

CHAPTER IV. IN WHICH I EXPERIENCE EXTREMES OF FORTUNE.

Whether it came from my training and repeated bankruptcy at the commercial college, or by direct inheritance from old Loudon, the Edinburgh mason, there can be no doubt about the fact that I was thrifty. Looking myself impartially over, I believe that is my only manly virtue. During my first two years in Paris I not only made it a point to keep well inside of my allowance, but accumulated considerable savings in the bank. You will say, with my masquerade of living as a penniless student, it must have been easy to do so: I should have had no difficulty, however, in doing the reverse. Indeed, it is wonderful I did not; and early in the third year, or soon after I had known Pinkerton, a singular incident proved it to have been equally wise. Quarter-day came, and brought no allowance. A letter of remonstrance was despatched, and for the first time in my experience, remained unanswered. A cablegram was more effectual; for it brought me at least a promise of attention. "Will write at once," my father telegraphed; but I waited long for his letter. I was puzzled, angry, and alarmed; but thanks to my previous thrift, I cannot say that I was ever practically embarrassed. The embarrassment, the distress, the agony, were all for my unhappy father at home in Muskegon, struggling for life and fortune against untoward chances, returning at night from a day of ill-starred shifts and ventures, to read and perhaps to weep over that last harsh letter from his only child, to which he lacked the courage to reply.

Nearly three months after time, and when my economies were beginning to run low, I received at last a letter with the customary bills of exchange.

"My dearest boy," it ran, "I believe, in the press of anxious business, your letters and even your allowance have been somewhat neglected. You must try to forgive your poor old dad, for he has had a trying time; and now when it is over, the doctor wants me to take my shotgun and go to the Adirondacks for a change. You must not fancy I am sick, only over-driven and under the weather. Many of our foremost operators have gone down: John T. M'Brady skipped to Canada with a trunkful of boodle; Billy Sandwith, Charlie Downs, Joe Kaiser, and many others of our leading men in this city bit the dust. But Big-Head Dodd has again weathered the blizzard, and I think I have fixed things so that we may be richer than ever before autumn.

"Now I will tell you, my dear, what I propose. You say you are well advanced with your first statue; start in manfully and finish it, and if your teacher--I can never remember how to spell his name--will send me a certificate that it is up to market standard, you shall have ten thousand dollars to do what you like with, either at home or in Paris. I suggest, since you say the facilities for work are so much greater in that city, you would do well to buy or build a little home; and the first thing you know, your dad will be dropping in for a luncheon. Indeed, I would come now, for I am beginning to grow old, and I long to see my dear boy; but there are still some operations that want watching

and nursing. Tell your friend, Mr. Pinkerton, that I read his letters every week; and though I have looked in vain lately for my Loudon's name, still I learn something of the life he is leading in that strange, old world, depicted by an able pen."

Here was a letter that no young man could possibly digest in solitude. It marked one of those junctures when the confidant is necessary; and the confidant selected was none other than Jim Pinkerton. My father's message may have had an influence in this decision; but I scarce suppose so, for the intimacy was already far advanced. I had a genuine and lively taste for my compatriot; I laughed at, I scolded, and I loved him. He, upon his side, paid me a kind of doglike service of admiration, gazing at me from afar off as at one who had liberally enjoyed those "advantages" which he envied for himself. He followed at heel; his laugh was ready chorus; our friends gave him the nickname of "The Henchman." It was in this insidious form that servitude approached me.

Pinkerton and I read and re-read the famous news: he, I can swear, with an enjoyment as unalloyed and far more vocal than my own. The statue was nearly done: a few days' work sufficed to prepare it for exhibition; the master was approached; he gave his consent; and one cloudless morning of May beheld us gathered in my studio for the hour of trial. The master wore his many-hued rosette; he came attended by two of my French fellow-pupils--friends of mine and both considerable sculptors in Paris at this hour. "Corporal John" (as we used to call him) breaking for once those habits of study and reserve which have since carried him so

high in the opinion of the world, had left his easel of a morning to countenance a fellow-countryman in some suspense. My dear old Romney was there by particular request; for who that knew him would think a pleasure quite complete unless he shared it, or not support a mortification more easily if he were present to console? The party was completed by John Myner, the Englishman; by the brothers Stennis,--Stennis-aine and Stennis-frere, as they used to figure on their accounts at Barbizon--a pair of hare-brained Scots; and by the inevitable Jim, as white as a sheet and bedewed with the sweat of anxiety.

