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THE CAXTONS

A FAMILY PICTURE

BY

EDWARD BULWER LYTTON (LORD LYTTON)

THE CAXTONS.

PART XIII,

CHAPTER I.

Saint Chrysostom, in his work on "The Priesthood," defends deceit, if for a good purpose, by many Scriptural examples; ends his first book by asserting that it is often necessary, and that much benefit

may arise from it; and begins his second book by saying that it ought not to be called "deceit," but "good management." (1)

"Good management," then, let me call the innocent arts by which I now sought to insinuate my project into favor and assent with my unsuspecting family. At first I began with Roland. I easily induced him to read some of the books, full of the charm of Australian life, which Trevanion had sent me; and so happily did those descriptions suit his own erratic tastes, and the free, half-savage man that lay rough and large within that soldierly nature, that he himself, as it were, seemed to suggest my own ardent desire, sighed, as the careworn Trevanion had done, that "he was not my age," and blew the flame that consumed me, with his own willing breath. So that when at last—wandering one day over the wild moors—I said, knowing his hatred of law and lawyers: "Alas, uncle, that nothing should be left for me but the Bar!" Captain Roland struck his cane into the peat and exclaimed, "Zounds, sir! the Bar and lying, with truth and a world fresh from God before you!"

"Your hand, uncle,—we understand each other. Now help me with those two quiet hearts at home!"

"Plague on my tongue! what have I done?" said the Captain, looking aghast. Then, after musing a little time, he turned his dark eye on me and growled out, "I suspect, young sir, you have been laying a trap for me; and I have fallen into it, like an old fool as I am."

"Oh, sir, I? you prefer the Bar!—"

"Rogue!"

"Or, indeed, I might perhaps get a clerkship in a merchant's office?"

"If you do, I will scratch you out of the pedigree!"

"Huzza, then, for Australasia!"

"Well, well, well!" said my uncle,—

"With a smile on his lip, and a tear in his eye,"—

"the old sea-king's blood will force its way,—a soldier or a rover, there is no other choice for you. We shall mourn and miss you; but who can chain the young eagles to the eyrie?"

I had a harder task with my father, who at first seemed to listen to me as if I had been talking of an excursion to the moon. But I threw in a dexterous dose of the old Greek Cleruchioe cited by Trevanion, which set him off full trot on his hobby, till after a short excursion to Euboea and the Chersonese, he was fairly lost amidst the Ionian colonies of Asia Minor. I then gradually and artfully decoyed him into his favorite science of Ethnology; and while he was speculating on the origin of the American savages, and considering the rival claims of Cimmerians, Israelites, and Scandinavians, I said quietly: "And you, sir, who think that all human improvement depends on the mixture of races; you, whose whole theory is an absolute sermon upon emigration, and the transplanting and interpolity of our species,—you, sir, should be the last man to chain your son, your elder son, to the soil, while your younger is the very missionary of rovers."

"Pisistratus," said my father, "you reason by synecdoche,—ornamental, but illogical;" and therewith, resolved to hear no more, my father rose and retreated into his study.

But his observation, now quickened, began from that day to follow my moods and humors; then he himself grew silent and thoughtful, and finally he took to long conferences with Roland. The result was that one evening in spring, as I lay listless amidst the weeds and fern that sprang up through the melancholy ruins, I felt a hand on my shoulder; and my father, seating himself beside me on a fragment of stone, said earnestly; "Pisistratus, let us talk. I had hoped better things from your study of Robert Hall."

"Nay, dear father, the medicine did me great good: I have not repined since, and I look steadfastly and cheerfully on life. But Robert Hall fulfilled his mission, and I would fulfil mine."

"Is there no mission in thy native land, O planeticose and exallotriote spirit?" (2) asked my father, with compassionate rebuke.

"Alas, yes! But what the impulse of genius is to the great, the instinct of vocation is to the mediocre. In every man there is a magnet; in that thing which the man can do best there is a loadstone."

"Papoe!" said my father, opening his eyes; "and are no loadstones to be found for you nearer than the Great Australasian Bight?"

"Ah,—sir, if you resort to irony I can say no more!" My father looked down on me tenderly as I hung my head, moody and abashed.

"Son," said he, "do you think that there is any real jest at my heart when the matter discussed is whether you are to put wide seas and long years between us?" I pressed nearer to his side, and made no answer.

