

Captain Brassbound's Conversion

by

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ACT I

On the heights overlooking the harbor of Mogador, a seaport on the west coast of Morocco, the missionary, in the coolness of the late afternoon, is following the precept of Voltaire by cultivating his garden. He is an elderly Scotchman, spiritually a little weatherbeaten, as having to navigate his creed in strange waters crowded with other craft but still a convinced son of the Free Church and the North African Mission, with a faithful brown eye, and a peaceful soul. Physically a wiry small-knit man, well tanned, clean shaven, with delicate resolute features and a twinkle of mild humor. He wears the sun helmet and pagri, the neutral-tinted spectacles, and the white canvas Spanish sand shoes of the modern Scotch missionary: but instead of a cheap tourist's suit from Glasgow, a grey flannel shirt with white collar, a green sailor knot tie with a cheap pin in it, he wears a suit of clean white linen, acceptable in color, if not in cut, to the Moorish mind.

The view from the garden includes much Atlantic Ocean and a long stretch of sandy coast to the south, swept by the north east trade wind, and scantily nourishing a few stunted pepper trees, mangy palms, and tamarisks. The prospect ends, as far as the land is concerned, in little hills that come nearly to the sea: rudiments, these, of the Atlas Mountains. The missionary, having had daily opportunities of looking at this seascape for thirty years or so, pays no heed to it, being absorbed in trimming a huge red geranium bush, to English eyes unnaturally big, which, with a dusty smilax or two, is the sole product of his pet flower-bed. He is sitting to his work on a Moorish stool. In the middle of the garden there is a pleasant seat in the shade of a tamarisk tree. The house is in the south west corner of the garden, and the geranium bush in the north east corner.

At the garden-door of the house there appears presently a man who is clearly no barbarian, being in fact a less agreeable product peculiar to modern commercial civilization. His frame and flesh are those of an ill-nourished lad of seventeen; but his age is inscrutable: only the absence of any sign of grey in his mud colored hair suggests that he is at all events probably under forty, without prejudice to the possibility of his being under twenty. A Londoner would recognize him at once as an extreme but hardy specimen of the abortion produced by nature in a city slum. His utterance, affectedly pumped and hearty, and naturally vulgar and nasal, is ready and fluent: nature, a Board School education, and some kerbstone practice having made him a bit of an orator. His dialect, apart from its base nasal delivery, is not unlike that of smart London society in its tendency to replace diphthongs by

vowels (sometimes rather prettily) and to shuffle all the traditional vowel pronunciations. He pronounces ow as ah, and i as aw, using the ordinary ow for o, i for a, a for u, and e for a, with this reservation, that when any vowel is followed by an r he signifies its presence, not by pronouncing the r, which he never does under these circumstances, but by prolonging and modifying the vowel, sometimes even to the extreme degree of pronouncing it properly. As to his yol for l (a compendious delivery of the provincial eh-al), and other metropolitan refinements, amazing to all but cockneys, they cannot be indicated, save in the above imperfect manner, without the aid of a phonetic alphabet. He is dressed in somebody else's very second best as a coast-guardsman, and gives himself the airs of a stage tar with sufficient success to pass as a possible fish porter of bad character in casual employment during busy times at Billingsgate. His manner shows an earnest disposition to ingratiate himself with the missionary, probably for some dishonest purpose.

THE MAN. Awtenoon, Mr. Renkin. (The missionary sits up quickly, and turns, resigning himself dutifully to the interruption.) Yr honor's eolth.

RANKIN (reservedly). Good afternoon, Mr. Drinkwotter.

DRINKWATER. You're not best pleased to be hinterrupted in yr bit o gawdnin bow the lawk o me, gavner.

RANKIN. A missionary knows nothing of leks of that soart, or of disleks either, Mr. Drinkwotter. What can I do for ye?

DRINKWATER (heartily). Nathink, gavner. Awve brort noos fer yer.

RANKIN. Well, sit ye doon.

