

Ernest Maltravers, Book 7

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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BOOK VII.

Every man should strive to be as good as possible, but not suppose himself to be the only thing that is good.

--PLOTIN. EN. 11. lib. ix. c. 9.

CHAPTER I.

"Deceit is the strong but subtle chain which runs through all the members of a society, and links them together; trick or be tricked is the alternative; 'tis the way of the world, and without it intercourse would drop."

/Anonymous writer/ of 1722.

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

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

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

"He after honour hunts, I after love."--/Ibid./

LUMLEY FERRERS was one of the few men in the world who act upon a profound, deliberate, and organized system--he had done so even from a boy. When he was twenty-one, he had said to himself, "Youth is the season for enjoyment: the triumphs of manhood, the wealth of age, do not compensate for a youth spent in unpleasurable toils." Agreeably to this maxim, he had resolved not to adopt any profession; and being fond of travel, and of a restless temper, he had indulged abroad in all the gratifications that his moderate income could afford him: that income went farther on the Continent than at home, which was another reason for the prolongation of his travels. Now, when the whims and passions of youth were sated; and, ripened by a consummate and various knowledge of mankind, his harder capacities of mind became developed and centred into such ambition as it was his nature to conceive, he acted no less upon a regular and methodical plan of conduct, which he carried into details. He had little or nothing within himself to cross his cold theories by contradictory practice; for he was curbed by no principles and regulated but by few tastes: and our tastes are often checks as powerful as our principles. Looking round the English world, Ferrers saw, that at his age and with an equivocal position, and no chances to throw away, it was necessary that he should cast off all attributes of the character of the wanderer and the /garcon/.

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

Accordingly, without saying a word to anybody, Ferrers took a long lease of a large house, in one of those quiet streets that proclaim the owners do not wish to be made by fashionable situations--streets in which, if

you have a large house, it is supposed to be because you can afford one. He was very particular in its being a respectable street--Great George Street, Westminster, was the one he selected.

No frippery or baubles, common to the mansions of young bachelors--no buhl, and marquetry, and Sevres china, and cabinet pictures, distinguished the large dingy drawing-rooms of Lumley Ferrers. He bought all the old furniture a bargain of the late tenant--tea-coloured chintz curtains, and chairs and sofas that were venerable and solemn with the accumulated dust of twenty-five years. The only things about which he was particular were a very long dining-table that would hold four-and-twenty, and a new mahogany sideboard. Somebody asked him why he cared about such articles. "I don't know," said he "but I observe all respectable family-men do--there must be something in it--I shall discover the secret by and by."

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

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

Mr. Ferrers had deeply studied the character of his uncle, as a prudent speculator studies the qualities of a mine in which he means to invest his capital, and much of his present proceedings was intended to act upon the uncle as well as upon the world. He saw that the more he could obtain for himself, not a noisy, social, fashionable reputation, but a good, sober, substantial one, the more highly Mr. Templeton would consider him, and the more likely he was to be made his uncle's heir,--that is, provided Mrs. Templeton did not supersede the nepotal parasite by indigenous olive-branches. This last apprehension died away as time passed, and no signs of fertility appeared. And, accordingly, Ferrers thought he might prudently hazard more upon the game on which he now ventured to rely. There was one thing, however, that greatly disturbed his peace; Mr. Templeton, though harsh and austere in his manner to his wife, was evidently attached to her; and, above all, he cherished the fondest affection for his stepdaughter. He was as anxious for her health, her education, her little childish enjoyments, as if he had been not only her parent, but a very doting one. He could not bear her to be crossed or thwarted. Mr. Templeton, who had never spoiled anything before, not even an old pen (so careful, and calculating, and methodical was he), did his best to spoil this beautiful child whom he could not even have the vain luxury of thinking he had produced to the admiring world. Softly, exquisitely lovely was that little girl; and every day she increased in the charm of her person, and in the caressing fascination of her childish ways. Her temper was so sweet and docile, that fondness and petting, however injudiciously exhibited, only seemed yet more to bring out the colours of a grateful and tender nature. Perhaps the measured kindness of more reserved affection might have been the true way of spoiling one whose instincts were all for exacting and returning love. She was a plant that suns less warm might have nipped and chilled. But beneath an uncapricious and unclouded sunshine she

sprang up in a luxurious bloom of heart and sweetness of disposition.

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

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

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

The next step in Lumley's policy was to arm Templeton's vanity against his wife, by constantly refreshing his consciousness of the sacrifices he had made by marriage, and the certainty that he would have attained all his wishes had he chosen more prudently. By perpetually, but most judiciously, rubbing this sore point, he, as it were, fixed the irritability into Templeton's constitution, and it reacted on all his thoughts, aspiring or domestic. Still, however, to Lumley's great surprise and resentment, while Templeton cooled to his wife, he only warmed to her child. Lumley had not calculated enough upon the thirst and craving for affection in most human hearts; and Templeton, though not exactly an amiable man, had some excellent qualities; if he had less sensitively regarded the opinion of the world, he would neither have contracted the vocabulary of cant, nor sickened for a peerage--both his affectation of saintship, and his gnawing desire of rank, arose from an extraordinary and morbid deference to opinion, and a wish for worldly honours and respect, which he felt that his mere talents could not secure to him. But he was, at bottom, a kindly man--charitable to the poor, considerate to his servants, and had within him the want to love and be loved, which is one of the desires wherewith the atoms of the universe are cemented and harmonised. Had Mrs. Templeton evinced love to him, he might have defied all Lumley's diplomacy, been consoled for worldly disadvantages, and been a good and even uxorious husband. But she evidently did not love him, though an admirable, patient, provident wife; and her daughter /did/ love him--love him as well even as she loved her mother; and the hard worldling would not have accepted a kingdom as the price of that little fountain of pure and ever-refreshing tenderness. Wise and penetrating as Lumley was, he never could thoroughly understand this weakness, as he called it; for we never know men entirely, unless we have complete sympathies with men in all their natural emotions; and Nature had left the workmanship of Lumley Ferrers

unfinished and incomplete, by denying him the possibility of caring for anything but himself.

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

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

While the career of this able and unprincipled man thus opened--and of course the opening was not made in a day--Ernest Maltravers was ascending by a rough, thorny, and encumbered path, to that eminence on which the monuments of men are built. His success in public life was not brilliant nor sudden. For, though he had eloquence and knowledge, he disdained all oratorical devices; and though he had passion and energy, he could scarcely be called a warm partisan. He met with much envy, and many obstacles; and the gracious and buoyant sociality of temper and manners that had, in early youth, made him the idol of his contemporaries at school or college, had long since faded away into a cold, settled, and lofty, though gentle reserve, which did not attract towards him the animal spirits of the herd. But though he spoke seldom, and heard many, with half his powers, more enthusiastically cheered, he

did not fail of commanding attention and respect; and though no darling of cliques and parties, yet in that great body of the people who were ever the audience and tribunal to which, in letters or in politics, Maltravers appealed, there was silently growing up, and spreading wide, a belief in his upright intentions, his unpurchasable honour, and his correct and well-considered views. He felt that his name was safely invested, though the return for the capital was slow and moderate. He was contented to abide his time.

