

Braddon Mary Elizabeth

John Marchmont's Legacy.

Volume 1 of

3



Mary Braddon
John Marchmont's
Legacy. Volume 1 of 3

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**Braddon M. E.
Mary Elizabeth
John Marchmont's
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**VOLUME I.
CHAPTER I.**

THE MAN WITH THE BANNER

The history of Edward Arundel, second son of Christopher Arundel Dangerfield Arundel, of Dangerfield Park, Devonshire, began on a certain dark winter's night upon which the lad, still a schoolboy, went with his cousin, Martin Mostyn, to witness a blank-verse tragedy at one of the London theatres.

There are few men who, looking back at the long story of their lives, cannot point to one page in the record of the past at which the actual history of life began. The page may come in the very middle of the book, perhaps; perhaps almost at the end. But let it come where it will, it is, after all, only the actual commencement. At an appointed hour in man's existence, the overture which has been going on ever since he was born is brought to a sudden

close by the sharp vibration of the prompter's signal-bell; the curtain rises, and the drama of life begins. Very insignificant sometimes are the first scenes of the play, – common-place, trite, wearisome; but watch them closely, and interwoven with every word, dimly recognisable in every action, may be seen the awful hand of Destiny. The story has begun: already we, the spectators, can make vague guesses at the plot, and predicate the solemn climax; it is only the actors who are ignorant of the meaning of their several parts, and who are stupidly reckless of the obvious catastrophe.

The story of young Arundel's life began when he was a light-hearted, heedless lad of seventeen, newly escaped for a brief interval from the care of his pastors and masters.

The lad had come to London on a Christmas visit to his father's sister, a worldly-minded widow, with a great many sons and daughters, and an income only large enough to enable her to keep up the appearances of wealth essential to the family pride of one of the Arundels of Dangerfield.

Laura Arundel had married a Colonel Mostyn, of the East India Company's service, and had returned from India after a wandering life of some years, leaving her dead husband behind her, and bringing away with her five daughters and three sons, most of whom had been born under canvas.

Mrs. Mostyn bore her troubles bravely, and contrived to do more with her pension, and an additional income of four hundred a year from a small fortune of her own, than the

most consummate womanly management can often achieve. Her house in Montague Square was elegantly furnished, her daughters were exquisitely dressed, her sons sensibly educated, her dinners well cooked. She was not an agreeable woman; she was perhaps, if any thing, too sensible, – so very sensible as to be obviously intolerant of anything like folly in others. She was a good mother; but by no means an indulgent one. She expected her sons to succeed in life, and her daughters to marry rich men; and would have had little patience with any disappointment in either of these reasonable expectations. She was attached to her brother Christopher Arundel, and she was very well pleased to spend the autumn months at Dangerfield, where the hunting-breakfasts gave her daughters an excellent platform for the exhibition of charming demi-toilettes and social and domestic graces, perhaps more dangerous to the susceptible hearts of rich young squires than the fascinations of a *valse à deux temps* or an Italian scena.

But the same Mrs. Mostyn, who never forgot to keep up her correspondence with the owner of Dangerfield Park, utterly ignored the existence of another brother, a certain Hubert Arundel, who had, perhaps, much more need of her sisterly friendship than the wealthy Devonshire squire. Heaven knows, the world seemed a lonely place to this younger son, who had been educated for the Church, and was fain to content himself with a scanty living in one of the dullest and dampest towns in fenny Lincolnshire. His sister might have very easily made life much more pleasant to the Rector of Swampington and his

only daughter; but Hubert Arundel was a great deal too proud to remind her of this. If Mrs. Mostyn chose to forget him, – the brother and sister had been loving friends and dear companions long ago, under the beeches at Dangerfield, – she was welcome to do so. She was better off than he was; and it is to be remarked, that if A's income is three hundred a year, and B's a thousand, the chances are as seven to three that B will forget any old intimacy that may have existed between himself and A. Hubert Arundel had been wild at college, and had put his autograph across so many oblong slips of blue paper, acknowledging value received that had been only half received, that by the time the claims of all the holders of these portentous morsels of stamped paper had been satisfied, the younger son's fortune had melted away, leaving its sometime possessor the happy owner of a pair of pointers, a couple of guns by crack makers, a good many foils, single-sticks, boxing-gloves, wire masks, basket helmets, leathern leg-guards, and other paraphernalia, a complete set of the old *Sporting Magazine*, from 1792 to the current year, bound in scarlet morocco, several boxes of very bad cigars, a Scotch terrier, and a pipe of undrinkable port.

Of all these possessions, only the undrinkable port now remained to show that Hubert Arundel had once had a decent younger son's fortune, and had succeeded most admirably in making ducks and drakes of it. The poor about Swampington believed in the sweet red wine, which had been specially concocted for Israelitish dealers in jewelry, cigars, pictures,

wines, and specie. The Rector's pensioners smacked their lips over the mysterious liquid and confidently affirmed that it did them more good than all the doctor's stuff the parish apothecary could send them. Poor Hubert Arundel was well content to find that at least this scanty crop of corn had grown up from the wild oats he had sown at Cambridge. The wine pleased the poor creatures who drank it, and was scarcely likely to do them any harm; and there was a reasonable prospect that the last bottle would by-and-by pass out of the rectory cellars, and with it the last token of that bitterly regretted past.

I have no doubt that Hubert Arundel felt the sting of his only sister's neglect, as only a poor and proud man can feel such an insult; but he never let any confession of this sentiment escape his lips; and when Mrs. Mostyn, being seized with a fancy for doing this forgotten brother a service, wrote him a letter of insolent advice, winding up with an offer to procure his only child a situation as nursery governess, the Rector of Swampington only crushed the missive in his strong hand, and flung it into his study-fire, with a muttered exclamation that sounded terribly like an oath.

"A *nursery* governess!" he repeated, savagely; "yes; an underpaid drudge, to teach children their A B C, and mend their frocks and make their pinafores. I should like Mrs. Mostyn to talk to my little Livy for half an hour. I think my girl would have put the lady down so completely by the end of that time, that we should never hear any more about nursery governesses."

He laughed bitterly as he repeated the obnoxious phrase; but his laugh changed to a sigh.

Was it strange that the father should sigh as he remembered how he had seen the awful hand of Death fall suddenly upon younger and stronger men than himself? What if he were to die, and leave his only child unmarried? What would become of her, with her dangerous gifts, with her fatal dowry of beauty and intellect and pride?

"But she would never do any thing wrong," the father thought. "Her religious principles are strong enough to keep her right under any circumstances, in spite of any temptation. Her sense of duty is more powerful than any other sentiment. She would never be false to that; she would never be false to that."

In return for the hospitality of Dangerfield Park, Mrs. Mostyn was in the habit of opening her doors to either Christopher Arundel or his sons, whenever any one of the three came to London. Of course she infinitely preferred seeing Arthur Arundel, the eldest son and heir, seated at her well-spread table, and flirting with one of his pretty cousins, than to be bored with his rackets younger brother, a noisy lad of seventeen, with no better prospects than a commission in her Majesty's service, and a hundred and fifty pounds a year to eke out his pay; but she was, notwithstanding, graciously pleased to invite Edward to spend his Christmas holidays in her comfortable household; and it was thus it came to pass that on the 29th of December, in the year 1838, the story of Edward Arundel's life began in a stage-box at

Drury Lane Theatre.

The box had been sent to Mrs. Mostyn by the fashionable editor of a fashionable newspaper; but that lady and her daughters being previously engaged, had permitted the two boys to avail themselves of the editorial privilege.

The tragedy was the dull production of a distinguished literary amateur, and even the great actor who played the principal character could not make the performance particularly enlivening. He certainly failed in impressing Mr. Edward Arundel, who flung himself back in his chair and yawned dolefully during the earlier part of the entertainment.

"It ain't particularly jolly, is it, Martin?" he said naïvely, "Let's go out and have some oysters, and come in again just before the pantomime begins."

"Mamma made me promise that we wouldn't leave the theatre till we left for good, Ned," his cousin answered; "and then we're to go straight home in a cab."

Edward Arundel sighed.

"I wish we hadn't come till half-price, old fellow," he said drearily. "If I'd known it was to be a tragedy, I wouldn't have come away from the Square in such a hurry. I wonder why people write tragedies, when nobody likes them."

He turned his back to the stage, and folded his arms upon the velvet cushion of the box preparatory to indulging himself in a deliberate inspection of the audience. Perhaps no brighter face looked upward that night towards the glare and glitter of the

great chandelier than that of the fair-haired lad in the stage-box. His candid blue eyes beamed with a more radiant sparkle than any of the myriad lights in the theatre; a nimbus of golden hair shone about his broad white forehead; glowing health, careless happiness, truth, good-nature, honesty, boyish vivacity, and the courage of a young lion, – all were expressed in the fearless smile, the frank yet half-defiant gaze. Above all, this lad of seventeen looked especially what he was, – a thorough gentleman. Martin Mostyn was prim and effeminate, precociously tired of life, precociously indifferent to everything but his own advantage; but the Devonshire boy's talk was still fragrant with the fresh perfume of youth and innocence, still gay with the joyous recklessness of early boyhood. He was as impatient for the noisy pantomime overture, and the bright troops of fairies in petticoats of spangled muslin, as the most inveterate cockney cooling his snub-nose against the iron railing of the gallery. He was as ready to fall in love with the painted beauty of the ill-paid ballet-girls, as the veriest child in the wide circle of humanity about him. Fresh, untainted, unsuspecting, he looked out at the world, ready to believe in everything and everybody.

