

Calidore

Thomas Love Peacock

Table of Contents

<u>Calidore</u>	1
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CHAPTER I

NOTWITHSTANDING the great improvements of machinery in this rapidly improving age, which is so much wiser, better, and happier than all that went before it, every gentleman is not yet accommodated with the convenience of a pocket boat.* We may therefore readily imagine that Miss Ap-Nanny and her sister Ellen, the daughters of the Vicar of Llanglasrhyd, were not a little astonished in a Sunday evening walk on the sea shore, when a little skiff, which, by the rapidity of its motion had attracted their attention while but a speck upon the waves, ran upon the beach, from which emerged a very handsome young gentleman, dressed not exactly in the newest fashion, who, after taking down the sail and hauling up the boat upon the beach, carefully folded it up in the size of a prayer-book and transferred it to his pocket: after which he turned himself to the sea, and, scooping up some water in the hollow of his hand, poured it down again in the manner of a libation, calling on the names of Neptune and Bromian* Jupiter and Proteus and Triton and the Nereids. Then turning towards the rocks he spread open his arms and invoked the Nymphs, the mountains, the rivers, the lakes, the fields, the springs, the woods, and the sea-shore, by the several appellations of Oreads, and Naiads, and Limniads, and Limoniads, and Ephydriads, and Dryads and Hamadryads. He did not notice the young ladies till he had completed this operation, and when he looked round and discovered them he seemed a little confused, but made them a very courteous bow in a fine but rather singular style of ancient politeness. From the moment of his first landing, and the commencement of the curious process of folding up his boat, Miss Ap-Nanny had been dying with curiosity, and had consulted her sister Ellen as to the propriety of addressing the stranger, having, however, fully made up her mind beforehand as usual with young ladies when they ask advice.

The stranger spared Ellen the trouble of giving her opinion by advancing and politely enquiring if there were any such thing as a town or inn in the neighbourhood? those being things, he said, for which he was instructed to enquire. Miss Ap-Nanny informed him, in fifty times as many words as were necessary, that there was no town within many miles, but a very good inn for the accommodation of picturesque tourists, kept by a very polite well-behaved accommodating old woman, named Gwyneth Owen, whose poor dear husband was gone to Abraham's bosom. "I hope he will not stay there long," said the stranger, touched apparently with sympathy by the rueful aspect with which Miss Ap-Nanny deemed it expedient to pronounce these latter words. The hawk's-eyes of Miss Ap-Nanny distended with amazement: but she proceeded to point out the way to the inn, observing at the same time: "You seem to be a stranger here, sir" "Perfectly, sweet lady," was the reply, which left Miss Ap-Nanny's curiosity as unsatisfied as before, though her wide mouth was pursed up into a smile by the courteous appellative, for she was not esteemed a beauty in this sinful generation, though she had eyes like the fish-pools by the gate of Bath-rabbim, and a nose like the tower of Lebanon which looks towards Damascus.* These prepossessing features, with the subaddition of two thin colourless lips, like faded threads of pink silk, set altogether in a complexion of smoky yellow like the wood of the Barberry-tree, over-shaded with inflexible masses of coarse copper-coloured hair, and mounted on a neck not perhaps very unlike the tower which David built for an armoury, formed altogether a combination of feminine charms that might have warmed the heart of a Jew, though it was doomed to "waste its sweetness on the desert air" among the tasteless squires of Cambria.

"Your way to the inn," she pursued, "lies to the left of that rocky peak; where you will see a narrow path that will bring you into the public road, where you will first pass by the house of my papa, the vicar."

This was said to give the stranger a notion of her consequence, but he astonished her again by asking: "Pray, what is a vicar?"

"A vicar, sir," said Miss Ap-Nanny, "Lord bless me! don't you know what a vicar is?"

The stranger had too much politeness to press any further enquiry into a subject which the lady seemed either unable or unwilling to explain, as to what a vicar might be, and directed his attention to her companion. All the mild and modest simplicity of Cambrian beauty concentrated its gentle graces in the beautiful Ellen. The soft light of her dark-brown eyes indicated a rare and happy union of sprightliness and gentleness: her complexion, delicately fair, was tinged with the natural roses of serenity and health: her black hair curled gracefully round her ivory temples, under the becoming Welsh costume of a black hat and feather: and her symmetrical figure sustained no disadvantage from the pressure of the sea-breeze upon her drapery.*

Nature had gifted our youth with a very susceptible spirit, and the contemplation of this beautiful creature fanned the dormant sparks of his natural combustibility into an instantaneous conflagration. When we add to this that these were the first unmarried girls he had ever seen, it will not appear surprising that he with difficulty restrained himself from falling at the feet of the lovely Ellen, and proffering himself to her acceptance as her true and devoted knight: but calling to mind some prudent counsels that had been carefully engraven on the tablets of his memory, touching the importance of time and place, he tore himself away with a very polite bow and an inarticulate valediction; and following the directions of Miss Ap-Nanny, arrived at the hospitable doors of mine hostess Gwyneth Owen.

The inn was filled with picturesque tourists who had arrived in various vehicles by the help of those noble quadrupeds who confer so much dignity on the insignificant biped, that if he venture to travel without them and rest his reception on his own merits the difference of his welcome may serve to shew him how much more of his imaginary importance belongs to his horse than to himself. Our traveller arriving alone and on foot was received with half a courtesy by the landlady, and shewn into the common parlour where the incipient cold of the autumnal evening was dispelled by an immense turf fire, by which were sitting two elderly gentlemen of the clerical profession, recumbent in arm chairs, with their eyes half shut, and their legs stretched out so that the points of their shoes came in contact at the centre of the fender. Each was smoking his pipe with contemplative gravity. Neither spoke: nor moved, except now and then as if by mechanism, to fill his glass from the jug of ale that stood between them on the table, and the moment this good example was set by one the other followed it instantaneously and automatically as the two figures at St Dunstan's strike upon the bell to the great delight of cockneys, amazement of rustics, and consolation of pickpockets. The stranger made several attempts to draw them into conversation, but could not succeed in extracting more than a "Hum!" from either of them. At length one of the reverend gentlemen, having buzzed the jug, articulated, with slow and minute emphasis: "Will you join in another jug?"

