

MENTAL TRAVELS IN IMAGINED LANDS.

CHAPTER I. LABOURLAND.

AFTER various wanderings through many countries, I turned my steps to the far-famed Labourland. Of this country I had heard curiously contradictory reports from people professing acquaintance with it. By one it would be described as the very centre of all that is good and beneficial to mankind; by another as a land of unceasing misery, whose inhabitants lived without pleasure and died without regret; while a third would say it was all very well to stay in for a while, merely as a visitor, but certainly most undesirable as a place of permanent residence.

Actuated by a desire to learn which of these reports was nearest the truth, I set out on my journey.

Having last resided in the country of Inertia, on reaching Labourland I at once noticed a marked contrast in the habits of the people. In Inertia, activity of any kind is looked upon as injurious to health and happiness; in Labourland, the inhabitants, or Labourers, as they style themselves, are unceasingly active, for the most part employed in roaming over their country in a nomadic manner. This they call 'getting on.' This restlessness, I learned, is considered needful, by the majority of the Labourers, to their continued good health and happiness.

Whatever the truth may be as regards this – and it is not without dispute even amongst themselves – migration is continually going on from one part of the country to another. Especially is there a movement towards the higher latitudes, called the Fortuna Mountains, a vast range dividing Labourland from Fortuneland. Indeed, to the latter country not a few Labourers, as they advance in years, emigrate; the climate, it is said, being much milder, and in every way more suitable to people beginning to require repose than the keener air and perpetual bustle of Labourland. Others again, however, assert that this idea is a popular fallacy; that with proper allowances in the habits of life for the advance of age, the air of Labourland is more conducive to longevity than that of Fortuneland,

which, although milder, is also more relaxing, thereby working as much harm to the human body as a colder atmosphere, especially to those not native to it.

The Labourers, for the most part, travel in companies, sometimes composed of hundreds, and even thousands, and at other times only of two or three people. These bands have each one or more recognised leaders, or masters, as they are commonly called, whose authority, however, is by no means absolute, obedience being entirely guided by mutual necessities and convenience, and severable by either party at will.

As I have always thought, in visiting strange countries, that the most interesting objects of study are the manners and customs of the inhabitants, and not merely a notice of the architectural or natural beauties of the land, I requested permission of the master of a company to join it for a time.

Although readily receiving his consent, I quickly found that knowledge of the Labourers would have to be gained more by observation than conversation; for except at short intervals of rest, which only occurred once or twice a day, it was not easy to get a word from my companions, each one being so eagerly engaged in pressing forward on the march, lest he should not keep pace with his fellows. Over the ground we now traversed it required, indeed, no little energy and determination to make progress; for we had commenced the ascent of the Fortuna Mountains, which this company had determined if possible to cross, in order to visit, if not settle in, Fortuneland.

As there is, strangely enough, notwithstanding the continual intercourse carried on between the two countries, no highroad to Fortuneland from Labourland, travelling is exceedingly difficult. My companions, besides the ordinary strength which has to be used in mountain climbing, were required to prepare temporary roads, in order to make the journey practicable for the women, children, and baggage; though, truth to tell, the women were in many instances not behind the men in taking a share of the toils of the ascent.

To myself, after a sojourn in Inertia, by which I had become accustomed, like its inhabitants, to look upon every molehill as a mountain, the precipitous way we were now slowly and painfully ascending began to look more and more impassable. To my companions, however, difficulties seemed only to give a zest to their endeavours; to overcome one obstacle meant, not a signal to rest, but to proceed to the attack of greater; and there was always a hearty emulation going on amongst them as to who should work the hardest and longest, and 'get on' the most quickly.