"How you do fidget, Edward!" whispered Martin Mostyn peevishly; "why don't you look at the stage? It's capital fun."

"Fun!"

"Yes; I don't mean the tragedy you know, but the supernumeraries. Did you ever see such an awkward set of fellows in all your life? There's a man there with weak legs and a

heavy banner, that I've been watching all the evening. He's more fun than all the rest of it put together."

Mr. Mostyn, being of course much too polite to point out the man in question, indicated him with a twitch of his light eyebrows; and Edward Arundel, following that indication, singled out the banner-holder from a group of soldiers in medieval dress, who had been standing wearily enough upon one side of the stage during a long, strictly private and confidential dialogue between the princely hero of the tragedy and one of his accommodating satellites. The lad uttered a cry of surprise as he looked at the weak-legged banner-holder.

Mr. Mostyn turned upon his cousin with some vexation.

"I can't help it, Martin," exclaimed young Arundel; "I can't be mistaken – yes – poor fellow, to think that he should come to this! – you haven't forgotten him, Martin, surely?"

"Forgotten what – forgotten whom? My dear Edward, what *do* you mean?"

"John Marchmont, the poor fellow who used to teach us mathematics at Vernon's; the fellow the governor sacked because –"

"Well, what of him?"

"The poor chap with the banner!" exclaimed the boy, in a breathless whisper; "don't you see, Martin? didn't you recognise him? It's Marchmont, poor old Marchmont, that we used to chaff, and that the governor sacked because he had a constitutional cough, and wasn't strong enough for his work."

"Oh, yes, I remember him well enough," Mr. Mostyn answered, indifferently. "Nobody could stand his cough, you know; and he was a vulgar fellow, into the bargain."

"He wasn't a vulgar fellow," said Edward indignantly; – "there, there's the curtain down again; – he belonged to a good family in Lincolnshire, and was heir-presumptive to a stunning fortune. I've heard him say so twenty times."

Martin Mostyn did not attempt to repress an involuntary sneer, which curled his lips as his cousin spoke.

"Oh, I dare say you've heard *him* say so, my dear boy," he murmured superciliously.

"Ah, and it was true," cried Edward; "he wasn't a fellow to tell lies; perhaps he'd have suited Mr. Vernon better if he had been. He had bad health, and was weak, and all that sort of thing; but he wasn't a snob. He showed me a signet-ring once that he used to wear on his watch-chain –"

"A *silver* watch-chain," simpered Mr. Mostyn, "just like a carpenter's."

"Don't be such a supercilious cad, Martin. He was very kind to me, poor Marchmont; and I know I was always a nuisance to him, poor old fellow; for you know I never could get on with Euclid. I'm sorry to see him here. Think, Martin, what an occupation for him! I don't suppose he gets more than nine or ten shillings a week for it."

"A shilling a night is, I believe, the ordinary remuneration of a stage-soldier. They pay as much for the real thing as for the

sham, you see; the defenders of our country risk their lives for about the same consideration. Where are you going, Ned?"

Edward Arundel had left his place, and was trying to undo the door of the box.

"To see if I can get at this poor fellow."

"You persist in declaring, then, that the man with the weak legs is our old mathematical drudge? Well, I shouldn't wonder. The fellow was coughing all through the five acts, and that's uncommonly like Marchmont. You're surely not going to renew your acquaintance with him?"

But young Arundel had just succeeded in opening the door, and he left the box without waiting to answer his cousin's question. He made his way very rapidly out of the theatre, and fought manfully through the crowds who were waiting about the pit and gallery doors, until he found himself at the stage-entrance. He had often looked with reverent wonder at the dark portal; but he had never before essayed to cross the sacred threshold. But the guardian of the gate to this theatrical paradise, inhabited by fairies at a guinea a week, and baronial retainers at a shilling a night, is ordinarily a very inflexible individual, not to be corrupted by any mortal persuasion, and scarcely corruptible by the more potent influence of gold or silver. Poor Edward's half-a-crown had no effect whatever upon the stern door-keeper, who thanked him for his donation, but told him that it was against his orders to let anybody go up-stairs.

"But I want to see some one so particularly," the boy said

eagerly. "Don't you think you could manage it for me, you know? He's an old friend of mine, – one of the supernu – what's-its-names?" added Edward, stumbling over the word. "He carried a banner in the tragedy, you know; and he's got such an awful cough, poor chap."

"Ze man who garried ze panner vith a gough," said the door-keeper reflectively. He was an elderly German, and had kept guard at that classic doorway for half-a-century or so; "Parking Cheremiah."

"Barking Jeremiah!"

"Yes, sir. They gall him Parking because he's berbetually goughin' his poor veag head off; and they gall him Cheremiah because he's always belangholy."

"Oh, do let me see him," cried Mr. Edward Arundel. "I know you can manage it; so do, that's a good fellow. I tell you he's a friend of mine, and quite a gentleman too. Bless you, there isn't a move in mathematics he isn't up to; and he'll come into a fortune some of these days –"

"Yaase," interrupted the door-keeper, sarcastically, "Zey bake von of him pegause off dad."

"And can I see him?"

"I phill dry and vind him vor you. Here, you Chim," said the door-keeper, addressing a dirty youth, who had just nailed an official announcement of the next morning's rehearsal upon the back of a stony-hearted swing-door, which was apt to jam the fingers of the uninitiated, – "vot is ze name off yat zuber vith ze

pad gough, ze man zay gall Parking."

"Oh, that's Morti-more."

"To you know if he's on in ze virsd zene?"

"Yes. He's one of the demons; but the scene's just over. Do you want him?"

"You gan dake ub zis young chendleman's gard do him, and dell him to slib town here if he has kod a vaid," said the door-keeper.

Mr. Arundel handed his card to the dirty boy.

"He'll come to me fast enough, poor fellow," he muttered. "I usen't to chaff him as the others did, and I'm glad I didn't, now."

Edward Arundel could not easily forget that one brief scrutiny in which he had recognised the wasted face of the schoolmaster's hack, who had taught him mathematics only two years before. Could there be anything more piteous than that degrading spectacle? The feeble frame, scarcely able to sustain that paltry one-sided banner of calico and tinsel; the two rude daubs of coarse vermilion upon the hollow cheeks; the black smudges that were meant for eyebrows; the wretched scrap of horsehair glued upon the pinched chin in dismal mockery of a beard; and through all this the pathetic pleading of large hazel eyes, bright with the unnatural lustre of disease, and saying perpetually, more plainly than words can speak, "Do not look at me; do not despise me; do not even pity me. It won't last long."

That fresh-hearted schoolboy was still thinking of this, when a wasted hand was laid lightly and tremulously on his arm, and

looking up he saw a man in a hideous mask and a tight-fitting suit of scarlet and gold standing by his side.

"I'll take off my mask in a minute, Arundel," said a faint voice, that sounded hollow and muffled within a cavern of pasteboard and wickerwork. "It was very good of you to come round; very, very good!"

"I was so sorry to see you here, Marchmont; I knew you in a moment, in spite of the disguise."

The supernumerary had struggled out of his huge head-gear by this time, and laid the fabric of papier-mâché and tinsel carefully aside upon a shelf. He had washed his face before putting on the mask, for he was not called upon to appear before a British public in martial semblance any more upon that evening. The pale wasted face was interesting and gentlemanly, not by any means handsome, but almost womanly in its softness of expression. It was the face of a man who had not yet seen his thirtieth birthday; who might never live to see it, Edward Arundel thought mournfully.

"Why do you do this, Marchmont?" the boy asked bluntly.

"Because there was nothing else left for me to do," the stage-demon answered with a sad smile. "I can't get a situation in a school, for my health won't suffer me to take one; or it won't suffer any employer to take me, for fear of my falling ill upon his hands, which comes to the same thing; so I do a little copying for the law-stationers, and this helps out that, and I get on as well as I can. I wouldn't so much mind if it wasn't for – "

He stopped suddenly, interrupted by a paroxysm of coughing.

"If it wasn't for whom, old fellow?"

"My poor little girl; my poor little motherless Mary."

Edward Arundel looked grave, and perhaps a little ashamed of himself. He had forgotten until this moment that his old tutor had been left a widower at four-and-twenty, with a little daughter to support out of his scanty stipend.

"Don't be down-hearted, old fellow," the lad whispered, tenderly; "perhaps I shall be able to help you, you know. And the little girl can go down to Dangerfield; I know my mother would take care of her, and will keep her there till you get strong and well. And then you might start a fencing-room, or a shooting-gallery, or something of that sort, at the West End; and I'd come to you, and bring lots of fellows to you, and you'd get on capitally, you know."

Poor John Marchmont, the asthmatic supernumerary, looked perhaps the very last person in the world whom it could be possible to associate with a pair of foils, or a pistol and a target; but he smiled faintly at his old pupil's enthusiastic talk.

"You were always a good fellow, Arundel," he said, gravely. "I don't suppose I shall ever ask you to do me a service; but if, by-and-by, this cough makes me knock under, and my little Polly should be left – I – I think you'd get your mother to be kind to her, – wouldn't you, Arundel?"

