



- [CHAPTER I](#)
- [CHAPTER II](#)
- [CHAPTER III](#)
- [CHAPTER IV](#)
- [CHAPTER V](#)
- [CHAPTER VI](#)
- [CHAPTER VII](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII](#)
- [CHAPTER IX](#)
- [CHAPTER X](#)
- [CHAPTER XI](#)
- [CHAPTER XII](#)
- [CHAPTER XIII](#)
- [CHAPTER XIV](#)
- [CHAPTER XV](#)
- [CHAPTER XVI](#)

Byron's Profession, by George Bernard Shaw

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Cashel Byron's Profession

By

George Bernard Shaw

PROLOGUE

I

Moncrief House, Panley Common. Scholastic establishment for the sons of gentlemen, etc.

Panley Common, viewed from the back windows of Moncrief House, is a tract of grass, furze and rushes, stretching away to the western horizon.

One wet spring afternoon the sky was full of broken clouds, and the common was swept by their shadows, between which patches of green and yellow gorse were bright in the broken sunlight. The hills to the northward were obscured by a heavy shower, traces of which were drying off the slates of the school, a square white building, formerly a gentleman's country-house. In front of it was a well-kept lawn with a few clipped holly-trees. At the rear, a quarter of an acre of land was enclosed for the use of the boys. Strollers on the common could hear, at certain hours, a hubbub of voices and racing footsteps from within the boundary wall. Sometimes, when the strollers were boys themselves, they climbed to the coping, and saw on the other side a piece of common trampled bare and brown, with a few square yards of concrete, so worn into hollows as to be unfit for its original use as a ball-alley. Also a long shed, a pump, a door defaced by innumerable incised

inscriptions, the back of the house in much worse repair than the front, and about fifty boys in tailless jackets and broad, turned-down collars. When the fifty boys perceived a stranger on the wall they rushed to the spot with a wild halloo, overwhelmed him with insult and defiance, and dislodged him by a volley of clods, stones, lumps of bread, and such other projectiles as were at hand.

On this rainy spring afternoon a brougham stood at the door of Moncrief House. The coachman, enveloped in a white india-rubber coat, was bestirring himself a little after the recent shower. Within-doors, in the drawing-room, Dr. Moncrief was conversing with a stately lady aged about thirty-five, elegantly dressed, of attractive manner, and only falling short of absolute beauty in her complexion, which was deficient in freshness.

"No progress whatever, I am sorry to say," the doctor was remarking.

"That is very disappointing," said the lady, contracting her brows.

"It is natural that you should feel disappointed," replied the doctor. "I would myself earnestly advise you to try the effect of placing him at some other--" The doctor stopped. The lady's face had lit up with a wonderful smile, and she had raised her hand with a bewitching gesture of protest.

"Oh, no, Dr. Moncrief," she said. "I am not disappointed with YOU; but I am all the more angry with Cashel, because I know that if he makes no progress with you it must be his own fault. As to taking him away, that is out of the question. I should not have a moment's peace if he were out of your care. I will speak to him very seriously about his conduct before I leave to-day. You will give him another trial, will you not?"

"Certainly. With the greatest pleasure," exclaimed the doctor, confusing himself by an inept attempt at gallantry. "He shall stay as long as you please. But"--here the doctor became grave again--"you cannot too strongly urge upon him the importance of hard work at the present time, which may be said to be the turning-point of his career as a student. He is now nearly seventeen; and he has so little inclination for study that I doubt whether he could pass the examination necessary to entering one of the universities. You probably wish him to take a degree before he chooses a profession."

"Yes, of course," said the lady, vaguely, evidently assenting to the doctor's remark rather than expressing a conviction of her own. "What profession would you advise for him? You know so much better than I."

"Hum!" said Dr. Moncrief, puzzled. "That would doubtless depend to some extent on his own taste--"

"Not at all," said the lady, interrupting him with vivacity. "What does he know about the world, poor boy? His own taste is sure to be something ridiculous. Very likely he would want to go on the stage, like me."

"Oh! Then you would not encourage any tendency of that sort?"

"Most decidedly not. I hope he has no such idea."

"Not that I am aware of. He shows so little ambition to excel in any particular branch that I should say his choice of a profession may be best determined by his parents. I am, of course, ignorant whether his relatives possess influence likely to be of use to him. That is often the chief point to be considered, particularly in cases like your son's, where no special aptitude manifests itself."

"I am the only relative he ever had, poor fellow," said the lady, with a pensive smile. Then, seeing an expression of astonishment on the doctor's face, she added, quickly, "They are all dead."

"Dear me!"

"However," she continued, "I have no doubt I can make plenty of interest for him. But it is difficult to get anything nowadays without passing competitive examinations. He really must work. If he is lazy he ought to be punished."

