II

As I have said, I was unpacking my luggage after a journey from London into Ukraine. The MS. of "Almayer's Folly"--my companion already for some three years or more, and then in the ninth chapter of its age--was deposited unostentatiously on the writing-table placed between two windows. It didn't occur to me to put it away in the drawer the table was fitted with, but my eye was attracted by the good form of the same drawer's brass handles. Two candelabra, with four candles each, lighted up festally the room which had waited so many years for the wandering nephew. The blinds were down.

Within five hundred yards of the chair on which I sat stood the first peasant hut of the village--part of my maternal grandfather's estate, the only part remaining in the possession of a member of the family; and beyond the village in the limitless blackness of a winter's night there lay the great unfenced fields--not a flat and severe plain, but a kindly bread-giving land of low rounded ridges, all white now, with the black patches of timber nestling in the hollows. The road by which I had come ran through the village with a turn just outside the gates closing the short drive. Somebody was abroad on the deep snow track; a quick tinkle of bells stole gradually into the stillness of the room like a tuneful whisper.

My unpacking had been watched over by the servant who had come to help me, and, for the most part, had been standing attentive but unnecessary at the door of the room. I did not want him in the least, but I did not like to tell him to go away. He was a young fellow, certainly more than ten years younger than myself; I had not been--I won't say in that place, but within sixty miles of it, ever since the year '67; yet his guileless physiognomy of the open peasant type seemed strangely familiar. It was quite possible that he might have been a descendant, a son, or even a grandson, of the servants whose friendly faces had been familiar to me in my early childhood. As a matter of fact he had no such claim on my consideration. He was the product of some village near by and was there on his promotion, having learned the service in one or two houses as pantry boy. I know this because I asked the worthy V---- next day. I might well have spared the question. I discovered before long that all the faces about the house and all the faces in the village: the grave faces with long mustaches of the heads of families, the downy faces of the young men, the faces of the little fair-haired children, the handsome, tanned, wide-browed faces of the mothers seen at the doors of the huts, were as familiar to me as though I had known them all from childhood and my childhood were a matter of the day before yesterday.

The tinkle of the traveller's bells, after growing louder, had faded away quickly, and the tumult of barking dogs in the village had calmed down at last. My uncle, lounging in the corner of a small couch, smoked his long Turkish chibouk in silence.

"This is an extremely nice writing-table you have got for my room," I remarked.

"It is really your property," he said, keeping his eyes on me, with an interested and wistful expression, as he had done ever since I had entered the house. "Forty years ago your mother used to write at this very table. In our house in Oratow, it stood in the little sitting-room which, by a tacit arrangement, was given up to the girls--I mean to your mother and her sister who died so young. It was a present to them jointly from your uncle Nicholas B. when your mother was seventeen and your aunt two years younger. She was a very dear, delightful girl, that aunt of yours, of whom I suppose you know nothing more than the name. She did not shine so much by personal beauty and a cultivated mind in which your mother was far superior. It was her good sense, the admirable sweetness of her nature, her exceptional facility and ease in daily relations, that endeared her to every body. Her death was a terrible grief and a serious moral loss for us all. Had she lived she would have brought the greatest blessings to the house it would have been her lot to enter, as wife, mother, and mistress of a household. She would have created round herself an atmosphere of peace and content which only those who can love unselfishly are able to evoke. Your mother--of far greater beauty, exceptionally distinguished in person, manner, and intellect--had a less easy disposition. Being more brilliantly gifted, she also expected more from life. At that trying time especially, we were greatly concerned about her state. Suffering in her health from the shock of her father's death (she was alone in the house with him when he died suddenly), she was torn by the inward struggle between her love for the man whom she was to marry in the end and her knowledge of her dead father's declared objection to that match. Unable to bring herself to disregard that cherished memory and that judgment she had always respected and trusted, and, on the other hand, feeling the impossibility to resist a sentiment so deep and so true, she could not have been expected to preserve her mental and moral balance. At war with herself, she could not give to others that feeling of peace which was not her own. It was only later, when united at last with the man of her choice, that she developed those uncommon gifts of mind and heart which compelled the respect and admiration even of our foes. Meeting with calm fortitude the cruel trials of a life reflecting all the national and social misfortunes of the community, she

