

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**WHAT WILL HE DO
WITH IT? – VOLUME
01**

Эдвард Джордж Бульвер-Литтон
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Содержание

BOOK I	4
CHAPTER I	4
CHAPTER II	14
CHAPTER III	19
CHAPTER IV	29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

What Will He Do with It? — Volume 01

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

In which the history opens with a description of the social manners, habits, and amusements of the English People, as exhibited in an immemorial National Festivity.— Characters to be commemorated in the history, introduced and graphically portrayed, with a nasological illustration.—Original suggestions as to the idiosyncrasies engendered by trades and callings, with other matters worthy of note, conveyed in artless dialogue after the manner of Herodotus, Father of History (mother unknown).

It was a summer fair in one of the prettiest villages in Surrey. The main street was lined with booths, abounding in toys, gleaming crockery, gay ribbons, and gilded ginger bread. Farther on, where the street widened into the ample village-green, rose the more pretending fabrics which lodged the attractive forms

of the Mermaid, the Norfolk Giant; the Pig-faced Lady, the Spotted Boy, and the Calf with Two Heads; while high over even these edifices, and occupying the most conspicuous vantage-ground, a lofty stage promised to rural playgoers the "Grand Melodramatic Performance of The Remorseless Baron and the Bandit's Child." Music, lively if artless, resounded on every side,—drums, fifes, penny-whistles, cat-calls, and a hand-organ played by a dark foreigner, from the height of whose shoulder a cynical but observant monkey eyed the hubbub and cracked his nuts.

It was now sunset,—the throng at the fullest,—an animated, joyous scene. The day had been sultry; no clouds were to be seen, except low on the western horizon, where they stretched, in lengthened ridges of gold and purple, like the border-land between earth and sky. The tall elms on the green were still, save, near the great stage, one or two, upon which had climbed young urchins, whose laughing faces peered forth, here and there, from the foliage trembling under their restless movements.

Amidst the crowd, as it streamed saunteringly along, were two spectators; strangers to the place, as was notably proved by the attention they excited, and the broad jokes their dress and appearance provoked from the rustic wits,—jokes which they took with amused good-humour, and sometimes retaliated with a zest which had already made them very popular personages. Indeed, there was that about them which propitiated liking. They were young; and the freshness of enjoyment was so visible in

their faces, that it begot a sympathy, and wherever they went, other faces brightened round them.

One of the two whom we have thus individualized was of that enviable age, ranging from five-and-twenty to seven-and-twenty, in which, if a man cannot contrive to make life very pleasant,—pitiable indeed must be the state of his digestive organs. But you might see by this gentleman's countenance that if there were many like him, it would be a worse world for the doctors. His cheek, though not highly coloured, was yet ruddy and clear; his hazel eyes were lively and keen; his hair, which escaped in loose clusters from a jean shooting-cap set jauntily on a well-shaped head, was of that deep sunny auburn rarely seen but in persons of vigorous and hardy temperament. He was good-looking on the whole, and would have deserved the more flattering epithet of handsome, but for his nose, which was what the French call "a nose in the air,"—not a nose supercilious, not a nose provocative, as such noses mostly are, but a nose decidedly in earnest to make the best of itself and of things in general,—a nose that would push its way up in life, but so pleasantly that the most irritable fingers would never itch to lay hold of it. With such a nose a man might play the violoncello, marry for love, or even write poetry, and yet not go to the dogs.

Never would he stick in the mud so long as he followed that nose in the air.

By the help of that nose this gentleman wore a black velvet jacket of foreign cut; a mustache and imperial (then much rarer

in England than they have been since the Siege of Sebastopol); and yet left you perfectly convinced that he was an honest Englishman, who had not only no designs on your pocket, but would not be easily duped by any designs upon his own.

