

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**ALICE, OR THE  
MYSTERIES —  
COMPLETE**

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

**Alice, or the Mysteries — Complete**

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# Edward Bulwer-Lytton

## Alice, or the Mysteries — Complete

### BOOK I

*"Thee, hid the bowering vales amidst, I call."*

—EURIPIDES: *Hel. I. 1116.*

### CHAPTER I

*Who art thou, fair one, who usurp'st the place  
Of Blanch, the lady of the matchless grace?—*

LAMB.

IT was towards the evening of a day in early April that two ladies were seated by the open windows of a cottage in Devonshire. The lawn before them was gay with evergreens, relieved by the first few flowers and fresh turf of the reviving spring; and at a distance, through an opening amongst the trees, the sea, blue and tranquil, bounded the view, and contrasted the more confined and home-like features of the scene. It was a spot remote, sequestered, shut out from the business and pleasures of the world; as such it suited the tastes and character of the owner.

That owner was the younger of the ladies seated by the window. You would scarcely have guessed, from her appearance, that she was more than seven or eight and twenty, though she exceeded by four or five years that critical boundary in the life of beauty. Her form was slight and delicate in its proportions, nor was her countenance the less lovely because, from its gentleness and repose (not unmingled with a certain sadness) the coarse and the gay might have thought it wanting in expression. For there is a stillness in the aspect of those who have felt deeply, which deceives the common eye, —as rivers are often alike tranquil and profound, in proportion as they are remote from the springs which agitated and swelled the commencement of their course, and by which their waters are still, though invisibly, supplied.

The elder lady, the guest of her companion, was past seventy; her gray hair was drawn back from the forehead, and gathered under a stiff cap of quaker-like simplicity; while her dress, rich but plain, and of no very modern fashion, served to increase the venerable appearance of one who seemed not ashamed of years.

"My dear Mrs. Leslie," said the lady of the house, after a thoughtful pause in the conversation that had been carried on for the last hour, "it is very true; perhaps I was to blame in coming to this place; I ought not to have been so selfish."

"No, my dear friend," returned Mrs. Leslie, gently; "selfish is a word that can never be applied to you; you acted as became you,—agreeably to your own instinctive sense of what is best when at your age,—independent in fortune and rank, and still so lovely,—you resigned all that would have attracted others, and devoted yourself, in retirement, to a life of quiet and unknown benevolence. You are in your sphere in this village,—humble though it be,—consoling, relieving, healing the wretched, the destitute, the infirm; and teaching your Evelyn insensibly to imitate your modest and Christian

virtues." The good old lady spoke warmly, and with tears in her eyes; her companion placed her hand in Mrs. Leslie's.

"You cannot make me vain," said she, with a sweet and melancholy smile. "I remember what I was when you first gave shelter to the poor, desolate wanderer and her fatherless child; and I, who was then so poor and destitute, what should I be, if I was deaf to the poverty and sorrows of others,—others, too, who are better than I am. But now Evelyn, as you say, is growing up; the time approaches when she must decide on accepting or rejecting Lord Vargrave. And yet in this village how can she compare him with others; how can she form a choice? What you say is very true; and yet I did not think of it sufficiently. What shall I do? I am only anxious, dear girl, to act so as may be best for her own happiness."

"Of that I am sure," returned Mrs. Leslie; "and yet I know not how to advise. On one hand, so much is due to the wishes of your late husband, in every point of view, that if Lord Vargrave be worthy of Evelyn's esteem and affection, it would be most desirable that she should prefer him to all others. But if he be what I hear he is considered in the world,—an artful, scheming, almost heartless man, of ambitious and hard pursuits,—I tremble to think how completely the happiness of Evelyn's whole life may be thrown away. She certainly is not in love with him, and yet I fear she is one whose nature is but too susceptible of affection. She ought now to see others,—to know her own mind, and not to be hurried, blindfold and inexperienced, into a step that decides existence. This is a duty we owe to her,—nay, even to the late Lord Vargrave, anxious as he was for the marriage. His aim was surely her happiness, and he would not have insisted upon means that time and circumstances might show to be contrary to the end he had in view."

"You are right," replied Lady Vargrave. "When my poor husband lay on his bed of death, just before he summoned his nephew to receive his last blessing, he said to me, 'Providence can counteract all our schemes. If ever it should be for Evelyn's real happiness that my wish for her marriage with Lumley Ferrers should not be fulfilled, to you I must leave the right to decide on what I cannot foresee. All I ask is that no obstacle shall be thrown in the way of my wish; and that the child shall be trained up to consider Lumley as her future husband.' Among his papers was a letter addressed to me to the same effect; and, indeed, in other respects that letter left more to my judgment than I had any right to expect. Oh, I am often unhappy to think that he did not marry one who would have deserved his affection! and—but regret is useless now."

"I wish you could really feel so," said Mrs. Leslie; "for regret of another kind still seems to haunt you; and I do not think you have yet forgotten your early sorrows."

"Ah, how can I?" said Lady Vargrave, with a quivering lip.

At that instant, a light shadow darkened the sunny lawn in front of the casements, and a sweet, gay young voice was heard singing at a little distance; a moment more, and a beautiful girl, in the first bloom of youth, bounded lightly along the grass, and halted opposite the friends.

It was a remarkable contrast,—the repose and quiet of the two persons we have described, the age and gray hairs of one, the resigned and melancholy gentleness written on the features of the other—with the springing step and laughing eyes and radiant bloom of the new comer! As she stood with the setting sun glowing full upon her rich fair hair, her happy countenance and elastic form, it was a vision almost too bright for this weary earth,—a thing of light and bliss, that the joyous Greek might have placed among the forms of Heaven, and worshipped as an Aurora or a Hebe.

"Oh, how can you stay indoors this beautiful evening? Come, dearest Mrs. Leslie; come, Mother, dear Mother, you know you promised you would,—you said I was to call you; see, it will rain no more, and the shower has left the myrtles and the violet-bank so fresh."

"My dear Evelyn," said Mrs. Leslie, with a smile, "I am not so young as you."

"No; but you are just as gay when you are in good spirits—and who can be out of spirits in such weather? Let me call for your chair; let me wheel you—I am sure I can. Down, Sultan; so you have found me out, have you, sir? Be quiet, sir, down!"

This last exhortation was addressed to a splendid dog of the Newfoundland breed, who now contrived wholly to occupy Evelyn's attention.

The two friends looked at this beautiful girl, as with all the grace of youth she shared while she rebuked the exuberant hilarity of her huge playmate; and the elder of the two seemed the most to sympathize with her mirth. Both gazed with fond affection upon an object dear to both. But some memory or association touched Lady Vargrave, and she sighed as she gazed.

## CHAPTER II

*Is stormy life preferred to this serene?—YOUNG: Satires.*

AND the windows were closed in, and night had succeeded to evening, and the little party at the cottage were grouped together. Mrs. Leslie was quietly seated at her tambour-frame; Lady Vargrave, leaning her cheek on her hand, seemed absorbed in a volume before her, but her eyes were not on the page; Evelyn was busily employed in turning over the contents of a parcel of books and music which had just been brought from the lodge where the London coach had deposited it.

"Oh, dear Mamma!" cried Evelyn, "I am so glad; there is something you will like,—some of the poetry that touched you so much set to music."

Evelyn brought the songs to her mother, who roused herself from her reverie, and looked at them with interest.

"It is very strange," said she, "that I should be so affected by all that is written by this person: I, too" (she added, tenderly stroking down Evelyn's luxuriant tresses), "who am not so fond of reading as you are!"

"You are reading one of his books now," said Evelyn, glancing over the open page on the table. "Ah, that beautiful passage upon 'Our First Impressions.' Yet I do not like you, dear Mother, to read his books; they always seem to make you sad."

"There is a charm to me in their thoughts, their manner of expression," said Lady Vargrave, "which sets me thinking, which reminds me of—of an early friend, whom I could fancy I hear talking while I read. It was so from the first time I opened by accident a book of his years ago."

"Who is this author that pleases you so much?" asked Mrs. Leslie, with some surprise; for Lady Vargrave had usually little pleasure in reading even the greatest and most popular masterpieces of modern genius.

"Maltravers," answered Evelyn; "and I think I almost share my mother's enthusiasm."

"Maltravers!" repeated Mrs. Leslie. "He is, perhaps, a dangerous writer for one so young. At your age, dear girl, you have naturally romance and feeling enough of your own without seeking them in books."

"But, dear madam," said Evelyn, standing up for her favourite, "his writings do not consist of romance and feeling only; they are not exaggerated, they are so simple, so truthful."

"Did you ever meet him?" asked Lady Vargrave.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Leslie, "once, when he was a gay, fair-haired boy. His father resided in the next county, and we met at a country-house. Mr. Maltravers himself has an estate near my daughter in B——shire, but he does not live on it; he has been some years abroad,—a strange character!"

"Why does he write no more?" said Evelyn; "I have read his works so often, and know his poetry so well by heart, that I should look forward to something new from him as an event."

"I have heard, my dear, that he has withdrawn much from the world and its objects,—that he has lived greatly in the East. The death of a lady to whom he was to have been married is said to have unsettled and changed his character. Since that event he has not returned to England. Lord Vargrave can tell you more of him than I."

"Lord Vargrave thinks of nothing that is not always before the world," said Evelyn.

"I am sure you wrong him," said Mrs. Leslie, looking up and fixing her eyes on Evelyn's countenance; "for *you* are not before the world."

Evelyn slightly—very slightly—pouted her pretty lip, but made no answer. She took up the music, and seating herself at the piano, practised the airs. Lady Vargrave listened with emotion; and as Evelyn in a voice exquisitely sweet, though not powerful, sang the words, her mother turned away her face, and half unconsciously, a few tears stole silently down her cheek.

When Evelyn ceased, herself affected,—for the lines were impressed with a wild and melancholy depth of feeling,—she came again to her mother's side, and seeing her emotion, kissed away the tears from the pensive eyes. Her own gayety left her; she drew a stool to her mother's feet, and nestling to her, and clasping her hand, did not leave that place till they retired to rest.

And the lady blessed Evelyn, and felt that, if bereaved, she was not alone.

## CHAPTER III

*BUT come, thou Goddess, fair and free,  
In heaven yclept Euphrosyne!*

.....  
*To hear the lark begin his flight,  
And, singing, startle the dull night.*

—*L'Allegro.*

*But come, thou Goddess, sage and holy,  
Come, divinest Melancholy!*

.....  
*There held in holy passion still,  
Forget thyself to marble.*

—*Il Penseroso.*

THE early morn of early spring—what associations of freshness and hope in that single sentence! And there a little after sunrise—there was Evelyn, fresh and hopeful as the morning itself, bounding with the light step of a light heart over the lawn. Alone, alone! no governess, with a pinched nose and a sharp voice, to curb her graceful movements, and tell her how young ladies ought to walk. How silently morning stole over the earth! It was as if youth had the day and the world to itself. The shutters of the cottage were still closed, and Evelyn cast a glance upward, to assure herself that her mother, who also rose betimes, was not yet stirring. So she tripped along, singing from very glee, to secure a companion, and let out Sultan; and a few moments afterwards, they were scouring over the grass, and descending the rude steps that wound down the cliff to the smooth sea sands. Evelyn was still a child at heart, yet somewhat more than a child in mind. In the majesty of—

"That hollow, sounding, and mysterious main,"—

in the silence broken but by the murmur of the billows, in the solitude relieved but by the boats of the early fishermen, she felt those deep and tranquillizing influences which belong to the Religion of Nature. Unconsciously to herself, her sweet face grew more thoughtful, and her step more slow. What a complex thing is education! How many circumstances, that have no connection with books and tutors, contribute to the rearing of the human mind! The earth and the sky and the ocean were among the teachers of Evelyn Cameron; and beneath her simplicity of thought was daily filled, from the turns of invisible spirits, the fountain of the poetry of feeling.

This was the hour when Evelyn most sensibly felt how little our real life is chronicled by external events,—how much we live a second and a higher life in our meditations and dreams. Brought up, not more by precept than example, in the faith which unites creature and Creator, this was the hour in which thought itself had something of the holiness of prayer; and if (turning from dreams divine to earlier visions) this also was the hour in which the heart painted and peopled its own fairyland below, of the two ideal worlds that stretch beyond the inch of time on which we stand, Imagination is perhaps holier than Memory.

So now, as the day crept on, Evelyn returned in a more sober mood, and then she joined her mother and Mrs. Leslie at breakfast; and then the household cares—such as they were—devolved upon her, heiress though she was; and, that duty done, once more the straw hat and Sultan were in requisition; and opening a little gate at the back of the cottage, she took the path along the village churchyard that led to the house of the old curate. The burial-ground itself was surrounded and shut

in with a belt of trees. Save the small time-discoloured church and the roofs of the cottage and the minister's house, no building—not even a cotter's hut—was visible there. Beneath a dark and single yew-tree in the centre of the ground was placed a rude seat; opposite to this seat was a grave, distinguished from the rest by a slight palisade. As the young Evelyn passed slowly by this spot, a glove on the long damp grass beside the yew-tree caught her eye. She took it up and sighed,—it was her mother's. She sighed, for she thought of the soft melancholy on that mother's face which her caresses and her mirth never could wholly chase away. She wondered why that melancholy was so fixed a habit, for the young ever wonder why the experienced should be sad.

And now Evelyn had passed the churchyard, and was on the green turf before the minister's quaint, old-fashioned house. The old man himself was at work in his garden; but he threw down his hoe as he saw Evelyn, and came cheerfully up to greet her.

It was easy to see how dear she was to him.

"So you are come for your daily lesson, my young pupil?"

"Yes; but Tasso can wait if the—"

"If the tutor wants to play truant; no, my child; and, indeed, the lesson must be longer than usual to-day, for I fear I shall have to leave you to-morrow for some days."

"Leave us! why?—leave Brook-Green—impossible!"

"Not at all impossible; for we have now a new vicar, and I must turn courtier in my old age, and ask him to leave me with my flock. He is at Weymouth, and has written to me to visit him there. So, Miss Evelyn, I must give you a holiday task to learn while I am away."

Evelyn brushed the tears from her eyes—for when the heart is full of affection the eyes easily run over—and clung mournfully to the old man, as she gave utterance to all her half-childish, half-womanly grief at the thought of parting so soon with him. And what, too, could her mother do without him; and why could he not write to the vicar instead of going to him?

The curate, who was childless and a bachelor, was not insensible to the fondness of his beautiful pupil, and perhaps he himself was a little more *distract* than usual that morning, or else Evelyn was peculiarly inattentive; for certain it is that she reaped very little benefit from the lesson.

Yet he was an admirable teacher, that old man! Aware of Evelyn's quick, susceptible, and rather fanciful character of mind, he had sought less to curb than to refine and elevate her imagination. Himself of no ordinary abilities, which leisure had allowed him to cultivate, his piety was too large and cheerful to exclude literature—Heaven's best gift—from the pale of religion. And under his care Evelyn's mind had been duly stored with the treasures of modern genius, and her judgment strengthened by the criticisms of a graceful and generous taste.

In that sequestered hamlet, the young heiress had been trained to adorn her future station; to appreciate the arts and elegances that distinguish (no matter what the rank) the refined from the low, better than if she had been brought up under the hundred-handed Briareus of fashionable education. Lady Vargrave, indeed, like most persons of modest pretensions and imperfect cultivation, was rather inclined to overrate the advantages to be derived from book-knowledge; and she was never better pleased than when she saw Evelyn opening the monthly parcel from London, and delightedly poring over volumes which Lady Vargrave innocently believed to be reservoirs of inexhaustible wisdom.

But this day Evelyn would not read, and the golden verses of Tasso lost their music to her ear. So the curate gave up the lecture, and placed a little programme of studies to be conned during his absence in her reluctant hand; and Sultan, who had been wistfully licking his paws for the last half-hour, sprang up and caracoled once more into the garden; and the old priest and the young woman left the works of man for those of Nature.

"Do not fear, I will take such care of your garden while you are away," said Evelyn; "and you must write and let us know what day you are to come back."

"My dear Evelyn, you are born to spoil every one—from Sultan to Aubrey."

"And to be spoilt too, don't forget that," cried Evelyn, laughingly shaking back her ringlets. "And now, before you go, will you tell me, as you are so wise, what I can do to make—to make—my mother love me?"

Evelyn's voice faltered as she spoke the last words, and Aubrey looked surprised and moved.

"Your mother love you, my dear Evelyn! What do you mean,—does she not love you?"

"Ah, not as I love her. She is kind and gentle, I know, for she is so to all; but she does not confide in me, she does not trust me; she has some sorrow at heart which I am never allowed to learn and soothe. Why does she avoid all mention of her early days? She never talks to me as if she, too, had once a mother! Why am I never to speak of her first marriage, of my father? Why does she look reproachfully at me, and shun me—yes, shun me, for days together—if—if I attempt to draw her to the past? Is there a secret? If so, am I not old enough to know it?"

Evelyn spoke quickly and nervously, and with quivering lips. Aubrey took her hand, and pressing it, said, after a little pause,—

"Evelyn, this is the first time you have ever thus spoken to me. Has anything chanced to arouse you—shall I call it curiosity, or shall I call it the mortified pride of affection?"

"And you, too, aye harsh; you blame me! No, it is true that I have not thus spoken to you before; but I have long, long thought with grief that I was insufficient to my mother's happiness,—I who love her so dearly. And now, since Mrs. Leslie has been here, I find her conversing with this comparative stranger so much more confidentially than with me. When I come in unexpectedly, they cease their conference, as if I were not worthy to share it; and—and oh, if I could but make you understand that all I desire is that my mother should love me and know me and trust me—"

"Evelyn," said the curate, coldly, "you love your mother, and justly; a kinder and a gentler heart than hers does not beat in a human breast. Her first wish in life is for your happiness and welfare. You ask for confidence, but why not confide in her; why not believe her actuated by the best and the tenderest motives; why not leave it to her discretion to reveal to you any secret grief, if such there be, that preys upon her; why add to that grief by any selfish indulgence of over-susceptibility in yourself? My dear pupil, you are yet almost a child; and they who have sorrowed may well be reluctant to sadden with a melancholy confidence those to whom sorrow is yet unknown. This much, at least, I may tell you,—for this much she does not seek to conceal,—that Lady Vargrave was early inured to trials from which you, more happy, have been saved. She speaks not to you of her relations, for she has none left on earth. And after her marriage with your benefactor, Evelyn, perhaps it seemed to her a matter of principle to banish all vain regret, all remembrance if possible, of an earlier tie."

"My poor, poor mother! Oh, yes, you are right; forgive me. She yet mourns, perhaps, my father, whom I never saw, whom I feel, as it were, tacitly forbid to name,—you did not know him?"

"Him!—whom?"

"My father, my mother's first husband."

"No."

"But I am sure I could not have loved him so well as my benefactor, my real and second father, who is now dead and gone. Oh, how well I remember him,—how fondly!" Here Evelyn stopped and burst into tears.

"You do right to remember him thus; to love and revere his memory,—a father indeed he was to you. But now, Evelyn, my own dear child, hear me. Respect the silent heart of your mother; let her not think that her misfortunes, whatever they may be, can cast a shadow over you,—you, her last hope and blessing. Rather than seek to open the old wounds, suffer them to heal, as they must, beneath the influences of religion and time; and wait the hour when without, perhaps, too keen a grief, your mother can go back with you into the past."

"I will, I will! Oh, how wicked, how ungracious I have been! It was but an excess of love, believe it, dear Mr. Aubrey, believe it."

"I do believe it, my poor Evelyn; and now I know that I may trust in you. Come, dry those bright eyes, or they will think I have been a hard taskmaster, and let us go to the cottage."

They walked slowly and silently across the humble garden into the churchyard, and there, by the old yew-tree, they saw Lady Vargrave. Evelyn, fearful that the traces of her tears were yet visible, drew back; and Aubrey, aware of what passed within her, said,—

"Shall I join your mother, and tell her of my approaching departure? And perhaps in the meanwhile you will call at our poor pensioner's in the village,—Dame Newman is so anxious to see you; we will join you there soon."

Evelyn smiled her thanks, and kissing her hand to her mother with seeming gayety, turned back and passed through the glebe into the little village. Aubrey joined Lady Vargrave, and drew her arm in his.

Meanwhile Evelyn thoughtfully pursued her way. Her heart was full, and of self-reproach. Her mother had, then, known cause for sorrow; and perhaps her reserve was but occasioned by her reluctance to pain her child. Oh, how doubly anxious would Evelyn be hereafter to soothe, to comfort, to wean that dear mother from the past! Though in this girl's character there was something of the impetuosity and thoughtlessness of her years, it was noble as well as soft; and now the woman's trustfulness conquered all the woman's curiosity.

She entered the cottage of the old bedridden crone whom Aubrey had referred to. It was as a gleam of sunshine,—that sweet comforting face; and here, seated by the old woman's side, with the Book of the Poor upon her lap, Evelyn was found by Lady Vargrave. It was curious to observe the different impressions upon the cottagers made by the mother and daughter. Both were beloved with almost equal enthusiasm; but with the first the poor felt more at home. They could talk to her more at ease: she understood them so much more quickly; they had no need to beat about the bush to tell the little peevish complaints that they were half-ashamed to utter to Evelyn. What seemed so light to the young, cheerful beauty, the mother listened to with so grave and sweet a patience. When all went right, they rejoiced to see Evelyn; but in their little difficulties and sorrows nobody was like "my good Lady!"

