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STELLA OF THE NORTH.

A NOVEL.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS. LEADENHALL-STREET.

STELLA OF THE NORTH,
OR THE
FOUNDLING OF THE SHIP.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF ADELAIDE DE NARBONNE, &c.

“Virtue can itself advance
“To what the fav’rite fools of chance
“By fortune seem’d design’d;
“Virtue can gain the odds of fate,
“And from itself shake off the weight
“Upon th’ unworthy mind.”

PARNELL.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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FOR LANE AND NEWMAN,

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1802.

S T E L L A

OF THE

N O R T H.

CHAP. I.

“Darker scenes obtrude
“Than Fancy fashions in her wildest mood.”

PLEASURES OF HOPE.

ABOUT ten o'clock one night in October, 17—, a loud knocking was heard at the door of an inn situated in the most retired quarter of the small town of Port Patrick, in North Britain.

The landlord, who acted in the double capacity of host and waiter, had, for some time previous to this period, discerned a vessel attempting to reach the shore, in spite of the wind, which happened to prove unfavourable, and greatly retarded its progress. Conceiving the crew had at length accomplished their landing, and flattering himself with the prospect of benefiting by their arrival, he started from the recumbent posture in which he lay reclined on a bench before a well-replenished turf fire, and, hastily stirring it to a brighter blaze, flew to admit the welcome visitors.

The first object that met his view was a tall, military-looking figure, in a blue coat, with a red collar; the latter stood high, and concealed the lower part of his face, while a large hat was so placed as to effect the same purpose above. After casting a cursory glance round the kitchen, he returned to the door, and presently re-entering, was followed by two sailors, bearing an armed-chair. In this homely conveyance sat a female, her head resting against the back of it; her attitude bespoke the last stage of sickness and debility; but her form and features were entirely excluded from observation by the immense quantity of covering in which she seemed enveloped. A woman, apparently past the meridian of life, assisted to support her; and a third sailor carried a travelling trunk on his head, which having deposited on an old-fashioned oaken table near the window, he called to his companions to take time by the fore-lock, and hasten back to the vessel, lest Master *Borus* chopped round again before they reached her; adding, with a significant nod, that wind and tide were not to be detained by a can of grog.

Saying this, he pocketed a shilling thrown him by the gentleman, tossed off a glass of spirits, and snatching up his hat, hurried from the house. After being rewarded for their trouble, the other two men followed his example, swearing, as they shook the landlord heartily by the hand, that he knew the right proportion of whiskey and water better than any man on the coast of Scotland.

Meanwhile the wife and daughter of mine host, having been previously roused from their first slumber, were bustling about to prepare a chamber for the reception of the invalid, upon whom her female attendant seemed exclusively to bestow her whole care. Some proper restorative cordials, said to be peculiarly beneficial in all cases of extreme sea-sickness, were powerfully recommended: these the domestic promised to administer when her mistress was in bed, but declined offering them before that period. Having at length accomplished this point, she declared her intention of watching by the lady through the night, lest the effects of the voyage should again require assistance. The rest of the family therefore retired, and the gentleman was conducted immediately to his apartment.

About an hour had now elapsed from the time of their arrival, and a second was rapidly advancing to its close, when a kind of suppressed noise issued apparently from the chamber of the invalid, and shortly after a door was heard to open softly. The sound of steps cautiously moving overhead succeeded, and in a few minutes more some person seemed descending the staircase. As no bell had hitherto rung, the landlord's daughter, who happened to be the only person awake, did not deem it necessary to quit a warm bed uncalled for; but a gentle tap at her door soon brought her to the threshold, from which she started back, on perceiving the stranger with a candle in his hand. Apprehensions, however, of a personal nature quickly subsided, upon learning that the lady was again extremely ill; and as it was become necessary to have medical advice, he requested that one of the faculty might be instantly summoned.

The girl awakened her parents with this intelligence; and the landlady, who had frequently on their arrival, regretted the absence of the principal doctor in the neighbourhood, then on professional business in a distant quarter of the country, hastened to the invalid's room, reminding the gentleman, as she ascended the staircase, of having already acquainted him with this unlucky circumstance. He listened, however, to her loquacity without evincing any particular degree of disappointment on the subject of it, and only desired her husband would endeavour to remedy the want by procuring any other decent practitioner within his reach.

A messenger was consequently dispatched on this errand, though the chief part of the operator's intended work happened to be performed by dame Nature just as the hostess entered the apartment; where she found the lady delivered of a dead child, to the visible astonishment of both her male and female companion, who, incredible as it may seem, declared such an event was totally unexpected by either of them.

This asseveration was not considered by the landlady in a light favourable to the veracity of the speakers; and suspicious of something wrong, from the preceding silence observed on the real situation of the woman in the straw, she felt inclined to give vent to her sentiments with a freedom of manner not quite acceptable to her hearers, who she over and over again protested could not but have known the true state of the case, and therefore must be looked up to as answerable for the consequence, should any thing happen of an alarming description, all of which could easily have been guarded against, had she been properly consulted on the occasion; a midwife, she said, residing at no great distance, whose skill she could aver, from *experience*, to equal, if not surpass, that possessed by the first man practitioner in the kingdom.

A stern look of displeasure from the gentleman interrupted the remainder of this harangue; but the pause was but momentary—for the surgeon had no sooner made his appearance, and pronounced his patient in danger, than the subject was resumed by the loquacious hostess, who would not have been suffered to continue in the room, had not necessity rendered her presence indispensable. At length it was deemed possible to dismiss her, and she was commanded to retire, though not before the doctor was made acquainted with the supposed ignorance of the strangers relative to what had come to pass.

This piece of information certainly surprised the son of Esculapius almost as much as it had done herself; and the start of astonishment that succeeded, sufficiently shewed his incredulity equalled her own on the occasion.

What passed through his mind was not unmarked by the gentleman; and, though half shrinking from the steady gaze of the surgeon, he repeated his former asseveration (which the female attendant corroborated), in such impressive terms, that his auditor's doubts were considerably staggered, and he knew not what judgment to form on the probable or improbable nature of their intelligence.

Meanwhile the mistress of the house, who, in the language of the turf, had frequently been taken in by less suspicious-looking guests, summoned her husband to a private consultation on the *pro* and *con* merits of the case. A death—a funeral—its attendant expences, were all before her mental vision; it was not that she cared much about the two first articles, provided the last was properly arranged.—No! Mrs. Martin could have witnessed half the extirpation of the human race with all the indifference of a modern philosopher of the Gallic school, if she herself only escaped with part of their spoils: but the longer she reflected on what the strangers had avowed, on the air of mystery that surrounded them, and a certain something that, without being able to define, left an impression on the mind inimical to a favourable idea of their principles, the more was she convinced of the risk to be encountered in proportion as the length of their bill increased, without obtaining some security against the chances that might ensue either in the event of prolonged existence or immediate death. Some casual incidents had already occurred to shew that their departure from the Irish coast had been suddenly undertaken. The very small portion of luggage with which they were provided, likewise increased this good woman's fears; as, in her judgment, it not only bespoke scanty finances, but likewise precluded every hope of indemnification by other means, should pecuniary deficiencies render the detention of their trunk a necessary measure.

Having duly scanned over all these circumstances, she proceeded to enumerate the incalculable losses sustained on similar occasions by the easy temper of a husband who, but for her interposition, would speedily ruin both his poor wife and child, by that eternal and nonsensical propensity to assist others at the expence of his own interest.

Martin, who was really a worthy fellow, had been too long and too well accustomed to what is vulgarly styled petticoat government, to think of contesting the matter with a woman of so selfish a disposition; he, therefore, usually let her talk on without interruption, and not venturing to increase the evil by open opposition, generally contrived to practise in private, what he dared not speak when humanity called upon his exertions in its favour.

The result of this consultation was, therefore, to clear the house of its present guests without delay. Should the lady's death be the consequence of this hasty measure, those to whom she belonged must look to that; as for any thing else, every one had a right to take care of themselves. This, Mrs. Martin said, was the essence of her breed, and according to its dictates she would live and die.

Her husband swallowed a gill of rum and water in silence, and tacitly acquiesced in her sentiments, though resolved to counteract them, if they militated too much against the feelings of his own honest heart when put in execution.

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CHAP. II.

“We know not what we fear,
“But float upon a wild and violent sea
“Each way, and move.”

SHAKESPEARE.

DETERMINED to commence her operations with caution, lest the supposed adventurers should prove quality in disguise, and the biter be bit, a circumstance which had more than once occurred before the present juncture, Mrs. Martin watched for the surgeon's departure from the chamber of his patient, and beset him with a torrent of questions relative to her and her companions. These, however, he prudently contrived to evade as much as possible; and where that could not be easily accomplished, the answers she received were so vague and laconic that they rather served to heighten her fears than otherwise.

More than ever alarmed for the future, she resolved at once to conclude the matter according to that mode of proceeding most likely, in her opinion, to prove decisive.

Assuming an air of penitential humility (for Mrs. Martin was an actress in her way), she repaired to the gentleman's door, and softly tapping at it, requested to speak with him.

No reply was obtained to this entreaty. The door stood ajar: she looked in, and perceived the room was empty!

“Humph!” said Mrs. Martin, emphatically to herself—“still with the doctor's patient—and yet I do not recollect that they addressed each other as husband and wife! Curious enough, faith!—But I'll be at the bottom of it, else my name's not Janet Martin, of Port Patrick.”

So saying, she stepped on to the next apartment; when having performed a similar ceremony, the door was gently unlocked, and the female attendant, holding it half open, desired to know her business.

In a voice of fawning servility, she begged leave to enquire if his Honour was in the chamber.

The woman returned an evasive answer.

The question was repeated in other words to the same tune; and the reply proved still unsatisfactory.

Mrs. Martin was not however to be thus got rid of; her passion, never governable, except where interest was obviously in view, began to spurn at restraint: she gave way to the impulse, and suddenly pushing past the servant, rushed into the room. The gentleman stepped from the opposite side of the bed, and sternly demanded the cause of her intrusion.

Mrs. Martin, who prided herself upon being able to see as far into a millstone as most of her neighbours, conceiving she had now discovered rather more than was meant to meet the eye, was preparing to open upon the subject of her remarks in no very pleasant manner, when she was again ordered to explain herself, or retire immediately.

There was something in the manner of pronouncing these words that instantly stopped the flood-gates of the landlady's intended eloquence. She shrunk from that commanding look of conscious superiority so visible in the gentleman's whole deportment, and, fixing her eyes on the floor, remained silent, while her changing colour bore witness to the internal struggle of contending passions which agitated her bosom.

“Leave the room, woman—we want you not!” repeated the object of her terror. He turned to the fireside as he spoke.

Mrs. Martin had not yet accomplished the end of her visit, and to retire as she came, was doing nothing towards the gratification of a curiosity that now reigned more paramount than ever in her mind; she therefore judged it requisite to squeeze out a few tears, and when the convenient sobs that accompanied them permitted her to articulate, proceeded, with all due humility, to acknowledge her offence, deprecate his wrath, and bespeak his attention on a subject, in which he and his family were alone interested.

The gentleman suddenly raised his head from the chimney-piece against which it reclined, and regarding her with a perturbed air, ordered her to proceed.

The lady groaned, while her female attendant advanced to the bed, and whispered her in a low, but tremulous voice.

A few minutes seemed to restore every thing to its former state, on discovering the nature of Mrs. Martin’s communication, which was merely to recommend a sick nurse for the invalid, lest she who at present acted in that capacity should be too much injured by continual attendance to perform the office during the necessary period of her mistress’s confinement.

Apparently relieved by this explanation, though provoked at the secret alarm it had produced, a civil, but peremptory negative was given to the proposition: her own services, which had likewise been artfully proffered, were declined in a similar manner: and at length, finding her company no longer desired, she sullenly withdrew.

The acceptance or rejection of a sick nurse was the criterion by which Mrs. Martin proposed to judge of the “means, or no means” from whence her chance of future advantages were likely to accrue; for, in her calculation of probabilities, it seemed clear as two and two make four, that no person of the least fortune or consequence, could possibly do without that necessary appendage to indisposition in such a predicament. The matter was therefore speedily settled agreeable to her usual mode of conclusions on all occasions of the same description; and she retired once more to the councils of her pillow, in order to procure an hour’s rest, or in failure of that event, to con over the best method of conducting the meditated attack.

In consequence of this determination, a prodigious bustle was heard below on the following morning; the whole house indeed seemed in an uproar, and apprehensive lest the noise should incommode the invalid, the gentleman, who it appeared had spent the remainder of the night in her room, rung to demand an explanation.

The landlord’s daughter answered the summons at the expiration of a few minutes, and informed him, after some hesitation, that a family of rank was expected in the course of the day, who meant to sleep in the inn, and embark for Ireland early next morning; that the noise he complained of was occasioned by preparations for their reception, and as their retinue was numerous, her mother feared it would not be possible to accommodate his Honour and the sick lady at the same time, the apartments now occupied by each of them being exactly those which would be required for the expected guests; and indeed all the rooms in the house were scarcely sufficient for the purpose; but his Lordship had long been a good customer, and paid like a Prince, therefore he must not be disappointed, or put to any inconveniency whatever.

“I beg pardon, Sir—your honour seems displeased; but I only obey my mother,” added the girl, in apparent confusion, “and her commands none of the family dare dispute.”

“D—n your mother!” said the gentleman, in a voice that made the poor girl tremble; then, after a short pause, he desired to see her immediately.

Mrs. Martin soon made her appearance, and pouring forth a thousand apologies for the

message she was under the necessity of sending by her daughter, requested to know his Honour's pleasure.

His Honour's pleasure was to continue in his present lodgings till the lady could be removed with safety.

Mrs. Martin was extremely sorry to say that intention could not be complied with at this juncture.

The gentleman seemed peremptory.

The landlady no less so. Her voice began to swell into a higher key. The lady was disturbed: her nurse intreated the disputants to speak lower. Mrs. Martin heeded not the request, and the gentleman again ordered her from his presence, in a manner that admitted not of further hesitation. Extremely provoked, she flounced round in a fury of passion, and brushing past a table that stood in her way, accidentally threw down a pocket-book, with some other articles that lay near it. The former burst open in the fall, and her eyes were instantly rivetted on the contents. Mrs. Martin's countenance underwent an instantaneous change, as she stooped to pick up a large parcel of Bank notes!

A total alteration of measures speedily succeeded, and the opposition party were now readily permitted to retain their present station.

This concession, however, was not made with more fawning servility on the one side, than received by the other with an air of conscious superiority and contempt. The stranger accepted it rather as a thing of necessity than choice; and determined to quit the inhospitable roof when the convalescent state of his fair companion rendered such a measure no longer dangerous, he dismissed the now obsequious landlady, with the mortifying declaration of his intentions.

The recent bustle speedily ceased on her re-appearance below stairs; order once more arose out of chaos, and the late expected noble travellers were either contented to take up their quarters elsewhere, or, what is still more probable, the whole story was merely a fabrication of Mrs. Martin's fruitful imagination, to serve a temporary purpose, for not another syllable transpired respecting their motions.

The lady's maid, having left the sick room, for a little fresh air in the evening, was met by the mistress of the house, and pressing invited to take a seat at the family tea-table.

Unable to resist her overpowering kindness, and recollecting she had yet a few minutes to spare before her presence might become necessary, the woman complied; and after some preliminary discourse, in Mrs. Martin's usual roundabout manner, when curiosity set her brains at work for its gratification, the following question-and-answer conversation was bandied between her and her guest.

Landlady.— "By the by, I beg pardon, but I think I heard your lady call you.—Bless my heart! this memory of mine is not worth a farthing—see, if I have not forgot your name already!"

"My name is Norris, Madam, at your service."

Landlady.— "Oh, ay! now I recollect—yes, it was just so. And your master's too?—if my memory does not deceive me a second time, you addressed him this morning by the title of Major; but though he may be a military man, I presume that is not his only appellation."

Mrs. Norris bowed, but spoke not.

The inquisitive hostess repeated her question.

Mrs. Norris sipped her tea faster: some of it went down the wrong way, and she was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

In the confusion occasioned by this incident, Mrs. Martin seemed to have forgotten the

preceding interrogatory, for she renewed her battery, by supposing the lady and gentleman were man and wife.

Mrs. Norris coloured, bowed as before, and took another fit of coughing.

“And so,” resumed the landlady, after a temporary pause—“and so you say they are man and wife? I was sure from the first that was the case; for, says I, after what I saw, says I— ‘Who shall presume to—’”

“I know not what you saw, Madam,” replied Mrs. Norris, in some confusion, “but I’m sure I never spoke on the subject; nor can you say I did, with truth: I beg therefore to set you right on that head, in order to prevent future mistakes relative to this evening’s conversation.— But my Lady’s bell rings—I must hasten to her chamber.”

So saying, Mrs. Norris abruptly quitted the tea-table, and left her entertainer completely puzzled to comprehend the meaning of her words.

Provoked, on reflection, to find herself so adroitly baulked of intelligence on which she had reckoned with undoubted certainty, Mrs. Martin’s temper was beginning again to overleap the late prudent boundaries assigned it, when the pocketbook, and all its precious furniture, rose to mental view; and gulping down a large cup of tea, to lay the evil spirit, she succeeded in confining its ebullitions to the domestic circle then present, which merely consisting of her husband and daughter, they listened in respectful silence, till the whispered surmises of a censorious mind were suddenly interrupted by a summons from a newly-arrived guest.

It was on a Monday night when the Major (as we shall now style him), landed with his family at Port Patrick. Early on the morning of the following Wednesday he walked out in quest of private lodgings; which having procured at some distance from the town, the lady, himself, and their domestic took possession of them in the evening of the succeeding day, in spite of the rhetoric exerted by their disappointed hostess, to retain them in her own mansion.

During the period of their short residence in the latter abode, the Major, except on the foregoing occasion, had scarcely crossed the threshold.

This strict seclusion was ascribed to his anxiety on the lady’s account; but though that was now in some degree removed by the pleasing prospect of her approaching recovery, he did not appear to relax in his passion for retirement, and seldom left the house, unless at a very early or very late hour of the day. On these occasions he was usually seen rambling amongst the chasms of the terrific rock which frowned over one part of their romantic little dwelling, or tracing the sea-beat shore, and watching the last rays of a setting sun sinking beneath the gliding wave, resplendently bright with its reflected glories.

Like Hamlet, “man seemed not to delight him;” though it could not be added— “nor woman neither,” since his whole attention was apparently devoted to her who accompanied him, with a solicitude that powerfully marked the interest he took in her welfare.

The small house they now occupied belonged to a widow lady, at this time on a visit to some friends in Ireland: the Hermitage (for so this little spot was called), had therefore been let by a friend, during her absence. The Major paid in advance, and took it for a month certain; but before the expiration of that period it was supposed the invalid would be sufficiently recovered to encounter the fatigue of a longer journey.

To this point they were indeed advancing, but by much slower steps than at first flattered their hopes, for, in spite of all their care, the lady appeared greatly indisposed for several days after her removal. Youth, however, and probably a good constitution, were on her side. The disorder began to take a favourable turn towards the close of the second week; and the little party were congratulating themselves on the prospect of being shortly enabled to reach the place of

their original destination, wherever that happened to be situated, when some powerful, but hidden cause accelerated their motions, and led them to risk the chance of her perfect recovery, in order to hasten their departure from the neighbourhood of Port Patrick.

Mrs. Norris had one evening gone with a message to Martin, who usually made their markets for them, and was standing in the bar with him, when a stranger entered the house, and stopped to give some directions to a servant in the passage. The sound of this person's voice produced a sudden pause in what she was saying. She turned quickly round, to observe the speaker, then started in evident confusion, and abruptly retired to a distant corner of the room, while he walked on to the parlour.

When the door was heard to close upon him, and Martin rejoined her, she instantly repaid the latter whatever was due, or laid out by him, for necessities on her master's account, and slipping through the back yard, hastened to the Hermitage.

Mrs. Norris, on her arrival, was closeted some time with the Major. At the conclusion of their consultation, he entered the lady's apartment, and she retired to that usually occupied by herself. Each appeared uncommonly agitated; and as the girl who had the charge of the house in her mistress's absence crossed the little passage leading to the lodging rooms, she heard, or fancied she heard, the voice of distress, intermingled with deep and profound sighs. While she yet listened, the door of the invalid's chamber suddenly opened, and Mrs. Norris was summoned to attend her lady.

The Major in a few minutes entered the kitchen, and requested a trusty messenger might be speedily procured, on business that required immediate dispatch. This order being executed to his satisfaction, the man was taken aside to receive his directions, and instantly departed.

By four o'clock next morning a carriage drove to the door. The travelling trunk stood ready corded in the passage, which was presently fixed behind the vehicle; and its owners seated themselves without loss of time. The postillion cracked his whip, and the rattle of the receding wheels soon ceased to reach the weeping girl, who remained for some minutes transfixed to the threshold, listening to the reverberated sound as it gradually died away amongst the mountains.

Solitary and sad, she then entered her now lonely dwelling. The window of the Major's late apartment commanded the most extensive view, and there she placed herself, in order to discover if the chaise was yet visible in that direction; but her hopes were disappointed—it no longer appeared: and after giving a few more tears to the memory of her generous benefactors, she prepared to set the deserted rooms in their former state of arrangement, when something bright, and apparently of value, dropped from one of the beds as she removed the counterpane.

On examination, it proved to be a golden case, containing the miniature picture of a young and beautiful woman; but whether or not intended for a likeness of the strange lady was impossible to determine, for she had constantly appeared in a large cap or bonnet, with a black veil thrown over them, which altogether concealed her features entirely from observation, and even at the very climax of her sufferings, prevented the ingenious Mrs. Martin from gratifying her curiosity, by obtaining a satisfactory view of her countenance, in spite of the many and various manoeuvres put in practice for that purpose.

Nevertheless, the air and *tout ensemble* of the picture conveyed a general idea of the fair fugitive, that pleased the affectionate girl; who, after considering what steps were proper to be adopted for its restoration, soon perceived the impossibility of such a measure, as it was already too late to think of overtaking the travellers; she therefore secreted it in a place of safety, till the return of her mistress should determine its future destination.

CHAP. III.

“No one friendly beam
“E’er gave a glimpse from whom I am descended.”
MAHOMET.

IN something less than six weeks from this period Mrs. Bertram, the proprietor of the Hermitage, returned from Ireland.

The same vessel that brought the Major and his family to Port Patrick conveyed her back, on its next trip, to the Scottish coast. The master’s wife (who was then with him) happened to be an old and favourite servant of this lady, and had partly accompanied her husband on the present voyage, in order to render any service to her former mistress that might be required during her passage home, Mrs. Bertram being usually much indisposed on the water.

The maid at the Hermitage was niece to this woman: and great proved her astonishment, when the latter followed her mistress into the parlour with a child in her arms, apparently not many weeks old, and beautiful as an angel.

At first Sally supposed it might be one of her Irish cousins, as Mrs. Wallace had a sister married in that kingdom. In this idea she was soon undeceived, however. Mrs. Bertram said the infant belonged to a deceased friend of hers, and was henceforth to remain under her protection.

The real state of the case, nevertheless, was as follows.

It may be remembered that the sailor who carried the trunk on the night the Major and his party reached Port Patrick, had hastened from the inn before his companions finished their can of grog. This man repaired to the house occupied by his captain’s wife, in order to accompany her back to the vessel. Mrs. Wallace had expected her husband’s arrival for some time, and being previously prepared for the voyage, instantly attended her conductor.

Already had they weighed anchor, and the wind continuing favourable, were plowing the ocean with rapidity, when the mate abruptly entered the cabin, and, with a look of inexpressible consternation, placed something, wrapped in a piece of old stamped cotton, on the table.

“See,” cried the man, in a voice of affright, recoiling a few paces as he spoke—“see, mistress, what I found in my hammock just now!”

“In your hammock!” repeated Mrs. Wallace. “How came any thing there without your knowledge?”

“Nay,” replied the mate, “that is more than I can inform you; unless the devil, or some of his imps, are turned carriers, and, owing me a spite, flew hither with it.”

“I do not understand you, James,” said Mrs. Wallace, laying aside some check shirts she was finishing for her husband, with much deliberation.

“Look at it!” returned the man, “and then you will just be as wise as myself! The old proverb says— ‘seeing is believing;’ but, faith, in spite of the old proverb, I can scarcely yet credit the evidence of my own senses! All I know is, that in my hammock I found it, here I brought it, there it lies—so examine, and judge for yourself.”

While James was thus haranguing on the subject of his discovery, Mrs. Wallace stepped back for a light, by which she had been working on the other side of the cabin.

She then advanced to the table which was placed near the door, and began to comply with

the mate's request; but before the calico covering was half unwrapped, she started suddenly back, with surprise and dismay impressed on every feature: in the next moment she turned an eye of scrutinizing suspicion on her companion, who, instantly comprehending her meaning, protested his innocence, and swore, if he had no sins to answer for but what her looks seemed to charge him with, he might go to Davie Jones's locker without fearing either death or the devil.

Mrs. Wallace once more resumed the task of enquiry, and proceeded to unfold the bundle.

It contained a poor little infant, apparently on the verge of the grave!

For the space of a few seconds she gazed upon the deserted helpless wretch, with sensations of mingled commiseration and horror. Its feeble voice, scarcely heard, seemed to implore immediate relief. She possessed a kind and benevolent heart, on which the melting cry of misery seldom failed to make a powerful impression. The child, therefore, met with all due attention; and after fluctuating for some time between life and death, the former at length triumphed over parental desertion, and visible symptoms of convalescence were gradually discovered in its late nearly inanimate frame.

It was fortunate Mrs. Wallace had declined going to bed when she first came on board; a circumstance that originated in her solicitude to finish the shirts as soon as possible, and which prevented any further loss of time for the infant's relief.

A consultation was afterwards held with her husband and the mate, on the topic of this very extraordinary incident; but no probable person could be fixed upon as the inhuman parent of the poor baby.

The only female passengers who came with them from Ireland were not supposed likely to know any thing of the matter: the lady had indeed been extremely indisposed during the greater part of the voyage; but sea-sickness was assigned as the cause of her illness, than which almost nothing could be worse. As for her female attendant, she seemed too far advanced in life to incur suspicions of such a description; nor could any of the kind possibly attach to her appearance. Besides, none of the party had ever been seen in the mate's cabin; and so far from quitting their own, not one of the crew were permitted to approach it while they remained on board—a period which contrary winds had prolonged to an unusual length, and rendered uncomfortably tedious.

One thing, nevertheless, was clear—whoever proved the perpetrators of a deed so atrocious, were no doubt capable of denying the imputation when charged with it: chance might therefore effect a discovery at some future period, which an immediate enquiry would only serve to crush in the first instance, by serving to put the offender or offenders on their guard against the certain consequences of a successful investigation.

None of the other sailors were yet informed of what had taken place in the mate's cabin, and it was now agreed to let them remain unacquainted with the whole transaction. Having come to this determination, Mrs. Wallace contrived to keep the child from their knowledge till the vessel arrived in its destined harbour. It was then secretly conveyed to her sister's house, who happened at this juncture to be a nurse, and kindly consented to take it under her care for the present, which relieved its worthy benefactress from her immediate difficulties on a subject of so much importance to its precarious existence.

On the following evening she waited upon Mrs. Bertram, who had been for some time on a visit to a friend in the same place: to her Mrs. Wallace related every circumstance of the story, and concluded by requesting her advice and directions on the occasion.

Mrs. Bertram was her own mistress, unincumbered by any family; but, naturally fond of

children, she felt uncommonly interested in the fate of the deserted being, whose eventful preservation seemed to be the particular work of Providence. She reflected on the unaccountable incident with astonishment, and ordering a carriage, accompanied by the humane Mrs. Wallace, drove directly to the habitation of her sister.

But if interested for the little foundling before she saw it, how much was every sentiment in its favour augmented on her arrival! Mrs. Vere had accommodated it with a decent change of clothes from the wardrobe of her own infant, and the alteration produced by that and other marks of attention, had so considerably improved its appearance, that Mrs. Bertram thought she had scarcely ever seen a more lovely baby.

On a second visit, the ground it had gained in her affection continued to increase; she viewed its little form with additional partiality, and bestowed the warmest eulogiums on the two worthy sisters, for their generous exertions in its behalf, while pecuniary aid was liberally supplied for all necessary demands from a purse ever open to the calls of want or affliction, and requisite instructions given relative to those private enquiries judged proper to be made, in various quarters, on the occasion. All hopes of success in the latter design, however, vanished, on the recurrence of repeated disappointments: prolonged investigation therefore became useless, and discovery ceased to appear practicable.

Mrs. Bertram possessed much genuine sensibility of mind; her feelings evaporated not in the fashionable jargon of those sentimental effusions which are rather the offspring of affectation, than the pure emanations of humanity. Her eyes often swam in liquid anguish for distress which her limited means could not relieve: but where fortune failed to assist the most benevolent of hearts in the service of her fellow-creatures, by advice and the soothing voice of consolation she endeavoured to remedy the deficiency; and the weeping child of Misfortune has found her tears dried, her sorrows diminished, and her mind unconsciously eased of its late oppression, without being sensible at the time that the main object of her application remained unanswered, or that she departed as poor in cash from Mrs. Bertram's presence as she entered.

In the present instance, however, that lady's ability proved happily adequate to her wishes. On the second repetition of her visit to Mrs. Vere's, she caressed the little foundling with increasing tenderness, mused over its helpless state as it lay upon her knee, dropped a liquid witness of the commiseration its forlorn condition inspired, kissed it off from its forehead, and finally declared her resolution to take the sole charge of its future maintenance on herself.

Oh ye who are superabundantly gifted with the means of succouring the wretched—ye who possess the power without the divine, and yet more enviable inclination to do good—ye rich and opulent sons of prosperity, think on Mrs. Bertram, imitate her example—go, and do so likewise!

In consequence of the above determination, Mrs. Vere continued her maternal offices to the baby, while its new and generous benefactress remained in Ireland; and being a female, it was christened Stella, after the worthy Mrs. Bertram.

On returning to Galloway, a change of measures became necessary, and Stella was then brought up by the hand.

When they arrived at Port Patrick, Mrs. Wallace undertook to sound the Martins relative to the mysterious Major and his family; for Mrs. Bertram could not help entertaining some latent suspicion of her *protégée's* claims to protection in that quarter, in spite of all that had been represented to the contrary.

The purposed enquiry demanded much management and precaution. Mrs. Bertram still wished to conceal the real circumstances under which the child had been introduced to her

knowledge, unless some probable chance appeared for ascertaining its claims to parental affection; and that she now almost dreaded to discover, from apprehensions of losing the little creature, who by this time had considerably increased the interest its forlorn and deserted condition first created in her bosom.

Mrs. Wallace, when she commenced the subject that carried her to the inn, was too well acquainted with the landlady's prying, loquacious disposition, not to be extremely careful of dropping the most distant allusion to Stella, or hinting at any circumstance in which she was obviously implicated. Her interrogatories, artfully introduced, and adroitly conducted, satisfied her that no relationship could possibly exist between the parties in question; for it clearly appeared, in the course of their conversation, that the strange lady had actually been delivered of a dead child on the very night of her arrival at Port Patrick; which child Martin himself saw committed to the grave next day: no suspicions therefore could attach to her on the occasion. Neither was Mrs. Norris liable to any of a similar description; for she was evidently too far advanced in life to lie under such an imputation: besides, though her lady was known to have been extremely indisposed during the voyage, she herself gave no particular indication of the kind. So that, in short, all that transpired only served to shew the inutility of any succeeding attempt to accelerate a discovery which time and chance alone seemed capable of producing.

Little Stella, thus unavoidably thrown upon the protection of strangers, proved so far the peculiar care of Providence, that in Mrs. Bertram she found a maternal friend and benefactress, fully qualified to supply the loss of parents, whose barbarous desertion of her helpless infancy had evinced their inability to perform the character assigned them by nature; but whether from a total defalcation of every virtuous principle, or the imperious dictates of hard necessity, could not at present be determined.

Though slightly formed, extremely small for her apparent age, and rather of a delicate constitution, proper management, good air, and ease of mind gradually performed their parts, and progressive time saw her insensibly advance to the more perfect attainment of every personal advantage. Her mental endowments were not less promising; and before the conclusion of her ninth year she was looked upon as a miracle for abilities and knowledge in all the few branches of education that could be procured in a tolerable country school about half a mile distant from the Hermitage.

As Stella thus gradually rose into notice, her benefactress and Mrs. Wallace were equally struck with the strong resemblance she bore to the miniature picture which had been given by Sally to the former, on her return from Ireland.—The same soft blue eyes, the same small, but commanding forehead, an aquiline nose apparently cast in the same mould, similar dimples playing round the most beautiful mouth in the world, a profusion of auburn hair, and a complexion so brilliant that the veins were seen meandering in every direction: her features, however, were on a less scale, and appeared of a description to remain so, even at a later period of life. Indeed the whole figure indicated smaller proportions when the limbs reached their ultimate growth; yet the fine-turned neck and shoulders were alike conspicuous in both, and on every comparison the painting and its animated counterpart visibly approximated more to each others standard of perfection.

Observations of this nature could not fail to produce various conjectures; and Mrs. Bertram carefully preserved the miniature picture, which seemed to have been left by the particular appointment of Heaven, in order to elucidate the present mystery that enveloped Stella's birth, at some future and more propitious juncture.

CHAP. IV.

“Another guest there was, of sense refin’d,
“Who felt each worth, for every worth she had.”

THOMSON.

IN the neighbourhood of the Hermitage a rich and opulent family occasionally resided, with the younger branches of which Stella, in some of her walks from school, had accidentally become acquainted. A private path, leading to the humble seminary, bordered on a quarter of the pleasure grounds, where a pavilion was situated, to which two little girls and their governess usually repaired, to commence the tasks of the day, at an early hour of the morning, when the weather proved sufficiently favourable for the purpose.

There, too, they were commonly to be met with in an evening, freed from the confinement of study, and at liberty to ramble through the plantations, innocent amusement their aim, and health, cheerfulness, content, their constant attendants.

Frequent opportunities occurred, during the latter period, to facilitate the intimacy that speedily took place between these young people and our heroine. Miss Sommers, the governess, was a most amiable and accomplished woman; she had seen much of the world, and quick in discerning merit, as anxious to improve the natural abilities of her fellow-creatures, she was not long in discovering that both were possessed in no trifling degree by the beautiful *protégée* of Mrs. Bertram, whose mind and manners equally interested and charmed her, and whose avidity in the attainment of knowledge was not greater than the gratification experienced by her worthy instructress, while occupied in administering any degree of useful information to the ductile and grateful Stella, who listened to her precepts with the most delighted attention, implicitly obeyed her injunctions, hung upon every word she uttered, and rendered herself mistress of the most difficult lessons with a promptitude and eagerness truly astonishing.

While, by the humane aid of this worthy woman, the hours usually allotted to relaxation and amusement in the pavilion or pleasure grounds, proved thus propitious to the prompt and inspiring understanding of our heroine, her name and abilities were not unknown at the mansion-house. The extent of the latter was frequently mentioned, accompanied by high, but just encomiums on her various acquirements: these, however, were at first either totally unheeded, or merely considered as the giddy effusions of youthful minds on the acquisition of an additional playfellow or new acquaintance. At length Miss Sommers was appealed to as a competent witness of their veracity on the occasion, and her verdict appeared of too much importance to be totally disregarded. Mrs. Ross felt her curiosity excited to see the theme of so much warm panegyric, and the now happy friends of Stella were permitted to invite her to the Grove.

This mark of distinction greatly pleased our heroine, who, though commonly of a mild and unassuming temper, had yet certain lofty traits in her character which constantly instigated a wish to associate with those who were either her superiors in station, or otherwise remarkable for some praiseworthy turn of mind.

With Mrs. Ross, who was a woman of great respectability and goodness of heart, she soon justified the previous favourable impression received of her; and rightly supposing she was now arrived at an age to benefit by higher and better qualified teachers than those under whose tuition she had hitherto chiefly remained, that lady one evening called upon Mrs. Bertram, and

explained the motive of her visit by offering to give the little girl the same chance for improvement that her own daughters enjoyed under the eye of their excellent governess.

A proposal so evidently advantageous for her darling Stella, was received with extreme satisfaction by Mrs. Bertram, and readily assented to with many expressions of grateful acknowledgment: she did not, however, think it necessary to enter upon the particulars of her birth, or to hint at the nature of those ties by which she was bound to the child of her adoption. Her silence on this subject proceeded from no want of confidence in the principles of Mrs. Ross, for that lady bore a most excellent character, but was merely observed on account of a report currently circulated of her husband's decided bias for people of ancient family, rank, and consequence; which report she had reason to believe was but too well founded, and in that case feared it might prove detrimental to Stella, by defeating his wife's good intentions in her favour; or, if such happened not to be the effect of the disclosure at present, it might hereafter draw down his displeasure, should it accidentally transpire that Mrs. Ross was fully, or even partially informed of existing circumstances, which, she must have been convinced at the time, would meet with his unequivocal disapprobation, had he suspected that a poor deserted foundling, wrapped in an old calico rag, was pitched upon as a fit associate for participating in the advantages of a first-rate education with his daughters.

If the real state of the case should therefore be discovered at some future period, Mrs. Bertram thought it best to refrain from acquainting Mrs. Ross with the truth, by which means she would have the plea of ignorance to urge as some extenuation of her offence, provided her benevolent conduct happened to incur the unmerited resentment of a haughty and despotic husband.

As Stella bore the surname of Bertram, Mrs. Ross was consequently permitted to retain the commonly received opinion of her being nearly related to the family of her benefactress.

This innocent deception had hitherto saved the poor orphan many a bitter pang, for her mind was too sensible to insult, and her feelings too acute to bear the "proud man's scorn" and "all the thousand ills that patient merit of the unworthy takes," without suffering the most poignant distress; and it was perhaps from a thorough knowledge of her character in this respect, as much as any other consideration whatever, that induced Mrs. Bertram to conceal previous transactions from her knowledge till such time as the irresistible call of necessity rendered their disclosure no longer practicable, or at least no longer prudent to withhold.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding all these precautions, it must be confessed that the now public and daily visits of Stella at Ross Grove, were rather acquiesced in by the master of the mansion, in compliance with the wishes of his family, than originating from any other motive of a more laudable nature.

Be that as it may, she profited rapidly by the indulgence, and in a comparatively short period became a real honour to her good and amiable teacher, Miss Sommers.

A man of wealth, an eastern Nabob, was Mr. Ross; from plundering the innocent natives of a foreign country, he was now plundered in turn by the rapacious of his own. Fond of splendour, pomp, and shew, his retinue was numerous; his horses, his carriages, all were in style; and the vanity of the Scotchman found no small gratification in being thus enabled to display his magnificence in the country of his forefathers, to revisit which he had ever looked forward from the scorching plains of Hindostan, with a degree of ardent expectation peculiar to the inhabitants of that quarter of Great Britain, from whence he had emigrated at an early period of life, in pursuit of what he was now abundantly supplied with.

The mansion-house, prior to his residence in it, had been considerably enlarged, and the

pleasure grounds new laid out in the most elegant manner. His progenitors had, for some generations, derived no small benefit from the timber on the estate; consequently it was always considered as a chief source of emolument, and its preservation particularly attended to: by this means the plantations were in a thriving state, and contributed much to the ornamental, as well as useful beauties of the place, which, in that bleak and exposed part of the coast, derived infinite advantage from the shelter they afforded during the general run of the most favourable seasons.

The family at Rossgrove consisted of the Nabob, his lady, one son, then on his travels, and three daughters; the eldest of the latter was their first-born, and (probably from a resemblance in character and disposition), the decided favourite of her father. Maria and Emma were many years her junior, and, as far as could be judged at their early period of life, infinitely more amiable in temper and manners.

Mr. Ross usually left the country a few weeks before the Christmas holidays commenced, and returned with his lady and daughters to a splendid house he possessed in London.

Such had proved nearly the *routine* of their movements since the family bade adieu to the shores of the East. This winter a change of measures took place equally wise and judicious.

Perfectly sensible that the two youngest girls could not be left in better hands than with Miss Sommers, and rightly supposing they would most likely pay closer attention to their studies in the uninterrupted seclusion of Rossgrove, than amid the gayer scenes of the capital, into which they were yet too young to be introduced with propriety, it was now determined that Maria and Emma should remain in the country with their governess during the three first winters after their acquaintance with our heroine commenced. This was the most fortunate circumstance that could have happened in her favour, and she neglected not to make the most of the opportunity it afforded for mental and personal improvement, the latter of which was considerably accelerated by the aid of a very tolerable dancing-master, who was engaged to teach at several of the most respectable houses in the neighbourhood, from whence he derived a genteel gratuity for his periodical visits.

On the beginning of the fourth season Stella was deprived of her companions: it was then judged requisite to give them what is called “the finishing polish,” at one of the most fashionable seminaries in the metropolis. In consequence of this resolution, a separation became necessary between the young people: Stella was therefore parted from her beloved associates; and, what proved yet a greater misfortune, likewise deprived of the personal instructions and advice of the worthy Miss Sommers, whose services being no longer required, was recommended to fill a similar situation in the house of a genteel family near London.

These two events were heavily felt by the tender and affectionate Stella, now on the eve of her fourteenth year. Happily the loss of their company was, however, the principal circumstance she had to regret; for on the score of useful or ornamental knowledge, and every accomplishment that can embellish the female character, few could equal, none easily surpass her: indeed her progress had been so great in all the different branches which fell immediately under the cognizance of Miss Sommers, that her attainments appeared not much inferior to those possessed by her teacher, who frequently told her, with a good-humoured smile, that she doubted not but she would one day find a formidable rival in her young pupil, should subsequent occurrences render the adoption of a similar line of life necessary. As to the dancing-master’s province, she had long encroached upon it: a light elastic form, and tuneful ear, gave her infinite advantages in this respect; and her easy movements in the mazy windings of the cotillion, the Scotch reel, or the lively country dance, conveyed ideas of elegance and airy grace personified to every spectator.

Alone ignorant, in a great degree, of the practical part of music which Miss Sommers was not qualified to teach, the few instructions accident had supplied her with, were of too limited a nature to be of much service, though by attention and application she hoped in time to remedy the deficiency that a want of proper assistance occasioned. Already she could play several little airs on a harp, the joint present of Maria and Emma, who supplied her with many of the most fashionable pieces of music, and a number of other memorials of their remembrance by every opportunity that occurred for the purpose. In warbling a “wood-note wild,” or singing with heart-felt pathos the sweet melodious strains of her native land, few could, however, excel her.

Left to the comparative solitude of her early home, she now resolved to devote an hour or two every morning to the acquirement of some further knowledge in this favourite and fascinating science: but though the vocal harmony of Metastasio was easily poured forth in all its native and energetic purity, that which depended on mechanical execution proved infinitely more difficult of attainment than, in the ardour of youthful expectation, she had previously flattered herself would be the case. Her solicitude for this additional accomplishment did not escape the observation of Mrs. Bertram, who had private reasons for encouraging every attempt of the kind.

CHAP. V.

“Serene, yet warm; humane, yet firm her mind;
“As little touch’d as any one’s with bad.”

THOMSON.

MRS. Bertram was the widow of an officer who possessed a small landed property amounting to something about two hundred pounds per annum. The pension that fell to her on his decease, together with this sum, of which he bequeathed her the life-rent, proved for some time the total amount of her annual resources. At length, by the death of a brother, she became mistress of the Hermitage, and having always been particularly partial to that spot, finally fixed her abode in the neighbourhood of Port Patrick. This little place brought her nearly thirty pounds more; so that, upon the whole, she was looked upon as an opulent person in that part of the kingdom. Her pension, as an officer’s widow, however, ceased with her life; and the jointure left by her husband descended, on that event, to the heir-at-law, with whom he had never been on any terms of friendly intercourse for many years previous to his demise.

Of her present annual income nearly thirty pounds was therefore all she could legally call her own; and of that small sum ten had long been appropriated to the use of a distant relative of her husband, from whom she had formerly received some material piece of service. The remainder, left from the rents of the Hermitage, she secretly determined to bequeath Stella, as some future provision against the chance of absolute indigence, though far removed from all pretensions to a competent independency.

Mrs. Bertram possessed no domestic tie, no family connexion in the wide-extended circle of creation, who could have any claim whatever on her finances; of course she conceived herself at liberty to dispose of her own immediate property according as the dictates of inclination might direct; and that inclination leading her to settle it upon the friendless child of her adoption, she obeyed its impulse, by appointing Stella the future heiress of the Hermitage.

This legacy, she well knew, was by no means adequate to the purpose of maintaining her in a state of inactive ease, and any material addition to the sum, from annual savings, happened to be out of the question, for she had several necessitous pensioners, whose yearly demands were nearly equal to the source that supplied them, and from whom the divine sensation of humanity forbade her to withdraw the support they had been accustomed to receive. Stella, she considered, was young, and might possibly still be so at the period of her decease: she was therefore better able to struggle with difficulties, or to surmount them by industrious exertions, than the aged or infirm offspring of want and misfortune.

The idea first suggested in jest by Miss Sommers, of “rivalling her teacher in the governess line,” repeatedly occurred to Mrs. Bertram, as a consideration that might hereafter be of importance, by enabling her *protégée* to provide for herself, when the friendly heart that now protected her from every evil was mouldering in the dust, and no longer capable of dictating that advice she had hitherto followed with so much honour to herself and satisfaction to her worthy benefactress.

To encourage every wish for an increase of knowledge, under this view for futurity, was therefore a maxim Mrs. Bertram studiously adhered to; and her ward being consequently allowed sufficient time for mental improvement, failed not to profit by the kind indulgence.

Mrs. Bertram’s character and conduct were such as to procure her much general esteem;

but the number of those admitted to her more particular friendship was very limited. She happened to be partial to retirement; and a mind well stored with many valuable acquirements drew an inexhaustible fund of amusement from its own resources, without being under the necessity of applying to foreign aid for that purpose.

Every situation in life, however, has its advantages and disadvantages. If Mrs. Bertram was happier in several respects than her neighbours, one great drawback to the comforts she otherwise enjoyed, brought her state pretty much on a level with those apparently less fortunate beings who surrounded her. A constitution, originally delicate, age and increasing infirmities had now rendered considerably worse. This excellent woman seldom indeed experienced the blessings of good health for any length of time through the year; a circumstance which had partly induced her to acquiesce in Mrs. Ross's wish to give Stella the benefit of Miss Sommers's instructions, conscious she was herself unequal to the task of constant application, and those mental exertions such an undertaking required, in her then weak and frequently indisposed condition.

As her *protégée* advanced in life, she found an ample recompence for her benevolence in the filial love, uniform attention, and promising abilities of our fair heroine, whose company was always a sure resource in the day of sickness, when unable to use any exertion for self-amusement from her own individual share of intellectual knowledge.

On all these occasions Stella appeared to find no gratification beyond the limits of her friend's apartment. She was her constant companion; she read to her; she sung, when the invalid was able to bear it; she was, in short, the cheerful administering angel to all her wants and wishes, and never seemed so happy as when her attempts to please or entertain proved thoroughly successful—which, in fact, was generally the case.

Thus situated, between the hours spent with her maternal protectress, and those dedicated to the purposes of education at the Grove, Stella had little leisure to form any extensive circle of acquaintance, even in the early part of her life; and afterwards, when the separation from her young friends took place, Mrs. Bertram's additional complaints left her less time than ever for so doing.

With one or two respectable families, however, she was rather on an intimate footing; and when Mrs. Bertram's health allowed of her absence, that lady insisted on her visiting them, by way of a little relaxation from the confinement of a sick chamber, or the intensity of the application usually bestowed upon scientific pursuits.

Stella, who was naturally of a cheerful disposition, constantly derived some new fund of amusement from these little temporary excursions, with which, on her return home, she exhilarated the spirits of her benefactress, who observed, with infinite delight, that, young as she was, the Hermitage seemed to possess a preference, in her opinion, over every other spot to which she resorted: it was, indeed, a little terrestrial paradise, and well deserving the partiality she evinced for it.

Nearly two years elapsed in this manner without producing any material occurrence. Our heroine kept up a regular correspondence with her late governess, and was not unfrequently gratified by an epistle, or a small memorial of remembrance, in the form of some elegant trifle, from her young friends in London, and occasionally invited to the Grove, when the return of summer brought back its temporary inhabitants from the metropolis.

The latter circumstance did not, however, greatly enlarge the sphere of her acquaintance; for she never was asked to the mansion of wealth and grandeur when any person of rank or consequence happened to be a visitor there.

Stella was now fast advancing to womanhood, and to be looked upon as a fit companion for the rich and haughty Miss Ross, though formerly tolerated in the light of a playfellow to her younger sisters, was not to be thought of: Mr. Ross, therefore, hinted to his lady (who still retained her partiality for our heroine), the great impropriety of familiarizing a little insignificant country girl with that style of society which the ill-judged nature of her education might hereafter induce her to regard with an equalizing eye, very unsuitable to her lowly situation in life, and perhaps even inspire the presumptuous idea of arrogating to her own imaginary merit every mark of condescension derived from the censurable suffrage of superiors to a creature almost of their own creation.

So argued the adventitious pride of birth—so spoke the man whose importance originated in the golden harvest he had reaped with the resistless hand of force, from the legal, but unfortunate possessors, in a far distant region, where the conviction of riches proves certain destruction to the hapless natives, and poverty is considered as the greatest crime their European plunderers can possibly be accused of.

Mr. Ross had no defalcation from the general system of fortune-making in the east, to reproach himself with: there he pursued the same plan so long, so successfully adopted by his predecessors, and had returned to the land of his forefathers a Nabob in every sense of the word.

CHAP. VI.

“’Tis such fools as you
“That make the world full of ill-favour’d children;
“’Tis not her glass, but you that flatter her;
“And out of you she sees herself more proper
“Than any of her lineaments can shew her.”

SHAKESPEARE.

WE have already hinted that Miss Ross was the distinguished favourite of her father. This circumstance, however, seemed productive of no real advantage to the young lady; on the contrary, the evil propensities of her mind (and of these she possessed a tolerable share), had been permitted to acquire additional strength, by the erroneous indulgence of a mistaken parent, in whose opinion she was all perfection.

While Stella was only considered in the light of a mere child, retained as a humble companion to the younger branches of the family, Miss Ross cared nothing about the matter: now, when mental cultivation and personal attractions conspired to render her pre-eminently conspicuous, envy, ever a predominant trait in that lady’s character, marked our heroine as an object of peculiar hatred, by secretly whispering that the lowly ward of the unassuming Mrs. Bertram might possibly become a formidable rival to the first-born offspring of a rich and powerful Nabob, even in the very articles which least admit of female competition—beauty, and its certain attendant, admiration. Indeed it could hardly escape the most superficial observation that the “little insignificant country girl” was already her superior in those adventitious advantages, on the possession of which this high-bred favourite of Fortune particularly valued herself.

Blind to his daughter’s defects, and indulgent to her follies, Mr. Ross soon imbibed all

her prejudices, and Stella gradually incurred his dislike in proportion to the increasing antipathy of her unprovoked and malicious enemy, who seized every opportunity of representing her most innocent actions in the worst point of view. Happily, the mistress of the house was not to be influenced so easily; she knew Margaret's natural disposition, and speedily penetrated the motives of her conduct: Stella therefore still maintained that place she had long held in her opinion, and usually passed the period allotted for her visit in a *tête-à-tête* with her respected patroness, whose declining state of health, about this time, frequently rendered an indiscriminate crowd too fatiguing and oppressive for her strength and spirits: of course, the seclusion she preferred on these occasions made the society of such a companion as Stella extremely acceptable.

When indisposition, therefore, confined her to the limits of her own apartment, our heroine adopted the same mode of conduct observed at the Hermitage, during Mrs. Bertram's illness:—she sung, she read, she assisted Mrs. Ross in any piece of fine needle-work which happened to be in hands at the time; and, in short, endeavoured to soften the painful or tedious moments of distress by every possible means best calculated for the purpose.

While thus occupied in the retirement of a sick room, that lady's affectionate daughter had little objection to her vicinity; on the contrary, it was looked upon rather with a favourable eye than otherwise. One ruling idea governed uniformly the actions of Margaret Ross:—that bloated idol *self* happened to be almost the sole object of her idolatry; and, to gratify its voracious demands, every other exterior circumstance was continually rendered subservient. The visits of the "little insignificant country girl" were therefore passed over in silence, because they relieved her from the necessity of personal attendance, where individual considerations made the semblance of filial duty sometimes a requisite measure, in order to furnish an opening for animadverting on the acute nature of feelings she never experienced, with all the studied grace of fashionable refinement, and the elegant sentimental cant of modern pretenders to sensibility.—Sensibility! hackneyed theme of declamation! now

"More honour'd in the breach, than the observance;"

for, alas! thy effusions are no longer

"Warm from the heart, and faithful to its fires."

No! its ill-regulated ebullitions are merely sported for the purposes of deception—in order to teach the liquid eye to languish more irresistibly, to spread a voluptuous tenderness over the features, or to afford an opportunity for exhibiting the human form in the fascinating attitude of interesting despondency; while the mental system, which contains that spark of celestial essence that alone connects us with the Deity, is degraded by the disgusting trammels of affectation, and, occupied merely with exterior arrangements, melts not at the touch of real woe, nor secretly harbours that divinely sympathetic emotion which originally emanating from a Superior Being, seems to approximate its possessor to something beyond the common boundaries of mortality.

That air of haughty reserve and repelling coldness of manner that invariably marked the reception of Stella when Mrs. Ross was no longer confined to her apartment, could not be supposed to pass always unnoticed, even by the most superficial observer:—no wonder, then, if the unsuspecting ward of Mrs. Bertram was frequently astonished with a conduct so inexplicable: but conscious of no intentional offence to irritate the passions of another, no

presumptuous behaviour to require humiliation, the innocent object of unmerited dislike ascribed those appearances, which were sometimes sufficiently obvious, to the natural disposition of the father and daughter, whose self-command, she had often remarked, was not much calculated to give them a first-rate claim to pre-eminence in the ancient school of real philosophy.

Thus judging with candour, she became convinced the subject of her frequent surprise could only proceed from constitutional defects, which required more commiseration than resentment: but though such might be the case, she did not find herself at length disposed to encounter the capricious consequences which perpetually resulted from them, and therefore formed the resolution of limiting her visits to the apartment of Mrs. Ross, when that lady found her health in a situation which prevented her from mingling in the society that occasionally resorted to the Grove. In conformity with this determination, all invitations from that quarter were politely declined, unless when the mistress of the mansion happened to be thus unfortunately situated.

Mrs. Ross possessed much good sense, feeling, and humanity: she early remarked the visible superiority of Stella's character, and delighted to increase her store of knowledge by communicating what she herself had attained during her intercourse with the inhabitants of various and distant countries: but her discourse was chiefly directed to the necessity of self-government; the dreadful effects resulting from a want of which, she endeavoured to place in a striking point of view, by relating numerous facts calculated to exemplify her position, and all drawn from well-authenticated incidents in different quarters of the globe. Without a due attention to this single, but important article of conduct, she considered the most brilliant accomplishments of no avail, and liable, on every little start of passion, to be totally obscured, or, at best, only an aggravation of errors, which ought to have been previously eradicated from the mind, if they could not be restricted to proper bounds.

Mrs. Ross had frequent occasion to regret the mischiefs arising from an improper mode of education in the person of her eldest daughter, at the period of whose birth she herself happened to be a very young woman, and too volatile to reflect much upon subsequent consequences.

Various circumstances had indeed occurred to give her mind a more serious turn; but at too late a period to expel from that of Margaret those evil propensities which already had taken root in a soil particularly prepared for their reception, and composed of materials sufficiently obstinate to persevere in rejecting any attempted innovation on its customary system.

All that could therefore be done by the conscious mother was, to guard against similar mismanagement in the junior branches of an increasing family; and this she flattered herself with having partly accomplished, by procuring so able a preceptor as Miss Sommers, though finally obliged to acquiesce in depriving them of that advantage in obedience to her husband's determination of placing them under what was styled *more fashionable tuition*: a determination, however, by no means congenial to her own opinion, and to which she consented with much reluctance.

On the second summer after Maria and Emma left Rossgrove, a regiment of light horse came to be stationed in this part of the kingdom. Many of the officers were men of rank and fortune, whose appearance was prepossessing, and whose whole deportment bespoke their intimate acquaintance with the higher circles of life.

The military, generally considered as an agreeable addition to society in most situations, become doubly valuable in proportion to the circumscribed nature of the neighbourhood, and the superiority of their manners to the inhabitants of those small provincial towns, where a

temporary residence is often assigned them.

Miss Ross, who affected to look with sovereign contempt on the swains of her father's native country, conceived she was never in her proper element unless when surrounded by the gay and gallant heroes of the sword; while they, on their part, shewed no kind of reluctance to partake of the good things with which the Nabob's table was always profusely replenished, nor were backward to repay his favours in that coin apparently most acceptable to the young lady's palate—unceasing attention, and flattery unbounded!

Margaret Ross felt, indeed, a continual inclination for monopolizing the one, and possessed a stomach capable of digesting the other in any form or proportion whatever.

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CHAP. VII.

There is a fate in the affairs of men,
Rough-hew them how we may.

ABOUT this period an acquaintance of hers, who had lately been married to one of the corps, but had not yet joined them, was expected, with her husband, to be quartered in the neighbourhood.

Though no particular degree of intimacy had hitherto existed between this lady and Miss Ross, the latter became extremely impatient for her arrival; an event which was no sooner announced, than, with all the ardour of the closest friendship, she hastened to pay her respects, and invite her to the Grove. Here the stranger was shortly requested to take up her sole residence; and her acquiescence with the most pressing entreaties was attended by consequences peculiarly agreeable to her new friend, as it proved the means of creating a much greater intercourse with the corps, some of which seldom failed to accompany Colonel Arabin, when he returned in the evening from head-quarters.

All was now gaiety and amusement under the roof of Mr. Ross. His lady, however, did not appear to gain strength; on the contrary, her complaints became daily more stationary; but she had the best advice that could be procured on the occasion, and every thing which money commanded within her reach. What then signified the total neglect of a fashionable daughter? or how could she be so unreasonable as to imagine people had leisure to bestow on invalids, even though a mother might happen to come under that denomination, when there was scarcely sufficient time for the various and more interesting avocations that hourly engrossed the mind of the thoughtless and unfeeling Margaret? Besides, was there not the humble, convenient Stella Bertram to take the drudgery and prosing uniformity of a sick-room confinement off her hands? Certainly! As the ward of Mrs. Bertram was known to be a particular favourite with Mrs. Ross, that lady's daughter could not reproach herself with any very material breach of the filial duties, while her place chanced to be supplied by a person so much more to the taste of her mother; especially as she had now so many increasing demands on her time and attention.

Human nature is seldom at a loss to find or create an excuse for pursuing the predominant bias of inclination:—Miss Ross flattered herself she had performed wonders in this line of discovery, and secretly applauded her adroit management on the occasion.

But the life of man is said to be full of vicissitudes, and that allotted to his female helpmate seems no less condemned to feel the curse of instability. Miss Ross imagined she had tolerably provided against the weathercock nature of sublunary enjoyments; but wiser and more experienced politicians than poor Margaret, have been suspected of reckoning without their host in cases of higher import.

The range of apartments particularly occupied by her mother was situated at a distance from those assigned for the reception of company, and opened, by a private door, upon a quarter of the shrubbery, which was little frequented, and from whence a winding path led to the habitation of Mrs. Bertram.

It was in tracing this direction that Stella had first attracted the notice of her young companions; it was likewise in this direction she usually reached the dressing-room of their mother, without being under the necessity of appearing to the rest of the family, or encountering the eyes of strangers. Miss Ross had taken an early opportunity of intimating her approbation of this entrance as the most convenient one for our heroine to adopt in her visits to the invalid; and

the manner in which the hint was conveyed, seemed paramount to an actual prohibition of any other mode of ingress. In fact, the matter in itself appeared so totally indifferent to Stella, that she uniformly adhered to the same path, without deviating, or wishing to deviate, from the letter of her instructions.

Nothing therefore was likely to be apprehended from a *mal-à-propos* discovery of our heroine's lovely face, or elegant figure, in these occasional peregrinations to the remote apartment of Mrs. Ross, whose dutiful daughter, absorbed in dissipation, and freed from the shackles of filial attention, though fettered by those of selfish gratification, continued to trace the same thoughtless circle of giddy amusement, till roused from the vortex of delusive pleasure, by a sensation of mortified pride and disappointment, she was at length secretly forced to acknowledge that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" below!

The presumptive heir of Rossgrove still remained abroad, for the double purpose of completing the grand tour, and effecting the restoration of his health, which had lately been somewhat on the decline.

The intelligence transmitted by his travelling companion was far from satisfactory on this subject; and there appeared much cause to apprehend that a constitution naturally delicate, the deficiencies of which had been still farther increased by a free style of living, would not long be able to maintain its struggle for terrestrial existence.

This information gave his mother's heart many a bitter pang, though it was received with the utmost *nonchalance* by her daughter, with whom the young man had never proved a favourite, and on whose demise, if prior to her own, she reflected with much Christian fortitude, so many advantages must eventually accrue, to compensate for the trifling loss of an only brother.

It had been customary to give an entertainment on the anniversary of his birthday; and Margaret, fearful, no doubt, lest another opportunity for celebrating it might not offer, prudently determined to make the most of that now in her power, the period of which rapidly approached.

During the time of her mother's indisposition, she acted, of course, as mistress of the mansion. This happened to be the case at present. No circumstance of profusion or splendour was therefore omitted that could possibly contribute to the vanity of the entertainers, or gratification of their guests. The military received a particular invitation, and cards were likewise sent to all the neighbouring gentry; the regimental band had orders to attend on the occasion, and a dance was to conclude the festivities of the day.

As Stella was enthusiastically fond of music, Mrs. Ross requested she might be with her at an early hour; for though her own health was not in a situation to let her mingle in the expected crowd, she wished her young friend to be gratified by the harmony of sounds Colonel Arabin had provided: besides, it was the commemoration of her son's birthday, and she felt a sensation of pleasure that absorbed every other feeling for the present; and this sensation she imagined, would receive a considerable addition by the participation of a mind so congenial with her own—a mind which had uniformly endeavoured to mitigate her mental and corporeal sufferings by every exertion of affection and gratitude, her limited means, but willing inclination, could devise for the purpose.

This invitation from Mrs. Ross did not, however, meet with the approbation of one whose claims upon the obedience of our heroine were always implicitly acknowledged and religiously complied with.

Mrs. Bertram conceived that lady could not be at any loss for society at such a juncture, as, no doubt, many of the visitors would request permission to pay their respects to her on the

celebration of this event: and therefore the presence of Stella not being materially requisite, it was judged better for her to remain at the Hermitage, than, by risking an accidental encounter with any of the gay, dissipated, young men, then at the mansion-house, subject herself to the chance of forming an acquaintance with those who might imagine her beauty and apparently unprotected condition gave a licence to presume on some very casual interview as an excuse for introducing themselves hereafter to her more immediate notice: a circumstance which would prove by no means favourable to the future views entertained for her establishment in life.

Mrs. Bertram knew that the greatest circumspection of conduct was required for the character of a teacher or governess, in any respectable family. She had frequently remarked, with secret anxiety, the aspiring temper of her *protégée*, and perceived, with astonishment, the easy, but unassuming air of equality visible in her manner, even when in company with people evidently her superiors in rank and fortune. From observations on this natural bias of her disposition, she wisely feared Stella, if permitted to mingle in such an assemblage as was now expected at the Grove, might allow her thoughts to soar beyond the limits of the lot that, in all human probability, awaited her; by which means peace and contentment would for ever be banished from her bosom, and every rational prospect of a comfortable establishment totally done away.

Such were the chief reasons which instigated Mrs. Bertram to withstand the imploring look of poor Stella—a look that spoke powerfully in favour of Mrs. Ross's request.

Another, but more secret motive, enforced the necessity of this disappointment.

The house-steward at the Grove, a gentleman by birth, sensible, prudent, and friendly, on whose representation she could perfectly rely, had mentioned a circumstance in confidence, which led Mrs. Bertram to put a decided negative on the projected visit.

It has already been noticed that when she happened to be in a tolerable state of health (for otherwise no consideration could prevail on her ward to quit the Hermitage) Stella was permitted to attend in the solitary chamber of Mrs. Ross, to which, by the particular directions of that lady's daughter, she almost uniformly entered by a private door. Hitherto this mode of ingress had been pursued agreeably to Margaret's wishes; that is to say, without producing any disclosure of the lovely girl's beautiful features or fascinating form. But

“There is a fate in the affairs of men,
“Rough-hew them how we may;”

and in those of women likewise, as Miss Ross speedily experienced.

In spite of all the caution religiously observed on these occasions, time and chance defeated the low-minded vigilance that thus built its illusive fabric of personal superiority on the basis of that obscurity in which charms, so much more pre-eminently striking, were endeavoured to be kept from public, or even casual investigation.

Some of the officers had one evening caught a transient view of Stella, as she crossed the gallery for a book Mrs. Ross wanted from the library. Of this incident she herself still remained ignorant; but on them it made a deep and lasting impression.

It happened that, Mrs. Ross excepted, none of the family knew of her being then in the house: the domestics, therefore, when interrogated on the subject of her name and usual place of residence, could afford the curious enquirers no sort of satisfaction relative to the fair object of their solicitude. No pains, however, were spared for that purpose; and success would probably have crowned their labours, had not a return of Mrs. Bertram's complaints at this critical

juncture, confined her affectionate companion to the limits of a sick room at the Hermitage.

Some time now elapsed ere she had it in her power to revisit the Grove: but, at length, Mrs. Bertram's illness took a favourable turn, and she insisted on her *protégée* obeying the summons of Mrs. Ross, who had repeatedly requested to see her.

On her arrival, she was informed that two ladies from the neighbourhood had called in, and were then with the mistress of the mansion.

Unwilling to intrude under such a circumstance, she left the house, and walked to a retired alcove in a remote part of the shrubbery, where seating herself, her attention was speedily occupied by a volume of Thomson's Seasons, which she happened to put in her workbag on leaving the Hermitage.

About half an hour had elapsed in this manner when the sound of voices at no great distance reached her lonely retreat: loud bursts of laughter announced the gay and happy votaries of pleasure were approaching. She listened for a moment, and then following the direction of her ear, turned to a small window, in order to discover if she was likely to be disturbed by their nearer vicinity.

From this apprehension, however, she was soon relieved. Miss Ross, with a large party, amongst which appeared several of the military gentlemen, was crossing a walk that wound near the alcove, and presently turned into another, leading to the green-house. Stella felt rejoiced at the certainty of escaping their notice, and immediately turning from the window, was preparing to resume her former studies, when, glancing a look towards the door, the book dropped from her hand, on perceiving a very handsome man, in the military uniform, with folded arms and an air of pensive dejection, silently regarding her, as he leaned against a tree directly opposite where she had placed herself.

Startled and disconcerted at a circumstance so totally unexpected, she suddenly rose, and as suddenly re-seated herself, uncertain whether to remain, or, by quitting the alcove, endeavour to make the best of her way to the house; which could not, however, be accomplished without passing almost close to her unwelcome neighbour.

From this state of irresolution she was quickly released by a second repetition of similar sounds to those which had recently alarmed her. The same party again appeared. Her silent companion abruptly started from his position, sighed profoundly, and darting into the thickest part of the adjoining wilderness, instantly disappeared from her view.

Stella instinctively followed with her eyes the direction he had taken. The circumstances of this strange incident seemed to have struck her as something singular, and the look and elegant figure of the unknown were still before the eyes of her imagination, when, on rising to retire from the alcove, she once more discovered Miss Ross and her guests strolling through the western plantation. The voice of mirth and gaiety still broke at intervals on the calm repose of a most beautiful evening. Our heroine paused to observe their motions, and eagerly sought for the form of the stranger almost the happy group; but her endeavours were fruitless—he appeared not in the number, and the mental vision alone presented his resemblance. Having by this time tolerably composed her late agitated spirits, she now bent her steps to the mansion, in expectation Mrs. Ross's visitors would be departed; and found her conjectures in that respect right.

At a late hour she returned to the Hermitage, without obtaining any further knowledge of the elegant stranger, whose form and pensive air still floated on the surface of her memory, with a sensation hitherto unknown to her gentle bosom.

The house-steward, Mr. Benson, accidentally overheard the two officers who saw her

cross the gallery, conversing on the subject; and their subsequent enquiries creating more than a suspicion of their ultimate tendency, he thought it necessary to acquaint Mrs. Bertram with the nature of his sentiments on the occasion. The adventure of the alcove we have related from our own individual knowledge of its authenticity: Stella, either from inadvertency or forgetfulness, or some other cause, had neglected to mention the affair; which seemed surprising on reflection, for every little secret had, till this period, been shared with her kind and maternal benefactress.

Mr. Benson's intelligence was gratefully received by his prudent auditor. It happened to be given a very short time before the approaching birthday, and finally determined her intentions respecting her *protégée's* motions.

In addition to the above information, she likewise learned that one of the gentlemen who had expressed so much solicitude relative to Stella, was unfortunately a particular favourite with Miss Ross; and even reported to be at this very juncture on the footing of a successful and acknowledged admirer of that young lady, who was asserted to prove too tenacious of her claims on his heart to tolerate any "rival near the throne;" far less the humble Stella, for whom she had long evinced the most decided aversion.

Of her temper and disposition Mr. Benson was sufficiently assured to think the foregoing circumstances of some consequence to the inhabitants of the Hermitage, for whom he entertained the highest sentiments of regard and veneration.

He knew it was totally impossible to say what length the ebullitions of disappointment and revenge might carry the irritated mind of Margaret, if any casual incident occurred to rouse her ungovernable passions: he therefore advised, as a preventative to apprehended evils, that Stella should not even trust to the seclusion of Mrs. Ross's apartment, but, under some plausible excuse, refrain entirely from visiting at the Grove during the expected festivity, lest, in the hurry and confusion of so complicated a scene, some unforeseen occurrence might possibly favour the wishes of the gentlemen, and create much future mischief.

Mrs. Bertram, always the avowed friend of propriety, coincided in the wisdom of this opinion; and Stella acquiesced in the decision, without enquiring into the particular motives from whence it originated, or uttering a single complaint, by which the intrinsic value of the sacrifice could be ascertained.

CHAP. VIII.

“Graceful with hills, and dales, and leafy woods.”

THOMSON.

THE situation of the Hermitage was beautifully romantic: it stood in the centre of an extensive garden, surrounded by a fence of evergreens, thickly interwoven with a great profusion of sweetbrier and honeysuckle. Nearly half the circumference was defended from the bleak north-easterly winds by a semicircular range of picturesque and lofty rocks, partly covered with verdure, and partly with a venerable, though not numerous quantity of trees; while a foaming cascade, rushing from one of the highest points of elevation, dashed over every intervening impediment, and presented a prospect truly grand and magnificently impressive, till, reaching the ground, it afterwards glided gently along in a meandering stream, that encompassed one side of the premises, and finally disappeared in the woods of Ross-grove.

If this charming little spot failed in any particular feature of rural fascination, the deficiency would have originated in a want of timber, had not part of the Nabob's extensive plantations entirely done away the objection, by approximating so closely to the fragrant fence, as to convey the idea of acknowledging but one and the same wealthy master. This circumstance, adding equally to the beauty and comfort of the situation, was peculiarly desirable in a quarter of the country not superabundantly stored with those noble productions of the earth, and which was exposed, during the dreary months of winter, to all the changeable and chilling blasts of an inclement sky.

The predecessors of Mr. Ross, as we have already observed, had indeed paid such uncommon attention to this useful and ornamental object, that even the cynical Doctor Johnson himself might, here at least, have discovered woods and groves worthy of his most fastidious and reluctant approbation.

In a quarter of the stupendous rock, where an intervening projection excluded the ruder traits of the scene, and only admitted a confined view of the precipitous torrent dashing down in a thousand varied forms, an excavation had been made by the hand of Nature, which that of Art afterwards modelled into a delightful little retirement, well adapted for solitary meditation: it seemed indeed to have been the temporary habitation of some religious recluse during the darker ages of the world, when the gloomy reign of superstition held its despotic sway over the reasoning faculties of the mind, and taught mankind to believe that to render themselves voluntarily unhappy was the most acceptable service they could do a good and beneficent Being, whose every action breathes peace and inexhaustible tenderness to the whole human race.

This idea of the place appeared more probable from the particular nature of its situation: for at no great distance stood some fine old ruins, once the abode of a pious and holy community; who, in the profound retirement of such a retreat, seemed to have bid an eternal adieu to all intercourse with the busy haunts of men, and, undisturbed by external objects, here held the even tenor of their way,

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot.”

The grotto, as it was called, looked down upon this fast decaying edifice, which formed a picturesque termination to a view cut through a part of the plantations fronting the east side of

Rossgrove. Stella had adorned it with some elegant shell-work and shining spars: a small old-fashioned press filled a nich in the wall, the lower division of which contained a judicious arrangement of these beautiful articles, and on the upper shelves were a few well-chosen books: an oaken table, two or three chairs, and a kind of sofa, nearly composed the remainder of the furniture: the latter stood in a recess, round which were placed several flowering shrubs in large pots: exactly in the front was a curiously arched casement, which projected considerably beyond the recess, and extending over the stream below, in a bolder direction than the body of the grotto, appeared to hang suspended in the air.

The ascent was by several steps rudely cut in the rock, and the entrance, top, and sides were romantically shaded by some venerable-looking trees, which, from time immemorial, had forced their roots through the crevices of the stone, and continued to "rear their old fantastic form on high," in spite of the northern wintry blast that frequently roared through their bending branches, and shook their elevated trunks almost to final destruction. This aerial situation presented a commanding view of the Grove, with its proud turrets rising in the midst of the gay and now verdant foliage which surrounded it.

The little chamber was the favourite retreat of our heroine: she had been permitted by her kind benefactress to consider it as her own; and when otherwise unoccupied, an hour or two was usually here devoted to drawing, reading, or any particular study that required uninterrupted attention.

Mrs. Bertram's house, though not of the largest dimensions, was extremely commodious and well laid out. The furniture was plain, but neat; and every article conveyed an idea of elegant simplicity, which bespoke the inhabitants possessed of superior minds, where judgment and taste alike united to produce the useful and ornamental: the latter, however, owed its existence to no extraneous aid. Of the chief part of it Stella happened to be the architect: she adorned the walls with the most beautiful drawings; the sofa, the chairs, were principally worked by her; and the graceful, airy festoons which hung above the paintings, vied with nature in brightness of colours and delicacy of design. In short, all was strikingly pleasing, and in a style very different from the common run of the neighbourhood, without appearing to deviate, in the smallest degree, from the station in life which their limited finances had assigned them to fill.

The garden was well stored with fruit-trees, vegetables, plants, and flowers of various kinds. These, considering their northern situation, were thriving and productive; for which they were greatly indebted to the shelter afforded by the Nabob's plantations, and the high range of towering rocks that preserved them, in some degree, from the violence of the storm on that side, from whence it occasionally raged with most intemperate fury. The shrubbery, thro' which wound a path that led to the grotto, was kept in excellent order, and never permitted to exclude a view of the old ruin, which formed a very picturesque prospect from the upper story of the dwelling. While the wide extended ocean presented one still more interesting and sublime, though further removed from the premises.

At one of the windows from whence the latter object happened to be most perceptible, Stella often watched, with trembling anxiety, the wave-tossed bark, struggling with the warring elements, whose raging spirit seemed every instant fraught with tremendous destruction, and ready to engulf the exhausted, terrified wretches, who, alternately soaring aloft on the high-towering billow, or immersed in the world of waters below, as they rushed, with irresistible speed, from their aerial elevation, saw nothing short of death, in its most horrid form, in every quick, approaching movement of the creaking and dismasted vessel.

Sighs, profound, sympathetic, and sad, burst from the agitated bosom of our heroine, as

her eyes dwelt on the melancholy and heart-rending source of her solicitude; while the total impossibility of administering the smallest aid to the care-worn sufferers, created a sensation of awful and overwhelming resignation, too indefinable for description, too oppressive and terrific to evaporate in words.

Sickening at the too certain conclusion of the dreadful scene, Stella, on all such occasions, felt the inefficacy of human wisdom to ensure the continuance of rational content; else the original lot assigned us by Providence would (in her opinion) have prevented many evils, could we have remained satisfied with our portion of worldly goods, which few people, in one shape or other, are totally deprived of. Grasping at more than is allotted us, we frequently lose the little that might have sufficed for all our wants; and life itself is but too often sacrificed to an immoderate thirst after a delusive and most unconquerable inclination for unceasing accumulation.

When restored tranquillity smoothed the troubled surface of the deep, and the white-sailed vessel, whose bright painted sides gaily glittered in the refulgent beams of a setting sun, glided along her liquid course, unmolested by the furies of the storm, our heroine has figured a thousand charms within the floating fabric; and almost wished she had been one of the happy number who were thus borne, insensibly, to other climates and more propitious skies—expectation seated at the helm, and hope beating high in every breast.

Formed by circumstances, and led astray by every fallacious appearance, our judgments are hasty, our conclusions often rash. The apparently ill-starred mariner, even while struggling with the fiercest blast of the tempest, is equally the care of Providence with those who skim over the bosom of the calmer ocean, and reach their destined port in safety. From the hour of human trial none are, however, exempted: all mankind have their destined portion of evil, and he who feels it not at present, ought to look forward to futurity with fear and trembling.

