

Chapter III - Mr Yorke

Cheerfulness, it would appear, is a matter which depends fully as much on the state of things within as on the state of things without and around us. I make this trite remark, because I happen to know that Messrs Helstone and Moore trotted forth from the mill-yard gates at the head of their very small company, in the best possible spirits. When a ray from a lantern (the three pedestrians of the party carried each one) fell on Mr Moore's face, you could see an unusual, because a lively, spark dancing in his eyes, and a new-found vivacity mantling on his dark physiognomy; and when the rector's visage was illuminated, his hard features were revealed all agrin and ashine with glee. Yet a drizzling night, a somewhat perilous expedition, you would think were not circumstances calculated to enliven those exposed to the wet and engaged in the adventure. If any member or members of the crew who had been at work on Stilbro' Moor had caught a view of this party, they would have had great pleasure in shooting either of the leaders from behind a wall: and the leaders knew this; and the fact is, being both men of steely nerves and steady beating hearts, were elate with the knowledge.

I am aware, reader, and you need not remind me, that it is a dreadful thing for a parson to be warlike; I am aware that he should be a man of peace. I have some faint outline of an idea of what a clergyman's mission is amongst mankind, and I remember distinctly whose servant he is, whose message he delivers, whose example he should follow; yet, with all this, if you are a parson-hater, you need not expect me to go along with you every step of your dismal, downward-tending, unchristian road; you need not expect me to join in your deep anathemas, at once so narrow and so sweeping, in your poisonous rancour, so intense and so absurd, against 'the cloth;' to lift up my eyes and hands with a Supplehough, or to inflate my lungs with a Barraclough, in horror and denunciation of the diabolical rector of Briarfield.

He was not diabolical at all. The evil simply was - he had missed his vocation. He should have been a soldier, and circumstances had made him a priest. For the rest, he was a conscientious, hard-headed, hard-handed, brave, stern, implacable, faithful little man; a man almost without sympathy, ungentle, prejudiced, and rigid; but a man true to principle, honourable, sagacious, and sincere. It seems to me, reader, that you cannot always cut out men to fit their profession, and that you ought not to curse them because their profession sometimes hangs on them ungracefully. Nor will I curse Helstone, clerical Cossack as he was. Yet he was cursed, and by many of his own parishioners, as by others he was adored - which is the frequent fate of men who show partiality in friendship and bitterness in enmity, who are equally attached to principles and adherent to prejudices.

Helstone and Moore, being both in excellent spirits, and united for the present in one cause, you would expect that, as they rode side by side, they would converse amicably. Oh no! These two men, of hard, bilious natures both, rarely came into contact but they chafed each other's moods. Their frequent bone of contention was the war. Helstone was a high Tory (there were Tories in those days), and Moore was a bitter Whig - a Whig, at least, as far as opposition to the war-party was concerned, that being the question which affected his own interest; and only on that question did he profess any British politics at all. He liked to infuriate Helstone by declaring his belief in the invincibility of Bonaparte; by taunting England and Europe with the impotence of their efforts to withstand him and by coolly advancing the opinion that it was as well to yield to him soon as late, since he must in the end crush every antagonist, and reign supreme.

Helstone could not bear these sentiments. It was only on the consideration of Moore being a sort of outcast and alien, and having but half measure of British blood to temper the foreign gall which corroded his veins, that he brought himself to listen to them without indulging the wish he felt to cane the speaker. Another thing, too, somewhat allayed his disgust; namely, a fellow- feeling for the dogged tone with which these opinions were asserted, and a respect for the consistency of Moore's crabbed contumacy.

As the party turned into the Stilbro' road, they met what little wind there was; the rain dashed in their faces. Moore had been fretting his companion previously, and now, braced up by the raw breeze, and perhaps irritated by the sharp drizzle, he began to goad him.

'Does your Peninsular news please you still?' he asked.

'What do you mean?' was the surly demand of the rector.

'I mean, have you still faith in that Baal of a Lord Wellington?'

'And what do you mean now?'