The companion of the personage thus sketched might be somewhere about seventeen; but his gait, his air, his lithe, vigorous frame, showed a manliness at variance with the boyish bloom of his face. He struck the eye much more than his elder comrade. Not that he was regularly handsome,—far from it; yet it is no paradox to say that he was beautiful, at least, few indeed were the women who would not have called him so. His hair, long like his friend's, was of a dark chestnut, with gold gleaming through it where the sun fell, inclining to curl, and singularly soft and silken in its texture. His large, clear, dark-blue, happy eyes were fringed with long ebon lashes, and set under brows which already wore the expression of intellectual power, and, better still, of frank courage and open loyalty. His complexion was fair, and somewhat pale, and his lips in laughing showed teeth exquisitely white and even. But though his profile was clearly cut, it was far from the Greek ideal; and he wanted the height of stature which is usually considered essential to the personal pretensions of the male sex. Without being positively short, he was still under middle height, and from the compact development of his proportions, seemed already to have attained his full growth. His dress, though not foreign, like his comrade's, was peculiar: a broad-brimmed straw hat, with a wide blue

ribbon; shirt collar turned down, leaving the throat bare; a dark-green jacket of thinner material than cloth; white trousers and waistcoat completed his costume. He looked like a mother's darling,—perhaps he was one.

Scratch across his back went one of those ingenious mechanical contrivances familiarly in vogue at fairs, which are designed to impress upon the victim to whom they are applied, the pleasing conviction that his garment is rent in twain.

The boy turned round so quickly that he caught the arm of the offender,— a pretty village-girl, a year or two younger than himself. "Found in the act, sentenced, punished," cried he, snatching a kiss, and receiving a gentle slap. "And now, good for evil, here's a ribbon for you; choose."

The girl slunk back shyly, but her companions pushed her forward, and she ended by selecting a cherry-coloured ribbon, for which the boy paid carelessly, while his elder and wiser friend looked at him with grave, compassionate rebuke, and grumbled out,—"Dr. Franklin tells us that once in his life he paid too dear for a whistle; but then he was only seven years old, and a whistle has its uses. But to pay such a price for a scratch-back! —Prodigal! Come along."

As the friends strolled on, naturally enough all the young girls who wished for ribbons, and were possessed of scratch-backs, followed in their wake. Scratch went the instrument, but in vain.

"Lasses," said the elder, turning sharply upon them his nose in the air, "ribbons are plentiful,—shillings scarce; and kisses,

though pleasant in private, are insipid in public. What, still! Beware! know that, innocent as we seem, we are women-eaters; and if you follow us farther, you are devoured! "So saying, he expanded his jaws to a width so preternaturally large, and exhibited a row of grinders so formidable, that the girls fell back in consternation. The friends turned down a narrow alley between the booths, and though still pursued by some adventurous and mercenary spirits, were comparatively undisturbed as they threaded their way along the back of the booths, and arrived at last on the village-green, and in front of the Great Stage.

"Oho, Lionel!" quoth the elder friend; "Thespian and classical, —worth seeing, no doubt." Then turning to a grave cobbler in leathern apron, who was regarding with saturnine interest the motley figures ranged in front of the curtain as the *Drumatis Persona*, he said, "You seem attracted, sir; you have probably already witnessed the performance." "Yes," returned the Cobbler; "this is the third day, and to-morrow's the last. I are n't missed once yet, and I sha' n't miss; but it are n't what it was a while back."

"That is sad; but then the same thing is said of everything by everybody who has reached your respectable age, friend. Summers, and suns, stupid old watering-places, and pretty young women, `are n't what they were a while back.' If men and things go on degenerating in this way, our grandchildren will have a dull time of it."

The Cobbler eyed the young man, and nodded approvingly.

He had sense enough to comprehend the ironical philosophy of the reply; and our Cobbler loved talk out of the common way. "You speaks truly and cleverly, sir. But if old folks do always say that things are worse than they were, ben't there always summat in what is always said? I'm for the old times; my neighbour, Joe Spruce, is for the new, and says we are all a-progressing. But he 's a pink; I 'm a blue."

"You are a blue?" said the boy Lionel; "I don't understand."

"Young 'un, I'm a Tory,—that's blue; and Spruce is a Rad,—that's pink!

And, what is more to the purpose, he is a tailor, and I'm a cobbler."

"Aha!" said the elder, with much interest; "more to the purpose is it?

How so?"

