



## Chapter 19

# How to Make a Phliziz

The week passed without any further communication with the ‘Hall,’ as Arthur was evidently fearful that we might ‘wear out our welcome’; but when, on Sunday morning, we were setting out for church, I gladly agreed to his proposal to go round and enquire after the Earl, who was said to be unwell.

Eric, who was strolling in the garden, gave us a good report of the invalid, who was still in bed, with Lady Muriel in attendance.

“Are you coming with us to church?” I enquired.

“Thanks, no,” he courteously replied. “It’s not—exactly in my line, you know. It’s an excellent institution—for the poor. When I’m with my own folk, I go, just to set them an example. But I’m not known here: so I think I’ll excuse myself sitting out a sermon. Country-preachers are always so dull!”

Arthur was silent till we were out of hearing. Then he said to himself, almost inaudibly, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

“Yes,” I assented: “no doubt that is the principle on which church-going rests.”

“And when he does go,” he continued (our thoughts ran so much together, that our conversation was often slightly elliptical), “I suppose he repeats the words ‘I believe in the Communion of Saints’?”

But by this time we had reached the little church, into which a goodly stream of worshippers, consisting mainly of fishermen and their families, was flowing.

The service would have been pronounced by any modern aesthetic religionist—or religious aesthete, which is it?—to be crude and cold: to me, coming fresh from the ever-advancing developments of a London church under a soi-disant ‘Catholic’ Rector, it was unspeakably refreshing.

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There was no theatrical procession of demure little choristers, trying their best not to simper under the admiring gaze of the congregation: the people's share in the service was taken by the people themselves, unaided, except that a few good voices, judiciously posted here and there among them, kept the singing from going too far astray.

There was no murdering of the noble music, contained in the Bible and the Liturgy, by its recital in a dead monotone, with no more expression than a mechanical talking-doll.

No, the prayers were prayed, the lessons were read, and best of all the sermon was talked; and I found myself repeating, as we left the church, the words of Jacob, when he 'awaked out of his sleep.' "Surely the Lord is in this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

"Yes," said Arthur, apparently in answer to my thoughts, "those 'high' services are fast becoming pure Formalism. More and more the people are beginning to regard them as 'performances,' in which they only 'assist' in the French sense. And it is specially bad for the little boys. They'd be much less self-conscious as pantomime-fairies. With all that dressing-up, and stagy-entrances and exits, and being always en evidence, no wonder if they're eaten up with vanity, the blatant little coxcombs!"

When we passed the Hall on our return, we found the Earl and Lady Muriel sitting out in the garden. Eric had gone for a stroll.

We joined them, and the conversation soon turned on the sermon we had just heard, the subject of which was 'selfishness.'

"What a change has come over our pulpits," Arthur remarked, "since the time when Paley gave that utterly selfish definition of virtue, 'the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness!'"

Lady Muriel looked at him inquiringly, but she seemed to have learned by intuition, what years of experience had taught me, that the way to elicit Arthur's deepest thoughts was neither to assent nor dissent, but simply to listen.

"At that time," he went on, "a great tidal wave of selfishness was sweeping over human thought. Right and Wrong had somehow been transformed into Gain and Loss, and Religion had become a sort of commercial transaction. We may be thankful that our preachers are beginning to take a nobler view of life."

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“But is it not taught again and again in the Bible?” I ventured to ask.

“Not in the Bible as a whole,” said Arthur. “In the Old Testament, no doubt, rewards and punishments are constantly appealed to as motives for action. That teaching is best for children, and the Israelites seem to have been, mentally, utter children. We guide our children thus, at first: but we appeal, as soon as possible, to their innate sense of Right and Wrong: and, when that stage is safely past, we appeal to the highest motive of all, the desire for likeness to, and union with, the Supreme Good. I think you will find that to be the teaching of the Bible, as a whole, beginning with ‘that thy days may be long in the land,’ and ending with ‘be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’”

We were silent for awhile, and then Arthur went off on another tack. “Look at the literature of Hymns, now. How cankered it is, through and through, with selfishness! There are few human compositions more utterly degraded than some modern Hymns!”

I quoted the stanza

”Whatever, Lord, we tend to Thee,  
Repaid a thousandfold shall be,  
Then gladly will we give to Thee,  
Giver of all!”