'Do you still believe that this wooden-faced and pebble-hearted idol of England has power to send fire down from heaven to consume the French holocaust you want to offer up?'

'I believe Wellington will flog Bonaparte's marshals into the sea the day it pleases him to lift his arm.'

'But, my dear sir, you can't be serious in what you say. Bonaparte's marshals are great men, who act under the guidance of an omnipotent master-spirit. Your Wellington is the most humdrum of commonplace

martinets, whose slow, mechanical movements are further cramped by an ignorant home government.'

'Wellington is the soul of England. Wellington is the right champion of a good cause, the fit representative of a powerful, a resolute, a sensible, and an honest nation.'

'Your good cause, as far as I understand it, is simply the restoration of that filthy, feeble Ferdinand to a throne which he disgraced. Your fit representative of an honest people is a dull-witted drover, acting for a duller-witted farmer; and against these are arrayed victorious supremacy and invincible genius.'

'Against legitimacy is arrayed usurpation; against modest, single-minded, righteous, and brave resistance to encroachment is arrayed boastful, double-tongued, selfish, and treacherous ambition to possess. God defend the right!'

'God often defends the powerful.'

'What! I suppose the handful of Israelites standing dryshod on the Asiatic side of the Red Sea was more powerful than the host of the Egyptians drawn up on the African side? Were they more numerous? Were they better appointed? Were they more mighty, in a word - eh? Don't speak, or you'll tell a lie, Moore; you know you will. They were a poor, overwrought band of bondsmen. Tyrants had oppressed them through four hundred years; a feeble mixture of women and children diluted their thin ranks; their masters, who roared to follow them through the divided flood, were a set of pampered Ethiops, about as strong and brutal as the lions of Libya. They were armed, horsed, and charioted; the poor Hebrew wanderers were afoot. Few of them, it is likely, had better weapons than their shepherds' crooks or their masons' building-tools; their meek and mighty leader himself had only his rod. But bethink you, Robert Moore, right was with them; the God of battles was on their side. Crime and the lost archangel generalled the ranks of Pharaoh, and which triumphed? We know that well. 'The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore' yea, 'the depths covered them, they sank to the bottom as a stone.' The right hand of the Lord became glorious in power; the right hand of the Lord dashed in pieces the enemy!'

'You are all right; only you forget the true parallel. France is Israel, and Napoleon is Moses. Europe, with her old overgorged empires and rotten dynasties, is corrupt Egypt; gallant France is the Twelve Tribes, and her fresh and vigorous Usurper the Shepherd of Horeb.'

'I scorn to answer you.'

Moore accordingly answered himself - at least, he subjoined to what he had just said an additional observation in a lower voice.

'Oh, in Italy he was as great as any Moses! He was the right thing there, fit to head and organise measures for the regeneration of nations. It puzzles me to this day how the conqueror of Lodi should have condescended to become an emperor, a vulgar, a stupid humbug; and still more how a people who had once called themselves republicans should have sunk again to the grade of mere slaves. I despise France! If England had gone as far on the march of civilisation as France did, she would hardly have retreated so shamelessly.'

'You don't mean to say that besotted imperial France is any worse than bloody republican France?' demanded Helstone fiercely.

'I mean to say nothing, but I can think what I please, you know, Mr Helstone, both about France and England; and about revolutions, and regicides, and restorations in general; and about the divine right of kings, which you often stickle for in your sermons, and the duty of non-resistance, and the sanity of war, and - '

Mr Moore's sentence was here cut short by the rapid rolling up of a gig, and its sudden stoppage in the middle of the road. Both he and the rector had been too much occupied with their discourse to notice its approach till it was close upon them.

'Nah, maister; did th' waggons hit home?' demanded a voice from the vehicle.

'Can that be Joe Scott?'

'Ay, ay!' returned another voice; for the gig contained two persons, as was seen by the glimmer of its lamp. The men with the lanterns had now fallen into the rear, or rather, the equestrians of the rescue-party had outridden the pedestrians. 'Ay, Mr Moore, it's Joe Scott. I'm bringing him back to you in a bonny pickle. I fand him on the top of the moor yonder, him and three others. What will you give me for restoring him to you?'

