

CHAPTER V

JOE GATES

OR, "T'WILL BE ALL THE SAME A HUNDRED YEARS HENCE."

All hail to thee, most memorable and worthy Joe! How shall I speak thy praises? How shall my feeble efforts do justice to thy worth, most happy, jovial, good-tempered Joe? Praise thee I cannot, for thou art above all praise. Censure thee, I will not, for thou art superior to all censure. Say, then, in what strain can I most approvingly do justice to thee, thou happy mortal?

Now could the subject of this panegyric hear my invocation, I'd back his opinion at long odds on the next Derby or St. Leger stake, that his answer would be "Never mind, 'twill be all the same a hundred years hence!" And there's a share of sound philosophy in Joe's advice, which proves his good sense. How much better would it be for society generally if it were more frequently acted on. I don't mean when it is applied in that wild, reckless and improvident mode in which it is too frequently heard. There are various ways of rendering the sentence but the tone in which it is given will at once determine the wisdom of the speaker. Who is there that, when he has felt the common ingratitude of the world, and honestly complained of it, has not been consoled with, "Never mind, 'twill be all the same a hundred years hence?" When cares and trouble oppress us, and the mind is oppressed and cast down with discomforts that reduce us almost to despair, who can help feeling a consolation in the anticipation of a period when the cause from whence these discomforts arise shall be removed. But I am moralising instead of telling my story. Still, I feel it almost impossible to associate myself with the hero of this tale, without partaking in some degree of his own peculiar thoughts and expressions and this was his most frequent and favourite saying. It gave him character through life. While a boy his philosophy did not carry him farther than "never mind!" when in after years the vexations of the world assailed him, then he anticipated another century. There were occasions, too, when he backed up his familiar adage by a second but this was reserved for particular circumstances such, for instance, as when there was no possibility of avoiding a difficulty, or when an unfortunate speculation had drained his pocket to an uncomfortable extent, then he would add, "What's the odds, as long as you are happy?" In truth, Joe was a real philosopher. You would never see him in a towering passion, ranting and raving, and making himself and every one else uncomfortable. No, no, he knew better. If he won he would console the loser with "Never mind, 'twill be all the same a hundred years hence," and if he lost, ditto repeated, with the addendum.

The sun was just upon taking leave of this earth for the night, and his golden lights in the distant west were gradually fading into the twilight of the beautiful autumn, which was now sufficiently advanced to have tinged the summer foliage with a sombre brown hue. No frosts or autumnal winds had yet touched it. It was rich, and harmonised exquisitely with the foreground of the picture. The golden beech trees in the distance contrasted beautifully with the varied green of the oak and holly. At the time all was silent and still. Suddenly a distant horn sounded, which echo repeated again and again, till the whole forest rung. It was the distance which mellowed the tone - for it was the rude cow-horn of the swineherd, now calling the herd together, from distant parts of the forest, to their evening meal. Immediately, the scene, before so quiet, was all alive and whole troops of hogs scampered away in the direction of the horn-blower, who was no more or less than our hero Joe Gates, then a mere child of some ten or eleven years, who assisted his father in this his usual autumnal occupation. This is termed in forest language *pannage month*; it commences in September, and lasts (or did last) about six weeks. The term "pannage," as it was originally written, signified a small sum of money paid into the steward's court for the right of turning hogs into the forest during this period. The method adopted is this:

The swineherd collects from the different farmers and foresters generally a herd of some five or six hundred hogs. The parties owning them, in consideration of his trouble and responsibility, allow him a shilling per head per swine. This payment enables him to erect in some convenient part of the forest a sort of sty, large enough to contain the herd.

He constructs the sty entirely of forest materials, by building it under the shelter of some wide-spreading tree, and enclosing it in a fence covered in with boughs, dried furze, &c., making a rough building, but well adapted to the comfortable reception of the hogs. He also takes care to strew it very plentifully with straw or fern and selects a situation in the neighbourhood of some stream or pond, that there may be no want of water.

