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#54 in our series by Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN THE HISTORY MAKES GREAT PROGRESS AND IS MARKED BY ONE IMPORTANT EVENT IN HUMAN LIFE.

SPINOZA is said to have loved, above all other amusements, to put flies into a spider's web; and the struggles of the imprisoned insects were wont to bear, in the eyes of this grave philosopher, so facetious and hilarious an appearance, that he would stand and laugh thereat until the tears "coursed one another down his innocent nose." Now it so happened that Spinoza, despite the general (and, in my most meek opinion, the just) condemnation of his theoretical tenets,* was, in character and in nature, according to the voices of all who knew him, an exceedingly kind, humane, and benevolent biped; and it doth, therefore, seem a little strange unto us grave, sober members of the unphilosophical Many, that the struggles and terrors of these little winged creatures should strike the good subtleist in a point of view so irresistibly ludicrous and delightful. But, for my part, I believe that that most imaginative and wild speculator beheld in the entangled flies nothing more than a living simile--an animated illustration--of his own beloved vision of Necessity; and that he is no more to be considered cruel for the complacency with which he gazed upon those agonized types of his system than is Lucan for dwelling with a poet's pleasure upon the many ingenious ways with which that Grand Inquisitor of Verse has contrived to vary the simple operation of dying. To the bard, the butchered soldier was only an epic ornament; to the philosopher, the murdered fly was only a metaphysical illustration. For, without being a fatalist, or a disciple of Baruch de Spinoza, I must confess that I cannot conceive a greater resemblance to our human and earthly state than the penal predicament of the devoted flies. Suddenly do we find ourselves plunged into that Vast Web,--the World; and even as the insect, when he first undergoeth a similar accident of necessity, standeth amazed and still, and only by little and little awakeneth to a full sense of his situation; so also at the first abashed and confounded, we remain on the mesh we are urged upon, ignorant, as yet, of the toils around us, and the sly, dark, immitigable foe that lieth in yonder nook, already feasting her imagination upon our destruction. Presently we revive, we stir, we flutter; and Fate, that foe--the old arch-spider, that hath no moderation in her maw--now fixeth one of her many eyes upon us, and giveth us a partial glimpse of her laidly and grim aspect. We pause in mute terror; we gaze upon the ugly spectre, so imperfectly beheld; the net ceases to tremble, and the wily enemy draws gently back into her nook. Now we begin to breathe again; we sound the strange footing on which we tread; we move tenderly along it, and again the grisly monster advances on us; again we pause; the foe retires not, but remains still, and surveyeth us; we see every step is accompanied with danger; we look round and above in despair; suddenly we feel within us a new impulse and a new power! we feel a vague sympathy with /that/ unknown region which

spreads beyond this great net,--/that limitless beyond/ hath a mystic affinity with a part of our own frame; we unconsciously extend our wings (for the soul to us is as the wings to the fly!); we attempt to rise,--to soar above this perilous snare, from which we are unable to crawl. The old spider watcheth us in self-hugging quiet, and, looking up to our native air, we think,--now shall we escape thee. Out on it! We rise not a hair's breadth: we have the /wings/, it is true, but the /feet/ are fettered. We strive desperately again: the whole web vibrates with the effort; it will break beneath our strength. Not a jot of it! we cease; we are more entangled than ever! wings, feet, frame, the foul slime is over all! where shall we turn? every line of the web leads to the one den,--we know not,--we care not,--we grow blind, confused, lost. The eyes of our hideous foe gloat upon us; she whetteth her insatiate maw; she leapeth towards us; she fixeth her fangs upon us; and so endeth my parallel!

* One ought, however, to be very cautious before one condemns a philosopher. The master's opinions are generally pure: it is the conclusions and corollaries of his disciples that "draw the honey forth that drives men mad." Schlegel seems to have studied Spinoza /de fonte/, and vindicates him very earnestly from the charges brought against him,--atheism, etc.--ED.

But what has this to do with my tale? Ay, Reader, that is thy question; and I will answer it by one of mine. When thou hearest a man moralize and preach of Fate, art thou not sure that he is going to tell thee of some one of his peculiar misfortunes? Sorrow loves a parable as much as mirth loves a jest. And thus already and from afar, I prepare thee, at the commencement of this, the third of these portions into which the history of my various and wild life will be divided, for that event with which I purpose that the said portion shall be concluded.

It is now three months after my entire recovery from my wounds, and I am married to Isora!--married,--yes, but /privately/ married, and the ceremony is as yet closely concealed. I will explain.

The moment Isora's anxiety for me led her across the threshold of my house it became necessary for her honour that our wedding should take place immediately on my recovery: so far I was decided on the measure; now for the method. During my illness, I received a long and most affectionate letter from Aubrey, who was then at Devereux Court: /so/ affectionate was the heart-breathing spirit of that letter, so steeped in all our old household remembrances and boyish feelings, that coupled as it was with a certain gloom when he spoke of himself and of worldly sins and trials, it brought tears to my eyes whenever I recurred to it; and many and many a time afterwards, when I thought his affections seemed estranged from me, I did recur to it to convince myself that I was mistaken. Shortly afterwards I received also a brief epistle from my uncle; it was as kind as usual, and it mentioned Aubrey's return to Devereux Court. "That unhappy boy," said Sir William, "is more than ever devoted to his religious duties; nor do I believe that any

priest-ridden poor devil in the dark ages ever made such use of the scourge and the penance."

Now, I have before stated that my uncle would, I knew, be averse to my intended marriage; and on hearing that Aubrey was then with him, I resolved, in replying to his letter, to entreat the former to sound Sir William on the subject I had most at heart, and ascertain the exact nature and extent of the opposition I should have to encounter in the step I was resolved to take. By the same post I wrote to the good old knight in as artful a strain as I was able, dwelling at some length upon my passion, upon the high birth, as well as the numerous good qualities of the object, but mentioning not her name; and I added everything that I thought likely to enlist my uncle's kind and warm feelings on my behalf. These letters produced the following ones:--

FROM SIR WILLIAM DEVEREUX.

'Sdeath, nephew Morton,--but I won't scold thee, though thou deservest it. Let me see, thou art now scarce twenty, and thou talkest of marriage, which is the exclusive business of middle age, as familiarly as "girls of thirteen do of puppy-dogs." Marry!--go hang thyself rather. Marriage, my dear boy, is at the best a treacherous proceeding; and a friend--a true friend--will never counsel another to adopt it rashly. Look you: I have had experience in these matters; and, I think, the moment a woman is wedded some terrible revolution happens in her system; all her former good qualities vanish, /hey presto!/ like eggs out of a conjuror's box; 'tis true they appear on t' other side of the box, the side turned to other people, but for the poor husband they are gone forever. Ods fish, Morton, go to! I tell thee again that I have had experience in these matters which thou never hast had, clever as thou thinkest thyself. If now it were a good marriage thou wert about to make; if thou wert going to wed power, and money, and places at court,--why, something might be said for thee. As it is, there is no excuse--none. And I am astonished how a boy of thy sense could think of such nonsense. Birth, Morton, what the devil does that signify so long as it is birth in another country? A foreign damsel, and a Spanish girl, too, above all others! 'Sdeath, man, as if there was not quicksilver enough in the English women for you, you must make a mercurial exportation from Spain, must you! Why, Morton, Morton, the ladies in that country are proverbial. I tremble at the very thought of it. But as for my consent, I never will give it,--never; and though I threaten thee not with disinheritance and such like, yet I do ask something in return for the great affection I have always borne thee; and I make no doubt that thou wilt readily oblige me in such a trifle as giving up a mere Spanish donna. So think of her no more. If thou wantest to make love, there are ladies in plenty whom thou needest not to marry. And for my part, I thought that thou wert all in all with the Lady Hasselton: Heaven bless her pretty face! Now don't think I want to scold thee; and don't think thine old uncle harsh,--God knows he is not,--but my dear, dear boy, this is quite out of the question, and thou must let me hear no more about it. The gout cripples me so that I must leave off. Ever thine old uncle,

WILLIAM DEVEREUX.

P. S. Upon consideration, I think, my dear boy, that thou must want money, and thou art ever too sparing. Messrs. Child, or my goldsmiths in Aldersgate, have my orders to pay to thy hand's-writing whatever thou mayst desire; and I do hope that thou wilt now want nothing to make thee merry withal. Why dost thou not write a comedy? is it not the mode still?

LETTER FROM AUBREY DEVEREUX.

I have sounded my uncle, dearest Morton, according to your wishes; and I grieve to say that I have found him inexorable. He was very much hurt by your letter to him, and declared he should write to you forthwith upon the subject. I represented to him all that you have said upon the virtues of your intended bride; and I also insisted upon your clear judgment and strong sense upon most points being a sufficient surety for your prudence upon this. But you know the libertine opinions and the depreciating judgment of women entertained by my poor uncle; and he would, I believe, have been less displeased with the heinous crime of an illicit connection than the amiable weakness of an imprudent marriage--I might say of any marriage--until it was time to provide heirs to the estate.

Here Aubrey, in the most affectionate and earnest manner, broke off, to point out to me the extreme danger to my interests that it would be to disoblige my uncle; who, despite his general kindness, would, upon a disagreement on so tender a matter as his sore point, and his most cherished hobby, consider my disobedience as a personal affront. He also recalled to me all that my uncle had felt and done for me; and insisted, at all events, upon the absolute duty of my delaying, even though I should not break off, the intended measure. Upon these points he enlarged much and eloquently; and this part of his letter certainly left no cheering or comfortable impression upon my mind.

Now my good uncle knew as much of love as L. Mummius did of the fine arts,* and it was impossible to persuade him that if one wanted to indulge the tender passion, one woman would not do exactly as well as another, provided she were equally pretty. I knew therefore that he was incapable, on the one hand, of understanding my love for Isora, or, on the other, of acknowledging her claims upon me. I had not, of course, mentioned to him the generous imprudence which, on the news of my wound, had brought Isora to my house: for if I had done so, my uncle, with the eye of a courtier of Charles II., would only have seen the advantage to be derived from the impropriety, not the gratitude due to the devotion; neither had I mentioned this circumstance to Aubrey,--it seemed to me too delicate for any written communication; and therefore, in his advice to delay my marriage, he was unaware of the necessity which rendered the advice unavailing. Now then was I in this dilemma, either to marry, and that /instanter/, and so, seemingly, with the most hasty and the most

insolent decorum, incense, wound, and in his interpretation of the act, condemn one whom I loved as I loved my uncle; or, to delay the marriage, to separate Isora, and to leave my future wife to the malignant consequences that would necessarily be drawn from a sojourn of weeks in my house. This fact there was no chance of concealing; servants have more tongues than Argus had eyes, and my youthful extravagance had filled my whole house with those pests of society. The latter measure was impossible, the former was most painful. Was there no third way?--there was that of a private marriage. This obviated not every evil; but it removed many: it satisfied my impatient love; it placed Isora under a sure protection; it secured and established her honour the moment the ceremony should be declared; and it avoided the seeming ingratitude and indelicacy of disobeying my uncle, without an effort of patience to appease him. I should have time and occasion then, I thought, for soothing and persuading him, and ultimately winning that consent which I firmly trusted I should sooner or later extract from his kindness of heart.

* A Roman consul, who, removing the most celebrated remains of Grecian antiquity to Rome, assured the persons charged with conveying them that, if they injured any, they should make others to replace them.

That some objections existed to this mediatory plan was true enough: those objections related to Isora rather than to myself, and she was the first, on my hinting at the proposal, to overcome its difficulties. The leading feature in Isora's character was generosity; and, in truth, I know not a quality more dangerous either to man or woman. Herself was invariably the last human being whom she seemed to consider; and no sooner did she ascertain what measure was the most prudent for me to adopt, than it immediately became that upon which she insisted. Would it have been possible for me, man of pleasure and of the world as I was thought to be,--no, my good uncle, though it went to my heart to wound thee so secretly, it would /not/ have been possible for me, even if I had not coined my whole nature into love, even if Isora had not been to me what one smile of Isora's really was,--it would not have been possible to have sacrificed so noble and so divine a heart, and made myself, in that sacrifice, a wretch forever. No, my good uncle. I could not have made that surrender to thy reason, much less to thy prejudices. But if I have not done great injustice to the knight's character, I doubt whether the youngest reader will not forgive him for a want of sympathy with one feeling, when they consider how susceptible that charming old man was to all others.

And herewith I could discourse most excellent wisdom upon that mysterious passion of love. I could show, by tracing its causes, and its inseparable connection with the imagination, that it is only in certain states of society, as well as in certain periods of life, that love--real, pure, high love--can be born. Yea, I could prove, to the nicety of a very problem, that, in the court of Charles II., it would have been as impossible for such a feeling to find root, as it would be for myrtle trees to effloresce from a Duvillier periwig. And we are not

to expect a man, however tender and affectionate he may be, to sympathize with that sentiment in another, which, from the accidents of birth and position, nothing short of a miracle could have ever produced in himself.

We were married then in private by a Catholic priest. St. John, and one old lady who had been my father's godmother--for I wished for a female assistant in the ceremony, and this old lady could tell no secrets, for, being excessively deaf, nobody ever talked to her, and indeed she scarcely ever went abroad--were the sole witnesses. I took a small house in the immediate neighbourhood of London; it was surrounded on all sides with a high wall which defied alike curiosity and attack. This was, indeed, the sole reason which had induced me to prefer it to many more gaudy or more graceful dwellings. But within I had furnished it with every luxury that wealth, the most lavish and unsparing, could procure. Thither, under an assumed name, I brought my bride, and there was the greater part of my time spent. The people I had placed in the house believed I was a rich merchant, and this accounted for my frequent absences (absences which Prudence rendered necessary), for the wealth which I lavished, and for the precautions of bolt, bar, and wall, which they imagined the result of commercial caution.

Oh the intoxication of that sweet Elysium, that Tadmor in life's desert,--the possession of the one whom we have first loved! It is as if poetry, and music, and light, and the fresh breath of flowers, were all blended into one being, and from that being rose our existence! It is content made rapture,--nothing to wish for, yet everything to feel! Was that air the air which I had breathed hitherto? that earth the earth which I had hitherto beheld? No, my heart dwelt in a new world, and all these motley and restless senses were melted into one sense,--deep, silent, fathomless delight!

