

CHAPTER XXI. FACE TO FACE.

I fell from the skies on Barbizon about two o'clock of a September afternoon. It is the dead hour of the day; all the workers have gone painting, all the idlers strolling, in the forest or the plain; the winding causewayed street is solitary, and the inn deserted. I was the more pleased to find one of my old companions in the dining-room; his town clothes marked him for a man in the act of departure; and indeed his portmanteau lay beside him on the floor.

"Why, Stennis," I cried, "you're the last man I expected to find here."

"You won't find me here long," he replied. "King Pandion he is dead; all his friends are lapped in lead. For men of our antiquity, the poor old shop is played out."

"I have had playmates, I have had companions," I quoted in return. We were both moved, I think, to meet again in this scene of our old pleasure parties so unexpectedly, after so long an interval, and both already so much altered.

"That is the sentiment," he replied. "All, all are gone, the old familiar faces. I have been here a week, and the only living creature who seemed to recollect me was the Pharaon. Bar the Sirons, of course, and the perennial Bodmer."

"Is there no survivor?" I inquired.

"Of our geological epoch? not one," he replied. "This is the city of Petra in Edom."

"And what sort of Bedouins encamp among the ruins?" I asked.

"Youth, Dodd, youth; blooming, conscious youth," he returned. "Such a gang, such reptiles! to think we were like that! I wonder Siron didn't sweep us from his premises."

"Perhaps we weren't so bad," I suggested.

"Don't let me depress you," said he. "We were both Anglo-Saxons, anyway, and the only redeeming feature to-day is another."

The thought of my quest, a moment driven out by this rencounter, revived in my mind. "Who is he?" I cried. "Tell me about him."

"What, the Redeeming Feature?" said he. "Well, he's a very pleasing creature, rather dim, and dull, and genteel, but really pleasing. He is very British, though, the artless Briton! Perhaps you'll find him too much so for the transatlantic nerves. Come to think of it, on the other hand, you ought to get on famously. He is an admirer of your great republic in one of its (excuse me) shoddiest features; he takes in and

sedulously reads a lot of American papers. I warned you he was artless."

"What papers are they?" cried I.

"San Francisco papers," said he. "He gets a bale of them about twice a week, and studies them like the Bible. That's one of his weaknesses; another is to be incalculably rich. He has taken Masson's old studio--you remember?--at the corner of the road; he has furnished it regardless of expense, and lives there surrounded with vins fins and works of art. When the youth of to-day goes up to the Caverne des Brigands to make punch--they do all that we did, like some nauseous form of ape (I never appreciated before what a creature of tradition mankind is)--this Madden follows with a basket of champagne. I told him he was wrong, and the punch tasted better; but he thought the boys liked the style of the thing, and I suppose they do. He is a very good-natured soul, and a very melancholy, and rather a helpless. O, and he has a third weakness which I came near forgetting. He paints. He has never been taught, and he's past thirty, and he paints."

"How?" I asked.

"Rather well, I think," was the reply. "That's the annoying part of it. See for yourself. That panel is his."

I stepped toward the window. It was the old familiar room, with the tables set like a Greek P, and the sideboard, and the aphasiac piano,

and the panels on the wall. There were Romeo and Juliet, Antwerp from the river, Enfield's ships among the ice, and the huge huntsman winding a huge horn; mingled with them a few new ones, the thin crop of a succeeding generation, not better and not worse. It was to one of these I was directed; a thing coarsely and wittily handled, mostly with the palette-knife, the colour in some parts excellent, the canvas in others loaded with mere clay. But it was the scene, and not the art or want of it, that riveted my notice. The foreground was of sand and scrub and wreckwood; in the middle distance the many-hued and smooth expanse of a lagoon, enclosed by a wall of breakers; beyond, a blue strip of ocean. The sky was cloudless, and I could hear the surf break. For the place was Midway Island; the point of view the very spot at which I had landed with the captain for the first time, and from which I had re-embarked the day before we sailed. I had already been gazing for some seconds, before my attention was arrested by a blur on the sea-line; and stooping to look, I recognised the smoke of a steamer.

"Yes," said I, turning toward Stennis, "it has merit. What is it?"

"A fancy piece," he returned. "That's what pleased me. So few of the fellows in our time had the imagination of a garden snail."

"Madden, you say his name is?" I pursued.

"Madden," he repeated.

"Has he travelled much?" I inquired.

"I haven't an idea. He is one of the least autobiographical of men. He sits, and smokes, and giggles, and sometimes he makes small jests; but his contributions to the art of pleasing are generally confined to looking like a gentleman and being one. No," added Stennis, "he'll never suit you, Dodd; you like more head on your liquor. You'll find him as dull as ditch water."

"Has he big blonde side-whiskers like tusks?" I asked, mindful of the photograph of Goddedaal.

"Certainly not: why should he?" was the reply.

"Does he write many letters?" I continued.

"God knows," said Stennis. "What is wrong with you? I never saw you taken this way before."

"The fact is, I think I know the man," said I. "I think I'm looking for him. I rather think he is my long-lost brother."

"Not twins, anyway," returned Stennis.

And about the same time, a carriage driving up to the inn, he took his

departure.

