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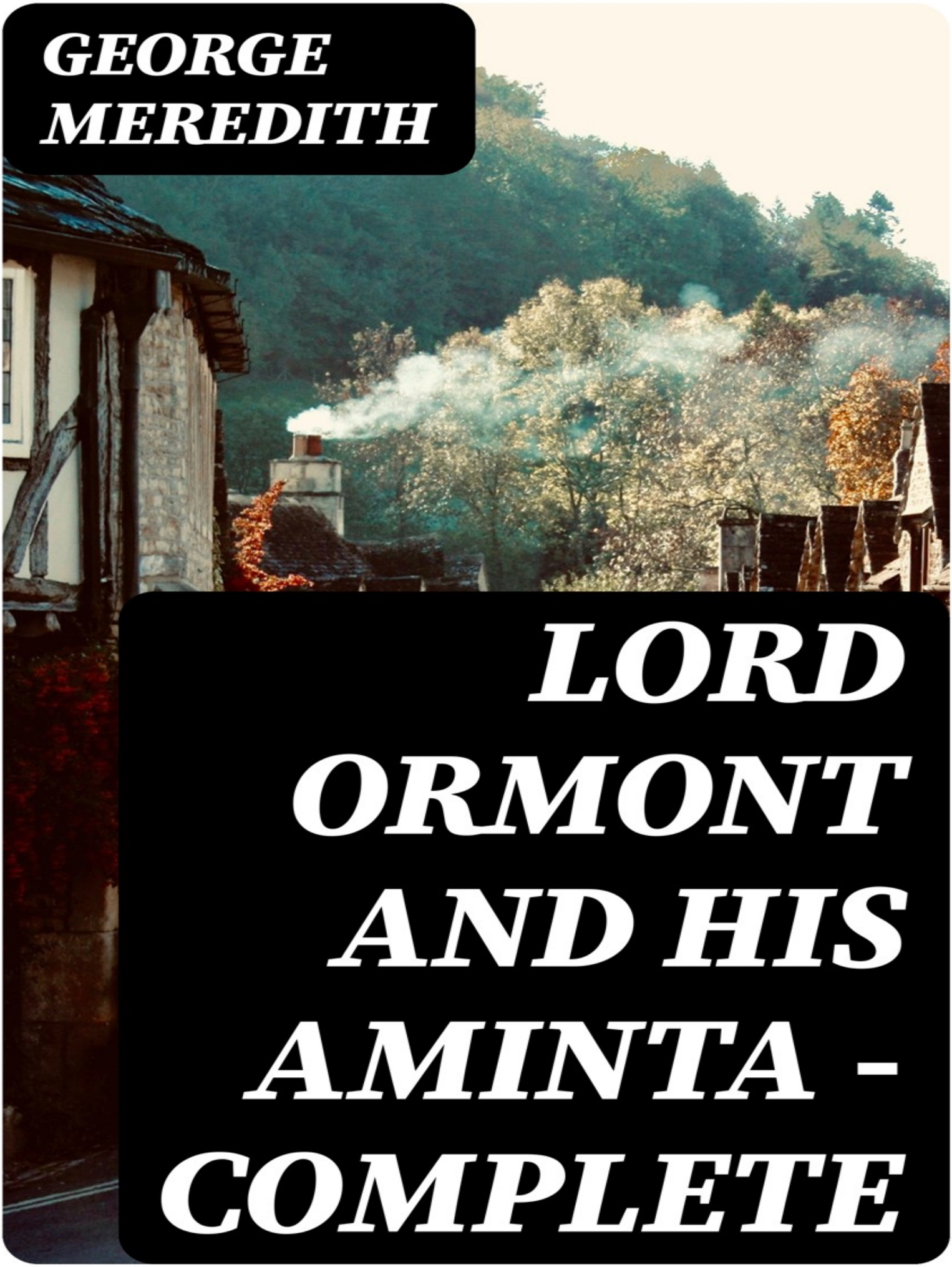

