

Theresa
by
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(L. E. L.)

From
Heath's Book of Beauty, 1833
Compiled
by
Peter J. Bolton



THERESA

Artist F. Stone Engraver J. Thomson

THERESA.

“ THERE are individuals doomed to misfortune, and such is my destiny. There must be, among the general ill-luck, some one who is the unluckiest of them all: I am that one. To be banished from Vienna before the new ballet, and simply for being absent from my quarters without leave—what I have done fifty times before with impunity! And now for Colonel Rasaki—as though he had hoarded all the malice of his life for a moment—to hold forth on the necessity of strict discipline; and to awaken me from the prettiest allegory of the West-wind suddenly being personified by Madlle. Angeline, with an order from the Emperor to try the air of this old castle—as if I were a ghost or a rat, and could possibly be the better for dust, rust, damp, and darkness!”

Count Adalbert walked up and down the gloomy chamber which had been hurriedly prepared for his reception. The high and narrow windows had been built as if quite unconscious of their proper destina-

tion, and excluded the light and air as much as possible; still, many of the panes having been broken, little streams of the rain now beating against them came driving in; and a variety of small zephyrs, in the shape of draughts, did any thing but add to the Count's comfort. Half a tree would not have sufficed to fill the ample hearth, on which could just be perceived a flickering flame, almost lost in the immense volumes of smoke that rolled into the room, like waves on a beach; till Adalbert rushed in despair into the outward hall, which was inhabited by the one or two antique servitors who still remained in the large but ruinous building.

The sight of the old woman, whose wrinkled visage had driven him away in the first instance, might be shut out; now the smoke could not. Down he sat on a wooden stool, which must have been the first attempt ever made at a seat, so irregular were its shape and movements. This he drew to a table, whereon a most disconsolate supper was spread: twice the visitor looked down, to see whether he was cutting the meat or the wooden trencher.

Like most other young men, Count Adalbert had relations who conceived they knew better what was good for him than he did himself; and his uncle—whose experience was certainly very efficacious as a warning, and who believed that an error was easier to be prevented than remedied—on perceiving the young Count's predilection for the pret-

tiest dancer that had ever illuminated the horizon of Vienna, deemed that some *rouleaux*, and even a diamond necklace, would be saved by his nephew's being introduced to the historical records of his family, in which the old Castle of Aremberg occupied a distinguished place. Advantage was accordingly taken of a slight breach of military observance, and the delinquent forced to leave Vienna at a quarter of an hour's notice — quite unsuspecting how active his uncle had been for his good. Had Adalbert been aware of this most fatherly act, it is probable his guardian would have more than shared the execrations which the exile lavished in his inmost heart on fate, Colonel Rasaki, nay even on the august person of the Emperor.

A long ride had completely fatigued him, and he resolved to postpone his discontents.

“I shall have time enough to grumble,” thought he, as he followed the lighted pine-splinter — the only taper the place afforded — to the state chamber. The moths flew out of the tapestry as he entered — they had half devoured the court of Solomon, no more “in all his glory;” the green velvet hangings of the enormous bed had shared the same fate; and Adalbert was again driven to the hall, where he fell asleep thinking of suicide, and awoke dreaming of Angeline, whose image, however, instantly took flight before the melancholy reality of the old castle.

Yet, a week had not elapsed before Adalbert thought the said castle very well for a change, and

the neighbourhood delightful. The truth is, he had fallen in love—as pleasant a method of passing time in the country as any young gentleman could devise.

Wandering in search of the beauties of Nature—(people who have nothing else to do, become picturesque in self-defence)—he met with one of her beauties indeed, the loveliest peasant girl that ever “made sunshine in a shady place.” A scarlet cloth cap, trimmed with fur, partly covered a profusion of fair hair, which was parted on the soft forehead, and fell in bright and natural ringlets on the neck; her dress was of grey serge, and short enough to shew a foot and ankle such as not even the rude country shoes could disguise; her cheek had the bright beaming crimson of early youth and morning exercise; and her deep blue eyes shone with the vivacity of uncurbed gaiety and unbroken spirits. She came along, bearing a willow basket of wood-strawberries and wild blossoms, with a dancing step, and a lively song on her lips, singing in the very gladness of her heart.

