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EUGENE ARAM — VOLUME 01

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Eugene Aram — Volume 01

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Eugene Aram — Volume 01:

Содержание

Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton
Eugene Aram — Volume 01

TO SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART., ETC

SIR,—It has long been my ambition to add some humble tribute to the offerings laid upon the shrine of your genius. At each succeeding book that I have given to the world, I have paused to consider if it were worthy to be inscribed with your great name, and at each I have played the procrastinator, and hoped for that morrow of better desert which never came. But 'defluat amnis',—the time runs on; and I am tired of waiting for the ford which the tides refuse. I seize, then, the present opportunity, not as the best, but as the only one I can he sure of commanding, to express that affectionate admiration with which you have inspired me in common with all your contemporaries, and which a French writer has not ungracefully termed "the happiest prerogative of genius." As a Poet and as a Novelist your fame has attained to that height in which praise has become superfluous; but in the character of the writer there seems to me a yet higher claim to veneration than in that of the writings. The example your genius sets us, who can emulate? The example

your moderation bequeaths to us, who shall forget? That nature must indeed be gentle which has conciliated the envy that pursues intellectual greatness, and left without an enemy a man who has no living equal in renown.

You have gone for a while from the scenes you have immortalized, to regain, we trust, the health which has been impaired by your noble labors or by the manly struggles with adverse fortunes which have not found the frame as indomitable as the mind. Take with you the prayers of all whom your genius, with playful art, has soothed in sickness, or has strengthened, with generous precepts, against the calamities of life.

[Written at the time of Sir W. Scott's visit to Italy, after the great blow to his health and fortunes.]

"Navis quae, tibi creditum
Debes Virgilium . . .
Reddas incolumem!"

"O ship, thou owest to us Virgil! Restore in safety him whom we intrusted to thee."

You, I feel assured, will not deem it presumptuous in one who, to that bright and undying flame which now streams from the gray hills of Scotland,—the last halo with which you have crowned her literary glories,—has turned from his first childhood with a deep and unrelaxing devotion; you, I feel assured, will not deem it presumptuous in him to inscribe an

idle work with your illustrious name,—a work which, however worthless in itself, assumes something of value in his eyes when thus rendered a tribute of respect to you.

THE AUTHOR OF "EUGENE ARAM."

LONDON, December 22, 1831.

PREFACE
TO THE EDITION OF 1831

Since, dear Reader, I last addressed thee, in "Paul Clifford," nearly two years have elapsed, and somewhat more than four years since, in "Pelham," our familiarity first began. The Tale which I now submit to thee differs equally from the last as from the first of those works; for of the two evils, perhaps it is even better to disappoint thee in a new style than to weary thee with an old. With the facts on which the tale of "Eugene Aram" is founded, I have exercised the common and fair license of writers of fiction it is chiefly the more homely parts of the real story that have been altered; and for what I have added, and what omitted, I have the sanction of all established authorities, who have taken greater liberties with characters yet more recent, and far more protected by historical recollections. The book was, for the most part, written in the early part of the year, when the interest which the task created in the Author was undivided by other subjects of excitement, and he had leisure enough not only to be 'nescio quid meditans nugarum,' but also to be 'totes in illis.'

["Not only to be meditating I know not what of trifles, but also to be wholly engaged on them."]

I originally intended to adapt the story of Eugene Aram to the Stage. That design was abandoned when more than half

completed; but I wished to impart to this Romance something of the nature of Tragedy,—something of the more transferable of its qualities. Enough of this: it is not the Author's wishes, but the Author's books that the world will judge him by. Perhaps, then (with this I conclude), in the dull monotony of public affairs, and in these long winter evenings, when we gather round the fire, prepared for the gossip's tale, willing to indulge the fear and to believe the legend, perhaps, dear Reader, thou mayest turn, not reluctantly, even to these pages, for at least a newer excitement than the Cholera, or for momentary relief from the everlasting discussion on "the Bill." [The year of the Reform Bill.]

LONDON, December 22, 1831.

PREFACE
TO THE EDITION OF 1840

The strange history of Eugene Aram had excited my interest and wonder long before the present work was composed or conceived. It so happened that during Aram's residence at Lynn his reputation for learning had attracted the notice of my grandfather,—a country gentleman living in the same county, and of more intelligence and accomplishments than, at that day, usually characterized his class. Aram frequently visited at Heydon (my grandfather's house), and gave lessons—probably in no very elevated branches of erudition—to the younger members of the family. This I chanced to hear when I was on a visit in Norfolk some two years before this novel was published; and it tended to increase the interest with which I had previously speculated on the phenomena of a trial which, take it altogether, is perhaps the most remarkable in the register of English crime. I endeavored to collect such anecdotes of Aram's life and manners as tradition and hearsay still kept afloat. These anecdotes were so far uniform that they all concurred in representing him as a person who, till the detection of the crime for which he was sentenced, had appeared of the mildest character and the most unexceptionable morals. An invariable gentleness and patience in his mode of tuition—qualities then very uncommon at school

—had made him so beloved by his pupils at Lynn that, in after life, there was scarcely one of them who did not persist in the belief of his innocence.

His personal and moral peculiarities, as described in these pages, are such as were related to me by persons who had heard him described by his contemporaries, the calm, benign countenance; the delicate health; the thoughtful stoop; the noiseless step; the custom, not uncommon with scholars and absent men, of muttering to himself; a singular eloquence in conversation, when once roused from silence; an active tenderness and charity to the poor, with whom he was always ready to share his own scanty means; an apparent disregard for money, except when employed in the purchase of books; an utter indifference to the ambition usually accompanying self-taught talent, whether to better the condition or to increase the repute: these, and other traits of the character portrayed in the novel, are, as far as I can rely on my information, faithful to the features of the original.