The Cobbler put the forefinger of the right hand on the forefinger of the left; it is the gesture of a man about to ratiocinate or demonstrate, as Quintilian, in his remarks on the oratory of fingers, probably observes; or if he has failed to do so, it is a blot in his essay.

"You see, sir," quoth the Cobbler, "that a man's business has a deal to do with his manner of thinking. Every trade, I take it, has ideas as belong to it. Butchers don't see life as bakers do; and if you talk to a dozen tallow-chandlers, then to a dozen blacksmiths, you will see tallow- chandlers are peculiar, and blacksmiths too."

"You are a keen observer," said he of the jean cap, admiringly;

"your remark is new to me; I dare say it is true."

"Course it is; and the stars have summat to do with it; for if they order a man's calling, it stands to reason that they order a man's mind to fit it. Now, a tailor sits on his board with others, and is always a-talking with 'em, and a-reading the news, therefore he thinks, as his fellows do, smart and sharp, bang up to the day, but nothing 'riginal and all his own, like. But a cobbler," continued the man of leather, with a majestic air, "sits by hissself, and talks with hissself; and what he thinks gets into his head without being put there by another man's tongue."

"You enlighten me more and more," said our friend with the nose in the air, bowing respectfully,— "a tailor is gregarious, a cobbler solitary. The gregarious go with the future, the solitary stick by the past. I understand why you are a Tory and perhaps a poet."

"Well, a bit of one," said the Cobbler, with an iron smile. "And many 's the cobbler who is a poet,—or discovers marvellous things in a crystal, —whereas a tailor, sir" (spoken with great contempt), "only sees the upper leather of the world's sole in a newspaper."

Here the conversation was interrupted by a sudden pressure of the crowd towards the theatre. The two young friends looked up, and saw that the new object of attraction was a little girl, who seemed scarcely ten years old, though in truth she was about two years older. She had just emerged from behind the curtain, made her obeisance to the crowd, and was now walking in front of the

stage with the prettiest possible air of infantine solemnity. "Poor little thing!" said Lionel. "Poor little thing!" said the Cobbler. And had you been there, my reader, ten to one but you would have said the same. And yet she was attired in white satin, with spangled flounces and a tinsel jacket; and she wore a wreath of flowers (to be sure, the flowers were not real) on her long fair curls, with gaudy bracelets (to be sure, the stones were mock) on her slender arms. Still there was something in her that all this finery could not vulgarize; and since it could not vulgarize, you pitied her for it. She had one of those charming faces that look straight into the hearts of us all, young and old. And though she seemed quite self- possessed, there was no effrontery in her air, but the ease of a little lady, with a simple child's unconsciousness that there was anything in her situation to induce you to sigh, "Poor thing!"

"You should see her act, young gents," said the Cobbler: "she plays uncommon. But if you had seen him as taught her,—seen him a year ago."

"Who's he?"

"Waife, sir; mayhap you have heard speak of Waife?"

"I blush to say, no."

"Why, he might have made his fortune at Common Garden; but that's a long story. Poor fellow! he's broke down now, anyhow. But she takes care of him, little darling: God bless thee!" and the Cobbler here exchanged a smile and a nod with the little girl, whose face brightened when she saw him amidst the crowd.

"By the brush and pallet of Raphael!" cried the elder of the young men, "before I am many hours older I must have that child's head!"

"Her head, man!" cried the Cobbler, aghast.

"In my sketch-book. You are a poet,—I a painter. You know the little girl?"

"Don't I! She and her grandfather lodge with me; her grandfather,— that's Waife,—marvellous man! But they ill-uses him; and if it warn't for her, he'd starve. He fed them all once: he can feed them no longer; he'd starve. That's the world: they use up a genus, and when it falls on the road, push on; that's what Joe Spruce calls a-progressing. But there's the drum! they're a-going to act; won't you look in, gents?"

"Of course," cried Lionel,—"of course. And, hark ye, Vance, we'll toss up which shall be the first to take that little girl's head."

"Murderer in either sense of the word!" said Vance, with a smile that would have become Correggio if a tyro had offered to toss up which should be the first to paint a cherub.

CHAPTER II

The historian takes a view of the British stage as represented by the irregular drama, the regular having (ere the date of the events to which this narrative is restricted) disappeared from the vestiges of creation.

