

# ERNEST MALTRAVERS - BOOK 3

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## BOOK III.

"Not to all men Apollo shows himself—  
Who sees him—/he/ is great!"  
CALLIM. /Ex Hymno in Apollinon/.

## CHAPTER I.

"Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears—soft stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony."  
SHAKESPEARE.

### BOAT SONG ON THE LAKE OF COMO.

#### I.

The Beautiful Clime!—the Clime of Love!  
Thou beautiful Italy!  
Like a mother's eyes, the earnest skies  
Ever have smiles for thee!  
Not a flower that blows, not a beam that glows,  
But what is in love with thee!

#### II.

The beautiful lake, the Larian lake!  
Soft lake like a silver sea,  
The Huntress Queen, with her nymphs of sheen,  
Never had bath like thee.  
See, the Lady of night and her maids of light,  
Even now are mid-deep in thee!

The ancient name of Como.

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### III.

Beautiful child of the lonely hills,  
Ever blest may thy slumbers be!  
No mourner should tread by thy dreamy bed,  
No life bring a care to thee—  
Nay, soft to thy bed, let the mourner tread—  
And life be a dream like thee!

Such, though uttered in the soft Italian tongue, and now imperfectly translated—such were the notes that floated one lovely evening in summer along the lake of Como. The boat, from which came the song, drifted gently down the sparkling waters, towards the mossy banks of a lawn, whence on a little eminence gleamed the white walls of a villa, backed by vineyards. On that lawn stood a young and handsome woman, leaning on the arm of her husband, and listening to the song. But her delight was soon deepened into one of more personal interest, as the boatmen, nearing the banks, changed their measure, and she felt that the minstrelsy was in honour of herself.

### SERENADE TO THE SONGSTRESS.

#### I.

#### CHORUS.

Softly—oh, soft! let us rest on the oar,  
And vex not a billow that sighs to the shore:—  
For sacred the spot where the starry waves meet  
With the beach, where the breath of the citron is sweet.  
There's a spell on the waves that now waft us along  
To the last of our Muses, the Spirit of Song.

#### RECITATIVE.

The Eagle of old renown,  
And the Lombard's iron crown  
And Milan's mighty name are ours no more;  
But by this glassy water,  
Harmonia's youngest daughter,  
Still from the lightning saves one laurel to our shore.

#### II.

#### CHORUS.

They heard thee, Teresa, the Teuton, the Gaul,  
Who have raised the rude thrones of the North on our fall;  
They heard thee, and bow'd to the might of thy song;  
Like love went thy steps o'er the hearts of the strong;

As the moon to the air, as the soul to the clay,  
To the void of this earth was the breath of thy lay.

RECITATIVE.

Honour for aye to her  
The bright interpreter  
Of Art's great mysteries to the enchanted throng;  
While tyrants heard thy strains,  
Sad Rome forgot her chains;  
The world the sword had lost was conquer'd back by song!

"Thou repentest, my Teresa, that thou hast renounced thy dazzling career for a dull home, and a husband old enough to be thy father," said the husband to the wife, with a smile that spoke confidence in the answer.

"Ah, no! even this homage would have no music to me if thou didst not hear it."

She was a celebrated personage in Italy—the Signora Cesarini, now Madame de Montaigne. Her earlier youth had been spent upon the stage, and her promise of vocal excellence had been most brilliant. But after a brief though splendid career, she married a French gentleman of good birth and fortune, retired from the stage, and spent her life alternately in the gay saloons of Paris and upon the banks of the dreamy Como, on which her husband had purchased a small but beautiful villa. She still, however, exercised in private her fascinating art; to which—for she was a woman of singular accomplishment and talent—she added the gift of the improvisatrice. She had just returned for the summer to this lovely retreat, and a party of enthusiastic youths from Milan had sought the lake of Como to welcome her arrival with the suitable homage of song and music. It is a charming relic, that custom of the brighter days of Italy; and I myself have listened, on the still waters of the same lake, to a similar greeting to a greater genius—the queenlike and unrivalled Pasta—the Semiramis of Song! And while my boat paused, and I caught something of the enthusiasm of the serenaders, the boatman touched me, and, pointing to a part of the lake on which the setting sun shed its rosier smile, he said, "There, Signor, was drowned one of your countrymen 'bellissimo uomo! che fu bello!'"—yes, there, in the pride of his promising youth, of his noble and almost godlike beauty, before the very windows—the very eyes—of his bride—the waves without a frown had swept over the idol of many hearts—the graceful and gallant Locke. And above his grave was the voluptuous sky, and over it floated the triumphant music. It was as the moral of the Roman poets—calling the living to a holiday over the oblivion of the dead.

Captain William Locke of the Life Guards (the only son of the accomplished Mr. Locke of Norbury Park), distinguished by a character the most amiable, and by a personal beauty that certainly equalled, perhaps surpassed, the highest masterpiece of Grecian sculpture. He was

returning in a boat from the town of Como to his villa on the banks of the lake, when the boat was upset by one of the mysterious under-currents to which the lake is dangerously subjected; and he was drowned in sight of his bride, who was watching his return from the terrace or balcony of their home.

As the boat now touched the bank, Madame de Montaigne accosted the musicians, thanked them with a sweet and unaffected earnestness for the compliment so delicately offered, and invited them ashore. The Milanese, who were six in number, accepted the invitation, and moored their boat to the jutting shore. It was then that Monsieur de Montaigne pointed out to the notice of his wife a boat, that had lingered under the shadow of a bank, tenanted by a young man, who had seemed to listen with rapt attention to the music, and who had once joined in the chorus (as it was twice repeated), with a voice so exquisitely attuned, and so rich in its deep power, that it had awakened the admiration even of the serenaders themselves.

"Does not that gentleman belong to your party?" De Montaigne asked of the Milanese.

"No, Signor, we know him not," was the answer; "his boat came unawares upon us as we were singing."

While this question and answer were going on, the young man had quitted his station, and his oars cut the glassy surface of the lake, just before the place where De Montaigne stood. With the courtesy of his country, the Frenchman lifted his hat; and, by his gesture, arrested the eye and oar of the solitary rower. "Will you honour us," he said, "by joining our little party?"

"It is a pleasure I covet too much to refuse," replied the boatman, with a slight foreign accent, and in another moment he was on shore. He was one of remarkable appearance. His long hair floated with a careless grace over a brow more calm and thoughtful than became his years; his manner was unusually quiet and self-collected, and not without a certain stateliness, rendered more striking by the height of his stature, a lordly contour of feature, and a serene but settled expression of melancholy in his eyes and smile. "You will easily believe," said he, "that, cold as my countrymen are esteemed (for you must have discovered already that I am an Englishman), I could not but share in the enthusiasm of those about me, when loitering near the very ground sacred to the inspiration. For the rest, I am residing for the present in yonder villa, opposite to your own; my name is Maltravers, and I am enchanted to think that I am no longer a personal stranger to one whose fame has already reached me." Madame de Montaigne was flattered by something in the manner and tone of the Englishman, which said a great deal more than his words; and in a few minutes, beneath the influence of the happy continental ease, the whole party seemed as if they had known each other for years. Wines, and fruits, and other simple and

unpretending refreshments, were brought out and ranged on a rude table upon the grass, round which the guests seated themselves with their host and hostess, and the clear moon shone over them, and the lake slept below in silver. It was a scene for a Boccaccio or a Claude.

