## Chapter IV - ‘The Young Idea’

The alterations of feeling in that first dialogue between Tom and Philip continued to make their intercourse even after many weeks of schoolboy intimacy. Tom never quite lost the feeling that Philip, being the son of a ‘rascal,’ was his natural enemy; never thoroughly overcame his repulsion to Philip's deformity. He was a boy who adhered tenaciously to impressions once received; as with all minds in which mere perception predominates over thought and emotion, the external remained to him rigidly what it was in the first instance. But then it was impossible not to like Philip's company when he was in a good humor; he could help one so well in one's Latin exercises, which Tom regarded as a kind of puzzle that could only be found out by a lucky chance; and he could tell such wonderful fighting stories about Hal of the Wynd, for example, and other heroes who were especial favorites with Tom, because they laid about them with heavy strokes. He had small opinion of Saladin, whose cimeter could cut a cushion in two in an instant; who wanted to cut cushions? That was a stupid story, and he didn't care to hear it again. But when Robert Bruce, on the black pony, rose in his stirrups, and lifting his good battle-axe, cracked at once the helmet and the skull of the too hasty knight at Bannockburn, then Tom felt all the exaltation of sympathy, and if he had had a cocoanut at hand, he would have cracked it at once with the poker. Philip in his happier moods indulged Tom to the top of his bent, heightening the crash and bang and fury of every fight with all the artillery of epithets and similes at his command. But he was not always in a good humor or happy mood. The slight spurt of peevish susceptibility which had escaped him in their first interview was a symptom of a perpetually recurring mental ailment, half of it nervous irritability, half of it the heart-bitterness produced by the sense of his deformity. In these fits of susceptibility every glance seemed to him to be charged either with offensive pity or with ill-repressed disgust; at the very least it was an indifferent glance, and Philip felt indifference as a child of the south feels the chill air of a northern spring. Poor Tom's blundering patronage when they were out of doors together would sometimes make him turn upon the well-meaning lad quite savagely; and his eyes, usually sad and quiet, would flash with anything but playful lightning. No wonder Tom retained his suspicions of the humpback.

But Philip's self-taught skill in drawing was another link between them; for Tom found, to his disgust, that his new drawing-master gave him no dogs and donkeys to draw, but brooks and rustic bridges and ruins, all with a general softness of black-lead surface, indicating that nature, if anything, was rather satiny; and as Tom's feeling for the picturesque in landscape was at present quite latent, it is not surprising that Mr Goodrich's productions seemed to him an uninteresting form of art. Mr Tulliver, having a vague intention that

Tom should be put to some business which included the drawing out of plans and maps, had complained to Mr Riley, when he saw him at Mudport, that Tom seemed to be learning nothing of that sort; whereupon that obliging adviser had suggested that Tom should have drawing-lessons. Mr Tulliver must not mind paying extra for drawing; let Tom be made a good draughtsman, and he would be able to turn his pencil to any purpose. So it was ordered that Tom should have drawing-lessons; and whom should Mr Stelling have selected as a master if not Mr Goodrich, who was considered quite at the head of his profession within a circuit of twelve miles round King's Lorton? By which means Tom learned to make an extremely fine point to his pencil, and to represent landscape with a 'broad generality,' which, doubtless from a narrow tendency in his mind to details, he thought extremely dull.

