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The Pilgrims of the Rhine

Lytton, Edward Bulwer Lytton

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Chapter XXXI.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

GERTRUDE AND TREVYLYAN, WHEN THE FORMER IS AWAKENED TO THE
APPROACH OF DEATH.

THE next day Gertrude and her companions went along the banks of the haunted Neckar. She had passed a sleepless and painful night, and her evanescent and child-like spirits had sobered down into a melancholy and thoughtful mood. She leant back in an open carriage with Trevylyan, ever constant by her side, while Du——e and Vane rode slowly in advance. Trevylyan tried in vain to cheer her, even his attempts (usually so eagerly received) to charm her duller moments by tale or legend, were, in this instance, fruitless. She shook her head gently—pressed his hand, and said, “No, dear Trevylyan—no,—even your art fails to day, but your kindness, never!” and pressing his hand to her lips, she burst passionately into tears.

Alarmed and anxious, he clasped her to his breast, and strove to lift her face, as it drooped on its resting place, and kiss away its tears.

“Oh!” said she, at length, “do not despise my

weakness, I am overcome by my own thoughts; I look upon the world and see that it is fair and good, I look upon you, and I see all that I can venerate and adore. Life seems to me so sweet, and the earth so lovely, can you wonder then that I should shrink at the thought of death? Nay, interrupt me not, dear Albert; the thought must be borne and braved. I have not cherished, I have not yielded to it through my long-increasing illness, but there have been times when it has forced itself upon me; and now, *now* more palpably than ever. Do not think me weak and childish, I never feared death till I knew you; but to see you no more—never again to touch this dear hand—never to thank you for your love—never to be sensible of your care—to lie down and sleep, *and never, never, once more to dream of you!*—Ah! that is a bitter thought! but I will brave it—yes, brave it, as one worthy of your regard.”

Trevylyan, choked by his emotions, covered his own face with his hands, and leaning back in the carriage, vainly struggled with his sobs.

“Perhaps,” she said, yet ever and anon clinging to the hope that had utterly abandoned *him*. “Perhaps, I may yet deceive myself; and my love for you, which seems to me as if it could conquer death, may bear me up against this fell disease;—the hope to live with you—to watch you—to share your high dreams, and oh, above all, to soothe you in sorrow and sickness, as you have soothed me—has not that hope something that may support even this sink-

ing frame? And who shall love thee as I love? who see thee as I have seen? who pray for thee in gratitude and tears as I have prayed? Oh, Albert, so little am I jealous of you, so little do I think of myself in comparison, that I could close my eyes happily on the world, if I knew that what I could be to thee, another will be!"

"Gertrude," said Trevylyan; and lifting up his colourless face, he gazed upon her with an earnest and calm solemnity. "Gertrude, let us be united at once! if fate must sever us, let her cut the last tie too; let us feel at least that on earth we have been all in all to each other; let us defy death, even as it frowns upon us. Be mine to-morrow—this day—oh God! be mine!"

Over even that pale countenance, beneath whose hues the lamp of life so faintly fluttered, a deep, a radiant flash passed one moment, lighting up the beautiful ruin with the glow of maiden youth, and impassioned hope, and then died rapidly away.

"No, Albert;" she said, sighing; "No! it must not be: far easier would come the pang to you, while yet we are not wholly united; and for my own part, I am selfish, and feel as if I should leave a tenderer remembrance on your heart, thus parted;—tenderer, but not so sad. Nor would I wish you to feel yourself widowed to my memory, or cling like a blight to your fair prospects of the future. Remember me rather as a dream; as something never wholly won, and therefore asking no fidelity but that of kind and forbearing thoughts. Do you remember one

evening as we sailed along the Rhine—ah, happy, happy hour! that we heard from the banks a strain of music, not so skilfully played as to be worth listening to for itself, but, suiting as it did, the hour and the scene, we remained silent, that we might hear it the better; and when it died insensibly upon the waters, a certain melancholy stole over us; we felt that a something that softened the landscape had gone, and we conversed less lightly than before. Just so, my own loved—my own adored Trevelyman, just so is the influence that our brief love—your poor Gertrude's existence, should bequeath to your remembrance. A sound—a presence—should haunt you for a little while, but no more, ere you again become sensible of the glories that court your way!"

But as Gertrude said this, she turned to Trevelyman, and seeing his agony, she could refrain no longer; she felt that to soothe was to insult; and throwing herself upon his breast they mingled their tears together.