This is a strange people, thought I, to leave so pleasant and peaceful a country, as Labourland in our journey through it had appeared to be, for these difficult and dangerous mountains. Why should they not have been content to wander about in the lower regions, where travelling is attended with some comfort and little toil; and where, moreover, they would not have been too tired to cultivate

those lighter tastes and arts which were now almost wholly neglected by them, but which do so much to make life agreeable, both to the possessors and their neighbours? Certainly the air on the mountains was very bracing, and that alone, I suspect, supported the Labourers, and enabled them to work with the untiring energy they so continually displayed. Not a few, however, did succumb to a too great strain, and although no one went back voluntarily, many were obliged to do so. Such were pitied, but never envied, at having thus to return to a more placid, if less adventurous life. It was painful to see the sad despairing looks of these men, as they began to fall behind in the upward march, and finally commenced descending the hills up which they had so laboriously climbed. Indeed, it was no uncommon sight to behold one of these poor creatures rush on death, rather than bear the unhappiness of having to turn his back upon Fortuneland.

With diminished numbers, but unabated energy, we continued the ascent. 'Every man for himself' was now the cry. The masters, to whom some obedience had at first been shown, were now wholly unnoticed, every one taking up what was called an 'independent position,' and working away as seemed most beneficial to himself. Of course, they were too sensible not to combine in the work of getting on when mutually advantageous; when their united stock of strength could effect greater advances on the way than individual labour was capable of achieving.

These joint enterprises were, occasionally, I noticed, turned to bad account by some designing member of the community. For instance, we arrived at a deep rent in the mountains, which, although avoidable by a detour of no great extent, it was proposed by one of the company that we should throw a bridge across. After some persuasion, part of our band agreed to join in this undertaking, and, with considerable labour, succeeded. No sooner was it completed than the original promoter of the work crossed over, and while his co-workers were collecting their goods and chattels preparatory to following, he coolly detached his end of the bridge from the side, the consequence being that the whole structure disappeared into the abyss, leaving, as may be imagined, the people on the other side in much distress and wrath at seeing the trick which at once destroyed the fruits of their toil. For this offence I expected to see the perpetrator soundly punished; but I was quite mistaken. By some he was applauded, by others envied; and it was only those he had duped who expressed any anger towards him. Yet even these people seemed compelled to a secret admiration of his cleverness, as it was called. Also, as by this move he had put a considerable distance between himself and his dupes, their rage was not likely to do him any harm, and before they again met, it had time to cool down and the event to be forgotten.

It may seem as if this trick was without adequate motive, and done from sheer love of hoaxing. But this was by no means the case. For, as I have before hinted, it was a mark of great distinction among the Labourers to be able to keep

in the van; in fact, it was their only patent of nobility. They alone were held in estimation who managed to out-strip their fellows in the march. Consequently, it will be seen that our clever friend gained no inconsiderable advantage in the way of *prestige*; and as it was a too prevalent maxim with the Labourers that 'the end justified the means,' he was thought little the worse for securing the lead by thus taking in his neighbours.

Just as the summits of the mountains began to look less hopelessly distant than they had so long appeared, we were overtaken by a terrible and destructive tempest, called, in Labourland, the 'Panic Storm,' which rages with peculiar violence over the high ground we were now upon. Unfortunately, part of our company happened to be encamped, for the time, close to a deep mountain lake, probably caused by some bygone volcanic action, and called the Bankrupcian Pool. So fierce was the gust of the storm, that, into this lake, not a few of those nearest its edge were precipitated, and only one or two managed, by extraordinary exertions, to get out again. The rest were all drowned.

Already some of the more adventurous of the company had reached the summit of the mountains, although they risked their necks in the attempt, by climbing up the face of a huge pile of rocks, almost perpendicular, called the Speculation Precipices. On these a false step meant destruction, as the bones of many an unfortunate traveler, lying far below, who had made the attempt and failed, could testify.

At last, by one route and another, all who survived of the company gained the top of the mountains, and Fortuneland lay before us.

Here we sold off the various implements of labour, which we had used in forcing our passage, to traders who reimported them into Labourland. With the proceeds we purchased passports, small circular pieces of gold, without which we were assured it was not safe to travel in Fortuneland; but, possessed with which, every attention and courtesy would be shown us by the inhabitants.

CHAPTER II.

FORTUNELAND.

DULY provided, therefore, with the needful passports, we recommenced our journey by a good broad road, gently descending, into Fortuneland.

