COLLINS
CLASSICS

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Confessions of an English Opium Eater

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Аннотация

HarperCollins is proud to present its incredible range of best-loved, essential classics.'I here present you, courteous reader, with the record of a remarkable period in my life…'The 'Confessions of an English Opium Eater' is both a classic of the English autobiographical genre and a hard-nosed study of the effects of drugs on an artistic mind. A close associate of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the brilliant but troubled de Quincey recounts both the pleasures and pain of opium addiction in captivating prose. The result is by turns enlightened, nightmarish and witty – a faithful mirror of the drug itself.

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History of Collins

In 1819, millworker William Collins from Glasgow, Scotland, set up a company for printing and publishing pamphlets, sermons, hymn books and prayer books. That company was Collins and was to mark the birth of HarperCollins Publishers as we know it today. The long tradition of Collins dictionary publishing can be traced back to the first dictionary William published in 1824, *Greek and English Lexicon*. Indeed, from 1840 onwards, he began to produce illustrated dictionaries and even obtained a licence to print and publish the Bible.

Soon after, William published the first Collins novel, *Ready Reckoner*, however it was the time of the Long Depression, where harvests were poor, prices were high, potato crops had failed and violence was erupting in Europe. As a result, many factories across the country were forced to close down and William chose to retire in 1846, partly due to the hardships he was facing.

Aged 30, William's son, William II took over the business. A keen humanitarian with a warm heart and a generous spirit, William II was truly 'Victorian' in his outlook. He introduced new, up-to-date steam presses and published affordable editions of Shakespeare's works and *Pilgrim's Progress*, making them available to the masses for the first time. A new demand for educational books meant that success came with the publication of travel books, scientific books, encyclopaedias

and dictionaries. This demand to be educated led to the later publication of atlases and Collins also held the monopoly on scripture writing at the time.

In the 1860s Collins began to expand and diversify and the idea of 'books for the millions' was developed. Affordable editions of classical literature were published and in 1903 Collins introduced 10 titles in their Collins Handy Illustrated Pocket Novels. These proved so popular that a few years later this had increased to an output of 50 volumes, selling nearly half a million in their year of publication. In the same year, The Everyman's Library was also instituted, with the idea of publishing an affordable library of the most important classical works, biographies, religious and philosophical treatments, plays, poems, travel and adventure. This series eclipsed all competition at the time and the introduction of paperback books in the 1950s helped to open that market and marked a high point in the industry.

HarperCollins is and has always been a champion of the classics and the current Collins Classics series follows in this tradition – publishing classical literature that is affordable and available to all. Beautifully packaged, highly collectible and intended to be reread and enjoyed at every opportunity.

Life & Times

Opium and Addiction

Laudanum is a tincture of opium dissolved in alcohol. It was once widely used as a 'cure-all' because it contains high levels of morphine and codeine, which make it a very effective analgesic. It also has a very relaxing effect on the mind due to its narcotic content. In the early 19th century, many people suffered from chronic and ultimately fatal ailments, such as tuberculosis (consumption) and syphilis, for which there were no known cures. Laudanum became the medication of choice, as it alleviated the pain and soothed the mind, enabling people to continue functioning while their diseases gradually took away their lives.

In those days, laudanum contained raw opium, so that it was a cocktail of many compounds exuded by the opium poppy. It is still used in some countries for the treatment of people in severe pain due to terminal illnesses, such as cancer, but these days the drug is processed so that the solution does not contain undesirable chemicals. In its processed form, it is more commonly referred to as tincture of opium rather than laudanum. The term 'laudanum' is derived from the word 'ladanum' which is an aromatic resin obtained from the rock rose (*Cistus ladanifer*). As opium is the dried sap of the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*), pharmacists saw a similarity between the two. The

species name of the opium poppy – *somniferum* – alludes to the sleep-inducing properties of the drug.

Confessions of an English Opium Eater

Confessions of an English Opium Eater (1821) is, as it suggests, a confessional on the effects that laudanum had on the author. This is because opium has the unfortunate quality of being highly addictive, both physiologically and psychologically. The result is that the patient becomes a user and craves higher and higher doses as their tolerance for the drug increases. Opium addiction, through the administration of laudanum, became quite a problem. People needed the drug to cope with their afflictions, but its use sent them into a spiraling dependency that, in turn, caused other problems due to the opium's side effects. These included erratic and unreasonable behaviour, malnutrition due to vomiting and loss of appetite, and general self-neglect. Of course, the problem was also compounded by the fact that alcohol was the solvent, leading to alcoholism alongside the opium addiction.

Thomas de Quincey began taking laudanum to treat his neuralgia, a condition resulting in spasms of pain along nerves, typically in the head and face. It is caused by damaged or malfunctioning nerves that prompt the brain to feel phantom aches and pains, which can be quite debilitating. It may be that childhood illness or injury caused his nervous system to begin these intermittent bouts of pain, but de Quincey was probably also a hypochondriac in nature, thereby exaggerating the problem

in his own mind and making the neuralgia partly psychosomatic.

De Quincey took laudanum for the first time at the age of 19. For the next eight years, he used laudanum as a recreational drug, whenever he decided that his condition warranted a dose. He then suffered a tragedy when his friend Catherine, the youngest daughter of William Wordsworth, died, closely followed by his son, Thomas, in the same year: 1812. This prompted de Quincey to use laudanum on a daily basis, and he soon entered into full-blown opium addiction, which would dog him for the rest of his life. He displayed all the classic behaviours associated with modern-day heroin addiction. He would go into binges of consumption and then try to rehabilitate himself by attempting to kick the habit, always without prolonged success.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is another famous opium addict of the same era as de Quincey. Coleridge was the elder of the two, by a dozen years, and had published *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in 1798, which greatly inspired de Quincey. They met in 1807, and an acquaintance was begun rather than a proper friendship – both seeing a connection through their shared drug habit. When the de Quincey published *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, a peculiar literary rivalry began. They each published magazine articles that were virtually interchangeable in theme, style and tone, almost as if they were binary stars, caught in one another's gravitational field. They orbited one another in this way for a while, as if obsessed by the self-image they saw in the other.

Both Coleridge and de Quincey were among William Wordsworth's circle of friends. Wordsworth was disapproving of their use of opium because of the decline in condition and mood that it brought about. Anxiety, depression and fatigue were very evident symptoms. Wordsworth was a vigorous man who made the most of life and enjoyed outdoor pursuits, such as trekking. Wordsworth believed that opium addiction brought out the worst in people. However, because of its benefits, it would be a long time before the use of opium would be outlawed, at a time before the evolution of more specific remedies. It was banned in the US in 1905. In Britain it was more complicated, due to the perception that opiate addictions were medical conditions rather than condemnable behaviour. In 1926 the Rolleston Act allowed general practitioners to prescribe opiates in Britain if they saw fit, so that addicts were able to continue with their habits.

About the Author

De Quincey had an unusual start in life. His father died when he was young and his mother had a peculiar idea of the best way to school him. Instead of sending him to the best school, she did the opposite. She actually removed him from one school, where he was doing too well, and sent him to an inferior school to encourage him to work harder and develop a sense of self-reliance – an approach that many modern parents might do well to follow, as it worked in that regard. De Quincey became a free-spirited and self-educated character, if a little eccentric in nature, with a clear mission in mind to follow Wordsworth and Coleridge

into the world of poetry and literature. It would be fair to say that he possessed an 'artistic temperament': naturally compelled towards self-expression, with an accompanying disregard for his own well-being.