So Dame Newman, the moment she saw the pale countenance and graceful shape of Lady Vargrave at the threshold, uttered an exclamation of delight. Now she could let out all that she did not like to trouble the young lady with; now she could complain of east winds, and rheumatiz, and the parish officers, and the bad tea they sold poor people at Mr. Hart's shop, and the ungrateful grandson who was so well to do and who forgot he had a grandmother alive!

## CHAPTER IV

*TOWARDS the end of the week we received a card from the town ladies.  
Vicar of Wakefield.*

THE curate was gone, and the lessons suspended; otherwise—as like each to each as sunshine or cloud permitted—day followed day in the calm retreat of Brook-Green,—when, one morning, Mrs. Leslie, with a letter in her hand, sought Lady Vargrave, who was busied in tending the flowers of a small conservatory which she had added to the cottage, when, from various motives, and one in especial powerful and mysterious, she exchanged for so sequestered a home the luxurious villa bequeathed to her by her husband.

To flowers—those charming children of Nature, in which our age can take the same tranquil pleasure as our youth—Lady Vargrave devoted much of her monotonous and unchequered time. She seemed to love them almost as living things; and her memory associated them with hours as bright and as fleeting as themselves.

"My dear friend," said Mrs. Leslie, "I have news for you. My daughter, Mrs. Merton, who has been in Cornwall on a visit to her husband's mother, writes me word that she will visit us on her road home to the Rectory in B——shire. She will not put you much out of the way," added Mrs. Leslie, smiling, "for Mr. Merton will not accompany her; she only brings her daughter Caroline, a lively, handsome, intelligent girl, who will be enchanted with Evelyn. All you will regret is, that she comes to terminate my visit, and take me away with her. If you can forgive that offence, you will have nothing else to pardon."

Lady Vargrave replied with her usual simple kindness; but she was evidently nervous at the visit of a stranger (for she had never yet seen Mrs. Merton), and still more distressed at the thought of losing Mrs. Leslie a week or two sooner than had been anticipated. However, Mrs. Leslie hastened to reassure her. Mrs. Merton was so quiet and good-natured, the wife of a country clergyman with simple tastes; and after all, Mrs. Leslie's visit might last as long, if Lady Vargrave would be contented to extend her hospitality to Mrs. Merton and Caroline.

When the visit was announced to Evelyn, her young heart was susceptible only of pleasure and curiosity. She had no friend of her own age; she was sure she should like the grandchild of her dear Mrs. Leslie.

Evelyn, who had learned betimes, from the affectionate solicitude of her nature, to relieve her mother of such few domestic cares as a home so quiet, with an establishment so regular, could afford, gayly busied herself in a thousand little preparations. She filled the rooms of the visitors with flowers (not dreaming that any one could fancy them unwholesome), and spread the tables with her own favourite books, and had the little cottage piano in her own dressing-room removed into Caroline's—Caroline must be fond of music. She had some doubts of transferring a cage with two canaries into Caroline's room also; but when she approached the cage with that intention, the birds chirped so merrily, and seemed so glad to see her, and so expectant of sugar, that her heart smote her for her meditated desertion and ingratitude. No, she could not give up the canaries; but the glass bowl with the goldfish—oh, that would look so pretty on its stand just by the casement; and the fish—dull things!—would not miss her.

The morning, the noon, the probable hour of the important arrival came at last; and after having three times within the last half-hour visited the rooms, and settled and unsettled and settled again everything before arranged, Evelyn retired to her own room to consult her wardrobe, and Margaret,—once her nurse, now her abigail. Alas! the wardrobe of the destined Lady Vargrave—the betrothed of a rising statesman, a new and now an ostentatious peer; the heiress of the wealthy Templeton—was one that many a tradesman's daughter would have disdained. Evelyn visited so little; the clergyman of

the place, and two old maids who lived most respectably on a hundred and eighty pounds a year, in a cottage, with one maidservant, two cats, and a footboy, bounded the circle of her acquaintance. Her mother was so indifferent to dress; she herself had found so many other ways of spending money!—but Evelyn was not now more philosophical than others of her age. She turned from muslin to muslin—from the coloured to the white, from the white to the coloured—with pretty anxiety and sorrowful suspense. At last she decided on the newest, and when it was on, and the single rose set in the lustrous and beautiful hair, Carson herself could not have added a charm. Happy age! Who wants the arts of the milliner at seventeen?

"And here, miss; here's the fine necklace Lord Vargrave brought down when my lord came last; it will look so grand!"

The emeralds glittered in their case; Evelyn looked at them irresolutely; then, as she looked, a shade came over her forehead, and she sighed, and closed the lid.

"No, Margaret, I do not want it; take it away."

"Oh, dear, miss! what would my lord say if he were down! And they are so beautiful! they will look so fine! Deary me, how they sparkle! But you will wear much finer when you are my lady."

"I hear Mamma's bell; go, Margaret, she wants you."

Left alone, the young beauty sank down abstractedly, and though the looking-glass was opposite, it did not arrest her eye; she forgot her wardrobe, her muslin dress, her fears, and her guests.

"Ah," she thought, "what a weight of dread I feel here when I think of Lord Vargrave and this fatal engagement; and every day I feel it more and more. To leave my dear, dear mother, the dear cottage—oh! I never can. I used to like him when I was a child; now I shudder at his name. Why is this? He is kind; he condescends to seek to please. It was the wish of my poor father,—for father he really was to me; and yet—oh that he had left me poor and free!"

At this part of Evelyn's meditation the unusual sound of wheels was heard on the gravel; she started up, wiped the tears from her eyes, and hurried down to welcome the expected guests.

## CHAPTER V

*TELL me, Sophy, my dear, what do you think of our new visitors?  
Vicar of Wakefield.*

MRS. MERTON and her daughter were already in the middle drawing-room, seated on either side of Mrs. Leslie,—the former a woman of quiet and pleasing exterior, her face still handsome, and if not intelligent, at least expressive of sober good-nature and habitual content; the latter a fine dark-eyed girl, of decided countenance, and what is termed a showy style of beauty,—tall, self-possessed, and dressed plainly indeed, but after the approved fashion. The rich bonnet of the large shape then worn; the Chantilly veil; the gay French *Cachemire*; the full sleeves, at that time the unnatural rage; the expensive yet unassuming *robe de soie*; the perfect *chaussure*; the air of society, the easy manner, the tranquil but scrutinizing gaze,—all startled, discomposed, and half-frightened Evelyn.

Miss Merton herself, if more at her ease, was equally surprised by the beauty and unconscious grace of the young fairy before her, and rose to greet her with a well-bred cordiality, which at once made a conquest of Evelyn's heart.

Mrs. Merton kissed her cheek, and smiled kindly on her, but said little. It was easy to see that she was a less conversable and more homely person than Caroline.

When Evelyn conducted them to their rooms, the mother and daughter detected at a glance the care that had provided for their comforts; and something eager and expectant in Evelyn's eyes taught the good-nature of the one and the good breeding of the other to reward their young hostess by various little exclamations of pleasure and satisfaction.

"Dear, how nice! What a pretty writing-desk!" said one—"And the pretty goldfish!" said the other—"And the piano, too, so well placed;" and Caroline's fair fingers ran rapidly over the keys. Evelyn retired, covered with smiles and blushes. And then Mrs. Merton permitted herself to say to the well-dressed abigail,—

"Do take away those flowers, they make me quite faint."

"And how low the room is,—so confined!" said Caroline, when the lady's lady withdrew with the condemned flowers. "And I see no Pysche. However, the poor people have done their best."

"Sweet person, Lady Vargrave!" said Mrs. Merton,—"so interesting, so beautiful; and how youthful in appearance!"

"No *tournure*—not much the manner of the world," said Caroline.

"No; but something better."

"Hem!" said Caroline. "The girl is very pretty, though too small."

"Such a smile, such eyes,—she is irresistible! and what a fortune! She will be a charming friend for you, Caroline."

"Yes, she may be useful, if she marry Lord Vargrave; or, indeed, if she make any brilliant match. What sort of a man is Lord Vargrave?"

"I never saw him; they say, most fascinating."

"Well, she is very happy," said Caroline, with a sigh.

## CHAPTER VI

*TWO lovely damsels cheer my lonely walk.—LAMB: Album Verses.*

AFTER dinner there was still light enough for the young people to stroll through the garden. Mrs. Merton, who was afraid of the damp, preferred staying within; and she was so quiet, and made herself so much at home, that Lady Vargrave, to use Mrs. Leslie's phrase, was not the least "put out" by her. Besides, she talked of Evelyn, and that was a theme very dear to Lady Vargrave, who was both fond and proud of Evelyn.

"This is very pretty indeed,—the view of the sea quite lovely!" said Caroline. "You draw?"

"Yes, a little."

"From Nature?"

"Oh, yes."

"What, in Indian ink?"

"Yes; and water-colours."

"Oh! Why, who could have taught you in this little village; or, indeed, in this most primitive county?"

"We did not come to Brook-Green till I was nearly fifteen. My dear mother, though very anxious to leave our villa at Fulham, would not do so on my account, while masters could be of service to me; and as I knew she had set her heart on this place, I worked doubly hard."

"Then she knew this place before?"

"Yes; she had been here many years ago, and took the place after my poor father's death,—I always call the late Lord Vargrave my father. She used to come here regularly once a year without me; and when she returned, I thought her even more melancholy than before."

"What makes the charm of the place to Lady Vargrave?" asked Caroline, with some interest.

"I don't know; unless it be its extreme quiet, or some early association."

"And who is your nearest neighbour?"

"Mr. Aubrey, the curate. It is so unlucky, he is gone from home for a short time. You can't think how kind and pleasant he is,—the most amiable old man in the world; just such a man as Bernardin St. Pierre would have loved to describe."

"Agreeable, no doubt, but dull—good curates generally are."

"Dull? not the least; cheerful even to playfulness, and full of information. He has been so good to me about books; indeed, I have learned a great deal from him."

"I dare say he is an admirable judge of sermons."

"But Mr. Aubrey is not severe," persisted Evelyn, earnestly; "he is very fond of Italian literature, for instance; we are reading Tasso together."

"Oh! pity he is old—I think you said he was old. Perhaps there is a son, the image of the sire?"

"Oh, no," said Evelyn, laughing innocently; "Mr. Aubrey never married."

"And where does the old gentleman live?"

"Come a little this way; there, you can just see the roof of his house, close by the church."

"I see; it is *tant soit peu triste* to have the church so near you."

"Do you think so? Ah, but you have not seen it; it is the prettiest church in the county; and the little burial-ground—so quiet, so shut in; I feel better every time I pass it. Some places breathe of religion."

"You are poetical, my dear little friend."

Evelyn, who *had* poetry in her nature, and therefore sometimes it broke out in her simple language, coloured and felt half-ashamed.

"It is a favourite walk with my mother," said she, apologetically; "she often spends hours there alone: and so, perhaps, I think it a prettier spot than others may. It does not seem to me to have anything of gloom in it; when I die, I should like to be buried there."

Caroline laughed slightly. "That is a strange wish; but perhaps you have been crossed in love?"

"I!—oh, you are laughing at me!"

"You do not remember Mr. Cameron, your real father, I suppose?"

"No; I believe he died before I was born."

"Cameron is a Scotch name: to what tribe of Camerons do you belong?"

"I don't know," said Evelyn, rather embarrassed; "indeed I know nothing of my father's or mother's family. It is very odd, but I don't think we have any relations. You know when I am of age that I am to take the name of Templeton."

"Ah, the name goes with the fortune; I understand. Dear Evelyn, how rich you will be! I do so wish I were rich!"

"And I that I were poor," said Evelyn, with an altered tone and expression of countenance.

"Strange girl! what can you mean?"

Evelyn said nothing, and Caroline examined her curiously.

"These notions come from living so much out of the world, my dear Evelyn. How you must long to see more of life!"

"I! not in the least. I should never like to leave this place,—I could live and die here."

"You will think otherwise when you are Lady Vargrave. Why do you look so grave? Do you not love Lord Vargrave?"

"What a question!" said Evelyn, turning away her head, and forcing a laugh.

"It is no matter whether you do or not: it is a brilliant position. He has rank, reputation, high office; all he wants is money, and that you will give him. Alas! I have no prospect so bright. I have no fortune, and I fear my face will never buy a title, an opera-box, and a house in Grosvenor Square. I wish I were the future Lady Vargrave."

"I am sure I wish you were," said Evelyn, with great *naivete*; "you would suit Lord Vargrave better than I should."

Caroline laughed.

"Why do you think so?"

"Oh, his way of thinking is like yours; he never says anything I can sympathize with."

"A pretty compliment to me! Depend upon it, my dear, you will sympathize with me when you have seen as much of the world. But Lord Vargrave—is he too old?"

"No, I don't think of his age; and indeed he looks younger than he is."

"Is he handsome?"

"He is what may be called handsome,—you would think so."

"Well, if he comes here, I will do my best to win him from you; so look to yourself."

"Oh, I should be so grateful; I should like him so much, if he would fall in love with you!"

"I fear there is no chance of that."

"But how," said Evelyn, hesitatingly, after a pause,— "how is it that you have seen so much more of the world than I have? I thought Mr. Merton lived a great deal in the country."

"Yes, but my uncle, Sir John Merton, is member for the county; my grandmother on my father's side—Lady Elizabeth, who has Tregony Castle (which we have just left) for her jointure-house—goes to town almost every season, and I have spent three seasons with her. She is a charming old woman,—quite the *grand dame*. I am sorry to say she remains in Cornwall this year. She has not been very well; the physicians forbid late hours and London; but even in the country we are very gay. My uncle lives near us, and though a widower, has his house full when down at Merton Park; and Papa, too, is rich, very hospitable and popular, and will, I hope, be a bishop one of these days—not at all like a mere country parson; and so, somehow or other, I have learned to be ambitious,—we are

an ambitious family on Papa's side. But, alas! I have not your cards to play. Young, beautiful, and an heiress! Ah, what prospects! You should make your mamma take you to town."

"To town! she would be wretched at the very idea. Oh, you don't know us."

"I can't help fancying, Miss Evelyn," said Caroline, archly, "that you are not so blind to Lord Vargrave's perfections and so indifferent to London, only from the pretty innocent way of thinking, that so prettily and innocently you express. I dare say, if the truth were known, there is some handsome young rector, besides the old curate, who plays the flute, and preaches sentimental sermons in white kid gloves."

Evelyn laughed merrily,—so merrily that Caroline's suspicions vanished. They continued to walk and talk thus till the night came on, and then they went in; and Evelyn showed Caroline her drawings, which astonished that young lady, who was a good judge of accomplishments. Evelyn's performance on the piano astonished her yet more; but Caroline consoled herself on this point, for her voice was more powerful, and she sang French songs with much more spirit. Caroline showed talent in all she undertook; but Evelyn, despite her simplicity, had genius, though as yet scarcely developed, for she had quickness, emotion, susceptibility, imagination. And the difference between talent and genius lies rather in the heart than the head.

## CHAPTER VII

*DOST thou feel  
The solemn whispering influence of the scene  
Oppressing thy young heart, that thou dost draw  
More closely to my side?*

—F. HEMANS: *Wood Walk and Hymn.*

CAROLINE and Evelyn, as was natural, became great friends. They were not kindred to each other in disposition; but they were thrown together, and friendship thus forced upon both. Unsuspecting and sanguine, it was natural to Evelyn to admire; and Caroline was, to her inexperience, a brilliant and imposing novelty. Sometimes Miss Merton's worldliness of thought shocked Evelyn; but then Caroline had a way with her as if she were not in earnest,—as if she were merely indulging an inclination towards irony; nor was she without a certain vein of sentiment that persons a little hackneyed in the world and young ladies a little disappointed that they are not wives instead of maids, easily acquire. Trite as this vein of sentiment was, poor Evelyn thought it beautiful and most feeling. Then, Caroline was clever, entertaining, cordial, with all that superficial superiority that a girl of twenty-three who knows London readily exercises over a country girl of seventeen. On the other hand, Caroline was kind and affectionate towards her. The clergyman's daughter felt that she could not be always superior, even in fashion, to the wealthy heiress.

One evening, as Mrs. Leslie and Mrs. Merton sat under the veranda of the cottage, without their hostess, who had gone alone into the village, and the young ladies were confidentially conversing on the lawn, Mrs. Leslie said rather abruptly, "Is not Evelyn a delightful creature? How unconscious of her beauty; how simple, and yet so naturally gifted!"

"I have never seen one who interested me more," said Mrs. Merton, settling her *pelerine*; "she is extremely pretty."

"I am so anxious about her," resumed Mrs. Leslie, thoughtfully. "You know the wish of the late Lord Vargrave that she should marry his nephew, the present lord, when she reaches the age of eighteen. She only wants nine or ten months of that time; she has seen nothing of the world: she is not fit to decide for herself; and Lady Vargrave, the best of human creatures, is still herself almost too inexperienced in the world to be a guide for one so young placed in such peculiar circumstances, and of prospects so brilliant. Lady Vargrave at heart is a child still, and will be so even when as old as I am."

"It is very true," said Mrs. Merton. "Don't you fear that the girls will catch cold? The dew is falling, and the grass must be wet."

"I have thought," continued Mrs. Leslie, without heeding the latter part of Mrs. Merton's speech, "that it would be a kind thing to invite Evelyn to stay with you a few months at the Rectory. To be sure, it is not like London; but you see a great deal of the world. The society at your house is well selected, and at times even brilliant; she will meet young people of her own age, and young people fashion and form each other."

"I was thinking myself that I should like to invite her," said Mrs. Merton; "I will consult Caroline."

"Caroline, I am sure, would be delighted; the difficulty lies rather in Evelyn herself."

"You surprise me! she must be moped to death here."

"But will she leave her mother?"

"Why, Caroline often leaves me," said Mrs. Merton.

Mrs. Leslie was silent, and Evelyn and her new friend now joined the mother and daughter.

"I have been trying to persuade Evelyn to pay us a little visit," said Caroline; "she could accompany us so nicely; and if she is still strange with us, dear grandmamma goes too,—I am sure we can make her at home."

"How odd!" said Mrs. Merton; "we were just saying the same thing. My dear Miss Cameron, we should be so happy to have you."

"And I should be so happy to go, if Mamma would but go too."

As she spoke, the moon, just risen, showed the form of Lady Vargrave slowly approaching the house. By the light, her features seemed more pale than usual; and her slight and delicate form, with its gliding motion and noiseless step, had in it something almost ethereal and unearthly.

Evelyn turned and saw her, and her heart smote her. Her mother, so wedded to the dear cottage—and had this gay stranger rendered that dear cottage less attractive,—she who had said she could live and die in its humble precincts? Abruptly she left her new friend, hastened to her mother, and threw her arms fondly round her.

"You are pale; you have over-fatigued yourself. Where have you been? Why did you not take me with you?"

Lady Vargrave pressed Evelyn's hand affectionately.

"You care for me too much," said she. "I am but a dull companion for you; I was so glad to see you happy with one better suited to your gay spirits. What can we do when she leaves us?"

"Ah, I want no companion but my own, own mother. And have I not Sultan, too?" added Evelyn, smiling away the tear that had started to her eyes.

## CHAPTER VIII

*FRIEND after friend departs;  
Who hath not lost a friend?  
There is no union here of hearts  
That finds not here an end.*

—J. MONTGOMERY.

THAT night Mrs. Leslie sought Lady Vargrave in her own room. As she entered gently she observed that, late as the hour was, Lady Vargrave was stationed by the open window, and seemed intently gazing on the scene below. Mrs. Leslie reached her side unperceived. The moonlight was exceedingly bright; and just beyond the garden, from which it was separated but by a slight fence, lay the solitary churchyard of the hamlet, with the slender spire of the holy edifice rising high and tapering into the shining air. It was a calm and tranquillizing scene; and so intent was Lady Vargrave's abstracted gaze, that Mrs. Leslie was unwilling to disturb her reverie.

At length Lady Vargrave turned; and there was that patient and pathetic resignation written in her countenance which belongs to those whom the world can deceive no more, and who have fixed their hearts in the life beyond.

Mrs. Leslie, whatever she thought or felt, said nothing, except in kindly remonstrance on the indiscretion of braving the night air. The window was closed; they sat down to confer.

Mrs. Leslie repeated the invitation given to Evelyn, and urged the advisability of accepting it. "It is cruel to separate you," said she; "I feel it acutely. Why not, then, come with Evelyn? You shake your head: why always avoid society? So young, yet you give yourself too much to the past!"

Lady Vargrave rose, and walked to a cabinet at the end of the room; she unlocked it, and beckoned to Mrs. Leslie to approach. In a drawer lay carefully folded articles of female dress,—rude, homely, ragged,—the dress of a peasant girl.

