

THE CAXTONS - PART 8

EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON*

PART VIII.

CHAPTER I.

There entered, in the front drawing-room of my father's house in Russell Street, an Elf! clad in white,—small, delicate, with curls of jet over her shoulders; with eyes so large and so lustrous that they shone through the room as no eyes merely human could possibly shine. The Elf approached, and stood facing us. The sight was so unexpected and the apparition so strange that we remained for some moments in startled silence. At length my father, as the bolder and wiser man of the two, and the more fitted to deal with the eerie things of another world, had the audacity to step close up to the little creature, and, bending down to examine its face, said, "What do you want, my pretty child?"

Pretty child! Was it only a pretty child after all? Alas! it would be well if all we mistake for fairies at the first glance could resolve themselves only into pretty children.

"Come," answered the child, with a foreign accent, and taking my father by the lappet of his coat, "come, poor papa is so ill! I am frightened! come, and save him."

"Certainly," exclaimed my father, quickly. "Where's my hat, Sisty? Certainly, my child; we will go and save papa."

"But who is papa?" asked Pisistratus,—a question that would never have occurred to my father. He never asked who or what the sick papas of poor children were when the children pulled him by the lappet of his coat. "Who is papa?"

The child looked hard at me, and the big tears rolled from those large, luminous eyes, but quite silently. At this moment a full-grown figure filled up the threshold, and emerging from the shadow, presented to us

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the aspect of a stout, well-favored young woman. She dropped a courtesy, and then said, mincingly,—

”Oh, miss, you ought to have waited for me, and not alarmed the gentlefolks by running upstairs in that way! If you please, sir, I was settling with the cabman, and he was so imperent,—them low fellows always are, when they have only us poor women to deal with, sir, and—”

”But what is the matter?” cried I, for my father had taken the child in his arms soothingly, and she was now weeping on his breast.

”Why, you see, sir [another courtesy], the gent only arrived last night at our hotel, sir,—the Lamb, close by Lunnun Bridge,—and he was taken ill, and he’s not quite in his right mind like; so we sent for the doctor, and the doctor looked at the brass plate on the gent’s carpet-bag, sir, and then he looked into the ’Court Guide,’ and he said, ’There is a Mr. Caxton in Great Russell Street,—is he any relation?’ and this young lady said, ’That’s my papa’s brother, and we were going there.’ And so, sir, as the Boots was out, I got into a cab, and miss would come with me, and—”

”Roland—Roland ill! Quick, quick, quick!” cried my father, and with the child still in his arms he ran down the stairs. I followed with his hat, which of course he had forgotten. A cab, by good luck, was passing our very door; but the chambermaid would not let us enter it till she had satisfied herself that it was not the same she had dismissed. This preliminary investigation completed, we entered and drove to the Lamb.

The chambermaid, who sat opposite, passed the time in ineffectual overtures to relieve my father of the little girl,—who still clung nestling to his breast,—in a long epic, much broken into episodes, of the causes which had led to her dismissal of the late cabman, who, to swell his fare, had thought proper to take a ”circumbendibus!”—and with occasional tugs at her cap, and smoothings down of her gown, and apologies for being such a figure, especially when her eyes rested on my satin cravat, or drooped on my shining boots.

Arrived at the Lamb, the chambermaid, with conscious dignity, led us up a large staircase, which seemed interminable. As she mounted the region above the third story, she paused to take breath and inform us, apologetically, that the house was full, but that if the ”gent” stayed over Friday, he would be moved into No. 54, ”with a look-out and a chimbly.” My little cousin now slipped from my father’s arms, and, running up the stairs, beckoned to us to follow. We did so, and were led to a door, at which the child stopped and listened; then, taking off her shoes, she stole in on tiptoe. We entered after her.

By the light of a single candle we saw my poor uncle’s face; it was flushed with fever, and the eyes had that bright, vacant stare which it is so terrible to meet. Less terrible is it to find the body wasted,

the features sharp with the great life-struggle, than to look on the face from which the mind is gone,—the eyes in which there is no recognition. Such a sight is a startling shock to that unconscious habitual materialism with which we are apt familiarly to regard those we love; for in thus missing the mind, the heart, the affection that sprang to ours, we are suddenly made aware that it was the something within the form, and not the form itself, that was so dear to us. The form itself is still, perhaps, little altered; but that lip which smiles no welcome, that eye which wanders over us as strangers, that ear which distinguishes no more our voices,—the friend we sought is not there! Even our own love is chilled back; grows a kind of vague, superstitious terror. Yes, it was not the matter, still present to us, which had conciliated all those subtle, nameless sentiments which are classed and fused in the word "affection;" it was the airy, intangible, electric something, the absence of which now appals us.

I stood speechless; my father crept on, and took the hand that returned no pressure. The child only did not seem to share our emotions, but, clambering on the bed, laid her cheek on the breast, and was still.

"Pisistratus," whispered my father at last, and I stole near, hushing my breath,— "Pisistratus, if your mother were here!"

I nodded; the same thought had struck us both. His deep wisdom, my active youth, both felt their nothingness then and there. In the sick chamber both turned helplessly to miss the woman.

So I stole out, descended the stairs, and stood in the open air in a sort of stunned amaze. Then the tramp of feet, and the roll of wheels, and the great London roar, revived me. That contagion of practical life which lulls the heart and stimulates the brain,—what an intellectual mystery there is in its common atmosphere! In another moment I had singled out, like an inspiration, from a long file of those ministrants of our Trivia, the cab of the lightest shape and with the strongest horse, and was on my way, not to my mother's, but to Dr. M— H—, Manchester Square, whom I knew as the medical adviser to the Trevanions. Fortunately, that kind and able physician was at home, and he promised to be with the sufferer before I myself could join him. I then drove to Russell Street, and broke to my mother, as cautiously as I could, the intelligence with which I was charged.

