

THE WORKS

OF

EDWARD BULWER LYTTON

(LORD LYTTON)

NIGHT AND MORNING

Book V

CHAPTER I.

"Per ambages et ministeria deorum." —PETRONTUS.

[Through the mysteries and ministrings of the gods.]

Mr. Roger Morton was behind his counter one drizzling, melancholy day. Mr. Roger Morton, alderman, and twice mayor of his native town, was a thriving man. He had grown portly and corpulent. The nightly potations of brandy and water, continued year after year with mechanical perseverance, had deepened the roses on his cheek. Mr. Roger Morton was never intoxicated—he "only made himself comfortable." His constitution was strong; but, somehow or other, his digestion was not as good as it might be. He was certain that something or other disagreed with him. He left off the joint one day—the pudding another. Now he avoided vegetables as poison—and now he submitted with a sigh to the doctor's interdict of his cigar. Mr. Roger Morton never thought of leaving off the brandy and water: and he would have resented as the height of impertinent insinuation any hint upon that score to a man of so sober and respectable a character.

Mr. Roger Morton was seated—for the last four years, ever since his second mayoralty, he had arrogated to himself the dignity of a chair. He received rather than served his customers. The latter task was left to two of his sons. For Tom, after much cogitation, the profession of an apothecary had been selected. Mrs. Morton observed, that it was a genteel business, and Tom had always been a likely lad. And Mr. Roger considered that it would be a great comfort and a great saving to have his medical adviser in his own son.

The other two sons and the various attendants of the shop were plying the profitable trade, as customer after customer, with umbrellas and in pattens, dropped into the tempting shelter—when a man, meanly dressed, and who was somewhat past middle age, with a careworn, hungry face, entered timidly. He waited in patience by the crowded counter, elbowed by sharp-boned and eager spinsters—and how sharp the elbows of spinsters are, no man can

tell who has not forced his unwelcome way through the agitated groups in a linendraper's shop!—the man, I say, waited patiently and sadly, till the smallest of the shopboys turned from a lady, who, after much sorting and shading, had finally decided on two yards of lilac-coloured penny riband, and asked, in an insinuating professional tone,—

"What shall I show you, sir?"

"I wish to speak to Mr. Morton. Which is he?"

"Mr. Morton is engaged, sir. I can give you what you want."

"No—it is a matter of business—important business." The boy eyed the napless and dripping hat, the gloveless hands, and the rusty neckcloth of the speaker; and said, as he passed his fingers through a profusion of light curls "Mr. Morton don't attend much to business himself now; but that's he. Any cravats, sir?"

The man made no answer, but moved where, near the window, and chatting with the banker of the town (as the banker tried on a pair of beaver gloves), sat still—after due apology for sitting—Mr. Roger Morton.

The alderman lowered his spectacles as he glanced grimly at the lean apparition that shaded the spruce banker, and said,—

"Do you want me, friend?"

"Yes, sir, if you please;" and the man took off his shabby hat, and bowed low.

"Well, speak out. No begging petition, I hope?"

"No, sir! Your nephews—"

The banker turned round, and in his turn eyed the newcomer. The linendraper started back.

"Nephews!" he repeated, with a bewildered look. "What does the man mean?"

Wait a bit."

"Oh, I've done!" said the banker, smiling. "I am glad to find we agree so well upon this question: I knew we should. Our member

will never suit us if he goes on in this way. Trade must take care of itself. Good day to You!"

"Nephews!" repeated Mr. Morton, rising, and beckoning to the man to follow him into the back parlour, where Mrs. Morton sat casting up the washing bills.

"Now," said the husband, closing the door, "what do you mean, my good fellow?"

"Sir, what I wish to ask you is-if you can tell me what has become of—of the young Beau—, that is, of your sister's sons. I understand there were two—and I am told that—that they are both dead. Is it so?"

"What is that to you, friend?"

"An please you, sir, it is a great deal to them!"

"Yes—ha! ha! it is a great deal to everybody whether they are alive or dead!" Mr. Morton, since he had been mayor, now and then had his joke. "But really—"

"Roger!" said Mrs. Morton, under her breath— "Roger!"

"Yes, my dear."