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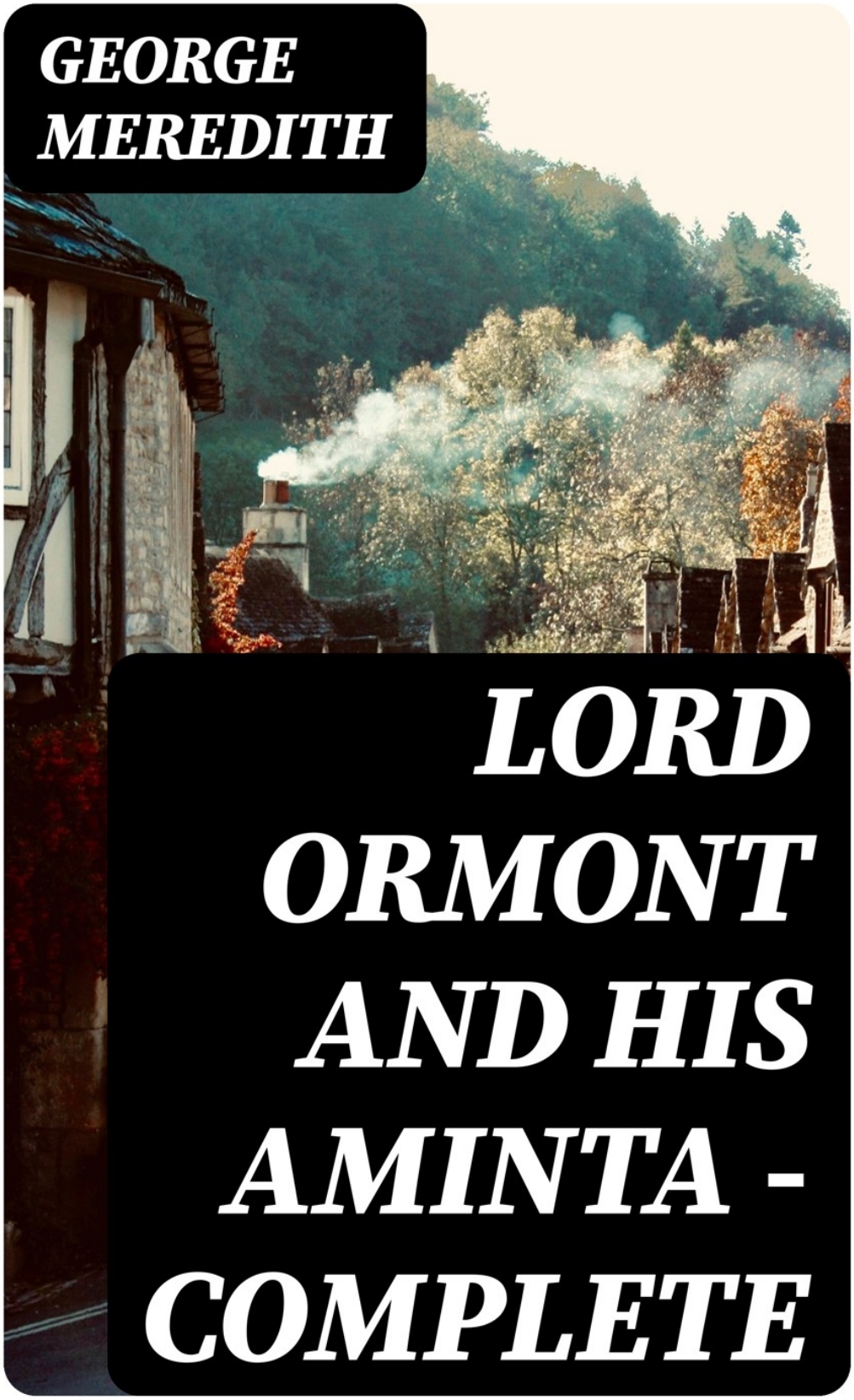

LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA - COMPLETE

George Meredith

Lord Ormont and His Aminta — Complete

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CHAPTER I. LOVE AT A SCHOOL

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A procession of schoolboys having to meet a procession of schoolgirls on the Sunday's dead march, called a walk, round the park, could hardly go by without dropping to a hum in its chatter, and the shot of incurious half-eyes the petticoated creatures—all so much of a swarm unless you stare at them like lanterns. The boys cast glance because it relieved their heaviness; things were lumpish and gloomy that day of the week. The girls, who sped their peep of inquisition before the moment of transit, let it be seen that they had minds occupied with thoughts of their own.

Our gallant fellows forgot the intrusion of the foreign as soon as it had passed. A sarcastic discharge was jerked by chance at the usher and the governess—at the old game, it seemed; or why did they keep steering columns to meet? There was no fun in meeting; it would never be happening every other Sunday, and oftener, by sheer toss-penny accident. They were moved like pieces for the pleasure of these two.

Sometimes the meeting occurred twice during the stupid march-out, when it became so nearly vexatious to boys almost biliously oppressed by the tedium of a day merely allowing them to shove the legs along, ironically naming it animal excise, that some among them pronounced the sham variation of monotony to be a bothering nuisance if it was going to happen every Sunday, though Sunday required diversions. They hated the absurdity in this meeting and meeting; for they were obliged to anticipate it, as a part of

their ignominious weekly performance; and they could not avoid reflecting on it, as a thing done over again: it had them in front and in rear; and it was a kind of broadside mirror, flashing at them the exact opposite of themselves in an identically similar situation, that forced a resemblance.

Touching the old game, Cuper's fold was a healthy school, owing to the good lead of the head boy, Matey Weyburn, a lad with a heart for games to bring renown, and no thought about girls. His emulation, the fellows fancied, was for getting the school into a journal of the Sports. He used to read one sent him by a sporting officer of his name, and talk enviously of public schools, printed whatever they did—a privilege and dignity of which, they had unrivalled enjoyment in the past, days, when wealth was more jealously exclusive; and he was always prompting for challenges and saving up to pay expenses; and the fellows were to laugh at kicks and learn the art of self-defence—train to rejoice in whipcord muscles. The son of a tradesman, if a boy fell under the imputation, was worthy of honour with him, let the fellow but show grip and toughness. He loathed a skulker, and his face was known for any boy who would own to fatigue or confess himself beaten. “Go to bed,” was one of his terrible stings. Matey was good at lessons, too—liked them; liked Latin and Greek; would help a poor stumbler.