They entered the little theatre, and the Cobbler with them; but the last retired modestly to the threepenny row. The young gentlemen were favoured with reserved seats, price one shilling. "Very dear," murmured Vance, as he carefully buttoned the pocket to which he restored a purse woven from links of steel, after the fashion of chain mail. Ah, Messieurs and Confreres the Dramatic Authors, do not flatter yourselves that we are about to give you a complacent triumph over the Grand Melodrame of "The Remorseless Baron and the Bandit's Child." We grant it was horrible rubbish, regarded in an aesthetic point of view, but it was mighty effective in the theatrical. Nobody yawned; you did not even hear a cough, nor the cry of that omnipresent baby, who is always sure to set up an unappeasable wail in the midmost interest of a classical five-act piece, represented for the first time on the metropolitan boards. Here the story rushed on, /per fas aut nefas/, and the audience went with it. Certes, some man who understood the stage must have put the incidents together, and then left it to each illiterate histrio to find the words, —words, my dear confreres, signify so little in an acting play. The movement

is the thing. Grand secret! Analyze, practise it, and restore to grateful stars that lost Pleiad the British Acting Drama.

Of course the Bandit was an ill-used and most estimable man. He had some mysterious rights to the Estate and Castle of the Remorseless Baron. That titled usurper, therefore, did all in his power to hunt the Bandit out in his fastnesses and bring him to a bloody end. Here the interest centred itself in the Bandit's child, who, we need not say, was the little girl in the wreath and spangles, styled in the playbill "Miss Juliet Araminta Wife," and the incidents consisted in her various devices to foil the pursuit of the Baron and save her father. Some of these incidents were indebted to the Comic Muse, and kept the audience in a broad laugh. Her arch playfulness here was exquisite. With what vivacity she duped the High Sheriff, who had the commands of his king to take the Bandit alive or dead, into the belief that the very Lawyer employed by the Baron was the criminal in disguise, and what pearly teeth she showed when the Lawyer was seized and gagged! how dexterously she ascertained the weak point in the character of the "King's Lieutenant" (*jeune premier*), who was deputed by his royal master to aid the Remorseless Baron in trouncing the Bandit! how cunningly she learned that he was in love with the Baron's ward (*jeune amoureuse*), whom that unworthy noble intended to force into a marriage with himself on account of her fortune! how prettily she passed notes to and fro, the Lieutenant never suspecting that she was the Bandit's child, and at last got the king's soldier on her side, as the

event proved! And oh, how gayly, and with what mimic art, she stole into the Baron's castle, disguised as a witch, startled his conscience with revelations and predictions, frightened all the vassals with blue lights and chemical illusions, and venturing even into the usurper's own private chamber, while the tyrant was tossing restless on the couch, over which hung his terrible sword, abstracted from his coffer the deeds that proved the better rights of the persecuted Bandit! Then, when he woke before she could escape with her treasure, and pursued her with his sword, with what glee she apparently set herself on fire, and skipped out of the casement in an explosion of crackers! And when the drama approached its /denouement/, when the Baron's men, and the royal officers of justice, had, despite all her arts, tracked the Bandit to the cave, in which, after various retreats, he lay hidden, wounded by shots, and bruised by a fall from a precipice, — with what admirable byplay she hovered around the spot, with what pathos she sought to decoy away the pursuers! it was the skylark playing round the nest. And when all was vain,—when, no longer to be deceived, the enemies sought to seize her, how mockingly she eluded them, bounded up the rock, and shook her slight finger at them in scorn! Surely she will save that estimable Bandit still! Now, hitherto, though the Bandit was the nominal hero of the piece, though you were always hearing of him,—his wrongs, virtues, hairbreadth escapes,—he had never been seen. Not Mrs. Harris, in the immortal narrative, was more quoted and more mythical. But in the last scene there was the Bandit,