At this stage in our wanderings a curious circumstance was noticeable among the Labourers. Some of those who had been most bold and venturesome in the ascent of the mountains, who never lost their heads on the most uncertain and precarious footholds, were now quite unable to keep steadily on their feet; but were ever and again making false steps, and tumbling about in the most grotesque and undignified manner, much to the amusement of onlookers. I could only account for this behaviour by supposing that long-continued hard work

had displaced their centre of gravity; and, consequently, when the strain was taken off their muscles, they became 'top-heavy.' This top-heaviness was further exaggerated by the way in which many of the party carried their newly-acquired passports, that is, strung together in massive chains, and fastened round the top of the head. Of course, every one has noticed how a heavy weight, borne thus, makes the bearer stagger, especially when unaccustomed to the burden. The object, in carrying the passports in this manner, was that they might be seen by every one, and, thereby, to reap the full benefit we were promised in their possession. A useless precaution, however, for most of the people with whom we came in contact were not backward in asking for the production of the passports, when in any doubt of our having them. With some of our band, I noticed also, that the effect of placing so much metal near the brain produced that form of incipient insanity commonly called having the 'head turned' – which leads its victims to commit all sorts of foolish actions, and become imbued with all manner of absurd notions, without, however, being positively insane. Though, with others, I joined in the laugh at the foibles of these people, yet I confess that, at the same time, I felt really sorry to see so many formerly admirable and skilful men now becoming objects of ridicule, losing all the dignity which their immense determination and pluck had given them in the eyes of those who had seen them forcing a way over the Fortuna Mountains.

On reaching the county of Indolenceshire, one of the first the traveller passes through on entering Fortuneland by way of Labourland, we said good-bye to many of our comrades, who had decided to take up their abode there. And, assuredly, it seemed just the spot for those who had toiled so vigorously as my comrades to repose in. Vegetation was rich and plentiful; sweet scents perfumed the dreamy midsummer air; a luxuriant foliage offered its shade from a too glaring sun; and everything spoke of rest and peace for the dwellers in such a clime; while the passports secured, from obliging neighbours, all the needs and luxuries of life without exertion to the new residents.

But, I may as well say here, that this proved to be a fallacious idea of the place. It was, really, as unhealthy for strangers to live in as are those tropical countries of which travellers tell us, where even the very luxuriousness of nature, at first so inviting, contains that which is most injurious to the health of men not born to the soil. I heard afterwards that our settlers nearly all became ill with 'Ennuifer,' a plague which continually lurks about Indolenceshire, and, those who did not die of it, were obliged to leave the country-side before they could regain health.

We soon began to find that the usefulness of the passports had not been overstated. No one now thought of travelling on foot. We had only to show our passports and the people of the country provided us with the means of luxurious and easy conveyance, and, also, put before us the best viands obtainable

whenever we chose to call for them; so that our journey came to be like a royal progress, such was the deference and attention paid us.

An incident occurred which plainly showed us, however, how completely we were dependent on these little gold pieces, and not on our own merits (as at times our entertainers, in a spirit of flattery, half hinted) for this good treatment.

One of our company, who had always been somewhat reckless in his conduct – he was one of those who had risked his neck by climbing the Speculation Precipices – having been taken by one of our new friends – of whom we had always now a number dancing attendance – to look at a very deep opening in the earth, said to contain vast stores of gold, unfortunately dropped his passports into it while leaning over the edge to see what could be seen. As there was, as yet, no way of getting to the bottom of this chasm, it was, therefore, impossible to regain the lost treasure. His friend did his best to console the poor fellow, by telling him that, as soon as means were found to reach the bottom, he would not only get his original passports back again, but also have a share of the gold which, there was no doubt, lay hidden in the depths? But as at present nothing whatever was being done by any one to secure this, though it was much talked about – which indeed had been the cause of our companion's unfortunate visit – this was but cold comfort for him. The next occasion on which passports were asked for, our hero of the chasm had, of course, none to produce. On discovering this, the man who made the demand – although before he had been civility itself – now became very insolent and harsh, calling our friend robber, swindler, embezzler, and many other hard names, and finally had him locked up in jail.

In due course the prisoner was brought before a magistrate, charged with travelling in Fortuneland without passports, and, after having been severely lectured from the bench, was condemned to surrender all his property, and betake himself back to his own country again without delay.