It is true that he was something of a self-imagined pariah, but that too was common in the creative type, due to the acute awareness of being different and having heightened sensibilities about the difficulty with conforming and becoming marginalized by society. This probably added to de Quincey's inclination to take opium, as a means of escaping his inner demons as much as anything else. He effectively lived the entirety of his adult life with laudanum as his faithful companion, always there to dull his senses.

Confessions of an English Opium Eater was heavily coloured by a period in which de Quincey was homeless and living on the streets of London, which he viewed as the seminal moment in his life, following his uncertain childhood. It was this episode that led to his opium eating, which, in turn, opened his mind to his literary potential. As such, he was equally cursed and blessed, as he saw it, and this is really the central theme of the book – the pros and cons of opium addiction. The key sections of the tome are entitled *The Pleasures of Opium* and *The Pains of Opium*, in which he tries to address a balanced and fair view.

In this work, de Quincey attempts to be objective by the admittance of his gains and losses. It was this stark honesty that made the book immediately popular, although de Quincey chose

to publish the book anonymously, as he wasn't at all certain of what the reaction to the book would be. The truth is that he had inadvertently tapped into the humanity of the British public. Like so many since, he found that people were willing to accept and embrace him for the candour with which he detailed his flaws as a person. People like to see qualities in celebrities that they can identify with because, as any evolutionary psychologist will tell you, we evolved as social apes and we like to identify moral and ethical allies. Thus, de Quincey set a precedent that opened the way for the introspective autobiography by demonstrating the people *do* want to know about the insalubrious and sordid truths of the lives of others.

PART I

FROM THE "LONDON MAGAZINE" FOR SEPTEMBER 1821.

To The Reader

I here present you, courteous reader, with the record of a remarkable period in my life: according to my application of it, I trust that it will prove not merely an interesting record, but in a considerable degree useful and instructive. In *that* hope it is that I have drawn it up; and *that* must be my apology for breaking through that delicate and honourable reserve which, for the most part, restrains us from the public exposure of our own errors and infirmities. Nothing, indeed, is more revolting to English feelings than the spectacle of a human being obtruding on our notice his moral ulcers or scars, and tearing away that "decent drapery" which time or indulgence to human frailty may have drawn over them; accordingly, the greater part of *our* confessions (that is, spontaneous and extra-judicial confessions) proceed from demireps, adventurers, or swindlers: and for any such acts of gratuitous self-humiliation from those who can be supposed in sympathy with the decent and self-respecting part of society, we must look to French literature, or to that part of the German which is tainted with the spurious and defective sensibility of the

French. All this I feel so forcibly, and so nervously am I alive to reproach of this tendency, that I have for many months hesitated about the propriety of allowing this or any part of my narrative to come before the public eye until after my death (when, for many reasons, the whole will be published); and it is not without an anxious review of the reasons for and against this step that I have at last concluded on taking it.

Guilt and misery shrink, by a natural instinct, from public notice: they court privacy and solitude: and even in their choice of a grave will sometimes sequester themselves from the general population of the churchyard, as if declining to claim fellowship with the great family of man, and wishing (in the affecting language of Mr. Wordsworth)

Humbly to express
A penitential loneliness.

It is well, upon the whole, and for the interest of us all, that it should be so: nor would I willingly in my own person manifest a disregard of such salutary feelings, nor in act or word do anything to weaken them; but, on the one hand, as my self-accusation does not amount to a confession of guilt, so, on the other, it is possible that, if it *did*, the benefit resulting to others from the record of an experience purchased at so heavy a price might compensate, by a vast overbalance, for any violence done to the feelings I have noticed, and justify a breach of the general rule. Infirmity and misery do not of necessity imply guilt. They approach or recede from shades of that dark alliance, in proportion to the probable

motives and prospects of the offender, and the palliations, known or secret, of the offence; in proportion as the temptations to it were potent from the first, and the resistance to it, in act or in effort, was earnest to the last. For my own part, without breach of truth or modesty, I may affirm that my life has been, on the whole, the life of a philosopher: from my birth I was made an intellectual creature, and intellectual in the highest sense my pursuits and pleasures have been, even from my schoolboy days. If opium-eating be a sensual pleasure, and if I am bound to confess that I have indulged in it to an excess not yet *recorded*[1] of any other man, it is no less true that I have struggled against this fascinating enthralment with a religious zeal, and have at length accomplished what I never yet heard attributed to any other man—have untwisted, almost to its final links, the accursed chain which fettered me. Such a self-conquest may reasonably be set off in counterbalance to any kind or degree of self-indulgence. Not to insist that in my case the self-conquest was unquestionable, the self-indulgence open to doubts of casuistry, according as that name shall be extended to acts aiming at the bare relief of pain, or shall be restricted to such as aim at the excitement of positive pleasure.

Guilt, therefore, I do not acknowledge; and if I did, it is possible that I might still resolve on the present act of confession in consideration of the service which I may thereby render to the whole class of opium-eaters. But who are they? Reader, I am sorry to say a very numerous class indeed. Of this I

became convinced some years ago by computing at that time the number of those in one small class of English society (the class of men distinguished for talents, or of eminent station) who were known to me, directly or indirectly, as opium-eaters; such, for instance, as the eloquent and benevolent —, the late Dean of —, Lord —, Mr. — the philosopher, a late Under-Secretary of State (who described to me the sensation which first drove him to the use of opium in the very same words as the Dean of —, viz., "that he felt as though rats were gnawing and abrading the coats of his stomach"), Mr. —, and many others hardly less known, whom it would be tedious to mention. Now, if one class, comparatively so limited, could furnish so many scores of cases (and *that* within the knowledge of one single inquirer), it was a natural inference that the entire population of England would furnish a proportionable number. The soundness of this inference, however, I doubted, until some facts became known to me which satisfied me that it was not incorrect. I will mention two. (1) Three respectable London druggists, in widely remote quarters of London, from whom I happened lately to be purchasing small quantities of opium, assured me that the number of *amateur* opium-eaters (as I may term them) was at this time immense; and that the difficulty of distinguishing those persons to whom habit had rendered opium necessary from such as were purchasing it with a view to suicide, occasioned them daily trouble and disputes. This evidence respected London only. But (2)—which will possibly surprise the reader more—some

years ago, on passing through Manchester, I was informed by several cotton manufacturers that their workpeople were rapidly getting into the practice of opium-eating; so much so, that on a Saturday afternoon the counters of the druggists were strewed with pills of one, two, or three grains, in preparation for the known demand of the evening. The immediate occasion of this practice was the lowness of wages, which at that time would not allow them to indulge in ale or spirits, and wages rising, it may be thought that this practice would cease; but as I do not readily believe that any man having once tasted the divine luxuries of opium will afterwards descend to the gross and mortal enjoyments of alcohol, I take it for granted

That those eat now who never ate before;

And those who always ate, now eat the more.

