

## CHAPTER V. IN WHICH I AM DOWN ON MY LUCK IN PARIS.

In no part of the world is starvation an agreeable business; but I believe it is admitted there is no worse place to starve in than this city of Paris. The appearances of life are there so especially gay, it is so much a magnified beer-garden, the houses are so ornate, the theatres so numerous, the very pace of the vehicles is so brisk, that a man in any deep concern of mind or pain of body is constantly driven in upon himself. In his own eyes, he seems the one serious creature moving in a world of horrible unreality; voluble people issuing from a cafe, the queue at theatre doors, Sunday cabfuls of second-rate pleasure-seekers, the bedizened ladies of the pavement, the show in the jewellers' windows--all the familiar sights contributing to flout his own unhappiness, want, and isolation. At the same time, if he be at all after my pattern, he is perhaps supported by a childish satisfaction: this is life at last, he may tell himself, this is the real thing; the bladders on which I was set swimming are now empty, my own weight depends upon the ocean; by my own exertions I must perish or succeed; and I am now enduring in the vivid fact, what I so much delighted to read of in the case of Lonsteau or Lucien, Rodolphe or Schaunard.

Of the steps of my misery, I cannot tell at length. In ordinary times what were politically called "loans" (although they were never meant to be repaid) were matters of constant course among the students, and many a man has partly lived on them for years. But my misfortune befell me

at an awkward juncture. Many of my friends were gone; others were themselves in a precarious situation. Romney (for instance) was reduced to tramping Paris in a pair of country sabots, his only suit of clothes so imperfect (in spite of cunningly adjusted pins) that the authorities at the Luxembourg suggested his withdrawal from the gallery. Dijon, too, was on a leeshore, designing clocks and gas-brackets for a dealer; and the most he could do was to offer me a corner of his studio where I might work. My own studio (it will be gathered) I had by that time lost; and in the course of my expulsion the Genius of Muskegon was finally separated from her author. To continue to possess a full-sized statue, a man must have a studio, a gallery, or at least the freedom of a back garden. He cannot carry it about with him, like a satchel, in the bottom of a cab, nor can he cohabit in a garret, ten by fifteen, with so momentous a companion. It was my first idea to leave her behind at my departure. There, in her birthplace, she might lend an inspiration, methought, to my successor. But the proprietor, with whom I had unhappily quarrelled, seized the occasion to be disagreeable, and called upon me to remove my property. For a man in such straits as I now found myself, the hire of a lorry was a consideration; and yet even that I could have faced, if I had had anywhere to drive to after it was hired. Hysterical laughter seized upon me as I beheld (in imagination) myself, the waggoner, and the Genius of Muskegon, standing in the public view of Paris, without the shadow of a destination; perhaps driving at last to the nearest rubbish heap, and dumping there, among the ordures of a city, the beloved child of my invention. From these extremities I was relieved by a seasonable offer, and I parted from the Genius of Muskegon

for thirty francs. Where she now stands, under what name she is admired or criticised, history does not inform us; but I like to think she may adorn the shrubbery of some suburban tea-garden, where holiday shop-girls hang their hats upon the mother, and their swains (by way of an approach of gallantry) identify the winged infant with the god of love.

In a certain cabman's eating-house on the outer boulevard I got credit for my midday meal. Supper I was supposed not to require, sitting down nightly to the delicate table of some rich acquaintances. This arrangement was extremely ill-considered. My fable, credible enough at first, and so long as my clothes were in good order, must have seemed worse than doubtful after my coat became frayed about the edges, and my boots began to squelch and pipe along the restaurant floors. The allowance of one meal a day besides, though suitable enough to the state of my finances, agreed poorly with my stomach. The restaurant was a place I had often visited experimentally, to taste the life of students then more unfortunate than myself; and I had never in those days entered it without disgust, or left it without nausea. It was strange to find myself sitting down with avidity, rising up with satisfaction, and counting the hours that divided me from my return to such a table. But hunger is a great magician; and so soon as I had spent my ready cash, and could no longer fill up on bowls of chocolate or hunks of bread, I must depend entirely on that cabman's eating-house, and upon certain rare, long-expected, long-remembered windfalls. Dijon (for instance) might get paid for some of his pot-boiling work, or else an old friend