"Come this way—I want to speak to you about this bill." The husband approached, and bent over his wife. "Who's this man?"

"I don't know."

"Depend on it, he has some claim to make—some bills or something. Don't commit yourself—the boys are dead for what we know!"

Mr. Morton hemmed and returned to his visitor.

"To tell you the truth, I am not aware of what has become of the young men."

"Then they are not dead—I thought not!" exclaimed the man, joyously.

"That's more than I can say. It's many years since I lost sight of the only one I ever saw; and they may be both dead for what I know."

"Indeed!" said the man. "Then you can give me no kind of—of—hint like, to find them out?"

"No. Do they owe you anything?"

"It does not signify talking now, sir. I beg your pardon."

"Stay— who are you?"

"I am a very poor man, sir."

Mr. Morton recoiled.

"Poor! Oh, very well—very well. You have done with me now. Good day— good day. I'm busy."

The stranger pecked for a moment at his hat— turned the handle of the door—peered under his grey eyebrows at the portly trader, who, with both hands buried in his pockets, his mouth pursed up, like a man about to say "No" fidgeted uneasily behind Mrs. Morton's chair. He sighed, shook his head, and vanished.

Mrs. Morton rang the bell—the maid-servant entered. "Wipe the carpet, Jenny;— dirty feet! Mr. Morton, it's a Brussels!"

"It was not my fault, my dear. I could not talk about family matters before the whole shop. Do you know, I'd quite forgot those poor boys. This unsettles me. Poor Catherine! she was so fond of them. A pretty boy that Sidney, too. What can have become of them? My heart rebukes me. I wish I had asked the man more."

"More!— why he was just going to beg."

"Beg—yes—very true!" said Mr. Morton, pausing irresolutely; and then, with a hearty tone, he cried out, "And, damme, if he had begged, I could afford him a shilling! I'll go after him." So saying, he hastened back through the shop, but the man was gone—the rain was falling, Mr. Morton had his thin shoes on—he blew his nose, and went back to the counter. But, there, still rose to his memory the pale face of his dead sister; and a voice murmured in his ear, "Brother, where is my child?"

"Pshaw! it is not my fault if he ran away. Bob, go and get me the county paper."

Mr. Morton had again settled himself, and was deep in a trial for murder, when another stranger strode haughtily into the shop. The new-comer, wrapped in a pelisse of furs, with a thick moustache, and an eye that took in the whole shop, from master to boy, from ceiling to floor, in a glance, had the air at once of a foreigner and a soldier. Every look fastened on him, as he paused an instant, and then walking up to the alderman, said, —

"Sir, you are doubtless Mr. Morton?"

"At your commands, sir," said Roger, rising involuntarily.

"A word with you, then, on business."

"Business!" echoed Mr. Morton, turning rather pale, for he began to think himself haunted; "anything in my line, sir? I should be —"

The stranger bent down his tall stature, and hissed into Mr. Morton's foreboding ear:

"Your nephews!"

Mr. Morton was literally dumb-stricken. Yes, he certainly was haunted! He stared at this second questioner, and fancied that there was something very supernatural and unearthly about him. He was so tall, and so dark, and so stern, and so strange. Was it the Un-speakable himself come for the linendraper? Nephews again! The uncle of the babes in the wood could hardly have been more startled by the demand!

"Sir," said Mr. Morton at last, recovering his dignity and somewhat peevishly, — "sir, I don't know why people should meddle with my family affairs. I don't ask other folks about their nephews. I have no nephew that I know of."

"Permit me to speak to you, alone, for one instant." Mr. Morton sighed, hitched up his trousers, and led the way to the parlour, where Mrs. Morton, having finished the washing bills, was now engaged in tying certain pieces of bladder round certain pots of preserves. The eldest Miss Morton, a young woman of five or six-and-twenty, who was about to be very advantageously married to a young gentleman who dealt in coals and played the violin (for N — — was a very musical town), had just joined her for the purpose of extorting "The Swiss Boy, with variations," out of a sleepy little

piano, that emitted a very painful cry under the awakening fingers of Miss Margaret Morton.