"Hum!" said the other.

A violent rattling of copper ensued in their respective coat pockets; two equal quantities of half-pence were deliberately counted down upon the table; the bell was rung, and the little, round, Welsh waiting-maid carried out the money, and replenished the jug in silence. They went on as before till the liquor was exhausted, when it became the other's turn to ask the question, and the same eventful words, "Will you join in another jug?" were repeated, with the same ceremonies and the same results.

Our traveller, in the meanwhile, looked over his tablets of instruction. These two reverend gentlemen were the Vicar of Llanglasrhyd and the Rector of Bwlchpenbach. The rector performed afternoon service at a chapel twenty miles from his rectory, and Llanglasrhyd lying half-way between them, he slept every Sunday night under the roof of Gwyneth Owen, where his dearest friend, the Vicar of Llanglasrhyd, met him to smoke away the evening. They had thus passed together every Sunday evening for forty years, and during the whole period had

scarcely said ten words to each other beyond the usual forms of meeting and parting, and "Will you join in another jug?" Yet were their meetings so interwoven with their habitual comforts that either would have regarded the loss of the other as the greatest earthly misfortune that could have befallen him, and would never, perhaps, have mustered sufficient firmness of voice to address the same question, "Will you join in another jug?" to any other human being. It may seem singular to those who have heard the extensive form of Welsh hospitality that the vicar did not invite the rector to pass these evenings at his vicarage; but it must be remembered that the Rector of Bwlchpenbach was every week at Llanglasrhyd in the way of his business, and that the Vicar of Llanglasrhyd had no business whatever to take him on any single occasion to Bwlchpenbach; therefore the balance of the consumption of ale would have been entirely against the vicar, and as they regularly drank three quarts each at a sitting, or one hundred and fifty–six quarts in a year, the Rector of Bwlchpenbach would have consumed in forty years six thousand two hundred and forty quarts of ale, without equivalent or compensation, at the expense of the Vicar of Llanglasrhyd, a circumstance not to be thought of without vexation of spirit.

Our traveller folded up his tablets, rung the bell, and inquired what he could have for supper, and what wine was to be had? The landlady entered with a tempting list of articles, and enumerated several names of wine. The stranger seemed perplexed, and at length said he would have them all, for he liked to see a well–covered table, having always been used to one. The landlady dropped a double courtesy, and the reverend gentlemen dropped their pipes; the pipes broke, and the odorous embers were scattered on the hearth.

When the supper smoked, and the wine sparkled on the table, the stranger pressed the reverend gentlemen to join him. They did not indeed require much pressing, and assisted with great industry in the demolition of his abundant banquet: but still not a syllable could he extract from either of them except that the Vicar of Llanglasrhyd, when his heart was warmed with Madeira, invited the rector and the young stranger to breakfast with him the next morning at the vicarage, which the latter joyfully accepted, as he very well by this time understood that his lively and jovial companion was the father of the beautiful creature who had charmed him on the sea–shore. He sate from this time in contented silence, contemplating the happy meeting of the following morning while the reverend gentlemen sipped the liquid so far and only till with their usual felicitous sympathy they vanished at the same instant under the table. The landlady and her household were summoned to their assistance. The Vicar of Llanglasrhyd was carried home by the postillions, and the Rector of Bwlchpenbach was put to bed by the ostler.

CHAPTER II OUR YOUTH was not unmindful of his engagement, and rising betimes, sent up his compliments to the rector of Bwlchpenbach to know if he was ready to accompany him to the vicarage. The ostler, by dint of knocking at the door and shouting "Ho! ho! ho! your reverence!" succeeded in waking the reluctant rector, and in extracting a response very oracular in its brevity, the purport of which was that he was too queasy to rise. The stranger therefore proceeded to the vicarage without him, where he found the lovely Ellen in the parlour alone, to whom he found himself under the awkward necessity of explaining that he came to breakfast by the vicar's invitation; for the vicar had been carried home in a state of profound sleep, and had continued in the same state sans intermission, so that his family necessarily remained in profound ignorance of his appointment. Ellen ran upstairs and knocked at her father's door to announce the stranger's arrival, but the vicar sympathised in queasiness with his friend the rector, and murmured an injunction to his wife and daughters to do the honours of the house. Miss Ap–Nanny, hearing her sister's communication, skipped down stairs by three steps at a time, determined not to let the stranger escape again without gratifying her curiosity about himself and his boat. Mrs Ap–Nanny, a grave and solemn matron, as silent as her husband, next made her appearance, and the beautiful hands of Ellen prepared the tea.

"Ellen, my dear," said Miss Ap–Nanny, "perhaps Mr – I beg the gentleman's pardon, I have not the pleasure of knowing his name."

"My name," said the stranger, "is Calidore."

Calidore

"A foreign name, I presume," said Miss Ap-Nanny.

"Probably," said the stranger.

"But, dear me, sir, surely you must know something about your own name!"

"Certainly," said Calidore, stealing glances all the while at Ellen, and perfectly distraught.

"Allow me to hand you some toast: you must have had a very pleasant sail yesterday."

"Very pleasant!"

"Did you come far?"

"Very far."

"From Ireland perhaps."

"Not from Ireland."

"Then you must have come a long way in such a small boat, such a very small boat."

Not so very small: it is one of our best sea boats."

"Do you carry your best sea boats in your waistcoat pockets? Then I suppose in your great-coat pockets you carry your ships of the line! But, dear me, sir, you must come from a very strange place."

"I come from a part of the world which is known to the rest by the name of Terra Incognita. I am not at liberty to say more concerning it."

"But, sir, if it is a fair question, what has brought you to Wales?"

