

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**WHAT WILL HE DO
WITH IT? — VOLUME
12**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

What Will He Do with It? — Volume 12

BOOK XII

CHAPTER I

THE MAN OF THE WORLD SHOWS MORE INDIFFERENCE TO THE THINGS AND DOCTRINES OF THE WORLD THAN MIGHT BE SUPPOSED. —BUT HE VINDICATES HIS CHARACTER, WHICH MIGHT OTHERWISE BE JEOPARDISED, BY THE ADROITNESS WITH WHICH, HAVING RESOLVED TO ROAST CHESTNUTS IN THE ASHES OF ANOTHER MAN'S HEARTH, HE HANDLES THEM WHEN HOTTEST BY THE PROXY OF A —CAT'S PAW.

In the letter which George told Waife he had received from his uncle, George had an excuse for the delicate and arduous mission he undertook, which he did not confide to the old man, lest it should convey more hopes than its nature justified. In this letter, Alban related, with a degree of feeling that he rarely manifested, his farewell conversation with Lionel, who had just departed to join his new regiment. The poor young man had buoyed himself up with delighted expectations of the result of Sophy's prolonged residence under Darrell's roof; he had persuaded his reason that when Darrell had been thus enabled to see and judge of her for himself, he would be irresistibly attracted towards her; that Innocence, like Truth, would be mighty and prevail; Darrell was engaged in the attempt to clear William Losely's name and blood from the taint of felony;—Alban was commissioned to negotiate with Jasper Losely on any terms that would remove all chance of future disgrace from that quarter. Oh yes! to poor Lionel's eyes obstacles vanished—the future became clear. And thus, when, after telling him of his final interview with the Minister, Darrell said, "I trust that, in bringing to William Losely this intelligence, I shall at least soften his disappointment, when I make it thoroughly clear to him how impossible it is that his Sophy can ever be more to me—to us—than a stranger whose virtues create an interest in her welfare"—Lionel was stunned as by a blow. Scarcely could he murmur:

"You have seen her—and your resolve remains the same."

"Can you doubt it?" answered Darrell, as if in surprise. "The resolve may now give me pain on my account, as before it gave me pain on yours. But if not moved by your pain, can I be moved by mine? That would be a baseness." The Colonel, in depicting Lionel's state of mind after the young soldier had written his farewell to Waife, and previous to quitting London, expressed very gloomy forebodings. "I do not say," wrote he, "that Lionel will guiltily seek death in the field, nor does death there come more to those who seek than to those who shun it; but he will go upon a service exposed to more than ordinary suffering, privation, and disease—without that rallying power of hope—that Will, and Desire to Live, which constitute the true stamina of Youth. And I have always set a black mark upon those who go into war joyless and despondent. Send a young fellow to the camp with his spirits broken, his heart heavy as a lump of lead, and the first of those epidemics, which thin ranks more than the cannon, says to itself, 'There is a man for me!' Any doctor will tell you that, even at home, the gay and light-hearted walk safe through the pestilence, which settles on the moping as malaria settles on a marsh. Confound Guy Darrell's ancestors, they have spoilt Queen Victoria as good a young soldier as ever wore a sword by his side! Six months ago, and how blithely Lionel Houghton looked forth to the future! —all laurel!—no cypress! And now I feel as if I had shaken

hands with a victim sacrificed by Superstition to the tombs of the dead. I cannot blame Darrell: I dare say in the same position I might do the same. But no; on second thoughts, I should not. If Darrell does not choose to marry and have sons of his own, he has no right to load a poor boy with benefits, and say: 'There is but one way to prove your gratitude; remember my ancestors, and be miserable for the rest of your days!' Darrell, forsooth, intends to leave to Lionel the transmission of the old Darrell name; and the old Darrell name must not be tarnished by the marriage on which Lionel has unluckily set his heart! I respect the old name; but it is not like the House of Vipont—a British Institution. And if some democratical cholera, which does not care a rush for old names, carries off Lionel, what becomes of the old name then? Lionel is not Darrell's son; Lionel need not perforce take the old name. Let the young man live as Lionel Haughton, and the old name die with Guy Darrell!

