

The Examiner.

AND SEMI-WEEKLY INTELLIGENCER.

"THIS IS TRUE LIBERTY WHEN FREE-BORN MEN—HAVING TO ADVISE THE PUBLIC—MAY SPEAK FREE."—MILTON'S EURIPIDES.

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SELECT TALE.

Self-Sacrifice;

OR

THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT.

THE "days of chivalry," in the steel armor and horse-prancing sense of the phrase, have doubtless passed away into the limbo reserved for all social extravagances; but the spirit which, in the eyes of thoughtful men, redeemed its less vain shows and tinsel accessories from unmitigated contempt, interfused with the prosaic drama of conventional modern life, survives in more than all its ancient vigor, and from time to time gleams forth and illumines the sober hues of our neutral tinted civilization with the brilliant prismatic colors of the dawn. In other words, there are deeds constantly enacted in this matter-of-fact world of ours, which, for real heroism, have no parallel in the glittering annals of plumed and painted chivalry. A romantic episode in the life of a gallant and well-known sea officer—for the exact verity of which I, and indeed many others still living, can vouch—affords, I think, a vivid illustration of this brief text.

Francis Travers, as I shall call him, was the only son of a worthy and somewhat eccentric gentleman of Devonshire, who had passed the greater part of an active and successful life in the naval service of the East India Company. He retired from active pursuits at the—for the bustling go-ahead country—early age of forty-five; and having securely invested the savings of his life—amounting to about twenty thousand pounds—in the funds, retired to an old-fashioned residence called Marlands, to enjoy in leisured solitary dignity—he had been long a widower—the remainder of his allotted days. His house, in common with those of most retired seamen, was speedily decorated with a windvane and a flag-staff, on which was frequently exhibited bunting of every hue and device known and recognized beneath the sun; but even with the help of these interesting time-killers, the time passed slowly and heavily with the old mariner, and it was soon abundantly evident that to be thus everlastingly anchored, stranded in one spot, was ruinous to his health as well as temper. He grew daily more and more restless, fidgety, and irritable, and drank a great deal more than he had been accustomed to. Finally, on the very morning after the news arrived that his son had creditably passed for a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, Mr. Travers was found dead and cold in his bed. The coroner's inquest recorded that he died by "the visitation of God."

Lieutenant Travers, the sole heir of his father's wealth, was at this time a fine specimen of a well educated, intelligent naval officer; and rich, well looking, and of robust health, might be fairly looked upon as an extremely fortunate person, whom in all probability a brilliant, cloudless future awaited. In the young officer's own opinion, however, all these aids and appliances were nothing if they failed to obtain for him the one sole object, after professional fame, of his ambition—the hand of the beautiful girl by whom, since his first visit to his father at Marlands, his whole being—heart, soul, sense, had been engrossed. His admiration of Mary Wharton was perhaps all the more enthusiastic and intense from having remained as yet in his own breast. His heart alone knew and brooded over its own secret, and was likely, it seemed, to do so for an indefinite time to come, inasmuch as the daring sailor, who had already been twice wounded in desperate

boat expeditions upon which he had volunteered, doubted much whether he should ever muster sufficient audacity to disclose his passion even to the fair lady herself.