Well, too much of this species of love is not fit for a worldly tale, and I will turn, for the reader's relief, to worldly affections. From my first reunion with Isora, I had avoided all the former objects and acquaintances in which my time had been so charmingly employed. Tarleton was the first to suffer by my new pursuit. "What has altered you?" said he; "you drink not, neither do you play. The women say you are grown duller than a Norfolk parson, and neither the Puppet Show nor the Water Theatre, the Spring Gardens nor the Ring, Wills's nor the Kit Cat, the Mulberry Garden nor the New Exchange, witness any longer your homage and devotion. What has come over you?--speak!"

"Apathy!"

"Ah! I understand,--you are tired of these things; pish, man!--go down into the country, the green fields will revive thee, and send thee back to London a new man! One would indeed find the town intolerably dull, if the country were not, happily, a thousand times duller: go to the country, Count, or I shall drop your friendship."

"Drop it!" said I, yawning, and Tarleton took pet, and did as I desired him. Now I had got rid of my friend as easily as I had found him,--a

matter that would not have been so readily accomplished had not Mr. Tarleton owed me certain moneys, concerning which, from the moment he had "dropped my friendship," good breeding effectually prevented his saying a single syllable to me ever after. There is no knowing the blessings of money until one has learned to manage it properly!

So much, then, for the friend; now for the mistress. Lady Hasselton had, as Tarleton hinted before, resolved to play me a trick of spite; the reasons of our rupture really were, as I had stated to Tarleton, the mighty effects of little things. She lived in a sea of trifles, and she was desperately angry if her lover was not always sailing a pleasure-boat in the same ocean. Now this was expecting too much from me, and, after twisting our silken strings of attachment into all manner of fantastic forms, we fell fairly out one evening and broke the little ligatures in two. No sooner had I quarrelled with Tarleton than Lady Hasselton received him in my place, and a week afterwards I was favoured with an anonymous letter, informing me of the violent passion which a certain /dame de la cour/ had conceived for me, and requesting me to meet her at an appointed place. I looked twice over the letter, and discovered in one corner of it two /g's/ peculiar to the caligraphy of Lady Hasselton, though the rest of the letter (bad spelling excepted) was pretty decently disguised. Mr. Fielding was with me at the time. "What disturbs you?" said he, adjusting his knee-buckles.

"Read it!" said I, handing him the letter.

"Body of me, you are a lucky dog!" cried the beau. "You will hasten thither on the wings of love."

"Not a whit of it," said I; "I suspect that it comes from a rich old widow whom I hate mortally."

"A rich old widow!" repeated Mr. Fielding, to whose eyes there was something very piquant in a jointure, and who thought consequently that there were few virginal flowers equal to a widow's weeds. "A rich old widow: you are right, Count, you are right. Don't go, don't think of it. I cannot abide those depraved creatures. Widow, indeed,--quite an affront to your gallantry."

"Very true," said I. "Suppose you supply my place?"

"I'd sooner be shot first," said Mr. Fielding, taking his departure, and begging me for the letter to wrap some sugar plums in.

Need I add, that Mr. Fielding repaired to the place of assignation, where he received, in the shape of a hearty drubbing, the kind favours intended for me? The story was now left for me to tell, not for the Lady Hasselton; and that makes all the difference in the manner a story is told,--/me/ narrante, it is de /te/ fabula narratur; /te/ narrante, and it is de /me/ fabula, etc. Poor Lady Hasselton! to be laughed at, and have Tarleton for a lover!

I have gone back somewhat in the progress of my history in order to make

the above honourable mention of my friend and my mistress, thinking it due to their own merits, and thinking it may also be instructive to young gentlemen who have not yet seen the world to testify the exact nature and the probable duration of all the loves and friendships they are likely to find in that Great Monmouth Street of glittering and of damaged affections! I now resume the order of narration.

I wrote to Aubrey, thanking him for his intercession, but concealing, till we met, the measure I had adopted. I wrote also to my uncle, assuring him that I would take an early opportunity of hastening to Devereux Court, and conversing with him on the subject of his letter. And after an interval of some weeks, I received the two following answers from my correspondents; the latter arrived several days after the former:--

FROM AUBREY DEVEREUX.

I am glad to understand from your letter, unexplanatory as it is, that you have followed my advice. I will shortly write to you more at large; at present I am on the eve of my departure for the North of England, and have merely time to assure you of my affection.

AUBREY DEVEREUX.

P. S. Gerald is in London; have you seen him? Oh, this world! this world! how it clings to us, despite our education, our wishes, our conscience, our knowledge of the Dread Hereafter!

LETTER FROM SIR WILLIAM DEVEREUX.

MY DEAR NEPHEW,--Thank thee for thy letter, and the new plays thou sentest me down, and that droll new paper, the "Spectator:" it is a pretty shallow thing enough,--though it is not so racy as Rochester or little Sid would have made it; but I thank thee for it, because it shows thou wast not angry with thine old uncle for opposing thee on thy love whimsies (in which most young men are dreadfully obstinate), since thou didst provide so kindly for his amusement. Well, but, Morton, I hope thou hast got that crotchet clear out of thy mind, and prithee now /don't/ talk of it when thou comest down to see me. I hate conversations on marriage more than a boy does flogging,--ods fish, I do. So you must humour me on that point!

Aubrey has left me again, and I am quite alone,--not that I was much better off when he was here, for he was wont, of late, to shun my poor room like a "lazar house," and when I spoke to his mother about it, she muttered something about "example" and "corrupting." 'Sdeath, Morton, is your old uncle, who loves all living things, down to poor Ponto the dog, the sort of man whose example corrupts youth? As for thy mother, she grows more solitary every day; and I don't know how it is, but I am not so fond of strange faces as I used to be. 'Tis a new thing for me to be avoided and alone. Why, I remember even little Sid, who had as

much venom as most men, once said it was impossible to--Fie now--see if I was not going to preach a sermon from a text in favour of myself! But come, Morton, come, I long for your face again: it is not so soft as Aubrey's, nor so regular as Gerald's; but it is twice as kind as either. Come, before it is too late: I feel myself going; and, to tell thee a secret, the doctors tell me I may not last many months longer. Come, and laugh once more at the old knight's stories. Come, and show him that there is still some one not too good to love him. Come, and I will tell thee a famous thing of old Rowley, which I am too ill and too sad to tell thee now.

WM. DEVEREUX.

Need I say that, upon receiving this letter, I resolved, without any delay, to set out for Devereux Court? I summoned Desmarais to me; he answered not my call: he was from home,--an unfrequent occurrence with the necessitarian valet. I waited his return, which was not for some hours, in order to give him sundry orders for my departure. The exquisite Desmarais hemmed thrice,--"Will Monsieur be so very kind as to excuse my accompanying him?" said he, with his usual air and tone of obsequious respect.

"And why?" The valet explained. A relation of his was in England only for a few days: the philosopher was most anxious to enjoy his society, a pleasure which fate might not again allow him.

Though I had grown accustomed to the man's services, and did not like to lose him even for a time, yet I could not refuse his request; and I therefore ordered another of my servants to supply his place. This change, however, determined me to adopt a plan which I had before meditated; namely, the conveying of my own person to Devereux Court on horseback, and sending my servant with my luggage in my post-chaise. The equestrian mode of travelling is, indeed to this day, the one most pleasing to me; and the reader will find me pursuing it many years afterwards, and to the same spot.

I might as well observe here that I had never intrusted Desmarais--no, nor one of my own servants--with the secret of my marriage with, or my visits to, Isora. I am a very fastidious person on those matters; and of all confidants, even in the most trifling affairs, I do most eschew those by whom we have the miserable honour of being served.

In order, then, to avoid having my horse brought me to Isora's house by any of these menial spies, I took the steed which I had selected for my journey, and rode to Isora's with the intention of spending the evening there, and thence commencing my excursion with the morning light.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE; PARTING; A DEATH-BED.--AFTER ALL HUMAN NATURE IS A BEAUTIFUL

FABRIC; AND EVEN ITS IMPERFECTIONS ARE NOT ODIUS TO HIM WHO HAS STUDIED THE SCIENCE OF ITS ARCHITECTURE, AND FORMED A REVERENT ESTIMATE OF ITS CREATOR.

IT is a noticeable thing how much fear increases love. I mean--for the aphorism requires explanation--how much we love in proportion to our fear of losing (or even to our fear of injury done to) the beloved object. 'Tis an instance of the reaction of the feelings: the love produces the fear, and the fear reproduces the love. This is one reason, among many, why women love so much more tenderly and anxiously than we do; and it is also one reason among many why frequent absences are, in all stages of love, the most keen excitors of the passion. I never breathed, away from Isora, without trembling for her safety. I trembled lest this Barnard, if so I should still continue to call her persecutor, should again discover and again molest her. Whenever (and that was almost daily) I rode to the quiet and remote dwelling I had procured her, my heart beat so vehemently, and my agitation was so intense, that on arriving at the gate I have frequently been unable, for several minutes, to demand admittance. There was, therefore, in the mysterious danger which ever seemed to hang over Isora, a perpetual irritation to a love otherwise but little inclined to slumber; and this constant excitement took away from the torpor into which domestic affection too often languishes, and increased my passion even while it diminished my happiness.

On my arrival now at Isora's, I found her already stationed at the window, watching for my coming. How her dark eyes lit into lustre when they saw me! How the rich blood mantled up under the soft cheek which feeling had refined of late into a paler hue than it was wont, when I first gazed upon it, to wear! Then how sprang forth her light step to meet me! How trembled her low voice to welcome me! How spoke, from every gesture of her graceful form, the anxious, joyful, all-animating gladness of her heart! It is a melancholy pleasure to the dry, harsh afterthoughts of later life, to think one has been thus loved; and one marvels, when one considers what one is now, how it could have ever been! That love /of ours/ was never made for after years! It could never have flowed into the common and cold channel of ordinary affairs! It could never have been mingled with the petty cares and the low objects with which the loves of all who live long together in this sordid and most earthly earth are sooner or later blended! We could not have spared to others an atom of the great wealth of our affection. We were misers of every coin in that boundless treasury. It would have pierced me to the soul to have seen Isora smile upon another. I know not even, had we had children, if I should not have been jealous of my child! Was this selfish love? yes, it was, intensely, wholly selfish; but it was a love made so only by its excess; nothing selfish on a smaller scale polluted it. There was not on earth that which the one would not have forfeited at the lightest desire of the other. So utterly were happiness and Isora entwined together that I could form no idea of the one with which the other was not connected. Was this love made for the many and miry roads through which man must travel? Was it made for age, or, worse than age, for those cool, ambitious, scheming years that we call mature, in which all the luxuriance and verdure of

things are pared into tame shapes that mimic life, but a life that is estranged from Nature, in which art is the only beauty and regularity the only grace? No, in my heart of hearts, I feel that our love was not meant for the stages of life through which I have already passed; it would have made us miserable to see it fritter itself away, and to remember what it once was. Better as it is! better to mourn over the green bough than to look upon the sapless stem. You who now glance over these pages, are you a mother? If so, answer me one question: Would you not rather that the child whom you have cherished with your soul's care, whom you have nurtured at your bosom, whose young joys your eyes have sparkled to behold, whose lightest grief you have wept to witness as you would have wept not for your own; over whose pure and unvexed sleep you have watched and prayed, and, as it lay before you thus still and unconscious of your vigil, have shaped out, oh, such bright hopes for its future lot,--would you not rather that while thus young and innocent, not a care tasted, not a crime incurred, it went down at once into the dark grave? Would you not rather suffer this grief, bitter though it be, than watch the predestined victim grow and ripen, and wind itself more and more around your heart, and when it is of full and mature age, and you yourself are stricken by years, and can form no new ties to replace the old that are severed, when woes have already bowed the darling of your hope, whom woe never was to touch, when sins have already darkened the bright, seraph, unclouded heart which sin never was to dim,--behold it sink day by day altered, diseased, decayed, into the tomb which its childhood had in vain escaped? Answer me: would not the earlier fate be far gentler than the last? And if you /have/ known and wept over that early tomb, if you have seen the infant flower fade away from the green soil of your affections; if you have missed the bounding step, and the laughing eye, and the winning mirth which made this sterile world a perpetual holiday,--Mother of the Lost, if you have known, and you still pine for these, answer me yet again! Is it not a comfort, even while you mourn, to think of all that that breast, now so silent, has escaped? The cream, the sparkle, the elixir of life, it had already quaffed: is it not sweet to think it shunned the wormwood and the dregs? Answer me, even though the answer be in tears! Mourner, your child was to you what my early and only love was to me; and could you pierce down, down through a thousand fathom of ebbing thought, to the far depths of my heart, you would there behold a sorrow /and a consolation/ that have something in unison with your own!

When the light of the next morning broke into our room, Isora was still sleeping. Have you ever observed that the young, seen asleep and by the morning light, seem much younger even than they are? partly because the air and the light sleep of dawn bring a fresher bloom to the cheek, and partly, because the careless negligence and the graceful postures exclusively appropriated to youth, are forbidden by custom and formality through the day, and developing themselves unconsciously in sleep, they strike the eye like the ease and freedom of childhood itself. There, as I looked upon Isora's tranquil and most youthful beauty, over which circled and breathed an ineffable innocence,--even as the finer and subtler air, which was imagined by those dreamy bards who kindled the soft creations of naiad and of nymph, to float around a goddess,--I could not believe that aught evil awaited one for whom infancy itself

seemed to linger,--linger as if no elder shape and less delicate hue were meet to be the garment of so much guilelessness and tenderness of heart. I felt, indeed, while I bent over her, and her regular and quiet breath came upon my cheek, that feeling which is exactly the reverse to a presentiment of ill. I felt as if, secure in her own purity, she had nothing to dread, so that even the pang of parting was lost in the confidence which stole over me as I then gazed.

