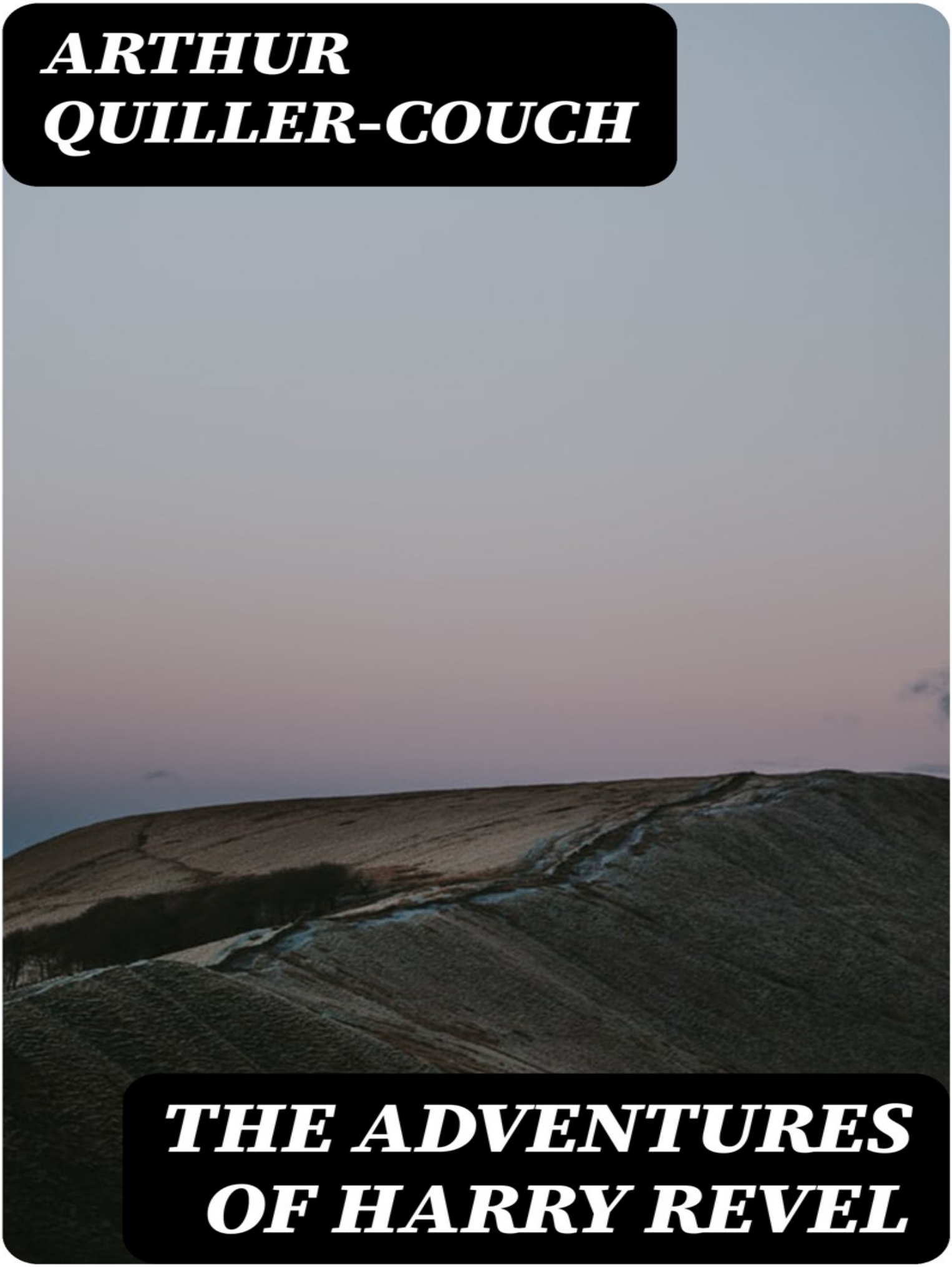
ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH



# THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY REVEL

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**Arthur Quiller-Couch**

# The Adventures of Harry Revel

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# PREFACE

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When I started to set down these early adventures of Harry Revel, I meant to dedicate them to my friend Mr. W. F. Collier of Woodtown, Horrabridge: but he died while the story was writing, and now cannot twit me with the pranks I have played among his stories of bygone Plymouth, nor send me his forgiveness—as he would have done. Peace be to him for a lover of Dartmoor and true gentleman of Devon!