"Do these remind you of your first charity to me?" she said touchingly: "they tell me that I have nothing to do with the world in which you and yours, and Evelyn herself, should move."

"Too tender conscience!—your errors were but those of circumstances, of youth;—how have they been redeemed! none even suspect them. Your past history is known but to the good old Aubrey and myself. No breath, even of rumour, tarnishes the name of Lady Vargrave."

"Mrs. Leslie," said Lady Vargrave, reclosing the cabinet, and again seating herself, "my world lies around me; I cannot quit it. If I were of use to Evelyn, then indeed I would sacrifice, brave all; but I only cloud her spirits. I have no advice to give her, no instruction to bestow. When she was a child I could watch over her; when she was sick, I could nurse her; but now she requires an adviser, a guide; and I feel too sensibly that this task is beyond my powers. I, a guide to youth and innocence, —I! No, I have nothing to offer her, dear child! but my love and my prayers. Let your daughter take her, then,—watch over her, guide, advise her. For me—unkind, ungrateful as it may seem—were she but happy, I could well bear to be alone!"

"But she—how will she, who loves you so, submit to this separation?"

"It will not be long; and," added Lady Vargrave, with a serious, yet sweet smile, "she had better be prepared for that separation which must come at last. As year by year I outlive my last hope,—that of once more beholding *him*,—I feel that life becomes feebler and feebler, and I look more on that quiet churchyard as a home to which I am soon returning. At all events, Evelyn will be called upon to form new ties that must estrange her from me; let her wean herself from one so useless to her, to all the world,—now, and by degrees."

"Speak not thus," said Mrs. Leslie, strongly affected; "you have many years of happiness yet in store for you. The more you recede from youth, the fairer life will become to you."

"God is good to me," said the lady, raising her meek eyes; "and I have already found it so. I am contented."

## CHAPTER IX

*THE greater part of them seemed to be charmed with his presence.*  
*MACKENZIE: The Man of the World.*

IT was with the greatest difficulty that Evelyn could at last be persuaded to consent to the separation from her mother; she wept bitterly at the thought. But Lady Vargrave, though touched, was firm, and her firmness was of that soft, imploring character which Evelyn never could resist. The visit was to last some months, it is true, but she would return to the cottage; she would escape, too—and this, perhaps, unconsciously reconciled her more than aught else—the periodical visit of Lord Vargrave. At the end of July, when the parliamentary session at that unreformed era usually expired, he always came to Brook-Green for a month. His last visits had been most unwelcome to Evelyn, and this next visit she dreaded more than she had any of the former ones. It is strange,—the repugnance with which she regarded the suit of her affianced!—she, whose heart was yet virgin; who had never seen any one who, in form, manner, and powers to please, could be compared to the gay Lord Vargrave. And yet a sense of honour, of what was due to her dead benefactor, her more than father,—all combated that repugnance, and left her uncertain what course to pursue, uncalculating as to the future. In the happy elasticity of her spirits, and with a carelessness almost approaching to levity, which, to say truth, was natural to her, she did not often recall the solemn engagement that must soon be ratified or annulled; but when that thought did occur, it saddened her for hours, and left her listless and despondent. The visit to Mrs. Merton was, then, finally arranged, the day of departure fixed, when, one morning, came the following letter from Lord Vargrave himself:—

To the LADY VARGRAVE, etc.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I find that we have a week's holiday in our do-nothing Chamber, and the weather is so delightful, that I long to share its enjoyment with those I love best. You will, therefore, see me almost as soon as you receive this; that is, I shall be with you at dinner on the same day. What can I say to Evelyn? Will you, dearest Lady Vargrave, make her accept all the homage which, when uttered by me, she seems half inclined to reject?

*In haste, most affectionately yours,*  
VARGRAVE.

HAMILTON PLACE, April 30, 18—.

This letter was by no means welcome, either to Mrs. Leslie or to Evelyn. The former feared that Lord Vargrave would disapprove of a visit, the real objects of which could scarcely be owned to him; the latter was reminded of all she desired to forget. But Lady Vargrave herself rather rejoiced at the thought of Lumley's arrival. Hitherto, in the spirit of her passive and gentle character, she had taken the engagement between Evelyn and Lord Vargrave almost as a matter of course. The will and wish of her late husband operated most powerfully on her mind; and while Evelyn was yet in childhood, Lumley's visits had ever been acceptable, and the playful girl liked the gay and good-humoured lord, who brought her all sorts of presents, and appeared as fond of dogs as herself. But Evelyn's recent change of manner, her frequent fits of dejection and thought, once pointed out to Lady Vargrave by Mrs. Leslie, aroused all the affectionate and maternal anxiety of the former. She was resolved to watch, to examine, to scrutinize, not only Evelyn's reception of Vargrave, but, as far as she could, the manner and disposition of Vargrave himself. She felt how solemn a trust was the happiness of a whole life; and she had that romance of heart, learned from Nature, not in books, which made her believe that there could be no happiness in a marriage without love.

The whole family party were on the lawn, when, an hour earlier than he was expected, the travelling carriage of Lord Vargrave was whirled along the narrow sweep that conducted from the

lodge to the house. Vargrave, as he saw the party, kissed his hand from the window; and leaping from the carriage, when it stopped at the porch, hastened to meet his hostess.

"My dear Lady Vargrave, I am so glad to see you! You are looking charmingly; and Evelyn?—oh, there she is; the dear coquette, how lovely she is! how she has improved! But who [sinking his voice], who are those ladies?"

"Guests of ours,—Mrs. Leslie, whom you have often heard us speak of, but never met—"

"Yes; and the others?"

"Her daughter and grandchild."

"I shall be delighted to know them."

A more popular manner than Lord Vargrave's it is impossible to conceive. Frank and prepossessing, even when the poor and reckless Mr. Ferrers, without rank or reputation, his smile, the tone of his voice, his familiar courtesy,—apparently so inartificial and approaching almost to a boyish bluntness of good-humour,—were irresistible in the rising statesman and favoured courtier.

Mrs. Merton was enchanted with him; Caroline thought him, at the first glance, the most fascinating person she had ever seen; even Mrs. Leslie, more grave, cautious, and penetrating, was almost equally pleased with the first impression; and it was not till, in his occasional silence, his features settled into their natural expression that she fancied she detected in the quick suspicious eye and the close compression of the lips the tokens of that wily, astute, and worldly character, which, in proportion as he had risen in his career, even his own party reluctantly and mysteriously assigned to one of their most prominent leaders.

When Vargrave took Evelyn's hand, and raised it with meaning gallantry to his lips, the girl first blushed deeply, and then turned pale as death; nor did the colour thus chased away soon return to the transparent cheek. Not noticing signs which might bear a twofold interpretation, Lumley, who seemed in high spirits, rattled away on a thousand matters,—praising the view, the weather, the journey, throwing out a joke here and a compliment there, and completing his conquest over Mrs. Merton and Caroline.

"You have left London in the very height of its gayety, Lord Vargrave," said Caroline, as they sat conversing after dinner.

"True, Miss Merton; but the country is in the height of its gayety too."

"Are you so fond of the country, then?"

"By fits and starts; my passion for it comes in with the early strawberries, and goes out with the hautboys. I lead so artificial a life; but then I hope it is a useful one. I want nothing but a home to make it a happy one."

"What is the latest news?—dear London! I am so sorry Grandmamma, Lady Elizabeth, is not going there this year, so I am compelled to rusticate. Is Lady Jane D—— to be married at last?"

"Commend me to a young lady's idea of news,—always marriage! Lady Jane D——! yes, she is to be married, as you say—*at last!* While she was a beauty, our cold sex was shy of her; but she has now faded into plainness,—the proper colour for a wife."

"Complimentary!"

"Indeed it is—for you beautiful women we love too much for our own happiness—heigho!—and a prudent marriage means friendly indifference, not rapture and despair. But give me beauty and love; I never was prudent: it is not my weakness."

Though Caroline was his sole supporter in this dialogue, Lord Vargrave's eyes attempted to converse with Evelyn, who was unusually silent and abstracted. Suddenly Lord Vargrave seemed aware that he was scarcely general enough in his talk for his hearers. He addressed himself to Mrs. Leslie, and glided back, as it were, into a former generation. He spoke of persons gone and things forgotten; he made the subject interesting even to the young, by a succession of various and sparkling anecdotes. No one could be more agreeable; even Evelyn now listened to him with pleasure, for to all women wit and intellect have their charm. But still there was a cold and sharp levity in the

tone of the man of the world that prevented the charm sinking below the surface. To Mrs. Leslie he seemed unconsciously to betray a laxity of principle; to Evelyn, a want of sentiment and heart. Lady Vargrave, who did not understand a character of this description, listened attentively, and said to herself, "Evelyn may admire, but I fear she cannot love him." Still, time passed quickly in Lumley's presence, and Caroline thought she had never spent so pleasant an evening.

When Lord Vargrave retired to his room, he threw himself in his chair, and yawned with exceeding fervour. His servant arranged his dressing-robe, and placed his portfolios and letter-boxes on the table.

"What o'clock is it?" said Lumley.

"Very early, my lord; only eleven."

"The devil! The country air is wonderfully exhausting. I am very sleepy; you may go."

"This little girl," said Lumley, stretching himself, "is preternaturally shy. I must neglect her no longer—yet it is surely all safe? She has grown monstrous pretty; but the other girl is more amusing, more to my taste, and a much easier conquest, I fancy. Her great dark eyes seem full of admiration for my lordship. Sensible young woman! she may be useful in piquing Evelyn."

## CHAPTER X

*Julio. Wilt thou have him?—The Maid in the Mill.*

LORD VARGRAVE heard the next morning, with secret distaste and displeasure, of Evelyn's intended visit to the Mertons. He could scarcely make any open objection to it; but he did not refrain from many insinuations as to its impropriety.

"My dear friend," said he to Lady Vargrave, "it is scarcely right in you (pardon me for saying it) to commit Evelyn to the care of comparative strangers. Mrs. Leslie, indeed, you know; but Mrs. Merton, you allow, you have now seen for the first time. A most respectable person doubtless; but still, recollect how young Evelyn is, how rich; what a prize to any younger sons in the Merton family (if such there be). Miss Merton herself is a shrewd, worldly girl; and if she were of our sex would make a capital fortune-hunter. Don't think my fear is selfish; I do not speak for myself. If I were Evelyn's brother, I should be yet more earnest in my remonstrance."

"But, Lord Vargrave, poor Evelyn is dull here; my spirits infect hers. She ought to mix more with those of her own age, to see more of the world before—before—"

"Before her marriage with me? Forgive me, but is not that my affair? If I am contented, nay, charmed with her innocence, if I prefer it to all the arts which society could teach her, surely you would be acquitted for leaving her in the beautiful simplicity that makes her chief fascination? She will see enough of the world as Lady Vargrave."

"But if she should resolve never to be Lady Vargrave—?"

Lumley started, bit his lip, and frowned. Lady Vargrave had never before seen on his countenance the dark expression it now wore. He recollected and recovered himself, as he observed her eye fixed upon him, and said, with a constrained smile,—

"Can you anticipate an event so fatal to my happiness, so unforeseen, so opposed to all my poor uncle's wishes, as Evelyn's rejection of a suit pursued for years, and so solemnly sanctioned in her very childhood?"

"She must decide for herself," said Lady Vargrave. "Your uncle carefully distinguished between a wish and a command. Her heart is as yet untouched. If she can love you, may you deserve her affection."

"It shall be my study to do so. But why this departure from your roof just when we ought to see most of each other? It cannot be that you would separate us?"

"I fear, Lord Vargrave, that if Evelyn were to remain here, she would decide against you. I fear if you press her now, such now may be her premature decision. Perhaps this arises from too fond an attachment for her home; perhaps even a short absence from her home—from me—may more reconcile her to a permanent separation."

Vargrave could say no more, for here they were joined by Caroline and Mrs. Merton; but his manner was changed, nor could he recover the gayety of the previous night.

When, however, he found time for meditation, he contrived to reconcile himself to the intended visit. He felt that it was easy to secure the friendship of the whole of the Merton family; and that friendship might be more useful to him than the neutral part adopted by Lady Vargrave. He should, of course, be invited to the rectory; it was much nearer London than Lady Vargrave's cottage, he could more often escape from public cares to superintend his private interest. A country neighbourhood, particularly at that season of the year, was not likely to abound in very dangerous rivals. Evelyn would, he saw, be surrounded by a *worldly* family, and he thought that an advantage; it might serve to dissipate Evelyn's romantic tendencies, and make her sensible of the pleasures of the London life, the official rank, the gay society that her union with him would offer as an equivalent for her fortune. In short, as was his wont, he strove to make the best of the new turn affairs had taken. Though guardian

to Miss Cameron, and one of the trustees for the fortune she was to receive on attaining her majority, he had not the right to dictate as to her residence. The late lord's will had expressly and pointedly corroborated the natural and lawful authority of Lady Vargrave in all matters connected with Evelyn's education and home. It may be as well, in this place, to add, that to Vargrave and the co-trustee, Mr. Gustavus Douce, a banker of repute and eminence, the testator left large discretionary powers as to the investment of the fortune. He had stated it as his wish that from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty thousand pounds should be invested in the purchase of a landed estate; but he had left it to the discretion of the trustees to increase that sum, even to the amount of the whole capital, should an estate of adequate importance be in the market, while the selection of time and purchase was unreservedly confided to the trustees. Vargrave had hitherto objected to every purchase in the market,—not that he was insensible to the importance and consideration of landed property, but because, till he himself became the legal receiver of the income, he thought it less trouble to suffer the money to lie in the Funds, than to be pestered with all the onerous details in the management of an estate that might never be his. He, however, with no less ardour than his deceased relative, looked forward to the time when the title of Vargrave should be based upon the venerable foundation of feudal manors and seignorial acres.

"Why did you not tell me Lord Vargrave was so charming?" said Caroline to Evelyn, as the two girls were sauntering, in familiar *tete-a-tete*, along the gardens. "You will be very happy with such a companion."

Evelyn made no answer for a few moments, and then, turning abruptly round to Caroline, and stopping short, she said, with a kind of tearful eagerness, "Dear Caroline, you are so wise, so kind too; advise me, tell me what is best. I am very unhappy."

Miss Merton was moved and surprised by Evelyn's earnestness.

"But what is it, my poor Evelyn," said she; "why are you unhappy?—you whose fate seems to me so enviable."

"I cannot love Lord Vargrave; I recoil from the idea of marrying him. Ought I not fairly to tell him so? Ought I not to say that I cannot fulfil the wish that—oh, there's the thought which leaves me so irresolute!—His uncle bequeathed to me—me who have no claim of relationship—the fortune that should have been Lord Vargrave's, in the belief that my hand would restore it to him. It is almost a fraud to refuse him. Am I not to be pitied?"

"But why can you not love Lord Vargrave? If past the *premiere jeunesse*, he is still handsome. He is more than handsome,—he has the air of rank, an eye that fascinates, a smile that wins, the manners that please, the abilities that command, the world! Handsome, clever, admired, distinguished—what can woman desire more in her lover, her husband? Have you ever formed some fancy, some ideal of the one you could love, and how does Lord Vargrave fall short of the vision?"

"Have I ever formed an ideal?—oh, yes!" said Evelyn, with a beautiful enthusiasm that lighted up her eyes, blushed in her cheek, and heaved her bosom beneath its robe; "something that in loving I could also revere,—a mind that would elevate my own; a heart that could sympathize with my weakness, my follies, my romance, if you will; and in which I could treasure my whole soul."

"You paint a schoolmaster, not a lover!" said Caroline. "You do not care, then, whether this hero be handsome or young?"

"Oh, yes, he should be both," said Evelyn, innocently; "and yet," she added, after a pause, and with an infantine playfulness of manner and countenance, "I know you will laugh at me, but I think I could be in love with more than one at the same time!"

"A common case, but a rare confession!"

"Yes; for if I might ask for the youth and outward advantages that please the eye, I could also love with a yet deeper love that which would speak to my imagination,—Intellect, Genius, Fame! Ah, these have an immortal youth and imperishable beauty of their own!"

"You are a very strange girl."

"But we are on a very strange subject—it is all an enigma!" said Evelyn, shaking her wise little head with a pretty gravity, half mock, half real. "Ah, if Lord Vargrave should love you—and you—oh, you *would* love him, and then I should be free, and so happy!"

They were then on the lawn in sight of the cottage windows, and Lumley, lifting his eyes from the newspaper, which had just arrived and been seized with all a politician's avidity, saw them in the distance. He threw down the paper, mused a moment or two, then took up his hat and joined them; but before he did so, he surveyed himself in the glass. "I think I look young enough still," thought he.

"Two cherries on one stalk," said Lumley, gayly: "by the by, it is not a complimentary simile. What young lady would be like a cherry?—such an uninteresting, common, charity-boy sort of fruit. For my part, I always associate cherries with the image of a young gentleman in corduroys and a skeleton jacket, with one pocket full of marbles, and the other full of worms for fishing, with three-halfpence in the left paw, and two cherries on one stalk (Helena and Hermia) in the right."

"How droll you are!" said Caroline, laughing.

"Much obliged to you, and don't envy your discrimination, 'Melancholy marks me for its own.' You ladies,—ah, yours is the life for gay spirits and light hearts; to us are left business and politics, law, physic, and murder, by way of professions; abuse, nicknamed fame; and the privilege of seeing how universal a thing, among the great and the wealthy, is that pleasant vice, beggary,—which privilege is proudly entitled 'patronage and power.' Are we the things to be gay,—'droll,' as you say? Oh, no, all our spirits are forced, believe me. Miss Cameron, did you ever know that wretched species of hysterical affection called 'forced spirits'? Never, I am sure; your ingenuous smile, your laughing eyes, are the index to a happy and a sanguine heart."

"And what of me?" asked Caroline, quickly, and with a slight blush.

"You, Miss Merton? Ah, I have not yet read your character,—a fair page, but an unknown letter. You, however, have seen the world, and know that we must occasionally wear a mask." Lord Vargrave sighed as he spoke, and relapsed into sudden silence; then looking up, his eyes encountered Caroline's, which were fixed upon him. Their gaze flattered him; Caroline turned away, and busied herself with a rose-bush. Lumley gathered one of the flowers, and presented it to her. Evelyn was a few steps in advance.

"There is no thorn in this rose," said he; "may the offering be an omen. You are now Evelyn's friend, oh, be mine; she is to be your guest. Do not scorn to plead for me."

"Can *you* want a pleader?" said Caroline, with a slight tremor in her voice.

"Charming Miss Merton, love is diffident and fearful; but it must now find a voice, to which may Evelyn benignly listen. What I leave unsaid—would that my new friend's eloquence could supply."

He bowed slightly, and joined Evelyn. Caroline understood the hint, and returned alone and thoughtfully to the house.

"Miss Cameron—Evelyn—ah, still let me call you so, as in the happy and more familiar days of your childhood, I wish you could read my heart at this moment. You are about to leave your home; new scenes will surround, new faces smile on you; dare I hope that I may still be remembered?"

He attempted to take her hand as he spoke; Evelyn withdrew it gently.

"Ah, my lord," said she, in a very low voice, "if remembrance were all that you asked of me—"

"It is all,—favourable remembrance, remembrance of the love of the past, remembrance of the bond to come."

Evelyn shivered. "It is better to speak openly," said she.

"Let me throw myself on your generosity. I am not insensible to your brilliant qualities, to the honour of your attachment; but—but—as the time approaches in which you will call for my decision, let me now say, that I cannot feel for you—those—those sentiments, without which you could not desire our union,—without which it were but a wrong to both of us to form it. Nay, listen to me. I grieve bitterly at the tenor of your too generous uncle's will; can I not atone to you? Willingly would I sacrifice the fortune that, indeed, ought to be yours; accept it, and remain my friend."

"Cruel Evelyn! and can you suppose that it is your fortune I seek? It is yourself. Heaven is my witness, that, had you no dowry but your hand and heart, it were treasure enough to me. You think you cannot love me. Evelyn, you do not yet know yourself. Alas! your retirement in this distant village, my own unceasing avocations, which chain me, like a slave, to the galley-oar of politics and power, have kept us separate. You do not know me. I am willing to hazard the experiment of that knowledge. To devote my life to you, to make you partaker of my ambition, my career, to raise you to the highest eminence in the matronage of England, to transfer pride from myself to you, to love and to honour and to prize you,—all this will be my boast; and all this will win love for me at last. Fear not, Evelyn,—fear not for your happiness; with me you shall know no sorrow. Affection at home, splendour abroad, await you. I have passed the rough and arduous part of my career; sunshine lies on the summit to which I climb. No station in England is too high for me to aspire to,—prospects, how bright with you, how dark without you! Ah, Evelyn! be this hand mine—the heart shall follow!"