"As to the poor girl's birth and parentage, I believe we shall never know them. I quite agree with Darrell that it will be wisest never to inquire. But I dismiss, as farfetched and improbable, his supposition that she is Gabrielle Desmaret's daughter. To me it is infinitely more likely, either that the deposition of the nurse, which poor Willy gave to Darrell, and which Darrell showed to me, is true (only that Jasper was conniving at the temporary suspension of his child's existence while it suited his purpose)—or that, at the worst, this mysterious young lady is the daughter of the artiste. In the former supposition, as I have said over and over again, a marriage between Lionel and Sophy is precisely that which Darrell should desire; in the latter case, of course, if Lionel were the head of the House of Vipont, the idea of such an union would be inadmissible. But Lionel, */entre nous/*, is the son of a ruined spendthrift by a linen-draper's daughter. And Darrell has but to give the handsome young couple five or six thousand a year, and I know the world well enough to know that the world will trouble itself very little about their pedigrees. And really Lionel should be left wholly free to choose whether he prefer a girl whom he loves with his whole heart, five or six thousand a year, happiness, and the chance of honours in a glorious profession to which he will then look with glad spirits—or a life-long misery, with the right, after Darrell's death—that I hope will not be these thirty years—to bear the name of Darrell instead of Haughton; which, if I were the last of the Haughtons, and had any family pride—as, thank Heaven I have not—would be a painful exchange to me; and dearly bought by the addition of some additional thousands a year, when I had grown perhaps as little disposed to spend them as Guy Darrell himself is. But, after all, there is one I compassionate even more than young Haughton. My morning rides of late have been much in the direction of Twickenham, visiting our fair cousin Lady Montfort. I went first to lecture her for letting these young people see so much of each other. But my anger melted into admiration and sympathy when I found with what tender, exquisite, matchless friendship she had been all the while scheming for Darrell's happiness; and with what remorse she now contemplated the sorrow which a friendship so grateful, and a belief so natural, had innocently occasioned. That remorse is wearing her to death. Dr. F.—, who attended poor dear Willy, is also attending her; and he told me privately that his skill was in vain—that her case baffled him; and he had very serious apprehensions. Darrell owes some consideration to such a friend. And to think that here are lives permanently embittered, if not risked, by the ruthless obstinacy of the best-hearted man I ever met! Now, though I have already intimated my opinions to Darrell with a candour due to the oldest and dearest of my friends, yet I have never, of course, in the letters I have written to him or the talk we have had together, spoken out so plainly as I do in writing to you. And having thus written, without awe of his grey eye and dark brow, I have half as mind to add 'seize him in a happy moment and show him this letter.' Yes, I give you full leave; show it to him if you think it would avail. If not, throw it into the fire, and—pray Heaven for those whom we poor mortals cannot serve."

On the envelope Alban had added these words: "But of course, before showing the enclosed, you will prepare Darrell's mind to weigh its contents." And probably it was in that curt and simple injunction that the subtle man of the world evinced the astuteness of which not a trace was apparent in the body of his letter.

Though Alban's communication had much excited his nephew, yet George had not judged it discreet to avail himself of the permission to show it to Darrell. It seemed to him that the pride of his host would take much more offence at its transmission through the hands of a third person than at the frank tone of its reasonings and suggestions. And George had determined to re-enclose it to the Colonel, urging him to forward it himself to Darrell just as it was, with but a brief line to say, "that, on reflection, Alban submitted direct to his old school-fellow the reasonings and apprehensions which he had so unreservedly poured forth in a letter commenced without the intention at which the writer arrived at the close." But now that the preacher had undertaken the duty of an advocate, the letter became his brief.

George passed through the library, through the study, up the narrow stair that finally conducted to the same lofty cell in which Darrell had confronted the midnight robber who claimed a child in Sophy. With a nervous hand George knocked at the door.

Unaccustomed to any intrusion on the part of guest or household in that solitary retreat, somewhat sharply, as if in anger, Darrell's voice answered the knock.

"Who's there?"

"George Morley."

Darrell opened the door.

CHAPTER II

"A GOOD ARCHER IS NOT KNOWN BY HIS ARROWS, BUT HIS AIM." "A GOOD MAN IS NO MORE TO BE FEARED THAN A SHEEP." "A GOOD SURGEON MUST HAVE AN EAGLE'S EYE, A LION'S HEART, AND A LADY'S HAND." "A GOOD TONGUE IS A GOOD WEAPON." AND DESPITE THOSE SUGGESTIVE OR ENCOURAGING PROVERBS, GEORGE MORLEY HAS UNDERTAKEN SOMETHING SO OPPOSED TO ALL PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY THAT IT BECOMES A GRAVE QUESTION WHAT HE WILL DO WITH IT.