So now I have only to beg, by way of preface, that no one will bother himself by inquiring too curiously into the geography, topography, etc. of this tale, or of any that I have written or may write. If these tales have any sense of locality, they certainly will not square with the ordnance maps; and even the magnetic pole works loose and goes astray at times—a phenomenon often observed by sailors off the sea-coast of Bohemia.

It may be permissible to add that the story which follows by no means exhausts the adventures, civil and military, of Harry Revel. But the recital of his further campaigning in company with Mr. Benjamin Jope, and of the verses in which Miss Plinlimmon commemorated it, will depend upon public favour.

A.T. QUILLER-COUCH.
THE HAVEN, FOWEY, March 28th, 1903.

# CHAPTER I.

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## I FIND MYSELF A FOUNDLING.

My earliest recollections are of a square courtyard surrounded by high walls and paved with blue and white pebbles in geometrical patterns—circles, parallelograms, and lozenges. Two of these walls were blank, and had been coped with broken bottles; a third, similarly coped, had heavy folding doors of timber, leaden-grey in colour and studded with black bolt-heads. Beside them stood a leaden-grey sentry-box, and in this sat a red-faced man with a wooden leg and a pigtail, whose business was to attend to the wicket and keep an eye on us small boys as we played. He owned two books which he read constantly: one was Foxe's *Martyrs*, and the other (which had no title on the binding) I opened one day and found to be *The Devil on Two Sticks*.

The arch over these gates bore two gilt legends. That facing the roadway ran: "*Train up a Child in the Way he should Go,*" which prepared the visitor to read on the inner side: "*When he is Old he will not Depart from it.*" But we twenty-five small foundlings, who seldom evaded the wicket, and so passed our days with the second half of the quotation, found in it a particular and dreadful meaning.

The fourth and last wall was the front of the hospital, a two-storeyed building of grey limestone, with a clock and a small cupola of copper, weather-greened, and a steeply pitched roof of slate pierced with dormer windows, behind

one of which (because of a tendency to walk in my sleep) I slept in the charge of Miss Plinlimmon, the matron. Below the eaves ran a line of eight tall windows, the three on the extreme right belonging to the chapel; and below these again a low-browed colonnade, in the shelter of which we played on rainy days, but never in fine weather—though its smooth limestone slabs made an excellent pitch for marbles, whereas on the pebbles in the yard expertness could only be attained by heart-breaking practice. Yet we preferred them. If it did nothing else, the Genevan Hospital, by Plymouth Dock, taught us to suit ourselves to the world as we found it.

I do not remember that we were unhappy or nursed any sense of injury, except over the porridge for breakfast. The Rev. Mr. Scougall, our pastor, had founded the hospital some twenty years before with the money subscribed by certain Calvinistic ladies among whom he ministered, and under the patronage of a Port Admiral of like belief, then occupying Admiralty House. His purpose (to which we had not the smallest objection) was to rescue us small jetsam and save us from many dreadful Christian heresies, more especially those of Rome. But he came from the north of Britain and argued (I suppose) that what porridge had done for him in childhood it might well do for us— a conclusion against which our poor little southern stomachs rebelled. It oppressed me worse than any, for since the discovery of my sleep-walking habit my supper (of plain bread and water) had been docked, so that I came ravenous to breakfast and yet could not eat.