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

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

without a metaphor, he had at last come. His craving for excitement vented itself at Hazard, and his remaining guineas melted daily away.

But De Montaigne's letters to Maltravers consoled him for the loss of less congenial friends. The Frenchman was now an eminent and celebrated man; and his appreciation of Maltravers was sweeter to the latter than would have been the huzzas of crowds. But, all this while, his vanity was pleased and his curiosity roused by the continued correspondence of his unseen Egeria. That correspondence (if so it may be called, being all on one side) had now gone on for a considerable time, and he was still wholly unable to discover the author: its tone had of late altered--it had become more sad and subdued--it spoke of the hollowness as well as the rewards of fame; and, with a touch of true womanly sentiment, often hinted more at the rapture of soothing dejection, than of sharing triumph. In all these letters, there was the undeniable evidence of high intellect and deep feeling; they excited a strong and keen interest in Maltravers, yet the interest was not that which made him wish to discover, in order that he might love, the writer. They were for the most part too full of the irony and bitterness of a man's spirit, to fascinate one who considered that gentleness was the essence of a woman's strength. Temper spoke in them, no less than mind and heart, and it was not the sort of temper which a man who loves women to be womanly could admire.

"I hear you often spoken of" (ran one of these strange epistles), "and I am almost equally angry whether fools presume to praise or to blame you. This miserable world we live in, how I loathe and disdain it!--yet I desire you to serve and to master it! Weak contradiction, effeminate paradox! Oh! rather a thousand times that you would fly from its mean temptations and poor rewards!--if the desert were your dwelling-place and you wished one minister, I could renounce all--wealth, flattery, repute, womanhood--to serve you.

* * * * *

"I once admired you for your genius. My disease has fastened on me, and I now almost worship you for yourself. I have seen you, Ernest Maltravers,--seen you often,--and when you never suspected that these eyes were on you. Now that I have seen, I understand you better. We can not judge men by their books and deeds. Posterity can know nothing of the beings of the past. A thousand books never written--a thousand deeds never done--are in the eyes and lips of the few greater than the herd. In that cold, abstracted gaze, that pale and haughty brow, I read the disdain of obstacles, which is worthy of one who is confident of the goal. But my eyes fill with tears when I survey you!--you are sad, you are alone! If failures do not mortify you, success does not elevate. Oh, Maltravers, I, woman as I am, and living in a narrow circle, I, even I, know at last that to have desires nobler, and ends more august, than others, is but to surrender waking life to morbid and melancholy dreams.

* * * * *

"Go more into the world, Maltravers--go more into the world, or quit it altogether. Your enemies must be met; they accumulate, they grow strong--you are too tranquil, too slow in your steps towards the prize which should be yours, to satisfy my impatience, to satisfy your friends. Be less refined in your ambition that you may be more immediately useful. The feet of clay after all are the swiftest in the race. Even Lumley Ferrers will outstrip you if you do not take heed.

* * * * *

"Why do I run on thus!--you--you love another, yet you are not less the ideal that I could love--if ever I loved any one. You love--and yet--well--no matter."

CHAPTER II.

"Well, but this is being only an official nobleman. No matter, 'tis still being a nobleman, and that's his aim."
/Anonymous writer of 1772/.

"La musique est le seul des talens qui jouissent de lui-meme; tons les autres veulent des temoins."*--MARMONTEL.

* Music is the sole talent which gives pleasure of itself; all the others require witnesses.

"Thus the slow ox would gaudy trappings claim."--HORACE.

MR. TEMPLETON had not obtained his peerage, and, though he had met with no direct refusal, nor made even a direct application to headquarters, he was growing sullen. He had great parliamentary influence, not close borough, illegitimate influence, but very proper orthodox influence of character, wealth, and so forth. He could return one member at least for a city--he could almost return one member for a county, and in three boroughs any activity on his part could turn the scale in a close contest. The ministers were strong, but still they could not afford to lose supporters hitherto zealous--the example of desertion is contagious. In the town which Templeton had formerly represented, and which he now almost commanded, a vacancy suddenly occurred--a candidate started on the opposition side and commenced a canvass; to the astonishment and panic of the Secretary of the Treasury, Templeton put forward no one, and his interest remained dormant. Lord Saxingham hurried to Lumley.

"My dear fellow, what is this?--what can your uncle be about? We shall lose this place--one of our strongholds. Bets run even."

"Why, you see, you have all behaved very ill to my uncle--I am really sorry for it, but I can do nothing."

"What, this confounded peerage! Will that content him, and nothing short of it?"

"Nothing."

"He must have it, by Jove!"

"And even that may come too late."

"Ha! do you think so?"

"Will you leave the matter to me?"

"Certainly--you are a monstrous clever fellow, and we all esteem you."

"Sit down and write as I dictate, my dear lord."

"Well," said Lord Saxingham, seating himself at Lumley's enormous writing-table--"well, go on."

"/My dear Mr. Templeton/--"

"Too familiar," said Lord Saxingham.

"Not a bit; go on."

"/My dear Mr. Templeton:/--"

"/We are anxious to secure your parliamentary influence in C----- to the proper quarter, namely, to your own family, as the best defenders of the administration, which you honour by your support. We wish signally, at the same time, to express our confidence in your principles, and our gratitude for your countenance./"

"D-----d sour countenance!" muttered Lord Saxingham.

"/Accordingly,/" continued Ferrers, "/as one whose connection with you permits the liberty, allow me to request that you will suffer our joint relation, Mr. Ferrers, to be put into immediate nomination./"

Lord Saxingham threw down the pen and laughed for two minutes without ceasing. "Capital, Lumley, capital--Very odd I did not think of it before."

"Each man for himself, and God for us all," returned Lumley, gravely: "pray go on, my dear lord."

"/We are sure you could not have a representative that would, more faithfully reflect your own opinions and our interests. One word more. A creation of peers will probably take place in the spring, among which I am sure your name would be to his Majesty a gratifying addition; the title will of course be secured to your sons--and failing the latter, to your nephew./"

"/With great regard and respect,

"Truly yours,

"SAXINGHAM./"

"There, inscribe that 'Private and confidential,' and send it express to my uncle's villa."

"It shall be done, my dear Lumley--and this contents me as much as it does you. You are really a man to do us credit. You think it will be arranged?"

"No doubt of it."

"Well, good day. Lumley, come to me when it is all settled: Florence is always glad to see you; she says no one amuses her more. And I am sure that is rare praise, for she is a strange girl,--quite a Timon in petticoats."

Away went Lord Saxingham.