"I come," said George, "to ask you one of the greatest favours a man can confer upon another; it will take some little time to explain. Are you at leisure?"

Darrell's brow relaxed.

"Seat yourself in comfort, my dear George. If it be in my power to serve or to gratify Alban Morley's nephew, it is I who receive a favour." Darrell thought to himself—"The young man is ambitious—I may aid in his path towards a See!"

GEORGE MORLEY.—"First let me say that I would consult your intellect on a matter which habitually attracts and engages mine—that old vexed question of the origin and uses of Evil, not only in the physical, but the moral world; it involves problems over which I would ponder for hours as a boy—on which I wrote essays as a schoolman—on which I perpetually collect illustrations to fortify my views as a theologian."

"He is writing a book," thought Darrell, enviously; "and a book on such a subject will last him all his life. Happy man!"

GEORGE MORLEY.—"The Pastor, you know, is frequently consulted by the suffering and oppressed; frequently called upon to answer that question in which the scepticism of the humble and the ignorant ordinarily begins: 'Why am I suffering? Why am I oppressed? Is this the justice of Providence? Has the Great Father that benign pity, that watchful care for His children, which you preachers tell us?' Ever intent on deducing examples from the lives to which the clue has become apparent, must be the Priest who has to reason with Affliction caused by no apparent fault; and where, judged by the Canons of Human justice, cloud and darkness obscure the Divine—still to 'vindicate the ways of God to man.'"

DARRELL.—"A philosophy that preceded, and will outlive, all other schools. It is twin-born with the world itself. Go on; though the theme be inexhaustible, its interest never flags."

GEORGE MORLEY.—"Has it struck you, Mr. Darrell, that few lives have ever passed under your survey; in which the inexpressible tenderness of the Omniscient has been more visibly clear than in that of your guest, William Losely?"

DARRELL (surprised).—"Clear? To me, I confess that if ever there were an instance in which the Divine tenderness, the Divine justice, which I can never presume to doubt, was yet undiscernible to my bounded vision, it is in the instance of the very life you refer to. I see a man of admirable virtues—of a childlike simplicity of character, which makes him almost unconscious of the grandeur of his own soul—involved by a sublime self-sacrifice—by a virtue, not by a fault—in the most dreadful of human calamities—ignominious degradation;—hurled in the midday of life from the sphere of honest men—a felon's brand on his name—a vagrant in his age; justice at last, but tardy and niggard, and giving him but little joy when it arrives; because, ever thinking only of others, his heart is wrapped in a child whom he cannot make happy in the way in which his hopes have been set!—George—no, your illustration might be turned by a sceptic into an argument against you."

GEORGE MORLEY.—"Not unless the sceptic refused the elementary starting-ground from which you and I may reason; not if it be granted that man has a soul, which it is the object of this life to enrich and develop for another. We know from my uncle what William Losely was before this calamity befel him—a genial boon-companion—a careless, frank, 'good fellow'—all the virtues you now praise in him dormant, unguessed even by himself. Suddenly came CALAMITY!—suddenly arose the SOUL! Degradation of name, and with it dignity of nature! How poor, how slight, how insignificant William Losely the hanger-on of rural Thanes compared with that William Waife whose entrance into this house, you—despite that felon's brand when you knew it was the martyr's glory,—greeted with noble reverence; whom, when the mind itself was stricken down—only the soul left to the wreck of the body—you tended with such pious care as he lay on—your father's bed! And do you, who hold Nobleness in such honour—do you, of all men, tell me that you cannot recognise that Celestial tenderness which ennobled a Spirit for all Eternity?"

"George, you are right," cried Darrell; "and I was a blockhead and blunderer, as man always is when he mistakes a speck in his telescope for a blotch in the sun of a system."

