

# New Readings in Biography

By Richard Garnett

## I.—TIMON OF ATHENS

No, it was not true that Timon was dead, and buried on the sea-shore. So the first party discovered that hastened to his cave at the tidings, thinking to seize his treasure, and had their heads broken for their pains. But the second party fared better; for these were robbers, captained by Alcibiades, who had taken to the road, as many a man of spirit has done before and since. They took Timon's gold, and left him bound in his chair. But on the way home the lesser thieves mysteriously disappeared, and the gold became the sole property of Alcibiades. As it is written, "The tools to him that can handle them."

Timon sat many hours in an uncomfortable position, and though, in a general way, he abhorred the face of man, he was not displeased when a gentleman of bland appearance entered the cavern, and made him a low obeisance. And perceiving that Timon was bound, the bland man exclaimed with horror, and severed his bonds ere one could say Themistocles. And in an instant the cavern was filled with Athenian senators.

"Hail," they cried, "to Timon the munificent! Hail to Timon the compassionate! Hail to Timon the lover of his kind!"

"I am none of these things," said Timon. "I am Timon the misanthrope."

"This must be my Lord's wit and playfulness," said the bland man, "for how else should the Senate and the people have passed a decree, indited by myself, ordering an altar to be raised to Timon the Benefactor, and appointing him chief archon? But come, hand over thy treasure, that thy installation may take effect with due observance."

"I have been deprived of my treasure," said Timon.

But the ambassadors gave him no credit until they had searched every chink and crevice in the cavern, and dug up all the earth round the entrance. Then they regarded each other with blank consternation.

"Let us leave him as we found him," said one.

"Let us hang him up," said another.

"Let us sell him into captivity," said a third.

"Nay, friends," said the bland gentleman, "such confession of error would impeach our credit as statesmen. Moreover, should the people learn that Timon has lost his money, they will naturally conclude that we have taken it. Let us, therefore, keep this misfortune from their knowledge, and trust for relief to the chapter of accidents, as usual in State affairs."

They therefore robed Timon in a dress of honour, and conducted him to Athens, where half the inhabitants were awaiting him. Two triumphal arches spanned the principal street, and on one was inscribed "Timon the Benefactor," and on the other "Timon the Friend of Humanity." And all along, far as the eye could reach, stood those whom his bounty, as was stated, had rescued from perdition, the poor he had relieved, the sick he had medicined, the orphans he had fathered, the poets and painters he had patronised, all lauding and thanking him, and soliciting a continuance of his liberality. And the rabble cried "Largesse, largesse!" and horsemen galloped forth, casting among them nuts enveloped in silver-leaf and apples and comfits and trinkets and brass farthings in incredible quantities. At which the people murmured somewhat, and spoke

amiss respecting Timon and the senators who escorted him, and the bland gentleman strove to keep Timon between himself and the populace. While Timon was pondering what the end of these things should be, his mob encountered another cheering for Alcibiades, and playing pitch and toss with drachmas and didrachmas and tetradrachmas, yea, even with staters and darics.

“Long live Alcibiades,” cried Timon’s followers, as they attacked Alcibiades’s supporters to get their share.

“Long live Timon,” cried Alcibiades’s party, as they defended themselves.

Timon and Alcibiades extricated themselves from the scuffle, and walked away arm in arm.

“My dear friend,” said Timon, “how inexpressibly beholden I am to you for taking the burden of my wealth upon yourself! There is nothing I would not do to evince my gratitude.”

“Nothing?” queried Alcibiades.

“Nothing,” persisted Timon.

“Then,” said Alcibiades, “I will thank thee to relieve me of Timandra, who is as tired of me as I am of her.”

Timon winced horribly, but his word was his bond, and Timandra accompanied him to his cavern, where at first she suffered much inconvenience from the roughness of the accommodation. But Timon, though a misanthrope, was not a brute; and when in process of time Timandra’s health required special care, rugs and pillows were provided for her, and also for Timon; for he saw that he could no longer pass for a churl if he made his wife more comfortable than himself. And, though he counted gold as dross, yet was he not dissatisfied that Timandra had saved the gold he had given her formerly against a rainy day. And when a child was born, Timon was at his wits’ end, and blessed the old woman who came to nurse it. And she admonished him of his duty to the Gods, which meant sacrifice, which meant merry-making. And the child grew, and craved food and drink, and Timon possessed himself of three acres and a cow. And not being able to doubt his child’s affection for him, he came to believe in Timandra’s also. And when the tax-gatherer oppressed his neighbours, he pleaded their cause, which was also his own, in the courts of Athens, and gained it by the interest of Alcibiades. And his neighbours made him demarch, and he feasted them. And Apemantus came to deride him, and Timon bore with him; but he was impertinent to Timandra, and Timon beat him.