I rose gently, went to the next room, and dressed myself; I heard my horse neighing beneath, as the servant walked him lazily to and fro. I re-entered the bed-chamber in order to take leave of Isora; she was already up. "What!" said I, "it is but three minutes since I left you asleep, and I stole away as time does when with you."

"Ah!" said Isora, smiling and blushing too, "but for my part, I think there is an instinct to know, even if all the senses were shut up, whether the one we love is with us or not. The moment you left me, I felt it at once, even in sleep, and I woke. But you will not, no, you will not leave me yet!"

I think I see Isora now, as she stood by the window which she had opened, with a woman's minute anxiety, to survey even the aspect of the clouds, and beseech caution against the treachery of the skies. I think I see her now, as she stood the moment after I had torn myself from her embrace, and had looked back, as I reached the door, for one parting glance,--her eyes all tenderness, her lips parted, and quivering with the attempt to smile, the long, glossy ringlets (through whose raven hue the /purpureum lumen/ broke like an imprisoned sunbeam) straying in dishevelled beauty over her transparent neck; the throat bent in mute despondency; the head drooping; the arms half extended, and dropping gradually as my steps departed; the sunken, absorbed expression of face, form, and gesture, so steeped in the very bitterness of dejection,--all are before me now, sorrowful, and lovely in sorrow, as they were beheld years ago, by the gray, cold, comfortless light of morning!

"God bless you,--my own, own love," I said; and as my look lingered, I added, with a full but an assured heart; "and He will!" I tarried no more: I flung myself on my horse, and rode on as if I were speeding /to/, and not /from/, my bride.

The noon was far advanced, as, the day after I left Isora, I found myself entering the park in which Devereux Court is situated. I did not enter by one of the lodges, but through a private gate. My horse was thoroughly jaded; for the distance I had come was great, and I had ridden rapidly; and as I came into the park, I dismounted, and, throwing the rein over my arm, proceeded slowly on foot. I was passing through a thick, long plantation, which belted the park and in which several walks and rides had been cut, when a man crossed the same road which I took, at a little distance before me. He was looking on the ground, and appeared wrapt in such earnest meditation that he neither saw nor heard me. But I had seen enough of him, in that brief space of time, to feel convinced that it was Montreuil whom I beheld. What brought him hither, him, whom I believed in London, immersed with Gerald in political

schemes, and for whom these woods were not only interdicted ground, but to whom they must have also been but a tame field of interest, after his audiences with ministers and nobles? I did not, however, pause to consider on his apparition; I rather quickened my pace towards the house, in the expectation of there ascertaining the cause of his visit.

The great gates of the outer court were open as usual: I rode unheeding through them, and was soon at the door of the hall. The porter, who unfolded to my summons the ponderous door, uttered, when he saw me, an exclamation that seemed to my ear to have in it more of sorrow than welcome.

"How is your master?" I asked.

The man shook his head, but did not hasten to answer; and, impressed with a vague alarm, I hurried on without repeating the question. On the staircase I met old Nicholls, my uncle's valet; I stopped and questioned him. My uncle had been seized on the preceding day with gout in the stomach; medical aid had been procured, but it was feared ineffectually, and the physicians had declared, about an hour before I arrived, that he could not, in human probability, outlive the night. Stifling the rising at my heart, I waited to hear no more: I flew up the stairs; I was at the door of my uncle's chamber; I stopped there, and listened; all was still; I opened the door gently; I stole in, and, creeping to the bedside, knelt down and covered my face with my hands; for I required a pause for self-possession, before I had courage to look up. When I raised my eyes, I saw my mother on the opposite side; she sat on a chair with a draught of medicine in one hand, and a watch in the other. She caught my eye, but did not speak; she gave me a sign of recognition, and looked down again upon the watch. My uncle's back was turned to me, and he lay so still that, for some moments, I thought he was asleep; at last, however, he moved restlessly.

"It is past noon!" said he to my mother, "is it not?"

"It is three minutes and six seconds after four," replied my mother, looking closer at the watch.

My uncle sighed. "They have sent an express for the dear boy, Madam?" said he.

"Exactly at half-past nine last evening," answered my mother, glancing at me.

"He could scarcely be here by this time," said my uncle, and he moved again in the bed. "Pish, how the pillow frets one!"

"Is it too high?" said my mother.

"No," said my uncle, faintly, "no--no--the discomfort is not in the pillow, after all: 'tis a fine day; is it not?"

"Very!" said my mother; "I wish you could go out."

My uncle did not answer: there was a pause. "Ods fish, Madam, are those carriage wheels?"

"No, Sir William--but--"

"There /are/ sounds in my ear; my senses grow dim," said my uncle, unheeding her: "would that I might live another day; I should not like to die without seeing him. 'Sdeath, Madam, I do hear something behind!--Sobs, as I live!--Who sobs for the old knight?" and my uncle turned round, and saw me.

"My dear--dear uncle!" I said, and could say no more.

"Ah, Morton," cried the kind old man, putting his hand affectionately upon mine. "Beshrew me, but I think I have conquered the grim enemy now that you are come. But what's this, my boy?--tears--tears,--why, little Sid--no, nor Rochester either, would ever have believed this if I had sworn it! Cheer up, cheer up."

But, seeing that I wept and sobbed the more, my uncle, after a pause, continued in the somewhat figurative strain which the reader has observed he sometimes adopted, and which perhaps his dramatic studies had taught him.

"Nay, Morton, what do you grieve for?--that Age should throw off its fardel of aches and pains, and no longer groan along its weary road, meeting cold looks and unwilling welcomes, as both host and comrade grow weary of the same face, and the spendthrift heart has no longer quip or smile wherewith to pay the reckoning? No, no: let the poor pedler shuffle off his dull pack, and fall asleep. But I am glad you are come: I would sooner have one of your kind looks at your uncle's stale saws or jests than all the long faces about me, saving only the presence of your mother;" and with his characteristic gallantry, my uncle turned courteously to her.

"Dear Sir William!" said she, "it is time you should take your draught; and then would it not be better that you should see the chaplain? he waits without."

"Ods fish," said my uncle, turning again to me, "'tis the way with them all: when the body is past hope comes the physician, and when the soul is past mending comes the priest. No, Madam, no, 'tis too late for either.--Thank ye, Morton, thank ye" (as I started up--took the draught from my mother's hand, and besought him to drink it), "'tis of no use; but if it pleases thee, I must,"--and he drank the medicine.

My mother rose, and walked towards the door: it was ajar; and, as my eye followed her figure, I perceived, through the opening, the black garb of the chaplain.

"Not yet," said she, quietly; "wait." And then gliding away, seated herself by the window in silence, and told her beads.

My uncle continued: "They have been at me, Morton, as if I had been a pagan; and I believe, in their hearts, they are not a little scandalized that I don't try to win the next world by trembling like an ague. Faith now, I never could believe that Heaven was so partial to cowards; nor can I think, Morton, that Salvation is like a soldier's muster-roll, and that we may play the devil between hours, so that, at the last moment, we whip in, and answer to our names. Ods fish, Morton, I could tell thee a tale of that; but 'tis a long one, and we have not time now. Well, well, for my part, I deem reverently and gratefully of God, and do not believe He will be very wroth with our past enjoyment of life, if we have taken care that others should enjoy it too; nor do I think, with thy good mother, and Aubrey, dear child! that an idle word has the same weight in the Almighty's scales as a wicked deed."

"Blessed, blessed, are they," I cried through my tears, "on whose souls there is as little stain as there is on yours!"

"Faith, Morton, that's kindly said; and thou knowest not how strangely it sounds, after their exhortations to repentance. I know I have had my faults, and walked on to our common goal in a very irregular line; but I never wronged the living nor slandered the dead, nor ever shut my heart to the poor,--'t were a burning sin if I had,--and I have loved all men and all things, and I never bore ill-will to a creature. Poor Ponto, Morton, thou wilt take care of poor Ponto, when I'm dead,--nay, nay, don't grieve so. Go, my child, go: compose thyself while I see the priest, for 't will please thy poor mother; and though she thinks harshly of me now, I should not like her to do so /to-morrow! Go, my dear boy, go."

I went from the room, and waited by the door, till the office of the priest was over. My mother then came out, and said Sir William had composed himself to sleep. While she was yet speaking, Gerald surprised me by his appearance. I learned that he had been in the house for the last three days, and when I heard this, I involuntarily accounted for the appearance of Montreuil. I saluted him distantly, and he returned my greeting with the like pride. He seemed, however, though in a less degree, to share in my emotions; and my heart softened to him for it. Nevertheless we stood apart, and met not as brothers should have met by the death-bed of a mutual benefactor.

"Will you wait without?" said my mother.

"No," answered I, "I will watch over him." So I stole in, with a light step, and seated myself by my uncle's bed-side. He was asleep, and his sleep was as hushed and quiet as an infant's. I looked upon his face, and saw a change had come over it, and was increasing sensibly: but there was neither harshness nor darkness in the change, awful as it was. The soul, so long nurtured on benevolence, could not, in parting, leave a rude stamp on the kindly clay which had seconded its impulses so well.

The evening had just set in, when my uncle woke; he turned very gently, and smiled when he saw me.

"It is late," said he, and I observed with a wrung heart, that his voice was fainter.

"No, Sir, not very," said I.

"Late enough, my child; the warm sun has gone down; and 'tis a good time to close one's eyes, when all without looks gray and chill: methinks it is easier to wish thee farewell, Morton, when I see thy face indistinctly. I am glad I shall not die in the daytime. Give me thy hand, my child, and tell me that thou art not angry with thine old uncle for thwarting thee in that love business. I have heard tales of the girl, too, which made me glad, for thy sake, that it is all off, though I might not tell thee of them before. 'Tis very dark, Morton. I have had a pleasant sleep. Ods fish, I do not think a bad man would have slept so well. The fire burns dim, Morton: it is very cold. Cover me up; double the counterpane over the legs, Morton. I remember once walking in the Mall; little Sid said, 'Devereux'--it is colder and colder, Morton; raise the blankets more over the back; 'Devereux,' said little Sid--faith, Morton, 'tis ice now--where art thou?--is the fire out, that I can't see thee? Remember thine old uncle, Morton--and--and--don't forget poor--Ponto. Bless thee, my child; bless you all!"

And my uncle died!

CHAPTER III.

A GREAT CHANGE OF PROSPECTS.

I SHUT myself up in the apartments prepared for me (they were not those I had formerly occupied), and refused all participation in my solitude, till, after an interval of some days, my mother came to summon me to the opening of the will. She was more moved than I had expected. "It is a pity," said she, as we descended the stairs, "that Aubrey is not here, and that we should be so unacquainted with the exact place where he is likely to be that I fear the letter I sent him may be long delayed, or, indeed, altogether miscarry."

"Is not the Abbe here?" said I, listlessly.

"No!" answered my mother, "to be sure not."

"He has /been/ here," said I, greatly surprised. "I certainly saw him on the day of my arrival."

"Impossible!" said my mother, in evident astonishment; and seeing that, at all events, she was unacquainted with the circumstance, I said no more.

The will was to be read in the little room where my uncle had been accustomed to sit. I felt it as a sacrilege to his memory to choose

that spot for such an office, but I said nothing. Gerald and my mother, the lawyer (a neighbouring attorney, named Oswald), and myself were the only persons present. Mr. Oswald hemmed thrice, and broke the seal. After a preliminary, strongly characteristic of the testator, he came to the disposition of the estates. I had never once, since my poor uncle's death, thought upon the chances of his will; indeed, knowing myself so entirely his favourite, I could not, if I had thought upon them, have entertained a doubt as to their result. What then was my astonishment when, couched in terms of the strongest affection, the whole bulk of the property was bequeathed to Gerald; to Aubrey the sum of forty, to myself that of twenty thousand pounds (a capital considerably less than the yearly income of my uncle's princely estates), was allotted. Then followed a list of minor bequests,--to my mother an annuity of three thousand a year, with the privilege of apartments in the house during her life; to each of the servants legacies sufficient for independence; to a few friends, and distant connections of the family, tokens of the testator's remembrance,--even the horses to his carriage, and the dogs that fed from his menials' table, were not forgotten, but were to be set apart from work, and maintained in indolence during their remaining span of life. The will was concluded: I could not believe my senses; not a word was said as a reason for giving Gerald the priority.

I rose calmly enough. "Suffer me, Sir," said I to the lawyer, "to satisfy my own eyes." Mr. Oswald bowed, and placed the will in my hands. I glanced at Gerald as I took it: his countenance betrayed, or feigned, an astonishment equal to my own. With a jealous, searching, scrutinizing eye, I examined the words of the bequest; I examined especially (for I suspected that the names must have been exchanged) the place in which my name and Gerald's occurred. In vain: all was smooth and fair to the eye, not a vestige of possible erasure or alteration was visible. I looked next at the wording of the will: it was evidently my uncle's; no one could have feigned or imitated the peculiar turn of his expressions; and, above all, many parts of the will (the affectionate and personal parts) were in his own handwriting.

"The date," said I, "is, I perceive, of very recent period; the will is signed by two witnesses besides yourself. Who and where are they?"

"Robert Lister, the first signature, my clerk; he is since dead, Sir."

"Dead!" said I; "and the other witness, George Davis?"

"Is one of Sir William's tenants, and is below, Sir, in waiting."

"Let him come up," and a middle-sized, stout man, with a blunt, bold, open countenance, was admitted.

"Did you witness this will?" said I.

"I did, your honour!"

"And this is your handwriting?" pointing to the scarcely legible scrawl.

"Yees, your honour," said the man, scratching his head, "I think it be; they are my /ees/, and G, and D, sure enough."

"And do you know the purport of the will you signed?"

"Anan!"

"I mean, do you know to whom Sir William--stop, Mr. Oswald, suffer the man to answer me--to whom Sir William left his property?"

"Noa, to be sure, Sir; the will was a woundy long one, and Maister Oswald there told me it was no use to read it over to me, but merely to sign, as a witness to Sir William's handwriting."

"Enough: you may retire;" and George Davis vanished.

"Mr. Oswald," said I, approaching the attorney, "I may wrong you, and if so, I am sorry for it, but I suspect there has been foul practice in this deed. I have reason to be convinced that Sir William Devereux could never have made this devise. I give you warning, Sir, that I shall bring the business immediately before a court of law, and that if guilty--ay, tremble, Sir--of what I suspect, you will answer for this deed at the foot of the gallows."

