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Title: *Isabella. A Novel*

Place of publication: London

Publisher: Printed for Henry Colburn and Co.

Date of publication: 1823

Edition: 1st ed.

Number of volumes: 3

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ISABELLA.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "RHODA," &c,

"Take, if you can, ye careless and supine,
Counsel and caution from a voice like mine.
Truths that the theorist could never reach,
And observation taught me,—I teach."

COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR HENRY COLBURN AND CO.

1823.

ISABELLA.

CHAP. I.

“Oh! these deliberate fools!”

SHAKESPEARE.

“Example draws where Precept fails;
And Sermons are less read than Tales.”

IT is advisable, therefore, that Tales should supply the place of Sermons; but it is not therefore necessary that they should resemble them.

These little Volumes do not, then, contain an illustration of mysteries, which, if they could be illustrated, would be no longer mysteries. Nor do they pretend to argue the plea of Faith versus Works — nor Works versus Faith. No! we leave such high and inscrutable matters to those who prefer the means to the end. We deal in simple facts; and present you with the veritable, and, as we trust, the delightful

HISTORY

OF

ISABELLA HASTINGS.

Isabella was the eldest daughter of Lady Jane Hastings, a widow, whose purposed web of life had been broken to pieces by the unexpected accident of her husband dying before his father. By this untimely, and, as Lady Jane always called it, *unnatural* event, the title and fortunes which had determined her choice in a companion for life, had eluded her hopes, and had rested with a younger brother of her husband's. The several sons which had blessed the first period of the marriage had all died in their infancy; and several years having elapsed between the death of the last, and the quick succession in which she had presented Mr. Hastings with the three daughters who survived him, Lady Jane found herself, on his death, in the wane of life, without having made one ascending step from the rank in which she was born, with a limited income, and three girls, who, if they were to be countesses, baronesses, or even splendidly-established commoners, could only hope to be so by the favours bestowed upon them by Nature, or from the reputation imposed upon them by education. In the minute features of the loveliest babe ever born, it is beyond the skill of the most practised eye to ascertain whether the expanding form will be that of ugliness or beauty. Lady Jane was resolved to leave nothing to chance; she determined to inflict on the powerless victims every accomplishment that could adorn beauty, if such should be their happy lot, or which would most effectually countervail the

want of it, were she destined to be the unfortunate creature who was to *bring out* to observation a train of Misses whom no one would wish to look upon.

From these motives Isabella, had received what Lady Jane called, “the best of all possible educations.” Not, indeed, in one particular, resembling those of the present day; where authority seems to have changed hands, and the child rules the parent. “*Sic volo*” was Lady Jane’s motto: and, as her maternal feelings were not of a nature to lead her to sacrifice the future well-being of her offspring to the indulgence of the present moment, she was not deterred by any harshness in the process from pursuing the end which she had in view. But who shall arraign the motives of parental fondness? She *could* only design the good of her children; and her indefatigable labourings to promote this good were so evident to all, that the least candid of her acquaintance could not but allow that the Misses Hastings were contracting a debt of obligation to their mother, that the most implicit obedience in their disposal in life, and their most devoted affection through the course of it, would but inadequately discharge.

Does any one ask upon what foundation so extensive a claim was rested? the answer is easy. No one could accumulate a greater variety of dancing and drawing, of singing and language masters for their daughters than Lady Jane Hastings had done; no one could have poured into their tender minds a greater portion of premature knowledge, and no slave-master could more rigorously have enacted the fulfilment of every successive task than had Lady Jane.

Nor let it be supposed that the moral of education had escaped the acuteness of her intellect. She well knew, when properly modified, how it might tend to enhance the merit of the more essential parts of her system; the additional brilliancy which the setting might give to the stone. Her moral was not indeed conveyed in the antiquated phraseology of the apostolic age, but she had many, if not unanswerable, reasons to prove, that it meant the same thing. If she dropped the motive “for letting their light to shine before men,” she enforced the duty. No one could instil into the tender minds of the pupils a higher respect for the “world’s good opinion,” nor a greater dread of its censure; nor could more eruditely instruct them in all the mysteries of a “dignified pride,” nor better enforce the sacredness of the duties that we owe “to ourselves.” If in the spirited acting up to the full sense of such instructions the confines of another’s pride were trespassed upon, or the duties that we owe “to others” were forgotten, the fault was not Lady Jane’s. Inconvenience must happen to individuals, but each ought to take care of themselves. So she had been instructed; by the rule which she now gave she had acted; and she imagined that she could plead her own success as a proof of the solidity of its foundation.

As the master architect, Lady Jane attended herself to the great outlines of her daughters’ education; the minor parts she left to be filled by the assistant governess. Her own time being fully occupied by seeing that the expensive attendance of the various accomplishment masters was not thrown away, or that the person during their absence lost not the ply which it had been the result of so much trouble to give it, she committed to Mrs. Obrien all the cares of religious instruction. Having made it an indispensable part of her recommendation that she should be “a member of the Established Church,” she modestly said, that she considered her as a person better fitted than herself to go into all the “detail of such matters.”—“Mrs. Obrien had been educated to understand them;” and indeed she had “no great fault to find with the manner of enforcing what she knew;”—“if

there were a little too much point made of outward observances which sometimes encroached upon a time barely sufficient for all the necessary parts of education, or a little too literal an interpretation of rules and precepts which a more extended intellect would have taken in a more liberal sense, yet the error was on the right side. Provided that nothing more important was omitted, there was no harm, while girls were young, in being something more scrupulous, perhaps than others, of doing, what however all the world did, and what all the world must do in the end,—but the reputation of strictness had its advantages, and she must acknowledge that nobody could have nobler sentiments than Mrs. Obrien, or could better know how to instil them into her pupils; so that she hoped there would be no great harm done by a little preciseness while they continued in the school-room,—it made them more obedient there, and would soon wear off when they came into the world.”

Lady Jane had already begun to reap the reward of so happy an union of energy and supineness,—of vigilant watchfulness and dormant confidence,—of unbending control and modest acquiescence. It was agreed on all hands that Lady Jane was the most exemplary of mothers, and the Misses Hastings the best educated of daughters. Lady Jane drew the consequence, that the Misses Hastings would be the earliest and best established young ladies of the age, that is of the next—five years! Already she had a little foretaste of this supreme felicity in the disappointment which seemed to hover over the as strenuous, but, as she conceived, less well-directed efforts of her sister-in-law, the Lady Stanton.—Lady Stanton had a little preceded her in the race of bringing up, and bringing out, “accomplished females,” and Lady Jane having felt that the titled daughters of Lady Stanton had advantages beyond any which she could claim for her own, she had wisely *appeared* to waive all competition where she had little hope of victory. She had calculated, indeed, that the most formidable of these daughters would be disposed of before she brought any of her own under public observation; but Lady Charlotte Stanton had now “been out” the last three years, and she was Lady Charlotte Stanton still!—Lady Jane wondered how it could be!—for she was beautiful as an angel, or a goddess, or any other unearthly being which happened to occur to Lady Jane’s imagination when she spoke of her niece—yet perhaps it might be accounted for—she had always seen errors in her sister’s way of bringing up her girls: errors which she flattered herself she had kept free from. The difference would be seen.—Isabella, after all, might be disposed of before her transcendant cousin. Every body knew how strictly her daughters had been educated.—Lady Stanton’s system was different,—it might be right;—it might attract more admirers, but for her part she did not think it so likely to secure husbands.—Men liked women who had been used to obey; who would not always have a will of their own.—*If* she had taught her daughters *any* thing, it was the natural superiority of the other sex, and the necessity in all females to bow to it.—Men did not like to be shouldered by an equal every hour in the day; if they wanted amusement they could find it elsewhere.—A cheerful, quiet home, was what men sought for when they *did* marry.—Wives that had talents at their husband’s command, not such as were always seeking for public display. She was sure Lord Stanton was of her opinion — he had often said, — “we are wrong Jane, you are right — you bring up your daughters so as that they may make rational men happy — Lady Stanton educates hers as if they were never to know control.”

“She had endeavoured to deserve such approbation. She had educated her daughters for wives, and she did *suspect* they would be sooner sought than those who might perhaps have some outward advantages over them.”

These suspicions were swelling fast into hopes when she saw the first, the second, and the third year of Lady Charlotte’s “entrance into the world” come and go, without the great end of all Lady Stanton’s cares having been answered. These hopes broke out in a little civil triumphing; a little complimentary comparison of her own ways of education when opposed to those of Lady Stanton, rounded off with the candid acknowledgment, that “every body know their own concerns best;” and that “nobody could deny but that Lady Stanton as earnestly desired the establishment of her children as any body in the world could; but the issue would be seen.”

This prophecy was now upon the point of being accomplished. Isabella descended from the school room, and entered the arena where her cousin had been skirmishing for the last three years with so little success; and now the great problems of each of these relative, but rival families were, “whether Isabella would be established in her first season,”—or, “whether Lady Charlotte would be established at all.”

CHAP. II.

“I would not marry her, ’though she was endowed
with all that Adam had left him before he trans-
gressed.” SHAKESPEARE.

NOTHING could be more opposite than the characters of Isabella and Lady Charlotte. Isabella brought up under the strictest discipline, with the whole weight of parental authority unceasingly pressing on her imagination,—accustomed to have her performance severely criticised, and being scantily fed with praise, even when it was beyond the power of criticism to find fault, was diffident of her own powers, and cautious of bringing into open day either her inclinations or her opinions, yet acute, and endued with the most genuine and lively feelings, she felt more than she expressed, and knew more than she displayed.

Lady Charlotte, the spoiled Child, of a self-willed Mother, the victim at once of violence and indulgence, unconscious of the very meaning of self-government, estimating herself highly, confident, with fiery passions, and a cold heart, was quick to conceive, and ready to exhibit; but her acquirements were wholly superficial: it was the reputation, and not the acquisition of knowledge that was her aim. The mortification of others was the aliment of her happiness; the mortification of Isabella was peculiarly so: the indiscreet emulations of education had already established a rivalry between them, and however stoutly Lady Charlotte might deny it to others, she could not conceal from herself, that her three years’ seniority had not secured to her even the simple advantage over Isabella of being farther advanced in the various lessons that had been imposed upon each; she knew that Isabella excelled her in most of the shewy parts of education, to which she made the most pretence, and that in spite of the impediments that the modesty and feeling of Isabella threw in the way of its manifestation, her superiority would make itself felt whenever a comparison was instituted between them. Hence she had always both hated and feared her. Their personal attractions partook of the difference of their characters. Lady Charlotte was a Goddess.—Isabella was a Grace: passion flashed from the dark eyes of Lady Charlotte, love beamed from the intelligent azure of Isabella’s—the soft voluptuousness of Lady Charlotte’s browner tint intoxicated the senses, the modest purity of Isabella’s fairness gave repose to affection: Lady Charlotte might make a man mad; Isabella could only make him happy.

The moment was now arrived when the powers of each were to be tried by competition.

The gloss of novelty was something worn off from Lady Charlotte — she had been seen; — she had been criticised; — she had been appreciated, and — she had not been chosen! — she felt this.—She felt it the more when the garland which had not been offered to her acceptance, might any moment be placed on the brow of Isabella. They were relations, they were intimate acquaintance, they were nominally friends, and Lady Charlotte made use of the prerogatives of the latter character to draw the portrait of her rival with the pencil of knowledge.

“Who can know her better than I do? Dear, sweet girl! I wonder how she will succeed in the world? That odious Lady Jane has so bowed the poor thing’s spirit, that she has scarcely left her the power of knowing black from white. All that she does is so sweet! — so good! —so in rule! — that I am terribly afraid she will be thought dull; but she *is not* dull, I can assure you. Yet, if the truth must be spoken, there is something very like dullness in her feelings. None of that *devoûment* which marks the existence of superior spirits. Hers is not a superior spirit. How peaceably will she pass through life! While I —” The inference was easily made, and all acute feelers declared for Lady Charlotte. But more particularly did she desire to fasten this inference upon the imagination of Mr. Willoughby — the handsome, the fashionable, the agreeable, the rich Mr. Willoughby! —the desired of all beholders who had daughters to marry, and of those who wished to become wives themselves.

The dazzling charms of Lady Charlotte had powerfully attracted him: he seemed to be on the point of surrendering to manners so animated, and a display so imposing as scarcely to leave admiration an option: yet the magical words had not yet been spoken — he was still without the fatal circle — and a more powerful enchantress might rend asunder in a moment all the spells which it had cost Lady Charlotte so much pains and art to weave.

CHAP. III.

“Much may be said on both sides.”

SIR ROGER DE COVERLEY.

“THE good horse is mine,” said Lord Burghley to Mr. Lascelles: “Willoughby weds, and the fair Isabella is the bride.”

“How do you prove this, my Lord?” asked Mr. Lascelles.

“Oh! as l’ami de famille, I am in the secret. Besides, I have this moment parted from Willoughby, radiant with joy and triumph.”

“Triumph!” repeated Mr. Lascelles: “what, over his own inclinations? I have lost my money, but I shall keep my opinion. I still maintain that he takes the woman he approves, rather than the one whom he admires.”

“The choice does him honour,” replied Lord Burghley.

“Do you mean to call him a fool, my Lord?”

“Is it folly, in an engagement for life, to prefer that which will retain its excellence through every period of it, to that which will only charm for a day?”

“I lost my money on a contrary calculation,” replied Mr. Lascelles; “and on what can approbation fasten in a school-room automaton, the creature of Mamma and la Governante? One who has been bribed to show no will of her own before matrimony, by the hopes of never submitting to that of another afterwards?”

“You do not know Isabella,” said Lord Burghley. “Yes, I do,” replied Mr. Lascelles. “I know her for a miracle of education! So much accomplishment, so much wisdom, so much propriety, at eighteen, is an artificial monster, that revolts me more than could the most hideous incongruities of nature.”

“Oh!” returned Lord Burghley, “if imperfection is your taste, Lady Jane’s education has left enough of that to satisfy any man. You might pursue your favourite plan of reform, even if this monster of perfection had fallen to your lot. I speak of natural qualities, not artificial adjuncts; and I repeat, that you do not know Isabella.”

“Better than she does herself, poor innocent!” replied Mr. Lascelles. She would not do a naughty thing for the world! Oh no! But she knows not how much undue restraint Nature has to indemnify herself for; not how far the bow must be bent the contrary way before it can attain its natural perpendicular. Besides, with all her timid bashfulness, I have seen a sparkle in the eye, and an arch play about the mouth, that tell me that Mrs. Willoughby and Miss Hastings will probably have nothing in common but the person.”

“You would then prefer,” said Lord Burghley, “the eccentricities, — the petulancies, — the stoutly declared will of Lady Charlotte, to the even course of propriety, and yielding spirit of Isabella?”

“Oh! for propriety and yielding, I give her no more credit than for the colour of her gown; the one is imposed and the other chosen by Lady Jane. The taste and the temper of women never declare themselves till after they are married. But for what is really their own, who would not exchange the softest smile that ever mantled over the ruby lips of Isabella, for one of those love-inspiring, though disdainful glances, that dart from the eye of the fire-souled Charlotte?”

“I would not,” said Lord Burghley, with emphasis, “if the suffrage of a sexagenary may have any weight; and it is plain that Willoughby would not. He may boast a little more penetration than you lay claim to, my friend; and probably may have seen enough of the taste and the temper also of the virgin, to resolve to shun the wife. And had not Dunstan been hoodwinked by something more than love, he might have seen the same, but he will find it out some of these days; for I have more news for you — Willoughby does not only marry Isabella Hastings, but Dunstan weds Lady Charlotte Stanton, and that in a fortnight.”

“What, our nouveau Riche?” exclaimed Mr. Lascelles. “And is the haughty Charlotte come to this? Yet I thank you for your news, my Lord: it has saved me some useless compassion. I was just going to propose that Mr. Willoughby should be hanged on the next willow tree, as a recreant knight; but, if the lady is not induced to hang herself in despair, I do not know why the false swain should be hung *in terrorem*. When the consolation is so near, and in *such a form*, the injury cannot have been great.”

“The injury,” returned Lord Burghley, “is just as many thousands as Mr. Willoughby’s income exceeds Mr. Dunstan’s, and no more.”

CHAP. IV.

“He offer’d the jewels, and gold in store;
So she gave her hand—and they said no more.”

OLD BALLAD.

“MY dear Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby, as he sat playing with the shining ringlets of his young bride, “you are all that I can wish. The sweetness of your temper, and the elegance of your appearance, secure my happiness. Let me always see you thus good-humoured and well-dressed, and I shall have nothing to ask.”

Such, in the estimation of Mr. Willoughby, were the boundaries of matrimonial happiness, and such the means of securing it; and in marrying Isabella Hastings, he believed that he had given a pregnant proof how discreetly he could conduct this most important transaction of life. Ten years’ experience in the *ways of the world*, unchecked by parental restraint, and borne above the control of circumstances by the powers of an affluent fortune, had allowed Mr. Willoughby to taste of every stream that is supposed to flow from the fountain of pleasure; and at two and thirty he was inclined, with a much wiser man, to pronounce all that was vanity.

It is not, however, that in exhausting the relish for life, that we get rid of our existence; and at the age to which Mr. Willoughby had yet only arrived, he might reasonably reckon upon a long remainder, for the enjoyment of which it was the part of prudence to provide some substitute for the evanescent delights which had escaped his grasp. The provision to which he had recourse was matrimony, and he set about it with a precaution, and a spirit of calculation for which he gave himself the more credit, as it was the first instance of his life in which he had exercised either of those qualities. They did for him all that, perhaps, could be hoped for from such counsellors: they rather secured him from the mischiefs of the state than procured for him its pleasures. He had been too often in love to suffer love alone to decide his choice: he had gathered the flower and had found the serpent under it, and he rather sought to shun the rocks by which he believed himself to be surrounded, than hoped to attain that fairy land, where every sun is bright, and every gale is perfume.

In having seen much of the wives of others, he concluded that he must have learnt what to avoid in choosing his own,— for *once* he resolved to be wise, and, alike to the surprise of his associates, and to his own, he stemmed the current of passion which was carrying him rapidly towards Lady Charlotte, and, under the gentler auspices of approbation and reason, he married Miss Hastings.

In her birth and her beauty he found all that could justify his selection to the world, and believing that education had given her all the qualities that would justify it to himself, he looked no further; naturally concluding that what was itself so lovely, must be to him an object of love.

The motives that had determined Isabella in the acceptance of Mr. Willoughby, if they were not more natural than those which had decided his choice in her favour, were at least more simple.

The earliest impression that had been made on the mind of Isabella was, that she had the best and most sedulous of mothers, and the next was the intended purpose of all

these cares and pains. Why had all the honest impulses of nature been held down that the surface might not lose its smoothness, or the figure its proportion, but for the one great end of female existence? and that this end should be accomplished in Lady Jane's family, by the distinguished matrimonial establishment of all and each of the daughters? This had been the stimulant to industry, the promised reward of obedience, Isabella well understood all this, and knew that a failure in the attainment of the object so long, and so assiduously looked forward to, would not be pitied in her as a misfortune, but would be punished as a fault.

She therefore held herself ready to be sacrificed at the shrine of Plutus, whenever the maternal sacrificer should give the word.

Isabella indeed neither thought of the god, nor the sacrificer, nor the sacrifice. It was not by these names that she designated the immorality that she was prompt to commit — she called the whole thing “being established; and being established as mamma thought best.” — Thus, when in hearing of the proposals of Mr. Willoughby she found the purpose for which she had been so carefully educated likely to be so soon and so eligibly answered, nothing occurred to her but to acquiesce in the opinion which she had heard confidently expressed by others, that there was nothing to be done but to accept the hand that was offered her, and to rejoice that it was offered by a man whom she knew to have been the object of the hopes and fears of half her acquaintance.

She married: and was then at leisure to discover how far the having in possession all the requisites to matrimonial happiness of which she had ever heard, could in fact produce the result that had been promised from them.

Had Lady Jane been equally successful in petrifying the feelings as she had been in controlling the actions of her daughter, Isabella might never have discovered any error in the calculation which had made the destiny of her life. If she could have confined her affection to rich shawls and splendid jewels; if she could have gloated on the elegance and variety of her equipage; or have exulted in her well-fancied liveries, or her exquisitely decorated mansion, she might have been — no! — I will not profane the word — she would no more have been a happy woman than she would have been a rational being; but she might have been one of those animals who have no existence but in their senses, who sport and flutter in a mid-day sun, and who are chilled into annihilation by a passing cloud.

But the heart and understanding of Isabella alike forbad such a degradation. Nor could either one or the other have secured her happiness, had the splendours of life been presented to her by the hand of age, of folly, or of vice. As the gift of Mr. Willoughby, indeed, it is not to be wondered at if they dazzled her senses and confounded her judgment; if, in the first glow of exultation attendant on the sudden acquisition of all that she had been accustomed to hear spoken of as the *ne plus ultra* of life, she did not distinguish how little she held by the sacred bond of that appropriate affection which makes of two individuals but one soul, and how much she owed to the incidental circumstances of being the wife of a man of fortune.

Isabella found herself the happiest of women; and she blessed the prudence and foresight of her mother that had made her so. Hitherto, indeed, she had thought more of the conquest that she had made, than the return that it demanded from herself. She felt assured of the love of Mr. Willoughby, but had not yet asked herself whether she loved him.

It was one of Lady Jane's maxims, that a well-educated girl would of course love the husband who had placed her above the level of her companions, that is, that she would love him "sufficiently." But she could prove by a thousand arguments that there might be as much indiscretion in too devoted an attachment to a husband, in the wife of a man of fashion, as in the head-long fancy of any love-sick damsel by the side of a purling stream. She could talk learnedly of the various claims that people of distinction had upon their feelings, and their time;— of the duties that they owed to society; — of the immorality of suffering the Aaron's rod of conjugal attachment to swallow up all that we owed to our family: with many more such erudite and original *et cœteras*, as shewed at once the acuteness of the intellect, and the softness of the heart.

Isabella had taken it for granted that she should love the husband that Lady Jane presented to her, and when she saw that husband the handsome and captivating Mr. Willoughby, she had no doubt but that she did love him, but as yet she knew not what it was to love, nor even the indications that might have assured her that she was beloved. How, otherways, could she have mistaken the even good humour, the laugh, the jest, the assured and easy approach of Mr. Willoughby, for symptoms of a heart trembling for its dearest interests, and doubtful how it should secure them? indeed, as Mr. Willoughby had made himself content with the acceptance of his offers from the mother, rather than sought to secure the affections of the daughter, he had in fact never had one doubt or fear upon the subject. He might have repeated the boast of Caesar, with a slight variation of phrase, He came, he demanded, —he obtained! — and, pleased with his acquisition, he resembled more a happy victor than a successful lover. But the settlements were now arranged, the equipage chosen, the jewels presented, and the moment approached, that for a certain time at least, the fiat of fashion decreed that Mr. Willoughby and his bride were to be all the world to each other.

On their marriage they had withdrawn to Mr. Willoughby's house in Hertfordshire; the season was November, London was empty, and every publick place supplementary to the attractions of the capital, began to be deserted. Mr. Willoughby was no sportsman; seclusion with so beautiful and innocent a companion as Isabella was a novelty that for the time filled up every wish; and now indeed might she with reason have believed herself the idol of his affections: and now it was that she resigned her heart to him, so absolutely and so irrecoverably that neither circumstance nor time could henceforth restore it to her keeping.—He seemed but to exist in her presence; her wishes were his laws, and so sedulously was her accommodation or her pleasure anticipated, that if she were always to have lived only with Mr. Willoughby, it seemed that hands, and feet, and thought, would have been superfluous to Isabella.

How natural was it for a girl hitherto checked, controled, held down, without a choice even in the colour of a ribbon, or the power of command in the slightest instance, to be at once astonished and intoxicated with her situation: Isabella was both; but she was something more; she was abashed with the triumph that she believed she had attained. She could not believe that she owed such excess of happiness to any merits or charms of her own: it was the goodness, the kindness of Mr. Willoughby alone from which it flowed; and while she loved him the better for the thought, she became timid lest he should discover some imperfection in her, which might make her less worthy in his eyes, of that ardour of affection, on which she was now sensible that all her future happiness

must depend. What now were splendour and riches to her?—to live always with Mr. Willoughby, and *thus* to live with him, bounded her ideas of felicity.

But was it so with Mr. Willoughby? — to him there was a world beyond Beech Wood. The first, the second, the third, nay even the fourth week was past, and neither satiety nor weariness had been felt.—Oh might it always be so!—thought the too well-experienced Mr. Willoughby — and he felt that the charm was broken.

The fifth week was ushered in with, “My dear Isabella, we must not always live so — I must not seclude you thus from the world — our friends will think that we mean to bury ourselves alive — it is really high time not only to enjoy, but to celebrate our union.”

Isabella thought that the enjoyment was the best celebration — but she did not say so — she was modest and retiring, and knew not how to presume to appropriate wholly to herself what she thought so well suited to make the happiness of many.

“It would indeed be wrong that *you* should live in seclusion,” said she.

“Oh we should neither of us like it,” replied Mr. Willoughby, —and began immediately to write his letters of invitation, desiring Isabella, that she would summon her mother and sisters to their Christmas party.

“We must have Lady Charlotte,” said Mr. Willoughby, “and — dire necessity! — that fool her husband too. That fair cousin of yours, Isabella, I fear has paid too dear for her whistle.”

“Why should you think so?” said Isabella. “I really believe that she likes Mr. Dunstan. At least, I am quite sure she chose to marry him; for she always did what she pleased, in spite of my uncle. Lady Stanton would never suffer her to be contradicted.

“Like Dunstan!” exclaimed Mr. Willoughby, “oh! no, that’s impossible. Lady Charlotte has better taste: take my word for it she knows that Dunstan is a low-bred fool; one who disgraces his birth, low as it is. He was a kind of a *pis aller*, I take it.”

“What, at one and twenty?” returned Isabella. “With so much beauty, with so many charms, as Lady Charlotte possesses?”

“You young Ladies,” said Mr. Willoughby, fondly patting the cheek of Isabella, “attach a great deal of glory to doing your business quickly. Lady Charlotte, with all her beauty, and all her charms, had seen more than one competitor who had started with her reach the goal before her; and I suspect that she was not unapprehensive of being distanced by her sweet little cousin here,” said he, gently drawing Isabella towards him.

Isabella coloured a deep crimson. All the petty jealousies and heart-burnings that had ever been between them rushed into her mind, and a consciousness that she had been complimented on having robbed her cousin of her favourite admirer, completed her confusion.

“You look terribly guilty, my dear Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby. “What! You did not suspect that I was such an adept in the arcana of your sex?”

“Indeed I have no arcana,” replied Isabella, blushing, and even trembling, with the varied emotion, of fear lest she was lowered in the opinion of the man whom she loved, and eagerness to vindicate herself. “I have no arcana. Mamma, indeed, wished that I should marry early; but I did not care about it, except to please her.”

“I am most happy,” said Mr. Willoughby, caressing her, “that it pleased Mamma that you should marry me.”

“Oh! but that pleased me too,” said Isabella, timidly, and with her eyes cast on the ground.

It would have been well for Mr. Willoughby if at this moment his vanity had stood his friend, and given the whole meaning of this compliment to his personal qualities; but he had known too many machinating mothers and obedient daughters, not to allow his “rent-roll,” — “his princely mansion in the country,” — and his “excellent town-house,” their full share in the pleasure so ingenuously expressed by Isabella. He knew that choice had had no part in her acceptance of his hand; and while he gave her credit for softness and truth, he regarded her as too much the creature of circumstances to feel his self-love much flattered by an attachment which he believed that she would have felt equally for any man who had been her husband. He emboldened not, therefore, this first indirect acknowledgment of love on the part of Isabella by any answering tenderness on his side, but pursuing his arrangement of the purposed party.

“I know,” said he, “we may have Sir Charles Seymour. He promised to hold himself in readiness for the first summons I should give when his visit would not be an intrusion, and I suspect he may think it long of coming; and we will have your old play-fellow Burghley; he is a good-natured spirited creature, and as full of tricks as a kitten; and with George Stanton, and one or two more, the house will be full. If Eagle’s Crag were a little nearer we would adjourn thither, and enact such a Christmas as has not been seen since the days of good Queen Bess; but it would be a bad joke to travel into Westmoreland for the purpose, so we must do as well as we can in the more limited space of Beech Wood.”

Isabella was acquiescent; the house was filled; and she felt more from deprivation than accession, that she was no longer its sole inhabitant. But how could she wish it otherways when Mr. Willoughby had so many other claims upon his attention? Hers was not that sickly love which droops if it is not fed every hour in the day with sugar plums. She could indeed a little wonder that he did not appear to regret the uninterrupted intercourse which he had once seemed to estimate so highly; that she heard no more of the exquisite bliss of being “all to each other;” the joy of being “he the relator, she sole auditress.” She perceived that there were others to whom he could “relate,” and by whose attention he seemed to think himself well repaid. She felt no such changes in herself; yet she was not the less obliged to attend more to others. And perhaps this was the case with Mr. Willoughby also; only he had more command over himself than she had; he could appear pleased with what, perhaps, after all, he only endured:—it was a debt due to society. She admired him the more for being thus able to discharge it; she tried to imitate him, looking for her indemnification when they should be once again alone.

CHAP. V.

“Let observation, with extensive view,
Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life;
Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate,
O’erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate.”

JOHNSON.

IN the mean time the hours passed not unpleasantly; — the whole party seemed to be in good humour with themselves and each other; Lady Jane was at the acme of delight. The splendour, the elegance, the festivity with which Isabella was surrounded, she regarded only as the fruits of her own sagacity and management. She was willing even to undervalue the personal attractions of Isabella, that she might exalt her own talents in having made them produce more than their price.

“You see, girls,” she would observe to her daughters, “that it is not superior beauty that always succeeds best;—there is no denying that Lady Charlotte is handsomer than Isabella — at least more imposing — she suffers the powers of her charms to be less disputed, but what has all this done for her? after three years’ exhibition on her part, and all the manoeuvring possible on Lady Stanton’s, what is it come to at last? she had married, — what? a man of warehouses and manufactories. Not that I look down upon trade—God forbid! it is the sinews of the Nation, and the best houses in the peerage have been beholden to it. But this Mr. Dunstan? — so recent! so fresh from the shop! his manners so little purified! his clumsy opulence reminds one every moment of his only distinction, and the lowness of his mind shows how little worthy he is even of that. I am astonished my brother would consent to such an union; but he has such a tribe of daughters, and his estate is so encumbered! — the fault was in Lady Charlotte; and it all springs from the same source — education! education! — I always foretold how it would be, and now I hope you will acknowledge that I was right, and be sensible of the obligations that you all owe to my care. Three years’ experience has shown that a man of fashion would not have so self-willed a wife, and Lady Charlotte was glad to take up with the man that would. I hope that she will be duly thankful to him, but what would Lady Stanton give to call Mr. Willoughby her son-in-law.”

The young ladies could not but allow that Lady Jane had done excellently well for one daughter, and secretly hoping that she would be equally successful for the other two, felt a fresh flow of spirits, and anticipated enjoyment, as they looked around on ottomans and candelabras, on gorgeous liveries and elegant carriages. Of the two latter ingredients in matrimonial happiness it must be acknowledged that Lady Charlotte was by no means deficient; nor could it be discovered by any outward sign or gesture, except sometimes a slight movement in her beautiful lip when addressed by Mr. Dunstan, that she thought there was any thing wanting to make her the object of envy — never had her brow been seen so cloudless — never had her manners been so equal; every childish or school room emulation appeared to be forgotten. Isabella was her “dear cousin” — her “chère amie:”—and it was “we,” and “us” — and “you and I know, my dear,”—with every other

phase of familiar intercourse and appropriate liking, that bespoke the friendship of near relations and chosen companions.

How wonderfully is Lady Charlotte improved by her marriage! thought Isabella — I am quite convinced that she has done the thing she liked; and now that she is at ease, as to her establishment in life, we shall see no more of those hot and cold fits, those uncertainties and caprices which used to make her so intolerable — as we must be much together, the change will be greatly to my advantage.

Yet when Isabella heard and saw Mr. Dunstan, certain doubts came across her mind! — “Was he not all that Lady Charlotte had been accustomed to ridicule and despise? — his plebeian birth, his ludicrous deference for all that was great, even the creeping devotion which he paid to his titled wife, she should have supposed would have been of all things revolting to her high and disdainful spirit.” These doubts were not weakened by a certain turn of Lady Charlotte’s eye, which Isabella knew well, and which, although it appeared now to be put more than usually under control, seemed to say that Lady Charlotte’s present forbearance rested on no sound foundation; nor did she think this the less for the pains which Lady Charlotte took to magnify all Mr. Dunstan’s supposable good qualities, and her eager recommendation of him to Isabella’s approbation. Isabella suspected that so much unnecessary pains, had the merits been real, must arise either from Lady Charlotte’s consciousness that they did not exist, or for the purpose of keeping the object of them in good humour, as a froward child is bribed to behave well in company. In all their driving or riding parties Lady Charlotte laid claim to Mr. Willoughby, while she would consign Isabella to Mr. Dunstan, with, “do, dear Isabella, accompany Mr. Dunstan, you are such a favourite with him!” — but Isabella would not be so consigned; and there were others who would have disputed the consignment, had she been willing to have submitted to it. There was the young and mirthful Burghley, — the companion of her childhood, the nephew and heir to her never-failing friend Lord Burghley; — there was Sir Charles Seymour, the well-bred, the fashionable Sir Charles Seymour; whose civilities, always well-placed, were never obtrusive; who outraged no decorum, affected no superiority, was at the disposal of every body, and passed for the best tempered and most obliging person in the world. With such aids-de-camp Isabella found no difficulty in eluding the awkward attempts of Mr. Dunstan to establish himself as her professed attendant. She had always to plead a prior engagement to Sir Charles Seymour; or some wild trick of the boyish Burghley threw him so intirely out of his play, that, as he sometimes observed, with mingled resentment and surprise, “Mrs. Willoughby had never, no not *once*, *tried* his curricule, though he might say, without a boast, that it was the first curricule *going*, and so said his friend the Duke; and Lord L. ‘absolutely could not conjecture how he could get such a one: nobody else had any thing like it;’ — and no doubt that was the simple truth; for nobody but himself knew how to give proper directions about such things; few people indeed would or could go to the expence necessary to have such a *complete thing*; — if Mrs. Willoughby would but once try it, she would soon see the difference; for, certainly, though every thing that Mr. Willoughby had was elegant, fashionable, and dashing enough, the ease of the thing was what he did not understand, indeed he might repeat it, that nobody did but himself.”

“Happy Lady Charlotte!” cried Burghley, in a tone which made Lady Charlotte frown, and every body else laugh.

But although Lady Charlotte had the mortification to see that Mr. Dunstan was more truly appreciated by her simple cousin than she had hoped might have been the case, and that, still worse, this cousin was also more highly estimated by others than her invidious praises, and the air of protecting superiority which she assumed towards her, were likely to have allowed, yet she was sufficiently successful in drawing almost the whole of Mr. Willoughby's attention to herself. The field was, indeed, entirely open to her. Isabella was, by all the laws of fashion and hospitality, quite out of the question; and her sisters were the sisters of Mr. Willoughby also; so that, farther than, "Pray, Burghley, take care of Isabella," — "George, you must be Harriet's beau," it could not be expected that his gallantry would extend in that direction. And thus, as Lady Charlotte was left the undisputed property of Mr. Willoughby in every morning excursion, so she became the paramount object of his care, that the evenings should pass in the way most agreeable to her. A word from her decided between music, dancing, or cards. The latter she usually left to those whom she designated as invalids; amongst which number her husband was invariably one. "Heaven knows," would she say, "he has no music in his soul." "His knowledge in that delicious science was not one of the good parts for which she suffered love for him." "It was a great treat to her to sing and play to one who could understand her." She seized therefore generally on the instrument, and calling Mr. Willoughby to her side, sometimes employing him in turning over the leaves of the music-book, and sometimes inducing him to join his voice to hers, she would keep possession of him for hours. In vain would Mr. Burghley declare that Isabella could sing the song better, or Sir Charles Seymour gently inquire, if there were not another instrument? Lady Charlotte was equally deaf to both. "Let us go on," she would say to Mr. Willoughby; and she would say it with so expressive a tone, and a look of so much favour, that it was not in man to say no.

Isabella was too modest even to wish to enter the lists with her; and Lady Jane, who was rather an ambitious than a vain mother, more proud of her own management than pleased with her daughter's acquirements, was careless whether or no Isabella spread her nets, now the fish was caught; and as for her other two daughters, there was no one of the present party whom she could either wish or hope that they would attract.

Mr. Burghley she thought too young, and too dependant; Sir Charles was too wary; and cousin George Stanton was poor, and a gamester. Nor was there any thing more hopeful in the fleeting guests, who came and went, tarrying but a day. Lady Jane, therefore, let every thing go on without any interruption from her, provided only that she had her rubber at whist. This Isabella always took care to arrange as much to her satisfaction as she possibly could. George Stanton would rather play a half-crown game than none at all, especially as he was sure to find a ready acquiescence from Mr. Willoughby to any bet he could propose; and Mr. Dunstan, who played whist well, and who was not unversed in any of the accumulating advantages of small gains, was always to be had; but Mr. Burghley and Sir Charles Seymour were equally immovable whenever she talked to them of the card table, except she would make one of the party. To this nothing but the necessity of securing Lady Jane her favourite amusement ever induced her to do; for though she could sacrifice her own pleasure to that of her mother, yet she had in fact but one point of attraction in the whole circle by which she was surrounded.

Of Mr. Willoughby's various ways of pleasing, all were equally new to Isabella. Before marriage she had seen him handsome, gay, acquiescent; she had known him since

as a passionate and doating lover; and perhaps in this, the nonage of her reason, she might have been best pleased had she never advanced one step farther in her knowledge;—but there is nothing stationary under the moon. Mr. Willoughby must be something more or less than a lover. Isabella must know him in all the various lights that society throws upon the character. She must see him abide the touch stone of moral feeling, — she must hear him recognize the obligations of a responsible being, before she could judge whether or no “her lot was cast in a fair ground,” whether, *indeed*, she had “a goodly heritage.” Of all this, at present, she knew nothing; but she hourly gained some light on subjects so interesting; the social qualities were now under her observation; and Isabella proudly compared her destiny with that of Lady Charlotte’s.

Could there, indeed, be a greater contrast than between the gay, good-humoured, and accommodating Willoughby, and the solemn, morose, and immoveable Dunstan? — between the intelligent good-breeding of the former, and the pedantic civility of the latter? between him who estimated himself by his personal qualities alone, and him who valued himself only on the weight of his purse? — in a word, between the gentleman by birth and education, and an upstart who held his place in society by the money he spent there?

It was not, however, necessary that Mr. Willoughby should have had so deep a relief to have brought all his engaging qualities to bear full on the mind of Isabella. Without comparing him with any other, her eye followed him with delight through all the various exercises of the day;—she could have wished herself the object of every civility, or act of good-will, that he showed to each of his guests; and in the evenings she sat intently listening for the sounds of his voice as they sometimes mingled with Lady Charlotte’s, or made audible some gay remark, or acute observation; but nothing of jealousy or mistrust made a part of her feelings. To her he was never wanting in a kind word or look, a gentle pressure of the hand as he passed her, or a fond caress when no eye was upon them. All the time that he gave to Lady Charlotte Isabella knew to be no more than is customary for the master of the mansion to dedicate to the female guest of the most distinction, yet she could not but wish that all this would come to an end, that the festivities of the joyous Christmas should cease, that they should repair to town, — where, as she knew, they might live much more to themselves if they wished it, so she had not a doubt but that Mr. Willoughby did wish it, as earnestly as she did herself.

CHAP. VI.

“Oh! how the spring of love resembleth well
Th’ uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shews all the glory of the Sun,
And by and by, a cloud takes all away.”

SHAKESPEARE.

AT last the desired moment arrived. The party at Beechwood broke up, and Isabella took possession for the first time of her town house: that house which had made so prominent a feature in the enumerated advantages of her projected marriage. Two months before, it is possible that she would not have thought its consequence overrated; but the novelty of having servants and carriages at her command, of being surrounded by costly mirrors and silken draperies, *all her own property*, as had been so often emphatically insisted upon, was already worn off; her eye was satiated with them, and her ear weary of hearing of their omnipotency. Her heart had spoken, and it required as the *sine qua non* of her happiness, that she should be the first, the declared, the undisputed object of her husband’s affections.

We are again alone, thought she. Again we shall be every thing to each other.

But the days of Hertfordshire returned no more!

Mr. Willoughby had morning occupations and evening engagements, in which Isabella had no share. There was certainly nothing extraordinary in this, and they were also not unfrequently together; but they were also often apart, and apart when it appeared to Isabella that it only depended upon Mr. Willoughby’s wish that they might have been together. But Isabella would not allow herself to believe that there was anything wrong in a creature who was to her so charming: she was rather inclined to doubt the force of her own attractions. She was unused to flattery, and the rigid manner in which all that she had been taught had been invariably judged, made her more alive to her own imperfections than to the points in which she really excelled others. How little, she thought, could she hope to be sufficient in companionship to such a man as Mr. Willoughby! She half envied the volubility of Lady Charlotte. He was all kindness! all goodness! and if more variety was necessary to him than to her, it proceeded only from the superiority of his acquirements, his more extended occupations, the larger number of human beings to whom he could give pleasure, or from whom he could receive it, and the ever-recurring opportunities of such communication. But if she had less of his company than during the first weeks of their residence in Hertfordshire, if she had not so much of it as even in London she thought might have fallen to her share, other proofs of his love seemed to arise, to supply the place of those which she, perhaps, too sensibly regretted.

Her entrance into the fairy palace of which she was henceforth to be the deity, had been hailed by the most gay and splendid festivities, professedly given to celebrate the event of her nuptials. Nor was the feast that was spread before her the feast of Tantalus. Her kind, her fashionable husband, had said, “pluck, and eat;” and in the unbounded indulgence, and the exuberance of pleasure, that Mr. Willoughby pressed upon Isabella, she still persuaded herself that she recognised the fervour of that passion which it so much flattered her heart and her vanity to believe that she had excited.

She felt, however, something of disappointment, when she observed that she was more unrestrained, than fostered — more allowed to please herself, than the object of pleasure to her husband; and that, provided he met her “well-dressed” and “good-humoured,” amidst a score of “his friends,” at his own, or some other festive board, he seemed little to concern himself how she disposed of herself in the interim. She could not now wholly solve this mystery by any doubt of her own powers of charming. She was now come forth into open day, and she had hourly proofs that the more she was seen the more highly was she appreciated. There *were* countenances that brightened with delight whenever she appeared; there *were* those who hung with rapture on every word that she uttered. She made dangerous comparisons: she might have felt dangerous regrets, had she not fortunately entertained in reality that passion for her husband, that she so mistakenly imagined that he must feel for her. It was this sacred feeling which, like the charmed gift of some benignant fairy, bore Isabella safe through the dangers by which she was surrounded: for as yet Isabella had no principles. Between the worldly maxims of Lady Jane, and the “grand sentiments” of la Governante, Isabella felt herself perpetually impelled different ways. Her morality was a “chateau en Espagne,” — beautiful in its parts, but destitute of the proportions of virtue, or the stability of truth. Without one evil propensity, with a vague notion that nothing was lovely but what was right, her good name below, and her eternal happiness above, were at the mercy of the accidents of the day, — of the forbearance of others, rather than secured by any guardianship of her own.

The perils of her situation seemed to increase hourly. Isabella could no longer conceal from herself that she was the last object on whom the attentions of Mr. Willoughby were bestowed; that her approval or admiration was the approval or admiration that he was the least solicitous to secure. It was no longer to her that the eye of Mr. Willoughby was directed in the hope of being understood; it was not to her that the half-word which implies mutual understanding was addressed; the smile of intelligence had ceased to pass between them; nor did it seem that either her gaiety or her gravity retained any influence over the feelings of Mr. Willoughby. Could this growing indifference proceed from satiety, or preference to another? Each alternative was nearly equally painful; and the state of mind which the continual debating this anxious point produced in Isabella, was peculiarly fatal to her interests; it robbed her of her gaiety, and induced such a mistrust of her power to please as gave a timidity and reserve in her intercourse with her husband, which led Mr. Willoughby to the falsest conclusions as to the extent of her understanding, and the feelings of her heart. Although a wife she scarcely dared to express an opinion; and she ventured not to obtrude her love. The change was strange and direful; and Isabella drooped under it until she seemed almost to realize the imputation of coldness and apathy which Lady Charlotte industriously laboured to affix to her character.

CHAP. VII.

“Then she plots, then she ruminates, then she devises; and what they think in their heart they may effect, they will break their heart but they will effect.”

SHAKESPEARE.

IT was now that the bold game of that daring and unprincipled woman began to display itself. All of either fear or hatred that the rivalry of their childhood and youth had engendered in the breast of Lady Charlotte, was mild to what she had felt when at the moment that she believed she had secured to herself the hand of Mr. Willoughby, she saw it wrested from her by the machinations of Lady Jane Hastings, and given to the person in the world over whom she most desired to triumph. His distinction had not only excited her ambition, and flattered her vanity, but it had engaged her fancy; and had she had a heart to have been touched, it might probably have reached even that. She almost persuaded herself that this had really been the case; and willingly mistook the rage of disappointed pride for the mortification of slighted love. What vengeance could be too great for offences so atrocious? According to her own statement of the case, she had a heavy account, indeed, to adjust with Mr. Willoughby, and she promised herself most solemnly that he should not escape from her toils till he had paid the uttermost farthing; —but it was not with Mr. Willoughby alone that she had to reckon. If he had to account to her, she had to account to the world. She had given the pledge of superior charms, and superior pretensions, not very modestly veiled, that she “would not be one of the common herd of young ladies, who flutter and glitter for a few seasons, and are heard of no more.”—To continue Lady Charlotte another winter would be annihilation!—to behold Isabella established before her would be distraction! and yet she was conscious that a few more passing months, and these double horrors of her fate would be realized. At this agonizing moment Mr. Dunstan appeared like a guardian angel. Lady Charlotte paused not an instant. Assured of the reality and extent of his wealth, and confident of her own power to make it take whatever form would please her most, she thought not of his birth, his manners, or his mind. To prove to the world that she had not looked up to Mr. Willoughby with a hope that had been disappointed, and to precede Isabella in the matrimonial career, engrossed all the powers of her understanding, and controlled every feeling of her soul. Motives so interwoven with all that she felt, made the distinctions of life, — could even suspend her natural character, — could make the fiery Lady Charlotte mild, — the disdainful daughter of an Earl smile upon the son of a manufacturer!

On this occasion Mr. Dunstan could smile too; for he was not only enamoured of the beauty of Lady Charlotte, but he also was going to gratify the ruling passion of *his* soul, if a soul he had — he was going to be allied to nobility! — It was not therefore to be wondered at, if, with such incitements on each side, that Mr. Dunstan and Lady Charlotte pressed forward with such eagerness to the goal of matrimony, as to distance the more methodical and philosophical pace of Mr. Willoughby, who was only “going to be married.”

Lady Charlotte was a bride three whole months before Isabella became so, and so ably did she know how to turn the tables on Mr. Willoughby, that her friends boldly asserted, that it was her refusal of his hand that had given it to Isabella.

Isabella also had *her* partisans, and her flatterers. The fact was as stoutly denied on the one side, as asserted on the other. The advantage of the victory was not sufficient without the glory of it; and that both belonged to Isabella, the matrimonial destiny of Lady Charlotte was appealed to as an undeniable proof.

It could not be the result of *choice*; — “what judgment could step from this to that?” — “it was a dernier resort” — a “pis aller” — a flat acknowledgement that Lady Charlotte had been rejected, and Isabella taken. Lady Charlotte was not so destitute of *friends* as to be left in ignorance that such unpleasant truths were abroad. She tossed her lofty head on high, and affected to despise them, but they shed fresh venom upon the already rankling wounds of mortified vanity; and while she felt herself compelled to rebut such degrading insinuations, by putting a strong rein on the contempt and dislike that she felt for Mr. Dunstan, her hatred to Isabella, and her desire of vengeance upon Mr. Willoughby, were multiplied tenfold. To shew him how ill he had chosen, and to sting him to the heart, became the master movement of her soul, and provided that he was miserable, and Isabella degraded, she cared not at what price or evil to herself.

Living in the same society, and associating with the familiarity of relations, there was scarcely a day in which Lady Charlotte had not the means to mortify Isabella, or to spread her allurements before Mr. Willoughby. Isabella felt that she was held down in her presence; yet all was done with so much apparent carelessness and freedom from design, that she knew not of what to complain — all seemed to proceed from her rival’s superiority in the art of charming — and this superiority seemed to be hourly establishing itself more firmly in the only place where it would have given Isabella much pain to have allowed it. This was, however, a new feeling. Isabella had hitherto felt herself strong in the preference that had been given to her over Lady Charlotte by Mr. Willoughby, and it was not likely that she would, in the present circumstances, yield to her whatever she might have done to another, without a struggle.

Something beyond the general satisfaction that her self-love had experienced on being chosen by so distinguished a person as Mr. Willoughby, had been felt by Isabella, from believing that she had been deliberately and particularly preferred to Lady Charlotte—her flatterers had not left her ignorant of the fact, and the triumph had been boasted of by others, until poor Isabella had been too much a partaker of it. On this weak side, her boasted education had not only left her vulnerable, but had even been calculated to lay low all those defences that the natural rectitude of her mind might have furnished her with. To excel Lady Charlotte was a precept: — to take pleasure in seeing her humbled was a natural consequence which had not been guarded against.

She knew that she had always excelled her in all their youthful competitions, and she considered her own superiority as no longer to be disputed, when, in the question who was most worthy to charm a man of taste and refinement, Mr. Willoughby had decided in her favour. — Of all her acquaintance Lady Charlotte was perhaps the last of whom Isabella could have been persuaded she should have become jealous.

How acute was then the pang that wrung her heart, when from wondering, doubting, fearing — she could no longer withstand the conviction, that although the

conversation of other females might be preferred to her own, that of Lady Charlotte was preferred to all the rest?

The vanity, the pride, the ambition, and the selfishness, that the mode of education to which Isabella had been subjected is so peculiarly fitted to engender, were on this conviction called into action in a moment; — and as quickly did the injunction, which she had so often received, “*not to be wanting to herself*,” occur to her recollection.

“What is this potent charm, thought she, that is to sink me into nothingness? Lady Charlotte has known my superiority, and she shall again know it! —It shall be seen whether I cannot rival her in all that seems to make her so charming in the eyes of him who no longer sees any charms in me. — My dress may be as studied — my taste as fastidious as hers; — like her I can be capricious — and like her I can prove my right to homage by encouraging numerous worshippers. Oh Willoughby! — and can this be the woman you prefer? — as a wife you rejected her; for what do you now seek her?”

The uncontrollable tears of bitter anguish rolled down the cheeks of the miserable Isabella; the hasty sparks of anger and revenge were extinguished—she trembled at her own thoughts, she shrunk from her own purposes — the rectitude of her heart revolted from the maxims by which she had been taught to regulate her conduct. It cannot be right, though she, to do wrong; — and would it not be wrong to do that from resentment, which my softer feelings condemn? yet what can be wrong that shall appear acceptable to my husband? what can be unfair that can aid me to preserve a heart so justly due to me?

CHAP. VIII.

“The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.”

SHAKSPEARE.

ISABELLA’S carriage was at the door; she was going out. “Drive,” said she, “to Mrs. Nesbitt’s.” “She is the best woman in the world, thought she, as the carriage moved on. I have heard Mamma say so a hundred times; and she knows what is right, and what the world will think to be right. And then she loves me so well, and is so ready to enter into all that concerns me. And she does not love Lady Charlotte. And she is so acute, that I shall have no occasion to say three words before she will see into the bottom of the grievance. How often has she penetrated, nay, even anticipated my thoughts. I cannot have a better counsellor.” Again tears filled the eyes of Isabella. “What am I about to do? thought she. Shall I confess that I fear Lady Charlotte’s influence over my husband? Shall I complain of that husband? I ought better *to consult my own dignity*: or rather, I ought better to consult my own heart. I will call upon Mrs. Nesbitt, but I will not say a word of my unhappiness; it may not be so confirmed as I think. Yet last night! Well, I will see farther.”

As Isabella made this wise resolution, she entered Mrs. Nesbitt’s boudoir, and was received by that friendly lady with a violent exclamation —

“My dearest Mrs. Willoughby! how pale you are! And there are tears absolutely in your eyes! You, my dear! can you have any thing to afflict or vex you?”

“Why should you suppose that I have either?” said Isabella: “I was up late; and the high wind —

“Don’t tell me of being up late, and the high wind,” interrupted Mrs. Nesbitt, which the familiarity which her age and her intimacy gave her a right to assume in her intercourse with Isabella. “My dear child, I have known you too well and too long not to read your very soul in that ingenuous countenance of yours. I know what is the matter. Yes, yes, I saw it all; although I was resolved not to say a word till you mentioned it to me. Never was there such a flirtation scene! It was quite abominable! And that passive husband to stand by and bear it all! as if an earl’s daughter could not do wrong. But the eccentricities of the beautiful Lady Charlotte, I suppose, are to be the excuse for all. She is to be judged by no common rules, I presume.”

Isabella burst into tears.

“And was it indeed so evident? And did you indeed see what I thought that no one but myself had seen — that is, had observed?”

“We must live in a better-natured world than we do for that to have been the case,” returned Mrs. Nesbitt. “Yes, it *was* evident enough; that must be confessed; but perhaps not so much noticed by any one as me, because there can be few who take so much interest in you as I do, my love.”

“And were you not surprised, my dear madam, that the very woman whom —”

“Your husband *refused* six months ago,” interrupted Mrs. Nesbitt, “should be the object of so much gallantry to that very husband? That is your question, my dear. And my answer is *no*: not in the least. Nay, never lift up those beautiful blue eyes in such

astonishment. What man, with one grain of understanding, would have made Lady Charlotte his wife? And what man, who has his five senses, but must admire her?"

"Was it then only Mr. Willoughby's understanding that chose me?" said Isabella mournfully.

"Look in the glass, my love," replied the obliging Mrs. Nesbitt, "and answer yourself, even though you do look pale."

"Ah! madam," said Isabella, blushing, "I have heard such flattery before, from lips even more persuasive than yours; but what avail charms, the influence of which is so fleeting?"

"The influence will not be fleeting, if you know how to make use of it," — returned Mrs. Nesbitt.

"Oh, teach me," cried Isabella, "that most valuable of secrets, and take my everlasting blessing with you!"

"Why, my little novice in the ways of the world, and in the ways of the lords of it," said Mrs. Nesbitt, "can it be necessary that you should come to me, though I were as wise as Ethan and Heman, and Chalcot or Darda, or even Solomon himself, for what any woman who has been married four months could tell you?—Is there indeed so little of the female in that dear heart, unhackneyed as it is, as not to tell you the weapons with which you ought to fight such a warfare as this?"

"I am afraid," said Isabella consciously, "that there may have arisen some such thoughts as those to which you allude; but I endeavoured to repress them. Would not the weapons be unholy ones? — could I expect a fortunate issue from their use?"

"Why not?" said Mrs. Nesbitt. "Will not the end sanctify the means? If you mean no harm, can you do any?"

"I don't know," said Isabella.

"You don't know!" replied Mrs. Nesbitt. "Why then, my dear, I must tell you, that your boasted education has left you ignorant of the science of life."

"But, my dear madam," said Isabella, "I do not perfectly understand you. What would you have me do?"

"Out-dress, out-shine, out-talk Lady Charlotte," replied Mrs. Nesbitt. "Let Mr. Willoughby see that in the eyes of others you are her superior; — let him hear you talked of for the elegance of the parties you give, — of the charm that you throw over every society into which you enter; — let him see that others can fall in love with you, and he will fall in love too."

"I thought," said Isabella, with great simplicity, "that he had already fallen in love with me."

"Nothing like it, my dear," returned Mrs. Nesbitt. "He knew that there was no occasion to be at that trouble; —he negotiated with mamma; he did not woo the daughter."

"But he has known me since," said Isabella meekly.

"Yes, my dear," returned Mrs. Nesbitt; "he knows you to be one of those excellently good wives who can see nothing wrong in whatever their husbands do, and therefore do not fear to do whatever they chuse."

"I do not know that Mr. Willoughby does any thing that is wrong," said Isabella; "and I am quite sure that he does not *mean* any thing that is so. If he find other people more amusing than I am, that is my fault perhaps, not his."

"It is your fault, my dear," replied Mrs. Nesbitt, "but it is a fault that you may easily amend.—Mr. Willoughby with all his faults"—

"With all his faults!" interrupted Isabella, "I was told before I married that Mr. Willoughby had no faults, and I know not that he has any now; he is indulgence itself, and I have not a complaint to make, except — but I know you will laugh at me — except that he leaves me too much at liberty to please myself."

"I do, indeed, believe," returned Mrs. Nesbitt, "it is a fault of which not another wife in the liberties of London and Westminster would complain except yourself."

"And shall I not love such a man?" said Isabella, fervently.

"To be sure, my dear!" said Mrs. Nesbitt. "Who would say to the contrary?—I beg I may not be misunderstood; — do not conceive that I am counselling you to rebellion, or witchcraft, or any other such crying sin! I think you know me better; — you know that I am *quite* religious. There *are* people who call me methodistical; — but I do not mind that; — I go on in the way which I know to be right, and let people think and talk as they please. I assure you, my dear, I live to myself, and my own notions; and to shew you that I am right I can quote Scripture for every thing that I advise; for I shall advise nothing but what shall be for the good of your husband, and your happiness; and you will see in twenty instances that I can quote you out of the Bible, that where the end is righteous, the means become so too; and in your case they will be strictly so; for what do I advise — Nothing in the least wrong in itself!—only to let your husband know that you have it in your power to do wrong if you please, that he may look about him, and make him lock up his jewel in his own bosom, lest it should be worn on the finger of another."

"Oh! my dear, dear madam," cried Isabella, "don't make such suppositions. I cannot bear them."

"Poo!" said Mrs. Nesbitt. "When he sees that you don't like to do wrong, will he not love you the better? Besides, all stratagems are fair in war; there would be no living in this world but for these little *detours*; — yes, *detours*. I am really forced to use the word, though you know that I am a true John Bull, and hate the French, all but their gloves and their silks, and their fashions; yes, I hate their very language; but *roundabouts* is so vulgar! Who could say roundabouts? But there is no harm in the thing, my dear. Witness the good Rebecca's ingenious little plan. She knew that the elder was to serve the younger; but all things are done by *means* in this world, and so she was quite right to make use of what she thought would succeed best. But don't be alarmed; I am not going to wrap you up in the skins of beasts. My very first measure, if it cannot be said to be as open as daylight, shall at least be as brilliant: you shall give a ball."

"Nay now, my dear madam, I am sure that you are laughing at me," said Isabella. "What can my giving a ball have to do with making me acceptable to Mr. Willoughby? He does not love balls. I have heard him say that he is too old for them; and I wished at that moment that I did not love dancing so well, lest he should think himself too old for me too."

"He is not too old," replied Mrs. Nesbitt, "to admire the pretty fancies of a pretty woman in the decorations of a ball, my dear. I saw *that* pretty plainly when Lady Charlotte, like the old woman in the fairy-tale, turned all her tradesman husband's eggs and nuts into pearls and diamonds, and astonished the whole world by the taste and splendour of her *debut* in *fête* making. Deuce take the French! their words are always on

one's tongue, I think, when one is talking of the *nothings* of life. Yet balls that can fix wavering husbands, or that can keep doubtful ones from wavering, are *not* nothings; and I saw with half an eye how your fickle swain bowed before the creative powers of the goddess of the scene. Nay, I heard it too: for, my love, for your sake, I think it no shame to lend an attentive ear to what otherwise would pass without notice. Much good may come from such attentions sometimes. You know that Gideon was sent to listen to what was passing in his enemy's camp, and was encouraged by what he heard there, and so got the victory. Well, as I was saying, it so happened, that just as I had slipped behind some of that magnificent drapery which, while it served to conceal the awkward junction of two of the rooms, was equally an ornament to both, I heard —"

"Pray, my dear, Mrs. Nesbitt, do not tell me what you heard," said Isabella. "I do not wish you to listen *for my sake*; and I am sure that such results as you seem to have met with can never encourage me."

"Oh! my dear, I heard no harm," said Mrs. Nesbitt: "nothing, I dare say, but what Mr. Willoughby would have said in the hearing of the whole assembly; merely some pretty-turned compliments on the taste and imagination of the fair contriver, but quite enough to convince me that the wisdom of man can be flattered by the elegant follies of the woman whom he happens to call his wife. Something was said of how proud Mr. Dunstan must be of such talents. I marked it, my dear, because — if you will pardon me — I have thought that you have been a little careless that way — only *careless* — mind the word, for you can, if you will, outshine Lady Charlotte in this respect, as well as in every other. But in all *the things* that you have given since you were married, you have never seemed to interest yourself; provided you had your friends about you, and you had dancing enough, all went well. All was very proper, all was done by rule — all very well — perfectly well — critically well — but nothing creative, nothing that bespoke the master-hand which you might have put forth if you would have given yourself the trouble, and which you really must take, for you *shall* give a ball."

"I fear I have none of those talents upon which you compliment me," said Isabella, "for really I did not discover that there was anything wanting in the ball and party that Mr. Willoughby so kindly spared no expence in giving, to make as many others as he could, as he flatteringly said, share in the happiness that he felt. I am sure I was very happy; and I thought that everybody else was so also."

"Oh! certainly," replied Mrs. Nesbitt, "there was nothing wanting to *others*, but I was afraid that so far it was a cost manque, as it did not seem to have reflected any honour upon you. Whole columns were filled with a description of the marvels of Lady Charlotte's feast, of the charms of the fair enchantress, of her wit and her talents. One should have thought that she was the only person in the room worth looking at, and there might have been no Mr. Dunstan in the world. But *you* were dismissed with, 'On Monday evening Mr. Willoughby gave a splendid entertainment to his numerous friends, and other distinguished fashionables, at his house in Grosvenor-street, in honour of his nuptials.' Not a word of you, my dear! Nothing said of *your* beauty, of *your* taste! Not a word as if you had had any share in the business. *Mr.* Willoughby's entertainment, not *Mrs.* Willoughby's: it might as well have been the celebration of your funeral as your marriage."

“Not *quite as well*,” said Isabella, smiling, “I remember reading the paragraph, and being pleased that the only circumstance was noticed that could reflect honour upon me.”

“Oh, you would not have thought so,” said Mrs. Nesbitt, “if you had heard what Mr. Willoughby said to Lady Charlotte, as they stood shaded from the general eye by the crimson and gold drapery. And I am sure you will not think so when I tell you that this ball, which you hold so lightly, is to be the first step in the plan that I have formed for your reforming your husband.”

“Reforming my husband!” exclaimed Isabella, “Good God, madam!” does Mr. Willoughby want reforming?”

“Yes, my dear,” returned Mrs. Nesbitt, coolly, “and so do all other men who have lived unmarried till two or three and thirty — now don’t agitate yourself—don’t suppose that I am going to charge Mr. Willoughby ‘with treasons, stratagems, and spoils.’ He is the last man in the world that would betray any body, though he may be betrayed.—And as for spoils, poor Willoughby!—he is more likely to furnish, than to gain them; but, my dear, ‘the full soul loatheth the honey comb,’ as the wise man says; and there are certain habits that a lengthened celibacy gives men, and certain notions not very favourable to our sex that it generates, which it is for the wife’s good to have broken and rooted out. It is a sublime idea, that a beautiful young creature, scarcely eighteen, should be able to work such a reform—a labour of love we may call it; but it cannot be done by a *coup de main*.—French again! I declare.—We must proceed by sapping.

“I have heard Mrs. Obrian talk of such sublimities,” said Isabella, with something of indignation in her tone, “but I never could understand her: it always appeared to me that the end could have been better attained by going directly to the proposed point.”

“Oh, indeed, you are mistaken, my dear,” returned Mrs. Nesbitt. “We must, as the Bible says, sometimes ‘fetch a compass,’—a little circumlocution. There! —I have escaped both *detour* and roundabouts this time. I always say that the English language has as many words as the French, though I cannot always think of the right word just when I want it.”

Isabella, depressed by Mrs. Nesbitt’s observations, and wearied with her loquacity, sat pensively silent, wholly uninterested in the comparative richness of the French and English language, and puzzled between the sanctity of the end that she had in view, and the unworthiness of the means, as it seemed to her, that was proposed for the accomplishment of it.

“What! ‘Sweeting, all *a mort*?’” said the eternally quoting Mrs. Nesbitt. “These grave looks will never stand against the eternal *enjoûement* of Lady Charlotte.—Now promise me, you must absolutely promise me, that you will give this ball, and then, as we proceed, I will open my whole plan to you.”

“I will promise you,” said Isabella, “that I will ask Mr. Willoughby to give me leave to give it.”

“Now, my dear, this is a tone that will never do,” said Mrs. Nesbitt; you have a good foundation in that pretty notion of subserviency to your lord and master, and I know that submission to a husband is a duty.—God forbid that I should say otherwise; and I am sure I always practised it, hard as I have sometimes found it; but as for those supererogatory works, of never acting without his concurrence, and of rather suffering offence than giving it, they are all, as the apostle speaks, ‘but straw and stubble;’

rubbishy notions fit only to be burnt. What would have become of that surly brute Nabal,—Nabal was his name, and folly was with him; ‘that man of Belial,’ as the discreet Abigail calls him, if the ‘woman of the beautiful countenance and good understanding,’ had thought it necessary to have asked his consent, before she had taken the loaves, and the sheep, and the wine, and the raisins and figs, and the corn with which she loaded so many asses, that she gave to the hungry David, and by appeasing his hunger, and his anger, saved the life of her churlish husband? —I am sure that was a sublime act, if ever there was one—why are such things recorded, but for examples, my dear?—You are of a beautiful countenance, you are of a good understanding, my dear child, and why should you not act as seems good in your eyes, for the good of your husband?”

“Because, my dear Madam,” said Isabella, “Mr. Willoughby is no Nabal,—he can act for himself; and I can have all I wish, and more than I wish, for simply asking for it; and I have no scruple but that I shall not encroach upon so much indulgence.”

“Very true, my dear, very true;” said Mrs. Nesbitt. “Willoughby has ‘a hand open as day to melting charity;’ so ask and have—ask and have.”

CHAP. IX.

“Yet, he is soft of voice and aspect;
Indifferent, not austere.”

BYRON.

THE conference with Mrs. Nesbitt had lasted much longer, and had taken a much more serious and consequential turn, than Isabella had anticipated. It had entirely disinclined her from prosecuting any other of her intended morning avocations. She returned home immediately, her head and her heart full of new thoughts and feelings, which she did not understand, and which she feared to analyze. The simple sorrow of being rivalled in the admiration of her husband, and which she had been doubtful whether she might not owe rather to her own imperfections, than his fault, was swelled to an apprehensive fear lest this husband, whom she had been taught to consider as perfect, and whom her imagination idolized, was not regarded in the world as tainted by its errors, and duped by its follies;—what was this reform which she was to work in Mr. Willoughby? How was she to effect it? and how strange that she could hear only of its necessity from one who had been the warmest eulogist, the most enthusiastic admirer of his virtues and his talents, at a time when a little prudent doubt, and a little rational discrimination, might have been as guides to her conduct, or as preservatives from disappointment. —Isabella wished that she could hear more.—Isabella wished that she had not heard so much.—Mrs. Nesbitt could *mean* nothing but what was kind, but she might be mistaken. Yet she was *not* mistaken in one point; it was too evident, that if Isabella were to possess her husband’s heart, she must conquer it.—How to complete this conquest became her most serious consideration. Mrs. Nesbitt asserted, that it could not be done by the beaten road of obedience, forbearance, passiveness. She must make herself *felt*, that she might be beloved; she must shew that she might be lost, that her value might be known. —Isabella was not unaware of the slippery ground that she was urged to tread. One false step, and she was undone!—Yet she a little wished to try the experiment; she more than a little wished to triumph over Lady Charlotte, and she resolved to follow the advice of Mrs. Nesbitt.

I have rights, thought she, I have affections. Alas! I even love!—what can Lady Charlotte oppose to such claims? Is she indeed so pre-eminently charming that all must sink on the comparison? what is Lady Charlotte that I cannot be? and what would I not be to excel her in the eyes of Mr. Willoughby?

While Isabella was lost in thoughts such as these, and in a variety of plans conceived and rejected in the same moment, how she could best effect her purpose, Mr. Willoughby entered the room—a consciousness of error tinged her cheek with crimson, and gave a little flutter to her manner of receiving him.

“You look as if you were thinking of your lover,” said Mr. Willoughby laughing.

“I *was*,” returned Isabella, playfully.

“And what was your thought?” said Mr. Willoughby.

“I thought that I would make him a request,” said Isabella.

“Name it, and take it,” returned Mr. Willoughby, in gay good humour.

“I should like to give a ball,” said Isabella.

"A ball?" —said Mr. Willoughby, with a tone of some surprise, —"I was not aware that your talents lay that way, my dear."

"Does it require much talent to give a ball?" asked Isabella.

"To give it with effect it does — and without it is done in a way that is distinguished, one had better save one's money, and one's trouble, and amuse oneself at the expense of other people."

"You would rather then that I thought no more about the matter?" said Isabella, with a feeling that she had been repulsed.

"Oh, by no means," returned Mr. Willoughby, — "if giving a ball will give you the least pleasure, I am sure that *I* shall wish for no other effect. I had only conceived from the indifference which you shewed as to taking any management in the little that we have done of this sort, that you had no taste for such things; and although I admire the talents that can give novelty and grace to so common an occurrence as a ball, yet I acknowledge that they are wholly feminine—I have neither imagination nor activity for such a performance; but I shall rejoice to find that you have." —

"If I am at a loss," returned Isabella, "you know I can call in a powerful coadjutrix."

"Lady Charlotte?"—said Mr. Willoughby with quickness.

The lucid fairness of Isabella's complexion became instantly suffused with the colour of the rose.

"I thought of mamma," said she—and they were both silent for a minute.

"You could not have a better," —said Mr. Willoughby, recovering himself—"and when shall this great gala be? now you have named it, I feel quite an inclination for the thing."

Isabella had lost hers; but she could not now draw back, and the mighty *when* was soon settled — but if to fix the *when* did not require much consultation, this was by no means the case with the *how*. —

Mrs. Nesbitt was no sooner acquainted that the bill had received the assent of the sovereign, than the whole of her little soul was in a bustle; her brain became a chaos of contrivances, — there was not a room or a closet in Mr. Willoughby's house that did not, in her imagination, undergo an entire change; partitions were removed and erected; boudoirs were transformed into temples; and dressing rooms into conservatories, while columns and arches arose on every hand with a facility that would have done honour to Aladdin's lamp. Every angle was to her mind's eyes shaded with the most beautiful drapery; every recess hung with the most magnificent canopies: there were also to be so many ingenious surprises: so many witty secrets, which were to come to light so *a propos!* that Isabella was alike bewildered by such a labyrinth of metamorphoses, and sickened by so much deception. Nor was she much relieved by the more solemn and profound erudition with which the matter was treated by Lady Jane, to whom she had recourse a little to stem the tide of Mrs. Nesbitt's destructive, or as she called them, creative powers. Lady Jane, as much a pedant in the arranging an entertainment as in educating a daughter, overlooked the solid foundation of "simplicity" in the one, as she did of "religious obligation" in the other, and gave all her attention to details that could have no value but in the eyes of the upholsterer, or the passing moral of the day. The shade of a drapery, or the affixing of a chandelier, cost her as much consideration, and brought forth as deep a train of reasoning, as might have been sufficient to have settled

the various interest at the Congress of Vienna. The Misses Hastings also added to the perplexity of poor Isabella; they had each their favourite plan, which, however, varied with each successive hour, and the continual intreaty of "Do, dear Isabella, let it be so," — "Now, pray, Isabella, indulge me," — and the violent condemnation, or praise of their several fancies, — "Oh, that would be hideous, shocking!" — "Oh, that would be delightful, delicious, exquisite!" — "quite new!" — "common place!" *et cetera, et cetera*, so exhausted the spirits and so puzzled Isabella's desire to oblige each, that she knew not what to decide; and acknowledging that she *had* no talents for the decorations of a ball, she would most willingly have resigned the whole management into the hands of Lady Jane and Mrs. Nesbitt, had not the latter continually reminded her, that it was not only "the giving a ball," in which she was engaged, but a trial of skill with her rival; and that it would not avail how "*nouvelle*," or "*unique*," the entertainment was, if Mr. Willoughby were not made sensible that it was the offspring of her genius. —

Under this spur, Isabella laboured on to accomplish that which her real good taste and good sense told her could be of no use whatever to the interests of her heart. Experience confirmed the dictates of these two infallible guides; for she soon found, that although Mr. Willoughby bore with unwearied good temper the eternal discussions, the accumulated notes and callings that this business produced from Mrs. Nesbitt, and Lady Jane; and that he even seemed to have pleasure in all from which she appeared to derive any, yet that in fact he took no more interest in the details in which she was hourly engaged, than he would have done if they had regarded the furnishing of a baby-house. He smiled upon the importance that seemed to be attached to the various alterations that were going forward, as a mother does on the delight that her infant shews in dressing a doll; but Isabella could see no symptom how all this display of "taste" was advancing her one degree in his love, esteem, or admiration. She began heartily to repent of having engaged in such an enterprise; and thought of nothing but how to get over it with the least trouble: and to forget it when it was over as soon as she could; — but Isabella knew not yet the slippery path of emulating vanity! — she knew not the hateful passions that are involved in the single word *rivalship*.

CHAP. X.

—“Yet I see
Thy honourable metal may be wrought
From that it is disposed.”—
SHAKSPEARE.

THE important day at length arrived! Mrs. Nesbitt had invited herself to dine with Isabella, that she might assist in overlooking all the preparations, and in ascertaining that all was in order, and every one at their post. She also promised herself the reward of witnessing Mr. Willoughby's delighted approbation on such a display of his wife's imaginative talents, for as Mrs. Nesbitt herself had been the master-wheel of the whole machine, she had not a doubt but that its movements would secure the most animated applause.

For these, the first fruits of this so confidently anticipated triumph, she was, however, obliged to wait longer than she had reckoned upon. Mr. Willoughby had no taste for the restricted space and scanty attendance which generally belongs to the lords and ladies of the most extended mansions upon such days of gala. He had been out the whole morning; had returned only to dress, and without having once walked through the decorated rooms, had gone out again to dinner.

“*Tant mieux! tant mieux!*” said the mortified Mrs. Nesbitt,—“I like it the better. His surprise and admiration will only be the greater when he sees the apartments lighted up, and every thing in its highest glory. Yes, yes, his heart will die within him, like good old Jacob's, when he heard of the wealth and honours of his son. Your triumph will then be complete.”

“I wish I had more spirit to enjoy it,” said Isabella, “but I feel sad.”

“Nothing in the world, my dear, but anxiety and fatigue,” said Mrs. Nesbitt.—“We will dine, and that will refresh you; and then to the important labours of the toilette.”

“Labour, fatigue, and anxiety, are but indifferent elements to form pleasure from,” said Isabella.

“Oh, there is no *rose sans picque*,” replied Mrs. Nesbitt. “Joseph you know, my dear, was taken from a dungeon to be governor of Egypt.”

“I wonder,” said Isabella, smiling, “how you happen to be so well read in Scripture, as to be able to quote its authority on every occasion.”

“*No wonder* at all, my dear!” returned Mrs. Nesbitt. “I was brought up by an old grandmother, and was forced to learn chapter after chapter by rote, on pain of her displeasure, which was by no means a non-entity, I can assure you, and thus it is all in my head.”

“And never reached your heart,” said Isabella, laughing, “but will any of your Scripture learning assist Adams to decide between the dresses that have been sent home for me to choose from? for I have really been so worried for the last week between “*bleu celeste*” and “*bleu foncée*,” between the “elegant” and the “superb,” that I have not a clear idea left upon the subject, and Adams is quite in despair at my stupidity.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Nesbitt, “I declare for the superb, without any hesitation upon this occasion; and, indeed, I think I could give some authority for it. You remember how

gorgeously Judith and Esther arrayed themselves when their purpose was to catch the hearts of those they feared;—but I cannot say that all my grandmother’s gettings off helped me forward much in the article of dress. We read, indeed, of a party-coloured garment, but that is now become the appropriate mark of a fool; and also a great deal about needle-work and embroidery, but not a word to enable one how to apply them to the modern modes; so, my dear, we must think more of Madame Lambert in these matters, than of the Bible. And now let us go to your dressing-room, and decide between the “*bleu celeste*” and the “*bleu foncée*.”

In this decision Isabella took little part, and Mrs. Nesbitt and Adams carried all before them, and Isabella descended from her toilette, to use Mrs. Nesbitt’s expression, “*extrêmement parée*.”

She descended also with a heavy heart; although not able to tax Mr. Willoughby with actual unkindness in so long delaying his return from his dinner party, she felt a consciousness of being neglected, and while she suggested a thousand excuses for the negligence, she felt her eyes fill with tears, and her heart tremble with apprehension. Mrs. Nesbitt saw nothing of all this, so wholly was she engrossed with admiring her own performances, and in anticipating the wonderful effects that they were to produce on the wandering affections of a fickle husband.

The apartments now began to fill, but Isabella was scarcely conscious that she was not alone — with her eyes fixed upon the entrance, she thought only of Mr. Willoughby, and not seeing him, she saw nobody. When her attention for a few moments had been forcibly diverted from this only point of interest, on recovering the power of renewing it, she cast an eager glance on the accumulating crowds, to discover if, among the multitude, she could discern that single countenance which she so longed to see. Her feverish impatience magnified minutes into hours, and to her it seemed as if half the evening was gone, and she had nearly consigned herself to despair, when at length Mr. Willoughby appeared.

He came, and he came with Lady Charlotte! his dinner engagement had been with Mr. Dunstan, and the groupe that now entered was composed of the company who had been guests at his table. Never did Lady Charlotte look more commandingly beautiful; and as if she had disdained to owe any of her attractions to external ornament, she was this evening, contrary to her usual custom, dressed with a marked simplicity — a simplicity, which, if it were unsuited to the splendour of the gala where she was to make her appearance, rendered her the most distinguished figure there, and formed a striking contrast to the display and magnificence of Isabella’s dress. Isabella’s heart smote her! how willingly would she have deposited her jewels in their boxes, and have exchanged her gorgeous robe for the simplest garment ever worn by village maiden!

How vain! how ostentatious will Willoughby think me — this odious ball has occasioned me nothing but mortification! — were the painful thoughts that passed through her mind as the gay and happy party led by Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby approached her.

“My dear Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby, “you must have thought me a sad truant.”

“But it is *I* whom you must put into the corner,” said Lady Charlotte, gaily; “it is all my fault. I protest I do not know how the hours flew; but my good friends here were *all* so agreeable that I had no notion it was so late — it was quite abominable not to

remind me; and now I recollect, this naughty Willoughby was worse than any body, for he would have another song, another air, till I am half dead with squalling."

The covert impertinence of this pretended apology was of use to Isabella; instead of humbling her, it gave her spirit to reply.

"You do yourself injustice; it is not so late as you seem to imagine; dancing has not commenced, though some of the young ladies, I believe, begin to be impatient."

"Shew us then the way to the ball-room," said Mr. Willoughby; for I protest I don't know where I am, though in my own house."

"Oh that is quite delightful!" cried Mrs. Nesbitt, who, coming up at the instant, caught the last words. "I always told Mrs. Willoughby that it would be so; but we have a great many more charming surprises and puzzles for you; so come along, and be enchanted at every step."

"If you mean bewildered by being enchanted," returned Mr. Willoughby, "you are right. Isabella, are we to turn to the right or the left? This is all quite different from what it used to be."

"To be sure!" said Mrs. Nesbitt, with a tone of triumph. "Now you see the difference between a ball given by a gentleman and a lady."

Isabella heard the word "vulgar!" uttered in a whisper by Lady Charlotte to Mr. Willoughby, who laughed.

"Come, my lady ball-giver," said he to Isabella, "lead the way."

It is not the way to my triumph, thought she, but to my humiliation; and I deserve it.

Yet on their entrance into the ball-room an involuntary exclamation of delight which burst from Lady Charlotte's lips gave her a momentary exultation.

Perhaps all my folly will not be thrown away! thought Isabella.

The dancing immediately began; but Lady Charlotte declined taking any share in it, and Mr. Willoughby remaining near her, they continued in conversation till the first pause in that pleasurable exercise gave them an opportunity of again seeking Isabella.

"If you are not going to dance again directly," said Mr. Willoughby to her, "pray come with Lady Charlotte and me, and let us make the tour of the rooms. I really must understand all that you have been doing, and Lady Charlotte is an adept in this art, and longs to criticise."

"Don't believe a word he says, my dear Isabella," said Lady Charlotte: "I long for no such thing; I only want to admire, and to teach him to admire."

"I can scarcely expect either one or the other," returned Isabella, "from your science, or Mr. Willoughby's indifference; but I am ready to attend you."

"Oh! you are quite mistaken as to Mr. Willoughby's indifference about such matters," said Lady Charlotte: "he is nothing so little as indifferent; though he may, in his masculine superiority, pretend to despise such frivolities; but we will make him take both pride and pleasure in your fairy works before the night is over, or we will know the reason why."

"The reason is very simple," replied Mr. Willoughby: "if I have neither pride nor pleasure in such things, it is because I do not understand them. The brightest ornament of a ball-room is a number of happy faces, and the power of producing them worth all the draperies and paper temples that ever Nixon furnished;" and so saying, he drew Isabella's arm under one of his, and offering the other to Lady Charlotte, who immediately took it,

the trio moved on together, notwithstanding the uplifted hands and eyes of Mrs. Nesbitt, and the manifest tokens that she made to Isabella of the total disapproval of such a procedure.

To the eye of a reasoner of Mrs. Nesbitt's sort, nothing could indeed be less likely to promote the triumph of Isabella over her rival than their being thus placed in immediate comparison,—Lady Charlotte's eye beaming with triumphant malice and projected mischief; Isabella, meek and mortified, disgusted by the familiarity affected by Lady Charlotte in her address and manners towards her husband, and ashamed to be led in triumph, as it were, by the very person over whom she hoped to have triumphed; while Mr. Willoughby, equally unconscious of the feelings of either of his companions, and far from sharing in the one or the other, thought not of any thing beyond enjoying the present moment. Of intended injury or unkindness to Isabella he was wholly innocent; and had the supposition been suggested to him, would have declared himself incapable of any such enormity. Nor was he more aware of the arts by which Lady Charlotte was appropriating him to herself, nor of the web of flattery which she was weaving around him. Yet she had already established an intimacy between them, of which, if he had been asked the grounds, he could not have found them. She could now talk to him of "old times;" could reproach him laughingly for "having once betrayed her into a fool's paradise;" could remark that "he had known to choose better;" could sigh, look down, and blush, — and yet could so quickly resume her gaiety, or could put on so natural a carelessness, as to leave him in doubt whether he had escaped from a coquet, or had sacrificed the genuine passion of a beautiful creature to too rigid an attention to the dictates of prudence. Of any danger to his happiness, or his loyalty to Isabella, he did not dream; for had he not chosen her, and rejected Lady Charlotte? He went on, therefore, amusing himself, without a purpose or a fear of injury to other or himself; and least of all to his innocent and amiable wife.

Nothing could exceed the gaiety and enjoyment of Lady Charlotte at this moment — unshackled by any delicacy of feeling herself, or by respect to that of others, in the prosecution of her design to attract Mr. Willoughby, and to confound Isabella, she scrupled not to advance to the very confines of propriety, and beyond all the bounds of good nature. Hence she indulged in a freedom and severity of remark, which, if it raised the blush of modesty or indignation on the cheek of Isabella, made Mr. Willoughby laugh, and which, in spite of his better taste and excellent temper, entertained him so extremely, that he seemed to have no ear but for her. When a momentary gravity, or a peculiar cast of countenance, announced to her quick apprehension that she was pushing her game too far, she knew how with grace and adroitness to resume her moral position, and to leave no other impression on his mind, than that youth, spirits, and happiness, are not always discreet.

