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The Pilgrims of the Rhine

Lytton, Edward Bulwer Lytton

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Chapter XXV.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.—A COMMON INCIDENT NOT BEFORE DESCRIBED.—
TREVYLYAN AND GERTRUDE.

THE day now grew cool as it waned to its decline, and the breeze came sharp upon the delicate frame of the sufferer. They resolved to proceed no further; and as they carried with them attendants and baggage, which rendered their route almost independent of the ordinary accommodation, they steered for the opposite shore, and landed at a village beautifully sequestered in a valley, and where they fortunately obtained a lodging not often met with in the regions of the picturesque.

When Gertrude, at an early hour, retired to bed, Vane and Du——e fell into speculative conversation upon the nature of man. Vane's philosophy was of a quiet and passive scepticism; the physician dared more boldly, and rushed from doubt to negation. The attention of Trevelyman, as he sate apart and musing, was arrested in despite of himself. He listened to an argument in which he took no share; but which suddenly inspired him with an interest in that awful subject, which in the heat of youth and the

occupations of the world had never been so prominently called forth before.

“Great God!” thought he, with unutterable anguish, as he listened to the earnest vehemence of the Frenchman, and the tranquil assent of Vane; “if this creed were indeed true,—if there be no other world—Gertrude is lost to me eternally,—through the dread gloom of death there would break forth no star!”

That is a peculiar incident that perhaps occurs to us all at times, but which I have never found expressed in books;—viz. to hear a doubt of futurity at the very moment in which the present is most overcast; and to find at once this world stripped of its delusion, and the next of its consolation. It is perhaps for others, rather than ourselves, that the fond heart requires an Hereafter. The tranquil rest, the shadow, and the silence, the mere pause of the wheel of life, have no terror for the wise, who know the due value of the world—

“After the billows of a stormy sea,
Sweet is at last the haven of repose!”

But not so when that stillness is to divide us eternally from others; when those we have loved with all the passion, the devotion, the watchful sanctity of the weak human heart, are to exist to us no more!—when, after long years of desertion and widowhood on earth, there is to be no hope of re-union in that INVISIBLE beyond the stars; when the torch, not of life only, but of love, is to be quenched in the Dark Fountain; and the grave, that we would fain hope

is the great restorer of broken ties, is but the dumb seal of hopeless—utter—inexorable separation! And it is this thought—this sentiment, which makes religion out of woe, and teacheth belief to the mourning heart, that in the gladness of united affections felt not the necessity of a heaven! To how many is the death of the beloved, the parent of faith!

Stung by his thoughts Trevelyman rose abruptly, and stealing from the lowly hostelry, walked forth amidst the serene and deepening night; from the window of Gertrude's room the light streamed calm on the purple air.

With uneven steps and many a pause, he paced to and fro beneath the window, and gave the rein to his thoughts. How intensely he felt the ALL that Gertrude was to him; how bitterly he foresaw the change in his lot and character that her death would work out! For who that met him in later years ever dreamt that emotions so soft, and yet so ardent, had visited one so stern? Who ever could have believed that time was, when the polished and cold Trevelyman had kept the vigils he now held, below the chamber of one so little like himself as Gertrude, in that remote and solitary hamlet; shut in by the haunted mountains of the Rhine, and beneath the moonlight of the romantic North.

While thus engaged, the light in Gertrude's room was suddenly extinguished; it is impossible to express how much that trivial incident affected him! It was like an emblem of what was to come; the light had been the only evidence of life that broke upon that hour, and he was now

left alone with the shades of night. Was not this like the herald of Gertrude's own death; the extinction of the only living ray that broke upon the darkness of the world?

His anguish, his presentiment of utter desolation, increased. He groaned aloud; he dashed his clenched hand to his breast—large and cold drops of agony stole down his brow. "Father," he exclaimed with a struggling voice, "let this cup pass from me! Smite my ambition to the root; curse me with poverty, shame, and bodily disease; but leave me this one solace, this one companion of my fate!"

At this moment Gertrude's window opened gently, and he heard her accents steal soothingly upon his ear.

"Is not that your voice, Albert?" said she, softly; "I heard it just as I laid down to rest, and could not sleep while you were thus exposed to the damp night air. You do not answer; surely it is your voice; when did I mistake it for another's?"

Mastering with a violent effort his emotions, Trevlyan answered, with a sort of convulsive gaiety—

"Why come to these shores, dear Gertude, unless you are honoured with the chivalry that belongs to them? What wind, what blight, can harm me while within the circle of your presence; and what sleep can bring me dreams so dear as the waking thought of you?"

"It is cold," said Gertrude, shivering; "come in, dear Albert, I beseech you, and I will thank you to-morrow." Gertrude's voice was choked by the hectic cough, that

went like an arrow to Trevylyan's heart; and he felt that in her anxiety for him she was now exposing her own frame to the unwholesome night.

He spoke no more, but hurried within the house; and when the grey light of morn broke upon his gloomy features, haggard from the want of sleep, it might have seemed, in that dim eye and fast sinking check, as if the lovers were not to be divided,—even by death itself.

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