realized the highest conceptions of duty as a wife, a mother, and a patriot, sharing the exile of her husband and representing nobly the ideal of Polish womanhood. Our uncle Nicholas was not a man very accessible to feelings of affection. Apart from his worship for Napoleon the Great, he loved really, I believe, only three people in the world: his mother--your great-grandmother, whom you have seen but cannot possibly remember; his brother, our father, in whose house he lived for so many years; and of all of us, his nephews and nieces grown up around him, your mother alone. The modest, lovable qualities of the youngest sister he did not seem able to see. It was I who felt most profoundly this unexpected stroke of death falling upon the family less than a year after I had become its head. It was terribly unexpected. Driving home one wintry afternoon to keep me company in our empty house, where I had to remain permanently administering the estate and at tending to the complicated affairs--(the girls took it in turn week and week about)--driving, as I said, from the house of the Countess Tekla Potocka, where our invalid mother was staying then to be near a doctor, they lost the road and got stuck in a snow drift. She was alone with the coachman and old Valery, the personal servant of our late father. Impatient of delay while they were trying to dig themselves out, she jumped out of the sledge and went to look for the road herself. All this happened in '51, not ten miles from the house in which we are sitting now.

"The road was soon found, but snow had begun to fall thickly again, and they were four more hours getting home. Both the men took off their sheepskin lined greatcoats and used all their own rugs to wrap her up against the cold, notwithstanding her protests, positive orders, and even struggles, as Valery afterward related to me. 'How could I,' he remonstrated with her, 'go to meet the blessed soul of my late master if I let any harm come to you while there's a spark of life left in my body?' When they reached home at last the poor old man was stiff and speechless from exposure, and the coachman was in not much better plight, though he had the strength to drive round to the stables himself. To my reproaches for venturing out at all in such weather, she answered, characteristically, that she could not bear the thought of abandoning me to my cheerless solitude. It is incomprehensible how it was that she was allowed to start. I suppose it had to be! She made light of the cough which came on next day, but shortly afterward inflammation of the lungs set in, and in three weeks she was no more! She was the first to be taken away of the young generation under my care. Behold the vanity of all hopes and fears! I was the most frail at birth of all the children. For years I remained so delicate that my parents had but little hope of bringing me up; and yet I have survived five brothers and two sisters, and many of my contemporaries; I have outlived my wife and daughter, too--and from all those who have had some knowledge at least of

these old times you alone are left. It has been my lot to lay in an early grave many honest hearts, many brilliant promises, many hopes full of life."

He got up briskly, sighed, and left me saying, "We will dine in half an hour."

Without moving, I listened to his quick steps resounding on the waxed floor of the next room, traversing the anteroom lined with bookshelves, where he paused to put his chibouk in the pipe-stand before passing into the drawing-room (these were all en suite), where he became inaudible on the thick carpet. But I heard the door of his study-bedroom close. He was then sixty-two years old and had been for a quarter of a century the wisest, the firmest, the most indulgent of guardians, extending over me a paternal care and affection, a moral support which I seemed to feel always near me in the most distant parts of the earth.

