



EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON

ALICE OR THE MYSTERIES

BOOK IV

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BOOK IV.

"A virtuous woman is man's greatest pride."--SIMONIDES.

CHAPTER I.

ABROAD uneasy, nor content at home.

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And Wisdom shows the ill without the cure.

HAMMOND: Elegies.

TWO or three days after the interview between Lord Vargrave and Maltravers, the solitude of Burleigh was relieved by the arrival of Mr. Cleveland. The good old gentleman, when free from attacks of the gout, which were now somewhat more frequent than formerly, was the same cheerful and intelligent person as ever. Amiable, urbane, accomplished, and benevolent, there was just enough worldliness in Cleveland's nature to make his views sensible as far as they went, but to bound their scope. Everything he said was so rational; and yet, to an imaginative person, his conversation was unsatisfactory, and his philosophy somewhat chilling.

"I cannot say how pleased and surprised I am at your care of the fine old place," said he to Maltravers, as, leaning on his cane and his ci-devant pupil's arm, he loitered observantly through the grounds; "I see everywhere the presence of the Master."

And certainly the praise was deserved. The gardens were now in order, the dilapidated fences were repaired, the weeds no longer encumbered the walks. Nature was just assisted and relieved by Art, without being oppressed by too officious a service from her handmaid. In the house itself some suitable and appropriate repairs and decorations--with such articles of furniture as combined modern comfort with the ancient and picturesque shapes of a former fashion--had redeemed the mansion from all appearance of dreariness and neglect; while still was left to its quaint

halls and chambers the character which belonged to their architecture and associations. It was surprising how much a little exercise of simple taste had effected.

"I am glad you approve what I have done," said Maltravers. "I know not how it was, but the desolation of the place when I returned to it reproached me. We contract friendship with places as with human beings, and fancy they have claims upon us; at least, that is my weakness."

"And an amiable one it is, too,--I share it. As for me, I look upon Temple Grove as a fond husband upon a fair wife. I am always anxious to adorn it, and as proud of its beauty as if it could understand and thank me for my partial admiration. When I leave you I intend going to Paris, for the purpose of attending a sale of the pictures and effects of M. de ----. These auctions are to me what a jeweller's shop is to a lover; but then, Ernest, I am an old bachelor."

"And I, too, am an Arcadian," said Maltravers, with a smile.

"Ah, but you are not too old for repentance. Burleigh now requires nothing but a mistress."

"Perhaps it may soon receive that addition. I am yet undecided whether I shall sell it."

"Sell it! sell Burleigh!--the last memorial of your mother's ancestry! the classic retreat of the graceful Digbys! Sell Burleigh!"

"I had almost resolved to do so when I came hither; then I forswore the intention: now again I sometimes sorrowfully return to the idea."

"And in Heaven's name, why?"

"My old restlessness returns. Busy myself as I will here, I find the range of action monotonous and confined. I began too soon to draw around me the large circumference of literature and action; and the small provincial sphere seems to me a sad going back in life. Perhaps I should not feel this, were my home less lonely; but as it is--no, the wanderer's ban is on me, and I again turn towards the lands of excitement and adventure."

"I understand this, Ernest; but why is your home so solitary? You are still at the age in which wise and congenial unions are the most frequently formed; your temper is domestic; your easy fortune and sobered

ambition allow you to choose without reference to worldly considerations. Look round the world, and mix with the world again, and give Burleigh the mistress it requires."

Maltravers shook his head, and sighed.

"I do not say," continued Cleveland, wrapped in the glowing interest of the theme, "that you should marry a mere girl, but an amiable woman, who, like yourself, has seen something of life, and knows how to reckon on its cares, and to be contented with its enjoyments."

"You have said enough," said Maltravers, impatiently; "an experienced woman of the world, whose freshness of hope and heart is gone! What a picture! No, to me there is something inexpressibly beautiful in innocence and youth. But you say justly,--my years are not those that would make a union with youth desirable or well suited."

"I do not say that," said Cleveland, taking a pinch of snuff; "but you should avoid great disparity of age,--not for the sake of that disparity itself, but because with it is involved discord of temper, pursuits. A very young woman, new to the world, will not be contented with home alone; you are at once too gentle to curb her wishes, and a little too stern and reserved--pardon me for saying so--to be quite congenial to very early and sanguine youth."

"It is true," said Maltravers, with a tone of voice that showed he was struck with the remark; "but how have we fallen on this subject? let us change it. I have no idea of marriage,--the gloomy reminiscence of Florence Lascelles chains me to the past."

"Poor Florence, she might once have suited you; but now you are older, and would require a calmer and more malleable temper."

"Peace, I implore you!"

The conversation was changed; and at noon Mr. Merton, who had heard of Cleveland's arrival, called at Burleigh to renew an old acquaintance. He invited them to pass the evening at the rectory; and Cleveland, hearing that whist was a regular amusement, accepted the invitation for his host and himself. But when the evening came, Maltravers pleaded indisposition, and Cleveland was obliged to go alone.

When the old gentleman returned about midnight, he found Maltravers awaiting him in the library; and Cleveland, having won fourteen points,

was in a very gay, conversable humour.

"You perverse hermit!" said he, "talk of solitude, indeed, with so pleasant a family a hundred yards distant! You deserve to be solitary,--I have no patience with you. They complain bitterly of your desertion, and say you were, at first, the _enfant de la maison_."

"So you like the Mertons? The clergyman is sensible, but commonplace."

"A very agreeable man, despite your cynical definition, and plays a very fair rubber. But Vargrave is a first-rate player."

"Vargrave is there still?"

"Yes, he breakfasts with us to-morrow,--he invited himself."

"Humph!"

"He played one rubber; the rest of the evening he devoted himself to the prettiest girl I ever saw,--Miss Cameron. What a sweet face! so modest, yet so intelligent! I talked with her a good deal during the deals in which I cut out. I almost lost my heart to her."

"So Lord Vargrave devoted himself to Miss Cameron?"

"To be sure,--you know they are to be married soon. Merton told me so. She is very rich. He is the luckiest fellow imaginable, that Vargrave! But he is much too old for her: she seems to think so too. I can't explain why I think it; but by her pretty reserved manner I saw that she tried to keep the gay minister at a distance: but it would not do. Now, if you were ten years younger, or Miss Cameron ten years older, you might have had some chance of cutting out your old friend."

"So you think I also am too old for a lover?"

"For a lover of a girl of seventeen, certainly. You seem touchy on the score of age, Ernest."

"Not I;" and Maltravers laughed.

"No? There was a young gentleman present, who, I think, Vargrave might really find a dangerous rival,--a Colonel Legard,--one of the handsomest men I ever saw in my life; just the style to turn a romantic young lady's head; a mixture of the wild and the thoroughbred; black curls, superb

eyes, and the softest manners in the world. But, to be sure, he has lived all his life in the best society. Not so his friend, Lord Doltimore, who has a little too much of the green-room lounge and French _cafe_ manner for my taste."

"Doltimore, Legard, names new to me; I never met them at the rectory."

"Possibly they are staying at Admiral Legard's, in the neighbourhood. Miss Merton made their acquaintance at Knaresdean. A good old lady--the most perfect Mrs. Grundy one would wish to meet with--who owns the monosyllabic appellation of Hare (and who, being my partner, trumped my king!) assured me that Lord Doltimore was desperately in love with Caroline Merton. By the way, now, there is a young lady of a proper age for you,--handsome and clever, too."

"You talk of antidotes to matrimony; and so Miss Cameron--"

"Oh, no more of Miss Cameron now, or I shall sit up all night; she has half turned my head. I can't help pitying her,--married to one so careless and worldly as Lord Vargrave, thrown so young into the whirl of London. Poor thing! she had better have fallen in love with Legard,--which I dare say she will do, after all. Well, good-night!"

CHAPTER II.

PASSION, as frequently is seen,
Subsiding, settles into spleen;
Hence, as the plague of happy life,
I ran away from party strife.--MATTHEW GREEN.

Here nymphs from hollow oaks relate
The dark decrees and will of fate.--_Ibid._

ACCORDING to his engagement, Vargrave breakfasted the next morning at Burleigh. Maltravers at first struggled to return his familiar cordiality with equal graciousness. Condemning himself for former and unfounded suspicions, he wrestled against feelings which he could not or would not analyze, but which made Lumley an unwelcome visitor, and connected him with painful associations, whether of the present or the past. But there were points on which the penetration of Maltravers served to justify his prepossessions.

The conversation, chiefly sustained by Cleveland and Vargrave, fell on public questions; and as one was opposed to the other, Vargrave's exposition of views and motives had in them so much of the self-seeking of the professional placeman, that they might well have offended any man tinged by the lofty mania of political Quixotism. It was with a strange mixture of feelings that Maltravers listened: at one moment he proudly congratulated himself on having quitted a career where such opinions seemed so well to prosper: at another, his better and juster sentiments awoke the long-dormant combative faculty, and he almost longed for the turbulent but sublime arena, in which truths are vindicated and mankind advanced.

The interview did not serve for that renewal of intimacy which Vargrave appeared to seek, and Maltravers rejoiced when the placeman took his departure.

Lumley, who was about to pay a morning visit to Lord Doltimore, had borrowed Mr. Merton's stanhope, as being better adapted than any statelier vehicle to get rapidly through the cross-roads which led to Admiral Legard's house; and as he settled himself in the seat, with his servant by his side, he said laughingly, "I almost fancy myself naughty master Lumley again in this young-man-kind of two-wheeled cockle-boat: not dignified, but rapid, eh?"