"Florence glad to see me!" said Lumley, throwing his arms behind him, and striding to and fro the room--"Scheme the Second begins to smile upon me behind the advancing shadow of Scheme One. If I can but succeed in keeping away other suitors from my fair cousin until I am in a condition to propose myself, why, I may carry off the greatest match in the three kingdoms. /Courage, mon brave Ferrers, courage!/"

It was late that evening when Ferrers arrived at his uncle's villa. He found Mrs. Templeton in the drawing-room seated at the piano. He entered gently; she did not hear him, and continued at the instrument. Her voice was so sweet and rich, her taste so pure, that Ferrers, who was a good judge of music, stood in delighted surprise. Often as he had now been a visitor, even an inmate, at the house, he had never before heard Mrs. Templeton play any but sacred airs, and this was one of the popular songs of sentiment. He perceived that her feeling at last overpowered her voice, and she paused abruptly, and turning round, her face was so eloquent of emotion, that Ferrers was forcibly struck by its expression. He was not a man apt to feel curiosity for anything not immediately concerning himself; but he did feel curious about this melancholy and beautiful woman. There was in her usual aspect that inexpressible look of profound resignation which betokens a lasting remembrance of a bitter past: a prematurely blighted heart spoke in her eyes, in her smile, her languid and joyless step. But she performed the routine of her quiet duties with a calm and conscientious regularity which showed that grief rather depressed than disturbed her thoughts. If her burden were heavy, custom seemed to have reconciled her to bear it without repining; and the emotion which Ferrers now traced in her soft and harmonious features was of a nature he had only once witnessed before--viz., on the first night he had seen her, when poetry, which is the key of memory, had evidently opened a chamber haunted by mournful and troubled ghosts.

"Ah! dear madam," said Ferrers, advancing, as he found himself discovered, "I trust I do not disturb you. My visit is unseasonable; but my uncle--where is he?"

"He has been in town all the morning; he said he should dine out, and I now expect him every minute."

"You have been endeavouring to charm away the sense of his absence. Dare I ask you to continue to play? It is seldom that I hear a voice so sweet and skill so consummate. You must have been instructed by the best Italian masters."

"No," said Mrs. Templeton, with a very slight colour in her delicate cheek, "I learned young, and of one who loved music and felt it; but who was not a foreigner."

"Will you sing me that song again?--you give the words a beauty I never discovered in them; yet they (as well as the music itself), are by my poor friend whom Mr. Templeton does not like--Maltravers."

"Are they his also?" said Mrs. Templeton, with emotion; "it is strange I did not know it. I heard the air in the streets, and it struck me much. I inquired the name of the song and bought it--it is very strange!"

"What is strange?"

"That there is a kind of language in your friend's music and poetry which comes home to me, like words I have heard years ago! Is he young, this Mr. Maltravers?"

"Yes, he is still young."

"And, and--"

Here Mrs. Templeton was interrupted by the entrance of her husband. He held the letter from Lord Saxingham--it was yet unopened. He seemed moody; but that was common with him. He coldly shook hands with Lumley; nodded to his wife, found fault with the fire, and throwing himself into his easy-chair, said, "So, Lumley, I think I was a fool for taking your advice--and hanging back about this new election. I see by the evening papers that there is shortly to be a creation of peers. If I had shown activity on behalf of the government I might have shamed them into gratitude."

"I think I was right, sir," replied Lumley; "public men are often alarmed into gratitude, seldom shamed into it. Firm votes, like old friends, are most valued when we think we are about to lose them; but what is that letter in your hand?"

"Oh, some begging petition, I suppose."

"Pardon me--it has an official look." Templeton put on his spectacles, raised the letter, examined the address and seal, hastily opened it, and broke into an exclamation very like an oath: when he had concluded--"Give me your hand, nephew--the thing is settled--I am to have the peerage. You were right--ha, ha!--my dear wife, you will be my lady, think of that--aren't you glad?--why don't your ladyship smile? Where's the child--where is she, I say?"

"Gone to bed, sir," said Mrs. Templeton, half frightened.

"Gone to bed! I must go and kiss her. Gone to bed, has she? Light that candle, Lumley." [Here Mr. Templeton rang the bell.] "John," said he, as the servant entered,--"John, tell James to go the first thing in the morning to Baxter's, and tell him not to paint my chariot till he hears from me. I must go kiss the child--I must, really."

"D--- the child," muttered Lumley, as, after giving the candle to his uncle, he turned to the fire; "what the deuce has she got to do with the matter? Charming little girl--yours, madam! how I love her! My uncle dotes on her--no wonder!"

"He is, indeed, very, very, fond of her," said Mrs. Templeton, with a sigh that seemed to come from the depth of her heart.

"Did he take a fancy to her before you were married?"

"Yes, I believe--oh yes, certainly."

"Her own father could not be more fond of her."

Mrs. Templeton made no answer, but lighted her candle, and wishing Lumley good night, glided from the room.

"I wonder if my grave aunt and my grave uncle took a bite at the apple before they bought the right of the tree. It looks suspicious; yet no, it can't be; there is nothing of the seducer or the seductive about the old fellow. It is not likely--here he comes."

In came Templeton, and his eyes were moist, and his brow relaxed.

"And how is the little angel, sir?" asked Ferrers.

"She kissed me, though I woke her up; children are usually cross when wakened."

"Are they?--little dears! Well, sir, so I was right, then; may I see the letter?"

"There it is."

Ferrers drew his chair to the fire, and read his own production with all the satisfaction of an anonymous author.

"How kind!--how considerate!--how delicately put!--a double favour! But perhaps, after all, it does not express your wishes."

"In what way?"

"Why--why--about myself."

"/You!--is there anything about /you/ in it?--I did not observe /that/--let me see."

"Uncles never selfish!--mem. for commonplace book!" thought Ferrers.

The uncle knit his brows as he re-perused the letter. This won't do, Lumley," said he very shortly, when he had done.

"A seat in parliament is too much honour for a poor nephew, then, sir?" said Lumley, very bitterly, though he did not feel at all bitter; but it was the proper tone. "I have done all in my power to advance your ambition, and you will not even lend a hand to forward me one step in my career. But, forgive me, sir, I have no right to expect it."

"Lumley," replied Templeton, kindly, "you mistake me. I think much more highly of you than I did--much: there is a steadiness, a sobriety about you most praiseworthy, and you shall go into parliament if you wish it; but not for C-----. I will give my interest there to some other friend of the government, and in return they can give you a treasury borough! That is the same thing to you."

Lumley was agreeably surprised--he pressed his uncle's hand warmly, and thanked him cordially. Mr. Templeton proceeded to explain to him that it was inconvenient and expensive sitting for places where one's family was known, and Lumley fully subscribed to all.

"As for the settlement of the peerage, that is all right," said Templeton; and then he sank into a reverie, from which he broke joyously--"yes, that is all right. I have projects, objects--this may unite them all--nothing can be better--you will be the next lord--what--I say, what title shall we have?"

"Oh, take a sounding one--yon have very little landed property, I think?"

"Two thousand a year in -----shire, bought a bargain."

"What's the name of the place?"

"Grubley."

"Lord Grubley!--Baron Grubley of Grubley--oh, atrocious! Who had the place before you?"

"Bought it of Mr. Sheepshanks--very old family."

"But surely some old Norman once had the place?"

"Norman, yes! Henry the Second gave it to his barber--Bertram Courval."

"That's it!--that's it! Lord de Courval--singular coincidence!--descent from the old line. Herald's College soon settle all that. Lord de Courval!--nothing can sound better. There must be a village or hamlet still called Courval about the property."

"I am afraid not. There is Coddle End!"

