

F. ANSTEY



**THE TRAVELLING
COMPANIONS**

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The Travelling Companions

A Story in Scenes

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CHAPTER I.

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Extremes Meet.

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SCENE—*An Excursion Agent's Offices. Behind the counters polite and patient Clerks are besieged by a crowd of Intending Tourists, all asking questions at once.*

FIRST INTENDING TOURIST. Here—have you made out that estimate for me yet?

CLERK. In one moment, Sir. (*He refers to a list, turns over innumerable books, jots down columns of francs, marks, and florins; reduces them to English money, and adds them up.*) First class fares on the Rhine, Danube and Black Sea steamers, I think you said, second class rail, and postwagen?

FIRST INT. T. I did say so, I believe; but you had better make it second class all through, and I can always pay the difference if I want to.

[*The CLERK alters the sums accordingly, and adds up again.*

CLERK. Fifty-five pounds fourteen and a penny, Sir. Shall I make you out the tickets now?

FIRST INT. T. Um, no. On second thoughts, I'd like to see one of your short Circular Tours for the English Lakes, or Wales, before I decide.

[The CLERK hands him a quantity of leaflets, with which he retires.

Enter MR. CLARENDON CULCHARD, age about twenty-eight; in Somerset House; tall; wears glasses, stoops slightly, dresses carefully, though his tall hat is of the last fashion but two. He looks about him expectantly, and then sits down to wait.

CULCHARD (*to himself*). No sign of him yet! I *do* like a man to keep an appointment. If this is the way he *begins*—I have my doubts whether he is *quite* the sort of fellow to—but I took the precaution to ask Hugh Rose about him, and Rose said he was the best company in the world, and I couldn't help getting on with him. I don't think Rose would deceive me. And from all I've seen of Podbury, he seems a pleasant fellow enough. What a Babel! All these people bent on pleasure, going to seek it in as many directions—with what success no one can predict. There's an idea for a sonnet there.

[He brings out a pocket-book, and begins to write —"As when a——"

AN AMURRCAN CITIZEN (*to CLERK*). See here, I've been around with your tickets in Yurrupe, and when I was at Vernis, I bought some goods at a store there, and paid cash down for 'em, and they promised to send 'em on for me right here, and that was last fall, and I've never heard any more of 'em, and what I want *you* should do now is to instruct your representative at Vernis to go round and hev a talk with that man, and ask him what in thunder he means by it, and

kinder hint that he'll hev the Amurrcan Consul in his hair pretty smart, if he don't look slippier!

[The CLERK mildly suggests that it would be better to communicate directly with the American Consulate, or with the tradesman himself.]

THE A. C. But hold on—how'm I goin' to write to that sharp, when I've lost his address, and disremember his name? Can't you mail a few particulars to your agent, so he'll identify him? No? *(Disappointed.)* Well, I thought you'd ha' fixed up a little thing like that, anyhow; in my country they'd ha' done it right away. Yes, *Sir!*

[He goes away in grieved surprise.]

Enter MR. JAMES PODBURY, age twenty-six; in a City Office; short, fresh-coloured, jaunty; close-cut dark hair. Not having been to the City to-day, he is wearing light tweeds, and brown boots.



Yes, Sir

PODBURY (*to himself*). Just nicked it—(*looks at clock*)—more or less. And he doesn't seem to have turned up yet. Wonder how we shall hit it off together. Hughie Rose said he was a capital good chap—when you once got over his manner. Anyhow, it's a great tip to go abroad with a fellow who knows the ropes. (*Suddenly sees CULCHARD absorbed in his note-book.*) So here you are, eh?

CULCH. (*slightly scandalized by the tweeds and the brown boots*). Yes, I've been here some little time. I wish you could

have managed to come before, because they close early here to-day, and I wanted to go thoroughly over the tour I sketched out before getting the tickets.

[He produces an elaborate outline.]

PODB. (*easily*). Oh, *that's* all right! I don't care where *I* go! All I want is, to see as much as we can in the time—leave all the rest to you. I'll sit here while you get the tickets.

AN OLD LADY (*to CLERK, as CULCHARD is waiting at the counter*). Oh, I *beg* your pardon, but *could* you inform me if the 1.55 train from Calais to Basle stops long enough for refreshments anywhere, and where they examine the luggage, and if I can leave my hand-bag in the carriage, and whether there is an English service at Yodeldorf, and is it held in the hotel, and Evangelical, or High Church, and are the sittings free, and what Hymn-book they use?