All this, you remember, happened in those dark ages when there were no schools of design; before schoolmasters were invariably men of scrupulous integrity, and before the clergy were all men of enlarged minds and varied culture. In those less favored days, it is no fable that there were other clergymen besides Mr Stelling who had narrow intellects and large wants, and whose income, by a logical confusion to which Fortune, being a female as well as blindfold, is peculiarly liable, was proportioned not to their wants but to their intellect, with which income has clearly no inherent relation. The problem these gentlemen had to solve was to readjust the proportion between their wants and their income; and since wants are not easily starved to death, the simpler method appeared to be to raise their income. There was but one way of doing this; any of those low callings in which men are obliged to do good work at a low price were forbidden to clergymen; was it their fault if their only resource was to turn out very poor work at a high price? Besides, how should Mr Stelling be expected to know that education was a delicate and difficult business, any more than an animal endowed with a power of boring a hole through a rock should be expected to have wide views of excavation? Mr Stelling's faculties had been early trained to boring in a straight line, and he had no faculty to spare. But among Tom's contemporaries, whose fathers cast their sons on clerical instruction to find them ignorant after many days, there were many far less lucky than Tom Tulliver. Education was almost entirely a matter of luck - usually of ill-luck - in those distant days. The state of mind in which you take a billiard-cue or a dice-box in your hand is one of sober certainty compared with that of old-fashioned fathers, like Mr Tulliver, when they selected a school or a tutor for their sons. Excellent men, who had been forced all their lives to spell on an impromptu-phonetic system, and having carried on a successful business in spite of this disadvantage, had acquired money enough to give their sons a better start in life than they had had themselves, must necessarily take their chance as to the conscience and the competence of the schoolmaster

whose circular fell in their way, and appeared to promise so much more than they would ever have thought of asking for, including the return of linen, fork, and spoon. It was happy for them if some ambitious draper of their acquaintance had not brought up his son to the Church, and if that young gentleman, at the age of four-and-twenty, had not closed his college dissipations by an imprudent marriage; otherwise, these innocent fathers, desirous of doing the best for their offspring, could only escape the draper's son by happening to be on the foundation of a grammar-school as yet unvisited by commissioners, where two or three boys could have, all to themselves, the advantages of a large and lofty building, together with a head-master, toothless, dim-eyed and deaf, whose erudite indistinctness and inattention were engrossed by them at the rate of three hundred pounds a-head, - a ripe scholar, doubtless, when first appointed; but all ripeness beneath the sun has a further stage less esteemed in the market.

Tom Tulliver, then, compared with many other British youths of his time who have since had to scramble through life with some fragments of more or less relevant knowledge, and a great deal of strictly relevant ignorance, was not so very unlucky. Mr Stelling was a broad-chested, healthy man, with the bearing of a gentleman, a conviction that a growing boy required a sufficiency of beef, and a certain hearty kindness in him that made him like to see Tom looking well and enjoying his dinner; not a man of refined conscience, or with any deep sense of the infinite issues belonging to every-day duties, not quite competent to his high offices; but incompetent gentlemen must live, and without private fortune it is difficult to see how they could all live genteelly if they had nothing to do with education or government. Besides, it was the fault of Tom's mental constitution that his faculties could not be nourished on the sort of knowledge Mr Stelling had to communicate. A boy born with a deficient power of apprehending signs and abstractions must suffer the penalty of his congenital deficiency, just as if he had been born with one leg shorter than the other. A method of education sanctioned by the long practice of our venerable ancestors was not to give way before the exceptional dulness of a boy who was merely living at the time then present. And Mr Stelling was convinced that a boy so stupid at signs and abstractions must be stupid at everything else, even if that reverend gentleman could have taught him everything else. It was the practice of our venerable ancestors to apply that ingenious instrument the thumb-screw, and to tighten and tighten it in order to elicit non-existent facts; they had a fixed opinion to begin with, that the facts were existent, and what had they to do but to tighten the thumb-screw? In like manner, Mr Stelling had a fixed opinion that all boys with any capacity could learn what it was the only regular thing to teach; if they were slow, the thumb-screw must be tightened, - the exercises must be insisted on with increased severity, and a page of

Virgil be awarded as a penalty, to encourage and stimulate a too languid inclination to Latin verse.

