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BOOK VIII.

O Fate! O Heaven!--what have ye then decreed?

SOPHOCLES: *_OEd. Tyr._* 738.

"Insolent pride . . .

.

The topmost crag of the great precipice

Surmounts--to rush to ruin."

Ibid. 874.

CHAPTER I.

. . . SHE is young, wise, fair,

In these to Nature she's immediate heir.

.

. . . Honours best thrive

When rather from our acts we them derive

Than our foregoers!--*_All's Well that Ends Well_*.

LETTER FROM ERNEST MALTRAVERS TO THE HON. FREDERICK CLEVELAND.

EVELYN is free; she is in Paris; I have seen her,--I see her daily!

How true it is that we cannot make a philosophy of indifference! The affections are stronger than all our reasonings. We must take them into our alliance, or they will destroy all our theories of self-government. Such fools of fate are we, passing from system to system, from scheme to scheme, vainly seeking to shut out passion and sorrow--forgetting that they are born within us--and return to the soul as the seasons to the earth! Yet,--years, many years ago, when I first looked gravely into my own nature and being here, when I first awakened to the dignity and solemn responsibilities of human life, I had resolved to tame and curb myself into a thing of rule and measure. Bearing within me the wound scarred over but never healed, the consciousness of wrong to the heart that had leaned upon me, haunted by the memory of my lost Alice, I shuddered at new affections bequeathing new griefs. Wrapped in a haughty egotism, I wished not to extend my empire over a wider circuit than my own intellect and passions. I turned from the trader-covetousness of bliss, that would freight the wealth of life upon barks exposed to every wind upon the seas of Fate; I was contented with the hope to pass life alone, honoured, though unloved. Slowly and reluctantly I yielded to the fascinations of Florence Lascelles. The hour that sealed the compact between us was one of regret and alarm. In vain I sought to deceive myself,--I felt that I did not love. And then I imagined that Love was no longer in my nature,--that I had exhausted its treasures before my

time, and left my heart a bankrupt. Not till the last--not till that glorious soul broke out in all its brightness the nearer it approached the source to which it has returned--did I feel of what tenderness she was worthy and I was capable. She died, and the world was darkened! Energy, ambition, my former aims and objects, were all sacrificed at her tomb. But amidst ruins and through the darkness, my soul yet supported me; I could no longer hope, but I could endure. I was resolved that I would not be subdued, and that the world should not hear me groan. Amidst strange and far-distant scenes, amidst hordes to whom my very language was unknown, in wastes and forests, which the step of civilized man, with his sorrows and his dreams, had never trodden, I wrestled with my soul, as the patriarch of old wrestled with the angel,--and the angel was at last the victor! You do not mistake me: you know that it was not the death of Florence alone that worked in me that awful revolution; but with that death the last glory fled from the face of things that had seemed to me beautiful of old. Hers was a love that accompanied and dignified the schemes and aspirations of manhood,--a love that was an incarnation of ambition itself; and all the evils and disappointments that belong to ambition seemed to crowd around my heart like vultures to a feast allured and invited by the dead. But this at length was over; the barbarous state restored me to the civilized. I returned to my equals, prepared no more to be an actor in the strife, but a calm spectator of the turbulent arena. I once more laid my head beneath the roof of my fathers; and if without any clear and definite object, I at least hoped to find amidst "my old hereditary trees" the charm of contemplation and repose. And scarce--in the first hours of my arrival--had I indulged that dream, when a fair face, a sweet voice, that had once before left deep and unobliterated impressions on my heart, scattered all my philosophy to the winds. I saw Evelyn! and if ever there was love at first sight, it was that which I felt for her: I lived in her presence, and forgot the Future! Or, rather, I was with the Past,--in the bowers of my springtide of life and hope! It was an after-birth of youth--my love for that young heart!

It is, indeed, only in maturity that we know how lovely were our earliest years! What depth of wisdom in the old Greek myth, that allotted Hebe as the prize to the god who had been the arch-labourer of life! and whom the satiety of all that results from experience had made enamoured of all that belongs to the Hopeful and the New!

This enchanting child, this delightful Evelyn, this ray of undreamed of sunshine, smiled away all my palaces of ice. I loved, Cleveland,--I loved more ardently, more passionately, more wildly than ever I did of old! But suddenly I learned that she was affianced to another, and felt that it was not for me to question, to seek the annulment of the bond. I had been unworthy to love Evelyn if I had not loved honour more! I fled from her presence, honestly and resolutely; I sought to conquer a forbidden passion; I believed that I had not won affection in return; I believed, from certain expressions that I overheard Evelyn utter to another, that her heart as well as her hand was given to Vargrave. I came hither; you know how sternly and resolutely I strove to eradicate a weakness that seemed without even the justification of hope! If I suffered, I betrayed it not. Suddenly Evelyn appeared again before

me!--and suddenly I learned that she was free! Oh, the rapture of that moment! Could you have seen her bright face, her enchanting smile, when we met again! Her ingenuous innocence did not conceal her gladness at seeing me! What hopes broke upon me! Despite the difference of our years, I think she loves me! that in that love I am about at last to learn what blessings there are in life.

Evelyn has the simplicity, the tenderness, of Alice, with the refinement and culture of Florence herself; not the genius, not the daring spirit, not the almost fearful brilliancy of that ill-fated being,--but with a taste as true to the Beautiful, with a soul as sensitive to the Sublime! In Evelyn's presence I feel a sense of peace, of security, of home! Happy! thrice happy! he who will take her to his breast! Of late she has assumed a new charm in my eyes,--a certain pensiveness and abstraction have succeeded to her wonted gayety. Ah, Love is pensive,--is it not, Cleveland? How often I ask myself that question! And yet, amidst all my hopes, there are hours when I tremble and despond! How can that innocent and joyous spirit sympathize with all that mine has endured and known? How, even though her imagination be dazzled by some prestige around my name, how can I believe that I have awakened her heart to that deep and real love of which it is capable, and which youth excites in youth? When we meet at her home, or amidst the quiet yet brilliant society which is gathered round Madame de Ventadour or the Montaignes, with whom she is an especial favourite; when we converse; when I sit by her, and her soft eyes meet mine,--I feel not the disparity of years; my heart speaks to her, and that is youthful still! But in the more gay and crowded haunts to which her presence allures me, when I see that fairy form surrounded by those who have not outlived the pleasures that so naturally dazzle and captivate her, then, indeed, I feel that my tastes, my habits, my pursuits, belong to another season of life, and ask myself anxiously if my nature and my years are those that can make her happy? Then, indeed, I recognize the wide interval that time and trial place between one whom the world has wearied, and one for whom the world is new. If she should discover hereafter that youth should love only youth, my bitterest anguish would be that of remorse! I know how deeply I love by knowing how immeasurably dearer her happiness is than my own! I will wait, then, yet a while, I will examine, I will watch well that I do not deceive myself. As yet I think that I have no rivals whom I need fear: surrounded as she is by the youngest and the gayest, she still turns with evident pleasure to me, whom she calls her friend. She will forego the amusements she most loves for society in which we can converse more at ease. You remember, for instance, young Legard? He is here; and, before I met Evelyn, was much at Lady Doltimore's house. I cannot be blind to his superior advantages of youth and person; and there is something striking and prepossessing in the gentle yet manly frankness of his manner,--and yet no fear of his rivalry ever haunts me. True, that of late he has been little in Evelyn's society; nor do I think, in the frivolity of his pursuits, he can have educated his mind to appreciate Evelyn, or be possessed of those qualities which would render him worthy of her. But there is something good in the young man, despite his foibles,--something that wins upon me; and you will smile to learn, that he has even surprised from me--usually so reserved on such matters--the confession of my attachment and hopes! Evelyn often talks to me of her

