

#### **CHAPTER IV. - MY PIPES.**

In a select company of scoffers my brier was known as the Mermaid. The mouth-piece was a cigarette-holder, and months of unwearied practice were required before you found the angle at which the bowl did not drop off.

This brings me to one of the many advantages that my brier had over all other pipes. It has given me a reputation for gallantry, to which without it I fear I could lay no claim. I used to have a passion for repartee, especially in the society of ladies. But it is with me as with many other men of parts whose wit has ever to be fired by a long fuse: my best things strike me as I wend my way home. This embittered my early days; and not till the pride of youth had been tamed could I stop to lay in a stock of repartee on likely subjects the night before. Then my pipe helped me. It was the apparatus that carried me to my prettiest compliment. Having exposed my pipe in some prominent place where it could hardly escape notice, I took measures for insuring a visit from a lady, young, graceful, accomplished. Or I might have it ready for a chance visitor. On her arrival, I conducted her to a seat near my pipe. It is not good to hurry on to the repartee at once; so I talked for a time of the weather, the theatres, the new novel. I kept my eye on her; and by and by she began to look about her. She observed the strange-looking pipe. Now is the critical moment. It is possible that she may pass it by without remark, in which case all is lost; but experience has shown me that four times out of six she touches it in assumed horror, to pass some humorous remark. Off tumbles the bowl. "Oh," she exclaims, "see what I have done! I am so sorry!" I pull myself together. "Madame," I reply calmly, and bowing low, "what else was to be expected? You came near my pipe--and it lost its head." She blushes, but cannot help being pleased; and I set my pipe for the next visitor. By the help of a note-book, of course, I guarded myself against paying this very neat compliment to any person more than once. However, after I smoked the Arcadia the desire to pay ladies compliments went from me.

Journeying back into the past, I come to a time when my pipe had a mouth-piece of fine amber. The bowl and the rest of the stem were of brier, but it was a gentlemanly pipe, without silver mountings. Such tobacco I revelled in as may have filled the pouch of Pan as he lay

smoking on the mountain-sides. Once I saw a beautiful woman with brown hair, in and out of which the rays of a morning sun played hide-and-peek, that might not unworthily have been compared to it. Beguiled by the exquisite Arcadia, the days and the years passed from me in delicate rings of smoke, and I contentedly watched them sailing to the skies. How continuous was the line of those lovely circles, and how straight! One could have passed an iron rod through them from end to end. But one day I had a harsh awakening. I bit the amber mouth-piece of my pipe through, and life was never the same again.

It is strange how attached we become to old friends, though they be but inanimate objects. The old pipe put aside, I turned to a meerschaum, which had been presented to me years before, with the caution that I must not smoke it unless I wore kid gloves. There was no savor in that pipe for me. I tried another brier, and it made me unhappy. Clays would not keep in with me. It seemed as if they knew I was hankering after the old pipe, and went out in disgust. Then I got a new amber mouth-piece for my first love. In a week I had bitten that through too, and in an over-anxious attempt to file off the ragged edges I broke the screw. Moralists have said that the smoker who has no thought but for his pipe never breaks it; that it is he only who while smoking concentrates his mind on some less worthy object that sends his teeth through the amber. This may be so; for I am a philosopher, and when working out new theories I may have been careless even of that which inspired them most.

After this second accident nothing went well with me or with my pipe. I took the mouthpieces out of other pipes and fixed them on to the Mermaid. In a little while one of them became too wide; another broke as I was screwing it more firmly in. Then the bowl cracked at the rim and split at the bottom. This was an annoyance until I found out what was wrong and plugged up the fissures with sealing-wax. The wax melted and dropped upon my clothes after a time; but it was easily renewed.

It was now that I had the happy thought of bringing a cigarette-holder to my assistance. But of course one cannot make a pipe-stem out of a cigarette-holder all at once. The thread you wind round the screw has a disappointing way of coming undone, when down falls the bowl, with an escape of sparks. Twisting a piece of paper round the screw is an improvement; but, until you have acquired the knack, the operation has to be renewed every time you relight your pipe. This involves a sad loss of time, and in my case it afforded a butt for the dull wit of visitors.

Otherwise I found it satisfactory, and I was soon astonishingly adept at making paper screws. Eventually my brier became as serviceable as formerly, though not, perhaps, so handsome. I fastened on the holder with sealing-wax, and often a week passed without my having to renew the joint.

It was no easy matter lighting a pipe like mine, especially when I had no matches. I always meant to buy a number of boxes, but somehow I put off doing it. Occasionally I found a box of vestas on my mantelpiece, which some caller had left there by mistake, or sympathizing, perhaps, with my case; but they were such a novelty that I never felt quite at home with them. Generally I remembered they were there just after my pipe was lighted.