The conversation naturally fell upon music; it is almost the only thing which Italians in general can be said to know—and even that knowledge comes to them, like Dogberry's reading and writing, by nature—for of music, as an /art/, the unprofessional amateurs know but little. As vain and arrogant of the last wreck of their national genius as the Romans of old were of the empire of all arts and arms, they look upon the harmonies of other lands as barbarous; nor can they appreciate or understand appreciation of the mighty German music, which is the proper minstrelsy of a nation of men—a music of philosophy, of heroism, of the intellect and the imagination; beside which, the strains of modern Italy are indeed effeminate, fantastic, and artificially feeble. Rossini is the Canova of music, with much of the pretty, with nothing of the grand!

The little party talked, however, of music, with an animation and gusto that charmed the melancholy Maltravers, who for weeks had known no companion save his own thoughts, and with whom, at all times, enthusiasm for any art found a ready sympathy. He listened attentively, but said little; and from time to time, whenever the conversation flagged, amused himself by examining his companions. The six Milanese had nothing remarkable in their countenances or in their talk; they possessed the characteristic energy and volubility of their countrymen, with something of the masculine dignity which distinguishes the Lombard from the Southern, and a little of the French polish, which the inhabitants of Milan seldom fail to contract. Their rank was evidently that of the middle class; for Milan has a middle class, and one which promises great results hereafter. But they were noways distinguished from a thousand other Milanese whom Maltravers had met with in the walks and cafes of their noble city. The host was somewhat more interesting. He was a tall, handsome man, of about eight-and-forty, with a high forehead, and features strongly impressed with the sober character of thought. He had but little of the French vivacity in his manner; and without looking at his countenance, you would still have felt insensibly that he was the eldest of the party. His wife was at least twenty years younger than himself, mirthful and playful as a child, but with a certain feminine and fascinating softness in her unrestrained gestures and sparkling gaiety, which seemed to subdue her natural joyousness into the form and method of conventional elegance. Dark hair carelessly arranged, an open forehead, large black laughing eyes, a small straight nose, a complexion just relieved from the olive by an evanescent, yet perpetually recurring blush; a round dimpled cheek, an exquisitely-shaped mouth with small pearly teeth, and a light and delicate figure a little below the ordinary standard, completed the picture of Madame de Montaigne.

"Well," said Signor Tirabaloschi, the most loquacious and sentimental of the guests, filling his glass, "these are hours to think of for the rest

of life. But we cannot hope the Signora will long remember what we never can forget. Paris, says the French proverb, */est le paradis des femmes/*: and in Paradise, I take it for granted, we recollect very little of what happened on earth.”

”Oh,” said Madame de Montaigne, with a pretty musical laugh, ”in Paris it is the rage to despise the frivolous life of cities, and to affect */des sentimens romanesques/*. This is precisely the scene which our fine ladies and fine writers would die to talk of and to describe. Is it not so, */mon ami/*?” and she turned affectionately to De Montaigne.

”True,” replied he; ”but you are not worthy of such a scene—you laugh at sentiment and romance.”

”Only at French sentiment and the romance of the Chaussee d’Antin. You English,” she continued, shaking her head at Maltravers, ”have spoiled and corrupted us; we are not content to imitate you, we must excel you; we out-horror horror, and rush from the extravagant into the frantic!”

”The ferment of the new school is, perhaps, better than the stagnation of the old,” said Maltravers. ”Yet even you,” addressing himself to the Italians, ”who first in Petrarch, in Tasso, and in Ariosto, set to Europe the example of the Sentimental and the Romantic; who built among the very ruins of the classic school, amidst its Corinthian columns and sweeping arches, the spires and battlements of the Gothic—even you are deserting your old models and guiding literature into newer and wilder paths. ’Tis the way of the world—eternal progress is eternal change.”

”Very possibly,” said Signor Tirabaloschi, who understood nothing of what was said. ”Nay, it is extremely profound; on reflection, it is beautiful—superb! you English are so—so—in short, it is admirable. Ugo Foscolo is a great genius—so is Monti; and as for Rossini,—you know his last opera—*/cosa stupenda/*!”

Madame de Montaigne glanced at Maltravers, clapped her little hands, and laughed outright. Maltravers caught the contagion, and laughed also. But he hastened to repair the pedantic error he had committed of talking over the heads of the company. He took up the guitar, which, among their musical instruments, the serenaders had brought, and after touching its chords for a few moments, said: ”After all, Madame, in your society, and with this moonlit lake before us, we feel as if music were our best medium of conversation. Let us prevail upon these gentlemen to delight us once more.”

”You forestall what I was going to ask,” said the ex-singer; and Maltravers offered the guitar to Tirabaloschi, who was in fact dying to exhibit his powers again. He took the instrument with a slight grimace of modesty, and then saying to Madame de Montaigne, ”There is a song composed by a young friend of mine, which is much admired by the ladies; though to me it seems a little too sentimental,” sang the following

stanzas (as good singers are wont to do) with as much feeling as if he could understand them!

#### NIGHT AND LOVE.

When stars are in the quiet skies,  
Then most I pine for thee;  
Bend on me, then, thy tender eyes!  
As stars look on the sea!

For thoughts, like waves that glide by night,  
Are stillest where they shine;  
Mine earthly love lies hushed in light  
Beneath the heaven of thine.

There is an hour when angels keep  
Familiar watch on men;  
When coarser souls are wrapt in sleep,—  
Sweet spirit, meet me then.

There is an hour when holy dreams  
Through slumber fairest glide;  
And in that mystic hour it seems  
Thou shouldst be by my side.

The thoughts of thee too sacred are  
For daylight's common beam;—  
I can but know thee as my star,  
My angel, and my dream!

And now, the example set, and the praises of the fair hostess exciting general emulation, the guitar circled from hand to hand, and each of the Italians performed his part; you might have fancied yourself at one of the old Greek feasts, with the lyre and the myrtle-branch going the round.

But both the Italians and the Englishman felt the entertainment would be incomplete without hearing the celebrated vocalist and improvvisatrice who presided over the little banquet; and Madame de Montaigne, with a woman's tact, divined the general wish, and anticipated the request that was sure to be made. She took the guitar from the last singer, and turning to Maltravers, said, "You have heard, of course, some of our more eminent improvvisatori, and therefore if I ask you for a subject it will only be to prove to you that the talent is not general amongst the Italians."

"Ah," said Maltravers, "I have heard, indeed, some ugly old gentlemen with immense whiskers, and gestures of the most alarming ferocity, pour out their vehement impromptus; but I have never yet listened to a young and a handsome lady. I shall only believe the inspiration when I hear

it direct from the Muse.”

”Well, I will do my best to deserve your compliments—you must give me the theme.”

Maltravers paused a moment, and suggested the Influence of Praise on Genius.

