

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**LUCRETIA – VOLUME
02**

Эдвард Джордж Бульвер-Литтон
Lucretia — Volume 02

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Lucretia — Volume 02

CHAPTER III

CONFERENCES

The next day Sir Miles did not appear at breakfast,—not that he was unwell, but that he meditated holding certain audiences, and on such occasions the good old gentleman liked to prepare himself. He belonged to a school in which, amidst much that was hearty and convivial, there was much also that nowadays would seem stiff and formal, contrasting the other school immediately succeeding him, which Mr. Vernon represented, and of which the Charles Surface of Sheridan is a faithful and admirable type. The room that Sir Miles appropriated to himself was, properly speaking, the state apartment, called, in the old inventories, "King James's chamber;" it was on the first floor, communicating with the picture-gallery, which at the farther end opened upon a corridor admitting to the principal bedrooms. As Sir Miles cared nothing for holiday state, he had unscrupulously taken his cubiculum in this chamber, which was really the handsomest in the house, except the banquet-hall, placed his bed in one angle

with a huge screen before it, filled up the space with his Italian antiquities and curiosities; and fixed his favourite pictures on the faded gilt leather panelled on the walls. His main motive in this was the communication with the adjoining gallery, which, when the weather was unfavourable, furnished ample room for his habitual walk. He knew how many strides by the help of his crutch made a mile, and this was convenient. Moreover, he liked to look, when alone, on those old portraits of his ancestors, which he had religiously conserved in their places, preferring to thrust his Florentine and Venetian masterpieces into bedrooms and parlours, rather than to dislodge from the gallery the stiff ruffs, doublets, and farthingales of his predecessors. It was whispered in the house that the baronet, whenever he had to reprove a tenant or lecture a dependant, took care to have him brought to his sanctum, through the full length of this gallery, so that the victim might be duly prepared and awed by the imposing effect of so stately a journey, and the grave faces of all the generations of St. John, which could not fail to impress him with the dignity of the family, and alarm him at the prospect of the injured frown of its representative. Across this gallery now, following the steps of the powdered valet, strode young Ardworth, staring now and then at some portrait more than usually grim, more often wondering why his boots, that never creaked before, should creak on those particular boards, and feeling a quiet curiosity, without the least mixture of fear or awe as to what old Squaretoes intended to say to him. But all feeling of irreverence ceased when, shown into the

baronet's room, and the door closed, Sir Miles rose with a smile, and cordially shaking his hand, said, dropping the punctilious courtesy of Mister: "Ardworth, sir, if I had a little prejudice against you before you came, you have conquered it. You are a fine, manly, spirited fellow, sir; and you have an old man's good wishes,—which are no bad beginning to a young man's good fortune."

The colour rushed over Ardworth's forehead, and a tear sprang to his eyes. He felt a rising at his throat as he stammered out some not very audible reply.

"I wished to see you, young gentleman, that I might judge myself what you would like best, and what would best fit you. Your father is in the army: what say you to a pair of colours?"

"Oh, Sir Miles, that is my utmost ambition! Anything but law, except the Church; anything but the Church, except the desk and a counter!"

The baronet, much pleased, gave him a gentle pat on the shoulder. "Ha, ha! we gentlemen, you see (for the Ardworths are very well born, very), we gentlemen understand each other! Between you and me, I never liked the law, never thought a man of birth should belong to it. Take money for lying,—shabby, shocking! Don't let that go any farther! The Church-Mother Church—I honour her! Church and State go together! But one ought to be very good to preach to others,—better than you and I are, eh? ha, ha! Well, then, you like the army,—there's a letter for you to the Horse Guards. Go up to town; your business is done.

And, as for your outfit,—read this little book at your leisure." And Sir Miles thrust a pocketbook into Ardworth's hand.

"But pardon me," said the young man, much bewildered. "What claim have I, Sir Miles, to such generosity? I know that my uncle offended you."

"Sir, that's the claim!" said Sir Miles, gravely. "I cannot live long," he added, with a touch of melancholy in his voice; "let me die in peace with all! Perhaps I injured your uncle,—who knows but, if so, he hears and pardons me now?"

"Oh, Sir Miles!" exclaimed the thoughtless, generous-hearted young man; "and my little playfellow, Susan, your own niece!"

Sir Miles drew back haughtily; but the burst that offended him rose so evidently from the heart, was so excusable from its motive and the youth's ignorance of the world, that his frown soon vanished as he said, calmly and gravely,—

"No man, my good sir, can allow to others the right to touch on his family affairs; I trust I shall be just to the poor young lady. And so, if we never meet again, let us think well of each other. Go, my boy; serve your king and your country!"

