

## Literature, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines

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## 'TIS USELESS TRYING.

You will never succeed—'tis useless trying' was the answer we received one day when talking of something quite important to you, dear reader, but very near our own heart. The voice was one we always listen to, and not seldom follow, but this time its discouraging arguments were unheeded. We did try, and we did succeed.

The fact set us moralising on the good or evil tendency of these three words—'tis useless trying,' and the conclusion we come to was this, that for one vain idea dispelled, one wild project overturned by their prudent influence, these chilling words have rung the knell of a hundred brilliant and life-sustaining hopes, and paralysed into apathy a thousand active and ardent minds, who might otherwise have elevated themselves, and helped the world on in its progress. What would America have been if that strong-hearted Columbus had been discouraged by sneers and arguments about the uselessness of an attempt to discover a new world? Or where would have been Newton's stupendous theory, if at the commencement of his researches, some meddling friend at his ear had whispered, 'don't try, you will be sure to fail?' In aid of the 'Never try' doctrine comes vanity, with its potent arguments that no attempt at all is better than a failure. We deny the fact in toto. Should a man fail in a project too high for him, he at last becomes acquainted with the extent of his own powers; he loses that inflated self-exaltation which is the greatest bane to real merit; and in finding his own level he may yet do well. And better, far better, that all the pretenders in the world should sink back into deserved obscurity, than that one spark of real talent should be extinguished by the real check—'tis useless trying.' Now having prosed enough, let us enlighten our arguments by a story.

Between ten and twenty years ago—the precise date is immaterial—there was in the city of New York a barber's apprentice, a young boy named Reuben Vandrest. His Dutch lineage was shown by his surname, which, in course of years and generations, had been corrupted from Van der Dest to Vandrest, while for his scriptural Christian name he was indebted to a worthy Quaker, his maternal grandfather who had come over with William Penn. These names were, in truth, all the boy owed to his progenitors, as from his cradle he had been an orphan, cast on the charity of the wide world. But the excellent sect to which Reuben's mother had belonged, is one of the few who never casts the lamb from their bosom, and the orphan child was not deserted. The friends took care of him, and when he was able to earn a livelihood, one of their number received him as an apprentice. Such was the short and simple story of the barber's boy.

Without entering on metaphysics, every human being has some inner life which the world outside knows nothing of. Thus from his earliest childhood the passion of Reuben Vandrest had been music. He would follow the itinerant minstrels of the city through one street after another, often thus losing his meals, his rest everything except his schooling, which precious thing he was too wise to throw away even for music. He made friendships with blind pipers, Italian hurdygurdyists, and, above all, with wandering fiddlers; for, with an intuitive perception, the violin—the prince of stringed instruments—was his chief favourite. From all and each of these wandering musicians Reuben was intent on gaining something—they were won by his childish manners and earnest admiration—for love of praise is the same in a blind fiddler as in an opera singer—and by degrees Reuben not only listened but learned to play. No instrument came amiss to him; but his sole private property was an old fife; with this simplest of all orchestral varieties the poor barber's boy used to creep to his garret, and there strive, with his acute ear and retentive memory, to make out the tunes he had heard in the streets, or invent others.

But the grand era in the boy's life was coming. One day as he stood wistfully looking at a violin which he held in his arms fondly and lingeringly, prior to returning it to his right owner, a poor street musician, the idea of its construction first entered into Reuben's mind. He had been accustomed to regard a violin as a mysterious thing—a self-creating sound-producing thing, and never once had he considered of what it was made, or how. Now he began to peer into its mysteries, and to find out that it was only wood and gut after all. He questioned his friend the fiddler, but the man had scraped away during a lifetime without once casting a thought on the mechanism of his instrument. True he could replace a broken string, and at times even manufacture a bridge with his penknife, but that was all. When Reuben inquisitively wanted to learn how violins were made, the fiddler shook his head, and said he did not know.

'Do you think I could make one?' pursued the anxious boy.

A burst of laughter, so cuttingly derisive, that Reuben's face grew crimson, was the only answer. 'Why you little simpleton, cried the fiddler when his mirth had subsided, 'surely you'll not be so silly as to try? You could as soon build a house,

'But violins must be made by somebody.' 'Yes by people who know all about it; not by a lad like you. Take my advice and don't try.'