The strawberries led to an acquaintance—Adalbert was thirsty, and Theresa (for such was her name) generous: she divided her fruit with the stranger, eagerly pressing the best upon him, in all the frank and earnest good-nature of a child. She was too simple, and too much accustomed to meet with kindness from every one, to be bashful.

They arrived at the cottage, where Theresa's

mother made Adalbert as welcome as herself; and in a few days, whether seated by her side as she turned her spinning-wheel of an evening, or with her when wandering in search of wild flowers and fruit, the contented exile and the beautiful peasant were constantly together. The dame was exceedingly quick in observing their love, which she seemed to consider quite natural. Though very ignorant, she had seen something of society beyond their own valley and its peasantry, and at once discovered that the Count was their superior: but the goodness and loveliness of her child entitled her, in the old woman's eyes, to be a princess at least.

Theresa was the most guileless creature, and had never dreamt of love till she felt it; the world to her was bounded by the wild moor and deep wood which surrounded their cottage. The only human beings she had ever beheld were the ancient domestics at the Castle, and a few of the peasants far poorer than themselves; for they had many comforts, which their neighbours eyed with much suspicion and some envy. Learning she had none, for neither mother nor daughter could read; but knowledge she had acquired. She knew all the legends and ballads of the country by heart; these gave their poetry to her naturally vivid imagination; and the imagination refines both feeling and manner. Having lived in absolute seclusion, she had nothing of that coarseness caught from familiar intercourse unrestrained by the delicacies of

polished life. Her companions had been the bird and the blossom, her songs, and her thoughts; and if the poet's dream of unsophisticated, yet refined nature, was ever realised, it was in that sweet and innocent maiden. Her love for Adalbert was a singular blending of childishness and romance: now her inward delight would find vent in buoyant laughter, and the playfulness of a young fawn bounding along the sunny glades of a forest: but oftener would she sink into a deep and tender silence—as if conscious that a new and even fearful existence had opened upon her—and gaze in his face, till her eyes were averted to conceal the large tears that had insensibly gathered in them. They had been acquainted with each other one whole fortnight, when the old priest at Hartzburg was called upon to marry the handsomest couple that had ever stood before the image of the Madonna!

If we did but know how we rush into one evil while seeking to avoid another, we should have no resolution to shun any thing. Could Count von Hermanstadt have anticipated that the fascinating dancer was far less dangerous than the then unknown peasant, his nephew would never have been ordered to the Castle of Aremberg. Little either could he dream, that the incognito he had himself enjoined, would have been found so useful and agreeable by his nephew. For Count von Hermanstadt, though very willing that Adalbert should take the Emperor's displeasure for granted, was not

desirous that others of a court where the sovereign's favour was every thing, should likewise take it for granted.

The first three weeks of Adalbert's married life passed very delightfully away, his position was one of such complete novelty: the cottage really was pleasanter than the castle; and if Theresa's beauty might have been a model for the painter, as the sweet colours flitted over her face, in like manner the many emotions that now disturbed the calm of a mind hitherto so tranquil and so glad, might have been a study for the philosopher. But Adalbert's previous habits had been ill-fitted to make their present state one of security—nay, his very youth was an obstacle; for in youth it seems so natural to love and be beloved, that we know not how to value as we ought the first devotion of the entire and trusting heart. Moreover, he had lived in a world of sarcasm; and Theresa's ignorance, which, now they were by themselves, was but a source of amusement, would, as he was aware, have been fertile matter of ridicule in society—ridicule, too, which must have reflected on him. Besides, all the prejudices of ancestry had, from infancy, been grafted on his mind—and he would as soon have thought of throwing his companion into the river on whose waters they were gazing, each on the mirrored face of the other, as of presenting her at Vienna. And yet that would have been the more merciful course. What was life whose affections were

wounded, and whose hopes were destroyed? And such was the life to which Adalbert was about to leave her. It came at last.

