

1: The novels of Charles Lever / - CORE

Lever, Charles James () Sir Jasper Carew: his life and experience / Charles Lever ; illustrations by Gordon Browne (The Novels of Charles Lever ; v. 11 / edited by his daughter).

I make this remark in part to deprecate some of the criticism which I have seen pronounced upon these Memoirs. It has been said: How could any man have met so many adventures? By change of place. Nothing more is required. The pawn on the chess-board has a life of a very uneventful character, simply because his progress is slow, methodical, and unchanging. Not so the knight, who, with all the errantry of his race, dashes here and there, encountering every rank and condition of men, continually in difficulties himself, or the cause of them to others. What the knight is to the chess-board, the adventurer is to real life. The same wayward fortune and zig-zag course belongs to each, and each is sure to have his share in nearly every great event that occurs about him. But I also refer to this subject on another account. Tale-writers are blamed for the introduction of incidents which have little bearing on the main story, or whose catastrophes are veiled in obscurity. But I would humbly ask, Are not these exactly the very traits of real life? Do not things occur every week singular enough to demand a record, and yet, to all seeming, not in any way bearing upon our fortunes? While I need but appeal to universal experience to corroborate me when I say that life is little else than a long series of uncompleted adventures, I do not employ the strongest of all argument on this occasion, and declare that in writing my Memoirs I had no choice but to set down the whole or nothing, because I am aware that some sceptical folk would like to imagine me a shade, and my story a fiction! I am quite conscious of some inaccuracies; for aught I know, there may be many in these pages; but I wrote most of them in very old age, away from books, and still further away from the friends who might have afforded me their counsel and guidance. I wrote with difficulty and from memory, that is, from a memory in which a fact often faded while I transcribed it, and where it demanded all my efforts to call up the incidents, without, at the same time, summoning a dozen others, irrelevant and unwarranted. These same pages, with all their faults, have been a solace to many a dreary hour, when, alone and companionless, I have sat in the stillness of a home that no footsteps resound in, and by a hearth where none confronts me. They would be still richer in comfort if I thought they could cheer some heart lonely as my own, and make pain or sorrow forget something of its sting. I scarcely dare to hope for this, but I wish it heartily! And if there be aught of presumption in the thought, pray set it down amongst the other errors and shortcomings of Palazzo Guidotte, Senegaqlia, Jan. It might, indeed, seem a strange and absurd thing that any people should take so much pains, and incur so much expense, just for the sake of mystifying generations then unborn. Still, I was led to this conclusion by observing and reflecting on a somewhat similar phenomenon in our own day; and indeed it was the only explanation I was ever able to come to, respecting those great mansions that we Irish gentlemen are so fond of rearing on our estates, "totally regardless of expense," and just as indifferent to all the circumstances of our fortune, and all the requirements of our station, the only real difference being, that our forefathers were satisfied with quizzing their descendants, whereas we, with a livelier appreciation of fun, prefer enjoying the joke in our own day. Perhaps I am a little too sensitive on this point; but my reader will forgive any excess of irritability when I tell him that to this national ardor for brick and mortar this passion for cutstone and stucco it is I owe, not only some of the mischances of my life, but also a share of what destiny has in store for those that are to come after me. He was a powerful, big-boned, slashing trooper, with a heavy hand on a sabre, and a fine deep, bass voice in the conventicle; and if his Christian name was a little inconvenient for those in a hurry, he was called Bind-your-kings-in-chains-and-your-nobles-in-links-of-iron Carew, it was of the less consequence, as he was always where he ought to be, without calling. Here, at a short distance from the opening of the Vale of Arklow, he built a small house, contiguous to which, after a few years, was to be seen an outlandish kind of scaffolding, a composite architecture between a draw-well and a gallows; and which, after various conjectures about its use, some even suggesting that it was a new apparatus "to raise the Devil," turned out to be the machinery for working a valuable lead mine which, by "pure accident," my fortunate ancestor had just discovered there. There were seventeen townlands in our possession, and five

