

## CHAPTER II.

THE opportunity I wanted presented itself in a curious way, and led, unexpectedly enough, to some rather important consequences.

I have already stated, among the other branches of human attainment which I acquired at the public school, that I learned to draw caricatures of the masters who were so obliging as to educate me. I had a natural faculty for this useful department of art. I improved it greatly by practice in secret after I left school, and I ended by making it a source of profit and pocket money to me when I entered the medical profession. What was I to do? I could not expect for years to make a halfpenny, as a physician. My genteel walk in life led me away from all immediate sources of emolument, and my father could only afford to give me an allowance which was too preposterously small to be mentioned. I had helped myself surreptitiously to pocket-money at school, by selling my caricatures, and I was obliged to repeat the process at home!

At the time of which I write, the Art of Caricature was just approaching the close of its colored and most extravagant stage of development. The subtlety and truth to Nature required for the pursuit of it now, had hardly begun to be thought of then. Sheer farce and coarse burlesque, with plenty of color for the money, still made up the sum of what the public of those days wanted. I was first assured of my capacity for the production of these requisites, by a medical friend of the ripe critical age of nineteen. He knew a print-publisher, and enthusiastically showed

him a portfolio full of my sketches, taking care at my request not to mention my name. Rather to my surprise (for I was too conceited to be greatly amazed by the circumstance), the publisher picked out a few of the best of my wares, and boldly bought them of me--of course, at his own price. From that time I became, in an anonymous way, one of the young buccaneers of British Caricature; cruising about here, there and everywhere, at all my intervals of spare time, for any prize in the shape of a subject which it was possible to pick up. Little did my highly-connected mother think that, among the colored prints in the shop-window, which disrespectfully illustrated the public and private proceedings of distinguished individuals, certain specimens bearing the classic signature of "Thersites Junior," were produced from designs furnished by her studious and medical son. Little did my respectable father imagine when, with great difficulty and vexation, he succeeded in getting me now and then smuggled, along with himself, inside the pale of fashionable society--that he was helping me to study likenesses which were destined under my reckless treatment to make the public laugh at some of his most august patrons, and to fill the pockets of his son with professional fees, never once dreamed of in his philosophy.

For more than a year I managed, unsuspected, to keep the Privy Purse fairly supplied by the exercise of my caricaturing abilities. But the day of detection was to come.

Whether my medical friend's admiration of my satirical sketches led him into talking about them in public with too little reserve; or whether

the servants at home found private means of watching me in my moments of Art-study, I know not: but that some one betrayed me, and that the discovery of my illicit manufacture of caricatures was actually communicated even to the grandmotherly head and fount of the family honor, is a most certain and lamentable matter of fact. One morning my father received a letter from Lady Malkinshaw herself, informing him, in a handwriting crooked with poignant grief, and blotted at every third word by the violence of virtuous indignation, that "Thersites Junior" was his own son, and that, in one of the last of the "ribald's" caricatures her own venerable features were unmistakably represented as belonging to the body of a large owl!

Of course, I laid my hand on my heart and indignantly denied everything. Useless. My original model for the owl had got proofs of my guilt that were not to be resisted.

The doctor, ordinarily the most mellifluous and self-possessed of men, flew into a violent, roaring, cursing passion, on this occasion--declared that I was imperiling the honor and standing of the family--insisted on my never drawing another caricature, either for public or private purposes, as long as I lived; and ordered me to go forthwith and ask pardon of Lady Malkinshaw in the humblest terms that it was possible to select. I answered dutifully that I was quite ready to obey, on the condition that he should reimburse me by a trebled allowance for what I should lose by giving up the Art of Caricature, or that Lady Malkinshaw should confer on me the appointment of

physician-in-waiting on her, with a handsome salary attached. These extremely moderate stipulations so increased my father's anger, that he asserted, with an unmentionably vulgar oath, his resolution to turn me out of doors if I did not do as he bid me, without daring to hint at any conditions whatsoever. I bowed, and said that I would save him the exertion of turning me out of doors, by going of my own accord. He shook his fist at me; after which it obviously became my duty, as a member of a gentlemanly and peaceful profession, to leave the room. The same evening I left the house, and I have never once given the clumsy and expensive footman the trouble of answering the door to me since that time.

I have reason to believe that my exodus from home was, on the whole, favorably viewed by my mother, as tending to remove any possibility of my bad character and conduct interfering with my sister's advancement in life.

