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EUGENE ARAM — VOLUME 02

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Eugene Aram — Volume 02

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Eugene Aram — Volume 02:

Содержание

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BOOK II

CHAPTER I.
THE MARRIAGE SETTLED.—LESTER'S HOPES AND SCHEMES.—GAIETY OF TEMPER A GOOD SPECULATION.—THE TRUTH AND FERVOUR OF ARAM'S LOVE

Love is better than a pair of spectacles, to make every thing seem greater which is seen through it.
—Sir Philip Sydney's Arcadia.

Aram's affection to Madeline having now been formally announced to Lester, and Madeline's consent having been somewhat less formally obtained, it only remained to fix the time for their wedding. Though Lester forbore to question Aram as to his circumstances, the Student frankly confessed, that if not

affording what the generality of persons would consider even a competence, they enabled one of his moderate wants and retired life to dispense, especially in the remote and cheap district in which they lived, with all fortune in a wife, who, like Madeline, was equally with himself enamoured of obscurity. The good Lester, however, proposed to bestow upon his daughter such a portion as might allow for the wants of an increased family, or the probable contingencies of Fate. For though Fortune may often slacken her wheel, there is no spot in which she suffers it to be wholly still.

It was now the middle of September, and by the end of the ensuing month it was agreed that the spousals of the lovers should be held. It is certain that Lester felt one pang for his nephew, as he subscribed to this proposal; but he consoled himself with recurring to a hope he had long cherished, viz. that Walter would return home not only cured of his vain attachment to Madeline, but of the disposition to admit the attractions of her sister. A marriage between these two cousins had for years been his favourite project. The lively and ready temper of Ellinor, her household turn, her merry laugh, a winning playfulness that characterised even her defects, were all more after Lester's secret heart than the graver and higher nature of his elder daughter. This might mainly be, that they were traits of disposition that more reminded him of his lost wife, and were therefore more accordant with his ideal standard of perfection; but I incline also to believe that the more persons advance in years, the more, even

if of staid and sober temper themselves, they love gaiety and elasticity in youth. I have often pleased myself by observing in some happy family circle embracing all ages, that it is the liveliest and wildest child that charms the grandsire the most. And after all, it is perhaps with characters as with books, the grave and thoughtful may be more admired than the light and cheerful, but they are less liked; it is not only that the former, being of a more abstruse and recondite nature, find fewer persons capable of judging of their merits, but also that the great object of the majority of human beings is to be amused, and that they naturally incline to love those the best who amuse them most. And to so great a practical extent is this preference pushed, that I think were a nice observer to make a census of all those who have received legacies, or dropped unexpectedly into fortunes; he would find that where one grave disposition had so benefited, there would be at least twenty gay. Perhaps, however, it may be said that I am taking the cause for the effect!

But to return from our speculative disquisitions; Lester then, who, though he so slowly discovered his nephew's passion for Madeline, had long since guessed the secret of Ellinor's affection for him, looked forward with a hope rather sanguine than anxious to the ultimate realization of his cherished domestic scheme. And he pleased himself with thinking that when all soreness would, by this double wedding, be banished from Walter's mind, it would be impossible to conceive a family group more united or more happy.

And Ellinor herself, ever since the parting words of her cousin, had seemed, so far from being inconsolable for his absence, more bright of cheek and elastic of step than she had been for months before. What a world of all feelings, which forbid despondence, lies hoarded in the hearts of the young! As one fountain is filled by the channels that exhaust another; we cherish wisdom at the expense of hope. It thus happened from one cause or another, that Walter's absence created a less cheerless blank in the family circle than might have been expected, and the approaching bridals of Madeline and her lover, naturally diverted in a great measure the thoughts of each, and engrossed their conversation.

