

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**"MY NOVEL" —
VOLUME 02**

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
"My Novel" — Volume 02

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Bulwer-Lytton E. G.

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BOOK SECOND

INITIAL CHAPTER

INFORMING THE READER HOW THIS WORK CAME TO HAVE INITIAL CHAPTERS

"There can't be a doubt," said my father, "that to each of the main divisions of your work—whether you call them Books or Parts—you should prefix an Initial or Introductory Chapter."

PISISTRATUS.—"Can't be a doubt, sir? Why so?"

MR. CAXTON.—"Fielding lays it down as an indispensable rule, which he supports by his example; and Fielding was an artistical writer, and knew what he was about."

PISISTRATUS.—"Do you remember any of his reasons, sir?"

MR. CAXTON.—"Why, indeed, Fielding says, very justly, that he is not bound to assign any reason; but he does assign a good many, here and there,—to find which I refer you to 'Tom Jones.' I will only observe, that one of his reasons, which is unanswerable, runs to the effect that thus, in every Part or Book, the reader has the advantage of beginning at the fourth or fifth page instead of the first,—'a matter by no means of trivial consequence,' saith Fielding, 'to persons who read books with no other view than to say they have read them,—a more general motive to reading than is commonly imagined; and from which not only law books and good books, but the pages of Homer and Virgil, Swift and Cervantes, have been often turned Over.' There," cried my father, triumphantly, "I will lay a shilling to twopence that I have quoted the very words."

MRS. CANTON.—"Dear me, that only means skipping; I don't see any great advantage in writing a chapter, merely for people to skip it."

PISISTRATUS.—"Neither do I!"

MR. CANTON (dogmatically).—"It is the repose in the picture,—Fielding calls it 'contrast.'—(Still more dogmatically.)—I say there can't be a doubt about it. Besides" added my father after a pause,—"besides, this usage gives you opportunities to explain what has gone before, or to prepare for what's coming; or, since Fielding contends, with great truth, that some learning is necessary for this kind of historical composition, it allows you, naturally and easily, the introduction of light and pleasant ornaments of that nature. At each flight in the terrace you may give the eye the relief of an urn or a statue. Moreover, when so inclined, you create proper pausing-places for reflection; and complete by a separate, yet harmonious ethical department, the design of a work, which is but a mere Mother Goose's tale if it does not embrace a general view of the thoughts and actions of mankind."

PISISTRATUS.—"But then, in these initial chapters, the author thrusts himself forward; and just when you want to get on with the /dramatis personae/, you find yourself face to face with the poet himself."

MR. CANTON.—"Pooh! you can contrive to prevent that! Imitate the chorus of the Greek stage, who fill up the intervals between the action by saying what the author would otherwise say in his own person."

PISISTRATUS (slyly).—"That's a good idea, sir,—and I have a chorus, and a choregus too, already in my eye."

MR. CANTON (unsuspectingly).—"Aha! you are not so dull a fellow as you would make yourself out to be; and, even if an author did thrust himself forward, what objection is there to that? It is a mere affectation to suppose that a book can come into the world without an author. Every child has a father,—one father at least,—as the great Conde says very well in his poem."

PISISTRATUS.—"The great Conde a poet! I never heard that before."

MR. CANTON.—"I don't say he was a poet, but he sent a poem to Madame de Montansier. Envious critics think that he must have paid somebody else to write it; but there is no reason why a great captain should not write a poem,—I don't say a good poem, but a poem. I wonder, Roland, if the duke ever tried his hand at 'Stanzas to Mary,' or 'Lines to a Sleeping Babe.'"

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—"Austin, I'm ashamed of you. Of course the duke could write poetry if he pleased,—something, I dare say, in the way of the great Conde; that is, something warlike and heroic, I'll be bound. Let's hear!"

MR. CAXTON (reciting).—

"Telle est du Ciel la loi severe
Qu'il faut qu'un enfant ait un pere;
On dit meme quelquefois
Tel enfant en a jusqu'a trois."