GEORGE MORLEY.—"But more difficult it is to recognise the mysterious agencies of Heavenly Love when no great worldly adversity forces us to pause and question. Let Fortune strike down a victim, and even the heathen cries, 'This is the hand of God!' But where Fortune brings no vicissitude; where her wheel runs smooth, dropping wealth or honours as it rolls—where Affliction centres its work within the secret, unrevealing heart—there, even the wisest man may not readily perceive by what means Heaven is admonishing, forcing, or wooing him nearer to itself. I take the case of a man in whom Heaven acknowledges a favoured son. I assume his outward life crowned with successes, his mind stored with opulent gifts, his nature endowed with lofty virtues; what an heir to train through the brief school of earth for due place in the ages that roll on for ever! But this man has a parasite weed in each bed of a soul rich in flowers;—weed and flowers intertwined, stem with stem—their fibres uniting even deep down to the root.

"Can you not conceive with what untiring vigilant care Heaven will seek to disentangle the flower from the weed?—how (let me drop inadequate metaphor)—how Heaven will select for its warning chastisements that very error which the man has so blent with his virtues that he holds it a virtue itself?—how, gradually, slowly, pertinaciously, it will gather this beautiful nature all to itself—insist on a sacrifice it will ask from no other? To complete the true nature of poor William Losely, Heaven ordained the sacrifice of worldly repute; to complete the true nature of Guy Darrell, God ordains him the sacrifice of PRIDE!"

Darrell started-half rose; his eye flashed-his cheek paled; but he remained silent.

"I have approached the favour I supplicate," resumed George, drawing a deep breath, as of relief. "Greater favour man can scarcely bestow upon his fellow. I entreat you to believe that I respect, and love, and honour you sufficiently to be for a while so lifted up into your friendship that I may claim the privilege, without which friendship is but a form;—just as no freedom is more obnoxious than intrusion on confidence withheld, so no favour, I repeat, more precious than the confidence which a man of worth vouchsafes to him who invites it with no claim but the loyalty of his motives."

Said Darrell, softened, but with stateliness: "All human lives are as separate circles; they may touch at one point in friendly approach, but, even where they touch, each rounds itself from off the other. With this hint I am contented to ask at what point in my circle you would touch?"

GEORGE MORLEY.—"I thank you gratefully; I accept your illustration. The point is touched; I need no other." He paused a moment, as if concentrating all his thoughts, and then said, with musing accents: "Yes, I accept your illustration; I will even strengthen the force of the truth implied in it by a more homely illustration of my own. There are small skeleton abridgments of history which we give to children. In such a year a king was crowned—a battle was fought; there was some great disaster, or some great triumph. Of the true progress and development of the nation whose record is thus epitomised—of the complicated causes which lead to these salient events—of the animated, varied

multitudinous life which has been hurrying on from epoch to epoch, the abridgment tells nothing. It is so with the life of each individual man: the life as it stands before us is but a sterile epitome—hid from our sight the EMOTIONS which are the People of the Heart. In such a year occurred a visible something—a gain—a loss—a success—a disappointment; the People of the Heart crowned or deposed a King. This is all we know; and the most voluminous biography ever written must still be a meagre abridgment of all that really individualised and formed a man. I ask not your confidence in a single detail or fact in your existence which lies beyond my sight. Far from me so curious an insolence; but I do ask you this: Reflecting on your past life as a whole, have not your chief sorrows had a common idiosyncrasy? Have they not been strangely directed towards the frustration of some one single object—cherished by your earliest hopes, and, as if in defiance of fate, resolutely clung to even now?"

"It is true," muttered Darrell. "You do not offend me; go on!"

"And have not these SORROWS, in frustrating your object, often assumed, too, a certain uniformity in the weapons they use, in the quarter they harass or invade, almost as if it were a strategic policy that guided them where they could most pain, or humble, or eject a FOE that they were ordered to storm? Degrade you they could not; such was not their mission. Heaven left you intact a kingliness of nature—a loftiness of spirit, unabased by assaults levelled not against yourself, but your pride; your personal dignity, though singularly sensitive, though bitterly galled, stood proof. What might lower lesser men, lowered not you; Heaven left you that dignity, for it belongs alike to your intellect and your virtues—but suffered it to be a source of your anguish. Why? Because, not content with adorning your virtues, it was covering the fault against which were directed the sorrows. You frown—forgive me."

"You do not transgress, unless it be as a flatterer! If I frowned, it was unconsciously—the sign of thought, not anger. Pause!—my mind has left you for a moment; it is looking into the past."

