

## CHAPTER XLII. THE QUAIN'T PHILOSOPHER.

No person came to my room, and nothing happened to interrupt me while I was reading Mr. Philip Dunboyne's letters.

One of them, let me say at once, produced a very disagreeable impression on me. I have unexpectedly discovered Mrs. Tenbruggen--in a postscript. She is making a living as a Medical Rubber (or Masseur), and is in professional attendance on Mr. Dunboyne the elder. More of this, a little further on.

Having gone through the whole collection of young Dunboyne's letters, I set myself to review the differing conclusions which the correspondence had produced on my mind.

I call the papers submitted to me a correspondence, because the greater part of Philip's letters exhibit notes in pencil, evidently added by Helena. These express, for the most part, the interpretation which she had placed on passages that perplexed or displeased her; and they have, as Philip's rejoinders show, been employed as materials when she wrote her replies.

On reflection, I find myself troubled by complexities and contradictions in the view presented of this young man's character. To decide positively whether I can justify to myself and to my regard for Eunice, an attempt to reunite the lovers, requires more time for consideration than I can reasonably expect that Helena's patience will allow. Having a quiet hour or two still before me, I have determined to make extracts from the letters for my own use; with the intention of referring to them while I am still in doubt which way my decision ought to incline. I shall present them here, to speak for themselves. Is there any objection to this? None that I can see.

In the first place, those extracts have a value of their own. They add necessary information to the present history of events.

In the second place, I am under no obligation to Mr. Gracedieu's daughter which forbids me to make use of her portfolio. I told her that I only consented to receive it, under reserve of my own right of action--and her assent to that stipulation was expressed in the clearest terms.

### EXTRACTS FROM MR. PHILIP DUNBOYNE'S LETTERS.

First Extract.

You blame me, dear Helena, for not having paid proper attention to the questions put to me in your last letter. I have only been waiting to make up my mind, before I replied.

First question: Do I think it advisable that you should write to my father? No, my dear; I beg you will defer writing, until you hear from me again.

Second question: Considering that he is still a stranger to you, is there any harm in your asking me what sort of man my father is? No harm, my sweet one; but, as you will presently see, I am afraid you have addressed yourself to the wrong person.

My father is kind, in his own odd way--and learned, and rich--a more high-minded and honorable man (as I have every reason to believe) doesn't live. But if you ask me which he prefers, his books or his son, I hope I do him no injustice when I answer, his books. His reading and his writing are obstacles between us which I have never been able to overcome. This is the more to be regretted because he is charming, on the few occasions when I find him disengaged. If you wish I knew more about my father, we are in complete agreement as usual--I wish, too.

But there is a dear friend of yours and mine, who is just the person we want to help us. Need I say that I allude to Mrs. Staveley?

I called on her yesterday, not long after she had paid a visit to my father. Luck had favored her. She arrived just at the time when hunger had obliged him to shut up his books, and ring for something to eat. Mrs. Staveley secured a favorable reception with her customary tact and delicacy. He had a fowl for his dinner. She knows his weakness of old; she volunteered to carve it for him.

If I can only repeat what this clever woman told me of their talk, you will have a portrait of Mr. Dunboyne the elder--not perhaps a highly-finished picture, but, as I hope and believe, a good likeness.

Mrs. Staveley began by complaining to him of the conduct of his son. I had promised to write to her, and I had never kept my word. She had reasons for being especially interested in my plans and prospects, just then; knowing me to be attached (please take notice that I am quoting her own language) to a charming friend of hers, whom I had first met at her house. To aggravate the disappointment that I had inflicted, the young lady had neglected her, too. No letters, no information. Perhaps my father would kindly enlighten

her? Was the affair going on? or was it broken off?

My father held out his plate and asked for the other wing of the fowl. "It isn't a bad one for London," he said; "won't you have some yourself?"

"I don't seem to have interested you," Mrs. Staveley remarked.

"What did you expect me to be interested in?" my father inquired. "I was absorbed in the fowl. Favor me by returning to the subject."

Mrs. Staveley admits that she answered this rather sharply: "The subject, sir, was your son's admiration for a charming girl: one of the daughters of Mr. Gracedieu, the famous preacher."

My father is too well-bred to speak to a lady while his attention is absorbed by a fowl. He finished the second wing, and then he asked if "Philip was engaged to be married."