DRINKWATER. Aw thenk yr honor. (He sits down on the seat under the tree and composes himself for conversation.) Hever ear o Jadge Ellam?

RANKIN. Sir Howrrd Hallam?

DRINKWATER. Thet's im-enginest jadge in Hingland! --awlus gives the ket wen it's robbry with voylence, bless is awt. Aw sy nathink agin im: awm all fer lor mawseolf, AW em.

RANKIN. Well?

DRINKWATER. Hever ear of is sist-in-lor: Lidy Sisly Winefleet?

RANKIN. Do ye mean the celebrated Leddy--the traveller?

DRINKWATER. Yuss: should think aw doo. Walked acrost Harfricar with nathink but a little dawg, and wrowt abaht it in the Dily Mile (the Daily Mail, a popular London newspaper), she did.

RANKIN. Is she Sir Howrrd Hallam's sister-in-law?

DRINKWATER. Deeceased wawfe's sister: yuss: thet's wot SHE is.

RANKIN. Well, what about them?

DRINKWATER. Wot abaht them! Waw, they're EAH. Lannid aht of a steam yacht in Mogador awber not twenty minnits agow. Gorn to the British cornsl's. E'll send em orn to you: e ynt got naowheres to put em. Sor em awr (hire) a Harab an two Krooboys to kerry their laggige. Thort awd cam an teoll yer.

RANKIN. Thank you. It's verra kind of you, Mr. Drinkwotter.

DRINKWATER. Down't mention it, gavner. Lor bless yer, wawn't it you as converted me? Wot was aw wen aw cam eah but a pore lorst sinner? Down't aw ow y'a turn fer thet? Besawds, gavner, this Lidy Sisly Winefleet mawt wor't to tike a walk crost Morocker--a rawd inter the mahntns or sech lawk. Weoll, as you knaow, gavner, thet cawn't be done eah withaht a heskort.

RANKIN. It's impoossible: th' would oall b' murrdered. Morocco is not lek the rest of Africa.

DRINKWATER. No, gavner: these eah Moors ez their religion; an it mikes em dinegerous. Hever convert a Moor, gavner?

RANKIN (with a rueful smile). No.

DRINKWATER (solemnly). Nor never will, gavner.

RANKIN. I have been at work here for twenty-five years, Mr. Drinkwotter; and you are my first and only convert.

DRINKWATER. Down't seem naow good, do it, gavner?

RANKIN. I don't say that. I hope I have done some good. They come to me for medicine when they are ill; and they call me the Christian who is not a thief. THAT is something.

DRINKWATER. Their mawnds kennot rawse to Christiennity lawk hahrs ken, gavner: thet's ah it is. Weoll, ez haw was syin, if a heskort is wornted, there's maw friend and commawnder Kepn Brarsbahnd of the schooner Thenksgivin, an

is crew, includin mawseolf, will see the lidy an Jadge Ellam through henny little excursion in reason. Yr honor mawt mention it.

RANKIN. I will certainly not propose anything so dangerous as an excursion.

DRINKWATER (virtuously). Naow, gavner, nor would I awst you to. (Shaking his head.) Naow, naow: it IS dinegerous. But hall the more call for a heskort if they should ev it hin their mawnds to gow.

RANKIN. I hope they won't.

DRINKWATER. An sow aw do too, gavner.

RANKIN (pondering). 'Tis strange that they should come to Mogador, of all places; and to my house! I once met Sir Howrrd Hallam, years ago.

DRINKWATER (amazed). Naow! didger? Think o thet, gavner! Waw, sow aw did too. But it were a misunnerstedin, thet wors. Lef the court withaht a stine on maw kerrickter, aw did.

RANKIN (with some indignation). I hope you don't think I met Sir Howrrd in that way.

DRINKWATER. Mawt yeppn to the honestest, best meanin pusson, aw do assure yer, gavner.

RANKIN. I would have you to know that I met him privately, Mr. Drinkwotter. His brother was a dear friend of mine. Years ago. He went out to the West Indies.

