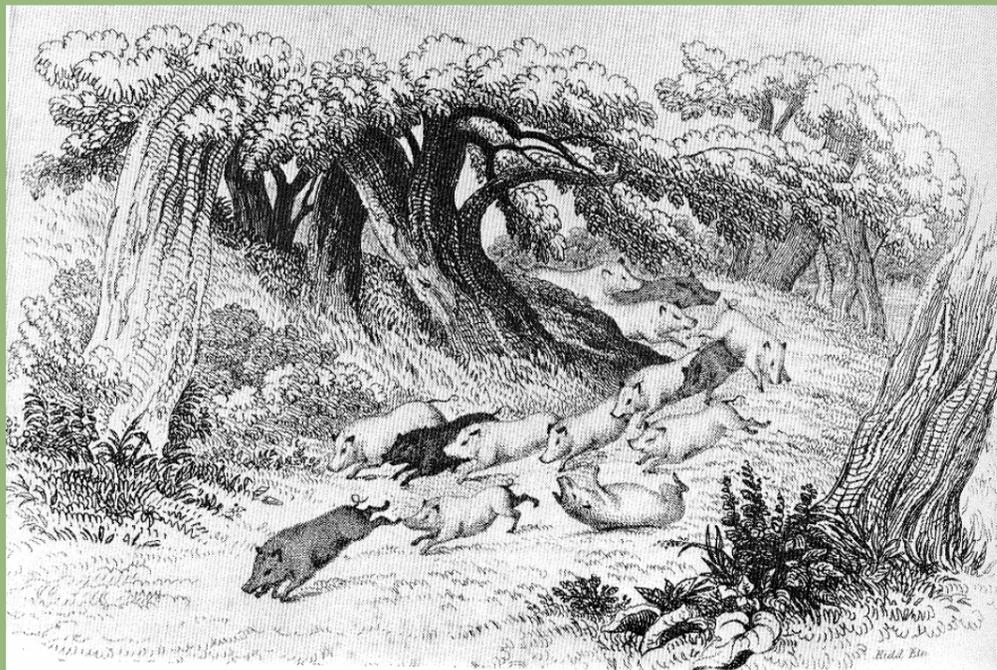


TALES OF THE NEW FOREST



PHILIP KLITZ

CHAPTER XIV

TIMOTHY TIGHT

IT was early in the autumn of the year 183—, a period remarkable for the long drought and intense heat which then prevailed, that the gentleman (as he was pleased to consider himself) of whom I am about to give some account, reached the middle of one of those wide and dreary heaths which occur in different portions of the New Forest.

The mid-day sun poured down his scorching rays with a force that induced the Englishman to compare his climate, pour *le moment*, with the torrid zone. The very heath itself had lost its beautiful purple bloom. The delightfully verdant tint which generally pervades the forest, its woods and banks, the fresh and blooming fern, even the trees, with their dense foliage were all assuming a dark warm tint, varying from ochre to burnt sienna. The rippling forest streams had ceased their purling murmurs and what had formerly been their bright canals were now nothing but dry and dusty courses. The flags and weeds hung their heads in sheer despair of ever again tasting water - nay, for lack of moisture many had died.

Nothing which might indicate the existence of liquids could anywhere be seen, save in the far distance where, beneath the shade of an old wooden bridge, stood some half-dozen thirsty cows, who, worried by forest flies, swept their tails to and fro languidly in the vain hope of annihilating their tormentors. So parching an effect had the heat of the atmosphere on the feelings and imagination, that it was scarcely possible to suppose that there was water enough left to cover the hoofs of the poor cows and truly they laboured hard to chew the dry cud of the burnt grass and would now and then dip their noses into the muddy brook, as if their gastric juice were exhausted. The Deserts of Arabia were humbly imitated on the king of England's highway and it only required a strong gust of wind to raise the sands of the forest into the semblance of a miniature simoom.