But how intolerable was the situation of Isabella! — disregarded by her husband; angry and abashed, she maintained a grave and dejected silence, disdaining to take any part in a mirth that she felt to be unbecoming in itself, and insulting to her. The arrangement of the rooms seemed little to interest either Mr. Willoughby or Lady Charlotte. Isabella had neither admiration to be thankful for, nor criticism to repel, and the purpose for which she had been dragged, like a captive at the wheels of the victor's chariot, was scarcely adverted to, until, as they returned to the ball-room, Lady Charlotte said, in a tone of mockery—"All very well, excellently well, my little cousin, all quite as

it should be, except that grave face of yours, which does any thing but realize Willoughby's criterion of the brightest ornament of a ball-room, and which invites your friends to any thing but mirth."

This remark completed Isabella's discomfiture, and, hastily withdrawing her arm from under Mr. Willoughby's, she left her rival in possession of the field, and mingled with the crowd to conceal, if possible, her own defeat. But it was not here that she was to be made sensible of it — the contrasted beauties of the two cousins, the marked difference of choice which had that evening appeared in their dress, and still more the but too apparent contest in which they were engaged, had fixed the attention of almost the whole of the congregated multitude exclusively upon them. Scarcely an individual of which it was composed, but had declared in favour of one or the other, and Isabella had, by a very large majority, the greater number of suffrages — the rights of wifehood spoke to the moral sense — her style of beauty went directly to the heart. Magnificently arrayed, and surrounded by the most dazzling splendour, her pensive air, and almost *supplicating* eye, told of the insignificance of such distinctions for the purposes of happiness, and made envy give way to pity; — while on the part of Lady Charlotte, the very *force* of her charms was against her;—the audacity of her pretensions was still more so; and the natural desire to humble the proud, and to exalt the lowly, produced an almost universal, though uncommunicated purpose, to uphold Isabella.

In an instant she found herself surrounded by numerous claimants for her hand in the dance, by a company of well-reputationed matrons, emulous to testify, by the attention to the wife, their disapprobation of the husband; and by crowds of good-natured young ladies, who held flirtation in a *married woman*, as one of the seven deadly sins, and "that odious Lady Charlotte"—and "poor dear sweet Mrs. Willoughby"—passed from one pair of ruby lips to another, until it might have been thought that their generous souls had only been alive to the detestation of the one and compassion for the other. Happily for the amusement of the night, this was not the exact state of the case; the words were scarcely uttered, when the tender-hearted utterers were as busily occupied in advancing each their own particular interest or pleasure, as if there had not been a Lady Charlotte or a Mrs. Willoughby in the world. Isabella, however, felt the encouragement which the interest generally manifested for her was so well calculated to give, and again remembering the standard maxim of Lady Jane not "to be wanting to herself," she overcame, as well as she could, the feeling of mortification and inferiority which Lady Charlotte had so well succeeded in producing, and resolved to give herself up to the only pleasure that she could now promise herself from an entertainment so studiously prepared, and from which she had been taught to expect such important effects.

Isabella could not but see the admiration which she excited: Mrs. Nesbitt's words recurred to her remembrance, "let him see that others can fall in love with you, and he will fall in love with you too." There may be more good sense in this advice, thought Isabella, that I was at first inclined to allow; — the form upon which many eyes are fixed, may, in the end, not be thought unworthy of even Willoughby's preference. Married almost before I was seen, he does not know the competition that he might have had to contend with, had I been a little longer in the world before he asked me of my mother. Lady Charlotte, at least, shall not again triumph over my grave looks. Willoughby shall see *one* happy face, and see it perhaps where he least expects it; nor shall Lady Charlotte have reason to think that I fear her.

Actuated by this dangerous mode of reasoning, she resolved to affect the gaiety that she did not feel; but finding her spirits rise with the adulation which was poured upon her from all sides, she became in reality the most joyous of the joyous group.

Dancing was Isabella's favourite amusement; it was also the art in which she excelled most of her companions, and particularly so Lady Charlotte. Stimulated by the desire of displaying her superiority, and animated by flattery, Isabella this evening excelled herself; the murmur of applause reached the ears of Mr. Willoughby, where he still sat by the side of Lady Charlotte — he stepped forward to observe her — the dance had ceased, but Isabella was engaged in a lively conversation with her partner.

"How beautiful Isabella looks tonight!" said Mr. Willoughby, looking on her with a pleased surprise, as she raised her beautiful eyes with a look of gay intelligence to Sir Charles Seymour.

"I always told you she was handsome, said Lady Charlotte—*very* handsome — handsomer than I am a great deal, but you never looked as if you believed me."

"I never saw her so animated! — so all soul! before," said Mr. Willoughby.

"Oh how should you?" returned Lady Charlotte. "I doubt, my good friend, if Mr. Dunstan would see either animation or soul in my eyes — the conversation of a husband has no Promethean powers!"

Mr. Willoughby's vanity was wounded. I am not a Dunstan, thought he.

"I do not believe," returned he, very seriously, "that Sir Charles has any such powers for Isabella; her animation is as innocent as it is engaging."

"Bless me! who ever thought otherways?" said Lady Charlotte, carelessly; "and I beg that you will think my animation innocent, too, although not excited by my husband."

"I must answer you in your own words," replied Mr. Willoughby, with a smile of a very equivocal nature, "who ever thought otherways?" but come, do not let you and me quarrel — rather let us dance."

A flash of indignation darted from the eyes of Lady Charlotte; it was but momentary, and was instantly succeeded by the most fascinating smile.

"You know," said she, "it is not my forte to say No!"—and she suffered him to lead her into the dance, although by no means unconscious that dancing was far less her forte, than the power of denial. Mr. Willoughby gently pressed the hand, so flatteringly yielded, and then took credit to himself for the little rebuff that he had given Lady Charlotte, and the warmth with which he had defended Isabella.

How happy would the knowledge of this defence have made her!—and still more perhaps would she have been delighted with the praises which he had bestowed upon her person — of her innocence it could never have occurred to her, that he could entertain a doubt; but of his appreciation of her beauty she had now the most mortifying mistrust.

It was not, however, from the admiration of her husband that Isabella was this evening to derive her gratification — she saw him indeed, for the remainder of its festive hours, take a full share in the general amusement; but still Lady Charlotte appeared to be the point of attraction from which he could not withdraw himself; and she turned away her eyes, and removed from their vicinity, that she might not see what robbed her of all self-possession, and hazarded the betrayal of the inmost recesses of her heart. It was therefore in listening to the flattery of Sir Charles Seymour, that she endeavoured to lose the consciousness of the homage that she believed Mr. Willoughby to be offering to Lady

Charlotte, and it was in allowing herself to take pleasure in the incense that was offered to her vanity, that she strove to forget the wounds that were inflicted upon her heart.

But the excitement was too powerful, the effort too great; — she became feverish and exhausted, and before the splendid apartments had closed upon the last of the numerous guests, Isabella, over-worn, and tortured by a violent head-ache, had retired to her own room.

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CHAP. XI.

— “Judge not what is best
By pleasant, though to Nature seeming meet;
Created as thou art to nobler end.”

MILTON.

ISABELLA awoke to no pleasurable recollections. Languid in body and mind, the occurrences of the past evening furnished nothing to cheer either one or the other. This, supposed so important ball, had not established one point of mutual interest between herself and Mr. Willoughby; had occasioned no communication; had collected no store of confidential remark or gay observation, from which to draw for after amusement or friendly intercourse. The evening *had been*, and *was gone* — and she could not flatter herself that the display of her taste, and her talents for decoration, had advanced her one step in the estimation of her husband, or that he would not as soon forget *her* ball, as she had invariably seen him do the balls of other people. Before she awoke, he was already gone out to his usual morning engagements; and when she left her room, it was only to look on the deserted and disordered apartments, from whence was already removing the tattered and faded ornaments which had cost such enormous sums to arrange and to affix. Isabella turned from the scene with disgust; but it was only to fix the disgust upon herself.

How was it possible, thought she, that I could suffer Mrs. Nesbitt to persuade me to such a folly? How could I for a moment believe that such an act of vanity and extravagance could make me more amiable in the eyes of my husband? When *he* prepared the feast, I was happy: now I have made it a piece of management, to entrap, as it were, his admiration, I am disappointed and mortified. There must be some error in her reasoning. Her plan may do with some men, but it will never succeed with Mr. Willoughby; he has been too well used to all that adorns life to give much credit to the talents that produce such common effects. They may furnish him with a theme for flattery to the happy woman whom he admires, but cannot recommend a wife to his affection. Alas! what can? How kind and how fond he has been! and how indulgent does he continue to be! Ought I not to be satisfied? Mamma, I know, would scold me if I were to complain. How often has she told me that a husband's love would not outlive the honeymoon; but that, if I were discreet, I might always secure my husband as my best friend. I have read such things, too, in some French moralists; but if the husband's love is so evanescent, how comes it that the wife feels so differently? Oh! no: I cannot believe it. There *are* charms, there *are* qualities, that can secure the heart of a husband for life. Were I more attractive, were I more like Lady Charlotte, Mr. Willoughby would love me now exactly as he did during those happy, happy weeks that we passed in Hertfordshire. The fault must be in me, not in him; for still he is very kind. He would have me happy, but he cares not that I should be only happy through him; and that must be because he can be happy otherwise than by me.

The sadness of these reflections made Isabella forget that her breakfast was untasted before her. It had remained untouched to a very late hour, when Mrs. Nesbitt ran into the room to her.

"My dearest creature, I have been in despair! I thought I never should get to you. I thought that you must have been gone out these fifty hours ago. What a little philosopher you are, to be able to sit solitary at home, when you could not have shown yourself anywhere without having been crowned with laurels. Such a sensation! Never did a ball answer so well."

"Answer!" repeated Isabella: "My dear Mrs. Nesbitt, in what respect did it answer? Could any thing be more declared than Mr. Willoughby's exclusive admiration of Lady Charlotte? Could any thing be more evident than that he did not care a pin for all the ingenious contrivances and expensive decorations you suggested, and which you so kindly wished to give me the credit of?"

"What have you been dreaming of, my dear Mrs. Willoughby?" said Mrs. Nesbitt, "and what have you been thinking of since you awoke, to take things *à travers* thus, to make you look so sad? And I verily believe that you have not yet breakfasted! No wonder that your heart faints within you. After all the delightful excitations of last night, it is of course that you should feel exhausted; but then, my dear, you should take some means to recruit yourself. Let me give you a cup of coffee. Bless me, it is cold! May I ring the bell? Pray, Sir, bring Mrs. Willoughby some hot coffee. As you drink it, my dear, I will tell you such things!—things that will be more restorative than all the coffee in the world."

"I wish you could tell me," said Isabella, "that I had not played the fool."

"Played the fool, indeed!" returned Mrs. Nesbitt; "yes, as David did, and saved his life by it. Now I call that playing the wise man; and you will have been the wise woman too, and I trust will continue so. Nothing more marked than Mr. Willoughby's exclusive admiration indeed! Why, my dear, they absolutely quarrelled!—true as I'm alive! — and quarrelled about *you*! — Mr. Willoughby said you were so beautiful, and so lovely, and so all soul, and I don't know what; and Lady Charlotte was ready to box his ears; for she will always have it that you have no spirit, and tries to make him believe that as you only married him because mamma appointed it, so you don't care a rush for him. But it would not do last night; — it is all quite true; — I was told it all by one who heard the very words."

"You astonish me!" said Isabella. "Why should he say such things to Lady Charlotte, and appear to me to feel them so little?"

"Oh! my dear, you never will do yourself justice. How could he forbear from saying such things, when every body was saying them all around him? And this Lady Charlotte could not bear, and so, of course, said something depreciating; and then it was that he grew so warm, and praised you more than any body did; and Lady Charlotte was so provoked that she looked like a fury."

"When could all this happen?" said Isabella. "They were never separated during the whole evening, and I left them in the room, and Mr. Willoughby went out this morning before I awoke."

"All very likely," returned Mrs. Nesbitt; "for after the fracas he made her dance; on purpose, my informer thought, to show how inferior she was to you, for she certainly dances like a cow; and you, my dear,—but I have no words to say how *you* dance; — Jephthah's daughter would have been nothing to you; — and so they continued together, sometimes squabbling, sometimes dancing: but that cruel head-ache of yours prevented you from seeing any thing of all this; and what more kind than that Mr. Willoughby should not disturb you before he went out?"

"I wonder he did not wish to know that my head-ache was better," said Isabella, with a sigh.

"Oh! it was sure to be better, my dear," returned Mrs. Nesbitt; "all head-aches are better. Nothing more than a little heat and a little fatigue. Most heads would have done more than ached; they would have been turned by such a buzz of admiration as you had about you last night; and if you kept your own steady, there were many that were turned, I can tell you. I have been all round the town, my dear, just to pick up what I could learn of how things went off; but all the glory of the rooms was lost in your glory. Never did I hear such encomiums!—such raptures!—one should have thought that you had never been seen before. But you were divinely dressed, that's the truth of it. You see I was quite right as to the '*superbe*.' I knew the point from whence you would be seen to advantage. Lord Thomas himself said that nothing was ever more lovely, — more captivating!"

"He is the last man in the world that I should wish to speak of me at all," said Isabella; "I always shun him as if he were the plague."

"You will be very clever if you can shun him now," said Mrs. Nesbitt; "for I warn you that he has marked you. And what harm? The more *you* look *down* upon, the more *Mr. Willoughby* will look *up* to you."

"If I thought I should find Mr. Willoughby in the Park," said Isabella, "I would drive there directly."

"Oh! drive there, by all means," said Mrs. Nesbitt. "I will send my carriage home; it has been out all morning. You shall take me with you, and set me down afterwards; and as we go I will tell you more of the effects of last night."

Of some of these effects Isabella had already experienced too much. It was not possible that all the arrows which Mrs. Nesbitt shot so plentifully from her *adulation bow* should all fall harmless. Isabella knew that the most flattering things which she repeated could not wholly be her own invention, for they had been too frequently addressed to her own ears. She therefore easily persuaded herself that what was reported as having passed between Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby might also be true. Perhaps then, after all, Mrs. Nesbitt might be right; the way to Mr. Willoughby's heart might be through the admiration that she should excite in others. She thought that she could judge whether this were the case or no, if she could see him while the impression that was said to be given was recent. She felt impatient to throw herself in his way, and thought every moment lost till she was in the Park.

The first object that she saw there was Mr. Willoughby. He rode directly up to her carriage, inquired kindly after her health, and after having received a satisfactory answer, confirmed by the sparkling eye, and glowing cheeks of Isabella, he began gaily to talk to her of her achievements the evening before—told her of the conquests she had made, bade her beware that she did not get his throat cut, and after laughing and chatting by the chariot window for about three minutes, rode on, and left her to prosecute her drive.

Isabella was in Heaven! — she felt herself already in possession of all that Mrs. Nesbitt had promised her, and could not but accede to that lady's vehement asseverations that all she had foretold had come true, and that if she would but continue to go on as she had begun, that she could not fail to beat Lady Charlotte and every other competitor from the field.

Isabella was this day engaged to dinner, where she met with a large and brilliant party, all emulous to compliment her on the pleasure that she had afforded them the

evening before; and eager to stimulate her, by the most exaggerated estimation of it, to repeat the expensive gratification. Lady Charlotte was present; she appeared to be annihilated; and, added to the usual gay good humour with which Mr. Willoughby was accustomed to treat Isabella, she fancied that she saw something of an air of gallantry in his address to her, which told her that the admiration which she had excited in others had not been lost upon him.

The evening was closed by other scenes equally gratifying to her self-love, and to the holy triumph, as she thought it, over Lady Charlotte.

Isabella returned home intoxicated with her success. She called it happiness; she called it the gratification of conjugal love. Alas! she knew not that it was composed of vanity, of pride, of strife, of envy, and of hate!

Poor human nature! to what dangers art thou exposed, even in thy pursuits after the most worthy objects!

CHAP. XII.

“Ranks as a virtue, and is still a vice.”

COWPER.

THE present effervescence of Isabella's mind stirred up the latent love of pleasure which nature had implanted, and which education had nourished; but which, in the first days of her marriage, had been smothered by the more exquisite delight which she derived from being the sole and exclusive object of Mr. Willoughby's thoughts and affections, and which, on her return to more general society, had been depressed by the fear that she had lost, or was losing, this, *to her* the first distinction of life. But now, when she could persuade herself to regard it as the means of securing the inestimable prize of a husband's love, it awoke with fresh vigour, and was but the more predominant for its late subjection. If education had left one impression deeper than another upon the mind of Isabella, it was, that amusement was the great business of life. It is true that it had been qualified by the undefined, and perhaps undeniable epithet, “innocent.” But pleasure, in some form, had been held out to her as the sum of all human happiness. It had been the bribe that had made smooth the first rudiments of knowledge; it had been the reward of her progress in all that she had been taught; it was to be her indemnification, in the days of wifehood, for the restraint of those of the nursery and the school-room. She was to be happy by something external, and independent of herself. To be amused, was to be the philosopher's stone, that would transmute all things into gold; to be dull, was to be reduced to *nothing*.

Having now the means in her power, and stimulated by the desire of showing herself wherever Lady Charlotte was to be seen, Isabella, “nothing loth,” threw herself into the vortex of dissipation; and, from having been retiring and pensive, under a sense of her husband's indifference, became, from the overpowering desire to gain his affections, the gayest of the gay, and the most prominent figure in pleasure's festive train.

Mrs. Nesbitt, continually at her elbow, failed not to urge her forward in the unholy career into which she had entered. The spur was always the same: there was some superiority to be gained over Lady Charlotte; or there was some flagrant attempt to seduce Mr. Willoughby from his rightful allegiance to be punished. It was a perpetual struggle; a continual hostility; and Isabella's gentler soul would have withdrawn from the contest, had not Mrs. Nesbitt been careful to cover some of its thorns, by the constant repetition of the effects that Isabella's growing popularity were working on the mind of Mr. Willoughby. As Isabella was rather told of these effects than aware of them herself, even this motive could not long have induced her to continue the course of life that she was in, but for a bosom enemy: an enemy which Isabella had no suspicion that she harboured in her breast. She had been so often told that she was not vain, that she did not believe that she could be influenced by aught of all that creates vanity in others. She imagined that if she did not dislike to hear the praises of her charms from the mouth of the flatterers by whom she was surrounded, that it was rather from the proof that such praises afforded that she was worthy the love of Mr. Willoughby, than from any pleasure she took in the adulation itself.

And could the homage of the many have compensated for the neglect of one, Isabella had been undone.

She had stepped from the school-room into the world; and she appeared there, not only with all the glowing charms of youth and novelty, but under the attractive form of a wife.

Isabella Hastings might have fixed the distant gaze, or might have allured, perhaps, the cautious step of one who "was rich enough to please himself;" she might more frequently than her companions have been invited to have exhibited herself in a quadrille, or have been more frequently led from her box at the opera; but all who feared "to be taken in" would have stood aloof; and all who might have been feared, as designing "to take in," would have been distanced by the vigilance of Lady Jane; but the *admiring Mrs. Willoughby* involved no consequence, established no claim; all might breathe their incense at a shrine where the only offering was a heart.

The panoply of matrimony, once the bulwark of its possessor, is now become the treacherous betrayer of the treasure which it seems to guard; and Isabella, who had often heard debated with anxious hope and fear, the probability whether or not she would be established, on her "first coming out," had now reason to think that she might have had the whole world to have chosen from.

She moved not without a crowd of adulators, with whom all that she said, or did, or looked, was "fairest, virtuous, discreet, best." She heard from every mouth that she had no fault; and she felt it, in the universal delight which she inspired. But not for all this did even her fancy wander from the preference that she gave her husband; and all who approached her were alike indifferent, except as they were distinguished by their manners, or their understanding.

In this light Sir Charles Seymour stood foremost in her favour. The suavity of the one, and the cultivation of the other, made him always an agreeable companion to Isabella. In him also there appeared more of esteem than admiration in all the attentions that he shewed her, and Isabella rather reposed upon him as a friend, than was upon her guard against him as a lover. He was more especially of use and pleasure to her in warding off the offensive and declared gallantries of Lord Thomas Orville.

The handsome and haughty Orville was known in the annals of fashion as the most audacious and successful of lovers. His victories had been signalized by one divorce, and by the destruction of all family peace, nearly as often as he had attempted to invade it. To avoid and shun Lord Thomas Orville had been Lady Jane's injunction to Isabella, when she sent her forth into the world, unfurnished with one safeguard against the witcheries of a man who had ruined the happiness and reputation of women of double the experience of Isabella; yet had she been amongst his victims, Lady Jane would have told herself, and she would have told her friends, that the fault belonged wholly to her who had sinned against the training of the best education and the most explicit warnings. Of the seeds of vanity, and the love of pleasure, that she had sown in her daughter's heart, did she so little apprehend the natural harvest.

Happily for Isabella, she had that within which supplied all that had been wanting on the part of Lady Jane.

Shrinking alike from his immoralities, and offended by his presumption, neither the boasted charms of his person, nor the proud humility of Lord Thomas's devotion, had any influence over Isabella. She could not even take pride in the distinction of keeping

him at a distance, whose approach was courted but by too many, so much did she disdain him!

With Sir Charles Seymour the whole case was different. If Sir Charles were supposed to have had his favourites, these were the tales of other times. At five-and-forty he might be supposed to repose upon his laurels; and, as he was the man in the world of the least pretensions, he alarmed no pride, awakened no fear, and often found himself, from the false security of the objects of his attack, master of the fort, without having once aroused the suspicion of the garrison.

Isabella was never more at ease than when in the company of Sir Charles Seymour. He would talk to her of Mr. Willoughby, and his words would be all panegyric; yet could he so place them, that the mind of Isabella received the impression that this so eulogized husband was not wholly worthy of the wife with whom heaven had blessed him.

Sir Charles then sees, thought Isabella, the preference that is given to Lady Charlotte, and he pities me. She hated Lady Charlotte the more; but she did not, as Sir Charles intended that she should have done, love her husband less.

Thus time passed on; until Sir Charles had almost wholly appropriated her to himself, while she remained unconscious that he had done so.

She called him her friend; and she was every moment upon the point of opening her whole heart to him. Of Mrs. Nesbitt's crooked policy she had become heartily weary. She was convinced that it had not advanced her one step in the affections of her husband. She had also discovered that she was a very tiresome personage; and that Lady Jane's "best woman in the world," meant only the best good lover of all the good things that the world could give; that, under the sanction of garbled quotations from Scripture, she affected to justify the most worldly maxims; and that from the fountain of all love and benevolence, she would often produce authority for hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. Isabella was disgusted; and she resolved that she should no longer be her counsellor.

But where should she apply for that guidance which she felt to be so necessary to her? Could she be in want of a wise and kind friend who had a mother, the pattern of all mothers? a mother to whose unremitting care and strenuous exertions she owed the very station which was so dear to her heart, and which wanted nothing of being complete felicity, but the knowledge of how to turn all its blessings to her own account?

Isabella had asked herself this question, but the reply had not encouraged her to seek in her mother the friend that she wanted.

There was something in Lady Jane's maxims that revolted the heart of Isabella, and which told her that her complaints would be as idle wind in the ear of Lady Jane.

In marrying her daughter splendidly she appeared to believe that she had discharged the whole of the duty of a mother — she had made her rich and distinguished: she had instructed her to be prudent; she had shewn her by calculation that she might have all that a *wise* woman could wish for without forfeiting the world's good opinion; and she had warned her against the *bad taste*, which led to degradation. What could she do more? she had other daughters to dispose of; and had as little leisure as she saw reason to trouble herself about the concerns of poor Isabella — she would not indeed have been able to have understood why she was not the happiest of women. To the complaint of the indifference of her husband, she would have opposed his indulgence; to supply the want

of companionship at home, she would have recommended a still more sedulous cultivation of society abroad; and, as an universal panacea, she would have told her, that no woman of common understanding ever expected to have a lover in a husband, and that none but a baby would think of crying for what no one ever possessed. Isabella was too well acquainted with the manner in which her mother treated so much “romantic nonsense,” to look to her for consolation or counsel, and she would have felt nearly as reluctant to have confessed to Lady Jane, that she was in love with Mr. Willoughby, as to have told her she was so with Lord Thomas Orville.

In addition to these personal reasons which shut up Isabella from all confidence with her mother, there were others that would have effectually prevented her from finding that sympathy and attention from Lady Jane, which she so much wanted, and without which she felt desolate in the midst of multitudes.

Lady Jane’s continual activity in furthering “the business of her life,” which was yet upon her hands in the marriage of her two remaining daughters, kept her in a constant bustle of plots and manoeuvring — of note-writing, and arrangements; “she was hurried out of her life, but it was all for her daughters — she knew many mothers were more careless; but, for her part, having given them the *best of educations*, she was resolved that they should not lose the fruit of it — it should not be her fault, if they were not all as well established as her dear Isabella.”

This “dear Isabella,” however, she scarcely ever saw but in a crowd; nor had she more than a hurried minute to afford her, even when Isabella, wearied of a home which was to her nothing but a splendid solitude, sought companionship and society with her mother and her sisters. Lady Jane “*must* speak to the dress-maker;” Lady Jane “*must* inspect the decoration for the feast in the evening; she had an hundred orders to give! — and the girls! — oh indeed you must not interrupt them. Harriet is practising the song which she is to sing; Elizabeth the quadrille that she is to dance; they have no time to throw away; when they are married it will be quite a different thing—work now, play then — you have attained the goal, and must not interrupt them in the race — I am really sorry to part with you, but I am so busy, and —we shall meet at night.”

All this was no cure for the heartache, and Isabella’s heart grew every day more and more pained.

CHAP. XIII.

——— “The world’s a school
Of wrong; and what proficient swarm around!
We must, or imitate, or disapprove.”

YOUNG.

MR. Willoughby was become less attentive to Isabella, than she had ever before known him to be; less mindful as to what would amuse or gratify her; less in her company; and less cheerful when there. Over his natural gaiety and carelessness there seemed to have stolen a shadow of gravity, which would at times deepen even to abstraction; — Isabella was alarmed: she knew that he lived much with Mr. Dunstan; nor could she wholly impute such a choice to the force of Lady Charlotte’s attractions. It was not probable that, under the eye of her husband, she should be most disposed to display them; still less could Isabella believe that Mr. Dunstan himself could be the inducement which led Mr. Willoughby to his house; but she knew that Mr. Dunstan loved high play, and that from the most sordid motives, it was always to be found in his society; she knew also the appetite of her cousin George Stanton for this pernicious amusement, and the disgraceful advantage that he was supposed to make of it. She knew all this, and she trembled for the consequences that might ensue to the unsuspecting, open-hearted, and generous Willoughby— yet she was obliged to devour her griefs in silence, for to whom could she reveal them? she endeavoured, therefore, to forget them, and she found it easier to do so in the society of those whose study it seemed to be to charm away her hours, than either to consign herself to retirement and solitude, or to suffer herself to be dragged about from one place of public amusement to another, where she met with no peculiar attentions, and excited no sympathy. It was therefore in the dissipation of private parties, that Isabella continued the vain attempt to find some indemnification for the want of happiness at home. — Here the ear was always soothed with flattery, and here she was perpetually stimulated to dazzle and to outshine Lady Charlotte; but having lost the hope that she could by these means regain the heart of her husband, the contest was carried on more from the desire of mortifying her rival, than from any expectation of good to herself.

How changed at this period was the mind of Isabella!—She was yet innocent; innocent of the intention, even of the thought of ill—but she was giving the reins to every feeling which can lead the human heart to the consummation of vice! In endeavouring to excel Lady Charlotte in every frivolous distinction, and every idle expence, she had removed every restraint on her vanity. In seeking the admiration rather than the esteem of her husband, she had tasted of the pleasure that can result from admiration in general; and in the gratification which she received from such homage, she sometimes forgot the motive which led her to allow of it. Thus she gave an insight into her heart, which more encouraged the audacious hopes of those who sought to recommend themselves to her, than all the modesty of her outward demeanour and the propriety of her manner could do towards repressing them.—She could now triumph in the mortification of her companions, and she could sicken at their success. Her temper had lost its placidity; her benevolence its generosity; there was envy, there was hatred, there was revenge in her

heart; and she sanctified them all, by the simple consideration that she *ought* not to be outdone by Lady Charlotte!

But Isabella was not thus changed without many secret upbraidings of that most true of all friends, while it is allowed to speak at all,—her conscience! — She could now look back with regret on those days of control, the emancipation from which had once been her most fervent wish; —she could remember, with something like a sensation of shame, the time when good humour was her shield against injuries, and hope her consolation under them.—She thought, with bitter tears, that she had now neither good humour, nor hope!—but she had not yet learnt, that if she had exerted her strength rather in the regulation of her own mind, than in a worse than fruitless emulation of the guilty aberrations of the rival whom she strove to outshine, she would have retained, in the midst of every other loss, the inestimable treasure of self-esteem.—It was intolerable to her generous temperament to think for a moment that she had no right to retain it!—she drove away the thought, by erecting in her imagination a false standard of vice and virtue.

What did she do that others did not? Her understanding told her that she was wrong; but by the maxims of the world in which she lived, she was told every hour in the day that she was right. All seemed to live for their individual interest or pleasure.—Society was little else than a warfare, where all stratagem was allowable. Each had their circle, into which no other foot must intrude but at its peril; and all was justified, was sanctified by the undisputed aphorism, that “We must take care of ourselves.” Isabella asked herself, what this care was?

The care which at this moment seemed most incumbent on Isabella, was, that she should keep Lord Thomas Orville at a distance. Notwithstanding the ever ready interposition of Sir Charles Seymour, Lord Thomas was not easily repulsed—he knew she was a neglected wife, and he saw her a dissipated one. He had believed himself irresistible, and the evident coldness of Isabella towards him had picqued his pride, and what might at first have been little more than an idle gallantry was now become with him a point of honour to accomplish. Mr. Willoughby’s negligence, and the sense which Isabella betrayed that she had of it, seemed to those who composed the circle in which she moved as having broken down more than half the barriers that any woman could oppose to the cajoleries and the perseverance of such a man as Lord Thomas. She was already pitied by the good as but another victim to be sacrificed to his profligacy; and Isabella had heard Lady Charlotte’s sarcastic remark, that the laurels of her fair cousin would soon be laid at the feet of Lord Thomas. Even Mr. Willoughby had gently warned her that he should be pained to hear her name joined with his. But this had been the voice of kindness, not of suspicion. His reliance on the integrity and purity of Isabella was unshakeable as a rock! The

“Graceful acts,
The thousand decencies that daily flow’d
From all her words and actions.”

gave him so firm an assurance of the soul within, that never did a thought cross his mind that man or devil could sully such a chastity.

Isabella felt the justice which he did her, and blessed him for the caution which was pointed against her inexperience, and not her weakness. The happiest moment which

she had known for many weeks was that in which he exercised a guardianship that it was her fondest wish never to have had withdrawn for a single instant. Nothing could be more strange than that it ever should be so withdrawn; but, left unguarded by her natural protector, she more than ever clung to the friendly support and the kind interposition of Sir Charles Seymour.

Nothing could appear more disinterested, more unstudied, than his attentions towards her; and yet, whenever they now met, they never failed to find themselves seated by each other engaged in a conversation so interesting, and exclusive, that in the midst of crowds they were alone. The subject was still upon Mr. Willoughby. From Sir Charles, Isabella could learn a thousand little circumstances that were interesting to her. By his means she could trace the progress of a day which would otherways have been a blank. Her heart was for ever on her lips; but she had not yet let one word escape her that spoke the feeling she had of Mr. Willoughby's neglect; nor had she heard one word from Sir Charles Seymour that could awaken a thought of his wish to supply the place of the negligent husband. Yet nothing that passed in the mind of Isabella was unknown to Sir Charles; and he saw enough there to encourage him to try whether he might not only be accepted as a safeguard against Lord Thomas Orville, but also to hope that he might be admitted as a consolation for the desertion of Mr. Willoughby himself.

"Where does Willoughby hide himself?" said Sir Charles to Isabella as they met one evening. "I have not seen him any where this week."

"It is not one of the virtues of a wife to watch the footsteps of a husband," said Isabella, with a faint smile.

"It might be the pleasure of some husbands to be always in company with their wives," returned Sir Charles. "Possession cannot dim the lustre of a diamond."

"But it may be the means of discovering its flaws," said Isabella.

"May not the imperfection be in the vision?" rejoined Sir Charles.

"All things are possible!" said Isabella; and Sir Charles felt that he had made a step.

Isabella felt also that she had been guilty of an imprudence; and the words were no sooner uttered than her heart reproached her, and, rising hastily, she quitted Sir Charles, and studiously avoided him for the rest of the evening — another imprudence, which only served to give Sir Charles a clearer view of what was passing within.

Will it be admitted as any excuse for the weakness to which she had yielded, that the soul of Isabella was at this moment fretted almost beyond endurance?

Mr. Willoughby had left town on a casual engagement for a day, among a number of his friends who were assembled on occasion of a family ceremony. He had already extended his absence to a week, and the only notice that Isabella had received of his intention had been a few words written on the first day of his expected return, to say that she must not look for him till "she saw him."

Yet it was not from any individual attraction that he had found amongst the gay party of which he had made one, that he had forgotten the rights, and overlooked the wishes of Isabella.

Long accustomed to be unaccountable to any one for the disposal of his time, and having found Isabella the most accommodating and least exacting of wives, it did not occur to him on this first separation after their marriage, that he was not as free as he had been before that period, or that he might not, without any scruple, yield to any and every

inclination that the passing events gave rise to. Each day had brought with it some temptation to prolong his absence, and there was nothing in London to which he was impatient to return.

Sufficiently mortifying to poor Isabella would have been this statement of the truth of the case; but she had still greater cause for uneasiness of heart, in the knowledge that Lady Charlotte made one of the company wherein Mr. Willoughby had been detained so much longer than he had purposed to remain. Seeing what she had so often seen, could she doubt that Lady Charlotte was the bond from which he could not break away? And it was scarcely possible that she could put any limits to her apprehensions of the consequences of so free and familiar an intercourse, through a course of festive days, when every charm would be displayed by the lady, and where mirth and wine, and the general manners of the society, would remove so many restraints from the gentleman.

Such had been the galling reflections of Isabella through many hours of painful solitude, previous to her meeting with Sir Charles Seymour. She had determined that she would be gay, and rebut any observations on Mr. Willoughby's absence by a dissembled indifference.

She appeared pensive and out of spirits; and when Sir Charles touched the master key of her soul, it returned tones that laid open all the secrets which she had so earnestly determined to conceal.

Alarmed by this proof how little she was equal to the support of herself in the slippery path she was treading, she resolved to seek the aids of more experienced and firmer minds than her own; some one who could tell her where lay the wrong of which she was sensible in herself, but which she could not discover by any of the maxims that she had hitherto been taught as the only true regulators of her conduct.

CHAP. XIV.

“Let thy pride pardon what thy nature needs,
The salutary censure of a friend.”

YOUNG.

REPEATED experience of the degree of sympathy and assistance that she should find in Harley-street, had now reduced Isabella's visits at Lady Jane's to little more than a call of a quarter of an hour, if she happened to be in that part of the town, “to see how all was going on,” or an express visit of perhaps twice that length, if her other occupations had kept her away for more than a day or two. But, as she was supposed not to have “any thing to tell,” even these longer interviews with her sisters, if she found them disengaged enough to afford her their society, were taken up rather in detailing their own hopes and fears, their solitudes on the various points of dress, and probabilities of establishment, than in adverting to the pensive air of Isabella, or in seeking a reason for the warning voice, that sometimes told them with a sigh, that “all is not gold that glitters.” They beheld her equipage from the windows, they examined her dress, and only did not envy her happiness, because they hoped one day to be as happy themselves.

It was not, therefore, to Harley-street that Isabella could resort with any hope of attention to her vexations, or of counsel that would help her to endure them. But she flattered herself that she had still one friend who would do both.

It is true that she feared her almost as much as she loved her; and her fears had lately kept her more apart than she ought to have held herself from one who had seemed almost to depart from her natural character to shew kindness to her. Circumstances were, however, now become urgent, and Isabella resolved to seek the wisdom of Lady Rachel Roper.

Lady Rachel was the aunt of Mr. Willoughby. She was also the friend of all with whom she had any connection; but she was not less the terror of more than half of those who approached her.

For the weaknesses, the imperfections, even for the *natural faults* of the human creature, she had a most extended toleration. She had a hand to support, a head to rectify, and a heart to forgive, all that could be *fairly* charged to the frailty of our fallen condition; but for the vices and follies of *fashion*, for those who followed the multitude to do evil only because they would be in a crowd, or for those who adopted the jargon of false morality, lest they should be thought too wise or too good, she found no apology in her understanding, or mitigation of chastisement in her feelings.

Mr. Willoughby was the only son of a beloved sister; he had appeared to inherit all her virtues and all her graces; and Lady Rachel had prefigured him in her mind.

— “Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state;
Th' observ'd of all observers.”——

The model, and the guide in all that dignifies the man, or that distinguishes the Christian! — his days of infancy, of boyhood, and of opening manliness promised no less: — but the moulding hands which should have fixed the lines of this perfect form, were

withdrawn at the very moment, when all its elements were struggling each for mastery; and that which might have been the fairest work of creation, became but the discordant, though splendid fragments of a wreck!

Mr. Willoughby's parents had died, almost simultaneously at the very period when their continuance in life seemed to be the most necessary for his well being. The restraints of guardianship were felt just long enough to be galling, but for too short a time to be useful, and Mr. Willoughby, at one and twenty, had not only a pleasure but a pride in shewing that he was his own master.

In using this liberty he soon lost the purity, the simplicity, the originality of character, which an education devoid of all trick, of all falseness of motive, of all affectation, had seemed so firmly to have impressed. He shone, perhaps, with brighter lustre than those around him, but the fire of each was kindled alike from the same censer, and it was not holy fire!

But, amidst all that Mr. Willoughby lost, he did not lose his sincerity, — his affections, — his gratitude. The kindness, the love, and the patience of Lady Rachel, from his earliest years, and through many of the first of his aberrations, were engraven on his heart. Much that had been done he wished undone; there were mischiefs that were irreparable, but his contrition and his candour led him never to dissemble the sense that he retained of his errors; and he could sooner have forgotten every pleasure and every duty of his life, than have failed in the attention and respect that he owed to Lady Rachel.

He never now approached her without pain and fear, but he did not therefore cease to visit her. His first request to Isabella, after she became his wife, was, that she would accompany him to Lady Rachel.

Of Lady Rachel Isabella had heard, and could she have shrunk from complying with any wish expressed by the object of her then newly conceived passion, she would have excused herself from this visit; but where was it that she would not go with Willoughby? nor had she ever any reason to repent her compliance.

Lady Rachel, it is true, appeared to Isabella as a creature of another world, a something that she had never seen before, but her eccentricity was as pleasing as it was novel; the "Cross Old Woman," whom she had expected to see, appeared under the form of a commanding personage, with all the beauty that *could* escape the ravages of sixty years, and with an eye that told of a spirit within that no evolution of time could ever annihilate: graceful and dignified in her manner; plain, but energetic in her language, her words were but the dictates of her understanding, or the effusions of her heart.

There was, however, a steadiness in the look of observation with which she regarded those who were introduced to her, that appalled the timid, and confused the bashful. Isabella felt it through every nerve, while Lady Rachel stood silently gazing upon her for more than a minute; and when turning to her nephew, she at length said— "You have done well! See that you are worthy of the happiness that is in your power. Let not the world mar this precious jewel: if you *do*, a double guilt will be yours." Isabella felt as if the warning and denunciation came from heaven itself.

With a softer air, and tenderer accent, she then addressed Isabella:

"For you, my child, you must come to me very often. I no longer go into the world; I make the world come to me: and my doors will always be open to you, while I can see you without a heart-ache."

Isabella did not understand these last words; she wondered why any heart should ache for her when her own spoke of nothing but happiness.

"What can Lady Rachel mean," said she to Mr. Willoughby, when they were alone together, "by the fear of my ever giving her the heart-ache?"

"She means," said Mr. Willoughby, laughing, and caressing her, "that you may be a naughty child; that the world may spoil you; and she had no charity for those whom the world spoils."

"But it has not spoilt you," said Isabella fondly. Mr. Willoughby coloured, and said, "The truth is, my dear Isabella, that Lady Rachel does not think as others do; but I suspect that she is right, and others wrong."

It was some time before Isabella's farther knowledge of Lady Rachel confirmed this opinion of Mr. Willoughby's. Lady Rachel held the maxims by which Isabella had been taught to regulate her conduct in such sovereign contempt, that Isabella was sometimes angry; and she treated as the merest trifles so much of what Isabella had been made to consider as the weighty matters of the law, that Isabella began to doubt her wisdom. But she found such a charm in the spirit and originality of her conversation as nothing could countervail; and she solved all that appeared to her as strange, or imbecile, by teaching herself to believe, that "poor Lady Rachel" had lived so long out of the world that she did not know what was necessary to live in it.

A still farther progress in their intimacy produced another alteration in her opinion. She began to suspect that it was not "poor Lady Rachel" that did not know the world, but "poor Isabella," who had never been taught to distinguish truth from falsehood, Bristol stones from diamonds.

Still, whether pitying Lady Rachel or mistrusting herself, Lady Rachel maintained her influence over the mind of Isabella. As long as she was at ease with Mr. Willoughby, and at peace with herself, she yielded to this influence; and there was scarcely a day that she did not pass a part of it in the drawing-room of Lady Rachel Roper. But no sooner did she begin to grow unhappy, and to seek, in following the pernicious counsels of Mrs. Nesbitt, a remedy for her unhappiness, than a consciousness that Lady Rachel would not approve the regimen that she had adopted, made her abate in her visits to her. She was not always aware to what degree this abatement extended, until reminded of her negligence by some sarcastic remark of Lady Rachel, or by a coldness and reserve in her deportment, which Isabella could even less endure than her more open severity. Isabella would then make her peace by an increased assiduity, and although she sometimes sickened as she ascended Lady Rachel's stairs, it was but rarely that the sun-shine which she met within her apartments did not restore her to ease and comfort the moment that she was seated.

It was in one of these intervals, in her attendance upon Lady Rachel, that Isabella had discovered the weakness of her own self-government; and, alarmed by the helpless situation in which she found herself, she cast all her hope upon Lady Rachel. The first moment of their interview she believed would be terrific, but the result she knew would be peace; and like one who, having dabbled with quacks, from a fear of the regular course of the knife, or the caustic, awakes at length to the sense of the danger incurred, and braves all sufferings so that life may be preserved, Isabella resolved to throw herself into the hands of Lady Rachel, and to do and to suffer all that she might prescribe.

The doors of Lady Rachel were always open to Isabella; and there were not any after Lady Rachel had quitted her dressing-room that Isabella had reason to believe would prevent her being received. Early rising was, in the estimation of Lady Rachel, one of the virtues; and Isabella calculated that her reception might be the gentler, the earlier she presented herself.

The clocks in the city and liberties of Westminster had not done sounding eleven, when Isabella broke in upon the morning studies of Lady Rachel. The book was immediately closed, and the hand was held out to welcome her, but the brow was cold and rigid.

“Do you come to offer me the dregs of your last night’s orgies?” said Lady Rachel; “or have the reflections they occasioned chased away the power of sleep from your eyes?”

“My dear Lady Rachel,” said Isabella, “why should you think that either is the case? Indeed, I am no slug-a-bed. Mamma always made us rise early. In fact, we had so much to do, that the day was scarcely long enough; and we always took a walk in the Park before breakfast; the morning air mamma thought so good for the complexion. So you see that it is no extraordinary effort in me to avail myself of your happy custom of early hours.”

“Umph!” said Lady Rachel, “and do I owe the honour of this visit to your having had lessons to learn, or to the care of your complexion?”

“To neither, indeed, my dear Lady Rachel,” returned Isabella, “although there are some lessons I would willingly learn,—lessons that would, perhaps, make the care of my complexion useless.”

“Very moral, and very sententious! but not very explicit,” returned Lady Rachel; “however, I think I can understand you. What has put you, child, so much out of humour with the world of a sudden?”

“Not of a *sudden*,” replied Isabella. “I think I have liked it worse and worse every week since I began to know it.”

“Where is your husband, child?” said Lady Rachel.

“My dear Madam, what has that to do with my liking the world? I am sure there is nothing that it contains, that Mr. Willoughby would not give me if I wished for it.”

“Except his company,” said Lady Rachel drily.

“Oh Lady Rachel!” said Isabella, “who would have thought that you would have made such an observation?”

“And why not?” said Lady Rachel; “you come to me to talk of your quarrels with the world, and are surprised that I should point out the cause of them.”

“Mr. Willoughby is not the cause of them,” said Isabella earnestly, “and to a wife”—

“Away with all common place maxims,” said Lady Rachel; “away with all equivocation. What but dissatisfaction at home could put you out of humour with a world which smiles but too much upon you? and if a wife complain to a friend, that friend ought to tell her the truth.”

“But did I complain of Mr. Willoughby?” asked Isabella.

“Yes,” returned Lady Rachel, “when you told me that there were lessons that you would willingly learn, and lessons that might make the care of your complexion useless,

what was it but to tell me that your husband had no relish for your present acquirements, or no taste for your beauty?"

"Alas!" said Isabella, "nothing can be more true, and yet I am sure I did not mean to say it; and mamma always tells me that I am so happy, and that I ought to be so happy, that I really think I must be quite criminal to feel so sad and cast down as I do, almost perpetually."

"Are *you sad* and *cast down*, my child?" said Lady Rachel; "how is that? when I hear of you as giving the tone to every society, when your name is in the mouth of every coxcomb, and when neither cost nor solicitude are spared to make you the most gilded of the butterflies that glitter through this gay town?"

"And after what you have discovered, my dear madam," said Isabella, timidly and blushing, "cannot you see the reason of all this?"

"No, upon my word," replied Lady Rachel, "except that you are dissipated and vain, and love dress."

"How widely do you mistake my motives!" said Isabella. "I had flattered myself, that *you at least* would have done me more justice! How little do you know the poor Isabella, if you think that for her own pleasure she either leads the life she does, or bestows so much either time or money in adorning her person."

"Does your husband then enjoin you to be at half a dozen places every evening? does he compel you to listen to the flattery of every fool who approaches you? does he condemn you to a continual renewal of the most expensive silks and the finest laces?"

"Yes, he does," said Isabella warmly; "for he admires the same in others, and it is my duty not to be excelled in any thing that he likes."

"Poor Duty!" said Lady Rachel, shrugging up her shoulders, "how hard is thy burthen!"

"Is it *not* my duty," cried Isabella eagerly, "to do every thing that Mr. Willoughby likes?"

"No!" replied Lady Rachel.

"But I have solemnly engaged to obey him," urged Isabella.

"You had previously solemnly engaged to renounce the pomps and vanities of the world," replied Lady Rachel.

"But, dear madam, is there not something due to the station we hold in life; to the expectations of the society in which we move?"

"Yes," replied Lady Rachel; "provide things honest in the sight of all men. But you are too rapid in your transitions for the slowness of my intellect: I thought we were speaking of the duty of pleasing a husband; and now it seems as if to please the world was the matter in question. Pray, child, which do you mean to make your paramount duty?"

"To please my husband, surely," said Isabella.

"And to mortify and outshine Lady Charlotte Dunstan," said Lady Rachel.

Isabella blushed.

"I am sure, my dear Lady Rachel," said she, "you would not have that woman triumph over me: you would not have me forget what I owe to myself."

"There is another creditor that you are bound to satisfy first," said Lady Rachel.

Isabella felt awed: yet she thought to herself that Lady Rachel had a very extraordinary way of making the most solemn subjects bear upon the commonest

incidents of life, wholly unlike Mrs. Nesbitt's quotations and allusions; and she intimated her thought, by gently remarking, that, "*just then*, she was not thinking of such things."

"Truly I believe you," said Lady Rachel: "you were thinking of laying aside the modest adornments of a virtuous wife, and of assuming the meretricious ornaments of a coquette. And you would call this duty!"

"What *would* you have me do?" said Isabella, with the tears starting in to her eyes.

"Your duty," replied Lady Rachel.

"Oh! that I knew it!" cried Isabella.

"It is written, where those that run may read," returned Lady Rachel.

"I have always been told," said Isabella, "that to please my husband, and to enjoy the innocent pleasures that are offered to me, and to secure the world's good opinion, was my duty. I have tried to do all this, and yet you seem to think I have not fulfilled my obligations."

"Is this all your duty?" said Lady Rachel.

"Oh! not all, to be sure," said Isabella, "but —"

"Finish your sentence, child," said Lady Rachel.

"I do not know how," said Isabella. "Something, I confess, seems wanting: but I hope I have too much prudence, too much proper pride, to do anything that is wrong; and while I take care not to do so, surely I may be allowed to try every means in my power to prevent the machinations of a bad woman from estranging my husband's heart."

"If we do not differ," replied Lady Rachel, "upon the meaning of the words, 'anything wrong,' our dispute will be ended; but I apprehend that neither prudence nor pride will be the best expositors of what is so."

"Can you tell me what would be so?" said Isabella, with an accent of the most earnest supplication; "for never poor mariner, that went to sea without his compass, was ever more at a loss which way to steer, than I am to know how to conduct myself in this world of shining surface and sunken rocks."

"Very metaphorical!" said Lady Rachel, "and what if I tell you that you have been accustomed to talk in metaphors till plain speech is either unintelligible or shocking to your ears?"

"It may be so," said Isabella, "for assuredly I find nothing in the maxims on which I have been instructed to rely, that brings me either direction in my doubts, or comfort in my sorrows."

"And how should they?" replied Lady Rachel, "when they all tend to excite and inflame the grand disturbers of all that makes the peace and happiness of life? You have been educated, child, to be vain, envious, and ambitious; and can you wonder that in a world where there are hundreds who are greater adepts in these accomplishments than yourself, that you should be mortified, maligned, and held down to the very crucifying — not indeed of the sins and offences that war against the soul — but of every honest feeling of your heart, which may well bleed at every vein in such a contest?"

"Oh indeed," said Isabella, "you do mamma injustice; she always told me that it was very foolish to be vain. She said, as you do, that it would make us unhappy. She said it was very low-minded to be envious; and although she did excite us to ambition, it was only the ambition to excel; and that, you know, my dear Lady Rachel, is 'the glorious fault of Angels and of Gods.'"

“Umph!” said Lady Rachel. “I beg your pardon, child; I had forgot that you do not love my umph. But, to give you quotation for quotation,

‘Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,
Aspiring to be angels men rebel.’”

“Well, but I am not ambitious,” said Isabella, “I only wish that Mr. Willoughby would like to talk to me as well as he likes to talk to others; and then I should not care who was greater, or finer, or more admired. I should not care who else said that Lady Charlotte was handsomer, or better dressed, or more entertaining than myself.”

“And why should not this laudable end be obtained by laudable means?” said Lady Rachel. “Are you not more likely to charm as an excellent original than as a bad copy?”

“I fear my excellencies would not be to Mr. Willoughby’s taste,” said Isabella, with much sadness in her tone.

“Then be it your aim to *exalt* his taste,” replied Lady Rachel; “*that* is your duty. He once could taste what was just and pure. When he chose you, I persuaded myself that he had returned to his first love; beware that it is not your fault that he finds no relish for it. Foster not, for any selfish gratification, for any evanescent joy, — foster not, I charge you, his debasement.”

“What a responsibility!” said Isabella. “Have I not enough upon my hands to guard against my own faults, but must I be made answerable for those of Mr. Willoughby? Surely, my dear Lady Rachel, your moral is too severe. I thought that *you* would have pitied me. Many do, who have not half your kindness.”

“Insidious pity!” said Lady Rachel, with a tone of indignation; and “why should I pity you? What has fallen short in all to which you looked for happiness when you married?”

“Had I not a right to expect that my husband would prefer me to every other individual of my sex?” said Isabella.

“No!” replied Lady Rachel, “such an expectation made not any part of the bond. Did it make any in the motives that induced you to accept Mr. Willoughby?”

“Oh! Lady Rachel,” cried Isabella, “what searching questions do you ask! and of such things as I never thought of before I was married, whatever I may have done since.”

“My poor child!” said Lady Rachel, with a softness in her accent and manner which she seldom suffered to appear; “if I probe you deeply, it is not to give you pain, but to make you sensible where lies the cure of all your grievances. The fault is not yours. In words you were warned from vanity and from envy; but every practical lesson engraved them on your heart. What was the strife for pre-eminence in every showy accomplishment, but the strife of vanity? What was the struggle to cope with others, beyond the actual means of your situation, but envy of those above you? You were to be too proud to be outdone; you were to be ambitious of outstripping your contemporaries in the race of worldly glory. Nature had furnished you with the means; and when Mr. Willoughby offered you his hand, the end seemed to be within your grasp. Did you stop to ask yourself for *what* Mr. Willoughby loved you? Did you even ask whether he loved you *at all*? Did any one ask those questions for you? Did you question yourself, were you questioned by others, whether you loved Mr. Willoughby?”

Isabella drooped under this investigation.

"I know not how to answer you," she replied. "Surely there must be some misapprehension somewhere, or the same circumstances could not be seen so differently. I cannot recollect one doubt being suggested as to my accepting Mr. Willoughby. I was told that I could not do otherwise; and I was so overwhelmed with the enumeration of the sources of my future happiness, that I should have been treated as an idiot, I must have appeared one to myself, if I had hesitated to have accepted so brilliant an offer."

"Of what then do you complain?" said Lady Rachel. "Has any of this brilliancy faded from your sight?"

"I confess, not any on which I reckoned before marriage, but — but—said Isabella, hesitating, "I did not know that I should love Mr. Willoughby as I do love him: I did not know that I could not bear that he should not love me better than any body else; especially *that* Lady Charlotte, whom I was told he had *so* preferred me to! Oh! how were they mistaken that told me so!"

"Perhaps not so," replied Lady Rachel: "but if you will put yourself into competition with the most finished coquette of the age, you must expect, and I should hope you would wish, to lose by the comparison. The contest is as unwise as it is unholy."

"If I must not try to charm my husband in the way that he likes," said Isabella, "and if he have no taste for the few good qualities that I really do possess, how much happier should I have been if *he* had never *charmed me*; if I had been wise enough to have found my happiness, as I am told so many others do, rather in what their husbands *possess*, than from what they *are*."

"There is profanation in the wish," said Lady Rachel, sternly. "Did you not love your husband, you would ere this have been a cast-away. Cherish this love as you would do the immediate jewel of your soul; but purify it from all base emulation, from all the feculancies of rivalry, and let this reflection cheer you in the dreary way you have to tread, that had Mr. Willoughby desired a Lady Charlotte for his wife, he would not have chosen an Isabella."

"And having chosen her," said the dejected Isabella, "he seems but to exist for the Lady Charlotte whom he rejected. Ah! dear Lady Rachel! it may be wrong to attempt to imitate, from any motives whatever, qualities intrinsically unamiable, but you cannot persuade me, but that if I *naturally* resembled Lady Charlotte more than I do, that I should be happier."

"And you would purchase happiness by resembling her?" asked Lady Rachel.

"I could wish to appear to do so," replied Isabella, "but I would not *be* all that I believe she is, no — not, I *think*, to be gazed on as I have sometimes seen Mr. Willoughby gaze on her."

"You would then wear the livery of vice, and keep the honour of virtue?" returned Lady Rachel. "You would do all in your power to confirm your husband in his preference to vice, and would still think yourself virtuous. Remember, however, that although it may be ingenious to deceive without lying, that you cannot deceive without sinning — and think you that when you have thus pampered the vicious tastes of your husband, that he will love you the better for any virtue that you may have had the good luck to retain?"

"What then is it that I must do?" asked the poor Isabella, mournfully; "must I suffer Lady Charlotte to hold my husband's heart without a struggle?"

"As your quarrel is just," replied Lady Rachel, "take care that your warfare is honest. What is it that you would wish that your husband should think you? be that thing as nearly as you can; and if you are not happy you will deserve to be so."

"At eighteen only *deserve* to be happy!" said Isabella, with a sigh.

"To *deserve* to be happy, is the highest aim of the longest life," returned Lady Rachel, "and is often the only reward on this side Heaven for all the virtues to which human nature is equal. Should you attain so high an eminence at twice eighteen, you would be an enviable being."

"But I was always told," said Isabella, "that if I were *not wanting to myself*, I should be happy."

"That is a phrase I do not understand," said Lady Rachel; "can you explain it to me?"

"I believe," said Isabella, with a conscious dropping of her eyelids, that it means not to suffer myself to be trampled upon."

"Umph!" said Lady Rachel; "well child, go home, and try all these fine maxims upon which your boasted education has been grounded, and when you have proved their worth, return and tell me, and I shall be instructed too."

This was too much for the mortified Isabella; tears stood in her eyes.

"I will go home," said she, rising, "for I see that you despise me, and where I had hoped to have found a friend, I meet only with the severity of a critic."

"And may not that very severity be an act of the truest friendship?" returned Lady Rachel; "you tread on breaking ice; shall I be nice in the means that may place you safely on firm ground?"

"That I am in danger I feel," replied Isabella, "but I believe the cause to be in others rather than myself. I may be weak, but when I mean no harm, nor would do any, why should I think my footing insecure?"

"Away with the imbecility of such sentimental arguing," cried Lady Rachel. "How can you be secure when competition, is your religion, pre-eminence your Heaven, degradation your Hell? In the stillness of your chamber, ponder, weigh, and determine whether your religion is holy, your heaven the region of happiness, or your powers of endurance equal to the alternative — if you are satisfied with the course in which you are, pursue it: if not, come to me again, and we will endeavour to find one more pure, more safe, more happy. And now for the present farewell; at this moment an angel's tongue would not inform your understanding."

CHAP. XV.

“Methinks in thee some blessed spirit speaks!”
SHAKSPEARE.

ISABELLA withdrew, dissatisfied with Lady Rachel, and angry with herself. In the bravery of her sorrow she had sought the counsel of Lady Rachel, and had boasted to herself that she would not shrink from its severity; but, with the coward petulance of a child, she had dashed the salutary cup from her rather than endure its bitterness. She had pertinaciously defended maxims which her heart condemned, and she had refused to admit truths which her reason acknowledged. The still small voice within now told her all this, and she was mortified and vexed; but as she was not yet truly humble, she wanted alike the docility and the courage to encounter the consequences of principles that, although she might dispute, she could not doubt. She continued even in her incipient penitence to reason perversely: “Must she submit to be less charming to the senses of her husband, in the hope of being more approved by his reason? — must she be content with *deserving* his love, and let another enjoy it? — could she sacrifice the important present for an uncertain hereafter? — and could she resign herself to a passive hopelessness, when the only mitigation to her anguish was in action, in renewed attempts to do herself justice?”

“Lady Rachel does not feel as I do, thought she; it is easy to trace out the rugged path of narrow rectitude, — it is difficult to walk in it! And how am I assured that this *is* the *only* path that is honest and safe?—how many, both of the good and the wise, think otherwise than Lady Rachel, and act as they think? Was it discreet of Lady Rachel, thus at once to set before me all the difficulties that I should have to encounter in the course which she proposes? difficulties from within and from without? Had she known the weakness of which I was guilty last night, she would have been more scrupulous of frightening me from her by her rigidity. I can believe that her moral is more safe, but the compassion of Sir Charles would have been more soothing.”

These and many other such questions and reasonings engaged the mind of Isabella; but neither her heart nor her understanding returned her any satisfactory solution to her doubts — accustomed to move in the darkness of error, she could scarcely bear the light of truth; and it was perhaps in the hope of being confirmed in the wisdom of the maxims in which she had been trained, that on her return home from Lady Rachel’s, she called at her mother’s.

If such were her hope, she was disappointed. Lady Jane was absent, and she found her eldest sister with swelled eyes and a clouded countenance.

“What is the matter?” cried Isabella, in a pitying accent.

“Oh Isabella,” returned Harriet, “how happy are you to be married? with you, this eternal cry of ‘be first,’ in all we do, is over; you have gained the prize, and may rest on your arms, and be at peace.”

“What has happened?” said Isabella.

“Nothing much out of the common way,” replied Harriet; “but it has vexed me more than usual because mamma was so cross; perhaps I *was* saucy, for one cannot always be a child you know; and so, to punish me, she has taken Elizabeth to the Park,

and has left me at home; and she says, that except I humble myself, I shall not go to Mrs. Frampton's to-night — but I am resolved not to humble myself — I see no reason why I should humble myself to mamma, when she is always telling me to remember my own dignity; however, it is all mamma's fault, not mine."

"What is all this about?" said Isabella. "Oh it all happened about the music last night; mamma wished particularly that I should excel Miss Thompson, because you know Mrs. Thompson thinks nobody understands education as well as she does, and because you know a certain person was to be present. I am sure I wished it too, but I really had a cold, and so mamma is sure that I did not take pains; and the truth is, that she was applauded and listened to a great deal more than I was, and especially by *him*, and how could I help this?—but mamma has done nothing but scold, and quarrel with me about it ever since. She says it signifies nothing what pains she takes when she is so ill seconded, and that she cannot expect that good luck will stand always her friend; for she will have it that it was luck only that married you, for she says that you were often abominably careless, and that she had hoped better things from me, but that now she despairs; with a great deal more of the same, that you have heard a thousand times repeated. I do wish I was married, and then nobody would care whether I sang in or out of tune."

"Very true!" said Isabella, with a deep-drawn sigh, and giving her sister all the comfort of which the case would admit, and which had often been administered to her upon similar occasions, she proceeded home to meditate on the comfort in the progress, and the happiness in the result, of living to the opinions of others rather than our own. She made something like a resolution to escape from such slavery, did more justice to the wisdom as well as the purity of Lady Rachel's moral, and felt more at peace with herself for doing so.

On entering her house Isabella encountered her husband, who was just returned from his excursion into the country.

"Oh Isabella, is it you?" said Mr. Willoughby; "how do you do? you look pale," and with these words he passed her, and went into his own room.

Isabella also went into hers, and there she wept plentifully.

Ah! thought she, Harriet little knows that matrimony is no safeguard from vexation. I *could* find my indemnifications, but I have no heart but for Mr. Willoughby. I will advise Harriet never to marry the man whom she is likely to love — but is not this the breaking of ice of which Lady Rachel spoke? did she not say, that in the wish not to love my husband, there was profanation? that but for this love I should have been a cast-away? how cruel did I think the words when she uttered them! and yet, perhaps, they are alarmingly true! resentment does at times stir up such thoughts! — and *with* such thoughts can I really mean no harm? can I be sure that I would not do any? could prudence, could pride, shut my heart against the soothings of sympathy, or the desire of revenge? —revenge! — what a horrible word! —Oh, holy love! defend me from the wanderings of all my baser passions! I will clasp thee to my bosom as my shield, and, so guarded, surely I can have no danger to fear."

The morning had been one of mortification and sorrow, and Isabella's countenance retained the traces of the workings of her mind. Of this she was conscious as she cast the last glance on the looking-glass before she stepped into her carriage.

With these witch-like looks, thought she, I had better stay at home. Were I under mamma's command she would not let me stir out. — But I can think no more,—my head

aches,—my heart is heavy; I *must* try what society will do for me; and I *ought* not to care how I look in any eyes but those of Mr. Willoughby; and if he see my pale cheeks a second time he may think that I am ill, and perhaps he may be sorry.

It was not, however, her fate this evening to meet Mr. Willoughby; but she did meet Sir Charles Seymour, and he approached her with so much respect and concern in his countenance, as made her ready to ask, “what is the matter?” — she had, however, no occasion for the inquiry.

“My dear Mrs. Willoughby,” said Sir Charles, “how happy I am to see you! I scarcely thought that I could have had the pleasure to night; but you are ill! had you not better have staid at home? although I admire you more than ever for the effort you are making.”

“Really,” said Isabella, “it is no great effort to come out with the headache, which is the whole matter. I thought a little dissipation would do me good.”

“Were it *only* the headache?” said Sir Charles, “but how amiable is all this! Well! — I find your truant is come home. Does he tell you how gay they have been at Danesfield?”

“I have scarcely seen Mr. Willoughby,” returned Isabella; “but they could not be otherwise than gay. The very purpose of the meeting was festivity.”

“Lady Charlotte Dunstan says,” returned Sir Charles, “that she really never spent so delightful a week; the party was so complete! all were there who would have been welcome; all absent who would have lessened the enjoyment. Those were her very words.”

“Was Mr. Dunstan there?” said Isabella.

“What a malicious question,” replied Sir Charles, “and something superfluous too; for you must know that he was excluded alike by ‘those who would not have been welcome,’ and ‘those who would have lessened the enjoyment’.”

Isabella was resolved to be prudent; she only replied,

“Can you tell me who were there?”

“Oh yes! I know the set, but I think there are not any that would interest you. I wish you would draw Willoughby from it; take my word, it will do him no good.”

Isabella was determined that she would not say that she had no influence over Mr. Willoughby; yet she did say it: — not at that very moment, but in five minutes afterwards, when Sir Charles, with an interest in her happiness that flattered, and a precision, which left her no doubt of the accuracy of his information, conveyed to her understanding in ambiguous, but not doubtful phrases, at once the attachment of Mr. Willoughby to Lady Charlotte, and the high play in which he was engaged with her brother.

At this moment Isabella forgot every thing but the balm which Sir Charles’s sympathy afforded to her lacerated heart. Eager to be mistress of every circumstance of her misfortune, and hoping for assistance and support from Sir Charles’s friendship, and his knowledge of the world, she was listening to him with an attention, and an interest, which to those who did not know the subject of their discourse, and it was carried on in the lowest tone possible, would admit of but one interpretation, when the words, “Sin not!” — fell upon her ear, in a voice solemn and impressive. Both she and her companion started:

“Who’s that?” said Sir Charles, looking angrily around.

"A friend!" cried Isabella, as she turned her quick eye in succession on every countenance within her view; but not a single feature of any betrayed any interest in her, her virtues, or her vices, all were grave or gay, for themselves alone.

"It is strange!" said Isabella.

"It is intolerable!" said Sir Charles, "that cursed screen has sheltered the impertinent! but such liberties are not to be endured."

"The Oracle, however, has spoken plainly," said Isabella, "and I will obey its dictates." And as she spoke she arose, and turned from Sir Charles.

"My dear Mrs. Willoughby, is it possible?" said he, "I could not have believed that your admirably constituted mind could have been so affected! don't you see the trick?"

"Where can be the trick in so plain an admonition," replied Isabella; "an admonition that I must feel humbled to find it supposed, however unfoundedly, that I wanted."

"You! My dear Mrs. Willoughby, you!" —cried Sir Charles, "do you believe that those insolent words were directed to you? of every creature in the room you perhaps are the only individual to whom they cannot apply."

"Yet I shall not be afraid to take them to myself," said Isabella, calmly, "such advice is as the common blessings of nature; the property of all; the beneficence of heaven, in which all may share, without encroaching on the rights of others.—Good night."

"Leave me not, I beseech you," said Sir Charles. "I guess the quarter from whence the insolence has proceeded; and nothing can be further from the wish of the impertinent warner, than that you should take the warning; nay do not go: let not the artful malice of a devil prevail over the spirit of an angel."

"I must be gone," said Isabella. "I go to meditate on what I have heard; on all that I have heard, through this extraordinary day. —Farewell."

Nor did Sir Charles farther endeavour to detain her — he felt that the moment was unpropitious to his sophistry; and though he doubted not but that a fresh wound to her vanity, and a recurring mortification to her affections, would, at no very distant period, enable him to re-assume, and to confirm his powers over her mind, yet he was himself startled at what had happened, and alarmed by such a proof that his designs were penetrated by some friend of Isabella's, who had taken this method of at once shewing him that he was understood, and of putting her upon her guard. He had indeed endeavoured to insinuate to Isabella, that the whole was nothing more than a piece of jealous mischief on the part of Lord Thomas Orville, yet he had no suspicion that he had any thing to do with the words that had been spoken, but wholly imputed them to some unknown guardianship which was extended over Isabella.

CHAP. XVI.

“Her words breathe fire celestial, and impart
New vigour to her soul, that sudden caught
The generous flame.”—

THOMSON.

ISABELLA retired with an unruffled countenance, and an apparent composure, which ill agreed with the tumult that so singular an incident, added to all that she had heard from Sir Charles, had caused within.

She could not doubt but that the words were directed to her; she did not believe that they proceeded in any way from Lord Thomas Orville; who, although she had seen him in the course of the evening, she had reason to think had left the rooms sometime before.

But from whom then could such an injunction come? what was there in her conduct? what was there even in her heart, that could call for so pointed a warning? at this moment she was sure that she was “more sinned against than sinning.” It was from the evil habits into which her husband seemed to be falling; it was from the loss of his affections, rather than from any wandering of her own, that her sorrows flowed. Who that knew her intimately, but must know this? and who but one who did so know her; one who was interested in her good conduct, and her happiness, would so have spoken? her thoughts glanced towards Lady Rachel: she had already warned her of the danger of her situation; but it could not be her.

Was there then another to whom it could appear that she was on the precipice of vice? Lady Rachel was not then singular. It was not the misanthropy of age; it was not seclusion from the world; the having out-lived its pleasures and its usages, that had produced the admonition which she had received. It rather seemed to have come from one who partook of the play around him, and who knew better than herself, all its intricacies, and all its cheateries. This called for thinking; — for self-scrutiny; — for a careful tracing of the real direction, which her various and mingled feelings were actually taking. She returned home that she might, in the solitude which she knew awaited her there, pursue the investigation without interruption.

In the last twenty-four hours, Isabella had lived half a century. —She awoke as from a dream: — she saw at once her errors and her dangers, nor could she find in all the moral that she had ever been taught, correction for the one, or safe-guard for the other.

Under the influence of this moral, she had in the short space of a few weeks, gone astray in two different directions. The pensive inaction into which she had fallen on the first consciousness of the indifference of her husband, she had dignified with the name of “virtuous suffering;” she had indulged in all the dangerous sentiment of self compassion, and in morbid murmurings of the insufficiency of this world’s good, and she had rather soothed her self-love, by a secret hope of becoming an object of pity and admiration, than set herself to remedy the evil under which she drooped, by bringing into day the genuine excellencies of her character. Aroused from this sentimental supineness by the touch of jealousy, and stimulated by the worldly wisdom of Mrs. Nesbitt, she had rushed at once into the contrary extreme; and, adopting in its full force the only principle of which she

had ever heard, she resolved not to be “out-done,” at whatever cost she might bear away the prize. Every real vice of the heart, and every factitious virtue of the imagination, were called into action, by a principle so lofty in its pretensions, and so grovelling in the means of attaining its end. The check which she had met with in her career, by the extraordinary incident of the evening, had given her a moment’s pause: and she was astonished and terrified by finding how far already from the path of rectitude she had been carried by a maxim which she had been accustomed to consider as the stimulator to every generous thought.

It had made her deaf to the warnings of Lady Rachel; it had exposed her to the treacherous flattery of Sir Charles Seymour; it had made her a party in the censure of her husband; it had aggravated every painful feeling; and it had nearly converted her wish for redress, into a purpose of retaliation!

The evil was of tremendous magnitude; but where was the remedy? Isabella thought that it could only be found in a frank confession of her faults, and in the wisdom of Lady Rachel.

To Lady Rachel, without hesitation, and with a hope, rather than a fear of receiving from her the chastisement that she felt she deserved, did she repair.

Isabella repeated her visit at the same early hour, at which it had been made the day before; as being sure not only that she should be admitted, but that she should find Lady Rachel disengaged.

She was admitted, and she did find Lady Rachel disengaged; but she was by no means the Lady Rachel of the preceding morning! the folio was not closed on the entrance of Isabella, the hand was not stretched out to welcome her; there was no peculiar expression of countenance; there was not even the caustic remark, or the satiric reproach which, though it might wound the ear, re-assured the heart, by proving the interest that was excited. All was distant, stately, and ceremonious!—the very tone in which the accommodation of a chair was offered her, smote upon the feelings of Isabella with the sharpness of a two edged sword; but Isabella was too truly humbled, too intimately sensible that she deserved the reception that she met with, to be moved by any spark of resentment, or to feel any fear, but that she should not be able to restore herself to so much favour, as to secure her the correction which she so much desired, and obtain for her the counsel she so much wanted.

“My dear Lady Rachel,” said the trembling Isabella, “do not terrify me with that air of estrangement, and forgetfulness? I do indeed deserve that you should withdraw a kindness which I have so little benefited by, but I cannot support such a loss.

“I come to humble myself before you; I come to confess that you are right, that I am wrong; to acknowledge the error of the way I have been in, and to benefit by the benevolent wisdom, which but yesterday promised to point out one, more pure, more safe, more happy.”

“The repentance is sudden! the wants must be pressing!” returned Lady Rachel, without relaxing one feature of her face.

“Oh, if you will not touch me with your golden sceptre,” said Isabella, “I shall die!”

“There then,” said Lady Rachel, touching Isabella’s hand with an ivory rule which lay on the table, “that is as near as I can go to golden sceptres. And now, ——What wilt thou Isabella?”

Isabella scarcely knew what she would. She had a long story to tell; but it was rather of the progress of her own feelings, than of what had been done by others. Yet the extraordinary incident of the evening before, was what she most wished to divulge; yet how divulge it without leaving the impression on Lady Rachel's mind that the warning was deserved.

"If the thing were possible," said Isabella, "I could almost fancy that you were at Lady Terant's last night."

"And why so?" said Lady Rachel; "what phantasmagoria was playing off there, that could put such a fancy into your head?"

"The deception was not of the eye, but of the ear," replied Isabella. "I certainly heard a voice which came from I know not where, and it uttered words which none but you have a right to utter."

"Have some compassion on my nerves," said Lady Rachel. "If the being seen where we are not, is a sign that we shall soon be seen no more; the being heard when we do not speak, may be equally prophetic of our approaching silence."

"And of a future office!" said Isabella, "for let the words come from whom they would, I am sure they were prompted by a guardian angel."

"What were the words?" said Lady Rachel.

"Sin not!" said Isabella, deeply blushing.

"They could not apply to you, child," returned Lady Rachel; "you who mean no harm, and would do none."

"Oh spare me!" said Isabella; "my meanings, I am now painfully convinced, are no security for my actions."

"Were you sinning?" asked Lady Rachel.

"I believe I was," said Isabella. "I am sure I was in the way of temptation; and without any very strong determination of resistance."

"And the tempter was Sir Charles Seymour," replied Lady Rachel; "but where were all the doughty champions under whose banners you were so stoutly to combat the world, the flesh, and the devil? did not pride cry 'Avaunt, traitor?'—Was 'Prudence' asleep at her post?—Was 'the world's good word' silent?—And was 'taste' reconciled to 'degradation'?"

"I abjure all such counsellors—all such defenders," cried Isabella; "under their influence I am become at once weak and self-confident; and there seems to me more safety and strength in the simple words, 'sin not,' uttered by my invisible friend, than in all I ever heard of the 'dignity of pride,' the 'security of prudence,' the 'sanction of the world,' or the 'award of good taste'."

"You have spoken truth and candour," said Lady Rachel, with an emotion which astonished Isabella; "truth and candour which I never! no never! again expected to have seen equalled!—blessed God," continued she, raising her eyes to heaven, "I thank thee, for this renewal of one of thy fairest works!"—Then, with something of super-human power, repressing in an instant the ebullition of passion into which she had been betrayed, her features resumed their wonted expression; and, throwing her arms around Isabella, "let me embrace you," said she; "from this moment we are friends; you have weaknesses, you have faults; but they are the faults of human-nature, not the monstrous productions of artificial life; they are the growth of your own heart, not the transplanted poison of the world of fashion: for the one there is an appointed remedy; the other neither admits of,

nor desires a cure. The heart is gangrened! the vital principle is destroyed! nothing short of a miracle can restore it."

"My dear Lady Rachel," said Isabella, melting into tears, "how kind! how good you are! and cannot you guess what kindred spirit spoke in that soft still voice which I heard last night?"

"No, indeed, I cannot *guess*," said Lady Rachel, "for I *know*."

Isabella started. "Are you indeed a witch?" said she.

"I mean not to make any mystery of the matter," returned Lady Rachel. "I must not suffer such a trifling circumstance to fasten itself on your imagination; for your imagination is one of the enemies against which we have to guard; you must not enter every place of resort with the impression that some Sylph or Genii is hovering over you; trick, management, and machinery of every kind, I abominate. Your Oracle was Lord Burghley."

"And what could lead Lord Burghley to think that I stood in need of such a warning?" said Isabella.

"To one so well versed in the ways of the world, as Lord Burghley is," replied Lady Rachel, "there was enough to shew the usefulness of such a caution."

"I might more readily admit the usefulness of such an admonition," replied Isabella, "had the person in question been Lord Thomas Orville; but Sir Charles Seymour——"

"Had the person been Lord Thomas Orville," said Lady Rachel, "you would not have been worth a caution. The woman who can listen for a moment to him who boastingly outrages at once the primordial order of his God, the holy institution from whence flow all the charities and all the decencies of human existence, and the sacred dictates of truth, deserves the fate which she provokes, and may without any breach of the 'royal law of love,' be left to undergo it; but the smooth, the plausible, the friendly Sir Charles Seymour; the observer of all decorum; the gentle cautioner against every impropriety, the *generous* reporter of the vices of the husband that he may undermine the virtues of the wife, although scarcely less to be detested than the more open violator of the most sacred obligations, is much more dangerous to inexperienced innocence; for suspicion is not the offspring of virtue; it is the hateful produce of depravity, or the painful result of confidence betrayed."

"But is Sir Charles Seymour such a man?" said Isabella, with affright.

"He is," said Lady Rachel. "You fled from the tiger, to take shelter in the serpent's den."

"Oh! how I have been deceived!" said Isabella.

"It could scarcely be otherwise," replied Lady Rachel.

"How blest am I," said Isabella, "to have had so kind and so wise a friend as Lord Burghley. But what could move him to such energetic efforts in my favour?"

"His inducement to such exertions," returned Lady Rachel, "belongs to a piece of family history, which perhaps you will challenge my delicacy, as you have done once before, for giving you; but the affection and respect that we owe to the most sacred relations in life are not grounded on the impeccability of their objects; and the weakness from whence we must turn away our eyes may yet be innocently the subject of our knowledge, without furnishing a reason to so frail a creature as is the human animal, why we should not love the kind and good qualities that are in unison with it. In a few words,

Lord Burghley should have been your father, if Lady Jane had not preferred the choice of a higher rank than any that Lord Burghley was then likely ever to have raised her to, to the immediate companionship of a most excellent and agreeable man, with a moderate competence.

Lord Burghley was not only rejected, but he had too much cause for being disappointed; and the disappointment pierced even to the heart's core. But he was not only an ardent lover, he was a constant one; and thus thwarted in the first object of his heart, his affection have ever since hovered over the offspring of the woman whom he had hoped to have made his wife. On *you* his best hopes have rested; and it would be a second tearing asunder of his heart-strings, if you were to be lost to him by the indulgence of too fervent feelings, as your mother was, by too calculating a head.

She married the man whom she did not love; and was what the world calls happy. Hence her opinion that love is no necessary ingredient in married happiness. But as your father's passion, having nothing to feed on but the charms of the person, scarcely survived the first year of their marriage, she concludes that no woman ever preserved the heart of her husband for a longer period: an opinion as false as it is pernicious; but it served to soothe a vanity that was mortified by the shortness of the empire of her beauty. Her passions were calm; she was therefore prudent, and she was content to await patiently until the death of your grandfather should put her in possession of what she valued more than the love or even the admiration of her husband. But your father died before he attained the eminence to which Lady Jane aspired, and a younger brother of your father's has succeeded to the title and the property which were to have given rank and opulence to Lady Jane.

"Your mother's jointure, and the provision for yourself and sisters were below your station in life; and Lady Jane never having felt a wish, but what she supposed that money might have supplied, we may pardon her, if she believes that in seeking to make her children rich, she does all in her power to make them happy."

"And could my mother have married the man who so truly loved her?" said Isabella, "and who was so worthy of her love? and did she prefer any other blessing that this world can give? oh fatal choice! if not to herself, to her children – but I will love Lord Burghley in her stead – and cannot you, my dear Lady Rachel, and this good Lord Burghley, teach me how to make my husband love me? He has not a cold heart; I am sure he has not; he is kind, he is indulgent! I know not why he chose me, if he did not like me. Perhaps he finds me too much a child; too little his equal to take any pleasure in my conversation; — and, with him, I am always so timid! — but can you not teach me to be important in his eyes? — not like Lady Charlotte! — no, I will never again try to resemble her; — but something perhaps I may become, that he will like as well, and approve more."

Lady Rachel sighed deeply; so as Isabella had never heard her sigh before; so as Isabella did not think she could have sighed.

"There was a time," returned she, "that I should have replied 'yes!' — but I dare not flatter you. Twelve years of the indurating process of the ways of the world, may have converted a heart of flesh into one of stone. Hopes, long dead, revived when he first brought you to me as his wife; but too soon I found that even his marriage was but another link in that chain of worldly calculation with which he had been so long bound. He had drank too freely at the fountain of others, not to be careful to secure his own — he

had been too long the world's idol not to wish to be the object of its envy. Your beauty secured the one point; the sedulousness of your education, and Lady Jane's reputation for moral prudence, set him at rest on the other. Your person could not but charm his senses, but he troubled himself not to inquire whether the good qualities that were imputed to you, were of a kind to engage his fancy, or to secure his heart.—My dear child, I fear that heart must be purified before they can be so. He has been too long used to stimulants, to relish the simple fare of retiring love, and unsophisticated virtue. But if you cannot raise him to your level, you must not sink to his; there must be no doing of evil, that good may come. — You must do all for yourself, that you can do *honestly*—and leave the rest to Providence.”

The tears flowed fast down Isabella's glowing cheeks, as Lady Rachel pronounced these last words. “I am *very* wretched,” said she.

“I will allow you to say so,” returned Lady Rachel, “because you are new to sorrow; and I will only hope that you may never know by fatal comparison how far beyond the truth is the strength of your expression.”

“What can be worse,” said Isabella, “than to be told that my husband will never love me?”

“I have not told you so,” replied Lady Rachel. “I have expressed my fears, but I have not said that I have no hopes; still less have I presumed to say that there are none. There are sentimental quacks, I know, who pretend to give a recipe for gaining and preserving a husband's heart, as easily as they would give a cure for the tooth-ache. We meet with such wonderful performances in plays, and romances; where the rooted bad habits of years are eradicated by the shifting of a scene, —by the sight of a picture, — by a little manoeuvring on the part of the wife, —but never in real life. I deal in no such juggling. Reformation is the work of mortification, or the produce of time; and the only cestus I can recommend as a charm for a husband is patient endurance, and a steady perseverance in the practise of affectionate virtue: in any case your own love will be a mitigation, not an aggravation, of the evil. The virtuous love of a wife is a fund of happiness that no misfortune can exhaust; — but you must discharge it of all rancour, of all envy, of all jealousy; you must purify it till you can present it at the foot of the throne of mercy, as a plea for the safety of its object, when that object seems to be regardless of his own.”

Isabella felt her heart warmed, — her mind raised. She looked on Lady Rachel as if she would by one cabalistic word impart to her powers so much, as she thought, beyond all natural attainment. But there was no mystery in the instruction that Lady Rachel had to give; yet she seemed to Isabella to be a setter-forth of “strange doctrine,” when she talked of lowliness of mind, “whence each esteemed others better than themselves;” of “charity that seeketh not her own,” as the only sure foundation of “peace of mind;” of “joy unfeigned,” and of “rejoicing evermore.” Yet all was easy of comprehension, compared with her absolute prohibition that she should hate Lady Charlotte.

“Dear, dear Lady Rachel, how can I help it?” said Isabella.

“By pitying her,” replied Lady Rachel; “and there is not a more pitiable object to be seen than Lady Charlotte. The favourite of nature and of fortune, she wants nothing but goodness to be as happy as consists with mortality; and yet be assured that your eye scarcely ever rests on a more miserable creature. To be revenged on a man, who had not,

however, injured her, she has made herself the property of another, whom she equally hates and despises; —torn by passions, which are but the more ravenous the more they are fed, she subsists on poison, and nourishes a worm within, which is even now corroding her beauty, her good name, her temporal and eternal felicity.