And Lumley's face, as he spoke, had in it so much of frank gayety, and his manner was so simple, that Maltravers could with difficulty fancy him the same man who, five minutes before, had been uttering sentiments that might have become the oldest-hearted intriguer whom the hot-bed of ambition ever reared.

As soon as Lumley was gone, Maltravers left Cleveland alone to write letters (Cleveland was an exemplary and voluminous correspondent) and strolled with his dogs into the village. The effect which the presence of Maltravers produced among his peasantry was one that seldom failed to refresh and soothe his more bitter and disturbed thoughts. They had gradually (for the poor are quick-sighted) become sensible of his _justice_,--a finer quality than many that seem more amiable. They felt that his real object was to make them better and happier; and they had learned to see that the means he adopted generally advanced the end. Besides, if sometimes stern, he was never capricious or unreasonable; and then, too, he would listen patiently and advise kindly. They were a little in awe of him, but the awe only served to make them more industrious and orderly,--to stimulate the idle man, to reclaim the drunkard. He was one of the favourers of the small-allotment

system,—not, indeed, as panacea, but as one excellent stimulant to exertion and independence; and his chosen rewards for good conduct were in such comforts as served to awaken amongst those hitherto passive, dogged, and hopeless a desire to better and improve their condition. Somehow or other, without direct alms, the goodwife found that the little savings in the cracked teapot or the old stocking had greatly increased since the squire's return, while her husband came home from his moderate cups at the alehouse more sober and in better temper. Having already saved something was a great reason why he should save more. The new school, too, was so much better conducted than the old one; the children actually liked going there; and now and then there were little village feasts connected with the schoolroom; play and work were joint associations.

And Maltravers looked into his cottages, and looked at the allotment-ground; and it was pleasant to him to say to himself, "I am not altogether without use in life." But as he pursued his lonely walk, and the glow of self-approval died away with the scenes that called it forth, the cloud again settled on his brow; and again he felt that in solitude the passions feed upon the heart. As he thus walked along the green lane, and the insect life of summer rustled audibly among the shadowy hedges and along the thick grass that sprang up on either side, he came suddenly upon a little group that arrested all his attention.

It was a woman, clad in rags, bleeding, and seemingly insensible, supported by the overseer of the parish and a labourer.

"What is the matter?" asked Maltravers.

"A poor woman has been knocked down and run over by a gentleman in a gig, your honour," replied the overseer. "He stopped, half an hour ago, at my house to tell me that she was lying on the road; and he has given me two sovereigns for her, your honour. But, poor creature! she was too heavy for me to carry her, and I was forced to leave her and call Tom to help me."

"The gentleman might have stayed to see what were the consequences of his own act," muttered Maltravers, as he examined the wound in the temple, whence the blood flowed copiously.

"He said he was in a great hurry, your honour," said the village official, overhearing Maltravers. "I think it was one of the grand folks up at the parsonage; for I know it was Mr. Merton's bay horse,—he is a hot 'un!"

"Does the poor woman live in the neighbourhood? Do you know her?" asked Maltravers, turning from the contemplation of this new instance of Vargrave's selfishness of character.

"No; the old body seems quite a stranger here,--a trumper, or beggar, I think, sir. But it won't be a settlement if we take her in; and we can carry her to the Chequers, up the village, your honour."

"What is the nearest house,--your own?"

"Yes; but we be so busy now!"

"She shall not go to your house, and be neglected; and as for the public-house, it is too noisy: we must move her to the Hall."

"Your honour!" ejaculated the overseer, opening his eyes.

"It is not very far; she is severely hurt. Get a hurdle, lay a mattress on it. Make haste, both of you; I will wait here till you return."

The poor woman was carefully placed on the grass by the road-side, and Maltravers supported her head, while the men hastened to obey his orders.

CHAPTER III.

ALSE from that forked hill, the boasted seat
Of studious Peace and mild Philosophy,
Indignant murmurs mote be heard to threat.--WEST.

MR. CLEVELAND wanted to enrich one of his letters with a quotation from Ariosto, which he but imperfectly remembered. He had seen the book he wished to refer to in the little study the day before; and he quitted the library to search for it.

As he was tumbling over some volumes that lay piled on the writing-table, he felt a student's curiosity to discover what now constituted his host's favourite reading. He was surprised to observe that the greater portion of the works that, by the doubled leaf and the pencilled reference, seemed most frequently consulted, were not of a literary nature,--they were chiefly scientific; and astronomy seemed the chosen science. He then remembered that he had heard Maltravers speaking to a builder, employed on the recent repairs, on the subject of an observatory. "This

is very strange," thought Cleveland; "he gives up literature, the rewards of which are in his reach, and turns to science, at an age too late to discipline his mind to its austere training."

Alas! Cleveland did not understand that there are times in life when imaginative minds seek to numb and to blunt imagination. Still less did he feel that, when we perversely refuse to apply our active faculties to the catholic interests of the world, they turn morbidly into channels of research the least akin to their real genius. By the collision of minds alone does each mind discover what is its proper product: left to ourselves, our talents become but intellectual eccentricities.

Some scattered papers, in the handwriting of Maltravers, fell from one of the volumes. Of these, a few were but algebraical calculations, or short scientific suggestions, the value of which Mr. Cleveland's studies did not enable him to ascertain; but in others they were wild snatches of mournful and impassioned verse, which showed that the old vein of poetry still flowed, though no longer to the daylight. These verses Cleveland thought himself justified in glancing over; they seemed to portray a state of mind which deeply interested, and greatly saddened him. They expressed, indeed, a firm determination to bear up against both the memory and the fear of ill; but mysterious and hinted allusions here and there served to denote some recent and yet existent struggle, revealed by the heart only to the genius. In these partial and imperfect self-communings and confessions, there was the evidence of the pining affections, the wasted life, the desolate hearth of the lonely man. Yet so calm was Maltravers himself, even to his early friend, that Cleveland knew not what to think of the reality of the feelings painted. Had that fervid and romantic spirit been again awakened by a living object? If so, where was the object found? The dates affixed to the verses were most recent. But whom had Maltravers seen? Cleveland's thoughts turned to Caroline Merton, to Evelyn; but when he had spoken of both, nothing in the countenance, the manner, of Maltravers had betrayed emotion. And once the heart of Maltravers had so readily betrayed itself! Cleveland knew not how pride, years, and suffering school the features, and repress the outward signs of what pass within. While thus engaged, the door of the study opened abruptly, and the servant announced Mr. Merton.

"A thousand pardons," said the courteous rector. "I fear we disturb you; but Admiral Legard and Lord Doltimore, who called on us this morning, were so anxious to see Burleigh, I thought I might take the liberty. We have come over quite in a large party,—taken the place by storm. Mr. Maltravers is out, I hear; but you will let us see the house. My allies are already in the hall, examining the armour."

Cleveland, ever sociable and urbane, answered suitably, and went with Mr. Merton into the hall, where Caroline, her little sisters, Evelyn, Lord Doltimore, Admiral Legard, and his nephew were assembled.

"Very proud to be my host's representative and your guide," said Cleveland. "Your visit, Lord Doltimore, is indeed an agreeable surprise. Lord Vargrave left us an hour or so since to call on you at Admiral Legard's: we buy our pleasure with his disappointment."

"It is very unfortunate," said the admiral, a bluff, harsh-looking old gentleman; "but we were not aware, till we saw Mr. Merton, of the honour Lord Vargrave has done us. I can't think how we missed him on the road."

"My dear uncle," said Colonel Legard, in a peculiarly sweet and agreeable tone of voice, "you forget we came three miles round by the high road; and Mr. Merton says that Lord Vargrave took the short cut by Langley End. My uncle, Mr. Cleveland, never feels in safety upon land, unless the road is as wide as the British Channel, and the horses go before the wind at the rapid pace of two knots and a half an hour!"

"I just wish I had you at sea, Mr. Jackanapes," said the admiral, looking grimly at his handsome nephew, while he shook his cane at him.

The nephew smiled; and, falling back, conversed with Evelyn.

The party were now shown over the house; and Lord Doltimore was loud in its praises. It was like a chateau he had once hired in Normandy,--it had a French character; those old chairs were in excellent taste,--quite the style of Francis the First.

"I know no man I respect more than Mr. Maltravers," quoth the admiral. "Since he has been amongst us this time, he has been a pattern to us country gentlemen. He would make an excellent colleague for Sir John. We really must get him to stand against that young puppy who is member of the House of Commons only because his father is a peer, and never votes more than twice a session."

Mr. Merton looked grave.

"I wish to Heaven you could persuade him to stay amongst you," said Cleveland. "He has half taken it into his head to part with Burleigh!"

"Part with Burleigh!" exclaimed Evelyn, turning abruptly from the

handsome colonel, in whose conversation she had hitherto seemed absorbed.

"My very ejaculation when I heard him say so, my dear young lady."

"I wish he would," said Lord Doltimore hastily, and glancing towards Caroline. "I should much like to buy it. What do you think would be the purchase-money?"

"Don't talk so cold-bloodedly," said the admiral, letting the point of his cane fall with great emphasis on the floor. "I can't bear to see old families deserting their old places,--quite wicked. You buy Burleigh! have not you got a country seat of your own, my lord? Go and live there, and take Mr. Maltravers for your model,--you could not have a better."

