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Содержание

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
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BOOK VII

Every man should strive to be as good as possible, but not suppose himself to be the only thing that is good.
—PLOTIN. EN. 11. lib. ix. c. 9.

CHAPTER I

"Deceit is the strong but subtle chain which runs through all the members of a society, and links them together;

trick or be tricked is the alternative; 'tis the way of the world, and without it intercourse would drop."
/Anonymous writer/ of 1722.

"A lovely child she was, of looks serene,
And motions which o'er things indifferent shed
The grace and gentleness from whence they came."

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

"His years but young, but his experience old."

—SHAKESPEARE.

"He after honour hunts, I after love."

—/Ibid./

LUMLEY FERRERS was one of the few men in the world who act upon a profound, deliberate, and organized system—he had done so even from a boy. When he was twenty-one, he had said to himself, "Youth is the season for enjoyment: the triumphs of manhood, the wealth of age, do not compensate for a youth spent in unpleasurable toils." Agreeably to this maxim, he had resolved not to adopt any profession; and being fond of travel, and of a restless temper, he had indulged abroad in all the gratifications that his moderate income could afford him: that income went farther on the Continent than at home, which was another reason for the prolongation of his travels. Now, when the whims and passions of youth were sated; and, ripened by a consummate and various knowledge of mankind, his harder capacities of mind became developed and centred into such ambition as it was his nature to conceive, he acted no less upon a regular and methodical plan of conduct, which he carried

into details. He had little or nothing within himself to cross his cold theories by contradictory practice; for he was curbed by no principles and regulated but by few tastes: and our tastes are often checks as powerful as our principles. Looking round the English world, Ferrers saw, that at his age and with an equivocal position, and no chances to throw away, it was necessary that he should cast off all attributes of the character of the wanderer and the /garcon/.

"There is nothing respectable in lodgings and a cab," said Ferrers to himself—that "/self/" was his grand confidant!—"nothing stationary. Such are the appliances of a here-to-day-gone-to-morrow kind of life. One never looks substantial till one pays rates and taxes, and has a bill with one's butcher!"

Accordingly, without saying a word to anybody, Ferrers took a long lease of a large house, in one of those quiet streets that proclaim the owners do not wish to be made by fashionable situations—streets in which, if you have a large house, it is supposed to be because you can afford one. He was very particular in its being a respectable street—Great George Street, Westminster, was the one he selected.

No frippery or baubles, common to the mansions of young bachelors—no buhl, and marquetrie, and Sevres china, and cabinet pictures, distinguished the large dingy drawing-rooms of Lumley Ferrers. He bought all the old furniture a bargain of the late tenant—tea-coloured chintz curtains, and chairs and sofas that were venerable and solemn with the accumulated dust of

twenty-five years. The only things about which he was particular were a very long dining-table that would hold four-and-twenty, and a new mahogany sideboard. Somebody asked him why he cared about such articles. "I don't know," said he "but I observe all respectable family-men do—there must be something in it—I shall discover the secret by and by."

In this house did Mr. Ferrers ensconce himself with two middle-aged maidservants, and a man out of livery, whom he chose from a multitude of candidates, because the man looked especially well fed. Having thus settled himself, and told every one that the lease of his house was for sixty-three years, Lumley Ferrers made a little calculation of his probable expenditure, which he found, with good management, might amount to about one-fourth more than his income.

"I shall take the surplus out of my capital," said he, "and try the experiment for five years; if it don't do, and pay me profitably, why, then either men are not to be lived upon, or Lumley Ferrers is a much duller clog than he thinks himself!"

Mr. Ferrers had deeply studied the character of his uncle, as a prudent speculator studies the qualities of a mine in which he means to invest his capital, and much of his present proceedings was intended to act upon the uncle as well as upon the world. He saw that the more he could obtain for himself, not a noisy, social, fashionable reputation, but a good, sober, substantial one, the more highly Mr. Templeton would consider him, and the more likely he was to be made his uncle's heir,—that is, provided Mrs.

Templeton did not supersede the nepotal parasite by indigenous olive-branches. This last apprehension died away as time passed, and no signs of fertility appeared. And, accordingly, Ferrers thought he might prudently hazard more upon the game on which he now ventured to rely. There was one thing, however, that greatly disturbed his peace; Mr. Templeton, though harsh and austere in his manner to his wife, was evidently attached to her; and, above all, he cherished the fondest affection for his stepdaughter. He was as anxious for her health, her education, her little childish enjoyments, as if he had been not only her parent, but a very doting one. He could not bear her to be crossed or thwarted. Mr. Templeton, who had never spoiled anything before, not even an old pen (so careful, and calculating, and methodical was he), did his best to spoil this beautiful child whom he could not even have the vain luxury of thinking he had produced to the admiring world. Softly, exquisitely lovely was that little girl; and every day she increased in the charm of her person, and in the caressing fascination of her childish ways. Her temper was so sweet and docile, that fondness and petting, however injudiciously exhibited, only seemed yet more to bring out the colours of a grateful and tender nature. Perhaps the measured kindness of more reserved affection might have been the true way of spoiling one whose instincts were all for exacting and returning love. She was a plant that suns less warm might have nipped and chilled. But beneath an uncapricious and unclouded sunshine she sprang up in a luxurious bloom of heart

and sweetness of disposition.