On the evening of that day set apart for commemorating the birth of a male heir to the domains of Rossgrove, Stella happened to be engaged in one of the foregoing contemplations. The sea proved unusually smooth, the air serene, and a vessel, slowly moving at a distance, seemed to enjoy the voluptuous repose that reigned over every object, as the sunny rays gilded the milk-white canvas with gleams of radiance, or trembling on the waters below, displayed the reflected forms of the bark in innumerable fantastic shapes.

Stella thought the sailors must be happy, for every thing seemed to wear a smiling aspect around them; while a sigh followed the conviction that she herself was at that very moment the child of disappointment and solitude.

A cheerful and well-regulated mind has many internal resources against the casual incidents of life. Our heroine was not of a disposition to renounce one possible good, because another happened to be placed beyond her reach: she shook off the pensive dejection that pervaded her thoughts, and endeavoured to turn them on more enlivening reflections.

This mental effort did not pass unrewarded. Deprived of the musical feast she had secretly promised herself, an unexpected succedaneum offered to compensate, in some measure, for the sacrifice filial duty imperiously exacted. She descended the staircase, and bent her steps to the grotto, in order to amuse herself with giving the finishing strokes to a landscape which had been left but half completed in the morning.

CHAP. IX.

“Where shou’d this music be? i’ th’ air, or earth?
“It sounds no more: and, sure, it waits upon
“Some God o’ th’ island!”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE sunbeams still continued to play upon the bosom of the ocean, and lengthened the shadows of every surrounding object, as our heroine, unconscious of the pleasure that awaited her, advanced to her favourite retreat.

While slowly winding along the path that led to the end of her walk, strains, soft and harmonious, seemed to be wasted on the evening breeze, which at this period blew directly from the Grove. She stopped to listen, but the sound had ceased. In an instant the well-known grand and solemn march of the forty-second regiment broke, at intervals, upon the stillness of the preceding pause, and absorbed every faculty in immoveable attention. It happened to be a favourite piece of music with Stella, and though much of its beauty was unavoidably lost, from the nature of her situation, yet, in spite of this circumstance, it had never been heard to such advantage before.

Every terrestrial enjoyment, however, has its limited period; and what was derived from the present, speedily terminated. For some time its renewal was eagerly, but unsuccessfully expected. At length she proceeded to an angle of the rocky barrier: again it met her in the seraphic strains of “Lochaber,” and again died away amid the murmurs of the gurgling stream that rushed over some obstructing impediments to its progress, beneath a rustic wooden bridge, on the railing of which she now leaned, solicitous to catch the sweet notes so recently borne on the passing breeze, and which still continued to vibrate on her delighted ear, long after the invisible musician had ceased playing.

Rightly judging that the more aerial situation of the grotto would enable her to hear the melody, if repeated, to greater advantage, she started from her reverie, hastened forward, and ascending the steps with the light and graceful motion of a sylph, took her station at the door, totally unmindful of the unfinished landscape, or any other consideration by which her thoughts had lately been occupied.

She was not mistaken in this idea. A few minutes had scarcely elapsed before her expectations were fully gratified; and she now plainly discovered (what indeed had been previously suspected) that it was the military band at the Grove by which her enraptured senses were thus fascinated.

The shades of twilight gradually spread their grey mantle over the face of nature, unnoticed by the delighted Stella; she marked not their progress, nor heeded the flight of time: all but the present enjoyment seemed to have vanished from remembrance. With some of the music she was well acquainted, and the vocal melody of her harmonious voice, almost unconscious of the exertion accompanied, at intervals, the floating notes, which appeared to skim over the gently waving top of the lower plantations, and stealing up the sides of the rock, imperceptibly died away, or swelled into louder cadence, according to the pleasure of the performers.

During a pause, after warbling one of her native airs with peculiar pathos, a rustling kind of sound suddenly attracted her notice. She stepped from the threshold to discover the cause, but

perceived no living object near her: even the feathered songsters of the woods had retired for the night, except two thrushes, who occasionally answered each other from the neighbouring plantations. The lateness of the hour now, for the first time, struck her, and a sensation, bordering on alarm, throbbed at her heart, which was not lessened by a circumstance that quickly followed: for the low-whispered accents of a human voice conveyed, like the music, on the gentle breeze, seemed to proceed from some quarter evidently at not great distance, but yet not sufficiently near to distinguish their particular import: once, however, her own name, or something similar, struck upon her ear. The impulse of the moment carried her instantly back to the grotto, where, scarcely daring to breathe, she stood agitated and irresolute. At length she softly stole a second time to the threshold, and half concealing herself behind the door, once more endeavoured to ascertain what was, or was not to be apprehended.

While listening in this attentive position, an idea suddenly occurred, which did not appear improbable:—possibly Mrs. Bertram had sent the maid in quest of her. The conjecture was more than feasible: she darted from her hiding-place, flew down the steps, and hastened to obey the imaginary summons with uncommon speed.

Still an impression, verging on something like fear, led her frequently to regard the vicinity with a scrutinizing and anxious eye; but, except the bright streams of light that occasionally gleamed through the trees from the windows of the Nabob's festive mansion, and now and then afforded transient glimpses of the gay and happy groups, rapidly moving to and fro in the mazy windings of the dance, nothing appeared to create any fresh alarm: her apprehensions, therefore, began to subside in the foregoing supposition, when, all at once, they were again renewed by perceiving an unusual emotion amongst some of the thickest parts of the bushes. Stella involuntarily recoiled, and abruptly stopped in the midst of her progress: but presently recollecting herself—

“It is but one of the sheep which has strayed from its companions,” said she: “at any rate, I shall soon be at home.”

Stella did not “whistle” at this juncture “for want of thought:” she certainly attempted to sing, however, though from a very different motive; for, in order to drown too much of that troublesome intruder, the beautiful plaintive air of Roslin Castle was hummed in a low key, as she hurried on with more speed than attention, to her steps, till their progress was unexpectedly impeded by a broken branch which caught her gown on one side of the road; and fear, aided by the increasing shades of night, giving it a mortal shape, she rushed forward, to disengage herself from the grasp of an imaginary being, till, stumbling over a stone that lay in her way, the agitated form of our heroine fell, extended and helpless, on the earth. Her senses fled for an instant, but were quickly recalled by an exclamation uttered in a masculine voice, which burst from some person who rushed from the wooden bridge. Their restoration, however, was but transitory: additional terror and dismay took possession of every faculty, and a second temporary suspension of the mental powers succeeded.

On her recovery, she found herself supported in the arms of a stranger; but concluding the emotion under which she laboured had possibly deceived her, she turned her head in order to ascertain her real situation, and immediately her assistant exclaimed, in accents of surprise and pleasure—“Our fair *incognita*, by Jove!”

Stella again raised her eyes, and perceived another person, whose face, however, was too much in the shade to be easily discerned. He seemed deeply immersed in thought, and returned not any answer to the observation of his companion, but stood rooted to the spot with folded arms, intently gazing on the trembling and agitated Stella.

The moment she was able to move, her acknowledgements were returned, in a low and tremulous voice, for the recent aid afforded her, and the profuse offers of further assistance, which were rapidly uttered by the only one of the strangers who seemed to have the full use of his tongue. The continuation of his services, however, was civilly declined; and she positively refused his ready-tendered arm, declaring herself sufficiently recovered to conclude what remained of her short walk alone.

The latter part of Stella's reply certainly conveyed what might be called rather a broad hint; but though intended to indicate her wish for their absence, it did not suit the views of her new acquaintance to understand it in that light; and, in spite of her efforts to the contrary, he who had been the most active to assist her continued at her side, while his friend, in silence, followed slowly behind, apparently absorbed in a reverie of some interesting, but melancholy meditation.

Though vexed and disconcerted at finding herself thus subjected to the company of strangers at such an hour and place, and uncertain in what light their unexpected appearance might be viewed by Mrs. Bertram, our heroine was under the necessity of submitting to an evil from which she found it impossible to escape. This circumstance excepted, no other cause of complaint remained; for she had been treated with the utmost respect, and the most polite attention, by one of her assiduous companions; while the other appeared to take no concern whatever in any thing that was passing before him. Ashamed, therefore, to evince any further reluctance to the company of a person who expressed so much anxiety on her account, yet unwilling to sanction a perseverance which she could not now help regarding as something bordering on a degree of officious intrusion, Stella walked silently along, merely returning short monosyllables to those parts of his discourse from whence it was impossible to withhold some sort of reply; thus endeavouring to mark, by the laconic nature of her answers, the disapprobation with which she listened to him, and her impatience to conclude an interview already too much prolonged, and commenced under circumstances too disagreeable to be remembered with any great degree of pleasure.

The overhanging rocks under which their path hitherto lay, had, during their course in that direction, prevented them from deriving much benefit from the bright beams of a clear, beautiful moon, which soared in calm, majestic splendour over the frowning mass that enclosed that quarter of the garden. On reaching a more open situation, where the rocks had no longer power to produce this effect, she speedily discovered the military uniform, and the nodding plume that adorned the shining helmet of her unwelcome companion. On turning her head, to glance a look of similar enquiry over the figure of their silent attendant, her eyes met his so earnestly fixed upon her face, that she instantly withdrew them in much confusion, but not before the motive of the hasty survey was accomplished, for he too wore the same garb.

Another discovery, however, and one still more important, originated from this gratification of her curiosity; for she immediately recognised in the mute gentleman's features the very identical person who had formerly occasioned her no small alarm and perturbation at the door of the alcove in the shrubbery.

More agitated than she had ever felt herself on any former occurrence, an unaccountable tremor pervaded her whole frame, and her heart throbbed with such violence, that, scarcely able to support herself, she moved on with increasing difficulty, and almost wished for another offer of the assisting arm, which had been so frequently rejected with the most determined obstinacy.

The foregoing little incident, trifling as it certainly appears, nevertheless produced an evident effect on the hitherto unsocial stranger. He presently stepped forward, and, as if the eyes of Stella had broke the spell by which the powers of language had been suspended, now joined in

the conversation, if indeed what passed could come under that denomination, for the faculty of speech seemed almost exclusively confined to his more voluble companion, who appeared not in the least disconcerted by the silent proofs of inattention with which his female auditor repeatedly honoured him.

Stella now soon understood that her conductors were two of the guests assembled at Rossgrove; and the little she had as yet seen of the world led her to suppose they were persons of some consequence.

At the door of the Hermitage she repeated her acknowledgments, and bidding them adieu in a manner that precluded all further intrusion, abruptly entered.

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CHAP. X.

“There’s nothing ill can dwell in such a temple:
“If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
“Good things will strive to dwell with’t.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE escort of Stella were indeed what they had represented themselves—military men, and the visitors at the Grove: they likewise happened to be two of the number who had formerly seen her; but of this latter circumstance she yet remained ignorant.

Many had proved the enquiries set on foot respecting our heroine from the period of her first discovery in the gallery: even Colonel Arabin, though residing under the roof she was supposed to inhabit, had never chanced to meet with the object of their pursuit; and his lady remained either in the same predicament, or pretended to be totally unacquainted with her existence.

Defeated in their attempts for information at the juncture when most ardent for its attainment, and afterwards entirely occupied by a variety of intervening engagements, her image seemed gradually obliterated from the memory of two of the gentlemen, while on that of the third it made an impression, deep, lasting, and indelible. Yet, strange as it must appear, he who was really the most interested person on the occasion, apparently evinced the greatest indifference, and observed the most stoical silence on every introduction of the topic with his brother officers.

The second view of Stella, which he accidentally obtained in the shrubbery when strolling through it with Miss Ross and her party, completed the destruction of his peace, without producing any defalcation in those sentiments of honour and moral integrity, on the possession of which he had hitherto justly valued himself.

The foregoing incident will partly be explained when it is added, that the secret lover of Stella was already the avowed admirer and affianced husband of Margaret Ross, and the identical person alluded to by Mr. Benson, the house-steward, in his communication to Mrs. Bertram.

Major St. Vincent, however, was a man of honour in the strictest sense of the word, and where that unfortunately interfered with the bias of inclination, the latter was uniformly sacrificed to the former; not, perhaps, without some internal struggle, but generally free from every indication of apparent hesitation.

In the present instance, he cautiously adhered to the same conscientious line of conduct; and the motives which dictated this mode of proceeding will, we trust, sufficiently recommend him to the favour of our readers when hereafter acquainted with them.

But it may be asked, could a man of real honour give his hand to one woman, while his heart was in the possession of another? In most cases of a similar description this question may be easily answered: in the present one, general conclusions, drawn from received opinions, will probably prove erroneous.

The evening of the birthday happened to be uncommonly warm and oppressive; a circumstance which the numerous assemblage of guests contributed considerably to increase. Major St. Vincent found it particularly fatiguing, and seized the first favourable opportunity of quitting the room, in order to procure a little fresh air in the shrubbery. In crossing the vestibule,

he was joined by Captain Montague, and, arm in arm, they strolled out together, impelled by the same motive.

Refreshed and invigorated by the gentle and healthy breeze that gave a tremulous movement to the surrounding foliage, they continued to saunter along for some time, inattentive to the path they followed, and solely occupied by the discussion of a professional subject, which had given rise to a variety of different opinions before the company separated in the eating room. At length their progress was suddenly arrested by the rivulet, which, in the direction they pursued, appeared too broad to pass without the aid of other assistance than now offered for that purpose.

Beyond this barrier to their steps the prospect was invitingly lovely. They had formerly passed the Hermitage once or twice by a different road, but the weather proved unfavourable for an advantageous view of its romantic situation, and no subsequent circumstance had occurred to recall it to their memory amidst the hurry of regimental arrangements, and the succeeding engagements that necessarily occupied their time for a considerable period after their arrival in Galloway.

With the owner of this little secluded spot they were likewise unacquainted; for Miss Ross's manœuvres were too successfully conducted to admit of introducing either Mrs. Bertram or her beautiful *protégée* to their knowledge. No suspicion, therefore, arose that the object of so much curiosity happened to be the inhabitant of the very place they were now contemplating with such infinite pleasure, every additional view of which increased the wish for a more minute investigation. The intervening brook merely served as a stimulus to more active exertion:—they followed up the stream; in order to discover a place to cross it, and at length reached the vicinity of the rude steps that led to the grotto. Here, while they paused on the next course to be adopted for the acceleration of their design, the melodious warblings of a female voice, evidently in unison with the military band at the Grove, all at once rivetted them to the spot. They listened with rapturous astonishment, and scarcely ventured to breathe or move, lest the celestial notes, proving the illusion of fancy, should cease to charm their fascinated senses. The seraphic strains seemed to vibrate on their ears from above; and Major St. Vincent first broke the silence, by observing they certainly proceeded from an angel.

"Or rather some charming woman in the form of one," replied his friend. "But hark! again it floats on the air: and see!" continued he, looking upwards to where the nymph-like form of the lovely songstress was stationed.

"Ah! yes, by heavens, a celestial being!" exclaimed the transported St. Vincent, totally thrown off his guard as he followed the direction of his companion's eyes: "yes, an angel, in faith!"

"Hang celestial beings!" cried Montague, in a gay tone of voice; "give me the human form divine in female shape—the supernatural is not to my taste:—

"I take the body, you the mind,
"Which has the better bargain?"

Follow me, and we'll endeavour to ascertain this point immediately."

So saying, with a sudden spring he bounded over a part of the fence which happened to be in a less thriving condition in this quarter of the garden; and St. Vincent, equally agile, speedily imitating his example, they soon reached the wooden bridge, where, leaning on the rustic paling, they paused again, to reconnoitre the environs, and reconsider their future plans of

operation.

From this position, a full view of the grotto was easily obtained, and a few minutes had scarcely elapsed before another song from that quarter fixed their eager eyes upon it in attentive silence.

To ascertain whether or not this melody was produced by any person residing in the vicinity, now became an object of some importance.

That the vocal performer was a being of a superior order to the common run of the lower class of the community, admitted not of a doubt; and as they were given to understand that most of the genteeller families in the neighbourhood had accepted the Nabob's invitation to the Grove, they could not comprehend how she who appeared so well qualified to make one in such an assemblage, had not joined the festive group on this memorable occasion. If an inhabitant of the small house they had recently admired, she was not only a neighbour, but the nearest one too, to the Grove. This observation increased their surprise at her absence, which, it was plain, could neither have been caused by her own indisposition, nor that of any near relative; for in that case her mind would have experienced sensations very different from those by which it was now evidently occupied.

Montague was positive there must be some mystery in the business: he protested he could not sleep till he knew whether she had descended from the clouds, rose from the sea, like another Venus, or been merely introduced into the world in a similar manner with themselves. To authenticate this point, and procure a better view of the imaginary divinity, they ascended the eminence in a different and more difficult direction; and it was in the course of their progress that the subject of their pursuit was alarmed by the rustling amongst the bushes, accompanied by the pronunciation of her name, which Captain Montague suddenly recollected was that by which the owner of the Hermitage had once been mentioned to him.

Having tolerably well ascertained the path she must unavoidably pursue in her descent, and unwilling to increase an alarm which they perceived was already sufficiently distressing, they renounced their recent intention of abruptly intruding on her retirement, for which no decent apology could easily be offered, and softly resumed their station on the bridge, along which she must evidently pass at all events.

One consideration, however, chiefly inclined them to adopt this measure:—it was not probable she would be alone in the grotto at so late hour; and one of the gentlemen, it has formerly been hinted, had particular reasons for cautiously avoiding every degree of *eclat* on the occasion.

In the event of our heroine appearing with a companion, it was much easier to escape observation amidst the adjoining thickets, than being under the same roof with her.

The result of this determination has already been shewn, as likewise the subsequent proceedings that sprung from it.

CHAP. XI.

“My life is yours, nor wish I to preserve it,
But to serve you.”

CONGREVE.

MAJOR St. Vincent was the second son of a genteel, and, in some of its branches, noble family, in the south of England, whose veins were more copiously supplied with the honourable stream of ancestry, than their coffers filled with the golden gifts of Fortune. The former had been preserved pure and unsullied through the lapse of many generations, while the latter had suffered much diminution—from a variety of unfortunate circumstances; the chief part of which is foreign to the subject of our history, and therefore unnecessary to dwell upon at present.

But though thus unprovided with adequate means for supporting the pride of birth in all its pristine lustre, splendid expectations, of considerable magnitude, were not wanting to gild the prospect of futurity with brighter colours. The Major's father was nephew to Lord Fitzhenry; and in the event of the latter dying a bachelor, was next heir to the title and estate.

To this period they looked forward as that which was to replace them in their proper rank in life; and, in the meanwhile, they expressed no repugnance to increase their existing consequence, by the union of the young soldier with a woman of respectable connexions, but still larger fortune.

The intended bride was no other than the favourite and first-born offspring of Mr. Ross. At one of the fashionable watering places which that lady had visited in the course of the preceding year, she first commenced an acquaintance with Major St. Vincent, who happened then to be quartered in the neighbourhood.

His tall, elegant, martial-looking figure, dignified air, and highly-polished manners, united to a set of features possessing every trait of masculine beauty and expressive intelligence, soon attracted her attention, and recommended him to particular notice long before the charms of a well-cultivated understanding made any impression on her volatile and indiscriminating mind; though the superior advantages he enjoyed in this enviable respect rendered his company, even at so early a period of life, peculiarly acceptable to the judicious and well-informed few with whom he always endeavoured to associate.

To be regarded as an object worthy of attention by the handsome, the all-accomplished St. Vincent, was considered as a certain passport to celebrity by the fortunate female destined to receive such a mark of distinction: but though the wish to secure it proved nearly universal, the means were rather difficult of attainment.

St. Vincent, though young, happened to be of a more serious thinking turn of mind than is usually met with at his age; yet his temper was ardent, and his passions strong. A certain air of reserve (perfectly consistent, however, with good-breeding) gave to his appearance an idea of mental superiority, that occasionally repressed presumptuous vanity, and kept intrusive familiarity at a distance. The superficial coxcomb and trifling coquette were, of course, seldom at ease in his presence; though the former often affected to be thought on an intimate footing with him, and the latter sedulously sought to obtain some exclusive proof of his attention.

Miss Ross immediately placed Major, then Captain St. Vincent, amongst the number of her particular favourites; and, agreeably to her usual mode of proceeding, determined to be “*aut Cæsar, aut nullus*,” in his opinion. Louis the XIVth of France possessed not a greater rage for

universal dominion than the daughter of the Scottish Nabob; which urged her to set every engine at work to establish her projected empire. St. Vincent's mother and sister, then at the same watering place, soon perceived a partiality which Margaret took little pains to conceal. Her fortune entitled her to rank with the highest circles in genteel life; but report, with its hundred tongues, had more than doubled its actual amount: had it been ten times as much, however, it would not have appeared too great for him to whom these two ladies secretly destined it. They seized every possible opportunity of paying her the most flattering attention, and, by the intimacy that was speedily formed between them, furnished innumerable openings for facilitating an union apparently productive of so many advantages to a beloved son and brother.

Unfortunately, these efforts in his favour did not produce an adequate effect on his side of the question. St. Vincent was uniformly well-bred, and politely attentive to the daily guest and companion of his mother and sister: his heart, however, took no part in the family scheme for his advantage; it remained uninterested by the lady's evident predilection in his behalf, and unaffected by all her blandishments.

In fact, though she might congratulate herself on almost the exclusive enjoyment of his company in the domestic circle, her progress, in other respects, was not of a description likely to bring the ultimate object of her wishes to a speedy conclusion. Margaret, nevertheless, saw matters in a different light—a light more consonant to her vanity. For the first time in her life she fancied herself under the influence of a permanent attachment; and her constant appearance with the St. Vincent family seemed to countenance the current rumour of a matrimonial engagement being on the tapis.

This idea met with no discouragement from the female quarter of the house; by the gentleman, however, it was heard with a degree of indifference that did not even induce him to take the trouble of contradicting it.

In this state were affairs situated when the regiment to which he belonged was unexpectedly ordered to another part of the kingdom.

Somewhat surprised at having yet received no explicit declaration of his sentiments, Miss Ross conceived this circumstance would certainly bring matters to a crisis, by hastening an event so truly desirable. The gentleman, however, proved in no such haste, and departed without coming to the much wished-for *eclaircissement*.

Astonished, piqued, and mortified by a disappointment so totally unforeseen, Margaret received the first intelligence of his absence with sensations not easily to be defined.

At the time when this circumstance happened, a week had yet to elapse before the division to which he belonged expected to quit their present quarters; and in the interim, she had been prevailed upon to spend a day or two at a friend's house in the neighbourhood. To the pressing invitation she received for this purpose, Miss Ross readily acceded, from an idea that St. Vincent, hurt by the implied indifference her departure at such a juncture evinced, would immediately follow, and come to the long-desired explanation. His mother and sister saw the motive of her absence, and secretly flattered themselves with a similar consequence resulting from it. Sufficient leisure would still remain for future arrangements; while, at the same time, they fondly hoped the appearance of a period so limited might possibly conduce to accelerate the grand object of maternal solicitude.

By some manœuvre or another it was found necessary to alter the order of the route; and St. Vincent, of course, marched with the second, instead of the last division, before the unfortunate Margaret suspected the deprivation she was doomed to lament.

But though thus disappointed in a personal interview, still a letter could equally explain

his sentiments; and that compensation might yet be in store for her. Prepossessed with this notion, when the first shock of the moment had a little subsided, she hastened from her lodgings to those occupied by Mrs. St. Vincent, and contrived to introduce the enquiry with an air of affected carelessness, very foreign to the nature of her real feelings on the occasion. Nothing satisfactory, however, succeeded this attempt at dissimulation: a cool complimentary card was all that appeared addressed to her by St. Vincent.

Her frame trembled, her eyes flashed fire, as she ran over the contents. Mrs. St. Vincent and Louisa marked the rising storm with sorrow, and gave a half-suppressed sigh to the apprehended destruction of their hopes. They tried, nevertheless, to exculpate the offender, by resting his defence on the plea of professional necessity, and the well known fact that a soldier's time is not at his own command.

Margaret made no comments on the humiliating subject: she listened to them in silence; but a sullen air of supercilious incredulity pervaded every feature, and bore witness to the internal tempest that raged within her haughty bosom. She seized an early opportunity of retiring from the presence of friends recently so dear to her; and on returning home, hastened to her own apartment, where her former lover's farewell-note speedily underwent a second perusal, which almost as speedily sealed its final destruction: with every mark of contemptuous indignation, it was instantly torn in a thousand pieces, and the mutilated fragments scattered round the chamber.

In the course of the succeeding evening, Miss Ross appeared in the public rooms as formerly. Her dress was more splendid, her ornaments more numerous than usual: wounded pride produced an uncommon flow of artificial spirits; and self-consideration brought her even to mention the truant swain with every indication of the utmost *nonchalance*.

Margaret played her cards so artfully, that though the true state of the case remained dubious with some of her acquaintance, the greater part of the number were completely duped on the occasion; and, what was still more extraordinary, she duped herself! By a constant adherence to the same mode of conduct, the actress became an adept in the part she had undertaken to perform, till habit rendered it easy; and her natural passion for admiration continually hurrying her into the vortex of folly and dissipation, new pursuits every day started up—new objects occurred to occupy the mind, to detach it from useless sensations of regret, and to banish from remembrance all painful retrospections of the past. St. Vincent seemed no longer to retain a place in her thoughts: or if his idea did occasionally force its way on her memory, the same giddy round of amusement was immediately recurred to, and all intrusive reflections were driven from their hold by a double portion of fashionable resources, of which she had always sufficient at command.

The persevering, though concealed endeavour thus made to the extirpation of his image, too plainly proved the strength of the enemy she struggled to dislodge. Margaret repeatedly supposed she had conquered all remains of her former attachment for the now reprobated St. Vincent; and it was not till accident once more threw him in her way, that she secretly acknowledged herself undeceived in this fallacious idea.

CHAP. XII.

“If I boast of aught,
“Be it to have been Heav’n’s happy instrument,
“The means of good to my ill-fated parents.”

ROWE.

MISS Ross, by the demise of a maternal uncle in the West Indies, had received a considerable addition to the fortune settled upon her by the Nabob, when the troops under Colonel Arabin’s command arrived in Galloway. Her vanity, increased by this unexpected accession of wealth, seemed to have imbibed more inflated notions of individual consequence than any hitherto indulged; and on the first intimation of her recreant knight’s vicinity, she fully determined to treat him with the utmost *hauteur* and every mark of the most fortifying indifference, should a wish to avoid the imputation of peculiarity subject her to the necessity of seeing him at the Grove with his brother officers.

This resolution was tolerably well adhered to during the course of the first fortnight: about the end of that period, almighty Love resumed his former station in her heart, and, gradually aided by powerful auxiliaries, seemed to recommence his reign with every prospect of ultimate success.

Previous to the northern march of the troops, St. Vincent had obtained permission to remain a few weeks with his relations, from whom he had been absent for some time antecedent to this period.

On reaching his paternal home, he found a highly-valued father visibly declining in health, and painfully embarrassed in circumstance, while evident traits of dejection and low spirits sat gloomily impressed on the pensive countenances of his other relatives.

The original cause of these distressing appearances was reluctantly explained, to which he listened with sensations of suppressed anguish; which, unhappily, furnished too many additional instances of incurable depravity and boundless extravagance to those already frequently deplored, in the unprincipled conduct of an elder brother.

Colonel St. Vincent (for he was likewise in the army) happened to be one of those characters who prefer self-gratification to the comfort and peace of dearest and nearest connexions; both of which are but too often sacrificed to an insatiable inclination for every vicious pursuit, and every species of expensive amusement. It proved necessary, however, to keep on good terms with their uncle Lord Fitzhenry, whose temper was none of the best, and who had more than once threatened to marry, when any casual intelligence relative to the Colonel’s irregularities unfortunately reached him. The parents of that misguided young man, therefore, anxiously endeavoured to conceal his errors from public knowledge; for the loss of his Lordship’s favour would have involved the whole family in final and irremediable ruin. The prodigal’s wants were consequently supplied with as little noise as possible; till what remained from the purpose was almost swallowed up by the perpetual demands of numerous and increasing creditors; some of whom, upon finding the source nearly exhausted from whence they had hitherto had their claims duly answered, began to speak of adopting more vigorous measures, and even plainly hinted their design of applying to Lord Fitzhenry on the occasion, who, it was supposed, would not permit his presumptive heir to linger out the residue of his existence within the walls of a loathsome prison.

This threat, sufficient of itself to create a serious alarm, was quickly succeeded by an intimation that Mr. St. Vincent himself would certainly be arrested for a debt of some magnitude, if means were not taken to repay it before the expiration of five months from the period assigned for the settlement of the business.

Such was the state of affairs when the younger St. Vincent procured leave of absence to pay a short visit to his father's family.

A drowning person is ready to catch at the first object which bears the smallest prospect of present assistance. The unfortunate Mr. St. Vincent had repeatedly turned his thoughts on every probable means for averting the threatened storm, without deriving the most trifling degree of consolation from the melancholy and futile reflections that occurred on the subject; when the Major's appearance recalled to his mother's remembrance the principal events which had taken place at their last meeting, and gave birth to an idea, that was presently communicated to her husband, as the most feasible means that remained to extricate them from those impending difficulties, the dread of which was rapidly hastening him to a premature grave. This resource was no other than to attempt the accomplishment of the former much wished-for alliance between her son and Miss Ross; the revival of whose partiality for the Major she fondly flattered herself might be easily effected, if he would only agree to sanction the projected design with his approbation and consent.

The strong mind and filial piety of the young soldier was well known to his parents: the first, they were persuaded, would induce him to sacrifice his own feelings, if necessary, for their tranquillity; from the latter every thing was to be hoped, should success crown the measure, and the lady retain her late prepossession in his favour; and of this circumstance Mrs. St. Vincent could not admit a doubt: the father also coincided in the same opinion; and Louisa, when informed of their scheme, was positive no woman could ever totally eradicate an attachment once inspired by such a man as her brother Henry. After several subsequent conversations on the topic, their expectations became more sanguine; and their joint wishes were consequently signified to him in the most tender and affecting terms.

The heart of Henry was perfectly disengaged at this juncture, and though the beauty of Miss Ross might, in some degree, have captivated his senses, her mental endowments (cautious as she had ever been to suppress every reprehensible tendency in his presence) were by no means calculated to secure his affections: he therefore paused a few minutes after the communication.

"It is true my own happiness," thought he, "can never be implicated in such an union; but if that of my beloved parents is at stake—if to me they look for their only chance of comfort on earth—"

He raised his eyes before the sentence was concluded, and met those of the two people dearest to him on earth fixed upon his face with an expression of anxious expectation and agonizing suspense, which spoke volumes to his feelings, and at once determined his conduct.

The sensible and well-regulated mind of this worthy young man was inconceivably shocked to observe the agitation of his parents, when he reflected that on him they depended for the restoration of their peace; but his heart was too full for utterance, and language refused to come to his relief. He gazed upon the trickling drops that chased each other down their pallid, care-worn cheeks for a single moment; then abruptly pulling out his handkerchief, turned to the window, in order to conceal the emotion he could no longer suppress.

His fate was now advancing to a crisis: he saw, he felt this to be the case; felt it too without experiencing any individual satisfaction arising from the conviction on his own account: prompt acquiescence, however, became requisite to relieve the tortured bosoms of those to

whom he owed his birth. An exertion was therefore made to banish every selfish consideration:—he turned from the window, bent one knee before them, seized a hand of each, pressed it emphatically to his lips, then rose, bowed in silence, and hurried from the room.

The distressed parents uttered not a syllable during this scene, which passed with rapidity. Deeply affected by a thousand oppressive sensations, they continued gazing upon each other till the sound of his retiring steps died upon their ear. Mr. St. Vincent then extended his arms, and folding his agitated, weeping wife to his bosom, sobbed aloud, mingling scalding tears of regret with those of admiration and gratitude, for the cruel necessity that forced them to require what was evidently not granted without a secret pang of reluctance.

Such an instance of filial duty from one son seemed almost to compensate for the sufferings entailed upon them by another; and their acknowledgements to Providence were profuse and sincere, for the critical relief thus obtained through his means.

Every thing now soon wore a different appearance under the roof of Mr. St. Vincent. The creditors of the Colonel were prevailed upon to wait a little longer, and the semblance of health once more began to visit the father's countenance.

The temporary forbearance of the principal claimants to whom he stood indebted, was a point of the utmost importance to Mr. St. Vincent, as it prevented any disclosure of existing circumstances from reaching his uncle, whose fortune, having chiefly descended to him by the maternal side, was entirely in his own power to dispose of in what manner he judged most proper: a privilege he frequently threatened to use in favour of some distant relations of his mother's, when any of his nephew's family happened, though unintentionally, to incur his displeasure. The small portion of wealth he inherited from his father was strictly entailed, and would have proved very inadequate to the support of title without the additional aid of the other.

As the final success of their new scheme was still hid in the womb of futurity, and depended on contingencies which could not be yet ascertained, it was agreed that nothing should be said to Lord Fitzhenry on the subject till such time as the sentiments of the lady were first sounded; for the Major seemed far from entertaining any expectations so very sanguine as those adopted by his mother and sister on the occasion; on the contrary, he concluded vanity, wounded pride, and insulted affectation, if she ever had honoured him with any real degree of the latter, had long since probably excluded him from all share in her remembrance. The northern destination of the regiment was considered as a most fortunate incident at this period, and seemed happily adapted to afford opportunities to ascertain this matter, without carrying the appearance of any premeditated design for that purpose.

Mrs. Arabin, who happened to be related to the St. Vincent family, and at this juncture with them on a visit, promised to facilitate their wishes by every possible exertion in her power.

On the second week after this arrangement, Henry St. Vincent escorted that lady back to her husband, and then proceeded with the troops to Scotland.

The parting with his parents and sisters was affecting and solemn: the former, with streaming eyes, pressed him to their hearts, calling him their better angel—he on whom every hope, every prospect of future tranquility depended; the latter clasped their arms round his neck, and sobbed upon his bosom: every look and action spoke sensibility and gratitude for this seasonable relief from the recent terror of apprehended ruin.

In the comparative happiness thus dispensed to others, St. Vincent experienced that internal gratification which the conscious sense of a virtuous deed uniformly bestows, and which, for a certain period, is sometimes sufficiently powerful to absorb every intrusive reflections of a more selfish description.

CHAP. XIII.

“Fondly make a merit of forgiveness,
“And give to Fate a second opportunity,
“If the first blow should miss.”

ROWE.

IT has already been hinted that Miss Ross proved too good a Christian to persevere in harbouring any lasting degree of resentment against the once distinguished, though truant favourite of a former day.

Mrs. Arabin, true to her promise, contributed considerably to the acceleration of this circumstance, and smoothed the way for the Major's reinstatement in the lady's good opinion, by the most adroit management of her temper and disposition.

Inexpressibly flattered by the returning devoirs of the only man who had ever, in fact, found the real way to her heart, every remaining sentiment of wounded pride or displeasure gradually lessened, till at length all recollections inimical to his views were finally obliterated from her memory. Aided, therefore, by the lurking auxiliary he still retained in her breast, united with the friendly exertions of the Arabins, St. Vincent shortly perceived the garrison was ready to surrender on proper terms. As the indifference he felt to this ill-sorted union did not appear likely to subside by a more intimate knowledge of Margaret's character, though the reprehensible parts of it continued to be carefully concealed from his view with the most cautious, but difficult perseverance, he rightly judged that a sacrifice thus unavoidably necessary could not be too speedily accomplished; and, secretly ashamed to find a latent, lingering bias to procrastination frequently intrude on his better intentions, the dictates of filial magnanimity at length determined him to put further hesitation out of the question, by immediately availing himself of her visible partiality in his favour. In consequence of this resolution, Lord Fitzhenry was made acquainted with the future brilliant prospects of his nephew, and every thing speedily so arranged as to preclude any possibility of retraction on his side with honour.

This circumstance was no sooner ascertained than the breast of St. Vincent seemed eased of an oppressive burthen. To know the worst, is said to be some relief: he felt it as such on the present occasion, and looked forward to the ultimate conclusion of the affair with a sensation of stern, persevering resignation, which frequently pervades superior minds when acquiescence becomes requisite in any pressing contingency against which their feelings instinctively revolt; and, in whatever light he considered it, such, in this instance, appeared to be the case with himself, though he could not well account for it.

Margaret Ross was handsome, elegant, accomplished, and rich: what more could be reasonably required?—and from whence originated that inconceivable something, approaching almost to repugnance, by which his heart was actuated on the occasion? Her evil propensities he was yet unacquainted with: of her foibles indeed this could not be said; but human nature is liable to such, and proper management, with increasing years, might effect a beneficial change where confirmed depravity of disposition was presumed to have not footing. Strange then that indifference would not give place to warmer and more appropriate sentiments for a woman to

whose acknowledged preference he was so infinitely indebted! The nature of his feelings seemed to be of that description peculiarly inimical to alteration or amendment, so difficult to define, yet so well expressed by the Poet:—

“I do not like thee, Doctor Fell;
“The reason why I cannot tell—
“But I don’t like thee, Doctor Fell.”

Nevertheless, he entertained no particular predilection for any other woman whatever; and if his bosom did not receive Margaret Ross as its welcome mistress, she had, notwithstanding, no complaint to make of a rival in his affections.

In this manner were affairs situated at Rossgrove, when the accidental appearance of our heroine first convinced the intended bridegroom he had still a heart to dispose of, and fatally removed the veil of indifference from the eyes of the unfortunate youth, which had hitherto somewhat served to support his mind in the ordeal trial he had gone through in the performance of filial duty.

Unconscious, in the first instance, of the real motive that propelled him forward in the path of enquiry that succeeded her discovery, St. Vincent imagined it was merely to gratify the whimsical humour of the friends who accompanied him that he felt stimulated to obtain a further knowledge of the lovely girl they had seen in the gallery.

The incident that procured him a second view of her in the alcove originated in a wish to preserve the nest of a thrush from the depredations of two school-boys, who were preparing to carry off its young inhabitants, when the cries of the parent bird brought him from his party to their relief. It was in returning from the accomplishment of this humane deed by a different path through the shrubbery, that the figure of Stella, in her solitary retreat, unexpectedly caught his view, and fixed him to the spot with sensations of surprise and admiration.

What these might have produced it is difficult to say, had not the voice of his affianced bride roused him from the dangerous reverie to a recollection of his situation, and hurried him from the cause of it.

The investigation into the nature of his feelings that succeeded this unlucky interview, and the conclusion of the self-examination upon which he entered, were equally unfavourable to his peace, and left but little room for individual congratulation on the ostensible score of filial obedience.

Henry St. Vincent, strict in principle and enthusiastic in all his ideas of moral rectitude, was deeply hurt to find that that degree of indifference which had hitherto contributed to preserve him from forming any of those desultory attachments so commonly engaged in by young men in the military line, now no longer existed; and shuddered to reflect that it had vanished in favour of an entire stranger almost at the very moment when he was upon the point of giving his hand at the altar to a woman whom he had publicly avowed as chosen for his future partner through life.

His compliance with the wishes of his parents, their peace, perhaps their very existence, the happiness of his family, his own character in the eyes of the world—all, all was now at stake; and he shrunk from the certain consequences that must inevitably follow the smallest deviation from the narrow and difficult path of propriety.

It was evident indeed that on the manner in which he conducted himself at this critical juncture depended the share of mental ease and respectability he must hope to enjoy hereafter,

and an internal self-approbation, which proves the first of all earthly considerations to a well-regulated mind, and which the world can neither give nor take away.

In a character gifted, like his, with the stronger power of reason, passion is seldom long permitted to act in open opposition to the dictates of morality or honour: it sometimes, however, unfortunately happens that the violence of the one is proportionably great to the energies of the other. St. Vincent fatally experienced this truth, and felt, with deep regret, that the sensibility of his heart had never before been fully called into action, nor placed in a state of warfare with the cooler determinations of judgment.

Restless and unhappy, the sleepless hours of night stole heavily away: but the solitary pillow is often a faithful counsellor. Though astonished to find his feelings so refractory and acute, and shocked to think the influence of the passions could be productive of such an internal struggle, the empire of the latter began to recede before the suggestions of wounded honour; and ere the first dawn of the following morning appeared, a resolution was taken to encounter, with becoming fortitude, the fate necessity had imposed upon him.

The result of this determination was to hasten forward the completion of the task filial affection enjoined him to accomplish, with additional dispatch, and in the interim to avoid every probable chance of any succeeding interviews with her in whom all his secret misery originated.

But though the last-mentioned intention might be, and certainly was, strictly consonant to the rules of propriety and wisdom, it may perhaps be again asked if the wish to accelerate his nuptials with one woman, while his heart was in the possession of another, be equally entitled to come under either of these denominations; or even privileged in any respect whatever to assume the name of an honourable transaction, when interested motives were incontrovertibly the chief, if not sole inducements to the conclusion of a reluctant union with Margaret Ross. With all due submission to the imperial fiat of superior casuists, we think these interrogatories may be answered in a manner highly praiseworthy to Henry St. Vincent.

It has already appeared that his father's credit in the world was at stake before the lady's affections were ascertained to be permanently fixed: now that they were acknowledged to be so, and that she was willing to bestow the means of procuring tranquillity to that father, could any man, possessed of reflection or sensibility, bear to sacrifice the peace of all those who were, or ought to be most dear to him, merely for the sake of indulging a recent and visionary attachment, which, obtained at such a price, would undoubtedly end in bitterness of heart, self-reproach, and probable disappointment, since he remained even ignorant if a reciprocity of sentiment was experienced in his behalf? No: the suppression of his feelings, the victory of gratitude over inclination, were but poor compensations for the wealth and tenderness so generously bestowed upon him: and if that warmth of affection which usually marks a first attachment was unhappily wanting on his side, it became doubly requisite to make up for the deficiency by every act of friendship and attention to her wishes. These, he well knew, could only be gratified by the completion of the meditated union with the person who exclusively possessed her heart; and that heart ought not to suffer for its promptness to furnish him with the power of extricating a much-loved relative from the threatened tempest that still was suspended over his head, and ready to involve every other member of the family in the same ruin.

So mentally reasoned the meritorious and noble-minded St. Vincent. Nevertheless, though the spirit proved willing, the flesh continued weak. The actual performance of the ceremony could alone, therefore, secure him from those returns of irresolution under which he occasionally laboured, in spite of every effort to the contrary; and towards it he constantly looked with mingled sensations of solicitude and reluctance. Henry knew he could safely rely

upon the strength of his principles for conducting him through the allotted path with propriety, when human frailty had no longer any remaining excuse to gloss over the erroneous wanderings of a fluctuating heart, or any illusive pretence for imagining an endless felicity with a different woman from her whose domestic lot seemed henceforth so closely interwoven with his own.

The impatience now manifested by her late philosophical lover for the accomplishment of their union, was received as a flattering proof of increased attachment by the elated Margaret; and his request that an early day might be named for the purpose, acceded to without any very apparent degree of reluctance.

From the moment in which he had reason to suspect the nature of his sentiments for the fair stranger, St. Vincent endeavoured to regulate his actions according to the strictest rules of honour and propriety: if his thoughts, therefore, would sometimes play the truant, and wander, unpermitted by judgment, in the wide and illusive field of imagination, his conduct at least was under the control of prudence, and, barring the accidents of chance, such as he had no cause to be ashamed of.

CHAP. XIV.

“High arbiter
“Chance governs all.”

MILTON.

THOUGH the last interview in the garden of the Hermitage did not serve to lessen the misery and oppression of heart under which Major St. Vincent laboured, yet it was not productive of any alteration in his conduct: the same, or rather a greater degree of caution was observed to regulate all his motions, and in proportion as he became sensible of his danger, he took measures to resist it.

The best intentions, however, may be disappointed, and even rendered nugatory, by the very means taken to ensure their success. The precautions adopted by St. Vincent unfortunately had this effect, and proved the source of fresh mental embarrassments, instead of contributing to remove those which already existed: for had not his solicitude to avoid every subject that led to any knowledge of our heroine's name or situation prevented a disclosure of these two circumstances, it is probable he would have spared himself the fatal indulgence of listening to her melodious voice, and the subsequent pangs that arose from their unexpected meeting in the garden.

Two evenings previous to that fixed upon for his union with Miss Ross, St. Vincent felt his spirits unusually depressed: but inclined to ascribe this circumstance to any cause rather than the right one, he concluded it was occasioned by overheating himself while exercising a vicious horse, which the riding-master had found difficult to manage in the morning. A little fresh air, however, he supposed might be serviceable; and under this impression he stole, unperceived, from a close and crowded drawing-room, in order to take a solitary ramble in the woods.

Nature happened to be in one of those moods most congenial to the contemplative mind—calm, mild, soothing, and serene. Every surrounding object seemed to feel her influence: not a leaf appeared to move; and the solemn stillness that reigned was only interrupted at

intervals by the evening songs of the little feathered choristers, the drowsy hum of the circling beetle, the faint lowing of the distant cattle, or the shrill whistle of the distant labourer, winding along to his humble dwelling, after the daily toils of the field were over, and the sweat of his brow had furnished the homely board with more than the most voluptuous epicure can frequently command—peace, contentment, sound health, and a good appetite.

With folded arms, and eyes bent upon the ground, St. Vincent pensively moved along. The direction he took was different from that leading to the Hermitage: but though his steps retraced not the prohibited quarter, thought, that uncontrollable something, which cannot always be confined to its mental prison, nor uniformly regulated by the force of reason, insensibly pointed to the peaceful and romantic residence of his bosom's queen.

The sensations produced by the wanderings of fancy, however, were now become more sad than violent:—suspense was upon the eve of becoming certainty, and despair, no longer fed by the illusive suggestions of deceitful hope, dwelt upon the approaching ceremony as the stern decree of irremediable necessity, from whence there remained no possibility of escape; while, on the other hand, the conviction of having acted right occasionally dissipated the melancholy reflections which at times absorbed his mind, and spread a glow of self-approbation over every feature, which made him feel that to persevere, is to succeed in well-doing.

Secretly congratulating himself on the small degree of temporary tranquillity which, on the occurrence of this reflection, pervaded his breast, he pursued his walk, too much immersed in contemplations on the past and future, to remark that he had quitted the nearer plantations, and was crossing a park ornamented with extensive and numerous clumps of trees, through which lay a private path, usually taken by foot passengers who resided on the estate of Ross Grove; when his attention was suddenly roused by a shriek of horror, and which was immediately succeeded by a hollow, growling sound, which murmured from the other side of a thicket apparently at no great distance: the first was evidently the voice of distress, the second threatening danger. He darted immediately forward to the spot from whence it appeared to proceed; but ere it could be reached, another exclamation of terror, louder than the former, burst upon his ear, and in the succeeding instant a female figure rushed from behind some trees in the closest quarter of the thicket, and dropped senseless at his feet.

The cause of her alarm soon became obvious.—A furious bull appeared in view: his glaring eyeballs were fixed upon the prostrate being before him, and the half-suppressed bellowing that sullenly issued from his foaming jaws seemed to announce inevitable destruction, had not timely assistance been at hand for her protection.

Major St. Vincent perceived there was not a single moment to be lost: he caught her up in his arms, and lowering her on the other side of the wall that enclosed the park, instantly sprang after her. Fortunately, the circumstance happened near the verge of the field, otherwise the preserved and preserver might equally have suffered.

Thus deprived of his intended prey, the enraged animal abruptly stopped in the middle of his career, and tearing up the earth with his feet, made the park re-echo with the most tremendous roaring; then, moving on at a quicker pace, sometimes snuffing the air, sometimes running with his nose close to the ground, the terrific sound sinking again at intervals to a sullen murmur: she raised her head just as the late object of her fears happened to be sinking from view on the other side of the wall; but apprehensive he was only recoiling to renew the charge with renovated vigour, she cast a frantic glance on the face of her supporter, wildly clasped her arms round his neck, and, heaving a profound sigh, again fainted on his bosom.

The look, the air, the action, graceful even in the midst of distress and terror, now, for the

first time, flashed with recollected anguish on his heart. With an agitated and trembling hand, he put aside her veil and a profusion of auburn ringlets that, displaced and disordered, had hitherto, in the confusion of the moment, concealed her features from particular observation. Montague happened to turn round at this instant, and the name of Stella Bertram burst from his lips, accompanied by an exclamation of surprise, while he fixed the quick eye of scrutinizing enquiry on his unhappy friend, whose countenance but too faithfully portrayed what was passing in his tortured mind.

Yes, it was Stella Bertram whom he had delivered from approaching danger, whom he now pressed to his throbbing bosom, whose arms were entwined round his neck, whose form unresistingly rested where he would gladly have retained it for ever! Again he removed the luxuriant ringlets, which had a second time escaped from the temporary confinement in which they had been placed by the fingers of her ill-starred lover; and while he gazed upon her pallid, but beautiful countenance, the big drops of half-suppressed tenderness slowly coursed down his manly cheeks, and sighs of better regret issued from a breast torn by the conflict of warring passions, where the late erected barrier of fortitude no longer resisted the enemy it was raised to repel, and the struggle between love and honour seemed equally to preponderate, and equally bent on victory.

At length the magnetic name of Margaret Ross, emphatically pronounced by the sympathizing Montague, recalled his wandering thought to some degree of recollection. He saw, with increasing horror, the precipice on which he stood, and the yawning gulf of infamy that opened before him seemed ready prepared to swallow him up, should the nature of his present conduct lead to error or self-desertion.

St. Vincent started from the humiliating contemplation, and heaving another profound sigh, endeavoured to free himself from her clasping hands; but his emotion became too great to accomplish it, and in a frantic voice he called upon Montague to assist in the painful undertaking, if he did not wish to see his miserable friend start into instant madness.

The compassionate observer of this scene no sooner perceived the original cause of all the present mischief disqualified for any further attempts of a similar and dangerous tendency, than he had flown to a neighbouring brook for some water, with which, having filled his helmet, he hastened back, in order to apply it for the relief of the fainting Stella, when the emotion of her agitated supporter particularly attracted his attention, and drew from him the name of his future bride as the most likely means to give his thoughts a different direction.

Captain Montague had not the same motives for caution as the Major: the adventure in the garden of the hermitage had consequently been followed up by a world of information relative to the history of its inhabitants, with the chief part of which St. Vincent was totally unacquainted.

Though from considerations of delicacy the Major had been prevented from recapitulating the utmost extent of those domestic embarrassments which left him only one line of conduct to pursue, they had long been on too intimate a footing with each other for Montague to remain altogether ignorant of the unfortunate predicament in which he was placed;—he knew enough of his affairs to be convinced they were trying and critical: to rouse him from the dangerous empire of the senses was, therefore, the office of friendship; and its exertions to effect that salutary purpose never appeared more necessary than at this moment, when all that seemed most important to his peace and well being as a man of honour, was evidently at stake. Montague's manners and exterior were fashionable; but his principles were just, generous, and humane; and he acted accordingly.

The contents of the helmet, copiously administered, soon began to operate: Stella gradually regained her mental faculties; and her limbs becoming more flexible, Montague gently unclasped her fingers, and taking the place St. Vincent reluctantly resigned, continued to bathe her temples and hands till such time as her recovery seemed nearly accomplished.

While engaged in this humane employment, his companion, with an air of the deepest dejection visible on every feature, silently observed all that was passing, without making the smallest effort to take any further share in it.

It was not long before Stella now found herself able to return home; and, with the most interesting expression of countenance, the timid blush of modesty dying her cheeks with its finest tinge, she gracefully acknowledged her obligations for the protection afforded her.

A deeper shade of blooming colour became obvious as she turned to address her first preserver in a more marked and energetic manner: her eyes, which she scarcely raised to his face, were instantly withdrawn on meeting his, and fixed upon the ground in evident confusion, while every native charm appeared heightened by the celestial indication of gratitude and sensibility which beamed over her lovely countenance.

In elegant and appropriate language she mentioned the sense entertained of his manly exertions in her favour, and spoke of the pleasure it gave her to find he had not been a sufferer himself by his humanity.

The tone of her voice, the quickly-averted look that retired from his more steady gaze, her dignified, yet truly feminine figure, with the thousand attractions which appeared in every word and motion, all sunk deep upon his heart; but though they throbbed there with painful violence, the powers of his tongue seemed suspended, and the short sentence he attempted to utter in return was too inarticulate to be intelligible.

Stella regarded him for a moment in silence: her heart partook of the perturbation with which his was agitated, but the emotion it produced proved less visible. She wished to be alone, however, and, curtsying to the two friends, was proceeding to the public road, when Montague, perceiving his companion make an involuntary movement to accompany her, judiciously stepped forward, and waving his hand with a repulsive motion to St. Vincent, called his dogs from the park, whither they had rambled; he then strung after our heroine, and insisted upon seeing her to the Hermitage, though she endeavoured to save him this additional trouble by every possible argument in her power.

The truth was, as we have noticed above, she eagerly longed for an opportunity of giving vent to her feeling in solitude and freedom. A degree of unusual languor hung upon her spirits: at first she ascribed it to the effects of her recent alarm; but the look of disappointment and chagrin which unconsciously marked her features as she turned her head once or twice on some frivolous pretence, and perceived the still immovable form of St. Vincent, seemed to say his presence would have been tolerated with less reluctance, if necessitated to permit the attendance of a conductor. The observations made by Captain Montague on the occasion presently convinced him there was a deeper cause for her apparent dejection than the ostensible one she chose to assign for it.

CHAP. XV.

“The long-expressed hour is come at last.”

DRYDEN.

OVERWHELMED by a multitude of melancholy reflections which successively rose in his mind, St. Vincent, immoveable and sad, mournfully watched their receding steps, till Stella's white dress was enveloped in the shades of night, and distant forms could no longer be discriminated.

He remained, nevertheless, with his eyes still following the direction they pursued, when the animal that had proved the original cause of this unfortunate interview once more caught his notice. A striking alteration had now taken place in his appearance: no longer the threatening, furious assailant, whose formidable voice made the woods re-echo with his roar, whose approaching motions seemed pregnant with probable destruction; but stunned, bruised, and calmed, he appeared to move with difficulty, and slowly wound his way to the distant plantations. The circumstance of his re-appearance, however, produced an unpleasant effect on the mind of Henry St. Vincent: it again called to his mind every recent occurrence, and rousing him from the temporary torpor into which he had sunk, increased the agitation of the moment. He started from the tree against which he leaned, and throwing himself upon the spot which Stella had quitted, gave way to the anguish that swelled his heart almost to bursting. In a character possessed of so much energy as his, every predominant sensation reigns with despotic sway. To sentiments similar to those by which he was now influenced, the Major had hitherto been a stranger; and his brother officers, when rallying him on the topic of that indifference for which he had long been remarkable, frequently prophesied it would one day be expelled by a passion ardent in proportion to the imputed apathy with which they charged him. This prognostication at length was accomplished:—the preceding deceitful calm had vanished in a wild whirlwind of contending emotions: his best founded and most rational determinations were ineffectually formed: instable and contradictory in his conduct, all the ungovernable impetuosity of a first and sudden attachment seemed to throb through every vein at the most unlucky period it could possibly have chosen to render its victim completely miserable.

From a train of mortifying reflections on the fragile nature of all human resolutions, and the futility of dependance on the best arranged plans of terrestrial wisdom, the wretched St. Vincent was first roused by the sound of an approaching rider. He started up, and saw Colonel Arabin galloping past to the Grove, without discovering his vicinity.

To the Grove he now likewise bent his way; and on entering the house, immediately repaired to his own apartment, where he remained till his thoughts were sufficiently collected to appear below stairs.

It is now time to account for the unexpected *rencontre* with our heroine on the side of the mansion.

About a mile beyond this quarter of the domains lived the family of Mr. Adair, in which were several young people, with whom Stella occasionally associated. She had gone to visit them at an early hour in the morning, and two of the ladies accompanied her back to the park gate, where they separated, without suspecting the danger that awaited her in her solitary, but usual walk through the plantations.

Accustomed to the path, and hitherto in all her excursions unmolested by any similar

occurrence, she had already traversed two thirds of her way, and entered one of the closest thickets, before her formidable neighbour was discovered. What followed has been related in the foregoing pages.

Stella had acquainted Mrs. Bertram with the particulars of the interview that took place between her and the military strangers in the garden. It was supposed some enquiries would naturally be made after her health in the course of the succeeding day; and in this idea they were not mistaken. Captain Montague called in the forenoon; but Mrs. Bertram happened to be absent on a charitable visit to a sick neighbour, by whom she was unexpectedly sent for, and consequently saw him not. Thus circumstanced, it was not the intention of her *protégée* to receive him if he appeared at the Hermitage, and the servant was directed to answer him accordingly.

By some misapprehension of the girl, he was, nevertheless, admitted before Stella could effect her escape from the parlour; but though disappointed in this intention, she found little cause for after regret. Montague, lively and animated as he appeared, was yet uniformly respectful in his conduct and address. His manners were extremely pleasing, his mind well cultivated, and his air that of the gentleman and soldier. Stella, in spite of her utmost caution, could not help being pleased with his company and conversation; she gradually relaxed from the reserve which had marked his first reception; and the hour allotted for his visit elapsed unperceived by either, till the clock striking two warned him of the flight of time, and the necessity of departing, in order to attend the arrangement of some regimental business at Wigton, from whence he had not been able to revisit the Grove till the memorable evening when his critical arrival proved of such material importance to St. Vincent and our heroine in the park of the Nabob.

Mrs. Bertram, when informed of Captain Montague's appearance at the Hermitage, expressed no displeasure on the occasion; it was a mere matter of course visit, and expected to happen: neither did any prohibition pass her lips relative to a repetition of it; for, in fact, she imagined she knew Stella too well to suppose she would take upon her to encourage a step of this kind unsanctioned by her knowledge or approbation. Should such an event, notwithstanding, occur, she secretly determined to give it her decided negative, provided it appeared that their intrusive guest happened to prove the affianced husband of Miss Ross—of whose name, as likewise his companions, they were yet ignorant.

No attempt was made, however, to put her prudent determination in practice, for neither of the gentleman had hitherto returned again to the Hermitage.

The very important service Captain Montague had contributed to render her in the park, led Stella to conclude that her late safeguard might once more be introduced under Mrs. Bertram's roof without any apparent breach of propriety: she consequently yielded to his pressing entreaties for that purpose, and permitted him to follow her into the parlour; but finding no one present besides themselves, Stella, after a slight apology for her absence, went in search of her maternal friend, who by this time was labouring under a considerable degree of anxiety on account of her return from Mr. Adair's at so untimely an hour of the night.

A brief relation of the evening's adventure succeeded the joyful exclamation that hailed her appearance; and Mrs. Bertram, her heart overflowing with the warmest sensations of gratitude, hastened down stairs, to pour forth its effusions for the friendly protection afforded her darling Stella. This she did in a manner and style so far beyond his expectations, that her auditor no longer wondered at the superior accomplishments and polite address of his young companion.

Montague, though naturally of a gay, volatile disposition, which sometimes led him

astray from the narrow path of worldly prudence, was yet possessed of many estimable qualities: his heart was benevolent, his temper good; he abhorred every species of criminal indulgence; and, though frequently involved in difficulties, from a great flow of animal spirits, and an open, generous turn of mind, his were rather the frailties incident to human nature, than the vicious depravities that degrade it below the level of the brute creation.

When removed from the vortex of folly, and no longer instigated by emulation to figure in the fashionable circles of life as a first-rate man of the *ton*, few young persons could acquit themselves better, or appear in a more advantageous light. Accustomed to mix with indiscriminate multitudes, he soon perceived that those with whom he was now in company were of a description infinitely above the common level of the country people, and by no means everyday characters.

Pleased to find himself so agreeably disappointed in the appearance and behaviour of the old lady, and still more captivated by the winning graces of her beautiful ward, whose attractive manners seemed to have acquired additional charms by the encouraging presence of her beloved and parental benefactress, Captain Montague displayed that fund of information and good sense, which he really possessed, with so much propriety, and in terms so respectful, that he speedily gained the favourable opinion of his new acquaintance; who, upon discovering he was not the intended bridegroom, at length acceded to his earnest request of being sometimes permitted to call at the Hermitage: after which he departed, highly delighted with so agreeable an addition to the friendly circle of those to whom he was already introduced in this hospitable quarter of the kingdom.

On the third day from this period, Major St. Vincent became the husband of Margaret Ross.

Lord Fitzhenry sent him an order upon his banker for five thousand pounds, as a marriage present, and the Nabob gave thirty thousand more, as a wedding portion with his daughter.

The first sum, with another to the same amount from his wife's fortune, was forwarded immediately to his father. This seasonable supply set the old gentleman entirely at his ease; and there remained a tolerable surplus after paying off all his own and the most clamorous of the Colonel's creditors.

The capability to perform this act of filial duty gave the first pleasurable sensation to the aching heart of the donor it had long experienced, and encouraged him to persevere in the narrow, but consolatory path of moral rectitude.

Miss Ross, now become Mrs. St. Vincent, and at the height of her wishes, seemed to have nothing further to desire: all nature appeared smiling to her view; and her inflated ideas of individual consequence, swelled into greater magnitude than ever, apparently led her to forget that she was subject, like the rest of her fellow-creatures, to the changes of life and the vicissitudes of an ever-varying world.

CHAP. XVI.

“Helas! vous voyez que je vous suive par-tout!”

THE second week after the conclusion of the ceremony had previously been fixed upon for a grand field-day of the troops at Wigton, where the remainder of the corps, quartered in different parts of the neighbourhood, were ordered to form a junction on the occasion.

As the officers were all under the necessity of attending this assembling of the regiment, it was proposed to include the bride and her female companions amongst the spectators, and after spending the day at Wigton, to bring as many of the gentlemen back with them in the evening as could be spared from their professional duties at the time. This plan was accordingly put in practice; and the party proceeded in high spirits to the appointed rendezvous.

The Adair family, having received intelligence of the approaching military manœuvres, had prevailed upon Mrs. Bertram to indulge them with the company of their favourite Stella, who having never before been present at any exhibition of the kind, formed a thousand ideal sources of gratification in the ardour of a sanguine imagination, which the occurrences of the day were fully expected to realize.

These suppositions were not entirely disappointed. The troops performed their various evolutions in a manner highly honourable to their commander; and the many-headed multitude who witnessed their well-conducted movement, evinced their approbation by repeated plaudits: all went on in due order, and, but for one unlucky accident, the day would have concluded to the universal satisfaction of the numerous groups that lined the field of action.

Some little cloud is ever rising to overshadow the transient gleams of terrestrial enjoyment—some dark shade to envelop the smiling face of innocent pleasure still approaches, with the sombre veil of disappointment in its train. At present, it is true, our knowledge of futurity is limited and imperfect; but a clearer view into its mysterious regions, without the ability to escape from impending evil, would certainly add little to the real happiness of life; and, endowed with the power of prescience, the end of our creation would probably remain unanswered; since, forewarned of error, and enabled to avoid its pernicious effects, man would soar beyond the boundaries of mortality, and vie with superior beings for pre-eminence of station: a consummation, however flattering to the weakness of human vanity, yet surely by no means “devoutly to be wished,” since He who placed us here “with all our imperfections on our heads,” undoubtedly best knows our proper rank in the world; and as “whatever is right,” so ought we to rest contented with the dispensations of an all-wise and omnipotent Ruler, who must be a competent judge of our allotted powers to fill the transitory portion of existence assigned us on earth, and in whom we live, move, and have our being, amidst the wide extended circle of his works below.

Mrs. St. Vincent, however, was not much accustomed to moralize: what of desirable the world possessed, or, at least, the means to command it, had hitherto been in her power; and she apprehended not any material alteration in the system of enjoyment, while the ability of procuring every gratification remained unimpaired: even the long-harboured dislike entertained for the humble, unassuming Stella began to subside into indifference, when an unfortunate circumstance revived it with additional force, and led her to suspect that even unbounded wealth itself was inadequate to render happiness altogether permanent, or terrestrial tranquillity free from occasional interruption.

Some of the events of this memorable field-day were calculated to teach her both these sad truths; but she received the lesson without benefiting by the moral to be drawn from it.

The various manœuvres of a well-conducted mock-fight had now almost terminated, without producing any accidents of a disagreeable nature which not unfrequently take place on similar occasions; and Major St. Vincent having dismounted, and consigned his prancing charger to the care of a servant, was walking arm in arm with a brother officer on one side of the field, when his eye rested on Captain Montague standing before a group of female spectators, with some of whom he appeared engaged in particular conversation.

St. Vincent, whose looks had for some time wandered over the surrounding multitude, unconscious of the propelling motive that dictated the survey, now made an involuntary stop; and a second glance served to convince him his suspicions were well founded, when the idea of Stella Bertram occurred to his mind as the person to whom Montague was directing his discourse. It proved, indeed, as he had surmised:—Stella, dressed with the most elegant simplicity, and seeming more attractive than ever, soon caught his sight.

He gazed upon her for a moment in silence; then bowing, and suppressing a rebellious sigh, moved slowly along the front of the spectators.

Their eyes, however, had again met, but the glance was transient, though felt through every throbbing vein; and the cheeks of Stella were suffused with the deepest shade of crimson, as she modestly returned his passing compliment.

“That is a devilish fine girl, faith!” observed the officer who accompanied him. “Your bow acknowledged her as an acquaintance—cannot you contrive to rank me likewise in the happy number, by a speedy introduction to her notice?”

“The term of what you style acquaintance has not been sufficiently long to authorize such a freedom,” replied St. Vincent, gravely.

His companion was going to re-urge the request, when he was interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. St. Vincent and the ladies of her party, who were crossing the field as the Major spoke.

At this instant a vicious horse broke from the ranks, and, after dismounting his rider, continued to plunge and scamper over the ground with alarming velocity.

The fellow having regained his legs, replaced his fallen helmet, and muttered a few hearty curses on the ungovernable animal, endeavoured to stop his rapid career, and had nearly caught hold of the reins in a corner of the field, when the object of his pursuit suddenly starting back, eluded the accomplishment of his design, and springing past him once more, made the best use of his temporary freedom.

Another soldier now came to the assistance of his comrade, and the terrified spectators perceiving their united efforts only contributed to increase the dangerous rapidity of the horse’s motions, were hastily beginning to disperse, when a partial opening, occasioned by the retreating multitude, presented itself near the spot where Stella and her companion were stationed.

The horse being now hard pushed, and probably seeing no other likely method of effecting an escape from his pursuers, made directly for this gap at a furious rate; and his progress was upon the point of proving decidedly fatal to a lovely little girl, about five years of age, who happened to belong to our heroine’s party, from which she had imperceptibly strayed a few paces distant, when Stella, insensible to those sensations of individual consideration which withheld the nearer relatives of the child from risking their own safety for her preservation, darted from the trembling, agitated group, and at the imminent hazard of her own life, snatched the helpless little creature from approaching destruction.

The panting, astonished animal abruptly sprang aside, and suddenly turning round, was again preparing to bound away, when some of the officers, who had hitherto been occupied in protecting the ladies from the apprehended danger of its approach, rushed forward, and happily secured him before he could make good his retreat.

The field now rang with repeated plaudits on the magnanimity and self-possession thus critically exhibited by Stella, and all crowded round to discover the female who had given so striking a proof of determined courage and innate greatness of mind.

Captain Montague had previously been called away by the quarter-master of his own troop, with whom he was conversing at a distance when the foregoing incident happened.

The burst of noisy applause that now broke forth occasioned a sudden pause in what he was saying; and he hastened to the spot, in order to learn the cause in which it originated. He pushed through the crowd, and discovered Henry St. Vincent supporting a female on the ground, who, herself pale and trembling, was endeavouring to staunch the blood that copiously flowed from the nose of a girl seated on her knee, while the varying emotions which alternately marked her assistant's expressive countenance as he observed a similar stream descend from one of her own temples, betokened the deep interest he took in a circumstance to which she herself, entirely absorbed in her solicitude for the safety of another, paid no manner of attention.

At the distance of a few paces Mrs. St. Vincent was displaying the intense nature of her feelings in a violent fit of hysterics: surrounded, however, by so numerous a train of attendants, that her husband no doubt concluded his aid immaterial on the occasion; for he attempted not to quit his present position, nor even appeared conscious of his lady's indisposition, till Montague, perceiving it was Stella Bertram whom his circling arm supported, and, apprehensive of this circumstance drawing upon him observations on the impropriety of a conduct so unguarded, whispered his disapprobation, and brought him speedily on his feet.

CHAP. XVII.

“Our senses are often the masters of our mind, and reason vainly opposes itself to the liveliness of their impressions.”

GODWIN.

THE surgeon of the regiment now appeared, and effectually stopped the bleeding. That which flowed from the child originated in the blow received by the violence of her fall when first thrown down in the hurry of an attempted, but unsuccessful escape. The wound which had disfigured the face of Stella could not be so easily accounted for, as she was too much agitated by her fears for the little girl to be capable of ascertaining the precise nature of what she suffered herself: it was but slight, however, and probably serviceable in its effects, as the loss of so much blood perhaps saved her, at this critical juncture, from a fainting fit.

No sooner was she raised from the ground, than the voice of applause again resounded through the field.

Hitherto heedless of every occurrence that passed, while her mind was exclusively occupied by the object of her care, our heroine suspected not that for her the re-echoing plaudits were uttered, nor once supposed the exertion of so much intrepidity formed a claim to any uncommon portion of approbation: great, therefore, was her astonishment and consequent confusion when, on raising her head at the noise, she perceived every eye fixed upon her, and heard her name repeated with accompanying expressions of praise and admiration.

Timid and abashed, she shrunk from the oppressive gaze of public notice, and disengaging herself from the supporting arms of the Adairs, retired behind some of the multitude, under pretence of enquiring after the child, who was now under the care of another protector.

Louisa St. Vincent, the favourite sister of the Major, had been invited to Rossgrove on the celebration of her brother's nuptials, and was at this time amongst the number of those who were engaged in the restoration of Mrs. St. Vincent's senses.

Conceiving the Major's presence might possibly prove more conducive to this end than any other circumstance whatever, she hastened to try the experiment by summoning him to her assistance.

At the crisis of her arrival, St. Vincent had only eyes and recollection for one single object in creation; and that object was so far from proving his wife, that he actually remembered not such a connexion existed amongst the number of his late domestic acquisitions.

Though he had resigned his lovely burden to the care of her female friends, he found it yet impossible to quit the spot on which she remained. Absorbed in anxious solicitude for the report of the surgeon, he watched every turn of his countenance, as the latter examined the wound on her temple, with an expression of mute expectation and torturing suspense, that left no room in his bosom for any other subject foreign to the interests that important one created. His eyes and thoughts were still fixed on the spot she had recently occupied, when his sister approached him. Ignorant of any other cause for dejection than the reluctance with which she knew he had commenced his matrimonial career, and flattering herself even that had now vanished before the efforts of reason and the splendid prospects that opened upon his view, Louisa remarked his pensive, unhappy air with a secret pang of anguish she could hardly

suppress. She advanced, however; and fixing her swimming eyes on his face—

“My dearest Henry,” she softly whispered, “recollect yourself! Come,” she added, laying her hand upon his arm as she spoke, “Mrs. St. Vincent is ill—for Heaven’s sake, hasten to her relief, I beseech you!”

The voice and imploring look of this beloved sister vibrated on his heart: he gently pressed her offered hand, and drawing it under his arm, accompanied her whither she pleased to lead him.

Mrs. St. Vincent was upon the recovery when they reached her; but jealousy, resentment, or affectation (perhaps a portion of each) produced another fit. Her husband approached to tender his assistance, and had already taken his seat by her side in the coach, to which she had already been conveyed, when, upon the temporary return of her senses, she repulsed him with a disdainful air, and once more exhibited the modish sensibilities of an injured wife by the extent of her hysterical ravings, which, like the insanity of Hamlet, had matter in its madness.

The astonished husband listened in silence, and at length turned from her with evident marks of disgust.

At this moment the coachman appeared, and beckoning the fellow to approach, he directed him to bring the horses, and proceed with the carriage to the Grove, as his mistress, much indisposed, was at present seated in it, and no doubt anxious to return home.

His mistress instantly countermanded the order, and thanked Heaven she was sufficiently competent to direct her own motions.

The Major bowed, and jumped from the coach, without seeming to notice this spirited proof of intelligence.

Colonel Arabin took him aside, and spoke for some time with much apparent earnestness to his almost silent auditor.

We have elsewhere observed that to a person manly and elegant, St. Vincent united a mind cultivated, energetic, and sensible, with a heart rich in the possession of every grace, every virtue, that could adorn or dignify the human character.

Prior to his unfortunate knowledge of Stella Bertram he was noted for a magnanimity and self-recollection superior to the generality of men of his age; for even at the period of his union with Miss Ross, this young man had but just concluded his twentieth year; notwithstanding which, Lord Fitzhenry’s parliamentary interest, in conjunction with his own personal merit, had advanced him to a rank in his profession which many a gray-headed veteran finds it impossible to attain, unaided by the assisting hand of such powerful auxiliaries.

If any undertaking of difficulty called for his exertions, he was bold and enterprising; if misery, or any description of wretchedness, claimed his commiseration or relief, tenderness and benevolence swelled his bosom, and raised the ready tear into his eye: too open and generous to give offence, he was little apt to be offended; and those individuals who were attached to him from the attractive suavity of his manners (in spite of his natural bias to a serious, but not repulsive turn), and the winning graces of his conversation, in every intercourse of friendship found new and heightened motives to confirm and rivet their esteem. A character of this description, though subject, like all the human race, to occasional error, was yet open to conviction when the ebullitions of passion began to subside, and make way for the cooler dictates of reason.

Colonel Arabin’s judicious arguments, assisted by the rhetoric of Captain Montague, who joined them, produced the desired effect. St. Vincent secretly felt that his wife had some cause for dissatisfaction with his conduct, and the recent displeasure she had given birth to was

speedily turned into another channel: self-reproach filled his breast; he considered himself as the principal culprit, and once more formed the often-repeated resolution of keeping a stricter guard over his actions.

While the two friends of the Major were thus exerting their influence to reestablish tranquillity and good-humour, Mrs. Arabin was no less meritoriously employed in a similar, but more difficult attempt to appease the mind of Mrs. St. Vincent.

Soon after the Major's hasty retreat, she had prevailed upon his angry lady to quit her carriage for the open air, and whispering Louisa to keep the rest of their party at a distance, insensibly led Mrs. St. Vincent to another quarter. She then commenced the chief object of their *tête-à-tête* in the most cautious, yet energetic terms she could devise, for the purpose of effecting a reconciliation, which those who witnessed the late violence of her temper were anxious to accomplish on the Major's account, for whose happiness the whole circle of spectators seemed much interested during the scene that took place in the carriage: the number of these, however, was not great, and, fortunately, all appeared equally eager to bury the transaction in oblivion.

To combat with determined obstinacy, and argue where reason was unattended to by the auditor, was a task that required all Mrs. Arabin's patience and management in the execution. One string alone seemed to vibrate on the wayward Mrs. St. Vincent's feelings: her friend soon perceived she had touched the right key, and pursued the advantage it offered, with some prospect of final success.

The chief part of the foregoing *fracas* had originated in the violence of Mrs. St. Vincent's attachment to her husband, who she imagined had never appeared more strikingly captivating or conspicuously interesting than through the course of this unfortunate day. To think he could bestow the smallest degree of particular attention on any other object than herself, was a supposition not to be borne: that Stella, the long detested Stella, should prove that object, was still more insupportable. Mrs. Arabin ineffectually endeavoured to eradicate this idea, which appeared to have made a strong impression on her mind; and from arguing with her on the topic, proceeded to warn her against pushing her resentment too far, lest her husband's affections should ultimately fall a sacrifice to conjugal discord, and, by rendering her society disagreeable, prove the groundwork of the evil she apprehended, in forcing him to search for that tranquillity elsewhere which his wife refused to afford him at home.

Mrs. St. Vincent started at the bare possibility of an idea which she had, in some measure, already admitted as a bosom guest; and softening by degrees as Mrs. Arabin continued her discourse, she at length melted into tears. A few minutes more completed the triumph of affection over the feelings of wounded pride and apprehended estrangement from a still adored husband.

The temper St. Vincent was now improved favourable to the vanity of his lady, who, though she would rather have submitted to any concession when her passion subsided, than risk the threatened possibility held forth by her friendly monitor, nevertheless received him with an air of haughty condescension, perfectly in character, while secret pleasure throbbed through every pulsation of her heart at so fortunate a termination to an affair which, from the now recollected nature of his looks, and the abrupt manner of his quitting the carriage, seemed to promise a far different and less amicable conclusion.

CHAP. XVIII.

“Let not that devil which undoes your sex,
“That cursed curiosity, seduce you
“To hunt for needless secrets, which neglected
“Shall never hurt your quiet.”

ROWE.

THOUGH no competent apology can properly be offered for such a public display of intemperate violence and unseasonable resentment as Mrs. St. Vincent exhibited on the foregoing occasion, yet justice compels us to acknowledge she had some private and stimulating motives for her conduct; which, though they cannot wholly exculpate, may at least, in a certain degree, extenuate her errors, when the nature of her ungovernable disposition is duly considered.

Stella, it may be remembered, she had taken every precaution to exclude from the Major's knowledge; and she flattered herself this circumstance had been effectually accomplished, till an accidental discovery took place, on the very morning of the field-day, which fatally undeceived her in that respect, and roused to its climax every dormant passion inimical to our heroine, in her malignant bosom.

While dressing for the projected excursion, several smart-looking girls were observed from her window crossing the park. She enquired who they were, and was answered by her maid, after a cursory survey—

“Probably Miss Bertram and some of her friends going to view the troops: though,” added Jenny, in the following moment, “I think she cannot be one of them neither, as she would scarcely venture that way again, after what happened so lately in the park.”