The doctor looked perplexed. "The fact is," he said, "your son can hardly be dealt with as a child any longer. He is still quite a boy in his habits and ideas; but physically he is rapidly springing up into a young man. That reminds me of another point on which I will ask you to speak earnestly to him. I must tell you that he has attained some distinction among his school-fellows here as an athlete. Within due bounds I do not discourage bodily exercises: they are a recognized part of our system. But I am sorry to say that Cashel has not escaped that tendency to violence which sometimes results from the possession of unusual strength and dexterity. He actually fought with one of the village youths in the main street of Panley some months ago. The matter did not come to my ears immediately; and, when it did, I allowed it to pass unnoticed, as he had interfered, it seems, to protect one of the smaller boys. Unfortunately he was guilty of a much more serious fault a little later. He and a companion of his had obtained leave from me to walk to Panley Abbey together. I afterwards found that their real object was to witness a prize-fight that took place--illegally, of course--on the common. Apart from the deception practised, I think the taste they betrayed a dangerous one; and I felt bound to punish them by a severe imposition, and restriction to the grounds for six weeks. I do not hold, however, that everything has been done in these cases when a boy has been punished. I set a high value on a mother's influence for softening the natural roughness of boys."

"I don't think he minds what I say to him in the least," said the lady, with a sympathetic air, as if she pitied the doctor in a matter that chiefly concerned him. "I will speak to him about it, of course. Fighting is an unbearable habit. His father's people were always fighting; and they never did any good in the world."

"If you will be so kind. There are just the three points: the necessity for greater--much greater--application to his studies; a word to him on the subject of rough habits; and to sound him as to his choice of a career. I agree with you in not attaching much importance to his ideas on that subject as yet. Still, even a boyish fancy may be turned to account in rousing the energies of a lad."

"Quite so," assented the lady. "I will certainly give him a lecture."

The doctor looked at her mistrustfully, thinking perhaps that she herself would be the better for a lecture on her duties as a mother. But he did not dare to tell her so; indeed, having a prejudice to the effect that actresses were deficient in natural feeling, he doubted the use of daring. He also feared that the subject of her son was beginning to bore her; and, though a doctor of divinity, he was as reluctant as other men to be found wanting in address by a pretty woman. So he rang the bell, and bade the servant send Master Cashel Byron. Presently a door was heard to open below, and a buzz of distant voices became audible. The doctor fidgeted and tried to think of something to say, but his invention failed him: he sat in silence while the inarticulate buzz rose into a shouting of "By-ron!" "Cash!" the latter cry imitated from the summons usually addressed to cashiers in haberdashers' shops. Finally there was a piercing yell of "Mam-ma-a-a-ah!" apparently in explanation of the demand for Byron's attendance in the drawing-room. The doctor reddened. Mrs. Byron smiled. Then the door below closed, shutting out the tumult, and footsteps were heard on the stairs.

"Come in," cried the doctor, encouragingly.

Master Cashel Byron entered blushing; made his way awkwardly to his mother, and kissed the critical expression which was on her upturned face as she examined his appearance. Being only seventeen, he had not yet acquired a taste for kissing. He inexpertly gave Mrs. Byron quite a shock by the collision of their teeth. Conscious of the failure, he drew himself upright, and tried to hide his hands, which were exceedingly dirty, in the scanty folds of his jacket. He was a well-grown youth, with neck and shoulders already strongly formed, and short auburn hair curling in little rings close to his scalp. He had blue eyes, and an expression of boyish good-humor, which, however, did not convey any assurance of good temper.

"How do you do, Cashel?" said Mrs. Byron, in a queenly manner, after a prolonged look at him.

"Very well, thanks," said he, grinning and avoiding her eye.

"Sit down, Byron," said the doctor. Byron suddenly forgot how to sit down, and looked irresolutely from one chair to another. The doctor made a brief excuse, and left the room; much to the relief of his pupil.

"You have grown greatly, Cashel. And I am afraid you are very awkward." Cashel colored and looked gloomy.

"I do not know what to do with you," continued Mrs. Byron. "Dr. Moncrief tells me that you are very idle and rough."

"I am not," said Cashel, sulkily. "It is bec--"

"There is no use in contradicting me in that fashion," said Mrs. Byron, interrupting him sharply. "I am sure that whatever Dr. Moncrief says is perfectly true."

"He is always talking like that," said Cashel, plaintively. "I can't learn Latin and Greek; and I don't see what good they are. I work as hard as any of the rest--except the regular stewes, perhaps. As to my being rough, that is all because I was out one day with Gully Molesworth, and we saw a crowd on the common, and when we went to see what was up it was two men fighting. It wasn't our fault that they came there to fight."