"I will do my best, Sir Miles, if only to merit your kindness."

"Stay a moment: you are intimate, I find, with young Mainwaring?"

"An old college friendship, Sir Miles."

"The army will not do for him, eh?"

"He is too clever for it, sir."

"Ah, he'd make a lawyer, I suppose,—glib tongue enough, and

can talk well; and lie, if he's paid for it?"

"I don't know how lawyers regard those matters, Sir Miles; but if you don't make him a lawyer, I am sure you must leave him an honest man."

"Really and truly—"

"Upon my honour I think so."

"Good-day to you, and good luck. You must catch the coach at the lodge; for I see by the papers that, in spite of all the talk about peace, they are raising regiments like wildfire."

With very different feelings from those with which he had entered the room, Ardworth quitted it. He hurried into his own chamber to thrust his clothes into his portmanteau, and while thus employed, Mainwaring entered.

"Joy, my dear fellow, wish me joy! I am going to town,—into the army; abroad; to be shot at, thank Heaven! That dear old gentleman! Just throw me that coat, will you?"

A very few more words sufficed to explain what had passed to Mainwaring.

He sighed when his friend had finished: "I wish I were going with you!"

"Do you? Sir Miles has only got to write another letter to the Horse Guards. But no, you are meant to be something better than food for powder; and, besides, your Lucretia! Hang it, I am sorry I cannot stay to examine her as I had promised; but I have seen enough to know that she certainly loves you. Ah, when she changed flowers with you, you did not think I saw you,—sly, was

not I? Pshaw! She was only playing with Vernon. But still, do you know, Will, now that Sir Miles has spoken to me so, that I could have sobbed, 'God bless you, my old boy!' 'pon my life, I could! Now, do you know that I feel enraged with you for abetting that girl to deceive him?"

"I am enraged with myself; and—"

Here a servant entered, and informed Mainwaring that he had been searching for him; Sir Miles requested to see him in his room. Mainwaring started like a culprit.

"Never fear," whispered Ardworth; "he has no suspicion of you, I'm sure. Shake hands. When shall we meet again? Is it not odd, I, who am a republican by theory, taking King George's pay to fight against the French? No use stopping now to moralize on such contradictions. John, Tom,—what's your name?—here, my man, here, throw that portmanteau on your shoulder and come to the lodge." And so, full of health, hope, vivacity, and spirit, John Walter Ardworth departed on his career.

Meanwhile Mainwaring slowly took his way to Sir Miles. As he approached the gallery, he met Lucretia, who was coming from her own room. "Sir Miles has sent for me," he said meaningly. He had time for no more, for the valet was at the door of the gallery, waiting to usher him to his host. "Ha! you will say not a word that can betray us; guard your looks too!" whispered Lucretia, hurriedly; "afterwards, join me by the cedars." She passed on towards the staircase, and glanced at the large clock that was placed there. "Past eleven! Vernon is never up before

twelve. I must see him before my uncle sends for me, as he will send if he suspects—" She paused, went back to her room, rang for her maid, dressed as for walking, and said carelessly, "If Sir Miles wants me, I am gone to the rectory, and shall probably return by the village, so that I shall be back about one." Towards the rectory, indeed, Lucretia bent her way; but half-way there, turned back, and passing through the plantation at the rear of the house, awaited Mainwaring on the bench beneath the cedars. He was not long before he joined her. His face was sad and thoughtful; and when he seated himself by her side, it was with a weariness of spirit that alarmed her.

"Well," said she, fearfully, and she placed her hand on his.

"Oh, Lucretia," he exclaimed, as he pressed that hand with an emotion that came from other passions than love, "we, or rather I, have done great wrong. I have been leading you to betray your uncle's trust, to convert your gratitude to him into hypocrisy. I have been unworthy of myself. I am poor, I am humbly born, but till I came here, I was rich and proud in honour. I am not so now. Lucretia, pardon me, pardon me! Let the dream be over; we must not sin thus; for it is sin, and the worst of sin,—treachery. We must part: forget me!"

"Forget you! Never, never, never!" cried Lucretia, with suppressed but most earnest vehemence, her breast heaving, her hands, as he dropped the one he held, clasped together, her eyes full of tears,—transformed at once into softness, meekness, even while racked by passion and despair.

