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"MY NOVEL" — VOLUME 04

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"My Novel" — Volume 04

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«My Novel» — Volume 04:

Содержание

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
«My Novel» — Volume 04

BOOK FOURTH

INITIAL CHAPTER

COMPRISING MR. CAXTON'S OPINIONS ON THE MATRIMONIAL STATE, SUPPORTED BY LEARNED AUTHORITIES

"It was no bad idea of yours, Pisistratus," said my father, graciously, "to depict the heightened affections and the serious intention of Signor Riccabocca by a single stroke,— /He left of his spectacles!/ Good."

"Yet," quoth my uncle, "I think Shakspeare represents a lover as falling into slovenly habits, neglecting his person, and suffering his hose to be ungartered, rather than paying that attention to his outer man which induces Signor Riccabocca to leave off his spectacles, and look as handsome as nature will permit him."

"There are different degrees and many phases of the passion,"

replied my father. "Shakspeare is speaking of an ill-treated, pining, woe-begone lover, much aggrieved by the cruelty of his mistress,—a lover who has found it of no avail to smarten himself up, and has fallen despondently into the opposite extreme. Whereas Signor Riccabocca has nothing to complain of in the barbarity of Miss Jemima."

"Indeed he has not!" cried Blanche, tossing her head, —"forward creature!"

"Yes, my dear," said my mother, trying her best to look stately, "I am decidedly of opinion that, in that respect, Pisistratus has lowered the dignity of the sex. Not intentionally," added my mother, mildly, and afraid she had said something too bitter; "but it is very hard for a man to describe us women."

The captain nodded approvingly; Mr. Squills smiled; my father quietly resumed the thread of his discourse.

"To continue," quoth he. "Riccabocca has no reason to despair of success in his suit, nor any object in moving his mistress to compassion. He may, therefore, very properly tie up his garters and leave off his spectacles. What do you say, Mr. Squills? —for, after all, since love- making cannot fail to be a great constitutional derangement, the experience of a medical man must be the best to consult."

"Mr. Caxton," replied Squills, obviously flattered, "you are quite right: when a man makes love, the organs of self-esteem and desire of applause are greatly stimulated, and therefore, of course, he sets himself off to the best advantage. It is only,

as you observe, when, like Shakspeare's lover, he has given up making love as a bad job, and has received that severe hit on the ganglions which the cruelty of a mistress inflicts, that he neglects his personal appearance: he neglects it, not because he is in love, but because his nervous system is depressed. That was the cause, if you remember, with poor Major Prim. He wore his wig all awry when Susan Smart jilted him; but I set it right for him."

"By shaming Miss Smart into repentance, or getting him a new sweetheart?" asked my uncle.

"Pooh!" answered Squills, "by quinine and cold bathing."

"We may therefore grant," renewed my father, "that, as a general rule, the process of courtship tends to the spruceness, and even foppery, of the individual engaged in the experiment, as Voltaire has very prettily proved somewhere. Nay, the Mexicans, indeed, were of opinion that the lady at least ought to continue those cares of her person even after marriage. There is extant, in Sahagun's 'History of New Spain,' the advice of an Aztec or Mexican mother to her daughter, in which she says, 'That your husband may not take you in dislike, adorn yourself, wash yourself, and let your garments be clean.' It is true that the good lady adds, 'Do it in moderation; since if every day you are washing yourself and your clothes, the world will say that you are over-delicate; and particular people will call you—TAPETZON TINEMAXOCH!' What those words precisely mean," added my father, modestly, "I cannot say, since I never had the opportunity to acquire the ancient Aztec language,—but something very

opprobrious and horrible, no doubt."

"I dare say a philosopher like Signor Riccabocca," said my uncle, "was not himself very /tapetzon tine/—what d' ye call it?—and a good healthy English wife, that poor affectionate Jemima, was thrown away upon him."

"Roland," said my father, "you don't like foreigners; a respectable prejudice, and quite natural in a man who has been trying his best to hew them in pieces and blow them up into splinters. But you don't like philosophers either,—and for that dislike you have no equally good reason."

"I only implied that they are not much addicted to soap and water," said my uncle.

"A notable mistake. Many great philosophers have been very great beaux. Aristotle was a notorious fop. Buffon put on his best laced ruffles when he sat down to write, which implies that he washed his hands first. Pythagoras insists greatly on the holiness of frequent ablutions; and Horace—who, in his own way, was as good a philosopher as any the Romans produced—takes care to let us know what a neat, well-dressed, dapper little gentleman he was. But I don't think you ever read the 'Apology' of Apuleius?"

"Not I; what is it about?" asked the captain.