Every one, even those who did not generally like children, delighted in this charming creature, excepting only Mr. Lumley Ferrers. But that gentleman, less mild than Pope's Narcissa,—

"To make a wash, had gladly stewed the child!"

He had seen how very common it is for a rich man, married late in life, to leave everything to a young widow and her children by her former marriage, when once attached to the latter; and he sensibly felt that he himself had but a slight hold over Templeton by the chain of the affections. He resolved, therefore, as much as possible, to alienate his uncle from his young wife; trusting that, as the influence of the wife was weakened, that of the child would be lessened also; and to raise in Templeton's vanity and ambition an ally that might supply to himself the want of love. He pursued his twofold scheme with masterly art and address. He first sought to secure the confidence and regard of the melancholy and gentle mother; and in this—for she was peculiarly unsuspicious and inexperienced, he obtained signal and complete success. His frankness of manner, his deferential attention, the art with which he warded off from her the spleen or ill-humour of Mr. Templeton, the cheerfulness that his easy gaiety threw over a very gloomy house, made the poor lady hail his visits and trust in his friendship. Perhaps she was glad of any interruption to /tetes-a-tetes/ with a severe and ungenial husband, who had no sympathy for the sorrows, of whatever nature they might be, which preyed upon her, and who made it a point of

morality to find fault wherever he could.

The next step in Lumley's policy was to arm Templeton's vanity against his wife, by constantly refreshing his consciousness of the sacrifices he had made by marriage, and the certainty that he would have attained all his wishes had he chosen more prudently. By perpetually, but most judiciously, rubbing this sore point, he, as it were, fixed the irritability into Templeton's constitution, and it reacted on all his thoughts, aspiring or domestic. Still, however, to Lumley's great surprise and resentment, while Templeton cooled to his wife, he only warmed to her child. Lumley had not calculated enough upon the thirst and craving for affection in most human hearts; and Templeton, though not exactly an amiable man, had some excellent qualities; if he had less sensitively regarded the opinion of the world, he would neither have contracted the vocabulary of cant, nor sickened for a peerage—both his affectation of saintship, and his gnawing desire of rank, arose from an extraordinary and morbid deference to opinion, and a wish for worldly honours and respect, which he felt that his mere talents could not secure to him. But he was, at bottom, a kindly man—charitable to the poor, considerate to his servants, and had within him the want to love and be loved, which is one of the desires wherewith the atoms of the universe are cemented and harmonised. Had Mrs. Templeton evinced love to him, he might have defied all Lumley's diplomacy, been consoled for worldly disadvantages, and been a good and even

uxorious husband. But she evidently did not love him, though an admirable, patient, provident wife; and her daughter /did/ love him—love him as well even as she loved her mother; and the hard worldling would not have accepted a kingdom as the price of that little fountain of pure and ever-refreshing tenderness. Wise and penetrating as Lumley was, he never could thoroughly understand this weakness, as he called it; for we never know men entirely, unless we have complete sympathies with men in all their natural emotions; and Nature had left the workmanship of Lumley Ferrers unfinished and incomplete, by denying him the possibility of caring for anything but himself.

His plan for winning Templeton's esteem and deference was, however, completely triumphant. He took care that nothing in his /menage/ should appear "/extravagant/;" all was sober, quiet, and well-regulated. He declared that he had so managed as to live within his income: and Templeton receiving no hint for money, nor aware that Ferrers had on the Continent consumed a considerable portion of his means, believed him. Ferrers gave a great many dinners, but he did not go on that foolish plan which has been laid down by persons who pretend to know life, as a means of popularity—he did not profess to give dinners better than other people. He knew that, unless you are a very rich or a very great man, no folly is equal to that of thinking that you soften the hearts of your friends by soups /a la bisque/, and Johannisberg at a guinea a bottle. They all go away saying, "What right has that d——d fellow to give a better dinner than we do? What horrid

taste! What ridiculous presumption."

