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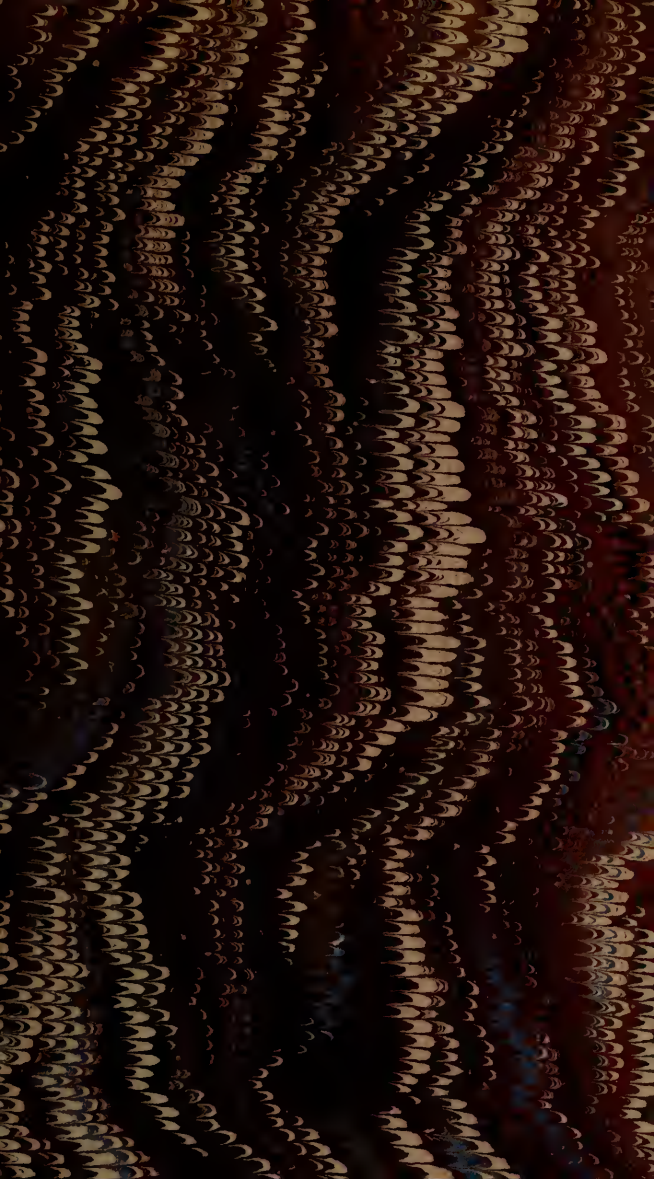
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E. CUBITT.



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NOVELS

OF

SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTON

Library Edition

NOVELS OF LIFE AND MANNERS

VOL. X.

ERNEST MALTRAVERS

OR

THE ELEUSINIA

BY

SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, BART.

Part the Second

LIBRARY EDITION—IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

Θαβῶ τῶ διοικοῦντι.

M. ANTONIN., lib. vi. sec. 8.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

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ERNEST MALTRAVERS

PART THE SECOND

COMPRISING

ALICE ; OR, THE MYSTERIES

N O T E.

ALTHOUGH it has been judged desirable to designate this Second Part of 'Ernest Maltravers' by its original title of 'Alice,' yet, as it has been elsewhere stated, the two Parts are united by the same plot, and form but one entire whole. The more ingenious and attentive will perhaps perceive that under the outward story, which knits together the destinies of Alice and Maltravers, there is an interior philosophical design which explains the author's application of the word "Eleusinia," or "Mysteries," appended to the title. Thus regarded, Ernest Maltravers will appear to the reader as the type of Genius, or Intellectual Ambition, which, at the onset of its career, devotes itself with extravagant and often erring passion to Nature alone (typified by Alice). Maltravers is separated by action, and the current of worldly life, from the simple and earlier form of Nature—new objects successively attract, and for a short time absorb, his devotion, but he has always a secret yearning to the first idol, and a repentant regret for his loss. Completing, however, his mental education in the actual world, and, though

often led astray from the path, still earnestly fixing his eye upon the goal—he is ultimately reunited to the one who had first smiled upon his youth, and ever (yet unconsciously) influenced his after manhood. But this attachment is no longer erring, and the object of it has attained to a purer and higher state of being ;—that is, GENIUS, if duly following its vocation, reunites itself to the NATURE from which life and art had for a while distracted it ; but to Nature in a higher and more spiritual form than that under which youth beholds it—Nature elevated and idealised.

In tracing the progress and denouement of this conception, the reader will be better enabled to judge both of the ethical intention of the author, and of the degree of success with which, as an artist, he has connected the inward story with the outer, and, while faithful to his main typical purpose, left to the characters that illustrate it the attributes of reality—the freedom and movement of living beings. So far as an author may presume to judge of his own writings, no narrative fiction by the same hand (with the exception of the poem of ‘ King Arthur ’) deserves to be classed before this work in such merit as may be thought to belong to harmony between a premeditated conception and the various incidents and agencies employed in the development of plot.

BOOK I.

Σὲ τὰν ἐναύλιοις ὑπὸ δενδροκόμοις
. . . ἀναβοάσω.—EURIP. *Hel.* 1. 1116.

Thee, hid the bowering vales amidst, I call.

ALICE; OR, THE MYSTERIES.

BOOK I.—CHAPTER I.

Who art thou, fair one, who usurp'st the place
Of Blanch, the lady of the matchless grace?—LAMB.

IT was towards the evening of a day in early April, that two ladies were seated by the open windows of a cottage in Devonshire. The lawn before them was gay with evergreens, relieved by the first few flowers and fresh turf of the reviving spring; and at a distance, through an opening amongst the trees, the sea, blue and tranquil, bounded the view, and contrasted the more confined and home-like features of the scene. It was a spot remote, sequestered, shut out from the business and pleasures of the world;—as such it suited the tastes and character of the owner.

That owner was the younger of the ladies seated by the window. You would scarcely have guessed, from her appearance, that she was more than seven or eight-and-twenty, though she exceeded by four or five years

that critical boundary in the life of beauty. Her form was slight and delicate in its proportions, nor was her countenance the less lovely, because, from its gentleness and repose (not unmixed with a certain sadness), the coarse and the gay might have thought it wanting in expression. For there is a stillness in the aspect of those who have felt deeply, which deceives the common eye—as rivers are often alike tranquil and profound, in proportion as they are remote from the springs which agitated and swelled the commencement of their course, and by which their waters are still, though invisibly, supplied.

The elder lady, the guest of her companion, was past seventy ; her grey hair was drawn back from the forehead, and gathered under a stiff cap of Quaker-like simplicity ; while her dress, rich but plain, and of no very modern fashion, served to increase the venerable appearance of one who seemed not ashamed of years.

“My dear Mrs Leslie,” said the lady of the house, after a thoughtful pause in the conversation that had been carried on for the last hour, “it is very true ; perhaps I was to blame in coming to this place ; I ought not to have been so selfish.”

“No, my dear friend,” returned Mrs Leslie, gently ; “selfish is a word that can never be applied to you ; you acted as became you—agreeably to your own instinctive sense of what is best, when at your age— independent in fortune and rank, and still so lovely—you resigned all that would have attracted others, and devoted yourself, in retirement, to a life of quiet and

unknown benevolence. You are in your sphere in this village—humble though it be—consoling, relieving, healing the wretched, the destitute, the infirm ; and teaching your Evelyn insensibly to imitate your modest and Christian virtues.” The good old lady spoke warmly, and with tears in her eyes ; her companion placed her hand in Mrs Leslie’s.

“ You cannot make me vain,” said she, with a sweet and melancholy smile. “ I remember what I was when you first gave shelter to the poor desolate wanderer and her fatherless child ; and I, who was then so poor and destitute, what should I be if I was deaf to the poverty and sorrows of others—others, too, who are better than I am ? But now Evelyn, as you say, is growing up ; the time approaches when she must decide on accepting or rejecting Lord Vargrave ;—and yet in this village how can she compare him with others ?—how can she form a choice ? What you say is very true ; and yet I did not think of it sufficiently. What shall I do ? I am only anxious, dear girl, to act so as may be best for her own happiness.”

“ Of that I am sure,” returned Mrs Leslie ; “ and yet I know not how to advise. On one hand, so much is due to the wishes of your late husband, in every point of view, that if Lord Vargrave be worthy of Evelyn’s esteem and affection, it would be most desirable that she should prefer him to all others. But if he be what I hear he is considered in the world—an artful, scheming, almost heartless man, of ambitious and hard pursuits—I tremble to think how completely

the happiness of Evelyn's whole life may be thrown away. She certainly is not in love with him, and yet I fear she is one whose nature is but too susceptible of affection. She ought now to see others—to know her own mind, and not to be hurried, blindfold and inexperienced, into a step that decides existence. This is a duty we owe to her—nay, even to the late Lord Vargrave, anxious as he was for the marriage. His aim was surely her happiness, and he would not have insisted upon means that time and circumstances might show to be contrary to the end he had in view."

"You are right," replied Lady Vargrave; "when my poor husband lay on his bed of death, just before he summoned his nephew to receive his last blessing, he said to me, 'Providence can counteract all our schemes. If ever it should be for Evelyn's real happiness that my wish for her marriage with Lumley Ferrers should not be fulfilled, to you I must leave the right to decide on what I cannot foresee. All I ask is, that no obstacle shall be thrown in the way of my wish; and that the child shall be trained up to consider Lumley as her future husband.' Among his papers was a letter addressed to me to the same effect; and, indeed, in other respects, that letter left more to my judgment than I had any right to expect. Oh, I am often unhappy to think that he did not marry one who would have deserved his affection! and—but regret is useless now!"

"I wish you could really feel so," said Mrs Leslie; "for regret of another kind still seems to haunt you;

and I do not think you have yet forgotten your early sorrows."

"Ah! how can I?" said Lady Vargrave, with a quivering lip.

At that instant, a light shadow darkened the sunny lawn in front of the casements, and a sweet, gay, young voice was heard singing at a little distance;—a moment more, and a beautiful girl, in the first bloom of youth, bounded lightly along the grass, and halted opposite the friends.

It was a remarkable contrast,—the repose and quiet of the two persons we have described—the age and grey hairs of the one, the resigned and melancholy gentleness written on the features of the other—with the springing step, and laughing eyes, and radiant bloom of the new-comer! As she stood with the setting sun glowing full upon her rich fair hair, her happy countenance and elastic form—it was a vision almost too bright for this weary earth—a thing of light and bliss—that the joyous Greek might have placed among the forms of heaven, and worshipped as an Aurora or a Hebe.

"Oh! how can you stay in-doors this beautiful evening? Come, dearest Mrs Leslie; come, mother, dear mother, you know you promised you would—you said I was to call you—see, it will rain no more, and the shower has left the myrtles and the violet-bank so fresh."

"My dear Evelyn," said Mrs Leslie, with a smile, "I am not so young as you."

“No ; but you are just as gay when you are in good spirits—and who can be out of spirits in such weather? Let me call for your chair ; let me wheel you—I am sure I can.—Down, Sultan ; so you have found me out, have you, sir ? Be quiet, sir—down !”

This last exhortation was addressed to a splendid dog of the Newfoundland breed, who now contrived wholly to occupy Evelyn’s attention.

The two friends looked at this beautiful girl, as with all the grace of youth she shared while she rebuked the exuberant hilarity of her huge playmate ; and the elder of the two seemed the most to sympathise with her mirth. Both gazed with fond affection upon an object dear to both. But some memory or association touched Lady Vargrave, and she sighed as she gazed.

CHAPTER II.

Is stormy life preferred to this serene?—YOUNG'S *Satires*.

AND the windows were closed in, and night had succeeded to evening, and the little party at the cottage were grouped together. Mrs Leslie was quietly seated at her tambour-frame;—Lady Vargrave, leaning her cheek on her hand, seemed absorbed in a volume before her, but her eyes were not on the page;—Evelyn was busily employed in turning over the contents of a parcel of books and music, which had just been brought from the lodge, where the London coach had deposited it.

“Oh, dear mamma!” cried Evelyn, “I am so glad; there is something you will like—some of the poetry that touched you so much, set to music.”

Evelyn brought the songs to her mother, who roused herself from her reverie, and looked at them with interest.

“It is very strange,” said she, “that I should be so affected by all that is written by this person; I, too,” she added, tenderly stroking down Evelyn’s luxuriant tresses, “who am not so fond of reading as you are!”

“You are reading one of his books now,” said Evelyn,

glancing over the open page on the table. "Ah, that beautiful passage upon 'Our First Impressions.' Yet I do not like you, dear mother, to read his books; they always seem to make you sad."

"There is a charm to me in their thoughts, their manner of expression," said Lady Vargrave, "which sets me thinking, which reminds me of—of an early friend, whom I could fancy I hear talking while I read. It was so from the first time I opened by accident a book of his, years ago."

"Who is this author that pleases you so much?" asked Mrs Leslie, with some surprise, for Lady Vargrave had usually little pleasure in reading even the greatest and most popular masterpieces of modern genius.

"Maltravers," answered Evelyn; "and I think I almost share my mother's enthusiasm."

"Maltravers!" repeated Mrs Leslie. "He is, perhaps, a dangerous writer for one so young. At your age, dear girl, you have naturally romance and feeling enough of your own, without seeking them in books."

"But, dear madam," said Evelyn, standing up for her favourite, "his writings do not consist of romance and feeling only; they are not exaggerated, they are so simple—so truthful."

"Did you ever meet him?" asked Lady Vargrave.

"Yes," returned Mrs Leslie, "once, when he was a gay, fair-haired boy. His father resided in the next county, and we met at a country-house. Mr Maltravers himself has an estate near my daughter in

B——shire, but he does not live on it ; he has been some years abroad—a strange character !”

“Why does he write no more ?” said Evelyn ; “I have read his works so often, and know his poetry so well by heart, that I should look forward to something new from him as an event.”

“I have heard, my dear, that he has withdrawn much from the world and its objects—that he has lived greatly in the East. The death of a lady to whom he was to have been married is said to have unsettled and changed his character. Since that event he has not returned to England. Lord Vargrave can tell you more of him than I.”

“Lord Vargrave thinks of nothing that is not always before the world,” said Evelyn.

“I am sure you wrong him,” said Mrs Leslie, looking up and fixing her eyes on Evelyn’s countenance ; “for *you* are not before the world.”

Evelyn slightly—very slightly—pouted her pretty lip, but made no answer. She took up the music, and seating herself at the piano, practised the airs. Lady Vargrave listened with emotion ; and as Evelyn in a voice exquisitely sweet, though not powerful, sang the words, her mother turned away her face, and, half unconsciously, a few tears stole silently down her cheek.

When Evelyn ceased, herself affected—for the lines were impressed with a wild and melancholy depth of feeling—she came again to her mother’s side, and, seeing her emotion, kissed away the tears from the

pensive eyes. Her own gaiety left her—she drew a stool to her mother's feet, and nestling to her, and clasping her hand, did not leave that place till they retired to rest.

And the Lady blessed Evelyn, and felt that, if bereaved, she was not alone.

CHAPTER III.

But come, thou Goddess, fair and free,
In heaven yeleft Euphrosyne !

To hear the lark begin his flight,
And, singing, startle the dull night.—*L'Allegro.*

But come, thou Goddess, sage and holy,
Come, divinest Melancholy !

There held in holy passion still,
Forget thyself to marble.—*Il Penseroso.*

THE early morning of early Spring—what associations of freshness and hope in that single sentence ! And there—a little after sunrise—there was Evelyn, fresh and hopeful as the morning itself, bounding with the light step of a light heart over the lawn. Alone—alone ! no governess, with a pinched nose and a sharp voice, to curb her graceful movements, and tell her how young ladies ought to walk. How silently Morning stole over the Earth ! It was as if Youth had the day and the world to itself. The shutters of the cottage were still closed, and Evelyn cast a glance upward, to assure herself that her mother, who also rose betimes, was not yet stirring. So she tripped along, singing from very glee, to secure a companion, and let

out Sultan ; and, a few moments afterwards, they were scouring over the grass, and descending the rude steps that wound down the cliff to the smooth sea-sands. Evelyn was still a child at heart, yet somewhat more than a child in mind. In the majesty of

“That hollow, sounding, and mysterious main”—

in the silence broken but by the murmur of the billows—in the solitude relieved but by the boats of the early fishermen—she felt those deep and tranquillising influences which belong to the Religion of Nature. Unconsciously to herself, her sweet face grew more thoughtful, and her step more slow. What a complex thing is education ! How many circumstances, that have no connection with books and tutors, contribute to the rearing of the human mind !—the earth, and the sky, and the ocean, were among the teachers of Evelyn Cameron ; and beneath her simplicity of thought was daily filled, from the urns of invisible spirits, the fountain of the poetry of feeling.

This was the hour when Evelyn most sensibly felt how little our real life is chronicled by external events—how much we live a second and a higher life in our meditations and dreams. Brought up, not more by precept than example, in the faith which unites creature and Creator, this was the hour in which thought itself had something of the holiness of prayer ; and if (turning from dreams divine to earthlier visions) this also was the hour in which the heart painted and peopled its own fairy land below—of the two ideal worlds that

stretch beyond the inch of time on which we stand, Imagination is perhaps holier than Memory.

So now, as the day crept on, Evelyn returned in a more sober mood, and then she joined her mother and Mrs Leslie at breakfast ; and then the household cares—such as they were—devolved upon her, heiress though she was ; and, that duty done, once more the straw hat and Sultan were in requisition ; and, opening a little gate at the back of the cottage, she took the path along the village churchyard that led to the house of the old curate. The burial-ground itself was surrounded and shut in with a belt of trees. Save the small time-discoloured church, and the roofs of the cottage and the minister's house, no building—not even a cottar's hut—was visible there. Beneath a dark and single yew-tree, in the centre of the ground, was placed a rude seat ; opposite to this seat was a grave, distinguished from the rest by a slight palisade. As the young Evelyn passed slowly by this spot, a glove on the long damp grass beside the yew-tree caught her eye. She took it up and sighed—it was her mother's. She sighed—for she thought of the soft melancholy on that mother's face which her caresses and her mirth never could wholly chase away. She wondered why that melancholy was so fixed a habit—for the young ever wonder why the experienced should be sad.

And now Evelyn had passed the churchyard, and was on the green turf before the minister's quaint, old-fashioned house.

The old man himself was at work in his garden ; but he threw down his hoe as he saw Evelyn, and came cheerfully up to greet her.

It was easy to see how dear she was to him.

“So you are come for your daily lesson, my young pupil?”

“Yes ; but Tasso can wait if the——”

“If the tutor wants to play truant ; no, my child ;—and, indeed, the lesson must be longer than usual to-day, for I fear I shall have to leave you to-morrow for some days.”

“Leave us ! why ?—leave Brook-Green—impossible !”

“Not at all impossible ; for we have now a new vicar, and I must turn courtier in my old age, and ask him to leave me with my flock. He is at Weymouth, and has written to me to visit him there. So, Miss Evelyn, I must give you a holiday task to learn while I am away.”

Evelyn brushed the tears from her eyes—for when the heart is full of affection, the eyes easily run over—and clung mournfully to the old man, as she gave utterance to all her half-childish, half-womanly grief at the thought of parting so soon with him. And, what, too, could her mother do without him ; and why could he not write to the vicar, instead of going to him ?

The curate, who was childless and a bachelor, was not insensible to the fondness of his beautiful pupil, and perhaps he himself was a little more *distract* than usual that morning, or else Evelyn was peculiarly inatten-

tive ; for certain it is, that she reaped very little benefit from the lesson.

Yet he was an admirable teacher, that old man ! Aware of Evelyn's quick, susceptible, and rather fanciful character of mind, he had sought less to curb than to refine and elevate her imagination. Himself of no ordinary abilities, which leisure had allowed him to cultivate, his piety was too large and cheerful to exclude literature—Heaven's best gift—from the pale of religion. And under his care Evelyn's mind had been duly stored with the treasures of modern genius, and her judgment strengthened by the criticisms of a graceful and generous taste.

In that sequestered hamlet, the young heiress had been trained to adorn her future station ; to appreciate the arts and elegancies that distinguish (no matter what the rank) the refined from the low, better than if she had been brought up under the hundred-handed Briareus of fashionable education. Lady Vargrave, indeed, like most persons of modest pretensions and imperfect cultivation, was rather inclined to overrate the advantages to be derived from book-knowledge, and she was never better pleased than when she saw Evelyn opening the monthly parcel from London, and delightedly poring over volumes which Lady Vargrave innocently believed to be reservoirs of inexhaustible wisdom.

But this day Evelyn would not read, and the golden verses of Tasso lost their music to her ear. So the

curate gave up the lecture, and placed a little programme of studies, to be conned during his absence, in her reluctant hand ; and Sultan, who had been wistfully licking his paws for the last half-hour, sprang up and caracolled once more into the garden—and the old priest and the young woman left the works of man for those of Nature.

“Do not fear ; I will take such care of your garden while you are away,” said Evelyn ; “and you must write and let us know what day you are to come back.”

“My dear Evelyn, you are born to spoil every one—from Sultan to Aubrey.”

“And to be spoilt too—don’t forget that,” cried Evelyn, laughingly shaking back her ringlets. “And now, before you go, will you tell me, as you are so wise, what I can do to make—to make—my mother love me ?”

Evelyn’s voice faltered as she spoke the last words, and Aubrey looked surprised and moved.

“Your mother love you, my dear Evelyn ! What do you mean—does she not love you ?”

“Ah, not as I love her ;—she is kind and gentle, I know, for she is so to all ; but she does not confide in me—she does not trust me ; she has some sorrow at heart which I am never allowed to learn and soothe. Why does she avoid all mention of her early days ? she never talks to me as if *she*, too, had once a mother ! Why am I never to speak of her first marriage—of my father ? Why does she look reproachfully at me, and shun me—yes, shun me, for days together—if

—if I attempt to draw her to the past? Is there a secret?—if so, am I not old enough to know it?”

Evelyn spoke quickly and nervously, and with quivering lips. Aubrey took her hand, and pressing it, said, after a little pause,

“Evelyn, this is the first time you have ever thus spoken to me. Has anything chanced to arouse your—shall I call it curiosity, or shall I call it the mortified pride of affection?”

“And you, too, are harsh; you blame me! No, it is true that I have not thus spoken to you before; but I have long, long thought with grief that I was insufficient to my mother’s happiness—I who love her so dearly. And now, since Mrs Leslie has been here, I find her conversing with this comparative stranger, so much more confidentially than with me;—when I come in unexpectedly, they cease their conference, as if I were not worthy to share it; and—and oh, if I could but make you understand that all I desire is, that my mother should love me, and know me, and trust me——”

“Evelyn,” said the curate, coldly, “you love your mother, and justly; a kinder and a gentler heart than hers does not beat in a human breast. Her first wish in life is for your happiness and welfare. You ask for confidence, but why not confide in her? why not believe her actuated by the best and the tenderest motives? why not leave it to her discretion to reveal to you any secret grief, if such there be, that preys upon her? why add to that grief by any selfish indulgence of over-sus-

ceptibility in yourself? My dear pupil, you are yet almost a child ; and they who have sorrowed may well be reluctant to sadden with a melancholy confidence those to whom sorrow is yet unknown. This much, at least, I may tell you—for this much she does not seek to conceal—that Lady Vargrave was early inured to trials from which you, more happy, have been saved. She speaks not to you of her relations, for she has none left on earth. And after her marriage with your benefactor, Evelyn, perhaps it seemed to her a matter of principle to banish all vain regret, all remembrance, if possible, of an earlier tie.”

“ My poor, poor mother ! Oh, yes, you are right ; forgive me. She yet mourns, perhaps, my father, whom I never saw, whom I feel, as it were, tacitly forbid to name,—you did not know him ? ”

“ Him !—whom ? ”

“ My father, my mother’s first husband ? ”

“ No.”

“ But I am sure I could not have loved him so well as my benefactor, my real and second father, who is now dead and gone. Oh, how well I remember *him*—how fondly ! ” Here Evelyn stopped and burst into tears.

“ You do right to remember him thus ; to love and revere his memory—a father, indeed, he was to you. But now, Evelyn, my own dear child, hear me. Respect the silent heart of your mother : let her not think that her misfortunes, whatever they may be, can cast a shadow over you—you, her last hope and blessing.

Rather than seek to open the old wounds, suffer them to heal, as they must, beneath the influences of religion and time ; and wait the hour when without, perhaps, too keen a grief, your mother can go back with you into the past."

"I will—I will. Oh, how wicked,—how ungracious I have been ! it was but an excess of love, believe it, dear Mr Aubrey, believe it."

"I do believe it, my poor Evelyn ; and now I know that I may trust in you. Come, dry those bright eyes, or they will think I have been a hard taskmaster, and let us go to the cottage."

They walked slowly and silently across the humble garden into the churchyard, and there, by the old yew-tree, they saw Lady Vargrave. Evelyn, fearful that the traces of her tears were yet visible, drew back ; and Aubrey, aware of what passed within her, said,—

"Shall I join your mother, and tell her of my approaching departure ? and perhaps, in the meanwhile, you will call at our poor pensioner's in the village—Dame Newman is so anxious to see you—we will join you there soon.

Evelyn smiled her thanks, and kissing her hand to her mother with seeming gaiety, turned back and passed through the glebe into the little village. Aubrey joined Lady Vargrave, and drew her arm in his.

Meanwhile Evelyn thoughtfully pursued her way. Her heart was full, and of self-reproach. Her mother had, then, known cause for sorrow ; and, perhaps, her reserve was but occasioned by her reluctance to pain

her child. Oh, how doubly anxious would Evelyn be hereafter to soothe, to comfort, to wean that dear mother from the past ! Though in this girl's character there was something of the impetuosity and thoughtlessness of her years, it was noble as well as soft ; and now the woman's trustfulness conquered all the woman's curiosity.

She entered the cottage of the old bed-ridden crone whom Aubrey had referred to. It was as a gleam of sunshine, that sweet comforting face ; and here, seated by the old woman's side, with the Book of the Poor upon her lap, Evelyn was found by Lady Vargrave. It was curious to observe the different impressions upon the cottagers made by the mother and daughter. Both were beloved with almost equal enthusiasm ; but with the first the poor felt more at home. They could talk to her more at ease : she understood them so much more quickly ; they had no need to beat about the bush to tell the little peevish complaints that they were half-ashamed to utter to Evelyn. What seemed so light to the young, cheerful beauty, the mother listened to with so grave and sweet a patience. When all went right, they rejoiced to see Evelyn ; but in their little difficulties and sorrows, nobody was like "my good Lady !"

So Dame Newman, the moment she saw the pale countenance and graceful shape of Lady Vargrave at the threshold, uttered an exclamation of delight. Now she could let out all that she did not like to trouble

the young lady with ; now she could complain of east winds, and rheumatiz, and the parish officers, and the bad tea they sold poor people at Mr Hart's shop, and the ungrateful grandson who was so well to do and who forgot he had a grandmother alive !

CHAPTER IV.

Towards the end of the week we received a card from the town ladies.
Vicar of Wakefield.

THE curate was gone, and the lessons suspended ; otherwise — as like each to each as sunshine or cloud permitted—day followed day in the calm retreat of Brook-Green ; when, one morning, Mrs Leslie, with a letter in her hand, sought Lady Vargrave, who was busied in tending the flowers of a small conservatory which she had added to the cottage, when, from various motives, and one in especial powerful and mysterious, she exchanged for so sequestered a home, the luxurious villa bequeathed to her by her husband.

To flowers — those charming children of Nature, in which our age can take the same tranquil pleasure as our youth—Lady Vargrave devoted much of her monotonous and unchecked time. She seemed to love them almost as living things ; and her memory associated them with hours as bright and as fleeting as themselves.

“ My dear friend,” said Mrs Leslie, “ I have news for you. My daughter, Mrs Merton, who has been in Cornwall on a visit to her husband’s mother, writes me

word that she will visit us on her road home to the Rectory in B——shire. She will not put you much out of the way," added Mrs Leslie, smiling, "for Mr Merton will not accompany her ; she only brings her daughter Caroline, a lively, handsome, intelligent girl, who will be enchanted with Evelyn. All you will regret is, that she comes to terminate my visit, and take me away with her. If you can forgive that offence, you will have nothing else to pardon."

Lady Vargrave replied with her usual simple kindness, but she was evidently nervous at the visit of a stranger (for she had never yet seen Mrs Merton), and still more distressed at the thought of losing Mrs Leslie a week or two sooner than had been anticipated. However, Mrs Leslie hastened to reassure her. Mrs Merton was so quiet and good-natured, the wife of a country clergyman with simple tastes ; and, after all, Mrs Leslie's visit might last as long, if Lady Vargrave would be contented to extend her hospitality to Mrs Merton and Caroline.

When the visit was announced to Evelyn, her young heart was susceptible only of pleasure and curiosity. She had no friend of her own age ; she was sure she should like the grandchild of her dear Mrs Leslie.

Evelyn, who had learned betimes, from the affectionate solicitude of her nature, to relieve her mother of such few domestic cares as a home so quiet, with an establishment so regular, could afford, gaily busied herself in a thousand little preparations. She filled the rooms of the visitors with flowers (not dreaming that

any one could fancy them unwholesome), and spread the tables with her own favourite books, and had the little cottage piano in her own dressing-room removed into Caroline's—Caroline must be fond of music : she had some doubts of transferring a cage with two canaries into Caroline's room also, but when she approached the cage with that intention, the birds chirped so merrily, and seemed so glad to see her, and so expectant of sugar, that her heart smote her for her meditated desertion and ingratitude. No, she could not give up the canaries ; but the glass bowl with the gold-fish—oh, that would look so pretty on its stand just by the casement ; and the fish—dull things !—would not miss her.

The morning—the noon—the probable hour of the important arrival came at last ; and after having three times within the last half-hour visited the rooms, and settled and unsettled and settled again everything before arranged, Evelyn retired to her own room to consult her wardrobe, and Margaret—once her nurse, now her Abigail. Alas ! the wardrobe of the destined Lady Vargrave—the betrothed of a rising statesman, a new and now an ostentatious peer—the heiress of the wealthy Templeton—was one that many a tradesman's daughter would have disdained. Evelyn visited so little ; the clergyman of the place, and two old maids who lived most respectably on a hundred and eighty pounds a-year, in a cottage, with one maidservant, two cats, and a footboy, bounded the circle of her acquaintance. Her mother was so indifferent to dress ; she

herself had found so many other ways of spending money!—but Evelyn was not now more philosophical than others of her age. She turned from muslin to muslin—from the coloured to the white, from the white to the coloured—with pretty anxiety and sorrowful suspense. At last she decided on the newest, and when it was on, and the single rose set in the lustrous and beautiful hair, Carson herself could not have added a charm. Happy age! Who wants the arts of the milliner at seventeen?

“And here, miss; here’s the fine necklace that Lord Vargrave brought down when my lord came last; it will look so grand!”

The emeralds glittered in their case—Evelyn looked at them irresolutely; then, *as* she looked, a shade came over her forehead, and she sighed, and closed the lid.

“No, Margaret, I do not want it; take it away.”

“O dear, miss! what would my lord say if he were down? And they are so beautiful! they will look so fine! Deary me, how they sparkle! But you will wear much finer when you are my lady.”

“I hear mamma’s bell; go, Margaret, she wants you.”

Left alone, the young beauty sank down abstractedly, and though the looking-glass was opposite, it did not arrest her eye; she forgot her wardrobe, her muslin dress, her fears, and her guests.

“Ah,” she thought, “what a weight of dread I feel *here* when I think of Lord Vargrave and this fatal engagement; and every day I feel it more and more.

To leave my dear, dear mother—the dear cottage—oh, I never can ! I used to like him when I was a child ; now I shudder at his name. Why is this ? He is kind—he condescends to seek to please. It was the wish of my poor father—for father he really was to me ; and yet—oh that he had left me poor and free !”

At this part of Evelyn’s meditation the unusual sound of wheels was heard on the gravel ; she started up—wiped the tears from her eyes—and hurried down to welcome the expected guests.

CHAPTER V.

Tell me, Sophy, my dear, what do you think of our new visitors?

Vicar of Wakefield.

MRS MERTON and her daughter were already in the middle drawing-room, seated on either side of Mrs Leslie. The former a woman of quiet and pleasing exterior; her face still handsome, and if not intelligent, at least expressive of sober good-nature and habitual content. The latter a fine dark-eyed girl, of decided countenance, and what is termed a showy style of beauty—tall, self-possessed, and dressed plainly indeed, but after the approved fashion. The rich bonnet of the large shape then worn; the Chantilly veil; the gay French *Cachemire*; the full sleeves, at that time the unnatural rage; the expensive yet unassuming *robe de soie*; the perfect *chaussure*; the air of society; the easy manner; the tranquil but scrutinising gaze—all startled, discomposed, and half-frightened Evelyn.

Miss Merton herself, if more at her ease, was equally surprised by the beauty and unconscious grace of the young fairy before her, and rose to greet her with a well-bred cordiality, which at once made a conquest of Evelyn's heart.

Mrs Merton kissed her cheek, and smiled kindly on her, but said little. It was easy to see that she was a less conversable and more homely person than Caroline.

When Evelyn conducted them to their rooms, the mother and daughter detected at a glance the care that had provided for their comforts ; and something eager and expectant in Evelyn's eyes taught the good-nature of the one and the good-breeding of the other to reward their young hostess by various little exclamations of pleasure and satisfaction.

“ Dear, how nice !—What a pretty writing-desk !” said one : “ And the pretty gold-fish !” said the other : “ And the piano, too, so well placed ;” and Caroline's fair fingers ran rapidly over the keys. Evelyn retired, covered with smiles and blushes. And then Mrs Merton permitted herself to say to the well-dressed Abigail :— *

“ Do take away those flowers, they make me quite faint.”

“ And how low the room is—so confined !” said Caroline, when the lady's lady withdrew with the condemned flowers. “ And I see no Psyche—however, the poor people have done their best.”

“ Sweet person, Lady Vargrave,” said Mrs Merton—“ so interesting—so beautiful !—and how youthful in appearance !”

“ No *tournure*—not much the manner of the world,” said Caroline.

“ No ; but something better.”

“Hem!” said Caroline. “The girl is very pretty, though too small.”

“Such a smile—such eyes—she is irresistible!—and what a fortune!—she will be a charming friend for you, Caroline.”

“Yes, she may be useful, if she marry Lord Vargrave ; or, indeed, if she make any brilliant match. What sort of a man is Lord Vargrave?”

“I never saw him ; they say, most fascinating.”

“Well, she is very happy,” said Caroline, with a sigh.

CHAPTER VI.

Two lovely damsels cheer my lonely walk.—LAMB'S *Album Verses*.

AFTER dinner, there was still light enough for the young people to stroll through the garden. Mrs Merton, who was afraid of the damp, preferred staying within; and she was so quiet, and made herself so much at home, that Lady Vargrave, to use Mrs Leslie's phrase, was not the least "put out" by her; besides, she talked of Evelyn, and that was a theme very dear to Lady Vargrave, who was both fond and proud of Evelyn.

"This is very pretty, indeed!—the view of the sea quite lovely!" said Caroline. "You draw?"

"Yes, a little."

"From Nature?"

"Oh, yes!"

"What, in Indian ink?"

"Yes; and water-colours."

"Oh!—why, who could have taught you in this little village; or, indeed, in this most primitive county?"

"We did not come to Brook-Green till I was nearly fifteen. My dear mother, though very anxious to leave our villa at Fulham, would not do so on my account,

while masters could be of service to me ; and as I knew she had set her heart on this place, I worked doubly hard."

"Then she knew this place before?"

"Yes ; she had been here many years ago, and took the place after my poor father's death—(I always call the late Lord Vargrave my father). She used to come here regularly once a-year without me ; and when she returned, I thought her even more melancholy than before."

"What makes the charm of the place to Lady Vargrave?" asked Caroline, with some interest.

"I don't know ; unless it be its extreme quiet, or some early association."

"And who is your nearest neighbour?"

"Mr Aubrey, the curate. It is so unlucky, he is gone from home for a short time. You can't think how kind and pleasant he is—the most amiable old man in the world—just such a man as Bernardin St Pierre would have loved to describe."

"Agreeable, no doubt, but dull—good curates generally are."

"Dull—not the least ; cheerful, even to playfulness, and full of information. He has been so good to me about books ; indeed, I have learned a great deal from him."

"I dare say he is an admirable judge of sermons."

"But Mr Aubrey is not severe," persisted Evelyn, earnestly ; "he is very fond of Italian literature, for instance ; we are reading Tasso together."

“ Oh ! pity he is old—I think you said he was old. Perhaps there is a son, the image of the sire ? ”

“ Oh no,” said Evelyn, laughing innocently ; “ Mr Aubrey never married.”

“ And where does the old gentleman live ? ”

“ Come a little this way—there, you can just see the roof of his house, close by the church.”

“ I see ; it is *tant soit peu triste* to have the church so near you.”

“ *Do* you think so ? Ah ! but you have not seen it : it is the prettiest church in the county ; and the little burial-ground—so quiet—so shut in ; I feel better every time I pass it. Some places breathe of religion.”

“ You are poetical, my dear little friend.”

Evelyn, who *had* poetry in her nature—and therefore sometimes it broke out in her simple language—coloured and felt half-ashamed.

“ It is a favourite walk with my mother,” said she, apologetically ; “ she often spends hours there alone ; and so, perhaps, I think it a prettier spot than others may. It does not seem to me to have anything of gloom in it ; when I die, I should like to be buried there.”

Caroline laughed slightly. “ That is a strange wish ; but perhaps you have been crossed in love ? ”

“ I !—oh, you are laughing at me ! ”

“ You do not remember Mr Cameron, your real father, I suppose ? ”

“ No ; I believe he died before I was born.”

“Cameron is a Scotch name: to what tribe of Camerons do you belong?”

“I don’t know,” said Evelyn, rather embarrassed; “indeed, I know nothing of my father’s or mother’s family. It is very odd, but I don’t think we have any relations. You know, when I am of age, that I am to take the name of Templeton.”

“Ah! the name goes with the fortune; I understand. Dear Evelyn, how rich you will be! I do so wish I were rich!”

“And I that I were poor,” said Evelyn, with an altered tone and expression of countenance.

“Strange girl! what can you mean?”

Evelyn said nothing, and Caroline examined her curiously.

“These notions come from living so much out of the world, my dear Evelyn. How you must long to see more of life!”

“I!—not in the least. I should never like to leave this place—I could live and die here.”

“You will think otherwise when you are Lady Vargrave. Why do you look so grave? Do you not love Lord Vargrave?”