Lord Doltimore sneered, coloured, settled his neckcloth, and turning round to Colonel Legard, whispered, "Legard, your good uncle is a bore."

Legard looked a little offended, and made no reply.

"But," said Caroline, coming to the relief of her admirer, "if Mr. Maltravers will sell the place, surely he could not have a better successor."

"He sha'n't sell the place, ma'am, and that's poz!" cried the admiral. "The whole county shall sign a round-robin to tell him it's a shame; and if any one dares to buy it we'll send him to Coventry."

Miss Merton laughed, but looked round the old wainscot walls with unusual interest; she thought it would be a fine thing to be Lady of Burleigh!

"And what is that picture so carefully covered up?" said the admiral, as they now stood in the library.

"The late Mrs. Maltravers, Ernest's mother," replied Cleveland, slowly. "He dislikes it to be shown--to strangers: the other is a Digby."

Evelyn looked towards the veiled portrait, and thought of her first interview with Maltravers; but the soft voice of Colonel Legard murmured in her ear; and her revery was broken.

Cleveland eyed the colonel, and muttered to himself, "Vargrave should keep a sharp look-out."

They had now finished their round of the show-apartments--which indeed

had little but their antiquity and old portraits to recommend them--and were in a lobby at the back of the house, communicating with a courtyard, two sides of which were occupied with the stables. The sight of the stables reminded Caroline of the Arab horses; and at the word "horses" Lord Doltimore seized Legard's arm and carried him off to inspect the animals. Caroline, her father, and the admiral followed. Mr. Cleveland happened not to have on his walking-shoes; and the flagstones in the courtyard looked damp; and Mr. Cleveland, like most old bachelors, was prudently afraid of cold; so he excused himself, and stayed behind. He was talking to Evelyn about the Digbys, and full of anecdotes about Sir Kenelm at the moment the rest departed so abruptly; and Evelyn was interested, so she insisted on keeping him company.

The old gentleman was flattered; he thought it excellent breeding in Miss Cameron. The children ran out to renew acquaintance with the peacock, who, perched on an old stirrup-stone, was sunning his gay plumage in the noon-day.

"It is astonishing," said Cleveland, "how certain family features are transmitted from generation to generation! Maltravers has still the forehead and eyebrows of the Digbys,--that peculiar, brooding, thoughtful forehead, which you observed in the picture of Sir Kenelm. Once, too, he had much the same dreaming character of mind, but he has lost that, in some measure at least. He has fine qualities, Miss Cameron,--I have known him since he was born. I trust his career is not yet closed; could he but form ties that would bind him to England, I should indulge in higher expectations than I did even when the wild boy turned half the heads in Gottingen.

"But we were talking of family portraits: there is one in the entrance-hall, which perhaps you have not observed; it is half obliterated by damp and time, yet it is of a remarkable personage, connected with Maltravers by ancestral intermarriages,--Lord Falkland, the Falkland of Clarendon; a man weak in character, but made most interesting by history,--utterly unfitted for the severe ordeal of those stormy times; sighing for peace when his whole soul should have been in war; and repentant alike whether with the Parliament or the king, but still a personage of elegant and endearing associations; a student-soldier, with a high heart and a gallant spirit. Come and look at his features,--homely and worn, but with a characteristic air of refinement and melancholy thought."

Thus running on, the agreeable old gentleman drew Evelyn into the outer hall. Upon arriving there, through a small passage, which opened upon

the hall, they were surprised to find the old housekeeper and another female servant standing by a rude kind of couch on which lay the form of the poor woman described in the last chapter. Maltravers and two other men were also there; and Maltravers himself was giving orders to his servants, while he leaned over the sufferer, who was now conscious both of pain and the service rendered to her. As Evelyn stopped abruptly, and in surprise, opposite and almost at the foot of the homely litter, the woman raised herself up on one arm, and gazed at her with a wild stare; then muttering some incoherent words which appeared to betoken delirium, she sank back, and was again insensible.

CHAPTER IV.

HENCE oft to win some stubborn maid,
Still does the wanton god assume
The martial air, the gay cockade,
The sword, the shoulder-knot, and plume.

MARRIOTT.

THE hall was cleared, the sufferer had been removed, and Maltravers was left alone with Cleveland and Evelyn.

He simply and shortly narrated the adventure of the morning; but he did not mention that Vargrave had been the cause of the injury his new guest had sustained. Now this event had served to make a mutual and kindred impression on Evelyn and Maltravers. The humanity of the latter, natural and commonplace as it was, was an endearing recollection to Evelyn, precisely as it showed that his cold theory of disdain towards the mass did not affect his actual conduct towards individuals. On the other hand, Maltravers had perhaps been yet more impressed with the prompt and ingenuous sympathy which Evelyn had testified towards the sufferer: it had so evidently been her first gracious and womanly impulse to hasten to the side of this humble stranger. In that impulse, Maltravers himself had been almost forgotten; and as the poor woman lay pale and lifeless, and the young Evelyn bent over her in beautiful compassion, Maltravers thought she had never seemed so lovely, so irresistible,—in fact, pity in woman is a great beautifier.

As Maltravers finished his short tale, Evelyn's eyes were fixed upon him with such frank and yet such soft approval, that the look went straight to his heart. He quickly turned away, and abruptly changed the

conversation.

"But how long have you been here, Miss Cameron,--and your companions?"

"We are again intruders; but this time it was not my fault."

"No," said Cleveland, "for a wonder it was male, and not lady-like curiosity that trespassed on Bluebeard's chamber. But, however, to soften your resentment, know that Miss Cameron has brought you a purchaser for Burleigh. Now, then, we can test the sincerity of your wish to part with it. I assure you, meanwhile, that Miss Cameron was as much shocked at the idea as I was. Were you not?"

"But you surely have no intention of selling Burleigh?" said Evelyn, anxiously.

"I fear I do not know my own mind."

"Well," said Cleveland, "here comes your tempter. Lord Doltimore, let me introduce Mr. Maltravers."

Lord Doltimore bowed.

"Been admiring your horses, Mr. Maltravers. I never saw anything so perfect as the black one; may I ask where you bought him?"

"It was a present to me," answered Maltravers.

"A present?"

"Yes, from one who would not have sold that horse for a king's ransom,--an old Arab chief, with whom I formed a kind of friendship in the desert. A wound disabled him from riding, and he bestowed the horse on me, with as much solemn tenderness for the gift as if he had given me his daughter in marriage."

"I think of travelling in the East," said Lord Doltimore, with much gravity: "I suppose nothing will induce you to sell the black horse?"

"Lord Doltimore!" said Maltravers, in a tone of lofty surprise.

"I do not care for the price," continued the young nobleman, a little disconcerted.

"No; I never sell any horse that has once learned to know me. I would as soon think of selling a friend. In the desert, one's horse is one's friend. I am almost an Arab myself in these matters."

"But talking of sale and barter reminds me of Burleigh," said Cleveland, maliciously. "Lord Doltimore is a universal buyer. He covets all your goods: he will take the house, if he can't have the stables."

"I only mean," said Lord Doltimore, rather peevishly, "that if you wish to part with Burleigh, I should like to have the option of purchase."

"I will remember it, if I determine to sell the place," answered Maltravers, smiling gravely; "at present I am undecided."

He turned away towards Evelyn as he spoke, and almost started to observe that she was joined by a stranger, whose approach he had not before noticed,—and that stranger a man of such remarkable personal advantages, that, had Maltravers been in Vargrave's position, he might reasonably have experienced a pang of jealous apprehension. Slightly above the common height; slender, yet strongly formed; set off by every advantage of dress, of air, of the nameless tone and pervading refinement that sometimes, though not always, springs from early and habitual intercourse with the most polished female society,—Colonel Legard, at the age of eight and twenty, had acquired a reputation for beauty almost as popular and as well known as that which men usually acquire by mental qualifications. Yet there was nothing effeminate in his countenance, the symmetrical features of which were made masculine and expressive by the rich olive of the complexion, and the close jetty curls of the Antinous-like hair.

They seemed, as they there stood—Evelyn and Legard—so well suited to each other in personal advantages, their different styles so happily contrasted; and Legard, at the moment, was regarding her with such respectful admiration, and whispering compliment to her in so subdued a tone, that the dullest observer might have ventured a prophecy by no means agreeable to the hopes of Lumley Lord Vargrave.

But a feeling or fear of this nature was not that which occurred to Maltravers, or dictated his startled exclamation of surprise.

Legard looked up as he heard the exclamation, and saw Maltravers, whose back had hitherto been turned towards him. He, too, was evidently surprised, and seemingly confused; the colour mounted to his cheek, and then left it pale.

"Colonel Legard," said Cleveland, "a thousand apologies for my neglect: I really did not observe you enter,--you came round by the front door, I suppose. Let me make you acquainted with Mr. Maltravers."

Legard bowed low.

"We have met before," said he, in embarrassed accents: "at Venice, I think!"

Maltravers inclined his head rather stiffly at first, but then, as if moved by a second impulse, held out his hand cordially.

"Oh, Mr. Ernest, here you are!" cried Sophy, bounding into the hall, followed by Mr. Merton, the old admiral, Caroline, and Cecilia.

The interruption seemed welcome and opportune. The admiral, with blunt cordiality, expressed his pleasure at being made known to Mr. Maltravers.