"Oh, William, say anything,—reproach, chide, despise me, for mine is all the fault; say anything but that word 'part.' I have chosen you, I have sought you out, I have wooed you, if you will; be it so. I cling to you, you are my all,—all that saves me from—from myself," she added falteringly, and in a hollow voice. "Your love—you know not what it is to me! I scarcely knew it myself before. I feel what it is now, when you say 'part.'"

Agitated and tortured, Mainwaring writhed at these burning words, bent his face low, and covered it with his hands.

He felt her clasp struggling to withdraw them, yielded, and saw her kneeling at his feet. His manhood and his gratitude and his heart all moved by that sight in one so haughty, he opened his arms, and she fell on his breast. "You will never say 'part' again, William!" she gasped convulsively.

"But what are we to do?"

"Say, first, what has passed between you and my uncle."

"Little to relate; for I can repeat words, not tones and looks. Sir Miles spoke to me, at first kindly and encouragingly, about my prospects, said it was time that I should fix myself, added a few words, with menacing emphasis, against what he called 'idle dreams and desultory ambition,' and observing that I changed countenance,—for I felt that I did,—his manner became more cold and severe. Lucretia, if he has not detected our secret, he more than suspects my—my presumption. Finally, he said dryly, that I had better return home, consult with my father, and that if I preferred entering into the service of the Government to any

mercantile profession, he thought he had sufficient interest to promote my views. But, clearly and distinctly, he left on my mind one impression,—that my visits here are over."

"Did he allude to me—to Mr. Vernon?"

"Ah, Lucretia! do you know him so little,—his delicacy, his pride?"

Lucretia was silent, and Mainwaring continued:—

"I felt that I was dismissed. I took my leave of your uncle; I came hither with the intention to say farewell forever."

"Hush! hush! that thought is over. And you return to your father's,—perhaps better so: it is but hope deferred; and in your absence I can the more easily allay all suspicion, if suspicion exist. But I must write to you; we must correspond. William, dear William, write often,—write kindly; tell me, in every letter, that you love me,—that you love only me; that you will be patient, and confide."

"Dear Lucretia," said Mainwaring, tenderly, and moved by the pathos of her earnest and imploring voice, "but you forget: the bag is always brought first to Sir Miles; he will recognize my hand. And to whom can you trust your own letters?"

"True," replied Lucretia, despondingly; and there was a pause. Suddenly she lifted her head, and cried: "But your father's house is not far from this,—not ten miles; we can find a spot at the remote end of the park, near the path through the great wood: there I can leave my letters; there I can find yours."

"But it must be seldom. If any of Sir Miles's servants see me,

if—"

"Oh, William, William, this is not the language of love!"

"Forgive me,—I think of you!"

"Love thinks of nothing but itself; it is tyrannical, absorbing,—it forgets even the object loved; it feeds on danger; it strengthens by obstacles," said Lucretia, tossing her hair from her forehead, and with an expression of dark and wild power on her brow and in her eyes. "Fear not for me; I am sufficient guard upon myself. Even while I speak, I think,—yes, I have thought of the very spot. You remember that hollow oak at the bottom of the dell, in which Guy St. John, the Cavalier, is said to have hid himself from Fairfax's soldiers? Every Monday I will leave a letter in that hollow; every Tuesday you can search for it, and leave your own. This is but once a week; there is no risk here."

Mainwaring's conscience still smote him, but he had not the strength to resist the energy of Lucretia. The force of her character seized upon the weak part of his own,—its gentleness, its fear of inflicting pain, its reluctance to say "No,"—that simple cause of misery to the over-timid. A few sentences more, full of courage, confidence, and passion, on the part of the woman, of constraint and yet of soothed and grateful affection on that of the man, and the affianced parted.

Mainwaring had already given orders to have his trunks sent to him at his father's; and, a hardy pedestrian by habit, he now struck across the park, passed the dell and the hollow tree, commonly called "Guy's Oak," and across woodland and fields

golden with ripening corn, took his way to the town, in the centre of which, square, solid, and imposing, stood the respectable residence of his bustling, active, electioneering father.

Lucretia's eye followed a form as fair as ever captivated maiden's glance, till it was out of sight; and then, as she emerged from the shade of the cedars into the more open space of the garden, her usual thoughtful composure was restored to her steadfast countenance. On the terrace, she caught sight of Vernon, who had just quitted his own room, where he always breakfasted alone, and who was now languidly stretched on a bench, and basking in the sun. Like all who have abused life, Vernon was not the same man in the early part of the day. The spirits that rose to temperate heat the third hour after noon, and expanded into glow when the lights shone over gay carousers, at morning were flat and exhausted. With hollow eyes and that weary fall of the muscles of the cheeks which betrays the votary of Bacchus,—the convivial three-bottle man,—Charley Vernon forced a smile, meant to be airy and impertinent, to his pale lips, as he rose with effort, and extended three fingers to his cousin.