Indeed, the fascinating powers of opium are admitted even by medical writers, who are its greatest enemies. Thus, for instance, Awsiter, apothecary to Greenwich Hospital, in his "Essay on the Effects of Opium" (published in the year 1763), when attempting to explain why Mead had not been sufficiently explicit on the properties, counteragents, &c., of this drug, expresses himself in the following mysterious terms (φωναντα συνετοισι): "Perhaps he thought the subject of too delicate a nature to be made common; and as many people might then indiscriminately use it, it would take from that necessary fear and caution which should prevent their experiencing the extensive power of this drug, *for there are many properties in it,*

if universally known, that would habituate the use, and make it more in request with us than with Turks themselves; the result of which knowledge," he adds, "must prove a general misfortune." In the necessity of this conclusion I do not altogether concur; but upon that point I shall have occasion to speak at the close of my Confessions, where I shall present the reader with the *moral* of my narrative.

Preliminary Confessions

These preliminary confessions, or introductory narrative of the youthful adventures which laid the foundation of the writer's habit of opium-eating in after-life, it has been judged proper to premise, for three several reasons:

1 As forestalling that question, and giving it a satisfactory answer, which else would painfully obtrude itself in the course of the Opium Confessions—"How came any reasonable being to subject himself to such a yoke of misery; voluntarily to incur a captivity so servile, and knowingly to fetter himself with such a sevenfold chain?"—a question which, if not somewhere plausibly resolved, could hardly fail, by the indignation which it would be apt to raise as against an act of wanton folly, to interfere with that degree of sympathy which is necessary in any case to an author's purposes.

2 As furnishing a key to some parts of that tremendous scenery which afterwards peopled the dreams of the Opium-eater.

3 As creating some previous interest of a personal sort in the confessing subject, apart from the matter of the confessions, which cannot fail to render the confessions themselves more interesting. If a man "whose talk is of oxen" should become an opium-eater, the probability is that (if he is not too dull to dream at all) he will dream about oxen; whereas, in the case before him, the reader

will find that the Opium-eater boasteth himself to be a philosopher; and accordingly, that the phantasmagoria of *his* dreams (waking or sleeping, day-dreams or night-dreams) is suitable to one who in that character,

Humani nihil a se alienum putat.

For amongst the conditions which he deems indispensable to the sustaining of any claim to the title of philosopher is not merely the possession of a superb intellect in its *analytic* functions (in which part of the pretensions, however, England can for some generations show but few claimants; at least, he is not aware of any known candidate for this honour who can be styled emphatically *a subtle thinker*, with the exception of *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, and in a narrower department of thought with the recent illustrious exception[2] of *David Ricardo*) but also on such a constitution of the *moral* faculties as shall give him an inner eye and power of intuition for the vision and the mysteries of our human nature: *that* constitution of faculties, in short, which (amongst all the generations of men that from the beginning of time have deployed into life, as it were, upon this planet) our English poets have possessed in the highest degree, and Scottish professors[3] in the lowest.

I have often been asked how I first came to be a regular opium-eater, and have suffered, very unjustly, in the opinion of my acquaintance from being reputed to have brought upon myself all the sufferings which I shall have to record, by a long course of indulgence in this practice purely for the sake of creating

an artificial state of pleasurable excitement. This, however, is a misrepresentation of my case. True it is that for nearly ten years I did occasionally take opium for the sake of the exquisite pleasure it gave me; but so long as I took it with this view I was effectually protected from all material bad consequences by the necessity of interposing long intervals between the several acts of indulgence, in order to renew the pleasurable sensations. It was not for the purpose of creating pleasure, but of mitigating pain in the severest degree, that I first began to use opium as an article of daily diet. In the twenty-eighth year of my age a most painful affection of the stomach, which I had first experienced about ten years before, attacked me in great strength. This affection had originally been caused by extremities of hunger, suffered in my boyish days. During the season of hope and redundant happiness which succeeded (that is, from eighteen to twenty-four) it had slumbered; for the three following years it had revived at intervals; and now, under unfavourable circumstances, from depression of spirits, it attacked me with a violence that yielded to no remedies but opium. As the youthful sufferings which first produced this derangement of the stomach were interesting in themselves, and in the circumstances that attended them, I shall here briefly retrace them.

My father died when I was about seven years old, and left me to the care of four guardians. I was sent to various schools, great and small; and was very early distinguished for my classical attainments, especially for my knowledge of Greek. At thirteen

I wrote Greek with ease; and at fifteen my command of that language was so great that I not only composed Greek verses in lyric metres, but could converse in Greek fluently and without embarrassment—an accomplishment which I have not since met with in any scholar of my times, and which in my case was owing to the practice of daily reading off the newspapers into the best Greek I could furnish *extempore*; for the necessity of ransacking my memory and invention for all sorts and combinations of periphrastic expressions as equivalents for modern ideas, images, relations of things, &c., gave me a compass of diction which would never have been called out by a dull translation of moral essays, &c. "That boy," said one of my masters, pointing the attention of a stranger to me, "that boy could harangue an Athenian mob better than you and I could address an English one." He who honoured me with this eulogy was a scholar, "and a ripe and a good one," and of all my tutors was the only one whom I loved or reverenced. Unfortunately for me (and, as I afterwards learned, to this worthy man's great indignation), I was transferred to the care, first of a blockhead, who was in a perpetual panic lest I should expose his ignorance; and finally to that of a respectable scholar at the head of a great school on an ancient foundation. This man had been appointed to his situation by — College, Oxford, and was a sound, well-built scholar, but (like most men whom I have known from that college) coarse, clumsy, and inelegant. A miserable contrast he presented, in my eyes, to the Etonian brilliancy of my favourite master; and beside,

he could not disguise from my hourly notice the poverty and meagreness of his understanding. It is a bad thing for a boy to be and to know himself far beyond his tutors, whether in knowledge or in power of mind. This was the case, so far as regarded knowledge at least, not with myself only, for the two boys, who jointly with myself composed the first form, were better Grecians than the head-master, though not more elegant scholars, nor at all more accustomed to sacrifice to the Graces. When I first entered I remember that we read Sophocles; and it was a constant matter of triumph to us, the learned triumvirate of the first form, to see our "Archididascalus" (as he loved to be called) conning our lessons before we went up, and laying a regular train, with lexicon and grammar, for blowing up and blasting (as it were) any difficulties he found in the choruses; whilst *we* never condescended to open our books until the moment of going up, and were generally employed in writing epigrams upon his wig or some such important matter. My two class-fellows were poor, and dependent for their future prospects at the university on the recommendation of the head-master; but I, who had a small patrimonial property, the income of which was sufficient to support me at college, wished to be sent thither immediately. I made earnest representations on the subject to my guardians, but all to no purpose. One, who was more reasonable and had more knowledge of the world than the rest, lived at a distance; two of the other three resigned all their authority into the hands of the fourth; and this fourth, with whom I had to

negotiate, was a worthy man in his way, but haughty, obstinate, and intolerant of all opposition to his will. After a certain number of letters and personal interviews, I found that I had nothing to hope for, not even a compromise of the matter, from my guardian. Unconditional submission was what he demanded, and I prepared myself, therefore, for other measures. Summer was now coming on with hasty steps, and my seventeenth birthday was fast approaching, after which day I had sworn within myself that I would no longer be numbered amongst schoolboys. Money being what I chiefly wanted, I wrote to a woman of high rank, who, though young herself, had known me from a child, and had latterly treated me with great distinction, requesting that she would "lend" me five guineas. For upwards of a week no answer came, and I was beginning to despond, when at length a servant put into my hands a double letter with a coronet on the seal. The letter was kind and obliging. The fair writer was on the sea-coast, and in that way the delay had arisen; she enclosed double of what I had asked, and good-naturedly hinted that if I should *never* repay her, it would not absolutely ruin her. Now, then, I was prepared for my scheme. Ten guineas, added to about two which I had remaining from my pocket-money, seemed to me sufficient for an indefinite length of time; and at that happy age, if no *definite* boundary can be assigned to one's power, the spirit of hope and pleasure makes it virtually infinite.