The improvvisatrice nodded assent, and after a short prelude broke forth into a wild and varied strain of verse, in a voice so exquisitely sweet, with a taste so accurate, and a feeling so deep that the poetry sounded to the enchanted listeners like the language that Armida might have uttered. Yet the verses themselves, like all extemporaneous effusions, were of a nature both to pass from the memory and to defy transcription.

When Madame de Montaigne’s song ceased, no rapturous plaudits followed—the Italians were too affected by the science, Maltravers by the feeling, for the coarseness of ready praise;—and ere that delighted silence which made the first impulse was broken, a new comer, descending from the groves that clothed the ascent behind the house, was in the midst of the party.

”Ah, my dear brother,” cried Madame Montaigne, starting up, and banging fondly on the arm of the stranger, ”why have you lingered so long in the wood? You, so delicate! And how are you? How pale you seem!”

”It is but the reflection of the moonlight, Teresa,” said the intruder; ”I feel well.” So saying, he scowled on the merry party, and turned as if to slink away.

”No, no,” whispered Teresa, ”you must stay a moment and be presented to my guests: there is an Englishman here whom you will like—who will /interest/ you.”

With that she almost dragged him forward, and introduced him to her guests. Signor Cesarini returned their salutations with a mixture of bashfulness and /hauteur/, half-awkward and half-graceful, and muttering some inaudible greeting, sank into a seat and appeared instantly lost in reverie. Maltravers gazed upon him, and was pleased with his aspect—which, if not handsome, was strange and peculiar. He was extremely slight and thin—his cheeks hollow and colourless, with a profusion of black silken ringlets that almost descended to his shoulders. His eyes, deeply sunk into his head, were large and intensely brilliant; and a thin moustache, curling downwards, gave an additional austerity to his mouth, which was closed with gloomy and half-sarcastic firmness. He was not dressed as people dress in general, but wore a frock of dark camlet, with a large shirt-collar turned down, and a narrow slip of black silk twisted rather than tied round his throat; his nether garments fitted tight to his limbs, and a pair of half-hessians completed his costume. It was evident that the young man

(and he was very young—perhaps about nineteen or twenty) indulged that coxcombrity of the Picturesque which is the sign of a vainer mind than is the commoner coxcombrity of the /Mode/.

It is astonishing how frequently it happens, that the introduction of a single intruder upon a social party is sufficient to destroy all the familiar harmony that existed there before. We see it even when the intruder is agreeable and communicative—but in the present instance, a ghost could scarcely have been a more unwelcoming or unwelcome visitor. The presence of this shy, speechless, supercilious-looking man threw a damp over the whole group. The gay Tirabalschi immediately discovered that it was time to depart—it had not struck any one before, but it certainly /was/ late. The Italians began to bustle about, to collect their music, to make fine speeches and fine professions—to bow and to smile—to scramble into their boat, and to push towards the inn at Como, where they had engaged their quarters for the night. As the boat glided away, and while two of them were employed at the oar, the remaining four took up their instruments and sang a parting glee. It was quite midnight—the hush of all things around had grown more intense and profound—there was a wonderful might of silence in the shining air and amidst the shadows thrown by the near banks and the distant hills over the water. So that as the music chiming in with the oars grew fainter and fainter, it is impossible to describe the thrilling and magical effect it produced.

The party ashore did not speak; there was a moisture, a grateful one, in the bright eyes of Teresa, as she leant upon the manly form of De Montaigne, for whom her attachment was, perhaps, yet more deep and pure for the difference of their ages. A girl who once loves a man, not indeed old, but much older than herself, loves him with such a /looking up/ and venerating love! Maltravers stood a little apart from the couple, on the edge of the shelving bank, with folded arms and thoughtful countenance. "How is it," said he, unconscious that he was speaking half aloud, "that the commonest beings of the world should be able to give us a pleasure so unworldly? What a contrast between those musicians and this music. At this distance their forms are dimly seen, one might almost fancy the creators of those sweet sounds to be of another mould from us. Perhaps even thus the poetry of the Past rings on our ears—the deeper and the diviner, because removed from the clay which made the poets. O Art, Art! how dost thou beautify and exalt us; what is nature without thee!"

"You are a poet, Signor," said a soft clear voice beside the soliloquist; and Maltravers started to find that he had had unknowingly a listener in the young Cesarini.

"No," said Maltravers; "I cull the flowers, I do not cultivate the soil."

"And why not?" said Cesarini, with abrupt energy; "you are an

Englishman—/you/ have a public—you have a country—you have a living stage, a breathing audience; we, Italians, have nothing but the dead.”

As he looked on the young man, Maltravers was surprised to see the sudden animation which glowed upon his pale features.

”You asked me a question I would fain put to you,” said the Englishman, after a pause. ”/You/, methinks, are a poet?”

”I have fancied that I might be one. But poetry with us is a bird in the wilderness—it sings from an impulse—the song dies without a listener. Oh that I belonged to a /living/ country,—France, England, Germany, Arnerica,—and not to the corruption of a dead giantess—for such is now the land of the ancient lyre.”

”Let us meet again, and soon,” said Maltravers, holding out his hand.

Cesarini hesitated a moment, and then accepted and returned the proffered salutation. Reserved as he was, something in Maltravers attracted him; and, indeed, there was that in Ernest which fascinated most of those unhappy eccentrics who do not move in the common orbit of the world.

In a few moments more the Englishman had said farewell to the owner of the villa, and his light boat skimmed rapidly over the tide.

”What do you think of the /Inglese/?” said Madame de Montaigne to her husband, as they turned towards the house. (They said not a word about the Milanese.)

”He has a noble bearing for one so young,” said the Frenchman; ”and seems to have seen the world, and both to have profited and to have suffered by it.”

”He will prove an acquisition to our society here,” returned Teresa; ”he interests me; and you, Castruccio?” turning to seek for her brother; but Cesarini had already, with his usual noiseless step, disappeared within the house.

”Alas, my poor brother!” she said, ”I cannot comprehend him. What does he desire?”

”Fame!” replied De Montaigne, calmly. ”It is a vain shadow; no wonder that he disquiets himself in vain.”

## CHAPTER II.

”Alas! what boots it with incessant care  
To strictly meditate the thankless Muse;  
Were I not better done as others use,  
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
Or with the tangles of Neaera’s hair?”  
MILTON’S /Lycidas/.

THERE is nothing more salutary to active men than occasional intervals of repose,—when we look within, instead of without, and examine almost /insensibly/ (for I hold strict and conscious self-scrutiny a thing much rarer than we suspect)—what we have done—what we are capable of doing. It is settling, as it were, a debtor and creditor account with the past, before we plunge into new speculations. Such an interval of repose did Maltravers now enjoy. In utter solitude, so far as familiar companionship is concerned, he had for several weeks been making himself acquainted with his own character and mind. He read and thought much, but without any exact or defined object. I think it is Montaigne who says somewhere: ”People talk about thinking—but for my part I never think, except when I sit down to write.” I believe this is not a very common case, for people who don’t write think as well as people who do; but connected, severe, well-developed thought, in contradistinction to vague meditation, must be connected with some tangible plan or object; and therefore we must be either writing men or acting men, if we desire to test the logic, and unfold into symmetrical design the fused colours of our reasoning faculty. Maltravers did not yet feel this, but he was sensible of some intellectual want. His ideas, his memories, his dreams crowded thick and confused upon him; he wished to arrange them in order, and he could not. He was overpowered by the unorganised affluence of his own imagination and intellect. He had often, even as a child, fancied that he was formed to do something in the world, but he had never steadily considered what it was to be, whether he was to become a man of books or a man of deeds. He had written poetry when it poured irresistibly from the fount of emotion within, but looked at his effusions with a cold and neglectful eye when the enthusiasm had passed away.