Whatever might be Madeline's infatuation as to the merits of Aram, one merit—the greatest of all in the eyes of a woman who loves, he at least possessed. Never was mistress more burningly and deeply loved than she, who, for the first time, awoke the long slumbering passions in the heart of Eugene Aram. Every day the ardour of his affections seemed to increase. With what anxiety he watched her footsteps!—with what idolatry he hung upon her words!—with what unspeakable and yearning emotion he gazed upon the changeful eloquence of her cheek. Now that Walter was gone, he almost took up his abode at the manor-house. He came thither in the early morning, and rarely returned home before the family retired for the night; and even then, when all was hushed, and they believed him in his solitary home, he lingered for hours around the house, to look up to Madeline's window, charmed to

the spot which held the intoxication of her presence. Madeline discovered this habit, and chid it; but so tenderly, that it was not cured. And still at times, by the autumnal moon, she marked from her window his dark figure gliding among the shadows of the trees, or pausing by the lowly tombs in the still churchyard—the resting-place of hearts that once, perhaps, beat as wildly as his own.

It was impossible that a love of this order, and from one so richly gifted as Aram; a love, which in substance was truth, and yet in language poetry, could fail wholly to subdue and inthral a girl so young, so romantic, so enthusiastic, as Madeline Lester. How intense and delicious must have been her sense of happiness! In the pure heart of a girl loving for the first time—love is far more ecstatic than in man, inasmuch as it is unfevered by desire—love then and there makes the only state of human existence which is at once capable of calmness and transport!

CHAPTER II.
A FAVOURABLE SPECIMEN OF A NOBLEMAN AND A COURTIER. —A MAN OF SOME FAULTS AND MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

> *Titinius Capito is to rehearse. He is a man of an excellent disposition, and to be numbered among the chief ornaments of his age. He cultivates literature—he loves men of learning, etc.*
> ***—Lord Orrery: Pliny.***

About this time the Earl of _____, the great nobleman of the district, and whose residence was within four miles of Grassdale, came down to pay his wonted yearly visit to his country domains. He was a man well known in the history of the times; though, for various reasons, I conceal his name. He was a courtier;—deep —wily—accomplished; but capable of generous sentiments and enlarged views. Though, from regard to his interests, he seized and lived as it were upon the fleeting spirit of the day—the penetration of his intellect went far beyond its reach. He claims the merit of having been the one of all his co-temporaries (Lord Chesterfield alone excepted), who most clearly saw, and most distinctly prophesied, the dark and fearful storm that at the close

of the century burst over the vices, in order to sweep away the miseries, of France—a terrible avenger—a salutary purifier.

From the small circle of sounding trifles, in which the dwellers of a court are condemned to live, and which he brightened by his abilities and graced by his accomplishments, the sagacious and far-sighted mind of Lord—comprehended the vast field without, usually invisible to those of his habits and profession. Men who the best know the little nucleus which is called the world, are often the most ignorant of mankind; but it was the peculiar attribute of this nobleman, that he could not only analyse the external customs of his species, but also penetrate their deeper and more hidden interests.

The works, and correspondence he has left behind him, though far from voluminous, testify a consummate knowledge of the varieties of human nature The refinement of his taste appears less remarkable than the vigour of his understanding. It might be that he knew the vices of men better than their virtues; yet he was no shallow disbeliever in the latter: he read the heart too accurately not to know that it is guided as often by its affections as its interests. In his early life he had incurred, not without truth, the charge of licentiousness; but even in pursuit of pleasure, he had been neither weak on the one hand, nor gross on the other; —neither the headlong dupe, nor the callous sensualist: but his graces, his rank, his wealth, had made his conquests a matter of too easy purchase; and hence, like all voluptuaries, the part of his worldly knowledge, which was the most fallible, was that

which related to the sex. He judged of women by a standard too distinct from that by which he judged of men, and considered those foibles peculiar to the sex, which in reality are incident to human nature.

