

THE YOUTH OF THE POET AND THE PAINTER.

[Continued from p. 58 of last Number.]

LETTER V.

FANNY ASHFORD TO EDWARD ASHFORD.

Doughnut.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

No letter from you yet, although you have now been a fortnight at Lovedale. This is too cruel. So far as I am concerned, I am willing to have you in the country, and away from College; but for mother's sake you should write her a full account of yourself. She grieves and laments over your abrupt departure, as if you were ruined for life; and seems to think you can never retrieve your lost standing in your class. You know she had set her heart on your success; and this frightful dissolution of your collegiate bands has created a perfect dismay in her tender heart. If you will only write her a full account of it, how it all took place, she will, I doubt not, become perfectly satisfied, and you will regain your place in her affection.

Who do you think has visited us, to our evident consternation as I fear, but the illustrious head of Triflecut College, the majestic President Littlego. Of all pompous persons he is the chief; and the extreme self-sufficiency of the man put me out of patience with him in five minutes. He held a conversation with mother about you, which I will report for your benefit as nearly as I can.

"Madam," said the President, "I hope your health is good. We have had very hot weather this season; and the boys returned to their tasks without much spirit. Have you received any intelligence from your son Edward since he saw fit to leave his duties?"

"We heard from him," she replied, "through his friend, Mr. Hope."

"I hope he did not remark in that letter," said the majestic Littlego, "that any too difficult tasks had been imposed upon him by the several departments in college. We treat all the boys alike; the utmost republicanism prevails in our system; and it is impossible that Ashford should

have been overloaded with requirements. I am surprised he should have left us, and I am authorized to say by the board of control, that even now, if he chooses to return immediately, he will be permitted to again unite himself with his class. This privilege has been conceded to him for your sake Madam, no less than his own. I shall feel it my duty to correspond with Ashford on this subject;" and bowing very gravely, this majestic gentleman stalked slowly out of the parlor.

Poor mother was nearly frightened to death by this visit of the dignitary, and I fear it will hold as long in her memory as the visit of "my gracious Prince" to Mrs. Bellenden in the novel. Since you left, we have had a little party as usual, at this time; but it went off poorly, however, as mother mourns over your absence so severely; and she, you know, is the life of all parties. Your friend Hope came, out of whom I can make nothing, except as being your friend, seemed in capital spirits, and whenever he talked with mother about you, smiled with more than his usual brilliancy. Pray write us at once.

Your affectionate

FANNY.

LETTER VI.

EDWARD ASHFORD TO JAMES HOPE.

Lovedale.

I am yet on the river, and love to float on the sparkling waters; but I feel sad and cold this sunny day. It is too solitary, I believe, yet much better than the dull noise of the city, and the stupid form at college. Nature can never be enough, yet how much better than the society of most men. I run away to the forest as if I was pursued by a demon, to avoid the fellowship of these kind-hearted people, yet know not why. I suppose we were not born in the same planet, and different colored blood runs in our veins. What a mistake that we are all brothers in this world, and how rarely we find a true brother's or even a cousin's friendly eye fixed on us.

To-day has been pure golden sunshine since morning; and how the day-god played with the trunks of the trees, as if the forest were one great harp. In the morning, as I sat among golden-rods, under the shade of a pine, where on every side these sunny flowers grew, it seemed as if the sunlight had become so thickly knotted and intertwined with the roots and stems of the plants and grasses, that it could not escape, but must remain and shine forever; yet the pine-tree's shadow, at sunset and before, fell long across the place, and the gay light had fled, like the few bright days of life, which fly so rapid by. The old tell us we are young, and can know nothing of life; to me, it seems I have lived centuries, out of which I can reckon on my fingers the days of pleasure, when my heart beat high. I fancy, there is a race of men born to know only the loss of life by its joys, — to live by single days, and to pass their time for the most part in shadowy vistas, where there is neither darkness nor light, but perpetual mist. I am one of these; and though I love nature, the river, the forest, the clouds, she is only a phantom, like myself, and passes slowly, an unexplained mystery, like my own consciousness, which shows through a want of perfect knowledge. I see myself, only as what I do not know, and others, as some reflection of this ignorance, an iceberg among other icebergs, slowly drifting from the frozen pole of birth to the frozen pole of death, through a sunny sea.