“And pray what did happen in the park?” asked Mrs. St. Vincent, carelessly turning from the window as she spoke.

Jenny expressed much surprise that her master, and her master's friend, Captain Montague, had never thought of mentioning the subject; and proceeded to remedy their negligence by giving a most exaggerated detail of the bull adventure, such as she had received it from common report, in the first instance—in the second, with as many embellishments of her own as rendered it almost a new creation, and that by no means of a description to give any very favourable impression of the part performed by Stella in the drama, even supposing (which, however, was not the case) her mistress had been previously partial to our heroine.

The whole harangue was, indeed, but too well calculated to inflame the irritable temper of Mrs. St. Vincent, already, on every trivial occurrence, sufficiently inclined to a jealous tendency, where any defalcation in the affections of St. Vincent appeared to be implicated. Her agitation was extreme; she trembled with ill-restrained rage, and for some time experienced the most agonizing sensations. At length wounded pride came to her assistance, and began to remind her that the man to whom she had recently given her hand at the altar, owed her too many obligations, and must be too much attached to a woman of her merit, fortune, and personal attraction, to wander, even in idea, from one he had evidently preferred to all the rest of her sex, and sanctioned that preference by the most public, solemn, and binding tie on earth.

Those, therefore, who discovered Stella sitting with her husband and Montague at the park wall, and even, shameless creature! leaning her head upon her supporter's bosom, while his arms encircled her passive form, possibly knew not one of the gentlemen from the other; of course, Captain Montague was far more likely to be the person alluded to than the Major.—Yes,

it must be so! it could not possibly be her dear Henry! The longer she reflected upon it, the less probable it seemed that he would condescend to demean himself by any familiar intercourse with a mere upstart chit—a country girl, whom Mrs. Bertram maintained from charity. Yet still, she thought, he might be sounded at a distance on the subject. The creature was, by some people, supposed to be handsome, and men were apt to be thrown off their guard in such company. Oh! if he could by guilty of—yes, she would speak to him immediately.

After Mrs. St. Vincent had finished this mental soliloquy Jenny was directed to call her master without delay.

Her master had set out an hour ago to join the troops, was the answer returned on Jenny's re-appearance.

"Enquire for Captain Montague then," exclaimed Mrs. St. Vincent, in a voice of impatience: "tell him I must see him directly."

"Captain Montague accompanied my master, Madam."

"He seldom does otherwise, I think," was the reply: "Birds of a feather—"

Mrs. St. Vincent checked her self, and turning to Jenny, asked if she had heard of Stella being visited by any of the officers before or since the park affair.

Jenny answered in the affirmative.

The subsequent question was natural:—

"Was Mr. St. Vincent of the number?"

"It was so reported, Madam."

Mrs. St. Vincent changed colour, swallowed a glass of water, and, after a silence of some length, her dress being completed, joined the party below stairs, with an appearance of mental ease, little in unison with her real feelings.

Predisposed to suspicion by the foregoing communication, she entered her carriage with the secret determination of watching her husband's motions, and endeavouring to discover if he paid any particular attention to the now more than ever detested Stella.

In order to ascertain the actual presence of the latter, and the quarter of the field in which she had taken her station, it was necessary to reconnoitre the spectators; and, for this purpose, she seized an early opportunity of walking round the space where the troops were first assembling from different directions.

As the manœuvres of the day were not yet commenced, some of the officers accompanied the female party in their perambulations. In passing a small group that stood rather more backward than the neighbouring multitude, one of the military gentlemen abruptly exclaimed—

"D—n me! if Montague has not already got acquainted with some of these girls! That fellow is never out of his way!"

They were now nearly fronting those of whom he spoke. Montague seemed deeply engaged in conversation with one of the number, and standing with his back to the Rossgrove party, saw not their approach.

"We must grant him the merit of discernment, however," observed another of the officers, applying his eye to an opera-glass, as he slowly advanced; "for, by my soul, I scarcely ever saw a handsomer face, or more elegant figure than she to whom the happy dog is now addressing himself!"

The ladies involuntarily stopped, to regard the object of an eulogium so pointed, and Mrs. St. Vincent instantly discovered the person of whom she was in search. The flush of indignation spread over her countenance, as she recognised our heroine in the character of Montague's new acquaintance.

“Perhaps” thought she, “his friend the Major may not be far distant: they are noted for being seldom asunder.”

The spontaneous idea had insensibly occurred, and she shuddered lest it should prove but too well authenticated. The event justified her fears; for St. Vincent was discovered making his way through the crowd, as if he had been retiring from that very spot to another quarter of the field.

This was certainly the case; but the cause of it happened to be not exactly what she imagined, for he had passed through the multitude merely to speak with some of the men who were leading about several young horses behind the spectators.

A look of ineffable contempt was now directed to the innocent Stella, who, unconscious of any merited reason for displeasure, respectfully curtsied, as the haughty, supercilious Mrs. St. Vincent stalked disdainfully past her.

To this mark of attentive politeness our heroine received not the smallest similar return from Mrs. St. Vincent. Not such was the case, however, with that lady’s male escort:—the officer who spoke last, being now close to Captain Montague, slipped his arm through that of the latter, and turning him suddenly round, under pretence of speaking on some regimental business, began to discourse with great, though unconnected volubility, while his wandering eyes were perpetually directed to the blushing Stella, who shrunk from the bold stare of curiosity, and retired behind one of the Miss Adairs to avoid his notice.

Meanwhile Louisa St. Vincent having caught a transient glimpse of Montague’s new acquaintance, and eager to procure some intelligence of so lovely a girl, beckoned him and the other gentleman to advance. They bowed to Stella, and obeying the summons, heard Mrs. St. Vincent, as they joined Louisa, reply to an interrogatory on the subject by sarcastically observing that she really knew little about her, but believed she was the person who got a smattering of education while in the humble station of a toad eater to her two sisters, Maria and Emma.

The manner, more than the words, in which this curious piece of information was conveyed, struck the auditors as something extraordinary; and a short pause instantly ensued.

Montague smiled as the lady spoke. It was not a smile of admiration, nor of coincidence of sentiment; neither was it the smile of complaisant credulity, polite approbation, or obsequious applause: no, nothing of the kind appeared: it merely seemed to indicate a superiour, but suppressed degree of information on the subject, well calculated to increase suspicion, if already entertained, or to create it, if otherwise.

Alike ignorant of the previous circumstances which had occurred to discompose her temper, as unconscious of observation at the time, Captain Montague suspected not the effect produced by his smile on the irritable nerves of Mrs. St. Vincent, whose curiosity proved now sufficiently roused to surmount every opposing obstacle in the way of its gratification.

Such was therefore the state of her mind when the incident at the conclusion of the field day took place, and operated to cause a more public display of feelings (equally violent and ill regulated) than, under different circumstances, might possibly have happened.

Perhaps the serious and pensive air of dejection that continued to pervade her husband’s appearance, did not much contribute to the preservation of her late restored cheerfulness; for the small portion of good-humour recently assumed was but of short duration, and once more vanished, like the evanescent impressions of a morning dream, before another event which occurred in the course of the evening.

What that event was, will appear in the succeeding pages, if the reader has patience to peruse them.

CHAP. XIX.

“In ev’ry peevish mood she will upbraid:

“If I but look awry,

“She cries— ‘I’ll not endure it’.”

DRYDEN.

THE female party from Ross Grove dined at the inn with the officers, and the military band played during the time they remained at table.

Stella and her companions happened to be in an adjoining house, from whence, as the tavern windows remained open, the music was heard distinctly.

During the pause in the performance, one of the gentlemen called upon another for a toast.

“I will give you,” replied the latter, “the fair and magnanimous Stella Bertram, provided my right-hand neighbour has no objection.”

“No, faith, none in the world,” was the answer, in a voice she instantly recognized for that of Captain Montague; “But the labourer is worthy of his hire: we will drink her in a bumper, if you please.”

“By my soul, Major, I should be devilishly jealous of that girl, were I in Mrs. St. Vincent’s situation!” exclaimed another speaker, with a loud laugh.

“And why so, Sir?” asked the person to whom he addressed himself, in a stern and serious accent.

“Because you—”

The remainder of the sentence was drowned in the louder voice of Captain Montague, who seemed to be speaking at this instant to some one across the table.

Mrs. Arabin and Mrs. St. Vincent soon after appeared at one of the windows: they seemed to converse in a low, whispering voice—the former, with apparent earnestness, the latter, with an air of sullen dissatisfaction and ill-humour.

Stella, disconcerted by what had previously passed relative to herself, had retired from her first station, likewise at an open window; and being now seated by the mistress of the house at the tea-table, no longer overheard the various topics that were discussed, though near where she was. The Miss Adairs soon followed her example; and good-humoured cheerfulness reigned uninterrupted round the festive board, till the happy group, tempted by the fineness of the evening, departed to take a ramble in the neighbourhood.

A similar proposal had been made by some of the gentlemen at the tavern, in order to visit the ruins of the old castle, which once reared its gloomy walls on the south side of Wigton.

Approaching an angle of the now desolated and gloomy edifice, a voice, singing one of the tunes recently played by the band, caught their attention. The vocal performer seemed to possess great taste, and the strains were warbled in the softest purest style of harmony. St.

Vincent abruptly stopped short in the midst of something he was saying to one of the ladies, while Montague contrived to disengage himself from another, and joined him. The rest of the company proceeded a few steps further, and then paused, to listen, for the next song was continued in a much lower key. At length it totally ceased, and again they advanced forward, eager to discover the hitherto invisible musician.

It proved to be Stella, seated under the shade of some venerable-looking trees which half

concealed the remains of an old Gothic arch, on the mutilated, moss-covered stones of which she and her companions had placed themselves, to observe the setting sun, which was now disappearing with uncommon beauty; while at intervals she entertained them with a repetition of the most favourite airs played by the band, and endeavoured to suit her voice to a fine echo that happened to be in the vicinity.

Rays of the bright luminary rested on her form, and seemed to mark her for something more than human, when, from her elevated situation on the mouldering side of the ruin, the refulgent beams, partially darting through the foliage, first gave her to the view of those already charmed with her melody.

Confused and abashed by the appearance of such unexpected auditors, our heroine's distress was augmented when the recollection passed through her mind, like a flash of lightning, that, under circumstances nearly similar, she had formerly been surprised by Captain Montague and his companion: that companion might now make one of the present number, for their uniform announced their profession. She glanced a hasty eye over the group; but either the distance was yet too great for particular discrimination, or her increasing agitation prevented the discovery of him whose image was but too frequently before her mental vision: the song, however, ceased, and she remained silent. Probably from an idea that their approach had interrupted the harmonious strains which seemed so peculiarly adapted to the hour and surrounding scenery; or, more probably still, from a manoeuvre of Mrs. St. Vincent, who perhaps recognised, or at least suspected the songstress to be her apprehended rival, the party turned into a different direction, and were soon lost to the view of Stella and her companions.

Persuaded there was no further interruption to be feared from this quarter, she was easily prevailed upon to resume her former occupation in the musical way, which was recommenced by giving them that pretty little air composed by Lady Elizabeth Heron, called, "The Banks of Cree," the words written by Mr. Burns, beginning—

"Here is the glen, and here the bower;"

and had just finished the first line of—

"Wilt thou be my dearie?"

by the same charming poet, when a second stop was put to "the woodnote wild," equally unexpected as the former.

One of the officers darted abruptly past a projection of the ruins, and seizing her hand with the easy assured look of an old acquaintance, gaily swore he would be her dearie to all eternity.

Stella started from her seat, and disengaging her hand with an air of cool contempt, began to descend from her elevated station.

Mr. Jones regarded her for a moment in silence, then followed her steps, and with all the well-bred assurance of high life, protested she must positively proceed with her song, otherwise he could not consent to let her depart so abruptly; after which, again seizing her hand, he attempted to reseate her.

Surprised by such an instance of persevering freedom in an entire stranger, Stella recoiled from his touch in visible emotion. A few seconds, however, afforded sufficient leisure for self-recollection, and with an expression of natural dignity, that awed even impertinence into

forbearance, she coolly requested to know by what right he conceived himself entitled to command her emotions.

Stella, "mild as a morning in May," when properly treated, and blessed with a disposition remarkable for its sweetness and urbanity, possessed, nevertheless, a competent portion of spirit to repress the encroachments of vanity, and assert her own free agency on all occasions like the present. She once more haughtily withdrew her hand, and prepared to retire, when the words "Silly, affected girl!" pronounced in a sarcastical accent, caught her ear. She turned hastily round to discover the speaker, and perceived Mrs. St. Vincent observing her with every symptom of displeasure and resentment on her countenance.

Stella regarded her for a moment with a steady look: her spirits rose against so many proofs of unmerited ill-usage, and conscious innocence strengthened her mind with more than usual firmness.

Mrs. St. Vincent was either unable to bear the expressive eye that now seemed to scrutinize her inmost thoughts, but which hitherto had sunk beneath her own overpowering gaze, or wished to conceal her increasing agitation, for she turned her head, under pretence of speaking to one of the ladies who happened to be a few steps behind the rest of the company.

The first object that at this juncture attracted her notice was Major St. Vincent and Captain Montague, conversing in a low voice, while the direction of their eyes apparently pointed to Stella as the chief topic of their conversation.

In a few minutes they separated: St. Vincent advanced to join his lady, and Montague soon after accosted Stella, whose countenance spoke a very different reception from that which his brother officer had lately experienced. Inattentive to some casual observation of her husband's, who was now at her side, Mrs. St. Vincent emphatically asked one of the ladies if she had ever seen a more affected or forward person than the country girl with whom Captain Montague appeared on so familiar a footing of intimacy.

This interrogatory was evidently intended for more than her to whom it seemed ostensibly addressed: Montague heard it, and cast a glance at the speaker sufficiently intelligent to convince her the source from whence it originated was not totally unknown to him.

Mrs. St. Vincent's face was in a glow: she stooped, to conceal the tell-tale emotion, under pretence of disentangling her petticoat from a briar, and, in the meantime, repeated her question, which yet remained unanswered.

The lady hesitated, and gave an evasive reply.

Louisa St. Vincent prevented another repetition of the query, by eagerly protesting she could not agree with her sister; for, in her humble judgment, the young woman was beauty, sweetness, and unassuming modesty personified.

"Pray, Henry," she continued, looking up at her brother, "is she not the lovely, generous girl, whose well-merited applause resounded through the field this morning, and the same who was toasted at the mess? I was so agitated by Mrs. St. Vincent's indisposition, when she so generously exerted herself in behalf of the child, that my thoughts were entirely occupied, and left me no leisure to bestow my attention on any thing less interesting; but if I rightly recollect, you were an eye-witness to her magnanimity, and can inform me if my present conjecture be well founded."

"No doubt he can," said Mrs. St. Vincent, with peculiar emphasis, glancing a look of particular meaning at her husband as she spitefully uttered the laconic sentence.

Of the insinuation conveyed in these few words, he took not the smallest notice, but turning to his sister, with an air of affected unconcern, briefly answered in the affirmative, and

almost instantly began another topic of conversation.

We are sometimes apt to overdo, where to underdo is merely intended: it was the case at this juncture: the tone of the Major's voice, his abrupt reply, and immediate change of subject, passed not unheeded by Mrs. St. Vincent; again she cast a quick penetrating glance on his face, then whispered some imagined jest to one of the party on the other side, and burst into a hysterical fit of laughter.

Major St. Vincent either chose not to notice the wit of his fair and perverse helpmate, or remarked her conduct with the utmost indifference.

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CHAP. XX.

“Form’d to delight, to love, and to persuade,
“Impassive spirits and angelic natures
“Might have been charm’d like yielding human weakness,
“Stoop’d from their heav’n, and listen’d to his talking.”

ROWE.

MEANWHILE Captain Montague had been occupied in describing various parts of the ruins to the Miss Adairs and his friend Stella, who, ever eager to obtain every degree of information, found her self not only instructed by the communication, but likewise highly gratified by such an instance of his inclination to oblige her, at a period too when one of her own sex, whom she had never intentionally offended, seemed sedulously watchful to shew her every make of disrespect and unqualified contempt in her power. Sensible of the debt due to his well-timed humanity, which appeared particularly calculated to do away the bad impression Mrs. St. Vincent wished to give of her character and situation in life, our heroine listened to his discourse with visible complacency, while gratitude displayed itself in every intelligent feature.

Mr. Jones, the now crest-fallen beau, who had recently taken the office of her director in the musical line, and for some time been ineffectually endeavouring to obtain her notice by a few commonplace remarks on the topic of discussion, convinced at length of the inutility of further perseverance, and disconcerted by the repeated rebuffs he experienced, finally returned to his party, swearing the little virago had the spirit of an Emperor in her composition, though to Montague she appeared sufficiently condescending, else he was devilishly mistaken: Stella harboured no sentiments beyond the actual limits of friendly regard from Captain Montague, neither did Captain Montague experience any warmer sensation for Stella Bertram.

Will the same assertion hold good respecting her opinion of Henry St. Vincent? Truth has previously forced us to answer this question in the negative. Yet Stella was innocent of evil intention; for she knew not the real situation of him whose image occupied the secret recesses of her heart; neither was the true state of that heart, or the whole extent of its feelings, as yet fully ascertained by our young and beautiful heroine.

Previous to the commencement of the field-day the name of St. Vincent had never reached her; Montague merely mentioned him by the appellation of his friend, when any casual recurrence to preceding events was occasionally introduced. Mrs. Bertram imagined her *protégée* chiefly indebted to the Captain for her critical preservation from danger; and Stella felt too much agitated and confused, on every retrospection of the past in which the Major was so deeply implicated, to be desirous of dwelling on his particular share in the transactions which had taken place; though her gratitude was by no means withheld from evincing itself in general expressions of acknowledgment.

Thus, from a strange coincidence of circumstances, she suspected not that he who gradually began to occupy her secret thoughts, over which he had already imperceptibly acquired a considerable degree of influence before she was aware of the dangerous intruder, happened to be the destined husband of the proud and supercilious Miss Ross; from whose repulsive manners she shrunk with disgust, and from whom the most unfeeling humiliation and contempt had continually been her portion.

Another circumstance contributed to her ignorance in this respect. St. Vincent had never

called at the Hermitage either by himself or in company with Captain Montague; Stella, therefore, had not met with him, but now and then by accident; and those meetings, though of a nature sufficiently distressing to leave an indelible impression on her own mind, seemed to be either entirely obliterated from his, or herself considered in too insignificant a point of view to be judged worthy of any further attention.

She felt piqued as this idea arose in her mind, and fancied a confirmation of it visible in the conduct of Captain Montague, who apparently avoided every subject which might lead to any introduction of the one, in which she was secretly most interested.

Wounded pride therefore proved, for one, more powerful than curiosity in a female bosom, and instigated our heroine to follow the example thus set by others, of refraining from all enquiry on the occasion.

But Stella, though she might, in some measure, agree with the Poet in thinking that—

“Where ignorance is bliss,
“’Tis folly to be wise,”

was not long permitted to enjoy this negative state of happiness.

Major St. Vincent, always a fine figure, was particularly so on horseback; easy, graceful, commanding, he appeared superior to all who were near him:

“As if an angel dropp’d down from the clouds,
“To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,
“And witch the world with noble horsemanship.”

With no less management St. Vincent seemed to direct the spirited motions of a high-mettled charger during the manœuvres of the memorable field-day, in the course of which many admiring plaudits were justly bestowed on his manly, elegant form, and martial appearance, by the gazing spectators, who followed him with their eyes wherever he moved.

To these marks of approbation the heart of our heroine beat responsive; for under the glittering helmet and waving plume, the cherished, but secret object of her daily meditations and midnight dreams was speedily recognised. But by how bitter a pang was this recognition accompanied, when the fatal discovery that he was already the husband of another, succeeded it!

Sickenings at the idea, and now eager to quit the field, the entreaties of her friends alone prevailed to retrain her from retiring. Her spirits, however, were totally fled; she felt no longer amused or interested by the gay scenes passing before her—all nature seemed suddenly obscured to her view; till the dangerous situation of the little girl recalled her thoughts from individual considerations to the more active exertions of humanity, and by changing the channel of gloomy reflection, led her to adopt the semblance of cheerfulness, in order to avoid the jests of her companions, who, ignorant of the officer’s name in whose arms she had been supported when administering relief to the child, already insinuated more than common motives of compassion stimulated his attention to her then situation.

Stella, delicate in her ideas of propriety, and strictly adhering in her own conduct to the notions she entertained of it, where the female character was in any degree implicated, started at this bare surmise, and endeavoured not to confirm it by any inadvertency on her side, with an anxiety and solicitude that increased their desire to tease her, and served to confirm the former suspicions of Captain Montague, who accidentally overheard something said on the subject as he

mingled in the crowd where she stood.

Hitherto at a loss to define the precise nature of those sentiments which had caused her so many distressing moments, Stella now imagined the discovery accomplished. It originated, she supposed, in a presentiment of the unhappiness that awaited her chief benefactor in an union with the haughty daughter of the Nabob; and a sigh of regret followed the thought, that he to whom she owed so many obligations should prove the husband of a woman apparently possessing a mind and manners so unlike his own.

Stella fancied the sigh she heaved was due to the fate of St. Vincent; but it proceeded from a yet nearer source of interest; and while a silent tear dropped on the conviction that his peace was for ever wrecked, his tranquillity fled for ever, the liquid witness of her feelings flowed alike from one troubled source of anguish, and no less evinced her sympathetic solicitude for his future destiny, than the sad, the hopeless certainty that disappointed and probable wretchedness must henceforth be the inmate of her own bosom. The mandate, however, was sealed—the irrevocable ceremony past: why then should she weakly permit her thoughts to dwell on the idea of a man with whom, and his concerns, she was totally unconnected—and a married man, too? Was this mental debility the sole fruit of Mrs. Bertram's advice, of Miss Sommer's instructions?

A brighter red suffused our heroine's lovely cheek, as she asked herself the humiliating question. She raised her eyes to heaven, and again bent them on the ground, as if oppressed by a sense of her own unworthiness. At length the proud, the internal conviction of conscious innocence seemed to invigorate every faculty of her soul, and checked any dormant inclination to commiserate the lot of one whose selfish heart could lead him to make such an election—an election that could only be the offspring of sordid avarice and equally inimical to every prospect of present felicity, as destructive of all future enjoyment through life.

Stella wondered what evil spirit had lately influenced her ideas, and taught them to wander from the tranquil path in which they had hitherto held their even way. Another circumstance likewise puzzled her to account for:—why should Major St. Vincent create any emotion in her breast?—why was her face covered with confusion on his casual appearance—he who had never, but from the natural impulse of humanity, paid her the smallest degree of attention, and apparently regarded her, on all other occasions, in the most insignificant point of view? or wherefore did her tongue hesitate in the performance of its office, when he became the subject of conversation? Was she situated in the same predicament with Captain Montague? Certainly not; on the contrary, unembarrassed, and perfectly at her ease, nothing of the kind was ever experienced in his company.

All this appeared unintelligible to the yet partially enlightened Stella Bertram; and gladly would she have applied for a solution of the enigma to the superior wisdom of her maternal friend, had not some strange restraining sensation withheld her from entering on the painful topic.

Major St. Vincent, however, *was married*; and in these two little words dwelt a talisman sufficiently potent to drive, or to attempt driving him from her thoughts. In a well-regulated mind, early imbued with the principles of religion and moral integrity, virtuous exertions are generally attended with ultimate success; and though its extent may not be altogether consonant to our wishes, we are, nevertheless, certain to derive no small benefit from the reflection, that a governing sense of duty, and a conscientious adherence to what our inward monitor prescribes as the right line of conduct, prove the chief motives of our actions, and the unerring guides by which we direct our fragile steps from the thorny and lacerating path of self-reproach, or galling

retrospection.

Our heroine's comprehensive mind glanced a quick, but reflective eye over these considerations; and she instantly formed a resolution to adopt them as a preservation against the illusive deception of a too tender heart.

This determination was not like that formerly adopted by the then Miss Ross, on the abrupt departure of her supposed admirer, resentment claimed no share in it, and the emotions of wounded pride subsided in the more rational recollection of the deficiency of her title to any other mode of conduct from a man who had never, in the smallest instance, given her the most distant cause to imagine he entertained any particular prepossession in her favour; but, on the contrary, evinced his total indifference towards her by the strongest proof he could possibly give—his marriage with another woman!

The longer these reflections were dwelt upon, the more she became astonished at the self-deception which had been permitted to take possession of her mind, and her resolution proportionably strengthened to resist its future progress.

CHAP. XXI.

“I’ll grow proud,
“As gentle spirits still are apt to do
“When cruel slight or chilling scorn falls on them.”

MISS H. MORE.

IN pursuance of this prudent intention, Stella yielded to the new-formed wish which at this moment occupied her thoughts, and, once more inspired by the innocent gayety of her friends, became apparently gay in her turn; but though this strain of cheerfulness proved rather an effort of the mind than the spontaneous effusions of a heart at ease, neither the company, nor the time, in which it was displayed, was calculated for nice discrimination, or adequate to ascertain its genuine source.

Happy to find herself relieved from insinuations that wounded her self-consequences, and jarred on those secret feelings which she wished to suppress, her spirits, now gradually tranquillized, seemed to have returned to their usual channel; and during a ramble round the ruins of the Castle, she had readily complied with the request of her companions, who were desirous of hearing her sing in that particular quarter of the desolated fabric where the echo reverberated most powerfully.

The unexpected appearance of Mrs. St. Vincent and her friends put an end to this innocent amusement, without compensating for the interruption by substituting any thing as an equivalent in its place. Stella imagined that lady viewed her with an air of more than usual haughtiness, and, provoked by the unceremonious address of the military hero, who seemed to think, like too many of his cloth, that scarlet and cockade authorized any degree of impertinence in country quarters, a conscious feeling of mental superiority, for the first time, inspired her with a spirit of retaliation, that enabled her to look the insolence of wealth and the imbecility of intellect in the face with a steady eye, which appeared to be tolerably understood by those on whom it rested.

This day, the dawn of which was ushered in by expected scenes of pleasure to the inhabitants of Rossgrove and the Hermitage, had finally been productive of chagrin to each of the parties. Mrs. St. Vincent, who, under the semblance of careless indifference, watched every turn of her husband’s countenance, and regulated the whole of her observations by the standard of a jaundiced imagination, fancied she saw a thousand additional causes for dissatisfaction in the conduct of the Major and Captain Montague. The attentions paid by the latter to our heroine she had had several opportunities of remarking in the course of the day: these, however, appeared more the result of good-humoured politeness than any sentiment of a warmer description; and the expression of pleasure that illumined their features, when conversing with each other, was of too open, too unembarrassed a nature, to justify the idea of a particular attachment in either of the respective parties. St. Vincent’s manner and looks were totally different; it was impossible, she mentally said, to overlook this circumstance: he betrayed himself on every occasion where the little presumptuous gypsy was in question.—Mrs. Arabin spoke of his humanity being the sole instigation to his conduct in the earlier part of the day: but she would be glad to know how that apology could possibly be accepted for what passed during the time they spent in the environs of the old Castle, where his behaviour proved equally reprehensible and particular, if it might be judged of by the nature of his looks, and that air of

suspicious caution which is seldom or ever adopted without the internal conviction of something wrong that requires concealment; and never were these appearances more obvious than during the period of dinner and at the old ruins. She saw his defalcation from propensity, not to give it a worse name, in every word and action; while the striking intimacy existing between him and Montague warranted the conclusion that the latter was the convenient confidant of the former, and his willing representative on occasions where he durst not openly shew the insufferable depravity of his own morals. Under an impression so unfavourable to Montague, it cannot be wondered at if her dislike to that gentleman soon equalled the hatred she bore the innocent and unoffending Stella.

The incidents of this eventful day may be considered as an epitome of our progress through life. Replete with fallacious prospects of enjoyment, brilliant hopes and expected pleasure break upon our view in the commencement of our career, and the sparkling eye of youth dwells delighted on the fascinating images which present themselves in the self-created mirror. Reverse the illusive picture, and see what follows. Disappointment, chagrin, sorrow, and despair accompany the decline of life, at the commencement of which the accomplishment of every wish, the indulgence of every gratification, were rashly supposed attainable. But let not the wisdom or goodness of Providence be arraigned, because this best of all possible worlds happens not to be formed exactly to suit the various tastes of those who inhabit it: our task is to conduct ourselves properly through the part assigned us, and to leave the result of the whole to a high and omnipotent Director.

Mrs. St. Vincent was seldom in a happy disposition of mind when the spirit of moralizing seized her: reflection, however, seemed not to be her *fort*; unless when some ideal necessity of an unpleasant description drove her to adopt it, as a last resource, under the pressure of apprehended evils, which perhaps solely originated in the chimeras of a distempered fancy, it was never admitted; and when admitted, scarcely ever productive of any permanent or beneficial effects.

She now returned home, extremely out of temper, of which her husband appeared evidently the cause, for, in spite of every wise determination, the irritable nature of her disposition proved too powerful for total suppression.

The mind of Major St. Vincent was not more at ease, though differently affected; and there were moments when he was mentally forced to acknowledge that the sacrifice made to parental tranquillity was infinitely greater than previous appearances rendered probable.

As for poor Stella, that degree of fortitude recently evinced, and which, in the ardor of youth and sanguine expectation, was considered as a fixed principle of action, gradually disappeared; her spirits failed her, her look became dejected, and it soon cost her no small exertion to retain the bare semblance of composure during the remainder of her short visit in Wigton. On the succeeding evening she bade her friends at that place farewell, and, accompanied by the Miss Adairs, they took the road to their respective habitations.

These young ladies, one excepted, parted from her at a small distance from their own house; Charlotte persisted in seeing her a little beyond it.

The evening was far advanced before they reached the last plantation that lay nearest the Hermitage; she insisted therefore that her companion should either return immediately, or, proceeding onward, remain with her till the following morning.

To comply with the latter request happened not to be in her power at the present juncture; of course, they parted; and Stella, who had hitherto restrained her tears with difficulty, now unobserved and alone, permitted them to flow without interruption.

Apprehensive of alarming Mrs. Bertram by the traces of sorrow still visible on her pallid cheeks, though the first gush of solitary anguish had somewhat subsided; and solicitous to conceal the real state of her heart from that worthy friend, before whom she could not muster sufficient courage to assign any satisfactory cause for her uneasiness, far less disclose the genuine source of it, she turned from the path leading directly to the door, and opening a small gate, of which she always kept a key, entered a covered walk on the opposite side of the garden, that wound in a romantic direction to the grotto.

The conflict of internal anguish, more than the fatigue arising from her late excursion, insensibly overpowered the agitated frame of our heroine. Her first intention was, to reach the grotto, and remain there for a few minutes, till the acquisition of more composure enabled her to meet the enquiring eye of Mrs. Bertram; but, weak and weary, she threw herself on one of the stone seats near the bottom of the ascent, and resting her head on her hand, sunk into a profound reverie.

The elegant figure of Henry St. Vincent, manly, dignified, and graceful still returned with fatal perseverance, and swam before her mental vision—that St. Vincent, whose intrusive image, sad and recent experience had now taught her, was, alas! become too stationary to be easily eradicated from her heart!

“Wretch!” cried the weeping Stella to herself, “is he not a married man—the husband of Mrs. St. Vincent? Oh why can I longer doubt the nature of my feelings? Why have the events of this ill-omened day opened so culpable a source of self-reproach and misery? Why was I not sooner made acquainted with his engagements at the Grove? But fool—presumptuous fool, that I am! what difference could that information have made in my situation? Would a man in his rank of life have bestowed a thought upon one in mine? Ah, no, no! Now indeed I bitterly feel the justice of Miss Ro—I mean Mrs. St. Vincent’s animadversions on the impropriety of that superior mode of education I received under her father’s roof. Why was I taken out of the humble station allotted me? Why were notions instilled into my young and ductile, but too aspiring mind, calculated to remove the distinctions of birth, and mist of ignorance, and to give the reasoning faculties a wider range to ascertain the extent of their original powers?

But, good Heavens! am I indeed become so ungrateful a being as to dare arraign the wisdom of those for whose indulgent kindness I ought to feel so infinitely indebted? Have not the favours heaped on me, now repining, enabled me to rise above the malice of Fortune, and bestowed that source of intellectual enjoyment which the world cannot take away, and which, by the mental equality it creates, gives the lowly inhabitant of the cottage a compensation for wealth, sometimes the only advantage possessed by those who vainly conceive themselves pre-eminently exalted above their fellow-creatures?

“Ah! but,” continued Stella, “has not that very circumstance proved the bane of my peace? Yes, I have already said it has! In this one individual instance, better had it been for me had I remained in the rank I was originally destined to fill: then, perhaps, I had never raised my thoughts beyond their proper limits, never formed my estimate of happiness by objects too exalted for attainment.—And yet, riches excepted, let me ask myself in what I am so much inferior to the uninformed, supercilious Mrs. St. Vincent. Humility would probably answer, ‘In every thing;’ but Justice gives a different decision.

“Yes, conscious worth whispers a proud superiority in mental endowments, which at times raises this swelling heart above the low-minded indignities of the unfeeling, capricious Mrs. St. Vincent! Let me then retain this enviable distinction by continuing to respect myself, by remembering I have not, nor ever can have, any legal claim upon the husband of another.—But

is it indeed possible? Have I given way to such an idea, even for a single moment? Unworthy Stella! weak, erring girl! hasten to regain thy own approbation by a less reprehensible mode of proceeding; endeavour to exclude from thy thoughts the fatal cause of the evil; once more try to persevere in well-doing, and the merit of good intentions will at least be thine.”

The sincerity of our heroine’s determination on this subject was speedily ascertained in a manner she little expected at the time.

END OF VOL. I.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

STELLA OF THE NORTH.

A NOVEL.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

STELLA OF THE NORTH,
OR THE
FOUNDLING OF THE SHIP.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF ADELAIDE DE NARBONNE, &c.

“Virtue can itself advance
“To what the fav’rite fools of chance
 “By fortune seem’d design’d;
“Virtue can gain the odds of fate,
“And from itself shake off the weight
 “Upon th’ unworthy mind.”

PARNELL.

VOL. II.

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STELLA

OF THE

NORTH.

“Feeling does not stay to calculate with weights and balance the importance and magnitude of every object that excites it: it flows impetuously from the heart, without consulting the cooler responses of the understanding.”

GODWIN.

A TEMPORARY pause succeeded these reflections, which seemed to have somewhat tranquillized her late perturbed mind: she rose, and slowly ascending the steps, proceeded to complete its entire recovery, by continuing the task of self-examination a few minutes longer in the grotto.

Stella had already proved the fallacy of hope and the disappointment of hasty conclusions on this subject: success, however, appeared still within her reach; and with the short-sighted ardour of youthful impetuosity, the same system of reformation was once more adopted, while the bare possibility of an unsuccessful termination to the attempt was not permitted to damp expectation, or reckoned amongst other probable chances in the catalogue of human accidents.

On entering her favourite retirement, Stella placed herself amongst the flowering shrubs in the window, and pensively marked the last rays of the sun glittering on the distant bosom of the ocean. A passing shadow momentarily caught her eye; but the woodbine and sweetbriar that hung in festoons on the exterior side, prevented her from discovering by what it was produced. After leaning ineffectually forward for that purpose, she resumed her contemplative posture, and the incident was presently forgotten in reflections of a more interesting nature.

The door had been left unlatched on her entrance; it was now gradually pushed open, and a very beautiful spaniel appeared, whose motions indicated the loss of his master, for he traced the floor repeatedly with his nose to the ground, and then approaching the window, stopped before Stella, looked up in her face, wagged his tail, and seemed evidently to court particular attention by the fawning caresses and playful gambols with which he strove to attract her notice.

“Some sportsman from the grove is probably on his way home,” thought Stella; “perhaps Captain Montague; if so, he may now be in the Hermitage with Mrs. Bertram. But,” continued she, stroking the dog’s head while she spoke, “you have got a collar I perceive; by it I shall soon discover if I am right in my supposition.”

She bent downwards to examine the inscription, and the name of Major St. Vincent met her view! The truant heart of our heroine palpitated at the sight. The animal was invited to place himself on a part of the seat she occupied: she saw him now to greater advantage: he seemed the most beautiful creature of his species in the world; she caressed him with ardour, and felt gratified by the readiness and patience he evinced to remain with his head and his two forefeet resting upon her knee.

The name so unexpectedly discovered, and the spot where she was now seated, recalled to her remembrance the accidental interview that had formerly taken place in the vicinity. It might almost be considered as the first she had had with Montague or his friend; for the short

space the latter appeared to her in the shrubbery, was not of a nature to come under that denomination.

The unruffled ease of mind—the thoughtless gaiety of heart—the happy indifference respecting futurity, which then pervaded her bosom, when, blithe as the soaring lark, she carolled forth the note of harmony and content, officiously rose to her view, and presenting the sad contrast between past and present sensations, filled her breast with all the thousand melancholy images which retrospection ever produces on similar occasions; but the conscious existence of self-reproach withheld the powers of articulation from venting the poignant feelings of regret in words, and once more deluged her eyes in tears. The spaniel looked up, as if sympathizing in her sorrows, and placing his foot upon her shoulder, attempted to lick her cheek.

Stella now recovered the power of speech: she gently removed his foot, momentarily gazed upon him with an expression of the most interesting tenderness, and suddenly clasping her arms round the animal, gave way to a still more violent burst of anguish, exclaiming, as the drops chased each other down her face—

“Oh Heavens! this is too—too much indeed!—Would to God I had expired at the hour of my birth!—would to God I had been permitted to rest in my watery cradle!—then would my lacerated heart have escaped this continual warfare between prudence and inclination; then no even unintentional dereliction of principle would have torn it with perpetual remorse! Oh St. Vincent!—beloved St. Vincent! fatal to me was the moment that first presented you to my view; fatal the ill-starred night that conducted you to—”

She was proceeding in broken sentences to discharge some of the secret burthen that oppressed her saddened heart, when a profound sigh was heard from the door, to which her back happened to be turned: she started, and looking hastily round, perceived the shadow of a person slowly retreating from the threshold.

At this instant the dog gave a sudden bark, expressive of pleasure, and leaping from his resting place, sprung to the entrance.

Stella intuitively followed him in trembling emotion. The door was yet but half open; she laid her hand on the lock, but presently withdrew it, and shrunk from advancing upon hearing the sound of a voice that vibrated through her bosom.

A timid glance discovered Major St. Vincent leaning against a projection of the rock. The dog was placed in his arms, and he caressed it with the fondest expressions of affection.

“Oh happy—happy little animal!” he softly articulated, “what would I not give to be in thy enviable situation!—Free, unfettered, at liberty to follow the unchangeable dictates of inclination!—Oh God!” he continued, abruptly placing the dog on the ground, and striking his forehead in a paroxysm of despair, “why was I preordained to this late discovery of additional wretchedness? To be miserable alone was at least some consolation: even that solitary comfort is now removed; and, miserable myself, I am likewise doomed to constitute the misery of her, who, in spite of every tie, human or divine, is dearer to me than the air I breathe, than the ruddy drops that visit my sad heart!”

The dog continued to leap round him while he spoke, and at length bounded back to the grotto.

St. Vincent, agitated and unhappy, stood irresolute whether to advance or remain where he was. He raised his eyes to the door: Juba had pushed it further open in the hurry of his entrance, and Stella appeared supporting herself against the wall. Her face was covered from observation; but deep and convulsive sighs marked the acute nature of the sensations which now shook her frame to agony, and produced an effect no less painful on the feelings of the Major.

Propelled by the impulse of the moment, St. Vincent's former resolutions no longer fluctuated on the verge of propriety—they instantly and entirely disappeared from view; he sprung forward, and catching hold of the hand that hung almost lifeless by her side, pressed it to his lips and heart before she was aware of his intention.

Stella started from a reverie replete with anguish, and suddenly raising her head, gazed upon him for a moment with a look in which confusion and tenderness seemed struggling for pre-eminence. The deep shade of melancholy it spread over the face of St. Vincent was too legibly written on his fine features to be easily mistaken. Though the period for observation was short and transient, our heroine saw enough to recall her wandering senses from the dangerous direction they had taken: she withdrew her hand, and was hastily advancing to the door without uttering a syllable, when her visitor, in a voice of the most persuasive entreaty, implored her to hear him only for five minutes.

"No! not for one, Sir!" replied Stella, in a tremulous voice; "I have already heard too much!"

"Miss Bertram," cried St. Vincent, in a solemn accent, "your peace, your honour are not, cannot be dearer to yourself than they are to me; nor would I injure you, in any respect, for the world! To bury in my own bosom the secret anguish that has long corroded it, has hitherto been the stern, the unalterable purpose of my soul. In that resolution I should have persevered—in that resolution probably died, had not the disclosure—the fatal disclosure I will call it, of your sentiments in my favour deprived me of all self-command, and—"

He was proceeding, when his trembling auditor, in spite of her recent hurry to retire, still remained stationary, unconscious of the magnetic influence that retained her steps, again interrupted him by uttering exclamations against her own folly, and the most pathetic entreaties to forget the imprudence of which she had been guilty.—"Never more, Sir," added she, "let me see you here!—any further intrusions on your side can only be regarded in the light of an insult by me: and, be assured, however weak or unguarded you may think yourself entitled to imagine her whose sentiments are now supposed known to you, those principles of which she is nevertheless possessed, will ever protect her from failing in that respect which is due to her own character, and teach her to turn with virtuous abhorrence from the bare idea of listening to a married man on any subject that will not bear the broad glare of day, and the approving ear of an impartial world! Adieu, Sir!—we meet no more, or only meet as strangers!"

"Meet no more!" repeated St. Vincent, in a voice of unrestrained anguish. "Heavenly Powers! what a sentence! But I submit to the imperious *fiat* of necessity;—I know my fate is consummated, and my destiny irretrievable! You shall therefore be obeyed: yet not unconditionally, for my bursting heart pants after comfort, however inadequate the allotted portion may prove to assuage its sorrows. Stella, then—dear, angelic Stella! one word—only one word more, I beseech you!—Quit me not without affording the much-valued gratification of knowing you will not be a sufferer on the occasion.—Say you will endeavour to be happy, whatever becomes of the wretched St. Vincent! Oh give me this satisfaction before we part for ever! Will you not speak to me!—not accord the poor indulgence of one consolatory sentence? Inhuman Stella! you commiserate not the woes you inflict; your heart is alike callous to pity, as your determinations are inflexibly severe!"

He grasped her reluctant hand, of which he was again in possession, in order to prevent her farther retreat; and once more rivetted the imploring eye of misery on her varying and agitated countenance, as he stopped her on the first steps that led from the grotto.

CHAP. II.

“Aimas-tu comme moi?—Sous mes maux je succombe.”

STELLA, thus in a manner forcibly detained, felt at once the necessity of some exertion to liberate herself from a situation so trying and painful. She attempted to speak, but distress and confusion held her silent, and the inarticulate sentence died on her lips before it reached his ear.

Abashed and disconcerted by the state of her feelings, and the situation to which she was reduced, she covered her face, and, in spite of every endeavour to suppress her emotion, wept aloud.

Once more inconceivably affected, and no longer able to restrain the impulsive violence of those agonizing reflections that tumultuously throbbed in his bosom, he snatched her abruptly to his heart, and as abruptly relinquishing his hold, dropped on one knee before her, in order to deprecate the resentment which evidently flushed her late pallid cheeks, and darted from eyes yet humid with sensations of a very different description.

At this interesting moment a rustling noise was heard amongst the underwood near the grotto, and immediately a person rushed from behind some of the neighbouring bushes, who suddenly turning into the adjoining plantation, disappeared amid the gloom of the overshadowing foliage, now considerably deepened by the sombre tint of retiring twilight.

Astonished, confounded, alarmed, by a circumstance that seemed to mark them for objects of particular observation, St. Vincent instantly started from the ground, and, like Stella, followed with his eyes the direction apparently taken by the fugitive, in silent consternation.

After the lapse of a few minutes, our heroine in a firm voice, and with an air of impressive dignity, thus silently addressed her musing companion—

“You see, Sir, the consequence of your ill-judged intrusion! The appearance of that person at so late an hour; the concealment from whence he emerged; his evident solicitude to elude discovery; all—all evince more of formed design than casual accident, on the occasion! Yes! the reason is but too obvious:—your steps have been watched, and my hitherto unspotted fame—that first of female treasures, and, till now, almost my sole possession on earth, must probably henceforth be sacrificed to your rash, your unjustifiable proceedings. Such, alas! is the cruel effect of a single deviation from any of the moral duties, that the innocent is often unavoidably involved in punishment of the guilty!”

The voice of Stella here began to falter; she paused for a moment, wiped off a conscious tear, and then proceeded in a firmer tone—

“Shame, remorse, and self accusation are the sure attendants on premeditated error. From the latter, however, I am free: of the three former I cannot, perhaps, say so much; it is fit, therefore, I suffer for my unguarded folly. In the light of correction I shall consider whatever evils may arise from the degradation to which I have incautiously subjected myself, by weakly condescending to listen for a single moment to the prohibited professions of personal regard from a married man!”

St. Vincent’s emotion increased, and he attempted to interrupt her in extreme agitation.

“One more, and for the last time, adieu!” cried our heroine, hastily waving her hand with a repulsive motion. “Reflect on the past; amend the future; and remember however deficient in

the adventitious circumstances of rank or fortune, Stella Bertram is at least your equal in the superior advantages arising from a sense of conscious rectitude, and a rigid adherence to those principles of virtue and morality, which alone lead to happiness through every station allotted for our sphere of action to move in below."

The solemn accent in which these words were uttered; the look of inborn worth that accompanied them; the bright beam of intelligence that irradiated her countenance while she spoke, all conspired to make a forcible impression on the mind of her unhappy auditor, who, totally overpowered by the intensity of his feelings, permitted her at length to depart without exerting any farther effort to procure her attention.

Apparently rivetted to the spot, he retained the same position for some time after her departure. With folded arms and a dejected air, her retiring form was mentally traced long after it had ceased to become visible, and as the farthest gate of the garden was heard to close on the woman he must henceforth endeavour to exclude from his thoughts, a chilling sensation pervaded his whole frame, and ran with distressing, but resistless rapidity through every vein. Slowly he returned to the grotto. From the landing-place at the porch a view was obtained of the Hermitage: a light soon appeared in one of the little apartments; his eye insensibly rested upon it. The window shutters were left open, and a female figure was distinctly perceived pacing the room with irregular steps. By the handkerchief which she frequently raised to her eyes, she seemed to be weeping; and every movement, as far as could be ascertained by the distance, indicated some internal agitation. The heart of St. Vincent whispered it was Stella whom he now gazed upon; and again he remained stationary. At the end of a short period the window shutters were closed—he sighed to find her no longer visible: a conviction of the lasting deprivation of hope, peace, and happiness seemed to have taken hold of his mind. He entered the grotto, the door of which our heroine had neglected to close in the moment of alarm and perturbation, and throwing himself upon the seat she had recently occupied, covered his face, and gave way to a sudden burst of uncontrollable anguish; from which having procured a temporary relief, the unhappy St. Vincent fled from the spot with the precipitation of confirmed despair, and reached Ross Grove in a state of mind easier to be conceived than described.

On his arrival, the voice of mirth and gaiety resounded from the farther end of the hall. His heart sickened at the idea of mingling, in its present situation, with the votaries of mirth. He knew several guests were then in the house, with some of whom he was but little acquainted; and to use the exertions politeness rendered requisite should he join them, appeared at this juncture impossible.

While he yet paused to consider on his next motions, the parlour door suddenly opened, and approaching footsteps were heard. St. Vincent retired behind one of the pillars till the person, or persons, had passed him. It proved to be Mrs. St. Vincent, who was met by her maid at the opposite end of the lobby, and after a whisper from the latter, the purport of which he could not distinguish, they retired together.

This discovery at once determined his motions. He concluded his wife was gone to her own apartment; and the momentary, half-formed intention of retiring for the night under-pretence (indeed it was more than pretence), of indisposition, instantly vanished before the reluctant sensation he felt to her presence in the existing situation of his mind. Equally unwilling, however, to gain the happy group from which she had just retired, he opened a glass door that led to the shrubbery, and taking the first path that offered, slowly pursued his way, in the hope of tranquillizing his thoughts so far as to escape the chance of any particular observation on the singularity of his present dejected appearance.

With this object in view, he exerted his best efforts for its accomplishment; and absorbed in mental cogitations, entered a walk which, from its solitary and secluded situation, seemed peculiarly adapted to the soothing purpose of meditation, even at a period of the day more liable to intrusion than the late still hour in which it was now visited.

At length, conceiving his mind sufficiently composed to join the family, and anxious to return home, lest his absence, already too much prolonged, should subject him to the very scrutiny he felt solicitous to avoid, St. Vincent crossed the shrubbery, and was proceeding along a path that lay on one side of a small pavilion, surrounded by tall overhanging trees, when the sound of his own name, pronounced with uncommon emphasis, caught his ear from an open window under which he was passing at the moment.

Astonished by a circumstances so totally unexpected, his progress was instantly arrested, and instinctively he stopped to ascertain from whence it originated.

A temporary pause succeeded; but his suspense was not permitted to be of long duration.

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CHAP. III.

“Une éternelle chaîne
“M’impose le tourment d’une éternelle peine.”

“WHAT! clasped in his arms!—on his knees before her! You rave, Jenny—it cannot be possible!” said a voice, which he speedily recognised to be that of Mrs. St. Vincent.

“You may depend upon the truth of this information, Madam; James never told me a falsehood since the first moment of our acquaintance,” was the reply.

Mrs. St. Vincent said something in return, which the Major could not distinctly make out; but what followed tolerably supplied the deficiency, for the girl immediately answered—

“Yes, indeed, Madam. James left them together, I do assure you; and from the hints he dropped, it seemed more than probable the Major would pass the night with her.”

Mrs. St. Vincent’s rage now burst forth in the most violent exclamations against the supposed perfidious conduct of her husband, which Jenny, either from folly or design, continued to augment by sympathy she attempted to administer on the occasion.

The Major had heard enough, however, to convince him that the idea of Stella was well founded in regard to the intention of the man whose abrupt appearance had recently alarmed them. Shocked at the meanness of his wife, who could thus condescend to bribe a domestic to watch the motions of her husband, his first impulse was to enter the pavilion, to acquaint her with his knowledge of her ill-judged proceedings, and not only to insist upon a change of measures in the first instance, but likewise the immediate dismissal of her female confidant, as a preliminary step to the prospect of future reformation; while, on his side, their auxiliary, James, who was one of the grooms, should instantly receive a similar order, and be discharged from his service with every possible mark of ignominy.

This resolution was upon the point of being put into execution, when the design was speedily relinquished, from a momentary reflection on the consequent evils which would probably accrue to the innocent Stella, should the transaction be attended with any degree of public *éclat*; and that such would prove the case could scarcely be doubted, since the two inferior culprits would naturally tell the story in the light they conceived most favourable to their own individual share in the business, while he had every reason to apprehend they would be supported in the attempt by their employer, who, it evidently appeared, was capable of adopting any measure for the accomplishment of her project.

Another consideration perhaps weighed equally strong on this side of the question. The principal facts alledged against him were certainly incontrovertible, and he was incapable of adding falsehood to error, by denying what he knew to be true, if interrogated on the subject. Should he happen to be placed in this predicament, his veracity might or might not be established, according to existing circumstances; but no succeeding effort would be sufficiently powerful to protect the guiltless and noble-minded Stella from the malice of the calumniator, or the effects of her jealous suspicions, which, he was but too well convinced, would perpetually be levelled at her unoffending head, and bursting forth with renewed violence on the most trivial occasions. Besides, it would not be denied that appearances were extremely against them; and the late hour, no less than the secluded situation of the spot where their interview had been witnessed, were circumstances particularly inimical to the fair fame of our heroine, under the probable supposition that both were fixed upon by her own appointment, for the purpose of a

premeditated assignation. Such a representation of the affair was by no means unlikely, especially when recollected that neither of the foregoing incidents could have been effected by force, nor apparently conducted without the knowledge, or, at least, acquiescence of Stella.

Averse to risk conclusions eventually so fatal to the character of her he adored, and at the same time so well calculated to gain unlimited credit in the present depraved state of society, St. Vincent checked the propelling impulse by which he was at first actuated, and adopting one less hostile to his fears, prudently determined upon leaving the result of the whole to chance, without dropping any hint by which the extent of his knowledge might be ascertained, till necessity obliged him to alter the system of forbearance, for one of a less pleasing description.

In pursuance of this design he stole softly past the pavilion, and reached the house while some of the guests were yet too much occupied by the orgies of the gaming table to notice his absence.

No regular supper was served up at Rossgrove; but a well furnished sideboard, abundantly replenished with the choicest delicacies, stood ready prepared for those visitors who might be inclined to partake of its various accommodations. Fortunately for St. Vincent, the parlour in which it stood was unoccupied by any person when he entered it. On the mantelpiece lay two letters which had arrived during his absence. One of them required an immediate answer: inclination led him to delay it till the following morning; but second thoughts are said to be best, and having swallowed some wine and water, he determined to put them in execution without farther loss of time.

Writing materials were always at hand in this room; and St. Vincent was occupied in obeying the injunctions of his correspondent, when some of the company from the other apartment came to pay a visit to the sideboard.

It was a rule under the Nabob's roof to leave every person master of his own time and actions; little notice was, therefore, taken of the Major's absence, and his present companions naturally concluded that business, similar to what he was engaged with on their entrance, had hitherto deprived them of his presence in the drawing-room, whither, after having finished his letter, he accompanied them, and at the particular request of one of the ladies, took his place at a card-table.

St. Vincent's mind was not much in tune for any occupation that required a superior degree of attention at this juncture. The stakes were high, and he would soon have found himself a considerable loser, had not what is usually called goodluck, that undefinable, but propitious friend, proved his better genius, and by almost constantly supplying an uncommon run of successful cards, remedied the mental abstraction which otherwise must have created no small degree of surprise, and rendered him an object of embarrassing observation to those who were accustomed to regard him as their superior on similar occasions.

The clock had already announced the hour of midnight, and expectation hovered eagerly over the conclusion of a game on which a large sum of money depended, when the door opened, and Mrs. St. Vincent appeared in the room! The Major raised his eyes at the noise caused by her entrance: a sudden flush overspread his features, and the card he was in the act of playing dropped from his trembling hand on the floor. He stooped to take it up, and during the momentary pause it produced, self-recollection resumed its usual station in his bosom.

Mrs. St. Vincent's surprise and agitation was not inferior to that experienced by her husband. She had not the smallest idea of finding him in the house; but strongly prepossessed with the notion that he would pass the remainder of the night at the Hermitage, had already formed several resolutions on the nature of her future proceedings, relative to his supposed

reprehensible conduct, with which she was secretly determined to acquaint her father on the succeeding morning; and in the interim, by the calmness! and dignity of her manner, evince how little the meditated separation (for she condescended to think of nothing less at present), from one, now indubitably unworthy of her affections, would cost her.

To discover him stationary at a card table, apparently in good spirits, and, to all appearance, much interested in the fate of the game which he was then engaged with, seemed wonderful—most wonderful, after all heterogeneous mass of information so recently received. The capricious Margaret began to question the evidence of her own senses: she advanced nearer; his embarrassment had vanished, unperceived by the company, and given place to the usual easy elegance of manner for which he was so generally admired.

“How long pray has St. Vincent been of your party?” said she, in a low whispering voice, as she leaned over Mrs. Arabin’s chair.

“Upon my word, I cannot precisely say,” replied her friend, arranging her cards as she spoke; “but we have all reason to wish the period had been of shorter duration than it was proved, for he wins our money most unmercifully.”

“You know not then at what time he entered the drawing-room after I left it?”

Mrs. Arabin turned quickly round on this second interrogatory, and fixed a look of silent surprise on the enquirer, without paying any farther attention to her demand.

The survey, though transient, convinced her there was more than met her eye in the case, and on stealing a momentary glance at the Major, she perceived he was regarding them with some degree of interest and anxiety, in spite of the careless air he chose to assume on discovering he was observed.

Impatient for a satisfactory answer to her query, and conceiving Mrs. Arabin’s attention too much engaged by her cards to obtain it from her, Margaret now made a similar application to another lady at a neighbouring table, whose reply shewed her equally deficient on the subject.

One of the gentlemen, however, who had found him writing in the parlour, overheard this latter enquiry, and immediately observed, that though the Major himself was certainly the proper person to gratify her on the occasion, yet he would venture to take the task upon his own shoulders, by informing her that Mr. St. Vincent had been occupied during a great part of the evening in letter writing, after which he had joined them in the drawing-room.

“And where was he thus occupied in letter writing?” demanded Margaret, in a quick tone of voice.

“In the parlour, Madam,” was the laconic answer.

“You no doubt saw him there?” returned Mrs. St. Vincent, with a look of supercilious incredulity.

“I certainly did so,” said the gentleman, in a manner that seemed not much calculated to encourage any further suspicions of his veracity.

Margaret remained for the succeeding minute silent and thoughtful.

Meanwhile Mrs. Arabin contrived to get her place supplied at the card-table, and putting her arm through Mrs. St. Vincent’s, let her insensibly to the other side of the room.

Her efforts, however, to dive into the thoughts of the latter proved abortive; either ashamed of the confidence reposed in her domestics, or nearly convinced that her husband had in this instance been wronged by their intelligence, Margaret parried every attempt made by her friend for an explanation of her late apparent solicitude respecting the Major’s motions, and secretly determined to be sure of the ground on which she stood, before she laid herself open, once more, to the severity of those animadversions Mrs. Arabin had formerly made upon her

conduct, in a situation similar to the present one.

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CHAP. IV.

“Ye must never taste
“The sweets of Hymen.”

MAURICE.

IN about half an hour after Mrs. St. Vincent's re-appearance in the drawing-room, the ladies retired to their respective apartments for the night, and the gentlemen soon followed their example.

Mrs. St. Vincent was in her dressing-room, attended by Jenny, when the Major entered that usually occupied by himself. A thin partition divided them; but his lady happened to be too much occupied by the topic nearest her heart to recollect his probable vicinity, by which means he obtained a pretty tolerable knowledge of the nature of their conversation, and discovered the fluctuating opinions entertained by his fair helpmate, whose ardent wish was now to find him innocent of the accusation lately preferred against him.

This inclination in his favour was no sooner ascertained by the penetrating and artful Jenny, than her sentiments seemed to undergo an instantaneous change on the same side the question. The burthen of her recent communication was therefore speedily saddled on the shoulders of their late coadjutor, James, the groom, who, Jenny had now discovered, to be unworthy of credit, and ever ready to perform any foolish action, provided the reward was commensurate to his expectations.

James, the groom, must nevertheless be spoken with, before his mistress could possibly think of retiring to rest, and accordingly Jenny went in search of him.

Unfortunately, the stipulated reimbursement for his services had been paid down on the execution of his mission; and being afterwards sent to the post-house by Mr. Ross, he could not resist the temptation of depositing a part of the cash on a tenement seldom much celebrated for the productive nature of its interest.

In plain English, James had encountered some of his acquaintances, with whom he adjourned to an ale-house, and afterwards returned to Rossgrove “as drunk as an Emperor.”

Mrs. St. Vincent was therefore obliged to resign her intention of interrogating him till a more favourable opportunity occurred for the purpose; and incapable of submitting to necessity or disappointment, with a good grace, she retired to bed, half-doubting, half-satisfied, sullen, and restless.

When the Major, on joining her, made some commonplace enquiry relative to her health, she answered him captiously, that whatever might be the state of her health, she had not, at least, injured it by rambling on secret excursions at midnight.

The Major carelessly answered, he hoped she had more prudence than to risk it by making so injudicious an experiment.

“Some people's prudence,” she replied, with quickness, “was not to be much applauded on that score.”

He presumed she did not include her own in the number.

She was sorry she could not return the compliment.

The Major professed himself ignorant of her meaning.

His, she protested, was infinitely more incomprehensible.

“Since our understanding appears thus equally defective, had we not better try to remedy

the failure by a few hours' repose: I never was more drowsy I think."

"The pretense is convenient, and on a footing with its prototype, letter writing," retorted Margaret.

This was what might justly be called a broad hint; but St. Vincent permitted it to evaporate in silence, and the lady, finding her rhetoric remained unnoticed, soon after followed his example.

On the following morning he left his chamber at an earlier hour than usual, and on enquiring for James, was informed he had returned to the ale-house on the family retiring to their apartments, and had not again re-appeared at the Grove.

Major St. Vincent had already taken his resolution in regard to this man from what had transpired relative to his inebriety on the foregoing night. This additional intelligence, therefore, only served to strengthen that resolution, and both combined to finish a plausible pretence for his immediate dismissal; which took place on his return to the mansion.

Neither the fellow nor his late employers entertained any suspicion of the real cause in which his discharge originated; and as he was gone before Mrs. St. Vincent left her apartment, no probable opportunity remained for procuring the necessary information from himself on the subject.

Some incomprehensible, intuitive sensation seemed continually to haunt her thoughts in respect to Stella however, and the dread of any accidental circumstance throwing her once more in the way of St. Vincent, frequently occurred to disturb her most tranquil moments. Under this impression a thousand plausible reasons were assigned to Mrs. Ross for the prolonged absence of our heroine; while the latter continued ignorant of that lady's ardent desire to see her, every invitation intended to procure her company at the Grove, being carefully concealed from her knowledge by the particular direction of Mrs. St. Vincent.

The perturbation of mind, and that interesting air of dejection that usually accompanies secret sorrow, would have proved inconceivably distressing to Mrs. Bertram, as she contemplated the pale face and tearful eye of poor Stella on her appearance after the last interview with St. Vincent, had not a flying report previously reached her of the meritorious conduct she had exhibited in behalf of the little girl during the transaction of the field-day. To this circumstance therefore, the altered looks of her darling were ascribed; for common report, as usual, had magnified the danger, and exaggerated the consequences which were supposed to attend it, far beyond the real state of the case; and Mrs. Bertram was upon the point of dispatching a messenger to Mr. Adair's, in order to learn her situation, when this design was rendered abortive by the arrival of Captain Montague, who assured her, whatever agitation the spirits of Stella might have suffered, her personal enquiries were happily of too trifling a description to create a moment's uneasiness on the subject of their speedy and fortunate termination.

Though sufficiently acquainted with the magnanimity of her *protégée's* mind to be convinced she would make light of circumstances under the pressure of which numbers would sink overwhelmed with anguish, this knowledge did not contribute to relieve her fears; on the contrary, she felt them increase as the evening advanced without returning the object of her solicitude to the maternal bosom that throbbed for her safety; and her apprehensions were become almost insupportable as the lingering hours lagged heavily along, when the sound of the closing gate caught her ears, and Stella in the succeeding moment stood before her.

But Stella was not long able to stand before her:—she sunk into a chair, overcome by contending emotions, even more acute than those formerly experienced on a similar trial of her

fortitude, and would instantly have fainted, but for the timely assistance afforded her.

Mrs. Bertram forbore to fatigue her by requiring any repetition of the past transaction at Wigton, till she was in a condition better calculated for the office of an historian; and in the meantime exerted herself with her usual good sense, to recompose her mind and spirits, by every means most likely to produce that effect.

The benevolent exertion was not unattended by success. Stella became gradually better, and on separating at an early period of the night, insisted on accompanying her beloved benefactress to her apartment; from thence she proceeded to her own little chamber, with a heart softened by the pious benediction bestowed upon her by the worthy Mrs. Bertram, and would possibly have enjoyed the soothing calm which it infused into her bosom for a much longer period, had not her eyes, in crossing the floor, rested upon the fatal spot on which she had parted, perhaps for ever, from the only man who had hitherto ever interested her feelings. The candle had been placed in a corner of the room near the door, and interfered not with the bright and beautiful moon-beam that shed its silvery influence over the prospect, exhibiting the grotto and its vicinity distinctly to view.

A burst of agony again swelled the heart of Stella: she tore herself from the torturing contemplation, and paced the room with an agitated and irregular motion.

The night proved a sleepless one to our unhappy heroine. There were moments when she resolved to open her whole heart to Mrs. Bertram, and implore her advice and direction for the line of conduct that ought to be adopted in future; but the idea was speedily checked from an apprehension of the pain it would probably occasion, and the conviction that, in all human likelihood, no repetition of the same occurrences would ever again take place to put her fortitude any longer to the test; in which case it would be no less cruel than unnecessary to create uneasiness in the mind of her kind benefactress, respecting the result of evils, which, perhaps, had ceased to exist on one side, while it was a certain duty she owed her own character to prevent their baneful progress on the other.

If Mrs. Bertram, nevertheless, obtained any superficial or accidental knowledge of the foregoing transactions, and ever questioned her on the subject, it would then be time enough to become explicit, and explicit in that event she undoubtedly meant to be; at present her conduct must be ruled by circumstances, and these, if no longer of a pressing or critical nature, might as well be confined to her own bosom, already sufficiently wretched, as promulgated, for the purpose of rendering a dear and valuable friend almost equally so.

Sleepless, faint, and languid, she found herself totally incapacitated to appear below stairs, and Mrs. Bertram, extremely alarmed, insisted on procuring medical advice without further loss of time.

To this proposal Stella, however, would by no means agree: she knew the whole *materia medica* could not reach the seat of her disorder, and wished not to expose herself to enquiries she was inadequate to satisfy without trenching either on delicacy or truth. Two days she remained an invalid, confined to her chamber; on the third she was able to quit it for the parlour, to the no small joy of her worthy benefactress.

Mrs. Wallace, the first and early preserver of her youth, had now for some years been settled in Ireland, but happened to be at this juncture on a visit to her niece Sally, who, it may be remembered, was in the service of Mrs. Bertram at the period of our heroine's infant introduction at the Hermitage, and had latterly been married to a respectable farmer in the neighbourhood. For her little foundling the good woman still retained all the affection of a tender mother; and her attachment met with the most lively gratitude from Stella, on whom she insisted upon attending

during her illness, not more with a view to indulge her own feelings, than to spare Mrs. Bertram from the fatigue of a sick room, which in her precarious state of health she was ill qualified to undergo.

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CHAP. V.

“Care sat on his faded cheek, but under brows
“Of dauntless courage.”

MILTON.

BEFORE the conclusion of the week, Stella, assisted by youth and a tolerable, though not strong constitution, once more resumed her usual occupations in the family: but though her health was apparently restored, the same could not be said of her spirits; and she found it, at times, utterly impossible to struggle against the overwhelming sensation of dejection that occasionally oppressed them.

Captain Montague had called on the second day of her illness, with which she had particularly requested he might not be made acquainted: some plausible reason was consequently assigned for her absence from the parlour; and an order he received on the succeeding morning obliging him to set out for a distant part of the country, where one of the troops happened to be quartered, prevented a repetition of his visits at this juncture.

This circumstance, therefore, accounted for the apparent neglect of a man, whom she wished, yet feared to see, from a knowledge of the intimacy that subsisted between him and the person whose image she was striving to efface from her memory.

Another incident, however, surprised her in a far greater degree. About the period of Captain Montague's departure, two ladies had called at the gate of the Hermitage, who expressed much polite anxiety to see her. Mrs. Wallace remarking the solicitude of Stella to conceal her indisposition from the knowledge of her male visitor, concluded the request might possibly be intended to implicate his female successors, whom, she understood from themselves, to be strangers. Prepossessed with this idea, she apologized for the absence of Stella, and regretted that Mrs. Bertram (who was then sitting by the bed of her *protégée*), could not have the pleasure of attending their commands from the unfortunate interference of a prior engagement. She then opened the gate (from whence she was retiring when their approach prevented her) and offered to conduct them to the parlour: this, however, they declined, under the supposition she was only an occasional visitor, like themselves; and after expressing their admiration of the situation and surrounding scenery, they turned into the plantations, through which she perceived them enter one of the winding paths that led to the Grove.

This little incident was mentioned to Stella on her recovery; but she could form no probable idea of those to whom it alluded, for she had not the smallest intercourse with any of the inhabitants at the mansion-house; even Mrs. Ross herself, as it now evidently appeared, having totally ceased to remember her.

Mrs. Bertram, whose ill health seemed much improved of late, was one evening absent from the Hermitage, where she had left Mrs. Wallace in the parlour with Stella; from whom, however, the former was soon under the necessity of separating by the arrival of an unexpected summons from her niece.

Our heroine, thus consigned to her own meditations, seated herself in a small bow window, overshadowed by the spreading foliage of the creeping honeysuckle and jessamine. Her only companion was the beautiful Seasons of Thomson, by the charming pages of which she was entirely occupied, when the closing sound of the garden gate reached her ear, and she imagined

some voices issued from that direction. The window at which she was placed, did not afford a competent view of the entrance to the house; but she naturally concluded Mrs. Bertrams' return was the cause of what she heard, and her undivided attention once more rested on the volume before her.

In a few minutes the maid threw open the door, and Captain Montague appeared on the threshold! He did not seem alone: and the book dropped from her trembling hand as she rose to receive him, while her eyes were directed to the door in fearful apprehension of what was to follow.

Montague hastily advanced, took her hand, and, after the compliments customary on similar occasions, requested permission to introduce two ladies whom he had had the pleasure of accompanying from Ross Grove.

"Ladies!" burst faintly from the faltering lips of Stella, while conflicting sensations throbbed in her bosom, and an expression of something bordering on disappointment seemed to mark her features with the idea of a very different visitor.

The momentary look of surprise this repetition of his words called forth from Captain Montague restored her recollection, and a rosy blush suffused her late pallid countenance as he led her to the door.

A deeper shade of the same colour succeeded when Miss St. Vincent was announced as one of his companions. The other lady proved likewise a guest at the mansion-house.

Uncertain of the motive in which their appearance originated, Stella was at a loss what judgment to form on the occasion: the presence of Captain Montague a little reassured her mind however, and by degrees she recovered her self-possession, convinced nothing inimical to her tranquillity would be permitted to molest her in his company.

Stella entertained not a thought which angels need have shrunk from acknowledging; but the semblance of guilt seemed to pursue her, when the circumstance of the person who had evidently watched her motions at the grotto glanced across her memory; and she knew not how far Miss St. Vincent might, or might not, be acquainted with that mysterious and disagreeable affair.

But though this degree of uncertainty on a subject so important to her peace, gave an air of timidity and embarrassment to the manners of our heroine which had seldom before been the case, it lessened not the prepossession in her favour already entertained by the strangers; on the contrary, it only served to render her more interesting in their eyes; and the lapse of a very short period had scarcely been concluded, ere the visitors and the visited were equally at their ease, and equally charmed with each other.

"But tell me," cried Montague, looking earnestly in the face of Stella during a pause in the conversation, "what is become of the rosy hue that formerly was stationary on your cheeks?—It has fled, I think, since our arrival, and left not a trace behind!"

"Upon my word," said the lady who accompanied them, "this observation reminds me of a similar circumstance relative to your brother, Louisa.—Don't you think he is much altered of late?"

Stella caught the eye of Montague steadily regarding her with a serious pensive look. On perceiving he was remarked, it was instantly withdrawn, and he turned to address an evasive reply to Miss Williams, before Louisa, affected by the idea of her brother's supposed ill health, could return her an answer.

The cheek of Stella grew paler, and the transient tint produced by the intelligent eye of Montague, vanished almost in the very moment of its creation.

She and Louisa, now equally silent, seemed solely absorbed in their own individual reflections. Not so with their two companions:—in that quarter the conversation by no means flagged: it was indeed studiously supported by Montague, who at length turned to Stella, and requested she would shew the beauties of the place to her fair guests.

Any change in her present situation was desirable, and might conduct her thoughts into another channel; she therefore acquiesced, and retired to procure her bonnet.

Meanwhile the strangers employed themselves in taking a more minute survey of the little apartment than had yet been the case. The walls were covered with blue paper, of a shade peculiarly favourable to a number of very fine drawings, the workmanship of Stella, which hung round in plain, but neat looking frames. A small recess, opposite the window, was fitted up for the reception of books, and seemed well stored with many of the most valuable productions of the press. The window itself afforded a most romantic, though rather limited prospect, as it extended but a short way beyond the garden; and the mantelpiece was adorned with a great variety of spun and shell work, fancifully formed and arranged by the elegant taste of our heroine. The chairs, and a sofa near the recess, exhibited similar proofs of taste and industry in the well-designed pattern and close imitation of nature displayed in the shading of the various flowers judiciously chosen to adorn them.

This room, though commonly known by the appellation of the parlour, was in fact the principal apartment in the house: Mrs. Bertram thought her situation not sufficiently exalted to sport any other in the superior style of a drawing-room; but its appearance nevertheless well entitled it to that distinction. It was never used as an eating place, a still smaller chamber on the opposite side being appropriate to that purpose, and, except in name, bore no resemblance to any thing of the latter description. The family usually sat in it during the summer season; in the colder days of winter the lesser apartment was preferred, as more comfortable for the small number by which it was occupied.

In a few minutes Stella again appeared, and conducted her guests through the garden towards the grotto. Had this been the first time of her visiting the spot since the unfortunate interview with St. Vincent, Stella would have required all her fortitude to support her under the scrutinizing eye of Montague, and in the presence of Louisa, whose name and striking resemblance to her brother perpetually recalled his image to her view; but sensible she could not renounce her favourite retreat without producing an adequate reason for such a step, or at best creating much food for curiosity by the singularity of her proceedings, Stella wisely concluded that of two evils, it was most prudent to chuse the least, and accordingly determined the first excursion she ventured upon after her recovery, should be to the grotto and its environs.

But though this wise resolution had been put in practice, the recollections that occurred were of two painful a nature to inspire any wish for indulging them by prolonging her visit: and gladly would she have observed the same line of conduct on the present occasion, could such have been adopted with proper regard to the rules of politeness; but of that there appeared little likelihood, for her companions, delighted with all they saw, seemed far more inclined to remain than depart; and Stella, accustomed to extract good from evil, found herself in some measure rewarded for this tax upon her feeling, by the sensation of returning ease that gradually spread over her mind, while the ladies kept her constantly employed in answering questions relative to the various objects that attracted their notice, and by that means prevented her thoughts from dwelling on a subject that might otherwise have too keenly engrossed their attention.

Louisa St. Vincent, an enthusiastic admirer of the beauties of nature, seemed highly gratified by those which were now presented to her view in the grotto and its surrounding

romantic scenery. The air of elegant simplicity that reigned through this favourite retreat of our heroine—its appropriate furniture, singular situation, and the lovely interesting girl who seemed to preside over and direct the arrangement of the whole—a whole so well calculated to make its due impression on a heart formed of materials congenial with her own, spoke forcibly to the feelings of Louisa, and seemed already to bind her to Stella by that strong, but imperceptible ligament of sympathy which connects kindred souls with each other, before its secret, though irresistible influence, has had time to develop the nature of the new-born sentiment, or try its indefinable sensations by the criterion of reason.

From the objects around her, Louisa alternately turned a look, expressive of admiration and pleasure, on the face of her beautiful conductor, who, on her part, seemed particularly attached to her new acquaintance, and gratified by the opportunity that now offered for evincing her solicitude to oblige her; while Captain Montague, sensible that her modest, unassuming character required the assisting hand of considerate friendship to shew it in all its genuine lustre, missed no possible opening to render her merit conspicuous, or place the superior advantage she possessed, in the most favourable light on every occasion that occurred for the purpose.

CHAP. VI.

“To a mind resolv’d and wise
“There is an impotence in misery
“Which makes me smile, when all its shafts are in me.”
YOUNG.

OPPORTUNITIES for rendering her this service were not indeed difficult to be met with at present; for the topic which proved most propitious to his design seemed to be the spontaneous effects of situation and existing circumstances, while the discussions to which they led were exactly of that description best suited to the taste of Stella, and peculiarly calculated to draw her genius and abilities for conversation into public notice. The distant view of the cascade, and its monotonous sound—the lengthened shadows of the old ruin, and the fantastic forms of innumerable rocky projections in the vicinage—the white walls and cottage-looking aspect of the Hermitage, placed on a small adjoining eminence, beneath the sheltering foliage of a few aged and wide-spreading trees, with its little Gothic casements just visible amidst the creeping tendrils and fragrant boughs which nearly concealed them from observation on this quarter of the building—the mansion-house and fine plantations of Rossgrove, towering in proud magnificence over every similar object in the neighbourhood—the distant ocean, here and there dotted with a smooth-gliding sail—the mild refulgence of a setting sun, that fringed the edges of a few scattered clouds with the most beautiful colours, while its oblique rays danced on the bosom of the deep, and silvered the woods with its passing and chastened radiance—all, all exhibited room for contemplation, when sensibility and taste united to discriminate their various beauties, and estimate them according to their intrinsic value.

Neither did the fine echo amidst the rocks escape their notice: Louisa and Montague happened to be scientific performers in the musical line, and were easily prevailed upon to try their powers on the present occasion. Stella, who had lately made some progress in the same way, aided by the friendly instructions of the latter, took up the harp in her turn, and though her execution might not perhaps equal that displayed by Miss St. Vincent, the melody of her vocal strains were certainly superior.

The air she sung was particularly requested by Captain Montague, and happened to be one of those he had formerly heard her warble in the grotto, on the evening when the military band played at Rossgrove. In one of the most interesting parts of it, her eyes insensibly fell upon the splendid residence of the Nabob, and her voice became all at once tremulous as she perceived the principal door suddenly open, and several ladies and gentlemen issue from the house. Mrs. St. Vincent made one of the number: she leaned upon the arm of Mr. Jones (the Lieutenant whose free address had so much disgusted our heroine at the old Castle of Wigton), and appeared entirely engrossed by some interesting conversation, in which they were evidently engaged as they wound through the walls in the pleasure grounds, and separated from the rest of the party.