Maltravers was not much gnawed by the desire of fame—perhaps few men of real genius are, until artificially worked up to it. There is in a sound and correct intellect, with all its gifts fairly balanced, a calm consciousness of power, a certainty that when its strength is fairly put out, it must be to realise the usual result of strength. Men of second-rate faculties, on the contrary, are fretful and nervous, fidgeting after a celebrity which they do not estimate by their own talents, but by the talents of some one else. They see a tower, but are occupied only with measuring its shadow, and think their own height (which they never calculate) is to cast as broad a one over the earth.

It is the short man who is always throwing up his chin, and is as erect as a dart. The tall man stoops, and the strong man is not always using the dumb-bells.

Maltravers had not yet, then, the keen and sharp yearning for reputation; he had not, as yet, tasted its sweets and bitters—fatal draught, which /once/ tasted, begets too often an insatiable thirst! neither had he enemies and decriers whom he was desirous of abashing by merit. And that is a very ordinary cause for exertion in proud minds. He was, it is true, generally reputed clever, and fools were afraid of him: but as he actively interfered with no man's pretensions, so no man thought it necessary to call him a blockhead. At present, therefore, it was quietly and naturally that his mind was working its legitimate way to its destiny of exertion. He began idly and carelessly to note down his thoughts and impressions; what was once put on the paper, begot new matter; his ideas became more lucid to himself; and the page grew a looking-glass, which presented the likeness of his own features. He began by writing with rapidity, and without method. He had no object but to please himself, and to find a vent for an overcharged spirit; and, like most writings of the young, the matter was egotistical. We commence with the small nucleus of passion and experience, to widen the circle afterwards; and, perhaps, the most extensive and universal masters of life and character have begun by being egotists. For there is in a man that has much in him a wonderfully acute and sensitive perception of his own existence. An imaginative and susceptible person has, indeed, ten times as much life as a dull fellow, "an he be Hercules." He multiplies himself in a thousand objects, associates each with his own identity, lives in each, and almost looks upon the world with its infinite objects as a part of his individual being. Afterwards, as he tames down, he withdraws his forces into the citadel, but he still has a knowledge of, and an interest in, the land they once covered. He understands other people, for he has lived in other people—the dead and the living;—fancied himself now Brutus and now Caesar, and thought how /he/ should act in almost every imaginable circumstance of life.

Thus, when he begins to paint human characters, essentially different from his own, his knowledge comes to him almost intuitively. It is as if he were describing the mansions in which he himself has formerly lodged, though for a short time. Hence in great writers of History—of Romance—of the Drama—the /gusto/ with which they paint their personages; their creations are flesh and blood, not shadows or machines.

Maltravers was at first, then, an egotist, in the matter of his rude and desultory sketches—in the manner, as I said before, he was careless and negligent, as men will be who have not yet found that expression is an art. Still those wild and valueless essays—those rapt and secret confessions of his own heart—were a delight to him. He began to taste the transport, the intoxication of an author. And, oh, what a luxury is

there in that first love of the Muse! that process by which we give palpable form to the long-intangible visions which have flitted across us;—the beautiful ghost of the Ideal within us, which we invoke in the Gadara of our still closets, with the wand of the simple pen!

It was early noon, the day after he had formed his acquaintance with the De Montaignes, that Maltravers sat in his favourite room;—the one he had selected for his study from the many chambers of his large and solitary habitation. He sat in a recess by the open window, which looked on the lake; and books were scattered on his table, and Maltravers was jotting down his criticisms on what he read, mingled with his impressions on what he saw. It is the pleasantest kind of composition—the note-book of a man who studies in retirement, who observes in society, who in all things can admire and feel. He was yet engaged in this easy task, when Cesarini was announced, and the young brother of the fair Teresa entered his apartment.

”I have availed myself soon of your invitation,” said the Italian.

”I acknowledge the compliment,” replied Maltravers, pressing the hand shyly held out to him.

”I see you have been writing—I thought you were attached to literature. I read it in your countenance, I heard it in your voice,” said Cesarini, seating himself.

”I have been idly beguiling a very idle leisure, it is true,” said Maltravers.

”But you do not write for yourself alone—you have an eye to the great tribunals—Time and the Public.”

”Not so, I assure you honestly,” said Maltravers, smiling. ”If you look at the books on my table, you will see that they are the great masterpieces of ancient and modern lore—these are studies that discourage tyros—”

”But inspire them.”

”I do not think so. Models may form our taste as critics, but do not excite us to be authors. I fancy that our own emotions, our own sense of our destiny, make the great lever of the inert matter we accumulate. ’Look in thy heart and write,’ said an old English writer, who did not, however, practise what he preached. And you, Signor—”

Sir Philip Sidney.

”Am nothing, and would be something,” said the young man, shortly and bitterly.

"And how does that wish not realise its object?"

"Merely because I am Italian," said Cesarini. "With us there is no literary public—no vast reading class—we have dilettanti and literati, and students, and even authors; but these make only a coterie, not a public. I have written, I have published; but no one listened to me. I am an author without readers."

"It is no uncommon case in England," said Maltravers.

The Italian continued: "I thought to live in the mouths of men—to stir up thoughts long dumb—to awaken the strings of the old lyre! In vain. Like the nightingale, I sing only to break my heart with a false and melancholy emulation of other notes."

"There are epochs in all countries," said Maltravers, gently, "when peculiar veins of literature are out of vogue, and when no genius can bring them into public notice. But you wisely said there were two tribunals—the Public and Time. You have still the last to appeal to. Your great Italian historians wrote for the unborn—their works not even published till their death. That indifference to living reputation has in it, to me, something of the sublime."

"I cannot imitate them—and they were not poets," said Cesarini, sharply. "To poets, praise is a necessary aliment; neglect is death."

"My dear Signor Cesarini," said the Englishman, feelingly, "do not give way to these thoughts. There ought to be in a healthful ambition the stubborn stuff of persevering longevity; it must live on, and hope for the day which comes slow or fast, to all whose labours deserve the goal."

"But perhaps mine do not. I sometimes fear so—it is a horrid thought."

"You are very young yet," said Maltravers; "how few at your age ever sicken for fame! That first step is, perhaps, the half way to the prize."

I am not sure that Ernest thought exactly as he spoke; but it was the most delicate consolation to offer to a man whose abrupt frankness embarrassed and distressed him. The young man shook his head despondingly. Maltravers tried to change the subject—he rose and moved to the balcony, which overhung the lake—he talked of the weather—he dwelt on the exquisite scenery—he pointed to the minute and more latent beauties around, with the eye and taste of one who had looked at Nature in her details. The poet grew more animated and cheerful; he became even eloquent; he quoted poetry and he talked it. Maltravers was more and more interested in him. He felt a curiosity to know if his talents equalled his aspirations: he hinted to Cesarini his wish to see his compositions—it was just what the young man desired. Poor Cesarini!