"Coddle End!--Coddle End!--the very thing, sir--the very thing--clear corruption from Courval!--Lord de Courval of Courval! Superb! Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Templeton, and he had hardly laughed before since he was thirty.

The relations sat long and conversed familiarly. Ferrers slept at the villa, and his sleep was sound; for he thought little of plans once formed and half executed; it was the hunt that kept him awake, and he slept like a hound when the prey was down. Not so Templeton, who did not close his eyes all night.--"Yes, yes," thought he, "I must get the fortune and the title in one line by a prudent management. Ferrers deserves what I mean to do for him. Steady, good-natured, frank, and will get on--yes, yes, I see it all. Meanwhile I did well to prevent his standing for C-----; might pick up gossip about Mrs. T., and other things that might be unpleasant. Ah, I'm a shrewd fellow!"

CHAPTER III.

"/Lauzun./--There, Marquis, there, I've done it.

/Montespan./--Done it! yes! Nice doings!"

/The Duchess de la Valliere/.

LUMLEY hastened to strike while the iron was hot. The next morning he went straight to the Treasury--saw the managing secretary, a clever, sharp man, who, like Ferrers, carried off intrigue and manoeuvre by a blunt, careless, bluff manner.

Ferrers announced that he was to stand for the free, respectable, open city of C-----, with an electoral population of 2,500. A very showy place it was for a member in the old ante-reform times, and was

considered a thoroughly independent borough. The secretary congratulated and complimented him.

"We have had losses lately in /our/ elections among the larger constituencies," said Lumley.

"We have indeed--three towns lost in the last six months. Members do die so very unseasonably."

"Is Lord Staunch yet provided for?" asked Lumley. Now Lord Staunch was one of the popular show-fight great guns of the administration--not in office, but that most useful person to all governments, an out-and-out supporter upon the most independent principles--who was known to have refused place and to value himself on independence--a man who helped the government over the stile when it was seized with a temporary lameness, and who carried "great weight with him in the country." Lord Staunch had foolishly thrown up a close borough in order to contest a large city, and had failed in the attempt. His failure was everywhere cited as a proof of the growing unpopularity of ministers.

"Is Lord Staunch yet provided for?" asked Lumley.

"Why, he must have his old seat--Three-Oaks. Three-Oaks is a nice, quiet little place; most respectable constituency--all Staunch's own family."

"Just the thing for him; yet, 'tis a pity that he did not wait to stand for C-----; my uncle's interest would have secured him."

"Ay, I thought so the moment C----- was vacant. However, it is too late now."

"It would be a great triumph if Lord Staunch could show that a large constituency volunteered to elect him without expense."

"Without expense!--Ah, yes, indeed! It would prove that purity of election still exists--that British institutions are still upheld."

"It might be done, Mr. -----."

"Why, I thought that you--"

"Were to stand--that is true--and it will be difficult to manage my uncle; but he loves me much--you know I am his heir--I believe I could do it; that is, if you think it would be /a very great advantage/ to the party, and /a very great service/ to the government."

"Why, Mr. Ferrers, it would indeed be both."

"And in that case I could have Three-Oaks."

"I see--exactly so; but to give up so respectable a seat--really it is a sacrifice."

"Say no more, it shall be done. A deputation shall wait on Lord Staunch directly. I will see my uncle, and a despatch shall be sent down to C----- to-night; at least, I hope so. I must not be too confident. My uncle is an old man, nobody but myself can manage him; I'll go this instant."

"You may be sure your kindness will be duly appreciated."

Lumley shook hands cordially with the secretary and retired. The secretary was not "humbled," nor did Lumley expect he should be. But the secretary noted this of Lumley Ferrers (and that gentleman's object was gained), that Lumley Ferrers was a man who looked out for office, and if he did tolerably well in parliament, that Lumley Ferrers was a man who ought to be /pushed/.

Very shortly afterwards the /Gazette/ announced the election of Lord Staunch for C-----, after a sharp but decisive contest. The ministerial journals rang with exulting paeans; the opposition ones called the electors of C----- all manner of hard names, and declared that Mr. Stout, Lord Staunch's opponent, would petition--which he never did. In the midst of the hubbub, Mr. Lumley Ferrers quietly and unobservedly crept into the representation of Three-Oaks.

On the night of his election he went to Lord Saxingham's; but what there happened deserves another chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

"Je connois des princes du sang, des princes etrangers, des grands seigneurs, des ministres d'etat, des magistrats, et des philosophes qui fileroient pour l'amour de vous. En pouvez-vous demander davantage?"*

/Lettres de Madame de Sevigne/

* I know princes of the blood, foreign princes, great lords, ministers of state, magistrates, and philosophers who would even spin for love of you. What can you ask more?

"/Lindore./ I--I believe it will choke me. I'm in love * * * Now hold your tongue. Hold your tongue, I say.

"/Dalner./ You in love! Ha! ha!

"/Lind./ There, he laughs.

"/Dal./ No; I am really sorry for you."

/German Play (False Delicacy)/.

* * * "What is here?

Gold."--SHAKSPEARE.

IT happened that that evening Maltravers had, for the first time, accepted one of many invitations with which Lord Saxingham had honoured him. His lordship and Maltravers were of different political parties, nor were they in other respects adapted to each other. Lord Saxingham was a clever man in his way, but worldly even to a proverb among worldly people. That "man was born to walk erect and look upon the stars," is an eloquent fallacy that Lord Saxingham might suffice to disprove. He seemed born to walk with a stoop; and if he ever looked upon any stars, they were those which go with a garter. Though of celebrated and historical ancestry, great rank, and some personal reputation, he had

all the ambition of a /parvenu/. He had a strong regard for office, not so much from the sublime affection for that sublime thing,--power over the destinies of a glorious nation,--as because it added to that vulgar thing--importance in his own set. He looked on his cabinet uniform as a beadle looks on his gold lace. He also liked patronage, secured good things to distant connections, got on his family to the remotest degree of relationship; in short, he was of the earth, earthy. He did not comprehend Maltravers; and Maltravers, who every day grew prouder and prouder, despised him. Still, Lord Saxingham was told that Maltravers was a rising man, and he thought it well to be civil to rising men, of whatever party; besides, his vanity was flattered by having men who are talked of in his train. He was too busy and too great a personage to think Maltravers could be other than sincere, when he declared himself, in his notes, "very sorry," or "much concerned," to forego the honour of dining with Lord Saxingham on the, &c., &c.; and therefore continued his invitations, till Maltravers, from that fatality which undoubtedly regulates and controls us, at last accepted the proffered distinction.

He arrived late--most of the guests were assembled; and, after exchanging a few words with his host, Ernest fell back into the general group, and found himself in the immediate neighbourhood of Lady Florence Lascelles. This lady had never much pleased Maltravers, for he was not fond of masculine or coquettish heroines, and Lady Florence seemed to him to merit both epithets; therefore, though he had met her often since the first day he had been introduced to her, he had usually contented himself with a distant bow or a passing salutation. But now, as he turned round and saw her, she was, for a miracle, sitting alone; and in her most dazzling and noble countenance there was so evident an appearance of ill health, that he was struck and touched by it. In fact, beautiful as she was, both in face and form, there was something in the eye and the bloom of Lady Florence, which a skilful physician would have seen with prophetic pain. And, whenever occasional illness paled the roses of the cheek, and sobered the play of the lips, even an ordinary observer would have thought of the old commonplace proverb--"that the brightest beauty has the briefest life." It was some sentiment of this kind, perhaps, that now awakened the sympathy of Maltravers. He addressed her with more marked courtesy than usual, and took a seat by her side.