I feel, that within lies a heap of perpetual snow, encircled by a fair ring of grass and flowers, over which the sun plays, yet this central cold never melts to nourish their roots, but shines mild and graceful, though never warm. Can I ever become warm in this snowy peak? I should be, for there alone does it seem that the air of my life is clear. I should be resigned to this penance, would society leave me to myself; but, in addition to this pressure of inward ice, I am doomed to perpetual conflict with those around; and I have not only my individual part to play, but to act in domestic tragedies beside.

At the earnest request of a mother, who, if too tender-hearted, has a real love for me, though of my character she understands no one part, I went to the college, in hope to burrow concealed behind stupid folios while in the house, and leave them to stand and smile ring defiance i

the face of the tutors while away. I resolved to devote so much time to one or two languages as would keep up the appearance of study, for my mother's sake, and for the rest to wander in the fields, if I could find any in the mean village of Triflecut. In doing so I felt I was acting so far for my mother, without making the life too wretched to bear. I came out of the sanctity of my little chamber at home, where at least all was in keeping, where I had memories of many a walk, my favorite books, and a few pictures, into the barren interior of the staring brick edifice at Triflecut. I recited some two or three lessons tolerably I believe, although I felt it was useless work; and went I think to five prayers. But the latter, I very soon gave over, for I could submit no longer to the dull, droning voice of the college minister, grinding out his requests for health and happiness, with not near the life of a hand-organ. I became so perfectly tired of this nonsensical stuff, that I unconsciously went in any direction sooner than to the Chapel. On Sunday, I did not go to church, and was summoned before the President, who told me I must go like a good boy to church, or be turned away; to which I replied, that I should do as I thought best, and returned to my room. I saw that in reciting our lessons to the conceited tutors, who think College is the Universe, and the President Jupiter, they had the impudence to give us marks for what we did, as if we, paying them for so much aid in our lessons, were therefore to be rewarded by them with a couple of pencil scratches. Such a system as this fell below the discipline of the school I last attended, where we had neither marks nor punishments, were neither kicked nor flattered, blamed nor praised. At College, I found we were treated, not only as machines, but to be set up or down, at the discretion of these tutors, who had merely to scratch down a mark, and thus decide our fates. This foolery I felt I could not agree to, even for my mother's sake. I was led, by what predisposition I cannot say, unless by the general idea I had of a class, called scholars, to fancy there was something romantic and beautiful in the life in Colleges. I conjured a ghost from the middle ages, dim cloisters, retired meditations, and beautiful persons, who dwelt together in a religious community, where only sunrise and twilight divided the day, and all was

order, silence, and gentle repose. I saw the pale scholar, gliding like a shade through the aisles of a solitary chapel, or studiously bent upon his mighty volume in a recess of the vaulted library. I should be one of these scholars, have my gown and spiritual republic with the rest, and take my place in mysterious debates on subjects too lofty for the vulgar eye to profane, and feel fear as I wandered in the retired court-yards, that I should never rise to the lofty place of the true scholar. I had wove some such webs, which, it is true, hung on my mother's request, before I went to Trifecut.

I found here no scholars whatever. Some young men, deficient in grace, were wearing out the elbows of their coats, in getting by heart some set lessons of some little text-books, and striving, which should commit them the most perfectly to memory. This perfection lay in the point of a tutor's pencil, and was at last decided on by the votes of a band of professors, who loved wine and puddings better than literature or art, and whose chief merit lay in keeping their feet dry. The collegians seemed lost in the microscopic side of learning; and I felt I could see no poetry there, nor get any marks, and might either wait to be formally turned out by the vote of the professors, headed by the President, or fly myself. I chose the latter.

I have had a little formal letter from the President, informing me, that I may come back, if I will be a good boy, or stay away, if I will be a bad one; I shall not reply, for I have nothing to say. It was childish to go to College, and yet more childish to stay more than one day, when I was there.

As I sat on my sand-bank to-day, looking at a finely-shaped arrow-head I had found, I could not but recall the forms of those uncivilized men who once pitched their wigwags under the groves on its border. I saw them circling me, in their mazy dance, like a company of demons come from the depths of nature, to torment me in my poor condition; they shook their long, straight hair, in raven clouds above their flat foreheads, while some maidens, who sat in a group apart, smiled on me, with those moon-like watery smiles, which make me at once frantic and powerless. Apart from the maidens, and the dancing group, to the trunk of a tree bared for the purpose, was bound by tight-drawn sinews

a youth, whose curling hair, and pale cheeks showed he had been stolen from some other clime. Those fearful hands pressed close into his tender flesh, and it seemed the blood would gush from them every instant; yet the expression of his countenance was calm and resigned, as if the patience of years lay within his unaltering eyes; as the Indian girls smiled, I saw a fainter smile yet, of the same cast, flow over his thin cheek, and a tall, muscular chief from the dancing group raised his heavy spear and balanced it, in his upraised arm, as if he would throw it.

