

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**ERNEST
MALTRAVERS —
VOLUME 03**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

Ernest Maltravers — Volume 03

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Содержание

BOOK III	5
CHAPTER I	5
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	11

Edward Bulwer-Lytton Ernest Maltravers — Volume 03

BOOK III

*"Not to all men Apollo shows himself—
Who sees him—he/ is great!"*

CALLIM. /Ex Hymno in Apollinon/.

CHAPTER I

*"Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears—soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony."*

SHAKESPEARE.

BOAT SONG ON THE LAKE OF COMO

I

The Beautiful Clime!—the Clime of Love!
Thou beautiful Italy!
Like a mother's eyes, the earnest skies
Ever have smiles for thee!
Not a flower that blows, not a beam that glows,
But what is in love with thee!

II

The beautiful lake, the Larian lake!¹
Soft lake like a silver sea,
The Huntress Queen, with her nymphs of sheen,
Never had bath like thee.
See, the Lady of night and her maids of light,
Even now are mid-deep in thee!

¹ The ancient name of Como.

III

Beautiful child of the lonely hills,
Ever blest may thy slumbers be!
No mourner should tread by thy dreamy bed,
No life bring a care to thee—
Nay, soft to thy bed, let the mourner tread—
And life be a dream like thee!

Such, though uttered in the soft Italian tongue, and now imperfectly translated—such were the notes that floated one lovely evening in summer along the lake of Como. The boat, from which came the song, drifted gently down the sparkling waters, towards the mossy banks of a lawn, whence on a little eminence gleamed the white walls of a villa, backed by vineyards. On that lawn stood a young and handsome woman, leaning on the arm of her husband, and listening to the song. But her delight was soon deepened into one of more personal interest, as the boatmen, nearing the banks, changed their measure, and she felt that the minstrelsy was in honour of herself.

SERENADE TO THE SONGSTRESS

I

CHORUS

Softly—oh, soft! let us rest on the oar,
And vex not a billow that sighs to the shore:—
For sacred the spot where the starry waves meet
With the beach, where the breath of the citron is sweet.
There's a spell on the waves that now waft us along
To the last of our Muses, the Spirit of Song.

RECITATIVE

The Eagle of old renown,
And the Lombard's iron crown
And Milan's mighty name are ours no more;
But by this glassy water,
Harmonia's youngest daughter,
Still from the lightning saves one laurel to our shore.

II

CHORUS

They heard thee, Teresa, the Teuton, the Gaul,
Who have raised the rude thrones of the North on our fall;
They heard thee, and bow'd to the might of thy song;
Like love went thy steps o'er the hearts of the strong;
As the moon to the air, as the soul to the clay,
To the void of this earth was the breath of thy lay.

RECITATIVE

Honour for aye to her
The bright interpreter
Of Art's great mysteries to the enchanted throng;
While tyrants heard thy strains,
Sad Rome forgot her chains;
The world the sword had lost was conquer'd back by song!

"Thou repentest, my Teresa, that thou hast renounced thy dazzling career for a dull home, and a husband old enough to be thy father," said the husband to the wife, with a smile that spoke confidence in the answer.

"Ah, no! even this homage would have no music to me if thou didst not hear it."

She was a celebrated personage in Italy—the Signora Cesarini, now Madame de Montaigne. Her earlier youth had been spent upon the stage, and her promise of vocal excellence had been most brilliant. But after a brief though splendid career, she married a French gentleman of good birth and fortune, retired from the stage, and spent her life alternately in the gay saloons of Paris and upon the banks of the dreamy Como, on which her husband had purchased a small but beautiful villa. She still, however, exercised in private her fascinating art; to which—for she was a woman of singular accomplishment and talent—she added the gift of the improvvisatrice. She had just returned for the summer to this lovely retreat, and a party of enthusiastic youths from Milan had sought the lake of Como to welcome her arrival with the suitable homage of song and music. It is a charming relic, that custom of the brighter days of Italy; and I myself have listened, on the still waters of the same lake, to a similar greeting to a greater genius—the queenlike and unrivalled Pasta—the Semiramis of Song! And while my boat paused, and I caught something of the enthusiasm of the serenaders, the boatman touched me, and, pointing to a part of the lake on which the setting sun shed its rosiest smile, he said, "There, Signor, was drowned one of your countrymen 'bellissimo uomo! che fu bello!'"—yes, there, in the pride of his promising youth, of his noble and almost godlike beauty, before the very windows—the very eyes—of his bride—the waves without a frown had swept over the idol of many hearts—the graceful and gallant Locke.² And above his grave was the voluptuous sky, and over it floated

² Captain William Locke of the Life Guards (the only son of the accomplished Mr. Locke of Norbury Park), distinguished by a

the triumphant music. It was as the moral of the Roman poets—calling the living to a holiday over the oblivion of the dead.