"I have landed on this shore by accident. My present destination is London. I am to remain in this island twelve months, and return with a wife and a philosopher."

"God bless me! what can Terra Incognita want with a philosopher, and how are you to take them away?"

"In the same boat that brought me."

"Why, who do you think will trust herself? You would like some more tea? Ellen, my dear, do you think any lady would trust herself?"

"If she had love enough," said Ellen.

"Cream and sugar?" said Miss Ap-Nanny.

"The boat is perfectly safe," said the stranger, looking at Ellen. "I could go through a hurricane with it."

"Love, to be sure, will do anything," said Miss Ap-Nanny, "but, Lord bless me! Pray take an egg; and to be sure it would be worth some risk just in the way of curiosity to see Terra Incognita. They must be very strange people, but what they can want of a philosopher I cannot imagine. I hope if you bring him this way you will keep him

Calidore

muzzled, for my papa says they are very terrible monsters, fiends of darkness and imps of the devil. I would not trust myself in a boat with one for the world. Would you, Ellen, my dear?"

"I should not be much afraid," said Ellen, smiling, "if he were in the hands of a safe keeper."

"We have a philosopher or two among us already," said the stranger, "and they are by no means such formidable animals as you seem to suppose."

"But my papa says so," said Miss Ap-Nanny.

"I bow acquiescence," said the stranger, "but perhaps the Welsh variety is a peculiarly fierce breed."

"I am happy to say there is not one in all Wales," said Miss Ap-Nanny.

"I hear they run tame in London," said Ellen.

"Then you are not so much afraid of them as your sister, said the stranger.

"Not quite," said Ellen, smiling again, "I think I would venture into the same room with one even if he were not in an iron cage."

"Oh, fie, Ellen," said Miss Ap-Nanny, "that is what you call having liberal opinions. I cannot imagine where you got them. I am sure you did not learn them from me. Do you know, sir, Ellen is very heterodox. My papa actually detected her in the fact of reading a wicked book called Principles of Moral Science, which, with his usual sweet temper, he put, without saying a word, behind the fire. He says liberal opinions are only another name for impiety."

"Dear, good man!" said Mrs Ap-Nanny, opening her mouth for the first time, "he never was guilty of a liberal opinion in the course of his life."

Mrs Ap-Nanny left the room shortly after breakfast to superintend the affairs of the household; and Miss Ap-Nanny, who was her secreatry of state for the culinary department, was called out to assist in consultation whether leek porridge or buttered ale should be administered to the queasy vicar: for, though the old gentleman preferred the latter, Mrs Ap-Nanny was of opinion that the former was more medicinal, and the vicar was one of that numerous class of Benedicts* of whom their wives take so much care in their indispositions, that they are never suffered to consult their own tastes in any of the essential p[ractice of the science of dietetics. On this occasion, however, the vicar was roused to exertion, and was so Athanasian* in his invectives against the leek porridge, and so Jeremitylorically* pathetic in his entreaties for the buttered ale, that the heart of Mrs Ap-Nanny was softened, and the ale was prepared accordingly.

Whether it was owing to the exertion he had used in obtaining the ale, or to the ale itself, or to both in conjunction, we are not prepared to say, but the vicar found himself suddenly better, rose, dressed and descended. Opening the parlour-door, he recoiled several paces in amazement to see the stranger on his knees before his daughter Ellen, in the act of making passionate love, and Ellen, in the simplicity of her heart, listening to him with interested if not delighted attention.

"Heyday!" exclaimed the vicar, who was destined this morning to exert his energies more than he had done for twenty years, "Why, what on earth ? Is this your return for my old Welsh hospitality, to begin by seducing my daughter, the staff of my life now that I am stricken in Years?"

"I assure you, sir" said Calidore, "I have none but the most honourable motives."

Calidore

"How can that be, sir, when you never saw her before this morning?"

"Indeed, sir, I beg your pardon. I saw her yesterday."

"Oho! then you came here by appointment, and this was the scheme between you to lay a trap for my sobriety, and make me an accomplice. And now I recollect, I do not recollect that I gave you an invitation, as you want to make me to believe I did."

"Nay, sir, your friend the rector can witness it."

"Sir, what can a young man of your figure you look like a courtier mean by making love at first sight to my daughter? What can you mean, sir? Perhaps you have heard that she will have a thousand pounds, and that may be a temptation."

"Money," said the stranger, "is to me mere chaff." And producing a bag from his pocket, and shaking it by one corner, he scattered on the floor a profusion of gold. The Vicar, who had seen nothing but paper money for twenty years, was astonished at these yellow apparitions, and picking up one inspected it with great curiosity. On one side was the phenomenon of a crowned head with a handsome and intelligent face, and the legend ARTHURUS REX. On the reverse, a lion sleeping at Neptune's feet, and the legend REDIBO.

"Here is a foreign potentate," said the Reverend Dr Ap-Nanny, "whom I never remember to have heard of. Pray, is he legitimate by the grace of God, or a blasphemous and seditious usurper whom the people have had the impudence to choose for themselves?"

"He is very legitimate, and has an older title than any other being in the world."

"Then I reverence him," said the Vicar. "Old Authority, sir, old Authority, there is nothing like old Authority. But what do you want with my daughter?"

"Candidly, sir," said the stranger, "I am on a quest for a wife, and am so far inspired by the grace of Venus, Cupid, and Juno, that I am willing my quest should end where it begins here."

"On a quest!" exclaimed the Vicar; "Venus, Cupid, and Juno! Ah! I see how it is. Rich, humoured, and touched in the head. Pray, what do you mean by Juno?"

"Juno Pronuba, said the stranger, the goddess of marriage."

"I see, sir, you are inclined to make a joke of both me and my daughter. Sir, I must tell you this very unbecoming levity."

"My dear sir, I assure you."

"Sir, it is palpable. Would any man make a serious proposal to a man of my cloth for his daughter, and talk to him of the grace of Venus and Cupid and Juno Pronuba, the goddess of marriage?"

