

### **XXIII. Pilkington's**

On attaining the age of eight, or thereabout, children fly away from the Gardens, and never come back. When next you meet them they are ladies and gentlemen holding up their umbrellas to hail a hansom.

Where the girls go to I know not, to some private place, I suppose, to put up their hair, but the boys have gone to Pilkington's. He is a man with a cane. You may not go to Pilkington's in knickerbockers made by your mother, make she ever so artfully. They must be real knickerbockers. It is his stern rule. Hence the fearful fascination of Pilkington's.

He may be conceived as one who, baiting his hook with real knickerbockers, fishes all day in the Gardens, which are to him but a pool swarming with small fry.

Abhorred shade! I know not what manner of man thou art in the flesh, sir, but figure thee bearded and blackavised, and of a lean tortuous habit of body, that moves ever with a swish. Every morning, I swear, thou readest avidly the list of male births in thy paper, and then are thy hands rubbed gloatingly the one upon the other. 'Tis fear of thee and thy gown and thy cane, which are part of thee, that makes the fairies to hide by day; wert thou to linger but once among their haunts between the hours of Lock-out and Open Gates there would be left not one single gentle place in all the Gardens. The little people would flit. How much wiser they than the small boys who swim glamoured to thy crafty hook. Thou devastator of the Gardens, I know thee, Pilkington.

I first heard of Pilkington from David, who had it from Oliver Bailey.

This Oliver Bailey was one of the most dashing figures in the Gardens, and without apparent effort was daily drawing nearer the completion of his seventh year at a time when David seemed unable to get beyond half-past five. I have to speak of him in the past tense, for gone is Oliver from the Gardens (gone to Pilkington's) but he is still a name among us, and some lordly deeds are remembered of him, as that his father shaved twice a day. Oliver himself was all on that scale.

His not ignoble ambition seems always to have been to be wrecked upon an island, indeed I am told that he mentioned it insinuatingly in his prayers, and it was perhaps inevitable that a boy with such an outlook should

fascinate David. I am proud, therefore, to be able to state on wood that it was Oliver himself who made the overture.

On first hearing, from some satellite of Oliver's, of Wrecked Islands, as they are called in the Gardens, David said wistfully that he supposed you needed to be very very good before you had any chance of being wrecked, and the remark was conveyed to Oliver, on whom it made an uncomfortable impression. For a time he tried to evade it, but ultimately David was presented to him and invited gloomily to say it again. The upshot was that Oliver advertised the Gardens of his intention to be good until he was eight, and if he had not been wrecked by that time, to be as jolly bad as a boy could be. He was naturally so bad that at the Kindergarten Academy, when the mistress ordered whoever had done the last naughty deed to step forward, Oliver's custom had been to step forward, not necessarily because he had done it, but because he presumed he very likely had.

The friendship of the two dated from this time, and at first I thought Oliver discovered generosity in hasting to David as to an equal; he also walked hand in hand with him, and even reproved him for delinquencies like a loving elder brother. But 'tis a gray world even in the Gardens, for I found that a new arrangement had been made which reduced Oliver to life-size. He had wearied of well-doing, and passed it on, so to speak, to his friend. In other words, on David now devolved the task of being good until he was eight, while Oliver clung to him so closely that the one could not be wrecked without the other.

When this was made known to me it was already too late to break the spell of Oliver, David was top-heavy with pride in him, and, faith, I began to find myself very much in the cold, for Oliver was frankly bored by me and even David seemed to think it would be convenient if I went and sat with Irene. Am I affecting to laugh? I was really distressed and lonely, and rather bitter; and how humble I became. Sometimes when the dog Joey is unable, by frisking, to induce Porthos to play with him, he stands on his hind legs and begs it of him, and I do believe I was sometimes as humble as Joey. Then David would insist on my being suffered to join them, but it was plain that he had no real occasion for me.

It was an unheroic trouble, and I despised myself. For years I had been fighting Mary for David, and had not wholly failed though she was advantaged by the accident of relationship; was I now to be knocked out so easily by a seven year old? I reconsidered my weapons, and I fought Oliver

and beat him. Figure to yourself those two boys become as faithful to me as my coat-tails.