It is a just remark of Dr. Johnson's (and, what cannot often be said of his remarks, it is a very feeling one), that we never do

anything consciously for the last time (of things, that is, which we have long been in the habit of doing) without sadness of heart. This truth I felt deeply when I came to leave —, a place which I did not love, and where I had not been happy. On the evening before I left — for ever, I grieved when the ancient and lofty schoolroom resounded with the evening service, performed for the last time in my hearing; and at night, when the muster-roll of names was called over, and mine (as usual) was called first, I stepped forward, and passing the head-master, who was standing by, I bowed to him, and looked earnestly in his face, thinking to myself, "He is old and infirm, and in this world I shall not see him again." I was right; I never *did* see him again, nor ever shall. He looked at me complacently, smiled good-naturedly, returned my salutation (or rather my valediction), and we parted (though he knew it not) for ever. I could not reverence him intellectually, but he had been uniformly kind to me, and had allowed me many indulgences; and I grieved at the thought of the mortification I should inflict upon him.

The morning came which was to launch me into the world, and from which my whole succeeding life has in many important points taken its colouring. I lodged in the head-master's house, and had been allowed from my first entrance the indulgence of a private room, which I used both as a sleeping-room and as a study. At half after three I rose, and gazed with deep emotion at the ancient towers of —, "drest in earliest light," and beginning to crimson with the radiant lustre of a cloudless

July morning. I was firm and immovable in my purpose; but yet agitated by anticipation of uncertain danger and troubles; and if I could have foreseen the hurricane and perfect hail-storm of affliction which soon fell upon me, well might I have been agitated. To this agitation the deep peace of the morning presented an affecting contrast, and in some degree a medicine. The silence was more profound than that of midnight; and to me the silence of a summer morning is more touching than all other silence, because, the light being broad and strong as that of noonday at other seasons of the year, it seems to differ from perfect day chiefly because man is not yet abroad; and thus the peace of nature and of the innocent creatures of God seems to be secure and deep only so long as the presence of man and his restless and unquiet spirit are not there to trouble its sanctity. I dressed myself, took my hat and gloves, and lingered a little in the room. For the last year and a half this room had been my "pensive citadel": here I had read and studied through all the hours of night, and though true it was that for the latter part of this time I, who was framed for love and gentle affections, had lost my gaiety and happiness during the strife and fever of contention with my guardian, yet, on the other hand, as a boy so passionately fond of books, and dedicated to intellectual pursuits, I could not fail to have enjoyed many happy hours in the midst of general dejection. I wept as I looked round on the chair, hearth, writing-table, and other familiar objects, knowing too certainly that I looked upon them for the last time. Whilst I write this it is eighteen years ago,

and yet at this moment I see distinctly, as if it were yesterday, the lineaments and expression of the object on which I fixed my parting gaze. It was a picture of the lovely —, which hung over the mantelpiece, the eyes and mouth of which were so beautiful, and the whole countenance so radiant with benignity and divine tranquillity, that I had a thousand times laid down my pen or my book to gather consolation from it, as a devotee from his patron saint. Whilst I was yet gazing upon it the deep tones of — clock proclaimed that it was four o'clock. I went up to the picture, kissed it, and then gently walked out and closed the door for ever!

So blended and intertwisted in this life are occasions of laughter and of tears, that I cannot yet recall without smiling an incident which occurred at that time, and which had nearly put a stop to the immediate execution of my plan. I had a trunk of immense weight, for, besides my clothes, it contained nearly all my library. The difficulty was to get this removed to a carrier's: my room was at an aërial elevation in the house, and (what was worse) the staircase which communicated with this angle of the building was accessible only by a gallery, which passed the head-master's chamber door. I was a favourite with all the servants, and knowing that any of them would screen me and act confidentially, I communicated my embarrassment to a groom of the head-master's. The groom swore he would do anything I wished, and when the time arrived went upstairs to bring the trunk down. This I feared was beyond the strength of any one man; however, the groom was a man

Of Atlantean shoulders, fit to bear
The weight of mightiest monarchies;

and had a back as spacious as Salisbury Plain. Accordingly he persisted in bringing down the trunk alone, whilst I stood waiting at the foot of the last flight in anxiety for the event. For some time I heard him descending with slow and firm steps; but unfortunately, from his trepidation, as he drew near the dangerous quarter, within a few steps of the gallery, his foot slipped, and the mighty burden falling from his shoulders, gained such increase of impetus at each step of the descent, that on reaching the bottom it trundled, or rather leaped, right across, with the noise of twenty devils, against the very bedroom door of the Archididascalus. My first thought was that all was lost, and that my only chance for executing a retreat was to sacrifice my baggage. However, on reflection I determined to abide the issue. The groom was in the utmost alarm, both on his own account and on mine, but, in spite of this, so irresistibly had the sense of the ludicrous in this unhappy *contretemps* taken possession of his fancy, that he sang out a long, loud, and canorous peal of laughter, that might have wakened the Seven Sleepers. At the sound of this resonant merriment, within the very ears of insulted authority, I could not myself forbear joining in it; subdued to this, not so much by the unhappy *étourderie* of the trunk, as by the effect it had upon the groom. We both expected, as a matter of course, that Dr. — would sally, out of his room, for in general, if but a mouse stirred, he sprang out like a mastiff from his

kennel. Strange to say, however, on this occasion, when the noise of laughter had ceased, no sound, or rustling even, was to be heard in the bedroom. Dr. — had a painful complaint, which, sometimes keeping him awake, made his sleep perhaps, when it did come, the deeper. Gathering courage from the silence, the groom hoisted his burden again, and accomplished the remainder of his descent without accident. I waited until I saw the trunk placed on a wheelbarrow and on its road to the carrier's; then, "with Providence my guide," I set off on foot, carrying a small parcel with some articles of dress under my arm; a favourite English poet in one pocket, and a small 12mo volume, containing about nine plays of Euripides, in the other.

It had been my intention originally to proceed to Westmoreland, both from the love I bore to that country and on other personal accounts. Accident, however, gave a different direction to my wanderings, and I bent my steps towards North Wales.