Vargrave's words were artful and eloquent; the words were calculated to win their way, but the manner, the tone of voice, wanted earnestness and truth. This was his defect; this characterized all his attempts to seduce or to lead others, in public or in private life. He had no heart, no deep passion, in what he undertook. He could impress you with the conviction of his ability, and leave the conviction imperfect, because he could not convince you that he was sincere. That best gift of mental power—*earnestness*—was wanting to him; and Lord Vargrave's deficiency of heart was the true cause why he was not a great man. Still, Evelyn was affected by his words; she suffered the hand he now once more took to remain passively in his, and said timidly, "Why, with sentiments so generous and confiding, why do you love me, who cannot return your affection worthily? No, Lord Vargrave; there are many who must see you with juster eyes than mine,—many fairer, and even wealthier. Indeed, indeed, it cannot be. Do not be offended, but think that the fortune left to me was on one condition I cannot, ought not to fulfil. Failing that condition, in equity and honour it reverts to you."

"Talk not thus, I implore you, Evelyn; do not imagine me the worldly calculator that my enemies deem me. But, to remove at once from your mind the possibility of such a compromise between your honour and repugnance—repugnance! have I lived to say that word?—know that your fortune is not at your own disposal. Save the small forfeit that awaits your non-compliance with my uncle's dying prayer, the whole is settled peremptorily on yourself and your children; it is entailed,—you cannot alienate it. Thus, then, your generosity can never be evinced but to him on whom you bestow your hand. Ah, let me recall that melancholy scene. Your benefactor on his death-bed, your mother kneeling by his side, your hand clasped in mine, and those lips, with their latest breath, uttering at once a blessing and a command."

"Ah, cease, cease, my lord!" said Evelyn, sobbing.

"No; bid me not cease before you tell me you will be mine. Beloved Evelyn, I may hope,—you will not resolve against me?"

"No," said Evelyn, raising her eyes and struggling for composure; "I feel too well what should be my duty; I will endeavor to perform it. Ask me no more now. I will struggle to answer you as you wish hereafter."

Lord Vargrave, resolved to push to the utmost the advantage he had gained, was about to reply when he heard a step behind him; and turning round, quickly and discomposed, beheld a venerable form approaching them. The occasion was lost: Evelyn also turned; and seeing who was the intruder, sprang towards him almost with a cry of joy.

The new comer was a man who had passed his seventieth year; but his old age was green, his step light, and on his healthful and benignant countenance time had left but few furrows. He was clothed in black; and his locks, which were white as snow, escaped from the broad hat, and almost touched his shoulders.

The old man smiled upon Evelyn, and kissed her forehead fondly. He then turned to Lord Vargrave, who, recovering his customary self-possession, advanced to meet him with extended hand.

"My dear Mr. Aubrey, this is a welcome surprise. I heard you were not at the vicarage, or I would have called on you."

"Your lordship honours me," replied the curate. "For the first time for thirty years I have been thus long absent from my cure; but I am now returned, I hope, to end my days among my flock."

"And what," asked Vargrave,— "what—if the question be not presumptuous—occasioned your unwilling absence?"

"My lord," replied the old man, with a gentle smile, "a new vicar has been appointed. I went to him, to proffer an humble prayer that I might remain amongst those whom I regarded as my children. I have buried one generation, I have married another, I have baptized a third."

"You should have had the vicarage itself; you should be better provided for, my dear Mr. Aubrey; I will speak to the Lord Chancellor."

Five times before had Lord Vargrave uttered the same promise, and the curate smiled to hear the familiar words.

"The vicarage, my lord, is a family living, and is now vested in a young man who requires wealth more than I do. He has been kind to me, and re-established me among my flock; I would not leave them for a bishopric. My child," continued the curate, addressing Evelyn with great affection, "you are surely unwell,—you are paler than when I left you."

Evelyn clung fondly to his arm, and smiled—her old gay smile—as she replied to him. They took the way towards the house.

The curate remained with them for an hour. There was a mingled sweetness and dignity in his manner which had in it something of the primitive character we poetically ascribe to the pastors of the Church. Lady Vargrave seemed to vie with Evelyn which should love him the most. When he retired to his home, which was not many yards distant from the cottage, Evelyn, pleading a headache, sought her chamber, and Lumley, to soothe his mortification, turned to Caroline, who had seated herself by his side. Her conversation amused him, and her evident admiration flattered. While Lady Vargrave absented herself, in motherly anxiety, to attend on Evelyn, while Mrs. Leslie was occupied at her frame, and Mrs. Merton looked on, and talked indolently to the old lady of rheumatism and sermons, of children's complaints and servants' misdemeanours,—the conversation between Lord Vargrave and Caroline, at first gay and animated, grew gradually more sentimental and subdued; their voices took a lower tone, and Caroline sometimes turned away her head and blushed.

## CHAPTER XI

*THERE stands the Messenger of Truth—there stands  
The Legate of the skies.*

—COWPER.

FROM that night Lumley found no opportunity for private conversation with Evelyn; she evidently shunned to meet with him alone. She was ever with her mother or Mrs. Leslie or the good curate, who spent much of his time at the cottage; for the old man had neither wife nor children, he was alone at home, he had learned to make his home with the widow and her daughter. With them he was an object of the tenderest affection, of the deepest veneration. Their love delighted him, and he returned it with the fondness of a parent and the benevolence of a pastor. He was a rare character, that village priest!

Born of humble parentage, Edward Aubrey had early displayed abilities which attracted the notice of a wealthy proprietor, who was not displeased to affect the patron. Young Aubrey was sent to school, and thence to college as a sizar: he obtained several prizes, and took a high degree. Aubrey was not without the ambition and the passions of youth: he went into the world, ardent, inexperienced, and without a guide. He drew back before errors grew into crimes, or folly became a habit. It was nature and affection that reclaimed and saved him from either alternative,—fame or ruin. His widowed mother was suddenly stricken with disease. Blind and bedridden, her whole dependence was on her only son. This affliction called forth a new character in Edward Aubrey. This mother had stripped herself of so many comforts to provide for him,—he devoted his youth to her in return. She was now old and imbecile. With the mingled selfishness and sentiment of age, she would not come to London, —she would not move from the village where her husband lay buried, where her youth had been spent. In this village the able and ambitious young man buried his hopes and his talents; by degrees the quiet and tranquillity of the country life became dear to him. As steps in a ladder, so piety leads to piety, and religion grew to him a habit. He took orders and entered the Church. A disappointment in love ensued; it left on his mind and heart a sober and resigned melancholy, which at length mellowed into content. His profession and its sweet duties became more and more dear to him; in the hopes of the next world he forgot the ambition of the present. He did not seek to shine,—

"More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise."

His own birth made the poor his brothers, and their dispositions and wants familiar to him. His own early errors made him tolerant to the faults of others,—few men are charitable who remember not that they have sinned. In our faults lie the germs of virtues. Thus gradually and serenely had worn away his life—obscure but useful, calm but active,—a man whom "the great prizes" of the Church might have rendered an ambitious schemer, to whom a modest confidence gave the true pastoral power,—to conquer the world within himself, and to sympathize with the wants of others. Yes, he was a rare character, that village priest!

## CHAPTER XII

*TOUT notre raisonnement se réduit à céder au sentiment.*<sup>1</sup>—PASCAL.

LORD VARGRAVE, who had no desire to remain alone with the widow when the guests were gone, arranged his departure for the same day as that fixed for Mrs. Merton's; and as their road lay together for several miles, it was settled that they should all dine at——, whence Lord Vargrave would proceed to London. Failing to procure a second chance-interview with Evelyn, and afraid to demand a formal one—for he felt the insecurity of the ground he stood on—Lord Vargrave, irritated and somewhat mortified, sought, as was his habit, whatever amusement was in his reach. In the conversation of Caroline Merton—shrewd, worldly, and ambitious—he found the sort of plaything that he desired. They were thrown much together; but to Vargrave, at least, there appeared no danger in the intercourse; and perhaps his chief object was to pique Evelyn, as well as to gratify his own spleen.

It was the evening before Evelyn's departure; the little party had been for the last hour dispersed; Mrs. Merton was in her own room, making to herself gratuitous and unnecessary occupation in seeing her woman *pack up*. It was just the kind of task that delighted her. To sit in a large chair and see somebody else at work—to say languidly, "Don't crumple that scarf, Jane; and where shall we put Miss Caroline's blue bonnet?"—gave her a very comfortable notion of her own importance and habits of business,—a sort of title to be the superintendent of a family and the wife of a rector. Caroline had disappeared, so had Lord Vargrave; but the first was supposed to be with Evelyn, the second, employed in writing letters,—at least, it was so when they had been last observed. Mrs. Leslie was alone in the drawing-room, and absorbed in anxious and benevolent thoughts on the critical situation of her young favourite, about to enter an age and a world the perils of which Mrs. Leslie had not forgotten.

It was at this time that Evelyn, forgetful of Lord Vargrave and his suit, of every one, of everything but the grief of the approaching departure, found herself alone in a little arbour that had been built upon the cliff to command the view of the sea below. That day she had been restless, perturbed; she had visited every spot consecrated by youthful recollections; she had clung with fond regret to every place in which she had held sweet converse with her mother. Of a disposition singularly warm and affectionate, she had often, in her secret heart, pined for a more yearning and enthusiastic love than it seemed in the subdued nature of Lady Vargrave to bestow. In the affection of the latter, gentle and never fluctuating as it was, there seemed to her a something wanting, which she could not define. She had watched that beloved face all the morning. She had hoped to see the tender eyes fixed upon her, and hear the meek voice exclaim, "I cannot part with my child!" All the gay pictures which the light-hearted Caroline drew of the scenes she was to enter had vanished away—now that the hour approached when her mother was to be left alone. Why was she to go? It seemed to her an unnecessary cruelty.

As she thus sat, she did not observe that Mr. Aubrey, who had seen her at a distance, was now bending his way to her; and not till he had entered the arbour, and taken her hand, did she waken from those reveries in which youth, the Dreamer and the Desirer, so morbidly indulges.

"Tears, my child?" said the curate. "Nay, be not ashamed of them; they become you in this hour. How we shall miss you! and you, too, will not forget us?"

"Forget you! Ah, no, indeed! But why should I leave you? Why will you not speak to my mother, implore her to let me remain? We were so happy till these strangers came. We did not think there was any other world,—*here* there is world enough for me!"

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<sup>1</sup> "All our reasoning reduces itself to yielding to sentiment."

"My poor Evelyn," said Mr. Aubrey, gently, "I have spoken to your mother and to Mrs. Leslie; they have confided to me all the reasons for your departure, and I cannot but subscribe to their justice. You do not want many months of the age when you will be called upon to decide whether Lord Vargrave shall be your husband. Your mother shrinks from the responsibility of influencing your decision; and here, my child, inexperienced, and having seen so little of others, how can you know your own heart?"

"But, oh, Mr. Aubrey," said Evelyn, with an earnestness that overcame embarrassment, "have I a choice left to me? Can I be ungrateful, disobedient to him who was a father to me? Ought I not to sacrifice my own happiness? And how willingly would I do so, if my mother would smile on me approvingly!"

"My child," said the curate, gravely, "an old man is a bad judge of the affairs of youth; yet in this matter, I think your duty plain. Do not resolutely set yourself against Lord Vargrave's claim; do not persuade yourself that you must be unhappy in a union with him. Compose your mind, think seriously upon the choice before you, refuse all decision at the present moment; wait until the appointed time arrives, or, at least, more nearly approaches. Meanwhile, I understand that Lord Vargrave is to be a frequent visitor at Mrs. Merton's; there you will see him with others, his character will show itself. Study his principles, his disposition; examine whether he is one whom you can esteem and render happy: there may be a love without enthusiasm, and yet sufficient for domestic felicity, and for the employment of the affections. You will insensibly, too, learn from other parts of his character which he does not exhibit to us. If the result of time and examination be that you can cheerfully obey the late lord's dying wish, unquestionably it will be the happier decision. If not, if you still shrink from vows at which your heart now rebels, as unquestionably you may, with an acquitted conscience, become free. The best of us are imperfect judges of the happiness of others. In the woe or weal of a whole life, we must decide for ourselves. Your benefactor could not mean you to be wretched; and if he now, with eyes purified from all worldly mists, look down upon you, his spirit will approve your choice; for when we quit the world, all worldly ambition dies with us. What now to the immortal soul can be the title and the rank which on earth, with the desires of earth, your benefactor hoped to secure to his adopted child? This is my advice. Look on the bright side of things, and wait calmly for the hour when Lord Vargrave can demand your decision."

The words of the priest, which well defined her duty, inexpressibly soothed and comforted Evelyn; and the advice upon other and higher matters, which the good man pressed upon a mind so softened at that hour to receive religious impressions, was received with gratitude and respect. Subsequently their conversation fell upon Lady Vargrave,—a theme dear to both of them. The old man was greatly touched by the poor girl's unselfish anxiety for her mother's comfort, by her fears that she might be missed, in those little attentions which filial love alone can render; he was almost yet more touched when, with a less disinterested feeling, Evelyn added mournfully,—

"Yet why, after all, should I fancy she will so miss me? Ah, though I will not *dare* complain of it, I feel still that she does not love me as I love her."

"Evelyn," said the curate, with mild reproach, "have I not said that your mother has known sorrow? And though sorrow does not annihilate affection, it subdues its expression, and moderates its outward signs."

Evelyn sighed, and said no more.

As the good old man and his young friend returned to the cottage, Lord Vargrave and Caroline approached them, emerging from an opposite part of the grounds. The former hastened to Evelyn with his usual gayety and frank address; and there was so much charm in the manner of a man, whom *apparently* the world and its cares had never rendered artificial or reserved, that the curate himself was impressed by it. He thought that Evelyn might be happy with one amiable enough for a companion and wise enough for a guide. But old as he was, he had loved, and he knew that there are instincts in the heart which defy all our calculations.

While Lumley was conversing, the little gate that made the communication between the gardens and the neighbouring churchyard, through which was the nearest access to the village, creaked on its hinges, and the quiet and solitary figure of Lady Vargrave threw its shadow over the grass.

## CHAPTER XIII

*AND I can listen to thee yet,  
Can lie upon the plain;  
And listen till I do beget  
That golden time again.*

—WORDSWORTH.

IT was past midnight—hostess and guests had retired to repose—when Lady Vargrave's door opened gently. The lady herself was kneeling at the foot of the bed; the moonlight came through the half-drawn curtains of the casement, and by its ray her pale, calm features looked paler, and yet more hushed.

Evelyn, for she was the intruder, paused at the threshold till her mother rose from her devotions, and then she threw herself on Lady Vargrave's breast, sobbing as if her heart would break. Hers were the wild, generous, irresistible emotions of youth. Lady Vargrave, perhaps, had known them once; at least, she could sympathize with them now.

She strained her child to her bosom; she stroked back her hair, and kissed her fondly, and spoke to her soothingly.

"Mother," sobbed Evelyn, "I could not sleep, I could not rest. Bless me again, kiss me again; tell me that you love me—you cannot love me as I do you; but tell me that I am dear to you; tell me you will regret me, but not too much; tell me—" Here Evelyn paused, and could say no more.

"My best, my kindest Evelyn," said Lady Vargrave, "there is nothing on earth I love like you. Do not fancy I am ungrateful."

"Why do you say ungrateful?—your own child,—your only child!" And Evelyn covered her mother's face and hands with passionate tears and kisses.

At that moment, certain it is that Lady Vargrave's heart reproached her with not having, indeed, loved this sweet girl as she deserved. True, no mother was more mild, more attentive, more fostering, more anxious for a daughter's welfare; but Evelyn was right. The gushing fondness, the mysterious entering into every subtle thought and feeling, which should have characterized the love of such a mother to such a child, had been to outward appearance wanting. Even in this present parting there had been a prudence, an exercise of reasoning, that savoured more of duty than love. Lady Vargrave felt all this with remorse; she gave way to emotions new to her,—at least to exhibit; she wept with Evelyn, and returned her caresses with almost equal fervour. Perhaps, too, she thought at that moment of what love that warm nature was susceptible; and she trembled for her future fate. It was as a full reconciliation—that mournful hour—between feelings on either side, which something mysterious seemed to have checked before; and that last night the mother and the child did not separate,—the same couch contained them: and when, worn out with some emotions which she could not reveal, Lady Vargrave fell into the sleep of exhaustion, Evelyn's arm was round her, and Evelyn's eyes watched her with pious and anxious love as the gray morning dawned.

She left her mother still sleeping, when the sun rose, and went silently down into the dear room below, and again busied herself in a thousand little provident cares, which she wondered she had forgot before.

The carriages were at the door before the party had assembled at the melancholy breakfast-table. Lord Vargrave was the last to appear.

"I have been like all cowards," said he, seating himself,—"anxious to defer an evil as long as possible; a bad policy, for it increases the worst of all pains,—that of suspense."

Mrs. Merton had undertaken the duties that appertain to the "hissing urn." "You prefer coffee, Lord Vargrave? Caroline, my dear—"

Caroline passed the cup to Lord Vargrave, who looked at her hand as he took it—there was a ring on one of those slender fingers never observed there before. Their eyes met, and Caroline coloured. Lord Vargrave turned to Evelyn, who, pale as death, but tearless and speechless, sat beside her mother; he attempted in vain to draw her into conversation. Evelyn, who desired to restrain her feelings, would not trust herself to speak.

Mrs. Merton, ever undisturbed and placid, continued to talk on: to offer congratulations on the weather,—it was such a lovely day; and they should be off so early; it would be so well arranged,—they should be in such good time to dine at——, and then go three stages after dinner; the moon would be up.

"But," said Lord Vargrave, "as I am to go with you as far as——, where our roads separate, I hope I am not condemned to go alone, with my red box, two old newspapers, and the blue devils. Have pity on me."

"Perhaps you will take Grandmamma, then?" whispered Caroline, archly.

Lumley shrugged his shoulders, and replied in the same tone,—

"Yes,—provided you keep to the proverb, 'Les extremes se touchent,' and the lovely grandchild accompany the venerable grandmamma."

"What would Evelyn say?" retorted Caroline.

Lumley sighed, and made no answer.

Mrs. Merton, who had hung fire while her daughter was carrying on this "aside," now put in,—

"Suppose I and Caroline take your *britzka*, and you go in our old coach with Evelyn and Mrs. Leslie?"

Lumley looked delightedly at the speaker, and then glanced at Evelyn; but Mrs. Leslie said very gravely, "No, *we* shall feel too much in leaving this dear place to be gay companions for Lord Vargrave. We shall all meet at dinner; or," she added, after a pause, "if this be uncourteous to Lord Vargrave, suppose Evelyn and myself take his carriage and, he accompanies you?"

"Agreed," said Mrs. Merton, quietly; "and now I will just go and see about the strawberry-plants and slips—it was so kind in you, dear Lady Vargrave, to think of them."

An hour had elapsed, and Evelyn was gone! She had left her maiden home, she had wept her last farewell on her mother's bosom, the sound of the carriage-wheels had died away; but still Lady Vargrave lingered on the threshold, still she gazed on the spot where the last glimpse of Evelyn had been caught. A sense of dreariness and solitude passed into her soul: the very sunlight, the spring, the songs of the birds, made loneliness more desolate.

Mechanically, at last, she moved away, and with slow steps and downcast eyes passed through the favourite walk that led into the quiet burial-ground. The gate closed upon her, and now the lawn, the gardens, the haunts of Evelyn, were solitary as the desert itself; but the daisy opened to the sun, and the bee murmured along the blossoms, not the less blithely for the absence of all human life. In the bosom of Nature there beats no heart for man!

## BOOK II

*"The hour arrived—years having rolled away  
When his return the Gods no more delay.  
Lo! Ithaca the Fates award; and there  
New trials meet the Wanderer."*

*HOMER: Od. lib. i, 16.*

## CHAPTER I

*THERE is continual spring and harvest here—  
Continual, both meeting at one time;  
For both the boughs do laughing blossoms bear,  
And with fresh colours deck the wanton prime;  
And eke at once the heavy trees they climb,  
Which seem to labour under their fruit's load.*

*SPENSER: The Garden of Adonis.*

*Vis boni  
In ipsa inesset forma.<sup>2</sup>*

*—TERENCE.*

BEAUTY, thou art twice blessed; thou blessest the gazer and the possessor; often at once the effect and the cause of goodness! A sweet disposition, a lovely soul, an affectionate nature, will speak in the eyes, the lips, the brow, and become the cause of beauty. On the other hand, they who have a gift that commands love, a key that opens all hearts, are ordinarily inclined to look with happy eyes upon the world,—to be cheerful and serene, to hope and to confide. There is more wisdom than the vulgar dream of in our admiration of a fair face.

Evelyn Cameron was beautiful,—a beauty that came from the heart, and went to the heart; a beauty, the very spirit of which was love! Love smiled on her dimpled lips, it reposed on her open brow, it played in the profuse and careless ringlets of darkest yet sunniest auburn, which a breeze could lift from her delicate and virgin cheek; Love, in all its tenderness, in all its kindness, its unsuspecting truth,—Love coloured every thought, murmured in her low melodious voice, in all its symmetry and glorious womanhood. Love swelled the swan-like neck, and moulded the rounded limb.

She was just the kind of person that takes the judgment by storm: whether gay or grave, there was so charming and irresistible a grace about her. She seemed born, not only to captivate the giddy, but to turn the heads of the sage. Roxalana was nothing to her. How, in the obscure hamlet of Brook-Green, she had learned all the arts of pleasing it is impossible to say. In her arch smile, the pretty toss of her head, the half shyness, half freedom, of her winning ways, it was as if Nature had made her to delight one heart, and torment all others.