mother, and describes her in colours so glowing that I feel the greatest interest in one who has helped to form so beautiful and pure a mind. Can you learn who Lady Vargrave was? There is evidently some mystery thrown over her birth and connections; and, from what I can hear, this arises from their lowliness. You know that, though I have been accused of family pride, it is a pride of a peculiar sort. I am proud, not of the length of a mouldering pedigree, but of some historical quarterings in my escutcheon,--of some blood of scholars and of heroes that rolls in my veins; it is the same kind of pride that an Englishman may feel in belonging to a country that has produced Shakspeare and Bacon. I have never, I hope, felt the vulgar pride that disdains want of birth in others; and I care not three straws whether my friend or my wife be descended from a king or a peasant. It is myself, and not my connections, who alone can disgrace my lineage; therefore, however humble Lady Vargrave's parentage, do not scruple to inform me, should you learn any intelligence that bears upon it.

I had a conversation last night with Evelyn that delighted me. By some accident we spoke of Lord Vargrave; and she told me, with an enchanting candour, of the position in which she stood with him, and the conscientious and noble scruples she felt as to the enjoyment of a fortune, which her benefactor and stepfather had evidently intended to be shared with his nearest relative. In these scruples I cordially concurred; and if I marry Evelyn, my first care will be to carry them into effect,--by securing to Vargrave, as far as the law may permit, the larger part of the income; I should like to say all,--at least till Evelyn's children would have the right to claim it: a right not to be enforced during her own, and, therefore, probably not during Vargrave's life. I own that this would be no sacrifice, for I am proud enough to recoil from the thought of being indebted for fortune to the woman I love. It was that kind of pride which gave coldness and constraint to my regard for Florence; and for the rest, my own property (much increased by the simplicity of my habits of life for the last few years) will suffice for all Evelyn or myself could require. Ah, madman that I am! I calculate already on marriage, even while I have so much cause for anxiety as to love. But my heart beats,--my heart has grown a dial that keeps the account of time; by its movements I calculate the moments--in an hour I shall see her!

Oh, never, never, in my wildest and earliest visions, could I have fancied that I should love as I love now! Adieu, my oldest and kindest friend! If I am happy at last, it will be something to feel that at last I shall have satisfied your expectations of my youth.

Affectionately yours,

E. MALTRIVERS.

RUE DE -----, PARIS,
January --, 18--.

CHAPTER II.

IN her youth

There is a prone and speechless dialect--
Such as moves men.--_Measure for Measure_.

Abbess. Haply in private--
Adriana. And in assemblies too.--_Comedy of Errors_.

IT was true, as Maltravers had stated, that Legard had of late been little at Lady Doltimore's, or in the same society as Evelyn. With the vehemence of an ardent and passionate nature, he yielded to the jealous rage and grief that devoured him. He saw too clearly, and from the first, that Maltravers adored Evelyn; and in her familiar kindness of manner towards him, in the unlimited veneration in which she appeared to hold his gifts and qualities, he thought that that love might become reciprocal. He became gloomy and almost morose; he shunned Evelyn, he forbore to enter into the lists against his rival. Perhaps the intellectual superiority of Maltravers, the extraordinary conversational brilliancy that he could display when he pleased, the commanding dignity of his manners, even the matured authority of his reputation and years, might have served to awe the hopes, as well as to wound the vanity, of a man accustomed himself to be the oracle of a circle. These might have strongly influenced Legard in withdrawing himself from Evelyn's society; but there was one circumstance, connected with motives much more generous, that mainly determined his conduct. It happened that Maltravers, shortly after his first interview with Evelyn, was riding alone one day in the more sequestered part of the Bois de Boulogne, when he encountered Legard, also alone, and on horseback. The latter, on succeeding to his uncle's fortune, had taken care to repay his debt to Maltravers; he had done so in a short but feeling and grateful letter, which had been forwarded to Maltravers at Paris, and which pleased and touched him. Since that time he had taken a liking to the young man, and now, meeting him at Paris, he sought, to a certain extent, Legard's more intimate acquaintance. Maltravers was in that happy mood when we are inclined to be friends with all men. It is true, however, that, though unknown to himself, that pride of bearing, which often gave to the very virtues of Maltravers an unamiable aspect, occasionally irritated one who felt he had incurred to him an obligation of honour and of life never to be effaced; it made the sense of this obligation more intolerable to Legard; it made him more desirous to acquit himself of the charge. But on this day there was so much cordiality in the greeting of Maltravers, and he pressed Legard in so friendly a manner to join him in his ride, that the young man's heart was softened, and they rode together, conversing familiarly on such topics as were in common between them. At last the conversation fell on Lord and Lady Doltimore; and thence Maltravers, whose soul was full of one thought, turned it indirectly towards Evelyn.

"Did you ever see Lady Vargrave?"

"Never," replied Legard, looking another way; "but Lady Doltimore says she is as beautiful as Evelyn herself, if that be possible; and still so

young in form and countenance, that she looks rather like her sister than her mother!"

"How I should like to know her!" said Maltravers, with a sudden energy.

Legard changed the subject. He spoke of the Carnival, of balls, of masquerades, of operas, of reigning beauties!

"Ah," said Maltravers, with a half sigh, "yours is the age for those dazzling pleasures; to me they are 'the twice-told tale.'"

Maltravers meant it not, but this remark chafed Legard. He thought it conveyed a sarcasm on the childishness of his own mind or the levity of his pursuits; his colour mounted, as he replied,--

"It is not, I fear, the slight difference of years between us,--it is the difference of intellect you would insinuate; but you should remember all men have not your resources; all men cannot pretend to genius!"

"My dear Legard," said Maltravers, kindly, "do not fancy that I could have designed any insinuation half so presumptuous and impertinent. Believe me, I envy you, sincerely and sadly, all those faculties of enjoyment which I have worn away. Oh, how I envy you! for, were they still mine, then--then, indeed, I might hope to mould myself into greater congeniality with the beautiful and the young!"

Maltravers paused a moment, and resumed, with a grave smile: "I trust, Legard, that you will be wiser than I have been; that you will gather your roses while it is yet May: and that you will not live to thirty-six, pining for happiness and home, a disappointed and desolate man; till, when your ideal is at last found, you shrink back appalled, to discover that you have lost none of the tendencies to love, but many of the graces by which love is to be allured!"

There was so much serious and earnest feeling in these words that they went home at once to Legard's sympathies. He felt irresistibly impelled to learn the worst.

"Maltravers," said he, in a hurried tone, "it would be an idle compliment to say that you are not likely to love in vain; perhaps it is indelicate in me to apply a general remark; and yet--yet I cannot but fancy that I have discovered your secret, and that you are not insensible to the charms of Miss Cameron!"

"Legard!" said Maltravers,--and so strong was his fervent attachment to Evelyn, that it swept away all his natural coldness and reserve,--"I tell you plainly and frankly that in my love for Evelyn Cameron lie the last hopes I have in life. I have no thought, no ambition, no sentiment that is not vowed to her. If my love should be unreturned, I may strive to endure the blow, I may mix with the world, I may seem to occupy myself in the aims of others; but my heart will be broken! Let us talk of this no more; you have surprised my secret, though it must have betrayed itself. Learn from me how preternaturally strong, how generally fatal is love

deferred to that day when--in the stern growth of all the feelings--love writes itself on granite!"