That a man thus described—so benevolent that he would rob his own necessities to administer to those of another, so humane that he would turn aside from the worm in his path—should have been guilty of the foulest of human crimes, namely, murder for the sake of gain; that a crime thus committed should have been so episodical and apart from the rest of his career that, however it might rankle in his conscience, it should never have hardened his nature; that through a life of some duration, none of the errors,

none of the vices, which would seem essentially to belong to a character capable of a deed so black, from motives apparently so sordid, should have been discovered or suspected,— all this presents all anomaly in human conduct so rare and surprising that it would be difficult to find any subject more adapted for that metaphysical speculation and analysis, in order to indulge which, Fiction, whether in the drama or the higher class of romance, seeks its materials and grounds its lessons in the chronicles of passion and crime.

> [For I put wholly out of question the excuse of jealousy, as unsupported by any evidence, never hinted at by Aram himself (at least on any sufficient authority), and at variance with the only fact which the trial establishes; namely, that the robbery was the crime planned, and the cause, whether accidental or otherwise, of the murder.]

The guilt of Eugene Aram is not that of a vulgar ruffian; it leads to views and considerations vitally and wholly distinct from those with which profligate knavery and brutal cruelty revolt and displease us in the literature of Newgate and the hulks. His crime does, in fact, belong to those startling paradoxes which the poetry of all countries, and especially of our own, has always delighted to contemplate and examine. Whenever crime appears the aberration and monstrous product of a great intellect or of a nature ordinarily virtuous, it becomes not only the subject for genius, which deals with passions, to describe, but a problem for philosophy, which deals with actions, to investigate and

solve; hence the Macbeths and Richards, the Iagos and Othellos. My regret, therefore, is not that I chose a subject unworthy of elevated fiction, but that such a subject did not occur to some one capable of treating it as it deserves; and I never felt this more strongly than when the late Mr. Godwin (in conversing with me after the publication of this romance) observed that he had always thought the story of Eugene Aram peculiarly adapted for fiction, and that he had more than once entertained the notion of making it the foundation of a novel. I can well conceive what depth and power that gloomy record would have taken from the dark and inquiring genius of the author of "Caleb Williams." In fact, the crime and trial of Eugene Aram arrested the attention and engaged the conjectures of many of the most eminent men of his own time. His guilt or innocence was the matter of strong contest; and so keen and so enduring was the sensation created by an event thus completely distinct from the ordinary annals of human crime that even History turned aside from the sonorous narrative of the struggles of parties and the feuds of kings to commemorate the learning and the guilt of the humble schoolmaster of Lynn. Did I want any other answer to the animadversions of commonplace criticism, it might be sufficient to say that what the historian relates the novelist has little right to disdain.

Before entering on this romance, I examined with some care the probabilities of Aram's guilt; for I need scarcely perhaps observe that the legal evidence against him is extremely deficient,

—furnished almost entirely by one (Houseman) confessedly an accomplice of the crime and a partner in the booty, and that in the present day a man tried upon evidence so scanty and suspicious would unquestionably escape conviction. Nevertheless, I must frankly own that the moral evidence appeared to me more convincing than the legal; and though not without some doubt, which, in common with many, I still entertain of the real facts of the murder, I adopted that view which, at all events, was the best suited to the higher purposes of fiction. On the whole, I still think that if the crime were committed by Aram, the motive was not very far removed from one which led recently to a remarkable murder in Spain. A priest in that country, wholly absorbed in learned pursuits, and apparently of spotless life, confessed that, being debarred by extreme poverty from prosecuting a study which had become the sole passion of his existence, he had reasoned himself into the belief that it would be admissible to rob a very dissolute, worthless man if he applied the money so obtained to the acquisition of a knowledge which he could not otherwise acquire, and which he held to be profitable to mankind. Unfortunately, the dissolute rich man was not willing to be robbed for so excellent a purpose; he was armed and he resisted. A struggle ensued, and the crime of homicide was added to that of robbery. The robbery was premeditated; the murder was accidental. But he who would accept some similar interpretation of Aram's crime must, to comprehend fully the lessons which belong to so terrible a picture

of frenzy and guilt, consider also the physical circumstances and condition of the criminal at the time,—severe illness, intense labor of the brain, poverty bordering upon famine, the mind preternaturally at work devising schemes and excuses to arrive at the means for ends ardently desired. And all this duly considered, the reader may see the crime bodying itself out from the shades and chimeras of a horrible hallucination,—the awful dream of a brief but delirious and convulsed disease. It is thus only that we can account for the contradiction of one deed at war with a whole life,—blasting, indeed, forever the happiness, but making little revolution in the pursuits and disposition of the character. No one who has examined with care and thoughtfulness the aspects of Life and Nature but must allow that in the contemplation of such a spectacle, great and most moral truths must force themselves on the notice and sink deep into the heart. The entanglements of human reasoning; the influence of circumstance upon deeds; the perversion that may be made, by one self-palter with the Fiend, of elements the most glorious; the secret effect of conscience in frustrating all for which the crime was done, leaving genius without hope, knowledge without fruit, deadening benevolence into mechanism, tainting love itself with terror and suspicion,—such reflections (leading, with subtler minds, to many more vast and complicated theorems in the consideration of our nature, social and individual) arise out of the tragic moral which the story of Eugene Aram (were it but adequately treated) could not fail to convey.

BRUSSELS, August, 1840.

PREFACE
TO THE PRESENT EDITION

If none of my prose works have been so attacked as "Eugene Aram," none have so completely triumphed over attack. It is true that, whether from real or affected inorance of the true morality of fiction, a few critics may still reiterate the old commonplace charges of "selecting heroes from Newgate," or "investing murderers with interest;" but the firm hold which the work has established in the opinion of the general public, and the favor it has received in every country where English literature is known, suffice to prove that, whatever its faults, it belongs to that legitimate class of fiction which illustrates life and truth, and only deals with crime as the recognized agency of pity and terror in the conduct of tragic narrative. All that I would say further on this score has been said in the general defence of my writings which I put forth two years ago; and I ask the indulgence of the reader if I repeat myself:—