"But I have noted you of late," continued my father, "and I have observed that your old studies are grown distasteful to you; and I have talked with Roland, and I see that your desire is deeper than a boy's mere whim. And then I have asked myself what prospect I can hold out at home to induce you to be contented here, and I see none; and therefore I should say to you, 'Go thy ways, and God shield thee,'—but, Pisistratus, your mother!"

"Ah, sir, that is indeed the question; and there indeed I shrink! But, after all, whatever I were,—whether toiling at the Bar or in some public office,—I should be still so much from home and her. And then you, sir, she loves you so entirely that—"

"No," interrupted my father; "you can advance no arguments like these to touch a mother's heart. There is but one argument that comes home there: is it for your good to leave her? If so, there will be no need of further words. But let us not decide that question hastily; let you and I be together the next two months. Bring your books and sit with me; when you want to go out, tap me on the shoulder, and say 'Come.' At the end of those two months I will say to you 'Go' or 'Stay.' And you will trust me; and if I say the last, you will submit?"

"Oh yes, sir, yes!"

(1) Hohler's translation.

(2) Words coined by Mr. Caxton from (Greek word), "disposed to roaming," and (Greek word), "to export, to alienate."

Chapter II.

This compact made, my father roused himself from all his studies, devoted his whole thoughts to me, sought with all his gentle wisdom to wean me imperceptibly from my one fixed, tyrannical idea, ranged through his wide pharmacy of books for such medicaments as might alter the system of my thoughts. And little thought he that his very tenderness and wisdom worked against him, for at each new instance of either my heart called aloud, "Is it not that thy tenderness may be repaid, and thy wisdom be known abroad, that I go from thee into the strange land, O my father?"

And the two months expired, and my father saw that the magnet had turned unalterably to the loadstone in the Great Australasian Bight; and he said to me, "Go, and comfort your mother. I have told her your wish, and authorized it by my consent, for I believe now that it is for your good."

I found my mother in the little room she had appropriated to herself next my father's study. And in that room there was a pathos which I have no words to express; for my mother's meek, gentle, womanly soul spoke there, so that it was the Home of Home. The care with which she had transplanted from the brick house, and lovingly arranged, all the humble memorials of old times dear to her affections,—the black silhouette of my father's profile cut in paper, in the full pomp of academics, cap and gown (how had he ever consented to sit for it?), framed and glazed in the place of honor over the little hearth; and boyish sketches of mine at the Hellenic Institute, first essays in sepia and Indian ink, to animate the walls, and bring her back, when she sat there in the twilight, musing alone, to sunny hours, when Sisty and the young mother threw daisies at each other; and covered with a great glass: shade, and dusted each day with her own hand, the flower-pot Sisty had bought with the proceeds of the domino-box on that memorable occasion on which he had learned "how bad deeds are repaired with good." There, in one corner, stood the little cottage piano which I remembered all my life,—old-fashioned, and with the jingling voice of approaching decrepitude, but still associated with such melodies as, after childhood, we hear never more! And in the modest hanging shelves, which looked so gay with ribbons and tassels and silken cords, my mother's own library, saying more to the heart than all the cold wise poets whose souls my father invoked in his grand Heraclea. The Bible over which, with eyes yet untaught to read, I had hung in vague awe and love as it lay open on my mother's lap, while her sweet voice, then only serious, was made the oracle of its truths. And my first lesson-books were there, all hoarded. And

bound in blue and gold, but elaborately papered up, Cowper's Poems,—a gift from my father in the days of courtship: sacred treasure; which not even I had the privilege to touch, and which my mother took out only in the great crosses and trials of conjugal life, whenever some words less kind than usual had dropped unawares from her scholar's absent lips. Ah! all these poor household gods, all seemed to look on me with mild anger; and from all came a voice to my soul, "Cruel, dost thou forsake us?" And amongst them sat my mother, desolate as Rachel, and weeping silently.

"Mother! mother!" I cried, falling on her neck, "forgive me,—it is past; I cannot leave you!"

CHAPTER III.

"No, no! it is for your good,—Austin says so. Go,—it is but the first shock."