I suppose I was little better myself when I unveiled the Genius of Muskegon. The master walked about it seriously; then he smiled.

"It is already not so bad," said he, in that funny English of which he was so proud. "No, already not so bad."

We all drew a deep breath of relief; and Corporal John (as the most considerable junior present) explained to him it was intended for a public building, a kind of prefecture--

"He! Quoi?" cried he, relapsing into French. "Qu'est-ce que vous me chantez la? O, in America," he added, on further information being hastily furnished. "That is anozer sing. O, very good, very good."

The idea of the required certificate had to be introduced to his mind

in the light of a pleasantry--the fancy of a nabob little more advanced than the red Indians of "Fennimore Cooperr"; and it took all our talents combined to conceive a form of words that would be acceptable on both sides. One was found, however: Corporal John engrossed it in his undecipherable hand, the master lent it the sanction of his name and flourish, I slipped it into an envelope along with one of the two letters I had ready prepared in my pocket, and as the rest of us moved off along the boulevard to breakfast, Pinkerton was detached in a cab and duly committed it to the post.

The breakfast was ordered at Lavenue's, where no one need be ashamed to entertain even the master; the table was laid in the garden; I had chosen the bill of fare myself; on the wine question we held a council of war with the most fortunate results; and the talk, as soon as the master laid aside his painful English, became fast and furious. There were a few interruptions, indeed, in the way of toasts. The master's health had to be drunk, and he responded in a little well-turned speech, full of neat allusions to my future and to the United States; my health followed; and then my father's must not only be proposed and drunk, but a full report must be despatched to him at once by cablegram--an extravagance which was almost the means of the master's dissolution. Choosing Corporal John to be his confidant (on the ground, I presume, that he was already too good an artist to be any longer an American except in name) he summed up his amazement in one oft-repeated formula--"C'est barbare!" Apart from these genial formalities, we talked, talked of art, and talked of it as only artists can. Here in the

South Seas we talk schooners most of the time; in the Quarter we talked art with the like unflagging interest, and perhaps as much result.

Before very long, the master went away; Corporal John (who was already a sort of young master) followed on his heels; and the rank and file were naturally relieved by their departure. We were now among equals; the bottle passed, the conversation sped. I think I can still hear the Stennis brothers pour forth their copious tirades; Dijon, my portly French fellow-student, drop witticisms well-conditioned like himself; and another (who was weak in foreign languages) dash hotly into the current of talk with some "Je trove que pore oon sontimong de delicacy, Corot ...," or some "Pour moi Corot est le plou ...," and then, his little raft of French foundering at once, scramble silently to shore again. He at least could understand; but to Pinkerton, I think the noise, the wine, the sun, the shadows of the leaves, and the esoteric glory of being seated at a foreign festival, made up the whole available means of entertainment.

We sat down about half past eleven; I suppose it was two when, some point arising and some particular picture being instanced, an adjournment to the Louvre was proposed. I paid the score, and in a moment we were trooping down the Rue de Renne. It was smoking hot; Paris glittered with that superficial brilliancy which is so agreeable to the man in high spirits, and in moods of dejection so depressing; the wine sang in my ears, it danced and brightened in my eyes. The pictures that we saw that afternoon, as we sped briskly and loquaciously through the

immortal galleries, appear to me, upon a retrospect, the loveliest of all; the comments we exchanged to have touched the highest mark of criticism, grave or gay.