"Where have you been hiding? Catching bloom from the roses? You have the prettiest shade of colour,—just enough; not a hue too much. And there is Sir Miles's valet gone to the rectory, and the fat footman puffing away towards the village, and I, like a faithful warden, from my post at the castle, all looking out for the truant."

"But who wants me, cousin?" said Lucretia, with the full blaze

of her rare and captivating smile.

"The knight of Laughton confessedly wants thee, O damsel! The knight of the Bleeding Heart may want thee more,—dare he own it?"

And with a hand that trembled a little, not with love, at least, it trembled always a little before the Madeira at luncheon,—he lifted hers to his lips.

"Compliments again,—words, idle words!" said Lucretia, looking down bashfully.

"How can I convince thee of my sincerity, unless thou takest my life as its pledge, maid of Laughton?"

And very much tired of standing, Charley Vernon drew her gently to the bench and seated himself by her side. Lucretia's eyes were still downcast, and she remained silent; Vernon, suppressing a yawn, felt that he was bound to continue. There was nothing very formidable in Lucretia's manner.

"Fore Gad!" thought he, "I suppose I must take the heiress after all; the sooner 't is over, the sooner I can get back to Brook Street."

"It is premature, my fair cousin," said he, aloud,—"premature, after less than a week's visit, and only some fourteen or fifteen hours' permitted friendship and intimacy, to say what is uppermost in my thoughts; but we spendthrifts are provokingly handsome! Sir Miles, your good uncle, is pleased to forgive all my follies and faults upon one condition,—that you will take on yourself the task to reform me. Will you, my fair cousin? Such as

I am, you behold me. I am no sinner in the disguise of a saint. My fortune is spent, my health is not strong; but a young widow's is no mournful position. I am gay when I am well, good-tempered when ailing. I never betrayed a trust,—can you trust me with yourself?"

This was a long speech, and Charley Vernon felt pleased that it was over. There was much in it that would have touched a heart even closed to him, and a little genuine emotion had given light to his eyes, and color to his cheek. Amidst all the ravages of dissipation, there was something interesting in his countenance, and manly in his tone and his gesture. But Lucretia was only sensible to one part of his confession,—her uncle consented to his suit. This was all of which she desired to be assured, and against this she now sought to screen herself.

"Your candour, Mr. Vernon," she said, avoiding his eye, "deserves candour in me; I cannot affect to misunderstand you. But you take me by surprise; I was so unprepared for this. Give me time,—I must reflect."

"Reflection is dull work in the country; you can reflect more amusingly in town, my fair cousin."

"I will wait, then, till I find myself in town."

"Ah, you make me the happiest, the most grateful of men," cried Mr. Vernon, rising, with a semi-genuflection which seemed to imply, "Consider yourself knelt to,"—just as a courteous assailer, with a motion of the hand, implies, "Consider yourself horsewhipped."

Lucretia, who, with all her intellect, had no capacity for humour, recoiled, and looked up in positive surprise.

"I do not understand you, Mr. Vernon," she said, with austere gravity.

"Allow me the bliss of flattering myself that you, at least, are understood," replied Charley Vernon, with imperturbable assurance. "You will wait to reflect till you are in town,—that is to say, the day after our honeymoon, when you awake in Mayfair."

Before Lucretia could reply, she saw the indefatigable valet formally approaching, with the anticipated message that Sir Miles requested to see her. She replied hurriedly to this last, that she would be with her uncle immediately; and when he had again disappeared within the porch, she said, with a constrained effort at frankness,—

"Mr. Vernon, if I have misunderstood your words, I think I do not mistake your character. You cannot wish to take advantage of my affection for my uncle, and the passive obedience I owe to him, to force me into a step of which—of which—I have not yet sufficiently considered the results. If you really desire that my feelings should be consulted, that I should not—pardon me—consider myself sacrificed to the family pride of my guardian and the interests of my suitor—"

"Madam!" exclaimed Vernon, reddening.

Pleased with the irritating effect her words had produced, Lucretia continued calmly, "If, in a word, I am to be a free agent

in a choice on which my happiness depends, forbear to urge Sir Miles further at present; forbear to press your suit upon me. Give me the delay of a few months; I shall know how to appreciate your delicacy."