Mr. Morton threw open the door with a grunt, and the stranger pausing at the threshold, the full flood of sound (key C) upon which "the Swiss Boy" was swimming along, "kine" and all, for life and death, came splash upon him.

"Silence! can't you?" cried the father, putting one hand to his ear, while with the other he pointed to a chair; and as Mrs. Morton looked up from the preserves with that air of indignant suffering with which female meekness upbraids a husband's wanton outrage, Mr. Roger added, shrugging his shoulders, —

"My nephews again, Mrs. K!"

Miss Margaret turned round, and dropped a courtesy. Mrs. Morton gently let fall a napkin over the preserves, and muttered a sort of salutation, as the stranger, taking off his hat, turned to mother and daughter one of those noble faces in which Nature has written her grant and warranty of the lordship of creation.

"Pardon me," he said, "if I disturb you. But my business will be short. I have come to ask you, sir, frankly, and as one who has a right to ask it, what tidings you can give me of Sidney Morton?"

"Sir, I know nothing whatever about him. He was taken from my house, about twelve years since, by his brother. Myself, and the two Mr. Beauforts, and another friend of the family, went in search of them both. My search failed."

"And theirs?"

"I understood from Mr. Beaufort that they had not been more successful. I have had no communication with those gentlemen since. But that's neither here nor there. In all probability, the elder of the boys—who, I fear, was a sad character—corrupted and ruined his brother; and, by this time, Heaven knows what and where they are."

"And no one has inquired of you since—no one has asked the brother of Catherine Morton, nay, rather of Catherine Beaufort—where is the child intrusted to your care?"

This question, so exactly similar to that which his superstition had rung on his own ears, perfectly appalled the worthy alderman. He staggered back-stared at the marked and stern face that lowered upon him—and at last cried,—

"For pity's sake, sir, be just! What could I do for one who left me of his own accord?—"

"The day you had beaten him like a dog. You see, Mr. Morton, I know all."

"And what are you?" said Mr. Morton, recovering his English courage, and feeling himself strangely browbeaten in his own house;—"What and who are you, that you thus take the liberty to catechise a man of my character and respectability?"

"Twice mayor—" began Mrs. Morton.

"Hush, mother!" whispered Miss Margaret,— "don't work him up."

"I repeat, sir, what are you?"

"What am I?—your nephew! Who am I? Before men, I bear a name that I have assumed, and not dishonoured—before Heaven I am Philip Beaufort!"

Mrs. Morton dropped down upon her stool. Margaret murmured "My cousin!" in a tone that the ear of the musical coal-merchant might not have greatly relished. And Mr. Morton, after a long pause, came up with a frank and manly expression of joy, and said:—

"Then, sir, I thank Heaven, from my heart, that one of my sister's children stands alive before me!"

"And now, again, I—I whom you accuse of having corrupted and ruined him—him for whom I toiled and worked—him, who was to me, then, as a last surviving son to some anxious father—I, from whom he was reft and robbed—I ask you again for Sidney—for my brother!"

"And again, I say, that I have no information to give you — that — Stay a moment-stay. You must pardon what I have said of you before you made yourself known. I went but by the accounts I had received from Mr. Beaufort. Let, me speak plainly; that gentleman thought, right or wrong, that it would be a great thing to separate your brother from you. He may have found him — it must be so — and kept his name and condition concealed from us all, lest you should detect it. Mrs. M., don't you think so?"

"I'm sure I'm so terrified I don't know what to think," said Mrs. Morton, putting her hand to her forehead, and see-sawing herself to and fro upon her stool.

"But since they wronged you — since you — you seem so very — very —"

"Very much the gentleman," suggested Miss Margaret. "Yes, so much the gentleman; — well off, too, I should hope, sir," — and the experienced eye of Mr. Morton glanced at the costly sables that lined the pelisse, — "there can be no difficulty in your learning from Mr. Beaufort all that you wish to know. And pray, sir, may I ask, did you send any one here to-day to make the very inquiry you have made?"

"I? — No. What do you mean?"

"Well, well — sit down — there may be something in all this that you may make out better than I can."