“What a question!” said Evelyn, turning away her head, and forcing a laugh.

“It is no matter whether you do or not: it is a brilliant position. He has rank—reputation—high office: all he wants is money, and that you will give him. Alas! I have no prospect so bright. I have no fortune, and I fear my face will never buy a title, an

opera-box, and a house in Grosvenor Square. I wish I were the future Lady Vargrave."

"I am sure I wish you were," said Evelyn, with great *naïveté*; "you would suit Lord Vargrave better than I should."

Caroline laughed.

"Why do you think so?"

"Oh, his way of thinking is like yours; he never says anything I can sympathise with."

"A pretty compliment to me! Depend upon it, my dear, you will sympathise with me when you have seen as much of the world. But Lord Vargrave—is he too old?"

"No, I don't think of his age; and indeed he looks younger than he is."

"Is he handsome?"

"He is what may be called handsome—you would think so."

"Well, if he comes here, I will do my best to win him from you; so look to yourself."

"Oh, I should be so grateful; I should like him so much, if he would fall in love with you!"

"I fear there is no chance of that."

"But how," said Evelyn, hesitatingly, after a pause—"how is it that you have seen so much more of the world than I have? I thought Mr Merton lived a great deal in the country."

"Yes, but my uncle, Sir John Merton, is member for the county: my grandmother on my father's side—Lady Elizabeth, who has Tregony Castle (which we

have just left) for her jointure-house—goes to town almost every season, and I have spent three seasons with her. She is a charming old woman—quite the *grande dame*. I am sorry to say she remains in Cornwall this year; she has not been very well; the physicians forbid late hours and London: but even in the country we are very gay. My uncle lives near us, and though a widower, has his house full when down at Merton Park; and papa, too, is rich—very hospitable and popular—and will, I hope, be a bishop one of these days—not at all like a mere country parson; and so, somehow or other, I have learned to be ambitious—we are an ambitious family on papa's side. But, alas! I have not your cards to play. Young, beautiful, and an heiress! Ah, what prospects! You should make your mamma take you to town.”

“To town! she would be wretched at the very idea. Oh, you don't know us.”

“I can't help fancying, Miss Evelyn,” said Caroline, archly, “that you are not so blind to Lord Vargrave's perfections, and so indifferent to London, only from the pretty innocent way of thinking, that so prettily and innocently you express. I dare say, if the truth were known, there is some handsome young rector, besides the old curate, who plays the flute, and preaches sentimental sermons in white kid gloves.”

Evelyn laughed merrily—so merrily that Caroline's suspicions vanished. They continued to walk and talk thus, till the night came on, and then they went in; and Evelyn showed Caroline her drawings, which as-

tonished that young lady, who was a good judge of accomplishments. Evelyn's performance on the piano astonished her yet more ; but Caroline consoled herself on this point, for her voice was more powerful, and she sang French songs with much more spirit. Caroline showed talent in all she undertook, but Evelyn, despite her simplicity, had genius, though as yet scarcely developed ; for she had quickness, emotion, susceptibility, imagination. And the difference between talent and genius lies rather in the heart than the head.

CHAPTER VII.

Dost thou feel

The solemn whispering influence of the scene

Oppressing thy young heart, that thou dost draw

More closely to my side?—F. HEMANS, *Wood Walk and Hymn.*

CAROLINE and Evelyn, as was natural, became great friends. They were not kindred to each other in disposition, but they were thrown together, and friendship thus forced upon both. Unsuspecting and sanguine, it was natural to Evelyn to admire; and Caroline was, to her inexperience, a brilliant and imposing novelty. Sometimes Miss Merton's worldliness of thought shocked Evelyn; but then Caroline had a way with her, as if she were not in earnest—as if she were merely indulging an inclination towards irony; nor was she without a certain vein of sentiment that persons a little hackneyed in the world, and young ladies a little disappointed that they are not wives instead of maids, easily acquire. Trite as this vein of sentiment was, poor Evelyn thought it beautiful and most feeling. Then, Caroline was clever, entertaining, cordial, with all that superficial superiority that a girl of twenty-three who knows London readily exercises over a country girl of seventeen. On the other hand, Caroline was kind and affectionate

towards her. The clergyman's daughter felt that she could not be always superior, even in fashion, to the wealthy heiress.

One evening, as Mrs Leslie and Mrs Merton sat under the verandah of the cottage, without their hostess, who had gone alone into the village—and the young ladies were confidentially conversing on the lawn, Mrs Leslie said, rather abruptly, "Is not Evelyn a delightful creature? How unconscious of her beauty; how simple, and yet so naturally gifted!"

"I have never seen one who interested me more," said Mrs Merton, settling her *pélerine*; "she is extremely pretty."

"I am so anxious about her," resumed Mrs Leslie, thoughtfully. "You know the wish of the late Lord Vargrave that she should marry his nephew, the present lord, when she reaches the age of eighteen. She only wants nine or ten months of that time; she has seen nothing of the world; she is not fit to decide for herself; and Lady Vargrave, the best of human creatures, is still herself almost too inexperienced in the world to be a guide for one so young, placed in such peculiar circumstances, and of prospects so brilliant. Lady Vargrave, at heart, is a child still, and will be so even when as old as I am."

"It is very true," said Mrs Merton. "Don't you fear that the girls will catch cold? the dew is falling, and the grass must be wet."

"I have thought," continued Mrs Leslie, without heeding the latter part of Mrs Merton's speech, "that

it would be a kind thing to invite Evelyn to stay with you a few months at the Rectory. To be sure, it is not like London ; but you see a great deal of the world : the society at your house is well selected, and at times even brilliant ;—she will meet young people of her own age, and young people fashion and form each other.”

“I was thinking, myself, that I should like to invite her,” said Mrs Merton ; “I will consult Caroline.”

“Caroline, I am sure, would be delighted ; the difficulty lies rather in Evelyn herself.”

“You surprise me ! she must be moped to death here.”

“But will she leave her mother ?”

“Why, Caroline often leaves me,” said Mrs Merton.

Mrs Leslie was silent, and Evelyn and her new friend now joined the mother and daughter.

“I have been trying to persuade Evelyn to pay us a little visit,” said Caroline ; “she could accompany us so nicely : and if she is still strange with us—dear grandmamma goes too—I am sure we can make her at home.”

“How odd !” said Mrs Merton ; “we were just saying the same thing. My dear Miss Cameron, we should be so happy to have you.”

“And I should be so happy to go, if mamma would but go too.”

As she spoke, the moon, just risen, showed the form of Lady Vargrave slowly approaching the house. By the light, her features seemed more pale than usual : and her slight and delicate form, with its gliding motion

and noiseless step, had in it something almost ethereal and unearthly.

Evelyn turned and saw her, and her heart smote her. Her mother—so wedded to the dear cottage—and had this gay stranger rendered that dear cottage less attractive—she who had said she could live and die in its humble precincts ? Abruptly she left her new friend, hastened to her mother, and threw her arms fondly round her.

“You are pale, you have over-fatigued yourself. Where have you been ?—why did you not take me with you ?”

Lady Vargrave pressed Evelyn’s hand affectionately.

“You care for me too much,” said she. “I am but a dull companion for you ; I was so glad to see you happy with one better suited to your gay spirits. What can we do when she leaves us ?”

“Ah ! I want no companion but my own—own mother. And have I not Sultan, too ?” added Evelyn, smiling away the tear that had started to her eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

Friend after friend departs ;
Who hath not lost a friend ?
There is no union here of hearts
That finds not here an end.—J. MONTGOMERY.

THAT night, Mrs Leslie sought Lady Vargrave in her own room. As she entered gently she observed that, late as the hour was, Lady Vargrave was stationed by the open window, and seemed intently gazing on the scene below. Mrs Leslie reached her side unperceived. The moonlight was exceedingly bright, and just beyond the garden, from which it was separated but by a slight fence, lay the solitary churchyard of the hamlet, with the slender spire of the holy edifice rising high and tapering into the shining air. It was a calm and tranquillising scene ; and so intent was Lady Vargrave's abstracted gaze, that Mrs Leslie was unwilling to disturb her reverie.

At length Lady Vargrave turned ; and there was that patient and pathetic resignation written in her countenance which belongs to those whom the world can deceive no more, and who have fixed their hearts in the life beyond.

Mrs Leslie, whatever she thought or felt, said no-

thing, except in kindly remonstrance on the indiscretion of braving the night air. The window was closed : they sat down to confer.

Mrs Leslie repeated the invitation given to Evelyn, and urged the advisability of accepting it. "It is cruel to separate you," said she ; "I feel it acutely. Why not, then, come with Evelyn ? You shake your head—why always avoid society ?—So young yet, you give yourself too much to the past !"

Lady Vargrave rose, and walked to a cabinet at the end of the room ; she unlocked it, and beckoned to Mrs Leslie to approach. In a drawer lay carefully folded articles of female dress—rude, homely, ragged—the dress of a peasant girl.

"Do these remind you of your first charity to me ?" she said, touchingly : "they tell me that I have nothing to do with the world in which you and yours, and Evelyn herself, should move."

"Too tender conscience !—your errors were but those of circumstance—of youth ;—how have they been redeemed !—none even suspect them. Your past history is known but to the good old Aubrey and myself. No breath, even of rumour, tarnishes the name of Lady Vargrave."

"Mrs Leslie," said Lady Vargrave, reclosing the cabinet, and again seating herself, "my world lies around me—I cannot quit it. If I were of use to Evelyn, then indeed I would sacrifice—brave all ; but I only cloud her spirits : I have no advice to give her—no instruction to bestow. When she was a child, I

could watch over her ; when she was sick, I could nurse her ; but now she requires an adviser—a guide ; and I feel too sensibly that this task is beyond my powers. I, a guide to youth and innocence !—*I!* No, I have nothing to offer her—dear child !—but my love and my prayers. Let your daughter take her, then—watch over her, guide, advise her. For me—unkind, ungrateful as it may seem—were she but happy, I could well bear to be alone !”

“ But she—how will she, who loves you so, submit to this separation ?”

“ It will not be long ; and,” added Lady Vargrave, with a serious yet sweet smile, “ she had better be prepared for that separation which must come at last. As year by year I outlive my last hope—that of once more beholding *him*—I feel that life becomes feebler and feebler, and I look more on that quiet churchyard as a home to which I am soon returning. At all events, Evelyu will be called upon to form new ties, that must estrange her from me ; let her wean herself from one so useless to her, to all the world,—now, and by degrees.”

“ Speak not thus,” said Mrs Leslie, strongly affected ; “ you have many years of happiness yet in store for you ;—the more you recede from youth, the fairer life will become to you.”

“ God is good to me,” said the lady, raising her meek eyes ; “ and I have already found it so—I am contented.”

CHAPTER IX.

The greater part of them seemed to be charmed with his presence.

MACKENZIE, *The Man of the World.*

IT was with the greatest difficulty that Evelyn could at last be persuaded to consent to the separation from her mother: she wept bitterly at the thought. But Lady Vargrave, though touched, was firm, and her firmness was of that soft, imploring character, which Evelyn never could resist. The visit was to last some months, it is true; but she would return to the cottage; she would escape, too—and this, perhaps, unconsciously reconciled her more than aught else—the periodical visit of Lord Vargrave. At the end of July, when the parliamentary session, at that unreformed era, usually expired, he always came to Brook-Green for a month. His last visits had been most unwelcome to Evelyn, and this next visit she dreaded more than she had any of the former ones. It is strange, the repugnance with which she regarded the suit of her affianced!—she whose heart was yet virgin—who had never seen any one who, in form, manner, and powers to please, could be compared to the gay Lord Vargrave. And yet a sense of honour—of what

was due to her dead benefactor, her more than father—all combated that repugnance, and left her uncertain what course to pursue, uncalculating as to the future. In the happy elasticity of her spirits, and with a carelessness almost approaching to levity, which, to say truth, was natural to her, she did not often recall the solemn engagement that must soon be ratified or annulled ; but when that thought did occur, it saddened her for hours, and left her listless and despondent. The visit to Mrs Merton was, then, finally arranged—the day of departure fixed—when, one morning, came the following letter from Lord Vargrave himself :—

TO THE LADY VARGRAVE, ETC. ETC.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—I find that we have a week’s holiday in our do-nothing Chamber, and the weather is so delightful, that I long to share its enjoyment with those I love best. You will, therefore, see me almost as soon as you receive this ; that is, I shall be with you at dinner on the same day. What can I say to Evelyn ? Will you, dearest Lady Vargrave, make her accept all the homage which, when uttered by me, she seems half inclined to reject ?—In haste, most affectionately yours,

VARGRAVE.”

“HAMILTON PLACE, *April 30, 18—.*”

This letter was by no means welcome, either to Mrs Leslie or to Evelyn. The former feared that Lord Vargrave would disapprove of a visit, the real objects of which could scarcely be owned to him. The latter

was reminded of all she desired to forget. But Lady Vargrave herself rather rejoiced at the thought of Lumley's arrival. Hitherto, in the spirit of her passive and gentle character, she had taken the engagement between Evelyn and Lord Vargrave almost as a matter of course. The will and wish of her late husband operated most powerfully on her mind ; and while Evelyn was yet in childhood, Lumley's visits had ever been acceptable, and the playful girl liked the gay and good-humoured lord,—who brought her all sorts of presents, and appeared as fond of dogs as herself. But Evelyn's recent change of manner, her frequent fits of dejection and thought—once pointed out to Lady Vargrave by Mrs Leslie—aroused all the affectionate and maternal anxiety of the former. She was resolved to watch, to examine, to scrutinise—not only Evelyn's reception of Vargrave, but, as far as she could, the manner and disposition of Vargrave himself. She felt how solemn a trust was the happiness of a whole life ; and she had that romance of heart, learned from Nature, not in books, which made her believe that there could be no happiness in a marriage without love.

The whole family party were on the lawn, when, an hour earlier than he was expected, the travelling carriage of Lord Vargrave was whirled along the narrow sweep that conducted from the lodge to the house. Vargrave, as he saw the party, kissed his hand from the window ; and, leaping from the carriage when it stopped at the porch, hastened to meet his hostess.

“ My dear Lady Vargrave, I am so glad to see you. You are looking charmingly ; and Evelyn ?—oh, there she is ; the dear coquette, how lovely she is !—how she has improved ! But who,” sinking his voice,—“ who are those ladies ? ”

“ Guests of ours—Mrs Leslie, whom you have often heard us speak of, but never met——”

“ Yes—and the others ? ”

“ Her daughter and grandchild.”

“ I shall be delighted to know them.”

A more popular manner than Lord Vargrave’s it is impossible to conceive. Frank and prepossessing, even when the poor and reckless Mr Ferrers, without rank or reputation—his smile—the tone of his voice—his familiar courtesy, apparently so inartificial and approaching almost to a boyish bluntness of good humour—were irresistible in the rising statesman and favoured courtier.

Mrs Merton was enchanted with him ; Caroline thought him, at the first glance, the most fascinating person she had ever seen ; even Mrs Leslie, more grave, cautious, and penetrating, was almost equally pleased with the first impression ; and it was not till, in his occasional silence, his features settled into their natural expression, that she fancied she detected, in the quick suspicious eye, and the close compression of the lips, the tokens of that wily, astute, and worldly character, which, in proportion as he had risen in his career, even his own party reluctantly and mysteriously assigned to one of their most prominent leaders.

When Vargrave took Evelyn's hand, and raised it with meaning gallantry to his lips, the girl first blushed deeply, and then turned pale as death ; nor did the colour thus chased away soon return to the transparent cheek. Not noticing signs which might bear a twofold interpretation, Lumley, who seemed in high spirits, rattled away on a thousand matters—praising the view, the weather, the journey—throwing out a joke here, and a compliment there, and completing his conquest over Mrs Merton and Caroline.

“You have left London in the very height of its gaiety, Lord Vargrave,” said Caroline, as they sat conversing after dinner.

“True, Miss Merton ; but the country is in the height of its gaiety too.”

“Are you so fond of the country then ?”

“By fits and starts—my passion for it comes in with the early strawberries, and goes out with the hautboys—I lead so artificial a life ; but then I hope it is a useful one. I want nothing but a home to make it a happy one.”

“What is the latest news ?—dear London ! I am so sorry, grandmamma, Lady Elizabeth is not going there this year ; so I am compelled to rusticate. Is Lady Jane D—— to be married at last ?”

“Commend me to a young lady's idea of news—always marriage ! Lady Jane D—— ! yes, she is to be married, as you say—*at last* ! While she was a beauty our cold sex were shy of her ; but she has now faded into plainness—the proper colour for a wife.”

“ Complimentary ! ”

“ Indeed it is—for you beautiful women we love too much for our own happiness—heigho !—and a prudent marriage means friendly indifference, not rapture and despair. But give me beauty and love ; I never was prudent ; it is not my weakness.”

Though Caroline was his sole supporter in this dialogue, Lord Vargrave’s eyes attempted to converse with Evelyn, who was unusually silent and abstracted. Suddenly Lord Vargrave seemed aware that he was scarcely general enough in his talk for his hearers. He addressed himself to Mrs Leslie, and glided back, as it were, into a former generation. He spoke of persons gone and things forgotten ; he made the subject interesting even to the young, by a succession of various and sparkling anecdotes. No one could be more agreeable ; even Evelyn now listened to him with pleasure ; for to all women wit and intellect have their charm. But still there was a cold and sharp levity in the tone of the man of the world that prevented the charm sinking below the surface. To Mrs Leslie he seemed unconsciously to betray a laxity of principle ; to Evelyn, a want of sentiment and heart. Lady Vargrave, who did not understand a character of this description, listened attentively, and said to herself, “ Evelyn may admire, but I fear she cannot love him.” Still time passed quickly in Lumley’s presence, and Caroline thought she had never spent so pleasant an evening.

When Lord Vargrave retired to his room, he threw himself in his chair, and yawned with exceeding fervour.

His servant arranged his dressing-robe, and placed his portfolios and letter-boxes on the table.

“What o’clock is it?” said Lumley.

“Very early, my lord ; only eleven.”

“The devil!—the country air is wonderfully exhausting. I am very sleepy ; you may go.”

“This little girl,” said Lumley, stretching himself, “is preternaturally shy—I must neglect her no longer—yet it is surely all safe. She has grown monstrous pretty ; but the other girl is more amusing, more to my taste, and a much easier conquest, I fancy. Her great dark eyes seem full of admiration for my lordship—sensible young woman!—she may be useful in piquing Evelyn.”

CHAPTER X.

Julio. Wilt thou have him?—*The Maid in the Mill.*

LORD VARGRAVE heard the next morning, with secret distaste and displeasure, of Evelyn's intended visit to the Mertons. He could scarcely make any open objection to it; but he did not refrain from many insinuations as to its impropriety.

“My dear friend,” said he to Lady Vargrave, “it is scarcely right in you (pardon me for saying it) to commit Evelyn to the care of comparative strangers. Mrs Leslie, indeed, you know; but Mrs Merton, you allow, you have now seen for the first time—a most respectable person, doubtless; but still, recollect how young Evelyn is—how rich—what a prize to any younger sons in the Merton family (if such there be). Miss Merton herself is a shrewd, worldly girl; and if she were of our sex, would make a capital fortune-hunter. Don't think my fear is selfish; I do not speak for myself. If I were Evelyn's brother, I should be yet more earnest in my remonstrance.”

“But, Lord Vargrave, poor Evelyn is dull here; my spirits infect hers. She ought to mix more with those

of her own age, to see more of the world before—before——”

“Before her marriage with me. Forgive me, but is not that my affair? If I am contented, nay, charmed with her innocence—if I prefer it to all the arts which society could teach her—surely you would be acquitted for leaving her in the beautiful simplicity that makes her chief fascination? She will see enough of the world as Lady Vargrave.”

“But if she should resolve never to be Lady Vargrave——?”

Lumley started, bit his lip, and frowned. Lady Vargrave had never before seen on his countenance the dark expression it now wore. He recollected and recovered himself, as he observed her eye fixed upon him, and said, with a constrained smile—

“Can you anticipate an event so fatal to my happiness, so unforeseen, so opposed to all my poor uncle’s wishes, as Evelyn’s rejection of a suit pursued for years, and so solemnly sanctioned in her very childhood?”

“She must decide for herself,” said Lady Vargrave. “Your uncle carefully distinguished between a wish and a command. Her heart is as yet untouched. If she can love you, may you deserve her affection.”

“It shall be my study to do so. But why this departure from your roof, just when we ought to see most of each other? It cannot be that you would separate us?”

“I fear, Lord Vargrave, that if Evelyn were to remain here, she would decide against you. I fear if you

press her now, such now may be her premature decision. Perhaps this arises from too fond an attachment for her home : perhaps even a short absence from her home— from me—may more reconcile her to a permanent separation.”

Vargrave could say no more, for here they were joined by Caroline and Mrs Merton. But his manner was changed, nor could he recover the gaiety of the previous night.

When, however, he found time for meditation, he contrived to reconcile himself to the intended visit. He felt that it was easy to secure the friendship of the whole of the Merton family; and that friendship might be more useful to him than the neutral part adopted by Lady Vargrave. He should, of course, be invited to the Rectory: it was much nearer London than Lady Vargrave's cottage—he could more often escape from public cares to superintend his private interests. A country neighbourhood, particularly at that season of the year, was not likely to abound in very dangerous rivals. Evelyn would, he saw, be surrounded by a *worldly* family, and he thought that an advantage; it might serve to dissipate Evelyn's romantic tendencies, and make her sensible of the pleasures of the London life, the official rank, the gay society, that her union with him would offer as an equivalent for her fortune. In short, as was his wont, he strove to make the best of the new turn affairs had taken. Though guardian to Miss Cameron, and one of the trustees for the fortune she was to receive on attaining her majority, he

had not the right to dictate as to her residence. The late lord's will had expressly and pointedly corroborated the natural and lawful authority of Lady Vargrave in all matters connected with Evelyn's education and home. It may be as well, in this place, to add, that to Vargrave and the co-trustee, Mr Gustavus Douce, a banker of repute and eminence, the testator left large discretionary powers as to the investment of the fortune. He had stated it as his wish that from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty thousand pounds should be invested in the purchase of a landed estate ; but he had left it to the discretion of the trustees to increase that sum, even to the amount of the whole capital, should an estate of adequate importance be in the market ; while the selection of time and purchase was unreservedly confided to the trustees. Vargrave had hitherto objected to every purchase in the market ; not that he was insensible to the importance and consideration of landed property, but because, till he himself became the legal receiver of the income, he thought it less trouble to suffer the money to lie in the funds, than to be pestered with all the onerous details in the management of an estate that might never be his. He, however, with no less ardour than his deceased relative, looked forward to the time when the title of Vargrave should be based upon the venerable foundation of feudal manors and seignorial acres.

“Why did you not tell me Lord Vargrave was so charming?” said Caroline to Evelyn, as the two girls were sauntering, in familiar *tête-à-tête*, along the gar-

dens. "You will be very happy with such a companion."

Evelyn made no answer for a few moments, and then, turning abruptly round to Caroline, and stopping short, she said, with a kind of tearful eagerness, "Dear Caroline, you are so wise, so kind too—advise me—tell me what is best. I am very unhappy."

Miss Merton was moved and surprised by Evelyn's earnestness.

"But what is it, my poor Evelyn?" said she; "why are you unhappy?—you whose fate seems to me so enviable."

"I cannot love Lord Vargrave; I recoil from the idea of marrying him. Ought I not fairly to tell him so? Ought I not to say, that I cannot fulfil the wish that—oh, there's the thought which leaves me so irresolute!—his uncle bequeathed to me—me who have no claim of relationship—the fortune that should have been Lord Vargrave's, in the belief that my hand would restore it to him. It is almost a fraud to refuse him. Am I not to be pitied?"

"But why can you not love Lord Vargrave? If past the *première jeunesse*, he is still handsome: he is more than handsome: he has the air of rank—an eye that fascinates—a smile that wins—the manners that please—the abilities that command—the world! Handsome—clever—admired—distinguished—what can woman desire more in her lover—her husband? Have you ever formed some fancy, some ideal, of the one you could love, and how does Lord Vargrave fall short of the vision?"

“Have I ever formed an ideal?—oh, yes!” said Evelyn, with a beautiful enthusiasm that lighted up her eyes, blushed in her cheek, and heaved her bosom beneath its robe; “something that in loving I could also revere: a mind that would elevate my own; a heart that could sympathise with my weakness, my follies, my romance, if you will; and in which I could treasure my whole soul.”

“You paint a schoolmaster, not a lover!” said Caroline. “You do not care, then, whether this hero be handsome or young?”

“Oh, yes, he should be both,” said Evelyn, innocently; “and yet,” she added, after a pause, and with an infantine playfulness of manner and countenance, “I know you will laugh at me; but I think I could be in love with more than one at the same time!”

“A common case, but a rare confession!”

“Yes; for if I might ask for the youth and outward advantages that please the eye, I could also love with a yet deeper love that which would speak to my imagination—Intellect, Genius, Fame! Ah, these have an immortal youth and imperishable beauty of their own!”

“You are a very strange girl.”

“But we are on a very strange subject—it is all an enigma!” said Evelyn, shaking her wise little head with a pretty gravity—half mock, half real. “Ah, if Lord Vargrave should love you—and you—oh, you *would* love him, and then I should be free, and so happy!”

They were then on the lawn in sight of the cottage

windows, and Lumley, lifting his eyes from the newspaper, which had just arrived and been seized with all a politician's avidity, saw them in the distance. He threw down the paper, mused a moment or two, then took up his hat and joined them ; but before he did so, he surveyed himself in the glass. "I think I look young enough still," thought he.

"Two cherries on one stalk," said Lumley, gaily : "by the by, it is not a complimentary simile. What young lady would be like a cherry?—such an uninteresting, common, charity-boy sort of fruit. For my part, I always associate cherries with the image of a young gentleman in corduroys and a skeleton jacket, with one pocket full of marbles, and the other full of worms for fishing, with three-halfpence in the left paw, and two cherries on one stalk (Helena and Hermia) in the right."

"How droll you are !" said Caroline, laughing.

"Much obliged to you, and don't envy your discrimination—'melancholy marks me for its own.' You ladies,—ah, yours is the life for gay spirits and light hearts ; to us are left business and politics—law, physic, and murder, by way of professions—abuse, nicknamed fame ;—and the privilege of seeing how universal a thing, among the great and the wealthy, is that pleasant vice, beggary ; which privilege is proudly entitled, 'patronage and power.' Are we the things to be gay—'droll,' as you say ?—Oh, no, all our spirits are forced, believe me. Miss Cameron, did you ever know that wretched species of hysterical affection called

‘forced spirits?’ Never, I am sure ; your ingenuous smile, your laughing eyes, are the index to a happy and a sanguine heart.”

“And what of me?” asked Caroline, quickly, and with a slight blush.

“You, Miss Merton?—ah, I have not yet read your character—a fair page, but an unknown letter. You, however, have seen the world, and know that we must occasionally wear a mask.” Lord Vargrave sighed as he spoke, and relapsed into sudden silence ; then, looking up, his eyes encountered Caroline’s, which were fixed upon him ;—their gaze flattered him ; Caroline turned away, and busied herself with a rose-bush. Lumley gathered one of the flowers, and presented it to her. Evelyn was a few steps in advance.

“There is no thorn in this rose,” said he : “may the offering be an omen—you are now Evelyn’s friend—oh, be mine ; she is to be your guest. Do not scorn to plead for me.”

“Can *you* want a pleader?” said Caroline, with a slight tremor in her voice.

“Charming Miss Merton, love is diffident and fearful ; but it must now find a voice, to which may Evelyn benignly listen. What I leave unsaid, would that my new friend’s eloquence could supply.”

He bowed slightly, and joined Evelyn. Caroline understood the hint, and returned alone and thoughtfully to the house.

“Miss Cameron—Evelyn—ah, still let me call you so—as in the happy and more familiar days of your

childhood—I wish you could read my heart at this moment: you are about to leave your home—new scenes will surround—new faces smile on you; dare I hope that I may still be remembered?”

He attempted to take her hand as he spoke; Evelyn withdrew it gently.

“Ah, my lord,” said she, in a very low voice, “if remembrance were all that you asked of me——”

“It is all—favourable remembrance—remembrance of the love of the past—remembrance of the bond to come.”

Evelyn shivered. “It is better to speak openly,” said she: “let me throw myself on your generosity. I am not insensible to your brilliant qualities—to the honour of your attachment—but—but—as the time approaches in which you will call for my decision—let me now say, that I cannot feel for you—those—those sentiments, without which you could not desire our union—without which it were but a wrong to both of us to form it. Nay, listen to me—I grieve bitterly at the tenor of your too-generous uncle’s will—can I not atone to you? Willingly would I sacrifice the fortune that, indeed, ought to be yours—accept it, and remain my friend.”

“Cruel Evelyn! and can you suppose that it is your fortune I seek?—it is yourself. Heaven is my witness that, had you no dowry but your hand and heart, it were treasure enough to me. You think you cannot love me. Evelyn, you do not yet know yourself. Alas! your retirement in this distant village—my

own unceasing avocations, which chain me, like a slave, to the galley-oar of politics and power—have kept us separate. You do not know me. I am willing to hazard the experiment of that knowledge. To devote my life to you—to make you partaker of my ambition, my career—to raise you to the highest eminence in the matronage of England—to transfer pride from myself to you—to love, and to honour, and to prize you—all this will be my boast ; and all this will win love for me at last. Fear not, Evelyn—fear not for your happiness ; with me you shall know no sorrow. Affection at home—splendour abroad—await you. I have passed the rough and arduous part of my career—sunshine lies on the summit to which I climb. No station in England is too high for me to aspire to—prospects, how bright with you ! how dark without you ! Ah, Evelyn ! be this hand mine—the heart shall follow !”

Vargrave’s words were artful and eloquent ; the *words* were calculated to win their way—but the manner, the tone of voice, wanted earnestness and truth. This was his defect—this characterised all his attempts to seduce or to lead others, in public or in private life. He had no heart, no deep passion, in what he undertook. He could impress you with the conviction of his ability, and leave the conviction imperfect, because he could not convince you that he was sincere. That best gift of mental power—*earnestness*—was wanting to him ; and Lord Vargrave’s deficiency of heart was the true cause why he was not a great

man. Still, Evelyn was affected by his words ; she suffered the hand he now once more took to remain passively in his, and said, timidly—

“ Why, with sentiments so generous and confiding—why do you love me, who cannot return your affection worthily ? No, Lord Vargrave ; there are many who must see you with juster eyes than mine—many fairer, and even wealthier. Indeed—indeed, it cannot be. Do not be offended, but think that the fortune left to me was on one condition I cannot, ought not to fulfil. Failing that condition, in equity and honour it reverts to you.”

“ Talk not thus, I implore you, Evelyn : do not imagine me the worldly calculator that my enemies deem me. But, to remove at once from your mind the possibility of such a compromise between your honour and repugnance—(repugnance ! have I lived to say that word ?)—know that your fortune is not at your own disposal. Save the small forfeit that awaits your non-compliance with my uncle’s dying prayer, the whole is settled peremptorily on yourself and your children ; it is entailed—you cannot alienate it. Thus, then, your generosity can never be evinced, but to him on whom you bestow your hand. Ah ! let me recall that melancholy scene. Your benefactor on his deathbed—your mother kneeling by his side—your hand clasped in mine—and those lips, with their latest breath, uttering at once a blessing and a command ! ”

“ Ah, cease—cease, my lord ! ” said Evelyn, sobbing.

“ No ; bid me not cease before you tell me you will

be mine. Beloved Evelyn ! I may hope—you will not resolve against me.”

“No,” said Evelyn, raising her eyes and struggling for composure ; “I feel too well what should be my duty ; I will endeavour to perform it. Ask me no more now : I will struggle to answer you as you wish hereafter.”

Lord Vargrave, resolved to push to the utmost the advantage he had gained, was about to reply, when he heard a step behind him ; and, turning round, quickly and discomposed, beheld a venerable form approaching them. The occasion was lost : Evelyn also turned ; and, seeing who was the intruder, sprang towards him almost with a cry of joy.

The new-comer was a man who had passed his seventieth year ; but his old age was green, his step light, and on his healthful and benignant countenance time had left but few furrows. He was clothed in black ; and his locks, which were white as snow, escaped from the broad hat, and almost touched his shoulders.

The old man smiled upon Evelyn, and kissed her forehead fondly. He then turned to Lord Vargrave, who, recovering his customary self-possession, advanced to meet him with extended hand.

“My dear Mr Aubrey, this is a welcome surprise. I heard you were not at the vicarage, or I would have called on you.”

“Your lordship honours me,” replied the curate. “For the first time for thirty years I have been thus

long absent from my cure ; but I am now returned, I hope, to end my days among my flock."

"And what," asked Vargrave—"what—if the question be not presumptuous—occasioned your unwilling absence ?"

"My lord," replied the old man, with a gentle smile, "a new vicar has been appointed. I went to him, to proffer an humble prayer that I might remain amongst those whom I regarded as my children. I have buried one generation—I have married another—I have baptised a third."

"You should have had the vicarage itself—you should be better provided for, my dear Mr Aubrey ; I will speak to the Lord Chancellor."

Five times before had Lord Vargrave uttered the same promise—and the curate smiled to hear the familiar words.

"The vicarage, my lord, is a family living, and is now vested in a young man who requires wealth more than I do. He has been kind to me, and re-established me among my flock ; I would not leave them for a bishopric. My child," continued the curate, addressing Evelyn with great affection, "you are surely unwell—you are paler than when I left you."

Evelyn clung fondly to his arm, and smiled—her old gay smile—as she replied to him. They took the way towards the house.

The curate remained with them for an hour. There was a mingled sweetness and dignity in his manner

which had in it something of the primitive character we poetically ascribe to the pastors of the church. Lady Vargrave seemed to vie with Evelyn which should love him the most. When he retired to his home, which was not many yards distant from the cottage, Evelyn, pleading a headache, sought her chamber, and Lumley, to soothe his mortification, turned to Caroline, who had seated herself by his side. Her conversation amused him, and her evident admiration flattered. While Lady Vargrave absented herself in motherly anxiety, to attend on Evelyn—while Mrs Leslie was occupied at her frame—and Mrs Merton looked on, and talked indolently to the old lady of rheumatism and sermons, of children's complaints and servants' misdemeanours—the conversation between Lord Vargrave and Caroline, at first gay and animated, grew gradually more sentimental and subdued : their voices took a lower tone, and Caroline sometimes turned away her head and blushed.

CHAPTER XI.

There stands the Messenger of Truth—there stands
The Legate of the Skies.—COWPER.

FROM that night Lumley found no opportunity for private conversation with Evelyn; she evidently shunned to meet with him alone; she was ever with her mother, or Mrs Leslie, or the good curate, who spent much of his time at the cottage; for the old man had neither wife nor children—he was alone at home—he had learned to make his home with the widow and her daughter. With them he was an object of the tenderest affection—of the deepest veneration. Their love delighted him, and he returned it with the fondness of a parent and the benevolence of a pastor. He was a rare character, that village priest!

Born of humble parentage, Edward Aubrey had early displayed abilities which attracted the notice of a wealthy proprietor, who was not displeased to affect the patron. Young Aubrey was sent to school, and thence to college as a sizar: he obtained several prizes, and took a high degree. Aubrey was not without the ambition and the passions of youth: he went into the world, ardent, inexperienced, and without a guide. He

drew back before errors grew into crimes, or folly became a habit. It was nature and affection that reclaimed and saved him from either alternative—fame or ruin. His widowed mother was suddenly stricken with disease. Blind and bed-ridden, her whole dependence was on her only son. This affliction called forth a new character in Edward Aubrey. This mother had stripped herself of so many comforts to provide for him—he devoted his youth to her in return. She was now old and imbecile. With the mingled selfishness and sentiment of age, she would not come to London—she would not move from the village where her husband lay buried—where her youth had been spent. In this village the able and ambitious young man buried his hopes and his talents ; by degrees, the quiet and tranquillity of the country life became dear to him. As steps in a ladder, so piety leads to piety, and religion grew to him a habit. He took orders and entered the church. A disappointment in love ensued—it left on his mind and heart a sober and resigned melancholy, which at length mellowed into content. His profession and its sweet duties became more and more dear to him ; in the hopes of the next world he forgot the ambition of the present. He did not seek to shine—

“More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise.”

His own birth made the poor his brothers, and their dispositions and wants familiar to him. His own early errors made him tolerant to the faults of others ; few men are charitable who remember not that they have

sinned. In our faults lie the germs of virtues. Thus gradually and serenely had worn away his life—obscure, but useful—calm, but active—a man whom “the great prizes” of the church might have rendered an ambitious schemer—to whom a modest confidence gave the true pastoral power—to conquer the world within himself, and to sympathise with the wants of others. Yes, he was a rare character, that village priest !

CHAPTER XII.

Tout notre raisonnement se réduit à céder au sentiment.*—PASCAL.

LORD VARGRAVE, who had no desire to remain alone with the widow when the guests were gone, arranged his departure for the same day as that fixed for Mrs Merton's; and as their road lay together for several miles, it was settled that they should all dine at ——, whence Lord Vargrave would proceed to London. Failing to procure a second chance interview with Evelyn, and afraid to demand a formal one—for he felt the insecurity of the ground he stood on—Lord Vargrave, irritated and somewhat mortified, sought, as was his habit, whatever amusement was in his reach. In the conversation of Caroline Merton—shrewd, worldly, and ambitious—he found the sort of plaything that he desired. They were thrown much together; but to Vargrave, at least, there appeared no danger in the intercourse; and, perhaps, his chief object was to pique Evelyn, as well as to gratify his own spleen.

It was the evening before Evelyn's departure; the little party had been for the last hour dispersed; Mrs Merton was in her own room, making to herself gra-

* All our reasoning reduces itself to yielding to sentiment.

tuitous and unnecessary occupation in seeing her woman *pack up*. It was just the kind of task that delighted her. To sit in a large chair, and see somebody else at work—to say, languidly, “Don’t crumple that scarf, Jane—and where shall we put Miss Caroline’s blue bonnet?”—gave her a very comfortable notion of her own importance and habits of business—a sort of title to be the superintendent of a family and the wife of a rector. Caroline had disappeared—so had Lord Vargrave ; but the first was supposed to be with Evelyn ; the second, employed in writing letters ; at least, it was so when they had been last observed. Mrs Leslie was alone in the drawing-room, and absorbed in anxious and benevolent thoughts on the critical situation of her young favourite, about to enter an age and a world, the perils of which Mrs Leslie had not forgotten.