Maltravers, as if impatient of his own weakness, put spurs to his horse, and they rode on rapidly for some time without speaking.

That silence was employed by Legard in meditating over all he had heard and witnessed, in recalling all that he owed to Maltravers; and before that silence was broken the young man nobly resolved not even to attempt, not even to hope, a rivalry with Maltravers; to forego all the expectations he had so fondly nursed, to absent himself from the company of Evelyn, to requite faithfully and firmly that act of generosity to which he owed the preservation of his life,--the redemption of his honour.

Agreeably to this determination, he abstained from visiting those haunts in which Evelyn shone; and if accident brought them together, his manner was embarrassed and abrupt. She wondered,--at last, perhaps she resented,--it may be that she grieved; for certain it is that Maltravers was right in thinking that her manner had lost the gayety that distinguished it at Merton Rectory. But still it may be doubted whether Evelyn had seen enough of Legard, and whether her fancy and romance were still sufficiently free from the magical influences of the genius that called them forth in the eloquent homage of Maltravers, to trace, herself, to any causes connected with her younger lover the listless melancholy that crept over her. In very young women--new alike to the world and the knowledge of themselves--many vague and undefined feelings herald the dawn of Love; shade after shade and light upon light succeeds before the sun breaks forth, and the earth awakens to his presence.

It was one evening that Legard had suffered himself to be led into a party at the ----- ambassador's; and there, as he stood by the door, he saw at a little distance Maltravers conversing with Evelyn. Again he writhed beneath the tortures of his jealous anguish; and there, as he gazed and suffered, he resolved (as Maltravers had done before him) to fly from the place that had a little while ago seemed to him Elysium! He would quit Paris, he would travel, he would not see Evelyn again till the irrevocable barrier was passed, and she was the wife of Maltravers! In the first heat of this determination, he turned towards some young men standing near him, one of whom was about to visit Vienna. He gayly proposed to join him,--a proposal readily accepted, and began conversing on the journey, the city, its splendid and proud society, with all that cruel exhilaration which the forced spirits of a stricken heart can alone display, when Evelyn (whose conference with Maltravers was ended) passed close by him. She was leaning on Lady Doltimore's arm, and the admiring murmur of his companions caused Legard to turn suddenly round.

"You are not dancing to-night, Colonel Legard," said Caroline, glancing towards Evelyn. "The more the season for balls advances, the more indolent you become."

Legard muttered a confused reply, one half of which seemed petulant, while the other half was inaudible.

"Not so indolent as you suppose," said his friend. "Legard meditates an excursion sufficient, I hope, to redeem his character in your eyes. It is a long journey, and, what is worse, a very cold journey, to Vienna."

"Vienna! do you think of going to Vienna?" cried Caroline.

"Yes," said Legard. "I hate Paris; any place better than this odious city!" and he moved away.

Evelyn's eyes followed him sadly and gravely. She remained by Lady Doltimore's side, abstracted and silent for several minutes.

Meanwhile Caroline, turning to Lord Devonport (the friend who had proposed the Viennese excursion), said, "It is cruel in you to go to Vienna,--it is doubly cruel to rob Lord Doltimore of his best friend and Paris of its best waltzer."

"Oh, it is a voluntary offer of Legard's, Lady Doltimore,--believe me, I have used no persuasive arts. But the fact is, that we have been talking of a fair widow, the beauty of Austria, and as proud and as unassailable as Ehrenbreitstein itself. Legard's vanity is piqued; and so--as a professed lady-killer--he intends to see what can be effected by the handsomest Englishman of his time."

Caroline laughed, and new claimants on her notice succeeded to Lord Devonport. It was not till the ladies were waiting their carriage in the shawl-room that Lady Doltimore noticed the paleness and thoughtful brow of Evelyn.

"Are you fatigued or unwell, dear?" she said.

"No," answered Evelyn, forcing a smile; and at that moment they were joined by Maltravers, with the intelligence that it would be some minutes before the carriage could draw up. Caroline amused herself in the interval by shrewd criticisms on the dresses and characters of her various friends. Caroline had grown an amazing prude in her judgment of others!

"What a turban!--prudent for Mrs. A---- to wear,--bright red; it puts out her face, as the sun puts out the fire. Mr. Maltravers, do observe Lady B---- with that _very_ young gentleman. After all her experience in angling, it is odd that she should still only throw in for small fish. Pray, why is the marriage between Lady C---- D---- and Mr. F---- broken off? Is it true that he is so much in debt, and is so very--very profligate? They say she is heartbroken."

"Really, Lady Doltimore," said Maltravers, smiling, "I am but a bad scandal-monger. But poor F---- is not, I believe, much worse than others. How do we know whose fault it is when a marriage is broken off? Lady C---- D---- heartbroken! what an idea! Nowadays there is never any affection in compacts of that sort; and the chain that binds the frivolous nature is but a gossamer thread! Fine gentlemen and fine

ladies, their loves and their marriages--

"May flourish and may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made.'

"Never believe that a heart long accustomed to beat only in good society can be broken,--it is rarely ever touched!"

Evelyn listened attentively, and seemed struck. She sighed, and said in a very low voice, as to herself, "It is true--how could I think otherwise?"

For the next few days Evelyn was unwell, and did not quit her room. Maltravers was in despair. The flowers, the books, the music he sent; his anxious inquiries, his earnest and respectful notes, touched with that ineffable charm which Heart and Intellect breathe into the most trifling coinage from their mint,--all affected Evelyn sensibly. Perhaps she contrasted them with Legard's indifference and apparent caprice; perhaps in that contrast Maltravers gained more than by all his brilliant qualities. Meanwhile, without visit, without message, without farewell,--unconscious, it is true, of Evelyn's illness,--Legard departed for Vienna.

CHAPTER III.

A PLEASING land . . .
Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye,
And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,
Forever flashing round a summer sky.--THOMSON.

DAILY, hourly, increased the influence of Evelyn over Maltravers. Oh, what a dupe is a man's pride! what a fool his wisdom! That a girl, a mere child, one who scarce knew her own heart, beautiful as it was,--whose deeper feelings still lay coiled up in their sweet buds,--that she should thus master this proud, wise man! But as thou--our universal teacher--as thou, O Shakspeare! haply speaking from the hints of thine own experience, hast declared--

"None are so truly caught, when they are caught,
As wit turned fool; folly in wisdom hatched,
Hath wisdom's warrant."

Still, methinks that, in that surpassing and dangerously indulged affection which levelled thee, Maltravers, with the weakest, which overturned all thy fine philosophy of Stoicism, and made thee the veriest slave of the "Rose Garden,"--still, Maltravers, thou mightest at least have seen that thou hast lost forever all right to pride, all privilege to disdain the herd! But thou wert proud of thine own infirmity! And far sharper must be that lesson which can teach thee that Pride--thine angel--is ever pre-doomed to fall.

What a mistake to suppose that the passions are strongest in youth! The passions are not stronger, but the control over them is weaker. They are more easily excited, they are more violent and more apparent; but they have less energy, less durability, less intense and concentrated power, than in maturer life. In youth, passion succeeds to passion, and one breaks upon the other, as waves upon a rock, till the heart frets itself to repose. In manhood, the great deep flows on, more calm, but more profound; its serenity is the proof of the might and terror of its course, were the wind to blow and the storm to rise.

