

A photograph of a person wearing a red Santa hat, seen from the back, looking towards a large, brightly lit Christmas tree. The tree is decorated with many warm white lights and ornaments. The background is slightly blurred, showing a home interior with a fireplace mantel visible on the left.

***FRANK
E. SMEDLEY***

***THE FORTUNES
OF THE COLVILLE
FAMILY; OR,
A CLOUD WITH
ITS SILVER
LINING***

Frank E. Smedley

The Fortunes of the Colville Family; or, A Cloud with its Silver Lining

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CHAPTER I.—THE TWO PICTURES.

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“ Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!”

Words, of course, in themselves good and well-chosen, and embodying a wish which all who love their neighbour should feel and communicate;—

A God in his mercy grant there may be very many who can respond to such a salutation hopefully; for in this Valley of the Shadow of Death there must be some who shrink from it as from a bitter mockery. Of such are those who, loving deeply, have lost, or fear to lose, the object of their fond idolatry; of such are those to whom, gifted, perhaps, with an even wider capacity of affection, such a fear would seem a blessing, for then they would not have toiled through a lifetime lonely-hearted. “A Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!” God comfort those who shudder at such kindly greeting!

One short month since, a little space of time, but more than long enough for the performance of many a deeper tragedy than that to which we are about to refer, an artist, glancing into the sunny breakfast-parlour of Ashburn Rectory, might have made a pretty picture of the group on which his eye would have fallen.

That *gentleman* (in rags he would equally have looked such) with the calm, high forehead, mild eye, and earnest, thoughtful mouth, must be the father of the family; for his dark hair shows many a silver thread, and the lines that appear upon his still smooth brow can scarcely be the result of mental occupation only; but, if we are right in our

conjecture, whence did that curly-pated nine-year-old urchin, seated upon his knee, contrive to get his arch, merry face? for he can scarcely have “come alive” out of one of Murillo’s paintings, to give light and life to our family sketch. Oh! we see, it is his mother’s countenance the rogue has appropriated, only the mischief in it is all his own; for the expression of her still-beautiful features is chastened and pensive, as of one who has lived and loved, and done angels’ work on earth, until the pure soul within has stamped its impress on the outward form.

But if you want something pretty—nay, we may as well tell the whole truth, and say at once bewitching—to look at, cast your eyes (you won’t be in a hurry to remove them again) upon the figure seated at mamma’s right hand, and recognising her facsimile (with twenty summers taken off her age, and barely eighteen left), declare whether that is not “nice,” rather. The expression is not the same, we confess: more of the woman and less of the angel, you will say. We admit it; but then, how could that little rosebud of a mouth look anything but petulant? those violet eyes express—well, it’s difficult to tell what they don’t express that is good, and fresh, and piquant, and gay, and—must we add? a little bit coquettish also;—why, the very dimple on her chin—such a well-modelled chin—has something pert and saucy about it. There! you’ve seen enough of the little beauty: you’ll be falling in love with her directly!

No one could mistake the relationship existing between the gentleman we have already described, and that tall, graceful boy, with his pale, finely-chiselled features, and classically-shaped head. Even the earnest, thoughtful

expression is common to both father and son, save that the curl of the short upper lip, which tells of pride in the boy, has, in the man, acquired a character of chastened dignity.

Reader, do you like our picture? Let us turn to another, less pleasing, but alas! equally true.

The waves of time roll on, and, like a dream, another month has lapsed into the sea of ages.

The sun is shining still; but it shines upon an open grave, with aching hearts around it. A good man has died, and his brave, loving spirit has gone whither his faith has preceded him, and his good works alone can follow him. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

Let us reserve our sympathy for those who live to mourn them.

When the curate of Ashburn preached a funeral sermon, recalling to the minds of those who had practically benefited by them the virtues of their late rector, holly garlands hung in the fine old church, to commemorate the birth-time of One who came to bring "peace on earth, and good-will towards men;" but none dared to wish the widow and orphans "A Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year," lest the wish might seem an insult to their sorrow.



CHAPTER II.—THE BROTHERS.

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“ercy, I *have* been quiet *so* long, and you say I must not stand upon my head, because it disturbs mamma; do come out and let us ride the pony by turns,” implored little Hugh Colville in a strenuous whisper; which was, however, clearly audible throughout the small breakfast-parlour, which was the scene of our family picture.

Percy Colville, the shy, handsome boy of our sketch, looked up with a pensive smile from the writing on which he was engaged, and shook his head negatively, in token that he felt obliged to refuse the request of his younger brother, in whom the reader will recognise, with little difficulty, a certain Murillo-like urchin to whom he has been already introduced. But the petition of her youngest born had reached the ears of the widow, who (if she had a virtue which had outgrown its due proportions till cavillers might deem it a fault), was, perhaps, a little over indulgent to Master Hugh.

