

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**WHAT WILL HE DO
WITH IT? – VOLUME
06**

Эдвард Джордж Бульвер-Литтон
What Will He Do
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http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=35006233

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

What Will He Do with It? — Volume 06

BOOK VI

CHAPTER I

Etchings of Hyde Park in the month of June, which, if this history escapes those villains the trunk-makers, may be of inestimable value to unborn antiquarians.—Characters, long absent, reappear and give some account of themselves.

Five years have passed away since this history opened. It is the month of June once more,—June, which clothes our London in all its glory, fills its languid ballrooms with living flowers, and its stony causeways with human butterflies. It is about the hour of six P.M. The lounge in Hyde Park is crowded; along the road that skirts the Serpentine crawl the carriages one after the other; congregate by the rails the lazy lookers-on,—lazy in attitude, but with active eyes, and tongues sharpened on the whetstone of scandal,—the Scaligers of club windows airing their vocabulary in the Park. Slowly saunter on foot idlers of all degrees in

the hierarchy of London idlesse: dandies of established-fame; youthful tyros in their first season. Yonder in the Ride, forms less inanimate seem condemned to active exercise; young ladies doing penance in a canter; old beaux at hard labour in a trot. Sometimes, by a more thoughtful brow, a still brisker pace, you recognize a busy member of the Imperial Parliament, who, advised by physicians to be as much on horseback as possible, snatches an hour or so in the interval between the close of his Committee and the interest of the Debate, and shirks the opening speech of a well-known bore. Among such truant lawgivers (grief it is to say it) may be seen that once model member, Sir Gregory Stollhead. Grim dyspepsia seizing on him at last, "relaxation from his duties" becomes the adequate punishment for all his sins. Solitary he rides, and communing with himself, yawns at every second. Upon chairs beneficently located under the trees towards the north side of the walk are interspersed small knots and coteries in repose. There you might see the Ladies Prymme, still the Ladies Prymme,—Janet and Wilhelmina; Janet has grown fat, Wilhelmina thin. But thin or fat, they are no less Prymmes. They do not lack male attendants; they are girls of high fashion, with whom young inen think it a distinction to be seen talking; of high principle, too, and high pretensions (unhappily for themselves, they are co-heiresses), by whom young men under the rank of earls need not fear to be artfully entrapped into "honourable intentions." They coquet majestically, but they never flirt; they exact devotion, but they do not ask in each

victim a sacrifice on the horns of the altar; they will never give their hands where they do not give their hearts; and being ever afraid that they are courted for their money, they will never give their hearts save to wooers who have much more money than themselves. Many young men stop to do passing homage to the Ladies Prymme: some linger to converse; safe young men,—they are all younger sons. Farther on, Lady Frost and Mr. Crampe, the wit, sit amicably side by side, pecking at each other with sarcastic beaks; occasionally desisting, in order to fasten nip and claw upon that common enemy, the passing friend! The Slowes, a numerous family, but taciturn, sit by themselves; bowed to much, accosted rarely.

Note that man of good presence, somewhere about thirty, or a year or two more, who, recognized by most of the loungers, seems not at home in the lounge. He has passed by the various coteries just described, made his obeisance to the Ladies Prymme, received an icy epigram from Lady Frost, and a laconic sneer from Mr. Crampe, and exchanged silent bows with seven silent Slowes. He has wandered on, looking high in the air, but still looking for some one not in the air, and evidently disappointed in his search, comes to a full stop at length, takes off his hat, wipes his brow, utters a petulant "Prr—r—pshaw!" and seeing, a little in the background, the chairless shade of a thin, emaciated, dusty tree, thither he retires, and seats himself with as little care whether there to seat himself be the right thing in the right place, as if in the honeysuckle arbour of a village inn. "It