Mademoiselle Angeline's engagement had now drawn to its close: the manager offered to have the stage paved with ducats, if she would but give him one night more—the tenth muse was inexorable; and the day she departed for Paris, Adalbert received his recall to Vienna. To say he felt no regret, would be doing him scant justice—to say he felt much, would be more than the truth. Once or twice he thought of taking Theresa with him; but from this step he shrank for many reasons, not the least of which was, that a lingering impulse of good forbade his transplanting the pure and beautiful flower to wither and die in the thick and blighting atmosphere of the city: besides, he should often be able to visit Aremberg. He told them of important business—of a speedy return—and said all that has been so often and so vainly said in the hour of parting. He threw his horse's bridle over his arm, and Theresa walked with him along the little forest path which led to the road.

Adalbert was almost angry that she shewed none of the passionate despair, whose complaints he had nerved himself to meet: pale, silent, she clasped his hand a little more tenderly, she gazed on his face even more intently, than usual; and yet these tokens of sorrow she seemed trying to suppress. It never entered her imagination that

any entreaty of hers could alter their position— that any prayer could have prolonged Adalbert's stay for an hour; but every effort was directed to conceal her own grief: she felt so acutely the least sign of his suffering, that she only wished to spare him the sight of hers. At last he mounted his horse—once he looked back—Theresa was leaning against the old oak-tree for support, watching his progress—she caught his look, and as she interpreted it into an intention of returning, she held out her hands, and he could see the light come again to her eye and the colour to her cheek, while she sprang forward breathless with expectation; he, however, averted his head, and spurred his steed to its utmost swiftness: he did not see her sink on the earth—the strength which had sustained her had gone with her husband.

Youth's first acquaintance with sorrow is a terrible thing—before time has taught, what it will surely teach, that grief is our natural portion, at once transitory and eternal. But the first lesson is the severest—we have not then looked among our fellows, and seen that suffering is general; and we feel as if marked out by fate for misery that has no parallel. Theresa felt more acutely every hour, how wide a gulf had opened between her present and past existence: her girlhood had passed for ever; she took no pleasure in any of her former pursuits; she had put away childish things; and nothing had arisen to supply their place, save one

memory haunted but by one image. Days, weeks elapsed, and Adalbert returned not — her sleep was broken by a thousand fanciful terrors; but one fear had taken possession of her mother Ursaline's mind — that the stranger was false; and bitterly did she lament that she had ever intrusted him with the happiness of her precious child.

“ And yet I did it for the best!” she would piteously exclaim, whenever her eye fell on the pale cheek of her daughter.

“ He is come, my mother!” exclaimed Theresa, bounding one evening into the cottage with a long-unaccustomed lightness of heart and step. Though eager to spring down the path and meet him, yet, amid all the forgetfulness of joy, she had be-thought her of her aged parent, and returned that she too might share the happiness of their meeting. They hurried out, and three horsemen were riding up the valley — one much in advance of the others.

“ Mother, it is a stranger!” with difficulty articulated Theresa, and, sick at heart, clung to her arm for support.

The rider was full in sight, when, with a shriek that roused her daughter, Ursaline exclaimed, “ Now the blessed saints be good unto us, but it is my old master — I should know him amid a thousand!”

The words were scarcely uttered, when the horseman dismounted at a rough part of the road, and, flinging his bridle to his attendants, approached alone. He was a tall, stately, and austere-looking

man, seemingly about fifty, and one who apparently knew the place well. Ursaline dropped on her knee; he raised her kindly, and, following the direction of her look, turned and clasped Theresa in his arms.

“My child! my sweet child!” and he gazed long and earnestly on her beautiful face.

“Your father, the Baron von Haitzinger,” murmured Ursaline.