[The CLERK sets her mind free on as many of these points as he can, and then attends to CULCHARD.]

CULCH. (*returning to PODBURY with two cases bulging with books of coloured coupons*). Here are yours. I should like you to run your eye over them, and see that they are correct, if you don't mind.

PODB. (*stuffing them in his pocket*). Can't be bothered now. Take your word for it.

CULCH. No—but considering that we start the first thing tomorrow morning, wouldn't it be as well to have some idea of where you're going? And, by the way, excuse me, but is it altogether prudent to keep your tickets in an outside pocket like that? I always keep mine, with my money, in a special

case in an inner pocket, with a buttoned flap—then I know I *can't* lose them.

PODB. Anything for a quiet life! (*He examines his coupons.*) Dover to Ostend? Never been there—like to see what Ostend's like. But why didn't you go by Calais?—*shorter*, you know.

CULCH. Because I thought we'd see Bruges and Ghent on our way to Brussels.

PODB. Bruges, eh? Capital! Anything particular going on there? No? It don't matter. And Ghent—let's see, wasn't that where they brought the good news from? Yes, we'll stop at Ghent—if we've time. Then—Brussels? Good deal of work to be done there, I suppose, sightseeing, and that? I like a place where you can moon about without being bothered myself; now, at *Brussels*—never mind, I was only thinking.

CULCH. It's the best place to get to Cologne and up the Rhine from. Then, you see, we go rather out of our way to Nuremberg—

PODB. Where they make toys? / know—pretty festive there, eh?

CULCH. I don't know about festive—but it is—er—a quaint, and highly interesting old place. Then I thought we'd dip down to Constance, and strike across the Alps to the Italian Lakes.

PODB. Italian Lakes? First-rate! Yes, *they're* worth seeing, I suppose. Think they're better than the *Swiss* ones, though?

CULCH. (*tolerantly*). I can get the coupons changed for Switzerland if you prefer it. The Swiss Lakes may be the more picturesque.

PODB. Yes, we'll do Switzerland—and run back by Paris, eh? Not much to do in Switzerland, though, after all!

CULCH. (*with a faintly superior smile*). There are one or two mountains, I believe. But, personally, I should prefer Italy.

PODB. So should I. No fun in mountains—unless you go up 'em. What do you think of choosing some quiet place, where nobody ever goes—say in France or Germany—and, sticking to *that*. More of a rest, wouldn't it be? such a bore having to know a lot of people!

CULCH. I don't see how we can change *all* the tickets, really. If you like, we could stop a week at St. Goarshausen.

PODB. What's St. Goarshausen like—cheery?

CULCH. I understood the idea was to keep away from our fellow countrymen, and as far as I can remember St. Goarshausen, it is not overrun with tourists—we should be quiet enough *there*.

PODB. That's the place for *me*, then. Or could we push on to Vienna? Never seen Vienna.

CULCH. If you like to give up Italy altogether.

PODB. What do you say to *beginning* with Italy and working back? Too hot, eh? Well, then, we'll let things be as they are—I dare say it will do well enough. So *that's* settled!

CULCH. (*to himself on parting, after final arrangements concluded*). I wish Rose had warned me that Podbury's habit of mind was so painfully desultory. (*He sighs.*) However—

PODB. (*to himself*). Wonder how long I shall take to get over Culchard's manner. (*He sighs.*) I wish old Hughie was coming—he'd give me a leg over! [*He walks on thoughtfully.*

CHAPTER II.

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Podbury picks up Acquaintances.

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SCENE—*Courtyard of the "Grand Hôtel du Lion Belgique et d'Albion," at Brussels. It is just after table d'hôte; PODBURY and CULCHARD are sitting on a covered terrace, with coffee.*

PODBURY (*producing a pipe*). Not such a bad dinner! Expect they'll rook us a lot for it, though. Rather fun, seeing the waiters all troop in with a fresh course, when the proprietor rang his bell. Like a ballet at the Empire—eh?

CULCHARD (*selecting a cigarette*). I'm not in a position to say. I don't affect those places of entertainment myself.

PODB. Oh! Where *do* you turn in when you want to kick up your heels a bit? Madame Tussaud's? I say, why on earth didn't you talk to that old Johnny next to you at dinner? He was trying all he knew to be friendly.

CULCH. Was he? I dare say. But I rather understood we came out with the idea of keeping out of all that.