I turned to Gerald, who rose while I was yet speaking. Before I could address him, he exclaimed, with evident and extreme agitation,

"You cannot, Morton,--you cannot--you dare not--insinuate that I, your brother, have been base enough to forge, or to instigate the forgery of, this will?"

Gerald's agitation made me still less doubtful of his guilt.

"The case, Sir," I answered coldly, "stands thus: my uncle could not have made this will; it is a devise that must seem incredible to all who knew aught of our domestic circumstances. Fraud has been practised, how I know not; by whom I do know."

"Morton, Morton: this is insufferable; I cannot bear such charges, even from a brother."

"Charges!--your conscience speaks, Sir,--not I; no one benefits by this fraud but you: pardon me if I draw an inference from a fact."

So saying, I turned on my heel, and abruptly left the apartment. I ascended the stairs which led to my own: there I found my servant preparing the paraphernalia in which that very evening I was to attend my uncle's funeral. I gave him, with a calm and collected voice, the necessary instructions for following me to town immediately after that event, and then I passed on to the room where the deceased lay in state. The room was hung with black: the gorgeous pall, wrought with the proud heraldry of our line, lay over the coffin; and by the lights which made, in that old chamber, a more brilliant, yet more ghastly, day, sat the

hired watchers of the dead.

I bade them leave me, and kneeling down beside the coffin, I poured out the last expressions of my grief. I rose, and was retiring once more to my room, when I encountered Gerald.

"Morton," said he, "I own to you, I myself am astounded by my uncle's will. I do not come to make you offers; you would not accept them: I do not come to vindicate myself, it is beneath me; and we have never been as brothers, and we know not their language: but I /do/ come to demand you to retract the dark and causeless suspicions you have vented against me, and also to assure you that, if you have doubts of the authenticity of the will, so far from throwing obstacles in your way, I myself will join in the inquiries you institute and the expenses of the law."

I felt some difficulty in curbing my indignation while Gerald thus spoke. I saw before me the persecutor of Isora, the fraudulent robber of my rights, and I heard this enemy speak to me of aiding in the inquiries which were to convict himself of the basest, if not the blackest, of human crimes; there was something too in the reserved and yet insolent tone of his voice which, reminding me as it did of our long aversion to each other, made my very blood creep with abhorrence. I turned away, that I might not break my oath to Isora, for I felt strongly tempted to do so; and said in as calm an accent as I could command, "The case will, I trust, require no king's evidence; and, at least, I will not be beholden to the man whom my reason condemns for any assistance in bringing upon himself the ultimate condemnation of the law."

Gerald looked at me sternly. "Were you not my brother," said he, in a low tone, "I would, for a charge so dishonouring my fair name, strike you dead at my feet."

"It is a wonderful exertion of fraternal love," I rejoined, with a scornful laugh, but an eye flashing with passions a thousand times more fierce than scorn, "that prevents your adding that last favour to those you have already bestowed on me."

Gerald, with a muttered curse, placed his hand upon his sword; my own rapier was instantly half drawn, when, to save us from the great guilt of mortal contest against each other, steps were heard, and a number of the domestics charged with melancholy duties at the approaching rite, were seen slowly sweeping in black robes along the opposite gallery. Perhaps that interruption restored both of us to our senses, for we said, almost in the same breath, and nearly in the same phrase, "This way of terminating strife is not for us;" and, as Gerald spoke, he turned slowly away, descended the staircase, and disappeared.

The funeral took place at night: a numerous procession of the tenants and peasantry attended. My poor uncle! there was not a dry eye for thee, but those of thine own kindred. Tall, stately, erect in the power and majesty of his unrivalled form, stood Gerald, already assuming the dignity and lordship which, to speak frankly, so well became him; my

mother's face was turned from me, but her attitude proclaimed her utterly absorbed in prayer. As for myself, my heart seemed hardened: I could not betray to the gaze of a hundred strangers the emotions which I would have hidden from those whom I loved the most. Wrapped in my cloak, with arms folded on my breast, and eyes bent to the ground, I leaned against one of the pillars of the chapel, apart, and apparently unmoved.

But when they were about to lower the body into the vault, a momentary weakness came over me. I made an involuntary step forward, a single but deep groan of anguish broke from me, and then, covering my face with my mantle, I resumed my former attitude, and all was still. The rite was over; in many and broken groups the spectators passed from the chapel: some to speculate on the future lord, some to mourn over the late, and all to return the next morning to their wonted business, and let the glad sun teach them to forget the past, until for themselves the sun should be no more, and the forgetfulness eternal.

The hour was so late that I relinquished my intention of leaving the house that night; I ordered my horse to be in readiness at daybreak and before I retired to rest I went to my mother's apartments: she received me with more feeling than she had ever testified before.

"Believe me, Morton," said she, and she kissed my forehead; "believe me, I can fully enter into the feelings which you must naturally experience on an event so contrary to your expectations. I cannot conceal from you how much I am surprised. Certainly Sir William never gave any of us cause to suppose that he liked either of your brothers--Gerald less than Aubrey--so much as yourself; nor, poor man, was he in other things at all addicted to conceal his opinions."

"It is true, my mother," said I; "it is true. Have you not therefore some suspicions of the authenticity of the will?"

"Suspicious!" cried my mother. "No!--impossible!--suspicions of whom? You could not think Gerald so base, and who else had an interest in deception? Besides, the signature is undoubtedly Sir William's handwriting, and the will was regularly witnessed; suspicions, Morton,--no, impossible! Reflect, too, how eccentric and humoursome your uncle always was: suspicions!--no, impossible!"

"Such things have been, my mother, nor are they uncommon: men will hazard their souls, ay, and what to some are more precious still, their lives too, for the vile clay we call money. But enough of this now: the Law,--that great arbiter,--that eater of the oyster, and divider of its shells,--the Law will decide between us, and if against me, as I suppose and fear the decision will be,--why, I must be a suitor to fortune instead of her commander. Give me your blessing, my dearest mother: I cannot stay longer in this house; to-morrow I leave you."

And my mother did bless me, and I fell upon her neck and clung to it.

"Ah!" thought I, "this blessing is almost worth my uncle's fortune."

I returned to my room; there I saw on the table the case of the sword sent me by the French king. I had left it with my uncle, on my departure to town, and it had been found among his effects and reclaimed by me. I took out the sword, and drew it from the scabbard. "Come," said I, and I kindled with a melancholy yet a deep enthusiasm, as I looked along the blade, "come, my bright friend, with thee through this labyrinth which we call the world will I carve my way! Fairest and speediest of earth's levellers, thou makest the path from the low valley to the steep hill, and shapest the soldier's axe into the monarch's sceptre! The laurel and the fasces, and the curule car, and the emperor's purple,--what are these but thy playthings, alternately thy scorn and thy reward! Founder of all empires, propagator of all creeds, thou leddest the Gaul and the Goth, and the gods of Rome and Greece crumbled upon their altars! Beneath thee the fires of the Gheber waved pale, and on thy point the badge of the camel-driver blazed like a sun over the startled East! Eternal arbiter, and unconquerable despot, while the passions of mankind exist! Most solemn of hypocrites, --circling blood with glory as with a halo; and consecrating homicide and massacre with a hollow name, which the parched throat of thy votary, in the battle and the agony, shouteth out with its last breath! Star of all human destinies! I kneel before thee, and invoke from thy bright astrology an omen and a smile."

CHAPTER IV.

AN EPISODE.--THE SON OF THE GREATEST MAN WHO (ONE ONLY EXCEPTED) /EVER ROSE TO A THRONE/, BUT BY NO MEANS OF THE GREATEST MAN (SAVE ONE) WHO /EVER EXISTED/.

BEFORE sunrise the next morning I had commenced my return to London. I had previously intrusted to the /locum tenens/ of the sage Desmarais, the royal gift, and (singular conjunction!) poor Ponto, my uncle's dog. Here let me pause, as I shall have no other opportunity to mention him, to record the fate of the canine bequest. He accompanied me some years afterwards to France, and he died there in extreme age. I shed tears as I saw the last relic of my poor uncle expire, and I was not consoled even though he was buried in the garden of the gallant Villars, and immortalized by an epitaph from the pen of the courtly Chaulieu.

Leaving my horse to select his own pace, I surrendered myself to reflection upon the strange alteration that had taken place in my fortunes. There did not, in my own mind, rest a doubt but that some villany had been practised with respect to the will. My uncle's constant and unvarying favour towards me; the unequivocal expressions he himself from time to time had dropped indicative of his future intentions on my behalf; the easy and natural manner in which he had seemed to consider, as a thing of course, my heritage and succession to his estates; all, coupled with his own frank and kindly character, so little disposed to raise hopes which he meant to disappoint, might alone have been sufficient to arouse my suspicions at a devise so contrary to all past experience of the testator. But when to these were linked the

bold temper and the daring intellect of my brother, joined to his personal hatred to myself; his close intimacy with Montreuil, whom I believed capable of the darkest designs; the sudden and evidently concealed appearance of the latter on the day my uncle died; the agitation and paleness of the attorney; the enormous advantages accruing to Gerald, and to no one else, from the terms of the devise: when these were all united into one focus of evidence, they appeared to me to leave no doubt of the forgery of the testament and the crime of Gerald. Nor was there anything in my brother's bearing and manner calculated to abate my suspicions. His agitation was real; his surprise might have been feigned; his offer of assistance in investigation was an unmeaning bravado; his conduct to myself testified his continued ill-will towards me,—an ill-will which might possibly have instigated him in the fraud scarcely less than the whispers of interest and cupidity.

But while this was the natural and indelible impression on my mind, I could not disguise from myself the extreme difficulty I should experience in resisting my brother's claim. So far as my utter want of all legal knowledge would allow me to decide, I could perceive nothing in the will itself which would admit of a lawyer's successful cavil: my reasons for suspicion, so conclusive to myself, would seem nugatory to a judge. My uncle was known as a humourist; and prove that a man differs from others in one thing, and the world will believe that he differs from them in a thousand. His favour to me would be, in the popular eye, only an eccentricity, and the unlooked-for disposition of his will only a caprice. Possession, too, gave Gerald a proverbial vantage-ground, which my whole life might be wasted in contesting; while his command of an immense wealth might, more than probably, exhaust my spirit by delay, and my fortune by expenses. Precious prerogative of law, to reverse the attribute of the Almighty! to fill the /rich/ with good things, but to send the poor empty away! /In corruptissima republica plurimoe leges/. Legislation perplexed is synonymous with crime unpunished,—a reflection, by the way, I should never have made, if I had never had a law-suit: sufferers are ever reformers.

Revolving, then, these anxious and unpleasing thoughts, interrupted, at times, by regrets of a purer and less selfish nature for the friend I had lost, and wandering, at others, to the brighter anticipations of rejoining Isora, and drinking from her eyes my comfort for the past and my hope for the future, I continued and concluded my day's travel.

The next day, on resuming my journey, and on feeling the time approach that would bring me to Isora, something like joy became the most prevalent feeling in my mind. So true it is that misfortunes little affect us so long as we have some ulterior object, which, by arousing hope, steals us from affliction. Alas! the pang of a moment becomes intolerable when we know of nothing /beyond/ the moment which it soothes us to anticipate! Happiness lives in the light of the future: attack the present; she defies you! darken the future, and you destroy her!

It was a beautiful morning: through the vapours, which rolled slowly away beneath his beams, the sun broke gloriously forth; and over wood and hill, and the low plains, which, covered with golden corn, stretched

immediately before me, his smile lay in stillness, but in joy. And ever from out the brake and the scattered copse, which at frequent intervals beset the road, the merry birds sent a fitful and glad music to mingle with the sweets and freshness of the air.

I had accomplished the greater part of my journey, and had entered into a more wooded and garden-like description of country, when I perceived an old man, in a kind of low chaise, vainly endeavouring to hold in a little but spirited horse, which had taken alarm at some object on the road, and was running away with its driver. The age of the gentleman and the lightness of the chaise gave me some alarm for the safety of the driver; so, tying my own horse to a gate, lest the sound of his hoofs might only increase the speed and fear of the fugitive, I ran with a swift and noiseless step along the other side of the hedge and, coming out into the road just before the pony's head, I succeeded in arresting him, at a rather critical spot and moment. The old gentleman very soon recovered his alarm; and, returning me many thanks for my interference, requested me to accompany him to his house, which he said was two or three miles distant.

Though I had no desire to be delayed in my journey for the mere sake of seeing an old gentleman's house, I thought my new acquaintance's safety required me, at least, to offer to act as his charioteer till we reached his house. To my secret vexation at that time, though I afterwards thought the petty inconvenience was amply repaid by a conference with a very singular and once noted character, the offer was accepted. Surrendering my own steed to the care of a ragged boy, who promised to lead it with equal judgment and zeal, I entered the little car, and, keeping a firm hand and constant eye on the reins, brought the offending quadruped into a very equable and sedate pace.

"Poor Bob," said the old gentleman, apostrophizing his horse; "poor Bob, like thy betters, thou knowest the weak hand from the strong; and when thou art not held in by power, thou wilt chafe against love; so that thou renewest in my mind the remembrance of its favourite maxim, namely, 'The only preventive to rebellion is restraint!'"

"Your observation, Sir," said I, rather struck by this address, "makes very little in favour of the more generous feelings by which we ought to be actuated. It is a base mind which always requires the bit and bridle."

"It is, Sir," answered the old gentleman; "I allow it: but, though I have some love for human nature, I have no respect for it; and while I pity its infirmities, I cannot but confess them."

"Methinks, Sir," replied I, "that you have uttered in that short speech more sound philosophy than I have heard for months. There is wisdom in not thinking too loftily of human clay, and benevolence in not judging it too harshly, and something, too, of magnanimity in this moderation; for we seldom contemn mankind till they have hurt us, and when they have hurt us, we seldom do anything but detest them for the injury."

"You speak shrewdly; Sir, for one so young," returned the old man, looking hard at me; "and I will be sworn you have suffered some cares; for we never begin to think till we are a little afraid to hope."