Another of our party, whom I had noticed, on the Fortuna mountains, as having much difficulty in keeping up with the others, and who had only managed with some help to reach Fortuneland, was so foolish, in the exuberance of his feelings at the kind treatment he now received, as to make presents, to his new friends, of his passports until he had none left. He, in turn, soon found himself in trouble, and was brought before the authorities charged with the same offence as his former companion. As, however, he had no doubt, when his friends to whom he had given his passports heard of his trouble, they would come forward and return some to help him out of his predicament, he was not much alarmed. What was his surprise when, having told his story to the magistrate, saying to whom he had given his passports, and the magistrate, having summoned these people before him, they one and, all declared they knew nothing of the prisoner; some of them adding, that the sooner the latter was sent out of the country the

better, for, as they suspected from his pitching such stories, he must surely be a rogue and vagabond? Accordingly he was found guilty, and banished with all speed to his native land.

These incidents were, it need not be said, a warning to the rest of us not to be deceived by the apparent friendliness of the people among whom we lived into throwing away our passports as useless, as we might indeed very easily have been beguiled into doing, so eager appeared every one to receive and entertain us.

Those of our company who still kept to the road had, as their goal, the capital of Fortuneland, the great and gay city of Pleasureton.

Our arrival there was the signal for the final dispersion of the band which had so long held together.

As had been the case ever since we set foot in Fortuneland, we were received in the most kindly manner by the citizens – after, of course, due examination of our passports.

From merely separating, my companions soon became completely estranged, and would pass each other with the faintest nod of recognition, or with none at all. I found out that this was owing to the whole population of Pleasureton being divided into grades or castes. These, again, were very often subdivided into ‘sets’ and ‘cliques,’ and, except in matters which absolutely require the co-operation of all the inhabitants, such as the protection of the country and the affairs of government, it was held to be an offence of the gravest kind for members of one grade to have any intercourse with those of another. Hence, if it so happened that our late travellers chanced to get into different grades, all friendship with their old companions must cease, in accordance with the above-mentioned custom. It may be supposed that, however strongly this rule might have impressed itself on those born under it, to strangers it would have appeared too absurd, or at least unnecessary, if not also absolutely mischievous to the common weal of the country, to permit of their submitting to be guided by it. And so at first the Labourers thought; only by degrees did they fall in with its requirements. For a time, they, as the phrase went, ‘mixed with all classes of society.’ Gradually, however, the desire to stand well in the esteem of their neighbours made each strive to gain admission into what were considered the best grades. This, naturally, led to antagonism and envy, so that, before long, the Labourers began to draw the line more distinctly, and to observe the custom more strictly, than even those born and brought up under it.

Curiously enough, it was the women who, for the most part, had the arranging of the grades, and who now guided, up the social heights, those by whom they had formerly been conducted, through so much difficulty and danger, over the Fortuna Mountains. For not being now occupied by domestic work, having the passports to secure every service with, they spent the time, which the men devoted to amusements more congenial, in caballing and intriguing in order to

gain admission into the various grades, and in generally proving the truth of a well-known proverbial couplet?³

One unfortunate result of this 'caste' system in social affairs, was, that it produced, not seldom, much unhappiness among the young people of Pleasureton. Before arriving at an age to properly comprehend the importance of these social distinctions, they would sometimes fall in love with members of other grades. As marriage, under such circumstances, was rendered almost impossible by the heavy social punishment attendant on the breaking of the ordained regulations, few had the courage to follow their inclinations, and hence much misery resulted from blighted hopes and affections. Again, as there was in each grade only a small stock to select from, it had come to pass that marriages were not brought about solely by mutual affinities so much as by less natural means; people did not first fall in love and consummate their happiness by marriage, but the marriage was 'arranged,' as it was called, often by a third party, and the falling in love was left to follow or not as chance would have it. This was not the invariable mode of proceeding, but common enough nevertheless.