The conversation grew general; refreshments were proffered and declined; the visit drew to its close.

It so happened that as the guests departed, Evelyn, from whose side the constant colonel had insensibly melted away, lingered last,--save, indeed, the admiral, who was discussing with Cleveland a new specific for the gout. And as Maltravers stood on the steps, Evelyn turned to him with all her beautiful naivete of mingled timidity and kindness, and said,--

"And are we really never to see you again; never to hear again your tales of Egypt and Arabia; never to talk over Tasso and Dante? No books, no talk, no disputes, no quarrels? What have we done? I thought we had made it up,--and yet you are still unforgiving. Give me a good scold, and be friends!"

"Friends! you have no friend more anxious, more devoted than I am. Young, rich, fascinating as you are, you will carve no impression on human hearts deeper than that you have graven here!"

Carried away by the charm of her childlike familiarity and enchanting sweetness, Maltravers had said more than he intended; yet his eyes, his emotion, said more than his words.

Evelyn coloured deeply, and her whole manner changed. However, she

turned away, and saying, with a forced gayety, "Well, then, you will not desert us; we shall see you once more?" hurried down the steps to join her companions.

CHAPTER V.

SEE how the skilful lover spreads his toils.--STILLINGFLEET.

THE party had not long returned to the rectory, and the admiral's carriage was ordered, when Lord Vargrave made his appearance. He descanted with gay good-humour on his long drive, the bad roads, and his disappointment at the *_contretemps_* that awaited him; then, drawing aside Colonel Legard, who seemed unusually silent and abstracted, he said to him,--

"My dear colonel, my visit this morning was rather to you than to Doltimore. I confess that I should like to see your abilities enlisted on the side of the Government; and knowing that the post of Storekeeper to the Ordnance will be vacant in a day or two by the promotion of Mr. ----, I wrote to secure the refusal. To-day's post brings me the answer. I offer the place to you; and I trust, before long, to procure you also a seat in parliament. But you must start for London immediately."

A week ago, and Legard's utmost ambition would have been amply gratified by this post; he now hesitated.

"My dear lord," said he, "I cannot say how grateful I feel for your kindness; but--but--"

"Enough; no thanks, my dear Legard. Can you go to town to-morrow?"

"Indeed," said Legard, "I fear not; I must consult my uncle."

"I can answer for him; I sounded him before I wrote. Reflect! You are not rich, my dear Legard; it is an excellent opening: a seat in parliament, too! Why, what can be your reason for hesitation?"

There was something meaning and inquisitive in the tone of voice in which this question was put that brought the colour to the colonel's cheek. He knew not well what to reply; and he began, too, to think that he ought not to refuse the appointment. Nay, would his uncle, on whom he was

dependent, consent to such a refusal? Lord Vargrave saw the irresolution, and proceeded. He spent ten minutes in combating every scruple, every objection: he placed all the advantages of the post, real or imaginary, in every conceivable point of view before the colonel's eyes; he sought to flatter, to wheedle, to coax, to weary him into accepting it; and he at length partially succeeded. The colonel petitioned for three days' consideration, which Vargrave reluctantly acceded to; and Legard then stepped into his uncle's carriage, with the air rather of a martyr than a maiden placeman.

"Aha!" said Vargrave, chuckling to himself as he took a turn in the grounds, "I have got rid of that handsome knave; and now I shall have Evelyn all to myself!"

CHAPTER VI.

I AM forfeited to eternal disgrace if you do not commiserate.

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Go to, then, raise, recover.--BEN JONSON: *Poetaster*.

THE next morning Admiral Legard and his nephew were conversing in the little cabin consecrated by the name of the admiral's "own room."

"Yes," said the veteran, "it would be moonshine and madness not to accept Vargrave's offer; though one can see through such a millstone as that with half an eye. His lordship is jealous of such a fine, handsome young fellow as you are,--and very justly. But as long as he is under the same roof with Miss Cameron, you will have no opportunity to pay your court; when he goes, you can always manage to be in her neighbourhood; and then, you know--puppy that you are--her business will be very soon settled." And the admiral eyed the handsome colonel with grim fondness.

Legard sighed.

"Have you any commands at -----?" said he; "I am just going to canter over there before Doltimore is up."

"Sad lazy dog, your friend."

"I shall be back by twelve."

"What are you going to ----- for?"

"Brookes, the farrier, has a little spaniel,--King Charles's breed. Miss Cameron is fond of dogs. I can send it to her, with my compliments,--it will be a sort of leave-taking."

"Sly rogue; ha, ha, ha! d----d sly; ha, ha!" and the admiral punched the slender waist of his nephew, and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Good-by, sir."

"Stop, George; I forgot to ask you a question; you never told me you knew Mr. Maltravers. Why don't you cultivate his acquaintance?"

"We met at Venice accidentally. I did not know his name then; he left just as I arrived. As you say, I ought to cultivate his acquaintance."

"Fine character!"

"Very!" said Legard, with energy, as he abruptly quitted the room.

George Legard was an orphan. His father--the admiral's elder brother--had been a spendthrift man of fashion, with a tolerably large unentailed estate. He married a duke's daughter without a sixpence. Estates are troublesome,--Mr. Legard's was sold. On the purchase-money the happy pair lived for some years in great comfort, when Mr. Legard died of a brain fever; and his disconsolate widow found herself alone in the world with a beautiful little curly-headed boy, and an annuity of one thousand a year, for which her settlement had been exchanged. All the rest of the fortune was gone,--a discovery not made till Mr. Legard's death. Lady Louisa did not long survive the loss of her husband and her station in society; her income of course died with herself. Her only child was brought up in the house of his grandfather, the duke, till he was of age to hold the office of king's page; thence, as is customary, he was promoted to a commission in the Guards. To the munificent emoluments of his pay, the ducal family liberally added an allowance of two hundred a year; upon which income Cornet Legard contrived to get very handsomely in debt. The extraordinary beauty of his person, his connections, and his manners obtained him all the celebrity that fashion can bestow; but poverty is a bad thing. Luckily, at this time, his uncle the admiral returned from sea, to settle for the rest of his life in England.

Hitherto, the admiral had taken no notice of George. He himself had married a merchant's daughter with a fair portion; and had been blessed

with two children, who monopolized all his affection. But there seemed some mortality in the Legard family; in one year after returning to England and settling in B-----shire, the admiral found himself wifeless and childless. He then turned to his orphan nephew; and soon became fonder of him than he had ever been of his own children. The admiral, though in easy circumstances, was not wealthy; nevertheless, he advanced the money requisite for George's rise in the army, and doubled the allowance bestowed by the duke. His grace heard of this generosity, and discovered that he himself had a very large family growing up; that the marquess was going to be married, and required an increase of income; that he had already behaved most handsomely to his nephew; and the result of this discovery was that the duke withdrew the two hundred a year. Legard, however, who looked on his uncle as an exhaustless mine, went on breaking hearts and making debts--till one morning he woke in the Bench. The admiral was hastily summoned to London. He arrived; paid off the duns--a kindness which seriously embarrassed him--swore, scolded, and cried; and finally insisted that Legard should give up that d-----d coxcomb regiment, in which he was now captain, retire on half-pay, and learn economy and a change of habits on the Continent.

The admiral, a rough but good-natured man on the whole, had two or three little peculiarities. In the first place, he piqued himself on a sort of John Bull independence; was a bit of a Radical (a strange anomaly in an admiral)--which was owing, perhaps, to two or three young lords having been put over his head in the earlier part of his career; and he made it a point with his nephew (of whose affection he was jealous) to break with those fine grand connections, who plunged him into a sea of extravagance, and then never threw him a rope to save him from drowning.

In the second place, without being stingy, the admiral had a good deal of economy in his disposition. He was not a man to allow his nephew to ruin him. He had an extraordinarily old-fashioned horror of gambling,--a polite habit of George's; and he declared positively that his nephew must, while a bachelor, learn to live upon seven hundred a year. Thirdly, the admiral could be a very stern, stubborn, passionate old brute; and when he coolly told George, "Harkye, you young puppy, if you get into debt again--if you exceed the very handsome allowance I make you--I shall just cut you off with a shilling," George was fully aware that his uncle was one who would rigidly keep his word.

However, it was something to be out of debt, and one of the handsomest men of his age; and George Legard, whose rank in the Guards made him a colonel in the line, left England tolerably contented with the state of affairs.

Despite the foibles of his youth, George Legard had many high and generous qualities. Society had done its best to spoil a fine and candid disposition, with abilities far above mediocrity; but society had only partially succeeded. Still, unhappily, dissipation had grown a habit with him; all his talents were of a nature that brought a ready return. At his age, it was but natural that the praise of salons should retain all its sweetness.

In addition to those qualities which please the softer sex, Legard was a good whist player, superb at billiards, famous as a shot, unrivalled as a horseman,--in fact, an accomplished man, "who did everything so devilish well!" These accomplishments did not stand him in much stead in Italy; and, though with reluctance and remorse, he took again to gambling,--he really had nothing else to do.

In Venice there was, one year, established a society somewhat on the principle of the salon at Paris. Some rich Venetians belonged to it; but it was chiefly for the convenience of foreigners,--French, English, and Austrians. Here there was select gaming in one room, while another apartment served the purposes of a club. Many who never played belonged to this society; but still they were not the habitues.