"I swear to you, sir," said the stranger, earnestly, "by the sacred head of Pan."

"Pan!" exclaimed the vicar. "Sir! this is most outrageous. Ellen, my love, fetch me another mug of buttered ale, for my exertions exhaust me."

Calidore

Ellen disappeared, glad of momentary relief, for she had been sitting in a state of extreme embarrassment, with her hands crossed on her lap, and her looks fixed on the carpet. The vicar threw himself into his great arm-chair, and fanned himself with his handkerchief. The stranger stood silently watching the door for the reappearance of Ellen, who shortly returned with the mug, which the vicar, taking, presented to the stranger, saying: "Come, sir. My wrath, which was great, must not make me unmindful of old Welsh hospitality."

Calidore took the mug, and sipped it to please the vicar, having first poured a small quantity of it on the floor, saying: "Hil thi, Bacche!"*

"Really, sir," said the vicar, after a copious draught, "this is most monstrous and most incomprehensible. I wax warm, sir, in wrath."

The truth was that the vicar was really angry with the stranger's words and actions, but as often as he cast his eyes on the golden shower on the floor he felt his wrath suddenly mollified. But having broken the ice of his voice he went on like a general thaw, to the great amazement of Ellen, as well as of Mrs and Miss Ap-Nanny, who, hearing the unusual rimbombo of his gutturonasal eloquence, burst into the room to ascertain what was the matter.

"I declare," said Mrs Ap-Nanny, "here is the floor covered with money."

"I declare," said Miss Ap-Nanny, "here is papa in a passion."

"I am so," said the vicar, "and with very orthodox reason. I am in a great and very exceeding passion. I found this young man in the act of seducing Ellen –"

"Nay, nay, dear papa," said Ellen deprecatingly.

"Oh! the monster!" said Miss Ap-Nanny.

"Oh! horrid!" said Mrs Ap-Nanny.

"and with this gold, I suppose," said Miss Ap-Nanny. "Did he throw all this gold on the floor?"

"Yes," said the vicar: "he throws everything on the floor: he threw himself on the floor: he threw his money on the floor: he threw my buttered ale on the floor."

"And greased the carpet, I protest" screamed Mrs Ap-Nanny.

"And had the impudence to talk to me about Bacchus," continued the vicar; "and called Pan to witness that he wanted to marry my daughter by the grace of Venus and Cupid and Juno Pronuba, the goddess of marriage: which I think composes altogether the most atrocious outrage that was ever offered to a man of my cloth."

"I am so inexperienced in the manners of this country," said Calidore, "that I did not know that the greatest outrage one gentleman can offer to another is to propose to marry his daughter. I should have acted with more circumspection if I had been aware of this fact."

"Sir," said the vicar, "there is no such fact but in your own head, which seems to be a repository for every thing that is nowhere else, and for nothing that is elsewhere. Sir, the vial of my wrath overflows."

"Jupiter knows," said the stranger.

"Jupiter!" said the vicar. "Do you take my daughter for Dana', that you come courting with a shower of gold? Rally sir, I must say –"

"Certainly," interrupted Miss Ap–Nanny, "it is a most extraordinary proceeding for a gentleman to land one evening on a strange coast, and begin the next morning by making love to one of the two first pretty girls he sees. But Ellen knows better than to listen to such a fly–away offer. Don't you, Ellen, my dear?" Ellen was silent. "Why, bless me, the girl is bewitched. What can you have done to her, you wicked wretch, to bewitch her so completely in such a short space of time?" And combining this idea of Ellen's bewitchment with those of the gold and the pocket–boat, the conviction flashed upon her that the stranger was one who had sold himself to the devil; and unable in her sudden panic to give utterance to the idea, she fell back in a chair kicking and screaming in a fit of violent hysterics."

"Water! water!" cried the vicar, and in his hurry and alarm poured over her forehead the remainder of his buttered ale.

Ellen slipped away in the confusion, sent in the servant with the water, and made her escape into the garden. The stranger snatched his opportunity and pursued her, while Dr and Mrs Ap–Nanny were engrossed with the fainting spinster. Calidore, after a few d tours among the thick shades of the garden, found Ellen by the banks of a little torrent, that flung itself in rapid descent down a sloping hollow of rock. She was sitting on a rustic bench under a trellis wreathed with clematis, which she had planted and reared. Calidore threw himself at her feet. Ellen was exceedingly discomposed. Her acquaintance with the youth of the other sex had been limited to the jolly squires and hunting parsons of Cambria, and a young and handsome stranger, kneeling at her feet, and breathing passionate love, made a very dazzling impression on her inexperienced and susceptible mind. Calidore, on the other hand, who had come to England on a quest for a wife, had been prepared to fall in love at a moment's notice, and being thus prepared on both sides the ignition was easy and the combustion rapid. Ellen however, could not feel perfectly convinced that she had really made so sudden a conquest; nor, if she had been so convinced, could she have supposed that a flame so lightly kindled would not be as easily destroyed. She therefore, as usual on similar occasions, assured the enamoured youth that she had no other attachments; that if he were what he appeared to be she might in time feel kindly disposed towards him; entreated him to take a little time to ascertain if his momentary partiality were likely to continue permanent; exhorted him to proceed to London, as that was his destination, and assured him that if he revisited that part of Wales she should be happy to see him again. Calidore* could not but acquiesce in the propriety of all she said: and, encouraged by these sweet words, and by much sweeter looks, he tore himself away from the garden of the vicarage, returned to the inn, threw himself into a post–chaise, and set forward for the metropolis. We shall leave him to enjoy the music of hoofs and wheels, while we give some account of his birth, parentage and education.