serves me right," said he to himself: "a precocious villain bursts in upon me, breaks my day, makes an appointment to meet me here, in these very walks, ten minutes before six; decoys me with the promise of a dinner at Putney,—room looking on the river and fried flounders. I have the credulity to yield: I derange my habits; I leave my cool studio; I put off my easy blouse; I imprison my freeborn throat in a cravat invented by the Thugs; the dog-days are at hand, and I walk rashly over scorching pavements in a black frock-coat and a brimless hat; I annihilate 3s. 6d. in a pair of kid gloves; I arrive at this haunt of spleen; I run the gauntlet of Frosts, Slowes, and Prymmes: and my traitor fails me! Half-past six,—not a sign of him! and the dinner at Putney,—fried flounders? Dreams! Patience, five minutes more; if then he comes not, breach for life between him and me! Ah, voila! there he comes, the laggard! But how those fine folks are catching at him! Has he asked them also to dinner at Putney, and do they care for fried flounders?"

The soliloquist's eye is on a young man, much younger than himself, who is threading the motley crowd with a light quick step, but is compelled to stop at each moment to interchange a word of welcome, a shake of the hand. Evidently he has already a large acquaintance; evidently he is popular, on good terms with the world and himself. What free grace in his bearing! what gay good-humour in his smile! Powers above! Lady Wilhelmina surely blushes as she returns his bow. He has passed Lady Frost unblighted; the Slowes evince emotion, at least the female

Slower, as he shoots by them with that sliding bow. He looks from side to side, with the rapid glance of an eye in which light seems all dance and sparkle: he sees the soliloquist under the meagre tree; the pace quickens, the lips part half laughing.

"Don't scold, Vance. I am late, I know; but I did not make allowance for interceptions."

"Body o' me, interceptions! For an absentee just arrived in London, you seem to have no lack of friends."

"Friends made in Paris and found again here at every corner, like pleasant surprises,—but no friend so welcome and dear as Frank Vance."

"Sensible of the honour, O Lionello the Magnificent. Verily you are /bon prince!/ The Houses of Valois and of Medici were always kind to artists. But whither would you lead me? Back into that treadmill? Thank you, humbly; no."

"A crowd in fine clothes is of all mobs the dullest. I can look undismayed on the many-headed monster, wild and rampant; but when the many-headed monster buys its hats in Bond Street, and has an eyeglass at each of its inquisitive eyes, I confess I take fright. Besides, it is near seven o'clock; Putney not visible, and the flounders not fried!"

"My cab is waiting yonder; we must walk to it: we can keep on the turf, and avoid the throng. But tell me honestly, Vance, do you really dislike to mix in crowds; you, with your fame, dislike the eyes that turn back to look again, and the lips that respectfully murmur, 'Vance the Painter'? Ah, I always said you would be a

great painter,—and in five short years you have soared high."

"Pooh!" answered Vance, indifferently. "Nothing is pure and unadulterated in London use; not cream, nor cayenne pepper; least of all Fame,—mixed up with the most deleterious ingredients. Fame! did you read the 'Times' critique on my pictures in the present Exhibition? Fame indeed Change the subject. Nothing so good as flounders. Ho! is that your cab? Superb! Car fit for the 'Grecian youth of talents rare,' in Mr. Enfield's 'Speaker;' horse that seems conjured out of the Elgin Marbles. Is he quiet?"

"Not very; but trust to my driving. You may well admire the horse,— present from Darrell, chosen by Colonel Morley." When the young men had settled themselves into the vehicle, Lionel dismissed his groom, and, touching his horse, the animal trotted out briskly.

"Frank," said Lionel, shaking his dark curls with a petulant gravity, "your cynical definitions are unworthy that masculine beard. You despise fame! what sheer affectation!"

""Pulverem Olympicum
Collegisse juvat; metaque fervidis
Evitata rotis——""

"Take care," cried Vance; "we shall be over." For Lionel, growing excited, teased the horse with his whip; and the horse bolting, took the cab within an inch of a water-cart.

"Fame, fame!" cried Lionel, unheeding the interruption.