By dint of angling with great dexterity and patience, under the direction of both her parents, my handsome sister Annabella had succeeded in catching an eligible husband, in the shape of a wizen, miserly, mahogany-colored man, turned fifty, who had made a fortune in the West Indies. His name was Batterbury; he had been dried up under a tropical sun, so as to look as if he would keep for ages; he had two subjects of conversation, the yellow-fever and the advantage of walking exercise: and he was barbarian enough to take a violent dislike to me. He had proved a very delicate fish to hook; and, even when Annabella

had caught him, my father and mother had great difficulty in landing him--principally, they were good enough to say, in consequence of my presence on the scene. Hence the decided advantage of my removal from home. It is a very pleasant reflection to me, now, to remember how disinterestedly I studied the good of my family in those early days.

Abandoned entirely to my own resources, I naturally returned to the business of caricaturing with renewed ardor.

About this time Thersites Junior really began to make something like a reputation, and to walk abroad habitually with a bank-note comfortably lodged among the other papers in his pocketbook. For a year I lived a gay and glorious life in some of the freest society in London; at the end of that time, my tradesmen, without any provocation on my part, sent in their bills. I found myself in the very absurd position of having no money to pay them, and told them all so with the frankness which is one of the best sides of my character. They received my advances toward a better understanding with brutal incivility, and treated me soon afterward with a want of confidence which I may forgive, but can never forget. One day, a dirty stranger touched me on the shoulder, and showed me a dirty slip of paper which I at first presumed to be his card.

Before I could tell him what a vulgar document it looked like, two more dirty strangers put me into a hackney coach. Before I could prove to them that this proceeding was a gross infringement on the liberties of the British subject, I found myself lodged within the walls of a prison.

Well! and what of that? Who am I that I should object to being in prison, when so many of the royal personages and illustrious characters of history have been there before me? Can I not carry on my vocation in greater comfort here than I could in my father's house? Have I any anxieties outside these walls? No: for my beloved sister is married--the family net has landed Mr. Batterbury at last. No: for I read in the paper the other day, that Doctor Softly (doubtless through the interest of Lady Malkinshaw) has been appointed the King's-Barber-Surgeon's-Deputy-Consulting Physician. My relatives are comfortable in their sphere--let me proceed forthwith to make myself comfortable in mine. Pen, ink, and paper, if you please, Mr. Jailer: I wish to write to my esteemed publisher.

"DEAR SIR--Please advertise a series of twelve Racy Prints, from my fertile pencil, entitled, 'Scenes of Modern Prison Life,' by Thersites Junior. The two first designs will be ready by the end of the week, to be paid for on delivery, according to the terms settled between us for my previous publications of the same size.

"With great regard and esteem, faithfully yours,

"FRANK SOFTLY."

Having thus provided for my support in prison, I was enabled to introduce myself to my fellow-debtors, and to study character for the new series of prints, on the very first day of my incarceration, with my mind quite at ease.

If the reader desires to make acquaintance with the associates of my captivity, I must refer him to "Scenes of Modern Prison Life," by Thersites Junior, now doubtless extremely scarce, but producible to the demands of patience and perseverance, I should imagine, if anybody will be so obliging as to pass a week or so over the catalogue of the British Museum. My fertile pencil has delineated the characters I met with, at that period of my life, with a force and distinctness which my pen cannot hope to rival--has portrayed them all more or less prominently, with the one solitary exception of a prisoner called Gentleman Jones. The reasons why I excluded him from my portrait-gallery are so honorable to both of us, that I must ask permission briefly to record them.

My fellow-captives soon discovered that I was studying their personal peculiarities for my own advantage and for the public amusement. Some thought the thing a good joke; some objected to it, and quarreled with me. Liberality in the matter of liquor and small loans, reconciled a large proportion of the objectors to their fate; the sulky minority I treated with contempt, and scourged avengingly with the smart lash of caricature. I was at that time probably the most impudent man of my age in all England, and the common flock of jail-birds quailed before the

magnificence of my assurance. One prisoner only set me and my pencil successfully at defiance. That prisoner was Gentleman Jones.

He had received his name from the suavity of his countenance, the inveterate politeness of his language, and the unassailable composure of his manner. He was in the prime of life, but very bald--had been in the army and the coal trade--wore very stiff collars and prodigiously long wristbands--seldom laughed, but talked with remarkable glibness, and was never known to lose his temper under the most aggravating circumstances of prison existence.