The thumb-screw was a little relaxed, however, during this second half-year. Philip was so advanced in his studies, and so apt, that Mr Stelling could obtain credit by his facility, which required little help, much more easily than by the troublesome process of overcoming Tom's dulness. Gentlemen with broad chests and ambitious intentions do sometimes disappoint their friends by failing to carry the world before them. Perhaps it is that high achievements demand some other unusual qualification besides an unusual desire for high prizes; perhaps it is that these stalwart gentlemen are rather indolent, their *divinae particulum aurae* being obstructed from soaring by a too hearty appetite. Some reason or other there was why Mr Stelling deferred the execution of many spirited projects, - why he did not begin the editing of his Greek play, or any other work of scholarship, in his leisure hours, but, after turning the key of his private study with much resolution, sat down to one of Theodore Hook's novels. Tom was gradually allowed to shuffle through his lessons with less rigor, and having Philip to help him, he was able to make some show of having applied his mind in a confused and blundering way, without being cross-examined into a betrayal that his mind had been entirely neutral in the matter. He thought school much more bearable under this modification of circumstances; and he went on contentedly enough, picking up a promiscuous education chiefly from things that were not intended as education at all. What was understood to be his education was simply the practice of reading, writing, and spelling, carried on by an elaborate appliance of unintelligible ideas, and by much failure in the effort to learn by rote.

Nevertheless, there was a visible improvement in Tom under this training; perhaps because he was not a boy in the abstract, existing solely to illustrate the evils of a mistaken education, but a boy made of flesh and blood, with dispositions not entirely at the mercy of circumstances.

There was a great improvement in his bearing, for example; and some credit on this score was due to Mr Poulter, the village schoolmaster, who, being an old Peninsular soldier, was employed to drill Tom, - a source of high mutual pleasure. Mr Poulter, who was understood by the company at the Black Swan to have once struck terror into the hearts of the French, was no longer personally formidable. He had rather a shrunken appearance, and was tremulous in the mornings, not from age, but from the extreme perversity of the King's Lorton boys, which nothing but gin could enable him to sustain with any firmness. Still, he carried himself with martial erectness, had his clothes scrupulously brushed, and his trousers tightly strapped; and on the Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, when he came to Tom,

he was always inspired with gin and old memories, which gave him an exceptionally spirited air, as of a superannuated charger who hears the drum. The drilling-lessons were always protracted by episodes of warlike narrative, much more interesting to Tom than Philip's stories out of the Iliad; for there were no cannon in the Iliad, and besides, Tom had felt some disgust on learning that Hector and Achilles might possibly never have existed. But the Duke of Wellington was really alive, and Bony had not been long dead; therefore Mr Poulter's reminiscences of the Peninsular War were removed from all suspicion of being mythical. Mr Poulter, it appeared, had been a conspicuous figure at Talavera, and had contributed not a little to the peculiar terror with which his regiment of infantry was regarded by the enemy. On afternoons when his memory was more stimulated than usual, he remembered that the Duke of Wellington had (in strict privacy, lest jealousies should be awakened) expressed his esteem for that fine fellow Poulter. The very surgeon who attended him in the hospital after he had received his gunshot-wound had been profoundly impressed with the superiority of Mr Poulter's flesh, - no other flesh would have healed in anything like the same time. On less personal matters connected with the important warfare in which he had been engaged, Mr Poulter was more reticent, only taking care not to give the weight of his authority to any loose notions concerning military history. Any one who pretended to a knowledge of what occurred at the siege of Badajos was especially an object of silent pity to Mr Poulter; he wished that prating person had been run down, and had the breath trampled out of him at the first go-off, as he himself had, - he might talk about the siege of Badajos then! Tom did not escape irritating his drilling-master occasionally, by his curiosity concerning other military matters than Mr Poulter's personal experience.

‘And General Wolfe, Mr Poulter, - wasn't he a wonderful fighter?’ said Tom, who held the notion that all the martial heroes commemorated on the public-house signs were engaged in the war with Bony.

‘Not at all!’ said Mr Poulter, contemptuously. ‘Nothing o' the sort! Heads up!’ he added, in a tone of stern command, which delighted Tom, and made him feel as if he were a regiment in his own person.

‘No, no!’ Mr Poulter would continue, on coming to a pause in his discipline; ‘they'd better not talk to me about General Wolfe. He did nothing but die of his wound; that's a poor haction, I consider. Any other man 'ud have died o' the wounds I've had. One of my sword-cuts 'ud ha' killed a fellow like General Wolfe.’

‘Mr Poulter,’ Tom would say, at any allusion to the sword, ‘I wish you'd bring your sword and do the sword-exercise!’