It was much to him to get a new listener, and he fondly imagined every honest listener must be a warm admirer. But with the coyness of his caste, he affected reluctance and hesitation; he dallied with his own impatient yearnings. And Maltravers, to smooth his way, proposed an excursion on the lake.

"One of my men shall row," said he; "you shall recite to me, and I will be to you what the old housekeeper was to Moliere."

Maltravers had deep good-nature where he was touched, though he had not a superfluity of what is called good-humour, which floats on the surface and smiles on all alike. He had much of the milk of human kindness, but little of its oil.

The poet assented, and they were soon upon the lake. It was a sultry day, and it was noon; so the boat crept slowly along by the shadow of the shore, and Cesarini drew from his breast-pocket some manuscripts of small and beautiful writing. Who does not know the pains a young poet takes to bestow a fair dress on his darling rhymes!

Cesarini read well and feelingly. Everything was in favour of the reader. His own poetical countenance—his voice, his enthusiasm, half-suppressed—the pre-engaged interest of the auditor—the dreamy loveliness of the hour and scene—for there is a great deal as to time in these things). Maltravers listened intently. It is very difficult to judge of the exact merit of poetry in another language even when we know that language well—so much is there in the untranslatable magic of expression, the little subtleties of style. But Maltravers, fresh, as he himself had said, from the study of great and original writers, could not but feel that he was listening to feeble though melodious mediocrity. It was the poetry of words, not things. He thought it cruel, however, to be hypercritical, and he uttered all the commonplaces of eulogium that occurred to him. The young man was enchanted: "And yet," said he with a sigh, "I have no Public. In England they would appreciate me." Alas! in England, at that moment, there were five hundred poets as young, as ardent, and yet more gifted, whose hearts beat with the same desire—whose nerves were broken by the same disappointments.

Maltravers found that his young friend would not listen to any judgment not purely favourable. The archbishop in /Gil Blas/ was not more touchy upon any criticism that was not panegyric. Maltravers thought it a bad sign, but he recollected Gil Blas, and prudently refrained from bringing on himself the benevolent wish of "beaucoup de bonheur et un peu, plus de bon gout." When Cesarini had finished his MS., he was anxious to conclude the excursion—he longed to be at home, and think over the admiration he had excited. But he left his poems with Maltravers, and getting on shore by the remains of Pliny's villa, was soon out of sight.

Maltravers that evening read the poems with attention. His first opinion

was confirmed. The young man wrote without knowledge. He had never felt the passions he painted, never been in the situations he described. There was no originality in him, for there was no experience; it was exquisite mechanism, his verse,—nothing more. It might well deceive him, for it could not but flatter his ear—and Tasso’s silver march rang not more musically than did the chiming stanzas of Castruccio Cesarini.

The perusal of this poetry, and his conversation with the poet, threw Maltravers into a fit of deep musing. "This poor Cesarini may warn me against myself!" thought he. "Better hew wood and draw water than attach ourselves devotedly to an art in which we have not the capacity to excel. . . . It is to throw away the healthful objects of life for a diseased dream,—worse than the Rosicrucians, it is to make a sacrifice of all human beauty for the smile of a sylphid that never visits us but in visions." Maltravers looked over his own compositions, and thrust them into the fire. He slept ill that night. His pride was a little dejected. He was like a beauty who has seen a caricature of herself.

### CHAPTER III.

"Still follow SENSE, of every art the Soul."  
POPE: /Moral Essays/—Essay iv.

ERNEST MALTRAVERS spent much of his time with the family of De Montaigne. There is no period of life in which we are more accessible to the sentiment of friendship than in the intervals of moral exhaustion which succeed to the disappointments of the passions. There is, then, something inviting in those gentler feelings which keep alive, but do not fever, the circulation of the affections. Maltravers looked with the benevolence of a brother upon the brilliant, versatile, and restless Teresa. She was the last person in the world he could have been in love with—for his nature, ardent, excitable, yet fastidious, required something of repose in the manners and temperament of the woman whom he could love, and Teresa scarcely knew what repose was. Whether playing with her children (and she had two lovely ones—the eldest six years old), or teasing her calm and meditative husband, or pouring out extempore verses, or rattling over airs which she never finished, on the guitar or piano—or making excursions on the lake—or, in short, in whatever occupation she appeared as the Cynthia of the minute, she was always gay and mobile—never out of humour, never acknowledging a single care or cross in life—never susceptible of grief, save when her brother’s delicate health or morbid temper saddened her atmosphere of sunshine. Even then, the sanguine elasticity of her mind and constitution quickly recovered from the depression; and she persuaded herself that Castruccio would grow stronger every year, and ripen into a celebrated and happy man. Castruccio himself lived what romantic

poetasters call the "life of a poet." He loved to see the sun rise over the distant Alps—or the midnight moon sleeping on the lake. He spent half the day, and often half the night, in solitary rambles, weaving his airy rhymes, or indulging his gloomy reveries, and he thought loneliness made the element of a poet. Alas! Dante, Alfieri, even Petrarch might have taught him, that a poet must have intimate knowledge of men as well as mountains, if he desire to become the CREATOR. When Shelley, in one of his prefaces, boasts of being familiar with Alps and glaciers, and Heaven knows what, the critical artist cannot help wishing that he had been rather familiar with Fleet Street or the Strand. Perhaps, then, that remarkable genius might have been more capable of realizing characters of flesh and blood, and have composed corporeal and consummate wholes, not confused and glittering fragments.

Though Ernest was attached to Teresa and deeply interested in Castruccio, it was De Montaigne for whom he experienced the higher and graver sentiment of esteem. This Frenchman was one acquainted with a much larger world than that of the Coteries. He had served in the army, had been employed with distinction in civil affairs, and was of that robust and healthful moral constitution which can bear with every variety of social life, and estimate calmly the balance of our moral fortunes. Trial and experience had left him that true philosopher who is too wise to be an optimist, too just to be a misanthrope. He enjoyed life with sober judgment, and pursued the path most suited to himself, without declaring it to be the best for others. He was a little hard, perhaps, upon the errors that belong to weakness and conceit—not to those that have their source in great natures or generous thoughts. Among his characteristics was a profound admiration for England. His own country he half loved, yet half disdained. The impetuosity and levity of his compatriots displeased his sober and dignified notions. He could not forgive them (he was wont to say) for having made the two grand experiments of popular revolution and military despotism in vain. He sympathised neither with the young enthusiasts who desired a republic, without well knowing the numerous strata of habits and customs upon which that fabric, if designed for permanence, should be built—nor with the uneducated and fierce chivalry that longed for a restoration of the warrior empire—nor with the dull and arrogant bigots who connected all ideas of order and government with the ill-starred and worn-out dynasty of the Bourbons. In fact, GOOD SENSE was with him the /principium et fons/ of all theories and all practice. And it was this quality that attached him to the English. His philosophy on this head was rather curious.