It is the faith or imagination of the worshipper which invests the idol or the shrine with its transcendent attributes; and often as Francis Travers had counted up his own advantages—*videlect*, a person which even his modesty could not but admit was not one to frighten the gentler sex; a professional reputation for skill and daring; and now, since the death of his father, a handsome fortune—he pronounced them all mere dross and rags when weighed against the divine perfections of the lady. It is very doubtful whether any other human being would have arrived at the same conclusion. Mary Wharton was indeed an amiable, graceful girl; and her beauty, if not of the brilliant kind which at first view dazzles the beholder, was scarcely less ultimately dangerous in its pensive thoughtfulness, and in the beseeching gentleness which, gleaming from out the transparent depths of her sweet blue eyes, tinted the pale, finely-turned cheek with varying charm. But excepting this beauty of expression more than of form, and an unquestionably amiable temper and disposition, she had really nothing to boast. Of worldly fortune she would not possess one shilling, and was neither fashionably nor wealthily connected. Her father Sir Richard Wharton—a gambling, spendthrift baronet, of old creation, it is true, but bankrupt alike in health and fortune, known, in fact, to be overwhelmed in debt, was scarcely very desirable as a father-in-law; and yet Francis Travers, as he took leave of Lady Wharton and her daughter, after attending his father's funeral, could not help wondering, as he gazed upon the fair, gentle girl, and felt her calm reservedness of tone and manner sweep coldly across his beating heart, at his presumptuous folly in having loved

— "A bright, particular star.
And thought to wed it."

So strange are the tricks which the blind god sometimes plays with the eyes and understanding of his more enthusiastic votaries.

The frigate to which Lieutenant Travers was first appointed, after knocking about the Channel through the winter, picking up a few trifling prizes, was ordered to Portsmouth, to be overhauled, and have her defects made good; but being found thoroughly infected with dry rot, was put out of commission, and ultimately broken up. The brush off Trafalgar had crippled Napoleon's marine; and as the breeze with Brother Jonathan had not yet sprung up, lieutenants were in somewhat less request than usual, and Travers took up his abode at Marlands, undisturbed for a considerable time by intimation or command from the Admiralty. Mary Wharton, more beautiful, more interesting than ever, received him with a much more cordial frankness than formerly; Lady Wharton seemed pleased with his return; whilst Sir Richard, who, he instinctively felt, had long since penetrated his secret, and with whom, by the way, he had always been a great favorite, expressed unqualified pleasure at seeing him. What wonder, then, that the illusions dispelled by former coldness should reappear beneath the genial warmth of such a reception? There was no rival in the case; of that he felt assured.

Indeed, with the exception of the Rev. Edmund Harford, curate of the parish church, and Mary's cousin, Lady Wharton and her daughter lived at Archer's Lodge in almost entire seclusion. Sir

Richard for three-fourths of the year resided in London, and when visiting Devonshire, surrounded himself with associates whose manners and pursuits were anything but congenial with those of his wife and daughter. As to the curate, accomplished scholar and eloquent divine as he was, and as much as Miss Wharton seemed to take pleasure in his varied and brilliant conversation—not more, however, than did her mother and Travers himself, any notion of marriage with him was, the lieutenant felt, quite out of the question. Edmund Harford's salary as curate, was only about ninety pounds a year, he had no influential connections to push him on in the church—and Travers thought he had ill-read the human character if Lady Wharton, did any chance exist of allying herself with poverty and wretchedness, would permit an intercourse likely to have so fatal a result. Thus reasoning, believing, hoping, Travers surrendered himself unresistingly to the influence to which he was enthralled. He walked, fished, played at billiards, with the baronet, participated freely in all the various modes he adopted for killing time, except gambling, and awaited with torturing anxiety a favourable moment for terminating the feverish doubts which, reason as he might, still haunted him incessantly. A circumstance, sudden, unexpected and terrible, cut short his hesitation and pushed him to a decision he might have else delayed for months, perhaps years.

A dispute arose, late one night, between Sir Richard Wharton and one of his companions, respecting alleged unfair play at cards. Injurious epithets were freely interchanged; and after a fruitless attempt, by the persons present, to adjust the quarrel amicably, an appeal to the arbitrament of the pistol was arranged for an early hour the next morning.

The meeting took place, and both combatants were wounded at the first fire—Sir Richard, as it proved, mortally.

The baronet was instantly conveyed to the nearest public house, and such medical aid as the locality afforded was instantly procured. On examination of the wound, which was in the chest, and bled internally, the surgeon at once informed the sufferer that nothing could be done to prolong, much less to save his life.