He then proceeds to gather the herd together. As his "connection" extends frequently through a very considerable extent of the forest, by the time some of the poor pigs get to this sty, they are tired and hungry enough to eat anything. He then supplies them with a good meal of acorns and beech mast, which they are very fond of, and having eaten *like pigs*, till they can eat no longer, they go to sleep.

The next morning they get acquainted with the locality; the pond or stream is easily found, and they make out the day as best they can. Towards evening they are driven out, and under the neighbouring trees, by some apparently

miraculous means, acorns and beech-mast continue to fall, long enough to enable them to make another good and comfortable meal, "Gurth," or Gates all the while blowing his horn. They then gladly return to the sty and sleep again. One or two repetitions to the same monotonous tune so associates music with their meals that, when they are turned into the forest to provide acorns and beech mast for themselves, they very readily scamper back again at the sound of the horn. They never wander far and there are always some who, having gone through the same process before, easily initiate the juniors. During this jolly, roving life, it is astonishing how they improve and a week or two of barley-meal afterwards, as old Gates used to say, "just fits them for the knife," and "makes them *pretty pork!*"



Old Gates had practised the profession of swineherd, in addition to other occupations, for many a year. His residence was in the vicinity of Captain W—,’s beautiful cottage, as described in our former tale. Joe was his only son, and from infancy had shown a decided porcine propensity, for his chief delight was to roll himself, and that with such an effect that it was impossible to say of him if he were rosy, pale, dark, or comely, so begrimed was he with dirt and mud. From rolling he took to crawling; and one fine summer's day he actually "walked off" and got outside of the wicket to play with a donkey under which he had literally taken his stand before his mother missed him. Thus did our adventurer grow up, as soon as he could talk he amused them all by his good temper and fun. At four years he could dance and sing, at six he could tumble, stand upon his head, throw a somersault out of his bed-room window, which was not above six feet from the ground, and all this he would do without a shoe to his foot, and I verily believe he would have gone without clothes if his parents would have allowed him. It must have been Joe who, when asked if his mother ever punished him replied "Yes, sir, when she washes my face." A perfect forest gamin was Joe!

Talk of climbing, where was the tree in the whole forest he could not climb? This was an accomplishment highly useful in his vocation, for from these eminences he was enabled to shower down acorns and mast in great profusion on the grunting gormandisers below. Should any inquisitive feaster chance to look up, Joe would shy a large acorn at his snout and make him squeak again. Joe only laughed, and said to the pig, "never mind" and then he would go on shaking branch by branch till the whole tree was denuded of its fruit, and in a minute he was upon another. But his greatest delight perhaps was to blow the horn.

He was naturally musical, there was something so happy in his nature, so accordant with joyous sounds, though scarcely having heard any, that he contrived to fascinate the pigs and amuse himself with his modulations on that primitive instrument.

Not far from his home there was a small stream branching from the forest river and on a fine summer's afternoon, Joe would find his way to the brook and lie down on the sunny bank watching the trout. Then he would follow them into their holes and even here, his feelings as usual dictated his actions, for he would scorn to beguile the poor fish with hook and line. No, in accordance with his usual temperament, he would tickle them! Literally tickle them, till they lay passive in his hand, then he would treacherously throw them out on the bank with a chuckle and a laugh and as the poor fish lay on the bank gasping for its native element, Joe would say, "never mind," and go in search of another. In the winter time he strewed bird-lime for the thrushes and blackbirds. In short, Joe was beginning to do many things which we all in mature years say ought not to be done but which things a genuine "Boy" is always found to do as if from intuition. Joe's good temper however always got him out of a scrape as easily as his thoughtlessness got him into it.

One day (a very important era in his life) he had been chasing a squirrel from tree to tree and with a loaded stick, commonly used in the forest for the purpose, was endeavouring to bring it down, when he suddenly found himself surrounded by the New Forest Hunt. He was so intent upon following his game that he did not hear them. 'Twas early, and fortunately for him they had not yet found. Just as Joe discovered where he was, the view halloo was given by the huntsman.