"Here, unlike the milder guilt of Paul Clifford, the author was not to imply reform to society, nor open in this world atonement and pardon to the criminal. As it would have been wholly in vain to disguise, by mean tamperings with art and truth, the ordinary habits of life and attributes of character which all record and remembrance ascribed to Eugene Aram;

as it would have defeated every end of the moral inculcated by his guilt, to portray, in the caricature of the murderer of melodrama, a man immersed in study, of whom it was noted that he turned aside from the worm in his path,—so I have allowed to him whatever contrasts with his inexpiable crime have been recorded on sufficient authority. But I have invariably taken care that the crime itself should stand stripped of every sophistry, and hideous to the perpetrator as well as to the world. Allowing all by which attention to his biography may explain the tremendous paradox of fearful guilt in a man aspiring after knowledge, and not generally inhumane; allowing that the crime came upon him in the partial insanity produced by the combining circumstances of a brain overwrought by intense study, disturbed by an excited imagination and the fumes of a momentary disease of the reasoning faculty, consumed by the desire of knowledge, unwholesome and morbid, because coveted as an end, not a means, added to the other physical causes of mental aberration to be found in loneliness, and want verging upon famine,—all these, which a biographer may suppose to have conspired to his crime, have never been used by the novelist as excuses for its enormity, nor indeed, lest they should seem as excuses, have they ever been clearly presented to the view. The moral consisted in showing more than the mere legal punishment at the close. It was to show how the consciousness of the deed was to exclude whatever humanity of character preceded and belied it from all active exercise, all social confidence; how the knowledge of

the bar between the minds of others and his own deprived the criminal of all motive to ambition, and blighted knowledge of all fruit. Miserable in his affections, barren in his intellect; clinging to solitude, yet accursed in it; dreading as a danger the fame he had once coveted; obscure in spite of learning, hopeless in spite of love, fruitless and joyless in his life, calamitous and shameful in his end,—surely such is no palliative of crime, no dalliance and toying with the grimness of evil! And surely to any ordinary comprehension and candid mind such is the moral conveyed by the fiction of 'Eugene Aram.'"—[A word to the Public, 1847]

In point of composition "Eugene Aram" is, I think, entitled to rank amongst the best of my fictions. It somewhat humiliates me to acknowledge that neither practice nor study has enabled me to surpass a work written at a very early age, in the skilful construction and patient development of plot; and though I have since sought to call forth higher and more subtle passions, I doubt if I have ever excited the two elementary passions of tragedy, —namely, pity and terror,—to the same degree. In mere style, too, "Eugene Aram," in spite of certain verbal oversights, and defects in youthful taste (some of which I have endeavored to remove from the present edition), appears to me unexcelled by any of my later writings,—at least in what I have always studied as the main essential of style in narrative; namely, its harmony with the subject selected and the passions to be moved,—while it exceeds them all in the minuteness and fidelity of its descriptions of external nature. This indeed it ought to do, since the study

of external nature is made a peculiar attribute of the prin cipal character, whose fate colors the narrative. I do not know whether it has been observed that the time occupied by the events of the story is conveyed through the medium of such descriptions. Each description is introduced, not for its own sake, but to serve as a calendar marking the gradual changes of the seasons as they bear on to his doom the guilty worshipper of Nature. And in this conception, and in the care with which it has been followed out, I recognize one of my earliest but most successful attempts at the subtler principles of narrative art.

In this edition I have made one alteration somewhat more important than mere verbal correction. On going, with maturer judgment, over all the evidences on which Aram was condemned, I have convinced myself that though an accomplice in the robbery of Clarke, he was free both from the premeditated design and the actual deed of murder. The crime, indeed, would still rest on his conscience and insure his punishment, as necessarily incidental to the robbery in which he was an accomplice, with Houseman; but finding my convictions, that in the murder itself he had no share, borne out by the opinion of many eminent lawyers by whom I have heard the subject discussed, I have accordingly so shaped his confession to Walter.

Perhaps it will not be without interest to the reader if I append to this preface an authentic specimen of Eugene Aram's composition, for which I am indebted to the courtesy of a gentleman by whose grandfather it was received, with other

papers (especially a remarkable "Outline of a New Lexicon"), during Aram's confinement in York prison. The essay I select is, indeed, not without value in itself as a very curious and learned illustration of Popular Antiquities, and it serves also to show not only the comprehensive nature of Aram's studies and the inquisitive eagerness of his mind, but also the fact that he was completely self-taught; for in contrast to much philological erudition, and to passages that evince considerable mastery in the higher resources of language, we may occasionally notice those lesser inaccuracies from which the writings of men solely self-educated are rarely free,—indeed Aram himself, in sending to a gentleman an elegy on Sir John Armitage, which shows much, but undisciplined, power of versification, says, "I send this elegy, which, indeed, if you had not had the curiosity to desire, I could not have had the assurance to offer, scarce believing I, who was hardly taught to read, have any abilities to write."

THE MELSUPPER AND SHOUTING THE CHURN

These rural entertainments and usages were formerly more general all over England than they are at present, being become by time, necessity, or avarice, complex, confined, and altered. They are commonly insisted upon by the reapers as customary things, and a part of their due for the toils of the harvest, and complied with by their masters perhaps more through regards of interest than inclination; for should they refuse them the pleasures of this much-expected time, this festal night, the youth especially, of both sexes would decline serving them for the future, and employ their labors for others, who would promise them the rustic joys of the harvest-supper, mirth and music, dance and song. These feasts appear to be the relics of Pagan ceremonies or of Judaism, it is hard to say which, and carry in them more meaning and are of far higher antiquity than is generally apprehended. It is true the subject is more curious than important, and I believe altogether untouched; and as it seems to be little understood, has been as little adverted to. I do not remember it to have been so much as the subject of a conversation. Let us make, then, a little excursion into this field, for the same reason men sometimes take a walk. Its traces are discoverable at a very great distance of time from ours,—nay,

seem as old as a sense of joy for the benefit of plentiful harvests and human gratitude to the eternal Creator for His munificence to men. We hear it under various names in different counties, and often in the same county; as, "melsupper," "churn-supper," "harvest-supper," "harvesthome," "feast of in-gathering," etc. And perhaps this feast had been long observed, and by different tribes of people, before it became preceptive with the Jews. However, let that be as it will, the custom very lucidly appears from the following passages of S. S., Exod. xxiii. 16, "And the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labors, which thou hast sown in the field." And its institution as a sacred rite is commanded in Levit. xxiii. 39: "When ye have gathered in the fruit of the land ye shall keep a feast to the Lord."