"Yes; I have no doubt that you have fifty good excuses, Cashel. But I will not allow any fighting; and you really must work harder. Do you ever think of how hard *I* have to work to pay Dr. Moncrief one hundred and twenty pounds a year for you?"

"I work as hard as I can. Old Moncrief seems to think that a fellow ought to do nothing else from morning till night but write Latin verses. Tatham, that the doctor thinks such a genius, does all his constering from cribs. If I had a crib I could conster as well--very likely better."

"You are very idle, Cashel; I am sure of that. It is too provoking to throw away so much money every year for nothing. Besides, you must soon be thinking of a profession."

"I shall go into the army," said Cashel. "It is the only profession for a gentleman."

Mrs. Byron looked at him for a moment as if amazed at his presumption. But she checked herself and only said, "I am afraid you will have to choose some less expensive profession than that. Besides, you would have to pass an examination to enable you to enter the army; and how can you do that unless you study?"

"Oh, I shall do that all right enough when the time comes."

"Dear, dear! You are beginning to speak so coarsely, Cashel. After all the pains I took with you at home!"

"I speak the same as other people," he replied, sullenly. "I don't see the use of being so jolly particular over every syllable. I used to have to stand no end of chaff about my way of speaking. The fellows here know all about you, of course."

"All about me?" repeated Mrs. Byron, looking at him curiously.

"All about your being on the stage, I mean," said Cashel. "You complain of my fighting; but I should have a precious bad time of it if I didn't lick the chaff out of some of them."

Mrs. Byron smiled doubtfully to herself, and remained silent and thoughtful for a moment. Then she rose and said, glancing at the weather, "I must go now, Cashel, before another shower begins. And do, pray, try to learn something, and to polish your manners a little. You will have to go to Cambridge soon, you know."

"Cambridge!" exclaimed Cashel, excited. "When, mamma? When?"

"Oh, I don't know. Not yet. As soon as Dr. Moncrief says you are fit to go."

"That will be long enough," said Cashel, much dejected by this reply. "He will not turn one hundred and twenty pounds a year out of doors in a hurry. He kept big Inglis here until he was past twenty. Look here, mamma; might I go at the end of this half? I feel sure I should do better at Cambridge than here."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Byron, decidedly. "I do not expect to have to take you away from Dr. Moncrief for the next eighteen months at least, and not then unless you work properly. Now don't grumble, Cashel; you annoy me exceedingly when you do. I am sorry I mentioned Cambridge to you."

"I would rather go to some other school, then," said Cashel, ruefully. "Old Moncrief is so awfully down on me."

"You only want to leave because you are expected to work here; and that is the very reason I wish you to stay."

Cashel made no reply; but his face darkened ominously.

"I have a word to say to the doctor before I go," she added, reseating herself. "You may return to your play now. Good-bye, Cashel." And she again raised her face to be kissed.

"Good-bye," said Cashel, huskily, as he turned toward the door, pretending that he had not noticed her action.

"Cashel!" she said, with emphatic surprise. "Are you sulky?"

"No," he retorted, angrily. "I haven't said anything. I suppose my manners are not good enough, I'm very sorry; but I can't help it."

"Very well," said Mrs. Byron, firmly. "You can go, Cashel. I am not pleased with you."

Cashel walked out of the room and slammed the door. At the foot of the staircase he was stopped by a boy about a year younger than himself, who accosted him eagerly.

"How much did she give you?" he whispered.

"Not a halfpenny," replied Cashel, grinding his teeth.

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed the other, much disappointed. "That was beastly mean."

"She's as mean as she can be," said Cashel. "It's all old Monkey's fault. He has been cramming her with lies about me. But she's just as bad as he is. I tell you, Gully, I hate my mother."

"Oh, come!" said Gully, shocked. "That's a little too strong, old chap. But she certainly ought to have stood something."

"I don't know what you intend to do, Gully; but I mean to bolt. If she thinks I am going to stick here for the

next two years she is jolly much mistaken."

"It would be an awful lark to bolt," said Gully, with a chuckle. "But," he added, seriously, "if you really mean it, by George, I'll go too! Wilson has just given me a thousand lines; and I'll be hanged if I do them."

"Gully," said Cashel, his eyes sparkling, "I should like to see one of those chaps we saw on the common pitch into the doctor--get him on the ropes, you know."

Gully's mouth watered. "Yes," he said, breathlessly; "particularly the fellow they called the Fibber. Just one round would be enough for the old beggar. Let's come out into the playground; I shall catch it if I am found here."