Isabella shuddered. “And I was about to have engaged in the same career!” said she, with anguish in her tone.

“You were,” replied Lady Rachel, “but with less excuse than Lady Charlotte. She is by nature ardent and daring, —you, gentle and diffident; — in her first transgressions she followed but the impulses of an impetuous temperament; when you began to go wrong you had to struggle against the restraints of timidity, the shackles of modesty; — all within, pushed her forward in the course; with you all withheld you! Learn to pity Lady Charlotte, and to be grateful for yourself.”

“I shall certainly be more happy if I can pity Lady Charlotte,” replied Isabella; “for certainly I have not had an easy moment since I first tried to excel her. My mind has been in such tumults, my temper has been so easily ruffled! I have felt so vehemently! I really think that I have hated Lady Charlotte more than I have loved Mr. Willoughby.”

“Pour the oil of humility on the raging waves of vanity and envy,” said Lady Rachel, “and you will find that a virtuous love, even when unrequited, is a source of pleasure. It will enable you to look *down* (to use a phrase of your old school) upon Lady Charlotte; it will give you dignity in your own eyes; it will make you less diffident; and all this lofty structure will be grounded on humility.”

“Ah! dear Lady Rachel,” said Isabella, “do you not speak parables? How can I be less diffident when I am more humble?”

“Diffidence is not humility,” said Lady Rachel. “You were diffident because you were anxious to excel: you will be humble because you will be content to be excelled.”

All this was new to Isabella, but it was very soothing. The tumult of her mind abated; and, without the change of any one outward circumstance in her favour since she had quitted her own house, she returned to it calmed, at peace with herself, and hopeful, even beyond what Lady Rachel had encouraged her to be, that the day would come when she should be as dear to Mr. Willoughby as he was to her.

CHAP. XVII.

“This affliction has a taste as sweet
As any cordial drop.”

SHAKSPEARE.

FROM this day the course of Isabella's life was changed. Hitherto she had sought to attain the first object of her wishes by assimilating her manners and her character to whatever she conceived was liked by the vitiated taste of her husband; from this time she pursued the same end, by endeavouring to lead his taste to approve of the character and manners naturally her own. Without lessening her attachment, she had received the impression that the being which had appeared so perfect in her eyes, and in whose praise she had believed that every suffrage united, was not so spotless as she had conceived; not even so praiseworthy as he had once been; not so excellent as she was confident that he might become. The world had then misled him: it should be her care to restore him to himself; to restore him to the good opinion of Lady Rachel; to be happy herself — happy, perhaps, as no other human creature had ever been!

Such were the visions of youthful hope. If they were unsubstantial, they were not unuseful; they did not dazzle to betray; on the contrary, they came in aid of Lady Rachel's moral, and the conviction of her own understanding. Every day's experience confirmed the truth both of one and the other; and Isabella rose in her own estimation, the less she struggled for superiority over others.

But it was not only to herself that Isabella appeared to be another person. With little apparent alteration in her course of life, the spirit from which she acted was wholly changed; and this alone gave a freedom and dignity to all she did, that converted the timidity of a lovesick girl into the modest confidence of an affectionate wife. The effect of such a conversion was felt by all who approached her.

Mrs. Nesbitt, with uplifted hands and eyes, wondered what had happened to her dear Mrs. Willoughby! There were no complaints now! no consultations how to counteract Lady Charlotte! and yet, for her part, she saw no difference in the abominable ways of going on between that odious woman and Mr. Willoughby. But no doubt Mrs. Willoughby had begun to find that she had better enjoy what she could get, than cry for what was not to be had. Yet if she had not been so tame-spirited she might have had *all*. She had been listening to some *mighty good sort of a person*, she supposed; while, if she had followed her advice, she might have trampled her rival under her feet. But it was not the first time that the wisdom of Ahitophel had been baffled by the cunning of a Hushai; and if dear Mrs. Willoughby was happy, she should be content.

It was no longer necessary for Isabella to seek the assistance of any one to repress the impertinence of Lord Thomas Orville. A word, a look, would awe him into silence; and, as he recoiled defeated from her presence, he cursed the pride which so well aped virtue. But Isabella's newly-assumed powers were felt most by Sir Charles Seymour.

There was no marked withdrawal on the part of Isabella from the familiarity and good understanding that had been between them. It would have been impossible for any indifferent observer to have seen any change in their intercourse; but Sir Charles felt the ground he was losing in every word that passed between them. There was a publicity and

unconcernedness in all she said, that threw him back into the common multitude of those who called themselves her friends, which, while it left him nothing to complain of, convinced him that she was no longer the dupe of his treacherous pity for herself, or his perfidious friendship for her husband.

Isabella could not but be sensible of the eminence that she had attained in society, by simply doing right; by being less solicitous for the immediate effect, than for the peace of mind which such conduct would ultimately afford her — she thought it wonderful! — almost miraculous! She talked of it to Lady Rachel as a kind of fairy-gift that she owed to her supernatural science. Lady Rachel referred her to the book of all wisdom for a solution of the mystery; and Isabella, the more she studied the sacred volume, the more she blessed the hour when she had submitted herself to the guidance of Lady Rachel.

Isabella could now endure to seat herself by Lady Charlotte, and by so doing she came oftener into contact with Mr. Willoughby than she would otherways have done. She had lost a degree of that unwholesome sense of his superiority, which had so frequently closed her lips when he was within hearing. This circumstance no longer kept her silent.

There had sprung up between herself and Lord Burghley an intimacy and freedom of conversation, arising from her gratitude for his guardianship, and his desire to promote her interests, that made him an almost constant attendant upon her steps. The seat that he was always most eager to secure for her was that in the closest vicinity to Mr. Willoughby; and there, seated by her side, or resting on the back of her chair, he would engage her in discourse upon every topic that he could imagine would engage the attention of her careless husband. Isabella, no longer afraid to give utterance to her thoughts or her feelings, shewed that she had opinions and tastes; and she had sometimes the exquisite pleasure of hearing Mr. Willoughby say, as he listened to what passed, and sometimes joined in the conversation, “that is so true, as Isabella observed!” — “I dare say Isabella can tell us” — “Oh! that is a matter that Isabella knows better than I do!”

Isabella, upon such occasions, was in danger of falling back into the error of thinking Mr. Willoughby nothing less than a demi-god, and nothing perhaps kept her true to her newly awakened sense that he was but too wholly mortal, except the connection which continued to subsist between him and Lady Charlotte. There was nothing however, in this connection that violently outraged the customs of the world in which they all lived; nothing that fixed the stigma of guilt on either of the parties. There was a carelessness and openness in the attentions of Mr. Willoughby towards Lady Charlotte that seemed to say there was nothing between them that shunned the light. He was the constant inmate of Mr. Dunstan’s house, and Lady Charlotte was reputed to live well with Mr. Dunstan. She certainly disposed of his fortune as she pleased, and lent her attractions to those parties where the distinguishing feature was high play. Her partiality for Mr. Willoughby, and her delight in his conversation, was by her audaciously avowed. He was her “*cicisbeo*,” her “*cher ami*” — the person to whom she could apply in all the little wants and difficulties that beset the life of a fine lady. By him she procured the earliest and the finest flowers, and the first fruits of all the conservatories and fruit-houses in the vicinity of London; and she thought that she had fully paid the price of all these rarities and dainties, when she assured him that “he was the most useful person in the world;” or held out her fair hand, with a declaration that “he was the best friend she had.” In all this there was nothing secret; she rather seemed to take a pleasure, and triumph in displaying the power that she had over him, and more especially when Isabella was

present—she continued, notwithstanding, to treat her with the affectation of fondness, and at the same time an evident pretension to superiority. It was, however, no longer that she was gratified by the shrinking of Isabella from the one, or that she found herself able to chase the rose from her cheek by the other.

Isabella received the pretended fondness with a cold civility, which shewed that she truly estimated their value, and by the impassiveness both of her countenance and manner when she attempted to throw her into shade, she left her nothing but her own impotent malice to rejoice in.

There were, indeed, moments when Isabella thought, in spite of strong appearances to the contrary, that the game was not wholly in the hands of her rival.

She had seen, and it would be too much for the frailty of human nature to believe, that she had seen without pleasure, the workings of Lady Charlotte's countenance, and the quickened pulsation of her bosom, on the slightest symptoms that indicated a chance that her captive might escape her.

Upon these occasions it was that Isabella more particularly acknowledged the solidity of the principles upon which she had so newly been taught to act. She saw Lady Charlotte, through the rebellious contests of unholy passions, ground, to use the expression of Lady Rachel, as it were, between two mill-stones; consumed with rancour even where she triumphed; stormy and agitated as the boisterous ocean, when thwarted in her purposes — while she, the sufferer, could say, to her aching bosom, "be still;"—and could wear on her unruffled countenance the peace of resignation!

It had happened that Isabella had been suddenly taken ill, when Mr. Willoughby was in another room, dancing with Lady Charlotte. The bustle occasioned by this circumstance caught Mr. Willoughby's ear. Lady Charlotte was instantly deserted, standing in the midst of those, before whom she had but the previous moment been displaying her triumph; while Mr. Willoughby flew to Isabella, supported her drooping head on his shoulder, and on her recovering the powers of motion, conveyed her to her carriage with one arm round her waist, while he held one of her hands in his. Isabella, indisposed as she was, had not failed to observe the pale and disfigured countenance of Lady Charlotte as they passed her, nor the rage which further disturbed her beautiful features, when, to her demand of "will you not return?" Mr. Willoughby had replied, "certainly not!" — in a tone which Isabella would not have exchanged for the music of the spheres.

Isabella, however, in general enjoyed too good health, to make many demands upon the sense of propriety, the good nature, or the still tenderer feelings of Mr. Willoughby; and her equable temper, her even spirits, and the *apparently* quiet enjoyment which she had in all around her, were so little the symptoms of outraged affection, or wounded feelings, to which Mr. Willoughby was accustomed, that he found it not difficult to lull to sleep any suspicion that his conscience might sometimes awake, that he was using her ill; or that while he treated her with unvaried kindness, and unlimited indulgence, he had any thing for which to reproach himself, or that she could have any thing to wish. And it was true, that Isabella had learnt so well to regulate her own mind, and lived at this period in so much hope, that she was less aware than at any former one of her married life, how much was in fact wanting to the completion, or the stability of her happiness.

She was soon to become a mother; and the interest that Mr. Willoughby took in the expectation of his offspring was to Isabella a pledge that, in becoming a father, he would become all that she could wish as a husband.

The smiles of a wife, though she may not be powerful enough to thaw the ice with which, Lady Rachel says, the world has encrusted his heart, but the smiles of his infant will cause it to melt away as before a meridian sun. When I hold my child in my arms, I think I may defy all the machinations of Lady Charlotte.

Isabella went no more into public; but her two kind friends, Lady Rachel and Lord Burghley, took care that she did not therefore remain in solitude. The friendship of the latter had been peculiarly useful to her. Lady Rachel's chamber counsel, might sometimes have been forgotten, had she not had almost perpetually at her elbow so skilful a commentator on the text as Lord Burghley. It was from his eye that she took the lesson which upheld her in the even course that she wished to tread, and from which she might otherwise have been in danger of swerving, as the insolence of Lady Charlotte, or the indifference of Mr. Willoughby, at times awakened her resentment, or sunk her into sadness. She owed to his *apropos* anecdote, or ludicrous remark, the rallying moment, which gave her power to laugh when others laughed, and to be gay when Sir Charles Seymour would still attempt to make her sentimental.

Lord Burghley gave the word that there was nothing so delightful as "the *Soirees*" of Mrs. Willoughby; and Lady Rachel had sanctioned the opinion, by having broken through her general rule, and establishing herself almost every evening in Isabella's drawing-room. As Isabella was understood to be always "at home," all who were upon her visiting list might present themselves between the hours of nine and twelve; and even of the gayest and the busiest, there were few who, from curiosity to see "what sort of a thing it was," did not sometimes find their way thither. But the more habitual party was of such who, not being overwhelmed by engagements from home, or who, finding no attractions at home, eagerly seized this escape from solitude, and the tedium of conversing with their own thoughts, and this substitute for dissipation, which from various causes they could no longer partake of elsewhere.

To this part of her visitors, Isabella furnished the resource of the card table; while she found her own amusement amongst the few of superior intellect, and cultivated taste, whom Lady Rachel and Lord Burghley had drawn around them. The group, of which Isabella formed the centre, assumed from hence something of a literary aspect, and gave a colour to the sarcasms of Lady Charlotte, that "Mrs. Willoughby was become a blue stocking." To pick up anecdotes to which she could give a ludicrous turn, and to ascertain as well as she could what was really passing in Isabella's mind, Lady Charlotte not unfrequently passed ten minutes or a quarter of an hour at Mrs. Willoughby's, on her progress to gayer scenes, and more interesting parties. If she found Mr. Willoughby at home, she would offer to set him down at his evening's engagement; or she would sometimes enter with him and some hanging-on female companion, at the latest period of Isabella's assembly, and tell her, with an insolent air, "see, I have brought your wanderer home."

Patiently as Isabella had brought herself to bear these impertinencies, she was not sorry to have an active defender, and sometimes an avenger, in her young friend Mr. Burghley.— He was one of her most certain visitors; and he had no greater delight than to make himself a torment to Lady Charlotte. As he was considered merely as a good-

natured rattle, though felt at times to be a sharp one, it would have been beneath the dignity of Lady Charlotte to have been offended by what she called "his intolerable nonsense;" but the buzzing bee would often make her feel his sting, and then fly off to enjoy the honey of Isabella's smile. At other times he would attach himself so closely to Lady Charlotte, that she could not shake him from her, and he would oblige her to carry him away in her carriage, that he might be at hand, he said, "to amend her report," which he gravely assured her "was often very faulty, from her not at all understanding what had been passing under her eyes" — thus instituting himself both as a spy, and a restraint upon Lady Charlotte, by which he not unfrequently rendered Isabella the most essential service, in bringing over the laugh to his side; which, had it remained on Lady Charlotte's, might have found its way in a graver form to the apprehension of Mr. Willoughby.

But the most indefatigable and assiduous of Isabella's visitors was Sir Charles Seymour. Do what she would to put him out of his play, he was too experienced a gamester to be foiled by so truly ingenuous and artless an opponent. She could not but bow to the opinion that she knew Lady Rachel entertained of him; but now that she had no weaknesses of her own to make her afraid of him, she was not able to discover any thing in the manner of Sir Charles that could distinguish his attentions to her from those of any other well-bred man whom the constant intercourse of society allowed to call himself her friend. There were now no insidious remarks to alarm her, no affected compassion to soften her, no pretended zeal to interest her; she saw him but as an amusing companion, and a good-natured well-wisher; and Sir Charles congratulated himself on having laid not only her prudence asleep, but the much more formidable suspicions of her friends, and was content, like the crafty beast, of a less savage nature, to remain quiet in his lair until he could rush out and seize his defenceless prey.

All these different aims and chicaneries appeared to be matters of no concern to Mr. Willoughby, feeling himself secure in the innocence and integrity of Isabella, and seeing nothing in her conduct but what must be the result of the purest modesty, that she should amuse herself in these hours of restraint in the best manner she could, appeared to him but as a thing of course,—“what all the world did,” and “what it would be very foolish not to do.” He sometimes made a part of her society; but he felt no call upon himself to sacrifice the more vivid pleasures that awaited him elsewhere, and contented himself with believing that she was so surrounded by friends that she could not want him.

“The ice has not yet begun to melt!” said Isabella, with a sigh.

“It must be broken up by storms,” replied Lady Rachel.

The tenderness of the wife, however, still clung to gentler methods; and the moment now arrived when Isabella believed herself in the possession of all that she most wished for.

CHAP. XVIII.

“Magdalen, hitherto, has only known
The name of sorrow.”

WILSON.

THE evening meetings were given up; the parties were dissolved; Isabella presented a son to her husband!

It may be doubted whether Isabella could have been persuaded to believe that there was a bliss beyond what she experienced, when, after having been supported by Mr. Willoughby through hours of agony, she beheld the tears flow in currents down his cheeks, when he embraced first herself, and then her child, — when she heard him thank her, again and again, for the courage that she had shown, and for the treasure that she had given him, — and when she heard him exclaim that he had never known a real pleasure until that moment.

But the enthusiasm of the hour passed away, and with it much of that glowing hope and vivid joy which had made Isabella assure herself, and assure Lady Rachel, that “henceforth she should have nothing to wish.”

Yet Mr. Willoughby passed many hours with Isabella whenever he could be admitted into her apartment, and felt no attraction powerful enough to withdraw him from his boy; by the side of whose little resting-place he would remain silent and contemplative until the nurses grew weary of his presence. Nothing could exceed his anxious care for the one, or the lively pleasure he took in the other; and Mr. Willoughby in these virtuous and happy hours recognised the feelings and the principles that had once made him equally beloved by others, and contented with himself.

From this hour, thought he, I will be what once I was! The time lost shall be redeemed!—I will live for my boy!—too happy, if my most assiduous cares can guard him from the follies of his father!

How natural to the heart of man the wish to be virtuous! — how difficult to accomplish that wish! To retread the faulty steps of twelve years was not to be done by a wish!

“As soon as you are sufficiently recovered, my love,” said Mr. Willoughby to Isabella, “we will go to Brighton. Bathing will strengthen you, and the sea air will blow roses into my boy’s cheeks.”

“I understood,” said Isabella, “that we were to go into Westmoreland. You have not been there for a long time; and I should like to see the place where you passed the first years of your life.”

“If I could recover the tastes that I then had, I should like to go too,” returned Mr. Willoughby; “but you would find it a most *triste sejour*. I could fear almost, that the old house had tumbled down by this time. I have not lately been plagued about repairs; so that I begin to suspect that the mansion has filled up the lake, and thus I have got rid of two plagues together.”

Mr. Willoughby said this with an air of chagrin and bitterness that gave Isabella pain.

"I think you would be sorry to lose either your lake or your house," replied she; "and Lady Rachel has described Eagle's Crag so majestic, so sublime, yet with a mixture of so many milder beauties, that I should think the novelty of the scene to me, who have seen only the artificial features of the metropolitan counties, would be a security from all weariness; and our boy may get the 'thaws and sinews' of his ancestors, by scrambling upon his hereditary mountains. Would not that renew to you the pleasure that you once took in doing so yourself?"

"I *should* like to look upon the old place once more," said Mr. Willoughby; "and I should not be sorry if my boy should like it better than any other spot under heaven, but I fear you would soon be weary of solitary mountains and silent streams; and the distance is so enormous, that, except one could remove with a wish, it would be very inconvenient to have such long journeys to make perpetually."

"But why should we not determine to pass several months there?" said Isabella, timidly.

"Because," said Mr. Willoughby, laughing, "I verily believe, if I were to make such a determination, I should break it in a week. I have still a horror of the *ennui* that seized me when I was last there; and I was so teased with applications that I could not grant, and told of so many wants that I could not supply, that I almost made a vow never to go there again."

"But you would go into society now," said Isabella. "Our boy will soon be a playfellow for you; and I suppose that there are human creatures even in Westmoreland?"

"I doubt whether you would think them so," returned Mr. Willoughby, "when compared with the standard of humanity to which you have been accustomed. But if you really have taken a fancy to see the old place, I would have *you* go by all means. I will follow you when I can, and stay with you as long as I can, or we will return together; for I question whether a very short taste of Eagle's Crag will not suffice. Three weeks' sojourn may perhaps bring you over to my mind, that my pretty box in Hertfordshire is worth all my Northern possessions."

Isabella's heart sunk at the proposal of going alone.

"Beechwood," said she, with a sigh, "is very dear to me. But I am in no haste to leave London; I will stay your leisure to accompany me whenever we go."

"Oh! by no means," replied Mr. Willoughby. "I am impatient to have the boy out of the suffocation of this place; and, if you really don't like Brighton, this may be as good a year as any, for you to gratify your curiosity as to Eagle's Crag. And as you will of course travel slower than I could bear to do, although you may set out before me, yet perhaps I may beat you in. I should not dislike a fortnight's exercise in some of my old haunts."

"Do you think it possible that I could prevail upon Lady Rachel to accompany me?" said Isabella.

A sudden flush deepened the colour of Mr. Willoughby's face.

"I should think not," said he, as he struggled to repress a sigh, which yet smote on Isabella's ear: "times long gone by. — Besides, the journey would be too much for her: I fear it would never do: yet if you could persuade her I should be very glad. — I should then hope — I should then think—well, do all you can. But positively I am unwilling to expose you to what I fear, after all, you will not like. I do not know whether the place is fit to receive you; for although I have no actual fears of its falling down, it is rather too

substantial for that, yet things must be in strange disorder. There must be much fumigating and airing before I shall trust you and your little companion within the old walls."

"I had thought," said Isabella, "that you had not suffered the place to be neglected."

"For some years every thing was taken care of," returned Mr. Willoughby. "I had used to think that when I married I should like to renew the old ways of going on — but that fancy wore away with many other youthful fancies. There were some good people whom I used to love, but I saw little of them, and so I began to attach myself to the people, good or bad, that were more within my reach,—and still something put off marrying. The keeping so large a place in neatness and airing was expensive. I was grown fond of Beechwood, I had laid out large sums of money upon it, and I began to think it was not wise to spend money upon what gave me no pleasure, when I had so many uses for it that did."

"Yet," said Isabella, "Lady Rachel has told me that Eagle's Crag is not in a state of desolation."

"Perhaps not," replied Mr. Willoughby, "not absolute desolation. There is an old housekeeper and an old steward, who, I really believe, would spend the last farthing they have, rather than that it should go quite to decay. Perhaps they may have kept it weather tight, clean, and whole. I know that Lady Rachel has correspondence with some of her old connexions in Westmoreland, and she may have heard something of this from them; but I will write, and see how matters stand; and I am sure if Evans and Roberts *can* make you a few rooms comfortable they will do so, for it will rejoice their kind hearts to see the descendant of my father. For their sakes, as you wish to look upon the mansion of my forefathers, I shall be glad that you should go. I shall be delighted to give them such a pleasure; they well deserve this, and all, and more than all I can do for them, at my hands."

Isabella's heart was saddened by this conversation. If her hopes could have rested upon the amiable feelings which had shone through the indifference and carelessness of thinking, which Mr. Willoughby too plainly manifested, she could not but be aware that no principle had appeared upon which she might depend; and she could receive no pleasure from so ready an acquiescence in her wishes, when their gratification was to be purchased by a separation from her husband. She began to question the expediency of such a step; she determined to consult Lady Rachel, and she resolved, if she did go to Eagle's Crag, to prevail on her, if possible, to accompany her thither.

CHAP. XIX.

“Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial
To my proportion’d strength.”

MILTON.

ISABELLA found every encouragement possible from Lady Rachel as to the expediency of her visiting Eagle’s Crag, but upon the point of her own journey to the same place, she found her unpersuadable.

“Child,” said she, “you sometimes tell me that I delight in martyrdom; but you are mistaken. I would not undergo what the re-entrance into Eagle’s Crag would make me suffer for any less consideration than to save its unfortunate master, his amiable wife, or his helpless offspring, from misery and destruction! With such an object in view, or to rejoice in its accomplishment, I would suffer any thing; but, without such a motive, I would rather embrace the rack than look again upon scenes once so delightful — now so blasted! Urge me no more — but do you go — perhaps you may be appointed agent of restoration to the virtues and the blessings that once made that sacred spot their favoured residence. — Nor will you find it such a desolated place as its careless master apprehends. There has been a guardian hand upon it, from the hour when he, with such a prodigal thrift, withdrew his — make yourself mistress of all the details that Roberts and Evans can give you. Be not afraid to act; your husband, whatever he is besides, is no tyrant; he will bless you for the good which he will not take the trouble to do. He will thank you for having shielded his child from the beggary which he is fast bringing upon him; and which, should it be completed, will break his own heart, if it be not callous, to the core.”

“Good Heavens!” said Isabella, “is Mr. Willoughby in danger of beggary?—and what endless sums have I squandered away in follies for which I did not care; but which his kindness, his indulgence, seemed never to think sufficient for my gratification.”

“The first restraint from which he freed himself,” said Lady Rachel, “was the restraint of calculation. When first he became, what is called ‘his own master’ — miserable misnomer as it is! — he knew that he was rich; and he continued to persuade himself that he was so, when he had taken every means to be poor; but all that was done, or lost, or given, for follies and virtues were strangely mingled —was but a trifle for ‘a man of his fortune.’ So his flatterers told him, so he told himself; and being unrestrained by settlements or entails; he has been longer of finding his mistake than he would otherwise have been. I have reason to think that he has found it — whether too late or not I cannot tell; be it your care to probe the matter to the bottom. Accept as a favour from Heaven the desire that has been awakened in your heart to visit Eagle’s Crag. I do not tell you that happiness awaits you there, but I believe that you and your child would have been undone, if your residence had been confined to Grosvenor Square and Beechwood.”

“I entreat you,” said Isabella, in an agony, “to tell me all that you know on this terrific subject. Oh instruct me how to act! — there is nothing that I will not do. I will strip myself of the most indispensable necessities, if I may, by so doing, preserve my husband and my child!”

“Moderate your feelings,” said Lady Rachel; “the remedy is not to be found in exaggerated apprehensions; the reverse of wrong is not right. I am not mistress of any such specific facts as to justify my giving either the absolute certainty, or the extent of the mischief incurred. The property *was* extremely large—there must be great resources. I believe the evil to be great; I hope it is not irretrievable; but, whatever it is, you would but aggravate it, were you to attempt to lessen the expenditure by any violent means, or by any undisguised declaration even of your suspicions that any thing is wrong— your unhappy husband has the spirit of a martyr in his follies. Act with caution, and without any sudden or apparent change in your usual manner of proceeding. The few hundred pounds that you can save without the concurrence of your husband would be a trifle to what will be spent by others; and never forget that economy and parsimony are of two houses. I have known those who would quarrel with their housekeeper for the waste of a score of eggs, who would lay out five guineas in a piping bullfinch.”

“Oh how unfitted am I, for the task before me,” exclaimed Isabella.

“Why unfitted?” replied Lady Rachel. “God has given you an intellect to comprehend, an integrity to support the difficulties that surround you. With good sense and probity we need not fear but that we shall discover the right path, nor that we shall want courage to pursue it. You have now entered upon your *real* education; the mortal is training for immortality!”

It is certain that nothing short of the high views which Lady Rachel gave Isabella of the task assigned her would have enabled her to have undertaken it with any chance of success; the greatness of the object absorbed all lesser considerations. And even her reluctance to separate from Mr. Willoughby, which might have taken, with the help of some worldly sophistry, the form of virtue; or which might in softer moments have degenerated into an effeminate sorrow, was held in controul by the sense of the responsibility which as an accountable creature was laid upon her. Even all that she was likely to be called upon to do or to suffer for his sake, and for that of her boy, faded before the apprehension of how she should approve herself to her God!

CHAP. XX.

“She who in the region of delight
Slumber’d in the sun-shine, or the shelter’d shade,
Rose with the storm.”

WILSON.

NOTWITHSTANDING the exalted tone of thought that Isabella’s conversation with Lady Rachel had given to her mind, it was not without a degree of shrinking from the burning iron which was presented to her hand, that she heard Mr. Willoughby tell her, “that things at old Eagle’s Crag were not so bad as he had feared;” that “Roberts and Evans had undertaken to have all matters in tolerable order whenever she should be ready to make her journey.”

“And indeed, my love,” said he, looking anxiously at her, “if you feel strong enough, the sooner you set out the better, except you would take a month’s strengthening at Brighton before you go, for your confinement has made you thin and pale; paler and thinner, it really seems to me, than you were a week ago.”

“Will it not suit you to go with me?” said Isabella. “I should have such pleasure in viewing with you the haunts of your childhood, and in being introduced by you to all your favourite spots.”

“Oh! indeed you would not!” said Mr. Willoughby, with a kind of shudder, “Retrospection always makes me sad. No, no! be you my *avant courier*. You will put every thing into nice order, I know; and when I see you and Godfrey with all your comforts about you, and the old mansion trim and well set out, I shall not be assailed by that legion of blue devils which crossed my path wherever I went when I was last there. But one thing I beg: don’t let Roberts talk to you about expense; for although, when nobody was there to see whether the place were neatly kept or not, I thought it nonsense to have money thrown away upon its walks and seats; yet now that you are to traverse the one, and to repose upon the other, I would have every thing as complete as your own drawing-room, and every thing done that can please your eye, or gratify your senses. You will want all,” added he, with a kind of melancholy smile, “to make Eagle’s Crag resemble any thing you ever saw before.”

“Its very novelty,” said Isabella, “I have no doubt, will have a charm for me. And could you,” added she, casting a doubting eye on Mr. Willoughby, “could you have gone with me”—then, seeing denial in his face, she immediately changed the conclusion of the sentence into — “yet you will follow me so immediately I trust, that I will endeavour to think it the same thing.”

“Oh! it will be quite so,” returned Mr. Willoughby. “You may depend upon it I will join you as soon as possible; but I think I must have a few dips in the sea first; I feel quite relaxed; and I have some arrangements to make in Hertfordshire. If you should really take a fancy to Eagle’s Crag, it might not be amiss to sell Beechwood; the place is expensive, and if you are determined not to go to it, I see no good in keeping it.”

“Surely, my dear Mr. Willoughby,” said Isabella, “in all such things you must determine for me. I am not aware that I ever did say I would not go again to Beechwood.

Wherever you wish me to be, there I will be; and whatever arrangements you may think right, I will acquiesce in with pleasure."

"Spoken like a prettily-behaved wife," said Mr. Willoughby, kissing her. "But, Isabella, you look grave. I do not love either to make, or to exact sacrifices. Let us each do as we like, and then we are sure to be pleased with each other; for I am confident that you will never like any thing that I could seriously disapprove, and I hope you can say as much for me."

"I hope I never gave you reason to think otherwise," said Isabella, "nor ever shall."

Mr. Willoughby did not press for a more explicitly expressed confidence in the rectitude of his taste: he turned the current of the conversation, by asking, "when she thought she should be ready to leave London, and how long she intended to be in making her journey?" Isabella named a week as a sufficient time for any preparations that she had to make; and she referred to Mr. Willoughby, who knew the distance, and the rate of travelling, better than she did, as to the other particular.

All this being arranged between them, Mr. Willoughby promised to write to Roberts, fixing the day, later than which, nothing must be unfinished that would be necessary to the comfortable reception of Isabella at Eagle's Crag; and having so done, he quitted her to follow his "own likings," in whatever direction they might lead him.

Isabella, left to herself, found from what had passed abundant cause for a variety of reflections, as new as they were unpleasant to her.

It was very evident that Mr. Willoughby would not be sorry for a pretence to get rid of his house in Hertfordshire; and it did not escape her that he contemplated without reluctance the possibility that she would fix herself wholly at Eagle's Crag. That her doing so, provided he could persuade himself that she preferred it to any other residence, would not be any restraint upon his more vagrant fancies; and though his natural generosity and indulgent temper made him urge her to deny herself nothing which she could desire to have, yet she could not forget that he had said, that he "thought it nonsense to spend money upon what gave him no pleasure, when he had so many uses for it that did." His observation, on even the passing shadow on her countenance, told her that he would ill brook any interference in his own pursuits, and would hold himself little obliged to her for a prudence that reproached his want of it, or for any sacrifices exacted by his want of consideration. Nor could she fail to be struck by the incongruity between his first dissuasion from her going to Eagle's Crag at all, and the readiness with which he now accelerated her departure, and for a tarriance to which there did not appear to be, in his mind, any definite end.

These reflections took even a deeper tinge, when, two days afterwards, he returned to the subject, with

"I have been thinking, Isabella, that it would not be unadvisable to take this opportunity of making some little alteration in our household. Here we are at the latter end of August; our Northern summer is a late one; you will probably not be disposed, should it happen that you really do fall in love with fells and rocks, to think of quitting Westmoreland much before Christmas; and that would be an awkward time for you and Godfrey to encounter so long a journey. Perhaps it may be latish in the Spring before you would think of returning to town, especially if I *should* dispose of the Hertfordshire house, where you might otherwise have been until London had anybody in it. Now, all

this taken into the account, will it not be as well to get rid of the cook? I have not been satisfied with him for some time; he is not what he was when I first took him; he is very expensive and very insolent; and I do not think our Westmoreland neighbours would much relish his *cuisine*. And then there is your housekeeper: she and Evans would never understand one another; and there would be such lifting up of hands at the extravagance of the one and the parsimony of the other, that you would not know what to do between them. I think, if you have no objection, I should advise that Le Clare and Thompson march off together: between them they would be likely to upset all the Median laws of Eagle's Crag, and would drive poor Roberts and Evans out of their wits. No doubt we can find damsels in Westmoreland who can scour floors and dust furniture; so that I would propose to part with the whole of our present establishment of that kind, and trust to Evans to collect a household over whom she would have the undisputed control; with the exception, however, of your personal attendant and the nurses; of course, none of these can be displaced. Have you any objection to this plan?"

Isabella knew so little of the detail of anything that went on in her own house, and would have thought so little of personal inconvenience, if she had foreseen any, that she gave a prompt and cheerful acquiescence; and the whole matter would have passed as a thing of no consequence, had it not been for the intimation that she had received from Lady Rachel; but with this clue in her hand she could not but trace, in what was represented merely as a temporary arrangement, and as arising from the unforeseen circumstance of the projected visit to Eagle's Crag, a purpose of making a permanent change in their way of living, and a retrenching of expense, which she well knew could only arise in the mind of Mr. Willoughby from a sense of the most imperative necessity for such a measure. She was, however, more cheered by seeing the readiness with which he had anticipated her own purposes, than alarmed by any deprivation that might eventually fall on herself. She had no distinct idea either of the resources or the expenditure of Mr. Willoughby. She had been told, when she married him, that his fortune would allow of every indulgence that her heart or her fancy could require; and she had experienced so liberal a supply of money, and saw herself surrounded by such a superfluity of luxury, that she could not but think that much might be parted with, and yet more remain than was essential to everything that she could want. She was too well acquainted with the modifying jargon of the "necessity of some arrangement"—"some little difficulties"—"what happens to everybody," to be much alarmed by such designations, or to suspect how frequently they denominated bankruptcy and disgrace.

The word "beggary," indeed, from the mouth of Lady Rachel, had smote upon her heart; but she knew Lady Rachel's unshaded way of speaking; and she was rather inclined to indulge the hope that Lady Rachel had admitted, that the evil might be averted, than to adopt her fear that it was irretrievably incurred. Yet the whole face of the purposed visit to Eagle's Crag had changed; instead of a few weeks residence in a place where the novelty and the magnificence of the objects around her might well supply the want of her usual society, and which she could quit at any moment when she grew weary of it; and where, while she remained, there would be no falling off in any of those circumstantial accommodations to which she was accustomed, she now could not but perceive that her removal into Westmoreland might be the commencement of a banishment from all that had hitherto made the pleasure of her life; from her usual haunts! from her usual companions!—from her family!—that the economy of all around

her was about to be changed, and that she was too likely to find herself alone in a situation at once new, strange, and difficult. Lady Rachel had indeed told her that good sense and probity were sufficient for the exigency, but she felt herself ignorant, and she suspected that she might find herself weak.

Of all that passed in her mind, it was not possible that Isabella could disclose any part to Mr. Willoughby. No communication had ever been between them respecting what was indeed the mutual interest of both. "Spend, and I will supply," had been the only financial regulation where she was concerned, that Mr. Willoughby had ever made; and she was fully aware that she would be the last person to whom he would unbosom himself, either as to the evils to which his indiscretion might have exposed him, or respecting the means by which they might be remedied. To be "good humoured and well dressed," had been his first admonition; and she could not but see that he gave her little credit for any qualities that were beyond those necessary for the fulfilling it.

Under these impressions Isabella made her farewell visits to the remaining few of her friends who still continued in town. — Lady Jane and her daughters had already gone to their summer mart, where attractions could be best exchanged for settlements, or where the chance was the greatest, that the flirtations of the Spring might be finished up by the marriage of the Autumn.

Isabella would have been glad to have taken one of her sisters with her into Westmoreland, but Lady Jane had put her negative upon any such wish, by observing, that her sisters could not be allowed to bury themselves with her in so remote a country residence till they had secured one for themselves—and to this Isabella knew she had nothing to reply.

The kindness of friendship might however have supplied the companionship, which the calculation of relationship had refused. Mrs. Nesbitt declared herself ready to go *any where* with her dear Mrs. Willoughby — even to *that* Westmoreland! — but it had happened, that in a full persuasion of the power which she supposed that she still held over the mind of Isabella, she had been loud and vehement in her remonstrances against any such scheme; and had represented it as little less than exile from all that bore the name of humanity; had foretold the certain death of Isabella, at once from rushing torrents, impassable mountains, and moping solitude; and had farther denounced, that should she escape as by a miracle from all these, that the still greater evils of triumphant rivalry, and galling neglect, would fall upon her head; with many hints that she would deserve *all* that she so brought upon herself if she obstinately persisted in a plan so preposterous. Having thus incautiously declared her opinion of the step that Mr. Willoughby was going to take, it was not difficult for Isabella to escape from all the wishes and offers of Mrs. Nesbitt to accompany her in her banishment. She did this by a peremptory and explicit declaration that she would not involve any one in such horrors as Mrs. Nesbitt had predicted, for any selfish consideration whatever, and that therefore there was no more to be said or done, but to remain obliged to Mrs. Nesbitt for the sacrifice that she offered her.

Mrs. Nesbitt thus having overshot her mark, could only repent her former authoritative tone; and indemnify herself the best she could for the present disappointment, by declaring to all who would hear her, that Isabella was the most obstinate and ungrateful young person with whom she ever had to deal.

Lady Rachel was the single person, in parting from whom, Isabella felt any real sorrow; but the separation from her was bitter. She was become to her like a second conscience, and as an oracle whose dictates she implicitly followed — it was to cut off a right hand to be without her. Nor were her regrets wholly selfish — in spite of Lady Rachel's self-control, Isabella perceived the unusual workings of her mind as she bade her farewell.

“You are going to Eagle's Crag!” said she, and her lips quivered. “You are going to tread in the footsteps of those whose path has led to Heaven! Emulate their ways! You will behold scenes where once there was bliss exceeded only by that known to our first parents before they fell! You may not be able to restore this paradise; at least *deserve* to have it restored to you! You will behold the spot where all that constitutes human happiness was blasted with the suddenness of the lightning's flash! Learn hence, that here below, the battle is not to the strong, nor the race to the swift; but look beyond this ‘visible diurnal sphere,’ and behold the crown that has been trodden in the dust by mortal feet, shine in bright effulgence around the immortal brow! — Farewell!”

CHAP. XXI.

“A man may smile, and smile, and be a villain.”
SHAKSPEARE.

THE emotion of Lady Rachel's parting words had impressed a solemnity on the feelings of Isabella, which appeared to Mr. Willoughby as the token of regret in the choice that she had made.

“Do you repent your selection of your summer residence?” asked he. “If you do, for Heaven's sake, don't go. Nothing is so foolish as to do a thing because it has been determined upon, when one has lost the relish for it. I don't half like the scheme myself; I begin to feel that I shall be very uncomfortable to have you and Godfrey at such a distance from me. Had we not better all go to Brighton together?”

“If you really wish that we should do so,” replied Isabella, “I am ready to give up the Westmoreland scheme; but I have not repented of my choice, and the less as you tell me that you shall not be easy to be absent from — from — from *us*. I flatter myself that I shall scarcely have time to put all things into the order which I know you like, before you are with me; but if you really wish me not to go” —

“No, no!” interrupted Mr. Willoughby. “Provided the matter is your own choice, I do not know any arrangement that will do better for the remainder of the summer than spending it at Eagle's Crag; but I would not have you go reluctantly.”

“I do not go reluctantly,” replied Isabella.

“Well, then things may remain as they have been fixed. But I must set you on your way. Don't hurry yourself in the morning. If you will make your first night's resting place not more than twenty miles from London, I will accompany you; and the next morning, after seeing you all well packed up, turn off to Beechwood, where I have appointed a person upon business.”

Isabella's eyes sparkled at this proposal.

“How kind, how good you are!” said she. “I shall now, indeed, begin my journey under auspices which must make it prosperous.”

In fact Mr. Willoughby felt an unwillingness to part from Isabella that he had not anticipated, and he could not contemplate her as left to the care of servants only, without a feeling of fear, which yet appeared to him too ridiculous to be avowed.

He had made something of a truce with his uneasiness by determining to escort her on her first setting out; and he thought that he could see her depart from the inn the next morning without any return of so unusual a sensation. But he was mistaken. As he was putting her into her coach, his heart suddenly smote him for thus leaving the creature in the world over whom he was most bound to watch, with the sedulous care of love, to the protection of a common footman only. Hastily calling to his own personal servant, —

“Edwards,” cried he, “mount the dickey, and attend Mrs. Willoughby to Eagle's Crag, and return by the first coach.”

“Oh no, no!” said Isabella: “indeed there is no occasion; and I am sure you will want Edwards.”

“Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby, with an impressive earnestness, which made her heart both beat and glow, “I have at this moment no wish so urgent as that you shall have

every attention, —every accommodation. I ought to have accompanied you myself; but as that could not be, I should not have a moment's rest if Edwards were not with you. So pray say no more about it. When he brings me word that you and Godfrey are safe and well, I shall be the happiest man in the world; that is, as happy as I can be till I rejoin you."

Isabella burst into tears; and Mr. Willoughby, pressing her to his heart, put her into the coach, and bade her farewell.

If I am parted from with so much reluctance, why am I parted with at all? thought Isabella.

But the uneasiness which this thought involved was quickly lost in the evidence that she had just received that Mr. Willoughby could not part from her without pain. The time may come, thought she, when we shall not part at all!

Soothed with this hope, and occupied with the care of her boy, Isabella did not advert to the solitariness and newness of her situation; never before had she felt herself at her own disposal without guidance, and without protection.

The short excursions which Lady Jane had ever made from her only residence in London were made upon such beaten roads, and ways so traversed by all who formed Isabella's world, that she could not change horses, or stop for refreshment, but the chances were that she fell in with some acquaintance; and even from almost every passing carriage she had a nod, or a smile of recognition. But she was now got fifty miles from London, in a direction that she had never gone before; and although she still looked for some familiar face in the few carriages that she met, she looked in vain; — she even thought that England must be depopulated, so few appeared its inhabitants. She travelled with her road book in her hand, that she might at least make acquaintance with names; and if she had not been ashamed of her curiosity, she would have stopped the postilions to inquire after the designation of every village through which she passed, and of every decent looking house that she saw from the road.

Her anxiety for her boy made her day's journey short; and when she had put him to bed at an early hour, and found herself left to her own resources for the rest of the evening, she felt all the dreary unusualness of her situation.

I wish I durst write to Mr. Willoughby, thought she. But he did not desire that I would write; and then; — he always so ridicules letter-writing! He would think me silly. Yet I would say nothing of myself; I would only talk of Godfrey. But perhaps I had better not. — I will, however, write to Lady Rachel, I know that she will be glad to hear from me; and she will be pleased to know how sorry Mr. Willoughby appeared to be to part from me.

This occupation beguiled a part of the tediousness of the evening; and having slept well, she arose with renovated spirits, and with a degree less of the feeling of being deserted, than she had had the day before.

It had been Mr. Willoughby's injunction that she should not travel more than fifty miles a day. This multiplied the days of travelling, and would have made the journey very tedious to any one less a novice than Isabella; but she observed the successive places and counties through which she passed with the curiosity and interest that she would have done had she been in a foreign country: and had she had the art of book-making, she might have furnished two elegantly-printed and hot-pressed volumes, with the views of the costumes and the wonders that she saw in her travels from London to Eagle's Crag.

That which is performed daily, as a thing of the most common occurrence, by persons of all descriptions, in mail-coaches and out, was a real epoch in the life of Isabella.

As she approached the loftier features of the Northern parts of the Island, her interest increased. Her eye dwelt with rapture on the grand inequality of form in all by which she was surrounded; and although she clasped her infant closer to her breast, as she beheld the tremendous risings and fallings over which she was about to pass, she felt for herself nothing but pleasure. In this pleasure she found no sympathy from her companions. Mrs. Adams declared, "It was monstrous shocking!" And the nurse was sure that "Master would be shook to death." But the tender nerves of the one still stood every succeeding horror, and the apprehensions of the other were not realized.

Isabella was now arrived at her last sleeping-place; when, as she alighted from her carriage, her eye fell on Sir Charles Seymour. With a delight little short of what might have been felt in the deserts of Arabia on recognising a countryman, she exclaimed, "Is it possible! Sir Charles Seymour! Oh, how glad I am to see you!"

Nor had she reason to doubt that she communicated less pleasure than she felt. Sir Charles, who had been drawn to the window by the rattling of her carriage wheels, had been as quick in acknowledging to whom it belonged, as Isabella had been in recognising her old acquaintance. Sir Charles was already at the door of the coach; already his hand was stretched out to assist her in stepping from it, and his arm ready to support her into the house.

But not even the tumult of this unexpected meeting could make Isabella withdraw her attention from her boy for a single moment.

"No, no, Sir Charles," said she, "you must not hurry me away so. Nurse, give me Godfrey. There — take care — I will keep him quiet till everything is ready for him. And pray make haste; it is later than it should be, and the poor little fellow is tired."

So saying, she received the baby into her own arms; and having no hand for Sir Charles, and being deaf to his desire that he might "bear her lovely burthen for her," she made her way into the room that was appointed for her, followed by Sir Charles, who, in the newly-awakened affections of a mother, saw another barrier raised between him and his presumptuous hopes.

"But where is Willoughby?" asked Sir Charles.

"Detained by business," replied Isabella.

"Well, but he is intending to follow you; is he not?"

"Undoubtedly—undoubtedly," replied Isabella, whose whole attention was given to her boy, who had now begun to cry. "You must excuse me, Sir Charles; I can think of nothing but Godfrey, till I have seen him fed and asleep." And the nurse appearing at the same moment at the door, "I come, I come," said she.

"But you mean to return, I hope," said Sir Charles. "May I not have the honour of drinking tea with you? It is rather too early an hour to think of supper."

"Is not that your carriage which is coming to the door now?" said Isabella.

"What a blunderer that fellow is," said Sir Charles: "I told him, as plain as I could speak, that I should not go farther to-night. I had anticipated a solitary evening; but I hope you will have too much charity to let me pass it alone."

"And for myself too," said Isabella. "I will return in half an hour, and we will drink tea together."

Isabella was even better than her word, for she returned within the half hour, unconscious how the desire of society had shortened the caresses and the solitudes which she usually bestowed upon her infant.

Sir Charles had much to ask, and Isabella much to tell, of what had passed in their mutual world since last they had met. He had also to communicate his feats in the destruction of grouse; and to raise her imagination on the scene of the “Andes vast and deserts wild” over and through which she was to pass. And yet, it was not any of all this that was uppermost in Sir Charles’s thought. Diverging from the last topic, to that which was really so:

“I cannot but admire Willoughby’s courage,” said he. “I durst not have suffered even a sister to have made such a journey alone.”

“Do you call it being alone?” said Isabella, whose fondness for her husband, and Lady Rachel’s remarks, made her quick to observe any impropriety that involved a reflection on him: “do you call it being alone, to travel with such a suit as I have with me? I can assure you that I am half ashamed of the trouble I give; and I think myself much obliged to Mr. Willoughby, who, to gratify my impatience to visit the mansion of his ancestors, has got over all his scruples of letting me stir without him. And he has done this too at the personal inconvenience of letting me have his own servant to attend me.”

“But why did he not come with you himself?” said Sir Charles, pressing the subject.

“For very good and substantial reasons, take my word for it,” returned Isabella; “but with which I should never think of troubling you, my good friend.”

There was something of archness in her smile and accent, as she said these words, that could hardly be misunderstood.

“Oh, I see you think me impertinent,” returned Sir Charles. “But Heaven knows how little I am really so. And I could tell you, my dear Mrs. Willoughby—”

“Nothing,” interrupted Isabella, “that I shall like to hear so much, as everything about Westmoreland. You say that you have been in the very heart of its deserts. Pray tell me all their secrets. Let me hear of the height of its mountains; of the depth and clearness of its lakes. I expect to be enchanted with all these: and I cannot become too soon acquainted with their charms.”

“I wish their charms may compensate for their solitude,” replied Sir Charles. “But of course you don’t mean to make a very long stay in this savage region?”

“Not if I find it savage,” said Isabella. “I am come to be sovereign of the castle, not its prisoner.”

“Have you seen Eagle’s Crag,” said Sir Charles.

“No,” replied Isabella; “have you seen it? Pray what kind of place is it?”

“The place in the world where I should like to pass my life with the woman I loved,” said Sir Charles.

Isabella felt painfully at this moment her unprotected state, and it struck her that Sir Charles having remained all night at the same inn with herself had not been his original purpose, but had arisen from his unexpected meeting with her. Her heart beat quicker, yet she replied composedly,

“You give me no distinct notion of what I may expect at Eagle’s Crag, with those we love all places are the same.” As she uttered these words she rang the bell, and on the appearance of Edwards, who had received Mr. Willoughby’s orders personally to wait on

Isabella, she said, "Pray tell Adams that I am coming up stairs directly — you will excuse me, Sir Charles; but as I keep nursery hours in the morning, I am obliged to conform to them at night."

Sir Charles was surprised, confounded, picqued. He attempted in vain, by entreaty, and by raillery, to make her change her purpose; not the grouse which he had ordered his own servant to superintend the dressing of, nor the char that was to be cooked with all the intelligence of those best used to its excellencies, could make her alter her design; she bade the insidious tempter good night, nor was she aware how deeply her perseverance had wounded his pride and disappointed his hope, until she saw, as she withdrew, his features reflected in a glass, where his looks, "alien from Heaven," shewed plainly that it was not merely a few hours of social or friendly conversation that he sought for in detaining her.

How fast I grow in experience! thought Isabella, and how careful ought those to be in guarding themselves, who have no other to guard them!

Sir Charles made also his reflections on this little incident. He would willingly have believed that Isabella's prudence arose from a consciousness of weakness; but his was not a heart to be moved to softness, by virtue, even when arrayed in so much loveliness.—He was not accustomed to be foiled; and to be so by a child, who had nothing but good sense and honesty to defend her, moved his spirit more to revenge than it excited his admiration or his love.

"If I cannot make her love me," said he, "I shall hate her! and she may find my hate even more baneful than my love."

Isabella, satisfied with herself, and not even resentful to Sir Charles, whose offence, in the world to which she was accustomed, was but of too common occurrence, was soon sunk in the blissful repose so justly the due of innocence: but Sir Charles lay tossing even on a bed of down, and stung too sharply by the malignancy of his own thoughts to find repose in any posture. Reasoning more from a consciousness of his own designs, than from any probability that they had been penetrated by Isabella, he concluded therefore that she would no more return into his company; and when he sent a respectful message, expressive of a hope that they might breakfast together before each proceeded on their separate way, he looked for nothing but a flat refusal, or an equivocating excuse.

But Isabella had been only prudent, not angry; and felt no reason in her own mind why the half-hour that was to be passed at the breakfast table should not be passed with Sir Charles. His imagination had magnified a simple act of defensive propriety into a premeditated offence. She gave, therefore, a ready assent to his invitation; and by so doing suggested a doubt in his double mind, whether her withdrawal the night before was fear of herself or anger against him, or, what was worse than either, perfect indifference.

The latter appeared most likely to be the case, from the ease and serenity with which she rejoined him. All was open and careless. The fineness of the morning, the beauties of the surrounding country, found them topics of conversation until Isabella was informed that her carriage was ready, and the nurse stood waiting for her lady's orders, with the infant in her arms.

Sir Charles lost not this opportunity of leaving, if possible, the two impressions on Isabella's mind which he most earnestly wished to fix there.

He hung, with well dissembled rapture, over the baby, declared him the loveliest little creature he had ever seen; examined his tiny hands, and peeped under his eye-lids to see if the mother's eye would look out from thence. What a fond father would Sir Charles make — was the inference intended to be given.

“Had I such a boy,” exclaimed he, “I would not, for ‘a day of kings’ entreaties, sell him one hour from my embracing;” and can Willoughby — oh! I will scold him roundly for such *insouciance*!

How negligent a father is Mr. Willoughby—was the consequence which he here wished to have drawn.

Isabella, soon “moved with the touch of blame” imputed to her husband, drew the wrapper gently over the child's face, and, without one reference to the pleasure of their having met, coldly bad Sir Charles good morning; and Sir Charles felt for the moment that he had nothing to hope either from resentment to the husband, or approbation of himself.

Well then, thought he, if I cannot make her love, I shall know how to make her fear me!

CHAP. XXII.

“Strait my eye hath caught new pleasures,
While the landscape round it measures;
Russet lawns and fallows grey,
Where the nibbling flocks do stray;
Mountains, on whose barren breast
The lab’ring clouds do often rest.”

MILTON.

ISABELLA had hastened her departure, that she might arrive as early in the day as possible at Eagle’s Crag; and she soon lost every thought of what had passed between herself and Sir Charles during the last few hours, in anticipating what she should find in those that were coming; every object which she now saw, might have reference to Eagle’s Crag. Her inquiries were incessant. “Not yet — not yet, madam — you cannot see it yet,” was the constant answer. “It lies *quite down* there; but that great mountain—the greatest of all—that with the strange shape and the high top; that—that’s Eagle’s Crag; the house and lake lie just under it.”

Isabella looked until her eyes ached, to see that which was not to be seen. At length, as she reached the top of a moderate ascent, the voices of the postillions, and her own sagacity, assured her that she did then indeed behold the object so ardently desired to be seen. But it was seen from the pinnacle of a mountain, down which wound a road, steep, rugged, and narrow, — the most tremendous that Isabella had yet encountered, and to the bottom of which she thought it impossible she should ever arrive with an unbroken carriage and whole bones. But the drivers and the horses were alike accustomed to such passes; and to Isabella’s exclamation, “Surely this is not the road!” she received the encouraging admonition of, “Don’t be afraid, my lady: I’ll warrant you we’ll soon bring you safe to the bottom.” And which she soon found was justified by the ease and safety with which she descended. A few seconds only were given to what she thought the peril of her situation. Every succeeding moment was occupied in examining the objects that lay before her; and there could scarcely be found, in nature or art, any more calculated to fix the attention.

The gigantic mountain of Eagle’s Crag raised its huge form in strangely grotesque features innumerably varied. Here a ponderous mass of unshapen stone; there the light minaret of Saracenic architecture; the sacred cathedral, in all its Gothic magnificence, here carried up the thoughts to heaven: while there, the meek appearance of the shepherd’s lowly hut recalled them to the scanty comforts of human existence. Towers of every shape—gateways—arches—all were there portrayed by the hand of Nature, or arose under the plastic power of imagination.

At the foot of this mighty work of the great Creator, stood the mansion of the ancient family of the Willoughbys; a turreted stone building of irregular form, and extended dimensions, largely occupying with its gardens and appendages parts of the capacious basin which was formed on three sides by the surrounding heights. To the South spread a lake, clear as crystal, with its deeply indented outline, and its banks gay with autumnal flowers and tufted brushwood. Beyond the lake lay a park, which stretched

away to the South far as the eye could reach; the branching heads and elegant forms of its numerous herds of different kinds of deer were seen reposing on the banks of the lake, or reflected from its surface. The whole scene was lighted up by the dazzling brilliancy of a declining sun; and Isabella, enraptured and enchanted, breathless with delight and wonder, could not find words in which to express her feelings.

Oh! here indeed, thought she, I could live for ever! *if* Mr. Willoughby would live with me! The *if* sobered her ecstasy. Without him, thought she, even this paradise would be a dreary waste!

She embraced her boy; she dropped a tear on his cheek, nor was her own dry when the carriage stopped, and she saw herself surrounded by a group of domestics who were assembled to receive her, and to obey her orders. In every face she beheld respect and duty, but there was no affectionate gratulation, no recognition of past kindness. She came amongst them as a stranger, — and a stranger unsupported, and unaccompanied by the only individual from whom she could have derived a right to their attachment, or who could have recommended her to their favour. Even in entering her own house she felt herself an intruder. Why did Lady Rachel send me here? thought she; and the sadness of her heart communicated itself to her countenance, and gave an air of languor and fatigue to every movement.

“Our rough hills have tired you, madam,” said a respectable looking personage, whom Isabella had no difficulty in assuring herself could be no one but Mrs. Evans; and she said it with a voice of so much kindness that Isabella felt that she had already a friend.

“Yes,” said she, “I do feel tired; but I am sure that I shall find every thing here that I can wish or want.”

The good-will became instantly reciprocal; for the mild obligingness of Isabella went to Mrs. Evans’s heart in a moment.

“If Mr. Roberts or myself, madam, had left any thing undone that we could do to make every thing as it ought to be, I am sure we should be very wrong, and should have done very contrary to my master’s orders. I hope, madam, my master is well?”

Isabella’s full heart would hardly allow her to answer in the affirmative. She diverted the current of her thoughts by saying, “that is Mr. Roberts, I am sure; and presently I must learn from you who all these good people are. I have no doubt but that we shall be very happy together.”

As she said this, she entered a large and highly ornamented hall, “bedight” with painted windows and full-length pictures of a long line of ancestry.

Isabella stopped to gaze. She was surprised at the perfect order and preservation in all that she saw.

“It all looks,” said she, “as if Mr. Willoughby had only quitted it yesterday!”

“Ah! madam!” said Mrs. Evans, “it is a long time since my master was here; but we shall soon see him now, I am sure, and it will be a joyful day to all when he comes.”

Isabella’s heart glowed within her, on this testimony to the character of her husband. “I see so much to admire,” said she, as she ascended the stairs, “that I forget that I ought to lose no time in putting my little boy to bed. Pray shew me where he is to sleep.”

"I hope you will like the room I have prepared for him, madam," returned Mrs. Evans. "It was my master's nursery, just by my lady's room. She never could have him too near her, and so I thought it might be the same with you, madam."

"Thank you for thinking so," said Isabella. "You will see that you thought rightly.—Oh! what a beautiful room!—and every thing that can be wanted, as if nothing had been displaced since Mr. Willoughby was a baby too!"

"That is my master's crib," said Evans. "My lady worked the quilt and curtains with her own hands; but, perhaps, it is old-fashioned now, and you may have something that you will like better for your young gentleman."

"My boy shall sleep no where but where his father slept," said Isabella, fervently. "Nurse, give me the child. Oh! how pretty he looks in that pretty bed!"

The nurse was not so complimentary. She was afraid master would not sleep any where but in his own crib; the mattress was too hard—was too soft. Master would be suffocated. The quilt was not like quilts now-a-days, — not like his own.

Isabella silenced all objections, by declaring her approbation of every thing, both general and particular, and thereby seated herself still more firmly in the heart of Mrs. Evans.

Isabella, having seen that her child was well provided for, passed from his room into a beautiful little cabinet, by which alone the nursery was separated from her own apartment.

It was furnished with hangings of black satin in pannels, embroidered with large bunches of natural flowers; and festoons of similar workmanship over the intermediate space united the pannels. Specimens of the most delicate carving in wood by Gibbons ornamented the chimney. The tables, the cabinets, and the book-shelves were inlaid with ivory and ebony; and the curtains and the coverings of the sofa and chairs were of figured silk of a light blue colour.

"Dear Mrs. Evans," said Isabella, "you have made every thing look so exactly as it must have done so many years ago, that I almost expect to find the Lady of the House in the next room. How is it possible that all these beautiful things can have been so well kept?"

"It is the business of my life, madam, to preserve every thing that belonged to my lady," returned Mrs. Evans. I am *charged* to do so; but these works of hers have never seen the light since we lost her till now. No one but my master's wife was worthy to look upon them, when she who worked them was no more."

Isabella felt the connecting link between herself and the last possessor. May I be so beloved in my life, and lamented after my death! thought she.

She then examined the remainder of the apartment, which seemed to be studiously constructed for the accommodation of two individuals, who even in their separation were desirous to be as little apart as possible. The inspection made Isabella melancholy. "There is much more space than I shall want," said she; "if it were not for that beautiful little room, and its nearness to Godfrey, I should prefer some smaller apartment."

"But when my master comes," said Mrs. Evans, there will not be more room than you will want, and you being here, madam, will make him love these rooms again; else, when he has been here alone, he could not bear to look into them. He said, he thought he saw my lady and his good father in every corner of them."

“Would they were here now!” said Isabella. Mrs. Evans looked earnestly on her; “had you not better go down to the library, madam?” said she; “there are a great many fine prints and entertaining books; I thought you would prefer it, either to the saloon or drawing room, especially as it looks on the flower garden, and I dare say that you are like my lady, and are fond of flowers.”

Isabella willingly acceded to the proposal, but on entering the library she beheld what was dearer to her than prints, or books, or flowers; she saw there letters and letters in the handwriting of Mr. Willoughby. So unexpected a pleasure transported her out of herself. “And has he written indeed!” said she. “Oh how good! how unexpected!” The words did not escape the ears of Mrs. Evans, but having stirred the fire, and brushed the hearth, she withdrew in silence.

Isabella was in the mean while devouring the feast that lay before her. The first letter which she opened contained these words:

“If you have thought of me as incessantly as I have thought of you through this tedious day, you must at this moment be employed in writing to me. I have travelled with you through every stage; and I now picture you, after having seen our dear Godfrey asleep, over your solitary repast; but (I trust) cheating the sense of loneliness by communicating with me. I never repented any thing more in my life than having let you go alone; all those reasons which appeared to me so cogent before we parted, seem as the merest trifles now I have you no longer with me. If my present uneasiness do not subside, the sale of the Hertfordshire house and the dippings at Brighton must take their chance, and I shall be down at Eagle’s Crag, it may be as soon as yourself. With you on my arm, I should perhaps be better able to face the shadowy terrors and vain regrets that have kept me from the residence of my ancestors, or have scared me away when I have gone thither. Dearest Isabella farewell! I would not miss the post for the world, and I have not another moment. Kiss my boy for me — I wish I could kiss both him and you for myself.”

Isabella had never before had a letter from Mr. Willoughby.—There was nothing that she so little expected as that he would write to her otherwise than as a matter of course, or to communicate his wishes or his orders.—She thought she was in a dream.—Were those words really addressed to her? and how unworthy was she of them! she had not written! she had not counted the hours as they passed! she had thought more of herself than of him; their only feeling in common was their affection for their boy! but if she could have flattered herself that she was regretted, how severe would have been her regrets! she was sure, in that case nothing could have tempted her to have separated herself from him.—Perhaps he may be here to-morrow, and then he will see in my delight how sincere has been my sorrow to have left him.

These were the thoughts that were suspended in her eager desire to renew the happiness that she felt in perusing letters so fond, so flattering. The next in order was conceived in these terms:

“Dear Isabella, I could half laugh at myself for the miserable way I was in all Tuesday. I was really never more uneasy in my life, which was being completely ridiculous; for certainly you and Godfrey were in no danger of being run away with, or robbed, or murdered. I hope, indeed I feel assured, that you did not experience the least difficulty. Travelling is absolutely a joke in England. I shall be glad, however, to hear that you are both safe and well; and I hope it would occur to you to write to me, if not

from your first sleeping-place, at least from the second. I find a thousand plagues here, and great difficulties in disposing of this place, at least at the price which I am told it is worth. I was worried to death all yesterday: I feel quite nervous and relaxed. I am afraid that I must have a little sea; and if I hear that you are well, and that you like Eagle's Crag, I shall not grudge myself what will enable me the better to enjoy your society when we do meet. Farewell, my love!"

Isabella laid down the letter. Tears were in her eyes; yet but ten minutes before she would have thought herself but too happy to have had such an one from the same hand.

If I had written, thought she, the wish for my letter might have been lost before it could have arrived; yet I shall never forgive myself for not writing. But there is a third letter, languidly breaking the seal. Oh! how happy shall I be if it is like the first.

She read as follows:

"I am hurried to death, and can get nothing done that I wish. It will be impossible that I should join you as soon as I had hoped. I must go to Brighton. Don't let Edwards return without a letter; and tell me whether you were frightened out of your wits by the tremendous descent to Eagle's Crag. Tell me how you like everything there; and pray tell Roberts that he must make as large a remittance to Dawkins as he can: I shall want it all, if I don't sell Beechwood. Pray make yourself very comfortable, and keep my boy in health. Yours sincerely, F. Willoughby."

The paper fell from Isabella's hands, and the tears gushed in torrents from her eyes. She could neither speak nor think. She could scarcely believe that she was the happy, the transported being, that had stood in the same spot so short a moment before. She felt how the different style of these letters resembled the gradations of her bridal bliss, till the kindness of the one, and the happiness of the other, seemed alike to have escaped her grasp.

"It was well that I did *not* write," were the first words that her full heart would suffer her to utter. "Oh! too truly does Lady Rachel say that he is the creature of the instant; that he is the sport of every varying feeling. By what power shall I fix him to such as can alone save him from misery, from degradation!"

The sadness of her reflections was interrupted by a notice from Edwards, that in order to obey Mr. Willoughby's orders of returning by the first coach, he should be obliged to leave Eagle's Crag early the next morning; and he therefore requested that what dispatches she might have for him might be made up that night.

Isabella could never have been less fitted than at this moment to write to her husband. She had never addressed him by letter in any part of their intercourse. The fondness that would have flowed unconstrained from her pen, had she only received his first epistle, was completely checked by the perusal of his last. Every fear that she had ever felt lest she should be thought importuning or obtrusive was strong upon her; but something also of displeasure mingled with her fears. She was incapable of writing what she did not feel; and she did not dare to express what she did feel. Her letter was short and constrained, but all that it did express was true. Thus she wrote:

"I am very sorry that I did not write to you from off the road. I was afraid I might be troublesome. We had a very good journey, and I was not very much alarmed even by the last hill down to this place. I was very glad, however, to find myself at the bottom on many accounts. I never beheld so magnificent, so interesting a spot! I find every thing

within the house in the most exact order; and by what I see from my windows I expect the same in my walks to-morrow, but Edwards sends me word that he must be gone so early in the morning that I shall not be able to give you any account of what I see. I will give your message to Roberts. Godfrey bore the journey very well; and is now fast asleep in your former crib. I fell in with Sir Charles Seymour at ——. We passed part of the evening together; and I saw him for a moment the next morning. He will tell you, I dare say, what quantities of grouse he has killed; he seems to pride himself much on his prowess in that way. Pray be so kind as to let me know how the sale of Beechwood goes on, and how Brighton agrees with you. I wish the clear air of these mountains was esteemed as bracing as the sea breezes. I am your affectionate wife,

“ISABELLA WILLOUGHBY.”

Isabella felt relieved when her task was over, but she was dissatisfied with the manner in which she had performed it. As she had proceeded in her writing she had attained more freedom of mind, and more courage to express what was passing there; she thought that if she had the letter then to write, that she could have done all much better; — she resolved that it should be done much better next time, and, having sealed the letter, she applied herself to the regulation of her own thoughts, discomposed, and put out of all order by the variety of emotions to which she had been exposed during the last few hours, and by the newness and strangeness of her present situation. She saw with pleasure a letter from Lady Rachel, and she was sure that she could not have a better assistant in the task that she had appointed herself than what that letter would be. Lady Rachel wrote as follows:

“My dear child, never did I think that I should have addressed another letter to the mistress of Eagle’s Crag! At my age I ought to be able to do it with a steadier hand than I can at this moment command. But if I cannot control my feelings, neither shall they master me. I will write, cost me what it will: the next attempt will be easier. I shall become accustomed to think of you in the place of her who is hidden from my eyes for ever. I shall be able to think of you in her seats, in her walks. But I charge you enter not the hallowed walls of the building sacred to the worship of our God, if you are not determined, with an invincible determination, that you will emulate her virtues. Every step that you can now take will make you acquainted with the extent and the variety of them; and you may expect the mountains by which you are surrounded to fall and cover you, if you profane, by the factitious morals of a soft and delicate religion, those haunts which have been marked in all their windings by the genuine and vigorous exertions of a self-denying holiness. She whom you follow was happier than you, but it is not therefore necessary that she should be better. That which she learned and practised in all the blessedness of a loved companionship, you must study and acquire in solitude. She was tasked to hold herself ready to resign at a moment’s warning the consummation of all human good. You are to consider the evils of life as dust upon the balance in comparison of all earthly bliss. The stores of the best learning are now within your reach. Every book that you can open will bear marks that it has not been read in vain by those who have gone before you. *Read your Bible*: not as you have hitherto read it, as an historical or as a geographical study, but as the rule of life; and deviate not from that rule, either into the labyrinth of sentiment or the ratiocination of sophistry. You will receive this letter in the library; in that library where the voice of wisdom was never heard in vain. Raise your eyes to its shelves, and see there the resource that the munificence of your husband’s

ancestors has provided for the tedium of life, which that husband has imposed upon you. Read for the purpose of knowledge; not for the idle occupation of a heavy hour. The elements of all common information have been given you. They will now enable you to make the next step, which you have never yet made, and to apply them to use. Remember, that if you quit Eagle's Crag neither wiser nor better than you entered it, that you will have incurred a responsibility that you will find it difficult to discharge. I might talk to you in a softer tone. I might tell you of your hardships, of your merits, of beauty and youth buried in barren solitudes. I disdain to do it! I rejoice that you are entered upon a warfare where, if you come off victor, the palm you bear will be amaranthine! — Do I love you less? — God knoweth! — My beloved child, — the almost only object that remains to me on earth, that I *can*, that I *dare* love, disappoint not my hopes, blast not your own immortal joys; think more of what you are called upon to perform, than what you may have to suffer. And the arms of God's mercy be around you!"

How did Isabella's heart glow within her as she read this vehement exhortation from Lady Rachel!—how did she raise her imagination to the highest pitch of human excellence! how little appeared the cares, the mortifications which had but the moment before disturbed her! she was exalted in her own estimation by the part that was given her to act; and she felt that she could never again be the child, the wavering doubting creature that she had been. She wondered that she should never have heard of such things before, and she resolved that her boy should suck them in with his very milk.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY J. NICHOLS AND SON, 25, PARLIAMENT-STREET.

ISABELLA.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "RHODA," &c.

"Take if you can, ye careless and supine,
Counsel and caution from a voice like mine.
Truths that the theorist could never reach,
And observation taught me,—I teach."
COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR HENRY COLBURN AND CO.

1823.

ISABELLA.

CHAP. XXIII.

——“Those who can pity, here
May, if they think it well, let fall a tear:
The subject well deserves it.”

SHAKSPEARE.

ISABELLA awoke the next morning with her heart alive to all the pleasures of her situation, and her mind strengthened to meet all its difficulties. She descended into the library, which now appeared to her as sanctified, and she looked from it, upon a flower garden, gay with autumnal annuals, and kept with the exactest neatness. This garden extended to the lake, the banks of which were its southern boundary, and across which the park lay in ample extent, for some distance, broad, well-wooded, with spacious glades opening on either hand: then pressed by the surrounding hills, it seemed to run out into a valley, wild, broken, and solemn. The view, as far as the eye could reach, was closed by towering mountains, that seemed to make Eagle's Crag a world of itself, shut out from all other human interference.

Isabella thought of Rasselas, and his happy valley!

Isabella summoned Mrs. Evans to her side. “You must tell me the name of every cluster of rocks that has a name,” said she; “and of every group of trees that was ever so distinguished; you must instruct me where every path leads, and make me forget, as soon as you can, that I am a stranger to that which I am so pleased to find my home.”

Mrs. Evans's benevolent features brightened with pleasure. “Oh, Madam, there is many an honest heart that I shall rejoice by telling what you say. How have we all wished for this day, when my master would bring us a mistress! Now I am sure he will love Eagle's Crag again better, a thousand times better than when he used to bound light and happy as that doe, from crag to crag.”

“You must tell me of all those happy past-gone times,” said Isabella, sighing. “But there is one thing that I do not see, and yet I am sure it is near: I mean a church.”

“To be sure there is, Madam!” returned Mrs. Evans; “but I wish I could go there without thinking of those who used to take such delight in seeing the people who sat around them, good and happy. But such times will come again *now*.”

“But where is the church?” said Isabella. “You cannot see it from the house, Madam,” replied Mrs. Evans, “and yet it is just by—but so it is with a great many things at Eagle's Crag; for the great mountain does jut out here, and then there, in so many odd ways, that when you think you can go no farther, you just turn sharp, and there you find room enough and to spare for some pretty building, or some plot of garden-ground; and all so sheltered! and so warm! The hot-house and the green-house, they are all built so, and they all are in very good repair, although they are not filled with plants and fruits as they had used to be. And now, I dare say,” continued Evans, who forgot the distance of respect, in the interest of her subject; “I dare say, Madam, that you think the lake quite shuts in the flower-garden at that end, and that you can get no farther; but it is no such matter—*there* is the path which leads to the church, and from thence there are many,

many pretty walks; but they are rugged and steep; not fit for those who have been only used to the smack smooth grounds about London."

"I will soon teach myself to be used to them," said Isabella. "You have been in London then, Mrs. Evans?"

"Very often," said Evans. "I always went when my Lady went. I was her maid then; but I have never stirred from Eagle's Crag since I lost her; and I hope I never shall."

Shall I be so beloved? be so regretted, again? thought Isabella. There is something very different in the manners of the servants to whom I have been accustomed from those of this good Evans; she seems to take a pleasure in recognising the relative situation of master and servant! while the very civility of the fine ladies and gentlemen who speak of their superiors as if they were their equals, is often actually impertinent; the cause of this difference must be in the principals, thought Isabella.

"When I have breakfasted," said she, "you must shew me all the house; and let me see all the servants. I have not had much to do with those we had in London. Mr. Willoughby was so good as to save me all the trouble; but now he is not here, I shall like to be acquainted with every thing; and you, I am sure will tell me all that is necessary to know."

Every word that Isabella uttered raised her more and more in the favour of Mrs. Evans; and had not this faithful domestic been conscious of the difficulties in which Mr. Willoughby was involved, her joy on seeing once again such a head of the family at Eagle's Crag, would have known no bounds.

The inspection of the house and household had the same effect on the mind of Isabella as to her estimation of Mrs. Evans; nor was she more struck with the magnificence of all that had been committed to the care of that faithful domestic, than with the skill that had been exerted in its preservation. She visited Mr. Roberts in his own apartment; and there, making both these worthy dependants sit down, she explained in a few words the simplicity of her own taste; the little attendance, or expense, that she should exact while she continued alone; but she did all this with a dignity, and a delicacy, that betrayed no consciousness of any cause for such restrictions but what was founded in her own preference to such a mode of living; and she inquired what provision could be made for extending the scale when Mr. Willoughby's arrival should make it necessary to resume more of the former manner of going on. She received such answers to these inquiries, as proved to her that all had been foreseen and arranged; she could not doubt but that this had been done by the suggestion of Lady Rachel, who, however she might stimulate her to act for herself, was thus advertent to render her way less intricate. She recalled moreover her charge that she must not forget that economy, and parsimony were of two houses; and she finished this first conversation with her new friends, by desiring that some little festivity might be prepared for the household, and such other dependants as Roberts and Evans might see proper to include as guests, on the first arrival of the heir of the Willoughby's at Eagle's Crag.

"Madam," said Mr. Roberts, rising from his seat, and making a low and profound bow, "may I be pardoned for saying so; but when I look upon you, it seems quite wonderful to hear all you say; and to see that you forget nothing. My master is a happy man!" bowing again.

"Oh!" said Isabella, blushing, "I wish you may always find it so, but indeed I am little used to such things, and I am afraid I shall make many mistakes."

The fact, however, really was that Isabella was astonished with her own powers; she no longer found herself that trivial Being whose greatest exertion was made in arranging a party of pleasure, or in ornamenting a ballroom; but she felt that she had the destiny of many human creatures in her hands; and that she was responsible for the use or abuse of a property which involved the comfort and happiness of almost all around her.

Could it be that Mr. Willoughby had run away from such a responsibility? 'As large a remittance to be made to Dowkins as he can,' thought Isabella; how shall I find proper terms in which to tell Roberts this? I dread his eye; it will tell me so much that I shall tremble to hear; but I must hear it, and Lady Rachel tells me that she rejoices that I am entered upon such warfare! I will not shrink from it; but I could have been content to have been spared it.

Such reflections led her thoughts again to the church, she desired that the door might be opened, and the way to it pointed out to her. Both were done by Mrs. Evans, who seemed as if she suffered an injury when any one else administered to the wishes and wants of her Lady.

Isabella entered the sacred walls more at that instant impressed by the feeling that she was about to visit the last receptacle of the ancestors of her husband, than with any respect to the high destiny to which the building was dedicated. Nor was there any other thought in the mind of her companion, who led her straight to the recess from whence descended the steps which led to the family vault. The sides of this recess were covered with various monumental notices of the Willoughby family, but contained, in the imagination of Mrs. Evans, but the single marble which commemorated the virtues and the loss of her lamented superiors. With tears fast flowing, and with a faltering voice, she began to comment, and to explain; when Isabella's eye, glancing on an unadorned tablet of the purest white marble, read these words:

Sacred to the memory
of Rachel Roper! — the only offspring of
a widowed mother.

Ob. July 30, 17—.

Ætat. 21.

And underneath followed these lines:

Mortal, within this cold and narrow space
Lie beauty's bloom, and pleasure's sparkling grace;
The sculptor's model, and the seraph's voice;
An eye that taught e'en sadness to rejoice!
All these have perish'd by death's stunning blow;
Like the scorch'd flower by fervid suns laid low:
With bitter sorrow let the wreck be mourn'd.
These all were dust, and are to dust return'd!
But love's chaste ardours, and a will resign'd;
A heart all softness, and all truth the mind;
With pious hope, and firm integrity;
A Christian's faith, an angel's charity;
These all surviv'd! and to the realms of bliss

Bore her pure soul, in trembling ecstacies!
Exult immortal! in thy fellow's lot!
Each joy remember'd, and each pain forgot!

"What is that?" said Isabella; "had Lady Rachel Roper a daughter?"

"Ah, madam, did you not know that she had?" returned Evans, "I thought,—I supposed,—I thought that you must have known all about Miss Roper."

"Poor Lady Rachel!" said Isabella.

"Ay, poor indeed, madam!" replied Mrs. Evans; "nobody knows what Lady Rachel has suffered! nor how she has borne it!"

Isabella was carefully examining dates.

"But how is this?" said she, "I had understood that Lady Rachel never resided here after the death of Mr. Willoughby and Lady Margaret? and this marble is dated several years after that event."

"Lady Rachel," returned Mrs. Evans, "would have Miss Roper buried where she was born; where she had lived; and where once she thought she would have had a right to be buried."

"A right!" said Isabella; "was it not enough that Lady Rachel wished it?"

"Ah, madam," replied Mrs. Evans, "nobody disputed her right; but I mean if she had married my master."

Isabella became sick. She supported herself on an adjoining tomb. "Let us go," said she, "I will come again some other time."

Mrs. Evans, seeing her emotion, hastened to offer her arm; Isabella accepted it; and, breathing more freely when she returned to the open air, "Evans," said she, "you must tell me all this sad story. Oh, I sometimes thought that Lady Rachel knew not how to allow for feelings which she had never experienced; but, now I see that she has been tried with every sorrow that can wound the human heart. Well may she treat those as light which touch little more than the fancy; but I must know every thing; you said that Lady Rachel's daughter was born here?"

"Yes, madam;" replied Mrs. Evans; "my lady went to her, when she was all in grief for the loss of Mr. Roper, and she brought her home with her, and they never parted afterwards. Lady Rachel and Mr. Roper had been lovers a great while, and somehow they could not marry; and at last all came right, and they were the happiest people! Oh! I have heard my lady tell of their happiness till my eyes ran over. And then all of a sudden Mr. Roper was ordered abroad, and he was killed in the first battle; and my lady was with child, or else it was thought that she would have died too; but she did so struggle to preserve the life of her infant!—and my lady took such care of her! And then the little girl was born; a lovely baby it was! There were only two years between her and my master. They were brought up together; and every one knew that the lady-sisters wished that they might like one another; and sure enough there was a time when they did, but they were too young to have the marriage talked of; and so after my Lady and Mr. Willoughby died it came to nothing; for my master went into the world, and thought of other things besides marrying; and then the young lady fell ill, and she went from bad to worse, till she died of a consumption, and then it was that Lady Rachel would bring her down here to be buried, and she came with her herself. Many wondered that she could; but Lady Rachel had all her thoughts in Heaven, so could bear earthly losses. She never

shed one tear all the time she was here; but when the mournful ceremonies were over, and she got into her coach to go away. Oh, Madam! never shall I forget her look! and she drew her veil over her face; and bold would have been the person who had uncovered it, knowing what they must have seen there!”

Isabella’s breath came thick and short, as she listened to this relation.

“Is there any picture of Miss Roper?” said she.

“None, Madam, *only* of Miss Roper,” returned Mrs. Evans. “My Lady Rachel took away that which was painted of her when she was about fifteen years old. But,” added she, hesitating, “there is another.”

“What here?” said Isabella.

“Yes, Madam; but it was taken when she was a child; and —

“Mr. Willoughby is painted in the same piece,” said Isabella.

“Why yes, Madam, that’s the thing. Both children; and at play as it were together: *that* is here.”

“How could I miss seeing it when I looked over the whole house this morning?” said Isabella.

“You could not see it, Madam,” returned Evans.

“Is it taken down? Surely it has not been thrown aside,” said Isabella; “Lady Rachel would never allow that.”

“Oh no, Madam, it is taken good care of,” said Mrs. Evans. “It hangs where it always did; it is in the library.”

“Then why could not I see it?” said Isabella.

“Why, Madam, when my master was last here he was not quite like himself: he was out of spirits; he seemed to be afraid of everything that he used to love; and one morning he sent for me into the library. ‘Evans,’ said he, and the tears stood in his eyes as he spoke, ‘I must have that picture taken down; it makes me melancholy. I can’t inhabit this room if that picture is there, it must be taken down; but you must take great care of it.’ My Lady, Sir, I said, hung it there with her own hands. ‘Then,’ said he, quick, ‘it shall *not* be taken down, though it make me as miserable as I deserve to be.’ I do not know what he meant by that, for I am sure, if the prayers of the poor and the praises of the rich are to be trusted, he well deserves to be happy. ‘But let my papers and books,’ said he, ‘be removed into the green parlour: I will live there.’ I was very sorry for this, Madam; for I knew my master always loved the library, as they did all; and he had everything so handy about him there. So I thought I would manage so that he should not see the picture, and yet stay in the room he liked best; and I told him how I would contrive, and he seemed pleased. He said, ‘I shall like to be near that picture, though I can’t bear to see it: perhaps it may do me good to be near it.’ And so I managed, as I had seen my Lady manage, when she had a mind to have two pictures in one place, that she might turn first one and then the other side outward, as she liked best; and there were pictures enow that would suit the size, and so I covered it up with a very pretty flower-piece of my Lady’s own painting, and my master said no more about leaving the room; but all together, I suppose, he did not like thinking of things that he could not help thinking of when he was here, and so he never came again; but now it will be quite another thing; now we shall see my dear master again.”

This narration furnished Isabella with more than sufficient subject for reflection, but it oppressed her almost beyond the power of thought.

She believed that she had found, in what she had heard, a clue to the inconsistencies of her husband's character; she saw, not only a naturally good disposition led astray by the influence of bad example; but she saw also, in the eager versatility with which every new scheme of pleasure was pursued, an attempt to escape from the reproachful workings of a principle of right, which could not be violated with impunity—as long as this resource did not fail, Isabella could hope nothing from the generosity of his temper, or the kindness of his heart; every means of repelling the foe must drop from his slackened hand, before he would seek the only true means of peace in a reconciliation with his offended conscience. And could she bear to contemplate such a destitution for the being whom she loved best on earth? And how could she forbear sinking under the apprehension of the hardness of feelings too likely to be generated by such a process? These were but a part of the painful thoughts that made heavy the heart of Isabella. She might have hoped by undeviating rectitude, and persevering attachment, finally to have triumphed over desultory fancy that the whim of the moment might give birth to; but she was now aware that she had to struggle against an early preference, which although it had not been powerful enough to withstand the first gush of the world's torrent, had like the supple willow, only bowed its head, to rise again with added strength. Its course was now aided by a sense of the disappointment which had attended all that had been preferred to its claims, by the bitterness of self reproach, and by the hopelessness of regaining what had been thrown away. To this standard of excellence, exalted by regret, perhaps beyond its real height, Isabella could not but fear, that all which she could do would be referred; and her heart sunk under the conviction of the disproportion between her own merits and those of the lamented Rachel. He may suffer, thought she, the charms of vice to engage his fancy, but to secure his affections there must be a sublimity of virtue in his wife that I shall never be able to reach!