Nevertheless, I do not think we were unhappy. Perhaps we were too young, and at any rate we had nothing with which to contrast our lot. Across the roadway outside lay blue water, and of this and of roving ships and boats and free passers-by glimpses came to us through the wicket when Mr. George, the porter (we always addressed him as "Mr." and supposed him to resemble the King in features), admitted a visitor, or the laundress, or the butcher's boy. And sometimes we broke off a game to watch the topmasts of a vessel gliding by silently, above the wall's coping. But if at any time the world called to us, we took second thoughts, remembering our clothes.

We wore, I dare say, the most infernal costume ever devised by man—a tightish snuff-coloured jacket with diminutive tails, an orange waistcoat, snuff-coloured breeches, grey-blue worsted stockings, and square-toed shoes with iron toe-plates. Add a flat-topped cap with an immense leathern brim; add Genevan neck-bands; add, last of all, a leathern badge with "G.F.H." (Genevan Foundling Hospital) depending from the left breast-button; and you may imagine with what diffidence we took our rare walks abroad. The dock-boys, of course, greeted us with cries of "Yellow Hammer!" The butcher-boy had once even dared to fling that taunt at us within our own yard; and we left him in no doubt about the hammering, gallant fellow though he was and wore a spur on his left heel. But no bodily deformity could have corroded us as did those thrice-accursed garments with terror of the world without and of its laughter.

Of a world yet more distant we were taught the gloomiest views. Twice a week regularly, and incidentally

whenever he found occasion, Mr. Scougall painted the flames of hell for us in the liveliest colours. We never doubted his word that our chances of escaping them were small indeed; but somehow, as life did not allure, so eternity did not greatly frighten us. Meanwhile we played at our marbles. We knew, in spite of the legend over the gateway, that at the age of ten or so our elder companions disappeared. They went, as a fact, into various trades and callings, like ordinary parish apprentices. Perhaps we guessed this; if so, it must have been vaguely, and I incline to believe that we confused their disappearance with death in our childish musings on the common lot. They never came back to see us; and I remember that we were curiously shy of speaking about them, once gone.

From Miss Plinlimmon's window above the eaves I could look over the front wall on to an edge of roadway, a straight dock like a canal— crowded with shipping—and a fort which fired a gun in the early morning and again at sunset. And every morning, too, the drums would sound from the hill at our back; and be answered by a soldier, who came steadily down the roadway beside the dock, halted in front of our gates, and blew a call on his bugle. Other bugle-calls sounded all around us throughout the day and far into our sleep-time: but this was the only performer I ever saw. He wore a red coat, a high japanned hat, and clean white pantaloons with black gaiters: and I took it for granted that he was always the same soldier. Yet I had plenty of opportunities for observing him, for Miss Plinlimmon made it a rule that I should stand at the window and continue to gaze out of it while she dressed.

One day she paused in the act of plaiting her hair. "Harry," said she, "I shall always think of you and that tune together. It is called the Revelly, which is a French word."

"But the soldier is English?" said I.

"Oh, I truly trust so—a heart of oak, I should hope! England cannot have too many of them in these days, when a weak woman can scarce lay herself down in her bed at night with the certainty of getting up in the same position in the morning."

(They were days when, as I afterwards learnt, Napoleon's troops and flat-bottomed boats were gathered at Boulogne and waiting their opportunity to invade us. But of this scarcely an echo penetrated to our courtyard, although the streets outside were filled daily with the tramping of troops and rolling of store-wagons. We knew that our country—whatever that might mean—was at war with France, and we played in our yard a game called "French and English." That was all: and Miss Plinlimmon, good soul, if at times she awoke in the night and shuddered and listened for the yells of Frenchmen in the town, heroically kept her fears to herself. This was as near as she ever came to imparting them.)

"I have often thought of you, Harry," she went on, "as embracing a military career. Mr. Scougall very kindly allows me to choose surnames for you boys when you—when you leave us. He says (but I fear in flattery) that I have more invention than he." And here, though bound on my word of honour not to look, I felt sure she was smiling to herself in the glass. "What would you say if I christened you Revelly?"

"Oh, please, no!" I entreated. "Let mine be an English name. Why—why couldn't I be called Plinlimmon? I would rather have that than any name in the world."