DRINKWATER. The Wust Hindies! Jist acrost there, tather sawd thet howcean (pointing seaward)! Dear me! We cams hin with vennyity, an we deepawts in dawknness. Down't we, gavner?

RANKIN (pricking up his ears). Eh? Have you been reading that little book I gave you?

DRINKWATER. Aw hev, et odd tawms. Very camfitn, gavner. (He rises, apprehensive lest further catechism should find him unprepared.) Awll sy good awtenoon, gavner: you're busy hexpectin o Sr Ahrd an Lidy Sisly, ynt yer? (About to go.)

RANKIN (stopping him). No, stop: we're oalways ready for travellers here. I have something else to say--a question to ask you.

DRINKWATR (with a misgiving, which he masks by exaggerating his hearty sailor manner). An weollcome, yr honor.

RANKIN. Who is this Captain Brassbound?

DRINKWATER (guiltily). Kepn Brarsbahnd! E's-weoll, e's maw Kepn, gavner.

RANKIN. Yes. Well?

DRINKWATER (feebly). Kepn of the schooner Thenksgivin, gavner.

RANKIN (searchingly). Have ye ever haird of a bad character in these seas called Black Paquito?

DRINKWATER (with a sudden radiance of complete enlightenment). Aoh, nar aw tikes yer wiv me, yr honor. Nah sammun es bin a teolln you thet Kepn Brarsbahnd an Bleck Pakeetow is hawdentially the sime pussn. Ynt thet sow?

RANKIN. That is so. (Drinkwater slaps his knee triumphantly. The missionary proceeds determinedly) And the someone was a verra honest, straightforward man, as far as I could judge.

DRINKWATER (embracing the implication). Course a wors, gavner: Ev aw said a word agin him? Ev aw nah?

RANKIN. But is Captain Brassbound Black Paquito then?

DRINKWATER. Waw, it's the nime is blessed mather give im at er knee, bless is little awt! Ther ynt naow awm in it. She ware a Wust Hinjin--howver there agin, yer see (pointing seaward)-- leastwaws, naow she worn't: she were a Brazilian, aw think; an Pakeetow's Brazilian for a bloomin little perrit--awskin yr pawdn for the word. (Sentimentally) Lawk as a Hinglish lidy mawt call er little boy Birdie.

RANKIN (not quite convinced). But why BLACK Paquito?

DRINKWATER (artlessly). Waw, the bird in its netral stite bein green, an e evin bleck air, y' knaow--

RANKIN (cutting him short). I see. And now I will put ye another question. WHAT is Captain Brassbound, or Paquito, or whatever he calls himself?

DRINKWATER (officially). Brarsbahnd, gavner. Awlus calls isseolf Brarsbahnd.

RANKIN. Well. Brassbound, then. What is he?

DRINKWATER (fervently). You awsk me wot e is, gavner?

RANKIN (firmly). I do.

DRINKWATER (with rising enthusiasm). An shll aw teoll yer wot e is, yr honor?

RANKIN (not at all impressed). If ye will be so good, Mr. Drinkwotter.

DRINKWATER (with overwhelming conviction). Then awll teoll you, gavner, wot he is. Ee's a Paffick Genlmmn: thet's wot e is.

RANKIN (gravely). Mr. Drinkwotter: pairfection is an attribute, not of West Coast captains, but of thr Maaker. And there are gentlemen and gentlemen in the world, espaecially in these latitudes. Which sort of gentleman is he?

DRINKWATER. Hinglish genlman, gavner. Hinglish speakin; Hinglish fawther; West Hinjin plawnter; Hinglish true blue breed. (Reflectively) Tech o brahn from the mather, preps, she bein Brazilian.

RANKIN. Now on your faith as a Christian, Felix Drinkwotter, is Captain Brassbound a slaver or not?

DRINKWATER (surprised into his natural cockney pertness). Naow e ynt.

RANKIN. Are ye SURE?

DRINKWATER. Waw, a sliver is abaht the wanne thing in the wy of a genlman o fortn thet e YNT.