"You have been to the House, I suppose, Mr. Maltravers?" said Lady Florence.

"Yes, for a short time; it is not one of our field nights--no division was expected; and by this time, I dare say, the House has been counted out."

"Do you like the life?"

"It has excitement," said Maltravers, evasively.

"And the excitement is of a noble character?"

"Scarcely so, I fear--it is so made up of mean and malignant motives,--there is in it so much jealousy of our friends, so much unfairness to our enemies;--such readiness to attribute to others the basest objects,--such willingness to avail ourselves of the poorest stratagems! The ends may be great, but the means are very ambiguous."

"I knew /you/ would feel this," exclaimed Lady Florence, with a

heightened colour.

"Did you?" said Maltravers, rather interested as well as surprised. "I scarcely imagined it possible that you would deign to divine secrets so insignificant."

"You did not do me justice, then," returned Lady Florence, with an arch yet half-painful smile; "for--but I was about to be impertinent."

"Nay, say on."

For--then--I do not imagine you to be one apt to do injustice to yourself."

"Oh, you consider me presumptuous and arrogant; but that is common report, and you do right, perhaps, to believe it."

"Was there ever any one unconscious of his own merit?" asked Lady Florence, proudly. "They who distrust themselves have good reason for it."

"You seek to cure the wound you inflicted," returned Maltravers, smiling.

"No; what I said was an apology for myself, as well as for you. You need no words to vindicate you; you are a man, and can bear out all arrogance with the royal motto /Dieu et mon droit/. With you deeds can support pretension; but I am a woman--it was a mistake of Nature."

"But what triumphs that man can achieve bring so immediate, so palpable a reward as those won by a woman, beautiful and admired--who finds every room an empire, and every class her subjects?"

"It is a despicable realm."

"What!--to command--to win--to bow to your worship--the greatest, and the highest, and the sternest; to own slaves in those whom men recognise as their lords! Is such a power despicable? If so, what power is to be envied?"

Lady Florence turned quickly round to Maltravers, and fixed on him her large dark eyes, as if she would read into his very heart. She turned away with a blush and a slight frown--"There is mockery on your lip," said she.

Before Maltravers could answer, dinner was announced, and a foreign ambassador claimed the hand of Lady Florence. Maltravers saw a young lady with gold oats in her very light hair, fall to his lot, and descended to the dining-room, thinking more of Lady Florence Lascelles than he had ever done before.

He happened to sit nearly opposite to the young mistress of the house (Lord Saxingham, as the reader knows, was a widower and Lady Florence an only child); and Maltravers was that day in one of those felicitous moods in which our animal spirits search and carry up, as it were, to the surface, our intellectual gifts and acquisitions. He conversed generally and happily; but once, when he turned his eyes to appeal to Lady Florence for her opinion on some point in discussion, he caught her gaze fixed upon him with an expression that checked the current of his

gaiety, and cast him into a curious and bewildered reverie. In that gaze there was earnest and cordial admiration; but it was mixed with so much mournfulness, that the admiration lost its eloquence, and he who noticed it was rather saddened than flattered.

After dinner, when Maltravers sought the drawing-rooms, he found them filled with the customary snob of good society. In one corner he discovered Castruccio Cesarini, playing on a guitar, slung across his breast with a blue riband. The Italian sang well; many young ladies were grouped round him, amongst others Florence Lascelles. Maltravers, fond as he was of music, looked upon Castruccio's performance as a disagreeable exhibition. He had a Quixotic idea of the dignity of talent; and though himself of a musical science, and a melody of voice that would have thrown the room into ecstasies, he would as soon have turned juggler or tumbler for polite amusement, as contend for the bravos of a drawing-room. It was because he was one of the proudest men in the world, that Maltravers was one of the least /vain/. He did not care a rush for applause in small things. But Cesarini would have summoned the whole world to see him play at push-pin, if he thought the played it well.

"Beautiful! divine! charming!" cried the young ladies, as Cesarini ceased; and Maltravers observed that Florence praised more earnestly than the rest, and that Cesarini's dark eye sparkled, and his pale cheek flushed with unwonted brilliancy. Florence turned to Maltravers, and the Italian, following her eyes, frowned darkly.

"You know the Signor Cesarini," said Florence, joining Maltravers. "He is an interesting and gifted person."

"Unquestionably. I grieve to see him wasting his talents upon a soil that may yield a few short-lived flowers, without one useful plant or productive fruit."

"He enjoys the passing hour, Mr. Maltravers; and sometimes, when I see the mortifications that await sterner labour, I think he is right."

"Hush!" said Maltravers; "his eyes are on us--he is listening breathlessly for every word you utter. I fear that you have made an unconscious conquest of a poet's heart; and if so, he purchases the enjoyment of the passing hour at a fearful price."

"Nay," said Lady Florence, indifferently, "he is one of those to whom the fancy supplies the place of the heart. And if I give him an inspiration, it will be an equal luxury to him whether his lyre be strung to hope or disappointment. The sweetness of his verses will compensate to him for any bitterness in actual life."

"There are two kinds of love," answered Maltravers,--"love and self-love; the wounds of the last are often most incurable in those who appear least vulnerable to the first. Ah, Lady Florence, were I privileged to play the monitor, I would venture on one warning, however much it might offend you."

"And that is--"

"To forbear coquetry."

Maltravers smiled as he spoke, but it was gravely--and at the same time

he moved gently away. But Lady Florence laid her hand on his arm.

"Mr. Maltravers," said she, very softly, and with a kind of faltering in her tone, "am I wrong to say that I am anxious for your good opinion? Do not judge me harshly. I am soured, discontented, unhappy. I have no sympathy with the world. These men whom I see around me--what are they? the mass of them unfeeling and silken egotists--ill-judging, ill-educated, well-dressed: the few who are called distinguished--how selfish in their ambition, how passionless in their pursuits! Am I to be blamed if I sometimes exert a power over such as these, which rather proves my scorn of them than my own vanity?"

"I have no right to argue with you."

"Yes, argue with me, convince me, guide me--Heaven knows that, impetuous and haughty as I am, I need a guide,"--and Lady Florence's eyes swam with tears. Ernest's prejudices against her were greatly shaken: he was even somewhat dazzled by her beauty, and touched by her unexpected gentleness; but still, his heart was not assailed, and he replied almost coldly, after a short pause:

"Dear Lady Florence, look round the world--who so much to be envied as yourself? What sources of happiness and pride are open to you! Why, then, make to yourself causes of discontent?--why be scornful of those who cross not your path? Why not look with charity upon God's less endowed children, beneath you as they may seem? What consolation have you in hurting the hearts or the vanities of others? Do you raise yourself even in your own estimation? You affect to be above your sex--yet what character do you despise more in women than that which you assume? Semiramis should not be a coquette. There now, I have offended you--I confess I am very rude."