After wandering about for some time in Denbighshire, Merionethshire, and Carnarvonshire, I took lodgings in a small neat house in B—. Here I might have stayed with great comfort for many weeks, for provisions were cheap at B—, from the scarcity of other markets for the surplus produce of a wide agricultural district. An accident, however, in which perhaps no offence was designed, drove me out to wander again. I know not whether my reader may have remarked, but I have often remarked, that the proudest class of people in England (or

at any rate the class whose pride is most apparent) are the families of bishops. Noblemen and their children carry about with them, in their very titles, a sufficient notification of their rank. Nay, their very names (and this applies also to the children of many untitled houses) are often, to the English ear, adequate exponents of high birth or descent. Sackville, Manners, Fitzroy, Paulet, Cavendish, and scores of others, tell their own tale. Such persons, therefore, find everywhere a due sense of their claims already established, except among those who are ignorant of the world by virtue of their own obscurity: "Not to know *them*, argues one's self unknown." Their manners take a suitable tone and colouring, and for once they find it necessary to impress a sense of their consequence upon others, they meet with a thousand occasions for moderating and tempering this sense by acts of courteous condescension. With the families of bishops it is otherwise: with them, it is all uphill work to make known their pretensions; for the proportion of the episcopal bench taken from noble families is not at any time very large, and the succession to these dignities is so rapid that the public ear seldom has time to become familiar with them, unless where they are connected with some literary reputation. Hence it is that the children of bishops carry about with them an austere and repulsive air, indicative of claims not generally acknowledged, a sort of *noli me tangere* manner, nervously apprehensive of too familiar approach, and shrinking with the sensitiveness of a gouty man from all contact with the οι πολλοι. Doubtless,

a powerful understanding, or unusual goodness of nature, will preserve a man from such weakness, but in general the truth of my representation will be acknowledged; pride, if not of deeper root in such families, appears at least more upon the surface of their manners. This spirit of manners naturally communicates itself to their domestics and other dependants. Now, my landlady had been a lady's maid or a nurse in the family of the Bishop of —, and had but lately married away and "settled" (as such people express it) for life. In a little town like B—, merely to have lived in the bishop's family conferred some distinction; and my good landlady had rather more than her share of the pride I have noticed on that score. What "my lord" said and what "my lord" did, how useful he was in Parliament and how indispensable at Oxford, formed the daily burden of her talk. All this I bore very well, for I was too good-natured to laugh in anybody's face, and I could make an ample allowance for the garrulity of an old servant. Of necessity, however, I must have appeared in her eyes very inadequately impressed with the bishop's importance, and, perhaps to punish me for my indifference, or possibly by accident, she one day repeated to me a conversation in which I was indirectly a party concerned. She had been to the palace to pay her respects to the family, and, dinner being over, was summoned into the dining-room. In giving an account of her household economy she happened to mention that she had let her apartments. Thereupon the good bishop (it seemed) had taken occasion to caution her as to her selection of inmates, "for,"

said he, "you must recollect, Betty, that this place is in the high road to the Head; so that multitudes of Irish swindlers running away from their debts into England, and of English swindlers running away from their debts to the Isle of Man, are likely to take this place in their route." This advice certainly was not without reasonable grounds, but rather fitted to be stored up for Mrs. Betty's private meditations than specially reported to me. What followed, however, was somewhat worse. "Oh, my lord," answered my landlady (according to her own representation of the matter), "I really don't think this young gentleman is a swindler, because …" "You don't *think* me a swindler?" said I, interrupting her, in a tumult of indignation: "for the future I shall spare you the trouble of thinking about it." And without delay I prepared for my departure. Some concessions the good woman seemed disposed to make; but a harsh and contemptuous expression, which I fear that I applied to the learned dignitary himself, roused her indignation in turn, and reconciliation then became impossible. I was indeed greatly irritated at the bishop's having suggested any grounds of suspicion, however remotely, against a person whom he had never seen; and I thought of letting him know my mind in Greek, which, at the same time that it would furnish some presumption that I was no swindler, would also (I hoped) compel the bishop to reply in the same language; in which case I doubted not to make it appear that if I was not so rich as his lordship, I was a far better Grecian. Calmer thoughts, however, drove this boyish design out of my mind; for

I considered that the bishop was in the right to counsel an old servant; that he could not have designed that his advice should be reported to me; and that the same coarseness of mind which had led Mrs. Betty to repeat the advice at all, might have coloured it in a way more agreeable to her own style of thinking than to the actual expressions of the worthy bishop.

I left the lodgings the very same hour, and this turned out a very unfortunate occurrence for me, because, living henceforward at inns, I was drained of my money very rapidly. In a fortnight I was reduced to short allowance; that is, I could allow myself only one meal a day. From the keen appetite produced by constant exercise and mountain air, acting on a youthful stomach, I soon began to suffer greatly on this slender regimen, for the single meal which I could venture to order was coffee or tea. Even this, however, was at length withdrawn; and afterwards, so long as I remained in Wales, I subsisted either on blackberries, hips, haws, &c., or on the casual hospitalities which I now and then received in return for such little services as I had an opportunity of rendering. Sometimes I wrote letters of business for cottagers who happened to have relatives in Liverpool or in London; more often I wrote love-letters to their sweethearts for young women who had lived as servants at Shrewsbury or other towns on the English border. On all such occasions I gave great satisfaction to my humble friends, and was generally treated with hospitality; and once in particular, near the village of Llan-y-styndw (or some such name), in a sequestered part of Merionethshire, I

was entertained for upwards of three days by a family of young people with an affectionate and fraternal kindness that left an impression upon my heart not yet impaired. The family consisted at that time of four sisters and three brothers, all grown up, and all remarkable for elegance and delicacy of manners. So much beauty, and so much native good breeding and refinement, I do not remember to have seen before or since in any cottage, except once or twice in Westmoreland and Devonshire. They spoke English, an accomplishment not often met with in so many members of one family, especially in villages remote from the high road. Here I wrote, on my first introduction, a letter about prize-money, for one of the brothers, who had served on board an English man-of-war; and, more privately, two love-letters for two of the sisters. They were both interesting-looking girls, and one of uncommon loveliness. In the midst of their confusion and blushes, whilst dictating, or rather giving me general instructions, it did not require any great penetration to discover that what they wished was that their letters should be as kind as was consistent with proper maidenly pride. I contrived so to temper my expressions as to reconcile the gratification of both feelings; and they were as much pleased with the way in which I had expressed their thoughts as (in their simplicity) they were astonished at my having so readily discovered them. The reception one meets with from the women of a family generally determines the tenor of one's whole entertainment. In this case I had discharged my confidential duties as secretary so much

to the general satisfaction, perhaps also amusing them with my conversation, that I was pressed to stay with a cordiality which I had little inclination to resist. I slept with the brothers, the only unoccupied bed standing in the apartment of the young women; but in all other points they treated me with a respect not usually paid to purses as light as mine — as if my scholarship were sufficient evidence that I was of "gentle blood." Thus I lived with them for three days and great part of a fourth; and, from the undiminished kindness which they continued to show me, I believe I might have stayed with them up to this time, if their power had corresponded with their wishes. On the last morning, however, I perceived upon their countenances, as they sate at breakfast, the expression of some unpleasant communication which was at hand; and soon after, one of the brothers explained to me that their parents had gone, the day before my arrival, to an annual meeting of Methodists, held at Carnarvon, and were that day expected to return; "and if they should not be so civil as they ought to be," he begged, on the part of all the young people, that I would not take it amiss. The parents returned with churlish faces, and "*Dym Sassenach*" (*no English*) in answer to all my addresses. I saw how matters stood; and so, taking an affectionate leave of my kind and interesting young hosts, I went my way; for, though they spoke warmly to their parents in my behalf, and often excused the manner of the old people by saying it was "only their way," yet I easily understood that my talent for writing love-letters would do as little to recommend me with two

grave sexagenarian Welsh Methodists as my Greek sapphics or alcaics; and what had been hospitality when offered to me with the gracious courtesy of my young friends, would become charity when connected with the harsh demeanour of these old people. Certainly, Mr. Shelley is right in his notions about old age: unless powerfully counteracted by all sorts of opposite agencies, it is a miserable corrupter and blighter to the genial charities of the human heart.