A picture rose before the supernumerary's weary eyes as he said this; the picture of a pleasant lady whose description he

had often heard from the lips of a loving son, a rambling old mansion, wide-spreading lawns, and long arcades of oak and beeches leading away to the blue distance. If this Mrs. Arundel, who was so tender and compassionate and gentle to every red-cheeked cottage-girl who crossed her pathway, – Edward had told him this very often, – would take compassion also upon this little one! If she would only condescend to see the child, the poor pale neglected flower, the fragile lily, the frail exotic blossom, that was so cruelly out of place upon the bleak pathways of life!

"If that's all that troubles you," young Arundel cried eagerly, "you may make your mind easy, and come and have some oysters. We'll take care of the child. I'll adopt her, and my mother shall educate her, and she shall marry a duke. Run away, now, old fellow, and change your clothes, and come and have oysters, and stout out of the pewter."

Mr. Marchmont shook his head.

"My time's just up," he said; "I'm on in the next scene. It was very kind of you to come round, Arundel; but this isn't exactly the best place for you. Go back to your friends, my dear boy, and don't think any more of me. I'll write to you some day about little Mary."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," exclaimed the boy. "You'll give me your address instanter, and I'll come to see you the first thing to-morrow morning, and you'll introduce me to little Mary; and if she and I are not the best friends in the world, I shall never again boast of my successes with lovely woman. What's

the number, old fellow?"

Mr. Arundel had pulled out a smart morocco pocket-book and a gold pencil-case.

"Twenty-seven, Oakley Street, Lambeth. But I'd rather you wouldn't come, Arundel; your friends wouldn't like it."

"My friends may go hang themselves. I shall do as I like, and I'll be with you to breakfast, sharp ten."

The supernumerary had no time to remonstrate. The progress of the music, faintly audible from the lobby in which this conversation had taken place, told him that his scene was nearly on.

"I can't stop another moment. Go back to your friends, Arundel. Good night. God bless you!"

"Stay; one word. The Lincolnshire property – "

"Will never come to me, my boy," the demon answered sadly, through his mask; for he had been busy re-investing himself in that demoniac guise. "I tried to sell my reversion, but the Jews almost laughed in my face when they heard me cough. Good night."

He was gone, and the swing-door slammed in Edward Arundel's face. The boy hurried back to his cousin, who was cross and dissatisfied at his absence. Martin Mostyn had discovered that the ballet-girls were all either old or ugly, the music badly chosen, the pantomime stupid, the scenery a failure. He asked a few supercilious questions about his old tutor, but scarcely listened to Edward's answers; and was intensely

aggravated with his companion's pertinacity in sitting out the comic business – in which poor John Marchmont appeared and re-appeared; now as a well-dressed passenger carrying a parcel, which he deliberately sacrificed to the felonious propensities of the clown; now as a policeman, now as a barber, now as a chemist, now as a ghost; but always buffeted, or cajoled, or bonneted, or imposed upon; always piteous, miserable, and long-suffering; with arms that ached from carrying a banner through five acts of blank-verse weariness, with a head that had throbbled under the weight of a ponderous edifice of pasteboard and wicker, with eyes that were sore with the evil influence of blue-fire and gunpowder smoke, with a throat that had been poisoned by sulphurous vapours, with bones that were stiff with the playful pummelling of clown and pantaloon; and all for – a shilling a night!

CHAPTER II.

LITTLE MARY

Poor John Marchmont had given his address unwillingly enough to his old pupil. The lodging in Oakley Street was a wretched back-room upon the second-floor of a house whose lower regions were devoted to that species of establishment commonly called a "ladies' wardrobe." The poor gentleman, the teacher of mathematics, the law-writer, the Drury-Lane supernumerary, had shrunk from any exposure of his poverty; but his pupil's imperious good-nature had overridden every objection, and John Marchmont awoke upon the morning after the meeting at Drury-Lane to the rather embarrassing recollection that he was to expect a visitor to breakfast with him.

How was he to entertain this dashing, high-spirited young schoolboy, whose lot was cast in the pleasant pathways of life, and who was no doubt accustomed to see at his matutinal meal such luxuries as John Marchmont had only beheld in the fairy-like realms of comestible beauty exhibited to hungry foot-passengers behind the plate-glass windows of Italian warehouses?

"He has hams stewed in Madeira, and Perigord pies, I dare say, at his Aunt Mostyn's," John thought, despairingly. "What can I give him to eat?"

But John Marchmont, after the manner of the poor, was apt to over-estimate the extravagance of the rich. If he could have seen the Mostyn breakfast then preparing in the lower regions of Montague Square, he might have been considerably relieved; for he would have only beheld mild infusions of tea and coffee – in silver vessels, certainly – four French rolls hidden under a glistening damask napkin, six triangular fragments of dry toast, cut from a stale half-quartern, four new-laid eggs, and about half a pound of bacon cut into rashers of transcendental delicacy. Widow ladies who have daughters to marry do not plunge very deep into the books of Messrs. Fortnum and Mason.

"He used to like hot rolls when I was at Vernon's," John thought, rather more hopefully; "I wonder whether he likes hot rolls still?"

Pondering thus, Mr. Marchmont dressed himself, – very neatly, very carefully; for he was one of those men whom even poverty cannot rob of man's proudest attribute, his individuality. He made no noisy protest against the humiliations to which he was compelled to submit; he uttered no boisterous assertions of his own merit; he urged no clamorous demand to be treated as a gentleman in his day of misfortune; but in his own mild, undemonstrative way he did assert himself, quite as effectually as if he had raved all day upon the hardship of his lot, and drunk himself mad and blind under the pressure of his calamities. He never abandoned the habits which had been peculiar to him from his childhood. He was as neat and orderly in his second-

floor-back as he had been seven or eight years before in his simple apartments at Cambridge. He did not recognise that association which most men perceive between poverty and shirt-sleeves, or poverty and beer. He was content to wear threadbare cloth, but adhered most obstinately to a prejudice in favour of clean linen. He never acquired those lounging vagabond habits peculiar to some men in the day of trouble. Even amongst the supernumeraries of Drury Lane, he contrived to preserve his self-respect; if they nicknamed him Barking Jeremiah, they took care only to pronounce that playful sobriquet when the gentleman-super was safely out of hearing. He was so polite in the midst of his reserve, that the person who could wilfully have offended him must have been more unkindly than any of her Majesty's servants. It is true, that the great tragedian, on more than one occasion, apostrophised the weak-kneed banner-holder as "BEAST" when the super's cough had peculiarly disturbed his composure; but the same great man gave poor John Marchmont a letter to a distinguished physician, compassionately desiring the relief of the same pulmonary affection. If John Marchmont had not been prompted by his own instincts to struggle against the evil influences of poverty, he would have done battle sturdily for the sake of one who was ten times dearer to him than himself.

If he *could* have become a swindler or a reprobate, – it would have been about as easy for him to become either as to have burst at once, and without an hour's practice, into a full-blown Léotard or Olmar, – his daughter's influence would have held him back

as securely as if the slender arms twined tenderly about him had been chains of adamant forged by an enchanter's power.

How could he be false to his little one, this helpless child, who had been confided to him in the darkest hour of his existence; the hour in which his wife had yielded to the many forces arrayed against her in life's battle, and had left him alone in the world to fight for his little girl?

"If I were to die, I think Arundel's mother would be kind to her," John Marchmont thought, as he finished his careful toilet. "Heaven knows, I have no right to ask or expect such a thing; but Polly will be rich by-and-by, perhaps, and will be able to repay them."

A little hand knocked lightly at the door of his room while he was thinking this, and a childish voice said, "May I come in, papa?"

The little girl slept with one of the landlady's children, in a room above her father's. John opened the door, and let her in. The pale wintry sunshine, creeping in at the curtainless window near which Mr. Marchmont sat, shone full upon the child's face as she came towards him. It was a small, pale face, with singularly delicate features, a tiny straight nose, a pensive mouth, and large thoughtful hazel eyes. The child's hair fell loosely upon her shoulders; not in those corkscrew curls so much affected by mothers in the humbler walks of life, nor yet in those crisp undulations lately adopted in Belgravian nurseries; but in soft silken masses, only curling at the extreme

end of each tress. Miss Marchmont – she was always called Miss Marchmont in that Oakley Street household – wore her brown-stuff frock and scanty diaper pinafore as neatly as her father wore his threadbare coat and darned linen. She was very pretty, very lady-like, very interesting; but it was impossible to look at her without a vague feeling of pain, that was difficult to understand. You knew, by-and-by, why you were sorry for this little girl. She had never been a child. That divine period of perfect innocence, – innocence of all sorrow and trouble, falsehood and wrong, – that bright holiday-time of the soul, had never been hers. The ruthless hand of poverty had snatched away from her the gift which God had given her in her cradle; and at eight years old she was a woman, – a woman invested with all that is most beautiful amongst womanly attributes – love, tenderness, compassion, carefulness for others, unselfish devotion, uncomplaining patience, heroic endurance. She was a woman by reason of all these virtues; but she was no longer a child. At three years old she had bidden farewell for ever to the ignorant selfishness, the animal enjoyment of childhood, and had learned what it was to be sorry for poor papa and mamma; and from that first time of awakening to the sense of pity and love, she had never ceased to be the comforter of the helpless young husband who was so soon to be left wifeless.