Yet there was so much virtue in the bitter self-upbraidings of the unhappy Willoughby, and such a depth of feeling in the constancy of his attachment to the object whom he had injured, that a ray of hope shot across the darkened mind of Isabella, that the time might come, when she should at once be able to heal the wounds of his mind, and to possess herself of his heart. This was indeed a holy rivalry! no baneful or degrading feelings mingled in the contest; and at this moment Isabella desired nothing so much as to look upon the only representation within her reach, of the excellence that she was resolved to emulate.

She returned with all haste to the library, and eagerly turned the picture: there she beheld two children represented in their sports; but although the lineaments of the boy instantly recalled to her mind the features of her husband, her undivided attention was at this time directed to his companion, a beautiful infant of about five years old, whose glowing health and charming figure were animated with such a spirit of frolick, mirth, and arch playfulness, as made it the most interesting object that Isabella had ever looked upon.

“Was Miss Roper like this charming child?” said Isabella.

“There cannot be two things more alike,” replied Mrs. Evans. “Surely there never was any thing equal to the merriment of that sweet baby; she was the darling of every body; so comical! always playing some good-natured trick or other; she seemed born for nothing but to laugh, yet how many tears did she shed and make others shed? and indeed in her very joys it might have been seen how much she could feel, for if any body was

hurt, or any thing went wrong between her and my master, her large blue eyes would so fill with tears, and she would so clasp her little hands together!"

"How happy Mr. Willoughby must have been with such a companion!" said Isabella.

"Yes, they were indeed the happiest playfellows I ever saw," replied Mrs. Evans. "But all *that* was childish sport, and it passed away. I do not know how it was with my master when she died, for he never came near us then, and he has never been here but once since. We heard he was quite beside himself, as it were. To be sure, he must have been very sorry; and that was the reason, I suppose, that he did not attend the funeral. It was no want of love or respect either, I am sure; but he has not such a lofty mind as Lady Rachel, and it would have killed him to have seen that sad ceremony."

"This picture must not be turned again," said Isabella; "and you must shew me the places which Miss Roper best loved, and tell me what she did; and if there be anybody left that she would have been kind to."

"Ah! madam," said Mrs. Evans, "she was kind, to every body; but all her particular favourites Lady Rachel has taken care of. I believe she would think it a robbery if any body else were to do any thing for them."

"Except Mr. Willoughby, I suppose," said Isabella.

"I do not know, madam," said Evans, "but I think she is most jealous of him of all."

All this sunk deep into the mind of Isabella, and from this hour she attached herself to the memory of Miss Roper as to that of an elder sister, whom she equally honoured and loved, and whom she desired most exactly to imitate. She was pleased even to identify their interests; she loved her the more for the love which she could not doubt but that she had borne for her husband, and she loved him the better for the love which he had had for her.

How blest would she have been, thought Isabella, to have made my poor Willoughby happy and good! I will endeavour to make him both! How fond would she have been of his boy! I will love my little Godfrey better and better!

CHAP. XXIV.

“One that in her sex, her years,
Wisdom and constancy, hath amazed me.”
SHAKSPEARE.

THESE reveries solaced the fancy and soothed the heart of Isabella; but in thinking of gratifying her who now soared above all human gratification, she lost not any of her attention in ministering to the real good of one who had yet to work out his final reward with sorrow and trembling.

She and Mr. Roberts became intimately confidential. The gentlemanly old man laid before her with so much perspicuity, but at the same time with so much delicate consideration, the real state of Mr. Willoughby's affairs, that she was instructed without being appalled. She seized, as if by intuition, the very result which he was desirous to suggest. She distinguished and arranged with a clearness and facility that astonished both herself and him; and she, who to the eye might have seemed “bred only to sing, to dance, to dress,” approved herself to the ear, the Goddess of Wisdom herself.

Her lofty conception of what was just gave an illumination to her intellect that superseded the necessity of instruction, and anticipated experience.

In the course of a few conversations they had between them settled a plan of economy upon which she was persuaded that a residence at Eagle's Crag might be established, if not on the magnificent scale of former times, yet on such an one as would not exact any sacrifice either of comfort or hospitality. But the difficulty was still to “bell the cat;” for unless Mr. Willoughby would consent to sell the property in Hertfordshire, and to give up his town establishment, all that could be done by herself and Mr. Roberts at Eagle's Crag would be in vain.

To the accomplishment of these two points, therefore, Isabella turned all her thoughts; and happily for the zeal which was necessary to bring about so great a work, her inclinations and her understanding fully concurred.

If she durst not bring out into open day the *necessity* of the measure, the want was nearly supplied by her vivid painting of the *delight* which in her estimation would attend it.

Of Eagle's Crag she could unfeignedly speak as of a Paradise, from which she never could desire to wander;—she could incidentally suggest how susceptible of comfortable accommodation she found that, with a small household, which might appear at first sight suitable only to a large one.—She could enumerate the sources of amusement that its extensive library, its magnificent collection of pictures and prints, and its numerous and various musical instruments, afforded. And she could do all this with the glowing warmth of truth. She did indeed feel that they were sufficient, in her own case, to keep away the consciousness of solitude, and to cheat the progress of time. Of the health and vigour of her boy she could speak with equal sincerity and pleasure; and she could urge without the semblance of selfishness, or the appearance of repining, the addition of the only circumstance that could add to her happiness.

Isabella no longer found restraint or difficulty in writing to Mr. Willoughby. Her subjects flowed from a source that was inexhaustible, and which remained unchecked even by the very unworthy returns which they produced.

Mr. Willoughby's letters were short, disjointed, and uninforming. They were, however, so far kind, that his regret on being parted from her and his boy, made a part of each; to which was added a constant assurance that he would rejoin them the moment he was able. Nor did he ever fail, in the most vehement exhortations, that she would not refuse herself any thing whatever that could contribute to her accommodation or amusement. In confirmation of the sincerity of his wishes, and his attention in these points, she would, not unfrequently, receive some dainty that her northern situation did not supply, or some new publication which he would tell her, she must not be "so out of the world" as not to read; and even once or twice there arrived an expensive article of dress, that he said he could not forbear from buying, because it would so peculiarly become her.

All was acceptable that came from his hand; but she sighed when she saw the selection that he seemed to believe suitable to her taste. No one could be more indifferent in the choice of food than was Isabella; her present situation took from her every desire of ornament in dress; and the books that were sent were not unread, more from a desire that she might be able to give an opinion of them in return, than from any pleasure that she derived from the perusal. Reading was now become to Isabella an occupation, and even an obligation that she could not willingly interrupt for every idle volume that might fall in her way; she was in regular correspondence with Lady Rachel, and by her suggestion she was enabled to make good use of the large store of knowledge with which she was surrounded. She now found that all which she had been accustomed to consider as having constituted her "being well-informed," was merely the having had the instruments put into her hands by which she might gain information. "The Extracts," "The Beauties," "The Selections," "The Blossoms," and "The Flowers," which had made her school-room studies, fell into their deserved discredit with her. She saw how a whole was injured by being seen only in parts, and how much more valuable was the little ingot than the extended gilding; her reading had now the perpetual delight of discovery, and she found her mind expand almost as sensibly, as she might have felt her person, had she catered as richly and as plentifully for the one as she did for the other.

But did Isabella do nothing but read and economise? Yes! she passed parts of her time in music, other parts in drawing, and as she made all that she did a study, there was a never-failing interest created by observing the progress towards perfection which resulted from what was begun only as an amusement. Her boy was an ever-springing fountain of delight, and if she had made any complaint of time, it would not have been that it moved too slowly, but that it passed too quickly.

And could occupation supply the wish for society? and was improvement sufficient for happiness?— *No!* Isabella was not happy! she was neither satisfied with the present, nor unapprehensive for the future. Her heart sunk under the indifference of her husband, and her understanding was appalled by the evils to which that husband was every day exposing himself. The very caresses which she bestowed on her child were mingled with tears; but she had learnt to take her share in the general portion of human sorrows, without aggravating the sum which fell to her lot, by a morbid self-love, or by an unjust comparison between her own burthen and that of others; she felt the want of

affection in the man she loved, but she thought of the stroke of perpetual separation to which Lady Rachel had bowed, and repressed her sigh; she trembled at the too probable destiny that hung over the head of her child, but she raised her eye to the tomb of Miss Roper, and clasped him to her heart in a transport of thankfulness.

Nor was she wholly destitute of society. It is true that Eagle's Crag being without the usual limit of lake attractions in Westmoreland, had neither its solitudes invaded by a frivolous curiosity, nor its neighbourhood dotted over with those equivocal erections, to which no legitimate designation can honestly be given; there was here no etherial natives who had withdrawn from a corporeal world to live upon "the feast of reason and the flow of soul," because they had not more substantial food elsewhere; there was here no picturesque poverty nor elegant distress; no straw-roofed cottage, whose opening door disclosed the pale and beautiful female, arrayed in drapery of the most dazzling whiteness, engaged in the culinary art, while the celestial eye darted anxious solicitude in hopes to descry the partner of her joys and sorrows, on whose return depended the scanty meal of the day; there was no returning lover, whose symmetry of form and intellectual physiognomy betrayed, under the coarseness of his habiliments and the meanness of his labours, the soul that might have directed the councils, and the figure that might have adorned the courts of kings!

All around was *true!* all as it appeared to be! the mingled web of human comforts and of human sorrow, the tares and the corn! but there was perhaps less of inequality of station in the neighbourhood of Eagle's Crag than would generally be found elsewhere.

The property which formed the domain of that ancient house, was more extended than proportionably productive, and although the extent made up to its proprietors for the barrenness of many of its parts, yet it so far distanced any shouldering intruder, that there was not within the distance of several miles any family who visited the inhabitants of Eagle's Crag upon the footing of equality. All were dependants, or at least, in a degree to be *obliged* by the *great* house; and as in Isabella's retirement she was not disposed to seek society from afar, neither was she likely to be sought by those who could expect neither amusement nor festivity as the reward of the trouble they must take in seeking her.

But there was still a number of individuals of a humbler station, from whose resemblance the lapse of fourteen years had not obliterated the impression that the unwearied kindness and hospitality of Mr. Willoughby and Lady Margaret had made. There was also a generation grown up who had heard their mothers and their aunts tell of the happy hours that they had passed at *the Hall*; of the magnificence of its apartments, and of the graciousness of its inhabitants; who had been compelled to listen again and again to the tales that were gone by, and to the lamentations that they would return no more; and in consequence to sit down under the desponding conviction that *they* should never have such histories to relate to *their* posterity.

No little stir was therefore of course occasioned amongst the little hive of busy bodies when the report was spread from one to the other, "that Mr. Willoughby and his Lady were coming to live always and for ever at Eagle's Crag."

The old were sure that it did not signify to them, come who would! they could not be like *their* Mr. Willoughby, and the Lady Margaret; they should not take the trouble to go to the Hall to see they did not know whom. Mr. Willoughby was always very kind and

very civil, but he was not like his father; and as to his lady, to be sure she would be above such plain bodies as they were; it was too much to expect another Lady Margaret.

The young held a different language. It was, "nay, mother," and "indeed, aunt," and "why should not this young lady be as good as the other young lady? for Lady Margaret was not old; no, not when she died;" and for "their parts they could not but think the world was as good as it ever was: why should it not? It was older, and the older people grew the wiser they became; at least they were always told so; and why should it not be the same with the world? They should like to see the inside of that fine place, of which they had heard so much. The sight of the very towers and walls of it always made them long. And then it would be so disrespectful not to pay their duty to their Landlord and his Lady; they would think that they did not know in Westmoreland what was proper and right."

But all these debates were out of place. "Mr. Willoughby was not coming at all, and his lady only for a little, and away again. Well, there is no believing anybody. They were sure they had it from one, who had it from one, who was told it by a cousin of Mrs. Evans, and to be sure Mrs. Evans must know; and yet it is all moonshine; and now we shall none of us ever go again to Eagle's Crag," with a tone of disappointment, said the one who had the most strongly protested against availing herself of the opportunity which she had so lately thought within her power.

The note of rumour was again changed: Mrs. Willoughby was coming with her little boy; to be all alone, and to stay through the long winter! poor young lady! she will be moped to death; it will be quite charity to call upon her sometimes, and she will be glad to hear what used to be done; and then her sweet baby! I dare say he is very like his grandfather. I am sure I would walk ten miles to see him; and so would I, echoed all the veterans; and I would walk twenty said the young, only just to have a peep at all the fine furniture that you have told us of, and which Mrs. Evans has kept so closely covered up these hundred years, that nobody has seen it but herself.

And thus a visit to Eagle's Crag was carried *nemine contradicente*.

But it was easier to decide both for and against so important a measure before the moment of putting it into execution arrived, than to adhere to either purpose when the time for action was come. A visit to Eagle's Crag could not be carried into execution without causing many qualms to arise in the breasts of the inexperienced, and many scruples were suggested by the cautious; it was thought most expedient to secure a friend in the garrison before any attack was made on the fort; if Mrs. Evans would sanction their approach, they should not be afraid of their reception.

The little feast that Isabella had ordered upon her arrival had paved the way for entering upon the negotiation meditated. It had indeed been given to a lower order of dependants, but so much had been reported of the beauty and graciousness of Isabella, in the condescension of bringing her boy amongst them herself, and of the kind and encouraging words that she had spoken to each, that all dread of repulse to an offered mark of respect was done away. The vicar's wife was deputed to speak to Mrs. Evans; Mrs. Evans undertook to communicate Isabella's determination, venturing at the same time to anticipate it, by a confident assurance that Mrs. Willoughby would be glad to see all her neighbours, and that she had told her so herself. The offer was made and graciously accepted — the visitations were performed, and the old could no longer boast of an exclusive knowledge of the glories of Eagle's Crag, or lay claim to the peculiar

honour of having been distinguished by the civilities of its owners; the young were as well informed, and had been as graciously received as any mother or aunt of the whole collection.

Thus had Isabella soon a little circle of acquaintance and well-wishers; from whom, if she did not receive any very vivid pleasure, she could always communicate it: and thus were her walks and rides rescued from the solitude and dreariness that must otherwise have attended them. She could now have an end to pursue, whenever she stirred beyond the limits of her immediate home. She had some little presents to deliver at one house; she was sure that she could have a cup of milk for Godfrey at another; she had promised to visit Mrs. Russel's bees; or she was to go and eat some of Mrs. Perry's potted char. The interchange of good offices was unceasing; and Isabella returned cheered by the respect she had received or the importance that she had conferred.

Nor had she less pleasure from her visitations amongst the still poorer class of her neighbours. The only change that she had made in the economy of her personal establishment had been the parting with her own maid. It had been her wish, from her first conversation with Mr. Roberts, to divest herself of so expensive, and, in her present situation, so useless an appendage; but she was unwilling to discharge a person against whom she had no precise fault to allege, and she acted under Lady Rachel's caution, both as to the inefficiency of any sacrifice that she could make, and the inexpediency of any sudden or very obvious change in her way of life. But Mrs. Adams obviated all scruples, and took away all ground for curiosity or suspicion of mystery, by dismissing herself. At the end of the first fortnight she informed Isabella, "that she was extremely sorry—excessively so—but she found it absolutely impossible to live at Eagle's Crag. The place did not agree with her; she fancied the air was too sharp for her tender lungs. The doctor had always told her that her lungs were tender; and she was sure she had had such an oppression upon her spirits ever since she came down that shocking hill, that she should die of the vapours if she continued where she was. The sight of that monstrous mountain, which always looked as if it was tumbling on their heads, made her quite nervous. She could not conceive how Mrs. Willoughby could bear it. She was sure she could not; and though indeed she was very sorry to inconvenience Mrs. Willoughby, yet the sooner she could make it agreeable to part with her the better."

Isabella could make this agreeable immediately, for Mrs. Adams appeared to her quite a different creature in the offices of adorning her person, and in suggesting the various means of doing so, which qualities had very well recommended her to her favour in town, to Mrs. Adams nervous and vapourish, and with a little affected short cough, at Eagle's Crag, where she had scarce need of any part of her services, and none at all for her science.

Her very phraseology seemed to be altered; for Isabella thought that she could never have borne such a jargon of affectation and ignorance as Mrs. Adams's language sounded in her ears, since she had been used to the respectful plainness of Mrs. Evans's good sense. For the first time in her life, Isabella was aware of the difference between vulgarity and rusticity; the expression of nature, and the apeing refinement. The preference which she gave to the former mode made her very glad, independently of every other motive for parting with her, to replace the fine Mrs. Adams by an active, civil, natural young woman, the niece of Mrs. Evans. Fortunately her footman was Westmoreland born; had been brought up by Lady Rachel Roper; and on Mr.

Willoughby's marriage had been promoted from a subaltern station in Lady Rachel's family to the honour of attending on Isabella.

George was happy to return amongst his friends; and took much greater delight in walking by the side of Isabella's pony, as she scrambled up the hills, or made her way through the intricacies of the vallies, than he had ever done stuck up behind her carriage.

Her equipage generally consisted of a pony for herself, and another, with a saddle suited to the purpose, on which the nurse and her boy were placed, while the nursery-maid and her own new attendant, who did not appear to have either nerves or lungs, walked by its side, led it by the bridle, or occasionally took the nurse's place, or relieved her for a time of her burthen.

In this guise Isabella made daily excursions, either amongst those who considered themselves as her acquaintance, or those who looked upon her only as their benefactress; and she would have found it difficult to have determined from which she received the greatest gratification, or which was the better company. The provincial accent and peculiar idiom of the country, both of which had extraordinary charms for the imagination, if not for the ear, of Isabella, were stronger in the latter; and when they set before her a bowl of cream and a saucer of sweetmeats, inviting her to eat of the "boiled up berries, strays, and rhasps," or told her, in contradistinction to the turf generally burnt, that they "had cobbles for the chambers," she felt the full power of simplicity, and thought it ill exchanged for one advancing step towards greater refinement or higher pretensions. But still there were hours when Isabella sighed for the interchange of intellect; when she longed to hear a human voice that could reply to her in language the full force of which was felt mutually by the speaker and the hearer. Nor did she long sigh in vain.

CHAP. XXV.

“His words are bonds, his oaths are oracles, his heart as free from fraud, as earth from heaven.”

SHAKSPEARE.

ONE day, when she had extended her rambles somewhat out of their usual direction, she perceived a neat habitation which she had not noticed before. It was situated in a small meadow, that sloped from the mountain that sheltered it from the north, down to a brook, the southern boundary of the little homestead.

There was nothing in the appearance of the house beyond that of a cottage; a genuine cottage, without any pretence to “gentility.” But there was an air of sedulous care bestowed upon the stone walls, and blue tiles of the building, and an attention to ornament in the arrangement of the diminutive garden which lay before it, that told her that its inhabitants had leisure and means beyond the necessary wants and works of the day. Isabella inquired of her attendants the name of this pretty residence; and whether they knew any thing of those to whom it belonged. She was readily answered by her Westmoreland damsel, that the place was called “Fell-beck; and for all that it looked no bigger, nor no better than a cottage, yet, as she had been told, there lived within a cousin of a Queen.”

Isabella could not hope from her present informer much elucidation of the pedigree of this royal scion; yet she asked what she meant by that? Sarah could not tell; but asked in her turn, if there were not once a Queen who had lived in Westmoreland, whose name was Parr? Isabella replied, yes, Catherine Parr.

“Why then, Madam,” replied Sarah, “that’s it; for this gentleman’s name is Parr; and he has a daughter, and her name’s Catherine.”

Isabella smiled at the accuracy of Sarah’s heraldic knowledge, but felt her curiosity so much raised as to pursue her inquiries, as to the where, and the how, and the why? but all that she could learn farther was, “that Mr. Parr, the people said, had once been a great man; but that now he was not great, yet had enough to give a deal to every body who wanted it; and that Miss Catherine was very wise, and very good; that she knew about the stars, and the flowers; and could doctor the sick, and make clothes for the poor; and that she and her father lived together, with no other creature than one old woman.”

All this only increased Isabella’s desire to know more; she advanced almost unwittingly towards the house; always saying to herself that she would by no means intrude upon the privacy of any body; and yet so reluctant to return without having had at least a distant view of this extraordinary Mr. Parr, and his still more extraordinary daughter, that she continued to wind up the narrow lane which she was told led the nearest that she could approach to the house, without entering its actual premises. She was now arrived at a neat wicket, which opened directly into the little garden, and had begun to feel the absolute necessity of immediately proceeding to pass the house, without having had her curiosity gratified, when there issued from the stone porch of the dwelling a female figure, that she could not doubt must be the very Catherine Parr, whom she had

so much desired to see. To stand and gaze was impossible; yet never before had she so little felt herself under the influence of propriety.

The person who thus presented herself to her notice, must have fixed the gaze of the most incurious observer.

It was a form of almost sylph-like lightness: arrayed in a jacket and petticoat of Scottish tartan; the jacket was made high in the back, but disclosed a throat and neck of the most dazzling whiteness; while the succinct petticoat betrayed the prettiest foot and ancle imaginable; the hands and arms were uncovered, even with a glove, and rivalled the neck in fairness; a profusion of light brown hair was confined by a ribbon, put on in the fashion of the Scottish snood, and gave additional interest to the pensive paleness of a countenance which seemed scarcely to belong to any human being. But in vain did such an assemblage of attractions burst on the sight of Isabella; in spite of the earnestness of her desire to the contrary, she urged her pony forward, giving at the same time some caution to the nurse for the accommodation of the baby. Nothing she either did or said, could escape the observation of Miss Parr, who was not ten paces from her; she was indeed instantly by her side, inviting her in modest and well-bred phrase, but with the blush of timidity on her cheek, to do her the favour to accept any refreshment, either for herself or her infant, that she had to offer; and to allow that the child might rest as long as it was agreeable to her.

Isabella met the courtesy which offered so full a satisfaction to her wishes with all the ease and politeness which her mode of life gave her, and with a sweetness and urbanity all her own. She acknowledged, that a wish to have a nearer view of what had pleased her so much at a distance, had betrayed her into taking a liberty, for which she was sensible she had to apologize, and that she was much obliged for the opportunity given her of doing so in a manner so agreeable to herself.

Isabella was not long in dismounting; she followed her new acquaintance to the house, with a heart beating with expectation of what she was to see there. The porch opened into a recess; the four sides of which were nearly taken up with four doors that led from it; that on the right hand opened into a room of about twenty feet long, and sixteen wide, with windows to the eastern and southern sun.

And now Isabella, though she had expected to see something by no means correspondent to the size or outward appearance of the building, was struck with a degree of surprise, which not all her habitual good breeding enabled her wholly to conceal.

Nearly the whole of the walls of the room were fitted up with books, apparently arranged with regard to the science or subject on which they might be supposed to treat; while the spaces not so occupied, were filled with astronomical apparatus, globes, or musical instruments, and on the several tables lay implements for writing or drawing; none of which, by the half written manuscript, and unfinished sketches that lay amongst them, seemed to be there for no purpose.

But here the wonder of the apartment ended, or rather took another direction; all that there was of furniture was of the plainest and simplest form; neither affecting elegance, nor affording much of accommodation; the floor was covered with common matting; there was no sofa; and the chairs were of unstained wood, with straw bottoms. There was indeed one exception in an armed chair, well upholstered, and evidently calculated for the comfort and repose of the person for whose use it was destined.

From this chair arose, upon Isabella's entrance, the most magnificent figure that she thought she had ever seen. There was in it the ruins of all that could have formed the most finished model of masculine perfection; and there still remained so much of the fire of youth in the eye, and the vigour of the limbs, that the grey hair which shaded the commanding forehead, and the wrinkles which marked its surface, seemed more to have been planted there by misfortune than by age.

"I am persuaded," said Mr. Parr, "that it can only be Mrs. Willoughby whom I have the honour to see before me. Do me the favour to take this chair. A manacle," added he, with an affectionate smile cast on Catherine, "that my daughter has fixed on the age of her father."

Isabella was so surprised and confounded with all that she saw and heard, that she could scarcely command herself to give intelligible utterance to the apology for the intrusion of which she had been guilty.

"A liberty," she said, "however, that she could hardly repent that she had taken."

"The liberty is on our side;" replied Mr. Parr; "and I must candidly acknowledge, taken with the most perfect malice afore-thought. I would not entrap you, madam, by any false appearance of what you might obligingly esteem our benevolent attention either to your wishes, or to your accommodation, into an acquaintance that you may not desire to form; but I will openly avow, that it would give me a gratification beyond what you may perhaps at present be able to understand, if you would allow my daughter and myself sometimes to be visitors at Eagle's Crag. If this does not suit your own plans, I trust to the ingenuousness of your countenance, that you will explicitly tell me so *now*; when such explicitness cannot be offensive, as being impossible to be grounded upon any personal dislike. If in future we should prove unworthy of the favour we solicit, it will be easy, as it will be right, to shut the doors of Eagle's Crag against us."

Isabella knew not what to think of the person who thus addressed her; so unlike was his proceeding to any which she had before met with. Yet it could be the effect neither of unfeeling boldness; nor could it proceed from ignorance of the manners of the world. The delicate attention that he shewed to every circumstance by which she might be restrained, and the elegance and superiority of his address, forbad both the one and the other supposition.

She replied, with as little embarrassment and as much frankness as she could at that moment command, "that any gratification which she could afford either to himself or his daughter they were entitled to expect from her hands, and that she should consider it as an additional obligation if they would allow her to offer it at Eagle's Crag

Mr. Parr made Isabella a bow, as elegant as it was grateful; tears stood in his eyes.

"If ever, Madam," said he, "you should see, which God forbid! that fine boy likely to be left alone, and deserted in a wicked and unfeeling world, you will understand the impulse that has this day impelled me to set at defiance all vulgar forms; you will feel the gratitude that you have implanted *here!*" said he, laying his hand upon his heart.

While this conversation was passing, Catherine had drawn from under one of the tables a long and low stool, well cushioned, on which she had placed the nurse with the baby on her knee; and having herself vanished through a different door than that by which Isabella had entered the room, she had returned in an instant, accompanied by an old female servant, the very quintessence of old-fashioned neatness, loaded with bread and butter, milk and fruit, all excellent looking of their kind, and served up with a

propriety and care that almost amounted to elegance. The sparkling water of the country was also placed before Isabella; to which Mr. Parr, withdrawing for a moment, added on his return two decanters of foreign wine.

"There is nothing," said Isabella, "that is equal to Westmoreland hospitality. It is a virtue that I knew only by name before I came here."

"When *all* is but *little*," returned Mr. Parr, "there is no room for selection. The frankness of the gift must atone for the smallness of the offering."

"But," said Isabella, "I am so surrounded by riches that I am at a loss on which to fix my attention. This seems to be a very fine instrument," said she, touching the keys of a piano-forte, which appeared to have no fault but being rather too large for the room in which it was placed.

"We are all epicures in our own way," returned Mr. Parr. "My daughter fancies herself a pattern of moderation and temperance, because she has no taste for dress or furniture; but she is as dainty as the rest of us in the tone of her piano-forte or her harp."

"Mrs. Willoughby would scarcely think so," said Catherine, with a blush and a smile, "if she were to hear the notes which you, my dear father, are compelled to hear from me every night."

"I hope myself to be a judge of that," said Isabella, "as I flatter myself that you and Mr. Parr will allow me to convince you at Eagle's Crag of the sense I have of the pleasure that I have received at Fell-beck."

Both the father and daughter looked pleased at this well-bred recognition of names, with which they hardly supposed that Isabella was acquainted.

"I cannot imagine," continued Isabella, "how I should have remained so long unacquainted with this beautiful spot, as I go out with my boy every day, and have endeavoured to vary my rides as much as possible; but I apprehend now, that, however they begin, they will generally take in Fell-beck before they end."

Isabella now arose to take her leave, when she desired that she might be allowed to send her pony for Miss Parr at an early hour the next day.

"We shall have a most sincere pleasure in waiting upon you to-morrow," returned Mr. Parr; "but we are both excellent walkers. Riding is not one of Catherine's exceptions to self-denial."

"But the evenings now shut in so soon," said Isabella, "that I hope you will not refuse to pass the night at Eagle's Crag. The morning is the best time for walking at this time of year."

Mr. Parr again bowed.

"You know, madam, how to reconcile *un Impertinente malgré lui* to himself," said he. "We shall gratefully accept your extended favours."

This little event had all the importance of an adventure to Isabella.

She had been enchanted with all that she had seen, and she longed impatiently to know every thing that could be known concerning Mr. Parr and his daughter; yet she had figured them to herself as the victims of such a series of extraordinary circumstances as was likely to make whatever she did hear flat and uninteresting.

The account that she could collect of them from Mr. Roberts, or Mrs. Evans, was very meagre, and left much to be filled up by imagination or conjecture. Of the unblemished honour and high character of Mr. Parr, however, they spoke in the strongest terms; and to the great estimation in which in former times he had been held at Eagle's

Crag they could also depose. But this was at a period long past. There had intervened a certain number of years when he had been lost sight of from the neighbourhood, and had only been spoken of as having sold all the property which he had once possessed in the country. About five years previous to the present time he had re-appeared, bringing with him his daughter, then just rising into womanhood. He had purchased Fell-beck, and had built the house which he inhabited. He mingled in no society, and was scarcely known beyond the immediate spot where he resided: but there he was known by the blessings of all to whom he could communicate good; in all that related to his small household, or personal gratification, frugal and sparing, although neither niggard nor unindulgent; but in charity magnificent; and sometimes the object of astonishment to his few neighbours from the arrival of a large box of books, an expensive apparatus for some scientific purpose, or some new musical instrument.

The young lady was represented as gentle and retiring; active when she could be useful, but uncommunicative, and with little of the alacrity or cheerfulness of youth; none of its ebullition, indiscretion, or inconsequence. "She seemed not made for this world," was the observation of the few who approached her; to whom she appeared too wise and too good to mix with common mortals.

Isabella could understand how such a character might be formed by sorrow and deprivation; and was resolved that she would sooth the one and repair the other to the extent of her abilities.

Isabella expected her guests with impatience; her usual occupations were suspended in conjecturing what degree of confidence Mr. Parr intended to afford her, and what might make the subject of such a confidence; for she could not but be aware, from what had already passed, that it was his purpose to interest her in the welfare of his daughter, and perhaps to ask her patronage for her. She could not suppose, from the sense that he had evinced both of delicacy and propriety, even when he seemed to intrench upon their rights, that he would do this without endeavouring to shew that she was worthy of interest, and that she would not disgrace patronage; yet it seemed strange that he should choose so young a person as herself for the repository of secrets which seemed to be so carefully shut out from the rest of the world. There was something very extraordinary in all this! Isabella did not therefore like it the worse; however, she was forced by circumstances into thoughts and conduct beyond her age, or her experience; her imagination was not only young but ardent, and in giving way to it, she might be pardoned, if for once she lost sight of the cool prudence that would have shrunk from admitting two entire strangers to her privacy, or for having neglected a due attention to the evil eventual to herself, in the hope of doing good to others.

It is certain that neither one nor the other occurred at this time to Isabella in such a degree as to give her any regret for the frankness with which she had opened her house to those of whom she knew nothing but that there was a mystery hung over their situation. Yet she had been glad to feel something of a sanction for what she had done, from the account which she had received of the former well known respectability of Mr. Parr's character; and she was resolved that she would relate all that had occurred to Lady Rachel, the moment that she should be able to add to it the result of her own further knowledge of the manners and the sentiments of her new acquaintance.

There was an early punctuality in the way of keeping their engagement, that shewed how agreeable it was to their wishes; and a simplicity in their appearance that

proved those wishes not to be grounded in a sense of the superiority in station of the person whom they visited. Catherine had made no change in the dress which she had worn the day before; and Mr. Parr, depositing a little package on a table in the hall, where Isabella met them, said, "my dear Catherine, when you go to your room you will not forget to take this with you."

Isabella watched Mr. Parr to see whether he would make any recognition of the objects around him; or would allude to the period when he was an accustomed guest in that house upon a very different footing to that of carrying his own bundle.

Neither was the case; yet she saw him cast a furtive look on one side, and then on the other, as wishing to behold what once he knew was there to be seen; she saw the working of his countenance, and the strength of the effort with which he composed it to the due discharge of the civilities of the moment; but she saw this effort almost fail him on his entering the library. Over the chimney-piece of that room hung a full-length picture of Mr. Willoughby's father. Mr. Parr made a few hasty steps towards it, as if to feast his eyes on the features of one whom he had loved; but he stopped short; looked around the room; walked to the window; and, after a few moment's struggle for the power of speech, he said, turning to Isabella, "are there any of the wild red deer in the park? it used to be one of their haunts."

"You are well acquainted with this country I believe," said Isabella.

"*I have* been, madam," replied Mr. Parr. "Catherine, you have heard me speak of Eagle's Crag; you now see it, and may judge whether I have been exorbitant in my estimation of it."

The moment of agitation was past, and Mr. Parr appeared to take pleasure in reviewing the objects from whence he had been so long estranged.

"You have a noble store of information around you, madam," said he, looking on the books; "and of amusement also. I am much mistaken if you do not know how to profit by both."

"I should be very happy to do so under so able a direction as I must suppose yours to be, by what I observed at Fell-beck yesterday," replied Isabella; "and I suspect that Miss Parr, if she will so far condescend, is very able to become my instructress."

"Probably," returned Mr. Parr, with that genuineness of character by which he was so peculiarly marked; "you might be of mutual use to each other. Catherine has in all likelihood gone beyond you in the exactness and depth of her acquirements, for to add another and another link to knowledge has been the only occupation of her life; yet the sum of what she knows is small; in all the ornamental accomplishments of female instruction, there is no question but that you have exceeded her far. In drawing and music, of which I wished her to know something, as affording breaks into the too languid monotony of her existence, she has had no other instructor than myself for many years past, and her progress has been in proportion to the skill of her master."

"We will each put the other to the test," said Isabella, smiling; "and at present my leisure may more than rival hers; but you must not tax it too high; for I apprehend that I shall be often tempted to neglect the volume, or the instrument, for the more rare pleasure of conversation."

"Catherine will not dispute the ground with you there, madam," said Mr. Parr, smiling, "for she is silent — too silent: and how should it be otherwise, when she has only an old man to talk to?"

“Oh, my father!” said Catherine, “whom should I like to talk to so well?”

“My little boy will teach you to talk,” said Isabella; “for, silent as he is, he loves nothing so well as being talked to.”

“Perhaps that is my case,” said Catherine, with a blush. “I do so love to hear my father talk, that I forget I ought to say anything myself.”

Every word that passed recommended Isabella’s guests more and more to her approbation; and before the hour of retiring to dress for dinner arrived, she was persuaded that she had made a most valuable acquisition in having become acquainted with them.

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CHAP. XXVI.

— “Take him for all in all,
You will not look upon his like again.”

SHAKSPEARE.

CATHERINE appeared at dinner in the same simplicity of dress which she had worn in the morning. The form was the same, the material only was changed from tartan to white muslin; the hair was confined as before by a single ribbon, but its colour was different. Isabella endeavoured to give the tone of gaiety to their table-talk; nor did she endeavour in vain. Mr. Parr maintained as fully his claim to all the lighter graces of conversation, as he had done to the higher powers of intellect. Even a vein of humour, and the sparkles of wit, broke from beneath the crust that solitude and misfortune had been so long gathering over them. The effect upon the sensitive Catherine was striking: she listened, — she smiled, — she blushed with delight; and her eye almost made a verbal appeal to Isabella, whether, so listening, she could ever have a desire to speak?

Isabella, so long unused to the interchange of thought with any one who could fully understand her, was not less pleased than Catherine. The wine and the fruits had been long untasted before Isabella thought of withdrawing with her youthful companion; and if the pleasure that Mr. Parr had taken in the colloquy was to be judged of by his eagerness to renew it, he had not been less gratified than either of the two ladies. He rejoined them in the library almost immediately.

“I have been walking through the long gallery,” said he to Isabella: “will you give Catherine leave to see, while there is yet a ray of light, some of the pictures that hang there, and of which she had heard me speak?”

“I will attend her this moment,” said Isabella.

“I beg that she may go alone,” said Mr. Parr. “Catherine has no fear of ghosts.”

Isabella, conceiving that there was some particular reason for this request, as well as for sending poor Catherine to look upon pictures which it was too dark to see, made no farther opposition; but pointing out to Catherine how she would most readily find the way to the gallery, she resumed her seat.

“I am sensible, madam,” said Mr. Parr, “of the apology I owe you for the peremptory manner I assume; but I should not think myself an honest man if I accepted the hospitality of your roof, even for one night, while there could remain upon your mind a single doubt as to the propriety of having afforded it to me. I have avowed my motives for having sought your acquaintance, and accepted your kindness; but it is fitting you should know to whom you have granted the one, and offered the other.

“Already you know my name, Parr—Edward Parr. It is a name well known to Lady Rachel Roper, and one that need not shrink from her comment. But there have been in my life years of obscurity, if not of mystery, that must have withdrawn me from her sight. You have a right to hear my account of the cause of this obscurity, that it may be confronted, if you wish to put it to such a proof, by what others can say of me.

“Some two or three and twenty years ago, I was as happy as it is necessary for humanity to be! Through the progress of my education, and in my outset of life, I had fulfilled the hopes of those from whom I was descended. I had added to the usual

acquisitions to be made in England, the knowledge of foreign countries; and I had only to reproach myself that in my pursuit of the latter I had lingered too long. I returned to my native country scarcely in time to close the eyes of one of the best of fathers. Some of his last words were, 'My son, bereave not the land of your forefathers of the benefit of your example, and the expenditure of your property.' These words remained for several years the law of my mind, and it was in that period that I was the friend and inmate of this house.

"All that I had of good in me was confirmed by the virtues which were the objects of my daily observation: and in the conduct of a fortune which, although not large, was affluent, as it exceeded my wishes, in the pursuit of science, in the intercourse of friendship, and the exercise of piety and benevolence, I possessed all that a reasonable being could desire, and all that an immortal one could hope! It might have been supposed also that being safe in port, I should have put out to sea no more. I touched upon the verge of forty, and I did not feel myself disposed to fulfil the supposed duty of providing an heir for my estate. I had a brother, —an unhappy one! —but I could not entirely forego the hope that he might still become worthy of the stock from whence he sprung. He was many years younger than myself; and I could please myself with the thought that a virtuous wife might be, in the hands of Providence, one of the means by which he might return from the error of his ways. I was willing to retain the power of making such a step easy to him whenever I could lead him to take it. He knew that this was my wish: but my hopes faded day by day; at length they appeared to be extinct; — I was informed that he was dead! My grief was poignant, for I had fondly loved him, and — but excuse me — I cannot say more! It was here, — it was in the very spot where you, madam, are now sitting, that the voice of friendship and of reason first taught me to assuage my sorrows, to abate my agonizing fears! I was told that 'when we determine what is the *least* that is necessary to salvation, we make a law for Heaven;' and I was warned not to lose 'my charity and my happiness together, by a presumptuous judgment.' I was not deaf to the wisdom and goodness which thus poured wine and oil into my wounds; I was induced to quit for a time my home, and to seek by new objects some obliteration of the one which was too constantly for my peace before my eyes. I found it to my cost!

"How, madam, shall I tell *you* such a tale? — how shall I wound your purity by the knowledge of vice and of degradation? Innocent and lovely as my Catherine now is, and not older, did her mother appear, when, with a readiness of compliance which flattered my self-love, and which I mistook for an affection correspondent to my own, she became my wife. Then it was that I wrote in grateful raptures to my friends here, to thank them for a counsel which had conducted me to perfect happiness! — words vain and presumptuous! A little interval, and I was to present to them this inestimable jewel,—a little interval that was to be spent in an excursion on the Continent. It was the first request that my bride had made me; and I had reason afterwards to conclude that a childish desire to see foreign countries had been the real motive that had influenced the frank acceptance of my offered hand, — an acceptance which I had so vainly imputed to a passion as ardent as my own.

I was too much in love to be quick-sighted in discovering any blemishes in an object so lovely; all that was short of, or contrary to what I had pictured to myself, I imputed to the giddiness and spirits of youth, and I did not forget that three or four and forty, and eighteen, could not in all things think alike. I began to reflect that I was really

old enough to be the father of the creature whom I had made my wife, and that I should be absurd to desire that her taste for pleasure and novelty should not out-run mine. I was sensible that I owed her not only the attentions of a lover, but the indulgence of a parent; and moreover I was not willing that she should recognize me in the latter character by any restraint that I put on her inclinations. The period of travelling was lengthened at her request; but I grew alarmed when I found that the desire for dissipation, and the appetite for admiration, grew by what it fed on. She had become a mother!—but she had not become maternal. I felt it to be my duty to stop her short in a career which I too truly feared would lead to her destruction — painful duty, to thwart the wishes of those we love!

I announced to her my intention of returning home. It was met by remonstrance; and when the remonstrance was made in vain, was resented by sullenness and tears. I was but the more confirmed in the necessity of enforcing my determination. The very day on which we were to leave Naples was fixed, when I learnt that my poor unhappy brother still lived!—But how lived?—Again I must entreat you to spare me.

“Every consideration could not but give way to the urgent call that was upon me. I opened my agonized bosom to my wife. I implored her to consider the temporary withdrawal of my protection but as a new stimulant to the care of herself. I pointed out the dangers by which she was surrounded, the entire shipwreck that must be inevitable to both, if she neglected to guard herself against them. She was softened — she wept — she promised. I believed her sincere; I tried to confide in the strength of her resolution, and — we parted!

“Half my property was scarcely a sufficient sacrifice to avert the fate that hung over the head of my unhappy brother had I not interposed; but the sacrifice was trivial in my eyes. I had seen him penitent, I had regained his love; his last breath had expired in my arms! I could appeal to my father and to my God that I had done my duty!

“I returned with all the haste in my power to my wife and child, hoping to reconcile the one to the lessened fortunes to which she must now conform; and so to bring up the other as to make her grateful to her parent for that very diminution.

“I returned, but I returned to desolation! the cruel spoiler had availed himself of my absence, and of such an absence! to rifle of its sweets my best, my dearest treasure! My wife had deserted my house, and had abandoned her child! It was not difficult for me to trace her guilty retreat. I tore her from it! I acquainted her family with what had happened, and, disclaiming all vindictive measures, I offered to conduct her to them, and to leave her under their protection with an ample provision for all her wants. Her absence from my house had been so short, and I had taken care so securely to veil the name of her betrayer, that she might have passed her life under the parental roof without any very heavy imputation on her fame. A disagreement between persons of such different ages would have been easily believed, and I was willing to have taken a full share of the censure, as the cause of it. Can you believe it, madam? the paternal door was shut against her! From that moment I renounced the rights of a husband, and assumed those of a parent. Alas! it required all the tenderness of one to find consolation for the unhappy victim of seduction!

“Returned from a moment of fatal delirium to a just sense of her fault; the upbraidings of her heart, and the conviction of the value of the happiness that she had

thrown away, wrought in her so sharp a sorrow that had she been left alone to its workings, the period would have been as short as it was severe — but she was not so left!

“I explained my intentions towards her. I gave it to her choice, whether she would be established under my eye, and within the reach of my protection; or whether she would choose a home for herself, and trust to her future conduct to create herself friends. She did not hesitate: at the very moment when we *could* henceforth be *only friends*, it was her misfortune to begin really to love me. I withdrew her and myself from the observation and knowledge of all who had ever before known her. It was believed by every one, but her own family, that she was dead. The ambiguous expression that ‘I had lost my wife,’ maintained even my dear friends at Eagle’s Crag, in the same error.

“I placed her and her child in an habitation in the closest vicinity, but apart, from the small domicile which I had fixed on for myself, in the environs of a provincial town in the South of France; and there assuming the name, as I resolved to perform the duties of a father to her, I determined to dedicate the remainder of my life to the care and education of my *two* children. I sold my paternal property in this country; great part of this sacrifice had become necessary; and as I could not contemplate any probability when I should wish to return to what small remnant might be left, I found it more consonant to the uses that I should in future have for money, to reduce it to a form that would be always tangible.

“The destitution which took place at Eagle’s Crag a short time afterwards, took from me the only regret that had ever interfered with my sense of the propriety of the measure I had pursued. I corresponded with Mr. Willoughby to the last hour of his life. He knew the inmost recesses of my heart in every feeling that dwelt there, with the exception only of those which belonged to the secret of another; and the dejection that he could not but discover there, he could easily account for, by the sorrows which had attended my last interview with my ever-beloved brother, and by the loss (by death as he supposed) of a creature whom he well knew I had loved, ‘not wisely, but too well.’

“But when, by the lamented death of that best of friends, every link in the chain of my former existence was broken, I became known and alive only to the two helpless and unprotected objects of my care and my love, whom I had buried in the South of France, from the view of every human eye that could recognize them as compatriots.

“The years passed on, and did not pass wholly without something which at times wore the face of happiness. My Catherine grew ‘sweet to every sense,’ and her unhappy mother, in the delight which she afforded her, and the fervent and grateful affection that she bore to me, could at times lose part of her too keen regret for the higher felicity which she had once had within her power.

“Catherine was now growing into womanhood, and her mother earnestly implored me, that she might be informed of the truth of our relative situations, and of the unhappy cause that had produced our estrangement. I resisted her earnestness for some time, unwilling that she should weaken in any degree the claims that she had upon the reverence and love of her daughter, established, as they justly were, by a series of years of the most exemplary conduct, and the most maternal fondness. I dreaded also the effect that such a disclosure would have upon the spirits and feelings of Catherine; but I yielded at length, when the fading complexion, and decreasing strength of the mother, seemed but too surely to confirm her prognostics that she should not long survive.

“‘Bereave me not,’ said she, ‘of the consolation my wounded conscience will receive by a sincere confession of my crime to my daughter. Allow me the satisfaction of dying in the belief that, as a warning, I may be of use to my child; although, as an example, I cannot be so. And oh! above all let her once hear me call you my husband! Once let me see her embrace you as her father!’

“It was a petition not to be withstood. The disclosure was made! The recognition was completed! And soon afterwards the mother and the wife sunk into the grave!”

Here Mr. Parr paused; and Isabella, covering her face with her handkerchief, gave way to a flood of tears.

“I pain you, madam,” resumed Mr. Parr; “and I have no right to do so. Forgive me for having made you a sharer in my sorrow; but I could not otherwise acquit myself of the obligation that I had incurred not to expose you to a connexion, which an after knowledge of my past life might cause you to repent having formed. I have little more to add. I had now no motive for concealing myself from observation. I had every reason to put an end to my banishment from my native country; and I had the most powerful inducements to seek, by an entire change of scene, some relief to the intense feelings which the painful disclosure, and the death of her unhappy mother, had occasioned my poor Catherine.

“The cheerfulness of youth had already drooped under an unremitted rumination on what she had heard, and what she had witnessed; and I had but too much reason to fear that her health would also give way. But where could we go? I had been too long estranged from every former connexion, to hope that I could renew the ties of society with pleasure. My character was changed: I dreaded to expose the opening beauties and the tender virtues of my Catherine to the sunshine or the chill of a flattering and cold-hearted world. My whole soul revolted from introducing her to those unnatural relations who had refused protection and consolation to her unfortunate mother. My first care was to shelter her even from their notice. How deep were now my lamentations that Eagle’s Crag was desolate. Yet all my wishes, all my thoughts, hovered around its neighbourhood. I could not bear to think of a home in any other spot on the whole face of the globe. I was resolved, if possible, to purchase a few acres in a vicinity so endeared to me by the remembrance of happiness now for ever gone!

“I was willing to hope that some sprouts from its root might spring up for my Catherine. At least, that in the seclusion and obscurity in which I proposed to live, she might be secure from temptation and from falsehood. *She* had no choice; for she knew no world beyond the narrow boundary within which she had been reared. She had none to lament but those whom she could never rejoin in this world. She had none to love but me, for she knew no one else. She might truly say with Ruth, ‘Where thou goest I will go; where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people; and thy God my God.’

“Fell-beck was to be sold: I bought it, and built on its sunny bank the cottage that you, madam, have seen. Here, with one faithful servant, who had nursed my daughter’s mother in her infancy, who had not deserted her in her misfortune, and who had followed her to the grave, we took up our abode. Our accommodations were of the simplest kind. I had long been indifferent to accommodation; and Catherine thought not of it. By narrowing our necessary expenses within the smallest possible bounds, that did not exclude the comforts and the decencies of life, we obtained a superfluity of means to

answer the higher gratifications that our intellectual or our moral tastes might demand. We had chosen a cottage for our habitation, and we became cottagers.

“Here we have now resided nearly five years; and here I should have been well content to dwell unknown and unconnected until the final scene which will shut from my eyes all that is mortal, had I had only myself to think of. But what was to become of Catherine when I was no more. Any succeeding moment—in the twinkling of an eye—she might become alone, unprotected, unfriended! My heart reproached me unceasingly with my neglect to secure her from a destiny so desolate and so terrific. But I knew not where to find, I knew not where to seek, the shelter that was so necessary. Nor was my uneasiness confined to my apprehensions for the future. I saw a character insensibly forming in my poor Catherine the directly reverse of the one best fitted to perform the duties of this working-day world, and the least susceptible of relishing the happiness that it can afford. So silent!—so abstracted!—so unearthly! Formed for and capable of exercise and exertion, she would, but at my suggestion to the contrary, have passed whole days in some sedentary occupation, or in pensive thought.

“Her looks commercing with the skies;
Her wrapt soul sitting in her eyes.”

“Too well I knew of whom and on what she thought! Was I a second time to see the mind wear out the body? Were the virtues of the daughter to be as fatal to me as had been the failings of the mother? Was I to survive *both* my children?

“Inured as I was to sorrow, and little of gladness that I could anticipate for this last object of my tenderness, I will acknowledge that my soul was in tumults when I thought of the moment that would take her from me. Strange contradiction to all that we profess to hope and believe!

“I conceived that I could with rapture have suffered martyrdom to have made her happy; I shrunk from the single stroke that would have confirmed her so unchangeably through an eternity of ages!

“But I grow talkative; pardon me; it is long since my heart has dared to give vent to its feelings.

“It was at the moment when my fears for the present, and my apprehensions for the future, were at the most painful height, that I learnt that Eagle’s Crag was again about to receive an inhabitant. How eagerly did I seek after, and listen to, every varying note of rumour which told of the whom and the how! It conveyed at length the truth; and, with such particulars of commendation, as seemed to open an accomplishment to my wishes; but I too fatally knew, excuse me, madam, how the graces of youth and beauty may be mistaken for the virtues they represent. My *all* was at stake! I could not be too cautious: yet I had an almost superstitious conviction,—for which of us is not superstitious?—that the walls of Eagle’s Crag must sanctify whomsoever they inclosed; and I had soon reason to suppose that it was not merely on so shadowy a belief that I should be called to justify the temerity I meditated. Some circumstances reached me that—again I have to ask your pardon; in resolving to be unreserved, I am in danger of becoming impertinent—my resolution was taken, and had you not so happily anticipated my purpose, many days would not have elapsed before you had seen me a mendicant at your gate, with my daughter in my hand.

“You now, madam, know who, and what I am; you are the repository of events and thoughts which no other now existing creature is so fully informed of as yourself. You understand what I have the presumption to wish from you, to ask of you; and it now belongs to you to determine whether you will allow my daughter and myself a probationary claim upon your society and kindness, or whether the first day of our intercourse shall be the last.”

Isabella scarcely suffered Mr. Parr to finish the last words of this sentence; with impatience speaking in every feature of the face, she started from her chair, and stretching out her hand to Mr. Parr,

“Receive this,” said she, “as a pledge that while I have a roof to shelter me, or a protection to afford, your admirable—your beloved Catherine shall want neither one nor the other. Be witness,” added she, looking around her, “be witness for me every sacred memorial of the friendship once so precious to you, that I claim the privilege, inefficient as I may be, to supply the friends whom you have lost; of giving you back the rights that once were yours at Eagle’s Crag!”

Mr. Parr bent one knee to the ground, fervently pressing the hand of Isabella, which he retained in both his own.

“In this posture,” said he, “let me return thanks to the fountain of all good, and to the effulgent emanation of his nature which stands before me, for that lightening of apprehension, that inspiration of hope, which will mark the present moment from all that has preceded it — from all that can come after it. The piety of gratitude can only be adequate to such blessings!”

“Oh, rise! — pray rise!” said Isabella. “You overpower me; you make me ill!” added she, as she sunk upon a chair.

“It is thus that the inhabitants of earth meet the joys of Heaven!” said Mr. Parr. “Our souls are too high set.—Let us seek Catherine in the gallery: she will not be surprised that we have left her there so long, for she knew my purpose; but it is a place too congenial to her aspirations to suffer her to remain there longer than necessary.”

Isabella ordered lights and coffee into the library, and willingly accompanied Mr. Parr in search of Catherine.

They found her contemplating the picture of Lady Margaret Willoughby, on which there were still sufficient rays of reflected light to make the features and countenance visible. She turned from it on the approach of her father, as if afraid of awakening in his mind the too painful remembrance of one of whom she had heard him speak so fondly.

“You cannot look too long, or too attentively, on that portrait,” said Mr. Parr. “It represents all that a woman ought to be, and all that she would wish to be.”

“And she finished her pilgrimage at six and thirty!” said Catherine, with a tone expressive of her sense of the beatitude of so early a consummation.

“It is the privilege of humanity to die,” said Mr. Parr; “but it is the duty of virtue to live; and it is a duty, my dear Catherine,” added he, with a smile, “that I enjoin you to perform.”

“And I also,” said Isabella; “for know, my dear Catherine, that I am now allowed to embrace you as a friend, and I have a great many offices for you to perform in that capacity, that will not permit you to escape us these hundred years to come.”

“We are entered on our probation, Catherine,” said Mr. Parr. “Be it the care of both to acquit ourselves well.”

Thus conversing, they returned to light, and to the library; and now it was that Isabella was struck by the change that had taken place on Mr. Parr’s brow. The cloud of anxiety which had rested on it through every varying change of conversation was gone. It was lighted up with the beams of pleasure and of gratitude, as his eye glanced from Catherine to herself; fresh agility seemed to be communicated to every movement; while the juvenility of his spirit made Catherine frequently turn towards him with a look of doubt whether it was her father that was seated by her side.

And is this my work? thought Isabella. Oh! who can deny themselves the delight of making others happy!

The hours seemed to be winged; there was no break, no pause in the conversation. All Mr. Parr’s superiority of intellect were by skill so familiarized to the conception and knowledge of his two youthful companions, that even Catherine forgot her usual character of listener, and mingled with gaiety and readiness in the conversation. It was not possible that any three persons could be more pleased with each other. It will indeed by my own fault, thought Isabella, if I am not better and wiser for my residence at Eagle’s Crag!

Isabella had appointed Catherine’s chamber to be adjoining to her own; she accompanied her to it when they retired to bed.

“My dear Miss Parr,” said she, shewing her the communicating door, “this entrance will always be open to you; your father has honoured me by in some degree recommending you to my care. I am too young to be your directress; but while your father will not disdain to superintend us both, neither will want any other guide—we must be friends, and I have been told that it is the duty and privilege of friendship to guard its objects from every tendency to evil. I bespeak your correction of all that you may see amiss in me.”

“Oh, my dear madam!” said Catherine, throwing her arms round Isabella’s neck, “*I correct you!* you, who seem to me a being of superior order! you, that have restored a degree of happiness to my father which I never before saw him possess! oh, I can only bow before you in love and gratitude; never, never shall I believe that you can err!”

“Yet you must believe it, my dear Catherine,” said Isabella, kissing her, “because it is *truth*; and because you will not have known me twenty-four hours, before you will see that it is so; and so good night, but we must not part to-morrow.”

Isabella repeated this prohibition to Mr. Parr at the breakfast table; he submitted as to Catherine, but he asserted that he must himself return home. At this proposal Catherine looked aghast. “And leave me, father?” “and leave you, Catherine,” returned he calmly; “my dear, it is not the law of nature that a parent and a child should be one and indivisible—be not alarmed, my love; no day will pass without my seeing you — nor more, if Mrs. Willoughby will allow me to limit her kindness, on this first experiment, than two before you return to Fell-beck.” “It is a nestling,” said he, addressing Isabella, “that must be weaned by degrees.”

Catherine acquiesced, but her rising bosom, and the tear in her eye, shewed the sacrifice that she made.

Many were the reflections that Mr. Parr’s pathetic and disastrous story gave rise to in Isabella’s bosom; but none that came so home to her personal feelings, as the

comment that it furnished to that maxim of Lady Rachel's, which asserted that the virtue of a wife had no safeguard so impregnable as the love for her husband. She could now look back upon moments of mortification, of resentment, and of excited vanity, which she trembled but to think of — she could feel that she had known the instant

“When slighted Virtue, quits her slipp'ry reign.
And Pride and Prudence take her seat in vain;
The Guardians yield, by force superior ply'd,
By Interest, Prudence, and by Flattery, Pride.”

And when all the defences that she had ever been taught to raise against degradation were levelled before her; and when she was preserved alone by that conjugal love, which she had never been instructed to consider as necessary to the formation of the marriage bond. With how much consolation and thankfulness did she now hug it to her heart! and how fervently did she resolve to preserve it unfaded and unfading through all the bitter trials that neglect, or even abandonment, might expose it to!

CHAP. XXVII.

“I do note,
How grief and patience, rooted in her, both
Mingle their spurs together.”

SHAKSPEARE.

FROM this period there was no day without some intercourse between Eagle's Crag and Fell-beck; and Catherine came to consider it as a matter only to be decided by the circumstance of the hour, whether she remained at the one, or returned to the other; but were the ladies left together, or were they accompanied by Mr. Parr, every passing hour was marked by a succession of amusing or improving occupations. Catherine communicated to Isabella her greater store of scientific knowledge, and Isabella led Catherine to higher perfection in the knowledge of the use of the pencil, or the touch of the instrument. In one particular, however, the balance of obligation was wholly on Catherine's side. Isabella had increased the happiness of Catherine an hundred-fold. She had exhilarated her spirits; she had broken in upon her abstractions, she had opened her mind to all the youthful visions of joy and hope; her perspective still terminated in heaven; but she could now contemplate with satisfaction the joys and duties that lay in the way. Never did Isabella repress the rising cheerfulness of her friend by suffering a hint to escape her of the sense of early disappointment, which lay so heavily at her heart. If Mr. Parr, thought she, has been able to preserve his philanthropy, and his relish for society, through sorrows and ill usage such as he has endured, shall I become a calumniator of the goodness of God in his appointments to man, because I have not all that my fond heart pants for, or that my self-love accounts my due?

But it was not even reflections, such as these, that could enable Isabella to derive from the society of Catherine all the happiness which she had communicated to her companion.

It is true that her solitary hours were cheered and enlivened by her new friends; and it is equally true that a large share of the pleasure that she bestowed was reflected on her own breast; but all was insufficient to sooth the anxieties, to obliterate the mortifications, or to repress the fears that now every succeeding day gave birth to.

Isabella had seen the glories of August, and the beauties and labours of September pass away, in the continually disappointed expectation of the arrival of Mr. Willoughby; nor had the variations of such a suspense been softened by any regularity of their intercourse by letters. Small as the pleasure had been that she had ever received from such intercourse, it was now considerably lessened. On her own part she had continued weekly to give an account of the health and progress of her boy; and to transmit a short detail of the proceedings and events at Eagle's Crag; mingling with each, as much of her own feelings and occupations as would not leave Mr. Willoughby ignorant either of her thoughts or her actions, in as great a degree to the full, as he now seemed to concern himself with either. On the two former points her communications were always equally complete and regular; on the latter she was more or less diffuse according to the style or frequency of the epistles which she received from Mr. Willoughby. But nothing could be more variable in both their particulars, than those letters were now become.

Sometimes they would arrive for several successive posts together; at others a fortnight would elapse without any. Some would be written in strains of the fondest affection both to Isabella and his boy; and would be fraught with the strongest expressions of impatience to rejoin them. Through these ran a vein of dejection and unhappiness, and a half expressed longing to repose his sorrows in some sympathizing bosom: then he would break off short, give his expressions a gay turn, and leave it doubtful how far he had been in earnest in any thing that he had said. If Isabella, induced by such glimpses into what seemed to be passing in her husband's mind, ventured gently to urge her claim to his confidence, she invariably observed that his next letter was evidently written under a stricter guard against any such lapses; and by his perfect inadvertence to any desire on her part to be partaker in this uneasiness, she could not doubt, but that it was unacceptable to him. But the greater part of his letters were little more than acknowledgements of the receipt of hers; orders to Roberts, and complaints of the delays and vexations which he found in settling his business; and neither in the one or the other could she discover the nature of this business, nor could trace his occupations, nor the society in which he lived. The letters were sometimes dated from Brighton, sometimes from the house in town; and sometimes, but this was rarely, from Beechwood. From such a correspondence, if she could derive neither comfort nor information, she thought she found intimations of its source in the style of Lady Rachel's letters to her; and she believed it to be such as forbad her too eagerly to wish for an elucidation, probably more painful than the obscurity in which she felt herself lost.

There was more of softness, more of commiseration in Lady Rachel's manner of writing than she generally allowed herself, let the subject be what it would, or the person whom she addressed be ever so dear to her. In return to Isabella's communication of the friendship which she had formed with Mr. Parr and his daughter, Lady Rachel had fully confirmed the favourable opinion that Isabella had expressed of the character of the former; and had said, "hold fast the acquisition that you have made: a friend is born for adversity." She had, however, added nothing to the information that Isabella had received from Mr. Parr, and which Isabella had not thought herself at full liberty to detail even to Lady Rachel, except that the mother of Catherine was a Scotch woman; and that from thence probably arose the predilection that had been shewn by the daughter to the Scotch garment, and mode of head-dress, which had struck Isabella as singular, and not easily accountable for in one who seemed in general to shun every thing that could draw observation upon her.

Thus, while Isabella received little exhilaration from the letters of Lady Rachel, her conversations with Mr. Roberts were not more consolatory. A gloom rested on his brow; and there was a sadness in his accent, even when he would force himself to say, "Madam, we must hope the best." "My honoured Lady, all may be well." "My Master will be here one of these days yet."

But Isabella began now to believe that this day would never come. The shades of October were far advanced, and she was still a prey to the cruel fluctuations of hope and disappointment that the uncertainty and impenetrableness of Mr. Willoughby subjected her to. She heard seldom from her mother or sisters; and their letters were wholly filled with details of their own schemes and plans—of the balls, the parties, the beaux and the belles, which took up so much of their time, as scarcely left them leisure to inquire how Isabella continued to like a course of life so different from their own. Once or twice,

indeed, there was a hint from Lady Jane, that she “did not understand such seclusion;” “that perhaps Isabella did not consider how her interests might be undermining;” “but that she was not one to interfere between man and wife.”

Isabella could not but understand such innuendos as disadvantageous to Mr. Willoughby, but they could be to no purpose but to increase her dejection, and new edge her fears. She wondered that her mother had not forborne them!

In vain was her growing attachment to Catherine; in vain were all the efforts of Mr. Parr to lighten that load of thought, which she considered herself as bound to confine to her own breast. It weighed upon her without intermission, and deprived her of all power to exhilarate others, or be exhilarated herself. She saw plainly that nothing of all this escaped the penetration of Mr. Parr: but he betrayed neither his conjectures, nor his knowledge, otherwise than by multiplied endeavours to amuse and to sustain her. His manners were become those of a tender parent; and it would have been difficult to have known, as he exerted himself to charm the progress of the evening hours, which of the two lovely creatures to whose amusement he dedicated himself, had the greater right to call him parent.

Thus, thought Isabella, did he once before, forgetting the wrongs of the husband, assume the character of a tender father, to an erring wife! Let it be another call upon me to be, that which I ought to be; that my failure may not inflict a second wound upon the heart of this benevolent, this suffering being!

There was, indeed, one distinction in Mr. Parr’s address to Isabella, that could not escape her observation. It was marked with a respect amounting sometimes to little short of sacred reverence. Such was the impression that he had received in contemplating a heart so pure,—a mind so powerful,—and a devotion to her duties so disinterested, in a creature so young, and so deserted.

Had Morna been an Isabella! was the thought of every moment; and his sigh for the one was the deeper, and his admiration of the other the more glowing!

CHAP. XXVIII.

“The heart’s affection,—secret thing!
Is like the cleft rock’s ceaseless spring,
Which free and independent flows,
Of summer’s sun, or winter’s snows;
The fox-glove from its side may fall,
The heath-bloom fade, or the moss-flowers white;
But still its runlet, bright, though small,
Will issue sweetly to the light.”

BAILLIE.

THE second week in November was now arrived; and Isabella meditated whether she ought not to assume the courage to require to Mr. Willoughby an explicit avowal of his purposes for himself, and his wishes for her. She doubted whether the passive state in which she was remaining did not violate Lady Rachel’s admonition; “be not afraid to act; whatever else he is, your husband is not a tyrant.”

Perhaps, thought Isabella, I shall be accountable for any errors that my apparent unconsciousness of the offences committed against me may occasion. I may be thought indifferent; acquiescent! Yet may not expostulation irritate? May it not provoke an open avowal of that which is at present shaded? should I be chased from Eagle’s Crag!

Her full heart seemed bursting at the very thought.

Alas, I am a coward! I *am* afraid to act! oh how a sense of my own weakness aggravates the injuries of others!

The desire, the almost necessity that she felt for some support beyond her own strength, and the relief of disburthening her mind, made the temptation to confide her doubts and her griefs to Mr. Parr, almost irresistible. Inclination could suggest much sophistry to justify, and even to recommend such a confidence. She found herself involved in a labyrinth of what appeared to her a contrariety of duties. But she caught the clue of that simple and explicit obligation, “not to expose the weakness and failings of her husband;” and extricated herself from the danger she was in. The blush of shame was on her cheek, when, having gained this vantage ground, she looked back upon the hazard she had been in, of incurring the disgrace of establishing a confidence, that she would not have dared to own to the man whom she was bound not only to love, but to honour and obey!

Strengthening herself to endure all that she ought to endure, she resolved to be determined alone by her own sense of what was right; and to take the responsibility, and the consequence of what she should do upon herself alone.

Her usual companions were absent; and she had appointed in her own mind, the night and the hour when this momentous, this terrific letter was to be written: when she was to appear in a new light to her husband; when she was to assume rights! when she was to call for explanations!

She wondered at her own temerity: and again she felt it more tolerable to endure the rack to which she was bound, than to demand the stroke that was to put an end, perhaps, at once to her torture, and her hope!

Her mind remained for some time in a state of the most excruciating irresolution; but having by a train of deductions, both from the past and the present, arrived at almost a certainty that she was not only neglected, but supplanted, she foresaw, in such an usurpation, consequences to her offspring of so tremendous a nature, that she conceived herself bound to avert them if possible, at whatever cost to herself—she adopted then firmly the resolution to throw the die, on the cast of which seemed to depend the happiness, or the misery of her life.

There was, however, *one* more inlet through which a ray of hope might dart: she might that very night receive the wished-for intelligence of the approach of Mr. Willoughby. His silence had been unusually long; it might be broken by all that she wished to hear!

With beating heart, and trembling limbs, she awaited the moment of decision: it came—and brought with it, a letter from her husband!

She caught it eagerly: but with her finger on the seal, she had not courage to break it; so much did she dread the words, “pray tell Roberts.”—Suspense could, however, be endured no longer; she burst open the paper, averting her eyes, when they were arrested at the same moment by the expression,

“I am the happiest of men! my dearest love, I shall be with you in less than five days from the date of this. I shall embrace you! I shall behold my boy! Your steady soul, my dear Isabella, cannot enter into the tumults of mine in this expectation; but you have no notion of the impediments, the contrarieties, that have so harassed me. All has gone on smoothly with you—but *I have escaped!* and if I can but be true to myself, I shall find at Eagle’s Crag a shelter from every future danger. God preserve you my dearest love! I would my arms were around you at this moment!”

Isabella could not believe her senses! yet it was,—yes, it was the hand writing of Mr. Willoughby! but the style! the feelings! oh, how foreign from all to which she had been accustomed! He even seemed to reproach her with indifference! She who had been so often chilled, even by the simple thought that her love was of no value to him! What had wrought the change? To what escape does he allude? No matter: he has broken his chains, whatever they were! he will rejoin me! Now I shall not be afraid to let him see how dear, how inexpressibly dear he is to me! he will see that *he*, at least can shake my steady soul! Oh, how little do I deserve or covet such a praise, when his happiness, his love is in question! But we shall be again together, and all will be well!

Visions of delight unthought of before floated in the brain of Isabella; she could not but be sensible of the extraordinary growth which had taken place in all her powers within the last few months; she could not but feel that she was worthy of being the confidante and the counsellor of her husband; that in claiming his love, she offered a full equivalent in revealing her own.

“Hitherto he may have considered me as a child; the object of indulgence alone; henceforth he shall know me as a friend; as the being that can suffer both with him, and for him! and this without the necessity of uttering one word of reproach; of wounding him by acknowledging that I have been wounded myself. Oh God, I thank thee!”

Isabella summoned Mr. Roberts to partake of her joy. She gave fifty orders for more accommodation than would have been necessary for a monarch and his train; she made a thousand inquiries into the minutest particulars as to what Mr. Willoughby had been accustomed to have: she called Evans: she hurried to her nursery; she embraced and

wept over the little Godfrey; in a word, she betrayed to her whole household, by her joy in the expectation of her husband, the sorrow which she had so carefully veiled, that his absence had occasioned her.

"I could not have believed all this," said Mr. Roberts, solemnly, to Mrs. Evans; "I have thought my Lady a most wonderful personage, but I could not have thought that she loved my master so beyond all bounds."

"Ah, Mr. Roberts," returned Mrs. Evans, "you would never believe me, that my Lady had a breaking heart under that composed countenance."

Isabella arose early in the morning, and surprised her friends at Fell-beck, by her appearance at their breakfast table.

"Mr. Willoughby is coming," said she, as she entered their room. "He may be here on Wednesday, —to-morrow, —to day, —any time; you say, my dear Mr. Parr, that you have not seen him since he was a boy. Oh, I hope you will think him like his father! and I am sure he will love and reverence you as one, if you will permit him, for indeed he has a kind heart, and an affectionate one, —every body says so!" forgetting, in her eagerness to make his eulogium, that she was making his apology too.

Catherine's eyes sparkled with pleasure at the happiness of her friend; and Mr. Parr congratulated her with the tenderness of a parent.

"What a happy man is Mr. Willoughby!" said he, with a sigh. "But my dear Mrs. Willoughby, you must compose yourself. I scarcely thought that you could have been so transported."

"Oh, but you do not know; you cannot guess——." Isabella stopped; for the secret of all her past wretchedness was about to escape her. "Indeed," added she, recollecting herself, "I did not know myself of half the vexations and impediments with which Mr. Willoughby has been obliged to struggle before he could rejoin me; but now I hope we shall be able to indemnify him for them all."

Isabella having thus communicated her joy to her friends, could not bear to be another moment from Eagle's Crag; for her fervid imagination represented to her that Mr. Willoughby might even be already there.

"You will be so kind as to let us have the earliest intelligence of the arrival of Mr. Willoughby," said Mr. Parr; "we shall not come to Eagle's Crag until we know that you have met; for well says the wise man, 'a friend and a companion can never meet amiss; but above both is a wife with her husband'."

"It is a joy," said Isabella, "that I have never known before, for till now we have never been parted."

Away flew Isabella, and left Mr. Parr to ruminate on all that had come to his knowledge; and to tremble for the disappointment that he feared might be preparing for Isabella.

CHAP. XXIX.

“Naughty lady!
You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face.” SHAKSPEARE.

“I have promis’d a thousand——
Hearts?”

I think so. —
Not one! —the time may come thou may’st.”
BYRON.

Mr. Willoughby might well say that he had had an escape. Not all his experience in what is called the “*ways of the world*,” had been sufficient to preserve him from a danger into which he had run, precisely because he believed that he was stronger than his enemy. A single doubt of his own self-command would have saved him, for Mr. Willoughby was incapable of premeditated baseness; all his aspirations were on the side of virtue; never did Mr. Willoughby *purpose* to do evil. Hence believing himself safe in his *wishes*, the mischief had generally been incurred before he was aware of his inclination to it. No previous precaution had veiled any part of the undesigned aberration; and thus with virtue in his heart, and vice in his actions, he could not escape from the reproach of inconsequence, but at the cost of the more injurious stigma of hypocrisy. An alternation of sinning and repenting had left him, at this period of his life, the sport of every blast of temptation, and all that he now did rightly, was but the shadow of virtue, which like the steps of a spirit left no trace behind it; while all that he did amiss, made him but the more incapable of doing otherways.

Thus, when from his marriage, the great epoch of his life, he resolved to date an entire dereliction of all that might hitherto have been wrong; nothing was more consonant to the generous feelings of his heart, or to his moral sense of rectitude, than that he should be one of the kindest and most faithful of husbands: and, having sacrificed what he was sensible was an ill-placed passion for Lady Charlotte Stanton, to the more rational preference of the milder character of Isabella, he believed that he had given such a proof of self-command, as ought to exonerate him from all fear of any future influence that the powerful attractions of Lady Charlotte might still have over his fancy.

But Mr. Willoughby had been too much used to a life of excitement, to be able at once to rest satisfied with the calm and regular happiness of domestic bliss.

No sooner were the transports of the first days of his marriage past, than a sense of vacuity ensued; yet in returning to the more varied scenes of general life, he meant not so much that they should supersede either the duties or the pleasures of his new engagement, as that they should add to the one, and support him in the discharge of the other. While he poured out his fortune at the feet of Isabella; while he left her will the sole arbitress of her actions; while he felt kind, and was certain that he was faithful; his conscience made him no reproach for the small proportion that she engaged either of his time or his thoughts. Nor was he more alive to the hazard of a mode of conduct towards others, which the example of so many around him sanctioned; and which, not proceeding

from any evil design in himself, he could not but regard as innocent. If there *were* any deviations into a more marked attention to any particular person, than even the indulgence of a licentious world allows, it was only in *trifles*, which could carry no consequence with them.

So he flattered himself; unaware as he was, that in these imagined trifles, like the locks of Sampson, lie the strength of vice!

He had accustomed himself to regard Lady Charlotte as a coquette who was more in his power, than he was in hers; and when, by the sordidness of her marriage, the whole motives of which he very shrewdly penetrated, she sunk still lower in his moral approbation, he scarcely considered her otherways than as a very beautiful creature, with whom he might amuse himself as he thought fit, without any hazard of incurring a real attachment on his part, or blemishing the estimation that she held in the world.

Thus setting at defiance the power of Lady Charlotte, he threw himself perpetually into the circle of her charms; and he knew not that he had tasted the enchanted cup, till he started at the transformation that he perceived in himself. His safety he knew to be in flight, but it was no longer in his power to fly; she had woven around him a web of so artful a structure, although of so imperceptible a texture, that he found himself impeded in every attempt to break from her society; while he was wholly unsuspecting that it was by her machinations that he was detained there.

Lady Charlotte, on quitting town, had established herself at Brighton. Mr. Dunstan had no ancestral domain to which Lady Charlotte could repair, there to swell her pride by appropriating to herself the honours that had been won by others; or from whence she could tell of the Edwards and Henrys who had given names to all the narrow and inconvenient divisions of which those turrets were composed that had been honoured by their residence; or who had trodden the high windowed and gloomy galleries, the echoes of which returned sounds from their steps, sufficient to appal the most unsuperstitious heart.

Wealth was Mr. Dunstan's sole distinction; and to make this wealth answer all the purposes of vanity, was Lady Charlotte's sole purpose in every part of her domestic arrangement. Hence, every place which she inhabited was the temple of the most refined luxury! the shrine of voluptuousness! all that could seduce the senses, or dazzle the imagination, was around her; and her motto was, "Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds, before they are withered."

Her mansion at Brighton was the resort of all that was gay and fashionable, witty, and unprincipled. There was to be found *the best company*: and to be received there *en famille*, was a distinction. It was a distinction sought in vain by many: it was *offered* to Mr. Willoughby! but this distinguished favour seemed to proceed from Mr. Dunstan, not from Lady Charlotte.

Mr. Dunstan no longer fancied himself in love—Lady Charlotte had cured him of that folly; but he was not the less under the influence of another still greater,—the folly of supposing that he derived honour from expending his substance in a vain competition with his superiors in rank and fortune.

He had entered the world with one single ambition: the ambition of being known to the great and the fashionable. His mean to this end was also single: it consisted in wealth accumulated by his father. This was a circumstance little inquired into by those who drank his wine, eat his dinner, rode his horses, or made him keep theirs; but it was

never forgotten by himself; and the pain attendant on the remembrance made it necessary that the blot in the escutcheon should be obliterated as soon as possible. He was resolved to fall in love with the first woman of rank whose liberality of sentiment would lead her to forget the obscurity of birth, in the notoriety of fortune. Lady Charlotte's charms had for a short time, and to as great a degree as Mr. Dunstan was capable of, made that real, which, there were an hundred chances to one, must have been assumed; and Mr. Dunstan had, what he called to himself, the unlooked for good luck of really liking the titled creature whom his ambition had decided that he must marry. He had already found a more than sufficient counterbalance for this luck, in the interior qualities of the object of his choice; but all her external advantages remained the same. By her means he had become the son-in-law of an Earl; he was known as the distinguished man, who had married the beautiful Lady Charlotte Stanton; and he had the privilege of making presents to her sisters, and paying the debts of her brothers. Still more, her imprimateur gave sterling fashion to what the fastidious might, without such a stamp, have thought no better than base metal; Mr. Dunstan, who in his strife with the meanness of his original, had thought the twenty-four hours of his existence, "*un jour manque*," in which, with whatever pains or mortifications it might have been acquired, he had not been able to make the acquisition of "a valuable acquaintance," could now repose upon his arms, could talk of his laurels, and could make his victories come home to him.

He was at the acme of his glory, although somewhat in the decline of his happiness, when Lady Charlotte chose Brighton as the theatre on which to display her own talents, and her husband's riches; and such was the strength of their united powers, that there was not a single individual in Brighton, or its vicinity, but such as could submit to the annihilation of "being quite out of the world," who did not strain every nerve to be seen at Lady Charlotte's parties, and to be invited to Mr. Dunstan's dinners. What was the reward of management in some, and the prize of effrontery in others, was offered to Mr. Willoughby gratuitously, and he was sought as giving distinction to those from whom all the rest of the world seemed to think they derived it.

Nothing could be more simple than all this on the part of Lady Charlotte. He was her "old friend!"—he was her "new cousin!"—"they had always been in such habits of intimacy!"—"he was a poor widower,"—at present "quite on the *pavée*." And "he and Mr. Dunstan had known each other so long!"—neither wonder nor censure could attach to his being, as it were, domesticated with those to whom he was united by so many ties.

So Lady Charlotte designed that Mr. Willoughby should think; and so Mr. Willoughby thought. His prudence slept upon its post; while Lady Charlotte, not trusting wholly either to her charms, or to her flattery, to accomplish the overthrow which she meditated, at once of the honour and happiness of her victim, called in a third auxiliary, not less potent than either of the former.

Mr. Willoughby did not love play; but he loved excitement, and was regardless of money; and now, uneasy in his mind, and out of humour with himself from a consciousness of error, he was ready to fly to any resource which prevented him from looking within.

Amongst the varied attractions by which Lady Charlotte and Mr. Dunstan drew around them all that either made, or wished to make, "the world of fashion," the powerful stimulus of high play was not wanting. Lady Charlotte had seen that Mr. Willoughby was not insensible to the feverish pleasure that this most irrational of all pastimes can

communicate; she had seen it with pleasure during the memorable week that they had passed together some weeks before; and she had made use of this discovery to accelerate the ruin which she so much wished to accomplish; and towards which she was not unaware that the first steps were made already.

Mr. Willoughby's natural generosity had long degenerated into profuseness; what at first was a simple desire of gratification was become by indulgence a morbid disability to withstand the slightest inclination, at whatever expense it was to be satisfied. The consequence was not difficult to be foreseen, and would probably be immediate, if the operation of such weakness was aided by the quick process of unsuccessful gaming. So would Isabella be thrown from the eminence on which it was gall and wormwood to Lady Charlotte to see her placed; and she knew that poverty would wring the soul of Mr. Willoughby to torture, not only from the pain of deprivation, but from the sense of degradation. The pleasure of revenge might then be hers. To this pleasure she could subordinate other purposes that she had in view; or might so blend them together as at once to be able to gratify what she called love, and to accomplish the downfall of Isabella, and the misery of Mr. Willoughby.

Nor did she fear that the dangerous engine of gambling which she had brought into play for such nefarious purposes should, by any re-action, bring on herself the ruin she had designed for others. Although not very prompt in allowing Mr. Dunstan the merit of any tolerable qualities that he might possess, she felt a full reliance on his prudence.

Notwithstanding he might appear to bye-standers to pay high for the station that he maintained in the world, she was not afraid that he would be betrayed into a bad bargain; and she considered the whist and the loo tables, not only as allurements which drew around her those who otherways might have stood aloof, but as a resource from whence the more substantial gratifications of the dinner table, were in part to be furnished. When Mr. Dunstan recounted to her these paltry and disgraceful gains, she did but despise him the more; but such a feeling took nothing from her happiness, for love or honour had been no part of her bond; and the source from whence they sprung promised permanency to those enjoyments for which alone she had contracted it. Thus, without a fear of the consequences to herself, did she "drug the cup," which she made Mr. Willoughby drink, with every poison that could corrupt his moral feeling, and every ingredient that could stimulate his vicious inclinations.

At the period when Isabella removed into Westmorland, Mr. Willoughby's difficulties pressed closely upon him, and he could no longer shut his eyes to the necessity there was that some change in his manner of living must be made. He was not sorry that, by giving way to Isabella's preference of Eagle's Crag to Beechwood, he should be able to veil from her, at least for a time, the situation that his affairs were in; and he flattered himself that before he rejoined her, he should be able to make such arrangements as would spare her the pain and mortification under which he was himself suffering.

He parted from her with real regret; and had he taken the wiser method of dealing openly with her, they might, perhaps, from that moment have dated their mutual happiness. But he regarded Isabella as a child; a most engaging and amiable child it is true, but still a child; and he could not be ignorant that she had become his wife merely on the ground of fulfilling the purpose for which she had been brought up, by forming a good establishment; and he was not so unreasonable as to suppose himself the object of

an affection that could withstand the disappointment, that the disclosures which he had to make must bring to all the visions of magnificence and distinction with which he concluded that all the preference that she could feel for him must be identified. He hated pain himself: he could not willingly inflict it upon others without partaking of what he communicated in a very uneasy degree. He could least of all bear to inflict it upon a young and innocent creature who naturally looked up to him as the source of all the good that she could expect in life. On the integrity of Isabella he had an unshaken reliance; and he entertained a full sense of obligation to her for the mildness and cheerfulness with which she never failed to meet his every wish; but he had no confidence in the powers of her understanding, or the strength of her mind, from which he could hope assistance in removing his difficulties, or support to bear them.

She will but weep, thought he, and say that she is ready to do any thing that I wish; and I do not know what it is that I do wish.

Thus reasoning, he thought it therefore both wise and kind to keep her in ignorance as long as possible of all that could make her uneasy; or put to hazard that degree of esteem and approbation which he believed that she entertained for him.

It was his purpose, at the time when they parted, immediately to dispose of Beechwood, and to rejoin Isabella as soon as possible; but the negotiations necessary to accomplish the first point, drew out into length. It was necessary that he should be near the spot, that he might be more easily consulted; to wait in solitude at the house which was so soon to become the property of another, was impossible for a man of Mr. Willoughby's habits, and ungoverned feelings. He tried the experiment, and fretted himself into a nervous fever in a week. Brighton then became necessary, even as he believed, for his health; and he told himself that he yielded rather to this necessity, than to the allurements that were held out to him there.