A young man's ambition is but vanity,--it has no definite aim, it plays with a thousand toys. As with one passion, so with the rest. In youth, Love is ever on the wing, but, like the birds in April, it hath not yet built its nest. With so long a career of summer and hope before it, the disappointment of to-day is succeeded by the novelty of to-morrow, and the sun that advances to the noon but dries up its fervent tears. But when we have arrived at that epoch of life,--when, if the light fail us, if the last rose wither, we feel that the loss cannot be retrieved, and that the frost and the darkness are at hand, Love becomes to us a treasure that we watch over and hoard with a miser's care. Our youngest-born affection is our darling and our idol, the fondest pledge of the Past, the most cherished of our hopes for the Future. A certain melancholy that mingles with our joy at the possession only enhances its charm. We feel ourselves so dependent on it for all that is yet to come. Our other barks--our gay galleys of pleasure, our stately argosies of pride--have been swallowed up by the remorseless wave. On this last vessel we freight our all, to its frail tenement we commit ourselves. The star that guides it is our guide, and in the tempest that menaces we behold our own doom!

Still Maltravers shrank from the confession that trembled on his lips; still he adhered to the course he had prescribed to himself. If ever (as he had implied in his letter to Cleveland)--if ever Evelyn should discover they were not suited to each other! The possibility of such an affliction impressed his judgment, the dread of it chilled his heart. With all his pride, there was a certain humility in Maltravers that was perhaps one cause of his reserve. He knew what a beautiful possession is youth,--its sanguine hopes, its elastic spirit, its inexhaustible resources! What to the eyes of woman were the acquisitions which manhood had brought him,--the vast but the sad experience, the arid wisdom, the philosophy based on disappointment? He might be loved but for the vain glitter of name and reputation,--and love might vanish as custom dimmed the illusion. Men of strong affections are jealous of their own genius. They know how separate a thing from the household character genius often is,--they fear lest they should be loved for a quality, not for themselves.

Thus communed he with himself; thus, as the path had become clear to his hopes, did new fears arise; and thus did love bring, as it ever does, in its burning wake,--

"The pang, the agony, the doubt!"

Maltravers then confirmed himself in the resolution he had formed: he would cautiously examine Evelyn and himself; he would weigh in the balance every straw that the wind should turn up; he would not aspire to the treasure, unless he could feel secure that the coffer could preserve the gem. This was not only a prudent, it was a just and a generous determination. It was one which we all ought to form if the fervour of our passions will permit us. We have no right to sacrifice years to moments, and to melt the pearl that has no price in a single draught! But can Maltravers adhere to his wise precautions? The truth must be spoken,--it was, perhaps, the first time in his life that Maltravers had been really in love. As the reader will remember, he had not been in love with the haughty Florence; admiration, gratitude,--the affection of the head, not that of the feelings,--had been the links that bound him to the enthusiastic correspondent revealed in the gifted beauty; and the gloomy circumstances connected with her early fate had left deep furrows in his memory. Time and vicissitude had effaced the wounds, and the Light of the Beautiful dawned once more in the face of Evelyn. Valerie de Ventadour had been but the fancy of a roving breast. Alice, the sweet Alice!--her, indeed, in the first flower of youth, he had loved with a boy's romance. He had loved her deeply, fondly,--but perhaps he had never been in love with her; he had mourned her loss for years,--insensibly to himself her loss had altered his character and cast a melancholy gloom over all the colours of his life. But she whose range of ideas was so confined, she who had but broke into knowledge, as the chrysalis into the butterfly--how much in that prodigal and gifted nature, bounding onwards into the broad plains of life, must the peasant girl have failed to fill! They had had nothing in common but their youth and their love. It was a dream that had hovered over the poet-boy in the morning twilight,--a dream he had often wished to recall, a dream that had haunted him in the noon-day,--but had, as all boyish visions ever have done, left the heart unexhausted, and the passions unconsumed! Years, long years, since then had rolled away, and yet, perhaps, one unconscious attraction that drew Maltravers so suddenly towards Evelyn was a something indistinct and undefinable that reminded him of Alice. There was no similarity in their features; but at times a tone in Evelyn's voice, a "trick of the manner," an air, a gesture, recalled him, over the gulfs of Time, to Poetry, and Hope, and Alice.

In the youth of each--the absent and the present one--there was resemblance,--resemblance in their simplicity, their grace. Perhaps Alice, of the two, had in her nature more real depth, more ardour of feeling, more sublimity of sentiment, than Evelyn. But in her primitive ignorance half her noblest qualities were embedded and unknown. And Evelyn--his equal in rank; Evelyn, well cultivated; Evelyn, so long courted, so deeply studied--had such advantages over the poor peasant girl! Still the poor peasant girl often seemed to smile on him from that fair face; and in Evelyn he half loved Alice again!

So these two persons now met daily; their intercourse was even more familiar than before, their several minds grew hourly more developed and transparent to each other. But of love Maltravers still forbore to speak; they were friends,--no more; such friends as the disparity of their years and their experience might warrant them to be. And in that

young and innocent nature--with its rectitude, its enthusiasm, and its pious and cheerful tendencies--Maltravers found freshness in the desert, as the camel-driver lingering at the well. Insensibly his heart warmed again to his kind; and as the harp of David to the ear of Saul, was the soft voice that lulled remembrance and awakened hope in the lonely man.

Meanwhile, what was the effect that the presence, the attentions, of Maltravers produced on Evelyn? Perhaps it was of that kind which most flatters us and most deceives. She never dreamed of comparing him with others. To her thoughts he stood aloof and alone from all his kind. It may seem a paradox, but it might be that she admired and venerated him almost too much for love. Still her pleasure in his society was so evident and unequivocal, her deference to his opinion so marked, she sympathized in so many of his objects, she had so much blindness or forbearance for his faults (and he never sought to mask them), that the most diffident of men might have drawn from so many symptoms hopes the most auspicious. Since the departure of Legard, the gayeties of Paris lost their charm for Evelyn, and more than ever she could appreciate the society of her friend. He thus gradually lost his earlier fears of her forming too keen an attachment to the great world; and as nothing could be more apparent than Evelyn's indifference to the crowd of flatterers and suitors that hovered round her, Maltravers no longer dreaded a rival. He began to feel assured that they had both gone through the ordeal; and that he might ask for love without a doubt of its immutability and faith. At this period they were both invited, with the Doltimores, to spend a few days at the villa of De Montaigne, near St. Cloud. And there it was that Maltravers determined to know his fate!

CHAPTER IV.

CHAOS of Thought and Passion all confused.--POPE.

IT is to the contemplation of a very different scene that the course of our story now conducts us.

Between St. Cloud and Versailles there was at that time--perhaps there still is--a lone and melancholy house, appropriated to the insane,--melancholy, not from its site, but the purpose to which it is devoted. Placed on an eminence, the windows of the mansion command--beyond the gloomy walls that gird the garden ground--one of those enchanting prospects which win for France her title to La Belle. There the glorious Seine is seen in the distance, broad and winding through the varied plains, and beside the gleaming villages and villas. There, too, beneath the clear blue sky of France, the forest-lands of Versailles and St. Germain stretch in dark luxuriance around and afar. There you may see sleeping on the verge of the landscape the mighty city,--crowned with the thousand spires from which, proud above the rest, rises the eyry of Napoleon's eagle, the pinnacle of Notre Dame.