The door yet remained open, and the eyes of Stella still dwelt involuntarily upon it. In a few minutes her voice became more agitated; it grew fainter, and in the following instant entirely ceased. Her auditors, wholly occupied by the charms of her harmonious notes, and inattentive to every other exterior circumstance, finding she remained totally silent, at length raised their heads from a listening attitude, and looking at her with astonishment, were upon the point of

expressing the alarm her pale countenance and altered appearance created, when Louisa, following the direction of her still immovable eyes, turned abruptly round, and immediately discovered her brother's tall elegant figure deeply engaged in conversation with Mrs. Arabin. They seemed not to have observed the party at the door of the grotto, and entered a path that led directly to the vicinity of the Hermitage.

"It is my brother!" exclaimed Miss St. Vincent in a joyful accent: "see—he and Mrs. Arabin are certainly coming this way to join us!"

Stella, sick at the bare idea of such an event, tried to suppress a sigh; which, however, burst forth in spite of her wishes to the contrary: and retreating backwards, she sunk upon the window seat.

Previous to this last movement, she assured her guests she was perfectly well; in consequence of which the ladies had advanced a few steps to observe the motions of St. Vincent and his companion, with whom they seemed solicitous to meet; but their hopes speedily vanished, for he and Mrs. Arabin struck into another path, and soon after disappeared at an angle of the grove.

Our heroine, who had secretly watched their steps in fearful expectation of the event, found herself happily relieved from the embarrassing situation such an interview must have placed her in; and starting from her seat in order to join Louisa and Miss Williams, who appeared to be returning to the grotto, she was hastening forward from the recess of the window, when, to her no small confusion, she perceived Captain Montague leaning on a stone pillar near the door, and regarding her with every mark of the deepest attention.

This was not the first time a similar circumstance had occurred to disconcert her. Montague's manner and looks had more than once struck her as singular and incomprehensible; and conscious but of one cause that could produce this effect, she felt the pride of secret innocence swell her heart, on the supposition that her emotion might be ascribed to a wrong motive, when the genuine source from whence it sprung remained no longer problematical.

Occupied by this idea, she remarked not that the ladies seemed to have changed their recent intention, and instead of ascending again to the grotto, were amusing themselves with examining some cavities in the adjoining rocks. Roused from the temporary pause that succeeded her observations on the conduct of Montague, she again prepared to join them, when, hurt by the expressive glance of mingled displeasure and vexation which passed over her countenance, he abruptly seized her hand as she attempted to quit the threshold, and arresting her progress, protested he could not permit her to leave him in anger, or allow of her departure till the reason of his apparently extraordinary behaviour was explained, which, he flattered himself, it was possible to accomplish without subjecting his motions to the imputation of officious curiosity.—"I have frequently, my sweet girl," continued he, "been astonished at the undefinable nature of my sentiments in your favour—but be not alarmed, the confession that follows is not of a description to call up your blushes: yet, perhaps, it requires some apology; and did I not believe you superior to most of your sex, I should certainly consider such as necessary preliminary before I venture to avow, that it is not love, in the common acceptation of the word, which binds me to you:—no; it is something less turbulent than passion—less ardent than attachments of the heart; yet it is warm as the emanations of friendship, and calmly tranquil, like the sensations existing between the nearest and most affectionate relatives: it is such, in short, as I never experienced before for any other casual acquaintance, and can only be accounted for, I will not say entirely on the score of real merit, though that has undoubtedly no small share in it, but from a most striking resemblance you bear to a person who—"

Montague abruptly paused—hesitated when he attempted again to proceed, and seemed unusually agitated. At length he thus renewed the subject:—

“Often has this incomprehensible similitude forcibly struck me; but never before the present evening did it appear in so conspicuous a point of view. Domestic occurrences are uninteresting to those not naturally connected with them, otherwise—but, no!—it cannot be! the idea is absurd!—”

Again he paused, apparently absorbed in thought: an air of pensive dejection stole over his countenance, and his eyes continued for some time rivetted on the ground.

Wounded pride and every sensation of displeasure vanished from the bosom of Stella as she contemplated his whole appearance; while a faint resemblance to some person she had seen likewise occurred on her side, and she wondered this expression of his features had never been discovered till the present moment, when melancholy recollection taking possession of his mind, spread a sombre hue of chastened sorrow over the *tout ensemble* of his face and figure, and recalled to her fancy the image of those she entertained a confused recollection of having formerly seen, but where she knew not, though that such did, or had existed, she thought could not admit of a doubt.

“There appears a strange coincidence in opinion,” said Stella, after a short pause: “you hint at my resemblance to a friend of yours, while the same notion has taken hold of my mind in regard to a similar occurrence, on your account; for your features this moment exhibit a something, though faintly portrayed, yet (now that you call my attention to the subject) of such a description as to convince me the idea does not altogether proceed from the effects of an ardent or mistaken imagination. It is singularly strange, however, that the discovery has never been made, on my side, before; while yours, you tell me, it is not a new one. Perhaps it may partly be accounted for by never having remarked your face with an equal degree of observation, or seen you in a mood so very serious as at this juncture: from whence,” added she, smiling, “it is to be presumed the original of our imaginary similitude is some mighty humdrum character, whose general disposition happens to be nothing less than cheerfully inclined.”—But, see—the ladies are at length approaching; I must join them.”

“Your remark, Stella, has increased my curiosity, without furnishing one single item to gratify it; for it is exactly the serious expression of your own countenance that conveys the likeness I mean, most forcibly. I shall call at the Hermitage very soon, but unaccompanied: the present topic can then be more fully discussed.”

He was going to say something further, but the vicinity of Louisa and Miss Williams put a stop to his words, and the two latter, having requested permission to repeat their visit, soon after took the road to Rossgrove, escorted by their male attendant, having previously confessed themselves much gratified by their ramble to the Hermitage.

Mrs. Bertram was at home when Stella returned to the house, and the warmth with which she dwelt upon the praise of Louisa St. Vincent made her regret the unavoidable call which had taken her from home, when that young lady honoured them with a visit; but a repetition of it being promised, she consoled herself with the idea of its arrival; and meanwhile secretly mused over those other parts of our heroine’s intelligence relative to the resemblance hinted at by Montague, which she could not help thinking might possibly allude to that already discovered between her and the miniature picture in Mrs. Bertram’s possession: of any or the smallest similitude it bore to Captain Montague no recollection, however, had hitherto struck her; though, like Stella, she sometimes imagined the cast of his face not totally unknown to her.

CHAP. VII.

“Hope! beautiful as are thy visions, in how much anguish
and agony do they clothe the terrors of disappointment!”
GODWIN.

IT may perhaps appear strange that a woman of Mrs. Bertram's steady and prudent character, should not only tolerate, but, in a manner, authorize the occasional visits of a young, gay officer, like Captain Montague, whose appearance and behaviour were peculiarly pleasing, and whose unremitting attention to her *protégée* evinced the warm interest he took in her happiness and welfare.

Mrs. Bertram, whose knowledge of the world was founded on long experience, and whose acute penetration seldom failed her, had reasons for her conduct, which, in her opinion, sufficiently justified the proceeding. Stella was not, she knew, one of those very susceptible ladies who are continually in danger of forming attachments with every new acquaintance; on the contrary, she proved rather remarkable for an uncommon degree of indifference on all such occasions. It is true, no man possessed of so handsome a figure, or manners so fascinating, had, as yet, been a visitor at the Hermitage; and when this circumstance, in conjunction with the natural delicacy of her taste, was taken into consideration, it could not have appeared surprising if the consequence had been fatal to her future tranquillity: but, according to a French proverb, “the first step is the most critical,” and from this first step Mrs. Bertram soon discovered there was little or nothing to be apprehended. She paid the strictest attention to their every look and action for some time after his introduction under her roof, and clearly perceived no due object for rational alarm need be dreaded on his account; while many advantages accrued to Stella in other respects from the obliging solicitude he constantly evinced to add to her stock of useful knowledge, or to render her acquisitions in the ornamental parts of education more conspicuous. Drawing and music were favourite accomplishments with Montague: he was himself a proficient in each of these sciences; and the instructions she received from him were of a description to render her equally so before much time was elapsed.

This circumstance was of no small importance to the future success of Stella in the line of life her maternal friend had eventually destined her to fill; and as she usually made one of the number when he was engaged with his scholar, it was presumed no censure could attach to the conduct of our heroine while thus occupied under the eye of her benefactress.

In addition to this reason for authorizing his presence, another powerful one lent its co-operation. At the commencement of their acquaintance it one day transpired, during some conversation on trans-Atlantic affairs, that he had had an opportunity of rendering a very essential piece of service to a British lady, unexpectedly left a widow with a large family, in the vicinity of Charlestown. Mrs. Bertram knew that the preservation of this lady, who happened to be her sister, with the critical protection afforded her fatherless children, was solely due to the humane interference of a military gentleman; but that this military gentleman should prove to be Captain Montague was never even suspected, till the circumstance became known in the course of some anecdotes he was relating for their amusement soon after his introduction at the Hermitage.

Captain Montague at the period alluded to, was in the infantry; and the corps to which he belonged, was reduced on its return to Europe, at the conclusion of the American war.

Warm, gentle, and strongly attached to the memory of an unfortunate sister, who, together with her family, had after-wards lost their lives at sea, while returning to Britain, Mrs. Bertram considered herself particularly indebted to her guest for his friendly exertions in her behalf. The disclosure of the above-mentioned incident, therefore, confirmed the favourable impression already received of his character, and ever afterwards secured him a welcome reception at the Hermitage.

But while Montague enjoyed this indulgence, he, who was by no means deficient in penetration, more than his hostess, soon perceived that the utmost circumspection and undeviating propriety of behaviour were expected to be strictly observed on every occasion; and consequently, it was easy to see that an attempt to procure a similar introduction for any of his corps, would be disagreeable and difficult of attainment. Convinced of this fact, the experiment was not made; and he submitted with the utmost *nonchalance* to the inundation of witticisms which were continually poured forth at the mess, on the topic of his solitary rambles to the habitation of "the lovely Stella Bertram," for by that appellation she was frequently toasted at the convivial board since the transaction of the field-day, which had procured her some degree of celebrity.

At the Hermitage, Captain Montague tasted those pure and tranquil enjoyments calculated to charm the mind of genuine sensibility; but which, as we have formerly observed, are seldom to be met with in the more splendid, though less happy scenes of fashionable life: he tasted them, too, unalloyed by any apprehensions for futurity, any latent presentiment of after regret; for the society of Stella continued to be courted more for mental, than personal attractions.

Another consideration induced him to persevere in a repetition of his visits, which, though not of a selfish description, was not less capable of influencing his actions. This proceeded from a friendly solicitude to prevent any farther intercourse between St. Vincent and our heroine, or, rather, the chance of such an occurrence again unexpectedly taking place; for he imagined himself sufficiently acquainted with the excellent principles of each party, to apprehend an event of that nature would happen from any other source than some unfortunate or unforeseen accident, the effects of which, if not totally done away, might nevertheless be greatly mitigated by his watchful care and presence.

Attached to the Major by ties stronger than those of blood, and on his side equally dear to his friend, their bond of union seemed mutually strengthened by the delicate embarrassing situation of the one, and the unceasing attentions of the other, even though those attentions were actively employed to disappoint the secret inclinations of him for whose honour and future peace of mind they were put in practice.

The nearly uniform indifference evinced by the Major, and his freedom from all tender attachments of the heart, prior to his marriage, afforded Montague but a slender cause for congratulation. He knew the mind of St. Vincent was of that description which only receives the most forcible impressions, and when received, was formed to retain them with strong and lasting perseverance. Margaret Ross was not likely to inspire a passion of this kind; and should another woman have the power to effect it, and at period unfortunately too late for its honourable gratification, he trembled for the fate his friend, whose terrestrial happiness must, in that case, be inevitably ruined.

When he called on the following evening, his countenance had assumed a more serious cast than usual, and an air of uncommon melancholy marked his whole deportment. After the first compliments were over, Mrs. Bertram and Stella resumed their work, and a momentary

silence ensued, during which their visitor paced the room with an agitated and irregular step. At length he became stationary before the latter, who, on looking up from a flower-piece she was painting, perceived him regarding her with a look of the deepest attention. His arms were folded, and his whole deportment bespoke some secret sorrow that preyed upon his heart, under which he seemed undetermined how to conduct himself.

“Good God! Captain Montague, are you not well?” cried Stella, in a voice of the utmost astonishment.

Mrs. Bertram suddenly dropped her knitting, and turning hastily round, made a similar enquiry.

Roused from his reverie by their friendly solicitude, he started from his musing posture, and apologizing for the unfounded alarm he had given, endeavoured to assume a more cheerful air; but the effort appeared forced, and again his face bore testimony to a mind ill at ease.

The anxiety of his female friends was no longer to be partially repressed; a second time it broke forth in yet more excessive terms. He raised his head from the table on which he was now leaning, and fixing a steady eye on Stella, reminded her of the hint respecting a resemblance between her and a near relation of his own, which had been noticed by him on the preceding evening.

“I recollect it perfectly,” replied she; “but the subject appeared of a painful nature, and I wished not to obtrude it unnecessarily on your memory; though,” continued she, with a smile, “my curiosity is by no means silent on the occasion.”

“It was—it ever must be a painful subject,” rejoined Montague, in a faltering voice; “but—to see you without recalling it, is impossible! The similitude I formerly mentioned daily increases, and though sensible of the absurdity and final disappointment unavoidably attendant on the investigation I am about to enter upon, still I can no longer refrain from commencing it. Pardon me then, my good friend, (turning to Mrs. Bertram as he spoke) if I begin the distressing task by entreating to know the exact nature of those family ties which connect my young favourite, Stella, with her worthy relative: pardon me, likewise, when I add that some unsatisfactory reports which have recently reached me on this head, in conjunction with a secret cause only known to myself, stimulate an enquiry you may possibly deem impertinent, and, which, I confess, certainly carries that appearance while the motives of it remain hidden from your view. You may safely trust me, however, when I solemnly aver that nothing less than idle curiosity actuates me on the occasion. Condescend, then, to indulge me with an explicit answer to the foregoing question, I beseech you.”

Mrs. Bertram seemed at a loss what to say: she fixed her eyes upon the floor, and for some minutes remained entirely absorbed in silent reflection. Stella, during this momentous pause, appeared strongly agitated, and alternately regarded her two friends with a look of the deepest interest, without venturing to utter a single syllable, lest the smallest interruption should retard the expected *eclaircissement* which apparently hovered over the next sentence that would issue from their lips. The long regretted mystery which had hitherto enveloped her birth was now perhaps on the verge of being removed for ever and her real rank in society finally ascertained! With its hitherto dubious nature she had for some time been made acquainted; but the information Mrs. Bertram thought proper to give on the subject, was of too guarded a description, to inspire ideas superior to the station of life in which she had been educated: a certain something, however, now whispered that, on a full investigation of circumstances, it might appear she was born to hold a higher rank. Whether she was, therefore, to rise above, or sink below the level of her present condition, was a matter of not little importance; and she

waited the solution of the business in all the trembling anxiety of a youthful heart may be supposed to experience when an event of such magnitude is rapidly approaching its crisis.

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CHAP. VIII.

“He took it up;
“But scarce was it unfolded to his sight
“When he, as if an arrow pierc’d his eye,
“Started, and, trembling, dropp’d it on the ground.”
YOUNG.

“YOU seem averse to gratify my curiosity, dear Madam,” said Montague: “if the question I have asked is an improper one, think no more of it, I beseech you; and I will endeavour to do the same, whatever self-denial the attempt may cost me.”

He gazed at her for a moment or too in silence; and then, after an ineffectual effort to dispel the mournful air of dejection that overspread his features, endeavoured to turn the conversation into a more chearful channel. The heart of poor Stella was too full, however, to second his design: she answered him not, but sat immersed in mental abstraction, her eyes bent upon vacancy, and her head turned towards the window. Mrs. Bertram continued equally absorbed by her own reflections; and another pause, as if by mutual consent of the parties, again ensued.

Captain Montague once more traversed the room in ill-concealed perturbation: he then seated himself near the table on which the drawing materials of Stella lay scattered. An accidental movement of his arm displaced a few loose sheets of paper, and something dropped from amongst them upon the carpet. He stooped to lift it up:—in a moment surprise shook his frame, and the darkest shade of crimson blushed every agitated feature. He started from his chair, and approaching Stella, hastily demanded by what means that picture had come into her possession. It was the miniature picture formerly made mention of, which had been left at the Hermitage by the mysterious travellers. Stella replied that it belonged to Mrs. Bertram.

To the latter therefore he now addressed himself, and solemnly conjured her to answer his question.

“First tell me,” said she, astonished at the evident emotion of his manner, “why you are thus solicitous for this information?”

“Because,” he returned in a hurried, yet faltering accent, “because the original of that picture is—my mother!”

Mrs. Bertram and Stella mutually regarded him with a look of increased surprise.

“Your mother!” repeated the former.

“Yes, too surely my mother!—my unfortunate mother! Oh tell me, I beseech you, what you know of her! Where is now this ill-starred parent? Would to God she may have seen and retracted her errors long ere this time!—If so, the past shall be buried in oblivion, and the future may yet exhibit happier days! Speak, dear Mrs. Bertram—I burn with impatience to learn her fate!”

Unwilling to add the pang of disappointment to the anguish that visibly wrung his heart by candidly confessing her total inability to gratify his wishes on the subject of his mother’s present situation, Mrs. Bertram knew not well what to reply. His enquiries, however, were too strenuously urged to be easily eluded: having therefore premised her communication with endeavouring to enforce the necessity of acquiring more composure and some degree of self-command, she proceeded to acquaint him with the limited nature of her knowledge, and the

accident by which she became possessed of the miniature. During the short recital he gazed alternately on Stella and the picture: the resemblance between them seemed to increase at every glance: the period of its being left at the Hermitage likewise tallied with the years she numbered; and Mrs. Bertram had tacitly confessed her birth was involved in mystery.

Occupied by reflections on a chain of events, the links of which appeared to his mind's eye inexplicably connected with each other, the narrator had already concluded her little story, and some minutes of silence elapsed before the sound of her voice appeared no longer to vibrate on his ears. At length he once more became a listener; but the historian, in her turn, was now mute, and seemed by no means inclined to continue the topic.

Though what he heard of the picture served to confirm the idea previously entertained respecting his mother having formerly been in that quarter of the country, still the most material part of the business remained uncleared up while left in ignorance relative to the real birth of Stella. To account for his present anxiety on that head, it is necessary to mention an occurrence which had recently taken place.

A short time before this period, the husband of Mrs. Bertram's maid, Sally, (who resided with her at the juncture when Stella first became one of the family) happened to be met by Captain Montague as he was crossing one of the farmer's fields on a shooting excursion. Affability and urbanity of manners in a superior seldom fail to fascinate the minds of the vulgar:—the Captain entered into conversation with his rustic companion, and the man, naturally of a talkative disposition, became gradually so much pleased with his new acquaintance, that he insisted upon being permitted to shew him the particular spots most frequented by the feathered victims of the sportsman. In the course of their perambulation, the Hermitage was occasionally mentioned; and, from less to more, the history of his wife's former attendance on Mrs. Bertram, with the detail of his courtship and marriage. One thing led to another:—Sally's regret at parting with the mysterious strangers, and the liberal remuneration her services obtained, were by no means forgotten; while the discovery of the little foundling by Mrs. Wallace, (with the particulars of which he was but partly acquainted, however,) and her subsequent introduction under the roof of her benefactress, formed features no less prominent than extraordinary in the domestic picture he loquaciously exhibited. Montague had private reasons for being struck with the *tout ensemble*, or, at least, some part of this communication, when more at leisure to reflect upon particular circumstances apparently connected with it.

On the morning of the preceding day he called upon the wife of this man, in order to learn something farther on the subject. Astonished at being questioned by a stranger on topics so long past, and ever so cautiously avoided by her old mistress, Sally shrunk from the scrutinizing eye of the enquirer; and by the evasive and confused manner in which her answers were given, together with the broken sentences which now and then unconsciously escaped her, fully confirmed what they were intended to conceal—namely, the existence of a secret, in which his heart unaccountably whispered he was himself somehow or other interested. The effect in this instance, however, preceded the cause, if we may venture so to express ourselves.

In fact, the increasing, though lately discovered resemblance Stella bore to his mother, served more than any other circumstance to establish an idea of this description when Mrs. Bertram's reserved manners, on every allusion to our heroine's birth, was recollected: suspicion was therefore created, but only received additional force from the recital and conduct of his new acquaintances; while some intelligence of a domestic nature, which had shortly reached him, rendered an investigation into the truth or falsehood of these incidents more than ever necessary to his feelings.

Fraught with this conviction, and strengthened in the design of enquiry by the unexpected discovery of his mother's picture, he determined to draw Mrs. Bertram from the strict reserve hitherto maintained on that topic, by hinting at one or two of the leading events particularly connected with her *protégée's* first introduction to her notice. This manoeuvre had the desired effect: she became more explicit, and finally rendered him master of the whole transaction as far as she herself was enabled so to do.

To be yet farther "puzzled in mazes, and perplexed with error," was nevertheless all the advantage he derived from her communication; for by it the fate of an unhappy parent still remained as undecided as ever. On the particulars of her unfortunate story he appeared extremely unwilling to dwell; Mrs. Bertram consequently forbore to press on the bruised reed, and merely contented herself with knowing that the errors of this misguided woman were of a description too painful to be enumerated by a son possessed of filial piety, or the smallest degree of sensibility.

As for poor Stella, her lot remained involved in its usual shade of obscurity; for no connexion could possibly be supposed to exist between her and the lady delivered of a dead child at Martin's inn: the gay dream of high-born relatives, and every splendid prospect for futurity, faded from her view as the subject was discussed; and the unacknowledged Foundling of the Ship speedily sunk from visions of imaginary grandeur to her former state of humble dependance on the bounty of the benevolent and friendly Mrs. Bertram.

In numberless situations of life the real vicissitudes of fortune, and the illusive deceptions of a sanguine mind, produce equal misery in the human breast:—such was not, however, the case with Stella: the pang arising from disappointed expectation was but of short duration, for her thoughts had not wandered far in the wide field of conjecture: ashamed at permitting them to approach even its fascinating verge, she gave a sigh to the past, and snatching the hand of her benefactress, pressed it to her lips with fervour.

"Yes, beloved friend of the orphan Stella!—parent, guide, supporter—every tender name in one!—still must the fatherless, unprotected foundling remain a burden on your charity! Yes, it must be so, I see!—The golden dreams of a foolish girl, whose principal wish was to possess the power of repaying your parental cares, are now over! Then, farewell to them! You, I know, want not any indemnification on my account: for myself, a change of condition would be instantly rejected, if attended with the necessity of a separation from you. My dear Madam, ease my heart by an assurance of your continued affection, for nature seems to have marked me for your own!"

Mrs. Bertram folded her to the most benevolent of human bosoms, while the scalding tears of affection and gratitude mutually mingled in one stream on their glowing cheeks.

Captain Montague beheld this scene with deep, but silent emotion: his feelings at length became too powerful to be suppressed: Stella, in every movement and look, seemed the express image of a long lost mother. The idea was not indeed new; but casual resemblances are frequently met with: it had therefore been hitherto carefully confined to his own breast; where it might possibly have died away unheeded, but for the strange combination of events which thus forced it into notice.

Those events still continued to haunt his fancy with a thousand chimeras on the occasion; and what part of his mother's conduct came within his knowledge, in some measure justified their encouragement. After the foregoing occurrences, he found it therefore in vain to attempt divesting himself of the notion that Stella was not an alien to his blood: but the circumstances under which their claim to propinquity might hereafter be established, appeared deadly to the honour of his mother, and such as in all human likelihood could never be acknowledged with

propriety.

The miniature picture lay uncovered before him as these reflections passed in sad succession through his mind: he snatched it suddenly from the table—gazed upon it, till a truant tear glistened on its glassy surface—then throwing it hastily down, darted from the room with his handkerchief at his eyes, and entering one of the more retired walks in the garden, continued to traverse it with a perturbed step and an air of the deepest dejection, till the shades of evening gradually closing around warned him to retire.

Having procured his hat by means of the maid, whom he encountered at the gate, he left his compliments to the ladies, and returned to Rossgrove, without attempting to bid them personally adieu.

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CHAP. IX.

“Self-importance of man, upon how slight a basis do thy gigantic erections repose!”

GODWIN.

THE attention of the worthy Mrs. Bertram and her amiable *protégée* was speedily turned from individual considerations relative to their own feelings, when the situation of the agitated Captain Montague presented itself to their notice. Consolation, however, they knew not well how to administer, for the nature of the wound remained unknown to them; and while endeavouring to probe one part, they feared to lacerate another yet more severely: that it was deep and dreadful to the feelings of a man of honour, his actions sufficiently evinced. No common event, they were fully persuaded, could have taken so keen a hold on his mind; and they mutually regretted that it should have been his lot to have the sensibilities of his nature thus called into view by any accidental occurrence taking place under the hitherto peaceful roof of the hermitage.

The remainder of the night was spent in conversing on the foregoing transactions, and at a later hour than usual they resigned themselves to calm, undisturbed repose commonly (though not always) attendant on the slumbers of the virtuous and the good, happy in the consoling reflection that if a state of mediocrity was all they could boast of, it was yet uncontaminated by guilty pursuits, or the torturing pangs of a reproachful conscience, that worst and most insupportable of human afflictions.

Early on the following morning Captain Montague presented himself at their breakfast table: his look, though it still bore the traces of recent sorrow, and he sometimes relapsed into a temporary fit of abstraction, seemed now more tranquil. The subject of the preceding evening was, however, carefully avoided by all parties; and cheerfulness, or at least the semblance of it, soon appeared to have resumed its former residence at the Hermitage.

About an hour after the removal of the tea equipage, a note arrived from Mrs. Adair, entreating Mrs. Bertram would have the goodness to spare Stella for a few days, as one of her daughters was taken suddenly ill, and expressed a strong desire for her company. This request was immediately complied with, and an answer returned to that effect.

Captain Montague, on hearing her intention, declared his determination of being her escort. The walk was not to commence till the evening; he therefore remained with them till the clock warned him that their early dinner hour was rapidly approaching, and then returned to the mansion of the Nabob, but not before the period of Stella's departure for Woodside was precisely settled.

Montague, on his reappearance at the humble dwelling of Mrs. Bertram, seemed by no means exhilarated by the effects of Mr. Ross's splendid board, or the great variety of costly and choice wines with which it was always so plentiful furnished; on the contrary, his spirits seemed unusually depressed, and it was only by a forced exertion of fortitude that he evidently supported any share in the conversation.

Mrs. Bertram and Stella apprehended he was indisposed, and under that idea entreated he would not think of accompanying the latter. He pretended to laugh at the supposition, and declared his health never had been better.—A walk, were he even ill, would prove beneficial—in his present state it must consequently be doubly so; and Stella was requested to prepare for it without further delay.

Before they reached the second plantation the same gloomy influence again cast a shade over his countenance. A pause of some length succeeded, during which his companion repeatedly regarded him with a look of tender concern and the deepest interest. He once caught her eye while resting upon his face, fraught with the most lively expression of sympathy.

"Stella, my sweet girl," he suddenly exclaimed, "you pity me, I see: but why that look of alarm?—nothing very new has occurred? One unfortunate affair is indeed drawing to a crisis little expected:—with this affair I have recently been made acquainted, and even wished to have consulted Mrs. Bertram on the occasion: yet I know not how it happened, my courage always deserted me on the point of disclosure. To you, I think, I can lay my errors open with less reluctance. They are not premeditated ones; of this you may be assured: start not then, my sweet friend, from the confession of the penitent sinner; but hear me with patience, and generously grant me that assistance which one human creature owes to another in distress!"

He paused, apparently waiting for a reply. Stella in a low, softened voice begged him to proceed. He pressed her hand to his lips, and heaving a deep sigh, proceeded.

"The error principally alluded to, might, perhaps, receive some palliation in the eyes of many people when the circumstances under which it was committed are duly considered; but the pleas of youth, of intoxication, and bad example, though they might be justly urged on this occasion, shall not be permitted to bias your opinion, unless I appear on trial to merit the indulgence—yet let me see—the second of these, when I reconsider the matter, cannot be entirely discarded, since, from the consequences of inebriety originate the chief part of my misconduct—but I keep you too long in suspense. Pardon what may bear the semblance of indelicacy in the following disclosure; and as I have ever supposed you superior to the generality of your sex in the possession of every feminine virtue, so let me find your friendship equal to the call now made upon its exertions in my favour.

"Soon after the corps to which I belong arrived in this quarter of the country, several of the officers were invited to dine at a gentleman's house, where a numerous party of ladies were assembled for the purpose of having a dance in the evening. A few of them we had once or twice seen at the parrade; to the remainder we were strangers. The young lady who sat on my left hand during the time of dinner, happened to prove one of the former: I recollected her face immediately, and we soon became mutually pleased with each other's conversation. I engaged her hand for the evening before the female party retired from the table, and as she rose to depart, promised to attend her at an early hour in the drawing-room.

"And here let me interrupt my little narrative to observe how necessary it is for parents, or those, of whatever description, to whom the care of the young and the beautiful belong, to prove ever watchful and strictly observant of the character, principles, and conduct of the company with whom they are permitted to associate. Unhappily, my new acquaintance had no guiding hand to warn her of the hidden quicksand towards which she was verging.

"My companions of the blade were by no means men of the strictest morals; on the contrary, every appearance of rigidity in that respect was considered as fair game, and treated accordingly. It was previously known that the mistress of the mansion had long renounced all private pretensions to the title of a reformer; although in the eye of the public she contrived to keep up appearances, and was visited by numbers who secretly despised her character and proceedings.

"The husband of this lady is a man of a very eccentric turn, and said to be easily duped by her artifices. He is much attached to his bottle, and fond of company. In consequence of this bias to conviviality, his table is usually well attended, and his house a constant place of resort for

all who chuse to become its inhabitants. Possessed of a weak head, in more respects than one, a small portion of the juice of the grape suffices to steep his senses in speedy oblivion; and the licence occasionally taken by the male part of the guests, when the master of the mansion is no longer able to control their tongues or actions, proves frequently far from pardonable. This happened to be the case on the day I speak of; and, to our shame be it mentioned, when we entered the drawing room, no human beings whatever could possibly be less calculated for the society of virtuous, or even commonly decent women, than those who, at this ill-judged period, approached them. Coffee and tea were handed round—our hearts became more composed; and at a late hour the dancing commenced.

“Perhaps I was at this juncture the least intoxicated man of the company: but if my faculties were clearer in one instance, in others they had little to boast of. A dangerous sensation pervaded my senses, produced no doubt by the loose and unprincipled language which had recently been sported in the dining-room. My partner, however, did not appear hurt by the freedom of my behaviour; and the passive forbearance of her manner (not to give it a harsher appellation) contributed to increase the delirium of mind, by the facility with which every succeeding liberty on my side was pardoned by this misjudging girl, with whom offence and forgiveness were apparently synonymous terms.

“The elder part of the guests were placed in an adjoining apartment, and too seriously occupied in the orgies of the card-table to notice the gayer proceedings of their juniors. A variety of refreshments and rich wines of every description were plentifully supplied from the surrounding sideboards while the exercise of dancing was continued: of course, the blood of each individual became gradually more and more inflamed, and the effects of the draughts taken immediately after dinner were not permitted to evaporate. The same round of unrestrained festivity being repeated at the late supper hour, completely accomplished the overturn of reason and every remaining degree of reflection. The master of the house had long renounced all pretensions to either, and was now snoring off the fumes of intoxication in a distant apartment.

“My fair partner, it appeared, was a ward of our entertainer, and at this juncture on a visit to the family. She, and the few females who now formed the rest of the domestic circle, remained with us for some time after the guests of the day returned to their respective homes. Myself, and four others of the corps accepted an invitation to pass the night in our present abode, in order to accompany our host on a shooting excursion on the following morning. Relieved from the presence of her husband, his wife seemed to lose sight of every other consideration, the promotion of noisy mirth and a moderate freedom from fastidious restraint excepted. The inspiring song—the meaning sentiment—the sly *double entendre*, alternately succeeded each other; in short, liberty of thought, word, and deed appeared gradually establishing its voluptuous empire, unencumbered by any disguise, but a covering of the most flimsy texture. A little spirited romping at length commenced. The clock struck two: our hostess called upon her three female companions to retire: we opposed this design, and a violent struggle was the consequence. The candles were unfortunately extinguished during the contest; and our opponents better, better acquainted with the direction of the dark winding passages, effected their escape to different apartments in the gallery: unwilling to be outdone in generalship, the fugitives nevertheless were soon overtaken. Either from negligence or want of time, the first door I reached was unlocked: I opened it:—a faint exclamation convinced me my fair, but imprudent partner was the inmate. Darkness, solicitude, and opportunity formed a treacherous combination too formidable to the then state of my mind to combat: the disorder of my senses increased, and soon communicated its influence to my companion. In short, the remainder of this fatal night was

passed in one and the same apartment: and the consequences that have resulted from a proceeding so censurable and weak, have reduced me to the necessity of this humiliating detail.”

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CHAP. X.

“What proof, alas! have I not giv’n of love?
“What have I not abandon’d to thy arms?
“Have I not set at nought my noble birth,
“A spotless fame, and an unblemish’d race,
“The peace of innocence, and pride of virtue?”

ROWE.

AT the conclusion of the last sentence the feelings of Montague seemed entirely to overpower him for several minutes.

Stella meanwhile maintained an obstinate silence: her indignation seemed directed more to the female, than male part of the offenders; and, in fact, they were certainly the most blameable of the number: but though this appeared evidently the case, still she felt averse to condemn even where acquittal was impossible. Her delicacy, too, seemed to be wounded by a recital so new, so unexpected; for that women in a superior rank of life should have so conducted themselves, and exhibited so total a dereliction from every principle of virtue or common decency, appeared perfectly inexplicable to the pure and uncorrupted heart of our heroine. To commiserate and pardon the failings of her fellow-creatures had been one of the first lessons imprinted on her young and ductile mind by the good and worthy Mrs. Bertram: but, in the present instance, premeditated depravity of manners in the erring female group, thus introduced to her knowledge, apparently steeled her bosom against them; and the pity, that under different circumstances would have throbbed through every vein, was now too much mingled with contempt, to admit of immediate utterance.

Montague, who was sufficiently acquainted with the upright nature of her disposition to suspect the impression such a recital would make, had purposely dwelt on every palliating circumstance, in order to lessen the idea of guilt unavoidably attached to such a mode of conduct and cast the chief part of the blame on the preceding incidents, which had previously prepared the mind for the admission of error, and finally led to so great a defalcation from the general principles of moral rectitude. In vain, however, he waited to hear the sound of her voice: she continued to walk slowly on in silence.

“You seem too much disgusted to afford me any further attention, Stella,” said her companion at length, in a low, hesitating accent:—“tell me, am I permitted to conclude my unfortunate relation or not?”

“Well, Sir, proceed,” she replied, “and inform me in what manner my assistance can be required in such a business.”

He bowed, and thus continued:—

“Your own purity, my sweet friend, (for I must still presume to address you by that appellation) cannot hold the character of a practised seducer in greater detestation than the man before you has invariably done:—I reprobate—I abhor it; nor would I be answerable for the accumulated anguish of which it is productive, to obtain the empire of the world: but in this instance, as in every other of my life, I thank Heaven I stand self-acquitted on that account. Do not, however, suppose that by such an avowal I mean to exculpate myself from actual error at the expence of my unhappy companion in misfortune.—No; certainly I am the chief aggressor, however unintentionally; for I ought to have resisted the temptation thrown in my way; and but

for the fatal disorder of my senses, occasioned by antecedent events, I assuredly had done so:—yet, allow me just to hint that perhaps few young men so circumstanced, and meeting with an equal degree of—encouragement—dare I call it?—would, possibly, have conducted themselves better, or displayed any greater portion of self-command.”

“Spare your comments, Sir,” interrupted his auditor, who, while she tacitly owned the justice of the remark, deeply blushed at the idea of the light and disgraceful view in which a part of the sex were thus implicated— “spare your comments, Sir, and hasten to a conclusion: the distance from Mr. Adair’s house rapidly diminishes, you see.”

“I perceive it,” returned Montague, “and will not much longer encroach on your patience.—On the morning that succeeded this fatal adventure I let the roof of my host before the family, fatigued with the sports of the foregoing day, quitted their respective apartments. In vain were tears and entreaties alternately employed to break my declared resolution of returning no more: the momentary delirium of pleasure had fled, and its galling successor, self-reproach, was but ill calculated to soothe my tortured mind. Before our separation, however, I endeavoured to lessen the weight of that self-accusation which now pressed acutely on her feelings, by representing myself as the principal criminal, and one who undoubtedly merited her lasting displeasure. This latter sensation, nevertheless, seemed entirely absorbed in tenderness and attachment to her undoer; and I had the additional agony of perceiving myself alike the destroyer of her fondest hopes and honour.”

Montague here paused for a moment, unable to suppress the workings of the complicated feelings which agonized his bosom.

“It is impossible to express what my sufferings were on this discovery of her real sentiments in my favour, and the violent, but ineffectual remorse that agitated her frame on every recurrence to her recent dereliction from virtue. Reflections on the past were now, however, of no farther avail than as far as they contributed to guard her conduct against similar events in future. I have reason to believe the heart and intentions of this unfortunate victim to malign circumstances are naturally good; but the force of example is great, and has been known to effect a change in the dispositions of those possessed of more experience and fortitude than fell to her share. Her occasional and frequently too much prolonged residence with the second wife of her guardian, who concealed a corrupted and unprincipled mind under the most specious and fascinating manners, certainly pleads in her behalf; especially as I have since learned she has little or no claim for advice or protection on any other human being beyond the limits of this artful woman’s power, or her husband’s jurisdiction.”

“Alas!” cried Stella, involuntarily sighing, “how I pity the lost, infatuated girl!”

“Yes, my sweet, benevolent Stella!” exclaimed Montague, extremely agitated—“yes, I knew you would finally commiserate her sufferings, however the commencement of the communication might offend your delicacy! But how will pity, that emanation from the Divinity, be augmented, when subsequent events reach your ear—when I add that the consequences of our mutual folly must speedily become known, if proper measures are not quickly taken to elude the chance of public notice!”

Stella started, and changed colour at this, to her, unexpected intimation:—the pangs of unrequited love, in conjunction with the whispers of a lacerated conscience, seemed sufficiently terrible without any additional aggravation; that aggravation, nevertheless, was destined to be her portion, and contempt, lasting as ignominious, was ready to overwhelm all her future prospects in life! Our heroine became suddenly sick at heart, and after seating herself on the road-side, Montague was forced to procure her some water from a neighbouring brook in his

helmet.

The application produced almost an immediate effect: she soon found herself able to pursue her walk, assisted by his offered arm, which was now readily accepted, though it had been repeatedly declined at a more early period of his narrative.

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CHAP. XI.

“From public haunts,
“And all the gay delights of social life,
“Driv’n with disgrace.”

MAURICE.

“THOUGH I have hitherto strictly adhered to my first formed resolution of avoiding all future personal intercourse with this unhappy girl,” resumed Montague, “several letters have, notwithstanding, passed between us, in spite of every wish on my side to the contrary. Two, recently received, confirm the existence of the foregoing circumstance, which in others had only been obscurely hinted at.

“To expose her to public infamy is not to be thought of. Stella, my dear Stella! say, how shall I conduct myself in this trying emergency?—how afford the advice or assistance she pathetically implores me to grant? Every better particle of human nature revolts at the bare idea of inattention to the sufferings of my own creation. Speak—tell me how the apprehended evil may be avoided—how the publication of her shame may be prevented, ere it prove too late to make the attempt!”

“One mode of safe, of honourable, and timely reparation alone remains,” said his youthful counsellor to this solemn request. “I am sorry you should find it necessary to consult me, or any person whatever, on a subject so obvious to every right-judging mind: your hand can solely effect a cure—it must and ought to be exclusively hers whom you have injured.”

“Impossible!” exclaimed Montague, in a firm, yet agitated voice; “it is already promised to the sister of my dearest friend—to Louisa St. Vincent! and must not be separated from the heart that has long been in her possession!”

“I have done then, Sir,” returned Stella, slowly withdrawing her arm from his, and proceeding at a quicker pace: “further, or other advice, is beyond my ability to bestow!—Was it generous to distress me, however, by the recital of irremediable evils, which you previously knew I had not the power to mitigate?”

“Oh, yes, you have the power!” cried Montague, again seizing her half-reluctant hand, and replacing it as before. “Though Maria’s principles have suffered a temporary perversion, her heart, as I have before observed, is not a corrupt one, and her intentions I believe to be good: she sees her former errors, and, though perhaps unable to separate them entirely from an ill-fated attachment to their principal cause, would yet willingly regain the path to virtue, if a restoration can possibly be accomplished without the *eclat* of notoriety—a circumstance, the dread of which is particularly formidable to her feelings. Say then, my noble minded friend, say you will rise superior to the misjudging weakness generally imputed to your sex on similar occasions;—tell me you will see, and seeing speak comfort to the repentant sinner—that you will endeavour to raise her from her present state of sorrow and humiliation, not precipitate her farther down the gulf of error by the stern look of silent reproach, or the repulsive hand of cold, unforgiving prudery!”

“I have already told you, Mr. Montague, that whatever may be my inclination to serve you, the ability is wanting for that purpose.”

“And I have already told you the reverse,” he replied, with quickness. “Though a representation of this case to Mrs. Bertram might excite in her breast feelings repugnant to my

purpose, yet the influence you possess over that worthy lady might be exerted in the most beneficial manner, to the arrangement of this vexatious affair:—would she but condescend to undertake the management of the wretched girl's situation, at, and during the term of her approaching confinement, every apprehension on her account would instantly subside, and my gratitude for the kindness be inexpressible as lasting.—Is it not possible to accomplish this point, think you?

“Why did you not personally make the proposal?” asked Stella; “it would have come better from yourself than a second person.”

“Perhaps so,” he replied; “but, upon my soul, I had not sufficient courage to attempt it! After hinting at the miseries entailed on her family by a like conduct in my unhappy mother, was it possible to acknowledge myself so lost to all feeling and example, as to be the means of reducing an innocent girl to a similar state of guilt and wretchedness?—No: to one so much my senior as Mrs. Bertram, I could not prevail with myself to make the humiliating confession, though able to accomplish it to her gentle, unassuming Stella, on whose goodness and humanity I rest my cause for absolution, and something of even more importance in the existing state of affairs.”

Our heroine was on the point of returning an answer, when a casual glance was obtained of one of the Miss Adairs, apparently advancing to meet her.

“Tell me quickly what I have to hope from your friendly interference?” whispered Montague, in a hurried and perturbed accent.

“Every thing, be assured, it can possibly effect,” was the satisfactory, but laconic reply.

A tear dropped upon her hand as he silently raised it to his lips in token of acknowledgment.

“I shall call at Mr. Adair's to-morrow; in that event may I hope for a few minutes private discourse with you?”

“Certainly, if practical to accomplish it.”

“Enough, my sweet friend—my gentle Stella!—may Heaven, for Heaven alone can do it, reward such unexampled goodness!—You know not the burthen your humanity has removed from my bosom!”

The near vicinity of Sally Adair now put an end to the subject. He proceeded with his companions to the house, and after paying a short visit, returned to Rossgrove.

Stella was welcomed with their usual kindness by her worthy hostess and all the family; and on entering the chamber of the invalid, she had the unexpected gratification of finding her by no means so bad as her fears had represented her.

Although our heroine kept her station by the bed of her friend through the chief part of the night, she was nevertheless dressed and ready to receive Captain Montague on his arrival.

A favourable opportunity for a private interview was not long unattained: under pretence of procuring a little fresh air, Stella repaired to the garden, accompanied by her military friend. Here the topic of the preceding evening was speedily introduced, and underwent a second discussion. With the family to whom the unfortunate Maria owed the original perversion of her principles, Stella was personally acquainted; but it had frequently been mentioned in her hearing as no less noted for what is vulgarly termed hospitality, than the gay and dissipated manners of its mistress. The ward of her husband happened to be an orphan, who possessed not one near relative on the face of the earth, and who, by the express terms of her father's will, was under the necessity of spending two thirds of every year under the roof of her guardian till the completion of her minority was accomplished. Unhappily for her, his first wife expired in child-bed soon

after she became an inmate of his house; and the successor of the deceased was but ill calculated to supply her place as a moral instructress to the young and uneducated Maria. The natural consequences which too commonly result from such an example and situation have already been detailed; may they serve as a beacon to others in similar circumstances!

Placed by the silent pillow of her sick friend during the preceding night, our heroine had sufficient time to think on the different circumstances related by Captain Montague, and to weigh causes and effects in the impartial scale of cool, unbiassed reflection. The conclusion of this investigation proved indeed rather more favourable to the male than female culprit, as the temptation to error apparently originated on her side of the question; but, upon the whole, everything being considered and re-considered in the most charitable point of view, neither of the parties appeared quite so unpardonable as more fastidious judges, in the effervescence of untried virtue, might probably have deemed them: she therefore determined to use her best endeavours in their behalf; and was not long in communicating this intention to her pleased and grateful auditor.

Before they separated, it was agreed that Stella should make some plausible excuse for a short visit to the Hermitage in the course of the succeeding day; when Mrs. Bertram (from whose benevolence and prudence he was desired to expect every thing) was to be entrusted with the whole detail of this distressing business, and, if willing to accept of the task, have its future arrangement entirely confided to her care.

Montague would gladly have prevailed with Stella to promise a private visit to poor Maria (whose place of residence lay at not great distance) prior to the intended disclosure of her condition to Mrs. Bertram; but this appeared a step of too much importance to be taken without the knowledge or approbation of her benefactress; and finding his arguments decidedly ineffectual on the subject, he forbore at length to urge it any further, but left his young assistant to the guidance of her own better judgment, persuaded he might safely rely on its unerring dictates where the cause of humanity was implicated, or relief required for the unfortunate, of whatever description.

CHAP. XII.

“Of all the paths which lead to human bliss,
“The most secure and grateful to our steps
“With mercy and humanity is mark’d.”

GLOVER.

WE trust our readers are long since convinced that Mrs. Bertram was not one of those rigid moralists, who, (self-supposed) beyond the fear of temptation themselves, disdain to make any allowance for the effects of its influence on others of a less happy temperament. She heard our heroine with patience, though not unmixed with some unavoidable portion of regret, approved of her conduct in the affair, and promised to consult her pillow on the proper measures necessary to be adopted for the regulation of her future motions. Stella, gladdened by the exhilarating smile of this excellent woman, and enriched by the blessing that followed it, received, with heartfelt pleasure, her permission to request a visit from Captain Montague at the Hermitage, and again departed for Mr. Adair’s, accompanied by a little girl in the neighbourhood, who, when not otherwise employed, sometimes attended her to the opposite side of the plantations.

Before the limits of these were nearly attained, Captain Montague appeared in view. To him the success of her embassy was speedily related, and the invitation from Mrs. Bertram was no sooner delivered, than accepted with delight. Peace once more seemed to shed her tranquil influence over his mind, and Stella was overwhelmed with a profusion of acknowledgments, as the principal source from whence it flowed.

To conceal the nature of his transgression from the ear of Louisa St. Vincent was an object no less momentous to his view for the future, than the assistance so ardently wished for on Maria’s account. He knew her character was of that description, and her notions of moral rectitude so religiously strict, that the positive renunciation of his hand, in favour of Maria, would prove the certain consequence of a discovery, whatever might be the acute nature of her own feelings on the occasion. Apprehensions of this kind now, however, began gradually to subside: the forced semblance of cheerfulness which for some time past he had obliged himself to assume in company, was no longer fictitious. Stella saw and felt, with infinite satisfaction, the importance of the mission with which she had been intrusted, and mentally experienced that “to do good to others, is to be ultimately happy ourselves.”

Though Miss Adair was soon in a convalescent state, she could not think of parting with Stella till the perfect reestablishment of her health was effected: of course, our heroine’s visit at Woodside was prolonged much beyond its original limits. Meanwhile Mrs. Bertram and Captain Montague had several consultations on the business which the former had agreed to arrange; and the principal outlines of their plan were no sooner compleated, than she prepared to put them in practice.

In the life time of the first Mrs. Harris (the name of Maria’s guardian) she had been a visitor at Green-Bank, and rather on a footing of intimacy with the family, by whom she was much esteemed. On the second marriage of that gentleman, their former intercourse gradually ceased; for the gay and fashionable manners of the present Mrs. Harris accorded but ill with her notions of propriety, or the quiet, retired manner in which time smoothly and rationally glided along at the Hermitage.

Before a woman is allowed to possess too much influence over the mind of her husband,

he ought to be well assured of her inclination and ability to exert it properly. Mr. Harris was too greatly infatuated with the personal charms of his fashionable wife to suppose this inquiry a matter of any moment. Unfortunately, the lady soon perceived his inattention in this respect, and her empire was speedily established on a foundation too secure to be easily shaken. The consequences of this circumstance may be readily imagined:—every thing underwent a total alteration at Green-Bank: the house, the furniture, all was modernized; for how could a high-bred dame, born and educated in the metropolis of the three kingdoms, possibly exist amidst the Gothic barbarism of such antediluvian objects, as every where surrounded her. Here had she stopped, however, all might still have been well; but the spirit of innovation was not to be so easily satisfied; and the master of the house gradually became converted from a character of respectability, to one somewhat the reverse: at least such happened to be the opinion of the thinking and sensible part of his neighbours on the occasion; to which, however, his female helpmate evidently paid very little attention.

His ward, the unfortunate Maria Campbell, had been consigned to his care at a very early period of life by her father, who died in the island of St. John, and left his countryman, Mr. Harris, then in Nova Scotia, his sole executor.

Had the first Mrs. Harris survived a few years longer, it is probable that her instructions and example, in conjunction with the natural upright bent of Maria's mind, would finally have preserved her from the subsequent misery, by which, from a different mode of education, she was now overwhelmed.

Mrs. Bertram knew and loved her when a child, not more on her own account, than on that of her departed friend's, with whom Maria was a particular favourite. After that lady's death, she was placed at a boarding-school in the north of England, and on her guardian's second appearance at the altar, removed to one of the most fashionable seminaries in London, where she was taught every modern accomplishment, and untaught every moral one formerly acquired.

Mrs. Harris, to whom the entire direction of her conduct was now entrusted, found it necessary, however, to take her home before the second year of her residence in the metropolis terminated. To Maria the change indeed proved of little consequence, for the force of bad example was destined to be equally her portion. On the part of her guardian's wife the case happened to be widely different; for the annual sum allotted for the maintenance of his ward, was, like the education of poor Maria, left, without restriction or superintendence, at her command. The expensive and vain disposition of this woman frequently involved her in occasional difficulties, against which she soon judged it convenient to guard herself by appropriating the whole amount of Miss Campbell's yearly allowance to her own use. The result of this prudent determination brought Maria back to Green-Bank before the critical period of fourteen summers had been numbered from the first period of her existence; and the tender plant, which had just begun to expand its leaves in one hothouse, speedily arrived at its last stage of maturity in another.

To hear that Maria Campbell was thoughtless and giddy, had long ceased to be new intelligence in the neighbourhood: no imputation of a more criminal nature, however, had yet fixed a stigma on her name, though now in her nineteenth year; and whenever she was mentioned at the Hermitage, Mrs. Bertram still secretly hoped that the early rudiments of virtue instilled into her young and ductile mind by her first worthy instructress, would yet prove sufficiently powerful to preserve her from continued error, in spite of the bad example perpetually before her eyes. The mistress of the Hermitage encouraged this idea from a mistaken notion that

“Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
“As to be hated needs but to be seen.”

An assertion certainly true where an uncorrupted heart first views it in all its natural deformity; but the case becomes altered when the youthful mind is habituated to all its various gradations, and the insinuating influence of pleasure permitted by imperceptible steps to establish its dominion in the bosom.

Mrs. Bertram, though under any circumstances she would deeply have regretted the fall of a fellow-creature from the paths of virtue and the station in life she seemed born to fill, felt her concern doubly increased by the knowledge that Captain Montague proved an equal sharer in her guilt: however, it was vain to moralize where active exertions could alone be serviceable, and these she had promised to adopt without farther loss of time.

On fixing her final residence at the Hermitage some little affairs of her husband’s remained unsettled, and the advice of Mr. Harris had often been usefully followed on the occasion. One or two of the papers relative to the business had been left at Green-Bank: these were considered at the time of small or no importance, and therefore never enquired after. It now, however, occurred to her, that, under pretence of asking for them, she might form a plausible excuse for renewing her former intercourse with the family. The scheme succeeded to the extent of her expectations; and a few introductory lines from Captain Montague soon procured her the unlimited confidence of Maria, whose situation was already become critical and alarming.

CHAP. XIII.

“All things invite
“To peaceful counsels, and the settled state
“Of order.”

MILTON.

IT was not, however, without infinite difficulty that she could prevail on this infatuated girl to suppress the self-deluding hope of a legal connexion with her undoer. Attached to him by the strongest ties of affection, her passion seemed to acquire additional force as the dreaded time approached when she was to become a mother. On Montague she fondly doted—to Montague still looked up as her future partner through life, the source of her own felicity, the indulgent father of her unborn offspring, who, by acknowledging a private marriage, would hereafter restore their innocent child to all the privileges of legitimacy. The sensibility of mind possessed by Montague had prolonged this deception, till the idea almost formed part of her existence. Conscious of the injury he had done her, and his inability to repair it according to her wishes, and shocked at the effect an explicit declaration of the latter circumstance would probably produce on the intellects of a woman whose letters contained the most violent and unqualified professions of unalterable love, Montague had fatally augmented the evil by the very means he took to soothe it. The few unavoidable answers she received, though an impartial reader could

not easily have mistaken their tenor, were willingly misapprehended by poor Maria, and every entreaty they contained for her forgiveness converted into a certain proof of an intended reparation, legal as honourable.

Mrs. Bertram, on a perusal of these short and affecting epistles, was astonished at the persevering obstinacy with which she continued to delude herself, and sometimes felt disposed to undeceive her at once, by procuring an incontestible acknowledgment of the truth from the hand of Montague; but, on second thoughts, she renounced this design till the hour of confinement was elapsed, lest the final destruction of her fondest hopes might be attended with fatal consequences in her present precarious condition.

Though continually occupied in parties of pleasure with the military, and daily immersed in the vortex of folly and thoughtless dissipation, Mrs. Harris could not fail to remark the alteration which had latterly taken place in Maria's spirits and appearance. If the real source of that alteration, however, was suspected by her, she either chose to preserve the semblance of ignorance, or affected to believe it proceeded from the late hours and racketing style of life which people of fashion (she sometimes condescended to allow) were frequently necessitated to comply with. On a second declaration of this opinion Mrs. Bertram determined to profit by it, and in the course of her third visit at Green-Bank, easily prevailed with its mistress (who detested the idea of an invalid in her domestic establishment) to indulge her with Maria's company for a few weeks under the calm and orderly roof of the Hermitage.

It had been preconcerted by the parties most interested in obtaining this leave of absence, that every apprehended obstacle to its success should be done away by an assurance from Maria that the advantages accruing from her residence with her guardian should be continued, without any deduction, in the same manner as if she was still an inhabitant of his house.

This intimation settled the matter at once; and Maria, two days after it was concluded, accompanied Mrs. Bertram to her peaceful retreat at the Hermitage, in somewhat more than the seventh month of her pregnancy.

Maria, from a knowledge of friendship entertained for her present hostess by Captain Montague, now fondly cherished the hope of procuring that interview with the latter which had hitherto been so often ineffectually attempted. But she little knew the woman she had to deal with, when such an idea took possession of her mind. Mrs. Bertram's disposition, though fraught with the milk of human kindness where the tearful eye of misery besought her interference, was yet inflexible to what she conceived the voice of persevering error; and she declared her decided resolution of renouncing all further share in the approaching event, if her arrangements were not unconditionally complied with.

Maria, who dreaded the publication of her disgrace, lest the total loss of character, which must unavoidably follow it, should prove an insuperable barrier to her future union with the father of her child, was again forced to submit to the hard law of necessity, and trust to what chance or a change of measures might hereafter produce.

Meanwhile an alteration in the motions of the military took place, which proved by no means agreeable to the female part of their acquaintance in this quarter of Galloway. The greater part of the regiment was ordered to Kirkcudbright, Dumfries, and the vicinity. Amongst those destined for the latter place happened to be Captain Montague. Major St. Vincent, Mr. Jones, and one other gentleman alone were to continue for some time longer in their present station.

On the day prior to their march, Stella received a few hurried lines from Montague, containing this intelligence: he likewise mentioned his intention of calling upon her in the course of the evening.

The family at Woodside were engaged to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Harris; and as Miss Adair could not yet accompany them, Stella was suffered to stay behind with the invalid. The latter usually lay down for an hour or two in the evening; and her attendant had hardly left the chamber before Captain Montague made his appearance.

This was not the most cheerful of all possible interviews: their spirits seemed equally low, and the nature of those subjects which formed a chief part of their conversation, appeared but ill calculated to exhilarate them. Stella leaned pensively on the side of the open window, while he poured forth the grateful and friendly effusions of his heart, and dwelt on the regret that filled it on the near prospect of a separation from his beloved Louisa St. Vincent, and his much esteemed Stella: Maria, too—the undone Maria! might soon be no more!—might be sent to her final account by his means, and, like the accusing angel, carry his future condemnation along with her to the throne of immutable Justice! The softened mind of Montague shuddered at this picture of its own creation; and snatching the hand of the weeping Stella, he grasped it to his heart, imploring her by all her hopes of a hereafter, never to desert the wretched girl, or her unfortunate offspring.

Stella, in much emotion, raised her eyes to give him the solemn assurance so movingly requested, when a sudden exclamation of surprise that burst from her lips, called his attention to another object. It proved to be one very little expected at the time.

Placed amongst some trees growing near a window from whence every look and motion of Stella and her companion could be easily distinguished, appeared Mrs. St. Vincent on horseback. Mr. Jones, on his charger, was at her side, and leaned familiarly on the crutch of her saddle: while the malignant glance and sarcastic whisper alternately succeeded each other during the momentary observation a very short survey afforded of our heroine and her visitor.

Montague started from his seat, and regarded the companion of the lady with a stern, indignant eye. His meaning seemed to be pretty legibly written on his countenance; for the subject of it immediately resumed a less familiar posture, and apparently shrunk into his natural insignificance. Not so with Mrs. St. Vincent:—she cast another look of sneering contempt at the two friends—honoured her redoubtable beau with something of the same description, and then bursting into a loud laugh, put her horse to a canter, and vanished, with her escort, in a few minutes from sight.

“That cruel woman,” said Stella, recoiling intuitively as Margaret passed the window, “that cruel woman seems to take a most unaccountable pleasure in mortifying me on every possible opportunity: one would suppose she was too happily situated to trouble herself about a poor, unassuming foundling, so much in every respect her inferior!”

At the words “too happily situated” an involuntary sigh marked her meaning, and Montague could not refrain from raising his eyes to her face. The flush of insulted, but conscious worth that burned on her lovely cheeks was accompanied by the intrusive tear of bitter recollection. He silently gazed upon her for a moment, and suddenly dropping her hand, paced the room in visible, though mute emotion.

“I have frequently,” resumed Stella, without noticing his agitation, “envied those fortunate mortals who have brothers or near connexions to protect them from unmerited insult: had I been in possession of such, Mr. Jones, perhaps—but it does not much signify; I must bear inevitable evils as well as I can.”

“Damn the stupid dog!” cried Montague, with a vehemence of manner that startled her: “surely you cannot apprehend any thing from such an insignificant puppy!—If he presume only to mention your name with the slightest degree of disrespect, I will cane him through the

regiment.”

Stella soon perceived the error she had committed by letting complaints of such a description escape her lips; but a full heart is not always a prudent one:—she endeavoured, however, to repair the mischief by turning the discourse on more general topics; and had nearly succeeded, when Mr. Adair’s carriage drove to the door. Montague remained a few minutes after the return of the Adair family, and then, with evident regret, bade them adieu.

The next direction of his steps was to the grotto of the Hermitage, where the few interviews which had taken place between him and Mrs. Bertram, since the residence of Maria with that lady, were generally held. His intended visit was announced by a note similar to the one received by Stella; and the good lady, having apologized for her absence to her fair guest, whom she requested to remain within doors till her return, had already been some time in expectation of his appearance, before he presented himself to her view.

The grateful heart of Captain Montague shewed itself on this occasion in the genuine colours of unadulterated nature; and Mrs. Bertram became more than ever interested in the welfare and happiness of a young man whose feelings revolted so strongly from the idea of even unintentional error, and whose principles had escaped the infection of example, though his manners and address bespoke the first polish of fashionable life.

CHAP. XIV.

“Friends should part kind, who are to meet no more.”

HILL.

THE key of the private garden-door usually kept by Stella, had been in the possession of Captain Montague from the time that Maria became an inmate of the Hermitage; and on quitting the grotto, Mrs. Bertram accompanied him along the covered walk that led to it.

Their progress was slow, and their conversation carried on in low whispers: they moved with caution, and were within a few yards of the spot that was to separate them, when a rustling sound amongst some of the neighbouring bushes, followed by an abrupt and wild exclamation, suddenly interrupted a discourse that seemed altogether calculated to absorb their whole attention.

Mrs. Bertram stopped short in the midst of a sentence she was uttering with uncommon earnestness of manner, and turning round to discover from whence this unaccountable circumstance proceeded, a female figure was seen to rush from the opposite hedge, who, darting across the road, threw her arms round Captain Montague, and instantly sunk in a fainting fit at his feet.

The whole of this strange transaction was so rapid and unexpected, that the astonished spectators scarcely knew whether to believe it real or imaginary.

Mrs. Bertram was the first who appeared to recollect herself and comprehend the mystery: the truth flashed upon her at the second glance cast upon the apparently expiring object before them, who was quickly recognised for the unhappy Maria Campbell. Montague, softened by the previous discourse that had taken place relative to her unfortunate condition, could not behold this victim to a momentary error without the keenest sensations of remorse and

compassion. He raised her from the ground, and conveyed her in his arms to a small covered seat there at hand; where, still acting as her supporter, he mournfully surveyed the sad alteration a few months had produced in her features and whole appearance, as her head lay reclined on his bosom, without evincing the smallest degree of sense or motion.

"Are you mad?" cried Mrs. Bertram, softly endeavouring to unclasp his hands and remove her from his hold: "retire—depart instantly, before her recollection returns! otherwise the consequences may prove fatal."

"I cannot leave you in this situation," replied he, in a low tremulous voice, while a tear trickled down his cheek and fell upon her forehead, as his eyes remained fixed on her languid countenance.

"Not leave me!" repeated his companion: "you must indeed, however, Captain Montague! and that speedily too—indeed you must!"

"And how is she to be got back to the house, then?—you cannot possibly support her so far without additional assistance."

"Commit the management of that matter to me, Sir," replied Mrs. Bertram, in a firm, determined voice; "and do me the favour to believe I am competent to the task of arranging it properly: you evidently are not so at present. Respect her past sufferings, and increase not those to come by agonizing her already wounded mind with the presence of him in whom all her misery has originated.—I insist upon your absence."

Every word pronounced by Mrs. Bertram, and her determined manner and commanding look, spoke strongly to the tortured soul of Montague. Silent and sad, he now prepared to obey her; and aided by her endeavours to free him from his burthen, had nearly accomplished the meditated retreat, when the movements and change of posture occasioned by this attempt, apparently operated to the restoration of the animal powers, and Maria once more regained her senses.

Their return, however, was productive of fresh difficulties:—she clung to him with strength almost supernatural, and wildly declared her intention of henceforth living or dying in his arms—of sharing his fate—of remaining with him for ever!

Mrs. Bertram tried the force of expostulation and reason; but expostulation and reason were unattended to amidst the frantic ravings of passion and the delirium of despair. At length exhausted nature gave way to corporeal weakness, and another fainting fit succeeded. Montague, mute and miserable, now saw the prudence of the sacrifice required by necessity; and Mrs. Bertram's former request being again urged, no longer met with resistance: he dropped another liquid witness of heartfelt penitence on the pale cheek of the unconscious Maria—pressed his trembling lips on her cold forehead—imprinted a kiss on the hastily snatched hand of his inestimable friend, and sighing profoundly as he burst from the half-relaxed hold of the former, and casting a farewell, melancholy look on them both, rushed forward to the door, from whence his receding form soon ceased to be visible.

At the entrance of the first plantation he met Mrs. Wallace in her way to the Hermitage. She would have passed him unnoticed, however, had not his appearance alarmed her, and produced an enquiry after his health. The unhappy young man started at the sound of her voice, and suddenly stopping, raised his eyes to her face. She was speedily recognised; and on her asking for Mrs. Bertram, he directed her where to find her, accompanied by a request to hasten forwards without loss of time.

Mrs. Wallace, apprehensive from his perturbed and agitated appearance, that some untoward accident had befallen her friend, instantly obeyed his injunctions. She found Mrs.

Bertram supporting Maria, whose senses were again on the recovery: but mental anguish was now absorbed in corporeal sufferings:—the pangs of a premature labour had seized her, brought on by the conflict she had this evening undergone. She was, with difficulty, conveyed to her apartment; where a restless, agonizing night preceded the apprehended event, which took place on the following morning, and gave birth to the secondary cause of all her misery in the form of a female infant; which, though small and apparently delicate, appeared, notwithstanding, likely to live.

Just as Mrs. Bertram was going to forward a note to Stella, in which was contained a request to see her at the Hermitage, a messenger arrived from Woodside, with intelligence that Miss Adair had had a relapse; and therefore as the presence of our heroine could not be dispensed with, her maternal friend was entreated once more to prolong her leave of absence, which was otherwise to have expired in the course of a few days. The mother of the invalid seemed so much interested in the success of this petition, that Mrs. Bertram could not find in her heart to refuse her acquiescence, and a favourable answer was accordingly returned. Stella, of course, remained ignorant of the recent event at the Hermitage; for her worthy benefactress feared to trust it to paper, and a verbal message was out of the question.

Soon after the servant was dispatched from Woodside on this commission, the sound of the trumpet was heard approaching from Wigton. Stella knew it announced the departure of the troops; she therefore stole softly from the chamber of her patient, and entering her own, threw up the sash to observe their motions. The martial strains, grand, solemn, and impressive, reverberated at intervals amidst the surrounding hills for some time previous to the appearance of the performers. At length the helmets of the soldiers were discovered, glittering in the sunbeams of the morning, as they emerged from a plantation of Scotch firs, that concealed a part of the road through which they had to pass.

A gentleman, of an elegant figure and commanding air, occasionally appeared amongst the multitude, as the movements of a high mettled, fiery charger made its way through the crowd of spectators that encompassed, and, at times, nearly retarded their march. The heart of Stella throbbed as she first glanced her eye over this elegant horseman; and she shrunk back from the window under an idea that it could only be St. Vincent who thus shone conspicuous above his companions. Her mind became soon, however, reassured, from the recollection that he was yet to remain in his present quarters for some time to come: she therefore returned to her former situation at the window, and, convinced the cause of her alarm could not possibly be the person she had supposed, again leaned forward, in expectation of discovering her friend Montague in the number.

This wish was not long ungratified. Montague, hitherto placed in the rear, suddenly galloped up to Colonel Arabin, who rode at the head of the men; and after conversing with him for a few minutes, he was returning to his former station, when, upon casting a hasty glance in that direction, he perceived Stella at the window.

Montague moved his helmet, and was advancing to bid her a second adieu, but the Colonel having some further directions to give, called him abruptly back.

The troops in the interim moved on, and before their discourse terminated, the officer who had attracted her notice joined the two former. The late apprehensions of Stella were now not merely renewed—they were confirmed: it was indeed St. Vincent, as her heart had already hinted. She sickened at the conviction, and in much agitation turned from the ardent and melancholy gaze with which he evidently regarded her. Montague speedily remarked the air of pensive dejection that immediately spread over the countenance of his friend. He said something

to him in a low voice, but with much seeming earnestness: the Major suddenly started from his reverie, and each profoundly bowing to our heroine, passed the house without taking any farther notice of her.

The road lay within a short distance of this side of the mansion, and the trampling of horses again attracted her attention. Another division of the troops appeared in view, under the command of Lieutenant Jones. The scene of the preceding evening recurred to his memory, and on looking toward the open window, Stella was perceived leaning against the side of the sash, from whence she imagined herself least likely to be observed.

In the hope of remaining unheeded, she was not, however, long permitted to indulge. Mr. Jones had no sooner reached the vicinity of the window than he instantly rode up, and accosted her in a manner that determined her to retain her position as the most explicit proof she could give of the unimportant light in which she regarded him, and a distant and slight movement of the head was the sole return his first address was honoured with.

“Nay, my fair maid of the Hermitage,” said the incorrigible, familiar puppy, “for Heaven’s sake, do not let your grief thus absorb every sentiment of politeness! though that happy dog Montague is upon the move, those who remain will do their best to supply his place: believe me, you will find Harcourt and myself tolerable substitutes. I wish, *pro bono publico*, I could say as much for the Major; but a married military man is no better than any other unfortunate devil in the same predicament, when his wife is at his elbow.”

“The Major!” involuntarily exclaimed Stella, inattentive to every other part of this witty harangue, and wholly thrown off her guard by the sound of a name so interesting to her feelings— “what of the Major?” repeated she, bending forward as she spoke with a look of earnest enquiry.

Jones burst into a loud and sarcastic laugh; but seeing her about to retire from his view, with a countenance expressive of the profoundest contempt for a conduct so unpardonable, he endeavoured to restrain his mirth, and ludicrously bowing as he advanced nearer the window, begged leave to illustrate the nature of what he had said, by adding that though the Major, Harcourt, and himself were now upon their march with the rest of the light horse, their intention was merely to accompany them a few miles on their way, after which it would prove equally the endeavour and inclination of the two latter to supply the loss of those who had hitherto, in some people’s opinion at least, (again bowing) obtained a preference over them. As for Captain Montague—

Stella had already heard all she desired, and feeling perfectly indifferent to the conclusion of his information, closed the sash with a dignified air of cool disdain, without permitting him sufficient time to finish the sentence.

Jones seemed at first disposed to be offended; but on perceiving the object of his intended displeasure no longer in view to witness its formidable appearance, the design was quickly converted into another loud peal of unmeaning laughter, in the midst of which the disconcerted warrior clapped spurs to his charger, and galloped after his leaders.

CHAP. XV.

“We are creatures of sensation: our worst calamities derive as much of their pungency from the accessories by which they are accompanied, as they do from their intrinsic

value.”

GODWIN.

TWO of the younger Miss Adair's, who, unperceived by Stella, had been observing all that passed from an upper window, now joined her. Convinced that their former suspicions relative to Captain Montague were by no means so unfounded as she seemed willing to persuade them, our heroine at length silently acquiesced in an opinion, for the farther combating of which her spirits were at present by no means adequate: her teasing companions of course seemed to think a reciprocal attachment between her and the Captain henceforth established.

In the evening Mrs. Wallace called at Mr. Adair's, and taking Stella side, related to her the event that had happened at the Hermitage. She heard the recital in much agitation of mind, and at its conclusion insisted upon accompanying the good woman back to their mutual benefactress. This design was, however, presently negatived by the former, who declared Mrs. Bertram had expressly prohibited her return till the time already determined on for that purpose should arrive. As she knew her visitor was far better calculated than herself to be an useful assistant in such an emergency, Stella at length acquiesced, and consented to remain at Woodside for the specified time, provided nothing material occurred in the interim to require her presence at home.

A fortnight from the morning on which the troops had passed Mr. Adair's was already elapsed without producing any occurrence of consequence, except the restoration of his daughter to her former state of convalescence. The term of our heroine's visit was now arrived, and, accompanied by two of the young ladies, after taking an affectionate farewell of the family, she set off for the Hermitage.

The stile which led to the private path through the park, by some accident had been broken down, and its place was now filled up with stones and furze until it could be properly repaired. This occasioned a trifling disappointment to the young ladies, who saw themselves under the necessity of proceeding by the public road, although extremely dusty, and considerably about: no probable alternative, however, appeared; and while the Miss Adair's stood regretting the circumstance without attempting to remedy it by advancing forward, Stella, sunk into mental abstraction, was retracing in idea the various incidents of the formidable bull adventure which had occurred in the vicinity of their present station. Absorbed in the train of painful reflections that naturally followed, she perceived not that her companions had removed to the opposite side of the road, and were speaking to a gentleman in a shooting dress, who was pointing to the principal gate of the park, that lay at some distance before them. At length she heard the voice of Sally Adair repeating her name, and recollecting herself, immediately issued from behind a hawthorn bush, the full form of which had accidentally concealed her from their view. The stranger turned round upon her approach, and a sudden flush of crimson spread over every feature.

“Come, Stella,” cried one of the Adair's, in a gay accent, “our difficulties are ended: Major St. Vincent is in possession of a key to the park, and kindly offers the wanderers admittance to its apparently prohibited regions.”

Stella started at this intimation, and raising her eyes from the ground, on which they had been hitherto rivetted, met those of St. Vincent fixed upon her face with an expression of the deepest interest: her looks were again bent downwards; and the whole party now moved on to the gate.

During this period the Major compelled himself to converse on a variety of topics: but

forced exertions of this description are not always successful: frequent pauses broke in upon the detail of those events on which he discoursed; and the anxiety with which he endeavoured to repair his error, evinced a mind struggling under some powerful and, occasionally, ill-suppressed anguish.

At length they came to that part of the road where he had placed Stella on the exterior side of the park-wall, and supported her in his arms while fainting under the terror and apprehension to which the dread of her expected sufferings from the bull had given birth.

St. Vincent's temporary abstractions increased as they drew nearer this memorable spot. Arrived at it, his eyes and thoughts appeared solely occupied by Stella. The whole of his conduct now became too pointed to pass longer unnoticed. The Adairs remarked this circumstance; but mistaking the cause from whence it originated, thoughtlessly added to the distress of the parties most interested by the ill-timed raillery that succeeded their observation.

"Ah Stella! you are a sly girl," cried Elizabeth, with a provoking archness of manner, "and under that downcast look think to conceal the sensations produced by a first review of this never-to-be-forgotten spot after the departure of your truant swain, your gallant protector!—Trust not appearances, however, Major; nor fear that your absent friend runs any risk of being expunged from remembrance; for I aver, and Sally there can corroborate what I say, that we never pass that identical portion of the wall, either on this or the other side, without a look, a sigh, or some incontestible proof of particular attention escaping that demure little gipsy."

"Good God, Elizabeth!" exclaimed Stella, in a voice of the deepest distress.

"Nay, nay, child," cried Sally, laughing as she spoke, "two against one will gain credit in any court in Christendom."

"This is too much!" said Stella, in a low, tremulous accent—"it is cruel—very cruel indeed!—I entreat the subject may be changed—if you value me, I entreat it!"

The Major, after a perturbed look at Stella, had previously advanced a few steps without being conscious of the circumstance.

A servant, breathless with haste, now appeared, and accosting the Miss Adair's, informed them their presence was instantly required at home, where some visitors had arrived soon after their departure, who impatiently awaited their return, which he had been dispatched to accelerate without loss of time.

"Major," cried the gay Elizabeth, beckoning him back, "to your protection we commit this forsaken damsel; pray see her safely across the park, lest some furious animal should again start up to impede her progress, and Captain Montague summon you to a court-martial for negligence in the execution of your duty."

"Adieu, my silent friend!" rejoined her laughing sister. "We shall meet again in the course of a few days: meanwhile I trust Major St. Vincent will be enabled to give the absent red coat a good account of you."

"Is this treatment generous?—is it delicate?" asked Stella, in a reproachful whisper.

"We will discuss the merits of this question at a more favourable opportunity," replied the giddy Adair's, and curtsying to the Major, hurried instantly away.

The situation of those who remained, was at this juncture by no means enviable. They walked on in silence: but the deep and half-suppressed sighs which repeatedly burst from the bosom of her companion reverberated on the trembling heart of poor Stella, who, at length, sick and overcome by the conflicting emotions of her soul, would have sunk to the ground in a fainting fit, had not the feeble groan that announced her situation roused the unfortunate St. Vincent to a sense of it. She was now reduced to the dilemma of either resting herself upon the

side of the ground, or accepting the offered arm of her conductor: she preferred the latter, as least liable to objection; and they slowly continued their progress.

The approaching sound of horses' feet now gradually reached them, and Mrs. St. Vincent, with her constant companion Lieutenant Jones, abruptly appeared at a sudden turning of the road.

Stella started, and involuntarily attempted to withdraw her hand; but conscious of her inability to support her trembling frame, St. Vincent resisted the effort, and grasped it more firmly in his.

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CHAP. XVI.

“Are these the proofs of tenderness and love:—
“These endless quarrels, discontents, and jealousies:—
“These never-ceasing wailings and complaining—
“These furious starts—these whirlwinds of the soul,
“Which every other moment rise to madness?”

ROWE.

MRS. St. Vincent regarded them with an uncommon degree of malevolence; and checking her horse, which was so placed as to prevent them passing her, sarcastically accosted her husband with—

“Your servant, Major St. Vincent!—Is not this a charming evening?”