there in his cavern, helpless with bruises and wounds, lying on a rock. In rushed the enemies, Baron, High Sheriff, and all, to seize him. Not a word spoke the Bandit, but his attitude was sublime,—even Vance cried "bravo;" and just as he is seized, halter round his neck, and about to be hanged, down from the chasm above leaps his child, holding the title-deeds, filched from the Baron, and by her side the King's Lieutenant, who proclaims the Bandit's pardon, with due restoration to his honours and estates, and consigns to the astounded Sheriff the august person of the Remorseless Baron. Then the affecting scene, father and child in each other's arms; and then an exclamation, which had been long hovering about the lips of many of the audience, broke out, "Waife, Waife!" Yes, the Bandit, who appeared but in the last scene, and even then uttered not a word, was the once great actor on that itinerant Thespian stage, known through many a fair for his exuberant humour, his impromptu jokes, his arch eye, his redundant life of drollery, and the strange pathos or dignity with which he could suddenly exalt a jester's part, and call forth tears in the startled hush of laughter; he whom the Cobbler had rightly said, "might have made a fortune at Covent Garden." There was the remnant of the old popular mime!—all his attributes of eloquence reduced to dumb show! Masterly touch of nature and of art in this representation of him,—touch which all who had ever in former years seen and heard him on that stage felt simultaneously. He came in for his personal portion of dramatic tears. "Waife, Waife!" cried many a village voice, as

the little girl led him to the front of the stage.

He hobbled; there was a bandage round his eyes. The plot, in describing the accident that had befallen the Bandit, idealized the genuine infirmities of the man,—infirmities that had befallen him since last seen in that village. He was blind of one eye; he had become crippled; some malady of the trachea or larynx had seemingly broken up the once joyous key of the old pleasant voice. He did not trust himself to speak, even on that stage, but silently bent his head to the rustic audience; and Vance, who was an habitual playgoer, saw in that simple salutation that the man was an artistic actor. All was over, the audience streamed out, much affected, and talking one to the other. It had not been at all like the ordinary stage exhibitions at a village fair. Vance and Lionel exchanged looks of surprise, and then, by a common impulse, moved towards the stage, pushed aside the curtain, which had fallen, and were in that strange world which has so many reduplications, fragments of one broken mirror, whether in the proudest theatre or the lowliest barn,—nay, whether in the palace of kings, the cabinet of statesmen, the home of domestic life,—the world we call "Behind the Scenes."

CHAPTER III

Striking illustrations of lawless tyranny and infant avarice exemplified in the social conditions of Great Britain.— Superstitions of the dark ages still in force amongst the trading community, furnishing valuable hints to certain American journalists, and highly suggestive of reflections humiliating to the national vanity.

The Remorseless Baron, who was no other than the managerial proprietor of the stage, was leaning against a sidescene with a pot of porter in his hand. The King's Lieutenant might be seen on the background, toasting a piece of cheese on the point of his loyal sword. The Bandit had crept into a corner, and the little girl was clinging to him fondly as his hand was stroking her fair hair. Vance looked round, and approached the Bandit,—“Sir, allow me to congratulate you; your bow was admirable. I have never seen John Kemble; before my time: but I shall fancy I have seen him now,—seen him on the night of his retirement from the stage. As to your grandchild, Miss Juliet Araminta, she is a perfect chrysolite.”

Before Mr. Waife could reply, the Remorseless Baron stepped up in a spirit worthy of his odious and arbitrary character. “What do you do here, sir? I allow no conspirators behind the scenes earwiggling my people.”

“I beg pardon respectfully: I am an artist,—a pupil of the

Royal Academy; I should like to make a sketch of Miss Juliet Araminta."

"Sketch! nonsense."

"Sir," said Lionel, with the seasonable extravagance of early youth, "my friend would, I am sure, pay for the sitting—handsomely!"

"Ha!" said the manager, softened, "you speak like a gentleman, sir: but, sir, Miss Juliet Araminta is under my protection; in fact, she is my property. Call and speak to me about it to-morrow, before the first performance begins, which is twelve o'clock. Happy to see any of your friends in the reserved seats. Busy now, and—and—in short—excuse me—servant, sir—servant, sir."