No; though Ferrers himself was a most scientific epicure, and held the luxury of the palate at the highest possible price, he dieted his friends on what he termed "respectable fare." His cook put plenty of flour into the oyster sauce; cod's head and shoulders made his invariable fish; and four /entrees/, without flavour or pretence, were duly supplied by the pastry-cook, and carefully eschewed by the host. Neither did Mr. Ferrers affect to bring about him gay wits and brilliant talkers. He confined himself to men of substantial consideration, and generally took care to be himself the cleverest person present; while he turned the conversation on serious matters crammed for the occasion —politics, stocks, commerce, and the criminal code. Pruning his gaiety, though he retained his frankness, he sought to be known as a highly-informed, painstaking man, who would be sure to rise. His connections, and a certain nameless charm about him, consisting chiefly in a pleasant countenance, a bold yet winning candour, and the absence of all /hauteur/ or pretence, enabled him to assemble round this plain table, which, if it gratified no taste, wounded no self-love, a sufficient number of public men of rank, and eminent men of business, to answer his purpose. The situation he had chosen, so near the Houses of Parliament, was convenient to politicians, and, by degrees, the large dingy drawing-rooms became a frequent resort for public men to talk over those thousand underplots by which a party is served or attached. Thus, though not in parliament himself,

Ferrers became insensibly associated with parliamentary men and things, and the ministerial party, whose politics he espoused, praised him highly, made use of him, and meant, some day or other, to do something for him.

While the career of this able and unprincipled man thus opened—and of course the opening was not made in a day—Ernest Maltravers was ascending by a rough, thorny, and encumbered path, to that eminence on which the monuments of men are built. His success in public life was not brilliant nor sudden. For, though he had eloquence and knowledge, he disdained all oratorical devices; and though he had passion and energy, he could scarcely be called a warm partisan. He met with much envy, and many obstacles; and the gracious and buoyant sociality of temper and manners that had, in early youth, made him the idol of his contemporaries at school or college, had long since faded away into a cold, settled, and lofty, though gentle reserve, which did not attract towards him the animal spirits of the herd. But though he spoke seldom, and heard many, with half his powers, more enthusiastically cheered, he did not fail of commanding attention and respect; and though no darling of cliques and parties, yet in that great body of the people who were ever the audience and tribunal to which, in letters or in politics, Maltravers appealed, there was silently growing up, and spreading wide, a belief in his upright intentions, his unpurchasable honour, and his correct and well-considered views. He felt that his name was safely invested, though the return

for the capital was slow and moderate. He was contented to abide his time.

Every day he grew more attached to that true philosophy which makes a man, as far as the world will permit, a world to himself; and from the height of a tranquil and serene self-esteem, he felt the sun shine above him, when malignant clouds spread sullen and ungenial below. He did not despise or wilfully shock opinion, neither did he fawn upon and flatter it. Where he thought the world should be humoured, he humoured—where contemned, he contemned it. There are many cases in which an honest, well-educated, high-hearted individual is a much better judge than the multitude of what is right and what is wrong; and in these matters he is not worth three straws if he suffer the multitude to bully or coax him out of his judgment. The Public, if you indulge it, is a most damnable gossip, thrusting its nose into people's concerns, where it has no right to make or meddle; and in those things, where the Public is impertinent, Maltravers scorned and resisted its interference as haughtily as he would the interference of any insolent member of the insolent whole. It was this mixture of deep love and profound respect for the eternal PEOPLE, and of calm, passionless disdain for that capricious charlatan, the momentary PUBLIC, which made Ernest Maltravers an original and solitary thinker; and an actor, in reality modest and benevolent, in appearance arrogant and unsocial. "Pauperism, in contradistinction to poverty," he was wont to say, "is the dependence upon other people for existence,

not on our own exertions; there is a moral pauperism in the man who is dependent on others for that support of moral life—self-respect."

Wrapped in this philosophy, he pursued his haughty and lonesome way, and felt that in the deep heart of mankind, when prejudices and envies should die off, there would be a sympathy with his motives and his career. So far as his own health was concerned, the experiment had answered. No mere drudgery of business—late hours and dull speeches—can produce the dread exhaustion which follows the efforts of the soul to mount into the higher air of severe thought or intense imagination. Those faculties which had been overstrained now lay fallow—and the frame rapidly regained its tone. Of private comfort and inspiration Ernest knew but little. He gradually grew estranged from his old friend Ferrers, as their habits became opposed. Cleveland lived more and more in the country, and was too well satisfied with his quondam pupil's course of life and progressive reputation to trouble him with exhortation or advice. Cesarini had grown a literary lion, whose genius was vehemently lauded by all the reviews—on the same principle as that which induces us to praise foreign singers or dead men;—we must praise something, and we don't like to praise those who jostle ourselves. Cesarini had therefore grown prodigiously conceited—swore that England was the only country for true merit; and no longer concealed his jealous anger at the wider celebrity of Maltravers. Ernest saw him squandering away his substance, and prostituting

his talents to drawing-room trifles, with a compassionate sigh. He sought to warn him, but Cesarini listened to him with such impatience that he resigned the office of monitor. He wrote to De Montaigne, who succeeded no better. Cesarini was bent on playing his own game. And to one game, without a metaphor, he had at last come. His craving for excitement vented itself at Hazard, and his remaining guineas melted daily away.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.