When we arrived at the Lamb, we found the doctor already writing his prescription and injunctions: the activity of the treatment announced the clanger. I flew for the surgeon who had been before called in. Happy those who are strange to that indescribable silent bustle which the sick-room at times presents,—that conflict which seems almost hand to hand between life and death,—when all the poor, unresisting, unconscious frame is given up to the war against its terrible enemy the dark blood flowing, flowing; the hand on the pulse, the hushed suspense, every look on the physician's bended brow; then the sinapisms to the

feet, and the ice to the head; and now and then, through the lull of the low whispers, the incoherent voice of the sufferer,—babbling, perhaps, of green fields and fairyland, while your hearts are breaking! Then, at length, the sleep,—in that sleep, perhaps, the crisis,—the breathless watch, the slow waking, the first sane words, the old smile again, only fainter, your gushing tears, your low "Thank God thank God!"

Picture all this! It is past; Roland has spoken, his sense has returned; my mother is leaning over him; his child's small hands are clasped round his neck; the surgeon, who has been there six hours, has taken up his hat, and smiles gayly as he nods farewell; and my father is leaning against the wall, his face covered with his hands.

CHAPTER II.

All this had been so sudden that, to use the trite phrase,—for no other is so expressive,—it was like a dream. I felt an absolute, an imperious want of solitude, of the open air. The swell of gratitude almost stifled me; the room did not seem large enough for my big heart. In early youth, if we find it difficult to control our feelings, so we find it difficult to vent them in the presence of others. On the spring side of twenty, if anything affects us, we rush to lock ourselves up in our room, or get away into the streets or the fields; in our earlier years we are still the savages of Nature, and we do as the poor brute does: the wounded stag leaves the herd, and if there is anything on a dog's faithful heart, he slinks away into a corner.

Accordingly, I stole out of the hotel and wandered through the streets, which were quite deserted. It was about the first hour of dawn,—the most comfortless hour there is, especially in London! But I only felt freshness in the raw air, and soothing in the desolate stillness. The love my uncle inspired was very remarkable in its nature; it was not like that quiet affection with which those advanced in life must usually content themselves, but connected with the more vivid interest that youth awakens. There was in him still so much of viva, city and fire, in his errors and crotchets so much of the self-delusion of youth, that one could scarce fancy him other than young. Those Quixotic, exaggerated notions of honor, that romance of sentiment which no hardship, care, grief, disappointment, could wear away (singular in a period when, at two and twenty, young men declare themselves blases!), seemed to leave him all the charm of boyhood. A season in London had made me more a man of the world, older in heart than he was. Then, the sorrow that gnawed him with such silent sternness. No, Captain Roland was one of those men who seize hold of your thoughts, who mix themselves up with your lives. The idea that Roland should die,—die with the load at his heart unlightened,—was one that seemed to take a spring out of

the wheels of nature, all object out of the aims of life,—of my life at least. For I had made it one of the ends of my existence to bring back the son to the father, and restore the smile, that must have been gay once, to the downward curve of that iron lip. But Roland was now out of danger; and yet, like one who has escaped shipwreck, I trembled to look back on the danger past: the voice of the devouring deep still boomed in my ears. While rapt in my reveries, I stopped mechanically to hear a clock strike—four; and, looking round, I perceived that I had wandered from the heart of the City, and was in one of the streets that lead out of the Strand. Immediately before me, on the doorsteps of a large shop whose closed shutters were as obstinate a stillness as if they had guarded the secrets of seventeen centuries in a street in Pompeii, reclined a form fast asleep, the arm propped on the hard stone supporting the head, and the limbs uneasily strewn over the stairs. The dress of the slumberer was travel-stained, tattered, yet with the remains of a certain pretence; an air of faded, shabby, penniless gentility made poverty more painful, because it seemed to indicate unfitness to grapple with it. The face of this person was hollow and pale, but its expression, even in sleep, was fierce and hard. I drew near and nearer; I recognized the countenance, the regular features, the raven hair, even a peculiar gracefulness of posture: the young man whom I had met at the inn by the way-side, and who had left me alone with the Savoyard and his mice in the churchyard, was before me. I remained behind the shadow of one of the columns of the porch, leaning against the area rails, and irresolute whether or not so slight an acquaintance justified me in waking the sleeper, when a policeman, suddenly emerging from an angle in the street, terminated my deliberations with the decision of his practical profession; for he laid hold of the young man's arm and shook it roughly: "You must not lie here; get up and go home!" The sleeper woke with a quick start, rubbed his eyes, looked round, and fixed them upon the policeman so haughtily that that discriminating functionary probably thought that it was not from sheer necessity that so improper a couch had been selected, and with an air of greater respect he said, "You have been drinking, young man,—can you find your way home?"

"Yes," said the youth, resettling himself, "you see I have found it!"

"By the Lord Harry!" muttered the policeman, "if he ben't going to sleep again. Come, come, walk on; or I must walk you off."

My old acquaintance turned round. "Policeman," said he, with a strange sort of smile, "what do you think this lodging is worth,—I don't say for the night, for you see that is over, but for the next two hours? The lodging is primitive, but it suits me; I should think a shilling would be a fair price for it, eh?"

"You love your joke, sir," said the policeman, with a brow much relaxed, and opening his hand mechanically.

"Say a shilling, then; it is a bargain! I hire it of you upon credit. Good night, and call me at six o'clock."

With that the young man settled himself so resolutely, and the policeman's face exhibited such bewilderment, that I burst out laughing, and came from my hiding-place.

The policeman looked at me. "Do you know this-this—"

"This gentleman?" said I, gravely. "Yes, you may leave him to me;" and I slipped the price of the lodging into the policeman's hand. He looked at the shilling, he looked at me, he looked up the street and down the street, shook his head, and walked off. I then approached the youth, touched him, and said: "Can you remember me, sir; and what have you done with Mr. Peacock?"

Stranger (after a pause).—"I remember you; your name is Caxton."

Pisistratus.—"And yours?"

Stranger.—"Poor devil, if you ask my pockets,—pockets, which are the symbols of man; Dare-devil, if you ask my heart. [Surveying me from head to foot.] The world seems to have smiled on you, Mr. Caxton! Are you not ashamed to speak to a wretch lying on the stones? but, to be sure, no one sees you."

Pisistratus (sententiously).—"Had I lived in the last century, I might have found Samuel Johnson lying on the stones."

