the men-hunters. He heard the clatter of arms as they swung themselves from their horses. He heard a voice cry, 'Yes, this is the robber's gray horse,—see, it still reeks with sweat!' And behind and in front, at either door, again came the knocking, and again the shout, 'Open, in the name of the law!'

"Then lights began to gleam from the casements of the neighboring houses; then the space filled rapidly with curious wonderers startled from their sleep: the world was astir, and the crowd came round to know what crime or what shame had entered the old soldier's home.

"Suddenly, within, there was heard the report of a fire-arm; and a minute or so afterwards the front door was opened, and the soldier appeared.

"'Enter,' he said to the gendarmes: 'what would you?'

"'We seek a robber who is within your walls.'

"'I know it; mount and find him: I will lead the way.'

"He ascended the stairs; he threw open his son's room: the officers of justice poured in, and on the floor lay the robber's corpse.

"They looked at each other in amazement. 'Take what is left you,' said the father. 'Take the dead man rescued from the galleys; take the living man on whose hands rests the dead man's blood!'

"I was present at my friend's trial. The facts had become known beforehand. He stood there with his gray hair, and his mutilated limbs, and the deep scar on his visage, and the Cross of the Legion of Honor on his breast; and when he had told his tale, he ended with these words: 'I have saved the son whom I reared for France from a doom that would have spared the life to brand it with disgrace. Is this a crime? I give you my life in exchange for my son's disgrace. Does my country need a victim? I have lived for my country's glory, and I can die contented to satisfy its laws, sure that, if you blame me, you will not despise; sure that the hands that give me to the headsman will scatter flowers over my grave. Thus I confess all. I, a soldier, look round amongst a nation of soldiers; and in the name of the star which glitters on my breast I dare the fathers of France to condemn me!'

"They acquitted the soldier,—at least they gave a verdict answering to what in our courts is called 'justifiable homicide.' A shout rose in the court which no ceremonial voice could still; the crowd would have borne him in triumph to his house, but his look repelled such vanities. To his house he returned indeed; and the day afterwards they found him dead, beside the cradle in which his first prayer had been breathed over his sinless child. Now, father and son, I ask you, do you condemn that man?"

CHAPTER VIII.

My father took three strides up and down the room, and then, halting on his hearth, and facing his brother, he thus spoke: "I condemn his deed, Roland! At best he was but a haughty egotist. I understand why Brutus should slay his sons. By that sacrifice he saved his country! What did this poor dupe of an exaggeration save? Nothing but his own name. He could not lift the crime from his son's soul, nor the dishonor from his son's memory. He could but gratify his own vain pride; and insensibly to himself, his act was whispered to him by the fiend that ever whispers to the heart of man, 'Dread men's opinions more than God's law!' Oh, my dear brother! what minds like yours should guard against the most is not the meanness of evil,—it is the evil that takes false nobility, by garbing itself in the royal

magnificence of good." My uncle walked to the window, opened it, looked out a moment, as if to draw in fresh air, closed it gently, and came back again to his seat; but during the short time the window had been left open, a moth flew in.

"Tales like these," renewed my father, pityingly,—“whether told by some great tragedian, or in thy simple style, my brother,—tales like these have their uses: they penetrate the heart to make it wiser; but all wisdom is meek, my Roland. They invite us to put the question to ourselves that thou hast asked, ‘Can we condemn this man?’ and reason answers as I have answered, ‘We pity the man, we condemn the deed.’ We—take care, my love! that moth will be in the candle. We—whisk! whisk!” and my father stopped to drive away the moth. My uncle turned, and taking his handkerchief from the lower part of his face, of which he had wished to conceal the workings, he flapped away the moth from the flame. My mother moved the candles from the moth.

I tried to catch the moth in my father's straw-hat. The deuce was in the moth! it baffled us all, now circling against the ceiling, now sweeping down at the fatal lights. As if by a simultaneous impulse, my father approached one candle, my uncle approached the other; and just as the moth was wheeling round and round, irresolute which to choose for its funeral pyre, both candles were put out. The fire had burned down low in the grate, and in the sudden dimness my father's soft, sweet voice came forth, as if from an invisible being: “We leave ourselves in the dark to save a moth from the flame, brother! Shall we do less for our fellow-men? Extinguish, oh! humanely extinguish, the light of our reason when the darkness more favors our mercy.” Before the lights were relit, my uncle had left the room; his brother followed him. My mother and I drew near to each other and talked in whispers.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CAXTONS: A FAMILY PICTURE — VOLUME 03

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