PODB. Of course. *I'm* not keen about getting to know people. He had no end of a pretty daughter, though. Mean to say you didn't spot her?

CULCH. If by "spotting" you mean—was I aware of the existence of a very exuberant young person, with a most distressing American accent?—I can only say that she made her presence sufficiently evident. I confess she did not

interest me to the point of speculating upon her relationship to anybody else.

PODB. Well—if you come to that, I don't know that I—still, she was uncommonly—*(Happens to glance round, and lowers his voice.)* Jove! she's in the Reading-room, just behind us. *(Hums, with elaborate carelessness.)* La di deedle-lumpty—looodle-oodle-loo—

CULCH. *(who detests humming)*. By the way, I wish you hadn't been in such a hurry to come straight on. I particularly wished to stop at Bruges, and see the Memlings.

PODB. I do like that! For a fellow who means to keep out of people's way! They'd have wanted you to stay to lunch and dinner, most likely.

CULCH. *(raising his eyebrows)*. Hardly, my dear fellow—they're pictures, as it happens.

PODB. *(unabashed)*. Oh, are they? Any way, you've fetched up your average here. Weren't there enough in the Museum for you?

CULCH. *(pityingly)*. You surely wouldn't call the collection here exactly representative of the best period of Flemish Art?

PODB. If you ask me, I should call it a simply footling show—but you were long enough over it. *(CULCHARD shudders slightly, and presently pats his pockets.)* What's up now? Nothing gone wrong with the works, eh?

CULCH. *(with dignity)*. No—I was merely feeling for my note-book. I had a sudden idea for a sonnet, that's all.

PODB. Ah, you shouldn't have touched those mussels they gave us with the sole. Have a nip of this cognac, and you'll soon be all right.

[CULCHARD *scribbles in lofty abstraction*; PODBURY *hums*; MR. CYRUS K. TROTTER, *and his daughter, MAUD S. TROTTER, come out by the glass door of the Salon de Lecture, and seat themselves at an adjoining table.*

MISS TROTTER. Well, I guess it's gayer out here, anyway. That Reading Saloon is just about as lively as a burying lot with all the tombs unlet. I want the address of that man who said that Brussels was a second Parrus.

MR. TROTTER. Maybe we ain't been long enough off the cars to jedge yet. Do you feel like putting on your hat and sack, and sorter smellin' round this capital?

MISS T. Not any. I expect the old city will have to curb its impatience to see me till to-morrow. I'm tired some.

CULCH. (*to himself*). Confound it, how can I—! (*Looks up, and observes* MISS T. *with a sudden attention.*) That fellow Podbury has better taste than I gave him credit for. She *is* pretty—in her peculiar style—*quite* pretty! Pity she speaks with that deplorable accent.

[*Writes—"Vermilion lips that sheathe a parrot tongue," and runs over all the possible rhymes to "tongue."*

PODB. (*observing that his pencil is idle*). Gas cut off again? Come for a toddle. You don't mean to stick here all the evening, eh?

CULCH. Well, we might take a turn later on, and see the effect of St. Gudule in the moonlight.

PODB. Something *like* a rollick that! But what do you say to dropping in quietly at the Eden for an hour or so, eh?

Variety show and all that going on.

CULCH. Thanks—variety shows are not much in my line; but don't mind me if you want to go.

[PODBURY *wanders off, leaving CULCHARD free to observe*
MISS TROTTER.

MISS T. Charley writes he's having a lovely time in Germany going round. I guess he isn't feeling so cheap as he did. I wish he'd come along right here.

MR. T. I presume he's put in all the time he had for Belgium—likely we'll fetch up against him somewhere before he's through.

MISS T. Well, and I don't care how soon we do, either. Charley's a bright man, and real cultivated. I'm always telling him that he's purrfectly splendid company, considering he's only a cousin.

MR. T. That's so every time. I like Charley Van Boodeler firstrate myself.

CULCH. (*to himself*). If Charley Van Boodeler was *engaged* to her, I suppose he'd be there. Pshaw! What *does* it matter? Somehow, I rather wish now that I'd—but perhaps we shall get into conversation presently. Hang it, here's that fellow Podbury back again! Wish to goodness he'd—(To PODBURY.) Hallo, so you haven't started yet?

PODB. Been having a talk with the porter. He says there's a big fair over by the Station du Midi, and it's worth seeing. Are you game to come along and sample it, eh?

