

BOOK XXII.

THE FLOWER-CURTAIN LIFTED FROM BEFORE A TROPICAL AUTHOR, WITH
SOME

REMARKS ON THE TRANSCENDENTAL FLESH-BRUSH PHILOSOPHY.

I.

Some days passed after the fatal tidings from the Meadows, and at length, somewhat mastering his emotions, Pierre again sits down in his chamber; for grieve how he will, yet work he must. And now day succeeds day, and week follows week, and Pierre still sits in his chamber. The long rows of cooled brick-kilns around him scarce know of the change; but from the fair fields of his great-great-great-grandfather's manor, Summer hath flown like a swallow-guest; the perfidious wight, Autumn, hath peeped in at the groves of the maple, and under pretense of clothing them in rich russet and gold, hath stript them at last of the slightest rag, and then ran away laughing; prophetic icicles depend from the arbors round about the old manorial mansion--now locked up and abandoned; and the little, round, marble table in the viny summer-house where, of July mornings, he had sat chatting and drinking negus with his gay mother, is now spread with a shivering napkin of frost; sleety varnish hath encrusted that once gay mother's grave, preparing it for its final cerements of wrapping snow upon snow; wild howl the winds in the woods: it is Winter. Sweet Summer is done; and Autumn is done; but

the book, like the bitter winter, is yet to be finished.

That season's wheat is long garnered, Pierre; that season's ripe apples and grapes are in; no crop, no plant, no fruit is out; the whole harvest is done. Oh, woe to that belated winter-overtaken plant, which the summer could not bring to maturity! The drifting winter snows shall overwhelm it. Think, Pierre, doth not thy plant belong to some other and tropical clime? Though transplanted to northern Maine, the orange-tree of the Floridas will put forth leaves in that parsimonious summer, and show some few tokens of fruitage; yet November will find no golden globes thereon; and the passionate old lumber-man, December, shall peel the whole tree, wrench it off at the ground, and toss it for a fagot to some lime-kiln. Ah, Pierre, Pierre, make haste! make haste! force thy fruitage, lest the winter force thee.

Watch yon little toddler, how long it is learning to stand by itself! First it shrieks and implores, and will not try to stand at all, unless both father and mother uphold it; then a little more bold, it must, at least, feel one parental hand, else again the cry and the tremble; long time is it ere by degrees this child comes to stand without any support. But, by-and-by, grown up to man's estate, it shall leave the very mother that bore it, and the father that begot it, and cross the seas, perhaps, or settle in far Oregon lands. There now, do you see the soul. In its germ on all sides it is closely folded by the world, as the husk folds the tenderest fruit; then it is born from the world-husk, but still now outwardly clings to it;--still clamors for the support of its mother the

world, and its father the Deity. But it shall yet learn to stand independent, though not without many a bitter wail, and many a miserable fall.

That hour of the life of a man when first the help of humanity fails him, and he learns that in his obscurity and indigence humanity holds him a dog and no man: that hour is a hard one, but not the hardest. There is still another hour which follows, when he learns that in his infinite comparative minuteness and abjectness, the gods do likewise despise him, and own him not of their clan. Divinity and humanity then are equally willing that he should starve in the street for all that either will do for him. Now cruel father and mother have both let go his hand, and the little soul-toddler, now you shall hear his shriek and his wail, and often his fall.

When at Saddle Meadows, Pierre had wavered and trembled in those first wretched hours ensuing upon the receipt of Isabel's letter; then humanity had let go the hand of Pierre, and therefore his cry; but when at last inured to this, Pierre was seated at his book, willing that humanity should desert him, so long as he thought he felt a far higher support; then, ere long, he began to feel the utter loss of that other support, too; ay, even the paternal gods themselves did now desert Pierre; the toddler was toddling entirely alone, and not without shrieks.

If man must wrestle, perhaps it is well that it should be on the

nakedest possible plain.

