

XXXI. WITH HIS PROSY OLD GUIDE-BOOK, HE TAKES A PROSY STROLL
THROUGH THE
TOWN

When I left home, I took the green morocco guide-book along, supposing that from the great number of ships going to Liverpool, I would most probably ship on board of one of them, as the event itself proved.

Great was my boyish delight at the prospect of visiting a place, the infallible clew to all whose intricacies I held in my hand.

On the passage out I studied its pages a good deal. In the first place, I grounded myself thoroughly in the history and antiquities of the town, as set forth in the chapter I intended to quote. Then I mastered the columns of statistics, touching the advance of population; and pored over them, as I used to do over my multiplication-table. For I was determined to make the whole subject my own; and not be content with a mere smattering of the thing, as is too much the custom with most students of guide-books. Then I perused one by one the elaborate descriptions of public edifices, and scrupulously compared the text with the corresponding engraving, to see whether they corroborated each other. For be it known that, including the map, there were no less than seventeen plates in the work. And by often examining them, I had so impressed every column and cornice in my mind, that I had no doubt of recognizing the originals in a moment.

In short, when I considered that my own father had used this very guide-book, and that thereby it had been thoroughly tested, and its fidelity proved beyond a peradventure; I could not but think that I was building myself up in an unerring knowledge of Liverpool; especially as I had familiarized myself with the map, and could turn sharp corners on it, with marvelous confidence and celerity.

In imagination, as I lay in my berth on ship-board, I used to take pleasant afternoon rambles through the town; down St. James-street and up Great George's, stopping at various places of interest and attraction. I began to think I had been born in Liverpool, so familiar seemed all the features of the map. And though some of the streets there depicted were thickly involved, endlessly angular and crooked, like the map of Boston, in Massachusetts, yet, I made no doubt, that I could march through them in the darkest night, and even run for the most distant dock upon a pressing emergency.

Dear delusion!

It never occurred to my boyish thoughts, that though a guide-book, fifty years old, might have done good service in its day, yet it would prove but a miserable cicerone to a modern. I little imagined that the Liverpool my father saw, was another Liverpool from that to which I, his son Wellingborough was sailing. No; these things never obtruded; so accustomed had I been to associate my old morocco guide-book with the

town it described, that the bare thought of there being any discrepancy, never entered my mind.

While we lay in the Mersey, before entering the dock, I got out my guide-book to see how the map would compare with the identical place itself. But they bore not the slightest resemblance. However, thinks I, this is owing to my taking a horizontal view, instead of a bird's-eye survey. So, never mind old guide-book, you, at least, are all right.

But my faith received a severe shock that same evening, when the crew went ashore to supper, as I have previously related.

The men stopped at a curious old tavern, near the Prince's Dock's walls; and having my guide-book in my pocket, I drew it forth to compare notes, when I found, that precisely upon the spot where I and my shipmates were standing, and a cherry-cheeked bar-maid was filling their glasses, my infallible old Morocco, in that very place, located a fort; adding, that it was well worth the intelligent stranger's while to visit it for the purpose of beholding the guard relieved in the evening.

This was a staggerer; for how could a tavern be mistaken for a castle? and this was about the hour mentioned for the guard to turn out; yet not a red coat was to be seen. But for all this, I could not, for one small discrepancy, condemn the old family servant who had so faithfully served my own father before me; and when I learned that this tavern went by the name of "The Old Fort Tavern;" and when I was told that many of the old

stones were yet in the walls, I almost completely exonerated my guide-book from the half-insinuated charge of misleading me.

The next day was Sunday, and I had it all to myself; and now, thought I, my guide-book and I shall have a famous ramble up street and down lane, even unto the furthest limits of this Liverpool.

I rose bright and early; from head to foot performed my ablutions "with Eastern scrupulosity," and I arrayed myself in my red shirt and shooting-jacket, and the sportsman's pantaloons; and crowned my entire man with the tarpaulin; so that from this curious combination of clothing, and particularly from my red shirt, I must have looked like a very strange compound indeed: three parts sportsman, and two soldier, to one of the sailor.

My shipmates, of course, made merry at my appearance; but I heeded them not; and after breakfast, jumped ashore, full of brilliant anticipations.

My gait was erect, and I was rather tall for my age; and that may have been the reason why, as I was rapidly walking along the dock, a drunken sailor passing, exclaimed, "Eyes right! quick step there!"