The Baron's manner left no room for further parley. Vance bowed, smiled, and retreated. But meanwhile his young friend had seized the opportunity to speak both to Waife and his grandchild; and when Vance took his arm and drew him away, there was a puzzled, musing expression on Lionel's face, and he remained silent till they had got through the press of such stragglers as still loitered before the stage, and were in a quiet corner of the sward. Stars and moon were then up,—a lovely summer night.

"What on earth are you thinking of, Lionel? I have put to you three questions, and you have not answered one."

"Vance," answered Lionel, slowly, "the oddest thing! I am so disappointed in that little girl,—greedy and mercenary!"

"Precocious villain! how do you know that she is greedy and mercenary?"

"Listen: when that surly old manager came up to you, I said something— civil, of course—to Waife, who answered in a hoarse, broken voice, but in very good language. Well, when I told the manager that you would pay for the sitting, the child caught hold of my arm hastily, pulled me down to her own height, and whispered, 'How much will he give?' Confused by a question so point-blank, I answered at random, 'I don't know; ten shillings, perhaps.' You should have seen her face!"

"See her face! radiant,—I should think so. Too much by half!" exclaimed Vance. "Ten shillings! Spendthrift!" "Too much! she looked as you might look if one offered you ten shillings for your picture of 'Julius Cmsar considering whether he should cross the Rubicon.' But when the manager had declared her to be his property, and appointed you to call to-morrow,—implying that he was to be paid for allowing her to sit,—her countenance became overcast, and she muttered sullenly, 'I'll not sit; I'll not!' Then she turned to her grandfather, and something very quick and close was whispered between the two; and she pulled me by the sleeve, and said in my ear—oh, but so eagerly!—"I want three pounds, sir,—three pounds!—if he would give three pounds; and come to our lodgings,—Mr. Merle, Willow Lane. Three pounds,—three!,' And with those words hissing in my ear, and coming from that fairy mouth, which ought to drop pearls and diamonds, I left her," added Lionel, as gravely as if he were sixty, "and lost

an illusion!"

"Three pounds!" cried Vance, raising his eyebrows to the highest arch of astonishment, and lifting his nose in the air towards the majestic moon,—"three pounds!—a fabulous sum! Who has three pounds to throw away? Dukes, with a hundred thousand a year in acres, have not three pounds to draw out of their pockets in that reckless, profligate manner. Three pounds!—what could I not buy for three pounds? I could buy the Dramatic Library, bound in calf, for three pounds; I could buy a dress coat for three pounds (silk lining not included); I could be lodged for a month for three pounds! And a jade in tinsel, just entering on her teens, to ask three pounds for what? for becoming immortal on the canvas of Francis Vance?—bother!"

Here Vance felt a touch on his shoulder. He turned round quickly, as a man out of temper does under similar circumstances, and beheld the sweat face of the Cobbler.

"Well, master, did not she act fine?—how d'ye like her?"

"Not much in her natural character; but she sets a mighty high value on herself."

"Anan, I don't take you."

"She'll not catch me taking her! Three pounds!—three kingdoms! Stay," cried Lionel to the Cobbler; "did not you say she lodged with you? Are you Mr. Merle?"

"Merle's my name, and she do lodge with me,—Willow Lane."

"Come this way, then, a few yards down the road,—more

quiet. Tell me what the child means, if you can;" and Lionel related the offer of his friend, the reply of the manager, and the grasping avarice of Miss Juliet Araminta.

The Cobbler made no answer; and when the young friends, surprised at his silence, turned to look at him, they saw he was wiping his eyes with his sleeves.

"Poor little thing!" he said at last, and still more pathetically than he had uttered the same words at her appearance in front of the stage; "'tis all for her grandfather; I guess,—I guess."

"Oh," cried Lionel, joyfully, "I am so glad to think that. It alters the whole case, you see, Vance."

"It don't alter the case of the three pounds," grumbled Vance. "What's her grandfather to me, that I should give his grandchild three pounds, when any other child in the village would have leaped out of her skin to have her face upon my sketch-book and five shillings in her pocket? Hang her grandfather!"

They were now in the main road. The Cobbler seated himself on a lonely milestone, and looked first at one of the faces before him, then at the other; that of Lionel seemed to attract him the most, and in speaking it was Lionel whom he addressed.