"About a great many things. It is that Sage's vindication from several malignant charges,—amongst others, and principally indeed, that of being much too refined and effeminate for a philosopher. Nothing can exceed the rhetorical skill with which he excuses himself for using—tooth- powder. 'Ought a

philosopher,' he exclaims, 'to allow anything unclean about him, especially in the mouth,—the mouth, which is the vestibule of the soul, the gate of discourse, the portico of thought! Ah, but AEmilianus [the accuser of Apuleius] never opens his mouth but for slander and calumny,—tooth-powder would indeed be unbecoming to him! Or, if he use any, it will not be my good Arabian tooth powder, but charcoal and cinders. Ay, his teeth should be as foul as his language! And yet even the crocodile likes to have his teeth cleaned; insects get into them, and, horrible reptile though he be, he opens his jaws inoffensively to a faithful dentistical bird, who volunteers his beak for a toothpick.'"

My father was now warm in the subject he had started, and soared miles away from Riccabocca and "My Novel." "And observe," he exclaimed,— "observe with what gravity this eminent Platonist pleads guilty to the charge of having a mirror. 'Why, what,' he exclaims, 'more worthy of the regards of a human creature than his own image' /nihil respectabilius homini quam formam suam/! Is not that one of our children the most dear to us who is called 'the picture of his father'? But take what pains you will with a picture, it can never be so like you as the face in your mirror! Think it discreditable to look with proper attention on one's self in the glass! Did not Socrates recommend such attention to his disciples,—did he not make a great moral agent of the speculum? The handsome, in admiring their beauty therein, were admonished that handsome is who handsome does; and the more the ugly stared at themselves, the more they became

naturally anxious to hide the disgrace of their features in the loveliness of their merits. Was not Demosthenes always at his speculum? Did he not rehearse his causes before it as before a master in the art? He learned his eloquence from Plato, his dialectics from Eubulides; but as for his delivery—there, he came to the mirror!

"Therefore," concluded Mr. Caxton, returning unexpectedly to the subject,—"therefore, it is no reason to suppose that Dr. Riccabocca is averse to cleanliness and decent care of the person because he is a philosopher; and, all things considered, he never showed himself more a philosopher than when he left off his spectacles and looked his best."

"Well," said my mother, kindly, "I only hope it may turn out happily. But I should have been better pleased if Pisistratus had not made Dr. Riccabocca so reluctant a wooer."

"Very true," said the captain; "the Italian does not shine as a lover. Throw a little more fire into him, Pisistratus,—something gallant and chivalrous."

"Fire! gallantry! chivalry!" cried my father, who had taken Riccabocca under his special protection; "why, don't you see that the man is described as a philosopher?—and I should like to know when a philosopher ever plunged into matrimony without considerable misgivings and cold shivers! Indeed, it seems that —perhaps before he was a philosopher— Riccabocca had tried the experiment, and knew what it was. Why, even that plain-speaking, sensible, practical man, Metellus Numidicus, who was

not even a philosopher, but only a Roman censor, thus expressed himself in an exhortation to the people to perpetrate matrimony: 'If, O Quirites, we could do without wives, we should all dispense with that subject of care /ea molestia careremus/; but since nature has so managed it that we cannot live with women comfortably, nor without them at all, let us rather provide for the human race than our own temporary felicity.'"

Here the ladies set up such a cry of indignation, that both Roland and myself endeavoured to appease their wrath by hasty assurances that we utterly repudiated the damnable doctrine of Metellus Numidicus.

My father, wholly unmoved, as soon as a sullen silence was established, recommenced. "Do not think, ladies," said he, "that you were without advocates at that day: there were many Romans gallant enough to blame the censor for a mode of expressing himself which they held to be equally impolite and injudicious. 'Surely,' said they, with some plausibility, if Numidicus wished men to marry, he need not have referred so peremptorily to the disquietudes of the connection, and thus have made them more inclined to turn away from matrimony than give them a relish for it.' But against these critics one honest man (whose name of Titus Castricius should not be forgotten by posterity) maintained that Metellus Numidicus could not have spoken more properly; 'For remark,' said he, 'that Metellus was a censor, not a rhetorician. It becomes rhetoricians to adorn and disguise and make the best of things; but Metellus, /sanctus vir/,—a holy and blameless man,

grave and sincere to wit, and addressing the Roman people in the solemn capacity of Censor,—was bound to speak the plain truth, especially as he was treating of a subject on which the observation of every day, and the experience of every life, could not leave the least doubt upon the mind of his audience.' Still, Riccabocca, having decided to marry, has no doubt prepared himself to bear all the concomitant evils—as becomes a professed sage; and I own I admire the art with which Pisistratus has drawn the kind of woman most likely to suit a philosopher—"

Pisistratus bows, and looks round complacently; but recoils from two very peevish and discontented faces feminine.

