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BOOK V.

SINGLE LIFE

1825—1826

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CHAPTER I.

PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT. 1825. ÆT. 22.

MY father's Autobiography comes to an end in the middle of a lively period, and on the threshold of a serious epoch, in his life. In the last chapter of it we have seen him, at the age of twenty-two, just entering into the world with high aspirations, and an ardent ambition not yet directed to any fixed purpose. Already the desire of personal distinction was associated with the idea of public usefulness; but its aims were still indefinite, and its course uncertain.

His capabilities both of pleasure and of pain were exceptionally large; and whatever he did or felt, was felt and done strongly. The airs of indifference and frivolity assumed by him in his Pelham days were not merely literary artifices; they were partly the devices of a shy nature to protect from unsympathetic notice its own sensitive intensity. The real man was passionately earnest. He had a temperament naturally joyous and buoyant: but its natural buoyancy had been considerably subdued by an early sorrow so acutely felt that the traces of it were never wholly effaced. That premature experience had, no doubt, deepened his character in many directions; but it had also given to his disposition at this time a morbid, and even a dangerous, inclination. It subjected him to frequent fits of great melancholy and dejection. In natures as active as his there is always a healthy tendency to enjoyment; and these melancholy moods were followed by impatient cravings for excitement. The

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nature was a rich one—a fertile and tenacious soil wherein any seed, whether of good or evil, was certain to strike strong root and bear fruit abundantly. But the quality of the harvest to be reaped from it depended much on the character of its cultivation during the next few years. His observant schoolmaster had noted, with misgiving, in his character as a boy the latent dangers of this exuberant vitality. 'He is,' said Dr. Hooker, 'capable of extraordinary exertion, and also of self-denial, for any object in which he is interested; but, without such an object, his high spirits, his eagerness for pleasure, and keen enjoyment of it, may prove the ruin of his character.'

The 'high spirits' had been greatly sobered; but the 'eagerness for pleasure' was to some extent inseparable from the 'capability of extraordinary exertion,' and other permanent qualities of his nature. He had now the means of amply indulging it. The allowance made to him by his mother was a large one; and, with all his love of pleasure, his tastes were not extravagant. He was in the heyday of his youth. No professional or family obligations restricted its unfettered freedom; no anxieties for himself or others overshadowed its boundless horizon. Two years later he had exchanged deliberately all these advantages for the responsibilities of matrimony under conditions exceptionally trying, and with no other sources of income than genius and labour.

There is a time of life when even sadness is a kind of happiness; a time when the atmosphere of sentiment is finer than it can ever be again, and the sorrows that gather and disperse in that atmosphere are like the ethereal showers sometimes seen, in the fervid skies of Mexico, hovering over the earth but never reaching it. Grief, however passionate, when it comes to us for the first time, has at least the compensating charm of its 'raven gloss' still fresh upon it. The griefs of later years are less vehement, but they are more oppressive. Thus, all early feelings, even disappointed hopes and frustrated affections, are more beautiful than later ones in the retrospect

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of those who have felt them. And this, perhaps, is one of many reasons why men, as they approach the age when to look back is more natural than to look forward, instinctively recall the most trivial impressions of their youth, or childhood, with greater pleasure than the most important achievements of their middle life.

In my father's account of his school and college days, even those passages which describe his sorrowings for the loss of his first love were probably written with something of the wistful pleasure common to such recollections. But he may well have shrunk and hesitated as he approached in memory a time which was the beginning of lifelong calamities grimly prosaic, softened by no mitigating touches of romance, and productive only of the most poignant and enduring mortification. Here, at any rate, he threw aside the record of his reminiscences. Not but that he meant to continue it. Time after time, he took it up again with that object. Time after time, again he put it down untouched. And so years passed away, adding much to the experiences of his life, but nothing to his written account of them.