"Miss Clavering," answered Vernon, with a touch of the St. John haughtiness, "I am in despair that you should even think so grave an appeal to my honour necessary. I am well aware of your expectations and my poverty. And, believe me, I would rather rot in a prison than enrich myself by forcing your inclinations. You have but to say the word, and I will (as becomes me as a man and gentleman) screen you from all chance of Sir Miles's displeasure, by taking it on myself to decline an honour of which I feel, indeed, very undeserving."

"But I have offended you," said Lucretia, softly, while she turned aside to conceal the glad light of her eyes,— "pardon me; and to prove that you do so, give me your arm to my uncle's room."

Vernon, with rather more of Sir Miles's antiquated stiffness than his own rakish ease, offered his arm, with a profound reverence, to his cousin, and they took their way to the house. Not till they had passed up the stairs, and were even in the gallery, did further words pass between them. Then Vernon said,—

"But what is your wish, Miss Clavering? On what footing shall I remain here?"

"Will you suffer me to dictate?" replied Lucretia, stopping short with well-feigned confusion, as if suddenly aware that the

right to dictate gives the right to hope.

"Ah, consider me at least your slave!" whispered Vernon, as, his eye resting on the contour of that matchless neck, partially and advantageously turned from him, he began, with his constitutional admiration of the sex, to feel interested in a pursuit that now seemed, after piquing, to flatter his self-love.

"Then I will use the privilege when we meet again," answered Lucretia; and drawing her arm gently from his, she passed on to her uncle, leaving Vernon midway in the gallery.

Those faded portraits looked down on her with that melancholy gloom which the effigies of our dead ancestors seem mysteriously to acquire. To noble and aspiring spirits, no homily to truth and honour and fair ambition is more eloquent than the mute and melancholy canvas from which our fathers, made, by death, our household gods, contemplate us still. They appear to confide to us the charge of their unblemished names. They speak to us from the grave, and heard aright, the pride of family is the guardian angel of its heirs. But Lucretia, with her hard and scholastic mind, despised as the veriest weakness all the poetry that belongs to the sense of a pure descent. It was because she was proud as the proudest in herself that she had nothing but contempt for the virtue, the valour, or the wisdom of those that had gone before. So, with a brain busy with guile and stratagem, she trod on, beneath the eyes of the simple and spotless Dead.

Vernon, thus left alone, mused a few moments on what had passed between himself and the heiress; and then, slowly

retracing his steps, his eye roved along the stately series of his line. "Faith!" he muttered, "if my boyhood had been passed in this old gallery, his Royal Highness would have lost a good fellow and hard drinker, and his Majesty would have had perhaps a more distinguished soldier,—certainly a worthier subject. If I marry this lady, and we are blessed with a son, he shall walk through this gallery once a day before he is flogged into Latin!"

Lucretia's interview with her uncle was a masterpiece of art. What pity that such craft and subtlety were wasted in our little day, and on such petty objects; under the Medici, that spirit had gone far to the shaping of history. Sure, from her uncle's openness, that he would plunge at once into the subject for which she deemed she was summoned, she evinced no repugnance when, tenderly kissing her, he asked if Charles Vernon had a chance of winning favour in her eyes. She knew that she was safe in saying "No;" that her uncle would never force her inclinations,—safe so far as Vernon was concerned; but she desired more: she desired thoroughly to quench all suspicion that her heart was pre-occupied; entirely to remove from Sir Miles's thoughts the image of Mainwaring; and a denial of one suitor might quicken the baronet's eyes to the concealment of the other. Nor was this all; if Sir Miles was seriously bent upon seeing her settled in marriage before his death, the dismissal of Vernon might only expose her to the importunity of new candidates more difficult to deal with. Vernon himself she could use as the shield against the arrows of a host. Therefore, when Sir Miles repeated his question, she

answered, with much gentleness and seeming modest sense, that Mr. Vernon had much that must prepossess in his favour; that in addition to his own advantages he had one, the highest in her eyes,—her uncle's sanction and approval. But—and she hesitated with becoming and natural diffidence—were not his habits unfixed and roving? So it was said; she knew not herself,—she would trust her happiness to her uncle. But if so, and if Mr. Vernon were really disposed to change, would it not be prudent to try him,—try him where there was temptation, not in the repose of Laughton, but amidst his own haunts of London? Sir Miles had friends who would honestly inform him of the result. She did but suggest this; she was too ready to leave all to her dear guardian's acuteness and experience.

