



# *A Far Country*



*by Winston Churchill*



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*Part One*



## *Chapter One*

**M**y name is Hugh Paret. I was a corporation lawyer, but by no means a typical one, the choice of my profession being merely incidental, and due, as will be seen, to the accident of environment. The book I am about to write might aptly be called *The Autobiography of a Romanticist*. In that sense, if in no other, I have been a typical American, regarding my country as the happy hunting-ground of enlightened self-interest, as a function of my desires. Whether or not I have completely got rid of this romantic virus I must leave to those the aim of whose existence is to eradicate it from our literature and our life. A somewhat Augean task!

I have been impelled therefore to make an attempt at setting forth, with what frankness and sincerity I may, with those powers of selection of which I am capable, the life I have lived in this modern America; the passions I have known, the evils I have done. I endeavour to write a biography of the inner life; but in order to do this I shall have to relate those causal experiences of the outer existence that take place in the world of space and time, in the four walls of the

home, in the school and university, in the noisy streets, in the realm of business and politics. I shall try to set down, impartially, the motives that have impelled my actions, to reveal in some degree the amazing mixture of good and evil which has made me what I am today: to avoid the tricks of memory and resist the inherent desire to present myself other and better than I am. Your American romanticist is a sentimental spoiled child who believes in miracles, whose needs are mostly baubles, whose desires are dreams. Expediency is his motto. Innocent of a knowledge of the principles of the universe, he lives in a state of ceaseless activity, admitting no limitations, impatient of all restrictions. What he wants, he wants very badly indeed. This wanting things was the corner-stone of my character, and I believe that the science of the future will bear me out when I say that it might have been differently built upon. Certain it is that the system of education in vogue in the 70's and 80's never contemplated the search for natural corner-stones.

At all events, when I look back upon the boy I was, I see the beginnings of a real person who fades little by little as manhood arrives and advances, until suddenly I am aware that a stranger has taken his place....

I lived in a city which is now some twelve hours distant from the Atlantic seaboard. A very different city, too, it was in youth, in my grandfather's day and my father's, even in my own boyhood, from what it has since become in this most material of ages.

There is a book of my photographs, preserved by my mother, which I have been looking over lately. First is presented a plump child of two, gazing in smiling trustfulness upon a world of sunshine;

later on a lean boy in plaided kilts, whose wavy, chestnut-brown hair has been most carefully parted on the side by Norah, his nurse. The face is still childish. Then appears a youth of fourteen or thereabout in long trousers and the queerest of short jackets, standing beside a marble table against a classic background; he is smiling still in undiminished hope and trust, despite increasing vexations and crossings, meaningless lessons which had to be learned, disciplines to rack an aspiring soul, and long, uncomfortable hours in the stiff pew of the First Presbyterian Church. Associated with this torture is a peculiar Sunday smell and the faint rustling of silk dresses. I can see the stern black figure of Dr. Pound, who made interminable statements to the Lord.

“Oh, Lord,” I can hear him say, “thou knowest...”

These pictures, though yellowed and faded, suggest vividly the being I once was, the feelings that possessed and animated me, love for my playmates, vague impulses struggling for expression in a world forever thwarting them. I recall, too, innocent dreams of a future unidentified, dreams from which I emerged vibrating with an energy that was lost for lack of a definite objective: yet it was constantly being renewed. I often wonder what I might have become if it could have been harnessed, directed! Speculations are vain. Calvinism, though it had begun to make compromises, was still a force in those days, inimical to spontaneity and human instincts. And when I think of Calvinism I see, not Dr. Pound, who preached it, but my father, who practised and embodied it. I loved him, but he made of righteousness a stern and terrible thing implying not joy, but punishment, the, suppression rather than the expansion of



aspirations. His religion seemed woven all of austerity, contained no shining threads to catch my eye. Dreams, to him, were matters for suspicion and distrust.

I sometimes ask myself, as I gaze upon his portrait now, the duplicate of the one painted for the Bar Association, whether he ever could have felt the secret, hot thrills I knew and did not identify with religion. His religion was real to him, though he failed utterly to make it comprehensible to me. The apparent calmness, evenness of his life awed me. A successful lawyer, a respected and trusted citizen, was he lacking somewhat in virility, vitality? I cannot judge him, even to-day. I never knew him. There were times in my youth when the curtain of his unfamiliar spirit was withdrawn a little: and once, after I had passed the crisis of some childhood disease, I awoke to find him bending over my bed with a tender expression that surprised and puzzled me.

He was well educated, and from his portrait a shrewd observer might divine in him a genteel taste for literature. The fine features bear witness to the influence of an American environment, yet suggest the intellectual Englishman of Matthew Arnold's time. The face is distinguished, ascetic, the chestnut hair lighter and thinner than my own; the side whiskers are not too obtrusive, the eyes blue-grey. There is a large black cravat crossed and held by a cameo pin, and the coat has odd, narrow lapels. His habits of mind were English, although he harmonized well enough with the manners and traditions of a city whose inheritance was Scotch-Irish; and he invariably drank tea for breakfast. One of my earliest recollections is of the silver breakfast service and egg-cups which my great-

grandfather brought with him from Sheffield to Philadelphia shortly after the Revolution. His son, Dr. Hugh Moreton Paret, after whom I was named, was the best known physician of the city in the decorous, Second Bank days.

My mother was Sarah Breck. Hers was my Scotch-Irish side. Old Benjamin Breck, her grandfather, undaunted by sea or wilderness, had come straight from Belfast to the little log settlement by the great river that mirrored then the mantle of primeval forest on the hills. So much for chance. He kept a store with a side porch and square-paned windows, where hams and sides of bacon and sugar loaves in blue glazed paper hung beside ploughs and calico prints, barrels of flour, of molasses and rum, all of which had been somehow marvellously transported over the passes of those forbidding mountains,—passes we blithely thread to-day in dining cars and compartment sleepers. Behind the store were moored the barges that floated down on the swift current to the Ohio, carrying goods to even remoter settlements in the western wilderness.

Benjamin, in addition to his emigrant's leather box, brought with him some of that pigment that was to dye the locality for generations a deep blue. I refer, of course, to his Presbyterianism. And in order the better to ensure to his progeny the fastness of this dye, he married the granddaughter of a famous divine, celebrated in the annals of New England,—no doubt with some injustice,—as a staunch advocate on the doctrine of infant damnation. My cousin Robert Breck had old Benjamin's portrait, which has since gone to the Kinley's. Heaven knows who painted it, though no great art were needed to suggest on canvas the tough fabric of that sitter, who was

more Irish than Scotch. The heavy stick he holds might, with a slight stretch of the imagination, be a blackthorn; his head looks capable of withstanding many blows; his hand of giving many. And, as I gazed the other day at this picture hanging in the shabby suburban parlour, I could only contrast him with his anaemic descendants who possessed the likeness. Between the children of poor Mary Kinley,—Cousin Robert's daughter, and the hardy stock of the old country there is a gap indeed!

Benjamin Breck made the foundation of a fortune. It was his son who built on the Second Bank the wide, corniced mansion in which to house comfortably his eight children. There, two tiers above the river, lived my paternal grandfather, Dr. Paret, the Breck's physician and friend; the Durrett's and the Hambleton's, iron-masters; the Hollister's, Sherwin's, the McAlery's and Ewanses,—Breck connections,—the Willetts and Ogilvys; in short, everyone of importance in the days between the 'thirties and the Civil War. Theirs were generous houses surrounded by shade trees, with glorious back yards—I have been told—where apricots and pears and peaches and even nectarines grew.

The business of Breck and Company, wholesale grocers, descended to my mother's first cousin, Robert Breck, who lived at Claremore. The very sound of that word once sufficed to give me a shiver of delight; but the Claremore I knew has disappeared as completely as Atlantis, and the place is now a suburb (hateful word!) cut up into building lots and connected with Boyne Street and the business section of the city by trolley lines. Then it was "the country," and fairly saturated with romance. Cousin Robert, when he came

into town to spend his days at the store, brought with him some of this romance, I had almost said of this aroma. He was no suburbanite, but rural to the backbone, professing a most proper contempt for dwellers in towns.

Every summer day that dawned held Claremore as a possibility. And such was my capacity for joy that my appetite would depart completely when I heard my mother say, questioningly and with proper wifely respect

“If you’re really going off on a business trip for a day or two, Mr. Paret” (she generally addressed my father thus formally), “I think I’ll go to Robert’s and take Hugh.”

“Shall I tell Norah to pack, mother,” I would exclaim, starting up.

“We’ll see what your father thinks, my dear.”

“Remain at the table until you are excused, Hugh,” he would say.