Then to my mother I opened the sluices of that deep I had concealed from scholar and soldier. To her I poured all the wild, restless thoughts which wandered through the ruins of love destroyed; to her I confessed what to myself I had scarcely before avowed. And when the picture of that, the darker, side of my mind was shown, it was with a prouder face and less broken voice that I spoke of the manlier hopes and nobler aims that gleamed across the wrecks and the desert and showed me my escape.

"Did you not once say, mother, that you had felt it like a remorse that my father's genius passed so noiselessly away,—half accusing the happiness you gave him for the death of his ambition in the content of his mind? Did you not feel a new object in life when the ambition revived at last, and you thought you heard the applause of the world murmuring round your scholar's cell? Did you not share in the day dreams your brother conjured up, and exclaim, 'If my brother could be the means of raising him in the world!' And when you thought we had found the way to fame and fortune, did you not sob out from your full heart, 'And it is my brother who will pay back to his son all—all he gave up for me'?"

"I cannot bear this, Sisty! Cease, cease!"

"No; for do you not yet understand me? Will it not be better still if your son—yours—restore to your Austin all that he lost, no matter how? If through your son, mother, you do indeed make the world hear of your husband's genius, restore the spring to his mind, the glory to his pursuits; if you rebuild even that vaunted ancestral name which is glory to our poor sonless Roland; if your son can restore the decay of generations, and reconstruct from the dust the whole house into which you have entered, its meek, presiding angel,—all, mother! if this can be done, it will be your work; for unless you can share my ambition, unless you can dry those eyes, and smile in my face, and bid me go, with a cheerful voice, all my courage melts from my heart, and again I say, I cannot leave you!"

Then my mother folded her arms round me, and we both wept, and could not speak; but we were both happy.

CHAPTER IV.

Now the worst was over, and my mother was the most heroic of us all. So I began to prepare myself in good earnest, and I followed Trevanion's instructions with a perseverance which I could never, at that young day, have thrown into the dead life of books. I was in a good school, amongst our Cumberland sheep-walks, to learn those simple elements of rural art which belong to the pastoral state. Mr. Sidney, in his admirable "Australian Hand-Book," recommends young gentlemen who think of becoming settlers in the Bush to bivouac for three months on Salisbury Plain. That book was not then written, or I might have taken the advice; meanwhile I think, with due respect to such authority, that I went through a preparatory training quite as useful in seasoning the future emigrant. I associated readily with the kindly peasants and craftsmen, who became my teachers. With what pride I presented my father with a desk, and my mother with a work-box, fashioned by my own hands! I made Bolt a lock for his plate-chest, and (that last was my magnum opus, my great masterpiece) I repaired and absolutely set going an old turret-clock in the tower that had stood at 2 p.m. since the memory of man. I loved to think, each time the hour sounded, that those who heard its deep chime would remember me. But the flocks were

my main care. The sheep that I tended and helped to shear, and the lamb that I hooked out of the great marsh, and the three venerable ewes that I nursed through a mysterious sort of murrain which puzzled all the neighborhood,—are they not written in thy loving chronicles, O House of Caxton?

And now, since much of the success of my experiment must depend on the friendly terms I could establish with my intended partner, I wrote to Trevanion, begging him to get the young gentleman who was to join me, and whose capital I was to administer, to come and visit us. Trevanion complied; and there arrived a tall fellow, somewhat more than six feet high, answering to the name of Guy Bolding, in a cut-away sporting-coat, with a dog whistle tied to the button-hole, drab shorts and gaiters, and a waistcoat with all manner of strange furtive pockets. Guy Bolding had lived a year and a half at Oxford as a "fast man,"—so "fast" had he lived that there was scarcely a tradesman at Oxford into whose books he had not contrived to run.

His father was compelled to withdraw him from the University, at which he had already had the honor of being plucked for "the little-go;" and the young gentleman, on being asked for what profession he was fit, had replied, with conscious pride, that he could "tool a coach!" In despair, the sire, who owed his living to Trevanion, had asked the states man's advice; and the advice had fixed me with a partner in expatriation.