It was at this time that Evelyn, forgetful of Lord Vargrave and his suit—of every one—of everything but the grief of the approaching departure—found herself alone in a little arbour, that had been built upon the cliff to command the view of the sea below. That day she had been restless, perturbed ; she had visited every spot consecrated by youthful recollections ; she had clung with fond regret to every place in which she had held sweet converse with her mother. Of a disposition singularly warm and affectionate, she had often, in her secret heart, pined for a more yearning and enthusiastic love than it seemed in the subdued nature of Lady Vargrave to bestow. In the affection of the latter,

gentle and never-fluctuating as it was, there seemed to her a something wanting, which she could not define. She had watched that beloved face all the morning. She had hoped to see the tender eyes fixed upon her, and hear the meek voice exclaim, "I cannot part with my child!" All the gay pictures which the light-hearted Caroline drew of the scenes she was to enter, had vanished away—now that the hour approached when her mother was to be left alone. Why was she to go? It seemed to her an unnecessary cruelty.

As she thus sat, she did not observe that Mr Aubrey, who had seen her at a distance, was now bending his way to her; and not till he had entered the arbour and taken her hand, did she waken from those reveries in which youth, the Dreamer and the Desirer, so morbidly indulges.

"Tears, my child," said the curate—"nay, be not ashamed of them; they become you in this hour. How we shall miss you!—and you, too, will not forget us!"

"Forget you! Ah no, indeed! But why should I leave you? Why will you not speak to my mother—implore her to let me remain? We were so happy till these strangers came. We did not think there was any other world—*here* there is world enough for me!"

"My poor Evelyn," said Mr Aubrey, gently, "I have spoken to your mother, and to Mrs Leslie; they have confided to me all the reasons for your departure, and I cannot but subscribe to their justice. You do

not want many months of the age when you will be called upon to decide whether Lord Vargrave shall be your husband. Your mother shrinks from the responsibility of influencing your decision ; and here, my child, inexperienced, and having seen so little of others, how can you know your own heart ? ”

“ But, oh, Mr Aubrey,” said Evelyn, with an earnestness that overcame embarrassment, “ have I a choice left to me ? Can I be ungrateful—disobedient to him who was a father to me ? Ought I not to sacrifice my own happiness ? And how willingly would I do so if my mother would smile on me approvingly ! ”

“ My child,” said the curate, gravely, “ an old man is a bad judge of the affairs of youth ; yet, in this matter, I think your duty plain. Do not resolutely set yourself against Lord Vargrave’s claim—do not persuade yourself that you must be unhappy in a union with him. Compose your mind—think seriously upon the choice before you—refuse all decision at the present moment—wait until the appointed time arrives, or, at least, more nearly approaches. Meanwhile, I understand that Lord Vargrave is to be a frequent visitor at Mrs Merton’s—there you will see him with others—his character will show itself—study his principles—his disposition—examine whether he is one whom you can esteem and render happy ; there may be a love without enthusiasm—and yet sufficient for domestic felicity, and for the employment of the affections. You will insensibly, too, learn from other parts

of his character which he does not exhibit to us. If the result of time and examination be, that you can cheerfully obey the late lord's dying wish—unquestionably it will be the happier decision. If not—if you still shrink from vows at which your heart now rebels—as unquestionably you may, with an acquitted conscience, become free. The best of us are imperfect judges of the happiness of others. In the woe or weal of a whole life, we must decide for ourselves. Your benefactor could not mean you to be wretched ; and if he now, with eyes purified from all worldly mists, look down upon you, his spirit will approve your choice. For when we quit the world, all worldly ambition dies with us. What now to the immortal soul can be the title and the rank which on earth, with the desires of earth, your benefactor hoped to secure to his adopted child ? This is my advice. Look on the bright side of things, and wait calmly for the hour when Lord Vargrave can demand your decision."

The words of the priest, which well defined her duty, inexpressibly soothed and comforted Evelyn ; and the advice upon other and higher matters, which the good man pressed upon a mind, so softened at that hour to receive religious impressions, was received with gratitude and respect. Subsequently their conversation fell upon Lady Vargrave—a theme dear to both of them. The old man was greatly touched by the poor girl's unselfish anxiety for her mother's comfort—by her fears that she might be missed, in those little attentions which filial love alone can render ; he was almost

yet more touched when, with a less disinterested feeling, Evelyn added mournfully,

“Yet why, after all, should I fancy she will so miss me? Ah, though I will not *dare* complain of it, I feel still that she does not love me as I love her.”

“Evelyn,” said the curate, with mild reproach, “have I not said that your mother has known sorrow? and though sorrow does not annihilate affection, it subdues its expression, and moderates its outward signs.”

Evelyn sighed, and said no more.

As the good old man and his young friend returned to the cottage, Lord Vargrave and Caroline approached them, emerging from an opposite part of the grounds. The former hastened to Evelyn with his usual gaiety and frank address: and there was so much charm in the manner of a man, whom *apparently* the world and its cares had never rendered artificial or reserved, that the curate himself was impressed by it. He thought that Evelyn might be happy with one amiable enough for a companion and wise enough for a guide. But, old as he was, he had loved, and he knew that there are instincts in the heart which defy all our calculations.

While Lumley was conversing, the little gate that made the communication between the gardens and the neighbouring churchyard, through which was the nearest access to the village, creaked on its hinges, and the quiet and solitary figure of Lady Vargrave threw its shadow over the grass.

CHAPTER XIII.

And I can listen to thee yet,
Can lie upon the plain—
And listen till I do beget
That golden time again.—WORDSWORTH.

It was past midnight—hostess and guests had retired to repose—when Lady Vargrave's door opened gently. The lady herself was kneeling at the foot of the bed : the moonlight came through the half-drawn curtains of the casement ; and by its ray her pale, calm features looked paler, and yet more hushed.

Evelyn, for she was the intruder, paused at the threshold, till her mother rose from her devotions, and then she threw herself on Lady Vargrave's breast, sobbing as if her heart would break—hers were the wild, generous, irresistible emotions of youth. Lady Vargrave, perhaps, had known them once ; at least, she could sympathise with them now.

She strained her child to her bosom—she stroked back her hair, and kissed her fondly, and spoke to her soothingly.

“Mother,” sobbed Evelyn, “I could not sleep—I could not rest. Bless me again—kiss me again ; tell me that you love me—you cannot love me as I do

you ; but tell me that I am dear to you—tell me you will regret me, but not too much—tell me——” Here Evelyn paused, and could say no more.

“ My best, my kindest Evelyn,” said Lady Vargrave, “ there is nothing on earth I love like you. Do not fancy I am ungrateful.”

“ Why do you say ungrateful ?—your own child—your only child !” And Evelyn covered her mother’s face and hands with passionate tears and kisses.

At that moment, certain it is that Lady Vargrave’s heart reproached her with not having, indeed, loved this sweet girl as she deserved. True, no mother was more mild, more attentive, more fostering, more anxious for a daughter’s welfare ; but Evelyn was right !—the gushing fondness, the mysterious entering into every subtle thought and feeling, which should have characterised the love of such a mother to such a child, had been, to outward appearance, wanting. Even in this present parting, there had been a prudence, an exercise of reasoning, that savoured more of duty than love. Lady Vargrave felt all this with remorse—she gave way to emotions new to her—at least to exhibit,—she wept with Evelyn, and returned her caresses with almost equal fervour. Perhaps, too, she thought at that moment of what love that warm nature was susceptible ; and she trembled for her future fate. It was as a full reconciliation—that mournful hour—between feelings on either side, which something mysterious seemed to have checked before ;—and that last night the mother and the child did not separate—the

same couch contained them ; and, when worn out with some emotions which she could not reveal, Lady Vargrave fell into the sleep of exhaustion, Evelyn's arm was round her, and Evelyn's eyes watched her with pious and anxious love as the grey morning dawned.

She left her mother still sleeping when the sun rose, and went silently down into the dear room below, and again busied herself in a thousand little provident cares, which she wonderéd she had forgot before.

The carriages were at the door before the party had assembled at the melancholy breakfast table. Lord Vargrave was the last to appear.

“ I have been like all cowards,” said he, seating himself—“ anxious to defer an evil as long as possible ; a bad policy, for it increases the worst of all pains—that of suspense.”

Mrs Merton had undertaken the duties that appertain to the “ hissing urn.” “ You prefer coffee, Lord Vargrave ?—Caroline, my dear——”

Caroline passed the cup to Lord Vargrave, who looked at her hand as he took it—there was a ring on one of those slender fingers never observed there before. Their eyes met, and Caroline coloured. Lord Vargrave turned to Evelyn, who, pale as death, but tearless and speechless, sat beside her mother ; he attempted in vain to draw her into conversation. Evelyn, who desired to restrain her feelings, would not trust herself to speak.

Mrs Merton, ever undisturbed and placid, continued

to talk on : to offer congratulations on the weather—it was such a lovely day—and they should be off so early—it would be so well arranged—they should be in such good time to dine at —, and then go three stages after dinner—the moon would be up.

“But,” said Lord Vargrave, “as I am to go with you as far as —, where our roads separate, I hope I am not condemned to go alone, with my red box, two old newspapers, and the blue devils. Have pity on me.”

“Perhaps you will take grandmamma, then ?” whispered Caroline, archly.

Lumley shrugged his shoulders, and replied in the same tone, “Yes—provided you keep to the proverb, ‘*Les extrêmes se touchent,*’ and the lovely grandchild accompany the venerable grandmamma.”

“What would Evelyn say ?” retorted Caroline.

Lumley sighed, and made no answer.

Mrs Merton, who had hung fire while her daughter was carrying on this “aside,” now put in.

“Suppose I and Caroline take your britzka, and you go in our old coach with Evelyn and Mrs Leslie ?”

Lumley looked delightedly at the speaker, and then glanced at Evelyn ; but Mrs Leslie said very gravely, “No, *we* shall feel too much in leaving this dear place to be gay companions for Lord Vargrave. We shall all meet at dinner ; or,” she added, after a pause, “if this be uncourteous to Lord Vargrave, suppose Evelyn and myself take his carriage, and he accompanies you ?”

“Agreed,” said Mrs Merton, quietly ; “and now I will just go and see about the strawberry-plants and

slips—it was so kind in you, dear Lady Vargrave, to think of them.”

An hour had elapsed, and Evelyn was gone ! She had left her maiden home—she had wept her last farewell on her mother’s bosom—the sound of the carriage-wheels had died away ; but still Lady Vargrave lingered on the threshold—still she gazed on the spot where the last glimpse of Evelyn had been caught. A sense of dreariness and solitude passed into her soul : the very sunlight—the spring—the songs of the birds—made loneliness more desolate.

Mechanically, at last, she moved away, and with slow steps and downcast eyes passed through the favourite walk that led into the quiet burial-ground. The gate closed upon her—and now the lawn—the gardens—the haunts of Evelyn—were solitary as the desert itself ;—but the daisy opened to the sun, and the bee murmured along the blossoms, not the less blithely for the absence of all human life. In the bosom of Nature there beats no heart for man !

BOOK II.

Ἔτος ἦλθε, περιπλομένων ἐνιαυτῶν,
Τῷ οἱ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ οἰκόνδε νέεσθαι
Εἰς Ἴθάκην, οὐδ' ἔνθα πεφυγμένος ἦεν ἀέθλων.

Hom. *Od.*, lib. i. l. 16.

The hour arrived—years having rolled away—
When his return the Gods no more delay.
Lo ! Ithaca the Fates award ; and there
New trials meet the Wanderer.



BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

There is continual spring and harvest here—
Continual, both meeting at one time :
For both the boughs do laughing blossoms bear,
And with fresh colours deck the wanton prime ;
And eke at once the heavy trees they climb,
Which seem to labour under their fruits' load.

SPENSER, *The Garden of Adonis.*

Vis boni

In ipsâ inesset formâ.*—TERENT.

BEAUTY, thou art twice blessed ; thou blessest the gazer and the possessor ; often, at once the effect and the cause of goodness ! A sweet disposition—a lovely soul—an affectionate nature—will speak in the eyes, the lips, the brow, and become the cause of beauty. On the other hand, they who have a gift that commands love, a key that opens all hearts, are ordinarily inclined to look with happy eyes upon the world—to be cheerful and serene—to hope and to confide. There is more wisdom than the vulgar dream of in our admiration of a fair face.

* Even in beauty there exists the power of virtue.

Evelyn Cameron was beautiful : a beauty that came from the heart, and went to the heart—a beauty, the very spirit of which was love ! Love smiled on her dimpled lips—it reposed on her open brow—it played in the profuse and careless ringlets of darkest yet sunniest auburn, which a breeze could lift from her delicate and virgin cheek. Love, in all its tenderness,—in all its kindness, its unsuspecting truth—Love coloured every thought, murmured in her low melodious voice,—in all its symmetry and glorious womanhood, Love swelled the swan-like neck, and moulded the rounded limb.

She was just the kind of person that takes the judgment by storm : whether gay or grave, there was so charming and irresistible a grace about her. She seemed born, not only to captivate the giddy, but to turn the heads of the sage. Roxalana was nothing to her. How, in the obscure hamlet of Brook-Green, she had learned all the arts of pleasing, it is impossible to say. In her arch smile, the pretty toss of her head, the half shyness, half freedom of her winning ways, it was as if Nature had made her to delight one heart, and torment all others.

Without being learned, the mind of Evelyn was cultivated and well informed. Her heart, perhaps, helped to instruct her understanding ; for by a kind of intuition she could appreciate all that was beautiful and elevated. Her unvitiated and guileless taste had a logic of its own : no schoolman had ever a quicker penetration into truth—no critic ever more readily de-

tected the meretricious and the false. The book that Evelyn could admire was sure to be stamped with the impress of the noble, the lovely, or the true !

But Evelyn had faults—the faults of her age ; or rather she had tendencies that might conduce to error. She was of so generous a nature that the very thought of sacrificing herself for another had a charm. She ever acted from impulse—impulses pure and good, but often rash and imprudent. She was yielding to weakness, persuaded into anything—so sensitive, that even a cold look from one moderately liked cut her to the heart ; and by the sympathy that accompanies sensitiveness, no pain to her was so great as the thought of giving pain to another. Hence it was that Vargrave might form reasonable hopes of his ultimate success. It was a dangerous constitution for happiness ! How many chances must combine to preserve to the mid-day of characters like this, the sunshine of their dawn ! The butterfly, that seems the child of the summer and the flowers, what wind will not chill its mirth—what touch will not brush away its hues ?

CHAPTER II.

These, on a general survey, are the modes
Of pulpit oratory, which agree
With no unlettered audience.—POLWHELE.

MRS LESLIE had returned from her visit to the rectory to her own home, and Evelyn had now been some weeks at Mrs Merton's. As was natural, she had grown in some measure reconciled and resigned to her change of abode. In fact, no sooner did she pass Mrs Merton's threshold, than, for the first time, she was made aware of her consequence in life.

The Reverend Mr Merton was a man of the nicest perception in all things appertaining to worldly consideration: the second son of a very wealthy baronet (who was the first commoner of his county), and of the daughter of a rich and highly-descended peer, Mr Merton had been brought near enough to rank and power to appreciate all their advantages. In early life he had been something of a "tuft-hunter;" but as his understanding was good, and his passions not very strong, he had soon perceived that that vessel of clay, a young man with a moderate fortune, cannot long sail down the same stream with the metal vessels of rich earls and

extravagant dandies. Besides, he was destined for the church,—because there was one of the finest livings in England in the family. He therefore took orders at six-and-twenty ; married Mrs Leslie's daughter, who had thirty thousand pounds ; and settled at the Rectory of Merton, within a mile of the family seat. He became a very respectable and extremely popular man. He was singularly hospitable, and built a new wing—containing a large dining-room and six capital bedrooms—to the rectory, which had now much more the appearance of a country villa than a country parsonage. His brother, succeeding to the estates, and residing chiefly in the neighbourhood, became, like his father before him, member for the county, and was one of the country gentlemen most looked up to in the House of Commons. A sensible and frequent, though uncommonly prosy speaker, singularly independent (for he had a clear fourteen thousand pounds a-year, and did not desire office), and valuing himself on not being a party man, so that his vote on critical questions was often a matter of great doubt, and, therefore, of great moment—Sir John Merton gave considerable importance to the Reverend Charles Merton. The latter kept up all the more select of his old London acquaintances ; and few country houses, at certain seasons of the year, were filled more aristocratically than the pleasant rectory-house. Mr Merton, indeed, contrived to make the Hall a reservoir for the Parsonage, and periodically drafted off the *élite* of the visitors at the former to spend a few days at the latter. This was the

more easily done, as his brother was a widower, and his conversation was all of one sort—the state of the nation and the agricultural interest. Mr Merton was upon very friendly terms with his brother—looked after the property in the absence of Sir John—kept up the family interest—was an excellent electioneer—a good speaker, at a pinch—an able magistrate—a man, in short, most useful in the county : on the whole, he was more popular than his brother, and almost as much looked up to—perhaps, because he was much less ostentatious. He had very good taste, had the Reverend Charles Merton !—his table plentiful, but plain—his manners affable to the low, though agreeably sycophantic to the high ; and there was nothing about him that ever wounded self-love. To add to the attractions of his house, his wife, simple and good-tempered, could talk with anybody, take off the bores, and leave people to be comfortable in their own way ; while he had a large family of fine children of all ages, that had long given easy and constant excuse, under the name of “little children’s parties,” for getting up an impromptu dance or a gypsy dinner—enlivening the neighbourhood, in short. Caroline was the eldest ; then came a son, attached to a foreign ministry, and another, who, though only nineteen, was a private secretary to one of our Indian satraps. The acquaintance of these young gentlemen, thus engaged, it was therefore Evelyn’s misfortune to lose the advantage of cultivating—a loss which both Mr and Mrs Merton assured her was very much to be regretted. But to make up to her for such

a privation, there were two lovely little girls ; one ten, and the other seven years old, who fell in love with Evelyn at first sight. Caroline was one of the beauties of the county,—clever and conversible—“drew young men,” and set the fashion to young ladies, especially when she returned from spending the season with Lady Elizabeth.

It was a delightful family !

In person, Mr Merton was of the middle height ; fair, and inclined to stoutness, with small features, beautiful teeth, and great suavity of address. Mindful still of the time when he had been “about town,” he was very particular in his dress : his black coat, neatly relieved in the evening by a white underwaist-coat, and a shirt-front admirably plaited, with plain studs of dark enamel—his well-cut trousers, and elaborately-polished shoes—(he was good-humouredly vain of his feet and hands)—won for him the common praise of the dandies (who occasionally honoured him with a visit to shoot his game, and flirt with his daughter), “that old Merton was a most gentlemanlike fellow—so d——d neat for a parson !”

Such, mentally, morally, and physically, was the Reverend Charles Merton, rector of Merton, brother of Sir John, and possessor of an income that, what with his rich living, his wife’s fortune, and his own, which was not inconsiderable, amounted to between four and five thousand pounds a-year—which income, managed with judgment, as well as liberality, could not fail to secure to him all the good things of this world—the respect of

his friends amongst the rest. Caroline was right when she told Evelyn that her papa was very different from a mere country parson.

Now this gentleman could not fail to see all the claims that Evelyn might fairly advance upon the esteem, nay, the veneration, of himself and family: a young beauty, with a fortune of about a quarter of a million, was a phenomenon that might fairly be called celestial. Her pretensions were enhanced by her engagement to Lord Vargrave—an engagement which might be broken; so that, as he interpreted it, the *worst* that could happen to the young lady was to marry an able and rising Minister of State—a peer of the realm; but she was perfectly free to marry a still greater man, if she could find him; and who knows but what perhaps the *attaché*, if he could get leave of absence?—Mr Merton was too sensible to pursue that thought further for the present.

The good man was greatly shocked at the too familiar manner in which Mrs Merton spoke to this high-fated heiress—at Evelyn's travelling so far without her own maid—at her very primitive wardrobe—poor, ill-used child! Mr Merton was a connoisseur in ladies' dress. It was quite painful to see that the unfortunate girl had been so neglected. Lady Vargrave must be a very strange person. He inquired compassionately whether she was allowed any pocket-money? and finding to his relief, that in that respect Miss Cameron was munificently supplied, he suggested that a proper Abigail should be immediately engaged; that proper orders to

Madame Devy should be immediately transmitted to London, with one of Evelyn's dresses, as a pattern for nothing but length and breadth. He almost stamped with vexation when he heard that Evelyn had been placed in one of the neat little rooms generally appropriated to young lady visitors.

"She is quite contented, my dear Mr Merton ; she is so simple ; she has not been brought up in the style you think for."

"Mrs Merton," said the rector, with great solemnity, "Miss Cameron may know no better now ; but what will she think of us hereafter ? It is my maxim to recollect what people will be, and show them that respect which may leave pleasing impressions when they have it in their power to show us civility in return."

With many apologies, which quite overwhelmed poor Evelyn, she was transferred from the little chamber, with its French bed and bamboo-coloured wash-hand stand, to an apartment with a buhl wardrobe and a four-post bed with green silk curtains, usually appropriated to the regular Christmas visitant, the Dowager Countess of Chipperton : a pretty morning-room communicated with the sleeping apartment, and thence a private staircase conducted into the gardens. The whole family were duly impressed and re-impressed with her importance. No queen could be more made of. Evelyn mistook it all for pure kindness, and returned the hospitality with an affection that extended to the whole family, but particularly to the two little girls, and a beautiful black spaniel. Her dresses came down from

London—her Abigail arrived—the buhl wardrobe was duly filled—and Evelyn at last learned that it is a fine thing to be rich. An account of all these proceedings was forwarded to Lady Vargrave, in a long and most complacent letter, by the rector himself. The answer was short, but it contented the excellent clergyman ; for it approved of all he had done, and begged that Miss Cameron might have everything that seemed proper to her station.

By the same post came two letters to Evelyn herself—one from Lady Vargrave, one from the curate. They transported her from the fine room and the buhl wardrobe to the cottage and the lawn ;—and the fine Abigail, when she came to dress her young lady's hair, found her weeping.

It was a matter of great regret to the rector that it was that time of year when—precisely because the country is most beautiful—every one worth knowing is in town. Still, however, some stray guests found their way to the rectory for a day or two, and still there were some aristocratic old families in the neighbourhood, who never went up to London : so that two days in the week the rector's wine flowed, the whist-tables were set out, and the piano called into requisition.

Evelyn—the object of universal attention and admiration—was put at her ease by her station itself ; for good manners come like an instinct to those on whom the world smiles. Insensibly she acquired self-possession and the smoothness of society ; and if her child-like playfulness broke out from all conventional re-

straint, it only made more charming and brilliant the great heiress, whose delicate and fairy cast of beauty so well became her graceful *abandon* of manner, and who looked so unequivocally ladylike to the eyes that rested on Madam Devy's blondes and satins.

Caroline was not so gay as she had been at the cottage. Something seemed to weigh upon her spirits : she was often moody and thoughtful. She was the only one in the family not good-tempered ; and her peevish replies to her parents, when no visitor imposed a check on the family circle, inconceivably pained Evelyn, and greatly contrasted the flow of spirits which distinguished her when she found somebody worth listening to. Still Evelyn—who, where she once liked, found it difficult to withdraw regard—sought to overlook Caroline's blemishes, and to persuade herself of a thousand good qualities below the surface ; and her generous nature found constant opportunity of venting itself in costly gifts, selected from the London parcels, with which the officious Mr Merton relieved the monotony of the rectory. These gifts Caroline could not refuse, without paining her young friend. She took them reluctantly, for, to do her justice, Caroline, though ambitious, was not mean.

Thus time passed in the rectory, in gay variety and constant entertainment ; and all things combined to spoil the heiress, if, indeed, goodness ever is spoiled by kindness and prosperity. Is it to the frost or to the sunshine that the flower opens its petals, or the fruit ripens from the blossom ?

CHAPTER III.

Rod. How sweet these solitary places are——

Ped. What strange music
Was that we heard afar off?

Curio. We've told you what he is—what time we've sought him—
His nature and his name.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER, *The Pilgrim.*

ONE day, as the ladies were seated in Mrs Merton's morning room, Evelyn, who had been stationed by the window hearing the little Cecilia go through the French verbs, and had just finished that agreeable task, exclaimed,

“Do tell me to whom that old house belongs, with the picturesque gable-end, and Gothic turrets—there, just peeping through the trees—I have always forgot to ask you.”

“Oh, my dear Miss Cameron,” said Mrs Merton, “that is Burleigh—have you not been there? How stupid in Caroline not to show it to you! It is one of the lions of the place. It belongs to a man you have often heard of—Mr Maltravers.”

“Indeed!” cried Evelyn; and she gazed with new interest on the grey melancholy pile, as the sunshine brought it into strong contrast with the dark pines around it. “And Mr Maltravers himself——?”

“Is still abroad, I believe ; though I did hear, the other day, that he was shortly expected at Burleigh. It is a curious old place, though much neglected. I believe, indeed, it has not been furnished since the time of Charles I. (Cissy, my love, don't stoop so.) Very gloomy, in my opinion ; and not any fine room in the house, except the library, which was once a chapel. However, people come miles to see it.”

“Will you go there to-day?” said Caroline, languidly ; “it is a very pleasant walk through the glebe-land and the wood—not above half a mile by the footpath.”

“I should like it so much.”

“Yes,” said Mrs Merton, “and you had better go before he returns—he is so strange. He does not allow it to be seen when he is down. But, indeed, he has only been once at the old place since he was of age. (Sophy, you will tear Miss Cameron's scarf to pieces ; do be quiet, child.) That was before he was a great man—he was then very odd—saw no society—only dined once with us—though Mr Merton paid him every attention. They show the room in which he wrote his books.”

“I remember him very well, though I was then but a child,” said Caroline—“a handsome, thoughtful face.”

“Did you think so, my dear ? fine eyes and teeth, certainly, and a commanding figure—but nothing more.”

“Well,” said Caroline, “if you like to go, Evelyn, I am at your service.”

“And—I—Evy, dear—I—may go,” said Cecilia, clinging to Evelyn.

“And me, too,” lisped Sophia, the youngest hope—
“there’s such a pretty peacock.”

“Oh, yes—they may go, Mrs Merton ; we’ll take such care of them.”

“Very well, my dear—Miss Cameron quite spoils you.”

Evelyn tripped away to put on her bonnet—and the children ran after her, clapping their hands—they could not bear to lose sight of her for a moment.

“Caroline,” said Mrs Merton, affectionately, “are you not well?—you have seemed pale lately, and not in your usual spirits.”

“Oh, yes, I’m well enough,” answered Caroline, rather peevishly ; “but this place is so dull now—very provoking that Lady Elizabeth does not go to London this year.”

“My dear, it will be gayer, I hope, in July, when the races at Knaresdean begin ; and Lord Vargrave has promised to come.”

“Has Lord Vargrave written to you lately ?”

“No, my dear.”

“Very odd.”

“Does Evelyn ever talk of him ?”

“Not much,” said Caroline, rising and quitting the room.

It was a most cheerful, exhilarating day ; the close of sweet May : the hedges were white with blossoms, a light breeze rustled the young leaves, the butterflies had ventured forth, and the children chased them over the grass, as Evelyn and Caroline, who walked much

too slow for her companion (Evelyn longed to run), followed them soberly towards Burleigh.

They passed the glebe-fields ; and a little bridge, thrown over a brawling rivulet, conducted them into a wood.

“This stream,” said Caroline, “forms the boundary between my uncle’s estates and those of Mr Maltravers. It must be very unpleasant to so proud a man as Mr Maltravers is said to be, to have the land of another proprietor so near his house. He could hear my uncle’s gun from his very drawing-room. However, Sir John takes care not to molest him. On the other side, the Burleigh estates extend for some miles ; indeed, Mr Maltravers is the next great proprietor to my uncle in this part of the county. Very strange that he does not marry ! There, now you can see the house.”

The mansion lay somewhat low, with hanging woods in the rear ; and the old-fashioned fish-ponds gleaming in the sunshine, and overshadowed by gigantic trees, increased the venerable stillness of its aspect. Ivy and innumerable creepers covered one side of the house ; and long weeds cumbered the deserted road.

“It is sadly neglected,” said Caroline ; “and was so, even in the last owner’s life. Mr Maltravers inherits the place from his mother’s uncle. We may as well enter the house by the private way. The front entrance is kept locked up.”

Winding by a path that conducted into a flower-garden, divided from the park by a ha-ha, over which

a plank and a small gate, rusting off its hinges, were placed, Caroline led the way towards the building. At this point of view it presented a large bay-window, that, by a flight of four steps, led into the garden. On one side rose a square, narrow turret, surmounted by a gilt dome and quaint weathercock, below the architrave of which was a sun-dial, set in the stonework ; and another dial stood in the garden, with the common and beautiful motto—

*“ Non numero horas, nisi serenas ! ” **

On the other side of the bay-window a huge buttress cast its mass of shadow. There was something in the appearance of the whole place that invited to contemplation and repose—something almost monastic. The gaiety of the teeming spring-time could not divest the spot of a certain sadness, not displeasing, however, whether to the young, to whom there is a luxury in the vague sentiment of melancholy, or to those who, having known real griefs, seek for an anodyne in meditation and memory. The low lead-coloured door, set deep in the turret, was locked, and the bell beside it broken. Caroline turned impatiently away. “ We must go round to the other side,” said she, “ and try to make the deaf old man hear us.”

“ Oh, Carry ! ” cried Cecilia, “ the great window is open ; ” and she ran up the steps.

“ That is lucky,” said Caroline ; and the rest followed Cecilia.

* I number not the hours, unless sunny.

Evelyn now stood within the library of which Mrs Merton had spoken. It was a large room, about fifty feet in length, and proportionably wide ; somewhat dark, for the light came only from the one large window through which they entered ; and though the window rose to the cornice of the ceiling, and took up one side of the apartment, the daylight was subdued by the heaviness of the stonework in which the narrow panes were set, and by the glass stained with armorial bearings in the upper part of the casement. The bookcases, too, were of the dark oak which so much absorbs the light ; and the gilding, formerly meant to relieve them, was discoloured by time.

The room was almost disproportionably lofty ; the ceiling, elaborately coved, and richly carved with grotesque masks, preserved the Gothic character of the age in which it had been devoted to a religious purpose. Two fireplaces, with high chimney-pieces of oak, in which were inserted two portraits, broke the symmetry of the tall bookcases. In one of these fireplaces were half-burnt logs ; and a huge arm-chair, with a small reading-desk beside it, seemed to bespeak the recent occupation of the room. On the fourth side, opposite the window, the wall was covered with faded tapestry, representing the meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba ; the arras was nailed over doors on either hand ; the chinks between the door and the wall serving, in one instance, to cut off in the middle his wise majesty, who was making a low bow ; while in the other it took the ground from under the

wanton queen, just as she was descending from her chariot.

Near the window stood a grand piano, the only modern article in the room, save one of the portraits, presently to be described. On all this Evelyn gazed silently and devoutly: she had naturally that reverence for genius which is common to the enthusiastic and young; and there is, even to the dullest, a certain interest in the homes of those who have implanted within us a new thought. But here there was, she imagined, a rare and singular harmony between the place and the mental characteristics of the owner. She fancied she now better understood the shadowy and metaphysical repose of thought that had distinguished the earlier writings of Maltravers—the writings composed or planned in this still retreat.

But what particularly caught her attention was one of the two portraits that adorned the mantelpieces. The further one was attired in the rich and fanciful armour of the time of Elizabeth; the head bare, the helmet on a table on which the hand rested. It was a handsome and striking countenance; and an inscription announced it to be a Digby, an ancestor of Maltravers.

But the other was a beautiful girl of about eighteen, in the now almost antiquated dress of forty years ago. The features were delicate, but the colours somewhat faded, and there was something mournful in the expression. A silk curtain drawn on one side seemed to denote how carefully it was prized by the possessor.

Evelyn turned for explanation to her cicerone.

“This is the second time I have seen that picture,” said Caroline ; “for it is only by great entreaty, and as a mysterious favour, that the old housekeeper draws aside the veil. Some touch of sentiment in Maltravers makes him regard it as sacred. It is the picture of his mother before she married ; she died in giving him birth.”

Evelyn sighed ; how well she understood the sentiment which seemed to Caroline so eccentric ! The countenance fascinated her ; the eye seemed to follow her as she turned.

“As a proper pendant to this picture,” said Caroline, “he ought to have dismissed the effigies of you warlike gentleman, and replaced it by one of poor Lady Florence Lascelles, for whose loss he is said to have quitted his country ; but, perhaps, it was the loss of her fortune.”

“How can you say so ?—fie !” cried Evelyn, with a burst of generous indignation.

“Ah, my dear, you heiresses have a fellow-feeling with each other ! Nevertheless, clever men are less sentimental than we deem them—heigho !—this quiet room gives me the spleen, I fancy.”

“Dearest Evy,” whispered Cecilia, “I think you have a look of that pretty picture, only you are much prettier. Do take off your bonnet ; your hair just falls down like hers.”

Evelyn shook her head gravely ; but the spoiled child hastily untied the ribbons, and snatched away

the hat, and Evelyn's sunny ringlets fell down in beautiful disorder. There was no resemblance between Evelyn and the portrait, except in the colour of the hair, and the careless fashion it now by chance assumed. Yet Evelyn was pleased to think that a likeness did exist, though Caroline declared it was a most unflattering compliment.

"I don't wonder," said the latter, changing the theme—"I don't wonder Mr Maltravers lives so little in this 'Castle Dull ;' yet it might be much improved. French windows and plate glass, for instance ; and if those lumbering bookshelves and horrid old chimney-pieces were removed, and the ceiling painted white and gold, like that in my uncle's saloon, and a rich, lively paper, instead of the tapestry, it would really make a very fine ball-room."

"Let us have a dance here now," cried Cecilia. "Come, stand up, Sophy ;" and the children began to practise a waltz step, tumbling over each other, and laughing in full glee.

"Hush, hush !" said Evelyn, softly. She had never before checked the children's mirth, and she could not tell why she did so now.

"I suppose the old butler has been entertaining the bailiff here," said Caroline, pointing to the remains of the fire.

"And is this the room he chiefly inhabited—the room that you say they show as his ?"

"No ; that tapestry door to the right leads into a little study where he wrote." So saying, Caroline tried

to open the door, but it was locked from within. She then opened the other door, which showed a long wainscoted passage, hung with rusty pikes, and a few breastplates of the time of the Parliamentary Wars. "This leads to the main body of the house," said Caroline, "from which the room we are now in and the little study are completely detached, having, as you know, been the chapel in Popish times. I have heard that Sir Kenelm Digby, an ancestral connection of the present owner, first converted them into their present use ; and, in return, built the village church on the other side of the park."

Sir Kenelm Digby, the old cavalier philosopher !—a new name of interest to consecrate the place ! Evelyn could have lingered all day in the room ; and, perhaps, as an excuse for a longer sojourn, hastened to the piano—it was open—she ran her fairy fingers over the keys, and the sound from the untuned and neglected instrument thrilled wild and spiritlike through the melancholy chamber.

"Oh ! do sing us something, Evy," cried Cecilia, running up to, and drawing a chair to, the instrument.

"Do, Evelyn," said Caroline, languidly ; "it will serve to bring one of the servants to us, and save us a journey to the offices."

It was just what Evelyn wished. Some verses, which her mother especially loved—verses written by Maltravers upon returning, after absence, to his own home—had rushed into her mind as she had touched the keys. They were appropriate to the place, and had

been beautifully set to music. So the children hushed themselves, and nestled at her feet ; and, after a little prelude, keeping the accompaniment under, that the spoiled instrument might not mar the sweet words, and sweeter voice, she began the song.

Meanwhile, in the adjoining room, the little study which Caroline had spoken of, sat the owner of the house ! He had returned suddenly and unexpectedly the previous night. The old steward was in attendance at the moment, full of apologies, congratulations, and gossip ; and Maltravers, grown a stern and haughty man, was already impatiently turning away, when he heard the sudden sound of the children's laughter and loud voices in the room beyond. Maltravers frowned.

“What impertinence is this ?” said he, in a tone that, though very calm, made the steward quake in his shoes.

“I don't know, really, your honour ; there be so many grand folks come to see the house in the fine weather, that——”

“And you permit your master's house to be a raree-show ?—you do well, sir.”

“If your honour were more amongst us, there might be more discipline like,” said the steward, stoutly ; “but no one in my time has cared so little for the old place as those it belongs to.”

“Fewer words with me, sir,” said Maltravers, haughtily ; “and now go and inform those people that I am returned, and wish for no guests but those I invite myself.”

“ Sir ! ”

“ Do you not hear me ? Say, that if it so please them, these old ruins are my property, and are not to be jobbed out to the insolence of public curiosity. Go, sir.”

“ But—I beg pardon, your honour—if they be great folks ?——”

“ Great folks !—great ! Ay, there it is. Why, if they be great folks, they have great houses of their own, Mr Justis.”

The steward stared. “ Perhaps, your honour,” he put in, deprecatingly, “ they be Mr Merton’s family : they come very often when the London gentlemen are with them.”

“ Merton !—oh, the cringing parson. Harkye ! one word more with me, sir, and you quit my service to-morrow.”

Mr Justis lifted his eyes and hands to heaven : but there was something in his master’s voice and look which checked reply, and he turned slowly to the door—when a voice of such heavenly sweetness was heard without, that it arrested his own step, and made the stern Maltravers start in his seat. He held up his hand to the steward to delay his errand, and listened, charmed and spell-bound. His own words came on his ear—words long unfamiliar to him, and at first but imperfectly remembered—words connected with the early and virgin years of poetry and aspiration—words that were as the ghosts of thoughts now far too gentle for his altered soul. He bowed down his head, and the dark shade left his brow.

The song ceased. Maltravers moved with a sigh, and his eyes rested on the form of the steward with his hand on the door.

“Shall I give your honour’s message?” said Mr Justis, gravely.

“No—take care for the future : leave me now.”

Mr Justis made one leg, and then, well pleased, took to both.

“Well,” thought he, as he departed, “how foreign parts do spoil a gentleman!—so mild as he was once ! I must botch up the accounts, I see—the squire has grown sharp.”

As Evelyn concluded her song, she—whose charm in singing was that she sang from the heart—was so touched by the melancholy music of the air and words, that her voice faltered, and the last line died inaudibly on her lips.

The children sprang up and kissed her.

“Oh,” cried Cecilia, “there is the beautiful peacock !” And there, indeed, on the steps without, perhaps attracted by the music, stood the picturesque bird. The children ran out to greet their old favourite, who was extremely tame ; and presently Cecilia returned.

“Oh, Carry ! do see what beautiful horses are coming up the park !”