"You are a darling!" exclaimed she, much to my surprise; and, the next moment, I felt a little pecking kiss on the back of my neck. She usually kissed me at night, after my prayers were said: but somehow this was different, and it fetched tears to my eyes—greatly to my surprise, for we were not given to tears at the Genevan Hospital. "Plinlimmon is a mountain in Wales, and that, I dare say, is what makes me so romantic. Now, you are not romantic in the least: and, besides, it wouldn't do. No, indeed. But you shall be called by an English name, if you wish, though to my mind there's a *je ne sais quoi* about the French. I once knew a Frenchman, a writing and dancing master, called Duvelleroy, which always seemed the beautifullest name."

"Was he beautiful himself?" I asked.

"He used to play a kit—which is a kind of small fiddle—holding it across his waist. It made him look as if he were cutting himself in half; which did not contribute to that result. But suppose, now, we call you Revel—Harry Revel? That's English enough, and will remind me just the same—if Mr. Scougall will not think it too Anacherontic."

I saw no reason to fear this: but then I had no idea what she meant by it, or by calling herself romantic. She was certainly soft-hearted. She possessed many books, as well as an album in her own handwriting, and encouraged me to read aloud to her on summer mornings when the sun was up and ahead of us. And once, in the story of *Maximilian, or Quite the Gentleman: Founded on Fact and Designed to*

*excite the Love of Virtue in the Rising Generation*, at a point where the hero's small brother Felix is carried away by an eagle, she dissolved in tears. "In my native Wales," she explained afterwards, "the wild sheep leap from rock to rock so much as a matter of course that you would, in time, be surprised if they didn't. And that naturally gives me a sympathy with all that is sublime on the one hand or affecting on the other."

Yet later—but I cannot separate these things accurately in time—I awoke in my cot one night and heard Miss Plinlimmon sobbing. The sound was dreadful to me and I longed to creep across the room to her dark bedside and comfort her; though I could tell she was trying to suppress it for fear of disturbing me. In the end her sobs ceased and, still wondering, I dropped off to sleep, nor next day did I dare to question her.

But it could not have been long after this that we boys got wind of Mr. Scougall's approaching marriage with a wealthy lady of the town. I must speak of this ceremony, because, as the fates ordained, it gave me my first start in life.

# CHAPTER II.

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## I START IN LIFE AS AN EMINENT PERSON

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Mr. Scougall was a lean, strident man who, if he lectured us often, whipped us on the whole with judgment and when we deserved it. So we bore him no grudge. But neither did we love him nor take any lively interest in him as a bridegroom, and I was startled to find these feelings shared by Mr. George in the porter's box when I discussed the news with him. "I'm to have a new suit of clothes," said Mr. George, "but whoever gets Scougall, he's no catch." This sounded blasphemous, while it gave me a sort of fearful joy. I reported it, under seal of secrecy, to Miss Plinlimmon. "Naval men, my dear Harry," was her comment, "are notoriously blunt and outspoken, even when retired upon a pension; perhaps, indeed, if anything, more so. It is in consequence of this habit that they have sometimes performed their grandest feats, as, for instance, when Horatio Nelson put his spy-glass up to his blind eye. I advise you to do the same and treat Mr. George as a chartered heart of oak, without remembering his indiscretions to repeat them." She went on to tell me that sailor-men were beloved in Plymouth and allowed to do pretty well as they pleased; and how, quite recently, a Quaker lady had been stopped in Bedford Street by a Jack Tar who said he had sworn to kiss her. "Thee must be quick about it, then," said the Quaker lady. And he was.

I suppose this anecdote encouraged me to be more familiar with Mr. George. At any rate, I confided to him next day that I thought of being a soldier.

"Do you know what we used to say in the Navy?" he answered. "We used to say, 'A friend before a messmate, a

messmate before a shipmate, a shipmate before a dog, and a dog before a soldier.'"

"You think," said I, somewhat discouraged, "that the Navy would be a better opening for me?"