I sighed as I answered, "There are some men, I fancy, to whom constitution supplies the office of care; who, naturally melancholy, become easily addicted to reflection, and reflection is a soil which soon repays us for whatever trouble we bestow upon its culture."

"True, Sir!" said my companion; and there was a pause. The old gentleman resumed: "We are not far from my home now (or rather my temporary residence, for my proper and general home is at Cheshunt, in Hertfordshire); and, as the day is scarcely half spent, I trust you will not object to partake of a hermit's fare. Nay, nay, no excuse: I assure you that I am not a gossip in general, or a liberal dispenser of invitations; and I think, if you refuse me now, you will hereafter regret it."

My curiosity was rather excited by this threat; and, reflecting that my horse required a short rest, I subdued my impatience to return to town, and accepted the invitation. We came presently to a house of moderate size, and rather antique fashion. This, the old man informed me, was his present abode. A servant, almost as old as his master, came to the door, and, giving his arm to my host, led him, for he was rather lame and otherwise infirm, across a small hall into a long low apartment. I followed.

A miniature of Oliver Cromwell, placed over the chimney-piece, forcibly arrested my attention.

"It is the only portrait of the Protector I ever saw," said I, "which impresses on me the certainty of a likeness; that resolute gloomy brow,--that stubborn lip,--that heavy, yet not stolid expression,--all seem to warrant a resemblance to that singular and fortunate man, to whom folly appears to have been as great an instrument of success as wisdom, and who rose to the supreme power perhaps no less from a pitiable fanaticism than an admirable genius. So true is it that great men often soar to their height by qualities the least obvious to the spectator, and (to stoop to a low comparison) resemble that animal* in which a common ligament supplies the place and possesses the property of wings."

* The flying squirrel.

The old man smiled very slightly as I made this remark. "If this be true," said he, with an impressive tone, "though we may wonder less at the talents of the Protector, we must be more indulgent to his character, nor condemn him for insincerity when at heart he himself was deceived."

"It is in that light," said I, "that I have always viewed his conduct."

And though myself, by prejudice, a Cavalier and a Tory, I own that Cromwell (hypocrite as he is esteemed) appears to me as much to have exceeded his royal antagonist and victim in the virtue of sincerity, as he did in the grandeur of his genius and the profound consistency of his ambition."

"Sir," said my host, with a warmth that astonished me, "you seem to have known that man, so justly do you judge him. Yes," said he, after a pause, "yes, perhaps no one ever so varnished to his own breast his designs; no one, so covetous of glory, was ever so duped by conscience; no one ever rose to such a height through so few acts that seemed to himself worthy of remorse."

At this part of our conversation, the servant, entering, announced dinner. We adjourned to another room, and partook of a homely yet not uninviting repast. When men are pleased with each other, conversation soon gets beyond the ordinary surfaces to talk; and an exchange of deeper opinions was speedily effected by what old Barnes* quaintly enough terms, "The gentleman-usher of all knowledge,--Sermocination!"

* In the "Gerania."

It was a pretty, though small room, where we dined; and I observed that in this apartment, as in the other into which I had been at first ushered, there were several books scattered about, in that confusion and number which show that they have become to their owner both the choicest luxury and the least dispensable necessary. So, during dinner-time, we talked principally upon books, and I observed that those which my host seemed to know the best were of the elegant and poetical order of philosophers, who, more fascinating than deep, preach up the blessings of a solitude which is useless, and a content which, deprived of passion, excitement, and energy, would, if it could ever exist, only be a dignified name for vegetation.

"So," said he, "when, the dinner being removed, we were left alone with that substitute for all society,--wine! "so you are going to town: in four hours more you will be in that great focus of noise, falsehood, hollow joy, and real sorrow. Do you know that I have become so wedded to the country that I cannot but consider all those who leave it for the turbulent city, in the same light, half wondering, half compassionating, as that in which the ancients regarded the hardy adventurers who left the safe land and their happy homes, voluntarily to expose themselves in a frail vessel to the dangers of an uncertain sea? Here, when I look out on the green fields and the blue sky, the quiet herds basking in the sunshine or scattered over the unpolluted plains, I cannot but exclaim with Pliny, 'This is the true Movoetov!' this is the source whence flow inspiration to the mind and tranquillity to the heart! And in my love of Nature--more confiding and constant than ever is the love we bear to women--I cry with the tender and sweet Tibullus,--

"Ego composito securus acervo
Despiciam dites, despiciamque famem."*

* "Satisfied with my little hoard, I can despise wealth, and fear not
hunger."

"These," said I, "are the sentiments we all (perhaps the most restless
of us the most passionately) at times experience. But there is in our
hearts some secret but irresistible principle that impels us, as a
rolling circle, onward, onward, in the great orbit of our destiny; nor
do we find a respite until the wheels on which we move are broken--at
the tomb."

"Yet," said my host, "the internal principle you speak of can be
arrested before the grave,--at least stilled and impeded. You will
smile incredulously, perhaps (for I see you do not know who I am), when
I tell you that I might once have been a monarch, and that obscurity
seemed to me more enviable than empire; I resigned the occasion: the
tide of fortune rolled onward, and left me safe but solitary and
forsaken upon the dry land. If you wonder at my choice, you will wonder
still more when I tell you that I have never repented it."

Greatly surprised, and even startled, I heard my host make this strange
avowal. "Forgive me," said I, "but you have powerfully excited my
interest; dare I inquire from whose experience I am now deriving a
lesson?"

"Not yet," said my host, smiling, "not till our conversation is over,
and you have bid the old anchorite adieu, in all probability forever:
you will then know that you have conversed with a man, perhaps more
universally neglected and contemned than any of his contemporaries.
Yes," he continued, "yes, I resigned power, and I got no praise for my
moderation, but contempt for my folly; no human being would believe that
I could have relinquished that treasure through a disregard for its
possession which others would only have relinquished through an
incapacity to retain it; and that which, had they seen it recorded in an
ancient history, men would have regarded as the height of philosophy,
they despised when acted under their eyes, as the extremest abasement of
imbecility. Yet I compare my lot with that of the great man whom I was
expected to equal in ambition, and to whose grandeur I might have
succeeded; and am convinced that in this retreat I am more to be envied
than he in the plenitude of his power and the height of his renown; yet
is not happiness the aim of wisdom? if my choice is happier than his, is
it not wiser?"

"Alas," thought I, "the wisest men seldom have the loftiest genius, and
perhaps happiness is granted rather to mediocrity of mind than to
mediocrity of circumstance;" but I did not give so uncourteous a reply
to my host an audible utterance; on the contrary, "I do not doubt," said
I, as I rose to depart, "the wisdom of a choice which has brought you
self-gratulation. And it has been said by a man both great and good, a

man to whose mind was open the lore of the closet and the experience of courts that, in wisdom or in folly, 'the only difference between one man and another, is whether a man governs his passions or his passions him.' According to this rule, which indeed is a classic and a golden aphorism, Alexander, on the throne of Persia, might have been an idiot to Diogenes in his tub. And now, Sir, in wishing you farewell, let me again crave your indulgence to my curiosity."

"Not yet, not yet," answered my host; and he led me once more into the other room. While they were preparing my horse, we renewed our conversation. To the best of my recollection, we talked about Plato; but I had now become so impatient to rejoin Isora that I did not accord to my worthy host the patient attention I had hitherto given him. When I took leave of him he blessed me, and placed a piece of paper in my hand; "Do not open this," said he, "till you are at least two miles hence; your curiosity will then be satisfied. If ever you travel this road again, or if ever you pass by Cheshunt, pause and see if the old philosopher is dead. Adieu!"

And so we parted.

You may be sure that I had not passed the appointed distance of two miles very far, when I opened the paper and read the following words:--

Perhaps, young stranger, at some future period of a life, which I venture to foretell will be adventurous and eventful, it may afford you a matter for reflection, or a resting-spot for a moral, to remember that you have seen, in old age and obscurity, the son of him who shook an empire, avenged a people, and obtained a throne, only to be the victim of his own passions and the dupe of his own reason. I repeat now the question I before put to you,--Was the fate of the great Protector fairer than that of the despised and forgotten

RICHARD CROMWELL?

"So," thought I, "it is indeed with the son of the greatest ruler England, or perhaps, in modern times, Europe has ever produced, that I have held this conversation upon content! Yes, perhaps your fate is more to be envied than that of your illustrious father; but who /would/ envy it more? Strange that while we pretend that happiness is the object of all desire, happiness is the last thing which we covet. Love and wealth and pleasure and honour,--these are the roads which we take so long that, accustomed to the mere travel, we forget that it was first undertaken not for the course but the goal; and in the common infatuation which pervades all our race, we make the toil the meed, and in following the means forsake the end."

I never saw my host again; very shortly afterwards he died:* I and Fate, which had marked with so strong a separation the lives of the father and the son, united in that death--as its greatest, so its only universal blessing--the philosopher and the recluse with the warrior and the chief!

* Richard Cromwell died in 1712--ED.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE HERO SHOWS DECISION ON MORE POINTS THAN ONE.--MORE OF ISORA'S CHARACTER IS DEVELOPED.

To use the fine image in the "Arcadia," it was "when the sun, like a noble heart, began to show his greatest countenance in his lowest estate," that I arrived at Isora's door. I had written to her once, to announce my uncle's death and the day of my return: but I had not mentioned in my letter my reverse of fortunes; I reserved that communication till it could be softened by our meeting. I saw by the countenance of the servant who admitted me that all was well: so I asked no question; I flew up the stairs; I broke into Isora's chamber, and in an instant she was in my arms. Ah, Love, Love! wherefore art thou so transitory a pilgrim on the earth,--an evening cloud which hovers on our horizon, drinking the hues of the sun, that grows ominously brighter as it verges to the shadow and the night, and which, the moment that sun is set, wanders on in darkness or descends in tears?

"And now, my bird of Paradise," said I, as we sat alone in the apartment I had fitted up as the banqueting-room, and on which, though small in its proportions, I had lavished all the love of luxury and of show which made one of my most prevailing weaknesses, "and now how has time passed with you since we parted?"

"Need you ask, Morton? Ah, have you ever noted a poor dog deserted by its master, or rather not deserted, for that you know is not my case yet," added Isora, playfully, "but left at home while the master went abroad? have you noted how restless the poor animal is; how it refuses all company and all comfort; how it goes a hundred times a day into the room which its master is wont mostly to inhabit; how it creeps on the sofa or the chair which the same absent idler was accustomed to press; how it selects some article of his very clothing, and curls jealously around it, and hides and watches over it as I have hid and watched over this glove, Morton? Have you ever noted that humble creature whose whole happiness is the smile of one being, when the smile was away,--then, Morton, you can tell how my time has passed during your absence."

I answered Isora by endearments and by compliments. She turned away from the latter.

"Never call me those fine names, I implore you," she whispered; "call me only by those pretty pet words by which I know you will never call any one else. Bee and bird are my names, and mine only; but beauty and angel are names you have given or may give to a hundred others! Promise me, then, to address me only in your own language."

"I promise, and lo, the seal to the promise. But tell me, Isora, do you not love these rare scents that make an Araby of this unmellowed clime? Do you not love the profusion of light which reflects so dazzling a lustre on that soft cheek; and those eyes which the ancient romancer* must have dreamed of when he wrote so prettily of "eyes that seemed a temple where love and beauty were married"? Does not yon fruit take a more tempting hue, bedded as it is in those golden leaves? Does not sleep seem to hover with a downier wing over those sofas on which the limbs of a princess have been laid? In a word, is there not in luxury and in pomp a spell which no gentler or wiser mind would disdain?"

* Sir Philip Sydney, who, if we may judge from the number of quotations from his works scattered in this book, seems to have been an especial favourite with Count Devereux.--ED.

"It may be so!" said Isora, sighing; "but the splendour which surrounds us chills and almost terrifies me. I think that every proof of your wealth and rank puts me further from you: then, too, I have some remembrance of the green sod, and the silver rill, and the trees upon which the young winds sing and play; and I own that it is with the country, and not the town, that all my ideas of luxury are wed."

"But the numerous attendants, the long row of liveried hirelings, through which you may pass, as through a lane, the caparisoned steeds, the stately equipage, the jewelled tiara, the costly robe which matrons imitate and envy, the music, which lulls you to sleep, the lighted show, the gorgeous stage,--all these, the attributes or gifts of wealth, all these that you have the right to hope you will one day or other command, you will own are what you could very reluctantly forego."

"Do you think so, Morton? Ah, I wish you were of my humble temper: the more we limit and concentrate happiness, the more certain, I think, we are of securing it; they who widen the circle encroach upon the boundaries of danger; and they who freight their wealth upon a hundred vessels are more liable, Morton, are they not? to the peril of the winds and the waves than they who venture it only upon one."

"Admirably reasoned, my little sophist; but if the one ship sink?"

"Why, I would embark myself in it as well as my wealth, and should sink with it."

"Well, well, Isora, your philosophy will, perhaps, soon be put to the test. I will talk to you to-morrow of business."

"And why not to-night?"

"To-night, when I have just returned! No, to-night I will only talk to you of love!"

As may be supposed, Isora was readily reconciled to my change of circumstances; and indeed that sum which seemed poverty to me appeared positive wealth to her. But perhaps few men are by nature and inclination more luxurious and costly than myself; always accustomed to a profuse expenditure at my uncle's, I fell insensibly and */con amore/*, on my */debut/* in London, into all the extravagances of the age. Sir William, pleased rather than discontented with my habits, especially as they were attended with some */eclat/*, pressed upon me proofs of his generosity which, since I knew his wealth and considered myself his heir, I did not scruple to accept, and at the time of my return to London after his death, I had not only spent to the full the princely allowance I had received from him, but was above half my whole fortune in debt. However, I had horses and equipages, jewels and plate, and I did not long wrestle with my pride before I obtained the victory, and sent all my valuables to the hammer. They sold pretty well, all things considered, for I had a certain reputation in the world for taste and munificence; and when I had received the product and paid my debts, I found that the whole balance in my favour, including, of course, my uncle's legacy, was fifteen thousand pounds.