would pass through Paris; and then I would be entertained to a meal after my own soul, and contract a Latin Quarter loan, which would keep me in tobacco and my morning coffee for a fortnight. It might be thought the latter would appear the more important. It might be supposed that a life, led so near the confines of actual famine, should have dulled the nicety of my palate. On the contrary, the poorer a man's diet, the more sharply is he set on dainties. The last of my ready cash, about thirty francs, was deliberately squandered on a single dinner; and a great part of my time when I was alone was passed upon the details of imaginary feasts.

One gleam of hope visited me--an order for a bust from a rich Southerner. He was free-handed, jolly of speech, merry of countenance; kept me in good humour through the sittings, and when they were over, carried me off with him to dinner and the sights of Paris. I ate well; I laid on flesh; by all accounts, I made a favourable likeness of the being, and I confess I thought my future was assured. But when the bust was done, and I had despatched it across the Atlantic, I could never so much as learn of its arrival. The blow felled me; I should have lain down and tried no stroke to right myself, had not the honour of my country been involved. For Dijon improved the opportunity in the European style; informing me (for the first time) of the manners of America: how it was a den of banditti without the smallest rudiment of law or order, and debts could be there only collected with a shotgun. "The whole world knows it," he would say; "you are alone, mon petit Loudon, you are alone to be in ignorance of these facts. The judges of

the Supreme Court fought but the other day with stilettos on the bench at Cincinnati. You should read the little book of one of my friends: *Le Touriste dans le Far-West*; you will see it all there in good French." At last, incensed by days of such discussion, I undertook to prove to him the contrary, and put the affair in the hands of my late father's lawyer. From him I had the gratification of hearing, after a due interval, that my debtor was dead of the yellow fever in Key West, and had left his affairs in some confusion. I suppress his name; for though he treated me with cruel nonchalance, it is probable he meant to deal fairly in the end.

Soon after this a shade of change in my reception at the cabman's eating-house marked the beginning of a new phase in my distress. The first day, I told myself it was but fancy; the next, I made quite sure it was a fact; the third, in mere panic I stayed away, and went for forty-eight hours fasting. This was an act of great unreason; for the debtor who stays away is but the more remarked, and the boarder who misses a meal is sure to be accused of infidelity. On the fourth day, therefore, I returned, inwardly quaking. The proprietor looked askance upon my entrance; the waitresses (who were his daughters) neglected my wants and sniffed at the affected joviality of my salutations; last and most plain, when I called for a *suisse* (such as was being served to all the other diners) I was bluntly told there were no more. It was obvious I was near the end of my tether; one plank divided me from want, and now I felt it tremble. I passed a sleepless night, and the first thing in the morning took my way to Myner's studio. It was a step I had long

meditated and long refrained from; for I was scarce intimate with the Englishman; and though I knew him to possess plenty of money, neither his manner nor his reputation were the least encouraging to beggars.

I found him at work on a picture, which I was able conscientiously to praise, dressed in his usual tweeds, plain, but pretty fresh, and standing out in disagreeable contrast to my own withered and degraded outfit. As we talked, he continued to shift his eyes watchfully between his handiwork and the fat model, who sat at the far end of the studio in a state of nature, with one arm gallantly arched above her head. My errand would have been difficult enough under the best of circumstances: placed between Myner, immersed in his art, and the white, fat, naked female in a ridiculous attitude, I found it quite impossible. Again and again I attempted to approach the point, again and again fell back on commendations of the picture; and it was not until the model had enjoyed an interval of repose, during which she took the conversation in her own hands and regaled us (in a soft, weak voice) with details as to her husband's prosperity, her sister's lamented decline from the paths of virtue, and the consequent wrath of her father, a peasant of stern principles, in the vicinity of Chalons on the Marne;--it was not, I say, until after this was over, and I had once more cleared my throat for the attack, and once more dropped aside into some commonplace about the picture, that Myner himself brought me suddenly and vigorously to the point.