MR. CAXTON (completing his sentence).—"Not only as regards mildness of temper and other household qualifications, but as regards the very person of the object of his choice. For you evidently remember, Pisistratus, the reply of Bias, when asked his opinion on marriage: [Long sentence in Greek]"

Pisistratus tries to look as if he had the opinion of Bias by heart, and nods acquiescingly.

MR. CAXTON.—"That is, my dears, 'The woman you would marry is either handsome or ugly: if handsome, she is koine,—namely, you don't have her to yourself; if ugly, she is /poine/,—that is, a fury.' But, as it is observed in Aulus Gellius (whence I borrow this citation), there is a wide interval between handsome and ugly. And thus Ennius, in his tragedy of 'Menalippus,' uses an admirable expression to designate women of the proper degree of matrimonial comeliness, such as a philosopher would select.

He calls this degree /stata forma/,—a rational, mediocre sort of beauty, which is not liable to be either /koine/ or /poine/. And Favorinus, who was a remarkably sensible man, and came from Provence—the male inhabitants of which district have always valued themselves on their knowledge of love and ladies—calls this said /stata forma/ the beauty of wives,—the uxorial beauty. Ennius says that women of a /stata forma/ are almost always safe and modest. Now, Jemima, you observe, is described as possessing this /stata forma/; and it is the nicety of your observation in this respect, which I like the most in the whole of your description of a philosopher's matrimonial courtship, Pisistratus (excepting only the stroke of the spectacles), for it shows that you had properly considered the opinion of Bias, and mastered all the counter logic suggested in Book v., chapter xi., of Aulus Gellius."

"For all that," said Blanche, half archly, half demurely, with a smile in the eye and a pout of the lip, "I don't remember that Pisistratus, in the days when he wished to be most complimentary, ever assured me that I had a /stata forma/,—a rational, mediocre sort of beauty."

"And I think," observed my uncle, "that when he comes to his real heroine, whoever she may be, he will not trouble his head much about either Bias or Aulus Gellius."

CHAPTER II

Matrimony is certainly a great change in life. One is astonished not to find a notable alteration in one's friend, even if he or she have been only wedded a week. In the instance of Dr. and Mrs. Riccabocca the change was peculiarly visible. To speak first of the lady, as in chivalry bound, Mrs. Riccabocca had entirely renounced that melancholy which had characterized Miss Jemima; she became even sprightly and gay, and looked all the better and prettier for the alteration. She did not scruple to confess honestly to Mrs. Dale that she was now of opinion that the world was very far from approaching its end. But, in the meanwhile, she did not neglect the duty which the belief she had abandoned serves to inculcate,—"She set her house in order." The cold and penurious elegance that had characterized the Casino disappeared like enchantment, —that is, the elegance remained, but the cold and penury fled before the smile of woman. Like Puss-in-Boots, after the nuptials of his master, Jackeymo only now caught minnows and sticklebacks for his own amusement. Jackeymo looked much plumper, and so did Riccabocca. In a word, the fair Jemima became an excellent wife. Riccabocca secretly thought her extravagant, but, like a wise man, declined to look at the house bills, and ate his joint in unreproachful silence.

Indeed there was so much unaffected kindness in the nature

of Mrs. Riccabocca—beneath the quiet of her manner there beat so genially the heart of the Hazeldeans—that she fairly justified the favourable anticipations of Mrs. Dale. And though the doctor did not noisily boast of his felicity, nor, as some new married folks do, thrust it insultingly under the /nimis unctis naribus/,—the turned-up noses of your surly old married folks,—nor force it gaudily and glaringly on the envious eyes of the single, you might still see that he was a more cheerful and light- hearted man than before. His smile was less ironical, his politeness less distant. He did not study Machiavelli so intensely,—and he did not return to the spectacles; which last was an excellent sign. Moreover, the humanizing influence of the tidy English wife might be seen in the improvement of his outward or artificial man. His clothes seemed to fit him better; indeed, the clothes were new. Mrs. Dale no longer remarked that the buttons were off the wristbands, which was a great satisfaction to her. But the sage still remained faithful to the pipe, the cloak, and the red silk umbrella. Mrs. Riccabocca had (to her credit be it spoken) used all becoming and wife-like arts against these three remnants of the old bachelor, Adam, but in vain. "/Anima mia/," [Soul of mine]—said the doctor, tenderly, "I hold the cloak, the umbrella, and the pipe as the sole relics that remain to me of my native country. Respect and spare them."

