

Literature, &c.

The British Magazines.

From Chamber's Edinburgh Journal.
IT IS POSSIBLE.

PRIVY-COUNSELLOR STRYK had perpetually upon his tongue three words that had become to him a kind of proverb: 'It is possible.' It often happened that he used them in the reports made by him to the minister in full council; and when this occurred, a smile, such as is usually given to our neighbours' weaknesses, played upon the lips of his colleagues.

Privy-Counsellor Stryk, nevertheless, was held in high consideration. The different rulers of the electorate, in their turn, showed their appreciation of his varied information and talent by always employing him. Every one did justice to his ability and tact—nay, perhaps a little overrated them; and Stryk, open, upright, and conscientious, was looked upon as a deep and subtle politician, with a penetration and farsightedness little short of the gift of prophecy: And all this reputation he owed solely to the three words—'It is possible.'

Often, however, they escaped him almost involuntarily, yet when they had once escaped him, he thought himself bound to follow up and maintain their consequences. Thus this saying exercised the greatest influence upon his opinions, his habits, and all the events of his life. Who could believe it of a man so learned and enlightened? And yet it was not only possible, but true.

He was himself fully aware of this influence, and yet not only did he remain constant to his three words, but he was seriously anxious to impress his only son with the same conviction of their omnipotence. The young man, who, like most other young people, thought himself much more clear-sighted than his old father, considered this as nothing more than a very singular mania.

'This little oddity, my dear father,' he said, 'may be excused in you, but my adopting it would be considered a mere piece of affectation, a ridiculous copying of you.'

'It is possible, my dear Frederick,' said the privy-counsellor, 'but you may let laugh those that will when you have in these three words the secret of prudence, repose, security, and happiness. Think not that this maxim became habitual to me by mere chance. I adopted it upon sad experience that led to mature reflection. I owe to it all that I have, all that I am. The misfortunes of my youth, and despair, made me first lay hold of it; and once laid hold of, I raised myself by its help, and reconquered fortune. The little patrimony bequeathed to me by my parents only sufficed to enable me to subsist while studying at the university; and yet, because I carefully avoided debt, I passed for having a comfortable competence, and was welcomed into society that would have disdained me, had people known that I was all the while content with bread and milk as my whole dietary. I well received, and generally esteemed, yet I had but one bosom friend amongst the men, and but one lady had ever engaged more than a passing thought; and pretension to her, the daughter of a general officer, was hopeless, and would have remained so, had not fortune smiled upon me most unexpectedly. I was made chamberlain to the dowager-duchess, with a good pension; and shortly after, a cousin died in Batavia, and left me a considerable property. Unwilling, in my first hours as an accepted lover, to leave my Philippina, I gave full powers to my friend Schneemuller, the friend of my heart, my second self, and despatched him to Amsterdam.'

'You never before mentioned this friend to me,' said Frederick.

'It is possible,' answered the privy-counsellor; 'and I will soon tell you why. Alarmed for his health by his long delay and total silence, I sacrificed love to friendship, and tearing myself from my Philippina, while she, overcome with grief was yet fainting in her mother's arms, I set out for Amsterdam. Suffice it to say, I discovered that my best friend had deceived me, and was by this time in America with the whole of my cousin's bequest: it is impossible! I cried; 'it is impossible!' But soon I was obliged to say, 'it is possible!' And I flew back to Philippina, to soothe the feelings wounded by the treachery of my friend; and again I was compelled to say 'It is possible!' when the first greeting on my arrival at home was the announcement that three days after the letter conveying the tidings of my loss, my betrothed had become the bride of another. I spare you my agonies. Henceforth I believed everything possible but good to me; and no matter how improbable any suggestion seemed, I replied, 'It is possible!' In these three words was embodied my whole system of practical philosophy. I kept continually repeating them, till at length they became a comfort in sorrow—an antidote to despair. When I said to myself, 'Canst thou ever again be happy in this world?'—my lips formed the words 'It is possible;' and the event justified the almost mechanical hope. I adopted the maxim, and no longer lived in an ideal world peopled either by angels or devils—the youthful heart seldom knows any medium. Henceforth good fortune had no power to intoxicate, for I thought of its instability, and said, 'It is possible;' and misfortune could neither surprise nor wholly depress me, for I was prepared for anything. Men in general act in the ordinary, as well as the more important concerns of life, upon a sudden impulse, for which they can hardly

account, and of which they are almost unconscious. Take my advice, my son, adopt my maxim, were it only to give you the power of self-possession, and make you ready either to do or to suffer. Repeat it till you have made it your own. This at least is possible.'