His natural disposition was grave and reflective; and though he was not without wit, it was rarely used. He lived, necessarily, with the frivolous and the ostentatious, yet ostentation and frivolity were charges never brought against himself. As a diplomatist and a statesman, he was of the old and erroneous school of intriguers; but his favourite policy was the science of conciliation. He was one who would so far have suited the present age, that no man could better have steered a nation from the chances of war; James the First could not have been inspired with a greater affection for peace; but the Peer's dexterity would have made that peace as honourable as the King's weakness could have made it degraded. Ambitious to a certain extent, but neither grasping nor mean, he never obtained for his genius the full and extensive field it probably deserved. He loved a happy life above all things; and he knew that while activity is the spirit, fatigue is the bane, of happiness.

In his day he enjoyed a large share of that public attention which generally bequeaths fame; yet from several causes (of which his own moderation is not the least) his present reputation is infinitely less great than the opinions of his most distinguished cotemporaries foreboded.

It is a more difficult matter for men of high rank to

become illustrious to posterity, than for persons in a sterner and more wholesome walk of life. Even the greatest among the distinguished men of the patrician order, suffer in the eyes of the after-age for the very qualities, mostly dazzling defects, or brilliant eccentricities, which made them most popularly remarkable in their day. Men forgive Burns his amours and his revellings with greater ease than they will forgive Bolingbroke and Byron for the same offences.

Our Earl was fond of the society of literary men; he himself was well, perhaps even deeply, read. Certainly his intellectual acquisitions were more profound than they have been generally esteemed, though with the common subtlety of a ready genius, he could make the quick adaptation of a timely fact, acquired for the occasion, appear the rich overflowing of a copious erudition. He was a man who instantly perceived, and liberally acknowledged, the merits of others. No connoisseur had a more felicitous knowledge of the arts, or was more just in the general objects of his patronage. In short, what with all his advantages, he was one whom an aristocracy may boast of, though a people may forget; and if not a great man, was at least a most remarkable lord.

The Earl of—, in his last visit to his estates, had not forgotten to seek out the eminent scholar who shed an honour upon his neighbourhood; he had been greatly struck with the bearing and conversation of Aram, and with the usual felicity with which the accomplished Earl adapted his nature to those with whom he was thrown, he had succeeded in ingratiating himself with

Aram in return. He could not indeed persuade the haughty and solitary Student to visit him at the castle; but the Earl did not disdain to seek any one from whom he could obtain instruction, and he had twice or thrice voluntarily encountered Aram, and effectually drawn him from his reserve. The Earl now heard with some pleasure, and more surprise, that the austere Recluse was about to be married to the beauty of the county, and he resolved to seize the first occasion to call at the manor- house to offer his compliments and congratulations to its inmates.

Sensible men of rank, who, having enjoyed their dignity from their birth, may reasonably be expected to grow occasionally tired of it; often like mixing with those the most who are the least dazzled by the condescension; I do not mean to say, with the vulgar parvenus who mistake rudeness for independence;—no man forgets respect to another who knows the value of respect to himself; but the respect should be paid easily; it is not every Grand Seigneur, who like Louis XIVth., is only pleased when he puts those he addresses out of countenance.

There was, therefore, much in the simplicity of Lester's manners, and those of his nieces, which rendered the family at the manor-house, especial favourites with Lord—; and the wealthier but less honoured squirearchs of the county, stiff in awkward pride, and bustling with yet more awkward veneration, heard with astonishment and anger of the numerous visits which his Lordship, in his brief sojourn at the castle, always contrived to pay to the Lesters, and the constant invitations, which they

received to his most familiar festivities.

Lord—was no sportsman, and one morning, when all his guests were engaged among the stubbles of September, he mounted his quiet palfrey, and gladly took his way to the Manor-house.

It was towards the latter end of the month, and one of the earliest of the autumnal fogs hung thinly over the landscape. As the Earl wound along the sides of the hill on which his castle was built, the scene on which he gazed below received from the grey mists capriciously hovering over it, a dim and melancholy wildness. A broader and whiter vapour, that streaked the lower part of the valley, betrayed the course of the rivulet; and beyond, to the left, rose wan and spectral, the spire of the little church adjoining Lester's abode. As the horseman's eye wandered to this spot, the sun suddenly broke forth, and lit up as by enchantment, the quiet and lovely hamlet embedded, as it were, beneath,—the cottages, with their gay gardens and jasmined porches, the streamlet half in mist, half in light, while here and there columns of vapour rose above its surface like the chariots of the water genii, and broke into a thousand hues beneath the smiles of the unexpected sun: But far to the right, the mists around it yet unbroken, and the outline of its form only visible, rose the lone house of the Student, as if there the sadder spirits of the air yet rallied their broken armament of mist and shadow.