'Why, my thanks, I believe; for I could better have afforded to lose a better man. That is you, I suppose, Mr Yorke, by your voice?'

'Ay, lad, it's me. I was coming home from Stilbro' market, and just as I got to the middle of the moor, and was whipping on as swift as the wind (for these, they say, are not safe times, thanks to a bad government!), I heard a groan. I pulled up. Some would have whipt on faster; but I've naught to fear that I know of. I don't believe there's a lad in these parts would harm me - at least, I'd give them as good as I

got if they offered to do it. I said, 'Is there aught wrong anywhere?' 'Deed is there,' somebody says, speaking out of the ground, like. 'What's to do? Be sharp and tell me,' I ordered. 'Nobbut four on us ligging in a ditch,' says Joe, as quiet as could be. I tell'd 'em more shame to 'em, and bid them get up and move on, or I'd lend them a lick of the gig-whip; for my notion was they were all fresh. 'We'd ha' done that an hour sin', but we're teed wi' a bit o' band,' says Joe. So in a while I got down and loosed 'em wi' my penknife; and Scott would ride wi' me, to tell me all how it happened; and t' others are coming on as fast as their feet will bring them.'

'Well, I am greatly obliged to you, Mr Yorke.'

'Are you, my lad? You know you're not. However, here are the rest approaching. And here, by the Lord, is another set with lights in their pitchers, like the army of Gideon; and as we've th' parson wi' us - good- evening, Mr Helstone, we'se do.'

Mr Helstone returned the salutation of the individual in the gig very stiffly indeed. That individual proceeded:

'We're eleven strong men, and there's both horses and chariots amang us. If we could only fall in wi' some of these starved ragamuffins of frame-breakers we could win a grand victory. We're could iv'ry one be a Wellington - that would please ye, Mr Helstone - and sich paragraphs as we could contrive for t' papers! Briarfield suld be famous: but we'se hev a column and a half i' th' Stilbro' Courier ower this job, as it is, I dare say. I'se expect no less.'

'And I'll promise you no less, Mr Yorke, for I'll write the article myself,' returned the rector.

'To be sure - sartainly! And mind ye recommend weel that them 'at brake t' bits o' frames, and teed Joe Scott's legs wi' band, suld be hung without benefit o' clergy. It's a hanging matter, or suld be. No doubt o' that'

'If I judged them I'd give them short shrift!' cried Moore. 'But I mean to let them quite alone this bout, to give them rope enough, certain that in the end they will hang themselves.'

'Let them alone, will ye, Moore? Do you promise that?'

'Promise! No. All I mean to say is, I shall give myself no particular trouble to catch them; but if one falls in my way - '

'You'll snap him up, of course. Only you would rather they would do something worse than merely stop a wagon before you reckon with

them. Well, we'll say no more on the subject at present Here we are at my door, gentlemen, and I hope you and the men will step in. You will none of you be the worse of a little refreshment.'

Moore and Helstone opposed this proposition as unnecessary. It was, however, pressed on them so courteously, and the night, besides, was so inclement, and the gleam from the muslin-curtained windows of the house before which they had halted looked so inviting, that at length they yielded. Mr Yorke, after having alighted from his gig, which he left in charge of a man who issued from an outbuilding on his arrival, led the way in.

It will have been remarked that Mr Yorke varied a little in his phraseology. Now he spoke broad Yorkshire, and anon he expressed himself in very pure English. His manner seemed liable to equal alternations. He could be polite and affable, and he could be blunt and rough. His station then you could not easily determine by his speech and demeanour. Perhaps the appearance of his residence may decide it.

