

The West Shore.

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MY BRIER-WOOD PIPE, AND WHAT IT COST ME.

I smoke. Not having the fear of King James before my eyes, I may say I "drink" tobacco; for when he wrote his "Counterblast" the enjoyment of the burning weed was regarded as potation, not fumigation. To be in the fashion, I smoke a pipe. But not only to be in the fashion. The pipe pleases me as a work of art, and it gives me something to care for and become attached to. Your cigar-smoker is an unhappy, solitary creature, compared to me. He enjoys only what he consumes, and flings away, into the fire or into the kennel, that which he has just pressed delightfully to his lips. But I always have a cherished companion in my soothing pleasure. My pipe is with me. It is not merely so much clay, and wood, and amber. It has assumed an individuality, and is a partner of my musing hour. We have got used to each other's ways, and thoroughly understand one another; are tolerant of each other's peculiarities, and accommodate ourselves to each other's moods. Sometimes, indeed, my companion seems coy and reluctant at the most interesting moment; but a little attention, half compulsory, half enticing, almost always puts matters upon their natural footing again. At other times, I must confess I am ill treated, and my attendant minister, instead of burning incense before me, will coldly go out, and sullenly refuse any response to my most importunate wooing, just when it ought to be aglow with warmth and fragrant with perfume. But I am able to trace these little, miffs, in almost all cases, to some neglect on my part. I have been remiss in proper care, or have allowed other affairs to divert my attention more than suits the views of my jealous companion. Matters, however, very rarely come to this pass between us; a little judicious coaxing generally brings about an understanding, to our great mutual satisfaction.

I have spoken of my pipe: I have two. That is, two of principal importance. Of these, one is the pipe *par excellence*, but the other is a prime favorite; and there are, besides, three or four that are well enough in their way when the whim takes me to enjoy them; but they have no particular and recognized position. Pipe-smoking is a Turkish habit. The pipe, that is, the one which I always mean when I ask Jenny about my pipe, is, of course a meerschaum. It is of such fine quality and so exquisitely carved that I am the envy of at least a dozen of my friends, who have not been able, for love or money, to compass such a marvel. The bowl is in the form of a Turk's head, and is decorated with two dark carbuncles by way of eyes. The tobacco is, of course, put through the top of the turban into the place of the skull; and I derive consequence in the eyes of some people from appearing to consume the brains of one of my fellow-creatures for my passing pleasure. I have already the serene joy, only to be appreciated by the meerschaum smoker, of seeing my Turk's full and lightly-flowing beard turning so gradually a rich brown under my fumigations. But although I contemplate the present aspect of his countenance with the greatest satisfaction, I must confess that I have some misgivings in regard to the certainly approaching period when the line of demarcation shall invade the face proper, and the finely-cut nose of my Turk shall be divided horizontally across the bridge into a cream-colored section and a tawny-brown section. Then, however, I shall build my hopes upon the time when this line shall have risen to the very turban's edge, while the hue in the lower part has deepened, so that I shall have my tawny-skinned Oriental with a dark, chesnut-brown beard and a white turban; and then I shall stop smoking this pipe, and lay it

away in a little cabinet—a peaceful trophy.

But although I worship with all loyal devotion at my meerschaum shrine, I confess to a great fondness for a little briar-wood pipe—the second in order of precedence among my favorites—so great that, if the meerschaum knew it, it would, I fear, breed permanent trouble between us. This briar-wood beauty is no mere knot of wood with a hole in it, but the daintiest little pipe that ever was made. Its chief charm, however, is that it gives me no trouble whatever, and always accommodates itself to my convenience and my temper. It requires no solicitous looking after, like the other; which, I must confess, is capricious and exacting, like all prima donas of well-established reputation. I can enjoy it when I please, and as I please—taking no thought whether it is too hot or too cold, or whether it is in a condition to be handled. Its very form is at once graceful and convenient. The stem is made with a double curvature, which conforms to the position of my thumb and fingers as I hold it, and to that of my chin as I carelessly let it hang from my mouth. It is mottled beautifully, and the bowl is lined with the finest meerschaum, which shows itself above the edge like the creamy foam upon rich ale.

