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First Chapter Appears in to-day's Examiner



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CHAPTER I. A KINSMAN AND AN ENEMY.

After five and forty years, they tell me, turbulent students of the University of Edinburgh listen with envy to stories of the battles of Peter Clephane and Andrew Kilgour. To one whose sun is far on the wrong side of the meridian, and who ought rather to be engaged with his evening prayer than his morning folly, the memory of early misdeeds can be no matter for satisfaction, yet, I must own, it causes me no surprise to hear that our ungracious reputation still lives, for if fervency of hate could give immortality to strife ours might be forever memorable.

Jonathan and David made a covenant of love, their souls being knit together in the bonds of a mutual affection, but we swore vows of vengeance, our hearts being aflame with reciprocal ill-will. As a consequence, hostilities were frequent and hot, and by a process as quick as it was natural we got into the very blackest books of the authorities. Almost as regularly as day succeeded day we heard it angrily prophesied that our rebellious and intractable spirit would assuredly bring us to a speedy and an evil end. I being the greater sinner (from causes which may presently be appreciated), was encouraged with the direr predictions.

But the censors might have saved their breath. If these warnings had any effect at all, it was to stimulate and embitter our enmity. There are certain moods in which admonition but fans into the flame the spark of rebellion that lies in every unregenerate human bosom. I fear that mood was ours. Defiant and impenitent, we were a grievous affliction to our professors, and the cause of many fits of cholera, resulting in red faces and shaken nerves. I regret to add that what rendered us no better than a pest to our teachers made us a source of endless delight to our fellow-students, particularly to such as were studying divinity.

I hope students of a later generation are vouchsafed more grace, though I am bound to add that several of those who used to cheer loudest in the thick of the fray are now worthily thumping pulpits, and with evident success pointing their hearers to the straight gate and narrow way. Who knows but they serve heaven all the better for having some special knowledge of the ways of sin? If the devil were converted, he would probably make a first-rate preacher.

Peter and I were kinsmen, and the deadlier enemies on that account. We had come up in the same month of the same year to pursue our studies, as college pastimes are ironically styled, he from Dundee, I from a remote part of the Highlands, and as we had never previously met nor even heard of each other, save by vague and casual reports, our introduction was that of strangers. For cousins the meeting was not cordial. A town bred exquisite and the sole heir of a lawyer with a big bank account and a trunkful of mortgages, Peter entertained a sovereign contempt for all such as were not of the gilded court of Mammon. The wretch who could not fee a fashionable tailor and live like a prince, if he happened to be of princely tastes, would inspire neither affection nor respect in my worthy cousin. Himself possessed of the longest purse and the finest clothes in the university, he was fawned upon by a body of the most devoted trades that ever worshipped a golden calf.

To the charmed inner circle of his worshippers I was never for a moment admitted, yet none of his chosen friends touched him so closely as I did nor yielded him so much pleasure. They flattered, but I served as target for his wit, an unenviable capacity that was extremely gratifying to him and extremely galling to me. Never an opportunity of vexing me did he miss. Not once during the two years we were together did he forego the slightest chance of taunting and ridiculing me. Though naturally averse to toil, he would cheerfully have laboured for half a day to coin a sentence that would sting or contrive an insult that would humiliate me.

At our first meeting, though I spoke a purer English than his own, he begged for an interpreter, as unhappily he had not the delightful Celtic dialect at his command, expressed surprise that one born to the heritage of a kilt should demean his fine legs with trousers, and then with a sarcasm that was alternately like ice and fire in the blood he commented on the instructive and interesting antiquarian cut of breeches made in the Highlands.

"As for your coat," said he, "it is the finest specimen of the antique I have seen, and I more than half suspect you of being the lucky finder of a garment dropped from the ark during its cruise among the northern peat bogs. As an antediluvian relic there would be a fortune in the thing. Why don't you exhibit yourself?" Whereupon his satellites laughed, uproariously, calling out that it wasn't fair to purloin the clothes of Noah and say never a word about it.