Reuben said no more, but he could not get the idea from his mind. Every violin that he saw he begged to look at; he examined the varieties of construction, the sort of wood used, the thickness and fashion of the strings; and after weeks of consideration, he at last determined to try and make one for himself. During the long light summer nights he worked hour after hour in his garret or on the roof of the house; his natural mechanical skill aided by patience and ardour; and with the few tools which he borrowed from the good-natured carpenters who had given him the wood, he succeeded in forming the body of the violin. But here a long cessation took place in Reuben's toil, for he had not even the few pence necessary to purchase strings; and the bow, which he could not make, it was utterly out of his power to buy. He sat looking in despair at the half-finished instrument—a body without a soul—and even his life could not console him.

But one day a kind-hearted customer noticed the slight pale-looking boy who had arranged his locks so gently and carefully, and Reuben became the glad recipient of a dollar. He flew to buy catgut and an old bow, and with trembling hands strung his instrument. Who can describe the important moment? Leverrier's crowning calculation for the new planet, Lord Rosse's first peep through his giant telescope, are little compared to poor Reuben's first attempt to draw sounds from his violin. The sound came, string after string was tuned; the bow was applied, and the violin had a soul! Feeble and thin the notes were, but still they were musical tones, and the boy hugged his self-made treasure to his beating heart, actually sobbing with joy.

He played tune after tune; he never noticed that evening darkened into night, he forgot his supper; he forgot too—what but for his musical enthusiasm would long since have come into his mind—that though the childish life might pass master in the house of his master, a violin never would. The good Quaker, one of the strictest of his sect, thought music was useless, sinful, heathenish; and a fiddler in his eyes was equal with a thief. Therefore who can picture Reuben's consternation when his garret door opened, and his master stood before him? Reuben bore all Ephraim's wrath in silence, only he took care to keep his darling violin safe from the storm, by pressing it closely in his arms.

'Thou hast been neglecting thy work, and stealing fiddles,' cried the angry man.

'I have not neglected my work,' timidly answered the boy; 'and I have not stolen the violin—indeed I have not.'

'Where didst thou get it?'

'I made it myself.'

Old Ephraim looked surprised. All the music in the world was nothing to him. But he had a fancy for mechanical employments, and the idea of making a violin struck him as ingenious. He examined it and became less angry. 'Will it play,' asked he.

Reuben delighted began one of his most touching airs; but his master stopped him. 'That will do,' said he; 'I only want to see if it sounds—all tunes are the same. And I suppose thou wilt turn musician.'

Reuben hung his head and said nothing.

'Well that thou canst never do, so I advise thee not to try. Forget the fiddle and be a good barber. However, I will say no more only thou must play out of doors the next time.'

But all the discouragements of the old Quaker could not repress Reuben's love for music. He cut, and curled and shaved and then flew away to his violin. From the roof of the house his music went forth; and in this most original sonnet-room, with the open sky above him, and the pert city sparrows, now used to his melody, hopping by his side, did the boy gradually acquire the first secrets of his art. It is needless to enumerate the contrivances he resorted to for instruction—how he wandered through the streets with his violin at night, to gain a few cents wherewith to purchase old music; and how he gradually acquired skill, so as to be admitted into a wandering band.

One night when this primitive orchestra was engaged for a ball at a private house in the city, the first violin mysteriously disappeared. In this dilemma young Reuben found courage to offer himself as a substitute. It was a daring thing. The other musicians first laughed at him, then heard him play the part which no one else could take, and finally suffered him to try! For the first time in his life the barber's boy witnessed the glare of a ball. It seemed to him a fairy scene: he was dazzled, bewildered, excited, and in his enthusiasm he played excellently. The night wore away; the dancers seemed never weary; not so to the aching fingers of the musicians. Reuben especially, to whom the excitement seemed new, grew more and more exhausted, and at last, just as he finished playing a waltz, fell fainting from his chair. Most of the gay couples passed on—it was only a poor musician; but one young girl, in whom the compassionate and simple nature of a child had not been swept away by the formalities of young ladyhood, held a glass of water to the boy's lips.

'Cora Dacres bringing to life a fainting fiddler,' said a tittering voice. 'Oh what a nice story when we go back to school!'

The girl turned round indignantly, saying, 'Cora Dacres is never ashamed of doing what is right. Are you better now?' she added gently to poor Reuben, who had opened his eyes.