Another fellow stopped me to know whether I was going fox-hunting; and one of the dock-police, stationed at the gates, after peeping out upon me from his sentry box, a snug little den, furnished with benches and

newspapers, and hung round with storm jackets and oiled capes, issued forth in a great hurry, crossed my path as I was emerging into the street, and commanded me to halt! I obeyed; when scanning my appearance pertinaciously, he desired to know where I got that tarpaulin hat, not being able to account for the phenomenon of its roofing the head of a broken-down fox-hunter. But I pointed to my ship, which lay at no great distance; when remarking from my voice that I was a Yankee, this faithful functionary permitted me to pass.

It must be known that the police stationed at the gates of the docks are extremely observant of strangers going out; as many thefts are perpetrated on board the ships; and if they chance to see any thing suspicious, they probe into it without mercy. Thus, the old men who buy "shakings," and rubbish from vessels, must turn their bags wrong side out before the police, ere they are allowed to go outside the walls. And often they will search a suspicious looking fellow's clothes, even if he be a very thin man, with attenuated and almost imperceptible pockets.

But where was I going?

I will tell. My intention was in the first place, to visit Riddough's Hotel, where my father had stopped, more than thirty years before: and then, with the map in my hand, follow him through all the town, according to the dotted lines in the diagram. For thus would I be performing a filial pilgrimage to spots which would be hallowed in my eyes.

At last, when I found myself going down Old Hall-street toward Lord-street, where the hotel was situated, according to my authority; and when, taking out my map, I found that Old Hall-street was marked there, through its whole extent with my father's pen; a thousand fond, affectionate emotions rushed around my heart.

Yes, in this very street, thought I, nay, on this very flagging my father walked. Then I almost wept, when I looked down on my sorry apparel, and marked how the people regarded me; the men staring at so grotesque a young stranger, and the old ladies, in beaver hats and ruffles, crossing the walk a little to shun me.

How differently my father must have appeared; perhaps in a blue coat, buff vest, and Hessian boots. And little did he think, that a son of his would ever visit Liverpool as a poor friendless sailor-boy. But I was not born then: no, when he walked this flagging, I was not so much as thought of; I was not included in the census of the universe. My own father did not know me then; and had never seen, or heard, or so much as dreamed of me. And that thought had a touch of sadness to me; for if it had certainly been, that my own parent, at one time, never cast a thought upon me, how might it be with me hereafter? Poor, poor Wellingborough! thought I, miserable boy! you are indeed friendless and forlorn. Here you wander a stranger in a strange town, and the very thought of your father's having been here before you, but carries with it the reflection that, he then knew you not, nor cared for you one

whit.

But dispelling these dismal reflections as well as I could, I pushed on my way, till I got to Chapel-street, which I crossed; and then, going under a cloister-like arch of stone, whose gloom and narrowness delighted me, and filled my Yankee soul with romantic thoughts of old Abbeys and Minsters, I emerged into the fine quadrangle of the Merchants' Exchange.

There, leaning against the colonnade, I took out my map, and traced my father right across Chapel-street, and actually through the very arch at my back, into the paved square where I stood.

So vivid was now the impression of his having been here, and so narrow the passage from which he had emerged, that I felt like running on, and overtaking him around the Town Hall adjoining, at the head of Castle-street. But I soon checked myself, when remembering that he had gone whither no son's search could find him in this world. And then I thought of all that must have happened to him since he paced through that arch. What trials and troubles he had encountered; how he had been shaken by many storms of adversity, and at last died a bankrupt. I looked at my own sorry garb, and had much ado to keep from tears.

But I rallied, and gazed round at the sculptured stonework, and turned to my guide-book, and looked at the print of the spot. It was correct to a pillar; but wanted the central ornament of the quadrangle. This,

however, was but a slight subsequent erection, which ought not to militate against the general character of my friend for comprehensiveness.

The ornament in question is a group of statuary in bronze, elevated upon a marble pedestal and basement, representing Lord Nelson expiring in the arms of Victory. One foot rests on a rolling foe, and the other on a cannon. Victory is dropping a wreath on the dying admiral's brow; while Death, under the similitude of a hideous skeleton, is insinuating his bony hand under the hero's robe, and groping after his heart. A very striking design, and true to the imagination; I never could look at Death without a shudder.

At uniform intervals round the base of the pedestal, four naked figures in chains, somewhat larger than life, are seated in various attitudes of humiliation and despair. One has his leg recklessly thrown over his knee, and his head bowed over, as if he had given up all hope of ever feeling better. Another has his head buried in despondency, and no doubt looks mournfully out of his eyes, but as his face was averted at the time, I could not catch the expression. These woe-begone figures of captives are emblematic of Nelson's principal victories; but I never could look at their swarthy limbs and manacles, without being involuntarily reminded of four African slaves in the market-place.