On one subject there was, I must confess, perfect unanimity of sentiment among all grades of citizens, viz., in their unflinching loyalty to King Fashion, the semi-autocratic ruler of Fortuneland. His decrees were never for a moment disputed, although very often of an extremely stupid and meaningless nature. For instance, during my stay at Pleasureton, he issued a mandate that no boots or shoes were to be worn of more than a certain specified size. As, unfortunately, this size was too small for about half the population, the consequence was that every second person you met walked lame, or unnaturally at least. Yet not a murmur against the King did I hear. Every one seemed to consider it a happiness to suffer in carrying out His Majesty's commands. Fortunately, his laws were not like those of the Medes and Persians,⁴ but the very reverse, for they were replaced or altered many times every year. Perhaps this was the way he managed to retain the allegiance of his subjects, who might always be hoping that the next change would be for the better? It was a question of great concern to the Labourers to discover some kinship with the people among whom they had come to live. Long, long ago, Fortuneland and Labourland had been united in one kingdom, under the famous Adamite dynasty. The conditions under which it was then governed had, in course of time, however, become impracticable. The upshot was that a great division of the empire took place; several kingdoms were set up, but these in turn all became merged into the two countries of which I am writing.

It was not, then, without reason that the Labourers hoped to discover some relationship with their new countrymen. A learned body of men devoted themselves to giving assistance in the search, and, considering the length of time through which the genealogies had to be traced, their efforts were remarkably

successful. The only case of failure I heard of, was that of an old gentleman of rather churlish disposition, who, when he went to these savants for information respecting his forefathers, having left his passports locked up at home, on being asked to produce them, according to the invariable custom before any business or pleasure can be proceeded with, declined to take the trouble to go back to his house for any such purpose. Whereupon the professors assured him that it was quite impossible to find out anything about his ancestors without an examination of the passports, and that, indeed, it depended on their being in proper order whether he had any ancestors at all? In vain the old gentleman argued against this, showing how absurd it was to connect two things which could not possibly have any bearing the one on the other. The genealogists remained unmoved in their determination not to proceed without the production of the passports. This so incensed the old gentleman that he departed in a huff, declaring the whole affair to be a 'piece of humbug.'

It was not long before I noticed a change come over the appearance of the Labourers. They began to lose the swarthy complexions and bright, healthy looks, by which they had at first been distinguishable from the citizens of Pleasureton. Formerly ill-health was almost unknown: now, sickness in various forms attacked them; and even those who did keep in good health were always imagining themselves the victims of some disease, and therefore were little less unhappy than those who really suffered.

One of the causes of this ill-health, and the consequent discovery that life was not so pleasant in Fortuneland as they had expected it to be, was, as I have mentioned before, that they had entirely neglected to acquire any knowledge of employments, or cultivated any tastes, which were foreign and unnecessary to the work to which they had formerly been devoted so assiduously and unceasingly. This having ended, they had nothing in the way of employment to fall back upon to pass the time, and keep their minds from an unhealthy vacuity. For although, on our first arrival at Pleasureton, the mere enjoyments of the place for a while kept them employed, yet these soon began to pall; and as most of the occupations which King Fashion permitted in his dominions required a training and education of which the Labourers were quite ignorant, and for the most part had become too old to set about learning, they were unable to find interest in the affairs which made life at Pleasureton endurable and moderately happy. As might be expected, the more vigorous-minded amongst the Labourers were not content to dawdle away their time and suffer in health by a prolonged stay in the city. They longed for an active life; and some of the younger men, with the addition of a few kindred spirits from Fortuneland, organised a party for a journey into Fameland.

Fameland is separated from Fortuneland by a wild tract of country called the Endeavour Wastes, and, beyond that again, by the Oblivion Ocean, a broad