Soon after this I contrived, by means which I must omit for want of room, to transfer myself to London. And now began the latter and fiercer stage of my long sufferings; without using a disproportionate expression I might say, of my agony. For I now suffered, for upwards of sixteen weeks, the physical anguish of hunger in. I various degrees of intensity, but as bitter perhaps as ever any human being can have suffered who has survived it would not needlessly harass my reader's feelings by a detail of all that I endured; for extremities such as these, under any circumstances of heaviest misconduct or guilt, cannot be contemplated, even in description, without a rueful pity that is painful to the natural goodness of the human heart. Let it suffice, at least on this occasion, to say that a few fragments of bread from the breakfast-table of one individual (who supposed me to be ill, but did not know of my being in utter want), and these at uncertain intervals, constituted my whole support. During the former part of my sufferings (that is, generally in Wales, and always for the first two months in London) I was houseless, and

very seldom slept under a roof. To this constant exposure to the open air I ascribe it mainly that I did not sink under my torments. Latterly, however, when colder and more inclement weather came on, and when, from the length of my sufferings, I had begun to sink into a more languishing condition, it was no doubt fortunate for me that the same person to whose breakfast-table I had access, allowed me to sleep in a large unoccupied house of which he was tenant. Unoccupied I call it, for there was no household or establishment in it; nor any furniture, indeed, except a table and a few chairs. But I found, on taking possession of my new quarters, that the house already contained one single inmate, a poor friendless child, apparently ten years old; but she seemed hunger-bitten, and sufferings of that sort often make children look older than they are. From this forlorn child I learned that she had slept and lived there alone for some time before I came; and great joy the poor creature expressed when she found that I was in future to be her companion through the hours of darkness. The house was large, and, from the want of furniture, the noise of the rats made a prodigious echoing on the spacious staircase and hall; and amidst the real fleshly ills of cold and, I fear, hunger, the forsaken child had found leisure to suffer still more (it appeared) from the self-created one of ghosts. I promised her protection against all ghosts whatsoever, but alas! I could offer her no other assistance. We lay upon the floor, with a bundle of cursed law papers for a pillow, but with no other covering than a sort of large horseman's cloak; afterwards,

however, we discovered in a garret an old sofa-cover, a small piece of rug, and some fragments of other articles, which added a little to our warmth. The poor child crept close to me for warmth, and for security against her ghostly enemies. When I was not more than usually ill I took her into my arms, so that in general she was tolerably warm, and often slept when I could not, for during the last two months of my sufferings I slept much in daytime, and was apt to fall into transient dosings at all hours. But my sleep distressed me more than my watching, for beside the tumultuousness of my dreams (which were only not so awful as those which I shall have to describe hereafter as produced by opium), my sleep was never more than what is called *dog-sleep*; so that I could hear myself moaning, and was often, as it seemed to me, awakened suddenly by my own voice; and about this time a hideous sensation began to haunt me as soon as I fell into a slumber, which has since returned upon me at different periods of my life—viz., a sort of twitching (I know not where, but apparently about the region of the stomach) which compelled me violently to throw out my feet for the sake of relieving it. This sensation coming on as soon as I began to sleep, and the effort to relieve it constantly awaking me, at length I slept only from exhaustion; and from increasing weakness (as I said before) I was constantly falling asleep and constantly awaking. Meantime, the master of the house sometimes came in upon us suddenly, and very early; sometimes not till ten o'clock, sometimes not at all. He was in constant fear of bailiffs. Improving on the

plan of Cromwell, every night he slept in a different quarter of London; and I observed that he never failed to examine through a private window the appearance of those who knocked at the door before he would allow it to be opened. He breaksfasted alone; indeed, his tea equipage would hardly have admitted of his hazarding an invitation to a second person, any more than the quantity of esculent *matériel*, which for the most part was little more than a roll or a few biscuits which he had bought on his road from the place where he had slept. Or, if he *had* asked a party—as I once learnedly and facetiously observed to him—the several members of it must have *stood* in the relation to each other (not *sate* in any relation whatever) of succession, as the metaphysicians have it, and not of a coexistence; in the relation of the parts of time, and not of the parts of space. During his breakfast I generally contrived a reason for lounging in, and, with an air of as much indifference as I could assume, took up such fragments as he had left; sometimes, indeed, there were none at all. In doing this I committed no robbery except upon the man himself, who was thus obliged (I believe) now and then to send out at noon for an extra biscuit; for as to the poor child, *she* was never admitted into his study (if I may give that name to his chief depository of parchments, law writings, &c.); that room was to her the Bluebeard room of the house, being regularly locked on his departure to dinner, about six o'clock, which usually was his final departure for the night. Whether this child were an illegitimate daughter of Mr. —, or only a servant, I could not

ascertain; she did not herself know; but certainly she was treated altogether as a menial servant. No sooner did Mr. — make his appearance than she went below stairs, brushed his shoes, coat, &c.; and, except when she was summoned to run an errand, she never emerged from the dismal Tartarus of the kitchen, &c., to the upper air until my welcome knock at night called up her little trembling footsteps to the front door. Of her life during the daytime, however, I knew little but what I gathered from her own account at night, for as soon as the hours of business commenced I saw that my absence would be acceptable, and in general, therefore, I went off and sate in the parks or elsewhere until nightfall.

But who and what, meantime, was the master of the house himself? Reader, he was one of those anomalous practitioners in lower departments of the law who — what shall I say?— who on prudential reasons, or from necessity, deny themselves all indulgence in the luxury of too delicate a conscience, (a periphrasis which might be abridged considerably, but *that* I leave to the reader's taste): in many walks of life a conscience is a more expensive encumbrance than a wife or a carriage; and just as people talk of "laying down" their carriages, so I suppose my friend Mr. — had "laid down" his conscience for a time, meaning, doubtless, to resume it as soon as he could afford it. The inner economy of such a man's daily life would present a most strange picture, if I could allow myself to amuse the reader at his expense. Even with my limited opportunities for

observing what went on, I saw many scenes of London intrigues and complex chicanery, "cycle and epicycle, orb in orb," at which I sometimes smile to this day, and at which I smiled then, in spite of my misery. My situation, however, at that time gave me little experience in my own person of any qualities in Mr. —'s character but such as did him honour; and of his whole strange composition I must forget everything but that towards me he was obliging, and to the extent of his power, generous.

That power was not, indeed, very extensive; however, in common with the rats, I sate rent free; and as Dr. Johnson has recorded that he never but once in his life had as much wall-fruit as he could eat, so let me be grateful that on that single occasion I had as large a choice of apartments in a London mansion as I could possibly desire. Except the Bluebeard room, which the poor child believed to be haunted, all others, from the attics to the cellars, were at our service; "the world was all before us," and we pitched our tent for the night in any spot we chose. This house I have already described as a large one; it stands in a conspicuous situation and in a well-known part of London. Many of my readers will have passed it, I doubt not, within a few hours of reading this. For myself, I never fail to visit it when business draws me to London; about ten o'clock this very night, August 15, 1821—being my birthday—I turned aside from my evening walk down Oxford Street, purposely to take a glance at it; it is now occupied by a respectable family, and by the lights in the front drawing-room I observed a domestic party assembled, perhaps

at tea, and apparently cheerful and gay. Marvellous contrast, in my eyes, to the darkness, cold, silence, and desolation of that same house eighteen years ago, when its nightly occupants were one famishing scholar and a neglected child. Her, by-the-bye, in after-years I vainly endeavoured to trace. Apart from her situation, she was not what would be called an interesting child; she was neither pretty, nor quick in understanding, nor remarkably pleasing in manners. But, thank God! even in those years I needed not the embellishments of novel accessories to conciliate my affections: plain human nature, in its humblest and most homely apparel, was enough for me, and I loved the child because she was my partner in wretchedness. If she is now living she is probably a mother, with children of her own; but, as I have said, I could never trace her.