“Such I presume you think it, Madam, otherwise I had scarcely had the pleasure of seeing you on horseback.”

“Humph!—the pleasure!—witty too!—Well, but, Sir, pray where is the wonder of my being on horseback when your pedestrian companion has already acquired sufficient strength to quit her apartment?”

Stella raised her eyes to the speaker; but not comprehending the meaning of what she heard, nor supposing herself implicated in its explanation, instantly withdrew them again.

St. Vincent did not seem more enlightened on the subject; but his look of enquiry passed unheeded in the laudable eagerness manifested by his lady to mortify our unfortunate heroine.

“Upon my word, Miss Bertram,” the Miss was pronounced with peculiar emphasis, “you really evince an immense portion of courage thus to encounter the night air at so early a period of emancipation from the confinement of a sick chamber!”

Stella once more looked up with an air of the utmost astonishment; but immediately recollecting that she probably alluded to her late attendance on Miss Adair, and being besides uncertain whether she spoke in earnest or jest, though from the general tenor of her former conduct the latter appeared most likely, the eyes of our heroine were a second time dropped in mute forbearance.

“Pretty, ignorant, modest innocent!” cried the scoffing Mrs. St. Vincent, turning with an expressive sneer of supercilious contempt to the obsequious Mr. Jones, whose white teeth were just beginning to show themselves at the commencement of a ready approving smile, when the stern contracted brow and indignant eye of the Major speedily closed his lips, and spread a degree of ludicrous solemnity over every working feature.

“A *convenient double*,” resumed Mrs. St. Vincent, “is one of the most useful items in a modern man of fashion’s inventory of indispensable necessities. I think, Major, you and your friend Montague are of this opinion: no doubt he would have been equally ready to serve his counterpart under similar circumstances; but, perhaps, in the present instance, your partnership may be formed on one and the same system of reciprocity; and then in that case—why the article of commerce becomes a mutual concern, you know!”

Another expressive glance was directed to the Lieutenant, who nevertheless began to feel by no means at home in his saddle, which, with the particular construction of a bridle he had seen twenty times before, was examined and re-examined with the most persevering assiduity, every instant.

"You have been invisible for some time at the Hermitage, I think, Miss Bertram?" continued Mrs. St. Vincent, bowing with an air of ceremonious, but affected respect to Stella.

"I was from home, Madam," faintly replied the agitated girl.

"Or denied when there!" retorted Mrs. St. Vincent, with malignant quickness.

"Madam!" said our heroine, with increased surprise.

"Sweet, unconscious innocent!" again cried her tormentor, with an hysterical kind of laugh.

Stella made another and more successful effort to free herself from the arm of the Major, and gliding past the horses, walked on as well as her trembling limbs and mental perturbation would permit.

"And now, Mr. St. Vincent, when you have no burthen but that of your own reflections to support, may I presume to enquire how you met with that well principled and modest-looking lady who had just discovered she can move off with out your officious assistance?"

"Suppose I plead privilege, Madam, and refuse to gratify impertinent curiosity?—Your are my wife, not my Father Confessor."

"And treated accordingly!" retorted the enraged Mrs. St. Vincent, bursting into a flood of tears.

"Ride on, Mr. Jones," said the Major, in a tone of evident displeasure: "however your presence may be necessary to Mrs. St. Vincent, her husband can at present dispense with it."

"No, stay, Mr. Jones," sobbed the lady, "and bear witness to the treatment I am going to experience!—going!" she reiterated— "when has it ever been otherwise?"

Mr. Jones seemed unwilling to disoblige either party, and, though, like the Yorkshireman, he preferred "eating to fighting," scarcely knew how to act in so critical an emergency.

"Ride on, Sir!" vociferated St. Vincent, in a voice that speedily determined the matter, and admitted not of further hesitation: "*your evidence shall be called for when wanted!*"

Mr. Jones bowed, and shewed his wisdom by a prompt and ready compliance with the will of his commander.

St. Vincent now endeavoured to expostulate with this perverse woman on the folly and absurdity of her conduct; and, for the sake of poor Stella, to whom he well knew she ever bore the most inveterate malice, finally condescended to explain the accidental nature of his recent appearance in her company.

Where reason is not a native of the soil, like other exotics, it frequently proves difficult to rear. Mrs. St. Vincent heard him at first with every indication of impatience and incredulity: the result of some former altercations of the same nature had, however, made her rather fearful of exceeding certain bounds, at the climax of which she began to feel herself nearly arrived: his influence was, besides, still predominant over her mind; therefore, when she saw him almost wearied out, and visibly disgusted with the violence of her temper, the dread of a lasting rupture being the consequence of such repeated provocations at length operated as usual, and her passions gradually subsided into a state of more apparent calmness.

"You will now, however, accompany me home, Sir, and I will walk across the park with you?" said she, in a half-sullen, half-humble voice.

"No; Jones must supply my present deficiencies in point of attendance: I have tacitly promised to see Miss Bertram through the plantations, and cannot possibly do otherwise."

"The claims of a wife must then, it seems, yield to those of—"

"Honour!" interrupted the Major, perceiving her eyes sparkle, and her deepening colour

indicate an approaching relapse.

“Yes, the honour of a modern husband!” she replied, with a disdainful toss of the head.

“Margaret!” said St. Vincent, fixing a stern and significant eye on her face.

The word was too emphatically pronounced to fail of making the intended impression: she knew from experience how little was to be gained with the Major by ill-humour or violence; and apprehending a return of both, resisted the recall of Jones no longer, but silently permitted herself to be escorted home by her now crest-fallen conductor.

In spite of her wish to proceed alone, the weeping Stella was soon overtaken by St. Vincent, who, on reaching her, attempted to apologize for the foregoing scene; but the words died away, and his voice became nearly inarticulate before the first sentence was concluded.

“Leave me, Sir—I entreat you, leave me!” said Stella, after a temporary, and affecting pause. “Alas! why am I thus perpetually destined to be the victim of fallacious appearances!—why for ever doomed to encounter the punishment of guilt, without the most distant inclination to wander from the narrow path of moral rectitude!—hard—hard fate!”

Her tears streamed afresh at the melancholy picture of the past and the future, which a sanguine imagination now presented to her view; and in the mute contemplation of anguish so unmerited, St. Vincent seemed to have forgotten the heavy portion of individual misery which had fallen to his own share, while hers possessed sufficient influence to throb with accumulating force through his every vein.

Persevering to refuse his offered arm, and equally cautious in avoiding every possible degree of conversation—sick at heart, weak, and weary, she at length reached the garden gate of the Hermitage; where, afraid to trust her voice with a last farewell, she raised her humid eyes, and fixed them for a moment on the agitated St. Vincent with a look of unutterable woe, who, torn already by a thousand conflicting passions, was totally inadequate to the task of sustaining this unexpected proof of tenderness. He struck his forehead with violence, and suddenly snatching her hand, pressed it first to his heart, and afterwards to his lips, in all the agony of incurable despair; then abruptly rushed from her presence, and darted into the thickest part of the plantations.

CHAP. XVII.

“Blustering when courted, crouching when oppress’d;
“Wise to themselves, and fools to all the world;
“Restless in change, and perjur’d to a proverb.”

DRYDEN.

TO account for the dark, mysterious hints thrown out by Mrs. St. Vincent, in which our heroine seemed evidently implicated, it is here necessary to observe that an old woman in the neighbourhood of the Hermitage, remarkable for her gossiping disposition, had somehow discovered that a child was supposed to be born in that house, whose mother was carefully screened from public notice. This person had not heard of the unfortunate Maria’s residence there, for it had hitherto remained a profound secret in the vicinity: of course, the little stranger, if such really existed, was immediately saddled upon poor Stella, whose reported absence received no manner of credit from an idea that it was merely fabricated for the purpose of deception and temporary concealment. This story, circulated at first in whispers amongst the country people, at length reached the ears of Mrs. St. Vincent’s maid Jenny, from whom it was speedily communicated to ascertain the truth.

An imputation so inimical to the character of our innocent heroine was greedily listened to by this unfeeling woman, and every means of investigation instantly, though secretly adopted, to ascertain the truth.

Where the stigma of error is ardently wished to be fixed on the conduct of an enemy, the slightest appearance may suffice for the designs of calumny, and every trifle judged sufficient to build a foundation upon: the foregoing attempt was therefore, in due time, imagined to be successfully accomplished, as far as related to the birth of the child; but the partner in her guilt still remained to be ascertained.

After every possible scrutiny was practised for this purpose, little or nothing appeared to criminate Major St. Vincent, who, upon the whole, stood tolerably acquitted of the charge, though his affectionate wife still harboured some private suspicions on the occasion.

Not so with Captain Montague, however:—his frequent visits to the Hermitage were no secret in the neighbourhood; neither was his partiality for our heroine unknown. The interesting situation in which Mrs. St. Vincent had herself discovered them at Mr. Adair’s seemed to corroborate the general notion of a particular attachment between them. The prominent features of this interview instantly recurred to her memory: the lady in tears—the gentleman pressing her hand to his bosom—the visible consternation of the parties on perceiving they were observed—all, all seemed conviction “strong as proofs of holy writ,” and, in the jaundiced eye of a predetermined accuser, of the most decisive description, though not exclusively calculated to exculpate her husband from a co-partnership in the affair; for, in spite of every effort to bring him in as a fellow-offender having failed, her unjustifiable hatred to poor Stella still induced her to retain the supposition that opportunity was alone wanting to pursue a similar line of conduct with one whom she more than suspected had formerly viewed the detested girl with no small degree of secret partiality.

Under this view of the business, Mrs. St. Vincent felt comparatively happy, if a disposition like hers can be supposed capable of such a sensation; for she concluded her husband would soon cease to indulge a prepossession in favour of a woman already the mistress of his

dearest friend; or should the fascinating delusion continue a little longer, it would still prove but temporary, and would not be followed by any consequences that ought seriously to alarm her for producing a permanent estrangement of his affections.

Had Mrs. St. Vincent been reasonable enough to think thus rationally for any length of time, it had been fortunate for herself; but uniformity of conduct on such occasions formed no part of her character; and this unlucky encounter with the reprobated Stella, in such company, speedily overthrew all the small stock of wisdom on which she had previously laid so instable a foundation for domestic tranquillity. The case might nevertheless be exactly as he had represented it, respecting the accidental nature of their interview; and this idea furnished some small degree of consolation, although inadequate to the task of totally removing every intrusive suspicion which occasionally obtruded itself on her versatile and irascible mind.

Mrs. St. Vincent proved of that order of being who are “every thing by starts, and nothing long:” her attachment to the Major reigned, notwithstanding, paramount over every other passion; and the partial interruptions it at times received from the ungovernable violence of her temper, were usually succeeded by an increase of affection, which frequently rendered the effects of some subsequent and capricious cause of offence more than ever intolerent and provoking. Strict in principle, and steady in all his actions, St. Vincent nevertheless endeavoured to overlook consequences in causes: he knew he was greatly in arrears on the score of what is generally understood by the word love; he knew that to her preference of him was owing the peace of his family, and the chief part of all he could now call his own in the world; and he likewise knew that his heart was entirely in the possession of another woman, in spite of the foregoing obligations to Margaret Ross. These considerations operated as they ever will do in a good and generous mind: they rendered him indulgent to foibles, and patient under the provocations which would have driven men of an inferior character to extremities; and it was only when a sense of what he owed himself rendered coercion necessary, when he conceived his honour or his respectability implicated by a different mode of proceeding, that he adopted strong measures, or judiciously exerted the legal and decisive authority of a husband for the purpose of recalling her to considerations of duty and propriety. In this predicament he found himself placed on the recent occasion; and the remedy, though repugnant to his nature, was necessarily practised with its usual success.

After separating from Major St. Vincent, Stella entered her home in a state of extreme perturbation, which was not lessened by the anxiety her appearance created in Mrs. Bertram, and her kind enquiries on the subject.

“Stella, my love, you are not well!” said her worthy benefactress, regarding her with a look of the utmost solicitude: “has any thing happened to distress you?”

“Nothing new, my dear mother,” (so she usually styled her truly maternal friend) was the reply, as she threw herself languidly on the sofa.

“Perhaps your walk has fatigued you, then?—the evening has proved uncommonly close and sultry.”

Stella sighed, but spoke out.

Mrs. Bertram threw open the sash in order to procure her a little fresh air; and having made her swallow some hartshorn and water, enquired for Mrs. Wallace, who, she said, had left her a few hours ago, on a short visit to her niece, and proposed afterwards walking on to meet Stella in her way back from Woodside.

“I saw her not, however,” replied our heroine.

“You surprise me,” cried the old lady: “I certainly perceived some one with you:—the

evening, indeed, is far advanced, and with the distance might have deceived me as to the person; but surely in crossing the Grove you were not alone?—in that circumstance I could scarcely be mistaken.”

Stella repeated her former answer, in a voice expressive of chagrin and vexation.

“Then, my love,” resumed Mrs. Bertram, without noticing the increased emotion of her auditor, “you are still ignorant, I presume, of the last new arrangements at the Grove. Mrs. Ross is ordered by her physicians to the milder climate of the south, and sets off accordingly in a very short time, to try what effect change of air will produce on her enfeebled frame. But this is not all:—Mr. Benson called with a message from her this morning, requesting to see me in the course of the day. I obeyed the summons immediately, and being conducted to her apartment, soon learned the cause of the invitation. She wishes, my dear child, to obtain your company and attendance during the term of her absence. Independent of her former obligations, I conceived the advantages to be derived from a situation so eligible far too important to be declined without your previous approbation and knowledge. After some further discourse on the subject, it was agreed to await your return before any final determination should take place.—What say you, Stella—are you willing to comply with this request, and oblige your kind benefactress at the Grove?”

A short pause ensued, during which our heroine appeared much agitated. At length, perceiving an answer unavoidable, she replied, in a tremulous accent—

“I have insuperable objections to the scheme you mention, my dear Madam.”

“Insuperable objections, Stella!” repeated Mrs. Bertram, with a look of astonishment: “I do not comprehend you meaning child.”

Stella threw her arms round the goody lady’s neck, and wept upon her bosom.

Mrs. Bertram’s surprise augmented: she requested an immediate explanation of words so mysterious and incomprehensible.

Stella, shocked and hurt by reflecting on the suspicion and weak conduct she had displayed, gradually acquired more self-command and mental exertion: she spoke of a violent head-ache, to which the depression of her spirits was ascribed; of her inability for a situation so superior to her expectations, and the repugnance she must assuredly feel to be placed at so considerable a distance from her best and dearest friend at the Hermitage; in short, every topic was introduced most likely to disguise the truth, and prevent any further arguments in behalf of Mrs. Ross’s proposal: and, at length, when all her attempts for that purpose proved ineffectual, she declared, in a faltering voice, her unconquerable dislike to any station in life, however beneficial in other respects, that must subject her to the daily insults of such a woman as Mrs. St. Vincent, who, as her kind friend well knew, had long harboured the most decided, though inexplicable aversion for her, which, she was so far from wishing to conceal, that no possible opportunity for displaying her unmerited hatred was permitted to escape without exhibiting some fresh instance of its virulence.

Stella spoke with a bitterness of expression till now unpractised; but the late scene pressed heavy on her remembrance, and her heart swelled at the idea of tamely acquiescing in her own humiliation by accepting an offer so well calculated to gratify the unceasing malice of a capricious, ill-tempered enemy.

“Mrs. St. Vincent, my dear, does not accompany her mother,” said Mrs. Bertram, after regarding her *protégée* with a look of fresh astonishment; “she remains at the Grove till the regiment removes to its next destination. It is in consequence of her declining the performance of her filial duties that you are requested to supply her place. Poor Mrs. Ross! how I pity her!—My

Stella would not desert a parent under such circumstances: but wealth and happiness are by no means synonymous terms.”

Stella thought of St. Vincent, and sighed as she pensively answered— “Too surely they are not!”

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CHAP. XVIII.

“I feel my genial spirits droop,
“My hopes all flat—Nature within me seems
“In all her functions weary of herself,
“And I shall shortly be with them that rest.”

MILTON.

RELIEVED by the foregoing intelligence from an apprehension yet more formidable to her mind than all the ostensible terror Mrs. St. Vincent's malevolent disposition was supposed to inspire, an apprehension that a residence under the same roof with Major St. Vincent would neither prove conducive to the re-establishment of his peace or her own, but, on the contrary, be attended with the most probable evil to both, Stella began to see the business in a different point of view, and flattered herself that change of place, and a succession of new objects, might be of material service in producing an alteration in those sentiments which at present blasted every enjoyment, and obscured every prospect in disappointment and secret anguish.

After much conversation on the subject, it was determined to delay its final discussion till the following day: that discussion, however, was to be made as subservient as possible to the wishes of Mrs. Ross, to whose early indulgence our heroine was so infinitely indebted for the many great and incalculable advantages derived from the sources of extensive knowledge and superior education.

The two chief considerations which could occasion a moment's hesitation, were now totally out of the question: the Major would be far removed from all future chance of interfering with her meritorious struggles for the restoration of her lost tranquillity, and Mrs. Bertram would not be left without a companion while Maria Campbell remained under her roof; a circumstance which was likely to prove of some duration, as her guardian and his fashionable helpmate were now in Yorkshire, attending a widowed sister of the latter, from whom they expected a considerable increase of fortune on the event of her demise, which, from an incurable state of bad health, seemed gradually approaching: at any rate, Mrs. Bertram had been long engaged to spend some time with her friends in Ireland; and consequently was equally prepared in either case against the likelihood of passing the term of her *protégée's* absence in total solitude.

These considerations partly reconciled the mind of Stella to a temporary separation from her maternal friend: nevertheless, she determined to stipulate for permission to revisit the Hermitage, should any unforeseen occurrence require her return before the expiration of their intended residence in the south. This arrangement afforded her affectionate heart no small pleasure, as its adoption appeared to unite the reciprocal duties of gratitude to Mrs. Ross, and filial attention to her chief benefactress, the friendly Mrs. Bertram.

Maria Campbell, whose recovery had latterly appeared somewhat dubious, happened to be rather more indisposed than usual this evening; which was probably owing to the agitation she experienced at the idea of a first interview with our heroine, whom she had not yet seen, but to whose humane interference in her affairs she knew herself infinitely indebted: Stella, therefore, was not allowed to satisfy her curiosity by an immediate introduction into the chamber of a woman of whom she had heard so much, and who, in a great measure, owed her present comparative state of safety from public exposure to the exertions she had used for that purpose.

Breakfast was no sooner concluded next day, than the suspense by which they were both

agitated, was speedily brought to a termination.

Solitude, sickness, and misfortune are great promoters of sober reflection; and Maria had benefited very considerably by the two latter; whilst the former was only occasionally broke upon, to admit the instructive and sensible conversation of her kind hostess, whose salutary precepts seemed to have made their proper impression on her young and naturally uncorrupted heart. The gay, the giddy, the fashionable pupil of the dissipated Mrs. Harris no longer appeared to view; melancholy personified seemed to have taken her place, accompanied by that look of pensive dejection and broken-hearted submission to irremediable evils, which is frequently exhibited in a countenance expressive, like Maria's, of all that passes in the secret recesses of the soul—a soul deeply wounded by the fatal conviction of voluntary error and self-created wretchedness. Her pallid face and emaciated form seemed to announce the journey of dissolution commenced, which was to raise her

“Above
“The reach of human pain—above the flight
“Of human joy.”*

When Mrs. Bertram, on entering the room, mentioned the name of her *protégée*, Maria, supporting herself on the arm of the easy chair in which she was seated, attempted to receive her standing: her corporeal and mental frame, however, were at this moment equally inadequate to the task imposed upon them; and the trembling, enfeebled girl was under the necessity of replacing herself almost instantly. She leaned her throbbing forehead against the back of the chair, and whilst her hand was extended to Stella, a violent burst of anguish took place, which, though it deeply affected her new acquaintance, proved of material service to herself, as it probably prevented a return of those fainting fits to which she had latterly been subject. But though the bloom of her cheeks had vanished, and the once sparkling lustre of her dark eyes was no longer visible—though the playful smile of light hearted innocence sported not, as formerly, on the coral lip of beauty, or dwelt in the fascinating dimple that added an additional grace to the *tout-ensemble* of the late glowing picture, Stella, as she mournfully gazed on the now humbled victim of error, fancied she could easily trace the sad change that grief had produced, and judge, by what remained of the almost ruined fabric, how eminently lovely it must have appeared in the pristine days of its glory; she saw, she felt the fatal contrast, and her eyes were instantly suffused in tears of the deepest regret and commiseration. Maria's conduct corresponded with the nature of her feelings; and softly raising the hand she still grasped in hers, with a look of ineffable sweetness, pressed it to her bosom in all the ardour of warm and grateful acknowledgment.

Mrs. Bertram, who thought it best to let the first effusions of acute sensibility subside of themselves, unchecked by the interference of cool and dispassionate reason, was for some minutes a silent spectator of this scene; but apprehensive, if too much prolonged, of the effect it might produce on the weak and shattered nerves of poor Maria, she at length interposed; and the interrupted, desultory sentences hitherto uttered, were succeeded by others of a more connected description; during which the young people appeared mutually pleased and interested in behalf of each other, and alike happy in the idea that this hitherto formidable interview was finally accomplished.

On retiring from the chamber of the invalid, Stella could not help expressing her anxiety for the recovery of their guest, who apparently looked forward to the hour of expected

* Thomson.

dissolution with a degree of calmness and composure extremely affecting to her young visitor. The subject was then changed for that of the preceding evening; after which they prepared to call at the Grove, and acquaint Mrs. Ross with the result of their determination, which they had previously agreed should be favourable to her wishes.

From the bearer of that lady's message to the Hermitage, Mrs. Bertram understood the other members of the family were engaged to spend the whole of the day from home. This circumstance was casually repeated to our heroine during the first intimation she received of the business, and proved a seasonable relief from the apprehension of any accidental *rencontre* with the Major. After their arrival they reached the apartment of Mrs. Ross without seeing a single individual, the servant who announced them excepted.

Stella had not visited her early patroness for some time; and the death-like expression marked in legible characters on every placid feature almost overcame her fortitude, as she paused to contemplate the sad alteration but too apparent since their last meeting.

"I thought you had forgotten your poor sick friend, Stella," said the faintly smiling invalid, as she presented a hand still more emaciated than Maria Campbell's; "but I ought not to expect young people would quit the cheerful scenes of health and happiness for the dreary seclusion of such a room as this: at least," continued she, sighing, "I have not been much accustomed to sacrifices of this description; and from you, my good girl, it would be cruel to exact what the nearest relative thinks too much to bestow on a dying parent."

"Good God!" exclaimed Stella, with energy, and raising the hand she still retained to her lips: "I was ready at all times to obey your summons, my dear, my revered benefactress; why then have I not been called upon to gratify my own feelings by being permitted to administer to your wants and wishes?"

"Permitted, my dear!" repeated Mrs. Ross, in a voice of surprise; "why you excused yourself from accepting my invitation so frequently of late, that at length I determined to try my influence with good Mrs. Bertram here, since what I once possessed over your inclinations seemed apparently too much upon the wane to leave any flattering prospect of success from a direct application to yourself."

"Indeed, indeed," exclaimed Stella, emphatically, "you wrong me, Madam!—nothing should have detained me from attending your commands, except the positive prohibition I received."

"Prohibition!"

"Yes, my dear Madam: Mrs. St. Vincent ordered me to be informed that you were too much indisposed to admit visitors, but that I should be sent for when my services were wanted; till then, I was given to understand, they could be dispensed with."

"Enough, my good girl," said Mrs. Ross, while a profound sigh accompanied the tear that glistened in her downcast, languid eye: "my suspicions, I find, were just! Alas! when—but," added she, suddenly checking herself, "where the evil is irremediable, complaint proves equally childish and ineffectual."

Mrs. Ross, after a momentary pause, now entered on the topic of their projected journey to the south, and expressed the highest satisfaction at the visible alacrity with which Stella agreed to accompany her. To Mrs. Bertram she poured forth the warmest acknowledgments for her ready acquiescence in a plan the successful accomplishment of which seemed to afford her no small satisfaction, and repeatedly assured her guests that her gratitude and remembrance of their goodness could only terminate with her existence.

"Alas!" thought Stella, "is the great, the opulent Mrs. Ross, she who ought to command

and be obeyed by her numerous train of domestics—is this woman, at whose nod the good things of this world are ready to descend in torrents, necessitated to look for consolation and attendance from the humble and lowly inhabitants of such an abode as ours—from the friendless widow and unacknowledged foundling?—Oh Providence! thy levelling hand is here visible indeed!—that hand which places the poor and needy, but virtuous and contented offspring of the cottage on an enviable equality with the proud and prosperous possessor of thousands, and forces the latter to look down from the summit of earthly grandeur, from the dazzling pomp of adventitious success, on a fellow-creature whose sole wealth possibly consists in an upright heart and a virtuous conduct!”

Such were the secret reflections of our heroine while the sick and dejected Mrs. Ross was conversing with the mistress of the Hermitage; and as they passed in quick succession through her mind, she felt alike the inefficacy of wealth to procure happiness, or the pride of grandeur to banish corroding anguish from the bosom that sighed for the less glaring, but more rational enjoyments of life.

CHAP. XIX.

“Gently scan your brother man,
“Still gentler sister woman;
“Tho’ they may gang a kennin wrang,
“To step aside is human:
“One point must still be greatly dark—
“The moving why they do it;
“And just as lamely can you mark
“How far perhaps they rue it.”

BURNS.

MRS. BERTRAM returned home before dinner; but, at the request of Mrs. Ross, permitted Stella to become her guest for the remainder of the day. It had of late been customary with the lady of the mansion to lie down in the afternoon, in order to recruit her debilitated frame, which the smallest exertion was apt to fatigue: she retired therefore about the usual period allotted for this purpose, and requested our heroine might amuse herself in the interim with a new publication, that would be found on the window-seat in the drawing-room.

The work was well written; but the subject appeared dry and uninteresting: the perusal of very few pages sufficed to satisfy her curiosity, and she threw the volume aside in disgust. The sun shone mildly refulgent through the shrubbery, and exhibited the variegated tints of the flowering plants in the most pleasing point of view. At length some of his glittering beams rested on the little glass casement of a small cottage, picturesquely situated in a well wooded corner of the pleasure-grounds. Stella recollected having formerly visited this romantic spot in company with her young friends, Maria and Emma. It was then inhabited by Mr. Ross’s huntsman and his family. The wife of this man happened to be a particular favourite with all the three, and she now determined to call upon her.

The good woman was alone, and appeared to be highly delighted with this mark of our heroine’s attention. She ushered her into the best apartment—wiped the dust from an old fashioned high backed chair that stood near the chimney, and moving it to the window, entreated her guest to be seated. A small table, covered with a coarse, but clean napkin, was then placed before her, and oaten bread, with the produce of her little dairy, ostentatiously displayed for her acceptance.

It was not in the nature of Stella intentionally to offend any human being; and she forced herself to partake of the articles so hospitably offered, and so profusely recommended by her kind hostess, in spite of the dinner she had so recently partaken of at the Grove.

“Ah, welladay!” said the worthy creature, as she pensively leaned on a corner of the table, and addressed herself in a low restrained voice to her visitor, “times are sadly changed, Miss Stella, since the illness of our good lady! For my part, I wish I were any where but here, and so I continually tell my husband. Poor folks, however, must do as they can: he says we may not be bettered by flitting*; and to be sure the house is beyond what we expect, and the wages far greater than ever we had before. I should not be sorry, however, to see some people who call themselves my superiors a little more attentive to appearances, for ‘handsome is that handsome

* The Scotch term for removing to another place.

does,' says the old proverb."

From the position in which Stella happened to be placed at the window, a distant prospect of the very spot where she had been consigned to the care of St. Vincent by the mischief-loving Adairs, struck her view. Like the attractive nature of the loadstone, this discovery fixed her thoughts instantly on one object, and rendered them inattentive to every other; she therefore heedlessly replied, that it might be so, and that she believed Mrs. Blair was perfectly in the right, without comprehending a single syllable of what the poor woman alluded to.

"Nay, Miss Stella," exclaimed the latter, a little piqued at the evident inattention of her auditor, "I am sure you do more than believe so, otherwise you had never proved so great a favourite with our good lady at the mansion-house.—Alas! alas! how badly have things gone on since her place in the family has been supplied by another! Perhaps they may mend, however, when the remainder of the soldiers leave us. I wonder what kept that Jones behind! if I were the Major—"

"The Major!" interrupted Stella, with a sudden start—"what did you say of the Major?—he is not approaching, I hope?"

"No, no," answered Mrs. Blair, with a significant shake of her head; "there are others who take solitary walks as well as the Major. As for him, he is not only the handsomest, but the best gentleman in the world: I wish I could say half as much of some folks but too nearly connected with him."

The emphatical manner in which these words were pronounced struck Stella: her mental abstraction was now no longer visible; she became all ear, and eagerly requested her entertainer to explain herself.

Mrs. Blair drew her seat closer to our heroine, and after a few preliminary cautions, proceeded to inform her that Mrs. St. Vincent's conduct with Mr. Jones had latterly been much remarked and animadverted upon by the lower class of people; that she was frequently seen at all hours walking with him in the plantations and shrubbery; and what particularly provoked their censure was, the open and daring manner in which she often ventured to notice him under the very eye of her husband, who was universally adored by every human being on the Nabob's estate; while she, on the contrary, seemed an object of general dislike and secret reprobation.—"The covered walk, yonder by the side of the river, is a favourite haunt of the Major's; he is frequently seen there for an hour at a time: and, would you believe it, Miss?" continued the narrator, with an additional portion of energy, "his strange, unaccountable lady thinks nothing of meeting him in that out-of-the-way place with only the vile, conceited fellow Jones in her company; who, however, shews one sign of grace at least, for he appears always much graver than Miss Ross, and never joins in the loud laughs she sets up in her husband's hearing: but we need not be surprised at any thing after the treatment she is known to give her good mother."

"But how does Major St. Vincent bear this behaviour of his lady?—does he take no notice of Mr. Jones's share in it?"

"Why, Miss Stella, to tell you a secret, it is thought the Major cares very little about her; and, in regard to Jones, he is said to consider him in too contemptible a light to apprehend any serious liking on the part of his wife for such a puppy: at least, so the Major's gentleman told my husband. But, dear Miss, for the love of God, do not repeat a single syllable of what I have said, otherwise we may perhaps be brought into some quandary about them! young Madam would stop at nothing to be revenged on us in that case; and poor folks, you know, cannot always command a house to put their head in, if turned into the open air at a moment's warning."

Stella assured her talkative companion that she had nothing to apprehend on that account;

and promising to repeat her visit at some future opportunity, soon after quitted the cottage. Her steps, however, instead of carrying her to the mansion-house, insensibly conveyed her to the “favourite haunt of the Major,” where, uninterrupted and alone, she pursued the train of reflections produced by Mrs. Blair’s recent intelligence.

In regard to the imputed guilt of which Mrs. St. Vincent seemed pretty clearly suspected, the upright heart of our heroine entertained a very different opinion from that adopted by the public: that she appeared imprudent was undeniable; but, badly as Stella thought of her in general, she could not admit the possibility of real error, when the husband she possessed was put in competition with the despicable insignificant substitute assigned him; nor did she imagine Mrs. St. Vincent’s principles so corrupt, or her haughty disposition yet so humbled, as to carry her to so criminal an excess of unjustifiable passion. The adduced instances of supposed boldness and depravity brought in accusation against her by Mrs. Blair, seemed, in the more candid judgment of our gentle heroine, to imply nothing farther than a wish to rekindle his dormant tenderness, (if for her he had ever experienced a sensation of that description) by calling those particles of jealousy which are inherent in our nature from their present state of apathy into action, and thereby ascertaining the positive extent of her actual influence over his mind, in the degree of resentment her apparent preference of another might produce: indeed, her mode of proceeding before the Major could scarcely admit of a different construction; unless she had irretrievably reached the last stage of infamy, and become hardened, in the most unexampled manner, at the very commencement of vice; a circumstance not commonly usual even in characters where the bias to profligacy had long reigned predominant before practice took place of theory, and gave a loose to the secret inclinations of the unfortunate and erring mortal over whom its degrading sway had unhappily proved too fatally successful. That Mrs. St. Vincent, however, could not yet have attained this climax of female misconduct seemed fully ascertained by the behaviour of her husband, who, though the nature of his feelings on her account rendered him perfectly indifferent to her proceedings in the common and trifling occurrences of a modern woman of fashion’s transactions, would by no means have remained a passive or inactive spectator of those in which his own honour and the respect due to himself were seriously implicated.

But though Stella called to her aid all these auxiliary reflections in favour of Mrs. St. Vincent’s innocence, and was willing to imagine the foregoing motives might have influenced her secret inclinations in the adoption of such measures, she could not help condemning the means by which they were to be effected. “To do evil that good may arise from it,” was rather a dangerous experiment, and it was to be feared the mind that could stoop to make it, might afterwards be led by imperceptible gradations to the commission of the very deed, from the contemplation of which, at an earlier period, she would have turned with every sensation of abhorrence and disgust.

At any rate, however, the peace of Mrs. Ross and the happiness of her son-in-law seemed for ever fled: of this melancholy truth the former had given many indications in the course of the day; and, in regard to the latter, suspicion had long taken the form of certainty in the opinion of the public. The fetters that necessity sometimes binds us with in the ordinary and unavoidable situations which commonly connect us with each other through life, are at best of a temporary construction, and usually cease with the casual circumstance that created them; but from those forged on the altar of matrimony, divorce or death can alone set us free: the first of which was remedy only to be resorted to in the last emergency, and always stamped its objects with notoriety; the second—Stella shuddered at the thought of uniting the image of St. Vincent in the

same idea that introduced an allusion to our final dissolution, and hastened to banish the tormenting reflections that spontaneously succeeded it, by endeavouring to turn them from their present course to subject of a less interesting description.

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CHAP. XX.

“Pleasure never comes sincere to man,
“But lent by Heaven upon hard usury:
“And while Jove holds us out the bowl of joy,
“Ere it can reach our lips, its dash’d with gall
“By some left-handed God.”

DRYDEN and LEE.

AT an angle of the walk stood a small pavilion, romantically situated on a rock that projected over the river. It consisted of two rooms, one above the other, with light closets attached to each. The lower apartment served the double purpose of a bathing-room (for the water was conveyed thither by pipes, and then received into a marble reservoir, sufficiently large for the accommodation of any person who wished to benefit by such an indulgence,) and a green-house in miniature; a profusion of tall and very fine exotics being scientifically arranged round its walls, and in many places bending their variegated forms over the sides of the bathing place, so as to give it more the appearance of a shady arbour than the interior of a stone building. The upper room was finished with much taste: it contained a book-case and several musical instruments, and commanded one or two confined views through the surrounding plantations. Stella recollected that in the absence of the heads of the family, her beloved governess had frequently dispensed her instructive precepts in this favourite retirement to her young and attentive pupils. She felt a propelling inclination once more to revisit it, and ascending the steps, soon entered the apartment.

The view from a small Gothic window opposite the door, was nearly the same with that which had fascinated her eye at the cottage: it rested on the well-known side of the park where she had more than once encountered the man whose image was but too seldom absent from her thoughts; and had this additional advantage from its lofty situation, that the prospect reached even to the grotto at the Hermitage, which formed a picturesque and beautiful termination to the lengthened scene thus judiciously carried though every intervening impediment.

On the window-seat lay a book, which on examination proved to be Hammond’s Love Elegies. Stella casually opened it at the lines beginning—

“Oh say, thou dear possessor of my breast!”

and a piece of paper, bearing the name of Major St. Vincent, dropped upon the floor. This incident ascertained the last peruser of the volume; and Stella, in trembling emotion, continued to regard it with an additional degree of interest, unconscious of the fatal indulgence to which she was thus weakly giving way.

The poetical merit of the beautiful verses which had evidently occupied his recent attention, seemed to increase every time she threw her eyes upon them, and reflected in whose possession they had been.—“Perhaps,” thought Stella, “my image was before his mental vision when he read this charming poem!—Ah, yes!” continued she, raising her eyes to the park and more distant grotto as she spoke, “the objects that present themselves from this window convince me I am not mistaken in such a supposition: the well-known scene could not have been contemplated without that combination of ideas which I ever experience on all similar

occasions!—But what have we here?” she added, perceiving a second piece of half-folded paper lying near her: “Oh, it is another marker that has fallen from this precious book, I dare say! it shall again be replaced in some of the pages, however—Heavens! what do I see?—my own name!—How in the world came it here?”

Astonishment took possession of every faculty at a circumstance so totally unexpected. Curiosity, however, speedily whispered that so strange a discovery authorized a farther and more minute investigation of the matter: Stella instantly obeyed the impulsive sensation of the moment, and, without permitting herself time for longer reflection, proceeded to examine the mysterious paper.

It appeared to be the remnant of a letter from Captain Montague, whose half-torn, mutilated signature was with difficulty made out: the superscription, however, happened to be totally wanting; but the contents plainly shewed it could only have been addressed to Major St. Vincent; and the justice of this supposition soon became apparent on a farther perusal.

It is here necessary to observe that Louisa St. Vincent had been summoned from Rossgrove almost immediately after the departure of that division of the troops which was ordered to Dumfries. The cause of her sudden and unexpected return to England originated in the declining health of Mr. St. Vincent, whose former complaints had again resumed their late threatening aspect; chiefly brought on, it was imagined, by the persevering misconduct of his eldest son, and an accidental discovery of the domestic unhappiness he himself had proved the principal instrument of entailing on the Major. He was not, however, apprehended to be in any immediate danger; but Louisa had always been his favourite attendant on such occasions: and the marriage of one of her sisters, which took place about this time, rendered her presence doubly necessary to their mother.

In the abovementioned fragment frequent allusions were made to some previous subject of conversation, which, it appeared, had been recently discussed between her and Montague, as she passed through Dumfries in her way to the south. What the precise description of the *tête-à-tête* was, Stella could not possibly divine, for the paper happened to be much torn in that particular quarter; but from the paragraph that followed, it seemed to intimate at something about the unhappy situation and prospects of her brother, which (ignorant of Mrs. St. Vincent’s jealous suspicions of our heroine) Louisa ascribed to the natural bad temper of his wife; and she had expressed great anxiety to learn his real sentiments respecting her conduct; a circumstance which, this affectionate sister complained, was nevertheless studiously concealed from her knowledge, though she had reason to believe some secret sorrow preyed upon his mind, in spite of the evasive and even ludicrous style in which he treated her often repeated apprehensions when topics of this kind were casually introduced between them.

The subsequent observations made by Captain Montague on the source of Louisa’s solicitude for the abovementioned explanation, with the dark hints and reiterated, but wholesome advice which followed them, seemed to glance at the probable consequences of an unfortunate attachment to some other woman than his wife, in no very equivocal terms. The cheeks of our heroine glowed at the internal conviction that this woman could only be herself; and she felt deeply mortified on reflecting what the private sentiments of the writer must necessarily prove of her principles, under the degrading supposition that she was accessory to, or acquainted with, the Major’s imprudent predilection in her favour. A thousand instances immediately occurred to her mind in which Captain Montague appeared to have observed her motions with no common degree of interest whenever his friend became occasionally the subject of discourse, or was even named before her. The pang that shot through her heart on the intrusion of all such recollections

was acute and painful in the extreme; and bitter self-reproach silently whispered the additional mortification, that what she now suffered was justly merited for the blamable gratification secretly experienced on a fresh conviction of his attachment not many minutes prior to the humiliating sensations which at present oppressed her wounded spirit.

One discovery, nevertheless, afforded some prospect of indemnification for the past, and proved the source of considerable satisfaction in the midst of many sorrows. To the great disappointment of our heroine, the first visit of Miss St. Vincent at the Hermitage had never been repeated. For this singular circumstance no explanatory or adequate reason had hitherto transpired, though the whole tenor of that young lady's conduct at the time gave cause to expect a very different mode of proceeding. One short sentence in this letter now dispelled the late existing mystery: but, similar to the paragraph already quoted, all connexion with what preceded it was broken off by another unfortunate chasm in the disjointed intelligence. What remained, however, proved sufficient for the purpose of removing the veil of obscurity which had long hung over her conjectures on the subject; for it hinted that Mrs. St. Vincent was, in fact, the groundwork of the whole, by prohibiting all farther intercourse with the inhabitants of the Hermitage, as people to whose society she entertained secret, but insuperable objections: and it appeared that Louisa, solicitous to keep her capricious sister in good-humour, if such an herculean undertaking could possibly be effected, had, in consequence of this intimation, instantly sacrificed her own inclinations as a peace offering to fraternal tranquillity.

The discovery of this circumstance was extremely grateful to the feelings of poor Stella, who had frequently deplored the short-lived nature of Louisa's friendly professions, and apprehended the total neglect she experienced from that quarter might have proceeded from a knowledge of the Major's ill-judged sentiments in her favour. Instead of blaming Louisa for instability and forgetfulness, she now fully exculpated her from every charge of the kind, and felt her returning admiration of her conduct augment in proportion to the supposed injury she had formerly sustained by the bad opinion appearances had given rise to. The meditations of our young moralist, however, were soon interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps; and fearful (should the paper be hereafter perceived) that her knowledge of its contents would end in something more than suspicion, Stella in great perturbation thrust the tell-tale page into her bosom, and waited for what was to follow in anxious expectation.

The agitation of her mind quickly subsided on the appearance of a servant, who informed her that his mistress had left her chamber, and requested to see her again.

Stella cast a longing, lingering look on the volume of poems, which, at this moment, seemed the most desirable of human possessions.—“I wish to give it a farther perusal,” said she, mentally, “and can return it in a day or two.”

The latter part of the sentence removed every remaining degree of hesitation, and the Love Elegies were speedily deposited in her pocket.

CHAP. XXI.

“Fool, do not boast!
“Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind
“With all thy pow’r, altho’ this corp’real rind
“Thou hast immanacled, while Heav’n sees good.”
MILTON.

LET not the starched prude, or the furious censurer, too severely anathematize our poor little heroine for thus yielding to the bias of the moment, and the temptation of opportunity; happy might all of the above description be considered, if the frailties of human nature, so circumstanced, proved with them equally venial and trifling. It has often been observed that those most violently bent on the condemnation of others, are generally the first to err themselves—I say generally, for far be it from me to affirm there are no particular exceptions in the case, and that interest, a sensation of fellow-feeling, or some other secret cause of equal potency, does not now and then supply the place of principle, and restrain us from being too severe in a self-conceited virtue: no, I am experimentally convinced to the contrary; for it has more than once been my lot to see the innocent condemned on the most fallacious appearances, and the guilty supported, when living proofs of their criminality were actually present. There was this material difference in the business, however—poverty damned the one, riches purified the other: so true is the old adage, that “some people may sooner steal a horse, than others look over the wall.”

The fashionable modes of noticing vice, and the various criterion by which it is established, are numerous; not indeed according to the gradations of its magnitude, but the weight of the erring mortal’s golden capabilities in the art of what is vulgarly styled *hush-money*. In this necessary article Stella was rather deficient; and the pains and penalties incident to a defalcation in the *one thing needful* would certainly have produced an immediate effect, had not chance stood her friend, by concealing the extent of her imprudence from the observation of the servant.

“The contents of that strange letter have disturbed and agitated me,” whispered Stella to herself, as she proceeded to the mansion-house; “but Hammond’s beautiful verses will restore my mind to its usual state of tranquillity.—‘Misjudging girl!’ answered sober-thinking Prudence; ‘will not the very circumstances connected with their perusal, produce a contrary effect?’

Stella dreamed not of that; her heart was free from the most distant idea of intentional error, and she suspected not that censure could attach to a conduct equally innocent in fact as, she rashly concluded, it was in appearance: but “*l’innocence n’est pas toujours une sûreté, parce que la malice va à son but par des artifices qu’un coeur droit ne peut imaginer, contre lesquels, par conséquent, il lui est impossible de se garder.*”

As the evening advanced, Stella became proportionably solicitous to depart, lest procrastination should again render her the victim of accident, and the return of the visiting party interfere with her motions. But something was still to settle relative to the projected journey; new arrangements perpetually occurred as to the mode of their route: and it was not till a late hour that she found herself able to accomplish her retreat. On quitting the room, Mrs. Ross made her a handsome pecuniary present, for the purpose of procuring those fashionable articles of dress which the occasion might render necessary. This Stella would gladly have declined; for her

maternal friend at the Hermitage generously supplied every want of the kind in a suitable and genteel manner: Mrs. Ross would accept of no refusal, however; and she was therefore obliged at last to acquiesce.

The evening, though fast drawing to a close, was not yet dark, and Stella could not resist the inclination she felt to take another peep into the volume purloined from the window-seat of the pavilion. The private and solitary path through the shrubbery seemed to afford a favourable opportunity for this coveted indulgence, whither withdrawing, she drew it from her pocket accordingly.

Entirely engrossed by the interesting nature of her subject, our heroine insensibly wandered from the right path; and entering another, without paying the least attention to her steps, or even conceiving the possibility of a mistake, slowly moved on in a direction very different from that she imagined herself pursuing.

The chief anxiety experienced by Stella during the latter part of her visit at the Grove, was concentrated in her wish to get clear of the house unnoticed by those she most dreaded to encounter: this object had been successfully effected, and her mind, of course, became more tranquillized; for she flattered herself there could be little remaining chance of any untoward accident taking place in a quarter of the pleasure-grounds almost exclusively appropriated to the convenience of the domestics, and scarcely ever resorted to by any of their superiors. All this was very true; and nothing but a small degree of observation on her own side was wanting to realize the idea she entertained of her probable security on the occasion.

Hammond's beautiful verses, and he to whom Hammond's beautiful verses most probably belonged, were each of them, however, too predominant in her mind to admit of any attention to the trifling circumstances of right or wrong: the *dulce* more than the *utile* occupied every thought; and time and space appeared considerations entirely estranged from the mind of our heroine, though once in her estimation of great importance.

From this state of unconscious wandering and mental delirium, the rattling sound of carriage wheels suddenly roused her. Stella raised her eyes from the favourite volume, and, with inconceivable astonishment, perceived the dreaded absentees turning an angle of the public road, and almost at her elbow. With increased surprise, and in extreme perturbation, she cast a hasty glance round, in order to discover the cause of an encounter so perfectly incomprehensible and unexpected, and could scarcely credit the evidence of her senses when she found herself on the verge of the north-west side of the plantations, and close to the high road that led through the park.

Confounded and thunderstruck by the obvious mistake thus committed, and the disagreeable predicament in which it placed her, the mischief-making volume dropped from her fingers; and unable to proceed or retreat, she stood immoveably fixed to the spot.

The phaeton in which Mr. Jones was driving Mrs. St. Vincent, abruptly stopped when it reached Stella, and both seemed apparently much entertained by her visible embarrassment and distress.

"Your servant, Miss Bertram," cried the Lieutenant, bowing with a ludicrous air of affected respect, as he checked the horses: "you seem immersed in the deepest abyss of philosophical contemplation; we shall shortly have a learned publication on the beauties of Nature, I presume."

"Or, perhaps, Miss Bertram may favour us with a dissertation on highway exhibitions, and entitle it 'The critical Minute, or a new Mode to attract Notice, *en passant*,' said his companion, with her usual sarcastic sneer.

“Or suppose the lady tried her hand on the ‘human face divine’ under a light-horseman’s helmet?” asked the Lieutenant, with a significant wink at his unfeeling fellow-traveller.

“And the light-horseman, in return, places her on the pedestal of Niobe’s statue, as the most picturesque figure of the two,” retorted Mrs. St. Vincent, while the military wit laughed immoderately at what he styled the *à-propos* conceit of this bright idea. “But alas! alas! man delights not her, nor woman neither?” resumed this female tormentor, mimicking the vacant look and still motionless attitude of our poor disconcerted heroine.

“Oh, trust me for that!” exclaimed the other, with quickness; “our modern Pylades and Orestes understand the Promethean art, and will soon bring her to sing

‘How happy could I be with either! &c.’

Yes, faith! they are practitioners of some standing, and allowed by the corps to be tolerable adapts in these matters—egad, I know them!”

A conscious smile, that indicated more than met the eye, and a look, intended to be particularly sagacious, accompanied these very clever remarks.

“Wretch!” cried Mrs. St. Vincent, gaily tapping him on the shoulder with her parasol as she spoke, “you will really put the modest Miss Bertram to the blush, and spoil my projected representative of Niobe, if you proceed at this rate any longer!”

The Lieutenant, in reply, whispered something slyly in her ear; to which no answer was given; but the heightened colour of his amiable coadjutor deepened at the communication, and her eyes sparkled with an additional degree of malevolence as they fiercely darted over the trembling form of her still motionless victim. Any further vent to her feelings was at this period, however, denied; for another carriage rapidly approached, from whence (apprehensive no doubt that something was the matter with the phaeton, on perceiving it stationary,) a voice hastily demanded to know what had happened. Of this enquiry no notice whatever was taken; all that marked its being heard was a sudden motion of the head, and a glance cast towards the speaker. The Lieutenant then smacked his whip, and the impatient horses abruptly set off at a gallop.

The post-coach followed the phaeton, and speedily passed Stella. In it was the Nabob, Mrs. Arabin (who still remained behind her husband at Ross Grove), another lady, and Captain Harcourt.

Mr. Ross regarded our heroine with a stern and inquisitive air; Mrs. Arabin’s countenance implied a strong degree of surprise, but she bowed with apparent affability; and the remainder of the party stared with the most visible symptoms of curiosity and astonishment.

The expression of displeasure that marked the features of the first, and the conciliatory smile of the second, affected her infinitely more than all the (to her) incomprehensible jargon of her late tormentors, whose mean and unmerited insults were not half so wounding to her gentle spirit, as the galling conviction that she had drawn them upon herself by her own imprudence and inattention. She gazed after the carriage for a moment, and then pulling her bonnet further over her face, burst into a flood of tears.

CHAP. XXII.

“Be not over exquisite
“To cast the fashion of uncertain evils:
“For grant they be so, while they rest unknown,
“What need a man forestal his date of grief,
“And run to meet what he would most avoid?”

MILTON.

BEFORE the first violence of bitter self-reproach had subsided, two horsemen rode up, and stopped within a few yards of the weeping, unhappy girl, whose mind was then too much absorbed in the melancholy nature of her own reflections to observe what was passing around her.

The travellers seemed alternately occupied in speaking to each other and watching her motions. At last one of them suddenly dismounted, and springing forward, caught hold of her hands, which he grasped in his.

Stella, her eyes drowned in tears, and unable to speak, started involuntarily aside, and, with her face still concealed in her bonnet, endeavoured, though ineffectually, to disengage herself from his hold; till the welcome, but unexpected voice of Captain Montague reached her ear, and banished every remaining apprehension.

A fresh flood of tears now burst again from her overcharged heart, in which shame, surprise, and pleasure were mingled in equal proportions, while a thousand enquires rapidly succeeded each other respecting the cause of his speedy reappearance in this part of the country.

This was easily accounted for:—regimental business with the Major had called him back to Galloway; were his visit, he said, might probably be repeated before the final departure of the troops from Scotland.

The eye of Montague at this moment was cast upon her handkerchief, which, wet with tears, had dropped from her hand on his first accosting her. Near it lay the ill-starred volume of poems. He lifted them up together, and presented both to our heroine just as the Major rode up to whisper a few words, *en passant*, to his friend. St. Vincent appeared spell-bound for a moment; then bowing low to Stella, clapped spurs to his charger, and instantly followed the carriages.

“Oh God! Oh God!” exclaimed Stella, emphatically, “for what further humiliations am I reserved?”

The supporting arm of Montague was never more seasonably offered: but she closed her eyes on a second tender of the book, and repulsing it with her half-extended hand, protested she would never touch it more.

Ignorant of her motives for this rejection, Montague conceived there must certainly be something of importance concealed in the mysterious leaves of the little volume, the outer covering of which was remarkably elegant: he began, therefore, to open it, for the purpose of elucidating this matter, when our heroine recollecting the name on the title page, and the certain conviction of Montague’s former suspicions, which would unavoidably follow such a discovery, abruptly snatched it from his hand, and hurried it into her pocket.

Montague recoiled a few paces, and gazed at her averted, glowing cheek in the utmost astonishment. A momentary silence ensued, during which either a sudden recollection of the book, or a suspicion of the truth, darted through his mind; whichever proved the case, no further

questions on the subject were asked; and the subsequent conversation turned immediately on the situation of Maria and his little infant.

Stella was yet too much agitated and disconcerted to carry on a connected conversation: exertion in the present state of affairs was, nevertheless, too requisite not to be attempted; she therefore endeavoured to do her best, and succeeded tolerably in the task thus self-imposed on her fortitude.

Montague was not to return to Dumfries before Thursday morning; this was Tuesday night: and after many solicitations and much entreaty, she was at length prevailed upon to promise him a sight of his poor little daughter on the succeeding evening. At a convenient distance from the Hermitage he retired, and Stella finished her eventful walk alone.

"What ails you, Stella?" cried Mrs. Bertram, on her entrance: "upon my word these solitary walks shall no longer be permitted; you constantly return from them indisposed of late."

Stella could have fully accounted for her present agitated appearance, had she chose to have made known her recent adventures: a strong sensation of repugnance, which she found utterly impossible to conquer, however, retrained her from making the communication, and she merely answered—

"I have seen Captain Montague, Madam."

"Captain Montague, child!—how—where is he?—not here, I hope?"

Stella replied in the negative, and related some circumstances of the foregoing scene.

"You did wrong, my love, to promise him a sight of the infant," said Mrs. Bertram, mildly; "disagreeable consequences may possibly ensue from the ill-judged indulgence."

"I am sorry, my dear mother, you disapprove of it: but pardon me for saying I do not perceive what evil consequences can be produced by such an event."

"Young people, Stella, seldom think about consequences till too late to prevent the mischief they occasion."

"I can only repeat, Madam, that I am sorry for my error, and shall endeavour to repair it by prevailing on the Captain to refrain from exacting the accomplishment of my promise."

"By no means, my dear girl; your present promise shall be held sacred: only in future be more cautious, and enter into no engagement whatever without bestowing a little previous reflection on the propriety of the measure you are requested to adopt."

Stella avowed her determination to abide by this salutary advice, and protested it should henceforth be held in remembrance as a guide and preserver from similar errors.

The subjects which succeeded Mrs. Bertram's departure from the Grove, those at least that passed between Mrs. Ross and her young visitor, were next discussed; and Stella was gratified to find that every part of her conduct, in this instance, met with the entire approbation of her maternal monitor.

Maria, it seems, had frequently enquired after her during the long period of her absence; Mrs. Bertram therefore desired her *protégée* to see the fair invalid before they retired for the night. With this request, under resent circumstances, she would gladly have dispensed; but the will of her benefactress was omnipotent; and she instantly complied with it, in spite of the secret reluctance experienced thereto.

The spirits of poor Maria appeared unusually low and depressed; those of our heroine were not in a much better state. The former ventured to mention her child, which was the first time it had been named before Stella, and melting into tears, deplored her hard fate in being so seldom permitted to water its little face with the repentant drops of maternal anguish.

"Oh Stella!" cried she, with clasped hands and a look of unutterable woe, "pity me,

Stella, and cast me not from you with indignant contempt, when I acknowledge that the author of all her misery is still dear to the devoted Maria!—dear as the ruddy drops that visit this sad heart—a heart bursting with concealment, but which dare not attempt to disburden its sorrows before the good and venerable friend who deigns to shelter the head of the penitent from the load of public infamy one fatal, one incautious moment has suspended over it! Oh Stella! to be virtuous and to be happy are too surely synonymous terms!—Remember, she who speaks from sad experience tells you so; and may her sufferings prove a beacon to preserve you from a similar destiny!”

Miss Campbell’s voice here became nearly inarticulate; and covering her face, she wept aloud.

Stella was deeply affected; she felt this scene more acutely from the recollection of her previous interview with Montague: but while she sympathized sincerely with the unhappy mourner, a secret pang for herself sometimes shot across her bosom, and added considerably to the interest taken in the sorrows of another.

“Alas!” thought our heroine, “if virtue and happiness are, as Maria says, synonymous terms, why then is innocence so frequently oppressed, and vice, on the contrary, triumphant? I am happily a stranger to the feelings of this poor unfortunate girl, and even free in idea from guilt of any description: ought I not, then, to be happy according to her doctrine?—and am I so?—Ah, no, no, no! Comparatively so, she should have said—and in that case I might have ventured to agree with her; for certainly, though felicity belongs to neither of us, my sensations must be far more enviable than hers, who has to sustain the sting of self-reproach for actual error, along with the disappointment of her dearest hopes, and the apprehended horrors of public and, what is yet worse, merited contempt.”

The short silence that each seemed disposed to observe in the present disposition of their mind, was first broken by Maria.

“Oh Miss Bertram!” said she, in a low, mournful accent, “you are good; virtuous, and gentle: I see you enter into my sufferings, and commiserate an unhappy fellow-creature, though fallen—even so fallen as I am! Pardon the distress I occasion you, and kindly make allowances for the double portion of it which wrings this nearly exhausted heart—yes, a double portion of misery is too surely mine! I love, to distraction love, a man who cruelly disclaims all future knowledge of me, and, though my earthy prospects are for ever clouded through my fatal acquaintance with him, refuses to grant me the poor indulgence of hearing my last sentence from his own lips! My child, too—alas! wretched little being! destined to an ignominious lot in life, and torn from the maternal bosom, that bosom alone interested for thy welfare through the wide circle of this extensive globe—thee, too, my hapless child, I am scarcely permitted to see! Privileges enjoyed by the human race in general, even by the very brute creation, are prohibited to me: in vain I languish to clasp her unconscious form in my arms, or die to allay the agonizing solicitude of a mother’s fears, by once more beholding the innocent proof of an erroneous and ill-placed, but unconquerable tenderness! This blessing, hitherto bestowed with a scanty and reluctant hand, is henceforth to be totally withheld, from the supposition that it acts as a strengthener of that attachment I must ever retain for her dear, but unfeeling father. Miss Bertram, say, will you plead for me?—will you try to prevail with our worthy and benevolent friend to withdraw this harsh and overwhelming sentence? If any one possesses that power it is you: and surely, surely my future prospects are liable to sufficient privations in other respects, without this heart-rendering addition to the number! say, then, dear Stella, tell me I shall yet be permitted to see my ill-starred infant!”

“Alas!” replied Stella, with sensations of the utmost regret, “I dare not give hopes which may, in the end, prove illusive, and by that means finally increase the evil they were intended to remedy! my dear mother will not, I much fear, be influenced by me on this subject.”

“You previously knew then of her determination,” cried Miss Campbell, with quickness, “and have kindly endeavoured to soften her heart in my favour?—God in heaven for ever bless you, my good and generous Miss Bertram, and grant you may never stand in need of an intercessor on such an occasion!”

“No,” answered Stella, “I must not assume a merit to which I have no just claim—I was ignorant of the foregoing circumstance till you mentioned it. I pity, I regret, I sympathized in the anguish it causes; but indeed, by dear Miss Campbell, this is all I can do for you.”

Maria’s tears flowed afresh at this intimation, and a silence again ensued. Before it received any interruption, Mrs. Bertram joined them; and reminding Stella of the late hour and long visit she had paid the weeping Maria, they wished her a good night, and retired.

CHAP. XXIII.

“Oh, what a pain to think, when every thought,
“Perplexing thought, in intricacies runs,
“And Fancy knits th’ inextricable toil
“In which herself is taken!”

YOUNG.

MRS. BERTRAM perceived that Stella was apparently more affected than usual, and she now enquired the cause of it.

“I have no concealments from you, my dear mother,” Stella would have said, as the words rose spontaneously to her lips; but she remembered St. Vincent, and merely confined her communication to the affairs of others, by relating what had passed in the course of the foregoing conversation.

“I applaud your prudence, my love,” said Mrs. Bertram, when our heroine ceased speaking. “Few are those who deserve advice, because few are those who profit by it: you have shewn you belong not to this class of incurables; and I rejoice to find my opinion of you invariably well founded. You cannot imagine, my dear child, how much your conduct gratifies and pleases me on every trying emergency!”

The ingenuous nature of poor Stella revolted at the idea of applause, in her opinion, so unmerited, and she felt considerably distressed by it. The poet says—

“Praise undeserv’d, is flatt’ry in disguise.”

Such, however, she well knew was by no means the case in the present instance; and the accusing angel seemed to stand before her “mind’s eye,” arrayed in more than his usual terrors. With her protectress, Stella immediately determined to be explicit; but before the mode of communication could be mentally arranged, Mrs. Bertram resumed her discourse: and time being thus allowed for cooler reflection, our heroine’s former repugnance to entering upon the painful topic, recurred with its usual force; and the late intended confession was again withheld from the knowledge of her maternal friend.

Without remarking the palpitating heart or glowing cheek of her agitated *protégée*, the good lady proceeded to explain her motives for adopting a measure that, to appearance, was certainly, as Maria had styled it, a harsh one. Caustics, however, are sometimes necessary to be applied when milder remedies prove ineffectual; and such was the state of the matter at present.

Mrs. Bertram had early observed that Maria Campbell’s disposition was yielding as wax, and apt, not only to receive, but retain, every favourite impression, however inimical to her character or peace. The child happened to prove extremely like its father; and the ecstatic delight she took in tracing this cherished resemblance considerably augmented the force of that partiality, the secret indulgence of which was continually encouraged as the first and dearest object of her existence.

For her future, as well as present, tranquillity of mind, her worthy hostess entertained many just and alarming apprehensions; and perceiving the susceptibilities of her nature rather increased by gentle measures than otherwise, she reluctantly resorted to those of a more coercive nature, in order to try if it were practicable to rouse some little degree of magnanimity, or even

common fortitude, as an occasional support under the unavoidable evils generally attendant on the lot which had befallen her.

As the first and most necessary step for this purpose, the child was prohibited from appearing so frequently, as usual, at the Hermitage.

In the reasons assigned for the adoption of this new mode of proceeding, it was impossible not to acknowledge the justness, propriety, and wisdom of such a regulation. Stella saw and felt all this, but without being able to sanction the whole with her undivided approbation; for she likewise experienced the pangs of disappointed passion and hopeless despair, and though free from the actual commission of error, or the apprehended opprobrium that follows any dereliction from moral rectitude, her feelings secretly sympathized with the unfortunate Maria, and she could not help thinking that the evils under which she previously groaned, were indeed sufficiently overwhelming and severe to require every alleviation and indulgence in the power of those around her to bestow.

These sentiments, however, our heroine wisely chose to keep to herself; and at a very late hour she retired to her own little apartment, where, harassed, weary, and miserable, she sunk upon the first chair that offered. The soothing aid of balmy sleep seemed, nevertheless, to fly her heavy eye-lids; though the night wasted fast, and a solemn stillness reigned in every quarter, Stella felt not the smallest inclination for repose. Alone, and at liberty to indulge the conflicting emotions of her heart, she now gave a loose to the luxury of unrestrained anguish, which burst forth with additional violence in proportion to the time and difficulty with which it had been suppressed. Thought, that busy active principle which retraces the past, and anticipates the future, held its despotic sway over her mind, and continued to banish every idea of present rest, while the incidents of this eventful day perpetually recurred, and filled her bosom with a thousand painful reflections on their probable consequences.

Amongst the quick succession of these self-created tormentors, Hammond's Love Elegies were not forgotten, nor appeared the least conspicuous of the number. Slowly, and with a trembling hand, Stella drew them from her pocket, and after gazing upon the volume for some time with a melancholy mien, threw it aside with a new, but momentary sensation of anger, to which the sight of it apparently gave birth. It seemed to be regarded as the evil Genius of the day, and the source from whence all her subsequent vexations flowed to it she owed the reproaches of her own mind, which incessantly condemned the culpable weakness, the imbecile wish that had instigated her to purloin it from the pavilion. One wrong step frequently leads to another, and so on till the climax of error is gradually accomplished by imperceptible degree. This sad truth was fully ascertained by experience: for had the inclination to examine the contents of this book been properly checked on the first discovery of its owner, the possession of it would not have been afterwards coveted, nor would it in the end have been taken from its place; of course, no deviation from the road to the Hermitage would probably have happened, and the bitter humiliation that succeeded would have been spared her.

For the childish, yet malignant insults of Mrs. St. Vincent and her empty companion, no sensation, but that of contemptuous pity, remained; and she wondered how either of them could ever have produced a single moment's uneasiness, more especially as the purport of their meaning was totally incomprehensible and unknown, though its aim evidently appeared that of mortification. The stern glance of the Nabob rather made a deeper impression; because she had not accustomed herself to consider him in the same point of view with the two former. But, distressing as the whole occurrence certainly proved at the time, their power to wound her feelings seemed, at this period, trifling, when put in competition with the circumstances of the

succeeding interview; and her apprehensions lest the fatal volume should be equally recognised by the two friends, whose looks and manner, she sometimes fancied, implied this idea, was but too well founded.

“The smallest infringement on propriety is generally productive of the most unpleasant effects; so my kind monitress my dear mother, has frequently told me.” thought Stella: “and after what I now suffer, can the justice of the remark be doubted?—An, no, no! I feel it cannot! May my first error, however, prove the last! With the example of poor Maria Campbell before my eyes, I should be doubly inexcusable were I to fail in the respect due to my own character, by a repetition of the like weakness—a weakness that must even degrade me below the level of her I now commiserate, in as much as the education and morals of the one have been infinitely more attended to than the other. A married man, too! Oh good Heaven, preserve my senses!”

She shuddered at the succession of images this recollection embodied, and covering her face with both hands, sunk back in the chair, overwhelmed with anguish.

In this manner, sleepless and unhappy, passed the lingering hours away, till the early beams of the morning darting through her little casement, announced the rapid approach of day. She then fell into an interrupted kind of slumber, from which little or no benefit could be expected; for during its continuance every recent object of waking distress haunted her in dreams, and brought in its train a fresh accumulation of terror. Amidst these visionary starts of a perturbed imagination, Fancy, on forward wing, placed her in the grotto with Montague, and his infant daughter in her arms: she saw him fold it to his bosom, imprint a kiss on its little forehead, and, as he returned it to her care, felt one of her own hands suddenly raised to his lips with the warm pressure of silent, but heartfelt gratitude. At that interesting moment an enormous snake seemed to issue from the nearest plantation, and writhing itself round an obelisk in the pleasure-grounds of Rossgrove, fixed a fiery and threatening look on its terrified observers, who attended its motions in anxious expectation of what was to ensue. At length the monster seemed to be collecting all its force, and abruptly bounding through the air, directed its course to the grotto; where Stella, in imagination, already conceived herself its victim, when Montague springing forward, seized it by the throat and after a conflict of some minutes, threw it with violence from the landing place: in the following instance it reared a mortified, though still furious aspect, and hissing at our terrified heroine in a manner that made her blood almost curdle in her veins, speedily glided from view amidst the underwood bordering on the path that led to the Grove.

Stella, thus relieved from imagined destruction, immediately felt her late torpid senses return: she grasped the hand of her deliverer in token of acknowledgment, and attempted to express her feelings by words: the power of articulation, however, was apparently denied. A repetition of the tremendous hissing sound which had recently appalled her, again vibrated in her ears: she looked hastily up—the same terrific monster appeared, writhing itself as before round the obelisk: but it was not now alone; the helpless devoted daughter of her late protector lay entwined in its scaly folds, and seemed doomed to instant destruction.

What the apprehensions of Stella could not effect, this dreadful sight accomplished. As an excruciating shriek seemed to burst from the little wretch, her agony became extreme; it broke the fetters of sleep, and quickly relieved her from the influence of those illusive horrors, which, though generated amidst the baseless fabrics of a dream, almost shook the mental faculties to distraction. She started up in a state of utmost agitation, cast a timid, inquisitive glance round the room, as if fearful of finding the visionary cause of her alarm realized; when having fully ascertained the truth, she sunk upon her knees in fervent acknowledgement to Heaven for granting this termination to the ideal distress of the foregoing scene.

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CHAP. XXIV.

“Ah me! that fear
“Comes thund’ring back with dreadful revolution
“On my defenceless head”

MILTON

TO think of obtaining any further repose at this time was totally out of the question; the experiment, of course, remained untried: and her anxiety entirely turned upon the most effectual means of repairing the mischief already committed, so as to prevent Mrs. Bertram from suspecting the cause of her haggard looks and languid appearance, both of which, she was conscious, might subject her to no common degree of observation. Having changed her dress, and endeavoured to assume an air of tranquillity, foreign to the present nature of her feelings, she left her apartment to encounter the unknown vicissitudes of the day.

As Mrs. Ross’s departure from the Grove was speedily to take place, some preparation on the part of our heroine became unavoidably necessary; and her intention, on the preceding evening, had been to walk over to Wigton this morning, in order to make a few purchases for the occasion: a violent headach, however, interfered to prevent the execution of her design; and she passed the greater portion of the day in Maria’s chamber, where subjects, suitable to their present turn of mind, engaged their attention.

As the evening approached, and the appointed period for her interview with Captain Montague drew near, the thoughts of our heroine became more abstracted, and wandered at intervals from the scene now before her, to that in which she was shortly so interestingly to engage. The dream, and its attendant horrors, recurred to her memory, accompanied by a thousand apprehensions of lurking evil, either to herself, or the poor little infant, who, almost prohibited the arms of one parent, was upon the point of being placed in those of the other, whom she had never yet seen.

A restless solicitude likewise seized our heroine respecting the extent of Montague’s knowledge of Hammond’s Love Elegies, and the probable discovery by St. Vincent of their being in her possession. If the gentlemen were both acquainted with this vexatious circumstance, their opinion of her conduct appeared to her of too humiliating a description to be reflected upon with patience; and the colour of Stella alternately varied its hue as she secretly moralized on female weakness and human possibilities. At length the clock struck six, and reminded her that one hour more only remained to prepare for the reception of Captain Montague.

The circumstances which had taken place on the first introduction of herself at the Hermitage, and the success that attended their arrangements on the occasion, suggested a similar mode of conduct in the management of Maria’s affair. Her child was consequently put to nurse with Mrs. Thompson (the *ci-devant* Sally Wallace, who happened about this period to be delivered of a female infant, which did not long survive its birth,) and a plausible story being propagated to answer the purpose of deception, every thing apparently succeeded to their wish; for the whispered slander of the gossiping neighbour already noticed, like the suspicions entertained by Mrs. St. Vincent, were as yet equally unknown to the inhabitants of the Hermitage, where Maria was represented as continuing to reside for the benefit of her health, on account of a consumptive habit, with which she had been threatened before her guardian and Mrs. Harris left the country.

From the house of its ostensible mother, Mrs. Wallace or her niece had sometimes been permitted to convey the little creature to the arms of her to whom it owed its miserable existence. Miss Campbell's apparent declining condition seemed to plead hard for the occasional and stolen indulgence its presence visibly afforded her: but the consequences which followed a repetition of this gratification proved very different from the original expectations entertained of their efficacy; and Mrs. Bertram, it may be remembered, found herself finally necessitated to prohibit a remedy so ill calculated for producing the desired effect.

Stella, her heart full of the approaching occurrence, stopped for a moment at the door of Maria's chamber, and regarding her with a look and most expressive and interesting, hastily wiped off a pitying tear, and then hurried to her own apartment.

"I shall soon see the two beings so coveted, so beloved by poor Maria!" thought our heroine, as she tied on her straw bonnet, "Those beings from whom she seems unavoidably and eternally separated!—Alas! with what transports would she not have flown to such an interview, if permitted to have taken my place! Ah! would to Heaven such had proved the case! for the unaccountable reluctance I experience to my part in the transaction momentarily increases with the lapse of every intervening instant of time: but it signifies not, I will perform my promise; and if contempt is really the result of Captain Montague's knowledge of my late proceeding in the pavilion, why conscious innocence in other respects must just support me under the trial as well as it is able."

Her mental soliloquy finished; and ready to sally forth, she descended the staircase, and enquired for Mrs. Bertram: the latter, however, was at her evening devotion, during which no one presumed to disturb her. Stella looked at the clock, and perceiving there was no time to lose, hastened to the habitation of farmer Thompson, from whose wife she received the little infant. Half an hour more brought her to the grotto; where Montague soon after joined her.

The usually gay, fashionable friend of our heroine seemed here to have renounced all the adventitious advantages he had hitherto possessed, and permitted Nature to operate in her most interesting form. Stella, previously acquainted with his situation in regard to Louisa St. Vincent, could not help admiring the delicate manner in which he conducted himself through the whole of this trying affair. The new, the delightful sensation of parental affection seemed to throb in every vein, and while he caressed the little infant, his attachment for his offspring appeared to banish every recollection of the mother's errors; without, however, lessening the indifference he experienced for her, or softening his resolution to see her no more.

Possessed of innate good principles and great sensibility of heart, any casual deviation from the former was deeply regretted, and whatever interested the latter acutely felt; but while he deplored the fatal effects of bad example, and the propelling impetuosity of youthful passions, which were apter to lead him astray than any evil propensities of his own, his determination to avoid the particular source in which his late misconduct originated, was invariably adhered to with the most scrupulous exactness; for a repetition of what his cooler judgment told him was materially wrong, appeared a double aggravation of the fault. Such were his sentiments on the present occasion, and by them he intended immoveably to abide. The child, however, was innocent; and every feeling of humanity called upon him to indemnify his unoffending offspring for the injury entailed upon it through life by the circumstances of its unfortunate birth. Naturally of a tender and affectionate disposition, he felt himself moved as he ardently gazed upon its little face, and thought less of the unhappy mother than his adored Louisa, whose image he vainly strove to trace in the features of the smiling infant.

The future charge he meant to take of it appeared the only possible reparation that could

now be made to Maria, whose situation, in regard to pecuniary matters, set any indemnification of that description totally out of the question on her own individual account, though to their child it might hereafter be of consequence to fulfil the duty of a parent in this respect.

As the modern man of fashion, when an exterior compliance with the tonish habits of high life rendered simulation and conformity necessary, he generally acquitted himself in a style that seemed to say he was only in his proper element, and met with his equals alone in the first circles of elegant society; but the real character of this young and amiable man never appeared in its true colouring to such advantage, as, when freed from the trammels situation and circumstances frequently imposed upon it, he found himself at liberty to follow the genuine bent of inclination, which secretly pointed to rational enjoyments, pleasures unaccompanied by the sting of after reproach, and a participation in all the milder and more tranquil virtues to be met with in the less elevated stations of private life. This had proved so much the case since his introduction at the Hermitage, that it had now become almost the ruling principle of his mind, and nearly taken the lead over every factitious sentiment hitherto adopted in his former intercourse with gayer scenes of the world. No wonder, then, if all his better feelings were, at this period, roused into action, and the sensibility of his soul called forth by the powerful demands nature made upon them.

At length Stella thought it necessary to interfere; having therefore reminded him of the time that was elapsed, she insisted upon being permitted to retire with her little charge—a request which he did not, however, seem at first much disposed to comply with. The child had fallen asleep in his arms: these had never before formed a cradle for such a purpose; and it was not without more than one remonstrance from our heroine that she finally prevailed with him to relinquish the precious burden.

As he softly replaced the unconscious innocent on her bosom, and with parental fondness bent forward to imprint a farewell kiss on its little forehead, a sudden exclamation of mingled surprise and horror, burst from Stella, which speedily fixed his eyes on her face with an air of astonishment scarcely inferior to her own. He followed the now silent direction of her looks, and discovered a female figure, rising from a garden chair near the obelisk, whom he instantly recognised for Mrs. St. Vincent. On perceiving she was observed, she curtsied in a style of derision peculiar to herself, and then disappeared in the plantations.

“The supposed illusions of sleep are thus, then, converted into sad reality!” sighed Stella, languidly sinking upon the window-seat as she spoke; “yes, they were not, as I would willingly have persuaded myself, the idle chimeras of a disturbed imagination, but apparently commissioned to forewarn me of approaching evil in the form of my persevering an unrelenting enemy. I have slighted the gracious intention of my guardian angel, and must abide the consequences. Save your innocent child, however!—she, too, was implicated in the same scene that presented itself in the course of my last night’s perturbed and, as it now seems, portentous visions. Nay, Captain Montague, restrain that incredulous smile till you are better acquainted with the cause of my alarm, and then I trust you will acquit me of a bias to superstition, when I declare, that from the bottom of my soul I regret the facility with which I agreed to indulge you with this interview, and no less the weak and childish attention to appearances which led me to leave the door of the grotto open in order to avoid an inferior evil, should any casual intrusion happen to break in upon the secret and mysterious nature of our interview.”

Our heroine, as well as her agitation would permit her, now proceeded to relate the particulars of her dream, as already mentioned, and the deep impression it had at the time made upon her feelings; an impression ultimately renewed and strengthened by the wonderful

coincidence of circumstances which had thus recently occurred, and which Montague, in spite of all his subsequent attempts to eradicate from her mind, either by the force of reason or ridicule, could not help privately reflecting upon as something peculiarly strange and incomprehensible.

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CHAP. XXV.

“I am involv’d
“And buried in the web myself have wrought.”
YOUNG.

IN the course of this discussion, Stella frequently mentioned the unequivocal marks of enmity perpetually shewn her by Mrs. St. Vincent; and expressed much astonishment that such should be the case, when no conscious offence had ever been given on her part to merit treatment so cruel and unprovoked.

