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The Pilgrims of the Rhine

Lytton, Edward Bulwer Lytton

London, 1834

Chapter VI.

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-120544](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-120544)



CHAPTER VI.

GORCUM.—THE TOUR OF THE VIRTUES: A PHILOSOPHER'S TALE.

It was a bright and cheery morning as they glided by GORCUM. The boats pulling to the shore full of fishermen and peasants in their national costume; the breeze, just curling the waters, and no more; the lightness of the blue sky; the loud and laughing voices from the boats,—all contributed to raise the spirit and fill it with that indescribable gladness which is the physical sense of life.

The tower of the church, with its long windows and its round dial, rose against the light clear sky, and on a bench under a green bush facing the water, sate a jolly Hollander, refreshing the breezes with the fumes of his national weed.

“How little it requires to make a journey pleasant, when the companions are our friends,” said Gertrude as they sailed along. “Nothing can be duller than these banks; nothing more delightful than this voyage.”

“Yet what tries the affections of people for each other so severely as a journey together,” said Vane. “That perpetual companionship from which there is no escaping, that confinement, in all our moments of ill-humour and listlessness, with persons who want us to look amused—ah, it is a severe ordeal for friendship to pass through! A post chaise must have jolted many an intimacy to death.”

“You speak feelingly, dear father,” said Gertrude laughing; “and I suspect with a slight desire to be sarcastic upon us. Yet, seriously, I should think that travel must be like life, and that good persons must be always agreeable companions to each other.”

“Good persons! my Gertrude,” answered Vane with a smile. “Alas, I fear the good weary each other quite as much as the bad. What say you, Trevelyman, would Virtue be a pleasant companion from Paris to Petersburg? Ah, I see you intend to be on Gertrude’s side of the question. Well now if I tell you a story, since stories are so much the fashion with you, in which you shall find that

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the Virtues themselves actually made the experiment of a tour, will you promise to attend to the moral."

"Oh, dear father, any thing for a story," cried Gertrude; "especially from you who have not told us one all the way. Come, listen, Albert; nay, listen to your new rival."

And, pleased to see the vivacity of the invalid, Vane began as follows:—

THE TOUR OF THE VIRTUES.

A PHILOSOPHER'S TALE.

ONCE upon a time, several of the Virtues, weary of living for ever with the bishop of Norwich, resolved to make a little excursion; accordingly, though they knew every thing on earth was very ill prepared to receive them, they thought they might safely venture on a tour, from Westminster bridge to Richmond; the day was fine, the wind in their favour, and as to entertainment,—why there seemed, according to Gertrude, to be no possibility of any disagreement among the Virtues.

They took a boat at Westminster stairs, and just as they were about to push off, a poor woman, all in rags, with a child in her arms, implored their compassion. Charity put her hand into her reticule, and took out a shilling. Justice, turning round to look after the baggage, saw the folly Charity was about to commit. "Heavens!" cried Justice, seizing poor Charity by the arm, "what are you

doing? Have you never read Political Economy? Don't you know that indiscriminate almsgiving is only the encouragement to idleness, the mother of vice? You a Virtue, indeed! I'm ashamed of you. Get along with you, good woman—yet stay, there is a ticket for soup at the Mendicity Society, they'll see if you're a proper object of compassion." But Charity is quicker than Justice, and slipping her hand behind her, the poor woman got the shilling and the ticket for soup too. Economy and Generosity saw the double gift. "What waste!" cried Economy, frowning; "what, a ticket and a shilling! *either* would have sufficed."

"Either!" said Generosity; "fie! Charity should have given the poor creature half a crown, and Justice a dozen tickets!" So the next ten minutes were consumed in a quarrel between the four Virtues, which would have lasted all the way to Richmond, if Courage had not advised them to get on shore and fight it out. Upon this, the Virtues suddenly perceived they had a little forgotten themselves, and Generosity offering the first apology, they made it up, and went on very agreeably for the next mile or two.