CHAPTER III

KING ARTHUR, after the fatal battle in which so many of his knights perished, and he himself was dangerously wounded by the traitor Mordred, was conveyed by the Ladies or Nymphs of the waters on board a small vessel, which made from the land in the sight of Duke Lukyon of Gloster. Fatigue and exhaustion overcame the pain of his wound, and he fell into a deep sleep. When he awoke, under the midnight moon, he found himself miraculously well. Merlin was standing by him on the deck with a small bottle. He had just poured from it a few drops upon Arthur's wound, which had healed immediately. Looking round, the king found himself in the midst of familiar faces. He recognised his dear Guenever, and her dear friend Sir Launcelot, and Sir Cawline and his lady, and Sir Gawaine and Sir Kay and many other valiant and courteous knights and ladies bright of blee, and last not least in love his butler Bedevere.

"Honest Bedevere," said King Arthur, "if there be anything in this vessel analogous to a buttery and a cellar, do thy office and let us eat and drink. This is a merry meeting indeed, for I thought we were all dead."

Calidore

"The will of fate," said Merlin, "seconded by my art and this vital elixir, has wrought this effect. You must forsake your kingdom for the present, but you shall return to it by—and-by with a numerous chivalry, and reign glorious and victorious in Britain. Meanwhile we must live in a solitary island, in a sea hitherto unexplored, where we must enjoy ourselves as well as we can till the fated hour of your return."

"Very well," said King Arthur; "and for the present, illuminate Bedevere with your art, to assist him in procuring us a supper, for none of us has eaten anything since we were killed."

Merlin led the whole party to the cabin, where they feasted joyously till sunrise, and continued to live a very merry life during the whole of their voyage.

When they approached the destined island they were delighted to perceive that its aspect presented a most promising diversity of mountain, valley, and forest reposing in the sunshine of a delicious climate. Two very singular persons were walking on the seashore; one in the appearance a young and handsome man with a crown of vine-leaves on his head; the other a wild and singular figure in a fine state of picturesque roughness with goat's horns and feet and a laughing face. As the vessel fixed its keel in the shore and King Arthur and his party landed, the two strangers approached and inquired who they were, and whence they came? This, replied Merlin, is the great King Arthur; this is his fair queen, Guenevere: and I am the potent Merlin: these are the illustrious knights of the round table: and this is the King's butler, Bedevere. The butler, said the first stranger, shall be welcome. And so shall the ladies, said the second. But as to the rest of you, pursued the first, we must know you a little better before we accord you our permission to advance a step in this island. I am Bacchus, and I, said the other, am Pan. So, said Sir Launcelot, I find we have to contend with the evil powers. If you mean us by that appellation, said Bacchus, you will find us too strong for you. This island is the retreat of all the gods and goddesses, genii and nymphs, who formerly reigned in Olympus, and dwelt in the mountains and valleys of Greece and Italy. Though we had not much need of mankind, we had a great affection for them, and lived among them on good terms and in an interchange of kind offices. They regaled us with the odours of sacrifice, built us magnificent temples, and especially showed their piety by singing and dancing, and being always social and cheerful, and full of pleasure and life, which is the most gratifying appearance that man can present to the gods. But after a certain time they began to change most lamentably for the worse. They discontinued their sacrifices; they broke our images, many of which we had sate for ourselves; they called us frightful and cacophonous names Beelzebub and Amaimon and Astaroth: they plundered and demolished our temples, and built ugly structures on their ruins, where, instead of dancing and rejoicing as they had been used to do, and delighting us with spectacles of human happiness, they were eternally sighing and groaning, and beating their breasts, and dropping their lower jaws, and turning up the whites of their eyes, and cursing each other and all mankind, and chaunting such dismal staves that we shut our eyes and ears, and, flying from our favourite terrestrial scenes, assembled in a body among the clouds of Olympus. Here we held a council as to what was to be done for the amendment of these perverted mortals; but Jupiter informed us that necessity, his mistress, and that of the world, compelled him to acquiesce for a time in this condition of things, that mankind, who had never been good for a great deal, were now become so worthless, and withal so disagreeable, that the wisest course we could adopt would be to leave them to themselves and retire to an undisturbed island for which he had stipulated with the fates. Here, then, we are, and have been for ages. That mountain on which the white clouds are resting is now Mount Olympus, and there dwell Jupiter and the Olympian deities. In these forests and valleys reside Pan and Silenus, the Fauns and the Satyrs, and the small nymphs and genii. I divide my time between the two, for though my home is Olympus, I have a most special friendship for Pan. Now I have only this to say, that if you come here to make frightful faces, chaunt long tunes, and curse each other through the nose, I give you fair warning to depart in peace: if not, we shall find no trouble in expelling you by force, as Jupiter will testify to you. Jupiter gave the required testification by a peal of thunder from Olympus.

Merlin and King Arthur fell on their knees, and the rest of their party followed the example.

Calidore

"Great Bacchus and mighty Pan," said Merlin, "pity our ignorance and take us under your protection, for if you banish us from this happy shore, our vessel must wander over the seas for ever, like the Flying Dutchman that is to be, and we are very ill victualled for such a navigation."

"Speak," said Bacchus,

Will you drink, and join with me

In midnight feast and revelry,

And songs whose notes shall take their pace

From an Olympic chariot-race,

Till Echo from our social mirth

Shall learn there still are souls on earth,

And with her hundred tongues repeat

The tale to Jove's own mountain seat?"

"That will we," exclaimed King Arthur and Merlin.

"That will we," shouted the knights of the round table.

"That will we," vociferated the butler, with a voice like the voice of three.

"Speak," said Pan,

"Will ye dance and bound with me

At evening round the old oak tree

Or round the tall and tufted pine,

With woodbine wreathed and eglantine,

While Fauns shall pipe, and wood nymphs sweet,

The cymbals clash, the timbrels beat;

Knights and damsels fair and free,

Will ye join these sports with me?"

"That will we," exclaimed the ladies of King Arthur's court.

"That will we," exclaimed the king and the knights and Merlin and the butler.

"Rise, then," said Bacchus: "rise, then," said Pan, courteously assisting the ladies.