The three chambers of Pierre at the Apostles' were connecting ones. The first--having a little retreat where Delly slept--was used for the more exacting domestic purposes: here also their meals were taken; the second was the chamber of Isabel; the third was the closet of Pierre. In the first--the dining room, as they called it--there was a stove which boiled the water for their coffee and tea, and where Delly concocted their light repasts. This was their only fire; for, warned again and again to economize to the uttermost, Pierre did not dare to purchase any additional warmth. But by prudent management, a very little warmth may go a great way. In the present case, it went some forty feet or more. A horizontal pipe, after elbowing away from above the stove in the dining-room, pierced the partition wall, and passing straight through Isabel's chamber, entered the closet of Pierre at one corner, and then abruptly disappeared into the wall, where all further caloric--if any--went up through the chimney into the air, to help warm the December sun. Now, the great distance of Pierre's caloric stream from its fountain, sadly impaired it, and weakened it. It hardly had the flavor of heat. It would have had but very inconsiderable influence in raising the depressed spirits of the most mercurial thermometer; certainly it was not very elevating to the spirits of Pierre. Besides, this caloric stream, small as it was, did not flow through the room, but only entered it, to elbow right out of it, as some coquettish maidens enter the heart; moreover, it was in the furthest corner from the only place where, with a judicious view to the light, Pierre's

desk-barrels and board could advantageously stand. Often, Isabel insisted upon his having a separate stove to himself; but Pierre would not listen to such a thing. Then Isabel would offer her own room to him; saying it was of no indispensable use to her by day; she could easily spend her time in the dining-room; but Pierre would not listen to such a thing; he would not deprive her of the comfort of a continually accessible privacy; besides, he was now used to his own room, and must sit by that particular window there, and no other. Then Isabel would insist upon keeping her connecting door open while Pierre was employed at his desk, that so the heat of her room might bodily go into his; but Pierre would not listen to such a thing: because he must be religiously locked up while at work; outer love and hate must alike be excluded then. In vain Isabel said she would make not the slightest noise, and muffle the point of the very needle she used. All in vain. Pierre was inflexible here.

Yes, he was resolved to battle it out in his own solitary closet; though a strange, transcendental conceit of one of the more erratic and non-conforming Apostles,--who was also at this time engaged upon a profound work above stairs, and who denied himself his full sufficiency of food, in order to insure an abundant fire;--the strange conceit of this Apostle, I say,--accidentally communicated to Pierre,--that, through all the kingdoms of Nature, caloric was the great universal producer and vivifyer, and could not be prudently excluded from the spot where great books were in the act of creation; and therefore, he (the Apostle) for one, was resolved to plant his head in a hot-bed of

stove-warmed air, and so force his brain to germinate and blossom, and bud, and put forth the eventual, crowning, victorious flower;--though indeed this conceit rather staggered Pierre--for in truth, there was no small smack of plausible analogy in it--yet one thought of his purse would wholly expel the unwelcome intrusion, and reinforce his own previous resolve.

However lofty and magnificent the movements of the stars; whatever celestial melodies they may thereby beget; yet the astronomers assure us that they are the most rigidly methodical of all the things that exist. No old housewife goes her daily domestic round with one millionth part the precision of the great planet Jupiter in his stated and unalterable revolutions. He has found his orbit, and stays in it; he has timed himself, and adheres to his periods. So, in some degree with Pierre, now revolving in the troubled orbit of his book.

Pierre rose moderately early; and the better to inure himself to the permanent chill of his room, and to defy and beard to its face, the cruelest cold of the outer air; he would--behind the curtain--throw down the upper sash of his window; and on a square of old painted canvas, formerly wrapping some bale of goods in the neighborhood, treat his limbs, of those early December mornings, to a copious ablution, in water thickened with incipient ice. Nor, in this stoic performance, was he at all without company,--not present, but adjoiningly sympathetic; for scarce an Apostle in all those scores and scores of chambers, but undeviatingly took his daily December bath. Pierre had only to peep out

of his pane and glance round the multi-windowed, inclosing walls of the quadrangle, to catch plentiful half-glimpses, all round him, of many a lean, philosophical nudity, refreshing his meager bones with crash-towel and cold water. "Quick be the play," was their motto: "Lively our elbows, and nimble all our tenuities." Oh, the dismal echoings of the raspings of flesh-brushes, perverted to the filing and polishing of the merest ribs! Oh, the shuddersome splashings of pails of ice-water over feverish heads, not unfamiliar with aches! Oh, the rheumatical cracklings of rusted joints, in that defied air of December! for every thick-frosted sash was down, and every lean nudity courted the zephyr!