My first feeling in greeting the "fast" man was certainly that of deep disappointment and strong repugnance. But I was determined not to be too fastidious; and, having a lucky knack of suiting myself pretty well to all tempers (without which a man had better not think of loadstones in the Great Australasian Bight), I contrived before the first week was out to establish so many points of connection between us that we became the best friends in the world. Indeed, it would have been my fault if we had not; for Guy Bolding, with all his faults, was one of those excellent creatures who are nobody's enemies but their own. His good-humor was inexhaustible. Not a hardship or privation came amiss to him. He had a phrase, "Such fun!" that always rushed laughingly to his lips when another man would have cursed and groaned. If we lost our way in the great trackless moors, missed our dinner, and were half-famished, Guy rubbed hands that would have felled an ox, and chuckled out, "Such fun!" If we stuck in a bog, if we were caught in a thunder-storm, if we were pitched head-over-heels by the wild colts we undertook to break in, Guy Bolding's sole elegy was "Such fun!" That grand shibboleth of philosophy only forsook him at the sight of an open book. I don't think that at that time he could have found "fun" even in Don Quixote. This hilarious temperament had no insensibility; a kinder heart never beat,— but, to be sure, it beat to a strange, restless, tarantula sort of measure, which kept it in a perpetual dance. It made him one of those officiously good fellows who are never quiet themselves, and never let any one else be quiet if they can help it. But Guy's great fault, in this prudent world, was his absolute incontinence of money. If you had turned a Euphrates of gold into his pockets at morning, it would have been as dry as the Great Sahara by twelve at noon. What he did with the money was a mystery as much to himself as to every one else. His father said, in a letter to me, that "he had seen him shying at sparrows with half-crowns!" That such a young man could come to no good in England, seemed perfectly clear.

Still, it is recorded of many great men, who did not end their days in a workhouse, that they were equally non-retentive of money. Schiller, when he had nothing else to give away, gave the clothes from his back, and Goldsmith the blankets from his bed. Tender hands found it necessary to pick Beethoven's pockets at home before he walked out. Great heroes, who have made no scruple of robbing the whole world, have been just as lavish as poor poets and musicians. Alexander, in parcelling out his spoils, left himself "hope"! And as for Julius Caesar, he was two millions in debt when he shied his last half-crown at the sparrows in Gaul. Encouraged by these illustrious examples, I had hopes of Guy Bolding; and the more as he was so aware of his own infirmity that he was perfectly contented with the arrangement which made me treasurer of his capital, and even besought me, on no account, let him beg ever so hard, to permit his own money to come in his own way. In fact, I contrived to gain a great ascendancy over his simple, generous, thoughtless nature; and by artful appeals to his affections,— to all he owed to his father for many bootless sacrifices, and to the duty of providing a little dower for his infant sister, whose meditated portion had half gone to pay his college debts,—I at last succeeded in fixing into his mind an object to save for.

Three other companions did I select for our Cleruchia. The first was the son of our old shepherd, who had lately married, but was not yet encumbered with children,—a good shepherd, and an intelligent, steady fellow. The second was a very different character. He had been the dread of the whole squirearchy. A more bold and dexterous poacher did not exist. Now my acquaintance with this latter person, named Will Peterson, and more popularly "Will o' the Wisp," had commenced thus: Bolt had managed to rear, in a small copse about a mile from the house, —and which was the only bit of ground in my uncle's domains that might by courtesy be called "a wood,"—a young colony of pheasants, that he dignified by the title of a "preserve." This colony was audaciously despoiled and grievously depopulated, in spite of two watchers, who, with Bolt, guarded for seven nights successively the

slumbers of the infant settlement. So insolent was the assault that bang, bang! went the felonious gun,—behind, before, within but a few yards of the sentinels,—and the gunner was off and the prey seized, before they could rush to the spot. The boldness and skill of the enemy soon proclaimed him, to the experienced watchers, to be Will o' the Wisp; and so great was their dread of this fellow's strength and courage, and so complete their despair of being a match for his swiftness and cunning, that after the seventh night the watchers refused to go out any longer; and poor Bolt himself was confined to his bed by an attack of what a doctor would have called rheumatism, and a moralist, rage. My indignation and sympathy were greatly excited by this mortifying failure, and my interest romantically aroused by the anecdotes I had heard of Will o' the Wisp; accordingly, armed with a thick bludgeon, I stole out at night, and took my way to the copse. The leaves were not off the trees, and how the poacher contrived to see his victims I know not; but five shots did he fire, and not in vain, without allowing me to catch a glimpse of him. I then retreated to the outskirts of the copse, and waited patiently by an angle which commanded two sides of the wood. Just as the dawn began to peep, I saw my roan emerge within twenty yards of me. I held my breath, suffered him to get a few steps from the wood, crept on so as to intercept his retreat, and then pounce—such a bound! My hand was on his shoulder,—prrr, prrr; no eel was ever more lubricate. He slid from me like a thing immaterial, and was off over the moors with a swiftness which might well have baffled any clodhopper,—a race whose calves are generally absorbed in the soles of their hobnail shoes. But the Hellenic Institute, with its classical gymnasias, had trained its pupils in all bodily exercises; and though the Will o' the Wisp was swift for a clodhopper, he was no match at running for any youth who has spent his boyhood in the discipline of cricket, prisoner's bar, and hunt-the-hare. I reached him at length, and brought him to bay.