It was only when we issued again from the museum that a difference of race broke up the party. Dijon proposed an adjournment to a cafe, there to finish the afternoon on beer; the elder Stennis, revolted at the thought, moved for the country, a forest if possible, and a long walk. At once the English speakers rallied to the name of any exercise: even to me, who have been often twitted with my sedentary habits, the thought of country air and stillness proved invincibly attractive. It appeared, upon investigation, we had just time to hail a cab and catch one of the fast trains for Fontainebleau. Beyond the clothes we stood in, all were destitute of what is called (with dainty vagueness) personal effects; and it was earnestly mooted, on the other side, whether we had not time to call upon the way and pack a satchel? But the Stennis boys exclaimed upon our effeminacy. They had come from London, it appeared, a week before with nothing but greatcoats and tooth-brushes. No baggage--there was the secret of existence. It was expensive, to be sure; for every time you had to comb your hair, a barber must be paid, and every time you changed your linen, one shirt must be bought and another thrown away; but anything was better (argued these young gentlemen) than to be the slaves of haversacks. "A fellow has to get rid gradually of all material attachments; that was manhood" (said they); "and as long as you were bound down to anything,--house, umbrella, or portmanteau,--you were still tethered by the umbilical cord." Something engaging in this

theory carried the most of us away. The two Frenchmen, indeed, retired, scoffing, to their bock; and Romney, being too poor to join the excursion on his own resources and too proud to borrow, melted unobtrusively away. Meanwhile the remainder of the company crowded the benches of a cab; the horse was urged (as horses have to be) by an appeal to the pocket of the driver; the train caught by the inside of a minute; and in less than an hour and a half we were breathing deep of the sweet air of the forest and stretching our legs up the hill from Fontainebleau octroi, bound for Barbizon. That the leading members of our party covered the distance in fifty-one minutes and a half is (I believe) one of the historic landmarks of the colony; but you will scarce be surprised to learn that I was somewhat in the rear. Myner, a comparatively philosophic Briton, kept me company in my deliberate advance; the glory of the sun's going down, the fall of the long shadows, the inimitable scent and the inspiration of the woods, attuned me more and more to walk in a silence which progressively infected my companion; and I remember that, when at last he spoke, I was startled from a deep abstraction.

"Your father seems to be a pretty good kind of a father," said he. "Why don't he come to see you?" I was ready with some dozen of reasons, and had more in stock; but Myner, with that shrewdness which made him feared and admired, suddenly fixed me with his eye-glass and asked, "Ever press him?"

The blood came in my face. No; I had never pressed him; I had never even

encouraged him to come. I was proud of him; proud of his handsome looks, of his kind, gentle ways, of that bright face he could show when others were happy; proud, too (meanly proud, if you like) of his great wealth and startling liberalities. And yet he would have been in the way of my Paris life, of much of which he would have disapproved. I had feared to expose to criticism his innocent remarks on art; I had told myself, I had even partly believed, he did not want to come; I had been (and still am) convinced that he was sure to be unhappy out of Muskegon; in short, I had a thousand reasons, good and bad, not all of which could alter one iota of the fact that I knew he only waited for my invitation.

"Thank you, Myner," said I; "you're a much better fellow than ever I supposed. I'll write to-night."

"O, you're a pretty decent sort yourself," returned Myner, with more than his usual flippancy of manner, but (as I was gratefully aware) not a trace of his occasional irony of meaning.

Well, these were brave days, on which I could dwell forever. Brave, too, were those that followed, when Pinkerton and I walked Paris and the suburbs, viewing and pricing houses for my new establishment, or covered ourselves with dust and returned laden with Chinese gods and brass warming-pans from the dealers in antiquities. I found Pinkerton well up in the situation of these establishments as well as in the current prices, and with quite a smattering of critical judgment; it turned out he was investing capital in pictures and curiosities for the States, and

the superficial thoroughness of the creature appeared in the fact, that although he would never be a connoisseur, he was already something of an expert. The things themselves left him as near as may be cold; but he had a joy of his own in understanding how to buy and sell them.