He abstained from interfering with me and my studies, until it was reported in our society, that in the sixth print of my series, Gentleman Jones, highly caricatured, was to form one of the principal figures. He then appealed to me personally and publicly, on the racket-ground, in the following terms:

"Sir," said he, with his usual politeness and his unwavering smile, "you will greatly oblige me by not caricaturing my personal peculiarities. I am so unfortunate as not to possess a sense of humor; and if you did my likeness, I am afraid I should not see the joke of it."

"Sir," I returned, with my customary impudence, "it is not of the slightest importance whether you see the joke of it or not. The public will--and that is enough for me."



With that civil speech, I turned on my heel; and the prisoners near all burst out laughing. Gentleman Jones, not in the least altered or ruffled, smoothed down his wristbands, smiled, and walked away.

The same evening I was in my room alone, designing the new print, when there came a knock at the door, and Gentleman Jones walked in. I got up, and asked what the devil he wanted. He smiled, and turned up his long wristbands.

"Only to give you a lesson in politeness," said Gentleman Jones.

"What do you mean, sir? How dare you--?"

The answer was a smart slap on the face. I instantly struck out in a state of fury--was stopped with great neatness--and received in return a blow on the head, which sent me down on the carpet half stunned, and too giddy to know the difference between the floor and the ceiling.

"Sir," said Gentleman Jones, smoothing down his wristbands again, and addressing me blandly as I lay on the floor, "I have the honor to inform you that you have now received your first lesson in politeness. Always be civil to those who are civil to you. The little matter of the caricature we will settle on a future occasion. I wish you good-evening."

The noise of my fall had been heard by the other occupants of rooms on

my landing. Most fortunately for my dignity, they did not come in to see what was the matter until I had been able to get into my chair again. When they entered, I felt that the impression of the slap was red on my face still, but the mark of the blow was hidden by my hair. Under these fortunate circumstances, I was able to keep up my character among my friends, when they inquired about the scuffle, by informing them that Gentleman Jones had audaciously slapped my face, and that I had been obliged to retaliate by knocking him down. My word in the prison was as good as his; and if my version of the story got fairly the start of his, I had the better chance of the two of being believed.

I was rather anxious, the next day, to know what course my polite and pugilistic instructor would take. To my utter amazement, he bowed to me as civilly as usual when we met in the yard; he never denied my version of the story; and when my friends laughed at him as a thrashed man, he took not the slightest notice of their agreeable merriment. Antiquity, I think, furnishes us with few more remarkable characters than Gentleman Jones.

That evening I thought it desirable to invite a friend to pass the time with me. As long as my liquor lasted he stopped; when it was gone, he went away. I was just locking the door after him, when it was pushed open gently, but very firmly, and Gentleman Jones walked in.

My pride, which had not allowed me to apply for protection to the prison authorities, would not allow me now to call for help. I tried to get to

the fireplace and arm myself with the poker, but Gentleman Jones was too quick for me. "I have come, sir, to give you a lesson in morality to-night," he said; and up went his right hand.

I stopped the preliminary slap, but before I could hit him, his terrible left fist reached my head again; and down I fell once more--upon the hearth-rug this time--not over-heavily.

"Sir," said Gentleman Jones, making me a bow, "you have now received your first lesson in morality. Always speak the truth; and never say what is false of another man behind his back. To-morrow, with your kind permission, we will finally settle the adjourned question of the caricature. Good-night."

I was far too sensible a man to leave the settling of that question to him. The first thing in the morning I sent a polite note to Gentleman Jones, informing him that I had abandoned all idea of exhibiting his likeness to the public in my series of prints, and giving him full permission to inspect every design I made before it went out of the prison. I received a most civil answer, thanking me for my courtesy, and complimenting me on the extraordinary aptitude with which I profited by the most incomplete and elementary instruction. I thought I deserved the compliment, and I think so still. Our conduct, as I have already intimated, was honorable to us, on either side. It was honorable attention on the part of Gentleman Jones to correct me when I was in error; it was honorable common sense in me to profit by the correction.

I have never seen this great man since he compounded with his creditors and got out of prison; but my feelings toward him are still those of profound gratitude and respect. He gave me the only useful teaching I ever had; and if this should meet the eye of Gentleman Jones I hereby thank him for beginning and ending my education in two evenings, without costing me or my family a single farthing.