There was a most glorious sunset this evening, and I stood on the high bank of the river to watch it. The long line of dancing light was traced from my feet across the river, till it sunk at the foot of some black hills. The sky above was flecked with spots of fused gold, with a lake of the richest blue, surrounded by yellow banks, and crimson mountains, rolling and towering into a host of laughing rosy clouds. This is the setting of the life in the clouds, while our sunlight here falls into the arms of the black hills. Still, our little boats dance down the golden tide, play with the shining foam, and leave behind a long row of pretty bubbles, which expand and fade in an instant. I shall love better to play among the purple mountains, and the silver trees. I am haunted to-day by some figures from the sky, though O! how seldom they come.

EDWARD.

LETTER VII.

MATHEWS GRAY TO JAMES HOPE.

Easton.

MY DEAR HOPE,

I have received your letter, in which you describe your friend Edward, and wish to know my opinion, as to what you can do for him, in his present situation. I am not sure that I can offer you one suggestion on the subject, which will clear your mind of doubt, or render your duty as a friend more easy. It is not unknown to you, that I have long regarded Edward, from his connection with you, as one of my

riends; and the various conversations we have held upon him make me feel, though I have never seen him, as if I was an old acquaintance.

He is one of a class of young persons, who have lately sprung into existence, as distinct from the youth of the last generation, as Italians from Icelanders,—the children of the new birth of the century, whose places have not been found. This mania for what is natural, and this distaste for conventionalisms, is exhibited as the popular idea, yet inaccessible to the class in which he was born, and which is the last to feel the auroral influences of reform. But not in our day will this new idea of civilization complete itself, and hence these unconscious reformers will be the last to discover their true position. They cannot unite themselves with sects or associations, for the centre of their creed consists in the disavowal of congregations, and they wander solitary and alone, the true madmen of this nineteenth century. The youth of our age will be the manhood of the next, and though Edward will not become a man of the world so deep are his peculiarities, the great number of those, who profess a like belief with him, disavow in later life the ideal tendencies of their early years. The vein in them was not a central one, which ran to the core of their existence.

I sympathize with what you say of Edward's family, and especially of his mother. Educated as she was, to say nothing of her original character, I fear she cannot stand in the right place, to see him as he is. She feels sensitive about each new step he takes, without comprehending how impossible it is for him to run astray in the vices and follies, which followed the want of occupation, in the young men she was brought up with, and asks anxiously of his every movement, how will the world regard this? forgetting, how indifferent the world is of her son's affairs. Your desire, that I should write her on the subject, with her previous knowledge of my character, I cannot accede to; for though I am older than you, and better known, she would have more confidence in what you might furnish. If you write, I would not insist on Edward's youth, or advance the old common-places, that years will bring discretion, and experience open closed eyes, as I know you would, if you happened to be struck with the folly of the

opinion; I would calmly ask her to wait for a season, and not precipitate her judgment, and dwell upon the exquisite delicacy of her son's character, which I do not believe either she or her daughter appreciate.

You inquire, "Do you think Ashford a poet, or simply a lover of verse, who writes by force of imitation?" What the world generally calls a poet, I believe he will never be, that is, to carefully prepare a good many dull verses, print them on the whitest paper, with notes of introduction, and engage a favorable critic to make them a pretty review. Whether he publishes anything, I consider doubtful; but from the poem you showed me, I judge the production of verse is natural to him, and that by abundant encouragement from his friends, he may be led to write with more attention to critical rules, though for some years he will pay the least possible respect to measure and formal art. He will have a favorable beginning for a poet, and his verse become the product of necessity and nature. I am glad he inclines to so much privacy, for this port-folio literature has long had a charm for me, which I cannot value too greatly. I would do my best to inspire him with a belief in his powers, though I should make a very gradual approach to any formal criticism of what he may send. Above all, I would leave his life to himself. How many years I required to untie the dexterous noose, which the stern education of my youth knotted about my faculties, and in fact, what day passes, in which I do not wage violent war with the legends of boyhood. How much more difficult for such a person as Edward, who has scarcely any control over himself, to become free, should he once fall into the snare of custom. I hope he will remain at Lovedale, as it pleases him, for I long to hear some one brought up poetically in nature. Soon enough, time will hammer his chains of practice, if they are not forging already.