Away went the fox. The hounds, setting up full cry, followed him. "Yoicks! Yoicks! Away! Loo! Loo! Loo! Tantivy, boys! Away! Away!" And forthwith hounds, huntsman, horsemen, all followed the track of the fox. Joe could not resist, away he also went pell-mell, literally lost in excitement, bewildered with joy. This was a sport after his own heart - he followed close. "Keep back, boy; keep back," cried the huntsman. The whipper-in smacked his whip at him. Joe began to give in just then, by a clever manoeuvre of the fox the hounds were put off the scent and came to check. This gave him breathing time but again they soon found, and away went Joe, as mad as ever. There were a few others who followed on foot but he soon left them behind. Away he went, as clean over the furze brake as the bravest hound of the pack, and was among the select few who could boast of being in at Reynard's death.

From that day Joe became a sportsman of a higher order than that implied in the tickling of trout and trapping of blackbirds. The hunt was far more congenial to his taste, and from hence there was not a wild orest pony within reach that he did not chase down, and bend to his will too with nothing but a small cord. He had by practice enabled himself to catch any one of them on foot, by a kind of slip or noose, in the style of the lasso; and it was fortunate that this amusement found favour with him, for he was beginning to form certain highly-objectionable habits. He had learnt the precise spot at which to place the springe, and a method of arranging that machinery by which the capture of the hare was reduced to a moral certainty.

He knew, though I cannot say he had begun to practise, a way of laying baits on the branches of trees, by which a young deer now and then found himself detained in a state of semi-suspension and he had, in short, acquired a proficiency in general strategy that might have proved his ruin, had not the inspiring pony chase have given a harmless character to his "pursuits." At home he was generally a good boy, tractable and active and their neighbour, Captain W— observing this made overtures to the boy's father, which resulted in Joe's enlistment on the captain's domestic staff. He bore a true allegiance to his master and devoted service to his young and lovely mistress; but it was remarkable in Joe, that if the hounds were heard, no matter what his occupation, he would scamper off, regardless alike of the captain's military countermand and the witching call of Ellen.

It will be recollected that on the occasion of the old captain's illness, Joe hastened off for our friend the little doctor, who was partial to Joe and a fox-hunter himself - that is, he liked it, and sometimes in his visits in the neighbourhood, if he fell in with the hounds, he would have a run for an hour or two. It was here he had first seen our hero and his madcap enthusiasm quite amused the doctor. When the captain died the question naturally arose with Ellen what should she do with old Nanny and Joe? This was a matter soon settled. Nanny would not leave Ellen and the doctor wished to have Joe - he would just suit him - and as he was now eighteen he began to wish to get away. Parting with old Nanny and Miss Ellen was a task. Ellen had taught him to read and write and Joe was grateful. He wished them good-bye and brushed away a tear (for withal he was tender-hearted). As he got into the doctor's gig Joe said to himself, "never mind! 'Twill be all right by-and-by" and away they drove.

Our hero's occupations now demanded his close attention. The doctor kept two nags and, as Joe had strong sporting predilections, it is not to be wondered at that he was proud of his nags, for by the learned in those matters they might have been aptly denominated "spicy". There were also two dogs in connection with the establishment - a setter, beautiful and lively and a wide-awake Scotch terrier. Among these objects of "fancy" Joe was in his element and both in the realm of the stall and the kennel, his loving subjects soon learnt to pay him most implicit obedience and to regard him with looks which distinctly expressed their sense of his superior genius. The subject would have well suited the exquisite pencil of Landseer. Behold now the mud-bespattered swineherd transformed into the spruce and active "doctor's man," in neat brown livery, drab inexpressibles, and continuations to match, the expansion of the organ of self-esteem being manifested by persevering but abortive attempts to coerce into something like genteel order his rough brown locks, which, in spite of many unctuous persuasives, would never cease to betray their forest origin. In this position the only drawback to his perfect happiness was the necessity of having twice a-day to perambulate the town with "doctor's stuff." But for this, Joe's life, by his own confession, would have been one of unmixed content though even had this weight been removed, his condition as "perfectly happy" would, as events proved, have been transient, for Joe's heart was vulnerable, and it was his destiny about this period to experience that peculiar commotion in the inner man which generally ensues in a case of "first love."