The Earl was not a man peculiarly alive to scenery, but he now involuntarily checked his horse, and gazed for a few moments

on the beautiful and singular aspect which the landscape had so suddenly assumed. As he so gazed, he observed in a field at some little distance, three or four persons gathered around a bank, and among them he thought he recognised the comely form of Rowland Lester. A second inspection convinced him that he was right in his conjecture, and, turning from the road through a gap in the hedge, he made towards the group in question. He had not proceeded far, before he saw, that the remainder of the party was composed of Lester's daughters, the lover of the elder, and a fourth, whom he recognised as a celebrated French botanist who had lately arrived in England, and who was now making an amateur excursion throughout the more attractive districts of the island.

The Earl guessed rightly, that Monsieur de N—had not neglected to apply to Aram for assistance in a pursuit which the latter was known to have cultivated with such success, and that he had been conducted hither, as a place affording some specimen or another not unworthy of research. He now, giving his horse to his groom, joined the group.

CHAPTER III.
WHEREIN THE EARL AND THE STUDENT CONVERSE ON GRAVE BUT DELIGHTFUL MATTERS. —THE STUDENT'S NOTION OF THE ONLY EARTHLY HAPPINESS

ARAM. If the witch Hope forbids us to be wise,
Yet when I turn to these—Woe's only friends,
And with their weird and eloquent voices calm
The stir and Babel of the world within,
I can but dream that my vex'd years at last
Shall find the quiet of a hermit's cell:—
And, neighbouring not this hacked and jaded world,
Beneath the lambent eyes of the loved stars,
And, with the hollow rocks and sparry caves,
The tides, and all the many-music'd winds
My oracles and co-mates;—watch my life
Glide down the Stream of Knowledge, and behold
Its waters with a musing stillness glass
The thousand hues of Nature and of Heaven.

—From Eugene Aram, a MS. Tragedy.

The Earl continued with the party he had joined; and when

their occupation was concluded and they turned homeward, he accepted the Squire's frank invitation to partake of some refreshment at the Manor- house. It so chanced, or perhaps the Earl so contrived it, that Aram and himself, in their way to the village lingered a little behind the rest, and that their conversation was thus, for a few minutes, not altogether general.

"Is it I, Mr. Aram?" said the Earl smiling, "or is it Fate that has made you a convert? The last time we sagely and quietly conferred together, you contended that the more the circle of existence was contracted, the more we clung to a state of pure and all self-dependent intellect, the greater our chance of happiness. Thus you denied that we were rendered happier by our luxuries, by our ambition, or by our affections. Love and its ties were banished from your solitary Utopia. And you asserted that the true wisdom of life lay solely in the cultivation—not of our feelings, but our faculties. You know, I held a different doctrine: and it is with the natural triumph of a hostile partizan, that I hear you are about to relinquish the practice of one of your dogmas; —in consequence, may I hope, of having forsworn the theory?"

"Not so, my Lord," answered Aram, colouring slightly; "my weakness only proves that my theory is difficult,—not that it is wrong. I still venture to think it true. More pain than pleasure is occasioned us by others—banish others, and you are necessarily the gainer. Mental activity and moral quietude are the two states which, were they perfected and united, would constitute perfect happiness. It is such a union which constitutes all we imagine of

Heaven, or conceive of the majestic felicity of a God."

"Yet, while you are on earth you will be (believe me) happier in the state you are about to choose," said the Earl. "Who could look at that enchanting face (the speaker directed his eyes towards Madeline) and not feel that it gave a pledge of happiness that could not be broken?"