mines in full work. In one of these, gold was found, and several fine crystals of topaz and beryl, a few specimens of which are yet to be seen in the Irish Academy. It has been often remarked that men of ability rarely or never transmit their gifts to the generation succeeding them. Nature would seem to set her face against monopolies, and at least, so far as intellect is concerned, to be a genuine "Free-Trader. The common incident that we so often hear of a man winning an enormous sum and losing every farthing of it, down to the very half-crown he began with, is just the type of many a family history, the only difference being that the event which in one case occupied a night, in the other was spread over two, or maybe three, hundred years. When my father succeeded to the family property, Ireland was enjoying her very palmiest days of prosperity. The spirit of her nationality, without coming into actual collision with England, yet had begun to assume an attitude of proud hostility, a species of haughty defiance, the first effect of which was to develop and call forth all the native ardor and daring of a bold and generous people. The themes were precisely those which lay fastest hold of enthusiastic temperaments. Liberty and Independence were in every mouth. From the glowing eloquence of the Parliament House, the burning words and heart-stirring sentences of Grattan and Ponsonby, they issued forth to mingle in all the exciting din of military display, the tramp of armed battalions, and the crash and glitter of mounted squadrons. To these succeeded those festive meetings, resounding with all the zeal of patriotic toasts, brilliant displays of those convivial accomplishments for which the Irish gentlemen of that day were so justly famed. There was something peculiarly splendid and imposing in the spectacle of the nation at that moment; but, like the grand groupings we witness upon the stage, all the gorgeousness of the display was only to intimate that the curtain was about to fall! But to come back to personal matters. At the first election which occurred after his accession to the property, my father was returned for Wicklow, by a large majority, in opposition to the Government candidate; and thus, at the age of twenty-two, entered upon life with all the glowing ardor of a young patriot, rich, well-looking, and sufficiently gifted to be flattered into the self-confidence of actual ability. Parliamentary conflicts have undergone a change just as great as those of actual warfare. In the times I speak of, tactical skill and subtlety would have availed but little, in comparison with their present success. The House was then a species of tournament, where he who would break his lance with the most valiant tilter was always sure of an antagonist. The marshalling of party, the muster of adherents, was not, as it now is, all-sufficient against the daring eloquence of a solitary opponent; and if, as is very probable, men were less under the guidance of great political theorems, they were assuredly not less earnest and devoted than we now see them. The contests of the House were carried beyond its walls, and political opponents became deadly enemies, ready to stake life at any moment in defence of their opinions. It was the school of the period; nor can it be better illustrated than by the dying farewell of a great statesman, whose last legacy to his son was in the words: My father was a faithful disciple of the sect. The splendor of his retinue was the astonishment of foreign courts; and the journals of the time constantly chronicled the princely magnificence of his entertainments, and the costly extravagance of his household. Wagers were the fashionable pastime of the period; and to the absurd extent to which this passion was carried, are we in all probability now indebted for that character of eccentricity by which our countrymen are known over all Europe. The most perilous exploits, the most reckless adventures, ordeals of personal courage, strength, endurance, and address, were invented as the subject of these wagers; and there was nothing too desperately hazardous, nor too absurdly ridiculous, as not to find a place in such contests. My father had run the gauntlet through all, and in every adventure was said to have acquitted himself with honor and distinction. Of one only of these exploits do I intend to make mention here; the reason for the selection will soon be palpable to my reader. At the time I speak of, Paris possessed two circles totally distinct in the great world of society. Scanty as are the materials which have reached us, there is yet abundant reason to believe that never, in the most abandoned days of the Regency, was there any greater degree of profligacy than then prevailed there. Every vice and debauchery of a corrupt age was triumphant, and even openly defended on the base and calumnious pretence that the company was at least as moral as that of the "Petit Trianon. His handsome figure, his winning manners, an easy disposition, and an ample fortune were ready recommendations in his favor, and he speedily became the chosen associate of the Prince. Amongst his papers are to be found the unerring proofs of what this friendship cost him. It would seem, however, that fortune at last took a

turn,â€”at least, the more than commonly wasteful extravagance of his life at one period would imply that he was a winner. These gambling contests between the Duke and himself had latterly become like personal conflicts, wherein each staked skill, fortune, and address on the issue,â€”duels which involved passions just as deadly as any whose arbitrament was ever decided by sword or pistol! At last, so decidedly had been the run against him that the Prince was forced to accept of loans from my father to enable him to continue the contest. Even this alternative, however, availed nothing. When he returned, his altered looks almost startled my father. The color had entirely deserted his cheeks; his very lips were bloodless; his eyes were streaked with red vessels; and when he tried to speak, his first words were inaudible. This sealed note contains the stake I now propose to risk. You are at liberty to set any sum you please against it. I can only say, it is all that now remains to me of value in the world. One condition, however, I must stipulate for; it is this: If you win"â€”here he paused, and a convulsive shudder rendered him for some seconds unable to continueâ€”"if you win, that you leave France within three days, and that you do not open this paper till within an hour after your departure. He tried to persuade the Prince that there was no necessity for so heavy a venture; that he was perfectly ready to advance any sum his Royal Highness could name; that fortune, so persecuting as she seemed, should not be pushed further, at least for the present. In fact, he did everything which ingenuity could prompt to decline the wager. But the more eagerly he argued, the more resolute and determined became the Duke; till at last, excited by his losses, and irritated by an opposition to which he was but little accustomed, the Prince cut short the discussion by the insolent taunt "that the Chevalier was probably right, and deemed it safer to retain what he had won, than risk it by another venture. The Prince never spoke nor moved; and my father, after in vain waiting for some remark, said,â€” "I perceive, sir, that I have miscalculated. These are all that I have about me;" and he drew from his pocket a mass of bank-notes of considerable amount. The Prince still maintained silence. Yes, sir, such is my stake. The fashionable game of the day was called Barocco, in which, after certain combinations, the hand to whom fell the Queen of Spades became the winner. So evenly had gone the fortune of the game that all now depended on this card. My father was the dealer, and turned up each card slowly, and with a hand in which not the slightest tremor could be detected. He was quickly removed by his attendants, and my father never saw him after! All his efforts to obtain an audience were in vain; and when his entreaties became more urgent, he was given significantly to understand that the Prince was personally indisposed to receive him. To be suddenly excluded from the society in which he had so long mixed, and banished from the country where he had lived with such distinction, were indeed deep personal affronts, and not without severe reflection on his conduct and character. His impatience to quit a land where he had been so grossly outraged grew greater with every mile he travelled; and although the snow lay heavily on the road, he passed on, regardless of everything but his insulted honor. It was midnight when he reached Calais. The packet, which had sailed in the afternoon, had just re- entered the port, driven back by a hurricane that had almost wrecked her. The gale increased in violence at every instant, and the noise of the sea breaking over the old piles of the harbor was now heard like thunder. Indifferent to such warning, my father sent for the captain, and asked him what sum would induce him to put to sea. A positive refusal to accept of any sum was the first reply; but by dint of persuasion, persistence, and the temptation of a large reward, he at last induced him to comply. To the landlord, who conveyed this request, my father strongly represented the danger of such an undertaking; that nothing short of an extreme necessity would have induced him to embark in such a hurricane; that the captain, who had undertaken the voyage at his especial entreaty, might, most naturally, object to the responsibility.