"I thought so, felt so!" murmured the unfortunate gentleman, with white lips. "Accursed chance!" A few moments afterwards he added, "How long think you, my life—this agony, may last?"

"Not long; an hour, perhaps; not more."

"So soon! I must be quick then. Let the room be cleared at once of all except my servant, James," he added, as soon as his orders were obeyed, "hasten to Marlands, to Mr. Travers; tell him I must see him instantly. Be swift, for more than life depends upon your speed."

For the next half hour the groans wrenched from the dying man, in his fast closing struggle with the terrible foe that held him in his iron grasp, were alone heard in the apartment; then hurrying feet sounded along the passage, and Lieutenant Travers, greatly excited, rushed in.

"Can this terrible intelligence be true?" he breathlessly exclaimed, "that you are—"

"Dying. Yes; a few more pulsations, my young friend, and that which men call life will be passed, and I shall be nothing!"

"May not something be still attempted? Where is the surgeon?"

"Gone, by my orders! You, Francis Travers can alone aid me in this extremity!"

"I! what can you mean?"

"Not, indeed, to save my life—that is past hoping for; but to rescue an ancient name which I have already tarnished from indelible disgrace and infamy. You love Mary Wharton?"

"As my own soul!" replied Travers, flushing scarlet.

"I have long known it. You are aware that the estates go to my nephew, and that she is portionless?"

"Perfectly; but that is a circumstance—"

"How much per annum of clear, available income do you possess?" interrupted Sir Richard, quickly.

So strange a question at such a moment startled Travers; but after a moment's pause, he replied, "Including my professional income, about a thousand a year."

"Enough! Hand me a glass of water. Now, come nearer, Travers, for my eyes grow dim, and my speech, beneath the choking grasp of this fell disease, is faint and difficult. You know that Lady Wharton and myself, though occasionally residing under one roof, have been for many years thoroughly estranged from each other. For this I know the world blames me, and I admit, quite justly. Well, the world, wise and prying as it is, as yet neither knows nor guesses the thousandth part of the wrong I have done my wife and children."

"Sir Richard!"

"When I married Ellen Harford, her fortune, secured to her by settlement, was invested in the funds; in her maiden name; the annual interest amounted to about eight hundred pounds—"

"Indeed! I never heard!"

"Perhaps not. This revenue Lady Wharton has constantly drawn, half-yearly, through Child's banking-house. It was devoted by her to the maintenance of our establishment. A few months since I—bend lower, that I may hiss the accursed confession in your ear—I, pressed by enormous gaming debts, and infatuated by the belief that I might, had I the means of playing for large stakes, retrieve my losses, forged—do you hear?—forged my wife's name to a warrant of attorney, drew out the entire capital, played with it, and lost all! And now—now," cried the miserable man with spasmodic violence, "you know all—know that by my act my wife, my child, are paupers—beggars—homeless—friendless; and, but for you, without resource or hope!"

"Merciful powers! can this be true?"

"As death!" rejoined the baronet, his husky accents sinking to a feeble whisper, "and you, on whom I counted, hesitate, I see, to save my name from infamy, even though the reward be Mary Wharton."

"Say not so!" passionately exclaimed Travers. "But how—by what means can I conceal—can I—"

"Easily. Continue to pay the dividend as usual through Child's till you are—where are you?—till you are married.—Lady Wharton will live with you and Mary till—till—you understand?"

"I think I do," stammered Travers; "but—"

"That's well!" A silence of several minutes succeeded, followed by incoherent murmurs, indicating that the senses of the dying man were wandering. "Cold, cold—and dark! Looked! and upon three trumps! Light the candles; we cannot see the cards! Ah! what shapes are these? Ellen, Mary! so stern, too, now that Travers has promised—has promised—" The death rattle choked his utterance, and in a few minutes Sir Richard Wharton had ceased to live.

[To be concluded in our next.]