Stranger (rising).—"You have spoilt my sleep: you had a right, since you paid for the lodging. Let me walk with you a few paces; you need not fear, I do not pick pockets—yet!"

Pisistratus.—"You say the world has smiled on me; I fear it has frowned on you. I don't say 'courage,' for you seem to have enough of that; but I say 'patience,' which is the rarer quality of the two."

Stranger.—"Hem! [again looking at me keenly.] Why is it that you stop to speak to me,—one of whom you know nothing, or worse than nothing?"

Pisistratus.—"Because I have often thought of you; because you interest me; because—pardon me—I would help you if I can,—that is, if you want help."

Stranger.—"Want? I am one want! I want sleep, I want food; I want the patience you recommend,—patience to starve and rot. I have travelled from Paris to Boulogne on foot, with twelve sous in my pocket. Out of those twelve sous in my pocket I saved four; with the four I went to a billiard-room at Boulogne: I won just enough to pay my passage and buy three rolls. You see I only require capital in order to make a fortune."

If with four sous I can win ten francs in a night, what could I win with a capital of four sovereigns, and in the course of a year? That is an application of the Rule of Three which my head aches too much to calculate just at present. Well, those three rolls have lasted me three days; the last crumb went for supper last night. Therefore, take care how you offer me money (for that is what men mean by help). You see I have no option but to take it. But I warn you, don't expect gratitude; I have none in me!"

Pisistratus.—"You are not so bad as you paint yourself. I would do something more for you, if I can, than lend you the little I have to offer. Will you be frank with me?"

Stranger.—"That depends; I have been frank enough hitherto, I think."

Pisistratus.—"True; so I proceed without scruple. Don't tell me your name or your condition, if you object to such confidence; but tell me if you have relations to whom you can apply? You shake your head. Well, then, are you willing to work for yourself, or is it only at the billiard-table—pardon me—that you can try to make four sous produce ten francs?"

Stranger (musing).—"I understand you. I have never worked yet,—I abhor work. But I have no objection to try if it is in me."

Pisistratus.—"It is in you. A man who can walk from Paris to Boulogne with twelve sous in his pocket and save four for a purpose; who can stake those four on the cool confidence in his own skill, even at billiards; who can subsist for three days on three rolls; and who, on the fourth day, can wake from the stones of a capital with an eye and a spirit as proud as yours,—has in him all the requisites to subdue fortune."

Stranger.—"Do you work—you?"

Pisistratus.—"Yes—and hard."

Stranger.—"I am ready to work, then."

Pisistratus.—"Good. Now, what can you do?"

Stranger (with his odd smile).—"Many things useful. I can split a bullet on a penknife; I know the secret tierce of Coulon, the fencing-master; I can speak two languages (besides English) like a native, even to their slang; I know every game in the cards; I can act comedy, tragedy, farce; I can drink down Bacchus himself; I can make any woman I please in love with me,—that is, any woman good for nothing. Can I earn a handsome livelihood out of all this,—wear kid gloves and set up a cabriolet? You see my wishes are modest!"

Pisistratus.—"You speak two languages, you say, like a native,—French, I suppose, is one of them?"

Stranger.—"Yes."

Pisistratus.—"Will you teach it?"

Stranger (haughtily). "No. Je suis gentilhomme, which means more or less than a gentleman. Gentilhomme means well born, because free born; teachers are slaves!"

Pisistratus (unconsciously imitating Mr. Trevanion).—"Stuff!"

Stranger (looks angry, and then laughs).—"Very true; stilts don't suit shoes like these! But I cannot teach. Heaven help those I should teach! Anything else?"

Pisistratus.—"Anything else!—you leave me a wide margin. You know French thoroughly,—to write as well as speak? That is much. Give me some address where I can find you,—or will you call on me?"

Stranger.—"No! Any evening at dusk I will meet you. I have no address to give, and I cannot show these rags at another man's door."

Pisistratus.—"At nine in the evening, then, and here in the Strand, on Thursday next. I may then have found some thing that will suit you. Meanwhile—" slides his purse into the Stranger's hand. N. B.—Purse not very full.

Stranger, with the air of one conferring a favor, pockets the purse; and there is something so striking in the very absence of all emotion at so accidental a rescue from starvation that Pisistratus exclaims,—

"I don't know why I should have taken this fancy to you, Mr. Dare-devil, if that be the name that pleases you best. The wood you are made of seems cross-grained, and full of knots; and yet, in the hands of a skilful carver, I think it would be worth much."

Stranger (startled).—"Do you? Do you? None, I believe, ever thought that before. But the same wood, I suppose, that makes the gibbet could make the mast of a man-of-war. I tell you, however, why you have taken this fancy to me,—the strong sympathize with the strong. You, too, could subdue fortune!"

Pisistratus.—"Stop! If so, if there is congeniality between us, then liking should be reciprocal. Come, say that; for half my chance of helping you is in my power to touch your heart."

Stranger (evidently softened).—"If I were as great a rogue as I ought to be, my answer would be easy enough. As it is, I delay it. Adieu.—

On Thursday.”

Stranger vanishes in the labyrinth of alleys round Leicester Square.

CHAPTER III.

On my return to the Lamb, I found that my uncle was in a soft sleep; and after a morning visit from the surgeon, and his assurance that the fever was fast subsiding, and all cause for alarm was gone, I thought it necessary to go back to Trevanion's house and explain the reason for my night's absence. But the family had not returned from the country. Trevanion himself came up for a few hours in the afternoon, and seemed to feel much for my poor uncle's illness. Though, as usual, very busy, he accompanied me to the Lamb to see my father and cheer him up. Roland still continued to mend, as the surgeon phrased it; and as we went back to St. James's Square, Trevanion had the consideration to release me from my oar in his galley for the next few days. My mind, relieved from my anxiety for Roland, now turned to my new friend. It had not been without an object that I had questioned the young man as to his knowledge of French. Trevanion had a large correspondence in foreign countries which was carried on in that language; and here I could be but of little help to him. He himself, though he spoke and wrote French with fluency and grammatical correctness, wanted that intimate knowledge of the most delicate and diplomatic of all languages to satisfy his classical purism.