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<sup>2</sup> "Even in beauty there exists the power of virtue."

Without being learned, the mind of Evelyn was cultivated and well informed. Her heart, perhaps, helped to instruct her understanding; for by a kind of intuition she could appreciate all that was beautiful and elevated. Her unvitiated and guileless taste had a logic of its own: no schoolman had ever a quicker penetration into truth, no critic ever more readily detected the meretricious and the false. The book that Evelyn could admire was sure to be stamped with the impress of the noble, the lovely, or the true!

But Evelyn had faults,—the faults of her age; or, rather, she had tendencies that might conduce to error. She was of so generous a nature that the very thought of sacrificing her self for another had a charm. She ever acted from impulse,—impulses pure and good, but often rash and imprudent. She was yielding to weakness, persuaded into anything, so sensitive, that even a cold look from one moderately liked cut her to the heart; and by the sympathy that accompanies sensitiveness, no pain to her was so great as the thought of giving pain to another. Hence it was that Vargrave might form reasonable hopes of his ultimate success. It was a dangerous constitution for happiness! How many chances must combine to preserve to the mid-day of characters like this the sunshine of their dawn! The butterfly that seems the child of the summer and the flowers—what wind will not chill its mirth, what touch will not brush away its hues?

## CHAPTER II

*THESE, on a general survey, are the modes  
Of pulpit oratory which agree  
With no unlettered audience.*

—POLWHELE.

MRS. LESLIE had returned from her visit to the rectory to her own home, and Evelyn had now been some weeks at Mrs. Merton's. As was natural, she had grown in some measure reconciled and resigned to her change of abode. In fact, no sooner did she pass Mrs. Merton's threshold, than, for the first time, she was made aware of her consequence in life.

The Rev. Mr. Merton was a man of the nicest perception in all things appertaining to worldly consideration. The second son of a very wealthy baronet (who was the first commoner of his county) and of the daughter of a rich and highly-descended peer, Mr. Merton had been brought near enough to rank and power to appreciate all their advantages. In early life he had been something of a "tuft-hunter;" but as his understanding was good and his passions not very strong, he had soon perceived that that vessel of clay, a young man with a moderate fortune, cannot long sail down the same stream with the metal vessels of rich earls and extravagant dandies. Besides, he was destined for the Church—because there was one of the finest livings in England in the family. He therefore took orders at six and twenty; married Mrs. Leslie's daughter, who had thirty thousand pounds: and settled at the rectory of Merton, within a mile of the family seat. He became a very respectable and extremely popular man. He was singularly hospitable, and built a new wing—containing a large dining-room and six capital bed-rooms—to the rectory, which had now much more the appearance of a country villa than a country parsonage. His brother, succeeding to the estates, and residing chiefly in the neighbourhood, became, like his father before him, member for the county, and was one of the country gentlemen most looked up to in the House of Commons. A sensible and frequent, though uncommonly prosy speaker, singularly independent (for he had a clear fourteen thousand pounds a year, and did not desire office), and valuing himself on not being a party man, so that his vote on critical questions was often a matter of great doubt, and, therefore, of great moment, Sir John Merton gave considerable importance to the Rev. Charles Merton. The latter kept up all the more select of his old London acquaintances; and few country houses, at certain seasons of the year, were filled more aristocratically than the pleasant rectory-house. Mr. Merton, indeed, contrived to make the Hall a reservoir for the parsonage, and periodically drafted off the *elite* of the visitors at the former to spend a few days at the latter. This was the more easily done, as his brother was a widower, and his conversation was all of one sort,—the state of the nation and the agricultural interest. Mr. Merton was upon very friendly terms with his brother, looked after the property in the absence of Sir John, kept up the family interest, was an excellent electioneerer, a good speaker at a pinch, an able magistrate,—a man, in short, most useful in the county; on the whole, he was more popular than his brother, and almost as much looked up to—perhaps, because he was much less ostentatious. He had very good taste, had the Rev. Charles Merton!—his table plentiful, but plain—his manners affable to the low, though agreeably sycophantic to the high; and there was nothing about him that ever wounded self-love. To add to the attractions of his house, his wife, simple and good-tempered, could talk with anybody, take off the bores, and leave people to be comfortable in their own way: while he had a large family of fine children of all ages, that had long given easy and constant excuse under the name of "little children's parties," for getting up an impromptu dance or a gypsy dinner,—enlivening the neighbourhood, in short. Caroline was the eldest; then came a son, attached to a foreign ministry, and another, who, though only nineteen, was a private secretary to one of our Indian satraps. The

acquaintance of these young gentlemen, thus engaged, it was therefore Evelyn's misfortune to lose the advantage of cultivating,—a loss which both Mr. and Mrs. Merton assured her was very much to be regretted. But to make up to her for such a privation there were two lovely little girls, one ten, and the other seven years old, who fell in love with Evelyn at first sight. Caroline was one of the beauties of the county, clever and conversable, "drew young men," and set the fashion to young ladies, especially when she returned from spending the season with Lady Elizabeth.

It was a delightful family!

In person, Mr. Merton was of the middle height; fair, and inclined to stoutness, with small features, beautiful teeth, and great suavity of address. Mindful still of the time when he had been "about town," he was very particular in his dress: his black coat, neatly relieved in the evening by a white underwaistcoat, and a shirt-front admirably plaited, with plain studs of dark enamel, his well-cut trousers, and elaborately polished shoes—he was good-humouredly vain of his feet and hands—won for him the common praise of the dandies (who occasionally honoured him with a visit to shoot his game, and flirt with his daughter), "That old Merton was a most gentlemanlike fellow—so d——d neat for a parson!"

Such, mentally, morally, and physically, was the Rev. Charles Merton, rector of Merton, brother of Sir John, and possessor of an income that, what with his rich living, his wife's fortune, and his own, which was not inconsiderable, amounted to between four and five thousand pounds a year, which income, managed with judgment as well as liberality, could not fail to secure to him all the good things of this world,—the respect of his friends amongst the rest. Caroline was right when she told Evelyn that her papa was very different from a mere country parson.

Now this gentleman could not fail to see all the claims that Evelyn might fairly advance upon the esteem, nay, the veneration of himself and family: a young beauty, with a fortune of about a quarter of a million, was a phenomenon that might fairly be called celestial. Her pretensions were enhanced by her engagement to Lord Vargrave,—an engagement which might be broken; so that, as he interpreted it, the *worst* that could happen to the young lady was to marry an able and rising Minister of State,—a peer of the realm; but she was perfectly free to marry a still greater man, if she could find him; and who knows but what perhaps the *attache*, if he could get leave of absence? Mr. Merton was too sensible to pursue that thought further for the present.

The good man was greatly shocked at the too familiar manner in which Mrs. Merton spoke to this high-fated heiress, at Evelyn's travelling so far without her own maid, at her very primitive wardrobe—poor, ill-used child! Mr. Merton was a connoisseur in ladies' dress. It was quite painful to see that the unfortunate girl had been so neglected. Lady Vargrave must be a very strange person. He inquired compassionately whether she was allowed any pocket money; and finding, to his relief, that in that respect Miss Cameron was munificently supplied, he suggested that a proper abigail should be immediately engaged; that proper orders to Madame Devy should be immediately transmitted to London, with one of Evelyn's dresses, as a pattern for nothing but length and breadth. He almost stamped with vexation when he heard that Evelyn had been placed in one of the neat little rooms generally appropriated to young lady visitors.

"She is quite contented, my dear Mr. Merton; she is so simple; she has not been brought up in the style you think for."

"Mrs. Merton," said the rector, with great solemnity, "Miss Cameron may know no better now; but what will she think of us hereafter? It is my maxim to recollect what people will be, and show them that respect which may leave pleasing impressions when they have it in their power to show us civility in return."

With many apologies, which quite overwhelmed poor Evelyn, she was transferred from the little chamber, with its French bed and bamboo-coloured washhand-stand, to an apartment with a buhl wardrobe and a four-post bed with green silk curtains, usually appropriated to the regular Christmas visitant, the Dowager Countess of Chipperton. A pretty morning room communicated

with the sleeping apartment, and thence a private staircase conducted into the gardens. The whole family were duly impressed and re-impressed with her importance. No queen could be made more of. Evelyn mistook it all for pure kindness, and returned the hospitality with an affection that extended to the whole family, but particularly to the two little girls, and a beautiful black spaniel. Her dresses came down from London; her abigail arrived; the buhl wardrobe was duly filled,—and Evelyn at last learned that it is a fine thing to be rich. An account of all these proceedings was forwarded to Lady Vargrave, in a long and most complacent letter, by the rector himself. The answer was short, but it contented the excellent clergyman; for it approved of all he had done, and begged that Miss Cameron might have everything that seemed proper to her station.

By the same post came two letters to Evelyn herself,—one from Lady Vargrave, one from the curate. They transported her from the fine room and the buhl wardrobe to the cottage and the lawn; and the fine abigail, when she came to dress her young lady's hair, found her weeping.

It was a matter of great regret to the rector that it was that time of year when—precisely because the country is most beautiful—every one worth knowing is in town. Still, however, some stray guests found their way to the rectory for a day or two, and still there were some aristocratic old families in the neighbourhood, who never went up to London: so that two days in the week the rector's wine flowed, the whist-tables were set out, and the piano called into requisition.

Evelyn—the object of universal attention and admiration—was put at her ease by her station itself; for good manners come like an instinct to those on whom the world smiles. Insensibly she acquired self-possession and the smoothness of society; and if her child-like playfulness broke out from all conventional restraint, it only made more charming and brilliant the great heiress, whose delicate and fairy cast of beauty so well became her graceful *abandon* of manner, and who looked so unequivocally ladylike to the eyes that rested on Madame Devy's blondes and satins.

Caroline was not so gay as she had been at the cottage. Something seemed to weigh upon her spirits: she was often moody and thoughtful. She was the only one in the family not good-tempered; and her peevish replies to her parents, when no visitor imposed a check on the family circle, inconceivably pained Evelyn, and greatly contrasted the flow of spirits which distinguished her when she found somebody worth listening to. Still Evelyn—who, where she once liked, found it difficult to withdraw regard—sought to overlook Caroline's blemishes, and to persuade herself of a thousand good qualities below the surface; and her generous nature found constant opportunity of venting itself in costly gifts, selected from the London parcels, with which the officious Mr. Merton relieved the monotony of the rectory. These gifts Caroline could not refuse without paining her young friend. She took them reluctantly, for, to do her justice, Caroline, though ambitious, was not mean.

Thus time passed in the rectory, in gay variety and constant entertainment; and all things combined to spoil the heiress, if, indeed, goodness ever is spoiled by kindness and prosperity. Is it to the frost or to the sunshine that the flower opens its petals, or the fruit ripens from the blossom?

## CHAPTER III

*Rod. How sweet these solitary places are!*

.....

*Ped. What strange musick  
Was that we heard afar off?*

*Curio. We've told you what he is, what time we've  
sought him,  
His nature and his name.*

*BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER. The Pilgrim.*

ONE day, as the ladies were seated in Mrs. Merton's morning-room, Evelyn, who had been stationed by the window hearing the little Cecilia go through the French verbs, and had just finished that agreeable task, exclaimed,—

"Do tell me to whom that old house belongs, with the picturesque gable-end and Gothic turrets, there, just peeping through the trees,—I have always forgot to ask you."

"Oh, my dear Miss Cameron," said Mrs. Merton, "that is Burleigh; have you not been there? How stupid in Caroline not to show it to you! It is one of the lions of the place. It belongs to a man you have often heard of,—Mr. Maltravers."

"Indeed!" cried Evelyn; and she gazed with new interest on the gray melancholy pile, as the sunshine brought it into strong contrast with the dark pines around it. "And Mr. Maltravers himself —?"

"Is still abroad, I believe; though I did hear the other day that he was shortly expected at Burleigh. It is a curious old place, though much neglected. I believe, indeed, it has not been furnished since the time of Charles the First. (Cissy, my love, don't stoop so.) Very gloomy, in my opinion; and not any fine room in the house, except the library, which was once a chapel. However, people come miles to see it."

"Will you go there to-day?" said Caroline, languidly; "it is a very pleasant walk through the glebe-land and the wood,—not above half a mile by the foot-path."

"I should like it so much."

"Yes," said Mrs. Merton, "and you had better go before he returns,—he is so strange. He does not allow it to be seen when he is down. But, indeed, he has only been once at the old place since he was of age. (Sophy, you will tear Miss Cameron's scarf to pieces; do be quiet, child.) That was before he was a great man; he was then very odd, saw no society, only dined once with us, though Mr. Merton paid him every attention. They show the room in which he wrote his books."

"I remember him very well, though I was then but a child," said Caroline,—"a handsome, thoughtful face."

"Did you think so, my dear? Fine eyes and teeth, certainly, and a commanding figure, but nothing more."

"Well," said Caroline, "if you like to go, Evelyn, I am at your service."

"And—I—Evy, dear—I—may go," said Cecilia, clinging to Evelyn.

"And me, too," lisped Sophia, the youngest hope,—"there's such a pretty peacock."

"Oh, yes, they may go, Mrs. Merton, we'll take such care of them."

"Very well, my dear; Miss Cameron quite spoils you."

Evelyn tripped away to put on her bonnet, and the children ran after her, clapping their hands, —they could not bear to lose sight of her for a moment.

"Caroline," said Mrs. Merton, affectionately, "are you not well? You have seemed pale lately, and not in your usual spirits."

"Oh, yes, I'm well enough," answered Caroline, rather peevishly; "but this place is so dull now; very provoking that Lady Elizabeth does not go to London this year."

"My dear, it will be gayer, I hope, in July, when the races at Knaresdean begin; and Lord Vargrave has promised to come."

"Has Lord Vargrave written to you lately?"

"No, my dear."

"Very odd."

"Does Evelyn ever talk of him?"

"Not much," said Caroline, rising and quitting the room.

It was a most cheerful exhilarating day,—the close of sweet May; the hedges were white with blossoms; a light breeze rustled the young leaves; the butterflies had ventured forth, and the children chased them over the grass, as Evelyn and Caroline, who walked much too slow for her companion (Evelyn longed to run), followed them soberly towards Burleigh.

They passed the glebe-fields; and a little bridge, thrown over a brawling rivulet, conducted them into a wood.

"This stream," said Caroline, "forms the boundary between my uncle's estates and those of Mr. Maltravers. It must be very unpleasant to so proud a man as Mr. Maltravers is said to be, to have the land of another proprietor so near his house. He could hear my uncle's gun from his very drawing-room. However, Sir John takes care not to molest him. On the other side, the Burleigh estates extend for some miles; indeed, Mr. Maltravers is the next great proprietor to my uncle in this part of the county. Very strange that he does not marry! There, now you can see the house."

The mansion lay somewhat low, with hanging woods in the rear: and the old-fashioned fish-ponds gleaming in the sunshine and overshadowed by gigantic trees increased the venerable stillness of its aspect. Ivy and innumerable creepers covered one side of the house; and long weeds cumbered the deserted road.

"It is sadly neglected," said Caroline; "and was so, even in the last owner's life. Mr. Maltravers inherits the place from his mother's uncle. We may as well enter the house by the private way. The front entrance is kept locked up."

Winding by a path that conducted into a flower-garden, divided from the park by a ha-ha, over which a plank and a small gate, rusting off its hinges, were placed, Caroline led the way towards the building. At this point of view it presented a large bay window that by a flight of four steps led into the garden. On one side rose a square, narrow turret, surmounted by a gilt dome and quaint weathercock, below the architrave of which was a sun-dial, set in the stonework; and another dial stood in the garden, with the common and beautiful motto,—

"Non numero horas, nisi serenas!"<sup>3</sup>

On the other side of the bay window a huge buttress cast its mass of shadow. There was something in the appearance of the whole place that invited to contemplation and repose,—something almost monastic. The gayety of the teeming spring-time could not divest the spot of a certain sadness, not displeasing, however, whether to the young, to whom there is a luxury in the vague sentiment of melancholy, or to those who, having known real griefs, seek for an anodyne in meditation and memory. The low lead-coloured door, set deep in the turret, was locked, and the bell beside it broken. Caroline turned impatiently away. "We must go round to the other side," said she, "and try to make the deaf old man hear us."

"Oh, Carry!" cried Cecilia, "the great window is open;" and she ran up the steps.

"That is lucky," said Caroline; and the rest followed Cecilia.

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<sup>3</sup> "I number not the hours, unless sunny."

Evelyn now stood within the library of which Mrs. Merton had spoken. It was a large room, about fifty feet in length, and proportionably wide; somewhat dark, for the light came only from the one large window through which they entered; and though the window rose to the cornice of the ceiling, and took up one side of the apartment, the daylight was subdued by the heaviness of the stonework in which the narrow panes were set, and by the glass stained with armorial bearings in the upper part of the casement. The bookcases, too, were of the dark oak which so much absorbs the light; and the gilding, formerly meant to relieve them, was discoloured by time.

The room was almost disproportionably lofty; the ceiling, elaborately coved, and richly carved with grotesque masks, preserved the Gothic character of the age in which it had been devoted to a religious purpose. Two fireplaces, with high chimney-pieces of oak, in which were inserted two portraits, broke the symmetry of the tall bookcases. In one of these fireplaces were half-burnt logs; and a huge armchair, with a small reading-desk beside it, seemed to bespeak the recent occupation of the room. On the fourth side, opposite the window, the wall was covered with faded tapestry, representing the meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba; the arras was nailed over doors on either hand,—the chinks between the door and the wall serving, in one instance, to cut off in the middle his wise majesty, who was making a low bow; while in the other it took the ground from under the wanton queen, just as she was descending from her chariot.

Near the window stood a grand piano, the only modern article in the room, save one of the portraits, presently to be described. On all this Evelyn gazed silently and devoutly: she had naturally that reverence for genius which is common to the enthusiastic and young; and there is, even to the dullest, a certain interest in the homes of those who have implanted within us a new thought. But here there was, she imagined, a rare and singular harmony between the place and the mental characteristics of the owner. She fancied she now better understood the shadowy and metaphysical repose of thought that had distinguished the earlier writings of Maltravers,—the writings composed or planned in this still retreat.

But what particularly caught her attention was one of the two portraits that adorned the mantelpieces. The further one was attired in the rich and fanciful armour of the time of Elizabeth; the head bare, the helmet on a table on which the hand rested. It was a handsome and striking countenance; and an inscription announced it to be a Digby, an ancestor of Maltravers.

But the other was a beautiful girl of about eighteen, in the now almost antiquated dress of forty years ago. The features were delicate, but the colours somewhat faded, and there was something mournful in the expression. A silk curtain, drawn on one side, seemed to denote how carefully it was prized by the possessor.

Evelyn turned for explanation to her cicerone.

"This is the second time I have seen that picture," said Caroline; "for it is only by great entreaty and as a mysterious favour that the old housekeeper draws aside the veil. Some touch of sentiment in Maltravers makes him regard it as sacred. It is the picture of his mother before she married; she died in giving him birth."

Evelyn sighed; how well she understood the sentiment which seemed to Caroline so eccentric! The countenance fascinated her; the eye seemed to follow her as she turned.

"As a proper pendant to this picture," said Caroline, "he ought to have dismissed the effigies of yon warlike gentleman, and replaced it by one of poor Lady Florence Lascelles, for whose loss he is said to have quitted his country: but, perhaps, it was the loss of her fortune."

"How can you say so?—fie!" cried Evelyn, with a burst of generous indignation.

"Ah, my dear, you heiresses have a fellow-feeling with each other! Nevertheless, clever men are less sentimental than we deem them. Heigho! this quiet room gives me the spleen, I fancy."

"Dearest Evy," whispered Cecilia, "I think you have a look of that pretty picture, only you are much prettier. Do take off your bonnet; your hair just falls down like hers."

Evelyn shook her head gravely; but the spoiled child hastily untied the ribbons and snatched away the hat, and Evelyn's sunny ringlets fell down in beautiful disorder. There was no resemblance between Evelyn and the portrait, except in the colour of the hair, and the careless fashion it now by chance assumed. Yet Evelyn was pleased to think that a likeness did exist, though Caroline declared it was a most unflattering compliment.

"I don't wonder," said the latter, changing the theme,— "I don't wonder Mr. Maltravers lives so little in this 'Castle Dull;' yet it might be much improved. French windows and plate-glass, for instance; and if those lumbering bookshelves and horrid old chimney-pieces were removed and the ceiling painted white and gold like that in my uncle's saloon, and a rich, lively paper, instead of the tapestry, it would really make a very fine ballroom."

"Let us have a dance here now," cried Cecilia. "Come, stand up, Sophy;" and the children began to practise a waltz step, tumbling over each other, and laughing in full glee.

"Hush, hush!" said Evelyn, softly. She had never before checked the children's mirth, and she could not tell why she did so now.

"I suppose the old butler has been entertaining the bailiff here," said Caroline, pointing to the remains of the fire.