Mrs. Riccabocca was touched, and had the good sense to perceive that man, let him be ever so much married, retains certain signs of his ancient independence,—certain tokens of

his old identity, which a wife, the most despotic, will do well to concede. She conceded the cloak, she submitted to the umbrella, she overcame her abhorrence of the pipe. After all, considering the natural villany of our sex, she confessed to herself that she might have been worse off. But through all the calm and cheerfulness of Riccabocca, a nervous perturbation was sufficiently perceptible; it commenced after the second week of marriage; it went on increasing, till one bright sunny afternoon, as he was standing on his terrace, gazing down upon the road, at which Jackeymo was placed, lo, a stage-coach stopped! The doctor made a bound, and put both hands to his heart as if he had been shot; he then leaped over the balustrade, and his wife from her window beheld him flying down the hill, with his long hair streaming in the wind, till the trees hid him from her sight.

"Ah," thought she, with a natural pang of conjugal jealousy, "henceforth I am only second in his home. He has gone to welcome his child!" And at that reflection Mrs. Riccabocca shed tears.

But so naturally amiable was she, that she hastened to curb her emotion, and efface as well as she could the trace of a stepmother's grief. When this was done, and a silent, self-rebuking prayer murmured over, the good woman descended the stairs with alacrity, and summoning up her best smiles, emerged on the terrace.

She was repaid; for scarcely had she come into the open air, when two little arms were thrown around her, and the sweetest

voice that ever came from a child's lips sighed out in broken English, "Good mamma, love me a little."

"Love you? with my whole heart!" cried the stepmother, with all a mother's honest passion. And she clasped the child to her breast.

"God bless you, my wife!" said Riccabocca, in a husky tone.

"Please take this too," added Jackeymo, in Italian, as well as his sobs would let him, and he broke off a great bough full of blossoms from his favourite orange-tree, and thrust it into his mistress's hand. She had not the slightest notion what he meant by it!

CHAPTER III

Violante was indeed a bewitching child,—a child to whom I defy Mrs. Caudle herself (immortal Mrs. Caudle!) to have been a harsh stepmother.

Look at her now, as released from those kindly arms, she stands, still clinging with one hand to her new mamma, and holding out the other to Riccabocca, with those large dark eyes swimming in happy tears. What a lovely smile! what an ingenuous, candid brow! She looks delicate, she evidently requires care, she wants the mother. And rare is the woman who would not love her the better for that! Still, what an innocent, infantine bloom in those clear, smooth cheeks! and in that slight frame, what exquisite natural grace!

"And this, I suppose, is your nurse, darling?" said Mrs. Riccabocca, observing a dark, foreign-looking woman, dressed very strangely, without cap or bonnet, but a great silver arrow stuck in her hair, and a filigree chain or necklace resting upon her kerchief.

"Ah, good Annetta," said Violante, in Italian. "Papa, she says she is to go back; but she is not to go back, is she?"

Riccabocca, who had scarcely before noticed the woman, started at that question, exchanged a rapid glance with Jackeymo, and then, muttering some inaudible excuse, approached the nurse, and, beckoning her to follow him, went away into the

grounds. He did not return for more than an hour, nor did the woman then accompany him home. He said briefly to his wife that the nurse was obliged to return at once to Italy, and that she would stay in the village to catch the mail; that indeed she would be of no use in their establishment, as she could not speak a word of English; that he was sadly afraid Violante would pine for her. And Violante did pine at first. But still, to a child it is so great a thing to find a parent, to be at home, that, tender and grateful as Violante was, she could not be inconsolable while her father was there to comfort.

For the first few days, Riccabocca scarcely permitted any one to be with his daughter but himself. He would not even leave her alone with his Jemima. They walked out together,—sat together for hours in the belvidere. Then by degrees he began to resign her more and more to Jemima's care and tuition, especially in English, of which language at present she spoke only a few sentences (previously, perhaps, learned by heart) so as to be clearly intelligible.

CHAPTER IV

There was one person in the establishment of Dr. Riccabocca who was satisfied neither with the marriage of his master nor the arrival of Violante,—and that was our friend Lenny Fairfield. Previous to the all- absorbing duties of courtship, the young peasant had secured a very large share of Riccabocca's attention. The sage had felt interest in the growth of this rude intelligence struggling up to light. But what with the wooing and what with the wedding, Lenny Fairfield had sunk very much out of his artificial position as pupil into his natural station of under-gardener. And on the arrival of Violante, he saw, with natural bitterness, that he was clean forgotten, not only by Riccabocca, but almost by Jackeymo. It was true that the master still lent him books, and the servant still gave him lectures on horticulture. But Riccabocca had no time nor inclination now to amuse himself with enlightening that tumult of conjecture which the books created. And if Jackeymo had been covetous of those mines of gold buried beneath the acres now fairly taken from the squire (and good-naturedly added rent-free, as an aid to Jemima's dower), before the advent of the young lady whose future dowry the produce was to swell, now that she was actually under the eyes of the faithful servant, such a stimulus was given to his industry that he could think of nothing else but the land, and the revolution he designed to effect in its natural English crops.