"Stand back!" said he, panting, and taking aim with his gun: "it is loaded."

"Yes," said I; "but though you're a brave poacher, you dare not fire at your fellow-man. Give up the gun this instant."

My address took him by surprise; he did not fire. I struck up the barrel, and closed on him. We grappled pretty tightly, and in the wrestle the gun went off. The man loosened his hold. "Lord ha' mercy! I have not hurt you?" he said falteringly.

"My good fellow,—no," said I; "and now let us throw aside gun and bludgeon, and fight it out like Englishmen, or else let us sit down and talk it over like friends."

The Will o' the Wisp scratched its head and laughed.

"Well, you're a queer one!" quoth it. And the poacher dropped the gun and sat down.

We did talk it over, and I obtained Peterson's promise to respect the preserve henceforth; and we thereon grew so cordial that he walked home with me, and even presented me, shyly and apologetically, with the five pheasants he had shot. From that time I sought him out. He was a young fellow not four and twenty, who had taken to poaching from the wild sport of the thing, and from some confused notions that he had a license from Nature to poach. I soon found out that he was meant for better things than to spend six months of the twelve in prison, and finish his life on the gallows after killing a gamekeeper. That seemed to me his most probable destiny in the Old World, so I talked him into a burning desire for the New one; and a most valuable aid in the Bush he proved too.

My third selection was in a personage who could bring little physical strength to help us, but who had more mind (though with a wrong twist in it) than both the others put together.

A worthy couple in the village had a son, who, being slight and puny, compared to the Cumberland breed, was shouldered out of the market of agricultural labor, and went off, yet a boy, to a manufacturing town. Now about the age of thirty, this mechanic, disabled for his work by a long illness, came home to recover; and in a short time we heard of nothing but the pestilential doctrines with which he was either shocking or infecting our primitive villagers. According to report, Corcyra itself never engendered a democrat more awful. The poor man was really very ill, and his parents very poor; but his unfortunate doctrines dried up all the streams of charity that usually flowed through our kindly hamlet. The clergyman (an excellent man, but of the old school) walked by the house as if it were tabooed. The apothecary said, "Miles Square ought to have wine;" but he did not send him any. The farmers held his name in execration, for he had incited all their laborers to strike for another shilling a week. And but for the old Tower, Miles Square would soon have found his way to the only republic in which he could obtain that democratic fraternization for which he sighed; the grave being, I suspect, the sole commonwealth which attains that dead flat of social equality that life in its every principle so heartily abhors.

My uncle went to see Miles Square, and came back the color of purple. Miles Square had preached him a long sermon on the unholiness of war. "Even in defence of your king and country!" had roared

the Captain; and Miles Square had replied with a remark upon kings in general that the Captain could not have repeated without expecting to see the old Tower fall about his ears, and with an observation about the country in particular, to the effect that "the country would be much better off if it were conquered!" On hearing the report of these loyal and patriotic replies, my father said "Papoe!" and roused out of his usual philosophical indifference, went himself to visit Miles Square. My father returned as pale as my uncle had been purple. "And to think," said he mournfully, "that in the town whence this man comes there are, he tells me, ten thousand other of God's creatures who speed the work of civilization while execrating its laws!"