"And is this the room he chiefly inhabited,—the room that you say they show as his?"

"No; that tapestry door to the right leads into a little study where he wrote." So saying, Caroline tried to open the door, but it was locked from within. She then opened the other door, which showed a long wainscoted passage, hung with rusty pikes, and a few breastplates of the time of the Parliamentary Wars. "This leads to the main body of the House," said Caroline, "from which the room we are now in and the little study are completely detached, having, as you know, been the chapel in popish times. I have heard that Sir Kenelm Digby, an ancestral connection of the present owner, first converted them into their present use, and, in return, built the village church on the other side of the park."

Sir Kenelm Digby, the old cavalier philosopher!—a new name of interest to consecrate the place! Evelyn could have lingered all day in the room; and perhaps as an excuse for a longer sojourn, hastened to the piano—it was open—she ran her fairy fingers over the keys, and the sound from the untuned and neglected instrument thrilled wild and spiritlike through the melancholy chamber.

"Oh, do sing us something, Evy," cried Cecilia, running up to, and drawing a chair to, the instrument.

"Do, Evelyn," said Caroline, languidly; "it will serve to bring one of the servants to us, and save us a journey to the offices."

It was just what Evelyn wished. Some verses, which her mother especially loved, verses written by Maltravers upon returning after absence to his own home, had rushed into her mind as she had touched the keys. They were appropriate to the place, and had been beautifully set to music. So the children hushed themselves, and nestled at her feet; and after a little prelude, keeping the accompaniment under, that the spoiled instrument might not mar the sweet words and sweeter voice, she began the song.

Meanwhile in the adjoining room, the little study which Caroline had spoken of, sat the owner of the house! He had returned suddenly and unexpectedly the previous night. The old steward was in attendance at the moment, full of apologies, congratulations, and gossip; and Maltravers, grown a stern and haughty man, was already impatiently turning away, when he heard the sudden sound of the children's laughter and loud voices in the room beyond. Maltravers frowned.

"What impertinence is this?" said he in a tone that, though very calm, made the steward quake in his shoes.

"I don't know, really, your honour; there be so many grand folks come to see the house in the fine weather, that—"

"And you permit your master's house to be a raree-show? You do well, sir."

"If your honour were more amongst us, there might be more discipline like," said the steward, stoutly; "but no one in my time has cared so little for the old place as those it belongs to."

"Fewer words with me, sir," said Maltravers, haughtily; "and now go and inform those people that I am returned, and wish for no guests but those I invite myself."

"Sir!"

"Do you not hear me? Say that if it so please them, these old ruins are my property, and are not to be jobbed out to the insolence of public curiosity. Go, sir."

"But—I beg pardon, your honour—if they be great folks?"

"Great folks!—great! Ay, there it is. Why, if they be great folks, they have great houses of their own, Mr. Justis."

The steward stared. "Perhaps, your honour," he put in, deprecatingly, "they be Mr. Merton's family: they come very often when the London gentlemen are with them."

"Merton!—oh, the cringing parson. Harkye! one word more with me, sir, and you quit my service to-morrow."

Mr. Justis lifted his eyes and hands to heaven; but there was something in his master's voice and look which checked reply, and he turned slowly to the door—when a voice of such heavenly sweetness was heard without that it arrested his own step and made the stern Maltravers start in his seat. He held up his hand to the steward to delay his errand, and listened, charmed and spell-bound. His own words came on his ear,—words long unfamiliar to him, and at first but imperfectly remembered; words connected with the early and virgin years of poetry and aspiration; words that were as the ghosts of thoughts now far too gentle for his altered soul. He bowed down his head, and the dark shade left his brow.

The song ceased. Maltravers moved with a sigh, and his eyes rested on the form of the steward with his hand on the door.

"Shall I give your honour's message?" said Mr. Justis, gravely.

"No; take care for the future; leave me now."

Mr. Justis made one leg, and then, well pleased, took to both.

"Well," thought he, as he departed, "how foreign parts do spoil a gentleman! so mild as he was once! I must botch up the accounts, I see,—the squire has grown sharp."

As Evelyn concluded her song, she—whose charm in singing was that she sang from the heart—was so touched by the melancholy music of the air and words, that her voice faltered, and the last line died inaudibly on her lips.

The children sprang up and kissed her.

"Oh," cried Cecilia, "there is the beautiful peacock!" And there, indeed, on the steps without—perhaps attracted by the music—stood the picturesque bird. The children ran out to greet their old favourite, who was extremely tame; and presently Cecilia returned.

"Oh, Carry! do see what beautiful horses are coming up the park!"

Caroline, who was a good rider, and fond of horses, and whose curiosity was always aroused by things connected with show and station, suffered the little girl to draw her into the garden. Two grooms, each mounted on a horse of the pure Arabian breed, and each leading another, swathed and bandaged, were riding slowly up the road; and Caroline was so attracted by the novel appearance of the animals in a place so deserted that she followed the children towards them, to learn who could possibly be their enviable owner. Evelyn, forgotten for the moment, remained alone. She was pleased at being so, and once more turned to the picture which had so attracted her before. The mild eyes fixed on her, with an expression that recalled to her mind her own mother.

"And," thought she, as she gazed, "this fair creature did not live to know the fame of her son, to rejoice in his success, or to soothe his grief. And he, that son, a disappointed and solitary exile in distant lands, while strangers stand within his deserted hall!"

The images she had conjured up moved and absorbed her; and she continued to stand before the picture, gazing upward with moistened eyes. It was a beautiful vision as she thus stood, with her delicate bloom, her luxuriant hair (for the hat was not yet replaced), her elastic form, so full of youth and health and hope,—the living form beside the faded canvas of the dead, once youthful, tender, lovely as herself! Evelyn turned away with a sigh; the sigh was re-echoed yet more deeply. She started: the door that led to the study was opened, and in the aperture was the figure of a man in the prime of life. His hair, still luxuriant as in his earliest youth, though darkened by the suns of the East, curled over a forehead of majestic expanse. The high and proud features, that well became a stature above the ordinary standard; the pale but bronzed complexion; the large eyes of deepest blue, shaded by dark brows and lashes; and more than all, that expression at once of passion and repose which characterizes the old Italian portraits, and seems to denote the inscrutable power that experience imparts to intellect, constituted an *ensemble* which, if not faultlessly handsome, was eminently striking, and formed at once to interest and command. It was a face, once seen, never to be forgotten; it was a face that had long, half unconsciously, haunted Evelyn's young dreams; it was a face she had seen before, though, then younger and milder and fairer, it wore a different aspect.

Evelyn stood rooted to the spot, feeling herself blush to her very temples,—an enchanting picture of bashful confusion and innocent alarm.

"Do not let me regret my return," said the stranger, approaching after a short pause, and with much gentleness in his voice and smile; "and think that the owner is doomed to scare away the fair spirits that haunted the spot in his absence."

"The owner!" repeated Evelyn, almost inaudibly, and in increased embarrassment; "are you then the—the—"

"Yes," courteously interrupted the stranger, seeing her confusion, "my name is Maltravers; and I am to blame for not having informed you of my sudden return, or for now trespassing on your presence. But you see my excuse;" and he pointed to the instrument. "You have the magic that draws even the serpent from his hole. But you are not alone?"

"Oh, no! no, indeed! Miss Merton is with me. I know not where she is gone. I will seek her."

"Miss Merton! You are not then one of that family?"

"No, only a guest. I will find her; she must apologize for us. We were not aware that you were here,—indeed we were not."

"That is a cruel excuse," said Maltravers, smiling at her eagerness: and the smile and the look reminded her yet more forcibly of the time when he had carried her in his arms and soothed her suffering and praised her courage and pressed the kiss almost of a lover on her hand. At that thought she blushed yet more deeply, and yet more eagerly turned to escape.

Maltravers did not seek to detain her, but silently followed her steps. She had scarcely gained the window, before little Cecilia scampered in, crying,—

"Only think! Mr. Maltravers has come back, and brought such beautiful horses!"

Cecilia stopped abruptly, as she caught sight of the stranger; and the next moment Caroline herself appeared. Her worldly experience and quick sense saw immediately what had chanced; and she hastened to apologize to Maltravers, and congratulate him on his return, with an ease that astonished poor Evelyn, and by no means seemed appreciated by Maltravers himself. He replied with brief and haughty courtesy.

"My father," continued Caroline, "will be so glad to hear you are come back. He will hasten to pay you his respects, and apologize for his truants. But I have not formally introduced you to my fellow-offender. My dear, let me present to you one whom Fame has already made known to you; Mr. Maltravers, Miss Cameron, step-daughter," she added in a lower voice, "to the late Lord Vargrave."

At the first part of this introduction Maltravers frowned; at the last he forgot all displeasure.

"Is it possible? I *thought* I had seen you before, but in a dream. Ah, then we are not quite strangers!"

Evelyn's eye met his, and though she coloured and strove to look grave, a half smile brought out the dimples that played round her arch lips.

"But you do not remember me?" added Maltravers.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Evelyn, with a sudden impulse; and then checked herself.

Caroline came to her friend's relief.

"What is this? You surprise me; where did you ever see Mr. Maltravers before?"

"I can answer that question, Miss Merton. When Miss Cameron was but a child, as high as my little friend here, an accident on the road procured me her acquaintance; and the sweetness and fortitude she then displayed left an impression on me not worn out even to this day. And thus we meet again," added Maltravers, in a muttered voice, as to himself. "How strange a thing life is!"

"Well," said Miss Merton, "we must intrude on you no more,—you have so much to do. I am so sorry Sir John is not down to welcome you; but I hope we shall be good neighbours. *Au revoir!*"

And, fancying herself most charming, Caroline bowed, smiled, and walked off with her train. Maltravers paused irresolute. If Evelyn had looked back, he would have accompanied them home; but Evelyn did not look back,—and he stayed.

Miss Merton rallied her young friend unmercifully, as they walked homeward, and she extracted a very brief and imperfect history of the adventure that had formed the first acquaintance, and of the interview by which it had been renewed. But Evelyn did not heed her; and the moment they arrived at the rectory, she hastened to shut herself in her room, and write the account of her adventure to her mother. How often, in her girlish reveries, had she thought of that incident, that stranger! And now, by such a chance, and after so many years, to meet the Unknown by his own hearth! and that Unknown to be Maltravers! It was as if a dream had come true. While she was yet musing—and the letter not yet begun—she heard the sound of joy-bells in the distance. At once she divined the cause; it was the welcome of the wanderer to his solitary home!

## CHAPTER IV

*MAIS en connaissant votre condition naturelle, usez des moyens qui lui sont propres, et ne pretendez pas regner par une autre voie que par celle qui vous fait roi.*<sup>4</sup>—PASCAL.

IN the heart as in the ocean, the great tides ebb and flow. The waves which had once urged on the spirit of Ernest Maltravers to the rocks and shoals of active life had long since receded back upon the calm depths, and left the strand bare. With a melancholy and disappointed mind, he had quitted the land of his birth; and new scenes, strange and wild, had risen before his wandering gaze. Wearied with civilization, and sated with many of the triumphs for which civilized men drudge and toil, and disquiet themselves in vain, he had plunged amongst hordes, scarce redeemed from primeval barbarism. The adventures through which he had passed, and in which life itself could only be preserved by wary vigilance and ready energies, had forced him, for a while, from the indulgence of morbid contemplations. His heart, indeed, had been left inactive; but his intellect and his physical powers had been kept in hourly exercise. He returned to the world of his equals with a mind laden with the treasures of a various and vast experience, and with much of the same gloomy moral as that which, on emerging from the Catacombs, assured the restless speculations of Rasselas of the vanity of human life and the folly of moral aspirations.

Ernest Maltravers, never a faultless or completed character, falling short in practice of his own capacities, moral and intellectual, from his very desire to overpass the limits of the Great and Good, was seemingly as far as heretofore from the grand secret of life. It was not so in reality; his mind had acquired what before it wanted,—*hardness*; and we are nearer to true virtue and true happiness when we demand too little from men than when we exact too much.

Nevertheless, partly from the strange life that had thrown him amongst men whom safety itself made it necessary to command despotically, partly from the habit of power and disdain of the world, his nature was incrustated with a stern imperiousness of manner, often approaching to the harsh and morose, though beneath it lurked generosity and benevolence.

Many of his younger feelings, more amiable and complex, had settled into one predominant quality, which more or less had always characterized him,—Pride! Self-esteem made inactive, and Ambition made discontented, usually engender haughtiness. In Maltravers this quality, which, properly controlled and duly softened, is the essence and life of honour, was carried to a vice. He was perfectly conscious of its excess, but he cherished it as a virtue. Pride had served to console him in sorrow, and therefore it was a friend; it had supported him when disgusted with fraud, or in resistance to violence, and therefore it was a champion and a fortress. It was a pride of a peculiar sort: it attached itself to no one point in especial,—not to talent, knowledge, mental gifts, still less to the vulgar commonplaces of birth and fortune; it rather resulted from a supreme and wholesale contempt of all other men, and all their objects,—of ambition, of glory, of the hard business of life. His favourite virtue was fortitude; it was on this that he now mainly valued himself. He was proud of his struggles against others, prouder still of conquests over his own passions. He looked upon FATE as the arch enemy against whose attacks we should ever prepare. He fancied that against fate he had thoroughly schooled himself. In the arrogance of his heart he said, "I can defy the future." He believed in the boast of the vain old sage,—"I am a world to myself!" In the wild career through which his later manhood had passed, it is true that he had not carried his philosophy into a rejection of the ordinary world. The shock occasioned by the death of Florence yielded gradually to time and change;

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<sup>4</sup> "But in understanding your natural condition, use the means which are proper to it; and pretend not to govern by any other way than by that which constitutes you governor."

and he had passed from the deserts of Africa and the East to the brilliant cities of Europe. But neither his heart nor his reason had ever again been enslaved by his passions. Never again had he known the softness of affection. Had he done so, the ice had been thawed, and the fountain had flowed once more into the great deeps. He had returned to England,—he scarce knew wherefore, or with what intent, certainly not with any idea of entering again upon the occupations of active life; it was, perhaps, only the weariness of foreign scenes and unfamiliar tongues, and the vague, unsettled desire of change, that brought him back to the fatherland. But he did not allow so unphilosophical a cause to himself: and, what was strange, he would not allow one much more amiable, and which was, perhaps, the truer cause,—the increasing age and infirmities of his old guardian, Cleveland, who prayed him affectionately to return. Maltravers did not like to believe that his heart was still so kind. Singular form of pride! No, he rather sought to persuade himself that he intended to sell Burleigh, to arrange his affairs finally, and then quit forever his native land. To prove to himself that this was the case, he had intended at Dover to hurry at once to Burleigh, and merely write to Cleveland that he was returned to England. But his heart would not suffer him to enjoy this cruel luxury of self-mortification, and his horses' heads were turned to Richmond when within a stage of London. He had spent two days with the good old man, and those two days had so warmed and softened his feelings that he was quite appalled at his own dereliction from fixed principles! However, he went before Cleveland had time to discover that he was changed; and the old man had promised to visit him shortly.

This, then, was the state of Ernest Maltravers at the age of thirty-six,—an age in which frame and mind are in their fullest perfection; an age in which men begin most keenly to feel that they are citizens. With all his energies braced and strengthened; with his mind stored with profusest gifts; in the vigour of a constitution to which a hardy life had imparted a second and fresher youth; so trained by stern experience as to redeem with an easy effort all the deficiencies and faults which had once resulted from too sensitive an imagination and too high a standard for human actions; formed to render to his race the most brilliant and durable service, and to secure to himself the happiness which results from sobered fancy, a generous heart, and an approving conscience,—here was Ernest Maltravers, backed, too, by the appliances and gifts of birth and fortune, perversely shutting up genius, life, and soul in their own thorny leaves, and refusing to serve the fools and rascals who were formed from the same clay, and gifted by the same God. Morbid and morose philosophy, begot by a proud spirit on a lonely heart!

## CHAPTER V

*LET such amongst us as are willing to be children again, if it be only for an hour, resign ourselves to the sweet enchantment that steals upon the spirit when it indulges in the memory of early and innocent enjoyment.*

**D. L. RICHARDSON.**

AT dinner, Caroline's lively recital of their adventures was received with much interest, not only by the Merton family, but by some of the neighbouring gentry who shared the rector's hospitality. The sudden return of any proprietor to his old hereditary seat after a prolonged absence makes some sensation in a provincial neighbourhood. In this case, where the proprietor was still young, unmarried, celebrated, and handsome, the sensation was of course proportionably increased. Caroline and Evelyn were beset by questions, to which the former alone gave any distinct reply. Caroline's account was, on the whole, gracious and favourable, and seemed complimentary to all but Evelyn, who thought that Caroline was a very indifferent portrait-painter.

It seldom happens that a man is a prophet in his own neighbourhood; but Maltravers had been so little in the county, and in his former visit his life had been so secluded, that he was regarded as a stranger. He had neither outshone the establishments nor interfered with the sporting of his fellow-squires; and on the whole, they made just allowance for his habits of distant reserve. Time, and his retirement from the busy scene, long enough to cause him to be missed, not long enough for new favourites to supply his place, had greatly served to mellow and consolidate his reputation, and his country was proud to claim him. Thus (though Maltravers would not have believed it had an angel told him) he was not spoken ill of behind his back: a thousand little anecdotes of his personal habits, of his generosity, independence of spirit, and eccentricity were told. Evelyn listened in rapt delight to all; she had never passed so pleasant an evening; and she smiled almost gratefully on the rector, who was a man that always followed the stream, when he said with benign affability, "We must really show our distinguished neighbour every attention,—we must be indulgent to his little oddities. His politics are not mine, to be sure; but a man who has a stake in the country has a right to his own opinion, that was always my maxim,—thank Heaven, I am a very moderate man. We must draw him amongst us; it will be our own fault, I am sure, if he is not quite domesticated at the rectory."

"With such attraction,—yes," said the thin curate, timidly bowing to the ladies.

"It would be a nice match for Miss Caroline," whispered an old lady; Caroline overheard, and pouted her pretty lip. The whist-tables were now set out, the music began, and Maltravers was left in peace.

The next day Mr. Merton rode his pony over to Burleigh. Maltravers was not at home. He left his card, and a note of friendly respect, begging Mr. Maltravers to waive ceremony, and dine with them the next day. Somewhat to the surprise of the rector, he found that the active spirit of Maltravers was already at work. The long-deserted grounds were filled with labourers; the carpenters were busy at the fences; the house looked alive and stirring; the grooms were exercising the horses in the park,—all betokened the return of the absentee. This seemed to denote that Maltravers had come to reside; and the rector thought of Caroline, and was pleased at the notion.

The next day was Cecilia's birthday,—and birthdays were kept at Merton Rectory; the neighbouring children were invited. They were to dine on the lawn, in a large marquee, and to dance in the evening. The hothouses yielded their early strawberries, and the cows, decorated with blue ribbons, were to give syllabubs. The polite Caroline was not greatly fascinated by pleasure of this kind; she graciously appeared at dinner, kissed the prettiest of the children, helped them to soup, and then, having done her duty, retired to her room to write letters. The children were not sorry, for they

were a little afraid of the grand Caroline; and they laughed much more loudly, and made much more noise, when she was gone—and the cake and strawberries appeared.

Evelyn was in her element; she had, as a child, mixed so little with children, she had so often yearned for playmates, she was still so childlike. Besides, she was so fond of Cecilia, she had looked forward with innocent delight to the day; and a week before had taken the carriage to the neighbouring town to return with a carefully concealed basket of toys,—dolls, sashes, and picture-books. But somehow or other, she did not feel so childlike as usual that morning; her heart was away from the pleasure before her, and her smile was at first languid. But in children's mirth there is something so contagious to those who love children; and now, as the party scattered themselves on the grass, and Evelyn opened the basket, and bade them with much gravity keep quiet, and be good children, she was the happiest of the whole group. But she knew how to give pleasure: and the basket was presented to Cecilia, that the little queen of the day might enjoy the luxury of being generous; and to prevent jealousy, the notable expedient of a lottery was suggested.

"Then Evy shall be Fortune!" cried Cecilia; "nobody will be sorry to get anything from Evy, —and if any one is discontented Evy sha'n't kiss her."

Mrs. Merton, whose motherly heart was completely won by Evelyn's kindness to the children, forgot all her husband's lectures, and willingly ticketed the prizes, and wrote the numbers of the lots on slips of paper carefully folded. A large old Indian jar was dragged from the drawing-room and constituted the fated urn; the tickets were deposited therein, and Cecilia was tying the handkerchief round Evelyn's eyes,—while Fortune struggled archly not to be as blind as she ought to be,—and the children, seated in a circle, were in full joy and expectation when there was a sudden pause. The laughter stopped; so did Cissy's little hands. What could it be? Evelyn slipped the bandage, and her eyes rested on Maltravers!

"Well, really, my dear Miss Cameron," said the rector, who was by the side of the intruder, and who, indeed, had just brought him to the spot, "I don't know what these little folks will do to you next."

"I ought rather to be their victim," said Maltravers, good-humouredly; "the fairies always punish us grown-up mortals for trespassing on their revels."