John had been compelled to leave his child, in order to get a living for her and for himself in the hard service of Mr. Laurence Vernon, the principal of the highly select and expensive academy

at which Edward Arundel and Martin Mostyn had been educated. But he had left her in good hands; and when the bitter day of his dismissal came, he was scarcely as sorry as he ought to have been for the calamity which brought him back to his little Mary. It is impossible for any words of mine to tell how much he loved the child; but take into consideration his hopeless poverty, his sensitive and reserved nature, his utter loneliness, the bereavement that had cast a shadow upon his youth, and you will perhaps understand an affection that was almost morbid in its intensity, and which was reciprocated most fully by its object. The little girl loved her father *too much*. When he was with her, she was content to sit by his side, watching him as he wrote; proud to help him, if even by so much as wiping his pens or handing him his blotting-paper; happy to wait upon him, to go out marketing for him, to prepare his scanty meals, to make his tea, and arrange and re-arrange every object in the slenderly furnished second-floor back-room. They talked sometimes of the Lincolnshire fortune, – the fortune which *might* come to Mr. Marchmont, if three people, whose lives when Mary's father had last heard of them, were each worth three times his own feeble existence, would be so obliging as to clear the way for the heir-at-law, by taking an early departure to the churchyard. A more practical man than John Marchmont would have kept a sharp eye upon these three lives, and by some means or other contrived to find out whether number one was consumptive, or number two dropsical, or number three apoplectic; but John

was utterly incapable of any such Machiavellian proceeding. I think he sometimes beguiled his weary walks between Oakley Street and Drury Lane by the dreaming of such childish day-dreams as I should be almost ashamed to set down upon this sober page. The three lives might all happen to be riding in the same express upon the occasion of a terrible collision; but the poor fellow's gentle nature shrank appalled before the vision he had invoked. He could not sacrifice a whole train-full of victims, even for little Mary. He contented himself with borrowing a "Times" newspaper now and then, and looking at the top of the second column, with the faint hope that he should see his own name in large capitals, coupled with the announcement that by applying somewhere he might hear of something to his advantage. He contented himself with this, and with talking about the future to little Mary in the dim firelight. They spent long hours in the shadowy room, only lighted by the faint flicker of a pitiful handful of coals; for the commonest dip-candles are sevenpence-halfpenny a pound, and were dearer, I dare say, in the year '38. Heaven knows what splendid castles in the air these two simple-hearted creatures built for each other's pleasure by that comfortless hearth. I believe that, though the father made a pretence of talking of these things only for the amusement of his child, he was actually the more childish of the two. It was only when he left that fire-lit room, and went back into the hard, reasonable, commonplace world, that he remembered how foolish the talk was, and how it was impossible – yes, impossible

– that he, the law-writer and supernumerary, could ever come to be master of Marchmont Towers.

Poor little Mary was in this less practical than her father. She carried her day-dreams into the street, until all Lambeth was made glorious by their supernal radiance. Her imagination ran riot in a vision of a happy future, in which her father would be rich and powerful. I am sorry to say that she derived most of her ideas of grandeur from the New Cut. She furnished the drawing-room at Marchmont Towers from the splendid stores of an upholsterer in that thoroughfare. She laid flaming Brussels carpets upon the polished oaken floors which her father had described to her, and hung cheap satin damask of gorgeous colours before the great oriel windows. She put gilded vases of gaudy artificial flowers on the high carved mantel-pieces in the old rooms, and hung a disreputable gray parrot – for sale at a greengrocer's, and given to the use of bad language – under the stone colonnade at the end of the western wing. She appointed the tradespeople who should serve the far-away Lincolnshire household; the small matter of distance would, of course, never stand in the way of her gratitude and benevolence. Her papa would employ the civil greengrocer who gave such excellent halfpennyworths of watercresses; the kind buttermilk man who took such pains to wrap up a quarter of a pound of the best eighteenpenny fresh butter for the customer whom he always called "little lady;" the considerate butcher who never cut *more* than the three-quarters of a pound of rump-steak,

which made an excellent dinner for Mr. Marchmont and his little girl. Yes, all these people should be rewarded when the Lincolnshire property came to Mary's papa. Miss Marchmont had some thoughts of building a shop close to Marchmont Towers for the accommodating butcher, and of adopting the greengrocer's eldest daughter for her confidante and companion. Heaven knows how many times the little girl narrowly escaped being run over while walking the material streets in some ecstatic reverie such as this; but Providence was very careful of the motherless girl, and she always returned safely to Oakley Street with her pitiful little purchases of tea and sugar, butter and meat. You will say, perhaps, that at least these foolish day-dreams were childish; but I maintain still, that Mary's soul had long ago bade adieu to infancy, and that even in these visions she was womanly; for she was always thoughtful of others rather than of herself, and there was a great deal more of the practical business of life mingled with the silvery web of her fancies than there should have been so soon after her eighth birthday. At times, too, an awful horror would quicken the pulses of her loving heart as she heard the hacking sound of her father's cough; and a terrible dread would seize her, – the fear that John Marchmont might never live to inherit the Lincolnshire fortune. The child never said her prayers without adding a little extempore supplication, that she might die when her father died. It was a wicked prayer, perhaps; and a clergyman might have taught her that her life was in the hands of Providence; and that it might please Him who had

created her to doom her to many desolate years of loneliness; and that it was not for her, in her wretched and helpless ignorance, to rebel against His divine will. I think if the Archbishop of Canterbury had driven from Lambeth Palace to Oakley Street to tell little Mary this, he would have taught her in vain; and that she would have fallen asleep that night with the old prayer upon her lips, the fond foolish prayer that the bonds which love had woven so firmly might never be roughly broken by death.

Miss Marchmont heard the story of last night's meeting with great pleasure, though it must be owned she looked a little grave when she was told that the generous-hearted school-boy was coming to breakfast; but her gravity was only that of a thoughtful housekeeper, who ponders ways and means, and even while you are telling her the number and quality of your guests, sketches out a rough ground-plan of her dishes, considers the fish in season, and the soups most fitting to precede them, and balances the contending advantages of Palestine and Julienne or Hare and Italian.

"A 'nice' breakfast you say, papa," she said, when her father had finished speaking; "then we must have watercresses, *of course*."

"And hot rolls, Polly dear. Arundel was always fond of hot rolls."

"And hot rolls, four for threepence-halfpenny in the Cut." – (I am ashamed to say that this benighted child talked as deliberately of the "Cut" as she might have done of the "Row.") – "There'll

be one left for tea, papa; for we could never eat four rolls. They'll take *such* a lot of butter, though."

The little housekeeper took out an antediluvian bead-purse, and began to examine her treasury. Her father handed all his money to her, as he would have done to his wife; and Mary doled him out the little sums he wanted, – money for half an ounce of tobacco, money for a pint of beer. There were no penny papers in those days, or what a treat an occasional "Telegraph" would have been to poor John Marchmont!

Mary had only one personal extravagance. She read novels, – dirty, bloated, ungainly volumes, – which she borrowed from a snuffy old woman in a little back street, who charged her the smallest hire ever known in the circulating-library business, and who admired her as a wonder of precocious erudition. The only pleasure the child knew in her father's absence was the perusal of these dingy pages; she neglected no duty, she forgot no tender office of ministering care for the loved one who was absent; but when all the little duties had been finished, how delicious it was to sit down to "Madeleine the Deserted," or "Cosmo the Pirate," and to lose herself far away in illimitable regions, peopled by wandering princesses in white satin, and gentlemanly bandits, who had been stolen from their royal fathers' halls by vengeful hordes of gipsies. During these early years of poverty and loneliness, John Marchmont's daughter stored up, in a mind that was morbidly sensitive rather than strong, a terrible amount of dim poetic sentiment; the possession of which is scarcely,

perhaps, the best or safest dower for a young lady who has life's journey all before her.

At half-past nine o'clock, all the simple preparations necessary for the reception of a visitor had been completed by Mr. Marchmont and his daughter. All vestiges of John's bed had disappeared; leaving, it is true, rather a suspicious-looking mahogany chest of drawers to mark the spot where once a bed had been. The window had been opened, the room aired and dusted, a bright little fire burned in the shining grate, and the most brilliant of tin tea-kettles hissed upon the hob. The white table-cloth was darned in several places; but it was a remnant of the small stock of linen with which John had begun married life; and the Irish damask asserted its superior quality, in spite of many darns, as positively as Mr. Marchmont's good blood asserted itself in spite of his shabby coat. A brown teapot full of strong tea, a plate of French rolls, a pat of fresh butter, and a broiled haddock, do not compose a very epicurean repast; but Mary Marchmont looked at the humble breakfast as a prospective success.

"We could have haddocks every day at Marchmont Towers, couldn't we, papa?" she said naïvely.

But the little girl was more than delighted when Edward Arundel dashed up the narrow staircase, and burst into the room, fresh, radiant, noisy, splendid, better dressed even than the waxen preparations of elegant young gentlemen exhibited at the portal of a great outfitter in the New Cut, and yet not at all like

either of those red-lipped types of fashion. How delighted the boy declared himself with every thing! He had driven over in a cabriolet, and he was awfully hungry, he informed his host. The rolls and watercresses disappeared before him as if by magic; little Mary shivered at the slashing cuts he made at the butter; the haddock had scarcely left the gridiron before it was no more.