As the boat now touched the bank, Madame de Montaigne accosted the musicians, thanked them with a sweet and unaffected earnestness for the compliment so delicately offered, and invited them ashore. The Milanese, who were six in number, accepted the invitation, and moored their boat to the jutting shore. It was then that Monsieur de Montaigne pointed out to the notice of his wife a boat, that had lingered under the shadow of a bank, tenanted by a young man, who had seemed to listen with rapt attention to the music, and who had once joined in the chorus (as it was twice repeated), with a voice so exquisitely attuned, and so rich in its deep power, that it had awakened the admiration even of the serenaders themselves.

"Does not that gentleman belong to your party?" De Montaigne asked of the Milanese.

"No, Signor, we know him not," was the answer; "his boat came unawares upon us as we were singing."

While this question and answer were going on, the young man had quitted his station, and his oars cut the glassy surface of the lake, just before the place where De Montaigne stood. With the courtesy of his country, the Frenchman lifted his hat; and, by his gesture, arrested the eye and oar of the solitary rower. "Will you honour us," he said, "by joining our little party?"

"It is a pleasure I covet too much to refuse," replied the boatman, with a slight foreign accent, and in another moment he was on shore. He was one of remarkable appearance. His long hair floated with a careless grace over a brow more calm and thoughtful than became his years; his manner was unusually quiet and self-collected, and not without a certain stateliness, rendered more striking by the height of his stature, a lordly contour of feature, and a serene but settled expression of melancholy in his eyes and smile. "You will easily believe," said he, "that, cold as my countrymen are esteemed (for you must have discovered already that I am an Englishman), I could not but share in the enthusiasm of those about me, when loitering near the very ground sacred to the inspiration. For the rest, I am residing for the present in yonder villa, opposite to your own; my name is Maltravers, and I am enchanted to think that I am no longer a personal stranger to one whose fame has already reached me." Madame de Montaigne was flattered by something in the manner and tone of the Englishman, which said a great deal more than his words; and in a few minutes, beneath the influence of the happy continental ease, the whole party seemed as if they had known each other for years. Wines, and fruits, and other simple and unpretending refreshments, were brought out and ranged on a rude table upon the grass, round which the guests seated themselves with their host and hostess, and the clear moon shone over them, and the lake slept below in silver. It was a scene for a Boccaccio or a Claude.

The conversation naturally fell upon music; it is almost the only thing which Italians in general can be said to know—and even that knowledge comes to them, like Dogberry's reading and writing, by nature—for of music, as an /art/, the unprofessional amateurs know but little. As vain and arrogant of the last wreck of their national genius as the Romans of old were of the empire of all arts and arms, they look upon the harmonies of other lands as barbarous; nor can they appreciate or understand appreciation of the mighty German music, which is the proper minstrelsy of a nation of men—a music of philosophy, of heroism, of the intellect and the imagination; beside which, the strains of modern Italy are indeed effeminate, fantastic, and artificially feeble. Rossini is the Canova of music, with much of the pretty, with nothing of the grand!

The little party talked, however, of music, with an animation and gusto that charmed the melancholy Maltravers, who for weeks had known no companion save his own thoughts, and with whom, at all times, enthusiasm for any art found a ready sympathy. He listened attentively, but

character the most amiable, and by a personal beauty that certainly equalled, perhaps surpassed, the highest masterpiece of Grecian sculpture. He was returning in a boat from the town of Como to his villa on the banks of the lake, when the boat was upset by one of the mysterious under-currents to which the lake is dangerously subjected; and he was drowned in sight of his bride, who was watching his return from the terrace or balcony of their home.

said little; and from time to time, whenever the conversation flagged, amused himself by examining his companions. The six Milanese had nothing remarkable in their countenances or in their talk; they possessed the characteristic energy and volubility of their countrymen, with something of the masculine dignity which distinguishes the Lombard from the Southern, and a little of the French polish, which the inhabitants of Milan seldom fail to contract. Their rank was evidently that of the middle class; for Milan has a middle class, and one which promises great results hereafter. But they were noways distinguished from a thousand other Milanese whom Maltravers had met with in the walks and cafes of their noble city. The host was somewhat more interesting. He was a tall, handsome man, of about eight-and-forty, with a high forehead, and features strongly impressed with the sober character of thought. He had but little of the French vivacity in his manner; and without looking at his countenance, you would still have felt insensibly that he was the eldest of the party. His wife was at least twenty years younger than himself, mirthful and playful as a child, but with a certain feminine and fascinating softness in her unrestrained gestures and sparkling gaiety, which seemed to subdue her natural joyousness into the form and method of conventional elegance. Dark hair carelessly arranged, an open forehead, large black laughing eyes, a small straight nose, a complexion just relieved from the olive by an evanescent, yet perpetually recurring blush; a round dimpled cheek, an exquisitely-shaped mouth with small pearly teeth, and a light and delicate figure a little below the ordinary standard, completed the picture of Madame de Montaigne.