Released at length, I would rush to Norah, who always rejoiced with me, and then to the wire fence which marked the boundary of the Peters domain next door, eager, with the refreshing lack of consideration characteristic of youth, to announce to the Peterses—who were to remain at home the news of my good fortune. There would be Tom and Alfred and Russell and Julia and little Myra with her grass-stained knees, faring forth to seek the adventures of a new day in the shady western yard. Myra was too young not to look wistful at my news, but the others pretended indifference, seeking to lessen my triumph. And it was Julia who invariably retorted “We can go out to Uncle Jake’s farm whenever we want to. Can’t we, Tom?”...

No journey ever taken since has equalled in ecstasy that leisurely trip of thirteen miles in the narrow-gauge railroad that wound through hot fields of nodding corn tassels and between delicious, acrid-smelling woods to Claremore. No silent palace “sleeping in the sun,” no edifice decreed by Kubla Khan could have worn more glamour than the house of Cousin Robert Breck.

It stood half a mile from the drowsy village, deep in its own grounds amidst lawns splashed with shadows, with gravel paths edged—in barbarous fashion, if you please with shells. There were flower beds of equally barbarous design; and two iron deer, which, like the figures on Keats’s Grecian urn, were ever ready poised to flee,—and yet never fled. For Cousin Robert was rich, as riches went in those days: not only rich, but comfortable. Stretching behind the house were sweet meadows of hay and red clover basking in the heat, orchards where the cows cropped beneath the trees, arbours where purple clusters of Concords hung beneath warm leaves: there were woods beyond, into which, under the guidance of Willie Breck, I made adventurous excursions, and in the autumn gathered hickories and walnuts. The house was a rambling, wooden mansion painted grey, with red scroll-work on its porches and horsehair furniture inside. Oh, the smell of its darkened interior on a midsummer day! Like the flavour of that choicest of tropical fruits, the mangosteen, it baffles analysis, and the nearest I can come to it is a mixture of matting and corn-bread, with another element too subtle to define.

The hospitality of that house! One would have thought we had arrived, my mother and I, from the ends of the earth, such was the welcome we got from Cousin Jenny, Cousin Robert’s wife, from Mary

and Helen with the flaxen pig-tails, from Willie, whom I recall as permanently without shoes or stockings. Met and embraced by Cousin Jenny at the station and driven to the house in the squeaky surrey, the moment we arrived she and my mother would put on the dressing-sacks I associated with hot weather, and sit sewing all day long in rocking-chairs at the coolest end of the piazza. The women of that day scorned lying down, except at night, and as evening came on they donned starched dresses; I recall in particular one my mother wore, with little vertical stripes of black and white, and a full skirt. And how they talked, from the beginning of the visit until the end! I have often since wondered where the topics came from.

It was not until nearly seven o'clock that the train arrived which brought home my Cousin Robert. He was a big man; his features and even his ample moustache gave a disconcerting impression of rugged integrity, and I remember him chiefly in an alpaca or seersucker coat. Though much less formal, more democratic—in a word—than my father, I stood in awe of him for a different reason, and this I know now was because he possessed the penetration to discern the flaws in my youthful character, —flaws that persisted in manhood. None so quick as Cousin Robert to detect deceptions which were hidden from my mother.

His hobby was carpentering, and he had a little shop beside the stable filled with shining tools which Willie and I, in spite of their attractions, were forbidden to touch. Willie, by dire experience, had learned to keep the law; but on one occasion I stole in alone, and promptly cut my finger with a chisel. My mother and Cousin Jenny accepted the fiction that the injury had been done with a flint

arrowhead that Willie had given me, but when Cousin Robert came home and saw my bound hand and heard the story, he gave me a certain look which sticks in my mind.

“Wonderful people, those Indians were!” he observed. “They could make arrowheads as sharp as chisels.”

I was most uncomfortable....

He had a strong voice, and spoke with a rising inflection and a marked accent that still remains peculiar to our locality, although it was much modified in my mother and not at all noticeable in my father; with an odd nasal alteration of the burr our Scotch-Irish ancestors had brought with them across the seas. For instance, he always called my father Mr. Par- r-ret. He had an admiration and respect for him that seemed to forbid the informality of “Matthew.” It was shared by others of my father’s friends and relations.

“Sarah,” Cousin Robert would say to my mother, “you’re coddling that boy, you ought to lam him oftener. Hand him over to me for a couple of months—I’ll put him through his paces.... So you’re going to send him to college, are you? He’s too good for old Benjamin’s grocery business.”

He was very fond of my mother, though he lectured her soundly for her weakness in indulging me. I can see him as he sat at the head of the supper table, carving liberal helpings which Mary and Helen and Willie devoured with country appetites, watching our plates.

“What’s the matter, Hugh? You haven’t eaten all your lamb.”

“He doesn’t like fat, Robert,” my mother explained.

“I’d teach him to like it if he were my boy.”

“Well, Robert, he isn’t your boy,” Cousin Jenny would remind him.... His bark was worse than his bite. Like many kind people he made use of brusqueness to hide an inner tenderness, and on the train he was hail fellow well met with every Tom, Dick and Harry that commuted,—although the word was not invented in those days,—and the conductor and brakeman too. But he had his standards, and held to them....

Mine was not a questioning childhood, and I was willing to accept the scheme of things as presented to me entire. In my tenderer years, when I had broken one of the commandments on my father’s tablet (there were more than ten), and had, on his home-coming, been sent to bed, my mother would come softly upstairs after supper with a book in her hand; a book of selected Bible stories on which Dr. Pound had set the seal of his approval, with a glazed picture cover, representing Daniel in the lions’ den and an angel standing beside him. On the somewhat specious plea that Holy Writ might have a chastening effect, she was permitted to minister to me in my shame. The amazing adventure of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego particularly appealed to an imagination needing little stimulation. It never occurred to me to doubt that these gentlemen had triumphed over caloric laws. But out of my window, at the back of the second storey, I often saw a sudden, crimson glow in the sky to the southward, as though that part of the city had caught fire. There were the big steel-works, my mother told me, belonging to Mr. Durrett and Mr. Hambleton, the father of Ralph Hambleton and the grandfather of Hambleton Durrett, my schoolmates at Miss Caroline’s. I invariably connected the glow, not with Hambleton and



Ralph, but with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! Later on, when my father took me to the steel-works, and I beheld with awe a huge pot filled with molten metal that ran out of it like water, I asked him—if I leaped into that stream, could God save me? He was shocked. Miracles, he told me, didn't happen any more.

“When did they stop?” I demanded.

“About two thousand years ago, my son,” he replied gravely.

“Then,” said I, “no matter how much I believed in God, he wouldn't save me if I jumped into the big kettle for his sake?”

For this I was properly rebuked and silenced.

My boyhood was filled with obsessing desires. If God, for example, had cast down, out of his abundant store, manna and quail in the desert, why couldn't he fling me a little pocket money? A paltry quarter of a dollar, let us say, which to me represented wealth. To avoid the reproach of the Pharisees, I went into the closet of my bed-chamber to pray, requesting that the quarter should be dropped on the north side of Lyme Street, between Stamford and Tryon; in short, as conveniently near home as possible. Then I issued forth, not feeling overconfident, but hoping. Tom Peters, leaning over the ornamental cast-iron fence which separated his front yard from the street, presently spied me scanning the sidewalk.

“What are you looking for, Hugh?” he demanded with interest.

“Oh, something I dropped,” I answered uneasily.

“What?”

Naturally, I refused to tell. It was a broiling, midsummer day; Julia and Russell, who had been warned to stay in the shade, but who were engaged in the experiment of throwing the yellow cat from the

top of the lattice fence to see if she would alight on her feet, were presently attracted, and joined in the search. The mystery which I threw around it added to its interest, and I was not inconsiderably annoyed. Suppose one of them were to find the quarter which God had intended for me? Would that be justice?

“It’s nothing,” I said, and pretended to abandon the quest—to be renewed later. But this ruse failed; they continued obstinately to search; and after a few minutes Tom, with a shout, picked out of a hot crevice between the bricks—a nickel!

“It’s mine!” I cried fiercely.

“Did you lose it?” demanded Julia, the canny one, as Tom was about to give it up.

My lying was generally reserved for my elders.

“N-no,” I said hesitatingly, “but it’s mine all the same. It was—sent to me.”

“Sent to you!” they exclaimed, in a chorus of protest and derision. And how, indeed, was I to make good my claim? The Peterses, when assembled, were a clan, led by Julia and in matters of controversy, moved as one. How was I to tell them that in answer to my prayers for twenty-five cents, God had deemed five all that was good for me?

“Some—somebody dropped it there for me.”

“Who?” demanded the chorus. “Say, that’s a good one!”