"This is ten times better than Aunt Mostyn's skinny breakfasts," the young gentleman observed candidly. "You never get enough with her. Why does she say, 'You won't take another egg, will you, Edward?' if she wants me to have one? You should see our hunting-breakfasts at Dangerfield, Marchmont. Four sorts of claret, and no end of Moselle and champagne. You shall go to Dangerfield some day, to see my mother, Miss Mary."

He called her "Miss Mary," and seemed rather shy of speaking to her. Her womanliness impressed him in spite of himself. He had a fancy that she was old enough to feel the humiliation of her father's position, and to be sensitive upon the matter of the two-pair back; and he was sorry the moment after he had spoken of Dangerfield.

"What a snob I am!" he thought; "always bragging of home."

But Mr. Arundel was not able to stop very long in Oakley Street, for the supernumerary had to attend a rehearsal at twelve o'clock; so at half-past eleven John Marchmont and his pupil went out together, and little Mary was left alone to clear away the breakfast, and perform the rest of her household duties.

She had plenty of time before her, so she did not begin at

once, but sat upon a stool near the fender, gazing dreamily at the low fire.

"How good and kind he is!" she thought; "just like Cosmo, – only Cosmo was dark; or like Reginald Ravenscroft, – but then he was dark too. I wonder why the people in novels are always dark? How kind he is to papa! Shall we ever go to Dangerfield, I wonder, papa and I? Of course I wouldn't go without papa."

CHAPTER III.

ABOUT THE LINCOLNSHIRE PROPERTY

While Mary sat absorbed in such idle visions as these, Mr. Marchmont and his old pupil walked towards Waterloo Bridge together.

"I'll go as far as the theatre with you, Marchmont," the boy said; "it's my holidays now, you know, and I can do as I like. I am going to a private tutor in another month, and he's to prepare me for the army. I want you to tell me all about that Lincolnshire property, old boy. Is it anywhere near Swampington?"

"Yes; within nine miles."

"Goodness gracious me! Lord bless my soul! what an extraordinary coincidence! My uncle Hubert's Rector of Swampington – such a hole! I go there sometimes to see him and my cousin Olivia. Isn't she a stunner, though! Knows more Greek and Latin than I, and more mathematics than you. Could eat our heads off at any thing."

John Marchmont did not seem very much impressed by the coincidence that appeared so extraordinary to Edward Arundel; but, in order to oblige his friend, he explained very patiently and lucidly how it was that only three lives stood between him and the possession of Marchmont Towers, and all lands and tenements

appertaining thereto.

"The estate's a very large one," he said finally; "but the idea of *my* ever getting it is, of course, too preposterous."

"Good gracious me! I don't see that at all," exclaimed Edward with extraordinary vivacity. "Let me see, old fellow; if I understand your story right, this is how the case stands: your first cousin is the present possessor of Marchmont Towers; he has a son, fifteen years of age, who may or may not marry; only one son, remember. But he has also an uncle – a bachelor uncle, and your uncle, too – who, by the terms of your grandfather's will, must get the property before you can succeed to it. Now, this uncle is an old man: so of course *he'll* die soon. The present possessor himself is a middle-aged man; so I shouldn't think *he* can be likely to last long. I dare say he drinks too much port, or hunts, or something of that sort; goes to sleep after dinner, and does all manner of apoplectic things, I'll be bound. Then there's the son, only fifteen, and not yet marriageable; consumptive, I dare say. Now, will you tell me the chances are not six to six he dies unmarried? So you see, my dear old boy, you're sure to get the fortune; for there's nothing to keep you out of it, except – "

"Except three lives, the worst of which is better than mine. It's kind of you to look at it in this sanguine way, Arundel; but I wasn't born to be a rich man. Perhaps, after all, Providence has used me better than I think. I mightn't have been happy at Marchmont Towers. I'm a shy, awkward, humdrum fellow. If it wasn't for Mary's sake – "

"Ah, to be sure!" cried Edward Arundel. "You're not going to forget all about – Miss Marchmont!" He was going to say "little Mary," but had checked himself abruptly at the sudden recollection of the earnest hazel eyes that had kept wondering watch upon his ravages at the breakfast-table. "I'm sure Miss Marchmont's born to be an heiress. I never saw such a little princess."

"What!" demanded John Marchmont sadly, "in a darned pinafore and a threadbare frock?"

The boy's face flushed, almost indignantly, as his old master said this.

"You don't think I'm such a snob as to admire a lady" – he spoke thus of Miss Mary Marchmont, yet midway between her eighth and ninth birthday – "the less because she isn't rich? But of course your daughter will have the fortune by-and-by, even if –"

He stopped, ashamed of his want of tact; for he knew John would divine the meaning of that sudden pause.

"Even if I should die before Philip Marchmont," the teacher of mathematics answered, quietly. "As far as that goes, Mary's chance is as remote as my own. The fortune can only come to her in the event of Arthur dying without issue, or, having issue, failing to cut off the entail, I believe they call it."

"Arthur! that's the son of the present possessor?"

"Yes. If I and my poor little girl, who is delicate like her mother, should die before either of these three men, there is another who will stand in my shoes, and will look out perhaps

more eagerly than I have done for his chances of getting the property."

"Another!" exclaimed Mr. Arundel. "By Jove, Marchmont, it's the most complicated affair I ever heard of. It's worse than those sums you used to set me in barter: 'If A. sells B. 999 Stilton cheeses at 9 1/2_d_ a pound,' and all that sort of thing, you know. Do make me understand it, old fellow, if you can."

John Marchmont sighed.

"It's a wearisome story, Arundel," he said. "I don't know why I should bore you with it."

"But you don't bore me with it," cried the boy energetically. "I'm awfully interested in it, you know; and I could walk up and down here all day talking about it."

The two gentlemen had passed the Surrey toll-gate of Waterloo Bridge by this time. The South-Western Terminus had not been built in the year '38, and the bridge was about the quietest thoroughfare any two companions confidentially inclined could have chosen. The shareholders knew this, to their cost.

Perhaps Mr. Marchmont might have been beguiled into repeating the old story, which he had told so often in the dim firelight to his little girl; but the great clock of St. Paul's boomed forth the twelve ponderous strokes that told the hour of noon, and a hundred other steeples upon either side of the water made themselves clamorous with the same announcement.

"I must leave you, Arundel," the supernumerary said

hurriedly; he had just remembered that it was time for him to go and be browbeaten by a truculent stage-manager. "God bless you, my dear boy! It was very good of you to want to see me, and the sight of your fresh face has made me very happy. I *should* like you to understand all about the Lincolnshire property. God knows there's small chance of its ever coming to me or to my child; but when I am dead and gone, Mary will be left alone in the world, and it would be some comfort to me to know that she was not without *one* friend – generous and disinterested like you, Arundel, – who, if the chance *did* come, would see her righted."

"And so I would," cried the boy eagerly. His face flushed, and his eyes fired. He was a preux chevalier already, in thought, going forth to do battle for a hazel-eyed mistress.

"I'll *write* the story, Arundel," John Marchmont said; "I've no time to tell it, and you mightn't remember it either. Once more, good-bye; once more, God bless you!"

"Stop!" exclaimed Edward Arundel, flushing a deeper red than before, – he had a very boyish habit of blushing, – "stop, dear old boy. You must borrow this of me, please. I've lots of them. I should only spend it on all sorts of bilious things; or stop out late and get tipsy. You shall pay me with interest when you get Marchmont Towers. I shall come and see you again soon. Good-bye."

The lad forced some crumpled scrap of paper into his old tutor's hand, bolted through the toll-bar, and jumped into a cabriolet, whose high-stepping charger was dawdling along

Lancaster Place.

The supernumerary hurried on to Drury Lane as fast as his weak legs could carry him. He was obliged to wait for a pause in the rehearsal before he could find an opportunity of looking at the parting gift which his old pupil had forced upon him. It was a crumpled and rather dirty five-pound note, wrapped round two half-crowns, a shilling, and half-a-sovereign.

The boy had given his friend the last remnant of his slender stock of pocket-money. John Marchmont turned his face to the dark wing that sheltered him, and wept silently. He was of a gentle and rather womanly disposition, be it remembered; and he was in that weak state of health in which a man's eyes are apt to moisten, in spite of himself, under the influence of any unwonted emotion.

He employed a part of that afternoon in writing the letter which he had promised to send to his boyish friend: —

"MY DEAR ARUNDEL,

"My purpose in writing to you to-day is so entirely connected with the future welfare of my beloved and only child, that I shall carefully abstain from any subject not connected with her interests. I say nothing, therefore, respecting your conduct of this morning, which, together with my previous knowledge of your character, has decided me upon confiding to you the doubts and fears which have long tormented me upon the subject of my

darling's future.

"I am a doomed man, Arundel! The doctors have told me this; but they have told me also that, though I can never escape the sentence of death which was passed upon me long ago, I may live for some years if I live the careful life which only a rich man can lead. If I go on carrying banners and breathing sulphur, I cannot last long. My little girl will be left penniless, but not quite friendless; for there are humble people, relatives of her poor mother, who would help her kindly, I am sure, in their own humble way. The trials which I fear for my orphan girl are not so much the trials of poverty as the dangers of wealth. If the three men who, on my death, would alone stand between Mary and the Lincolnshire property die childless, my poor darling will become the only obstacle in the pathway of a man whom, I will freely own to you, I distrust.