The past!—Was it not true? That home to whose porch came in time the Black Horses, in time just to save from the last worst dishonour, but not save from years racked by each pang that can harrow man's dignity in each daily assault on the fort of man's pride; the sly treacherous daughter—her terrible marriage—the man whose disgrace she had linked to her blood, and whose life was still insult and threat to his own. True, what a war upon Pride! And even in that secret and fatal love which had been of all his griefs the most influential and enduring, had his pride been less bitterly wounded, and that pride less enthroned in his being, would his grief have been so relentless, his attempts at its conquest so vain? And then, even now—what was it said, "I can bless?"—holy LOVE! What was it said, "but not pardon"?—stern PRIDE! And so onto these last revolutions of sterile life. Was he not miserable in Lionel's and Sophy's misery? Forlorn in that Citadel of Pride—closed round and invested with Sorrows—and the last hopes that had fled to the fortress, slain in defence of its outworks. With hand shading his face, Darrell remained some minutes silent. At last he raised his head, and his eye was steadfast, his lip firm.

"George Morley," said he, "I acknowledge much justice in the censure you have conveyed, with so artful a delicacy that, if it fail to reform, it cannot displease, and leaves much to be seriously revolved in solitary self-commune. But though I may own that pride is not made for man, and that in the blindness of human judgment I may often have confounded pride with duty, and suffered for the mistake, yet that one prevailing object of my life, which with so startling a truth you say it has pleased Heaven to frustrate, I cannot hold an error in itself. You have learned enough from your uncle, seen enough of me yourself, to know what that object has been. You are scholar enough to concede to me that it is no ignoble homage which either nations or persons render to the ancestral Dead—that homage is an instinct in all but vulgar and sordid natures. Has a man no ancestry of his own—rightly and justly, if himself of worth, he appropriates to his lineage all the heroes, and bards, and patriots of his fatherland! A free citizen has ancestors in all the glorious chiefs that have adorned the State, on the sole condition that he shall revere their tombs and guard their memory as a son! And

thus, whenever they who speak trumpet-tongued to grand democracies would rouse some quailing generation to heroic deed or sacrifice, they appeal in the Name of Ancestors, and call upon the living to be worthy of the dead! That which is so laudable—nay, so necessary a sentiment in the mass, cannot be a fault that angers Heaven in the man. Like all high sentiments, it may compel harsh and rugged duties; it may need the stern suppression of many a gentle impulse—of many a pleasing wish. But we must regard it in its merit and consistency as a whole. And if, my eloquent and subtle friend, all you have hitherto said be designed but to wind into pleas for the same cause that I have already decided against the advocate in my own heart which sides with Lionel's generous love and yon fair girl's ingenuous and touching grace, let us break up the court; the judge has no choice but the law which imperiously governs his judgment."

GEORGE MORLEY.—"I have not hitherto presumed to apply to particular cases the general argument you so indulgently allow me to urge in favour of my theory, that in the world of the human heart, when closely examined, there is the same harmony of design as in the external universe; that in Fault and in Sorrow are the axioms, and problems, and postulates of a SCIENCE. Bear with me a little longer if I still pursue the same course of reasoning. I shall not have the arrogance to argue a special instance—to say, 'This you should do, this you should not do.' All I would ask is, leave to proffer a few more suggestions to your own large and candid experience."

Said Darrell, irresistibly allured on, but with a tinge of his grave irony: "You have the true genius of the pulpit, and I concede to you its rights. I will listen with the wish to profit—the more susceptible of conviction because freed from the necessity to reply."

GEORGE MORLEY.—"You vindicate the object which has been the main ambition of your life. You say 'not an ignoble object.' Truly! ignoble objects are not for you. The question is, are there not objects nobler, which should have attained higher value, and led to larger results in the soul which Providence assigned to you; was not the proper place of the object you vindicate that of an auxiliary—a subordinate, rather than that of the all-directing, self-sufficing leader and autocrat of such various powers of mind? I picture you to myself—a lone, bold-hearted boy—in this ancient hall, amidst these primitive landscapes, in which old associations are so little disturbed by the modern—in which the wild turf of waste lands, vanishing deep into mazes of solemn wood, lends the scene to dreams of gone days—brings Adventure and Knighthood, and all the poetical colours of Old, to unite the homage due to the ancestral dead with the future ambition of life;—Image full of interest and of pathos—a friendless child of a race more beloved for its decay, looking dauntless on to poverty and toil, with that conviction of power which is born of collected purpose and earnest will; and recording his secret vow that singlehanded he will undo the work of destroying ages, and restore his line to its place of honour in the land!"