Tears suddenly blinded me. Overcome by chagrin, I turned and flew into the house and upstairs into my room, locking the door behind me. An interval ensued, during which I nursed my sense of wrong, and it pleased me to think that the money would bring a curse

on the Peters family. At length there came a knock on the door, and a voice calling my name.

“Hugh! Hugh!”

It was Tom.

“Hughie, won’t you let me in? I want to give you the nickel.”

“Keep it!” I shouted back. “You found it.”

Another interval, and then more knocking.

“Open up,” he said coaxingly. “I—I want to talk to you.”

I relented, and let him in. He pressed the coin into my hand. I refused; he pleaded.

“You found it,” I said, “it’s yours.”

“But—but you were looking for it.”

“That makes no difference,” I declared magnanimously.

Curiosity overcame him.

“Say, Hughie, if you didn’t drop it, who on earth did?”

“Nobody on earth,” I replied cryptically....

Naturally, I declined to reveal the secret. Nor was this by any means the only secret I held over the Peters family, who never quite knew what to make of me. They were not troubled with imaginations. Julia was a little older than Tom and had a sharp tongue, but over him I exercised a distinct fascination, and I knew it. Literal himself, good-natured and warm-hearted, the gift I had of tingeing life with romance (to put the thing optimistically), of creating kingdoms out of back yards—at which Julia and Russell sniffed—held his allegiance firm.



## *Chapter Two*

I must have been about twelve years of age when I realized that I was possessed of the bard's inheritance. A momentous journey I made with my parents to Boston about this time not only stimulated this gift, but gave me the advantage of which other travellers before me have likewise availed themselves—of being able to take certain poetic liberties with a distant land that my friends at home had never seen. Often during the heat of summer noons when we were assembled under the big maple beside the lattice fence in the Peters' yard, the spirit would move me to relate the most amazing of adventures. Our train, for instance, had been held up in the night by a band of robbers in black masks, and rescued by a traveller who bore a striking resemblance to my Cousin Robert Breck. He had shot two of the robbers. These fabrications, once started, flowed from me with ridiculous ease. I experienced an unwonted exhilaration, exaltation; I began to believe that they had actually occurred. In vain the astute Julia asserted that there were no train robbers in the east. What had my father done? Well, he had been very brave, but he had

had no pistol. Had I been frightened? No, not at all; I, too, had wished for a pistol. Why hadn't I spoken of this before? Well, so many things had happened to me I couldn't tell them all at once. It was plain that Julia, though often fascinated against her will, deemed this sort of thing distinctly immoral.

I was a boy divided in two. One part of me dwelt in a fanciful realm of his own weaving, and the other part was a commonplace and protesting inhabitant of a world of lessons, disappointments and discipline. My instincts were not vicious. Ideas bubbled up within me continually from an apparently inexhaustible spring, and the very strength of the longings they set in motion puzzled and troubled my parents: what I seem to see most distinctly now is a young mind engaged in a ceaseless struggle for self-expression, for self-development, against the inertia of a tradition of which my father was the embodiment. He was an enigma to me then. He sincerely loved me, he cherished ambitions concerning me, yet thwarted every natural, budding growth, until I grew unconsciously to regard him as my enemy, although I had an affection for him and a pride in him that flared up at times. Instead of confiding to him my aspirations, vague though they were, I became more and more secretive as I grew older. I knew instinctively that he regarded these aspirations as evidences in my character of serious moral flaws. And I would sooner have suffered many afternoons of his favourite punishment—solitary confinement in my room— than reveal to him those occasional fits of creative fancy which caused me to neglect my lessons in order to put them on paper. Loving literature, in his way, he was characteristically incapable of recognizing the literary instinct,

and the symptoms of its early stages he mistook for inherent frivolity, for lack of respect for the truth; in brief, for original sin. At the age of fourteen I had begun secretly (alas, how many things I did secretly!) to write stories of a sort, stories that never were finished.

He regarded reading as duty, not pleasure. He laid out books for me, which I neglected. He was part and parcel of that American environment in which literary ambition was regarded as sheer madness. And no one who has not experienced that environment can have any conception of the pressure it exerted to stifle originality, to thrust the new generation into its religious and commercial moulds. Shall we ever, I wonder, develop the enlightened education that will know how to take advantage of such initiative as was mine? that will be on the watch for it, sympathize with it and guide it to fruition?

I was conscious of still another creative need, that of dramatizing my ideas, of converting them into action. And this need was to lead me farther than ever afield from the path of righteousness. The concrete realization of ideas, as many geniuses will testify, is an expensive undertaking, requiring a little pocket money; and I have already touched upon that subject. My father did not believe in pocket money. A sea story that my Cousin Donald Ewan gave me at Christmas inspired me to compose one of a somewhat different nature; incidentally, I deemed it a vast improvement on Cousin Donald's book. Now, if I only had a boat, with the assistance of Ham Durrett and Tom Peters, Gene Hollister and Perry Blackwood and other friends, this story of mine might be staged. There were, however, as usual, certain seemingly insuperable difficulties: in the

first place, it was winter time; in the second, no facilities existed in the city for operations of a nautical character; and, lastly, my Christmas money amounted only to five dollars. It was my father who pointed out these and other objections. For, after a careful perusal of the price lists I had sent for, I had been forced to appeal to him to supply additional funds with which to purchase a row-boat. Incidentally, he read me a lecture on extravagance, referred to my last month's report at the Academy, and finished by declaring that he would not permit me to have a boat even in the highly improbable case of somebody's presenting me with one. Let it not be imagined that my ardour or my determination were extinguished. Shortly after I had retired from his presence it occurred to me that he had said nothing to forbid my making a boat, and the first thing I did after school that day was to procure, for twenty-five cents, a second-hand book on boat construction. The woodshed was chosen as a shipbuilding establishment. It was convenient—and my father never went into the back yard in cold weather. Inquiries of lumber-yards developing the disconcerting fact that four dollars and seventy-five cents was inadequate to buy the material itself, to say nothing of the cost of steaming and bending the ribs, I reluctantly abandoned the ideal of the graceful craft I had sketched, and compromised on a flat bottom. Observe how the ways of deception lead to transgression: I recalled the cast-off lumber pile of Jarvis, the carpenter, a good-natured Englishman, coarse and fat: in our neighbourhood his reputation for obscenity was so well known to mothers that I had been forbidden to go near him or his shop. Grits Jarvis, his son, who had inherited the talent, was also contraband. I can see now the

huge bulk of the elder Jarvis as he stood in the melting, soot-powdered snow in front of his shop, and hear his comments on my pertinacity.

“If you ever wants another man’s missus when you grows up, my lad, Gawd ‘elp ‘im!”

“Why should I want another man’s wife when I don’t want one of my own?” I demanded, indignant.

He laughed with his customary lack of moderation.

“You mind what old Jarvis says,” he cried. “What you wants, you gets.”

I did get his boards, by sheer insistence. No doubt they were not very valuable, and without question he more than made up for them in my mother’s bill. I also got something else of equal value to me at the moment,—the assistance of Grits, the contraband; daily, after school, I smuggled him into the shed through the alley, acquiring likewise the services of Tom Peters, which was more of a triumph than it would seem. Tom always had to be “worked up” to participation in my ideas, but in the end he almost invariably succumbed. The notion of building a boat in the dead of winter, and so far from her native element, naturally struck him at first as ridiculous. Where in Jehoshaphat was I going to sail it if I ever got it made? He much preferred to throw snowballs at innocent wagon drivers.

All that Tom saw, at first, was a dirty, coal-spattered shed with dim recesses, for it was lighted on one side only, and its temperature was somewhere below freezing. Surely he could not be blamed for a tempered enthusiasm! But for me, all the dirt and cold and



discomfort were blotted out, and I beheld a gallant craft manned by sturdy seamen forging her way across blue water in the South Seas. Treasure Island, alas, was as yet unwritten; but among my father's books were two old volumes in which I had hitherto taken no interest, with crude engravings of palms and coral reefs, of naked savages and tropical mountains covered with jungle, the adventures, in brief, of one Captain Cook. I also discovered a book by a later traveller. Spurred on by a mysterious motive power, and to the great neglect of the pons asinorum and the staple products of the Southern States, I gathered an amazing amount of information concerning a remote portion of the globe, of head-hunters and poisoned stakes, of typhoons, of queer war-craft that crept up on you while you were dismantling galleons, when desperate hand-to-hand encounters ensued. Little by little as I wove all this into personal adventures soon to be realized, Tom forgot the snowballs and the maddened grocery-men who chased him around the block; while Grits would occasionally stop sawing and cry out:—

“Ah, s'y!” frequently adding that he would be G—d—d.