"Well," said Signor Tirabaloschi, the most loquacious and sentimental of the guests, filling his glass, "these are hours to think of for the rest of life. But we cannot hope the Signora will long remember what we never can forget. Paris, says the French proverb, */est le paradis des femmes/*: and in Paradise, I take it for granted, we recollect very little of what happened on earth."

"Oh," said Madame de Montaigne, with a pretty musical laugh, "in Paris it is the rage to despise the frivolous life of cities, and to affect */des sentimens romanesques/*. This is precisely the scene which our fine ladies and fine writers would die to talk of and to describe. Is it not so, */mon ami/*?" and she turned affectionately to De Montaigne.

"True," replied he; "but you are not worthy of such a scene—you laugh at sentiment and romance."

"Only at French sentiment and the romance of the Chaussee d'Antin. You English," she continued, shaking her head at Maltravers, "have spoiled and corrupted us; we are not content to imitate you, we must excel you; we out-horror horror, and rush from the extravagant into the frantic!"

"The ferment of the new school is, perhaps, better than the stagnation of the old," said Maltravers. "Yet even you," addressing himself to the Italians, "who first in Petrarch, in Tasso, and in Ariosto, set to Europe the example of the Sentimental and the Romantic; who built among the very ruins of the classic school, amidst its Corinthian columns and sweeping arches, the spires and battlements of the Gothic—even you are deserting your old models and guiding literature into newer and wilder paths. 'Tis the way of the world—eternal progress is eternal change."

"Very possibly," said Signor Tirabaloschi, who understood nothing of what was said. "Nay, it is extremely profound; on reflection, it is beautiful—superb! you English are so—so—in short, it is admirable. Ugo Foscolo is a great genius—so is Monti; and as for Rossini,—you know his last opera—*/cosa stupenda/*!"

Madame de Montaigne glanced at Maltravers, clapped her little hands, and laughed outright. Maltravers caught the contagion, and laughed also. But he hastened to repair the pedantic error he had committed of talking over the heads of the company. He took up the guitar, which, among their musical instruments, the serenaders had brought, and after touching its chords for a few moments, said: "After all, Madame, in your society, and with this moonlit lake before us, we feel as if music were our best medium of conversation. Let us prevail upon these gentlemen to delight us once more."

"You forestall what I was going to ask," said the ex-singer; and Maltravers offered the guitar to Tirabaloschi, who was in fact dying to exhibit his powers again. He took the instrument with a

slight grimace of modesty, and then saying to Madame de Montaigne, "There is a song composed by a young friend of mine, which is much admired by the ladies; though to me it seems a little too sentimental," sang the following stanzas (as good singers are wont to do) with as much feeling as if he could understand them!

NIGHT AND LOVE

When stars are in the quiet skies,
Then most I pine for thee;
Bend on me, then, thy tender eyes!
As stars look on the sea!

For thoughts, like waves that glide by night,
Are stillest where they shine;
Mine earthly love lies hushed in light
Beneath the heaven of thine.

There is an hour when angels keep
Familiar watch on men;
When coarser souls are wrapt in sleep,—
Sweet spirit, meet me then.

There is an hour when holy dreams
Through slumber fairest glide;
And in that mystic hour it seems
Thou shouldst be by my side.

The thoughts of thee too sacred are
For daylight's common beam;—
I can but know thee as my star,
My angel, and my dream!

And now, the example set, and the praises of the fair hostess exciting general emulation, the guitar circled from hand to hand, and each of the Italians performed his part; you might have fancied yourself at one of the old Greek feasts, with the lyre and the myrtle-branch going the round.

But both the Italians and the Englishman felt the entertainment would be incomplete without hearing the celebrated vocalist and improvvisatrice who presided over the little banquet; and Madame de Montaigne, with a woman's tact, divined the general wish, and anticipated the request that was sure to be made. She took the guitar from the last singer, and turning to Maltravers, said, "You have heard, of course, some of our more eminent improvvisatori, and therefore if I ask you for a subject it will only be to prove to you that the talent is not general amongst the Italians."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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