For a long while Mr Poulter only shook his head in a significant manner at this request, and smiled patronizingly, as Jupiter may have done when Semele urged her too ambitious request. But one afternoon, when a sudden shower of heavy rain had detained Mr Poulter twenty minutes longer than usual at the Black Swan, the sword was brought, - just for Tom to look at.

'And this is the real sword you fought with in all the battles, Mr Poulter?' said Tom, handling the hilt. 'Has it ever cut a Frenchman's head off?'

'Head off? Ah! and would, if he'd had three heads.'

'But you had a gun and bayonet besides?' said Tom. '*I* should like the gun and bayonet best, because you could shoot 'em first and spear 'em after. Bang! Ps-s-s-s!' Tom gave the requisite pantomime to indicate the double enjoyment of pulling the trigger and thrusting the spear.

'Ah, but the sword's the thing when you come to close fighting,' said Mr Poulter, involuntarily falling in with Tom's enthusiasm, and drawing the sword so suddenly that Tom leaped back with much agility.

'Oh, but, Mr Poulter, if you're going to do the exercise,' said Tom, a little conscious that he had not stood his ground as became an Englishman, 'let me go and call Philip. He'll like to see you, you know.'

'What! the humpbacked lad?' said Mr Poulter, contemptuously; 'what's the use of *his* looking on?'

'Oh, but he knows a great deal about fighting,' said Tom, 'and how they used to fight with bows and arrows, and battle-axes.'

'Let him come, then. I'll show him something different from his bows and arrows,' said Mr Poulter, coughing and drawing himself up, while he gave a little preliminary play to his wrist.

Tom ran in to Philip, who was enjoying his afternoon's holiday at the piano, in the drawing-room, picking out tunes for himself and singing them. He was supremely happy, perched like an amorphous bundle on the high stool, with his head thrown back, his eyes fixed on the opposite cornice, and his lips wide open, sending forth, with all his might, impromptu syllables to a tune of Arne's which had hit his fancy.

'Come, Philip,' said Tom, bursting in; 'don't stay roaring 'la la' there; come and see old Poulter do his sword-exercise in the carriage-house!'

The jar of this interruption, the discord of Tom's tones coming across the notes to which Philip was vibrating in soul and body, would have been enough to unhinge his temper, even if there had been no question of Poulter the drilling-master; and Tom, in the hurry of seizing something to say to prevent Mr Poulter from thinking he was afraid of the sword when he sprang away from it, had alighted on this proposition to fetch Philip, though he knew well enough that Philip hated to hear him mention his drilling-lessons. Tom would never have done so inconsiderate a thing except under the severe stress of his personal pride.

Philip shuddered visibly as he paused from his music. Then turning red, he said, with violent passion, -

'Get away, you lumbering idiot! Don't come bellowing at me; you're not fit to speak to anything but a cart-horse!'

It was not the first time Philip had been made angry by him, but Tom had never before been assailed with verbal missiles that he understood so well.

'I'm fit to speak to something better than you, you poor-spirited imp!' said Tom, lighting up immediately at Philip's fire. 'You know I won't hit you, because you're no better than a girl. But I'm an honest man's son, and *your* father's a rogue; everybody says so!'

Tom flung out of the room, and slammed the door after him, made strangely heedless by his anger; for to slam doors within the hearing of Mrs Stelling, who was probably not far off, was an offence only to be wiped out by twenty lines of Virgil. In fact, that lady did presently descend from her room, in double wonder at the noise and the subsequent cessation of Philip's music. She found him sitting in a heap on the hassock, and crying bitterly.

'What's the matter, Wakem? what was that noise about? Who slammed the door?'

Philip looked up, and hastily dried his eyes. 'It was Tulliver who came in - to ask me to go out with him.'

'And what are you in trouble about?' said Mrs Stelling.

Philip was not her favorite of the two pupils; he was less obliging than Tom, who was made useful in many ways. Still, his father paid more than Mr Tulliver did, and she meant him to feel that she behaved exceedingly well to him. Philip, however, met her advances toward a good understanding very much as a caressed mollusk meets an invitation to show himself out of his shell. Mrs Stelling was not a

loving, tender-hearted woman; she was a woman whose skirt sat well, who adjusted her waist and patted her curls with a preoccupied air when she inquired after your welfare. These things, doubtless, represent a great social power, but it is not the power of love; and no other power could win Philip from his personal reserve.