In such engagements the time passed until I might very well expect an answer from my father. Two mails followed each other, and brought nothing. By the third I received a long and almost incoherent letter of remorse, encouragement, consolation, and despair. From this pitiful document, which (with a movement of piety) I burned as soon as I had read it, I gathered that the bubble of my father's wealth was burst, that he was now both penniless and sick; and that I, so far from expecting ten thousand dollars to throw away in juvenile extravagance, must look no longer for the quarterly remittances on which I lived. My case was hard enough; but I had sense enough to perceive, and decency enough to do my duty. I sold my curiosities, or rather I sent Pinkerton to sell them; and he had previously bought and now disposed of them so wisely that the loss was trifling. This, with what remained of my last allowance, left me at the head of no less than five thousand francs. Five hundred I reserved for my own immediate necessities; the rest I mailed inside of the week to my father at Muskegon, where they came in time to pay his funeral expenses.

The news of his death was scarcely a surprise and scarce a grief to me. I could not conceive my father a poor man. He had led too long a life of thoughtless and generous profusion to endure the change; and though I

grieved for myself, I was able to rejoice that my father had been taken from the battle. I grieved, I say, for myself; and it is probable there were at the same date many thousands of persons grieving with less cause. I had lost my father; I had lost the allowance; my whole fortune (including what had been returned from Muskegon) scarce amounted to a thousand francs; and to crown my sorrows, the statutory contract had changed hands. The new contractor had a son of his own, or else a nephew; and it was signified to me, with business-like plainness, that I must find another market for my pigs. In the meanwhile I had given up my room, and slept on a truckle-bed in the corner of the studio, where as I read myself to sleep at night, and when I awoke in the morning, that now useless bulk, the Genius of Muskegon, was ever present to my eyes. Poor stone lady! born to be enthroned under the gilded, echoing dome of the new capitol, whither was she now to drift? for what base purposes be ultimately broken up, like an unseaworthy ship? and what should befall her ill-starred artificer, standing, with his thousand francs, on the threshold of a life so hard as that of the unbefriended sculptor?

It was a subject often and earnestly debated by myself and Pinkerton. In his opinion, I should instantly discard my profession. "Just drop it, here and now," he would say. "Come back home with me, and let's throw our whole soul into business. I have the capital; you bring the culture. Dodd & Pinkerton--I never saw a better name for an advertisement; and you can't think, Loudon, how much depends upon a name." On my side, I would admit that a sculptor should possess one of three things--capital, influence, or an energy only to be qualified as hellish. The first two

I had now lost; to the third I never had the smallest claim; and yet I wanted the cowardice (or perhaps it was the courage) to turn my back on my career without a fight. I told him, besides, that however poor my chances were in sculpture, I was convinced they were yet worse in business, for which I equally lacked taste and aptitude. But upon this head, he was my father over again; assured me that I spoke in ignorance; that any intelligent and cultured person was Bound to succeed; that I must, besides, have inherited some of my father's fitness; and, at any rate, that I had been regularly trained for that career in the commercial college.

"Pinkerton," I said, "can't you understand that, as long as I was there, I never took the smallest interest in any stricken thing? The whole affair was poison to me."

"It's not possible," he would cry; "it can't be; you couldn't live in the midst of it and not feel the charm; with all your poetry of soul, you couldn't help! Loudon," he would go on, "you drive me crazy. You expect a man to be all broken up about the sunset, and not to care a dime for a place where fortunes are fought for and made and lost all day; or for a career that consists in studying up life till you have it at your finger-ends, spying out every cranny where you can get your hand in and a dollar out, and standing there in the midst--one foot on bankruptcy, the other on a borrowed dollar, and the whole thing spinning round you like a mill--raking in the stamps, in spite of fate and

fortune."

To this romance of dickering I would reply with the romance (which is also the virtue) of art: reminding him of those examples of constancy through many tribulations, with which the role of Apollo is illustrated; from the case of Millet, to those of many of our friends and comrades, who had chosen this agreeable mountain path through life, and were now bravely clambering among rocks and brambles, penniless and hopeful.