"I am not offended," said Florence, almost struggling with her tears; and she added inly, "Ah, I am too happy!"--There are some lips from which even the proudest women love to hear the censure which appears to disprove indifference.

It was at this time that Lumley Ferrers, flushed with the success of his schemes and projects, entered the room; and his quick eye fell upon that corner, in which he detected what appeared to him a very alarming flirtation between his rich cousin and Ernest Maltravers. He advanced to the spot, and, with his customary frankness, extended a hand to each.

"Ah, my dear and fair cousin, give me your congratulations, and ask me for my first frank, to be bound up in a collection of autographs by distinguished senators--it will sell high one of these days. Your most obedient, Mr. Maltravers;--how we shall laugh in our sleeves at the humbug of politics, when you and I, the best friends in the world, sit /vis-a-vis/ on opposite benches. But why, Lady Florence, have you never introduced me to your pet Italian? /Allons!/ I am his match in Alfieri, whom, of course, he swears by, and whose verses, by the way, seem cut out of box-wood--the hardest material for turning off that sort of machinery that invention ever hit on."

Thus saying, Ferrers contrived, as he thought, very cleverly, to divide a pair that he much feared were justly formed to meet by nature--and, to his great joy, Maltravers shortly afterwards withdrew.

Ferrers, with the happy ease that belonged to his complacent, though

plotting character, soon made Cesarini at home with him; and two or three slighting expressions which the former dropped with respect to Maltravers, coupled with some outrageous compliments to the Italian, completely won the heart of the poet. The brilliant Florence was more silent and subdued than usual; and her voice was softer, though graver, when she replied to Castruccio's eloquent appeals. Castruccio was one of those men who /talk fine/. By degrees, Lumley lapsed into silence, and listened to what took place between Lady Florence and the Italian, while appearing to be deep in "The Views of the Rhine," which lay on the table.

"Ah," said the latter, in his soft native tongue, "could you know how I watch every shade of that countenance which makes my heaven! Is it clouded? night is with me!--is it radiant? I am as the Persian gazing on the sun!"

"Why do you speak thus to me? were you not a poet, I might be angry."

"You were not angry when the English poet, that cold Maltravers, spoke to you perhaps as boldly."

Lady Florence drew up her haughty head. "Signor," said she, checking, however, her first impulse, and with mildness, "Mr. Maltravers neither flatters nor--"

"Presumes, you were about to say," said Cesarini, grinding his teeth. "But it is well--once you were less chilling to the utterance of my deep devotion."

"Never, Signor Cesarini, never--but when I thought it was but the common gallantry of your nation: let me think so still."

"No, proud woman," said Cesarini, fiercely, "no--hear the truth."

Lady Florence rose indignantly.

"Hear me," he continued. "I--I, the poor foreigner, the despised minstrel, dare to lift up my eyes to you! I love you!"

Never had Florence Lascelles been so humiliated and confounded. However she might have amused herself with the vanity of Cesarini, she had not given him, as she thought, the warrant to address her--the great Lady Florence, the prize of dukes and princes--in this hardy manner; she almost fancied him insane. But the next moment she recalled the warning of Maltravers, and felt as if her punishment had commenced.

"You will think and speak more calmly, sir, when we meet again," and so saying, she swept away.

Cesarini remained rooted to the spot, with his dark countenance expressing such passions as are rarely seen in the aspects of civilised men.

"Where do you lodge, Signor Cesarini?" asked the bland, familiar voice of Ferrers. "Let us walk part of the way together--that is, when you are tired of these hot rooms."

Cesarini groaned. "You are ill," continued Ferrers; "the air will revive you--come." He glided from the room, and the Italian

mechanically followed him. They walked together for some moments in silence, side by side, in a clear, lovely, moonlight night. At length Ferrers said, "Pardon me, my dear signor, but you may already have observed that I am a very frank, odd sort of fellow. I see you are caught by the charms of my cruel cousin. Can I serve you in any way?"

A man at all acquainted with the world in which we live would have been suspicious of such cordiality in the cousin of an heiress, towards a very unsuitable aspirant. But Cesarini, like many indifferent poets (but like few good ones), had no common sense. He thought it quite natural that a man who admired his poetry so much as Lumley had declared he did, should take a lively interest in his welfare; and he therefore replied warmly, "Oh, sir, this is indeed a crushing blow: I dreamed she loved me. She was ever flattering and gentle when she spoke to me, and in verse already I had told her of my love, and met with no rebuke."

"Did your verses really and plainly declare love, and in your own person?"

"Why, the sentiment was veiled, perhaps--put into the mouth of a fictitious character, or conveyed in an allegory."

"Oh," ejaculated Ferrers, thinking it very likely that the gorgeous Florence, hymned by a thousand bards, had done little more than cast a glance over the lines that had cost poor Cesarini such anxious toil, and inspired him with such daring hope. "Oh!--and to-night she was more severe--she is a terrible coquette, /la belle Florence/! But perhaps you have a rival."

"I feel it--I saw it--I know it."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"That accursed Maltravers! He crosses me in every path--my spirit quails beneath his whenever we encounter. I read my doom."

"If it be Maltravers," said Ferrers, gravely, "the danger cannot be great. Florence has seen but little of him, and he does not admire her much; but she is a great match, and he is ambitious. We must guard against this betimes, Cesarini--for know that I dislike Maltravers as much as you do, and will cheerfully aid you in any plan to blight his hopes in that quarter."

"Generous, noble friend!--yet he is richer, better-born than I."

"That may be: but to one in Lady Florence's position, all minor grades of rank in her aspirants seem pretty well levelled. Come, I don't tell you that I would not sooner she married a countryman and an equal--but I have taken a liking to you, and I detest Maltravers. She is very romantic--fond of poetry to a passion--writes it herself, I fancy. Oh, you'll just suit her; but, alas! how will you see her?"

"See her! What mean you?"

"Why, have you not declared love to-night? I thought I overheard you. Can you for a moment fancy that, after such an avowal, Lady Florence will again receive you--that is, if she mean to reject your suit?"

"Fool that I was! But no--she must, she shall."

"Be persuaded; in this country violence will not do. Take my advice, write an humble apology, confess your fault, invoke her pity; and, declaring that you renounce for ever the character of a lover, implore still to be acknowledged as a friend. Be quiet now, hear me out; I am older than you; I know my cousin; this will pique her; your modesty will soothe, while your coldness will arouse, her vanity. Meanwhile you will watch the progress of Maltravers; I will be by your elbow; and between us, to use a homely phrase, we will do for him. Then you may have your opportunity, clear stage, and fair play."

Cesarini was at first rebellious; but, at length, even he saw the policy of the advice. But Lumley would not leave him till the advice was adopted. He made Castruccio accompany him to a club, dictated the letter to Florence, and undertook its charge. This was not all.

"It is also necessary," said Lumley, after a short but thoughtful silence, "that you should write to Maltravers."

"And for what?"