The cold woodshed became a chantry on the New England coast, the alley the wintry sea soon to embrace our ship, the saw-horses—which stood between a coal-bin on one side and unused stalls filled with rubbish and kindling on the other—the ways; the yard behind the lattice fence became a backwater, the flapping clothes the sails of ships that took refuge there—on Mondays and Tuesdays. Even my father was symbolized with unparalleled audacity as a watchful government which had, up to the present, no inkling of our semi-piratical intentions! The cook and the housemaid, though

remonstrating against the presence of Grits, were friendly confederates; likewise old Cephas, the darkey who, from my earliest memory, carried coal and wood and blacked the shoes, washed the windows and scrubbed the steps.

One afternoon Tom went to work....

The history of the building of the good ship Petrel is similar to that of all created things, a story of trial and error and waste. At last, one March day she stood ready for launching. She had even been caulked; for Grits, from an unknown and unquestionably dubious source, had procured a bucket of tar, which we heated over a fire in the alley and smeared into every crack. It was natural that the news of such a feat as we were accomplishing should have leaked out, that the "yard" should have been visited from time to time by interested friends, some of whom came to admire, some to scoff, and all to speculate. Among the scoffers, of course, was Ralph Hambleton, who stood with his hands in his pockets and cheerfully predicted all sorts of dire calamities. Ralph was always a superior boy, tall and a trifle saturnine and cynical, with an amazing self-confidence not wholly due to the wealth of his father, the iron-master. He was older than I.

"She won't float five minutes, if you ever get her to the water," was his comment, and in this he was supported on general principles by Julia and Russell Peters. Ralph would have none of the Petrel, or of the South Seas either; but he wanted,—so he said,—"to be in at the death." The Hambletons were one of the few families who at that time went to the sea for the summer, and from a practical knowledge

of craft in general Ralph was not slow to point out the defects of ours. Tom and I defended her passionately.

Ralph was not a romanticist. He was a born leader, excelling at organized games, exercising over boys the sort of fascination that comes from doing everything better and more easily than others. It was only during the progress of such enterprises as this affair of the Petrel that I succeeded in winning their allegiance; bit by bit, as Tom's had been won, fanning their enthusiasm by impersonating at once Achilles and Homer, recruiting while relating the Odyssey of the expedition in glowing colours. Ralph always scoffed, and when I had no scheme on foot they went back to him. Having surveyed the boat and predicted calamity, he departed, leaving a circle of quaint and youthful figures around the Petrel in the shed: Gene Hollister, romantically inclined, yet somewhat hampered by a strict parental supervision; Ralph's cousin Ham Durrett, who was even then a rather fat boy, good-natured but selfish; Don and Harry Ewan, my second cousins; Mac and Nancy Willett and Sam and Sophy McAlery. Nancy was a tomboy, not to be denied, and Sophy her shadow. We held a council, the all-important question of which was how to get the Petrel to the water, and what water to get her to. The river was not to be thought of, and Blackstone Lake some six miles from town. Finally, Logan's mill-pond was decided on,—a muddy sheet on the outskirts of the city. But how to get her to Logan's mill-pond? Cephas was at length consulted. It turned out that he had a coloured friend who went by the impressive name of Thomas Jefferson Taliaferro (pronounced Tolliver), who was in the express business; and who, after surveying the boat with some misgivings,—

for she was ten feet long,—finally consented to transport her to “tide-water” for the sum of two dollars. But it proved that our combined resources only amounted to a dollar and seventy-five cents. Ham Durrett never contributed to anything. On this sum Thomas Jefferson compromised.

Saturday dawned clear, with a stiff March wind catching up the dust into eddies and whirling it down the street. No sooner was my father safely on his way to his office than Thomas Jefferson was reported to be in the alley, where we assembled, surveying with some misgivings Thomas Jefferson’s steed, whose ability to haul the Petrel two miles seemed somewhat doubtful. Other difficulties developed; the door in the back of the shed proved to be too narrow for our ship’s beam. But men embarked on a desperate enterprise are not to be stopped by such trifles, and the problem was solved by sawing out two adjoining boards. These were afterwards replaced with skill by the ship’s carpenter, Able Seaman Grits Jarvis. Then the Petrel by heroic efforts was got into the wagon, the seat of which had been removed, old Thomas Jefferson perched himself precariously in the bow and protestingly gathered up his rope-patched reins.

“Folks’ll ‘low I’se plum crazy, drivin’ dis yere boat,” he declared, observing with concern that some four feet of the stern projected over the tail-board. “Ef she topples, I’ll git to heaven quicker’n a bullet.”

When one is shanghaied, however,—in the hands of buccaneers,—it is too late to withdraw. Six shoulders upheld the rear end of the Petrel, others shoved, and Thomas Jefferson’s rickety horse began to move forward in spite of himself. An expression of sheer terror

might have been observed on the old negro's crinkled face, but his voice was drowned, and we swept out of the alley. Scarcely had we travelled a block before we began to be joined by all the boys along the line of march; marbles, tops, and even incipient baseball games were abandoned that Saturday morning; people ran out of their houses, teamsters halted their carts. The breathless excitement, the exaltation I had felt on leaving the alley were now tinged with other feelings, unanticipated, but not wholly lacking in delectable quality,—concern and awe at these unforeseen forces I had raised, at this ever growing and enthusiastic body of volunteers springing up like dragon's teeth in our path. After all, was not I the hero of this triumphal procession? The thought was consoling, exhilarating. And here was Nancy marching at my side, a little subdued, perhaps, but unquestionably admiring and realizing that it was I who had created all this. Nancy, who was the aptest of pupils, the most loyal of followers, though I did not yet value her devotion at its real worth, because she was a girl. Her imagination kindled at my touch. And on this eventful occasion she carried in her arms a parcel, the contents of which were unknown to all but ourselves. At length we reached the muddy shores of Logan's pond, where two score eager hands volunteered to assist the Petrel into her native element.

Alas! that the reality never attains to the vision. I had beheld, in my dreams, the Petrel about to take the water, and Nancy Willett standing very straight making a little speech and crashing a bottle of wine across the bows. This was the content of the mysterious parcel; she had stolen it from her father's cellar. But the number of uninvited spectators, which had not been foreseen, considerably modified the

programme,—as the newspapers would have said. They pushed and crowded around the ship, and made frank and even brutal remarks as to her seaworthiness; even Nancy, inured though she was to the masculine sex, had fled to the heights, and it looked at this supreme moment as though we should have to fight for the Petrel. An attempt to muster her doughty buccaneers failed; the gunner too had fled,—Gene Hollister; Ham Durrett and the Ewanses were nowhere to be seen, and a muster revealed only Tom, the fidus Achates, and Grits Jarvis.

“Ah, s’y!” he exclaimed in the teeth of the menacing hordes. “Stand back, carn’t yer? I’ll bash yer face in, Johnny. Whose boat is this?”

Shall it be whispered that I regretted his belligerency? Here, in truth, was the drama staged,—my drama, had I only been able to realize it. The good ship beached, the headhunters hemming us in on all sides, the scene prepared for one of those struggles against frightful odds which I had so graphically related as an essential part of our adventures.

“Let’s roll the cuss in the fancy collar,” proposed one of the headhunters,—meaning me.

“I’ll stove yer slats if yer touch him,” said Grits, and then resorted to appeal. “I s’y, carn’t yer stand back and let a chap ‘ave a charnst?”

The head-hunters only jeered. And what shall be said of the Captain in this moment of peril? Shall it be told that his heart was beating wildly?—bumping were a better word. He was trying to remember that he was the Captain. Otherwise, he must admit with shame that he, too, should have fled. So much for romance when

the test comes. Will he remain to fall fighting for his ship? Like Horatius, he glanced up at the hill, where, instead of the porch of the home where he would fain have been, he beheld a wisp of a girl standing alone, her hat on the back of her head, her hair flying in the wind, gazing intently down at him in his danger. The renegade crew was nowhere to be seen. There are those who demand the presence of a woman in order to be heroes....

“Give us a chance, can’t you?” he cried, repeating Grits’s appeal in not quite such a stentorian tone as he would have liked, while his hand trembled on the gunwale. Tom Peters, it must be acknowledged, was much more of a buccaneer when it was a question of deeds, for he planted himself in the way of the belligerent chief of the head-hunters (who spoke with a decided brogue).

“Get out of the way!” said Tom, with a little squeak in his voice. Yet there he was, and he deserves a tribute.

An unlooked-for diversion saved us from annihilation, in the shape of one who had a talent for creating them. We were bewilderingly aware of a girlish figure amongst us.

“You cowards!” she cried. “You cowards!”

Lithe, and fairly quivering with passion, it was Nancy who showed us how to face the head-hunters. They gave back. They would have been brave indeed if they had not retreated before such an intense little nucleus of energy and indignation!...