Where he did such good work was in sharpening the fellows to excel. He kept them to the grindstone, so that they had no time for rusty brooding; and it was fit done by exhortations off a pedestal, like St. Paul at the Athenians, it breathed out of him every day of the week. He carried a

light for followers. Whatever he demanded of them, he himself did it easily. He would say to boys, “You're going to be men,” meaning something better than women. There was a notion that Matey despised girls. Consequently, never much esteemed, they were in disfavour. The old game was mentioned only because of a tradition of an usher and governess leering sick eyes until they slunk away round a corner and married, and set up a school for themselves—an emasculate ending. Comment on it came of a design to show that the whole game had been examined dismissed as uninteresting and profitless.

One of the boys alluded in Matey's presence to their general view upon the part played by womankind on the stage, confident of a backing; and he had it, in a way: their noble chief whisked the subject, as not worth a discussion; but he turned to a younger chap, who said he detested girls, and asked him how about a sister at home; and the youngster coloured, and Matey took him and spun him round, with a friendly tap on the shoulder.

Odd remarks at intervals caused it to be suspected that he had ideas concerning girls. They were high as his head above the school; and there they were left, with Algebra and Homer, for they were not of a sort to inflame; until the boys noticed how he gave up speaking, and fell to hard looking, though she was dark enough to get herself named Browny. In the absence of a fair girl of equal height to set beside her, Browny shone.

She had a nice mouth, ready for a smile at the corners, or so it was before Matey let her see that she was his mark. Now she kept her mouth asleep and her eyes half down, up

to the moment of her nearing to pass, when the girl opened on him, as if lifting her eyelids from sleep to the window, a full side—look, like a throb, and no disguise—no slyness or boldness either, not a bit of languishing. You might think her heart came quietly out.

The look was like the fall of light on the hills from the first of morning. It lasted half a minute, and left a ruffle for a good half-hour. Even the younger fellows, without knowing what affected them, were moved by the new picture of a girl, as if it had been a frontispiece of a romantic story some day to be read. She looked compelled to look, but consenting and unashamed; at home in submission; just the look that wins observant boys, shrewd as dogs to read by signs, if they are interested in the persons. They read Browny's meaning: that Matey had only to come and snatch her; he was her master, and she was a brave girl, ready to go all over the world with him; had taken to him as he to her, shot for shot. Her taking to the pick of the school was a capital proof that she was of the right sort. To be sure, she could not much help herself.

Some of the boys regretted her not being fair. But, as they felt, and sought to explain, in the manner of the wag of a tail, with elbows and eyebrows to one another's understanding, fair girls could never have let fly such look; fair girls are softer, woollier, and when they mean to look serious, overdo it by craping solemn; or they pinafore a jigging eagerness, or hoist propriety on a chubby flaxen grin; or else they dart an eye, or they mince and prim and pout, and are sigh-away and dying-ducky, given to girls' tricks. Browny, after all, was the girl for Matey.

She won a victory right away and out of hand, on behalf of her cloud-and-moon sisters, as against the sunny-meadowy; for slanting intermediates are not espied of boys in anything: conquered by Browny; they went over to her colour, equal to arguing, that Venus at her mightiest must have been dark, or she would not have stood a comparison with the forest Goddess of the Crescent, swanning it through a lake—on the leap for run of the chase—watching the dart, with her humming bow at breast. The fair are simple sugary thing's, prone to fat, like broad-sops in milk; but the others are milky nuts, good to bite, Lacedaemonian virgins, hard to beat, putting us on our mettle; and they are for heroes, and they can be brave. So these boys felt, conquered by Browny. A sneaking native taste for the forsaken side, known to renegades, hauled at them if her image waned during the week; and it waned a little, but Sunday restored and stamped it.

By a sudden turn the whole upper-school had fallen to thinking of girls, and the meeting on the Sunday was a prospect. One of the day-boarders had a sister in the seminary of Miss Vincent. He was plied to obtain information concerning Browny's name and her parents. He had it pat to hand in answer. No parents came to see her; an aunt came now and then. Her aunt's name was not wanted. Browny's name was Aminta Farrell.

Farrell might pass; Aminta was debated. This female Christian name had a foreign twang; it gave dissatisfaction. Boy after boy had a try at it, with the same effect: you could not speak the name without a pursing of the month and a puckering of the nose, beastly to see, as one little fellow

reminded them on a day when Matey was in more than common favour, topping a pitch of rapture, for clean bowling, first ball, middle stump on the kick, the best bat of the other eleven in a match; and, says this youngster, drawling, soon after the cheers and claps had subsided to business, “Aminta.”

He made it funny by saying it as if to himself and the ground, in a subdued way, while he swung his leg on a half-circle, like a skater, hands in pockets. He was a sly young rascal, innocently precocious enough, and he meant no disrespect either to Browny or to Matey; but he had to run for it, his delivery of the name being so like what was in the breasts of the senior fellows, as to the inferiority of any Aminta to old Matey, that he set them laughing; and Browny was on the field, to reprove them, left of the tea-booth, with her school-mates, part of her head under a scarlet parasol.