He heard from every mouth of the delightful establishment which Lady Charlotte had formed, and it could not be wondered at if he went rather to a place where he was sure to find himself surrounded by friends, and *good* company, than that he should content himself with the benefit that the sea might equally have afforded him in a situation of less public resort. How innocently might all this have been done! How guiltily was it done!

Yet Mr. Willoughby owed not his subjection, wholly or unitedly, to the bewitching charms of Lady Charlotte, or the demoralizing society and habits in which he now lived.

Mr. Willoughby was no novice in the allurements and the arts of beauty, or in the power of example. He had sometimes fallen before, and sometimes triumphed over each. Lady Charlotte was aware of this, and she found it necessary to call to her assistance a more powerful agent than either, before she could bring about that fearful change in the feelings of the unfortunate Willoughby that he was about to experience.

When he had repaired to Brighton, he held Lady Charlotte but as he had always held her; a practised coquette; whose beauty pleased his senses, and whose freedom of manners allowed of equal freedom from him. He even conceived that his own respect for decorum was paramount to hers, and that she owed obligations to him that, however unwilling she might be to confess, she could not but feel. He was prepared for nothing so little as to find the free-principled, the unguarded, the seemingly cold-hearted Lady Charlotte, an observer of her duties, a respecer of decorum, and the apparent victim of

some secret sorrow. Yet no sooner was he domesticated in her house at Brighton, than her character seemed to have undergone this change.

To the general observation she might remain only what she had ever been, a most fascinating, but a most unprincipled woman; but with Mr. Willoughby she had a tone of moral, of interest, and of friendship, which bespoke a heart of good and deep feeling. Whenever they were accidentally apart from others, she wore a sadness in her brow that told of a mind ill at ease; and she seemed to regard all the splendour with which she was surrounded, not only with indifference but with disdain, as the object at once of her contempt and resentment. The contemptuous sarcasms and bitter taunts which in her gayer moments she had seemed to take pleasure in, when speaking of her husband, had now given way to the expression of a more chastised, but more painful sense of her wretchedness in being his wife. Some fatal secret appeared as if about to break from her lips; some deprecation of the contempt that she acknowledged must attach to such a choice as she had made in a partner for life, in the motives that had led, or the impulse that had compelled her to it.

From her blushes, her sighs, her half words, her stifled emotions, the vanity of Mr. Willoughby was not slow to understand her meaning, nor to assist her in revealing it so unequivocally as to establish a confidence and a connexion between them, that laid her pride at his feet; but which gave her an unlimited credit on his gratitude.

She could now *unblushingly* talk of her “unfortunate passion.” Could call herself “a self-devoted and unrepenting victim of his former attention towards her.” Could describe the “agony—the madness—which the first conviction of his intended marriage with another had thrown her into”—the “schemes of revenge” that it inspired — “revenge that had terminated so fatally for herself.” She could say “that a moment of delirium, a moment of insanity, had made her the wife of a man whom she despised, whom she detested;” and “that by so doing she had lowered herself in her own eyes, and she knew that she must be lowered almost below contempt in the eyes of him whose approbation, if she could obtain it, would still make one white spot in the darkness which she had drawn around her.”

Where was the heart of man that could receive a sacrifice thus offered? or who could neglect to purify it of all its bitterness to the fair sacrificer?

Mr. Willoughby exhausted himself in regret for his own blindness; at once of the real character of the woman whom he had so ardently admired, and of his own happiness, in the flattering partiality with which she had regarded him, and he poured forth the most vehement professions of admiration, respect, and love, for the creature of whom he had so doltishly deprived himself.

The sacred name of friend was prostituted by each to designate the immoral tie that was between them; and while she implored him, with the *simplicity* of unassisting helplessness, to protect her from *herself*; and while he promised to be at once the guardian of her honour and his own, he drank deeply of the cup of lawless gratification, and began to familiarize himself with all its worst consequences.

At this moment of danger and self-abandonment, the whole charm dissolved as by the stroke of a lance from some omnipotent knight. Lady Charlotte suddenly broke up her establishment at Brighton, and gave the victim of her arts a moment in which to reflect.

It was then that Mr. Willoughby saw the precipice on which he had stood. Astonished, angry, mortified, yet pleased, and grateful for his escape; all his better

feelings returned with added force; and carried him impetuously to the feet of Isabella, there to expatiate, by unremitted kindness and undeviating rectitude—so he purposed! the wrongs that he had offered to the claims that she had upon him.

But his connexion with Lady Charlotte, although it made the greater part of his guilt, was but a small part of his embarrassments. He had played deeply, and lost heavily. The remittances which he had so continually pressed Roberts to make, had been expended in discharging his debts of honour; those of conscience remained uncanceled; and when Lady Charlotte's sudden disappearance allowed him leisure to contemplate the situation in which he stood, he saw, that if he were to conceal the truth from Isabella, even for a few months, the sale of Beechwood must be immediately concluded.

He had returned to town; he put every means into operation; and he had been fortunate enough to accomplish his purpose.

It was in the moment of transport which his success had occasioned, that he had written to Isabella. A month had elapsed since Lady Charlotte, in disappointing his hopes, had fulfilled his wishes; he had had time to return to his senses, and to feel where his true happiness lay. In the angry mood in which he then was with Lady Charlotte, a comparison between the coquette who had seduced him, and the wife whom he had neglected, forced itself on his understanding, and Isabella stood before him in a powerfulness of attraction which she had never before presented to his imagination. He felt at that moment that to live with her, and for his boy, would be equally his happiness and his duty; and he believed that from henceforth he should wish for no other life; but he knew not what a scorpion he had admitted into his bosom; he knew not that he had so often been told by Lady Charlotte, and had so often repeated after her, "that all her errors and all her sorrows proceeded from a warmth and ardency of feeling as charming as it was unfortunate and uncommon;" "that she might be miserable, but could never be guilty;" "that he was the cause, the innocent cause indeed, but still the cause, of all her wretchedness, and that he owed her every compensation in his power consistent with her duties as a wife, and those that he had imposed upon himself by his character of a husband." He knew not that all this tissue of nonsense had been repeated, till he had no more doubt of its truth than he had of his own existence; nor of the consequence which Lady Charlotte had so artfully drawn from it, "that she had an established right to his respect and esteem, and a claim upon his affections, which ought not, and could not be shaken by the formal maxims of the world, any more than they could interfere with the observances that he owed to Isabella. He knew not that he had adopted the pernicious maxim "that the only real union was the union of souls; and that, while it was kept pure and unalloyed by the grosser indulgence of the senses, it was as innocent as it was lovely." He knew not that he had received the injurious impressions, "that Isabella's affections were of a lower order than Lady Charlotte's; and that while one must remain miserable by being withheld from dedicating herself soul and body to the man whom she loved, the other would be made happy by the even tenor of uninterrupted indulgence and complacent good-will." Such was the effect that Lady Charlotte's machinations had really had upon the mind of Mr. Willoughby; but of their force he had ceased to be aware at the moment when her sudden withdrawal of herself from all intercourse with him, had deeply wounded his vanity; and had left him doubtful whether to impute her disappearance to refined coquetry, or heroic self-command. At this moment he could not entirely expel a lurking suspicion that he had been duped; and the virtues and subduing

qualities to which she had laid so strong a claim, and for which, so short a period before, he had been inclined to give her full credit, now seemed something apocryphal; and this shadow of the truth clouded all the charms and all the pretensions of Lady Charlotte. His heart turned to the pure and unsophisticated character of Isabella; and every moment appeared an age that retarded the new era of his existence, which he purposed should from this hour begin; nor did his bridal morning arise so bright to his hopes, nor so welcome to his heart, as did the one on which he quitted London to begin his journey to Eagle's Crag.

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CHAP. XXX.

“She of gentler nature, softer, dearer;
Strength in her gentleness, hope in her sorrows;
Whose darkest hour some ray of lightness borrows
From better days to come; whose meek devotion
Calms every wayward passion’s wild commotion,
’Till Evil’s self seems its strong hold betraying.”

BAILLIE.

ISABELLA had returned from Fell-beck, in the trembling expectation that Mr. Willoughby might be already arrived; yet she was too reasonable to feel disappointed when she found her home as solitary as when she left it.

I am a fool, thought she, to let my wishes rather than my understanding calculate for me. Three days only of the limited five are yet gone; but he says, *within* five days. Well then, after to-day I *may* begin to look for him every hour; but to-day I will try not to expect him. I will try to compose my spirits. Mr. Parr said that he did not think that I could have been so transported. I did not myself know that I could. But this is joy; and I surely never felt joy before. How tumultuous, and yet how pleasant is the sensation!—but I *will* still it, I *will* be composed.

Isabella, in conformity with this wise resolution, betook herself to some of her wonted occupations; but in vain did she attempt to read; in vain did she sit down to her harp; in vain did she attempt to complete the unfinished sketch that lay on her drawing-table. The “domestic deity” was not at home. She could do nothing but caress her boy, or wander from room to room to ascertain what she already knew — that every thing was in that exactness of order which was due to the reception of the master of the mansion.

At length this day of vainly premeditated composure closed! and it was succeeded by that wherein all the flutter of joy and expectation would be allowable; but scarcely were the first hours past before the lightness of spirit in which Isabella had risen began to give place to an invading fear that her hopes might be disappointed. There was a magnitude in the bliss that had been promised her, which seemed too vast for reality. She had flattered herself too easily! Some new impediment would arise! It was not possible that she could be so happy!

Mr. Willoughby’s letter was read again and again: the more it exceeded all that she had ever hoped to attain, the more it seemed impossible that it should be verified. Yet she started at every sound; or fancied sounds when they were not to be heard. The day, however, wore away, and none were really heard that announced the arrival of Mr. Willoughby.

“Yet he may still come: he would not regard travelling late. He could not mean to deceive me. No! he may neglect, but he will never wantonly trifle with my feelings, merely to excite them.”

“But he says I have a steady soul. That I cannot guess at the tumults of his. Perhaps he thinks I cannot feel.”

And Isabella began to think that this opinion might be just, when, after a night of broken sleep and feverish irritation, she found herself in a state of depression which almost amounted to apathy.

She made as many efforts to excite her feelings, as two days before she had made to still them.

What can be the meaning of my insensibility? thought she. Is it the effect of despair. But how unjust I am to despair? Ten thousand accidents may have occasioned the delay of a few hours. If Mr. Willoughby were to know all that has passed in my heart for the last few days, well might he think me a child! well might he despise me!

It was a seasonable diversion of her thought to receive a note from Catherine. It contained only a few words of kind inquiry, as an accompaniment of a book which she had promised to lend her, but had no allusion to the expected arrival of Mr. Willoughby. Isabella, in return, confined her information on this subject to the simple statement that he was not yet come. But she could not make it without such a revulsion of feeling as produced a flood of tears; and these tears relieved the oppression of her heart. They drove away despair, and re-established the empire of hope.

Calm and confiding, Isabella passed that day and the next: the third she was equally calm, but she had lost all confidence.

Yet I am but where I was a week ago, thought she. I must return to my accustomed employments. I will go to-morrow to Fell-beck. I will again throw myself upon the support of Mr. Parr, and the sympathy of Catherine. How grateful ought I to be for such friends!

Isabella had just drank her coffee, and was sitting in all the sadness of these determinations, when a movement in the house called her attention, and the following moment she was startled by seeing Mr. Roberts enter with a letter in his hand.

"What is the matter, Roberts?" said Isabella; "where is George?"

"My master is just at hand madam," returned Roberts. "I thought that you might have orders to give; for he does not come alone."

"What worse have you to tell me?" said Isabella; "is Mr. Willoughby well?"

"Quite so, I believe, madam," said Mr. Roberts, giving the letter to Isabella. She eagerly broke the seal, and read these words:

"My dearest love! I trust you will do me the justice to believe that it is not my fault that I have not more faithfully kept my engagement; nor that now, when I shall be with you in an hour, that I shall bring a tribe of people with me, whom you may not, just at present, be glad to see. For my sins (I suppose) I fell in with a party of our friends, who have been lake-seeing; and they would first drag me out of my way, and then would accompany me to Eagle's Crag. Dunstan, Lady Charlotte, and Sir Charles Seymour, are the only part of these impertinents who will break in upon you at this unseasonable hour. After having been living with them for so many weeks at Brighton, I could not but consent to their vehemently-expressed desire that I would do them the honours of Eagle's Crag for a few days. I hope they will not stay longer, and then all the evil will be the *mal apropos* moment of their arrival, when I so much wished to have had you and my boy to myself. For the rest, you will not, I dare say, be sorry, after your long retirement, to see such intimate acquaintances and kind friends. Your favourite, that madcap Burghley, will be with us to-morrow; I would not suffer him to come to-night; but he will be a pleasant reinforcement to our party, when the bustle of the first meeting is over.

Ever yours,

F.W.”

Quick as the lightning’s flash, the perusal of this letter shewed Isabella the strange and perilous situation in which she was placed. All that was dear to her was at stake: her husband’s affections! her own dignity! How should she preserve the one, without hazarding the other? To receive Lady Charlotte as a friend would sully her sincerity: not to receive her as a welcome guest would offend Mr. Willoughby, and betray a jealousy, which, however well founded, as she could not doubt it to be, was a reproach to her husband, and a lessening of herself. How should she, also, be able to still the angry feelings which she felt arise in her bosom against this husband? who appeared to cajole her with more than accustomed tenderness, only to make her a party to his more creditable intercourse with the woman who wronged her.

All these thoughts passed in less than an instant of time through Isabella’s mind: but, strong in “the noble propriety of a pure heart, and a disciplined understanding,” she took her part without hesitation.

“Let every thing be done that the time will admit, to make your master’s reception such as it used to be, when he brought guests to Eagle’s Crag,” said Isabella. “Mr. Willoughby has some friends with him; you can give orders for the proper lights, and every other particular, that will make the house look as he has formerly seen it, when it was regularly inhabited; but I would not have any thing appear like preparation; still less like magnificence; the household does not admit of that; but let all be light and cheerful; and pray send Evans to me. Mr. Willoughby says he will be here in an hour.” Oh, thought Isabella, how different from the meeting that I had anticipated!

But this was no time to give way to tenderness, or repining; all the powers of her understanding, and all the exaltation of a highly moral sense, were scarcely sufficient to uphold her in the height of conduct, on which she knew she could alone look back with satisfaction, or even self-acquital.

She communicated her wishes to Evans in the same tone which she had held to Roberts; and found herself so well understood, that she could not doubt but that the execution would be exact.

Having thus provided that every thing external should do both herself and her husband honour, she turned all her attention to the regulation of her thoughts and her feelings. Whatever had been the first impulse of wounded pride and affection, a little reflection had made her renounce the notion that there could be premeditated unkindness, or vicious duplicity, even in a conduct which appeared so regardless of what was due to her, and so inconsistent with what she had been taught to expect. It was sufficiently painful to resolve her previous disappointment, and her present embarrassment, into that careless indifference which so frequently marked the actions of Mr. Willoughby, into his want of love for her, rather than his passion for another. She felt that we are as frequently duped by mistrust as by confidence; and she determined that, if she were to be deceived, it should be with as little loss of her own ingenuity as possible. If she were mistaken in trusting, at this suspicious moment, to the kind affections of her husband, she was resolved not to be accessory to her own degradation, by betraying any suspicion that she was degraded. To control the workings of pride and resentment was not without its difficulty; but her hardest task was to restrain the expression of her tenderness. To meet the man who had for so many weeks made her nightly dream, and daily wish, with the cool salutation due to an occasional separation of a few hours, was what seemed to her

almost an impossibility; but to betray, before such observers as Lady Charlotte and Sir Charles Seymour, the signs of a passion which they must know but too well was not reciprocal, was a rock on which, if she should strike, she could almost have wished might sink her.

What she should do, what she should say, how she should look, she settled over and over; feeling at the same time that when the moment arrived, she should neither do, nor say, nor look, any one thing that she had determined best to do, say, or look.

The violent beating of her heart, with which she was seized on hearing the ringing of the bell of the outer court, persuaded her still more of the contemptible figure that she was going to make; and she was ready to have taken refuge in flight had not the conviction that if she abandoned herself at that moment, she was undone for ever, wound up her spirits to the pitch of undergoing the dreadful exigency, let it produce what it would.

An exclamation of surprise and admiration, uttered by Lady Charlotte from the hall, gave her some degree of courage; and the impatient inquiry of Mr. Willoughby where he should find her, restored all her presence of mind.

"I am here, my dear Mr. Willoughby! I am here," said she, advancing to meet them, "and most heartily rejoiced to see you."

"That is, I think, more than any of us deserve," said he, kindly saluting her. "I have used you most abominably; but I know you will forgive me."

"Yes, my dear Isabella," said Lady Charlotte, "you must forgive us all; for we have come upon you in a strange way, and at such an undue hour too! but it is all the fault of that husband of yours. I thought it a shame to take you so unawares; and such a multitude as we are! I would not have come till to-morrow."

"Then I am more obliged to Mr. Willoughby than to you," said Isabella good-humouredly; "and since you have traversed our rugged roads safely, I cannot but rejoice that there were not more hours of expectation added to those I have been in for so many days!"

"At least," said Mr. Willoughby, casting no very kind eye on Lady Charlotte; "the disappointment of that expectation was *not my* fault."

"No, indeed was it not!" said Lady Charlotte. "My dear Mrs. Willoughby, I do not know what this lord and master of yours meant by all the pains that he took to shut his doors against us; but if we had believed him, we might have fancied that these old walls would have fallen on our heads, or that we should have caught our death from the bad air that we must have breathed within them. But Sir Charles had reconnoitred the outside of the fortress some weeks ago, and he assured us of its solidity; and I was resolved to penetrate into the recesses of its extremest interior, that, if I had found you at the bottom of some damp dungeon, I might have run away with you into light and air, and left your graceless husband in your place."

It could not surprise Isabella that the effrontery which had carried Lady Charlotte through her almost forcible entry into Eagle's Crag, should shew itself in this continued assumption of protecting familiarity which had so long been offensive to her; but, as she was resolved for the future to put an entire end to it, she made no return whatever to this sally of Lady Charlotte's; only civilly inquiring whether she would not wish for some refreshment, in preference to waiting for supper, which she said she had ordered, as supposing that as travellers they might be hungry.

"You do not then always go supperless to bed?" said Sir Charles, in allusion to her former refusal of partaking of the supper which he had provided for her when they had met on the road; a refusal which he had by no means forgotten or forgiven.

"At least," returned Isabella, "I do not desire my friends to do so; and the hospitality of Westmoreland knows nothing of striking off one meal out of four."

"Isabella," said Mr. Willoughby, starting from a reverie into which he had fallen, "where can I find my boy?"

"I will take you to him," said Isabella.

"And pray let somebody take me to my room," said Lady Charlotte; "I must get rid of this odious bonnet; it had made my head ache all day."

Isabella offered to be Lady Charlotte's conductor, and said that she would return and accompany Mr. Willoughby.

"Only tell me where I can find the child," said he, "and you may come to me there."

"You will find him," said Isabella, "in the room which you inhabited for so many of the first years of your life."

"And do you occupy the adjoining apartment?" asked Mr. Willoughby.

Isabella replied in the affirmative; and Mr. Willoughby left the room without making any reply. Isabella also stood silent for an instant, before she could sufficiently recollect herself to renew her offer of accompanying Lady Charlotte. She had seen but too plainly, in the very short time that had passed, that Mr. Willoughby was no longer the happy man that he had declared himself in his letters to be; and there was something so incomprehensible in the circumstances in which she seemed to stand with him, as filled her with sadness and dread. Lady Charlotte did not seem to feel either. Linking her arm into Isabella's, "My dear coz," said she, "I really had no notion that you were the lady of so magnificent a castle. Everything I see absolutely fills me with astonishment and delight. But have you not found it insupportably *triste* to be here so long alone? What could induce Mr. Willoughby to allow you to be so?"

"A compliance with my wishes," said Isabella, with a steady voice; and withdrawing at the same time her arm from Lady Charlotte's, she opened a door.

"I hope," said she, "you will find everything you wish for. Your maid, I see, is here. You will excuse me if I now go to Mr. Willoughby."

And the effort here was at an end. Isabella turned quickly into the next chamber, and, throwing herself into a chair, burst into a flood of tears.

Why she wept she could hardly have been able to have told; but she thought if it had not been for this relief her heart must have burst. The indulgence could not be long; but, as she passed from the room she was in, she caught a glimpse of herself in a looking-glass, and found such marks of her recent emotion as made it impossible that she should immediately rejoin Mr. Willoughby; and when she sought him in the nursery he was gone. Isabella could again have cried; and, lest the sight of her baby should make it impossible to restrain her tears, she did not trust herself with a single glance, but ran down stairs as if she had fled from some pursuing danger. Taking breath a moment before she entered the library, she felt a fresh mortification when she found therein only Sir Charles and Mr. Dunstan.

She had till this moment scarcely been aware of the presence of the latter; but she now found a relief in appearing to listen to his laboured panegyric upon all that was

around him, from the conversation of Sir Charles, with whom, since their last interview, she had resolved to have as little communication as possible. Mr. Dunstan had not yet done protesting that not his friend the Duke of ——'s seat in this county, not the princely habitation of the Earl of ——, where he had passed so many happy days in the other, were to be compared to Eagle's Crag, when Mr. Willoughby and Lady Charlotte returned at the same moment, which, although they entered at several doors, gave such an air of correspondence between them as made Isabella blush; and she blushed the deeper on perceiving the eye of Sir Charles fixed on her, with a look, as she thought, expressive at once of anger at the offending parties, and compassion for her. But a moment afterwards she hated herself, and felt indignant with Sir Charles, for a suspicion which she abandoned as wholly unfounded.

Mr. Willoughby approaching her, drew her gently aside; and said with a voice of great emotion, "our dear boy is an angel! I long to fold you in my arms, and thank you for your care of him. I *could not* wait for you; I never enter this place but with emotions that quite unman me. I should either have been a more worthy successor of its last revered inmates, or less sensible of the follies which have made me unfit to succeed them; you, dearest Isabella, must be my redeeming angel! how I wish that we could have met without so many eyes upon us. Roberts has been talking to me of you; *you* at least may tread these floors proudly; I wish you may be able to teach me to tread them happily."

Isabella tenderly pressed the hand which still held hers, "doubt it not!" was all she said, or could say; another word, and she must have betrayed the agitation of her heart and spirits. A summons to supper compelled her to turn from Mr. Willoughby, and to accompany her guests to an adjoining apartment.

Isabella saw with a glance of her eye, how well her intentions had been understood both by Roberts and Evans. All was light, order, and comfort; but nothing that indicated that the sudden arrival of so many unexpected guests had occasioned either hurry, or had brought forth any appearance beyond that of the ordinary mode of living; she could scarcely, however, repress a smile when she saw an unliveried attendant at the side board, who made no part of her household, but whom she immediately recognized as a nephew of Mr. Roberts, who in the life-time of Mr. Willoughby's father had filled the station, which it seemed, from the propriety and habitual ease with which he now performed the office, he could never have quitted.

But Isabella had little leisure for such observations as these; —there was a something in the scene before her that interested every feeling of her heart. Instead of the careless hilarity of new assembled friends, the party around her seemed each to be engaged in some cogitation of their own, and as although they forgot that any other but themselves were present.

Lady Charlotte's eye was roving from object to object, with a scrutinizing expression, as if to discover something that it was designed should not appear. Sir Charles, with a contracted brow, devoured in silence the viands that he scarcely seemed to know that he was eating. Mr. Willoughby was evidently struggling with an emotion that made him incapable of attending to any thing else. Mr. Dunstan alone seemed to be alive to what was before him; but, having declared "that he never was so hungry in his life," it was only what the table or the sideboard could furnish that appeared to have any attraction for him.

Isabella construed all this in a sense the most gratifying to her wishes. In the evident chagrin of Lady Charlotte she read disappointment; in the abstraction of Sir Charles she thought she detected a fear of the frustration of some nefarious design; and in the acute feeling betrayed by Mr. Willoughby, a feeling which she had scarcely dared to hope made any part of his character, she beheld the means by which he might be recalled to the paths of virtue and of happiness. At this moment she could not but be sensible of the superiority that she derived from the integrity of her heart, and the rectitude of her purposes. She could look backward without self reproach; and forward with a prayer that all her designs might prosper! She, who but a few hours before had feared that she might be humbled to the dust by the unrighteous triumph of her oppressors, was now the only one who could carry herself erect in their presence, and hers the only eye that could look steadily in the face of those who surrounded her!

Eager to break up the gloom and strangeness of the scene, she seized the instant of Mr. Dunstan's animated panegyric on the superexcellence of the wine which he was so plentifully drinking, to throw herself at once into conversation with a vivacity which compelled every one to follow her lead. It could not have been believed that she had been the Recluse of Eagle's Crag for four months, or that her spirits had been depressed by mortification, or her heart wounded by neglect. So powerful was the impulse, that her desire to rise above her guests in the estimation of her husband, gave to the natural resources of her intellect: an impulse which gained strength every moment by the effect which she saw was produced both on Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby; the one looked on her with a delighted surprise, and the other said, with a tone of raillery which ill disguised the envy she felt,

"Pray, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, what Westmoreland Helicon have you drank, that has converted your London taciturnity into such flowing eloquence?"

"The Helicon of health and happiness," said Isabella, with a timid glance cast towards Mr. Willoughby. And such was her anticipation of the new era of her life, which she believed to be opening upon her, that Isabella at this moment felt a lightness of heart and spirit which but the hour before she would have denied would ever have been her lot.

"I say the Helicon of innocence and good humour," said Mr. Willoughby.

"Of talent and hospitality," said Sir Charles.

"Of self-possession and triumph," said Lady Charlotte.

Mr. Dunstan said nothing; for Isabella not having partaken of his only conceivable source of inspiration, he knew not to what to impute the hilarity on which her friends complimented her, and he was therefore content to acquiesce in the fact, without attempting to assign a cause.

"Softly, softly, my good friends," said Isabella; "lest I suspect that you think me so completely rusticated, as even to have forgotten the cajoleries of society."

"But is it really literally the case," said Lady Charlotte, "that you have moved the sole and silent inhabitant of this stately mansion? have you never conversed with a single human being?"

"Not literally," replied Isabella; "but, with one exception, I believe I might say yes, in your sense of the words."

"And that exception," said Mr. Willoughby, "is Mr. Parr."

"Parr!" said Sir Charles, starting; "what Parr?"

"The country people," said Isabella, laughing, "call him Queen Catherine's cousin; and *if* superior excellence *is* a regal stamp, he may well maintain the relationship."

"I hope this paragon of yours is at least fourscore years old!" said Mr. Willoughby.

"Not quite," replied Isabella; "but as he was the friend of this house nearly half that time ago, I hope you will not be very jealous."

"I have certainly a remembrance of the person of whom you speak," said Mr. Willoughby. "My father," added he, with a sigh, "had a friend of that name, whom he used to tell me that he wished me to resemble more than any other person whom he knew. I shall be glad to renew my acquaintance with my prototype."

"That wish," said Lady Charlotte, with a kind of malicious gaiety, "like most other parental prayers, has been scattered by the winds, if Mrs. Willoughby reads aright the character of this miraculous Mr. Parr."

"Not for any want of excellence," said Isabella, with quickness, "although the merit may be of a different kind."

Mr. Willoughby coloured with pleasure and gratitude; and perhaps from a little self-reproach, and the warmth with which Isabella spoke.

"Thank you, thank you, Isabella," said he, kindly. "I would rather that you should give my character than that Lady Charlotte should."

"Who doubts it?" said Lady Charlotte. "Which of us ever desired to sit to a *faithful* portrait taker?"

"Caricatures are not faithful portraits," said Isabella. "With a few strokes I can give you something that shall resemble a man, but that is not the true representation of the human figure. See," said she, exemplifying what she said by a few scratches with a pencil on the back of a letter, "*this* is satire;—look there," pointing to an excellently painted portrait, "*that* is truth."

"The whole human race should make its bow to you, my dear Mrs. Willoughby," said Sir Charles.

"But positively," said Lady Charlotte, "whether he is a Methusalem, or a Joseph, I should like to see this wonderful personage. We could then better know how to estimate the penance that our dear Mrs. Willoughby has undergone since she has been dismissed from the world of human creatures, with a *go in peace*, and shut up between four stone walls. Will not the monster come out of his den at your bidding?"

"No," said Isabella, "nor at the *bidding* of any other person."

"Oh! pray let him stay and growl there," said Sir Charles. "This can be no Parr that I ever knew," added he, as if rebutting an imputation.

"This is rather rough badinage," said Mr. Willoughby, "considering that you are speaking of Mrs. Willoughby's friend, and of the man who had been the hereditary friend of this house; and is not likely to induce Isabella to try to bring Mr. Parr amongst us."

"We shall probably have no loss," said Lady Charlotte, who now began evidently to be out of temper; "his talents of charming are most likely confined to a *tête-à-tête*."

"I have never seen Mr. Parr *tête-à-tête*," said Isabella, with dignity.

"Oh!" said Lady Charlotte, with a tone of triumphant discovery, "how the clouds break up! the solitude of Eagle's Crag is the solitude of *select society*."

"The society of Mr. Parr and his daughter," said Isabella.

“His daughter!” cried Sir Charles eagerly, “is she young? is she handsome? is she beautiful?”

“I have succeeded so ill in the panegyric of one of my friends,” replied Isabella, “that I shall be careful how I speak for the other.”

“I am abominably tired!” said Lady Charlotte, affecting to stifle a yawn which was not there.

“You would like to retire?” said Isabella.

“Indeed I shall be glad, I have a horrible head ache.”

The bell was rung, the lights were distributed, and this ill-assorted assembly broke up.

The first thing that Isabella did in the morning, was to write the following letter to Mr. Parr:

“Rejoice with me, my dear friends! Mr. Willoughby arrived last night; he had been delayed by unexpectedly falling in with some of his acquaintance, who have been amusing themselves with visiting the northern lakes and mountains: they have not thought Eagle’s Crag unworthy of their notice. I suppose they will stay with us a few days. Mr. Willoughby is so happy as to have a very just remembrance of you, my dear sir; he desires me to say that nothing could give him more pleasure than that you and dear Catherine would favour us with your company. Your usual apartments are at your disposal. Mr. Willoughby would in person have preferred this request, but that he is particularly engaged this morning, and he is not willing to lose a day of your company, if you will be so kind as to give it us.

“You cannot doubt, my dear sir, how happy I should be to introduce to Mr. Willoughby, the only source of pleasure that I have possessed in his absence, but I think it fair to tell you whom you will meet.

“Mr. Dunstan and Lady Charlotte, and Sir Charles Seymour, are already with us; and I understand that two or three more gentlemen are to join our party to day; the one whom I best know is Mr. Burghley, Lord Burghley’s nephew, and a playfellow of mine in former days; and who will be the playfellow of somebody all his life-time; for he is almost as much a school-boy as when he used to come from Westminster to dine with us on a Sunday. You would like him; he has no evil in him, and a great deal of good, is very acute, and very good-humoured.

“Yours very sincerely,

“ISABELLA WILLOUGHBY.”

Mr. Parr returned the following answer:

“My dear Madam,

“Catherine and I do most sincerely congratulate you on the arrival of Mr. Willoughby.

“I should not have deferred an hour waiting upon him, accompanied by my daughter, if I had not imperative reasons not to come to Eagle’s Crag at present. I am sure, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, you will give me credit for the weight and truth of these reasons, although I feel myself obliged not to explain them. Be so kind as to use your influence with Mr. Willoughby, that he may extend to me the same degree of confidence.

“Accept, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, of the united prayers of myself and Catherine, for every blessing for yourself and Mr. Willoughby, which I know that your

virtues so well deserve, and which must naturally wait on those that I cannot but believe must be hereditary in Mr. Willoughby.

"I am, my dear madam, with the truest esteem and respect, most sincerely yours,
EDWARD PARR."

This letter confirmed a suspicion which had found its way into Isabella's mind. When Mr. Willoughby read it a thought crossed his mind also, which moved his spleen and clouded his brow.

"After all," said he, "Isabella, I suspect that this favourite of yours, is at best a misanthrope, who thinks he is virtuous when he condemns those failings in others, to which he has outlived the temptation in himself."

"Let my influence at least *so* far prevail," said Isabella, mildly, "as to induce you to suspend your judgment. If you cannot give Mr. Parr credit for the virtues which he really does possess, do not charge him with vices that you have no evidence to establish."

"Why? what but misanthropy, or *worse*, can make him refuse to visit me, when he has, as it were, been *living* with you?" said Mr. Willoughby.

"He does not refuse to visit *you*," said Isabella; "and as for his reasons, I will engage for him, that they are such as would do him honour."

"And you know those reasons? at least can so nearly guess them, that it is next to knowledge?" said Mr. Willoughby.

"No, on my word!" said Isabella.

"And you are *sure*, that he has never insinuated into your mind any suspicion of ——" He stopped, feeling that he was touching too tender a string.

"Of no human creature upon earth!" said Isabella, firmly and eagerly. "My dear Mr. Willoughby I do not know to what you allude. I will not even think of what you might intend to say; but believe me, that Mr. Parr is as incapable of attempting to poison my mind with injurious suspicions of any one, as I should be of entertaining them upon any evidence short of proof."

"My dearest Isabella, I do believe it," said Mr. Willoughby; "and I ought to be ashamed of having doubted your candour for a moment. But when the breast is troubled, it does not reflect objects truly!" added he, with a sigh, and turning from her.

The nature of Mr. Willoughby's suspicion could not escape the penetration of Isabella, and it made her doubt the truth of her own; but, be the cause what it would, the fact was the same. There was something in the party at Eagle's Crag, as it was at present constituted, from which Mr. Parr was resolved to keep aloof both himself and his daughter; and this conviction gave Isabella ground for many uneasy reflections.

CHAP. XXXI.

“Women!

Their faces are th’ entrenched beauties of
The world in one, which Nature made in scoff
Of all else excellencies!—but therein
Shelter’d more treason than the world had sin:
For well she knew those ills that would betide them,
Would shew them too foul, without a veil to hide
them:
So that men might be lur’d, and not descry,
In angel’s shape, she clad black misery.”

FELTHAM.

THIS party, wholly unconscious, as it should seem, that they were fit objects either of censure or suspicion, met at breakfast in all the sunshine of hilarity and good humour.

Lady Charlotte had no occasion for a headache, as the veil of ill-temper; the shade that had obscured the brow of Mr. Willoughby on the perusal of Mr. Parr’s letter had disappeared; and Isabella thought that she had never seen Sir Charles Seymour half so amiable; and Mr. Dunstan talked on, not discouraged, although unheeded, of “the astonishing fashionable lounge that his house was at Brighton;” and of the number of fine people, and fine places, that he and Lady Charlotte had visited since they left it. It seemed to be Lady Charlotte’s point to establish that she and Isabella were friends, and that they always had been so. She recounted twenty youthful scrapes and frolics that she asserted they had been engaged in together; and by the particularity of the circumstances that she narrated, and her undaunted appeals to Isabella for the confirmation of all she said, she could not fail to fix the fullest conviction on the minds of all that heard her, Isabella’s alone excepted, that she was uttering nothing but the simplest truth: thus trusting the success of her own effrontery to the modesty of another, who could not endure to put her to the blush by exposing her falsehood.

Isabella was not unacquainted with this part of the factitious and artful character of Lady Charlotte, and she had often suffered from it in the course of their intercourse; the only matter of surprise, therefore, that this exhibition of it occasioned her, was what could be the present motive for it. She saw, indeed, that Mr. Willoughby listened to all these idle, but well told tales, with a marked pleasure, as although he could wish nothing so much as to persuade himself that there was a conformity of sentiment and feeling between the two ladies, which he had not before been aware of; but at length observing that all the histories originated with Lady Charlotte, and that they met no farther confirmation from Isabella, than the not denying them amounted to, he said,

“How comes it, Isabella, that Lady Charlotte has so much better a memory than you? the days of your youth are not so far distant, but that you might remember all that happened as well as Lady Charlotte?”

“Oh, and so she does!” replied Lady Charlotte; “but don’t you know that Isabella has become wise ever since those blue stocking evenings, when she astonished all the

world? besides, she is matron-like, and sententious; now, I shall never be wise, or matron-like, or sententious, nor any thing else but what my feelings make me."

"And yet at this moment," said Isabella, "you trust rather to my feelings, than to your own."

"There! did I not tell you so?" retorted Lady Charlotte, "not only sententious, but oracular! well, I will try if I cannot be wise too; and my first lecture shall be taken this morning, and my dear Mrs. Willoughby shall be my preceptress; I am resolved to have her all to myself. I have a thousand things to say to her, so you gentlemen may dispose of yourselves as you think fit. I am resolved that Isabella shall go out in my little carriage. It will be quite a treat to you, my dear; you have been so long without a carriage, and you will so delight to shew me the lions of this princely domain."

"I will attend you, in whatever way you please," said Isabella; "but I shall make a sacrifice of my inclination by exchanging my beautiful sure-footed pony for any carriage whatever; and it must be a very diminutive one indeed, that will not exclude you from the best part of the beauties and peculiarities of our glens, fells, and tarns."

"Glens! fells! and tarns!" repeated Lady Charlotte, "why, my little northern lassie, what kind of language do you mean to speak when you return to the streets and squares of civilized life?"

"Just the language that I speak now," said Isabella; "the language of truth."

The two ladies prosecuted Lady Charlotte's plan; and Isabella found herself in the novel situation, not only of a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Charlotte, but treated by her in a manner as if, through the whole course of their lives, there had subsisted between them the familiarity and affection which naturally belonged to their acquaintance and relationship. Isabella could not but remember how very much the case had been otherwise; nor was she inclined suddenly to forget the past, when the least injurious cause to which even her candour could ascribe the change in Lady Charlotte, was a belief, that it arose from a desire to establish herself at Eagle's Crag till the return of the town season.

But Isabella could not but be civil and obliging; because she was naturally good-tempered, and habitually well bred. She therefore did "seriously incline," to exhibit to Lady Charlotte all the romantic spots, and sequestered beauties; all the cataracts and mountain steepes of the noted scenes through which they passed; with a reservation however of Fell-beck, from which she resolved most firmly to keep aloof.

But she soon found that Lady Charlotte had little attention for all that she attempted to shew her; and that it was something more than a form of speech when she had said "that she was resolved to have her all to herself, for that she had a thousand things to say to her."

"All this," said she, in reply to Isabella's calling her observation to the objects around them, "is very magnificent and very sublime—and very terrific; but I have really seen towering mountains and roaring torrents till I am sick of them. I would prefer the little delicious half acre in Grosvenor-square, with all its trim gravel paths, and its tiny shrubbery, to all the tremendous inequalities by which we are surrounded; and I can assure you, if I had no other motive for continuing in this neck-breaking country, but a passion for its beauties, I should by this time have been far on my way to smoothly shaven lawns, and civilized animalcula."

What can this be meant to lead to? thought Isabella. She knew Lady Charlotte's maxim of daring to avow all that she dared to do; but it cannot be, thought she, that she means to brave me to my face, and to make me the confident either of my husband's passion for her, or of her's for him.

Isabella sat in painful silence, resolved, that if the blow must come, it should force its way through all the impediments that she could oppose to it.

She attempted somewhat of a diversion, by calling to the servant to make some inquiry about the road.

"Oh, never mind what road we take," said Lady Charlotte, "provided they don't overturn us, and I can have my *tête-à-tête* out with you. I told you I had a thousand things to say to you; and though perhaps I might not be very accurate in my enumeration, my discourse shall make up in weight what it falls short of in numbers."

"Just now," returned Isabella, "I think I should prefer tale to weight: remember how long I have been out of the way of hearing any thing but the sound of the water-fall, or the spirit of the mountain; and rather give me what will amuse me, than any thing that will call for wisdom to comment upon."

"Bless me, my dear," replied Lady Charlotte, "I should almost suspect that you anticipate what I have to say; you seem so much afraid to hear it."

"Then why say it at all?" said Isabella.

"Because, my dear, I love you: because I am interested for you: and because, although the evil may be great, it may not, if taken in time, be irretrievable! and I know nobody so proper as myself to put you on your guard, and point out what is best to be done."

Isabella was tempted to jump out of the carriage; but Lady Charlotte, as if fearing that she might meditate such an escape from the insidious communication which she purposed, laid her hand forcibly on her arm, exclaiming, "Oh Isabella, how little do we know what we ought to wish for!—how little do we know what is good for us! — who would have believed that a marriage such as yours, the mortification of all who envied you, and the triumph of all who loved you, should in one short twelve-months, be fraught with ruin to yourself and offspring!"

Isabella could not now move, or speak; but she turned her eyes on Lady Charlotte with such a look of deprecation, as must have moved any one less stony-hearted than her present tormentor, to have recoiled from her purpose.

"I cannot believe," continued Lady Charlotte, "that you can be wholly ignorant as to what I allude; but having buried yourself alive so long, and Willoughby not being one of those husbands who think it their duty to make a confession of their sins to their wives, you cannot be aware to what extent the evil has proceeded; nor how necessary it is that you should interfere to put a stop to it."

"Lady Charlotte," said Isabella, with an unmoved countenance, and with a steady voice, the sound of which even surprised herself, "I *hear* no accusations against my husband, of what nature soever they may be. I will rely upon the integrity and affection of Mr. Willoughby against the suspicions or insinuations of any person breathing."

"My dear child," said Lady Charlotte, "this is no time to play Madam La Gouvernante's sentiments upon me. Lay aside these heroics; they have misled you far enough already, and let us talk common sense; you and I know the world pretty well. Would you not laugh at your good cousin if she were to tell you with a grave face that

she relied on the integrity and affections of Lord Western? and why should you and I be exempted from the common lot? Heaven preserve me from the folly of maintaining the impeccability of my august spouse. Although I must do him the justice to say that his sins are not of the same nature as those that beset your spotless sovereign. The plain truth is, that Willoughby has fallen into the most ruinous of all absurdities, as I have but too many family reasons to call it. *How* fallen I do not know; for I do believe that with him, it was not an original sin; and this gives me more hope of cure, which good counsel and good friends may effect, of both which you may avail yourself, if like a forward child, you do not dash the cup of health from your mouth. I saw a little of this several months ago, and would have warned you then, but — pardon me, my dear Isabella,—like the rest of us perhaps, matrimony had put you upon your stilts, and it was no time for me to act upon our former familiarity; and there might be something of the same intoxication on my part — I am sure I make no claim to more temperance than my neighbours; but of course we are both pretty well sobered by this time, and the best thing that we can do, is to assist each other in bearing the burthens of life as well as we can, and in finding out as many indemnifications for its disappointments as our ingenuity can suggest. No body's wine is clear to the bottom. I would have warned you I say; I did *not*, because, it may be, I was thinking just then more of myself than of you; but I do assure you that for many weeks I have thought more of you than myself.

“Perhaps you don't know that Willoughby has been living a great deal with us at Brighton. I know he is an idle correspondent; there I could not but see how he was going on. I remonstrated; I scolded; I called in the aid of Sir Charles Seymour, than whom I can assure you, my dear, you have not a more disinterested friend in the world, and he never plays. You know I have odd fancies, and I have thought if Lady Jane had not been in such a hurry to clap up your marriage with Willoughby, for whom I am persuaded that you did not care a pin when you married him, that you might have been the happy wife of Sir Charles Seymour—hush, hush! my dear; none of your moral disclaimings—none of your virtuous indignation, I beg; let my fancies pass; they are *but* fancies. We were talking of the incorrigibility of the man whom you *do* call your husband — whether an *attentive*, a *faithful*, husband you know best; but he *is* your husband, and the father of your child; and for both your sakes I would have saved him if I could; but all in vain: there were too many of our society that tempted him to sin; and the ruin went on with such gigantic strides, that I really trembled even for the walls of yon stately mansion; I saw but one thing to do: I broke up our establishment all of a sudden. It is true that nothing could be more agreeable than the life I was living at Brighton, if it had not been for the folly of Willoughby in more shapes than one: but the thought of the evil that he was bringing upon *you*, poisoned every pleasure. I believe he thought me one of the most capricious of mortals, when I told him one day that he had had his last dinner with us, and when he found that I was really off the next morning. But I did not care what he thought. I knew that Sir Charles would make use of this sudden check to his usual habits to turn his thoughts to what he ought to have been thinking of long before, rejoining you, my dear; and our little plot succeeded. We soon heard that he had sold Beechwood. There, my dear, was one limb of your grandeur lopped off, yet it was a measure of the most imperative necessity, and which averted all immediate causes for apprehension; and we heard next, that he was actually set off for Eagle's Crag—to fix him there became my point. But I must not arrogate all the merit of what I have done to myself. I will candidly

confess that I have acted by the advice both of your mother and my own. I had communicated my uneasiness on your account to my mother; she made it quite a family affair, and consulted with yours what could be done. They have agreed that nothing but a residence in Westmoreland for a few years will retrieve matters; and they, dear excellent people as they are! “could not but hope,” “could not but believe,” that “his regard for you and his boy,” his “good sense,” “his reason,” and “his duty,” would make him adopt this plan with the most facile readiness. But, without assuming any very wonderful sagacity to myself, I confess I did a little laugh at their ignorance of human nature. Perhaps it was only a *façon de parler*, in their character of *Elders*; for both Lady Jane and Lady Stanton do know that part of human nature which walks about in the world; and cannot in their hearts have much more value than I have for the simple fare called “good sense,” or “reason,” or the “duty,” of any man without a garnish of pleasure: and I thought that when he returned to you, out of spirits, as must be the case, to a dreary neglected residence — for I had been strangely misled to believe that this place, which I find so stately and magnificent, was almost wholly dilapidated, and unfurnished — he would think of nothing but running away again, and leaving you behind him; and perhaps return to some of his old haunts; where finding them ready swept and garnished, he might take to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, so that his last state might be worse than his first.

“Now, my dear, I could see no means so likely to prevent his retrogression, as to make his present home agreeable to him; to set him out in it well; and to give him an experience to refer to of the pleasures it could afford him. Some of this store of wisdom I imparted to my two sage coadjutrices, and they suggested that I could not do better than to throw myself in the way of Willoughby, on his road into Westmoreland, and under pretence of wanting to see his place, for which I did not care a farthing but for you, my dear; or to see you, which was natural enough; or any other nonsense I could think of; to fasten ourselves upon him, with a few other agreeable people for a little time, just to break the first gloom of his return, and to make him feel that there are pleasures in society apart from that odious excitement which depends upon a card. The first step you know is all—and I am charmed to find, from the state of your habitation, and every thing around it, that we shall have an ally in our praise-worthy purpose that I had not reckoned upon. Willoughby is not so free from vanity (I *may* say that, I hope, without offence), but that he must be charmed to exhibit such a princely domain as this is, to some of those who perhaps think him a ruined man; and really, my dear, when I see the dignified order by which you are surrounded, and the unhurried accommodation that awaits your guests, I cannot but suppose that Willoughby has more resources than I was aware of; and that nothing is wanting to the success of our little plan, but that you should lend yourself, with gaiety and good-humour, to the circumstances of the present hour; give life and soul to the society that we have collected for you, and enter into communication with your neighbours; many of whom I know would have visited you long ago, but that they understood that you did not wish to see any body; at least so they have told me; but perhaps the truth may be, (for heaven knows we are all selfish creatures!) the not being willing to take long drives merely to see a recluse wife, who could not be supposed to have much to offer them in the way of amusement. But the case will be now quite different, and you have but to let the voice of rumour go forth, that you and Mr.

Willoughby shall be glad to see your friends; and the courts of Eagle's Crag will be no longer solitary.

"All this, my dear, I have thought it right to state to you fully and candidly, that there might be no mistaking of motives, or conjectures as to how? and why? and for how long? and such questions. Here I am at your service for as much time as you may wish to have me; and if you will but steadily follow my plan, I will engage for it, that before the winter is over, Willoughby will be quite an altered person, and in the right way to retrieve, perhaps, all that he has lost?"

Lady Charlotte paused: for what more could she say to an auditor who seemed determined not to interrupt her, or to give her occasion, by seeming to doubt its truth, to prove any thing that she had asserted?

After a moment's silence, as if to ascertain whether she had any more to hear, Isabella said:

"Lady Charlotte, I have listened to all that you have thought proper to say to me, and I have no other reply to make, but, that I beg you to believe, that as you confess yourself to have been misinformed as to the state of Mr. Willoughby's property in this part of the world, that you may very probably be equally in an error in the conclusions that you have drawn as to his circumstances in other particulars." Then, speaking to the servant, "Go home," said she.

It is impossible to describe the concentrated rage that filled the heart of Lady Charlotte at the calm contempt with which Isabella had received all her professions of kindness, her information, her claims to sagacity, her advice, and offers of alliance. It was completely evident that she gave not the smallest credit to any thing that she had heard.

No human being had less command over her passions than had Lady Charlotte; even the powerful spring which but the moment before had actuated her hypocrisy, was scarcely strong enough to resist the impulse given by rage, to throw off all disguise, and to defy Isabella in open terms. Her eyes sparkled with fury: she clasped her fingers to the palm of her hand, relaxed them, again clasped them with an energy which hurt her, and again unclosed them, before she could regain command enough of herself to speak in terms of common civility, and it was hardly thus that she did speak.

"Isabella, you make me mad! will you be a child and a dupe all your life-time? or do you fancy that you can dupe me? but let me tell you—

"No," said Isabella, gently interrupting her, "pray let me tell you, — you say that you believe that you have done your duty in giving me the advice and information that you have done; permit me to do what I believe to be mine, as to the manner in which I receive what you have said."

"Yes, yes!" replied Lady Charlotte, vehemently, "go on in your fancied security and wisdom, till ruin engulphs you, your child, your husband! you will not have to reproach me that I did not warn you. I would have saved you."

"I am warned; I trust I shall be saved," said Isabella; and still her voice was unbroken, and her countenance unchanged: but the effort that she had made to preserve her composure, had nearly overcome her; and she felt that a few minutes longer continuance in her present torture, and she could endure no more. Happily at this critical instant, a sharp turning in the road, brought them of a sudden almost into contact with Sir Charles Seymour, Mr. Dunstan, and Mr. Willoughby, who were pursuing their morning amusement.

"Stop, stop!" cried Lady Charlotte, impatiently, "let me get out, I am tired of the carriage, I will walk" — and, instantly banishing from her countenance every trace of her late rage, "Oh," cried she, in a kind of good humoured mockery, "Oh, the horrors of a female *tête-à-tête*! I have wearied poor Isabella to death; and, to say the truth, she has not been unrevenged. Here, here, Sir Charles, take my seat, while I trudge homewards with *caro sposo*, and Willoughby."

"I think," said Isabella, jumping out of the carriage, "I can equal most of you in walking; so, if you please, we will dismiss the servants, and proceed all together."

"No, no!" said Sir Charles, "do have some pity on me; I have no dread of a *tête-à-tête*; and I long to explore that delicious dell that lies to the left; and who will be able to shew me its beauties half so well as you?"

And at the same time he attempted to draw her gently towards the little carriage, and to prevail with her to resume her place in it.

"What a *contre temps*!" cried Mr. Dunstan, pettishly, "here's our whole plan for the morning broken up. I thought, ladies, that you were quite dedicated to yourselves for the whole morning; prithee, Willoughby, lay your commands on Mrs. Willoughby to get into the carriage again; and I shall take the liberty of requesting Lady Charlotte not to suffer her caprice thus to put us all to the route."

"I never do lay my commands on Mrs. Willoughby," returned Mr. Willoughby, looking kindly on Isabella; "it has not been my way; first, I believe from my hatred to all restraint myself; and now, because I suspect, if either of us were to command, she would be the better ruler of the two."

The thrill of grateful rapture that ran through every vein of Isabella's heart, on hearing these words, was nearly as destructive of the equanimity of her demeanour, as had been the fiendish attacks which Lady Charlotte had made upon her feelings so little time before. Sliding her arm gently beneath Mr. Willoughby's, at once to steady her steps, and to indulge her fondness; she said, as she tenderly pressed the arm she held, "thank you, thank you! but it is a shame thus to interrupt what you were about to do; shall I get into the carriage again, and endeavour to persuade Lady Charlotte to do so too? the penance to her cannot be long; we are not half a quarter of a mile from the house?"

Mr. Willoughby's answer was interrupted by an angry squabble between Lady Charlotte and Mr. Dunstan.

"There's nothing on earth so absurd as you are," said Mr. Dunstan.

"Gently, gently, Dunstan!" cried Mr. Willoughby; "we will have you tossed in a blanket for a discourteous knight, if you go on at that rate. What can we do less, and what can we do that we shall like better, than to escort the ladies to the house, as they do us the honour to wish it? We shall have more than sufficient time for all that we meant to do, after we have seen them safe at home; and then we shall all meet at dinner in good humour with each other."

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Dunstan, "you would spoil the whole sex, Willoughby."

"Shall I stroke the black dog off its back, deary?" said Lady Charlotte, with the most provoking insolence of look and tone; "or shall I say pray, pray! as it used to do to me, when I was sovereign? When there *was* something on earth more absurd than me; and when I was not treated with a pshaw!"

"Let me alone!" said Mr. Dunstan, putting aside Lady Charlotte's hands, which in mockery she was holding up in a petitioning posture.

"And fall these sayings from that gentle tongue?" said she, with a malicious laugh; "but be it as you will; it is all for my good I dare say;" putting her hands awkwardly before her, and making him a curtesy, while he looked as if he could have beaten her.

"Hush!" said Mr. Willoughby, "he is in no humour to be sported with; pray take my other arm; he will be himself again in a moment, and then you may do what you will."

"I care not what he does," returned she; "you know what a brute he is, and how much I have to bear, and how I bear it."

"No more, no more, I beg," said Mr. Willoughby. "You will quite astonish Isabella."

"Oh, that I could be like her," cried Lady Charlotte; "so calm! so reasonable! so unmoved! so——" it seemed as if Mr. Willoughby at that moment exerted his influence so as to make it effectual; for she suddenly stopped; then said,

"I am ashamed of myself, but ——" again she stopped, as although restrained by something more than her own prudence; and she walked on in silence; while Sir Charles having placed himself on the other side of Isabella, eagerly entered into conversation with her, evidently with the purpose of withdrawing her thoughts from the disagreeable scene that had just passed; and all moving on together, they left Mr. Dunstan in the middle of the road, too sulky to stir; but seeming to entertain himself with throwing bits of stone at every bird that flitted by: and then, when they were almost out of hearing, calling after them, "I shall stay for you here! don't be long! make haste! to which he had no other answer returned, but by a laugh of Lady Charlotte's, which she took care should be loud enough to reach his ears.

"Fie, fie!" said Mr. Willoughby.

"I tell you that I must either laugh or cry;" said she, "and I have already given him more tears than he is worth."

No answer being made by Mr. Willoughby, and Sir Charles continuing with gaiety and good-breeding to engage the attention of all by various topics, the storm was lulled into silence.

Surely, thought Isabella, I need not be afraid of the influence of such a woman! Yet, alas! how soon had she to abandon this consoling thought!

CHAP. XXXII.

—“If it be so,
We need no grave to bury honesty;
There is not a grain of it the face to sweeten
Of the whole dungy earth.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE two gentlemen having conducted the ladies to the house, Isabella, as they were about to enter, saw her boy in the nurse's arms, and turning to caress him for a moment, she left Mr. Willoughby and Lady Charlotte still arm in arm. As she turned again to join them, she heard Lady Charlotte say, “*Indeed* I am ashamed—yet *you* well know that there *are* moments when I *can* command my feelings.”

“Ah! too well!” returned Mr. Willoughby; and Isabella saw the hand which was still detained within her husband's, gently pressed, and resigned with a sigh.

For an instant Isabella felt as if fixed to the spot on which she stood; but recollecting herself, she turned once more to her child, and taking him out of the nurse's arms, she carried him into the house, without any farther apparent advertence to the rest of the party; nor did it seem that she was more regarded by them than they were by her. At this moment, Mr. Willoughby's consciousness of his own guilty weakness robbed him of all the honest pleasure of a parent, and made him ashamed to lift an eye to his spotless and injured wife. Sir Charles had stepped aside to give some directions to a servant; and as to Lady Charlotte, as she could not absolutely stab Isabella to the heart, she had no other relief for the malignant passions which agitated her, than to escape from the presence of the object of her unjust hatred.

But, although unmolested, Isabella was not the less oppressed: her mind was wrought up to such a pitch of agony, that she seemed at length to have lost all self-command. She clasped her infant again and again almost madly to her bosom. She called on Heaven for pity; and felt that her prayers were granted in a flood of tears, which fell from her eyes, and which seemed to save her from distraction.

In her own room, and alone, Isabella had leisure to revolve in her mind the various emotions of the last hour; to analyze and arrange the mass of falsehood and truth which had been uttered by Lady Charlotte; and to understand, if possible, the motives that had elicited both the one and the other.

Isabella did but too painfully acknowledge the faithfulness of the representation made to her of the pecuniary difficulties which Mr. Willoughby had brought upon himself; but why should they be forced upon her apprehension by Lady Charlotte, except from the paltry wish of triumphing over her, she could not guess. And had she not other points, beyond comparison more galling, on which to establish her superiority? Yet she seemed to wish to veil all these by a hollow profession of friendship; and by representing herself as acting in conjunction with the parents of both. Her insidious recommendation of Sir Charles Seymour to her favour startled Isabella; and awoke a suspicion of a concert—a combination of mischief—so black that the pureness of her soul revolted from the very thought.

“And was it possible that Mr. Willoughby could be aware of such a combination?—it was *not* possible; she did not entertain the thought for the smallest possible division of time. Was he then to be a dupe?” The intellect of Isabella was bewildered in such a maze of wickedness, her heart could not understand it; it refused to believe it. “Mr. Willoughby might desert, but he could never betray her. His passions might declare for Lady Charlotte; but every instance of his affection, of his admiration, and even of his reverence, that he had given in the short space that they had lately been together, she believed to be genuine.” Even Lady Charlotte, although she knew her capable of a pleasure in tormenting her, in triumphing over her, in misrepresenting her, she could not prevail with herself to believe would plot to make her not only miserable, but infamous! she blushed for having suffered the imagination to discolour the whiteness of her mind; she rejected it as a chimera that her fevered brain had engendered in the moment of frenzied feeling. “And why had she suffered herself to be so put from her path of even rectitude?—of self-government? what had the disclosed intimacy between Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby told her more than what she had so long believed? and might not this be the very escape on which Mr. Willoughby had seemed to congratulate himself? should she not be thankful for this? should it not encourage her by every means in her power to strengthen her influence over her husband? to rejoice in, rather than to complain of the fiery ordeal to which she was exposed? in the progress of which she might hope, by the acute exercise of her understanding, and the mild operation of her virtues; to baffle the arts of the one party, and to awaken all the slumbering excellencies of the other. She was sensible that Lady Charlotte felt her superiority; the involuntary admiration which she expressed; the ill-humour that she had betrayed; convinced her of it. What have I then to do, thought Isabella, but to look well that I am true to myself? to keep suspicion and irritation aloof; to hold an even tenor of demeanour, and to trust in God for the issue.

The wisdom and piety of such resolves soon restored Isabella to a composure of mind which enabled her, not only to resolve, but to act. Yet the sadness of her heart would at times relieve itself by a deep sigh; and the agitation of the morning was written in such legible characters on her features, that it was impossible that the effect could escape observation when the party re-assembled before dinner.

Sir Charles’s “Good God! has any thing happened to you since we parted?” and Mr. Willoughby’s affectionate inquiry, “Isabella, my dear, are you not well?” revealed to Isabella what she had not herself adverted to, in the change of her appearance. The consciousness of the cause soon restored the colour to her cheeks; and while she replied to Mr. Willoughby with the simplicity of truth, “I have been a little unwell, but I am now better;”—Lady Charlotte cried out with a coquettish air of her head, “and able, I hope, to chastise Sir Charles for his ungallant notice of your ill looks.”

“What has been so transitory,” said Sir Charles, looking with evident pleasure on Isabella’s heightened beauty, “ought not indeed to have been the object of observation ’twas here—is gone!”

“Fine speeches,” said Mr. Willoughby, “flow from light feelings; but they will not cure a real evil. My dearest Isabella, if you feel yourself indisposed (and you look so) I beg you will withdraw. I can have no pleasure in your company if you are to suffer by it.”

Tears started into Isabella’s eyes; so earnest and so affectionate was the manner in which Mr. Willoughby spoke.

"I assure you," she said, "that I am quite well; and I can be nowhere so well pleased as where I am now; but I understand there is some addition to our last night's party—whom am I to see?"

"Oh here comes Burghley!" said Mr. Willoughby, "and you are always glad to see him."

"And I, always delighted to see my dear Mrs. Willoughby," said the handsome, gay, and good-humoured Burghley. "How do you do, my dear creature?" said he, shaking Isabella by the hand, "and how have you been these million years? and how is the baby? bless me! we have not met since those delightful evenings that we used to have in Grosvenor-square, which Lady Charlotte never could understand without my assistance; and how have you liked living amongst rocks and rustics? and how do you think I have been able to live without you?"

"Isabella must have Garaganta's mouth before she can answer all your questions, in one word Burghley," said Mr. Willoughby.

"In one word!" returned Mr. Burghley, "no indeed! I mean that she should bestow upon me ten times as many."

"And the first shall be an inquiry after Lord Burghley," said Isabella; "is he well? and where is he?"

"So you fob off the interest that I have in you, with referring me to that which you take in my uncle; but I love to obey better than to dispute with you. I thank God he is well, and as happy and benevolent as usual."

"And what young heir but yourself," said an indolent, foppish-looking man, with a voice of sovereign contempt, "would thank God for the health of an old uncle that keeps him out of an estate of ten thousand pounds a year?"

"I desire to know no one who would *not*," said Mr. Burghley, darting a look of indignation at the speaker, "if the possessor were such another person as Lord Burghley."

Isabella had instantly recognized by the voice the brother of Lady Charlotte, and the very brother to whose gambling propensities she knew that she had alluded in speaking of a similar failing in Mr. Willoughby. Such a proof of the utter falsehood of what she had asserted as to the purpose for which she had endeavoured to assemble around Mr. Willoughby good and safe society, made her blush at once with indignation and shame; and the coldness with which she received Mr. Stanton marked what was passing in her mind so visibly to Lady Charlotte, that she cried out, "Pray, George, who directed your steps to Eagle's Crag? Did I not absolutely forbid you to come here?"

"But luckily, my fair sister, you are not lord of the ascendant; and Willoughby's yea was more potent to bring me here, than your nay to keep me away."

"Don't talk nonsense, George," said Lady Charlotte. "If I am not lord of the ascendant, I hope Mrs. Willoughby is lady; and I trust she will drive you away from her castle in less than twenty-four hours. Are you not ashamed to be neglecting everything in the world that you ought to do?"

"At present," said Isabella, who was not deceived by this little artificial wrangle, "I believe we have all of us but one duty to perform; and I have only to hope that Westmoreland fare may make it a pleasant one. Mr. Willoughby, pray take Lady Charlotte to the dining-room."

"And shall not I take you?" said Mr. Burghley to Isabella.

"That honour is mine," said Sir Charles, interposing.

“Then faith, Seymour,” said Mr. Burghley, ‘we must be the two Kings of Brentford; for I will not relinquish this fair arm.”

“Nor I this soft hand,” said Sir Charles.

And thus, conducted by her two beaux, Isabella was led in a sort of triumph to the top of the table; while Lady Charlotte felt the inferiority of having, as it were, been consigned to the master of the house, as in the course of common civility, and without any attempt from any other to invade his privilege.

In addition to the persons named, there were three or four other gentlemen who made up the present dinner-party, and who were all known to Isabella, and whom she soon found to have been collected together from the different houses where they, as well as Lady Charlotte, had been visiting during the last month. They had therefore all some topic in common; the same sporting anecdotes to refer to, the same witticisms to sport, the same jokes to repeat.

Mr. Burghley and Sir Charles Seymour had also had their share in these physical and intellectual amusements; but they both seemed alike to have forgotten them in conversing with Isabella upon a variety of subjects, that their mutual acquaintance, or their different or agreeing tastes, could give rise to; while Lady Charlotte seemed to reign the sovereign of the other end of the table.

Thus the company that surrounded it might have been considered as two distinct societies, had it not been for the connecting link of Mr. Willoughby’s well-bred and well-tempered attention to all; and not least to Isabella; who, believing that she saw in his manners a desire that she should be more diffuse, extended notice and conversation to all, till the whole air of coteriership was done away, and a social communication extended to all.

Lady Charlotte’s brow clouded as she saw herself thus out-generaled; and Isabella’s expanded, as she saw the pleased approbation which spoke in Mr. Willoughby’s eye whenever it met hers.

Who would have believed, who had not have looked below the surface, that Isabella was unhappy, or had cause to be so?

CHAP. XXXIII.

“To wilful men
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters.”

SHAKSPEARE.

NOTHING could exceed the urbanity, the sweetness, and even affection, with which Mr. Willoughby treated Isabella, whether they were in company, or alone; but he discovered no mark of any wish, or thought of opening his heart to her, either as to his past chagrins or future plans. All was superficial; and if she hazarded any attempt to penetrate the interior, she was answered by a caress, or a slight expression, which scarcely made a reply to her observation. In the impatient hope that it would not be long before they were left to themselves, when greater leisure would afford more frequent and better opportunities of pressing the subject which she resolved they should not again part without having fully discussed, she forbore to importune him at a time when he could so easily elude all her efforts to obtain his confidence. But the hopes of a better future in this respect could not abate her alarm of the impending evil which she saw in Mr. Willoughby's increased intercourse with George Stanton;— an intercourse which she could not doubt, from the contemptuous opinion which she knew that Mr. Willoughby entertained of the general character of the man, could only be grounded in their mutual liking for high play. Yet it appeared to Isabella, that it was rather to escape from his own thoughts than from any pleasure which he took in the trial of skill, or of fortune, into which he was always so ready to enter when called upon by Mr. Stanton, that he either threw the dice, or studied the cards. She was the more persuaded of this from the general restlessness that seemed to be upon him, and the eagerness with which he accepted every offered civility from his neighbours.

Either by the means of Lady Charlotte, or by some effort of his own, all obstacles to visiting at Eagle's Crag seemed to be done away. No distance deterred, no scruples prevented, a very general resort to a spot so long deserted, but which now was supposed to offer so many means of gratification or amusement. It was quite another matter than when it was supposed that Isabella had retired into the country upon a plan of the most rigid economy. Since it now appeared that nothing could be more false than such a supposition; the fires now blazed in every room, and the lights now streamed from every window of Eagle's Crag; and all seemed emulous who should testify the earliest attention to the master of the mansion, who, it was now said, was come to fix his residence amongst the friends and acquaintance of his earliest youth.

All were received with the most bland and good-humoured hospitality by Mr. Willoughby; who, in addition to whatever motives he might have thus to hide himself from himself in a crowd, found an actual gratification to his love of dissipation and his love of expense, under a form so congenial to some of the best feelings of human nature, that he never suspected that he was as great an idler and as thoughtless a prodigal, while doing the honours of his paternal mansion, as he had ever been in loitering up and down Bond Street or St. James's.

To make Eagle's Crag once more the scene of festivity and happiness; to renew the ancient intimacies of his parents; to testify his respect to all whom they had loved; to spend his property amongst his tenants and dependants, what could be more amiable? more noble? more just? All that was wanting to make it all these, was that he should have had a right to the money which he expended, and that the time which he gave to others should have been the surplus of hours which had already discharged the duties that he owed to himself and to his God!

But the present current of Mr. Willoughby's thoughts were unchecked by such reflections.

In the first fervour of joy for his escape from the danger that had beset him at Brighton, he had thought only of the legitimate and hallowed pleasures that he should experience in reuniting himself to his wife and child; and no chagrin could be more sensible than that which he felt in being intercepted in his progress by the accidental falling in, as he thought it, with Lady Charlotte and her party. With a design of eluding, if possible, her declared intention of visiting Eagle's Crag, he had suffered himself to be dragged from place to place for a day or two, but by so doing had only strengthened the chains which he wished to break. It was with undissembled and genuine reluctance that he had been at last compelled to receive her visit; and this not only from his desire to be alone with Isabella, to, and with whom he had much to communicate and arrange; but from an apprehension that he should derive little honour from the condition of a place so long neglected by him, or the state of a household, which he concluded must be so little suited to the appearance which ought to belong to the large and magnificent, though, as he feared, dilapidated mansion of his ancestors.

An invisible hand, of which he knew nothing, had averted the first evil, and the good sense and good taste of Isabella had supplied all that was wanting to remedy the second. He had been struck with equal delight and admiration by the order and propriety with which he and his guests had been received; but, above all, he had been astonished and charmed by the reception given him by Isabella, and by the dignity and superiority which her character appeared to have attained. He listened to Roberts, until he thought it little less than miraculous that the young creature from whom he had parted so few months ago, and whom he had been accustomed to regard more as a plaything than as a friend, could in so short a time, and without the sacrifice of an atom of the simplicity and unassumingness which so peculiarly marked all that she said and did, have been so equal to the difficulties of the novel situation in which she had found herself; that she could so justly combine economy with a due regard to appearances; that she could submit to solitude and deprivations with cheerfulness; and, above all, that she could tolerate the irritating and trying suspense in which he could not but be conscious that he had so long kept her, with an equanimity of temper which had given her a friend in every one who had approached her, and had secured such a respect to her character as made her the astonishment of those who could best appreciate the whole merit of such self-command.

All this Roberts knew how to insinuate without sacrificing any respect due to his master; and Mr. Willoughby was never weary of listening to eulogiums so closely identified with himself, that he could not but admit a hope that she might supply all that was wanting on his part, to restore him to those better thoughts and more virtuous feelings with which he had set out in life, and the loss of which he regretted at times even with agony.

But while Isabella was the goddess of his reason, Lady Charlotte was the idol of his passions; and the more so, because she had not wholly yielded to the impulse of her *own*. Thus far she had persevered in the refined coquetry of allowing him to see that he was beloved, and in withholding every positive proof of her love. Hence he persuaded himself that his passion for Lady Charlotte was nearly as much a tribute to her virtues as to her charms; and hence was he so sensitively alive to any imputation that the malignity or morose suspicion of others might attach to her. A suspicion of this kind had occasioned his spleen against Mr. Parr; and any detection of jealousy on the part of Isabella would have been ruinous to the incipient interest that she was so powerfully creating in his heart.

Yet poor Isabella, in escaping from this danger, incurred another. Mr. Willoughby did not sufficiently understand the elements of a truly virtuous love, to comprehend how it could exist under neglect, and, as he could not conceal from himself, at times, under evident marks of preference to another, and yet preserve the unruffled surface that Isabella's invincible sweetness of temper, and gentle acquiescence in all his wishes, never failed to maintain. The consequence was, that while he gave her credit for all the higher qualities of the mind, he denied her that warm and distinctive feeling which it is so flattering to the vanity of man to excite, and which he could tell himself, as an apology for his own aberrations, was the greatest charm in woman. The concentrated affections of Isabella remained unknown; while the light particles of Lady Charlotte's base passion flew off and sparkled, and misled the unhappy Willoughby. Hence it was that, however dissatisfied he had been when he found himself so suddenly turned adrift at Brighton; and discomposed as he had been by the unforeseen meeting with Lady Charlotte, and her obstinate determination to accompany him to Eagle's Crag, he soon found in the flattery of her acknowledged attachment to him, an excuse for all that had disappointed, and all that had disgusted him. In affecting to take him as a monitor in the regulation of her conduct towards her husband, she found the secret of resuming her full influence over his mind; and in assuming the right of schooling him upon what she called "his follies;" she became the dictator of all that he should or should not do; and the depository of all his embarrassments, and his plans for obviating them. Thus, while he allowed Lady Charlotte to usurp the confidence so justly due to Isabella, he satisfied himself for the injury he did her, by endeavouring to persuade himself that her interests were safe in the hands of Lady Charlotte, and that it was a kindness to hide from her details which could only serve to make her unhappy.

At this period then Mr. Willoughby was tolerably well satisfied with himself. He was not doing anything that he called wrong, and full purposing to do everything that was right; exalting Lady Charlotte in his imagination alike for the favours she granted, and those which she withheld; and taking credit to himself for the homage that he rendered to the excellencies of Isabella, he banished from his mind all thoughts of the future, except such as referred to the excellent conduct which he was then to withhold, and gave himself wholly to the display of that magnificent hospitality and festive profusion, which could only have been well placed in the days of unimpaired fortunes and an unrepining conscience.

CHAP. XXXIV.

“I delight in masks and revels, sometimes altogether.
Art good at these kickshaws, knight?”

SHAKSPEARE.

WHAT were now the workings of Isabella's mind? — Was she to be carried away with the stream, or was she to attempt to oppose some boundaries to a tide which swelled to her destruction? To whom could she look for counsel or assistance? The only eye of the many which were upon her, which seemed to understand her situation, or to sympathize in her feelings, was Sir Charles Seymour's. In spite of the grounded distrust that she entertained of his principles, and of his designs, she could not but acknowledge that nothing could have been more irreproachable, and even praiseworthy, than the whole tone of his manners and conversation since his arrival at Eagle's Crag. All frothy gallantry was banished from his tongue; his admiration was expressed more by the homage of respect than the tribute of adulation. No word, dropped as if without design, betrayed that he was awake either to the folly of Mr. Willoughby's extravagance, or to the still more reprehensible error of his too apparent attachment to Lady Charlotte.

Isabella was not called upon to reprove the censurer of her husband; or to blush at the exposure of his weakness; yet she saw the delicacy with which Sir Charles interposed to stem the current of the one, and to veil the other from the eyes of common observers.

She saw with how much address he contrived to preserve for her the pre-eminence so justly her due; and how skilfully he baffled the attempts of Lady Charlotte to be known as the lady of the revels, or felt as the origin of the pleasures of the society.

Under pretence of saving Isabella trouble, or relieving her from exertions, that she *would* suppose were disagreeable to her, she would say,—

“My dear creature, I know you do so hate all these things! Leave all to me, and sit down to the instrument; the chosen few will be gathered around you. I will do all the drudgery. Set the old dowagers down to cards, and the misses to dancing reels, or make them play at questions and commands; and I will talk to the squires of their dogs and horses. What, indeed, would I not do in furtherance of that, which you know of? and which succeeds admirably. Willoughby was never happier in his life: I verily believe in a little time it will be as difficult to tear him away from Eagle's Crag, as it once was to drag him there.”

Isabella recalled to mind Mrs. Nesbitt's assurances of the evident success of *her* plan; and was as little exhilarated by the happiness which Lady Charlotte discovered in Mr. Willoughby, as she had been flattered or encouraged by Mrs. Nesbitt's congratulations on the progress that she had made in his admiration, by her love for dissipation, or by the display of her taste in the fashionable follies of the day.

Isabella was therefore by no means inclined to take Lady Charlotte's advice in consulting her own ease, rather than to maintain by some sacrifice the place that was due to her in the present society. By her own diligence, and the well-timed intervention of Sir Charles, Lady Charlotte never succeeded in any of these attempts to render herself important or necessary.

Isabella was the most gracious and attentive of hostesses,—the respectful administratrix to the accommodation of the old, and the cheerful partaker in the pleasures of the young; while Sir Charles never failed to step forward whenever it appeared expedient to do so, and so to bring Isabella into action, that Lady Charlotte was thrown into the shade, and all the country visitors received the impression that they owed to Mrs. Willoughby all the charms of their visit at Eagle's Crag.

Isabella could not be insensible to the obligations which she owed to Sir Charles, nor could she be ungrateful for them. Involuntarily their eyes communicated on every incident interesting to Isabella; and without a word having been uttered on the subject, she was more persuaded than if he had told her so a thousand times, that Sir Charles saw all that was going on, that he pitied her, and that he was zealous to befriend her. Under this impression she often unconsciously acted by his suggestion, and she grew accustomed to watch his countenance for a confirmation or a disavowal of what was passing in her own mind.

Yet not for all this did Isabella feel any alarm, nor had she reason to do so. Nothing could be more perfect than the line which Sir Charles thus silently traced out for her to tread; nothing more consonant to the pure dictates of her own heart, thus sanctioned, as she thought, by his better knowledge of the world, and perhaps by his more intimate acquaintance with the circumstances in which she stood.

She took, therefore, the part which she believed that prudence assigned her; and covering an aching heart with a cheerful countenance, threw no impediment in the way of any pleasurable arrangement suggested by Mr. Willoughby; promising herself that the interest which her yielding at this time would establish, might be used at no very distant period to avert the evil that otherwise seemed to advance with hasty steps to destroy her.

But thus, while with fiend-like art Sir Charles plotted to make her very virtues lead her to vice, and while he believed that he was every day becoming more and more master of her fate, she had another more honest and more open-hearted friend, who often threw himself between her and mischief, without claiming or thinking of any reward beyond the simple pleasure of being of use to her.

Mr. Burghley was always the first to break up the card-table; or to cause it to be neglected, by calling the attention of its votaries to fifty amusing follies and boyish tricks. Sometimes he would appear in masquerade; or he would act a scene in some play; or he would insist upon dancing; and being always sure of having the young and the gay of his party, he was able to overbear any opposition that the wishes of those who had other things in view might have made to his plans.

Most particularly did he manage to keep Mr. Stanton from Mr. Willoughby, as he well knew, that as to him, he was the most dangerous member of the society; he frequently did this by giving Mr. Willoughby a substitute for the frenzied delights of high play, by inducing Isabella to sit down to her instrument, and to accompany her music by her voice. This was an attraction which could draw him at any time away from every other, except the conversation of Lady Charlotte, who appeared every passing day, to add a link to the chains which she was throwing around him.

Mr. Burghley it is true found the gratification of more than one inclination, in practising this diversion in favour of Isabella. His boyish dislike to Lady Charlotte was increased tenfold by all that was now passing before his eyes; and it was delicious to him to mortify Lady Charlotte, and to serve Isabella at the same time; and when to this was

added the defeat of what he could not but consider as the nefarious designs of Mr. Stanton upon the purse of Mr. Willoughby, his happiness was complete.

When the sounds of Isabella's harp, or the strains of her voice, caused Mr. Willoughby to play the wrong card, or suspended the impassioned attention with which he was listening to Lady Charlotte, Mr. Burghley's eye sparkled with pleasure; and when Mr. Willoughby said, "No more now, Stanton; I can play no more now"—or when he broke in upon Lady Charlotte's eloquence with, "Come, let us listen to Isabella; I really had no conception of the powers of her voice or her knowledge of music," Mr. Burghley was ready to dance for joy.

Lady Charlotte was too acute not to see all this, and in consequence she hated Mr. Burghley with a most devout hatred.

Mr. Willoughby's taste for music was genuine and correct, and it had been cultivated from his youth; but though he knew that Isabella was considered as being peculiarly accomplished in this science, yet he had never hitherto had inclination nor leisure to attend to her. There were too many public sources of this kind of gratification in London, to leave any want of it at home; and Isabella, whose retiring nature made her averse from all public exhibition, was scarcely ever a performer elsewhere. In Mr. Willoughby's more peculiar society therefore Lady Charlotte bore away the palm in all such exhibitions; and Mr. Willoughby little suspected how much she could have been excelled by Isabella.

But the scene was now changed: Isabella, in her own house, and at the request of her friends, could have no motive or inclination to decline displaying her powers, both of voice and finger.

The various and excellent musical instruments which were to be found in almost every room at Eagle's Crag, enabled her to gratify the divers tastes of her auditors, from the sublimity of the organ to the light gaiety of the country dance.

She was always ready to comply with the wishes of any one who found their gratification in musical sounds; and not the less so from the effect, that with equal pleasure and surprise, she perceived that her skill and excelling powers had upon Mr. Willoughby.

"My dear Isabella," would he say, "you astonish me; I did not know that you could thus 'take the prisoned soul and lap it in elysium.' It must be this northern air that has had such an effect on your voice; or have you some 'little seraph that sits up on high,' and sends forth such sweet tones, while you only move your lips?"

Isabella blushed, as though Mr. Willoughby had been making love to her; and in truth it was much more like love making than she had ever before heard from his mouth.

"Is not the change more in you than in me?" asked she, smiling.

"I know not," replied Mr. Willoughby; "I would it might be so! you astonish me in a thousand ways. I believe I must make you my bailiff, my house steward, and my head musician; and if what Roberts says, and what I see and hear, is not waking visions, but sober sound reality, I certainly could not do a wiser thing."

"Might not the title of friend," said Isabella, "express in one word the earnestness of the wish to serve and please you? and perhaps in this case explain all the powers that I can boast, and which you so kindly magnify beyond their natural size?"

"Would I were worthy of such a friend," said Mr. Willoughby with a sigh.

Oh, would to God that you really prized the blessing! thought Isabella, and sighed too — the time *may* come! and with that thought she cleared her over-shadowed brow.

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CHAP. XXXV.

“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.”

SHAKSPEARE.

BY such anticipations, by the support that she felt in Sir Charles's discreet sagacity, and the more open efforts of Mr. Burghley in her favour, Isabella found herself enabled to go through, day after day, the various mortifications and tormenting apprehensions to which she was perpetually exposed. She believed that it was almost impossible that the present order of things should continue. She thought that it could not be that Lady Charlotte, under any pretence whatever, could maintain her post much longer; and she entertained a daily expectation that the next morning would announce her intended departure.

This expectation, however, became fainter and fainter, when she saw that although the perpetual ill-humour of Mr. Dunstan shewed that he was as little satisfied with Lady Charlotte as Isabella herself could be! yet that, notwithstanding the never-ceasing war between him and Lady Charlotte on every other point, they appeared to agree in a mutual desire to remain where they were.

Mr. Dunstan amused himself with field sports all the morning; returned to indulge in the pleasures of the table; and filled up the evening between the whist-table and in saying ill-natured things to Lady Charlotte; or in talking of the great people who were in despair that they could not get him amongst them; and in assuring Mr. Willoughby that he would not leave his society for that of the first duke in the kingdom.

Lady Charlotte also had a three-fold office; the separate parts of which she filled with equal zeal and spirit. The mornings were dedicated to cajoleries with Isabella; the dinner-hour to sarcasms on her husband; and the evenings were given to the most undisguised coquetry with Mr. Willoughby; and, because undisguised, could not be supposed otherwise than innocent. With Isabella she could even advance a claim of merit for such flirtations. It was wholly to amuse Mr. Willoughby—wholly for the purpose of keeping him satisfied with his continued absence from the dangerous habits of a London life.

“I know, my dear,” she would say to Isabella, “that *we* are living here just now at an enormous expense; but what is it to what would be incurred in town? And *there*, now the Herefordshire house is sold, you must go immediately on leaving Westmoreland. I tell Willoughby so every day. But I don't tell him that I hope soon to wean him from the necessity of being always surrounded by such numbers of people, who consume his fat beeves and drink his wines at such an immoderate rate. But you will see, my dear, that this will soon be over. Our constant guests are thinning every day; and what with your music, my dear, and my nonsense, I hope we shall be able to do garrison duty ourselves; and then, I really cannot contemplate anything more agreeable or comfortable than our snug little party. I include Sir Charles Seymour, of course; may be for weeks to come. And, my dear, we will live only upon Westmoreland mutton and potatoes, with their ‘boiled up berries,’ and bid defiance to impertinents and *ennui*, even if we should be snowed up. But I entreat you get rid of that intolerable rattle Burghley first. He will never

be content without some foolery is going on, nor without a regiment of fools like himself at his heels."

When Lady Charlotte undertook to converse with Isabella, she was generally obliged to content herself with being chief speaker; to harangue, rather than to take part in a dialogue. Isabella usually heard her in silence, answered her with a civil monosyllable or two, and, as soon as possible, found herself some occupation that separated them.