It was no bad younger brother's portion, perhaps, but I was in no humour to be made a younger brother without a struggle. So I went to the lawyers; they looked at the will, considered the case, and took their fees. Then the honestest of them, with the coolest air in the world, told me to content myself with my legacy, for the cause was hopeless; the will was sufficient to exclude a wilderness of elder sons. I need not add that I left this lawyer with a very contemptible opinion of his understanding. I went to another, he told me the same thing, only in a different manner, and I thought him as great a fool as his fellow practitioner. At last I chanced upon a little brisk gentleman, with a quick eye and a sharp voice, who wore a wig that carried conviction in every curl; had an independent, upright mien, and such a logical, emphatic way of expressing himself, that I was quite charmed with him. This gentleman scarce heard me out before he assured me that I had a famous case of it, that he liked making quick work, and proceeding with vigour, that he hated rogues, and delay, which was the sign of a rogue, but not the necessary sign of law, that I was the most fortunate man imaginable in coming to him, and, in short that I had nothing to do but commence proceedings, and leave all the rest to him. I was very soon talked into this proposal, and very soon embarked in the luxurious ocean of litigation.

Having settled this business so satisfactorily, I went to receive the condolence and sympathy of St. John. Notwithstanding the arduous occupations both of pleasure and of power, in which he was constantly engaged, he had found time to call upon me very often, and to express by letter great disappointment that I had neither received nor returned his visits. Touched by the phenomenon of so much kindness in a statesman, I paid him in return the only compliment in my power; namely, I asked his advice, with a view of taking it.

"Politics--politics, my dear Count," said he in answer to that request, "nothing like it; I will get you a seat in the House by next week,--you

are just of age, I think,--Heavens! a man like you who has learning enough for a German professor; assurance that would almost abash a Milesian; a very pretty choice of words, and a pointed way of consummating a jest,--why, with you by my side, my dear Count, I will soon--"

"St. John," said I, interrupting him, "you forget I am a Catholic!"

"Ah, I did forget that," replied St. John, slowly. "Heaven help me, Count, but I am sorry your ancestors were not converted; it was a pity they should bequeath you their religion without the estate to support it, for papacy has become a terrible tax to its followers."

"I wonder," said I, "whether the earth will ever be governed by Christians, not cavillers; by followers of our Saviour, not by co-operators of the devil; by men who obey the former, and 'love one another,' not by men who walk about with the latter (that roaring lion), 'seeking whom they may devour.' Intolerance makes us acquainted with strange nonsense, and folly is never so ludicrous as when associated with something sacred; it is then like Punch and his wife in Powell's puppet-show, /dancing in the Ark/. For example, to tell those who differ from us that they are in a delusion, and yet to persecute them for that delusion, is to equal the wisdom of our forefathers, who, we are told, in the 'Daemonologie' of the Scottish Solomon, 'burned a whole monasterie of nunnes for being misled, not by men, but /dreames!/'"

And being somewhat moved, I ran on for a long time in a very eloquent strain, upon the disadvantages of intolerance; which, I would have it, was a policy as familiar to Protestantism now as it had been to Popery in the dark ages; quite forgetting that it is not the vice of a peculiar sect, but of a ruling party.

St. John, who thought or affected to think very differently from me on these subjects, shook his head gently, but, with his usual good breeding, deemed it rather too sore a subject for discussion.

"I will tell you a discovery I have made," said I.

"And what is it?"

"Listen: that man is wisest who is happiest,--granted. What does happiness consist in? Power, wealth, popularity, and, above all, content! Well, then, no man ever obtains so much power, so much money, so much popularity, and, above all, such thorough self-content as a fool; a fool, therefore (this is no paradox), is the wisest of men. Fools govern the world in purple: the wise laugh at them; but they laugh in rags. Fools thrive at court; fools thrive in state chambers; fools thrive in boudoirs; fools thrive in rich men's legacies. Who is so beloved as a fool? Every man seeks him, laughs at him, and hugs him. Who is so secure in his own opinion, so high in complacency, as a fool? /sua virtute involvit/. Hark ye, St. John, let us turn fools: they are the only potentates, the only philosophers of earth. Oh, motley, 'motley's your only wear!'"

"Ha! ha!" laughed St. John; and, rising, he insisted upon carrying me with him to the rehearsal of a new play, in order, as he said, to dispel my spleen, and prepare me for ripe decision upon the plans to be adopted for bettering my fortune.

But, in good truth, nothing calculated to advance so comfortable and praiseworthy an end seemed to present itself. My religion was an effectual bar to any hope of rising in the state. Europe now began to wear an aspect that promised universal peace, and the sword which I had so poetically apostrophized was not likely to be drawn upon any more glorious engagement than a brawl with the Mohawks, any incautious noses appertaining to which fraternity I was fully resolved to slit whenever they came conveniently in my way. To add to the unpromising state of my worldly circumstances, my uncle's death had removed the only legitimate barrier to the acknowledgment of my marriage with Isora, and it became due to her to proclaim and publish that event. Now, if there be any time in the world when a man's friends look upon him most coldly; when they speak of his capacities of rising the most despondingly; when they are most inclined, in short, to set him down as a silly sort of fellow, whom it is no use inconveniencing one's self to assist,--it is at that moment when he has made what the said friends are pleased to term an imprudent marriage! It was, therefore, no remarkable instance of good luck that the express time for announcing that I had contracted that species of marriage was the express time for my wanting the assistance of those kind-hearted friends. Then, too, by the pleasing sympathies in worldly opinion, the neglect of one's friends is always so damnably neighboured by the exultation of one's foes! Never was there a man who, without being very handsome, very rude, or very much in public life, had made unto himself more enemies than it had been my lot to make. How the rascals would all sneer and coin dull jests when they saw me so down in the world! The very old maids, who, so long as they thought me single, would have declared that the will was a fraud, would, directly they heard I was married, ask if Gerald was handsome, and assert, with a wise look, that my uncle knew well what he was about. Then the joy of the Lady Hasselton, and the curled lip of the haughty Tarleton! It is a very odd circumstance, but it is very true, that the people we most despise have the most influence over our actions; a man never ruins himself by giving dinners to his father, or turning his house into a palace in order to feast his bosom friend: on the contrary, 'tis the poor devil of a friend who fares the worst, and starves on the family joint, while mine host beggars himself to banquet "that disagreeable Mr. A., who is such an insufferable ass," and mine hostess sends her husband to the Fleet by vying with "that odious Mrs. B., who was always her aversion!"

Just in the same manner, no thought disturbed me, in the step I was about to take, half so sorely as the recollection of Lady Hasselton the coquette and Mr. Tarleton the gambler. However, I have said somewhere or other that nothing selfish on a small scale polluted my love for Isora,--nor did there. I had resolved to render her speedy and full justice; and if I sometimes recurred to the disadvantages to myself, I always had pleasure in thinking that they were /sacrifices/ to her. But

to my great surprise, when I first announced to Isora my intention of revealing our marriage, I perceived in her countenance, always such a traitor to her emotions, a very different expression from that which I had anticipated. A deadly paleness spread over her whole face, and a shudder seemed to creep through her frame. She attempted, however, to smile away the alarm she had created in me; nor was I able to penetrate the cause of an emotion so unlooked for. But I continued to speak of the public announcement of our union as of a thing decided; and at length she listened to me while I arranged the method of making it, and sympathized in the future projects I chalked out for us to adopt. Still, however, when I proposed a definite time for the re-celebration of our nuptials, she ever drew back and hinted the wish for a longer delay.

"Not so soon, dear Morton," she would say tearfully, "not so soon; we are happy now, and perhaps when you are with me always you will not love me so well!"

I reasoned against this notion, and this reluctance, but in vain; and day passed on day, and even week on week, and our marriage was still undeclared. I now lived, however, almost wholly with Isora, for busy tongues could no longer carry my secret to my uncle; and, indeed, since I had lost the fortune which I was expected to inherit, it is astonishing how little people troubled their heads about my movements or myself. I lived then almost wholly with Isora; and did familiarity abate my love? Strange to say, it did not abate even the romance of it. The reader may possibly remember a conversation with St. John recorded in the Second Book of this history. "The deadliest foe to love," said he (he who had known all love,--that of the senses and that also of the soul!), "is not change, nor misfortune, nor jealousy, nor wrath, nor anything that flows from passion or emanates from fortune. The deadliest foe to love is CUSTOM!"

Was St. John right? I believe that in most instances he was; and perhaps the custom was not continued in my case long enough for me to refute the maxim. But as yet, the very gloss upon the god's wings was fresh as on the first day when I had acknowledged his power. Still was Isora to me the light and the music of existence! still did my heart thrill and leap within me when her silver and fond voice made the air a blessing! Still would I hang over her, when her beautiful features lay hushed in sleep, and watch the varying hues of her cheek; and fancy, while she slept, that in each low, sweet breath that my lips drew from hers, was a whisper of tenderness and endearment! Still when I was absent from her, my soul seemed to mourn a separation from its better and dearer part, and the joyous senses of existence saddened and shrank into a single want! Still was her presence to my heart as a breathing atmosphere of poesy which circled and tinted all human things; still was my being filled with that delicious and vague melancholy which the very excess of rapture alone produces,--the knowledge we dare not breathe to ourselves that the treasure in which our heart is stored is not above the casualties of fate. The sigh that mingles with the kiss; the tear that glistens in the impassioned and yearning gaze; the deep tide in our spirit, over which the moon and the stars have power; the chain of

harmony within the thought which has a mysterious link with all that is fair and pure and bright in Nature, knitting as it were loveliness with love!--all this, all that I cannot express; all that to the young for whom the real world has had few spells, and the world of visions has been a home, who love at last and for the first time,--all that to them are known were still mine.

In truth, Isora was one well calculated to sustain and to rivet romance. The cast of her beauty was so dreamlike, and yet so varying: her temper was so little mingled with the common characteristics of woman; it had so little of caprice, so little of vanity, so utter an absence of all jealous and all angry feeling; it was so made up of tenderness and devotion, and yet so imaginative and fairy-like in its fondness,--that it was difficult to bear only the sentiments of earth for one who had so little of earth's clay. She was more like the women whom one imagines are the creations of poetry, and yet of whom no poetry, save that of Shakspeare, reminds us; and to this day, when I go into the world, I never see aught of our own kind which recalls her, or even one of her features, to my memory. But when I am alone with Nature, methinks a sweet sound or a new-born flower has something of familiar power over those stored and deep impressions which do make her image, and it brings her more vividly before my eyes than any shape or face of her own sex, however beautiful it may be.

There was also another trait in her character which, though arising in her weakness, not her virtues, yet perpetuated the more dreamlike and imaginary qualities of our passion: this was a melancholy superstition, developing itself in forebodings and omens which interested, because they were steeped at once in the poetry and in the deep sincerity of her nature. She was impressed with a strong and uncontrollable feeling that her fate was predestined to a dark course and an early end; and she drew from all things around her something to feed the pensive character of her thoughts. The stillness of noon; the holy and eloquent repose of twilight, its rosy sky and its soft air, its shadows and its dews,--had equally for her heart a whisper and a spell. The wan stars, where, from the eldest time, man has shaped out a chart of the undiscoverable future; the mysterious moon, to which the great ocean ministers from its untrodden shrines; the winds, which traverse the vast air, pilgrims from an eternal home to an unpenetrated bourne; the illimitable heavens, on which none ever gazed without a vague craving for something that the earth cannot give, and a vague sense of a former existence in which that something was enjoyed; the holy night; that solemn and circling sleep, which seems, in its repose, to image our death, and in its living worlds to shadow forth the immortal realms which only through that death we can survey,--all had, for the deep heart of Isora, a language of omen and of doom. Often would we wander alone, and for hours together, by the quiet and wild woods and streams that surrounded her retreat, and which we both loved so well; and often, when the night closed over us, with my arm around her, and our lips so near that our atmosphere was our mutual breath, would she utter, in that voice which "made the soul plant itself in the ears," the predictions which had nursed themselves at her heart.

I remember one evening, in especial. The rich twilight had gathered

over us, and we sat by a slender and soft rivulet, overshadowed by some stunted yet aged trees. We had both, before she spoke, been silent for several minutes; and only when, at rare intervals, the birds sent from the copse that backed us a solitary and vesper note of music, was the stillness around us broken. Before us, on the opposite bank of the stream, lay a valley, in which shadow and wood concealed all trace of man's dwellings, save at one far spot, where, from a single hut, rose a curling and thin vapour, like a spirit released from earth, and losing gradually its earthier particles, as it blends itself with the loftier atmosphere of heaven.

It was then that Isora, clinging closer to me, whispered her forebodings of death. "You will remember," said she, smiling faintly, "you will remember me, in the lofty and bright career which yet awaits you; and I scarcely know whether I would not sooner have that memory--free as it will be from all recollection of my failings and faults, and all that I have cost you, than incur the chance of your future coldness or decrease of love."

And when Isora turned, and saw that the tears stood in my eyes, she kissed them away, and said, after a pause,--

"It matters not, my own guardian angel, what becomes of me: and now that I am near you, it is wicked to let my folly cost you a single pang. But why should you grieve at my forebodings? there is nothing painful or harsh in them to me, and I interpret them thus: 'If my life passes away before the common date, perhaps it will be a sacrifice to yours.' And it will, Morton--it will. The love I bear to you I can but feebly express now; all of us wish to prove our feelings, and I would give one proof of mine for you. It seems to me that I was made only for one purpose--to love you; and I would fain hope that my death may be some sort of sacrifice to you--some token of the ruling passion and the whole object of my life."

As Isora said this, the light of the moon, which had just risen, shone full upon her cheek, flushed as it was with a deeper tint than it usually wore; and in her eye--her features--her forehead--the lofty nature of her love seemed to have stamped the divine expression of itself.

Have I lingered too long on these passages of life? They draw near to a close, and a more adventurous and stirring period of manhood will succeed. Ah, little could they, who in after years beheld in me but the careless yet stern soldier--the wily and callous diplomatist--the companion alternately so light and so moodily reserved--little could they tell how soft, and weak, and doting my heart was once!