For Trevanion was a terrible word-weigher. His taste was the plague of my life and his own. His prepared speeches (or rather perorations) were the most finished pieces of cold diction that could be conceived under the marble portico of the Stoics,—so filed and turned, trimmed and tamed, that they never admitted a sentence that could warm the heart, or one that could offend the ear. He had so great a horror of a vulgarism that, like Canning, he would have made a periphrasis of a couple of lines to avoid using the word "cat." It was only in extempore speaking that a ray of his real genius could indiscreetly betray itself. One may judge what labor such a super-refinement of taste would inflict upon a man writing in a language not his own to some distinguished statesman or some literary institution,—knowing that language just well enough to recognize all the native elegances he failed to attain. Trevanion at that very moment was employed upon a statistical document intended as a communication to a Society at Copenhagen of which he was all honorary member. It had been for three weeks the torment of the whole house, especially of poor Fanny (whose French was the best at our joint disposal). But Trevanion had found her phraseology too mincing, too effeminate, too much that of the boudoir. Here, then, was an opportunity to introduce my new friend and test the capacities that I

fancied he possessed. I therefore, though with some hesitation, led the subject to "Remarks on the Mineral Treasures of Great Britain and Ireland" (such was the title of the work intended to enlighten the savants of Denmark); and by certain ingenious circumlocutions, known to all able applicants, I introduced my acquaintance with a young gentleman who possessed the most familiar and intimate knowledge of French, and who might be of use in revising the manuscript. I knew enough of Trevanion to feel that I could not reveal the circumstances under which I had formed that acquaintance, for he was much too practical a man not to have been frightened out of his wits at the idea of submitting so classical a performance to so disreputable a scapegrace. As it was, however, Trevanion, whose mind at that moment was full of a thousand other things, caught at my suggestion, with very little cross-questioning on the subject, and before he left London consigned the manuscript to my charge.

"My friend is poor," said I, timidly.

"Oh! as to that," cried Trevanion, hastily, "if it be a matter of charity, I put my purse in your hands; but don't put my manuscript in his! If it be a matter of business, it is another affair; and I must judge of his work before I can say how much it is worth,—perhaps nothing!"

So ungracious was this excellent man in his very virtues!

"Nay," said I, "it is a matter of business, and so we will consider it."

"In that case," said Trevanion, concluding the matter and buttoning his pockets, "if I dislike his work,—nothing; if I like it,—twenty guineas. Where are the evening papers?" and in another moment the member of Parliament had forgotten the statist, and was pishing and tutting over the "Globe" or the "Sun."

On Thursday my uncle was well enough to be moved into our house; and on the same evening I went forth to keep my appointment with the stranger. The clock struck nine as we met. The palm of punctuality might be divided between us. He had profited by the interval, since our last meeting, to repair the more obvious deficiencies of his wardrobe; and though there was something still wild, dissolute, outlandish, about his whole appearance, yet in the elastic energy of his step and the resolute assurance of his bearing there was that which Nature gives to her own aristocracy: for, as far as my observation goes, what has been called the "grand air" (and which is wholly distinct from the polish of manner or the urbane grace of high breeding) is always accompanied, and perhaps produced, by two qualities,—courage, and the desire of command. It is more common to a half-savage nature than to one wholly civilized. The Arab has it, so has the American Indian; and I suspect that it was more frequent among the knights and barons of the Middle Ages than it is among the polished gentlemen of the modern drawing-room.

We shook hands, and walked on a few moments in silence; at length thus commenced the Stranger,–

”You have found it more difficult, I fear, than you imagined, to make the empty sack stand upright. Considering that at least one third of those born to work cannot find it, why should I?”

Pisistratus.–”I am hard-hearted enough to believe that work never fails to those who seek it in good earnest. It was said of some man, famous for keeping his word, that ‘if he had promised you an acorn, and all the oaks in England failed to produce one, he would have sent to Norway for an acorn.’ If I wanted work, and there was none to be had in the Old World, I would find my way to the New. But to the point: I have found something for you, which I do not think your taste will oppose, and which may open to you the means of an honorable independence. But I cannot well explain it in the streets: where shall we go?”

Stranger (after some hesitation).–”I have a lodging near here which I need not blush to take you to,–I mean, that it is not among rogues and castaways.”

Pisistratus (much pleased, and taking the stranger’s arm).–”Come, then.”

Pisistratus and the stranger pass over Waterloo Bridge and pause before a small house of respectable appearance. Stranger admits them both with a latch-key, leads the way to the third story, strikes a light, and does the honors to a small chamber, clean and orderly. Pisistratus explains the task to be done, and opens the manuscript. The stranger draws his chair deliberately towards the light and runs his eye rapidly over the pages. Pisistratus trembles to see him pause before a long array of figures and calculations. Certainly it does not look inviting; but, pshaw! it is scarcely a part of the task, which limits itself to the mere correction of words.

Stranger (briefly).–”There must be a mistake here–stay!–I see–” (He turns back a few pages and corrects with rapid precision an error in a somewhat complicated and abstruse calculation.)

Pisistratus (surprised).–”You seem a notable arithmetician.”

Stranger.–”Did I not tell you that I was skilful in all games of mingled skill and chance? It requires an arithmetical head for that: a first-rate card-player is a financier spoilt. I am certain that you never could find a man fortunate on the turf or at the gaining-table who had not an excellent head for figures. Well, this French is good enough, apparently; there are but a few idioms, here and there, that, strictly speaking, are more English than French. But the whole is a work scarce worth paying for!”

Pisistratus.—"The work of the head fetches a price not proportioned to the quantity, but the quality. When shall I call for this?"

Stranger.—"To-morrow." (And he puts the manuscript away in a drawer.)