"Mercury came flying from the clouds on Olympus and presently alighted among them. "I come" said he, "to propose a treaty of holy alliance between the powers of Olympus and those of Fairyland. What says Merlin?"

"It is my dearest wish," said Merlin.

"Then stretch forth your wand." Merlin stretched forth his wand: Bacchus touched it with his thyrsus: a vessel immediately appeared in the offing, from which landed Oberon and Titania, and the whole of the fairy court. Pan blew his horn, and a chorus of Fauns, Satyrs, Nymphs and Genii came dancing from the woods. Apollo and Venus came down from Olympus. The happy alliance was concluded immediately. Oberon raised on the spot a palace for King Arthur. Bacchus made a fountain of wine spring up in the hall and gave it in charge to the butler Bedevere. Pan spread a sumptuous banquet: and the whole assembly of Gods, Nymphs, Genii, Fairies, Knights, and Ladies, entered at once into the full spirit of festal harmony, feasting, singing and dancing till Iris came down to inform Apollo that the Hours were looking for him, as it was near the time of sunrise.

It was the virtue of this island that its inhabitants were exempt from age and mortality: but they did not as a great philosopher has conjectured that persons similarly circumstanced would do, "cease to propagate": on the contrary, the ladies deemed themselves bound in loyalty to raise an army for King Arthur, that when the time should come for him to revisit his kingdom, he might do so with glory and power. Merlin assuming (by means of a pure anticipated cognition, as the transcendentalists express it) the figure of Mr. Malthus, made them an oration on the evils that might result from a too rapid increase of population, in an island where no one could die, and where they might possibly be under the necessity of remaining some ages, expatiating with great eloquence on the virtue of moral restraint; but his eloquence was thrown away: les choses alloient leur train:* and one morning, being thrown into a panic by the squeal of a newborn child, Merlin called his flying chariot, and waited upon Jupiter to entreat his interference in checking the impending dangers of a superabundant population. Jupiter consulted with Juno, and sent Mercury with a message to Necessity, the Queen of the World. On the return of Mercury, Jupiter assured Merlin that there should be only three children to a marriage, and that no marriage should take place before the parties were twenty years of age: and he might satisfy himself by an easy calculation that this judicious arrangement would restrain the population of the island within the capacity of its produce, for a much longer period of ages than King Arthur and his followers were likely to inhabit it.

Thus the islanders increased in numbers only by slow and regular gradations, and lived much the same kind of life as Pindar, in his tenth Pythian, ascribes to the Hyperboreans, alive eternally diversified by songs and festal dances, the breathing of pipes and the resonance of lyres, and banquets of protracted festivity, at which they bound their hair with golden laurel in honour of Apollo. Our islanders were less exclusive in their garlands, and forgot neither "the myrtle of Venus nor Bacchus's vine." Bacchus became so fond of them that he was almost a stranger in Olympus, and seldom sight of King Arthur; and in turn the butler Bedevere seldom lost sight of Bacchus.

But, as Ulysses grew weary in the island of Calypso, and cast a longing look towards the shores of Itaca, so King Arthur often found himself much too comfortable where he was, and longed for the time to come when he should return to his kingdom, and flourish again his good sword Escalabor. It would sometimes happen, at long and rare intervals, that there was an odd male child; and as it could not be expected that this unfortunate person should live without a wife, and be held up as a solitary and shining example of the beauty of moral restraint, Merlin deemed it more prudent, when he arrived at the marriageable age, to provide him with a fairy boat, and send him, under restrictions of secrecy, to England, to choose a wife for himself. On these occasions King Arthur enjoined him to examine accurately the state of the country, that he might judge from his report if there were a good opening for his return. Merlin took the same opportunity of procuring all remarkable philosophical books, that he might have an accurate view of the progress of human knowledge: and the ladies were always most unmerciful in their commissions for trinkets and jewellery. To detail the results of all these expeditions would lead us too far from our present subject. On one occasion King Arthur was informed that England was at that time governed by a cowardly braggadocio, whom his barons had just pent up in a little island in the Thames, and were making him do and say just whatever they pleased.

Calidore

"They must treat kings with more ceremony mony," said King Arthur, "before I trust myself among them."

On another occasion he heard tha the people's faces had grown longer by an inch an a half; that they were always psalm-singing an "seeking the Lord," and not finding him so readily as they expected, had amused themselves en attendant with cutting off the king's head, and tha a French wag had made this epigram on this occasion:

The English, in their way of managing things,

Dock the tails of their horses, the heads of their kings;

But the French, among whom more politeness prevails,

Let their kings wear their heads and their horses their tails.

Very facetious indeed," said King Arthur, "but I have a great aversion to long faces, and have too much regard for my horse's tail to trust it among them at present."

On another occasion he was told that the people had risen with one voice against the doctrine of divine right, had turned out a legitimate fanatical Scotchman, and imported a grave Dutchman, to whom, and his lawful heirs, they had made over themselves and all their posterity for ever, and that this they called a glorious revolution.

"I see," said King Arthur, " I bestir myself speedily, or my legitimacy will stand but a poor chance."

"Wait a little," said Merlin, "and you will see the doctrine of divine right rise from its ashes in the shape of a plump French Fhnx, and fatten itself on the blood and treasure of England, to the great delight and glory of the nation."

Many years now passed by without an odd male child; and they would have remained in total ignorance of what was passing in the old world but for an accident which never before had happened on those shores a shipwreck.* King Arthur and his knights were leading the midnight revelry, in company with Bacchus and Pan, in the royal palace, careless of the roar of the midnight storm; when the butler Bedevere entered and informed them that a vessel had been cast away on the shore, and only one person had escaped, whowas soliciting shelter and refreshment. "Refresh him," said King Arthur, "then bring him in and let us see him."

"I will soon set him to rights," said Bacchus.