"The course of true love never did run smooth," says one who had a perfect knowledge of that business, admitting which aphorism it might be argued, that if the current ever flowed for any length of time unruffled, true passion was not its characteristic. So with that eventful incident in Joe's career he had not to bemoan a cruel charmer, who wouldn't lend a willing ear to his inflammatory appeals, but rather of one who, not insensible to his smartness and his sentiments, could prove faithless. On so touching a theme a brief digression may perhaps be pardonable.

Within half-a-dozen doors of the doctor's residence stood a neat and well regulated establishment for the "entertainment of man and horse" called The Crown, the prime jewel in which (in Joe's estimation) was Betsey the bright-eyed waitress. And although Joe's opinion might have been more fervent and intense on this point than that of the public at large, I think that a strong sentiment in Betsey's favour was pretty general with all the frequenters of The Crown.



Bad times hadn't then descended on the jolly English farmer with the depressing force which, I regret to say, they seem since to have done and among this worthy class Betsey was an established favourite and the subject of much heavy, but I doubt, not hearty gallantry. One corpulent and rubicund old gentleman - of much weight socially as well as physically insisted always, not only on her bringing him his glass, but on her mixing it's ingredients; assuring her if he saw a new face in the room and thought the much used compliment would tell that "No grog whatsoever of *her* mixen' ever wanted zhugar."

It was natural that a young lady so highly popular should learn to put a proper estimation on herself, and that, as what everybody says must be true, it followed as a matter of course, if everybody said she was "an exceedin' pretty gal," why she must perforce believe it. It was not a little temerarious of young Mister Gates, under all circumstances, to look so high in an affair of love as to a barmaid of so many charms and so much consequence as Betsey. But *la grande* passion is a great leveller, whose operations cannot be calculated on. It is likewise a strong incentive to ambition which *might*, in Joe's case, have given him an ardour in the use of his hairbrush and have urged him to repeated outlays for the prepared fat of bears or other animals. At any rate, as soon as admiration of Betsey begun to assume the character of love in Joe's breast, and in the course of his morning and evening rounds with medicine he caught sight of his idol performing her avocations with a certain air of self-confidence, (mightily effective but indescribable) his bosom yearned for such an elevation in life as might enable him to pop the question on an equal footing, and he consequently began to contemplate the humiliating physic-basket with a daily increasing disgust.

There's a good deal of instinctive diplomacy in love. How was our friend Joe now to commence operations in a manner that could promise success? Write and request a private interview? Too abrupt besides, it was possible that Betsey couldn't read. Go to work on some anonymous verses? Suggestion barred by want of familiarity with the *belles lettres*. Divers other plans proposed themselves, bearing on the system of an attack direct, but none of them did Joe pursue. So as he set aside the idea of a straightforward march upon the citadel, he cast about for an indirect approach, by which, if he should prove in luck, he might "walk in and win."

Immediately on this resolve the ostler occurred to his mind as a most convenient mode of access, and if need were, a very friendly negotiator. At present he enjoyed some intimacy with that official, which originated in certain freely expressed opinions of the ostler, in reference to the doctor's nags, on which exciting subject there was a fellow-feeling in them. Joe soon managed to improve the acquaintance, and received an invitation for the following Sunday to take tea in the tap, which was "kept" by the ostler and his wife - who were but lately married. Sunday was a day of leisure with the Crown's subjects and to the great agitation of Joe's feelings, here, on this his first invite, he found himself and Betsey seated at the same tea-table.