It was not in the nature of Aram to like any allusion to himself, and still less to his affections: he turned aside his head, and remained silent: the wary Earl discovered his indiscretion immediately.

"But let us put aside individual cases," said he,—"the meum and the tuum forbid all argument:—and confess, that there is for the majority of human beings a greater happiness in love than in the sublime state of passionless intellect to which you would so chillingly exalt us. Has not Cicero said wisely, that we ought no more to subject too slavishly our affections, than to elevate them too imperiously into our masters? Neque se nimium erigere, nec subjacere serviliter."

"Cicero loved philosophizing better than philosophy," said Aram, coldly; "but surely, my Lord, the affections give us pain as well as pleasure. The doubt, the dread, the restlessness of love,—surely these prevent the passion from constituting a happy state of mind; to me one knowledge alone seems sufficient to embitter all its enjoyments,—the knowledge that the object beloved must die. What a perpetuity of fear that knowledge creates! The avalanche that may crush us depends upon a single breath!"

"Is not that too refined a sentiment? Custom surely blunts us to every chance, every danger, that may happen to us hourly. Were the avalanche over you for a day,—I grant your state of torture,—but had an avalanche rested over you for years, and not yet fallen, you would forget that it could ever fall; you would eat, sleep, and make love, as if it were not!"

"Ha! my Lord, you say well—you say well," said Aram, with a marked change of countenance; and, quickening his pace, he joined Lester's side, and the thread of the previous conversation was broken off.

The Earl afterwards, in walking through the gardens (an excursion which he proposed himself, for he was somewhat of an horticulturist), took an opportunity to renew the subject.

"You will pardon me," said he, "but I cannot convince myself that man would be happier were he without emotions; and that to enjoy life he should be solely dependant on himself!"

"Yet it seems to me," said Aram, "a truth easy of proof; if we love, we place our happiness in others. The moment we place our happiness in others, comes uncertainty, but uncertainty is the bane of happiness. Children are the source of anxiety to their parents;—his mistress to the lover. Change, accident, death, all menace us in each person whom we regard. Every new tie opens new channels by which grief can invade us; but, you will say, by which joy also can flow in;—granted! But in human life is there not more grief than joy? What is it that renders the balance even? What makes the staple of our happiness,—endearing to us the

life at which we should otherwise repine? It is the mere passive, yet stirring, consciousness of life itself!—of the sun and the air of the physical being; but this consciousness every emotion disturbs. Yet could you add to its tranquillity an excitement that never exhausts itself,— that becomes refreshed, not sated, with every new possession, then you would obtain happiness. There is only one excitement of this divine order,—that of intellectual culture. Behold now my theory! Examine it— it contains no flaw. But if," renewed Aram, after a pause, "a man is subject to fate solely in himself, not in others, he soon hardens his mind against all fear, and prepares it for all events. A little philosophy enables him to bear bodily pain, or the common infirmities of flesh: by a philosophy somewhat deeper, he can conquer the ordinary reverses of fortune, the dread of shame, and the last calamity of death. But what philosophy could ever thoroughly console him for the ingratitude of a friend, the worthlessness of a child, the death of a mistress? Hence, only when he stands alone, can a man's soul say to Fate, 'I defy thee.'"

"You think then," said the Earl, reluctantly diverting the conversation into a new channel "that in the pursuit of knowledge lies our only active road to real happiness. Yet here how eternal must be the disappointments even of the most successful! Does not Boyle tell us of a man who, after devoting his whole life to the study of one mineral, confessed himself, at last, ignorant of all its properties?"

