

BOOK XX.

CHARLIE MILLTHORPE.

I.

Pierre had been induced to take chambers at the Apostles', by one of the Apostles themselves, an old acquaintance of his, and a native of Saddle Meadows.

Millthorpe was the son of a very respectable farmer--now dead--of more than common intelligence, and whose bowed shoulders and homely garb had still been surmounted by a head fit for a Greek philosopher, and features so fine and regular that they would have well graced an opulent gentleman. The political and social levelings and confoundings of all manner of human elements in America, produce many striking individual anomalies unknown in other lands. Pierre well remembered old farmer Millthorpe:--the handsome, melancholy, calm-tempered, mute, old man; in whose countenance--refinedly ennobled by nature, and yet coarsely tanned and attenuated by many a prolonged day's work in the harvest--rusticity and classicalness were strangely united. The delicate profile of his face, bespoke the loftiest aristocracy; his knobbed and bony hands resembled a beggar's.

Though for several generations the Millthorpes had lived on the

Glendinning lands, they loosely and unostentatiously traced their origin to an emigrating English Knight, who had crossed the sea in the time of the elder Charles. But that indigence which had prompted the knight to forsake his courtly country for the howling wilderness, was the only remaining hereditament left to his bedwindled descendants in the fourth and fifth remove. At the time that Pierre first recollected this interesting man, he had, a year or two previous, abandoned an ample farm on account of absolute inability to meet the manorial rent, and was become the occupant of a very poor and contracted little place, on which was a small and half-ruinous house. There, he then harbored with his wife,--a very gentle and retiring person,--his three little daughters, and his only son, a lad of Pierre's own age. The hereditary beauty and youthful bloom of this boy; his sweetness of temper, and something of natural refinement as contrasted with the unrelieved rudeness, and oftentimes sordidness, of his neighbors; these things had early attracted the sympathetic, spontaneous friendliness of Pierre. They were often wont to take their boyish rambles together; and even the severely critical Mrs. Glendinning, always fastidiously cautious as to the companions of Pierre, had never objected to his intimacy with so prepossessing and handsome a rustic as Charles.

Boys are often very swiftly acute in forming a judgment on character. The lads had not long companioned, ere Pierre concluded, that however fine his face, and sweet his temper, young Millthorpe was but little vigorous in mind; besides possessing a certain constitutional, sophomorean presumption and egotism; which, however, having nothing to

feed on but his father's meal and potatoes, and his own essentially timid and humane disposition, merely presented an amusing and harmless, though incurable, anomalous feature in his character, not at all impairing the good-will and companionableness of Pierre; for even in his boyhood, Pierre possessed a sterling charity, which could cheerfully overlook all minor blemishes in his inferiors, whether in fortune or mind; content and glad to embrace the good whenever presented, or with whatever conjoined. So, in youth, do we unconsciously act upon those peculiar principles, which in conscious and verbalized maxims shall systematically regulate our maturer lives;--a fact, which forcibly illustrates the necessitarian dependence of our lives, and their subordination, not to ourselves, but to Fate.

If the grown man of taste, possess not only some eye to detect the picturesque in the natural landscape, so also, has he as keen a perception of what may not unfitly be here styled, the povertiresque in the social landscape. To such an one, not more picturesquely conspicuous is the dismantled thatch in a painted cottage of Gainsborough, than the time-tangled and want-thinned locks of a beggar, povertiresquely diversifying those snug little cabinet-pictures of the world, which, exquisitely varnished and framed, are hung up in the drawing-room minds of humane men of taste, and amiable philosophers of either the "Compensation," or "Optimist" school. They deny that any misery is in the world, except for the purpose of throwing the fine povertiresque element into its general picture. Go to! God hath deposited cash in the Bank subject to our gentlemanly order; he hath

bounteously blessed the world with a summer carpet of green. Begone, Heraclitus! The lamentations of the rain are but to make us our rainbows!

Not that in equivocal reference to the povertiresque old farmer Millthorpe, Pierre is here intended to be hinted at. Still, man can not wholly escape his surroundings. Unconsciously Mrs. Glendinning had always been one of these curious Optimists; and in his boyish life Pierre had not wholly escaped the maternal contagion. Yet often, in calling at the old farmer's for Charles of some early winter mornings, and meeting the painfully embarrassed, thin, feeble features of Mrs. Millthorpe, and the sadly inquisitive and hopelessly half-envious glances of the three little girls; and standing on the threshold, Pierre would catch low, aged, life-weary groans from a recess out of sight from the door; then would Pierre have some boyish inklings of something else than the pure povertiresque in poverty: some inklings of what it might be, to be old, and poor, and worn, and rheumatic, with shivering death drawing nigh, and present life itself but a dull and a chill! some inklings of what it might be, for him who in youth had vivaciously leaped from his bed, impatient to meet the earliest sun, and lose no sweet drop of his life, now hating the beams he once so dearly loved; turning round in his bed to the wall to avoid them; and still postponing the foot which should bring him back to the dismal day; when the sun is not gold, but copper; and the sky is not blue, but gray; and the blood, like Rhenish wine, too long unquaffed by Death, grows thin and sour in the veins.