With wrecked islands I did it. I began in the most unpretentious way by telling them a story which might last an hour, and favoured by many an unexpected wind it lasted eighteen months. It started as the wreck of the simple Swiss family who looked up and saw the butter tree, but soon a glorious inspiration of the night turned it into the wreck of David A---- and Oliver Bailey. At first it was what they were to do when they were wrecked, but imperceptibly it became what they had done. I spent much of my time staring reflectively at the titles of the boys' stories in the booksellers' windows, whistling for a breeze, so to say, for I found that the titles were even more helpful than the stories. We wrecked everybody of note, including all Homer's most taking characters and the hero of Paradise Lost. But we suffered them not to land. We stripped them of what we wanted and left them to wander the high seas naked of adventure. And all this was merely the beginning.

By this time I had been cast upon the island. It was not my own proposal, but David knew my wishes, and he made it all right for me with Oliver. They found me among the breakers with a large dog, which had kept me afloat throughout that terrible night. I was the sole survivor of the ill-fated Anna Pink. So exhausted was I that they had to carry me to their hut, and great was my gratitude when on opening my eyes, I found myself in that romantic edifice instead of in Davy Jones's locker. As we walked in the Gardens I told them of the hut they had built; and they were inflated but not surprised. On the other hand they looked for surprise from me.

"Did we tell you about the turtle we turned on its back?" asked Oliver, reverting to deeds of theirs of which I had previously told them.

"You did."

"Who turned it?" demanded David, not as one who needed information but after the manner of a schoolmaster.

"It was turned," I said, "by David A----, the younger of the two youths."

"Who made the monkeys fling cocoa-nuts at him?" asked the older of the two youths.

"Oliver Bailey," I replied.

"Was it Oliver," asked David sharply, "that found the cocoa-nut-tree first?"

"On the contrary," I answered, "it was first observed by David, who immediately climbed it, remarking, 'This is certainly the *cocos-nucifera*, for, see, dear Oliver, the slender columns supporting the crown of leaves which fall with a grace that no art can imitate.'"

"That's what I said," remarked David with a wave of his hand.

"I said things like that, too," Oliver insisted.

"No, you didn't then," said David.

"Yes, I did so."

"No, you didn't so."

"Shut up."

"Well, then, let's hear one you said."

Oliver looked appealingly at me. "The following," I announced, "is one that Oliver said: 'Truly dear comrade, though the perils of these happenings are great, and our privations calculated to break the stoutest heart, yet to be rewarded by such fair sights I would endure still greater trials and still rejoice even as the bird on yonder bough.'"

"That's one I said!" crowed Oliver.

"I shot the bird," said David instantly.

"What bird?"

"The yonder bird."

"No, you didn't."

"Did I not shoot the bird?"

"It was David who shot the bird," I said, "but it was Oliver who saw by its multi-coloured plumage that it was one of the *Psittacidae*, an excellent substitute for partridge."

"You didn't see that," said Oliver, rather swollen.

"Yes, I did."

"What did you see?"

"I saw that."

"What?"

"You shut up."

"David shot it," I summed up, "and Oliver knew its name, but I ate it. Do you remember how hungry I was?"

"Rather!" said David.

"I cooked it," said Oliver.

"It was served up on toast," I reminded them.

"I toasted it," said David.

"Toast from the bread-fruit-tree," I said, "which (as you both remarked simultaneously) bears two and sometimes three crops in a year, and also affords a serviceable gum for the pitching of canoes."

"I pitched mine best," said Oliver.

"I pitched mine farthest," said David.

"And when I had finished my repast," said I, "you amazed me by handing me a cigar from the tobacco-plant."

"I handed it," said Oliver.

"I snicked off the end," said David.

"And then," said I, "you gave me a light."

"Which of us?" they cried together.

"Both of you," I said. "Never shall I forget my amazement when I saw you get that light by rubbing two sticks together."

At this they waggled their heads. "You couldn't have done it!" said David.

"No, David," I admitted, "I can't do it, but of course I know that all wrecked boys do it quite easily. Show me how you did it."

But after consulting apart they agreed not to show me. I was not shown everything.