“My dear Percy, you have been writing for me long enough,” she said, “you will be ill if you shut yourself up too much; besides, Hugh has been so good that he deserves his ride, and you know I don’t like to trust him by himself.”

Percy hesitated: the writing on which he was engaged was the copy of a surveyor’s report concerning that *vexata quaestic*, dilapidations. Some difference of opinion had arisen on this subject between the agent of the patron of the living and Mrs. Colville’s solicitor, and a copy of the

report was to be forwarded by the next post to Mr. Wakefield, Mrs. Calville's legal adviser. The matter was of importance, involving a considerable sum of money. Percy was aware of these facts: he knew, also, that he could only just finish his task by the time the village post went out; and he was about to declare that Hugh must give up his ride for that day, when his mother, reading his thoughts-, stooped over him, and, kissing his pale brow, whispered—

“Do not refuse him, dear Percy: remember, he will not have many more rides——”

She paused, for her composure was failing, then finished in a trembling voice—

“You know the pony must be sold when we go away.”

As she spoke, an expedient suggested itself to Percy's mind, and pressing his mother's hand affectionately, he closed his writing-desk, and, carrying it off under his arm, exclaimed—“Come along, Hugh! we'll take old Lion (he wants a run, poor dog) as well as the pony, and have a glorious scamper.”

And a glorious scamper they had, only Hugh rode the whole way, and Percy ran by his side, declaring that he greatly preferred it, which was decidedly a pious fiction, if a fiction can ever be pious.

“Oh! mamma, mamma! do make breakfast—come, quick! there's a good mamma! for I'm as hungry as—as—several sharks,” exclaimed Hugh, rushing like a small express train into the breakfast-parlour, on the following morning.

“Oh, you naughty mad-cap, you've shaken the table, and made me blot ‘That Smile’ all over!” cried his sister Emily, in

vain endeavouring to repair the misfortune which had accrued to the “popular melody” she was copying.

We suppose it is scarcely necessary to reintroduce you to Emily, dear reader. You have not so soon forgotten the rosebud of a mouth, or the dangerous dimple—trust you for that.

“Well, I declare, so I have,” rejoined the culprit, a little shocked and a good deal amused at the mischief he had occasioned; then striking into the tune of the outraged ditty, he sang in an impish soprano, and with grimaces wonderful to behold—

“‘That smile—when once—de-par-ar-ar-arted,
Must leave—me bro—ken har-ar-ir-arted.’

“Oh! Emily, what a mess we have made of ‘broken-hearted,’ to be sure I’m so sorry, but what fun!”

And then came a burst of ringing, happy, childish laughter, which, of course, sealed his forgiveness: no one could think him to blame after *that*.

“I wonder where Percy is; I scarcely ever knew him late before,” observed Mrs. Colville, when quiet had been restored.

“Sarah tells me he is out riding,” returned Emily, applying herself with very unnecessary energy to cut bread and butter.

As she spoke, the clatter of horses’ feet became audible, and, in another moment, Percy cantered past the window.

“Where can the boy have been?” ejaculated Emily, holding the loaf lovingly, as though she was afraid of hurting

the poor thing.

"I know, I do!" observed Hugh, from under the table, whence, having in his mind's eye metamorphosed himself into a wolf, he was preparing to spring out and devour Emily.

"*You* know, Hugh!" repeated Mrs. Colville in surprise; "come from under the table, then, and tell me."

"But, mamma, I'm a wolf, and just going to eat up Emily."

"Not now, dear," was the calm reply, as if a daughter more or less devoured by wild beasts was of little moment to that un-anxious mother; "come here, and tell me about Percy."

"Well, you know, mamma," began Hugh, emerging from his hiding-place, and assuming the grave air of a *raconteur*, "when Percy came to bed last night, he did not go to bed at all—that is, not for a very, very, very long time. Do you know, I think"—and here he put on a solemn face, and spoke with an air of mystery—"I think he was not in bed at twelve o'clock, perhaps not till almost one!" Having disclosed this frightful fact, he paused and nodded like a bird, for the greater effect, ere he continued: "I went to sleep long before, but, whenever I opened my eyes, there he sat, still write, write, writing on, as if he was writing his life, like Robinson Crusoe—only," he added, parenthetically—"only he's got no man Friday."

"But what could he be writing?" exclaimed Emily, coquetting with the large bread-knife.