But neither father nor uncle made any opposition when, with a basket laden with wine and arrowroot, and a neat little Bible bound in brown, my mother took her way to the excommunicated cottage. Her visit was as signal a failure as those that preceded it. Miles Square refused the basket,—"he was not going to accept alms and eat the bread of charity;" and on my mother meekly suggesting that "if Mr. Miles Square would condescend to look into the Bible, he would see that even charity was no sin in giver or recipient," Mr. Miles Square had undertaken to prove "that, according to the Bible, he had as much a right to my mother's property as she had; that all things should be in common; and when all things were in common, what became of charity? No, he could not eat my uncle's arrowroot and drink his wine while my uncle was improperly withholding from him and his fellow-creatures so many unprofitable acres: the land belonged to the people." It was now the turn of Pisistratus to go. He went once, and he went often. Miles Square and Pisistratus wrangled and argued, argued and wrangled, and ended by taking a fancy to each other; for this poor Miles Square was not half so bad as his doctrines. His errors arose from intense sympathy with the sufferings he had witnessed amidst the misery which accompanies the reign of millocratism, and from the vague aspirations of a half-taught, impassioned, earnest nature. By degrees I persuaded him to drink the wine and eat the arrowroot en attendant that millennium which was to restore the land to the people. And then my mother came again and softened his heart, and for the first time in his life let into its cold crotchets the warm light of human gratitude. I lent him some books, amongst others a few volumes on Australia. A passage in one of the latter, in which it was said "that an intelligent mechanic usually made his way in the colony, even as a shepherd, better than a dull agricultural laborer," caught hold of his fancy and seduced his aspirations into a healthful direction. Finally, as he recovered, he entreated me to let him accompany me. And as I may not have to return to Miles Square, I think it right here to state that he did go with me to Australia, and did succeed, first as a shepherd, next as a superintendent, and finally, on saving money, as a landowner; and that in spite of his opinions of the unholiness of war, he was no sooner in possession of a comfortable log homestead than he defended it with uncommon gallantry against an attack of the aborigines, whose right to the soil was, to say the least of it, as good as his claim to my uncle's acres; that he commemorated his subsequent acquisition of a fresh allotment, with the stock on it, by a little pamphlet, published at Sydney, on the "Sanctity of the Rights of Property;" and that when I left the colony, having been much pestered by two refractory "helps" that he had added to his establishment, he had just distinguished himself by a very anti-levelling lecture upon the duties of servants to their employers. What would the Old World have done for this man?

CHAPTER V.

I had not been in haste to conclude my arrangements, for, independently of my wish to render myself acquainted with the small useful crafts that might be necessary to me in a life that makes the individual man a state in himself, I naturally desired to habituate my kindred to the idea of our separation, and to plan and provide for them all such substitutes or distractions, in compensation for my loss, as my fertile imagination could suggest. At first, for the sake of Blanche, Roland, and my mother, I talked the Captain into reluctant sanction of his sister-in-law's proposal to unite their incomes and share alike, without considering which party brought the larger proportion into the firm. I represented to him that unless he made that sacrifice of his pride, my mother would be wholly without those little notable uses and objects, those small household pleasures, so dear to woman; that all society in the neighborhood would be impossible, and that my mother's time would hang so heavily on her hands that her only resource would be to muse on the absent one and fret. Nay, if he persisted in so false a pride, I told him, fairly, that I should urge my father to leave the Tower. These representations succeeded; and hospitality had commenced in the old hall, and a knot of gossips had centred round my mother, groups of laughing children had relaxed the still brow of Blanche, and the Captain himself was a more cheerful and social man. My next point was to engage my father in the completion of the Great Book. "Ah! sir," said I, "give me an inducement to toil,—a reward for my industry. Let me think, in each tempting pleasure, each costly vice,—No, no; I will save for the Great Book! And the memory of the father shall

still keep the son from error. Ah, look you, sir! Mr. Trevanion offered me the loan of L1,500 necessary to commence with; but you generously and at once said 'No; you must not begin life under the load of debt.' And I knew you were right and yielded,—yielded the more gratefully that I could not but forfeit something of the just pride of manhood in incurring such an obligation to the father of—Miss Trevanion. Therefore I have taken that sum from you,—a sum that would almost have sufficed to establish your younger and worthier child in the world forever. To that child let me repay it, otherwise I will not take it. Let me hold it as a trust for the Great Book; and promise me that the Great Book shall be ready when your wanderer returns and accounts for the missing talent."