The favourite phrase of our privy-counsellor sometimes proved unpropitious; but he was not easily dejected. For instance, one day when an elector presided in person in council, some debate arose upon the late French Revolution of '93; and as the many changes were mentioned in the people who once so idolised their kings, the elector exclaimed, the French are the most abominable race on the face of the earth: no other nation could act as they do. Can you fancy my subjects ever being seized with such madness—ever abjuring their allegiance to their prince? What is your opinion, Stryk?

The counsellor, just then in a fit of absence, had only half heard what the elector said, and shrugging his shoulders, said mechanically, 'It is possible.'

The elector turned pale. 'What do you mean?' he exclaimed. 'Do you think that a day can ever dawn when my subjects will rejoice in my downfall?'

'It is possible,' again said the counsellor; but this time he said it advisedly. 'Nothing is more uncertain than popular opinion, for a people is made up of men, who have each an individual interest, which they prefer to that of the prince. Any new order of things begets new hopes. Whatever may be the degree of love, and however well deserved, borne by the people to your highness, I would not swear that that they would not, in new circumstances, forget the benefits of their prince, and that we might not see the electoral arms broken; to give place to the tree of liberty.'

The elector turned his back upon him, and Stryk was disgraced; while every one cried, 'What a fool with his 'It is possible!'

A few years after, the victorious French passed the Rhine; the elector, with all his court, took to flight. As he departed, he saw the tree of liberty planted, and the armorial bearings of the electorate broken publicly by the people.

Stryk being looked upon as a victim to the despotism so lately overthrown, was soon installed in the office which his talents so well fitted him to fill; and by his diplomatic ability, contributed not a little to the establishment of the new order of things, while, notwithstanding his natural ardour of character, he never suffered himself to be carried away by political enthusiasm. But attaching himself to no party, he became an object of suspicion to all. The Jacobins treated him as a concealed royalist, and the royalists as a disguised Jacobin. Still he cared not what name they gave him, and quietly went on with his official duties.

One day a commissary of the republic arrived in the new department, and was received with the greatest honours. All were crowding around him; all eager to pay their court; and some amongst them ventured to throw out insinuations against Stryk, and the lukewarmness of his republican opinions. The commissary made no remark at the time, but one day, at a public dinner, at which many toasts went round in honor of universal liberty, the rights of nations, and the triumphs of the republic, he suddenly turned to Stryk, saying, 'I marvel that Kings yet dare to resist us, for they do but thus accelerate their own ruin. The revolution will make the circuit of the globe! What hope is left to them? Do they dream of ever again bending the great nation, and bringing back the Bourbons? Fools that they are! all Europe must perish first! What think you, Citizen Stryk, can a rational man admit that monarchy can ever be re-established in France?'

'It is possible,' said Stryk. 'How possible?' cried the commissary in a voice of thunder. 'He who doubts of liberty has never loved it. It grieves me to see a public functionary holding such opinions. Can you state any grounds for them, citizen?'

'It is very possible,' answered Stryk calmly. 'Free Athens first became accustomed to Pericles, then to a king of Macedon. Rome had at first its Triumvirate, then a Cæsar, and at length a Nero. England had its Commonwealth, bowed before a Cromwell, and recalled its king.'

'What are you at with your Romans, your Athenians, and your English? I hope you do not dream of comparing them with the French? But I forgive your false views: you have not the honour of being born a Frenchman.'

The forgiveness was not, however, a complete one, for Stryk lost his office, and underwent some persecution, as an utterer of language not sufficiently respectful to the republic.

Some years afterwards, Bonaparte became First Consul, then consul for ten years, next consul for life, and finally emperor and king. Stryk was immediately reinstated in his office, as being ostensibly one of the moderate party. He enjoyed more favour and credit than ever; his predictions had been again accomplished, and he passed for a consummate politician.

Napoleon changed the face of the world, and disposed of crowns at pleasure. Stryk became prime minister to one of these new made kings, and obtained titles and honours. No such thing as a republican was to be found; all crawled in the dust before the new master. It was felt as a stigma to have ever imbibed republican opinions; and every one claimed credit for having been the only one carried along by the current, and eschewed the shame of having ever been anything but a royalist.