Pierre had not forgotten that the augmented penury of the Millthorpe's was, at the time we now retrospectively treat of, gravely imputed by the gossiping frequenters of the Black Swan Inn, to certain insinuated moral derelictions of the farmer. "The old man tipped his elbow too often," once said in Pierre's hearing an old bottle-necked fellow, performing the identical same act with a half-emptied glass in his hand. But though the form of old Millthorpe was broken, his countenance, however sad and thin, betrayed no slightest sign of the sot, either past or present. He never was publicly known to frequent the inn, and seldom quitted the few acres he cultivated with his son. And though, alas, indigent enough, yet was he most punctually honest in paying his little debts of shillings and pence for his groceries. And though, heaven knows, he had plenty of occasion for all the money he could possibly earn, yet Pierre remembered, that when, one autumn, a hog was bought of him for the servants' hall at the Mansion, the old man never called for his money till the midwinter following; and then, as with trembling fingers he eagerly clutched the silver, he unsteadily said, "I have no use for it now; it might just as well have stood over." It was then, that chancing to overhear this, Mrs. Glendinning had looked at the old man, with a kindly and benignantly interested eye to the povertiresque; and murmured, "Ah! the old English Knight is not yet out of his blood. Bravo, old man!"

One day, in Pierre's sight, nine silent figures emerged from the door of old Millthorpe; a coffin was put into a neighbor's farm-wagon; and a

procession, some thirty feet long, including the elongated pole and box of the wagon, wound along Saddle Meadows to a hill, where, at last, old Millthorpe was laid down in a bed, where the rising sun should affront him no more. Oh, softest and daintiest of Holland linen is the motherly earth! There, beneath the sublime tester of the infinite sky, like emperors and kings, sleep, in grand state, the beggars and paupers of earth! I joy that Death is this Democrat; and hopeless of all other real and permanent democracies, still hug the thought, that though in life some heads are crowned with gold, and some bound round with thorns, yet chisel them how they will, head-stones are all alike.

This somewhat particular account of the father of young Millthorpe, will better set forth the less immature condition and character of the son, on whom had now descended the maintenance of his mother and sisters. But, though the son of a farmer, Charles was peculiarly averse to hard labor. It was not impossible that by resolute hard labor he might eventually have succeeded in placing his family in a far more comfortable situation than he had ever remembered them. But it was not so fated; the benevolent State had in its great wisdom decreed otherwise.

In the village of Saddle Meadows there was an institution, half common-school and half academy, but mainly supported by a general ordinance and financial provision of the government. Here, not only were the rudiments of an English education taught, but likewise some touch of belles lettres, and composition, and that great American bulwark and

bore--elocution. On the high-raised, stage platform of the Saddle Meadows Academy, the sons of the most indigent day-laborers were wont to drawl out the fiery revolutionary rhetoric of Patrick Henry, or gesticulate impetuously through the soft cadences of Drake's "Culprit Fay." What wonder, then, that of Saturdays, when there was no elocution and poesy, these boys should grow melancholy and disdainful over the heavy, plodding handles of dung-forks and hoes?

At the age of fifteen, the ambition of Charles Millthorpe was to be either an orator, or a poet; at any rate, a great genius of one sort or other. He recalled the ancestral Knight, and indignantly spurned the plow. Detecting in him the first germ of this inclination, old Millthorpe had very seriously reasoned with his son; warning him against the evils of his vagrant ambition. Ambition of that sort was either for undoubted genius, rich boys, or poor boys, standing entirely alone in the world, with no one relying upon them. Charles had better consider the case; his father was old and infirm; he could not last very long; he had nothing to leave behind him but his plow and his hoe; his mother was sickly; his sisters pale and delicate; and finally, life was a fact, and the winters in that part of the country exceedingly bitter and long. Seven months out of the twelve the pastures bore nothing, and all cattle must be fed in the barns. But Charles was a boy; advice often seems the most wantonly wasted of all human breath; man will not take wisdom on trust; may be, it is well; for such wisdom is worthless; we must find the true gem for ourselves; and so we go groping and groping for many and many a day.

Yet was Charles Millthorpe as affectionate and dutiful a boy as ever boasted of his brain, and knew not that he possessed a far more excellent and angelical thing in the possession of a generous heart. His father died; to his family he resolved to be a second father, and a careful provider now. But not by hard toil of his hand; but by gentler practices of his mind. Already he had read many books--history, poetry, romance, essays, and all. The manorial book-shelves had often been honored by his visits, and Pierre had kindly been his librarian. Not to lengthen the tale, at the age of seventeen, Charles sold the horse, the cow, the pig, the plow, the hoe, and almost every movable thing on the premises; and, converting all into cash, departed with his mother and sisters for the city; chiefly basing his expectations of success on some vague representations of an apothecary relative there resident. How he and his mother and sisters battled it out; how they pined and half-starved for a while; how they took in sewing; and Charles took in copying; and all but scantily sufficed for a livelihood; all this may be easily imagined. But some mysterious latent good-will of Fate toward him, had not only thus far kept Charles from the Poor-House, but had really advanced his fortunes in a degree. At any rate, that certain harmless presumption and innocent egotism which have been previously adverted to as sharing in his general character, these had by no means retarded him; for it is often to be observed of the shallower men, that they are the very last to despond. It is the glory of the bladder that nothing can sink it; it is the reproach of a box of treasure, that once overboard it must down.