and stormy sea so dangerous to navigate that hardly one attempt in a hundred to cross it is successful. This is owing to the terrible cyclones which, ever and again, sweep over it, and by which the stoutest vessels are sent to the bottom. These storms are known as the Fresh Events Gales. Also, this ocean abounds in shoals and sunken rocks, on which many unfortunate vessels perish. Of all the ships launched on this sea, only three have been known to ride out the Fresh Events Gales; these are the 'Genius,' the 'Benefactor,' and the 'Scourge.' But the difficulties of a journey to Fameland by no means begin with the Oblivion Ocean; for the Endeavour Wastes are peopled by wandering tribes, called the Criticonians, who mercilessly attack any travellers they come across, as much, apparently, from mere love of fighting and doing mischief as for the sake of plunder, because, after slaying, they are often known to leave the property of their victims untouched. From the descriptions of Fameland left on record by the few travellers who have been able to reach it, it would appear to be no very desirable place to get to after all, except to those fond of an adventurous life. It is infested by wild beasts of the most savage nature, which, so far, it has been found impossible to exterminate, and against which the inhabitants have to be continually on guard. Even when unable to inflict bodily harm, the continual howling in which some of these beasts indulge is enough to destroy all rest, and almost drive a man to madness, – indeed, the latter result is not unknown. One animal, in particular, is described as being beyond all others most obnoxious in this respect. It is called the 'Carper,' a kind of jackal, and, like most of that species, more to be detested for its bark than its bite. The climate is also very severe, owing to the great height of the country above the sea level. It is exposed to keen winds, which, while they harden the strong constitutions, destroy the weak. The death-rate among the infant population is exceedingly high, a sufficient proof that the conditions of life there are not too favourable.

Never having been to Fameland, I am unable to guarantee the accuracy of the above accounts of the country. Perhaps, for reasons of their own, the narrators may have drawn a somewhat too gloomy picture by putting in all the shades and leaving out the lights. Of one thing, however, I am certain, that the difficulties of the journey thither have not been overdrawn. If it is asked, what then could be sufficient inducement to make people brave so many dangers, and even so many chances of death, in order to reach Fameland? I can only reply by conjecturing that it is owing to the sane innate restlessness formerly shown by the Labourers, which had in time carried them into Fortuneland, and which can only be appeased by continual occupation, regardless, apparently, in great measure, of the whither and wherefore.

As I did not accompany the party which now set out on this journey, I am unable to relate the adventures they met with. But, indeed, it was not long before many of its members were back again in Fortuneland, disgusted with their

attempt, which had proved difficult beyond all calculation. Most of the poor fellows had severe wounds, received in combat with the Criticonians, who had not failed to hover round the party and harass them in every possible way all the time they remained on the Endeavour Wastes. Their passports, which in Fortuneland were so potent, and on which they had relied for advancing them in their adventure, had proved, after the first few days' journey, quite useless. True, one or two isolated bands of the Criticonians had allowed the travellers to pass unmolested on their showing the passports; but these intervals of rest were usually followed by still fiercer attacks from more irreconcilable foes before they had proceeded many miles forward.

Probably, another cause helped to defeat the attainment of their journey's end, viz., through their stay in Pleasureton having so destroyed their old energies that they failed to overcome difficulties, now, at which formerly they would have laughed. Those of the party who did persevere, and at last succeeded in fighting their way across the Endeavour Wastes, were, I afterwards heard, nearly all lost in attempting the voyage over the Oblivion Ocean.

Thus, by one circumstance or another, I became parted from nearly all my old travelling companions. Not caring to become a naturalised subject of King Fashion, I shortly bade farewell to Pleasureton and Fortuneland – not sorry to have visited them, although, it may be, disappointed of much of the happiness I had expected to find there.

CHAPTER III. NOMUNNIBURGH.

THIS time I set out alone. My intention was to visit Nomunniburgh, an independent town situated in Idealand, which, I had heard, was very curious and interesting, as it possessed laws and customs differing considerably from those of any other State. There was no difficulty about getting there. The means of locomotion in Idealand being, it is well known, of the best description. I had only to secure a seat in the Imagination Railway Company's express, and, quick as thought, I was at the gates of the city.

Here, however, a hindrance presented itself. Before I could be admitted into the city my passport was demanded. Being provided with an ample supply of those which had proved so useful in Fortuneland, I accordingly presented one now. Imagine my surprise when it was returned by the officer at the gate, who said that it was not in order, and would not gain admission into the city. Also, I noticed, that the man regarded me with evident suspicion, as if he thought I was a conspirator or vagabond come to disturb the peace – in fact, just acting the reverse of the way I had always been received when the passports were shown in Fortuneland.