The day now grew a little overcast, and a shower seemed at hand. Prudence, who had a new bonnet on, suggested the propriety of putting to shore for half an hour; Courage was for braving the rain; but, as most of the Virtues are ladies, Prudence carried it. Just as they were about to land, another boat cut in before them very uncivilly, and gave theirs such a shake, that Charity was all but overboard. The

company on board the uncivil boat, who evidently thought the Virtues extremely low persons, for they had nothing very fashionable about their exterior, burst out laughing at Charity's discomposure, especially as a large basket full of buns, which Charity carried with her for any hungry-looking children she might encounter at Richmond, fell pounce into the water. Courage was all on fire; he twisted his moustache, and would have made an onset on the enemy, if, to his great indignation, Meekness had not forestalled him, by stepping mildly into the hostile boat and offering both cheeks to the foe; this was too much even for the incivility of the boatmen; they made their excuses to the Virtues, and Courage, who is no bully, thought himself bound discontentedly to accept them. But, oh, if you had seen how Courage used Meekness afterwards, you could not have believed it possible that one Virtue could be so enraged with another! This quarrel between the two threw a damp on the party; and they proceeded on their voyage, when the shower was over, with any thing but cordiality. I spare you the little squabbles that took place in the general conversation—how Economy found fault with all the villas by the way; and Temperance expressed becoming indignation at the luxuries of the city barge. They arrived at Richmond, and Temperance was appointed to order the dinner; meanwhile Hospitality, walking in the garden, fell in with a large party of Irishmen, and asked them to join the repast.

Imagine the long faces of Economy and Prudence, when

they saw the addition to the company. Hospitality was all spirits, he rubbed his hands and called for champagne with the tone of a younger brother. Temperance soon grew scandalised, and Modesty herself coloured at some of the jokes; but Hospitality, who was now half seas over, called the one a milksop, and swore at the other as a prude. Away went the hours; it was time to return, and they made down to the water-side thoroughly out of temper with one another, Economy and Generosity quarrelling all the way about the bill and the waiters. To make up the sum of their mortification, they passed a boat where all the company were in the best possible spirits, laughing and whooping like mad; and discovered these jolly companions to be two or three agreeable Vices, who had put themselves under the management of Good Temper. So you see, Gertrude, that even the Virtues may fall at loggerheads with each other, and pass a very sad time of it, if they happen to be of opposite dispositions, and have forgotten to take Good Temper along with them.

“Ah!” said Gertrude, “but you have overloaded your boat; too many Virtues might contradict one another, but not a few.”

“Voilà ce que je veux dire,” said Vane; “but listen to the sequel of my tale, which now takes a new moral.”

At the end of the voyage, and after a long sulky silence, Prudence said, with a thoughtful air, “My dear friends, I have been thinking, that as long as we keep so entirely together, never mixing with the rest of the world, we

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shall waste our lives in quarrelling amongst ourselves, and run the risk of being still less liked and sought after than we already are. You know that we are none of us popular; every one is quite contented to see us represented in a vaudeville, or described in an essay. Charity, indeed, has her name often taken in vain at a bazaar, or a subscription, and the miser as often talks of the duty he owes to *me*, when he sends the stranger from his door, or his grandson to gaol; but still we only resemble so many wild beasts, whom every body likes to see, but nobody cares to possess. Now, I propose, that we should all separate and take up our abode with some mortal or other for a year, with the power of changing at the end of that time should we not feel ourselves comfortable, that is, should we not find that we do all the good we intend; let us try the experiment, and on this day twelvemonths let us all meet, under the largest oak in Windsor forest, and recount what has befallen us?" Prudence ceased, as she always does when she has said enough, and, delighted at the project, the Virtues agreed to adopt it on the spot. They were enchanted at the idea of setting up for themselves, and each not doubting his or her success: for Economy in her heart thought Generosity no Virtue at all, and Meekness looked on Courage as little better than a heathen.

Generosity, being the most eager and active of all the Virtues, set off first on his journey. Justice followed, and kept up with him, though at a more even pace. Charity never heard a sigh, or saw a squalid face, but she stayed to

cheer and console the sufferer; a kindness which somewhat retarded her progress.