“Yes,” he said grimly: “that is the typical stanza. And the very last charity-sermon I heard was infected with it. After giving many good reasons for charity, the preacher wound up with ‘and, for all you give, you will be repaid a thousandfold!’ Oh the utter meanness of such a motive, to be put before men who do know what self-sacrifice is, who can appreciate generosity and heroism! Talk of Original Sin!” he went on with increasing bitterness. “Can you have a stronger proof of the Original Goodness there must be in this nation, than the fact that Religion has been preached to us, as a commercial speculation, for a century, and that we still believe in a God?”

“It couldn’t have gone on so long,” Lady Muriel musingly remarked, “if the Opposition hadn’t been practically silenced—put under what the French call *la cloture*. Surely in any lecture-hall, or in private society, such teaching would soon have been hooted down?”

“I trust so,” said Arthur: “and, though I don’t want to see ‘brawling in church’ legalized, I must say that our preachers enjoy an enormous privilege—which they ill deserve, and

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which they misuse terribly. We put our man into a pulpit, and we virtually tell him 'Now, you may stand there and talk to us for half-an-hour. We won't interrupt you by so much as a word! You shall have it all your own way!' And what does he give us in return? Shallow twaddle, that, if it were addressed to you over a dinner-table, you would think 'Does the man take me for a fool?'"

The return of Eric from his walk checked the tide of Arthur's eloquence, and, after a few minutes' talk on more conventional topics, we took our leave. Lady Muriel walked with us to the gate. "You have given me much to think about," she said earnestly, as she gave Arthur her hand. "I'm so glad you came in!" And her words brought a real glow of pleasure into that pale worn face of his.

On the Tuesday, as Arthur did not seem equal to more walking, I took a long stroll by myself, having stipulated that he was not to give the whole day to his books, but was to meet me at the Hall at about tea-time. On my way back, I passed the Station just as the afternoon-train came in sight, and sauntered down the stairs to see it come in. But there was little to gratify my idle curiosity: and, when the train was empty, and the platform clear, I found it was about time to be moving on, if I meant to reach the Hall by five.

As I approached the end of the platform, from which a steep irregular wooden staircase conducted to the upper world, I noticed two passengers, who had evidently arrived by the train, but who, oddly enough, had entirely escaped my notice, though the arrivals had been so few. They were a young woman and a little girl: the former, so far as one could judge by appearances, was a nursemaid, or possibly a nursery-governess, in attendance on the child, whose refined face, even more than her dress, distinguished her as of a higher class than her companion.

The child's face was refined, but it was also a worn and sad one, and told a tale (or so I seemed to read it) of much illness and suffering, sweetly and patiently borne. She had a little crutch to help herself along with: and she was now standing, looking wistfully up the long staircase, and apparently waiting till she could muster courage to begin the toilsome ascent.

There are some things one says in life—as well as things one does—which come automatically, by reflex action, as the physiologists say (meaning, no doubt, action without reflection, just as *lucus* is said to be derived 'a non lucendo'). Closing one's eyelids, when something seems to be flying into the eye, is one of those actions, and saying "May I carry the little girl up the stairs?" was another. It wasn't that any thought of offering help oc-

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curred to me, and that then I spoke: the first intimation I had, of being likely to make that offer, was the sound of my own voice, and the discovery that the offer had been made. The servant paused, doubtfully glancing from her charge to me, and then back again to the child. "Would you like it, dear?" she asked her. But no such doubt appeared to cross the child's mind: she lifted her arms eagerly to be taken up. "Please!" was all she said, while a faint smile flickered on the weary little face. I took her up with scrupulous care, and her little arm was at once clasped trustfully round my neck.



She was a very light weight—so light, in fact, that the ridiculous idea crossed my mind that it was rather easier going up, with her in my arms, than it would have been without her: and, when we reached the road above, with its cart-ruts and loose stones—all formidable obstacles for a lame child—I found that I had said "I'd better carry her over this rough place," before I had formed any mental connection between its roughness and my gentle little burden. "Indeed it's troubling you too much, Sir!" the maid exclaimed. "She can walk very well on the flat." But the arm, that was twined about my neck, clung just an atom more closely at the suggestion, and decided me to say "She's no weight, really. I'll carry her a little further. I'm going your way."