["That each child has a father
Is Nature's decree;
But, to judge by a rumour,
Some children have three."]

CAPTAIN ROLAND (greatly disgusted).—"Conde write such stuff!—I don't believe it."

PISISTRATUS.—"I do, and accept the quotations; you and Roland shall be joint fathers to my child as well as myself."

"Tel enfant en a jusqu'a trois."

MR. CAXTON (solemnly).—"I refuse the proffered paternity; but so far as administering a little wholesome castigation now and then, I have no objection to join in the discharge of a father's duty."

PISISTRATUS.—"Agreed. Have you anything to say against the infant hitherto?"

MR. CAXTON.—"He is in long clothes at present; let us wait till he can walk."

BLANCHE.—"But pray whom do you mean for a hero? And is Miss Jemima your heroine?"

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—"There is some mystery about the—"

PISISTRATUS (hastily).—"Hush, Uncle: no letting the cat out of the bag yet. Listen, all of you! I left Frank Hazeldean on his way to the Casino."

CHAPTER II

"It is a sweet pretty place," thought Frank, as he opened the gate which led across the fields to the Casino, that smiled down upon him with its plaster pilasters. "I wonder, though, that my father, who is so particular in general, suffers the carriage-road to be so full of holes and weeds. Mounseer does not receive many visits, I take it."

But when Frank got into the ground immediately before the house, he saw no cause of complaint as to want of order and repair. Nothing could be kept more neatly. Frank was ashamed of the dint made by the pony's hoofs on the smooth gravel: he dismounted, tied the animal to the wicket, and went on foot towards the glass door in front.

He rang the bell once, twice, but nobody came, for the old woman-servant, who was hard of hearing, was far away in the yard, searching for any eggs which the hen might have scandalously hidden for culinary purposes; and Jackymo was fishing for the sticklebacks and minnows which were, when caught, to assist the eggs, when found, in keeping together the bodies and souls of himself and his master. The old woman had been lately put upon board wages. Lucky old woman! Frank rang a third time, and with the impetuosity of his age. A face peeped from the belvidere on the terrace. "Diavolo!" said Dr. Riccabocca to himself. "Young cocks crow hard on their own dunghill; it must be a cock of a high race to crow so loud at another's."

Therewith he shambled out of the summer-house, and appeared suddenly before Frank, in a very wizard-like dressing-robe of black serge, a red cap on his head, and a cloud of smoke coming rapidly from his lips, as a final consolatory whiff, before he removed the pipe from them. Frank had indeed seen the doctor before, but never in so scholastic a costume, and he was a little startled by the apparition at his elbow, as he turned round.

"Signorino," said the Italian, taking off his cap with his usual urbanity, "pardon the negligence of my people; I am too happy to receive your commands in person."

"Dr. Rickeybockey?" stammered Frank, much confused by this polite address, and the low, yet stately, bow with which it was accompanied. "I—I have a note from the Hall. Mamma—that is, my mother—and aunt Jemima beg their best compliments, and hope you will come, sir."

The doctor took the note with another bow, and, opening the glass door, invited Frank to enter.

The young gentleman, with a schoolboy's usual bluntness, was about to say that he was in a hurry, and had rather not; but Dr. Riccabocca's grand manner awed him, while a glimpse of the hall excited his curiosity, so he silently obeyed the invitation.

The hall, which was of an octagon shape, had been originally panelled off into compartments, and in these the Italian had painted landscapes, rich with the warm sunny light of his native climate. Frank was no judge of the art displayed; but he was greatly struck with the scenes depicted: they were all views of some lake, real or imaginary; in all, dark-blue shining waters reflected dark-blue placid skies. In one, a flight of steps ascended to the lake, and a gay group was seen feasting on the margin; in another, sunset threw its rose-hues over a vast villa or palace, backed by Alpine hills, and flanked by long arcades of vines, while pleasure-boats skimmed over the waves below. In short, throughout all the eight compartments, the scene, though it differed in details, preserved the same general character, as if illustrating some favourite locality. The Italian did not, however, evince any desire to do the honours of his own art, but, preceding Frank across the hall, opened the door of his usual sitting-room, and requested him to enter. Frank did so rather reluctantly, and seated himself with unwonted bashfulness on the edge of a chair. But here new specimens of the doctor's handicraft soon riveted attention. The room had been originally papered, but Riccabocca had stretched canvas over the walls, and painted thereon sundry satirical devices, each separated from the other by scroll-works of fantastic arabesques. Here a Cupid was trundling a wheelbarrow full of hearts, which he appeared to be selling to an ugly old fellow, with a money-bag in his hand—probably Plutus. There