“Ah, give ‘em a chanst,” said their chief, after a moment.... He even helped to push the boat towards the water. But he did not volunteer to be one of those to man the Petrel on her maiden voyage. Nor did Logan’s pond, that wild March day, greatly resemble

the South Seas. Nevertheless, my eye on Nancy, I stepped proudly aboard and seized an "oar." Grits and Tom followed,—when suddenly the Petrel sank considerably below the water-line as her builders had estimated it. Ere we fully realized this, the now friendly head-hunters had given us a shove, and we were off! The Captain, who should have been waving good-bye to his lady love from the poop, sat down abruptly,—the crew likewise; not, however, before she had heeled to the scuppers, and a half-bucket of iced water had run it. Head-hunters were mere daily episodes in Grits's existence, but water... He muttered something in cockney that sounded like a prayer.... The wind was rapidly driving us toward the middle of the pond, and something cold and ticklish was seeping through the seats of our trousers. We sat like statues....

The bright scene etched itself in my memory—the bare brown slopes with which the pond was bordered, the Irish shanties, the clothes-lines with red flannel shirts snapping in the biting wind; Nancy motionless on the bank; the group behind her, silent now, impressed in spite of itself at the sight of our intrepidity.

The Petrel was sailing stern first.... Would any of us, indeed, ever see home again? I thought of my father's wrath turned to sorrow because he had refused to gratify a son's natural wish and present him with a real rowboat.... Out of the corners of our eyes we watched the water creeping around the gunwale, and the very muddiness of it seemed to enhance its coldness, to make the horrors of its depths more mysterious and hideous. The voice of Grits startled us.



“O Gawd,” he was saying, “we’re a-going to sink, and I carn’t swim! The blarsted tar’s give way back here.”

“Is she leaking?” I cried.

“She’s a-filling up like a bath tub,” he lamented.

Slowly but perceptibly, in truth, the bow was rising, and above the whistling of the wind I could hear his chattering as she settled.... Then several things happened simultaneously: an agonized cry behind me, distant shouts from the shore, a sudden upward lunge of the bow, and the torture of being submerged, inch by inch, in the icy, yellow water. Despite the splashing behind me, I sat as though paralyzed until I was waist deep and the boards turned under me, and then, with a spasmodic contraction of my whole being I struck out—only to find my feet on the muddy bottom. Such was the inglorious end of the good ship Petrel! For she went down, with all hands, in little more than half a fathom of water.... It was not until then I realized that we had been blown clear across the pond!

Figures were running along the shore. And as Tom and I emerged dragging Grits between us,—for he might have been drowned there abjectly in the shallows,—we were met by a stout and bare-armed Irishwoman whose scanty hair, I remember, was drawn into a tight knot behind her head; and who seized us, all three, as though we were a bunch of carrots.

“Come along wid ye!” she cried.

Shivering, we followed her up the hill, the spectators of the tragedy, who by this time had come around the pond, trailing after. Nancy was not among them. Inside the shanty into which we were thrust were two small children crawling about the floor, and the place

was filled with steam from a wash-tub against the wall and a boiler on the stove. With a vigorous injunction to make themselves scarce, the Irishwoman slammed the door in the faces of the curious and ordered us to remove our clothes. Grits was put to bed in a corner, while Tom and I, provided with various garments, huddled over the stove. There fell to my lot the red flannel shirt which I had seen on the clothes-line. She gave us hot coffee, and was back at her wash-tub in no time at all, her entire comment on a proceeding that seemed to Tom and me to have certain elements of gravity being, "By's will be by's!" The final ironical touch was given the anti-climax when our rescuer turned out to be the mother of the chief of the head-hunters himself! He had lingered perforce with his brothers and sister outside the cabin until dinner time, and when he came in he was meek as Moses.

Thus the ready hospitality of the poor, which passed over the heads of Tom and me as we ate bread and onions and potatoes with a ravenous hunger. It must have been about two o'clock in the afternoon when we bade good-bye to our preserver and departed for home....

At first we went at a dog-trot, but presently slowed down to discuss the future looming portentously ahead of us. Since entire concealment was now impossible, the question was,—how complete a confession would be necessary? Our cases, indeed, were dissimilar, and Tom's incentive to hold back the facts was not nearly so great as mine. It sometimes seemed to me in those days unjust that the Peterses were able on the whole to keep out of criminal difficulties, in which I was more or less continuously involved: for it

did not strike me that their sins were not those of the imagination. The method of Tom's father was the slipper. He and Tom understood each other, while between my father and myself was a great gulf fixed. Not that Tom yearned for the slipper; but he regarded its occasional applications as being as inevitable as changes in the weather; lying did not come easily to him, and left to himself he much preferred to confess and have the matter over with. I have already suggested that I had cultivated lying, that weapon of the weaker party, in some degree, at least, in self-defence.

Tom was loyal. Moreover, my conviction would probably deprive him for six whole afternoons of my company, on which he was more or less dependent. But the defence of this case presented unusual difficulties, and we stopped several times to thrash them out. We had been absent from dinner, and doubtless by this time Julia had informed Tom's mother of the expedition, and anyone could see that our clothing had been wet. So I lingered in no little anxiety behind the Peters stable while he made the investigation. Our spirits rose considerably when he returned to report that Julia had unexpectedly been a trump, having quieted his mother by the surmise that he was spending the day with his Aunt Fanny. So far, so good. The problem now was to decide upon what to admit. For we must both tell the same story.

It was agreed that we had fallen into Logan's Pond from a raft: my suggestion. Well, said Tom, the Petrel hadn't proved much better than a raft, after all. I was in no mood to defend her.

This designation of the Petrel as a "raft" was my first legal quibble. The question to be decided by the court was, What is a raft? just as

the supreme tribunal of the land has been required, in later years, to decide, What is whiskey? The thing to be concealed if possible was the building of the “raft,” although this information was already in the possession of a number of persons, whose fathers might at any moment see fit to congratulate my own on being the parent of a genius. It was a risk, however, that had to be run. And, secondly, since Grits Jarvis was contraband, nothing was to be said about him.

I have not said much about my mother, who might have been likened on such occasions to a grand jury compelled to indict, yet torn between loyalty to an oath and sympathy with the defendant. I went through the Peters yard, climbed the wire fence, my object being to discover first from Ella, the housemaid, or Hannah, the cook, how much was known in high quarters. It was Hannah who, as I opened the kitchen door, turned at the sound, and set down the saucepan she was scouring.

“Is it home ye are? Mercy to goodness!” (this on beholding my shrunken costume) “Glory be to God you’re not drownded! and your mother worritin’ her heart out! So it’s into the wather ye were?”

I admitted it.

“Hannah?” I said softly.

“What then?”

“Does mother know—about the boat?”

“Now don’t ye be wheedlin’.”

I managed to discover, however, that my mother did not know, and surmised that the best reason why she had not been told had to do with Hannah’s criminal acquiescence concerning the operations in

the shed. I ran into the front hall and up the stairs, and my mother heard me coming and met me on the landing.

“Hugh, where have you been?”

As I emerged from the semi-darkness of the stairway she caught sight of my dwindled garments, of the trousers well above my ankles. Suddenly she had me in her arms and was kissing me passionately. As she stood before me in her grey, belted skirt, the familiar red-and-white cameo at her throat, her heavy hair parted in the middle, in her eyes was an odd, appealing look which I know now was a sign of mother love struggling with a Presbyterian conscience. Though she inherited that conscience, I have often thought she might have succeeded in casting it off—or at least some of it—had it not been for the fact that in spite of herself she worshipped its incarnation in the shape of my father. Her voice trembled a little as she drew me to the sofa beside the window.

“Tell me about what happened, my son,” she said.

It was a terrible moment for me. For my affections were still quiveringly alive in those days, and I loved her. I had for an instant an instinctive impulse to tell her the whole story,—South Sea Islands and all! And I could have done it had I not beheld looming behind her another figure which represented a stern and unsympathetic Authority, and somehow made her, suddenly, of small account. Not that she would have understood the romance, but she would have comprehended me. I knew that she was powerless to save me from the wrath to come. I wept. It was because I hated to lie to her,—yet I did so. Fear gripped me, and—like some respectable criminals I have since known—I understood that any confession I made would

inexorably be used against me.... I wonder whether she knew I was lying? At any rate, the case appeared to be a grave one, and I was presently remanded to my room to be held over for trial....