Remote, sequestered, the place still commands the survey of the turbulent world below; and Madness gazes upon prospects that might well charm the

thoughtful eyes of Imagination or of Wisdom! In one of the rooms of this house sat Castruccio Cesarini. The apartment was furnished even with elegance; a variety of books strewed the table; nothing for comfort or for solace that the care and providence of affection could dictate was omitted. Cesarini was alone: leaning his cheek upon his hand, he gazed on the beautiful and tranquil view we have described. "And am I never to set a free foot on that soil again?" he muttered indignantly, as he broke from his reverie.

The door opened, and the keeper of the sad abode (a surgeon of humanity and eminence) entered, followed by De Montaigne. Cesarini turned round and scowled upon the latter; the surgeon, after a few words of salutation, withdrew to a corner of the room, and appeared absorbed in a book. De Montaigne approached his brother-in-law,--"I have brought you some poems just published at Milan, my dear Castruccio,--they will please you."

"Give me my liberty!" cried Cesarini, clenching his hands. "Why am I to be detained here? Why are my nights to be broken by the groans of maniacs, and my days devoured in a solitude that loathes the aspect of things around me? Am I mad? You know I am not! It is an old trick to say that poets are mad,--you mistake our agonies for insanity. See, I am calm; I can reason: give me any test of sound mind--no matter how rigid--I will pass it; I am not mad,--I swear I am not!"

"No, my dear Castruccio," said De Montaigne, soothingly; "but you are still unwell,--you still have fever; when next I see you perhaps you may be recovered sufficiently to dismiss the doctor and change the air. Meanwhile is there anything you would have added or altered?"

Cesarini had listened to this speech with a mocking sarcasm on his lip, but an expression of such hopeless wretchedness in his eyes, as they alone can comprehend who have witnessed madness in its lucid intervals. He sank down, and his head drooped gloomily on his breast. "No," said he; "I want nothing but free air or death,--no matter which."

De Montaigne stayed some time with the unhappy man, and sought to soothe him; but it was in vain. Yet when he rose to depart, Cesarini started up, and fixing on him his large wistful eyes, exclaimed, "Ah! do not leave me yet. It is so dreadful to be alone with the dead and the worse than dead!"

The Frenchman turned aside to wipe his eyes, and stifle the rising at his heart; and again he sat, and again he sought to soothe. At length Cesarini, seemingly more calm, gave him leave to depart. "Go," said he, "go; tell Teresa I am better, that I love her tenderly, that I shall live to tell her children not to be poets. Stay, you asked if there was aught I wished changed: yes, this room; it is too still: I hear my own pulse beat so loudly in the silence, it is horrible! There is a room below, by the window of which there is a tree, and the winds rock its boughs to and fro, and it sighs and groans like a living thing; it will be pleasant to look at that tree, and see the birds come home to it,--yet that tree is wintry and blasted too! It will be pleasant to hear it fret and chafe in

the stormy nights; it will be a friend to me, that old tree! let me have that room. Nay, look not at each other,--it is not so high as this; but the window is barred,--I cannot escape!" And Cesarini smiled.

"Certainly," said the surgeon, "if you prefer that room; but it has not so fine a view."

"I hate the view of the world that has cast me off. When may I change?"

"This very evening."

"Thank you; it will be a great revolution in my life."

And Cesarini's eyes brightened, and he looked happy. De Montaigne, thoroughly unmanned, tore himself away.

The promise was kept, and Cesarini was transferred that night to the chamber he had selected.

As soon as it was deep night, the last visit of the keeper paid, and, save now and then, by some sharp cry in the more distant quarter of the house, all was still, Cesarini rose from his bed; a partial light came from the stars that streamed through the frosty and keen air, and cast a sickly gleam through the heavy bars of the casement. It was then that Cesarini drew from under his pillow a long-cherished and carefully-concealed treasure. Oh, with what rapture had he first possessed himself of it! with what anxiety had it been watched and guarded! how many cunning stratagems and profound inventions had gone towards the baffling, the jealous search of the keeper and his myrmidons! The abandoned and wandering mother never clasped her child more fondly to her bosom, nor gazed upon his features with more passionate visions for the future. And what had so enchanted the poor prisoner, so deluded the poor maniac? A large nail! He had found it accidentally in the garden; he had hoarded it for weeks,--it had inspired him with the hope of liberty. Often, in the days far gone, he had read of the wonders that had been effected, of the stones removed, and the bars filed, by the self-same kind of implement. He remembered that the most celebrated of those bold unfortunates who live a life against the law, had said, "Choose my prison, and give me but a rusty nail, and I laugh at your jailers and your walls!" He crept to the window; he examined his relic by the dim starlight; he kissed it passionately, and the tears stood in his eyes.

Ah, who shall determine the worth of things? No king that night so prized his crown as the madman prized that rusty inch of wire,--the proper prey of the rubbish-cart and dunghill. Little didst thou think, old blacksmith, when thou drewest the dull metal from the fire, of what precious price it was to become!

Cesarini, with the astuteness of his malady, had long marked out this chamber for the scene of his operations; he had observed that the framework in which the bars were set seemed old and worm-eaten; that the window was but a few feet from the ground; that the noise made in the

winter nights by the sighing branches of the old tree without would deaden the sound of the lone workman. Now, then, his hopes were to be crowned. Poor fool! and even _thou_ hast hope still! All that night he toiled and toiled, and sought to work his iron into a file; now he tried the bars, and now the framework. Alas! he had not learned the skill in such tools, possessed by his renowned model and inspirer; the flesh was worn from his fingers, the cold drops stood on his brow; and morning surprised him, advanced not a hair-breadth in his labour.

He crept back to bed, and again hid the useless implement, and at last he slept.

And, night after night, the same task, the same results! But at length, one day, when Cesarini returned from his moody walk in the gardens (_pleasure_-grounds they were called by the owner), he found better workmen than he at the window; they were repairing the framework, they were strengthening the bars,--all hope was now gone! The unfortunate said nothing; too cunning to show his despair he eyed them silently, and cursed them; but the old tree was left still, and that was something,--company and music.

A day or two after this barbarous counterplot, Cesarini was walking in the gardens towards the latter part of the afternoon (just when in the short days the darkness begins to steal apace over the chill and western sun), when he was accosted by a fellow-captive, who had often before sought his acquaintance; for they try to have friends,--those poor people! Even _we_ do the same; though _we_ say we are _not_ mad! This man had been a warrior, had served with Napoleon, had received honours and ribbons,--might, for aught we know, have dreamed of being a marshal! But the demon smote him in the hour of his pride. It was his disease to fancy himself a monarch. He believed, for he forgot chronology, that he was at once the Iron Mask, and the true sovereign of France and Navarre, confined in state by the usurpers of his crown. On other points he was generally sane; a tall, strong man, with fierce features, and stern lines, wherein could be read many a bloody tale of violence and wrong, of lawless passions, of terrible excesses, to which madness might be at once the consummation and the curse. This man had taken a fancy to Cesarini; and, in some hours Cesarini had shunned him less than others,--for they could alike rail against all living things. The lunatic approached Cesarini with an air of dignity and condescension.

"It is a cold night, sir,--and there will be no moon. Has it never occurred to you that the winter is the season for escape?"