The Jews then, as is evident from hence, celebrated the feast of harvest, and that by precept; and though no vestiges of any such feast either are or can be produced before these, yet the oblation of the Primitae, of which this feast was a consequence, is met with prior to this, for we find that "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord" (Gen. iv. 3).

Yet this offering of the first-fruits, it may well be supposed was not peculiar to the Jews either at the time of, or after, its establishment by their legislator; neither the feast in consequence of it. Many other nations, either in imitation of the Jews, or rather by tradition from their several patriarchs, observed the rite of offering their Primitiae, and of solemnizing a festival after it, in religious acknowledgment for the blessing of harvest, though that

acknowledgment was ignorantly misapplied in being directed to a secondary, not the primary, fountain of this benefit,—namely to Apollo, or the Sun.

For Callimachus affirms that these Primitiae were sent by the people of every nation to the temple of Apollo in Delos, the most distant that enjoyed the happiness of corn and harvest, even by the Hyperboreans in particular,—Hymn to Apol., "Bring the sacred sheafs and the mystic offerings."

Herodotus also mentions this annual custom of the Hyperboreans, remarking that those of Delos talk of "Holy things tied up in sheaf of wheat conveyed from the Hyperboreans." And the Jews, by the command of their law, offered also a sheaf: "And shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of the harvest unto the priest."

This is not introduced in proof of any feast observed by the people who had harvests, but to show the universality of the custom of offering the Primitiae, which preceded this feast. But yet it maybe looked upon as equivalent to a proof; for as the offering and the feast appear to have been always and intimately connected in countries affording records, so it is more than probable they were connected too in countries which had none, or none that ever survived to our times. An entertainment and gayety were still the concomitants of these rites, which with the vulgar, one may pretty truly suppose, were esteemed the most acceptable and material part of them, and a great reason

of their having subsisted through such a length of ages, when both the populace and many of the learned too have lost sight of the object to which they had been originally directed. This, among many other ceremonies of the heathen worship, became disused in some places and retained in others, but still continued declining after the promulgation of the Gospel. In short, there seems great reason to conclude that this feast, which was once sacred to Apollo, was constantly maintained, when a far less valuable circumstance,—i.e., "shouting the churn,"—is observed to this day by the reapers, and from so old an era; for we read of this exclamation, Isa. xvi. 9: "For the shouting for thy summer fruits and for thy harvest is fallen;" and again, ver. 10: "And in the vineyards there shall be no singing, their shouting shall be no shouting." Hence then, or from some of the Phoenician colonies, is our traditionary "shouting the churn." But it seems these Orientals shouted both for joy of their harvest of grapes and of corn. We have no quantity of the first to occasion so much joy as does our plenty of the last; and I do not remember to have heard whether their vintages abroad are attended with this custom. Bread or cakes compose part of the Hebrew offering (Levit. xxiii. 13), and a cake thrown upon the head of the victim was also part of the Greek offering to Apollo (see Hom., Il., a), whose worship was formerly celebrated in Britain, where the May-pole yet continues one remain of it. This they adorned with garlands on May-day, to welcome the approach of Apollo, or the Sun, towards the North, and to signify that those flowers were

the product of his presence and influence. But upon the progress of Christianity, as was observed above, Apollo lost his divinity again, and the adoration of his deity subsided by degrees. Yet so permanent is custom that this rite of the harvest-supper, together with that of the May-pole (of which last see Voss. de Orig. and Prag. Idolatr., 1, 2), have been preserved in Britain; and what had been anciently offered to the god, the reapers as prudently ate up themselves.

At last the use of the meal of the new corn was neglected, and the supper, so far as meal was concerned, was made indifferently of old or new corn, as was most agreeable to the founder. And here the usage itself accounts for the name of "Melsupper" (where mel signifies meal, or else the instrument called with us a "Mell," wherewith antiquity reduced their corn to meal in a mortar, which still amounts to the same thing); for provisions of meal, or of corn in furmety, etc., composed by far the greatest part in these elder and country entertainments, perfectly conformable to the simplicity of those times, places, and persons, however meanly they may now be looked upon. And as the harvest was last concluded with several preparations of meal, or brought to be ready for the "mell," this term became, in a translated signification, to mean the last of other things; as, when a horse comes last in the race, they often say in the North, "He has got the mell."

All the other names of this country festivity sufficiently explain themselves, except "Churn-supper;" and this is entirely

different from "Melsupper:" but they generally happen so near together that they are frequently confounded. The "Churn-supper" was always provided when all was shorn, but the "Melsupper" after all was got in. And it was called the "Churn-supper" because, from immemorial times, it was customary to produce in a churn a great quantity of cream, and to circulate it by dishfuls to each of the rustic company, to be eaten with bread. And here sometimes very extraordinary execution has been done upon cream. And though this custom has been disused in many places, and agreeably commuted for by ale, yet it survives still, and that about Whitby and Scarborough in the East, and round about Gisburn, etc., in Craven, in the West. But perhaps a century or two more will put an end to it, and both the thing and name shall die. Vicarious ale is now more approved, and the tankard almost everywhere politely preferred to the Churn.

This Churn (in our provincial pronunciation Kern) is the Hebrew Kern, or Keren, from its being circular, like most horns; and it is the Latin 'corona',—named so either from 'radii', resembling horns, as on some very ancient coins, or from its encircling the head: so a ring of people is called corona. Also the Celtic Koren, Keren, or corn, which continues according to its old pronunciation in Cornwall, etc., and our modern word horn is no more than this; the ancient hard sound of k in corn being softened into the aspirate h, as has been done in numberless instances.

The Irish Celtae also called a round stone 'clogh crene', where

the variation is merely dialectic. Hence, too, our crane-berries, —i.e., round berries,—from this Celtic adjective 'crene', round.