All eyes were fixed on the door, and when Bedevere reopened it the whole party recoiled in surprise and alarm from the strange apparition that entered. A thin figure, in a close suit of black, which stuck to him the closer from being wet through with salt water; a face artificially stretched into preposterous elongation; eyes of which little more than the whites were visible long straight hair that hung like ends of black rope on each side of a hollow and saffron-coloured face; compounded altogether such a phaenomenon as none of the party had ever before seen or imagined. The apparition paused on the threshold, and stretching out his hands and spreading his long thin fingers, exclaimed:—"Satan avaunt! Hast thou spread thy snares for me in the wilderness? Sons and daughters of Belial! leave your abominations and lewd meetings and revelries, and fall on your knees and humble yourselves before the Lord with fasting and mortification and godly groans."

"Leave your grimaces," said King Arthur, "and eat, drink, and be merry."

"If any be merry," said the apparition, "let him sing psalms."

"Drink," said Bacchus. "Here is a cup of Chian for you. I am the roaring Bacchus."

Calidore

"Avaut! Beelzebub!" said the spectre. "Tempt me not. Children of Belial, I say unto you –"

"Stop –" said Arthur –

"Now say what manner of man art thou,

And whither would'st thou rove,

And why hast thou that clouded brow,

And is it for some evil vow

Or for thy lady love?"

"I am one," said the stranger, "whose feet are joyful on the mountains, for he bringeth good tidings."

"So it should seem," said Sir Launcelot, "by your pleasant physiognomy."

"I am a missionary of the New Light," pursued the stranger. "The spirit has moved me to wander and call back the stray sheep, the heathen and the gentile into the fold of sanctification. But the wind hath whirled me about, and the sea hath cast me forth among you. You are the children of Belial, and shall be cast into outer darkness."

"I understand this fellow," said Bacchus. "He is one of same cast as the old lamenters, whose dismal faces and frightful noises compelled us, as a mere matter of taste; to forsake the ancient world. Let me talk to him. You are a missionary of the lew Light."

"Verily I am a chosen vessel."

We are all staunch Heathens here. You would like to convert us?"

"Truly I would baptise you in Jordan, and whitewash your inward man."

Very well. There is a prophetess who lives just by in a cavern in the wood. She is an oracle. Convert her, and we will all follow. You have only to get the best of the argument with her, and your victory is complete."

"I will buckle on the armour of controversy and beat down Satan under my feet."

Pan undertook to shew him the way, and conducted him to the cave of a beautiful wood-nymph, with whom he left him.

A month passed away, and they heard nothing of him, till one night, while the palace was resounding with the sounds of music and the feet of the dancers, the wood-nymph appeared among them, followed by the chosen vessel. It was with difficulty that they recognised him, for he was in the dress of a Bacchanal; his hair was curling and bound with a wreath of vine-leaves; his face was round; his eyes sparkled; his right hand brandished a thyrsus, and in his left he carried a goblet, which he held out with a significant Bacchic gesture to Bedevere. Bedevere filled it with wine, and the missionary, advancing to Bacchus, poured a libation before him and knelt on one knee. Bacchus raised him up, embraced him with delight and said: "The nymph, I see, had the best of the argument."

She has converted me, I confess," said the missionary.

Calidore

By what process of logic," said Bacchus, "we will not enquire too closely."

The proselyte smiled: the nymph blushed, and, taking him by the hand, led him into the mazes of the dance, where he frolicked the gayest of the gay.

"I protest," said Queen Guenever, "he is really handsome fellow. Who would have thought it?" Such is the difference," said Bacchus, " between cheerful and gloomy creeds. Cheerfulness is the great source and fountain of beauty: but the ugliest object in nature is a human visage distorted by a fanatical faith."

King Arthur learned from this new-comer that all Europe was in an uproar; that the swinish multitude had broken loose, and was playing a cup and ball with sceptres and crowns. "Well," said King Arthur to Merlin, "what say you now?"

"I say," said Merlin, "as I have always said: 'Patience!'"

"You have said so," said King Arthur, "any time these thousand years."

"But you see very clearly," said Merlin, "things are continually getting better."

"I maintain," said King Arthur, "they are continually getting worse: for I am certain that though in my time there wer in Britain many monsters 'whom I and my good knights did slay,' there were no such monsters as these chosen vessels, of whom it seems there are swarms in that country now."

"That is an oscillation," said Merlin, "an accidental variation, or, to speak more correctly, a secular moral equation, as I will prove –;" and Merlin being a perfectibilian and King Arthur a deteriorationist, they immediately lapsed into an argument on a point which they had argued for a thousand years, and were of the same opinions still.

The chosen vessel became a new light among the Gentiles, and an especial darling of Bacchus and Pan. The first-fruit of his theological controversy with the wood-nymph was our hero Calidore: and the year which placed Calidore on the marriageable list, the number of males exceeding that of females by one, the lot fell on him to set sail in the fairy-boat and choose a wife for himself in England. He was charged with the usual commissions from the ladies and Merlin, with this addition from the latter, that being desirous to understand the progress of things viva voce from a philosopher, he commissioned him to bring over, on any terms, the finest philosopher he could buy.

CHAPTER IV THE FIRST object of Calidore on arriving in London was to change some of his gold Arthurs into the circulating medium of the country, and on making inquiry at his hotel, he was directed, for this purpose, to a spacious stone building with high walls and no windows. Alighting from his hackney-coach, with a money-box in his hand, he wandered through a labyrinth of paved courts and spacious rooms filled with smoky-faced clerks and solid globes of Jews, through some of which he had great difficulty in forcing his way. After some time, he discovered the office he wanted, presented his gold, which was duly tried, weighed, and carefully removed from his sight. The sum was enounced with very distinct articulation, and a piece of paper was given to him, with which he was sent to another place.

"How would you like it, sir?" said a little sharp-nosed man with a quill behind his ear."

"In the circulating medium of this city, said Calidore."

"But I mean, sir, in what portions?"

Calidore

"In no portions: I wish to have it all at once."

"Thousands, sir? said the little man."

"The specified sum, sir, said Calidore. The little man put into his hand several slips of paper."