He said, in answer to her question, ‘My toothache came on, and made me hysterical again.’

This had been the fact once, and Philip was glad of the recollection; it was like an inspiration to enable him to excuse his crying. He had to accept eau-de-Cologne and to refuse creosote in consequence; but that was easy.

Meanwhile Tom, who had for the first time sent a poisoned arrow into Philip's heart, had returned to the carriage-house, where he found Mr Poulter, with a fixed and earnest eye, wasting the perfections of his sword-exercise on probably observant but inappreciative rats. But Mr Poulter was a host in himself; that is to say, he admired himself more than a whole army of spectators could have admired him. He took no notice of Tom's return, being too entirely absorbed in the cut and thrust, - the solemn one, two, three, four; and Tom, not without a slight feeling of alarm at Mr Poulter's fixed eye and hungry-looking sword, which seemed impatient for something else to cut besides the air, admired the performance from as great a distance as possible. It was not until Mr Poulter paused and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, that Tom felt the full charm of the sword-exercise, and wished it to be repeated.

‘Mr Poulter,’ said Tom, when the sword was being finally sheathed, ‘I wish you'd lend me your sword a little while to keep.’

‘No no, young gentleman,’ said Mr Poulter, shaking his head decidedly; ‘you might do yourself some mischief with it.’

‘No, I'm sure I wouldn't; I'm sure I'd take care and not hurt myself. I shouldn't take it out of the sheath much, but I could ground arms with it, and all that.’

‘No, no, it won't do, I tell you; it won't do,’ said Mr Poulter, preparing to depart. ‘What 'ud Mr Stelling say to me?’

‘Oh, I say, do, Mr Poulter! I'd give you my five-shilling piece if you'd let me keep the sword a week. Look here!’ said Tom, reaching out the attractively large round of silver. The young dog calculated the effect as well as if he had been a philosopher.

‘Well,’ said Mr Poulter, with still deeper gravity, ‘you must keep it out of sight, you know.’

‘Oh yes, I'll keep it under the bed,’ said Tom, eagerly, ‘or else at the bottom of my large box.’

‘And let me see, now, whether you can draw it out of the sheath without hurting yourself.’ That process having been gone through more than once, Mr Poulter felt that he had acted with scrupulous conscientiousness, and said, ‘Well, now, Master Tulliver, if I take the crown-piece, it is to make sure as you'll do no mischief with the sword.’

‘Oh no, indeed, Mr Poulter,’ said Tom, delightedly handing him the crown-piece, and grasping the sword, which, he thought, might have been lighter with advantage.

‘But if Mr Stelling catches you carrying it in?’ said Mr Poulter, pocketing the crown-piece provisionally while he raised this new doubt.

‘Oh, he always keeps in his upstairs study on Saturday afternoon,’ said Tom, who disliked anything sneaking, but was not disinclined to a little stratagem in a worthy cause. So he carried off the sword in triumph mixed with dread - dread that he might encounter Mr or Mrs Stelling - to his bedroom, where, after some consideration, he hid it in the closet behind some hanging clothes. That night he fell asleep in the thought that he would astonish Maggie with it when she came, - tie it round his waist with his red comforter, and make her believe that the sword was his own, and that he was going to be a soldier. There was nobody but Maggie who would be silly enough to believe him, or whom he dared allow to know he had a sword; and Maggie was really coming next week to see Tom, before she went to a boarding-school with Lucy.

If you think a lad of thirteen would have been so childish, you must be an exceptionally wise man, who, although you are devoted to a civil calling, requiring you to look bland rather than formidable, yet never, since you had a beard, threw yourself into a martial attitude, and frowned before the looking-glass. It is doubtful whether our soldiers would be maintained if there were not pacific people at home who like to fancy themselves soldiers. War, like other dramatic spectacles, might possibly cease for want of a ‘public.’