We then conversed on various matters for nearly an hour; and my impression of this young man's natural ability was confirmed and heightened. But it was an ability as wrong and perverse in its directions or instincts as a French novelist's. He seemed to have, to a high degree, the harder portion of the reasoning faculty, but to be almost wholly without that arch beautifier of character, that sweet purifier of mere intellect,—the imagination; for though we are too much taught to be on our guard against imagination, I hold it, with Captain Roland, to be the divinest kind of reason we possess, and the one that leads us the least astray. In youth, indeed, it occasions errors, but they are not of a sordid or debasing nature. Newton says that one final effect of the comets is to recruit the seas and the planets by a condensation of the vapors and exhalations therein; and so even the erratic flashes of an imagination really healthful and vigorous deepen our knowledge and brighten our lights; they recruit our seas and our stars. Of such flashes my new friend was as innocent as the sternest matter-of-fact person could desire. Fancies he had in profusion, and very bad ones; but of imagination not a scintilla! His mind was one of those which live in a prison of logic, and cannot, or will not, see beyond the bars such a nature is at once positive and sceptical. This boy had thought proper to decide at once on the numberless complexities of the social world from his own harsh experience.

With him the whole system was a war and a cheat. If the universe were entirely composed of knaves, he would be sure to have made his way. Now this bias of mind, alike shrewd and unamiable, might be safe enough if accompanied by a lethargic temper; but it threatened to become terrible and dangerous in one who, in default of imagination, possessed abundance of passion: and this was the case with the young outcast. Passion, in him, comprehended many of the worst emotions which militate against human happiness. You could not contradict him but you raised quick choler; you could not speak of wealth, but the cheek paled with gnawing envy. The astonishing natural advantages of this poor boy his beauty, his readiness, the daring spirit that breathed around him like a fiery atmosphere—had raised his constitutional self-confidence into an arrogance that turned his very claims to admiration into prejudices against him. Irascible, envious, arrogant,—bad enough, but not the worst, for these salient angles were all varnished over with a cold, repellent cynicism,—his passions vented themselves in sneers. There seemed in him no moral susceptibility, and, what was more remarkable in a proud nature, little or nothing of the true point of honor. He had, to a morbid excess, that desire to rise which is vulgarly called "ambition," but no apparent wish for fame or esteem or the love of his species; only the hard wish to succeed, not shine, not serve,—succeed,

that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self-conceit, and enjoy the pleasures which the redundant nervous life in him seemed to crave. Such were the more patent attributes of a character that, ominous as it was, yet interested me, and yet appeared to me to be redeemable,—nay, to have in it the rude elements of a certain greatness. Ought we not to make something great out of a youth, under twenty, who has, in the highest degree, quickness to conceive and courage to execute? On the other hand, all faculties that can make greatness, contain those that can attain goodness. In the savage Scandinavian or the ruthless Frank lay the germs of a Sidney or a Bayard. What would the best of us be if he were suddenly placed at war with the whole world? And this fierce spirit was at war with the whole world,—a war self-sought, perhaps, but it was war not the less. You must surround the savage with peace, if you want the virtues of peace.

I cannot say that it was in a single interview and conference that I came to these convictions; but I am rather summing up the impressions which I received as I saw more of this person, whose destiny I presumed to take under my charge.

In going away, I said, "But at all events you have a name in your lodgings: whom am I to ask for when I call tomorrow?"

"Oh! you may know my name now," said he smiling, "it is Vivian,—Francis Vivian."

CHAPTER IV.

I remember one morning, when a boy, loitering by an old wall to watch the operations of a garden spider whose web seemed to be in great request. When I first stopped, she was engaged very quietly with a fly of the domestic species, whom she managed with ease and dignity. But just when she was most interested in that absorbing employment came a couple of May-flies, and then a gnat, and then a blue-bottle,—all at different angles of the web. Never was a poor spider so distracted by her good fortune! She evidently did not know which godsend to take first. The aboriginal victim being released, she slid half-way towards the May-flies; then one of her eight eyes caught sight of the blue-bottle, and she shot off in that direction,—when the hum of the gnat again diverted her; and in the middle of this perplexity, pounce came a young wasp in a violent passion! Then the spider evidently lost her presence of mind; she became clean demented; and after standing, stupid and stock-still, in the middle of her meshes for a minute or two, she ran off to her hole as fast as she could run, and left her guests to shift for themselves. I confess that I am somewhat in the dilemma of the attractive and amiable insect I have just described. I got on well

enough while I had only my domestic fly to see after. But now that there is something fluttering at every end of my net (and especially since the advent of that passionate young wasp, who is fuming and buzzing in the nearest corner), I am fairly at a loss which I should first grapple with; and alas! unlike the spider, I have no hole where I can hide myself, and let the web do the weaver's work. But I will imitate the spider as far as I can; and while the rest hum and struggle away their impatient, unnoticed hour, I will retreat into the inner labyrinth of my own life.

The illness of my uncle and my renewed acquaintance with Vivian had naturally sufficed to draw my thoughts from the rash and unpropitious love I had conceived for Fanny Trevanion. During the absence of the family from London (and they stayed some time longer than had been expected), I had leisure, however, to recall my father's touching history, and the moral it had so obviously preached to me; and I formed so many good resolutions that it was with an untrembling hand that I welcomed Miss Trevanion at last to London, and with a firm heart that I avoided, as much as possible, the fatal charm of her society. The slow convalescence of my uncle gave me a just excuse to discontinue our rides. What time Trevanion spared me, it was natural that I should spend with my family. I went to no balls nor parties; I even absented myself from Trevanion's periodical dinners. Miss Trevanion at first rallied me on my seclusion, with her usual lively malice. But I continued worthily to complete my martyrdom. I took care that no reproachful look at the gayety that wrung my soul should betray my secret. Then Fanny seemed either hurt or disdainful, and avoided altogether entering her father's study; all at once, she changed her tactics, and was seized with a strange desire for knowledge, which brought her into the room to look for a book, or ask a question, ten times a day. I was proof to all. But, to speak truth, I was profoundly wretched. Looking back now, I am dismayed at the remembrance of my own sufferings: my health became seriously affected; I dreaded alike the trial of the day and the anguish of the night. My only distractions were in my visits to Vivian and my escape to the dear circle of home. And that home was my safeguard and preservative in that crisis of my life; its atmosphere of unpretended honor and serene virtue strengthened all my resolutions; it braced me for my struggles against the strongest passion which youth admits, and counteracted the evil vapors of that air in which Vivian's envenomed spirit breathed and moved. Without the influence of such a home, if I had succeeded in the conduct that probity enjoined towards those in whose house I was a trusted guest, I do not think I could have resisted the contagion of that malign and morbid bitterness against fate and the world which love, thwarted by fortune, is too inclined of itself to conceive, and in the expression of which Vivian was not without the eloquence that belongs to earnestness, whether in truth or falsehood. But, somehow or other, I never left the little room that contained the grand suffering in the face of the veteran soldier, whose lip, often quivering with anguish, was never heard to murmur, and the tranquil wisdom which had succeeded my father's

early trials (trials like my own), and the loving smile on my mother's tender face, and the innocent childhood of Blanche (by which name the Elf had familiarized herself to us), whom I already loved as a sister,—without feeling that those four walls contained enough to sweeten the world, had it been filled to its capacious brim with gall and hyssop.