"My father, John Marchmont, was the third of four brothers. The eldest, Philip, died leaving one son, also called Philip, and the present possessor of Marchmont Towers. The second, Marmaduke, is still alive, a bachelor. The third, John, left four children, of whom I alone survive. The fourth, Paul, left a son and two daughters. The son is an artist, exercising his profession now in London; one of the daughters is married to a parish surgeon, who practises at Stanfield, in Lincolnshire; the other is an old maid, and entirely dependent upon her brother.

"It is this man, Paul Marchmont the artist, whom I fear.

"Do not think me weak, or foolishly suspicious, Arundel,

when I tell you that the very thought of this man brings the cold sweat upon my forehead, and seems to stop the beating of my heart. I know that this is a prejudice, and an unworthy one. I do not believe Paul Marchmont is a good man; but I can assign no sufficient reason for my hatred and terror of him. It is impossible for you, a frank and careless boy, to realise the feelings of a man who looks at his only child, and remembers that she may soon be left, helpless and defenceless, to fight the battle of life with a bad man. Sometimes I pray to God that the Marchmont property may never come to my child after my death; for I cannot rid myself of the thought – may Heaven forgive me for its unworthiness! – that Paul Marchmont would leave no means untried, however foul, to wrest the fortune from her. I dare say worldly people would laugh at me for writing this letter to you, my dear Arundel; but I address myself to the best friend I have, – the only creature I know whom the influence of a bad man is never likely to corrupt. *Noblesse oblige!* I am not afraid that Edward Dangerfield Arundel will betray any trust, however foolish, that may have been confided to him.

"Perhaps, in writing to you thus, I may feel something of that blind hopefulness – amid the shipwreck of all that commonly gives birth to hope – which the mariner cast away upon some desert island feels, when he seals his simple story in a bottle, and launches it upon the waste of waters that close him in on every side. Before my little girl is four years older, you will be a man, Arundel – with a man's intellect, a man's courage, and, above

all, a man's keen sense of honour. So long as my darling remains poor, her humble friends will be strong enough to protect her; but if ever Providence should think fit to place her in a position of antagonism to Paul Marchmont, – for he would look upon any one as an enemy who stood between him and fortune, – she would need a far more powerful protector than any she could find amongst her poor mother's relatives. Will *you* be that protector, Edward Arundel? I am a drowning man, you see, and catch at the frailest straw that floats past me. I believe in you, Edward, as much as I distrust Paul Marchmont. If the day ever comes in which my little girl should have to struggle with this man, will you help her to fight the battle? It will not be an easy one.

"Subjoined to this letter I send you an extract from the copy of my grandfather's will, which will explain to you how he left his property. Do not lose either the letter or the extract. If you are willing to undertake the trust which I confide to you to-day, you may have need to refer to them after my death. The legacy of a child's helplessness is the only bequest which I can leave to the only friend I have.

"JOHN MARCHMONT

"27, OAKLEY STREET, LAMBETH,

"December 30_th_, 1838.

*** * * * ***

"EXTRACT FROM THE WILL OF PHILIP MARCHMONT, SENIOR, OF MARCHMONT TOWERS

"I give and devise all that my estate known as Marchmont Towers and appurtenances thereto belonging to the use of my eldest son Philip Marchmont during his natural life without impeachment of waste and from and after his decease then to the use of my grandson Philip the first son of my said son Philip during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste and after the decease of my said grandson Philip to the use of the first and every other son of my said grandson severally and successively according to their respective seniority in tail and for default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters

and daughter of my said grandson Philip as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and if all the daughters of my said grandson Philip except one shall die without issue or if there shall be but one such daughter then to the use of such one or only daughter in tail and in default of such issue then to the use of the second and every other son of my said eldest son severally and successively according to his respective seniority in tail and in default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said eldest son Philip as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and in default of such issue to the use of my second son Marmaduke and his assigns during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste and after his decease to the use of the first and every son of my said son Marmaduke severally and successively according to their respective seniorities in tail and for default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said son Marmaduke as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and if all the daughters of my said son Marmaduke except one shall die without issue or if there shall be but one such daughter then to the use of such one or only daughter in tail and in default of such issue then to the use of my third son John during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste and from and after his decease then to the use of my grandson John the first son of my said son John during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste

and after the decease of my said grandson John to the use of the first and every other son of my said grandson John severally and successively according to their respective seniority in tail and for default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said grandson John as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or among them in tail and if all the daughters of my said grandson John except one shall die without issue or if there shall be but one such daughter' [*This, you will see, is my little Mary*] 'then to the use of such one or only daughter in tail and in default of such issue then to the use of the second and every other son of my said third son John severally and successively according to his respective seniority in tail and in default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said third son John as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and in default of such issue to the use of my fourth son Paul during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste and from and after his decease then to the use of my grandson Paul the son of my said son Paul during his natural life without impeachment of waste and after the decease of my said grandson Paul to the use of the first and every other son of my said grandson severally and successively according to their respective seniority in tail and for default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said grandson Paul as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and if all the daughters of my said grandson Paul except one shall die

without issue or if there shall be but one such daughter then to the use of such one or only daughter in tail and in default of such issue then to the use of the second and every other son of my said fourth son Paul severally and successively according to his respective seniority in tail and in default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said fourth son Paul as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail,' &c. &c.

"P.S. – Then comes what the lawyers call a general devise to trustees, to preserve the contingent remainders before devised from being destroyed; but what that means, perhaps you can get somebody to tell you. I hope it may be some legal jargon to preserve my *very*contingent remainder."

* * * * *

The tone of Edward Arundel's answer to this letter was more characteristic of the writer than in harmony with poor John's solemn appeal.

"You dear, foolish old Marchmont," the lad wrote, "of course I shall take care of Miss Mary; and my mother shall adopt her, and she shall live at Dangerfield, and be educated with my sister Letitia, who has the jolliest French governess, and a German maid for conversation; and don't let Paul Marchmont try on any of his games with me, that's all! But what do you mean, you ridiculous old boy, by talking about dying, and drowning, and

shipwrecked mariners, and catching at straws, and all that sort of humbug, when you know very well that you'll live to inherit the Lincolnshire property, and that I'm coming to you every year to shoot, and that you're going to build a tennis-court, – of course there *is* a billiard-room, – and that you're going to have a stud of hunters, and be master of the hounds, and no end of bricks to

"Your ever devoted Roman countryman and lover,

"EDGARDO?"

"42, MONTAGUE SQUARE,

"December 31_{st}, 1838.

"P.S. – By-the-bye, don't you think a situation in a lawyer's office would suit you better than the T. R. D. L.? If you do, I think I could manage it. A happy new year to Miss Mary!"

* * * * *

It was thus that Mr. Edward Arundel accepted the solemn trust which his friend confided to him in all simplicity and good faith. Mary Marchmont herself was not more innocent in the ways of the world outside Oakley Street, the Waterloo Road, and the New Cut, than was the little girl's father; nothing seemed

more natural to him than to intrust the doubtful future of his only child to the bright-faced handsome boy, whose early boyhood had been unblemished by a mean sentiment or a dishonourable action. John Marchmont had spent three years in the Berkshire Academy at which Edward and his cousin, Martin Mostyn, had been educated; and young Arundel, who was far behind his kinsman in the comprehension of a problem in algebra, had been wise enough to recognise that paradox which Martin Mostyn could not understand – a gentleman in a shabby coat. It was thus that a friendship had arisen between the teacher of mathematics and his handsome pupil; and it was thus that an unreasoning belief in Edward Arundel had sprung up in John's simple mind.

"If my little girl were certain of inheriting the fortune," Mr. Marchmont thought, "I might find many who would be glad to accept my trust, and to serve her well and faithfully. But the chance is such a remote one. I cannot forget how the Jews laughed at me two years ago, when I tried to borrow money upon my reversionary interest. No! I must trust this brave-hearted boy, for I have no one else to confide in; and who else is there who would not ridicule my fear of my cousin Paul?"

Indeed, Mr. Marchmont had some reason to be considerably ashamed of his antipathy to the young artist working for his bread, and for the bread of his invalid mother and unmarried sister, in that bitter winter of '38; working patiently and hopefully, in despite of all discouragement, and content to live a joyless and monotonous life in a dingy lodging near Fitzroy

Square. I can find no excuse for John Marchmont's prejudice against an industrious and indefatigable young man, who was the sole support of two helpless women. Heaven knows, if to be adored by two women is any evidence of a man's virtue, Paul must have been the best of men; for Stephanie Marchmont, and her daughter Clarisse, regarded the artist with a reverential idolatry that was not without a tinge of romance. I can assign no reason, then, for John's dislike of his cousin. They had been schoolfellows at a wretched suburban school, where the children of poor people were boarded, lodged, and educated all the year round for a pitiful stipend of something under twenty pounds. One of the special points of the prospectus was the announcement that there were no holidays; for the jovial Christmas gatherings of merry faces, which are so delightful to the wealthy citizens of Bloomsbury or Tyburnia, take another complexion in poverty-stricken households, whose scantily-stocked larders can ill support the raids of rawboned lads clamorous for provender. The two boys had met at a school of this calibre, and had never met since. They may not have been the best friends, perhaps, at the classical academy; but their quarrels were by no means desperate. They may have rather freely discussed their several chances of the Lincolnshire property; but I have no romantic story to tell of a stirring scene in the humble schoolroom – no exciting record of deadly insult and deep vows of vengeance. No inkstand was ever flung by one boy into the face of the other; no savage blow from a horsewhip ever cut a fatal

scar across the brow of either of the cousins. John Marchmont would have been almost as puzzled to account for his objection to his kinsman, as was the nameless gentleman who so naïvely confessed his dislike of Dr. Fell. I fear that a great many of our likings and dislikings are too apt to be upon the Dr. Fell principle. Mr. Wilkie Collins's Basil could not tell *why* he fell madly in love with the lady whom it was his evil fortune to meet in an omnibus; nor why he entertained an uncomfortable feeling about the gentleman who was to be her destroyer. David Copperfield disliked Uriah Heep even before he had any substantial reason for objecting to the evil genius of Agnes Wickfield's father. The boy disliked the snake-like schemer of Canterbury because his eyes were round and red, and his hands clammy and unpleasant to the touch. Perhaps John Marchmont's reasons for his aversion to his cousin were about as substantial as those of Master Copperfield. It may be that the schoolboy disliked his comrade because Paul Marchmont's handsome grey eyes were a little too near together; because his thin and delicately chiselled lips were a thought too tightly compressed; because his cheeks would fade to an awful corpse-like whiteness under circumstances which would have brought the rushing life-blood, hot and red, into another boy's face; because he was silent and suppressed when it would have been more natural to be loud and clamorous; because he could smile under provocations that would have made another frown; because, in short, there was that about him which, let it be found where it will, always gives birth to suspicion, – MYSTERY!