Caroline, who was a good rider, and fond of horses, and whose curiosity was always aroused by things connected with show and station, suffered the little girl to draw her into the garden. Two grooms, each

mounted on a horse of the pure Arabian breed, and each leading another, swathed and bandaged, were riding slowly up the road ; and Caroline was so attracted by the novel appearance of the animals in a place so deserted, that she followed the children towards them, to learn who could possibly be their enviable owner. Evelyn, forgotten for the moment, remained alone. She was pleased at being so, and once more turned to the picture which had so attracted her before. The mild eyes fixed on her with an expression that recalled to her mind her own mother.

“And,” thought she, as she gazed, “this fair creature did not live to know the fame of her son—to rejoice in his success—or to soothe his grief. And he, that son—a disappointed and solitary exile in distant lands, while strangers stand within his deserted hall !”

The images she had conjured up moved and absorbed her, and she continued to stand before the picture, gazing upward with moistened eyes. It was a beautiful vision as she thus stood, with her delicate bloom, her luxuriant hair (for the hat was not yet replaced)—her elastic form, so full of youth, and health, and hope—the living form beside the faded canvass of the dead—once youthful, tender, lovely as herself ! Evelyn turned away with a sigh—the sigh was re-echoed yet more deeply. She started : the door that led to the study was opened, and in the aperture was the figure of a man, in the prime of life. His hair, still luxuriant as in his earliest youth, though darkened by the suns of the East, curled over a forehead of majestic ex-

panse. The high and proud features, that well became a stature above the ordinary standard—the pale but bronzed complexion—the large eyes of deepest blue, shaded by dark brows and lashes—and, more than all, that expression at once of passion and repose which characterises the old Italian portraits, and seems to denote the inscrutable power that experience imparts to intellect—constituted an *ensemble* which, if not faultlessly handsome, was eminently striking, and formed at once to interest and command. It was a face, once seen, never to be forgotten ; it was a face that had long, half unconsciously, haunted Evelyn's young dreams ; it was a face she had seen before, though, then younger and milder and fairer, it wore a different aspect.

Evelyn stood rooted to the spot, feeling herself blush to her very temples—an enchanting picture of bashful confusion and innocent alarm.

“Do not let me regret my return,” said the stranger, approaching after a short pause, and with much gentleness in his voice and smile, “and think that the owner is doomed to scare away the fair spirits that haunted the spot in his absence.”

“The owner !” repeated Evelyn, almost inaudibly, and in increased embarrassment ; “are you then the—the——”

“Yes,” courteously interrupted the stranger, seeing her confusion ; “my name is Maltravers ; and I am to blame for not having informed you of my sudden return, or for now trespassing on your presence. But

you see my excuse ;” and he pointed to the instrument. “ You have the magic that draws even the serpent from his hole. But you are not alone ? ”

“ Oh, no ! no, indeed ! Miss Merton is with me. I know not where she is gone. I will seek her.”

“ Miss Merton ! You are not, then, one of that family ? ”

“ No, only a guest. I will find her—she must apologise for us. We were not aware that you were here—indeed we were not.”

“ That is a cruel excuse,” said Maltravers, smiling at her eagerness : and the smile and the look reminded her yet more forcibly of the time when he had carried her in his arms, and soothed her suffering, and praised her courage, and pressed the kiss almost of a lover on her hand. At that thought she blushed yet more deeply, and yet more eagerly turned to escape.

Maltravers did not seek to detain her, but silently followed her steps. She had scarcely gained the window before little Cecilia scampered in, crying—

“ Only think ! Mr Maltravers has come back, and brought such beautiful horses ! ”

Cecilia stopped abruptly as she caught sight of the stranger ; and the next moment Caroline herself appeared. Her worldly experience and quick sense saw immediately what had chanced ; and she hastened to apologise to Maltravers, and congratulate him on his return, with an ease that astonished poor Evelyn, and by no means seemed appreciated by Maltravers himself. He replied with brief and haughty courtesy.

“My father,” continued Caroline, “will be so glad to hear you are come back. He will hasten to pay you his respects, and apologise for his truants. But I have not formally introduced you to my fellow-offender. My dear, let me present to you one whom Fame has already made known to you—Mr Maltravers, Miss Cameron, daughter-in-law,” she added, in a lower voice, “to the late Lord Vargrave.”

At the first part of this introduction Maltravers frowned—at the last, he forgot all displeasure.

“Is it possible? I *thought* I had seen you before, but in a dream. Ah! then we are not quite strangers!”

Evelyn’s eye met his, and though she coloured and strove to look grave, a half smile brought out the dimples that played round her arch lips.

“But you do not remember me?” added Maltravers.

“Oh, yes!” exclaimed Evelyn, with a sudden impulse; and then checked herself.

Caroline came to her friend’s relief.

“What is this?—you surprise me—where did you ever see Mr Maltravers before?”

“I can answer that question, Miss Merton. When Miss Cameron was but a child, as high as my little friend here, an accident on the road procured me her acquaintance; and the sweetness and fortitude she then displayed left an impression on me not worn out even to this day. And thus we meet again,” added Maltravers, in a muttered voice, as to himself. “How strange a thing life is!”

“Well,” said Miss Merton, “we must intrude on

you no more—you have so much to do. I am sorry Sir John is not down to welcome you ; but I hope we shall be good neighbours. *Au revoir !*”

And, fancying herself most charming, Caroline bowed, smiled, and walked off with her train. Maltravers paused irresolute. If Evelyn had looked back, he would have accompanied them home ; but Evelyn did not look back—and he stayed.

Miss Merton rallied her young friend unmercifully as they walked homeward, and she extracted a very brief and imperfect history of the adventure that had formed the first acquaintance, and of the interview by which it had been renewed. But Evelyn did not heed her, and the moment they arrived at the rectory, she hastened to shut herself in her room, and write the account of her adventure to her mother. How often, in her girlish reveries, had she thought of that incident—that stranger ! And now, by such a chance, and after so many years, to meet the Unknown, by his own hearth ! and that Unknown to be Maltravers ! It was as if a dream had come true. While she was yet musing—and the letter not yet begun—she heard the sound of joy-bells in the distance—at once she divined the cause ; it was the welcome of the wanderer to his solitary home !

CHAPTER IV.

Mais en connaissant votre condition naturelle, usez des moyens qui lui sont propres, et ne prétendez pas régner par une autre voie que par celle qui vous fait roi.*—PASCAL.

IN the heart, as in the ocean, the great tides ebb and flow. The waves which had once urged on the spirit of Ernest Maltravers to the rocks and shoals of active life had long since receded back upon the calm depths, and left the strand bare. With a melancholy and disappointed mind he had quitted the land of his birth; and new scenes, strange and wild, had risen before his wandering gaze. Wearied with civilisation, and sated with many of the triumphs for which civilised men drudge and toil and disquiet themselves in vain, he had plunged amongst hordes scarce redeemed from primeval barbarism. The adventures through which he had passed, and in which life itself could only be preserved by wary vigilance and ready energies, had forced him, for a while, from the indulgence of morbid contemplations. His heart, indeed, had been left in-

* But in understanding your natural condition, use the means which are proper to it; and pretend not to govern by any other way than by that which constitutes you governor.

active ; but his intellect and his physical powers had been kept in hourly exercise. He returned to the world of his equals with a mind laden with the treasures of a various and vast experience, and with much of the same gloomy moral as that which, on emerging from the Catacombs, assured the restless speculations of Rasselas of the vanity of human life and the folly of moral aspirations.

Ernest Maltravers, never a faultless or completed character, falling short in practice of his own capacities, moral and intellectual, from his very desire to overpass the limits of the Great and Good, was seemingly as far as heretofore from the grand secret of life. It was not so in reality—his mind had acquired what before it wanted—*hardness* ; and we are nearer to true virtue and true happiness when we demand too little from men, than when we exact too much.

Nevertheless, partly from the strange life that had thrown him amongst men whom safety itself made it necessary to command despotically, partly from the habit of power, and disdain of the world, his nature was incrustated with a stern imperiousness of manner, often approaching to the harsh and morose, though beneath it lurked generosity and benevolence.

Many of his younger feelings, more amiable and complex, had settled into one predominant quality, which more or less had always characterised him—Pride ! Self-esteem made inactive, and Ambition made discontented, usually engender haughtiness. In Maltravers

this quality, which, properly controlled and duly softened, is the essence and life of honour, was carried to a vice. He was perfectly conscious of its excess, but he cherished it as a virtue. Pride had served to console him in sorrow, and, therefore, it was a friend ; it had supported him when disgusted with fraud, or in resistance to violence, and, therefore, it was a champion and a fortress. It was a pride of a peculiar sort—it attached itself to no one point in especial—not to talent, knowledge, mental gifts—still less to the vulgar commonplaces of birth and fortune ; it rather resulted from a supreme and wholesale contempt of all other men, and all their objects—of ambition—of glory—of the hard business of life. His favourite virtue was fortitude ; it was on this that he now mainly valued himself. He was proud of his struggles against others—prouder still of conquests over his own passions. He looked upon FATE as the arch enemy against whose attacks we should ever prepare. He fancied that against fate he had thoroughly schooled himself. In the arrogance of his heart he said, “I can defy the future.” He believed in the boast of the vain old sage—“I am a world to myself !” In the wild career through which his later manhood had passed, it is true that he had not carried his philosophy into a rejection of the ordinary world. The shock occasioned by the death of Florence yielded gradually to time and change ; and he had passed from the deserts of Africa and the East to the brilliant cities of Europe. But neither his heart nor his reason had ever again been enslaved by his

passions. Never again had he known the softness of affection. Had he done so, the ice had been thawed, and the fountain had flowed once more into the great deeps. He had returned to England—he scarce knew wherefore, or with what intent ; certainly not with any idea of entering again upon the occupations of active life ;—it was, perhaps, only the weariness of foreign scenes and unfamiliar tongues, and the vague, unsettled desire of change, that brought him back to the fatherland. But he did not allow so unphilosophical a cause to himself ; and, what was strange, he would not allow one much more amiable, and which was, perhaps, the truer cause—the increasing age and infirmities of his old guardian Cleveland, who prayed him affectionately to return. Maltravers did not like to believe that his heart was still so kind. Singular form of pride ! No, he rather sought to persuade himself that he intended to sell Burleigh, to arrange his affairs finally, and then quit for ever his native land. To prove to himself that this was the case, he had intended at Dover to hurry at once to Burleigh, and merely write to Cleveland that he was returned to England. But his heart would not suffer him to enjoy this cruel luxury of self-mortification, and his horses' heads were turned to Richmond, when within a stage of London. He had spent two days with the good old man, and those two days had so warmed and softened his feelings, that he was quite appalled at his own dereliction from fixed principles ! However, he went before Cleveland had time to discover that he was

changed ; and the old man had promised to visit him shortly.

This, then, was the state of Ernest Maltravers, at the age of thirty-six—an age in which frame and mind are in their fullest perfection,—an age in which men begin most keenly to feel that they are citizens. With all his energies braced and strengthened—with his mind stored with profusest gifts—in the vigour of a constitution to which a hardy life had imparted a second and fresher youth—so trained by stern experience as to redeem, with an easy effort, all the deficiencies and faults which had once resulted from too sensitive an imagination, and too high a standard for human actions ;—formed to render to his race the most brilliant and durable service, and to secure to himself the happiness which results from sobered fancy—a generous heart, and an approving conscience ;—here was Ernest Maltravers, backed, too, by the appliances and gifts of birth and fortune—perversely shutting up genius, life, and soul, in their own thorny leaves—and refusing to serve the fools and rascals, who were formed from the same clay, and gifted by the same God. Morbid and morose philosophy, begot by a proud spirit on a lonely heart !

CHAPTER V.

Let such amongst us as are willing to be children again, if it be only for an hour, resign ourselves to the sweet enchantment that steals upon the spirit when it indulges in the memory of early and innocent enjoyment.
—D. L. RICHARDSON.

AT dinner, Caroline's lively recital of their adventures was received with much interest, not only by the Merton family, but by some of the neighbouring gentry who shared the rector's hospitality. The sudden return of any proprietor to his old hereditary seat after a prolonged absence makes some sensation in a provincial neighbourhood. In this case, where the proprietor was still young, unmarried, celebrated, and handsome, the sensation was, of course, proportionably increased. Caroline and Evelyn were beset by questions, to which the former alone gave any distinct reply. Caroline's account was, on the whole, gracious and favourable, and seemed complimentary to all but Evelyn, who thought that Caroline was a very indifferent portrait-painter.

It seldom happens that a man is a prophet in his own neighbourhood; but Maltravers had been so little in the county, and in his former visit his life had been so secluded, that he was regarded as a stranger. He had neither outshone the establishment, nor interfered

with the sporting of his fellow-squires ; and, on the whole, they made just allowance for his habits of distant reserve. Time and his retirement from the busy scene, long enough to cause him to be missed, not long enough for new favourites to supply his place, had greatly served to mellow and consolidate his reputation, and his country was proud to claim him. Thus (though Maltravers would not have believed it, had an angel told him) he was not spoken ill of behind his back : a thousand little anecdotes of his personal habits, of his generosity, independence of spirit, and eccentricity, were told. Evelyn listened in rapt delight to all ; she had never passed so pleasant an evening ; and she smiled almost gratefully on the rector, who was a man that always followed the stream, when he said, with benign affability, “ We must really show our distinguished neighbour every attention—we must be indulgent to his little oddities : his politics are not mine, to be sure : but a man who has a stake in the country has a right to his own opinion—that was always my maxim :—thank Heaven, I am a very moderate man—we must draw him amongst us : it will be our own fault, I am sure, if he is not quite domesticated at the rectory.”

“ With such attraction—yes,” said the thin curate, timidly bowing to the ladies.

“ It would be a nice match for Miss Caroline,” whispered an old lady. Caroline overheard, and pouted her pretty lip.

The whist-tables were now set out—the music began—and Maltravers was left in peace.

The next day Mr Merton rode his pony over to Burleigh. Maltravers was not at home. He left his card, and a note of friendly respect, begging Mr Maltravers to waive ceremony, and dine with them the next day. Somewhat to the surprise of the rector, he found that the active spirit of Maltravers was already at work. The long deserted grounds were filled with labourers ; the carpenters were busy at the fences ; the house looked alive and stirring ; the grooms were exercising the horses in the park ; all betokened the return of the absentee. This seemed to denote that Maltravers had come to reside ; and the rector thought of Caroline, and was pleased at the notion.

The next day was Cecilia's birthday ; and birthdays were kept at Merton Rectory :—the neighbouring children were invited. They were to dine on the lawn, in a large marquee, and to dance in the evening. The hothouses yielded their early strawberries, and the cows, decorated with blue ribbons, were to give syllabubs. The polite Caroline was not greatly fascinated by pleasure of this kind : she graciously appeared at dinner—kissed the prettiest of the children—helped them to soup, and then having done her duty, retired to her room to write letters. The children were not sorry, for they were a little afraid of the grand Caroline ; and they laughed much more loudly, and made much more noise, when she was gone—and the cakes and strawberries appeared.

Evelyn was in her element ; she had, as a child, mixed so little with children—she had so often yearned

for playmates—she was still so childlike :—besides, she was so fond of Cecilia, she had looked forward with innocent delight to the day ; and a week before had taken the carriage to the neighbouring town, to return with a carefully concealed basket of toys—dolls, sashes, and picture-books. But, somehow or other, she did not feel so childlike as usual that morning ; her heart was away from the pleasure before her ; and her smile was at first languid. But in children's mirth there is something so contagious to those who love children ;—and now, as the party scattered themselves on the grass, and Evelyn opened the basket, and bade them with much gravity keep quiet, and be good children, she was the happiest of the whole group. But she knew how to give pleasure : and the basket was presented to Cecilia, that the little queen of the day might enjoy the luxury of being generous ; and to prevent jealousy, the notable expedient of a lottery was suggested.

“Then Evy shall be Fortune !” cried Cecilia ; “ nobody will be sorry to get anything from Evy—and if any one is discontented, Evy shan't kiss her.”

Mrs Merton, whose motherly heart was completely won by Evelyn's kindness to the children, forgot all her husband's lectures, and willingly ticketed the prizes, and wrote the numbers of the lots on slips of paper carefully folded. A large old Indian jar was dragged from the drawing-room and constituted the fated urn—the tickets were deposited therein, and Cecilia was tying the handkerchief round Evelyn's eyes—while

Fortune struggled archly not to be as blind as she ought to be—and the children, seated in a circle, were in full joy and expectation, when—there was a sudden pause—the laughter stopped—so did Cissy's little hands. What could it be? Evelyn slipped the bandage, and her eyes rested on Maltravers!

“Well, really, my dear Miss Cameron,” said the rector, who was by the side of the intruder, and who, indeed, had just brought him to the spot, “I don't know what these little folks will do to you next.”

“I ought rather to be their victim,” said Maltravers, good-humouredly; “the fairies always punish us grown-up mortals for trespassing on their revels.”

While he spoke, his eyes—those eyes, the most eloquent in the world—dwelt on Evelyn (as, to cover her blushes, she took Cecilia in her arms, and appeared to attend to nothing else), with a look of such admiration and delight as a mortal might well be supposed to cast on some beautiful fairy.

Sophy, a very bold child, ran up to him. “How do, sir?” she lisped, putting up her face to be kissed—“how's the pretty peacock?”

This opportune audacity served at once to renew the charm that had been broken—to unite the stranger with the children. Here was acquaintance claimed and allowed in an instant. The next moment Maltravers was one of the circle—on the turf with the rest—as gay, and almost as noisy—that hard, proud man, so disdainful of the trifles of the world

“But the gentleman must have a prize, too,” said

Sophy, proud of her tall new friend : “ what’s your other name ?—why do you have such a long, hard name ? ”

“ Call me Ernest,” said Maltravers.

“ Why don’t we begin ? ” cried the children.

“ Evy, come, be a good child, miss,” said Sophy, as Evelyn, vexed and ashamed, and half ready to cry, resisted the bandage.

Mr Merton interposed his authority ; but the children clamoured, and Evelyn hastily yielded. It was Fortune’s duty to draw the tickets from the urn, and give them to each claimant, whose name was called : when it came to the turn of Maltravers, the bandage did not conceal the blush and smile of the enchanting goddess ; and the hand of the aspirant thrilled as it touched hers.

The children burst into screams of laughter when Cecilia gravely awarded to Maltravers the worst prize in the lot—a blue ribbon—which Sophy, however, greedily insisted on having ; but Maltravers would not yield it.

Maltravers remained all day at the rectory, and shared in the ball—yes, he danced with Evelyn—he—Maltravers—who had never been known to dance since he was twenty-two ! The ice was fairly broken—Maltravers was at home with the Mertons. And when he took his solitary walk to his solitary house—over the little bridge, and through the shadowy wood—astonished, perhaps, with himself—every one of the guests,

from the oldest to the youngest, pronounced him delightful. Caroline, perhaps, might have been piqued some months ago, that he did not dance with *her*; but now, her heart—such as it was—felt preoccupied.

CHAPTER VI.

L'esprit de l'homme est plus pénétrant que conséquent, et embrasse plus qu'il ne peut lier.—VAUVENARGUES.*

AND now Maltravers was constantly with the Merton family: there was no need of excuse for familiarity on his part. Mr Merton, charmed to find his advances not rejected, thrust intimacy upon him.

One day they spent the afternoon at Burleigh, and Evelyn and Caroline finished their survey of the house—tapestry and armour, pictures and all. This led to a visit to the Arabian horses. Caroline observed that she was very fond of riding, and went into ecstasies with one of the animals—the one, of course, with the longest tail. The next day the horse was in the stables at the rectory, and a gallant epistle apologised for the costly gift.

Mr Merton demurred, but Caroline always had her own way; and so the horse remained (no doubt, in much amazement and disdain) with the parson's pony and the brown carriage-horses. The gift naturally conduced to parties on horseback—it was cruel entirely to separate the Arab from his friends—and how was

* The spirit of man is more penetrating than logical, and gathers more than it can garner.

Evelyn to be left behind?—Evelyn, who had never yet ridden anything more spirited than an old pony? A beautiful little horse belonging to an elderly lady, now growing too stout to ride, was to be sold hard by. Maltravers discovered the treasure, and apprised Mr Merton of it—he was too delicate to affect liberality to the rich heiress. The horse was bought; nothing could go quieter—Evelyn was not at all afraid. They made two or three little excursions. Sometimes only Mr Merton and Maltravers accompanied the young ladies—sometimes the party was more numerous. Maltravers appeared to pay equal attention to Caroline and her friend—still Evelyn's inexperience in equestrian matters was an excuse for his being ever by her side. They had a thousand opportunities to converse; and Evelyn now felt more at home with him; her gentle gaiety, her fanciful yet chastened intellect, found a voice. Maltravers was not slow to discover that beneath her simplicity there lurked sense, judgment, and imagination. Insensibly his own conversation took a higher flight. With the freedom which his mature years and reputation gave him, he mingled eloquent instruction with lighter and more trifling subjects; he directed her earnest and docile mind, not only to new fields of written knowledge, but to many of the secrets of nature—subtle or sublime. He had a wide range of scientific as well as literary lore:—the stars, the flowers, the phenomena of the physical world, afforded themes on which he descanted with the fervent love of a poet and the easy knowledge of a sage.

Mr Merton, observing that little or nothing of sentiment mingled with their familiar intercourse, felt perfectly at ease ; and knowing that Maltravers had been intimate with Lumley, he naturally concluded that he was aware of the engagement between Evelyn and his friend. Meanwhile Maltravers appeared unconscious that such a being as Lord Vargrave existed.

It is not to be wondered at, that the daily presence—the delicate flattery of attention from a man like Maltravers—should strongly impress the imagination, if not the heart, of a susceptible girl. Already prepossessed in his favour, and wholly unaccustomed to a society which combined so many attractions, Evelyn regarded him with unspeakable veneration ; to the darker shades in his character she was blind—to her, indeed, they did not appear. True that, once or twice in mixed society, his disdainful and imperious temper broke hastily and harshly forth. To folly—to pretension—to presumption—he showed but slight forbearance. The impatient smile, the biting sarcasm, the cold repulse, that might gall, yet could scarce be openly resented, betrayed that he was one who affected to free himself from the polished restraints of social intercourse. He had once been too scrupulous in not wounding vanity ; he was now too indifferent to it. But if sometimes this unamiable trait of character, as displayed to others, chilled or startled Evelyn, the contrast of his manner towards herself was a flattery too delicious not to efface all other recollections. To her ear his voice always softened its tone—to her capacity his mind ever

bent as by sympathy—not condescension ; to her—the young, the timid, the half-informed—to her alone he did not disdain to exhibit all the stores of his knowledge—all the best and brightest colours of his mind. She modestly wondered at so strange a preference. Perhaps a sudden and blunt compliment which Maltravers once addressed to her may explain it: one day, when she had conversed more freely and more fully than usual, he broke in upon her with this abrupt exclamation—

“Miss Cameron, you must have associated from your childhood with beautiful minds. I see already, that from the world, vile as it is, you have nothing of contagion to fear. I have heard you talk on the most various matters—on many of which your knowledge is imperfect ; but you have never uttered one mean idea, or one false sentiment. Truth seems intuitive to you.”

It was indeed this singular purity of heart which made to the world-wearied man the chief charm in Evelyn Cameron. From this purity came, as from the heart of a poet, a thousand new and heaven-taught thoughts which had in them a wisdom of their own—thoughts that often brought the stern listener back to youth, and reconciled him with life. The wise Maltravers learned more from Evelyn, than Evelyn did from Maltravers.

There was, however, another trait—deeper than that of temper—in Maltravers, and which was, unlike the latter, more manifest to her than to others ; his contempt for all the things her young and fresh enthusiasm had been taught to prize—the fame that endeared and

hallowed him to her eyes—the excitement of ambition and its rewards. He spoke with such bitter disdain of great names and great deeds—“Children of a larger growth they were,” said he one day, in answer to her defence of the luminaries of their kind ; “allured by baubles as poor as the rattle and the doll’s house—how many have been made great, as the word is, by their vices ! Paltry craft won command to Themistocles. To escape his duns, the profligate Cæsar heads an army, and achieves his laurels. Brutus, the aristocrat, stabs his patron, that patricians might again trample on plebeians, and that posterity might talk of *him*. The love of posthumous fame—what is it but as puerile a passion for notoriety, as that which made a Frenchman I once knew lay out two thousand pounds in sugar-plums ? To be talked of—how poor a desire ! Does it matter whether it be by the gossips of this age or the next ? Some men are urged on to fame by poverty—that is an excuse for their trouble : but there is no more nobleness in the motive, than in that which makes yon poor ploughman sweat in the eye of Phoebus. In fact, the larger part of eminent men, instead of being inspired by any lofty desire to benefit their species, or enrich the human mind, have acted or composed without any definite object beyond the satisfying a restless appetite for excitement, or indulging the dreams of a selfish glory. And, when nobler aspirations have fired them, it has too often been but to wild fanaticism and sanguinary crime. What dupes of glory ever were animated by a deeper faith, a higher ambition, than the

frantic followers of Mohammed?—taught to believe that it was virtue to ravage the earth, and that they sprang from the battle-field into Paradise. Religion and liberty—love of country—what splendid motives to action! Lo, the results, when the motives are keen—the action once commenced! Behold the Inquisition; the Days of Terror; the Council of Ten; and the Dungeons of Venice!”

Evelyn was scarcely fit to wrestle with these melancholy fallacies; but her instinct of truth suggested an answer.

“What would society be, if all men thought as you do, and acted up to the theory? No literature, no art, no glory, no patriotism, no virtue, no civilisation! You analyse men’s motives—how can you be sure you judge rightly? Look to the results—our benefit, our enlightenment! If the results be great, Ambition is a virtue, no matter what motive awakened it. Is it not so?”

Evelyn spoke blushing and timidly. Maltravers, despite his own tenets, was delighted with her reply.

“You reason well,” said he, with a smile. “But how are we sure that the results are such as you depict them? Civilisation—enlightenment—they are vague terms—hollow sounds. Never fear that the world will reason as I do. Action will never be stagnant while there are such things as gold and power. The vessel will move on—let the galley-slaves have it to themselves. What I have seen of life convinces me that progress is not always improvement. Civilisation has

evils unknown to the savage state ; and *vice versâ*. Men in all states seem to have much the same proportion of happiness. We judge others with eyes accustomed to dwell on our own circumstances. I have seen the slave, whom we commiserate, enjoy his holiday with a rapture unknown to the grave freeman. I have seen that slave made free, and enriched by the benevolence of his master ; and he has been gay no more. The masses of men in all countries are much the same. If there are greater comforts in the hardy North, Providence bestows a fertile earth and a glorious heaven, and a mind susceptible to enjoyment as flowers to light, on the voluptuous indulgence of the Italian, or the contented apathy of the Hindoo. In the mighty organisation of good and evil, what can we vain individuals effect ? They who labour most, how doubtful is their reputation !—Who shall say whether Voltaire or Napoleon, Cromwell or Cæsar, Walpole or Pitt, has done most good or most evil ? It is a question casuists may dispute on. Some of us think that poets have been the delight and the lights of men. Another school of philosophy has treated them as the corrupters of the species—panders to the false glory of war, to the effeminacies of taste, to the pampering of the passions above the reason. Nay, even those who have effected inventions that change the face of the earth—the printing-press, gunpowder, the steam-engine—men hailed as benefactors by the unthinking herd, or the would-be sages—have introduced ills unknown before ; adulterating and often counterbalancing the

good. Each new improvement in machinery deprives hundreds of food. Civilisation is the eternal sacrifice of one generation to the next. An awful sense of the impotence of human agencies has crushed down the sublime aspirations for mankind which I once indulged. For myself, I float on the great waters, without pilot or rudder, and trust passively to the winds, that are the breath of God."

This conversation left a deep impression upon Evelyn ; it inspired her with a new interest in one in whom so many noble qualities lay dulled and torpid by the indulgence of a self-sophistry, which, girl as she was, she felt wholly unworthy of his powers. And it was this error in Maltravers that, levelling his superiority, brought him nearer to her heart. Ah ! if she could restore him to his race !—it was a dangerous desire—but it intoxicated and absorbed her.

Oh ! how sweetly were those fair evenings spent—the evenings of happy June ! And then, as Maltravers suffered the children to tease him into talk about the wonders he had seen in the regions far away, how did the soft and social hues of his character unfold themselves ! There is in all real genius so much latent playfulness of nature, it almost seems as if genius never could grow old. The inscription that youth writes upon the tablets of an imaginative mind are, indeed, never wholly obliterated—they are as an invisible writing, which gradually becomes clear in the light and warmth. Bring genius familiarly with the young, and it is as young as they are. Evelyn did not yet,

therefore, observe the disparity of *years* between herself and Maltravers. But the disparity of knowledge and power served for the present to interdict to her that sweet feeling of equality in commune, without which love is rarely a very intense affection in women. It is not so with men. But by degrees she grew more and more familiar with her stern friend ; and in that familiarity there was perilous fascination to Maltravers. She could laugh him at any moment out of his most moody reveries—contradict with a pretty wilfulness his most favourite dogmas—nay, even scold him, with bewitching gravity, if he was not always at the command of her wishes—or caprice. At this time it seemed certain that Maltravers would fall in love with Evelyn ; but it rested on more doubtful probabilities whether Evelyn would fall in love with him.

CHAPTER VII.

Contrahe vela,
Et te littoribus cymba propinqua vehat.*—SENECA.

“HAS not Miss Cameron a beautiful countenance?” said Mr Merton to Maltravers, as Evelyn, unconscious of the compliment, sat at a little distance, bending down her eyes to Sophy, who was weaving daisy-chains on a stool at her knee, and whom she was telling not to talk loud—for Merton had been giving Maltravers some useful information respecting the management of his estate; and Evelyn was already interested in all that could interest her friend. She had one excellent thing in woman, had Evelyn Cameron: despite her sunny cheerfulness of temper she was *quiet*; and she had insensibly acquired, under the roof of her musing and silent mother, the habit of never disturbing others. What a blessed secret is that in the intercourse of domestic life!

“Has not Miss Cameron a beautiful countenance?”

Maltravers started at the question—it was a literal translation of his own thought at that moment—he checked the enthusiasm that rose to his lip, and calmly re-echoed the word—

* Furl your sails, and let the next boat carry you to the shore.

“ Beautiful, indeed ! ”

“ And so sweet-tempered and unaffected—she has been admirably brought up. I believe Lady Vargrave is a most exemplary woman. Miss Cameron will, indeed, be a treasure to her betrothed husband. He is to be envied.”

“ Her betrothed husband ! ” said Maltravers, turning very pale.

“ Yes ; Lord Vargrave. Did you not know that she was engaged to him from her childhood ? It was the wish, nay, command, of the late lord, who bequeathed her his vast fortune, if not on that condition, at least on that understanding. Did you never hear of this before ? ”

While Mr Merton spoke, a sudden recollection returned to Maltravers. He *had* heard Lumley himself refer to the engagement, but it had been in the sick chamber of Florence—little heeded at the time, and swept from his mind by a thousand after-thoughts and scenes. Mr Merton continued—

“ We expect Lord Vargrave down soon. He is an ardent lover, I conclude ; but public life chains him so much to London. He made an admirable speech in the Lords last night ; at least our party appear to think so. They are to be married when Miss Cameron attains the age of eighteen.”

Accustomed to endurance, and skilled in the proud art of concealing emotion, Maltravers betrayed to the eye of Mr Merton no symptom of surprise or dismay at this intelligence. If the rector had conceived any

previous suspicion that Maltravers was touched beyond mere admiration for beauty, the suspicion would have vanished, as he heard his guest coldly reply—

“I trust Lord Vargrave may deserve his happiness. But, to return to Mr Justis—you corroborate my own opinion of that smooth-spoken gentleman.”

The conversation flowed back to business. At last Maltravers rose to depart.

“Will you not dine with us to-day?” said the hospitable rector.

“Many thanks—no; I have much business to attend to at home for some days to come.”

“Kiss Sophy, Mr Ernest—Sophy very good girl to-day. Let the pretty butterfly go, because Evy said it was cruel to put it in a card-box—Kiss Sophy.”

Maltravers took the child (whose heart he had completely won) in his arms, and kissed her tenderly; then, advancing to Evelyn, he held out his hand, while his eyes were fixed upon her with an expression of deep and mournful interest, which she could not understand.

“God bless you, Miss Cameron!” he said, and his lip quivered.

Days passed, and they saw no more of Maltravers. He excused himself on pretence, now of business, now of other engagements, from all the invitations of the rector. Mr Merton, unsuspectingly, accepted the excuse; for he knew that Maltravers was necessarily much occupied.

His arrival had now spread throughout the country;

and such of his equals as were still in B——shire hastened to offer congratulations, and press hospitality. Perhaps it was the desire to make his excuses to Merton valid, which prompted the master of Burleigh to yield to the other invitations that crowded on him. But this was not all — Maltravers acquired in the neighbourhood the reputation of a man of business. Mr Justis was abruptly dismissed ; with the help of a bailiff, Maltravers became his own steward. His parting address to this personage was characteristic of the mingled harshness and justice of Maltravers.

“Sir,” said he, as they closed their accounts, “I discharge you because you are a rascal — there can be no dispute about that : you have plundered your owner, yet you have ground his tenants, and neglected the poor. My villages are filled with paupers—my rent-roll is reduced a fourth—and yet, while some of my tenants appear to pay nominal rents (why, you best know !), others are screwed up higher than any man’s in the county. You are a rogue, Mr Justis — your own account-books show it : and if I send them to a lawyer, you would have to refund a sum that I could apply very advantageously to the rectification of your blunders.”

“I hope, sir,” said the steward, conscience-stricken and appalled—“I hope you will not ruin me ; indeed —indeed, if I was called upon to refund, I should go to jail.”

“Make yourself easy, sir. It is just that I should suffer as well as you. My neglect of my own duties

tempted you to roguery. You were honest under the vigilant eye of Mr Cleveland. Retire with your gains : if you are quite hardened, no punishment can touch you : if you are not, it is punishment enough to stand there grey-haired, with one foot in the grave, and hear yourself called a rogue, and know that you cannot defend yourself—go !”

Maltravers next occupied himself in all the affairs that a mismanaged estate brought upon him. He got rid of some tenants—he made new arrangements with others—he called labour into requisition by a variety of improvements—he paid minute attention to the poor, not in the weakness of careless and indiscriminate charity, by which popularity is so cheaply purchased, and independence so easily degraded ; no, his main care was to stimulate industry and raise hope. The ambition and emulation that he so vainly denied in himself, he found his most useful levers in the humble labourers whose characters he had studied, whose condition he sought to make themselves desire to elevate. Unconsciously his whole practice began to refute his theories. The abuses of the old Poor-Laws were rife in his neighbourhood ; his quick penetration, and, perhaps, his imperious habits of decision, suggested to him many of the best provisions of the law now called into operation ; but he was too wise to be the Philosopher Square of a system. He did not attempt too much ; and he recognised one principle, which, as yet, the administrators of the new Poor-Laws have not sufficiently discovered. One main

object of the new code was, by curbing public charity, to task the activity of individual benevolence. If the proprietor or the clergyman find under his own eye isolated instances of severity, oppression, or hardship, in a general and salutary law, instead of railing against the law, he ought to attend to the individual instances ; and private benevolence ought to keep the balance of the scales even, and be the make-weight wherever there is a just deficiency of national charity.* It was this which, in the modified and discreet regulations that he sought to establish on his estates, Maltravers especially and pointedly attended to. Age, infirmity, temporary distress, unmerited destitution, found him a steady, watchful, indefatigable friend. In these labours, commenced with extraordinary promptitude, and the energy of a single purpose and stern mind, Maltravers was necessarily brought into contact with the neighbouring magistrates and gentry. He was combating evils and advancing objects in which all were interested ; and his vigorous sense, and his past parliamentary reputation, joined with the respect which in provinces always attaches to ancient birth, won unexpected and general favour to his views. At the rectory they heard of him constantly, not only through occasional visitors, but through Mr Merton,

* The object of parochial reform is not that of economy alone ; not merely to reduce poor-rates. The rate-payer ought to remember, that the more he wrests from the gripe of the sturdy mendicant, the more he ought to bestow on undeserved distress. Without the mitigations of private virtue, every law that benevolists could make would be harsh.

who was ever thrown in his way ; but he continued to keep himself aloof from the house. Every one (Mr Merton excepted) missed him ; even Caroline, whose able though worldly mind could appreciate his conversation ; the children mourned for their playmate, who was so much more affable than their own stiff-necked brothers ; and Evelyn was at least more serious and thoughtful than she had ever been before ; and the talk of others seemed to her wearisome, trite, and dull.

Was Maltravers happy in his new pursuits ? His state of mind at that time it is not easy to read. His masculine spirit and haughty temper were wrestling hard against a feeling that had been fast ripening into passion : but at night, in his solitary and cheerless home, a vision, too exquisite to indulge, would force itself upon him, till he started from the reverie, and said to his rebellious heart, "A few more years, and thou wilt be still. What, in this brief life, is a pang more or less ? Better to have nothing to care for, so wilt thou defraud Fate, thy deceitful foe ! Be contented that thou art alone !"

Fortunate was it, then, for Maltravers, that he was in his native land ! not in climes where excitement is in the pursuit of pleasure rather than in the exercise of duties ! In the hardy air of the liberal England he was already, though unknown to himself, bracing and ennobling his dispositions and desires. It is the boast of this island, that the slave whose foot touches the soil is free. The boast may be enlarged. Where so

much is left to the people—where the life of civilisation, not locked up in the tyranny of Central Despotism, spreads, vivifying, restless, ardent, through every vein of the healthful body, the most distant province, the obscurest village, has claims on our exertions, our duties, and forces us into energy and citizenship. The spirit of liberty, that strikes the chain from the slave, binds the freeman to his brother. This is the Religion of Freedom. And hence it is that the stormy struggles of free states have been blessed with results of Virtue, of Wisdom, and of Genius, by Him who bade us love one another—not only that love in itself is excellent, but that from love, which in its widest sense is but the spiritual term for liberty, whatever is worthiest of our solemn nature has its birth.

BOOK III.

Τραχέα λειάινει, παύει κόρον.

Ex. SOLON. Eleg.

Harsh things he mitigates, and pride subdues.



BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

You still are what you were, sir!