The garden, save only the orangetrees, was abandoned entirely to Lenny, and additional labourers were called in for the field work. Jackeymo had discovered that one part of the soil was suited to lavender, that another would grow camomile. He had in his heart apportioned a beautiful field of rich loam to flax; but against the growth of flax the squire set his face obstinately. That most lucrative, perhaps, of all crops when soil and skill suit, was formerly attempted in England much more commonly than it is now, since you will find few old leases do not contain a clause prohibitory of flax as an impoverishment of the land. And though Jackeymo learnedly endeavoured to prove to the squire that the flax itself contained particles which, if returned to the soil, repaid all that the crop took away, Mr. Hazeldean had his old-fashioned prejudices on the matter, which were insuperable. "My forefathers," quoth he, "did not put that clause in their leases without good cause; and as the Casino lands are entailed on Frank, I have no right to gratify your foreign whims at his expense."

To make up for the loss of the flax, Jackeymo resolved to convert a very nice bit of pasture into orchard ground, which he calculated would bring in L10 net per acre by the time Miss Violante was marriageable. At this the squire pished a little; but as it was quite clear that the land would be all the more valuable hereafter for the fruit-trees, he consented to permit the "grass-land" to be thus partially broken up.

All these changes left poor Lenny Fairfield very much to

himself,—at a time when the new and strange devices which the initiation into book knowledge creates made it most desirable that he should have the constant guidance of a superior mind.

One evening after his work, as Lenny was returning to his mother's cottage, very sullen and very moody, he suddenly came in contact with Sprott the tinker.

CHAPTER V

The tinker was seated under a hedge, hammering away at an old kettle, with a little fire burning in front of him, and the donkey hard by, indulging in a placid doze. Mr. Sprott looked up as Lenny passed, nodded kindly, and said,—

"Good evenin', Lenny: glad to hear you be so 'spectably sitivated with Mounseer."

"Ay," answered Lenny, with a leaven of rancour in his recollections, "you're not ashamed to speak to me now that I am not in disgrace. But it was in disgrace, when it wasn't my fault, that the real gentleman was most kind to me."

"Ar-r, Lenny," said the tinker, with a prolonged rattle in that said Ar-r, which was not without great significance. "But you sees the real gentleman, who han't got his bread to get, can hafford to 'spise his c'racter in the world. A poor tinker must be timbersome and nice in his 'sociations. But sit down here a bit, Lenny; I've summat to say to ye!"

"To me?"

"To ye. Give the neddy a shove out i' the vay, and sit down, I say."

Lenny rather reluctantly, and somewhat superciliously, accepted this invitation.

"I hears," said the tinker, in a voice made rather indistinct by a couple of nails, which he had inserted between his teeth,—"I

hears as how you be unkimmon fond of reading. I ha' sum nice cheap books in my bag yonder,—sum as low as a penny."

"I should like to see them," said Lenny, his eyes sparkling.

The tinker rose, opened one of the panniers on the ass's back, took out a bag, which he placed before Lenny, and told him to suit himself. The young peasant desired no better. He spread all the contents of the bag on the sward, and a motley collection of food for the mind was there,— food and poison, /serpentes avibus/ good and evil. Here Milton's Paradise Lost, there "The Age of Reason;" here Methodist Tracts, there "True Principles of Socialism,"—Treatises on Useful Knowledge by sound learning actuated by pure benevolence, Appeals to Operatives by the shallowest reasoners, instigated by the same ambition that had moved Eratosthenes to the conflagration of a temple; works of fiction admirable as "Robinson Crusoe," or innocent as "The Old English Baron," beside coarse translations of such garbage as had rotted away the youth of France under Louis Quinze. This miscellany was an epitome, in short, of the mixed World of Books, of that vast city of the Press, with its palaces and hovels, its aqueducts and sewers, which opens all alike to the naked eye and the curious mind of him to whom you say, in the tinker's careless phrase, "Suit yourself."

But it is not the first impulse of a nature healthful and still pure to settle in the hovel and lose itself amidst the sewers; and Lenny Fairfield turned innocently over the bad books, and selecting two or three of the best, brought them to the tinker, and asked the

price.