The men he recommended to take the kitchen way, saying that he would 'see them served wi' summat to taste presently.' The gentlemen were ushered in at the front entrance. They found themselves in a matted hall, lined almost to the ceiling with pictures. Through this they were conducted to a large parlour, with a magnificent fire in the grate; the most cheerful of rooms it appeared as a whole, and when you came to examine details, the enlivening effect was not diminished. There was no splendour, but there was taste everywhere, unusual taste, the taste, you would have said, of a travelled man, a scholar, and a gentleman. A series of Italian views decked the walls. Each of these was a specimen of true art. A connoisseur had selected them; they were genuine and valuable. Even by candle-light the bright clear skies, the soft distances, with blue air quivering between the eye and the hills, the fresh tints and well-massed lights and shadows, charmed the view. The subjects were all pastoral, the scenes were all sunny. There was a guitar and some music on a sofa; there were cameos, beautiful miniatures; a set of Grecian-looking vases on the mantelpiece; there were books well arranged in two elegant bookcases.

Mr Yorke bade his guests be seated. He then rang for wine. To the servant who brought it he gave hospitable orders for the refreshment of the men in the kitchen. The rector remained standing; he seemed not to like his quarters; he would not touch the wine his host offered him.

'E'en as you will,' remarked Mr Yorke. 'I reckon you're thinking of Eastern customs, Mr Helstone, and you'll not eat nor drink under my roof, feared we suld be forced to be friends; but I am not so particular

or superstitious. You might sup the contents of that decanter, and you might give me a bottle of the best in your own cellar, and I'd hold myself free to oppose you at every turn still, in every vestry-meeting and justice-meeting where we encountered one another.'

'It is just what I should expect of you, Mr Yorke.'

'Does it agree wi' ye now, Mr Helstone, to be riding out after rioters, of a wet night, at your age?'

'It always agrees with me to be doing my duty; and in this case my duty is a thorough pleasure. To hunt down vermin is a noble occupation, fit for an Archbishop.'

'Fit for ye, at ony rate. But where's t' curate? He's happen gone to visit some poor body in a sick gird, or he's happen hunting down vermin in another direction.'

'He is doing garrison-duty at Hollow's-miln.'

'You left him a sup o' wine, I hope, Bob' (turning to Mr Moore), 'to keep his courage up?'

He did not pause for an answer, but continued, quickly - still addressing Moore, who had thrown himself into an old-fashioned chair by the fireside - 'Move it, Robert! Get up, my lad! That place is mine. Take the sofa, or three other chairs, if you will, but not this. It belongs to me, and nob'dy else.'

'Why are you so particular to that chair, Mr Yorke?' asked Moore, lazily vacating the place in obedience to orders.

'My father war afore me, and that's all t' answer I sall gie thee; and it's as good a reason as Mr Helstone can give for the main feck o' his notions.'

'Moore, are you ready to go?' inquired the Rector.

'Nay; Robert's not ready, or rather, I'm not ready to part wi' him. He's an ill lad, and wants correcting.'

'Why, sir? what have I done?'

'Made thysel enemies on every hand.'

'What do I care for that? What difference does it make to me whether your Yorkshire louts hate me or like me?'

'Ay, there it is. The lad is a mak' of an alien amang us. His father would never have talked i' that way. - Go back to Antwerp, where you were born and bred, mauvaise tête!'

'Mauvaise tête vous-même, je ne fais que mon devoir; quant à vos lourdauds de paysans, je m'en moque!'

'En ravanche, mon garçon, nos lourdauds de paysans se moqueront de toi; sois en certain,' replied Yorke, speaking with nearly as pure a French accent as Gérard Moore.

'C'est bon! c'est bon! Et puisque cela m'est égal, que mes amis ne s'en inquiètent pas.'

'Tes amis! où sont-ils, tes amis?'

'Je fais êcho, Où sont-ils? et je suis fort aise que l'écho seul y répond. Au diable les amis! Je me souviens encore du moment où mon père et mes oncles Gérard appellèrent autour d'eux leurs amis et Dieu sait si les amis se sont empressés d'accourir a leur secours! Tenez, M. Yorke, ce mot, ami, m'irrite trop; ne m'en parlez plus.'

'Comme tu voudras.'

And here Mr Yorke held his peace; and while he sits leaning back in his three-cornered carved oak chair, I will snatch my opportunity to sketch the portrait of this French-speaking Yorkshire gentleman.