"Well, sir!" said Calidore, "what am I to do with these?"

"Whatever you please, sir, said the little man, smiling. I wish I could say as much for myself."

"I am much obliged to you, said Calidore; and I have no doubt you are an exceedingly facetious and agreeable person; but, at the same time, if you would have the goodness to direct me where I can receive my money."

"Sir, said the little man, that is your money."

"This!"

"Certainly, sir; that."

"What would you have?"

"Gold coin, to be sure, said Calidore."

"Gold coin! I am afraid, sir, you are a disaffected man and a Jacobin, or you would not ask for such a thing, when I have given you the best money in the world. Pray, sir, look at it you are a stranger, perhaps look at it, sir; that's all."

Calidore looked at one of the pieces of paper, and read aloud: "I promise to pay to Mr Henry Hare One Thousand Pounds John Figginbotham. Well, sir; and what have I to do with John Figginbotham's promise to pay a thousand pounds to Henry Hare?"

"John Figginbotham, sir, having made that promise, and put it upon that paper, makes that paper worth a thousand pounds."

"To Henry Hare, said Calidore."

"To any one, said the little man. You overlook the words: or bearer. Now, sir, you are the bearer."

"I understand. John Figginbotham promises to pay me a thousand pounds."

"Precisely."

"Then, sir, if you will have the goodness to direct me to John Figginbotham I will thank him to pay me directly."

"But, good God, sir! you mistake the matter."

"Mistake, sir!"

"Yes, sir! John Figginbotham does not pay; he only signs. We pay: we, who are here; I and my chums."

"Very well, sir; then why can you not pay me without all this circumlocution?"

"Sir, I have paid you."

"How, sir?"

"With those notes, sir."

"Sir, these are promises to pay, made by one Figginbotham. I wish these promises to be performed. You send me round in a circle from Hare to Figginbotham, and from Figginbotham to yourself, and I am still as much in the dark as ever, as to where I am to look for the performance of their very liberal promises."

"Oh! the performance, sir, very true sir, as you say; but, sir, promises are of two kinds, those which are meant to be performed, and those which are not, the latter being forms used for convenience and dispatch of business."

"Then, sir, these promises are not meant to be performed."

"Pardon me, sir, they are meant to be performed, not literally, but in a manner. They used to be performed by giving gold to the bearer, but that having been found peculiarly inconvenient has been laid aside by Act of Parliament ever since the year Ninety–Seven, and we now pay paper with paper, which simplifies business exceedingly."

"And pray, sir, do these promises to pay pass for realities among the people?"

"Certainly they do, sir; one of those slips of paper which you hold in your hand will purchase the labour of fifty men for a year."

"John Figginbotham must be a person of very great consequence, there is not much trouble I presume in making one of these things."

"Not much, sir."

"Then I suppose, sir, John Figginbotham has all the labour of the country under his absolute disposal. Assuredly this Figginbotham must be a great magician, and profoundly skilled in magic and demonology; for this is almost more than Merlin could do, to make the eternal repetition of the same promise pass for its eternal performance, and exercise unlimited control over the lives and fortunes of a whole nation, merely by putting his name upon pieces of paper. However, since, such is the case, I must try to make the best of the matter: but if I find that these talismans of the great magician Figginbotham do not act upon the people as you give me to understand they will, I shall take the liberty of blowing my bugle in his enchanted castle, and in the meantime, sir, I respectfully take leave of your courtly presence."

"Poor, deranged gentleman! exclaimed the little man after Calidore was gone, did you ever hear a man talk so in all your life, Mr Solomons?"

"Veyry much cracked," said Mr Solomons, "veyry much cracked in the head; but seems to be sound in the pocket, which is the beyter part of man."

CHAPTER V CALIDORE, finding the talismans of Figginbotham sufficiently efficacious, proceeded to establish himself in a magnificent house, engaged numerous servants, purchased an equipage, and lived like an ambassador. He suffered so much of his object to be known as might facilitate its accomplishment; and it was soon buzzed about the town, and significantly told in dashes by the Morning Post, that a stranger of great consequence was arrived from Terra Incognita, whither he would shortly return, and take with him from England a wife and a philosopher; which would be a very good speculation for any unmarried lady and literary gentleman,

Calidore

as on their arrival in the stranger's country, the former would receive a most splendid allowance of pin-money, and the latter would sit down for life as an Honorable Gentleman Pensioner, with such a pension in his single person as in this more economical nation would keep in pay two whole gangs of Legitimate Reviewers. This intelligence threw into a state of complete fermentation all the disinterested beauty and liberal talent of the metropolis, and all the seats of the Carlisle mails were engaged every night for a week in bringing up shoals of embryo laureats and poetical philosophers from Cumberland.

Calidore,* persuading himself that he had already made up his mind in the choice of a wife, prosecuted with great assiduity his search for a philosopher, and made diligent enquiry of several eminent booksellers, and among the rest of the fashionable Mr Macquire.

"A philosopher, sir," said Mr Macquire: "really the article is rather plentiful the in market, but I have not a sample on hand. A critic, indeed I could spare you a fine lively critic on reasonable terms, as I have several in my pay; but they are all sworn enemies to the very name of philosophy, and if it be mentioned in their hearing, one of them faints, another cries, another swears terrible oaths, and a fourth falls into such a fit of raving that I am obliged to call for a straight waistcoat. To be sure there is a Mr. Crocodile, the lay-preacher, who looks in upon me now and then, and talks a great deal about old philosophy: perhaps he might do, and I should think he would go cheap: he is worth little to us, and I never could hear that he was worth anything to any one else: but here is a gentleman who knows more about these things. Allow me to introduce Mr Index." And he presented to Calidore* a very smart, lively-looking little man, dressed in the pink of the fashion.

"Sir," said Mr Index, "I am proud of the opportunity of this introduction. From the moment I heard of your arrival in London I have longed for the hour of your acquaintance."

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