But, alas! one evening I discovered that it had a defect; and I am of such an exacting disposition that I never tolerate any faults that can be remedied, except those in my own character. Mrs. Maddox has often said that she "never found hany gentleman as was so 'ard to please as Mr. Robinson." Mrs. Maddox is my landlady. She describes herself as "a Henglish lady in rejucied circumstances," and is fond of occasional reference to her "connection with the harrystocracy." It is more than suspected that the particular form of harrystocracy with which she was connected was with a certain Harry, Lord W—, and that the nature of the alliance may be best learned from the columns of the London *Times*, among the reports of trials before Sir Cresswell Cresswell for divorce. Mrs. Maddox frets at my exactions; but Jenny, who is the maid that takes care of my room, says, "To be sure Mr. Robinson is a bit particular; but then there's a comfort in doing any thing for him, 'cause you can see he knows when it's well done." The fact is that Jenny is a very excellent and intelligent person. I found out that she understood and appreciated me very soon after I took my present apartments. She has continued to do so ever since; so that it has come to be an understood thing in the house, that if Mr. Robinson wants any thing done, it will be done if Jenny can do it. Mrs. Maddox tosses her well-oiled black curls—in which I detected a gray hair the other day—and has more than once insinuated that "the hussy" has particular reasons for her attention to Mr. Robinson. But let me tell you that Jenny is not only prettier and better behaved than her mistress ever was, but one who, if she lived in London, would never become acquainted with Sir Cresswell Cresswell, unless, indeed, through the instrumentality of a brute of a husband. What might be Jenny's views and feelings, were it not for certain differences of social position which must obtain under all forms of government, I, of course, am not called upon to say.

But the defect in my briar-wood pipe. It was a scratch on the stem, made accidentally with some tool or other, and which escaped the notice of the maker, and also mine when I bought it. Touch—touch in fine organizations always so much more delicate a sense than sight, with all men so much more to be relied upon as evidence of fact—revealed it to me. I was sitting upon the balcony on one of these glorious autumn evenings, smoking with Miss Kate Johnstone. That is, Miss Johnstone was sitting there with me, and I was smoking. She is a charming girl; so sensible, cheerful, and good-natured, and yet with a will of her own. She often sits, or used to sit, on the balcony in the evening while I smoked, for she did not object to the fumes of fine tobacco in the open air. She is a belle wherever she goes. And well she may be. Such a round, lithe figure, such an arched instep, and such white dimpled hands and shoulders, such clear brown eyes, and such waving chesnut hair are not often the united property of one woman. And then a fortune too! Not much, only thirty-five thousand dollars;

but the whole thirty-five are there, and all well invested. Munneigh Bagges, Esq.—she is an orphan, and Mr. Bagges is her uncle and guardian—who had noticed her inclination to sit upon the balcony while I smoked, took me aside one evening and spoke to me about this fortune.

"Mr. Robinson," said he, "it has been my duty to observe indications on your part of a desire to address my ward and niece, Miss Johnstone."

"Indeed, Sir," I began, "I haven't yet—"

"Pray don't explain or apologize. The transaction, I have no doubt, would be a most honorable one. I know your position and your reputation. I shall not make myself directly or indirectly a party to the affair. But I think it only correct to say to you, Sir, in view of prudential considerations, which, of course, being a man of sense, you entertain, that the amount of the lady's fortune has been much exaggerated by report. She has only thirty thousand dollars; and all of that must be settled upon her at her marriage. I should, however, be willing to consent to the investment of ten thousand dollars in a safe special partnership for the benefit of her husband. I may as well add that I am empowered by the will to retain the whole property as trustee, and make only such quarterly payments over eight hundred dollars a year as I should deem advisable in case she should marry without my consent. I've just said as much to Mr. Axletree. Good-evening, Sir. I have a business engagement."

Who was Axletree? Why the son of a village blacksmith who had worked his way through college, and into the law, and who was quite popular in our house—I always did hate popular men—and who had made a sort of particular acquaintance with Miss Johnstone by holding her horse hard, and swinging her quickly off the saddle one morning when, just as she was starting for a ride, the animal began to rear and plunge most violently; after which time she would sometimes sit and hear him talk about Dante and Shakspeare when I thought she might much better be out upon the balcony with me. Be this as it may, there Mr. Munneigh Bagges left me, with the assurance that if I could get Miss Johnstone's consent I might have her, and with her ten thousand dollars in cash for any safe concern in which I might desire to become a partner. Why it was just the sum that Grist, of Hopper and Grist, the rising flour house, mentioned that they were looking out for with a capable junior as Co. My fortune was in my hand; and so I smoked upon the balcony regularly, always invited Miss Johnstone out with me to enjoy the evening air, and always made myself as agreeable as possible.