A girl with such a name as Aminta might not be exactly up to the standard of old Matey, still, if he thought her so and she had spirit, the school was bound to subscribe; and that look of hers warranted her for taking her share in the story, like the brigand's wife loading gnus for him while he knocks over the foremost carabineer on the mountain-ledge below, who drops on his back with a hellish expression.

Browny was then clearly seen all round, instead of only front-face, as on the Sunday in the park, when fellows could not spy backward after passing. The pleasure they had in seeing her all round involved no fresh stores of observation, for none could tell how she tied her back-hair, which was the question put to them by a cynic of a boy, said to be queasy with excess of sisters. They could tell that she was

tall for a girl, or tallish—not a maypole. She drank a cup of tea, and ate a slice of bread-and-butter; no cake.

She appeared undisturbed when Matey, wearing his holiday white ducks, and all aglow, entered the booth. She was not expected to faint, only she stood for the foreign Aminta more than for their familiar Browny in his presence. Not a sign of the look which had fired the school did she throw at him. Change the colour and you might compare her to a lobster fixed on end, with a chin and no eyes. Matey talked to Miss Vincent up to the instant of his running to bat. She would have liked to guess how he knew she had a brother on the medical staff of one of the regiments in India: she asked him twice, and his cheeks were redder than cricket in the sun. He said he read all the reports from India, and asked her whether she did not admire Lord Ormont, our general of cavalry, whose charge at the head of fifteen hundred horse in the last great battle shattered the enemy's right wing, and gave us the victory—rolled him up and stretched him out like a carpet for dusting. Miss Vincent exclaimed that it was really strange, now, he should speak of Lord Ormont, for she had been speaking of him herself in morning to one of her young ladies, whose mind was bent on his heroic deeds. Matey turned his face to the group of young ladies, quite pleased that one of them loved his hero; and he met a smile here and there—not from Miss Aminta Farrell. She was a complete disappointment to the boys that day. “Aminta” was mouthed at any allusions to her.

So, she not being a match for Matey, they let her drop. The flush that had swept across the school withered to a dry recollection, except when on one of their Sunday afternoons

she fanned the desert. Lord Ormont became the subject of inquiry and conversation; and for his own sake—not altogether to gratify Matey. The Saturday autumn evening's walk home, after the race out to tea at a distant village, too late in the year for cricket, too early for regular football, suited Matey, going at long strides, for the story of his hero's adventures; and it was nicer than talk about girls, and puzzling. Here lay a clear field; for he had the right to speak of a cavalry officer: his father died of wounds in the service, and Matey naturally intended to join the Dragoons; if he could get enough money to pay for mess, he said, laughing. Lord Ormont was his pattern of a warrior. We had in him a lord who cast off luxury to live like a Spartan when under arms, with a passion to serve his country and sustain the glory of our military annals. He revived respect for the noble class in the hearts of Englishmen. He was as good an authority on horseflesh as any Englishman alive; the best for the management of cavalry: there never was a better cavalry leader. The boys had come to know that Browny admired Lord Ormont, so they saw a double reason why Matey should; and walking home at his grand swing in the October dusk, their school hero drew their national hero closer to them.

Every fellow present was dead against the usher, Mr. Shalders, when he took advantage of a pause to strike in with his “Murat!”

He harped on Murat whenever he had a chance. Now he did it for the purpose of casting eclipse upon Major-General Lord Ormont, the son and grandson of English earls; for he was an earl by his title, and Murat was the son of an

innkeeper. Shalders had to admit that Murat might have served in the stables when a boy. Honour to Murat, of course, for climbing the peaks! Shalders, too, might interest him in military affairs and Murat; he did no harm, and could be amusing. It rather added to his amount of dignity. It was rather absurd, at the same time, for an English usher to be spouting and glowing about a French general, who had been a stable-boy and became a king, with his Murat this, Murat that, and hurrah Murat in red and white and green uniform, tunic and breeches, and a chimney-afire of feathers; and how the giant he was charged at the head of ten thousand horse, all going like a cataract under a rainbow over the rocks, right into the middle of the enemy and through; and he a spark ahead, and the enemy streaming on all sides flat away, as you see puffed smoke and flame of a bonfire. That was fun to set boys jigging. No wonder how in Russia the Cossacks feared him, and scampered from the shadow of his plumes—were clouds flying off his breath! That was a fine warm picture for the boys on late autumn or early winter evenings, Shalders warming his back at the grate, describing bivouacs in the snow. They liked well enough to hear him when he was not opposing Matey and Lord Ormont. He perked on his toes, and fetched his hand from behind him to flourish it when his Murat came out. The speaking of his name clapped him on horseback—the only horseback he ever knew. He was as fond of giving out the name Murat as you see in old engravings of tobacco-shops men enjoying the emission of their whiff of smoke.

Matey was not inclined to class Lord Ormont alongside Murat, a first-rate horseman and an eagle-eye, as Shalders

rightly said; and Matey agreed that forty thousand cavalry under your orders is a toss above fifteen hundred; but the claim for a Frenchman of a superlative merit to swallow and make nothing of the mention of our best cavalry generals irritated him to call Murat a mountebank.

Shalders retorted, that Lord Ormont was a reprobate.