This circumstance occurred a second time, at no distant interval, for there was much in Joe that the ostler called 'cute', and relished amazingly and when the knowing mistress of the tap discerned, which she soon did, the state of Joe's heart and hinted as much to her spouse, the two commenced such a running fire of pleasant raillery, that Betsey, pretending to be offended, questioned Mister Joseph if such remarks weren't unproper and agreed to take refuge from them in a walk which he had actually the boldness to propose! After that I'm not surprised at his proposing anything and certain it is that the pair were soon considered as "engaged" and that Joe loved devoutly and said at anything that ruffled him, with peculiar emphasis and triumph, "never mind! What's the odds so long as you're happy?"

But Joe's philosophy was doomed to be severely tried. About six months had passed in that pleasurable stage of sentiment which follows confession and precedes marriage, when a corps of yeomanry called down from London a very long and dashing guardsman, to drill them for effective service and the guardsman took up his quarters at The Crown.

Need I occupy time in arriving at the ultimate result of his sojourn there as it affected Joe? Suffice it, that he found himself neglected and the soldier favoured and did not find, on this occasion, any balm for his injured feelings in the fact that "would be all the same a hundred years hence." On the contrary, his desertion left on his spirit an effect so lasting that the doctor and his sister both thought his removal from the scene expedient and his former mistress having, since he left her, become lady B—, the doctor wrote to her on Joe's behalf and his appointment as a groom arrived in answer to the doctor's letter.

The thoughts of this change rallied the moping lover and he fell back again on his philosophy and took comfort. He left his worthy master with a grateful heart and his faithless fair one with an ill-assumed indifference. Then, forswearing the sex generally, in a tempestuous state of feeling he bade adieu to the town of Lymington, and determined to live and die a bachelor.



In Lord B—'s establishment Joe soon rose into the position of head-groom and as his lordship patronised the turf, and had an extensive stud, Joe had a large share of business on his hands. He was himself a determined sportsman and when the family were in the country, who was always mentioned as the best authority on any topic connected with the sporting world? Why, Joe Gates. Who got up the B— races? Who started the Derby club at the B— Arms? Who got up the subscription for Jones's widow, when poor Bill broke his neck at the hurdle-race? Who could sing the best song? Tell the best story? Who told the B—cricketers, when nobody but he was bold enough to back them, that they could win, and should win, and they *did* win? Who threw down his crown for any praiseworthy object so readily as Joe? And who ever accused Joe of doing wrong, notwithstanding his jovial and convivial qualities? His noble master and mistress were positively proud of him.

To his credit be it spoken, he went every year at Whitsuntide to see his father, who was getting incapable of exertion, and for whom Joe finally managed to secure one of the lodges on Lord B—'s estate, his mother and sister being both dead.

On one occasion of his visiting the forest Joe, on his return, brought with him an innocent-looking little girl about nine years old, whom he said he'd made up his mind to adopt. "Never mind!" replied Joe, to the taunts his little companion brought on him, "twill be all the same a hundred years hence!" He placed her under the charge of the kind host and hostess of the B— Arms who, having no children of their own, behaved to it as tenderly as parents could have done. In process of time Joe became his lordship's coachman and, as the reader may remember, it was in that capacity we encountered him at the music festival. Not long after this Joe buried his father and the landlady of the B— Arms, her husband. The disconsolate widow freely vented her griefs before Joe in virtue of his being the best friend she had in the world. Out of pure compassion he conducted her a second time to the hymeneal altar, ay, and he made her happy, for it was impossible to live with him and be otherwise.

Inquisitiveness has been said, by unscrupulous writers to be a characteristic peculiarly feminine. Mrs. Gates insisted now on knowing the true pedigree of "Betsey", the child whom Joe had confided to her keeping and who had now grown up a fine young woman.

Could a faithful husband refuse to satisfy a curious wife on this point? Therefore the secret, long hermetically sealed, Joe at length divulged. In one of his visits to the New Forest, he inquired for his former love. She was dead, had died deserted and her child, in the absence of any friend to claim it, had been carried to the parish workhouse. Tears dimmed his eyes as the worthy fellow told the tale and it was with no ordinary effort that he succeeded in calling to his assistance his favourite "never mind! Twill be all the same a hundred years hence!"

and

"What's the odds as long as you're happy!"

