

ERNEST VANE.

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BY ALEXANDER BAILLIE COCHRANE, M. P.

AUTHOR OF "LUCILLE BELMONT."

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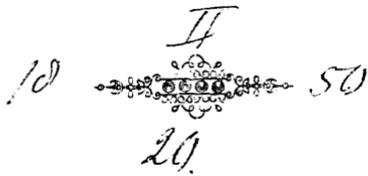
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TO THE HONOURABLE
GEORGE PERCY SYDNEY SMYTHE,
THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED
BY ALEXANDER BAILLIE COCHRANE,
IN THE PRESUMPTUOUS HOPE THAT THEIR TWO NAMES
MAY BE ASSOCIATED IN LITERATURE, AS THEY HAVE BEEN
IN LONG AND UNINTERRUPTED FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

It was a cold March evening, the lamps in Sackville Street were lit, and cast a flickering pale uncertain light through the drops of rain which plunged from the roofs of the houses upon the pavement; the shrill clear horns of the guards were heard above the tramp of the horses, and the swift rattle of the wheels of the mail coaches as they rolled along Piccadilly. The shutters of most of the houses were closed, but from the principal floor of an hotel, situated near the corner of Sackville Street and Vere Street, bright rays of fire-light were gleaming, occasionally the curtains were partially drawn aside, and a small fair head might be seen looking anxiously up and down the street, as though expecting some immediate arrival; but all the passengers bent on business or pleasure hurried by, only one or two occasionally casting a hurried glance at the window, when the head was quickly withdrawn. At last the patience of the fair occupant must have been quite exhausted, for she rang the bell almost impatiently, waited at the door until it was answered, and then asked the servant who appeared whether Mr. Leslie had put off the dinner hour. The servant answered in the negative.

“Did he not say at what time he should return?” the young lady asked.

“He told me to have his things to dress at the usual time,” was the reply.

The lady took up a book and began to read, but her eye had scarcely skimmed down the first page, when a heavy footstep was heard upon the stair, she started from her seat, letting her book and work both fall to the

ground, and ran up to the door exclaiming, “My dearest father.”

The person who entered the room was the type of a class with which most men in the course of their lives become familiar. He had thick-set and lumbering limbs, but, large as he was, the head still seemed out of proportion to his body; it hung a little on one side, as though borne down by its own weight. The hair was short and grizzly; and there was a heaviness in the glance which at first sight conveyed the notion of an overloaded brain, but a close observer might have detected a quick cunning glance in the little grey twinkling eye which glistened beneath the pent house of overhanging eye-brow; the lines of the face were strongly marked, indicating habits of deep and patient thought; and from the compressed upper lip it might be judged that the practice of self-command was habitual to him; and, indeed, among no class is self-command and control of feature so requisite as in that class which this man represented,—the moneyed interest,—where the betrayal of emotion is at times not less to be dreaded than the loss of a galleon, or the failure of some gigantic speculation; but if, in all physical characteristics, Mr. Leslie aptly illustrated the man of the counting-house, of shrewd guesses and practical dealings, it was impossible not at the same time to perceive from his appearance that he was a man of great consideration in the society which he frequented. His dress had an attention bestowed upon it rarely found among those whose time is occupied in business; he was scrupulously neat, and if he erred it was almost on the side of a certain dandyism; there was a peculiar pretension to an accuracy of fit and tie, which was slightly out of character and keeping with the stern concentrated look which we have described.

Talleyrand has said that, to study a man, you must notice not the countenance but the voice; but there is frequently as much character in a man's footsteps as in either his countenance or his voice; and an attentive practised ear might have traced the whole of Mr.