Matey hoped he would some day write us an essay on the morale of illustrious generals of cavalry; and Shalders told him he did not advance his case by talking nonsense.

Each then repeated to the boys a famous exploit of his hero. Their verdict was favourable to Lord Ormont. Our English General learnt riding before he was ten years old, on the Pampas, where you ride all day, and cook your steak for your dinner between your seat and your saddle. He rode with his father and his uncle, Muncastle, the famous traveller, into Paraguay. He saw fighting before he was twelve. Before he was twenty he was learning outpost duty in the Austrian frontier cavalry. He served in the Peninsula, served in Canada, served in India, volunteered for any chance of distinction. No need to say much of his mastering the picked Indian swordsmen in single combat: he knew their trick, and was quick to save his reins when they made a dash threatening the headstroke—about the same as disabling sails in old naval engagements.

That was the part for the officer; we are speaking of the General. For that matter, he had as keen an eye for the field and the moment for his arm to strike as any Murat. One world have liked to see Murat matched against the sabre of a wily Rajpoot! As to campaigns and strategy, Lord Ormont's head was a map. What of Murat and Lord Ormont horse to

horse and sword to sword? Come, imagine that, if you are for comparisons. And if Lord Ormont never headed a lot of thousands, it does not prove he was unable. Lord Ormont was as big as Murat. More, he was a Christian to his horses. How about Murat in that respect? Lord Ormont cared for his men: did Murat so particularly much? And he was as cunning fronting odds, and a thunderbolt at the charge. Why speak of him in the past? He is an English lord, a lord by birth, and he is alive; things may be expected of him to-morrow or next day.

Shalders here cut Matey short by meanly objecting to that.

“Men are mortal,” he said, with a lot of pretended stuff, deploring our human condition in the elegy strain; and he fell to reckoning the English hero's age—as that he, Lord Ormont, had been a name in the world for the last twenty-five years or more. The noble lord could be no chicken. We are justified in calculating, by the course of nature, that his term of activity is approaching, or has approached, or, in fact, has drawn to its close.

“If your estimate, sir, approaches to correctness,” rejoined Matey—tellingly, his comrades thought.

“Sixty, as you may learn some day, is a serious age, Matthew Weyburn.”

Matey said he should be happy to reach it with half the honours Lord Ormont had won.

“Excepting the duels,” Shalders had the impudence to say.

“If the cause is a good one!” cried Matey.

“The cause, or Lord Ormont has been maligned, was reprehensible in the extremest degree.” Shalders cockhorsed on his heels to his toes and back with a bang.

“What was the cause, if you please, sir?” a boy, probably naughty, inquired; and as Shalders did not vouchsafe a reply, the bigger boys knew.

They revelled in the devilish halo of skirts on the whirl encircling Lord Ormont's laurelled head.

That was a spark in their blood struck from a dislike of the tone assumed by Mr. Shalders to sustain his argument; with his “men are mortal,” and talk of a true living champion as “no chicken,” and the wordy drawl over “justification for calculating the approach of a close to a term of activity”—in the case of a proved hero!

Guardians of boys should make sure that the boys are on their side before they raise the standard of virtue. Nor ought they to summon morality for support of a polemic. Matey Weyburn's object of worship rode superior to a morality puffing its phrasy trumpet. And, somehow, the sacrifice of an enormous number of women to Lord Ormont's glory seemed natural; the very thing that should be, in the case of a first-rate military hero and commander—Scipio notwithstanding. It brightens his flame, and it is agreeable to them. That is how they come to distinction: they have no other chance; they are only women; they are mad to be singed, and they rush pelf-mall, all for the honour of the candle.

Shortly after this discussion Matey was heard informing some of the bigger fellows he could tell them positively that Lord Ormont's age was under fifty-four—the prime of

manhood, and a jolly long way off death! The greater credit to him, therefore, if he had been a name in the world for anything like the period Shalders insinuated, “to get himself out of a sad quandary.” Matey sounded the queer word so as to fix it sticking to the usher, calling him Mr. Peter Bell Shalders, at which the boys roared, and there was a question or two about names, which belonged to verses, for people caring to read poems.

To the joy of the school he displayed a greater knowledge of Murat than Shalders had: named the different places in Europe where Lord Ormont and Murat were both springing to the saddle at the same time—one a Marshal, the other a lieutenant; one a king, to be off his throne any day, the other a born English nobleman, seated firm as fate. And he accused Murat of carelessness of his horses, ingratitude to his benefactor, circussy style. Shalders went so far as to defend Murat for attending to the affairs of his kingdom, instead of galloping over hedges and ditches to swell Napoleon's ranks in distress. Matey listened to him there; he became grave; he nodded like a man saying, “I suppose we must examine it in earnest.” The school was damped to hear him calling it a nice question. Still, he said he thought he should have gone; and that settled it.