"Why," said Mr. Sprott, putting on his spectacles, "you has taken the werry dearest: them 'ere be much cheaper, and more hinterestin'."

"But I don't fancy them," answered Lenny; "I don't understand what they are about, and this seems to tell one how the steam-engine is made, and has nice plates; and this is 'Robinson Crusoe,' which Parson Dale once said he would give me—I'd rather buy it out of my own money."

"Well, please yourself," quoth the tinker; "you shall have the books for four bob, and you can pay me next month."

"Four bobs, four shillings? it is a great sum," said Lenny; "but I will lay by, as you are kind enough to trust me: good-evening, Mr. Sprott."

"Stay a bit," said the tinker; "I'll just throw you these two little tracts into the bargain; they be only a shilling a dozen, so 't is but tuppence,—and ven you has read those, vy, you'll be a regular customer."

The tinker tossed to Lenny Nos. 1 and 2 of "Appeals to Operatives," and the peasant took them up gratefully.

The young knowledge-seeker went his way across the green fields, and under the still autumn foliage of the hedgerows. He looked first at one book, then at another; he did not know on which to settle.

The tinker rose, and made a fire with leaves and furze and sticks, some dry and some green.

Lenny has now opened No. 1 of the tracts: they are the shortest to read, and don't require so much effort of the mind as the explanation of the steam-engine.

The tinker has set on his grimy glue-pot, and the glue simmers.

CHAPTER VI

As Violante became more familiar with her new home, and those around her became more familiar with Violante, she was remarked for a certain stateliness of manner and bearing, which, had it been less evidently natural and inborn, would have seemed misplaced in the daughter of a forlorn exile, and would have been rare at so early an age among children of the loftiest pretensions. It was with the air of a little princess that she presented her tiny hand to a friendly pressure, or submitted her calm clear cheek to a presuming kiss. Yet withal she was so graceful, and her very stateliness was so pretty and captivating, that she was not the less loved for all her grand airs. And, indeed, she deserved to be loved; for though she was certainly prouder than Mr. Dale could approve of, her pride was devoid of egotism,—and that is a pride by no means common. She had an intuitive forethought for others: you could see that she was capable of that grand woman-heroism, abnegation of self; and though she was an original child, and often grave and musing, with a tinge of melancholy, sweet, but deep in her character, still she was not above the happy genial merriment of childhood,—only her silver laugh was more attuned, and her gestures more composed, than those of children habituated to many play-fellows usually are. Mrs. Hazeldean liked her best when she was grave, and said "she would become a very sensible woman." Mrs. Dale liked her best

when she was gay, and said "she was born to make many a heart ache;" for which Mrs. Dale was properly reproved by the parson. Mrs. Hazeldean gave her a little set of garden tools; Mrs. Dale a picture-book and a beautiful doll. For a long time the book and the doll had the preference. But Mrs. Hazeldean having observed to Riccabocca that the poor child looked pale, and ought to be a good deal in the open air, the wise father ingeniously pretended to Violante that Mrs. Riccabocca had taken a great fancy to the picture- book, and that he should be very glad to have the doll, upon which Violante hastened to give them both away, and was never so happy as when Mamma (as she called Mrs. Riccabocca) was admiring the picture-book, and Riccabocca with austere gravity dandled the doll. Then Riccabocca assured her that she could be of great use to him in the garden; and Violante instantly put into movement her spade, hoe, and wheelbarrow.

This last occupation brought her into immediate contact with Mr. Leonard Fairfield; and that personage one morning, to his great horror, found Miss Violante had nearly exterminated a whole celery-bed, which she had ignorantly conceived to be a crop of weeds.

Lenny was extremely angry. He snatched away the hoe, and said angrily, "You must not do that, Miss. I'll tell your papa if you—"

Violante drew herself up, and never having been so spoken to before, at least since her arrival in England, there was something comic in the surprise of her large eyes, as well as something

tragic in the dignity of her offended mien. "It is very naughty of you, Miss," continued Leonard, in a milder tone, for he was both softened by the eyes and awed by the mien, "and I trust you will not do it again."

"Non capisco," murmured Violante, and the dark eyes filled with tears. At that moment up came Jackeymo: and Violante, pointing to Leonard, said, with an effort not to betray her emotion, "Il fanciullo e molto grossolano."—["He is a very rude boy."]

Jackeymo turned to Leonard with the look of an enraged tiger. "How you dare, scum of de earth that you are," cried he, "how you dare make cry the signorina?" And his English not supplying familiar vituperatives sufficiently, he poured out upon Lenny such a profusion of Italian abuse, that the boy turned red and white, in a breath, with rage and perplexity.