"I am not quite sure," Mrs. Staveley confessed.

"Then, my dear friend, we will wait till we are sure."

"But, Mr. Dunboyne, there is really no need to wait. I suppose your son comes here, now and then, to see you?"

"My son is most attentive. In course of time he will contrive to hit on the right hour for his visit. At present, poor fellow, he interrupts me every day."

"Suppose he hits upon the right time to-morrow?"

"Yes?"

"You might ask him if he is engaged?"

"Pardon me. I think I might wait till Philip mentions it without asking."

"What an extraordinary man you are!"

"Oh, no, no--only a philosopher."

This tried Mrs. Staveley's temper. You know what a perfectly candid person our friend is. She owned to me that she felt inclined to make herself disagreeable. "That's thrown away upon me," she said: "I don't know what a

philosopher is."

Let me pause for a moment, dear Helena. I have inexcusably forgotten to speak of my father's personal appearance. It won't take long. I need only notice one interesting feature which, so to speak, lifts his face out of the common. He has an eloquent nose. Persons possessing this rare advantage are blest with powers of expression not granted to their ordinary fellow-creatures. My father's nose is a mine of information to friends familiarly acquainted with it. It changes color like a modest young lady's cheek. It works flexibly from side to side like the rudder of a ship. On the present occasion, Mrs. Staveley saw it shift toward the left-hand side of his face. A sigh escaped the poor lady. Experience told her that my father was going to hold forth.

"You don't know what a philosopher is!" he repeated. "Be so kind as to look at me. I am a philosopher."

Mrs. Staveley bowed.

"And a philosopher, my charming friend, is a man who has discovered a system of life. Some systems assert themselves in volumes--my system asserts itself in two words: Never think of anything until you have first asked yourself if there is an absolute necessity for doing it, at that particular moment. Thinking of things, when things needn't be thought of, is offering an opportunity to Worry; and Worry is the favorite agent of Death when the destroyer handles his work in a lingering way, and achieves premature results. Never look back, and never look forward, as long as you can possibly help it. Looking back leads the way to sorrow. And looking forward ends in the cruelest of all delusions: it encourages hope. The present time is the precious time. Live for the passing day: the passing day is all that we can be sure of. You suggested, just now, that I should ask my son if he was engaged to be married. How do we know what wear and tear of your nervous texture I succeeded in saving when I said. 'Wait till Philip mentions it without asking?' There is the personal application of my system. I have explained it in my time to every woman on the list of my acquaintance, including the female servants. Not one of them has rewarded me by adopting my system. How do you feel about it?"

Mrs. Staveley declined to tell me whether she had offered a bright example of gratitude to the rest of the sex. When I asked why, she declared that it was my turn now to tell her what I had been doing.

You will anticipate what followed. She objected to the mystery in which my

prospects seemed to be involved. In plain English, was I, or was I not, engaged to marry her dear Eunice? I said, No. What else could I say? If I had told Mrs. Staveley the truth, when she insisted on my explaining myself, she would have gone back to my father, and would have appealed to his sense of justice to forbid our marriage. Finding me obstinately silent, she has decided on writing to Eunice. So we parted. But don't be disheartened. On my way out of the house, I met Mr. Staveley coming in, and had a little talk with him. He and his wife and his family are going to the seaside, next week. Mrs. Staveley once out of our way, I can tell my father of our engagement without any fear of consequences. If she writes to him, the moment he sees my name mentioned, and finds violent language associated with it, he will hand the letter to me. "Your business, Philip: don't interrupt me." He will say that, and go back to his books. There is my father, painted to the life! Farewell, for the present.

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Remarks by H. G.--Philip's grace and gayety of style might be envied by any professional Author. He amuses me, but he rouses my suspicion at the same time. This slippery lover of mine tells me to defer writing to his father, and gives no reason for offering that strange advice to the young lady who is soon to be a member of the family. Is this merely one more instance of the weakness of his character? Or, now that he is away from my influence, is he beginning to regret Eunice already?

Added by the Governor.--I too have my doubts. Is the flippant nonsense which Philip has written inspired by the effervescent good spirits of a happy young man? Or is it assumed for a purpose? In this latter case, I should gladly conclude that he was regarding his conduct to Eunice with becoming emotions of sorrow and shame.