But these monologues of Lady Charlotte were by no means useless to Isabella. They often let in upon her a ray of light, which she would have wanted without them; and nothing kept alive in her breast any degree of distrust of Sir Charles's integrity, but the toleration that Lady Charlotte extended to the constant protection that he gave to Isabella, even to Lady Charlotte's disadvantage. Mr. Burghley was the object of her avowed hostility for offences of the same nature; and as Isabella knew that Lady Charlotte's penetration and pride would be to the full as much awake in the one case as in the other, so was she sure that Sir Charles would not have escaped her resentment if there had not been some sinister motive to bribe her to forbearance. The never failing to include Sir Charles as one of the family party, and the continually designating him as Isabella's friend, made her still more upon her guard against him. An incident that occurred at this time awakened anew all the suspicion which she had ever entertained of the evil that might, under the fairest aspect, lurk at his heart.

Isabella had occasion to remark that the name of Parr was not acceptable to Mr. Willoughby, and that he seemed still to entertain some suspicion of his sinister influence over her mind. She imputed this to his attributing Mr. Parr's refusal to visit at Eagle's Crag at this time to some injurious opinion adopted by him of Lady Charlotte's character. Nor was she mistaken in this supposition. Such was the impression that rested on the mind of Mr. Willoughby; and his knight-errantry called upon him to resent this, as he maintained it to be a most unjust, and narrow-minded imputation; and he had manifested his resentment not only in slighting expressions of Mr. Parr, but in never having condescended to shew him the most trifling civility, making him the only exception to a most gracious and open-hearted recognition of every former friend and acquaintance who had ever been honoured by the regard of his parents.

"He has refused to come near us; I shall not presume to intrude upon his privacy," would he say; "and I have reason to believe that our society is not suited to his taste."

Lady Charlotte had evidently shewn that she partook of Mr. Willoughby's suspicions, and the indignation that they had excited; and Isabella, feeling how grounded such reasons for Mr. Parr's absenting himself really were, could not but admit the probability that he was in fact actuated by them; and in adopting this explanation of his conduct, she lost sight of the one that her own penetration had at first suggested. Feeling, therefore, that she could not with truth, or with likelihood of success, attempt to subdue the prejudices of Mr. Willoughby, she had thought it best quietly to give way to them; and by never bringing Mr. Parr or his daughter under observation, to let all recollection of them, if possible, slip out of the minds both of Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby. In pursuance of this object she had carefully abstained from all personal intercourse with Fell-beck, and had restrained her notice of her friends there to a few friendly words addressed to Catherine, or some share of the dainties which now abounded at Eagle's Crag.

Thus it happened that the name of Parr had ceased to be mentioned; and not only might Isabella have had no such friends, but such people might never have existed.

All, however, that Isabella's discretion had suggested to keep them out of notice was rendered vain by the enthusiastic feelings and open temper of Mr. Burghley. His passion for the romantic scenes with which he was surrounded made him pass almost the whole of his mornings in scrambling over the rocks and torrents in the vicinity; and his first burst into conversation when he appeared at dinner, was generally a rapturous description of what he had been exploring during the preceding hours.

Hitherto his transports had been confined to the beauties of inanimate nature; but one memorable day he had no sooner taken his usual place on the left hand of Isabella, than, with an eye even more on fire than common, and a heightened colour, he cried out,

"My dear Mrs. Willoughby, by what other divinity are these solitudes of yours inhabited? I had thought you sole goddess here; but I have today seen such a creature!

'Oh! ne'er did Grecian chisel trace
So fair a form, so sweet a face.'

"False quotation, Burghley; and as false admiration, I suspect," said Lady Charlotte, with a disdainful tone. "An over-heated imagination, like an over-heated furnace, always mars what it touches."

"Oh! I bow to the sublime rationality of Lady Charlotte Dunstan!" returned Mr. Burghley. "But I would not advise you to put your foot into the circle of my goddess, for all that."

"What neat-herd's daughter have you seen, Burghley," said Mr. Willoughby, laughing, "whose ruddy cheeks and black eyes your fancy has turned into charms of ethereal mould?"

"Oh! she is nothing earthly!" said Mr. Burghley.

A hair-brain'd sentimental trace
Was strongly marked in her face;
Her eye e'en turn'd on empty space
Beam'd keen with honour.
Down flow'd her robe, a tartan sheen ——

"Mad! absolutely mad!" cried Sir Charles Seymour, interrupting him.

"I suspect not sir," said a respectable looking old gentleman at the bottom of the table. "By the young gentleman's description I conceive he may have fallen in with Miss Parr; by her maternal descent she is of Scottish extraction, and therefore it is not unlikely but that she may affect the dress of her ancestors. I have heard that she does inherit her mother's beauty; God give her better fortunes! not to say better conduct."

"Ha, ha," said Lady Charlotte, "these northern solitudes, I perceive, are not more free from tales of scandal than the peopled haunts of busy men;—pray, sir, tell me all about it?" turning eagerly to the old gentleman, who was placed by her side.

"Your ladyship will excuse me," returned he solemnly; "charity covereth a multitude of sins; and all is oblivion in the grave!"

"Now could I hug that delectable old Nestor," said Mr. Burghley, in a low voice to Isabella; but she heard him not. Her whole attention was engrossed by Sir Charles Seymour, whose trembling hand, and varying countenance, now pale, now glowing, spoke the emotion of his mind.

Entire conviction flashed on the mind of Isabella, that she was at that very moment sitting by the seducer of the unfortunate Morna, and the destroyer of the happiness of her highly valued friend Mr. Parr. She drew her flowing garment closer around her, as if shrinking from the touch of something noxious; and shuddered with the remembrance how lately she had listened to such a man with complacency, and regarded him with confidence.

Mr. Burghley's quick sense saw in the twinkling of an eye that something was wrong; and filling a glass of wine, and bowing to the old gentleman, "Then here's to the oblivion of all faults and follies," said he, "and mine amongst the rest."

Sir Charles pledged him, with an almost hysteric laugh, and the subject was dropped.

But the effect had sunk deep into the heart of Isabella. The more she reflected, the more she was convinced that she had not wronged Sir Charles by the suspicions to which she had given way: but was it equally certain that a lapse of years had made no change in his character or principles? Was it fair to condemn him now for an offence committed so long since, and which, for anything she knew, might have been repented in bitterness of spirit? But, without such a proof of his dereliction of integrity, had she not repeatedly had reason to be displeased with him on her own account? And could she trust even to the fairer appearances of later days, when there was too much cause to apprehend that such appearances were assumed to cover the basest purposes?

The result of these reflections was a resolution to be more than ever on her guard against Sir Charles, and to get rid of Lady Charlotte as soon as it was possible.

CHAP. XXXVI.

“All with me’s meet, that I can fashion it.”

SHAKSPEARE.

ISABELLA had additional cause for being confirmed in both these purposes within the next eight and forty hours.

Wearied by the continual effort to which she was now called, let who would be her companion, she resolved to give herself a few hours’ suspension from such a state of exertion, by one of those morning excursions with her boy, which had made the happiest parts of her life previous to the arrival of Mr. Willoughby. She therefore ordered the nurse to be with the child at the garden entrance into the park, accompanied by the nursery girl and the pony; for as she did not purpose to go to any great distance from home, she ventured to dispense with the attendance of the footman, who had now little leisure from the necessary duties of his office. Her wish was to avoid, if possible, meeting with any individual of the company that was at present assembled at Eagle’s Crag; and she therefore silently withdrew herself from the crowd, before the morning arrangements that generally took place immediately after breakfast had been made; and joining the little party at the place appointed, struck directly out of the common paths and resorts of the park, into a wild and sequestered dell, where, by the height and thickness of shelter from the northern blasts, and the exposure to a southern sun, she would be secure of a warm and cheerful spot either for exercise or rest.

It was here that she had enjoyed two hours of the most perfect repose, and of the purest delight, in an abstraction from her usual state of contending feelings, and in witnessing the health, hilarity, and enjoyment of her boy. He was all life, laugh, and intelligence; and his animated actions, and his imperfect sounds, were to her the model of all grace, and the consummation of all human wit.

Seated on a dry bank, at the edge of the thickest part of the forest that overshadowed them, she was watching the child consume the last morsels of the meal which her foresight had provided for him, when a rustling amongst the trees behind her, occasioned her to look up; and she beheld a remarkably large and fierce-looking red stag, upon a high trot, in the immediate direction of the whole group.

“Fly, fly!” cried she to the nurse: and at the same moment threw herself directly before the animal, and was the next laid low by his branching horns, and trodden under his feet. In this instant of imminent peril, the screams of the flying nurse and girl offered but faint hopes of assistance; and had Isabella had time for thought, she must have given herself up for lost. But in fewer moments than the story takes in telling, the stag had been seen. Isabella had fallen under his attack, and she had found herself safe, and her enemy lying dead by her side!

“Merciful Heaven!” said she, “to whom do I owe such a deliverance?”

“To one,” said a voice but too well known to her, “who would have thought his life a cheap purchase, had it preserved yours.”

“Sir Charles Seymour;” said Isabella; “how came you here?”

“By a miracle, no doubt,” replied Sir Charles. “But, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, do you rather question how I came, than rejoice that I am here?”

“But at such a moment!” said Isabella; “in a place so retired? when I thought myself so entirely alone! how came it, that I did not see you when I first saw the stag? and yet that you should be so near that you could shoot him through the head at so critical an instant?”

“Take my arm, I beg you will take my arm,” said Sir Charles; “you tremble; you must be bruised; as we walk homewards I will tell you all. Come, let me assist to mount your nurse and your little boy; and they may trot on before us, and send you Lady Charlotte’s little carriage; for you ought not to have so long a walk after such a fright. I thank God that there seems to be neither dislocation nor sprain.”

“I will not separate myself from my boy,” said Isabella, fervently. “I will carry him myself on the pony, for the nurse trembles sadly; and if you will be so kind as to guard us home, I shall be much obliged to you.”

“And yet,” said Sir Charles, looking at her with a scrutinising eye, “you have not yet thanked me for saving your life.”

Isabella cast down her eyes. “Can you doubt,” said she, “whether I feel the obligation? add to it, I beseech you, by conducting us home in safety; never again will I seek the solitudes of the park; I see that they are beset by dangers.”

“Dangers indeed!” replied Sir Charles. “If a melancholy mood had not sent me into these solitudes this morning, with my gun in my hand, I should by this time have been the most miserable of men!”

Isabella made no reply; fearing by farther exertion to increase the trembling and sickness of which she now became so sensible that she feared she should not be able to retain her seat on the pony, or to hold her child.

Sir Charles watched her looks with the most attentive solicitude; and, suddenly stopping the horse, which he was leading by the bridle, “You are ill,” said he; “you must alight; you must suffer the servants to go forward, and bring you a carriage.”

But the fear of being left alone with Sir Charles, overcame, with Isabella, every other fear; and calling all the powers of her mind to her aid, she said, “I am better! — pray go on gently; and in a few minutes I shall be well.”

At the same time she delivered the child to the nurse; and rubbing her temples and the palms of her hands with lavender-water, she found herself relieved; and presently after, perfectly re-assured as to her ability to proceed homewards without any farther assistance.

Both sides preserved an almost uninterrupted silence. The presence of the servants restrained Sir Charles in whatever he might have wished to say; and Isabella was too much afraid of exhausting her spirits, and too much disturbed in mind, to be willing or able to say much: but, on her dismounting from her horse, she said, “Mr. Willoughby shall thank you for my safety; I feel that my thanks would be very inadequate to the value of the obligation I owe you.”

“And yet,” returned Sir Charles, “cruel and ungrateful as you are! your thanks are the only reward that I either desire or expect.”

“Allow me to quit you,” said Isabella. “My limbs tremble; I must lie down.” And, so saying, she took hold of the nursery girl’s arm, and withdrew into the house.

The report of the danger that Isabella had incurred, soon spread through the whole household; and the anxiety of Mrs. Evans for the safety of her lady, brought her immediately to Isabella’s apartment. The external injuries that had been received were

small; a few scratches and slight bruises made the sum of them. To these, Mrs. Evans applied her surgical skill; but feeling more alarm from the agitated state in which she saw Isabella, than from any of the contusions that she had received, she added to the gold-beaters skin and Hungary water, camphorated julep and lavender-drops, and recommended a recumbent posture, and perfect quiet for a few hours. To all this Isabella submitted; and the more willingly, as she learnt from Mrs. Evans, that neither Mr. Willoughby nor Lady Charlotte were within, they having driven out in Lady Charlotte's carriage about an hour before. Isabella therefore hoped that by the means of remaining quiet she should be quite recovered before their return, and able to treat the whole matter as an event that had left no consequences behind it. But before she retired to rest, she naturally went into the nursery to look once more on her boy, of whose escape she thought much more than of her own.

Nothing could be thought or talked of but the adventure of the morning; and the nurse and the girl were describing with gesticulation and eloquence the spot on which all had happened; and detailing their own danger, and their own terrors, and their wonder that Isabella had not run away too, but had actually thrown herself quite under the foot of the mad creature. Isabella's appearance cut the narrators suddenly short in their story, and caused their auditors to break up the circle which they had formed around them: "Don't go," said Isabella, good-naturedly: "I shall not be here a moment; and I am sure you must all long to know how your young master was saved so providentially."

"Why to be sure, ma'am," said the nurse; "it was the good Providence that put it into my head to tell that good gentleman, as I stood waiting with the pony, and because he asked me, that you were going to be all the morning in the park. But how he came to know just where, and just at that lucky moment, I don't know, for I did not tell him, because you know, ma'am, I could not; not knowing myself."

Isabella scarcely wanted this confirmation of her suspicions, that Sir Charles's coming was not accidental; that she had been watched by him, and that it must have been his purpose to have fastened himself on her as her companion in her walk home. What farther he could hope, she scarcely dared to conjecture; but she could not resist the impression, that on his former forbearance and respect, he had grounded an opinion that he had made an interest in her heart, and had thrown her off her guard; and that it would not be difficult to bring her to a more explicit avowal of her sentiments, and that this had been the time when he resolved to put the matter to an issue, and openly to plead for her favour.

This thought discomposed her more than all Mrs. Evans's sedatives had contributed to the quieting of the nerves; and after embracing her boy, and shedding over him some bitter tears, from thinking to what insults she was exposed by the neglect of her husband; she withdrew to try what perfect stillness would do for her.

It had had the usual effect of composing her fluttered spirits, when the hasty steps of Mr. Willoughby along the gallery, caused her to arouse herself from her couch, and to advance to meet him. But all her agitation returned, when she beheld him trembling, pale, and speechless! while he clasped her fervently to his heart, and, bursting into a passion of tears, she heard him ejaculate blessing on Sir Charles Seymour, and thanks to the Giver of all good.

Astonished; and transported with a sense of happiness which she had never known before, Isabella clung to Mr. Willoughby in all the confidence of acceptable love.

"My dear, dear Willoughby!" cried she, "be composed! be happy! such moments repay, a thousand fold, the alarm and danger that I have undergone."

"Oh thou preserver of my boy!" said he; "how shall I thank you, or chide you enough for the hazard to which you exposed yourself to save him!"

"Every mother would have done as much," said Isabella. "Every father could have done more."

"Let us look upon our dear rescued jewel together," said Mr. Willoughby; "he must be early taught at how great a price his life might have been redeemed."

Isabella hanging upon her husband's arm accompanied him to the nursery, and there passed a few of the most delicious moments of her life.

"Are you well enough to go down stairs?" said Mr. Willoughby; "you have other friends who long to congratulate you upon your escape. Lady Charlotte says that she shall not be able to believe that you are alive, till she sees you walk, and hears your voice."

So, thought Isabella, fade all my joys! yet her answer was a ready acquiescence in his request; and they went together to the library.

Here Isabella had to undergo the painful effort of receiving with apparent thankfulness, congratulations which she knew were hollow; and of listening to the studied details of Sir Charles, by which he explained very satisfactorily to all but Isabella, the "luckiest chance in the world," that brought him to her rescue at so critical a moment. Mr. Willoughby seemed never to be able to satisfy himself with the expression of his gratitude. He varied it in an hundred different ways; and if he had had a kingdom to have divided, would have said with Herod, "ask what thou wilt, and it shall be given thee, to the half of my kingdom." He gave orders immediately for a gala through the whole house, and seemed to consign himself wholly to the gaiety and happiness which so wonderful an escape from misery was so well fitted to inspire.

It seemed, however, as if Sir Charles was willing to intimate to Isabella that the most lively feelings, were not always the deepest. He took the tone of sentiment; he remained tremulous and pensive, and let it be seen that he was so from the terror impressed upon his mind by the danger that had threatened Isabella. "Those may rejoice in mirth," said he, "that did not witness the horrible scene; but for me!" and on the slightest renewed allusion to the subject he would cry, "for God's sake don't name it! — it haunts me night and day! — the scene is constantly before my eyes! — good God! — a moment later, and all would have been over."

Isabella could scarcely help reproaching herself for ingratitude in being unable to repay so much gallantry, and suffering by nothing more than a simple acknowledgement of obligation; but in spite of the plausibility by which he accounted for his sudden appearance, and the little claim that he seemed to establish on her favour from the service he had rendered her, she could not but feel that there was affectation in the effect that he pretended the incident had had on his feelings; nor resist the conviction that there had been design in the whole transaction; and that not improbably he had been the cause of the very mischief which he so much gloried in having been the instrument to avert.

Under these thoughts she grew impatient in his society, and her wishes to see the departure both of him and Lady Charlotte took place of every other desire; but she soon found that there was less likelihood than ever of so happy a consummation.

CHAP. XXXVII.

“Can’st thou know peace? is conscience mute
within?”
SHAKSPEARE.

THE intimacy between Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby became every day more and more confirmed; more and more open. Long morning walks *tête-à-tête* were avowed; the evening conversations were more exclusive than ever, and Lady Charlotte’s natural harshness of manner, seemed softened to something approaching to tenderness.

Mr. Willoughby had said to Isabella, “I think we cannot do better than to endeavour to prevail upon Dunstan and Lady Charlotte to take up their winter abode with us. We shall then be able to make head against the dreariness of its long evenings and snowy days; and it will be extremely convenient to me, not to go to town this year.”

“I should not be afraid of encountering all the dreariness of Eagle’s Crag with you alone for my companion,” returned Isabella; “and would not the advantage of such a withdrawal from the expenses of London be much enhanced by the reduction of those that would be incurred by such an addition to our family as you propose?”

“Oh, all expenses would soon come to an end in that case,” replied Mr. Willoughby; “for I should certainly hang or drown myself in a fortnight. The alternative is society here, or ruin in London.”

“Do not terrify me,” said Isabella.

“Is there any thing terrific,” said Mr. Willoughby, “in passing a few months here in good company; with good fires; good cheer; and your delicious music? this is what I offer you, and if you will accept it, all will be well; then time will bring every thing round. I have talked the matter over with Roberts; but to re-establish ourselves in town just now would undo all.”

“I much doubt,” replied Isabella, “that a few months of such seclusion as you propose will do any thing. You have imputed to me more than my due, in the attention that I have been drawn to give to circumstances which I could have been well content should never have come under my observation; but from the knowledge that I have attained, I cannot believe that the evil is of so light a nature as to be cured by abstaining one single season from the expenses of a London residence.”

“You do not know my resources,” replied Mr. Willoughby; “but we will talk of such things another time. I only mentioned the subject incidentally now, to know if you would object to domesticating the Dunstons with us for sometime to come. I dare say I could prevail with them to oblige us, if you make no objection.”

“I never shall make an objection to what is agreeable to you,” said Isabella; “except I am compelled to the cruel option of chusing between your wishes and your welfare.”

“Then the thing is decided,” replied Mr. Willoughby; “for in this case they go together. The Dunstons shall stay with us.”

“And Sir Charles Seymour?” said Isabella.

“Oh, that must be as he likes,” said Mr. Willoughby. “I wish to God I knew how to show my gratitude for the inestimable blessing he has preserved to me; but his remaining here would only add to the obligation. Yet he would certainly be a very

agreeable addition to our party, especially as Burghley leaves us to-morrow; but we can hardly expect that Sir Charles should make us such a sacrifice."

"I really do not see why we should desire it," replied Isabella; "and I shall be glad to find that he is not willing to offer it."

"And yet you do not seem much to delight in Dunstan," said Mr. Willoughby.

"I do not know who does," replied Isabella. "I should have thought that you would have found him a very heavy weight in a *tête-à-tête*."

"I will take care that we are never reduced to that;" said Mr. Willoughby; "but do you make nothing of yourself, and Lady Charlotte?"

"You have given me little cause to depend upon my powers to preserve you from *ennui*," said Isabella, yielding to a sadness of feeling, which at that moment she was not able to resist.

Mr. Willoughby looked earnestly at her. "Those words are not in your usual spirit," said he.

"Then, if they displease you, be kind enough to forget them;" said Isabella.

"I think you could not mean to reproach me?" said Mr. Willoughby.

"Be assured that I did not," said Isabella. "If *there be* a fault it is probably mine; and I am sure it was involuntary."

"But why so serious? why so sad, my love?" said he.

"Oh, Willoughby!" cried Isabella; "but forgive me: I would not offend you! I would not give you pain!"

"Forgive *you*!" said Mr. Willoughby; "alas, I fear that I have most cause to ask forgiveness! but in this embrace," cried he, clasping her to his heart, "be all misapprehension forgotten. I know your virtues; be candid to my faults, and I hope that we shall neither of us have any reason to complain."

Is it possible, thought Isabella, that he can at this moment be conscious that he injures me? Can he premeditatedly intend to injure me? I will not believe it. Yet to what a fiery trial does he expose us both!

Isabella, who was naturally tenacious of her sincerity, would have disdained to have sacrificed an atom of it to propitiate Lady Charlotte. She did not acknowledge the necessity of being civil at whatever cost of truth; and she suffered the arrangement thus notified to her by Mr. Willoughby, as it had been made without her concurrence, to take place without any observation on her part. She thought that she read in Lady Charlotte's countenance when they met, an expectation that she would speak on the subject: she was but the more disinclined to do so; and on her continued silence, she saw, not without some degree of triumph and pleasure, the expectation give place to disappointment and chagrin.

"Have you seen Willoughby lately?" said Lady Charlotte.

"Yes," replied Isabella.

"Then I suppose you know,—I conclude that he has told you, that he,—that we,—that you,—in short, my dear creature, I really have been obliged to comply with his so earnestly urged request, that we will remain here a little longer; indeed I know it will be the best thing for you both: and I have always told you that you might command me for any period that you chose. But I did not think Dunstan would have been prevailed on. Poor creature! he does so long to be amongst his Lords and his Dukes! but I saw that if we had gone, Willoughby would have gone too; and whether with or without you, my

dear, I can assure you, appeared problematical; but in either case the ruin would have been complete. You have not the art of controlling Willoughby's excursions; the great matter is to keep him in the country till old habits are a little broken; and you know you are not to mind us. We will have no more feasting; no second courses; mutton and potatoes, as I told you before, and a little soup will do as well for four as two: so it will be all economy, and you and I must do the best we can to make the time pass easily, if not merrily."

"Mr. Willoughby," said Isabella, "has been so kind as to give me his reasons for what has been arranged; and I have acquiesced in them. As to the economy of my family, I hope I shall be able to make it such as Mr. Willoughby will approve."

"Well, my dear, you are a good creature, that's the truth of it," returned Lady Charlotte, with a look of contempt; "but I sometimes fancy I can see a little of the wolf under the sheep's clothing. I perceive you are resolved not to tell me you shall be glad of my company."

"As I cannot flatter myself that my society has made any part of your motives for remaining at Eagle's Crag," returned Isabella, "you must pardon me, if I do not trouble you with any opinion as to the effect that yours will have upon me."

"Oh, I do assure you," cried Lady Charlotte, her eyes flashing fire, "that I am quite indifferent as to any of your opinions. I wrap myself up in my own integrity; and in the consciousness that under the sanction of your mother and mine, I am doing the best thing for Willoughby, and of course for you. But what do you intend to do with Sir Charles? after all your obligations to him, I hope you design to be a little more civil to him than you are to me?"

"Sir Charles will do what he best likes with himself," said Isabella; "and I cannot suppose that *his* friendship for Mr. Willoughby will induce him to rusticate in Westmoreland."

"Perhaps," said Lady Charlotte, with a sneer, "his friendship for *you* might exact such a sacrifice; to whom will he delegate the office of shooting red stags for you, when he is gone? and what will you do without such a valiant defender?"

"When that becomes the question," returned Isabella, wholly unmoved, "I shall know how to reply. As I do not wish *any body* to *sacrifice* themselves for Mr. Willoughby, so I will take care that no body *shall* sacrifice themselves for me."

Lady Charlotte felt awed by the dignity and spirit with which Isabella spoke:

"Come, come," said she, "don't let you and me quarrel. You know my hot way; but you know that it is only a flash in the pan, and its all over."

"I quarrel with no body," said Isabella, regardless of Lady Charlotte's outstretched hand; "and I give my friendship only to those I think worthy of it." And so saying she quietly withdrew.

"Oh, now I could destroy her!" said Lady Charlotte. And the words were not uttered when Sir Charles entered the room.

"Against whom are you meditating such vengeance?" said he.

"Against your idol!" returned Lady Charlotte. "That little detestable puritan, Isabella Willoughby; never, never will I forgive her for bearing that name!"

"I would I could assist you in making her lose it," replied Sir Charles; "but the truth is, it is a little frost piece that there is no melting by kindness. I frightened myself half out of my wits, in hopes of frightening her out of the whole of hers; that I might have

the merit of rescuing her from a danger of my own creating. There is not one woman in ten who would not have thrown herself into my arms out of gratitude; for when a man has saved a lady's life, there is nothing that she thinks she ought to refuse him. But she thought of nothing but throwing herself under the feet of the monster to save her boy; and scarcely seemed to care that her life had not been the sacrifice. She neither fainted, nor lost her presence of mind; but arose from the ground with all her senses about her, to question why and how I came there; instead of clinging round me in fear, or in thankfulness for what I had made her undergo, or for what I had saved her from."

"Oh, you made a fine piece of work there!" said Lady Charlotte; "exalted all her heroic qualities in the eyes of Willoughby; and even given her a hold upon his imagination, that were it not for my counter-working, might have been formidable."

"Well," returned Sir Charles, "if she is as cold as ice, she is also as fragile; and who knows but between us we may reduce her to nothing. I owe her a little ill-will; if she has not heart to win, she has one to break."

"Heart!" returned Lady Charlotte; "she has no heart! with her mincing duties! and regulated affections! who but she could bear to see Willoughby's passion for me with that unmoved countenance and unvarying demeanour? If I could but see her writhe upon the hook, I should be happy!"

"She may feel it as acutely, without making faces," replied Sir Charles; "but I suspect she does not think so much of resenting the evils as of remedying it. She may think that the day may at last be her own."

"She dare not!" replied Lady Charlotte; "she cannot have the presumption to think so."

"Yet there are symptoms," replied Sir Charles, "that Willoughby is opening his eyes, not only to her virtues, but her charms; you have yourself seen them."

"How dare you tell me so?" said Lady Charlotte. "Is it not enough that his foolish prudence robbed me of him as a husband? because, in sooth, I was not gentle, and meek, and mild enough; that is, not such a hypocrite, as the doll he chose; but do you so abet her pretensions, as to presume to insinuate that she will be able to deprive me of him as a lover?"

"I presume nothing," said Sir Charles; "but the game is up with us both, if we do not carry our point by a *coup-de-main*; if we do not look about us, with all our activity, the tortoise will win the race."

"What more can be done, that we have not done?" said Lady Charlotte. "Have not I been attacking her with jealousy on one side, and you with adulation on the other, for this month past? and what have we gained? she neither hates me, nor loves you; and I verily believe, if I were such a fool, I might run away with Willoughby, and she not care a pin about the matter."

"And I believe it would be the best step you could take to bring about both our ends," said Sir Charles. "It is possible that despair and revenge might yield me that, which I am farther off than ever from being likely to attain by gentler means."

"Why farther off than ever?" returned Lady Charlotte; "surely she is not so little of a woman, as not to have felt the perpetual immolation of my rights that you have been making on the altar of her vanity ever since we have been here. Let me tell you, Seymour, I have found it hard enough to bear, even while it seemed to forward my own views; but if you have been such a bungler as to have done all this in vain, there is nothing on earth

that I shall hate so much as you, except that insolent creature who will then triumph over us both."

"Isabella," returned Sir Charles, "has her own point, as well as you and I have ours. This point is to possess herself of the heart of her husband; and to recall him, as she would phrase it, from the error of his ways. While any hope of attaining this point remains, she will neither be turned out of the even path by jealousy, nor seduced from it by adulation; but despair and resentment may still be her ruin. The business be yours by some decisive step, to deprive her of all hope; and leave me to reap the advantage of her anger and desperation; and then we shall both have what we wish."

"And suppose you are so clumsy as not to know how to do so? what will be my situation? I tell you, Seymour, as I have told you an hundred times, I will not play the fool for any man that cannot marry me."

"But you would jingle your bells for one that could? would you not?" said Sir Charles.

"I do not know what I might not be tempted to do, that would rid me of my present plague. You must confess he grows quite intolerable; and is become so snappish and authoritative, that if I did not suspend the rod of his papa, the earl, over his head, there would be no living with him."

"Why yes, I do believe you would find Willoughby the gentler ruler of the two," said Sir Charles.

"No doubt!" said Lady Charlotte; "besides, he is not an idiot like Dunstan. I can speak and be understood. Oh, the misery of being 'over-mastered by a piece of valiant dust!' 'to make an account of one's life to a piece of wayward marle!' and, Oh the folly of our laws that binds me for ever to such servitude, or presents an alternative that no woman of common sense would pass *par là* to her wishes."

"It is no part of common sense," said Sir Charles, "to remain always hesitating; either forego the chase or seize the prey: why endure the misery you talk of any longer? the remedy is in your own hands; but you must make the first step: I will ensure you the second, and the third crowns your wishes."

"The first step ought to be yours," replied Lady Charlotte; "and I despise you for not having got more secure footing already; and what can you mean by being father off than ever? I don't understand you."

"It is not necessary that you should," replied Sir Charles; "but I tell you again, that the game is up, except you make some decisive step."

"Well, something must be done," said Lady Charlotte; "there is no going on to be disdained, and triumphed over by a creature that I could crush to atoms any moment that I please. *If* she has a heart to break, I will break it, or compel her to yield the prize for which we have so long contended."

"Bravely resolved!" said Sir Charles; "about it then! and victory attend you!"

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY J. NICHOLS AND SON, PARLIAMENT-STREET.

ISABELLA.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "RHODA," &c.

"Take, if you can, ye careless and supine,
Counsel and caution from a voice like mine.
Truths that the theorist could never reach,
And observation taught me,—I teach."

COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR HENRY COLBURN AND CO.

1823.

I S A B E L L A.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

“The gods are just, and of our present vices
Make instruments to plague and punish us.”

SHAKESPEARE.

IF appearances were to be trusted, Isabella at this period gave no great proof of the impassiveness which was so provoking to Lady Charlotte. When they met at dinner, her cheek was pale, and her eye depressed; she appeared abstracted, and had scarcely a smile even for the sallies of Mr. Burghley. From motives of delicacy, this ardent, but well-judging friend, while he endeavoured to dissipate her sadness, did not appear to notice it. Policy kept Sir Charles equally unobservant; nor did Mr. Willoughby let fall a word which could betray that he was aware of any change in her usual manner. But his eye was turned perpetually upon her; he was diligent to shew her every trifling attention; his discourse was directed to her, and in a tone that marked more affection than was his custom, except when they were alone.

Isabella was but too sensible of such marks of interest from the man whom she fondly loved; and whom the result of her solitary reflections but an hour before had taught her to believe was about to be torn from her for ever. Her hands trembled, her eyes filled with tears, and she was on the point of losing all self-command, when Mr. Dunstan's “wonder what *his Grace* will say to my spending my Christmas in this out-of-the-way place,” was received by Mr. Burghley with such a shout of laughter, so well echoed by the disdainful tones of Lady Charlotte and Sir Charles, that no pathos could stand before it. Even Isabella smiled; and thus having a moment in which she could recollect the scattered forces of her mind, she regained her power sufficiently to enter into general conversation, explaining the smile of which she was conscious, by saying, good-humouredly, to Mr. Dunstan, “the Duke cannot say less than that we are very attractive, and you very indulgent.”

“Yes, yes!” said Mr. Dunstan, who was always in good-humour with Isabella, because she alone treated him with uniform civility, “I dare say that is exactly what his Grace *will* say; and, indeed, it is a great deal the truth. You *do* contrive to make Eagle's Crag very agreeable; and, I am sure, there is nothing in my power, except quite breaking with the Duke, that I would not do to save you from the *ennui* of a *tête-à-tête*.”

Lady Charlotte's beautiful lips were drawn into a form which spoke the word fool! as plainly as if she had uttered it; and Mr. Burghley and Sir Charles again treating Mr. Dunstan with *cheers and laughter*, Isabella found the reins once again in her own hands, and resolved that if possible she would never again hold them so loosely.

The effect of the emotion that she had betrayed did not appear to pass so lightly from the mind of Mr. Willoughby. Contrary to his usual custom, it seemed to have made an impression on his feelings that proved he feared its cause or its consequences. She was his first object when, after a short separation, the party re-assembled over their coffee. He took a moment when Lady Charlotte was running over the keys of one of the musical instruments, to say to Isabella,

“You are uneasy: something disturbs you, you are not like yourself; it is impossible that you should suppose—I am sure your good sense and candour are above suspicion — you must do me the justice to believe that you are inexpressively dear to me; you cannot mistake compassion, and a fair appreciation of a thousand good qualities for any thing that can offend you. *She* is indeed to be pitied; you see how unequally she is yoked; and her fervent mind and warm feelings sometimes betray her into manners and expressions that nobody can condemn more sincerely than she does. She has not your command of mind; but you cannot be misled by all this. I am sure you know how to allow for weaknesses that you do not feel; and you must rather wish to aid, than to condemn my efforts to lighten so hard a lot. If any misapprehension has disturbed this just view of things, I beseech you to correct it. You have not a more sincere friend than Lady Charlotte; if there have been any fault or folly it is mine, not hers; pardon what is past, and trust me for the future.”

Mr. Willoughby might have spoken for ever. Isabella would not have dared to have trusted her voice in reply under the observation that was upon her; she pressed the hand which he held out to her tenderly between hers, and rising, went towards Lady Charlotte.

“I wish,” said she, “you would sing that little Scotch air, which you were singing the other night.”

Lady Charlotte looked up to Isabella with a cast of countenance that really terrified her.

“*You* wish that I would sing!” said she; “oh no! I know my own inferiority better. Nobody would listen to my voice, while they were wishing to hear yours.”

Good God! thought Isabella, can she be jealous of *me*?

Extraordinary as it may seem, this was really the case at this moment, even to the point of breaking out into fury. She beheld Sir Charles’s prophecy fast fulfilling, and she felt that if Mr. Willoughby *did* once open his eyes, not only to the virtues, but to the charms of Isabella, that she would rival her in his fancy, as she had before done in his judgment. What then was she? degraded even in her own eyes! disappointed in her revenge! the deserted, neglected, and triumphed-over creature which she had so long destined Isabella to be!

These thoughts passed like lightning through her brain, and seemed to set it on fire; she arose hastily from the instrument; but Sir Charles, who saw that she was ruining both his hopes and her own, laying his hand gently on hers, and as regardless of Isabella, as if there had not been such a creature in the world, he said,

“You do not thus escape; I would not forego the song you promised me for any gratification whatever.”

These words, accompanied by an intelligent pressure of her fingers, recalled her to common sense; and, resuming her seat, “well then, I will sing,” said she, “but I shall croak like a raven, for I have felt a cold coming all the evening.”

Nor did she undervalue her powers; the discord of her mind communicated itself to her touch and to her voice, and never did she make worse music.

“Lady Charlotte,” said Mr. Dunstan, “you play and sing horribly to-night; for pity’s sake have done.”

“You play like an angel!” said Sir Charles; “and sing like a seraph!” said Mr. Burghley laughing; “pray go on, were it only to convict Dunstan of having no ears.”

“Would he had no tongue!” said Lady Charlotte; and having given a little ease to her malignant heart by this morsel of mean spite, she sung her next song more like herself, and better deserved the plaudits that both Sir Charles and Mr. Burghley lavished upon her.

But from whence, thought Isabella, arises this change of scene?

She could easily account for Mr. Burghley’s part in the drama, as arising partly from roguery and partly from good-nature; but to find Sir Charles in open alliance with Lady Charlotte, and to see Mr. Willoughby remain throughout the whole inattentive to what passed, absorbed in his own thoughts, and indifferent alike to Lady Charlotte’s injuries and Lady Charlotte’s attractions, had in it something so new and so unaccountable, that she scarcely believed that she was not in a dream.

Is it possible, thought she, that my sorrows are passed? Is there no more in the connexion that has been so painful, than what has been represented? May I trust for the future?

“Now,” said Lady Charlotte to Isabella, and rising at the same time from her chair, “you really must take my place. You see how compliant I have been, even to my disgrace. You can fear no such consequence from obliging us.”

Isabella sat down, but she felt for a moment that she could not command a note. She struggled to resume her powers, and not wholly without success. She chose a little plaintive air, which required small compass of voice, but she sung it with so much expression, that, low as were the tones, they reached the ears and the heart of Mr. Willoughby. He was instantly by her side: but he listened in silence, and when she ceased singing returned to his place on the sofa, from whence he had been roused. He did not, however, again fall into a reverie; on the contrary, he took up a book, and appeared to be occupied in reading. The rest of the party fell almost into an equal silence, till Mr. Willoughby, as if suddenly becoming conscious of the general dulness, closed the volume, and said, “Burghley, do you really leave us to-morrow? Is it impossible that you should give us a little more of your enlivening company? It seems as if we should want it.”

“It seems rather as if it were given in vain,” returned Mr. Burghley, laughing; “but I assure you I should like nothing better than to continue your buffoon as long as you would tolerate me, if it could be. But I have played the truant too long; and although my good uncle never scolds, yet he can put his good-natured words into a certain form which I understand quite as well, and which I respect much more than I should all the scolding in the world; and his last letter shews me that he thinks it is high time that I was again in town.”

“We may as well go together then,” said Sir Charles, “if you have no objection, and don’t prefer your valet’s company to mine.”

“What! will you too leave us?” said Mr. Willoughby. “I thought we were sure of you, at least for another fortnight.”

“I thought so myself yesterday,” returned Sir Charles; “but my letters this morning have determined otherways, to my sincere regret, I assure you. But if you should not all tire of rustication, I hope I shall be able to get down to you again before it is long, and bring with me all the gossip and scandal of the town.”

“Oh! we shall have lost all taste for such things by that time,” returned Lady Charlotte. “We are going to be rational and good, *à merveille*.”

"*A merveille*, indeed!" returned Mr. Dunstan, with more than his usual quickness, though not with more than his usual good-nature, "if some of us are rational and good at all."

"You speak for yourself, I suppose," said Sir Charles, with a severe look; "and none of us are disposed to dispute your knowledge."

"Oh!" cried Mr. Dunstan, trying to get off from an antagonist whom he had by no means intended to provoke, "the present company, you know, is always excepted."

This confusion of ideas made Sir Charles and Mr. Burghley laugh; but Lady Charlotte's fiery eye had not yet withdrawn its indignant glance, which her husband's first speech had made her cast towards him; and Mr. Willoughby and Isabella appeared to be absorbed in their own thoughts.

Indeed, nothing could exceed the astonishment of the latter at what was passing before her. She had not dared to flatter herself that Sir Charles would leave them; and to find him determined to do, and with a tone of indifference so contrary to his usual manner, could not but suggest the suspicion that there was something more than an unexpected call to town which was the occasion of his doing so. That there was an intelligence between him and Lady Charlotte she could no longer doubt. She had heard the latter say, "you are right, there is not a moment to be lost;" and his reply, "hush;" shewed that he feared she might betray what she wished to conceal.

What could be the connexion between them? Her worst suspicions recurred; yet how were such base purposes to be forwarded by Sir Charles's withdrawing himself from Eagle's Crag? She was resolved to try him upon this point.

"We are then to lose you to-morrow, Sir Charles?" she said.

"Not if you command me to stay," said he.

"I am not used to command," replied Isabella.

"A wish would be sufficient," said Sir Charles.

"I have seen more powerful wishes than mine fail," said Isabella.

"More powerful! — Ah! whose can those be? — A word, a look would fix me to this spot, hard as it would be to witness what I must witness if I did stay, and which I dare not flatter myself I should be allowed to redress. But I shall offend you. In a word, I must be gone. That horrible scene in the park revealed to me a secret which, though it shall never pass my lips, warns me to be gone. I cannot imitate your heroism, and throw myself into the jaws of the lion, except it were to save something still dearer to the heart than even your divine little Godfrey."

These words were uttered as they stood a little apart; and Isabella had only to step back a few paces to be again in the hearing of the rest of the party. Her desire to ascertain what Sir Charles really meant had detained her till he spoke the last word; but it was scarcely pronounced when, with a look of such severe composure as chilled all the blood in Sir Charles's veins, she turned from him, and was again in society. She had not, indeed, gained any knowledge as to what grounds any understanding between him and Lady Charlotte could be founded; but she had heard a declaration so explicit of his sentiments for her, as justified the treating of him from henceforth with the greatest coldness and distance.

"What!" said Lady Charlotte, "are you too unsuccessful? Could not your persuasions prevent the desertion with which we are threatened?"

"I did not use any persuasions," replied Isabella.

"Shall I try my influence?" said Lady Charlotte.

"There is no point that I wish to gain," said Isabella.

"Oh! happy Isabella," exclaimed Lady Charlotte, "who has nothing to wish!"

"I am sure," said Mr. Dunstan, "Mrs. Willoughby deserves to have all her wishes, for she endeavours to give every body else what they wish."

"Logical!" said Lady Charlotte, with one of her most provoking sneers.

"I tell you what, Lady Charlotte," said Mr. Dunstan —

"No, no, my dear Sir," said Isabella, who dreaded one of the usual explosions between this ill-matched pair, "tell me" —

"So I will," said he; "and it is, that I wish to God that Lady Charlotte was like you."

"Shall we change partners?" said the unblushing Lady Charlotte.

"Were you talking of whist?" said Mr. Willoughby, suddenly rousing himself.

"Let us have a rubber; it will do us all good. Conversation does not go on smoothly to-night."

Isabella, for once, was not sorry for the proposal; and instantly rang for cards. Fate decided that she and Sir Charles should be the excluded persons; and Isabella, fixing her eye for a moment steadily on him, as if to assure him that she was perfectly aware of his presence, deliberately walked to one of the book-cases, and, taking down a book, established herself at a table, with such an air of determination not to be interrupted, that Sir Charles did not dare to make any attempt towards conversation.

But although Isabella's eyes were upon the book, her thoughts were far away.

That the reserve and propriety of behaviour which Sir Charles had so long preserved should suddenly be broken up by a tone of gallantry so undisguised and so affrontive to the purity and dignity of her character, she was persuaded could not be the inadvertence of an unguarded moment, for Sir Charles had no such moments; and, joined as it was to an intimation which could not be mistaken, that he was not unaware of the injuries to which she was exposed from the very person with whom she had so lately had a proof that he was upon the most confidential footing, seemed to leave no doubt but that such a change of manner arose from some detestable purpose, that was to be accomplished by exciting at once her jealousy and her resentment. It was impossible that the straight-forward spirit of Isabella could pursue the windings of such a labyrinth; yet she saw enough to put her more than ever upon her guard equally against Sir Charles and Lady Charlotte; but she resolved simply to keep the onward path of integrity and truth, and not to bewilder herself by any attempt at counteraction by plot or stratagem.

It may be the will of the Most High to try me in the furnace of adversity, thought she; but, with his help, I trust I shall come out as refined silver or the purest gold.

It was no more than necessary that Isabella should forget for a moment the natural timidity and self-diffidence of her character; — to have doubted her strength at this time would have been to have fallen.

She was environed by circumstances that might have seemed to an affrighted mind to have justified yielding; she felt her safety was in courage, — in being able to look in the face the desertion of her husband, — the treachery of Lady Charlotte, — the profligacy of Sir Charles! — to see all this as it really was, and to take her measures, not upon what the weakness of hope might tempt her to flatter herself *might be*, but what the strength of her intellect told her probably *would be*. She was aware that what she had

most to guard herself against, was the inconsequent manifestations of her husband's affections. Never did she catch a glimpse of the blissful vision of being permanently and exclusively beloved by him, but that her whole soul was melted into tenderness. Nothing else in life appeared to have any value; and she felt, that were she once to suffer the delusions of imagination to assume the reality of truth, and was then to be disappointed; that she durst not depend upon either her reason or her moral sense to preserve her from that tumult of conflicting passions which scarcely ever settles but in the abyss of vice, or the depths of despondency.

With others to hope might be strength;—with her she knew it would be weakness; and her first care was to balance words by actions.

Mr. Willoughby had said, “trust me for the future;” but he had solicited the presence of Lady Charlotte. He had said, “you have not a more sincere friend than Lady Charlotte;” yet he allowed himself to be engrossed with this supposed friend to the neglect of herself. He had acknowledged “fault, or folly;” yet he advocated the cause of her who had betrayed him into such error. Isabella knew the conclusion that she should draw from such a statement in the case of another; and she felt it to be her wisdom and her safety to act by it in her own.

Steeled by these reflections, she was able, when called upon, to take her place at the card-table, to know the cards that she played, and to conclude the evening with ease, and even with cheerfulness. Mr. Willoughby seemed to be reassured by her recovered composure, and the heterogeneous party seemed to fall into its usual form.

CHAP. XXXIX.

“Now the distemper’d mind
Has lost the concord of harmonious powers,
Which forms the soul of happiness, and all
Is off the poise within.” THOMSON.

“Proper deformity seems not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.” SHAKSPEARE.

THE next morning brought the farewell scene of Sir Charles and Mr. Burghley. Sir Charles, by half words, by meaning looks, and by affected sighs, maintained, as far as the eyes that were upon him, and Isabella’s dignified coldness made possible, the tone of sentiment and attachment that he had assumed the night before.

“It is impossible but that I should soon see you again,” said he, as he made his last adieu; “if it were only” — he stopped, — held out a hand, which met no corresponding one; — sighed, and withdrew.

Not so, the frank and honest Burghley. With his eyes glistening, and his heart more full of compassion and admiration than he cared to avow, “God bless you, my dear Mrs. Willoughby,” he cried. “What shall I say of you, and from you, to the thousand and one friends who will overwhelm me with inquiries of how you do? — what you do? — and when they shall see you? — May I say there is any chance of your being in town this spring?”

“No!” replied Isabella, “for I believe I shall remain here the whole of it. But it must not be supposed that absence and distance will make me forget those who are kind enough to remember me. Most particularly, you must commend me to Lord Burghley. I know he will question you closely about me. Pray tell him that I am well; that my boy thrives; and ——.” She paused, as at a loss for a third article of agreeable intelligence; she found none, and was silent.

“Oh! doubt not but I shall have enough to say to my uncle when you are the subject. I shall tell him that his ‘brightest star of the east’ is become a northern luminary, and has dimmed the lustre of every other twinkler. I shall tell him——.”

“No need to repeat your lesson to me,” interrupted Isabella. “If you forget half of it, there will be no loss. I wish you would take a lecture from Lady Rachel upon flattery, hyperbole, and metaphor; it would do you infinite good.”

“I like not her regimen,” replied Mr. Burghley; “no pouring in of wine and oil with Lady Rachel; daggers and molten lead are her universal specifics.”

“You are mistaken,” said Isabella. “But see her from me; and tell her that she is ever present to me, and rules every thought.”

“Does she ever counsel you to add a little of the wiliness of the serpent to the innocence of the dove?” said Mr. Burghley, in a low voice; “for surely you are a lambkin amongst wolves.”

“You have been reproached before,” said Isabella, smiling, “for false quotation. The word is *wisdom*, not *wiliness*; and I can assure you that wisdom is much more Lady Rachel’s Catholicon, than either daggers or molten lead.”

"Then I pray you, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, in her name," said Mr. Burghley, "to be wise; and so give me your hand, and God preserve you. And if you should stumble on my unknown goddess in your walks, as I suspect you will, tell her that there is a mortal who adores her." And so, with a most affectionate shake of the hand, he ran off to the carriage, at the door of which he found Sir Charles, and the two other gentlemen, grumbling that they were made to await in the cold the issue of his lengthened farewell to Isabella.

"Burghley is the happy man I find, Isabella," said Mr. Willoughby, on returning to the breakfast-room. "You seemed as if you had scarcely a word for Sir Charles, notwithstanding what you owe to him; while you kept us all shivering in the cold to listen to Burghley's rattle."

Isabella coloured deeply at these words. "I really beg your pardon," said she; "but I was not aware that the remembrance I had charged him with to Lord Burghley, and Lady Rachel, had taken up so much time."

"I should not have observed it," returned Mr. Willoughby, "but that Mr. Dunstan here did; and Sir Charles seemed vexed."

Isabella again felt herself colour; and she coloured the more because she saw Lady Charlotte fix her eye upon her with the most marked and malign attention. She flattered herself, however, that Mr. Willoughby was not aware of her confusion, as he was busy arranging with Mr. Dunstan as to what dogs, and in what direction he should pursue his morning's intended amusement of shooting. Before this discussion was wholly finished, Isabella withdrew to her nursery, as was her customary practice after breakfast, leaving Lady Charlotte as usual to pursue her own purposes for an hour or two.

A part of this time Isabella generally dedicated to the prosecution of that course of reading which, since her residence at Eagle's Crag, had made a part of the regular distribution of her time; but this morning, when, after having indulged herself with playing with her boy, even for a longer time than usual, she retired to her book, she found she could not command her attention for five minutes together; and having read the same page three times over, without having comprehended a word of what it contained, she gave over the attempt; and arraying herself for a walk, she went out in the hope that the keen air, and a variety of objects, would brace her nerves, and settle the confusion of her thoughts.

Having wandered about for some time, with little choice or object, she struck into a sequestered path, which led her a considerable distance from the house, to a little ornamented building, placed at the edge of a thick coppice, and opening in front upon the lake and park. As it faced the south, it was generally warm and cheerful, even at the most dreary season of the year, and here Isabella proposed to find amusement by watching the deer, and the water-fowl, and the various other objects that the park and lake presented. The building consisted of two rooms: the outer one well fitted up, lined thickly with matting, and its windows and entrance so closely fitted, as nearly to exclude the outward air; the other was little more than a receptacle for some additional chairs and tables, for the accommodation of a larger company than usual; or in which to make tea, when this retreat, which had once been a favourite spot, was chosen for such a purpose.

Isabella entered; and had scarcely seated herself in the place from whence she could command the most extensive view of the scene before her, when she saw, at a

turning of a walk, Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby, arm in arm, directing their steps to the very asylum which she had chosen for herself!

To meet them was intolerable; but thinking herself sure of a retreat through the inner room, she hastily entered it, and drawing the bolt with equal precipitation, attempted to open the door through which she proposed to make her escape.

What was her dismay on finding it locked on the outside; and at the same moment to hear Mr. Willoughby and Lady Charlotte enter the outer room! Perhaps the best thing that she could have done would have been instantly to have made her appearance; but a moment of irresolution put this out of her power. The voice and tone of Mr. Willoughby was so impassioned and tender, as to throw her into an universal tremor, and she sunk almost helplessly on a seat near her.

In the situation in which she was, it was impossible not to hear every word that was uttered in the adjoining apartment; and in the relation which she bore to the speakers, it was not in human nature not to listen.

"Tell me not," said Lady Charlotte, in the raised voice of anger, "tell me not of the warmth and truth of a passion which was alive to every shade of imperfection in its object, — which could darken those shades, — and which, on the cold balancing of prudence, could reject the thing beloved for—what? for excellence, no doubt; but excellence that did not charm, and merit that could not make happy! Tell such tales as these, Willoughby, to children; but think not to deceive me. No! like the rest of your sex, you saw your triumph, and abused it! — you saw that the creature who was cold and haughty to your whole sex besides, would have been but too yielding to your wishes; and you preferred a sacrifice to your vanity to the gratification of your love! — cold-hearted, calculating, prudent Willoughby! And do you now come to solicit that as a beggar which you might have commanded as a sovereign? — aye, and the poorest of beggars! What have you now to offer me! — not even your name and hand, worthless as you have made them by their having been once the property of another! And why was she to be preferred to me? — in what might not Charlotte Stanton, without presumption, cope with Isabella Hastings? I even disdain the competition! The man who might have made the one his own, and chose the other, is not a prize worthy of contention."

"How," said Mr. Willoughby, "have I deserved this cruel burst of indignation? My sorrows *have* met with more indulgence; the friend *has* soothed the mistaken lover; and of the presumption of hope you cannot reproach me."

"Yes, do upbraid my weakness," said Lady Charlotte. "I deserve it well! Oh! Willoughby, how little have you known the woman whom you have abandoned, — whom you have undone! — whom, maddened by your desertion, in a moment of frenzy and revenge, bound herself to the stock — the dolt, to whom, — oh! wretched thought! — I have made myself accountable. What was it that I would not, even at that very moment, have done or suffered for you! In your hands I could have been any thing that you had desired to make me! The distinction of having been your choice would have rendered all easy. But the world shall not see me degraded, — dragged at the car of Isabella Hastings! — the despised companion of the man whom she, with puerile plainings, might claim as her own, — the man whom she affects to love by rule and measure! by the line of duty, and who seeks to be so loved in return! — in whose presence your recreant passion quails, and dares not shew its head!"

“Is it possible,” said Mr. Willoughby, “that my deference for your delicacy, — my respect for your situation, should be so misconstrued? And can you wish that I should outrage my wife, and affront you at the same moment?”

“No, Sir!” replied Lady Charlotte, with the most insulting disdain, “it is *not* possible; nor is it possible that I should take a second place to any body; that I should be compelled to hear your querulous passion in a morning; and in an evening behold you watch, whether with fear or love you know best, the eye of your automaton wife! — see her the object of your solicitude, and hear her praises from your lips! No, Sir, this is *not* possible; nor shall it be endured any longer. This is not a part that even a *friend* can take. God knows with what innocence of intention, with what ardour of affection, I offered to cheer the solitude which your ruined fortunes make so necessary. I was willing even to conciliate your august spouse; but she scorns my friendship, and appears to brave my powers! and you, — gracious Heaven! do I live to hear it? — you talk to me of delicacy, of respect! of not outraging the person who has usurped my rights, and rendered me a wretch for ever!”

“For pity’s sake,” cried Mr. Willoughby, “be less violent. I entreat you to hear reason. Heaven is my witness how far I was from intending to pain you by any thing that passed last night. Too well *you* know how much reason I have for disturbed thoughts; too well I know how unfairly I have trespassed on your goodness in accepting your most affectionate offer to remain here. Can I view the sacrifice you make without regret and pain? — I who have it no longer in my power to repay by a life of devotion a tenderness such as yours, which, too ardent to be concealed, and too frank to be disavowed, is yet restrained by motives which exalt you in my mind above all the rest of your sex. Can I contemplate my own situation? can I contemplate yours? and (I must add) that of an unoffending, innocent, excellent, confiding creature, to whose happiness I have solemnly sworn to dedicate myself? and not be exposed to the severest pangs of remorse; the deepest sense of misfortune? God knows how I have struggled to maintain an outward calm, when all was tumult within! — when I have rather been willing to incur the censure of thoughtless indifference, than to betray that I felt, as all but a villain must feel! And if in such circumstances a temporary dejection, — a momentary endeavour a *little* to lighten, *that only* part of this extended evil which *can* be mitigated, may have occurred, is such a transient, and only *apparent* swerving from the ruling feeling of my soul, to be treated as a dereliction of that attachment which can end only with my life!”

“Oh! Willoughby,” said Lady Charlotte, “speak ever thus! and let my charmed senses be alive only to your accents! And, oh! thou dearest object of my heart, pardon my vehemence. Alas! how dearly have I expiated a fault of temperament which I was never taught to correct. Pardon too my injustice. I acknowledge that I was unjust; and that, for a moment, I could have rejoiced that you had been so too; but, when my heart will let me, I know how to appreciate the superiority that decided your choice,—a superiority in reason, in dignity of character. Oh! that they could have made you happy! I had then been less miserable. How have we both suffered from the fatal error that led you to believe that a heart such as yours could be satisfied with any thing less than a heart! but let me cease such useless repinings; be it now my only care to lighten the burthen which you have imposed upon yourself; all that I can do, short of self-degradation, I will do. I disavow my petulance—my ravings. I will remain here. I will patiently endure, that you *shall* ‘endeavour to mitigate the only part of the extended evil which can be mitigated;’ while I

writhe under that which does not admit of cure or mitigation. Let her have all the merit of implicit obedience to the man she does *not* love. I will content myself with what may belong to my unreserved dedication of myself, short of dishonour, to the man I *do* ——”

“Oh, beloved of my soul!” said Mr. Willoughby, clasping her fervently in his arms, “how shall I thank you? how shall I adore you enough?”

“Forbear!” said she, as she released herself from his embrace, “such transports alone can make me recall the promise I have given. A promise that I never would have given, had I not known my own power to maintain the limits by which it is bounded. I know the censure I should incur from the prudes of my own sex, whose virtue is their weakness, not their strength; who dare not trust themselves; who take shelter in hypocrisy; but why should I conceal the emotions of my soul? when I know that I can say to the most headstrong of them, thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.”

“Admirable! enchanting Charlotte!” exclaimed Mr. Willoughby, “what price is too high to pay for the distinction of being beloved by such a creature?”

“Willoughby!” said she, with a deep sigh, and laying her hand affectionately on his, “have done! heap not faggots on my fiery trial. Fain would I teach you to consider me only as a friend, a friend that wants as much consolation, as she wishes to afford. Think what a lot is mine; and do not aggravate its bitterness by shewing me how happy I might have been, if you had known what would have made your happiness. What is to be done? shall I go? shall I stay? can you be content to remain here, and abide in seclusion, what the slow operation of pinching economy may do towards restoring you to something like your former state? or will you by one vigorous act cut off hope and fear at once? sell all you have, discharge your debts, apportion your wife, and throw yourself on the wide world with the small residue?”

“I must not, will not, ruin my child!” cried he in an agony. “And yet could I hope,” said the guilty Willoughby, fervently grasping the fair hand that had not been removed from that on which it had rested for the last few minutes, “could I hope that my lovely friend would share my wanderings, — would illuminate my gloom—”

“No, Willoughby!” interrupted Lady Charlotte, “hope not from me any abandonment of my duty; gratified as I am by an ardency of passion on your part which so well knows what mine would grant, could I do so and retain my own esteem. As a wife I would have feared neither poverty, nor banishment; distance, solitude, deprivation, should not have separated us. But now our intercourse must be within the limits of our common society, or it must cease.

“It is true I owe my odious tyrant nothing; and nothing would I pay him. Were you once free, I would soon free myself; but I owe it my own dignity that he shall not spurn me from him, for a man who has not even his name to offer me. I repeat it, were your bonds once broken, mine should not hold me, formed as they were under the most unholy auspices, and never sanctified by one after hour of peace, or love; but I will not be the *victim* of the *husband* even of Isabella Hastings!”

“Oh, how you rend my heart with self-reproach! with excruciating regret!” said Mr. Willoughby; “but the sacrifice would not be wholly yours; I too should immolate most sacred duties, most highly valued distinctions on the altar of love; but I urge not this plea, I am already sufficiently wretched without having your ruin to lay to my charge; but God knows what I can do. I have thoughts of going to town; perhaps some resource may be found short of what you have suggested. I cannot make my boy a beggar. I would

rather waste out the lamp of life in the most miserable dungeon; but I should have better hopes of success, if you, my beloved friend, were to be near me, to warn me from danger, to aid me by your counsel; yet appearances would be better preserved, if you were to remain here. You might prepare; you might support her. It would then at least be impossible that she should do you the injustice to believe that you injured her! yet how can I bear to separate myself from my dearest friend! my wisest, my most disinterested adviser, at such a critical moment?"

"I repeat it," returned Lady Charlotte, "that I go or stay, as you may decide, or even, if you please, as Mrs. Willoughby may decide; hopeless as I am that she will ever do me justice, or allow me to be of any use, or consolation to her."

"Come, my beloved," said Mr. Willoughby, "let us walk. I fear the dampness of this place may injure you; and as we return to the house we will determine upon what is best to be done."

"Secure in our innocence," said Lady Charlotte, locking her arm within that of Mr. Willoughby's, "we cannot fear the reproach of our own hearts, let us determine upon what we will; and I am sure that you and I alike despise the censure of an ill-judging world."

And with these words this guiltless and courageous creature, with an assured step, and an erect countenance, withdrew from a spot where she had been putting into action every spring of a machine which she hoped was to plunge the object of her professed attachment into an abyss of misery and guilt. This unhappy being however seemed to have taken a much juster estimate of his own conduct, and its consequences, than did his more daring, and iron-souled associate. His face was pale; his eye downcast; his limbs trembling; and the arm which held his, communicated more support than it received.

CHAP. XL.

“Alas! there’s no sound
To raise him short of thunder!”

BYRON.

BUT they are gone! and Isabella remains! and how does she remain? a motionless body, from whence the animating principle seems to be fled. No colour was in the cheek; no speculation was in the eye. There was no power of action, or of thought: the heart, indeed, swelled as if it would have burst “its continent;” but the voice had no utterance; the mind no consciousness; life and death seemed to contend for victory!

At length, “Oh God!” burst from her convulsed and colourless lips;— “Oh, God, pardon him!” and the breaking heart was saved!

The awfulness of the appeal absorbed all mortal feelings. Wrongs! misery! were lost in the sense of the obnoxiousness of guilt.

The energy of prayer seemed to have restored her activity. Something perhaps she might do that might aid its efficacy. She hastily released herself from her confinement, and began to walk with a quick pace, she hardly knew whither, or for what purpose. But her strength seconded not her wishes: her limbs became trembling, — she gasped for breath: she was obliged to stop; to rest on the first object that was near her. The overwhelmingness of recollections came over her, and with it such a conviction of the difficulties of her situation, as nearly to throw her into despair.

“What shall I do? teach me, thou Fountain of Wisdom, to do what will please thee best!”

And again she was calmed. She walked slowly forward; unable to determine for the future, and for the present more alive to the single thought of how she should endure the shock of the first meeting with her injurers, than to any other of the sad variety of which her wretchedness was composed. She struck first into one, and then into another circuitous path: she recoiled from the view of those walls that sheltered those whom she so much dreaded to see; and striking off from the usual entrance, she found her way into the house, as if she had been the guilty one, through a little private door, that opened into a small hall, from whence went a flight of stairs that led directly to her own apartment. Here, to her surprise, she encountered Mrs. Evans, who appeared to be seeking for her; and whose caution that she must not be too much alarmed, told her of misfortune; and awakened her to a sense of danger.

“What? how? have they? has she?”

“Indeed, madam, he will be well again; it often happens; you must not be frightened; the last fit was not so strong as the first. I have put him into hot water; he is better.”

“Oh my child!” said Isabella, and rushed up stairs. Here she found the poor little boy just recovering from a severe convulsion fit, which, although no uncommon incident, at his age, seemed to the inexperienced, and half distracted mother, as the agony of death.

“I have sent for the apothecary,” said Mrs. Evans; “but I hope he will be quite well before he comes. I have seen many such accidents; it is only teeth; he will be well again in a few hours, and there is no particular danger of any return.”

Isabella's mind was now wholly engaged with the illness of her child: all that had passed so short a time before faded from her recollection; she was sensible alone to the sufferings of the object before her.

Mrs. Evans's calm and judicious manner stilled however, before long, the agitation of Isabella's distracted feelings. She took the child upon her knee: her tears flowed, and she felt that the revulsion caused by this new infliction, had probably saved either her brain or her life.

She inquired for Mr. Willoughby, and found that he was not returned; but as she received this information, he hastily entered the room.

"My dearest Isabella! my love!"

Isabella raised her eyes to him, with a look of so much wildness, that he had no thought but that the illness of the boy had unsettled her brain.

"My dear, dear love, be not so alarmed!" said he, clasping his arms round her; "our beloved boy will be better; he will do well; will he not, Evans?"

"Oh you will hurt him! you will hurt him!" said Isabella, struggling to disengage herself from Mr. Willoughby's embrace.

"Not for worlds! nor you either!" said he, with the tenderest and most impassioned accent: and drawing a chair close to hers, he put one arm round her waist, and laid the other hand gently on the child. Isabella again looked up to him, with such a gaze of wild surprise and doubt, as at once astonished, and alarmed him.

"Evans," said he, "give Mrs. Willoughby some cordial. Rest your head on my shoulder, my love," said he; "you have been dreadfully alarmed; but for my sake compose yourself."

"I have indeed been dreadfully alarmed," said Isabella. "For your sake did you say?"

"And for our dear boy's sake," said he.

"Oh Willoughby!" said Isabella, and burst into tears.

"Thank God!" said Mr. Willoughby, she will now be better.

Mrs. Evans quietly removed the child from Isabella's lap; and Isabella, reclining on Mr. Willoughby, continued to weep; while the fondness of his caresses, and his anxious solicitude, seemed to make the tears flow but the more copiously. Calmness and self-command, however, came with them; and the appearance of the medical assistant, centering again the whole of her feelings in the child, restored her to still further power of exertion.

She had the consolation to hear him declare that the paroxysm was passed; that all which had been done was right; and that there was nothing to be feared for the future.

"You will then, sir, I fear, find Mrs. Willoughby the greater invalid of the two," said Mr. Willoughby.

"Isabella, my love, be kind enough to let Mr. Hawkins feel your pulse. Mrs. Willoughby has been terrified till I fear that she is really ill."

Mr. Hawkins acknowledged that the pulse was extremely agitated and irregular; prescribed a composing draught; assured Isabella that she had no further reason for alarm; promised to call again in the morning; and took his departure.

Had this really skilful professor been aware of the extent of Isabella's moral sufferings, he could perhaps have done no more for her than he did; but he would have done it with less hope that she would benefit by his prescription. Quiet was what Isabella

knew she could not have; but seclusion was of all things what she wished for most. As her fears for her boy had subsided, the wretchedness of her own situation presented itself the more forcibly to her imagination. A new sense of pain was excited by what a few hours before she would have felt as the foretaste of the happiness that she most wished for in this world. But how, after what she had so recently seen and heard, could she regard the solicitude shewn towards her by Mr. Willoughby, but as the grossest hypocrisy, to cover the basest purposes? Never had she till this moment felt indignant against him; and the consciousness of anger towards an object so beloved, had an acuteness of pain that she thought more intolerable than any that she had ever felt before.

She sat absorbed, and silent; her cheek one moment a glowing crimson, and the next faded to a death-like paleness. Mr. Willoughby sat down by her, and, folding her cold and passive hands in his, "My dear Isabella," said he, "you terrify me: I never saw you so desert yourself. What is it that you fear? you must be persuaded that all danger is past; that we have nothing to do but to thank God for the safety of our dear boy."

"I do thank God; I do indeed!" said Isabella; "but—— pray leave me; I know I shall be better when I am alone. But I have such a fixed pain *here*," said she, laying her hand on her heart, "that I cannot speak: and such a pain *here*," added she, removing her hand to her head, "that I cannot think. Evans give me the medicine that was ordered. I will lie down here—close to my boy; let no body come near me but Evans for a few hours, and I shall be better."

Mr. Willoughby would have remonstrated against the place which she had chosen for her repose; wished her to remove into her own room, and said that he would himself watch by her; but she said, with something of impatience in her accent, "Pray let me have my own way; if I must leave my boy, I shall go distracted. I would rather be alone."

Mr. Willoughby fondly soothed her, and embraced her fervently; and again entreating that she would for his sake do all that she could to recover her composure, very unwillingly quitted the room; not without some suspicion that the alarm on account of the child's illness was not the whole cause of her malady.

And can all this be false? thought Isabella. Can that open brow cover the basest heart? Can those accents which seem to flow so spontaneously from the feeling, be suborned? If I wrong him, I am the most guilty of creatures! if I wrong him not, I am the most wretched! The wanderings of his fancy, the surprise of his passions, I was but too well aware that I was exposed to; but never could I have suspected him of premeditated treachery. Never could I have believed that he would have attempted to deceive, only the more easily to destroy me!

If this is so, no future moment can give me peace. I can never cease to love; but the love of such a man, could I obtain it, could never make me happy.

Absorbed in her wretchedness, Isabella thought not of taking care of her health; but urged by Evans, she at length consented to put off a part of her clothes, and to lie down on a sofa, by the bed on which her child was now in a sweet sleep.

The sight of his serene countenance communicated some degree of calm to her heart, and she had just dropped into a kind of doze, when she started up:

"Did I not hear a noise?" said she.

"Oh, madam, my master will be so sorry!" replied Mrs. Evans; "I am sure he would not have awoken you for the world. He has been standing at the door all this time, and was so unhappy about you, that I could not but let him just look at you, that he might

see how quiet you were; and it was his foot, just as he left the side of the sofa, that made you start."

No! thought Isabella, this cannot be trick; he may be seduced; he can never be false. "Where is Mr. Willoughby?" said she. "Tell him that I wish to see him."

Mr. Willoughby had not withdrawn beyond the outside of the door; he heard the kind inquiry, and the welcome wish; and was again in an instant by the side of Isabella.

"You are very kind," said she, stretching out her hand to him: "and I wished to see you, to tell you that I felt you to be so; and that I am better, a great deal better; and now leave me, and I shall go to sleep in good earnest."

"God bless you, my sweet love!" said he, kissing her; "and pray be as good as your word, and make us all happy again."

Us all! thought Isabella: can he really believe that any body but himself — that Lady Charlotte cares whether I am ill or well? is he indeed so much her dupe? and is it indeed beyond my power to undeceive him?

Something like hope followed this thought; and in the indulgence of it she fell asleep, and slept quietly and soundly for some hours.

Nor had this short interval been less consoling to Mr. Willoughby. A strong apprehension that Isabella had, by some means, become mistress of more of the real truth than he wished her to know, had fixed itself on his mind. The wildness of her look when he first accosted her, he could have referred to the alarm she was under for an interest so dear; but her manner of repulsing his caresses; her hasty question, "for your sake do you say?" her pathetic, and as it were appealing, "Oh, Willoughby!" the little consolation that she had seemed to derive from the assurances of the safety of her child; her peremptory desire to be alone; her want of compliance with his reasonable request, that she would not seek repose in a place where she was so little likely to find it; a something of failure in her usual gentleness of demeanour; all these circumstances bespoke a mind agitated by more than one painful feeling; the conscience of Mr. Willoughby was prompt to refer it to its true cause. On his first knowledge of the child's illness, he had sought her from a genuine desire to console, and to be consoled, for the impending misfortune which seemed equally to hang over them both; and from a tenderness of affection, which at the moment admitted of no rival. Lady Charlotte and her allurements had vanished from his imagination, and they were only recalled by the extraordinary and unexpected manner in which he had been received by Isabella; but they were recalled, not under the false colours with which Lady Charlotte's asserted innocence, and his own sophistry had invested them, but in all the naked horrors of their real guilt; and he felt himself at once the betrayer and the destroyer of the creature whom he had sworn to foster and protect. His whole future peace of mind lay upon the safety of Isabella; and in yielding to her earnest desire that he would quit her, he felt some consolation in affording her the only gratification which she seemed willing to receive at his hands. But to rejoin Lady Charlotte was impossible! he found that he could not resolve to quit the door of the apartment which contained all that he thought he prized on earth. He had remained fixed as it were upon the threshold, from whence the compassion of Mrs. Evans had only induced him to stir, by the hope of seeing Isabella in a state of repose; he had now done more: he had seen her again at her own desire; she had spoken kindly to him; she had assured him that she "was better," "much better;" she had promised to rest, and she had promised it in a manner that seemed to acknowledge a kind recognition of the interest

that he took in her welfare. Mr. Willoughby's fears for her life and health were dissipated, and he was ready to renounce the painful thought that he had in any way contributed to the disorder he had witnessed.

"It all proceeded, no doubt (said he to himself) from anxiety for her boy; she loves him a thousand times better than she can love me; and reasonably so; and no wonder, if my very kindness was of no value, while she thought his life at stake. The moment that a little repose had calmed her mind, she returns to the even tenour of that regulated affection which her duty dictates to her as my due. Had she had a heart so formed for love as Lady Charlotte's, what a happy man had I been! but she is as amiable as possible; and I am incapable of injuring her, further than by a preference which I cannot control, and which is sufficiently expiated by the misery it occasions me."

By such hollow reasoning did Mr. Willoughby still the honest voice of conscience, which would have told him what he was, and what he ought to be! but the moment when she *must* be heard was not yet come; and he sought Lady Charlotte to tell her that his boy was safe, and that Isabella would be quite well in the morning.

CHAP. XLI.

“Thou art alone,
If thy rare qualities, sweet gentleness,
Thy meekness, saint-like, wife-like government,
Obeying in commanding, and thy parts
Sovereign and pious, could but speak thee out
The Queen of earthly Queens.”

SHAKSPEARE.

HE had no cause to distrust his sagacity, when he saw that the child gave no cause for anxiety; and that Isabella, although pale and wan, yet, with her wonted countenance and voice, resumed her accustomed ways of going on; and seemed not to have been aware, or to have forgotten, that there had been a moment when the attentions of her husband had been less acceptable to her than usual.

“Nothing can be more clear,” thought he, re-assuring himself, “than that the whole was occasioned by her alarm for her boy. I never gave her cause to suspect me of unkindness; and I hope I never shall.”

The fact however was, that Isabella was so occupied in preparing herself for the future, that the past was less in her thoughts than a few hours before she could have believed possible. The genuine concern and affection that Mr. Willoughby had manifested for her, had suspended in her apprehension the certainty of the consummation of her misfortune. “There was no purposed deceit.” “She might be able to open his eyes to Lady Charlotte’s true character.” “Perhaps he had already abandoned the project of leaving Eagle’s Crag.” “If he did really love her—if he did care for her happiness—she might prevail with him to open all his pecuniary distresses to her; and she promised herself, that in any competition between Lady Charlotte and herself, who would do or suffer most for him, or with him, that she should come off victor.” All these important questions were now at issue; and they could only be determined by her taking her accustomed share in the general society. She put aside, therefore, the horror that she had conceived of communicating with Lady Charlotte; she sacrificed her anxious desire of remaining near her child; and she joined the party at breakfast, at the usual hour.

It was, however, almost beyond the power of her forbearance to receive with complacency Lady Charlotte’s congratulations on the recovery of her boy, and her vehement assurances of the anxiety that she had felt on the report of the effect which the first alarm had had upon her health.

“Upon my word, my dear,” said she, “you look like a perfect rag now. This has been a worse adventure than the red stag. We must take a great deal of care of you, and nurse you well, or we shall have you sick when the little urchin who has been the cause of all this mischief is quite well.”

Mr. Willoughby fixed his eyes upon Isabella, on Lady Charlotte’s thus addressing her, with so penetrating and scrutinising a look; that a consciousness that he had remarked her repulsive coldness in return, made the ready blood mount to her cheek: but she did not therefore relax the severity of her manner. She simply replied, “that when the cause was passed the effect would cease.”

"Oh! yes," said Mr. Willoughby, "our dear boy is safe; and you will be soon quite well, and blooming as ever."

"I *am* quite well," said Isabella; "and as to bloom," and it returned as she spoke, "we all know how short lived a possession that is."

"You and I, however," said Lady Charlotte, "may surely reckon upon its continuance for half a century to come."

"I do not reckon upon it for an hour," said Isabella, with a sigh.

"My dear Isabella," said Mr. Willoughby, "let us have no more such charnel-house observations; or you will force me to tell you, that I shall love you when you are old and wrinkled as well as I do now in all your youth and beauty."

"And I hope you would say true," replied Isabella, with a smile of conscious worth: "I verily believe that you will love me better."

"God grant that you may say true!" said Mr. Willoughby; and he said it with a warmth, that clouded Lady Charlotte's brow, and made Isabella's heart glow. "I shall not be abandoned!" said Isabella to herself; and the thrill of delight which struck through every feeling, was scarcely subsided, when Mr. Willoughby, on Lady Charlotte's leaving the room, said,

"I wish to speak with you, Isabella; let us go into the library."

Isabella's hope died within her; she trembled; now she thought is the dreadful annunciation about to be made!

But it seemed as if Mr. Willoughby could not make it; the privacy he had sought he appeared not to dare to use; he walked to the books; he observed that some of them were not in their proper places; wondered that people could be so careless; from thence turned to the window, said it was a fine day, talked of the view; looked towards the fire, and rung to have more coals put on. Isabella could no longer doubt what it was that she was about to hear. Mr. Willoughby's timidity gave her courage; and when the servant had withdrawn, after waiting a moment to see if Mr. Willoughby would speak, she said, "I am quite ready to attend to you; you said that you wanted to speak to me."

"I do," said Mr. Willoughby; "but on my soul I do not know how to speak! There is nothing on earth that I wish more than to make you happy, and yet it is my fate to make you miserable."

"You cannot make me miserable," returned Isabella, "except you wish to make me so. Any misfortune common to us both, you shall see I can bear, not as an additional burthen to you, but as a support and a comforter."

"I know the calmness and strength of your mind," replied he; "but I speak not so much of the sense that you will entertain of the evil, as of the wretchedness that I shall feel in having involved you in it."

"Tell me what the evil is to which you allude," said Isabella; "or rather let me tell you. You *do* know that I cannot be inadvertent of the difficulties under which you labour with respect to your property; and you *will* know that there is no measure of retrenchment or deprivation which you may think expedient to adopt, that I shall not come into with the most unrepining acquiescence; but then, my dear Willoughby, you must deal ingenuously with me; you must let me know the whole truth, the extent of the mischief, and by what means you propose to repair it."

"I have such means, I confidently believe," returned he; "but I doubt whether I should be able to make you comprehend them in all their bearings; nor can they be prosecuted here: I must go to town."

"Let me go with you there," said Isabella, eagerly.

"Go with me!" repeated Mr. Willoughby, astonished, "what, and leave Godfrey? and at this time too?"

"I love my child through you," returned Isabella; "and when the son and the father are in the scale, can you doubt which way the balance will turn?"

"But you *cannot* go with me," he replied; "I have not a place to shelter you in; Beechwood you know is gone, and if the town house is not sold, it must be, or disposed of in some way or other immediately.

"Let not this be an objection," said Isabella; "I am sure Lady Rachel will gladly receive me."

"No, no, Isabella; it cannot, must not be," returned Mr. Willoughby. "I would not be exposed to the animadversions of Lady Rachel on placing you in such a situation for any consideration whatever; if you have any regard for me, you will not wish to give me so severe a mortification."

"Then," said Isabella (and she said it with the greatest earnestness of entreaty), "if you have any regard for yourself, for me, or for your child, remain where you are! if I cannot comprehend all the necessary details on which to ground the remedial plan that you meditate, Roberts can; you cannot have a more faithful or a more acute assistant. The sale of the house can as well be done by agency as in person; no unnecessary expenses will be incurred; the approbation of all, whose approbation is worth a wish, will follow your determination not to abandon your wife and child."

"Abandon!" repeated Mr. Willoughby; "you speak as if a journey upon business was a dereliction of my duties. I go, only that I may pursue the best method to remedy evils, which I take shame to myself for having suffered to get so great a head, without having sooner applied a sufficient check to them. I cannot do this *here*. I had hoped that I might have done so; I have considered the matter in all its lights, and I find it to be impossible; do not give so reproachful a term as abandonment to a necessary piece of self-denial."

"If this be so," said Isabella, "I repeat my request; let me go with you. Whatever is accommodation for you will be accommodation for me; and I dare affirm that Lady Rachel will better approve that I should be subjected to apparent inconveniences, than that I should be left."

"Ask me," returned Mr. Willoughby, impatiently, "what I *can* grant. It cannot be either that you should accompany me to town, or that I should stay here with you."

"I will ask you what you can grant," said Isabella. "Open your whole heart to me. It is not wisdom, it is not experience, that always furnishes the best counsel. The sagacity of affection often goes beyond them both. In this case your interest cannot be divided from mine: may I not be supposed to be something of a judge what will best promote the happiness of both?"

"And can I be suspected of betraying either?" said Mr. Willoughby. "Isabella, you must rely upon me. There is no want of confidence. I would only save you the knowledge of many painful particulars; and, when you see the result, you will thank me for having spared you the details. My absence will not be long, and you will not be alone."

"Not alone!" said Isabella; "who then will be with me?"

"Lady Charlotte!" said Mr. Willoughby; but he said it with the colour rising even to his forehead, and in a voice scarcely articulate. "It is true," added he, gaining more courage as he proceeded, "that Dunstan is the most unpersuadable of creatures, and the most tyrannical; as all fools are, and now he finds that I am likely to be absent, although for so short a time, he repents of his engagement to remain with us; but Lady Charlotte is true to her promise, and if she can hope to make her society acceptable to you, she will be most happy to be your companion."

"I beg," said Isabella, with as much of haughtiness as would sit upon her features; "I beg that I may be allowed to decline Lady Charlotte's company."

"You have a strange prejudice against Lady Charlotte," said Mr. Willoughby. "I should have thought that your relationship, and early habits of intimacy, would have enabled you to have known her better."

"It is not prejudice that keeps me apart from Lady Charlotte," said Isabella: "it is knowledge."

"Knowledge? knowledge of what?" said Mr. Willoughby, with quickness.

"Knowledge, that under the mask of the most ungoverned frankness, she is capable of the most consummate art. She cannot dupe me. I pray God that she may not dupe others."

Mr. Willoughby stood confounded.

"Good God, Isabella! what can you mean? How can you be so unjust?"

"I am not unjust," replied Isabella, calmly; "and I again desire that she may not be my companion."

"Be that as you please," said Mr. Willoughby. "She will at least escape a little from the ill-humour of Dunstan, when she can tell him that she is likely to return to town. I fancy they will go to-morrow; and as—as—" he hesitated—"as I *must* go, it will be best to take a seat in their carriage: it will save an unnecessary expense, as you observe."

Mr. Willoughby looked as if he expected that such a proposal would have met from Isabella a most animated disapproval; or that it would have produced an emotion that would be extremely embarrassing to him: but Isabella was not taken by surprise; she had learned nothing from the conversation that had passed for which she was not fully prepared; and she received what she considered as the consummation of her fate, with all the calmness of despair.

"Willoughby," said she, fixing her eyes intently upon him, "I am not deceived. You have refused to remain with me, or to suffer me to accompany you. There can be but one reason for this. Go, then! but be assured that, whether you go in a vain confidence in your own strength, or in the hope of an indulgence of your weakness, that you are about to tread a path which can lead to nothing but misery and remorse. Under this conviction, I feel almost reckless as to what is to become of me or my infant. *If you will* destroy yourself, it may be best that we should all perish together."

"Dearest Isabella, talk not so strangely," said Mr. Willoughby. "I can no longer conceal from myself to what your suspicions point; but, by the God who made me, you do me injustice. You wrong too another, who is incapable of injuring you; who, sensible as she is of your aversion to her, never fails to acknowledge all your merits, and who is ready to administer to you all the offices of friendship. I go to town *wholly* for the purpose of arranging my affairs in such a manner as will enable me to return to you with

peace of mind, and the means of making you happy for the future. Do not deaden my inclinations to do this, by any perversity of construction—by any ungenerous suspicions of those to whom you are more obliged than you can even conjecture.”

“I am sincerely persuaded,” returned Isabella, “that at this moment you believe what you say. Yet all that I foresee will not the less happen. God preserve you! Yet is it not presumption to pray for one who willingly rushes on destruction?”

And as she said these words, her rising emotion became too powerful for control, she turned from him, and hastily quitted the room.

But she did not leave him without having made an indelible impression on his mind. It was impossible, in this instance, to mistake calmness of manner for coldness of temperament; it was impossible to believe that any other human creature had a paramount interest to his own in her heart. She had offered, for his sake, to quit an object that had hitherto appeared to be the darling passion of her soul. She had holden even this precious possession but as “dust upon the balance,” not in competition with any selfish gratification, but in comparison of the safety, the peace, and the virtue of the man whom she believed loved another in preference to herself. She had frankly avowed her suspicion of the injustice done her; but neither obloquy, invective, nor rage, had accompanied her avowal: all sense of her own wrongs appeared to be absorbed in concern for the guilt of him who wronged her. She appeared as an immortal intelligence mourning over the sins of frail humanity; but she proved, notwithstanding, that she was no more than human herself, by the varying passions that had marked her changing countenance, and by an emotion which had at length shaken her frame almost past endurance.