Vividly, as I write, I recall the misery of the hours I have spent, while awaiting sentence, in the little chamber with the honeysuckle wall-paper and steel engravings of happy but dumpy children romping in the fields and groves. On this particular March afternoon the weather had become morne, as the French say; and I looked down sadly into the grey back yard which the wind of the morning had strewn with chips from the Petrel. At last, when shadows were gathering in the corners of the room, I heard footsteps. Ella appeared, prim and virtuous, yet a little commiserating. My father wished to see me, downstairs. It was not the first time she had brought that summons, and always her manner was the same!

The scene of my trials was always the sitting room, lined with grim books in their walnut cases. And my father sat, like a judge, behind the big desk where he did his work when at home. Oh, the distance between us at such an hour! I entered as delicately as Agag, and the expression in his eye seemed to convict me before I could open my mouth.

“Hugh,” he said, “your mother tells me that you have confessed to going, without permission, to Logan’s Pond, where you embarked on a raft and fell into the water.”

The slight emphasis he contrived to put on the word raft sent a colder shiver down my spine than the iced water had done. What did he know? or was this mere suspicion? Too late, now, at any rate, to plead guilty.

“It was a sort of a raft, sir,” I stammered.

“A sort of a raft,” repeated my father. “Where, may I ask, did you find it?”

“I—I didn’t exactly find it, sir.”

“Ah!” said my father. (It was the moment to glance meaningfully at the jury.) The prisoner gulped. “You didn’t exactly find it, then. Will you kindly explain how you came by it?”

“Well, sir, we—I—put it together.”

“Have you any objection to stating, Hugh, in plain English, that you made it?”

“No, sir, I suppose you might say that I made it.”

“Or that it was intended for a row-boat?”

Here was the time to appeal, to force a decision as to what constituted a row-boat.

“Perhaps it might be called a row-boat, sir,” I said abjectly.

“Or that, in direct opposition to my wishes and commands in forbidding you to have a boat, to spend your money foolishly and wickedly on a whim, you constructed one secretly in the woodshed, took out a part of the back partition, thus destroying property that did not belong to you, and had the boat carted this morning to Logan’s Pond?” I was silent, utterly undone. Evidently he had specific information.... There are certain expressions that are, at times, more than mere figures of speech, and now my father’s wrath seemed literally towering. It added visibly to his stature.

“Hugh,” he said, in a voice that penetrated to the very corners of my soul, “I utterly fail to understand you. I cannot imagine how a son of mine, a son of your mother who is the very soul of truthfulness

and honour—can be a liar.” (Oh, the terrible emphasis he put on that word!) “Nor is it as if this were a new tendency—I have punished you for it before. Your mother and I have tried to do our duty by you, to instil into you Christian teaching. But it seems wholly useless. I confess that I am at a loss how to proceed. You seem to have no conscience whatever, no conception of what you owe to your parents and your God. You not only persistently disregard my wishes and commands, but you have, for many months, been leading a double life, facing me every day, while you were secretly and continually disobeying me. I shudder to think where this determination of yours to have what you desire at any price will lead you in the future. It is just such a desire that distinguishes wicked men from good.”

I will not linger upon a scene the very remembrance of which is painful to this day.... I went from my father’s presence in disgrace, in an agony of spirit that was overwhelming, to lock the door of my room and drop face downward on the bed, to sob until my muscles twitched. For he had, indeed, put into me an awful fear. The greatest horror of my boyish imagination was a wicked man. Was I, as he had declared, utterly depraved and doomed in spite of myself to be one?

There came a knock at my door—Ella with my supper. I refused to open, and sent her away, to fall on my knees in the darkness and pray wildly to a God whose attributes and character were sufficiently confused in my mind. On the one hand was the stern, despotic Monarch of the Westminster Catechism, whom I addressed out of habit, the Father who condemned a portion of his children from the cradle. Was I one of those who he had decreed before I was born must suffer the tortures of the flames of hell? Putting two and two



together, what I had learned in Sunday school and gathered from parts of Dr. Pound's sermons, and the intimation of my father that wickedness was within me, like an incurable disease,—was not mine the logical conclusion? What, then, was the use of praying?... My supplications ceased abruptly. And my ever ready imagination, stirred to its depths, beheld that awful scene of the last day: the darkness, such as sometimes creeps over the city in winter, when the jaundiced smoke falls down and we read at noonday by gas-light. I beheld the tortured faces of the wicked gathered on the one side, and my mother on the other amongst the blessed, gazing across the gulf at me with yearning and compassion. Strange that it did not strike me that the sight of the condemned whom they had loved in life would have marred if not destroyed the happiness of the chosen, about to receive their crowns and harps! What a theology—that made the Creator and Preserver of all mankind thus illogical!



## *Chapter Three*

**A**lthough I was imaginative, I was not morbidly introspective, and by the end of the first day of my incarceration my interest in that solution had waned. At times, however, I actually yearned for someone in whom I could confide, who could suggest a solution. I repeat, I would not for worlds have asked my father or my mother or Dr. Pound, of whom I had a wholesome fear, or perhaps an unwholesome one. Except at morning Bible reading and at church my parents never mentioned the name of the Deity, save to instruct me formally. Intended or no, the effect of my religious training was to make me ashamed of discussing spiritual matters, and naturally I failed to perceive that this was because it laid its emphasis on personal salvation.... I did not, however, become an unbeliever, for I was not of a nature to contemplate with equanimity a godless universe....

My sufferings during these series of afternoon confinements did not come from remorse, but were the result of a vague sense of injury; and their effect was to generate within me a strange motive

power, a desire to do something that would astound my father and eventually wring from him the confession that he had misjudged me. To be sure, I should have to wait until early manhood, at least, for the accomplishment of such a coup. Might it not be that I was an embryonic literary genius? Many were the books I began in this ecstasy of self-vindication, only to abandon them when my confinement came to an end.

It was about this time, I think, that I experienced one of those shocks which have a permanent effect upon character. It was then the custom for ladies to spend the day with one another, bringing their sewing; and sometimes, when I unexpectedly entered the sitting-room, the voices of my mother's visitors would drop to a whisper. One afternoon I returned from school to pause at the head of the stairs. Cousin Bertha Ewan and Mrs. McAlery were discussing with my mother an affair that I judged from the awed tone in which they spoke might prove interesting.

"Poor Grace," Mrs. McAlery was saying, "I imagine she's paid a heavy penalty. No man alive will be faithful under those circumstances."

I stopped at the head of the stairs, with a delicious, guilty feeling.

"Have they ever heard of her?" Cousin Bertha asked.

"It is thought they went to Spain," replied Mrs. McAlery, solemnly, yet not without a certain zest. "Mr. Jules Hollister will not have her name mentioned in his presence, you know. And Whitcomb chased them as far as New York with a horse-pistol in his pocket. The report is that he got to the dock just as the ship sailed. And then, you know, he went to live somewhere out West,—in Iowa, I believe."

“Did he ever get a divorce?” Cousin Bertha inquired.

“He was too good a church member, my dear,” my mother reminded her.

“Well, I’d have got one quick enough, church member or no church member,” declared Cousin Bertha, who had in her elements of daring.

“Not that I mean for a moment to excuse her,” Mrs. McAlery put in, “but Edward Whitcomb did have a frightful temper, and he was awfully strict with her, and he was old enough, anyhow, to be her father. Grace Hollister was the last woman in the world I should have suspected of doing so hideous a thing. She was so sweet and simple.”

“Jennings was very attractive,” said my Cousin Bertha. “I don’t think I ever saw a handsomer man. Now, if he had looked at me—”

The sentence was never finished, for at this crucial moment I dropped a grammar....

I had heard enough, however, to excite my curiosity to the highest pitch. And that evening, when I came in at five o’clock to study, I asked my mother what had become of Gene Hollister’s aunt.

“She went away, Hugh,” replied my mother, looking greatly troubled.

“Why?” I persisted.

“It is something you are too young to understand.”

Of course I started an investigation, and the next day at school I asked the question of Gene Hollister himself, only to discover that he believed his aunt to be dead! And that night he asked his mother if his Aunt Grace were really alive, after all? Whereupon complications

and explanations ensued between our parents, of which we saw only the surface signs.... My father accused me of eavesdropping (which I denied), and sentenced me to an afternoon of solitary confinement for repeating something which I had heard in private. I have reason to believe that my mother was also reprimanded.

It must not be supposed that I permitted the matter to rest. In addition to Grits Jarvis, there was another contraband among my acquaintances, namely, Alec Pound, the scrape-grace son of the Reverend Doctor Pound. Alec had an encyclopaedic mind, especially well stocked with the kind of knowledge I now desired; first and last he taught me much, which I would better have got in another way. To him I appealed and got the story, my worst suspicions being confirmed. Mrs. Whitcomb's house had been across the alley from that of Mr. Jennings, but no one knew that anything was "going on," though there had been signals from the windows—the neighbours afterwards remembered....

I listened shudderingly.