But as our explanation will be more brief than one broken in upon by words of wonder, regret, and affection, we will proceed to it; holding that explanation, like advice, should be of all convenient shortness. So much good luck had the Baron von Haitzinger had during the first thirty years of his life, that fortune seemed under the necessity of crowding an inordinate portion of evil into a small space, in order to make up for lost time. The same day brought him intelligence of his wife's desertion, and of his attainment as a traitor; and, further, that this accusation had been chiefly brought about by the intrigues of his former partner. A price being set on a man's head, usually makes him very speedy in his movements; and the Baron fled from his castle with the rapidity of life and death, but not unaccompanied. Wrapt in his mantle he bore with him their only child, a little girl of two years old. As boys, he and the Count von Hermanstadt had often hunted in the forests around Aremberg; his own foster-sister had married one of the dependants of the family; and to the care of Ursaline, now a

widow, he resolved to intrust his Theresa. Never should she owe her nurture to her mother — no, she should grow up pure and unsophisticated as the wild flowers on the heath beside her dwelling. Ursaline gave the required oath of secrecy, and took the charge.

Years and years of exile had passed over the Baron's head; his wife died—that was some comfort; and at length, a new emperor, together with the indefatigable efforts of his friend, Von Hermanstadt, procured the establishment of his innocence, the repeal of his banishment, and the restoration of his estate. His first act was to throw himself at the feet of his gracious sovereign, his second to depart in search of his child.

We have stated, it was the Baron's wish that Theresa should be brought up in ignorance and simplicity; but, as usually happens when our wishes are fulfilled, he was disappointed and somewhat dismayed on finding that she could not even read; and that instead of French, now the only language tolerated at Vienna, and which alone he had spoken for years — his exile having been alleviated by a constant residence at Paris — his child was unable to greet him save in the gutturals of her native German. Aghast at the ridicule the result of his experiment might entail upon him, he hurried to his family estate: here, having engaged a French governess and a professor of singing, he resolved to keep Theresa in perfect seclusion for

two years longer. Somewhat reluctantly, Ursaline accompanied them ; for her dread of their secret being discovered almost overcame her distress at the bare thought of her foster-child.

“ The Baron will kill us if he hears of your marriage—and yet I did it for the best : I thought he must be dead, and I knew you ought to marry none but a noble. Who could have thought Count Adalbert would have proved so false-hearted ? ”

Such were the constant lamentations of the old nurse whenever they were alone : but the secret she had to keep was too much for her ; and six weeks after leaving their cottage, Ursaline was safe from Von Haitzinger's anger in the grave.

Theresa wept for her long and bitterly : many sorrows took the semblance of one. Treated as a child, offered the amusements and the rewards of a child, when her heart was full of the grief and care of a woman—hourly she was more and more thrown upon herself. Her father, who considered every moment lost which was not given to the pursuit of education, debarred himself from her society. It was a sacrifice, but to Theresa it appeared choice ; and he thus repelled the confidence which kindness and familiar intercourse might have encouraged. She soon took an interest in the employments selected for her—they served to divert her attention from a remembrance that grew continually more painful. Every step she gained in knowledge, every experience brought by reading or conversa-

tion, but served to shew her more fully the difficulty of her position.

Love is the destiny of a woman's life, and hers had been sealed on the threshold of existence: it was too late now to change the colour of or alter the past. Theresa's greatest enjoyment was to wander through the lonely gardens: though the leaf and the flower could never more be to her the companions they had been, still, when alone, they aided her in recalling the days when they were mute witnesses to vows which had the common fate of being kept but by one. The difference between herself and those of her own age consisted in this, that they looked to the future, she dwelt upon the past; they hoped, she only remembered.