While he spoke, his eyes—those eyes, the most eloquent in the world—dwelt on Evelyn (as, to cover her blushes, she took Cecilia in her arms, and appeared to attend to nothing else) with a look of such admiration and delight as a mortal might well be supposed to cast on some beautiful fairy.

Sophy, a very bold child, ran up to him. "How do, sir?" she lisped, putting up her face to be kissed; "how's the pretty peacock?"

This opportune audacity served at once to renew the charm that had been broken,—to unite the stranger with the children. Here was acquaintance claimed and allowed in an instant. The next moment Maltravers was one of the circle, on the turf with the rest, as gay, and almost as noisy,—that hard, proud man, so disdainful of the trifles of the world!

"But the gentleman must have a prize, too," said Sophy, proud of her tall new friend. "What's your other name; why do you have such a long, hard name?"

"Call me Ernest," said Maltravers.

"Why don't we begin?" cried the children.

"Evy, come, be a good child, miss," said Sophy, as Evelyn, vexed and ashamed, and half ready to cry, resisted the bandage.

Mr. Merton interposed his authority; but the children clamoured, and Evelyn hastily yielded. It was Fortune's duty to draw the tickets from the urn, and give them to each claimant whose name was called; when it came to the turn of Maltravers, the bandage did not conceal the blush and smile of the enchanting goddess, and the hand of the aspirant thrilled as it touched hers.

The children burst into screams of laughter when Cecilia gravely awarded to Maltravers the worst prize in the lot,—a blue ribbon,—which Sophy, however, greedily insisted on having; but Maltravers would not yield it.

Maltravers remained all day at the rectory, and shared in the ball,—yes, he danced with Evelyn—he, Maltravers, who had never been known to dance since he was twenty-two! The ice was fairly broken,—Maltravers was at home with the Mertons. And when he took his solitary walk to his solitary house—over the little bridge, and through the shadowy wood—astonished, perhaps, with himself, every one of the guests, from the oldest to the youngest, pronounced him delightful. Caroline, perhaps, might have been piqued some months ago that he did not dance with *her*; but now, her heart—such as it was—felt preoccupied.

## CHAPTER VI

*L'ESPRIT de l'homme est plus penetrant que consequent, et embrasse plus qu'il ne peut lier.*<sup>5</sup>—VAUVENARGUES.

AND now Maltravers was constantly with the Merton family; there was no need of excuse for familiarity on his part. Mr. Merton, charmed to find his advances not rejected, thrust intimacy upon him.

One day they spent the afternoon at Burleigh, and Evelyn and Caroline finished their survey of the house,—tapestry, and armour, pictures and all. This led to a visit to the Arabian horses. Caroline observed that she was very fond of riding, and went into ecstasies with one of the animals,—the one, of course, with the longest tail. The next day the horse was in the stables at the rectory, and a gallant epistle apologized for the costly gift.

Mr. Merton demurred, but Caroline always had her own way; and so the horse remained (no doubt, in much amazement and disdain) with the parson's pony, and the brown carriage horses. The gift naturally conduced to parties on horseback—it was cruel entirely to separate the Arab from his friends—and how was Evelyn to be left behind?—Evelyn, who had never yet ridden anything more spirited than an old pony! A beautiful little horse belonging to an elderly lady, now growing too stout to ride, was to be sold hard by. Maltravers discovered the treasure, and apprised Mr. Merton of it—he was too delicate to affect liberality to the rich heiress. The horse was bought; nothing could go quieter; Evelyn was not at all afraid. They made two or three little excursions. Sometimes only Mr. Merton and Maltravers accompanied the young ladies, sometimes the party was more numerous. Maltravers appeared to pay equal attention to Caroline and her friend; still Evelyn's inexperience in equestrian matters was an excuse for his being ever by her side. They had a thousand opportunities to converse; and Evelyn now felt more at home with him; her gentle gayety, her fanciful yet chastened intellect, found a voice. Maltravers was not slow to discover that beneath her simplicity there lurked sense, judgment, and imagination. Insensibly his own conversation took a higher flight. With the freedom which his mature years and reputation gave him, he mingled eloquent instruction with lighter and more trifling subjects; he directed her earnest and docile mind, not only to new fields of written knowledge, but to many of the secrets of Nature, subtle or sublime. He had a wide range of scientific as well as literary lore; the stars, the flowers, the phenomena of the physical world, afforded themes on which he descanted with the fervent love of a poet and the easy knowledge of a sage.

Mr. Merton, observing that little or nothing of sentiment mingled with their familiar intercourse, felt perfectly at ease; and knowing that Maltravers had been intimate with Lumley, he naturally concluded that he was aware of the engagement between Evelyn and his friend. Meanwhile Maltravers appeared unconscious that such a being as Lord Vargrave existed.

It is not to be wondered at that the daily presence, the delicate flattery of attention from a man like Maltravers, should strongly impress the imagination, if not the heart, of a susceptible girl. Already prepossessed in his favour, and wholly unaccustomed to a society which combined so many attractions, Evelyn regarded him with unspeakable veneration; to the darker shades in his character she was blind,—to her, indeed, they did not appear. True that once or twice in mixed society his disdainful and imperious temper broke hastily and harshly forth. To folly, to pretension, to presumption, he showed but slight forbearance. The impatient smile, the biting sarcasm, the cold repulse, that might gall, yet could scarce be openly resented, betrayed that he was one who affected to free himself from the polished restraints of social intercourse. He had once been too scrupulous in not wounding vanity; he was now too indifferent to it. But if sometimes this unamiable trait of character, as displayed

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<sup>5</sup> "The spirit of man is more penetrating than logical, and gathers more than it can garner."

to others, chilled or startled Evelyn, the contrast of his manner towards herself was a flattery too delicious not to efface all other recollections. To her ear his voice always softened its tone; to her capacity of mind ever bent as by sympathy, not condescension; to her—the young, the timid, the half-informed—to her alone he did not disdain to exhibit all the stores of his knowledge, all the best and brightest colours of his mind. She modestly wondered at so strange a preference. Perhaps a sudden and blunt compliment which Maltravers once addressed to her may explain it. One day, when she had conversed more freely and more fully than usual, he broke in upon her with this abrupt exclamation,—

"Miss Cameron, you must have associated from your childhood with beautiful minds. I see already that from the world, vile as it is, you have nothing of contagion to fear. I have heard you talk on the most various matters, on many of which your knowledge is imperfect; but you have never uttered one mean idea, or one false sentiment. Truth seems intuitive to you."

It was indeed this singular purity of heart which made to the world-wearied man the chief charm in Evelyn Cameron. From this purity came, as from the heart of a poet, a thousand new and heaven-taught thoughts which had in them a wisdom of their own,—thoughts that often brought the stern listener back to youth, and reconciled him with life. The wise Maltravers learned more from Evelyn than Evelyn did from Maltravers.

There was, however, another trait—deeper than that of temper—in Maltravers, and which was, unlike the latter, more manifest to her than to others,—his contempt for all the things her young and fresh enthusiasm had been taught to prize, the fame that endeared and hallowed him to her eyes, the excitement of ambition, and its rewards. He spoke with such bitter disdain of great names and great deeds. "Children of a larger growth they were," said he, one day, in answer to her defence of the luminaries of their kind, "allured by baubles as poor as the rattle and the doll's house. How many have been made great, as the word is, by their vices! Paltry craft won command to Themistocles; to escape his duns, the profligate Caesar heads an army, and achieves his laurels; Brutus, the aristocrat, stabs his patron, that patricians might again trample on plebeians, and that posterity might talk of *him*. The love of posthumous fame—what is it but as puerile a passion for notoriety as that which made a Frenchman I once knew lay out two thousand pounds in sugar-plums? To be talked of—how poor a desire! Does it matter whether it be by the gossips of this age or the next? Some men are urged on to fame by poverty—that is an excuse for their trouble; but there is no more nobleness in the motive than in that which makes yon poor ploughman sweat in the eye of Phoebus. In fact, the larger part of eminent men, instead of being inspired by any lofty desire to benefit their species or enrich the human mind, have acted or composed, without any definite object beyond the satisfying a restless appetite for excitement, or indulging the dreams of a selfish glory. And when nobler aspirations have fired them, it has too often been but to wild fanaticism and sanguinary crime. What dupes of glory ever were animated by a deeper faith, a higher ambition, than the frantic followers of Mahomet,—taught to believe that it was virtue to ravage the earth, and that they sprang from the battle-field into paradise? Religion and liberty, love of country, what splendid motives to action! Lo, the results, when the motives are keen, the action once commenced! Behold the Inquisition, the Days of Terror, the Council of Ten, and the Dungeons of Venice!"

Evelyn was scarcely fit to wrestle with these melancholy fallacies; but her instinct of truth suggested an answer.

"What would society be if all men thought as you do, and acted up to the theory? No literature, no art, no glory, no patriotism, no virtue, no civilization! You analyze men's motives—how can you be sure you judge rightly? Look to the results,—our benefit, our enlightenment! If the results be great, Ambition is a virtue, no matter what motive awakened it. Is it not so?"

Evelyn spoke blushing and timidly. Maltravers, despite his own tenets, was delighted with her reply.

"You reason well," said he, with a smile. "But how are we sure that the results are such as you depict them? Civilization, enlightenment,—they are vague terms, hollow sounds. Never fear that

the world will reason as I do. Action will never be stagnant while there are such things as gold and power. The vessel will move on—let the galley-slaves have it to themselves. What I have seen of life convinces me that progress is not always improvement. Civilization has evils unknown to the savage state; and *vice versa*. Men in all states seem to have much the same proportion of happiness. We judge others with eyes accustomed to dwell on our own circumstances. I have seen the slave, whom we commiserate, enjoy his holiday with a rapture unknown to the grave freeman. I have seen that slave made free, and enriched by the benevolence of his master; and he has been gay no more. The masses of men in all countries are much the same. If there are greater comforts in the hardy North, Providence bestows a fertile earth and a glorious heaven, and a mind susceptible to enjoyment as flowers to light, on the voluptuous indulgence of the Italian, or the contented apathy of the Hindoo. In the mighty organization of good and evil, what can we vain individuals effect? They who labour most, how doubtful is their reputation! Who shall say whether Voltaire or Napoleon, Cromwell or Caesar, Walpole or Pitt, has done most good or most evil? It is a question casuists may dispute on. Some of us think that poets have been the delight and the lights of men; another school of philosophy has treated them as the corrupters of the species,—panderers to the false glory of war, to the effeminacies of taste, to the pampering of the passions above the reason. Nay, even those who have effected inventions that change the face of the earth—the printing-press, gunpowder, the steam-engine,—men hailed as benefactors by the unthinking herd, or the would-be sages,—have introduced ills unknown before, adulterating and often counterbalancing the good. Each new improvement in machinery deprives hundreds of food. Civilization is the eternal sacrifice of one generation to the next. An awful sense of the impotence of human agencies has crushed down the sublime aspirations for mankind which I once indulged. For myself, I float on the great waters, without pilot or rudder, and trust passively to the winds, that are the breath of God."

This conversation left a deep impression upon Evelyn; it inspired her with a new interest in one in whom so many noble qualities lay dulled and torpid, by the indulgence of a self-sophistry, which, girl as she was, she felt wholly unworthy of his powers. And it was this error in Maltravers that, levelling his superiority, brought him nearer to her heart. Ah, if she could restore him to his race! It was a dangerous desire, but it intoxicated and absorbed her.

Oh, how sweetly were those fair evenings spent,—the evenings of happy June! And then, as Maltravers suffered the children to tease him into talk about the wonders he had seen in the regions far away, how did the soft and social hues of his character unfold themselves! There is in all real genius so much latent playfulness of nature it almost seems as if genius never could grow old. The inscriptions that youth writes upon the tablets of an imaginative mind are, indeed, never wholly obliterated,—they are as an invisible writing, which gradually becomes clear in the light and warmth. Bring genius familiarly with the young, and it is as young as they are. Evelyn did not yet, therefore, observe the disparity of *years* between herself and Maltravers. But the disparity of knowledge and power served for the present to interdict to her that sweet feeling of equality in commune, without which love is rarely a very intense affection in women. It is not so with men. But by degrees she grew more and more familiar with her stern friend; and in that familiarity there was perilous fascination to Maltravers. She could laugh him at any moment out of his most moody reveries; contradict with a pretty wilfulness his most favourite dogmas; nay, even scold him, with bewitching gravity, if he was not always at the command of her wishes—or caprice. At this time it seemed certain that Maltravers would fall in love with Evelyn; but it rested on more doubtful probabilities whether Evelyn would fall in love with him.

## CHAPTER VII

*CONTRAHE vela,  
Et te littoribus cymba propinqua vehat.*<sup>6</sup>

—*SENECA.*

"HAS not Miss Cameron a beautiful countenance?" said Mr. Merton to Maltravers, as Evelyn, unconscious of the compliment, sat at a little distance, bending down her eyes to Sophy, who was weaving daisy-chains on a stool at her knee, and whom she was telling not to talk loud,—for Merton had been giving Maltravers some useful information respecting the management of his estate; and Evelyn was already interested in all that could interest her friend. She had one excellent thing in woman, had Evelyn Cameron: despite her sunny cheerfulness of temper she was *quiet*; and she had insensibly acquired, under the roof of her musing and silent mother, the habit of never disturbing others. What a blessed secret is that in the intercourse of domestic life!

"Has not Miss Cameron a beautiful countenance?"

Maltravers started at the question,—it was a literal translation of his own thought at that moment. He checked the enthusiasm that rose to his lip, and calmly re-echoed the word,—

"Beautiful indeed!"

"And so sweet-tempered and unaffected; she has been admirably brought up. I believe Lady Vargrave is a most exemplary woman. Miss Cameron will, indeed, be a treasure to her betrothed husband. He is to be envied."

"Her betrothed husband!" said Maltravers, turning very pale.

"Yes; Lord Vargrave. Did you not know that she was engaged to him from her childhood? It was the wish, nay, command, of the late lord, who bequeathed her his vast fortune, if not on that condition, at least on that understanding. Did you never hear of this before?"

While Mr. Merton spoke, a sudden recollection returned to Maltravers. He *had* heard Lumley himself refer to the engagement, but it had been in the sick chamber of Florence,—little heeded at the time, and swept from his mind by a thousand after-thoughts and scenes. Mr. Merton continued,—

"We expect Lord Vargrave down soon. He is an ardent lover, I conclude; but public life chains him so much to London. He made an admirable speech in the Lords last night; at least, our party appear to think so. They are to be married when Miss Cameron attains the age of eighteen."

Accustomed to endurance, and skilled in the proud art of concealing emotion, Maltravers betrayed to the eye of Mr. Merton no symptom of surprise or dismay at this intelligence. If the rector had conceived any previous suspicion that Maltravers was touched beyond mere admiration for beauty, the suspicion would have vanished as he heard his guest coldly reply,—

"I trust Lord Vargrave may deserve his happiness. But, to return to Mr. Justis; you corroborate my own opinion of that smooth-spoken gentleman."

The conversation flowed back to business. At last, Maltravers rose to depart.

"Will you not dine with us to-day?" said the hospitable rector.

"Many thanks,—no; I have much business to attend to at home for some days to come."

"Kiss Sophy, Mr. Ernest,—Sophy very good girl to-day. Let the pretty butterfly go, because Evy said it was cruel to put it in a card-box; kiss Sophy."

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<sup>6</sup> "Furl your sails, and let the next boat carry you to the shore."

Maltravers took the child (whose heart he had completely won) in his arms, and kissed her tenderly; then advancing to Evelyn, he held out his hand, while his eyes were fixed upon her with an expression of deep and mournful interest, which she could not understand.

"God bless you, Miss Cameron," he said, and his lip quivered.

Days passed, and they saw no more of Maltravers. He excused himself on pretence, now of business, now of other engagements, from all the invitations of the rector. Mr. Merton unsuspectingly accepted the excuse; for he knew that Maltravers was necessarily much occupied.

His arrival had now spread throughout the country; and such of his equals as were still in B——shire hastened to offer congratulations, and press hospitality. Perhaps it was the desire to make his excuses to Merton valid which prompted the master of Burleigh to yield to the other invitations that crowded on him. But this was not all,—Maltravers acquired in the neighbourhood the reputation of a man of business. Mr. Justis was abruptly dismissed; with the help of the bailiff Maltravers became his own steward. His parting address to this personage was characteristic of the mingled harshness and justice of Maltravers.

"Sir," said he, as they closed their accounts, "I discharge you because you are a rascal,—there can be no dispute about that; you have plundered your owner, yet you have ground his tenants, and neglected the poor. My villages are filled with paupers, my rent-roll is reduced a fourth; and yet, while some of my tenants appear to pay nominal rents (why, you best know),—others are screwed up higher than any man's in the country. You are a rogue, Mr. Justis,—your own account-books show it; and if I send them to a lawyer, you would have to refund a sum that I could apply very advantageously to the rectification of your blunders."

"I hope, sir," said the steward, conscience-stricken and appalled,—"I hope you will not ruin me; indeed, indeed, if I was called upon to refund, I should go to jail."

"Make yourself easy, sir. It is just that I should suffer as well as you. My neglect of my own duties tempted you to roguery. You were honest under the vigilant eye of Mr. Cleveland. Retire with your gains: if you are quite hardened, no punishment can touch you; if you are not, it is punishment enough to stand there gray-headed, with one foot in the grave, and hear yourself called a rogue, and know that you cannot defend yourself,—go!"

Maltravers next occupied himself in all the affairs that a mismanaged estate brought upon him. He got rid of some tenants, he made new arrangements with others; he called labour into requisition by a variety of improvements; he paid minute attention to the poor, not in the weakness of careless and indiscriminate charity, by which popularity is so cheaply purchased, and independence so easily degraded,—no, his main care was to stimulate industry and raise hope. The ambition and emulation that he so vainly denied in himself, he found his most useful levers in the humble labourers whose characters he had studied, whose condition he sought to make themselves desire to elevate. Unconsciously his whole practice began to refute his theories. The abuses of the old Poor Laws were rife in his neighbourhood; his quick penetration, and perhaps his imperious habits of decision, suggested to him many of the best provisions of the law now called into operation; but he was too wise to be the Philosopher Square of a system. He did not attempt too much; and he recognized one principle, which, as yet, the administrators of the new Poor-Laws have not sufficiently discovered. One main object of the new code was, by curbing public charity, to task the activity of individual benevolence. If the proprietor or the clergyman find under his own eye isolated instances of severity, oppression, or hardship in a general and salutary law, instead of railing against the law, he ought to attend to the individual instances; and private benevolence ought to keep the balance of the scales even, and be the makeweight wherever there is a just deficiency of national charity.<sup>7</sup> It was this which,

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<sup>7</sup> The object of parochial reform is not that of economy alone; not merely to reduce poor-rates. The ratepayer ought to remember that the more he wrests from the grip of the sturdy mendicant, the more he ought to bestow on undeserved distress. Without the mitigations of private virtue, every law that benevolists could make would be harsh.

in the modified and discreet regulations that he sought to establish on his estates, Maltravers especially and pointedly attended to. Age, infirmity, temporary distress, unmerited destitution, found him a steady, watchful, indefatigable friend. In these labours, commenced with extraordinary promptitude, and the energy of a single purpose and stern mind, Maltravers was necessarily brought into contact with the neighbouring magistrates and gentry. He was combating evils and advancing objects in which all were interested; and his vigorous sense, and his past parliamentary reputation, joined with the respect which in provinces always attaches to ancient birth, won unexpected and general favour to his views. At the rectory they heard of him constantly, not only through occasional visitors, but through Mr. Merton, who was ever thrown in his way; but he continued to keep himself aloof from the house. Every one (Mr. Merton excepted) missed him,—even Caroline, whose able though worldly mind could appreciate his conversation; the children mourned for their playmate, who was so much more affable than their own stiff-neckclothed brothers; and Evelyn was at least more serious and thoughtful than she had ever been before, and the talk of others seemed to her wearisome, trite, and dull.

Was Maltravers happy in his new pursuits? His state of mind at that time it is not easy to read. His masculine spirit and haughty temper were wrestling hard against a feeling that had been fast ripening into passion; but at night, in his solitary and cheerless home, a vision, too exquisite to indulge, would force itself upon him, till he started from the reverie, and said to his rebellious heart: "A few more years, and thou wilt be still. What in this brief life is a pang more or less? Better to have nothing to care for, so wilt thou defraud Fate, thy deceitful foe! Be contented that thou art alone!" Fortunate was it, then, for Maltravers, that he was in his native land, not in climes where excitement is in the pursuit of pleasure rather than in the exercise of duties. In the hardy air of the liberal England, he was already, though unknown to himself, bracing and ennobling his dispositions and desires. It is the boast of this island that the slave whose foot touches the soil is free. The boast may be enlarged. Where so much is left to the people, where the life of civilization, not locked up in the tyranny of Central Despotism, spreads, vivifying, restless, ardent, through every vein of the healthful body, the most distant province, the obscurest village, has claims on our exertions, our duties, and forces us into energy and citizenship. The spirit of liberty, that strikes the chain from the slave, binds the freeman to his brother. This is the Religion of Freedom. And hence it is that the stormy struggles of free States have been blessed with results of Virtue, of Wisdom, and of Genius by Him who bade us love one another,—not only that love in itself is excellent, but that from love, which in its widest sense is but the spiritual term for liberty, whatever is worthiest of our solemn nature has its birth.