Melted by her docility, and in high approval of the prudence which betokened a more rational judgment than he himself had evinced, the good old man clasped her to his breast and shed tears as he praised and thanked her. She had decided, as she always did, for the best; Heaven forbid that she should be wasted on an incorrigible man of pleasure! "And," said the frank-hearted gentleman, unable long to keep any thought concealed,— "and to think that I could have wronged you for a moment, my own noble child; that I could have been dolt enough to suppose that the good looks of that boy Mainwaring might have caused you to forget what— But you change colour!"—for, with all her dissimulation, Lucretia loved too ardently not to shrink at that name thus suddenly pronounced. "Oh," continued the baronet,

drawing her still nearer towards him, while with one hand he put back her face, that he might read its expression the more closely,—“oh, if it had been so,—if it be so, I will pity, not blame you, for my neglect was the fault: pity you, for I have known a similar struggle; admire you in pity, for you have the spirit of your ancestors, and you will conquer the weakness. Speak! have I touched on the truth? Speak without fear, child,—you have no mother; but in age a man sometimes gets a mother's heart.”

Startled and alarmed as the lark when the step nears its nest, Lucretia summoned all the dark wile of her nature to mislead the intruder. “No, uncle, no; I am not so unworthy. You misconceived my emotion.”

“Ah, you know that he has had the presumption to love you,—the puppy!— and you feel the compassion you women always feel for such offenders? Is that it?”

Rapidly Lucretia considered if it would be wise to leave that impression on his mind. On one hand, it might account for a moment's agitation; and if Mainwaring were detected hovering near the domain, in the exchange of their correspondence, it might appear but the idle, if hopeless, romance of youth, which haunts the mere home of its object,—but no; on the other hand, it left his banishment absolute and confirmed. Her resolution was taken with a promptitude that made her pause not perceptible.

“No, my dear uncle,” she said, so cheerfully that it removed all doubt from the mind of her listener; “but M. Dalibard has rallied me on the subject, and I was so angry with him that when

you touched on it, I thought more of my quarrel with him than of poor timid Mr. Mainwaring himself. Come, now, own it, dear sir! M. Dalibard has instilled this strange fancy into your head?"

"No, 'S life; if he had taken such a liberty, I should have lost my librarian. No, I assure you, it was rather Vernon; you know true love is jealous."

"Vernon!" thought Lucretia; "he must go, and at once." Sliding from her uncle's arms to the stool at his feet, she then led the conversation more familiarly back into the channel it had lost; and when at last she escaped, it was with the understanding that, without promise or compromise, Mr. Vernon should return to London at once, and be put upon the ordeal through which she felt assured it was little likely he should pass with success.

CHAPTER IV

GUY'S OAK

Three weeks afterwards, the life at Laughton seemed restored to the cheerful and somewhat monotonous tranquillity of its course, before chafed and disturbed by the recent interruptions to the stream. Vernon had departed, satisfied with the justice of the trial imposed on him, and far too high-spirited to seek to extort from niece or uncle any engagement beyond that which, to a nice sense of honour, the trial itself imposed. His memory and his heart were still faithful to Mary; but his senses, his fancy, his vanity, were a little involved in his success with the heiress. Though so free from all mercenary meanness, Mr. Vernon was still enough man of the world to be sensible of the advantages of the alliance which had first been pressed on him by Sir Miles, and from which Lucretia herself appeared not to be averse. The season of London was over, but there was always a set, and that set the one in which Charley Vernon principally moved, who found town fuller than the country. Besides, he went occasionally to Brighton, which was then to England what Baiae was to Rome. The prince was holding gay court at the Pavilion, and that was the atmosphere which Vernon was habituated to breathe. He was

no parasite of royalty; he had that strong personal affection to the prince which it is often the good fortune of royalty to attract. Nothing is less founded than the complaint which poets put into the lips of princes, that they have no friends,—it is, at least, their own perverse fault if that be the case; a little amiability, a little of frank kindness, goes so far when it emanates from the rays of a crown. But Vernon was stronger than Lucretia deemed him; once contemplating the prospect of a union which was to consign to his charge the happiness of another, and feeling all that he should owe in such a marriage to the confidence both of niece and uncle, he evinced steadier principles than he had ever made manifest when he had only his own fortune to mar, and his own happiness to trifle with. He joined his old companions, but he kept aloof from their more dissipated pursuits. Beyond what was then thought the venial error of too devout libations to Bacchus, Charley Vernon seemed reformed.

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