The quotations from Scripture in Aram's original MS. were both in the Hebrew character, and their value in English sounds.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I.
THE VILLAGE.—ITS INHABITANTS. —AN OLD MANORHOUSE: AND AN ENGLISH FAMILY; THEIR HISTORY, INVOLVING A MYSTERIOUS EVENT

> *"Protected by the divinity they adored, supported by the earth which they cultivated, and at peace with themselves, they enjoyed the sweets of life, without dreading or desiring dissolution." Numa Pompilius.*

In the country of—there is a sequestered hamlet, which I have often sought occasion to pass, and which I have never left without a certain reluctance and regret. It is not only (though this has a remarkable spell over my imagination) that it is the sanctuary, as it were, of a story which appears to me of a singular and fearful interest; but the scene itself is one which requires no legend to arrest the traveller's attention. I know not in any part of the world, which it has been my lot to visit, a landscape so entirely lovely and picturesque, as that which on every side of the village I speak of, you may survey. The hamlet to which I shall here give the

name of Grassdale, is situated in a valley, which for about the length of a mile winds among gardens and orchards, laden with fruit, between two chains of gentle and fertile hills.

Here, singly or in pairs, are scattered cottages, which bespeak a comfort and a rural luxury, less often than our poets have described the characteristics of the English peasantry. It has been observed, and there is a world of homely, ay, and of legislative knowledge in the observation, that wherever you see a flower in a cottage garden, or a bird-cage at the window, you may feel sure that the cottagers are better and wiser than their neighbours; and such humble tokens of attention to something beyond the sterile labour of life, were (we must now revert to the past,) to be remarked in almost every one of the lowly abodes at Grassdale. The jasmine here, there the vine clustered over the threshold, not so wildly as to testify negligence; but rather to sweeten the air than to exclude it from the inmates. Each of the cottages possessed at its rear its plot of ground, apportioned to the more useful and nutritious product of nature; while the greater part of them fenced also from the unfrequented road a little spot for the lupin, the sweet pea, or the many tribes of the English rose. And it is not unworthy of remark, that the bees came in greater clusters to Grassdale than to any other part of that rich and cultivated district. A small piece of waste land, which was intersected by a brook, fringed with ozier and dwarf and fantastic pollards, afforded pasture for a few cows, and the only carrier's solitary horse. The stream itself was of no ignoble repute among the

gentle craft of the Angle, the brotherhood whom our associations defend in the spite of our mercy; and this repute drew welcome and periodical itinerants to the village, who furnished it with its scanty news of the great world without, and maintained in a decorous custom the little and single hostelry of the place. Not that Peter Dealtry, the proprietor of the "Spotted Dog," was altogether contented to subsist upon the gains of his hospitable profession; he joined thereto the light cares of a small farm, held under a wealthy and an easy landlord; and being moreover honoured with the dignity of clerk to the parish, he was deemed by his neighbours a person of no small accomplishment, and no insignificant distinction. He was a little, dry, thin man, of a turn rather sentimental than jocose; a memory well stored with fag-ends of psalms, and hymns which, being less familiar than the psalms to the ears of the villagers, were more than suspected to be his own composition; often gave a poetic and semi-religious colouring to his conversation, which accorded rather with his dignity in the church, than his post at the Spotted Dog. Yet he disliked not his joke, though it was subtle and delicate of nature; nor did he disdain to bear companionship over his own liquor, with guests less gifted and refined.

In the centre of the village you chanced upon a cottage which had been lately white-washed, where a certain preciseness in the owner might be detected in the clipped hedge, and the exact and newly mended style by which you approached the habitation; herein dwelt the beau and bachelor of the village, somewhat

antiquated it is true, but still an object of great attention and some hope to the elder damsels in the vicinity, and of a respectful popularity, that did not however prohibit a joke, to the younger part of the sisterhood. Jacob Bunting, so was this gentleman called, had been for many years in the king's service, in which he had risen to the rank of corporal, and had saved and pinched together a certain small independence upon which he now rented his cottage and enjoyed his leisure. He had seen a good deal of the world, and profited in shrewdness by his experience; he had rubbed off, however, all superfluous devotion as he rubbed off his prejudices, and though he drank more often than any one else with the landlord of the Spotted Dog, he also quarrelled with him the oftenest, and testified the least forbearance at the publican's segments of psalmody. Jacob was a tall, comely, and perpendicular personage; his threadbare coat was scrupulously brushed, and his hair punctiliously plastered at the sides into two stiff obstinate-looking curls, and at the top into what he was pleased to call a feather, though it was much more like a tile. His conversation had in it something peculiar; generally it assumed a quick, short, abrupt turn, that, retrenching all superfluities of pronoun and conjunction, and marching at once upon the meaning of the sentence, had in it a military and Spartan significance, which betrayed how difficult it often is for a man to forget that he has been a corporal. Occasionally indeed, for where but in farces is the phraseology of the humorist always the same? he escaped into a more enlarged and christianlike

method of dealing with the king's English, but that was chiefly noticeable, when from conversation he launched himself into lecture, a luxury the worthy soldier loved greatly to indulge, for much had he seen and somewhat had he reflected; and valuing himself, which was odd in a corporal, more on his knowledge of the world than his knowledge even of war, he rarely missed any occasion of edifying a patient listener with the result of his observations.

After you had sauntered by the veteran's door, beside which you generally, if the evening were fine, or he was not drinking with neighbour Dealtry—or taking his tea with gossip this or master that—or teaching some emulous urchins the broadsword exercise—or snaring trout in the stream—or, in short, otherwise engaged; beside which, I say, you not unfrequently beheld him sitting on a rude bench, and enjoying with half-shut eyes, crossed legs, but still unindulgently erect posture, the luxury of his pipe; you ventured over a little wooden bridge; beneath which, clear and shallow, ran the rivulet we have before honorably mentioned; and a walk of a few minutes brought you to a moderately sized and old-fashioned mansion—the manor-house of the parish. It stood at the very foot of the hill; behind, a rich, ancient, and hanging wood, brought into relief—the exceeding freshness and verdure of the patch of green meadow immediately in front. On one side, the garden was bounded by the village churchyard, with its simple mounds, and its few scattered and humble tombs. The church was of great antiquity; and it was only in one point of

view that you caught more than a glimpse of its grey tower and graceful spire, so thickly and so darkly grouped the yew tree and the larch around the edifice. Opposite the gate by which you gained the house, the view was not extended, but rich with wood and pasture, backed by a hill, which; less verdant than its fellows, was covered with sheep: while you saw hard by the rivulet darkening and stealing away; till your sight, though not your ear, lost it among the woodland.