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.--CONJECTURE AND ANTICIPATION.

THE day for the public solemnization of our marriage was at length appointed. In fact, the plan for the future that appeared to me most promising was to proffer my services to some foreign court, and that of Russia held out to me the greatest temptation. I was therefore anxious, as soon as possible, to conclude the rite of a second or public nuptials, and I purposed leaving the country within a week afterwards. My little lawyer assured me that my suit would go on quite as well in my absence, and whenever my presence was necessary he would be sure to inform me of it. I did not doubt him in the least--it is a charming thing to have confidence in one's man of business.

Of Montreuil I now saw nothing; but I accidentally heard that he was on a visit to Gerald, and that the latter had already made the old walls ring with premature hospitality. As for Aubrey, I was in perfect ignorance of his movements; and the unsatisfactory shortness of his last letter, and the wild expressions so breathing of fanaticism in the postscript, had given me much anxiety and alarm on his account. I longed above all to see him, to talk with him over old times and our future plans, and to learn whether no new bias could be given to a temperament which seemed to lean so strongly towards a self-punishing superstition. It was about a week before the day fixed for my public nuptials that I received at last from him the following letter:--

MY DEAREST BROTHER,--I have been long absent from home,--absent on affairs on which we will talk hereafter. I have not forgotten you, though I have been silent, and the news of my poor uncle's death has shocked me greatly. On my arrival here I learned your disappointment and your recourse to law. I am not so much surprised, though I am as much grieved as yourself, for I will tell you now what seemed to me unimportant before. On receiving your letter, requesting consent to your designed marriage, my uncle seemed greatly displeased as well as vexed, and afterwards he heard much that displeased him more; from what quarter came his news I know not, and he only spoke of it in innuendoes and angry insinuations. As far as I was able I endeavoured to learn his meaning, but could not, and to my praises of you I thought latterly he seemed to lend but a cold ear; he told me at last, when I was about to leave him, that you had acted ungratefully to him, and that he should alter his will. I scarcely thought of this speech at the time, or rather I considered it as the threat of a momentary anger. Possibly, however, it was the prelude to that disposition of property which has so wounded you: I observe, too, that the will bears date about that period. I mention this fact to you; you can draw from it what inference you will: but I do solemnly believe that Gerald is innocent of any fraud towards you.

I am all anxiety to hear whether your love continues. I beseech you to write to me instantly and inform me on that head as on all others. We shall meet soon.

Your ever affectionate Brother,

AUBREY DEVEREUX.

There was something in this letter that vexed and displeased me: I thought it breathed a tone of unkindness and indifference, which my present circumstances rendered peculiarly inexcusable. So far, therefore, from answering it immediately, I resolved not to reply to it till after the solemnization of my marriage. The anecdote of my uncle startled me a little when I coupled it with the words my uncle had used towards myself on his death-bed; namely, in hinting that he had heard some things unfavourable to Isora, unnecessary then to repeat; but still if my uncle had altered his intentions towards me, would he not have mentioned the change and its reasons? Would he have written to me with such kindness, or received me with such affection? I could not believe that he would; and my opinions of the fraud and the perpetrator were not a whit changed by Aubrey's epistle. It was clear, however, that he had joined the party against me; and as my love for him was exceedingly great, I was much wounded by the idea.

"All leave me," said I, "upon this reverse,--all but Isora!" and I thought with renewed satisfaction on the step which was about to insure to her a secure home and an honourable station. My fears lest Isora should again be molested by her persecutor were now pretty well at rest; having no doubt in my own mind as to that persecutor's identity, I imagined that in his new acquisition of wealth and pomp, a boyish and unreturned love would easily be relinquished; and that, perhaps, he would scarcely regret my obtaining the prize himself had sought for, when in my altered fortunes it would be followed by such worldly depreciation. In short, I looked upon him as possessing a characteristic common to most bad men, who are never so influenced by love as they are by hatred; and imagined, therefore, that if he had lost the object of the love, he could console himself by exulting over any decline of prosperity in the object of the hate.

As the appointed day drew near, Isora's despondency seemed to vanish, and she listened, with her usual eagerness in whatever interested me, to my Continental schemes of enterprise. I resolved that our second wedding, though public, should be modest and unostentatious, suitable rather to our fortunes than our birth. St. John, and a few old friends of the family, constituted all the party I invited, and I requested them to keep my marriage secret until the very day for celebrating it arrived. I did this from a desire of avoiding compliments intended as sarcasms, and visits rather of curiosity than friendship. On flew the days, and it was now the one preceding my wedding. I was dressing to go out upon a matter of business connected with the ceremony, and I then, as I received my hat from Desmarais, for the first time thought it requisite to acquaint that accomplished gentleman with the rite of the morrow. Too well bred was Monsieur Desmarais to testify any other sentiment than pleasure at the news; and he received my orders and directions for the next day with more than the graceful urbanity which made one always feel quite honoured by his attentions.

"And how goes on the philosophy?" said I: "faith, since I am about to be married, I shall be likely to require its consolations."

"Indeed, Monsieur," answered Desmarais, with that expression of self-conceit which was so curiously interwoven with the obsequiousness of his address, "indeed, Monsieur, I have been so occupied of late in preparing a little powder very essential to dress, that I have not had time for any graver, though not perhaps more important, avocations."

"Powder--and what is it?"

"Will Monsieur condescend to notice its effect?" answered Desmarais, producing a pair of gloves which were tinted of the most delicate flesh-colour; the colouring was so nice, that when the gloves were on, it would have been scarcely possible, at any distance, to distinguish them from the naked flesh.

"'Tis a rare invention," said I.

"Monsieur is very good, but I flatter myself it is so," rejoined Desmarais; and he forthwith ran on far more earnestly on the merits of his powder than I had ever heard him descant on the beauties of Fatalism. I cut him short in the midst of his harangue: too much eloquence in any line is displeasing in one's dependant.

I had just concluded my business abroad, and was returning homeward with downcast eyes and in a very abstracted mood, when I was suddenly startled by a loud voice that exclaimed in a tone of surprise:

"What!--Count Devereux,--how fortunate!"

I looked up, and saw a little dark man, shabbily dressed; his face did not seem unfamiliar to me, but I could not at first remember where I had seen it: my look, I suppose, testified my want of memory, for he said, with a low bow,--

"You have forgotten me, Count, and I don't wonder at it; so please you, I am the person who once brought you a letter from France to Devereux Court."

At this, I recognized the bearer of that epistle which had embroiled me with the Abbe Montreuil. I was too glad of the meeting to show any coolness in my reception of the gentleman, and to speak candidly, I never saw a gentleman less troubled with */mauvaise honte/*.

"Sir!" said he, lowering his voice to a whisper, "it is most fortunate that I should thus have met you; I only came to town this morning, and for the sole purpose of seeking you out. I am charged with a packet, which I believe will be of the greatest importance to your interests. But," he added, looking round, "the streets are no proper place for my communication; */parbleu/*, there are those about who hear whispers through stone walls: suffer me to call upon you to-morrow."

"To-morrow! it is a day of great business with me, but I can possibly spare you a few moments, if that will suffice; or, on the day after, your own pleasure may be the sole limit of our interview."

"/Parbleu/, Monsieur, you are very obliging,--very; but I will tell you in one word who I am and what is my business. My name is Marie Oswald: I was born in France, and I am the half-brother of that Oswald who drew up your uncle's will."

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed; "is it possible that you know anything of that affair?"

"Hush--yes, all! my poor brother is just dead; and, in a word, I am charged with a packet given me by him on his death-bed. Now, will you see me if I bring it to-morrow?"

"Certainly; can I not see you to-night?"

"To-night?--No, not well; /parbleu/! I want a little consideration as to the reward due to me for my eminent services to your lordship. No: let it be to-morrow."

"Well! at what hour? I fear it must be in the evening."

"Seven, /s'il vous plait/, Monsieur."

"Enough! be it so."

And Mr. Marie Oswald, who seemed, during the whole of this short conference, to have been under some great apprehension of being seen or overheard, bowed, and vanished in an instant, leaving my mind in a most motley state of incoherent, unsatisfactory, yet sanguine conjecture.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EVENTS OF A SINGLE NIGHT.--MOMENTS MAKE THE HUES IN WHICH YEARS ARE COLOURED.

MEN of the old age! what wonder that in the fondness of a dim faith, and in the vague guesses which, from the frail ark of reason, we send to hover over a dark and unfathomable abyss,--what wonder that ye should have wasted hope and life in striving to penetrate the future! What wonder that ye should have given a language to the stars, and to the night a spell, and gleaned from the uncomprehended earth an answer to the enigmas of Fate! We are like the sleepers who, walking under the influence of a dream, wander by the verge of a precipice, while, in their own deluded vision, they perchance believe themselves surrounded by bowers of roses, and accompanied by those they love. Or, rather like the blind man, who can retrace every step of the path he has /once/ trodden, but who can guess not a single inch of that which he has not yet travelled, our Reason can re-guide us over the roads of past experience with a sure and unerring wisdom, even while it recoils, baffled and bewildered, before the blackness of the very moment whose boundaries we are about to enter.

The few friends I had invited to my wedding were still with me, when one of my servants, not Desmarais, informed me that Mr. Oswald waited for me. I went out to him.

"Parbleu!" said he, rubbing his hands, "I perceive it is a joyous time with you, and I don't wonder you can only spare me a few moments."

The estates of Devereux were not to be risked for a trifle, but I thought Mr. Marie Oswald exceedingly impertinent. "Sir," said I, very gravely, "pray be seated; and now to business. In the first place may I ask to whom I am beholden for sending you with that letter you gave me at Devereux Court? and, secondly, what that letter contained? for I never read it."

"Sir," answered the man, "the history of the letter is perfectly distinct from that of the will, and the former (to discuss the least important first) is briefly this. You have heard, Sir, of the quarrels between Jesuit and Jansenist?"

"I have."

"Well--but first, Count, let me speak of myself. There were three young men of the same age, born in the same village in France, of obscure birth each, and each desirous of getting on in the world. Two were deuced clever fellows, the third, nothing particular. One of the two at present shall be nameless; the third, 'who was nothing particular' (in his own opinion, at least, though his friends may think differently), was Marie Oswald. We soon separated: I went to Paris, was employed in different occupations, and at last became secretary, and (why should I disavow it?) valet to a lady of quality and a violent politician. She was a furious Jansenist; of course I adopted her opinions. About this time, there was much talk among the Jesuits of the great genius and deep learning of a young member of the order, Julian Montreuil. Though not residing in the country, he had sent one or two books to France, which had been published and had created a great sensation. Well, Sir, my mistress was the greatest /intriguante/ of her party: she was very rich, and tolerably liberal; and, among other packets of which a messenger from England was /carefully/ robbed, between Calais and Abbeville (you understand me, sir, /carefully/ robbed, /parbleu!/ I wish I were robbed in the same manner, every day in my life!), was one from the said Julian Montreuil to a political friend of his. Among other letters in this packet--all of importance--was one descriptive of the English family with whom he resided. It hit them all, I am told, off to a hair; and it described, in particular, one, the supposed inheritor of the estates, a certain Morton, Count Devereux. Since you say you did not read the letter, I spare your blushes, Sir, and I don't dwell upon what he said of your talent, energy, ambition, etc. I will only tell you that he dilated far more upon your prospects than your powers; and that he expressly stated what was his object in staying in your family and cultivating your friendship,--he expressly stated that £30,000 a year would be particularly serviceable to a certain political cause which he had strongly at heart."

"I understand you," said I, "the Chevalier's?"

"Exactly. 'This sponge,' said Montreuil, I remember the very phrase,--'this sponge will be well filled, and I am handling it softly now in order to squeeze its juices hereafter according to the uses of the party we have so strongly at heart.'"

"It was not a metaphor very flattering to my understanding," said I.

"True, Sir. Well, as soon as my mistress learned this she remembered that your father, the Marshal, had been one of her /plus chers amis/; in a word, if scandal says true, he had been /the cher ami/. However, she was instantly resolved to open your eyes, and ruin the /maudit Jesuite/: she enclosed the letter in an envelope and sent me to England with it. I came, I gave it you, and I discovered, in that moment, when the Abbe entered, that this Julian Montreuil was an old acquaintance of my own,--was one of the two young men who I told you were such deuced clever fellows. Like many other adventurers, he had changed his name on entering the world and I had never till now suspected that Julian Montreuil was Bertrand Collinot. Well, when I saw what I had done, I was exceedingly sorry, for I had liked my companion well enough not to wish to hurt him; besides, I was a little afraid of him. I took horse, and went about some other business I had to execute, nor did I visit that part of the country again, till a week ago (now I come to the other business), when I was summoned to the death-bed of my half-brother the attorney, peace be with him! He suffered much from hypochondria in his dying moments,--I believe it is the way with people of his profession,--and he gave me a sealed packet, with a last injunction to place it in your hands and your hands only. Scarce was he dead--(do not think I am unfeeling, Sir, I had seen very little of him, and he was only my half-brother, my father having married, for a second wife, a foreign lady who kept an inn, by whom he was blessed with myself)--scarce, I say, was he dead when I hurried up to town. Providence threw you in my way, and you shall have the document upon two conditions."

"Which are, first to reward you; secondly, to--"

"To promise you will not open the packet for seven days."

"The devil! and why?"

"I will tell you candidly: one of the papers in the packet I believe to be my brother's written confession,--nay, I know it is,--and it will criminate one I have a love for, and who, I am resolved, shall have a chance of escape."

"Who is that one? Montreuil?"

"No: I do not refer to him; but I cannot tell you more. I require the promise, Count: it is indispensable. If you don't give it me, /parbleu/, you shall not have the packet."

There was something so cool, so confident, and so impudent about this man, that I did not well know whether to give way to laughter or to indignation. Neither, however, would have been politic in my situation; and, as I said before, the estates of Devereux were not to be risked for a trifle.

"Pray," said I, however, with a shrewdness which I think did me credit,--"pray, Mr. Marie Oswald, do you expect the reward before the packet is opened?"