George paused, and tears stood in Darrell's eyes.

"Yes," resumed the scholar—"yes, for the child, for the youth, for the man in his first daring stride into the Action of Life, that object commands our respectful sympathies.

"But wait a few years. Has that object expanded? Has it led on into objects embracing humanity? Remains it alone and sterile in the bosom of successful genius? Or is it prolific and fruitful of grander designs—of more widespreading uses? Make genius successful, and all men have the right to say, 'Brother, help us!' What! no other object still but to build up a house!—to recover a line! What was grand at one stage of an onward career, is narrow and small at another! Ambition limited to the rise of a family!

"Can our sympathies still hallow that? No! In Guy Darrell successful— that ambition was treason to earth! Mankind was his family now! THEREFORE Heaven thwarted the object which opposed its own ends in creating you! THERFORE childless you stand on your desolate hearth! THEREFORE, lo! side by side—yon uncompleted pile—your own uncompleted life!"

Darrell sat dumb.—He was appalled!

GEORGE MORLEY.—"Has not that object stunted your very intellect? Has it not, while baffled in its own centred aim—has it not robbed you of the glory which youth craved, and which manhood might have won? Idolater to the creed of an Ancestor's NAMEE, has your own name that hold on the grateful respect of the Future, which men ever give to that genius whose objects are knit with mankind? Suddenly, in the zenith of life, amidst cheers, not of genuine renown,—cheers loud and brief as a mob's hurrah— calamities, all of which I know not, nor conjecture, interrupt your career;—and when your own life-long object is arrested, or rather when it is snatched from your eye, your genius renounces all uses. Fame, ever-during, was before you still, had your objects been those for which genius is given. You muse. Heaven permits these rude words to strike home! Guy Darrell, it is not too late! Heaven's warnings are always in time. Reflect, with the one narrow object was fostered and fed the one master failing of Pride. To us as Christians, or as reasoners, it is not in this world that every duty is to find its special meed; yet by that same mystical LAW which makes Science of Sorrow, rewards are but often the normal effect of duties sublimely fulfilled. Out of your pride and your one-cherished object, has there grown happiness? Has the success which was not denied you achieved the link with posterity that your hand, if not fettered, would long since have forged? Grant that Heaven says 'Stubborn child, yield at last to the warnings vouchsafed to thee by my love! From a son so favoured and strong I exact the most difficult offering! Thou hast sacrificed much, but for ends not prescribed in my law; sacrifice now to me the thing thou most clingest to—Pride. I make the pang I demand purposely bitter. I twine round the offering I ask the fibres that bleed in relaxing. What to other men would be no duty, is duty to thee, because it entails a triumphant self-conquest, and pays to Humanity the arrears of just dues long neglected.' Grant the hard sacrifice made; I must think Heaven has ends for your joy even here, when it asks you to part with the cause of your sorrows;—I must think that your evening of life may have sunshine denied to its noon. But with God are no bargains. A virtue, the most arduous because it must trample down what your life has exalted as virtue, is before you; distasteful, austere, repellant. The most inviting arguments in its favour are, that it proffers no bribes; men would acquit you in rejecting it; judged by our world's ordinary rule, men would be right in acquitting you. But if on reflection you say in your heart of hearts, 'This is a virtue,' you will follow its noiseless path up to the smile of God!"

The preacher ceased.

Darrell breathed a long sigh, rose slowly, took George's hand, pressed it warmly in both his own, and turned quickly and silently away. He paused in the deep recess where the gleam of the wintry sun shot through the small casement, aslant and pale on the massive wall: opening the lattice he looked forth on the old hereditary trees—on the Gothic church-tower— on the dark evergreens that belted his father's tomb. Again he sighed, but this time the sigh had a haughty sound in its abrupt impatience; and George felt that words written must remain to strengthen and confirm the effect of words spoken. He had at least obeyed his uncle's wise injunction—he had prepared Darrell's mind to weigh the contents of a letter, which, given in the first instance, would perhaps have rendered Darrell's resolution not less stubborn, by increasing the pain to himself which the resolution already inflicted.

