

A SUCCESSION OF SUNDAYS [THREE SUNDAYS IN A WEEK]



"YOU HARD-HEARTED, dunder-headed, obstinate, rusty, crusty, musty, fusty, old savage!" said I, in fancy, one afternoon, to my grand uncle Rumgudgeon—shaking my fist at him in imagination.

Only in imagination. The fact is that some trivial discrepancy *did* exist, between what I said just then, and what I had not the courage to say—between what I did and what I had half a mind to do.

The old porpoise, as I opened the dining-room door, was sitting with his feet up on the mantel-piece, and a bumper of port in his paw, making strenuous efforts to accomplish the ditty,

Remplis ton verre vide!

Vide ton verre plein!

[Refill thy empty glass!

Empy thy full one!]

"My *dear* uncle," said I, closing the door gently, and approaching him with the blandest of smiles, "you are always so *very* kind and considerate, and have evinced your benevolence in so many—so

very many ways—that—that I feel I have only to suggest this little point to you once more to procure your full acquiescence."

"Hem!" said he, "good boy! go on!"

"I am sure, my dearest uncle, [you confounded old rascal!] that you have no design really, seriously, to oppose my union with Kate. This is merely a joke of yours, I know—ha! ha! ha!—how *very* pleasant you are at times."

"Ha! ha! ha!" said he, "curse you! yes!"

"Of course, I *knew* you were jesting. Now, uncle, all that Kate and myself wish at present, is that you would oblige us with your advice—you are so *very* competent to advise us, uncle—and—and—as regards the *time*—*you* know, uncle—in short, when will it be most convenient for yourself, that the wedding shall—shall—come off, you know?"

"Come off, you scoundrel!—what do you mean by that?—Better wait till it goes on."

"Ha! ha! ha!—he! he! he!—hil hil hi!—ho! ho! ho!—hu! hu! hu!—oh, that's good!—oh, that's capital—*such* a wit! But all we wish *just now*, you know, uncle, is that you would indicate the time precisely."

"Ah!—*precisely?*"

"Yes, uncle—that is, if it would be quite agreeable to yourself."

"Wouldn't it answer, Bobby, if I were to leave it at random—some time within a year or so, for example?—*must* I say precisely?"

"If you please, uncle—precisely."

"Well, then, Bobby, my boy—you're a fine fellow, aren't you?—since you *will* have the exact time, I'll—I'll oblige you for once."

"Dear uncle!"

"Hush, sir! I'll oblige you for once. You shall have my consent—and the plum, Bobby, we mustn't forget the plum—let me see now, when shall it be? To-day's Sunday—*isn't it?* Well then, I have it. You shall be married precisely—*precisely*, now mind!—*when three Sundays come in succession!* Do you hear me, sir! *What* are you gaping at? I say, you shall have Kate (and the plum) when three *Sundays come in succession*—but not *till* then—you young scapegrace—not *till* then, if I die for it. You know me—I'm a man of my word—now be off!" Here he swallowed his tumbler of port, while I rushed from the room in despair.

A very "fine old English gentleman," was my grand-uncle Rumgudgeon, but unlike him of the song, he had his weak points. He was a little, puffy, pompous, passionate, semicircular somebody, with a red nose, a thick skull, a long purse, and a strong sense of his own consequence. With the best heart in the world, he contrived to earn

for himself, among those who only knew him superficially, the character of a curmudgeon, merely through a predominant whim of *contradiction*. Like many excellent people, he seemed possessed by a spirit of *tantalization*, which might easily, at a casual glance, have been mistaken for malevolence. To every request, a positive "No!" was his immediate answer; but in the end—in the long, long end—there were exceedingly few requests which he refused. Against all attacks upon his purse he made the most sturdy defence; but the amount extorted from him, at last was always in exact ratio with the length of the siege and the stubbornness of the resistance. In charity no one gave more liberally or with worse grace.