Diogenes might be seen walking through a market-place, with his lantern in his hand, in search of an honest man, whilst the children jeered at him, and the curs snapped at his heels. In another place a lion was seen half dressed in a fox's hide, while a wolf in a sheep's mask was conversing very amicably with a young lamb. Here again might be seen the geese stretching out their necks from the Roman Capitol in full cackle, while the stout invaders were beheld in the distance, running off as hard as they could. In short, in all these quaint entablatures some pithy sarcasm was symbolically conveyed; only over the mantel piece was the design graver and more touching. It was the figure of a man in a pilgrim's garb, chained to the earth by small but innumerable ligaments, while a phantom likeness of himself, his shadow, was seen hastening down what seemed an interminable vista; and underneath were written the pathetic words of Horace—

"Patriae quis exul
Se quoque fugit?"

["What exile from his country can also fly from himself?"]

The furniture of the room was extremely simple, and somewhat scanty; yet it was arranged so as to impart an air of taste and elegance to the room. Even a few plaster busts and statues, though bought but of some humble itinerant, had their classical effect, glistening from out stands of flowers that were grouped around them, or backed by graceful screen-works formed from twisted osiers, which, by the simple contrivance of trays at the bottom filled with earth, served for living parasitical plants, with gay flowers contrasting thick ivy leaves, and gave to the whole room the aspect of a bower. "May I ask your permission?" said the Italian, with his finger on the seal of the letter.

"Oh, yes," said Frank, with naivete.

Riccabocca broke the seal, and a slight smile stole over his countenance. Then he turned a little aside from Frank, shaded his face with his hand, and seemed to muse. "Mrs. Hazeldean," said he, at last, "does me very great honour. I hardly recognize her handwriting, or I should have been more impatient to open the letter." The dark eyes were lifted over the spectacles and went right into Frank's unprotected and undiplomatic heart. The doctor raised the note, and pointed to the characters with his forefinger.

"Cousin Jemima's hand," said Frank, as directly as if the question had been put to him.

The Italian smiled. "Mr. Hazeldean has company staying with him?"

"No; that is, only Barney,—the captain. There's seldom much company before the shooting season," added Frank, with a slight sigh; "and then, you know, the holidays are over. For my part, I think we ought to break up a month later."

The doctor seemed reassured by the first sentence in Frank's reply, and, seating himself at the table, wrote his answer,—not hastily, as we English write, but with care and precision, like one accustomed to weigh the nature of words,—in that stiff Italian hand, which allows the writer so much time to think while he forms his letters. He did not, therefore, reply at once to Frank's remark about the holidays, but was silent till he had concluded his note, read it three times over, sealed it by the taper he slowly lighted, and then, giving it to Frank, he said,

"For your sake, young gentleman, I regret that your holidays are so early; for mine, I must rejoice, since I accept the kind invitation you have rendered doubly gratifying by bringing it yourself."

"Deuce take the fellow and his fine speeches! One don't know which way to look," thought English Frank.

The Italian smiled again, as if this time he had read the boy's heart, without need of those piercing black eyes, and said, less ceremoniously than before, "You don't care much for compliments, young gentleman?"

"No, I don't indeed," said Frank, heartily.

"So much the better for you, since your way in the world is made: it would be so much the worse if you had to make it!"

Frank looked puzzled: the thought was too deep for him, so he turned to the pictures.

"Those are very funny," said he; "they seem capitally done. Who did 'em?"