Trained up the embrowned paling on either side of the gate, were bushes of rustic fruit, and fruit and flowers (through plots of which green and winding alleys had been cut with no untasteful hand) testified by their thriving and healthful looks, the care bestowed upon them. The main boasts of the garden were, on one side, a huge horse-chesnut tree—the largest in the village; and on the other, an arbour covered without with honeysuckles, and tapestried within by moss. The house, a grey and quaint building of the time of James I. with stone copings and gable roof, could scarcely in these days have been deemed a fitting residence for the lord of the manor. Nearly the whole of the centre was occupied by the hall, in which the meals of the family were commonly held—only two other sitting-rooms of very moderate dimensions had been reserved by the architect for the convenience or ostentation of the proprietor. An ample porch jutted from the main building, and this was covered with ivy, as the windows were with jasmine and honeysuckle; while seats were ranged inside the porch covered with many a rude initial

and long-past date.

The owner of this mansion bore the name of Rowland Lester. His forefathers, without pretending to high antiquity of family, had held the dignity of squires of Grassdale for some two centuries; and Rowland Lester was perhaps the first of the race who had stirred above fifty miles from the house in which each successive lord had received his birth, or the green churchyard in which was yet chronicled his death. The present proprietor was a man of cultivated tastes; and abilities, naturally not much above mediocrity, had been improved by travel as well as study. Himself and one younger brother had been early left masters of their fate and their several portions. The younger, Geoffrey, testified a roving and dissipated turn. Bold, licentious, extravagant, unprincipled, —his career soon outstripped the slender fortunes of a cadet in the family of a country squire. He was early thrown into difficulties, but, by some means or other they never seemed to overwhelm him; an unexpected turn —a lucky adventure—presented itself at the very moment when Fortune appeared the most utterly to have deserted him.

Among these more propitious fluctuations in the tide of affairs, was, at about the age of forty, a sudden marriage with a young lady of what might be termed (for Geoffrey Lester's rank of life, and the rational expenses of that day) a very competent and respectable fortune. Unhappily, however, the lady was neither handsome in feature nor gentle in temper; and, after a few years of quarrel and contest, the faithless husband, one

bright morning, having collected in his proper person whatever remained of their fortune, absconded from the conjugal hearth without either warning or farewell. He left nothing to his wife but his house, his debts, and his only child, a son. From that time to the present little had been known, though much had been conjectured, concerning the deserter. For the first few years they traced, however, so far of his fate as to learn that he had been seen once in India; and that previously he had been met in England by a relation, under the disguise of assumed names: a proof that whatever his occupations, they could scarcely be very respectable. But, of late, nothing whatsoever relating to the wanderer had transpired. By some he was imagined dead; by most he was forgotten. Those more immediately connected with him—his brother in especial, cherished a secret belief, that wherever Geoffrey Lester should chance to alight, the manner of alighting would (to use the significant and homely metaphor) be always on his legs; and coupling the wonted luck of the scapegrace with the fact of his having been seen in India, Rowland, in his heart, not only hoped, but fully expected, that the lost one would, some day or other, return home laden with the spoils of the East, and eager to shower upon his relatives, in recompense of long desertion,

"With richest hand … barbaric pearl and gold."

But we must return to the forsaken spouse.—Left in this abrupt destitution and distress, Mrs. Lester had only the resource of applying to her brother-in-law, whom indeed the fugitive

had before seized many opportunities of not leaving wholly unprepared for such an application. Rowland promptly and generously obeyed the summons: he took the child and the wife to his own home,—he freed the latter from the persecution of all legal claimants,—and, after selling such effects as remained, he devoted the whole proceeds to the forsaken family, without regarding his own expenses on their behalf, ill as he was able to afford the luxury of that self-neglect. The wife did not long need the asylum of his hearth,— she, poor lady, died of a slow fever produced by irritation and disappointment, a few months after Geoffrey's desertion. She had no need to recommend her children to their kindhearted uncle's care. And now we must glance over the elder brother's domestic fortunes.

In Rowland, the wild dispositions of his brother were so far tamed, that they assumed only the character of a buoyant temper and a gay spirit. He had strong principles as well as warm feelings, and a fine and resolute sense of honour utterly impervious to attack. It was impossible to be in his company an hour and not see that he was a man to be respected. It was equally impossible to live with him a week and not see that he was a man to be beloved. He also had married, and about a year after that era in the life of his brother, but not for the same advantage of fortune. He had formed an attachment to the portionlesss daughter of a man in his own neighbourhood and of his own rank. He wooed and won her, and for a few years he enjoyed that greatest happiness which the world is capable of

bestowing—the society and the love of one in whom we could wish for no change, and beyond whom we have no desire. But what Evil cannot corrupt Fate seldom spares. A few months after the birth of a second daughter the young wife of Rowland Lester died. It was to a widowed hearth that the wife and child of his brother came for shelter. Rowland was a man of an affectionate and warm heart: if the blow did not crush, at least it changed him. Naturally of a cheerful and ardent disposition, his mood now became soberized and sedate. He shrunk from the rural gaieties and companionship he had before courted and enlivened, and, for the first time in his life, the mourner felt the holiness of solitude. As his nephew and his motherless daughters grew up, they gave an object to his seclusion and a relief to his reflections. He found a pure and unfailing delight in watching the growth of their young minds, and guiding their differing dispositions; and, as time at length enabled the to return his affection, and appreciate his cares, he became once more sensible that he had a HOME.