Cesarini started; the ex-officer continued,--

"Ay, I see by your manner that you, too, chafe at our ignominious confinement. I think that together we might brave the worst. You probably are confined on some state offence. I give you full pardon, if you assist me. For myself I have but to appear in my capital; old Louis le Grand must be near his last hour."

"This madman my best companion!" thought Cesarini, revolting at his own

infirmity, as Gulliver started from the Yahoo. "No matter, he talks of escape.

"And how think you," said the Italian, aloud,--"how think you, that we have any chance of deliverance?"

"Hush, speak lower," said the soldier. "In the inner garden, I have observed for the last two days that a gardener is employed in nailing some fig-trees and vines to the wall. Between that garden and these grounds there is but a paling, which we can easily scale. He works till dusk; at the latest hour we can, let us climb noiselessly over the paling, and creep along the vegetable beds till we reach the man. He uses a ladder for his purpose; the rest is clear,--we must fell and gag him,--twist his neck if necessary,--I have twisted a neck before," quoth the maniac, with a horrid smile. "The ladder will help us over the wall, and the night soon grows dark at this season."

Cesarini listened, and his heart beat quick. "Will it be too late to try to-night?" said he in a whisper.

"Perhaps not," said the soldier, who retained all his military acuteness. "But are you prepared,--don't you require time to man yourself?"

"No--no,--I have had time enough!--I am ready."

"Well, then,--hist!--we are watched--one of the jailers! Talk easily, smile, laugh. This way."

They passed by one of the watch of the place, and just as they were in his hearing, the soldier turned to Cesarini, "Sir, will you favour me with your snuff-box?"

"I have none."

"None? what a pity! My good friend," and he turned to the scout, "may I request you to look in my room for my snuff-box? It is on the chimney-piece,--it will not take you a minute."

The soldier was one of those whose insanity was deemed most harmless, and his relations, who were rich and wellborn, had requested every indulgence to be shown to him. The watch suspected nothing, and repaired to the house. As soon as the trees hid him,--"Now," said the soldier, "stoop almost on all fours, and run quick."

So saying the maniac crouched low, and glided along with a rapidity which did not distance Cesarini. They reached the paling that separated the vegetable garden from the pleasure-ground; the soldier vaulted over it with ease, Cesarini with more difficulty followed. They crept along; the herbs and vegetable beds, with their long bare stalks, concealed their movements; the man was still on the ladder. "_La bonne Esperance_" said the soldier through his ground teeth, muttering some old watchword of the wars, and (while Cesarini, below, held the ladder steadfast) he rushed up the steps, and with a sudden effort of his muscular arm, hurled the

gardener to the ground. The man, surprised, half stunned, and wholly terrified, did not attempt to wrestle with the two madmen, he uttered loud cries for help! But help came too late; these strange and fearful comrades had already scaled the wall, had dropped on the other side, and were fast making across the dusky fields to the neighbouring forest.

CHAPTER V.

HOPES and Fears

Start up alarmed, and o'er life's narrow verge
Look down: on what?--a fathomless abyss!--YOUNG.

MIDNIGHT--and intense frost! There they were--houseless and breadless--the two fugitives, in the heart of that beautiful forest which has rung to the horns of many a royal chase. The soldier, whose youth had been inured to hardships, and to the conquests which our mother-wit wrings from the stepdame Nature, had made a fire by the friction of two pieces of dry wood; such wood was hard to be found, for the snow whitened the level ground, and lay deep in the hollows; and when it was discovered, the fuel was slow to burn; however, the fire blazed red at last. On a little mound, shaded by a semicircle of huge trees, sat the Outlaws of Human Reason. They cowered over the blaze opposite to each other, and the glare crimsoned their features. And each in his heart longed to rid himself of his mad neighbour; and each felt the awe of solitude,--the dread of sleep beside a comrade whose soul had lost God's light!

"Ho!" said the warrior, breaking a silence that had been long kept, "this is cold work at the best, and hunger pinches me; I almost regret the prison."

"I do not feel the cold," said Cesarini, "and I do not care for hunger: I am revelling only in the sense of liberty!"

"Try and sleep," quoth the soldier, with a coaxing and, sinister softness of voice; "we will take it by turns to watch."

"I cannot sleep,--take you the first turn."

"Hark ye, sir!" said the soldier sullenly; "I must not have my commands disputed; now we are free, we are no longer equal: I am heir to the crowns of France and Navarre. Sleep, I say!"

"And what Prince or Potentate, King or Kaiser," cried Cesarini, catching the quick contagion of the fit that had seized his comrade, "can dictate to the monarch of Earth and Air, the Elements and the music-breathing Stars? I am Cesarini the Bard! and the huntsman Orion halts in his chase above to listen to my lyre! Be stilled, rude man!--thou scarest away the angels, whose breath even now was rushing through my hair!"

"It is too horrible!" cried the grim man of blood, shivering; "my enemies

are relentless, and give me a madman for a jailer!"

"Ha! a madman!" exclaimed Cesarini, springing to his feet, and glaring at the soldier with eyes that caught and rivalled the blaze of the fire.

"And who are you?--what devil from the deep hell, that art leagued with my persecutors against me?"

With the instinct of his old calling and valour, the soldier also rose when he saw the movement of his companion; and his fierce features worked with rage and fear.

"Avaunt!" said he, waving his arm; "we banish thee from our presence! This is our palace!--and our guards are at hand!" pointing to the still and skeleton trees that grouped round in ghastly bareness. "Begone!"

At that moment they heard at a distance the deep barking of a dog, and each cried simultaneously, "They are after me!--betrayed!" The soldier sprang at the throat of Cesarini; but the Italian, at the same instant, caught a half-burned brand from the fire, and dashed the blazing end in the face of his assailant. The soldier uttered a cry of pain, and recoiled back, blinded and dismayed. Cesarini, whose madness, when fairly roused, was of the most deadly nature, again raised his weapon, and probably nothing but death could have separated the foes; but again the bay of the dog was heard, and Cesarini, answering the sound by a wild yell, threw down the brand, and fled away through the forest with inconceivable swiftness. He hurried on through bush and dell,--and the boughs tore his garments and mangled his flesh,--but stopped not his progress till he fell at last on the ground, breathless and exhausted, and heard from some far-off clock the second hour of morning. He had left the forest; a farmhouse stood before him, and the whitened roofs of scattered cottages sloped to the tranquil sky. The witness of man--the social tranquil sky and the reasoning man--operated like a charm upon the senses which recent excitement had more than usually disturbed. The unhappy wretch gazed at the peaceful abodes, and sighed heavily; then, rising from the earth, he crept into one of the sheds that adjoined the farmhouse, and throwing himself on some straw, slept sound and quietly till daylight, and the voices of peasants in the shed awakened him.

He rose refreshed, calm, and, for ordinary purposes, sufficiently sane to prevent suspicion of his disease. He approached the startled peasants, and representing himself as a traveller who had lost his way in the night and amidst the forest, begged for food and water. Though his garments were torn, they were new and of good fashion; his voice was mild; his whole appearance and address those of one of some station--and the French peasant is a hospitable fellow. Cesarini refreshed and rested himself an hour or two at the farm, and then resumed his wanderings; he offered no money, for the rules of the asylum forbade money to its inmates,--he had none with him; but none was expected from him, and they bade him farewell as kindly as if he had bought their blessings. He then began to consider where he was to take refuge, and how provide for himself; the feeling of liberty braced, and for a time restored, his intellect.