"By no means," answered the gentleman who in his own opinion was nothing particular; "by no means; nor until you and your lawyers are satisfied that the papers enclosed in the packet are sufficient fully to restore you to the heritage of Devereux Court and its demesnes."

There was something fair in this; and as the only penalty to me incurred by the stipulated condition seemed to be the granting escape to the criminals, I did not think it incumbent upon me to lose my cause from the desire of a prosecution. Besides, at that time, I felt too happy to be revengeful; and so, after a moment's consideration, I conceded to the proposal, and gave my honour as a gentleman--Mr. Oswald obligingly dispensed with an oath--that I would not open the packet till the end of the seventh day. Mr. Oswald then drew forth a piece of paper, on which sundry characters were inscribed, the purport of which was that, if, through the papers given me by Marie Oswald, my lawyers were convinced that I could become master of my uncle's property, now enjoyed by Gerald Devereux, I should bestow on the said Marie L5000: half on obtaining this legal opinion, half on obtaining possession of the property. I could not resist a smile when I observed that the word of a gentleman was enough surety for the safety of the man he had a love for, but that Mr. Oswald required a written bond for the safety of his reward. One is ready enough to trust one's friends to the conscience of another, but as long as a law can be had instead, one is rarely so credulous in respect to one's money.

"The reward shall be doubled if I succeed," said I, signing the paper; and Oswald then produced a packet, on which was writ, in a trembling hand,--"For Count Morton Devereux,--private,--and with haste." As soon as he had given me this precious charge, and reminded me again of my promise, Oswald withdrew. I placed the packet in my bosom, and returned to my guests.

Never had my spirit been so light as it was that evening. Indeed the good people I had assembled thought matrimony never made a man so little serious before. They did not however stay long, and the moment they were gone I hastened to my own sleeping apartment to secure the treasure I had acquired. A small escritoire stood in this room, and in it I was accustomed to keep whatever I considered most precious. With many a wistful look and murmur at my promise, I consigned the packet to one of the drawers of this escritoire. As I was locking the drawer, the sweet voice of Desmarais accosted me. Would Monsieur, he asked, suffer him to visit a friend that evening, in order to celebrate so joyful an event in

Monsieur's destiny? It was not often that he was addicted to vulgar merriment, but on such an occasion he owned that he was tempted to transgress his customary habits, and he felt that Monsieur, with his usual good taste, would feel offended if his servant, within Monsieur's own house, suffered joy to pass the limits of discretion, and enter the confines of noise and inebriety, especially as Monsieur had so positively interdicted all outward sign of extra hilarity. He implored /mille pardons/ for the presumption of his request.

"It is made with your usual discretion; there are five guineas for you: go and get drunk with your friend, and be merry instead of wise. But, tell me, is it not beneath a philosopher to be moved by anything, especially anything that occurs to another,--much less to get drunk upon it?"

"Pardon me, Monsieur," answered Desmarais, bowing to the ground: "one ought to get drunk sometimes, because the next morning one is sure to be thoughtful; and, moreover, the practical philosopher ought to indulge every emotion, in order to judge how that emotion would affect another; at least, this is my opinion."

"Well, go."

"My most grateful thanks be with Monsieur; Monsieur's nightly toilet is entirely prepared."

And away went Desmarais, with the light, yet slow, step with which he was accustomed to combine elegance with dignity.

I now passed into the room I had prepared for Isora's /boudoir/. I found her leaning by the window, and I perceived that she had been in tears. As I paused to contemplate her figure so touchingly, yet so unconsciously mournful in its beautiful and still posture, a more joyous sensation than was wont to mingle with my tenderness for her swelled at my heart. "Yes," thought I, "you are no longer the solitary exile, or the persecuted daughter of a noble but ruined race; you are not even the bride of a man who must seek in foreign climes, through danger and through hardship, to repair a broken fortune and establish an adventurer's name! At last the clouds have rolled from the bright star of your fate: wealth, and pomp, and all that awaits the haughtiest of England's matrons shall be yours." And at these thoughts Fortune seemed to me a gift a thousand times more precious than--much as my luxuries prized it--it had ever seemed to me before.

I drew near and laid my hand upon Isora's shoulder, and kissed her cheek. She did not turn round, but strove, by bending over my hand and pressing it to her lips, to conceal that she had been weeping. I thought it kinder to favour the artifice than to complain of it. I remained silent for some moments, and I then gave vent to the sanguine expectations for the future which my new treasure entitled me to form. I had already narrated to her the adventure of the day before: I now repeated the purport of my last interview with Oswald; and, growing more and more elated as I proceeded, I dwelt at last upon the description of

my inheritance, as glowingly as if I had already recovered it. I painted to her imagination its rich woods and its glassy lake, and the fitful and wandering brook that, through brake and shade, went bounding on its wild way; I told her of my early roamings, and dilated with a boy's rapture upon my favourite haunts. I brought visibly before her glistening and eager eyes the thick copse where hour after hour, in vague verses and still vaguer dreams, I had so often whiled away the day; the old tree which I had climbed to watch the birds in their glad mirth, or to listen unseen to the melancholy sound of the forest deer; the antique gallery and the vast hall which, by the dim twilights, I had paced with a religious awe, and looked upon the pictured forms of my bold fathers, and mused high and ardently upon my destiny to be; the old gray tower which I had consecrated to myself, and the unwitnessed path which led to the yellow beach, and the wide gladness of the solitary sea; the little arbour which my earliest ambition had reared, that looked out upon the joyous flowers and the merry fountain, and, through the ivy and the jessamine, wooed the voice of the bird, and the murmur of the summer bee; and, when I had exhausted my description, I turned to Isora, and said in a lower tone, "And I shall visit these once more, and with you!"

Isora sighed faintly, and it was not till I had pressed her to speak that she said:--

"I wish I could deceive myself, Morton, but I cannot--I cannot root from my heart an impression that I shall never again quit this dull city with its gloomy walls and its heavy air. A voice within me seems to say, 'Behold from this very window the boundaries of your living wanderings!'"

Isora's words froze all my previous exaltation. "It is in vain," said I, after chiding her for her despondency, "it is in vain to tell me that you have for this gloomy notion no other reason than that of a vague presentiment. It is time now that I should press you to a greater confidence upon all points consistent with your oath to our mutual enemy than you have hitherto given me. Speak, dearest, have you not some yet unrevealed causes for alarm?"

It was but for a moment that Isora hesitated before she answered with that quick tone which indicates that we force words against the will.

"Yes, Morton, I /will/ tell you now, though I would not before the event of this day. On the last day that I saw that fearful man, he said, 'I warn you, Isora d'Alvarez, that my love is far fiercer than hatred; I warn you that your bridal with Morton Devereux shall be stained with blood. Become his wife, and you perish! Yea, though I suffer hell's tortures forever and forever from that hour, my own hand shall strike you to the heart!' Morton, these words have thrilled through me again and again, as if again they were breathed in my very ear; and I have often started at night and thought the very knife glittered at my breast. So long as our wedding was concealed, and concealed so closely, I was enabled to quiet my fears till they scarcely seemed to exist. But when our nuptials were to be made public, when I knew that they were to

reach the ears of that fierce and unaccountable being, I thought I heard my doom pronounced. This, mine own love, must excuse your Isora, if she seemed ungrateful for your generous eagerness to announce our union. And perhaps she would not have acceded to it so easily as she has done were it not that, in the first place, she felt it was beneath your wife to suffer any terror so purely selfish to make her shrink from the proud happiness of being yours in the light of day; and if she had not felt [here Isora hid her blushing face in my bosom] that she was fated to give birth to another, and that the announcement of our wedded love had become necessary to your honour as to mine!"

Though I was in reality awed even to terror by learning from Isora's lip so just a cause for her forebodings,--though I shuddered with a horror surpassing even my wrath, when I heard a threat so breathing of deadly and determined passions,--yet I concealed my emotions, and only thought of cheering and comforting Isora. I represented to her how guarded and vigilant should ever henceforth be the protection of her husband; that nothing should again separate him from her side; that the extreme malice and fierce persecution of this man were sufficient even to absolve her conscience from the oath of concealment she had taken; that I would procure from the sacred head of our Church her own absolution from that vow; that the moment concealment was over, I could take steps to prevent the execution of my rival's threats; that, however near to me he might be in blood, no consequences arising from a dispute between us could be so dreadful as the least evil to Isora; and moreover, to appease her fears, that I would solemnly promise he should never sustain personal assault or harm from my hand; in short, I said all that my anxiety could dictate, and at last I succeeded in quieting her fears, and she smiled as brightly as the first time I had seen her in the little cottage of her father. She seemed, however, averse to an absolution from her oath, for she was especially scrupulous as to the sanctity of those religious obligations; but I secretly resolved that her safety absolutely required it, and that at all events I would procure absolution from my own promise to her.

At last Isora, turning from that topic, so darkly interesting, pointed to the heavens, which, with their thousand eyes of light, looked down upon us. "Tell me, love," said she, playfully, as her arm embraced me yet more closely, "if, among yonder stars we could choose a home, which should we select?"

I pointed to one which lay to the left of the moon, and which, though not larger, seemed to burn with an intenser lustre than the rest. Since that night it has ever been to me a fountain of deep and passionate thought, a well wherein fears and hopes are buried, a mirror in which, in stormy times, I have fancied to read my destiny, and to find some mysterious omen of my intended deeds, a haven which I believe others have reached before me, and a home immortal and unchanging, where, when my wearied and fettered soul is escaped, as a bird, it shall flee away, and have its rest at last.

"What think you of my choice?" said I. Isora looked upward, but did not answer; and as I gazed upon her (while the pale light of heaven streamed

quietly upon her face) with her dark eyes, where the tear yet lingered, though rather to soften than to dim; with her noble, yet tender features, over which hung a melancholy calm; with her lips apart, and her rich locks wreathing over her marble brow, and contrasted by a single white rose (that rose I have now--I would not lose one withered leaf of it for a kingdom!),--her beauty never seemed to me of so rare an order, nor did my soul ever yearn towards her with so deep a love.

It was past midnight. All was hushed in our bridal chamber. The single lamp, which hung above, burned still and clear; and through the half-closed curtains of the window, the moonlight looked in upon our couch, quiet and pure and holy, as if it were charged with blessings.

"Hush!" said Isora, gently; "do you not hear a noise below?"

"Not a breath," said I; "I hear not a breath, save yours."

"It was my fancy, then!" said Isora, "and it has ceased now;" and she clung closer to my breast and fell asleep. I looked on her peaceful and childish countenance, with that concentrated and full delight with which we clasp all that the universe holds dear to us, and feel as if the universe held nought beside,--and thus sleep also crept upon me.

I awoke suddenly; I felt Isora trembling palpably by my side. Before I could speak to her, I saw standing at a little distance from the bed, a man wrapped in a long dark cloak and masked; but his eyes shone through the mask, and they glared full upon me. He stood with his arms folded, and perfectly motionless; but at the other end of the room, before the escritoire in which I had locked the important packet, stood another man, also masked, and wrapped in a disguising cloak of similar hue and fashion. This man, as if alarmed, turned suddenly, and I perceived then that the escritoire was already opened, and that the packet was in his hand. I tore myself from Isora's clasp--I stretched my hand to the table by my bedside, upon which I had left my sword,--it was gone! No matter! I was young, strong, fierce, and the stake at hazard was great. I sprang from the bed, I precipitated myself upon the man who held the packet. With one hand I grasped at the important document, with the other I strove to tear the mask from the robber's face. He endeavoured rather to shake me off than to attack me; and it was not till I had nearly succeeded in unmasking him that he drew forth a short poniard, and stabbed me in the side. The blow, which seemed purposely aimed to save a mortal part, staggered me, but only for an instant. I renewed my grip at the packet--I tore it from the robber's hand, and collecting my strength, now fast ebbing away, for one effort, I bore my assailant to the ground, and fell struggling with him.

But my blood flowed fast from my wound, and my antagonist, if less sinewy than myself, had greatly the advantage in weight and size. Now for one moment I was uppermost, but in the next his knee was upon my chest, and his blade gleamed on high in the pale light of the lamp and moon. I thought I beheld my death: would to God that I had! With a piercing cry, Isora sprang from the bed, flung herself before the lifted blade of the robber, and arrested his arm. This man had, in the whole

contest, acted with a singular forbearance, he did so now: he paused for a moment and dropped his hand. Hitherto the other man had not stirred from his mute position; he now moved one step towards us, brandishing a poniard like his comrade's. Isora raised her hand supplicatingly towards him, and cried out, "Spare him, spare /him/! Oh, mercy, mercy!" With one stride the murderer was by my side; he muttered some words which passion seemed to render inarticulate; and, half pushing aside his comrade, his raised weapon flashed before my eyes, now dim and reeling. I made a vain effort to rise: the blade descended; Isora, unable to arrest it, threw herself before it; her blood, her heart's blood gushed over me; I saw and felt no more.

When I recovered my senses, my servants were round me; a deep red, wet stain upon the sofa on which I was laid brought the whole scene I had witnessed again before me--terrible and distinct. I sprang to my feet and asked for Isora; a low murmur caught my ear: I turned and beheld a dark form stretched on the bed, and surrounded, like myself, by gazers and menials; I tottered towards that bed,--my bridal bed,--with a fierce gesture motioned the crowd away; I heard my name breathed audibly; the next moment I was by Isora's side. All pain, all weakness, all consciousness of my wound, of my very self, were gone: life seemed curdled into a single agonizing and fearful thought. I fixed my eyes upon hers; and though /there/ the film was gathering dark and rapidly, I saw, yet visible and unconquered, the deep love of that faithful and warm heart which had lavished its life for mine.

I threw my arms around her; I pressed my lips wildly to hers. "Speak--speak!" I cried, and my blood gushed over her with the effort; "in mercy speak!"

Even in death and agony, the gentle being who had been as wax unto my lightest wish struggled to obey me. "Do not grieve for me," she said, in a tremulous and broken voice: "it is dearer to die for you than to live!"

Those were her last words. I felt her breath abruptly cease. The heart, pressed to mine, was still! I started up in dismay; the light shone full upon her face. O God! that I should live to write that Isora was--no more!

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