"Good sense," said he one day to Maltravers, as they were walking to and fro at De Montaigne's villa, by the margin of the lake, "is not a merely intellectual attribute. It is rather the result of a just equilibrium of all our faculties, spiritual and moral. The dishonest, or the toys of their own passions, may have genius; but they rarely, if ever, have good sense in the conduct of life. They may often win large prizes, but it is by a game of chance, not skill. But the man whom I perceive

walking an honourable and upright career—just to others, and also to himself (for we owe justice to ourselves—to the care of our fortunes, our character—to the management of our passions)—is a more dignified representative of his Maker than the mere child of genius. Of such a man we say he has GOOD SENSE; yes, but he has also integrity, self-respect, and self-denial. A thousand trials which his sense raves and conquers, are temptations also to his probity—his temper—in a word, to all the many sides of his complicated nature. Now, I do not think he will have this /good sense/ any more than a drunkard will have strong nerves, unless he be in the constant habit of keeping his mind clear from the intoxication of envy, vanity, and the various emotions that dupe and mislead us. Good sense is not, therefore, an abstract quality or a solitary talent; but it is the natural result of the habit of thinking justly, and therefore seeing clearly, and is as different from the sagacity that belongs to a diplomatist or attorney, as the philosophy of Socrates differed from the rhetoric of Gorgias. As a mass of individual excellences make up this attribute in a man, so a mass of such men thus characterised give a character to a nation. Your England is, therefore, renowned for its good sense, but it is renowned also for the excellences which accompany strong sense in an individual—high honesty and faith in its dealings, a warm love of justice and fair play, a general freedom from the violent crimes common on the Continent, and the energetic perseverance in enterprise once commenced, which results from a bold and healthful disposition.”

”Our wars, our debt—” began Maltravers.

”Pardon me,” interrupted De Montaigne, ”I am speaking of your people, not of your government. A government is often a very unfair representative of a nation. But even in the wars you allude to, if you examine, you will generally find them originate in the love of justice, which is the basis of good sense, not from any insane desire of conquest or glory. A man, however sensible, must have a heart in his bosom, and a great nation cannot be a piece of selfish clockwork. Suppose you and I are sensible, prudent men, and we see in a crowd one violent fellow unjustly knocking another on the head, we should be brutes, not men, if we did not interfere with the savage; but if we thrust ourselves into a crowd with a large bludgeon, and belabour our neighbours, with the hope that the spectators would cry, ’See what a bold, strong fellow that is!’—then we should be only playing the madman from the motive of the coxcomb. I fear you will find in the military history of the French and English the application of my parable.”

”Yet still, I confess, there is a gallantry, and a noblemanlike and Norman spirit in the whole French nation, which make me forgive many of their excesses, and think they are destined for great purposes, when experience shall have sobered their hot blood. Some nations, as some men, are slow in arriving at maturity; others seem men in their cradle. The English, thanks to their sturdy Saxon origin, elevated, not depressed, by the Norman infusion, never were children. The difference

is striking, when you regard the representatives of both in their great men—whether writers or active citizens.”

”Yes,” said De Montaigne, ”in Milton and Cromwell there is nothing of the brilliant child. I cannot say as much for Voltaire or Napoleon. Even Richelieu, the manliest of our statesmen, had so much of the French infant in him as to fancy himself a /beau garçon/, a gallant, a wit, and a poet. As for the Racine school of writers, they were not out of the leading-strings of imitation—cold copyists of a pseudo-classic, in which they saw the form, and never caught the spirit. What so little Roman, Greek, Hebrew, as their Roman, Greek, and Hebrew dramas? Your rude Shakespeare’s /Julius Caesar/—even his /Troilus and Cressida/—have the ancient spirit, precisely as they are imitations of nothing ancient. But our Frenchmen copied the giant images of old just as the school-girl copies a drawing, by holding it up to the window, and tracing the lines on silver paper.”

”But your new writers—De Stael—Chateaubriand?”

At the time of this conversation the later school, adorned by Victor Hugo, who, with notions of art elaborately wrong, is still a man of extraordinary genius, had not risen into its present equivocal reputation.

”I find no fault with the sentimentalists,” answered the severe critic, ”but that of exceeding feebleness. They have no bone and muscle in their genius—all is flaccid and rotund in its feminine symmetry. They seem to think that vigour consists in florid phrases and little aphorisms, and delineate all the mighty tempests of the human heart with the polished prettiness of a miniature-painter on ivory. No!—these two are children of another kind—affected, tricked-out, well-dressed children—very clever, very precocious—but children still. Their whinings, and their sentimentalities, and their egotism, and their vanity, cannot interest masculine beings who know what life and its stern objects are.”

”Your brother-in-law,” said Maltravers with a slight smile, ”must find in you a discouraging censor.”

”My poor Castruccio,” replied De Montaigne, with a half-sigh; ”he is one of those victims whom I believe to be more common than we dream of—men whose aspirations are above their powers. I agree with a great German writer, that in the first walks of Art no man has a right to enter, unless he is convinced that he has strength and speed for the goal. Castruccio might be an amiable member of society, nay, an able and useful man, if he would apply the powers he possesses to the rewards they may obtain. He has talent enough to win him reputation in any profession but that of a poet.”

”But authors who obtain immortality are not always first-rate.”

"First-rate in their way, I suspect; even if that way be false or trivial. They must be connected with the /history/ of their literature; you must be able to say of them, 'In this school, be it bad or good, they exerted such and such an influence;' in a word, they must form a link in the great chain of a nation's authors, which may be afterwards forgotten by the superficial, but without which the chain would be incomplete. And thus, if not first-rate for all time, they have been first-rate in their own day. But Castruccio is only the echo of others—he can neither found a school nor ruin one. Yet this" (again added De Montaigne after a pause)—"this melancholy malady in my brother-in-law would cure itself, perhaps, if he were not Italian. In your animated and bustling country, after sufficient disappointment as a poet, he would glide into some other calling, and his vanity and craving for effect would find a rational and manly outlet. But in Italy, what can a clever man do, if he is not a poet or a robber? If he love his country, that crime is enough to unfit him for civil employment, and his mind cannot stir a step in the bold channels of speculation without falling foul of the Austrian or the Pope. No; the best I can hope for Castruccio is, that he will end in an antiquary, and dispute about ruins with the Romans. Better that than mediocre poetry."

Maltravers was silent and thoughtful. Strange to say, De Montaigne's views did not discourage his own new and secret ardour for intellectual triumphs; not because he felt that he was now able to achieve them, but because he felt the iron of his own nature, and knew that a man who has iron in his nature must ultimately hit upon some way of shaping the metal into use.

The host and guest were now joined by Castruccio himself—silent and gloomy as indeed he usually was, especially in the presence of De Montaigne, with whom he felt his "self-love" wounded; for though he longed to despise his hard brother-in-law, the young poet was compelled to acknowledge that De Montaigne was not a man to be despised.