'I see no shame in it,' said Stryk: 'an

epidemic raged, and you caught the infection. It may appear again, and you may be again attacked. It is possible.'

'What!' was the indignant reply; 'do you deem us so weak as to be for ever changing?'

'I never forget,' answered Stryk, 'the sultan of Egypt mentioned by Addison. This sultan was sceptical enough to laugh at an aerial voyage said to be performed by Mohammed, in which numberless transactions took place in so small a space of time, that Mohammed, at his return, found his bed still warm, and took up an earthen pitcher, thrown down as he was carried away, before the water was all spilled. A dervise, who had the reputation of working miracles, undertook to cure him of his incredibility; and in presence of his whole court, ordered him to plunge his head into the tub of water and draw it up again. The sultan obeyed, and plunged his head into the water; but on the instant he did so, found himself at the foot of a mountain on the seashore. Conceive his surprise! He execrated the treachery of the dervise; but he was obliged to submit to his fate. Some woodcutters near directed him to the next town, where, after several adventures, he married a woman of great beauty and fortune, with whom he lived so many years, as to have fourteen children. At her death, he was reduced to get his livelihood by plying as a porter. He now heartily repented the scepticism of which he believed all these misfortunes to be the punishment. In a fit of devotion he threw off his clothes for the ablution usual with the Mohammedans before prayer, and no sooner raised his head after the first plunge, than he found himself before the tub, and heard from his whole court that he had never stirred, and that all the events that had so troubled him had been crowded into the short space of time necessary to dip his head into the water and take it out again. Gentlemen,' continued the old privy-counsellor, 'yours is a parallel case with that of the sultan of Egypt. If you had been told before the Revolution what you would do during its progress, you would never have believed it, and now that you have drawn your head out of the tub, you remember nothing of what you have thought, done, and experienced in the days of miracles. If the Bourbons and the emigrants ever enter France, they will look upon the history of the years that have elapsed since 1789 as a delusion, and will find themselves, like the sultan of Egypt, standing by the side of the tub, regarding their years of suffering as a deceitful dream.'

There was a general laugh. 'Well,' said some, 'you may not be so much out in your conjecture if they did return, but who ever dreams of the poor Bourbons being restored? This would indeed belong to an age of miracles.'

'Hem! It is possible,' said Stryk. 'But the Russian campaign was contemplated, and one of Napoleon's generals asked our friend's opinion as to its successful issue. The privy-counsellor declined answering, and the general, surprised at this reserve, said, 'For my own part, I expect to celebrate the New Year in St Petersburg, but you seem to apprehend an unhappy issue?'

Stryk, as usual, shrugged his shoulders and answered 'It is possible.'

This answer was not forgotten, and his name was soon erased from the treasury list. When the allied powers invaded France, and Napoleon's creations were crumbling into ruins on every side, every one said, 'Stryk is a prophet, and has had the fate of all seers.'

His disgrace under the government of the usurper, as the fallen emperor was now termed, was sufficient claim upon the favour of the new legitimate monarch. But it was not long before his anxiety brought a fresh storm upon his head. The monarch giving him one day to understand that his adhesion to every successive government tended to make his loyalty somewhat suspicious, the old man reminded him that his sincerity in his own moderate political views was proved by the fact, that he had the misfortune to displease only when each government pressed on too enthusiastically, and were not satisfied with his discharge of duty to his country, whoever might be the master. 'The state,' he added, 'has always need of the services of its citizens, and it is their duty to serve it in every circumstance.'

'The state,' said the prince, 'is the sovereign. Who dares to separate his person from the state is a rebel in heart.'

This was his last disgrace, but he was still faithful to the maxim that had taught him moderation, and at once salutary distrust and hopefulness. When the improbability of further political changes was pressed upon him, now that the Bourbons were again firmly seated, he answered, 'It is possible. They want to go back to the Inquisition, to the holy alliances. The cause of truth, of civil and religious liberty, is attacked; the freedom of the press is assailed. Thus was it in the days that produced a Franklin and a Washington—the days of the Bastille, thus was it in the time of Fouché and the Rogues. The same causes produce the same effects. It is possible.'

But his maxim taught moderation to no one but himself, and the three days of 1830 proved its truth, and revolutionised the king of France into king of the French.