David was now firmly convinced that he had once been wrecked on an island, while Oliver passed his days in dubiety. They used to argue it out together and among their friends. As I unfolded the story Oliver listened

with an open knife in his hand, and David who was not allowed to have a knife wore a pirate-string round his waist. Irene in her usual interfering way objected to this bauble and dropped disparaging remarks about wrecked islands which were little to her credit. I was for defying her, but David, who had the knack of women, knew a better way; he craftily proposed that we "should let Irene in," in short, should wreck her, and though I objected, she proved a great success and recognised the yucca filamentosa by its long narrow leaves the very day she joined us. Thereafter we had no more scoffing from Irene, who listened to the story as hotly as anybody.

This encouraged us in time to let in David's father and mother, though they never knew it unless he told them, as I have no doubt he did. They were admitted primarily to gratify David, who was very soft-hearted and knew that while he was on the island they must be missing him very much at home. So we let them in, and there was no part of the story he liked better than that which told of the joyous meeting. We were in need of another woman at any rate, someone more romantic looking than Irene, and Mary, I can assure her now, had a busy time of it. She was constantly being carried off by cannibals, and David became quite an adept at plucking her from the very pot itself and springing from cliff to cliff with his lovely burden in his arms. There was seldom a Saturday in which David did not kill his man.

I shall now provide the proof that David believed it all to be as true as true. It was told me by Oliver, who had it from our hero himself. I had described to them how the savages had tattooed David's father, and Oliver informed me that one night shortly afterward David was discovered softly lifting the blankets off his father's legs to have a look at the birds and reptiles etched thereon.

Thus many months passed with no word of Pilkington, and you may be asking where he was all this time. Ah, my friends, he was very busy fishing, though I was as yet unaware of his existence. Most suddenly I heard the whirr of his hated reel, as he struck a fish. I remember that grim day with painful vividness, it was a wet day, indeed I think it has rained for me more or less ever since. As soon as they joined me I saw from the manner of the two boys that they had something to communicate. Oliver nudged David and retired a few paces, whereupon David said to me solemnly,

"Oliver is going to Pilkington's."

I immediately perceived that it was some school, but so little did I understand the import of David's remark that I called out jocularly, "I hope he won't swish you, Oliver."

Evidently I had pained both of them, for they exchanged glances and retired for consultation behind a tree, whence David returned to say with emphasis,

"He has two jackets and two shirts and two knickerbockers, all real ones."

"Well done, Oliver!" said I, but it was the wrong thing again, and once more they disappeared behind the tree. Evidently they decided that the time for plain speaking was come, for now David announced bluntly:

"He wants you not to call him Oliver any longer."

"What shall I call him?"

"Bailey."

"But why?"

"He's going to Pilkington's. And he can't play with us any more after next Saturday."

"Why not?"

"He's going to Pilkington's."

So now I knew the law about the thing, and we moved on together, Oliver stretching himself consciously, and methought that even David walked with a sedate air.

"David," said I, with a sinking, "are you going to Pilkington's?"

"When I am eight," he replied.

"And sha'n't I call you David then, and won't you play with me in the Gardens any more?"

He looked at Bailey, and Bailey signalled him to be firm.

"Oh, no," said David cheerily.

Thus sharply did I learn how much longer I was to have of him. Strange that a little boy can give so much pain. I dropped his hand and walked on in silence, and presently I did my most churlish to hurt him by ending the story abruptly in a very cruel way. "Ten years have elapsed," said I, "since I last spoke, and our two heroes, now gay young men, are revisiting the wrecked island of their childhood. 'Did we wreck ourselves,' said one, 'or was there someone to help us?' And the other who was the younger, replied, 'I think there was someone to help us, a man with a dog. I think he used to

tell me stories in the Kensington Gardens, but I forget all about him; I don't remember even his name."

This tame ending bored Bailey, and he drifted away from us, but David still walked by my side, and he was grown so quiet that I knew a storm was brewing. Suddenly he flashed lightning on me. "It's not true," he cried, "it's a lie!" He gripped my hand. "I sha'n't never forget you, father."

Strange that a little boy can give so much pleasure.

Yet I could go on. "You will forget, David, but there was once a boy who would have remembered."

"Timothy?" said he at once. He thinks Timothy was a real boy, and is very jealous of him. He turned his back to me, and stood alone and wept passionately, while I waited for him. You may be sure I begged his pardon, and made it all right with him, and had him laughing and happy again before I let him go. But nevertheless what I said was true. David is not my boy, and he will forget. But Timothy would have remembered.