RANKIN. I've haired that expression "gentleman of fortune" before, Mr. Drinkwotter. It means pirate. Do ye know that?

DRINKWATER. Bless y'r awt, y' cawnt be a pawrit naradys. Waw, the aw seas is wuss pleest nor Piccadilly Suckus. If aw was to do orn thet there Hetlentic Howcean the things aw did as a bwoy in the Worterleoo Rowd, awd ev maw air cat afore aw could turn maw ed. Pawrit be blaowed!--awskink yr pawdn, gavner. Nah, jest to shaow you ah little thet there striteforard man y' mide mention on knawed wot e was atorkin abaht: oo would you spowse was the marster to wich Kepn Brarsbahnd served apprentice, as yr mawt sy?

RANKIN. I don't know.

DRINKWATER. Gawdn, gavner, Gawdn. Gawdn o Kawtoom--stetcher stends in Trifawlgr Square to this dy. Trined Bleck Pakeetow in smawshin hap the slive riders, e did. Promist Gawdn e wouldn't never smaggle slives nor gin, an (with suppressed aggravation) WOWN'T, gavner, not if we gows dahn on ahr bloomin bended knees to im to do it.

RANKIN (drily). And DO ye go down on your bended knees to him to do it?

DRINKWATER (somewhat abashed). Some of huz is hanconverted men, gavner; an they sy: You smaggles wanne thing, Kepn; waw not hanather?

RANKIN. We've come to it at last. I thought so. Captain Brassbound is a smuggler.

DRINKWATER. Weoll, waw not? Waw not, gavner? Ahrs is a Free Trade nition. It gows agin us as Hinglishmen to see these bloomin furriners settin ap their Castoms Ahses and spheres o hinfluence and sich lawk hall owver Arfricar. Daown't Harfricar belong as much to huz as to them? thet's wot we sy. Ennywys, there ynt naow awm in ahr business. All we daz is heskort, tourist HOR

commercial. Cook's hexcursions to the Hatlas Mahntns: thet's hall it is. Waw, it's spreadin civlawzytion, it is. Ynt it nah?

RANKIN. You think Captain Brassbound's crew sufficiently equipped for that, do you?

DRINKWATER. Hee-quipped! Haw should think sow. Lawtnin rawfles, twelve shots in the meggezine! Oo's to storp us?

RANKIN. The most dangerous chieftain in these parts, the Sheikh Sidi el Assif, has a new American machine pistol which fires ten bullets without loadin; and his rifle has sixteen shots in the magazine.

DRINKWATER (indignantly). Yuss; an the people that sells sich things into the ends o' them eathen bleck niggers calls theirseolves Christians! It's a crool shime, sow it is.

RANKIN. If a man has the heart to pull the trigger, it matters little what color his hand is, Mr. Drinkwotter. Have ye anything else to say to me this afternoon?

DRINKWATER (rising). Nathink, gavner, cept to wishyer the bust o yolth, and a many cornverts. Awtenoon, gavner.

RANKIN. Good afternoon to ye, Mr. Drinkwotter.

As Drinkwater turns to go, a Moorish porter comes from the house with two Krooboys.

THE PORTER (at the door, addressing Rankin). Bikouros (Moroccan for Epicurus, a general Moorish name for the missionaries, who are supposed by the Moors to have chosen their calling through a love of luxurious idleness): I have brought to your house a Christian dog and his woman.

DRINKWATER. There's eathen menners fer yer! Calls Sr Ahrd Ellam an Lidy Winefleet a Christian dorg and is woman! If ee ed you in the dorck et the Centl Crimnal, you'd fawnd aht oo was the dorg and oo was is marster, pretty quick, you would.

RANKIN. Have you broat their boxes?

THE PORTER. By Allah, two camel loads!

RANKIN. Have you been paid?

THE PORTER. Only one miserable dollar, Bikouros. I have brought them to your house. They will pay you. Give me something for bringing gold to your door.

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