This I regret; but another person there was at that time whom I have since sought to trace with far deeper earnestness, and with far deeper sorrow at my failure. This person was a young woman, and one of that unhappy class who subsist upon the wages of prostitution. I feel no shame, nor have any reason to feel it, in avowing that I was then on familiar and friendly terms with many women in that unfortunate condition. The reader needs neither smile at this avowal nor frown; for, not to remind my classical readers of the old Latin proverb, "*Sine cerere*," &c., it may well be supposed that in the existing state of my purse my connection with such women could not have been an impure one. But the truth is, that at no time of my life have I been a

person to hold myself polluted by the touch or approach of any creature that wore a human shape; on the contrary, from my very earliest youth it has been my pride to converse familiarly, *more Socratio*, with all human beings, man, woman, and child, that chance might fling in my way; a practice which is friendly to the knowledge of human nature, to good feelings, and to that frankness of address which becomes a man who would be thought a philosopher. For a philosopher should not see with the eyes of the poor limitary creature calling himself a man of the world, and filled with narrow and self-regarding prejudices of birth and education, but should look upon himself as a catholic creature, and as standing in equal relation to high and low, to educated and uneducated, to the guilty and the innocent. Being myself at that time of necessity a peripatetic, or a walker of the streets, I naturally fell in more frequently with those female peripatetics who are technically called street-walkers. Many of these women had occasionally taken my part against watchmen who wished to drive me off the steps of houses where I was sitting. But one amongst them, the one on whose account I have at all introduced this subject—yet no! let me not class the, oh! noble-minded Ann—with that order of women. Let me find, if it be possible, some gentler name to designate the condition of her to whose bounty and compassion, ministering to my necessities when all the world had forsaken me, I owe it that I am at this time alive. For many weeks I had walked at nights with this poor friendless girl up and down Oxford Street, or had rested with her

on steps and under the shelter of porticoes. She could not be so old as myself; she told me, indeed, that she had not completed her sixteenth year. By such questions as my interest about her prompted I had gradually drawn forth her simple history. Hers was a case of ordinary occurrence (as I have since had reason to think), and one in which, if London beneficence had better adapted its arrangements to meet it, the power of the law might oftener be interposed to protect and to avenge. But the stream of London charity flows in a channel which, though deep and mighty, is yet noiseless and underground; not obvious or readily accessible to poor houseless wanderers; and it cannot be denied that the outside air and framework of London society is harsh, cruel, and repulsive. In any case, however, I saw that part of her injuries might easily have been redressed, and I urged her often and earnestly to lay her complaint before a magistrate. Friendless as she was, I assured her that she would meet with immediate attention, and that English justice, which was no respecter of persons, would speedily and amply avenge her on the brutal ruffian who had plundered her little property. She promised me often that she would, but she delayed taking the steps I pointed out from time to time, for she was timid and dejected to a degree which showed how deeply sorrow had taken hold of her young heart; and perhaps she thought justly that the most upright judge and the most righteous tribunals could do nothing to repair her heaviest wrongs. Something, however, would perhaps have been done, for it had been settled between us at length, but unhappily

on the very last time but one that I was ever to see her, that in a day or two we should go together before a magistrate, and that I should speak on her behalf. This little service it was destined, however, that I should never realise. Meantime, that which she rendered to me, and which was greater than I could ever have repaid her, was this:—One night, when we were pacing slowly along Oxford Street, and after a day when I had felt more than usually ill and faint, I requested her to turn off with me into Soho Square. Thither we went, and we sat down on the steps of a house, which to this hour I never pass without a pang of grief and an inner act of homage to the spirit of that unhappy girl, in memory of the noble action which she there performed. Suddenly, as we sate, I grew much worse. I had been leaning my head against her bosom, and all at once I sank from her arms and fell backwards on the steps. From the sensations I then had, I felt an inner conviction of the liveliest kind, that without some powerful and reviving stimulus I should either have died on the spot, or should at least have sunk to a point of exhaustion from which all reascent under my friendless circumstances would soon have become hopeless. Then it was, at this crisis of my fate, that my poor orphan companion, who had herself met with little but injuries in this world, stretched out a saving hand to me. Uttering a cry of terror, but without a moment's delay, she ran off into Oxford Street, and in less time than could be imagined returned to me with a glass of port wine and spices, that acted upon my empty stomach, which at that time would have rejected all solid

food, with an instantaneous power of restoration; and for this glass the generous girl without a murmur paid out of her humble purse at a time—be it remembered!—when she had scarcely wherewithal to purchase the bare necessaries of life, and when she could have no reason to expect that I should ever be able to reimburse her.

Oh, youthful benefactress! how often in succeeding years, standing in solitary places, and thinking of thee with grief of heart and perfect love—how often have I wished that, as in ancient times, the curse of a father was believed to have a supernatural power, and to pursue its object with a fatal necessity of self-fulfilment; even so the benediction of a heart oppressed with gratitude might have a like prerogative, might have power given to it from above to chase, to haunt, to waylay, to overtake, to pursue thee into the central darkness of a London brothel, or (if it were possible) into the darkness of the grave, there to awaken thee with an authentic message of peace and forgiveness, and of final reconciliation!

I do not often weep: for not only do my thoughts on subjects connected with the chief interests of man daily, nay hourly, descend a thousand fathoms "too deep for tears;" not only does the sternness of my habits of thought present an antagonism to the feelings which prompt tears—wanting of necessity to those who, being protected usually by their levity from any tendency to meditative sorrow, would by that same levity be made incapable of resisting it on any casual access of such feelings; but also,

I believe that all minds which have contemplated such objects as deeply as I have done, must, for their own protection from utter despondency, have early encouraged and cherished some tranquillising belief as to the future balances and the hieroglyphic meanings of human sufferings. On these accounts I am cheerful to this hour, and, as I have said, I do not often weep. Yet some feelings, though not deeper or more passionate, are more tender than others; and often, when I walk at this time in Oxford Street by dreamy lamplight, and hear those airs played on a barrel-organ which years ago solaced me and my dear companion (as I must always call her), I shed tears, and muse with myself at the mysterious dispensation which so suddenly and so critically separated us for ever. How it happened the reader will understand from what remains of this introductory narration.

Soon after the period of the last incident I have recorded I met in Albemarle Street a gentleman of his late Majesty's household. This gentleman had received hospitalities on different occasions from my family, and he challenged me upon the strength of my family likeness. I did not attempt any disguise; I answered his questions ingenuously, and, on his pledging his word of honour that he would not betray me to my guardians, I gave him an address to my friend the attorney's. The next day I received from him a £10 bank-note. The letter enclosing it was delivered with other letters of business to the attorney, but though his look and manner informed me that he suspected its contents, he gave it up to me honourably and without demur.

This present, from the particular service to which it was applied, leads me naturally to speak of the purpose which had allured me up to London, and which I had been (to use a forensic word) soliciting from the first day of my arrival in London to that of my final departure.