The boys inclined to speak contemptuously of Shalders. Matey world not let them; he contrasted Shalders with the other ushers, who had no enthusiasms. He said enthusiasms were salt to a man; and he liked Shalders for spelling at his battles and thinking he understood them, and admiring Murat, and leading Virgil and parts of Lucan for his recreation. He said he liked the French because they could

be splendidly enthusiastic. He almost lost his English flavour when he spoke in downright approval of a small French fellow, coming from Orthez, near the Pyrenees, for senselessly dashing and kicking at a couple of English who jeered to hear Orthez named—a place trampled under Wellington's heels, on his march across conquered France. The foreign little cockerel was a clever lad, learning English fast, and anxious to show he had got hold of the English trick of not knowing when he was beaten. His French vanity insisted on his engaging the two, though one of them stood aside, and the other let him drive his nose all the compass round at a poker fist. What was worse, Matey examined these two, in the interests of fair play, as if he doubted.

Little Emile Grenat set matters right with his boast to vindicate his country against double the number, and Matey praised him, though he knew Emile had been floored without effort by the extension of a single fist. He would not hear the French abused; he said they were chivalrous, they were fine fellows, topping the world in some things; his father had fought them and learnt to respect them. Perhaps his father had learnt to respect Jews, for there was a boy named Abner, he protected, who smelt Jewish; he said they ran us Gentiles hard, and carried big guns.

Only a reputation like Matey's could have kept his leadership from a challenge. Joseph Masner, formerly a rival, went about hinting and shrugging; all to no purpose, you find boys born to be chiefs. On the day of the snow-fight Matey won the toss, and chose J. Masner first pick; and Masner, aged seventeen and some months, big as a navvy, lumbered across to him and took his directions, proud to

stand in the front centre, at the head of the attack, and bear the brunt—just what he was fit for, Matey gave no offence by choosing, half-way down the list, his little French friend, whom he stationed beside himself, rather off his battle-front, as at point at cricket, not quite so far removed. Two boys at his heels piled ammunition. The sides met midway of a marshy ground, where a couple of flat and shelving banks, formed for a broad new road, good for ten abreast—counting a step of the slopes—ran transverse; and the order of the game was to clear the bank and drive the enemy on to the frozen ditch-water. Miss Vincent heard in the morning from the sister of little Collett of the great engagement coming off; she was moved by curiosity, and so the young ladies of her establishment beheld the young gentlemen of Mr. Cuper's in furious division, and Matey's sore aim and hard fling, equal to a slinger's, relieving J. Masner of a foremost assailant with a spanker on the nob. They may have fancied him clever for selecting a position rather comfortable, as things went, until they had sight of him with his little French ally and two others, ammunition boys to rear, descending one bank and scaling another right into the flank of the enemy, when his old tower of a Masner was being heavily pressed by numbers. Then came a fight hand to hand, but the enemy stood in a clamp; not to split like a nut between crackers, they gave way and rolled, backing in lumps from bank to ditch.

The battle was over before the young ladies knew. They wondered to see Matey shuffling on his coat and hopping along at easy bounds to pay his respects to Miss Vincent, near whom was Browny; and this time he and Browny talked

together. He then introduced little Emile to her. She spoke of Napoleon at Brienne, and complimented Matey. He said he was cavalry, not artillery, that day. They talked to hear one another's voices. By constantly appealing to Miss Vincent he made their conversation together seem as under her conduct; and she took a slide on some French phrases with little Emile. Her young ladies looked shrinking and envious to see the fellows wet to the skin, laughing, wrestling, linking arms; and some, who were clown-faced with a wipe of scarlet, getting friends to rub their cheeks with snow, all of them happy as larks in air, a big tea steaming for them at the school. Those girls had a leap and a fail of the heart, glad to hug themselves in their dry clothes, and not so warm as the dripping boys were, nor so madly fond of their dress-circle seats to look on at a play they were not allowed even to desire to share. They looked on at blows given and taken in good temper, hardship sharpening jollity. The thought of the difference between themselves and the boys must have been something like the tight band—call it corset—over the chest, trying to lift and stretch for draughts of air. But Browny's feeling naturally was, that all this advantage for the boys came of Matey Weyburn's lead.

Miss Vincent with her young ladies walked off in couples, orderly chicks, the usual Sunday march of their every day. The school was coolish to them; one of the fellows hummed bars of some hymn tune, rather faster than church. And next day there was a murmur of letters passing between Matey and Browny regularly, little Collett for postman. Anybody might have guessed it, but the report spread a feeling that girls are not the entirely artificial beings or flat

targets we suppose. The school began to brood, like air deadening on oven-heat. Winter is hen-mother to the idea of love in schools, if the idea has fairly entered. Various girls of different colours were selected by boys for animated correspondence, that never existed and was vigorously prosecuted, with efforts to repress contempt of them in courtship for their affections. They found their part of it by no means difficult when they imagined the lines without the words, or, better still, the letter without the lines. A holy satisfaction belonged to the sealed thing; the breaking of the seal and inspection of the contents imposed perplexity on that sentiment. They thought of certain possible sentences Matey and Browny would exchange; but the plain, conceivable, almost visible, outside of the letter had a stronger spell for them than the visionary inside. This fancied contemplation of the love-letter was reversed in them at once by the startling news of Miss Vincent's discovery and seizure of the sealed thing, and her examination of the burden it contained. Then their thirst was for drama—to see, to drink every wonderful syllable those lovers had written.

