

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

## SELF SACRIFICE.

The 'days of chivalry,' in the steel armour 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, re-deemed its else vain shows and tinsel accessories from unmitigated contempt, interfused in 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 civilisation 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 this bustling, go-a-head country—early age of fifty-five; and having securely invested the savings of his life—amounting to about twenty thousand pounds—in the funds, retired to an old-fashioned and rustic 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 wind-vane and a flag-staff, on which was frequently exhibited bunting of every hue and device known and recognised beneath the sun; but even with the help of these interesting time-killers, the hours 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 strictly confined to 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 counted up his own advantages—*videlicet*, 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 charms. 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 spendthrift, gambling baronet, of old creation, it is true, but bankruptcy alike in health and fortune, known, in fact, to be overwhelmed with 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 sweeping 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 understandings 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, he imagined, 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 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 Mary 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 by 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 gaming, and awaited with torturing anxiety a favorable 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 hastily conveyed to the nearest public house, and such medical aid as the locality afforded was instantly procured. On examining 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 Marland 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; and 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 past, 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 professed 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 death, 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 a thousandth part of the wrong I have done my wife and child.'

'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 of Lady Wharton was 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 gambling 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, and lost all! And now, now, I, 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 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! Looed! 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.

About three weeks after the funeral of the deceased baronet, Lieutenant Travers received a letter, on service, from the Admiralty, announcing his appointment to a crack frigate, fitting for sea at Portsmouth, and directing him to report himself on board immediately. This summons rendered further delay or hesitation impossible. He could not leave Marlands without coming to a frank explanation with lady and Miss Wharton, and he resolved it should take place that very morning. Not a syllable had yet passed his lips relative to the extraordinary disclosure made by Sir Richard Wharton in his last moments, or to the wishes he had expressed regarding his daughter. In the event, Travers mentally argued, of the acceptance of his suite by Miss Wharton and her mother, there could be no reason for any concealment from them; they would not betray the late baronet's disgraceful secret. At all events he would not, by first revealing to Mary Wharton that she was penniless, and afterwards proffering her his hand and fortune, seem to wish to purchase her consent to a union with him. Full of these cogitations and resolves, he arrived at Archer's Lodge, where, to his extreme astonishment, he found the servants packing up the furniture, as for immediate removal. He hurried to the breakfast room, where he found Lady Wharton and her daughter both busily engaged in arranging books, music, and papers.

'What is the meaning of this?' he demanded, with intense agitation. 'Surely you are not leaving Archer's Lodge?'

'Indeed we are, Mr Travers,' replied Lady Wharton. 'We received a letter yesterday, accepting an offer we had made for the lease of a house in Wales, close to Edmund's new curacy, which he says will suit us admirably.'

'Us!—Edmund!' gasped Travers.

'Mary, love, place these papers,' said Lady Wharton, 'in the writing desk in my dressing room. Mr Travers, she added, as the door closed, 'you are ill. The walk has perhaps fatigued you. Let me give you a glass of wine.'

'No—no—no! What is it you say? Mary—Edmund! Speak, and quickly; for my brain turns.'

'I feared this,' said Lady Wharton, soothingly, as she approached, and gently took his hand; and perhaps I have been to blame in delaying the explanation which must now be made.'

'What explanation—relative to whom?'

'To Mary and her cousin, Edmund Harford.'

'Ha!'

'They are betrothed lovers, and have been so, with my consent, for many months. Listen to me calmly, Mr Travers,' continued Lady Wharton, terrified by the wild expression of the young man's eyes. 'Mary sometime

since wished me to give you my confidence. I hesitated; for, alas! bitter experience has taught me to place but little reliance on the faith of men. I was wrong, I see; but pray strive to calm yourself.'

'Go on—go on. Let me at least now know all—the worst, the worst!'

'I will be frank with you. The falling health of Sir Richard Wharton has for some time warned me that but a brief space remained to him on earth. The frightful catastrophe of the other day but hastened his end, in all probability, by only a few months. Mary's sole dependence was, in that event, I knew, the marriage-portion secured to me, the interest of which amounts to something over eight hundred pounds per annum.'