"What would I not give to have and to hold it for an hour?" "Hold an eel, less slippery; a scorpion, less stinging! But—" added Vance, observing his companion's heightened colour—"but," he added seriously, and with an honest compunction, "I forgot, you are a soldier, you follow the career of arms! Never heed what is said on the subject by a querulous painter! The desire of fame may be folly in civilians: in soldiers it is wisdom. Twin-born with the martial sense of honour, it cheers the march; it warms the bivouac; it gives music to the whirl of the bullet, the roar of the ball; it plants hope in the thick of peril; knits rivals with the bond of brothers; comforts the survivor when the brother falls; takes from war its grim aspect of carnage; and from homicide itself extracts lessons that strengthen the safeguards to humanity, and perpetuate life to nations. Right: pant for fame; you are a soldier!"

This was one of those bursts of high sentiment from Vance, which, as they were very rare with him, had the dramatic effect of surprise. Lionel listened to him with a thrilling delight. He could not answer: he was too moved. The artist resumed, as the cabriolet now cleared the Park, and rolled safely and rapidly along the road. "I suppose, during the five years you have spent abroad completing your general education, you have made little study, or none, of what specially appertains to the profession you have so recently chosen."

"You are mistaken there, my dear Vance. If a man's heart be set on a thing, he is always studying it. The books I loved best,

and most pondered over, were such as, if they did not administer lessons, suggested hints that might turn to lessons hereafter. In social intercourse, I never was so pleased as when I could fasten myself to some practical veteran,—question and cross-examine him. One picks up more ideas in conversation than from books, at least I do. Besides, my idea of a soldier who is to succeed some day is not that of a mere mechanician -at-arms. See how accomplished most great captains have been. What observers of mankind! what diplomatists! what reasoners! what men of action, because men to whom reflection had been habitual before they acted! How many stores of idea must have gone to the judgment which hazards the sortie or decides on the retreat!"

"Gently, gently!" cried Vance. "We shall be into that omnibus! Give me the whip,—do; there, a little more to the left,—so. Yes; I am glad to see such enthusiasm in your profession: 't is half the battle. Hazlitt said a capital thing, 'The 'prentice who does not consider the Lord Mayor in his gilt coach the greatest man in the world will live to be hanged!'"

"Pish!" said Lionel, catching at the whip.

VANCE (holding it back).—"No. I apologize. I retract the Lord Mayor: comparisons are odious. I agree with you, nothing like leather. I mean nothing like a really great soldier,—Hannibal, and so forth. Cherish that conviction, my friend: meanwhile, respect human life; there is another omnibus!"

The danger past, the artist thought it prudent to divert the conversation into some channel less exciting.

"Mr. Darrell, of course, consents to your choice of a profession?"

"Consents! approves, encourages. Wrote me such a beautiful letter! what a comprehensive intelligence that man has!"

"Necessarily; since he agrees with you. Where is he now?"

"I have no notion: it is some months since I heard from him. He was then at Malta, on his return from Asia Minor."

"So! you have never seen him since he bade you farewell at his old Manor- house?"

"Never. He has not, I believe, been in England."

"Nor in Paris, where you seem to have chiefly resided."

"Nor in Paris. Ah, Vance, could I but be of some comfort to him. Now that I am older, I think I understand in him much that perplexed me as a boy when we parted. Darrell is one of those men who require a home. Between the great world and solitude, he needs the intermediate filling- up which the life domestic alone supplies: a wife to realize the sweet word helpmate; children, with whose future he could knit his own toils and his ancestral remembrances. That intermediate space annihilated, the great world and the solitude are left, each frowning on the other."

"My dear Lionel, you must have lived with very clever people: you are talking far above your years."

"Am I? True; I have lived, if not with very clever people, with people far above my years. That is a secret I learned from Colonel Morley, to whom I must present you,—the subtlest

intellect under the quietest manner. Once he said to me, 'Would you throughout life be up to the height of your century,—always in the prime of man's reason, without crudeness and without decline,—live habitually while young with persons older, and when old with persons younger, than yourself.'