"Signoriuo Hazeldean, you are giving me what you refused yourself."

"Eh?" said Frank, inquiringly.

"Compliments!"

"Oh—I—no; but they are well done: are n't they, sir?"—

"Not particularly: you speak to the artist."

"What! you painted them?"

"Yes."

"And the pictures in the hall?"

"Those too."

"Taken from nature, eh?"

"Nature," said the Italian, sententiously, perhaps evasively, "lets nothing be taken from her."

"Oh!" said Frank, puzzled again. "Well, I must wish you good morning, sir; I am very glad you are coming."

"Without compliment?"

"Without compliment."

"A rivedersi—good-by for the present, my young signorino. This way," observing Frank make a bolt towards the wrong door. "Can I offer you a glass of wine?—it is pure, of our own making."

"No, thank you, indeed, sir," cried Frank, suddenly recollecting his father's admonition. "Good-by, don't trouble yourself, sir; I know any way now."

But the bland Italian followed his guest to the wicket, where Frank had left the pony. The young gentleman, afraid lest so courteous a host should hold the stirrup for him, twitched off the bridle, and mounted in haste, not even staying to ask if the Italian could put him in the way to Rood Hall, of which way he was profoundly ignorant. The Italian's eye followed the boy as he rode up the ascent in the lane, and the doctor sighed heavily. "The wiser we grow," said he to himself, "the more we regret the age of our follies: it is better to gallop with a light heart up the stony hill than sit in the summer-house and cry 'How true!' to the stony truths of Machiavelli!"

With that he turned back into the belvidere; but he could not resume his studies. He remained some minutes gazing on the prospect, till the prospect reminded him of the fields which Jackeymo was bent on his hiring, and the fields reminded him of Lenny Fairfield. He returned to the house, and in a few moments re-emerged in his out-of-door trim, with cloak and umbrella, re-lighted his pipe, and strolled towards Hazeldean village.

Meanwhile Frank, after cantering on for some distance, stopped at a cottage, and there learned that there was a short cut across the fields to Rood Hall, by which he could save nearly three miles. Frank, however, missed the short cut, and came out into the high road; a turnpike-keeper, after first taking his toll, put him back again into the short cut; and finally, he got into some green lanes, where a dilapidated finger-post directed him to Rood. Late at noon, having ridden fifteen miles in the desire to reduce ten to seven, he came suddenly upon a wild and primitive piece of ground, that seemed half chase, half common, with crazy tumbledown cottages of villanous aspect scattered about in odd nooks and corners. Idle, dirty children were making mud-pies on the road; slovenly-looking women were plaiting straw at the threshold; a large but forlorn and decayed church, that seemed to say that the generation which saw it built was more pious than the generation which now resorted to it, stood boldly and nakedly out by the roadside.

"Is this the village of Rood?" asked Frank of a stout young man breaking stones on the road—sad sign that no better labour could be found for him!

The man sullenly nodded, and continued his work. "And where's the Hall—Mr. Leslie's?"

The man looked up in stolid surprise, and this time touched his hat.

"Be you going there?"

"Yes, if I can find out where it is."

"I'll show your honour," said the boor, alertly.

Frank reined in the pony, and the man walked by his side. Frank was much of his father's son, despite the difference of age, and that more fastidious change of manner which characterizes each succeeding race in the progress of civilization. Despite all his Eton finery, he was familiar with peasants, and had the quick eye of one country-born as to country matters.

"You don't seem very well off in this village, my man?" said he, knowingly.

"Noa; there be a deal of distress here in the winter time, and summer too, for that matter; and the parish ben't much help to a single man."

"But surely the farmers want work here as well as elsewhere?"

"Deed, and there ben't much farming work here,—most o' the parish be all wild ground loike."

"The poor have a right of common, I suppose," said Frank, surveying a large assortment of vagabond birds and quadrupeds.

"Yes; neighbour Timmins keeps his geese on the common, and some has a cow, and them be neighbour Jowlas's pigs. I don't know if there's a right, loike; but the folks at the Hall does all they can to help us, and that ben't much: they ben't as rich as some folks; but," added the peasant, proudly, "they be as good blood as any in the shire."