M. G.

LETTER VIII.

RICHARD ASHFORD TO EDWARD ASHFORD.

Doughnut.

MY DEAR NED,

Thou art no more to be come at than the south shore, under a north-easter, and I have abandoned all hope of

seeing your face again. I have been besought by your acquaintances, both male and female, excepting your friend Hope, to communicate with you at Lovedale in person, and so "beard the lion in his den." To say nothing of the rheumatism, of which I have had several horrible twinges lately, I hold any intrusion into your solitude a paltry business; I am willing to let you alone, and would not write you a letter for a Dukedom, was I not the only medium of communication between the main land and your island.

You have played us a snug trick, and graduated at a college of your own founding. I heard a piece of your letter to Hope, which forced the water out of my eyes, as if they had been sponges. Your magnificent explosion of the College, as if it was a fuze, and very wet at that, exceeds in comic these old plays, I am reading; and if I was not a tolerable hand at laughing these many years, I had become one at reading that. The President took an oath on the four evangelists, that you were mad as a March hare; the Board of Control washed their hands of you at once, and you are now no more a member of Triflecut, than of Bedlam. Being free of College, consider within yourself what line of business you mean to pursue, and send us word. Your mother's heart is nearly broken, if that affords you any satisfaction, while your sister thinks you a cold-hearted villain, just good enough for the State's Prison, or the Lunatic Hospital. These agreeable conclusions, to which I have arrived from actual inspection, I fear will throw a fog over your passage, and perhaps induce you to put your helm hard up, and run for some other beacon. One thing consider settled, you cannot go back to College, for they are all your mortal enemies there, except Hope, and he is a quiz.

I am authorized, by your mother, as your oldest male relative, to inform you, that you can, if you choose, return to Doughnut, and enter the office of Lawyer Smealmin, to study law. Smealmin I advised with yesterday. He is a dry, spare, plugged-looking creature, with more laws in his head than straws in a wheat-stack. He sits at an angle of forty-five degrees, and lives on apples and sour milk. In his office you will be expected to hold a law book between your face and the fire in winter, and in the summer

try to keep your temperature low, by drinking iced water, and playing the flute. In his premises are two other young gentlemen sucking law, who look plump, and appear very cheerful. I cannot form an opinion as to your fitness for the law, as a profession, but will inform you, what is expected of a lawyer, and then you will be able to judge for yourself. I was once engaged in a protracted law-suit, which lasted three years, and then died of consumption, its lungs (the lawyers) having absorbed the whole substance. If you are a lawyer, you must be able to eat two dinners every day, one with your client, and the other with the bar; to purchase a dozen volumes, bound in law-calf, and full of law-veal, or, as it is sometimes called, mutton-head. In the morning, you enter your office at half-past eight, read the paper till nine, and then, if you feel able, walk as far as the Court-house. There you are provided with a seat by the Sheriff, and cold water by the deputy Sheriff. You next stare at the Court, consisting of one or more judges, twelve jurymen, a criminal or civil case, four baize tables, and a lot of attorneys. You next begin to make motions, which consists in getting a case put off, or put on, as you happen to feel, and run your eye over the docket, which is kept at the clerk's table, in a ledger, for the accommodation of the county, and the clerk's family. If it is your case which comes on, you open your eyes wide, talk a great deal about nothing, and dine with the bar. Occasionally you will feel sleepy after dinner, but awake yourself by smoking a cigar, or driving into the country. This, my dear Ned, is the general life of lawyers, so far as I have been able to learn, into which you can be initiated, if you will only say so.