As to Mr. Nicholas B., sub-lieutenant of 1808, lieutenant of 1813 in the French army, and for a short time _Officier d'Ordonnance_ of Marshal Marmont; afterward captain in the 2d Regiment of Mounted Rifles in the Polish army--such as it existed up to 1830 in the reduced kingdom established by the Congress of Vienna--I must say that from all that more distant past, known to me traditionally and a little _de visu_, and called out by the words of the man just gone away, he remains the most incomplete figure. It is obvious that I must have seen him in '64, for it is certain that he would not have missed the opportunity of seeing my mother for what he must have known would be the last time. From my early boyhood to this day, if I try to call up his image, a sort of mist rises before my eyes, mist in which I perceive vaguely only a neatly brushed head of white hair (which is exceptional in the case of the B. family, where it is the rule for men to go bald in a becoming manner before thirty) and a thin, curved, dignified nose, a feature in strict accordance with the physical tradition of the B. family. But it is not by these fragmentary remains of perishable mortality that he lives in my memory. I knew, at a very early age, that my granduncle Nicholas B. was a Knight of the Legion of Honour and that he had also the Polish Cross for _valour Virtuti Militari_. The knowledge of these glorious facts inspired in me an admiring veneration; yet it is not that sentiment, strong as it was, which resumes for me the force and the significance of his personality. It is over borne by another and complex impression of awe, compassion, and horror. Mr. Nicholas B. remains for me the unfortunate and miserable (but heroic) being who once upon a time had eaten a dog.

It is a good forty years since I heard the tale, and the effect has not worn off yet. I believe this is the very first, say, realistic, story I heard in my life; but all the same I don't know why I should have been so frightfully impressed.

Of course I know what our village dogs look like--but still. . . . No! At this very day, recalling the horror and compassion of my childhood, I ask myself whether I am right in disclosing to a cold and fastidious world that awful episode in the family history. I ask myself--is it right?--especially as the B. family had always been honourably known in a wide countryside for the delicacy of their tastes in the matter of eating and drinking. But upon the whole, and considering that this gastronomical degradation overtaking a gallant young officer lies really at the door of the Great Napoleon, I think that to cover it up by silence would be an exaggeration of literary restraint. Let the truth stand here. The responsibility rests with the Man of St. Helena in view of his deplorable levity in the conduct of the Russian campaign. It was during the memorable retreat from Moscow that Mr. Nicholas B., in company of two brother officers--as to whose morality and natural refinement I know nothing--bagged a dog on the outskirts of a village and subsequently devoured him. As far as I can remember the weapon used was a cavalry sabre, and the issue of the sporting episode was rather more of a matter of life and death than if it had been an encounter with a tiger. A picket of Cossacks was sleeping in that village lost in the depths of the great Lithuanian forest. The three sportsmen had observed them from a hiding-place making themselves very much at home among the huts just before the early winter darkness set in at four o'clock. They had observed them with disgust and, perhaps, with despair. Late in the night the rash counsels of hunger overcame the dictates of prudence. Crawling through the snow they crept up to the fence of dry branches which generally encloses a village in that part of Lithuania. What they expected to get and in what manner, and whether this expectation was worth the risk, goodness only knows.

However, these Cossack parties, in most cases wandering without an officer, were known to guard themselves badly and often not at all. In addition, the village lying at a great distance from the line of French retreat, they could not suspect the presence of stragglers from the Grand Army. The three officers had strayed away in a blizzard from the main column and had been lost for days in the woods, which explains sufficiently the terrible straits to which they were reduced. Their plan was to try and attract the attention of the peasants in that one of the huts which was nearest to the enclosure; but as they were preparing to venture into the very jaws of the lion, so to speak, a dog (it is mighty strange that there was but one), a creature quite as formidable under the circumstances as a lion, began to bark on the other side of the fence. . . .

At this stage of the narrative, which I heard many times (by request) from the lips of Captain Nicholas B.'s sister-in-law, my grandmother, I used to tremble with excitement.

The dog barked. And if he had done no more than bark, three officers of the Great Napoleon's army would have perished honourably on the points of Cossacks' lances, or perchance escaping the chase would have died decently of starvation. But before they had time to think of running away that fatal and revolting dog, being carried away by the excess of the zeal, dashed out through a gap in the fence. He dashed out and died. His head, I understand, was severed at one blow from his body. I understand also that later on, within the gloomy solitudes of the snow-laden woods, when, in a sheltering hollow, a fire had been lit by the party, the condition of the quarry was discovered to be distinctly unsatisfactory. It was not thin--on the contrary, it seemed unhealthily obese; its skin showed bare patches of an unpleasant character. However, they had not killed that dog for the sake of the pelt. He was large. . . . He was eaten. . . . The rest is silence. . . .