"I 'm glad to see you like them, at all events."

"Oh, yes, I likes them well eno'; mayhap you are at school with the young gentleman?"

"Yes," said Frank.

"Ah, I heard the clergyman say as how Master Randal was a mighty clever lad, and would get rich some day. I 'se sure I wish he would, for a poor squire makes a poor parish. There's the Hall, sir."

CHAPTER III

Frank looked right ahead, and saw a square house that, in spite of modern sash windows, was evidently of remote antiquity. A high conical roof; a stack of tall quaint chimney-pots of red-baked clay (like those at Sutton Place in Surrey) dominating over isolated vulgar smoke-conductors, of the ignoble fashion of present times; a dilapidated groin-work, encasing within a Tudor arch a door of the comfortable date of George III., and the peculiarly dingy and weather-stained appearance of the small finely-finished bricks, of which the habitation was built,—all showed the abode of former generations adapted with tasteless irreverence to the habits of descendants unenlightened by Pugin, or indifferent to the poetry of the past. The house had emerged suddenly upon Frank out of the gloomy waste land, for it was placed in a hollow, and sheltered from sight by a disorderly group of ragged, dismal, valetudinarian fir-trees, until an abrupt turn of the road cleared that screen, and left the desolate abode bare to the discontented eye. Frank dismounted; the man held his pony; and after smoothing his cravat, the smart Etonian sauntered up to the door, and startled the solitude of the place with a loud peal from the modern brass knocker,—a knock which instantly brought forth an astonished starling who had built under the eaves of the gable roof, and called up a cloud of sparrows, tomtits, and yellow-hammers, who had been regaling themselves amongst the litter of a slovenly farmyard that lay in full sight to the right of the house, fenced off by a primitive paintless wooden rail. In process of time a sow, accompanied by a thriving and inquisitive family, strolled up to the gate of the fence, and, leaning her nose on the lower bar of the gate, contemplated the visitor with much curiosity and some suspicion.

While Frank is still without, impatiently swingeing his white trousers with his whip, we will steal a hurried glance towards the respective members of the family within. Mr. Leslie, the paterfamilias, is in a little room called his "study," to which he regularly retires every morning after breakfast, rarely reappearing till one o'clock, which is his unfashionable hour for dinner. In what mysterious occupations Mr. Leslie passes those hours no one ever formed a conjecture. At the present moment he is seated before a little rickety bureau, one leg of which being shorter than the other is propped up by sundry old letters and scraps of newspapers; and the bureau is open, and reveals a great number of pigeonholes and divisions, filled with various odds and ends, the collection of many years. In some of these compartments are bundles of letters, very yellow, and tied in packets with faded tape; in another, all by itself, is a fragment of plum-pudding stone, which Mr. Leslie has picked up in his walks, and considered a rare mineral. It is neatly labelled, "Found in Hollow Lane, May 21st, 1804, by Maunder Sluggé Leslie, Esq." The next division holds several bits of iron in the shape of nails, fragments of horse-shoes, etc., which Mr. Leslie has also met with in his rambles, and, according to a harmless popular superstition, deemed it highly unlucky not to pick up, and, once picked up, no less unlucky to throw away. Item, in the adjoining pigeon-hole, a goodly collection of pebbles with holes in them, preserved for the same reason, in company with a crooked sixpence; item, neatly arranged in fanciful mosaics, several periwinkles, Blackamoor's teeth (I mean the shell so called), and other specimens of the conchiferous ingenuity of Nature, partly inherited from some ancestral spinster, partly amassed by Mr. Leslie himself in a youthful excursion to the seaside. There were the farm-bailiff's accounts, several files of bills, an old stirrup, three sets of knee and shoe buckles which had belonged to Mr. Leslie's father, a few seals tied together by a shoe-string, a shagreen toothpick case, a tortoise shell magnifying-glass to read with, his eldest son's first copybooks, his second son's ditto, his daughter's ditto, and a lock of his wife's hair arranged in a true lover's knot, framed and glazed. There were also a small mousetrap; a patent corkscrew too good to be used in common; fragments of a silver teaspoon, that had, by natural decay, arrived at a dissolution of its parts; a small brown holland bag, containing halfpence of various dates, as far back as Queen Anne, accompanied by two French /sous/ and a German /silber gros/,—the which miscellany Mr. Leslie magniloquently