I left him with a crimson face and my heart already a furnace of hate. Thenceforward we were as powder and flame to each other—we had but to come into contact to go off. Psychological experimenters hold that an idea is a force of which the natural tendency is to translate itself into action. When we were together, the tendency of our ideas was generally violently that way.

In the tongue I was no match for Peter, nor indeed in the entire university was there his equal in the use of that diabolical weapon of offense. In three minutes he could have blackened the character of a saint beyond hope

or recognition and put a much more patient man than Job beside himself with passion. As for me, a single sentence, sometimes a single sneering little laugh or curl of the lip was enough to bring my blood to the boiling point and create an irresistible itching in my fingers to close on his throat. To do him justice, he took no pains to evade a contest.

When we laid aside our coats to settle differences, I generally managed to pay off scores satisfactorily, for, though he was my master with the tongue, and three years my senior to boot, I, being bred a hunter and climber of hills, had the firmer muscle. Perhaps, too, I had the greater ardour in crucial moments, and if that had its effect, mine was not the first instance in which the spark of naphtha fire in the Celtic blood told in the fight.

But the fortunes of war are variable. It chanced that one day my enemy caught me with a crippled arm. He railed upon me, as was his wont, I retaliated, we fought, and the victory was with him. If he had whipped the whole British nation, instead of a maimed and insignificant unit of it, he could not have exulted more, nor if he had been of the race of rebel angels could he have paid his debt of vengeance with a keener or opener malignancy of delight.

"There, you Highland blusterer," he cried, when the issue was decided. "Have you enough, or would you like more? How does it feel to get a drubbing?"

"You ought to know who have had it so often," I retorted. "But as to this day's work, we will reckon for it yet. To-morrow we'll see who crows loudest."

"We will," he laughed, with a more sinister expression than I had ever seen in his face before. "You and I agree for once. And when the reckoning comes there are muir cocks I know whose crow will not be so cruse as it is to-day."

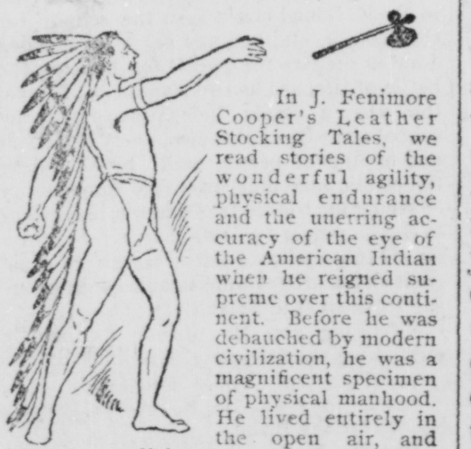
He came up to me with a devilish gleam in his eyes and snapped his fingers in my face. "To-morrow!" he hissed. "I'll show you what'll be to-morrow. See, I'll crush you like that!" and he stamped and ground his heel in the dust. "A poor, crawling thing like you setting yourself up before me!" Then he stood off a step and broke into a laugh of derision, but, checking himself, he bent forward again, saying, in a tone of simulated compassion:—"After all, as I'm a Christian, I ought to pity you. There is a shilling for you. Take it. Before seven days are over I dare say you will find it useful."

Such was my amazement at this speech and the sudden change of his manner, that I mechanically held out my hand and took the shilling. But its touch, which was as a sting in the quick, restored my senses, and I flung the coin back in his face.

"You may insult but you cannot degrade me," I cried, a hot, moist, prickly sensation springing to my eyes. "What your meaning is I cannot tell. I only know that, being yours, it must be spiteful and malicious. But before the seven days of which you talk are over I will repay you affront with interest. And in the meantime I will say in the spirit of Timon, it is a pity you are not good enough to spit on."

My outburst awoke the throng that had gathered about us, and I strode away in the midst of a dead silence, the picture, as an eyewitness afterward told me, of fury incarnate. Peter's tongue, however, was not long still.

(To be Continued.)



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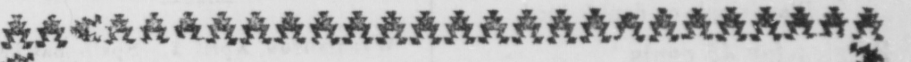


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