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EAST LYNNE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ASHLEY."

I.

THE LADY ISABEL.

IN an easy-chair of the spacious and handsome library of his town-house, sat William, Earl of Mount Severn. His hair was grey, the smoothness of his expansive brow was defaced by premature wrinkles, and his once attractive face bore the pale, unmistakable look of dissipation. One of his feet was cased in folds of linen, as it rested on a soft velvet ottoman, speaking of gout as plainly as any foot ever spoke yet. It would seem—to look at the man as he sat there—that he had grown old before his time. And so he had. His years were barely nine-and-forty, yet in all, save years, he was an aged man.

A noted character had been the Earl of Mount Severn. Not that he had been a renowned politician, or a great general, or an eminent statesman, or even an active member of the Upper House: not for any of these had the earl's name been in the mouths of men. But for the most reckless among the reckless, for the spendthrift among spendthrifts, for the gamester above all gamesters, and for a gay man outstripping the gay; by these characteristics did the world know Lord Mount Severn. It was said his faults were those of the head; that a better heart or more generous spirit never beat in human form: and there was much of truth in this. It had been well for him had he lived and died plain William Vane. Up to his five-and-twentieth year he had been industrious and steady, had kept his terms in the Temple, and studied late and early. The sober application of William Vane had been a byword with the embryo barristers around; Judge Vane, they ironically called him, and they strove ineffectually to allure him away to idleness and pleasure. But young Vane was ambitious, and he knew that on his own talents and exertions must depend his rising in the world. He was of excellent family, but poor, counting a relative in the old Earl of Mount Severn. The possibility of his succeeding to the earldom never occurred to him, for three healthy lives, two of them young, stood between him and the title. Yet those lives died off: one of apoplexy, one of fever in Africa, the third boating at Oxford; and the young Temple student, William Vane, suddenly found himself Earl of Mount Severn, and the lawful possessor of sixty thousand pounds a year.

His first idea was, that he should never know how to spend the money: that such a sum, year by year, could *not* be spent. It was a wonder his head was not turned by adulation at the onset, for he was courted, flattered, and caressed by all classes, from a royal duke downwards. He became the most attractive man of his day, the lion in society; for, independent of his newly acquired wealth and title, he was of distinguished appearance and fascinating manners. But unfortunately, the prudence which had sustained William Vane, the poor law student, in his solitary Temple chambers, entirely forsook William Vane, the young Earl of