"But," I cried, "they were both married!"

"What difference does that make when you love a woman?" Alec replied grandly. "I could tell you much worse things than that."

This he proceeded to do. Fascinated, I listened with a sickening sensation. It was a mild afternoon in spring, and we stood in the deep limestone gutter in front of the parsonage, a little Gothic wooden house set in a gloomy yard.

"I thought," said I, "that people couldn't love any more after they were married, except each other."

Alec looked at me pityingly.

“You’ll get over that notion,” he assured me.

Thus another ingredient entered my character. Denied its food at home, good food, my soul eagerly consumed and made part of itself the fermenting stuff that Alec Pound so willingly distributed. And it was fermenting stuff. Let us see what it did to me. Working slowly but surely, it changed for me the dawning mystery of sex into an evil instead of a holy one. The knowledge of the tragedy of Grace Hollister started me to seeking restlessly, on bookshelves and elsewhere, for a secret that forever eluded me, and forever led me on. The word fermenting aptly describes the process begun, suggesting as it does something closed up, away from air and sunlight, continually working in secret, engendering forces that fascinated, yet inspired me with fear. Undoubtedly this secretiveness of our elders was due to the pernicious dualism of their orthodox Christianity, in which love was carnal and therefore evil, and the flesh not the gracious soil of the spirit, but something to be deplored and condemned, exorcised and transformed by the miracle of grace. Now love had become a terrible power (gripping me) whose enchantment drove men and women from home and friends and kindred to the uttermost parts of the earth....

It was long before I got to sleep that night after my talk with Alec Pound. I alternated between the horror and the romance of the story I had heard, supplying for myself the details he had omitted: I beheld the signals from the windows, the clandestine meetings, the sudden and desperate flight. And to think that all this could have happened in our city not five blocks from where I lay!

My consternation and horror were concentrated on the man,—and yet I recall a curious bifurcation. Instead of experiencing that automatic righteous indignation which my father and mother had felt, which had animated old Mr. Jules Hollister when he had sternly forbidden his daughter's name to be mentioned in his presence, which had made these people outcasts, there welled up within me an intense sympathy and pity. By an instinctive process somehow linked with other experiences, I seemed to be able to enter into the feelings of these two outcasts, to understand the fearful yet fascinating nature of the impulse that had led them to elude the vigilance and probity of a world with which I myself was at odds. I pictured them in a remote land, shunned by mankind. Was there something within me that might eventually draw me to do likewise? The desire in me to which my father had referred, which would brook no opposition, which twisted and squirmed until it found its way to its object? I recalled the words of Jarvis, the carpenter, that if I ever set my heart on another man's wife, God help him. God help me!

A wicked man! I had never beheld the handsome and fascinating Mr. Jennings, but I visualised him now; dark, like all villains, with a black moustache and snapping black eyes. He carried a cane. I always associated canes with villains. Whereupon I arose, groped for the matches, lighted the gas, and gazing at myself in the mirror was a little reassured to find nothing sinister in my countenance....

Next to my father's faith in a Moral Governor of the Universe was his belief in the Tariff and the Republican Party. And this belief, among others, he handed on to me. On the cinder playground of the Academy we Republicans used to wage, during campaigns, pitched

battles for the Tariff. It did not take a great deal of courage to be a Republican in our city, and I was brought up to believe that Democrats were irrational, inferior, and—with certain exceptions like the Hollisters—dirty beings. There was only one degree lower, and that was to be a mugwump. It was no wonder that the Hollisters were Democrats, for they had a queer streak in them; owing, no doubt, to the fact that old Mr. Jules Hollister's mother had been a Frenchwoman. He looked like a Frenchman, by the way, and always wore a skullcap.

I remember one autumn afternoon having a violent quarrel with Gene Hollister that bade fair to end in blows, when he suddenly demanded:—

“I'll bet you anything you don't know why you're a Republican.”

“It's because I'm for the Tariff,” I replied triumphantly.

But his next question floored me. What, for example, was the Tariff? I tried to bluster it out, but with no success.

“Do you know?” I cried finally, with sudden inspiration.

It turned out that he did not.

“Aren't we darned idiots,” he asked, “to get fighting over something we don't know anything about?”

That was Gene's French blood, of course. But his question rankled. And how was I to know that he would have got as little satisfaction if he had hurled it into the marching ranks of those imposing torch-light processions which sometimes passed our house at night, with drums beating and fifes screaming and torches waving, —thousands of citizens who were for the Tariff for the same reason as I: to wit, because they were Republicans.



Yet my father lived and died in the firm belief that the United States of America was a democracy!

Resolved not to be caught a second time in such a humiliating position by a Democrat, I asked my father that night what the Tariff was. But I was too young to understand it, he said. I was to take his word for it that the country would go to the dogs if the Democrats got in and the Tariff were taken away. Here, in a nutshell, though neither he nor I realized it, was the political instruction of the marching hordes. Theirs not to reason why. I was too young, they too ignorant. Such is the method of Authority!

The steel-mills of Mr. Durrett and Mr. Hambleton, he continued, would be forced to shut down, and thousands of workmen would starve. This was just a sample of what would happen. Prosperity would cease, he declared. That word, Prosperity, made a deep impression on me, and I recall the certain reverential emphasis he laid on it. And while my solicitude for the workmen was not so great as his and Mr. Durrett's, I was concerned as to what would happen to us if those twin gods, the Tariff and Prosperity, should take their departure from the land. Knowing my love for the good things of the table, my father intimated, with a rare humour I failed to appreciate, that we should have to live henceforth in spartan simplicity. After that, like the intelligent workman, I was firmer than ever for the Tariff.

Such was the idealistic plane on which—and from a good man—I received my first political instruction! And for a long time I connected the dominance of the Republican Party with the continuation of manna and quails, in other words, with nothing that had to do with

the spiritual welfare of any citizen, but with clothing and food and material comforts. My education was progressing....

Though my father revered Plato and Aristotle, he did not, apparently, take very seriously the contention that that government alone is good "which seeks to attain the permanent interests of the governed by evolving the character of its citizens." To put the matter brutally, politics, despite the lofty sentiments on the transparencies in torchlight processions, had only to do with the belly, not the soul.

Politics and government, one perceives, had nothing to do with religion, nor education with any of these. A secularized and disjointed world! Our leading citizens, learned in the classics though some of them might be, paid no heed to the dictum of the Greek idealist, who was more practical than they would have supposed. "The man who does not carry his city within his heart is a spiritual starveling."

One evening, a year or two after that tariff campaign, I was pretending to study my lessons under the student lamp in the sitting-room while my mother sewed and my father wrote at his desk, when there was a ring at the door-bell. I welcomed any interruption, even though the visitor proved to be only the druggist's boy; and there was always the possibility of a telegram announcing, for instance, the death of a relative. Such had once been the case when my Uncle Avery Paret had died in New York, and I was taken out of school for a blissful four days for the funeral.

I went tiptoeing into the hall and peeped over the banisters while Ella opened the door. I heard a voice which I recognized as that of Perry Blackwood's father asking for Mr. Paret; and then to my

astonishment, I saw filing after him into the parlour some ten or twelve persons. With the exception of Mr. Ogilvy, who belonged to one of our old families, and Mr. Watling, a lawyer who had married the youngest of Gene Hollister's aunts, the visitors entered stealthily, after the manner of burglars; some of these were heavy-jowled, and all had an air of mystery that raised my curiosity and excitement to the highest pitch. I caught hold of Ella as she came up the stairs, but she tore herself free, and announced to my father that Mr. Josiah Blackwood and other gentlemen had asked to see him. My father seemed puzzled as he went downstairs.... A long interval elapsed, during which I did not make even a pretence of looking at my arithmetic. At times the low hum of voices rose to what was almost an uproar, and on occasions I distinguished a marked Irish brogue.

"I wonder what they want?" said my mother, nervously.

At last we heard the front door shut behind them, and my father came upstairs, his usually serene face wearing a disturbed expression.

"Who in the world was it, Mr. Paret?" asked my mother.

My father sat down in the arm-chair. He was clearly making an effort for self-control.

"Blackwood and Ogilvy and Watling and some city politicians," he exclaimed.

"Politicians!" she repeated. "What did they want? That is, if it's anything you can tell me," she added apologetically.

"They wished me to be the Republican candidate for the mayor of this city."

This tremendous news took me off my feet. My father mayor!

“Of course you didn’t consider it, Mr. Paret,” my mother was saying.

“Consider it!” he echoed reprovingly. “I can’t imagine what Ogilvy and Watling and Josiah Blackwood were thinking of! They are out of their heads. I as much as told them so.”

This was more than I could bear, for I had already pictured myself telling the news to envious schoolmates.