And as Philip obeyed, Mr. Morton, who was really and honestly rejoiced to see his sister's son alive and apparently thriving, proceeded to relate pretty exactly the conversation he had held with the previous visitor. Philip listened earnestly and with attention. Who could this questioner be? Some one who knew his birth — some one who sought him out? — some one, who — Good Heavens! could it be the long-lost witness of the marriage?

As soon as that idea struck him, he started from his seat and entreated Morton to accompany him in search of the stranger. "You know not," he said, in a tone impressed with that energy of will in which lay the talent of his mind, — "you know not of what importance this may be to my prospects — to your sister's fair name. If

it should be the witness returned at last! Who else, of the rank you describe, would be interested in such inquiries? Come!"

"What witness?" said Mrs. Morton, fretfully. "You don't mean to come over us with the old story of the marriage?"

"Shall your wife slander your own sister, sir? A marriage there was—God yet will proclaim the right—and the name of Beaufort shall be yet placed on my mother's gravestone. Come!"

"Here are your shoes and umbrella, pa," cried Miss Margaret, inspired by Philip's earnestness.

"My fair cousin, I guess," and as the soldier took her hand, he kissed the reluctant cheek—turned to the door—Mr. Morton placed his arm in his, and the next moment they were in the street.

When Catherine, in her meek tones, had said, "Philip Beaufort was my husband," Roger Morton had disbelieved her. And now one word from the son, who could, in comparison, know so little of the matter, had almost sufficed to convert and to convince the sceptic. Why was this? Because—Man believes the Strong!

CHAPTER II.

"— Quid Virtus et quid Sapientia possit
Utile proposuit nobis exemplar *Ullsem*." HOR.

["He has proposed to us Ulysses as a useful example of how much may be accomplished by Virtue and Wisdom."]

Meanwhile the object of their search, on quitting Mr. Morton's shop, had walked slowly and sadly on, through the plashing streets, till he came to a public house in the outskirts and on the high road to London. Here he took shelter for a short time, drying himself by the kitchen fire, with the license purchased by fourpenny-worth of gin; and having learned that the next coach to London would not pass for some hours, he finally settled himself in the Ingle, till the guard's horn should arouse him. By the same coach that the night before had conveyed Philip to N—, had the very man he sought been also a passenger!

The poor fellow was sickly and wearied out: he had settled into a doze, when he was suddenly wakened by the wheels of a coach and the trampling of horses. Not knowing how long he had slept, and imagining that the vehicle he had awaited was at the door, he ran out. It was a coach coming from London, and the driver was joking with a pretty barmaid who, in rather short petticoats, was fielding up to him the customary glass. The man, after satisfying himself that his time was not yet come, was turning back to the fire, when a head popped itself out of the window, and a voice cried, "Stars and garters! Will—so that's you!" At the sound of the voice the man halted abruptly, turned very pale, and his limbs trembled. The inside passenger opened the door, jumped out with a little carpet-bag in his hand, took forth a long leathern purse from which he ostentatiously selected the coins that paid his fare and satisfied the coachman, and then, passing his arm through that of the acquaintance he had discovered, led him back into the house.

"Will—Will," he whispered, "you have been to the Mortons. Never moind— let's hear all. Jenny or Dolly, or whatever your sweet praetty name is— a private room and a pint of brandy, my dear. Hot water and lots of the grocery. That's right."

And as soon as the pair found themselves, with the brandy before them, in a small parlour with a good fire, the last comer went to the door, shut it cautiously, flung his bag under the table, took off his gloves, spread himself wider and wider before the fire, until he had entirely excluded every ray from his friend, and then suddenly turning so that the back might enjoy what the front had gained, he exclaimed.

"Damme, Will, you're a praetty sort of a broather to give me the slip in that way. But in this world every man for his-self!"

"I tell you," said William, with something like decision in his voice, "that I will not do any wrong to these young men if they live."

"Who asks you to do a wrong to them?—booby! Perhaps I may be the best friend they may have yet—ay, or you too, though you're the ungratefulest whimsicallist sort of a son of a gun that ever I came across. Come, help yourself, and don't roll up your eyes in that way, like a Muggletonian asoide of a Fye-Fye!"

Here the speaker paused a moment, and with a graver and more natural tone of voice proceeded:

"So you did not believe me when I told you that these brothers were dead, and you have been to the Mortons to learn more?"