Your mother is equally willing you should study medicine with Doctor Phosphorus, whom I have also consulted. Of the two, I should prefer to become a doctor. In this case, you enter the medical College, and attend three courses of lectures, and pass one examination. Medicine seems to be a delicious occupation. You have great privileges at the dissecting-room, where you will find a greasy demonstrator in a red jacket, cutting up the carcase of a refugee Frenchman, who died at the poor-house of starvation, and as nobody would bury him, took shelter here, in the pleasant society of the students. You will be in ad-

dition allowed to visit the public hospital every other day, and become acquainted with all the Doughnut paupers, who preferred to be scientifically killed by the doctors, to unskilful death in the streets by the city authorities. These form an interesting class of men, and their diseases are so exceedingly compound, that if they cannot die of one complaint, they can certainly of some other. Besides this, there is Doctor Phosphorus' private practice, who physics all the old women *gratis*, and produces highly diseased conditions by artificial methods for the sole benefit of science and his students. The medical books are all written in what we sailors call "hog-Latin," and are far more entertaining, than if they were composed in common English; besides nobody can read them, except Doctors. As a physician you will not only be compelled to work all day, but frequently be called up at night, to visit a three-year-old infant, who eat an apple-peel in the morning, and has the gripes, besides living two miles in a straight line from your office, and when you prescribe, its affectionate parent will inform you, that she guesses it will do pretty well without any physic, and that she only wanted you to come and look at it. This, my dear boy, is a delicious manner of passing your earthly existence, and has claims on your attention, which, I fear, will prove irresistible. — There is still left to you, if you choose it, to become a merchant, in which condition many of the respectable citizens of Doughnut pass their lives. The great art in being a merchant is, to look wise, and ride in a carriage, — to build a large house, and invite your friends to dinner. At first, very true, you must learn to cipher and write letters, but this will not detain you long, — the great thing is, to look wise, and ride in a carriage.

I, my dear Ned, have always been accounted a humorist, since I came home from my last voyage, mounted a wig, and smoked a pipe; and I believe myself, that I am more than half. As to what you really mean to do, I will not venture one word of advice, for I have been to sea all my days, and can tell nothing about what trades suit the land best. Only if you begin to do anything, stick to it, like a burr, and never desert the ship, as long as you can keep a rag dry. Set your canvass, handle your rudder, and make straight to some point by the chart of the passage. Do'n't flounder about, like a lobster-box, without a tie.

Your mother is willing to set off what property belongs to you, and let you have the whole control, now and forever, if you choose; but I advise you to leave it where it is, for it will burn, like as not, in your pockets.

I have seen more of your friend, Hope, and I maintain what I said, the fellow is a quiz, whether he knows it or not. A good boy, though, and I am glad he takes so much interest in you. The rarest thing in this life is a true friend. Interest ties us mostly together, and our chains are made of bank-bills. The golden bracelets of love unite very few.

Your Uncle,

DICK.

LETTER IX.

EDWARD ASHFORD TO JAMES HOPE.

How much more we see of nature in some moods, than in others. It seems, I could be for an instant content in the sunny beauty of the calm, autumn day. I cannot blame my constitution, that varies its sympathy so often, but I mourn I am cold and indifferent to the common customs and occupations of men. If each man has been entrusted with the gift of doing some one thing better than another, how happens it, I discover no pursuit which seems my rightful destiny?

At times, I think I must be a poet; and am armed with a strong resolve to compose some verses, which shall utter the music of my thoughts. The rhymes come, the essence is wanting, and what I meant for song, has only its form. I am desirous to be as humble as a child. If I am granted any success, how proud I shall feel; I never ask for a greater blessing. I have this ardent desire after verse, if I begin to write, I can think of nothing else, either when walking, or in the house. Some spirit inhabits the else empty chambers of my mind, and leads me after this mirage, over the bare fields of existence, and entreats me to quench its thirst at the sweet spring of poetry. When I write, and see what poor success I meet,

I feel more dispirited than before. Was it once thus with the masters of song? I should be glad, had they left the record of their experience in their mighty vocation, for I might then be better prepared to fail. There remains only their beautiful success, and it is impossible to believe they faded beneath these harrowing disappointments, under which I lie cold and sorrowful. I read the sublime strains dejected by my feeble trial to follow their daring footsteps, and have concluded many times, that I cannot be a poet. Again the desire comes, again I long to sing, and add a new thorn to my pillow in my failure.

You cannot think how singular it is, you should say I was born a poet. Your keen eyes, that usually search every secret, have been blinded by love. You do not see, with the impartiality of a stranger, of what in another, you call trifling with the muse, you think, because I send it, poetry. I lately wrote some verse which I send you, as I do not feel like writing more to-day.