With most quick agility could turn
And return; make knots and undo them—
Give forked counsel.—*Volpone, or the Fox.*

BEFORE a large table, covered with parliamentary papers, sat Lumley Lord Vargrave. His complexion, though still healthy, had faded from the freshness of hue which distinguished him in youth. His features, always sharp, had grown yet more angular: his brows seemed to project more broodingly over his eyes, which, though of undiminished brightness, were sunk deep in their sockets, and had lost much of their quick restlessness. The character of his mind had begun to stamp itself on the physiognomy, especially on the mouth when in repose;—it was a face, striking for acute intelligence—for concentrated energy—but there was a something written in it which said—“BEWARE!” It would have inspired any one who had mixed much amongst men, with a vague suspicion and distrust.

Lumley had been always careful, though plain, in dress ; but there was now a more evident attention bestowed on his person than he had ever manifested in youth ;—while there was something of the Roman's celebrated foppery in the skill with which his hair was arranged on his high forehead, so as either to conceal or relieve a partial baldness at the temples. Perhaps, too, from the possession of high station, or the habit of living only amongst the great, there was a certain dignity insensibly diffused over his whole person, that was not noticeable in his earlier years—when a certain *ton de garnison* was blended with his ease of manners ; yet, even now, dignity was not his prevalent characteristic ; and in ordinary occasions, or mixed society, he still found a familiar frankness a more useful species of simulation. At the time we now treat of, Lord Vargrave was leaning his cheek on one hand, while the other rested idly on the papers methodically arranged before him. He appeared to have suspended his labours, and to be occupied in thought. It was, in truth, a critical period in the career of Lord Vargrave.

From the date of his accession to the peerage, the rise of Lumley Ferrers had been less rapid and progressive than he himself could have foreseen. At first, all was sunshine before him ; he had contrived to make himself useful to his party—he had also made himself personally popular. To the ease and cordiality of his happy address, he added the seemingly careless candour so often mistaken for honesty ; while, as there was nothing showy or brilliant in his abilities or ora-

tory — nothing that aspired far above the pretensions of others, and aroused envy by mortifying self-love — he created but little jealousy even amongst the rivals before whom he obtained precedence. For some time, therefore, he went smoothly on, continuing to rise in the estimation of his party, and commanding a certain respect from the neutral public, by acknowledged and eminent talents in the details of business ; for his quickness of penetration, and a logical habit of mind, enabled him to grapple with and generalise the minutiae of official labour, or of legislative enactments, with a masterly success. But as the road became clearer to his steps, his ambition became more evident and daring. Naturally dictatorial and presumptuous, his early suppleness to superiors was now exchanged for a self-willed pertinacity, which often displeased the more haughty leaders of his party, and often wounded the more vain. His pretensions were scanned with eyes more jealous and less tolerant than at first. Proud aristocrats began to recollect that a mushroom peerage was supported but by a scanty fortune—the men of more dazzling genius began to sneer at the red-tape minister as a mere official manager of details ;—he lost much of the personal popularity which had been one secret of his power. But what principally injured him in the eyes of his party and the public, were certain ambiguous and obscure circumstances connected with a short period, when himself and his associates were thrown out of office. At this time it was noticeable

that the journals of the Government that succeeded were peculiarly polite to Lord Vargrave, while they covered all his coadjutors with obloquy ; and it was more than suspected that secret negotiations between himself and the new ministry were going on, when, suddenly, the latter broke up, and Lord Vargrave's proper party were reinstated. The vague suspicions that attached to Vargrave were somewhat strengthened in the opinion of the public, by the fact that he was at first left out of the restored administration ; and when subsequently, after a speech which showed that he could be mischievous if not propitiated, he was re-admitted, it was precisely to the same office he had held before—an office which did not admit him into the Cabinet. Lumley, burning with resentment, longed to decline the offer : but alas ! he was poor ; and what was worse, in debt ;—"his poverty, but not his will, consented." He was reinstated ; but though prodigiously improved as a debater, he felt that he had not advanced as a public man. His ambition inflamed by his discontent, he had, since his return to office, strained every nerve to strengthen his position. He met the sarcasms on his poverty by greatly increasing his expenditure, and by advertising everywhere his engagement to an heiress whose fortune, great as it was, he easily contrived to magnify. As his old house in Great George Street—well fitted for the bustling commoner—was no longer suited to the official and fashionable peer, he had, on his accession to the title, exchanged that respectable residence for a large mansion

in Hamilton Place ; and his sober dinners were succeeded by splendid banquets. Naturally, he had no taste for such things ; his mind was too nervous, and his temper too hard, to take pleasure in luxury or ostentation. But now, as ever, he *acted upon a system*. Living in a country governed by the mightiest and wealthiest aristocracy in the world, which, from the first class almost to the lowest, ostentation pervades—the very backbone and marrow of society—he felt that to fall far short of his rivals in display was to give them an advantage which he could not compensate, either by the power of his connections or the surpassing loftiness of his character and genius. Playing for a great game, and with his eyes open to all the consequences, he cared not for involving his private fortunes in a lottery in which a great prize might be drawn. To do Vargrave justice, money with him had never been an object, but a means—he was grasping, but not avaricious. If men much richer than Lord Vargrave find state distinctions very expensive, and often ruinous, it is not to be supposed that his salary, joined to so moderate a private fortune, could support the style in which he lived. His income was already deeply mortgaged, and debt accumulated upon debt. Nor had this man, so eminent for the management of public business, any of that talent which springs from *justice*, and makes its possessor a skilful manager of his own affairs. Perpetually absorbed in intrigues and schemes, he was too much engaged in cheating others on a large scale, to have time to prevent being himself cheated on a small

one. He never looked into bills till he was compelled to pay them ; and he never calculated the amount of an expense that seemed the least necessary to his purposes. But still Lord Vargrave relied upon his marriage with the wealthy Evelyn to relieve him from all his embarrassments ; and if a doubt of the realisation of that vision ever occurred to him, still public life had splendid prizes. Nay, should he fail with Miss Cameron, he even thought that, by good management, he might ultimately make it worth while to his colleagues to purchase his absence with the gorgeous bribe of the Governor-Generalship of India.

As oratory is an art in which practice and the dignity of station produce marvellous improvement, so Lumley had of late made effects in the House of Lords of which he had once been judged incapable. It is true that no practice and no station can give men qualities in which they are wholly deficient ; but these advantages can bring out in the best light all the qualities they *do* possess. The glow of a generous imagination—the grasp of a profound statesmanship—the enthusiasm of a noble nature—these no practice could educe from the eloquence of Lumley Lord Vargrave, for he had them not :—but bold wit—fluent and vigorous sentences—effective arrangement of parliamentary logic—readiness of retort—plausibility of manner, aided by a delivery peculiar for self-possession and ease—a clear and ringing voice (to the only fault of which, shrillness without passion, the ear of the audience had grown accustomed)—and a countenance im-

pressive from its courageous intelligence ;—all these had raised the promising speaker into the matured excellence of a nervous and formidable debater. But precisely as he rose in the display of his talents, did he awaken envies and enmities hitherto dormant. And it must be added, that, with all his craft and coldness, Lord Vargrave was often a very dangerous and mischievous speaker for the interests of his party. His colleagues had often cause to tremble when he rose : nay, even when the cheers of his own faction shook the old tapestried walls. A man who has no sympathy with the public must commit many and fatal indiscretions when the public, as well as his audience, is to be his judge. Lord Vargrave's utter incapacity to comprehend political morality—his contempt for all the objects of social benevolence—frequently led him into the avowal of doctrines, which, if they did not startle the men of the world whom he addressed (smoothed away, as such doctrines were, by speciousness of manner and delivery), created deep disgust in those, even of his own politics, who read their naked exposition in the daily papers. Never did Lord Vargrave utter one of those generous sentiments which, no matter whether propounded by Radical or Tory, sink deep into the heart of the people, and do lasting service to the cause they adorn. But no man defended an abuse, however glaring, with a more vigorous championship, or hurled defiance upon a popular demand with a more courageous scorn. In some times, when the anti-popular principle is strong, such a leader may be useful ; but

at the moment of which we treat, he was a most equivocal auxiliary. A considerable proportion of the ministers, headed by the premier himself, a man of wise views and unimpeachable honour, had learned to view Lord Vargrave with dislike and distrust—they might have sought to get rid of him ; but he was not one whom slight mortifications could induce to retire of his own accord : nor was the sarcastic and bold debater a person whose resentment and opposition could be despised. Lord Vargrave, moreover, had secured a party of his own—a party more formidable than himself. He went largely into society—he was the special favourite of the female diplomats, whose voices at that time were powerful suffrages, and with whom, by a thousand links of gallantry and intrigue, the agreeable and courteous minister formed a close alliance. All that salons could do for him was done. Added to this, he was personally liked by his royal master, and the Court gave him their golden opinions ; while the poorer, the corrupter, and the more bigoted portion of the ministry, regarded him with avowed admiration.

In the House of Commons, too, and in the bureaucracy, he had no inconsiderable strength ; for Lumley never contracted the habits of personal abruptness and discourtesy common to men in power who wish to keep applicants aloof. He was bland and conciliating to all men of all ranks ; his intellect and self-complacency raised him far above the petty jealousies that great men feel for rising men. Did any tyro earn the smallest distinction in parliament, no man sought his ac-

quaintance so eagerly as Lord Vargrave ; no man complimented, encouraged, "brought on" the new aspirants of his party, with so hearty a good-will.

Such a minister could not fail of having devoted followers among the able, the ambitious, and the vain. It must also be confessed that Lord Vargrave neglected no baser and less justifiable means to cement his power, by placing it on the sure rock of self-interest. No jobbing was too gross for him. He was shamefully corrupt in the disposition of his patronage ; and no rebuffs, no taunts from his official brethren, could restrain him from urging the claims of any of his creatures upon the public purse. His followers regarded this charitable selfishness as the stanchness and zeal of friendship ; and the ambition of hundreds was wound up in the ambition of the unprincipled minister.

But besides the notoriety of his public corruption, Lord Vargrave was secretly suspected by some of personal dishonesty—suspected of selling his state information to stock-jobbers—of having pecuniary interests in some of the claims he urged with so obstinate a pertinacity. And though there was not the smallest evidence of such utter abandonment of honour—though it was probably but a calumnious whisper—yet the mere suspicion of such practices served to sharpen the aversion of his enemies, and justify the disgust of his rivals.

In this position now stood Lord Vargrave : supported by interested, but able and powerful partisans ; hated in the country, feared by some of those with

whom he served, despised by others, looked up to by the rest. It was a situation that less daunted than delighted him ; for it seemed to render necessary and excuse the habits of scheming and manœuvre which were so genial to his crafty and plotting temper. Like an ancient Greek, his spirit loved intrigue for intrigue's sake. Had it led to no end, it would still have been sweet to him as a means. He rejoiced to surround himself with the most complicated webs and meshes—to sit in the centre of a million plots. He cared not how rash and wild some of them were. He relied on his own ingenuity, promptitude, and habitual good fortune, to make every spring he handled conducive to the purpose of the machine—SELF.

His last visit to Lady Vargrave, and his conversation with Evelyn, had left on his mind much dissatisfaction and fear. In the earlier years of his intercourse with Evelyn, his good humour, gallantry, and presents, had not failed to attach the child to the agreeable and liberal visitor she had been taught to regard as a relation. It was only as she grew up to womanhood, and learned to comprehend the nature of the tie between them, that she shrank from his familiarity ; and then only had he learned to doubt of the fulfilment of his uncle's wish. The last visit had increased this doubt to a painful apprehension : he saw that he was not loved ; he saw that it required great address, and the absence of happier rivals, to secure to him the hand of Evelyn ; and he cursed the duties and the schemes which necessarily kept him from her side. He had

thought of persuading Lady Vargrave to let her come to London, where he could be ever at hand ; and as the season was now set in, his representations on this head would appear sensible and just. But then again, this was to incur greater dangers than those he would avoid. London !—a beauty and an heiress, in her first *début* in London !—What formidable admirers would flock around her ! Vargrave shuddered to think of the gay, handsome, well-dressed, seductive young *élégans*, who might seem, to a girl of seventeen, suitors far more fascinating than the middle-aged politician. This was perilous ; nor was this all. Lord Vargrave knew that in London—gaudy, babbling, and remorseless London—all that he could most wish to conceal from the young lady would be dragged to day. He had been the lover, not of one, but of a dozen women, for whom he did not care three straws, but whose favour had served to strengthen him in society, or whose influence made up for his own want of hereditary political connections. The manner in which he contrived to shake off these various Ariadnes, whenever it was advisable, was not the least striking proof of his diplomatic abilities. He never left them enemies. According to his own solution of the mystery, he took care never to play the gallant with Dulcineas under a certain age—“ Middle-aged women,” he was wont to say, “ are very little different from middle-aged men ; they see things sensibly, and take things coolly.” Now Evelyn could not be three weeks, perhaps three days, in London, without learning of one or other of

these *liaisons*. What an excuse, if she sought one, to break with him ! Altogether, Lord Vargrave was sorely perplexed, but not despondent. Evelyn's fortune was more than ever necessary to him, and Evelyn he was resolved to obtain, since to that fortune she was an indispensable appendage.

CHAPTER II.

You shall be Horace, and Tibullus I.—POPE.

LORD VARGRAVE was disturbed from his reverie by the entrance of the Earl of Saxingham.

“You are welcome!” said Lumley, “welcome!—the very man I wished to see.”

Lord Saxingham, who was scarcely altered since we met with him in the last series of this work, except that he had grown somewhat paler and thinner, and that his hair had changed from iron-grey to snow-white, threw himself in the arm-chair beside Lumley, and replied—

“Vargrave, it is really unpleasant, our finding ourselves always thus controlled by our own partisans. I do not understand this new-fangled policy—this squaring of measures to please the Opposition, and throw sops to that many-headed monster called Public Opinion. I am sure it will end most mischievously.”

“I am satisfied of it,” returned Lord Vargrave. “All vigour and union seem to have left us; and if they carry the —— question against us, I know not what is to be done.”

“For my part, I shall resign,” said Lord Saxing-

ham, doggedly ; “ it is the only alternative left to men of honour.”

“ You are wrong—I know another alternative.”

“ What is that ? ”

“ Make a cabinet of our own. Look ye, my dear lord, you have been ill-used—your high character, your long experience, are treated with contempt. It is an affront to you, the situation you hold. You, Privy Seal !—you ought to be premier—ay, and, if you are ruled by me, premier you shall be yet.”

Lord Saxingham coloured, and breathed hard.

“ You have often hinted at this before, Lumley ; but you are so partial, so friendly.”

“ Not at all. You saw the leading article in the —— to-day ?—that will be followed up by two evening papers within five hours of this time. We have strength with the Press, with the Commons, with the Court—only let us hold fast together. This —— question, by which they hope to get rid of us, shall destroy them. You shall be prime-minister before the year is over—by Heaven, you shall !—and then, I suppose, *I* too may be admitted to the cabinet ! ”

“ But how—how, Lumley ?—You are too rash, too daring.”

“ It has not been my fault hitherto—but boldness is caution in our circumstances. If they throw us out now, I see the inevitable march of events—we shall be out for years, perhaps for life. The cabinet will recede more and more from our principles, our party. Now is the time for a determined stand—now can we

make or mar ourselves. I will not resign—the king is with us—our strength shall be known. These haughty imbeciles shall fall into the trap they have dug for us.”

Lumley spoke warmly, and with the confidence of a mind firmly assured of success. Lord Saxingham was moved—bright visions flashed across him—the premiership—a dukedom. Yet he was old and childless, and his honours would die with the last lord of Saxingham !

“See,” continued Lumley, “I have calculated our resources as accurately as an electioneering agent would cast up the list of voters. In the Press, I have secured —— and —— ; and in the Commons we have the subtle ——, and the vigour of ——, and the popular name of ——, and all the boroughs of —— ; in the cabinet we have —— ; and at Court you know our strength. Let us choose our moment—a sudden *coup*—an interview with the king—a statement of our conscientious scruples to this atrocious measure. I know the vain, stiff mind of the premier ; *he* will lose temper—he will tender his resignation—to his astonishment, it will be accepted. You will be sent for—we will dissolve parliament—we will strain every nerve in the elections—we shall succeed, I know we shall. But be silent in the meanwhile—be cautious : let not a word escape you, let them think us beaten—lull suspicion asleep—let us lament our weakness, and hint, only hint at our resignation, but with assurances of continued support. I know how to blind them, if you leave it to me.”

The weak mind of the old earl was as a puppet in the hands of his bold kinsman. He feared one moment, hoped another—now his ambition was flattered—now his sense of honour was alarmed. There was something in Lumley's intrigue to oust the government with which he served, that had an appearance of cunning and baseness, of which Lord Saxingham, whose personal character was high, by no means approved. But Vargrave talked him over with consummate address, and when they parted, the earl carried his head two inches higher—he was preparing himself for his rise in life.

“That is well—that is well !” said Lumley, rubbing his hands when he was left alone ; “the old driveller will be my *locum tenens*, till years and renown enable me to become his successor. Meanwhile, I shall be really what he will be in name.”

Here Lord Vargrave's well-fed servant, now advanced to the dignity of own gentleman and house-steward, entered the room with a letter ; it had a portentous look—it was wafered—the paper was blue, the hand clerk-like—there was no envelope—it bore its infernal origin on the face of it—IT WAS A DUN'S.

Lumley opened the epistle with an impatient pshaw ! The man, a silversmith (Lumley's plate was much admired !), had applied for years in vain ; the amount was large—an execution was threatened !—an execution !—it is a trifle to a rich man ; but no trifle to one suspected of being poor—one straining at that very moment at so high an object—one to whom public

opinion was so necessary—one who knew that nothing but his title, and scarcely that, saved him from the reputation of an adventurer! He must again have recourse to the money-lenders—his small estate was long since too deeply mortgaged to afford new security. Usury, usury, again!—he knew its price, and he sighed—but what was to be done?

“It is but for a few months, a few months, and Evelyn must be mine. Saxingham has already lent me what he can; but he is embarrassed. This d—d office, what a tax it is! and the rascals say we are too well paid! I, too, who could live happy in a garret, if this purse-proud England would but allow one to exist within one’s income. My fellow-trustee, the banker, my uncle’s old correspondent—ah, well thought of! He knows the conditions of the will—he knows that, at the worst, I must have thirty thousand pounds, if I live a few months longer. I will go to him.”

CHAPTER III.

Animum nunc hoc celerem, nunc dividit illuc.—VIRGIL.*

THE late Mr Templeton had been a banker in a provincial town, which was the centre of great commercial and agricultural activity and enterprise. He had made the bulk of his fortune in the happy days of paper currency and war. Besides his country bank he had a considerable share in a metropolitan one of some eminence. At the time of his marriage with the present Lady Vargrave he retired altogether from business, and never returned to the place in which his wealth had been amassed. He had still kept up a familiar acquaintance with the principal and senior partner of the metropolitan bank I have referred to; for he was a man who always loved to talk about money matters with those who understood them. This gentleman, Mr Gustavus Douce, had been named, with Lumley, joint trustee to Evelyn's fortune. They had full powers to invest it in whatever stock seemed most safe or advantageous. The trustees appeared well chosen; as one, being destined to share the fortune, would have the deepest interest in its security; and the other, from

* Now this, now that, distracts the active mind.

his habits and profession, would be a most excellent adviser.

Of Mr Douce, Lord Vargrave had seen but little ; they were not thrown together. But Lord Vargrave, who thought every rich man might, some day or other, become a desirable acquaintance, regularly asked him once every year to dinner ; and twice in return he had dined with Mr Douce, in one of the most splendid villas, and off some of the most splendid plate it had ever been his fortune to witness and to envy !—so that the little favour he was about to ask was but a slight return for Lord Vargrave's condescension.

He found the banker in his private sanctum—his carriage at the door—for it was just four o'clock, an hour in which Mr Douce regularly departed to Caserta, as his aforesaid villa was somewhat affectedly styled.

Mr Douce was a small man, a nervous man—he did not seem quite master of his own limbs : when he bowed he seemed to be making you a present of his legs ; when he sat down, he twitched first on one side, then on the other—thrust his hands into his pockets, then took them out, and looked at them, as if in astonishment—then seized upon a pen, by which they were luckily provided with incessant occupation. Meanwhile, there was what might fairly be called a constant play of countenance : first he smiled, then looked grave—now raised his eyebrows, till they rose like rainbows, to the horizon of his pale, straw-coloured hair—and next darted them down, like an avalanche, over the twink-

ling, restless, fluttering, little blue eyes, which then became almost invisible. Mr Douce had, in fact, all the appearance of a painfully-shy man, which was the more strange, as he had the reputation of enterprise, and even audacity, in the business of his profession, and was fond of the society of the great.

“I have called on you, my dear sir,” said Lord Vargrave, after the preliminary salutations, “to ask a little favour, which, if the least inconvenient, have no hesitation in refusing. You know how I am situated with regard to my ward, Miss Cameron ; in a few months I hope she will be Lady Vargrave.”

Mr Douce showed three small teeth, which were all that, in the front of his mouth, fate had left him ; and then, as if alarmed at the indelicacy of a smile upon such a subject, pushed back his chair, and twitched up his blotting-paper coloured trousers.

“Yes, in a few months I hope she will be Lady Vargrave ; and you know then, Mr Douce, that I shall be in no want of money.”

“I hope—that is to say, I am sure—that—I trust that never will be the ca-ca-case with your lordship,” put in Mr Douce, with timid hesitation. Mr Douce, in addition to his other good qualities, stammered much in the delivery of his sentences.

“You are very kind, but it is the case just at present ; I have great need of a few thousand pounds upon my personal security. My estate is already a little mortgaged, and I don’t wish to encumber it more ; besides, the loan would be merely temporary : you know, that if at the

age of eighteen Miss Cameron refuses me (a supposition out of the question, but in business we must calculate on improbabilities), I claim the forfeit she incurs—thirty thousand pounds—you remember.”

“ Oh, yes—that—is—upon my word—I—I don’t exactly—but—your lord—l-l-l-lord-lordship knows best—I have been so—so busy—I forget the exact—hem—hem ! ”

“ If you just turn to the will you will see it is as I say. Now, could you conveniently place a few thousands to my account, just for a short time ?—But I see you don’t like it. Never mind, I can get it elsewhere ; only, as you were my poor uncle’s friend——”

“ Your lord—l-l-l-lordship is quite mistaken,” said Mr Douce, with trembling agitation ; “ upon my word, yes, a few thou-thou-thousands—to be sure—to be sure. Your lordship’s banker is—is——”

“ Drummond—disagreeable people—by no means obliging. I shall certainly change to your house when my accounts are better worth keeping.”

“ You do me great—great honour ; I will just—step—step—step out for a moment—and—and speak to Mr Dobs ;—not but what you may depend on—Excuse me ! Morning Chron-chron-Chronicle, my lord ! ”

Mr Douce rose, as if by galvanism, and ran out of the room, spinning round as he ran to declare, again and again, that he would not be gone a moment.

“ Good little fellow that—very like an electrified frog ! ” murmured Vargrave, as he took up the Morning

Chronicle, so especially pointed out to his notice ; and, turning to the leading article, read a very eloquent attack on himself. Lumley was thick-skinned on such matters—he liked to be attacked—it showed that he was up in the world.

Presently Mr Douce returned. To Lord Vargrave's amazement and delight he was informed that ten thousand pounds would be immediately lodged with Messrs Drummond. His bill of promise to pay in three months—five per cent interest—was quite sufficient : three months was a short date ; but the bill could be renewed on the same terms from quarter to quarter, till quite convenient to his lordship to pay. “ Would Lord Vargrave do him the honour to dine with him at Caserta next Monday ? ”

Lord Vargrave tried to affect apathy at his sudden accession of ready money ; but, really, it almost turned his head : he griped both Mr Douce's thin, little shivering hands, and was speechless with gratitude and ecstasy. The sum, which doubled the utmost he expected, would relieve him from all his immediate embarrassments. When he recovered his voice he thanked his dear Mr Douce with a warmth that seemed to make the little man shrink into a nutshell ; and assured him that he would dine with him every Monday in the year—if he was asked ! He then longed to depart ; but he thought, justly, that to go as soon as he had got what he wanted would look selfish ; accordingly, he reseated himself, and so did Mr Douce, and the conversation turned upon politics and news :

but Mr Douce, who seemed to regard all things with a commercial eye, contrived, Vargrave hardly knew how, to veer round from the change in the French ministry to the state of the English money-market.

“It really is, indeed, my lord—I say it, I am sure, with concern—a very bad ti-ti-ti-ti-time for men in business—indeed for all men—such poor interest in the English fu-fun-funds—and yet speculations are so unsound. I recommended my friend Sir Giles Grimsby to—to invest some money in the American canals ; a most rare res-res-respons-responsibility, I may say, for me ; I am cautious in—in recommending—but Sir Giles was an old friend—con-con-connection, I may say ; but most providentially, all turned out—that is—fell out—as I was sure it would—thirty per cent—and the value of the sh-sh-sh-shares doubled. But such things are very rare—quite godsend, I may say !”

“Well, Mr Douce, whenever I have money to lay out, I must come and consult you.”

“I shall be most happy at all times to—to advise your lordship ; but it is not a thing I’m very fond of ; there’s Miss Cameron’s fortune quite l-l-locked up—three per cents and Exchequer bills ; why, it might have been a mil-mil-million by this ti-ti-time, if the good old gentleman—I beg pardon—old—old nobleman, my poor dear friend, had been now alive !”

“Indeed !” said Lumley, greedily, and pricking up his ears ; “he was a good manager, my uncle !”

“None better, none better. I may say a genius for

busi—hem—hem! Miss Cameron a young woman of bus-bus-business, my lord?"

"Not much of that, I fear. A million, did you say?"

"At least!—indeed, at least—money so scarce—speculation so sure in America—great people the Americans—rising people—gi-gi-giants—giants!"

"I am wasting your whole morning—too bad in me," said Vargrave, as the clock struck five; "the Lords meet this evening—important business—once more a thousand thanks to you—good-day."

"A very good-day to you, my lord; don't mention it; glad at any time to ser-ser-serve you," said Mr Douce, fidgeting, curveting, and prancing round Lord Vargrave, as the latter walked through the outer office to the carriage.

"Not a step more; you will catch cold. Good-bye—on Monday, then, seven o'clock.—The House of Lords."

And Lumley threw himself back in his carriage in high spirits.

CHAPTER IV.

Oublié de Tullie, et bravé du Sénat.*

VOLTAIRE, *Brutus*, Act ii. Sc. 1.

IN the Lords that evening the discussion was animated and prolonged—it was the last party debate of the session. The astute Opposition did not neglect to bring prominently, though incidentally, forward, the question on which it was whispered that there existed some growing difference in the cabinet. Lord Vargrave rose late ; his temper was excited by the good fortune of his day's negotiation ; he felt himself of more importance than usual, as a needy man is apt to do when he has got a large sum at his banker's ; moreover, he was exasperated by some personal allusions to himself, which had been delivered by a dignified old lord who dated his family from the Ark, and was as rich as Cræsus. Accordingly Vargrave spoke with more than his usual vigour. His first sentences were welcomed with loud cheers—he warmed—he grew vehement—he uttered the most positive and unalterable sentiments upon the question alluded to—he greatly transgressed the discretion which the heads of his party were desirous to main-

* Forgotten by Tully, and bullied by the Senate.

tain ;—instead of conciliating without compromising, he irritated, galled, *and* compromised. The angry cheers of the opposite party were loudly re-echoed by the cheers of the more hot-headed on his own side. The premier and some of his colleagues observed, however, a moody silence. The premier once took a note, and then reseated himself, and drew his hat more closely over his brows. It was an ominous sign for Lumley ; but he was looking the Opposition in the face, and did not observe it. He sat down in triumph, he had made a most effective and a most mischievous speech—a combination extremely common. The leader of the Opposition replied to him with bitter calmness ; and, when citing some of his sharp sentences, he turned to the premier, and asked, “Are these opinions those also of the noble lord ?—I call for a reply—I have a right to demand a reply.” Lumley was startled to hear the tone in which his chief uttered the comprehensive and significant “*Hear, hear !*”

At midnight the premier wound up the debate, his speech was short, and characterised by moderation. He came to the question put to him—the House was hushed—you might have heard a pin drop—the Commons behind the throne pressed forward with anxiety and eagerness on their countenances.

“I am called upon,” said the minister, “to declare if those sentiments, uttered by my noble friend, are mine also, as the chief adviser of the Crown. Mylords, in the heat of debate every word is not to be scrupulously weighed, and rigidly interpreted.” (“Hear,

hear," ironically from the Opposition—approvingly from the Treasury benches.) “My noble friend will doubtless be anxious to explain what he intended to say. I hope—nay, I doubt not—that his explanation will be satisfactory to the noble lord, to the House, and to the country. But since I am called upon for a distinct reply to a distinct interrogatory, I will say at once that if those sentiments be rightly interpreted by the noble lord who spoke last, those sentiments are not mine, and will never animate the conduct of any cabinet of which I am a member.” (Long-continued cheering from the Opposition.) “At the same time, I am convinced that my noble friend’s meaning has not been rightly construed ; and till I hear from himself to the contrary, I will venture to state what I think he designed to convey to your lordships.” Here the premier, with a tact that nobody could be duped by, but every one could admire, stripped Lord Vargrave’s unlucky sentences of every syllable that could give offence to any one : and left the pointed epigrams and vehement denunciations a most harmless arrangement of commonplace.

The House was much excited ; there was a call for Lord Vargrave, and Lord Vargrave promptly rose. It was one of those dilemmas out of which Lumley was just the man to extricate himself with address. There was so much manly frankness in his manner—there was so much crafty subtlety in his mind ! He complained, with proud and honest bitterness, of the construction that had been forced upon his words by

the Opposition. "If," he added (and no man knew better the rhetorical effect of the *tu quoque* form of argument)—"if every sentence uttered by the noble lord opposite in his zeal for liberty, had, in days now gone by, been construed with equal rigour, or perverted with equal ingenuity, that noble lord had long since been prosecuted as an incendiary, perhaps executed as a traitor!" Vehement cheers from the ministerial benches ; cries of "Order !" from the Opposition. A military lord rose to order, and appealed to the Woolsack.

Lumley sat down, as if chafed at the interruption ; —he had produced the effect he had desired—he had changed the public question at issue into a private quarrel : a new excitement was created—dust was thrown into the eyes of the House. Several speakers rose to accommodate matters ; and, after half an hour of public time had been properly wasted, the noble lord on the one side, and the noble lord on the other, duly explained ; —paid each other the highest possible compliments, and Lumley was left to conclude his vindication, which now seemed a comparatively flat matter after the late explosion. He completed his task so as to satisfy, apparently, all parties—for all parties were now tired of the thing, and wanted to go to bed. But the next morning there were whispers about the town—articles in the different papers, evidently by authority—rejoicings among the Opposition—and a general feeling, that, though the Government might keep together that session, its dissensions would break out before the next meeting of parliament.

As Lumley was wrapping himself in his cloak after this stormy debate, the Marquess of Raby—a peer of large possessions, and one who entirely agreed with Lumley's views—came up to him, and proposed that they should go home together in Lord Raby's carriage. Vargrave willingly consented, and dismissed his own servants.

“You did that admirably, my dear Vargrave !” said Lord Raby, when they were seated in the carriage. “I quite coincide in all your sentiments ; I declare my blood boiled when I heard —— (the premier) appear half inclined to throw you over. Your hit upon —— was first-rate—he will not get over it for a month ; and you extricated yourself well.”

“I am glad you approve my conduct—it comforts me,” said Vargrave, feelingly ; “at the same time I see all the consequences ; but I can brave all for the sake of character and conscience.”

“I feel just as you do !” replied Lord Raby, with some warmth ; “and if I thought that —— meant to yield this question, I should certainly oppose his administration.”

Vargrave shook his head, and held his tongue, which gave Lord Raby a high idea of his discretion.

After a few more observations on political matters, Lord Raby invited Lumley to pay him a visit at his country-seat.

“I am going to Knaresdean next Monday ; you know we have races in the park—and really they are sometimes good sport : at all events, it is a very pretty

sight. There will be nothing in the Lords now—the recess is just at hand ; and if you can spare the time, Lady Raby and myself will be delighted to see you.”

“ You may be sure, my dear lord, I cannot refuse your invitation ; indeed, I intended to visit your county next week. You know, perhaps, a Mr Merton ? ”

“ Charles Merton ?—to be sure — most respectable man—capital fellow—the best parson in the county—no cant, but thoroughly orthodox ;—he certainly keeps in his brother, who, though a very active member, is what I call a waverer on certain questions. Have you known Merton long ? ”

“ I don’t know him at all as yet—my acquaintance is with his wife and daughter,—a very fine girl, by-the-by. My ward, Miss Cameron, is staying with them.”

“ Miss Cameron !—Cameron—ah !—I understand ; —I think I have heard that—but gossip does not always tell the truth ! ”

Lumley smiled significantly, and the carriage now stopped at his door.

“ Perhaps you will take a seat in our carriage on Monday ? ” said Lord Raby.

“ Monday ?—unhappily I am engaged ; but on Tuesday your lordship may expect me.”

“ Very well—the races begin on Wednesday : we shall have a full house—good night ! ”

CHAPTER V.

Homunculi quanti sunt, cum recogito.—PLAUTUS.*

It is obvious that, for many reasons, we must be brief upon the political intrigue in which the scheming spirit of Lord Vargrave was employed. It would, indeed, be scarcely possible to preserve the necessary medium between too plain a revelation, and too complex a disguise. It suffices, therefore, very shortly to repeat what the reader has already gathered from what has gone before—namely, that the question at issue was one which has happened often enough in all governments—one on which the cabinet was divided, and in which the weaker party was endeavouring to out-trick the stronger.

The malcontents, foreseeing that sooner or later the head of the gathering must break, were again divided among themselves whether to resign or to stay in, and strive to force a resignation on their dissentient colleagues. The richer and the more honest were for the former course ; the poorer and the more dependent

* When I reflect, how great your little men are in their own consideration.

for the latter. We have seen that the latter policy was that espoused and recommended by Vargrave (who, though not in the cabinet, always contrived somehow or other to worm out its secrets)—at the same time, he by no means rejected the other string to his bow. If it were possible so to arrange and to strengthen his faction, that, by the *coup d'état* of a sudden resignation in a formidable body, the whole government might be broken up, and a new one formed from among the resignees, it would obviously be the best plan. But then Lord Vargrave was doubtful of his own strength, and fearful to play into the hands of his colleagues, who might be able to stand even better without himself and his allies, and, by conciliating the Opposition, take a step onward in political movement, which might leave Vargrave placeless and powerless for years to come.

He repented his own rashness in the recent debate, which was, indeed, a premature boldness that had sprung out of momentary excitement—for the craftiest orator must be indiscreet sometimes. He spent the next few days in alternately seeking to explain away to one party, and to sound, unite, and consolidate the other. His attempts in the one quarter were received by the premier with the cold politeness of an offended but careful statesman, who believed just as much as he chose, and preferred taking his own opportunity for a breach with a subordinate, to risking any imprudence by the gratification of resentment. In the last quarter, the penetrating adventurer saw that his ground

was more insecure than he had anticipated. He perceived in dismay and secret rage, that many of those most loud in his favour while he was with the Government would desert him the soonest if thrown out. Liked as a subordinate minister, he was viewed with very different eyes the moment it was a question, whether, instead of cheering his sentiments, men should trust themselves to his guidance. Some did not wish to displease the Government ; others did not seek to weaken, but to correct them. One of his staunchest allies in the Commons was a candidate for a peerage—another suddenly remembered that he was second cousin to the premier ;—some laughed at the idea of a puppet premier in Lord Saxingham—others insinuated to Vargrave that he himself was not precisely of that standing in the country which would command respect to a new party, of which, if not the head, he would be the mouthpiece ;—for themselves they knew, admired, and trusted him ; but those d—d country gentlemen—and the dull public !

Alarmed, wearied, and disgusted, the schemer saw himself reduced to submission, for the present at least ; and more than ever he felt the necessity of Evelyn's fortune to fall back upon, if the chance of the cards should rob him of his salary. He was glad to escape for a breathing-while from the vexations and harassments that beset him, and looked forward with the eager interest of a sanguine and elastic mind—always escaping from one scheme to another—to his excursion into B——shire.

At the villa of Mr Douce, Lord Vargrave met a young nobleman who had just succeeded to a property not only large and unencumbered, but of a nature to give him importance in the eyes of politicians. Situated in a very small county, the estates of Lord Doltimore secured to his nomination at least one of the representatives, while a little village at the back of his pleasure-grounds constituted a borough, and returned two members to parliament. Lord Doltimore, just returned from the Continent, had not even taken his seat in the Lords ; and though his family connections, such as they were—and they were not very high, and by no means in the fashion—were ministerial, his own opinions were as yet unrevealed.

To this young nobleman Lord Vargrave was singularly attentive ; he was well formed to attract men younger than himself ; and he eminently succeeded in his designs upon Lord Doltimore's affection.

His lordship was a small, pale man, with a very limited share of understanding, supercilious in manner, elaborate in dress, not ill-natured *au fond*, and with much of the English gentleman in his disposition ;—that is, he was honourable in his ideas and actions, whenever his natural dulness and neglected education enabled him clearly to perceive (through the midst of prejudices, the delusions of others, and the false lights of the dissipated society in which he had lived) what was right and what wrong. But his leading characteristics were vanity and conceit. He had lived much with younger sons, cleverer than himself,

who borrowed his money, sold him their horses, and won from him at cards. In return, they gave him all that species of flattery which young men *can* give with so hearty an appearance of cordial admiration. “You certainly have the best horses in Paris.—You are really a devilish good fellow, Doltimore. Oh, do you know, Doltimore, what little *Désiré* says of you ! You have certainly turned the girl’s head.”

This sort of adulation from one sex was not corrected by any great acerbity from the other. Lord Doltimore, at the age of twenty-two, was a very good *parti*; and, whatever his other deficiencies, he had sense enough to perceive that he received much greater attention—whether from opera-dancers in search of a friend, or virtuous young ladies in search of a husband—than any of the companions, good-looking though many of them were, with whom he had habitually lived.

“You will not long remain in town now the season is over ?” said Vargrave, as after dinner he found himself, by the departure of the ladies, next to Lord Doltimore.

“No, indeed ; even in the season I don’t much like London. Paris has rather spoiled me for any other place.”

“Paris is certainly very charming—the ease of French life has a fascination that our formal ostentation wants. Nevertheless, to a man like you, London must have many attractions.”

“Why, I have a good many friends here ; but still, after Ascot, it rather bores me.”

“Have you any horses on the turf?”

“Not yet ; but Legard (you know Legard, perhaps—a very good fellow) is anxious that I should try my luck. I was very fortunate in the races at Paris—you know we have established racing there. The French take to it quite naturally.”