Violante took instant compassion upon the victim she had made, and with true feminine caprice now began to scold Jackeymo for his anger, and, finally approaching Leonard, laid her hand on his arm, and said with a kindness at once childlike and queenly, and in the prettiest imaginable mixture of imperfect English and soft Italian, to which I cannot pretend to do justice, and shall therefore translate: "Don't mind him. I dare say it was all my fault, only I did not understand you: are not these things weeds?"

"No, my darling signorina," said Jackeymo in Italian, looking ruefully at the celery-bed, "they are not weeds, and they sell very

well at this time of the year. But still, if it amuses you to pluck them up, I should like to see who's to prevent it."

Lenny walked away. He had been called "the scum of the earth,"—by a foreigner too! He had again been ill-treated for doing what he conceived his duty. He was again feeling the distinction between rich and poor, and he now fancied that that distinction involved deadly warfare, for he had read from beginning to end those two damnable tracts which the tinker had presented to him. But in the midst of all the angry disturbance of his mind, he felt the soft touch of the infant's hand, the soothing influence of her conciliating words, and he was half ashamed that he had spoken so roughly to a child.

Still, not trusting himself to speak, he walked away, and sat down at a distance: "I don't see," thought he, "why there should be rich and poor, master and servant." Lenny, be it remembered, had not heard the Parson's Political Sermon.

An hour after, having composed himself, Lenny returned to his work. Jackeymo was no longer in the garden: he had gone to the fields; but Riccabocca was standing by the celerybed, and holding the red silk umbrella over Violante as she sat on the ground, looking up at her father with those eyes already so full of intelligence and love and soul.

"Lenny," said Riccabocca, "my young lady has been telling me that she has been very naughty, and Giacomo very unjust to you. Forgive them both."

Lenny's sullenness melted in an instant: the reminiscences of

tracts Nos. 1 and 2,—

> "Like the baseless fabric of a vision,
> Left not a wreck behind."

He raised eyes swimming with all his native goodness towards the wise man, and dropped them gratefully on the infant peace-maker. Then he turned away his head and fairly wept. The parson was right: "O ye poor, have charity for the rich; O ye rich, respect the poor."

CHAPTER VII

Now from that day the humble Lenny and the regal Violante became great friends. With what pride he taught her to distinguish between celery and weeds,—and how proud too was she when she learned that she was useful! There is not a greater pleasure you can give children, especially female children, than to make them feel they are already of value in the world, and serviceable as well as protected. Weeks and months rolled away, and Lenny still read, not only the books lent him by the doctor, but those he bought of Mr. Sprott. As for the bombs and shells against religion which the tinker carried in his bag, Lenny was not induced to blow himself up with them. He had been reared from his cradle in simple love and reverence for the Divine Father, and the tender Saviour, whose life beyond all records of human goodness, whose death beyond all epics of mortal heroism, no being whose infancy has been taught to supplicate the Merciful and adore the Holy, yea, even though his later life may be entangled amidst the thorns of some desolate pyrrhonism, can ever hear reviled and scoffed without a shock to the conscience and a revolt of the heart. As the deer recoils by instinct from the tiger, as the very look of the scorpion deters you from handling it, though you never saw a scorpion before, so the very first line in some ribald profanity on which the tinker put his black finger made Lenny's blood run cold. Safe, too, was the peasant boy

from any temptation in works of a gross and licentious nature, not only because of the happy ignorance of his rural life, but because of a more enduring safeguard,—genius! Genius, that, manly, robust, healthful as it be, is long before it lose its instinctive Dorian modesty; shamefaced, because so susceptible to glory,—genius, that loves indeed to dream, but on the violet bank, not the dunghill. Wherefore, even in the error of the senses, it seeks to escape from the sensual into worlds of fancy, subtle and refined. But apart from the passions, true genius is the most practical of all human gifts. Like the Apollo, whom the Greek worshipped as its type, even Arcady is its exile, not its home. Soon weary of the dalliance of Tempe, it ascends to its mission,—the Archer of the silver bow, the guide of the car of light. Speaking more plainly, genius is the enthusiasm for self-improvement; it ceases or sleeps the moment it desists from seeking some object which it believes of value, and by that object it insensibly connects its self- improvement with the positive advance of the world. At present Lenny's genius had no bias that was not to the Positive and Useful. It took the direction natural to its sphere, and the wants therein,—namely, to the arts which we call mechanical. He wanted to know about steam-engines and Artesian wells; and to know about them it was necessary to know something of mechanics and hydrostatics; so he bought popular elementary works on those mystic sciences, and set all the powers of his mind at work on experiments.