"I have my reasons. Ask him, in a frank and friendly spirit, his opinion of Lady Florence; state your belief that she loves you, and inquire ingenuously what he thinks your chances of happiness in such a union."

"But why this?"

"His answer may be useful," returned Lumley, musingly. "Stay, I will dictate the letter."

Cesarini wondered and hesitated, but there was that about Lumley Ferrers which had already obtained command over the weak and passionate poet. He wrote, therefore, as Lumley dictated, beginning with some commonplace doubts as to the happiness of marriage in general, excusing himself for his recent coldness towards Maltravers, and asking him his confidential opinion both as to Lady Florence's character and his own chances of success.

This letter, like the former one, Lumley sealed and despatched.

"You perceive," he then said, briefly, to Cesarini, "that it is the object of this letter to entrap Maltravers into some plain and honest avowal of his dislike to Lady Florence; we may make good use of such expressions hereafter, if he should ever prove a rival. And now go home to rest: you look exhausted. Adieu, my new friend."

"I have long had a presentiment," said Lumley to his councillor SELF, as he walked to Great George Street, "that that wild girl has conceived a romantic fancy for Maltravers. But I can easily prevent such an accident ripening into misfortune. Meanwhile, I have secured a tool, if I want one. By Jove, what an ass that poet is! But so was Cassio; yet Iago made use of him. If Iago had been born now, and dropped that foolish fancy for revenge, what a glorious fellow he would have been! Prime minister at least!"

Pale, haggard, exhausted, Castruccio Cesarini, traversing a length of way, arrived at last at a miserable lodging in the suburb of Chelsea. His fortune was now gone; gone in supplying the poorest food to a

craving and imbecile vanity: gone, that its owner might seem what nature never meant him for: the elegant Lothario, the graceful man of pleasure, the troubadour of modern life! gone in horses, and jewels, and fine clothes, and gaming, and printing unsaleable poems on gilt-edged vellum; gone, that he might not be a greater but a more fashionable man than Ernest Maltravers! Such is the common destiny of those poor adventurers who confine fame to boudoirs and saloons. No matter whether they be poets or dandies, wealthy /parvenus/ or aristocratic cadets, all equally prove the adage that the wrong paths to reputation are strewn with the wrecks of peace, fortune, happiness, and too often honour! And yet this poor young man had dared to hope for the hand of Florence Lascelles! He had the common notion of foreigners, that English girls marry for love, are very romantic; that, within the three seas, heiresses are as plentiful as blackberries; and for the rest, his vanity had been so pampered, that it now insinuated itself into every fibre of his intellectual and moral system.

Cesarini looked cautiously round, as he arrived at his door; for he fancied that, even in that obscure place, persons might be anxious to catch a glimpse of the celebrated poet; and he concealed his residence from all; dined on a roll when he did not dine out, and left his address at "The Travellers." He looked round, I say, and he did observe a tall figure wrapped in a cloak that had indeed followed him from a distant and more populous part of the town. But the figure turned round, and vanished instantly. Cesarini mounted to his second floor. And about the middle of the next day a messenger left a letter at his door, containing one hundred pounds in a blank envelope. Cesarini knew not the writing of the address; his pride was deeply wounded. Amidst all his penury, he had not even applied to his own sister. Could it come from her, from De Montaigne? He was lost in conjecture. He put the remittance aside for a few days; for he had something fine in him, the poor poet! but bills grew pressing, and necessity hath no law.

Two days afterwards, Cesarini brought to Ferrers the answer he had received from Maltravers. Lumley had rightly foreseen that the high spirit of Ernest would conceive some indignation at the coquetry of Florence in beguiling the Italian into hopes never to be realised, and that he would express himself openly and warmly. He did so, however, with more gentleness than Lumley had anticipated.

"This is not exactly the thing," said Ferrers, after twice reading the letter; "still it may hereafter be a strong card in our hands--we will keep it."

So saying, he locked the letter up in his desk, and Cesarini soon forgot its existence.

CHAPTER V.

"She was a phantom of delight,
When first she gleamed upon my sight:
A lovely apparition sent
To be a moment's ornament."--WORDSWORTH.

MALTRAVERS did not see Lady Florence again for some weeks; meanwhile, Lumley Ferrers made his /debut/ in parliament. Rigidly adhering to his plan of acting on a deliberate system, and not prone to overrate

himself, Mr. Ferrers did not, like most promising new members, try the hazardous ordeal of a great first speech. Though bold, fluent, and ready, he was not eloquent; and he knew that on great occasions, when great speeches are wanted, great guns like to have the fire to themselves. Neither did he split upon the opposite rock of "promising young men," who stick to "the business of the house" like leeches, and quibble on details; in return for which labour they are generally voted bores, who can never do anything remarkable. But he spoke frequently, shortly, courageously, and with a strong dash of good-humoured personality. He was the man whom a minister could get to say something which other people did not like to say: and he did so with a frank fearlessness that carried off any seeming violation of good taste. He soon became a very popular speaker in the parliamentary clique; especially with the gentlemen who crowd the bar, and never want to hear the argument of the debate. Between him and Maltravers a visible coldness now existed; for the latter looked upon his old friend (whose principles of logic led him even to republicanism, and who had been accustomed to accuse Ernest of temporising with plain truths, if he demurred to their application to artificial states of society) as a cold-blooded and hypocritical adventurer; while Ferrers, seeing that Ernest could now be of no further use to him, was willing enough to drop a profitless intimacy. Nay, he thought it would be wise to pick a quarrel with him, if possible, as the best means of banishing a supposed rival from the house of his noble relation, Lord Saxingham. But no opportunity for that step presented itself; so Lumley kept a fit of convenient rudeness, or an impromptu sarcasm, in reserve, if ever it should be wanted.

The season and the session were alike drawing to a close, when Maltravers received a pressing invitation from Cleveland to spend a week at his villa, which he assured Ernest would be full of agreeable people; and as all business productive of debate or division was over, Maltravers was glad to obtain fresh air, and a change of scene. Accordingly, he sent down his luggage and favourite books, and one afternoon in early August rode alone towards Temple Grove. He was much dissatisfied, perhaps disappointed, with his experience of public life; and with his high-wrought and over-refining views of the deficiencies of others more prominent, he was in a humour to mingle also censure of himself, for having yielded too much to the doubts and scruples that often, in the early part of their career, beset the honest and sincere, in the turbulent whirl of politics, and ever tend to make the robust hues that should belong to action

"Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

His mind was working its way slowly towards those conclusions, which sometimes ripen the best practical men out of the most exalted theorists, and perhaps he saw before him the pleasing prospect flatteringly exhibited to another, when he complained of being too honest for party, viz., "of becoming a very pretty rascal in time!"