"Shrewdly said indeed. I felicitate you on the evident result of the maxim. And so Darrell has no home,—no wife and no children?"

"He has long been a widower; he lost his only son in boyhood, and his daughter—did you never hear?"

"No, what?"

"Married so ill—a runaway match—and died many years since, without issue."

"Poor man! It was these afflictions, then, that soured his life, and made him the hermit or the wanderer?"

"There," said Lionel, "I am puzzled; for I find that, even after his son's death and his daughter's unhappy marriage and estrangement from him, he was still in Parliament and in full activity of career. But certainly he did not long keep it up. It might have been an effort to which, strong as he is, he felt himself unequal; or, might he have known some fresh disappointment, some new sorrow, which the world never guesses? What I have said as to his family afflictions the world knows. But I think he will marry again. That idea seemed strong in his own mind when we parted; he brought it out bluntly, roughly. Colonel Morley is convinced that he will marry, if but for the sake of an heir."

VANCE.—"And if so, my poor Lionel, you are ousted of—"

LIONEL (quickly interrupting).—"Hush! Do not say, my dear Vance, do not you say—you!—one of those low, mean things which, if said to me even by men for whom I have no esteem, make my ears tingle and my cheek blush. When I think of what Darrell has already done for me,—me who have no claim on him,—it seems to me as if I must hate the man who insinuates, 'Fear lest your benefactor find a smile at his own hearth, a child of his own blood; for you may be richer at his death in proportion as his life is desolate.'"

VANCE.—"You are a fine young fellow, and I beg your pardon. Take care of that milestone: thank you. But I suspect that at least two-thirds of those friendly hands that detained you on the way to me were stretched out less to Lionel Haughton, a subaltern in the Guards, than to Mr. Darrell's heir presumptive."

LIONEL.—"That thought sometimes galls me, but it does me good; for it goads on my desire to make myself some one whom the most worldly would not disdain to know for his own sake. Oh for active service! Oh for a sharp campaign! Oh for fair trial how far a man in earnest can grapple Fortune to his breast with his own strong hands! You have done so, Vance; you had but your genius and your painter's brush. I have no genius; but I have a resolve, and resolve is perhaps as sure of its ends as genius. Genius and Resolve have three grand elements in common,—Patience, Hope, and Concentration."

Vance, more and more surprised, looked hard at Lionel

without speaking. Five years of that critical age, from seventeen to twenty-two, spent in the great capital of Europe; kept from its more dangerous vices partly by a proud sense of personal dignity, partly by a temperament which, regarding love as an ideal for all tender and sublime emotion, recoiled from low profligacy as being to love what the Yahoo of the mocking satirist was to man; absorbed much by the brooding ambition that takes youth out of the frivolous present into the serious future, and seeking companionship, not with contemporary idlers, but with the highest and maturest intellects that the free commonwealth of good society brought within his reach: five years so spent had developed a boy, nursing noble dreams, into a man fit for noble action,—retaining freshest youth in its enthusiasm, its elevation of sentiment, its daring, its energy, and divine credulity in its own unexhausted resources; but borrowing from maturity compactness and solidity of idea,—the link between speculation and practice, the power to impress on others a sense of the superiority which has been self-elaborated by unconscious culture.

"So!" said Vance, after a prolonged pause, "I don't know whether I have resolve or genius; but certainly if I have made my way to some small reputation, patience, hope, and concentration of purpose must have the credit of it; and prudence, too, which you have forgotten to name, and certainly don't evince as a charioteer. I hope, my dear fellow, you are not extravagant? No doubt, eh?—why do you laugh?"

"The question is so like you, Frank,—thrifty as ever."

"Do you think I could have painted with a calm mind if I knew that at my door there was a dun whom I could not pay? Art needs serenity; and if an artist begin his career with as few shirts to his back as I had, he must place economy amongst the rules of perspective."