"I know," resumed Hugh; then, having paused to balance himself on one leg, and spin round like a teetotum, he continued very fast, and without any stops, for Percy's footsteps sounded in the hall: "he was writing the paper he

had not time to finish yesterday, because I wanted him to go out with me and the pony; and this morning he got up at six o'clock to ride over to Staplehurst, seven miles there, and I don't know how many back again, to catch the post, and make it all the same as if it had been put in yesterday; I know he did, because Sarah says so." And, having delivered himself with the greatest vehemence of this somewhat incoherent account, he rushed up to his brother, then entering the room, and, throwing his arm as round his waist, exclaimed, "Oh, Percy! I've gone and told them all about your great letter, and sitting up late, and everything, and never remembered till now that you said I wasn't to mention it to anybody. Oh, I am so sorry, but what fun!" and, assured by the expression of Percy's face that his crime was not quite unpardonable, Hugh's merry, childish laugh again rang through the apartment.

The mother's heart was full: tears stood in her eyes as, pressing her elder son to her bosom, she murmured,—

"Dear, dear Percy, you must not overtask your strength thus."

The post that morning brought the following letter directed to Mrs. Colville:—

"My dear Sister,—That I have the will to aid you in your distress you cannot doubt; that the power to do so effectually is denied me, adds one more to the troubles of life. My imprudent marriage (he had run away with a pretty governess at eighteen), and its subsequent consequences (he had nine healthy children), force me to work like a horse in a mill, in order to make both ends meet. Of this I am not complaining.. I did an unwise thing, and must pay the

necessary penalty. But I mention these facts to prove to you the truth of my assertion, that my power is not coequal with my will. The little I can do is this: I am shareholder in an excellent proprietary school, where boys are taught everything necessary to fit them for a commercial life; Wilfred Jacob has been there two years, and is already conversant with, or, as he familiarly terms it, 'well up in' tare and tret. I trust Adolphus Samuel, Albert John, Thomas Gabriel, and even the little Augustus Timothy, will soon follow, and profit equally. I therefore propose to send your two boys to this school at my own cost; and, if the eldest distinguishes himself, as I am proud to believe Wilfred Jacob will do, a desk in my counting-house (No. 8, Grubbing Street, City) shall reward his diligence. Clementina Jane desires her kindest regards, and begs me to say that, should you finally determine upon settling in London, she shall have much pleasure in looking out a cheap lodging for you in some of the least expensive streets in the vicinity of Smithfield. I am, dear Margaret, ever your affectionate brother,

“Goldsmith and Thryft.

“P.S.—So much for habit: I have become so accustomed to sign for the firm, that I actually forget that my name is Tobiah.”

Mrs. Colville closed the letter, with a sigh, and placing it in her pocket, waited till the boys had breakfasted. As soon as they had quitted the room she handed it to her daughter, saying. “Read that, dear Emily: it is very kind of your uncle, but——”

“Percy at a desk in Grubbing Street! Oh, my dearest mamma, what a dreadful idea!” exclaimed the Rosebud, arching her brows, and pursing up her pretty little mouth with an expression of the most intense disapproval: “Uncle Tobiah means to be very kind, but he forgets what Percy is.”

Mrs. Colville shook her head mournfully. “I am afraid it is we who forget, love,” she said: “Percy can no longer hope to pursue the career marked out for him—with the very limited means at my disposal, college is quite out of the question; nay, if Sir Thomas Crawley persists in his demand for the incoming tenant’s claim to these dilapidations, and should prove his right to it, I shall be unable to send the boys to school at all; indeed, I must not reject your uncle’s offer rashly. I shall consult Mr. Slowkopf on the subject; he is a very prudent adviser.”

“Oh! if you mean to ask *him*, the matter is as good as settled, and poor Percy chained to a desk for life,” cried Emily. “Ah!” she continued, as a tall, thin, gaunt figure, clothed in rusty black, passed the window, “here he comes—the creature always puts me in mind of that naughty proverb about a certain person: one no sooner mentions him than there he is at one’s elbow;—but, if you really want to talk sense to him, mamma dear, I’d better go, for I shall only say pert things and disturb you: he is so delightfully slow and matter-of-fact, that I never can resist the temptation of plaguing him;” and as she spoke, the Rosebud laughed a little silvery laugh at her own wickedness, and tripped, fairy-like, out of the apartment.