Legard played: he won at first, then he lost, then he won again; it was a pleasant excitement. One night, after winning largely at roulette, he sat down to play ecarte with a Frenchman of high rank. Legard played well at this, as at all scientific games; he thought he should make a fortune out of the Frenchman. The game excited much interest; the crowd gathered round the table; bets ran high; the vanity of Legard, as well as his interest, was implicated in the conflict. It was soon evident that the Frenchman played as well as the Englishman. The stakes, at first tolerably high, were doubled. Legard betted freely. Cards went against him; he lost much, lost all that he had, lost more than he had, lost several hundreds, which he promised to pay the next morning. The table was broken up, the spectators separated. Amongst the latter had been one Englishman, introduced into the club for the first time that night. He had neither played nor betted, but had observed the game with a quiet and watchful interest. This Englishman lodged at the same hotel as Legard. He was at Venice only for a day; the promised sight of a file of English newspapers had drawn him to the club; the general excitement around had attracted him to the table; and once there, the spectacle of human emotions exercised its customary charm.

On ascending the stairs that conducted to his apartment, the Englishman

heard a deep groan in a room the door of which was ajar. He paused, the sound was repeated; he gently pushed open the door and saw Legard seated by a table, while a glass on the opposite wall reflected his working and convulsed countenance, with his hands trembling visibly, as they took a brace of pistols from the case.

The Englishman recognized the loser at the club; and at once divined the act that his madness or his despair dictated. Legard twice took up one of the pistols, and twice laid it down irresolute; the third time he rose with a start, raised the weapon to his head, and the next moment it was wrenched from his grasp.

"Sit down, sir!" said the stranger, in a loud and commanding voice.

Legard, astonished and abashed, sank once more into his seat, and stared sullenly and half-unconsciously at his countryman.

"You have lost your money," said the Englishman, after calmly replacing the pistols in their case, which he locked, putting the key into his pocket; "and that is misfortune enough for one night. If you had won, and ruined your opponent, you would be excessively happy, and go to bed, thinking Good Luck (which is the representative of Providence) watched over you. For my part, I think you ought to be very thankful that you are not the winner."

"Sir," said Legard, recovering from his surprise, and beginning to feel resentment, "I do not understand this intrusion in my apartments. You have saved me, it is true, from death,--but life is a worse curse."

"Young man, no! moments in life are agony, but life itself is a blessing. Life is a mystery that defies all calculation. You can never say, 'To-day is wretched, therefore to-morrow must be the same!' And for the loss of a little gold you, in the full vigour of youth, with all the future before you, will dare to rush into the chances of eternity! You, who have never, perhaps, thought what eternity is! Yet," added the stranger, in a soft and melancholy voice, "you are young and beautiful,--perhaps the pride and hope of others! Have you no tie, no affection, no kindred; are you lord of yourself?"

Legard was moved by the tone of the stranger, as well as by the words.

"It is not the loss of money," said he, gloomily,--"it is the loss of honour. To-morrow I must go forth a shunned and despised man,--I, a gentleman and a soldier! They may insult me--and I have no reply!"

The Englishman seemed to muse, for his brow lowered, and he made no answer. Legard threw himself back, overcome with his own excitement, and wept like a child. The stranger, who imagined himself above the indulgence of emotion (vain man!), woke from his reverie at this burst of passion. He gazed at first (I grieve to write) with a curl of the haughty lip that had in it contempt; but it passed quickly away; and the hard man remembered that he too had been young and weak, and his own errors greater perhaps than those of the one he had ventured to despise. He walked to and fro the room, still without speaking. At last he approached the gamester, and took his hand.

"What is your debt?" he asked gently.

"What matters it?--more than I can pay."

"If life is a trust, so is wealth: you have the first in charge for others, I may have the last. What is the debt?"

Legard started; it was a strong struggle between shame and hope. "If I could borrow it, I could repay it hereafter,--I know I could; I would not think of it otherwise."

"Very well, so be it,--I will lend you the money on one condition. Solemnly promise me, on your faith as a soldier and a gentleman, that you will not, for ten years to come--even if you grow rich, and can ruin others--touch card or dice-box. Promise me that you will shun all gaming for gain, under whatever disguise, whatever appellation. I will take your word as my bond."

Legard, overjoyed, and scarcely trusting his senses, gave the promise.

"Sleep then, to-night, in hope and assurance of the morrow," said the Englishman: "let this event be an omen to you, that while there is a future there is no despair. One word more,--I do not want your thanks! it is easy to be generous at the expense of justice. Perhaps I have been so now. This sum, which is to save your life--a life you so little value--might have blessed fifty human beings,--better men than either the giver or receiver. What is given to error may perhaps be a wrong to virtue. When you would ask others to support a career of blind and selfish extravagance, pause and think over the breadless lips this wasted gold would have fed! the joyless hearts it would have comforted! You talk of repaying me: if the occasion offer, do so; if not--if we never meet again, and you have it in your power, pay it for me to the Poor!

And now, farewell."

"Stay,--give me the name of my preserver! Mine is--"

"Hush! what matter names? This is a sacrifice we have both made to honour. You will sooner recover your self-esteem (and without self-esteem there is neither faith nor honour), when you think that your family, your connections, are spared all association with your own error; that I may hear them spoken of, that I may mix with them without fancying that they owe me gratitude."

"Your own name then?" said Legard, deeply penetrated with the delicate generosity of his benefactor.

"Tush!" muttered the stranger impatiently as he closed the door.

The next morning when he awoke Legard saw upon the table a small packet; it contained a sum that exceeded the debt named.

On the envelope was written, "Remember the bond."

The stranger had already quitted Venice. He had not travelled through the Italian cities under his own name, for he had just returned from the solitudes of the East, and was not yet hardened to the publicity of the gossip which in towns haunted by his countrymen attended a well-known name; that given to Legard by the innkeeper, mutilated by Italian pronunciation, the young man had never heard before, and soon forgot. He paid his debts, and he scrupulously kept his word. The adventure of that night went far, indeed, to reform and ennoble the mind and habits of George Legard. Time passed, and he never met his benefactor, till in the halls of Burleigh he recognized the stranger in Maltravers.

CHAPTER VII.

WHY value, then, that strength of mind they boast,
As often varying, and as often lost?

HAWKINS BROWNE (translated by SOAME JENYNS).

MALTRAVERS was lying at length, with his dogs around him, under a beech-tree that threw its arms over one of the calm still pieces of water that relieved the groves of Burleigh, when Colonel Legard spied him from

the bridle-road which led through the park to the house. The colonel dismounted, threw the rein over his arm; and at the sound of the hoofs Maltravers turned, saw the visitor, and rose. He held out his hand to Legard, and immediately began talking of indifferent matters.

Legard was embarrassed; but his nature was not one to profit by the silence of a benefactor. "Mr. Maltravers," said he, with graceful emotion, "though you have not yet allowed me an opportunity to allude to it, do not think I am ungrateful for the service you rendered me."

Maltravers looked grave, but made no reply. Legard resumed, with a heightened colour,--

"I cannot say how I regret that it is not yet in my power to discharge my debt; but--"

"When it is, you will do so. Pray think no more of it. Are you going to the rectory?"

"No, not this morning; in fact, I leave B-----shire tomorrow. Pleasant family, the Mertons."

"And Miss Cameron--"

"Is certainly beautiful,--and very rich. How could she ever think of marrying Lord Vargrave, so much older,--she who could have so many admirers?"

"Not, surely, while betrothed to another?"

This was a refinement which Legard, though an honourable man as men go, did not quite understand. "Oh," said he, "that was by some eccentric old relation,--her father-in-law, I think. Do you think she is bound by such an engagement?"

Maltravers made no reply, but amused himself by throwing a stick into the water, and sending one of his dogs after it. Legard looked on, and his affectionate disposition yearned to make advances which something distant in the manner of Maltravers chilled and repelled.

When Legard was gone, Maltravers followed him with his eyes. "And this is the man whom Cleveland thinks Evelyn could love! I could forgive her marrying Vargrave. Independently of the conscientious feeling that may belong to the engagement, Vargrave has wit, talent, intellect; and this

man has nothing but the skin of the panther. Was I wrong to save him?
No. Every human life, I suppose, has its uses. But Evelyn--I could
despise her if her heart was the fool of the eye!"

These comments were most unjust to Legard; but they were just of that
kind of injustice which the man of talent often commits against the man
of external advantages, and which the latter still more often retaliates
on the man of talent. As Maltravers thus soliloquized, he was accosted
by Mr. Cleveland.

"Come, Ernest, you must not cut these unfortunate Mertons any longer. If
you continue to do so, do you know what Mrs. Hare and the world will
say?"

"No--what?"

"That you have been refused by Miss Merton."

"That would be a calumny!" said Ernest, smiling.

"Or that you are hopelessly in love with Miss Cameron."

Maltravers started; his proud heart swelled; he pulled his hat over his
brows, and said, after a short pause,--

"Well, Mrs. Hare and the world must not have it all their own way; and
so, whenever you go to the rectory, take me with you."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE more he strove
To advance his suit, the farther from her love.

DRYDEN: Theodore and Honoria.