Lionel laughed again, and made some comments on economy which were certainly, if smart, rather flippant, and tended not only to lower the favourable estimate of his intellectual improvement which Vance had just formed, but seriously disquieted the kindly artist. Vance knew the world,—knew the peculiar temptations to which a young man in Lionel's position would be exposed,—knew that contempt for economy belongs to that school of Peripatetics which reserves its last lessons for finished disciples in the sacred walks of the Queen's Bench.

However, that was no auspicious moment for didactic warnings.

"Here we are!" cried Lionel,—*"Putney Bridge."*

They reached the little inn by the river-side, and while dinner was getting ready they hired a boat. Vance took the oars.

VANCE.—*"Not so pretty here as by those green quiet banks along which we glided, at moonlight, five years ago."*

LIONEL.—*"Ah, no! And that innocent, charming child, whose portrait you took,—you have never heard of her since?"*

VANCE.—*"Never! How should I? Have you?"*

LIONEL.—*"Only what Darrell repeated to me. His lawyer*

had ascertained that she and her grandfather had gone to America. Darrell gently implied that, from what he learned of them, they scarcely merited the interest I felt in their fate. But we were not deceived, were we, Vance?"

VANCE—"No; the little girl—what was her name? Sukey? Sally? Sophy, true—Sophy had something about her extremely prepossessing, besides her pretty face; and, in spite of that horrid cotton print, I shall never forget it."

LIONEL—"Her face! Nor I. I see it still before me!"

VANCE—"Her cotton print! I see it still before me! But I must not be ungrateful. Would you believe it,—that little portrait, which cost me three pounds, has made, I don't say my fortune, but my fashion?"

LIONEL—"How! You had the heart to sell it?"

VANCE.—"No; I kept it as a study for young female heads—'with variations,' as they say in music. It was by my female heads that I became the fashion; every order I have contains the condition, 'But be sure, one of your sweet female heads, Mr. Vance.' My female heads are as necessary to my canvas as a white horse to Wouvermans'. Well, that child, who cost me three pounds, is the original of them all. Commencing as a Titania, she has been in turns a 'Psyche,' a 'Beatrice-Cenci,' a 'Minna,' 'A Portrait of a Nobleman's Daughter,' 'Burns's Mary in Heaven,' 'The Young Gleaner,' and 'Sabrina Fair,' in Milton's 'Comus.' I have led that child through all history, sacred and profane. I have painted her in all costumes (her own cotton print excepted).

My female heads are my glory; even the 'Times' critic allows that! 'Mr. Vance, there, is inimitable! a type of childlike grace peculiarly his own,' etc. I'll lend you the article."

LIONEL.—"And shall we never again see the original darling Sophy? You will laugh, Vance, but I have been heartproof against all young ladies. If ever I marry, my wife must have Sophy's eyes! In America!"

VANCE.—"Let us hope by this time happily married to a Yankee! Yankees marry girls in their teens, and don't ask for dowries. Married to a Yankee! not a doubt of it! a Yankee who thaws, whittles, and keeps a 'store!'"

LIONEL.—"Monster! Hold your tongue. /A propos/ of marriage, why are you still single?"

VANCE.—"Because I have no wish to be doubled up! Moreover, man is like a napkin, the more neatly the housewife doubles him, the more carefully she lays him on the shelf. Neither can a man once doubled know how often he may be doubled. Not only his wife folds him in two, but every child quarters him into a new double, till what was a wide and handsome substance, large enough for anything in reason, dwindles into a pitiful square that will not cover one platter,—all puckers and creases, smaller and smaller with every double, with every double a new crease. Then, my friend, comes the washing-bill! and, besides all the hurts one receives in the mangle, consider the hourly wear and tear of the linen-press! In short, Shakspeare vindicates the single life, and depicts the double in the famous line, which is no doubt intended

to be allegorical of marriage,

"Double, double, toil and trouble.'