"Yes."

"Well, and what have you learned?"

"Nothing. Morton declares that he does not know that they are alive, but he says also that he does not know that they are dead."

"Indeed," said the other, listening with great attention; "and you really think that he does not know anything about them?"

"I do, indeed."

"Hum! Is he a sort of man who would post down the rhino to help the search?"

"He looked as if he had the yellow fever when I said I was poor," returned William, turning round, and trying to catch a glimpse at the fire, as he gulped his brandy and water.

"Then I'll be d--d if I run the risk of calling. I have done some things in this town by way of business before now; and though it's a long time ago, yet folks don't forget a haundsome man in a hurry—especially if he has done 'em! Now, then, listen to me. You see, I have given this matter all the 'tention in my power. 'If the lads be dead,' said I to you, 'it is no use burning one's fingers by holding a candle to bones in a coffin. But Mr. Beaufort need not know they are dead, and we'll see what we can get out of him; and if I succeeds, as I think I shall, you and I may hold up our heads for the rest of our life.' Accordingly, as I told you, I went to Mr. Beaufort, and—'Gad, I thought we had it all our own way. But since I saw you last, there's been the devil and all. When I called again, Will, I was shown in to an old lord, sharp as a gimblet. Hang me, William, if he did not frighten me out of my seven senses!"

Here Captain Smith (the reader has, no doubt, already discovered that the speaker was no less a personage) took three or four nervous strides across the room, returned to the table, threw himself in a chair, placed one foot on one hob, and one on the other, laid his finger on his nose, and, with a significant wink, said in a whisper, "Will, he knew I had been lagged! He not only refused to hear all I had to say, but threatened to prosecute—persecute, hang, draw, and quarter us both, if we ever dared to come out with the truth."

"But what's the good of the truth if the boys are dead?" said William, timidly.

The captain, without heeding this question, continued, as he stirred the sugar in his glass, "Well, out I sneaked, and as soon as I had got to my own door I turned round and saw Sharp the runner on the other side of the way—I felt deuced queer. However, I went in, sat down, and began to think. I saw that it was up with us, so far as the old uns were concerned; and it might be worth while to find out if the young uns really were dead."

"Then you did not know that after all! I thought so. Oh, Jerry!"

"Why, look you, man, it was not our interest to take their side if we could make our bargain out of the other. 'Cause why? You are only one witness—you are a good fellow, but poor, and with very shaky nerves, Will. You does not know what them big wigs are when a roan's caged in a witness-box—they flank one up, and they flank one down, and they bully and bother, till one's like a horse at Astley's dancing on hot iron. If your testimony broke down, why it would be all up with the case, and what then would become of us? Besides," added the captain, with dignified candour, "I have been lagged, it's no use denying it; I am back before my time. Inquiries about your respectability would soon bring the bulkies about me. And you would not have poor Jerry sent back to that d--d low place on t'other side of the herring-pond, would you?"

"Ah, Jerry!" said William, kindly placing his hand in his brother's, you know I helped you to escape; I left all to come over with you."

"So you did, and you're a good fellow; though as to leaving all, why you had got rid of all first. And when you told me about the marriage, did not I say that I saw our way to a snug thing for life? But to return to my story. There is a danger in going with the youngsters. But since, Will,—since nothing but hard words is to be got on the other side, we'll do our duty, and I'll find them out, and do the best I can for us—that is, if they be yet above ground. And now I'll own to you that I think I knows that the younger one is alive."

"You do?"

"Yes! But as he won't come in for anything unless his brother is dead, we must have a hunt for the heir. Now I told you that, many years ago, there was a lad with me, who, putting all things together—seeing how the Beauforts came after him, and recollecting different things he let out at the time—I feel pretty sure is your old master's Hopeful. I know that poor Will Gawtreay gave this lad the address of Old Gregg, a friend of mine. So after watching Sharp off the sly, I went that very night, or rather at two in the morning, to Gregg's house, and, after brushing up his memory, I found that the lad had been to him, and gone over afterwards to Paris in search of Gawtreay, who was then keeping a matrimony shop. As I was not rich enough to go off to Paris in a pleasant, gentlemanlike way, I