For the fine arts, and especially for the *belles lettres*, he entertained a profound contempt. With this he had been inspired by Casimir Périer, whose pert little query "*A quoi un poète est-il bon* [What is a poet good for]?" he was in the habit of quoting, with a very droll pronunciation, as the *ne plus ultra* of logical wit. Thus my own inking for the Muses excited his entire displeasure. He assured me one day, when I had asked him for a new copy of Horace, that the meaning of "*Poeta nascitur non fit* [The poet is born, not made]" was "a nasty poet for nothing fit"—an insult which I took in very serious dudgeon. His repugnance to "the humanities" had, also, been much increased of late by an accidental bias in favor of what he supposed to be natural science. Somebody had accosted him in the street, mistaking him for no less a personage than Doctor Double L. Dee, the lecturer upon quack physics. This set him off at a tangent; and just at the epoch of this story—for story it is growing to be after all—my grand-uncle Rumgudgeon was accessible and pacific only upon points which happened to chime in with the caprioles of the hobby he was riding. For the rest, he laughed with his arms and legs, and his politics were stubborn and easily understood. He thought, with Horsley, that "the people had nothing to do with the laws but to obey them."

I had lived with the old gentleman all my life. My parents had bequeathed me to him as a rich legacy, in dying. I believed the old villain loved me as his own child—nearly if not quite as well as he loved Kate—but it was a dog's existence that he led me, after all. From my first year until my fifth, he obliged me with very regular floggings. From five to fifteen, he threatened me, hourly, with the House of Correction. From fifteen to twenty, not a day passed in which he did not swear a round oath that he would cut me off with a shilling. I was a sad dog, it is true—but then it was a part of my nature—a point of my faith. In Kate I had, however, a firm friend, and I knew it. She was a good girl, and told me very sweetly that I might have her (plum and all) whenever I could badger my grand

uncle Rumgudgeon into the necessary consent. Poor girl!—she was barely fifteen, and without this consent, her little amount in the funds would not be come-at-able until five immeasurable summers had “dragged their slow lengths along.” What then, to do? At fifteen, or even at twenty (for I had now reached my fifth lustrum) five years in prospect are very much the same as five hundred. In vain we besieged the old gentleman with importunities. Here was a *pièce de résistance* (as Messieurs Ude and Careme would say) which suited his perverse fancy to a T. It would have stirred the indignation of Job himself, to see how much like an old mouser he behaved to us two poor wretched little mice. In his heart he wished for nothing more ardently than our own union. He had made up his mind to this all along. In fact, he would have given ten thousand pounds from his own pocket (Kate’s plum was *her own*) if he could have discovered or invented anything like a decent excuse for complying with our very natural wishes. But then we had been so imprudent as to broach the subject *ourselves*. Not to oppose it under such circumstances, I sincerely believe was not in the power of my dear, good, obstinate, tantalistical, old uncle Rumgudgeon.

I have said already that he had his weak points; but, in speaking of these, I must not be understood as referring to his obstinacy. That was one of his strong points—“*assurément ce n’était pas sa foible* [assuredly it was not among his foibles].” When I mentioned his weakness I had allusion to a *bizarre* old-womanish superstition which beset him. He was great in dreams, portents, *et id genus omne* [and all that sort] of rigmarole. He was excessively punctilious, too, upon small points of honor—although sufficiently loose in regard to large ones. He was *a man of his word*, beyond doubt, but it was after his own fashion. To

*Keep the word of promise to the ear,
But break it to the hope*

was, in fact, one of his hobbies. The *spirit* of his vows he made no scruple of setting at naught, but the *letter* of his word was a bond inviolable. Now it was this latter peculiarity in his disposition, of which Kate’s ingenuity enabled us one fine day, not long after our interview in the dining-room, to take a very unexpected advantage; and, having thus, in the fashion of all modern bards and orators, exhausted in prolegomena, all the time at my command, and nearly every inch of the space assigned me, I will sum up what constitutes the pith of the story in as concise a style as that of Tacitus or Montesquieu.

It happened then—so the Fates ordered it—that among the naval acquaintances of my betrothed, there were two gentlemen who had

just set foot on the shores of England, after a year's absence, each in foreign travel. In company with these gentlemen, my cousin and I, preconcertedly, paid old Uncle Rungudgeon a visit on the afternoon of Sunday, October the 10th,—just three weeks after the memorable decision which had so cruelly defeated our hopes. For about half an hour the conversation ran upon ordinary topics; but at last, we contrived, quite naturally, to give it the following turn:

Uncle. “—And so, Captain Pratt, you have been absent from London a whole year—a whole year to a day, as I live. Let me see—yes—this is October the tenth.”

Capt. Pratt. “A whole year to-day, sir,—precisely. You remember I called to bid you good-bye. And by the way, Mr. Rungudgeon, it *does* seem something like a coincidence, does it not—that our friend, Captain Smitherton, here, has been absent exactly a year also—a year to-day?”