The resumption of the Autobiography was prevented, however, by lack of leisure and opportunity even more than by lack of inclination. When an author begins to collect his works it is usually a sign that he meditates no important addition to the number of them; that he is contemplating an early retirement from his accustomed field of literary labour; and that he feels the day has come when his permanent position as a writer must rest rather on his past achievements than on his future exertions. In the case of imaginative writings which have powerfully affected for any length of time the imagination of their readers, the author and the public are almost always contemporaries. They have been young together, and together they grow old. By degrees they simultaneously exhaust the associations they had in common. A new race arises, with different experiences and sympathies, to

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which new writers furnish different forms of expression. The voices grow fewer and fainter that exclaimed to the author at the outset of his way

> Ibimus, ibimus
> Utcunque præcedes, supremum
> Carpere iter comites parati.

The old readers drop out of the *turba remi*, and the old writers rest silent on their oars.

It was under an impression that his literary life had reached some such period of rest and retrospection that my father began the memoirs which were to preserve the history of it. He at that time contemplated, if not a permanent retirement from the profession of authorship, at least a prolonged relaxation of its activity. His health, always fragile, had suffered much from mental exertion, and yet more from the wear and tear and worry of vexations which wrung to the roots the most sensitive fibres of his nature. The duration of his life (at least in the undiminished vigour of all its faculties) appeared to him extremely uncertain. In this mood his mind naturally reverted to the past, associating the recollections of it with thoughts of that distant future from which genius, consciously or unconsciously, awaits the final verdict on its work.

The retrospect thus taken must have 'revived to fancy's view' many things which, though unshown by the visible results of work actually accomplished, were associated with it in the recollections of its author: intellectual conceptions not embodied in such work, personal experiences and feelings imperfectly expressed by it, which had nevertheless combined their influence to shape its character or fix its aim. For, in all probability, no creative writer of true genius has ever given out the whole of what is in him. Every great author is greater than his greatest book; and in the life he has lived (not outwardly but inwardly) there should be something which, could we read it aright, would be better worth reading than all he has written. Although the records of this inner life

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are in a language more or less untranslateable, my father believed that a personal account of what was apparent to himself when he looked into the book of his mind might hereafter be read with interest as a transcript of the original text closer at least than the imaginative forms in which some portion of it had already been embodied. And so his memoirs were begun.

But the lasting farewells, so often taken of the public by writers to whom authorship has become an habitual occupation, resemble the vows of eternal fidelity addressed by lovers to each other. Fate and the future are in a conspiracy to defeat their fulfilment. In this case, there was certainly no foundation for the author's impression that the relations between the public and himself had reached that stage of reciprocal indifference to which an amicable separation offers the best prospect of mutual satisfaction. Their intercourse, soon afterwards renewed, was maintained with zest and increasing intimacy to the last hour of his life. He never got, as the phrase goes, to the bottom of his ink-bottle; never survived either the force and freshness of his imaginative power, or the public interest in repeated manifestations of its inexhaustible fecundity. And thus it happened that not only the most noticeable period of his political career, but also the most popular productions of his literary genius, were subsequent to the meditated close of his active connection with politics and literature.

The continuation of the Autobiography was consequently postponed in favour of more immediate demands; and the narrative it leaves unfinished is here continued from the biographical materials found in his correspondence, his private notes of reading, reflection, and observation, and sundry sketches or fragments of original compositions which serve to exemplify, better perhaps than any finished work, both his way of working and his way of thinking and feeling, at different periods of his life.

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CHAPTER II.

INFLUENCE OF THE ABBÉ KINSELA. 1825. ÆT. 22.

My father often told me that, although he never succeeded in keeping a journal, he had, at different periods of his life, begun to note down the daily employment of his time, with the intention of persevering in that practice.

Two years ago, when looking over some tattered and discarded tapestries, stowed away with other household rubbish in a loft at Knebworth, I found there an old leathern travelling-bag, much mildewed, and stuffed with torn papers, mostly college accounts and business letters. Among them was the fragment of a diary which probably represents the earliest of those unfruitful resolutions, for it is a rather bald record, in my father's handwriting, of what was seen and done by him during the first weeks of his visit to Paris in 1825. Some few of the entries in it may, I think, be shortly noticed here, because they show, incidentally, the direction given to his mind by the influence of the Abbé Kinsela, and also the general character of the things then engaging his attention.