A silence in which a small boy shudders and says firmly:

"I could not have eaten that dog."

And his grandmother remarks with a smile:

"Perhaps you don't know what it is to be hungry."

I have learned something of it since. Not that I have been reduced to eat dog. I have fed on the emblematical animal, which, in the language of the volatile Gauls, is called la vache enragee; I have lived on ancient salt junk, I know the taste of shark, of trepang, of snake, of nondescript dishes containing things without a name--but of the Lithuanian village dog--never! I wish it to be distinctly understood that it is not I, but my granduncle Nicholas, of the Polish landed gentry, Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur, etc., who in his young days, had eaten the Lithuanian dog.

I wish he had not. The childish horror of the deed clings absurdly to the grizzled man. I am perfectly helpless against it. Still, if he really had to, let us charitably remember that he had eaten him on active service, while bearing up bravely against the greatest military disaster of modern history, and, in a manner, for the sake of his country. He had eaten him to appease his hunger, no doubt, but also for the sake of an unappeasable and patriotic desire, in the glow of a great faith that lives still, and in the pursuit of a great illusion kindled like a false beacon by a great man to lead astray the effort of a brave nation.

Pro patria!_

Looked at in that light, it appears a sweet and decorous meal.

And looked at in the same light, my own diet of la vache enragee appears a fatuous and extravagant form of self-indulgence; for why should I, the son of a land which such men as these have turned up with their plowshares and bedewed with their blood, undertake the pursuit of fantastic meals of salt junk and hardtack upon the wide seas? On the kindest view it seems an unanswerable question. Alas! I have the conviction that there are men of unstained rectitude who are ready to murmur scornfully the word desertion. Thus the taste of innocent adventure may be made bitter to the palate. The part of the inexplicable should be al lowed for in appraising the conduct of men in a world where no explanation is final. No charge of faithlessness ought to be lightly uttered. The appearances of this perishable life are deceptive, like everything that falls under the judgment of our imperfect senses. The inner voice may remain true enough in its secret counsel. The fidelity to a special tradition may last through the events of an unrelated existence, following faithfully, too, the traced way of an inexplicable impulse.

It would take too long to explain the intimate alliance of contradictions in human nature which makes love itself wear at times the desperate shape of betrayal. And perhaps there is no possible explanation. Indulgence--as somebody said--is the most intelligent of all the virtues. I venture to think that it is one of the least common, if not the most uncommon of all. I would not imply by this that men are foolish--or even most men. Far from it. The barber and the priest, backed by the whole opinion of the village, condemned justly the conduct of the ingenious hidalgo, who, sallying forth from his native place, broke the head of the muleteer, put to death a flock of inoffensive sheep, and went through very doleful experiences in a certain stable. God forbid that an unworthy churl should escape merited censure by hanging on to the stirrup-leather of the sublime caballero. His was a very noble, a very unselfish fantasy, fit for nothing except to raise the envy of baser mortals. But there is more than one aspect to the charm of that exalted and dangerous figure. He, too, had his frailties. After reading so many romances he desired naively to escape with his very body from the intolerable reality of things. He wished to meet, eye to eye, the valorous giant Brandabarbaran, Lord of Arabia, whose armour is made of the skin of a dragon, and whose shield, strapped to his arm, is the gate of a fortified city. Oh, amiable and natural weakness! Oh, blessed simplicity of a gentle heart without guile! Who would not succumb to such a consoling temptation? Nevertheless, it was a form of self-indulgence, and the ingenious hidalgo of La Mancha was not a good citizen. The priest and the barber were not unreasonable in their strictures. Without going so far as the old King Louis-

Philippe, who used to say in his exile, "The people are never in fault"--one may admit that there must be some righteousness in the assent of a whole village. Mad! Mad! He who kept in pious meditation the ritual vigil-of-arms by the well of an inn and knelt reverently to be knighted at daybreak by the fat, sly rogue of a landlord has come very near perfection. He rides forth, his head encircled by a halo--the patron saint of all lives spoiled or saved by the irresistible grace of imagination. But he was not a good citizen.