"Ay," he answered again, eyeing me gloomily; "that is, if so be ye can't contrive to get to jail." He cast a glance down upon his jury-leg and patted the straps of it with his open palm. "The leg, now, that used to be here—I left it in a French prison called Jivvy, and often I thinks to myself, 'That there leg is having better luck than the rest of me.' And here's another curious thing. What d'ye think they call it in France when you remember a person in your will?"

I hadn't a notion, and said so.

"Why, 'legs,'" said he. "And they've got one of mine. If a man was superstitious, you might almost call it a coincidence, hey?"

This was the longest conversation I ever had with Mr. George. I have since found that sentiments very like his about the Navy have been uttered by Dr. Samuel Johnson. But Mr. George spoke them out of his own experience.

Mr. Scougall's bride was the widow of a Plymouth publican who had sold his business and retired upon a small farm across the Hamoaze, near the Cornish village of Anthony. On the wedding morning (which fell early in July) she had, by agreement with her groom, prepared a delightful surprise for us. We trooped after prayers into the dining-hall to find, in place of the hateful porridge, a feast laid out—ham and eggs, cold veal pies, gooseberry preserves, and—best of all—plate upon plate of strawberries

with bowl upon bowl of cool clotted cream. Not a child of us had ever tasted strawberries or cream in his life, so you may guess if we ate with prudence. At half-past ten Miss Plinlimmon (who had not found the heart to restrain our appetites) marshalled and led us forth, gorged and torpid, to the church where at eleven o'clock the ceremony was to take place. Her eyes were red-rimmed as she cast them up towards the window behind which Mr. Scougall, no doubt, was at that moment arraying himself: but she commanded a firm step, and even a firm voice to remark outside the wicket, as she looked up at the chimney-pots, that Nature had put on her fairest garb.

The day, to be sure, was monstrously hot and stuffy. Not a breath of wind ruffled the waters of the dock, around the head of which we trudged to a recently erected church on the opposite shore. I remember observing, on our way, the dazzling brilliance of its weathercock.

We found its interior spacious but warm, and the air heavy with the scent—it comes back to me as I write—of a peculiar sweet oil used in the lamps. Perhaps Mr. Scougall had calculated that a ceremony so interesting to him would attract a throng of sightseers; at any rate, we were packed into a gallery at the extreme western end of the church, and in due time watched the proceedings from that respectful distance and across a gulf of empty pews.

—That is to say, some of us watched. I have no doubt that Miss Plinlimmon did, for instance; nay, that her attention was riveted. Otherwise I cannot explain what followed.

On the previous night I had gone to bed almost supperless, as usual. I had come, as usual, ravenous to breakfast, and for once I had sated, and more than sated, desire. For years after, though hungry often enough in the course of them, I never thought with longing upon cold veal or strawberries, nor have I ever recovered an unmitigated appetite for either.

It is certain, then, that even before the ceremony began —and the bride arrived several minutes late—I slumbered on the back bench of the gallery. The evidence of six boys seated near me agrees that, at the moment when Mr. Scougall produced the ring, I arose quietly, but without warning, and made my exit by the belfry door. They supposed that I was taken ill; they themselves were feeling more or less uncomfortable.

The belfry stairway, by which we had reached the door of our gallery, wound upward beyond it to the top of the tower, and gave issue by a low doorway upon the dwarf battlements, from which sprang a spire some eighty feet high. This spire was, in fact, a narrowing octagon, its sides hung with slate, its eight ridges faced with Bath stone, and edged from top to bottom with ornamental crockets.

The service over, bride and bridegroom withdrew with their friends to the vestry for the signing of the register; and there, while they dallied and interchanged good wishes, were interrupted by the beadle, a white-faced pew-opener, and two draymen from the street, with news (as one of the draymen put it, shouting down the rest) that "one of Scougall's yellow orphans was up clinging to the weathercock by his blessed eyebrows; and was this a time

for joking, or for feeling ashamed of themselves and sending for a constable?"