THE line of conduct which Vargrave now adopted with regard to Evelyn was
craftily conceived and carefully pursued. He did not hazard a single
syllable which might draw on him a rejection of his claims; but at the
same time no lover could be more constant, more devoted, in attentions.
In the presence of others, there was an air of familiar intimacy that
seemed to arrogate a right, which to her he scrupulously shunned to
assert. Nothing could be more respectful, nay, more timid, than his

language, or more calmly confident than his manner. Not having much vanity, nor any very acute self-conceit, he did not delude himself into the idea of winning Evelyn's affections; he rather sought to entangle her judgment, to weave around her web upon web,--not the less dangerous for being invisible. He took the compact as a matter of course, as something not to be broken by any possible chance; her hand was to be his as a right: it was her heart that he so anxiously sought to gain. But this distinction was so delicately drawn, and insisted upon so little in any tangible form, that, whatever Evelyn's wishes for an understanding, a much more experienced woman would have been at a loss to ripen one.

Evelyn longed to confide in Caroline, to consult her; but Caroline, though still kind, had grown distant. "I wish," said Evelyn, one night as she sat in Caroline's dressing-room,--"I wish that I knew what tone to take with Lord Vargrave. I feel more and more convinced that a union between us is impossible; and yet, precisely because he does not press it, am I unable to tell him so. I wish you could undertake that task; you seem such friends with him."

"!" said Caroline, changing countenance.

"Yes, you! Nay, do not blush, or I shall think you envy me. Could you not save us both from the pain that otherwise must come sooner or later?"

"Lord Vargrave would not thank me for such an act of friendship. Besides, Evelyn, consider,--it is scarcely possible to break off this engagement _now_."

"_Now_! and why now?" said Evelyn, astonished.

"The world believes it so implicitly. Observe, whoever sits next you rises if Lord Vargrave approaches; the neighbourhood talk of nothing else but your marriage; and your fate, Evelyn, is not pitied."

"I will leave this place! I will go back to the cottage! I cannot bear this!" said Evelyn, passionately wringing her hands.

"You do not love another, I am sure: not young Mr. Hare, with his green coat and straw-coloured whiskers; or Sir Henry Foxglove, with his how-d'ye-do like a view-halloo; perhaps, indeed, Colonel Legard,--he is handsome. What! do you blush at his name? No; you say 'not Legard:' who else is there?"

"You are cruel; you trifle with me!" said Evelyn, in tearful reproach;

and she rose to go to her own room.

"My dear girl!" said Caroline, touched by her evident pain; "learn from me--if I may say so--that marriages are not made in heaven! Yours will be as fortunate as earth can bestow. A love-match is usually the least happy of all. Our foolish sex demand so much in love; and love, after all, is but one blessing among many. Wealth and rank remain when love is but a heap of ashes. For my part, I have chosen my destiny and my husband."

"Your husband!"

"Yes, you see him in Lord Doltimore. I dare say we shall be as happy as any amorous Corydon and Phyllis." But there was irony in Caroline's voice as she spoke; and she sighed heavily. Evelyn did not believe her serious; and the friends parted for the night.

"Mine is a strange fate!" said Caroline to herself; "I am asked by the man whom I love, and who professes to love me, to bestow myself on another, and to plead for him to a younger and fairer bride. Well, I will obey him in the first; the last is a bitterer task, and I cannot perform it earnestly. Yet Vargrave has a strange power over me; and when I look round the world, I see that he is right. In these most commonplace artifices, there is yet a wild majesty that charms and fascinates me. It is something to rule the world: and his and mine are natures formed to do so."

CHAPTER IX.

A SMOKE raised with the fume of sighs.

Romeo and Juliet.

IT is certain that Evelyn experienced for Maltravers sentiments which, if not love, might easily be mistaken for it. But whether it were that master-passion, or merely its fanciful resemblance,--love in early youth and innocent natures, if of sudden growth, is long before it makes itself apparent. Evelyn had been prepared to feel an interest in her solitary neighbour. His mind, as developed in his works, had half-formed her own. Her childish adventure with the stranger had never been forgotten. Her present knowledge of Maltravers was an union of dangerous and often opposite associations,--the Ideal and the Real.

Love, in its first dim and imperfect shape, is but imagination concentrated on one object. It is a genius of the heart, resembling that of the intellect; it appeals to, it stirs up, it evokes, the sentiments and sympathies that lie most latent in our nature. Its sigh is the spirit that moves over the ocean, and arouses the Anadyomene into life. Therefore is it that MIND produces affections deeper than those of external form; therefore it is that women are worshippers of glory, which is the palpable and visible representative of a genius whose operations they cannot always comprehend. Genius has so much in common with love, the imagination that animates one is so much the property of the other, that there is not a surer sign of the existence of genius than the love that it creates and bequeaths. It penetrates deeper than the reason, it binds a nobler captive than the fancy. As the sun upon the dial, it gives to the human heart both its shadow and its light. Nations are its worshippers and wooers; and Posterity learns from its oracles to dream, to aspire, to adore!

Had Maltravers declared the passion that consumed him, it is probable that it would soon have kindled a return. But his frequent absence, his sustained distance of manner, had served to repress the feelings that in a young and virgin heart rarely flow with much force until they are invited and aroused. *_Le besoin d'aimer_* in girls, is, perhaps, in itself powerful; but is fed by another want, *_le besoin d'etre aime_!* *_If_*, therefore, Evelyn at present felt love for Maltravers, the love had certainly not passed into the core of life: the tree had not so far struck its roots but what it might have borne transplanting. There was in her enough of the pride of sex to have recoiled from the thought of giving love to one who had not asked the treasure. Capable of attachment, more trustful and therefore, if less vehement, more beautiful and durable than that which had animated the brief tragedy of Florence Lascelles, she could not have been the unknown correspondent, or revealed the soul, because the features wore a mask.

It must also be allowed that, in some respects, Evelyn was too young and inexperienced thoroughly to appreciate all that was most truly lovable and attractive in Maltravers. At four and twenty she would, perhaps, have felt no fear mingled with her respect for him; but seventeen and six and thirty is a wide interval! She never felt that there was that difference in years until she had met Legard, and then at once she comprehended it. With Legard she had moved on equal terms; he was not too wise, too high for her every-day thoughts. He less excited her imagination, less attracted her reverence. But, somehow or other, that voice which proclaimed her power, those eyes which never turned from

hers, went nearer to her heart. As Evelyn had once said to Caroline, "It was a great enigma!"--her own feelings were a mystery to her, and she reclined by the "Golden Waterfalls" without tracing her likeness in the glass of the pool below.

Maltravers appeared again at the rectory. He joined their parties by day, and his evenings were spent with them as of old. In this I know not precisely what were his motives--perhaps he did not know them himself. It might be that his pride was roused; it might be that he could not endure the notion that Lord Vargrave should guess his secret by an absence almost otherwise unaccountable,--he could not patiently bear to give Vargrave that triumph; it might be that, in the sternness of his self-esteem, he imagined he had already conquered all save affectionate interest in Evelyn's fate, and trusted too vainly to his own strength; and it might be, also, that he could not resist the temptation of seeing if Evelyn were contented with her lot, and if Vargrave were worthy of the blessing that awaited him. Whether one of these or all united made him resolve to brave his danger, or whether, after all, he yielded to a weakness, or consented to what--invited by Evelyn herself--was almost a social necessity, the reader and not the narrator shall decide.

Legard was gone; but Doltimore remained in the neighbourhood, having hired a hunting-box not far from Sir John Merton's manors, over which he easily obtained permission to sport. When he did not dine elsewhere, there was always a place for him at the parson's hospitable board,--and that place was generally next to Caroline. Mr. and Mrs. Merton had given up all hope of Mr. Maltravers for their eldest daughter; and, very strangely, this conviction came upon their minds on the first day they made the acquaintance of the young lord.

"My dear," said the rector, as he was winding up his watch, preparatory to entering the connubial couch,--"my dear, I don't think Mr. Maltravers is a marrying man."

"I was just going to make the same remark," said Mrs. Merton, drawing the clothes over her. "Lord Doltimore is a very fine young man, his estates unencumbered. I like him vastly, my love. He is evidently smitten with Caroline: so Lord Vargrave and Mrs. Hare said."

"Sensible, shrewd woman, Mrs. Hare. By the by, we'll send her a pineapple. Caroline was made to be a woman of rank!"

"Quite; so much self-possession!"

"And if Mr. Maltravers would sell or let Burleigh--"

"It would be so pleasant!"

"Had you not better give Caroline a hint?"

"My love, she is so sensible, let her go her own way."

"You are right, my dear Betsy; I shall always say that no one has more common-sense than you; you have brought up your children admirably!"

"Dear Charles!"

"It is coldish to-night, love," said the rector; and he put out the candle.

From that time, it was not the fault of Mr. and Mrs. Merton if Lord Doltimore did not find their house the pleasantest in the county.

One evening the rectory party were assembled together in the cheerful drawing-room. Cleveland, Mr. Merton, Sir John, and Lord Vargrave, reluctantly compelled to make up the fourth, were at the whist-table; Evelyn, Caroline, and Lord Doltimore were seated round the fire, and Mrs. Merton was working a footstool. The fire burned clear, the curtains were down, the children in bed: it was a family picture of elegant comfort.

Mr. Maltravers was announced.

"I am glad you are come at last," said Caroline, holding out her fair hand. "Mr. Cleveland could not answer for you. We are all disputing as to which mode of life is the happiest."

"And your opinion?" asked Maltravers, seating himself in the vacant chair,--it chanced to be next to Evelyn's.