The solicitude evinced to ascertain the motives of that lady’s actions, and the touching manner in which she spoke of her feelings when subjected to the influence of Mrs. St. Vincent’s capricious humours, sensibly affected her auditor; and, for the first time since the commencement of their acquaintance, he ventured to glance at the probable cause of her displeasure.—“I presume not, however, to direct you, my dear Stella,” he added, “in an affair of so delicate a nature: nevertheless, were I sure of being pardoned for intruding my advice unasked, I would just hint at the necessity of avoiding all opportunities calculated to promote any further degree of intercourse with Major St. Vincent and——”

He was proceeding, when Stella, extremely hurt and agitated by the implied censure on that part of her conduct apparently contained in this admonition, rose from her seat with a dignified air, and entreated he would spare his premature caution, as the danger on her side was, she could assure him, more imaginary than real.

“In one point of view certainly so,” he relied; “for are you not good and virtuous? and is not my friend the noblest fellow under the canopy of heaven? But yet——”

The latter part of this sentence seemed to vibrate on a softened chord, and her countenance beamed with a ray of inexpressible delight; but the momentary gratification afforded by the impressive eulogium on St. Vincent instantly disappeared, when the humiliating circumstance to which it alluded recurred: she resumed the same look of disapprobation, and once more abruptly interrupted him in the middle of something he was going to say.

“Good evening, Sir!” with a cold and reserved air, said the secretly agitated Stella; “it grows late, and the child ought to be at home.”

“You leave me in displeasure, Stella!—I cannot consent to part with you thus.—Say we are friends?—say you pardon me?”

“When good is the end in view, we must overlook the disagreeable mode in which it is sometimes dispensed, even by friends.—I pardon you, Sir.”

“What! with that frigid air, and cold severity of accent!—indeed, Stella, my dear Stella, we part not on such terms.”

The heart of our heroine began to swell, “more in sorrow than in anger:” she bent over her still sleeping charge to conceal a truant tear that refused to be restrained within its proper limits, and again moved towards the threshold.

“Good Heavens! my sweet friend, how have I merited this unlooked-for reproof, this silent contempt? If the most disinterested esteem, the most sincere solicitude for your welfare, have unhappily led me to wound your feelings, the fault is surely venial, and ought not to be attended with consequences so seriously distressing. By my soul, I repeat it, we separate not on such terms!—give me your hand, and say the past is consigned to oblivion, as shall henceforth

be the subject from whence the whole has originated!”

The transient displeasure of our heroine had already subsided; but her increasing emotion prevented an articulate reply. She now blamed herself for thus giving way to the weak sensations of wounded pride, when conscience whispered the suspicions of Captain Montague had probability at least for their basis; and extending the hand he requested, which was speedily conveyed to his lips, she burst into tears, and again sunk upon her seat.

A tacit agreement, however, seemed to have taken place, for the purpose of avoiding the former forbidding theme. Montague, after a short silence, began to speak on less interesting topics; and, amongst other, mentioned the continuance of his intention in regard to returning to Dumfries early on the following morning. He likewise presented her with a few guineas for the nurse of his little girl, to whose house he accompanied them when returning composure permitted her to depart from the grotto. Montague did not, however, enter the habitation of Mr. Thompson, lest others than the immediate members of the family should happen to be present, and his appearance create either curiosity or suspicion in the spectators. At a small distance from the house, he waited her return; and having conducted her to the vicinity of the Hermitage, after an affectionate adieu, struck into a path leading to Ross Grove, while his late companion proceeded alone to the abode of her benefactress.

It had been the intention of Mrs. Bertram either to become the bearer of the child to its father, or to accompany Stella in the execution of that office, as she judged it improper for her young *protégée* to be the sole agent in such a transaction. Unfortunately, this design was, some how or other, neglected to be mentioned in time to our heroine; while on the part of her nominal mother, the appointed hour for the interview was mistaken, and a later one chosen in its place. Mrs. Bertram, therefore, made no immediate enquiry after Stella, on the termination of her devotions; and when the supposed period arrived for the above purpose, she discovered our heroine had already been absent too long to think of putting her scheme in practice. To remedy the evil in part was, nevertheless, yet in her power, and she determined to join the party in the grotto, in order to walk back with Stella. Disappointment seemed to be the allotted portion of Mrs. Bertram this evening: her wishes were again frustrated by the unexpected arrival of the clergyman's wife; and she was at length forced to renounce every thought of attending the child.

Stella gave a faithful account of all that merely related to the father and child: for her own share in some part of the evening's transactions, some reservation was supposed necessary, and of course adopted. Mrs. Bertram, however, appeared satisfied; and unable to see Miss Campbell after so recent a separation from the two beings who usually proved the chief subject of their *tête-à-têtes*, our heroine pleaded a return of her morning headach, and retired at an early hour to her chamber.

Harassed and overcome by the effects of the preceding night's distressing occurrences, in conjunction with those of the day, she hurried into bed, where corporeal fatigue proving superior to every other sensation, the torpor of deep repose immediately succeeded, and soon obliterated every painful reflection, for the present, from her memory.

The casual discovery of the interview at the grotto afforded Mrs. St. Vincent a sensation of pleasure to which she had long been a stranger: for bad dispositions can never experience more than a short-lived and transient gratification from the indulgence of their evil propensities. This enjoyment had indeed been pretty frequently obtained by Mrs. St. Vincent of late; but in proportion to its magnitude at the time, the consequences that succeeded generally proved detrimental to her peace; for the breach between her and her husband became gradually widened on every return of ill-humour; and unjustly blaming Stella for what was merely the natural

effects of her own caprice, the antipathy she had long encouraged for a character so diametrically opposite to her own daily increased, and led her to seize every plausible opportunity that occurred to vent the spiteful effusions of her rancorous heart.

After what has already appeared, it cannot, nevertheless, be denied that her suspicions were not altogether groundless; but candid, or well-disposed minds, would have rested perfectly secure on the prior knowledge they possessed of the principles and conduct of those they subjected to such an imputation: an imputation which could not, however, attach any actual blame on either side of a personal description; and for what merely related to mental feelings, no human being ought to be considered answerable, as long as they are confined to the bosom which gives them birth, and not permitted to interfere with the interests or tranquillity of society.

In the present instance, that accusation even the prejudiced Mrs. St. Vincent herself had no right to bring against them; for the suspected parties seemed mutually bent on maintaining their integrity, and avoiding every circumstance that could render them liable to the censure of the world, or the far more insupportable burden of self-reproach. Her own violent and ungovernable temper proved the cause of all those ideal torments she frequently suffered, and sufficiently avenged the injured objects of her hatred by the poignant nature of the anguish they inflicted: thus may it ever happen, that

“Evil on itself shall back recoil,”

and the unmerited mischief done to another, finally lacerate the breast of the inflictor!

END OF VOL II.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

STELLA OF THE NORTH.

A NOVEL.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS. LEADENHALL-STREET.

STELLA OF THE NORTH,
OR THE
FOUNDLING OF THE SHIP.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF ADELAIDE DE NARBONNE, &c.

“Virtue can itself advance
“To what the fav’rite fools of chance
 “By fortune seem’d design’d;
“Virtue can gain the odds of fate,
“And from itself shake off the weight
 “Upon th’ unworthy mind.”

PARNELL.

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S T E L L A

OF THE

N O R T H.

CHAP. I.

“Know the joy thy triumph brings is short;
My fate, (if the Gods govern) or, at least,
My mind’s beyond thy reach, and scorns thy malice!”

ROWE.

FOR a short time a temporary alteration now took place in the sentiments of Mrs. St. Vincent; who, after the discovery at the grotto, began to imagine she had been rather too hasty in the opinion previously formed of her husband’s conduct, and the imprudent share Stella was supposed to have in it.

That the real character of the latter was at length fully ascertained, appeared, however, no longer doubtful; and a conviction so consolatory to the feelings of Margaret, proved a source of no small exultation.

What, the favourite of her mother—she who was tacitly held up as a miracle of perfection, capable of affording an example, not merely to her equals, but even to her very superiors—in short, the immaculate *protégée* of the sententious prosing Mrs. Bertram, and the late tremendous object of her own jealous apprehensions—had this paragon, then, actually forfeited all claim to the ill-judged praise so erroneously, though so copiously bestowed upon her conduct for virtues to which she was a stranger, and prudence which it was now evident she never possessed? The incontrovertible disclosure of so fortunate a circumstance was almost beyond her hopes. Thank God, the Major had escaped the artful snares visibly spread to entrap him by this little presumptuous, unprincipled wanton:—but this was, no doubt, to be entirely ascribed to her own more conspicuous and irresistible attractions.—So thought Margaret; and the idea was too pleasing not to be indulged.

A slave perpetually to the existing impulse of the moment, she now became equally solicitous to evince her attachment to the Major (for whom all her former affection speedily returned with renovated force), as she had hitherto been occasionally studious to pique him, by the fictitious appearance of a preference for Mr. Jones; who soon found himself reduced to his natural state of insignificance, and apparently considered as of no further use in the part which, she fondly flattered herself, was henceforth reserved for her to perform.

Characters of every description have their allotted scene of action in the world: many members of the Privy Council, whose abilities were much on a level with those possessed by the discarded Lieutenant, have been reinstated in favour even when their final dismissal from office seemed no longer equivocal:—the sequel will, perhaps, show that Mr. Jones proved equally fortunate.

Surprised at this change, so new and unexpected in the manners of his wife, St. Vincent at first could scarcely credit the reality of a metamorphose so totally incomprehensible: on his side, he was not sensible of affording the smallest cause for the line of conduct thus suddenly adopted, by any alteration in his own: common civility, and some degree of polite attention had

ever been paid her;—those he considered her invariable due from a man whose pecuniary situation, if not his domestic one, was so greatly benefited by her alliance; and these she continued to receive as usual, though accompanied by apparent symptoms of increased coolness and simulated respect. St. Vincent, who conceived himself too well acquainted with her disposition to be mistaken, ascribed the new system of proceedings entirely to caprice, that inexhaustible source of her general manoeuvres; and under this idea treated it accordingly. She still persevered however; till at length, willing to believe she wished to remedy some of those errors he had particularly reprobated, and solicitous rather to encourage the work of reformation, than crush its first laudable efforts by an ill-judged adherence to his former frigid indifference, St. Vincent somewhat relaxed in that point; and a greater portion of tranquillity proved the immediate consequence in the family circle of Rossgrove.

This condescension on his part appeared another proof of the injury done him by the tenor of her recent suspicions; for it seemed to shew that the evils of which he had frequently complained, sprung not from any deficiency in the article of affection on his side, but rather originated in the capricious perverseness of her own behaviour, which repelled his supposed tenderness, and irritated his mind against her, by a mode of conduct totally inimical to the feelings of a fond husband, or the sentiments of a man of honour.

In the premature judgment of this superficial casuist, the above circumstances would never more be productive of similar effects; because, so Margaret said, and so she firmly believed at the time, they would never again be resumed, and consequently would no longer interfere to the prejudice of her future happiness.

Stella, the hitherto detested Stella, was henceforth out of the question, for had not she herself been a witness to the extent of her infamy in another quarter?—After a discovery so conclusive, a proof so undeniable of her criminal connexion with Montague, it would appear the climax of folly to injure her husband, her dear St. Vincent, by any further imputation of such an improbable nature—no, it was impossible to act in a manner so ridiculous and unjust. She had seen the child whose existence was formerly whispered to be enigmatical, and the same opinion continued to be still entertained—she had seen it now with her own eyes, and likewise observed the indecent familiarities that passed between its parents; for was not Montague admitted to the greatest freedoms, even in the very face of day, without the least apparent reluctance on the part of his abandoned paramour?

“Oh fool! fool!” continued the charitable Margaret, “fool that I was ever to suppose such a man as St. Vincent would degrade himself by harbouring any degree of partiality for a being so profligate, so lost to all sense of virtue and propriety!”

For some days the enthusiasm of reformation and reparation operated in an equally violent degree: but all extremes are liable to change, and enthusiasm either in love or religion, the most so of any;—Mrs. St. Vincent’s soon reached its climax.

The first fortnight this second edition of the honeymoon was nearly expired, and Margaret, to the wonder of her astonished husband, still continued to act the reasonable woman; when a sudden stop was put to the further performance of the comedy and the *dramatis personae* resumed their natural characters.

“Lord bless me, Madam!” cried Jenny, bursting into her mistress’s dressing-room one evening, with a countenance brimful of intelligence, “was ever the like heard?—I declare I am quite dumfounded at the bare idea!”

“And pray what is this mighty wonder that has *dumfounded* so wise a woman?” asked Margaret, without taking her eyes from the Major’s picture, to which she was affixing a superb

gold chain.

"Nay, Lord, Madam, only guess!—For my part I should never have thought of such a thing: but people now-a-days pay no manner of regard to right or wrong, except as it suits their own convenience."

Margaret put the chain round her neck, admired it and the miniature as she alternately examined them before a large mirror, and humming a favourite air, seemed to view her own figure with no small degree of complacency, without appearing to recollect the presence of the consequential personage who impatiently waited to be delivered of her important intelligence, but waited in vain.

Now Jenny's capability on the subject of retention was not of a first rate description, unless the communication happened to implicate any part of her own character, and in that case she could be secret as the grave; neither was Jenny a very noted proficient in the art of forbearance when report enabled her to extend the circle of human frailties through the augmented medium of repetition: perceiving, therefore, that her mistress was far more disposed to continue absorbed in self-contemplation, than solicitous to learn her intended information, Jenny ventures once more to renew the topic, by exclaiming in a drawling accent—

"La, Madam, how beautiful! how heligant! how every thing that is fine!—But I wonder your La'ship has not a little more curiosity."

"Curiosity! for what?" said her La'ship, carefully adjusting her handkerchief as she spoke— "why so, pray?"

"Lord, Madam, cannot you guess?"

"Me guess!—how should I guess?—Has my *ci-devant* friend, Jones, taken the lover's leap?"

"Worse, Madam!"

"Has Major St. Vincent challenged him, and received a bullet in return?"

Jenny had nearly said, "Worse, Madam!" again: but though her lady spoke in a gay, jesting voice, she knew the length of her present tether too well to outrun the constable; and therefore gulping down the nearly-committed mistake, suddenly checked herself, and meekly replied, she hoped it was not come to that yet.

"What is it come to then?—Prithee have done with this nonsense, and tell me at once."

"Nay, dear Madam, do but guess."

"Has Captain Montague's ghost appeared at the grotto, and the Lady of the Hermitage flown to the original's arms for shelter from the apparition of her dearie?"

"Madam!" cried Jenny, looking round with an expressive glance of terror, as if she expected to see something supernatural approaching to seize her.

"Has Captain Harcourt persuaded you to run off with him? He was rather sweet upon you last night in the passage I thought."

"Me, Madam!—Surely," said Jenny, colouring violently, "your La'ship cannot think that I would go off with any man! No, it is worse, far worse than even that!"

"The deuce it is!" cried Mrs. St. Vincent, with a smile. "But come, I will guess again.—Has the virtuous Miss Stella Bertram produced another bantling, and fathered it upon the Parson of the parish?"

"Worse, worse still, Madam!"

"Indeed!—nay, then I am able to guess no farther: so the mighty secret must remain untold, unless you chuse to speak more intelligibly."

"Well, Madam," replied Jenny, who by this time was as impatient to explain as the other

was to listen, "you shall now be obeyed:—but prepare to hear wonders. Mrs. Tomkins says—nay, you will scarcely believe me, Madam; but if I stand here, it is truth I speak;—Mrs. Tomkins informs me Miss Bertram is actually to attend your mother to Devonshire in the character of a companion!—Knowing what we know, Madam, can any thing equal this, pray?"

Mrs. St. Vincent turned hastily round, and stared at her for a moment in mute astonishment.

"Yes, indeed, Madam, you may well look surprised: it is truth, however, I assure you:—'For,' says the housekeeper, 'marry,' says she—"

"What signifies what either you or the housekeeper says," abruptly interrupted Mrs. St. Vincent: "I must see my mother instantly:—is she up?—is she awake?"

"I cannot tell," muttered the waiting-maid in a sullen accent; who, in consequence of being pretty deep in several of her lady's secrets, ventured now and then to take a little more freedom of tongue, than the other was always inclined to grant her; "for you know, Madam, it signifies not what some folks say."

"Impertinence!" retorted Margaret, sharply;— "Begone!—I insist on immediate obedience: inform my mother I must speak with her instantly.—No, stay, stupid animal, and slow as a snail!—I will go myself."

She brushed past the still sulky Jenny, and hurried to the chamber of Mrs. Ross.

CHAP. II.

“Speak of me as I am: nothing extenuate,
“Nor set down aught in malice.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THAT lady had just left her bed, after an hour's repose, as was customary with her of late in the evenings: Mrs. St. Vincent, therefore, entered immediately on the subject of her present visit, by abruptly requesting to know, if it was really possible, as reported, that she meant to take Stella Bertram to Devonshire with her.

Mrs. Ross answered in the affirmative.

“Good God, Madam! you are not in earnest, I hope?”

“Why not, Margaret?—Can I have a more eligible companion, or one that performs all the incumbent duties of her station with more uniform propriety?”

Margaret smiled contemptuously, and repeated the last word with a significant emphasis.

“Yes, *propriety*, Mrs. St. Vincent!—Can the term be better applied than on the present occasion? In my own family it cannot you well know.”

Margaret reddened at this home touch: but where a fact is too obvious to be refuted, true wisdom consists in not making the attempt; she therefore merely answered—“This young woman must not, however, accompany you, Madam.”

“Must not!—Who shall prevent her?—Not my own children surely?”

“No, Madam, you will save them that trouble, I dare say, when you know her story; which, if you will give me leave, you shall do immediately.”

“Proceed then, and let us hear it.”

Margaret did not much admire the humour her mother happened to be in this evening. Of late she seldom possessed sufficient spirits to contest any matter long with the violent and overbearing temper of a daughter, whose total inattention to almost all the filial duties of a child had been notorious for a considerable length of time: to find this ill-treated parent now capable of so much exertion, at a period too, when it was so little expected, and still less desired, rather disconcerted the first attempts of this predetermined impartial historian. She commenced her narrative of *positive* facts, however, after a pause of very short duration; and gradually warming in the progress of the communication, failed not to heighten every apparently aggravating circumstance with all the additional colouring a censorious and malignant mind could bestow. She then concluded the whole farrago of intermingled truth and falsehood, by sarcastically enquiring if Mrs. Ross still retained her former opinion of the girl's passion for *propriety*, and persevered in her design of taking her for a companion to Devonshire.

Though accustomed to her daughter's violence of temper, and thoroughly acquainted with her natural bias to misrepresentation, Mrs. Ross could scarcely command her usual portion of patience to the end of this curious recital; and it was only with the utmost difficulty she restrained herself from giving vent to those sensations of indignant resentment which repeatedly rose to her lips at the idea of so vile an aspersion being thrown upon the hitherto unsullied character of her young, and as she yet believed her, innocent favourite. Experimentally convinced, however, of the inutility of reason, and the still vainer attempt to implant the divine principles of mercy and forbearance in a soil so inimical to their culture, she refrained from entering at length on the subject, or exerting herself to refute what she knew was previously determined to be maintained; and merely replied that her opinion and intentions remained in

every respect the same.

"Then, Madam, you are stubbornly deaf to conviction, to truth, and the dictates of your late valued system of *propriety*," said Margaret, with a strong expression of impatience on every agitated feature.

"Your share of the two latter, Mrs. St. Vincent, is, I much fear, infinitely too small to supply my supposed deficiency in any article of the kind:—as to the former, when error is adopted as the obvious rule of conduct, and depravity scorns disguise, conviction must follow of course.—You are welcome to apply this observation where your feelings tell you it is most suitable."

Mrs. St. Vincent burst into tears, and by that means evinced her comprehension of the foregoing allusion.

Mrs. Ross knew they were not the tears of penitence or reformation, and permitted them to flow unnoticed. She took a volume of Blair's Sermons from a table, on which leaning her elbow, she seemed to be entirely occupied by the contents of the book.

Margaret's pride now came to her assistance on perceiving her mother's total inattention to the late subject of discussion: she hastily wiped her eyes, and again inquired if no further regard was to be paid to the nature of so important a communication—a communication so critical in its consequences to the respectability of her mother's appearance either at home or abroad.

Mrs. Ross raised her eyes from the page before her, and fixing them impressively on the face of her adviser, observed that the case, in her opinion, required no investigation.—

"However," added she, coldly, "I shall, nevertheless, mention it to Mrs. Bertram when we meet again."

"You had better mention it to Captain Montague," retorted Margaret, with quickness, and then flounced out of the room with the air and look of a fury.

Mrs. Ross followed her with her eyes, and a deep sigh burst from her bosom as the incorrigible Mrs. St. Vincent pulled the door to with violence after her. The latter threw herself on the sofa in her dressing-room, and again burst into an hysterical fit of tears.

At this instant Major St. Vincent entered the apartment, and, thunderstruck at the scene that presented itself, requested an explanation.

Roused by the sound of his voice, and flattering herself with conjugal support on the occasion, she suddenly raised her head from the arm of the sofa; and labouring under the dark influence of spite, disappointment, envy, and malice, instantly entered upon the subject of her mother's reported cruelty, and the cause in which it originated.

Totally thrown off his guard by the virulence of her language, and the volubility with which it was uttered, indignation succeeded to astonishment; and recoiling a few paces as the first energetic epithets bestowed upon poor Stella vibrated on his feelings, St. Vincent emphatically exclaimed—

"Stella Bertram vile, profligate, abandoned!—By Heaven, you wrong her!—I could stake my salvation on the purity of Stella Bertram!"

The scene that followed beggared description. St. Vincent was of too firm and manly a character to retract from what he had once said, particularly when he believed himself in the right. The former suspicion entertained by Margaret, returned with additional force; and the frail bond of peace and confidence, thus once more snapped asunder, the matrimonial breach soon became wider and more disjointed than ever.

There was a time when the enraged Margaret would have flown to her father, and poured

her complaints in the ears of parental affection: that period, however, no longer remained within her reach; for the Nabob had set out the preceding week to join his son at Montpellier, whose declining state of health required his presence, and seemed at this crisis to threaten the most serious consequences.

Indeed, her influence, even in that quarter, had rather declined of late. Since her marriage every evil propensity seemed to be freely indulged as it rose in her mind, and her passions permitted to reign with the most unbounded licence. Where obvious distinctions are made amongst the children of a family, it does not always happen that the particular favourite is uniformly the most grateful or deserving of the ill-judged partiality; on the contrary, the reverse is more commonly the case: and the weak injustice of the parent is but too often rewarded by the neglect and inattention of the very being for whom probably the other more worthy members of the domestic circle were constantly and totally overlooked.

Something too similar to this had occasionally occurred between Mrs. St. Vincent and her father prior to her union with the Major. After she became a wife, her overbearing and insolent spirit, as we have already observed, seemed more than ever to spurn at all restraint; and Mr. Ross frequently found, to his cost, that caprice and ill-humour, like death, levels all distinctions: his allotted share indeed of each was not small when the perverse fit happened to be upon her; and that, on a moderate average, could not be reckoned at less than two-thirds of every day in the week.

Conviction from self-experience is generally found pretty conclusive: and the Nabob's portion of the latter proved tolerably sufficient to establish the former. He now began to perceive some few errors in the character of his once all-perfect favourite; which led him to suspect she was not quite superior to her fellow-mortals, as he had formerly been willing to imagine.

From the Monarch to the beggar human favour is unstable, and naturally apt to change its object when provocations arise, and those who ought to remain the governed, attempt to become governors. In consequence of the foregoing discovery, Mrs. St. Vincent's power over her father's affections declined; and in proportion to the magnitude of the aggravating circumstances which daily took place to estrange him from his usual bias to this misguiding daughter, the disposition and character of the Major rose in his estimation, till it nearly reached the climax of favour once so unworthily attained by his wife; who now found, to her no small surprise and displeasure, that, in matters of domestic disagreement, her complaints appeared gradually less and less attended to; while St. Vincent, on the contrary, seemed to be the idol set up by her father as her substitute in his good opinion.

The sudden departure of the Nabob was therefore viewed by Margaret with the most philosophical degree of indifference; and the cause of it, so far from being considered a misfortune, appeared as little interesting to her feelings as the separation from this long indulgent, but much-mistaken parent: for Margaret still retained her former prudent manner of judging on the occasion, and looked upon the certain advantages which must necessarily accrue to herself by the death of an only brother, as fraught with a sufficient number of consolatory reasons to prove a full compensation for the event which produced them—an event alike common to all the human race, and therefore not to be deplored as an individual distress.—So thought Mrs. St. Vincent; and, under similar circumstances, Mrs. St. Vincent was by no means singular in her opinion.

CHAP. III.

“A grateful mind
“By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
“Indebted and discharg’d.”

MILTON.

A WEEK now only remained till the commencement of Mrs. Ross’s journey was to take place: during this period, as likewise that which succeeded her immediate altercation with Margaret, the latter gradually reinstated Lieutenant Jones in all his former rights and privileges, and, apparently indifferent to the future notions, sentiments, or conduct of her mother and husband, affected to carry matters with a higher hand than ever.

Perceiving, however, that no particular notice was taken of any part of her proceedings, and irritated to find herself of too little consequence to draw their attention, she once more determined to try her strength in another attempt to shake Mrs. Ross’s former resolution relative to our poor heroine.

In this undertaking she was equally unsuccessful as before. Mrs. Bertram, under the solemn seal of secrecy, had already entrusted that lady with the true state of the case; and the part it appeared Stella had acted in it, raised her character higher than ever in the eyes of her worthy patroness, who (now more at liberty to follow the bent of her own inclinations since the departure of the Nabob) no longer made any difficulty of avowing her steady adherence to every former arrangement, and her unalterable design of being accompanied by Stella—a design which at one time seemed rather to meet with the disapprobation of her husband, in consequence of his daughter’s distorted representations; but to which afterwards he tacitly ceased to give any very marked opposition, on observing the strong desire Mrs. Ross expressed for the society of her young friend during the period of her residence in England: preparations were accordingly made for their departure, in spite of this second effort of Mrs. St. Vincent to prevent our heroine from attending her mother.

Under the pretence of avoiding every probable cause of exasperating Mrs. St. Vincent, Stella had earnestly entreated to be spared going to the Grove, unless at those particular periods when her unrelenting enemy was engaged with the rest of the family on visiting parties in the neighbourhood: this request Mrs. Ross reluctantly acceded to on perceiving her solicitude on the subject; and Stella, of course, felt herself relieved from the many apprehensions which continually haunted her imagination relative to any further interviews with the Major.

A day or two previous to their intended departure, Mrs. Bertram took an opportunity of recapitulating all the circumstances particularly connected with her first introduction to her knowledge, and requested her above all things to be particularly attentive to the preservation of the miniature picture, which she now meant to confide to her care, as it was strongly impressed on her mind, though she knew not how to account for it, that this painting was some how or other connected with her birth, and might possibly in the end prove materially useful in the elucidation of that hitherto mysterious affair.

After a short pause, she proceeded next to hint at the uncertainty of life, and the increasing vicissitudes to which every human being is, in various respects, liable during their chequered progress through the chances and changes of the world.

“We may, and we may not meet again, my dear child,” continued this truly good woman, regarding her auditor with a look expressive of the utmost compassion and tenderness as she

addressed her. "All events are in the hand of a wise and over-ruling Providence: of course, what he orders must be best; and it is our unquestionable duty to conform, without repining, to the high dispensations of his omnipotent will. Your prospects, my love, are but of a limited nature: from the station you are going to be placed in with Mrs. Ross, unforeseen advantages may possibly accrue, and subsequent benefits I hope be derived as it will render you more competent for the lot I have long mentally assigned you to fill; and to do which with propriety, some knowledge of the world, of genteel life, its habits and customs, is absolutely necessary. At any rate, however, should our prospects on this head prove fallacious, you have still a maternal friend, and a home ready to receive you, while God Almighty sees fit to permit my continuance on earth. If the allotted term of existence happens, nevertheless, to expire before your return (as I have already said, every thing of this nature is uncertain, and therefore ought to be guarded against,) I have done all in my power to secure my beloved child a small resource in the day of trouble, (and the most prosperous are not exempted from such) by bequeathing the Hermitage, and the few acres I can call my own, to her future possession. In this drawer the papers belonging to it are all deposited: here, my love, you will find the deed of settlement, which constitutes you mistress of the Hermitage and its little domain:—see, Stella, the parcel is sealed, and lies in that corner.—Nay, my child, weep not! Why should what I have said cause so much emotion? Does the drawing of a will sign our mortal sentence, or discoursing upon it accelerate its final execution? This is a weakness I hoped you were superior to, and am grieved to find myself mistaken. Dry up your tears, my love; we have yet, I trust, many happy days to spend with each other."

Stella, who had hitherto wept in silence, now suddenly rose, and throwing her arms round Mrs. Bertram's neck in an agony of grief, emphatically exclaimed, while her words were almost inarticulate from the violence of her emotion—

"Oh my dearest mother! blame not your Stella if she protests against quitting you! You are ill—I am sure you think yourself ill;—under an impression so dreadful, how can I possibly leave you?—Oh my more than parent! command me not from you, but permit me to remain at the Hermitage! What is Mrs. Ross, what the whole world to me, when put in competition with the obligations I owe my earliest, my best, my ever-generous benefactress?—No, indeed, indeed I must not quit you, my mother! Oh! allow your Stella, the object of your bounty—allow her to discharge part of her immense debt, by dedicating her sole attention to the protecting, maternal friend who sheltered the helpless foundling from the consequences of that fate to which the less humane authors of her existence seemed to have consigned her!—Say, my mother, only say—'Stella, I grant your request—you may remain with me!'"

Mrs. Bertram attempted not to speak for several minutes, during which they continued locked in each others arms. At length she disengaged herself from the still weeping Stella, and, solicitous to dispel her apprehensions, strove by every possible argument reason could suggest, to calm her fears, and inspire better hopes respecting her future prospects in life. The fortitude of our heroine seemed, however, to have lost its firmness; and it was not without much difficulty that something like a faint degree of composure at last shed its placid influence over her soft features, and illumed them with an appearance of returning tranquillity. Stella never shone more interestingly beautiful than on similar occasions: duty, gratitude, friendship, and affection seemed to blend in forming the celestial expression of her mild and pensive countenance—a countenance at all times uncommonly lovely, but which constantly derived additional charms from any recent exertion of sensibility, of active benevolence, or the softer effusions of that passion which had lately taken possession of her breast.

Mrs. Bertram's rhetoric, though seldom so long in producing the desired effect, was sure of carrying every thing before it in the end: Stella finally consented to relinquish her own wishes in compliance with those of others; and, silent and sorrowful, set about the disagreeable task of packing up the few articles of dress prepared for her journey: these, though plain, were neat and genteel, perfectly appropriate to the situation she was going to fill, without encroaching on the sphere of her superiors, and such as Mrs. Ross could not but approve.

At the earnest request of Maria Campbell, Stella prevailed on her maternal friend to indulge her with a sight of the child before she herself left the Hermitage. This petition would probably have remained unattended to at any other period than the present; but sensible of the magnitude of the sacrifice made by our heroine to please her, Mrs. Bertram thought it would be hard to refuse so trifling a favour—and a favour too, from whence her *protégée* could only at best derive a secondary degree of gratification, since it was merely in compliance with the unfortunate mother's eager solicitations she had ventured upon asking it.

The gentle and feeling heart of Stella was extremely affected by this interview: she found herself, however, amply compensated by the temporary happiness it bestowed on poor Maria, and the repeated assurances received from her of her resolution to pay the most unceasing attention to the wants and wishes of their mutual benefactress during our heroine's absence.

When she went to pay her last visit at Woodside, a similar act of friendship was requested, on Mrs. Bertram's account, from that worthy family; every individual of which readily promised to call frequently at the Hermitage, and do every thing in their power to supply her place on all possible occasions.

As her young friends accompanied her part of the road back, they mentioned a circumstance which appeared incomprehensible to our heroine, who was yet ignorant of the imputation thrown upon her character by Mrs. St. Vincent, which Mrs. Ross and Mrs. Bertram had mutually agreed to conceal from her knowledge, as the inutility of such a vile communication was obvious, and could serve no earthly purpose, the inhuman one excepted, of tormenting its innocent victim.

Margaret, enraged and unusually irritated by the manner in which her intelligence had been received by her mother and husband, and particularly provoked at the incredulity which marked their opinion of her veracity relative to what she asserted having seen in the grotto, had flown in the first ebullition of passion to Mr. Adair's; where, unwilling to prove too explicit in her enquiries, lest the friends of Stella should take the alarm, and be upon their guard, the wary Mrs. St. Vincent attempted, by every insidious artifice in her power, to ascertain the extent of what they knew respecting the conduct of our heroine with St. Vincent and Montague. Not conceiving it possible she could have any particular reason for such an investigation, and by no means comprehending the precise meaning of her dark and mysterious hints, they carefully avoided every thing that alluded in the most distant degree to the Major, as a subject on which they were not competent to speak; while the manner in which the other gentleman's supposed partiality for their absent friend was tacitly acknowledged, confirmed Margaret in her suspicions of both. Though feelings of delicacy were imagined to prevent them from dwelling on the infelicity of a husband in the presence of his wife, she departed perfectly convinced that it was not for nothing he stood up in defence of Stella: and the success of her mission would speedily have been detailed alike to the Major and Mrs. Ross, had not the former left the room in evident displeasure on her attempting to recommence the hackneyed subject; and the latter positively prohibited her from presuming to mention it again in her presence.

CHAP. IV.

“Oh soft Remembrance! airy sprite!
“Thou second life of bliss and pain;
“Exquisite sense of keen delight,
“Who giv’st our feelings back again!”

FOX.

TO account for this part of Margaret’s conduct lay not within the compass of our heroine’s abilities: the curiosity expressed by her companions on the subject consequently remained ungratified; and after hazarding a few conjectures on the probable and improbable import of the whole, their thoughts gradually reverted to the approaching separation about to take place between them. This topic proved sufficiently interesting to absorb every other for the short period they were now together; and at length they parted after many reciprocal professions of friendship and remembrance.

The heart of our heroine felt uncommonly heavy when the much-loved associates of her youth retreated from view.

“One melancholy task is now over,” said she to herself as she entered the garden: “what would I not give to have those that remain equally so!—My mother, my dearest mother, why dwells this oppressive presentiment of evil in my bosom when I think of the approaching event?—Oh! could I only be permitted to continue at the Hermitage, how happy should I be! But, alas! your Stella is not privileged to follow the bent of her inclinations!—Poor, friendless, and unknown, she must yield to the hard law of necessity, and quit her first, generous benefactress, perhaps to meet no more!”

A deluge of tears interrupted all further utterance; and, unable to suppress her emotions, she hastened to the grotto, lest Mrs. Bertram should happen to discover her present distress, and decidedly censure what she would style another proof of mental imbecility.

To our poor heroine, who had never been ten miles from home in the whole course of her life, the journey before her seemed an undertaking of considerable magnitude, and the separation from those she loved scarcely less than eternal: the grotto—that spot in which so many hours of her existence had been spent, unmolested by the intrusion of the world, and where innocent pleasure proved her constant companion, till the arrival of the troops in Galloway mingled her cup with the tincture of human vicissitude and secret sorrow—that grotto was soon, likewise, to be far distant from her view!

The tears of Stella flowed afresh at the sad ideas which rose in melancholy rotation as she silently yielded to their force, and permitted the sensibility of her nature to a temporary dominion over the suggestions of reason and the cooler dictates of her better judgment. She regarded every object around her with a degree of interest never before experienced, and almost persuaded herself she should see them no more: every favourite shrub seemed to court her attention—every bird to sing in a more plaintive note; and, from the threshold, recollection assembled the festive group once more in the drawing-room of the Grove—once more they appeared in the windings of the mazy dance, passing the spacious windows in quick succession—and again the fascinating strains of the military band reverberated on her ear: the transition was easy to what followed—and the visionary forms of St. Vincent and his friend Montague instantly floated before her.

Stella sighed profoundly over the retrospective scenes that imagination portrayed in the

most impressive colours; and in the fulness of her heart supposed herself the most wretched of human beings.

Thus, in the absence of real evils, are we ever prone to create fictitious ones; and sensibility, that criterion by which the young and untried mind is apt to determine the standard of earthly perfection, overwhelms its possessor with a thousand ideal distresses, unknown to those less fastidious, unrefined mortals who consider the unavoidable misfortunes of life sufficiently oppressive without the additional load of “airy nothings,” so industriously cherished for the laudable purpose of self-formed misery, by the ill-judging few who have never experienced the pang of actual anguish, or suffered affliction beyond the illusive boundary of mental vision.

The moon already shone with uncommon brightness before Stella could tear herself away from her favourite retreat: the night, however, was not yet too far advanced to prevent the execution of a little excursion she wished to accomplish before it entirely closed in. She felt a strong inclination to bid Sally Thompson and the child of Maria a last adieu. The shortest and most unfrequented path to the house of the former wound past the ruins of the old Abbey. It was gloomy and solitary: but the usual road lay considerably about, and convenience prompted her to adopt it without further delay: she therefore obeyed the impulse of the moment, and descending from the grotto, bent her steps towards the farmer’s habitation.

In the course of her progress, it was necessary to cross a quarter of the venerable fabric that led to a vaulted gate-way through which she must pass. As she walked hastily along, the reverberated sound of her footsteps seemed uncommonly loud; and her heart began to beat in proportion as an apprehension of something, she knew not what, took possession of her mind. Almost convinced she was not alone in this forlorn and dismal looking spot, she stopped once or twice, uncertain whether to return or proceed, and anxiously listened to discover if her fears were really well founded, or merely the effect of imagination. The owl, however, which now circled over her head, and then rested on the northern turret, appeared to be the only living thing near her. At length she reached a private passage, cut through a part of the rocky barrier that on this side inclosed the little possessions of Mrs. Bertram: at the end of it was a strong close-made door, which from time immemorial had belonged to the proprietors of the Hermitage, and gave them a right to a footpath leading to the parish church, across a field of the Nabob’s, on whose domains it opened: but that gentleman chose to dispute the legality of their claim to this privilege; and therefore, rather than contest the matter with so powerful an opponent, it was never publicly insisted upon, nor used, unless on some particular occasions similar to the present. The key of this door, however, remained with the inhabitants of the Hermitage, who kept it in a little adjoining recess, formed for that purpose in the rock; from whence Stella now removed it, in order to effect her intended design: but on applying it to the lock, her astonishment was extreme to find that already occupied by another, exactly the same in every respect with the original one in her hand.

A circumstance so perfectly unaccountable renewed the recent apprehensions of our heroine; and she now almost encouraged the idea that something like the whispering of human voices, which at one time seemed to proceed from a retired corner of the building, was not entirely the creation of mental alarm, or ideal supposition, as she had then endeavoured to persuade herself. Impressed with this notion, she hastened forward, eager to conclude a walk which, in her present opinion, had never appeared so long before.

She found Mrs. Wallace with her niece: the child, however, happened to be asleep on her arrival; but in a few minutes it awaked; and Sally, having wrapped it up so as to prevent any evil consequences from its exposure to the night air, accompanied her aunt and Stella to the vicinity

of the private door. The latter had previously mentioned the strange incident of the key; and her companions, no less surprised than herself by an event so totally incomprehensible, determined to assist her in ascertaining the cause, if possible, of a circumstance so alarming and suspicious.

While they were conversing on the subject, and had nearly reached the spot where the intended investigation was to commence, the infant began to cry, and the party stopped to soothe it. Stella, who was naturally fond of children, and particularly attached to this one, was not the least active in her efforts on the occasion: indeed, more than one motive now urged her to make the attempt; for she feared they might be overheard by the unknown owners of the key, who, conceiving themselves discovered, might effect their escape before it proved practicable to ascertain who they were; an event, in every point of view, highly requisite to the safety of the Hermitage and its inmates, who undoubtedly could not be expected to enjoy their usual state of tranquillity while thus rendered liable to intrusions from such a mysterious neighbourhood.

In this part of North Britain it was customary for smugglers to conceal themselves and the produce of their contraband trade in situations similar to the present. No one spot on the habitable globe could be better calculated for that purpose than the ancient ruins of the old edifice:—it had more than once been occupied by such tenants; and the companions of Stella thought it likely to be in the same predicament at this juncture.

While they whispered their conjectures on the subject, and our heroine was at intervals fondly caressing her little favourite, the key was heard to turn in the lock. They started at the sound, and, without allowing themselves leisure to reflect on the road probable to be taken by those who were about to approach, suddenly retreated behind the nearest bushes, and awaited the result in silent apprehension.

Their suspense was not, however, of long duration. A man and woman passed cautiously through the door: their conversation was low, but apparently of an interesting description, and, as they advanced nearer, appeared of a nature not very favourable to the character of the female, whose delicacy seemed not of the most refined kind, and little apt to be hurt by the unequivocal style of her companion's language, or the occasional freedom of his treatment during several temporary pauses in their progress.

CHAP. V.

“Here matter new to gaze the Devil met.”

MILTON.

THE strangers were now, by slow degrees, advancing to the very identical spot where the three females had attempted to conceal themselves, and from whence they ventured not to move a single step, lest a discovery of their retreat should prove the consequence; when the whole system of caution hitherto observed was speedily rendered abortive by the child, who once more began to cry, in spite of every effort used by Stella and her companions to keep it quiet.

The man and woman at first instinctively recoiled at the sound; and while the latter uttered a faint scream, her comrade rushed suddenly forward in order to ascertain the real cause of their alarm.

Mrs. Wallace instantly perceived the inutility of any further attempt at concealment; and whispering her companions, endeavoured to assume an air of composure as she stepped from their hiding-place, and seemed to be merely intent on the road they were pursuing.

In consequence of this mode of proceeding, they were necessitated to pass close by the woman, who apparently eyed them with no small degree of interest almost from the first moment of their appearance, for the impulse of fear had quickly given way to what is commonly supposed more powerful in the breast of a female; and curiosity now usurped every faculty of her soul.

Stella happened at this instant to have the child in her arms: but they had scarcely passed the strangers, before she began to tremble violently; and finding herself unable to bear it any longer, after a silent pressure of her lips on its forehead, she turned round to replace it on the bosom of its faithful nurse.

The moon at this period emerged from behind a flying cloud which had partially obscured it, and darting its beams through the surrounding foliage, they rested directly on the lovely features of our heroine, who suddenly raised her eyes at an abrupt exclamation which burst from the unknown, and perceived, to her utter astonishment, that unknown now almost at her side, and no other than her inveterate enemy's maid Jenny.

This girl was soon recognised by the rest of the party; but, with the person who accompanied her, Stella alone was acquainted: hitherto he had kept behind, evidently watching their motions, till the above-mentioned exclamation brought him from the rear, and Lieutenant Jones stood confessed to view.

It has been said that there are men who would rather face the mouth of a cannon than incur the merited contempt of a virtuous woman: minds of this description cannot be altogether void of some good qualities; for those who experience the sensation of shame, shew thereby that they are capable of reformation. The magnanimous Mr. Jones, however, was superior to such little weaknesses where the possibility of retaliating his accuser's imputation with safety was supposed to be practicable. Under circumstances different from the present, he had perhaps stole away, and permitted his companion to manage for herself in the best manner she could: but Stella Bertram was conceived to be fair game;—her conduct by some had been represented as highly culpable—by others as rather somewhat suspicious: it is true, the very small number who chose to put this construction on her actions, were mostly confined to the precincts of Ross Grove; but it was exactly there where the military hero's chief consequence was supposed to center:

wherefore he flattered himself with possessing the certain means of invalidating any testimony she might feel disposed to prefer against him, either now or hereafter, by the easy and simple mode of recrimination, which her conduct had apparently enabled him to pursue, and which, he wisely judged, would be sufficient to render whatever she might report, to his prejudice of this night's adventure, of little or no avail, from the evidence he could produce of her own profligate character; since the caresses she lavished on the child, the visible agitation she suffered on being discovered with it, as likewise the hour and solitary spot chosen for the parting interview, all spoke strongly against her, and fully corroborated the opinion previously entertained by his friend Mrs. Vincent of her criminal intercourse with one, or both of the admirers so repeatedly assigned her.

Conceiving himself, therefore, pretty well secured against the event of consequences, and feeling the malignant triumph incident to little minds, when an opportunity of mortifying those they are secretly forced to acknowledge their superiors, is unexpectedly obtained, Mr. Jones advanced to the charge with a tolerable portion of assurance, and a full determination to wound the two men whom he privately detested, but dared not openly attack, through the medium of an innocent, defenceless girl, erroneously marked down as the favourite of both.

This manly and meritorious design was further strengthened by a recollection of the various benefits usually derived from what is vulgarly called "taking the first word of fighting." But though the foregoing resolution, in the existing state of affairs, was a wise one, and the ideas from whence it resulted passed rapidly through his mind, the scheme happened, nevertheless, to be rendered abortive by the more active oratorical abilities of his female coadjutor, whose genius for mischief was not inferior to his own, however strong might be the bias of his natural disposition for that sort of food which the mistress and maid seemed to swallow with an equal degree of avidity.

Mrs. Wallace and her little party, relieved from the apprehension of more dangerous neighbours, and feeling no inclination to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* so ill calculated for the eye of observation, were proceeding on their way, when it occurred to the former that some inquiry was requisite respecting the appearance of the additional key, the real owners of which it seemed a matter of importance to ascertain; she therefore turned round, and stopped nearly opposite the gentleman and lady to make the necessary investigation: but the latter, bursting with malice, ill-nature, and impertinence, which she was determined not to lose so favourable an opportunity of venting, instantly commenced the attack with a volubility so impetuous, and a torrent of abuse so incomprehensible, that Mrs. Wallace, perceiving the impossibility of making herself heard, at length ceased to attempt it; and remarking, with much astonishment, that the rhetoric of the speaker was chiefly addressed to Stella, she fixed a look of surprise alternately on each, in expectation of procuring some solution of a scene no less new than unintelligible.

Her curiosity, however, remained ungratified; for our heroine happened to be equally unenlightened with herself, and little could be gathered from the accuser, whose broad hints were alike thrown away on the listeners, as they merely ascribed the virulence of her language to her *mal-à-propos* appearance and the fear of exposure, to which a discovery so critical had subjected her. Nevertheless, still solicitous to comprehend some portion of an harangue so nervous, so voluble, and apparently so pointed, the silent group attempted not to move from their present position, actuated by a wish to solve the mystery, and an increasing desire to hear its conclusion.

Jenny, who, like most of the frail sister-hood, was extremely apt to forget her own errors in the laudable anxiety by which she was generally stimulated to propagate those, true or false, saddled on her neighbours, so far from harbouring any alarms originating in considerations of a

personal nature, or supposing herself liable to censure from the recent discovery, actually behaved as if she imagined no blame could possibly be attached to her share in the adventure, and seemed to think the black spots in her own character whitened in proportion as she bespattered the moral principles of another; till at length, almost breathless, and nearly exhausted with rage, on observing the cool and rational conduct of those she wished to provoke, and the inutility of all her endeavours to irritate their passions, she paused perforce; and Mrs. Wallace immediately seized the opportunity of renewing her inquiry relative to the key.

"The key!" resumed Jenny, with an additional shade of colour, and a look that conveyed the idea of a momentary recollection of something she wished rather to remember in any other person's conduct than her own:—"what have I to do with your paltry keys?—Do you take me for a jailer's wife, or the 'Squire's housekeeper?—Marry, come up! people are wonderous ready to forget themselves now-a-days!"

"It is indeed a common case," returned Mrs. Wallace, dryly, "and too frequently met with in all ranks and conditions of life."

The manner in which this remark was delivered drew a sort of half-smile half-sneer from the Lieutenant, which seemed to grate upon the feelings of his companion, who turned short upon him, and abruptly requested to partake of the jest, if he knew where it was to be found.—"Though, perhaps," she added, with a look, full of malice, directed to Stella, "Miss Bertram there may furnish you with one some nine months hence, if the leavings of your brother officers proves not too hard of digestion."

The sneer of the Lieutenant became more obvious as he emphatically replied, that the experiment she alluded to had already been made in another quarter, and produced an effect exactly similar to that she hinted at.

"I would have you to know, Sir," retorted the enraged Abigail, who only in part comprehended his meaning, "I would have you to know, Sir, that I am meat for your masters."

"So Captain Harcourt informed me," said Jones, significantly; "but if such is the case, I hope *you* have no objection *my* being of *equal service* to your mistress.—What say you, Miss Bertram? A fair exchange is no robbery, you know: and you likewise know, that when wives are agreeably occupied, husbands have more leisure on their hands to pursue the bent of their inclinations with impunity. But come, my girl," continued the incorrigible coxcomb, turning to Sally Thompson, and making an attempt to uncover the child, "let me see the little bantling; I am famous for my skill in physiognomy, and will tell you at a single glance whether the Major's star, or the Captain's, acquired the ascendant at its formation."

"You had better," replied Sally Thompson, provoked at his undaunted impudence, and retreating as she spoke, "you had better have consulted the stars on Mrs. St. Vincent's opinion of your visit to the old Abbey, and the danger of leaving a false key in the door on occasions where concealment appears so necessary."

The Lieutenant gave a loud whistle, and stepped back with an air intended to shew not only indifference, but derision.

Meanwhile Jenny, who had now recovered from a flood of tears, produced by the taunts of her ungrateful paramour, whom she no longer seemed to regard with an eye of affection, once more prepared to rehearse a second part of the same story; but in the present tumult of her mind, not clearly understanding the conclusion of Sally's speech, and supposing the truth remained no longer problematical, she fell into the snare her own precipitancy had woven; and Mrs. Wallace soon became convinced that the key had been obtained for purposes not very creditable to the character of Mrs. Jenny and her occasional associates, who, no doubt, found the unfrequented

walk that led to this place, and the solitary seclusion of the place itself, alike favourable to the *tête-à-têtes*, which happened to prove of a description too critically dangerous to venture upon under the immediate roof of her mistress.

Such is usually the fatal effects of a wanton disregard of appearances in our superiors, that it not only renders them personally contemptible, but likewise extends the baneful influence of example to the lower classes of the community; who, glad to find an excuse for the secret depravity of their own hearts, endeavour to flatter themselves with the idea, that errors may be pardoned in the low, the ignorant, and the humble, when they are practised by, and too often shamefully tolerated in those who ought to know better and act differently.

Yet, so great is the force of prejudice, and so strange the inconsistent nature of our feelings, that Mrs. St. Vincent would certainly have dismissed Jenny from her service, had the enormity of her conduct been fully ascertained, or even suspected by her; though her own proud defiance of the world's opinion, and her consequent mode of proceeding with Mr. Jones, had probably encouraged the girl to act in a manner very different from what she would otherwise have dared to venture upon, if situated under circumstances more inimical to the free indulgence of reprehensible inclinations, and better calculated to inspire the light and superficial mind with some degree of reverence for the precepts and practice of the truly good and virtuous members of society, in whatever station they happened to be placed.

Mrs. Wallace, who harboured not the smallest desire to become a reformer, and had now satisfied herself as to the owners of the key, felt no further inclination to prolong an interview from whence no gratification of a pleasurable description could possibly be derived; and therefore, after a short, but energetic admonition to the frail Jenny, she and her companions again advanced forward to the passage through the rocks; while the former, sullen and for a wonder, silent, took the road to Rossgrove; at a convenient distance from which the Lieutenant thought proper to effect a retreat, and the lady was consequently left to conclude her evening adventure alone.

CHAP. VI.

“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all!”
SHAKESPEARE.

TO account for the hatred and virulence displayed on every occasion against our heroine by the Abigail of Mrs. St. Vincent, might be judged superfluous when it is recollected that people of Jenny's description generally adopt the principles and mode of conduct practised by their superiors, or at least such as they suppose most likely to find favour in their sight. In the present instance, this line of proceeding had certainly proved the chosen one, independent of any other stimulus whatever; but a circumstance yet more powerful, had operated at an early period of their acquaintance to fix the vain and vindictive Jenny an irreconcilable enemy to poor Stella: and though our heroine was herself ignorant of the nature of her offence, it happened, notwithstanding, to be of that kind which is most acutely felt, and most keenly resented, by the party doomed to smart under its influence. In short, Stella had been considered in the light of a successful rival by the disappointed maid of Mrs. St. Vincent, who, from the moment this idea took possession of her mind vowed eternal war and detestation against the unconscious object of her secret aversion.

The schoolmaster of the parish was a young, smart-looking man, and, being designed for the church, had received a better education, and mingled with a genteeler circle of associates than the generality of those in similar circumstances usually do in Scotland. From his first arrival in this part of the country, Jenny had marked him down as a certain victim to her charms; and no pains being spared to effect this purpose, she conceived herself rapidly approaching to the crisis of her wishes, and already in fancy saw the magic badge on her finger that was destined to place her in the honourable station of a clergyman's lady, when the unfortunate face and figure of Stella Bertram destroyed all the illusive visions of matrimonial felicity, and totally eradicated the enraged Abigail from the thoughts of him whom she had hitherto erroneously accustomed herself to consider as her own. It is true, the young man ventured not to disclose his sentiments to her rival, from a supposition they would be rejected in his present dependant and humble station; but his astonishment proved too obvious for concealment when the object of it appeared in view; and, by those acquainted with his predilection in her favour, it was generally understood he meant to offer himself when his expectations for futurity were accomplished by the attainment of a good living.

Highly provoked to find her hopes disappointed, and herself thus unexpectedly deserted, Jenny, eager to recall the truant affections of her fickle admirer, formed the common, but frequently dangerous determination of either attempting to rouse his jealousy, or, if that were found impracticable, indemnifying herself for her recent loss elsewhere by commencing another serious flirtation, under similar views, with a serjeant in the light horse, who appeared to be infinitely less fastidious in his taste than his predecessor, and who had more than once evinced no reluctance to become the rival latter.

Every married soldier is generally supposed a single man if his wife do not fill a corner of the baggage cart: the serjeant was exactly in this predicament; for, though already a husband, the absence of his lady allowed him to claim the military privilege, from time immemorial, of bachelorship. Jenny, however, it must be confessed, was totally ignorant of this circumstance, and her former lover Mr. Johnstone, the schoolmaster, discovered no inclination to make her

more *clairvoyant* on the subject; neither did he appear to feel much interested in the progress apparently made by the knight of the halberd in the fair nymph's affections. This latter circumstance was observed by her with increased bitterness; and either the ardour of revenge, the instability of female sentiments, or the secret pleadings of a beginning inclination for her new admirer, operated so powerfully, as at length to render the office of the Priest no longer necessary to the attainment of his views, even if clerical assistance could have been obtained in a legal manner without let or molestation from the first proprietor of his hand and heart.

The serjeant, however, like many other gentlemen of the cloth, piqued himself on this *honourable* mode of proceeding in similar cases, and seldom mentioned the extent of his success to more than half a dozen confidential friends at most: and as those might naturally think themselves at liberty to speak of his adventures to others under the same restrictions, his good fortune was generally pretty well known in a very short period after its accomplishment.

In regard to the present affair, a little more caution was deemed requisite; for it did not appear quite certain how far the Major might think the seduction of his wife's maid a laughable incident; and, should he take it in a different light, as was invariably the case when such things came to his knowledge, he knew the man he had to deal with sufficiently to dread the consequences: Jenny's secret was therefore supposed to be cautiously preserved; and from gratitude, as she protested, for his attention to her character, his prudence was repeatedly rewarded according to the petition he preferred for that purpose.

But the greatest warriors and the wisest politicians should never be too certain of the ground they stand upon: security often proves a broken reed to those who confide most in its dangerous protection, and, in conjunction with success, frequently produces the very evil it was supposed to prevent. Secrecy and opportunity had hitherto gone hand in hand with their wishes; and even the schoolmaster himself, though he still retained a distinguished place in her bosom, began to be occasionally excluded from remembrance. This temporary exclusion, however, seldom lasted much beyond the term of her existing interview with the serjeant; and her remaining inclination for the one commonly resumed its former station when the absence of the other left the infatuated girl more at leisure to reflect on what she had once hoped to have been, and what she now was. Nevertheless, those fits of galling retrospection were not of a description to reform or amend: of one consequence alone they were constantly productive, and that was an additional portion of hatred and resentment against poor Stella, whom she invariably considered as the original source of all her misfortunes and succeeding misconduct.

There is not, perhaps, in the whole self-consolatory system so liberally resorted to in all such situations, a more useful or convenient auxiliary than what is usually known by the name of a *scapegoat*: our heroine stood exactly in this rank of serviceable beings, and never failed to be most unmercifully burthened with the entire weight of Mrs. Jenny's disappointments, and the long train of *et ceteras* that followed. But while the load happened to be unconsciously borne, the bearer suffered little; and therefore the other was left at full freedom to take advantage of her rival's ignorance in order to lighten her own mind at the expence of one so detested.

Unluckily, it was yet found possible to augment that detestation, though even Jenny herself at one time imagined such a circumstance next to impossible. The case was this:—security and success gradually began to render the lovers more careless and inattentive to the chance of discovery; and in one of her solitary walks near the pavilion, Stella accidentally stumbled on the happy pair, who, as she passed the lower windows of the bathing-room, were observed to be seated amidst some of the green-house plants in the opposite corner.

So little, however, did our heroine suspect the truth, and so very distant was she from

forming any uncharitable conclusion on the occasion, that she ventured not even to look a second time, in order to ascertain the identity of the parties; but, supposing it might be some of the guests or family at the Grove occupied in examining the plants, and fearful of catching their eye, she made the best of her way from the spot, lest the Major, or Mrs. St. Vincent herself, might be of the number; for of its extent she was likewise ignorant, as the intervening foliage prevented a full view of it, and might conceal persons from the observation of those standing without.

Stella, however, escaped not with equal impunity: she was perceived by Jenny, and her accidental appearance was immediately marked down to the score of premeditated design: the consequence was natural; and our heroine henceforth became the innocent object of her unceasing abhorrence, calumny, and abuse on every opening that occurred to vent her spleen and disappointment; for she doubted not but the knowledge she afterwards suspected Mr. Johnstone had acquired of her proceedings, was obtained through the medium of this hateful rival, to counteract whose fatal influence she had been driven to adopt those measures which had finally effected her complete destruction, together with the total overthrow of all her ambitious dreams of future pre-eminence, and the power of lording it over her present equals in the character of a Minister's wife and the mistress of a parsonage house.

Nevertheless, after the rumoured attachment between Stella and Captain Montague began to gain ground, and the removal of that part of the regiment to which the serjeant belonged put a conclusion to her intercourse with him, she once more ventured to persuade herself that Johnstone was not, as she had suspected, quite so well informed of certain circumstances, as her former fears had represented; and even at times entertained the idea of making a second attack on his heart, under the impression that our heroine must now be for ever expelled from it; though in her conscience she could not help believing her free from the imputed guilt thrown upon her character, as she knew from good authority, however averse to acknowledge so much, that her late rival was not only in perfect health at the period of her supposed confinement, but even absent on a visit at Woodside, where, instead of being an invalid herself, she was occupied in attending on one who actually was so.

This piece of intelligence, so material for the re-establishment of our heroine's character, was not, however, even permitted to reach the ears of her mistress; for the rancor she harboured against the former happened to be too greatly gratified by the effects of concealment, to allow of its promulgation.

As her attachment to the serjeant had concluded with his absence, she almost dreaded lest the same should prove the case with Stella and the Captain, and her now premeditated reconciliation with Johnstone be rendered abortive from the revival of his hopes in that quarter. No wonder then, if actuated by this irritating apprehension, and provoked, at the same time, to find she had once more committed herself to the person she considered as the chief bar to her schemes, by so critical and *mal-à-propos* an appearance with Jones, rage took entire possession of her breast, and threw her off her guard: Jenny considered not that she herself was the original cause of so many misfortunes, nor once reflected that her own misconduct, and not the officious interference of another, proved the principal cause of every succeeding mortification.

CHAP. VII.

“He knows too well
“Your beauty and your worth: your lover comes not
“To offer insults.”

PHILIPS.

ARRIVED at the door leading to the old ruins, Stella bade a last adieu to Sally Thompson and her little charge, and soon after reached the Hermitage with Mrs. Wallace.

Farmer Thompson happened to be from home when our heroine visited his wife; and as his road lay past Mrs. Bertram's, he called on his return to enquire after the family.

Something, it appeared, had occurred to amuse him, for his features exhibited evident traces of risibility. Mrs. Wallace remarked this circumstance, and enquired the cause.

It seems he had encountered Mrs. Jenny at some little distance from the Grove; but though he accosted her with much civility, she appeared extremely sullen, and scarcely deigned to notice him. Thinking she might possibly be ill, he turned back, after having passed her, to inquire if that were the case; but before an answer could be obtained, which she was visibly in no great hurry to grant, one of the footmen hastily approached from the shrubbery, and, in a surly accent, said she was wanted by her lady, who had been at home for some time, and was exceedingly out of humour at her long absence.

The disconcerted Abigail heard this intelligence with visible emotion; and after muttering something about people never knowing their own mind, said she understood her lady purposed remaining to a much later hour at Mr. Stewart's, where she had gone to spend the day.

“A later hour!” repeated the messenger; “Why, what the devil, do you take the present for an early one?”

“Oh gemini!” exclaimed the trembling Jenny, looking at her watch, “what shall I do? who could have imagined it was this time of night?—I shall be scolded and huffed, and huffed and scolded, till one of us is out of breath, and the other out of patience.—Let me run—let me fly!”

“I will bear your watch for you,” said the fellow, who had been eyeing it as she spoke; and snatching it suddenly out of her hand, added—“that you may run, that you may fly so much the lighter!—I wish I could support your character as easily; but *it* has already run and fled beyond my ability to follow.”

“Insolent puppy!” retorted Jenny, with an eye darting fire, and a heightened complexion, “how dare you thus presume to insult me?”

The footman, with an air of the utmost *sang froid*, continued to examine a trinket that hung on the chain of the watch, while rage at first prevented the lady from thinking of any thing but the provoking words he had uttered: almost immediately, however, she recollected herself, and attempted to regain it with a degree of eagerness that indicated the importance of the acquisition.

“Yes,” resumed the man, holding it beyond her reach, and still continuing to observe the trinket with the most irritating perseverance, “yes, you shall have it instantly; but first let one take a better view of the fine new bauble you have got:—if I am not mistaken, my sly Madam, this is the very identical thing I saw a certain gentleman purchase in Wigton lately;—yes, dn—me if it is not!—Faith, Jenny, you're a complete one!—I suspected as much, however, and

supposed “High Life below Stairs” would be acted as soon as your lady left the Grove, in spite of some people’s pretended indisposition as an excuse for not accompanying her. You recollect the green bed-room scene?—Egad, I rather entered a little too soon, I believe:—but well, well—

Jenny’s rage seemed to increase at every word he spoke, and her recent anxiety to obey the summons of her mistress appeared totally absorbed in something that yet more nearly interested her feelings. Her tormentor, however, visibly enjoyed the storm he had raised, and the evident amusement it afforded the farmer: he therefore still withheld the watch, and evaded her repeated efforts to force it from him, at the same time inquiring, with a significant wink, if the evening air had removed Mr. Jones’s headache.

Jenny knew nothing of either Mr. Jones or his headache.

“Ah ha, my girl!” cried Thomas, “say you so?—It won’t pass, however: John saw you turn the corner yonder, and he likewise saw you were soon followed—Serjeants or Lieutenants—hey, Jenny?—all fish that swims in the sea—hey, Jenny?”

The “hey, Jenny?” was accompanied by a familiar chuck under the chin.

“Insolent puppy!” again cried the furious Abigail, “take that for your impudence!” and a sound box on the ear gave additional force to her rhetoric.

She snatched the watch from his hand as, stunned by the blow, he recoiled a few steps; and pouring a fresh volley of abuse on her antagonist, of which Thompson himself got a share for not rendering her any assistance, she flew from the spot, and hastened home as fast as her legs could carry her.

By the foregoing detail of the farmer, who laughed several times very heartily during the repetition, it was evident that Jenny’s late interview with the Lieutenant was not the first of the kind; and greatly as Stella always disliked this man, her abhorrence of him was considerably increased, from the conviction of his duplicity and total want of principle when self-gratification or vanity happened to be the prevailing passion of his mind; and she secretly wondered how a woman in Mrs. St. Vincent’s superior station of life, could encourage the attention, or even tolerate the presence of a character so truly despicable in every point of view; a character too, which must appear to particular disadvantage when opposed to that of the all-accomplished, elegant, and manly St. Vincent. So thought our unexperienced heroine; but she was not qualified by the nature of her education to judge of such cases, nor competent to appreciate the convenience of an extensive influence over one of those *come-and-go* beings, so useful and necessary in the numerous arrangements of a fine lady’s ever-varying vocations.

At length the hour arrived that was destined to remove her from the Hermitage; and about eight in the morning she repaired to Rossgrove.

Stella knew that Mrs. St. Vincent seldom left her chamber till the forenoon, according to her less refined notions, was pretty far advanced; any accidental interview with her, was not therefore to be dreaded; and as for the Major, she had previously understood he was to go from Mr. Stewart’s (where they dined) to Wigton. Such had once, indeed, been his intention; but on second thoughts, he changed his mind, and returned to the Grove, in order to accompany his mother-in-law, who considered him as the first of beings, a stage or two on her journey. Great, therefore, proved the dismay of our heroine when, on quitting Mrs. Ross’s apartment, she met them at the door; and after a low bow to Stella, he conducted the old lady, who leaned on his arm, to her carriage.

For this rencounter poor Stella was totally unprepared; and the agitation that seized her trembling frame, almost deprived her of sufficient strength to descend the staircase. The Major,

in one respect, was more fortunate: he knew of the companion Mrs. Ross had chosen, and consequently had not the additional load of surprise to struggle with: but though he evidently strove to suppress his feelings, and was master of more time to reason himself into the necessity of mental exertion, it was clear the effort cost him no small trouble, and the gradual shade of deepening melancholy that overspread his pensive features, spoke the arduous trial of the moment; which, nevertheless, he was determined to surmount with propriety.

Some trifling mistake in the arrangement of the luggage, occasioned by the inadvertence of their attendants, obliged Stella to remain stationary at the door of the carriage several minutes after Mrs. Ross had entered it. Major St. Vincent, in the interim, was occupied in giving directions to his servant, who appeared with a led horse, which till this moment had either been overlooked by Stella, or passed in the hurry of her spirits for one on which some one of the domestics was to attend them. She now, for the first time, perceived it was the well-recollected charger of that gentleman; and glancing a quickly-withdrawn look over his dress, saw he was prepared to make part of their escort.

Thunderstruck by this conviction, Stella grew sick at heart; the colour forsook her cheeks; and after an ineffectual effort to recover herself, she was forced to lean against the panel of the carriage for support.

Mrs. Bertram's first intention was to have walked with her *protégée* to the Grove, in order to witness her final departure, and bid a second adieu to the kind friend under whose protection she was now placed; but an affecting scene which had passed between her and Mrs. Ross in the morning, had rendered her unable to put this design into execution: in consequence of which, Mrs. Wallace was deputed as her substitute. That good woman happened at this period to be assisting the domestics; when, on turning round, she observed the condition of her young friend, and uttering a faint exclamation of surprise, flew to her side.

Mrs. Ross was speaking to the house-steward at the opposite window, and neither heard nor saw what was passing near her. St. Vincent, however, did both, and reached her almost as soon as her female companion. Stella had not quite fainted away: the sound of his voice vibrated on her ears, and roused her to instantaneous recollection. She raised her head:—the look that was fixed on her pallid features now speedily suffused them with the deepest shade of crimson; and, without appearing to notice his evident anxiety, she hastily averted her face. In doing this, her eye glanced upon the windows of Mrs. St. Vincent's apartments, who she discovered observing their motions from the interior of a sash at which she had placed herself; while Jenny, who stood more behind, seemed to be answering the remarks of her mistress with a consonant degree of Christian charity and meekness.

Stella regarded them for a moment with a sensation of mingled astonishment and distress not to be defined: the latter, however, began to acquire the ascendant over the former. She silently wrung the hand of Mrs. Wallace, declined the offered assistance of the Major, and suddenly rushing forward, sprang into the coach with a degree of agility she could not have supposed possible before the attempted exertion.

A laugh, intended to be heard, reached those who stood on the outside. St. Vincent directed his eye to the quarter from whence it proceeded, and quickly perceived the cause in which the latter part of Stella's conduct originated. Mrs. St. Vincent and her companion, apparently appalled by the expressive and indignant look of reproof that succeeded and seemed to speak a language they equally understood, now withdrew to a greater distance from the window, and the Major stepped immediately into the carriage; when, every thing duly arranged, and Mrs. Ross having concluded her conversation with Mr. Benson, the postillions were ordered

to proceed.

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CHAP. VIII.

“Are these things then necessities?—

“Then let us meet them like necessities!”

SHAKESPEARE.

THAT St. Vincent purposed attending them a short way on horseback Stella had already seen enough to believe; but that his design was to enter the carriage never once occurred to her thoughts, and of his doing so she remained for some time ignorant, till Mrs. Ross, supposing her evident distress proceeded from the recent separation with her friends at the Hermitage, and solicitous to detach her mind from painful recollections, said something calculated to change the tenor of her contemplations; when, removing the handkerchief which had hitherto covered her face as it lay reclined and half concealed from observation in a corner of the vehicle, the first object that met her view happened to be the one she least wished to encounter.

Self-dependant, and henceforth so situated as to stand or fall by the nature of her succeeding conduct, Stella seemed almost instantly to feel what the respect due to her own character and future peace demanded: she saw herself placed in a situation critically delicate—a situation that certainly required the utmost prudence and circumspection, but which the stronger energies of her mind whispered could only prove dangerous by her own consent, or the censurable want of proper mental exertion.

Stella had never till this moment known the extent of her inward resources: she now flattered herself they would prove equal to the trials she was destined to struggle with; for that such were in store for her appeared too evident, if, as she suspected, Major St. Vincent were to remain with them any length of time.

St. Vincent, whose heart but too deeply sympathized with her feelings, and who wished to relieve her from the casual observation of Mrs. Ross, artfully contrived to turn the conversation and subject, in which our heroine was not supposed to be interested, and consequently not expected to join. This considerate manoeuvre afforded leisure for further reflection, and produced the desired effect: she found her fortitude return, and her resolution to act with circumspection and propriety strengthen, and secretly congratulated herself on the ability she felt to meet the trials which might await her with becoming resignation and magnanimity.

Necessity is a harsh teacher, but commonly makes wise scholars: like experience, though unpleasant at the time of trial, it repays us by a subsequent benefit, and is often the cause of producing superior traits in characters that, unimpelled by its imperious dictates, had possibly never been called into action, nor obtained the well-deserved meed of applause for their noble sufferance under its stern decrees.

Apparently actuated by a sense of these truths, St. Vincent seemed studiously assiduous to avoid every mark of particular attention calculated, however distantly, to occasion Stella the smallest uneasiness. Reassured by a mode of proceeding of which her own heart fully taught her how to appreciate the value, Stella endeavoured to evince her sense of it, by forcing herself to take some part in the conversation when any topic happened to be mentioned in which her participation seemed to be expected, or opinion required; and she acquitted herself in a manner so highly honourable to her character, her judgment, and the education she had received, that St. Vincent, who had never before seen so much of her, nor enjoyed any opportunity of hearing her

speaking on subjects which are usually supposed beyond the reach of her sex and years, felt the restraint he had imposed upon his conduct more than ever painful, though more than ever necessary, from the increasing admiration and respect with which she hourly inspired him; while she, on her part, could not help remarking all the merit, the worth, and various accomplishments of his mind, as different circumstances developed them to her view: but none struck her more strongly than when his filial attention to Mrs. Ross, which every possible opportunity that occurred powerfully portrayed, was brought into competition with the total and unnatural neglect of that lady's daughter even at the very moment of her separation from a valuable parent, with whom, as appeared from the present state of her health, she was perhaps destined to meet no more.

Though distressing recollections could not be easily suppressed as the carriage drove past certain parts of the park and shrubbery where accident had formerly brought them together, and though the timid, quick-withdrawn glance and down-cast look of Stella betrayed the secret force of memory, no less than the pensive, but more steady eye of St. Vincent, from whom, as contemplating the well-remembered scenes, a profound sigh more than once escaped, which greatly affected Stella, who but too readily comprehended the cause; yet the firm-rooted principle of conscious integrity established in their bosoms gradually surmounted the pang of acute sensibility, and enabled them, to appearance at least, to assume an air of composure, the true value of which could only be known to those superior minds who, like themselves, had experienced the severe necessity of affecting a temporary triumph over the softer feelings of the heart.

Mrs. Ross bore the journey to Newton-stewart* tolerably; well, but on quitting the coach, she found herself too much fatigued to proceed any further at present: it was therefore agreed to remain here till the following day.

Soon after their arrival, Stella, who was peculiarly partial to moonlight scenes and the still hour of evening, placed herself at a window of the inn from whence the different windings of the river could be seen to most advantage: a similar turn of mind had drawn St. Vincent likewise to the window, and he leaned against the side of it, apparently absorbed in a deep and profound reverie.

"It is the Cree," replied the landlord, in answer to a question addressed to him by Mrs. Ross, "it is the river Cree, Madam, which is navigable for small vessels to within two miles of the town: there is a handsome bridge over it; and in its mouth, in Wigton bay, there is a valuable salmon fishery."

The man continued his information a few minutes longer, and then retired to give orders for supper.

The name of this river was not unknown to either of the silent moralizers now occupied in gazing upon its meandering course; but neither of them took the smallest share in the foregoing account of it, nor seemed disposed to put their thoughts into language: these, however, if the varying colour of the lady and the ill-suppressed sighs of the gentleman might be interpreted according to appearances, wandered not far from the stream before them; or rather from the spot where the former had once accompanied the name with strains of vocal harmony, which still seemed to vibrate on the heart of the Major no less than the accompanying circumstances did on that of our heroine.

The Major at length starting from his musing attitude, traversed the room with a hasty,

* Now Newton Douglas.

irregular step; after which he placed himself at the back of Mrs. Ross's chair, and resting his arms upon it, began to speak on the first topic that occurred in conversation: in the interim Stella had sufficient leisure to regain her late assumed air of tranquillity; and the party sat down to supper, without appetite perhaps for the meal before them, but, nevertheless, not more unhappy than usual.

"I think," said Mrs. Ross, when the cloth was removed, "my dear Stella, there is a beautiful little air, composed by Lady Elizabeth Heron, called "The Banks of the Cree," which, if I mistake not, I have formerly heard you sing: the words I believe are by Burns: do you recollect it, my love?"

Stella meant to have said "Yes;" but the word somehow or other was not quite ready; she therefore only bowed.

"Are you acquainted with this little song, my dear Henry?" continued Mrs. Ross, addressing herself to the Major.

"I once had the pleasure of hearing it, Madam, and admire it extremely," replied St. Vincent, in an embarrassed and hesitating manner.

He glanced an expressive look at Stella as he spoke, and saw her eyes fixed upon the floor, while a deep and conscious blush betrayed her recollection of the period to which he evidently alluded.

"I have ever been enthusiastically fond of music," resumed Mrs. Ross; "sick or well, it is always acceptable to me.—Will you, Stella, indulge me then?—I should like to have "The Banks of the Cree" sung on the very spot which may be called its birthplace:—the chief residence of the composer is situated near this town—I shall point it out to you as we pass it to-morrow: meanwhile pray oblige your impatient auditors, and commence the task requested of you."

Stella said something about a "head-ache;" but the sentence was uttered in too low a voice to prove intelligible: Mrs. Ross imagined it conveyed her acquiescence, and seemed to expect her to begin immediately; while the Major poured out a glass of wine, and presenting it with an unsteady hand, his looks bearing testimony to the inward perturbation of his mind, and his words scarcely articulate, entreated her to try its effect in procuring them the wished-for indulgence.

The secret pride of our heroine and every gentler feeling of her bosom were roused from their recent state of torpidness by the idea that the very appearance she wished on all occasions to avoid, had now become so conspicuous, as to require the encouraging support of the individual from whose observation it particularly behoved her to conceal every reprehensible bias in his favour, or every circumstance that even bore the semblance of such a bias. Actuated by this impression, she instantly assumed an air of dignified self-possession, and politely declining the offered wine, as unnecessary to his purpose, began "The Banks of the Cree" with her usual grace.

St. Vincent observed her for a moment with the most fixed attention; he then poured out a bumper of Madeira, and hastily swallowing it with an avidity of which he seemed perfectly unconscious at the time, threw his arm over the back of the chair, and resting his head upon it, remained in that attitude some minutes after the melody of her voice had ceased to be distinguishable. Mrs. Ross, however, without noticing this circumstance, soon called for his plaudits on the occasion; which were given in a style that sufficiently evinced his approbation.

A few moments more had scarcely elapsed before he remarked, or pretended to remark, the look of fatigue Mrs. Ross was now supposed to exhibit, and urged her to retire for the night. Candles were consequently ordered, and our heroine followed her to her chamber; where,

anxious to ascertain the terms of Major St. Vincent's attendance, she endeavoured to procure the information so ardently desired without attracting the observation of that lady, or creating her suspicions on the interest the inquirer took in a solution of her question.

Stella's questions were at first so managed, that for some time she remained unsatisfied; for Mrs. Ross, not conceiving their ultimate tendency, frequently replied in a manner totally foreign to the wishes of her auditor: at length, however, success crowned the round-about measures of our heroine; and she learned that Dumfries was at present the destined place of separation.

While the chambermaid was conducting her to her own apartment, Major St. Vincent's servant appeared at the door of one they were passing, and requested another candle for his master's chamber, who had walked out, he said, and, from what he told him, might not possibly return for some time.