And in fine, Timon became very like any other Attic country gentleman, save that he always maintained that a young man did well to be a misanthrope until he got a loving and sensible wife, which, as he observed, could but seldom happen. And the Gods looked down upon him with complacency, and deferred the ruin of Athens until he should be no more.

## II.—NAPOLEON’S SANGAREE

Napoleon Buonaparte sat in his garden at St. Helena, in the shadow of a fig-tree. Before him stood a little table, and upon the table stood a glass of sangaree. The day was hot and drowsy; the sea boomed monotonously on the rocks; the broad fig-leaves stirred not; great flies buzzed heavily in the sultry air. Napoleon wore a loose linen coat and a broad-brimmed planter’s hat, and looked as red as the sangaree, but nowise as comfortable.

“To think,” he said aloud, “that I should end my life here, with nothing to sweeten my destiny but this lump of sugar!”

And he dropped it into the sangaree, and little ripples and beads broke out on the surface of the liquid.

“Thou should’st have followed me,” said a voice.

“Me,” said another.

And a steam from the sangaree rise high over Napoleon’s head, and from it shaped themselves two beautiful female figures. One was fair and very youthful, with a Phrygian cap on her head, and eager eyes beneath it, and a slender spear in her hand. The other was somewhat older, and graver, and darker, with serious eyes; and she carried a sword, and wore a helmet, from underneath which her rich brown tresses escaped over her vesture of light steel armour.

“I am Liberty,” said the first.

“I am Loyalty,” said the second.

And Napoleon laid his hand in that of the first spirit, and instantly saw himself as he had been in the days of his youthful victories, only beset with a multitude of people who were offering him a crown, and cheering loudly. But he thrust it aside, and they cheered ten times more, and fell in each other’s arms, and wept and kissed each other. And troops of young maidens robed in white danced before him, strewing his way with flowers. And the debts of the debtor were paid, and the prisor-ers were released from captivity. And the forty Academicians came bringing Napoleon the prize of virtue. And the Abbé Sieyès stood up, and offered Napoleon his choice of seventeen constitutions; and Napoleon chose the worst. And he came to sit with five hundred other men, mostly advocates. And when he said “Yea,” they said “Nay”; and when he said “white,” they said “black.” And they suffered him to do neither good nor evil, and when he went to war they commanded his army for him, until he was smitten with a great slaughter. And the enemy entered the country, and bread was scarce and wine dear; and the people cursed Napoleon, and Liberty vanished from before him. But he roamed on, ever looking for her, and at length he found her lying dead in the public way, all gashed and bleeding, and trampled with the feet of men and horses, and the wheel of a tumbril was over her neck. And Napoleon, under compulsion of the mob, ascended the tumbril; and Abbé Sieyès and Bishop Talleyrand rode at his side, administering spiritual consolation. Thus they came within sight of the guillotine, whereon stood M. de Robespierre in his sky-blue coat, and his jaw bound up in a bloody cloth, bowing and smiling, nevertheless, and beckoning Napoleon to ascend to him. Napoleon had never feared the face of man; but when he saw M. de Robespierre great dread fell upon him, and he leapt out of the tumbril, and fled amain, passing amid the people as it were mid withered leaves, until he came where Loyalty stood awaiting him.

She took his hand in hers, and, lo! another great host of people proffering him a crown, save one little old man, who alone of them all wore his hair in a queue with powder.

“See,” said the little old man, “that thou takest not what doth not belong to thee.”

“To whom belongeth it then?” asked Napoleon, “for I am a plain soldier, and have no skill in politics.”

“To Louis the Disesteemed,” said the little old man, “for he is a great-great-nephew of the Princess of Schwoffingen, whose ancestors reigned here at the flood.”

“Where dwells Louis the Disesteemed?” asked Napoleon.

“In England,” said the little old man.

Napoleon therefore repaired to England, and sought for Louis the Disesteemed. But none could direct him, save that it behoved him to seek in the obscurest places. And one day, as he was passing through a mean street, he heard a voice of lamentation, and perceived a man whose coat and shirt were rent and dirty; but not so his pantaloons, for he had none.

“Who art thou, thou pantaloonless one?” asked he, “and wherefore makest thou this lamentation?”

“I am Louis the Esteemed, King of France and Navarre,” replied the distrousered personage, “and I lament for my pantaloons, which I have been enforced to pawn, inasmuch as the broker would advance nothing upon my coat or my shirt.”

And Napoleon went upon his knees and divested himself of his own nether garments, and arrayed the king therein, to the great diversion of those who stood about.