Besides, no single man can be fairly called poor. What double man can with certainty be called rich? A single man can lodge in a garret, and dine on a herring: nobody knows; nobody cares. Let him marry, and he invites the world to witness where he lodges, and how he dines. The first necessary a wife demands is the most ruinous, the most indefinite superfluity; it is Gentility according to what her neighbours call genteel. Gentility commences with the honeymoon; it is its shadow, and lengthens as the moon declines. When the honey is all gone, your bride says, 'We can have our tea without sugar when quite alone, love; but, in case Gentility drop in, here's a bill for silver sugar-tongs!' That's why I'm single."

"Economy again, Vance."

"Prudence,—dignity," answered Vance, seriously; and sinking into a reverie that seemed gloomy, he shot back to shore.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Vance explains how he came to grind colours and save half-pence.

—A sudden announcement.

The meal was over; the table had been spread by a window that looked upon the river. The moon was up: the young men asked for no other lights; conversation between them—often shifting, often pausing—had gradually become grave, as it usually does with two companions in youth; while yet long vistas in the Future stretch before them deep in shadow, and they fall into confiding talk on what they wish,—what they fear; making visionary maps in that limitless Obscure.

"There is so much power in faith," said Lionel, "even when faith is applied but to things human and earthly, that let a man be but firmly persuaded that he is born to do, some day, what at the moment seems impossible, and it is fifty to one but what he does it before he dies. Surely, when you were a child at school, you felt convinced that there was something in your fate distinct from that of the other boys, whom the master might call quite as clever,—felt that faith in yourself which made you sure that you would be one day what you are."

"Well, I suppose so; but vague aspirations and self-conceits must be bound together by some practical necessity—perhaps a very homely and a very vulgar one—or they scatter and

evaporate. One would think that rich people in high life ought to do more than poor folks in humble life. More pains are taken with their education; they have more leisure for following the bent of their genius: yet it is the poor folks, often half self-educated, and with pinched bellies, that do three-fourths of the world's grand labour. Poverty is the keenest stimulant; and poverty made me say, not 'I will do,' but 'I must.'"

"You knew real poverty in childhood, Frank?"

"Real poverty, covered over with sham affluence. My father was Genteel Poverty, and my mother was Poor Gentility. The sham affluence went when my father died. The real poverty then came out in all its ugliness. I was taken from a genteel school, at which, long afterwards, I genteelly paid the bills; and I had to support my mother somehow or other,—somehow or other I succeeded. Alas, I fear not genteelly! But before I lost her, which I did in a few years, she had some comforts which were not appearances; and she kindly allowed, dear soul, that gentility and shams do not go well together. Oh, beware of debt, Lionello mio; and never call that economy meanness which is but the safeguard from mean degradation."

"I understand you at last, Vance; shake hands: I know why you are saving."

"Habit now," answered Vance, repressing praise of himself, as usual. "But I remember so well when twopence was a sum to be respected that to this day I would rather put it by than spend it. All our ideas—like orange-plants—spread out in proportion to the

size of the box which imprisons the roots. Then I had a sister." Vance paused a moment, as if in pain, but went on with seeming carelessness, leaning over the window-sill, and turning his face from his friend. "I had a sister older than myself, handsome, gentle."

"I was so proud of her! Foolish girl! my love was not enough for her. Foolish girl! she could not wait to see what I might live to do for her. She married—oh! so genteelly!—a young man, very well born, who had wooed her before my father died. He had the villany to remain constant when she had not a farthing, and he was dependent on distant relations, and his own domains in Parnassus. The wretch was a poet! So they married. They spent their honeymoon genteelly, I dare say. His relations cut him. Parnassus paid no rents. He went abroad. Such heart-rending letters from her. They were destitute. How I worked! how I raged! But how could I maintain her and her husband too, mere child that I was? No matter. They are dead now, both; all dead for whose sake I first ground colours and saved halfpence. And Frank Vance is a stingy, selfish bachelor. Never revive this dull subject again, or I shall borrow a crown from you and cut you dead. Waiter, ho!—the bill. I'll just go round to the stables, and see the horse put to."