And my thoughts would revert to Virginia and Carolina; and also to the historical fact, that the African slave-trade once constituted the

principal commerce of Liverpool; and that the prosperity of the town was once supposed to have been indissolubly linked to its prosecution. And I remembered that my father had often spoken to gentlemen visiting our house in New York, of the unhappiness that the discussion of the abolition of this trade had occasioned in Liverpool; that the struggle between sordid interest and humanity had made sad havoc at the fire-sides of the merchants; estranged sons from sires; and even separated husband from wife. And my thoughts reverted to my father's friend, the good and great Roscoe, the intrepid enemy of the trade; who in every way exerted his fine talents toward its suppression; writing a poem ("the Wrongs of Africa"), several pamphlets; and in his place in Parliament, he delivered a speech against it, which, as coming from a member for Liverpool, was supposed to have turned many votes, and had no small share in the triumph of sound policy and humanity that ensued.

How this group of statuary affected me, may be inferred from the fact, that I never went through Chapel-street without going through the little arch to look at it again. And there, night or day, I was sure to find Lord Nelson still falling back; Victory's wreath still hovering over his swordpoint; and Death grim and grasping as ever; while the four bronze captives still lamented their captivity.

Now, as I lingered about the railing of the statuary, on the Sunday I have mentioned, I noticed several persons going in and out of an apartment, opening from the basement under the colonnade; and, advancing, I perceived that this was a news-room, full of files of

papers. My love of literature prompted me to open the door and step in; but a glance at my soiled shooting-jacket prompted a dignified looking personage to step up and shut the door in my face. I deliberated a minute what I should do to him; and at last resolutely determined to let him alone, and pass on; which I did; going down Castle-street (so called from a castle which once stood there, said my guide-book), and turning down into Lord.

Arrived at the foot of the latter street, I in vain looked round for the hotel. How serious a disappointment was this may well be imagined, when it is considered that I was all eagerness to behold the very house at which my father stopped; where he slept and dined, smoked his cigar, opened his letters, and read the papers. I inquired of some gentlemen and ladies where the missing hotel was; but they only stared and passed on; until I met a mechanic, apparently, who very civilly stopped to hear my questions and give me an answer.

"Riddough's Hotel?" said he, "upon my word, I think I have heard of such a place; let me see--yes, yes--that was the hotel where my father broke his arm, helping to pull down the walls. My lad, you surely can't be inquiring for Riddough's Hotel! What do you want to find there?"

"Oh! nothing," I replied, "I am much obliged for your information"--and away I walked.

Then, indeed, a new light broke in upon me concerning my guide-book; and

all my previous dim suspicions were almost confirmed. It was nearly half a century behind the age! and no more fit to guide me about the town, than the map of Pompeii.

It was a sad, a solemn, and a most melancholy thought. The book on which I had so much relied; the book in the old morocco cover; the book with the cocked-hat corners; the book full of fine old family associations; the book with seventeen plates, executed in the highest style of art; this precious book was next to useless. Yes, the thing that had guided the father, could not guide the son. And I sat down on a shop step, and gave loose to meditation.

Here, now, oh, Wellingborough, thought I, learn a lesson, and never forget it. This world, my boy, is a moving world; its Riddough's Hotels are forever being pulled down; it never stands still; and its sands are forever shifting. This very harbor of Liverpool is gradually filling up, they say; and who knows what your son (if you ever have one) may behold, when he comes to visit Liverpool, as long after you as you come after his grandfather. And, Wellingborough, as your father's guidebook is no guide for you, neither would yours (could you afford to buy a modern one to-day) be a true guide to those who come after you. Guide-books, Wellingborough, are the least reliable books in all literature; and nearly all literature, in one sense, is made up of guide-books. Old ones tell us the ways our fathers went, through the thoroughfares and courts of old; but how few of those former places can their posterity trace, amid avenues of modern erections; to how few is the old guide-book now a

clew! Every age makes its own guidebooks, and the old ones are used for waste paper. But there is one Holy Guide-Book, Wellingborough, that will never lead you astray, if you but follow it aright; and some noble monuments that remain, though the pyramids crumble.

But though I rose from the door-step a sadder and a wiser boy, and though my guide-book had been stripped of its reputation for infallibility, I did not treat with contumely or disdain, those sacred pages which had once been a beacon to my sire.

