

## **CHAPTER V. - MY TOBACCO-POUCH.**

I once knew a lady who said of her husband that he looked nice when sitting with a rug over him. My female relatives seemed to have the same opinion of my tobacco-pouch; for they never saw it, even in my own room, without putting a book or pamphlet over it. They called it "that thing," and made tongs of their knitting-needles to lift it; and when I indignantly returned it to my pocket, they raised their hands to signify that I would not listen to reason. It seemed to come natural to other persons to present me with new tobacco-pouches, until I had nearly a score lying neglected in drawers. But I am not the man to desert an old friend that has been with me everywhere and thoroughly knows my ways. Once, indeed, I came near to being unfaithful to my tobacco-pouch, and I mean to tell how--partly as a punishment to myself.

The incident took place several years ago. Gilray and I had set out on a walking tour of the Shakespeare country; but we separated at Stratford, which was to be our starting-point, because he would not wait for me. I am more of a Shakespearian student than Gilray, and Stratford affected me so much that I passed day after day smoking reverently at the hotel door; while he, being of the pure tourist type (not that I would say a word against Gilray), wanted to rush from one place of interest to another. He did not understand what thoughts came to me as I strolled down the Stratford streets; and in the hotel, when I lay down on the sofa, he said I was sleeping, though I was really picturing to myself Shakespeare's boyhood. Gilray even went the length of arguing that it would not be a walking tour at all if we never made a start; so, upon the whole, I was glad when he departed alone. The next day was a memorable one to me. In the morning I wrote to my London tobacconist for more Arcadia. I had quarrelled with both of the Stratford tobacconists. The one of them, as soon as he saw my tobacco-pouch, almost compelled me to buy a new one. The second was even more annoying. I paid with a half-sovereign for the tobacco I had got from him; but after gazing at the pouch he became suspicious of the coin, and asked if I could not pay him in silver. An insult to my pouch I considered an insult to myself; so I returned to those shops no more. The evening of the day on which I wrote to London

for tobacco brought me a letter from home saying that my sister was seriously ill. I had left her in good health, so that the news was the more distressing. Of course I returned home by the first train. Sitting alone in a dull railway compartment, my heart was filled with tenderness, and I recalled the occasions on which I had carelessly given her pain. Suddenly I remembered that more than once she had besought me with tears in her eyes to fling away my old tobacco-pouch. She had always said that it was not respectable. In the bitterness of self-reproach I pulled the pouch from my pocket, asking myself whether, after all, the love of a good woman was not a far more precious possession. Without giving myself time to hesitate, I stood up and firmly cast my old pouch out at the window. I saw it fall at the foot of a fence. The train shot on.

By the time I reached home my sister had been pronounced out of danger. Of course I was much relieved to hear it, but at the same time this was a lesson to me not to act rashly. The retention of my tobacco-pouch would not have retarded her recovery, and I could not help picturing my pouch, my oldest friend in the world, lying at the foot of that fence. I saw that I had done wrong in casting it from me. I had not even the consolation of feeling that if any one found it he would cherish it, for it was so much damaged that I knew it could never appeal to a new owner as it appealed to me. I had intended telling my sister of the sacrifice made for her sake; but after seeing her so much better, I left the room without doing so. There was Arcadia Mixture in the house, but I had not the heart to smoke. I went early to bed, and fell into a troubled sleep, from which I awoke with a shiver. The rain was driving against my window, tapping noisily on it as if calling on me to awake and go back for my tobacco-pouch. It rained far on into the morning, and I lay miserably, seeing nothing before me but a wet fence, and a tobacco-pouch among the grass at the foot of it.

On the following afternoon I was again at Stratford. So far as I could remember, I had flung away the pouch within a few miles of the station; but I did not look for it until dusk. I felt that the porters had their eyes on me. By crouching along hedges I at last reached the railway a mile or two from the station, and began my search. It may be thought that the chances were against my finding the pouch; but I recovered it without much difficulty. The scene as I flung my old friend out at the window had burned itself into my brain, and I could go to the spot to-day as readily as I went on that occasion. There it was, lying among the grass, but not

quite in the place where it had fallen. Apparently some navy had found it, looked at it, and then dropped it. It was half-full of water, and here and there it was sticking together; but I took it up tenderly, and several times on the way back to the station I felt in my pocket to make sure that it was really there.

I have not described the appearance of my pouch, feeling that to be unnecessary. It never, I fear, quite recovered from its night in the rain, and as my female relatives refused to touch it, I had to sew it together now and then myself. Gilray used to boast of a way of mending a hole in a tobacco-pouch that was better than sewing. You put the two pieces of gutta-percha close together and then cut them sharply with scissors. This makes them run together, he says, and I believed him until he experimented upon my pouch. However, I did not object to a hole here and there. Wherever I laid that pouch it left a small deposit of tobacco, and thus I could generally get together a pipeful at times when other persons would be destitute. I never told my sister that my pouch was once all but lost, but ever after that, when she complained that I had never even tried to do without it, I smiled tenderly.