"Had the object of his study been himself, and not the mineral,

he would not have been so unsuccessful a student," said Aram, smiling. "Yet," added he, in a graver tone, "we do indeed cleave the vast heaven of Truth with a weak and crippled wing: and often we are appalled in our way by a dread sense of the immensity around us, and of the inadequacy of our own strength. But there is a rapture in the breath of the pure and difficult air, and in the progress by which we compass earth, the while we draw nearer to the stars,—that again exalts us beyond ourselves, and reconciles the true student unto all things,—even to the hardest of them all,—the conviction how feebly our performance can ever imitate the grandeur of our ambition! As you see the spark fly upward,—sometimes not falling to earth till it be dark and quenched,—thus soars, whither it recks not, so that the direction be above, the luminous spirit of him who aspires to Truth; nor will it back to the vile and heavy clay from which it sprang, until the light which bore it upward be no more!"

CHAPTER IV.
A DEEPER EXAMINATION INTO THE STUDENT'S HEART.— THE VISIT TO THE CASTLE.— PHILOSOPHY PUT TO THE TRIAL

I weigh not fortune's frown or smile,
I joy not much in earthly joys,
I seek not state, I seek not stile,
I am not fond of fancy's toys;
I rest so pleased with what I have,
I wish no more, no more I crave.

—Joshua Sylvester.

The reader must pardon me, if I somewhat clog his interest in my tale by the brief conversations I have given, and must for a short while cast myself on his indulgence and renew. It is not only the history of his life, but the character and tone of Aram's mind, that I wish to stamp upon my page. Fortunately, however, the path my story assumes is of such a nature, that in order to effect this object, I shall never have to desert, and scarcely again even to linger by, the way.

Every one knows the magnificent moral of Goethe's "Faust!" Every one knows that sublime discontent—that chafing at the

bounds of human knowledge—that yearning for the intellectual Paradise beyond, which "the sworded angel" forbids us to approach—that daring, yet sorrowful state of mind—that sense of defeat, even in conquest, which Goethe has embodied,—a picture of the loftiest grief of which the soul is capable, and which may remind us of the profound and august melancholy which the Great Sculptor breathed into the repose of the noblest of mythological heroes, when he represented the God resting after his labours, as if more convinced of their vanity than elated with their extent!

In this portrait, the grandeur of which the wild scenes that follow in the drama we refer to, do not (strangely wonderful as they are) perhaps altogether sustain, Goethe has bequeathed to the gaze of a calmer and more practical posterity, the burning and restless spirit—the feverish desire for knowledge more vague than useful, which characterised the exact epoch in the intellectual history of Germany, in which the poem was inspired and produced.

At these bitter waters, the Marah of the streams of Wisdom, the soul of the man whom we have made the hero of these pages, had also, and not lightly, quaffed. The properties of a mind, more calm and stern than belonged to the visionaries of the Hartz and the Danube, might indeed have preserved him from that thirst after the impossibilities of knowledge, which gives so peculiar a romance, not only to the poetry, but the philosophy of the German people. But if he rejected the superstitions, he did not

also reject the bewilderments of the mind. He loved to plunge into the dark and metaphysical subtleties which human genius has called daringly forth from the realities of things:—

> "To spin
> A shroud of thought, to hide him from the sun
> Of this familiar life, which seems to be,
> But is not—or is but quaint mockery
> Of all we would believe;—or sadly blame
> The jarring and inexplicable frame
> Of this wrong world: and then anatomize
> The purposes and thoughts of man, whose eyes
> Were closed in distant years; or widely guess
> The issue of the earth's great business,
> When we shall be, as we no longer are,
> Like babbling gossips, safe, who hear the war
> Of winds, and sigh!—but tremble not!"

Much in him was a type, or rather forerunner, of the intellectual spirit that broke forth when we were children, among our countrymen, and is now slowly dying away amidst the loud events and absorbing struggles of the awakening world. But in one respect he stood aloof from all his tribe—in his hard indifference to worldly ambition, and his contempt of fame. As some sages have seemed to think the universe a dream, and self the only reality, so in his austere and collected reliance upon his own mind—the gathering in, as it were, of his resources, he appeared to consider the pomps of the world as shadows, and the

life of his own spirit the only substance. He had built a city and a tower within the Shinar of his own heart, whence he might look forth, unscathed and unmoved, upon the deluge that broke over the rest of earth.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.