“Ah, indeed!—it is so long since I have been in Paris—most exciting amusement! *A propos* of races—I am going down to Lord Raby’s to-morrow ; I think I saw in one of the morning papers that you had very largely backed a horse entered at Knaresdean.”

“Yes, Thunderer—I think of buying Thunderer. Legard—Colonel Legard—(he was in the Guards, but he sold out)—is a good judge, and recommends the purchase. How very odd that you too should be going to Knaresdean !”

“Odd, indeed, but most lucky!—we can go together, if you are not better engaged.”

Lord Doltimore coloured and hesitated. On the one hand, he was a little afraid of being alone with so clever a man ; on the other hand, it was an honour—it was something for him to talk of to Legard. Nevertheless, the shyness got the better of the vanity—he excused himself—he feared he was engaged to take down Legard.

Lumley smiled, and changed the conversation ; and so agreeable did he make himself, that when the party

broke up, and Lumley had just shaken hands with his host, Doltimore came to him, and said, in a little confusion—

“I think I can put off Legard—if—if you——”

“That’s delightful!—What time shall we start?—need not get down much before dinner—one o’clock?”

“Oh, yes!—not too long before dinner—one o’clock will be a little too early.”

“Two, then. Where are you staying?”

“At Fenton’s.”

“I will call for you—good-night!—I long to see Thunderer!”

CHAPTER VI.

La santé de l'âme n'est pas plus assurée que celle du corps ; et quoique l'on paraisse éloigné des passions, on n'est pas moins en danger de s'y laisser importer que de tomber malade quand on se porte bien.*—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

IN spite of the efforts of Maltravers to shun all occasions of meeting Evelyn, they were necessarily sometimes thrown together in the round of provincial hospitalities ; and certainly, if either Mr Merton or Caroline (the shrewder observer of the two) had ever formed any suspicion that Evelyn had made a conquest of Maltravers, his manner at such times effectually removed it.

Maltravers was a man to feel deeply ; but no longer a boy to yield to every tempting impulse. I have said that FORTITUDE was his favourite virtue—but fortitude is the virtue of great and rare occasions ; there was another, equally hard-favoured and unshowy, which he took as the staple of active and everyday duties—and that virtue was JUSTICE. Now, in earlier life, he had been enamoured of the conventional Florimel that

* The health of the soul is not more sure than that of the body ; and although we may appear free from passions, there is not the less danger of their attack, than of falling sick, at the moment we are well.

we call HONOUR—a shifting and shadowy phantom, that is but the reflex of the opinion of the time and clime. But justice has in it something permanent and solid ; and out of justice arises the real, not the false honour.

“ Honour ! ” said Maltravers—“ honour is to justice as the flower to the plant—its efflorescence, its bloom, its consummation ! But honour that does not spring from justice is but a piece of painted rag, an artificial rose, which the men-milliners of society would palm upon us as more natural than the true.”

This principle of justice Maltravers sought to carry out in all things—not, perhaps, with constant success ; for what practice can always embody theory ?—but still, at least, his endeavour at success was constant. This, perhaps, it was which had ever kept him from the excesses to which exuberant and liberal natures are prone—from the extravagances of pseudo-genius.

“ No man,” for instance, he was wont to say, “ can be embarrassed in his own circumstances, and not cause embarrassment to others. Without economy, who can be just ? And what are charity—generosity—but the poetry and the beauty of justice ? ”

No man ever asked Maltravers twice for a just debt ; and no man ever once asked him to fulfil a promise. You felt that, come what would, you might rely upon his word. To him might have been applied the witty eulogium passed by Johnson upon a certain nobleman : —“ If he had promised you an acorn, and the acorn-season failed in England, he would have sent to Norway for one ! ”

It was not, therefore, the mere Norman and chivalrous spirit of honour, which he had worshipped in youth as a part of the Beautiful and Becoming, but which in youth had yielded to temptation, as a *sentiment* ever must yield to a passion—but it was the more hard, stubborn, and reflective *principle*, which was the later growth of deeper and nobler wisdom, that regulated the conduct of Maltravers in this crisis of his life. Certain it is, that he had never but once loved as he loved Evelyn ; and yet that he never yielded so little to the passion.

“If engaged to another,” thought he, “that engagement it is not for a third person to attempt to dissolve. I am the last to form a right judgment of the strength or weakness of the bonds which unite her to Vargrave—for my emotions would prejudice me despite myself. I may fancy that her betrothed is not worthy of her—but that is for her to decide. While the bond lasts, who can be justified in tempting her to break it?”

Agreeably to these notions, which the world may, perhaps, consider overstrained, whenever Maltravers met Evelyn, he intrenched himself in a rigid and almost a chilling formality. How difficult this was with one so simple and ingenuous ! Poor Evelyn ! she thought she had offended him—she longed to ask him her offence—perhaps, in her desire to rouse his genius into exertion, she had touched some secret sore, some latent wound of the memory ? She recalled all their conversations again and again. Ah ! why could they not be renewed ? Upon her fancy and her

thoughts Maltravers had made an impression not to be obliterated. She wrote more frequently than ever to Lady Vargrave, and the name of Maltravers was found in every page of her correspondence.

One evening, at the house of a neighbour, Miss Cameron (with the Mertons) entered the room almost in the same instant as Maltravers. The party was small, and so few had yet arrived, that it was impossible for Maltravers, without marked rudeness, to avoid his friends from the rectory ; and Mrs Merton, placing herself next to Evelyn, graciously motioned to Maltravers to occupy the third vacant seat on the sofa, of which she filled the centre.

“ We grudge all your improvements, Mr Maltravers, since they cost us your society. But we know that our dull circle must seem tame to one who has seen so much. However, we expect to offer you an inducement soon in Lord Vargrave. What a lively, agreeable person he is ! ”

Maltravers raised his eyes to Evelyn, calmly and penetratingly, at the latter part of this speech. He observed that she turned pale, and sighed involuntarily.

“ He had great spirits when I knew him,” said he ; “ and he had then less cause to make him happy. ”

Mrs Merton smiled, and turned rather pointedly towards Evelyn.

Maltravers continued—“ I never met the late lord. He had none of the vivacity of his nephew, I believe. ”

“ I have heard that he was very severe,” said Mrs

Merton, lifting her glass towards a party that had just entered.

“Severe!” exclaimed Evelyn. “Ah, if you could have known him—the kindest—the most indulgent—no one ever loved me as he did.” She paused, for she felt her lip quiver.

“I beg your pardon, my dear,” said Mrs Merton, coolly. Mrs Merton had no idea of the pain inflicted by *treading upon a feeling*. Maltravers was touched, and Mrs Merton went on. “No wonder he was kind to you, Evelyn—a brute would be that; but he was generally considered a stern man.”

“I never saw a stern look—I never heard a harsh word; nay, I do not remember that he ever even used the word ‘command,’” said Evelyn, almost angrily.

Mrs Merton was about to reply, when, suddenly, seeing a lady whose little girl had been ill of the measles, her motherly thoughts flowed into a new channel, and she fluttered away in that sympathy which unites all the heads of a growing family. Evelyn and Maltravers were left alone.

“You do not remember your father, I believe?” said Maltravers.

“No father but Lord Vargrave; while he lived, I never knew the loss of one.”

“Does your mother resemble you?”

“Ah, I wish I could think so; it is the sweetest countenance!”

“Have you no picture of her?”

“None—she would never consent to sit.”

“Your father was a Cameron ; I have known some of that name.”

“No relations of ours : my mother says we have none living.”

“And have we no chance of seeing Lady Vargrave in B——shire ?”

“She never leaves home ; but I hope to return soon to Brook-Green.”

Maltravers sighed, and the conversation took a new turn.

“I have to thank you for the books you so kindly sent—I ought to have returned them ere this,” said Evelyn.

“I have no use for them. Poetry has lost its charm for me ; especially that species of poetry which unites with the method and symmetry something of the coldness of Art. How did you like Alfieri ?”

“His language is a kind of Spartan French,” answered Evelyn, in one of those happy expressions which every now and then showed the quickness of her natural talent.

“Yes,” said Maltravers, smiling ; “the criticism is acute. Poor Alfieri !—in his wild life and his stormy passions he threw out all the redundance of his genius ; and his poetry is but the representative of his thoughts—not his emotions. Happier the man of genius who lives upon his reason, and wastes feeling only on his verse !”

“You do not think that we *waste* feeling upon human beings ?” said Evelyn, with a pretty laugh.

“ Ask me that question when you have reached my years, and can look upon fields on which you have lavished your warmest hopes—your noblest aspirations—your tenderest affections—and see the soil all profitless and barren. ‘ Set not your heart on the things of earth,’ saith the Preacher.”

Evelyn was affected by the tone, the words, and the melancholy countenance of the speaker.

“ You, of all men, ought not to think thus,” said she, with a sweet eagerness ; “ you who have done so much to awaken and to soften the heart in others—you who——” she stopped short, and added, more gravely, “ Ah, Mr Maltravers, I cannot reason with you, but I can hope you will refute your own philosophy.”

“ Were your wish fulfilled,” answered Maltravers, almost with sternness, and with an expression of great pain in his compressed lips, “ I should have to thank you for much misery.” He rose abruptly, and turned away.

“ How have I offended him ? ” thought Evelyn, sorrowfully ; “ I never speak but to wound him—what *have* I done ? ”

She could have wished, in her simple kindness, to follow him, and make peace ; but he was now in a coterie of strangers ; and shortly afterwards he left the room, and she did not see him again for weeks.

CHAPTER VII.

Nihil est aliud magnum quam multa minuta. *—*VET. AUCT.*

AN anxious event disturbed the smooth current of cheerful life at Merton Rectory. One morning when Evelyn came down she missed little Sophy, who had contrived to establish for herself the undisputed privilege of a stool beside Miss Cameron at breakfast. Mrs Merton appeared with a graver face than usual. Sophy was unwell, was feverish ; the scarlet fever had been in the neighbourhood. Mrs Merton was very uneasy.

“It is the more unlucky, Caroline,” added the mother, turning to Miss Merton, “because to-morrow, you know, we were to have spent a few days at Knaresdean, to see the races. If poor Sophy does not get better, I fear you and Miss Cameron must go without me. I can send to Mrs Hare to be your chaperon ; she would be delighted.”

“Poor Sophy !” said Caroline ; “I am very sorry to hear she is unwell ; but I think Taylor would take great care of her ; you surely need not stay, unless she is much worse.”

* There is nothing so great as the collection of the minute.

Mrs Merton, who, tame as she seemed, was a fond and attentive mother, shook her head and said nothing : but Sophy was much worse before noon. The doctor was sent for, and pronounced it to be the scarlet fever.

It was now necessary to guard against the infection. Caroline had had the complaint, and she willingly shared in her mother's watch of love for two or three hours. Mrs Merton gave up the party. Mrs Hare (the wife of a rich squire in the neighbourhood) was written to, and that lady willingly agreed to take charge of Caroline and her friend.

Sophy had been left asleep. When Mrs Merton returned to her bed, she found Evelyn quietly stationed there. This alarmed her, for Evelyn had never had the scarlet fever, and had been forbidden the sick-room. But poor little Sophy had waked and querulously asked for her dear Evy ; and Evy, who had been hovering round the room, heard the inquiry from the garrulous nurse, and come in she would ; and the child gazed at her so beseechingly, when Mrs Merton entered, and said so piteously, "Don't take Evy away," that Evelyn stoutly declared that she was not the least afraid of infection, and stay she must. Nay, her share in the nursing would be the more necessary, since Caroline was to go to Knaresdean the next day.

"But you go too, my dear Miss Cameron?"

"Indeed I could not ; I don't care for races, I never wished to go ; I would much sooner have stayed ; and I am sure Sophy will not get well without me—will you, dear?"

“Oh, yes, yes—if I’m to keep you from the nice races—I should be worse if I thought that.”

“But I don’t like the nice races, Sophy, as your sister Carry does ; she must go ; they can’t do without her ;—but nobody knows me, so I shall not be missed.”

“I can’t hear of such a thing,” said Mrs Merton, with tears in her eyes ; and Evelyn said no more then ;—but the next morning Sophy was still worse, and the mother was too anxious and too sad to think more of ceremony and politeness,—so Evelyn stayed.

A momentary pang shot across Evelyn’s breast when all was settled ; but she suppressed the sigh which accompanied the thought that she had lost the only opportunity she might have for weeks of seeing Maltravers ; to that chance she had indeed looked forward, with interest and timid pleasure,—the chance was lost—but why should it vex her—what was he to her ?

Caroline’s heart smote her, as she came into the room in her lilac bonnet and new dress ; and little Sophy, turning on her, eyes which, though languid, still expressed a child’s pleasure at the sight of finery, exclaimed, “How nice and pretty you look, Carry !—do take Evy with you—Evy looks pretty too !”

Caroline kissed the child in silence, and paused irresolute ; glanced at her dress, and then at Evelyn, who smiled on her without a thought of envy ; and she had half a mind to stay too, when her mother entered with a letter from Lord Vargrave. It was short : he should be at the Knaresdean races—hoped to meet them there,

and accompany them home. This information re-decided Caroline, while it rewarded Evelyn. In a few minutes more, Mrs Hare arrived ; and Caroline, glad to escape perhaps her own compunction, hurried into the carriage, with a hasty “God bless you all!—don’t fret—I’m sure she will be well to-morrow—and mind, Evelyn, you don’t catch the fever !”

Mr Merton looked grave and sighed, as he handed her into the carriage ; but when, seated there, she turned round and kissed her hand at him, she looked so handsome and distinguished, that a sentiment of paternal pride smoothed down his vexation at her want of feeling. He himself gave up the visit ; but a little time after, when Sophy fell into a tranquil sleep, he thought he might venture to canter across the country to the race-ground, and return to dinner.

Days—nay, a whole week passed—the races were over—but Caroline had not returned. Meanwhile Sophy’s fever left her ; she could quit her bed—her room—she could come down-stairs again—and the family was happy. It is astonishing how the least ailment in those little things stops the wheels of domestic life ! Evelyn fortunately had not caught the fever : she was pale, and somewhat reduced by fatigue and confinement : but she was amply repaid by the mother’s swimming look of quiet gratitude—the father’s pressure of the hand—Sophy’s recovery—and her own good heart. They had heard twice from Caroline, putting off her return :—Lady Raby was so kind, she

could not get away till the party broke up ;—she was so glad to hear such an account of Sophy.

Lord Vargrave had not yet arrived at the rectory to stay ; but he had twice ridden over, and remained there some hours. He exerted himself to the utmost to please Evelyn ; and she—who, deceived by his manners, and influenced by the recollections of long and familiar acquaintance, was blinded to his real character—reproached herself more bitterly than ever for her repugnance to his suit and her ungrateful hesitation to obey the wishes of her stepfather.

To the Mertons, Lumley spoke with good-natured praise of Caroline ; she was so much admired ; she was the beauty at Knaresdean. A certain young friend of his, Lord Doltimore, was evidently smitten. The parents thought much over the ideas conjured up by that last sentence.

One morning, the garrulous Mrs Hare—the gossip of the neighbourhood—called at the rectory ; she had returned, two days before, from Knaresdean ; and she, too, had her tale to tell of Caroline's conquests.

“ I assure you, my dear Mrs Merton, if we had not all known that his heart was preoccupied, we should have thought that Lord Vargrave was her warmest admirer. Most charming man, Lord Vargrave !—but as for Lord Doltimore, it was quite a flirtation. Excuse *me*—no scandal, you know, ha, ha !—a fine young man, but stiff and reserved—not the fascination of Lord Vargrave.”

“Does Lord Raby return to town, or is he now at Knaresdean for the autumn?”

“He goes on Friday, I believe: very few of the guests are left now. Lady A., and Lord B., and Lord Vargrave and your daughter, and Mr Legard, and Lord Doltimore, and Mrs and the Misses Cipher;—all the rest went the same day I did.”

“Indeed!” said Mr Merton, in some surprise.

“Ah, I read your thoughts: you wonder that Miss Caroline has not come back—is not that it? But perhaps Lord Doltimore—ha, ha!—no scandal now—do excuse *me!*”

“Was Mr Maltravers at Knaresdean?” asked Mrs Merton, anxious to change the subject, and unprepared with any other question. Evelyn was cutting out a paper horse for Sophy, who—all her high spirits flown—was lying on the sofa, and wistfully following her fairy fingers—“Naughty Evy, you have cut off the horse’s head!”

“Mr Maltravers—no, I think not; no, he was not there. Lord Raby asked him pointedly to come, and was, I know, much disappointed that he did not. But *à propos* of Mr Maltravers: I met him not a quarter of an hour ago, this morning, as I was coming to you. You know we have leave to come through his park, and as I was in the park at the time, I stopped the carriage to speak to him. I told him that I was coming here, and that you had had the scarlet fever in the house, which was the reason you had not gone to the races; and he turned quite pale, and seemed so

alarmed. I said we were all afraid that Miss Cameron should catch it ; and, excuse me—ha, ha !—no scandal I hope—but——”

“Mr Maltravers,” said the butler, throwing open the door.

Maltravers entered with a quick and even a hurried step ; he stopped short when he saw Evelyn ; and his whole countenance was instantly lightened up by a joyous expression, which as suddenly died away.

“This is kind, indeed,” said Mrs Merton ; “it is so long since we have seen you.”

“I have been very much occupied,” muttered Maltravers, almost inaudibly, and seated himself next Evelyn. “I only just heard—that—that you had sickness in the house—Miss Cameron, you look pale—you—you have not suffered, I hope ?”

“No—I am quite well,” said Evelyn, with a smile ; and she felt happy that her friend was kind to her once more.

“It’s only me, Mr Ernest,” said Sophy ; “you have forgot me !”

Maltravers hastened to vindicate himself from the charge, and Sophy and he were soon made excellent friends again.

Mrs Hare, whom surprise at this sudden meeting had hitherto silenced, and who longed to shape into elegant periphrasis the common adage, “Talk of, &c.,” now once more opened her budget. She tattled on : first to one, then to the other, then to all ; till she had

tattled herself out of breath ; and then the orthodox half-hour had expired, and the bell was rung, and the carriage ordered, and Mrs Hare rose to depart.

“Do just come to the door, Mrs Merton,” said she, “and look at my pony-phæton, it is so pretty—Lady Raby admires it so much ; you ought to have just such another.” As she spoke, she favoured Mrs Merton with a significant glance, that said, as plainly as glance could say, “I have something to communicate.” Mrs Merton took the hint, and followed the good lady out of the room.

“Do you know, my dear Mrs Merton,” said Mrs Hare, in a whisper, when they were safe in the billiard-room, that interposed between the apartment they had left and the hall—“do you know whether Lord Vargrave and Mr Maltravers are very good friends ?”

“No, indeed ; why do you ask ?”

“Oh, because when I was speaking to Lord Vargrave about him, he shook his head ; and really I don't remember what his lordship said ; but he seemed to speak as if there was a little soreness. And then he inquired very anxiously, if Mr Maltravers was much at the rectory ! and looked discomposed when he found you were such near neighbours. You'll excuse *me*, you know—ha, ha !—but we're such old friends !—and if Lord Vargrave is coming to stay here, it might be unpleasant to meet—you'll excuse *me*. I took the liberty to tell him, he need not be jealous of Mr Maltravers—ha, ha !—not a marrying man at all. But I did think Miss Caroline was the attraction—you'll ex-

cuse me—no scandal—ha, ha ! But after all, Lord Doltimore must be the man ;—well, good morning. I thought I'd just give you this hint. Is not the phaeton pretty ? Kind compliments to Mr Merton."

And the lady drove off.

During this confabulation, Maltravers and Evelyn were left alone with Sophy. Maltravers had continued to lean over the child, and appeared listening to her prattle ; while Evelyn, having risen to shake hands with Mrs Hare, did not reseat herself, but went to the window, and busied herself with a flower-stand in the recess.

"Oh, very fine, Mr Ernest," said Sophy (always pronouncing that proper name as if it ended in *th*), "you care very much for us to stay away so long—don't he, Evy ? I've a great mind not to speak to you, sir, that I have !"

"That would be too heavy a punishment, Miss Sophy—only, luckily, it would punish yourself ; you could not live without talking—talk—talk—talk !"

"But I might never have talked more, Mr Ernest, if mamma and pretty Evy had not been so kind to me ;" and the child shook her head mournfully, as if she had *pitié de soi-même*. "But you won't stay away so long again, will you ? Sophy play to-morrow—come to-morrow, and swing Sophy—no nice swinging since you've been gone."

While Sophy spoke, Evelyn turned half round, as if to hear Maltravers's answer ; he hesitated, and Evelyn spoke—

“You must not tease Mr Maltravers so : Mr Maltravers has too much to do to come to us.”

Now this was a very pettish speech in Evelyn, and her cheek glowed while she spoke ; but an arch provoking smile was on her lips.

“It can be a privation only to me, Miss Cameron,” said Maltravers, rising, and attempting in vain to resist the impulse that drew him towards the window. The reproach in her tone and words at once pained and delighted him ; and then this scene—the suffering child—brought back to him his first interview with Evelyn herself. He forgot, for the moment, the lapse of time—the new ties she had formed—his own resolutions.

“That is a bad compliment to us,” answered Evelyn, ingenuously ; “do you think we are so little worthy your society as not to value it? But perhaps,” she added, sinking her voice—“perhaps you have been offended—perhaps I—I—said—something that—that hurt you.”

“You !” repeated Maltravers, with emotion.

Sophy, who had been attentively listening, here put in—“Shake hands and make it up with Evy—you’ve been quarrelling, naughty Ernest !”

Evelyn laughed, and tossed back her sunny ringlets. “I think Sophy is right,” said she, with enchanting simplicity ; “let us make it up ;” and she held out her hand to Maltravers.

Maltravers pressed the fair hand to his lips. “Alas !” said he, affected with various feelings which gave a tremor to his deep voice, “your only fault is, that your

society makes me discontented with my solitary home : and as solitude must be my fate in life, I seek to inure myself to it betimes."

Here—whether opportunely or not, it is for the reader to decide—Mrs Merton returned to the room.

She apologised for her absence—talked of Mrs Hare and the little Master Hares—fine boys, but noisy ; and then she asked Maltravers if he had seen Lord Vargrave since his lordship had been in the county.

Maltravers replied with coldness, that he had not had that honour ; that Vargrave had called on him in his way from the rectory the other day, but that he was from home, and that he had not seen him for some years.

"He is a person of most prepossessing manners," said Mrs Merton.

"Certainly—most prepossessing."

"And very clever."

"He has great talents."

"He seems most amiable."

Maltravers bowed, and glanced towards Evelyn, whose face, however, was turned from him.

The turn the conversation had taken was painful to the visitor, and he rose to depart.

"Perhaps," said Mrs Merton, "you will meet Lord Vargrave at dinner to-morrow ; he will stay with us a few days—as long as he can be spared."

Maltravers meet Lord Vargrave !—the happy Vargrave !—the betrothed to Evelyn !—Maltravers witness the familiar rights—the enchanting privileges accorded

to another!—and that other one whom he could not believe worthy of Evelyn! He writhed at the picture the invitation conjured up.

“You are very kind, my dear Mrs Merton, but I expect a visitor at Burleigh—an old and dear friend, Mr Cleveland.”

“Mr Cleveland!—we shall be delighted to see him too. We knew him many years ago, during your minority, when he used to visit Burleigh two or three times a-year.”

“He is changed since then; he is often an invalid. I fear I cannot answer for him; but he will call as soon as he arrives, and apologise for himself.”

Maltravers then hastily took his departure. He would not trust himself to do more than bow distantly to Evelyn;—she looked at him reproachfully. So, then, it was really premeditated and resolved upon—his absence from the rectory—and why?—she was grieved—she was offended—but more grieved than offended—perhaps because esteem, interest, admiration, are more tolerant and charitable than Love!

CHAPTER VIII.

Arethusa. 'Tis well, my lord, your courting of ladies.

Claremont. Sure this lady has a good turn done her against her will.

PHILASTER.

IN the breakfast-room at Knaresdean, the same day, and almost at the same hour, in which occurred the scene and conversation at the rectory recorded in our last chapter, sat Lord Vargrave and Caroline alone. The party had dispersed, as was usual, at noon. They heard at a distance the sounds of the billiard-balls. Lord Doltimore was playing with Colonel Legard, one of the best players in Europe, but who, fortunately for Doltimore, had, of late, made it a rule never to play for money. Mrs and the Misses Cipher, and most of the guests, were in the billiard-room looking on. Lady Raby was writing letters, and Lord Raby riding over his home farm. Caroline and Lumley had been for some time in close and earnest conversation. Miss Merton was seated in a large arm-chair, much moved, with her handkerchief to her eyes. Lord Vargrave, with his back to the chimney-piece, was bending down, and speaking in a very low voice, while his quick eye glanced, ever and anon, from the lady's countenance

to the windows—to the doors, to be prepared against any interruption.

“No, my dear friend,” said he, “believe me that I am sincere. My feelings for you are, indeed, such as no words can paint.”

“Then why——”

“Why wish you wedded to another—why wed another myself? Caroline, I have often before explained to you that we are in this the victims of an inevitable fate. It is absolutely necessary that I should wed Miss Cameron. I never deceived you from the first. I should have loved her,—my heart would have accompanied my hand, but for your too seductive beauty,—your superior mind!—yes, Caroline, your mind attracted me more than your beauty. Your mind seemed kindred to my own—inspired with the proper and wise ambition which regards the fools of the world as puppets—as counters—as chessmen. For myself, a very angel from heaven could not make me give up the great game of life!—yield to my enemies—slip from the ladder—unravel the web I have woven! Share my heart—my friendship—my schemes! this is the true and dignified affection that should exist between minds like ours; all the rest is the prejudice of children.”

“Vargrave, I am ambitious—worldly: I own it, but I could give up all for you!”

“You think so, for you do not know the sacrifice. You see me now apparently rich—in power—courted; and this fate you are willing to share;—and this fate

you *should* share, were it the real one I could bestow on you. But reverse the medal. Deprived of office—fortune gone—debts pressing—destitution notorious—the ridicule of embarrassments—the disrepute attached to poverty and defeated ambition—an exile in some foreign town on the poor pension to which alone I should be entitled—a mendicant on the public purse ; and that, too, so eaten into by demands and debts, that there is not a grocer in the next market-town who would envy the income of the retired minister ! Retire, fallen—despised,—in the prime of life—in the zenith of my hopes ! Suppose that I could bear this for myself—could I bear it for you ? *You*, born to be the ornament of courts ! and you,—could you see me thus ? life embittered—career lost—and feel, generous as you are, that your love had entailed on me—on us both—on our children—this miserable lot ! Impossible, Caroline ! we are too wise for such romance. It is not because we love too little, but because our love is worthy of each other, that we disdain to make love a curse ! We cannot wrestle against the world, but we may shake hands with it, and worm the miser out of its treasures. My heart must be ever yours—my hand must be Miss Cameron's. Money I must have !—my whole career depends on it. It is literally with me the highwayman's choice—money or life."

Vargrave paused, and took Caroline's hand.

"I cannot reason with you," said she ; "you know the strange empire you have obtained over me, and, certainly, in spite of all that has passed " (and Caroline

turned pale), "I could bear anything rather than that you should hereafter reproach me for selfish disregard of your interests—your just ambition."

"My noble friend! I do not say that I shall not feel a deep and sharp pang at seeing you wed another,—but I shall be consoled by the thought that I have assisted to procure for you a station worthier of your merits than that which I can offer. Lord Doltimore is rich—you will teach him to employ his riches well; he is weak—your intellect will govern him; he is in love—your beauty will suffice to preserve his regard. Ah, we shall be dear friends to the last!"

More—but to the same effect—did this able and crafty villain continue to address to Caroline, whom he alternately soothed, irritated, flattered, and revolted. Love him she certainly did, as far as love in her could extend; but perhaps his rank, his reputation, had served to win her affection; and, not knowing his embarrassments, she had encouraged a worldly hope, that if Evelyn should reject his hand it might be offered to her. Under this impression she had trifled—she had coquetted—she had played with the serpent till it had coiled around her—and she could not escape its fascination and its folds. She was sincere—she could have resigned much for Lord Vargrave; but his picture startled and appalled her. For difficulties in a palace she might be prepared—perhaps even for some privations in a *cottage ornée*—but certainly not for penury in a lodging-house! She listened by degrees with more attention to Vargrave's description of the power and

homage that would be hers if she could secure Lord Doltimore : she listened, and was in part consoled. But the thought of Evelyn again crossed her ; and, perhaps, with natural jealousy was mingled some compunction at the fate to which Lord Vargrave thus coldly appeared to condemn one so lovely and so innocent.

“But do not, Vargrave,” she said, “do not be too sanguine ; Evelyn may reject you. She does not see you with my eyes ; it is only a sense of honour that, as yet, forbids her openly to refuse the fulfilment of an engagement from which I know that she shrinks ; and if she does refuse, and you be free—and I another’s——”

“Even in that case,” interrupted Vargrave, “I must turn to the Golden Idol ; my rank and name must buy me an heiress, if not so endowed as Evelyn, wealthy enough, at least, to take from my wheels the drag-chain of disreputable debt. But Evelyn—I will not doubt of her !—her heart is still unoccupied ?”

“True, as yet her affections are not engaged.”

“And this Maltravers—she is romantic, I fancy—did he seem captivated by her beauty or her fortune ?”

“No, indeed, I think not ; he has been very little with us of late. He talked to her more as to a child—there is a disparity of years.”

“I am many years older than Maltravers,” muttered Vargrave, moodily.

“You ! but your *manner* is livelier, and therefore younger !”

“Fair flatterer ! Maltravers does not love me : I fear his report of my character——”

“I never heard him speak of you, Vargrave ; and I will do Evelyn the justice to say, that precisely as she does not love she esteems and respects you.”

“Esteems—respects—these are the feelings for a prudent Hymen,” said Vargrave, with a smile. “But, hark ! I don’t hear the billiard-balls ; they may find us here—we had better separate.”

Lord Vargrave lounged into the billiard-room. The young men had just finished playing, and were about to visit Thunderer, who had won the race, and was now the property of Lord Doltimore.

Vargrave accompanied them to the stables ; and, after concealing his ignorance of horseflesh as well as he could, beneath a profusion of compliments on forehead, hind-quarters, breeding, bone substance, and famous points, he contrived to draw Doltimore into the court-yard, while Colonel Legard remained in converse high with the head groom.

“Doltimore, I leave Knaresdean to-morrow ; you go to London, I suppose ? Will you take a little packet for me to the Home Office ?”

“Certainly, when I go ; but I think of staying a few days with Legard’s uncle—the old admiral—he has a hunting-box in the neighbourhood, and has asked us both over.”

“Oh ! I can detect the attraction—but certainly it is a fair one—the handsomest girl in the county ; pity she has no money.”

“I don’t care for money,” said Lord Doltimore, col-

ouring and settling his chin in his neckcloth ; “ but you are mistaken ; I have no thoughts that way. Miss Merton is a very fine girl ; but I doubt much if she cares for me. I would never marry any woman who was not very much in love with me.” And Lord Doltimore laughed rather foolishly.

“ You are more modest than clear-sighted,” said Vargrave, smiling ; “ but mark my words—I predict that the beauty of next season will be a certain Caroline Lady Doltimore.”

The conversation dropped.

“ I think that will be settled well,” said Vargrave to himself, as he was dressing for dinner. “ Caroline will manage Doltimore, and I shall manage one vote in the Lords and three in the Commons. I have already talked him into proper politics ; a trifle all this, to be sure : but I had nothing else to amuse me, and one must never lose an occasion. Besides, Doltimore is rich, and rich friends are always useful. I have Caroline, too, in my power, and she may be of service with respect to this Evelyn, whom, instead of loving, I half hate : she has crossed my path, robbed me of wealth ; and now—if she does refuse me——but no, I will not think of *that* !”

CHAPTER IX.

Out of our reach the gods have laid
Of time to come the event ;
And laugh to see the fools afraid
Of what the knaves invent.—SEDLEY, *from Lycophron.*

THE next day Caroline returned to the rectory in Lady Raby's carriage ; and two hours after her arrival came Lord Vargrave. Mr Merton had secured the principal persons in the neighbourhood to meet a guest so distinguished, and Lord Vargrave, bent on shining in the eyes of Evelyn, charmed all with his affability and wit. Evelyn, he thought, seemed pale and dispirited. He pertinaciously devoted himself to her all the evening. Her ripening understanding was better able than heretofore to appreciate his abilities ; yet, inwardly, she drew comparisons between his conversation and that of Maltravers, not to the advantage of the former. There was much that amused, but nothing that interested in Lord Vargrave's fluent ease. When he attempted sentiment, the vein was hard and hollow ;—he was only at home on worldly topics. Caroline's spirits were, as usual in society, high, but her laugh seemed forced, and her eye absent.

The next day, after breakfast, Lord Vargrave walked

alone to Burleigh : as he crossed the copse that bordered the park, a large Persian greyhound sprang towards him, barking loudly ; and, lifting his eyes, he perceived the form of a man walking slowly along one of the paths that intersected the wood. He recognised Maltravers. They had not till then encountered since their meeting a few weeks before Florence's death ; and a pang of conscience came across the schemer's cold heart. Years rolled away from the past—he recalled the young, generous, ardent man, whom, ere the character or career of either had been developed, he had called his friend. He remembered their wild adventures and gay follies, in climes where they had been all in all to each other ;—and the beardless boy, whose heart and purse were ever open to him, and to whose very errors of youth and inexperienced passion, he, the elder and the wiser, had led and tempted, rose before him in contrast to the grave and melancholy air of the baffled and solitary man, who now slowly approached him—the man whose proud career he had served to thwart—whose heart his schemes had prematurely soured—whose best years had been consumed in exile—a sacrifice to the grave, which a selfish and dishonourable villany had prepared !—Cesarini, the inmate of a mad-house—Florence in her shroud :—such were the visions the sight of Maltravers conjured up. And to the soul which the unwonted and momentary remorse awakened, a boding voice whispered—“And thinkest *thou* that thy schemes shall prosper, and thy aspirations succeed ?” For the first time in his life, perhaps, the

unimaginative Vargrave felt the mystery of a presentiment of warning and of evil.

The two men met ; and with an emotion which seemed that of honest and real feeling, Lumley silently held out his hand, and half turned away his head.

“Lord Vargrave !” said Maltravers, with an equal agitation, “it is long since we have encountered.”

“Long—very long,” answered Lumley, striving hard to regain his self-possession ; “years have changed us both ; but I trust it has still left in you, as it has in me, the remembrance of our old friendship.”

Maltravers was silent, and Lord Vargrave continued—

“You do not answer me, Maltravers : can political differences, opposite pursuits, or the mere lapse of time, have sufficed to create an irrevocable gulf between us ? Why may we not be friends again ?”

“Friends !” echoed Maltravers ; “at our age that word is not so lightly spoken—that tie is not so unthinkingly formed—as when we were younger men.”

“But may not the old tie be renewed ?”

“Our ways in life are different ; and were I to scan your motives and career with the scrutinising eyes of friendship, it might only serve to separate us yet more. I am sick of the great juggle of ambition, and I have no sympathy left for those who creep into the pint-bottle, or swallow the naked sword.”

“If you despise the exhibition, why, then, let us laugh at it together, for I am as cynical as yourself.”

“Ah !” said Maltravers with a smile, half mournful, half bitter, “but are you not one of the Impostors ?”

“Who ought better to judge of the Eleusiniana than one of the Initiated? But, seriously, why on earth should political differences part private friendships? Thank Heaven! such has never been my maxim.”

“If the differences be the result of honest convictions on either side, No. But are you honest, Lumley?”

“Faith, I have got into the habit of thinking so; and habit’s a second nature. However, I dare say we shall meet yet in the arena, so I must not betray my weak points. How is it, Maltravers, that they see so little of you at the rectory? you are a great favourite there. Have you any living that Charley Merton could hold with his own?—You shake your head. And what think you of Miss Cameron, my intended!”

“You speak lightly. Perhaps you——”

“Feel deeply—you were going to say. I do. In the hand of my ward, Evelyn Cameron, I trust to obtain at once the domestic happiness to which I have as yet been a stranger, and the wealth necessary to my career.”

Lord Vargrave continued, after a short pause, “Though my avocations have separated us so much, I have no doubt of her steady affection,—and I may add, of her sense of honour. She alone can repair to me what else had been injustice in my uncle.” He then proceeded to repeat the moral obligations which the late lord had imposed on Evelyn—obligations that he greatly magnified. Maltravers listened attentively, and said little.

“And these obligations being fairly considered,” added Vargrave, with a smile, “I think, even had I rivals, that they could scarcely in honour attempt to break an existing engagement.”

“Not while the engagement lasted,” answered Maltravers ; “not till one or the other had declined to fulfil it, and therefore left both free : but I trust it will be an alliance in which all but affection will be forgotten—that of honour alone would be but a harsh tie.”

“Assuredly,” said Vargrave ; and, as if satisfied with what had passed, he turned the conversation—praised Burleigh—spoke of county matters—resumed his habitual gaiety, though it was somewhat subdued—and, promising to call again soon, he at last took his leave.

Maltravers pursued his solitary rambles : and his commune with himself was stern and searching.

“And so,” thought he, “this prize is reserved for Vargrave ! Why should I deem him unworthy of the treasure ? May he not be worthier, at all events, than this soured temper and erring heart ? And he is assured too of her affection ! Why this jealous pang ? Why can the fountain within never be exhausted ? Why, through so many scenes and sufferings, have I still retained the vain madness of my youth—the haunting susceptibility to love ? This is my latest folly.”

BOOK IV.

Γυναικὸς οὐδὲ χρῆμ' ἀνὴρ ληίζεται
'Εσθλῆς ἄμεινον.—SIMONIDES.

A virtuous woman is man's greatest pride.



BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

Abroad uneasy, nor content at home.

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 Monsieur 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, wrapt 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, conversible 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 *café* 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, analyse, 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 gaiety, 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 hotbed 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 a 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 good-wife found that the little savings in the cracked tea-pot or the old stocking had greatly increased since the squire's return ; while her husband came home from his moderate cups at the ale-house 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 school-room ; 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 cretur ! 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 tramper, 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.

Also 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 Mal-

travers 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 château he had once hired in Normandy—it had a French character; those old chairs were in excellent taste—quite the style of Francis I.

"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 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 neck-cloth—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 reverie 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 court-yard, 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 court-

yard 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 noonday.

“ 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 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 leant 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 is not my fault.”

“No,” said Cleveland, “for a wonder; it was male and not ladylike 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 into 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 *naïveté* 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 emotions, said more than his words.

Evelyn coloured deeply, and her whole manner changed. However, she turned away, and saying, with a forced gaiety, “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.