Maltravers dined with the De Montaignes, and spent the evening with them. He could not but observe that Castruccio, who affected in his verses the softest sentiments—who was, indeed, by original nature, tender and gentle—had become so completely warped by that worst of all mental vices—the eternally pondering on his own excellences, talents, mortifications, and ill-usage, that he never contributed to the gratification of those around him; he had none of the little arts of social benevolence, none of the playful youth of disposition which usually belongs to the good-hearted, and for which men of a master-genius, however elevated their studies, however stern or reserved to the vulgar world, are commonly noticeable amidst the friends they love or in the home they adorn. Occupied with one dream, centred in self, the young Italian was sullen and morose to all who did not sympathise with his own morbid fancies. From the children—the sister—the friend—the whole living earth, he fled to a poem on

Solitude, or stanzas upon Fame. Maltravers said to himself, "I will never be an author—I will never sigh for renown—if I am to purchase shadows at such a price!"

## CHAPTER IV.

"It cannot be too deeply impressed on the mind, that application is the price to be paid for mental acquisitions, and that it is as absurd to expect them without it as to hope for a harvest where we have not sown the seed.

"In everything we do, we may be possibly laying a train of consequences, the operation of which may terminate only with our existence."

BAILEY: /Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions/.

TIME passed, and autumn was far advanced towards winter; still Maltravers lingered at Como. He saw little of any other family than that of the De Montaignes, and the greater part of his time was necessarily spent alone. His occupation continued to be that of making experiments of his own powers, and these gradually became bolder and more comprehensive. He took care, however, not to show his "Diversions of Como" to his new friends: he wanted no audience—he dreamt of no Public; he desired merely to practise his own mind. He became aware, of his own accord, as he proceeded, that a man can neither study with such depth, nor compose with much art, unless he has some definite object before him; in the first, some one branch of knowledge to master; in the last, some one conception to work out. Maltravers fell back upon his boyish passion for metaphysical speculation; but with what different results did he now wrestle with the subtle schoolmen, now that he had practically known mankind. How insensibly new lights broke in upon him, as he threaded the labyrinth of cause and effect, by which we seek to arrive at that curious and biform monster—our own nature. His mind became saturated, as it were, with these profound studies and meditations; and when at length he paused from them, he felt as if he had not been living in solitude, but had gone through a process of action in the busy world: so much juster, so much clearer, had become his knowledge of himself and others. But though these researches coloured, they did not limit his intellectual pursuits. Poetry and the lighter letters became to him not merely a relaxation, but a critical and thoughtful study. He delighted to penetrate into the causes that have made the airy webs spun by men's fancies so permanent and powerful in their influence over the hard, work-day world. And what a lovely scene—what a sky—what an air wherein to commence the projects of that ambition which seeks to establish an empire in the hearts and memories

of mankind! I believe it has a great effect on the future labours of a writer,—the place where he first dreams that it is his destiny to write!

From these pursuits Ernest was aroused by another letter from Cleveland. His kind friend had been disappointed and vexed that Maltravers did not follow his advice, and return to England. He had shown his displeasure by not answering Ernest's letter of excuses; but lately he had been seized with a dangerous illness which reduced him to the brink of the grave; and with a heart softened by the exhaustion of the frame, he now wrote in the first moments of convalescence to Maltravers, informing him of his attack and danger, and once more urging him to return. The thought that Cleveland—the dear, kind gentle guardian of his youth—had been near unto death, that he might never more have hung upon that fostering hand, nor replied to that paternal voice, smote Ernest with terror and remorse. He resolved instantly to return to England, and made his preparations accordingly.

He went to take leave of the De Montaignes. Teresa was trying to teach her first-born to read; and seated by the open window of the villa, in her neat, not precise, /dishabille/—with the little boy's delicate, yet bold and healthy countenance looking up fearlessly at hers, while she was endeavouring to initiate him—half gravely, half laughingly—into the mysteries of monosyllables, the pretty boy and the fair young mother made a delightful picture. De Montaigne was reading the Essays of his celebrated namesake, in whom he boasted, I know not with what justice, to claim an ancestor. From time to time he looked from the page to take a glance at the progress of his heir, and keep up with the march of intellect. But he did not interfere with the maternal lecture; he was wise enough to know that there is a kind of sympathy between a child and a mother, which is worth all the grave superiority of a father in making learning palatable to young years. He was far too clever a man not to despise all the systems of forcing infants under knowledge-frames, which are the present fashion. He knew that philosophers never made a greater mistake than in insisting so much upon beginning abstract education from the cradle. It is quite enough to attend to an infant's temper, and correct that cursed predilection for telling fibs which falsifies all Dr. Reid's absurd theory about innate propensities to truth, and makes the prevailing epidemic of the nursery. Above all, what advantage ever compensates for hurting a child's health or breaking his spirit? Never let him learn, more than you can help it, the crushing bitterness of fear. A bold child who looks you in the face, speaks the truth, and shames the devil; that is the stuff of which to make good and brave—ay, and wise men!

Maltravers entered, unannounced, into this charming family party, and stood unobserved for a few moments, by the open door. The little pupil was the first to perceive him, and, forgetful of monosyllables, ran to greet him; for Maltravers, though gentle rather than gay, was a favourite with children, and his fair, calm, gracious countenance did

more for him with them than if, like Goldsmith's Burchell, his pockets had been filled with gingerbread and apples. "Ah, fie on you, Mr. Maltravers!" cried Teresa, rising; "you have blown away all the characters I have been endeavouring this last hour to imprint upon sand."

"Not so, Signora," said Maltravers, seating himself, and placing the child on his knee; "my young friend will set to work again with a greater gusto after this little break in upon his labours."

"You will stay with us all day, I hope?" said De Montaigne.

"Indeed," said Maltravers, "I am come to ask permission to do so, for to-morrow I depart for England."

"Is it possible?" cried Teresa. "How sudden! How we shall miss you! Oh! don't go. But perhaps you have bad news from England?"

"I have news that summon me hence," replied Maltravers; "my guardian and second father has been dangerously ill. I am uneasy about him, and reproach myself for having forgotten him so long in your seductive society."

"I am really sorry to lose you," said De Montaigne, with greater warmth in his tone than in his words. "I hope heartily we shall meet again soon: you will come, perhaps, to Paris?"

"Probably," said Maltravers; "and you, perhaps, to England?"

"Ah, how I should like it!" exclaimed Teresa.

"No, you would not," said her husband; "you would not like England at all; you would call it /triste/ beyond measure. It is one of those countries of which a native should be proud, but which has no amusement for a stranger, precisely because full of such serious and stirring occupations to the citizens. The pleasantest countries for strangers are the worst countries for natives (witness Italy), and /vice versa/."

Teresa shook her dark curls, and would not be convinced.

"And where is Castruccio?" asked Maltravers.

"In his boat on the lake," replied Teresa. "He will be inconsolable at your departure: you are the only person he can understand, or who understand him; the only person in Italy—I had almost said in the whole world."

"Well, we shall meet at dinner," said Ernest; "meanwhile let me prevail on you to accompany me to the /Pliniana/. I wish to say farewell to

that crystal spring.”

Teresa, delighted at any excursion, readily consented.

”And I too, mamma,” cried the child; ”and my little sister?”

”Oh, certainly,” said Maltravers, speaking for the parents.