Courage espied a travelling carriage, with a man and his wife in it quarrelling most conjugally, and he civilly begged he might be permitted to occupy the vacant seat opposite the lady. Economy still lingered, inquiring for the cheapest inns. Poor Modesty looked round and sighed, on finding herself so near to London, where she was almost wholly unknown; but resolved to bend her course thither, for two reasons; first, for the novelty of the thing; and, secondly, not liking to expose herself to any risks by a journey on the Continent. Prudence, though the first to project, was the last to execute, and therefore resolved to remain where she was for that night, and take daylight for her travels.

The year rolled on, and the Virtues, punctual to the appointment, met under the oak tree; they all came nearly at the same time, excepting Economy, who had got into a return post-chaise, the horses of which having been forty miles in the course of the morning had foundered by the way, and retarded her journey till night set in. The Virtues looked sad and sorrowful, as people are wont to do after a long and fruitless journey, and somehow or other, such was the wearing effect of their intercourse with the world, that they appeared wonderfully diminished in size.

"Ah, my dear Generosity," said Prudence with a sigh, "as you were the first to set out on your travels, pray let us hear your adventures first."

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“You must know, my dear sisters,” said Generosity, “that I had not gone many miles from you before I came to a small country town, in which a marching regiment was quartered, and at an open window I beheld, leaning over a gentleman’s chair, the most beautiful creature imagination ever pictured; her eyes shone out like two suns of perfect happiness, and she was almost cheerful enough to have passed for Good Temper herself. The gentleman, over whose chair she leant, was her husband; they had been married six weeks; he was a lieutenant with a hundred pounds a year besides his pay. Greatly affected by their poverty, I instantly determined, without a second thought, to ensconce myself in the heart of this charming girl. During the first hour in my new residence, I made many wise reflections, such as—that Love never was so perfect as when accompanied by poverty; what a vulgar error it was to call the unmarried state ‘*Single Blessedness*’; how wrong it was of us Virtues never to have tried the marriage bond, and what a falsehood it was to say that husbands neglected their wives, for never was there any thing in nature so devoted as the love of a husband—six weeks married!

“The next morning, before breakfast, as the charming Fanny was waiting for her husband, who had not yet finished his toilet, a poor wretched-looking object appeared at the window, tearing her hair and wringing her hands; her husband had that morning been dragged to prison, and her seven children had fought for the last mouldy crust. Prompted by me, Fanny, without inquiring further into the matter, drew from her silken purse a five pound note, and gave it to the

beggar, who departed more amazed than grateful. Soon after the lieutenant appeared,—‘What the d——l, another bill!’ muttered he, as he tore the yellow wafer from a large, square, folded, bluish piece of paper. ‘Oh, ah! confound the fellow, *he* must be paid. I must trouble you, Fanny, for fifteen pounds to pay this saddler’s bill.’

“‘Fifteen pounds, love?’ stammered Fanny, blushing.

“‘Yes, dearest, that fifteen pounds I gave you yesterday.’”

“‘I have only ten pounds,’ said Fanny, hesitatingly, ‘for such a poor wretched-looking creature was here just now, that I was obliged to give her five pounds.’”

“‘Five pounds? good God!’ exclaimed the astonished husband, ‘I shall have no more money these three weeks.’ He frowned, he bit his lips, nay he even wrung his hands, and walked up and down the room; worse still, he broke forth with—‘Surely, Madam, you did not suppose, when you married a lieutenant in a marching regiment, that he could afford to indulge you in the whim of giving five pounds to every mendicant who held out her hand to you? You did not, I say, Madam, imagine——’ but the bridegroom was interrupted by the convulsive sobs of his wife; it was their first quarrel, they were but six weeks married; he looked at her for one moment sternly, the next he was at her feet. ‘Forgive me, dearest Fanny, forgive me, for I cannot forgive myself. I was too great a wretch to say what I did; and do believe, my own Fanny, that while I may be too poor to indulge you in it, I do from my heart admire so noble, so disinterested, a generosity.’ Not a little proud did I feel to have been the cause of this exemplary husband’s