The drayman shouted and gesticulated so fiercely with a great hand flung aloft that Mr. Scougall, almost before comprehending, precipitated himself from the church. Outside stood his hired carriage with its pair of greys, but the driver was pointing with his whip and craning his neck like the rest of the small crowd.

It may have been their outcries, but I believe it was the ringing of the dockyard bell for the dinner-hour, which awoke me. In my dreams my arms had been about some kindly neck (and of my dreams in those days, though but a glimpse ever survived the waking, in those glimpses dwelt the shade, if not the presence, of my unknown mother). They were, in fact, clasped around the leg of the weathercock. Unsympathetic support! But I have known worse friends. A mercy it was, at any rate, that I kept my embrace during the moments when sense returned to me, with vision of the wonders spread around and below. Truly I enjoyed a wonderful view—across the roofs of Plymouth, quivering under the noon sun, and away to the violet hills of Dartmoor; and, again, across the water and shipping of the Hamoaze to the green slopes of Mount Edgcumbe and the massed trees slumbering in the heat. Slumber, indeed, and a great quiet seemed to rest over me, over the houses, the ships, the whole wide land. By the blessing of Heaven, not so much as the faintest breeze played about the spire, or cooled the copper rod burning my hand (and, again, it may have been this that woke me). I sat astride the topmost crocket, and glancing down between my boot heels, spied

the carriage with its pair of greys flattened upon the roadway just beyond the verge of the battlements, and Mr. Scougall himself dancing and waving his arms like a small but very lively beetle.

Doubtless, I had ascended by the narrow stairway of the crockets: but to descend by them with a lot of useless senses about me would be a very different matter. No giddiness attacked me as yet; indeed I knew rather than felt my position to be serious. For a moment I thought of leaving my perch and letting myself slip down the face of the slates, to be pulled up short by the parapet; but the length of the slide daunted me, and the parapet appeared dangerously shallow. I should shoot over it to a certainty and go whirling into air. On the other hand, to drop from my present saddle into the one below was no easy feat. For this I must back myself over the edge of it, and cling with body and legs in air while I judged my fall into the next. To do this thirty times or so in succession without mistake was past hoping for: there were at least thirty crockets to be manoeuvred, and a single miscalculation would send me spinning backwards to my fate. Above all, I had not the strength for it.

So I sat considering for a while; not terrified, but with a brain exceedingly blank and hopeless. It never occurred to me that, if I sat still and held on, steeplejacks would be summoned and ladders brought to me; and I am glad that it did not, for this would have taken hours, and I know now that I could not have held out for half an hour inactive. But another thought came. I saw the slates at the foot of the weathercock, that they were thinly edged and of light

scantling. I knew that they must be nailed upon a wooden framework not unlike a ladder. And at the Genevan Hospital, as I have recorded, we wore stout plates on our shoes.

I am told that it was a bad few moments for the lookers-on when they saw me lower myself sideways from my crocket and begin to hammer on the slates with my toes: for at first they did not comprehend, and then they reasoned that the slates were new, and if I failed to kick through them, to pull myself back to the crocket again would be a desperate job.

But they did not know our shoe-leather. Mr. Scougall, whatever his faults, usually contrived to get value for his money, and at the tenth kick or so my toes went clean through the slate and rested on the laths within. Next came the most delicate moment of all, for with a less certain grip on the crocket I had to kick a second hole lower down, and transfer my hand-hold from the stone to the wooden lath laid bare by my first kicks.

This, too, with a long poise and then a flying clutch, I accomplished; and with the rest of my descent I will not weary the reader. It was interminably slow, and it was laborious; but, to speak comparatively, it was safe. My boots lasted me to within twenty feet of the parapet, and then, just as I had kicked my toes bare, a steeplejack appeared at the little doorway with a ladder. Planting it in a jiffy, he scrambled up, took me under his arm, bore me down and laid me against the parapet, where at first I began to cry and then emptied my small body with throe after throe of sickness.