Trevanion had been more than satisfied with Vivian's performance, he had been struck with it; for though the corrections in the mere phraseology had been very limited, they went beyond verbal amendments,—they suggested such words as improved the thoughts; and besides that notable correction of an arithmetical error which Trevanion's mind was formed to over-appreciate, one or two brief annotations on the margin were boldly hazarded, prompting some stronger link in a chain of reasoning, or indicating the necessity for some further evidence in the assertion of a statement. And all this from the mere natural and naked logic of an acute mind, unaided by the smallest knowledge of the subject treated of! Trevanion threw quite enough work into Vivian's hands, and at a remuneration sufficiently liberal to realize my promise of an independence. And more than once he asked me to introduce to him my friend. But this I continued to elude,—Heaven knows, not from jealousy, but simply because I feared that Vivian's manner and way of talk would singularly displease one who detested presumption, and understood no eccentricities but his own.

Still, Vivian, whose industry was of a strong wing, but only for short flights, had not enough to employ more than a few hours of the day, and I dreaded lest he should, from very idleness, fall back into old habits and re-seek old friendships. His cynical candor allowed that both were sufficiently disreputable to justify grave apprehensions of such a result; accordingly, I contrived to find leisure in my evenings to lessen his ennui, by accompanying him in rambles through the gas-lit streets, or occasionally, for an hour or so, to one of the theatres.

Vivian's first care, on finding himself rich enough, had been bestowed on his person; and those two faculties of observation and imitation which minds so ready always eminently possess, had enabled him to achieve that graceful neatness of costume peculiar to the English gentleman. For the first few days of his metamorphosis traces indeed of a constitutional love of show or vulgar companionship were noticeable; but one by one they disappeared. First went a gaudy neckcloth, with collars turned down; then a pair of spurs vanished; and lastly a diabolical instrument that he called a cane—but which, by means of a running bullet, could serve as a bludgeon at one end, and concealed a dagger in the other—subsided into the ordinary walking-stick adapted to our peaceable metropolis. A similar change, though in a less degree, gradually took place in his manner and his conversation. He grew less abrupt in the one, and more calm, perhaps more cheerful, in the other. It was evident that he was not insensible to the elevated pleasure of providing for himself by praiseworthy exertion, of feeling for the first time that his intellect was of use to him creditably.

A new world, though still dim-seen through mist and fog-began to dawn upon him.

Such is the vanity of us poor mortals that my interest in Vivian was probably increased, and my aversion to much in him materially softened, by observing that I had gained a sort of ascendancy over his savage nature. When we had first suet by the roadside, and afterwards conversed in the churchyard, the ascendancy was certainly not on my side. But I now came from a larger sphere of society than that in which he had yet moved. I had seen and listened to the first men in England. What had then dazzled me only, now moved my pity. On the other hand, his active mind could not but observe the change in me; and whether from envy or a better feeling, he was willing to learn from me how to eclipse me and resume his earlier superiority,—not to be superior chafed him. Thus he listened to me with docility when I pointed out the books which connected themselves with the various subjects incidental to the miscellaneous matters on which he was employed. Though he had less of the literary turn of mind than any one equally clever I had ever met, and had read little, considering the quantity of thought he had acquired and the show he made of the few works with which he had voluntarily made himself familiar, he yet resolutely sat himself down to study; and though it was clearly against the grain, I augured the more favorably from tokens of a determination to do what was at the present irksome for a purpose in the future. Yet whether I should have approved the purpose had I thoroughly understood it, is another question. There were abysses, both in his past life and in his character, which I could not penetrate. There was in him both a reckless frankness and a vigilant reserve: his frankness was apparent in his talk on all matters immediately before us, in the utter absence of all effort to make himself seem better than he was. His reserve was equally shown in the ingenious evasion of every species of confidence that could admit me into such secrets of his life as he chose to conceal where he had been born, reared, and educated; how he came to be thrown on his own resources; how he had contrived, how he had subsisted, were all matters on which he had seemed to take an oath to Harpocrates, the god of silence. And yet he was full of anecdotes of what he had seen, of strange companions whom he never named, but with whom he had been thrown. And, to do him justice, I remarked that though his precocious experience seemed to have been gathered from the holes and corners, the sewers and drains of life, and though he seemed wholly without dislike to dishonesty, and to regard virtue or vice with as serene an indifference as some grand poet who views them both merely as ministrants to his art, yet he never betrayed any positive breach of honesty in himself. He could laugh over the story of some ingenious fraud that he had witnessed, and seem insensible to its turpitude; but he spoke of it in the tone of an approving witness, not of an actual accomplice. As we grew more intimate, he felt gradually, however, that pudor, or instinctive shame, which the contact with minds habituated to the distinctions between wrong and right unconsciously produces, and

such stories ceased. He never but once mentioned his family, and that was in the following odd and abrupt manner:—

”Ah!” cried he one day, stopping suddenly before a print-shop, ”how that reminds me of my dear, dear mother.”

”Which?” said I, eagerly, puzzled between an engraving of Raffaele’s ”Madonna” and another of ”The Brigand’s Wife.”

Vivian did not satisfy my curiosity, but drew me on in spite of my reluctance.

”You loved your mother, then?” said I, after a pause. ”Yes, as a whelp may a tigress.”

”That’s a strange comparison.”

”Or a bull-dog may the prize-fighter, his master! Do you like that better?”

”Not much; is it a comparison your mother would like?”