The young Countess's instructors were loud in their praises of her docility and progress; the French governess remarking, "*Mademoiselle est pleine des talens et des graces; mais elle est si triste et si silencieuse.*"

The two years passed, and Theresa was to accompany her father to Vienna. The Baron von Haitzinger, who had never quite recovered the shock of finding that his daughter could only speak German, and could neither read nor write, was utterly unprepared for the sensation she produced on her introduction into society. Theresa at twenty more than realised the promise of seventeen; yet it is singular how much the character of her beauty was changed. She had been a glad, bright, buoyant

creature, with a cheek like a rose, a mouth radiant with smiles, and the golden curls dancing in sunny profusion over the blushes they shaded. Now her hair and eyes were much darker, her cheek was pale, and the general cast of her face melancholy and thoughtful; her step was still light, but slow—it was urged on no longer by inward buoyancy: and if a painter, three years before, would have chosen her as a model for the youngest of the Graces, he would now have selected her for the loveliest of the Muses—so ethereal, so intellectual was that sad and expressive countenance. Her father was charmed with the ease and self-possession of her manner—the perfection of beautiful repose: true, it was broken in upon by none of the flatterings of girlish vanity, none of the slight yet keen excitements of a season given to gaiety.

The Countess was wholly indifferent to the scene that surrounded her—to its pleasure and its triumph; she had a standard of her own by which she measured enjoyment, and found what was here deemed pleasure by others, to be vapid and worthless; and now, more than ever, the image of Adalbert rose present to her mind. She compared him with the many cavaliers about her; and the comparison was, as it ever is, in favour of the heart's earliest idol. Even when unconsciously yielding to the influence exercised by light, music, and a glittering crowd, Theresa would start back, and muse on what might be the fate of Adalbert at that

very moment; for, with a confidence belonging to youth and woman, she admitted any suggestion rather than the obvious one of his inconstancy. Two or three brilliant conquests cost her a sleepless night and a pale cheek; but as her father always acquiesced in a prompt refusal, she gradually became happy in the belief that he did not desire her marriage.

One evening all Vienna was assembled at a *réunion* given by the French Ambassador. Dazzling with jewels, and looking her very loveliest, Theresa was seated beside the lady who accompanied her, when her eye suddenly rested on Adalbert. A dense crowd was between them, but the platform on which he was standing enabled him to see over their heads; and he was evidently gazing on her. With a faint cry, she half started from her seat—fortunately she was unobserved; and again sinking back in her chair, she endeavoured to collect her scattered spirits from their first confusion of surprise and delight. Her astonishment had yet to be increased. The Baron appeared on the scene, greeted the stranger most cordially, and arm in arm they descended among the throng. At intervals she caught sight of his splendid uniform; it came nearer and nearer: at last they emerged from a very ocean of velvet and plumes, and her father addressed her—

“Theresa, my love! I am most anxious to present to you the nephew of my oldest friend, Prince Ernest von Hermanstadt.”

Adalbert, or Ernest, bowed most admiringly it is true, but without the slightest token of recognition. Faint, breathless, Theresa sought in vain to speak.

“ You look pale, my child,” said her father ; “ the heat is too much for you. Do, Ernest, try to make your way with her to the window, and I will get a glass of water.”

Theresa felt her hand drawn lightly through the arm to which she had so often clung, and the Prince with some difficulty conveyed her to the window. There they stood alone for some minutes, before the Baron could rejoin them ; yet not by word or sign did her companion imply a previous knowledge. His manner was most gentle, most attentive ; but it was that of a perfect stranger.

Theresa drank the glass of water, and, by a strong effort, recalled her presence of mind. She looked in Prince Ernest’s face—it was no mistake ; every feature of that noble and striking countenance was too deeply treasured for forgetfulness. Her father, by continually addressing her, shewed how anxious he was for her to join in the conversation. At last she trusted her voice with a few brief words ; the Prince listened to them eagerly, but, it was evident, only with present admiration.

They remained together the rest of the evening, and the Prince von Hermanstadt handed her to the Baron’s carriage.

“ What do you think of my young favourite ?”

asked her father, as they entered their abode. "But I hate unnecessary mysteries, so shall tell you at once, that in Prince Ernest you see your destined husband: you have been betrothed from your birth. This, however, is no time to talk over family matters, for you look fatigued to death."