For several weeks he had not heard from his unknown correspondent, and the time was come when he missed those letters, now continued for more than two years; and which, in their eloquent mixture of complaint, exhortation, despondent gloom and declamatory enthusiasm, had often soothed him in dejection, and made him more sensible of triumph. While revolving in his mind thoughts connected with these subjects--and, somehow or other, with his more ambitious reveries were always mingled musings of curiosity respecting his correspondent--he was struck by the

beauty of a little girl, of about eleven years old, who was walking with a female attendant on the footpath that skirted the road. I said that he was struck by her beauty, but that is a wrong expression; it was rather the charm of her countenance than the perfection of her features which arrested the gaze of Maltravers--a charm that might not have existed for others, but was inexpressibly attractive to him, and was so much apart from the vulgar fascination of mere beauty, that it would have equally touched a chord at his heart, if coupled with homely features or a bloomless cheek. This charm was in a wonderful innocent and dove-like softness of expression. We all form to ourselves some /beau-ideal/ of the "fair spirit" we desire as our earthly "minister," and somewhat capriciously gauge and proportion our admiration of living shapes according as the /beau-ideal/ is more or less embodied or approached. Beauty, of a stamp that is not familiar to the dreams of our fancy, may win the cold homage of our judgment, while a look, a feature, a something that realises and calls up a boyish vision, and assimilates even distantly to the picture we wear within us, has a loveliness peculiar to our eyes, and kindles an emotion that almost seems to belong to memory. It is this which the Platonists felt when they wildly supposed that souls attracted to each other on earth had been united in an earlier being and a diviner sphere; and there was in the young face on which Ernest gazed precisely this ineffable harmony with his preconceived notions of the beautiful. Many a nightly and noonday reverie was realised in those mild yet smiling eyes of the darkest blue; in that ingenuous breadth of brow, with its slightly-pencilled arches, and the nose, not cut in that sharp and clear symmetry which looks so lovely in marble, but usually gives to flesh and blood a decided and hard character, that better becomes the sterner than the gentler sex--no; not moulded in the pure Grecian, nor in the pure Roman, cast; but small, delicate, with the least possible inclination to turn upward, that was only to be detected in one position of the head, and served to give a prettier archness to the sweet flexile lips, which, from the gentleness of their repose, seemed to smile unconsciously, but rather from a happy constitutional serenity than from the giddiness of mirth. Such was the character of this fair child's countenance, on which Maltravers turned and gazed involuntarily and reverently, with something of the admiring delight with which we look upon the Virgin of a Raffaele, or the sunset landscape of a Claude. The girl did not appear to feel any premature coquetry at the evident, though respectful admiration she excited. She met the eyes bent upon her, brilliant and eloquent as they were, with a fearless and unsuspecting gaze, and pointed out to her companion, with all a child's quick and unrestrained impulse, the shining and raven gloss, the arched and haughty neck, of Ernest's beautiful Arabian.

Now there happened between Maltravers and the young object of his admiration a little adventure, which served, perhaps, to fix in her recollection this short encounter with a stranger; for certain it is that, years after, she did remember both the circumstances of the adventure and the features of Maltravers. She wore one of those large straw-hats which look so pretty upon children, and the warmth of the day made her untie the strings which confined it. A gentle breeze arose, as by a turn in the road the country became more open, and suddenly wafted the hat from its proper post, almost to the hoofs of Ernest's horse. The child naturally made a spring forward to arrest the deserter, and her foot slipped down the bank, which was rather steeply raised above the road. She uttered a low cry of pain. To dismount--to regain the prize--and to restore it to its owner, was, with Ernest, the work of a moment; the poor girl had twisted her ankle and was leaning upon her

servant for support. But when she saw the anxiety, and almost the alarm, upon the stranger's face (and her exclamation of pain had literally thrilled his heart--so much and so unaccountably had she excited his interest), she made an effort at self-control, not common at her years, and, with a forced smile, assured him she was not much hurt--that it was nothing--that she was just at home.

"Oh, miss!" said the servant, "I am sure you are very bad. Dear heart, how angry master will be! It was not my fault; was it, sir?"

"Oh, no, it was not your fault, Margaret; don't be frightened--papa sha'n't blame you. But I'm much better now." So saying, she tried to walk; but the effort was in vain--she turned yet more pale, and though she struggled to prevent a shriek, the tears rolled down her cheeks.

It was very odd, but Maltravers had never felt more touched--the tears stood in his own eyes; he longed to carry her in his arms, but, child as she was, a strange kind of nervous timidity forbade him. Margaret, perhaps, expected it of him, for she looked hard in his face, before she attempted a burthen to which, being a small, slight person, she was by no means equal. However, after a pause, she took up her charge, who, ashamed of her tears, and almost overcome with pain, nestled her head in the woman's bosom, and Maltravers walked by her side, while his docile and well-trained horse followed at a distance, every now and then putting its fore-legs on the bank and cropping away a mouthful of leaves from the hedge-row.

"Oh, Margaret!" said the little sufferer, "I cannot bear it--indeed I cannot."

And Maltravers observed that Margaret had permitted the lame foot to hang down unsupported, so that the pain must indeed have been scarcely bearable. He could restrain himself no longer.

"You are not strong enough to carry her," said he, sharply, to the servant; and the next moment the child was in his arms. Oh, with what anxious tenderness he bore her! and he was so happy when she turned her face to him and smiled, and told him she now scarcely felt the pain. If it were possible to be in love with a child of eleven years old, Maltravers was almost in love. His pulses trembled as he felt her pure breath on his cheek, and her rich beautiful hair was waved by the breeze across his lips. He hushed his voice to a whisper as he poured forth all the soothing and comforting expressions which give a natural eloquence to persons fond of children--and Ernest Maltravers was the idol of children;--he understood and sympathised with them; he had a great deal of the child himself, beneath the rough and cold husk of his proud reserve. At length they came to a lodge, and Margaret eagerly inquiring "whether master and missus were at home," seemed delighted to hear they were not. Ernest, however, insisted on bearing his charge across the lawn to the house, which, like most suburban villas, was but a stone's throw from the lodge; and, receiving the most positive promise that surgical advice should be immediately sent for, he was forced to content himself with laying the sufferer on a sofa in the drawing-room; and she thanked him so prettily, and assured him she was so much easier, that he would have given the world to kiss her. The child had completed her conquest over him by being above the child's ordinary littleness of making the worst of things, in order to obtain the consequence and dignity of being pitied;--she was evidently unselfish and considerate for others. He did kiss her, but it was the hand that he kissed, and no

cavalier ever kissed his lady's hand with more respect; and then, for the first time, the child blushed--then, for the first time, she felt as if the day would come when she should be a child no longer! Why was this?--perhaps because it is an era in life--the first sign of a tenderness that inspires respect, not familiarity!

"If ever again I could be in love," said Maltravers, as he spurred on his road, "I really think it would be with that exquisite child. My feeling is more like that of love at first sight than any emotion which beauty ever caused in me. Alice--Valerie--no; the /first/ sight of them did not:--but what folly is this--a child of eleven--and I verging upon thirty!"

Still, however, folly as it might be, the image of that young girl haunted Maltravers for many days; till change of scene, the distractions of society, the grave thoughts of manhood, and, above all, a series of exciting circumstances about to be narrated, gradually obliterated a strange and most delightful impression. He had learned, however, that Mr. Templeton was the proprietor of the villa, which was the child's home. He wrote to Ferrers to narrate the incident, and to inquire after the sufferer. In due time he heard from that gentleman that the child was recovered, and gone with Mr. and Mrs. Templeton to Brighton, for change of air and sea-bathing.

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