Perhaps that and nothing else was meant by the well-remembered exclamation of my tutor.

It was in the jolly year 1873, the very last year in which I have had a jolly holiday. There have been idle years afterward, jolly enough in a way and not altogether without their lesson, but this year of which I speak was the year of my last school-boy holiday. There are other reasons why I should remember that year, but they are too long to state formally in this place. Moreover, they have nothing to do with that holiday. What has to do with the holiday is that before the day on which the remark was made we had seen Vienna, the Upper Danube, Munich, the Falls of the Rhine, the Lake of Constance,--in fact, it was a memorable holiday of travel. Of late we had been tramping slowly up the Valley of the Reuss. It was a delightful time. It was much more like a stroll than a tramp. Landing from a Lake of Lucerne steamer in Fluelen, we found ourselves at the end of the second day, with the dusk overtaking our leisurely footsteps, a little way beyond Hospenthal. This is not the day on which the remark was made: in the shadows of the deep valley and with the habitations of men left some way behind, our thoughts ran not upon the ethics of conduct, but upon the simpler human problem of shelter and food. There did not seem anything of the kind in sight, and we were thinking of turning back when suddenly, at a bend of the road, we came upon a building, ghostly in the twilight.

At that time the work on the St. Gothard Tunnel was going on, and that magnificent enterprise of burrowing was directly responsible for the unexpected building, standing all alone upon the very roots of the mountains. It was long, though not big at all; it was low; it was built of boards, without ornamentation, in barrack-hut style, with the white window-frames quite flush with the yellow face of its plain front. And yet it was a hotel; it had even a name, which I have forgotten. But there was no gold laced doorkeeper at its humble door. A plain but vigorous servant-girl answered our inquiries, then a man and woman who owned the place appeared. It was clear that no travellers were expected, or perhaps even desired, in this strange hostelry, which in its severe style resembled the house which sur mounts the unseaworthy-looking hulls of the toy Noah's

Arks, the universal possession of European childhood. However, its roof was not hinged and it was not full to the brim of slab-sided and painted animals of wood. Even the live tourist animal was nowhere in evidence. We had something to eat in a long, narrow room at one end of a long, narrow table, which, to my tired perception and to my sleepy eyes, seemed as if it would tilt up like a see saw plank, since there was no one at the other end to balance it against our two dusty and travel-stained figures. Then we hastened up stairs to bed in a room smelling of pine planks, and I was fast asleep before my head touched the pillow.

In the morning my tutor (he was a student of the Cracow University) woke me up early, and as we were dressing remarked: "There seems to be a lot of people staying in this hotel. I have heard a noise of talking up till eleven o'clock." This statement surprised me; I had heard no noise whatever, having slept like a top.

We went down-stairs into the long and narrow dining-room with its long and narrow table. There were two rows of plates on it. At one of the many curtained windows stood a tall, bony man with a bald head set off by a bunch of black hair above each ear, and with a long, black beard. He glanced up from the paper he was reading and seemed genuinely astonished at our intrusion. By and by more men came in. Not one of them looked like a tourist. Not a single woman appeared. These men seemed to know each other with some intimacy, but I cannot say they were a very talkative lot. The bald-headed man sat down gravely at the head of the table. It all had the air of a family party. By and by, from one of the vigorous servant-girls in national costume, we discovered that the place was really a boarding house for some English engineers engaged at the works of the St. Gothard Tunnel; and I could listen my fill to the sounds of the English language, as far as it is used at a breakfast-table by men who do not believe in wasting many words on the mere amenities of life.