Could it then be that a comparison should not force itself on the mind of the wretched Willoughby? That giving to Isabella all that his reason and his moral sense could approve, left to Lady Charlotte nothing but the basest dregs of passion! A passion that he believed could never be gratified, but upon terms that he had not, that he did not wish to have to offer.

“Why should I not break my chains at once?” cried he aloud. “Why not, from this moment, be what I ought to be, and what until I am, I can never be happy?”

And it might have been that this virtuous thought might have sprung into action, had not the evil one stood before him in the form of a beautiful and a wicked woman.

Lady Charlotte was at hand: the closing of one door was a signal for her to enter at the other.

“Well,” said she, “is this dreaded interview over? How has she taken it?”

“The interview,” replied Mr. Willoughby, “has been even more dreadful than I had imagined it to myself.”

“Oh! then mildness and indifference have at length given way?” said Lady Charlotte, with triumph in her tone.

“There was no indifference; and the mildness was unblemished,” said Mr. Willoughby.

“Where then was the terror of the interview?” said Lady Charlotte; “reasonable as she is, she must have seen that you could do nothing but go to town; and my offer of remaining here must convince her that you went there only on account of business.”

“She thought she might go with me,” said Mr. Willoughby.

“For what to do?” said Lady Charlotte.

"To watch over me; to watch for me; to save me from destruction;" said Mr. Willoughby.

"From whence are you threatened with destruction?" said Lady Charlotte.

"Not assuredly from the quarter that she suspects," returned he; "but she has told me such truths, that she has convinced me that I am a villain, or on the point of becoming one; and if it were not for the discretion of my fair friend here (taking Lady Charlotte's hand), perhaps I could not do better than grant one of the requests that she has made me; and either take her with me to town, or remain with her in the country."

"And if you will take my advice," said Lady Charlotte, withdrawing her hand disdainfully, "you will do the latter; if our friendship is to be subject to such hot and cold fits, be assured that I will break this heart to atoms, before I shall longer own you for its master. Well then, you stay?"

"No, I go! and I go with you; for, as we had foreseen, there is no wish to detain you here. I go too with her permission."

"Oh, Heavens!" cried Lady Charlotte, "the difference between duty and love! Had I her rights in you, would I part from you? No! I would hang upon you, not to be shaken off. I would manacle you. You might kill me, but we would not part. Willoughby, she does not love you: I *do*. I give you all I can give you without degradation; I ask but your friendship in return; and you insult me with a visible preference for the cold-hearted wisdom—yes, for once I will speak out—the cold-hearted wisdom of the woman whose legal property you are! You tell me you are a villain! What is it but to tell me that I make you so? And yet, but for me, you would indeed have been a villain."

"For heaven's sake," said Mr. Willoughby, "between us two let there be peace. In vain do we each of us struggle with our chains; we cannot break them. Nor ought you to be jealous of the poor justice that my understanding yields to the merits of a woman who deserves better at my hands, than any other should be preferred one moment before her."

"Give her, then, her desert," said Lady Charlotte, with the fire darting from her eyes; "and leave that heart to break which never beat for any one but you?"

"Torture me not!" cried Mr. Willoughby. "You know your power; use it for my happiness, and not for my misery. You know I cannot exist without your acknowledged love: why then is it only to make itself known in reproaches and upbraidings?"

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!" said Lady Charlotte, in a tone of deprecation the most tender and affectionate. "I am a wretch! and may it not be allowed the wretched sometimes to complain? Your friendship is my all; and is it a crime to agonize under the apprehension of losing it?"

"You can never lose it," said Mr. Willoughby. "Has it not stood out against your severity, and against the hopelessness to which you have doomed me? and can you fear that your kindness will not always have power to retain it?"

Lady Charlotte certainly at this moment did fear it. There was a calmness in Mr. Willoughby's asseverations; a distinctness in his reproaches; there was a regulated tone in his professions of attachment, unlike the voice of passion to which she had been accustomed from his lips. She had not now to repress his ardours: she found that she was weighed in the balance, and she dreaded lest he might discover that his happiness was in the opposite scale.

“Oh! pardon! pardon!” cried she. “Forgive the doubts of conscious worthlessness. It seems as if your preferring love was a prize too high for qualities like mine. All that I have to give is love.”

“And in that do you not give all?” said he. “Oh! my Charlotte, do not believe me insensible to goodness, to charms such as yours! For once let me fold you to my heart, and let its throbbings tell you that it can own no other mistress.”

“Let this single folly be the seal of our reconciliation,” said Lady Charlotte, gently, and without any reproof, withdrawing herself from his embrace; “and let us never repeat it. It is time we parted; we shall have eyes upon us; there is a spy in every servant in this house. I long to get out of it.”

“Go, then,” said he, kissing her hand again and again, “go; and eternal blessings attend you!”

“Yes, I am a villain!” said he, as she closed the door, “and I *do* rush upon destruction! Oh! Isabella, your prayers are in vain!”

And with this comfortable reflection Mr. Willoughby went to give some necessary orders previous to his departure; and in this diversion of his thoughts lost for some minutes the sense alike of his guilt and his wretchedness.

CHAP. XLII.

“Fierce Repentance rears
Her snaky crest: a quick returning pang
Shoots through the conscious heart.”

THOMSON.

THE suspension was but momentary; and, in hopes of some mitigation of his self-reproach, he sought Isabella. He found her in her nursery, apparently occupied wholly with her boy; but in her face were such marks of mortal anguish as plainly shewed that her thoughts were not confined to that dear object of her care, whose returned good looks, and joyous spirits, left no cause for pain or fear on his account.

Mr. Willoughby took him into his arms; caressed him; played with him; talked of his quick return to health, of the needless alarm that they had given themselves; “and so,” said he, “my dear Isabella will pass away all your fears. I will take as good care of myself as you will of our dear boy, and we shall meet to thank each other.”

Isabella was not obliged to reply to this; it was said in a moment when the child’s attendant was not within hearing, and the next she was again in waiting to resume her charge when called upon. Mr. Willoughby putting the boy into her arms, invited Isabella to walk.

“You have not been in the air to day, my love,” said he; “let us go towards the water, I want to consult you about some trifling alterations; the superintendence of the work will be an occupation, and an amusement for you in my absence.”

Isabella prepared herself to comply; but with a passive sadness wholly unlike her usual alacrity, when called upon to share in any pursuits of Mr. Willoughby’s.

She felt, indeed, such a dread of any renewal of a conversation like what had passed between them before that morning, that had she followed the impulse of her inclination, she would have avoided being again alone with Mr. Willoughby.

It was not, however, his intention to enter afresh upon the subject; but to act, as if having sufficiently re-assured her, there was no cause for uneasiness on her part; and that the few hours they were still to pass together might be passed in the unimportant, but familiar communication of a husband and wife arranging to their mutual satisfaction any trifle that engaged their attention at the moment.

In this spirit, having drawn her arm under his, he walked with her through the wild paths and secluded spots which formed the *pleasure ground* of Eagle’s Crag; commenting upon their beauties, pointing out the good taste of their former possessors, and suggesting such little emendations as a lapse of time had made desirable.

It was difficult for a mind as full of sorrow, and as devoid of hope as Isabella’s was at this time, to attend to such discourse. Every word he uttered presented a future which she felt would never come; yet was she afraid to utter a syllable that might betray what she felt. She had failed in persuading him to that wholesome distrust of himself which would have led to safety; but to irritate him by discovering her hopelessness that he would do right, could only have hastened and consummated the evil which she dreaded.

She could only repeat again and again, that she would attend to his directions; that she would think of the alterations which he suggested; would balance the alternatives that he left for her consideration, and agree with him that it would “be pleasant to have some object in her walks; that it would “do her good to be much in the air,” and that “a detail of how all went on would be a pleasant subject for their correspondence.” But so heavily did her mind weigh upon her bodily powers, that every step she took seemed ten; she was rather supported by Mr. Willoughby, than held up by any exertion of her own; and her feet dragged so slowly that at length Mr. Willoughby could not help saying, “you seem tired; are you ill?” “No, not ill,” said Isabella, “but inactive; and if you have said all that you wish to say, I should be glad to go in, and lie down till dinner-time.”

“Oh, Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby, “why will you thus destroy yourself? why will you doubt *me*, only to make yourself wretched?”

“Stay with me, or suffer me to go with you!” exclaimed Isabella, making what she thought her last effort, “and every doubt will vanish.”

“Why do you give such a test as you know I cannot comply with?” returned Mr. Willoughby. “Isabella, this is not like yourself, whom hitherto I have always found so reasonable, so persuadable.”

“Oh were it my own happiness alone that was at stake,” cried Isabella, “you would find me persuadable still! but I cannot consent, I cannot give my sanction to what I know will be your ruin.”

“Your suspicions are injurious to me, to more *than me*,” said Mr. Willoughby, “and if you would not have me leave you in anger you must at least *conceal* them.”

“I have done!” said Isabella; “let us go into the house.”

As she said these words, she sunk from his arm, and must have fallen to the ground had he not caught her; and clasping her fondly to him, he exclaimed,

“My dearest creature, forgive my harshness! how could I be such a brute!”

“Never, never before,” said Isabella, in an agony, “did you threaten me with your anger!”

“And never, never can you experience it!” cried he; “but I am a creature of imperfections; unworthy, wholly unworthy, of being linked with such sweetness; but, my dearest love, you have spoiled me; such has been your indulgence to all my follies, that I cannot bear the shadow of injustice from you; and indeed *now* you wrong me.”

“You never shall have injustice from me,” said Isabella, in a voice scarcely to be heard; and as she said these words they entered the house.

Mr. Willoughby, seating Isabella, said everything that he could think of to compose her, or that could give her confidence in him; and certainly, at the moment, he meant to be sincere; and such was the appearance of his being so, that Isabella, in spite of her reason, felt something like hope revive in her heart: and she promising that she would do all that she could to be easy, he conducted her to the door of her apartment and left her there, to take that repose of which she stood so much in want.

But repose visits not the wretched. Isabella could stretch her weary limbs upon the sofa, and press her throbbing head against its cushion, but the aching heart felt no relief.

“Leave you in anger!” were the only words that sounded in her ears: and that he was to leave her accompanied by her worst enemy, the only thought that remained on her mind.

In vain she attempted to reason herself into a less acute sense of what she was, and what she feared she must be. Unable to succeed, she gave way to a restlessness that would have made the softest down a bed of iron; and finding her present situation insupportable, she arose, and sought in active occupation to get more quickly through a period, every passing moment of which she knew must be misery to her.

The exertion served but to increase the irritation of her spirits, and when she appeared at dinner her raised colour, and the ardent brilliancy of her eye, might have misled any but her present observers to have believed her not only happy, but joyous. But *they* could not be deceived. Her motion was hurried, her voice quick, her hands tremulous, and the palpitation of her bosom betrayed itself through the foldings of her garment.

Lady Charlotte looked at her, and wondered. Mr. Willoughby regarded her, and trembled.

By a manner the most quiet, by accents of the most even tone, by a gentle but not too marked attention, he strove to restore some degree of composure to the agitated frame of Isabella: nor was he wholly unsuccessful. The colour faded from her cheek; the eye lost its brightness; and the voice resumed its usual sound. He carefully avoided any allusion to the separation that was to take place the next day; and Lady Charlotte, who dreaded, from the state in which she saw Isabella, some sudden and violent explosion of her feelings, so skilfully aided the design of Mr. Willoughby, that the emotion of Isabella subsided by degrees; and so settled a sadness took possession of her features, as bespoke a mind more disposed to suffer than to resent. Lady Charlotte could desire nothing better: it was the very degree and kind of misery that she could revel in, without fear of its excess recoiling upon herself: but it was not so with Mr. Willoughby.

Relieved from the apprehension of what might be the immediate effect of the disorder in which she had appeared, his heart was but the more painfully oppressed by the settled grief for which it had been exchanged; and no longer dreading the consequences of any revulsion of feeling which his most undisguised interest in what affected her might occasion, he openly dedicated himself to her for the remainder of the evening. Under the appearance of necessary communication previous to his departure, he conversed almost exclusively with her; but yet, as before friends who would excuse a temporary neglect from the knowledge of the cause, he conversed in his usual pitch of voice, without mystery, or any apparent desire to be more private.

Under the same pretence, he put no interval between the withdrawal of the ladies from the dining-room and his rejoining them; but when he arose to open the door upon their retiring, he said, "Come, I might as well go with you: we can't afford to lose half-hours now. Dunstan, you will join us when you choose." And so saying, he accompanied them into the library.

Isabella penetrated his motive for this little deviation from usual form. She felt that what he did was to shelter from a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Charlotte, and a grateful sense of so considerate a kindness brought tears of tenderness to her eyes. She could not forbear to press his hand, as if to thank him; and had they been alone, she might at this instant have acknowledged that her suspicions had wronged him.

By this kind of management the evening passed away with less pain and embarrassment than could have been hoped; and certainly not with less satisfaction to

Isabella, from a restless kind of uneasiness apparent in Lady Charlotte, which seemed to betray a fear that her victim might yet escape her.

True, however, to the plan which she had laid down for herself, Lady Charlotte, when the moment of separation for the night came, assumed all her wonted kindness and familiarity towards Isabella.

“My sweet friend, farewell! we must be early stirrers; but you must not arouse yourself from your downy couch, to attend at our breakfast; we will make our adieus now; and pray accept my thanks for all the pleasures that your stately castle has afforded us, and receive my best wishes, that it may ever be to you the abode of peace, of love, and happiness,—farewell!” said she, with an action as if she would have embraced Isabella. Isabella stepped back; “farewell!” said she, and then again approaching her, as she was herself about to quit the room; she said in an under voice, “take care! you may consummate my misery, but your own perdition will be the consequence!” and she passed on, without even casting an eye upon Lady Charlotte, to see what effect the denunciation had produced.

Nor would it have soothed the throbbing anxiety of her heart, or gratified a single feeling, had she seen the colourless lip, quivering with rage and fear; or witnessed the contracted hand, which seemed to mould itself into the form of immediate vengeance—she was gone! and Lady Charlotte had just so much self command left, as to enable her to smooth her features and to follow her, without having suffered the secret of the offence that she had received to escape her.

But Isabella had a much more severe farewell to make; she had willingly consented not to leave her chamber until the travelling party should be gone; being convinced that she could not have witnessed the departure of Mr. Willoughby and Lady Charlotte in the same carriage, without an emotion that must have betrayed the inmost recesses of her thoughts. In the hopes that she might a little veil also, even from Mr. Willoughby, a distress that she knew would be offensive to him, and for the manifestation of which he had threatened so severe a return, she was resolved not to arise from her bed; and she flattered herself that the wish which Mr. Willoughby must naturally be supposed to have not to provoke any outward marks of a grief which he was resolved not to remove, would facilitate her task of bidding him farewell with tolerable composure.

But Mr. Willoughby was on this occasion under the controul even of a more powerful sensation than the desire of eluding temporary embarrassment. His whole soul was in tumults; torn at once by self-reproach, by a guilty passion, by the tenderest pity, and even by the purest love for the unfortunate Isabella, he strove to persuade himself that the step which he was about to take was necessary; that it led to no evil consequences; that it would enable him so to settle his pecuniary difficulties as to place it in his power to return to his home, to his child, and to his wife! and then, thought he, I will wholly break my connexion with Lady Charlotte, innocent as it is. I will settle here. We shall meet no more, and the mild virtues of my Isabella will efface the ravage that this insensate and cruel passion has made in my mind. It was his hope that he might leave Isabella under the conviction that such were his purposes, and that a very short time would restore him to her, to remain with her for life; and he thought that he could make this so plain, that he might have the consolation of leaving her in full reliance on his integrity, and in all the cheerfulness of hope.

But what had appeared so convincing to his own understanding, when he came to represent it to Isabella, struck him instantly as inadequate to impose upon hers. The weight of his argument lay in his resolution to abandon Lady Charlotte; and this he could neither bring forward without acknowledging an interest between them, which he had so strenuously disavowed; or if he could, was it possible for him to hope that Isabella would rely upon a justice in future which was denied to her at present? He gave up then the hope of satisfying her reason, but he yielded to the indulgence of his present feelings by overwhelming her with the tenderest caresses.

Again and again he gave her the parting embrace, the parting kiss! reiterated his charge that she would write to him; that she would take care of herself. But all was uttered in monosyllables, or broken sentences. He talked not, as the day before, of alterations, of occupation, of amusement in his absence. There were no words but "Our boy!"—"Your precious health!"—"Do not doubt me!"—"Farewell!"—"I must be gone!"—"Not yet!"—"Not yet!"—And again and again a return from the already opened door.

The miserable Isabella could only utter, "Oh, Willoughby, you deceive yourself!"—"You go to ruin!"—"Oh! stay!"—"Yet, even yet, it is not too late!"—"Oh! take me with you!"—But the final farewell was at last pronounced, and he rushed hastily from the room, as if to deprive himself of the very power of return.

CHAP. XLIII.

“I have seen her sometimes in a calm
So desolate, that the most clamorous grief
Had nought to envy her within.”

BYRON.

ISABELLA, exhausted, sunk motionless upon her pillow; and remained almost without consciousness, until the “stealthy pace” of cautious respect approached her bed. It was Mrs. Evans with coffee in her hand.

“I thought, madam, that you would want some breakfast; and perhaps you may fall asleep afterwards, having been disturbed so early.”

Isabella looked up on her humble friend; and a consciousness that she was an object of compassion, and a sense of the kindness which pity had engendered, melted her into tears; when she could speak, “sit down, Evans,” said she, “and give me the coffee; as you have brought it, I will try to take some.”

“And perhaps eat a morsel of dry toast, madam,” said Evans.

“Yes,” said Isabella, “you make dry toast better than any body. I am sure you made this; and I think I could never forbear to eat what you made. It is very good indeed!” said she, eating a small piece, and then, drinking a cup of coffee, “Evans you are an excellent nurse; draw my curtains, and I will try to sleep for half an hour; but tell Williams to come to me the moment I ring.”

Isabella well knew that it was impossible she should sleep; but she could not refuse to Evans the pleasure of believing that her good and kind management had had its full effect; and she sent away the worthy creature with all the consolation which the lively interest she took in the sorrows of her young mistress so well deserved.

Isabella, however, found her bed insupportably irksome; and being in some degree renovated by the refreshment that she had taken, she arose; and feeling an almost invincible repugnance to undergoing the horrors of the solitary day that was before her, she waited not until she was dressed, before she wrote the following note to Mr. Parr.

“I am again alone. Pray let me see you, and my dear Catherine. We shall not meet as we parted; I cannot hope that your sagacity should be at a loss for the cause; but I know I may depend upon the rectitude of your feeling not to press for a confidence that could *tell* you nothing; and which it would be unbecoming in me to make. Were there any thing to be done, whose advice would I seek sooner than yours? but to suffer is a lesson I must learn from a higher source than that of any human intellect.”

Mr. Parr and his daughter obeyed this melancholy summons, if not with pleasure, with the readiest promptitude. Mr. Parr was too well acquainted with the characters of those with whom Isabella had lately been compelled to associate, to have entertained a hope that her happiness would be augmented by such an exchange from her former solitude; and, secluded even as he was from general intercourse, he had not escaped from hearing such observations, or from such relation of facts, as had prepared him to find her really unhappy.

But he was not prepared for the ravages that the emotions of the two preceding days had made in her countenance; and he absolutely started when, upon entering the

well-known library, he found her colourless as the garment in which she was wrapt; and saw that as she rose to receive him her whole frame trembled, and that the voice with which she would have greeted him, died inaudibly on her lips.

What a difference in her appearance from when they last met! she was then radiant with joy and hope: every pulse beating with the fond belief of being the cherished object of a husband's kindest affections! — now he saw her pale with sorrow; drooping under the conviction of the neglect, the unfaithfulness of that beloved husband, whom no coldness, no wrongs could dislodge from her heart.

The fervent Catherine ran to embrace her friend, and burst into tears as she cast her arms around her.

"I do not wonder that you have suffered much from the alarm that the illness of your dear boy has occasioned you," said Mr. Parr; "but Hawkins assures me that he is quite well, and that there is no danger of a recurrence of the disorder."

Isabella pressed the hand of Mr. Parr, in token of her gratitude for so delicate a proof that he would understand nothing more of the nature of her sufferings, than what she could unreluctantly avow.

"We must resume all our studies," said Isabella, with a smile as faint as the sun beam of a December's day. "My dear Catherine, you will find me I fear a sad truant; while you, I dare say, have made a full use of the interval of our separation."

Mr. Parr and Catherine fell easily into the mode that Isabella seemed to mark out for their intercourse; and without any reference to what might be supposed to have passed at Eagle's Crag since last they visited there, they re-commenced the occupations and amusements which had usually filled up their time before that interruption of their pursuits, which had ended with such a death blow to the happiness of Isabella.

But although she had thus endeavoured to ward off the destructive effects which she had so justly feared, both for her constitution and her intellects, if she had been left to solitude, and to the tyranny of her own thoughts; she by no means hoped, or even intended, had it been possible, wholly to abstract herself from a sense of the situation in which she was placed. She knew that at present she could only be passive; but she was not unaware that the time was probably not far distant, when she would be called upon to act.

During Mr. Willoughby's residence at Eagle's Crag she had communicated little with Lady Rachel; she had nothing to relate from which she had derived pleasure, or from which she could hope that Lady Rachel would receive a more favourable impression of Mr. Willoughby's character than what she usually professed to entertain. Her letters had therefore been short, and unfrequent; and she easily perceived by Lady Rachel's answers that she did not disapprove of this reserve, but reserve was now at an end. Mr.

Willoughby had gone away with Lady Charlotte, and had left her in solitude and wretchedness. What more could Isabella reveal of turpitude on his part, which he had not himself published to the world? But she was not without a hope that she might lighten the colours in which she knew he must appear to Lady Rachel, by relating the many acts of kindness, and expressions of affection, which he had so strangely mingled with his unshakable determination to desert her. She could also detail the little of reason which he had brought forward to justify such a step; and she endeavoured to persuade herself that Lady Rachel, from a more extended knowledge of his pecuniary difficulties than she had been able to extract from him, might find more weight in such arguments than she had

done. She had besides to lay the whole of her own conduct, through the intricate path which she had been treading, before Lady Rachel; and, above all, it was through Lady Rachel alone that she could expect to be truly informed of the real state of facts, and learn whether she had any thing to hope, or what more she had to suffer.

Urgent as were all the considerations that prompted her to write to Lady Rachel, yet Isabella was several days before she could sufficiently arrange her thoughts, or command her fingers steady enough to accomplish her purpose. She made frequent attempts; but the tone either of complaint or anger prevailed, as she thought, more than it ought, and she again postponed the letter till she could better satisfy herself with the feelings that she had to express.

At length she sent the following epistle to Lady Rachel:

"I know, my ever honoured Lady Rachel, that you disdain the weakness which leads the affections to apologize for failings which the reason condemns; but your candour withholds you from giving judgment until the whole of the case is before you. You will not therefore be one of the censurers of my dear Mr. Willoughby, even for a conduct the publicity of which leaves no doubt of what he *has done*, until you can more fully understand *why* he has done it.

"I am willing to persuade myself, that were I able to lay before you his reasons for neither remaining with me here, nor suffering me to go to town with him, they would be of sufficient weight to remove all imputation of wilful unkindness, or premeditated injury. But he has not thought it expedient to open himself to me on those difficulties in his pecuniary affairs, on which he grounded the manner of proceeding which must expose him to so much (I would fain hope) unjust censure. If the kindest expressions, and marks of the most sincere attachment, may be allowed as evidences of his feelings, he did not quit me with less reluctance than I parted from him; and perhaps it is the weakness of my own mind that incapacitates me from feeling that confidence in his asseverations of love, and his professed purpose of a speedy return, not again to separate, which the solemnity and earnestness of them seem to demand: and I am the more inclined to believe this to be the case, because I have an *indubitable proof*, that a connexion, which I acknowledge reflects dishonour on both parties, has not been carried to the length that the indiscretion of their manners might give hasty judges reason to believe.

"I have had my difficulties: and I must of course have many misgivings that I have not acted as well as I ought to have done. The most consoling test that I can think of is, the wish that I so earnestly feel, that you could have been witness to every word and thought that this cruel subject has given rise to on my side.

"You may, perhaps, be told, that it was offered, to break my solitude by the society of her whom I have the most reason to dread and to disapprove, of any human creature whatever. This is true: and although I can account to myself why I asked permission to refuse this offer, I doubt whether it may not appear to others, that it would have been more discreet to have sacrificed my feelings, and my dignity, to have separated two persons, although but for the shortest time, whom it is so much my interest to keep apart for ever.

"I hope it is not an undue partiality to my own decision which leads me to believe that this will not be your opinion.

"I had made my suspicions apparent; I had even avowed them: what intercourse could have been maintained between us that would not have degraded me, and sanctioned

the ill which I deprecated? I did not dare to do evil that good might come; could I even have hoped that so crooked a path would have led to good.

“My guardianship having been refused where it was due, and where it might have been useful, I believed that all farther consideration was narrowed to the respect that I owed to myself.

“I wished it to appear that I was not a dupe, lest my affected blindness should betray others into a security too likely to be not less injurious to them than to me: and it is most probable that had I determined otherwise, the disgrace on my part would have been incurred without producing the effect for which I had submitted to it. The husband’s impatience to return to “the haunts of men,” would at any time have been a sufficient pretence for the wife’s deserting the post which she affected to be willing to hold only in compassion to me.

“Such were my reasons for what I did. It will be a consolation if they form towards you my apology.

“Nor am I alone: Mr. Parr and his daughter are with me; and from them I shall receive all the human support that I can want here. From the intelligence that you shall send me, my dear Lady Rachel, I look for that information which must regulate my future conduct; and from your affection, all the assistance that can be given on this side of heaven, to maintain me in the path which it shall be my duty to tread.

“My boy has been alarmingly ill: he is now well; and I am told that I need not fear for the future. Can you doubt but that on this subject my heart is very sensible to joy and thankfulness? My dear, my ever honoured, my inexpressibly kind friend, farewell!”

The effort that Isabella had thus made to suppress nothing of the truth, while she kept back from the view of Lady Rachel the ravaging effects which such a state of things had had upon her mind, had in fact more disordered her frame, than if she had given a free vent to the sorrows that oppressed her. As she proceeded in her task, her head and heart seemed bursting with constrained passion, and when she had finished a detail which seemed the result of the calmest reason, and the most subdued feelings, she doubted whether her heart would not break, or her intellect desert her!

The soothings of the affectionate Catherine, who, alarmed by her longer than usual abstraction from her friends, had come to seek her in her own apartment, made the tears flow, and gave her the relief which she so much wanted: and when the powers of reflection returned, she could confess to herself, that the sense of having been able to discharge so trying a duty with so much magnanimity towards others, and with so little advertence to self, was a blessing not to be purchased at too high a price. Such consciousness spread over her countenance a gentle beam of inward peace, that in part restored her features to their natural expression, and imparted a consolation to her two faithful friends, which the severe sympathy that her sorrows had wrought in their hearts made no more than necessary.

CHAP. XLIV.

“We pray for all that Fortune can impart,
Yet in her smiles our surest rain find;
Grief is the fire that purifies the heart,
And frees from earthly dross th’ immortal mind.”

GALLY KNIGHT.

AND well it was, that the spirit had in its meekness so much strength, for every coming hour brought fresh assaults to prove it.

There wanted not real, although ill-judging friends; nor yet light tattlers, who seemed emulous who should be foremost in revealing to Isabella the injuries that she was sustaining.

In the varied form of compassion, of advice, of inuendo, there was laid before her a scene of gambling the most ruinous; of the violation of obligations the most sacred; of the forgetfulness of duties the most imperative! She was stimulated by the sarcasm of derision, to remain no longer insensible and inactive; and she was exhorted to take her destiny into her own hand, and to escape with her boy from the destruction which it would not be in her power to avert. Such was particularly the language of her mother and sisters: not without a reproach from the former, that she was answerable for all that had ensued from her haughty rejection of Lady Charlotte for her companion in the absence of Mr. Willoughby.

“No body doubts the guilt of their connexion,” wrote Lady Jane; “but as she still remains with her husband, she keeps her station in good company; why then fastidiously reject an arrangement which would have saved appearances to the world, and given Mr. Willoughby a motive for a speedy return into Westmoreland? — a return which would have obviated the most calamitous part of this mischief—a course of play that can only end in his own ruin, and that of yourself and your child.”

There was not a fibre in the heart of Isabella responsive to such a note of worldly and unprincipled reasoning, and she felt it as an aggravation of the most heavy of her griefs that she should be obliged to hear it from a parent!

The taunts, the reproaches, the scriptural quotations, and the advices of Mrs. Nesbitt, none of which were spared upon this occasion, passed by her as empty wind; and to the grovelling and humiliating counsels of Lady Jane she opposed the more pure and lofty spirit of Lady Rachel, which supported her in an elevation of mind, as far removed from the meanness of pride as it was from the falsely calculating spirit which forgets, in the fleeting moments of time, the interests of eternity. By her precepts her eye had learnt to penetrate the dark clouds of mortality, and to fix its visions on the brightness of immortal bliss.

Of all the motives for consolation, or the suggestions for conduct that Isabella received from her real or affected friends at this disastrous period, Lady Rachel alone was able to communicate the one, or to direct the other.

Thus she wrote:

“DEAREST CHILD,

“Your afflictions are severe and piercing; it is the will of God! how you shall bear them must be your own. The responsibility is an awful one; and it is as difficult to discharge, as it is awful. For the *one* right path, there are many wrong ones; and they will present themselves to you under very seducing appearances, and with very high sounding names. Be it your part to reduce them to the nakedness of truth, and the simplicity of virtue.

“There is nothing prudent, that is not true; nor dignified that is not honest; you have already acted upon this principle, and have thereby given a guarantee that no mistaken consideration for self, nor weak indulgence to others, shall ever betray you into a compromise with vice and folly. Bind yourself with bands of iron to that main pillar of righteousness, ‘not to do evil that good may come.’ This once shaken, the whole fabric of virtue and religion is levelled with the ground, and is dispersed as the light particles of the sandy desert!

“But, dearest child! I bless God that you stand more in need of consolation than of advice: it is sorrow, not sin that you have to grapple with. Keep the one afar from you, and the other *must* fade away into the fruition of everlasting happiness! You will say, and ‘*only* into everlasting happiness? have I nothing to hope on this side the grave?’ Far be it from me to encourage the rebellion of despair. Shall not he ‘who forms the light, and creates darkness,’ be able to say to the tormentors of this world, ‘Peace! be still!’ to take the sting from the serpent, and the poison from the adder? but come not forth on your journey with the scanty provision that is dependent on the supplies that you may meet with in the way; the manna *may* drop in the wilderness; but the land of milk and honey is beyond the waters of Jordan.

“Of your unhappy husband I can tell you nothing that you ought to hear. Yet I believe with you that he is more a dupe than a villain. His evil genius maintains her innocence stoutly; and has even the effrontery to talk of her friendship for you, and of the sacrifices that she was willing to make for your sake. And she had her hearers, and her believers. Yet she disdains to disavow, almost to her husband’s face, the *holy* attachment that subsists between herself and the unhappy victim of her machinations. In all this there is neither the devotedness of love nor the headlong impulse of passion: there is in it more of the cold calculation of malice than either; and malice is the ruling passion of her soul. Yet the infatuated Willoughby sees nothing but the most unspotted purity, and the most disinterested affection. The world, with very few exceptions, gives her credit for neither. Yet, as I have said, she has her partizans; and you have your censors. Your friend Mrs. Nesbitt is the bitterest among them; for which, I doubt not, she can find scriptural authority.

“The guilty pair are almost constantly together; and at this moment you cannot throw yourself between them with any prospect but that of perishing in the act. He calls her ‘his guide,’ his ‘polar star;’ and he even dares to foretell the hour when you will own your obligations to her.

“You will believe that I had chased him from my presence, e’er he could finish such a sentence, and that my doors are shut against them. Let not this concern you; every drop of the polluted blood that circulates in his veins must be wrung out before he can be restored to a healthy state. It is by the knife and the caustic that he can alone be saved; emollients and lenitives would be used in vain!

“God support you until the final hour of trial, and *through* it! It will not be long of coming; there is plan and purpose even in what your enemy wishes to be considered only as the aberrations of vehement affection. It is not enough for her to rob you of your husband’s love, except she may involve you in her own disgrace; nor is her passion so ungoverned as to carry her off with a ruined man, who cannot repay the sacrifices she makes him, even with the poor offering of his name and hand. Yet she is playing a desperate game; she will not be long able to retain her place in her husband’s house; already they live the lives of fiends; and when once this last hold upon society is gone, she must either throw herself into the power of Willoughby, or return to her family; and if ever she re-enter her father’s doors, he will break all connexion between them, or he will break her heart. If it were not for that worldly, temporizing Lady Stanton, matters would have come to extremities before now.

“She soothes and flatters the tradesman Dunstan, who values the cajoleries of a Countess above his wife’s chastity, and suffers himself to appear to be persuaded that there is nothing ‘but the ways of the world,’ and ‘the graces of fashionable life,’ in all that her worthy daughter does; and there is no want of examples by which to uphold the doctrine. But although fashion, like charity, may cover a multitude of sins, it cannot soften the asperities of temper; and the daughter does more in a quarter of an hour to deprive herself of her last asylum from the world’s scorn, than the mother can accomplish in a week towards re-establishing her firmly in it.

“Thus you see, my child, that all things tend to the catastrophe. Arouse every energy of your mind to abide the result. Whatever occurs, you and your dear boy shall never suffer the slightest pecuniary evil. I know how light you feel such apprehensions for yourself; and at this moment you advert, perhaps, but little to them even on his account; but the time will come when you will rejoice to feel that your child is not a beggar; and that your own merits have preserved him from being so.

“Your ardent young friend, Burghley, visits me often. His first visit seemed to be made with fear and trembling. I know I have an ill name amongst the feeble of soul, who cannot bear the sound of truth, but he is not one of those; and I have ‘so calmed the terrors of my claws,’ that he now runs in and out as if he were one of my household.

“I saw from the first that his motive for visiting me was kindness to you; and, without intending it, he disclosed so much of what had been passing at Eagle’s Crag, that I saw you, as although I had been there, in all your bright intelligence, enthroned above the cloudy atmosphere which lay at your feet. Preserve your pre-eminence I implore you! not merely that I may love you, as I never loved but one other human creature — that would be a trifle — but that the excellence which is so cheering on earth may shine forth in glory inexpressible to all eternity! Child of my renovated affections, God bless you!”

Stimulating as was the view that Lady Rachel presented to the intellectual and moral feelings of Isabella, of the duties that she had to perform, and the high destiny to which she was called, it was insufficient to arrest the corroding tooth of sorrow which preyed too visibly on the health of its victim. The energies of the mind wore out the body, and not all the kind soothings of her two inestimable friends, nor the vigorous efforts with which she endeavoured to sustain herself, could much longer have supported her under the excruciating suspense, and the agonising irritation to which she was doomed. She prayed for some crisis; some consummation that would cut off hope for ever, or restore

her to an agency, where the misery, however overwhelming to herself, might be useful to the being whom she so ardently loved!

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CHAP. XLV.

“Away! I’ll teach your differences. Away! away!
If you will measure your lubber’s length,
Turn: —but away! —go to! —have you wisdom?
So! —”

SHAKSPEARE.

A PERFECT confidence was at this time established between her and Mr. Parr; but it was the confidence of intuition. No circumstances had been required by Mr. Parr, nor had any been detailed by Isabella.

Mr. Parr had seen the heart, breaking under the weight of uncommunicated sorrow; and assuming the right, with the tenderness of a parent, had spoken and acted as although no reserve had been between them. Isabella felt that concealment was no longer possible, nor available to any good. It was a relief to have no part to act, no appearance to keep up. It was some consolation to weep in the presence of a friend; or silently to put into his hand the letters which she received, while she withdrew to torture herself in solitude, by ruminating on their contents; assured that on her return to society she should meet the eye of pity, and should hear the voice of wisdom and affection.

Yet a longer interval of solitude was at times necessary to her; and it had become her habit to wander about some part of every morning by herself, while Mr. Parr was gone home for a few hours, and while Catherine, at the request of her friend, found an occupation for herself.

At this part of the day her mind was less agitated than at any other; the irritation produced by the information brought by the post of the evening before was in some degree quieted, and the feverish expectation of what the next might produce was not risen to its highest point. In these rambles she would visit every place where she had ever been with Mr. Willoughby; and, strange as it may seem, the little building where she had overheard his conversation with Lady Charlotte, had for her a peculiar attraction. It is true that she never entered it without shuddering; but in her present circumstances there was a degree of balm in recalling to her mind the respect, the compassion, with which, even to her rival, he had spoken of her; in repeating to herself the very words he had used; in dwelling upon every syllable that told of his attachment to his boy, of his self-accusation, of his remorse, and even of his wretchedness. Well she knew that it was only through the gates of misery that he could return to the path of virtue; and she sought to strengthen her mind to bear his sufferings, by the remembrance of how they had been incurred, and from what they were to redeem him.

It was now that the storm which had so long threatened seemed to be bursting over her head. Her last letters from town seemed to shut the door upon hope; and Isabella had one morning withdrawn to her usual place of resort, with the dissipating conviction that in all probability she should enter it no more.

Here, as she sat absorbed in the saddest of thoughts, the innermost door of the little apartment opened, and Sir Charles Seymour stood before her!

She started from her seat, at so unexpected an apparition, but not from any apprehension for herself; she viewed him only as the messenger of ill tidings from her husband.

“Oh! tell me, tell me all!” cried she. “I am prepared for all! —I can bear all! —it will not kill me!” said she; and sunk almost lifeless on the seat from whence she had risen.

“Most admirable, most injured of thy sex!” said Sir Charles. “Would to God I had died, rather than had such a tale to tell! I need not appeal to you how zealously I have laboured to avert such a catastrophe; you have seen it; you have deigned, in the delicacy and wisdom of silence, I allow — but you have deigned not to leave me ignorant that you approved and that you thanked me for my friendship. For myself I could not ask for more; I did not deserve so much; for I have failed to preserve you! — Willoughby has consummated his folly! He has ruined himself, his child, — he has, — oh! blindness, infatuation beyond belief! —he has ruined *you*!”

“Oh! my beloved creature,” cried he, as seating himself by her, he put one arm round her waist, as if to support her sinking frame, “in what other circumstances than the present should I dare to avow a passion that I had resolved to carry to my grave in silence and despair! but now, now, when you are alone in the world! unsupported! —abandoned! —beggared! shall I be restrained by mere forms, from offering you my protection! — from laying my fortune and my love at your feet! Oh! do not look so wildly, so angrily! — do not struggle from the arm that shall be used only to defend you!”

“Let me go! — hold me not, basest of men!” cried the panting, struggling Isabella. “I *will* be at liberty!” and with one effort she pushed him from her, and rushing to the door, she thought herself free; but Sir Charles’s more powerful motion prevented her, and, interposing between her and the door,

“My beloved creature,” said he, “why this alarm? By all that is sacred, you have no cause for apprehension. I am, I *must* be the creature of your will. But you *shall* hear me. Fondly as I doat upon you, as assuredly as all my hopes of future happiness hang on this moment, yet could you see my heart, you would see that I could disappoint this fondness, abjure these hopes, were it only a selfish good that I sought; but it is *your* happiness, your security, your redemption from sorrows as great as undeserved, that I have in view. Oh! how deeply do I lament that these ends cannot be obtained by means more accordant to the delicacy of your wishes! But yet hear me, — hear with patience; — hear me with that unprejudiced reason which is as much your distinction as your beauty or your virtue. If the most respectful, the purest, the most ardent affection can recommend me to your favour, you need not hesitate to grant it me. I ask you to be my wife. I ask you to suffer me to become the protector of your child, the restorer of his ruined fortunes. The ties that shall bind us to each other will be from the first sacred in the eyes of God; they shall be made so in those of men from the first instant that by the absurd laws of this country it will be possible to make them so. Can the circumstance of being born on one side or the other of an imaginary line, mislead your good sense to believe *that* to be *wrong* as an English woman which you would know to be *right* as a Scotch woman? The laws of that well-judging country would give you a legal redress for the injuries inflicted upon you; and you would then have only known me in the light which would have reflected so much honour upon me, as the warmest, the most devoted lover, and the truest friend, that ever woman had. And shall you be afraid to take your

cause into your own hand? Shall words startle you? If I cannot now save your and your child from beggary and misery without some apparent wound to your delicacy, be assured that you cannot more deeply lament the necessity of that wound than I do myself. But are you in a situation to stand upon punctilio? Am I to look coolly on and witness your destruction, lest I should shock a feeling founded alone in prejudice, and disavowed by reason? Allow me to accompany you, even this very hour, from this hated place. Everything is prepared for your evasion; and when I have once seen you in security, I will not again appear before you, until I can present to you a legal obligation which shall secure to your boy, if not an equivalent for what his father has so basely robbed him of, at least such a provision as will secure him a station in the world worthy of the mother from whence he sprung."

It was with repeated interruptions, with struggling, and resentment, that Isabella had been obliged to suffer Sir Charles to speak thus far; but at this moment, bursting from him, she cried, "stand off! must I hear such profanation? forbear! let me be gone!"

"*Never*, till you are calmer—*never* till you are in a state better to understand your own happiness," said Sir Charles. "Lady Charlotte is with your husband. His only alternative to a jail, is banishment for the rest of his life from the country that gave him birth. And will you cling to such a man? As well might you refuse to quit the sinking vessel when the fury of the ocean pours over her. And must your boy share your destruction? and for what? a word? a name? Loveliest of creatures, see me thus lowly bent before you, in earnest supplication that you will save yourself, and bless me. I offer you rank—fortune. You despise them all. And well you may despise them: they are no purchase for merit such as yours. But I offer you a heart, which beats but for you, and which will cease to beat if you reject it, and in whose devotion I dare aver that you will find happiness."

"In vain, in vain," cried Isabella, endeavouring to disengage her hands from his grasp, "do you attempt to move me; to hear you is a crime! let me go!" said she, stamping with her foot; "or I will call for assistance, and expose you to all the obloquy and contempt that you deserve."

"Of what are you afraid?" cried he. "Your destiny is in your own hands. Only promise that you will reflect upon what I have said; that you will allow me again to see you. Tell me that you will pardon me the agitation I have caused you; that you do justice to the sincerity, the honesty of my offers, and I will let you go: for I am assured that in a calmer moment you will at least acquit me of any wilful offence."

"I will never pardon," said Isabella; "I will promise nothing. And go, Sir, I *will*, in spite of you—this moment will I go."

"Nor *this*, nor the *next*," said he. "I must not, I will not be baffled."

The piercing shriek of Isabella, the bursting open of the door, and the appearance of Mr. Parr, were the events of a single moment. Equally simultaneous were Sir Charles's relaxed grasp of Isabella, and Mr. Parr's vigorous seizure of Sir Charles.

"Again have we met? And again is it my fate to chastise thy baseness?" exclaimed Mr. Parr. "Thank the principle that withholds me from striking thee to my foot, never to rise again. Go, thou betrayer of innocence! thou insulter of virtue, go! and hide thy infamy in some corner of the earth, where thy name shall never be heard more!"

And thus saying, and at the same time violently shaking the trembling culprit, with one powerful swing he flung him from him, accompanying the action with a spurn

of his foot, which, although it touched not the person of Sir Charles, reached his pride, and caused him to turn back, foaming with rage, and vociferating vengeance.

“Approach not!” said Mr. Parr, raising with his strenuous arm the ponderous walking-stick which he held in his hand. “You *know* the vigor of this arm. Approach not, lest I forget every consideration, but the duty to inflict a punishment so justly your due, and fell you to the ground. Begone! and carry with you your disgraceful secret. I have before allowed you time for repentance, in vain as it seems. Abuse not my mercy a second time.”

“You shall hear from me; be assured, you shall hear from me!” cried Sir Charles, in a voice almost choked with rage.

“In any form you please,” returned Mr. Parr, with the utmost contempt. “But begone! — begone this instant! Away!” and he repeated the words, while he watched the retreating steps of Sir Charles till he could see him no more.

Then hastily turning round toward the miserable Isabella, he beheld her stretched senseless and breathless at his feet.

A gushing rivulet that fell into a basin at the door of the secluded place where they were, furnished him with the immediate means of recalling the apparent corpse to life; and, raising her gently in his arms, he laid her on the matted seat which half surrounded the room; then kneeling by her, “my dear child,” said he, “take courage; your audacious insulter is gone, never to return. You are safe. Be composed.”

“Safe! Oh! what is my safety?” cried the grateful Isabella. “*You* are in danger, and in danger for *me*!”

“In danger!—in danger from such a reptile as *that*?” cried Mr. Parr. “This arm could chastise an army of such guilt-shaken creatures! The slightest breath can quiver them! Waste not a thought upon the wretch. My will controls his fate. It has done so before time; it will ever do so; for well he knows I can tell a tale that would chase him from society with burning shame and infamy.”

“Oh! who could have believed, —who could have thought there was such a man!” said Isabella.

“Think of him no more,” said Mr. Parr. “With whatever design he came here, it is frustrated. You will never see him more.”

“He tells me,” said Isabella, in accents scarcely articulate, “he tells me that I am undone; that treachery and guilt are consummated! Oh! why stayed I here? — why did I not rush between them? Had I perished in the attempt, what then? — I had perished in an act of duty.”

“And your boy?” said Mr. Parr.

“My boy! my fatherless boy!” cried Isabella, in a tone of wild distraction, “O merciful God let me but preserve my senses! my boy! oh let him not be bereaved of both his parents in one hour! was not such a loss fatal to his father?”

“Then live for his sake,” replied Mr. Parr; “desert not yourself, and God will not desert you.”

“Oh, I have struggled, I have wrestled with my calamities! but now!”

“Now,” said Mr. Parr, “is the time to struggle, to wrestle more; do not believe that you are hopeless; take not your fate from one habituated to falsehood; the moment for action is come; arouse yourself to act, and doubt not but you will be blessed.”

“Oh, my more than parent!” said Isabella; “but for you —

“I am but the appointed agent,” said Mr. Parr; “look higher, and your fears and doubts will fade away, like darkness before the rising sun. But your mortal part is exhausted. You must be conveyed to the house. I fear you cannot walk; and I am unwilling to leave you.”

“Oh! leave me not!” said Isabella; “perhaps my limbs may support me.” But the effort to rise overcame her, and she sunk back again on the matting.

Fortunately the anxious Catherine, who had sought her friend in every other place of her usual resort, appeared at this time at the door of the room, and furnished at once the means of communication, and the assistance necessary to transport Isabella to the house with ease and safety. Mr. Parr charged himself with the superintendence of the whole management, and took the principal part in its execution.

Under such kind guardianship Isabella was removed with so little exertion, that her exhausted frame did not suffer; and the happiness of finding herself once more under her own roof in safety, and surrounded by friends emulous who should most contribute to her ease and comfort, assisted so powerfully the efforts that she herself made to compose her distracted thoughts, that Mr. Parr had soon the satisfaction of seeing her capable of receiving consolation, and of attending to reason. In this comparative repose we will leave her, to look after those who well deserved to “sleep no more.”

CHAP. XLVI.

“I can give no reason, nor I will not,
More than a lodged hate, and certain loathing
I bear Antonia, that I follow thus
A losing suit against him.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE crisis that Lady Rachel had foretold had taken place. Mr. Dunstan and Lady Charlotte had separated. In vain were all the emollients applied by Lady Stanton: the asperities of Lady Charlotte's temper had made their way through them all.

Boastful of her self-called virtue, she disdained to disguise either her connexion with Mr. Willoughby, or the hatred and contempt with which she regarded her husband.

They met but to quarrel; they parted but to study new methods how best to provoke and irritate each other.

Mr. Dunstan was authoritative — Lady Charlotte insolent. Mr. Dunstan forbade her to receive Mr. Willoughby's visits: Lady Charlotte told Mr. Dunstan that the house was as much hers as his, and that she would receive whom she chose. Mr. Dunstan swore he would shut his doors against her. Lady Charlotte replied that she would sue him for a separate maintenance. Mr. Dunstan threatened her with a divorce: Lady Charlotte defied him. Mr. Dunstan locked her up in her apartment, and Lady Charlotte disappeared, taking with her her personal attendant, and no track where she was gone could be traced.

It was at this period that the unhappy Willoughby, urged by the accumulating difficulties of his situation, had had recourse to the desperate expedient of the gaming-table, as the only immediate means in his power to free himself from the incessant harassing attendant upon every transaction of a necessitous man. The expedient had failed; and he too had disappeared from the haunts of society. No one doubted but that they were together. But it was not so that Lady Charlotte meant to play her game.

The place of concealment to which Mr. Willoughby had withdrawn had been concerted with her; and she had prepared it so apart from all his usual haunts, and so cut off from all the knowledge of all with whom he had to do in every rank of life, that he was as effectually concealed in the midst of the city of London as if he had been consigned to the grave.

Mr. Willoughby had no farther design in this seclusion than to gain time and leisure finally to determine how he should arrange his affairs, and then to quit the kingdom for ever.

In this moment of bitter reflection, the virtues of Isabella and the claims of his child seized upon his heart with irresistible force, and reduced the power of Lady Charlotte to the mild influence of a friend; a dear, an inexpressibly dear friend: but such an one as he wished not to make partaker in his disgrace, or to be involved in his distress.

The anguish that he felt from a sense of the bitter sorrows that he knew he must have brought upon Isabella, was as a warning voice not to reduce Lady Charlotte to the same condition; and the upbraidings of his conscience for what was past, goaded him to make all the reparation in his power, by assigning to his wife and child as ample a provision for the future as his limited means would allow; and by leaving Lady Charlotte

as fully as he could, in possession of that fair fame, which she so loudly asserted belonged by right to the pure and disinterested affection that subsisted between them. He had earnestly entreated her to remain under the protection of her husband, or to separate from him with the sanction of her friends, and to return to her father's house.

Nothing, however, could be farther from Lady Charlotte's intention than to take such salutary advice; but it was her purpose to have continued with Mr. Dunstan until she could ascertain what power the knowledge of Mr. Willoughby's ruin, and his supposed connexion with her, would give Sir Charles Seymour over the mind of Isabella. Judging of Isabella by herself, Lady Charlotte could scarcely limit this power to any degree short of so absolute a subjection of Isabella's resolutions to the tempting offers of protection and adoration which Sir Charles was so prepared to make her, as would ruin her reputation and destroy her peace of mind for ever. Lady Charlotte might then be the wife of Mr. Willoughby; and by persuading him to sell the whole of his landed property, a measure to which she was every day artfully leading him, they might still be in possession of means amply sufficient for any gratification of life in the foreign lands where they were henceforth to reside. Her triumph would thus be complete! and revenge and passion be alike satiated! Violence of temper had, however, been too powerful for deliberate malice.

The explosion with Mr. Dunstan had been produced, not by any premeditated scheme on her part, but by one of those ungovernable gusts of fury that had so often counteracted the cooler enormities of Lady Charlotte, but which she also seldom failed to turn to her own advantage by her after-management.

No sooner did she find herself, by her own intemperance, excluded from her husband's house, and thrown under the un pitying observation of the world, than she resolved to seize that instant to accomplish her triumph over Isabella, and to consummate her revenge on the guilty Willoughby.

By closely concealing herself at the very period when Mr. Willoughby disappeared, she foresaw that it would be concluded that they were together; and she calculated that Isabella's despair and indignation, on so decisive and so galling a proof of the injuries that were done her, would make her an easy prey to the arts of Sir Charles Seymour. To him alone she communicated the place of her retreat, and demanded to see him.

"Now," cried she, the instant he appeared, "the moment of my triumph approaches! I deliver into your hands the destiny of Isabella Hastings! I have broken with my tyrant;—the world thinks me a disgraced fugitive at the mercy of her wretched husband. But I have taken effectual means to retain in my own hand the necessary proofs of his and my innocence, to be produced when such proofs will avail me; and these means I will not let go till I have attained the object of all my machinations. Do you your part. Disgrace my rival in the face of the world! — burst asunder the ties that bind her to her husband; and when his hand is again in his own power I shall not scruple to make it mine, by the very means which, if you are not a greater bungler than I take you for, you may make effectual to obtain possession of your deified darling."

"Doubt not my courage, my adroitness, or my success," returned Sir Charles. "I will die but I will obtain her; you have heard me rave at her disdain, her cruelty; you have heard me curse her infatuated attachment to her faithless husband; you have heard me vow revenge! but if I can once make her mine, her will shall be my law—her wish my

religion! by every oath that ever lover swore or broke, I mean honestly by her. I would that she could be mine without tasting disgrace by the way; of dishonour she never can: the deed will be justified by the necessity, and I do not despair but that I may convince her reason, and touch her heart.”

“Win your laurels before you wear them!” said Lady Charlotte, with a smile of contempt, “and win them your own way. It is indifferent to me whether you convince her reason, touch her heart, or force her will; let her be disgraced; I care not whether she is dishonoured or not. My heart will never be at rest till I have brought down her proud humility, which made her despise me so meekly. Never can I make her suffer what she has made me endure! the sleepless nights, the restless days that I underwent, when first I saw myself supplanted by such a puppet! I can never forget, I will never forgive! I have sworn that I will never forgive Willoughby either; perhaps I never shall. My love may be transitory; I am sure my hate will be immortal. At times I think I hate him even now. Most assuredly I often rejoice in his torture, and I exult in the misery that I have in store for him. Deeply is he in my debt, and many must be the hours of anguish that I must make him suffer before we are quits! Oh, how I shall gloat over his distorted features when I tell him that his Isabella, his goddess of chastity, is in the arms of another! How often has he dared to insult me with his idiot commendations of her purity, her virtue, her constancy to him! He has had the presumption to tell me that she deserves better at his hands, than that any other woman should be preferred before her! Yes, I have heard him say it! and I did not stab him to the heart! but the stab is coming! my triumph will be full, and so shall my revenge be satisfied; for yet, I cannot exist without him! for him I forego all the gauds of life! I bind my fate to his broken fortunes! with him I will quit my country, my station, *the all*, that once made life desirable! oh this is madness! but there is joy in being mad, which none but madmen know!”

“And well do you deserve to know it,” said Sir Charles laughing; “for who so mad as you? But is it possible that you really mean to starve with Willoughby in foreign lands? with only half a reputation, and in possession of scarcely half a heart? I know Willoughby well; there is no answering madness in his character that can meet the glorious soarings which distinguish yours. *His* hate is not immortal; and his soft spirit will be so shaken by remorse and sorrow, that he will have no whole heart to give.”

“I charge you,” cried Lady Charlotte, vehemently, “if you do not mean to make me mad in earnest, not to hint the possibility that I am not sole and absolute monarch over the soul of Willoughby; did I think otherways—— but I know I am; and I will prove it by the uncontrolled power that I shall from this hour exercise over him; Isabella’s star is set, and I reign the sovereign luminary. The magic charm of her imaginary virtues, like the crystal castle in the fairy tales, has at times intervened between us, but you will dash it into atoms, and I shall enter in triumph.”

“It will be but a starving triumph,” returned Sir Charles.

“We shall not starve,” replied Lady Charlotte, “although others may. I am the grand financier, as well as sovereign over the heart. There is yet enough to be saved from the wreck of his misused fortunes to make us affluent in those wiser countries where all is given to individual gratification, and nothing to that of others. I am sick of the shews of life: of living to vanity rather than to pleasure. Henceforth *my* vanity shall be to be the happiest of my sex, in spite of all the musty moral-mongers in the world, with their formal saws of ‘virtue is its own reward’—‘oh! the sweet peace of conscience!’—and

thus prosing seek to cheat us of the sweetest moments of this life, by holding out the unknown joys of another. But leave me; and let me next hear of you as the master of the fate of Isabella Hastings, or let me not hear of you again."

"That woman," thought Sir Charles, as he withdrew, "is a devil! but she is a clever and a beauteous devil! and, in spite of the injury that I am about to do him, I envy Willoughby almost as much as I pity him."

It was under the influence of passions only in a degree less diabolical than those which actuated Lady Charlotte, that Sir Charles repaired with all speed to the precincts of Eagle's Crag. There, in close concealment, he watched the habits of Isabella, and soon became acquainted with all her daily haunts. No time was to be lost; and the morning of his so sudden and unexpected appearance all was in readiness to have carried her off with him, could he have determined her, by the first impulse of her grief and resentment, to have put herself under his protection; or if this had not been the case, and had he seen any hope of future yielding, his purpose was openly to visit her, and to undermine her integrity by his sophistry: but when he found that she would not listen to him for one moment; that her whole soul swelled with indignation and abhorrence, that she did not even fear him; and that by the mere vigor of her resolution, and the dignity of her virtue, she was about to escape from his hands, his senses became maddened, and every consideration of tenderness and pity gave way before the fear of losing his victim, and of returning unmasked, baffled, and despised, to encounter the scorn and fury of Lady Charlotte.

But the snarer was caught in his own toils, and the violence by which he thought to have secured his prize, was the very cause of that providential interposition of Mr. Parr, which drew on the disclosure, the disappointment, and the contempt that he so much dreaded.

CHAP. XLVII.

“My shame and guilt confound me;
————— If heart’s sorrow
Be a sufficient ransom for offence,
I tender’t here.”

SHAKSPEARE.

NOR did the consequence of his defeat rest with himself. Secure in his anticipated success, and eager to taste of those diabolical pleasures which she believed that she had prepared so securely for herself, Lady Charlotte ventured to unfold her part of the plot.

Since she had quitted her husband’s house, she had hitherto had no personal intercourse with Mr. Willoughby; all their communication had been by letters; but now, at whatever hazard, she was compelled to see him, if she would effectually convey the poison to his heart which was to be his destruction.

She resolved therefore to visit him; and she appeared before him, unannounced, and unexpected. At the sight of a form, radiant at once with the most dazzling beauty, and the expression of the most ardent affection, the miserable Willoughby started from his reverie of despondency and self-condemnation, and flew to embrace his lovely friend; exclaiming, “this is kind!” but Lady Charlotte waved him off.

“Willoughby,” she said, “you see how much I dare for you. At this period, when all my hopes of future happiness depend upon being able to prove that since I have left what the world in its wisdom pleases to call my lawful protector, we have been strangers to each other; I put all to hazard, to soften, since I cannot avert, your sufferings. But trespass not on my indulgence: remember we are *yet* no more than *friends*.”

“Do me not the injustice to think,” returned he, “that I am capable of abusing so much goodness: that in this my hour of degradation I can ever *wish* for more than friendship; but, in the gloom that surrounds me, your presence is as light and life: without your support, without your counsel, I am nothing. Do not despise me when I tell you that I have not had power; that I have not had *courage*, to make that communication which ought not to have been one moment delayed; and which, if it is anticipated by malice, or by kindness, will brand me not only as the most imprudent, but as the most hard hearted of human creatures.”

“The communication,” returned Lady Charlotte, “is become unnecessary.”

“Unnecessary!” repeated Mr. Willoughby; “does she know that I have ruined her? that I have despoiled my boy of his inheritance?”

“Willoughby,” replied Lady Charlotte, “look at me, and read in my face that which I have no power to tell.”

“Merciful Heaven!” exclaimed Mr. Willoughby; “is she dead? then what am I? what ought I to be?”

“She is not dead!” said Lady Charlotte.

“My son! my child! have I lost him? Oh well do I deserve such a stroke of chastisement!” said Mr. Willoughby.

“Your son lives—is well!” replied Lady Charlotte.

"What then is it that you have to tell me?" said the terrified Willoughby. "Surely my baseness has not driven reason from her seat? I have not quenched an intellect which illuminated all it touched upon?"

"Too confiding Willoughby!" returned Lady Charlotte. "Are death and madness the only evils that can befall a wife? how has your confidence been abused!"

"My confidence abused!" cried Mr. Willoughby; "you cannot—dare not. The voice of calumny itself will not presume to breathe a whisper against her honour!"

"Willoughby," said Lady Charlotte, "am I a calumniator? I never thought to have heard such words from you! but, at this moment, I can pardon your injustice. Mrs. Willoughby has put herself under the protection of Sir Charles Seymour."

"It is impossible!" said Mr. Willoughby; "you have been imposed upon. I will stake my life on her purity—her virtue."

"They are not worth the hazard," replied Lady Charlotte; "but since you believe me wicked enough to invent, or fool enough to be imposed upon by such a falsehood, I have done; and may now leave you; until by some you can better trust you are awakened from your false security."

"Oh, leave me not!" said he; "forgive me: without the most damning proof I could not believe such a tale from the mouth of an angel."

"Then wait till you have such proof," said Lady Charlotte, with the bitterest scorn in her accent; "it will not be long first."

"Tell me, I conjure you, tell me," said he, "from whom you heard this tale of impossible infamy: which but to credit for an instant would make virtue but a name, and truth a bye-word of derision."

"Was Mrs. Willoughby," said Lady Charlotte, "the only immaculate? Were all purity, all honour confined to her bosom; that if she fail, truth, honour, and virtue, must be extinct? I might have hoped that *you* had known at least *one* other woman better."

"If she be false," returned Mr. Willoughby, "no woman is true! There was a dignity in her purity; a simplicity in her virtue; a gentleness in her affection, that could not be counterfeit. My very *frown* would have killed her. In every action, word, and thought, there was a graceful decency, that threw such a sanctity about her, as must have repulsed the most licentious, and awed the most audacious."

"Your frown would have killed her!" repeated Lady Charlotte, disdainfully; "she has out-lived your desertion. Dream on! — and awake not till the appalling voice of public scorn shall sound the note of degradation in your ears."

"You do not yourself believe the opprobrious story?" said Mr. Willoughby, sternly.

"I would to God I did not!" said Lady Charlotte; "since you take it so much to heart. I did not think it would so much have touched you, or the evil should have told itself when it was felt; but I had flattered myself that, oppressive as it is, it would not have been without *one* consolation."

"Tell me upon what evidence you believe it?" said Mr. Willoughby, "that my heart may be lightened from suspicion, or broken by grief."

"I could not have believed that the falsehood of a woman whom you never loved, could have broken your heart!" said Lady Charlotte.

"Whom I never loved!" repeated Mr. Willoughby; "Oh I have loved her! and I might never have loved another, had not ——" he suddenly stopped.

"I understand you," replied Lady Charlotte, "had not I intervened! I thank you for the reproach; but no! — cold-hearted as you are, you never loved! you know not how to love. Love has a quicker sight; and had you loved, you might early have seen what might have saved you now from an incredulity worthy to be laughed at."

"What is it that you mean?" said Mr. Willoughby; "what could I have seen?"

"That which I saw," said Lady Charlotte; "and which I saw because I loved. The attack on the vanity; the yielding weakness; the capitulating indulgence; the established intercourse; the appointed rendezvous" —

"The appointed rendezvous!" broke in Mr. Willoughby, "you must not tell me so; there never was such a thing."

"True, indeed, that *I must* not tell you so!" replied Lady Charlotte, "or I *could* have told you of the motive of the retreat into Westmoreland; the meeting on the road —"

"She told me herself," interrupted Mr. Willoughby.

"No doubt," replied Lady Charlotte; "but did she tell you of the private visitations? the *tête-à-tête* walks? the *holy* friendship that subsisted between this votary of solitude, and her congenial soul?"

"It is calumny all!" replied Mr. Willoughby. "There is not a servant in her household that will not bear witness to the propriety, the exemplariness of her conduct."

"Have you consulted Adams on that point?" said Lady Charlotte, "her favourite attendant, whom she dismissed so suddenly. Did she ever assign a reason for such a dismissal?"

Mr. Willoughby changed countenance. "Do you know that Adams has ever dared to breathe a word against the faithfulness of my — my wife!" said he in a tone of the extremest anguish.

"Question *her*, and not me," said Lady Charlotte; "but whence had her seducer so intimate a knowledge of all the haunts around Eagle's Crag, which you mentioned to me yourself with surprise, more than once or twice? Yet he acted the stranger well, when he so adroitly fastened himself upon you, on your so long delayed, and so little wished for return; but probably at the moment not unexpected, as might be guessed by the readiness and order in which, to your astonishment, you found every thing that could be wished or wanted. What think you of the mysterious tale of the red stag? the sudden departure when he had engaged to remain? What were her motives for driving from her house, in company of her husband, the very woman to whose charge she laid the neglect and the falsehood of that husband? But why do I recapitulate such by-gone follies? ask for your wife, and the voice of multitudes will tell you that she is with Sir Charles Seymour; that she has accepted his protection for herself, and her child; and that she justifies her conduct by your desertion, and the ruin that you have brought on both."

The wretched Willoughby, now overcome by the effrontery and vehemence of the accusation, rather than by any weight of evidence that had been produced, uttered the groan of agony, and covering his face with his hands, sunk his head on the table before him.

"Willoughby, my dear Willoughby!" said the infernal Lady Charlotte, approaching him, and laying her hand with fondness on his shoulder, "for my sake do thus not desert yourself. Is there no drop of sweetness in the bitter cup? no after light breaking in upon you to dispel this present gloom?"

"I had hoped that the *rudest* bursting of your chains would not have taken from you all taste for liberty."

"Liberty!" cried he, "what liberty? would you have me give the woman whom I have betrayed to scorn and ignominy? would you have me pursue with vengeance the victim of my own crime? Oh, she *was* innocent as lovely! the villain that has undone her was but the instrument in the hands of a greater villain than himself. *I* have been her seducer! *I* have been her betrayer! in the moment when my neglect, my cruelty, the ruin that I had brought on her, and on her child, had maddened her brain, *not* corrupted her heart! in that moment, when the very fiends would have melted with compassion, he, a tenfold devil, with unrelenting savageness has seized his prey; but I will chase him from the earth but I will have ample vengeance. Every drop of his corrupted blood will be but a poor atonement for the ruin of my poor, injured, unhappy Isabella! Yet what have I to do with vengeance? I, who am the just mark of every thunderbolt of heaven. Leave me, leave me, lest I drag you also to destruction; leave me, I implore you."

"Never, my beloved!" said Lady Charlotte; "never will I leave you. Oh, do not thus abandon yourself, and all will yet be well."

"I have already abandoned myself," cried he, "too long abandoned all that made that self worthy of my care. Oh, where are the days of youth? the visions of virtue and of happiness that once enlightened my path? that one short twelvemonth past, I might have fixed for ever around me! fool! insensate! that could not see what would have made my bliss; what might have been my salvation!"

"And is this the return that love such as mine, is to meet with?" said Lady Charlotte. "Am I to be reproached? deserted? Oh Willoughby, but that I can allow for every thing in this cruel moment, your words would rend my heart in twain; you would indeed drag me to destruction; for I will not, cannot live without you. I cannot survive the estrangement of your affection."

"Seek not to plunge me further into crime, I entreat you," said he. "Am I not cursed enough already; here our intercourse must end. What remains for me of life must be spent in bitter anguish, remorse, and solitude. What could induce me to introduce you to such associates? you have, I thank my God for it! you have been a faithful guardian of your own honour: let me endeavour with tears of repentance to wash away the stains that are upon mine. If there remain for me one thought that is not misery, it must be that I have not your ruin to answer for; and this thought will bring you to my memory with more true and honest gratitude, than all the other obligations that I owe you."

"Let me then share your anguish, your remorse, your solitude," cried Lady Charlotte, in the softest accents of love. "I may also have wherewith to reproach myself; penitence may become me as well as you; but I will expiate all my faults by an attachment, by a devotion to the object of my love, that the world never yet saw equalled."

"There was a time," replied the contrite Willoughby, "when words such as these would have sounded sweetly in my ears: but the delusion of passion is past, and truth interprets them in a sense that startles conscience, and enforces repentance."

"Am I awake?" cried Lady Charlotte. "Am I in my senses? Is it you who speak, and is it I who hear? Gracious God! that I should have lived to be reproached! to be rejected! to be preached to! to be moralized upon! but it cannot be? my Willoughby cannot be so altered? Oh, how bitterly have you regretted the barrier that was between us!"

How fondly have I anticipated the possibility that it might sometime be removed! how zealously have I preserved myself worthy of your regard! and now!—now that we might be happy: when all our past sufferings, all our past restraint might be done away, what pining, what morbid scruples, has your sickly brain engendered to destroy the fair fabric of happiness that ardent love and unrestrained freedom had combined to raise for us?”

“I have been a fool, and a dupe,” replied Mr. Willoughby; “and I have wantonly trifled with the most solemn obligations of life: but I have never denied, I have never doubted their authority. I cannot be a deliberate villain! the remainder of my days, were they to be stretched beyond the common date of mortality, would be too short to atone for the mischiefs that I have thoughtlessly done to individuals and to society: —mischiefs that I should but too probably have continued to do, had it not been for the awakening blow that has fallen upon me. The severe reckoning to which I am called for the injuries that I have inflicted on that innocent creature, so peculiarly trusted to my care, cannot be settled but by a life spent in endeavouring to repair the evils that I have done her. Henceforth it shall be my occupation to watch over her; to mitigate her sorrows; for deep will her sorrows be! to smooth the path to penitence and peace: and, although my eyes must never behold her more, to exchange forgiveness; and mingle mutual regrets. And blest shall I be, if, ere the grave closes over me, I may hope that I have in part retraced my erring steps, and expiated by the sincerity of my contrition, the evils that cannot be undone.”

“Oh the head-long zeal of new conversion!” cried Lady Charlotte; “if you ought to do so much for your betrayer, what is due to her who would have been your preserver? For you, I have quitted rank and fortune; soiled my reputation, and abandoned my friends; for you I am become an outcast from society! cheap sacrifices all, if I could have secured your love, or soothed your sorrows! and am I now to be turned adrift with a few moral sentences for my consolation? Willoughby beware! my soul is on fire: dread the explosion!”

“I never can forget the obligations that I owe you,” replied he; “I never can cease to remember the distinction with which you have honoured me; but ——”

“Mean spirited, cowardly Willoughby!” cried she, interrupting him; “thou hast dared to commit the crime, and fearest to reap the fruit of it! You have broken the lock, and dare not seize the treasure! ‘The distinction with which I have honoured you!’ and is it thus that thou namest a love such as mine? base and ungrateful! but farewell for ever! yet know that I triumph still! for thou art miserable, and I am revenged!”

And with these words she darted from the room, and left the astounded Willoughby the most wretched of human creatures.

And who shall pity him? Not she who has injured, but she whom he has injured would be his comforter; but the hour of calm is not come: his wounds refuse to be healed; and in the desperation of his sorrow, he is reckless what he is, and what he shall become!

Yet in the direful variety of his distracted feelings, there was one master grief that held every other in check. Isabella! the victim of his indifference and his indiscretion! by him despoiled of fortune! of reputation! of virtue! the degraded mother of his child! Could he think of her, and reason not be driven from her seat? Could his heart feel for her injuries, and not break?

“It cannot last!” said the tortured Willoughby, and resigned himself to his sufferings!

CHAP. XLVIII.

“Gone to be married: gone to be friends!
False blood to false blood join’d!”

SHAKSPEARE.

BUT the resignation of Mr. Willoughby was despair; the resignation of Isabella was obedience: as the source, so was the stream. While the one lay groaning on the couch of agony, torn by remorse, racked by the unsatisfied wish for vengeance, tormented by the cruel thought that he was triumphed over by her whose offered love had betrayed him to his worst of ills, and unable even to give his better purposes action; Isabella, meek, silent, submissive, looked only to the mercy of her Creator for some mitigation of her inflictions, and asked only for light how best to please him, and for power to perform the task he should assign her!

Nor did she long wait before she found herself called upon, not only to suffer but to act.

A week had elapsed from the day on which Sir Charles Seymour had been chased, with such deserved ignominy from the asylum of that virtue which he had sought to wound. A week of bitter sorrow and racking suspense to Isabella! and she was still uncertain of the fate that awaited her.

All the information that the most assiduous affection, or the researches of the most active curiosity had been able to collect, amounted to no more than that Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby had both disappeared from the world, and that although no doubt was entertained of their being together, yet hitherto no trace had been found by the friends or enemies of either party, by which the place of retreat could be guessed at. It was conjectured that they were still in England; but that their final purpose was to escape to the Continent as soon as the vigilance and guard of Lady Charlotte’s family should become less alive, than in these first hours of resentment and concern it could be.

Isabella was inclined to believe that this design was already accomplished; that the scene was already closed; and that she had nothing further to hope or to fear. What was to become of herself she was as little careful as he seemed to be to whose most solicitous protection she had so sacred a claim. For her boy she still felt as a parent; but she doubted not of the inviolability of Lady Rachel’s promise, that she would protect and provide for him. In half-words she had repeatedly recommended him to the maternal care of Catherine, who but too well understood the inference that was to be drawn from such a transfer of duties, which had hitherto made the first pleasure of life to her afflicted friend. A speedy end to all her sufferings was indeed become the most earnest wish of the hopeless Isabella, and her enfeebled health seemed to promise its gratification. But no impatience attended this wish; it was in the true spirit of filial obedience that she still said, “not my will, but thine be done.”

This was the state of Isabella’s mind, when one evening she was aroused from the couch, on which the tender care of her friends had induced her to repose, by being informed that Mr. Burghley was arrived at Eagle’s Crag, and that he asked permission to see her. He had followed Roberts, to whom he had entrusted his message, so closely, that,

sure of being welcome, Isabella had scarcely given her eager assent than he stood before her.

“Be not alarmed; — I come from Lady Rachel Roper. The moment is now arrived for which you have so long wished, — the moment when your interposition may save, may restore your husband.”

“Save him from what? from whom?” said Isabella.

“From himself! He has now no other enemy,” said Mr. Burghley. Then glancing his eye around, and becoming instantly scarlet as it rested for a moment on Catherine, “I am sure I speak before friends,” said he; “have I not the honour to address myself to Mr. Parr?”

“And have not I the honour to recognize Mr. Burghley?” replied Mr. Parr. “But speak what you have to say. Mrs. Willoughby is in agonies till she can understand what has brought you here.”

“The demolition of the baseless fabrick of vice and treachery,” returned Mr. Burghley. “My dearest Mrs. Willoughby look up. Your wrongs are revenged. Your virtues are acknowledged. Mr. Willoughby is no longer deceived. Lady Charlotte has eloped with Sir Charles Seymour.”

“Merciful God!” cried Isabella, “can I only be saved by fresh crimes?”

“It is but the same net of wickedness that has been so long weaving to entrap you and our poor Willoughby,” returned Mr. Burghley. “Let the workers be caught in the work of their own hands; and may it be as the poisoned garment of Hercules to them.”

“Mrs. Willoughby seeks reconciliation, and not vengeance,” said Mr. Parr. “Pray tell her what Lady Rachel wishes her to do.”

“Lady Rachel wishes,” replied Mr. Burghley, “that Mrs. Willoughby would immediately repair to town. She asks it of you, Sir, that you will be so kind as to accompany her; and she requests the favour of this young lady,” blushing again as he spoke, “who can only be Miss Parr, that she will undertake the superintendence of Mrs. Willoughby’s little boy during his mother’s absence.”

“All and everything shall be done that Lady Rachel suggests,” returned Mr. Parr. “My dear Mrs. Willoughby, this excellent friend of yours thinks of everything, and clears the road before you of every difficulty: but speak, I entreat you! let us hear your voice! give vent to your full heart!”

And it was not without reason that Mr. Parr urged this request: for, pale and motionless, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, Isabella sat absorbed in the deepest thought; or rather, without the power of thinking. So strange, so horrible, did she feel the facts to be that Mr. Burghley had announced; and when, starting at the sound of Mr. Parr’s voice, she turned towards him, her look spoke so plainly the wandering of her mind, that Catherine, alarmed beyond every other consideration for the welfare of her friend, flew to her, and throwing her arms around her, “My Isabella! my friend!” cried she, “oh, speak! oh, speak! I conjure you!”

“There is strange wickedness in the world, Catherine!” said Isabella, laying her hand calmly on that of her friend: “but you are not wicked.”

And uttering an hysterical laugh, she fell back on the sofa.

All were presently in motion; and Mrs. Evans being summoned to her lady, Isabella was soon conveyed to her own apartment, and put to bed; Catherine taking her place by its side.

The two gentlemen being thus left alone, Mr. Burghley was at liberty to relate at full length all that had reached the public ear, relative to the strange turn that affairs had taken; but there were gaps in the narrative which Mr. Parr felt that he could have filled up better than any one else, if he had thought proper to do so; and there were others that could not be supplied by any conjecture that either he or Mr. Burghley could make. A revolution so extraordinary, and an event so unlooked for, even by the parties most immediately concerned, could indeed be only accounted for by the uncertainty that must attend the course of those who embark on the sea of vice.

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CHAP. XLIX.

“What will not revenge
Descend to? revenge at first thought sweet,
Bitter at length, back on itself recoils!”

MILTON.

SIR Charles had returned with all the speed he could make from Westmoreland to London, crest fallen, indignant, breathing vengeance, yet knowing in his heart that he should not dare to seek it; and most dreading to encounter the bitter taunts of Lady Charlotte, and wholly unprepared to mitigate the rage which he knew that her disappointment would excite. Yet every moment of delay in communicating the failure of their plans must be a new offence to her, as being fraught with the danger of unveiling her real character to the remaining victim of unrelenting vindictiveness. It was impossible that he could, face to face, undergo the humiliation of detailing his own shame, without some preparatory opening that might allow of time for the ebullition of her fiery passions a little to have spent itself before he exposed himself to its fury.

He wrote her the following lines:

“I have not succeeded; but I owe my disappointment neither to any want of address in myself nor to the unyielding temper of the person with whom I had to do. Had we been left alone to deal the matter between ourselves, I should have now been writing to you from Calais, and the happiest of men; but in the very moment that I had seized my prey, there came down upon me the evil genius of my life, the gigantic Parr! who with one vigorous effort wrested the trembling lamb from the wolf, and with his sonorous voice so made the neighbouring mountains to resound, that if I had not fled from the place of combat, I had been thrown into the accursed lake that lies so conveniently at the bottom of them.

“I hasten to give you this information the first moment I can; as it may be necessary that you should change your proceedings, and not trust to the ground which has thus slipped from under your feet, and upon which you must not attempt to tread any further. I hope you have betrayed no consciousness of what you had so much reason to believe was so far advanced; if so, as to you no great mischief is done. I see but one game that you have to play. Fortune may yet stand your friend, and whether you change your name a little sooner or a little later, should be, to a woman of your comprehensive mind, a matter of little consequence. For myself, I shall keep snug; and I have no fear that there will be more told than I wish to have revealed. There is a delicacy in that quarter resembling Cæsar’s—and *attempt* there is considered almost as disgraceful as *success*, with less bigoted people. Withal, pray remember that I am at your disposal, and ready to confirm or deny, as far as a man of honour can, anything that you may see expedient to have confirmed or denied.”

To this note he received in answer only these words: “Come to me instantly.”

Sir Charles obeyed the summons with fear and trembling; but the storm that he expected to have been poured on his head had taken another direction, and fell in all its violence on the devoted Willoughby.

It was no moment in which to reproach her ally for any failure of success, when by the precipitancy of her own disclosures, and the intemperance of her passions, she too had been driven from the field, baffled, despised, and rejected.

No sooner had Lady Charlotte retired from Mr. Willoughby's apartment to her own luring place, than the conviction, that in the last words which she had uttered, she had laid open to him all the secrets of her soul, struck upon her understanding, and she felt that she was undone.

Yet too often had the weakness of her enemy replaced the sceptre in her hand, when by the want of self-government she had suffered it to fall from her grasp, to give her reason wholly to despair to being able once more to resume her empire; she hastened to repair the error if possible: her trusty emissary conveyed to Mr. Willoughby the following palinode:

"I told you that you were miserable, and that I was revenged: now I tell you that I am miserable—good God, how miserable!—and that you are revenged. Dear object of my distracted heart, forgive me! Too well thou knowest the violent workings of that heart! but thou knowest also that it has not a pulse that beats not for thee! how could you, my dearest, outrage its feelings by talking of 'obligation?'—of the 'honour of my distinction?' Where has vanished our identity? that *oneness* which those who love can so well understand, and which those who love as I do, can so little bear to have doubted.

"I do not disavow the feeling which your cruel *gratitude* excited; but I do most earnestly renounce the violence with which it was expressed; poor impotent rage! which has turned in vengeance, as it was most right it should do, on myself? Could you see my present state of desolation, even your cold heart might pity me. But why do I call you cold? alas, you can feel but too acutely, and I honour you for the feelings which I have witnessed; I share them with you. Suffer me, I beseech you, to sit by you—to watch you—to sooth you. As a *friend* I claim this privilege. If you would not have my life to answer for, send me one word of peace. Tell me that you forgive me; say, 'dear Charlotte, come to me, and comfort me!'

"You may make the most wretched of her sex the most happy. *You* may; but no one else can. Will you refuse to do so?"

Mr. Willoughby returned this answer:

"I request, as the last favour I must ever receive at your hands, that we may henceforth be unknown to each other. I am unworthy of the love you profess for me. I can make no other return beyond the most ardent wishes for your well-being. The rest of my days is misery. But I would still fain believe that you will not rejoice in this misery; that you will not triumph in the wide-extended ruin that has followed our unfortunate connexion."

What became of Lady Charlotte, when she had read these words? She saw herself unmasked! She felt annihilated! What was she? What was she to become? A fugitive wife! A dishonoured female! Dishonoured for the man who disdained her; who cast her off; who wished to see her no more! She was to bear the mark of shame, without having received the wages of iniquity. Yet was there one state more than any other bitter to her—all other evil appeared light when balanced with a return to her husband: to humble herself before him, to submit herself to the common duties of life, was worse than detection, abandonment, and ignominy. Yet how was she to avoid such a humiliation? She had no means of support independent of Mr. Dunstan, except by the assistance of her

family; and to throw herself into their power was to make her husband the arbitrator of her fate.

Lady Charlotte was debating the direful alternative of starving or submission, when she received Sir Charles's note: and she could scarcely have rejoiced more in his success had she retained her power over Mr. Willoughby, than she did at his failure now she had lost it. Her quick apprehension caught in an instant all the circumstances of disgrace and danger with which Sir Charles was environed. She felt assured that nothing could be more acceptable to him than an immediate departure from England, in such circumstances, and in such company, as would put suspicion at fault, and confound persons and facts so effectually, as to make it almost impossible to come at the truth. With him she had no points of delicacy to manage; he knew her thoroughly; and a simple exposition of the state in which they both stood she had no doubt would produce from Sir Charles an offer to unite their interests and their fate. Yet the sacrifice of pride, and all that yet remained to her of better feeling, was greater than what, in her first eagerness to escape from greater mortification, she had supposed possible. Confident as she felt when alone, yet the first moment that she met his eye, downcast and conscious of defeat as she beheld it, was to her a terrible one. Her whole frame shook with the violence and the variety of her passions. Her cheek was pale, her lips quivered, and her bosom heaved; and Sir Charles, prepared as he was for a scene of fury and of terror, yet stood confounded by symptoms of a disorder even greater than he had anticipated, and the nature of which he could not understand.

"You are come," said she, "to tell me that Isabella has triumphed. This I could have believed possible: but I have to tell you that Willoughby has also triumphed; and this I could *not* have believed possible. But he has triumphed by his weakness, not by his strength. You knew the traitor better than I did, when you told me that in mere poorness of spirit he would sink under remorse and sorrow. So he has sunk: and at the instant when I looked to have seen his heart beat high with love and rapture, he became a preaching anchorite! a whining penitent! He thanked me for all favours passed,—wished me happy,—and bade me farewell, for ever! Oh! that at that moment I had stabbed him to the heart, and died in consummating my revenge!"

"What is it that you tell me?" cried Sir Charles, astonished almost beyond the power of understanding what he heard aright. "Is it possible! Have you and Willoughby parted, and for ever?"

"For ever *shall* it be!" returned Lady Charlotte. "I hope you do not think so meanly of me, as to believe I could ever again look upon the man who has once rejected me?"

"But how, and why?" said Sir Charles.