In so mighty a world as London it will surprise my readers that I should not have found some means of starving off the last extremities, of penury; and it will strike them that two resources at least must have been open to me—viz., either to seek assistance from the friends of my family, or to turn my youthful talents and attainments into some channel of pecuniary emolument. As to the first course, I may observe generally, that what I dreaded beyond all other evils was the chance of being reclaimed by my guardians; not doubting that whatever power the law gave them would have been enforced against me to the utmost—that is, to the extremity of forcibly restoring me to the school which I had quitted, a restoration which, as it would in my eyes have been a dishonour, even if submitted to voluntarily, could not fail, when extorted from me in contempt and defiance of my own wishes and efforts, to have been a humiliation worse to me than death, and which would indeed have terminated in death. I was therefore shy enough of applying for assistance even in those quarters where I was sure of receiving it, at the risk of furnishing my guardians with any clue of recovering me. But as to London in particular, though doubtless my father had in his lifetime had many friends there, yet (as ten years had passed since

his death) I remembered few of them even by name; and never having seen London before, except once for a few hours, I knew not the address of even those few. To this mode of gaining help, therefore, in part the difficulty, but much more the paramount fear which I have mentioned, habitually indisposed me. In regard to the other mode, I now feel half inclined to join my reader in wondering that I should have overlooked it. As a corrector of Greek proofs (if in no other way) I might doubtless have gained enough for my slender wants. Such an office as this I could have discharged with an exemplary and punctual accuracy that would soon have gained me the confidence of my employers. But it must not be forgotten that, even for such an office as this, it was necessary that I should first of all have an introduction to some respectable publisher, and this I had no means of obtaining. To say the truth, however, it had never once occurred to me to think of literary labours as a source of profit. No mode sufficiently speedy of obtaining money had ever occurred to me but that of borrowing it on the strength of my future claims and expectations. This mode I sought by every avenue to compass; and amongst other persons I applied to a Jew named D—[4].

To this Jew, and to other advertising money-lenders (some of whom were, I believe, also Jews), I had introduced myself with an account of my expectations; which account, on examining my father's will at Doctors' Commons, they had ascertained to be correct. The person there mentioned as the second son of — was found to have all the claims (or more than all) that I

had stated; but one question still remained, which the faces of the Jews pretty significantly suggested—was *I* that person? This doubt had never occurred to me as a possible one; I had rather feared, whenever my Jewish friends scrutinised me keenly, that I might be too well known to be that person, and that some scheme might be passing in their minds for entrapping me and selling me to my guardians. It was strange to me to find my own self *materialiter* considered (so I expressed it, for I doated on logical accuracy of distinctions), accused, or at least suspected, of counterfeiting my own self *formaliter* considered. However, to satisfy their scruples, I took the only course in my power. Whilst I was in Wales I had received various letters from young friends these I produced, for I carried them constantly in my pocket, being, indeed, by this time almost the only relics of my personal encumbrances (excepting the clothes I wore) which I had not in one way or other disposed of. Most of these letters were from the Earl of —, who was at that time my chief (or rather only) confidential friend. These letters were dated from Eton. I had also some from the Marquis of —, his father, who, though absorbed in agricultural pursuits, yet having been an Etonian himself, and as good a scholar as a nobleman needs to be, still retained an affection for classical studies and for youthful scholars. He had accordingly, from the time that I was fifteen, corresponded with me; sometimes upon the great improvements which he had made or was meditating in the counties of M— and Sl— since I had been there, sometimes upon the merits of a

Latin poet, and at other times suggesting subjects to me on which he wished me to write verses.

On reading the letters, one of my Jewish friends agreed to furnish me with two or three hundred pounds on my personal security, provided I could persuade the young Earl — who was, by the way, not older than myself—to guarantee the payment on our coming of age; the Jew's final object being, as I now suppose, not the trifling profit he could expect to make by me, but the prospect of establishing a connection with my noble friend, whose immense expectations were well known to him. In pursuance of this proposal on the part of the Jew, about eight or nine days after I had received the £10, I prepared to go down to Eton. Nearly £3 of the money I had given to my money-lending friend, on his alleging that the stamps must be bought, in order that the writings might be preparing whilst I was away from London. I thought in my heart that he was lying; but I did not wish to give him any excuse for charging his own delays upon me. A smaller sum I had given to my friend the attorney (who was connected with the money-lenders as their lawyer), to which, indeed, he was entitled for his unfurnished lodgings. About fifteen shillings I had employed in re-establishing (though in a very humble way) my dress. Of the remainder I gave one quarter to Ann, meaning on my return to have divided with her whatever might remain. These arrangements made, soon after six o'clock on a dark winter evening I set off, accompanied by Ann, towards Piccadilly; for it was my intention to go down as

far as Salthill on the Bath or Bristol mail. Our course lay through a part of the town which has now all disappeared, so that I can no longer retrace its ancient boundaries—Swallow Street, I think it was called. Having time enough before us, however, we bore away to the left until we came into Golden Square; there, near the corner of Sherrard Street, we sat down, not wishing to part in the tumult and blaze of Piccadilly. I had told her of my plans some time before, and I now assured her again that she should share in my good fortune, if I met with any, and that I would never forsake her as soon as I had power to protect her. This I fully intended, as much from inclination as from a sense of duty; for setting aside gratitude, which in any case must have made me her debtor for life, I loved her as affectionately as if she had been my sister; and at this moment with sevenfold tenderness, from pity at witnessing her extreme dejection. I had apparently most reason for dejection, because I was leaving the saviour of my life; yet I, considering the shock my health had received, was cheerful and full of hope. She, on the contrary, who was parting with one who had had little means of serving her, except by kindness and brotherly treatment, was overcome by sorrow; so that, when I kissed her at our final farewell, she put her arms about my neck and wept without speaking a word. I hoped to return in a week at farthest, and I agreed with her that on the fifth night from that, and every night afterwards, she would wait for me at six o'clock near the bottom of Great Titchfield Street, which had been our customary haven, as it were, of rendezvous, to prevent our

missing each other in the great Mediterranean of Oxford Street. This and other measures of precaution I took; one only I forgot. She had either never told me, or (as a matter of no great interest) I had forgotten her surname. It is a general practice, indeed, with girls of humble rank in her unhappy condition, not (as novel-reading women of higher pretensions) to style themselves *Miss Douglas*, *Miss Montague*, &c., but simply by their Christian names—*Mary*, *Jane*, *Frances*, &c. Her surname, as the surest means of tracing her hereafter, I ought now to have inquired; but the truth is, having no reason to think that our meeting could, in consequence of a short interruption, be more difficult or uncertain than it had been for so many weeks, I had scarcely for a moment adverted to it as necessary, or placed it amongst my memoranda against this parting interview; and my final anxieties being spent in comforting her with hopes, and in pressing upon her the necessity of getting some medicines for a violent cough and hoarseness with which she was troubled, I wholly forgot it until it was too late to recall her.

It was past eight o'clock when I reached the Gloucester Coffee-house, and the Bristol mail being on the point of going off, I mounted on the outside. The fine fluent motion[5] of this mail soon laid me asleep: it is somewhat remarkable that the first easy or refreshing sleep which I had enjoyed for some months, was on the outside of a mail-coach—a bed which at this day I find rather an uneasy one. Connected with this sleep was a little incident which served, as hundreds of others did at that time, to

convince me how easily a man who has never been in any great distress may pass through life without knowing, in his own person at least, anything of the possible goodness of the human heart—or, as I must add with a sigh, of its possible vileness. So thick a curtain of *manners*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.