When I kept them in mind and looked forward to using them, they were at the other side of the room, and it would have been a pity to get up for them. Besides, the most convenient medium for lighting one's pipe is paper, after all; and if you have not an old envelope in your pocket, there is probably a photograph standing on the mantelpiece. It is convenient to have the magazines lying handy; or a page from a book--hand-made paper burns beautifully--will do. To be sure, there is the lighting of your paper. For this your lamp is practically useless, standing in the middle of the table, while you are in an easy-chair by the fireside; and as for the tape-and-spark contrivance, it is the introduction of machinery into the softest joys of life. The fire is best. It is near you, and you drop your burning spill into it with a minimum waste of energy. The proper fire for pipes is one in a cheerful blaze. If your spill is carelessly constructed the flame runs up into your fingers before you know what you are doing, so that it is as well to marry and get your wife to make spills for you. Before you begin to smoke, scatter these about the fireplace. Then you will be able to reach them without rising. The irritating fire is the one that has burned low--when the coals are more than half cinders, and cling to each other in fear of death. With such a fire it is no use attempting to light a pipe all at once. Your better course now is to drop little bits of paper into the likely places in the fire, and have a spill ready to apply to the one that lights first. It is an anxious moment, for they may merely shrivel up sullenly without catching fire, and in that case some men lose their tempers. Bad to lose your temper over your pipe----

No pipe really ever rivalled the brier in my affections, though I can recall a mad month when I fell in love with two little meerschaums, which I

christened Romulus and Remus. They lay together in one case in Regent Street, and it was with difficulty that I could pass the shop without going in. Often I took side streets to escape their glances, but at last I asked the price. It startled me, and I hurried home to the brier.

I forget when it was that a sort of compromise struck me. This was that I should present the pipes to my brother as a birthday gift. Did I really mean to do this, or was I only trying to cheat my conscience? Who can tell? I hurried again into Regent Street. There they were, more beautiful than ever. I hovered about the shop for quite half an hour that day. My indecision and vacillation were pitiful. Buttoning up my coat, I would rush from the window, only to find myself back again in five minutes. Sometimes I had my hand on the shop door. Then I tore it away and hurried into Oxford Street. Then I slunk back again. Self whispered, "Buy them--for your brother." Conscience said, "Go home." At last I braced myself up for a magnificent effort, and jumped into a 'bus bound for London Bridge. This saved me for the time.

I now began to calculate how I could become owner of the meerschaums--prior to dispatching them by parcel-post to my brother--without paying for them. That was my way of putting it. I calculated that by giving up my daily paper I should save thirteen shillings in six months. After all, why should I take in a daily paper? To read through columns of public speeches and police cases and murders in Paris is only to squander valuable time. Now, when I left home I promised my father not to waste my time. My father had been very good to me; why, then, should I do that which I had promised him not to do? Then, again, there were the theatres. During the past six months I had spent several pounds on theatres. Was this right? My mother, who has never, I think, been in a theatre, strongly advised me against frequenting such places. I did not take this much to heart at the time. Theatres did not seem to me to be immoral. But, after all, my mother is older than I am; and who am I, to set my views up against hers? By avoiding the theatres for the next six months, I am (already), say, three pounds to the good. I had been frittering away my money, too, on luxuries; and luxuries are effeminate. Thinking the matter over temperately and calmly in that way, I saw that I should be thoughtfully saving money, instead of spending it, by buying Romulus and Remus, as I already called them. At the same time, I should be gratifying my father and my mother, and leading a higher and a nobler life. Even then I do not know that I should have bought the

pipes until the six months were up, had I not been driven to it by jealousy. On my life, love for a pipe is ever like love for a woman, though they say it is not so acute. Many a man thinks there is no haste to propose until he sees a hated rival approaching. Even if he is not in a hurry for the lady himself, he loathes the idea of her giving herself, in a moment of madness, to that other fellow. Rather than allow that, he proposes himself, and so insures her happiness. It was so with me. Romulus and Remus were taken from the window to show to a black-bearded, swarthy man, whom I suspected of designs upon them the moment he entered the shop. Ah, the agony of waiting until he came out! He was not worthy of them. I never knew how much I loved them until I had nearly lost them. As soon as he was gone I asked if he had priced them, and was told that he had. He was to call again to-morrow. I left a deposit of a guinea, hurried home for more money, and that night Romulus and Remus were mine. But I never really loved them as I loved my brier.