Noble and generous spirits are ye, who, with small care for

fame, and little reward from pelf, have opened to the intellects of the poor the portals of wisdom! I honour and revere ye; only do not think ye have done all that is needful. Consider, I pray ye, whether so good a choice from the tinker's bag would have been made by a boy whom religion had not scared from the Pestilent, and genius had not led to the self-improving. And Lenny did not wholly escape from the mephitic portions of the motley elements from which his awakening mind drew its nurture. Think not it was all pure oxygen that the panting lip drew in. No; there were still those inflammatory tracts. Political I do not like to call them, for politics means the art of government, and the tracts I speak of assailed all government which mankind has hitherto recognized. Sad rubbish, perhaps, were such tracts to you, O sound thinker, in your easy-chair! or to you, practised statesman, at your post on the Treasury Bench; to you, calm dignitary of a learned Church; or to you, my lord judge, who may often have sent from your bar to the dire Orcus of Norfolk's Isle the ghosts of men whom that rubbish, falling simultaneously on the bumps of acquisitiveness and combativeness, hath untimely slain! Sad rubbish to you! But seems it such rubbish to the poor man, to whom it promises a paradise on the easy terms of upsetting a world? For, ye see, those "Appeals to Operatives" represent that same world-upsetting as the simplest thing imaginable,—a sort of two-and-two-make-four proposition. The poor have only got to set their strong hands to the axle, and heave- a-boy! and hurrah for the topsy-turvy! Then just to put a little wholesome rage into

the heave-a-hoy! it is so facile to accompany the eloquence of "Appeals" with a kind of stir-the-bile-up statistics,— "Abuses of the aristocracy," "Jobs of the Priesthood," "Expenses of the Army kept up for Peers' younger sons," "Wars contracted for the villanous purpose of raising the rents of the landowners,"— all arithmetically dished up, and seasoned with tales of every gentleman who has committed a misdeed, every clergyman who has dishonoured his cloth; as if such instances were fair specimens of average gentlemen and ministers of religion! All this, passionately advanced (and, observe, never answered, for that literature admits no controversialists, and the writer has it all his own way), may be rubbish; but it is out of such rubbish that operatives build barricades for attack, and legislators prisons for defence.

Our poor friend Lenny drew plenty of this stuff from the tinker's bag. He thought it very clever and very eloquent; and he supposed the statistics were as true as mathematical demonstrations.

A famous knowledge-diffuser is looking over my shoulder, and tells me, "Increase education, and cheapen good books, and all this rubbish will disappear!" Sir, I don't believe a word of it. If you printed Ricardo and Adam Smith at a farthing a volume, I still believe that they would be as little read by the operatives as they are nowadays by a very large proportion of highly-cultivated men. I still believe that, while the press works, attacks on the rich and propositions for heave-a-hoys will always

form a popular portion of the Literature of Labour. There's Lenny Fairfield reading a treatise on hydraulics, and constructing a model for a fountain into the bargain; but that does not prevent his acquiescence in any proposition for getting rid of a National Debt, which he certainly never agreed to pay, and which he is told makes sugar and tea so shamefully dear. No. I tell you what does a little counteract those eloquent incentives to break his own head against the strong walls of the Social System,—it is, that he has two eyes in that head which are not always employed in reading. And having been told in print that masters are tyrants, parsons hypocrites or drones in the hive, and landowners vampires and bloodsuckers, he looks out into the little world around him, and, first, he is compelled to acknowledge that his master is not a tyrant (perhaps because he is a foreigner and a philosopher, and, for what I and Lenny know, a republican). But then Parson Dale, though High Church to the marrow, is neither hypocrite nor drone. He has a very good living, it is true,—much better than he ought to have, according to the "political" opinions of those tracts! but Lenny is obliged to confess that if Parson Dale were a penny the poorer, he would do a pennyworth's less good; and comparing one parish with another, such as Rood Hall and Hazeldean, he is dimly aware that there is no greater CIVILIZER than a parson tolerably well off. Then, too, Squire Hazeldean, though as arrant a Tory as ever stood upon shoe-leather, is certainly not a vampire nor blood sucker. He does not feed on the public; a great many of the public feed upon

him: and, therefore, his practical experience a little staggers and perplexes Lenny Fairfield as to the gospel accuracy of his theoretical dogmas. Masters, parsons, and landowners! having, at the risk of all popularity, just given a /coup de patte/ to certain sages extremely the fashion at present, I am not going to let you off without an admonitory flea in the ear. Don't suppose that any mere scribbling and typework will suffice to answer the scribbling and typework set at work to demolish you,—write down that rubbish you can't; live it down you may. If you are rich, like Squire Hazeldean, do good with your money; if you are poor, like Signor Riccabocca, do good with your kindness.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.