I recovered to find Mr. Scougall and another clergyman (the vicar) standing by the little door and gazing up at my line of holes on the face of the spire. Mr. Scougall was offering to pay.

"But no," said the vicar, "we will set the damage down against the lad's preservation; that is, if I don't recover from the contractor, who has undoubtedly swindled us over these slates."

# CHAPTER III.

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## I AM BOUND APPRENTICE.

Although holidays were a thing unknown at the Genevan Hospital, yet discipline grew sensibly lighter during Mr. Scougall's honeymoon, being left to Miss Plinlimmon on the understanding that in emergency she might call in the strong and secular arm of Mr. George. But we all loved Miss Plinlimmon, and never drove her beyond appealing to what she called our better instincts.

Her dearest aspiration (believe it if you can) was to make gentlemen of us—of us, doomed to start in life as parish apprentices! And to this her curriculum recurred whether it had been divagating into history, geography, astronomy, English composition, or religious knowledge. "The author of the book before me, a B.A.—otherwise a Bachelor of Arts, but not on that account necessarily unmarried— observes

that to believe the sun goes round the earth is a vulgar error. For my part I should hardly go so far: but it warns us how severely those may be judged who obtrusively urge in society opinions which the wise in their closets have condemned." "The refulgent orb—another way, my dears, of saying the sun—is in the vicinity of Persia an object of religious adoration. The Christian nations, better instructed, content themselves with esteeming it warmly, and as they follow its course in the heavens, draw from it the useful lesson to look always on the bright side of things." Humble beneficent soul! I never met another who had learned that lesson so thoroughly. Once she pointed out to me at the end of her dictation-book a publisher's colophon of a sundial with the word *Finis* above it, and, underneath, the words "Every Hour Shortens Life." "Now, I prefer to think that every hour lengthens it," said she, with one of her few smiles; for her cheerfulness was always serious.

Best of all were the hours when she read to us extracts from her album. "At least," she explained, "I *call* it an album. I ever longed to possess one, adorned with remarks—moral or sprightly, as the case might be—by the Choicest Spirits of our Age, and signed in their own illustrious handwriting. But in my sphere of life these were hard—nay, impossible—to come by; so in my dilemma I had recourse to subterfuge, and having studied the career of this or that eminent man, I chose a subject and composed what (as it seemed to me) he would *most likely* have written upon it, signing his name below—but in print, that the signatures may not pass hereafter for real ones, should the book fall into the hands of strangers. You must not think, therefore, that the lines on

Statesmanship which I am about to read you, beginning 'But why Statesmans *ship*? Because, my lords and gentlemen, the State is indeed a ship, and demands a skilful helmsman'—you must not think that they were actually penned by the Right Honourable William Pitt. But I feel sure the sentiments are such as he would have approved, and perhaps might have uttered had the occasion arisen."

This puzzled us, and I am not sure that we took any trouble to discriminate Miss Plinlimmon's share in these compositions from that of their signatories. Indeed, the first time I set eyes on Lord Wellington (as he rode by us to inspect the breaches in Ciudad Rodrigo) my memory saluted him as the Honourable Arthur Wellesley, author of the passage, "Though educated at Eton, I have often caught myself envying the quaintly expressed motto of the more ancient seminary amid the Hampshire chalk-hills, i.e. *Manners makyth man*"; and to this day I associate General Paoli with an apostrophe "O Corsica! O my country, bleeding and inanimate!" etc., and with Miss Plinlimmon's foot-note: "N.B.—The author of these affecting lines, himself a blameless patriot, actually stood godfather to the babe who has since become the infamous Napoleon Bonaparte. Oh, irony! What had been the feelings of the good Paoli, could he have foreseen this eventuality, as he promised and vowed beside the font! (if they have such things in Corsica: a point on which I am uncertain)."

I dwell on these halcyon days with Miss Plinlimmon because, as they were the last I spent at the Genevan Hospital, so they soften all my recollections of it with their own gentle prismatic haze. In fact, a bare fortnight had gone