So the cousins had parted, neither friends nor foes, to tread their separate roads in the unknown country, which is apt to seem barren and desolate enough to travellers who foot it in hobnailed boots considerably the worse for wear; and as the iron hand of poverty held John Marchmont even further back than Paul upon the hard road which each had to tread, the quiet pride of the teacher of mathematics most effectually kept him out of his kinsman's way. He had only heard enough of Paul to know that he was living in London, and working hard for a living; working as hard as John himself, perhaps; but at least able to keep afloat in a higher social position than the law-stationer's hack and the banner-holder of Drury Lane.

But Edward Arundel did not forget his friends in Oakley Street. The boy made a morning call upon his father's solicitors, Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and was so extremely eloquent in his needy friend's cause, as to provoke the good-natured laughter of one of the junior partners, who declared that Mr. Edward Arundel ought to wear a silk gown before he was thirty. The result of this interview was, that before the first month of the new year was out, John Marchmont had abandoned the classic banner and the demoniac mask to a fortunate successor, and had taken possession of a hard-seated, slim-legged stool in one of the offices of Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson, as copying and out-door clerk, at a salary of thirty shillings a week.

So little Mary entered now upon a golden age, in which her

evenings were no longer desolate and lonely, but spent pleasantly with her father in the study of such learning as was suited to her years, or perhaps rather to her capacity, which was far beyond her years; and on certain delicious nights, to be remembered ever afterwards, John Marchmont took his little girl to the gallery of one or other of the transpontine theatres; and I am sorry to say that my heroine – for she is to be my heroine by-and-by – sucked oranges, ate Abernethy biscuits, and cooled her delicate nose against the iron railing of the gallery, after the manner of the masses when they enjoy the British Drama.

But all this time John Marchmont was utterly ignorant of one rather important fact in the history of those three lives which he was apt to speak of as standing between him and Marchmont Towers. Young Arthur Marchmont, the immediate heir of the estate, had been shot to death upon the 1st of September, 1838, without blame to anyone or anything but his own boyish carelessness, which had induced him to scramble through a hedge with his fowling-piece, the costly present of a doating father, loaded and on full-cock. This melancholy event, which had been briefly recorded in all the newspapers, had never reached the knowledge of poor John Marchmont, who had no friends to busy themselves about his interests, or to rush eagerly to carry him any intelligence affecting his prosperity. Nor had he read the obituary notice respecting Marmaduke Marchmont, the bachelor, who had breathed his last stertorous breath in a fit of apoplexy exactly one twelvemonth before the day upon which Edward Arundel

breakfasted in Oakley Street.

CHAPTER IV. GOING AWAY

Edward Arundel went from Montague Square straight into the household of the private tutor of whom he had spoken, there to complete his education, and to be prepared for the onerous duties of a military life. From the household of this private tutor he went at once into a cavalry regiment; after sundry examinations, which were not nearly so stringent in the year one thousand eight hundred and forty, as they have since become. Indeed, I think the unfortunate young cadets who are educated upon the high-pressure system, and who are expected to give a synopsis of Portuguese political intrigue during the eighteenth century, a scientific account of the currents of the Red Sea, and a critical disquisition upon the comedies of Aristophanes as compared with those of Pedro Calderon de la Barca, not forgetting to glance at the effect of different ages and nationalities upon the respective minds of the two playwrights, within a given period of, say half-an-hour, – would have envied Mr. Arundel for the easy manner in which he obtained his commission in a distinguished cavalry regiment. Mr. Edward Arundel therefore inaugurated the commencement of the year 1840 by plunging very deeply into the books of a crack military-tailor in New Burlington Street, and by a visit to Dangerfield Park; where he went to make his

adieux before sailing for India, whither his regiment had just been ordered.

I do not doubt that Mrs Arundel was very sorrowful at this sudden parting with her yellow-haired younger son. The boy and his mother walked together in the wintry sunset under the leafless beeches at Dangerfield, and talked of the dreary voyage that lay before the lad; the arid plains and cruel jungles far away; perils by sea and perils by land; but across them all, Fame waving her white beckoning arms to the young soldier, and crying, "Come, conqueror that shall be! come, through trial and danger, through fever and famine, – come to your rest upon my bloodstained lap!" Surely this boy, being only just eighteen years of age, may be forgiven if he is a little romantic, a little over eager and impressionable, a little too confident that the next thing to going out to India as a sea-sick subaltern in a great transport-ship is coming home with the reputation of a Clive. Perhaps he may be forgiven, too, if, in his fresh enthusiasm, he sometimes forgot the shabby friend whom he had helped little better than a twelvemonth before, and the earnest hazel eyes that had shone upon him in the pitiful Oakley Street chamber. I do not say that he was utterly unmindful of his old teacher of mathematics. It was not in his nature to forget anyone who had need of his services; for this boy, so eager to be a soldier, was of the chivalrous temperament, and would have gone out to die for his mistress, or his friend, if need had been. He had received two or three grateful letters from John Marchmont;

and in these letters the lawyer's clerk had spoken pleasantly of his new life, and hopefully of his health, which had improved considerably, he said, since his resignation of the tragic banner and the pantomimic mask. Neither had Edward quite forgotten his promise of enlisting Mrs. Arundel's sympathies in aid of the motherless little girl. In one of these wintry walks beneath the black branches at Dangerfield, the lad had told the sorrowful story of his well-born tutor's poverty and humiliation.

"Only think, mother!" he cried at the end of the little history. "I saw the poor fellow carrying a great calico flag, and marching about at the heel of a procession, to be laughed at by the costermongers in the gallery; and I know that he belongs to a capital Lincolnshire family, and will come in for no end of money if he only lives long enough. But if he should die, mother, and leave his little girl destitute, you'll look after her, won't you?"

I don't know whether Mrs. Arundel quite entered into her son's ideas upon the subject of adopting Mary Marchmont, or whether she had any definite notion of bringing the little girl home to Dangerfield for the natural term of her life, in the event of the child being left an orphan. But she was a kind and charitable lady, and she scarcely cared to damp her boy's spirits by holding forth upon the doubtful wisdom of his adopting, or promising to adopt, any stray orphans who might cross his pathway.

"I hope the little girl may not lose her father, Edward," she said gently. "Besides, dear, you say that Mr. Marchmont tells you he has humble friends, who would take the child if anything

happened to him. He does not wish us to adopt the little girl; he only asks us to interest ourselves in her fate."

"And you will do that, mother darling?" cried the boy. "You will take an interest in her, won't you? You couldn't help doing so, if you were to see her. She's not like a child, you know, – not a bit like Letitia. She's as grave and quiet as you are, mother, – or graver, I think; and she looks like a lady, in spite of her poor, shabby pinafore and frock."

"Does she wear shabby frocks?" said the mother. "I could help her in that matter, at all events, Ned. I might send her a great trunk-full of Letitia's things: she outgrows them before they have been worn long enough to be shabby."

The boy coloured, and shook his head.

"It's very kind of you to think of it, mother dear; but I don't think that would quite answer," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because, you see, John Marchmont is a gentleman; and, you know, though he's so dreadfully poor now, he *is* heir to Marchmont Towers. And though he didn't mind doing any thing in the world to earn a few shillings a week, he mightn't like to take cast-off clothes."

So nothing more was to be said or done upon the subject.

Edward Arundel wrote his humble friend a pleasant letter, in which he told John that he had enlisted his mother's sympathy in Mary's cause, and in which he spoke in very glowing terms of the Indian expedition that lay before him.

"I wish I could come to say good-bye to you and Miss Mary before I go," he wrote; "but that's impossible. I go straight from here to Southampton by coach at the end of this month, and the *Auckland* sails on the 2nd of February. Tell Miss Mary I shall bring her home all kinds of pretty presents from Affghanistan, – ivory fans, and Cashmere shawls, and Chinese puzzles, and embroidered slippers with turned-up toes, and diamonds, and attar-of-roses, and suchlike; and remember that I expect you to write to me, and to give me the earliest news of your coming into the Lincolnshire property."