Among all the innate, hyena-like repellants to the reception of any set form of a spiritually-minded and pure archetypical faith, there is nothing so potent in its skeptical tendencies, as that inevitable perverse ridiculousness, which so often bestreaks some of the essentially finest and noblest aspirations of those men, who disgusted with the common conventional quackeries, strive, in their clogged terrestrial humanities, after some imperfectly discerned, but heavenly ideals: ideals, not only imperfectly discerned in themselves, but the path to them so little traceable, that no two minds will entirely agree upon it.

Hardly a new-light Apostle, but who, in superaddition to his revolutionary scheme for the minds and philosophies of men, entertains some insane, heterodoxical notions about the economy of his body. His soul, introduced by the gentlemanly gods, into the supernal

society,--practically rejects that most sensible maxim of men of the world, who chancing to gain the friendship of any great character, never make that the ground of boring him with the supplemental acquaintance of their next friend, who perhaps, is some miserable ninny. Love me, love my dog, is only an adage for the old country-women who affectionately kiss their cows. The gods love the soul of a man; often, they will frankly accost it; but they abominate his body; and will forever cut it dead, both here and hereafter. So, if thou wouldst go to the gods, leave thy dog of a body behind thee. And most impotently thou strivest with thy purifying cold baths, and thy diligent scrubbings with flesh-brushes, to prepare it as a meet offering for their altar. Nor shall all thy Pythagorean and Shellian dietings on apple-parings, dried prunes, and crumbs of oat-meal cracker, ever fit thy body for heaven. Feed all things with food convenient for them,--that is, if the food be procurable. The food of thy soul is light and space; feed it then on light and space. But the food of thy body is champagne and oysters; feed it then on champagne and oysters; and so shall it merit a joyful resurrection, if there is any to be. Say, wouldst thou rise with a lantern jaw and a spavined knee? Rise with brawn on thee, and a most royal corporation before thee; so shalt thou in that day claim respectful attention. Know this: that while many a consumptive dietarian has but produced the merest literary flatulencies to the world; convivial authors have alike given utterance to the sublimest wisdom, and created the least gross and most ethereal forms. And for men of demonstrative muscle and action, consider that right royal epitaph which Cyrus the Great caused to be engraved on his tomb--"I could drink a

great deal of wine, and it did me a great deal of good." Ah, foolish! to think that by starving thy body, thou shalt fatten thy soul! Is yonder ox fatted because yonder lean fox starves in the winter wood? And prate not of despising thy body, while still thou flourisheth thy flesh-brush! The finest houses are most cared for within; the outer walls are freely left to the dust and the soot. Put venison in thee, and so wit shall come out of thee. It is one thing in the mill, but another in the sack.

Now it was the continual, quadrangular example of those forlorn fellows, the Apostles, who, in this period of his half-developments and transitions, had deluded Pierre into the Flesh-Brush Philosophy, and had almost tempted him into the Apple-Parings Dialectics. For all the long wards, corridors, and multitudinous chambers of the Apostles' were scattered with the stems of apples, the stones of prunes, and the shells of peanuts. They went about huskily muttering the Kantian Categories through teeth and lips dry and dusty as any miller's, with the crumbs of Graham crackers. A tumbler of cold water was the utmost welcome to their reception rooms; at the grand supposed Sanhedrim presided over by one of the deputies of Plotinus Plinlimmon, a huge jug of Adam's Ale, and a bushel-basket of Graham crackers were the only convivia. Continually bits of cheese were dropping from their pockets, and old shiny apple parchments were ignorantly exhibited every time they drew out a manuscript to read you. Some were curious in the vintages of waters; and in three glass decanters set before you, Fairmount, Croton, and Cochituate; they held that Croton was the most potent, Fairmount a gentle tonic, and Cochituate the mildest and least inebriating of all.