“Thou hast done wickedly,” said the king when he heard who Napoleon was, “in that thou hast presumed to fight battles and win victories without any commission from me. Go, nevertheless, and lose an arm, a leg, and an eye in my service, then shall thy offence be forgiven thee.”

And Napoleon raised a great army, and gained a great battle for the king, and lost an arm. And he gained another greater battle, and lost a leg. And he gained the greatest battle of all; and the king sat on the throne of his ancestors, and was called Louis the Victorious: but Napoleon had lost an eye. And he came into the king’s presence, bearing his eye, his arm, and his leg.

“Thou art pardoned,” said the king, “and I will even confer a singular honour upon thee. Thou shalt defray the expense of my coronation, which shall be the most splendid ever seen in France.”

So Napoleon lost all his substance, and no man pitied him. But after certain days the keeper of the royal wardrobe rushed into the king’s presence, crying “Treason! treason! O Majesty, whence these republican and revolutionary pantaloons?”

“They are those I deigned to receive from the rebel Buonaparte,” said the king. “It were meet to return them. Where abides he now?”

“Saving your Majesty’s presence,” they said, “he lieth upon a certain dunghill.”

“If this be so,” said the king, “life can be no gratification to him, and it were humane to relieve him of it. Moreover, he is a dangerous man. Go, therefore, and strangle him with his own pantaloons. Yet, let a monument be raised to him, and engrave upon it, ‘Here lies Napoleon Buonaparte, whom Louis the Victorious raised from the dunghill.’”

They went accordingly; but behold! Napoleon already lay dead upon the dunghill. And this was told unto the king.

“He hath ever been envious of my glory,” said the king, “let him therefore be buried underneath.”

And it was so. And after no long space the king also died, and slept with his fathers. But when there was again a revolution in France, the people cast his bones out of the royal sepulchre, and laid Napoleon’s there instead. And the dunghill complained grievously that it should be disturbed for so slight a cause.

And Napoleon withdrew his hand from the hand of Loyalty, saying, “Pish!” And his eyes opened, and he heard the booming of the sea, and the buzzing of the flies, and felt the heat of the sun, and saw that the sugar he had dropped into his sangaree had not yet reached the bottom of the tumbler.

### III.—CONCERNING DANIEL DEFOE

Daniel Defoe, at the invitation of the judge, came forth from the garret wherein he abode, and rode in a cart unto the Royal Exchange, wherein he ascended the pillory, to the end that his ears might be nailed thereunto. And much people stood before him, some few pelting, some mocking, but the most part cheering or weeping, for they knew him for a friend to the poor, and especially those men who were called Dissenters. And a certain person in black stood by him, invisible to the people, but well seen of Daniel, who knew him for one whose life he had himself written.

And the man in black reasoned with Daniel, and said, "Thou seest this multitude of people, but which of them shall deliver thee out of my hand? Nay, but let thy white be black, and thy black white, and I myself will deliver thee, and make thee rich, and heal thy hurts, save the holes in thy ears, that I may know thee for mine own." But Daniel gave no heed to him. So the Devil departed, having great wrath, and entered into a certain smug-faced man standing by.

And now the crowd before Daniel was greatly diminished, and consisted mainly of his enemies, for his friends had gone away to drown their sorrow. And the smug-faced man into whom Satan had entered came forth from among them, and said unto him, "O Daniel, inasmuch as I am a Dissenter I am greatly beholden to thee; but inasmuch as I am an honest tradesman I have somewhat against thee, for thou hast written concerning short weights and measures. And a man's shop is more to him than his country or his religion. Wherefore I must needs be avenged of thee. Yet shalt thou own that the tender mercies of the good man are piteous, and that even in his wrath he thinketh upon compassion."

And he picked up a great stone from the ground, and wrapped it in a piece of paper, saying, "Lest peradventure it hurt him overmuch." And the stone was very rough and sharp, and the paper was very thin. And he hurled it with all his might at the middle of Daniel's forehead. and the blood spouted forth. And Daniel cried aloud, and called upon the name of the Devil. And in an instant the pillory and the people were gone, and he found himself in the Prime Minister's cabinet, healed of all his hurts, except the holes in his ears. And the Minister was so like the Devil that you could not tell the difference. And he said, "Against what wilt thou write first, Daniel?"

"Dissenters," said Daniel.

And he wrote a pamphlet, and such as read it took fire-brands, and visited the Dissenters in their habitations. And many Dissenters were put into prison, and others fined and spoiled of their goods. And he wrote other pamphlets, and each was cleverer and wickeder than the last. And whatsoever Daniel had of old declared to be white, lo! it was black; and what he had said was black, behold! it was white. And he throve and prospered exceedingly, and became a commissioner for public-houses and hackney-coaches and the imposing of oaths and the levying of custom, and all other such things as one does by deputy. And he mended the holes in his ears.