“Oh, father, why didn’t you take it?” I cried.

By this time, when he turned to me, he had regained his usual expression.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Hugh,” he said. “Accept a political office! That sort of thing is left to politicians.”

The tone in which he spoke warned me that a continuation of the conversation would be unwise, and my mother also understood that the discussion was closed. He went back to his desk, and began writing again as though nothing had happened.

As for me, I was left in a palpitating state of excitement which my father’s self-control or sang-froid only served to irritate and enhance, and my head was fairly spinning as, covertly, I watched his pen steadily covering the paper.

How could he—how could any man of flesh and blood sit down calmly after having been offered the highest honour in the gift of his community! And he had spurned it as if Mr. Blackwood and the others had gratuitously insulted him! And how was it, if my father so revered the Republican Party that he would not suffer it to be mentioned slightly in his presence, that he had refused contemptuously to be its mayor?...

The next day at school, however, I managed to let it be known that the offer had been made and declined. After all, this seemed to make my father a bigger man than if he had accepted it. Naturally I was asked why he had declined it.

“He wouldn’t take it,” I replied scornfully. “Office-holding should be left to politicians.”

Ralph Hambleton, with his precocious and cynical knowledge of the world, minimized my triumph by declaring that he would rather be his grandfather, Nathaniel Durrett, than the mayor of the biggest city in the country. Politicians, he said, were bloodsuckers and thieves, and the only reason for holding office was that it enabled one to steal the taxpayers’ money....

As I have intimated, my vision of a future literary career waxed and waned, but a belief that I was going to be Somebody rarely deserted me. If not a literary lion, what was that Somebody to be? Such an environment as mine was woefully lacking in heroic figures to satisfy the romantic soul. In view of the experience I have just related, it is not surprising that the notion of becoming a statesman did not appeal to me; nor is it to be wondered at, despite the somewhat exaggerated respect and awe in which Ralph’s grandfather was held by my father and other influential persons, that I failed to be stirred by the elements of greatness in the grim personality of our first citizen, the iron-master. For he possessed such elements. He lived alone in Ingrain Street in an uncompromising mansion I always associated with the Sabbath, not only because I used to be taken there on decorous Sunday visits by my father, but because it was the very quintessence of Presbyterianism. The moment I entered its

“portals”—as Mr. Hawthorne appropriately would have called them—my spirit was overwhelmed and suffocated by its formality and orderliness. Within its stern walls Nathaniel Durrett had made a model universe of his own, such as the Deity of the Westminster Confession had no doubt meant his greater one to be if man had not rebelled and foiled him.... It was a world from which I was determined to escape at any cost.

My father and I were always ushered into the gloomy library, with its high ceiling, with its long windows that reached almost to the rococo cornice, with its cold marble mantelpiece that reminded me of a tombstone, with its interminable book shelves filled with yellow bindings. On the centre table, in addition to a ponderous Bible, was one of those old-fashioned carafes of red glass tipped with blue surmounted by a tumbler of blue tipped with red. Behind this table Mr. Durrett sat reading a volume of sermons, a really handsome old man in his black tie and pleated shirt; tall and spare, straight as a ramrod, with a finely moulded head and straight nose and sinewy hands the colour of mulberry stain. He called my father by his first name, an immense compliment, considering how few dared to do so.

“Well, Matthew,” the old man would remark, after they had discussed Dr. Pound’s latest flight on the nature of the Trinity or the depravity of man, or horticulture, or the Republican Party, “do you have any better news of Hugh at school?”

“I regret to say, Mr. Durrett,” my father would reply, “that he does not yet seem to be aroused to a sense of his opportunities.”

Whereupon Mr. Durrett would gimble me with a blue eye that lurked beneath grizzled brows, quite as painful a proceeding as if he

used an iron tool. I almost pity myself when I think of what a forlorn stranger I was in their company. They two, indeed, were of one kind, and I of another sort who could never understand them,—nor they me. To what depths of despair they reduced me they never knew, and yet they were doing it all for my good! They only managed to convince me that my love of folly was ineradicable, and that I was on my way head first for perdition. I always looked, during these excruciating and personal moments, at the coloured glass bottle.

“It grieves me to hear it, Hugh,” Mr. Durrett invariably declared. “You’ll never come to any good without study. Now when I was your age...”

I knew his history by heart, a common one in this country, although he made an honourable name instead of a dishonourable one. And when I contrast him with those of his successors whom I was to know later...! But I shall not anticipate. American genius had not then evolved the false entry method of overcapitalization. A thrilling history, Mr. Durrett’s, could I but have entered into it. I did not reflect then that this stern old man must have throbbed once; nay, fire and energy still remained in his bowels, else he could not have continued to dominate a city. Nor did it occur to me that the great steel-works that lighted the southern sky were the result of a passion, of dreams similar to those possessing me, but which I could not express. He had founded a family whose position was virtually hereditary, gained riches which for those days were great, compelled men to speak his name with a certain awe. But of what use were such riches as his when his religion and morality compelled him to banish from him all the joys in the power of riches to bring?

No, I didn't want to be an iron-master. But it may have been about this time that I began to be impressed with the power of wealth, the adulation and reverence it commanded, the importance in which it clothed all who shared in it....

The private school I attended in the company of other boys with whom I was brought up was called Densmore Academy, a large, square building of a then hideous modernity, built of smooth, orange-red bricks with threads of black mortar between them. One reads of happy school days, yet I fail to recall any really happy hours spent there, even in the yard, which was covered with black cinders that cut you when you fell. I think of it as a penitentiary, and the memory of the barred lower windows gives substance to this impression.

I suppose I learned something during the seven years of my incarceration. All of value, had its teachers known anything of youthful psychology, of natural bent, could have been put into me in three. At least four criminally wasted years, to say nothing of the benumbing and desiccating effect of that old system of education! Chalk and chalk-dust! The Mediterranean a tinted portion of the map, Italy a man's boot which I drew painfully, with many yawns; history no glorious epic revealing as it unrolls the Meaning of Things, no revelation of that wondrous distillation of the Spirit of man, but an endless marching and counter-marching up and down the map, weary columns of figures to be learned by rote instantly to be forgotten again. "On June the 7th General So-and-so proceeded with his whole army—" where? What does it matter? One little chapter of Carlyle, illuminated by a teacher of understanding, were worth a million such text-books. Alas, for the hatred of Virgil! "Paret" (a



shiver), “begin at the one hundred and thirtieth line and translate!” I can hear myself droning out in detestable English a meaningless portion of that endless journey of the pious Aeneas; can see Gene Hollister, with heart-rending glances of despair, stumbling through Cornelius Nepos in an unventilated room with chalk-rubbed blackboards and heavy odours of ink and stale lunch. And I graduated from Densmore Academy, the best school in our city, in the 80’s, without having been taught even the rudiments of citizenship.

Knowledge was presented to us as a corpse, which bit by bit we painfully dissected. We never glimpsed the living, growing thing, never experienced the Spirit, the same spirit that was able magically to waft me from a wintry Lyme Street to the South Seas, the energizing, electrifying Spirit of true achievement, of life, of God himself. Little by little its flames were smothered until in manhood there seemed no spark of it left alive. Many years were to pass ere it was to revive again, as by a miracle. I travelled. Awakening at dawn, I saw, framed in a port-hole, rose-red Seriphos set in a living blue that paled the sapphire; the seas Ulysses had sailed, and the company of the Argonauts. My soul was steeped in unimagined colour, and in the memory of one rapturous instant is gathered what I was soon to see of Greece, is focussed the meaning of history, poetry and art. I was to stand one evening in spring on the mound where heroes sleep and gaze upon the plain of Marathon between darkening mountains and the blue thread of the strait peaceful now, flushed with pink and white blossoms of fruit and almond trees; to sit on the cliff-throne whence a Persian King had looked down upon a

Salamis fought and lost.... In that port-hole glimpse a Themistocles was revealed, a Socrates, a Homer and a Phidias, an AEschylus, and a Pericles; yes, and a John brooding Revelations on his sea-girt rock as twilight falls over the waters....

I saw the Roman Empire, that Scarlet Woman whose sands were dyed crimson with blood to appease her harlotry, whose ships were laden with treasures from the immutable East, grain from the valley of the Nile, spices from Arabia, precious purple stuffs from Tyre, tribute and spoil, slaves and jewels from conquered nations she absorbed; and yet whose very emperors were the unconscious instruments of a Progress they wot not of, preserved to the West by Marathon and Salamis. With Caesar's legions its message went forth across Hispania to the cliffs of the wild western ocean, through Hercynian forests to tribes that dwelt where great rivers roll up their bars by misty, northern seas, and even to Celtic fastnesses beyond the Wall....

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