Theresa retired to her chamber, her head dizzy with surprise and sorrow. She had gleaned enough from the conversation to discover that Ernest's absence from his country had been entirely voluntary — that she had known him under a feigned name — therefore, from the very first he had been deceiving her. Strange that till this moment her heart had never admitted the belief of his falsehood! As she paced her room, she caught sight of her whole-length figure in the glass: then rose upon her memory her own reflection as she had seen it shadowed in the river near her early home, and the change in herself struck her forcibly.

"I marvel that he knew me not? — it were far greater marvel had he known me."

She looked long and earnestly in the mirror; a rich colour rose to her cheek, and the light flashed from her eyes —

"What if I could make him love me now? and then let him feel only the faintest part of what I have felt!" But the last words were so softly uttered, that they sounded like any thing rather than a denunciation of revenge.

The next day and the next saw Ernest a con-

stant visitor; and Theresa in vain sought to hide from herself the truth, that she felt a keen pleasure in observing how much more suitable her new self was to her former lover. Then they had nothing, now they had so much in common with each other; they read together, they talked together; and Hermanstadt was delighted with the melancholy and thoughtful style of her conversation.

The summer was now advancing, and Haitzinger proposed visiting the Castle. Thither the whole party adjourned; the two elder Barons—for Ernest's uncle had now joined them—leaving the young people almost entirely to themselves. Here Theresa could not but perceive that Ernest grew daily depressed; sometimes he would leave her abruptly, and she would afterwards learn that for hours he had been wandering alone.

One evening, while walking in the old picture-gallery, Theresa turned to the window to admire the luxuriant growth of a parasitic plant, whose drooping white flowers hung in numberless fragrant clusters. Ernest approached to her side, and they leant from the casement—both mute with the same emotion, though from different causes. Suddenly he broke silence, and Theresa again listened to the avowal of his love. But now the voice was low and broken, and he spoke mournfully and hopelessly; for in the same hour in which he owned his passion for the Countess, he also acknowledged to her his marriage with the peasant.

Ernest had, in truth, been spoilt by circumstances; his conquests had been too easy, and he had mistaken vanity and interest for love. But a deep and true feeling elevates and purifies the heart into which it enters. His passion for Theresa brought back his better nature; and he now bitterly deplored the misery he must have caused the young and forsaken creature, whose happiness he had destroyed by such thoughtless cruelty. "The sacrifice I now make may well be held an atonement."

He turned to leave the gallery as he spoke, but Theresa's voice arrested his steps.

"I have long known your history, Prince Ernest—long looked for this confession. Your wife is now in the Castle; I will prepare her for an interview—from her you must seek your pardon."

She was gone before Von Hermanstadt recovered his breath. It would be vain to say what were his thoughts during the succeeding minutes; shame, surprise—something, too, of pity blended with regret. He had not moved from the spot, when the Countess's page put a note into his hand.

"I do not wish to let my father know all yet: join us at the end of the acacia wood—your wife there awaits your arrival.—THERESA."

The Prince obeyed the summons mechanically—as in dreams we obey some strange power. A sharp angle in the walk brought him, before he was aware, to the place; and there, as though he had but just parted from her, stood his wife, leaning for support

against the old oak. She wore the scarlet cap broidered with fur, the grey stuff dress, and the plaited apron: her beautiful profile was half turned towards him.

“Theresa!” he whispered; when, starting at the face, which was now completely given to view, he exclaimed, “Is it possible?” for he saw instantly that it was the Countess before him.

“Yes, Adalbert—or Ernest—by which name shall I claim you?” And the next moment she was in his arms.

Confession and forgiveness followed of course; though the Baron von Haitzinger resolved that he would give no encouragement to his grand-daughters being brought up in unsophisticated seclusion, as it rarely happens that two experiments of the same kind turn out well. Still, it is but justice to state, that Theresa never had any further occasion to regret that her husband’s heart was once lost and twice won.