CULCH. (*with an easy indifference intended for MISS T.'s benefit*). No, I think not, thanks. I'm very comfortable where I am.

[He resumes his writing.]

PODB. Well, it's poor fun having to go alone!

[He is just going, when MR. TROTTER rises and comes towards him.]

MR. T. You'll excuse me, Sir, but did I overhear you remark that there was a festivity in progress in this city?

PODB. So I'm told; a fair, down in the new part. I could tell you how to get to it, if you thought of going.

MR. T. Well, I don't see how I should ever strike that fair for myself, and I guess if there's anything to be seen we're bound to see it, so me and my darter—allow me to introduce my darter to you—Maud, this gentleman is Mr.—I don't think I've caught your name, Sir—Podbury?—Mr. Podbury, who's kindly volunteered to conduct us round.

MISS T. I should have thought you'd want to leave the gentleman some say in the matter, father—not to mention me!

PODB. (*eagerly*). But won't you come? Do. I shall be awfully glad if you will!

MISS T. If it makes you so glad as all that, I believe I'll come. Though what you could say different, after Poppa had put it up so steep on you, I don't know. I'll just go and fix myself first. [*She goes.*]

MR. T. (*to* PODBURY). My only darter, Sir, and a real good girl. We come over from the States, crossed a month ago to-day, and seen a heap already. Been runnin' all over Scotland and England, and kind of looked round Ireland and Wales, and now what we've got to do is to see as much as we can

of Germany and Switzerland and It'ly, and get some idea of France before we start home this fall. I guess we're both of us gettin' pretty considerable homesick already. My darter was sayin' to me on'y this evening at *table d'hôte*, "Father," she sez, "the vurry first thing we'll do when we get home is to go and hev a good square meal of creamed oysters and clams with buckwheat cakes and maple syrup." Don't seem as if we *could* git along without maple syrup *much* longer. (MISS TROTTER *returns*.) You never mean going out without your gums?



YOU WERE MY TUTOR!"

"WANTED TO KNOW IF

[He roars.]

MISS T. I guess it's not damp here—any. (*To PODBURY.*) Now you're going to be *Mary*, and father and I have got to be the little lambs and follow you around.

[They go out, leaving CULCHARD annoyed with himself and everybody else, and utterly unable to settle down to

his sonnet again.

IN AN UPPER CORRIDOR TWO HOURS LATER.

CULCH. (*coming upon* PODBURY). So you've got rid of your Americans at last, eh?

PODB. *I was in no hurry, I can tell you. She's a ripping little girl—tremendous fun. What do you think she asked me about you?*

CULCH. (*stiff, but flattered*). I wasn't aware she had honoured me by her notice. What *was* it?

PODB. Said you had a sort of schoolmaster look, and wanted to know if you were my tutor. My tutor! [*He roars.*

CULCH. I hope you—ah—undeceived her?

PODB. Rather! Told her it was t'other way round, and I was looking after *you*. Said you were suffering from melancholia, but were not absolutely dangerous.

CULCH. If that's your idea of a joke, all I can say is——

[He chokes with rage.

PODB. (*innocently*). Why, my dear chap, I thought you wanted 'em kept out of your way!

[CULCHARD *slams his bedroom door with temper, leaving* PODBURY *outside, still chuckling.*

CHAPTER III.

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Culchard comes out of his Shell.

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SCENE—*On the Coach from Braine l'Alleud to Waterloo. The vehicle has a Belgian driver, but the conductor is a true-born Briton. MR. CYRUS K. TROTTER and his daughter are behind with PODBURY. CULCHARD, who is not as yet sufficiently on speaking terms with his friend to ask for an introduction, is on the box-seat in front.*

MR. TROTTER. How are you getting along, Maud? Your seat pretty comfortable?

MISS TROTTER. Well, I guess it would be about as luxurious if it hadn't got a chunk of wood nailed down the middle—it's not going to have any one confusing it with a bed of roses *just* yet. (*To PODB.*) Your friend mad about anything? He don't seem to open his head more'n he's obliged to. I presume he don't approve of your taking up with me and father—he keeps away from us considerable, I notice.

PODB. (*awkwardly*). Oh—er—I wouldn't say that, but he's a queer kind of chap rather, takes prejudices into his head and all that. I wouldn't trouble about him if I were you—not worth it, y' know.

MISS T. Thanks—but it isn't going to shorten my existence any.