As an additional reason to accelerate Mrs. Ross's retiring, St. Vincent had hinted at the drowsy nature of his own sensations; that he should, therefore, have walked out this time of the night, especially after such an intimation, appeared extremely inconsistent and strange to Stella. The circumstance dwelt upon her mind; and feeling no inclination to sleep, she seated herself at the window of a small dressing-room which opened into her chamber, and from whence the nearest parts of the surrounding country, assisted by a bright moon, were still in a degree discernible. Here she continued till all in the house were apparently sunk in repose, and the bustle of the day entirely subsided: it was therefore natural to suppose St. Vincent had returned to his chamber; and though curious to know if that were really the case, yet, as it appeared totally impossible to ascertain the fact any more than to account for the cause of his late ramble, she began to think it high time to retire to bed, without persevering to fatigue herself any longer by a foolish desire to develop what ought to be of no consequence to her.

She now slowly retired from the window, and was just closing the shutters, when she perceived the shadow of a man on the opposite side of the street, a little below the inn. For a few minutes more she remained immovable, being as it were rooted to the spot. He advanced to the door; and she soon found her idea that it was the Major justified by his nearer approach.

Though Stella concealed herself behind the shutters as much as was convenient to admit of observing his motions, he either discovered her figure, or, attracted by the partial shade of light which appeared at the opening from her candle, concluded she was still up (for he previously knew the direction of her windows): he stopped before them for a few moments. She saw him fix a steadfast look on the spot where she stood; she even fancied his sighs were sufficiently audible to reach her ears at that distance.

At length, apprehensive, from the time he continued stationary, that he had discovered her in her watchful position, and no less shocked at the appearance, than terrified by the construction a conduct so particular could not fail to draw upon it, our heroine suddenly closed the shutters, and retired to the other side of the room.

Feet were soon after heard softly descending the staircase: she concluded it must be his servant, for the door of the inn was quickly unlocked, and two people plainly advanced along the passage leading to the bedchambers: another door now closed, and all again seemed buried in silence. In about ten minutes more the servant retired to his own bed; and Stella, hearing the clock strike two, hastily undressed, in the hope of obtaining a few hours repose before she appeared in the presence of some of her fellow-travellers, whose scrutinizing eyes she greatly feared would discover, from her languid looks, the manner in which the chief part of the night had been passed.

CHAP. IX.

“My conscience is of courtly mould,
“Fit for highest station:—
“Where’s the hand, when touch’d with gold,
“Proof against temptation?”

GAY.

BESIDES Mrs. Ross’s own maid, another female attendant made part of their travelling retinue. The latter occasionally assisted the former: she was a good-tempered, obliging girl, apparently much attached to our heroine, and fond of being near her when opportunities offered for that purpose. Of these, however, few had hitherto occurred; and Ann conceiving such might prove the case for some time longer, if she were not more fortunate in her endeavours to the contrary, now determined to lose no time in attempting the accomplishment of her design.

Not much accustomed to travelling, fatigue had sent her early to bed on the preceding evening: but next morning she entered the chamber of our heroine a very short time after quitting her own; a piece of attention Stella would willingly have dispensed with, as it awaked her from an early slumber, the first she had been able to obtain since her retreat from the windows. Ann, however, entertained not the smallest suspicion of having caused any greater evil, than apparently rousing her from a long and profound repose, similar to that she had herself been enjoying.

The mischief, nevertheless, was done, and it appeared cruel therefore to say any thing on the subject. Weary, languid, and unrefreshed, she prepared to leave her bed; while Ann, full of all she had heard and seen in the course of their journey, continued to detail a thousand uninteresting circumstances with a degree of persevering prolixity and ridiculous minuteness that defied the utmost patience of attention in her auditor: the thoughts of the latter consequently recurred to the strange and unaccountable ramble of the Major; and though the sound of the speaker’s voice was still heard, the import of her discourse was no more heeded or known than if she had not been present.

“And now, Miss,” continued the girl, who at length had seemingly brought her narration pretty near a period, “do not you think it was the oddest and queerest thing you ever heard?”

She repeated this question a second time before Stella seemed sensible it was addressed to her: the latter then started from her reverie, and inquired, with the look and voice of one who was ignorant of the foregoing topic, to which it alluded, what she meant.

“Mean, Miss!” cried Ann, with a vacant stare of surprise; “why surely what should I mean, but the very thing you have just been listening to? and, for my own part, I really do believe every word he said: Mr. Donner is a pretty sort of man, and would not speak a word that is not true of his master for the world; besides, Miss, we all know that the Major—”

The conclusion of the sentence touched a chord that instantly vibrated on the feelings of her companion: she became suddenly all ear; and Ann soon found herself under the necessity of re-commencing that part of the subject connected with what she had last said. This task was not considered as any great punishment, for the girl dearly liked to hear the sound of her own voice; and Stella, in due time, was given to understand that the very circumstance on which she herself had been intently thinking, happened to be the same Ann had recently alluded to.

It was the late and mysterious absence of St. Vincent from the inn which Donner had

related to this girl, for whom the man had long entertained a partiality, though he frequently sported with her credulity. Stella, though she died to learn all he had reported on this topic, yet feared to ask for the gratification of her curiosity, as it appeared plain Ann knew little beyond the mere fact of her master's unaccountable ramble; an event of which she would probably have remained ignorant, had not Donner (who supposed her previously acquainted with it from something she mentioned, that seemed to imply as much) been led to name the incident before her.

In the course of Ann's imperfect intelligence, Stella more than once imagined that she was deeper in the fellow's confidence than she chose to acknowledge; and the hesitation of the girl, which proceeded from a wish to recollect every thing that tended towards the marvellous, and to represent the Major's secret excursion in the most wonderful point of view, seemed, in the eye of trembling suspicion, to cover some information she feared to give, lest the displeasure of her auditor should be incurred by a greater degree of explicitness.

It was, nevertheless, certain that Ann, in the simplicity of her heart, had repeated some hints dropped by Donner, which were not perhaps intended to come round again: these, it is true, proved rather unintelligible to her, but were perfectly comprehended by Stella, and served to convince the latter that the state of the Major's mind had not been totally unobserved by his servant. Yet the substance of what transpired on the subject, appeared equally as applicable to any other woman as herself: and though St. Vincent was not accused of evincing a propensity to the fashionable vices of the times, it was not, nevertheless, far from improbable, considering the unhappy nature of his domestic engagements, that the former predilection in her favour might have been superseded by a later preference for some woman in the neighbourhood of Newtonstewart, possessed of easier principles or superior attractions to those he had discovered in Stella, and whose character he might wish to preserve free from the degrading stigma usually attached to the conduct of her who is observed to admit the attentions of a married man.

To some transaction of this kind Donner evidently alluded; though from the mysterious manner in which he had expressed himself, his words admitted of more than one construction. This circumstance led Ann to conclude there must undoubtedly be a degree of the wonderful in the case; and her avidity for further information rose in proportion as the idea of such a thing gained ground. The fellow perceiving this notion had taken hold of her mind, did not attempt to remove it, but had amused himself at the expence of her curiosity, by the addition of a thousand ridiculous incidents, the sole creation of his own prolific imagination.

Stella again sunk into another reverie much as she had condemned herself for harbouring the smallest partiality for St. Vincent, still the possibility that now occurred of a change in his former sentiments, sat by no means so easy on her mind as she had supposed would be the case while assured of the contrary. Discontented and unhappy, she requested to be left alone; and the girl, after teasing her with innumerable questions on the cause of her apparent dejection, at length reluctantly retired.

Under the severe discipline of a reproofing, yet refractory heart, she continued in her own room till summoned to the chamber of Mrs. Ross, from whence, though much against her inclination, she afterwards accompanied that lady to the parlour.

St. Vincent was leaning on the mantle-piece when they entered: his eyes seemed fixed on vacancy, and his whole appearance bespoke the deepest mental abstraction. Their approach was not at first perceived; but the voice of Mrs. Ross, who happened to say something to Stella, speedily recalled his attention, and he instantly advanced to meet her.

After the usual compliments and inquiries of the morning, having conducted her to a

chair, he placed another for Stella; and seating himself between them, began to discourse on the subject of their journey, and other topics of general conversation, with an air of more apparent gaiety and cheerfulness than had hitherto been visible in the general tenor of his behaviour.

Stella felt no inclination to follow the example thus set her: his averted looks, however, as he continued talking to his mother-in-law, left her at leisure to reflect on a mode of conduct so new and unexpected; and her thoughts again reverting to the nature of Ann's late intelligence, she gradually began to conclude a total change had really been effected in his sentiments, and that the uncommon flow of his spirits proceeded from the attendant success which had crowned his wishes with the object of their present pursuit.

In spite of the conviction afforded by her cooler judgment that this very event was the happiest thing that could possibly befall her, Stella was not able to restrain a sigh, which forced its way to the ears of St. Vincent: it seemed to possess some irresistible magic, for he suddenly became confused, and all at once stopped short in the middle of a sentence which he was still solely addressing to Mrs. Ross: in the next moment his eyes were turned upon Stella with a look of acute anguish; which, nevertheless, escaped her notice, from her being wholly absorbed by her own reflections, and therefore unconscious of St. Vincent's emotions. Instantly recollecting himself, he pulled out his watch, observed the morning was far advanced, expressed surprise at the apparent tardiness of the waiters, and abruptly retired, in order, as he said, to hasten the preparations for breakfast.

Stella, whose post it was to officiate on these occasions, happened to be seated at the table before his return; and from the attention required to the ceremonies of the tea-table, little leisure remained for further contemplation on surrounding objects. St. Vincent's former cheerfulness, however, seemed partly to have vanished—at least, it was now much less apparent, and frequent fits of silence occasionally seized him; but the instant he became sensible of this circumstance, his late adopted mode of proceeding was immediately resumed; and Stella, as she poured out the tea, found her hand sometimes arrested, and her eyes irresistibly fixed in astonishment on the varying inconsistencies which continually marked his conduct, and forced themselves upon her notice.

During their journey this day, Mrs. Ross several times complained of an uncommon degree of lassitude and fatigue. The bleak and mountainous track of country they had to pass probably produced this effect: it was therefore determined to take up their quarters for the night at—, where was an excellent inn, offering every accommodation they could possibly desire; and the necessary orders were accordingly given on their arrival for that purpose.

As the travellers reached this place at an early hour, Mrs. Ross retired to her chamber immediately after dinner was over, in order to obtain an hour's repose; during which the landlord, who attended them in person, had been repeatedly questioned relative to the gentlemen's seats in the neighbourhood, some of which the Major previously understood to be extremely beautiful. The information now received confirmed this idea; and when the ladies retired, a resolution was hastily formed of visiting one or two of those he had heard principally admired. Mine host was therefore requested to apologize for his absence from the tea-table, without mentioning the particular cause in which it originated; and the evening proving uncommonly inviting, he set out on foot, as most suitable to his purpose.

St. Vincent was peculiarly pleased with a very fine place in the vicinity: the surrounding grounds were laid out with much taste, the gardens well stored with a great variety of the best fruit-trees, and the house was modern, large, elegantly furnished, and commodious; in short, every thing conveyed an appearance of good order, of regularity and peace, for Virtue still held

her residence there; and neither religion nor common decency had as yet been outraged by the bold and open introduction of daring depravity, or the intrusion of its almost equally unprincipled supporters. If, as the old proverb tells us, “the receiver is as bad as the thief,” what are we to think of the mean sycophantic beings who chuse to degrade themselves in the most unequivocal manner, by countenancing with their presence the unblushing votaries of acknowledged adultery, because the chief culprit was in the possession of twelve thousand pounds per annum?—and twelve thousand pounds per annum might be expected to afford a tolerable portion of loaves and fishes in return for the total disregard they had shewn to their own character, in the, no doubt, disinterested solicitude evinced for the re-establishment of appearances, by which none but the wilfully blind could possibly be duped in the smallest degree, and which not even the erring parties themselves seemed anxious to preserve, if their real sentiments could be properly ascertained by the persevering and undisguised effrontery of their general mode of proceeding.

Indeed, to such a length have the timeserving worshippers of Mammon sometimes carried their venal adoration, that the same man has been known to cringe and fawn on the very person he had previously exerted every endeavour to render infamous in the eyes of the public, though no one circumstance had occurred to alter or do away the stigma of imputed guilt it was found necessary to load her with, except that the trifling article of self-interest lay now on the other side of the question, and was, of course, supposed to be implicated in a change of measures.

Characters of the above description continually act with the most glaring impropriety: it is not the dictates of moral rectitude, it is not a sense of right or wrong, by which their motions are commonly regulated—no: worldly propriety is the idol they look up to; and whether possessed of virtue or vice is considered a matter of no consequence as long as the power of bestowing the good things of the earth happens to be within their reach.

Hence, though friendship or compassion may be the ostensible pretence, sordid avarice is, in fact, the principle of their views; and those from whose imaginary interference in pecuniary matters serious consequences have been weakly apprehended, are held up to observation as proper subjects of detestation, as wretches who ought to be hunted from society, that their oppressors may safely enjoy the fruit of their iniquity free from the dread of refutation, and be enabled to retain the ability of continuing to poison the public mind by a long catalogue of exhibited, but supposititious errors, which never existed except in their own corrupted creative fancy; while, at the same time, the avowed adulteress, or the once well-known impure, is attended, countenanced, and attempted to be introduced into notice with the most barefaced and indefatigable industry, even though the actual presence of their spurious offspring affords a damning proof of certain guilt beyond the utmost effort of human impudence to palliate or conceal.

Similar motives naturally produce similar effects; wealth purifies every gradation of vice in the eyes of the mercenary in proportion as self-interest or poverty is supposed to obscure the good qualities of those from whose influence we have any thing to fear, or from whose inability to serve us we have nothing to expect.

CHAP. X.

“Nature here
“Wanton’d as in her prime, and play’d at will
“Her virgin fancies, pouring forth more sweet,
“Wild above rule or art.”

MILTON.

“To be good is to be happy.”

ROWE.

AFTER taking a cursory view of one or two other places in the neighbourhood, for the evening was now too far advanced to admit of a much longer absence from his companions, St. Vincent retraced his way back to the inn, and at a short distance from the town perceived Stella before him, who was returning from a solitary walk curiosity had led her to take in the vicinity.

Absorbed in one of those meditating fits in which she frequently indulged when alone, he had already reached her side before his approach was even suspected.

The voice of the Major, though manly and commanding, possessed, at the same time, a harmonious softness which rendered it peculiarly insinuating, especially when his mind was in that frame, to which it had latterly often inclined: this happened at the present juncture to prove the case; and Stella felt more than usually disposed to become a listener, when (her first surprise being over at a meeting so unexpected) he began to discourse on the objects which had recently attracted his attention. The manner in which he described them, and the whole tenor of his remarks, though extremely interesting, had hitherto been entirely confined to the beauties of inanimate nature; but, at length, digressing from this subject, he insensibly found himself dwelling upon the probable happiness experienced by the proprietors of the charming place he had first visited, and the felicity congenial minds, legally united, must enjoy amidst scenery so enchanting, with a fortune so enlarged, that the power of dispensing good seemed continually within their reach, affording a rich resource of rational pleasure by the conviction that others were rescued from misery, corporeal or mental, and restored to a state of comparative ease, through the benevolent exertions of a well-directed sensibility to the misfortunes of their less favoured fellow-creatures.

As he proceeded to deliver his sentiments on these topics, and feelingly drew the picture of those enviable beings who, all in all to each other, while conversing together, seem to forget the whole creation contains a single inhabitant beyond their own little circle, where

“All seasons, and their change, all please alike,”

Memory suddenly held up its retrospective mirror to his view, and the distorted contrast which it exhibited of his own situation, seemed at once to paralyze the mental faculties of the late animated speaker: his voice ceased to vibrate on the ear of his deeply-affected auditor; and the sad and solemn pause that ensued appeared to be reciprocally occupied by the same interesting ideas.

Stella felt this impressive silence ought to be broken, for her heart too faithfully portrayed what was passing in that of her unhappy companion. The effort, however, proved unsuccessful, for the powers of language refused to second it: she therefore renounced the attempt, and walked on at a quicker pace.

At length St. Vincent's mind became more tranquillized: he had lagged behind, to conceal the interior anguish of his soul; but soon again joined our agitated heroine, and was just beginning to speak, when Ann, who had discovered the direction taken by Stella on quitting the inn, appeared in view, and hastily advanced to meet her, with a message from Mrs. Ross, importing her wish to see her immediately. The presence of a third person proved no inconsiderable relief to the distressed Stella, and she opposed the motion made by the messenger to retire, by requesting the aid of her arm, under pretence of having over-fatigued herself by the length of her walk. St. Vincent in a faltering voice requested the preference as her supporter.

The accent in which he addressed her was but too expressive of the present state of his thoughts, not to reach her throbbing heart, though the offer was modestly declined, with a quick-withdrawn glance, such as apparently produced an additional degree of anguish in him to whom it was directed; for, abruptly striking his forehead, he uttered an exclamation of despair, succeeded by a profound sigh, and suddenly turning into another path, instantly disappeared from her view.

During the time of supper, he seemed absent and inattentive to the numerous enquiries made by Mrs. Ross on the subject of his recent excursion, the particulars of which, it was pretty evident to some part of the company, he seemed by no means inclined to repeat: the outlines, however, were given: and the hour of separation for the night at length arriving, was secretly hailed as a seasonable relief from the painful restraint and apprehended observation experienced by the narrator and his late companion.

As Mrs. Ross complained of a feverish sensation, together with an unusual degree of lassitude, it was settled, on the following morning, to remain in their present quarters till such time as she found herself more able to bear the fatigue of travelling again.

After breakfast St. Vincent recollected some professional business which required his presence at —— before he returned to Ross Grove: his original design had been to take that place in his way back from Dumfries; but the unexpected delay which the above circumstance occasioned, produced a change of measures; and he now formed the resolution of riding there in the course of the forenoon, as it was only a few miles distant, and consequently he could easily accomplish whatever was to be done, and join the ladies again in the evening.

Stella considered this arrangement in the light of a desirable relief from the painful necessity of being forced to meet him at meals, unsupported by the presence of Mrs. Ross, who had previously declared her intention of keeping her room through the principal part of the day; and as she continued too unwell to receive him there during the greater part of it, his absence was not likely to be so much felt by her as, under different circumstances, might possibly have proved the case.

The business which carried him to —— being concluded at an early period, and the weather proving quite favourable, one of the officers quartered at this place proposed a walk to ——, the seat of a noble and very amiable family in the vicinity. As St. Vincent had never seen this terrestrial paradise, though Fame had been loud in its praise, no less than in that of its beautiful and highly-accomplished inhabitants, he therefore readily assented to the scheme, and proceeded to put it in immediate execution, the distance from —— being but inconsiderable, and the road good.

But scarcely were they arrived at this romantic and enchanting spot, before the Major's companion received a hasty summons from one of the serjeants, requesting his speedy return on some recruiting business that required the utmost dispatch.

Left thus unexpectedly alone, St. Vincent wandered about the pleasure-grounds as fancy

or inclination directed his movements.

In crossing a walk that lay in the vicinity of a small, but elegantly constructed pavilion, the sound of a guitar arrested his attention: the music seemed far beyond any thing of the kind he had hitherto heard, and the voice that accompanied it was truly seraphic. Absorbed in the luxurious indulgence of the moment, he had stood for some time immoveably fixed to the spot, and fearful almost to breathe, lest a single note of the floating harmony should be lost, when an old grey-headed domestic appeared advancing to the place from whence it issued, with a letter in his hand.

On perceiving a stranger, whose intelligent countenance evinced the most striking expression of admiration and delight, the man suddenly stopped, and then respectfully accosting him, requested to know if he wanted a message conveyed to my Lord, or any of the family. St. Vincent, still solicitous to catch every strain, slightly bowed without speaking, and motioning with his hand for silence, continued to listen with the same air of eager fascination he had at first exhibited. The man seemed to participate in his feelings, as if deeply interested in whatever appeared connected with the noble and worthy house to which he belonged; and insensibly approaching nearer, his features beaming with a look of peculiar satisfaction that defied every prohibition to the contrary, softly whispered in the ear of the Major that it was Lady —— he now heard.

“Every body,” continued he, “says she plays and sings like an angel, and I am sure she is as good as the best that ever was in heaven:—but indeed, Sir, I know not any difference amongst them; for if ever there were angels on earth, I think in my conscience they are all equally so. And as for the young gentlemen—why, Sir, his Lordship’s heir, God bless him! knows every thing under the sun; besides, he is so amiable and condescending!—and then his brothers, Sir—faith, neither sea nor land, I believe, can furnish their superiors. You may credit me, Sir; for these grey hairs, silvered over in their service, bespeaks our acquaintance of a tolerable date—Michael has known them long—”

St. Vincent, who always felt particularly gratified by listening to the language of the heart, now felt its magic influence in all the force of genuine nature; and a temporary pause in the music having taken place, he regarded the garrulous old man with an air of benignity that seemingly encouraged him to proceed, for he immediately resumed his eulogium on the character and merits of his patrons in the following terms of panegyric, though in a lower voice than he had hitherto spoken.

“It is true, Sir, my Lord is sometimes a little passionate or so, but then we are seldom sufferers on those occasions, for he is as generous as a Prince, and would not intentionally injure a worm; indeed he has the best heart and disposition in the world: all his dependants love him and regard him as their friend and benefactor:—to be sure he may be happy, if any person can be so on earth, for he has the finest family, and the loveliest woman to his wife, in Scotland—and that, Sir, your honour knows, is a wide word.”

The national pride of the Caledonian seemed gratified by this idea; he appeared some inches taller, and an air of exultation sat conspicuously triumphant on every feature.

“Pray, my good friend, what may be the extent of the Earl’s family?” asked the Major.

“Five sons and five daughters, Sir.—Old as I am, I hope yet to see the young ladies all Duchesses, and my young masters the greatest men in the kingdom, next to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, God bless him!”

St. Vincent could not refrain from smiling at the faithful creature’s laconic method of arranging the future destiny of this noble family; neither could he entirely suppress a sigh at the

recollection that real happiness, so far from being included in what he supposed its climax, was probably more distantly removed from the higher circles of life than their inferiors generally permitted themselves to imagine. That such, however, was not the case here he had soon additional authority to confirm; for in a few minutes after his late companion left him to deliver the letter he had in his hand, (a circumstance apparently for some time over-looked in his eagerness to dwell on the eulogium of his benefactors) a gentleman, whom St. Vincent recollected to have once seen at Rossgrove, advanced from one of the other walks, and joined him. With the Earl and his family this person seemed well acquainted; he was, besides, better qualified to be a competent judge of their merit than the Major's first informant, whose gratitude might be supposed to bias his opinion in their favour: nevertheless, the account he now received only differed in the mode of expressing it, for the matter-of-fact part entirely coincided with that given by his predecessor.

Charmed with the good and amiable character this family possessed, St. Vincent felt a strong inclination to become known to them; and his new acquaintance, who was then on a visit at the house, undertook to gratify this wish, after having quitted him for a short period to mention his intention to the family.

His Lordship, who neither liked Nabobs, nor the means by which their immense wealth was usually acquired, had never yet paid his respects at Rossgrove, and, from the general character of its present master, seemed every day less disposed to do so.

Major St. Vincent's name was not, however, totally unknown to him, for he had more than once heard it mentioned in terms highly honourable to its possessor: but at this time he happened to be from home; and the intimation was therefore given to the ladies, most of whom were then in the pavilion. A polite message was immediately returned; but before the bearer could accomplish its delivery, Lady —— was seen issuing from the door, accompanied by three of the most elegant and lovely girls the Major had almost ever seen: they entered the path in which the two gentlemen were standing; and the latter, supposing their intention was to join them, instantly hastened forward in order to pay their respects. St. Vincent was received in the most pleasing manner; and an hour spent in their society fully corroborated all that had been previously reported in their favour.

When he quitted this terrestrial paradise, and parted from its charming inhabitants, whose benevolent hearts and all-accomplished minds seemed to place them, even more than their distinguished station, in the rank of superior beings, St. Vincent could not help stopping on the last eminence from whence their retiring forms were still visible, and continued gazing after them as they returned from conducting him to the vicinity of the high road, till their white garments no longer appeared amidst the trees. At length the fragrance of the honeysuckle and sweet-briar, which every where shed their united perfumes round this enchanting abode, ceased to regale his senses; and as he retraced his steps back, a musing melancholy, almost approaching to something of a prophetic tendency, gradually took possession of his mental faculties, and, in spite of every effort to exclude the officious intruder, persisted in conjuring up to view the too probable vicissitudes of futurity in store for the now happy group—the thousand evils that flesh is, sooner or later, heir to those evils, which all the human race, in one shape or another, are destined to encounter, and against the overwhelming influence of which, neither virtue, wisdom, rank, nor riches have been found altogether competent to protect the devoted victim of misfortunes.*

* Alas! these presentiments time and death have, since the above period, but too faithfully verified!

CHAP. XI.

“A gen’rous mind, though sway’d awhile by passion,
“Is like the steely vigour of the bow,
“Still holds its native rectitude, and bends
“But to recoil more forceful.”

BROOKE.

HAD Mrs. Ross found her health equal to the attempt, she would certainly have endeavoured to indulge the strong propensity she felt, from the Major’s recital on his re-appearance at —, to commence an acquaintance with the amiable family in whose praises he was no less warm than eloquent; but the case proving otherwise, she was forced to enjoy at second hand that pleasure which a personal intercourse must have considerably augmented. As for Stella, superior to every sensation of presumptuous competition, or the mean instigations of an envious mind, she listened with the most delighted attention, and secretly wished, since the narrator was destined to marry on a footing of equality, that his lot had been cast at — instead of Rossgrove: in that event, she persuaded herself, her feelings would have been very different on the occasion from what they were at present; his happiness must then have afforded a constant theme for contemplations of the most gratifying nature, and compassion could not have existed to heighten other sentiments in his favour.

The enthusiasm of disinterested affection glowed in her bosom, and tinged her cheek: in the ardor of self-exultation she felt her soul rise above individual considerations, or the boundary of that limited rank in life apparently assigned her by the mysterious circumstances of her birth: for a few moments the pride of conscious worth seemed to have annihilated worldly distinction, that intellectual merit might have room to act in its proper sphere, and be enabled to display its genuine lustre, unfettered by the adventitious advantages possessed by the rich and powerful sons of prosperity over their less fortunate fellow-creatures: but bitter recollection soon returned with all its train of mortifying attendants; and the mental vision of happier scenes gradually vanished before the sad conviction of existing circumstances.

Mrs. Ross, finding her disorder somewhat better before St. Vincent’s return in the evening, and afterwards conceiving herself so far recruited by a good night’s rest as to be able to continue the journey, on the following morning they recommenced it at an early hour, and reached Dumfries without encountering any further interruption.

Here they found Captain Montague, who had been previously acquainted with their motions, ready at the King’s Arms to receive them: the pleasure that beamed on his intelligent countenance was not inferior to that experienced by Stella on the occasion, who was herself once more restored to the society of a friend so highly valued, a man for whom she harboured the warm, but innocent affection of a sister.

Solicitous to obtain some account of the inhabitants of the Hermitage, Stella promised him, on separating for the night, to be in the sitting-room by eight o’clock next morning. She found him already waiting for her appearance; and as the Major had walked out on quitting his chamber, sufficient time was obtained for the expected information before the remainder of the party arrived to interrupt the communication.

The usual and natural cheerfulness of Montague’s disposition, it has formerly been mentioned, had of late undergone some change, partly from the peculiar circumstances in which

he had unfortunately involved himself, and partly from occurrences of a domestic description, the leading events of which had long been supposed consigned to oblivion, till incidents of a more recent date recalled them again to remembrance, and spread an occasional expression of sorrow over his features on every recurrence to the painful subject. The eyes of Stella, and the mournful air with which she regarded him when under the influence of this secret distress, could not always escape his notice: he saw her delicacy, however, would not allow of asking any questions, and determined at length to reward her forbearance on the first favourable opportunity that offered to second his views.

Mrs. Ross proposed remaining in Dumfries for a few days; but St. Vincent's departure was fixed to take place on the third morning from their arrival. That period now rapidly approached; and in proportion as it did so, the spirits of the Major sunk, and his dejection became more apparent. Stella, too, was not without her secret struggles; but the watchful eyes of Montague, she feared, were upon her; and this apprehension added considerable force to her exertions for the recovery of that degree of fortitude she had long determined to maintain.

On the night preceding his departure, Mrs. Ross finding herself too much agitated to appear in the sitting-room, took a solemn and most affecting farewell of this favourite son-in-law in her own chamber. The pang of separation seemed, indeed, mutually experienced; for the Major instantly left the inn, and was afterwards seen in one of the most retired walks, absorbed in a train of melancholy reflections, from which he did not appear anxious to free himself.

Montague, who happened to be ignorant of this circumstance, and supposed him still with Mrs. Ross, was extremely surprised to find the case otherwise; and would have set out in quest of him immediately, had he not been prevented by Donner, who informed him his master had left orders to say he purposed returning shortly, and in the interim wished to be alone.

Stella, who sickened at the idea of her share in the parting scene yet to take place, would gladly have escaped it by remaining with Mrs. Ross; but this indulgence was not allowed her: and she found herself most reluctantly under the distressing necessity of adjourning to the supper table, where she and Captain Montague were already seated before St. Vincent re-appeared. He spoke not on his entrance; but throwing his hat on a sofa near the door, drew a chair opposite to Montague, and leaning his elbow on a corner of the table, seemed entirely unconscious of his present situation, till roused from his reverie by the friendly voice of the Captain, who insisted upon helping him to something on that side of the table. The supper, notwithstanding all the efforts of Montague, proved uncomfortable and ill attended to; and the parties, though solicitous to prolong it from a certain temporary relief which the presence of the servants seemed to afford, yet secretly rejoiced when it was over.

The few days passed by St. Vincent and Stella in each other's company, had produced too many opportunities for discovering the worth and merit of their respective characters, not to rivet the attachment previously existing between them more closely than ever; and though they mutually adhered, with the utmost possible strictness, to the line of conduct self-prescribed for their behaviour, yet the dearly purchased heroism, on which they sometimes privately congratulated themselves, was more than once on the point of yielding to the superior force of human weakness, and a keen sensibility of heart almost too acute to struggle with: a strong sense of moral rectitude, joined to the innate delicacy of a well educated mind, and a proud consciousness of what was individually due to themselves, not merely in the opinion of the world, but, what appeared of infinitely more importance, in that of their own, nevertheless sustained them in the midst of the severest trials, and ultimately crowned their endeavours with the most valuable of all rewards, the certain approbation of their own upright and uncorrupted

hearts.

This night appeared fraught, however, with more than a usual demand on their fortitude; for it was the last, in all human probability, they would spend together for a great length of time; nay, perhaps for ever!—This idea, which their better judgment taught them to suppress, perpetually intruded itself on their thoughts, and imbittered every passing moment that seemed to bring their hopes and fears nearer a final termination: one pause continually succeeded another in the broken and disjointed conversation attempted at intervals to be maintained; and either wearied out by the ineffectual exertions of friendship, or insensibly giving way to the private chagrin that at times preyed upon his mind, Captain Montague at length appeared equally infected by the same inclination to mental abstraction and occasional taciturnity which his two companions had repeatedly evinced.

An observation of this circumstance brought our heroine to a just recollection of her critical situation. While he continued to speak, she imagined herself not called upon to take any very particular share in the discourse, and her thoughts were consequently left at leisure to dwell on subjects which interested her more nearly than those he introduced. Now the case was altered; for he who had hitherto chiefly supported the conversation, no longer took any principal share in its continuation; and she seemed to have no remaining choice but either to endeavour at supplying his deficiencies, or render herself liable to probable animadversions, against the chance of which it was absolutely requisite to guard her conduct with the utmost precaution and persevering attention.

Influenced by a motive so laudable, she turned to Captain Montague, and addressed some common-place, trifling inquiries, she knew not well what, respecting Dumfries and its inhabitants. At the sound of her voice, unsteady and faltering, St. Vincent suddenly started from his musing posture, and expressively regarded her for a moment in silence; then pouring out a bumper of wine, swallowed it, and again resumed his former attitude.

Disconcerted by this behaviour, but not entirely overcome, she speedily recommenced her design, and called upon the still silent Montague for his opinion on the foregoing subjects, who, apparently pleased to gratify her wishes, quickly relinquished his late bias to contemplation, and entered upon the subject Stella seemed desirous to inform herself of with his usual promptitude to oblige.

Of the town and its inhabitants he spoke in high terms of praise; but neither the beautiful situation of the former, nor the well-known sociable hospitality of the latter, on which he discoursed with apparent satisfaction, seemed long to interest his female auditor, who, having accomplished her scheme of escaping the chance of particular observation, by diverting its probable source into another channel, again became absent, silent, and inattentive.

In the ardor of energetic description, this change was not at first perceived; and he produced a copy of some lines written by Mr. Home, author of the tragedy of Douglas, which he recommended as a proof that that gentleman's sentiments coincided with his own on the occasion: they had been composed as far back as the year 1756, at a period when no inconsiderable degree of traffic in the tobacco line was carried on with Virginia; to which circumstance the poet alludes, and which, in fact, nearly comprised the sum total of all the commercial industry then practised in that part of the country. The lines were as follow:—

BY MR. JOHN HOME.

“Sweet is thy seat, Dumfries! by nature fine,
“And Art hath made its pleasing graces thine.
“But let thy streams in other numbers flow,
“And other verses with thy beauties glow:—
“Thy people’s manners my affections move;
“They win my numbers, who engage my love.—
“Industrious are thy sons, yet free and fair;
“Though busy, cheerful, and though wise, sincere:—
“Fair are thy maids—too fair for hearts like mine:
“Careless, they please, and charm without design;
“By sense conducted, neither fond nor coy,
“And made for modest love and sober joy.
“Flourish, Dumfries! may Heav’n increase thy store,
“Till Griffal* sink, and “Nith† shall glide no more!”

* A well known mountain in Galloway, not far distant from Dumfries.

† The river that flows by Dumfries, on the beautiful and romantic banks of which stands a part of the town.

CHAP. XII.

“Parting is such sweet sorrow,
“That I could bid farewell till it were morrow.”

OF the foregoing verses, the three last lines but two seemed to strike St. Vincent as particularly characteristic of her who individually occupied so much of his thoughts: he requested to read them himself; and during the perusal, his eyes were frequently turned upon our heroine with an expression of the keenest sensibility.

Stella almost equally wished and feared to quit the room at the usual time of retiring; but a message from Mrs. Ross soon decided her wavering motions.

The most critical moment of her existence seemed now arrived; and the manner in which she conducted herself during the short, but trying interval that yet required mental exertion, appeared the crisis of her fate, the touch-stone by which the future tenor of her days was to be marked either with cheering intellectual peace, or self-merited condemnation, according as the nature of the succeeding step she was upon the point of taking should be managed.

To escape the ceremony of a formal farewell was what she particularly wished to accomplish; but how to do so, without rendering herself liable to the charge of impoliteness, or the yet more distressing suspicion of the real situation of her mind, seemed difficult to determine.

Hesitating and irresolute in what way to proceed, she rose from her chair, while the varying colour of her cheek and her humid eyes, as they timidly glanced round the table, portrayed the agitation of her bosom, in spite of her solicitude to conceal it from observation.

Montague saw and felt for her situation; he likewise saw that the fluctuating resolution of St. Vincent could scarcely maintain its ground against the propelling influence of the moment, and that he seemed on the point of advancing to address her. Apprehensive of the consequences to both, their considerate friend instantly stepped forward, and seizing the hand of the trembling Stella, led her to the door, where the servant waited her approach with a candle.

“I shall do myself the pleasure of breakfasting with you to-morrow, if not prohibited,” said he, in a quick accent.—“Good night, *ma douce amie!* may your slumbers prove sound, and your dreams as agreeable as I wish them!”

Stella slightly curtsied, but attempted not to return any answer, for the power of articulation was not then at her command; nor did her conductor appear to expect it, as he left her immediately, and she heard the door of the parlour abruptly close behind him on his re-entrance.

Stunned and surprised at the unlooked-for rapidity by which her late dreaded difficulties had thus been suddenly terminated, our heroine remained for an instant immoveably fixed to the spot, till the servant, who, in the supposition she followed him, had already reached some distance, accidentally perceiving his mistake, retraced his steps to inquire if she waited for any thing he could procure. Roused by the sound of his voice, she cast a last sad look at the door, and motioning with her hand for him to proceed, followed in silence.

“You have then parted with the Major, my love,” said Mrs. Ross, addressing her with tears in her eyes: “is my dear Henry in better spirits than he seemed to be in at the period of our separation? His emotion affected me deeply.”

“So did it me, likewise,” thought Stella.

“Alas!” continued Mrs. Ross, without waiting for a reply to her last inquiry, “why is it

not in my power to make him as happy as he ought to be? — it pains me deeply, Stella—the sad conviction pains me more that I can express, that such a soul as St. Vincent possesses should be rendered miserable, as is but too surely the case, by the ill starred connexion he has formed in my family. Of the giddy, the misguided Mrs. St. Vincent I wished to have spoken to him, but the subject was evidently too distressing for his feelings: and perceiving he strove to evade my design, I forbore to press it from motives of delicacy, the value of which he apparently knew how to appreciate. Another affliction is likewise continually before my eyes: should my mortal career be, as I have too much reason to apprehend, rapidly advancing to a close, what then is to become of my poor Maria and Emma? or who shall guard them against the dangerous influence of example so cruelly set them by an elder sister?”

The scalding tears of maternal anguish flowed faster as the latter reflection intruded itself; and those of Stella, previously ready to burst forth, now accompanied them without restraint, as kneeling by the pillow of the invalid, she pressed her emaciated hand to her lips with all the mute, though emphatical eloquence of silent sorrow and heartfelt commiseration.

Though young in years, the strength of her mind far surpassed that which commonly belongs to so early a period of life, and had long taught her to support the wavering fortitude of the unhappy, rather than endanger its firmness by a weak and useless acquiescence in the inclination human nature generally experiences to indulge in what is called the *luxury of grief*. Such participations are frequently more calculated to soften, than nerve the breast against the attacks of misfortune or unavailing regret, and on most occasions ought to be carefully avoided. At present, however, her own seemed the victim of both in too great a degree to speak that consolation to others, which she no longer possessed wherewith to support herself.

Mrs. Ross was the first who recovered some portion of composure, and kindly apologized to her young friend for causing her, as she imagined, so much distress.

“Rise, my child,” said she; “let us speak, and, if possible, think no more of this unworthy Mrs. St. Vincent. Good and evil are more equally dispensed by the wise Arranger of terrestrial events than we are sometimes willing to allow. I ought to be grateful for the blessings I enjoy, and they are many, without weakly repining that my lot, like that of all my fellow creatures, has a tinge of the bitter in it: from some quarter or another the black cloud must come, to compel us to withdraw our thoughts from earthly attractions, and remind us of our dependance on a wise, just, and unerring Benefactor, who will not load us with more than we can bear; but who (as our own interior conviction fully ascertains) never meant us for perfect beings, and therefore assigned a mingled lot of pain and pleasure for our portion, in order to prove the necessity of a thorough reliance on his superior judgment, and our inability to conduct ourselves without the aiding hand of a more omnipotent director, who best knows in what way the rod of correction is required, and the form in which it may be most beneficially applied. It has long been my opinion that happiness and misery ought to be considered in a comparative point of view; and if this axiom is established, say, Stella, have I any right to complain? It is true, my first-born child has disappointed my hopes, and imbittered every prospect of earthly felicity; yet, granting this to be the case, has she not likewise been the means of procuring me such a son as St. Vincent? and am I not then indebted to her for an acquisition so valuable?—Oh yes, surely I am! Henceforth I will try to fix this circumstance in my memory, and aided by so persuasive a recollection, endeavour to think of her with less acrimony than I have hitherto done. Let us, in the meanwhile, persevere in what is right ourselves; and while we receive the good things of this life with gratitude, learn to make the most of them; submitting, at the same time, to the course of worldly vicissitudes and worldly sorrows as necessary and, no doubt, proper attendants on humanity!”

The substance of Mrs. Ross's discourse, together with the leisure it afforded for self-recollection, nearly restored the wounded mind of our heroine to a state of tolerable tranquillity. Still, however, a visible degree of dejection marked her looks and accent; and Mrs. Ross secretly reproached herself for being the cause of this appearance, and exerted her whole strength to dispel it. After some further conversation on different subjects, they separated for the night, equally disinclined to sleep and disposed to solitary moralizing.

When Stella entered the sitting-room next morning, her eyes were swelled with weeping, her face pale, and her whole appearance languid in the extreme. Montague almost started at her altered looks; and gently taking her hand, gazed at her a few moments in expressive silence. Stella, whose soul revolted at the idea of meriting compassion on such an occasion, felt her late colourless cheeks instantly glow, for the manner of her companion spoke too legibly his sentiments to be mistaken in their signification. She snatched her hand from his with unusual quickness, and the tea equipage being just then brought in, seated herself at the table, where, having speedily introduced some common-place topic of discussion, she followed it up with a steadiness and resolution that did her infinite honour in the eyes of her companions.

The first sensation of embarrassment thus got over, every succeeding moment rendered her situation easier: fortunately for her feelings, the friendly heart who saw her motive, knew how to appreciate a conduct so meritorious, and seconded her wishes so well, that the intellectual conflict she suffered was sooner subdued, than, under different circumstances, would probably have happened. No notice, however, was taken of St. Vincent's departure; nor his name introduced in any respect whatever.

The weather had rather been unfavourable from the period of their arrival at Dumfries, which was the chief cause that protracted the continuation of their journey, Mrs. Ross not chusing to move till an alteration for the better took place. The same reason that produced this determination likewise operated to confine Stella to the house, and consequently prevented her from viewing the numberless beauties of the surrounding country. This circumstance was not, however, much regretted before the departure of Major St. Vincent, as it did away the chance of meeting with him out of doors; and while he remained within, it was easy to escape from his presence, either by keeping her own room, or that of Mrs. Ross, from which, on his entrance, she commonly retired. Nevertheless, it was not without infinite reluctance this line of conduct was pursued; but a just and delicate sense of propriety overcame every other sensation, and the approbation of her own mind proved ever a precious reward for the struggles by which it was obtained.

When under the necessity of appearing at meals unsupported by the company of Mrs. Ross, Captain Montague's presence proved a seasonable relief to her spirits. This incomparable young man, who, as has been observed, generously entered into all her feelings, endeavoured to spare her, as well as his friend the Major, every possible difficulty within the reach of his ability to avert: now that the latter no longer demanded his exertions, they were of course all directed into one channel; and the restoration of our heroine's peace would not have remained unaccomplished, had his efforts been crowned with the success they so well merited.

CHAP. XIII.

“Some sullen influence, a foe to both,
“Has wrought this fatal marriage to undo us.”

ROWE.

ACTUATED by an irresistible inclination to give the history of his domestic troubles to his young and fair companion, whose very voice, no less than her form and face, continually presented the living portrait of an unhappy mother to his view, Montague had more than once been upon the verge of commencing the distressing communication, when a sense of filial delicacy rendered the attempt abortive, and repeatedly compelled him to silence.

One evening had now only to intervene before Mrs. Ross and her *protégée* commenced the prosecution of their journey: the weather had become more propitious to their wishes; and the latter, accompanied by Captain Montague, set out to see the ruins of the collegiate church of Linclouden, in the vicinity of the town.

In the course of this delightful ramble, the conversation accidentally turned on subjects which led, in some degree, to the very one Montague felt so frequently inclined to relate; and conceiving himself at this period more equal to the task than he had hitherto been, they seated themselves on a stone in the interior of the building, where, after a short pause, he spoke as follows:—

“When my acquaintance first commenced with you, my sweet friend, I had but lately quitted the gay scenes of London and its neighbourhood; where, absorbed in a constant vortex of folly and tonish dissipation, sober reflection was excluded from the order of the day, and every recollection foreign to the great business of pleasurable indulgence, drowned in the existing rage for fashionable pursuits, or obliterated from the tablet of memory by occurrences more congenial to the taste of the giddy and frivolous, though high bred circles, with which my situation in life entitled me to associate.

“Domestic incidents, however distressing, are but too apt to be partially effaced from remembrance under such circumstances: I had experienced some which occasionally were felt with the keenest sensibility; but too young and volatile to retain any constant impression of misfortune, my mind easily yielded to the force of example, and the temptations that daily surrounded me; and every trace of the past was continually buried in the more fascinating enjoyments of the present. Time, and absence from the great theatre of attraction, however, have at length supplied the early want of mature judgment, and, united with other events, gradually given a more serious cast to my character.

“My father happened to be heir to a handsome and extensive landed property in the south of England; and a considerable sum of money in the funds was to descend to his younger children, provided he married with the approbation of an uncle, who had always declared his intention of settling it upon him on the aforesaid condition.

“By an unfortunate and secret attendance on the orgies of the gaming table, the family estate was discovered to be extremely involved on the demise of my grandfather, who had long contrived to indulge this favourite, but dangerous propensity unsuspected, or at least unascertained by those nearest and most deeply interested on the occasion.

“Naturally of an independent disposition, and strict in his notions of moral justice, my father was no sooner acquainted with the real situation of his affairs, than he adopted the advice

of those more competent from their time of life, to form a right opinion on the succeeding steps he ought to pursue in such a predicament. His paternal fortune was all he had to look to during the existence of his uncle; and therefore, after putting matters in a train to lessen the incumbrances, and finally clear the estate, he obtained an appointment to a place of considerable emolument on a foreign station, and departed almost immediately to take possession of it.

“The commencement of my father’s new prospects was not so fortunate as the rectitude of intention by which they were undertaken seemed to warrant; for his health began to decline, and he soon found himself under the necessity of retiring to the country for its re-establishment.

“At no great distance from the principal town where he had hitherto resided, were a number of rural retreats, surrounded by extensive woods, composed of many different kinds of trees which never lose their verdure, but look green at all times of the year: these, irregularly mingling their variegated branches, appear in gay confusion, forming the most delightful groves and cool retirements, well calculated for excluding the intense heat of a burning sun from the languid traveller, unaccustomed to its fervid influence. My father surveyed several spots of this description, and at length fixed upon one in the vicinity of the seacoast, which appeared almost a terrestrial paradise; and the small house he selected for a temporary residence, was only separated from three or four more by intervening plantations of the cedar, the *lignum vitæ*, and the mahogany trees.

“Having one evening rambled further from his abode than usual, he found himself insensibly near an old ruinous-looking habitation in the centre of a grove, which, from its venerable appearance, spread an air of solemn grandeur over the space it occupied, that interested his feelings, and gradually led him forward, in order to take a more particular survey of the whole.

“The fabric, now fast crumbling into a confused mass of rubbish, seemed once to have been extensive, and still exhibited some few remains of former magnificence. As he stood silently musing on the effects of time and chance, unmindful that he himself was not exempted from their overwhelming influence, a snake, probably irritated by his near approach, which apparently interrupted its repose, made a sudden dart forward, and before he could spring aside, wounded him in the leg, and then hastily retired beneath some neighbouring brushwood.

“My father stood at first irresolute what step to adopt for the best in so dangerous an emergency: to return home required time, and his leg already began to exhibit alarming symptoms—what then was to be done? No human being probably inhabited the mouldering edifice; of course, assistance was not to be expected from that quarter: every passing moment became more precious, for every passing moment increased the difficulty of a removal in proportion as the pain he suffered grew more acute.

“In this state of tormenting anxiety, a rustling sound caught his ear. Apprehensive of a second attack from some venomous reptile or wild beast, against which he possessed no means of defence, even had the nature of his wound permitted him to attempt it, he began to conclude the termination of his earthly existence was at length arrived; and perceiving no means of escape whatever, if impending evil happened once more to be threatened, he placed himself against the bole of a large tree, firmly resolved to await the conclusive blow of that destiny he was shortly doomed to encounter. With no small difficulty, however, this design was, accomplished, for he could now scarcely make a foot; and the pain speedily augmenting to a height too dreadful to support, at length deprived him of all sensation: he sunk on the ground in a fainting fit, totally unconscious of the past, and alike unmindful of the present or the future.

“When my father recovered from this state of insensibility, he found himself laid on a

bed in a small, but well-furnished room, and attended by two females, whose skilful assistance had considerably lessened the swelling in his leg, and greatly alleviated the very acute agony he had lately suffered.

“Before his curiosity could be gratified on the subject of his present situation, and the humane aid thus seasonably afforded him, a young woman, of the most fascinating appearance, entered the room, and delivered a paper to one of the others, who, after raising her head to examine the contents, put her tongue to a powder it contained, in order to ascertain its potency: she then mixed it up with something else already in the room, and applied the whole to his leg, rubbing it with both her hands from the knee downwards, with a degree of persevering exertion that fully evinced the accident he had met with was considered in a serious and alarming point of view. The indefatigable operator on this occasion was a negro woman, and her companions seemed to be Europeans.

“My father soon learned that to the younger of the latter he probably stood indebted for the prolongation of his life, which had been effected by a critical discovery of his condition as she was returning home from a visit on the other side of the grove.

Several days elapsed before he was permitted to quit the friendly roof of his benefactors: his own domestics were, nevertheless, informed of his safety; and the negro assistant faithfully attended him with the usual application during the time he remained under her care.

“Every apprehension of danger on his account was now at an end; but one still more formidable fatally succeeded. Julia, the young and beautiful Julia Cramond, had inflicted a yet deeper wound on my father than that which he had received from the snake. He applied for a remedy to the cause in which this fresh disaster originated; but less charitable than the kind negro woman, Julia gave a positive negative to his request.

“Mr. Cramond, the proprietor of my father’s present abode, which almost joined the old ruins already mentioned, happened to be from home when the wounded stranger was discovered by his daughter, and conveyed by her direction to the house.

“This gentleman possessed much good sense, and a tolerable knowledge of the world; but his predominant passion was avarice, and its influence proved frequently so great as to obscure his every other good quality. Mrs. Cramond happened to possess a very lofty opinion of high birth; she herself was descended from an ancient family in Scotland, whose rank had long survived the less honourable, but more useful article of fortune; and though she had condescended to accept an untitled husband in consideration of other advantages, it was the first wish of her heart to hear her daughter addressed by the superior appellation of my Lady. An incident capable of bestowing this envied distinction was not, however, likely to occur in this quarter of the world; and several years being yet to elapse before the situation of their affairs would permit their return to Great Britain, their only daughter was strictly prohibited from entering into any engagements inimical to the future views of either of her parents, for her establishment in the matrimonial line.

“A few days subsequent to my father’s accidental introduction into the country residence of this gentleman, letters had arrived from England announcing his accession to a Baronet’s title, as male heir to a distant relation then dead: of this circumstance the ladies were yet ignorant when Mr. Cramond returned. Though personally a stranger to his guest, they were, nevertheless, known to each other by sight; and the lucrative situation my father possessed, proved an object of no less consideration in the eyes of his new acquaintance than his late acquired title, when discovered by chance, did in those of Mrs. Cramond. The declaration of my father, therefore, who happened to be too much in love to rest satisfied with the first refusal of the lady, was

joyfully received, and the continuation of his addresses unconditionally authorized by the parents of Julia, when applied to for their sanction. His health, too, now gradually returned; the wound in his leg was entirely cured: and though his former occupation demanded personal attendance elsewhere, he still contrived to find leisure sufficient for the purpose of visiting at Mount Cramond.

“Though ever an acceptable guest to the principals of the family, she, for whose favourable opinion he was chiefly solicitous, seemed not to second either their wishes or his own. Cold, reserved, and frequently surprised in tears, yet always listening to what he said with polite, though silent attention, Sir Charles knew not what judgment to form on appearances so inexplicable, nor could all his entreaties prevail upon her to grant him any satisfactory explanation on the occasion. In time his assiduities, however, were no longer refused; and if a verbal consent was not actually obtained, he was tacitly at least permitted to consider himself as a favoured lover. At length, at the earnest request of my father, who had ineffectually applied to Julia on the subject, Mr. Cramond announced the consent of his daughter to their union on the following Thursday; and preparations were accordingly set on foot for the celebration of the ceremony, which took place at the appointed time.

“Two days after the consummation of this event, Sir Charles received a letter from that uncle on whose approbation of his proceedings so much depended. The contents of this epistle proved a thunder-stroke to the now happy husband; for they informed him of his being affianced to a lady of rank and fortune in England by the friendly exertion of this gentleman in his favour; and concluded with a positive assurance, that accordingly as he fulfilled or disappointed his expectation on this occasion, was his future dependance on his friendship and good offices to be estimated.

CHAP. XIV.

“Ah, gentle pair! ye little think how nigh
“Your change approaches, when all these delights
“Will vanish and deliver you to woe!”

MILTON.

“SIR Charles, who, in the ardour of passion, had either forgotten, or wilfully overlooked the former knowledge he possessed of his uncle’s intentions, happened to be in company with Mr. Cramond when this intelligence reached him; and as the impression it made on his countenance was too obvious and striking to escape that gentleman’s notice, he laid the whole affair instantly before him, and entreated his advice in respect to his future conduct in this business.

“Mr. Cramond mused over the unexpected communication for some minutes in silent meditation. If evil threatened to turn the beam on one side, a considerable portion of good existed to counterbalance it on the other: a very short delay might have rendered his views for his daughter abortive, had this unlucky epistle arrived two days sooner; as the case now stood, she could not be unmarried again—of course, nothing was to be feared on that account; and perhaps every apprehension on the score of pecuniary disappointment might yet be done away by a little adroit management—at least, it was certainly worth a trial. So reasoned Mr. Cramond; and the natural disposition of the man spurred him on to make every possible exertion, in order to avoid the practical part of my great-uncle’s declaration.

“Fortunately, the necessary arrangement of some domestic occurrences had prevented the publication of the marriage for some days: in the present state of affairs, no circumstance could have happened more opportunely; and therefore, as the old gentleman could not live for ever, so Mr. Cramond justly observed, it was agreed to conceal his nephew’s union with Julia till such time as the former was fairly gathered to his forefathers; a consummation most ardently wished by this able politician. Meanwhile it was easy for Sir Charles to produce a thousand ostensible reasons for prolonging the term of his residence abroad; without entering into any particular discussion of his uncle’s intentions as to the nature of the future destiny supposed to be in store for him.

“This, with some other accompanying arrangements, was therefore speedily settled; and Lady Montague, of course, remained in her father’s house, under the lately renounced character and name of Miss Cramond.

“In the opinion of some married women this would not have been judged a very eligible situation, when rank and increasing riches entitled them to sport an establishment of their own: to my mother, however, such a consideration appeared not of the smallest importance; on the contrary, she acquiesced in the determination with an air of apparent indifference, calmly declaring that all places were alike to her; and the general tenor of her conduct at this period sufficiently evinced she spoke truth.

“Mrs. Cramond, under pretence of bad health, now constantly resided at their country residence; where her husband likewise spent most of his time, when the nature of his commercial occupation permitted of his absence. It need scarcely be added that my father pursued the same plan: but as many of his countrymen were inhabitants of the same place in which his abode was chiefly fixed, he was forced to act with much caution, lest accident or design should discover his secret, and waft it on the wings of rumour to his native shore.

“Three years had already elapsed in this manner, and the fourth commenced, when Mr. Cramond’s health, which had latterly appeared much on the decline, afforded serious cause for apprehension; and as his lady had also been frequently indisposed in the course of the last twelve months, he determined to follow the repeated advice of his physicians, and try what effect a sea voyage and an European climate would now produce on their debilitated constitutions.

“The aforesaid period had given birth to two sons in the family of Mr. Cramond, of which I happened to be the youngest; and how to dispose of our mother and her infant charge, hitherto concealed from the knowledge of the world, was a question of no small difficulty to determine. Some months, however, were yet to intervene before my grandfather’s affairs could be finally wound up; and, in the interim, it was not unjust to suppose the adjustment of this circumstance might likewise be accomplished in one way or another.

“This expectation was soon realized, in consequence of an incident as little looked for as were the effects which finally resulted from it.

“My father received private intelligence that, as his movements were known to be watched by a secret emissary from England, it behoved him to act with more caution, and visit seldomer at Mount Cramond.

“Astonished at the nature of an intimation, the source of which he found it impossible to discover, Sir Charles once more applied to his father-in-law as his never-failing counsellor in all cases affecting pecuniary concerns; for there seemed but too much reason to suppose his uncle had got some hint of his matrimonial situation, and commissioned one of his acquaintances, of which he had several in this part of the globe, to observe and report the proceedings of his nephew.

“Alarmed by this idea, which appeared to have probability for its foundation, various schemes were alternately adopted and renounced, in the hope of averting the consequences of a discovery.

“At length Mrs. Cramond mentioned one, which she said was first suggested by her daughter:—it was, to take the latter with them to England, where, her maiden name being still retained, she could appear in the character of a single woman, and the children might be produced to the world as the orphan offspring of a relation committed to the guardianship of Mr. Cramond.

“This proposition was not quite to the taste of my father, who, though he saw his wife much seldomer than proved agreeable to his wishes, yet could ill brook the thoughts of a total separation, which, in that event, must inevitably take place for some time.

“But a man who is either involved in debt, or forced to be the artificer of his own fortune, must comply with existing necessities, without arrogating to himself the envied privilege of chusing his destiny. New demands, unforeseen as unexpected, had recently been made on the family estate in England; and to add to this unpleasant circumstance, several speculations in which the Baronet had engaged, and which, on their commencement, promised the most profitable conclusion, had ultimately disappointed his expectations in almost every respect.

“Mr. Cramond’s avidity to provide against future circumstances of this kind, was not less ardent, than his solicitude to repair those which had already taken place: should the latter be found impracticable, the ability of my great-uncle to afford a sufficient indemnification for the loss, was too well known to be overlooked with the smallest degree of prudence or common sense. A proper attention to self-interest, Mr. Cramond averred, ought to be the first consideration of every rational being: to avoid incurring the old gentleman’s displeasure was a thing Sir Charles, therefore, certainly owed himself and his family. No alternative of course

remained—a separation appeared the most likely means of providing against an evil so formidable; and the result of the whole ended in my mother and her sons' accompanying Mr. and Mrs. Cramond to England.

“At the period of our embarkation from the West Indies, Lady Montague had not yet completed her eighteenth year, though upwards of three years a wife. Her eldest son was about two-and-twenty months old, myself not more than eleven.

“Arrived in England, my grandfather fixed his residence in a retired part of the country, at a considerable distance from the metropolis. But the benefit expected to be derived from his native air did not by any means answer the idea previously formed of its success: the liver complaint, to occasional attacks of which his wife had long been liable, daily gained ground; and medical assistance proving of no avail, Mrs. Cramond expired in less than two years after we reached Europe.

“In the third year after this event took place, a military gentleman, who, with his regiment, had been stationed for some time in the West Indies, from whence the corps was but recently returned, arrived in the neighbourhood of our abode, and frequently called at the Lodge. As my grandfather's health seldom permitted him at this period to quit his chamber, my mother usually received their visitor alone, and often walked out with him for a couple of hours at a time. At length the family at whose house he abode, left their country residence: but though he accompanied them to Town, and the distance was great, still this circumstance did not prevent his occasional appearance at the Lodge, where he gradually became a great favourite with my grandfather.

“Another year now passed away without any material occurrence taking place. In the spring of the second, part of the regiment to which this officer belonged; happened to be quartered in the vicinity; and his visits at the Lodge again became frequent.

“At length the route arrived; and about a week before the first division was to march, an incident occurred in our family that nearly brought Mr. Cramond to the grave, and proved the commencement of much domestic misery.

CHAP. XV.

“Farewell, remorse! all good to me is lost:—

“Evil, be thou my good!”

MILTON.

“MY mother, who had latterly evinced a particular partiality for moonlight walks, left the house one evening at a late hour to indulge this favourite inclination: she was accompanied by her own maid, an elderly woman, who went from England at an early age, for the purpose of waiting upon her some years after her birth, and had remained ever since that period in the service of her young mistress, by whom she was extremely beloved.

“A situation near the sea had been recommended to Mr. Cramond, after the death of his wife, in preference to any other whatsoever; and the Lodge, exactly answering the description of the place he wished to procure, it had been immediately taken, and the family removed to it without loss of time.

“This rural retirement lay upon a bold, romantic coast, within a very short distance of the ocean, but sheltered by extensive woods from the violence of those occasional tempests which are sometimes experienced in the neighbourhood of the sea. A covered path through the trees, led directly from the east side of our habitation almost to the edge of the water; where, on the verge of a small bay, stood a little bathing-house, neatly fitted up. Hither Lady Montague, whose spirits had become very indifferent for some time, often resorted at the making of the evening tide, in order, as she said, to observe the reflection of her favourite planet upon the smooth expanse of the deep, or to walk along the rugged surface of some precipice, and listen to the pensive, monotonous sound of the coming wave, before it dashed against the rocky barrier by which its further progress was limited.

“In little more than three quarters of an hour after she quitted the Lodge, her maid returned to the house; and meeting one of the servants, mentioned the cause of her being sent back as originating in a headach, on which account her Lady had insisted on her leaving her, in order to procure a remedy.

‘I shall, nevertheless, attend her again the instant I am better,’ continued the woman; ‘therefore no other person need supply my place, for so my Lady positively commanded: and at any rate you know she is as often unaccompanied as otherwise on such occasions.’

“The girl to whom she addressed herself, readily assented to the truth of this circumstance, which, as it frequently happened, created no particular degree of surprise in the present instance.

“Time passed on, however, and Lady Montague appeared not: it grew late, and her lengthened absence began to assume a serious aspect. The domestics were alarmed; and the girl who had been spoken to by her maid, repaired to the chamber of the latter to discover if she had joined her mistress: this was so far from proving the case, that she found her fast asleep in bed; from which, nevertheless, she instantly started with every appearance of horror and dismay on hearing the cause of their apprehensions; and accusing her late headach, the effects of which, she said, had made her oversleep herself when she ought to have been with her Lady, she hastily joined the other domestics, who now proceeded in different directions in quest of the absentee.

“In vain was every spot searched in the neighbourhood, not the smallest circumstance was discovered by which she could possibly be traced, and despair gradually succeeded to the

first ardor of pursuit.

“The question of what was next to be done, now resounded on every side. Mr. Cramond had retired for the night soon after she quitted the house; he was probably long since asleep: and having of late been in a convalescent state, his servant feared a relapse would prove the consequence of such distressing intelligence if abruptly communicated. Under this apprehension, the advice of my mother’s maid was adopted, and they agreed to refrain from disturbing him till the result of their renewed labours afforded something of a more satisfactory nature to direct their further motions: this they flattered themselves would certainly prove the case previous to his usual hour of waking; and again their enquiries were recommenced in every quarter.

“But success still continued equally wanting to their wishes, and disappointment attended every attempt to discover my mother. The morning had already dawned on their fruitless efforts, when a countryman at length arrived to inform them that a small vessel, supposed from the coast of France, had been seen hovering at no great distance a short time after the night closed in; but whether with hostile intentions, or merely in the smuggling line, he could not pretend to determine, though, in his opinion, the former appeared most likely: and Miss Cramond had, no doubt, fallen a sacrifice to their rapacity, in the expectation of receiving a handsome sum for her liberation.

“In confirmation of this idea, the speaker produced a pocketbook found on the beach, which was soon recognised for her property: this, the man averred, had certainly been offered to the ravishers by their terrified victim, as a temptation to release her; and, in the agitation of the moment, must have dropped from her hand.

“Lady Montague’s maid eyed the narrator of this very improbable story with a varying colour, and an air of much anxiety; she then glanced a look of scrutinizing solicitude on his auditors, who apparently coincided in his sentiments on the subject: after which, having claimed and obtained the pocketbook in right of her mistress, it was judged proper to acquaint Mr. Cramond with the whole of this mysterious and most unaccountable incident.

“To describe the scene that followed, is impossible; suffice it to say, that though my grandfather gave no credit to the absurd supposition of the countryman, his sufferings on the occasion were not less acute, for the evil appeared equally irremediable: indeed infinitely more so, since he fully persuaded himself that, in stepping over some of the projecting rocks, her foot must have slipped, and herself been instantly precipitated into the ocean below. The shock naturally produced by a conjecture so dreadful, proved too much for his enfeebled constitution to sustain; and after again ascertaining the inutility of further enquiry, his former disorder returned with additional force, and rendered him unable to quit his bed for several succeeding weeks.

“During the two first of these, Captain Ormsby (the gentleman before mentioned) spent every moment he could possibly spare from his professional duties with the unhappy father, and strove by every means in his power to mitigate the acuteness of his misery. The division of the troops to which he belonged, happened to be the last in the order of the march; and this circumstance furnished him with more leisure to obey the calls of friendship than could otherwise have been procured.

“It was not without difficulty, however, that the poor old man could be brought to listen to the necessity of acquainting Sir Charles with the melancholy event which had taken place: for in the first effusions of his grief, the secret of his lost child’s matrimonial union had transpired, and reached the ears of the friendly Captain, at least so the latter informed him; and though my grandfather could not recollect the circumstance, yet neither could he positively deny it, because the state of his mind was such as to disqualify him for retaining any knowledge of what he might

or might not have said during the first paroxysms of parental affliction. To assert a falsehood was not, however, to be thought of: and as concealment in this quarter, therefore, appeared no longer practicable, Ormsby was soon made acquainted with the whole transaction; and at length brought Mr. Cramond to coincide in his opinion on the propriety of immediately writing to Sir Charles. The fatal letter was accordingly dispatched to my father; and the Captain on the following day bade adieu to the house of mourning.

“Though in a very early stage of life when this sad, this ever-to-be-regretted affair happened, I yet retain a perfect recollection of my unhappy mother: this circumstance may possibly, in a great degree, be owing to the constant view of several fine portraits of Lady Montague which had been taken to send to her husband. The small miniature which I saw at the Hermitage was certainly one of these; for I well remember there were two of that size and similar appearance, amongst the number; one of which my grandmother usually wore during her lifetime, the other was intended for my father: the hair of the head, and the whole style of the painting, were of too striking a nature to be easily mistaken; and if worlds were in my power to bestow, I would freely give them to develop the mystery of its unaccountable discovery in that quarter of Great Britain.

“Of our mother,” continued Captain Montague, “my brother and myself were particularly fond; and even at this distant moment,” he added, deeply sighing at the painful images memory conjured up to view, “I still in idea see her lovely form before me, and feel the warm tears distilling from her eyes, drop upon my cheeks as she strained her quickly deserted children to her palpitating bosom, and kneeling by her pillow, attempted to implore that protection for their helpless youth she dared no longer ask for herself.

“Oh God! never—no, never shall I forget the transactions of that fatal night, nor the fearful astonishment her words and manner created in our minds!—Diabolical villain! infernal monster!—but do not be alarmed, Stella; I will endeavour to command my feelings if possible, and restrain execrations but too well merited; for are not the errors of a beloved, yet reprobated mother implicated in the same curse that issues forth to blast her unprincipled seducer, the abhorred, the infamous Ormsby?”

Though Stella was partly prepared for this discovery, she could not help being strongly affected when her companion reached the end of the last sentence: he himself appeared no less so; and a pause of some minutes ensued, which neither seemed disposed to interrupt. At length Montague resumed the task he had undertaken, and continued his narrative as follows.

CHAP. XVI.

“I know thee brave;
“Of such the time has need, of hearts like thine,
“Faithful and firm.”

BROOKE.

“THE first violence of our grief for the supposed death of my unfortunate mother had scarcely begun to subside, when her maid, under the pretence of bad health, requested my grandfather’s permission to retire from the Lodge. Though extremely unwilling to part with her, his consent was at last reluctantly obtained; and after receiving a considerable sum of money, which she preferred to the annuity he offered her as a remuneration for the time spent in his family, she departed from the house, to reside in future, according to her own account, with some relations in the north of England.

“In the course of the following two years and a half, nothing occurred worth troubling you with. Mr. Cramond’s health was in some degree restored, and Frederic and myself placed at a celebrated academy in the neighbourhood of the metropolis; near which our grandfather likewise took up his residence.

“Towards the end of that period, an estate that lay within a mile of his abode happened to be on sale, and was soon after purchased by my father’s uncle, who in a short time came to live in the mansion-house.

“Though the first intelligence of this circumstance rather startled Mr. Cramond, a very little reflection served to convince him it was a matter of no consequence, for we still retained the fictitious appellation by which we had been known since our arrival in England; and as he himself was now the only person in Great Britain, my mother’s maid excepted, who knew the real state of the case, scarcely any chance of discovery was to be feared.

“Reassured by this conviction, he shrunk not from an accidental interview which took place very unexpectedly with Mr. Howard in the course of a forenoon visit at a gentleman’s house in the neighbourhood. At the same house they were afterwards invited, though unknown to each other, to spend the day; and before the company separated in the evening, each became so far pleased with the conversation and manners of his new acquaintance, that a friendly intercourse was immediately established between them, which appeared equally agreeable to both parties.

“At length the Christmas holidays restored my brother and myself to our parental roof; and two days after our arrival, Mr. Howard called to enquire after my grandfather.

“Even at this early period of our lives we were tolerable horsemen: Mr. Cramond, kindly indulgent to our bias for manly exercises of every description, had furnished us with two beautiful little animals of the New Forest breed; and when Mr. Howard entered the parlour, Frederic and I were amusing ourselves with making them perform a thousand different manoeuvres in a small field fronting the windows, from whence our grandfather was observing us with an air of the most delighted attention: so occupied, indeed, was the good old man with the objects before him, that he heard not the name of his visitor announced by the servant who preceded him, nor was even sensible of his nearness, till that gentleman, after approaching the nearest window, and discovering the cause of his friend’s temporary fit of abstraction, suddenly turned round, and demanded to whom these young men belonged.

“At the sound of his voice Mr. Cramond started, and in spite of his efforts to the contrary, felt a considerable degree of embarrassment; but on a second repetition of the same question, he replied they were his nephews, (for in that light we had hitherto been represented) and were lately returned from school to spend the holidays with him.

“Mr. Howard, after this information, regarded us a few moments longer in silence. My horsemanship had the good fortune particularly to please him; and when we entered the room after the conclusion of our forenoon exercise, I was honoured with several distinguished marks of his approbation in a degree superior to my brother.

“Insensibly from this day we acquired an increasing interest in his heart; and our next vacation from the academy was passed, at his particular request, in the habitation of our new acquaintance, who frequently regarded us with a degree of scrutinizing attention that inspired his elder visitor with no small portion of apprehension for the consequences.

“One incident which took place in a short time after this period, nevertheless, somewhat allayed his fears on our account. The lady formerly mentioned by Mr. Howard as affianced to my absent father, had set out on a matrimonial excursion to Grana Green with a gentleman of her own chusing. This gentleman happened to be a low-born adventurer of infamous character; and as her own conduct soon shewed her principles to be similar to her lord and master’s, our uncle repeatedly congratulated himself, in Mr. Cramond’s presence, on the happy escape of his nephew Sir Charles Montague, from the ill-sorted fate he had prepared for him; and as fresh instances of his intended niece’s depravity reached his knowledge, he became gradually weaned from every wish to interfere in the future domestic arrangements of my father; who, he often declared, would have rendered him completely happy had he made him the great-uncle of two such boys as Frederic and myself.

The sensations of Mr. Cramond on such occasions may easier be conceived than described; and in the effusions of parental tenderness, he augured the most happy effects from the daily augmentation of Mr. Howard’s friendly attachment to his nephew’s unacknowledged children.

“The blind Goddess Fortune loves a train, and seldom smiles or frowns without a lengthened succession of followers, good or bad: at present she appeared to be in the former mood, and apparently disposed to adopt us as particular favourites.

“My brother in process of time was removed to one of the Universities; while, on the contrary, my predilection for a military life became so strong, that Mr. Howard, at my earnest request, was prevailed upon to intercede for Mr. Cramond’s acquiescence to my wishes—a compliance the latter seemed extremely averse to grant; but at length, overcome by the importunity of his friend, willing to gratify him at all events, and partially reconciled to the measure by the certain conviction that it was sanctioned by the approbation of my advocate, who otherwise was not of a character to have spoken on my side of the question, permission was granted me to follow the bent of an unconquerable inclination; and at the age of sixteen, my father’s consent being previously obtained, I commenced my military career with all the ardor of a young and sanguine mind, which conceives itself in the certain road to future glory and never-ending fame.

“Mr. Howard, much gratified by having carried his point, and considering himself as the sole medium through which my wishes could possibly have been crowned with any certain degree of success, seemed now more than ever interested in my future destiny; and, finally resolved not to leave what he had engaged in half done, he declared his determination to accompany me on my first visit to the Colonel of the regiment, who had given directions for my

immediate attendance upon him in London.

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CHAP. XVII.

“High arbiter
“Chance governs all.”

MILTON.

“WE were just finishing the last stage but one from the metropolis, and the evening was already pretty far advanced, when the carriage was suddenly stopped by a couple of highwaymen, one of whom held a pistol to the breast of the postillion, while the other, with the most horrid imprecations, abruptly burst open the door on the side next Mr. Howard, and presenting a blunderbuss, threatened instant destruction if his pecuniary demands were not speedily complied with.

“As he spoke, the deadly instrument was raised to the head of my uncle, and his finger already upon the trigger evinced a positive determination to be quickly and exactly obeyed. I saw there was not a moment to be lost. Mr. Howard’s agitation prevented his keeping pace with the villain’s impatience, whose watchful eye glancing on all sides, immediately discovered my intention: he turned the muzzle from his first destined victim; we fired at the same instant; part of the contents of his blunderbuss lodged in my shoulder, mine entered his heart, and he dropped upon the ground, uttering another volley of curses, accompanied by a deep and hollow groan.

“The report of fire-arms once more resounded in our ears: it was from the fellow who stood at the head of the horses; but the postillion escaped uninjured: and his late dreaded antagonist, on perceiving the fate of his comrade, speedily quitted the field of action, and made good his retreat, before our servant, who had been detained behind by his horse losing a shoe, could arrive to assist in securing the fugitive. Previous to his appearance, I had myself sprung from the carriage to lay hold of the ruffian, and followed his steps, till the quantity of blood that issued from my wound rendered me unable to continue the pursuit. Mr. Howard, apprehensive for the consequences, had likewise quitted his seat to observe my motions; but being too infirm to overtake me, the servant was supporting me back from the ineffectual attempt, when I found myself suddenly clasped in the good old man’s arms, with a degree of warmth that sufficiently spoke the nature of his feelings.

“In the interim the wounded man had shewn some symptoms of life; and the postillion, who stood over him during our absence, proposed having him removed to the nearest house, until such time as his real situation could be properly ascertained. A cart, which at this period opportunely approached, was immediately hired for the purpose; Mr. Howard’s servant accompanied it, while we proceeded to the conclusion of our night’s journey.

“After procuring a surgeon to dress my wound, which had previously been bound up in the best manner existing circumstances would admit, and now upon examination pronounced not dangerous, my uncle waited upon a neighbouring magistrate of his acquaintance, to whom he related the foregoing affair. This gentleman declared his readiness to save us all the trouble that could possibly be avoided on the occasion; and in consequence of this assurance, we fully expected to reach the metropolis at an early hour on the following day.

“On this subject, however, it was found we had reckoned without our host. I was unable to travel long before the time for our intended departure arrived; and the end of the week was nearly closed ere my removal appeared either safe, or even practicable.

“During this juncture the friendship, attention, and anxiety evinced by the kind Mr.

Howard, are not to be described: indeed they far exceeded in magnitude the cause that called them into action, for I had done nothing but what any other person in the same situation would have performed with an equal degree of readiness; and the reflection that I had saved a worthy man from destruction, more than sufficiently repaid all he supposed himself indebted for.

“At length we reached London; and my convalescent state being now ascertained, Mr. Cramond, who, from humane considerations, had hitherto been kept in ignorance of my condition, was finally informed of the whole transaction, accompanied by the warmest encomiums on my conduct, and a positive assertion that to my successful exertions in his favour, the writer was solely indebted for the prolongation of a life which, differently situated, must have fallen a sacrifice to the barbarous rapacity of his daring assailant.

“Pardon me, Stella, for my prolixity on his subject: I should not so far have encroached upon your patience, had not the consequence of this event entitled it to a greater degree of minute attention than would otherwise have been bestowed upon so common an occurrence.”

“Proceed,” replied his auditor, with a smile: “however lightly you may chuse to treat this business, it has already so completely terrified me, that some indemnification of a pleasant nature is certainly due; therefore let us have it quickly.”

Montague bowed, and resumed his story.

“The contents of Mr. Howard’s letter almost equally gratified and alarmed my grandfather—gratified, to find that gentleman’s former predilection in my favour was now become too confirmed to be easily removed—and alarmed, lest my situation should be worse than represented, and a pious fraud practised to keep him easy in the event of any casual rumour unexpectedly reaching him. Under this impression, his health being tolerably restored, he lost no time in relieving his apprehensions, by immediately setting out to join us in the metropolis.

“The meeting that took place between the two old gentlemen was such as might be supposed, warm and affecting; and that with my grandfather and self no less so. The former had for some time harboured so strong a wish to disclose the degree of relationship I stood in to Mr. Howard, that he was now more than once on the brink of mentioning the whole affair; but the intelligence seemed so important, on account of further losses recently sustained by my father, that fearful of the manner in which it might be received by his uncle, he forbore to speak on the subject, until the sanction of Sir Charles, to whom he had written, could first be obtained.