Capt. Smitherton. “Yes! just one year to a fraction. You will remember, Mr. Rungudgeon, that I called with Capt. Pratt on this very day, last year, to pay you my parting respects.”

Uncle. “Yes, yes, yes,—I remember it well—very queer indeed! Both of you gone just one year. A very strange coincidence, indeed! Just what Doctor Double L. Dee—”

Kate. “To be sure, papa, it is something strange; but then Captain Pratt and Captain Smitherton didn't go altogether the same route, and that makes a difference you know.”

Uncle. “I don't know any such thing, you huzzy! How should I? I think it only makes the matter more remarkable. Doctor Double L. Dee—”

Kate. “Why, papa, Captain Pratt went round Cape Horn, and Captain Smitherton doubled the Cape of Good Hope.”

Uncle. “Precisely!—the one went east and the other went west, you jade, and they both have gone quite round the world. By the by, Doctor Double L. Dee—”

Myself, [hurriedly.] “Captain Pratt, you must come and spend the evening with us to-morrow—you and Captain Smitherton—you can tell us all about your voyage, and we'll have a game of whist, and—”

Captain Pratt. “Whist, my dear fellow—you forget yourself. To-morrow will be Sunday. Some other evening—”

Kate. “Oh, no, fie!—Bobby's not *quite* so bad as that. *Today's* Sunday.”

Uncle. “To be sure—to be sure!”

Capt. Pratt. “I beg both your pardons—but I can't be so much mistaken. I *know* to-morrow's Sunday, because—”

Capt. Smitherton (in surprise.) “What *are* you all thinking about?”

Wasn't *yesterday* Sunday, I should like to know?"

All. "Yesterday, indeed! you *are* out!"

Uncle. "To-day's Sunday, I say—don't I know?"

Capt. Pratt. "Oh no!—to-morrow's Sunday."

Capt. Smitherton. "You are *all* mad—every one of you. I am as positive that yesterday was Sunday, as I am that I sit upon this chair."

Kate, (jumping up eagerly.) "I see it—I see it all. Papa, this is a judgment upon you, about—about you know what. Let me alone, and I'll explain it all in a minute. It's a very simple thing, indeed. Captain Smitherton says that yesterday was Sunday: so it was; he is right. Cousin Bobby, and uncle and I, say to-day is Sunday: so it is; we are right. Captain Pratt maintains that tomorrow will be Sunday: so it will; he is right, too. The fact is, we are all right, and thus three Sundays have come together."

Smitherton. "Oh yes, by the by, Pratt, Kate is quite rational. What fools we two are! Mr. Rumgudgeon, the matter stands thus: the earth you know is twenty-four thousand miles in circumference—"

Uncle. "To be sure!—Doctor Double—"

Smitherton. "Twenty-four thousand miles in circumference. Now this globe of the earth turns upon its own axis—revolves—spins round—these twenty-four thousand miles of extent, going from west to east, in precisely twenty-four hours. Do you understand, Mr. Rumgudgeon?"

Uncle. "To be sure—to be sure—Doctor Doub—"

Smitherton. "Well, sir; that is at the rate of one thousand miles per hour. Now suppose I sail from this position a thousand miles east. I anticipate the rising of the sun here at London, by just one hour. I see the sun rise one hour before you do. Proceeding, in the same direction, yet another thousand miles, I anticipate the rising by two hours—another thousand, and I anticipate it by three hours, and so on, until I go entirely round the globe, and back to this spot, when, having gone twenty-four thousand miles east, I anticipate the rising of the London sun by no less than twenty-four hours; that is to say, I am a day *in advance* of your time. Captain Pratt, on the contrary, when he had sailed a thousand miles west of this position, was an hour, and when he had sailed twenty-four thousand miles west, was twenty-four hours, or a day, *behind* the time at London. Thus, with me, yesterday was Sunday—thus, with you, today is Sunday—and thus, with Pratt, to-morrow will be Sunday. And what is more, Mr. Rumgudgeon, it is positively clear that we are *all right*; for there can be no philosophical or just reason assigned why the idea of one

A Succession of Sundays

should have preference over that of the other."

Uncle. "My eyes!—well, Kate—well, Bobby!—this is a judgment upon me, as you say. I always *was* a great old scoundrel. *But I am a man of my word—mark that!* you shall have her, my boy (plum and all,) when you please. Done up, by Jove! Three Sundays all in a row! I'll go, and take Double L. Dee's opinion upon *that.*"

[*November 27, 1841*]