II.

When arrived in the city, and discovering the heartless neglect of Glen, Pierre,--looking about him for whom to apply to in this strait,--bethought him of his old boy-companion Charlie, and went out to seek him, and found him at last; he saw before him, a tall, well-grown, but rather thin and pale yet strikingly handsome young man of two-and-twenty; occupying a small dusty law-office on the third floor of the older building of the Apostles; assuming to be doing a very large, and hourly increasing business among empty pigeon-holes, and directly under the eye of an unopened bottle of ink; his mother and sisters dwelling in a chamber overhead; and himself, not only following the law for a corporeal living, but likewise inter-linked with the peculiar secret, theologico-politico-social schemes of the masonic order of the seedy-coated Apostles; and pursuing some crude, transcendental Philosophy, for both a contributory means of support, as well as for his complete intellectual aliment.

Pierre was at first somewhat startled by his exceedingly frank and familiar manner; all old manorial deference for Pierre was clean gone and departed; though at the first shock of their encounter, Charlie could not possibly have known that Pierre was cast off.

"Ha, Pierre! glad to see you, my boy! Hark ye, next month I am to

deliver an address before the Omega order of the Apostles. The Grand Master, Plinlimmon, will be there. I have heard on the best authority that he once said of me--'That youth has the Primitive Categories in him; he is destined to astonish the world.' Why, lad, I have received propositions from the Editors of the Spinozaist to contribute a weekly column to their paper, and you know how very few can understand the Spinozaist; nothing is admitted there but the Ultimate Transcendentals. Hark now, in your ear; I think of throwing off the Apostolic disguise and coming boldly out; Pierre! I think of stumping the State, and preaching our philosophy to the masses.--When did you arrive in town?"

Spite of all his tribulations, Pierre could not restrain a smile at this highly diverting reception; but well knowing the youth, he did not conclude from this audacious burst of enthusiastic egotism that his heart had at all corroded; for egotism is one thing, and selfishness another. No sooner did Pierre intimate his condition to him, than immediately, Charlie was all earnest and practical kindness; recommended the Apostles as the best possible lodgment for him,--cheap, snug, and convenient to most public places; he offered to procure a cart and see himself to the transport of Pierre's luggage; but finally thought it best to mount the stairs and show him the vacant rooms. But when these at last were decided upon; and Charlie, all cheerfulness and alacrity, started with Pierre for the hotel, to assist him in the removal; grasping his arm the moment they emerged from the great arched door under the tower of the Apostles; he instantly launched into his amusing heroics, and continued the strain till the trunks were fairly in sight.

"Lord! my law-business overwhelms me! I must drive away some of my clients; I must have my exercise, and this ever-growing business denies it to me. Besides, I owe something to the sublime cause of the general humanity; I must displace some of my briefs for my metaphysical treatises. I can not waste all my oil over bonds and mortgages.--You said you were married, I think?"

But without stopping for any reply, he rattled on. "Well, I suppose it is wise after all. It settles, centralizes, and confirms a man, I have heard.--No, I didn't; it is a random thought of my own, that!--Yes, it makes the world definite to him; it removes his morbid subjectiveness, and makes all things objective; nine small children, for instance, may be considered objective. Marriage, hey!--A fine thing, no doubt, no doubt:--domestic--pretty--nice, all round. But I owe something to the world, my boy! By marriage, I might contribute to the population of men, but not to the census of mind. The great men are all bachelors, you know. Their family is the universe: I should say the planet Saturn was their elder son; and Plato their uncle.--So you are married?"

But again, reckless of answers, Charlie went on. "Pierre, a thought, my boy;--a thought for you! You do not say it, but you hint of a low purse. Now I shall help you to fill it--Stump the State on the Kantian Philosophy! A dollar a head, my boy! Pass round your beaver, and you'll get it. I have every confidence in the penetration and magnanimousness of the people! Pierre, hark in your ear;--it's my opinion the world is

all wrong. Hist, I say--an entire mistake. Society demands an Avatar,--a Curtius, my boy! to leap into the fiery gulf, and by perishing himself, save the whole empire of men! Pierre, I have long renounced the allurements of life and fashion. Look at my coat, and see how I spurn them! Pierre! but, stop, have you ever a shilling! let's take a cold cut here--it's a cheap place; I go here sometimes. Come, let's in."