Desolate and weary, a solitary pedestrian took his path across the wide heath. Overcome by the oppressive heat, he sought wistfully for a spot of shade and would have considered the umbrage of a solitary tree as a contribution thankfully to be accepted. Alas! He sought in vain. Parching with thirst, he still kept on his ambulatory course, devoutly longing for some evidence of human life in the shape of cottage, hovel, hut, or stack - still no such cheering prospect rose. And as hope deferred began to make sick the heart of the subject of this notice, hurried and frequent, much too frequent, ejaculations escaped his lips, betraying testiness of spirit, instead of that passive resignation of mind, so desirable in a fervid temperature. At length he was gratified with a view of something like a house about a mile and a half distant. Hope inspired him with new vigour. Here he would at least find a shady corner wherein to rest his weary limbs.



A glass of cold water would indeed be a luxury and the bare idea of it inspired him with such a sense of gratification that he stopped to take breath and enjoy it. For the hundredth time he wiped his forehead, while the perspiration oozed from every pore and again he started on his weary pilgrimage.

TIMOTHY TIGHT

Imagine his delight on finding that he was rapidly approaching a roadside public house whose gaudy sign announced "The Horse and Jockey," which offered "good entertainment for man and beast." How consoling! How cheering! After the fatiguing journey, after all his anxious aspirations, to attain thus a consummation so devoutly wished! Here he could find repose and, what he very much preferred to cold water, refreshing ale wherewith he might reinvigorate the inward man and then proceed with renewed strength on the mission with which he was charged.



How luxuriantly did he cast himself on the wooden settle that graced the hospitable retreat! With what kind solicitude did mine host of "The Horse and Jockey" inquire, "what would he take?" Panting for breath, exhausted by exertion, parched with thirst, he faintly gave him to understand that "a pint of beer" was at that moment the predominating desire of his heart.

And now, reader, we will, if you please, leave him to enjoy that wholesome beverage while I attempt a description of the traveller and the business on which he was engaged.

Memoir writers, I believe, are not generally agreed on the question as to the best mode of commencing their works, that is, as to the manner in which the hero of their story shall be introduced to public favour. Some begin at once with an account of person, age, characteristics. Others trace genealogies back to the remotest periods of antiquity and working their careful way forwards, arrive at the identical point of interest to their hero. Now I am rather awkwardly situated in this matter, as the subject of our narrative could boast but little knowledge of his ancestry. His father, Timothy Tight, senior, being in complete ignorance of the maternal branch while his inquiries on the subject of his paternity never extended beyond the generation from whence he sprung. No doubt the Tight family had existed during several centuries and, it is possible, may have been friendly with the Conqueror. The matter of lineage, however was uncertain but as far as they could be traced back, it appeared that they had followed the same worldly profession, though severally known by a different yet kindred appellation.

The senior Tight of one age had flourished as a highly respectable "barber surgeon." That profession waning, the succeeding Tight was known as a "peruke maker." The following age had its "Tight, fashionable hair-cutter." But Tight the elder of present time had somehow lost caste in his profession and his establishment had sunk to the level (and the title) of a "penny shaving-shop," in the locality of Smithfield. Here for years, had he followed his occupation with a flexile hand and fluent tongue, uniting with the more immediate duties of his profession, the agreeable task of rearing admired varieties of the feathered tribe and of teaching the young idea to sing. Here might be seen, surrounding his business apartment, canaries, goldfinches, bullfinches, linnets &c. each recommendable for some peculiar gift or acquirement and persons intent on being shaved, and having to "bide their time," might profitably occupy themselves in the study of Tight's collection.

The proprietor was himself a widower and the hero of this story was his only son. A son of more ambition than his forefathers, who scorned the comb and scissors and vowed that the last razor publicly wielded by members of the Tight family, should be that in use by his sire. Poor fellow! His disgust with his father's calling was supposed to have been engendered by a fiddle - the gift of his father, out of which sprung high-flown notions of musical genius and the sublime heights which some inspired minds had attained unto

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and therefore, why not Timothy? Nevertheless, an innate love of music and a keen susceptibility to its influence, are not invariably the guarantee of practical ability or of aptitude in learning and it was even so with "our" Timothy, who, after repeated attempts, discovered that his road to eminence was certainly not through the fiddle. So he laid it by in despair, or, figuratively speaking, suspended it in grief upon the willows.