The boy recovered and she appeared again amongst the dancers; but many a time did the auburn curls, and soft, brown, sympathising eyes of the little school girl float before the vision of Reuben Vandrest: and the young musician often caught himself repeating to his sole confidant—his violin—the pretty name he had heard on his waking, and dimly recognised as hers—Cora Dacres.

Long before he was twenty one, Reuben had entirely devoted himself to the musical profession. The turning point in his career was given by a curious incident. One moonlight night as he was playing on the roof as usual, he saw a head peep out from the uppermost window of the opposite house. This head was drawn in when he ceased playing, and again put forward as soon as he recommenced. A natural feeling of gratified vanity prevented the young man from yielding to his first shy impulse of retiring; and besides, sympathy in anything relating to his art, was so new to Reuben, that it gave him pleasure to be attentively listened to even by an unknown neighbor over the way. He threw all his soul into his violin, and played until midnight.

Next day while at his duties in his master's shop, the apprentice was sent for to the house opposite. Reuben went, bearing the insignia of his lowly trade, but instead of a patient customer, he saw a gentleman, who only smiled at his array of brushes.

'I did not send for you to act as barber,' said the stranger in English, which was strongly tinged with a foreign accent, 'but to speak to you about the violin playing which I heard last night. Am I rightly informed that the player was yourself?'

'It was, sir,' answered Reuben, trembling with eagerness.

'Who taught you?'

'I myself.'

'Then you love music?'

'With my whole heart and soul!' cried the young man enthusiastically.

The stranger skillfully drew from Reuben the little history of himself and his violin, and talked to him long and earnestly. 'You have a true feeling for that noble art, to which I, too, belong,' he said. 'You may have many difficulties to encounter; but never be discouraged—you will surmount them all. You have had many hindrances, but listen, and I will tell you what befell me at your age. I once came a poor boy like you, to the greatest capital in Europe, my heart full of music, but utterly without means. My only wealth was my violin. I left it one day in my poor chamber, while I went out to buy a loaf with my last coin. When I came back, my violin was gone! It had been stolen. May God forgive me for the crime I contemplated in my mad despair! I rushed to the river; I plunged in; but I was saved from the death I sought, and saved to live for better things. My friend,' continued the musician after a long silence, during which his face was hidden by his hands, 'in all the trials of your career remember this, and take warning.'

'I will—I will,' cried Reuben, much moved.

'And now, after having told you this terrible secret in my life, it is as well that I should not reveal my name; and besides it could do you no good, as I set out for Europe to-morrow. But should you ever be in Paris, take this address, leave this writing and you will hear of me.'

The gentleman wrote some lines in a foreign language, which Reuben could not make out, though among his musical acquaintance he had gained a little knowledge of both French and Italian. He then gave Vandrest the address, and bade him adieu. The young man long pondered over this adventure, and it was the final point which made him relinquish a trade so unpleasing to him for the practice of his beloved art.

It is a mistake to suppose that the profession of music is an easy, careless life, to which any one may turn who has a distaste for more solid pursuits. In no calling is intellectual activity and arduous study more imperatively required. He who would attain to moderate eminence in it, must devote years of daily patient toil to dry and uninteresting branches of study. A poet may be one by nature, it is utterly impossible that a musician can be great without as deep science as ever puzzled a mathematical brain.—He must work—work—every inch of his way; must dig the foundation, and enrich the soil, before he can form his garden and plant his flowers. Thus did our young ex-barber of New York; he studied by science what he had before learned through his natural genius, and rose slowly and gradually in his profession. Sometimes his slight and ordinary appearance, which made him look more boyish than he really was—his quaint old world name—and above all, a simplicity and Quaker-like peculiarity in his dress and manner, aroused the ridicule of his companions, who followed music more for show than through real genius and love of the art. But the story of his early perseverance always disarmed them; and it was a common saying with reference to young Vandrest, that he who could make a violin, would surely learn to play it.

By degrees the young violinist rose into note, and became received into society where he could hardly have dreamed that he should ever set his foot. But it is a happy peculiarity in the domestic manners of the new world, that real talent ever finds its way, and takes its own rank in society. Thus many a rich citizen was pleased to welcome to his house Mr Vandrest, the young and unassuming musician, whose gentle manners, and acknowledged talent was equally prized. The barber's

apprentice of New York was utterly forgotten, or only thought of as a proof of how many a man's fortune lies in his own hands, if he will only try.