II

That night there was just sufficient light struggling through the clouds to make Panley Common visible as a black expanse, against the lightest tone of which a piece of ebony would have appeared pale. Not a human being was stirring within a mile of Moncrief House, the chimneys of which, ghostly white on the side next the moon, threw long shadows on the silver-gray slates. The stillness had just been broken by the stroke of a quarter past twelve from a distant church tower, when, from the obscurity of one of these chimney shadows, a head emerged. It belonged to a boy, whose body presently wriggled through an open skylight. When his shoulders were through he turned himself face upward, seized the miniature gable in which the skylight was set, drew himself completely out, and made his way stealthily down to the parapet. He was immediately followed by another boy.

The door of Moncrief House was at the left-hand corner of the front, and was surmounted by a tall porch, the top of which was flat and could be used as a balcony. A wall, of the same height as the porch, connected the house front with the boundary wall, and formed part of the enclosure of a fruit garden which lay at the side of the house between the lawn and the playground. When the two boys had crept along the parapet to a point directly above the porch they stopped, and each lowered a pair of boots to the balcony by means of fishing-lines. When the boots were safely landed, their owners let the lines drop and reentered the house by another skylight. A minute elapsed. Then they reappeared on the top of the porch, having come out through the window to which it served as a balcony. Here they put on their boots, and stepped on to the wall of the fruit garden. As they crawled along it, the hindmost boy whispered.

"I say, Cashy."

"Shut up, will you," replied the other under his breath. "What's wrong?"

"I should like to have one more go at old mother Moncrief's pear-tree; that's all."

"There are no pears on it this season, you fool."

"I know. This is the last time we shall go this road, Cashy. Usen't it to be a lark? Eh?"

"If you don't shut up, it won't be the last time; for you'll be caught. Now for it."

Cashel had reached the outer wall, and he finished his sentence by dropping from it to the common. Gully held his breath for some moments after the noise made by his companion's striking the ground. Then he demanded in a whisper whether all was right.

"Yes," returned Cashel, impatiently. "Drop as soft as you can."

Gully obeyed; and was so careful lest his descent should shake the earth and awake the doctor, that his feet shrank from the concussion. He alighted in a sitting posture, and remained there, looking up at Cashel with a stunned expression.

"Crikey!" he ejaculated, presently. "That was a buster."

"Get up, I tell you," said Cashel. "I never saw such a jolly ass as you are. Here, up with you! Have you got your wind back?"

"I should think so. Bet you twopence I'll be first at the cross roads. I say, let's pull the bell at the front gate and give an awful yell before we start. They'll never catch us."

"Yes," said Cashel, ironically; "I fancy I see myself doing it, or you either. Now then. One, two, three, and away."

They ran off together, and reached the cross roads about eight minutes later; Gully completely out of breath, and Cashel nearly so. Here, according to their plan, Gully was to take the north road and run to Scotland, where he felt sure that his uncle's gamekeeper would hide him. Cashel was to go to sea; where, he argued, he could, if his affairs became desperate, turn pirate, and achieve eminence in that profession by adding a chivalrous humanity to the ruder virtues for which it is already famous.

Cashel waited until Gully had recovered from his race. Then he said.

"Now, old fellow, we've got to separate."

Gully, thus confronted with the lonely realities of his scheme, did not like the prospect. After a moment's reflection he exclaimed:

"Damme, old chap, but I'll come with you. Scotland may go and be hanged."

But Cashel, being the stronger of the two, was as anxious to get rid of Gully as Gully was to cling to him. "No," he said; "I'm going to rough it; and you wouldn't be able for that. You're not strong enough for a sea life. Why, man, those sailor fellows are as hard as nails; and even they can hardly stand it."

"Well, then, do you come with me," urged Gully. "My uncle's gamekeeper won't mind. He's a jolly good sort; and we shall have no end of shooting."

"That's all very well for you, Gully; but I don't know your uncle; and I'm not going to put myself under a compliment to his gamekeeper. Besides, we should run too much risk of being caught if we went through the country together. Of course I should be only too glad if we could stick to one another, but it wouldn't do; I feel certain we should be nabbed. Good-bye."

"But wait a minute," pleaded Gully. "Suppose they do try to catch us; we shall have a better chance against them if there are two of us."

"Stuff!" said Cashel. "That's all boyish nonsense. There will be at least six policemen sent after us; and even if I did my very best, I could barely lick two if they came on together. And you would hardly be able for one. You just keep moving, and don't go near any railway station, and you will get to Scotland all safe enough. Look here, we have wasted five minutes already. I have got my wind now, and I must be off. Good-bye."

Gully disdained to press his company on Cashel any further. "Good-bye," he said, mournfully shaking his hand. "Success, old chap."

"Success," echoed Cashel, grasping Gully's hand with a pang of remorse for leaving him. "I'll write to you as soon as I have anything to tell you. It may be some months, you know, before I get regularly settled."

He gave Gully a final squeeze, released him, and darted off along the road leading to Panley Village. Gully looked after him for a moment, and then ran away Scotlandwards.

