

THE COMBATANTS: AN ALLEGORY

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The Combatants: An Allegory by Edward Monro

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EDWARD MONRO

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AN ALLEGORY**

THE COMBATANTS.

THE COMBATANTS :

In Allegory.

BY THE
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The Combatants.

CHAPTER I.

I THOUGHT I stood in the midst of a vast plain, high mountains rose all around, shutting out, as I was told, a lovely land beyond, which the children of the plain only knew by the coloured lights of the sunset and sunrise which glowed from behind them. These mountains cast their deep shadows on the plain, which had upon it tall and beautiful trees scattered here and there; and all around, underneath the mountains, lay little villages hidden in the shadows, and which scarce ever seemed to see light, save when a stray sunbeam from the hill shot across them, and then I could see the houses and cottages which formed them, and here and there little gardens of many lovely flowers which, they said, were nourished by the sunbeams that every now and then shot from the hill tops. The centre of the plain was of sand, and bare and empty. It was when a ray of this sunshine was shooting

over the villages, that I saw a group of boys standing in one of the gardens, where they had been working.

"Oh! see, see, Eustace," cried one, "see the sunbeam, isn't it glorious! see, see, the beam of blue and purple, see how it has melted the sharp mountain top into liquid light, see how it glitters on yonder tree. Oh! what would I give to see the world it comes from! shall I ever?"

"They say some have," said Eustace, thoughtfully.

"I don't believe it," cried another who was in the group, "I don't believe any have—how could they climb such a hill as that?"

"Oh! I don't mean they climbed the mountains, Lucien, but there is a way through them you know, only one way, and those who have gone to the other side, have gone through that one way—I've heard of such," and he looked up very thoughtfully to the mountain top.

"Oh! dear," said the first speaker, "if that is so, why don't we all go instead of staying in this dark valley? what is that one way, Eustace?"

"Pleasing the king of the land," said Eustace, "and he will take those in who do."

"Yes, yes," said Bertram, "I know, I have heard it; well, I'm sure I would do anything the king told me, to get there—anything."

"Well, I should indeed like to be there," said Eustace.

"Oh! I don't believe any of it," said Lucien; "I'm

sure those mountains are to be climbed, don't believe a word he says, Bertram—Eustace was always half a fool, see if I don't get there some day by my own power; why do you smile Eustace? Oh! I tell you what, I won't stand that."

"I didn't mean to laugh," said Eustace, "I only had a thought."

"Well, and what was it? sir—you are always setting yourself up above others."

"Oh! I'm sure he's not," said Bertram and two or three more voices, "Eustace is very good; much better than we are."

"Well, well," answered Lucien, "there's enough; but what was your thought?"

"Why, that you could never climb these mountains; no one ever did yet."

"I say many have," cried the other.

"Yes," said Eustace, "set out to climb them, but never crossed them; you know some have turned back and said it was impossible."

"Well, but some have never come back."

"Yes, but where are they?"

"Why, safe across to be sure," said Lucien, angrily. Eustace shook his head.

"Where do you think they are?" said Bertram, in a half whisper to Eustace.

"Lost in the awful chasms at top," said he.

"Awful chasms at top!" said Lucien, "what folly!"

The ray of sunshine was gone and I lost sight of the boys.

I found the boys were captives, and the villagers

of the plain were all in captivity and under a cruel conqueror, who sorely oppressed them. I noticed the boys were in chains, though very long ones, so as not to prevent their using exertion; all were captives who dwelt on this plain, and the land beyond was called "the land of the free;" all who toiled on the plain longed to go there. Their captivity was sore. Their fathers had once lived in the land beyond, and had been brought to the sandy plain by this cruel conqueror.

When I looked again it was night, and the moon shone down on the sandy plain, and deep black shadows of the rugged mountains were painted on the plain, and hid the cottages of the villagers. But the light of the moon shot along a little wood of leafy trees which skirted the bottom of the mountains; along this I could see two figures walking oftly and slowly.

"Oh! Eustace," said Bertram's voice, "how blessed it would be to be in the land of the free!" and the poor captive seemed ready to cry with the earnestness of his desire. "Do you think there is any chance of our ever going there, Eustace?"

"It is no easy work to go there, Bertram," said the other; "I have heard the passage is most difficult and painful to those who do pass."

"But what matter the pain if we get there at last, free, free, of the captive's chain, free as a bird in the deep blue sky, free as the noble wind which rolls in a minute over the mountain top;" and the young captive's eye lit up with joy, and the tears