As the friends re-entered London, Vance said, "Set me down anywhere in Piccadilly; I will walk home. You, I suppose, of course, are staying with your mother in Gloucester Place?"

"No," said Lionel, rather embarrassed; "Colonel Morley, who

acts for me as if he were my guardian, took a lodging for me in Chesterfield Street, Mayfair. My hours, I fear, would ill suit my dear mother. Only in town two days; and, thanks to Morley, my table is already covered with invitations."

"Yet you gave me one day, generous friend!"

"You the second day, my mother the first. But there are three balls before me to-night. Come home with me, and smoke your cigar while I dress."

"No; but I will at least light my cigar in your hall, prodigal!"

Lionel now stopped at his lodging. The groom, who served him also as valet, was in waiting at the door. "A note for you, sir, from Colonel Morley,—just come." Lionel hastily opened it, and read,

MY DEAR HAUGHTON,—Mr. Darrell has suddenly arrived in London. Keep yourself free all to-morrow, when, no doubt, he will see you. I am hurrying off to him.

Yours in haste, A. V. M.

CHAPTER III

Once more Guy Darrell.

Guy Darrell was alone: a lofty room in a large house on the first floor, —his own house in Carlton Gardens, which he had occupied during his brief and brilliant parliamentary career; since then, left contemptuously to the care of a house agent, to be let by year or by season, it had known various tenants of an opulence and station suitable to its space and site. Dinners and concerts, routs and balls, had assembled the friends and jaded the spirits of many a gracious host and smiling hostess. The tenure of one of these temporary occupants had recently expired; and, ere the agent had found another, the long absent owner dropped down into its silenced halls as from the clouds, without other establishment than his old servant Mills and the woman in charge of the house. There, as in a caravansery, the traveller took his rest, stately and desolate. Nothing so comfortless as one of those large London houses all to one's self. In long rows against the walls stood the empty fauteuils. Spectral from the gilded ceiling hung lightless chandeliers. —The furniture, pompous, but worn by use and faded by time, seemed mementos of departed revels. When you return to your house in the country—no matter how long the absence, no matter how decayed by neglect the friendly chambers may be, if it has only been deserted in the

meanwhile (not let to new races, who, by their own shifting dynasties, have supplanted the rightful lord, and half-effaced his memorials)—the walls may still greet you forgivingly, the character of Home be still there. You take up again the thread of associations which had, been suspended, not snapped. But it is otherwise with a house in cities, especially in our fast-living London, where few houses descend from father to son,—where the title-deeds are rarely more than those of a purchased lease for a term of years, after which your property quits you. A house in London, which your father never entered, in which no elbow-chair, no old-fashioned work-table, recall to you the kind smile of a mother; a house that you have left as you leave an inn, let to people whose names you scarce know, with as little respect for your family records as you have for theirs,—when you return after a long interval of years to a house like that, you stand, as stood Darrell, a forlorn stranger under your own roof-tree. What cared he for those who had last gathered round those hearths with their chill steely grates, whose forms had reclined on those formal couches, whose feet had worn away the gloss from those costly carpets? Histories in the lives of many might be recorded within those walls. "Lovers there had breathed their first vows; bridal feasts had been held; babes had crowed in the arms of proud young mothers; politicians there had been raised into ministers; ministers there had fallen back into independent members;" through those doors corpses had been borne forth to relentless vaults. For these races and their records what cared the

owner? Their writing was not on the walls. Sponged out, as from a slate, their reckonings with Time; leaving dim, here and there, some chance scratch of his own, blurred and bygone. Leaning against the mantelpiece, Darrell gazed round the room with a vague wistful look, as if seeking to conjure up associations that might link the present hour to that past life which had slipped away elsewhere; and his profile, reflected on the mirror behind, pale and mournful, seemed like that ghost of himself which his memory silently evoked.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

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