The elder of his daughters, Madeline, at the time our story opens, had attained the age of eighteen. She was the beauty and the boast of the whole country. Above the ordinary height, her figure was richly and exquisitely formed. So translucently pure and soft was her complexion, that it might have seemed the token of delicate health, but for the dewy and exceeding redness of her lips, and the freshness of teeth whiter than pearls. Her eyes of a deep blue, wore a thoughtful and serene

expression, and her forehead, higher and broader than it usually is in women, gave promise of a certain nobleness of intellect, and added dignity, but a feminine dignity, to the more tender characteristics of her beauty. And indeed, the peculiar tone of Madeline's mind fulfilled the indication of her features, and was eminently thoughtful and high-wrought. She had early testified a remarkable love for study, and not only a desire for knowledge, but a veneration for those who possessed it. The remote corner of the county in which they lived, and the rarely broken seclusion which Lester habitually preserved from the intercourse of their few and scattered neighbours, had naturally cast each member of the little circle upon his or her own resources. An accident, some five years ago, had confined Madeline for several weeks or rather months to the house; and as the old hall possessed a very respectable share of books, she had then matured and confirmed that love to reading and reflection, which she had at a yet earlier period prematurely evinced. The woman's tendency to romance naturally tinctured her meditations, and thus, while they dignified, they also softened her mind. Her sister Ellinor, younger by two years, was of a character equally gentle, but less elevated. She looked up to her sister as a superior being. She felt pride without a shadow of envy, at her superior and surpassing beauty; and was unconsciously guided in her pursuits and predilections, by a mind she cheerfully acknowledged to be loftier than her own. And yet Ellinor had also her pretensions to personal loveliness, and pretensions perhaps that would be less

reluctantly acknowledged by her own sex than those of her sister. The sunlight of a happy and innocent heart sparkled on her face, and gave a beam it gladdened you to behold, to her quick hazel eye, and a smile that broke out from a thousand dimples. She did not possess the height of Madeline, and though not so slender as to be curtailed of the roundness and feminine luxuriance of beauty, her shape was slighter, feebler, and less rich in its symmetry than her sister's. And this the tendency of the physical frame to require elsewhere support, nor to feel secure of strength, influenced perhaps her mind, and made love, and the dependence of love, more necessary to her than to the thoughtful and lofty Madeline. The latter might pass through life, and never see the one to whom her heart could give itself away. But every village might possess a hero whom the imagination of Ellinor could clothe with unreal graces, and to whom the lovingness of her disposition might bias her affections. Both, however, eminently possessed that earnestness and purity of heart, which would have made them, perhaps in an equal degree, constant and devoted to the object of an attachment, once formed, in defiance of change and to the brink of death.

Their cousin Walter, Geoffrey Lester's son, was now in his twenty-first year; tall and strong of person, and with a face, if not regularly handsome, striking enough to be generally deemed so. High-spirited, bold, fiery, impatient; jealous of the affections of those he loved; cheerful to outward seeming, but restless, fond of change, and subject to the melancholy and pining mood common

to young and ardent minds: such was the character of Walter Lester. The estates of Lester were settled in the male line, and devolved therefore upon him. Yet there were moments when he keenly felt his orphan and deserted situation; and sighed to think, that while his father perhaps yet lived, he was a dependent for affection, if not for maintenance, on the kindness of others. This reflection sometimes gave an air of sullenness or petulance to his character, that did not really belong to it. For what in the world makes a man of just pride appear so unamiable as the sense of dependence?

CHAPTER II.
A PUBLICAN, A SINNER, AND A STRANGER

"Ah, Don Alphonso, is it you? Agreeable accident! Chance presents you to my eyes where you were least expected." Gil Blas.

It was an evening in the beginning of summer, and Peter Dealtry and the ci-devant Corporal sate beneath the sign of The Spotted Dog (as it hung motionless from the bough of a friendly elm), quaffing a cup of boon companionship. The reader will imagine the two men very different from each other in form and aspect; the one short, dry, fragile, and betraying a love of ease in his unbuttoned vest, and a certain lolling, see-sawing method of balancing his body upon his chair; the other, erect and solemn, and as steady on his seat as if he were nailed to it. It was a fine, tranquil balmy evening; the sun had just set, and the clouds still retained the rosy tints which they had caught from his parting ray. Here and there, at scattered intervals, you might see the cottages peeping from the trees around them; or mark the smoke that rose from their roofs- -roofs green with mosses and house-leek,— in graceful and spiral curls against the clear soft air. It was an English scene, and the two men, the dog at their feet, (for Peter Dealtry favoured a wirey stone-coloured cur, which he called a

terrier,) and just at the door of the little inn, two old gossips, loitering on the threshold in familiar chat with the landlady, in cap and kerchief,—all together made a groupe equally English, and somewhat picturesque, though homely enough, in effect.

"Well, now," said Peter Dealtry, as he pushed the brown jug towards the

Corporal, "this is what I call pleasant; it puts me in mind—"

"Of what?" quoth the Corporal.

"Of those nice lines in the hymn, Master Bunting.

'How fair ye are, ye little hills,
Ye little fields also;
Ye murmuring streams that sweetly run;
Ye willows in a row!'

"There is something very comfortable in sacred verses, Master Bunting; but you're a scoffer."

"Psha, man!" said the Corporal, throwing out his right leg and leaning back, with his eyes half-shut, and his chin protruded, as he took an unusually long inhalation from his pipe; "Psha, man! —send verses to the right-about—fit for girls going to school of a Sunday; full-grown men more up to snuff. I've seen the world, Master Dealtry;—the world, and be damned to you!—augh!"

"Fie, neighbour, fie! What's the good of profaneness, evil speaking and slandering?—

'Oaths are the debts your spendthrift soul must pay;

All scores are chalked against the reckoning day.'
Just wait a bit, neighbour; wait till I light my pipe."

"Tell you what," said the Corporal, after he had communicated from his own pipe the friendly flame to his comrade's; "tell you what—talk nonsense; the commander-in-chief's no Martinet—if we're all right in action, he'll wink at a slip word or two. Come, no humbug—hold jaw. D'ye think God would sooner have snivelling fellow like you in his regiment, than a man like me, clean limbed, straight as a dart, six feet one without his shoes!—baugh!"

This notion of the Corporal's, by which he would have likened the dominion of Heaven to the King of Prussia's body-guard, and only admitted the elect on account of their inches, so tickled mine host's fancy, that he leaned back in his chair, and indulged in a long, dry, obstreperous cachinnation. This irreverence mightily displeased the Corporal. He looked at the little man very sourly, and said in his least smooth accentuation:—

"What—devil—cackling at?—always grin, grin, grin—giggle, giggle, giggle—psha!"