"You didn't come here to talk this rot," said he.

"No," I replied sullenly; "I came to borrow money."

He painted awhile in silence.

"I don't think we were ever very intimate?" he asked.

"Thank you," said I. "I can take my answer," and I made as if to go, rage boiling in my heart.

"Of course you can go if you like," said Myner; "but I advise you to stay and have it out."

"What more is there to say?" I cried. "You don't want to keep me here for a needless humiliation?"

"Look here, Dodd, you must try and command your temper," said he. "This interview is of your own seeking, and not mine; if you suppose it's not disagreeable to me, you're wrong; and if you think I will give you money without knowing thoroughly about your prospects, you take me for a fool. Besides," he added, "if you come to look at it, you've got over the worst of it by now: you have done the asking, and you have every reason to know I mean to refuse. I hold out no false hopes, but it may be worth your while to let me judge."

Thus--I was going to say--encouraged, I stumbled through my story; told him I had credit at the cabman's eating-house, but began to think it was drawing to a close; how Dijon lent me a corner of his studio, where I tried to model ornaments, figures for clocks, Time with the scythe, Leda and the swan, musketeers for candlesticks, and other kickshaws, which had never (up to that day) been honoured with the least approval.

"And your room?" asked Myner.

"O, my room is all right, I think," said I. "She is a very good old lady, and has never even mentioned her bill."

"Because she is a very good old lady, I don't see why she should be fined," observed Myner.

"What do you mean by that?" I cried.

"I mean this," said he. "The French give a great deal of credit amongst themselves; they find it pays on the whole, or the system would hardly be continued; but I can't see where WE come in; I can't see that it's honest of us Anglo-Saxons to profit by their easy ways, and then skip over the Channel or (as you Yankees do) across the Atlantic."

"But I'm not proposing to skip," I objected.

"Exactly," he replied. "And shouldn't you? There's the problem. You



seem to me to have a lack of sympathy for the proprietors of cabmen's eating-houses. By your own account you're not getting on: the longer you stay, it'll only be the more out of the pocket of the dear old lady at your lodgings. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do: if you consent to go, I'll pay your passage to New York, and your railway fare and expenses to Muskegon (if I have the name right) where your father lived, where he must have left friends, and where, no doubt, you'll find an opening. I don't seek any gratitude, for of course you'll think me a beast; but I do ask you to pay it back when you are able. At any rate, that's all I can do. It might be different if I thought you a genius, Dodd; but I don't, and I advise you not to."

"I think that was uncalled for, at least," said I.

"I daresay it was," he returned, with the same steadiness. "It seemed to me pertinent; and, besides, when you ask me for money upon no security, you treat me with the liberty of a friend, and it's to be presumed that I can do the like. But the point is, do you accept?"

"No, thank you," said I; "I have another string to my bow."

"All right," says Myner. "Be sure it's honest."

"Honest? honest?" I cried. "What do you mean by calling my honesty in question?"

"I won't, if you don't like it," he replied. "You seem to think honesty as easy as Blind Man's Buff: I don't. It's some difference of definition."

I went straight from this irritating interview, during which Myner had never discontinued painting, to the studio of my old master. Only one card remained for me to play, and I was now resolved to play it: I must drop the gentleman and the frock-coat, and approach art in the workman's tunic.

"Tiens, this little Dodd!" cried the master; and then, as his eye fell on my dilapidated clothing, I thought I could perceive his countenance to darken.