Darrell turned and looked towards George, as if in surprise to see him still lingering there.

"I have now but to place before you this letter from my uncle to myself; it enters into those details which it would have ill become me specially to discuss. Remember, I entreat you, in reading it, that it is written by your oldest friend—by a man who has no dull discrimination in the perplexities of life or the niceties of honour."

Darrell bowed his head in assent, and took the letter. George was about to leave the room.

"Stay," said Darrell, "'tis best to have but one interview—one conversation on the subject which has been just enforced on me; and the letter may need a comment or a message to your uncle." He stood hesitating, with the letter open in his hand; and, fixing his keen eye on George's pale and powerful countenance, said: "How is it that, with an experience of mankind which you will pardon me for assuming to be limited, you yet read so wondrously the complicated human heart?"

"If I really have that gift," said George, "I will answer your question by another: Is it through experience that we learn to read the human heart—or is it through sympathy? If it be experience, what becomes of the Poet? If the Poet be born, not made, is it not because he is born to sympathise with what he has never experienced?"

"I see! There are born Preachers!"

Darrell reseated himself, and began Alban's letter. He was evidently moved by the Colonel's account of Lionel's grief, muttering to himself, "Poor boy!—but he is brave—he is young." When he came to Alban's forebodings on the effects of dejection upon the stamina of life, he pressed his hand quickly against his breast as if he had received a shock! He mused a while before he resumed his task; then he read rapidly and silently till his face flushed, and he repeated in a hollow tone, inexpressibly mournful: "Let the young man live, and the old name die with Guy Darrell. Ay, ay! see how the world sides with Youth! What matters all else so that Youth have its toy!" Again his eye hurried on impatiently till he came to the passage devoted to Lady Montfort; then George saw that the paper trembled violently in his hand and that his very lips grew white. "'Serious apprehensions,'" he muttered. "I owe 'consideration to such a friend.' This man is without a heart!"

He clenched the paper in his hand without reading farther. "Leave me this letter, George; I will give an answer to that and to you before night." He caught up his hat as he spoke, passed into the lifeless picture-gallery, and so out into the open air. George, dubious and anxious, gained the solitude of his own room, and locked the door.

CHAPTER III

AT LAST THE GREAT QUESTION BY TORTURE IS FAIRLY APPLIED TO GUY DARRELL.

WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT? What will Guy Darrell do with the thought that weighs on his brain, rankles in his heart, perplexes his dubious conscience? What will he do with the Law which has governed his past life? What will he do with that shadow of A NAME which, alike in swarming crowds or in lonely burial-places, has spelled his eye and lured his step as a beckoning ghost? What will he do with the PRIDE from which the mask has been so rudely torn? What will he do with idols so long revered? Are they idols, or are they but symbols and images of holy truths? What will he do with the torturing problem, on the solution of which depend the honour due to consecrated ashes, and the rights due to beating hearts? There, restless he goes, the arrow of that question in his side—now through the broad waste lands—now through the dim woods, pausing oft with short quick sigh, with hand swept across his brow as if to clear away a cloud;—now snatched from our sight by the evergreens round the tomb in that still churchyard—now emerging slow, with melancholy eyes fixed on the old roof-tree! What will he do with it? The Question of Questions, in which all Futurity is opened, has him on its rack. WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT? Let us see.

CHAPTER IV

*Immunis aram si tetigit manus,
Non sumptuosa blandior hostia,
Mollivit aversas Penates,
Farre pio et saliente mica.*

—HORAT.

It is the grey of the evening. Fairthorn is sauntering somewhat sullenly along the banks of the lake. He has missed, the last three days, his walk with Sophy—missed the pleasing excitement of talking at her, and of the family in whose obsolete glories he considers her very interest an obtrusive impertinence. He has missed, too, his more habitual and less irritating conversation with Darrell. In short, altogether he is put out, and he vents his spleen on the swans, who follow him along the wave as he walks along the margin, intimating either their affection for himself, or their anticipation of the bread-crumbs associated with his image—by the amiable note, half snort and half grunt, to which change of time or climate has reduced the vocal accomplishments of those classical birds, so pathetically melodious in the age of Moschus and on the banks of Cayster.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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