Among the established connection of the shaving shop was one, who, having for many years known the father, took an interest in the welfare of the son. This person was known in the musico-mechanical nomenclature which prevails in pianoforte manufactories as a "belly-man," which by interpretation meaneth the maker or preparer of the soundboard which forms a part of that popular instrument. To this man the senior Tight was wont to lament that his only child and dear son was hindered from revelling in the luxury of sounds of his own creation, enunciating some complex idea he entertained of such a denial, as it respected Timothy, as being contrary to the "dictates of nature." The belly-man suggested that if he could really appreciate the difference between two sounds he might make the object of so much anxiety a pianoforte tuner. Tight the father, caught at the proposal as though it had been inspired and it was immediately acted upon. Twenty pounds were paid to a tuner "from Broadwood's" and Timothy was duly initiated in the "art and mystery of equal and unequal temperaments," that is, by ocular, or it may be by aural demonstration, for who ever heard of a pianoforte-tuner being acquainted with the theory of his art, however well he may have thriven by its practice?

Yet, what could be thus taught, Timothy, by dint of application, had so far learnt, as at the end of twelve months he was competent to tune a set of discordant wires. So, being thus enabled to earn his own livelihood and entertaining great swelling ideas of the dignity of being independent of "the governor" (as he was wont to name his respected sire) he, Timothy Tight junior, at the expiration of his term of study, released himself from the thralldom of home and the shackles of a kind father's officious anxiety and, all unfettered, took his place among the "legion" who, with every conceivable degree of wit and talent, find "how to live" a problem of amazing difficulty and one moreover that demands daily a practical solution more or less satisfactory to the inquirer. In this hard-fighting, struggling legion, the grade of Timothy, if it depended on his talents, would most often be among the non-commissioned but frequently where real ability fails of promotion from its over modesty, shallowness, by its very assurance, for a while succeeds:

**"He that has but Impudence,
To all things hath a just pretence".**

is an aphorism of which most likely Timothy was profoundly ignorant, verbally, but as "Tight junior, pianoforte-tuner" he was one of its living exemplifications. Perfectly satisfied with his attainments and astonishingly small was the sum of them! He treated as preposterous the hint that it was possible to travel much further even on his line, under the guidance of Science. To which Timothy was pleased to respond that Science was "all humbug". Yes, I am sure I labour under no misapprehension, it was Science, not this little Tim Tight, that was "all humbug!"

One mode by which an inferior class of tuners obtain employment is by extracting from the underlings in manufacturing houses the names of parties recently supplied with instruments. On such they by-and-by call, as if connected with special establishments, and make kind inquiries as to the present condition of this or that instrument. A wet season may have intervened and the patient be relaxed. A drought and the "pitch" be objectionably elevated. In any case it is ten-to-one but some slight ailment requires attention and when an emissary from the maker's house represents himself as being so conveniently at hand, the chances of an engagement are, or used to be, very much in his favour. In this respectable path Timothy was accustomed to walk.

The manufactory in which his friend the “bellyman” was employed, had recently dispatched a valuable pianoforte to the forest residence of the Earl of— and Tight was duly furnished with that fact. His lordship's daughter was an enthusiastic musician. Her father's present had induced a more sedulous attention than usual to her favourite study and on the very morning of the day on which Timothy Tight made his appearance on the wide and solitary heath, she had complained to her kind papa that the pianoforte was “a little out of tune.”

To inspect this instrument - if it should be his good luck to be invited to do so - was the spontaneous mission thus undertaken in scorching heat by Tight the tuner. Disagreeably convinced, from a paucity of town engagements, that London could spare him, at least for a little while, he turned his back on the great metropolis and his face towards the New Forest on spec. Possibly the reflection that his journey was experimental only and that the broiling to which, while traversing the forest heath, his body was exposed, might turn out to be unprofitable - this consideration might, I repeat, have been instrumental in producing that over-heatedness of mind which broke out in those petulant ejaculations we just now took occasion wildly to reprove. Refreshed however, by the luxurious draught supplied from the Horse and Jockey, he proceeded towards the mansion of the earl and thanks to the virtue of the beverage he had imbibed, he completed the remainder of his journey in a superior state of spirits and with a greatly improved temper.

Lord— was gifted with a humorous and agreeable disposition and prone to give indulgence to any harmless whim or fancy that might suggest itself. He was moreover a keen observer of character and could dissemble or conceal his own at pleasure. At the moment Mr. Tight drew near the mansion, the earl was reclining in a rustic chair placed within the shade of the portico. If he longed for anything it was for the appearance of somebody who would not bore him at so hot a time by exacting his conversation or attention, but amuse him as a passive spectator.

