

CHAPTER IV

SOMETHING ABOUT MY FELLOW PASSENGERS

SEPTEMBER 30 to October 6. -- The Chancellor is a rapid sailer, and more than a match for many a vessel of the same dimensions. She scuds along merrily in the freshening breeze, leaving in her wake, far as the eye can reach, a long white line of foam as well defined as a delicate strip of lace stretched upon an azure ground.

The Atlantic is not visited by many gales, and I have every reason to believe that the rolling and pitching of the vessel no longer incommode any of the passengers, who are all more or less accustomed to the sea. A vacant seat at our table is now very rare; we are beginning to know something about each other, and our daily life, in consequence, is becoming somewhat less monotonous.

M. Letourneur, our French fellow-passenger, often has a chat with me. He is a fine tall man, about fifty years of age, with white hair and a grizzly beard. To say the truth, he looks older than he really is: his drooping head, his dejected manner, and his eye, ever and again suffused with tears, indicate that he is haunted by some deep and abiding sorrow. He never laughs; he rarely even smiles, and then only on his son; his countenance ordinarily bearing a look

of bitterness tempered by affection, while his general expression is one of caressing tenderness. It excites an involuntary commiseration to learn that M. Letourneur is consuming himself by exaggerated reproaches on account of the infirmity of an afflicted son.

Andre Letourneur is about twenty years of age, with a gentle, interesting countenance, but, to the irrepressible grief of his father, is a hopeless cripple. His left leg is miserably deformed, and he is quite unable to walk without the assistance of a stick. It is obvious that the father's life is bound up with that of his son; his devotion is unceasing; every thought, every glance is for Andre; he seems to anticipate his most trifling wish, watches his slightest movement, and his arm is ever ready to support or otherwise assist the child whose sufferings he more than shares.

M. Letourneur seems to have taken a peculiar fancy to myself, and constantly talks about Andre. This morning, in the course of conversation, I said:

"You have a good son, M. Letourneur. I have just been talking to him. He is a most intelligent young man."

"Yes, Mr. Kazallon," replied M. Letourneur, brightening up into a smile, "his afflicted frame contains a noble

mind. He is like his mother, who died at his birth."

"He is full of reverence and love for you, sir," I remarked.

"Dear boy!" muttered the father half to himself. "Ah, Mr. Kazallon," he continued, "you do not know what it is to a father to have a son a cripple, beyond hope of cure."

"M. Letourneur," I answered, "you take more than your share of the affliction which has fallen upon you and your son. That M. Andre is entitled to the very greatest commiseration no one can deny; but you should remember, that after all a physical infirmity is not so hard to bear as mental grief. Now, I have watched your son pretty closely, and unless I am much mistaken there is nothing that troubles him so much as the sight of your own sorrow."

"But I never let him see it," he broke in hastily. "My sole thought is how to divert him. I have discovered that, in spite of his physical weakness, he delights in traveling; so for the last few years we have been constantly on the move. We first went all over Europe, and are now returning from visiting the principal places in the United States. I never allowed my son to go to college, but instructed him entirely myself, and these travels, I hope, will

serve to complete his education. He is very intelligent, and has a lively imagination, and I am sometimes tempted to hope that in contemplating the wonders of nature he forgets his own infirmity."

"Yes, sir, of course he does," I assented.

"But," continued M. Letourneur, taking my hand, "although, perhaps, HE may forget, I can never forget. Ah, sir, do you suppose that Andre can ever forgive his parents for bringing him into the world a cripple?"

The remorse of the unhappy father was very distressing, and I was about to say a few kind words of sympathy when Andre himself made his appearance. M. Letourneur hastened toward him and assisted him up the few steep steps that led to the poop.

As soon as Andre was comfortably seated on one of the benches, and his father had taken his place by his side, I joined them, and we fell into conversation upon ordinary topics, discussing the various points of the Chancellor, the probable length of the passage, and the different details of our life on board. I find that M. Letourneur's estimate of Captain Huntly's character very much coincides with my own, and that, like me, he is impressed with the man's un-

decided manner and sluggish appearance. Like me, too, he has formed a very favorable opinion of Robert Curtis, the mate, a man of about thirty years of age, of great muscular power, with a frame and a will that seem ever ready for action.

While we were still talking of him, Curtis himself came on deck, and as I watched his movements I could not help being struck with his physical development; his erect and easy carriage, his fearless glance and slightly contracted brow all betoken a man of energy, thoroughly endowed with the calmness and courage that are indispensable to the true sailor. He seems a kind-hearted fellow, too, and is always ready to assist and amuse young Letourneur, who evidently enjoys his company. After he had scanned the weather and examined the trim of the sails, he joined our party and proceeded to give us some information about those of our fellow-passengers with whom at present we have made but slight acquaintance.

Mr. Kear, the American, who is accompanied by his wife, has made a large fortune in the petroleum springs in the United States. He is a man of about fifty, a most uninteresting companion, being overwhelmed with a sense of his own wealth and importance, and consequently supremely indifferent to all around him. His hands are always in his

pockets, and the chink of money seems to follow him wherever he goes. Vain and conceited, a fool as well as an egotist, he struts about like a peacock showing its plumage, and to borrow the words of the physiognomist Gratiolet, "il se flaire, il se savoure, il se goute." Why he should have taken his passage on board a mere merchant vessel instead of enjoying the luxuries of a transatlantic steamer, I am altogether at a loss to explain.

The wife is an insignificant, insipid woman, of about forty years of age. She never reads, never talks, and I believe I am not wrong in saying, never thinks. She seems to look without seeing, and listen without hearing, and her sole occupation consists in giving her orders to her companion, Miss Herbey, a young English girl of about twenty.

Miss Herbey is extremely pretty. Her complexion is fair and her eyes deep blue, while her pleasing countenance is altogether free from that insignificance of feature which is not unfrequently alleged to be characteristic of English beauty. Her mouth would be charming if she ever smiled, but, exposed as she is to the ridiculous whims and fancies of a capricious mistress, her lips rarely relax from their ordinary grave expression. Yet, humiliating as her position must be, she never utters a word of open complaint, but quietly and gracefully performs her duties, accepting

without a murmur the paltry salary which the bumptious petroleum-merchant condescends to allow her.

The Manchester engineer, William Falsten, looks like a thorough Englishman. He has the management of some extensive hydraulic works in South Carolina, and is now on his way to Europe to obtain some improved apparatus, and more especially to visit the mines worked by centrifugal force, belonging to the firm of Messrs. Cail. He is forty-five years of age, with all his interests so entirely absorbed by his machinery that he seems to have neither a thought nor a care beyond his mechanical calculations. Once let him engage you in conversation, and there is no chance of escape; you have no help for it but to listen as patiently as you can until he has completed the explanation of his designs.

The last of our fellow-passengers, Mr. Ruby, is the type of a vulgar tradesman. Without any originality or magnanimity in his composition, he has spent twenty years of his life in mere buying and selling, and as he has generally contrived to do business at a profit, he has realized a considerable fortune. What he is going to do with the money, he does not seem able to say: his ideas do not go beyond retail trade, his mind having been so long closed to all other impressions that it appears incapable of thought

or reflection on any subject besides. Pascal says,
"L'homme est visiblement fait pour penser. C'est toute
sa dignite et tout son merite;" but to Mr. Ruby the phrase
seems altogether inapplicable.