On this particular evening, as I took my little pipe from my lips, I felt for the first time a long seam down the wavy, well-polished stem. It was the merest scratch, a scarcely perceptible indentation of the surface. But still it was there; and it attracted my attention, and finally annoyed me. A hundred times did my finger wander up and down the pipe-stem, tracing out the length and shape of the blemish, as I talked to my fair companion. I could not help turning my eyes from hers to the pipe once or twice, even while she was speaking; till finally she stopped short in the middle of a sentence, and it was only by a promptly paid compliment, based upon what she was saying, that I prevented her from retiring quickly into the parlor where I knew Axletree was sitting. I finished my smoke and my chat with her; asked to be allowed to attend her on her ride the next afternoon, and we parted to our respective chambers.

On looking at my pipe, I found that the depth of the scratch was even less than it had seemed to the touch of my restless finger. It really did not mar the pipe at all, and to most eyes would need pointing out to be seen. But there it was; I had discovered it; and I should know of its existence if the whole world besides were ignorant. It was the spider in my soup, the skeleton in my closet. It annoyed me all the more because of the absolute perfection of the pipe in all other respects. Why should not a thing that was so nearly perfect be made absolutely so? There was no reason, and I was determined that it should be made perfect without delay; and that I would place it the next day in the hands of a little Hun-

garian, with whose name, as it consists chiefly of three c's, four k's, two z's, and a y, somewhat promiscuously distributed, I shall not trouble you, and who, a meerschaum pipe-maker in his own country, had been reduced here, from lack of money to buy stock, to a mere pipe-mender; for which he sought consolation by living with a pipe in his mouth. But I was impatient of delay. Why not do such a trifling and simple piece of work myself? I had the implements by me, why not use them? I determined to do so, and in a minute was rubbing away at my pipe-stem with the finest sand-paper. The surface was soon smoothed; but alas! I saw, when too late to stay my hand, that I had rubbed off color as well as surface. My pipe was a light kind of briar-wood which had been stained darker to give it the usual and the coveted color. There was but one remedy—to sand-paper it all over, and stain it all anew again. So at it I went, and rubbed until the first part of the operation was completed, and I postponed the rest until the morrow.

When I awoke in the morning my eye first sought my pipe where I left it upon my toilet table. You smile because it was a pipe that I looked after; just as you smile when you found that that kepi-capped boy, who is the delight and the torment of your life, took the toy gun with the real look that you denied yourself to buy for him to bed the first few nights after the acquisition of the longed-for treasure. But you, when that handsome bay who does his mile so easily within 2.40 first took his place in your stable, did you not, next morning, come to the breakfast-table with the odor of his stall about you? When that pretty little yacht first took you up the river to your country-place, did not your wife detect you standing at your bedroom window at an unwonted matinal hour, in a very scanty garment, feasting your eyes upon her—the yacht, alas! not the wife—as she sat like a duck upon the water? When that rare, early edition of your favorite poet came, rich with the decorating skill of Hayday, didn't you quite in an unconscious sort of way carry it up stairs with you when you went to bed, and take a last look at it "as it was up there" after you were undressed, and a first look at it in the morning before you were dressed? You know you did. And what difference does it make whether it is a horse, a boat, a book, or a toy gun or a pipe? I looked then at my hobby as you looked at yours, and it seemed whiter in the daylight than under the gas-burner; and I felt that I had done a foolish thing. Hastily I brought me wisdom as well as rest, I should have done no more than consign the pipe to the hands of my little friend of the consensual designation. But I thought that was hardly worth while, and that as I had begun I might as well go on. The truth was that I secretly shrunk from asking his ministrations, though I did not acknowledge it to myself, for fear he should pronounce my pipe not genuine.

I numbered a young druggist among my acquaintances, and calling upon him on my way homeward early that afternoon, I was provided with various dyes, including logwood and coppers, and a tincture which he thought would produce exactly the tint required. On reaching the house I overtook Miss Johnstone, radiant, upon the front steps, and, entering, together, we had a moment's talk about our anticipated pleasure, for which the afternoon promised finely. But I found that a full hour must pass before we should mount our horses, and I determined to improve a part of this by finishing my pipe. It would take but a little while, and just leave me time to leisurely don my riding gear. I took off my coat, turned up my cuffs, and applied the tincture with a camel's hair brush. But to my surprise and disgust the fluid, which when shaken in a bottle seemed to have just the reddish-brown hue that I so much desired to produce, when spread over the wood dried of a bright carnation color, besides looking as palpably painted as Miss —'s cheeks, and making the stem as streaked as those rods by the aid of which Jacob so effectually "did" his father-in-law in that little operation in sheep and neat cattle. This experience cost me some minutes of my hour, but it taught me nothing; for I went on with my job as if besotted. I summoned the ever-willing Jenny, and asked her to get me a Wedgewood mortar, in which I had seen the waiter