”Like? She is dead!” said he, rather falteringly.

I pressed his arm closer to mine.

”I understand you,” said he, with his cynic, repellent smile. ”But you do wrong to feel for my loss. I feel for it; but no one who cares for me should sympathize with my grief.”

”Why?”

”Because my mother was not what the world would call a good woman. I did not love her the less for that. And now let us change the subject.”

”Nay; since you have said so much, Vivian, let me coax you to say on. Is not your father living?”

”Is not the Monument standing?”

”I suppose so; what of that?”

”Why, it matters very little to either of us; and my question answers yours.”

I could not get on after this, and I never did get on a step further. I must own that if Vivian did not impart his confidence liberally, neither did he seek confidence inquisitively from me. He listened with interest if I spoke of Trevanion (for I told him frankly of my connection with that personage, though you may be sure that I said nothing of Fanny),

and of the brilliant world that my residence with one so distinguished opened to me. But if ever, in the fulness of my heart, I began to speak of my parents, of my home, he evinced either so impertinent an ennui or assumed so chilling a sneer that I usually hurried away from him, as well as the subject, in indignant disgust. Once especially, when I asked him to let me introduce him to my father,—a point on which I was really anxious, for I thought it impossible but that the devil within him would be softened by that contact,—he said, with his low, scornful laugh,—

”My dear Caxton, when I was a child I was so bored with ’Telemachus’ that, in order to endure it, I turned it into travesty.”

”Well?”

”Are you not afraid that the same wicked disposition might make a caricature of your Ulysses?”

I did not see Mr. Vivian for three days after that speech; and I should not have seen him then, only we met, by accident, under the Colonnade of the Opera-House. Vivian was leaning against one of the columns, and watching the long procession which swept to the only temple in vogue that Art has retained in the English Babel. Coaches and chariots blazoned with arms and coronets, cabriolets (the brougham had not then replaced them) of sober hue but exquisite appointment, with gigantic horses and pigmy ”tigers,” dashed on, and rolled off before him. Fair women and gay dresses, stars and ribbons, the rank and the beauty of the patrician world,—passed him by. And I could not resist the compassion with which this lonely, friendless, eager, discontented spirit inspired me, gazing on that gorgeous existence in which it fancied itself formed to shine, with the ardor of desire and the despair of exclusion. By one glimpse of that dark countenance, I read what was passing within the yetdarker heart. The emotion might not be amiable, nor the thoughts wise, yet were they unnatural? I had experienced something of them,—not at the sight of gay-dressed people, of wealth and idleness, pleasure and fashion, but when, at the doors of Parliament, men who have won noble names, and whose word had weight on the destinies of glorious England, brushed heedlessly by to their grand arena; or when, amidst the holiday crowd of ignoble pomp, I had heard the murmur of fame buzz and gather round some lordly laborer in art or letters: that contrast between glory so near and yet so far, and one’s own obscurity, of course I had felt it,—who has not? Alas! many a youth not fated to be a Themistocles will yet feel that the trophies of a Miltiades will not suffer him to sleep! So I went up to Vivian and laid my hand on his shoulder.

”Ah!” said he, more gently than usual, ”I am glad to see you, and to apologize,—I offended you the other day. But you would not get very gracious answers from souls in purgatory if you talked to them of the happiness of heaven. Never speak to me about homes and fathers!

Enough! I see you forgive me. Why are you not going to the opera? You can."

"And you too, if you so please. A ticket is shamefully dear, to be sure; still, if you are fond of music, it is a luxury you can afford."

"Oh! you flatter me if you fancy the prudence of saving withholds me. I did go the other night, but I shall not go again. Music!—when you go to the opera, is it for the music?"

"Only partially, I own; the lights, the scene, the pageant, attract me quite as much. But I do not think the opera a very profitable pleasure for either of us. For rich idle people, I dare say, it may be as innocent an amusement as any other, but I find it a sad enervator."

"And I just the reverse,—a horrible stimulant! Caxton, do you know that, ungracious as it will sound to you, I am growing impatient of this 'honorable independence'? What does it lead to? Board, clothes, and lodging,—can it ever bring me anything more?"

"At first, Vivian, you limited your aspirations to kid gloves and a cabriolet: it has brought the kid gloves already; by and by it will bring the cabriolet!"

"Our wishes grow by what they feed on. You live in the great world, you can have excitement if you please it; I want excitement, I want the world, I want room for my mind, man! Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly, and sympathize with you, my poor Vivian; but it will all come. Patience! as I preached to you while dawn rose so comfortless over the streets of London. You are not losing time. Fill your mind; read, study, fit yourself for ambition. Why wish to fly till you have got your wings? Live in books now; after all, they are splendid palaces, and open to us all, rich and poor."

"Books, books! Ah! you are the son of a book-man. It is not by books that men get on in the world, and enjoy life in the mean while."

"I don't know that; but, my good fellow, you want to do both,—get on in the world as fast as labor can, and enjoy life as pleasantly as indolence may. You want to live like the butterfly, and yet have all the honey of the bee; and, what is the very deuce of the whole, even as the butterfly, you ask every flower to grow up in a moment; and, as a bee, the whole hive must be stored in a quarter of an hour! Patience, patience, patience!"

Vivian sighed a fierce sigh. "I suppose," said he, after an unquiet pause, "that the vagrant and the outlaw are strong in me, for I long to run back to my old existence, which was all action, and therefore allowed no thought."

While he thus said, we had wandered round the Colonnade, and were in that narrow passage in which is situated the more private entrance to the opera: close by the doors of that entrance, two or three young men were lounging. As Vivian ceased, the voice of one of these loungers came laughingly to our ears.

"Oh!" it said, apparently in answer to some question, "I have a much quicker way to fortune than that: I mean to marry an heiress!"

Vivian started, and looked at the speaker. He was a very good-looking fellow. Vivian continued to look at him, and deliberately, from head to foot; he then turned away with a satisfied and thoughtful smile.

"Certainly," said I, gravely (construing the smile), "you are right there: you are even better-looking than that heiress-hunter!"