I made my plea in English; for I knew, if he were vain of anything, it was of his achievement of the island tongue. "Master," said I, "will you take me in your studio again? but this time as a workman."

"I sought your fazer was immensely reech," said he.

I explained to him that I was now an orphan and penniless.

He shook his head. "I have better workmen waiting at my door," said he, "far better workmen."

"You used to think something of my work, sir," I pleaded.

"Somesing, somesing--yes!" he cried; "enough for a son of a reech man--not enough for an orphan. Besides, I sought you might learn to be an artist; I did not sink you might learn to be a workman."

On a certain bench on the outer boulevard, not far from the tomb of Napoleon, a bench shaded at that date by a shabby tree, and commanding a view of muddy roadway and blank wall, I sat down to wrestle with my misery. The weather was cheerless and dark; in three days I had eaten but once; I had no tobacco; my shoes were soaked, my trousers horrid with mire; my humour and all the circumstances of the time and place lugubriously attuned. Here were two men who had both spoken fairly of my work while I was rich and wanted nothing; now that I was poor and lacked all: "no genius," said the one; "not enough for an orphan," the other; and the first offered me my passage like a pauper immigrant, and the second refused me a day's wage as a hewer of stone--plain dealing for an empty belly. They had not been insincere in the past; they were not insincere to-day: change of circumstance had introduced a new criterion: that was all.

But if I acquitted my two Job's comforters of insincerity, I was yet far from admitting them infallible. Artists had been contemned before, and had lived to turn the laugh on their contemners. How old was Corot before he struck the vein of his own precious metal? When had a young man been more derided (or more justly so) than the god of my admiration,

Balzac? Or if I required a bolder inspiration, what had I to do but turn my head to where the gold dome of the Invalides glittered against inky squalls, and recall the tale of him sleeping there: from the day when a young artillery-sub could be giggled at and nicknamed Puss-in-Boots by frisky misses; on to the days of so many crowns and so many victories, and so many hundred mouths of cannon, and so many thousand war-hoofs trampling the roadways of astonished Europe eighty miles in front of the grand army? To go back, to give up, to proclaim myself a failure, an ambitious failure, first a rocket, then a stick! I, Loudon Dodd, who had refused all other livelihoods with scorn, and been advertised in the Saint Joseph Sunday Herald as a patriot and an artist, to be returned upon my native Muskegon like damaged goods, and go the circuit of my father's acquaintance, cap in hand, and begging to sweep offices! No, by Napoleon! I would die at my chosen trade; and the two who had that day flouted me should live to envy my success, or to weep tears of unavailing penitence behind my pauper coffin.

Meantime, if my courage was still undiminished, I was none the nearer to a meal. At no great distance my cabman's eating-house stood, at the tail of a muddy cab-rank, on the shores of a wide thoroughfare of mud, offering (to fancy) a face of ambiguous invitation. I might be received, I might once more fill my belly there; on the other hand, it was perhaps this day the bolt was destined to fall, and I might be expelled instead, with vulgar hubbub. It was policy to make the attempt, and I knew it was policy; but I had already, in the course of that one morning, endured too many affronts, and I felt I could rather starve than face another. I

had courage and to spare for the future, none left for that day; courage for the main campaign, but not a spark of it for that preliminary skirmish of the cabman's restaurant. I continued accordingly to sit upon my bench, not far from the ashes of Napoleon, now drowsy, now light-headed, now in complete mental obstruction, or only conscious of an animal pleasure in quiescence; and now thinking, planning, and remembering with unexampled clearness, telling myself tales of sudden wealth, and gustfully ordering and greedily consuming imaginary meals: in the course of which I must have dropped asleep.

It was towards dark that I was suddenly recalled to famine by a cold souse of rain, and sprang shivering to my feet. For a moment I stood bewildered: the whole train of my reasoning and dreaming passed afresh through my mind; I was again tempted, drawn as if with cords, by the image of the cabman's eating-house, and again recoiled from the possibility of insult. "Qui dort dine," thought I to myself; and took my homeward way with wavering footsteps, through rainy streets in which the lamps and the shop-windows now began to gleam; still marshalling imaginary dinners as I went.