"The soft-souled creature," replied Lady Charlotte, "could not survive the dishonour of his precious wife."

"Is it possible," said Sir Charles, "that you could thus sell the skin before you had killed the bear?"

"Do not *you* reproach me," said Lady Charlotte: "you who alone have made that false, which, had it been true, would have medicined every other evil. But look to yourself. No sooner will he know how anticipation outran the deed, than he will fall at the feet of his offended deity; implore her pardon; and the first offerings by which she will be propitiated will be my disgrace and your immolation."

"Let us, then," cried Sir Charles, "join forces, and boldly stand upon our defence. All retreat seems to be cut off. Even the doors of your domestic tyrant would be hardly open to you. Defy him then at once; and since fate has not permitted me to be the protector of Isabella Willoughby, let it grant me the honour of protecting the lovely Charlotte, and I shall not repine."

"We treat upon fair and equal terms, it must be confessed," said Lady Charlotte. "Neither of us can mistake the motives of the other for the compact we are making; and if we should repent, we cannot complain of having been deceived. It is most certain that I will rather die a wanderer in the streets, than return under the roof of the man whom I despise and detest, and to whom I so madly gave authority over me; and you will find a Dunstan easier to deal with than a Willoughby."

"I fear neither of them," replied the valiant Sir Charles; "but it would be cold wandering in the streets; you had better be travelling in my carriage half over Europe; and there are some passages in my life that I am too modest to wish should be brought under public discussion, and which my ill success in Westmoreland may help to bring to light. I shall not be sorry to put the worriers of my reputation on a wrong scent. So that I do not see that we can do better than forget the disappointments we have received from others, by each doing all in their power to please the other."

"But my flight," said Lady Charlotte, "will furnish means to regain my liberty. You know my predilection for the married state: when I am free, will you marry me? I yield upon no other terms."

"By this fair hand," said Sir Charles, kissing it, "and by the honour of a gentleman, I will."

"Enough," said Lady Charlotte. "Should we be tired of each other, I will not prove troublesome; and where there can be no treachery there ought to be no resentment."

"We shall be the happiest of creatures," said Sir Charles, "where love is liberty, and nature law. Let us not delay to be so. I cannot be off too soon; and you are not without your reasons for wishing yourself on the other side of the channel."

"Every hour, till I am out of the reach of my husband and my father, is an age," replied Lady Charlotte. "Your absence from town can scarcely have been marked by any one. It may be supposed that we have been together ever since I left my prison. I shall be ready in an hour to accompany you to any sea port that you may think best."

The decision was soon made; and in less than forty-eight hours Sir Charles and Lady Charlotte were safely landed in France.

Such were the real circumstances of a tale that was told in as many ways as there were found persons to relate it; and which scandalized the serious, amazed the light minded, and surprised even the vicious; but which had the most powerful effects on the minds of Isabella and Mr. Willoughby.

CHAP. L.

“Oh, what can now console him.”

GALLY KNIGHT.

WHEN Mr. Willoughby withdrew from the world, Lady Charlotte was alone acquainted with the place of his retreat. It had been provided for him by her means, and it was only through her agency that he had purposed to hold any communication beyond the walls that inclosed him.

It has been seen that this seclusion was designed to continue only until Mr. Willoughby could so far overcome the impression which the first consciousness of the overwhelming ruin that he had brought upon himself, had made upon his mind, as to enable him to make those arrangements which would give him the power to offer the only amends that he had now to make to his injured wife and infant; and to provide such a subsistence for himself, as would supply the necessities and the decencies of life on some foreign shore.

He had not had sufficient command over himself to have made one step in so necessary a business, when the small remnant of peace and resolution, which the remorse for his own follies had left him, was borne down by the torrent of misery and self-condemnation that Lady Charlotte poured upon him with so unrelenting a hand, in the treacherous falsehoods by which she stigmatised Isabella.

Previously determined not to swell the sum of his offences farther, by involving Lady Charlotte in his transgressions and his wretchedness, he entertained not a thought of making her the companion of his flight; yet his heart clung to her as a friend—as the only human being to whom he could look up for sympathy, or from whose mouth he could hope to hear the accents of affection; and it might have been, that pity for himself would alike have overcome his compassion for another, and his sense of rectitude, even had Lady Charlotte continued in her husband’s house. But her rupture with Mr. Dunstan had turned his consideration for her reputation into a new channel. He now saw himself the only intervening guard between her and the fate which of all others she dreaded, the being at the mercy of a low minded and justly offended husband; and it would have been scarcely possible that he should have refused his protection to a woman who had, for his sake, deprived herself of every other support; and who, if he abandoned her, would have no other shelter from the shivering evils of poverty and the furious blasts of calumny, but the gloomy mansion of an angry parent, or the humiliating restraint of a vindictive husband.

Perhaps no other being but herself could, in such circumstances, have broken the bands by which Mr. Willoughby would have felt himself bound to Lady Charlotte!

But the cruel exultation that she had betrayed in the supposed ignominy of the unfortunate Isabella, the violence of her reproaches, and the diabolical triumph of which she had boasted, in the accomplishment of his misery, and her own revenge, had effectually torn from his eyes the bandage with which the infatuation of his senses had blinded him; and no sooner had the storm of conflicting passions, which the sense of the infamy that his own follies had brought on his unhappy wife, subsided, than his returning reason showed him the character of Lady Charlotte in its true light; and though his self-

love still clung to the chimera of the strength and faithfulness of her passion for him, yet was it mixed with so many debasing alloys, as justified to his feelings his determination to see her no more.

But in taking this resolution was there in the world a more forlorn and abandoned creature than the guilty Willoughby must have believed himself to be?

Where were now the groups of friends who had so often surrounded his festive board? where the wife whose mild qualities left unchecked his pleasures abroad, and whose sweetness of temper and graciousness of manner secured him peace and cheerfulness at home? where that self-approving mind and fresh-springing hope which had gladdened his early years, and had spread a lustre over his opening manhood? — dispersed! betrayed! annihilated! and in their place solitude, bitter regret, deep remorse, and burning shame!

Cheated and triumphed over even by her who had seduced him from the most sacred of his duties by the most vehement professions of everlasting love, could he hope that there existed a human being who would look upon him with pity, or hold out a friendly hand to support him under his burthen, or to assist him in lightening it?

Yet there were still some sacred duties that bound him to life and to exertion: the duty of repairing, as far as possible, the injuries that he had done to his wife; and that of securing protection for his infant son.

These duties could not be performed without some active effort on his part, and he was resolved to make it; and then to bid adieu to society and the hopes of happiness together.

It was easy for him to make the place of his abode known to his servant Edwards; and by his means to communicate with whomever he might judge the most proper to make his agent, to secure the two important objects that he had in view.

Rejecting each of his own particular friends, who, he might have flattered himself, would still be willing to serve him in so praiseworthy a purpose as he was now bent upon, he determined to apply to Lord Burghley, in the full confidence that in so doing he fixed upon the person who would be the most acceptable to Isabella in the mediation that must take place between them; and in an unreserved reliance on the parental care that he would extend to his boy, while he made the separation that must now take place between the child and the mother, as little grievous to the latter as possible. In pursuance of these thoughts, he wrote the following letter to Lord Burghley:

“MY LORD,

“The most culpable of men would not have dared to address your Lordship, if he were not also the most penitent; or if he addressed you for any other purpose than to entreat that you will exert the high qualities that have so long secured you the respect of the wise and the good, in aiding him to repair, as far as it is now reparable, the extensive evil that he has occasioned.

“That this miserable man feels only the tenderest compassion for the unfortunate woman who has been ruined by his follies, cannot, my Lord, give him any merit in your eyes. If he felt otherwise he would be a monster. But it may be an additional gratification to a disposition like yours, to be assured that, in saving the wife from utter destruction, you will mitigate the severest pangs of the guilty husband.

“If your Lordship should not hold this unhappy culprit wholly unworthy of your notice, the bearer will inform you where you may find the miserable

“F. WILLOUGHBY.”

The astonishment and confusion of thought which the perusal of this letter occasioned Lord Burghley, were beyond what he had before felt.

At the time when he received it he was under the full persuasion that Mr. Willoughby had quitted the kingdom in company with Lady Charlotte; and of the malignant calumny which she had fabricated against Isabella he had not a shadow of knowledge or conception. So distant from the power of his imagination was the existence of such an imputation, that he had read Mr. Willoughby's letter three times before he could clearly comprehend to what husband, or to what wife, it alluded; but perfectly persuaded that it could not be in favour of Lady Charlotte that Mr. Willoughby would endeavour to interest him, his thoughts were at length irresistibly compelled to settle upon Isabella. That she was unfortunate, that she was injured, he too well knew, and feelingly deplored; but that she could be in any situation which could possibly make it a merit in her injurer to regard her with compassion, was beyond the power of his understanding to resolve. What “utter destruction threatened her,” the averting of which would “mitigate the severest pang of a guilty husband?” This could not be an evil which applied equally to his child and his wife, otherwise did Lord Burghley feel assured that he too would have been included in the earnest application made to him for his protection of the latter. Had then any individual misfortune fallen upon Isabella, independent of the distress and misery brought on both herself and her son by the indiscretion of her husband?

These were questions that he could not solve by any conjecture in his power to make. He sought their elucidation from Lady Jane Hastings; but he sought it in vain. Yet from her he received information that, while it contributed to add wonder to wonder, and confusion to confusion, shed a ray of light on the dark fortunes of Isabella, which he was willing to believe might in time spring up to a perfect day.

From her he learned that the family of Lady Charlotte had been thrown into the greatest consternation and grief, by an express declaration from herself, that being no longer able to endure the tyranny and ill-usage of Mr. Dunstan, she had placed herself under the protection of Sir Charles Seymour, and had withdrawn to the Continent.

This new aspect of affairs more than ever inclined Lord Burghley to comply with Mr. Willoughby's request to make himself a party in all that might arise between him and Isabella; and he therefore lost no time in repairing to the place of Mr. Willoughby's concealment.

Mr. Willoughby received Lord Burghley with an assumed firmness of manner, and with the most profound respect, but with the air of a man who presumed nothing from their former acquaintance.

“Why this distance, Willoughby?” said the benevolent Lord Burghley: “Are we not friends?” And he put forth his hand with the most affectionate compassion.

“Oh! my Lord!” said the conscience-stricken Willoughby, and his heart rose to his throat; all his composure fled; and he turned hastily away to conceal his emotion.

“Willoughby,” said Lord Burghley, “compose yourself. You have erred; you have recovered the right way: rely upon every effort in my power to smooth the ruggedness of the path, and to make it the road to peace and happiness.”

“My Lord,” replied Mr. Willoughby, with a broken voice and a trembling frame, “be assured, that for nothing that concerns such a wretch as myself should I have

presumed to trouble you—but there is an interest—there is a human being—” His voice failed him, and he covered his face with his hands.

“You speak of your wife,” said Lord Burghley. “You speak of Isabella. You cannot do better than to speak of her, than to think of her as a preserving angel, who will bear you safely through all the dangers, all the sorrows, by which you are encompassed.”

Mr. Willoughby withdrew his hands from before his face, and, casting a look of wildness and indignation on Lord Burghley,

“You cannot,” said he fiercely, “mean to insult me?”

“There is some strange mistake here,” replied Lord Burghley. “But if you have been led to believe that your wife is less spotless than purity itself, you have been as grossly as wickedly deceived.”

“Where is she?” said Mr. Willoughby, impatiently. “Where is she at this moment?”

“In her own house, in Westmoreland,” replied Lord Burghley, “watching over the welfare of your child, and struggling with the emotions of a heart that is breaking with its sorrows for your unhappiness.”

“Oh! no, no!” cried Mr. Willoughby, with a tone of anguish that pierced the compassionate soul of Lord Burghley. “My Lord, *you* are deceived. She is—she is—do I live to speak it? and I the cause, the accursed cause!—she is with Sir Charles Seymour!” And at the same time, as if destroyed by the effort that he had made to utter the detested name, he sunk back on his chair, and remained motionless.

“No! on my life!” said Lord Burghley; “who can have imposed upon you so notorious a falsehood? Is it possible that your seducer shall have become your tormentor? and can you really be ignorant where Sir Charles is, and who is his companion?”

“I have already told you who is his companion, wherever he is,” said Mr. Willoughby; “urge me not to speak the name, lest my heart burst in the utterance.”

“Would to God,” said Lord Burghley, “that all your sorrows were as imaginary as this! Your wife is where you left her, and Sir Charles Seymour is at this hour in France with Lady Charlotte Dunstan.”

“It is false!” said Mr. Willoughby, starting up. “My Lord, I beg your pardon; but if you strike me for the word, I must say that it is false!”

“And I would rather that you should strike *me*,” said Lord Burghley, calmly, “than that it should not be true. My dear Willoughby, I now see that you have been most basely deceived; most diabolically tormented! With one vigorous effort shake off the chains that have so long bound you, and return to your most virtuous, most admirable wife; she will be an Abigail to watch over your safety, not a Dalilah to seduce you to your ruin.”

“It is not so! it cannot be so!” said Mr. Willoughby, with a look of wildness. “Oh Heavens! what she who offered to share with me degradation and poverty? she who for my sake abandoned rank, affluence, society, and reputation? she who could refuse the man she loved, that which her honour forbade her to grant! what *she* to have given herself to another? and that other the paramour — oh no! no! seek not to impose impossibilities upon me. I know the violence of her temperament. I know that her passions may for a moment overcome the generosity of her nature; may make her mistake the agony of jealousy for the pleasure of revenge; but she is chaste! she is true!”

“Was she true,” replied Lord Burghley, “when she poured into your ears the tale of infamy that blasted the fairest flower in virtue’s garden? Was she chaste when she

threw herself into the arms of Sir Charles Seymour, rather than return to the just subjection of her husband?"

"Am I then to believe this worse than hellish treachery?" cried Mr. Willoughby, in a voice of stifled agony; "and have I wronged my poor Isabella every way? but she is then spotless of every stain? Oh God, for this I thank thee!"

"As the unsunned snow on Andes highest point!" said Lord Burghley, "be assured of it; nor is there less doubt of the depravity of her calumniators. I had my information from Lady Jane Hastings, who had read the letter which announced her flight."

"My Lord," said Mr. Willoughby, "I am unfit for company; I can transact no business now; I beg you to excuse me, if I say that I would be glad to be alone."

"No, Willoughby," replied Lord Burghley, "I shall not leave you. I came to serve you, and I cannot leave you until you have pointed out the way in which I can do so."

"You *cannot* save me," replied Mr. Willoughby; "you have plucked one poisoned arrow from my heart, but you have struck another there, which will rankle to my death."

"For shame, my friend!" cried Lord Burghley; "can the desertion of a bad woman thus unman you? How Sir Charles has supplanted you in her favour is a secret that I cannot penetrate; but I should rejoice to hear that it is rather that she has not been able to induce you to consummate your ruin and her own, than that her fickleness has disappointed a purpose that would have stamped an indelible opprobrium on your name."

"On my honour, she has not disappointed any such purpose," said Mr. Willoughby. "Lady Charlotte and I had parted, never to meet again, before I wrote to your Lordship. I hope that in *any* case I should not have been such a rascal as to have made her a partaker in the ruin that I have brought on myself; but from the moment that I was led to believe that my neglect had corrupted the purest heart that ever beat in a human breast, I felt myself a wretch, to whose fate to bind that of any other, and that other, I own it with the blush of burning shame, the object of my love, would have been to heap coals of inextinguishable fire on my head in this world and the next; and I solemnly assure you that when I wrote to you, I had not a wish, or a purpose, beyond reclaiming my injured Isabella, and providing for her and my child. I was *then*, and am *now*, reckless what becomes of myself. My future days must be spent in obscurity and remorse; and I pray God, that I may be able to support their endurance to any period, which he may in his justice see proper to prolong them!"

"Brighter prospects open before you," said Lord Burghley. "The path of penitence ends in peace. Return to your wife, your child. The consequences of former indiscretions may be mitigated. You have still no inconsiderable resources. Time may restore you to the station of life which for the present you have lost; and, under the shadowing wings of virtuous love, obscurity itself will be the abode of happiness."

"No, my Lord," replied Mr. Willoughby, firmly; "never more will I behold the excellence to whom I have proved so unworthy a guardian. I know her virtues! I feel her charms! but henceforth I can only be the object of her duty, not of her affection. She married me without that preferring love which alone can throw a veil over the faults of humanity. After we were united, I took no pains, careless as I was! to inspire her with this love. Whence now can it be generated? She cannot even yield me the cold tribute of esteem and respect. I fear no reproaches from her. I know that she will strictly do all that she ought to do; and one of her duties will be to warn her son not to resemble his father. I cannot live a scarecrow to my child! I cannot take to my bosom the wife in whose

presence I shall feel humiliated. No! we must meet no more. But I will reduce myself to the narrowest pittance rather than she and her boy shall want any of the comforts or the accommodations of life, or that they should owe them to any other hand but mine. I am not yet so undone that my wife and child need be pensioners on the bounty of any one; and my own hands shall administer to the few wants that henceforth this worthless body can know, rather than that it should be so. But of this hereafter. I will leave her, who has the best right to it, that dear pledge of an union which, but for my folly, might have been a most happy one. She will not refuse to let me sometimes look upon him. I shall not blast him with a look; and every word I utter shall be a note of self-condemnation."

"I wonder not," said Lord Burghley, "that at this moment your recollections are so severe; that your resolves are so desperate; but you will resume a better spirit. You will feel that you are again unjust, to cast from you the woman whose happiness and whose dignity alike demand that she should be restored to the station of your associate and your wife."

"I cannot give her happiness," said Mr. Willoughby; "she can derive no dignity from being associated with the man who has disgraced himself."

"She ought at least to be allowed to decide this question herself," replied Lord Burghley. "I am confident that you will not refuse to see her."

"It is the single thing that I *will* refuse," said Mr. Willoughby. "Let her speak her wishes, her will; let her task me to the extent of my power; let her dictate to me the place of my abode, regulate the disposition of my time, point out all with whom I may converse; but let her not ask that we shall meet again; for this I *can not, will not* grant."

"Good God!" said Lord Burghley, "is it possible? can indeed that bad woman retain so much power over you?"

"She retains *no* power over me," said Mr. Willoughby, his frame shaking through every fibre; "from her, I am as free as air. I have not wronged her. But Isabella I have wronged, most cruelly wronged! beyond all forgiveness—beyond the hope that she can do otherwise than despise me! Fool, dupe, as I have been! And if she would not have me expire with shame at her feet, let her not seek to see me. And now, I entreat that you will leave me. My senses are confounded, my heart is oppressed, beyond any farther endurance. This hour of darkness and of agony I must battle with alone! but I will overcome myself; you shall hear from me. I will live to do all the justice that I can now do to my wife and child; and when this is done, I would that it might be the will of God that this tortured heart would break!"

"My dear Willoughby!" said Lord Burghley.

"Pray, pray be gone! my brain turns round; I must be alone!"

Lord Burghley withdrew, but he earnestly entreated Edwards to watch over his master with the most unremitted care, and to give the earliest notice of that degree of returning calmness from whence any hope could arise, that he might receive consolation and support from those who were so ready to afford them both to the fullest extent of their power.

Here then we must leave this wretched man to all the agonising reflections that the wrongs which he had done, and the treachery of which he had been the victim, were so well calculated to suggest, and look after gentler sorrows and less feculent affliction.

CHAP. LI.

“He says he loves my daughter,
And I do think so too.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE result of Lord Burghley's report to Lady Rachel Roper of the absolute rupture which had taken place between Mr. Willoughby and Lady Charlotte; and the state of mind in which he had left the former, was that Mr. Burghley should immediately proceed to Eagle's Crag, and bring up Isabella under the guardianship of Mr. Parr; as it appeared that it was alone by her personal exertions, that there could be any hope of calming the mind of Mr. Willoughby, or of herself being restored to her rightful claims upon his heart, and his society. Ignorant as they were of Sir Charles's irruption upon Eagle's Crag, they could only impute the calumny which had wrought so different an effect to that which had been intended, to the bold falsehood of Lady Charlotte's unprincipled mind; and they knew not that she had rather anticipated what she believed would happen, than that she had asserted what she knew to be false; but the shade of difference which this distinction made in the actual untruth which she had uttered, made not any in the depravity of the character from whence it sprung; and so great did this depravity appear both to Lord Burghley and Lady Rachel, that in honour to human nature, they mutually agreed to conceal, even from Isabella, the disgrace that had been reflected upon it.

Mr. Parr and Mr. Burghley had wearied themselves in attempting to unravel the web of wickedness that Lady Charlotte and Sir Charles Seymour had so artfully wrought into disentangleable intricacy, when Catherine returned to tell them, that Isabella had fallen into a quiet sleep; and that she had hopes that she might be able to begin her journey to town the next morning. An early desire that no time should be lost in getting there, had become the ruling feeling of Isabella's mind, and Catherine had in consequence, at her request, already given the necessary orders. She was herself now ready to receive any that her father might have to give, on his so sudden and unlooked for departure from his own house.

“I have only one direction to give my dear Catherine,” said he; “it is, that you do not lose sight of the little precious Godfrey for one hour. If we do not preserve that valuable treasure for our dear Mrs. Willoughby, all our efforts to restore her to happiness will be fruitless. The rest I leave to your discretion.”

“And *this*,” said Catherine, with a smile, “you might have left to my heart.”

“I know it, my dear child,” replied Mr. Parr, “but then I should not have satisfied my own; but remember that all you do must be under the superintendence of Mrs. Evans, who will not only bring her heart to the charge, but her skill also.”

Catherine was now about to retire; when Mr. Burghley said, hesitating and colouring,

“May we not ask one half hour's indulgence? — I have an apology to make, and I would rather make it in the presence of Mr. Parr, than at any other time.”

Catherine's natural lily, gave place to the most glowing rose.

"That blush, but too justly reproaches me," continued Mr. Burghley. "I have once been guilty of impertinence to your daughter," said he, turning to Mr. Parr; "and I am ready to submit to any penance that you may think proper to impose, except that of your forbidding me her acquaintance."

"I know to what you allude," said Mr. Parr, with his usual frankness; "Catherine and I have no secrets; and the next time you meet a rustic mountaineer botanizing, don't send her home to her father, with a report that she has met a wild man in her walks."

Mr. Burghley laughed, and blushed: Catherine blushed also, but did not laugh.

"I put myself into Miss Parr's hands," said Mr. Burghley. "If I am wild in time to come, it will be her fault; for she may make me what she will."

"Then pray, Catherine," said Mr. Parr, "make him reasonable at this moment; and let him not offer any objection to your withdrawing to your own room. You want repose and quiet."

Mr. Burghley instantly arose; and opening the door, "Thus prompt shall you always find me to promote your welfare, although at my own expence," said he, with a bow of such arch solemnity and respect, that made the truth, which had burst unbidden from his heart, appear nothing beyond a playful gallantry.

Catherine's gracious smile, and obliging "good night, sir," completed her conquest; and as he closed the door after her, "I hope," said he, fervently, "that the time may come, when I shall be permitted to tell *you* sir, that my happiness depends upon the smiles of your daughter."

"The time is not *yet* come," said Mr. Parr, with a satisfaction at his heart, which spread itself over his countenance; "and therefore we will at present think no more about it."

But neither his look nor his tone struck any chill to the hopes of Mr. Burghley; indeed, so much was Mr. Parr prepossessed in Mr. Burghley's favour, from the partial estimation in which he knew that Isabella held him; and so much pleased had he been with all that had passed between them in the last few hours, that he could not forbear to indulge a hope, that in the growing passion of this warm-hearted and generous-spirited young man, he should find an asylum for his Catherine, of which she so peculiarly stood in need; and which he so much feared he might die without having secured to her.

Mutually pleased with each other, Mr. Parr and Mr. Burghley passed the remainder of the evening in discussing repeatedly all that either of them knew of the circumstances in which Mr. Willoughby stood, and in forming plans to restore him to happiness, and to re-instate him in affluence. But the knowledge of each was so limited, and they were so entirely without authority to act, that at this present period Mr. Parr could do nothing more towards promoting their wishes and their projects, than to make a communication to Mr. Roberts as fully as he could of the situation in which Mr. Willoughby was placed; and to request him to furnish him with any papers sealed up, that might be wanted, or useful to the settlement of Mr. Willoughby's affairs, which was about to take place.

The grieved and honest Roberts retired for the purpose of collecting such documents, and the next morning put into the hands of Mr. Parr a packet, which he informed him would greatly facilitate the settlement that was projected; and respectfully requested that he might be favoured with any communication which might contribute to

lessen the anxiety that he felt for the fate of his master, and for that of those whose happiness was so dependent upon his.

“Oh, sir,” said this faithful creature, “my lady is an angel! and if my master will let her, she will make him the happiest and the best of men; and indeed sir, there was a time when he was worthy of such a wife; and I trust in God he will be so again! and then I shall once more see around the fires of Eagle’s Crag, the happy countenances that I have seen; when, every evening, all who belonged to them prayed for their prosperity; and every morning rose to bless them for that which they bestowed on others.”

Mr. Parr cheered the worthy creature with assurances of the respect and esteem in which he was held by all who knew him; and by encouraging the hopes which he had so gratefully expressed, of again seeing Eagle’s Crag the abode of benevolence, love, and peace.

Isabella arose calm and sedate; but with an evident guard on herself, that betrayed an apprehension that the least emotion would destroy her assumed fortitude. She cast one glance on her boy; but ventured not to take him into her arms: she spoke to Catherine only in monosyllables; and replied to the attentions of her other friends only by a look, or a movement of the hand, or head.

Mr. Parr was charmed to see how Mr. Burghley’s vivacity gave way before a solemnity so touching. Catherine herself could not have been more silent, less obtrusive, nor yet more attentive. Quietly he superintended every preparation for their departure; and when all was ready he communicated the intelligence to Catherine in a whisper. Instructed by a motion from her, he advanced towards Isabella, and saying, “will you permit me to lead you to your carriage,” he drew her arm under his; he perceived that her limbs failed her, and he put his arm around her: Mr. Parr assisted to support her; and Catherine gently pressing one of her hands, and instantly letting it go again, disappeared through the opposite door to that from which Isabella was to depart.

Isabella spoke not: she did not dare to fix her eyes upon one well known object, or to raise them from the ground; she passively suffered herself to be led to the carriage; and, having entered it, in unbroken silence, Mr. Parr followed her, and she was driven away.

Mr. Burghley cast an eager look towards the windows of the house, in the flattering hope that he might have one more glance at Catherine, to whom he had given no small proof of his self-command, and his forgetfulness of his own gratification, that he had not made a single adieu.

He was rewarded for his forbearance by beholding her at a little door, that opened into the court, evidently desirous to speak, and willing to be spoken to.

He flew to her, and seizing one of her hands, he exclaimed,

“You have commands for me; what would you have me do, or say, or think?”

“I am ashamed,” said the modest and simple minded Catherine, “to give you so much trouble: but I have thoughtlessly omitted to ask my father to give me one word from the inn where you are to sleep; just to tell me how my dear Mrs. Willoughby has borne her journey, and how she supports herself. Will you be so kind as to make my request for me?”

“May I not write that one word myself?” said Mr. Burghley.

“Oh why should you take the trouble?” said Catherine. “My father will be glad to write to me.”

“And shall *not* I?” said Mr. Burghley, with a look of intelligence, that made the conscious Catherine blush.

“A single line will be sufficient,” replied she.

“Well,” returned Mr. Burghley, “niggard as you are in your favours, you shall see by the exactness with which I obey your orders, that I am worthy of being honoured with them a second time, when I hope they will be less restrained.”

“Thank you,” said Catherine, “and now pray go; for I would have you as near my dear Mrs. Willoughby as possible. She will want all her friends.”

“And she will have friends in all who are near her,” said Mr. Burghley; “but she cannot want me now; and I — I — I *want* to talk to you.”

“But I cannot stay,” said Catherine; “you heard my father charge me never to lose sight of the little Godfrey, so God bless you.” And she vanished in a moment; and left him to mutter between his teeth, “the little tyrant!” and to love her the better for the good natured reserve that she maintained.

On such slight incidents often depend the great events of human life, that the interview at the “little door” became an epoch in existence both to Mr. Burghley and Catherine; and it will not be supposed that with all the real, and all the affected carelessness incident to young men, Mr. Burghley could forget to fulfil the commission he had received. He wrote the following lines from the appointed stage.

“*Our* dear Mrs. Willoughby has borne her little journey, and has supported herself through the day, as well as *our* dear Miss Parr could wish. How proud I am of the connecting link which thus binds me at once to father and daughter! but I dare not transgress my promised *one* line; yet pray remember that *we*—these plurals are delicious!—are as much interested for your charge as you can be for ours; and that we have a claim upon you for one word, if not for a whole line, to assure us of the welfare of little Godfrey. Your obedient slave, B.”

Catherine was charmed by Mr. Burghley’s gaiety; and her good-will was engaged by the warmth of his affections; but she was not drawn into a correspondence by his lover’s trick of pretended anxiety for her little charge.

When she wrote to her father, however, she sent him her acknowledgments for his exact compliance with her wishes; and promised to find out, as soon as possible, some new office in which to employ him.

Thus was an intercourse established between them; and Catherine, without being aware from whence it sprung, had a new interest in life, which brightened every object, and enlivened every thought.

Mr. Burghley was indeed the lover of all others for Catherine. His gaiety exhilarated her; and rekindled in her breast the native spark of cheerfulness and mirth, which early sorrow and deep thought had nearly extinguished: and while his gentleness laid all precaution asleep, the ardency of his feelings found a correspondence in her own, which soon identified their sentiments, their wishes, and their hearts!

CHAP. LII.

“Then Zara knew the agony of shame
That bowed Alashtor; and an icy chill
Shot to her heart, and quiver’d through her frame!”
GALLY KNIGHT.

AT this period nothing could be more fortunate for Catherine than that such a novel source of feeling should spring up. In this hour of sorrow all was gloomy around her.

The unusual solitude in which she was left; the importance of the charge that was committed to her care; the doubtful fate which hung over the head of her friend; all conspired to fill her mind with apprehension, and to depress her spirits; but she thought of Mr. Burghley, and said to herself, “these clouds will pass away.”

It is true that necessity for this consolation returned every minute; hitherto she had received none from any other source.

Isabella had indeed arrived in town, without apparently having suffered in health by the exertion that she had made, or from the anxiety of her mind; but here all of good was bounded.

No efforts that Lord Burghley could make were of any avail towards shaking Mr. Willoughby’s resolution that he would see her no more.

Lady Rachel had received her with the fondest affection. She had wept over her faded form, and she had applauded the strength of her mind; she had repeated her assurance that neither Isabella, nor her boy, should ever know deprivation; but she solemnly refused to assist in any way the unhappy Willoughby.

“If,” said she, “he *can* be restored to a healthy state of mind, it must be by the severity of the discipline that he is now undergoing. That the gangrene of vice has not wholly destroyed the moral principle, is proved by what he now endures. He can still feel; there is then still life: but I should hold myself as accessory to its final extinction, if I were to step in to abate him one pang of so salutary a suffering. If he have not strength in himself sufficient to make the sacrifices that his present condition requires, the saving him from them would be but bestowing an artificial life, that would last no longer than the first transitory emotion of pleasure on being so relieved. He must drink to the dregs the bitter cup that he has mingled for himself; to the last drop he must drink it. His mind is not yet sufficiently subdued; his pride has not yielded. He applauds himself for the readiness with which he is willing to part with his last shilling for the support of his wife and child; he knows not that he more fears the humiliation of their being indebted to another hand for their maintenance, than that he shrinks from the inconveniences that they must suffer. He writhes under the lash of remorse, and mistakes his misery for penitence. But the penitent is humble; the penitent kisses the rod. But while he refuses to let the woman whom he has injured choose the reparation that he shall make her, he thinks more of escaping pain himself, than of alleviating that which he has inflicted upon her.

“Be it your task, my dear child,” said she to Isabella, “to mould this proud spirit, and this obstinate self-will, into the form of virtue. There are not sacrifices that can

accomplish this transformation, that you are not called upon to make. *Your* pride, *your* self-will, must also be trodden under your feet. Self must be annihilated! The restoration of your husband to the path of virtue must be your sole aim. If, finally, this were only to be obtained by the renunciation of his society, the renunciation must be made. But it is not so, whatever he may now think or believe. He cannot be restored but by companionship with you. When he will consent that you shall together share the evil which he has brought upon you both, — when he shall seek by love, by tenderness, to heal the wounds that he has inflicted, then will he have re-instated you in all your rights; then will he have paid the homage due to your virtues; —and when he shall be willing, for your sake, to allow the hand of friendship to supply the defalcation which his vices have made in what is due from him to you, then, and not till then, will be proved that he is more ashamed of the vice, than afraid of the punishment. Then will he be penitent; then will his reformation be accomplished; he will be a new creature, and the blessings of renovation will be upon him.”

The understanding of Isabella acknowledged the sanative justice of Lady Rachel’s decision; but her feelings revolted from the severity of the discipline. She was uneasy even under the security from personal suffering that was promised; to see her child in safety, and secure from the ills of unprotected poverty, was all the pecuniary good to which her apprehension was at this time sensible. For herself to be less oppressed by distress than the object of her so ardent affection was henceforth to be, seemed to her an exemption, which robbed her of that identity with him, which, in this sad hour, could be her *one* and only worldly consolation.

Yet how dared she to breathe such thoughts before Lady Rachel?

She bowed before her, as the immediate agent of that Supreme Power, who punishes to reform, and chasteneth every son whom he receiveth!

“Oh! thou more than parent!” cried she, throwing herself on her knees before Lady Rachel, and hiding her face in her lap, “I acknowledge thy justice! thy goodness penetrates my heart! Forgive the feebleness of thy child, if she shrinks from thy stroke! Thy child! — may I promise to call myself so? I know the superiority of the virtues that I dare to emulate; but let the implicitness of my obedience prove that in all I *can*, I am no unworthy successor of her whose place I aspire to fill!”

“Oh! my child, my child!” cried Lady Rachel, with a burst of passion that astonished, and almost annihilated Isabella, “do I again embrace thee? Oh! beloved of my heart, thus let me fold thee to my bosom! Dost thou, wilt thou, recognize me as thy mother? Am I indeed no longer childless? No, no! My Rachel is restored to me; thou dost not only emulate, but equal that angel which is in heaven. She was not tried as thou art! Well dost thou fulfil those painful duties which she died because she was not permitted to perform. Oh! may a merciful God support thee under them! Yes,” continued she, still folding the amazed, the agitated Isabella, still closer to her bosom, “thou shalt take in my heart the place of a creature whom I loved, — blessed be God, not more than its Creator! for I could resign her to Him — I could rejoice that her eternity of bliss began, while I had yet to suffer all the sorrows of time; but yet a creature whom I loved with such intensity of passion, that no revolution of years ever has, ever *can*, lessen my regrets. But henceforth thou shalt fill the heart which she has left so vacant; not to efface her remembrance, but to be so blended with it, that Rachel and Isabella shall be one! But what am I about?” said Lady Rachel, resuming her steadier self; “I shall destroy by my

ungoverned feelings my greatest earthly treasure. Your body is too feeble for your mind, my child! Rest your head on my bosom; pour your tears there. When *I* relax the reins of self-government, although but for a moment, my fiery feelings scorch all around me; your gentler soul melts into a softer sorrow, and injures none but yourself."

"Never, never," said the sobbing Isabella, "did you injure me! — never can you injure me! These tears are tears of transport! of gratitude to my God, who enables me to be a consolation to you; it does me good to shed them."

"Receive this blessing then," said Lady Rachel, "as an earnest of a greater that is in store for you. You will be more than a *consolation* to the object of your dearest earthly love; you will be a saviour to him."

Isabella pressed Lady Rachel's hand with an almost convulsive grasp. "Do you think so?" said she, with an emotion that almost choked her utterance.

"*I do*," replied Lady Rachel; "but we must give him time. At present we must suffer him to proceed in his own way. He has much to unlearn. Let the torrent flow till it has worked itself clear. It will be well, however, that he should be immediately informed of your arrival, and of your wish to see him. He will refuse your request; but be not discouraged; persist, and you will succeed."

"Oh! could I save him, without augmenting his sufferings!" cried Isabella; "to see him humiliated before me will be the bitterness of death!"

"And the raising him to hope and peace, as the joys of Paradise," said Lady Rachel. "Lord Burghley will endeavour to smooth the way for you. We must precipitate nothing."

Prudent as was this resolution, and well-grounded as Lady Rachel's hopes appeared, there seemed to be but too great a possibility that both her prudence and her foresight would be disappointed.

Mr. Willoughby, so far from yielding to an interview with Isabella, persisted in his resolution not again to see Lord Burghley; and there was less hope that he would be shaken in his resolution, as it seemed less to proceed from a disturbed imagination, than to be the deliberate determination of his understanding.

It was evident that he had regained the calmness of his mind, and the power of acting reasonably. Nothing could exceed the clearness, integrity, and openness with which he stated the demands that were upon him, and the means that yet remained to satisfy them, from the celerity with which he proceeded to bring all his intended arrangements to an issue, and from the unlimited and uncontrollable power with which he invested Lord Burghley to act in future for his wife and child, without any reference to himself. Thus cutting off all necessity for a conference upon the subject, he proved the tenacity with which he adhered to his originally declared resolution, that having once fulfilled the only remaining obligation which bound him to any human creature, he would henceforth be self-banished from the society of mankind.

In vain was the request, the intreaty, that he would see Isabella, reiterated by repeated letters from Lord Burghley; in vain were her claims authoritatively urged by Lady Rachel; unsuccessfully did she herself resort to the humblest note of supplication; he was alike unmoved by all; and when Lord Burghley received the following letter, all hope seemed to be extinct, and the scene to be closed for ever.

"MY LORD,

“With this letter there will be delivered to you all the powers necessary to enable you to discharge, with as little inconvenience as the case will admit, the office that, with a kindness so undeserved on my part, you have consented to take upon yourself.

“In making this final communication I entreat your patience, if I trespass something more on your time and attention than may strictly appear to be necessary to accomplish the purpose for which alone I should have presumed to have troubled you at all.

“My Lord, in my so obstinate refusal to grant the only request that my unhappy wife has preferred, through the application of your Lordship, through that of Lady Rachel, and even through her own condescension, I may have appeared harsh, undutiful, and unkind. Nor do I know how to acquit myself of these imputations otherways, than by a most solemn asseveration that it is a conscientious consideration for others, rather than any tenderness for my own feelings, that has rendered me deaf to the voice of friendship, of authority, and of duty.

“I can never more bestow happiness, nor reflect honour. I can never more be the worthy object of filial affection, nor of conjugal love. I know that I have sinned, not beyond the power of forgiveness, but beyond the boundary of affection. Why then should I be seen by her, who cannot look upon me with pleasure? Why should I listen to accents whose every tone, be the words that were uttered what they might, must be the tone of reproach? What result of happiness could there be from an association which would narrow the accommodation of one party, or would expose both to the humiliation of preying upon relationship for a supply? I know the nobleness of Lady Rachel’s mind; and *misfortune* I might with gratitude have allowed her to repair: but never for me shall the current of her bounty be turned from its fertilizing course through the fields of virtue, to wash the barren strand of vice. She has reproached me with preferring to lessen the comforts of those for whose interests I affect to be so solicitous, to submitting myself to the humiliation of accepting the pecuniary aid which my vices have made necessary to their accommodation in life. The very reverse has been the principle upon which I have acted.

“In separating my interests from those of my wife and child, I have left the munificence of Lady Rachel to flow in its natural channel; and should the provision that I have endeavoured to make against the necessity of its reaching even those better parts of myself prove ineffectual, I shall rejoice that my inability is so well supplied, and shall not, I hope, be grudged the consolation of feeling that the worthless remnant does not interrupt any part of the stream.

“My Lord, you will be better able than I am myself to give weight and clearness to these confused thoughts: they are the workings of a disordered head, and an afflicted heart; but they are so bound up with the small remains of peace that I may still look to for myself, and are, in my opinion, so essential to the welfare of those who are inexpressibly dear to me, that I hope they will not be any farther controverted.

“It may be presumptuous to offer to one whom I have so justly offended, as I have done Lady Rachel Roper, an assurance of my undiminished duty, and my everlasting gratitude; but as this is the last time that I shall ever approach her, I intreat that she will pardon the liberty I take in making it. There is a still dearer object, to whom I dare not speak; for what words could I utter that would not be an insult? But permit me, my Lord, in bidding you a last farewell, to express the high esteem and regard, and never-ending

gratitude, with which I shall ever remain your Lordship's much obliged and sincerely
humble servant,
F. WILLOUGHBY.

Isabella read this letter, and hope died within her; but in losing hope, she attained all the energy of despair.

"No, cruel Willoughby!" said she, "thou shalt not thus bereave me! I *will* see thee; and if thou wilt not let me live with thee, I will die at thy feet!"

Lady Rachel now felt her fears awakened for the consequences to Isabella of such an interview, and hesitated whether she should give way to a resolution from which so much evil might be dreaded, and from which so little good would probably ensue. But, acknowledging the sacredness of that duty which imposed upon Isabella *all* that could be done towards the preservation of her unhappy husband, she silenced her fears, and adhered to her principles.

But it was not easy to make even this last effort. Many difficulties intervened. Mr. Willoughby was now seen by no one but his own servant; and he was forbidden, under the severest effects of his master's displeasure, to admit any one to him without his express permission.

It was certain that this permission would not be obtained for Isabella and Edwards, half in obedience to his master, and half in compassion for Isabella, whom he apprehended would scarcely survive witnessing the miserable state to which the object of her love was reduced, long resisted every means used to prevail with him to admit her against his master's prohibition. But at length, in part overawed, and in part persuaded, he yielded, and promised that she should find no impediment to entering Mr. Willoughby's apartment at any hour she should appoint.

There was no time to be lost. Edwards hourly expected that Mr. Willoughby would remove; and he was aware that he meant to do so with so much secrecy, that he should not himself have sufficient notice of the exact moment of his intended departure to give Isabella timely information when it would take place.

Vehemently as Isabella had desired, and earnestly as she had laboured to be admitted to her husband, now, when no farther obstacles were opposed to their meeting, her heart sunk, and she thought that she could have heard the sentence of her death with less trepidation than she learnt that whenever she chose she might once again look upon Mr. Willoughby.

Lady Rachel saw a confirmation of her own apprehensions in the quivering lips and death-like countenance of Isabella; but looking beyond the earth on which they stood for the support which was equally wanted by each,

"Go," said she, "my child! go, in the strength of the Lord! The issue is in his hands. It must be good!"

Isabella arose.

"I will go!" said she. "I will go under the banners which you have spread over me; and if I perish, I perish!"

She was accompanied by a confidential female servant of Lady Rachel's; and Edwards was summoned to attend her chair, as the sudden stopping of a carriage at the door of Mr. Willoughby's obscure lodging might have attracted his notice, and awakened his suspicions.

When Isabella entered the narrow passage which led to the dark stairs that she was to ascend, her tremblings increased so much that it was not without the assistance of Edwards that she could reach the top; and as he opened the door of the darkened room, within whose confined space was the object that she so much longed, yet feared to see, she could have wished that the floor would have sunk under her feet.

“Oh thou!” said she, “who calmed the tumultuous sea with a word, speak, I beseech thee, to this beating heart of mine, and bid it be still!”

“My master, madam,” whispered Edwards, “is upon the sofa. Tread softly, and he will not see you till you are close to him.”

Edwards gently closed the door upon her; and Isabella was the next moment by the side of her husband.

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CHAP. LIII.

“The treasures of the deep are not so precious
As the concealed comforts of a man
Lock’d up in woman’s love.”

MIDDLETON.

“WHO is there?” cried Mr. Willoughby, starting; “who are you?”

“Isabella! your wife! your friend!” cried she, and she cast herself upon her knees before him.

“Isabella? she whose virgin innocence I swore to guard from every approach of ill, and whom I left abandoned to all the evils of a wicked world? Wife? that sacred name which comprehends all the decencies, all the chaste delights that can gladden existence, and whose duties I degraded to the gratification of my vanity, or the amusement of my lighter hours? Are these the elements from whence to form a friend? away! seek not to deceive me: *you cannot* be my friend!”

“By that innocence which was never sullied,” said Isabella; “by that sacred name which in me has never been degraded; I dare claim the rights, the honours of a friend. Prove me! try me! I will not betray the one, nor be found unworthy of the other.”

“And for whose sake will you do this?” said Mr. Willoughby, in a tone of bitterness.

“For, for —” said Isabella, hesitatingly, and as if afraid to make a claim that would be disallowed, “for your sake.”

“For mine? for such a wretch as I am? leave me! leave me! It cannot be! the thing is impossible!”

“Be it then for my duty’s sake,” said Isabella, meekly.

“Your duty!” cried the impatient Willoughby. “Shall I be the puppet of your duty? fondled by precept! and schooled by rule! It is not by such frigid application, that the racking pain of my head and heart can be assuaged; it is not by the languid touch of duty, that the sinking principle of life can be revived within me!”

“Then,” said Isabella, throwing herself into the arms of her husband; “then, be it rekindled by the sacred fire of love? I have loved you, my Willoughby; I have fondly loved you from the first days of our marriage: and however mortified vanity, or disappointed affection, may sometimes have put on a contrary appearance; or a fear of being thought obtrusive, may have falsified the expression, I have never, never loved any other! even my wandering fancy has never seen a charm in any but yourself. I never can, I never shall love another; and I can never cease to love you! I ask not in return your love: *that* may be beyond your power to give; but I ask the privilege, not for your sake, but for my own, of suffering with you; of administering to your wishes! deign to accept of consolation and assistance from my hands”

The stupid horror of despair, which, when first Isabella had approached her husband, had fixed every feature as by the immoveability of death, had, as her voice reached his ears, faded from his countenance: and as she uttered the last words, his eyes darted a ray of intelligence, but it was the expression of impatience rather than of hope.

“What assistance? what consolation?” cried he, in a voice that thrilled through every fibre of her heart: and from *you!* you whom I have betrayed! ruined! And you say you love me! that you have always loved me! Good God! leave me: this instant leave me, if you would not see me do an act of tragic vengeance on myself, from all the wrongs that I have done to you.”

“I am not betrayed! I am not ruined!” said Isabella, in the softest tones of compassionate love. “I have lost nothing that was necessary to my happiness, but what you may restore: I may have been forgotten; but I have not been betrayed! In recalling me to your remembrance, think of me only as a friend: a friend that death alone can tear from you. No! never, never will I leave you! if you will not permit me to make you happy, we will be miserable together.”

“What! where? whom?” said Mr. Willoughby, with the quickness and confusion of a bewildered brain: “and will you indeed share ruin with me? will you abandon your native soil? your troops of friends! to hide your head in some foreign concealment with him who is not worthy of a friend? will you do this, as if the shame as well as the misery were yours?”

“With you,” returned Isabella, “I will share whatever the course of human events or the will of a Divine Providence may bring forth: but ruin, shame, and misery, I am not *now* called upon to share.”

“Are you then come to seduce me with the benevolence of Lady Rachel?” returned Mr. Willoughby. “Having forfeited her esteem, would you have me contemptible enough to live upon her bounty?”

“No!” said Isabella, firmly; “never shall you hear from me a proposal that can wound your most delicate notions of dignity. But, my Beloved, we are not ruined: the portion which you have so nobly assigned to me and to our child is for us *all* a sufficiency competent to every comfort of life, and not wholly inadequate to some of its decorations: and shall we not partake of it together? If greater affluence have been diminished by means which our better feelings condemn, the hour of shame, if ever there were such an hour, is passed. We have blushed for our weakness; we may be allowed to rejoice in our strength. If our native soil have witnessed our imperfections, shall it be to foreigners alone that we shall manifest our virtues? In living a life of reason and religion, on however contracted a scale, there can be no shame; why not live such a life in the presence of our own people? Some loppings off must take place wherever we are: but where shall we find so many indemnifications for such excisions, as in our native land? where the eye of kindness will still rest upon us, and the voice of friendship will still sound in our ears; where every object by which we shall be surrounded may become an object of attachment, and every act of common expenditure may be a blessing to a compatriot. The only sacrifice that we are called to, is the sacrifice of our vanity, of our pride. Forgive me if I say, that in flying to another country, in hiding ourselves from our former associates, we do not abjure these idols; we offer incense to them!”

“What!” replied Mr. Willoughby, in a voice that appalled the feeling heart of Isabella, “What! would you have me an object for the finger of scorn to point at! the jest of every witling that can tell how high I have been! how low I am fallen! fallen by my own folly! aye, there’s the sting! and dragged you, lovely, innocent, meritorious, as you are, into the same abyss! Never! never! I ask not *you* to accompany me; I am not so

selfish; but never shall my darker fortune shadow the land where my meridian sun has blazed.”

“Nor do I ask that they should,” replied Isabella, to whom the word *selfish* had conveyed a sensation of happiness, long unknown to her feelings. “It is the meridian sun, which is now about to break forth. All that has gone before was shade. What you will henceforth do, will court observation; what is past, as it was transacted in darkness, may well rest in obscurity. The blush and downcast eye may attend the consciousness of error, but the erect mien and untroubled countenance belong to the abjuration of it. To have fallen from the slippery eminence on which we were placed, betrays no extraordinary heedlessness; but to arise uncontaminated, to replace ourselves on the firm platform of reason and moderation, shews a strength which, if it furnish no grounds for pride, manifests a self-control that may well challenge the respect of others. You and I, my Willoughby, have been identified in the face of God and man; let us not be separated. In your sickness and your sorrow I have a right to my part. Oh bereave me not of what is dearer to me than health and joy, apart from you. You have always sought to give me happiness by indulgence and generosity; withdraw them not at a moment when they may establish a happiness dearer, ten thousand times dearer, to me than my own.”

The wondering, the doubting, and at length the ardently delighted eye of Mr. Willoughby, was now fixed intently on the features of Isabella.

He clasped his hands together.

“Oh Isabella! is it possible? Have I been thus beloved? am I still thus beloved? beloved with a strength of feeling that has resisted coldness, neglect, unfaithfulness! that no offence could alienate! no fear of poverty chill! Oh! how shall I expiate my folly, my blindness, my ingratitude!”

“All is expiated,” said Isabella; “all is forgotten; from this hour we understand each other, and can have but one soul between us.”

“If this be a dream,” exclaimed Mr. Willoughby, “Oh may I never awake! Gentlest most generous, most unresenting of human creatures,” cried he, pressing her fondly to his heart, “thou hast conquered! I yield myself to thy guidance; my proud heart might have withstood the discipline of duty, but has no defence against the control of love.”

“Oh misery!” cried Isabella, “thou mayst be borne! but bliss like this is too great for mortality!”

“My Isabella! My love!” cried Mr. Willoughby, “look up! revive! let not my return to virtue and to thee be more fatal than my wanderings have been.”

“No, dearest Willoughby,” said the reviving Isabella, “we shall not part; I shall live to bless you, and to be blessed by you.”

“Good God!” said Mr. Willoughby, “but I will not pain you by any retrospection; even to ease my bursting heart, which yearns to confess all its offences towards you.”

“Your *heart* never offended me,” said Isabella. “I *know* it always did me justice; but let us not look back: our way is onward.”

“Oh what a difference!” said Mr. Willoughby; “this is love! How could I mistake the *ignis fatuus* which misled me, for the holy flame of real love?”

“No more, my dear Willoughby; no more, I beg,” said Isabella; “is it not enough that the day-spring is returned, and every thing is now seen in its true light?”

"But how besotted must have been the senses that could revel in such a night of darkness as I have been lost in!" said Mr. Willoughby.

"Willoughby!" said Isabella, "at once to end all allusions to this painful subject, learn that you have no confessions to make me. I know alike your aberrations, and the extent of them."

"Isabella," said Mr. Willoughby, "what do you mean? what is it that you know?"

"I was witness," said Isabella;—and as she spoke every drop of her blood retreated to her heart, and she became cold as marble;—"I was witness to what passed in the little temple in the wood."

"And do you still say that you do not despise, hate, and abhor me?" cried he, vehemently.

"I pitied you then," said Isabella; "I prayed for you: my prayers have been heard, and now—I exult in you."

"Oh what a crowd of torturing recollections have you brought to my mind!" exclaimed Mr. Willoughby. "What must I have made you suffer! and at such a moment too! our dear boy! and yet you so meek! so kind! in the midst of all your own agonies so fearful of giving me pain; —me whom you knew to be a villain! a dissembling, a betraying villain!"

"No, no!" cried Isabella, "I never thought of you in such a light; for pity's sake do not harrow both your feelings and my own, by such groundless apprehensions. I saw the delusion under which you acted; and trusted that you, too, *would* see it; and that all would be well."

"And then," said Mr. Willoughby, pursuing the train of his own thoughts, "the calm dignity of demeanour; the mild, but steady adherence to what was right; the urgent entreaty that I would save *myself*; the meek submission to inevitable evil; Oh virtue, how uniform are all thy shapings! and this was the jewel that I flung from me! and for what? Oh lovely, and beloved! thou mayst forgive me; but never shall I forgive myself!"

"Yes for *my sake*, you will," said Isabella; "henceforth we must have no individual feelings; you will not harbour resentment against my best, my dearest friend."

"In all ways you overcome me," said Mr. Willoughby. "But my dearest, how will you teach me to bear with patience *your* sufferance of the ills attendant on that deprivation, which I have imposed upon you? How shall I learn to see *your* child despoiled of the inheritance of his fathers, and not hate the author of such cruelty?"

"By giving me more than I have lost," said Isabella; "by leaving to our child a better inheritance than that of which he has been deprived. What are buildings and acres? the changing possessions of successive owners. But the fruits of temperance and moderation; of self-government and integrity; of a christian's hope and a christian's faith, are eternal! These you will convey to your son, by precept and example; you have received them from your parents, and they have outlived all that they left you besides; and living they will support you and him; and dying they will bless you both."

"Who would dare to be a coward under such a commander?" cried Mr. Willoughby. "Oh wonderful Isabella! where learnt you this lofty strain of thought? this power to shake off all mortal evil; and thus to soar to heaven, while on earth?"

"In the school of adversity," replied Isabella, humbly: "I am not afraid to tell you so. I have seen the moment when your love was nothing to me, in comparison with your integrity; I have passed through a period, when all the riches of the universe would not

have stilled one agonizing throb; it was as the passage of death, with eternity opening upon me! and shall I have felt and seen this, and can the impression be otherways than indelible? Can there be an instant in my life to come, when the glories of eternity shall not make pale the brightest of all earthly joys?"

"My instructress, my guardian angel, my wife! Oh blessed name!" exclaimed the enraptured Willoughby; "take me to you, and make me all I ought to be!"

"Oh, Willoughby," said Isabella; "you have a more celestial guardian, a wiser instructor than I can be; but all that the affection of a wife can do, I dare affirm, that you shall receive from me. But our minds are too high set; you tremble; I am exhausted: and yet—how shall we part?"

"You shall not part," said the voice of Lady Rachel, as she entered the room. "Forgive me this intrusion; my anxiety, my fears, have brought me here. I trembled for this dear child, I trembled for you also, Willoughby, the two dearest possessions that I have now on earth. Encouraged by your lengthened conference to hope that the virtues of the one had prevailed over the imperfections of the other, I have ventured to approach you, and I ask no other proof that all is as I wish it, than my Isabella's last words — you are again united, and the asylum that has been granted to the wife, shall no longer be denied to the husband."

At these words of Lady Rachel's, Isabella cast herself into her arms in a transport of gratitude; and the humbled Willoughby bent his knee before her. She tenderly embraced them both.

"My children," said she, "you have nearly destroyed each other; calm yourselves; let us leave this place of gloom and sorrow: brighter scenes, and happier prospects attend you in my house. My carriage waits at a little distance; let it be called; and let us depart together."

It was a relief to Mr. Willoughby, to go himself to give orders for this purpose; and Isabella hiding her face in Lady Rachel's bosom, gave way to a gush of tears.

"My trembling conqueror!" said Lady Rachel, as she pressed her to her heart, "who could guess that this slight and agitated frame was inspired by a spirit so vigorous and so steady? But tell me in one word, are you wholly victor? has his pride yielded?"

"It has," said Isabella. "He has fulfilled your conditions. He *does* mourn the vice. He shrinks not from the punishment."

"Thank God!" said Lady Rachel; "then the principles instilled in his early years have not been given in vain; but no more— neither of you can support further emotion; think only that your trials are past; that you will be happy."

Mr. Willoughby returned; and now it was that he and Isabella fixed their eyes on each other with an earnest look of inquiry, as if to ask what changes had taken place in the countenance of either during the unhappy period of their separation. Each saw more than either cared to express; but the fondness with which Mr. Willoughby threw his supporting arm round Isabella's waist, and the tender pressure with which Isabella seized the hand of Mr. Willoughby, spoke their mutual grief for what they saw there.

"This pale cheek is a rebel to your will, my Isabella," said Mr. Willoughby; "and tells tales of bitter reproach to me."

"Peace and love will restore all," said Isabella; and moved towards the door, eager to be once more under the roof of Lady Rachel; and afraid that with the necessity for exertion she should lose the power.

CHAP. LIV.

“Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing.”

SHAKSPEARE.

ON their arrival at the house of Lady Rachel, she immediately condemned Isabella to the solitude of her own apartment; and delivered Mr. Willoughby to the affectionate care of Lord Burghley. Nor was she inattentive to the gratification of her absent friends.

Mr. Parr having seen Isabella safe under the protection of Lady Rachel, had waited a few days in the hopes of being witness to some opening prospect of a re-union between her and Mr. Willoughby, but finding little appearance of this being the case, he had returned into Westmoreland, having retained the willing Burghley as his regular intelligencer of all that might occur; and Lady Rachel now appointed him to the grateful task of communicating to their friends at Eagle’s Crag, the happy tidings of Mr. Willoughby’s restoration.

She had another task of the same kind to perform from which she anticipated much less pleasure. But no time was to be lost in informing Lady Jane Hastings of the change that had taken place in her daughter’s situation.

Lady Rachel having therefore provided the best means for the recovery of both Isabella and Mr. Willoughby from the effects of the violent agitation which they had undergone; and having secured to Mr. Parr and his daughter as early a participation as possible in their returning happiness, set forward on her visit to Lady Jane.

But, as she had foreseen, since she could not tell of renovated fortune, and reviving splendour, her intelligence was received with little pleasure or approbation.

Lady Jane coldly observed, “that for her part she had no hopes that Mr. Willoughby would abjure any of his follies. It was true that his connexion with Lady Charlotte was broken; strangely broken! she should never be able to understand that business; but he would find other Lady Charlotte’s, and such affairs were the least of the misfortunes that he had brought upon her child. She would never give her consent that she should live in obscurity with him; she ought to have every farthing that his ruinous proceedings had left him; and if he had gone abroad with Lady Charlotte, the law must have given it to her. She could derive no comfort from the renewing of a connexion which she saw would end, finally, in reducing her daughter to beggary. She might express her feelings too warmly; she hoped Lady Rachel would excuse her if she did; but a mother must feel as one; and after all that she had done to establish her child, to see all her labours baffled, and by such romantic arrangements, was very mortifying; very hurting; she did not blame Lady Rachel; it was very natural; very right that she should do the best for her nephew; but she blamed Isabella; who, if she had no consideration for herself, ought better to have regarded the interest of her son. When things were come to such extremities, the law was the best way of settling them; there was then no place for sentiment and generosity; every thing was done in a fair and equal way; and the offenders were the sufferers. But she would, with Lady Rachel’s permission, see Mrs. Willoughby in the morning. She hoped nothing would be done without her concurrence; and she

should certainly, between her daughter and herself, freely express her opinions, and give her advice as it was the duty of a mother to do."

Lady Rachel replied to all this well bred effusion of wisdom and affection, with a sufficient quantity of general concession: she admitted, that no doubt much was to be allowed to the feelings of a mother. That nothing could be more just than that the law should settle what could not be better settled without its interference; that romance and sentiment were bad referees in matters of common sense; that charity forbid us to think the worst; that it was to be hoped Mrs. Willoughby would not forget the interest of her son; and that it could not be disputed, that all the social duties ought to keep their respective places, and be careful not to encroach upon each other. And having acknowledged the truth of all this fund of original thought, and deep reasoning, she assured Lady Jane that Mrs. Willoughby would be ready to attend to every thing that her ladyship's parental wisdom might see fitting to suggest; and then took her leave, wondering how an Isabella could be the offspring of a Lady Jane.

But although Lady Jane had no heart to understand the feelings of Lady Rachel, she had acuteness of head sufficient to comprehend that she heartily despised her worldly wisdom; and being aware that, with such an ally by her side, Isabella would never yield her actions to any other guidance, she prudently resolved not to expose her reptile arguments to the eagle swoop of Lady Rachel's principles; and she therefore exchanged her purpose of visiting Isabella, for that of writing to her.

As her letter contained an epitome of all the rules by which the human animal may best fulfil the first law of its creation, "the care of itself," it is thought well worthy of a chapter of its own; and is accordingly given as follows.

CHAP. LV.

“Oh that you would altogether hold your peace,
and it should be for your wisdom.”

ANONYMOUS.

“MY DEAR ISABELLA,

“IT appears to me that after the indignities which you have received from Mr. Willoughby, and the ruin which he has brought upon you and your child, you ought not to have taken the decisive step of re-uniting yourself with him, without the sanction of a parent’s advice. But, perhaps, you regard Lady Rachel as a parent; and no doubt she might give herself a right to be so considered; but this seems to be out of the question. I heard no hint of any intention of remembering the relationship which subsists between her and Mr. Willoughby, even after her death; and this being the case, you ought to have been aware that she must have an interest, for her nephew’s sake, in direct opposition to yours, while I *can* only seek your good, in whatever I may suggest or advise.

“I was wholly unprepared for this blow; as, from all that I could collect, there was no reason to have believed that Mr. Willoughby would ever have been prevailed upon to live with you again. And in *this* he certainly judged rightly; for what confidence or concord can be between you? And in this circumstance the law would have compelled him to have provided for you to the very extent, and, if possible, beyond the very extent of his power: and this too would have been only justice; for more than he can now give is your due, and he ought to be the only sufferer, as he has been the only offender.

“I hinted something of this kind to you on Tuesday; but as you were then so feeble, and in such deep sorrow, and especially as I saw no danger of your having it in your power to act so imprudently as you have done, I forbore to urge you on the subject then, for which I reproach myself. I ought to have made every consideration give way to your real interest; and I ought to have provided against the possibility of what has happened.

“But the mischief has been incurred; and all that can now be done is to prevent as much as may be your suffering from it.

“As far as I can judge, the only motive that can have prevailed with Mr. Willoughby to alter his purpose of quitting the kingdom alone (now I suppose you are to go together), must have been the very scanty share of that which his ruinous folly has left him, that in that case must have been at his disposal; and this is the very reason why you should never have consented to such an alteration of his plans.

“If you do not exert yourself to repair the mistake that you have made, I can easily foretell what will happen. You and your child will not only be exposed to all the miseries of poverty and neglect, while he squanders the poor remnant of that noble fortune which I thought that my prudence had made so securely yours, but you will be persuaded, or bullied, into giving up your settlement; and then, good night to all your future prospects. The affluence which might yet be yours, will be for ever gone; and you and your boy may be beggars in the streets!

“Perhaps you are not aware (for you were always strangely thoughtless of such matters) that although I took care that you should be nobly portioned, in case of Mr.

Willoughby's death, yet that I could not prevail for any settlement on your children; and your fortune being so small, it would not have been discreet to have urged this point too strenuously.

"It seems the wisdom of the Willoughby family, like the foolish wisdom of the English law, 'abhors entails;' and you see the consequences — the wisdom and the property are like to end together. For your child's sake, therefore, you ought never to be induced to give up your jointure. God forbid that I should limit, even in thought, the life of any one; but after the strange career that Mr. Willoughby has run (and I am told that he is extremely altered), nobody knows how soon you may be in possession of that part of his property; and with such an advantage, in addition to your family distinctions, and your personal recommendations, if you don't destroy your beauty by your ill-placed grief, it is not presumptuous to expect that you may make a second marriage much superior to your first; and by this means, probably, have it in your power in some degree to make up to your poor ruined boy the injuries that he has received from his father,—a consideration to which no maternal heart can be insensible.

"I entreat that you will think seriously of all these things. I am willing to persuade myself that my present advice will not meet with the same neglect that attended the last I gave you. Had you listened to the suggestions of Lady Stanton and myself, conveyed to you through that degraded Lady Charlotte, none of these terrible things, which have brought such disgrace on our families, would have happened. You would have been safe, and at your ease in Westmoreland; and she, poor wretched thing! would still have been sanctioned by the protection of her husband.

"I shall never be able to understand the cause of her rupture with Mr. Willoughby; but I suppose it might arise from her being wise enough to refuse to share his broken fortunes, which ought to be a warning to you. Having quarrelled with him, what could she do, but what she did? to humble herself before that vulgar tyrant whom she has made her master was not to be thought of; and my brother's temper is so severe that I verily think, had she sought a shelter with him, that he would have shut her up for the rest of her life; for there is no man more jealous of his family honour than he is, for which he is much to be commended. My heart bleeds for my poor sister Stanton. And I am the last person in the world to say a word that would wound her feelings, or reflect upon her management; and although I certainly condemned the whole course of the education that she gave her daughters, as the least likely possible to lead to respectable establishments in the world, yet I am not ashamed to confess that I did not foresee *such* a finale; since nobody could take greater pains to impress upon their minds a more perfect horror of degradation, or more clearly set before them the necessity of restraining themselves within the limits that the world's opinion has fixed, beyond which no woman who would keep her reputation can exceed. And certainly any excursion is the more unpardonable, as, it must be acknowledged, the bounds are not very narrow. But I have wandered from my subject. All this, Isabella, does not apply to you. I thank God, I have guarded you better; and I have nothing to fear but a certain romantic disposition to indiscreet generosity, and forgetfulness of self, which, in fact, is the abandonment of one of the first of our duties; I might say of all; since, if we do not take care of ourselves, of whom shall we take care?

"This fault in your temperament I have never been able sufficiently to control; it has, indeed been the primary cause of all your misfortunes. You should earlier have stood

upon your *rights*. But I cannot take much blame to myself on this score. The fault lay with Mrs. Obrien; who had certainly extraordinarily fine sentiments, but did not well know how to direct the application of them. And, indeed, the general inapplicability of such high-sounding words to any of the actual purposes of life, has often made me think that they had better be wholly left out in the process of a good education. They are little better than the gilded backs of wooden books, to fill up gaps, when the volumes of real use are not sufficient to furnish the library; they serve but to puzzle and confound, and often prevent the going the direct way to the end in view. Make use of this observation on the present occasion. The end that we have in view is, that you shall, as little as possible, partake of the distresses that the follies of others have produced. Let no imaginary wife-like duty, or any Curtius' self-devotion, induce you to re-unite yourself with your husband, if such a measure of destruction can now, by any means, be avoided. But if in the state to which your precipitancy has brought matters this cannot be avoided (and the law is very unjustly severe against wives who *refuse* to live with their husbands); then, you must do nothing without the best legal advice (you know that we can command the highest in the kingdom) how most securely to put it out of your own power to be cheated or coaxed out of your future independency. Indeed, I *enjoin* you to do this, as you value your duty to me. Were I to use a less strong word, I should not do mine to you.

"There is certainly no alternative to your going abroad, if you are obliged to adhere to your rashly renewed engagement with your indiscreet husband. It is, indeed, a measure that I would advise; for to live in England in your degraded state would be to aggravate all the evils to which you are exposed; and I will do Mr. Willoughby the justice to say, that, with all his faults, I believe he has too much spirit to submit to such a humiliation. I hope you have sufficient dignity of mind to be of the same opinion. But you must not think of Paris; nor would I yet have you hide yourselves in any very obscure provincial town, and so be quite forgotten. There are places to be found where you might still live with some little distinction, and where all you spend would *tell*. That is, indeed, the great advantage of a foreign residence; nobody knows the interior of the menage: provided the outside is a little glittering, nobody troubles their head as to what is within. You ought to insist upon the choice being left to yourself, as some small return for the sacrifices that you have already made, and are still to make; and, if you do this, you may avail yourself of my advice in this particular, however strangely you may have neglected to resort to it upon so many more important points. I have, however, now endeavoured to remedy, as well as I can, the evils that are already incurred; and to obviate those which still hang over you.

"You may see, by the length of this letter, how important your interests are to me. It is not from *leisure* that I have taken the time necessary to write it; but I preferred writing to calling upon you at Lady Rachel's. I know that she must naturally be inimical to my side of the question; and I did not think it well-bred, to come into her house for the purpose of counteracting a mode of proceeding which she may think the most beneficial to the interests of her relation; besides which, I must confess that I was unwilling to run the risk of encountering Mr. Willoughby. It may be right in Lady Rachel (for it is not my way to judge any one) to receive him again under her roof; but I hope it will not be expected of me that I shall ever admit him under mine. A parent's feelings ought to be respected. Nor will I ever hold intercourse with him if I can help it. The same consideration that prevents me from visiting you at Lady Rachel's, makes me desire that

you will not communicate the contents of this letter to her. Of course they must be a secret from your husband; both as I do not wish unnecessarily to offend him, and as his being aware of the warnings I have given you, would probably render them inefficient. It may be more prudent not to let him discover that I am hostile to him; and as this might appear, if I were to visit you, and to refuse to see him, I think it better that you should come to me. I *will* be at liberty to receive you any morning before one, which, you know, I neither would nor could engage to be for any one less dear to me than you are. Your sisters entirely agree with me in all my opinions. They long to see you; but neither do they like to go to Lady Rachel's.

"I think that we shall be able to bring the matter to bear, of which I gave you a hint the other day; but I dare not speak with certainty. If things go on well, I will profit by my experience, and not expose Harriet to the inconveniences that you are exposed to, from having no pin-money; nor will I leave her offspring without a provision that cannot be dissipated by an extravagant father.

"God bless you, my dear child, and enable you to follow my counsels, and to profit by them.

"Ever your tenderly attached parent,

JANE HASTINGS."

Lady Jane's precaution to conceal the advice which she so maternally pressed upon Isabella, was wholly unnecessary. Isabella would as soon have thought of revealing that her mother was a thief, as she would have disclosed such an exposition of her principles and opinions, either to Lady Rachel or to Mr. Willoughby. She felt as if she were almost guilty of a parricide in looking on such an exposure of the nakedness of the mind of a parent, and scarcely giving herself time to come to a conclusion of the paper, she hastily committed it to the flames, earnestly wishing at the same time that she could blot its contents from her memory.

Thus would this valuable document of maternal wisdom have been lost to posterity, had not the higher estimate that its author made of its merits caused her to deposit a copy of it, entitled, "A copy of my letter to my daughter Willoughby, dissuading her from a re-union with her husband," in the secret recesses of her private cabinet; from whence to be produced whenever any future contingency in the Hastings family might call for a similar effort of her talents and her zeal.

CHAP. LVI.

“An angel’s arms are round me!—no! a mortal’s!
A mortal thing sublimed and beautified
By woes that would have broken many a heart!”
WILSON.

AT any other period Isabella would have felt such an evidence of the want of integrity and generous feelings in the mind of a parent, as a real affliction; but at the present still dearer interests were at stake.

It required all the powers of her understanding to determine what course to pursue, and all the firmness of her principle to abide the consequence of her decision.

She was as well aware as Lady Jane, that more than one path lay before her; and that all were rugged. On the choice which she made, must depend, not only all the happiness that she could hope for in life, but the peace of a self-acquitting conscience. The alternative lay between contending evils; and to balance these fairly, and courageously to support the decision of the preponderating scale, was the arduous task that was appointed her.

But she had no longer to dread from Mr. Willoughby any opposition to whatever she might see best or fittest to be done. So absolute was become her dominion over his mind and his affections, that he was but as an infant in the hands of the tenderest of mothers. She felt her own responsibility but the more weighty.

That they were henceforth to live together, and that they could not but live in love and concord, were no longer matters of doubt; but how they were to live, and what proportion of the necessities or comforts of life they were to allow themselves, were questions of no easy decision. Justice and loftiness of spirit pointed one way; the prejudice of habit and self-indulgence another. Isabella’s decision was made; but to impose it upon Mr. Willoughby in these the first moments of his enthusiastic astonishment and rapture was to hazard his after-repentance, and the abatement of his attachment to her. The choice, however, must be made; and every motive of honesty and delicacy called for its being made without delay.

The papers which had been transmitted from Roberts by Mr. Parr, and the clear and unsullied fairness of every statement made by Mr. Willoughby to Lord Burghley, had put her in possession of every necessary particular on which the determination could be founded. But she felt that the choice must be Mr. Willoughby’s, not hers; and she was now to put to the test whether his mind had indeed recovered that vigorous tone which would enable him at once to see what was right, and courage to pursue it, even to the cutting off a right hand, or the plucking out a right eye.

“My dearest Willoughby,” said she, “it appears from the disclosures which you have so kindly made to me, that the alternative which is offered to our choice is, either to sell Eagle’s Crag out of hand, or to remove into some retired and unexpensive residence. If we pursue the first measure, we shall obtain an immediate affluence of property, sufficient to supply us with the means to enjoy not only the comforts of life, but some of its luxuries and distinctions; and we may resume, although with an abatement of its splendour, our former career in the world. Should we, however, see in this mode of

proceeding any thing that hurts our feelings, or that is at variance with our principles, we must resolve upon a long course of obscurity and self-denial; but we may calculate on the result as enabling us to transmit to our offspring the possessions of your ancestors, if not wholly undiminished, yet in such a state as will shield our memory from the reproach of injustice or improvidence. With you, my Willoughby, I am willing to share either fortune; and you have a right to make the option."

Isabella trembled as she made this statement; Mr. Willoughby trembled as he heard it. But neither of them knew from what feeling the emotion of the other arose.

"My dear Isabella," said Mr. Willoughby, his voice quivering with agitation as he spoke, "I ought to have no vote in this decision. I have but too well proved that I am an unworthy guardian of my wife and child. You must alone determine."

"If," said Isabella, "you could submit your wishes as implicitly to me as you do with so much kindness your verbal assent, I should then have no difficulty in my choice; for you would be equally happy either way. But the will cannot be thus passive; and as much of the good or evil which belongs to either side of the alternative must depend upon the concurrence of the will in whatever is done, we must rather seek to determine *that* to what is best and most right, than rashly undertake what we shall be unable to perform."

Mr. Willoughby was silent. His eyes were fixed on the ground; his colour went and came. Isabella's heart palpitated; she dreaded to hear his voice.

At length, casting a hasty glance on Isabella, and instantly withdrawing it,

"My beloved," said he, with much emotion, "*I never can make* this decision! How can I doom you to deprivation and obscurity?"

Isabella's heart was still.

"Can you rather," said she, "divest yourself of the inheritance of your fathers? Can you give your son a right to reproach your memory?"

"Is it possible," said he, starting up, and eagerly embracing her, "is it possible that you can *wish*, at every conceivable inconvenience to yourself, to enable me to repair the wrongs that I have done to my boy? to give me a right once more to be at peace with myself?"

"Is it possible," said Isabella, with a smile, and with the tone of the fondest love, "is it possible that you should doubt it?"

"I know," said he, "that you would have shared any straits of poverty with me, if such had been my inevitable lot; but here is an option, an option that you have a right to make; — that you may make without injustice; that in some respects might perhaps be made with advantage. And do you wave every selfish consideration, and offer yourself a sacrifice on the altar of my folly?"

"I know not the words *yours* and *mine*," said Isabella. "I know not how to distinguish them in my understanding, or my feeling. *Your* happiness is *my* happiness; your honour my honour; *your* integrity *my* integrity. These are jewels that, although they may not sparkle in the hair, will rest within the breast; and when self-denial shall have redeemed too lavish a self-indulgence, and exemplary conduct have obliterated the remembrance of former thoughtlessness, then may we raise up our heads in the honest confidence of virtue, and allow our hearts to rejoice in the happiness that our own efforts have given us. And what is there in all this like waving any selfish consideration?—of offering ourselves *sacrifices* on *any* altar? The mind's health, my Willoughby, is nothing

else but virtue; and shall we so assiduously cater for the body, that must perish, and neglect the welfare of the soul, that shall exist to all eternity!"

"Dearest! best! most lovely! most beloved!" said the enraptured Willoughby; "with what sweet flowers do you strew the rugged path of duty; let us then tread it together! and should I sometimes stumble at the roughness in the way, your kind arm will be ready to support me; while with steadier pace you keep right onward to the reward in view."

"Dear Willoughby," said Isabella, "if you make my progress thus happy, shall I not be apt to forget that there is any heaven beyond it? But come, let us hasten to rejoice the heart of our dear Lady Rachel: she knew that the important decision was to rest with you; and I may now redeem my pledge, that you would make it under the control of reason and of virtue."

With these words, and on the wings of joy, Isabella flew to Lady Rachel:

"Bless your children! my dear Lady Rachel," said she; "from henceforth we shall be worthy of your love."

"You do not then sell Eagle's Crag?" said Lady Rachel.

"Oh, no, no!" cried they both in a breath; "for the world would we not part with that dear inheritance."

"And how do you propose to live?" said Lady Rachel, in a tone that totally disappointed the expectations of Isabella; and turned back the tide of pleasure, which but the moment before had flowed through every vein.

"My dear Lady Rachel," said Isabella, "why such a question? where will be the difficulty? Shall we not have sufficient for all the wants of virtue?"

"And shall you have no other wants?" said Lady Rachel.

"No, no!" said Isabella, earnestly, "I answer for us both."

"Isabella!" said Mr. Willoughby, "Lady Rachel sees the sacrifice which you are so generously willing to make in its true light. I ought not to have been overcome by the enthusiasm even of your love, of your virtue! it shall be the last *selfish* feeling to which I will ever yield. Eagle's Crag shall be sold!"

"Then, I will become the purchaser," said Lady Rachel; "and give it to — Isabella."

"Oh, my dear madam," cried Isabella, with an accent of distress, "you are too good, too kind to trifle with our feelings: what can this mean? what are we to understand by this?"

"That I adopt you as my daughter," said she, throwing her arms around Isabella: "that I endow you with all the accumulated property that belonged to that sacred name. My dear Willoughby," continued she, turning to her nephew, "take from my hand, the child of my love; the most perfect emanation of the divine Nature which has yet visited our earth! I need not bid you love her; she has made it impossible that you should do otherwise. But cherish her, imitate her! and may the God of all mercy bless you through succeeding generations!"

Surprise, joy, gratitude; with a thousand mingled sensations, from recollections of the past, and consciousness of the present, threw Mr. Willoughby in speechless emotion at the feet of Lady Rachel, while the more chastened and unmixed feelings of Isabella, caused her to cling fondly to the arm of her benefactress, and gaze upon her with the ardent eye of grateful affection.

“Rise, my dear Willoughby,” said Lady Rachel; “now no longer the object of my direst apprehensions, and of my saddest regrets! but the cherished offspring of a beloved sister, who, even on the throne of bliss, will join the hallelujah of angels, for the repentance of a sinner. My Isabella, you have thought my discipline severe; but the ingot is come forth from the fire pure gold. No fear for the future need now disturb your bliss. He who has been tried, and has stood the trial, as this poor culprit has done, is more to be depended upon than one who had never fallen. Willoughby, look up! let your eye meet mine; never more to sink under its scrutinizing fixture, as it has so often done in times no more to be remembered; take to your protection my dearest child: in committing her to your care, I prove the confidence that I have in the renewal of your hereditary virtues; and in making you an *unrestrained* sharer in a gift which I had dedicated wholly to her use, I recognize your identity. We will kill the fatted calf, and repair in company to keep the feast at Eagle’s Crag!”

CHAP. LVII.

“Surer to prosper, than prosperity
Could have assured us.”

MILTON.

THAT neither Isabella, nor Mr. Willoughby died of joy, I think it not more than necessary to declare in express terms; although it may perhaps require more credit as an historian, than I can flatter myself that I possess, to make it believed.

But infidelity does not injure truth; and if any one will take the trouble of making a journey into Westmoreland, and can there discover that stately mansion and princely domain so celebrated in these volumes, they will there find living witnesses of my veracity.

Nor are Mr. Willoughby and Isabella the only happy persons who bless and are blest in that remote country.

The ardent Burghley, having danced and sung, laughed and wept, and embraced every man, woman, and child, that came in his way, declared that the information which was to be conveyed to Eagle's Crag was of too holy a nature to be thrown into the general mass of miscellaneous tidings intrusted to the care of the vulgar post; that an especial messenger must be appointed to the office, and that he would himself be that messenger.

No one was inclined to dispute his claim; but he set not forward on his journey until he had provided himself with letters of credit from Lord Burghley, by which he was authorised and entitled to woo and to win the fair Catherine if he *could*. The task was not a difficult one.

She was already half won; and the delighted approbation which her father expressed of the sentiments of her heart, secured that heart wholly to Mr. Burghley.

If the first festival held at the mansion of the ancient family of the Willoughby's, celebrated the return of “the prodigal,” the second was honoured by the union of unspotted innocence and uncorruptible integrity. And that there might be no interruption to the happiness either of Isabella or Catherine, from the new connexion thus formed by the latter, a residence was found for the happy pair, in the midway between Eagle's Crag and Fell-beck.

The excellent, the venerable Mr. Parr, now *almost* restored to happiness, continued still to call the latter place his home; but he was so frequently an inhabitant of the apartments assigned to his use, both at Eagle's Crag, and Raven's Tearne, as to leave it doubtful whether he thought it so.

Lady Rachel also retained her house in town; but she found so many charms during the summer in Westmoreland, and so much difficulty in quitting it in winter, that she too was rather a resident than a visitor.

Thus surrounded by their friends, and blest by each other, Mr. Willoughby and Isabella, in offering up their thanksgivings for the manifold blessings that were bestowed upon them, failed not to acknowledge, that the afflictions with which they had been visited, were the most precious of them all.

A few words, and only a few, on a less grateful subject.

Mr. Dunstan hastened to fulfil the wishes of Lady Charlotte, by dissolving the union between them finally and completely. But speedy as were his movements to effect

this purpose, they could not outrun the fleeting connexion which had been so suddenly formed between Lady Charlotte and Sir Charles Seymour. A very few weeks put an end to an arrangement from which they were to have been “the happiest of creatures!” and Sir Charles thought himself bound neither by the “fair hand” of the lady, nor by his “honour as a gentleman,” to renew it in a form that would give Lady Charlotte a legal right to be a torment to him for the remainder of his life.

Dissension first, and desertion afterwards, if it could not make Lady Charlotte virtuous, made her at least heartily sick of vice; but it being more easy to raise the evil spirits of darkness than to lay them, she continued the unwilling slave to all those raging passions, which she had hoped to make the instruments of torment to others; and having to do with the vindictive disposition of Mr. Dunstan, which, in seeking to inflict punishment, found no means better fitted to his sordid apprehension than the imposition of poverty, she remains for the rest of her life equally indigent and despised.

Nor did Sir Charles Seymour escape without a competent retribution for the evil of his doings. Afraid to return to his native land, where shame and scorn await him, he continues a wanderer upon foreign ground, unwillingly atoning, by a life of unceasing mortification and excruciating recollections, his offences perpetrated against Morna, and meditated against Isabella!

In having delineated the excellences of self-command in an Isabella, I feel persuaded that I have only sketched a picture, the original of which will be recognized in many a virtuous breast—“*Ed Io anche son’ Pittore!*”

But I am prepared to be told, that no such a monster as Lady Charlotte is to be found.

As well may it be denied that the minute germ in the bosom of the acorn can expand into the lofty and extensive oak, as that the corrupt propensities of the human heart, unchastened by discipline, and unrestrained by principle, will not grow up into the full stature of every atrocity that ever disgraced the name of man.

If then, in shewing the fruits I hold forth a warning against the culture of the root, let me rather be considered as the guardian than as the calumniator of human nature; and let not the instructors of youth allow any of the wide spreading branches of “dignified spirit,” “emulation,” “the point of honour,” or “justice to self,” to shelter from their exterminating hook, — Pride, — Envy, — Revenge, — or Malice.

THE END.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY J. NICHOLS AND SON, PARLIAMENT-STREET.