

CHAPTER XIX. - PRIMUS.

Primus is my brother's eldest son, and he once spent his Easter holidays with me. I did not want him, nor was he anxious to come, but circumstances were too strong for us, and, to be just to Primus, he did his best to show me that I was not in his way. He was then at the age when boys begin to address each other by their surnames.

I have said that I always took care not to know how much tobacco I smoked in a week, and therefore I may be hinting a libel on Primus when I say that while he was with me the Arcadia disappeared mysteriously. Though he spoke respectfully of the Mixture--as became my nephew--he tumbled it on to the table, so that he might make a telephone out of the tins, and he had a passion for what he called "snipping cigars." Scrymgeour gave him a cigar-cutter which was pistol-shaped. You put the cigar end in a hole, pull the trigger, and the cigar was snipped. The simplicity of the thing fascinated Primus, and after his return to school I found that he had broken into my Cabana boxes and snipped nearly three hundred cigars.

As soon as he arrived Primus laid siege to the heart of William John, captured it in six hours, and demoralized it in twenty-four. We, who had known William John for years, considered him very practical, but Primus fired him with tales of dark deeds at "old Poppy's"--which was Primus's handy name for his preceptor--and in a short time William John was so full of romance that we could not trust him to black our boots. He and Primus had a scheme for seizing a lugger and becoming pirates, when Primus was to be captain, William John first lieutenant, and old Poppy a prisoner. To the crew was added a boy with a catapult, one Johnny Fox, who was another victim of the tyrant Poppy, and they practised walking the plank at Scrymgeour's window. The plank was pushed nearly half-way out at the window, and you walked up it until it toppled and you were flung into the quadrangle. Such was the romance of William John that he walked the plank with his arms tied, shouting scornfully, by request, "Captain Kidd, I defy you! ha, ha! the buccaneer does not live who will blanch the cheeks of Dick, the Doughty Tar!" Then William John disappeared, and had to be put in poultices.

While William John was in bed slowly recovering from his heroism, the pirate captain and Johnny Fox got me into trouble by stretching a string across the square, six feet from the ground, against which many tall hats struck, to topple in the dust. An improved sling from the Lowther Arcade kept the glazier constantly in the inn. Primus and Johnny Fox strolled into Holborn, knocked a bootblack's cap off, and returned with lumps on their foreheads. They were observed one day in Hyde Park--whither it may be feared they had gone with cigarettes--running after sheep, from which ladies were flying, while street-arabs chased the pirates, and a policeman chased the street-arabs. The only book they read was the "Comic History of Rome," the property of Gilray. This they liked so much that Primus papered the inside of his box with pictures from it. The only authors they consulted me about were "two big swells" called Descartes and James Payn, of whom Primus discovered that the one could always work best in bed, while the other thought Latin and Greek a mistake. It was the intention of the pirates to call old Poppy's attention to these gentlemen's views.

Soon after Primus came to me I learned that his schoolmaster had given him a holiday task. All the "fellows" in his form had to write an essay entitled "My Holidays, and How I Turned Them to Account," and to send it to their preceptor. Primus troubled his head little about the task while the composition of it was yet afar off; but as his time drew near he referred to it with indignation, and to his master's action in prescribing it as a "low trick." He frightened the housekeeper into tears by saying that he would not write a line of the task, and, what was more, he would "cheek" his master for imposing it; and I also heard that he and Johnny had some thought of writing the essay in a form suggested by their perusal of the "Comic History of Rome." One day I found a paper in my chambers which told me that the task was nevertheless receiving serious consideration. It was the instructions given by Primus's master with regard to the essay, which was to be "in the form of a letter," and "not less than five hundred words in length." The writer, it was suggested, should give a general sketch of how he was passing his time, what books he was reading, and "how he was making the home brighter." I did not know that Primus had risen equal to the occasion until one day after his departure, when I received his epistle from the schoolmaster, who wanted me to say whether it was a true statement. Here is Primus's essay on his holidays and how he made the home brighter:

"RESPECTED SIR:--I venture to address you on a subject of general interest to all engaged in education, and the subject I venture to address you on is, 'My Hollidays and How I Turned Them to Account.' Three weeks and two days has now elapsed since I quitted your scholastic establishment, and I quitted your scholastic establishment with tears in my eyes, it being the one of all the scholastic establishments I have been at that I loved to reside in, and everybody was of an amiable disposition. Hollidays is good for making us renew our studdies with redoubled vigor, the mussels needing to be invigorated, and I have not overworked mind and body in my hollidays. I found my uncle well, and drove in a handsome to the door, and he thought I was much improved both in appearance and manners; and I said it was jew to the loving care of my teacher making improvement in appearance and manners a pleasure to the youth of England. My uncle was partiklarly pleased with the improvement I had made, not only in my appearance and manners, but also in my studies; and I told him Casear was the Latin writer I liked best, and quoted 'veni, vidi, vici,' and some others which I regret I cannot mind at present. With your kind permission I should like to write you a line about how I spend my days during the hollidays; and my first way of spending my days during the hollidays is whatsoever my hands find to do doing it with all my might; also setting my face nobly against hurting the feelings of others, and minding to say, before I go to sleep, 'Something attempted, something done, to earn a night's repose,' as advised by you, my esteemed communicant. I spend my days during the hollidays getting up early, so as to be down in time for breakfast, and not to give no trouble. At breakfast I behave like a model, so as to set a good example; and then I go out for a walk with my esteemed young friend, John Fox, whom I chose carefully for a friend, fearing to corrupt my morals by holding communications with rude boys. The J. Fox whom I mentioned is esteemed by all who knows him as of a unusually gentle disposition; and you know him, respected sir, yourself, he being in my form, and best known in regretble slang as 'Foxy.' We walks in Hyde Park admiring the works of nature, and keeps up our classics when we see a tree by calling it 'arbor' and then going through the declensions; but we never climbs trees for fear of messing the clothes bestowed upon us by our beloved parents in the sweat of their brow; and we scorns to fling stones at the beautiful warblers which fill the atmosfere with music. In the afternoons I spend my days during the hollidays talking with the housekeeper about the things she understands, like not taking off my flannels till June 15, and also praising the matron at the school for

seeing about the socks. In the evening I devote myself to whatever good cause I can think of; and I always take off my boots and put on my slippers, so as not to soil the carpet. I should like, respected sir, to inform you of the books I read when my duties does not call me elsewhere; and the books I read are the works of William Shakespeare, John Milton, Albert Tennyson, and Francis Bacon. Me and John Fox also reads the 'History of Rome,' so as to prime ourselves with the greatness of the past; and we hopes the glorious examples of Romulus and Remus, but especially Hannibal, will sink into our minds to spur us along. I am desirous to acquaint you with the way I make my uncle's home brighter; but the 500 words is up. So looking forward eagerly to resume my studdies, I am, respected sir, your dilligent pupil."