And my father pished a little, and rubbed off the dew that had gathered on his spectacles. But I would not leave him in peace till he had given me his word that the Great Book should go on a *pas de great*,—nay, till I had seen him sit down to it with good heart, and the wheel went round again in the quiet mechanism of that gentle life.

Finally, and as the culminating acme of my diplomacy, I effected the purchase of the neighboring apothecary's practice and good-will for Squills, upon terms which he willingly subscribed to; for the poor man had pined at the loss of his favorite patients,—though Heaven knows they did not add much to his income. And as for my father, there was no man who diverted him more than Squills, though he accused him of being a materialist, and set his whole spiritual pack of sages to worry and bark at him, from Plato and Zeno to Reid and Abraham Tucker.

Thus, although I have very loosely intimated the flight of time, more than a whole year elapsed from the date of our settlement at the Tower and that fixed for my departure.

In the mean while, despite the rarity amongst us of that phenomenon, a newspaper, we were not so utterly cut off from the sounds of the far-booming world beyond, but what the intelligence of a change in the Administration and the appointment of Mr. Trevanion to one of the great offices of state reached our ears. I had kept up no correspondence with Trevanion subsequent to the letter that occasioned Guy Belding's visit; I wrote now to congratulate him: his reply was short and hurried.

An intelligence that startled me more, and more deeply moved my heart, was conveyed to me, some three months or so before my departure, by Trevanion's steward. The ill health of Lord Castleton had deferred his marriage, intended originally to be celebrated as soon as he arrived of age. He left the University with the honors of "a double-first class;" and his constitution appeared to rally from the effects of studies more severe to him than they might have been to a man of quicker and more brilliant capacities, when a feverish cold, caught at a county meeting in which his first public appearance was so creditable as fully to justify the warmest hopes of his party, produced inflammation of the lungs and ended fatally. The startling contrast forced on my mind,— here, sudden death and cold clay; there, youth in its first flower, princely rank, boundless wealth, the sanguine expectation of an illustrious career, and the prospect of that happiness which smiled from the eyes of Fanny,—that contrast impressed me with a strange awe: death seems so near to us when it strikes those whom life most flatters and caresses. Whence is that curious sympathy that we all have with the possessors of worldly greatness when the hour-glass is shaken and the scythe descends? If the famous meeting between Diogenes and Alexander had taken place, not before, but after the achievements which gave to Alexander the name of Great, the Cynic would not, perhaps, have envied the hero his pleasures nor his splendors,—neither the charms of Statira nor the tiara of the Mede; but if, the day after, a cry had gone forth, "Alexander the Great is dead!" verily I believe that Diogenes would have coiled himself up in his tub and felt that with the shadow of the stately hero something of glory and of warmth had gone from that sun which it should darken never more. In the nature of man, the humblest or the hardest, there is a something that lives in all of the Beautiful or the Fortunate, which hope and desire have appropriated, even in the vanities of a childish dream.

CHAPTER VI.

"Why are you here all alone, cousin? How cold and still it is amongst the graves!"

"Sit down beside me, Blanche: it is not colder in the churchyard than on the village green."

And Blanche sat down beside me, nestled close to me, and leaned her head upon my shoulder. We were both long silent. It was an evening in the early spring, clear and serene; the roseate streaks were fading gradually from the dark gray of long, narrow, fantastic clouds. Tall, leafless poplars, that stood

in orderly level line on the lowland between the churchyard and the hill, with its crown of ruins, left their sharp summits distinct against the sky. But the shadows coiled dull and heavy round the evergreens that skirted the churchyard, so that their outline was vague and confused; and there was a depth in that lonely stillness, broken only when the thrush flew out from the lower bushes, and the thick laurel-leaves stirred reluctantly, and again were rigid in repose. There is a certain melancholy in the evenings of early spring which is among those influences of Nature the most universally recognized, the most difficult to explain. The silent stir of reviving life, which does not yet betray signs in the bud and blossom, only in a softer clearness in the air, a more lingering pause in the slowly lengthening day; a more delicate freshness and balm in the twilight atmosphere; a more lively, yet still unquiet, note from the birds, settling down into their Coverts; the vague sense under all that hush, which still outwardly wears the bleak sterility of winter, of the busy change, hourly, modestly, at work, renewing the youth of the world, re-clothing with vigorous bloom the skeletons of things,—all these messages from the heart of Nature to the heart of Man may well affect and move us. But why with melancholy? No thought on our part connects and construes the low, gentle voices. It is not thought that replies and reasons, it is feeling that hears and dreams. Examine not, O child of man!—examine not that mysterious melancholy with the hard eyes of thy reason; thou canst not impale it on the spikes of thy thorny logic, nor describe its enchanted circle by problems conned from thy schools. Borderer thyself of two worlds,—the Dead and the Living,—give thine ear to the tones, bow thy soul to the shadows, that steal, in the Season of Change, from the dim Border Land.