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 !—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-bye, 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 monopolised 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 marquis 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 extraordinary 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 ; and 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 *habitués*.

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 *écarté* 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 recognised 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 ex-

ceeded 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 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 pronounciation, 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 recognised 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 to-morrow. 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 soliloquised, 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.”

“I!” 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 ; nor 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 Phillis.” 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 a 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 it is fed by another want, *le besoin d'être aimée !* 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 corre-

spondent, 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 evi-

dently smitten with Caroline ; so Lord Vargrave and Mrs Hare said."

"Sensible, shrewd woman, Mrs Hare. By the by, we'll send her a pine-apple. 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 musquitoes. 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 it is 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 for ever !”

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 stanch 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 Staël’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.

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

* Wrapping truth in obscurity.

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 have 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 à 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 hard-working 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 uncivilised—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, gaily: “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 squirearchal, farming, George III. 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 *debût* 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 soliloquising, 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, bethought 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 curtsied—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 case-ment, 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 whom 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 any way, 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 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.”

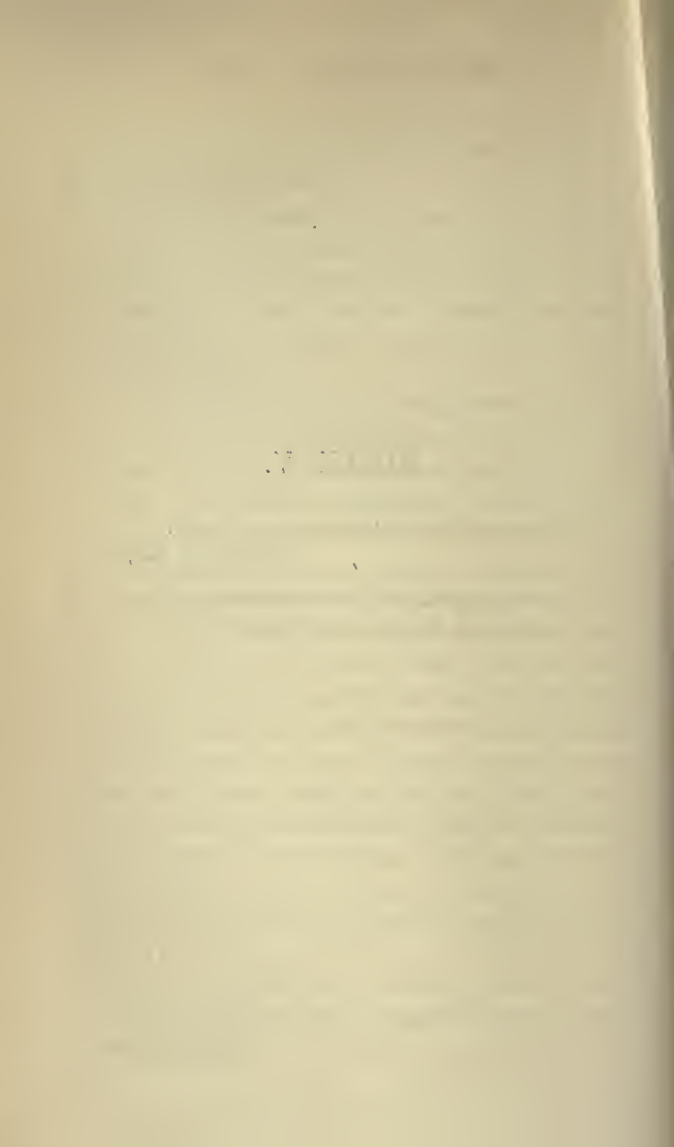
“Pick up a wife in Paris, and you will then know that peace is an impossible possession,” said the old bachelor, laughing.

BOOK V.

Νήπιοι· οὐδ' ἴσασιν ὅσφ πλέον ἡμίση παντὸς.

HES. *Op. et Dies*, 40.

Fools blind to truth ; nor know their erring soul
How much the half is better than the whole.



BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

Do as the Heavens have done; forget your evil;
With them, forgive yourself.—*The Winter's Tale.*

The sweet'st companion that e'er man
Bred his hopes out of.—*Ibid.*

THE curate of Brook-Green was sitting outside his door. The vicarage which he inhabited was a straggling, irregular, but picturesque building; humble enough to suit the means of the curate, yet large enough to accommodate the vicar. It had been built in an age when the *indigentes et pauperes*, for whom universities were founded, supplied more than they do now the fountains of the Christian ministry—when pastor and flock were more on an equality.

From under a rude and arched porch, with an oaken settle on either side for the poor visitor, the door opened at once upon the old-fashioned parlour—a homely but pleasant room, with one wide but low cottage casement, beneath which stood the dark shining table, that supported the large Bible in its green baize cover, the Concordance, and the last Sunday's sermon, in its jetty

case. There by the fireplace stood the bachelor's round elbow-chair, with a needlework cushion at the back ; a walnut-tree bureau ; another table or two ; half-a-dozen plain chairs constituted the rest of the furniture, saving some two or three hundred volumes, ranged in neat shelves on the clean wainscoted walls. There was another room, to which you ascended by two steps, communicating with this parlour, smaller, but finer, and inhabited only on festive days, when Lady Vargrave or some other quiet neighbour came to drink tea with the good curate.

An old housekeeper and her grandson—a young fellow of about two-and-twenty, who tended the garden, milked the cow, and did in fact what he was wanted to do—composed the establishment of the humble minister.

We have digressed from Mr Aubrey himself.

The curate was seated, then, one fine summer morning, on a bench at the left of his porch, screened from the sun by the cool boughs of a chestnut-tree, the shadow of which half covered the little lawn that separated the precincts of the house from those of silent Death and everlasting Hope ; above the irregular and moss-grown paling rose the village church ; and, through openings in the trees, beyond the burial-ground, partially gleamed the white walls of Lady Vargrave's cottage, and were seen at a distance the sails on the

“Mighty waters, rolling evermore.”

The old man was calmly enjoying the beauty of the morn-

ing, the freshness of the air, the warmth of the dancing beam, and not least, perhaps, his own peaceful thoughts ; the spontaneous children of a contemplative spirit and a quiet conscience. His was the age when we most sensitively enjoy the mere sense of existence ; when the face of nature, and a passive conviction of the benevolence of our Great Father, suffice to create a serene and ineffable happiness, which rarely visits us till we have done with the passions ; till memories, if more alive than heretofore, are yet mellowed in the hues of time, and Faith softens into harmony all their asperities and harshness ; till nothing within us remains to cast a shadow over the things without ; and on the verge of life, the Angels are nearer to us than of yore. There is an old age which has more youth of heart than youth itself !

As the old man thus sat, the little gate through which, on Sabbath days, he was wont to pass from the humble mansion to the house of God, noiselessly opened, and Lady Vargrave appeared.

The curate rose when he perceived her ; and the lady's fair features were lighted up with a gentle pleasure, as she pressed his hand and returned his salutation.

There was a peculiarity in Lady Vargrave's countenance which I have rarely seen in others. Her smile, which was singularly expressive, came less from the lip than from the eyes ; it was almost as if the brow smiled—it was as the sudden and momentary vanishing of a light but melancholy cloud that usually rested upon the features, placid as they were.

They sat down on the rustic bench, and the sea-breeze wantoned amongst the quivering leaves of the chestnut-tree that overhung their seat.

“I have come as usual, to consult my kind friend,” said Lady Vargrave ; “and, as usual also, it is about our absent Evelyn.”

“Have you heard again from her, this morning ?”

“Yes ; and her letter increases the anxiety which your observation, so much deeper than mine, first awakened.”

“Does she then write much of Lord Vargrave ?”

“Not a great deal ; but the little she does say, betrays how much she shrinks from the union my poor husband desired : more, indeed, than ever ! But this is not all, nor the worst : for you know, that the late lord had provided against that probability—(he loved her so tenderly, his ambition for her only came from his affection) ;—and the letter he left behind him pardons and releases her, if she revolts from the choice he himself preferred.”

“Lord Vargrave is, perhaps, a generous, he certainly seems a candid, man, and he must be sensible that his uncle has already done all that justice required.”

“I think so. But this, as I said, is not all ; I have brought the letter to show you. It seems to me as you apprehended. This Mr Maltravers has wound himself about her thoughts more than she herself imagines ; you see how she dwells on all that concerns him, and how, after checking herself, she returns again and again to the same subject.”

The curate put on his spectacles, and took the letter. It was a strange thing, that old grey-haired minister evincing such grave interest in the secrets of that young heart ! But they who would take charge of the soul, must never be too wise to regard the heart !

Lady Vargrave looked over his shoulder as he bent down to read, and at times placed her finger on such passages as she wished him to note. The old curate nodded as she did so ; but neither spoke till the letter was concluded.

The curate then folded up the epistle, took off his spectacles, hemmed, and looked grave.

“ Well,” said Lady Vargrave, anxiously—“ well ? ”

“ My dear friend, the letter requires consideration. In the first place, it is clear to me that, in spite of Lord Vargrave’s presence at the rectory, his lordship so manages matters that the poor child is unable of herself to bring that matter to a conclusion. And, indeed, to a mind so sensitively delicate and honourable, it is no easy task.”

“ Shall I write to Lord Vargrave ? ”

“ Let us think of it. In the meanwhile, this Mr Maltravers——”

“ Ah, this Mr Maltravers ! ”

“ The child shows us more of her heart than she thinks of ; and yet I myself am puzzled. If you observe, she has only once or twice spoken of the Colonel Legard, whom she has made acquaintance with ; while she treats at length of Mr Maltravers, and confesses the effect he has produced on her mind. Yet,

do you know, I more dread the caution respecting the first, than all the candour that betrays the influence of the last? There is a great difference between first fancy and first love."

"Is there?" said the lady, abstractedly.

"Again, neither of us is acquainted with this singular man—I mean Maltravers; his character, temper, and principles—of all of which Evelyn is too young, too guileless, to judge for herself. One thing, however, in her letter speaks in his favour."

"What is that?"

"He absents himself from her. This, if he has discovered her secret—or if he himself is sensible of too great a charm in her presence—would be the natural course that an honourable and a strong mind would pursue."

"What!—if he love her?"

"Yes—while he believes her hand is engaged to another."

"True! What shall be done—if Evelyn should love, and love in vain? Ah, it is the misery of a whole existence!"

"Perhaps she had better return to us," said Mr Aubrey; "and yet, if already it be too late, and her affections are engaged, we should still remain in ignorance respecting the motives and mind of the object of her attachment. And he, too, might not know the true nature of the obstacle connected with Lord Vargrave's claims."

"Shall I, then, go to her? You know how I shrink

from strangers—how I fear curiosity, doubts, and questions—how”—(and Lady Vargrave’s voice faltered)—“how unfitted I am for—for——” she stopped short, and a faint blush overspread her cheeks.

The curate understood her, and was moved.

“Dear friend,” said he, “will you intrust this charge to myself? You know how Evelyn is endeared to me by certain recollections! Perhaps, better than you, I may be enabled silently to examine if this man be worthy of her, and one who could secure her happiness;—perhaps better than you, I may ascertain the exact nature of her own feelings towards him:—perhaps too, better than you, I may effect an understanding with Lord Vargrave.”

“You are always my kindest friend,” said the lady, with emotion: “how much I already owe you!—what hopes beyond the grave! what——”

“Hush,” interrupted the curate, gently; “your own good heart and pure intentions have worked out your own atonement—may I hope also your own content. Let us return to our Evelyn: poor child! how unlike this despondent letter to her gay light spirits when with us! We acted for the best; yet, perhaps, we did wrong to yield her up to strangers. And this Maltravers!—with her enthusiasm and quick susceptibilities to genius, she was half prepared to imagine him all she depicts him to be. He must have a spell in his works that I have not discovered—for at times it seems to operate even on you.”

“Because,” said Lady Vargrave, “they remind me of *his* conversation—*his* habits of thought. If like *him* in other things, Evelyn may indeed be happy !”

“And if,” said the curate, curiously—“if, now that you are free, you were ever to meet with *him* again, and his memory had been as faithful as yours—and if he offered the sole atonement in his power, for all that his early error cost you—if such a chance should happen in the vicissitudes of life, you would——”

The curate stopped short ; for he was struck by the exceeding paleness of his friend’s cheek, and the tremor of her delicate frame.

“If that were to happen,” said she, in a very low voice ; “if we were to meet again, and if he were—as you and Mrs Leslie seem to think—poor, and like myself, humbly born—if my fortune could assist him—if my love could still—changed, altered as I am—ah ! do not talk of it—I cannot bear the thought of happiness ! And yet, if before I die I *could* but see him again !” She clasped her hands fervently as she spoke, and the blush that overspread her face threw over it so much of bloom and freshness, that even Evelyn, at that moment, would scarcely have seemed more young. “Enough,” she added, after a little while, as the glow died away. “It is but a foolish hope ; all earthly love is buried ; and my heart is there !”—she pointed to the heavens, and both were silent.

CHAPTER II.

Quibus otio vel magnificè, vel molliter, vivere copia erat, incerta pro certis malebant.*—SALLUST.

LORD RABY—one of the wealthiest and most splendid noblemen in England—was prouder, perhaps, of his provincial distinctions than the eminence of his rank or the fashion of his wife. The magnificent chateaux—the immense estates of our English peers—tend to preserve to us, in spite of the freedom, bustle, and commercial grandeur of our people, more of the Norman attributes of aristocracy than can be found in other countries. In his county, the great noble is a petty prince—his house is a court—his possessions and munificence are a boast to every proprietor in his district. They are as fond of talking of *the* earl's or *the* duke's movements and entertainments, as Dangeau was of the gossip of the Tuileries and Versailles.

Lord Raby, while affecting, as lieutenant of the county, to make no political distinctions between squire and squire—hospitable and affable to all—still, by that

* They who had the means to live at ease, either in splendour or in luxury, preferred the uncertainty of change to their natural security.

very absence of exclusiveness, gave a tone to the politics of the whole county ; and converted many who had once thought differently on the respective virtues of Whigs and Tories. A great man never loses so much as when he exhibits intolerance, or parades the right of persecution.

“ My tenants shall vote exactly as they please,” said Lord Raby ; and he was never known to have a tenant vote against his wishes ! Keeping a vigilant eye on all the interests, and conciliating all the proprietors in the county, he not only never lost a friend, but he kept together a body of partisans that constantly added to its numbers.

Sir John Merton’s colleague, a young Lord Nelthorpe, who could not speak three sentences if you took away his hat, and who, constant at Almack’s, was not only inaudible but invisible in parliament, had no chance of being re-elected. Lord Nelthorpe’s father, the Earl of Mainwaring, was a new peer ; and, next to Lord Raby, the richest nobleman in the county. Now, though they were much of the same politics, Lord Raby hated Lord Mainwaring. They were too near each other—they clashed—they had the jealousy of rival princes !

Lord Raby was delighted at the notion of getting rid of Lord Nelthorpe—it would be so sensible a blow to the Mainwaring interest. The party had been looking out for a new candidate, and Maltravers had been much talked of. It is true that, when in parliament some years before, the politics of Maltravers had differed from those of Lord Raby and his set. But Maltravers

had of late taken no share in politics—had uttered no political opinions—was intimate with the electioneering Mertons—was supposed to be a discontented man—and politicians believe in no discontent that is not political. Whispers were afloat that Maltravers had grown wise, and changed his views : some remarks of his, more theoretical than practical, were quoted in favour of this notion. Parties, too, had much changed since Maltravers had appeared on the busy scene—new questions had arisen, and the old ones had died off.

Lord Raby and his party thought, that if Maltravers could be secured to them, no one would better suit their purpose. Political faction loves converts better even than consistent adherents. A man's rise in life generally dates from a well-timed *rat*. His high reputation—his provincial rank as the representative of the oldest commoner's family in the county—his age, which combined the energy of one period with the experience of another—all united to accord Maltravers a preference over richer men. Lord Raby had been pointedly courteous and flattering to the master of Burleigh ; and he now contrived it so, that the brilliant entertainment he was about to give might appear in compliment to a distinguished neighbour, returned to fix his residence on his patrimonial property, while in reality it might serve an electioneering purpose—serve to introduce Maltravers to the county, as if under his lordship's own wing—and minister to political uses that went beyond the mere representation of the county.

Lord Vargrave had, during his stay at Merton Rectory, paid several visits to Knaresdean, and held many private conversations with the marquess : the result of these conversations was a close union of schemes and interests between the two noblemen. Dissatisfied with the political conduct of government, Lord Raby was also dissatisfied that, from various party reasons, a nobleman beneath himself in rank, and as he thought in influence, had obtained a preference in a recent vacancy among the Knights of the Garter. And if Vargrave had a talent in the world, it was in discovering the weak points of men whom he sought to gain, and making the vanities of others conduce to his own ambition.

The festivities of Knaresdean gave occasion to Lord Raby to unite at his house the more prominent of those who thought and acted in concert with Lord Vargrave ; and in this secret senate the operations for the following session were to be seriously discussed and gravely determined.

On the day which was to be concluded with the ball at Knaresdean, Lord Vargrave went before the rest of the Merton party, for he was engaged to dine with the marquess.

On arriving at Knaresdean, Lumley found Lord Saxingham and some other politicians, who had arrived the preceding day, closeted with Lord Raby ; and Vargrave, who shone to yet greater advantage in the diplomacy of party management than in the arena of parliament, brought penetration, energy, and decision to timid and fluctuating councils. Lord Vargrave

lingered in the room after the first bell had summoned the other guests to depart.

“My dear lord,” said he then, “though no one would be more glad than myself to secure Maltravers to our side, I very much doubt whether you will succeed in doing so. On the one hand, he appears altogether disgusted with politics and parliament ; and, on the other hand, I fancy that reports of his change of opinions are, if not wholly unfounded, very unduly coloured. Moreover, to do him justice, I think that he is not one to be blinded and flattered into the pale of a party ; and your bird will fly away, after you have wasted a bucketful of salt on his tail.”

“Very possibly,” said Lord Raby, laughing ; “you know him better than I do. But there are many purposes to serve in this matter—purposes too provincial to interest you. In the first place, we shall humble the Nelthorpe interest, merely by showing that we *do* think of a new member : secondly, we shall get up a manifestation of feeling that would be impossible, unless we were provided with a centre of attraction : thirdly, we shall rouse a certain emulation among other county gentlemen ; and if Maltravers decline, we shall have many applicants : and fourthly, suppose Maltravers has not changed his opinions, we shall make him suspected by the party he really does belong to, and which would be somewhat formidable if he were to head them. In fact, these are mere county tactics, that you can’t be expected to understand.”

“I see you are quite right : meanwhile you will at

least have an opportunity (though I say it who should not say it) to present to the county one of the prettiest young ladies that ever graced the halls of Knaresdean."

"Ah, Miss Cameron! I have heard much of her beauty: you are a lucky fellow, Vargrave!—by the by, are we to say anything of the engagement?"

"Why, indeed, my dear lord, it is now so publicly known that it would be false delicacy to affect concealment."

"Very well; I understand."

"How long I have detained you—a thousand pardons!—I have but just time to dress. In four or five months I must remember to leave you a longer time for your toilet."

"Me—how?"

"Oh, the Duke of —— can't live long; and I always observe that when a handsome man has the Garter, he takes a long time pulling up his stockings."

"Ha, ha! you are so droll, Vargrave."

"Ha, ha!—I must be off."

"The more publicity is given to this arrangement, the more difficult for Evelyn to shy at the leap," muttered Vargrave to himself as he closed the door. "Thus do I make all things useful to myself!"

The dinner party were assembled in the great drawing-room, when Maltravers and Cleveland, also invited guests to the banquet, were announced. Lord Raby received the former with marked *empressement*; and the stately marchioness honoured him with her most gracious smile. Formal presentations to the rest of

the guests were interchanged ; and it was not till the circle was fully gone through that Maltravers perceived, seated by himself in a corner, to which he had shrunk on the entrance of Maltravers, a grey-haired solitary man—it was Lord Saxingham ! The last time they had met was in the death-chamber of Florence ; and the old man forgot, for the moment, the anticipated dukedom and the dreamed-of premiership !—and his heart flew back to the grave of his only child ! They saluted each other—and shook hands in silence. And Vargrave—whose eye was on them—Vargrave, whose arts had made that old man childless, felt not a pang of remorse ! Living ever in the future, Vargrave almost seemed to have lost his memory. He knew not what regret was. It is a condition of life with men thoroughly worldly that they never look behind !

The signal was given : in due order the party were marshalled into the great hall—a spacious and lofty chamber, which had received its last alteration from the hand of Inigo Jones ; though the massive ceiling, with its antique and grotesque masques, betrayed a much earlier date, and contrasted with the Corinthian pilasters that adorned the walls, and supported the music gallery, from which waved the flags of modern warfare and its mimeries. The Eagle of Napoleon, a token of the services of Lord Raby's brother (a distinguished cavalry officer in command at Waterloo), in juxtaposition with a much gayer and more glittering banner, emblematic of the martial fame of Lord Raby himself, as Colonel of the B——shire volunteers !

The music pealed from the gallery—the plate glittered on the board—the ladies wore diamonds, and the gentlemen, who had them, wore stars. It was a very fine sight, that banquet!—such as became the festive day of a lord-lieutenant, whose ancestors had now defied, and now intermarried with, royalty. But there was very little talk, and no merriment. People at the top of the table drank wine with those at the bottom; and gentlemen and ladies seated next to each other whispered languidly in monosyllabic commune. On one side Maltravers was flanked by a Lady Somebody Something, who was rather deaf, and very much frightened for fear he should talk Greek; on the other side he was relieved by Sir John Merton—very civil, very pompous, and talking, at strictured intervals, about county matters, in a measured intonation, savouring of the House-of-Commons jerk at the end of the sentence.

As the dinner advanced to its close, Sir John became a little more diffuse, though his voice sank into a whisper.

“I fear there will be a split in the cabinet before parliament meets.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes; Vargrave and the premier cannot pull together very long. Clever man, Vargrave! but he has not enough stake in the country for a leader!”

“All men have public character to stake; and if that be good, I suppose no stake can be better?”

“Humph!—yes—very true; but still, when a man has land and money, his opinions, in a country like

this, very properly carry more weight with them. If Vargrave, for instance, had Lord Raby's property, no man could be more fit for a leader—a prime minister. We might then be sure that he would have no selfish interest to further ; he would not play tricks with his party—you understand ?”

“Perfectly.”

“I am not a party man, as you may remember ; indeed, you and I have voted alike on the same questions. Measures, not men—that is my maxim ; but still I don't like to see men placed above their proper stations.”

“Maltravers—a glass of wine,” said Lord Vargrave across the table. “Will you join us, Sir John ?”

Sir John bowed.

“Certainly,” he resumed, “Vargrave is a pleasant man and a good speaker ; but still they say he is far from rich—embarrassed, indeed. However, when he marries Miss Cameron it may make a great difference—give him more respectability ; do you know what her fortune is—something immense ?”

“Yes ; I believe so—I don't know.”

“My brother says that Vargrave is most amiable. The young lady is very handsome, almost too handsome for a wife—don't you think so ? Beauties are all very well in a ball-room ; but they are not calculated for domestic life. I am sure you agree with me. I have heard, indeed, that Miss Cameron is rather learned ; but there is so much scandal in a country neighbourhood ;—people are so ill-natured. I daresay she is not

more learned than other young ladies, poor girl ! What do you think ?”

“ Miss Cameron is—is very accomplished, I believe. And so you think the Government cannot stand ?”

“ I don't say that—very far from it : but I fear there must be a change. However, if the country gentlemen hold together, I do not doubt but what we shall weather the storm. The landed interest, Mr Maltravers, is the great stay of this country—the sheet-anchor, I may say. I suppose Lord Vargrave, who seems, I must say, to have right notions on this head, will invest Miss Cameron's fortune in land. But though one may buy an estate, one can't buy an old family, Mr Maltravers !—you and I may be thankful for that. By the way, who was Miss Cameron's mother, Lady Vargrave ?—something low, I fear—nobody knows.”

“ I am not acquainted with Lady Vargrave : your sister-in-law speaks of her most highly. And the daughter in herself is a sufficient guarantee for the virtues of the mother.”

“ Yes ; and Vargrave, on one side at least, has himself nothing in the way of family to boast of.”

The ladies left the hall—the gentlemen re-seated themselves. Lord Raby made some remark on politics to Sir John Merton, and the whole round of talkers immediately followed their leader.

“ It is a thousand pities, Sir John,” said Lord Raby, “ that you have not a colleague more worthy of you ; Nelthorpe never attends a committee, does he ?”

“ I cannot say that he is a very active member ; but he is young, and we must make allowances for him,” said Sir John, discreetly : for he had no desire to oust his colleague—it was agreeable enough to be *the* efficient member.

“ In these times,” said Lord Raby, loftily, “ allowances are not to be made for systematic neglect of duty ; we shall have a stormy session—the Opposition is no longer to be despised—perhaps a dissolution may be nearer at hand than we think for : as for Nelthorpe, he cannot come in again.”

“ That I am quite sure of,” said a fat country gentleman of great weight in the county ; “ he not only was absent on the great Malt question, but he never answered my letter respecting the Canal Company.”

“ Not answered your letter !” said Lord Raby, lifting up his hands and eyes in amaze and horror. “ What conduct ! Ah, Mr Maltravers, you are the man for us !”

“ Hear ! hear !” cried the fat squire.

“ Hear !” echoed Vargrave ; and the approving sound went round the table.

Lord Raby rose. “ Gentlemen, fill your glasses ;—a health to our distinguished neighbour !”

The company applauded ; each in his turn smiled, nodded, and drank to Maltravers, who, though taken by surprise, saw at once the course to pursue. He returned thanks simply and shortly ; and, without pointedly noticing the allusion in which Lord Raby had indulged, remarked, incidentally, that he had re-

tired, certainly for some years — perhaps for ever — from political life.

Vargrave smiled significantly at Lord Raby, and hastened to lead the conversation into party discussion. Wrapped in his proud disdain of what he considered the contests of factions for toys and shadows, Maltravers remained silent ; and the party soon broke up, and adjourned to the ball-room.

CHAPTER III.

Le plus grand défaut de la pénétration n'est pas de n'aller point jusqu'au but, c'est de le passer.*—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

EVELYN had looked forward to the ball at Knaresdean with feelings deeper than those which usually inflame the fancy of a girl, proud of her dress, and confident of her beauty. Whether or not she *loved* Maltravers, in the true acceptation of the word *love*, it is certain that he had acquired a most powerful command over her mind and imagination. She felt the warmest interest in his welfare—the most anxious desire for his esteem—the deepest regret at the thought of their estrangement. At Knaresdean she should meet Maltravers—in crowds, it is true—but still she should meet him ; she should see him towering superior above the herd ; she should hear him praised ; she should mark him, the observed of all. But there was another, and a deeper source of joy within her. A letter had been that morning received from Aubrey, in which he had announced his arrival for the next day. The letter, though affectionate, was short. Evelyn had been some

* The greatest defect of penetration is not that of not going just up to the point—it is the passing it.

months absent—Lady Vargrave was anxious to make arrangements for her return ; but it was to be at her option whether she would accompany the curate home. Now, besides her delight at seeing once more the dear old man, and hearing from his lips that her mother was well and happy, Evelyn hailed in his arrival the means of extricating herself from her position with Lord Vargrave. She would confide in him her increased repugnance to that union—he would confer with Lord Vargrave ; and then—and then—did there come once more the thought of Maltravers ? No !—I fear it was not Maltravers who called forth that smile and that sigh ! Strange girl, you know not your own mind !—but few of us, at your age, do !

In all the gaiety of hope, in the pride of dress and half-conscious loveliness, Evelyn went with a light step into Caroline's room. Miss Merton had already dismissed her woman, and was seated by her writing-table, leaning her cheek thoughtfully on her hand.

“Is it time to go ?” said she, looking up. “Well—we shall put papa, and the coachman, and the horses, too, in excellent humour. How well you look ! Really, Evelyn, you are indeed beautiful !”—and Caroline gazed with honest, but not unenvious admiration at the fairy form so rounded, and yet so delicate ; and the face that seemed to blush at its own charms.

“I am sure I can return the flattery,” said Evelyn, laughing bashfully.

“Oh ! as for me, I am well enough in my way : and hereafter, I daresay, we may be rival beauties. I hope

we shall remain good friends, and rule the world with divided empire. Do you not long for the stir, and excitement, and ambition of London?—for ambition is open to us as to men !”

“No, indeed,” replied Evelyn, smiling ; “I could be ambitious, indeed ; but it would not be for myself, but for——”

“A husband, perhaps ; well, you will have ample scope for such sympathy. Lord Vargrave——”

“Lord Vargrave again !” and Evelyn’s smile vanished, and she turned away.

“Ah,” said Caroline, “I should have made Vargrave an excellent wife—pity he does not think so ! As it is, I must set up for myself, and become a *maîtresse femme*. So you think I look well to-night ? I am glad of it—Lord Doltimore is one who will be guided by what other people say.”

“You are not serious about Lord Doltimore ?”

“Most sadly serious.”

“Impossible ! you could not speak so if you loved him.”

“Loved him ! no ! but I intend to marry him.”

Evelyn was revolted, but still incredulous.

“And you, too, will marry one whom you do not love?—’tis our fate ——”

“Never !”

“We shall see.”

Evelyn’s heart was damped, and her spirits fell.

“Tell me now,” said Caroline, pressing on the wrung withers, “do you not think this excitement, partial

and provincial though it be—the sense of beauty, the hope of conquest, the consciousness of power—better than the dull monotony of the Devonshire cottage? be honest——”

“No, no, indeed!” answered Evelyn, tearfully and passionately: “one hour with my mother, one smile from her lips, were worth it all.”

“And in your visions of marriage, you think then of nothing but roses and doves,—love in a cottage!”

“Love *in a home*, no matter whether a palace or a cottage,” returned Evelyn.

“Home!” repeated Caroline, bitterly; — “home—home is the English synonym for the French *ennui*. But I hear papa on the stairs.”

A Ball-room—what a scene of commonplace! how hackneyed in novels; how trite in ordinary life; and yet ball-rooms have a character and a sentiment of their own, for all tempers and all ages. Something in the lights—the crowd—the music—conduces to stir up many of the thoughts that belong to fancy and romance. It is a melancholy scene to men after a certain age. It revives many of those lighter and more graceful images connected with the wandering desires of youth; shadows that crossed us, and seemed love, but were not: having much of the grace and charm, but none of the passion and the tragedy, of love. So many of our earliest and gentlest recollections are connected with those chalked floors—and that music painfully gay—and those quiet nooks and corners, where the talk that hovers about the

heart and does not touch it has been held. Apart and unsympathising, in that austerer wisdom which comes to us after deep passions have been excited, we see form after form chasing the butterflies that dazzle us no longer among the flowers that have evermore lost their fragrance.

Somehow or other it is one of the scenes that remind us most forcibly of the loss of youth ! We are brought so closely in contact with the young and with the short-lived pleasures that once pleased us, and have forfeited all bloom. Happy the man who turns from "the tinkling cymbal," and "the gallery of pictures," and can think of some watchful eye and some kind heart *at home*. But those who have no home—and they are a numerous tribe—never feel lonelier hermits or sadder moralists than in such a crowd.

Maltravers leaned abstractedly against the wall, and some such reflections, perhaps, passed within, as the plumes waved and the diamonds glittered around him. Ever too proud to be vain, the *monstrari digito* had not flattered even in the commencement of his career. And now he heeded not the eyes that sought his look nor the admiring murmur of lips anxious to be overheard. Affluent, well-born, unmarried, and still in the prime of life,—in the small circles of a province, Ernest Maltravers would in himself have been an object of interest to the diplomacy of mothers and daughters ; and the false glare of reputation necessarily deepened curiosity, and widened the range of speculators and observers.

Suddenly, however, a new object of attention excited new interest—new whispers ran through the crowd, and these awakened Maltravers from his reverie. He looked up, and beheld all eyes fixed upon one form ! His own eyes encountered those of Evelyn Cameron !

It was the first time he had seen this beautiful young person in all the *éclat*, pomp, and circumstance of her station, as the heiress of the opulent Templeton—the first time he had seen her the cynosure of crowds, who, had her features been homely, would have admired the charms of her fortune in her face. And now, as radiant with youth, and the flush of excitement on her soft cheek, she met his eye, he said to himself—“ And could I have wished one so new to the world to have united her lot with a man, for whom all that to her is delight has grown wearisome and stale ? Could I have been justified in stealing her from the admiration that, at her age, and to her sex, has so sweet a flattery ? Or, on the other hand, could I have gone back to her years, and sympathised with feelings that time has taught me to despise ?—Better as it is.”

Influenced by these thoughts, the greeting of Maltravers disappointed and saddened Evelyn, she knew not why ; it was constrained and grave.

“ Does not Miss Cameron look well ? ” whispered Mrs Merton, on whose arm the heiress leant. “ You observe what a sensation she creates ? ”

Evelyn overheard, and blushed as she stole a glance at Maltravers. There was something mournful in the admiration which spoke in his deep earnest eyes.

“Everywhere,” said he, calmly, and in the same tone, “everywhere Miss Cameron appears, she must outshine all others.” He turned to Evelyn, and said, with a smile, “You must learn to inure yourself to admiration—a year or two hence, and you will not blush at your own gifts !”

“And you, too, contribute to spoil me !—fie !”

“Are you so easily spoiled ? If I meet you hereafter, you will think my compliments cold to the common language of others.”

“You do not know me—perhaps you never will.”

“I am contented with the fair pages I have already read.”

“Where is Lady Raby ?” asked Mrs Merton. “Oh, I see : Evelyn, my love, we must present ourselves to our hostess.”

The ladies moved on—and when Maltravers next caught a glance of Evelyn, she was with Lady Raby, and Lord Vargrave also was by her side.

The whispers round him had grown louder.

“Very lovely indeed !—so young, too ! and she is really going to be married to Lord Vargrave : so much older than she is—quite a sacrifice !”

“Scarcely so. He is so agreeable, and still handsome. But are you sure that the thing is settled ?”

“Oh, yes. Lord Raby himself told me so. It will take place very soon.”

“But do you know who her mother was ?—I cannot make out.”

“Nothing particular. You know the late Lord Var-

grave was a man of low birth. I believe she was a widow of his own rank—she lives quite in seclusion.”

“How d’ye do, Mr Maltravers? So glad to see you,” said the quick shrill voice of Mrs Hare. “Beautiful ball—nobody does things like Lord Raby—don’t you dance?”

“No, madam.”

“Oh, you young gentlemen are so *fine* nowadays.” (Mrs Hare laying stress on the word *young*, thought she had paid a very elegant compliment, and ran on with increased complacency.)

“You are going to let Burleigh, I hear, to Lord Doltimore—is it true?—No!—really now, what stories people do tell. Elegant man, Lord Doltimore! Is it true that Miss Caroline is going to marry his lordship?—Great match!—No scandal, I hope; you’ll excuse *me!*—Two weddings on the *tapis*—quite stirring for our stupid county. Lady Vargrave and Lady Doltimore, two new peeresses. Which do you think is the handsomer?—Miss Merton is the taller, but there is something fierce in her eyes. Don’t you think so?—By the by, I wish you joy—you’ll excuse *me.*”

“Wish me joy, madam!”

“Oh, you are so close. Mr Hare says he shall support you. You will have all the ladies with you. Well, I declare, Lord Vargrave is going to dance. How old is he, do you think?”

Maltravers uttered an audible *pshaw*, and moved away; but his penance was not over. Lord Vargrave, much as he disliked dancing, still thought it wise to

ask the fair hand of Evelyn ; and Evelyn also could not refuse.

And now, as the crowd gathered round the red ropes, Maltravers had to undergo new exclamations at Evelyn's beauty and Vargrave's luck. Impatiently he turned from the spot, with that gnawing sickness of the heart which none but the jealous know. He longed to depart, yet dreaded to do so. It was the last time he should see Evelyn perhaps for years—the last time he should see her as Miss Cameron !

He passed into another room, deserted by all save four old gentlemen—Cleveland one of them—immersed in whist ; and threw himself upon an ottoman, placed in a recess by the oriel window. There, half-concealed by the draperies, he communed and reasoned with himself. His heart was sad within him ; he never felt before *how* deeply and *how* passionately he loved Evelyn—how firmly that love had fastened upon the very core of his heart ! Strange, indeed, it was in a girl so young—of whom he had seen but little—and that little in positions of such quiet and ordinary interest—to excite a passion so intense in a man who had gone through strong emotions and stern trials ! But all love is unaccountable. The solitude in which Maltravers had lived—the absence of all other excitement—perhaps had contributed largely to fan the flame. And his affections had so long slept ; and after long sleep the passions wake with such giant strength ! He felt now too well that the last rose of life had bloomed for him—it was blighted in its birth, but it could never be re-

placed. Henceforth, indeed, he should be alone—the hopes of home were gone for ever ; and the other occupations of mind and soul—literature, pleasure, ambition—were already forsworn at the very age in which by most men they are most indulged ! O Youth ! begin not thy career too soon, and let one passion succeed in its due order to another ; so that every season of life may have its appropriate pursuit and charm !

The hours waned—still Maltravers stirred not ; nor were his meditations disturbed, except by occasional ejaculations from the four old gentlemen, as between each deal they moralised over the caprices of the cards.

At length, close beside him he heard that voice, the lightest sound of which could send the blood rushing through his veins ; and from his retreat he saw Caroline and Evelyn, seated close by.

“ I beg pardon,” said the former, in a low voice—“ I beg pardon, Evelyn, for calling you away—but I longed to tell you. The die is cast.—Lord Doltimore has proposed, and I have accepted him !—Alas, alas ! I half wish I could retract !”

“ Dearest Caroline !” said the silver voice of Evelyn, “ for Heaven’s sake, do not thus wantonly resolve on your own unhappiness ! You wrong yourself, Caroline !—you do, indeed !—you are not the vain, ambitious character you affect to be ! Ah ! what is it you require ?—Wealth ?—are you not my friend ?—am not I rich enough for both ?—Rank ?—what can it give you to compensate for the misery of a union without love ? Pray forgive me for speaking thus ; do not think me pre-

sumptuous, or romantic—but indeed, indeed, I know from my own heart what yours must undergo !”

Caroline pressed her friend’s hand with emotion.

“ You are a bad comforter, Evelyn ;—my mother—my father, will preach a very different doctrine. I am foolish, indeed, to be so sad in obtaining the very object I have sought ! Poor Doltimore !—he little knows the nature, the feelings of her whom he thinks he has made the happiest of her sex—he little knows”—Caroline paused, turned pale as death, and then went rapidly on—“ But you, Evelyn, *you* will meet the same fate ; we shall bear it together.”