Take some more of the Croton, my dear sir! Be brisk with the Fairmount! Why stops that Cochituate? So on their philosophical tables went round their Port, their Sherry, and their Claret.

Some, further advanced, rejected mere water in the bath, as altogether too coarse an element; and so, took to the Vapor-baths, and steamed their lean ribs every morning. The smoke which issued from their heads, and overspread their pages, was prefigured in the mists that issued from under their door-sills and out of their windows. Some could not sit down of a morning until after first applying the Vapor-bath outside and then thoroughly rinsing out their interiors with five cups of cold Croton. They were as faithfully replenished fire-buckets; and could they, standing in one cordon, have consecutively pumped themselves into each other, then the great fire of 1835 had been far less wide-spread and disastrous.

Ah! ye poor lean ones! ye wretched Soakites and Vaporites! have not your niggardly fortunes enough rinsed ye out, and wizened ye, but ye must still be dragging the hose-pipe, and throwing still more cold Croton on yourselves and the world? Ah! attach the screw of your hose-pipe to some fine old butt of Madeira! pump us some sparkling wine into the world! see, see, already, from all eternity, two-thirds of it have lain helplessly soaking!

II.

With cheek rather pale, then, and lips rather blue, Pierre sits down to his plank.

But is Pierre packed in the mail for St. Petersburg this morning? Over his boots are his moccasins; over his ordinary coat is his surtout; and over that, a cloak of Isabel's. Now he is squared to his plank; and at his hint, the affectionate Isabel gently pushes his chair closer to it, for he is so muffled, he can hardly move of himself. Now Delly comes in with bricks hot from the stove; and now Isabel and she with devoted solicitude pack away these comforting stones in the folds of an old blue cloak, a military garment of the grandfather of Pierre, and tenderly arrange it both over and under his feet; but putting the warm flagging beneath. Then Delly brings still another hot brick to put under his inkstand, to prevent the ink from thickening. Then Isabel drags the camp-bedstead nearer to him, on which are the two or three books he may possibly have occasion to refer to that day, with a biscuit or two, and some water, and a clean towel, and a basin. Then she leans against the plank by the elbow of Pierre, a crook-ended stick. Is Pierre a shepherd, or a bishop, or a cripple? No, but he has in effect, reduced himself to the miserable condition of the last. With the crook-ended cane, Pierre--unable to rise without sadly impairing his manifold intrenchments, and admitting the cold air into their innermost nooks,--Pierre, if in his solitude, he should chance to need any thing beyond the reach of his arm, then the crook-ended cane drags it to his immediate vicinity.

Pierre glances slowly all round him; every thing seems to be right; he looks up with a grateful, melancholy satisfaction at Isabel; a tear gathers in her eye; but she conceals it from him by coming very close to him, stooping over, and kissing his brow. 'Tis her lips that leave the warm moisture there; not her tears, she says.

"I suppose I must go now, Pierre. Now don't, don't be so long to-day. I will call thee at half-past four. Thou shalt not strain thine eyes in the twilight."

"We will see about that," says Pierre, with an unobserved attempt at a very sad pun. "Come, thou must go. Leave me."

And there he is left.

Pierre is young; heaven gave him the divinest, freshest form of a man; put light into his eye, and fire into his blood, and brawn into his arm, and a joyous, jubilant, overflowing, upbubbling, universal life in him everywhere. Now look around in that most miserable room, and at that most miserable of all the pursuits of a man, and say if here be the place, and this be the trade, that God intended him for. A rickety chair, two hollow barrels, a plank, paper, pens, and infernally black ink, four leprously dingy white walls, no carpet, a cup of water, and a dry biscuit or two. Oh, I hear the leap of the Texan Camanche, as at this moment he goes crashing like a wild deer through the green

underbrush; I hear his glorious whoop of savage and untamable health; and then I look in at Pierre. If physical, practical unreason make the savage, which is he? Civilization, Philosophy, Ideal Virtue! behold your victim!

III.