But the time came when Daniel must be judged, and he went before the Lord. And all the court was full of Dissenters, and the Devil was there also. And the Dissenters testified many and grievous things against Daniel.

"Daniel," said the Lord, "what answerest thou?"

"Nothing, Lord," said Daniel. "Only I would that the Dissenter who threw that stone at me should receive due and condign punishment, adequate to his misdeed."

"That," said the Devil, "is impossible."

"Thou sayest well, Satan," said the Lord, "and therefore shall Daniel go free. For if anything can excuse the apostasy of the noble, it is the ingratitude of the base."

So the Devil went to his own place, looking very small. And Daniel found himself in the same garret whence he had gone forth to the pillory; and before him were bread and cheese, and a pen and ink, and paper. And he dipped the pen into the ink, and wrote *Robinson Crusoe*.

#### IV.—CORNELIUS THE FERRYMAN

Fourscore years ago there was a good ferryman named Cornelius, who rowed people between New York and Brooklyn. He had neither wife nor child, nor any one to think of except himself.

It was, therefore, his custom, when he had earned enough in a day for his own wants, to put the rest aside, and bestow it upon sick or blind or maimed persons, lest they should come to the workhouse. And the sick and the blind and the maimed gathered around him, and waited by the water's edge, until Cornelius's day's work should be over.

This went on until one of the little sooty imps who are always in mischief came to hear of it, and told the principal devil in charge of the United States, whose name is Politicianus.

"Dear me," said the Devil, "this will never do. I will see to it immediately."

And he went off to Cornelius, and caught him in the act of giving two dimes to a blind beggar.

"How foolish you are!" he said; "what waste of money is this! If you saved it up, you would by-and-by be able to build an hospital for all the beggars in New York."

"It would be a long time before there was enough," objected Cornelius.

"Not at all," said the Devil, "if you let me invest your money for you." And he showed Cornelius the plan of a most splendid hospital, and across the front of it was inscribed in letters of gold, *Cornelius Diabolodorus*. And Cornelius was persuaded, and that evening he gave nothing to the poor. And the poor had come to think that Cornelius's money was their own, and abused him as though he had robbed them. And Cornelius drove them away: and his heart was hardened against them from that day forth.

But the Devil kept his promise to Cornelius, and put him up to all the good things in Wall Street, and he soon had enough to build ten hospitals. But the more he had to build with, the less he wanted to build. And by-and-by the Devil called upon him, and found him contemplating two pictures. One of them showed the finest hospital you can imagine, full of neat, clean rooms, in one of which sat Cornelius himself, wearing a dress with a number and badge, and sipping arrowroot. The other showed fine houses, and opera-boxes, and fast-trotting horses, and dry champagne, and ladies who dance in ballets, and paintings by the great masters. Cornelius thrust the pictures away, and the Devil did not ask to see them, nor was it needful that he should, for he had painted them himself.

"O dear Mr. Devil," said Cornelius, "I am so glad that you have called, for I wanted to speak to you. It strikes me that there is a great defect in the plan which you have been so good as to draw for me."

"What is that?" asked the Devil.

"There is no place for black men," said Cornelius. "And you know white men will never let them come into the same hospital."

And the Devil, to do him justice, talked very reasonably to Cornelius, and represented to him that there were very few black men in New York, and that these had very vigorous constitutions. But Cornelius was inflamed with enthusiasm, and frantic with philanthropy, and he vowed that he would not give a cent to an hospital that had not a wing for black men as big as all the rest of the building. And the Devil had to take his plan back, and come again in a year and a day. And when he did come back, Cornelius asked him if he did not think it would be a most excellent thing if all the Irishmen in New York could be shut up in an hospital or elsewhere; and he could not deny it. So he had to take his plan back again. And next year it was the turn of the Chinese, and then of the Red Indians, and then of the dogs and cats. And then Cornelius thought that he ought to provide room for all the people who had been ruined by his speculations, and the Devil thought so too, but doubted whether Cornelius would be able to afford it.

And at last Cornelius said:

“Methinks I have been very foolish in wishing to build an hospital at all while I am living. Surely it would be better that I should enjoy my money myself during my life, and leave the residue for the lawyers to divide after my death.”

“You are quite right,” said the Devil; “that is exactly what I should do if I were you.”

So Cornelius put the plans behind a shelf in his counting-house, and the mice ate them. And he went on prospering and growing rich, until the Devil became envious of him, and insisted on changing places with him. So Cornelius went below, and the Devil came and dwelt in New York, where he still is.