“ No !—no !—do not think so !—Where I give my hand, there shall I give my heart.”

At this time Maltravers half rose, and sighed audibly.

“ Hush !” said Caroline, in alarm. At the same moment, the whist-table broke up, and Cleveland approached Maltravers.

“ I am at your service,” said he ; “ I know you will not stay the supper. You will find me in the next room ; I am just going to speak to Lord Saxingham.” The gallant old gentleman then paid a compliment to the young ladies, and walked away.

“ So, you too are a deserter from the ball-room !” said Miss Merton to Maltravers as she rose.

“ I am not very well ; but do not let me frighten you away.”

“ Oh no ! I hear the music—it is the last quadrille before supper—and here is my fortunate partner looking for me.”

“I have been everywhere in search of you,” said Lord Doltimore, in an accent of tender reproach ; “come, we are almost too late now.”

Caroline put her arm into Lord Doltimore’s, who hurried her into the ball-room.

Miss Cameron looked irresolute whether or not to follow, when Maltravers seated himself beside her ;—and the paleness of his brow, and something that bespoke pain in the compressed lip, went at once to her heart. In her childlike tenderness, she would have given worlds for the sister’s privilege of sympathy and soothing. The room was now deserted—they were alone.

The words that he had overheard from Evelyn’s lips —“Where I shall give my hand, there shall I give my heart”—Maltravers interpreted but in one sense—“she loved her betrothed !”—and, strange as it may seem, at that thought which put the last seal upon his fate, selfish anguish was less felt than deep compassion. So young—so courted—so tempted as she must be—and with such a protector !—the cold, the unsympathising, the heartless Vargrave ! She, too, whose feelings, so warm, ever trembled on her lip and eye.—Oh ! when she awoke from her dream, and knew whom she had loved, what might be her destiny—what her danger !

“Miss Cameron,” said Maltravers, “let me for one moment detain you ; I will not trespass long. May I once, and for the last time, assume the austere rights of friendship ? I have seen much of life, Miss Cameron,

and my experience has been purchased dearly : and, harsh and hermit-like as I may have grown, I have not outlived such feelings as you are well formed to excite. Nay” (and Maltravers smiled sadly), “I am not about to compliment or flatter. I speak not to you as the young to the young ; the difference of our years, that takes away sweetness from flattery, leaves still sincerity to friendship. You have inspired me with a deep interest ;—deeper than I thought that living beauty could ever rouse in me again ! It may be that something in the tone of your voice, your manner—a nameless grace that I cannot define—reminds me of one whom I knew in youth ;—one who had not your advantages of education, wealth, birth ; but to whom Nature was more kind than Fortune.”

He paused a moment, and, without looking towards Evelyn, thus renewed :—

“You are entering life under brilliant auspices.—Ah ! let me hope that the noonday will keep the promise of the dawn ! You are susceptible—imaginative ; do not demand too much, or dream too fondly. When you are wedded, do not imagine that wedded life is exempt from its trials and its cares : if you know yourself beloved—and beloved you must be—do not ask from the busy and anxious spirit of man all which Romance promises and Life but rarely yields. And oh !” continued Maltravers, with an absorbing and earnest passion, that poured forth its language with almost breathless rapidity—“if ever your heart rebels—if ever it be dissatisfied—fly the false sentiment as

a sin ! Thrown, as from your rank you must be, on a world of a thousand perils, with no guide so constant and so safe as your own innocence—make not that world too dear a friend. Were it possible that your own home ever could be lonely or unhappy, reflect that to woman the unhappiest home is happier than all excitement abroad. You will have a thousand suitors hereafter : believe that the asp lurks under the flatterer's tongue, and resolve, come what may, to be contented with your lot. How many have I known, lovely and pure as you, who have suffered the very affections—the very beauty of their nature—to destroy them ! Listen to me as a warner—as a brother—as a pilot who has passed the seas on which your vessel is about to launch. And ever—ever let me know, in whatever lands your name may reach me, that one who has brought back to me all my faith in human excellence, while the idol of our sex, is the glory of her own. Forgive me this strange impertinence ; my heart is full, and has overflowed. And now, Miss Cameron—Evelyn Cameron—this is my last offence, and my last farewell !”

He held out his hand, and involuntarily, unknowingly, she clasped it, as if to detain him till she could summon words to reply. Suddenly he heard Lord Vargrave's voice behind—the spell was broken—the next moment Evelyn was alone, and the throng swept into the room towards the banquet, and laughter and gay voices were heard—and Lord Vargrave was again by Evelyn's side !

CHAPTER IV.

To you
This journey is devoted.
Lover's Progress, Act iv. Sc. 1.

As Cleveland and Maltravers returned homeward, the latter abruptly checked the cheerful garrulity of his friend. "I have a favour—a great favour to ask of you."

"And what is that?"

"Let us leave Burleigh to-morrow; I care not at what hour; we need go but two or three stages if you are fatigued."

"Most hospitable host! and why?"

"It is torture, it is agony to me to breathe the air of Burleigh," cried Maltravers, wildly. "Can you not guess my secret? Have I, then, concealed it so well? I love, I adore Evelyn Cameron, and she is betrothed to—she loves—another!"

Mr Cleveland was breathless with amaze; Maltravers had indeed so well concealed his secret; and now his emotion was so impetuous, that it startled and alarmed the old man, who had never himself experienced a passion, though he had indulged a senti-

ment. He sought to console and soothe ; but after the first burst of agony, Maltravers recovered himself, and said gently—

“ Let us never return to this subject again : it is right that I should conquer this madness, and conquer it I will ! Now you know my weakness, you will indulge it. My cure cannot commence until I can no longer see from my casements the very roof that shelters the affianced bride of another.”

“ Certainly, then, we will set off to-morrow : my poor friend ! is it indeed——”

“ Ah, cease,” interrupted the proud man ; “ no compassion, I implore : give me but time and silence— they are the only remedies.”

Before noon the next day, Burleigh was once more deserted by its lord. As the carriage drove through the village, Mrs Elton saw it from her open window. But her patron, too absorbed at that hour, even for benevolence, forgot her existence : and yet so complicated are the webs of fate, that in the breast of that lowly stranger was locked a secret of the most vital moment to Maltravers.

“ Where is he going ? where is the squire going ? ” asked Mrs Elton, anxiously.

“ Dear heart ! ” said the cottager, “ they do say he be going for a short time to foren parts. But he will be back at Christmas.”

“ And at Christmas I may be gone hence for ever,” muttered the invalid. “ But what will that matter to him—to any one ? ”

At the first stage Maltravers and his friend were detained a short time for the want of horses. Lord Raby's house had been filled with guests on the preceding night, and the stables of this little inn, dignified with the sign of the Raby Arms, and about two miles distant from the great man's place, had been exhausted by numerous claimants returning homeward from Knaresdean. It was a quiet, solitary post-house, and patience, till some jaded horses should return, was the only remedy ; the host, assuring the travellers that he expected four horses every moment, invited them within. The morning was cold, and the fire not unacceptable to Mr Cleveland ; so they went into the little parlour. Here they found an elderly gentleman of very prepossessing appearance, who was waiting for the same object. He moved courteously from the fireplace as the travellers entered, and pushed the B——shire Chronicle towards Cleveland : Cleveland bowed urbanely. "A cold day, sir ; the autumn begins to show itself,"

"It is true, sir," answered the old gentleman ; "and I feel the cold the more having just quitted the genial atmosphere of the south."

"Of Italy ?"

"No, of England only. I see by this paper (I am not much of a politician) that there is a chance of a dissolution of parliament, and that Mr Maltravers is likely to come forward for this county ; are you acquainted with him, sir ?"

"A little," said Cleveland, smiling.

“He is a man I am much interested in,” said the old gentleman ; “and I hope soon to be honoured with his acquaintance.”

“Indeed ! and you are going into his neighbourhood ?” asked Cleveland, looking more attentively at the stranger, and much pleased with a certain simple candour in his countenance and manner.

“Yes, to Merton Rectory.”

Maltravers, who had been hitherto stationed by the window, turned round.

“To Merton Rectory ?” repeated Cleveland. “You are acquainted with Mr Merton, then ?”

“Not yet ; but I know some of his family. However, my visit is rather to a young lady who is staying at the rectory—Miss Cameron.”

Maltravers sighed heavily ; and the old gentleman looked at him curiously. “Perhaps, sir, if you know that neighbourhood, you may have seen——”

“Miss Cameron ! Certainly ; it is an honour not easily forgotten.”

The old gentleman looked pleased.

“The dear child !” said he, with a burst of honest affection—and he passed his hand over his eyes. Maltravers drew near to him.

“You know Miss Cameron ? you are to be envied, sir,” said he.

“I have known her since she was a child—Lady Vargrave is my dearest friend.”

“Lady Vargrave must be worthy of such a daughter.

Only under the light of a sweet disposition and pure heart could that beautiful nature have been trained and reared."

Maltravers spoke with enthusiasm ; and, as if fearful to trust himself more, left the room.

"That gentleman speaks not more warmly than justly," said the old man, with some surprise. "He has a countenance which, if physiognomy be a true science, declares his praise to be no common compliment—may I inquire his name?"

"Maltravers," replied Cleveland, a little vain of the effect his ex-pupil's name was to produce.

The curate—for it was he—started and changed countenance.

"Maltravers : but he is not about to leave the county?"

"Yes—for a few months."

Here the host entered. Four horses that had been only fourteen miles, had just re-entered the yard. If Mr Maltravers could spare two to that gentleman, who had, indeed, pre-engaged them ?

"Certainly," said Cleveland ; "but be quick."

"And is Lord Vargrave still at Mr Merton's?" asked the curate, musingly.

"Oh, yes—I believe so. Miss Cameron is to be married to him very shortly—is it not so?"

"I cannot say," returned Aubrey, rather bewildered. "You know Lord Vargrave, sir?"

"Extremely well!"

“And you think him worthy of Miss Cameron?”

“That is a question for her to answer. But I see the horses are put to. Good day, sir! Will you tell your fair young friend that you have met an old gentleman who wishes her all happiness; and if she ask you his name, say Cleveland?”

So saying, Mr Cleveland bowed, and re-entered the carriage. But Maltravers was yet missing. In fact, he returned to the house by the back way, and went once more into the little parlour. It was something to see again one who would so soon see Evelyn!

“If I mistake not,” said Maltravers, “you are that Mr Aubrey on whose virtues I have often heard Miss Cameron delight to linger? Will you believe my regret that our acquaintance is now so brief?”

As Maltravers spoke thus simply, there was in his countenance — his voice — a melancholy sweetness, which greatly conciliated the good curate. And as Aubrey gazed upon his noble features and lofty mien, he no longer wondered at the fascination he had appeared to exercise over the young Evelyn.

“And may I not hope, Mr Maltravers,” said he, “that before long our acquaintance may be renewed? Could not Miss Cameron,” he added, with a smile and a penetrating look, “tempt you into Devonshire?”

Maltravers shook his head, and, muttering something not very audible, quitted the room. The curate heard the whirl of the wheels, and the host entered to inform him that his own carriage was now ready.

“There is something in this,” thought Aubrey, “which I do not comprehend. His manner—his trembling voice—bespoke emotions he struggled to conceal. Can Lord Vargrave have gained his point? Is Evelyn, indeed, no longer free?”

CHAPTER V.

Certes, c'est un grand cas, Icas,
Que toujours tracas ou fracas
Vous faites d'une ou d'autre sort ;
C'est le diable qui vous emporte ! *—VOITURE.

LORD VARGRAVE had passed the night of the ball and the following morning at Knaresdean. It was necessary to bring the councils of the scheming conclave to a full and definite conclusion ; and this was at last effected. Their strength numbered—friends and foes alike canvassed and considered, and due account taken of the waverers to be won over—it really did seem, even to the least sanguine, that the Saxingham, or Vargrave party, was one that might well aspire either to dictate to, or to break up, a government. Nothing now was left to consider but the favourable hour for action. In high spirits, Lord Vargrave returned about the middle of the day to the rectory.

“So,” thought he, as he reclined in his carriage—
“so, in politics the prospect clears as the sun breaks out. The party I have espoused is one that must be

* Certes, it is the fact, Icas, that you are always engaged in tricks or scrapes of some sort or another—it must be the devil that bewitches you.

the most durable, for it possesses the greatest property and the most stubborn prejudice—what elements for Party! All that I now require is a sufficient fortune to back my ambition. Nothing can clog my way but these cursed debts—this disreputable want of gold. And yet Evelyn alarms me! Were I younger—or had I not made my position too soon—I would marry her by fraud or by force: run off with her to Gretna, and make Vulcan minister to Plutus. But this would never do at my years, and with my reputation. A pretty story for the newspapers — d——n them! Well, nothing venture, nothing have; I will brave the hazard! Meanwhile, Doltimore is mine; Caroline will rule him, and I rule her. His vote and his boroughs are something—his money will be more immediately useful: I must do him the honour to borrow a few thousands—Caroline must manage that for me. The fool is miserly, though a spendthrift; and looked black when I delicately hinted, the other day, that I wanted a friend—*id est*, a loan!—money and friendship, same thing—distinction without a difference!” Thus cogitating, Vargrave whiled away the minutes till his carriage stopped at Mr Merton’s door.

As he entered the hall he met Caroline, who had just quitted her own room.

“How lucky I am that you have on your bonnet! I long for a walk with you round the lawn.”

“And I, too, am glad to see you, Lord Vargrave,” said Caroline, putting her arm in his.

“Accept my best congratulations, my own sweet

friend," said Vargrave, when they were in the grounds. "You have no idea how happy Doltimore is. He came to Knaresdean yesterday to communicate the news, and his neckcloth was primer than ever.—*C'est un bon enfant.*"

"Ah, how can you talk thus? Do you feel no pain at the thought that—that I am another's?"

"Your heart will be ever mine—and that is the true fidelity: what else, too, could be done? As for Lord Doltimore, we will go shares in him. Come, cheer thee, *m'amie*—I rattle on thus to keep up your spirits. Do not fancy I am happy!"

Caroline let fall a few tears; but, beneath the influence of Vargrave's sophistries and flatteries, she gradually recovered her usual hard and worldly tone of mind.

"And where is Evelyn?" asked Vargrave. "Do you know the little witch seemed to me half mad the night of the ball: her head was turned: and when she sat next me at supper, she not only answered every question I put to her *à tort et à travers*, but I fancied every moment she was going to burst out crying. Can you tell what was the matter with her?"

"She was grieved to hear that I was to be married to the man I do not love. Ah, Vargrave, she has more heart than you have!"

"But she never fancies that you love me?" asked Lumley, in alarm. "You women are so confoundedly confidential!"

"No—she does not suspect our secret."

“Then I scarcely think your approaching marriage was a sufficient cause for so much distraction.”

“Perhaps she may have overheard some of the impertinent whispers about her mother,—‘Who was Lady Vargrave?’—and, ‘What Cameron was Lady Vargrave’s first husband?’ I overheard a hundred such vulgar questions ; and provincial people whisper so loud.”

“Ah, that is a very probable solution of the mystery. And for my part, I am almost as much puzzled as any one else can be to know who Lady Vargrave was !”

“Did not your uncle tell you ?”

“He told me that she was of no very elevated birth and station, nothing more ; and she herself, with her quiet say-nothing manner, slips through all my careless questionings like an eel. She is still a beautiful creature, more regularly handsome than even Evelyn ; and old Templeton had a very sweet tooth at the back of his head, though he never opened his mouth wide enough to show it.”

“She must ever at least have been blameless, to judge by an air which, even now, is more like that of a child than a matron.”

“Yes ; she has not much of the widow about her, poor soul ! But her education, except in music, has not been very carefully attended to ; and she knows about as much of the world as the Bishop of Autun (better known as Prince Talleyrand) knows of the Bible. If she were not so simple, she would be silly ; but silliness is never simple—always cunning ; how-

ever, there is some cunning in her keeping her past Cameronian Chronicles so close. Perhaps I may know more about her in a short time, for I intend going to C——, where my uncle once lived, in order to see if I can revive under the rose—since peers are only contra-band electioneers—his old parliamentary influence in that city ; and they may tell me more there than I now know.”

“Did the late lord marry at C—— ?”

“No ; in Devonshire. I do not even know if Mrs Cameron ever was at C——.”

“You must be curious to know who the father of your intended wife was ?”

“Her father ! No ; I have no curiosity in that quarter. And, to tell you the truth, I am much too busy about the present to be raking into that heap of rubbish we call the Past. I fancy that both your good grandmother and that comely old curate of Brook-Green know everything about Lady Vargrave ; and, as they esteem her so much, I take it for granted that she is *sans tache*.”

“How could I be so stupid !—*à propos* of the curate, I forgot to tell you that he is here. He arrived about two hours ago, and has been closeted with Evelyn ever since !”

“The deuce ! What brought the old man hither ?”

“That I know not. Papa received a letter from him yesterday morning, to say that he would be here to-day. Perhaps Lady Vargrave thinks it time for Evelyn to return home.”

“What am I to do?” said Vargrave, anxiously. “Dare I yet venture to propose?”

“I am sure it will be in vain, Vargrave. You must prepare for disappointment.”

“And ruin,” muttered Vargrave, gloomily. “Hark you, Caroline,—she may refuse me if she pleases. But I am not a man to be baffled. Have her I will, by one means or another ;—revenge urges me to it almost as much as ambition. That girl’s thread of life has been the dark line in my woof—she has robbed me of fortune—she now thwarts me in my career—she humbles me in my vanity. But, like a hound that has tasted blood, I will run her down, whatever winding she takes !”

“Vargrave, you terrify me ! Reflect ; we do not live in an age when violence——”

“Tush !” interrupted Lumley, with one of those dark looks which at times, though very rarely, swept away all its customary character from that smooth, shrewd countenance. “Tush !—we live in an age as favourable to intellect and to energy as ever was painted in romance. I have that faith in fortune and myself that I tell you, with a prophet’s voice, that Evelyn shall fulfil the wish of my dying uncle. But the bell summons us back.”

On returning to the house, Lord Vargrave’s valet gave him a letter which had arrived that morning. It was from Mr Gustavus Douce, and ran thus :—

Fleet Street, — 20th, 18—.

“MY LORD,—It is with the greatest regret that I

apprise you, for Self & Co., that we shall not be able, in the present state of the Money Market, to renew your lordship's bill for £10,000, due the 28th instant. Respectfully calling your lordship's attention to same, I have the honour to be, for Self & Co., my lord, your lordship's most obedient and most obliged humble servant,

GUSTAVUS DOUCE.

“ To the Right Hon. the LORD VARGRAVE, &c. &c.”

This letter sharpened Lord Vargrave's anxiety and resolve ; nay, it seemed almost to sharpen his sharp features as he muttered sundry denunciations on Messrs Douce & Co., while arranging his neck-cloth at the glass.

CHAPTER VI.

Sol. Why, please your honourable lordship, we were talking here and there
—this and that.—*The Stranger.*

AUBREY had been closeted with Evelyn the whole morning; and, simultaneous with his arrival, came to her the news of the departure of Maltravers: it was an intelligence that greatly agitated and unnerved her: and coupling that event with his solemn words on the previous night, Evelyn asked herself, in wonder, what sentiments she could have inspired in Maltravers? Could he love her?—her, so young—so inferior—so uninformed!—Impossible! Alas!—alas!—for Maltravers!—his genius—his gifts—his towering qualities—all that won the admiration, almost the awe, of Evelyn—placed him at a distance from her heart! When she asked herself if he loved her, she did not ask, even in that hour, if she loved him. But even the question she did ask, her judgment answered erringly in the negative—Why should he love, and yet fly her? She understood not his high-wrought scruples—his self-deluding belief. Aubrey was more puzzled than enlightened by his conversation with his

pupil ; only one thing seemed certain—her delight to return to the cottage and her mother.

Evelyn could not sufficiently recover her composure to mix with the party below ; and Aubrey, at the sound of the second dinner-bell, left her to solitude, and bore her excuses to Mrs Merton.

“ Dear me ! ” said that worthy lady ; “ I am so sorry—I thought Miss Cameron looked fatigued at breakfast ; and there was something hysterical in her spirits ; and I suppose the surprise of your arrival has upset her. Caroline, my dear, you had better go and see what she would like to have taken up to her room—a little soup and the wing of a chicken.”

“ My dear,” said Mr Merton, rather pompously, “ I think it would be but a proper respect to Miss Cameron, if you yourself accompanied Caroline.”

“ I assure you,” said the curate, alarmed at the avalanche of politeness that threatened poor Evelyn—“ I assure you that Miss Cameron would prefer being left alone at present ; as you say, Mrs Merton, her spirits are rather agitated.”

But Mrs Merton, with a sliding bow, had already quitted the room, and Caroline with her.

“ Come back, Sophy !—Cecilia, come back ! ” said Mr Merton, settling his *jabot*.

“ Oh, dear Evy !—poor dear Evy !—Evy is ill ! ” said Sophy ; “ I may go to Evy !—I must go, papa ! ”

“ No, my dear, you are too noisy ; these children are quite spoiled, Mr Aubrey.”

The old man looked at them benevolently, and drew

them to his knee ; and, while Cissy stroked his long white hair, and Sophy ran on about dear Evy's prettiness and goodness, Lord Vargrave sauntered into the room.

On seeing the curate, his frank face lighted up with surprise and pleasure ; he hastened to him, seized him by both hands, expressed the most heartfelt delight at seeing him, inquired tenderly after Lady Vargrave, and not till he was out of breath, and Mrs Merton and Caroline returning apprised him of Miss Cameron's indisposition, did his rapture vanish ; and, as a moment before he was all joy, so now he was all sorrow.

The dinner passed off dully enough ; the children, readmitted to dessert, made a little relief to all parties ; and when they and the two ladies went, Aubrey himself quickly rose to join Evelyn.

“ Are you going to Miss Cameron ? ” said Lord Vargrave ; “ pray say how unhappy I feel at her illness. I think these grapes—they are very fine—could not hurt her. May I ask you to present them with my best—best and most anxious regards ? I shall be so uneasy till you return. Now, Merton ” (as the door closed on the curate), “ let's have another bottle of this famous claret !—Droll old fellow, that—quite a character ! ”

“ He is a great favourite with Lady Vargrave and Miss Cameron, I believe,” said Mr Merton. “ A mere village priest, I suppose ; no talent, no energy—or he could not be a curate at that age.”

“ Very true ;—a shrewd remark. The church is as

good a profession as any other for getting on, if a man has anything in him. I shall live to see *you* a bishop!"

Mr Merton shook his head.

"Yes, I shall ; though you have hitherto disdained to exhibit any one of the three orthodox qualifications for a mitre."

"And what are they, my lord?"

"Editing a Greek play—writing a political pamphlet—and apostatising at the proper moment."

"Ha ! ha ! your lordship is severe on us."

"Not I—I often wish I had been brought up to the church—famous profession, properly understood. By Jupiter, I should have been a capital bishop!"

In his capacity of parson, Mr Merton tried to look grave ;—in his capacity of a gentlemanlike, liberal fellow, he gave up the attempt, and laughed pleasantly at the joke of the rising man.

CHAPTER VII.

Will nothing please you?
What do you think of the Court?—*The Plain Dealer.*

ON one subject, Aubrey found no difficulty in ascertaining Evelyn's wishes and condition of mind. The experiment of her visit, so far as Vargrave's hopes were concerned, had utterly failed;—she could not contemplate the prospect of his alliance, and she poured out to the curate, frankly and fully, all her desire to effect a release from her engagement. As it was now settled that she should return with Aubrey to Brook-Green, it was indeed necessary to come to the long-delayed understanding with her betrothed. Yet this was difficult, for he had so little pressed—so distantly alluded to—their engagement, that it was like a forwardness, an indelicacy in Evelyn, to forestall the longed-for yet dreaded explanation. This, however, Aubrey took upon himself; and at this promise Evelyn felt as the slave may feel when the chain is stricken off.

At breakfast, Mr Aubrey communicated to the Mertons Evelyn's intention to return with him to Brook-Green, on the following day. Lord Vargrave started—bit his lip—but said nothing.

Not so silent was Mr Merton :—

“Return with you ! my dear Mr Aubrey—just consider—it is impossible—you see Miss Cameron’s rank of life, her position—so very strange—no servants of her own here but her woman—no carriage even ! You would not have her travel in a post-chaise—such a long journey ! Lord Vargrave, you can never consent to that, I am sure ?”

“Were it only as Miss Cameron’s *guardian*,” said Lord Vargrave, pointedly, “I should certainly object to such a mode of performing such a journey. Perhaps Mr Aubrey means to perfect the project by taking two outside places on the top of the coach ?”

“Pardon me,” said the curate, mildly, “but I am not so ignorant of what is due to Miss Cameron as you suppose. Lady Vargrave’s carriage, which brought me hither, will be no unsuitable vehicle for Lady Vargrave’s daughter ; and Miss Cameron is not, I trust, quite so spoilt by all your friendly attentions, as to be unable to perform a journey of two days, with no other protector than myself.”

“I forgot Lady Vargrave’s carriage, or rather I was not aware that you had used it, my dear sir,” said Mr Merton. “But you must not blame us, if we are sorry to lose Miss Cameron so suddenly : I was in hopes that *you* too would stay at least a week with us.”

The curate bowed at the rector’s condescending politeness ; and just as he was about to answer, Mrs Merton put in—

“And you see I had set my heart on her being Caroline’s bridesmaid.”

Caroline turned pale, and glanced at Vargrave, who appeared solely absorbed in breaking toast into his tea—a delicacy he had never before been known to favour.

There was an awkward pause : the servant opportunely entered with a small parcel of books, a note to Mr Merton, and that most blessed of all blessed things in the country, the letter-bag.

“What is this ?” said the rector, opening his note, while Mrs Merton unlocked the bag and dispensed the contents ;—“Left Burleigh for some months—a day or two sooner than he had expected—excuse French leave-taking—return Miss Merton’s books—much obliged—gamekeeper has orders to place the Burleigh preserves at my disposal. So we have lost our neighbour !”

“Did you not know Mr Maltravers was gone ?” said Caroline. “I heard so from Jenkins last night ; he accompanies Mr Cleveland to Paris.”

“Indeed !” said Mrs Merton, opening her eyes. “What could take him to Paris ?”

“Pleasure, I suppose,” answered Caroline. “I’m sure I should rather have wondered what could detain him at Burleigh.”

Vargrave was all this while breaking open seals, and running his eyes over sundry scrawls with the practised rapidity of the man of business ; he came to the last letter—his countenance brightened—

“Royal invitation, or rather command, to Windsor,” he cried. “I am afraid I, too, must leave you, this very day.”

“Bless me !” exclaimed Mrs Merton ; “is that from the king ? Do let me see !”

“Not exactly from the king ; the same thing, though :” and Lord Vargrave, carelessly pushing the gracious communication towards the impatient hand and loyal gaze of Mrs Merton, carefully put the other letters in his pocket, and walked musingly to the window.

Aubrey seized the opportunity to approach him. “My lord, can I speak with you a few moments ?”

“Me ! certainly : will you come to my dressing-room ?”

CHAPTER VIII.

There was never
Poor gentleman had such a sudden fortune.
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER, *The Captain*, Act v. Sc. 5.

“MY LORD,” said the curate, as Vargrave, leaning back in his chair, appeared to examine the shape of his boots ; while, in reality, “his sidelong looks,” not “of love,” were fixed upon his companion—“I need scarcely refer to the wish of the late lord, your uncle, relative to Miss Cameron and yourself ; nor need I, to one of a generous spirit, add, that an engagement could be only so far binding as both the parties, whose happiness it concerned, should be willing in proper time and season to fulfil it.”

“Sir !” said Vargrave, impatiently waving his hand ; and, in his irritable surmise of what was to come, losing his habitual self-control—“I know not what all this has to do with you ; surely you trespass upon ground sacred to Miss Cameron and myself. Whatever you have to say, let me beg you to come at once to the point.”

“My lord, I will obey you. Miss Cameron—and, I may add, with Lady Vargrave’s consent—deputes me,

to say that, although she feels compelled to decline the honour of your lordship's alliance, yet, if in any arrangement of the fortune bequeathed to her she could testify to you, my lord, her respect and friendship, it would afford her the most sincere gratification."

Lord Vargrave started.

"Sir," said he, "I know not if I am to thank you for this information—the announcement of which so strangely coincides with your arrival. But allow me to say, that there needs no ambassador between Miss Cameron and myself. It is due, sir, to my station, to my relationship, to my character of guardian, to my long and faithful affection, to all considerations which men of the world understand, which men of feeling sympathise with, to receive from Miss Cameron alone the rejection of my suit !"

"Unquestionably Miss Cameron will grant your lordship the interview you have a right to seek ; but pardon me, I thought it might save you both much pain, if the meeting were prepared by a third person ; and on any matter of business, any atonement to your lordship——"

"Atonement !—what can atone to me ?" exclaimed Vargrave, as he walked to and fro the room in great disorder and excitement. "Can you give me back years of hope and expectancy—the manhood wasted in a vain dream ? Had I not been taught to look to this reward, should I have rejected all occasion—while my youth was not yet all gone, while my heart was not yet all occupied—to form a suitable alliance ? Nay,

should I have indulged in a high and stirring career, for which my own fortune is by no means qualified ? Atonement !—atonement ! Talk of atonement to boys ! Sir ! I stand before you a man whose private happiness is blighted, whose public prospects are darkened, life wasted, fortunes ruined, the schemes of an existence built upon one hope, which was lawfully indulged, overthrown !—and you talk to me of *atonement* !”

Selfish as the nature of this complaint might be, Aubrey was struck with its justice.

“My lord,” said he, a little embarrassed, “I cannot deny that there is truth in much of what you say. Alas ! it proves how vain it is for man to calculate on the future, how unhappily your uncle erred in imposing conditions, which the chances of life and the caprices of affection could at any time dissolve ! But this is blame that attaches only to the dead : can you blame the living ?”

“Sir, I considered myself bound by my uncle’s prayer to keep my hand and heart disengaged, that this title—miserable and barren distinction though it be !—might, as he so ardently desired, descend to Evelyn. I had a right to expect similar honour upon her side !”

“Surely, my lord, you, to whom the late lord on his deathbed confided all the motives of his conduct and the secret of his life, cannot but be aware that, while desirous of promoting your worldly welfare, and uniting in one line his rank and his fortune, your uncle still had Evelyn’s happiness at heart as his warmest wish ; you must know that, if that happiness were forfeited

by a marriage with you, the marriage became but a secondary consideration. Lord Vargrave's will in itself was a proof of this. He did not impose, as an absolute condition, upon Evelyn, her union with yourself ; he did not make the forfeiture of her whole wealth the penalty of her rejection of that alliance. By the definite limit of the forfeit, he intimated a distinction between a command and a desire. And surely, when you consider all circumstances, your lordship must think that, what with that forfeit and the estate settled upon the title, your uncle did all that, in a worldly point of view, equity, and even affection, could exact from him."

Vargrave smiled bitterly, but said nothing.

"And if this be doubted, I have clearer proof of his intentions. Such was his confidence in Lady Vargrave, that, in the letter he addressed to her before his death, and which I now submit to your lordship, you will observe that he not only expressly leaves it to Lady Vargrave's discretion to communicate to Evelyn that history of which she is at present ignorant, but that he also clearly defines the line of conduct he wished to be adopted with respect to Evelyn and yourself. Permit me to point out the passage."

Impatiently Lord Vargrave ran his eye over the letter placed in his hands, till he came to these lines :—

"And if, when she has arrived at the proper age to form a judgment, Evelyn should decide against Lumley's claims, you know that on no account would I sacrifice her happiness ; all that I require is, that fair

play be given to his pretensions—due indulgence to the scheme I have long had at heart. Let her be brought up to consider him her future husband, let her not be prejudiced against him, let her fairly judge for herself, when the time arrives.”

“You see, my lord,” said Mr Aubrey, as he took back the letter, “that this letter bears the same date as your uncle’s will. What he desired has been done. Be just, my lord—be just, and exonerate us all from blame : who can dictate to the affections ?”

“And I am to understand that I have no chance, now or hereafter, of obtaining the affections of Evelyn ? Surely, at your age, Mr Aubrey, you cannot encourage the heated romance common to all girls of Evelyn’s age. Persons of our rank do not marry like the Corydon and Phillis of a pastoral. At my years, I never was fool enough to expect that I should inspire a girl of seventeen with what is called a passionate attachment. But happy marriages are based upon suitable circumstances, mutual knowledge and indulgence, respect, esteem. Come, sir, let me hope yet—let me hope that, on the same day, I may congratulate you on your preferment and you may congratulate me upon my marriage.”

Vargrave said this with a cheerful and easy smile ; and the tone of his voice was that of a man who wished to convey serious meaning in a jesting accent.

Mr Aubrey, meek as he was, felt the insult of the hinted bribe, and coloured with a resentment no sooner excited than checked. “Excuse me, my lord, I have

now said all—the rest had better be left to your ward herself.”

“Be it so, sir. I will ask you, then, to convey my request to Evelyn to honour me with a last and parting interview.”

Vargrave flung himself on his chair, and Aubrey left him.

CHAPTER IX.

Thus airy Strephon tuned his lyre.—SHENSTONE.

IN his meeting with Evelyn, Vargrave certainly exerted to the utmost all his ability and all his art. He felt that violence, that sarcasm, that selfish complaint would not avail, in a man who was not loved,—though they are often admirable cards in the hands of a man who is. As his own heart was perfectly untouched in the matter, except by rage and disappointment—feelings which with him never lasted very long—he could play coolly his losing game. His keen and ready intellect taught him that all he could now expect was to bequeath sentiments of generous compassion, and friendly interest—to create a favourable impression, which he might hereafter improve—to reserve, in short, some spot of vantage-ground in the country, from which he was to affect to withdraw all his forces. He had known, in his experience of women, which, whether as an actor or a spectator, was large and various—though not among very delicate and refined natures—that a lady often takes a fancy to a suitor *after* she has rejected him; that, precisely *because* she has once rejected, she ultimately accepts him. And even this chance was, in

circumstances so desperate, not to be neglected. He assumed, therefore, the countenance, the postures, and the voice of heartbroken but submissive despair ; he affected a nobleness and magnanimity in his grief, which touched Evelyn to the quick, and took her by surprise.

“It is enough,” said he, in sad and faltering accents ; “quite enough to me to know that you cannot love me,—that I should fail in rendering you happy : say no more, Evelyn, say no more ! Let me spare you, at least, the pain your generous nature must feel in my anguish—I resign all pretensions to your hand : you are free !—may you be happy !”

“Oh, Lord Vargrave ! oh, Lumley !” said Evelyn, weeping, and moved by a thousand recollections of early years. “If I could but prove in any other way my grateful sense of your merits—your too partial appreciation of me—my regard for my lost benefactor—then, indeed, nor till then, could I be happy. Oh ! that this wealth, so little desired by me, had been more at my disposal ; but, as it is, the day that sees me in possession of it, shall see it placed under your disposition, your control. This is but justice—common justice to you ; you were the nearest relation of the departed. I had no claim on him—none, but affection. Affection ! and yet I disobey him !”

There was much in all this that secretly pleased Vargrave ; but it only seemed to redouble his grief.

“Talk not thus, my ward, my friend—ah ! still my friend,” said he, putting his handkerchief to his eyes. “I repine not ;—I am more than satisfied. Still let

me preserve my privilege of guardian, of adviser—a privilege dearer to me than all the wealth of the Indies!”

Lord Vargrave had some faint suspicion that Legard had created an undue interest in Evelyn’s heart ; and on this point he delicately and indirectly sought to sound her. Her replies convinced him that if Evelyn had conceived any prepossession for Legard, there had not been time or opportunity to ripen it into deep attachment. Of Maltravers he had no fear. The habitual self-control of that reserved personage deceived him partly ; and his low opinion of mankind deceived him still more. For, if there had been any love between Maltravers and Evelyn, why should the former not have stood his ground, and declared his suit ? Lumley would have “*bah’d*” and “*pish’d*” at the thought of any punctilious regard for engagements so easily broken having power either to check passion for beauty, or to restrain self-interest in the chase of an heiress. He had known Maltravers ambitious ; and with him, ambition and self-interest meant the same. Thus, by the very *finesse* of his character, while Vargrave ever, with the worldly, was a keen and almost infallible observer, with natures of a more refined or a higher order, he always missed the mark by overshooting. Besides, had a suspicion of Maltravers ever crossed him, Caroline’s communications would have dispelled it. It was more strange that Caroline should have been blind ; nor would she have been so, had she been less absorbed in her own schemes and destinies. All her usual penetration had of late settled in self ; and an

uneasy feeling—half arising from conscientious reluctance to aid Vargrave's objects—half from jealous irritation at the thought of Vargrave's marrying another—had prevented her from seeking any very intimate or confidential communication with Evelyn herself.

The dreaded conference was over ; Evelyn parted from Vargrave with the very feelings he had calculated on exciting ;—the moment he ceased to be her lover, her old childish regard for him recommenced. She pitied his dejection—she respected his generosity—she was deeply grateful for his forbearance. But still—still she was free ; and her heart bounded within her at the thought.

Meanwhile, Vargrave, after his solemn farewell to Evelyn, retreated again to his own room, where he remained till his post-horses arrived. Then, descending into the drawing-room, he was pleased to find neither Aubrey nor Evelyn there. He knew that much affectation would be thrown away upon Mr and Mrs Merton ; he thanked them for their hospitality, with grave and brief cordiality, and then turned to Caroline, who stood apart by the window.

“All is up with me at present,” he whispered. “I leave you, Caroline, in anticipation of fortune, rank, and prosperity ; that is some comfort. For myself, I see only difficulties, embarrassment, and poverty in the future ; but I despond of nothing—hereafter you may serve me, as I have served you. Adieu !——I have been advising Caroline not to spoil Doltimore, Mrs Merton ; he is conceited enough already. Good-bye !

God bless you all!—love to your little girls. Let me know if I can serve you in any way, Merton—good-bye again!” And thus, sentence by sentence, Vargrave talked himself into his carriage. As it drove by the drawing-room windows, he saw Caroline standing motionless where he had left her : he kissed his hand—her eyes were fixed mournfully on his. Hard, wayward, and worldly, as Caroline Merton was, Vargrave was yet not worthy of the affection he had inspired ; for she could *feel*, and he could not ;—the distinction, perhaps, between the sexes. And there still stood Caroline Merton, recalling the last tones of that indifferent voice, till she felt her hand seized, and turned round to see Lord Doltimore, and smile upon the happy lover, persuaded that he was adored !



END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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