Fortunately, he had on his person, besides some rings of trifling cost, a

watch of no inconsiderable value, the sale of which might support him, in such obscure and humble quarter as he could alone venture to inhabit, for several weeks, perhaps months. This thought made him cheerful and elated; he walked lustily on, shunning the high road. The day was clear, the sun bright, the air full of racy health. Oh, what soft raptures swelled the heart of the wanderer, as he gazed around him! The Poet and the Freeman alike stirred within his shattered heart! He paused to contemplate the berries of the icy trees, to listen to the sharp glee of the blackbird; and once--when he found beneath a hedge a cold, scentless group of hardy violets--he laughed aloud in his joy. In that laughter there was no madness, no danger; but when as he journeyed on, he passed through a little hamlet, and saw the children at play upon the ground, and heard from the open door of a cabin the sound of rustic music, then indeed he paused abruptly; the past gathered over him: _he knew that which he had been, that which he was now_!--an awful memory! a dread revelation! And, covering his face with his hands, he wept aloud. In those tears were the peril and method of madness. He woke from them to think of his youth, his hopes, of Florence, of revenge! Lumley Lord Vargrave! better, from that hour, to encounter the tiger in his lair than find thyself alone with that miserable man!

CHAPTER VI.

IT seemed the laurel chaste and stubborn oak,
And all the gentle trees on earth that grew,
It seemed the land, the sea, and heaven above,
All breathed out fancy sweet, and sighed out love.

FAIRFAX'S _Tasso_.

AT De Montaigne's villa, Evelyn, for the first time, gathered from the looks, the manners, of Maltravers that she was beloved. It was no longer possible to mistake the evidences of affection. Formerly, Maltravers had availed himself of his advantage of years and experience, and would warn, admonish, dispute, even reprove; formerly, there had been so much of seeming caprice, of cold distance, of sudden and wayward haughtiness, in his bearing; but now the whole man was changed,--the Mentor had vanished in the Lover; he held his being on her breath. Her lightest pleasure seemed to have grown his law, no coldness ever alternated the deep devotion of his manner; an anxious, a timid, a watchful softness replaced all his stately self-possession. Evelyn saw that she was loved; and she then looked into her own heart.

I have said before that Evelyn was gentle, even to _yieldingness_; that her susceptibility made her shrink from the thought of pain to another: and so thoroughly did she revere Maltravers, so grateful did she feel for a love that could not but flatter pride, and raise her in her self-esteem, that she felt it impossible that she could reject his suit. "Then, do I love him as I dreamed I could love?" she asked herself; and her heart gave no intelligible reply. "Yes, it must be so; in his presence I feel a tranquil and eloquent charm; his praise delights me; his esteem is my most high ambition;--and yet--and yet--" she sighed and

thought of Legard; "but _he_ loved me not!" and she turned restlessly from that image. "He thinks but of the world, of pleasure; Maltravers is right,--the spoiled children of society cannot love: why should I think of him?"

There were no guests at the villa, except Maltravers, Evelyn, and Lord and Lady Doltimore. Evelyn was much captivated by the graceful vivacity of Teresa, though that vivacity was not what it had been before her brother's affliction; their children, some of whom had grown up, constituted an amiable and intelligent family; and De Montaigne himself was agreeable and winning, despite his sober manners and his love of philosophical dispute. Evelyn often listened thoughtfully to Teresa's praises of her husband,--to her account of the happiness she had known in a marriage where there had been so great a disparity of years; Evelyn began to question the truth of her early visions of romance.

Caroline saw the unequivocal attachment of Maltravers with the same indifference with which she had anticipated the suit of Legard. It was the same to her what hand delivered Evelyn and herself from the designs of Vargrave; but Vargrave occupied nearly all her thoughts. The newspapers had reported him as seriously ill,--at one time in great danger. He was now recovering, but still unable to quit his room. He had written to her once, lamenting his ill-fortune, trusting soon to be at Paris; and touching, with evident pleasure, upon Legard's departure for Vienna, which he had seen in the "Morning Post." But he was afar--alone, ill, untended; and though Caroline's guilty love had been much abated by Vargrave's icy selfishness, by absence and remorse, still she had the heart of a woman,--and Vargrave was the only one that had ever touched it. She felt for him, and grieved in silence; she did not dare to utter sympathy aloud, for Doltimore had already given evidence of a suspicious and jealous temper.

Evelyn was also deeply affected by the account of her guardian's illness. As I before said, the moment he ceased to be her lover, her childish affection for him returned. She even permitted herself to write to him; and a tone of melancholy depression which artfully pervaded his reply struck her with something like remorse. He told her in the letter that he had much to say to her relative to an investment, in conformity with her stepfather's wishes, and he should hasten to Paris, even before the doctor would sanction his removal. Vargrave forbore to mention what the meditated investment was. The last public accounts of the minister had, however, been so favourable, that his arrival might be almost daily expected; and both Caroline and Evelyn felt relieved.

To De Montaigne, Maltravers confided his attachment, and both the Frenchman and Teresa sanctioned and encouraged it. Evelyn enchanted them; and they had passed that age when they could have imagined it possible that the man they had known almost as a boy was separated by years from the lively feelings and extreme youth of Evelyn. They could not believe that the sentiments he had inspired were colder than those that animated himself.

One day, Maltravers had been absent for some hours on his solitary

rambles, and De Montaigne had not yet returned from Paris, which he visited almost daily. It was so late in the noon as almost to border on evening, when Maltravers; on his return, entered the grounds by a gate that separated them from an extensive wood. He saw Evelyn, Teresa, and two of her children walking on a terrace immediately before him. He joined them; and, somehow or other, it soon chanced that Teresa and himself loitered behind the rest, a little out of hearing. "Ah, Mr. Maltravers," said the former, "we miss the soft skies of Italy and the beautiful hues of Como."

"And, for my part, I miss the youth that gave 'glory to the grass and splendour to the flower.'"

"Nay; we are happier now, believe me,--or at least I should be, if--But I must not think of my poor brother. Ah, if his guilt deprived you of one who was worthy of you, it would be some comfort to his sister to think at last that the loss was repaired. And you still have scruples?"

"Who that loves truly has not? How young, how lovely, how worthy of lighter hearts and fairer forms than mine! Give me back the years that have passed since we last met at Como, and I might hope!"

"And this to me who have enjoyed such happiness with one older, when we married, by ten years than you are now!"

"But you, Teresa, were born to see life through the Claude glass."

"Ah, you provoke me with these refinements; you turn from a happiness you have but to demand."

"Do not--do not raise my hopes too high," cried Maltravers, with great emotion; "I have been schooling myself all day. But if I am deceived!"

"Trust me, you are not. See, even now she turns round to look for you; she loves you,--loves you as you deserve. This difference of years that you so lament does but deepen and elevate her attachment!"

Teresa turned to Maltravers, surprised at his silence. How joyous sat his heart upon his looks,--no gloom on his brow, no doubt in his sparkling eyes! He was mortal, and he yielded to the delight of believing himself beloved. He pressed Teresa's hand in silence, and, quitting her abruptly, gained the side of Evelyn. Madame de Montaigne comprehended all that passed within him; and as she followed, she soon contrived to detach her children, and returned with them to the house on a whispered pretence of seeing if their father had yet arrived. Evelyn and Maltravers continued to walk on,--not aware, at first, that the rest of the party were not close behind.