"Young master," he said, "it is now just four years ago, when Mr. Ruge, coming here, as he and his troop had done at fair-time ever sin' I can mind of, brought with him the man you have seen to-night, William Waife; I calls him Gentleman Waife. However that man fell into sick straits, how he came to join sich a carawan, would puzzle most heads. It puzzles Joe Spruce,

uncommon; it don't puzzle me."

"Why?" asked Vance.

"Cos of Saturn!"

"Satan?"

"Saturn,—dead agin his Second and Tenth House, I'll swear. Lord of Ascendant, mayhap; in combustion of the Sun,—who knows?"

"You're not an astrologer?" said Vance, suspiciously, edging off.

"Bit of it; no offence."

"What does it signify?" said Lionel, impatiently; "go on. So you called Mr. Waife 'Gentleman Waife;' and if you had not been an astrologer you would have been puzzled to see him in such a calling."

"Ay, that's it; for he warn't like any as we ever see on these boards hereabouts; and yet he warn't exactly like a Lunnon actor, as I have seen 'em in Lunnon, either, but more like a clever fellow who acted for the spree of the thing. He had sich droll jests, and looked so comical, yet not commonlike, but always what I calls a gentleman,—just as if one o' ye two were doing a bit of sport to please your friends. Well, he drew hugely, and so he did, every time he came, so that the great families in the neighbourhood would go to hear him; and he lodged in my house, and had pleasant ways with him, and was what I call a scollard. But still I don't want to deceive ye, and I should judge him to have been a wild dog in his day. Mercury ill-aspected,—not a doubt of

it. Last year it so happened that one of the great gents who belong to a Lunnon theatre was here at fair-time. Whether he had heard of Waife chanceways, and come express to judge for hisself, I can't say; like eno'. And when he had seen Gentleman Waife act, he sent for him to the inn—Red Lion—and offered him a power o' money to go to Lunnon,—Common Garden. Well, sir, Waife did not take to it all at once, but hemmed and hawed, and was at last quite coaxed into it, and so he went. But bad luck came on it; and I knew there would, for I saw it all in my crystal."

"Oh," exclaimed Vance, "a crystal, too; really it is getting late, and if you had your crystal about you, you might see that we want to sup."

"What happened?" asked Lionel, more blandly, for he saw the Cobbler, who had meant to make a great effect by the introduction of the crystal, was offended.

"What happened? why, just what I foreseed. There was an accident in the railway 'tween this and Lunnon, and poor Waife lost an eye, and was a cripple for life: so he could not go on the Lunnon stage at all; and what was worse, he was a long time atwixt life and death, and got summat bad on his chest wi' catching cold, and lost his voice, and became the sad object you have gazed on, young happy things that ye are."

"But he got some compensation from the railway, I suppose?" said Vance, with the unfeeling equanimity of a stoical demon.

"He did, and spent it. I suppose the gentleman broke out in him as soon as he had money, and, ill though he was, the money

went. Then it seems he had no help for it but to try and get back to Mr. Ruggie. But Mr. Ruggie was sore and spiteful at his leaving; for Ruggie counted on him, and had even thought of taking the huge theatre at York, and bringing out Gentleman Waife as his trump card. But it warn't fated, and Ruggie thought himself ill-used, and so at first he would have nothing more to say to Waife. And truth is, what could the poor man do for Ruggie? But then Waife produces little Sophy."

"You mean Juliet Araminta?" said Vance.

"Same—in private life she be Sophy. And Waife taught her to act, and put together the plays for her. And Ruggie caught at her; and she supports Waife with what she gets; for Ruggie only gives him four shillings a week, and that goes on 'baccy and such like."

"Such like—drink, I presume?" said Vance.

"No—he don't drink. But he do smoke, and he has little genteel ways with him, and four shillings goes on 'em. And they have been about the country this spring, and done well, and now they be here. But Ruggie behaves shocking hard to both on 'em: and I don't believe he has any right to her in law, as he pretends,—only a sort of understanding which she and her grandfather could break if they pleased; and that's what they wish to do, and that's why little Sophy wants the three pounds."