This was my first contact with British mankind apart from the tourist kind seen in the hotels of Zurich and Lucerne--the kind which has no real existence in a workaday world. I know now that the bald-headed man spoke with a strong Scotch accent. I have met many of his kind ashore and afloat. The second engineer of the steamer Mavis, for instance, ought to have been his twin brother. I cannot help thinking that he really was, though for some reason of his own he assured me that he never had a twin brother. Anyway, the deliberate, bald-headed Scot with the coal-black beard appeared to my boyish eyes a very romantic and mysterious person.

We slipped out unnoticed. Our mapped-out route led over the Furca Pass

toward the Rhone Glacier, with the further intention of following down the trend of the Hasli Valley. The sun was already declining when we found ourselves on the top of the pass, and the remark alluded to was presently uttered.

We sat down by the side of the road to continue the argument begun half a mile or so before. I am certain it was an argument, because I remember perfectly how my tutor argued and how without the power of reply I listened, with my eyes fixed obstinately on the ground. A stir on the road made me look up--and then I saw my unforgettable Englishman. There are acquaintances of later years, familiars, shipmates, whom I remember less clearly. He marched rapidly toward the east (attended by a hang-dog Swiss guide), with the mien of an ardent and fearless traveller. He was clad in a knickerbocker suit, but as at the same time he wore short socks under his laced boots, for reasons which, whether hygienic or conscientious, were surely imaginative, his calves, exposed to the public gaze and to the tonic air of high altitudes, dazzled the beholder by the splendour of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory. He was the leader of a small caravan. The light of a headlong, exalted satisfaction with the world of men and the scenery of mountains illumined his clean-cut, very red face, his short, silver-white whiskers, his innocently eager and triumphant eyes. In passing he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth toward the man and the boy sitting like dusty tramps by the roadside, with a modest knapsack lying at their feet. His white calves twinkled sturdily, the uncouth Swiss guide with a surly mouth stalked like an unwilling bear at his elbow; a small train of three mules followed in single file the lead of this inspiring enthusiast. Two ladies rode past, one behind the other, but from the way they sat I saw only their calm, uniform backs, and the long ends of blue veils hanging behind far down over their identical hat-brims. His two daughters, surely. An industrious luggage-mule, with unstarched ears and guarded by a slouching, sallow driver, brought up the rear. My tutor, after pausing for a look and a faint smile, resumed his earnest argument.

I tell you it was a memorable year! One does not meet such an Englishman twice in a lifetime. Was he in the mystic ordering of common events the ambassador of my future, sent out to turn the scale at a critical moment on the top of an Alpine pass, with the peaks of the Bernese Oberland for mute and solemn witnesses? His glance, his smile, the unextinguishable and comic ardour of his striving-forward appearance, helped me to pull myself together. It must be stated that on that day and in the exhilarating atmosphere of that elevated spot I had been feeling utterly crushed. It was the year in which I had first spoken aloud of my desire to go to sea. At first

like those sounds that, ranging outside the scale to which men's ears are attuned, remain inaudible to our sense of hearing, this declaration passed unperceived. It was as if it had not been. Later on, by trying various tones, I managed to arouse here and there a surprised momentary attention--the "What was that funny noise?"--sort of inquiry. Later on it was: "Did you hear what that boy said? What an extraordinary outbreak!" Presently a wave of scandalized astonishment (it could not have been greater if I had announced the intention of entering a Carthusian monastery) ebbing out of the educational and academical town of Cracow spread itself over several provinces. It spread itself shallow but far-reaching. It stirred up a mass of remonstrance, indignation, pitying wonder, bitter irony, and downright chaff. I could hardly breathe under its weight, and certainly had no words for an answer. People wondered what Mr. T. B. would do now with his worrying nephew and, I dare say, hoped kindly that he would make short work of my nonsense.

What he did was to come down all the way from Ukraine to have it out with me and to judge by himself, unprejudiced, impartial, and just, taking his stand on the ground of wisdom and affection. As far as is possible for a boy whose power of expression is still unformed I opened the secret of my thoughts to him, and he in return allowed me a glimpse into his mind and heart; the first glimpse of an inexhaustible and noble treasure of clear thought and warm feeling, which through life was to be mine to draw upon with a never-deceived love and confidence. Practically, after several exhaustive conversations, he concluded that he would not have me later on reproach him for having spoiled my life by an unconditional opposition. But I must take time for serious reflection. And I must think not only of myself but of others; weigh the claims of affection and conscience against my own sincerity of purpose. "Think well what it all means in the larger issues--my boy," he exhorted me, finally, with special friendliness. "And meantime try to get the best place you can at the yearly examinations."