"Ah, Monsieur Dodd," said the porter, "there has been a registered letter for you. The facteur will bring it again to-morrow."

A registered letter for me, who had been so long without one? Of what it could possibly contain, I had no vestige of a guess; nor did I delay myself guessing; far less form any conscious plan of dishonesty: the

lies flowed from me like a natural secretion.

"O," said I, "my remittance at last! What a bother I should have missed it! Can you lend me a hundred francs until to-morrow?"

I had never attempted to borrow from the porter till that moment: the registered letter was, besides, my warranty; and he gave me what he had--three napoleons and some francs in silver. I pocketed the money carelessly, lingered a while chaffing, strolled leisurely to the door; and then (fast as my trembling legs could carry me) round the corner to the Cafe de Cluny. French waiters are deft and speedy; they were not deft enough for me; and I had scarce decency to let the man set the wine upon the table or put the butter alongside the bread, before my glass and my mouth were filled. Exquisite bread of the Cafe Cluny, exquisite first glass of old Pomard tingling to my wet feet, indescribable first olive culled from the hors d'oeuvre--I suppose, when I come to lie dying, and the lamp begins to grow dim, I shall still recall your savour. Over the rest of that meal, and the rest of the evening, clouds lie thick; clouds perhaps of Burgundy; perhaps, more properly, of famine and repletion.

I remember clearly, at least, the shame, the despair, of the next morning, when I reviewed what I had done, and how I had swindled the poor honest porter; and, as if that were not enough, fairly burnt my ships, and brought bankruptcy home to that last refuge, my garret. The

porter would expect his money; I could not pay him; here was scandal in the house; and I knew right well the cause of scandal would have to pack. "What do you mean by calling my honesty in question?" I had cried the day before, turning upon Myner. Ah, that day before! the day before Waterloo, the day before the Flood; the day before I had sold the roof over my head, my future, and my self-respect, for a dinner at the Cafe Cluny!

In the midst of these lamentations the famous registered letter came to my door, with healing under its seals. It bore the postmark of San Francisco, where Pinkerton was already struggling to the neck in multifarious affairs: it renewed the offer of an allowance, which his improved estate permitted him to announce at the figure of two hundred francs a month; and in case I was in some immediate pinch, it enclosed an introductory draft for forty dollars. There are a thousand excellent reasons why a man, in this self-helpful epoch, should decline to be dependent on another; but the most numerous and cogent considerations all bow to a necessity as stern as mine; and the banks were scarce open ere the draft was cashed.

It was early in December that I thus sold myself into slavery; and for six months I dragged a slowly lengthening chain of gratitude and uneasiness. At the cost of some debt I managed to excel myself and eclipse the Genius of Muskegon, in a small but highly patriotic Standard Bearer for the Salon; whither it was duly admitted, where it stood the proper length of days entirely unremarked, and whence it came back to me

as patriotic as before. I threw my whole soul (as Pinkerton would have phrased it) into clocks and candlesticks; the devil a candlestick-maker would have anything to say to my designs. Even when Dijon, with his infinite good humour and infinite scorn for all such journey-work, consented to peddle them indiscriminately with his own, the dealers still detected and rejected mine. Home they returned to me, true as the Standard Bearer; who now, at the head of quite a regiment of lesser idols, began to grow an eyesore in the scanty studio of my friend. Dijon and I have sat by the hour, and gazed upon that company of images. The severe, the frisky, the classical, the Louis Quinze, were there--from Joan of Arc in her soldierly cuirass to Leda with the swan; nay, and God forgive me for a man that knew better! the humorous was represented also. We sat and gazed, I say; we criticised, we turned them hither and thither; even upon the closest inspection they looked quite like statuettes; and yet nobody would have a gift of them!