Miss Vincent's hand was upon one of Matey's letters. She had come across the sister of little Collett, Selina her name was, carrying it. She saw nothing of the others. Aminta was not the girl to let her. Nor did Mr. Cuper dare demand from Matey a sight or restitution of the young lady's half of the correspondence. He preached heavily at Matey; deplored that the boy he most trusted, etc.—the school could have repeated it without hearing. We know the master's lecture in tones—it sings up to sing down, and touches nobody. As

soon as he dropped to natural talk, and spoke of his responsibility and Miss Vincent's, Matey gave the word of a man of honour that he would not seek to communicate farther with Miss Farrell at the school.

Now there was a regular thunder-hash among the boys on the rare occasions when they met the girls. All that Matey and Browny were forbidden to write they looked—much like what it had been before the discovery; and they dragged the boys back from promised instant events. It was, nevertheless, a heaving picture, like the sea in the background of a marine piece at the theatre, which rouses anticipations of storm, and shows readiness. Browny's full eyebrow sat on her dark eye like a cloud of winter noons over the vanishing sun. Matey was the prisoner gazing at light of a barred window and measuring the strength of the bars. She looked unhappy, but looked unbeaten more. Her look at him fed the school on thoughts of what love really is, when it is not fished out of books and poetry. For though she was pale, starved and pale, they could see she was never the one to be sighing; and as for him, he looked ground dower all to edge. However much they puzzled over things, she made them feel they were sure, as to her, that she drove straight and meant blood, the life or death of it: all her own, if need be, and confidence in the captain she had chosen. She could have been imagined saying, There is a storm, but I am ready to embark with you this minute.

That sign of courage in real danger ennobled her among girls. The name Browny was put aside for a respectful Aminta. Big and bright events to come out in the world were hinted, from the love of such a couple. The boys were not

ashamed to speak the very word love. How he does love that girl! Well, and how she loves him! She did, but the boys had to be seeing her look at Matey if they were to put the girl on some balanced equality with a fellow she was compelled to love. It seemed to them that he gave, and that she was a creature carried to him, like driftwood along the current of the flood, given, in spite of herself. When they saw those eyes of hers they were impressed with an idea of her as a voluntary giver too; pretty well the half to the bargain; and it confused their notion of feminine inferiority. They resolved to think her an exceptional girl, which, in truth, they could easily do, for none but an exceptional girl could win Matey to love her.

Since nothing appeared likely to happen at the school, they speculated upon what would occur out in the world, and were assisted to conjecture, by a rumour, telling of Aminta Farrell's aunt as a resident at Dover. Those were days when the benevolently international M. de Porquet had begun to act as interpreter to English schools in the portico of the French language; and under his guidance it was asked, in contempt of the answer, Combien de postes d'ici a Douvres? But, accepting the rumour as a piece of information, the answer became important. Ici was twenty miles to the north-west of London. How long would it take Matey to reach Donvres? Or at which of the combien did he intend to waylay and away with Aminta? The boys went about pounding at the interrogative French phrase in due sincerity, behind the burlesque of traveller bothering coachman. Matey's designs could be finessed only by a knowledge of his character: that he was not the fellow to

give up the girl he had taken to; and impediments might multiply, but he would bear them down. Three days before the break-up of the school another rumour came tearing through it: Aminta's aunt had withdrawn her from Miss Vincent's. And now rose the question, two-dozen-mouthed, Did Matey know her address at Douvres? His face grew stringy and his voice harder, and his eyes ready to burst from a smother of fire. All the same, he did his work: he was the good old fellow at games, considerate in school affairs, kind to the youngsters; he was heard to laugh. He liked best the company of his little French friend from Orthez, over whose shoulder his hand was laid sometimes as they strolled and chatted in two languages. He really went a long way to make French fellows popular, and the boys were sorry that little Emile was off to finish his foreign education in Germany. His English was pretty good, thanks to Matey. He went away, promising to remember Old England, saying he was French first, and a Briton next. He had lots of plunk; which accounted for Matey's choice of him as a friend among the juniors.

CHAPTER II. LADY CHARLOTTE

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Love-passages at a school must produce a ringing crisis if they are to leave the rosy impression which spans the gap of holidays. Neither Matey nor Browny returned to their yoke, and Cuper's boys recollected the couple chiefly on Sundays. They remembered several of Matey's doings and sayings: his running and high leaping, his bowling, a maxim or two of his, and the tight strong fellow he was; also that the damsel's colour distinctly counted for dark. She became nearly black in their minds. Well, and Englishmen have been known to marry Indian princesses: some have a liking for negresses. There are Nubians rather pretty in pictures, if you can stand thick lips. Her colour does not matter, provided the girl is of the right sort. The exchange of letters between the lovers was mentioned. The discovery by Miss Vincent of their cool habit of corresponding passed for an incident; and there it remained, stiff as a poet, not being heated by a story to run. So the foregone excitement lost warmth, and went out like a winter sun at noon or a match lighted before the candle is handy.

Lord Ormont continued to be a subject of discussion from time to time, for he was a name in the newspapers; and Mr. Shalders had been worked by Matey Weyburn into a state of raw antagonism at the mention of the gallant General; he could not avoid sitting in judgement on him.