The scholastic year came to an end. I took a fairly good place at the exams, which for me (for certain reasons) happened to be a more difficult task than for other boys. In that respect I could enter with a good conscience upon that holiday which was like a long visit _pour prendre conge_ of the mainland of old Europe I was to see so little of for the next four-and-twenty years. Such, however, was not the avowed purpose of that tour. It was rather, I suspect, planned in order to distract and occupy my thoughts in other directions. Nothing had been said for months of my going to sea. But my attachment to my young tutor and his influence over me were so well known that he must have received a confidential mission to talk me out of my romantic folly. It was an excellently appropriate arrangement, as neither

he nor I had ever had a single glimpse of the sea in our lives. That was to come by and by for both of us in Venice, from the outer shore of Lido. Meantime he had taken his mission to heart so well that I began to feel crushed before we reached Zurich. He argued in railway trains, in lake steamboats, he had argued away for me the obligatory sunrise on the Righi, by Jove! Of his devotion to his unworthy pupil there can be no doubt. He had proved it already by two years of unremitting and arduous care. I could not hate him. But he had been crushing me slowly, and when he started to argue on the top of the Furca Pass he was perhaps nearer a success than either he or I imagined. I listened to him in despairing silence, feeling that ghostly, unrealized, and desired sea of my dreams escape from the unnerved grip of my will.

The enthusiastic old Englishman had passed--and the argument went on. What reward could I expect from such a life at the end of my years, either in ambition, honour, or conscience? An unanswerable question. But I felt no longer crushed. Then our eyes met and a genuine emotion was visible in his as well as in mine. The end came all at once. He picked up the knapsack suddenly and got onto his feet.

"You are an incorrigible, hopeless Don Quixote. That's what you are."

I was surprised. I was only fifteen and did not know what he meant exactly. But I felt vaguely flattered at the name of the immortal knight turning up in connection with my own folly, as some people would call it to my face. Alas! I don't think there was anything to be proud of. Mine was not the stuff of protectors of forlorn damsels, the redressers of this world's wrong are made of; and my tutor was the man to know that best. Therein, in his indignation, he was superior to the barber and the priest when he flung at me an honoured name like a reproach.

I walked behind him for full five minutes; then without looking back he stopped. The shadows of distant peaks were lengthening over the Furca Pass. When I came up to him he turned to me and in full view of the Finster Aarhorn, with his band of giant brothers rearing their monstrous heads against a brilliant sky, put his hand on my shoulder affectionately.

"Well! That's enough. We will have no more of it."

And indeed there was no more question of my mysterious vocation between us. There was to be no more question of it at all, no where or with any one. We began the descent of the Furca Pass conversing merrily.

Eleven years later, month for month, I stood on Tower Hill on the steps of the St. Katherine's Dockhouse, a master in the British Merchant Service. But the man who put his hand on my shoulder at the top of the Furca Pass was no longer living.

That very year of our travels he took his degree of the Philosophical Faculty--and only then his true vocation declared itself. Obedient to the call, he entered at once upon the four-year course of the Medical Schools. A day came when, on the deck of a ship moored in Calcutta, I opened a letter telling me of the end of an enviable existence. He had made for himself a practice in some obscure little town of Austrian Galicia. And the letter went on to tell me how all the bereaved poor of the district, Christians and Jews alike, had mobbed the good doctor's coffin with sobs and lamentations at the very gate of the cemetery.

How short his years and how clear his vision! What greater reward in ambition, honour, and conscience could he have hoped to win for himself when, on the top of the Furca Pass, he bade me look well to the end of my opening life?