Vanity dies hard; in some obstinate cases it outlives the man: but about the sixth month, when I already owed near two hundred dollars to Pinkerton, and half as much again in debts scattered about Paris, I awoke one morning with a horrid sentiment of oppression, and found I was alone: my vanity had breathed her last during the night. I dared not plunge deeper in the bog; I saw no hope in my poor statuary; I owned myself beaten at last; and sitting down in my nightshirt beside the window, whence I had a glimpse of the tree-tops at the corner of the boulevard, and where the music of its early traffic fell agreeably upon my ear, I penned my farewell to Paris, to art, to my whole past life,



and my whole former self. "I give in," I wrote. "When the next allowance arrives, I shall go straight out West, where you can do what you like with me."

It is to be understood that Pinkerton had been, in a sense, pressing me to come from the beginning; depicting his isolation among new acquaintances, "who have none of them your culture," he wrote; expressing his friendship in terms so warm that it sometimes embarrassed me to think how poorly I could echo them; dwelling upon his need for assistance; and the next moment turning about to commend my resolution and press me to remain in Paris. "Only remember, Loudon," he would write, "if you ever DO tire of it, there's plenty of work here for you--honest, hard, well-paid work, developing the resources of this practically virgin State. And of course I needn't say what a pleasure it would be to me if we were going at it SHOULDER TO SHOULDER." I marvel

(looking back) that I could so long have resisted these appeals, and continue to sink my friend's money in a manner that I knew him to dislike. At least, when I did awake to any sense of my position, I awoke to it entirely; and determined not only to follow his counsel for the future, but even as regards the past, to rectify his losses. For in this juncture of affairs I called to mind that I was not without a possible resource, and resolved, at whatever cost of mortification, to beard the Loudon family in their historic city.

In the excellent Scots' phrase, I made a moonlight flitting, a thing

never dignified, but in my case unusually easy. As I had scarce a pair of boots worth portage, I deserted the whole of my effects without a pang. Dijon fell heir to Joan of Arc, the Standard Bearer, and the Musketeers. He was present when I bought and frugally stocked my new portmanteau; and it was at the door of the trunk shop that I took my leave of him, for my last few hours in Paris must be spent alone. It was alone (and at a far higher figure than my finances warranted) that I discussed my dinner; alone that I took my ticket at Saint Lazare; all alone, though in a carriage full of people, that I watched the moon shine on the Seine flood with its tufted islets, on Rouen with her spires, and on the shipping in the harbour of Dieppe. When the first light of the morning called me from troubled slumbers on the deck, I beheld the dawn at first with pleasure; I watched with pleasure the green shores of England rising out of rosy haze; I took the salt air with delight into my nostrils; and then all came back to me; that I was no longer an artist, no longer myself; that I was leaving all I cared for, and returning to all that I detested, the slave of debt and gratitude, a public and a branded failure.

From this picture of my own disgrace and wretchedness, it is not wonderful if my mind turned with relief to the thought of Pinkerton, waiting for me, as I knew, with unwearied affection, and regarding me with a respect that I had never deserved, and might therefore fairly hope that I should never forfeit. The inequality of our relation struck me rudely. I must have been stupid, indeed, if I could have considered the history of that friendship without shame--I, who had given so

little, who had accepted and profited by so much. I had the whole day before me in London, and I determined (at least in words) to set the balance somewhat straighter. Seated in the corner of a public place, and calling for sheet after sheet of paper, I poured forth the expression of my gratitude, my penitence for the past, my resolutions for the future. Till now, I told him, my course had been mere selfishness. I had been selfish to my father and to my friend, taking their help, and denying them (which was all they asked) the poor gratification of my company and countenance.

Wonderful are the consolations of literature! As soon as that letter was written and posted, the consciousness of virtue glowed in my veins like some rare vintage.