## BOOK III

*Harsh things he mitigates, and pride subdues.*  
*Ex. SOLON: Eleg.*

### CHAPTER I

*YOU still are what you were, sir!*

.....

*... With most quick agility could turn  
And return; make knots and undo them,  
Give forked counsel.*

—*Volpone, or the Fox.*

BEFORE a large table, covered with parliamentary papers, sat Lumley Lord Vargrave. His complexion, though still healthy, had faded from the freshness of hue which distinguished him in youth. His features, always sharp, had grown yet more angular: his brows seemed to project more broodingly over his eyes, which, though of undiminished brightness, were sunk deep in their sockets, and had lost much of their quick restlessness. The character of his mind had begun to stamp itself on the physiognomy, especially on the mouth when in repose. It was, a face striking for acute intelligence, for concentrated energy; but there was a something written in it which said, "BEWARE!" It would have inspired any one who had mixed much amongst men with a vague suspicion and distrust.

Lumley had been always careful, though plain, in dress; but there was now a more evident attention bestowed on his person than he had ever manifested in youth,—while there was something of the Roman's celebrated foppery in the skill with which his hair was arranged on his high forehead, so as either to conceal or relieve a partial baldness at the temples. Perhaps, too, from the possession of high station, or the habit of living only amongst the great, there was a certain dignity insensibly diffused over his whole person that was not noticeable in his earlier years, when a certain *ton de garnison* was blended with his ease of manners. Yet, even now, dignity was not his prevalent characteristic; and in ordinary occasions, or mixed society, he still found a familiar frankness a more useful species of simulation. At the time we now treat of, Lord Vargrave was leaning his cheek on one hand, while the other rested idly on the papers methodically arranged before him. He appeared to have suspended his labours, and to be occupied in thought. It was, in truth, a critical period in the career of Lord Vargrave.

From the date of his accession to the peerage, the rise of Lumley Ferrers had been less rapid and progressive than he himself could have foreseen. At first, all was sunshine before him; he had contrived to make himself useful to his party; he had also made himself personally popular. To the ease and cordiality of his happy address, he added the seemingly careless candour so often mistaken for honesty; while, as there was nothing showy or brilliant in his abilities or oratory—nothing that aspired far above the pretensions of others, and aroused envy by mortifying self-love—he created but little jealousy even amongst the rivals before whom he obtained precedence. For some time, therefore, he went smoothly on, continuing to rise in the estimation of his party, and commanding a certain respect from the neutral public, by acknowledged and eminent talents in the details of business; for his quickness of penetration, and a logical habit of mind, enabled him to grapple with and generalize the minutiae of official labour or of legislative enactments with a masterly success. But as the road became clearer to his steps, his ambition became more evident and daring. Naturally dictatorial and

presumptuous, his early suppleness to superiors was now exchanged for a self-willed pertinacity, which often displeased the more haughty leaders of his party, and often wounded the more vain. His pretensions were scanned with eyes more jealous and less tolerant than at first. Proud aristocrats began to recollect that a mushroom peerage was supported but by a scanty fortune; the men of more dazzling genius began to sneer at the red-tape minister as a mere official manager of details; he lost much of the personal popularity which had been one secret of his power. But what principally injured him in the eyes of his party and the public were certain ambiguous and obscure circumstances connected with a short period when himself and his associates were thrown out of office. At this time, it was noticeable that the journals of the Government that succeeded were peculiarly polite to Lord Vargrave, while they covered all his coadjutors with obloquy: and it was more than suspected that secret negotiations between himself and the new ministry were going on, when suddenly the latter broke up, and Lord Vargrave's proper party were reinstated. The vague suspicions that attached to Vargrave were somewhat strengthened in the opinion of the public by the fact that he was at first left out of the restored administration; and when subsequently, after a speech which showed that he could be mischievous if not propitiated, he was readmitted, it was precisely to the same office he had held before,—an office which did not admit him into the Cabinet. Lumley, burning with resentment, longed to decline the offer; but, alas! he was poor, and, what was worse, in debt; "his poverty, but not his will, consented." He was reinstated; but though prodigiously improved as a debater, he felt that he had not advanced as a public man. His ambition inflamed by his discontent, he had, since his return to office, strained every nerve to strengthen his position. He met the sarcasms on his poverty by greatly increasing his expenditure, and by advertising everywhere his engagement to an heiress whose fortune, great as it was, he easily contrived to magnify. As his old house in Great George Street—well fitted for the bustling commoner—was no longer suited to the official and fashionable peer, he had, on his accession to the title, exchanged that respectable residence for a large mansion in Hamilton Place; and his sober dinners were succeeded by splendid banquets. Naturally, he had no taste for such things; his mind was too nervous, and his temper too hard, to take pleasure in luxury or ostentation. But now, as ever he *acted upon a system*. Living in a country governed by the mightiest and wealthiest aristocracy in the world, which, from the first class almost to the lowest, ostentation pervades,—the very backbone and marrow of society,—he felt that to fall far short of his rivals in display was to give them an advantage which he could not compensate either by the power of his connections or the surpassing loftiness of his character and genius. Playing for a great game, and with his eyes open to all the consequences, he cared not for involving his private fortunes in a lottery in which a great prize might be drawn. To do Vargrave justice, money with him had never been an object, but a means; he was grasping, but not avaricious. If men much richer than Lord Vargrave find State distinctions very expensive, and often ruinous, it is not to be supposed that his salary, joined to so moderate a private fortune, could support the style in which he lived. His income was already deeply mortgaged, and debt accumulated upon debt. Nor had this man, so eminent for the management of public business, any of that talent which springs from *justice*, and makes its possessor a skilful manager of his own affairs. Perpetually absorbed in intrigues and schemes, he was too much engaged in cheating others on a large scale to have time to prevent being himself cheated on a small one. He never looked into bills till he was compelled to pay them; and he never calculated the amount of an expense that seemed the least necessary to his purposes. But still Lord Vargrave relied upon his marriage with the wealthy Evelyn to relieve him from all his embarrassments; and if a doubt of the realization of that vision ever occurred to him, still public life had splendid prizes. Nay, should he fail with Miss Cameron, he even thought that, by good management, he might ultimately make it worth while to his colleagues to purchase his absence with the gorgeous bribe of the Governor-Generalship of India.

As oratory is an art in which practice and the dignity of station produce marvellous improvement, so Lumley had of late made effects in the House of Lords of which he had once been judged incapable. It is true that no practice and no station can give men qualities in which they are

wholly deficient; but these advantages can bring out in the best light all the qualities they *do* possess. The glow of a generous imagination, the grasp of a profound statesmanship, the enthusiasm of a noble nature,—these no practice could educe from the eloquence of Lumley Lord Vargrave, for he had them not; but bold wit, fluent and vigorous sentences, effective arrangement of parliamentary logic, readiness of retort, plausibility of manner, aided by a delivery peculiar for self-possession and ease, a clear and ringing voice (to the only fault of which, shrillness without passion, the ear of the audience had grown accustomed), and a countenance impressive from its courageous intelligence,—all these had raised the promising speaker into the matured excellence of a nervous and formidable debater. But precisely as he rose in the display of his talents, did he awaken envies and enmities hitherto dormant. And it must be added that, with all his craft and coldness, Lord Vargrave was often a very dangerous and mischievous speaker for the interests of his party. His colleagues had often cause to tremble when he rose: nay, even when the cheers of his own faction shook the old tapestried walls. A man who has no sympathy with the public must commit many and fatal indiscretions when the public, as well as his audience, is to be his judge. Lord Vargrave's utter incapacity to comprehend political morality, his contempt for all the objects of social benevolence, frequently led him into the avowal of doctrines, which, if they did not startle the men of the world whom he addressed (smoothed away, as such doctrines were, by speciousness of manner and delivery), created deep disgust in those even of his own politics who read their naked exposition in the daily papers. Never did Lord Vargrave utter one of those generous sentiments which, no matter whether propounded by Radical or Tory, sink deep into the heart of the people, and do lasting service to the cause they adorn. But no man defended an abuse, however glaring, with a more vigorous championship, or hurled defiance upon a popular demand with a more courageous scorn. In some times, when the anti-popular principle is strong; such a leader may be useful; but at the moment of which we treat he was a most equivocal auxiliary. A considerable proportion of the ministers, headed by the premier himself, a man of wise views and unimpeachable honour, had learned to view Lord Vargrave with dislike and distrust. They might have sought to get rid of him; but he was not one whom slight mortifications could induce to retire of his own accord, nor was the sarcastic and bold debater a person whose resentment and opposition could be despised. Lord Vargrave, moreover, had secured a party of his own,—a party more formidable than himself. He went largely into society; he was the special favourite of the female diplomats, whose voices at that time were powerful suffrages, and with whom, by a thousand links of gallantry and intrigue, the agreeable and courteous minister formed a close alliance. All that *salons* could do for him was done. Added to this, he was personally liked by his royal master; and the Court gave him their golden opinions; while the poorer, the corrupter, and the more bigoted portion of the ministry regarded him with avowed admiration.

In the House of Commons, too, and in the bureaucracy, he had no inconsiderable strength; for Lumley never contracted the habits of personal abruptness and discourtesy common to men in power who wish to keep applicants aloof. He was bland and conciliating to all men of ranks; his intellect and self-complacency raised him far above the petty jealousies that great men feel for rising men. Did any tyro earn the smallest distinction in parliament, no man sought his acquaintance so eagerly as Lord Vargrave; no man complimented, encouraged, "brought on" the new aspirants of his party with so hearty a good will.

Such a minister could not fail of having devoted followers among the able, the ambitious, and the vain. It must also be confessed that Lord Vargrave neglected no baser and less justifiable means to cement his power by placing it on the sure rock of self-interest. No jobbing was too gross for him. He was shamefully corrupt in the disposition of his patronage; and no rebuffs, no taunts from his official brethren, could restrain him from urging the claims of any of his creatures upon the public purse. His followers regarded this charitable selfishness as the stanchness and zeal of friendship; and the ambition of hundreds was wound up in the ambition of the unprincipled minister.

But besides the notoriety of his public corruption, Lord Vargrave was secretly suspected by some of personal dishonesty,—suspected of selling his State information to stock-jobbers, of having pecuniary interests in some of the claims he urged with so obstinate a pertinacity. And though there was not the smallest evidence of such utter abandonment of honour, though it was probably but a calumnious whisper, yet the mere suspicion of such practices served to sharpen the aversion of his enemies, and justify the disgust of his rivals.

In this position now stood Lord Vargrave: supported by interested, but able and powerful partisans; hated in the country, feared by some of those with whom he served, despised by others, looked up to by the rest. It was a situation that less daunted than delighted him; for it seemed to render necessary and excuse the habits of scheming and manoeuvre which were so genial to his crafty and plotting temper. Like an ancient Greek, his spirit loved intrigue for intrigue's sake. Had it led to no end, it would still have been sweet to him as a means. He rejoiced to surround himself with the most complicated webs and meshes; to sit in the centre of a million plots. He cared not how rash and wild some of them were. He relied on his own ingenuity, promptitude, and habitual good fortune to make every spring he handled conducive to the purpose of the machine—SELF.

His last visit to Lady Vargrave, and his conversation with Evelyn, had left on his mind much dissatisfaction and fear. In the earlier years of his intercourse with Evelyn, his good humour, gallantry, and presents had not failed to attach the child to the agreeable and liberal visitor she had been taught to regard as a relation. It was only as she grew up to womanhood, and learned to comprehend the nature of the tie between them, that she shrank from his familiarity; and then only had he learned to doubt of the fulfilment of his uncle's wish. The last visit had increased this doubt to a painful apprehension. He saw that he was not loved; he saw that it required great address, and the absence of happier rivals, to secure to him the hand of Evelyn; and he cursed the duties and the schemes which necessarily kept him from her side. He had thought of persuading Lady Vargrave to let her come to London, where he could be ever at hand; and as the season was now set in, his representations on this head would appear sensible and just. But then again this was to incur greater dangers than those he would avoid. London!—a beauty and an heiress, in her first *debut* in London! What formidable admirers would flock around her! Vargrave shuddered to think of the gay, handsome, well-dressed, seductive young *elegans*, who might seem, to a girl of seventeen, suitors far more fascinating than the middle-aged politician. This was perilous; nor was this all: Lord Vargrave knew that in London—gaudy, babbling, and remorseless London—all that he could most wish to conceal from the young lady would be dragged to day. He had been the lover, not of one, but of a dozen women, for whom he did not care three straws, but whose favour had served to strengthen him in society, or whose influence made up for his own want of hereditary political connections. The manner in which he contrived to shake off these various Ariadnes, whenever it was advisable, was not the least striking proof of his diplomatic abilities. He never left them enemies. According to his own solution of the mystery, he took care never to play the gallant with Dulcineas under a certain age. "Middle-aged women," he was wont to say, "are very little different from middle-aged men; they see things sensibly, and take things coolly." Now Evelyn could not be three weeks, perhaps three days, in London, without learning of one or the other of these *liaisons*. What an excuse, if she sought one, to break with him! Altogether, Lord Vargrave was sorely perplexed, but not despondent. Evelyn's fortune was more than ever necessary to him, and Evelyn he was resolved to obtain since to that fortune she was an indispensable appendage.

## CHAPTER II

*YOU shall be Horace, and Tibullus I.—POPE.*

LORD VARGRAVE was disturbed from his revery by the entrance of the Earl of Saxingham.

"You are welcome!" said Lumley, "welcome!—the very man I wished to see."

Lord Saxingham, who was scarcely altered since we met with him in the last series of this work, except that he had grown somewhat paler and thinner, and that his hair had changed from iron-gray to snow-white, threw himself in the armchair beside Lumley, and replied,—

"Vargrave, it is really unpleasant, our finding ourselves always thus controlled by our own partisans. I do not understand this new-fangled policy, this squaring of measures to please the Opposition, and throwing sops to that many-headed monster called Public Opinion. I am sure it will end most mischievously."

"I am satisfied of it," returned Lord Vargrave. "All vigour and union seem to have left us; and if they carry the —— question against us, I know not what is to be done."

"For my part, I shall resign," said Lord Saxingham, doggedly; "it is the only alternative left to men of honour."

"You are wrong; I know another alternative."

"What is that?"

"Make a Cabinet of our own. Look ye, my dear lord; you been ill-used; your high character, your long experience, are treated with contempt. It is an affront to you—the situation you hold. You, Privy Seal!—you ought to be Premier; ay, and, if you are ruled by me, Premier you shall be yet."

Lord Saxingham coloured, and breathed hard.

"You have often hinted at this before, Lumley; but you are so partial, so friendly."

"Not at all. You saw the leading article in the —— to-day? That will be followed up by two evening papers within five hours of this time. We have strength with the Press, with the Commons, with the Court,—only let us hold fast together. This —— question, by which they hope to get rid of us, shall destroy them. You shall be Prime Minister before the year is over—by Heaven, you shall!—and then, I suppose, I too may be admitted to the Cabinet!"

"But how?—how, Lumley? You are too rash, too daring."

"It has not been my fault hitherto,—but boldness is caution in our circumstances. If they throw us out now, I see the inevitable march of events,—we shall be out for years, perhaps for life. The Cabinet will recede more and more from our principles, our party. Now is the time for a determined stand; now can we make or mar ourselves. I will not resign; the king is with us; our strength shall be known. These haughty imbeciles shall fall into the trap they have dug for us."

Lumley spoke warmly, and with the confidence of a mind firmly assured of success. Lord Saxingham was moved; bright visions flashed across him,—the premiership, a dukedom. Yet he was old and childless, and his honours would die with the last lord of Saxingham!

"See," continued Lumley, "I have calculated our resources as accurately as an electioneering agent would cast up the list of voters. In the Press, I have secured —— and ——, and in the Commons we have the subtle ——, and the vigour of ——, and the popular name of ——, and all the boroughs of ——; in the Cabinet we have ——, and at Court you know our strength. Let us choose our moment; a sudden *coup*, an interview with the king, statement of our conscientious scruples to this atrocious measure. I know the vain, stiff mind of the premier; *he* will lose temper, he will tender his resignation; to his astonishment, it will be accepted. You will be sent for; we will dissolve parliament; we will strain every nerve in the elections; we shall succeed, I know we shall. But be silent in the meanwhile, be cautious: let not a word escape you, let them think us beaten; lull

suspicion asleep; let us lament our weakness, and hint, only hint at our resignation, but with assurances of continued support. I know how to blind them, if you leave it to me."

The weak mind of the old earl was as a puppet in the hands of his bold kinsman. He feared one moment, hoped another; now his ambition was flattered, now his sense of honour was alarmed. There was something in Lumley's intrigue to oust the government with which he served that had an appearance of cunning and baseness, of which Lord Saxingham, whose personal character was high, by no means approved. But Vargrave talked him over with consummate address, and when they parted, the earl carried his head two inches higher,—he was preparing himself for his rise in life.

"That is well! that is well!" said Lumley, rubbing his hands when he was left alone: "the old driveller will be my *locum tenens*, till years and renown enable me to become his successor. Meanwhile, I shall be really what he will be in name."

Here Lord Vargrave's well-fed servant, now advanced to the dignity of own gentleman and house-steward, entered the room with a letter; it had a portentous look; it was wafered, the paper was blue, the hand clerklike, there was no envelope; it bore its infernal origin on the face of it,—IT WAS A DUN'S.

Lumley opened the epistle with an impatient pshaw! The man, a silversmith (Lumley's plate was much admired!) had applied for years in vain; the amount was large, and execution was threatened! An execution!—it is a trifle to a rich man; but no trifle to one suspected of being poor, one straining at that very moment at so high an object, one to whom public opinion was so necessary, one who knew that nothing but his title, and scarcely that, saved him from the reputation of an adventurer! He must again have recourse to the money-lenders,—his small estate was long since too deeply mortgaged to afford new security. Usury, usury, again!—he knew its price, and he sighed—but what was to be done?

"It is but for a few months, a few months, and Evelyn must be mine. Saxingham has already lent me what he can; but he is embarrassed. This d——d office, what a tax it is! and the rascals say we are too well paid! I, too, who could live happy in a garret, if this purse-proud England would but allow one to exist within one's income. My fellow-trustee, the banker, my uncle's old correspondent—all, well thought of! He knows the conditions of the will; he knows that, at the worst, I must have thirty thousand pounds, if I live a few months longer. I will go to him."

## CHAPTER III

*ANIMUM nunc hoc celerem, nunc dividit illuc.*<sup>8</sup>—VIRGIL.

THE late Mr. Templeton had been a banker in a provincial town, which was the centre of great commercial and agricultural activity and enterprise. He had made the bulk of his fortune in the happy days of paper currency and war. Besides his country bank he had a considerable share in a metropolitan one of some eminence. At the time of his marriage with the present Lady Vargrave he retired altogether from business, and never returned to the place in which his wealth had been amassed. He had still kept up a familiar acquaintance with the principal and senior partner of the metropolitan bank I have referred to; for he was a man who always loved to talk about money matters with those who understood them. This gentleman, Mr. Gustavus Douce, had been named, with Lumley, joint trustee to Evelyn's fortune. They had full powers to invest it in whatever stock seemed most safe or advantageous. The trustees appeared well chosen, as one, being destined to share the fortune, would have the deepest interest in its security; and the other, from his habits and profession, would be a most excellent adviser.

Of Mr. Douce, Lord Vargrave had seen but little; they were not thrown together. But Lord Vargrave, who thought every rich man might, some time or other, become a desirable acquaintance, regularly asked him once every year to dinner; and twice in return he had dined with Mr. Douce, in one of the most splendid villas, and off some of the most splendid plate it had ever been his fortune to witness and to envy!—so that the little favour he was about to ask was but a slight return for Lord Vargrave's condescension.

He found the banker in his private sanctum, his carriage at the door; for it was just four o'clock, an hour in which Mr. Douce regularly departed to Caserta, as his aforesaid villa was somewhat affectedly styled.

Mr. Douce was a small man, a nervous man; he did not seem quite master of his own limbs: when he bowed he seemed to be making you a present of his legs; when he sat down, he twitched first on one side, then on the other, thrust his hands into his pockets, then took them out, and looked at them, as if in astonishment, then seized upon a pen, by which they were luckily provided with incessant occupation. Meanwhile, there was what might fairly be called a constant play of countenance: first he smiled, then looked grave; now raised his eyebrows, till they rose like rainbows, to the horizon of his pale, straw-coloured hair; and next darted them down, like an avalanche, over the twinkling, restless, fluttering, little blue eyes, which then became almost invisible. Mr. Douce had, in fact, all the appearance of a painfully shy man, which was the more strange, as he had the reputation of enterprise, and even audacity, in the business of his profession, and was fond of the society of the great.

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<sup>8</sup> "Now this, now that, distracts the active mind."

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