The nurse raised no further objection: and the next speaker was a ragged little boy, with bare feet, and a broom over his shoulder, who ran across the road, and pretended to sweep the perfectly dry road in front of us. "Give us a 'ap'ny!" the little urchin pleaded, with a broad grin on his dirty face.

"Don't give him a 'ap'ny!" said the little lady in my arms. The words sounded harsh: but the tone was gentleness itself. "He's an idle little boy!" And she laughed a laugh of such silvery sweetness as I had never yet heard from any lips but Sylvie's. To my astonishment, the boy actually joined in the laugh, as if there were some subtle sympathy between them, as he ran away down the road and vanished through a gap in the hedge.

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But he was back in a few moments, having discarded his broom and provided himself, from some mysterious source, with an exquisite bouquet of flowers. "Buy a posy, buy a posy! Only a 'ap'ny!" he chanted, with the melancholy drawl of a professional beggar.

"Don't buy it!" was Her Majesty's edict as she looked down, with a lofty scorn that seemed curiously mixed with tender interest, on the ragged creature at her feet.

But this time I turned rebel, and ignored the royal commands. Such lovely flowers, and of forms so entirely new to me, were not to be abandoned at the bidding of any little maid, however imperious. I bought the bouquet: and the little boy, after popping the halfpenny into his mouth, turned head-over-heels, as if to ascertain whether the human mouth is really adapted to serve as a money-box.

With wonder, that increased every moment, I turned over the flowers, and examined them one by one: there was not a single one among them that I could remember having ever seen before. At last I turned to the nursemaid. "Do these flowers grow wild about here? I never saw—" but the speech died away on my lips. The nursemaid had vanished!

"You can put me down, now, if you like," Sylvie quietly remarked.

I obeyed in silence, and could only ask myself "Is this a dream?", on finding Sylvie and Bruno walking one on either side of me, and clinging to my hands with the ready confidence of childhood.

"You're larger than when I saw you last!" I began. "Really I think we ought to be introduced again! There's so much of you that I never met before, you know."

"Very well!" Sylvie merrily replied. "This is Bruno. It doesn't take long. He's only got one name!"

"There's another name to me!" Bruno protested, with a reproachful look at the Mistress of the Ceremonies. "And it's—' Esquire'!"

"Oh, of course. I forgot," said Sylvie. "Bruno—Esquire!"

"And did you come here to meet me, my children?" I enquired.



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"You know I said we'd come on Tuesday, Sylvie explained. "Are we the proper size for common children?"

"Quite the right size for children," I replied, (adding mentally "though not common children, by any means!") "But what became of the nursemaid?"

"It are gone!" Bruno solemnly replied.

"Then it wasn't solid, like Sylvie and you?"

"No. Oo couldn't touch it, oo know. If oo walked at it, oo'd go right froo!"



"I quite expected you'd find it out, once," said Sylvie. "Bruno ran it against a telegraph post, by accident. And it went in two halves. But you were looking the other way."

I felt that I had indeed missed an opportunity: to witness such an event as a nursemaid going 'in two halves' does not occur twice in a life-time!

"When did oo guess it were Sylvie?" Bruno enquired.

"I didn't guess it, till it was Sylvie," I said. "But how did You manage the nursemaid?"

"Bruno managed it," said Sylvie. "It's called a Phlizz."

"And how do you make a Phlizz, Bruno?"

"The Professor teached me how," said Bruno. "First oo takes a lot of air—"

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“Oh, Bruno!” Sylvie interposed. “The Professor said you weren’t to tell!” But who did her voice?” I asked.

“Indeed it’s troubling you too much, Sir! She can walk very well on the flat.”

Bruno laughed merrily as I turned hastily from side to side, looking in all directions for the speaker. “That were me!” he gleefully proclaimed, in his own voice.

“She can indeed walk very well on the flat,” I said. “And I think I was the Flat.”

By this time we were near the Hall. “This is where my friends live,” I said. “Will you come in and have some tea with them?”

Bruno gave a little jump of joy: and Sylvie said “Yes, please. You’d like some tea, Bruno, wouldn’t you? He hasn’t tasted tea,” she explained to me, “since we left Outland.”

“And that weren’t good tea!” said Bruno. “It were so welly weak!”