"How?" cried Lionel, eagerly. "If they had three pounds could they get away? and if they did, how could they live? Where could they go?"

"That's their secret. But I heard Waife say—the first night they

came here—I that if he could get three pounds, he had hit on a plan to be independent like. I tell you what put his back up: it was Rugge insisting on his coming on the stage agin, for he did not like to be seen such a wreck. But he was forced to give in; and so he contrived to cut up that play-story, and appear hisself at the last without speaking."

"My good friend," cried young Lionel, "we are greatly obliged to you for your story; and we should much like to see little Sophy and her grandfather at your house to-morrow,—can we?"

"Certain sure you can, after the play's over; to-night, if you like."

"No, to-morrow: you see my friend is impatient to get back now; we will call to-morrow."

"'T is the last day of their stay," said the Cobbler. "But you can't be sure to see them safely at my house afore ten o'clock at night; and not a word to Rugge! mum!"

"Not a word to Rugge," returned Lionel; "good-night to you."

The young men left the Cobbler still seated on the milestone, gazing on the stars and ruminating. They walked briskly down the road.

"It is I who have had the talk now," said Lionel, in his softest tone. He was bent on coaxing three pounds out of his richer friend, and that might require some management. For amongst the wild youngsters in Mr. Vance's profession, there ran many a joke at the skill with which he parried irregular assaults on his purse; and that gentleman, with his nose more than usually in the

air, having once observed to such scoffers "that they were quite welcome to any joke at his expense," a wag had exclaimed, "At your expense! Don't fear; if a joke were worth a farthing, you would never give that permission."

So when Lionel made that innocent remark, the softness of his tone warned the artist of some snake in the grass, and he prudently remained silent. Lionel, in a voice still sweeter, repeated,— "It is I who have all the talk now!"

"Naturally," then returned Vance, "naturally you have, for it is you, I suspect, who alone have the intention to pay for it, and three pounds appear to be the price. Dearish, eh?"

"Ah, Vance, if I had three pounds!"

"Tush; and say no more till we have supped. I have the hunger of a wolf."

Just in sight of the next milestone the young travellers turned a few yards down a green lane, and reached a small inn on the banks of the Thames. Here they had sojourned for the last few days, sketching, boating, roaming about the country from sunrise, and returning to supper and bed at nightfall. It was the pleasantest little inn,—an arbour, covered with honeysuckle, between the porch and the river,—a couple of pleasure-boats moored to the bank; and now all the waves rippling under the moonlight.

"Supper and lights in the arbour," cried Vance to the waiting-maid, "hey, presto, quick! while we turn in to wash our hands. And hark! a quart jug of that capital whiskey-toddy."

CHAPTER IV

Being a chapter that links the past to the future by the gradual elucidation of antecedents.

O wayside inns and pedestrian rambles! O summer nights, under honeysuckle arbours, on the banks of starry waves! O Youth, Youth!

Vance ladled out the toddy and lighted his cigar; then, leaning his head on his hand and his elbow on the table, he looked with an artist's eye along the glancing river.

"After all," said he, "I am glad I am a painter; and I hope I may live to be a great one."

"No doubt, if you live, you will be a great one," cried Lionel, with cordial sincerity. "And if I, who can only just paint well enough to please myself, find that it gives a new charm to Nature —"

"Cut sentiment," quoth Vance, "and go on."

"What," continued Lionel, unchilled by the admonitory interruption, "must you feel who can fix a fading sunshine—a fleeting face—on a scrap of canvas, and say 'Sunshine and Beauty, live there forever!'"

VANCE.—"Forever! no! Colours perish, canvas rots. What remains to us of Zeuxis? Still it is prettily said on behalf of the poetic side of the profession; there is a prosaic one;—we'll blink it. Yes; I am glad to be a painter. But you must not catch the fever

of my calling. Your poor mother would never forgive me if she thought I had made you a dauber by my example."

LIONEL (gloomily).—"No. I shall not be a painter! But what can I be? How shall I ever build on the earth one of the castles I have built in the air? Fame looks so far,—Fortune so impossible. But one thing I am bent upon" (speaking with knit brow and clenched teeth), "I will gain an independence somehow, and support my mother."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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