The sun had set; and they were in a part of the grounds which, by way of contrast to the rest, was laid out in the English fashion; the walk wound, serpent-like, among a profusion of evergreens irregularly planted; the scene was shut in and bounded, except where at a distance, through an opening of the trees, you caught the spire of a distant church, over

which glimmered, faint and fair, the smile of the evening star.

"This reminds me of home," said Evelyn, gently.

"And hereafter it will remind me of you," said Maltravers, in whispered accents. He fixed his eyes on her as he spoke. Never had his look been so true to his heart; never had his voice so undisguisedly expressed the profound and passionate sentiment which had sprung up within him,--to constitute, as he then believed, the latest bliss, or the crowning misery, of his life! At that moment, it was a sort of instinct that told him they were _alone_; for who has not felt--in those few and memorable hours of life when love long suppressed overflows the fountain, and seems to pervade the whole frame and the whole spirit--that there is a magic around and within us that hath a keener intelligence than intellect itself? Alone at such an hour with the one we love, the whole world besides seems to vanish, and our feet to have entered the soil, and our lips to have caught the air, of Fairyland.

They were alone. And why did Evelyn tremble? Why did she feel that a crisis of existence was at hand?

"Miss Cameron--Evelyn," said Maltravers, after they had walked some moments in silence, "hear me--and let your reason as well as your heart reply. From the first moment we met, you became dear to me. Yes, even when a child, your sweetness and your fortitude foretold so well what you would be in womanhood; even then you left upon my memory a delightful and mysterious shadow,--too prophetic of the light that now hallows and wraps your image! We met again,--and the attraction that had drawn me towards you years before was suddenly renewed. I love you, Evelyn! I love you better than all words can tell! Your future fate, your welfare, your happiness, contain and embody all the hopes left to me in life! But our years are different, Evelyn; I have known sorrows,--and the disappointments and the experience that have severed me from the common world have robbed me of more than time itself hath done. They have robbed me of that zest for the ordinary pleasures of our race,--which may it be yours, sweet Evelyn, ever to retain! To me, the time foretold by the Preacher as the lot of age has already arrived, when the sun and the moon are darkened, and when, save in you and through you, I have no pleasure in anything. Judge, if such a being you can love! Judge, if my very confession does not revolt and chill, if it does not present to you a gloomy and cheerless future, were it possible that you could unite your lot to mine! Answer not from friendship or from pity; the love I feel for you can have a reply from love alone, and from that reasoning which love, in its enduring power, in its healthful confidence, in its prophetic foresight, alone supplies! I can resign you without a murmur; but I could not live with you and even fancy that you had one care I could not soothe, though you might have happiness I could not share. And fate does not present to me any vision so dark and terrible--no, not your loss itself; no, not your indifference; no, not your aversion--as your discovery, after time should make regret in vain, that you had mistaken fancy or friendship for affection, a sentiment for love. Evelyn, I have confided to you all,--all this wild heart, now and evermore your own. My destiny is with you."

Evelyn was silent; he took her hand, and her tears fell warm and fast upon it. Alarmed and anxious, he drew her towards him and gazed upon her face.

"You fear to wound me," he said, with pale lips and trembling voice.
"Speak on,--I can bear all."

"No, no," said Evelyn, falteringly; "I have no fear but not to deserve you."

"You love me, then,--you love me!" cried Maltravers wildly, and clasping her to his heart.

The moon rose at that instant, and the wintry sward and the dark trees were bathed in the sudden light. The time--the light--so exquisite to all, even in loneliness and in sorrow--how divine in such companionship! in such overflowing and ineffable sense of bliss! There and then for the first time did Maltravers press upon that modest and blushing cheek the kiss of Love, of Hope,--the seal of a union he fondly hoped the grave itself could not dissolve!

CHAPTER VII.

Queen. Whereon do you look?

Hamlet. On him, on him,--look you how pale he glares!--_Hamlet_.

PERHAPS to Maltravers those few minutes which ensued, as they walked slowly on, compensated for all the troubles and cares of years; for natures like his feel joy even yet more intensely than sorrow. It might be that the transport, the delirium of passionate and grateful thoughts that he poured forth, when at last he could summon words, expressed feelings the young Evelyn could not comprehend, and which less delighted than terrified her with the new responsibility she had incurred. But love so honest, so generous, so intense, dazzled and bewildered and carried her whole soul away. Certainly at that hour she felt no regret--no thought but that one in whom she had so long recognized something nobler than is found in the common world was thus happy and thus made happy by a word, a look from her! Such a thought is woman's dearest triumph; and one so thoroughly unselfish, so yielding, and so soft, could not be insensible to the rapture she had caused.

"And oh!" said Maltravers, as he clasped again and again the hand that he believed he had won forever, "now, at length, have I learned how beautiful is life! For this--for this I have been reserved! Heaven is merciful to me, and the waking world is brighter than all my dreams!"

He ceased abruptly. At that instant they were once more on the terrace where he had first joined Teresa, facing the wood, which was divided by a slight and low palisade from the spot where they stood. He ceased abruptly, for his eyes encountered a terrible and ominous apparition,--a

form connected with dreary associations of fate and woe. The figure had raised itself upon a pile of firewood on the other side of the fence, and hence it seemed almost gigantic in its stature. It gazed upon the pair with eyes that burned with a preternatural blaze, and a voice which Maltravers too well remembered shrieked out "Love! love! What! _thou_ love again? Where is the Dead! Ha, ha! Where is the Dead?"

Evelyn, startled by the words, looked up, and clung in speechless terror to Maltravers. He remained rooted to the spot.

"Unhappy man," said he, at length, and soothingly, "how came you hither? Fly not, you are with friends."

"Friends!" said the maniac, with a scornful laugh. "I know thee, Ernest Maltravers,--I know thee: but it is not thou who hast locked me up in darkness and in hell, side by side with the mocking fiend! Friends! ah, but no Friends shall catch me now! I am free! I am free! Air and wave are not more free!" And the madman laughed with horrible glee. "She is fair--fair," he said, abruptly checking himself, and with a changed voice, "but not so fair as the Dead. Faithless that thou art--and yet she loved _thee_! Woe to thee! woe! Maltravers, the perfidious! Woe to thee--and remorse--and shame!"

"Fear not, Evelyn,--fear not," whispered Maltravers, gently, and placing her behind him; "support your courage,--nothing shall harm you."

Evelyn, though very pale, and trembling from head to foot, retained her senses. Maltravers advanced towards the mad man. But no sooner did the quick eye of the last perceive the movement, than, with the fear which belongs to that dread disease,--the fear of losing liberty,--he turned, and with a loud cry fled into the wood. Maltravers leaped over the fence, and pursued him some way in vain. The thick copses of the wood snatched every trace of the fugitive from his eye.

Breathless and exhausted, Maltravers returned to the spot where he had left Evelyn. As he reached it, he saw Teresa and her husband approaching towards him, and Teresa's merry laugh sounded clear and musical in the racy air. The sound appalled him; he hastened his steps to Evelyn.

"Say nothing of what we have seen to Madame de Montaigne, I beseech you," said he; "I will explain why hereafter."

Evelyn, too overcome to speak, nodded her acquiescence. They joined the De Montaignes, and Maltravers took the Frenchman aside.

But before he could address him, De Montaigne said,--

"Hush! do not alarm my wife--she knows nothing; but I have just heard at Paris, that--that he has escaped--you know whom I mean?"

"I do; he is at hand; send in search of him! I have seen him. Once more I have seen Castruccio Cesarini!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, ALICE BY LYTTON, BOOK VIII ***

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