called "his coins," and had left in his will as a family heirloom. There were many other curiosities of congenial nature and equal value—/quae nunc describere longum est/. Mr. Leslie was engaged at this time in what is termed "putting things to rights,"—an occupation he performed with exemplary care once a week. This was his day; and he had just counted his coins, and was slowly tying them up again in the brown holland bag, when Frank's knock reached his ears.

Mr. Maunder Sluge Leslie paused, shook his head as if incredulously, and was about to resume his occupation, when he was seized with a fit of yawning which prevented the bag being tied for full two minutes.

While such the employment of the study, let us turn to the recreations in the drawing-room, or rather parlour. A drawing-room there was on the first floor, with a charming look-out, not on the dreary fir-trees, but on the romantic undulating forest-land; but the drawing-room had not been used since the death of the last Mrs. Leslie. It was deemed too good to sit in, except when there was company: there never being company, it was never sat in. Indeed, now the paper was falling off the walls with the damp, and the rats, mice, and moths—those /"edaces rerum"/—had eaten, between them, most of the chair-bottoms and a considerable part of the floor. Therefore, the parlour was the sole general sitting-room; and being breakfasted in, dined, and supped in, and, after supper, smoked in by Mr. Leslie to the accompaniment of rum-and-water, it is impossible to deny that it had what is called "a smell,"—a comfortable, wholesome family smell, speaking of numbers, meals, and miscellaneous social habitation. There were two windows: one looked full on the fir-trees; the other on the farmyard, with the pigsty closing the view. Near the fir-tree window sat Mrs. Leslie; before her, on a high stool, was a basket of the children's clothes that wanted mending. A work-table of rosewood inlaid with brass, which had been a wedding-present, and was a costly thing originally, but in that peculiar taste which is vulgarly called "Brummagem," stood at hand: the brass had started in several places, and occasionally made great havoc in the children's fingers and in Mrs. Leslie's gown; in fact it was the liveliest piece of furniture in the house, thanks to the petulant brasswork, and could not have been more mischievous if it had been a monkey. Upon the work-table lay a housewife and thimble, and scissors, and skeins of worsted and thread, and little scraps of linen and cloth for patches. But Mrs. Leslie was not actually working,—she was preparing to work; she had been preparing to work for the last hour and a half. Upon her lap she supported a novel, by a lady who wrote much for a former generation, under the name of "Mrs. Bridget Blue Mantle." She had a small needle in her left hand, and a very thick piece of thread in her right; occasionally she applied the end of the said thread to her lips, and then—her eyes fixed on the novel—made a blind, vacillating attack at the eye of the needle. But a camel would have gone through it with quite as much ease. Nor did the novel alone engage Mrs. Leslie's attention, for ever and anon she interrupted herself to scold the children, to inquire "what o'clock it was;" to observe that "Sarah would never suit;" and to wonder "why Mr. Leslie would not see that the work-table was mended." Mrs. Leslie has been rather a pretty woman. In spite of a dress at once slatternly and economical, she has still the air of a lady,—rather too much so, the hard duties of her situation considered. She is proud of the antiquity of her family on both sides; her mother was of the venerable stock of the Daudlers of Daudle Place, a race that existed before the Conquest. Indeed, one has only to read our earliest chronicles, and to glance over some of those long-winded moralizing poems which delighted the thanes and ealdermen of old, in order to see that the Daudles must have been a very influential family before William the First turned the country topsyturvy. While the mother's race was thus indubitably Saxon, the father's had not only the name but the peculiar idiosyncrasy of the Normans, and went far to establish that crotchet of the brilliant author of "Sybil; or, The Two Nations," as to the continued distinction between the conquering and conquered populations. Mrs. Leslie's father boasted the name of Montfichet,—doubtless of the same kith and kin as those great barons of Alontfichet, who once owned such broad lands and such turbulent castles. A high-nosed, thin, nervous, excitable progeny, those same Montfydgets, as the most troublesome Norman could pretend to be. This fusion of race was notable to the most ordinary physiognomist in