Some hours pass. Let us peep over the shoulder of Pierre, and see what it is he is writing there, in that most melancholy closet. Here, topping the reeking pile by his side, is the last sheet from his hand, the frenzied ink not yet entirely dry. It is much to our purpose; for in this sheet, he seems to have directly plagiarized from his own experiences, to fill out the mood of his apparent author-hero, Vivia, who thus soliloquizes: "A deep-down, unutterable mournfulness is in me. Now I drop all humorous or indifferent disguises, and all philosophical pretensions. I own myself a brother of the clod, a child of the Primeval Gloom. Hopelessness and despair are over me, as pall on pall. Away, ye chattering apes of a sophomorean Spinoza and Plato, who once didst all but delude me that the night was day, and pain only a tickle. Explain this darkness, exorcise this devil, ye can not. Tell me not, thou inconceivable coxcomb of a Goethe, that the universe can not spare thee and thy immortality, so long as--like a hired waiter--thou makest thyself 'generally useful.' Already the universe gets on without thee, and could still spare a million more of the same identical kidney. Corporations have no souls, and thy Pantheism, what was that? Thou wert

but the pretentious, heartless part of a man. Lo! I hold thee in this hand, and thou art crushed in it like an egg from which the meat hath been sucked."

Here is a slip from the floor.

"Whence flow the panegyric melodies that precede the march of these heroes? From what but from a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal!"

And here is a second.

"Cast thy eye in there on Vivia; tell me why those four limbs should be clapt in a dismal jail--day out, day in--week out, week in--month out, month in--and himself the voluntary jailer! Is this the end of philosophy? This the larger, and spiritual life? This your boasted empyrean? Is it for this that a man should grow wise, and leave off his most excellent and calumniated folly?"

And here is a third.

"Cast thy eye in there on Vivia; he, who in the pursuit of the highest health of virtue and truth, shows but a pallid cheek! Weigh his heart in thy hand, oh, thou gold-laced, virtuoso Goethe! and tell me whether it does not exceed thy standard weight!"

And here is a fourth.

"Oh God, that man should spoil and rust on the stalk, and be wilted and threshed ere the harvest hath come! And oh God, that men that call themselves men should still insist on a laugh! I hate the world, and could trample all lungs of mankind as grapes, and heel them out of their breath, to think of the woe and the cant,--to think of the Truth and the Lie! Oh! blessed be the twenty-first day of December, and cursed be the twenty-first day of June!"

From these random slips, it would seem, that Pierre is quite conscious of much that is so anomalously hard and bitter in his lot, of much that is so black and terrific in his soul. Yet that knowing his fatal condition does not one whit enable him to change or better his condition. Conclusive proof that he has no power over his condition. For in tremendous extremities human souls are like drowning men; well enough they know they are in peril; well enough they know the causes of that peril;--nevertheless, the sea is the sea, and these drowning men do drown.

IV.

From eight o'clock in the morning till half-past four in the evening, Pierre sits there in his room;--eight hours and a half!

From throbbing neck-bands, and swinging belly-bands of gay-hearted

horses, the sleigh-bells chimingly jingle;--but Pierre sits there in his room; Thanksgiving comes, with its glad thanks, and crisp turkeys;--but Pierre sits there in his room; soft through the snows, on tinted Indian moccasin, Merry Christmas comes stealing;--but Pierre sits there in his room; it is New-Year's, and like a great flagon, the vast city overbrims at all curb-stones, wharves, and piers, with bubbling jublations;--but Pierre sits there in his room:--Nor jingling sleigh-bells at throbbing neck-band, or swinging belly-band; nor glad thanks, and crisp turkeys of Thanksgiving; nor tinted Indian moccasin of Merry Christmas softly stealing through the snows; nor New-Year's curb-stones, wharves, and piers, over-brimming with bubbling jublations:--Nor jingling sleigh-bells, nor glad Thanksgiving, nor Merry Christmas, nor jubilating New Year's:--Nor Bell, Thank, Christ, Year;--none of these are for Pierre. In the midst of the merriments of the mutations of Time, Pierre hath ringed himself in with the grief of Eternity. Pierre is a peak inflexible in the heart of Time, as the isle-peak, Piko, stands unassailable in the midst of waves.