John Marchmont received this letter in the middle of January. He gave a despondent sigh as he refolded the boyish epistle, after reading it to his little girl.

"We haven't so many friends, Polly," he said, "that we should be indifferent to the loss of this one."

Mary Marchmont's cheek grew paler at her father's sorrowful speech. That imaginative temperament, which was, as I have said, almost morbid in its intensity, presented every object to the little girl in a light in which things are looked at by very few children. Only these few words, and her fancy roamed far away to that cruel land whose perils her father had described to her. Only these few words, and she was away in the rocky Bolan Pass, under hurricanes of drifting snow; she saw the hungry soldiers fighting with savage dogs for the possession of foul carrion. She had heard all the perils and difficulties which had befallen the Army of the Indus in the year '39, and the womanly heart ached

with the pain of those cruel memories.

"He will go to India and be killed, papa dear," she said. "Oh! why, why do they let him go? His mother can't love him, can she? She would never let him go, if she did."

John Marchmont was obliged to explain to his daughter that motherly love must not go so far as to deprive a nation of its defenders; and that the richest jewels which Cornelia can give to her country are those ruby life-drops which flow from the hearts of her bravest and brightest sons. Mary was no political economist; she could not reason upon the necessity of chastising Persian insolence, or checking Russian encroachments upon the far-away shores of the Indus. Was Edward Arundel's bright head, with its aureola of yellow hair, to be cloven asunder by an Affghan renegade's sabre, because the young Shah of Persia had been contumacious?

Mary Marchmont wept silently that day over a three-volume novel, while her father was away serving writs upon wretched insolvents, in his capacity of out-door clerk to Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson.

The young lady no longer spent her quiet days in the two-pair back. Mr. Marchmont and his daughter had remained faithful to Oakley Street and the proprietress of the ladies' wardrobe, who was a good, motherly creature; but they had descended to the grandeur of the first floor, whose gorgeous decorations Mary had glanced at furtively in the days gone by, when the splendid chambers were occupied by an elderly and reprobate

commission-agent, who seemed utterly indifferent to the delights of a convex mirror, surmounted by a maimed eagle, whose dignity was somewhat impaired by the loss of a wing; but which bijou appeared, to Mary, to be a fitting adornment for the young Queen's palace in St. James's Park.

But neither the eagle nor the third volume of a thrilling romance could comfort Mary upon this bleak January day. She shut her book, and stood by the window, looking out into the dreary street, that seemed so blotted and dim under the falling snow.

"It snowed in the Pass of Bolan," she thought; "and the treacherous Indians harassed the brave soldiers, and killed their camels. What will become of him in that dreadful country? Shall we ever see him again?"

Yes, Mary, to your sorrow! Indian scimitars will let him go scatheless; famine and fever will pass him by; but the hand which points to that far-away day on which you and he are to meet, will never fail or falter in its purpose until the hour of your meeting comes.

* * * * *

We have no need to dwell upon the preparations which were made for the young soldier's departure from home, nor on the tender farewells between the mother and her son.

Mr. Arundel was a country gentleman *pur et simple*; a hearty,

broad-shouldered squire, who had no thought above his farm and his dog-kennel, or the hunting of the red deer with which his neighbourhood abounded. He sent his younger son to India as coolly as he had sent the elder to Oxford. The boy had little to inherit, and must be provided for in a gentlemanly manner. Other younger sons of the House of Arundel had fought and conquered in the Honourable East India Company's service; and was Edward any better than they, that there should be sentimental whining because the lad was going away to fight his way to fortune, if he could? Mr. Arundel went even further than this, and declared that Master Edward was a lucky dog to be going out at such a time, when there was plenty of fighting, and a very fair chance of speedy promotion for a good soldier.

He gave the young cadet his blessing, reminded him of the limit of such supplies as he was to expect from home, bade him keep clear of the brandy-bottle and the dice-box; and having done this, believed that he had performed his duty as an Englishman and a father.

If Mrs. Arundel wept, she wept in secret, loth to discourage her son by the sight of those natural, womanly tears. If Miss Letitia Arundel was sorry to lose her brother, she mourned with most praiseworthy discretion, and did not forget to remind the young traveller that she expected to receive a muslin frock, embroidered with beetle-wings, by an early mail. And as Algernon Fairfax Dangerfield Arundel, the heir, was away at college, there was no one else to mourn. So Edward left the

home of his forefathers by a branch-coach, which started from the "Arundel Arms" in time to meet the "Telegraph" at Exeter; and no noisy lamentations shook the sky above Dangerfield Park – no mourning voices echoed through the spacious rooms. The old servants were sorry to lose the younger-born, whose easy, genial temperament had made him an especial favourite; but there was a certain admixture of joviality with their sorrow, as there generally is with all mourning in the basement; and the strong ale, the famous Dangerfield October, went faster upon that 31st of January than on any day since Christmas.

I doubt if any one at Dangerfield Park sorrowed as bitterly for the departure of the boyish soldier as a romantic young lady, of nine years old, in Oakley Street, Lambeth; whose one sentimental day-dream – half-childish, half-womanly – owned Edward Arundel as its centre figure.

So the curtain falls on the picture of a brave ship sailing eastward, her white canvas strained against the cold grey February sky, and a little girl weeping over the tattered pages of a stupid novel in a shabby London lodging.

CHAPTER V.

MARCHMONT TOWERS

There is a lapse of three years and a half between the acts; and the curtain rises to reveal a widely-different picture: – the picture of a noble mansion in the flat Lincolnshire country; a stately pile of building, standing proudly forth against a background of black woodland; a noble building, supported upon either side by an octagon tower, whose solid masonry is half-hidden by the ivy which clings about the stonework, trailing here and there, and flapping restlessly with every breath of wind against the narrow casements.

A broad stone terrace stretches the entire length of the grim façade, from tower to tower; and three flights of steps lead from the terrace to the broad lawn, which loses itself in a vast grassy flat, only broken by a few clumps of trees and a dismal pool of black water, but called by courtesy a park. Grim stone griffins surmount the terrace-steps, and griffins' heads and other architectural monstrosities, worn and moss-grown, keep watch and ward over every door and window, every archway and abutment – frowning threat and defiance upon the daring visitor who approaches the great house by this, the formidable chief entrance.

The mansion looks westward: but there is another approach, a

low archway on the southern side, which leads into a quadrangle, where there is a quaint little door under a stone portico, ivy-covered like the rest; a comfortable little door of massive oak, studded with knobs of rusty iron, – a door generally affected by visitors familiar with the house.

This is Marchmont Towers, – a grand and stately mansion, which had been a monastery in the days when England and the Pope were friends and allies; and which had been bestowed upon Hugh Marchmont, gentleman, by his Sovereign Lord and Most Christian Majesty the King Henry VIII, of blessed memory, and by that gentleman-commoner extended and improved at considerable outlay. This is Marchmont Towers, – a splendid and a princely habitation truly, but perhaps scarcely the kind of dwelling one would choose for the holy resting-place we call home. The great mansion is a little too dismal in its lonely grandeur: it lacks shelter when the dreary winds come sweeping across the grassy flats in the bleak winter weather; it lacks shade when the western sun blazes on every window-pane in the stifling summer evening. It is at all times rather too stony in its aspect; and is apt to remind one almost painfully of every weird and sorrowful story treasured in the storehouse of memory. Ancient tales of enchantment, dark German legends, wild Scottish fancies, grim fragments of half-forgotten demonology, strange stories of murder, violence, mystery, and wrong, vaguely intermingle in the stranger's mind as he looks, for the first time, at Marchmont Towers.

But of course these feelings wear off in time. So invincible is the power of custom, that we might make ourselves comfortable in the Castle of Otranto, after a reasonable sojourn within its mysterious walls: familiarity would breed contempt for the giant helmet, and all the other grim apparitions of the haunted dwelling. The commonplace and ignoble wants of every-day life must surely bring disenchantment with them. The ghost and the butcher's boy cannot well exist contemporaneously; and the avenging shade can scarcely continue to lurk beneath the portal which is visited by the matutinal milkman. Indeed, this is doubtless the reason that the most restless and impatient spirit, bent on early vengeance and immediate retribution, will yet wait until the shades of night have fallen before he reveals himself, rather than run the risk of an ignominious encounter with the postman or the parlour-maid. Be it how it might, the phantoms of Marchmont Towers were not intrusive. They may have perambulated the long tapestried corridors, the tenantless chambers, the broad black staircase of shining oak; but, happily, no dweller in the mansion was ever scared by the sight of their pale faces. All the dead-and-gone beauties, and soldiers, and lawyers, and parsons, and simple country-squires of the Marchmont race may have descended from their picture-frames to hold a witches' sabbath in the old mansion; but as the Lincolnshire servants were hearty eaters and heavy sleepers, the ghosts had it all to themselves. I believe there was one dismal story attached to the house, – the story of a Marchmont of the

time of Charles I, who had murdered his coachman in a fit of insensate rage; and it was even asserted, upon the authority of an old housekeeper, that John Marchmont's grandmother, when a young woman and lately come as a bride to the Towers, had beheld the murdered coachman stalk into her chamber, ghastly and blood-bedabbled, in the dim summer twilight. But as this story was not particularly romantic, and possessed none of the elements likely to insure popularity, – such as love, jealousy, revenge, mystery, youth, and beauty, – it had never been very widely disseminated.

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