According to Mr. Shalders, the opinion of all thoughtful people in England was with John Company and the better part of the Press to condemn Lord Ormont in his quarrel with

the Commissioner of one of the Indian provinces, who had the support of the Governor of his Presidency and of the Viceroy; the latter not unreservedly, yet ostensibly inclined to condemn a too prompt military hand. The Gordian knot of a difficulty cut is agreeable in the contemplation of an official chief hesitating to use the sword and benefiting by having it done for him. Lord Ormont certainly cut the knot.

Mr. Shalders was cornered by the boys, coming at him one after another without a stop, vowing it was the exercise of a military judgement upon a military question at a period of urgency, which had brought about the quarrel with the Commissioner and the reproof of the Governor. He betrayed the man completely cornered by generalizing. He said—

“We are a civilian people; we pride ourselves on having civilian methods.”

“How can that be if we have won India with guns and swords?”

“But that splendid jewel for England's tiara won,” said he (and he might as well have said crown), “we are bound to sheathe the sword and govern by the Book of the Law.”

“But if they won't have the Book of the Law!”

“They knew the power behind it.”

“Not if we knock nothing harder than the Book of the Law upon their skulls.”

“Happily for the country, England's councils are not directed by boys!”

“Ah, but we're speaking of India, Mr. Shalders.”

“You are presuming to speak of an act of insubordination committed by a military officer under civilian command.”

“What if we find an influential prince engaged in conspiracy?”

“We look for proof.”

“Suppose we have good proof?”

“We summon him to exonerate himself.”

“No; we mount and ride straight away into his territory, spot the treason, deport him, and rule in his place!”

It was all very well for Mr. Shalders to say he talked to boys; he was cornered again, as his shrug confessed.

The boys asked among themselves whether he would have taken the same view if his Murat had done it!

These illogical boys fought for Matey Weyburn in their defence of Lord Ormont. Somewhere, they wee sure, old Matey was hammering to the same end—they could hear him. Thought of him inspired them to unwonted argumentative energy, that they might support his cause; and scatter the gloomy prediction of the school, as going to the dogs now Matey had left.

The subject provoked everywhere in Great Britain a division similar to that between master and boys at Cuper's establishment: one party for our modern English magisterial methods with Indians, the other for the decisive Oriental at the early time, to suit their native tastes; and the Book of the Law is to be conciliatingly addressed to their sentiments by a benign civilizing Power, or the sword is out smartly at the hint of a warning to protect the sword's conquests. Under one aspect we appear potteringly European; under another, drunk of the East.

Lord Ormont's ride at the head of two hundred horsemen across a stretch of country including hill and forest, to fall

like a bolt from the blue on the suspected Prince in the midst of his gathering warriors, was a handsome piece of daring, and the high-handed treatment of the Prince was held by his advocates to be justified by the provocation, and the result. He scattered an unprepared body of many hundreds, who might have enveloped him, and who would presumptively have stood their ground, had they not taken his handful to be the advance of regiments. These are the deeds that win empires! the argument in his favour ran. Are they of a character to maintain empires? the counter-question was urged. Men of a deliberative aspect were not wanting in approval of the sharp and summary of the sword in air when we have to deal with Indians. They chose to regard it as a matter of the dealing with Indians, and put aside the question of the contempt of civil authority.

Counting the cries, Lord Ormont won his case. Festival aldermen, smoking clubmen, buckskin squires, obsequious yet privately excitable tradesmen, sedentary coachmen and cabmen, of Viking descent, were set to think like boys about him: and the boys, the women, and the poets formed a tipsy chorea. Journalists, on the whole, were fairly halved, as regarded numbers. In relation to weight, they were with the burgess and the presbyter; they preponderated heavily in the direction of England's burgess view of all cases disputed between civilian and soldier. But that was when the peril was over.

Admirers of Lord Ormont enjoyed a perusal of a letter addressed by him to the burgess's journal; and so did his detractors. The printing of it was an act of editorial ruthlessness. The noble soldier had no mould in his

intellectual or educational foundry for the casting of sentences; and the editor's leading type to the letter, without further notice of the writer—who was given a prominent place or scaffolding for the execution of himself publicly, if it pleased him to do that thing—tickled the critical mind. Lord Ormont wrote intemperately.

His Titanic hurling of blocks against critics did no harm to an enemy skilled in the use of trimmer weapons, notably the fine one of letting big missiles rebound. He wrote from India, with Indian heat—“curry and capsicums,” it was remarked. He dared to claim the countenance of the Commander-in-chief of the Army of India for an act disapproved by the India House. Other letters might be on their way, curryer than the preceding, his friends feared; and might also be malevolently printed, similarly commissioning the reverberation of them to belabour his name before the public. Admirers were still prepared to admire; but aldermen not at the feast, squire-archs not in the saddle or at the bottle, some few of the juvenile and female fervent, were becoming susceptible to a frosty critical tone in the public pronunciation of Lord Ormont's name since the printing of his letter and the letters it called forth. None of them doubted that his case was good. The doubt concerned the effect on it of his manner of pleading it. And if he damaged his case, he compromised his admirers. Why, the case of a man who has cleverly won a bold stroke for his country must be good, as long as he holds his tongue. A grateful country will right him in the end: he has only to wait, and not so very long. “This I did: