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Ernest Maltravers

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ruddy cheek. Sleep on youthful mariner, and dream on. Let fancy’s magical pinions bear thee to thy father’s land—let thy fond sister press thee to her bosom, and a mother’s warm tear bedew thy cheek—for the last time bid them farewell. Thou shalt never see them more. Perhaps thou art dreaming of future prospects—high hopes, I would fain undeceive thee; but, alas, farewell.

A figure was seen stealing along in the dark, where the moon was obscured by the sails and the bulwarks. Suddenly a man emerged, and approached the hatchway. He looked around, and then gazing down below, his eyes rested upon the boy sleeping on the deck. Taking one of the cannon balls from the rack which surrounded the hatchway, he held it over the boy’s head, and let it drop, then rushed away. Suddenly a shriek of horror echoed from the gundeck, and in a short time the ship was filled with the screams of murder.

* * * * * * * * * It was a beautiful summer’s day, and scarcely a cloud was seen in the sky, when the boatswain’s shrill pipe sounded, and the cry of “All hands witness punishment,” was heard on board of the frigate. The men were all dressed in their muster ing clothes, and ordered on deck. To one extremity of the foreyard was attached a block, through which was rove a rope, at one end of which was a noose; at the other a very heavy weight, stopped with a cord, which passed immediately before the mouth of one of the forward guns. A prisoner was slowly led to the forecastle. The solemn sentence was pronounced. At the signal given, the roar of the gun was heard, and ere the sound died away upon the distant waters, or the blue smoke curled above the masts, a spirit stood in the presence of its God.

Ernest Maltravers.

Months since we read Ernest Maltravers. We read it, not as the cold, calculating moralist would have us read such works, with a treble shield of crafty suspicion thrown before our hearts; but we read it as we contend, however erroneously, such a book should be read; with a mind ready to believe all it contained was true; with a heart prepared to sympathize with our favorites, and a disposition to place ourselves in their situations—to identify ourselves with them.

There is a vast deal of pleasure to be derived from the perusal of such a work; and, for our part, we envy not the man who has not a heart that will linger with pleasure over creations as bright and beautiful as those there shadowed forth. Such an one may sneer at this, and talk with disdain of sentimental novel readers; but if it be womanish and weak to love such things, we must plead guilty still, for we have loved the heroes and heroines of Bulwer. About some of them, there is something so pure and so noble
Ernest Maltravers.

so like what humanity ought to be, so unlike what many of the specimens we see around us daily are, that we cannot but love them. We defy any man—any man, we mean, who makes any pretensions to having a soul—to read the story of the blind flower girl in the "Last Days of Pompeii," and not feel his heart softened, aye, and bettered too. Bulwer has been charged with immorality, and his works have been decried on that account. In the volume before us we have an example of this. Maltravers, a young man of genius, with a soul all alive to the beautiful, possessing a heart that beat high with noble impulses and aspirations, loses his way in the midst of a storm. After wandering about till fully drenched, and well tired, he finds his way to the hut of a desperate character, Darvel. Here he meets Alice, the beautiful daughter of a miserable parent. With a form light and graceful, and a face extremely lovely, it was her misfortune to be so completely uneducated that she seemed more than half idiotic. In some instances, however, she exhibited not only quickness of perception, but even great depth of feeling. She was destined to exert a great and controlling influence over the future destiny of our hero. After having rescued him from the fate intended by her wretched father and his fellow assassin, she declares her determination to remain with him. Poor Ernest was greatly troubled to know what to do with her. But, filled with all the wild and romantic notions belonging to the German student of that day, he at length formed the singular determination of educating the young and beautiful being, of whom he had so strangely become the guardian and protector. Now Bulwer must have been sufficiently well versed in the mysteries of the human heart to know that, under circumstances such as those in which this interesting pair were placed, love would be the first plant to germinate. But then he ought to have remembered that, however natural such a denouement might have been, it was not exactly in accordance with our notions of morality. He ought to have known, too, that young men and women are apt to be more injured by the perusal of one short chapter of this kind, than profited by a dozen extended homilies. But we must leave Alice for a while, as Maltravers was compelled to leave her; and we have no time to follow our hero in his long search after her. Suffice it that they were separated, not soon to meet again. Years passed away, and Ernest became an author, a notable one, too. The romantic and adventurous spirit of youth was calmed down into something more than staid sobriety. Melancholy seized upon him, and with his fame spreading wider and wider as day succeeded day, he became still more discontented. Alice gone, he seemed to have nothing to live for. Just whilst he was in this state of mind, he received a letter from some unknown person. The lines were evidently traced by some fair one: the spirit of woman breathed through the whole, and it was evidently the production of one endowed with talents of no ordinary cast. The traces of genius were there—of genius, ever more attractive when it glances from the eye of some lovely woman. Before we
read this book we had formed our idea of what a perfectly lovely woman ought to be; but we had never seen such an one; never even read of such an one, until, like the realization of some glorious vision, Florence Lascelles, the bright and gifted beauty, stood revealed before us. Proud as Juno, with a heart prepared for almost any event, apparently almost destitute of sensibility, there yet welled up in her heart a tide of womanly feeling, pure and strong. She had read the works of Maltravers, and, with a fancy almost morbid, she had dreamed of him long. In imagination she was often by his side, cheering him on up the rugged steep of fame, rejoicing with him when the world huzza'd, and consoling him when its sneers or coldness galled. From such thoughts grew the determination to communicate with him by means of letters. One after another was sent, but she expected and received no reply. Long after she had met Maltravers did she continue this singular correspondence. Crowds of admirers flocked around her, and proffered lovers were cheap with her; but the only being for whom she cared remained to all appearance unmoved. One day, however, when by his side, a letter dropped from her bosom; stooping to pick it up he immediately recognized the hand-writing of his unknown mentor. The secret was now disclosed. Florence loved him—had loved him long—had loved him before they had ever met. It was but natural that, under such circumstances, he should mistake the feelings that stirred his breast. It was not strange that, acting from the impulse of the moment, he should pour forth the hurried words of passion. But when, in cooler mood, he examined more carefully his feelings, his heart misgave him. He felt not now the same joyous sensations that had warmed his breast when Alice stood similarly related to him. He was sometimes tempted to take back the vows he conceived were rashly made. But Florence saved him this task. A letter, forged by the selfish Ferrers, and delivered by the half-crazed Cesarini, filled her mind with suspicion. They met, quarreled, and separated to repent only when it was too late. Stung to the quick by her unjust and apparently unfounded accusations, Maltravers immediately left London. For some weeks he remained secluded at his country seat, restless, depressed, and unhappy. Too proud to seek a reconciliation after what had passed, and too much wounded soon to find relief, he suddenly determined to go abroad again. Arriving in London, he learned that Florence was extremely ill, but he resolved not to see her. At length, however, at her solicitation, he is induced to call. He arrives at the house. The muffled knocker, the noiseless tread of servants gliding silently from room to room, the half-neglected appearance of each apartment in that lordly mansion, tell a tale of sorrow. With a trembling heart he is ushered into the chamber of the invalid. Unseen by her he gazes long. There, propped on a couch, reclined the wreck of that form that, a few short weeks since, had moved by his side all graceful and glowing and beautiful. That large, clear blue eye, that had so often grown brighter beneath his gaze, was now dim and deep sunk in its socket. Those lips,
that had breathed to him their first vow of love, were now thin and compressed, as with pain. It was too much for Maltravers, and a bursting sob first revealed his presence. But we must not attempt to describe the interview: read it for yourself. We do not intend to enter upon a defence of Bulwer; but we defy any one who is not himself full of obscenity, to find anything calculated to minister to the appetite of the sensualist in the volume before us. With us it has always been a favorite. The plot is fine, and, what to young Misses is especially important, it ends well. After years of trouble, Maltravers finds Alice, and the meeting is a happy one. All the virtuous are rewarded, and the vicious punished.


The revolution in the French capital, of February, 1848, gave a brilliant, though perhaps only temporary, celebrity to Lamartine, and that éclat has created quite a demand for his productions. Some years since he gave to the world a book of poems, and a History of the Girondists followed not long after. His latest effort is embodied in the work quoted at the head of this article—a work to which we should be pleased to apply the rules of criticism fairly, and with what ability we might command, did room permit. But our space will barely suffice for a somewhat enlarged "table of contents."

We have heard of "an opinion as is an opinion," but it was reserved for Lamartine to denominate a book Raphael which is descriptive of an entirely different personage. It seems the name was suggested by the hero's resemblance to the celebrated painter; and he was fortunate that his likeness to other great men permitted him to sport even this cognomen, for

"Had he held a pencil, he would have painted the Virgin of Foligno; as a sculptor, he would have chiselled the Psyche of Canova; had he known the language in which sounds are written, he would have noted the aerial lament of the sea-breeze sighing among the fibres of Italian pines, or the breathing of a sleeping girl who dreams of one she will not name; [the reader is not advised as to the author who accomplished these two feats!] had he been a poet, he would have written the stanzas of Tasso's Erminia, the moonlight talk of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, or Byron's portrait of Haidee."

Verily Raphael must have found it troublesome to know himself "all things by turns and nothing long."

But let us come down to the earth, and discourse to mortals, who are obliged to obtain knowledge only by means of previously acquired ideas. Raphael was a descendant of a Spanish noble of limited means. His mother had, in early life, spent some time at Madrid, and when she removed to the country her good manners and refined language "never evaporated