Blanche (in a whisper).—"What are you thinking of? Speak, pray!"

Pisistratus.—"I was not thinking, Blanche,—or, if I were, the thought is gone at the mere effort to seize or detain it."

Blanche (after a pause).—"I know what you mean. It is the same with me often,—so often when I am sitting by my self, quite still. It is just like the story Primmins was telling us the other evening, 'how there was a woman in her village who saw things and people in a piece of crystal not bigger than my hand;(1) they passed along as large as life, but they were only pictures in the crystal.' Since I heard the story, when aunt asks me what I am thinking of, I long to say, 'I'm not thinking, I'm seeing pictures in the crystal!'"

Pisistratus.—"Tell my father that,—it will please him; there is more philosophy in it than you are aware of, Blanche. There are wise men who have thought the whole world, its 'pride, pomp, and circumstance,' only a phantom image,—a picture in the crystal."

Blanche.—"And I shall see you,—see us both, as we are sitting here; and that star which has just risen yonder,—see it all in my crystal, when you are gone!—gone, cousin!" (And Blanche's head drooped.)

There was something so quiet and deep in the tenderness of this poor motherless child that it did not affect one superficially, like a child's loud momentary affection, in which we know that the first toy will replace us. I kissed my little cousin's pale face and said, "And I too, Blanche, have my crystal; and when I consult it, I shall be very angry if I see you sad and fretting, or seated alone. For you must know, Blanche, that that is all selfishness. God made us, not to indulge only in crystal pictures, weave idle fancies, pine alone, and mourn over what we cannot help, but to be alert and active,—givers of happiness. Now, Blanche, see what a trust I am going to bequeath you. You are to supply my place to all whom I leave; you are to bring sunshine wherever you glide with that shy, soft step,—whether to your father when you see his brows knit and his arms crossed (that, indeed, you always do), or to mine when the volume drops from his hand, when he walks to and fro the room, restless, and murmuring to himself, then you are to steal up to him, put your hand in his, lead him back to his books, and whisper, 'What will Sisty say if his younger brother, the Great Book, is not grown up when he comes back?' And my poor mother, Blanche! Ah, how can I counsel you there,—how tell you where to find comfort for her? Only, Blanche, steal into her heart and be her daughter. And to fulfil this threefold trust, you must not content yourself with seeing pictures in the crystal,—do you understand me?"

"Oh, yes!" said Blanche, raising her eyes, while the tears rolled from them, and folding her arms resolutely on her breast.

"And so," said I, "as we two, sitting in this quiet burial-ground, take new heart for the duties and cares of life, so see, Blanche, how the stars come out, one by one, to smile upon us; for they, too, glorious orbs as they are, perform their appointed tasks. Things seem to approximate to God in proportion to their vitality and movement. Of all things, least inert and sullen should be the soul of man. How the grass grows up over the very graves,—quickly it grows and greenly; but neither so quick nor so green, my Blanche, as hope and comfort from human sorrows."

(1) In primitive villages in the West of England the belief that the absent may be seen in a piece of crystal is, or was not many years ago, by no means an uncommon superstition. I have seen more than

one of these magic mirrors, which Spenser, by the way, has beautifully described. They are about the size and shape of a swan's egg. It is not every one, however, who can be a crystal-seer; like second-sight, it is a special gift. N. B.—Since the above note (appended to the first edition of this work) was written, crystals and crystal-seers have become very familiar to those who interest themselves in speculations upon the disputed phenomena ascribed to Mesmerical Clairvoyance.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CAXTONS: A FAMILY PICTURE — VOLUME 13

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