At the distance of a few hundred yards from the road, the residence was approached through a beautiful carriage-drive, on either side of which were disposed, with all the taste and elegance that art could devise, a variety of exquisite and carefully attended shrubs. These afforded so delightful a contrast to the desolation of the heathy wild he had just left that the imagination of Timothy, although un-poetic, was powerfully appealed to and he owned it by pausing to admire. On he went again and presently came within range of observation from the rustic chair whereon still sat the earl. His lordship was attired in a loose light summer-dress, the coolest his tailor could invent, wore no cravat and had his head covered with a straw hat whose brim was of immense circumference and out-of-shape on one side from the effects of its owner's doze, during which it had served the purpose of a nightcap.

Mr. Tight, who had his own notions about the nobility, acquired perhaps from observations made at levee processions, would have laughed to scorn the assurance of that person in the garden seat being an earl indeed! But “that person,” glancing at Timothy at once recognised a “character” and perceiving that his person was unknown and his station misunderstood, he helped on Timothy's delusion. By-the-way, there was in Tim's pronunciation a peculiarity that I have not mentioned - a constraint, namely, forbidding his use of the sibillating letter ‘S’ and imparting to his mode of expression a somewhat ludicrous “lithp.” The individual in nankeen and straw accosted our adventurer in so affable a manner that Timothy, who jumped to conclusions, set him down forthwith as a jolly sort of fellow on the establishment and at once explicitly set forth who and what he, Mr. Tight was and what was the nature of his errand, all which, as nearly as he could recollect it, he would thank the gent in nankeens to make known unto the noble earl. The peer was a fond father, and Tight's opportune appearance gave him pleasure, for the complaint of his daughter in reference to her pianoforte, might immediately be remedied. Tight was thereupon invited into the hall, where he was left for a few minutes and then conducted by the same gentleman into the drawing-room, where stood the rosewood grand,

“a little out of tune.” Whatever might be his situation Tim's conductor made himself pretty much at home. Tim had heard that upper class servants in great houses did take uncommon liberties and the lord elicited from the tuner enough to make him laugh heartily, though he would sometimes seem to restrain himself, as if fearing to be overheard.

Meantime, the fatiguing walk which had at last brought him hither begun to suggest to Mr. Tight the comfort of a cold collation and emboldened by the affability of the personage who still kept him lively company, Timothy thus gave utterance to a subject of increasing interest. “I thay, thur, what kind of thap ith thith earl? They thay he'th a liberal thort of man! I thuppoth he'll do the thing handthome and thand a good dinner. Eh! What d'ye think? A bottle of wine, I th'pothe, in the houthkeeper'th room. I'm pretheth hungry and haven't toughed a bit sinth breakfath”.

However heartily his lordship may have laughed at the eccentricities of the tuner, he was too humane to allow him to remain longer without refreshment. He accordingly left the room, as if in quest of that which Timothy desired and he was by Timothy considered “a jolly good thort of fellow” for taking his wants up so readily. He continued the exercise of his craft until a tall and portly individual entered the room, the effect of a pompous gait and gesture being greatly heightened by a powdered head. This must be the earl, thought Tim and he straightway took occasion to “hope he thaw hith lordthip well.” Whereupon the butler corrected him with becoming gravity for so great a man and announced with remarkable preciseness of speech, that refreshment was provided for him in the housekeeper's room, an intimation so agreeable to Timothy, that he soon found himself seated before a round of beef and full bottle of sherry. Now was he at his ease, in the fullness of his heart's content he blandly asked the butler to take a “glath of wine” and was astonished that a gentleman's servant should decline so good an offer, particularly considering the heat of the day and at this reminiscence Timothy applied himself with renewed zest to the cool sherry. The butler, evidently acting upon instructions and perceiving that the tuner was making rapid progress to the bottom of his bottle, suggested that as there was another pianoforte to tune in the school-room, he had better finish his work first and his wine afterwards, a suggestion of which Timothy at once saw the prudence while it opened to him a new commission! He therefore adjourned to the schoolroom, a spacious apartment shut off at one end by a screen and here he recommenced the labours of his vocation. But within the space of a few hours to be the sport of a roasting sun, the victim of protracted thirst, the free recipient of strong ale taken in a state of hunger, the subject of such excitement as ensued upon his being engaged in the mansion of an earl, and the sherry-drinking occupant of a sort of elysium - all this had taxed too severely the sustaining powers of Timothy. So that when he strained his sense of ear and essayed to adjust the discrepant tones, the room began to revolve and the legs of the instrument to stand apparently upon the ceiling. In this disordered state, with his head aching fearfully, he thought it best to compose himself for a while so he sat down in quiet rest and, closing his eyes to the moving panorama of pictures and other objects in the room, he felt an inclination to sleep. A vivid sense of his situation and his duty recalled him while hovering, as it were, on the borders of dream-land and rallying himself with an effort and feeling his brain more tranquil, he resolved on a calm inspection of the pictures with which the room was hung very sensibly considering that such an unexciting “feast of reason” would tend to refit him for the professional work he had in hand.