So the party was soon ready, and they pushed off in the clear genial noontide (for November in Italy is as early as September in the North) across the sparkling and dimpled waters. The children prattled, and the grown-up people talked on a thousand matters. It was a pleasant day, that last day at Como! For the farewells of friendship have indeed something of the melancholy, but not the anguish, of those of love. Perhaps it would be better if we could get rid of love altogether. Life would go on smoother and happier without it. Friendship is the wine of existence, but love is the dram-drinking.

When they returned, they found Castruccio seated on the lawn. He did not appear so much dejected at the prospect of Ernest’s departure as Teresa had anticipated; for Castruccio Cesarini was a very jealous man, and he had lately been chagrined and discontented with seeing the delight that the De Montaignes took in Ernest’s society.

”Why is this?” he often asked himself; ”why are they more pleased with this stranger’s society than mine? My ideas are as fresh, as original; I have as much genius, yet even my dry brother-in-law allows /his/ talents, and predicts that/he/ will be an eminent man! while /I/—No!—one is not a prophet in one’s own country!”

Unhappy man! his mind bore all the rank weeds of the morbid poetical character, and the weeds choked up the flowers that the soil, properly cultivated, should alone bear. Yet that crisis in life awaited Castruccio, in which a sensitive and poetical man is made or marred; the crisis in which a sentiment is replaced by the passions—in which love for some real object gathers the scattered rays of the heart into a focus: out of that ordeal he might pass a purer and manlier being—so Maltravers often hoped. Maltravers then little thought how closely connected with his own fate was to be that passage in the history of the Italian. Castruccio contrived to take Maltravers aside, and as he led the Englishman through the wood that backed the mansion, he said, with some embarrassment, ”You go, I suppose, to London?”

”I shall pass through it—can I execute any commission for you?”

”Why, yes; my poems!—I think of publishing them in England: your aristocracy cultivate the Italian letters; and, perhaps, I may be read by the fair and noble—/that/ is the proper audience of poets. For the vulgar herd—I disdain it!”

"My dear Castruccio, I will undertake to see your poems published in London, if you wish it; but do not be sanguine. In England we read little poetry, even in our own language, and we are shamefully indifferent to foreign literature."

"Yes, foreign literature generally, and you are right; but my poems are of another kind. They must command attention in a polished and intelligent circle."

"Well! let the experiment be tried; you can let me have the poems when we part."

"I thank you," said Castruccio, in a joyous tone, pressing his friend's hand; and for the rest of that evening, he seemed an altered being; he even caressed the children, and did not sneer at the grave conversation of his brother-in-law.

When Maltravers rose to depart, Castruccio gave him the packet; and then, utterly engrossed with his own imagined futurity of fame, vanished from the room to indulge his reveries. He cared no longer for Maltravers—he had put him to use—he could not be sorry for his departure, for that departure was the Avatar of His appearance to a new world.

A small dull rain was falling, though, at intervals, the stars broke through the unsettled clouds, and Teresa did not therefore venture from the house; she presented her smooth cheek to the young guest to salute, pressed him by the hand, and bade him adieu with tears in her eyes. "Ah!" said she, "when we meet again I hope you will be married—I shall love your wife dearly. There is no happiness like marriage and home!" and she looked with ingenuous tenderness at De Montaigne.

Maltravers sighed;—his thoughts flew back to Alice. Where now was that lone and friendless girl, whose innocent love had once brightened a home for /him/? He answered by a vague and mechanical commonplace, and quitted the room with De Montaigne, who insisted on seeing him depart. As they neared the lake, De Montaigne broke the silence.

"My dear Maltravers," he said, with a serious and thoughtful affection in his voice, "we may not meet again for years. I have a warm interest in your happiness and career—yes, /career/—I repeat the word. I do not habitually seek to inspire young men with ambition. Enough for most of them to be good and honourable citizens. But in your case it is different. I see in you the earnest and meditative, not rash and overweening youth, which is usually productive of a distinguished manhood. Your mind is not yet settled, it is true; but it is fast becoming clear and mellow from the first ferment of boyish dreams and passions. You have everything in your favour,—competence, birth, connections; and, above all, you are an Englishman! You have a mighty stage, on which, it is true, you cannot establish a footing without

merit and without labour—so much the better; in which strong and resolute rivals will urge you on to emulation, and then competition will task your keenest powers. Think what a glorious fate it is, to have an influence on the vast, but ever-growing mind of such a country,—to feel, when you retire from the busy scene, that you have played an unforgotten part—that you have been the medium, under God’s great will, of circulating new ideas throughout the world—of upholding the glorious priesthood of the Honest and the Beautiful. This is the true ambition; the desire of mere personal notoriety is vanity, not ambition. Do not then be lukewarm or supine. The trait I have observed in you,” added the Frenchman, with a smile, “most prejudicial to your chances of distinction is, that you are /too/ philosophical, too apt to /cui bono/ all the exertions that interfere with the indolence of cultivated leisure. And you must not suppose, Maltravers, that an active career will be a path of roses. At present you have no enemies; but the moment you attempt distinction, you will be abused; calumniated, reviled. You will be shocked at the wrath you excite, and sigh for your old obscurity, and consider, as Franklin has it, that ‘you have paid too dear for your whistle.’ But in return for individual enemies, what a noble recompense to have made the Public itself your friend; perhaps even Posterity your familiar! Besides,” added De Montaigne, with almost a religious solemnity in his voice, “there is a conscience of the head as well as of the heart, and in old age we feel as much remorse if we have wasted our natural talents as if we had perverted our natural virtues. The profound and exultant satisfaction with which a man who knows that he has not lived in vain—that he has entailed on the world an heirloom of instruction or delight—looks back upon departed struggles, is one of the happiest emotions of which the conscience can be capable. What, indeed, are the petty faults we commit as individuals, affecting but a narrow circle, ceasing with our own lives, to the incalculable and everlasting good we may produce as public men by one book or by one law? Depend upon it that the Almighty, who sums up all the good and all the evil done by His creatures in a just balance, will not judge the august benefactors of the world with the same severity as those drones of society, who have no great services to show in the eternal ledger, as a set-off to the indulgence of their small vices. These things rightly considered, Maltravers, you will have every inducement that can tempt a lofty mind and a pure ambition to awaken from the voluptuous indolence of the literary Sybarite, and contend worthily in the world’s wide Altis for a great prize.”

Maltravers never before felt so flattered—so stirred into high resolves. The stately eloquence, the fervid encouragement of this man, usually so cold and fastidious, roused him like the sound of a trumpet. He stopped short, his breath heaved thick, his cheek flushed. “De Montaigne,” said he, “your words have cleared away a thousand doubts and scruples—they have gone right to my heart. For the first time I understand what fame is—what the object, and what the reward of labour! Visions, hopes, aspirations I may have had before—for months a new spirit has been fluttering within me. I have felt the wings breaking

from the shell, but all was confused, dim, uncertain. I doubted the wisdom of effort, with life so short, and the pleasures of youth so sweet. I now look no longer on life but as a part of the eternity to which I /feel/ we were born; and I recognise the solemn truth that our objects, to be worthy life, should be worthy of creatures in whom the living principle never is extinct. Farewell! come joy or sorrow, failure or success, I will struggle to deserve your friendship.”

Maltravers sprang into his boat, and the shades of night soon snatched him from the lingering gaze of De Montaigne.