"Why really, neighbour," said Peter, composing himself, "you must let a man laugh now and then."

"Man!" said the Corporal; "man's a noble animal! Man's a musquet, primed, loaded, ready to supply a friend or kill a foe—charge not to be wasted on every tom-tit. But you! not a musquet, but a cracker! noisy, harmless,—can't touch you, but off you go,

whizz, pop, bang in one's face!—baugh!"

"Well!" said the good-humoured landlord, "I should think Master Aram, the great scholar who lives down the vale yonder, a man quite after your own heart. He is grave enough to suit you. He does not laugh very easily, I fancy."

"After my heart? Stoops like a bow!"

"Indeed he does look on the ground as he walks; when I think, I do the same. But what a marvellous man it is! I hear, that he reads the Psalms in Hebrew. He's very affable and meek-like for such a scholard."

"Tell you what. Seen the world, Master Dealtry, and know a thing or two. Your shy dog is always a deep one. Give me a man who looks me in the face as he would a cannon!"

"Or a lass," said Peter knowingly.

The grim Corporal smiled.

"Talking of lasses," said the soldier, re-filling his pipe, "what creature Miss Lester is! Such eyes!—such nose! Fit for a colonel, by God! ay, or a major-general!"

"For my part, I think Miss Ellinor almost as handsome; not so grand-like, but more lovesome!"

"Nice little thing!" said the Corporal, condescendingly. "But, zooks! whom have we here?"

This last question was applied to a man who was slowly turning from the road towards the inn. The stranger, for such he was, was stout, thick- set, and of middle height. His dress was not without pretension to a rank higher than the lowest; but it was threadbare

and worn, and soiled with dust and travel. His appearance was by no means prepossessing; small sunken eyes of a light hazel and a restless and rather fierce expression, a thick flat nose, high cheekbones, a large bony jaw, from which the flesh receded, and a bull throat indicative of great strength, constituted his claims to personal attraction. The stately Corporal, without moving, kept a vigilant and suspicious eye upon the new comer, muttering to Peter,—"Customer for you; rum customer too—by Gad!"

The stranger now reached the little table, and halting short, took up the brown jug, without ceremony or preface, and emptied it at a draught.

The Corporal stared—the Corporal frowned; but before—for he was somewhat slow of speech—he had time to vent his displeasure, the stranger, wiping his mouth across his sleeve, said, in rather a civil and apologetic tone,

"I beg pardon, gentlemen. I have had a long march of it, and very tired I am."

"Humph! march," said the Corporal a little appeased, "Not in his Majesty's service—eh?"

"Not now," answered the Traveller; then, turning round to Dealtry, he said: "Are you landlord here?"

"At your service," said Peter, with the indifference of a man well to do, and not ambitious of halfpence.

"Come, then, quick—budge," said the Traveller, tapping him on the back: "bring more glasses—another jug of the October; and any thing or every thing your larder is able to produce—d'ye

hear?"

Peter, by no means pleased with the briskness of this address, eyed the dusty and way-worn pedestrian from head to foot; then, looking over his shoulder towards the door, he said, as he ensconced himself yet more firmly on his seat—

"There's my wife by the door, friend; go, tell her what you want."

"Do you know," said the Traveller, in a slow and measured accent—"Do you know, master Shrivel-face, that I have more than half a mind to break your head for impertinence. You a landlord!—you keep an inn, indeed! Come, Sir, make off, or—"

"Corporal!—Corporal!" cried Peter, retreating hastily from his seat as the brawny Traveller approached menacingly towards him—"You won't see the peace broken. Have a care, friend—have a care I'm clerk to the parish—clerk to the parish, Sir—and I'll indict you for sacrilege."

The wooden features of Bunting relaxed into a sort of grin at the alarm of his friend. He puffed away, without making any reply; meanwhile the Traveller, taking advantage of Peter's hasty abandonment of his cathedrarian accommodation, seized the vacant chair, and drawing it yet closer to the table, flung himself upon it, and placing his hat on the table, wiped his brows with the air of a man about to make himself thoroughly at home.

Peter Dealtry was assuredly a personage of peaceable disposition; but then he had the proper pride of a host and a clerk. His feeling were exceedingly wounded at this cavalier treatment

—before the very eyes of his wife too—what an example! He thrust his hands deep into his breeches pockets, and strutting with a ferocious swagger towards the Traveller, he said:—

"Harkye, sirrah! This is not the way folks are treated in this country: and I'd have you to know, that I'm a man what has a brother a constable."

"Well, Sir!"

"Well, Sir, indeed! Well!—Sir, it's not well, by no manner of means; and if you don't pay for the ale you drank, and go quietly about your business, I'll have you put in the stocks for a vagrant."

This, the most menacing speech Peter Dealtry was ever known to deliver, was uttered with so much spirit, that the Corporal, who had hitherto preserved silence—for he was too strict a disciplinarian to thrust himself unnecessarily into brawls,—turned approvingly round, and nodding as well as his stock would suffer him at the indignant Peter, he said: "Well done! 'fegs—you've a soul, man!—a soul fit for the forty- second! augh!—A soul above the inches of five feet two!"

There was something bitter and sneering in the Traveller's aspect as he now, regarding Dealtry, repeated—

"Vagrant—humph! And pray what is a vagrant?"

"What is a vagrant?" echoed Peter, a little puzzled.

"Yes! answer me that."

"Why, a vagrant is a man what wanders, and what has no money."

"Truly," said the stranger smiling, but the smile by no means

improved his physiognomy, "an excellent definition, but one which, I will convince you, does not apply to me." So saying, he drew from his pocket a handful of silver coins, and, throwing them on the table, added: "Come, let's have no more of this. You see I can pay for what I order; and now, do recollect that I am a weary and hungry man."

No sooner did Peter behold the money, than a sudden placidity stole over his ruffled spirit:—nay, a certain benevolent commiseration for the fatigue and wants of the Traveller replaced at once, and as by a spell, the angry feelings that had previously roused him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.