'I know—I have heard—'

'Indeed!'

'Yes; but no matter. Proceed, I beg of you.'

'The possession of an income in my own right, amply sufficient for the needs of an unambitious household, warranted me I conceived, in consenting to Mary's engagement with her cousin, whom she has known from girlhood, and of whose worth no one can speak too highly. My silence and reserve have, I perceive, Mr Travers, misled you; but forgive me: I did not know—I could not conceive—'

'Let me pass, madam,' exclaimed Travers, disengaging his hand, and staggering towards the door. 'I will return presently.'

A whirlwind of emotion was sweeping through his brain as he hurried from the house into the adjoining shrubbery. Wounded affection, despair, compassion, tugged at his heart, and ruled it by turns. The open air helped to cool and revive him; and after about an hour's bitter conflict with himself, he returned to the apartment where he had left Lady Wharton. She was still there.

'May I have your ladyship's permission to see Miss Wharton alone for a few minutes?' he asked.

Lady Wharton appeared surprised at the request, but at once acceded to it. 'I will send her to you immediately,' she replied, and left the room.

A considerable interval elapsed before Miss Wharton, trembling, blushing, painfully agitated, almost, indeed, to tears, entered the apartment.

'Pardon my freedom—my importunity, Miss Wharton,' said Travers in as calm a tone as he could command, as he led her to a seat, and placed himself beside her. 'I have a question to ask you, of the last importance to you as to myself; and I entreat you to answer it frankly as to a brother.'

The lady bowed, and the lieutenant proceeded with somewhat more firmness.

'You are, I am informed, dependent as to fortune upon Lady Wharton. Is it, then, I would ask, of your own free choice and will that you are contracted to your cousin—to the Reverend Mr Harford? Nay lady, be not offended at my boldness. It is in virtual compliance with the injunctions of Sir Richard Wharton, expressed in his last moments, that I ask this question.'

The momentary glance of indignant surprise passed from Mary Wharton's face at the mention of her father's name. Her suffused eyes were again bent on the ground, whilst the rich color came and went on her cheek, as she replied in a low, agitated voice—'Edmund and I have known, have been attached, almost betrothed to each other from his boyhood.'

'Enough Miss Wharton,' said Travers, hastily rising; 'I will not trespass further on your indulgence. May all good angels guard and bless you!' he added, seizing her hand, and passionately kissing it; and, for your sake, him—Farewell! He hurried from the house, and the same evening took coach for London; made the necessary arrangements for continuing the payment of Lady Wharton's dividend through Child's, as before, then proceeded to Portsmouth, and joined his ship, which a few days afterwards sailed for the South American station.

Lady Wharton and her daughter removed, as they had intimated, to Wales, where Edmund Harford obtained a curacy, scarcely of so much money-value as that which he had left in Devonshire. After the lapse of twelve months, he was married to Mary Wharton; still, however, retaining his curacy as a means of usefulness. The union was a happy one. In the enjoyment of an amply sufficient income, and soon begit with joyous infancy, their days passed in tranquil happiness; and each succeeding year as it rolled over them, in their beautiful retreat, augmenting with some new blessing their sum of worldly felicity. If a thought of the noble-hearted man to whom they were unconsciously so deeply indebted crossed their minds, it was chiefly when a present for one of the children of some rich or curious produce of distant climes arrived; or a gazette of that stirring period announced one of the bold deeds which rapidly advanced Lieutenant Travers to post-captain's rank. Peace, for which the harassed, trampled world had so long sighed, was at last proclaimed, and Edmund Harford, who corresponded with Captain Travers, thought it possible he might now pay them a visit—perhaps take up his abode in the neighborhood, for Marlands, they knew, had long since been disposed off. He, however, came not; and the next letter received announced that he had joined the expedition against Algiers, under Lord Exmouth. Tidings of the triumph of the British fleet over that celebrated nest of pirates reached them in due season, accompanied by victory's ever-present crimson shadow—the list of killed and wounded. Harford glanced anxiously at the sad column, and an exclamation of dismay and sorrow