Panley Village consisted of a High Street, with an old-fashioned inn at one end, a modern railway station and bridge at the other, and a pump and pound midway between. Cashel stood for a while in the shadow under the bridge before venturing along the broad, moonlit street. Seeing no one, he stepped out at a brisk walking pace; for he had by this time reflected that it was not possible to run all the way to the Spanish main. There was, however, another person stirring in the village besides Cashel. This was Mr. Wilson, Dr. Moncrief's professor of mathematics, who was returning from a visit to the theatre. Mr. Wilson had an impression that theatres were wicked places, to be visited by respectable men only on rare occasions and by stealth. The only plays he went openly to witness were those of Shakespeare; and his favorite was "As You Like It"; Rosalind in tights having an attraction for him which he missed in Lady Macbeth in petticoats. On this evening he had seen Rosalind impersonated by a famous actress, who had come to a neighboring town on a starring tour. After the performance he had returned to Panley, supped there with a friend, and was now making his way back to Moncrief House, of which he had been intrusted with the key. He was in a frame of mind favorable for the capture of a runaway boy. An habitual delight in being too clever for his pupils, fostered by frequently overreaching them in mathematics, was just now stimulated by the effect of a liberal supper and the roguish consciousness of having been to the play. He saw and recognized Cashel as he approached the village pound. Understanding the situation at once, he hid behind the pump, waited until the unsuspecting truant was passing within arm's-length, and then stepped out and seized him by the collar of his jacket.

"Well, sir," he said. "What are you doing here at this hour? Eh?"

Cashel, scared and white, looked up at him, and could not answer a word.

"Come along with me," said Wilson, sternly.

Cashel suffered himself to be led for some twenty yards. Then he stopped and burst into tears.

"There is no use in my going back," he said, sobbing. "I have never done any good there. I can't go back."

"Indeed," said Wilson, with magisterial sarcasm. "We shall try to make you do better in future." And he forced the fugitive to resume his march.

Cashel, bitterly humiliated by his own tears, and exasperated by a certain cold triumph which his captor evinced on witnessing them, did not go many steps farther without protest.

"You needn't hold me," he said, angrily; "I can walk without being held." The master tightened his grasp and pushed his captive forward. "I won't run away, sir," said Cashel, more humbly, shedding fresh tears. "Please let me go," he added, in a suffocated voice, trying to turn his face toward his captor. But Wilson twisted him back again, and urged him still onward. Cashel cried out passionately, "Let me go," and struggled to break loose.

"Come, come, Byron," said the master, controlling him with a broad, strong hand; "none of your nonsense, sir."

Then Cashel suddenly slipped out of his jacket, turned on Wilson, and struck up at him savagely with his right fist. The master received the blow just beside the point of his chin; and his eyes seemed to Cashel roll up and fall back into his head with the shock. He drooped forward for a moment, and fell in a heap face downward.

Cashel recoiled, wringing his hand to relieve the tingling of his knuckles, and terrified by the thought that he had committed murder. But Wilson presently moved and dispelled that misgiving. Some of Cashel's fury returned as he shook his fist at his prostrate adversary, and, exclaiming, "YOU won't brag much of having seen me cry," wrenched the jacket from him with unnecessary violence, and darted away at full speed.

Mr. Wilson, though he was soon conscious and able to rise, did not feel disposed to stir for a long time. He began to moan with a dazed faith that some one would eventually come to him with sympathy and assistance. Five minutes elapsed, and brought nothing but increased cold and pain. It occurred to him that if the police found him they would suppose him to be drunk; also that it was his duty to go to them and give them the alarm. He rose, and, after a struggle with dizziness and nausea, concluded that his most pressing duty was to get to bed, and leave Dr. Moncrief to recapture his ruffianly pupil as best he could.

Accordingly, at half-past one o'clock, the doctor was roused by a knocking at his chamber-door, outside which he presently found his professor of mathematics, bruised, muddy, and apparently inebriated. Five minutes elapsed before Wilson could get his principal's mind on the right track. Then the boys were awakened and the roll called. Byron and Molesworth were reported absent. No one had seen them go; no one had the least suspicion of how they got out of the house. One little boy mentioned the skylight; but observing a threatening expression on the faces of a few of the bigger boys, who were fond of fruit, he did not press his suggestion, and submitted to be snubbed by the doctor for having made it. It was nearly three o'clock before the alarm reached the village, where the authorities tacitly declined to trouble themselves about it until morning. The doctor, convinced that the lad had gone to his mother, did not believe that any search was necessary, and contented himself with writing a note to Mrs. Byron describing the attack on Mr. Wilson, and expressing regret that no proposal having for its object the readmission of Master Byron to the academy could be entertained.