The first pages of the diary record a visit to 'The Manufactory of Looking-glass,' and carefully describe the process of that manufacture. The next are devoted to a description of 'The National Reserve of Corn and Flour for Periods of Distress.' Then comes mention of a visit paid to 'the building in which all wine that enters France must be deposited: the dealers, who have small stalls in it, paying only as they withdraw the wine. *Vin Ordinaire de Bordeaux*, forty-two

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francs the barrel, about three sous a bottle. What an immense profit for the tavern-keepers!' A little later, he has 'visited the gigantic model of the elephant intended to be in bronze, where the Bastille stood. A fountain. Grand, stupendous, wonderful. Doubt and discussion as to the grace of its design and harmony with the purpose of the image, chiefly humbug. What is grand is grand.' This is followed by a visit to the church of Ste. Geneviève, and afterwards to the *Hospice des Enfants Trouvés*. The reflections suggested by the last are curious. A very few years later, my father's note-book contained the following entry:—'What can *seem* a more excellent institution than *Les Enfants Trouvés*? It would prevent infanticide by offering a home to deserted infants. Yet what are the facts? Since the propagation of these institutions, the number of foundlings has prodigiously increased, while the frequency of infanticide has not diminished.' And then follows a formidable array of facts collected from the statistics of France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. But on this occasion he only sees in the *Hospice des Enfants Trouvés* a 'most beautiful undertaking. Child brought in by its parents. No question asked. Invariably received. Kept there for a few days, and then sent to the country. Subsequently many of them return to Paris for education, or are put to different trades.'

And here he adds a warm tribute of respect to the French *Religieuses*. It was doubtless well merited, for the calumniators of the conventual orders in France are not those who best know what lives their members lead.

Noticed the great attention of the Nuns. Greatly affected by their supernatural devotion to purposes so truly beneficent. Vague and vain accusation of want of utility, commonly made against the *Religieuses*. All I have yet seen are the most useful class of citizens. Am informed, and credibly, that no monastery is suffered to exist without exercising some pursuit useful to the interests of society. N.B. Will certify myself on that point.

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The next day he visits the School for the Education of the *Enfants Trouvés*.

Alas, how different! *There* all was cleanliness, propriety, exertion on the part of the directors. *Here* all is misery, filth, idleness. Remissness in the masters; lamentable failure in the object. Noted the sensible and true conclusion of Kinsela, that those who are paid to do good work cannot do it with the zest and efficiency of persons who do it gratuitously from duty. Here, then, is the great and eternal use of the *Religieuses*.

This entry seems to have been followed by a suspension of the diary. For how long a time it is impossible to say, for the dates are not explicit; but apparently it was soon resumed, though not long continued. These are the entries in it:—

9*th.*[1]—Saw a Convent. Nothing particular. Nun promised to pray for us as heretics.

10*th.*—The Observatoire. Inferior to Greenwich.

11*th.*—Hospital for old women. Great cleanliness and comfort. Apparent cheerfulness of all. 5,000 inmates, so old, so infirm, and yet so lively! French gaiety on the brink of the grave.

12*th.*—Saw the Hospital for Veterans. [Here follows an account of its origin, description of its organisation, statement of qualifications for admission, &c.] Went to the Library. One veteran reading a book of devotion; another, *des aventures galantes*; a third, universal history. Characteristic of this people. Love, religion, and politics, all so fantastically mingled.

13*th.*—Saw an establishment for lighting by gas. Ingenious. Very promising. Immense benefit to all if it succeeds.

14*th.*—Porcelain manufactory at Sèvres. Paintings exquisite. A Madonna for 50 napoleons: a Cupid and Psyche for 25,000 francs. *Manières de voir* pecuniarily expressed. Colours remarkably fine, but not equal to the old.

15*th.*—Talked, with Kinsela, to a peasant, near Versailles, about religion. Sensible replies to questions on images and absolution. Inveterate ignorance in England about Catholic tenets.

16*th.*—Hospice for blind boys. Children taught music, Latin, mathematics. Last two scarcely seem useful; but probably many of the better classes resort here. Surprising geographical knowledge

[1] The month and year are not stated in the diary.

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