

I

*The Author's Preface,—which the reader, if in
a great hurry, or if it be his practice to read
against time, can skip.*

I HAVE often debated in my mind whether I should give to the world, or for ever lock up within the secrecy of my own breast, the history of the adventures which it has been my lot in life to experience. The importance of any single individual in society, especially one so isolated as myself, is so little, that it can scarcely be supposed that the community at large can be affected by his fortunes, either good or evil, or interested in any way in his fate. Yet it sometimes happens that circumstances conspire to elevate the humblest person from obscurity, and to give the whole world an interest in his affairs; and that man may safely consider himself of some value in his generation, whose history is of a character to instruct the ignorant and inexperienced. Such a man I consider myself to be; and the more I reflect upon my past life, the more I am convinced it contains a lesson which may be studied with profit; while, at the same time, if I am not greatly mistaken, the lesson will be found neither dry nor repulsive, but here and there, on the contrary, quite diverting. The psychologist (I hate big words, but one cannot do without them) and the metaphysician will discover in my relation some new subjects for reflection; and so perhaps will the doctor of medicine and the physiologist: but while I leave these learned gentlemen to discuss what may appear most wonderful in my revelations, I am most anxious that the common reader may weigh the value of what is, at least in appearance, more natural, simple, and comprehensible.

It will be perceived that many of the following adventures

are of a truly extraordinary character. There are some men—and to such my story will seem incredible enough—who pride themselves on believing nothing that they do not know, and who endeavour, very absurdly, to restrict the objects of belief to those that admit of personal cognizance. There are others again who boast the same maxim, but have a more liberal understanding of the subjects of knowledge, and permit themselves to believe many things which are susceptible of satisfactory proof, but not of direct cognition. Now I must declare beforehand, in order to avoid all trouble, that, from the very nature of the life I have led, consisting of the strangest transitions and vicissitudes, it is impossible I should have laid up proofs to satisfy any one of the truth of my relation who is disposed to be incredulous. If any one should say, “I doubt,” all the answer I could make would be, “Doubt, and be hanged,”—not, however, meaning any offence to anybody; though it is natural one should be displeased at having his veracity questioned. I write for the world at large, which is neither philosophic nor sceptical; and the world will believe me: otherwise it is a less sensible world than I have all along supposed it to be.

2

The birth and family of Sheppard Lee, with some account of his temper and complexion of mind.

I WAS BORN somewhere towards the close of the last century,—but, the register-leaf having been torn from the family Bible, and no one remaining who can give me information on the point, I am not certain as to the exact year,—in the State of New-Jersey, in one of the oldest counties that border upon the Delaware river. My father was a farmer in very good circum-

stances, respectable in his degree, but perhaps more famous for the excellent sausages he used to manufacture for the Philadelphia market, than for any quality of mind or body that can distinguish one man from his fellows. Taking the hint from his success in this article of produce, he gradually converted his whole estate into a market-farm, raising fine fruits and vegetables, and such other articles as are most in demand in a city; in which enterprise he succeeded beyond his highest expectations, and bade fair to be, as in the end he became, a rich man. The only obstacle to a speedy accumulation of riches was a disproportionate increase in the agents of consumption,—his children multiplying on his hands almost as fast as his acres, until he could count eleven in all; a number that filled him at one time with consternation. He used to declare no apple could be expected to ripen on a farm where there were eleven children; and as for watermelons and sugar-corn, it was folly to think of raising them longer. But fate sent my father relief sooner and more effectually than he either expected or desired: nine of the eleven being removed by death in a space of time short of six years. Three (two of whom were twin sisters) were translated in the natural way, falling victims to an epidemic, and were buried in the same grave. A fourth was soon after killed by falling out of an apple-tree. My eldest brother, then a boy of fourteen years old, upon some freak, ran away from home (for he was of a wild, madcap turn), and, getting into an oyster-boat, made a voyage into the bay, where he was lost; for, having fallen overboard, and not being able to swim, a clumsy fellow, who thought to save him in that way, clutched him round the neck with a pair of oyster-tongs, and thereby strangled him. Two others were drowned in a mill-pond, where they were scraping for snapping-turtles. Another, who was the wag of the family, was killed by attempting to ride a pig, which, running in great alarm through a broken fence into the orchard, dashed his brains out against a white-oak rail; and the ninth died of a sort

of hysterical affection, caused by this unlucky exploit of his brother; for he could not cease laughing at it, notwithstanding its melancholy termination, and he died of the fit within twenty-four hours.

Thus, in a few years, there remained but two of all the eleven children,—to wit, my oldest sister Prudence and myself. My mother (from whom I had my Christian name Sheppard, that being her maiden name) died several years before this last catastrophe, her mind having been affected, and indeed distracted, by so many mournful losses occurring in such rapid succession. She fell into a deep melancholy, and died insane.

Being one of the youngest children, I grieved but little for the loss of my brothers and sisters; nor was I able to appreciate the advantage which, in a worldly point of view, their death must prove to me. My father, however, perceived the difference; for, having now so few to look after and be chargeable to him, he could with great propriety consider himself a rich man. He immediately resolved, as I was now his only son, that I should have a good education; and it was not his fault if, in this particular, I fell short of his expectations. I was sent to good schools, and, in course of time, was removed to the college at Nassau Hall, in Princeton, where I remained during three years; that is, until my father's decease; when I yielded to the natural indolence of my temper, and left the college, or rather (for I had formed no resolution on the subject) procrastinated my return from day to day, until it was too late to return.

My natural disposition was placid and easy,—I believe I may say sluggish. I was not wanting in parts, but had as little energy or activity of mind as ever fell to the share of a Jerseyman; and how my father ever came to believe I should make a figure in the world, I cannot conceive, unless it was because he knew he had a fortune to leave me, and saw me safely lodged in a college. It is very certain he encouraged a strong belief that I should one day be a great man; and, I fancy, it was for this rea-

son he showed himself so favourable to me in his will. He left me the bulk of his property, bestowing upon my sister, who had recently married, little beyond a farm which he had purchased in a neighbouring county, but which was a valuable one, and quite satisfied her husband.

But my father was a better judge of sausages than of human character. Besides being deficient, as I humbly confess, in all those qualities that are necessary to the formation of a great man, I had not the slightest desire to be one. Ambition was a passion that never afflicted my mind; and I was so indifferent to the game of greatness which was playing around me, that, I seriously declare, there was a President of the United States elected to office, and turned out again, after having served his regular term, without my knowing any thing about it. I had not even the desire, so common to young men who find themselves in possession of a fortune, to launch out into elegant expenses, to dash about the country with fine horses, servants, and clothes, and to play the spendthrift in cities. On the contrary, I no sooner found myself arrived at my majority, which was a few months after my father's death, than I sat down very quietly on the farm, resolved to take the world easily; which I supposed I might easily do. I had some idea of continuing to conduct the estate, as my father had done before me; but it was a very vague one; and having made one or two efforts to bear myself like a man of business, I soon found the effort was too tiresome for one of my disposition; and I accordingly hired an overseer to manage the property for me.