He will not be called to; he will not be stirred. Sometimes the intent ear of Isabel in the next room, overhears the alternate silence, and then the long lonely scratch of his pen. It is, as if she heard the busy claw of some midnight mole in the ground. Sometimes, she hears a low cough, and sometimes the scrape of his crook-handled cane.

Here surely is a wonderful stillness of eight hours and a half, repeated day after day. In the heart of such silence, surely something is at

work. Is it creation, or destruction? Builds Pierre the noble world of a new book? or does the Pale Haggardness unbuild the lungs and the life in him?--Unutterable, that a man should be thus!

When in the meridian flush of the day, we recall the black apex of night; then night seems impossible; this sun can never go down. Oh that the memory of the uttermost gloom as an already tasted thing to the dregs, should be no security against its return. One may be passibly well one day, but the next, he may sup at black broth with Pluto.

Is there then all this work to one book, which shall be read in a very few hours; and, far more frequently, utterly skipped in one second; and which, in the end, whatever it be, must undoubtedly go to the worms?

Not so; that which now absorbs the time and the life of Pierre, is not the book, but the primitive elementalizing of the strange stuff, which in the act of attempting that book, have upheaved and upgushed in his soul. Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled one. The larger book, and the infinitely better, is for Pierre's own private shelf. That it is, whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only demands his ink. But circumstances have so decreed, that the one can not be composed on the paper, but only as the other is writ down in his soul. And the one of the soul is elephantinely sluggish, and will not budge at a breath. Thus Pierre is fastened on by two leeches;--how then can the life of Pierre last? Lo! he is fitting himself for the highest life, by thinning his blood and

collapsing his heart. He is learning how to live, by rehearsing the part of death.

Who shall tell all the thoughts and feelings of Pierre in that desolate and shivering room, when at last the idea obtruded, that the wiser and the profounder he should grow, the more and the more he lessened the chances for bread; that could he now hurl his deep book out of the window, and fall to on some shallow nothing of a novel, composable in a month at the longest, then could he reasonably hope for both appreciation and cash. But the devouring profundities, now opened up in him, consume all his vigor; would he, he could not now be entertainingly and profitably shallow in some pellucid and merry romance. Now he sees, that with every accession of the personal divine to him, some great land-slide of the general surrounding divineness slips from him, and falls crashing away. Said I not that the gods, as well as mankind, had unhanded themselves from this Pierre? So now in him you behold the baby toddler I spoke of; forced now to stand and toddle alone.

Now and then he turns to the camp-bed, and wetting his towel in the basin, presses it against his brow. Now he leans back in his chair, as if to give up; but again bends over and plods.

Twilight draws on, the summons of Isabel is heard from the door; the poor, frozen, blue-lipped, soul-shivering traveler for St. Petersburg is unpacked; and for a moment stands toddling on the floor. Then his hat, and his cane, and out he sallies for fresh air. A most comfortless

staggering of a stroll! People gaze at him passing, as at some imprudent sick man, willfully burst from his bed. If an acquaintance is met, and would say a pleasant newsmonger's word in his ear, that acquaintance turns from him, affronted at his hard aspect of icy discourtesy.

"Bad-hearted," mutters the man, and goes on.

He comes back to his chambers, and sits down at the neat table of Delly; and Isabel soothingly eyes him, and presses him to eat and be strong. But his is the famishing which loathes all food. He can not eat but by force. He has assassinated the natural day; how then can he eat with an appetite? If he lays him down, he can not sleep; he has waked the infinite wakefulness in him; then how can he slumber? Still his book, like a vast lumbering planet, revolves in his aching head. He can not command the thing out of its orbit; fain would he behead himself, to gain one night's repose. At last the heavy hours move on; and sheer exhaustion overtakes him, and he lies still--not asleep as children and day-laborers sleep--but he lies still from his throbbings, and for that interval holdingly sheaths the beak of the vulture in his hand, and lets it not enter his heart.

Morning comes; again the dropt sash, the icy water, the flesh-brush, the breakfast, the hot bricks, the ink, the pen, the from-eight-o'clock-to-half-past-four, and the whole general inclusive hell of the same departed day.

Ah! shivering thus day after day in his wrappers and cloaks, is this the

warm lad that once sung to the world of the Tropical Summer?