No.--Poor old guide-book, thought I, tenderly stroking its back, and smoothing the dog-ears with reverence; I will not use you with despite, old Morocco! and you will yet prove a trusty conductor through many old streets in the old parts of this town; even if you are at fault, now and then, concerning a Riddough's Hotel, or some other forgotten thing of the past. As I fondly glanced over the leaves, like one who loves more than he chides, my eye lighted upon a passage concerning "The Old Dock," which much aroused my curiosity. I determined to see the place without delay: and walking on, in what I presumed to be the right direction, at last found myself before a spacious and splendid pile of sculptured brown stone; and entering the porch, perceived from incontrovertible tokens that it must be the Custom-house. After admiring it awhile, I took out my guide-book again; and what was my amazement at discovering that, according to its authority, I was entirely mistaken with regard to this Custom-house; for precisely where I stood, "The Old Dock" must be standing, and reading on concerning it, I met with this very apposite

passage:--"The first idea that strikes the stranger in coming to this dock, is the singularity of so great a number of ships afloat in the very heart of the town, without discovering any connection with the sea."

Here, now, was a poser! Old Morocco confessed that there was a good deal of "singularity" about the thing; nor did he pretend to deny that it was, without question, amazing, that this fabulous dock should seem to have no connection with the sea! However, the same author went on to say, that the "astonished stranger must suspend his wonder for awhile, and turn to the left." But, right or left, no place answering to the description was to be seen.

This was too confounding altogether, and not to be easily accounted for, even by making ordinary allowances for the growth and general improvement of the town in the course of years. So, guide-book in hand, I accosted a policeman standing by, and begged him to tell me whether he was acquainted with any place in that neighborhood called the "Old Dock." The man looked at me wonderingly at first, and then seeing I was apparently sane, and quite civil into the bargain, he whipped his well-polished boot with his rattan, pulled up his silver-laced coat-collar, and initiated me into a knowledge of the following facts.

It seems that in this place originally stood the "pool," from which the town borrows a part of its name, and which originally wound round the greater part of the old settlements; that this pool was made into the

"Old Dock," for the benefit of the shipping; but that, years ago, it had been filled up, and furnished the site for the Custom-house before me.

I now eyed the spot with a feeling somewhat akin to the Eastern traveler standing on the brink of the Dead Sea. For here the doom of Gomorrah seemed reversed, and a lake had been converted into substantial stone and mortar.

Well, well, Wellingborough, thought I, you had better put the book into your pocket, and carry it home to the Society of Antiquaries; it is several thousand leagues and odd furlongs behind the march of improvement. Smell its old morocco binding, Wellingborough; does it not smell somewhat mummy-ish? Does it not remind you of Cheops and the Catacombs? I tell you it was written before the lost books of Livy, and is cousin-german to that irrecoverably departed volume, entitled, "The Wars of the Lord" quoted by Moses in the Pentateuch. Put it up, Wellingborough, put it up, my dear friend; and hereafter follow your nose throughout Liverpool; it will stick to you through thick and thin: and be your ship's mainmast and St. George's spire your landmarks.

No!--And again I rubbed its back softly, and gently adjusted a loose leaf: No, no, I'll not give you up yet. Forth, old Morocco! and lead me in sight of the venerable Abbey of Birkenhead; and let these eager eyes behold the mansion once occupied by the old earls of Derby!

For the book discoursed of both places, and told how the Abbey was on

the Cheshire shore, full in view from a point on the Lancashire side, covered over with ivy, and brilliant with moss! And how the house of the noble Derby's was now a common jail of the town; and how that circumstance was full of suggestions, and pregnant with wisdom!

But, alas! I never saw the Abbey; at least none was in sight from the water: and as for the house of the earls, I never saw that.

Ah me, and ten times alas! am I to visit old England in vain? in the land of Thomas-a-Becket and stout John of Gaunt, not to catch the least glimpse of priory or castle? Is there nothing in all the British empire but these smoky ranges of old shops and warehouses? is Liverpool but a brick-kiln? Why, no buildings here look so ancient as the old gable-pointed mansion of my maternal grandfather at home, whose bricks were brought from Holland long before the revolutionary war! Tis a deceit--a gull--a sham--a hoax! This boasted England is no older than the State of New York: if it is, show me the proofs--point out the vouchers. Where's the tower of Julius Caesar? Where's the Roman wall? Show me Stonehenge!

But, Wellingborough, I remonstrated with myself, you are only in Liverpool; the old monuments lie to the north, south, east, and west of you; you are but a sailor-boy, and you can not expect to be a great tourist, and visit the antiquities, in that preposterous shooting-jacket of yours. Indeed, you can not, my boy.

True, true--that's it. I am not the traveler my father was. I am only a common-carrier across the Atlantic.

After a weary day's walk, I at last arrived at the sign of the Baltimore Clipper to supper; and Handsome Mary poured me out a brimmer of tea, in which, for the time, I drowned all my melancholy.