Vivian colored; but before he could answer, one of the loungers, as the group recovered from the gay laugh which their companion's easy coxcombry had excited, said,—

"Then, by the way, if you want an heiress, here comes one of the greatest in England; but instead of being a younger son, with three good lives between you and an Irish peerage, one ought to be an earl at least to aspire to Fanny Trevanion!"

The name thrilled through me, I felt myself tremble; and looking up, I saw Lady Ellinor and Miss Trevanion, as they hurried from their carriage towards the entrance of the opera. They both recognized me, and Fanny cried,—

"You here! How fortunate! You must see us into the box, even if you run away the moment after."

"But I am not dressed for the opera," said I, embarrassed.

"And why not?" asked Miss Trevanion; then, dropping her voice, she added, "why do you desert us so wilfully?" and, leaning her hand on my arm, I was drawn irresistibly into the lobby. The young loungers at the door made way for us, and eyed me, no doubt, with envy.

"Nay!" said I, affecting to laugh, as I saw Miss Trevanion waited for my reply. "You forget how little time I have for such amusements now, and my uncle—"

"Oh, but mamma and I have been to see your uncle to-day, and he is nearly well,—is he not, mamma? I cannot tell you how I like and admire him. He is just what I fancy a Douglas of the old day. But mamma is impatient. Well, you must dine with us to-morrow, promise! Not adieu, but au revoir," and Fanny glided to her mother's arm. Lady Ellinor,

always kind and courteous to me, had good-naturedly lingered till this dialogue, or rather monologue, was over.

On returning to the passage, I found Vivian walking to and fro; he had lighted his cigar, and was smoking energetically. "So this great heiress," said he, smiling, "who, as far as I could see,—under her hood,—seems no less fair than rich, is the daughter, I presume, of the Mr. Trevanion, whose effusions you so kindly submit to me. He is very rich, then! You never said so, yet I ought to have known it; but you see I know nothing of your beau monde,—not even that Miss Trevanion is one of the greatest heiresses in England."

"Yes, Mr. Trevanion is rich," said I, repressing a sigh,—very rich."

"And you are his secretary! My dear friend, you may well offer me patience, for a large stock of yours will, I hope, be superfluous to you."

"I don't understand you."

"Yet you heard that young gentleman, as well as myself and you are in the same house as the heiress."

"Vivian!"

"Well, what have I said so monstrous?"

"Pooh! since you refer to that young gentleman, you heard, too, what his companion told him, 'one ought to be an earl, at least, to aspire to Fanny Trevanion!'"

"Tut! as well say that one ought to be a millionaire to aspire to a million! Yet I believe those who make millions generally begin with pence."

"That belief should be a comfort and encouragement to you, Vivian. And now, good-night; I have much to do."

"Good-night, then," said Vivian, and we parted.

I made my way to Mr. Trevanion's house and to the study. There was a formidable arrear of business waiting for me, and I sat down to it at first resolutely; but by degrees I found my thoughts wandering from the eternal blue-books, and the pen slipped from my hand in the midst of an extract from a Report on Sierra Leone. My pulse beat loud and quick; I was in that state of nervous fever which only emotion can occasion. The sweet voice of Fanny rang in my ears; her eyes, as I had last met them, unusually gentle, almost beseeching, gazed upon me wherever I turned; and then, as in mockery, I heard again those words,—"One ought to be an earl at least to aspire to—" Oh! did I aspire? Was I vain fool so

frantic, household traitor so consummate? No, no! Then what did I under the same roof? Why stay to imbibe this sweet poison that was corroding the very springs of my life? At that self-question, which, had I been but a year or two older, I should have asked long before, a mortal terror seized me; the blood rushed from my heart and left me cold, icy cold. To leave the house, leave Fanny! Never again to see those eyes, never to hear that voice! Better die of the sweet poison than of the desolate exile! I rose, I opened the windows; I walked to and fro the room; I could decide nothing, think of nothing; all my mind was in an uproar. With a violent effort at self-mastery, I approached the table again. I resolved to force myself to my task, if it were only to re-collect my faculties and enable them to bear my own torture. I turned over the books impatiently, when lo! buried amongst them, what met my eye? Archly, yet reproachfully,—the face of Fanny herself! Her miniature was there. It had been, I knew, taken a few days before by a young artist whom Trevanion patronized. I suppose he had carried it into his study to examine it, and so left it there carelessly. The painter had seized her peculiar expression, her ineffable smile,—so charming, so malicious; even her favorite posture,—the small head turned over the rounded Hebe-like shoulder; the eye glancing up from under the hair. I know not what change in my madness came over me; but I sank on my knees, and, kissing the miniature again and again, burst into tears. Such tears! I did not hear the door open, I did not see the shadow steal ever the floor; a light hand rested on my shoulder, trembling as it rested—I started. Fanny herself was bending over me!

”What is the matter?” she asked tenderly. ”What has happened? Your uncle—your family—all well? Why are you weeping?”

I could not answer; but I kept my hands clasped over the miniature, that she might not see what they contained.

”Will you not answer? Am I not your friend,—almost your sister? Come, shall I call mamma?”

”Yes—yes; go—go.”

”No, I will not go yet. What have you there? What are you hiding?”

And innocently, and sister-like, those hands took mine; and so—and so—the picture became visible! There was a dead silence. I looked up through my tears. Fanny had recoiled some steps, and her cheek was very flushed, her eyes downcast. I felt as if I had committed a crime, as if dishonor clung to me; and yet I repressed—yes, thank Heaven! I repressed the cry that swelled from my heart and rushed to my lips: ”Pity me, for I love you!” I repressed it, and only a groan escaped me,—the wail of my lost happiness! Then, rising, I laid the miniature on the table, and said, in a voice that I believe was firm,—

”Miss Trevanion, you have been as kind as a sister to me, and therefore

I was bidding a brother's farewell to your likeness; it is so like you—this!”

”Farewell!” echoed Fanny, still not looking up.

”Farewell—sister! There, I have boldly said the word; for—for—” I hurried to the door, and, there turning, added, with what I meant to be a smile,—” for they say at home that I—I am not well; too much for me this; you know, mothers will be foolish; and—and—I am to speak to your father to-morrow; and-good-night! God bless you, Miss Trevanion!”