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admiration for his amiable wife, and sincerely did I rejoice at having taken up my abode with these *poor* people; but not to tire you, my dear sisters, with the minutiae of detail, I shall briefly say that things did not long remain in this delightful position; for, before many months had elapsed, poor Fanny had to bear with her husband's increased and more frequent storms of passion, unfolloved by any halcyon and honeymoon suings for forgiveness;—for at my instigation every shilling went; and when there were no more to go, her trinkets, and even her clothes followed. The lieutenant became a complete brute, and even allowed his unbridled tongue to call me—me, sisters, *me*—‘heartless Extravagance.’ His despicable brother officers, and their gossiping wives, were no better, for they did nothing but animadvert upon my Fanny's ostentation and absurdity, for by such names had they the impertinence to call *me*. Thus grieved to the soul to find myself the cause of all poor Fanny's misfortunes, I resolved at the end of the year to leave her, being thoroughly convinced, that, however amiable and praiseworthy I might be in myself, I was totally unfit to be bosom friend and adviser to the wife of a lieutenant in a marching regiment, with only a hundred pounds a year besides his pay.”

The Virtues groaned their sympathy with the unfortunate Fanny; and Prudence, turning to Justice, said, “I long to hear what you have been doing, for I am certain you cannot have occasioned harm to any one.”

Justice shook her head and said, “Alas, I find that there are times and places, when even I do better not to appear,

as a short account of my adventures will prove to you. No sooner had I left you than I instantly repaired to India, and took up my abode with a Brahmin. I was much shocked by the dreadful inequalities of condition that reigned in the several castes, and I longed to relieve the poor Pariah from his ignominious destiny,—accordingly I set seriously to work on reform. I insisted upon the iniquity of abandoning men from their birth to an irremediable state of contempt, from which no virtue could exalt them. The Brahmins looked upon *my* Brahmin with ineffable horror. They called *me* the most wicked of vices; they saw no distinction between Justice and Atheism. I uprooted their society—that was sufficient crime. But the worst was, that the Pariahs themselves regarded me with suspicion; they thought it unnatural in a Brahmin to care for a Pariah! And one called me ‘Madness,’ another ‘Ambition,’ and a third ‘The Desire to innovate.’ My poor Brahmin led a miserable life of it; when one day, after observing, at my dictation, that he thought a Pariah’s life as much entitled to respect as a cow’s, he was hurried away by the priests, and secretly broiled on the altar, as a fitting reward for his sacrilege. I fled hither in great tribulation, persuaded that in some countries even Justice may do harm.”

“As for me,” said Charity, not waiting to be asked, “I grieve to say that I was silly enough to take up my abode with an old lady in Dublin, who never knew what discretion was, and always acted from impulse; my instigation was irresistible, and the money she gave in her drives through the suburbs of Dublin, was so lavishly spent that it kept

all the rascals of the city in idleness and whiskey. I found, to my great horror, that I was a main cause of a terrible epidemic, and that to give alms without discretion was to spread poverty without help. I left the city when my year was out, and, as ill-luck would have it, just at the time when I was most wanted."

"And oh," cried Hospitality, "I went to Ireland also. I fixed my abode with a Squireen; I ruined him in a year, and only left him because he had no longer a hovel to keep me in."

"As for myself," said Temperance, "I entered the breast of an English legislator, and he brought in a bill against alehouses; the consequence was, that the labourers took to gin, and I have been forced to confess, that Temperance may be too zealous, when she dictates too vehemently to others."