"You will never understand it, Pinkerton," I would say. "You look to the result, you want to see some profit of your endeavours: that is why you could never learn to paint, if you lived to be Methusalem. The result is always a fizzle: the eyes of the artist are turned in; he lives for a frame of mind. Look at Romney, now. There is the nature of the artist. He hasn't a cent; and if you offered him to-morrow the command of an army, or the presidentship of the United States, he wouldn't take it, and you know he wouldn't."

"I suppose not," Pinkerton would cry, scouring his hair with both his hands; "and I can't see why; I can't see what in fits he would be after, not to; I don't seem to rise to these views. Of course, it's the fault of not having had advantages in early life; but, Loudon, I'm so miserably low that it seems to me silly. The fact is," he might add with a smile, "I don't seem to have the least use for a frame of mind without square meals; and you can't get it out of my head that it's a man's duty to die rich, if he can."

"What for?" I asked him once.

"O, I don't know," he replied. "Why in snakes should anybody want to be a sculptor, if you come to that? I would love to sculp myself. But what I can't see is why you should want to do nothing else. It seems to argue a poverty of nature."

Whether or not he ever came to understand me--and I have been so tossed about since then that I am not very sure I understand myself--he soon perceived that I was perfectly in earnest; and after about ten days of argument, suddenly dropped the subject, and announced that he was wasting capital, and must go home at once. No doubt he should have gone long before, and had already lingered over his intended time for the sake of our companionship and my misfortune; but man is so unjustly minded that the very fact, which ought to have disarmed, only embittered my vexation. I resented his departure in the light of a desertion; I would not say, but doubtless I betrayed it; and something hang-dog in the man's face and bearing led me to believe he was himself remorseful. It is certain at least that, during the time of his preparations, we drew sensibly apart--a circumstance that I recall with shame. On the last day, he had me to dinner at a restaurant which he knew I had formerly frequented, and had only forsworn of late from considerations of economy. He seemed ill at ease; I was myself both sorry and sulky; and the meal passed with little conversation.

"Now, Loudon," said he, with a visible effort, after the coffee was come and our pipes lighted, "you can never understand the gratitude and loyalty I bear you. You don't know what a boon it is to be taken up by a man that stands on the pinnacle of civilization; you can't think how it's refined and purified me, how it's appealed to my spiritual nature; and I want to tell you that I would die at your door like a dog."

I don't know what answer I tried to make, but he cut me short.

"Let me say it out!" he cried. "I revere you for your whole-souled devotion to art; I can't rise to it, but there's a strain of poetry in my nature, Loudon, that responds to it. I want you to carry it out, and I mean to help you."

"Pinkerton, what nonsense is this?" I interrupted.

"Now don't get mad, Loudon; this is a plain piece of business," said he; "it's done every day; it's even typical. How are all those fellows over here in Paris, Henderson, Sumner, Long?--it's all the same story: a young man just plum full of artistic genius on the one side, a man of business on the other who doesn't know what to do with his dollars--"

"But, you fool, you're as poor as a rat," I cried.

"You wait till I get my irons in the fire!" returned Pinkerton. "I'm bound to be rich; and I tell you I mean to have some of the fun as I go

along. Here's your first allowance; take it at the hand of a friend; I'm one that holds friendship sacred as you do yourself. It's only a hundred francs; you'll get the same every month, and as soon as my business begins to expand we'll increase it to something fitting. And so far from it's being a favour, just let me handle your statuary for the American market, and I'll call it one of the smartest strokes of business in my life."

It took me a long time, and it had cost us both much grateful and painful emotion, before I had finally managed to refuse his offer and compounded for a bottle of particular wine. He dropped the subject at last suddenly with a "Never mind; that's all done with," nor did he again refer to the subject, though we passed together the rest of the afternoon, and I accompanied him, on his departure; to the doors of the waiting-room at St. Lazare. I felt myself strangely alone; a voice told me that I had rejected both the counsels of wisdom and the helping hand of friendship; and as I passed through the great bright city on my homeward way, I measured it for the first time with the eye of an adversary.