The pursuit was now directed entirely after Molesworth, and it was plain, from Mr. Wilson's narrative, that he had separated from Cashel outside Panley. Information was soon forthcoming. Peasants in all parts of the country had seen, they said, "a lad that might be him." The search lasted until five o'clock next afternoon, when it was rendered superfluous by the appearance of Gully in person, footsore and repentant. After parting from Cashel and walking two miles, he had lost heart and turned back. Half way to the cross roads he had reproached himself with cowardice, and resumed his flight. This time he placed eight miles betwixt himself and Moncrief House. Then he left the road to make a short cut through a plantation, and went astray. After wandering until morning, thinking dejectedly of the story of the babes in the wood, he saw a woman working in a field, and asked her the shortest way to Scotland. She had never heard of Scotland; and when he asked the way to Panley she lost patience and threatened to set her dog at him. This discouraged him so much that he was afraid to speak to the other strangers whom he met. Having the sun as a compass, he oscillated between Scotland and Panley according to the fluctuation of his courage. At last he yielded to hunger, fatigue, and loneliness, devoted his remaining energy to the task of getting back to school; struck the common at last, and hastened to surrender himself to the doctor, who menaced him with immediate expulsion. Gully was greatly concerned at having to leave the place he had just run away from, and earnestly begged the doctor to give him another chance. His prayer was granted. After a prolonged lecture, the doctor, in consideration of the facts that Gully had been seduced by the example of a desperate associate, that he had proved the sincerity of his repentance by coming back of his own accord, and had not been accessory to the concussion of the brain from which Mr. Wilson supposed himself to be suffering, accepted his promise of amendment and gave him a free pardon. It should be added that Gully kept his promise, and, being now the oldest pupil, graced his position by becoming a moderately studious, and, on one occasion, even a sensible lad.

Meanwhile Mrs. Byron, not suspecting the importance of the doctor's note, and happening to be in a hurry when it arrived, laid it by unopened, intending to read it at her leisure. She would have forgotten it altogether but for a second note which came two days later, requesting some acknowledgment of the previous communication. On learning the truth she immediately drove to Moncrief House, and there abused the doctor as he had never been abused in his life before; after which she begged his pardon, and implored him to assist

her to recover her darling boy. When he suggested that she should offer a reward for information and capture she indignantly refused to spend a farthing on the little ingrate; wept and accused herself of having driven him away by her unkindness; stormed and accused the doctor of having treated him harshly; and, finally, said that she would give one hundred pounds to have him back, but that she would never speak to him again. The doctor promised to undertake the search, and would have promised anything to get rid of his visitor. A reward of fifty pounds was offered. But whether the fear of falling into the clutches of the law for murderous assault stimulated Cashel to extraordinary precaution, or whether he had contrived to leave the country in the four days which elapsed between his flight and the offer of the reward, the doctor's efforts were unsuccessful; and he had to confess their failure to Mrs. Byron. She agreeably surprised him by writing a pleasant letter to the effect that it was very provoking, and that she could never thank him sufficiently for all the trouble he had taken. And so the matter dropped.

Long after that generation of scholars had passed away from Moncrief House, the name of Cashel Byron was remembered there as that of a hero who, after many fabulous exploits, had licked a master and bolted to the Spanish Main.

III

There was at this time in the city of Melbourne, in Australia, a wooden building, above the door of which was a board inscribed "GYMNASIUM AND SCHOOL OF ARMS." In the long, narrow entry hung a framed manuscript which set forth that Ned Skene, ex-champion of England and the colonies, was to be heard of within daily by gentlemen desirous of becoming proficient in the art of self-defence. Also the terms on which Mrs. Skene, assisted by a competent staff of professors, would give lessons in dancing, deportment, and calisthenics.

One evening a man sat smoking on a common wooden chair outside the door of this establishment. On the ground beside him were some tin tacks and a hammer, with which he had just nailed to the doorpost a card on which was written in a woman's handwriting: "WANTED A MALE ATTENDANT WHO CAN KEEP ACCOUNTS. INQUIRE WITHIN." The smoker was a powerful man, with a thick neck that swelled out beneath his broad, flat ear-lobes. He had small eyes, and large teeth, over which his lips were slightly parted in a good-humored but cunning smile. His hair was black and close-cut; his skin indurated; and the bridge of his nose smashed level with his face. The tip, however, was uninjured. It was squab and glossy, and, by giving the whole feature an air of being on the point of expanding to its original shape, produced a snubbed expression which relieved the otherwise formidable aspect of the man, and recommended him as probably a modest and affable fellow when sober and unprovoked. He seemed about fifty years of age, and was clad in a straw hat and a suit of white linen.