"My opinion is decidedly in favour of London. A metropolitan life, with its perpetual and graceful excitements,--the best music, the best companions, the best things in short. Provincial life is so dull, its pleasures so tiresome; to talk over the last year's news, and wear out one's last year's dresses, cultivate a conservatory, and play Pope Joan with a young party,--dreadful!"

"I agree with Miss Merton," said Lord Doltimore, solemnly; not but what I like the country for three or four months in the year, with good shooting

and hunting, and a large house properly filled, independent of one's own neighbourhood: but if I am condemned to choose one place to live in, give me Paris."

"Ah, Paris; I never was in Paris. I should so like to travel!" said Caroline.

"But the inns abroad are so very bad," said Lord Doltimore; "how people can rave about Italy, I can't think. I never suffered so much in my life as I did in Calabria; and at Venice I was bit to death by mosquitoes. Nothing like Paris, I assure you: don't you think so, Mr. Maltravers?"

"Perhaps I shall be able to answer you better in a short time. I think of accompanying Mr. Cleveland to Paris!"

"Indeed!" said Caroline. "Well, I envy you; but is it a sudden resolution?"

"Not very."

"Do you stay long?" asked Lord Doltimore.

"My stay is uncertain."

"And you won't let Burleigh in the meanwhile?"

"_Let_ Burleigh? No; if it once pass from my hands it will be forever!"

Maltravers spoke gravely, and the subject was changed. Lord Doltimore challenged Caroline to chess.

They sat down, and Lord Doltimore arranged the pieces.

"Sensible man, Mr. Maltravers," said the young lord; "but I don't hit it off with him: Vargrave is more agreeable. Don't you think so?"

"Y-e-s."

"Lord Vargrave is very kind to me,--I never remember any one being more so; got Legard that appointment solely because it would please me,--very friendly fellow! I mean to put myself under his wing next session!"

"You could not do better, I'm sure," said Caroline; "he is so much looked up to; I dare say he will be prime minister one of these days."

"I take the bishop:--do you think so really?--you are rather a politician?"

"Oh, no; not much of that. But my father and my uncle are staunch politicians; gentlemen know so much more than ladies. We should always go by their opinions. I think I will take the queen's pawn--your politics are the same as Lord Vargrave's?"

"Yes, I fancy so: at least I shall leave my proxy with him. Glad you don't like politics,--great bore."

"Why, so young, so connected as you are--" Caroline stopped short, and made a wrong move.

"I wish we were going to Paris together, we should enjoy it so;" and Lord Doltimore's knight checked the tower and queen.

Caroline coughed, and stretched her hand quickly to move.

"Pardon me, you will lose the game if you do so!" and Doltimore placed his hand on hers, their eyes met, Caroline turned away, and Lord Doltimore settled his right collar.

"And is it true? are you really going to leave us?" said Evelyn, and she felt very sad. But still the sadness might not be that of love,--she had felt sad after Legard had gone.

"I do not think I shall long stay away," said Maltravers, trying to speak indifferently. "Burleigh has become more dear to me than it was in earlier youth; perhaps because I have made myself duties there: and in other places I am but an isolated and useless unit in the great mass."

"You! everywhere, you must have occupations and resources,--everywhere, you must find yourself not alone. But you will not go yet?"

"Not yet--no. [Evelyn's spirits rose.] Have you read the book I sent you?" (It was one of De Stael's.)

"Yes; but it disappoints me."

"And why? It is eloquent."

"But is it true? Is there so much melancholy in life? Are the affections so full of bitterness? For me, I am so happy when with those I love! When I am with my mother, the air seems more fragrant, the skies more blue: it is surely not affection, but the absence of it, that makes us melancholy."

"Perhaps so; but if we had never known affection, we might not miss it: and the brilliant Frenchwoman speaks from memory, while you speak from hope,--memory, which is the ghost of joy: yet surely, even in the indulgence of affection, there is at times a certain melancholy, a certain fear. Have you never felt it, even with--with your mother?"

"Ah, yes! when she suffered, or when I have thought she loved me less than I desired."

"That must have been an idle and vain thought. Your mother! does she resemble you?"

"I wish I could think so. Oh, if you knew her! I have longed so often that you were acquainted with each other! It was she who taught me to sing your songs."

"My dear Mrs. Hare, we may as well throw up our cards," said the keen clear voice of Lord Vargrave: "you have played most admirably, and I know that your last card will be the ace of trumps; still the luck is against us."

"No, no; pray play it out, my lord."

"Quite useless, ma'am," said Sir John, showing two honours. "We have only the trick to make."

"Quite useless," echoed Lumley, tossing down his sovereigns, and rising with a careless yawn.

"How d'ye do, Maltravers?"

Maltravers rose; and Vargrave turned to Evelyn, and addressed her in a whisper. The proud Maltravers walked away, and suppressed a sigh; a moment more, and he saw Lord Vargrave occupying the chair he had left vacant. He laid his hand on Cleveland's shoulder.

"The carriage is waiting,--are you ready?"

CHAPTER X.

OBSCURIS vera involvens.*--VIRGIL.

* "Wrapping truth in obscurity."

A DAY or two after the date of the last chapter, Evelyn and Caroline were riding out with Lord Vargrave and Mr. Merton, and on returning home they passed through the village of Burleigh.

"Maltravers, I suppose, has an eye to the county one of these days," said Lord Vargrave, who honestly fancied that a man's eyes were always directed towards something for his own interest or advancement; "otherwise he could not surely take all this trouble about workhouses and paupers. Who could ever have imagined my romantic friend would sink into a country squire?"

"It is astonishing what talent and energy he throws into everything he attempts," said the parson. "One could not, indeed, have supposed that a man of genius could make a man of business."

"Flattering to your humble servant--whom all the world allow to be the last, and deny to be the first. But your remark shows what a sad possession genius is: like the rest of the world, you fancy that it cannot be of the least possible use. If a man is called a genius, it means that he is to be thrust out of all the good things in this life. He is not fit for anything but a garret! Put a genius into office! make a genius a bishop! or a lord chancellor!--the world would be turned topsy-turvy! You see that you are quite astonished that a genius can be even a county magistrate, and know the difference between a spade and a poker! In fact, a genius is supposed to be the most ignorant, impracticable, good-for-nothing, do-nothing sort of thing that ever walked upon two legs. Well, when I began life I took excellent care that nobody should take me for a genius; and it is only within the last year or two that I ventured to emerge a little out of my shell. I have not been the better for it; I was getting on faster while I was merely a plodder. The world is so fond of that droll fable, the hare and the tortoise,--it really believes because (I suppose the fable to be true!) a tortoise once beat a hare that all tortoises are much better runners than hares possibly can be. Mediocre men have the monopoly of the loaves and fishes; and even when talent does rise in life, it is a talent which

only differs from mediocrity by being more energetic and bustling."

"You are bitter, Lord Vargrave," said Caroline, laughing; "yet surely you have had no reason to complain of the non-appreciation of talent?"

"Humph! if I had had a grain more talent I should have been crushed by it. There is a subtle allegory in the story of the lean poet, who put _lead_ in his pocket to prevent being blown away! 'Mais a nos moutons,'--to return to Maltravers. Let us suppose that he was merely clever, had not had a particle of what is called genius, been merely a hardworking able gentleman, of good character and fortune, he might be half-way up the hill by this time; whereas now, what is he? Less before the public than he was at twenty-eight,--a discontented anchorite, a meditative idler."

"No, not that," said Evelyn, warmly, and then checked herself.

Lord Vargrave looked at her sharply; but his knowledge of life told him that Legard was a much more dangerous rival than Maltravers. Now and then, it is true, a suspicion to the contrary crossed him; but it did not take root and become a serious apprehension. Still, he did not quite like the tone of voice in which Evelyn had put her abrupt negative, and said, with a slight sneer,--

"If not that, what is he?"

"One who purchased by the noblest exertions the right to be idle," said Evelyn with spirit; "and whom genius itself will not suffer to be idle long."

"Besides," said Mr. Merton, "he has won a high reputation, which he cannot lose merely by not seeking to increase it."

"Reputation! Oh, yes! we give men like that--men of genius--a large property in the clouds, in order to justify ourselves in pushing them out of our way below. But if they are contented with fame, why, they deserve their fate. Hang fame,--give me power."

"And is there no power in genius?" said Evelyn, with deepening fervour; "no power over the mind, and the heart, and the thought; no power over its own time, over posterity, over nations yet uncivilized, races yet unborn?"

This burst from one so simple and young as Evelyn seemed to Vargrave so

surprising that he stared on her without saying a word.

"You will laugh at my championship," she added, with a blush and a smile; "but you provoked the encounter."

"And you have won the battle," said Vargrave, with prompt gallantry. "My charming ward, every day develops in you some new gift of nature!"

Caroline, with a movement of impatience, put her horse into a canter.

Just at this time, from a cross-road, emerged a horseman,--it was Maltravers. The party halted, salutations were exchanged.

"I suppose you have been enjoying the sweet business of squiredom," said Vargrave, gayly: "Atticus and his farm,--classical associations! Charming weather for the agriculturists, eh! What news about corn and barley? I suppose our English habit of talking on the weather arose when we were all a squirearchical farming, George-the-Third kind of people! Weather is really a serious matter to gentlemen who are interested in beans and vetches, wheat and hay. You hang your happiness upon the changes of the moon!"

"As you upon the smiles of a minister. The weather of a court is more capricious than that of the skies,--at least we are better husbandmen than you who sow the wind and reap the whirlwind."