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Part 72 "It were kinder to leave me as I am," replied I. The degradation of the felon absorbs all the rest. When the law has once separated from all save the guilty, it has done its worst. His third venture was more successful. It would appear now that some very important discoveries have been made in America respecting this claim, particulars of which have been already forwarded to England. As the parties who have made these discoveries may soon be expected in this country, it is not impossible that we may soon hear of another action of ejectment, although on very different grounds, and with very different results from the late one. There would seem now to be no doubt upon the subject, as one of the most eminent solicitors in this country has received instructions to take the necessary steps preliminary to a new action at law. The newly discovered facts are sufficiently curious to deserve mention. The late Walter Carew, Esq. A singular accident has at length brought this doc. Whether success attended the search in question we know not, but it certainly elicited another and most curious discovery: We are not at liberty to divulge any more of the singular circ. It was in the hands of the firm of Rogers and Raper that these doc. Raper himself has pa. Raper and the Countess of Gabriac, an Irishwoman by birth, are expected daily to arrive in this country, and we may look forward to their coming for the elucidation of one of the most curious stories in our domestic annals. To hear that my dear mother and Raper still lived; that they not only remembered me, but that their deep devotion to my cause still animated them,--was too much to bear! Bruised, and shattered, and broken down by fortune, this proof of affection kindled the almost dead embers of feeling within me, and I fell upon my knees in thankful prayer to Heaven that I was not deserted nor forgotten! It was no longer rank, and wealth, and riches that glittered before me. I sought for no splendors of fortune or high estate. All that I asked, all that I prayed for, was an honorable name before man, and that love which should once more reconcile me to myself,--lift me from the lonely depths of my isolation, and make a home for me with those to whom I was dear. I was weak and sickly, but no longer dispirited nor depressed; a faint flickering of hope now burned within me, and I felt that, even to the vulgar stare of curiosity, I could present the steady gaze of one whose vindication might one day be p. See how, confounding the weakness and the folly of the human heart with direct and actual criminality, you have suffered the probable or the possible to usurp the place of the inevitably true; have been so carried away by prejudice or by pa. If you cannot be always just, be sometimes merciful; distrust, at least, the promptings that disposed you to condemn, and say to your heart, "Good G. Years of prosperity have rolled over me,--years of tranquil happiness and sincere enjoyment. There is not a day on which I have not to thank Heaven for blessings of health and vigor, for the love of kind hearts, and for the affection of many benevolent natures. I know and I acknowledge that these are more than the recompense of any sorrows I have suffered; and in my daily walk of life I try to aid those who suffer, to console affliction, and to cheer weak-heartedness. The happiness that others seek and find within the circle of their own, I look for in the wider family of mankind, and I am not disappointed. Polly and Raper live with me. MacNaghten, too, inhabits the old room that once was his. Poor fellow, in his extreme old age he loves every spot that revives a memory of the past, and in his wanderings often calls me "Walter. The various details which came out upon the trial, with the evidence given by the Countess of Gabriac and Raper,--all of which, involving so much already known, I have spared the reader,--so far interested the King that he expressed a desire to see me at Court. I hastened, of course, to obey the command, and from the royal hand received the honor of knighthood, his Majesty saying, "We should have made you a baronet, only that it would have been of no use to you, seeing that you are the last of the Carews of Castle Carew. Would that anything in these memorials of a life may have served to lighten a weary hour, or softened a moment of suffering; since to the higher purposes of instruction or improvement they lay

V. 11. SIR JASPER CAREW. pdf

no claim. At all events, think of me as one too deeply conscious of his own faults to hide or to extenuate them, and too sincerely sensible of his good fortune not to strive to extend its blessings to others.

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