"Well," said Courage, keeping more in the back-ground than he had ever done before, and looking rather ashamed of himself, "that travelling carriage I got into belonged to a German General and his wife, who were returning to their own country. Growing very cold as we proceeded, she wrapped me up in a *polonaise*; but the cold increasing, I inadvertently crept into her bosom; once there I could not get out, and from thenceforward the poor General had considerably the worst of it. She became so provoking, that I wondered how he could refrain from an explosion. To do him justice, he did at last threaten to get out of the carriage, upon which, roused by me, she collared him—and conquered. When he got to his own district things grew worse, for every

aid-de-camp that offended her, she insisted that he might be publicly reprehended, and should the poor General refuse, she would with her own hands confer a caning upon them. It was useless to appeal to the Archduke; for if she said it was hot, the General dared not hint that he thought it cold, and so far did he carry his dread of this awful dame, that he never issued a standing order for the army, curtailed a moustache, or lengthened a coat, without soliciting her opinion first. The additional force she had gained in me was too much odds against the poor General, and he died of a broken heart, six months after my *liaison* with his wife. She after this became so dreaded and detested, that a conspiracy was formed to poison her; *this* daunted even me, so I left her without delay,—*et me voici.*”

“Humph!” said Meekness, with an air of triumph; “I at least have been more successful than you. On seeing much in the papers of the cruelties practised by the Turks on the Greeks, I thought my presence would enable the poor sufferers to bear their misfortunes calmly. I went to Greece then, at a moment when a well-planned and practicable scheme of emancipating themselves from the Turkish yoke was arousing their youth. Without confining myself to one individual, I flitted from breast to breast; I meekened the whole nation; my remonstrances against the insurrection succeeded, and I had the satisfaction of leaving a whole people ready to be killed, or strangled, with the most Christian resignation in the world.”

The Virtues, who had been a little cheered by the opening self-complacency of Meekness, would not, to her great

astonishment, allow that she had succeeded a whit more happily than her sisters, and called next upon Modesty for her confession.

“You know,” said that amiable young lady, “that I went to London in search of a situation. I spent three months of the twelve in going from house to house, but I could not get a single person to receive me. The ladies declared they never saw so old-fashioned a gawkey, and civilly recommended me to their abigails; the abigails turned me round with a stare, and then pushed me down to the kitchen and the fat scullion-maids; who assured me, that ‘in the respectable families they had had the honour to live in, they had never even heard of my name.’ One young housemaid, just from the country, did indeed receive me with some sort of civility; but she very soon lost me in the servants’ hall. I now took refuge with the other sex, as the least uncourteous. I was fortunate enough to find a young gentleman of remarkable talents, who welcomed me with open arms. He was full of learning, gentleness, and honesty. I had only one rival—Ambition. We both contended for an absolute empire over him. Whatever Ambition suggested, I damped. Did Ambition urge him to begin a book, I persuaded him it was not worth publication. Did he get up, full of knowledge, and instigated by my rival to make a speech, (for he was in Parliament,) I shocked him with the sense of his assurance—I made his voice droop and his accents falter. At last, with an indignant sigh, my rival left him; he retired into the country,

took orders, and renounced a career he had fondly hoped would be serviceable to others; but finding I did not suffice for his happiness, and piqued at his melancholy, I left him before the end of the year, and he has since taken to drinking!"

The eyes of the Virtues were all turned to Prudence. She was their last hope—"I am just where I set out," said that discreet Virtue; "I have done neither good nor harm. To avoid temptation, I went and lived with a hermit, to whom I soon found that I could be of no use beyond warning him not to overboil his peas and lentils, not to leave his door open when a storm threatened, and not to fill his pitcher too full at the neighbouring spring. I am thus the only one of you that never did harm; but only because I am the only one of you that never had an opportunity of doing it! In a word," continued Prudence, thoughtfully, "in a word, my friends, circumstances are necessary to the Virtues themselves. Had, for instance, Economy changed with Generosity, and gone to the poor lieutenant's wife, and had I lodged with the Irish Squireen instead of Hospitality, what misfortunes would have been saved to both! Alas! I perceive we lose all our efficacy when we are misplaced; and *then*, though in reality Virtues, we operate as Vices. Circumstances must be favourable to our exertions, and harmonious with our nature; and we lose our very divinity unless Wisdom directs our footsteps to the home we should inhabit, and the dispositions we should govern."

The story was ended, and the travellers began to dispute about its moral. Here let us leave them.

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THE CHURCH OF ST. MARIA.

Cologne.

W. B. 1840

SAUNDERS & OILEY — FOR THE PROPRIETOR G. I. ROBERTS.