In one of those elegant reunions which were established when worthy Brother Jonathan was first beginning to show his soul and mind—when Bryant's songs, and Allison's pictures, and Channing's lectures, first gave evidence of transatlantic genius—Vandrest again heard the name which had never utterly gone from his memory through all its vicissitudes—Cora Dacres. He turned round, and saw the altered likeness of the girl who had held the water to his lips on the night of the ball. She had grown into womanly beauty, but he remembered the face still. She had not the faintest memory of him—how could it be so? Light and darkness were not more different than the pleasing, intellectual, gentlemanlike man who was introduced to her, and the pale, angular ill-clad boy whom she had pitied and aided.

Sometimes Vandrest thought he would remind her of the circumstance; but then a vague feeling of sensitiveness and shame, not entirely the name of those poverty-stricken days, prevented him. He went home, and again his old violin might have heard breathed over it the name of Cora Dacres; but this time not in boyish enthusiasm for whatever was pleasing and beautiful, but in the first strong all-absorbing love of manhood, awakened in a nature which was everyway calculated to receive and retain that sentiment in its highest, purest, and most enduring character.

Reuben Vandrest (hate him not, dear reader, for having so unheroic a name: I will engage that, if Cora loved him she thought it most beautiful; and so would you, if any one dear to you bore the same): well Reuben Vandrest, who hitherto cared for nothing on earth except his violin, soon learned to regard Miss Dacres with enthusiastic attachment of an earnest and upright nature; for with all the allurements of a musical career, Reuben continued as simple-minded and guileless in character as the primitive sect from which he sprang. And Cora was worthy to inspire the love for such a man: whether she returned it or not, Reuben did not consider—he was too utterly absorbed in new delight of loving, and of loving her, to think of asking himself the question. He visited at her house, and became a favourite with her father—a would-be amateur, who took pleasure in filling his drawing-rooms with musicians, and treating them as costly and not disagreeable playthings.

But at last Mr Dacres was roused from his apathy by the evident and close friendship of young Vandrest. Though he liked the violinist well enough, the hint of Reuben marrying Cora sounded ill in the ears of the prudent man, especially when given by one of those odious good-natured friends with whom the world abounds. The result was a conversation between himself and Vandrest, in which, utterly bewildered and despairing, poor Reuben declared his hidden and treasured love, first with the shrinking timidity of a man who sees his inmost heart rudely laid bare, and then with the firmness given by a consciousness that there is in that heart nothing for which an honest man need blush.

'I am sorry for you, Mr. Vandrest,' said the blunt yet not ill-meaning citizen. 'But it is impossible that you can ever hope for Cora's hand.'

'Why impossible?' said the young man, recovering all his just pride and self-possession. 'I am not rich but have an unspotted name, and the world is all before me. Do you object to my profession?'

'By no means; a musician is an honourable man, just as much so as a storekeeper.'

At any other time the very complimentary comparison would have made Reuben smile but now he only answered, while the colour deepened in his cheek, 'Is it because of my early life? My father was of good family; but, it may be you would blush to remember that your daughter's husband once served in a barber's shop?'

'My dear sir,' said Mr Dacres, 'you forget we are Americans, and talent and wealth are our only aristocracy. The first you undoubtedly possess, but without the second, you cannot marry Cora; and there is no chance of your ever becoming a rich man.'

'Will you let me try?' eagerly cried Vandrest.

'It would be of no use; you would not succeed.'

'I could—I could!' exclaimed the young man impetuously. 'Only let me hope. I would try anything to win Cora!'

And in this earnestness of love did Reuben pursue his almost hopeless way. He had pledged his word that he would not speak of his love to Cora, that he would not try to win hers—this her father imperatively demanded; but Mr Dacres also promised that he would leave his daughter free, nor urge her to accept any other husband during the three years of absence that he required of Reuben Vandrest.

They parted—Reuben and Cora—with the outward seeming of ordinary acquaintance; but was it likely that the love so deep and absorbed as that of the young musician should have been entirely suppressed by him, and unappreciated by her who was its object? They parted without any open confession; but did not Cora's heart follow the wanderer as he sailed towards Europe?—did she not call up his image, and repeat his unmusical name, as though it contained a world of melody in itself? and did she not feel as certain in her heart of hearts that he loved her, as if he had told her so a hundred times?