The worthy Mr. Slowkopf, who had held the office of curate of Ashburn for about two years, was a very good

young man, and nothing else; all his other qualities were negative. He wasn't even positively a fool, though he looked and acted the part admirably. He was essentially, and in every sense of the word, a slow man: in manners, ideas, and appearance, he was behind the age in which he lived; in conversation he was behind the subject discussed; if he laughed at a joke, which, solemnly and heavily, he sometimes condescended to do, it was invariably ten minutes after it had been made. He never heard of Puseyism till Tract Ninety had been suppressed, or knew of the persecutions and imprisonments of Dr. Achilli till that amateur martyr was crying aloud for sympathy in Exeter Hall; he usually finished his fish when the cheese was being put on table; and went to bed as other people were getting up. Still, he had his good points. Unlike King Charles, of naughty memory,

“Who never said a foolish thing,
And never did a wise one,”

however dull and trite might be Mr. Slowkopf's remarks, his actions were invariably good and kind. The village gossips, when they were very hard-up for scandal, declared that, insensible as he appeared to all such frivolities as the fascinations of the softer sex, he was gradually taking a “slow turn” towards the Rosebud of Ashburn. Nay, the rumour was reported to have reached the delicate ears of the “emphatic she” herself; who was said to have replied, that as she was quite certain he would never dream of telling his love till he heard she was engaged to be married

to some one else—in which case she should have a legitimate reason for refusing him—the information did not occasion her the slightest uneasiness.

However this might be, certain it is, that on the morning in question, Mr. Slowkopf, gaunt, ugly, and awkward, solemnly walked into the breakfast-parlour, and that the widow, perplexed between her good sense and her loving tenderness for her children, laid before him her difficulties and her brother's letter.

The curate paused about three times as long as was necessary, and then, in a deep, sepulchral voice, observed—

“In order to attain to a sound and logical conclusion in regard to this weighty matter, it behoves me first to assure myself that I rightly comprehend the question propounded, and if, as I conceive, it prove to be one which will not admit of demonstration with a mathematical certainty; then, secondly, so to compare the different hypotheses which may present themselves, that, sufficient weight being allotted to each, a just and philosophical decision may be finally arrived at.”

Having, after this preamble, stated the case in language as precise and carefully selected as though he were framing a bill to lay before Parliament, and were resolved to guard against *the* possibility of the most astute legal Jehu driving a coach and four through it, he argued the matter learnedly and steadily for a good half-hour, ere he dug out the ore of common sense from the mass of logical rubbish beneath which he had buried it, and decided in favour of Mr. Goldsmith's proposal. Pleased at his own cleverness in having solved this difficult problem, and possessing

unlimited confidence in his oratorical powers, he volunteered to communicate the decision thus formed to the person most nearly concerned therein, an offer to which Mrs. Colville, feeling her strength unequal to the task, reluctantly consented.

Percy listened in silence till Mr. Slowkopf had talked himself out of breath, which it took him some time to accomplish, for, in every sense of the term, he was awfully long-winded; when at length he was silent, the boy fixed his large eyes earnestly upon his face as he replied, "I understand, sir, we are so poor that it is not possible to send me to a public school, or to college as—as—my dear father wished; but I do not see why I am necessarily obliged to become a merchant's clerk, a position which I shall never be fit for, and which I hate the idea of; the Colvilles have always been gentlemen."

"A man may work for his living in some honest occupation without forfeiting that title," returned Mr. Slowkopf, sententiously.

"Not as a merchant's clerk," was the haughty reply: "No; let me be an artist, if I cannot receive a gentleman's education in England. I know I have some talent for drawing, let me study that, and then go to Italy, beautiful Italy, for a few years; people can live very cheaply abroad, and I will be very careful. When I become famous I shall grow rich, and be able to support mamma, and send Hugh to college, and then I shall care less for not having been there myself."

"Without attempting to regard your scheme in its many complicated bearings, or to argue the matter in its entire completeness, for which time, unfortunately, is wanting,"

remarked Mr. Slowkopf, deliberately; “I will place before you, *in limine*, certain objections to it which render the commercial career proposed by your excellent uncle, if not in every point a more advantageous arrangement, at all events one more suited to the present position of affairs. Your uncle proposes to take upon himself all immediate expense connected with your education; while, as a clerk in his counting-house, you will be in the receipt of a gradually increasing salary. Your scheme would demand a constant outlay of capital, for certainly the next five years; nay, it would be no matter of surprise to me if ten years should elapse, ere, by the precarious earnings of an artist’s career, you were enabled to render yourself independent. In one case you will be an assistance to your excellent mother, in the other a burden upon her.”

Percy walked to the window; the burning tears of disappointed ambition and mortified pride rushed to his eyes, but he brushed them hurriedly away, as he said in a firm, steady voice, “Thank you for telling me the truth, Mr. Slowkopf; we will accept my uncle’s offer.”

Thus it came about that Percy and Hugh Colville were entered, as boarders, at Doctor Donkiestir’s excellent proprietary establishment.