Lady Mary the second daughter of the worthy earl, was, as I before observed, an ardent lover of music, in person she was very beautiful, in health extremely delicate. Her education, which might appear to have been retarded from considerations of her physical weakness, had in favourable times progressed with extraordinary rapidity from a certain refined sensibility, acumen, and power of memory with which she was endowed.

When this fragile form of grace should have made her debut in “the world,” it was discovered that a spinal affection had caused the paleness of her face and the delicacy of her system and for this developed malady she was at present under treatment. The family doctor at once interdicted laborious exertion, and adopted the generally received discipline in spinal complaints but she pleaded so hard to be allowed an hour daily at her favourite study, that on a promise of strictly following the rule laid down by him, it was granted. This general rule enforced her lying on a reclining board, for the space of seven or eight hours every day. On the opening-day of our story, the excessive heat of the weather had produced such lassitude in the fair patient that she felt scarcely equal to her accustomed practice but having persevered, despite the enervating influence of the atmosphere, she at last became so exhausted as to fall into a sound slumber almost as soon as she had taken her recumbent position on the board. The butler, previously to introducing Timothy, had proceeded to inform her of our hero's approach but finding her asleep, he decided on not waking her and the pianoforte being at one end of the spacious apartment and the board, concealed by the screen, being placed at the other end he contented himself by so arranging the screen as perfectly to conceal her from observation and if her ladyship should happen to wake before the tuner had completed his job, why there was a door at her hand by which she might retire unperceived from the apartment.

When however, a genius of the Tight order gets into a novel sphere, there is no stipulating as to what shall or shall not come to pass. Timothy, travelling the room like a connoisseur refreshing himself with works of art, came at last into contiguity with the screen and his inquiring mind immediately put itself in a wondering frame as to that screen's uses in such a place. Doubt, it is said, is the development of Truth. Out of speculation striking facts are evolved. Without investigation could we expect great discoveries? Tim might or might not have thought in this wise, at any rate with an enterprising but yet cautious step he advanced towards the screen and, peering anxiously around it, he stood, with bent body, utterly transfixed - the visible representation of a pianoforte-tuner in a state of living petrification!

Besides so unexpected a figure in that room and that position, the pallor of the patient's cheek, contrasting with the raven hair that hung around it, imparted to the object which had riveted the gaze of Mr. Tight a statuesque effect, startling at first sight to stronger nerves than his. Recovering from the cold chill which followed so violent a shock, he summoned all his faculties to determine, as deliberately as they might find it possible, whether what he saw were ghost, corpse, or marble image. For several minutes the said faculties sat (so to speak) in council but as their owner did not deem it prudent to assist their decision by any nearer approach to the subject of so dubious a constitution, Timothy pronounced no verdict and rushed for relief to the side of the pianoforte and plunged into the less embarrassing business of its tuning.