"Well retorted: and really, when I look round, I am half inclined to envy you. Were I not Vargrave, I would be Maltravers."

It was, indeed, a scene that seemed quiet and serene, with the English union of the feudal and the pastoral life,--the village-green, with its trim scattered cottages; the fields and pastures that spread beyond; the turf of the park behind, broken by the shadows of the unequal grounds, with its mounds and hollows and venerable groves, from which rose the turrets of the old Hall, its mullion windows gleaming in the western sun; a scene that preached tranquillity and content, and might have been equally grateful to humble philosophy and hereditary pride.

"I never saw any place so peculiar in its character as Burleigh," said the rector; "the old seats left to us in England are chiefly those of our great nobles. It is so rare to see one that does not aspire beyond the residence of a private gentleman preserve all the relics of the Tudor age."

"I think," said Vargrave, turning to Evelyn, "that as by my uncle's will your fortune is to be laid out in the purchase of land, we could not find a better investment than Burleigh. So, whenever you are inclined to sell, Maltravers, I think we must outbid Doltimore. What say you, my fair ward?"

"Leave Burleigh in peace, I beseech you!" said Maltravers, angrily.

"That is said like a Digby," returned Vargrave. "_Allons_!--will you not come home with us?"

"I thank you,--not to-day."

"We meet at Lord Raby's next Thursday. It is a ball given almost wholly in honour of your return to Burleigh; we are all going,--it is my young cousin's _debut_ at Knaresdean. We have all an interest in her conquests."

Now, as Maltravers looked up to answer, he caught Evelyn's glance, and his voice faltered.

"Yes," he said, "we shall meet--once again. Adieu!" He wheeled round his horse, and they separated.

"I can bear this no more," said Maltravers to himself; "I overrated my strength. To see her thus, day after day, and to know her another's, to writhe beneath his calm, unconscious assertion of his rights! Happy Vargrave!--and yet, ah! will _she_ be happy? Oh, could I think so!"

Thus soliloquizing, he suffered the rein to fall on the neck of his horse, which paced slowly home through the village, till it stopped--as if in the mechanism of custom--at the door of a cottage a stone's throw from the lodge. At this door, indeed, for several successive days, had Maltravers stopped regularly; it was now tenanted by the poor woman his introduction to whom has been before narrated. She had recovered from the immediate effects of the injury she had sustained; but her constitution, greatly broken by previous suffering and exhaustion, had received a mortal shock. She was hurt inwardly; and the surgeon informed Maltravers that she had not many months to live. He had placed her under the roof of one of his favourite cottagers, where she received all the assistance and alleviation that careful nursing and medical advice could give her.

This poor woman, whose name was Sarah Elton, interested Maltravers much.

She had known better days: there was a certain propriety in her expressions which denoted an education superior to her circumstances; and what touched Maltravers most, she seemed far more to feel her husband's death than her own sufferings,--which, somehow or other, is not common with widows the other side of forty! We say that youth easily consoles itself for the robberies of the grave,--middle age is a still better self-comforter. When Mrs. Elton found herself installed in the cottage, she looked round, and burst into tears.

"And William is not here!" she said. "Friends--friends! if we had had but one such friend before he died!"

Maltravers was pleased that her first thought was rather that of sorrow for the dead than of gratitude for the living. Yet Mrs. Elton was grateful,--simply, honestly, deeply grateful; her manner, her voice, betokened it. And she seemed so glad when her benefactor called to speak kindly and inquire cordially, that Maltravers did so constantly; at first from a compassionate and at last from a selfish motive--for who is not pleased to give pleasure? And Maltravers had so few in the world to care for him, that perhaps he was flattered by the grateful respect of this humble stranger.

When his horse stopped, the cottager's daughter opened the door and courtesied,--it was an invitation to enter; and he threw his rein over the paling and walked into the cottage.

Mrs. Elton, who had been seated by the open casement, rose to receive him. But Maltravers made her sit down, and soon put her at her ease. The woman and her daughter who occupied the cottage retired into the garden, and Mrs. Elton, watching them withdraw, then exclaimed abruptly,--

"Oh, sir, I have so longed to see you this morning! I so long to make bold to ask you whether, indeed, I dreamed it--or did I, when you first took me to your house--did I see--" She stopped abruptly; and though she strove to suppress her emotion, it was too strong for her efforts,--she sank back on her chair, pale as death, and almost gasped for breath.

Maltravers waited in surprise for her recovery.

"I beg pardon, sir,--I was thinking of days long past; and--but I wished to ask whether, when I lay in your hall, almost insensible, any one besides yourself and your servants were present?---or was it"--added the woman, with a shudder--"was it the dead?"

"I remember," said Maltravers, much struck and interested in her question and manner, "that a lady was present."

"It is so! it is so!" cried the woman, half rising and clasping her hands. "And she passed by this cottage a little time ago; her veil was thrown aside as she turned that fair young face towards the cottage. Her name, sir,--oh, what is her name? It was the same--the same face that shone across me in that hour of pain! I did not dream! I was not mad!"

"Compose yourself; you could never, I think, have seen that lady before. Her name is Cameron."

"Cameron--Cameron!" The woman shook her head mournfully. "No; that name is strange to me. And her mother, sir,--she is dead?"

"No; her mother lives."

A shade came over the face of the sufferer; and she said, after a pause,--

"My eyes deceive me then, sir; and, indeed, I feel that my head is touched, and I wander sometimes. But the likeness was so great; yet that young lady is even lovelier!"

"Likenesses are very deceitful and very capricious, and depend more on fancy than reality. One person discovers a likeness between faces most dissimilar,--a likeness invisible to others. But who does Miss Cameron resemble?"

"One now dead, sir; dead many years ago. But it is a long story, and one that lies heavy on my conscience. Some day or other, if you will give me leave, sir, I will unburden myself to you."

"If I can assist you in anyway, command me. Meanwhile, have you no friends, no relations, no children, whom you would wish to see?"

"Children!--no, sir; I never had but one child of _my own_ (she laid an emphasis on the last words), and that died in a foreign land."

"And no other relatives?"

"None, sir. My history is very short and simple. I was well brought up,--an only child. My father was a small farmer; he died when I was

sixteen, and I went into service with a kind old lady and her daughter, who treated me more as a companion than a servant. I was a vain, giddy girl, then, sir. A young man, the son of a neighbouring farmer, courted me, and I was much attached to him; but neither of us had money, and his parents would not give their consent to our marrying. I was silly enough to think that, if William loved me, he should have braved all; and his prudence mortified me, so I married another whom I did not love. I was rightly punished, for he ill-used me and took to drinking; I returned to my old service to escape from him--for I was with child, and my life was in danger from his violence. He died suddenly, and in debt. And then, afterwards, a gentleman--a rich gentleman--to whom I rendered a service (do not misunderstand me, sir, if I say the service was one of which I repent), gave me money, and made me rich enough to marry my first lover; and William and I went to America. We lived many years in New York upon our little fortune comfortably; and I was a long while happy, for I had always loved William dearly. My first affliction was the death of my child by my first husband; but I was soon roused from my grief. William schemed and speculated, as everybody does in America, and so we lost all; and William was weakly and could not work. At length he got the place of steward on board a vessel from New York to Liverpool, and I was taken to assist in the cabin. We wanted to come to London; I thought my old benefactor might do something for us, though he had never answered the letters I sent to him. But poor William fell ill on board, and died in sight of land."

Mrs. Elton wept bitterly, but with the subdued grief of one to whom tears have been familiar; and when she recovered, she soon brought her humble tale to an end. She herself, incapacitated from all work by sorrow and a breaking constitution, was left in the streets of Liverpool without other means of subsistence than the charitable contributions of the passengers and sailors on board the vessel. With this sum she had gone to London, where she found her old patron had been long since dead, and she had no claims on his family. She had, on quitting England, left one relation settled in a town in the North; thither she now repaired, to find her last hope wrecked; the relation also was dead and gone. Her money was now spent, and she had begged her way along the road, or through the lanes, she scarce knew whither, till the accident which, in shortening her life, had raised up a friend for its close.

"And such, sir," said she in conclusion, "such has been the story of my life, except one part of it, which, if I get stronger, I can tell better; but you will excuse that now."

"And are you comfortable and contented, my poor friend? These people are

kind to you?"

"Oh, so kind! And every night we all pray for you, sir; you ought to be happy, if the blessings of the poor can avail the rich."

Maltravers remounted his horse, and sought his home; and his heart was lighter than before he entered that cottage. But at evening Cleveland talked of Vargrave and Evelyn, and the good fortune of the one, and the charms of the other; and the wound, so well concealed, bled afresh.

"I heard from De Montaigne the other day," said Ernest, just as they were retiring for the night, "and his letter decides my movements. If you will accept me, then, as a travelling companion, I will go with you to Paris. Have you made up your mind to leave Burleigh on Saturday?"

"Yes; that gives us a day to recover from Lord Raby's ball. I am so delighted at your offer! We need only stay a day or so in town. The excursion will do you good,---your spirits, my dear Ernest, seem more dejected than when you first returned to England: you live too much alone here; you will enjoy Burleigh more on your return. And perhaps then you will open the old house a little more to the neighbourhood, and to your friends. They expect it: you are looked to for the county."

"I have done with politics, and sicken but for peace."

"Pick up a wife in Paris, and you will then know that peace is an impossible possession," said the old bachelor, laughing.

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