I walked till dinner-time in the plain, keeping to the fields; for I instinctively shunned observation, and was racked by many incongruous and impatient feelings. Here was a man whose voice I had once heard, whose doings had filled so many days of my life with interest and distress, whom I had lain awake to dream of like a lover; and now his hand was on the door; now we were to meet; now I was to learn at last the mystery of the substituted crew. The sun went down over the plain of the Angelus, and as the hour approached, my courage lessened. I let the laggard peasants pass me on the homeward way. The lamps were lit, the soup was served, the company were all at table, and the room sounded already with multitudinous talk before I entered. I took my place and found I was opposite to Madden. Over six feet high and well set up, the hair dark and streaked with silver, the eyes dark and kindly, the mouth very good-natured, the teeth admirable; linen and hands exquisite; English clothes, an English voice, an English bearing: the man stood out conspicuous from the company. Yet he had made himself at home, and seemed to enjoy a certain quiet popularity among the noisy boys of the table d'hote. He had an odd, silver giggle of a laugh, that sounded nervous even when he was really amused, and accorded ill with his big stature and manly, melancholy face. This laugh fell in continually all through dinner like the note of the triangle in a piece of modern French music; and he had at times a kind of pleasantry, rather of manner than of words, with which he started or maintained the merriment. He took his share in these diversions, not so much like a man in high spirits,

but like one of an approved good nature, habitually self-forgetful, accustomed to please and to follow others. I have remarked in old soldiers much the same smiling sadness and sociable self-effacement.

I feared to look at him, lest my glances should betray my deep excitement, and chance served me so well that the soup was scarce removed before we were naturally introduced. My first sip of Chateau Siron, a vintage from which I had been long estranged, startled me into speech.

"O, this'll never do!" I cried, in English.

"Dreadful stuff, isn't it?" said Madden, in the same language. "Do let me ask you to share my bottle. They call it Chambertin, which it isn't; but it's fairly palatable, and there's nothing in this house that a man can drink at all."

I accepted; anything would do that paved the way to better knowledge.

"Your name is Madden, I think," said I. "My old friend Stennis told me about you when I came."

"Yes, I am sorry he went; I feel such a Grandfather William, alone among all these lads," he replied.

"My name is Dodd," I resumed.

"Yes," said he, "so Madame Siron told me."

"Dodd, of San Francisco," I continued. "Late of Pinkerton and Dodd."

"Montana Block, I think?" said he.

"The same," said I.

Neither of us looked at each other; but I could see his hand deliberately making bread pills.

"That's a nice thing of yours," I pursued, "that panel. The foreground is a little clayey, perhaps, but the lagoon is excellent."

"You ought to know," said he.

"Yes," returned I, "I'm rather a good judge of--that panel."

There was a considerable pause.

"You know a man by the name of Bellairs, don't you?" he resumed.

"Ah!" cried I, "you have heard from Doctor Urquart?"

"This very morning," he replied.

"Well, there is no hurry about Bellairs," said I. "It's rather a long story and rather a silly one. But I think we have a good deal to tell each other, and perhaps we had better wait till we are more alone."

"I think so," said he. "Not that any of these fellows know English, but we'll be more comfortable over at my place. Your health, Dodd."

And we took wine together across the table.

Thus had this singular introduction passed unperceived in the midst of more than thirty persons, art students, ladies in dressing-gowns and covered with rice powder, six foot of Siron whisking dishes over our head, and his noisy sons clattering in and out with fresh relays.

"One question more," said I: "Did you recognise my voice?"

"Your voice?" he repeated. "How should I? I had never heard it--we have never met."

"And yet, we have been in conversation before now," said I, "and I asked you a question which you never answered, and which I have since had many thousand better reasons for putting to myself."

He turned suddenly white. "Good God!" he cried, "are you the man in the

telephone?"

I nodded.

"Well, well!" said he. "It would take a good deal of magnanimity to forgive you that. What nights I have passed! That little whisper has whistled in my ear ever since, like the wind in a keyhole. Who could it be? What could it mean? I suppose I have had more real, solid misery out of that ..." He paused, and looked troubled. "Though I had more to bother me, or ought to have," he added, and slowly emptied his glass.

"It seems we were born to drive each other crazy with conundrums," said I. "I have often thought my head would split."

Carthew burst into his foolish laugh. "And yet neither you nor I had the worst of the puzzle," he cried. "There were others deeper in."

"And who were they?" I asked.

"The underwriters," said he.

"Why, to be sure!" cried I, "I never thought of that. What could they make of it?"

"Nothing," replied Carthew. "It couldn't be explained. They were a crowd of small dealers at Lloyd's who took it up in syndicate; one of them has

a carriage now; and people say he is a deuce of a deep fellow, and has the makings of a great financier. Another furnished a small villa on the profits. But they're all hopelessly muddled; and when they meet each other, they don't know where to look, like the Augurs."

Dinner was no sooner at an end than he carried me across the road to Masson's old studio. It was strangely changed. On the walls were tapestry, a few good etchings, and some amazing pictures--a Rousseau, a Corot, a really superb old Crome, a Whistler, and a piece which my host claimed (and I believe) to be a Titian. The room was furnished with comfortable English smoking-room chairs, some American rockers, and an elaborate business table; spirits and soda-water (with the mark of Schweppe, no less) stood ready on a butler's tray, and in one corner, behind a half-drawn curtain, I spied a camp-bed and a capacious tub. Such a room in Barbizon astonished the beholder, like the glories of the cave of Monte Cristo.

"Now," said he, "we are quiet. Sit down, if you don't mind, and tell me your story all through."

I did as he asked, beginning with the day when Jim showed me the passage in the *Daily Occidental*, and winding up with the stamp album and the Chailly postmark. It was a long business; and Carthew made it longer, for he was insatiable of details; and it had struck midnight on the old eight-day clock in the corner, before I had made an end.

"And now," said he, "turn about: I must tell you my side, much as I hate it. Mine is a beastly story. You'll wonder how I can sleep. I've told it once before, Mr. Dodd."

"To Lady Ann?" I asked.

"As you suppose," he answered; "and to say the truth, I had sworn never to tell it again. Only, you seem somehow entitled to the thing; you have paid dear enough, God knows; and God knows I hope you may like it, now you've got it!"

With that he began his yarn. A new day had dawned, the cocks crew in the village and the early woodmen were afoot, when he concluded.