The oracle appearing no longer necessary to a ruler who was in his own person the very type of the vicissitudes of human life, it ceased. Stryk died. But who that has lived to see 1848 can decline to admit, of anything or everything, 'It is possible?'

From the Christian Treasury.
THE RAGGED BOY—THE RICH MERCHANT.

'Be not weary in well doing, for in due time you shall reap.'

BUSINESS of importance called me at one time to the great city, the London of America. I had spent the morning in viewing the great buildings—the City Hall, the great Custom House, Trinity Church, with its tall spire, then nearly completed, and many other public places so interesting to the stranger, and being much wearied with my morning's excursion, I sought my friend's house as a place of rest. While sitting at the dinner table, a servant handed me a note that moment left at the door by some unknown person, which read as follows:—

DEAR SIR,

Having seen your name announced as one of the speakers at the Sunday School meeting, it would give me a great pleasure to see you at No. — Pearl Street, this afternoon at 3 o'clock. Do not disappoint me.

Your friend,

GEORGE S——

I hastened to comply with the invitation at the appointed hour. Crowding my way through the multitude of people thronging the busy streets, I arrived at last at the number mentioned in the note. I inquired of the clerk for the name, and to my surprise he introduced me to the proprietor of a large wholesale dry goods store; one of the first establishments in the city.

'Sir,' said the merchant, 'I believe I am not mistaken, this is Mr. M——, the poor student of Mr. W——, once my teacher in the Sabbath School of W——.'

'I was a poor student and a teacher in the school you mentioned; but this cannot be little George S——, the white haired boy I owned as my scholar?'

'The same,' answered the merchant, grasping my hand with the greatest joy, and a tear trickled down his cheek. 'The same, only grown to manhood. You will pardon my hasty note and this abrupt meeting; but, sir, I thought that we should never, never meet again, and learning that you were in the city, I was anxious to offer you the hospitalities of my home during your stay, if it is agreeable and consistent with other engagements: please order your trunk to be taken to my house. My house is yours while you remain. I cannot be denied.'

Indeed, I could not deny him. With joy I complied with his generous offer. And at his house I found a home indeed. Here it may be proper to give you a history of our first acquaintance.

While preparing for the ministry, it was the custom to seek out poor children for the Sabbath School. In one of my rambles, I found a little boy in the street, poorly clad, with his little bare feet in the cold snow, no hat, and in the most wretched condition. I called him to me, and proposed the following questions—

'What is your name, my little fellow?'

'My name is George S——.'

'Where do you live?'

'In the woods, by the old mill.'

'What is your father's name?'

'I have no father (and burst into tears); my father was brought home dead about a year ago. He was found frozen to death on the road to our house.'

'And your mother—is she living?'

'Yes; but she is poor, and goes out to work.'

'Have you any brothers and sisters?'

'Yes; one brother and one sister.'

'Are they at home?'

'Yes, sir; they are little ones, and cannot go out now.'

'Well, my little fellow, you want a pair of shoes and some clothes.'

'Yes, sir, I do; but I want to get something for mother to eat first.'

This told the story. I asked no more questions, but immediately set about the work to be done—George was soon in my wagon with me, and food enough for his mother's present necessities. On reaching their house, I found a lonely woman with two dear little ones, and nothing to eat. George jumped out of the wagon, and ran into the house, saying, 'O mother, mother! you will not cry any more—the gentleman has got us enough to eat for a whole month.' I found by inquiry that the father had been a drunkard, and died in a drunken fit, and left the poor widow to struggle on alone.

George was then about ten years of age, was the only child large enough to be of any help to his mother, and a good boy he was to that poor mother.

I left the house, and the next day sent some good woman to clothe them, and got George to attend school the next Sabbath. George was at the school, with new shoes, a hat, and clothes—a happy, cheerful boy.

For one year he was my scholar, then I left the place, and never saw him again till I met him, as I have told you, a merchant in the great city. God had prospered him, giving him friends and influence, and from an errand boy in the store had raised him to be the owner. He was then twenty-four years old, with a wife, and one little boy a year old.

Now, go back with me to New York, and you may think that you see me seated at the fireside, while he is relating the details of God with him since I left him a little boy in the Sabbath school of W——.

Soon after I left the place, he was fortunate enough to meet a man from New York