the physique and in the morale of Mrs. Leslie. She had the speculative blue eye of the Saxon, and the passionate high nose of the Norman; she had the musing do-nothingness of the Daudlers, and the reckless have-at-every-thingness of the Montfydgets. At Mrs. Leslie's feet, a little girl with her hair about her ears (and beautiful hair it was too) was amusing herself with a broken-nosed doll. At the far end of the room, before a high desk, sat Frank's Eton schoolfellow, the eldest son. A minute or two before Frank's alarm had disturbed the tranquillity of the household, he had raised his eyes from the books on the desk to glance at a very tattered copy of the Greek Testament, in which his brother Oliver had found a difficulty that he came to Randal to solve. As the young Etonian's face was turned to the light, your first impression on seeing it would have been melancholy, but respectful, interest,—for the face had already lost the joyous character of youth; there was a wrinkle between the brows; and the lines that speak of fatigue were already visible under the eyes and about the mouth; the complexion was sallow, the lips were pale. Years of study had already sown in the delicate organization the seeds of many an infirmity and many a pain; but if your look had rested longer on that countenance, gradually your compassion might have given place to some feeling uneasy and sinister,—a feeling akin to fear. There was in the whole expression so much of cold calm force, that it belied the debility of the frame. You saw there the evidence of a mind that was cultivated, and you felt that in that cultivation there was something formidable. A notable contrast to this countenance, prematurely worn and eminently intelligent, was the round healthy face of Oliver, with slow blue eyes fixed hard on the penetrating orbs of his brother, as if trying with might and main to catch from them a gleam of that knowledge with which they shone clear and frigid as a star.

At Frank's knock, Oliver's slow blue eyes sparkled into animation, and he sprang from his brother's side. The little girl flung back the hair from her face, and stared at her mother with a look which spoke wonder and fright.

The young student knit his brows, and then turned wearily back to the books on his desk.

"Dear me," cried Mrs. Leslie, "who can that possibly be? Oliver, come from the window, sir, this instant: you will be seen! Juliet, run, ring the bell; no, go to the head of the kitchen stairs, and call out to Jenny 'Not at home.' Not at home, on any account," repeated Mrs. Leslie, nervously, for the Montfydget blood was now in full flow.

In another minute or so, Frank's loud boyish voice was distinctly heard at the outer door.

Randal slightly started.

"Frank Hazeldean's voice," said he; "I should like to see him, Mother."

"See him," repeated Mrs. Leslie, in amaze; "see him! and the room in this state!"

Randal might have replied that the room was in no worse state than usual; but he said nothing. A slight flush came and went over his pale face; and then he leaned his check on his hand, and compressed his lips firmly.

The outer door closed with a sullen, inhospitable jar, and a slip-shod female servant entered with a card between her finger and thumb.

"Who is that for?—give it to me, Jenny," cried Mrs. Leslie.

But Jenny shook her head, laid the card on the desk beside Randal, and vanished without saying a word.

"Oh, look, Randal, look up," cried Oliver, who had again rushed to the window; "such a pretty gray pony!"

Randal did look up; nay, he went deliberately to the window, and gazed a moment on the high-mettled pony and the well-dressed, spirited rider. In that moment changes passed over Randal's countenance more rapidly than clouds over the sky in a gusty day. Now envy and discontent, with the curled lip and the gloomy scowl; now hope and proud self-esteem, with the clearing brow and the lofty smile; and then again all became cold, firm, and close, as he walked back to his books, seated himself resolutely, and said, half aloud,—"**Well, KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!**"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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