He had just finished his pipe when a youth stopped to read the card on the doorpost. This youth was attired in a coarse sailor's jersey and a pair of gray tweed trousers, which he had considerably outgrown.

"Looking for a job?" inquired the ex-champion of England and the colonies.

The youth blushed and replied, "Yes. I should like to get something to do."

Mr. Skene stared at him with stern curiosity. His professional pursuits had familiarized him with the manners and speech of English gentlemen, and he immediately recognized the shabby sailor lad as one of that class.

"Perhaps you're a scholar," said the prize-fighter, after a moment's reflection.

"I have been at school; but I didn't learn much there," replied the youth. "I think I could bookkeep by double entry," he added, glancing at the card.

"Double entry! What's that?"

"It's the way merchants' books are kept. It is called so because everything is entered twice over."

"Ah!" said Skene, unfavorably impressed by the system; "once is enough for me. What's your weight?"

"I don't know," said the lad, with a grin.

"Not know your own weight!" exclaimed Skene. "That ain't the way to get on in life."

"I haven't been weighed since I was in England," said the other, beginning to get the better of his shyness. "I was eight stone four then; so you see I am only a light-weight."

"And what do you know about light-weights? Perhaps, being so well educated, you know how to fight. Eh?"

"I don't think I could fight you," said the youth, with another grin.

Skene chuckled; and the stranger, with boyish communicativeness, gave him an account of a real fight (meaning, apparently, one between professional pugilists) which he had seen in England. He went on to describe how he had himself knocked down a master with one blow when running away from school. Skene received this sceptically, and cross-examined the narrator as to the manner and effect of the blow, with the result of convincing himself that the story was true. At the end of a quarter of an hour the lad had commended himself so favorably by his conversation that the champion took him into the gymnasium, weighed him, measured him, and finally handed him a pair of boxing gloves and invited him to show what he was made of. The youth, though impressed by the prize-fighter's attitude with a hopeless sense of the impossibility of reaching him, rushed boldly at him several times, knocking his face on each occasion against Skene's left fist, which seemed to be ubiquitous, and to have the property of imparting the consistency of iron to padded leather. At last the novice directed a frantic assault at the champion's nose, rising on his toes in his excitement as he did so. Skene struck up the blow with his right arm, and the impetuous youth spun and stumbled away until he fell supine in a corner, rapping his head smartly on the floor at the same time. He rose with unabated cheerfulness and offered to continue the combat; but Skene declined any further exercise just then, and, much pleased with his novice's game, promised to give him a scientific education and make a man of him.

The champion now sent for his wife, whom he revered as a preeminently sensible and well-mannered woman. The newcomer could see in her only a ridiculous dancing-mistress; but he treated her with great deference, and thereby improved the favorable opinion which Skene had already formed of him. He related to her how, after running away from school, he had made his way to Liverpool, gone to the docks, and contrived to hide himself on board a ship bound for Australia. Also how he had suffered severely from hunger and thirst before he discovered himself; and how, notwithstanding his unpopular position as stowaway, he had been fairly treated as soon as he had shown that he was willing to work. And in proof that he was still willing, and had profited by his maritime experience, he offered to sweep the floor of the gymnasium then and there. This proposal convinced the Skenes, who had listened to his story like children listening to a fairy tale, that he was not too much of a gentleman to do rough work, and it was presently arranged that he should thenceforth board and lodge with them, have five shillings a week for pocket-money, and be man-of-all-work, servant, gymnasium- attendant, clerk, and apprentice to the ex-champion of England and the colonies.

He soon found his bargain no easy one. The gymnasium was open from nine in the morning until eleven at night, and the athletic gentlemen who came there not only ordered him about without ceremony, but varied the monotony of being set at naught by the invincible Skene by practising what he taught them on the person of his apprentice, whom they pounded with great relish, and threw backwards, forwards, and over their shoulders as though he had been but a senseless effigy, provided for that purpose. Meanwhile the champion looked on and laughed, being too lazy to redeem his promise of teaching the novice to defend himself. The

latter, however, watched the lessons which he saw daily given to others, and, before the end of a month, he so completely turned the tables on the amateur pugilists of Melbourne that Skene one day took occasion to remark that he was growing uncommon clever, but that gentlemen liked to be played easy with, and that he should be careful not to knock them about too much. Besides these bodily exertions, he had to keep account of gloves and foils sold and bought, and of the fees due both to Mr. and Mrs. Skene. This was the most irksome part of his duty; for he wrote a large, schoolboy hand, and was not quick at figures. When he at last began to assist his master in giving lessons the accounts had fallen into arrear, and Mrs. Skene had to resume her former care of them; a circumstance which gratified her husband, who regarded it as a fresh triumph of her superior intelligence. Then a Chinaman was engaged to do the more menial work of the establishment. "Skene's novice," as he was now generally called, was elevated to the rank of assistant professor to the champion, and became a person of some consequence in the gymnasium.