But with that inexplicable figure not far from him and all the mystery that enveloped it, to work he found impossible. It haunted his imagination, wrought him up into a frenzy of fear, which in its reaction left him wrapt in a cold moist condition of bewilderment. What *could* he do? Then he tried to fancy it was all a joke and essayed a laugh - but it was a miserable failure. Then supposing it *were* a ghost, Timothy tried to ask himself “what he tared for a ghoth?” But the question was stammeringly and slowly put and by no means confidently answered. Still, there was a torture in uncertainty quite unendurable and Timothy once more adventured to the screen. There reposed the beautiful figure in unsuspecting sleep and motionless as if carved in alabaster. “Ith it alive, I wonder? Or ith it thone, or wax?” whispered Timothy. “O! yeth, ith wax - I thee it now, ith a wax-work figure, like thothe at Madam Tuthaudth. But, la! Ith more beautiful than any there.” Saying this, he touched it - compressed between his thumb and finger the lovely cheek of lady Mary - and “O *good God, ith alive!*” He cried, as a shrill scream burst on his ear. One bound and down went the screen, another and he was out of the room running into the first passage that offered. Away he hurried, helter-skelter, nor did he cease as long as he heard the hysteric screams of her ladyship, or room was left to continue his

flight. A confused noise in the distance, told him of the consternation he had spread throughout the mansion. Topsy, tired, and completely exhausted, Timothy Tight wandered distractedly, nothing could be equal to his confusion. He had but an indistinct recollection of the various circumstances of the day and having now found a resting-place in an antiquated-looking hall, he sat down distressed, worn-out, indifferent. Fatigue and chagrin came to him hand-in-hand with the consolations of sleep and the spirit of dreams infused his slumbers with poignant recollections and lively images of the parched heath, the landlord of the Horse and Groom, of the “jolly good fellow,” the hall, the repast and the butler. And then came the apparition of the wax figure, and he groaned.

As long as our friend Timothy did no mischief, his lordship enjoyed him as a comicality and even when the story of the screen and lady Mary, as explained by the powdered butler, was told his lordship, though angry at the impertinence of the tuner, he attributed it rather to his silliness than to a wrong intention. But when he heard that our hero was not to be found, either in the house or on the grounds and that his hat still lay on the hall table, he feared the possibility of some unpleasant termination to the adventure. Still, not doubting but a short time would clear up the mystery, his lordship offered his arm to lady Mary and, as he placed a chair before her at the dinner table, remarked that “fright seemed to give her a colour” and complimented her on looking so well.

Tea had just made its appearance in the drawing-room, where a party consisting of the worthy vicar, the family doctor and a few neighbouring friends had assembled to spend the evening with the earl and his daughter. The sun was setting most gorgeously, the windows opened on a balcony from which they had an extensive view over the heath and of the woods in the distance. The air was sultry and the horizon appeared as though it was surrounded by a dense mass of liquid fire, when the earl suddenly started up, exclaiming “Surely that's the fire-bell ?” In a moment the cry of “Fire!” reached them. The stately butler with all the servants at his heels were running towards their lord, the women screamed as loudly as the occasion required and still the bell rung on, louder and faster. All the household were thrown into confusion. “Where? Where is it?” cried the earl, Where? Where? Where?” echoed the servants. “Bring out the engines” cried the earl. “Bring out the engines,” repeated all the servants. Still no engine appeared. All was hurry and bustle but nothing effectively was done. At length his lordship wisely resolved on ascertaining where the fire was and to this end he proceeded to the eastern wing of the mansion, which having been erected simply to preserve the symmetrical proportions of the building was rarely occupied. One large room, however, was reserved especially as the “merry hall” at audit-time and for the celebration of the harvest-home, in the festivities of which the earl took great delight.

It was into this large hall that poor Timothy had strayed and, as we have seen, fell asleep there. An unpleasant dream had troubled his slumbers and finally affrighted sleep from his weary eyes. Rising under great excitement, which was augmented by the intense stillness and solemnity of night and the remembrance of the vision which had so alarmed him he became too terrified to consult discretion. Thus, discerning at a little distance a bell-rope and made by terror reckless as to results, he pulled it violently and continued to pull it, till the cry of “Fire” reached him. This, added to his previous fright and the din of approaching voices, completely overcame him, for on the noble earl's entrance to his “merry hall,” where hung the bell-rope, there lay Timothy Tight on the floor in a deep swoon. The mystery was soon unravelled, his lordship gave orders that the “poor fellow” should be taken care of for the night, and sent away early the next morning. From that day to this, neither the kind earl of—, nor his beautiful daughter lady Mary have ever heard of, or from, Timothy Tight junior, pianoforte-tuner from Broadwood's, London.