He had been there more than nine months, and had developed from an active youth into an athletic young man of eighteen, when an important conversation took place between him and his principal. It was evening, and the only persons in the gymnasium were Ned Skene, who sat smoking at his ease with his coat off, and the novice, who had just come down-stairs from his bedroom, where he had been preparing for a visit to the theatre.

"Well, my gentleman," said Skene, mockingly; "you're a fancy man, you are. Gloves too! They're too small for you. Don't you get hittin' nobody with them on, or you'll mebber sprain your wrist."

"Not much fear of that," said the novice, looking at his watch, and, finding that he had some minutes to spare, sitting down opposite Skene.

"No," assented the champion. "When you rise to be a regular professional you won't care to spar with nobody without you're well paid for it."

"I may say I am in the profession already. You don't call me an amateur, do you?"

"Oh, no," said Skene, soothingly; "not so bad as that. But mind you, my boy, I don't call no man a fighting-man what ain't been in the ring. You're a sparrer, and a clever, pretty sparrer; but sparring ain't the real thing. Some day, please God, we'll make up a little match for you, and show what you can do without the gloves."

"I would just as soon have the gloves off as on," said the novice, a little sulkily.

"That's because you have a heart as big as a lion," said Skene, patting him on the shoulder. But the novice, who was accustomed to hear his master pay the same compliment to his patrons whenever they were seized with fits of boasting (which usually happened when they got beaten), looked obdurate and said nothing.

"Sam Ducket, of Milltown, was here to-day while you was out giving Captain Noble his lesson," continued Skene, watching his apprentice's face cunningly. "Now Sam is a real fighting-man, if you like."

"I don't think much of him. He's a liar, for one thing."

"That's a failing of the profession. I don't mind telling YOU so," said Skene, mournfully. Now the novice had found out this for himself, already. He never, for instance, believed the accounts which his master gave of the accidents and conspiracies which had led to his being defeated three times in the ring. However, as Skene had won fifteen battles, his next remark was undeniable. "Men fight none the worse for being liars. Sam Ducket bet Ebony Muley in twenty minutes."

"Yes," said the novice, scornfully; "and what is Ebony Muley? A wretched old nigger nearly sixty years old,

who is drunk seven days in the week, and would sell a fight for a glass of brandy! Ducket ought to have knocked him out of time in seventy seconds. Ducket has no science."

"Not a bit," said Ned. "But he has lots of game."

"Pshaw! Come, now, Ned; you know as well as I do that that is one of the stalest commonplaces going. If a fellow knows how to box, they always say he has science but no pluck. If he doesn't know his right hand from his left, they say that he isn't clever but that he is full of game."

Skene looked with secret wonder at his pupil, whose powers of observation and expression sometimes seemed to him almost to rival those of Mrs. Skene. "Sam was saying something like that to-day," he remarked. "He says you're only a sparrer, and that you'd fall down with fright if you was put into a twenty-four-foot ring."

The novice flushed. "I wish I had been here when Sum Ducket said that."

"Why, what could you ha' done to him?" said Skene, his small eyes twinkling.

"I'd have punched his head; that's what I could and would have done to him."

"Why, man, he'd eat you."

"He might. And he might eat you too, Ned, if he had salt enough with you. He talks big because he knows I have no money; and he pretends he won't strip for less than fifty pounds a side."

"No money!" cried Skene. "I know them as'll make up fifty pound before twelve to-morrow for any man as I will answer for. There'd be a start for a young man! Why, my fust fight was for five shillings in Tott'nam Fields; and proud I was when I won it. I don't want to set you on to fight a crack like Sam Ducket anyway against your inclinations; but don't go for to say that money isn't to be had. Let Ned Skene pint to a young man and say, 'That's the young man as Ned backs,' and others will come for'ard--ay, crowds of 'em."

The novice hesitated. "Do you think I ought to, Ned?" he said.

"That ain't for me to say," said Skene, doggedly. "I know what I would ha' said at your age. But perhaps you're right to be cautious. I tell you the truth, I wouldn't care to see you whipped by the like of Sam Ducket."

"Will you train me if I challenge him?"

"Will I train you!" echoed Skene, rising with enthusiasm. "Ay will I train you, and put my money on you, too; and you shall knock fireworks out of him, my boy, as sure as my name's Ned Skene."

"Then," cried the novice, reddening with excitement, "I'll fight him. And if I lick him you will have to hand over your belt as champion of the colonies to me."

"So I will," said Skene, affectionately. "Don't out late; and don't for your life touch a drop of liquor. You must go into training to-morrow."

This was Cashel Byron's first professional engagement.