“Unfortunately, during the delay occasioned by my recent confinement, Colonel Philips had left Town; and ignorant whither to follow him, I was forced to wait till his address could be procured.

“This circumstance prolonged our residence for a fortnight in London. At the expiration of that period, I received orders to join him at Dover; and, accompanied by my two highly esteemed companions, who insisted on proceeding with me, my journey thither was speedily accomplished.

“Mr. Howard possessed many acquaintances in this part of the country—Mr. Cramond none: while the former, therefore, happened to be engaged abroad, the latter, who declined all new society that could possibly be avoided, usually occupied himself in finishing a written detail of those circumstances which had occurred in his family since the first introduction of Sir Charles Montague at Mount Cramond. This statement of facts had been occasionally preparing for some time, and was intended either to refresh his memory when the particulars of the various transactions were required, or to be presented in its present form, and left to relate what he ardently wished to be spared a verbal repetition of. One copy was designed for Mr. Howard, the other for Frederic and myself, who were now to be speedily informed of events which our time

of life rendered us fit to be entrusted with.

“Some recording spirit, prophetic of approaching evil, surely guided his hand in the task he had thus critically undertaken to finish. Alas! how blind are we to the future! and how little did I suppose that the delay caused by the preservation of one dear relative, should ultimately prove the means of sending another to his grave, by conducting our steps to the coast of Kent at this most inauspicious juncture!—The ball of the highwayman missed its intended victim, it is true; but the arm of a much more atrocious villain unhappily succeeded too well in a work of destruction, without affording me the envied satisfaction of reflecting that my interference had proved equally successful in a cause still nearer to my heart—a cause that deeply interested every filial, every grateful sensation inherent in human nature, and yet chills the blood in my veins when imaged circumstances of the past start from the tablet of memory, and point to a venerable parent consigned to a premature grave for the crimes of—whom?—a daughter, and a mother!—Oh God! preserve my burning brain from the fatal effects of so horrid a recollection!”

The agitated Montague struck his forehead with violence, and starting from the side of the trembling, weeping Stella, darted past a projection of the ruins, and in melancholy solitude continued to pace over the mouldering monuments of former days, where the ashes of the saint and the sinner alike lay mingled in one promiscuous mass of confusion, and every surrounding object bore witness to the fragile nature of human exertions, the vanity of earthly pride, and the instable tenure by which our highest hopes and most favourite enjoyments are sometimes rashly supposed to be rendered fixed and certain.

CHAP. XVIII.

“If thou tell’st the heavy story right,
“Upon my soul, the hearers will shed tears!”
SHAKESPEARE.

STELLA, though extremely solicitous for the continuation of a recital that deeply interested her feelings, yet intreated Montague, on his return, to postpone the remainder of his communication for the present, under the idea that he was too much agitated to proceed with any degree of ease to himself. But, however grateful for the considerate motive that dictated this proposal, he declined profiting by it; and soon after reseating himself, again proceeded.

“The principal inns in Dover are commonly too much crowded and too noisy for the accommodation of those whose health is not sufficiently strong to encounter those circumstances with impunity: Mr. Cramond’s, though infinitely better of late than usual, happened nevertheless to be so circumstanced; and we therefore removed to a more retired and tranquil situation than that we had occupied on our first arrival.

“My grandfather and I were at this time alone; for as that part of the regiment to which I belonged, was to remain some time in its present station, I tarried in Dover, the two gentlemen having agreed to continue with me: Mr. Howard was now on a visit in the neighbourhood.

“We were sitting by ourselves on the second evening of our residence in this new abode, when Mr. Cramond appeared more than usually thoughtful: the idea of his lost daughter seemed frequently to recur; and he expressed an uncommon degree of anxiety to discover if I still recollected several circumstances he now mentioned as particularly indicative of her tenderness and attachment to Frederic and myself. On this subject I presently satisfied him, for the remembrance of her was too deeply engraven on our hearts, young as we then were, to be easily erased; and I concluded this assurance by protesting, with emphatical warmth, that had Miss Cramond been in fact our own mother, I did not believe we could possibly have loved or respected her more sincerely.

“Softened by the nature of our conversation, and totally thrown off his guard by the animated and energetic manner in which I spoke my sentiments on this interesting topic, the old man suddenly burst into tears, and falling on my neck, exclaimed, in broken, disjointed sentences—

“Oh my beloved boy! the dear, the sainted Julia Cramond, the ever regretted child of my affection, was indeed thy mother!”

“Confounded, and greatly agitated by intelligence so strange, so unexpected—

“Oh God!’ I cried, ‘my mother, say you?—Why then, ah! why was the gratification of knowing this, of learning our affinity to the dear departed saint and yourself concealed from our knowledge until a watery grave interposed to tear us for ever from the arms of maternal affection?—But can it be possible! are we indeed your grandchildren, my much respected friend and benefactor?—Tell me all—say, by what appellation is our father distinguished? lives he, my dear Sir?—Oh satisfy the solicitude of filial curiosity!’

‘He lives, my son; but his name must not yet pass your lips:—Sir Charles Montague was the husband of my poor girl, and your father.’

“Soon after the commencement of our discourse, stifled sounds of distress had more than once produced a pause in the conversation; they seemed to proceed from an adjoining room,

between which and that we occupied there was apparently but a very thin partition. Before the conclusion of the last sentence, they increased and became more audible. As it finished, a deep and hollow groan was distinctly heard; and immediately something fell upon the floor with a violence that caused us involuntarily to start from our seats, and rush to the apartment in which this unaccountable circumstance appeared to have happened.

“Oh Heavens! what was the unexpected discovery that ensued!—Stella, it beggars description: let me then briefly mention, that on the floor of the chamber we entered lay a female figure totally deprived of sense or motion, who, long ere a partial restoration of either could be effected, was recognised by her unfortunate and now dreadfully agitated father and son for the Julia Cramond, the Lady Montague, supposed for such a length of time the inhabitant of a watery grave!

“The eclaireissement that afterwards took place, proved no less distressing than disgraceful; for it appeared that an attachment had existed between my unhappy mother and the villain Ormsby previous to her marriage with Sir Charles Montague, which, upon being discovered by Mrs. Cramond, had been discouraged in the most unequivocal terms, on account of a total want in the two necessary articles of birth and fortune; and it was only in consideration of her daughter’s implicit obedience to her desires, that she consented to conceal the knowledge she had obtained of the foregoing affair from my grandfather.

“Naturally too timid and gentle to contest any point, however interested in its accomplishment, with parents who had constantly required, and uniformly experienced the most unconditional compliance with all their wishes, my mother yielded to the storm she dared not resist, and tacitly accepted the offer made by Mrs. Cramond. Ormsby, nevertheless, was not to be so easily renounced: too well he knew his influence over the heart of his predestined victim; and though she determined to avoid his presence after her marriage with my father took place, still he found means, apparently without design, to throw himself in her way, and through the medium of his emissaries, gradually became master of all that happened at Mount Cramond.

“My grandmother, who knew the sacrifice her daughter had made to filial duty, and judged of its extent by her faded cheek and dejected air, fearful of some untoward accident from the unprincipled and secret perseverance of the vile Ormsby, whose conduct she had privately watched, became at length anxious to quit the West Indies and return to England. In this wish she was seconded by her on whose account a change of scene had first appeared desirable.

“Virtue, and that degree of respect every woman ought invariably to preserve for herself, were by this time, alas! found too weak to resist much longer the powerful bias of an erring inclination, and a too tender heart! this fatal conviction was, therefore, no sooner ascertained, than she secretly prayed to be removed from the threatened danger, while a retreat could yet be accomplished with honour. The voyage, as already mentioned, took place; and though neither her spirits nor happiness returned in consequence thereof, a conscious sense of having acted with propriety shed some small portion of occasional tranquillity over her reflections, which was further increased by the presence of her children, for whom she had always evinced the most unbounded affection and tenderest regard.

“Here had the affair rested, it would have proved well, and much misery in that case been spared to each of the parties; but, unfortunately, the regiment to which Ormsby belonged received orders to sail for Europe, and my grandmother’s death having smoothed the way to a renewal of his diabolical machinations, they were consequently commenced, and again carried on with but too much success. The situation of the Lodge lay convenient for the predetermined execution of his purpose: a small trading vessel was hired to second it; and my mother, finding

herself in a state that must soon publish her infamy to the world, in an evil hour consented to deceive her aged parent, and desert him and her once idolized children for the degrading society of an artful seducer, a base and unprincipled scoundrel, with whom self-gratification was the chief object in view, and the misery entailed on its hapless victim considered as a matter of no comparative importance.”

Again Montague’s voice indicated extreme agitation, and again he started from the side of Stella; but hastily resuming his seat, thus proceeded:—

“The villain Ormsby’s family had formerly resided some time in Ireland, and he was well acquainted with many parts of that country: to that kingdom, therefore, he took her, as most likely to furnish the surest means of concealment, and hoped to reach a safe retreat ere the time of his companion’s confinement should arrive. In this hope he was, nevertheless, finally disappointed, as their intended progress was retarded on the evening of his landing by the inability of my mother to proceed forwards for several days. About the time she appeared able to recommence their journey, apprehensions of an imaginary pursuit seized her conductor; and misled by the impulsive force of a guilty conscience, he again embarked in a vessel ready to sail for Scotland. Lady Montague was shortly after delivered of a child, which survived not its birth; and long before the re-establishment of her health was effected, a second alarm of a similar description, obliged them again to change their quarters.

“Their next route was to Wales, where they procured a small retired habitation. From this place the Captain occasionally joined his regiment; but on succeeding to a small property in the West of England, entirely quitted the service; after which they settled for some years in France.

“Two daughters saw the light during their abode on the Continent, where they were at the time of the fatal encounter with Mr. Cramond and myself at Dover. This very unexpected meeting was occasioned by some pecuniary losses, owing to the dishonesty and failure of a person who happened to have the chief part of Ormsby’s little fortune in his hands; and they were now on their way back to France, whither the fugitive had fled, in order to discover his place of concealment, and endeavour to obtain restitution, if possible to procure it, of what he had defrauded them.

“With this view, Ormsby had left my poor infatuated mother, to secure a passage in one of the packetboats, only a very short time prior to our taking our place by an adjoining fireside in the same house they occupied. Having some business to transact afterwards about six miles from Dover, his return was not looked for before the succeeding morning; and in the interim my grandfather’s voice being recognised by his daughter, the discovery I have mentioned ensued.

“The foregoing particulars were partly collected from the broken and unconnected information of my unhappy parent, but still more from her attendant, who proved to be the identical woman so long employed about her person, and the same who left the Lodge, under pretence of bad health, soon after the supposed premature death of her mistress. Apparently ashamed of her share in the transaction, or, what was more probable, seized with a temporary fit of remorse for her ingratitude to so good a master, she now seemed uncommonly eager to make some atonement for the past, by the explicit nature of her present communications. Yet my grandfather visibly listened to her with an air of suspicion, that plainly evinced the small degree of confidence he placed in her recital, the observation of which more than once disconcerted the semblance of sincerity so artfully assumed by this able historian.

“Meanwhile the consequences that resulted from so affecting an interview, had nearly proved fatal to both parties: my mother was again seized with a succession of fainting fits, attended with the most alarming symptoms; and her father, unable to sustain the contemplation

of her sufferings, was at length conveyed to his own chamber more dead than alive.

“My heart is not surely composed of the softest materials; for though deeply torn, though bleeding almost at every pore, still the sensation of indignant resentment, of propelling revenge, reigned predominant over every other passion; and I sedulously watched for the return of the succeeding morning, destined to witness the merited punishment of a villain by the hand of the woman’s son he had so greatly injured.

“My poor grandfather, suspicious of my secret intention, grasped my hand in his, and as I assisted in supporting him to his room, solemnly adjured me, in the most affecting language, as I valued his future peace and happiness, to remain by his pillow, and upon no account whatever to leave the room, without obtaining his previous permission. My tongue refused to signify the requested acquiescence with his wishes; and had not a burst of tears relieved the anguish of my bosom, I think I could scarcely have survived the conflict that throbbed tumultuously through every vein. The good old man restrained the violence of his own sorrows, to gaze on me for a moment; and raising himself in bed, again wrung my hand in sad, expressive silence.

“The morning was fast approaching to its first dawn, ere sleep, that usual deserter of the unfortunate, came to his aid. This circumstance had no sooner taken place, than an indistinct bustle in the house seemed to indicate the return of the vile Ormsby. Every word recently uttered by my grandfather instantly vanished from my memory, and starting from the side of his bed, I stole softly to the door: this I immediately closed; and then, no longer apprehensive of restraint, rushed along the passage, actuated by a full determination to take a deadly revenge on the object of my fury.

“The first person I encountered was Lady Montague’s maid, who held her mistress’s door half open, evidently in the act of watching who approached. Speedily satisfied on this subject, the discovery was no sooner made, than she seemed disposed to retreat further into the chamber, and close the door: this I prevented, however, by stepping up to her, and sternly demanding to know if Ormsby had yet returned. She assured me in the strongest terms that he was still absent; and, with seeming earnestness, entreated me to retire, or at least speak lower, as she dreaded disturbing her Lady, who was only just fallen into a light slumber, from which the smallest noise would undoubtedly rouse her, and probably produce the most alarming consequences.

‘Tell me first,’ cried I, ‘from whence proceeded the bustle I overheard below stairs. If not occasioned by your rascally master’s return, in what else could it originate?’

‘Really, Sir,’ replied she, ‘it is not in my power to account for every accidental occurrence that may happen in a public inn, where travellers are arriving and departing at every hour of the night. Mr. Ormsby, however, you may be assured, had no earthly concern in it whatever; so pray retire, for I tremble lest Lady Montague suffer from the effects of your being here.’

CHAP. XIX.

“Oh Heav’n! that such resemblance of the Highest
“Should yet remain, where faith and realty
“Remain not!”

MILTON.

“WHILE I stood irresolute whether or not to comply with her request, Mr. Cramond’s servant, who, half asleep and half awake, had been dozing in a corner of the room at the time of my leaving his master’s pillow, happened to perceive I was absent from my late station, and trembling for the effects of my rashness and his own inattention, instantly followed my steps, in order to prevent the apprehended evil from taking place while a possibility of evading it yet remained.

“The faithful, affectionate fellow conceiving himself justified by existing circumstances in the adoption of a little art, speedily effected my return, by intimating Mr. Cramond’s misery, when he awoke from his short and unrefreshing slumber, on discovering my departure. Silent and disappointed, I permitted myself to be conducted back to his chamber; but not before a positive promise was extorted from William to give me immediate intimation of Ormsby’s appearance.

“My grandfather was asleep, however, when I re-entered the room, and his man affected to express no less pleasure than surprise on the occasion: nevertheless, he afterwards confessed the whole transaction was a contrivance of his own to meet the exigencies of the moment. In the mean time, satisfied with the promise I had obtained, and having no idea that any inclination to sleep could be experienced at such a period and under such circumstances, I threw myself into an easy chair near the bed, and, no doubt, overcome by mental exertion and bodily fatigue, before I was aware, sunk unconsciously into a temporary state of oblivion.

“From a short and unexpected sleep, I soon awoke, but not before the broad face of day illumed the apartment. My grandfather, whose sleep had proved transient, interrupted, and unrefreshing, appeared at this moment once more insensible to the power of misfortune. I listened to discover if I was right in my conjecture, and having fully ascertained this point, stole again softly to the door. William met me at the entrance: his looks bespoke some important intelligence; and conceiving it could only allude to the circumstance of Ormsby’s return, I was rushing impetuously past him, without allowing myself time to make any enquiries, when he suddenly stopped me with the very irritating and astonishing information, that my mother, accompanied by the wretch I so ardently longed to meet, had quitted the house upwards of an hour before my accidental interview with her maid, who I now found had purposely remained behind to mislead enquirers, and by that means secure them from the danger of a too speedy pursuit.

‘And where is the infamous woman now?’ cried I, in a voice almost inarticulate with passion and disappointment.

‘Gone, Sir, to her superiors,’ the man replied; ‘she followed them in a very short time after you spoke with her.’

‘How came her villanous employer to return so much sooner than expected?—and why did you not give me timely notice of this circumstance, according to your promise?’

‘The woman, it seems, Sir, sent a messenger with a note to Mr. Ormsby; which doubtless

brought him back so quickly. As to the latter question, I can only say that, not suspecting any thing of the kind, I was not prepared for the event that succeeded, consequently could not guard against it.'

"I was going to ask why he had not guarded against it, agreeable to my directions; but the mischief was already done, and could not now be remedied, unless by an immediate attempt to overtake them.

"The moment this idea occurred, I gave instant orders for the means of accomplishing it. But here my wishes were again frustrated, either from the real or pretended inability of the people in the house to throw any light on the route taken by the travellers, whose steps they positively averred were totally unknown to them: and after several ineffectual efforts to surmount the various difficulties I had to encounter on the occasion, all the information I could procure ended in learning, that a vessel had sailed for some part of the Continent early in the morning; but to what particular quarter no person could possibly conjecture with any degree of certainty.

"To conceal this painful intelligence for any length of time from Mr. Cramond, was soon found impracticable; and the fatal conviction it brought with it, of Lady Montague's innate depravity and total want of principle, proved a fresh stab to the already deeply-wounded bosom of her poor old father. From this moment he rapidly declined; his health seemed to have suffered an irreparable injury, and his spirits entirely deserted him.

"On the second evening from the departure of my unhappy mother, Mr. Howard rejoined us. The alteration that had taken place during the short time of his absence, in the situation and appearance of my grandfather, was too striking not to create the utmost surprise and alarm: and the latter, finding himself gradually weaker, at length conceived the moment at hand in which the long-concealed secret respecting our affinity to that gentleman ought to be divulged. Under this impression it was divulged; and the evidently desperate condition of the speaker failed not to have its due weight with his astonished auditor in dispelling all idea of intentional imposition, or casual mistake, through the whole of the very unexpected communication.

"Happily for me the hold I had already obtained in Mr. Howard's affection was too firmly established to be easily shaken; otherwise it is hard to say how my grandfather's confidential intelligence might have been received, since the visible irresolution he evinced in the course of the recital, and the apparent emotion of his mind, did not at first promise so favourable a conclusion to the business as afterwards proved the case. In short, a plain, unvarnished tale, aided by the force of previous friendship, finally triumphed over pride and prejudice; and in spite of the infamy attached to my mother's character, Mr. Howard at length acquiesced in the wishes of his expiring friend. My father's ill-starred union with Miss Cramond was forgiven, in consideration of the consequent misery it had caused him; and the offspring of that union were henceforth permitted to address their relative as the acknowledged children of his nephew Sir Charles Montague.

"Mr. Cramond breathed his last sigh in my arms exactly ten days from the period of a disclosure, the successful termination of which seemed to afford his departing spirit the only remaining degree of satisfaction it could now possibly taste on earth; and in three months after his decease, my uncle followed him to the grave, having first nominated me his successor in a will made expressly for the purpose, which contained, besides a few other trifling legacies, one of considerable amount to my brother, with several very valuable family jewels.

"The grief and regret experienced for the loss of two such valuable relatives was fully as deep, I believe, as any hitherto felt by a young man at my early time of life; and you, Stella, I

think, will credit me when I solemnly aver, that the great pecuniary advantages derived from these melancholy events, were so far from appearing in the light of a compensation for recent deprivations, that I would most willingly have yielded them up to the last farthing, if by so doing the much lamented death of friends so esteemed could have been prevented, and myself restored to their society.

“But though my sorrow, as I have said, was perfectly sincere, I pretend not to aver it proved more durable than that usually experienced by those who have only numbered the same years. At the time of life I had then attained, the first sensation of grief is commonly rather violent than lasting: mine gradually subsided; and though an affectionate, a tender remembrance of their goodness and worth can never be totally eradicated from the tablet of my memory, my mind, nevertheless, became shortly more tranquil, and insensibly reconciled itself to circumstances of irremediable evil, the final accomplishment of which neither human wisdom nor human strength can avert when the decisive fiat of mortality commands the vital spark of existence to finish its earthly career, and soar from corruptible to incorruptible regions of never-ending happiness and peace.

“At first I ascribed this comparative state of mental ease to insensibility, to want of thought, to want of natural affections, and a thousand other causes, which were all reprobated in turn, on account of the supposed effect they produced. At length I discovered that progressive time was the great cause of the whole, aided by the wise construction of the intellectual faculties of the mind, which are so ordered by a superior hand, that every thing shall work for good and useful ends; and grief, after a stated period, yields its place to the more active and necessary demands of the different stations allotted us to fill through life.

“Possessed of a fortune that might well be termed affluent, uncontrolled master of myself in the moments not devoted to professional duties, I plunged ere long into every species of juvenile folly and dissipation. Alas! could the worthy Mr. Howard have looked up from the grave, how differently would he have appreciated that mistaken confidence in my imaginary prudence which had led him to constitute me my own guardian, when subsequent events proved I was so ill qualified for the task of a self-director!

“In the midst of this wild career, the admonitions of St. Vincent, my early friend, occasional companion, and ever judicious adviser, were not spared, to effect a change in sentiment and proceedings so little congenial to his own. But temporary and transient proved the work of reformation: nor did the dangers and difficulties which were frequently encountered during the course of our abiding on the then hostile shores of America, so entirely damp this propensity for fashionable pursuits, as to prevent the mind from recurring to the same giddy round of idle indulgence on my return to Europe: even the attractive charms of Louisa St. Vincent, for whom I nevertheless experienced an attachment no less ardent than sincere were at first found inadequate to wean me from errors, venial perhaps, when my time of life and other circumstances are duly considered, but, notwithstanding, still highly censurable, in as much as my cooler judgment was not remiss in furnishing repeated intimations of disapprobation on the subject, although the too ready means of indulging confirmed habits continually plunged me into situations similar to those so recently condemned, on every succeeding opportunity that occurred.

“Soon after my arrival in your part of the country, several incidents happened to give my mind a more serious turn: with one of those, my dear Stella, you are already sufficiently acquainted; and to you my obligations on the account are infinite. After the foregoing confession of the nature of my former conduct, you may probably form conclusions not very favourable to

the sincerity of that contrition you have more than once witnessed for my part in the fatal affair which took place at Green-Bank. If suspicions of this description, however, really exist, believe me, my sweet friend, you wrong me much: of premeditated seduction, I repeat, I am, and ever have been innocent; I abhor, I reprobate the idea of such a thing, and would not be guilty of it for worlds. But pardon me, Stella; I trust assurances on this head are unnecessary to you; at any rate, they must prove superfluous, since what I have now said is but a renewal of former assertions to the same purport.

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CHAP. XX.

“Instead of rage,
“Delib’rate vengeance breath’d, firm and unmix’d.”
MILTON.

“THE more regular and rational mode of life which a happy necessity obliged me to adopt in the less fashionable and less dissipated circles of Galloway, afforded a greater portion of time for those serious reflections which the energetic and manly admonitions of St. Vincent had frequently, though transiently, led me to encourage: and—shall I confess it? temptation being now almost beyond the likelihood of appearing, to deceive or mislead, I felt my good resolutions gradually strengthened, and every intellectual faculty acquire additional force, accompanied by a certain degree of mental tranquillity, to which I had long been a stranger, but which now insensibly gained ground, and filled my bosom with sensations of the most agreeable nature.

“Otherwise situated in point of society, lassitude and *ennui* would probably have been the consequence of a change so sudden as that I had lately experienced, from the unlimited pleasures which on every side court acceptance amid the gay and dangerous allurements daily occurring in the metropolis, to the dull, unvaried, monotonous scenes of a distant provincial residence, where the corps to which I belonged formed the most prominent figure in the scene, and supplied the chief source of public and private amusement.

“The presence of Louisa St. Vincent soon confirmed the alteration, of which her brother’s constant precepts and example, in conjunction with my recent introduction at the Hermitage, had already laid the foundation.

“Had the first and latter of these circumstances taken place at an earlier period, I might probably have been spared much subsequent pain on account of the ever-regretted transaction with poor Maria Campbell: and yet, when the minutia of that business is fairly estimated, I may justly be permitted to say that self-reproach ought not wholly to attach to my—However, we will change the subject if you please; it cannot be agreeable to you, and never occurs without distressing myself extremely.

“Blest with constant and uninterrupted opportunities for entertaining her who had long been in possession of my heart, and enjoying every advantage that could be obtained from the friendship of the Major, and my inestimable, though new acquaintances at the habitation of good Mrs. Bertram and her amiable Stella, a new creation seemed already opened to my view; and I turned my eyes with increasing astonishment on the frivolous scenes, the degrading pursuits formerly adopted with as much eagerness, as if they alone contained all that was desirable, all that was praiseworthy on earth.

“In the midst of this pure and new-born felicity, or rather soon after its commencement, my father arrived in England; and eager to see this hitherto unknown parent, to whom I ardently longed to be introduced, I procured leave of absence from Colonel Arabin for that purpose; and the day of my intended departure was already fixed, when intelligence reached me, the nature of which produced a sudden change of measures, and rendered the projected journey then unnecessary.

“You recollect I formerly mentioned that Mr. Cramond had drawn up a written detail of domestic occurrences, one copy of which was designed for Sir Charles, before the fatal interview with my mother took place at Dover: what happened subsequent to that incident was afterwards

subjoined, at the particular request of the poor old man, and the whole forwarded to Jamaica, in order to make the Baronet master of what it appeared proper to acquaint him with.

“My father and Ormsby were personally, though slightly, known to each other while the latter remained in the western hemisphere; and the events that succeeded his return to Britain, of which Sir Charles had by the foregoing means been informed, were not of a description to efface any remembrance he might yet retain of so infamous a character; on the contrary, they rather served to rivet his face and figure more forcibly on the memory of this unfortunate husband, who, on his first landing at Falmouth, felt every single particle of forbearance instantly desert his mind on hearing the name of the unprincipled destroyer of his peace pronounced by some person, in an angry tone of voice, as he entered the inn to which he had been conducted on quitting the vessel. My father rushed to the room from whence the sound seemed to issue, and in the following moment discovered the cause of all his sorrows engaged in an altercation with another man, whom he had never before seen.

“The consequence of this very unlooked-for encounter may be easily imagined.—They fought; and Ormsby received the well-merited reward of his criminal conduct from the hands of him he had so deeply injured:—he fell! His wound was declared mortal; and the surgeon who attended him, gave it as his positive opinion that he would never see the dawn of another day.

“The expected result of this affair obliged his antagonist to think of his own safety. Sir Charles, who, under other circumstances, would have stood his trial, and firmly submitted to the decision of a British jury, found himself utterly unequal to the task of sustaining the mortifying recapitulation of domestic grievances, the sarcastic remarks, and galling rumours of recollected error and subsequent guilt, attached to every remembrance of his unhappy wife’s too culpable conduct, which he doubted not would soon be in common circulation, as is usually the case on such occasions, and which, however groundless, seldom fail to fix a stigma on the certainly blameless husband of her whose character in this respect remains no longer enigmatical.

“Actuated by the impulsive sensations of suppositions so repugnant to his feelings, and still further instigated to the measure by the solicitude and advice of two very particular friends, who were his fellow-passengers from the West Indies, he stepped on board a vessel at this critical juncture quitting the harbour, and, without enquiring her immediate destination, proceeded on the voyage, apparently indifferent on what quarter of the wide extended world he was next to be landed.

“His two friends were severally requested to acquaint my brother and myself with the circumstances of the foregoing transaction; and Frederic, who was but recently returned from a residence of some years on the Continent, happening to be more master of his time than, as a military man, I could pretend to, speedily followed our father’s movements, after procuring all the knowledge that could possibly be obtained of the vessel’s course, and the port she purposed making.

“It is but lately that my unceasing enquiries after them have been successful. They are now together in a safe situation; and the last intelligence I received from Frederic, mentions my father’s intention of returning to Jamaica. Happily, my fears on their account are, I trust, over, though they have long kept my mind agitated and uneasy, ignorant of their motions; for a considerable period elapsed before the confidential friends of Sir Charles could afford me the smallest satisfaction on the subject of either his or his son’s final destination; a circumstance peculiarly distressing at the time, as a series of tempestuous weather had succeeded their embarkation, which seemed to threaten the actual existence of the evils my busy imagination had created in order to torment me. I dare say the hints which frequently escaped me on the arrival of

the letters those gentlemen favoured me with relative to this painful topic, and the evident emotion every disappointment produced, cannot be yet totally effaced from your memory.”

Stella assured him he was not mistaken in this idea; and added that she had often sympathized with him in secret, without venturing to take the liberty of probing too deeply those wounds which he apparently wished to conceal from her knowledge.

To this Captain Montague replied, that it was not merely to her he declined entering on the detail of domestic events; for it was a theme he had hitherto cautiously avoided alike before every individual whatever who remained ignorant of the transaction.

“Indeed,” added he, “while Ormsby existed, and Lady Montague persevered in continuing a connexion so inimical to her peace, so disgraceful to her character, my soul shrunk involuntarily at the mortifying recollection of the freedom from justly merited chastisement enjoyed by one of the culprits, and my own unfortunate affinity to the other; and though frequently desirous to speak with you on these degrading occurrences, I continually shuddered at the thoughts of their introduction. Ormsby, however, is now in his grave; and whatever may have been the atrocity of his conduct, I war not with the dead. As for his erring companion, I am yet ignorant of her fate: that penitence and prayer may have succeeded to a criminal perseverance in guilt, I would gladly persuade myself is the case. I know her generous, but much injured husband and his son will not let any opportunity escape of discovering her retreat, and mitigating her afflictions, provided they are not caused by crimes of too heinous a nature, and merit any degree of indulgence. On this score, therefore, my mind is now become tolerably easy; and in this state the affair at present remains.

“Thus, my dear Stella, have I concluded the task of family historian, and related the principal incidents which have long caused me many a heartfelt and secret pang. Pardon me, however, if I add, that had I previously found you really implicated in the recital as—shall I say it? the child of her you so greatly resemble, which, in conjunction with the mystery enveloping your birth did not appear totally impossible when every attendant circumstance was duly weighed, I could in that event have almost overlooked the errors of an unhappy parent, and thanked her from my heart for the compensation afforded me in the acquisition of such a sister. Nay, even at times I still catch myself indulging this favourite supposition—a supposition strengthened by the apparent coincidence of circumstances, which I often mentally strive to render compatible with my wishes on the subject; but which, it must be confessed, generally eludes all my attempts for the purpose of actual conviction.”

Stella sighed as the flattering images thus suggested alternately rose and vanished from her view.

“Alas!” thought she, “no such good fortune is in store for me!—The unknown, the unacknowledged Stella dares not, after the lapse of so many years, hope to meet with a brother so truly worthy of her warmest affection, so well calculated to advise and protect her from evil.—Yet, Oh God!” she mentally murmured, “how desolate, how unconnected with her fellow-creatures, must be that hapless being who is even reduced to the humiliating condition of regretting that she is not the spurious offspring of such a woman as Lady Montague!”

While these mortifying reflections rapidly passed through the mind of our heroine, her companion seemed equally absorbed in his own ideas; and the silence now observed by the respective parties remained uninterrupted, till the wild, discordant voice of an owl, perched on one of the half-decayed turrets above them, broke the spell of abstraction, and recalled their attention to the late hour, and the lengthened time of their absence from Mrs. Ross.

Stella, languid and dejected, willingly accepted the offered arm of her military escort, and

casting a farewell glance over the venerable pile of ruins, under the walls of which she had sympathized in the sorrows of a much-valued friend, proceeded back to Dumfries; where, no further impediment occurring to retard their progress, their journey was again commenced at the appointed period.

It may here be proper to remark, that the foregoing information relative to Captain Ormsby's decease, proved erroneous, and was rather meant by his medical attendant to create a high notion of his own professional abilities, by the subsequent cure that was effected, than a real state of the case; for though the wound he received was certainly dangerous, it by no means proved mortal; and in the course of a few weeks he once more sailed for the Continent, which had only been quitted in order to settle some pecuniary affairs with the person whose failure had formerly brought him and his female companion to Dover. This circumstance, however, was not discovered by the son of the latter for upwards of two years from the date of his recent communication to Stella.

Captain Montague accompanied Mrs. Ross and her young friend as far as Carlisle; from whence, having seen them depart on the following morning, he returned immediately to Dumfries.

CHAP. XXI.

“Of those who sleep in dust so cold,
“For ever hid from human view,
“Shall many a tender tale be told,
“For many a tender thought is due.”

THE weather favoured the travellers, for it was now become uncommonly good; and Mrs. Ross bore the fatigue of her long journey much beyond the expectations of our heroine, or any of her domestics.

The situation previously chosen for them in Devonshire was commodious, romantic, and beautiful; and they were no sooner settled in their new abode, than Mrs. Ross, who was impatient to see her two younger daughters, and had promised to send for them when she reached Bellefield, directed Stella to write to them immediately on the subject. This commission proved too agreeable to the latter not to be executed with alacrity. But the pleasure experienced by their mother and friend on the prospect of a meeting so ardently desired, was speedily and cruelly damped by the disappointment that succeeded; for the answer received in return, informed them that Maria had lately been extremely indisposed, and was then confined to her bed with every symptom of a feverish complaint, which for some time past had been very frequent in the neighbourhood.

Extremely alarmed by this intelligence, our heroine was again directed to write to the governess of the school, requesting that Emma might instantly join her mother at Bellefield, lest she should catch the infection from her sister, and, like her, become unable to reach Devonshire for some time.

Before the end of the following week, this second letter was answered by Emma in person, whose joy at meeting with her mother and old companion Stella, seemed equally great with that experienced by themselves on the occasion.

The accounts received of Maria's situation for several succeeding weeks proved so very unfavourable, that Mrs. Ross at length formed the resolution of sending our heroine to attend upon her. As Emma could now supply her place at Bellefield, this determination was not supposed to interfere much with the other arrangements of that lady; and every former apprehension on the subject of infection having happily subsided, Stella departed, in compliance with the wishes of maternal solicitude.

She found the poor girl even worse than her fears had represented: weak, sick, and emaciated, every day seemed fraught with her final sentence; and Stella awaited the too certain approach of that sentence with a sensation even more oppressive to her feelings than she imagined could have been endured by herself under circumstances of a similar description.

While overwhelmed with anguish, and scarcely able to suppress the starting tear that seemed continually ready to burst forth from the restraint in which she strove to keep it, a lady of a most prepossessing appearance entered the chamber of the invalid, and approaching the bed where Stella was then supporting her sick friend, apologized in the warmest terms of regret for her unfortunate absence in the country at so critical a period, and in the language of genuine goodness, expressed the utmost solicitude to prove serviceable on the present occasion.

For two dreadful days Maria had ceased to speak above a faint whisper, and even that was now become nearly inarticulate, and required an exertion she appeared no longer able to

command. At the sound of the stranger's voice, she half raised her languid head from the bosom of Stella, and extended a bloodless, feeble hand for the acceptance of the former, while a transient gleam of something like pleasure illumined for a moment her pallid features, on which the seal of death had already fixed its decisive mark.

Stella, hitherto totally inattentive to every other object except that which chiefly occupied her thoughts, now turned her eyes from the face of Maria to that of the speaker, which, on examination, seemed not entirely unknown to her; and as she continued to gaze upon it, her heart began to palpitate with a sensation at the time perfectly unaccountable. The visitor, nevertheless, appeared neither to notice her nor her emotion, but silently grasped the cold hand of the poor invalid, while an unconscious tear trickled down her cheek as she bent over her helpless form, and contemplated the ravages of sickness on her young and once beautiful countenance; then heaving a deep sigh, and retiring a few steps from the bed, she conversed in a low accent with one of the attendants, and soon after left the room, evidently much affected by the hopeless condition of the dying Maria.

In a little time the latter dropped into one of those heavy, dozing slumbers, occasionally interrupted by convulsive startings, to which she had of late become subject. Stella then softly replaced her head upon the pillow, and quitting her situation behind it, knelt at the side of the bed, from whence she watched her looks with the most tender anxiety.

In less than an hour a servant entered with a small basket of very fine grapes, accompanied by Mrs. Mortimer's best wishes, and a hope that Miss Ross would find them refreshing.

"And who, pray, is Mrs. Mortimer?" enquired Stella, without appearing to take much interest in the question she asked.

"I cannot exactly inform you," replied one of the teachers who was then present: "however, she is the lady who called here lately, and I think must be in some manner connected with poor Miss Ross, for she has latterly seen her pretty often, and seems particularly solicitous for her recovery."

"I do not recollect meeting with her before," said Stella; "and yet her features are familiar to me."

"She has been absent in the country from the period of your arrival till now," answered the teacher.

As Stella had never heard of such a person, she conceived her idea on the subject erroneous, and ere the lapse of another hour, scarcely remembered she had even seen her.

In the evening, however, Mrs. Mortimer again returned. Our heroine at this juncture happening to be placed more in her view, attracted her notice in a manner so strikingly obvious, that it was easy to perceive she observed her with no inconsiderable degree of interest.

Supposing her one of the boarders particularly attached to Maria, she merely enquired her name of the teacher; and having learned it, addressed Stella in the most flattering terms of approbation on the tender and unremitting anxiety she displayed in behalf of her companion.

The affecting manner in which she spoke, the sound of her voice, and an undescribable something in her whole appearance, altogether struck Stella so forcibly, that, low spirited, and unable to command her feelings, she burst into tears, and hastily retired to a distant corner of the chamber.

Mrs. Mortimer gazed after her for a moment in silence, but checked the first impulse that inclined her to follow and renew the recent topic: she spoke of her, however, with additional kindness; and after giving some further directions relative to the invalid, and conversing a short

while with the governess below stairs on the probable melancholy event now fast approaching, this very pleasing woman departed, leaving a positive injunction to be instantly sent for when any material alteration seemed likely to take place in their patient's present alarming situation. Indeed it was her earnest wish to have remained in the sick chamber through the night; and she had expressed a strong desire to be indulged in the gratification of it; but to this proposal her husband, who accompanied her to the school, and attended her motions in the parlour of the governess, had previously put a decided negative, as her advanced state of pregnancy totally disqualified her for such an exertion of friendship.

The closing scene of Maria's short and innocent life now rapidly approached its final crisis; and before the dawn of the succeeding morning, that crisis was for ever passed. She expired in the arms of the much-afflicted Stella; and her gentle spirit departed to its native heaven almost without a sigh.

Our heroine, hitherto supported by a sense of duty and usefulness to her beloved companion, had sustained every trying occurrence, and borne infinitely more than her share of fatigue in the course of the recent and melancholy attendance in which she had constantly been engaged since her arrival in London, with a degree of persevering fortitude that seemed to set aside all considerations on her own account, and absorbed every feeling foreign to that which the most affectionate attachment dictated: now, when her presence and good offices were become equally unavailing, and exertions, mental or corporeal, no longer necessary, she felt herself totally incapacitated to struggle with existing evils any further; and yielding perforce to the oppressive load of anguish that overwhelmed every faculty of her soul, in a short period after the termination of her late cherished hopes and fears, she was removed to her own apartment in a state of mind nearly bordering on utter insensibility.

Mrs. Mortimer, who, according to the private directions of her husband, was not summoned to witness the decease of poor Miss Ross, found our heroine in the above condition some hours after all was over with the object of her friendly solicitude; and apprehensive in the general confusion and bustle such an event naturally creates every where, but particularly in a boarding-school, that she might not be attended with that degree of tenderness and care her present condition demanded, humanely requested the governess's permission to take her home with her in the carriage.

This favour was readily granted; and Stella, scarcely yet conscious of the transactions around her, was conveyed to the house of her new and kind acquaintance.

CHAP. XXII.

“The tear that flows
“From holy Friendship’s eye is register’d
“For future joys, when tears can flow no more.”

A FORTNIGHT had nearly elapsed after her removal, before Stella appeared sufficiently recovered from the shock of Maria’s death, and the succeeding indisposition that seized her, to leave her chamber.

During a great part of this time her condition seemed so seriously alarming, and her mental faculties so unsettled, that her worthy hostess could not at times divest herself of the utmost anxiety for the consequences that might eventually take place. At length, however, the disorder took a more favourable turn; and, agreeable to the opinion of her medical attendant, who had always averred there was no actual danger, she was soon declared in a state of convalescence.

She was sitting alone in her own room one evening when a carriage drove up to the house, and stopped before the door. Mrs. Mortimer had been from home for the greater part of the day; and she therefore concluded it was that lady now returned. A little bustle, however, succeeded below stairs; and one of the maids soon after entering, she enquired the cause: but relative to this matter the girl could afford her no satisfaction; all she knew being merely no more than that her mistress had got some visitors. This circumstance had nothing particularly singular in it, and therefore she asked no further questions on the subject.

When the hour of retiring for the night arrived, Mrs. Mortimer, after wishing the strangers good repose, repaired to the invalid’s apartment, in order to learn how she found herself; and having chatted a few minutes with her *protégée*, casually mentioned the arrival of a guest whose presence, she observed in a lower voice, could willingly have been dispensed with.

“Yet I speak not this from my own knowledge of her character,” added she, “for we are nearly strangers to each other, though she is the wife of my younger brother, who, I may venture to affirm, is one of the best and most amiable men in the world. Would to Heaven,” she continued, with a sigh, “his lot had proved equal to his merit! and then we should all have been but too happy! From some quarter, however, a little black cloud is perpetually rising to remind us of our imperfect state on earth: this grievance is, perhaps, sent with a similar view; and therefore we ought not to repine, but rather endeavour to make the best of unavoidable evils: at least, such I am determined shall be my mode of proceeding; and, whatever is the event, I can then have nothing to reproach myself with.”

As the topic appeared a tender one, Stella said little on the occasion, further than expressing her regret that Mrs. Mortimer should have any thing to give her uneasiness; and they soon after separated for the night.

Next morning Stella overheard two people conversing in the little dressing-room adjoining her bedchamber: the voice of one of them was speedily recognised for the house-maid’s; that of the other she could not so immediately recollect, though it appeared scarcely less familiar to her ear. The subject of their discourse seemed to turn upon herself and her situation; for she distinguished her own name in the course of their discussion, accompanied by several particulars, which had come within the knowledge of the former, relative to her late residence at the boarding-school, the death of Maria, and a long detailed account of the latter’s funeral, which

struck the heart of our heroine with a sensation of deep and acute anguish that swelled it almost to bursting. Her sobs at length became audible; they reached the party in the dressing-room:—a sudden pause succeeded. The housemaid then entered the chamber, followed by her companion. Stella raised her head, and abruptly looked round on their entrance; when, to her inexpressible astonishment, she discovered in the person of the latter Mrs. St. Vincent's maid Jenny.

An exclamation of affected surprise burst from the lips of the staring Abigail as she advanced further into the apartment and pertly gazed upon the wonder-struck Stella. After a minute or two passed in this manner, apparently with the design of identifying the person of our heroine, she turned upon her heel, and assuming an air of supercilious contempt, such as she had seen practised on similar occasions by her mistress, flounced out of the room.

Stella could not avoid remarking the masterly imitation; and, in spite of her present agitation, internally whispered—

“How futile, how trifling are the adventitious distinctions of rank and riches, while minds, formed of congenial materials, and thus levelled by nature, betray their original similitude, beyond the power of art or education to counteract!”

But shortlived was the mental soliloquy, and painful the train of reflections that speedily succeeded.—How came Mrs. St. Vincent's favourite attendant under the roof of the amiable Mrs. Mortimer?—She must have changed her mistress since Mrs. Ross left Galloway, for Mrs. St. Vincent had then no intention of visiting the south at this period; and indeed could not, with any degree of propriety, quit Rossgrove while Mrs. Arabin and one or two other friends of the family remained as her guests.

This recollection afforded a temporary relief to the thoughts of our heroine, for the elder sister of her departed Maria was the very last person she wished to encounter in the present weak state of her health and spirits; and unconscious of having merited the ill offices of that lady's maid, she gradually began to consider the unexpected appearance of Jenny as rather fortunate than otherwise; for however indifferent might be her private opinion of the latter's temper and prudence, still she was persuaded that the whole tenour of her own conduct and character, had ever proved too irreproachable to be mentioned in any terms but such as would do her credit amongst strangers. Considering the matter in this point of view, she doubted not, therefore, but Mrs. Mortimer would, through the usual channel of Abigail conveyance, soon receive additional conviction that her friendship and goodness were not thrown away on an unworthy object; for in whatever manner Jenny might evince her personal dislike, though ignorant of the cause that gave rise to it, she could never let herself believe the girl was so totally lost to every sense of truth and justice, as to give an unfavourable representation of a person who, to her knowledge, never even formed a wish to cause her a moment's uneasiness on any occasion whatever.

Thus judging of others by herself, she suspected not that hatred in bad minds increases in proportion to the unmerited injuries we have heaped upon the innocent object of our malevolence; a fact too well established by sad and uniform experience to admit of appearing in a questionable shape, however mortifying the truth thereof may prove to the honour of humanity.

One agreeable circumstance was sure to accrue, at any rate, from the very unlooked-for arrival of Jenny: she would now have a charming opportunity of enquiring after the dear mistress of the Hermitage; and perhaps learn something, likewise, of the unfortunate Maria Campbell; though on every thing relative to that subject, the utmost caution was requisite with a character of Jenny's description. The idea of a letter from Mrs. Bertram next succeeded: of this she thought herself perfectly assured; and wondering Jenny had not delivered it on discovering she was the guest of Mrs. Mortimer, Stella became extremely impatient for the appearance of the

housemaid, in order to make the necessary enquiries on this interesting topic.

While thus eager to realize the pleasing day-dream she had indulged with all the enthusiasm of warm and youthful expectation, the whole fabric was most disagreeably overturned by the occurrence of a circumstance she had recently endeavoured to persuade herself could not possibly take place at this juncture.

The door of her chamber was suddenly thrown open by the identical person who was supposed to possess the power of gratifying her wish for domestic intelligence; and in the following instant Mrs. St. Vincent, the formidable Mrs. St. Vincent herself, appeared at the entrance.

The flush of hope, of pleasure and expectation, which had coloured the late pallid cheek of Stella, fled with the rapidity of lightening, and she shrunk intuitively from the bold, unfeeling gaze of her very unwelcome visitor; while the latter advanced further into the room, with an expression of increasing malevolence on her countenance, which indicated insult and mortification to the terrified and trembling object of her constant, but unmerited aversion.

"You will now, Madam, no doubt, believe the evidence of your own eyes," said the Abigail, with a pert toss of her head.

"Wonderful! most wonderful!" cried her mistress, in a voice scarcely articulate with rage and every bad passion that agitates the human bosom: "this I could not have credited unassisted by the aid of ocular conviction. But pray, Madam," she continued, "was not your former attempt to seduce the brother's affections sufficiently atrocious, without evincing an intention to persevere in a design so abominable, by thus practising on the credulity of his sister, and daringly establishing yourself in her family? But, no doubt, my wise mother's candid, immaculate Miss Bertram would generously acquaint her hostess with the sum total of her adventures in Galloway; and should the authenticity of the confession appear dubious, why Captain Montague, we all know, can easily certify your claims to veracity, by producing a living proof in confirmation of what you may chuse to advance on the subject. Infamous girl! your impudence can only be equalled by your artful contrivances; and both, I firmly believe, are unparalleled in the annals of the unprincipled sisterhood to which you belong!"

Mrs. St. Vincent had now completely run herself out of breath; a circumstance to which the pause that succeeded seemed solely attributable; for to any humane or considerate motive, those best acquainted with the general tenour of her character will not ascribe it. The thing itself, however, proved of little consequence in the present posture of affairs; for Stella, who at first was struck dumb with astonishment and a total incapacity to comprehend the meaning of what she heard, became afterwards so perfectly overcome with horror and a faintness that seized her whole frame, that long ere the conclusion of the harangue, the sound of the speaker's voice had ceased to reach her, or her presence to inspire either terror or indignation.

Nevertheless, Mrs. St. Vincent was so absorbed by the spirit of unappeasable revenge, that she noticed not the groan uttered by her victim, nor heeded the motionless form of the helpless being who, with her head sunk upon her bosom, lay stretched, without sense or recollection, on the sofa that received her when her trembling limbs refused their supporting aid, and placed her in this humble and death-like situation before the eyes of her mean and vindictive oppressor.

Jenny, however, began to fear the joke had been carried a little too far; and the housemaid happening to pass the door when this idea first occurred, she hastily summoned her to the assistance of the invalid, and entreated her mistress to leave the room.

While this short conversation passed between the Abigail and her worthy mistress, the

housemaid, who had now raised the head of our heroine, suddenly exclaimed—

“Oh my God, she is gone!—the best young lady in the world is surely dead!”

“The best young lady in the world!” repeated Mrs. St. Vincent, in an accent expressive of the most hardened and unfeeling disposition, accompanied by an air of ineffable contempt:—

“perhaps so. But either *the best young lady in the world* quits this house immediately, or I am no longer an inhabitant of it!”

Having pronounced this with uncommon energy, the furious Mrs. St. Vincent indignantly retired, followed by her equally respectable attendant; who, nevertheless, had the sense to prevent her mistress from appearing below stairs till the first effervescence of passion had in some measure subsided.

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CHAP. XXIII.

“The stroke of Heaven I can bear; but injuries from man are not so easily supported.”

FARQUHAR.

TERRIFIED by finding all her efforts unavailing for the restoration of Stella, the housemaid at length rung the bell for additional assistance; and the consternation produced by the discovery of our heroine's situation soon became general.

Several ineffectual remedies were successively applied; but the condition of the patient remained nearly unaltered; and she continued apparently unconscious of every exertion in her favour.

Mrs. Mortimer, extremely alarmed and agitated beyond measure, determined not to quit the lifeless form of her favourite till the medical aid already sent for arrived. Having come to this resolution, she dispatched one of the domestics to Mrs. St. Vincent with an account of the disastrous condition of Stella, accompanied by a request to excuse her absence from the breakfast-table, whither she entreated her to repair without ceremony, and act as mistress of the repast, till she herself was again able to rejoin her, and resume her place.

“Indeed!” cried Mrs. St. Vincent, with a disdainful motion of her head as the speaker concluded his message;—“upon my word, very extraordinary usage it must be confessed! Things are really come to a pretty pass, when the daughter of Mr. Ross is only to be considered as a secondary object to a low-born country girl—to Stella Bertram of the Hermitage! Tell your mistress, friend, I am infinitely indebted to her for so great an instance of attention; but at present I do not chuse to avail myself of her politeness: I am not disposed for any breakfast at this juncture.—You are answered, Sir, and may therefore return to her who sent you.”

The man, however, did not return as commanded; but, not being able to comprehend the substance of what he heard, remained stationary, in evident expectation of something less inexplicable, and more resembling the commonplace messages with which he had hitherto been usually entrusted.

Mrs. St. Vincent was not in a humour to be trifled with: she repeated her orders for his absence, accompanied by a look well calculated to enforce immediate obedience; and the servant, with a countenance expressive of dissatisfaction and astonishment, instantly quitted the room. Mrs. Mortimer seemed equally at a loss with the footman to comprehend the unintelligible message he attempted to deliver; for it was merely an attempt, and so cruelly mangled into the bargain, that even Mrs. St. Vincent herself would have found some difficulty to recollect her own arrangement of it, had she been present at the time.

Nevertheless, concluding that the circumstance was produced by some blunder or misapprehension of the servant, and not doubting but her request to Mrs. St. Vincent had been better understood, Mrs. Mortimer, chiefly occupied by her extreme anxiety for the recovery of Stella, soon gave herself no further concern on the occasion, but strove to accomplish this desirable event with a degree of solicitude highly honourable to her feelings and character.

After a considerable space had elapsed, our heroine at length opened her eyes, and gazing around her, with a languid, yet terrified look, finally rested them on the anxious face of her friendly hostess; then suddenly clasping her arms round the neck of the latter as she raised her head from that lady's shoulder, a violent burst of tears succeeded, from which much apparent

relief was presently obtained. But though the faint murmurs and half-pronounced sentences that escaped her were yet too unconnected to be easily comprehended, the sound of her restored voice was speedily heard by the attentive Jenny, who had secretly stationed herself so as to observe all their motions; and no sooner were her fears dissipated by this circumstance (for Jenny and her mistress began to be a little alarmed respecting their share in the foregoing part of the transaction, as the consequences became more and more serious), than she hastened to her employer, and related the happy turn the business had now taken.

Relieved by this intelligence from apprehensions she now felt ashamed to encourage, all the late suppressed, but not yet subdued, evil propensities of her mind, once more returned with renovated force, from the galling reflection of Mrs. Mortimer's neglect, for which no adequate atonement had hitherto been offered; nor any further notice taken of her motions than if she had not been in the same house with the mistress of it.

Propelled by these irritating recollections, so hostile to the feelings of wounded pride and self-consideration, she listened to the information of her maid with a degree of inexpressible rancour, which increased on every given instance of Mrs. Mortimer's affectionate attention to Stella. At length she suddenly started from her seat, and, determined to be an eye-witness of what Jenny related with the most provoking aggravations, proceeded to the chamber of the invalid.

Mrs. Mortimer supposing she came from a humane motive, paid her some compliments under that idea; and was proceeding to speak on the subject which had caused her so great an alarm, when the impatient interruptions of her auditor, and the manner in which she expressed herself on the occasion, produced an explanation of her real sentiments, that proved by no means agreeable to the former, who, though she knew enough of her visitor's character and disposition to be perfectly convinced neither of them were of the most amiable description, yet could not have believed them so extremely the reverse, unless such an instance as the present had occurred to ascertain the fact.

Mrs. Mortimer, though uncommonly good tempered and gentle in her manners, was yet by no means weakly so; and on occasions where it appeared proper to exert herself, possessed sufficient spirit to resent premeditated insult, or ill-timed officiousness: rightly judging, therefore, if any case could authorize her to shew her sense of another person's improper conduct under her own roof, she was now certainly placed in that predicament:—a tolerable warm altercation ensued, which, though carried on with the semblance of politeness on one side, was conducted with so much violence and even scurrility on the other, that an open rupture seemed the probable, and indeed unavoidable consequence resulting from the whole.

In the course of this unpleasant *fracas*, during which she heard herself openly accused of the most degrading and atrocious propensities with which a vindictive, jealous woman could possibly charge her greatest enemy, our poor terrified heroine found means to steal from the apartment; but unable, in the present trembling agitation of her frame, to proceed to a more distant situation, she was forced to take shelter in the dressing-room; where, throwing herself into the first chair that offered, a violent burst of tears came to her relief, and soon proved of infinite service in removing a considerable part of the load that oppressed her overcharged bosom.

She had not remained here above half an hour before a voice she could not immediately recollect, accosted her.

"My dear Miss Bertram," said the stranger, "I grieve to see you thus; and still more to reflect that your sufferings originate in the unhappy temper of a person with whom our family

happens to be so nearly connected: but, believe me, in our opinion you stand fully acquitted of the charge brought against you; and both Mrs. Mortimer and myself will ever be found ready to do you any service in our power to accomplish.”

Stella was at first too much engrossed by the melancholy nature of her present reflections to pay attention to exterior objects, or to think of immediately uncovering her face, bathed in tears, to the observation of the speaker. At length, overcome by the friendly importunity of the latter, she raised her head, to acknowledge the sense entertained of her goodness at a juncture so trying and painful; and her eyes rested upon features certainly not unknown to her, though unable to recollect the friendly stranger’s name in the present state of her spirits.

This inability was too strongly portrayed on her expressive countenance not to be quickly understood by her visitor; who taking her hand, and regarding her with a look of ineffable benignity, tenderly enquired if she had so totally forgotten Louisa St. Vincent as not to recognise her in the person of her present companion.

Stella started—her throbbing heart beat quicker at the question; and while she apologized for her inattention on the score of sickness and distress of mind, requested to learn what happy circumstance had procured her the honour of her presence at a period so critical and embarrassing.

“I came to meet Mrs. St. Vincent at my sister Mortimer’s,” replied Louisa.

“Your sister Mortimer’s!” repeated Stella, with increasing astonishment: “is my ever amiable and kind Mrs. Mortimer your sister, Madam?”

“Surely, my dear Miss Bertram, you cannot remain ignorant of that circumstance after being so long under her roof.”

“Indeed but I am ignorant of it, Madam; and my want of information on the subject will not appear so extraordinary when it is recollected that, from the nature of my first acquaintance with the dear lady, she would probably suppose her connexion with Mr. Ross’s family previously known to me, and therefore judge it unnecessary to mention it. It is, nevertheless, true she occasionally spoke of a favourite brother, to whom she appeared particularly attached; but the topic seemed ever accompanied with some distressing remembrance, and therefore it was never prolonged by superfluous questions on my part: besides, I have hitherto been too greatly indisposed to converse much on any occasion whatever, even had my spirits proved more equal to the task of exertion than they really were. But,” continued she, bursting into a fresh flood of tears, “ill health and mental distress are only comparative evils, I find, when brought in competition with unmerited disgrace—they vanish into nothing.”

The voice of Stella here became inarticulate, and Louisa’s too much interrupted by her feelings to administer consolation, where it was evidently so much wanted. In a few minutes, however, the latter again addressed herself in the soothing terms of friendly compassion to our heroine; who, somewhat tranquillized and reassured by the tender sympathy of so kind a comforter, endeavoured to shew her gratitude by the subsequent restraint she put upon the violence of those sorrows that filled her agitated bosom.

CHAP. XXIV.

“Regretter ceux qu’on aime est un bien en comparaison
de vivre avec ceux qu’on hait.”

ROCHEFAUCAULT.

ALTHOUGH the sound of voices in altercation no longer issued from the adjoining room, yet the smallest noise in the house made Stella still tremble, and the colour of her cheeks undergo an immediate change; for she feared her cruel and implacable enemy would again appear before her, and again use her influence to render her contemptible in the eyes of strangers. At length, flattering herself there was nothing more at present to apprehend on that subject, she ventured to enquire after her tormenter, secretly wishing, yet hardly daring to hope that she had left Town, or at least was no longer an inhabitant under the hospitable roof of Mrs. Mortimer.

“The friendly interposition of Mrs. Arabin has effected a sort of reconciliation between my sister and Mrs. St. Vincent,” replied Louisa, faintly smiling, and endeavouring to suppress a sigh which heaved her bosom as she spoke; “but, from my knowledge of their characters, I much doubt whether it will be very lasting.”

“Mrs. Arabin, Madam—is she too in England?” asked our heroine.

“Yes, my dear,” said Louisa. “It was through her means my unfortunate brother’s wife came at this juncture to the south. Mrs. Arabin has had a considerable fortune lately bequeathed her by a distant relation, which rendered her presence absolutely necessary here; and Mrs. St. Vincent was seized with the whim of accompanying her. No person, you probably know, has so much to say with Mrs. St. Vincent as that lady; and, convinced she could not be with a more worthy woman, her husband readily consented to her absence, on condition she should spend a few days with Mrs. Ross in Devonshire. To this proviso she agreed; and I was desired to meet them at a gentleman’s house about half way to Town: from thence we proceeded to Bellefield; for on receiving information of Maria’s death, Mrs. Arabin wished to visit her poor afflicted mother as speedily as possible; and the situation of her own affairs fortunately permitted her to put this design in execution without any detriment to them, or inconvenience to herself. We arrived in London late last night; and this house not being sufficiently large to accommodate more than Mrs. Arabin and her companion, I removed to a friend’s in the next street, with whom I have long been particularly intimate.”

“But, my dear Madam,” interrupted Stella, with much eagerness, “tell me, I beseech you, how did you leave the family in Devonshire?—Poor Mrs. Ross—”

“Is in deep affliction,” returned Miss St. Vincent; “but, nevertheless, calmly resigned to the irresistible dispensations of Heaven. Yet, were I to hazard an opinion on the nature of her feelings, I should be apt to imagine she suffers not less on account of the living than the dead: her eldest daughter’s conduct was not exactly what either Mrs. Arabin or I could have wished while at Bellefield; her heart, indeed, seems totally callous to every sensation of filial duty. She declined to remain behind, though we strongly urged the propriety of such a measure at that time, arising from our domestic distress; but we urged in vain. Alas, my ill-starred brother! how terribly different is the character and disposition of this unhappy woman to yours!—Ah, why, why was so great a sacrifice demanded!—Would to God—but—”

Here the feelings of Louisa became too acute for utterance; and a pause ensued, which neither seemed disposed for some time to interrupt.

At length it was broken by our heroine; who, in a faltering, tremulous voice, enquired if the ladies were below stairs.

“No,” replied Louisa, wiping the tears from her eyes as she spoke. “Mrs. St. Vincent, ever occupied by personal considerations, recollected she had some articles of fashionable mourning to purchase, and condescended to request my sister’s company on the occasion. As Mrs. Arabin happened to be otherwise engaged, and could not attend her, Catherine, though still extremely dissatisfied with her late behaviour, would not again irritate her by a refusal. They will not probably return for some time. Meanwhile you are left in my charge: and as Mrs. Mortimer gave me a thousand injunctions on the score of attention, I must now take upon me to order my patient to bed; for indeed, my dear Miss Bertram, that appears the most proper place for you at present, as you seem completely exhausted by the preceding cruel events of this morning.”

This was really true, for Stella could scarcely support herself during the greater part of the conversation; and the exertions she had used, originating more in terror and apprehension than any other source, now subsiding, left her proportionably weak, as they had previously been too great for her yet precarious state of health. Two questions, however, still remained to be asked.—Did Mrs. St. Vincent purpose residing constantly with Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer while in Town? and what stay might she be supposed to intend making?

Neither of these enquiries could be answered with any degree of certainty, Louisa replied: the former depended on particular circumstances; though she talked of staying with Catharine when she left her husband, yet her temper and disposition were both so variable, it was impossible to reckon on what succeeding contingencies might produce; and the same assertion held good in regard to the time allotted for her continuance in Town. “But, my dear girl, more of this hereafter; I prohibit any further discourse at present. Hasten to obey the directions of your female physician; and, if practicable, endeavour to procure some repose.”

Stella, snatching the hand of her kind adviser, pressed it silently to her lips; and, assisted by the maid who usually attended her, retired to obey her friendly injunctions.

But though thus considerably prohibited from speaking on the topic nearest her mind, thought, busy thought, was not to be so easily repressed; and in the course of her solitary meditations, the idea more than once occurred of returning immediately to Bellefield. To remain where she was appeared now incompatible with the happiness and comfort either of herself or others: and what right had she to intrude on the peace of those very friends to whom she stood indebted for so many good offices since the period of her final separation from poor Maria?—Was she predestined to make every member of Major St. Vincent’s family equally unhappy with himself?”

The nature of this last reflection proved too bitter not to produce the most acute feelings; and for some time Stella wept, like a child, over the sad conviction of her untoward fate. One step, and one alone, remained to be taken; and she wondered that she had not thought of it even in the midst of her greatest agitation.—Yes, she would set out immediately for Devonshire:—it was her intention, at any rate, to have done so in a few days at the furthest; and, by Emma’s last letter, it appeared plain she was impatiently expected at Bellefield. To meet the dreaded Mrs. St. Vincent a second time could not be thought of with any degree of composure: under the roof of her mother she ran little chance of encountering so unpleasant an accident; for there Mrs. St. Vincent was less likely to come again in haste, than to any other quarter of the country.

Stella now soon arranged her plans for the accomplishment of a speedy retreat; and her mind, relieved by the prospect of a circumstance at present so desirable, became more and more tranquillized. She fell at length into a profound slumber; from which she awoke two hours after,

with renovated strength, refreshed alike in her mental and corporeal faculties, and fully determined on the earliest opportunity to put her scheme into execution.

The first object that met her view on drawing aside the bed curtains, was Mrs. Mortimer; to whom she communicated her intention instantly to depart; but that lady, no less tenacious of her right to free agency than the imperious Mrs. St. Vincent, warmly protested against such an undertaking in the present delicate state of her health. Stella, however, continued firm in her notion of the propriety of the measure; and Mrs. Arabin, who happened to be in search of Mrs. Mortimer, led by the sound of her voice, now joined them, and reinforced the arguments of our heroine with additional ones of her own. These proved so replete with good sense and rational conviction, that their kind hostess, though with much apparent reluctance, at last acquiesced: on condition, however, that Stella relinquished the design of commencing her journey till the following day; which, on being permitted to remain quietly in her own apartment, was reluctantly agreed to.

Mrs. St. Vincent, fortunately, spent the day abroad; and, as “night was at odds with morning” before her return took place, the two sisters passed most of the intervening time with our heroine; for Mrs. Arabin was engaged in looking over some papers relative to her own affairs; and Mr. Mortimer happened to be absent on a visit to a friend in Wales.

The kindness and friendship evinced by these two amiable women for Stella, was such as to affect her in the most sensible manner; and when the hour of separation arrived, she felt the pang of a final adieu scarcely less acute than that experienced on parting with her beloved Mrs. Bertram.

END OF VOL. III.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

STELLA OF THE NORTH.

A NOVEL.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS. LEADENHALL-STREET.

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STELLA OF THE NORTH,
OR THE
FOUNDLING OF THE SHIP.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF ADELAIDE DE NARBONNE, &c.

“Virtue can itself advance
“To what the fav’rite fools of chance
“By fortune seem’d design’d;
“Virtue can gain the odds of fate,
“And from itself shake off the weight
“Upon th’ unworthy mind.”

PARNELL.

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S T E L L A

OF THE

N O R T H.

CHAP. I.

“It is not a single spot
“Of such a mould, or fix’d to such a clime;
“No—’tis the social circle of my friends,
“The lov’d community in which I’m link’d,
“And in whose welfare all my wishes centre.”

THE morning was lowering and gloomy; it seemed in unison with the frame of mind in which our poor heroine departed from the friendly roof of the kind Mrs. Mortimer, and her no less amiable sister; but if thus forced to fly from those so highly, so justly valued, she was likewise quitting the only person on earth who had hitherto proved her decided and most irreconcilable enemy:—and for whom was she quitting this cruel woman? For Mrs. Ross, for her dear Emma.—Ought she then to repine at any event that accelerated so pleasing a circumstance? Surely, no:—it was the very thing she had long wished to accomplish; for had not Mrs. Ross repeatedly expressed the utmost solicitude for the restoration of her health, and her speedy return to Devonshire? and was she not now at last permitted to join those beloved friends? Ungrateful Stella, to feel the least depression of spirits with such a prospect before her!—How could a sensation so unpardonable possibly be harboured on such an occasion! Henceforth it should not be allowed to intrude on the better feelings of the heart.

“Yes,” continued she mentally, “I shall soon be at the feet of the almost sainted Mrs. Ross, in the circling arms of my kind Emma; and it shall henceforth be my endeavour to supply the place of the ever-to-be-regretted daughter and sister they have lost. Alas! that she who ought to make up the deficiency as far as human means can effect it, should prove herself so unworthy of being considered in either of these two points of view!—but no matter—since that is the case, it becomes me to show myself deserving of their flattering partiality by an additional degree of attention. If we will not exert ourselves for the purpose of mitigating distress, or even prove indifferent to the sorrows of a fellow-creature, we can hardly merit the appellation of human beings, nor presume to request that commiseration under misfortune which we refused to those, perhaps infinitely more estimable than ourselves, in similar circumstances.”

Thus argued the young philosopher as she pursued her journey to Devonshire, accompanied by a female attendant of Mrs. Mortimer’s, who was directed by that lady to take every possible care of her on the road.

The train of reflections to which she had given unbounded freedom, proved in the end extremely consoling and salutary: it filled her mind with increasing solicitude to act as she had prescribed to herself, and illumed her late languid features with a shade of the most interesting description: the *tout-ensemble* bespoke gratitude, benevolence, friendship, and filial duty, all blended in the same sweet countenance, and all alike expressive of the anxiety she felt to put her upright intentions in immediate practice.

On her arrival at Bellefield, the trial that awaited her soon afforded a sufficient opportunity for this purpose. Mrs. Ross and her daughter were extremely affected by her appearance; and even the foregoing wise resolutions of the traveller were more than once nearly put to flight by the excess of maternal and sisterly anguish which she was forced to witness on their first meeting, and in the course of the conversation that speedily succeeded it.

These two circumstances proved too much for the body, if not for the mind of our heroine; and in conjunction with the fatigue suffered by the one, and the internal struggle maintained by the other, she found herself under the disagreeable necessity of keeping her bed for the greater part of the week that followed her return to Bellefield.

Her health, from this period however, was gradually restored, and in the course of a month appeared to have gained ground amazingly; but a long respite from the vicissitudes incident to human life is not our allotted portion on earth.

Stella heard frequently from the Hermitage; Mrs. Ross grew no worse, and time began to produce its usual beneficial effect on the spirits of Emma: she herself had apparently become so far reconciled to irremediable evils, that an air of exterior tranquillity pervaded her countenance, which, whatever might be the secret pang it covered, was sufficiently visible to deceive superficial observers, or preserve her from exciting the troublesome curiosity of those hitherto unacquainted with the real situation of her heart.

Comparatively calm, and unruffled by the obtrusive form of any fresh or disagreeable occurrence, a considerable period stole away with a degree of pensive serenity to which the inmates of Bellefield had recently been strangers; for, if happiness refused to visit them, resignation to the dispensations of Heaven supplied its place; and our heroine vainly imagined this state of present ease was of that middling description to escape the ever changing influence of time and chance, those two great enemies to the durability of terrestrial peace: but youth and inexperience are apt to view a favourite object in the most desirable, rather than in its true light; and Stella soon found she had been guilty of this error, so common to those who, like her, were in a manner new to the world and the world's variation.

Mr. Ross had now been abroad for several months with his son; and his letters, though not so frequent as his lady could have wished, were yet sufficiently so to inform her of all that appeared materially necessary to mention. The death of Maria, however painful the loss of a child is generally found by a parent, seemed to have made no deep impression on the feelings of her father; who considered the deprivation of one child as an advantageous event to another, in as much as the survivor would receive an accumulation of wealth, in his opinion, fully adequate to compensate for any other loss whatever.

The second epistle after the decease of his daughter, contained many consolatory reflections on this subject, and particularly hinted at his intention of settling two thirds of her patrimony on Mrs. St. Vincent, who seemed to have regained in absence that place in his affections which the culpable tenor of her usual conduct had somewhat lessened before his departure from Scotland.

Mrs. Ross saw with deep regret the strange infatuation of this mistaken parent; but she knew that in any predetermined point, remonstrance was unavailing, and reason unattended to. Her son, however, was now again in a convalescent state: that piece of intelligence made amends for much unhappiness; and as they proposed returning soon to England, she judged it best to take no notice at present of the injustice intended to Emma, but rather trust to futurity, which would give the surest proof of her superior worth and consequent claim to parental affection.

She was running over the contents of the letter on the third evening from its arrival, when

another, with the foreign postmark, was put into her hand. As her husband had previously signified the intended time of his quitting the Continent, she doubted not but that this epistle was sent off on the commencement of their journey to the seacoast; and under this impression proceeded to examine it. The first sentence, however, undeceived her: it was written by her son, to inform her that his father had received a violent contusion on his head and left side by the overturning of a carriage; and as the medical gentlemen who had been called in on the occasion seemed rather apprehensive of the result, he thought it proper to acquaint her with the circumstance, as likewise the earnest desire repeatedly expressed by their patient to see her (if able to travel) immediately. He concluded with entreating she would lose no time in complying with this request; and enforced the necessity of the measure in terms so energetic, that Mrs. Ross, fully persuaded her husband was upon his death-bed, and overpowered by the sudden and unexpected nature of the intelligence, became instantly too sick to support her trembling frame: she was, however, happily prevented from falling upon the floor by the entrance of our heroine, who, perceiving her situation, darted across the room, and caught her in her arms just in time to save her from the threatened danger that might have attended such an accident.

Before she was yet sufficiently recovered to speak, she pointed to the cause that had reduced her to a situation so alarming; and Stella snatching up the letter, speedily ran over the contents. By the time it was finished, Mrs. Ross regained the power of articulation; and fixing her now streaming eyes on our heroine, enquired, in a low feeble voice, if she would not accompany her.

Stella started at the question: it was true she possessed few ties to any particular quarter of the globe; but to remove so far from her early and best friend, from the kind, the generous, the maternal Mrs. Bertram, appeared by no means a desirable circumstance. Her friend's health had been long in a precarious state; and, though better of late, yet at her time of life, no great dependance could be placed on the probable nature of its continuance.—Was it then for the child of her bounty, for the unacknowledged orphan who was indebted to her for life, education, support, for every thing;—then was it for this dependant being to desert her worthy benefactress at the very period perhaps when her services might be most wanted, and her presence particularly required? To cross the world of waters, to quit the very land she inhabited, to have no longer the comparative power of flying at a moment's warning to the respected friend of her helpless infancy, should sickness or any other unforeseen casualty demand her speedy return to the Hermitage:—her heart recoiled from the bare idea of a desertion fraught with such apparent ingratitude; and she was going to utter a mild, but decisive negative, when Emma, alarmed by the confused and unsatisfactory account given of her mother's sudden illness by one of the servants, abruptly rushed into the room, and no sooner obtained a knowledge of existing circumstances, than our heroine was assailed with fresh entreaties on the subject.

Unable to resist the united urgency of two such pleaders, Stella at length was compelled to alter her first determination, and give a reluctant consent to their wishes. In consequence of this change in her former plans, Mrs. Ross, Emma, and herself immediately sat down to acquaint Mrs. Bertram with what had passed, and to procure her approbation for what was then in agitation; and as the acquiescence of her *protégée* had only been extorted upon condition that she agreed willingly to the request of Mrs. Ross, an answer was desired without delay. Though the distance was considerable, yet hopes were entertained of procuring it long before they reached Dover, as the wind remained totally adverse to crossing the Channel, and even gave little indication of proving more favourable for some time to come.

After several days of anxious expectation, the much wished-for answer from Mrs.

Bertram arrived. It contained her cheerful permission for Stella to accompany Mrs. Ross, on whom, for the future term of her absence, she delegated all her authority over the movements of our heroine; who likewise received a most kind and affectionate epistle from the same friendly pen, and one scarcely less so from Maria Campbell, fraught with the warmest assurances of lasting regard, and her decided resolution to pay every possible and unremitting degree of attention to their mutual and ever-beloved benefactress.

The tenor of these letters were such as to convey the utmost satisfaction, though not unmingled with a certain melancholy sensation to the bosom of our heroine. Mrs. Ross had signified to Emma's late governess her intention of taking her abroad with her; and every thing being now in readiness for their departure, they became extremely solicitous for its commencement. They at length reached Dover without encountering any unpleasant accident; but were forced to remain two days, on account of the unsettled state of the weather. At last it permitted them to embark; and a few days more brought them to the residence of the Nabob.

CHAP. II.

“Has she consented?—What is her consent?
“Is she not mine?”

HUGHES.

THOUGH Francis Ross, under the first alarm his father's accident occasioned, had written in a manner that gave cause to apprehend the most serious consequences, the travellers found their fears considerably lessened on their arrival. Mr. Ross remained indeed still weak, and confined to his room; but he was now in a convalescent state, and no dangerous symptoms any longer appeared to render his recovery doubtful.

Whether the reflections usually produced by the seclusion of a sick chamber gave rise to a different mode of thinking, or nature, all powerful nature, made itself be heard on the appearance of a wife and daughter, is hard to determine; but the Nabob received them with a greater degree of kindness and condescension than he usually deigned to evince on any occasion whatever of a domestic description; and, for some time, all went on well. His recovery gradually advanced; and the health of his lady seemed so much improved by the salubrious air of Provence, the house proved so commodious, the surrounding scenery appeared so charming, and young Ross apparently took so much delight in the whole, that it was finally determined to remain in their present residence until the end of the succeeding summer, in full expectation that, long before the conclusion of that yet distant period, they would all be able to return to Britain in a situation, as to health and spirits, very different from what they experienced on quitting it.

Ever attentive and partial to our heroine, Mrs. Ross let no opportunity escape of doing justice to her favourite; and Emma failed not to follow her example with an additional portion of friendly warmth, which did infinite honour to her feeling and affectionate heart. Mr. Ross, however, paid her no particular mark of attention: he was civil indeed, when it appeared scarcely possible to be otherwise; and Stella, little accustomed to any notice from that quarter, received what he chose occasionally to show her, with the utmost propriety of behaviour:—and the line of conduct she observed in his presence (where, however, she came as seldom as circumstances would admit), was so exactly suited to the treatment she met with, that it placed her in a light far superior to the proud and supercilious master of the mansion, in the opinion of all those in the neighbourhood with whom the family associated.

Whatever occurred of a disagreeable nature in this respect at home, was, however, speedily forgotten in the course of the next delightful ramble amidst the rural and fascinating beauties which, in this charming country, surrounded them on every side.

In these rambles she and her companion Emma were not unfrequently joined by Francis Ross, who either was, or affected to be, so prodigiously attached to his sister, that he seldom wished to lose sight of her; and so different on these occasions was the behaviour of this young man to that of his stately father, that Stella usually found herself nearly as much at ease with him as with Emma. Of acquired knowledge, he possessed a considerable portion; and his long residence abroad had furnished him with a fund of information, which rendered his conversation no less amusing than instructive. Stella listened to him as she would to a brother; and she, like her friend, was never more gratified than when he made a third in their little excursion.

Time rolled pleasantly away; and the letters that at various periods arrived from Scotland serving to convince her all was as she could wish at the Hermitage, our heroine became

insensibly reconciled to her distant residence, and apparently satisfied with her acquiescence to the request of Mrs. Ross: but a storm as generally succeeds a calm in the moral, as in the physical world; and one was now preparing to burst on the head of Stella, accompanied with every symptom of overwhelming violence.

Possessing an ardent and sanguine temper, and accustomed from his earliest infancy to have every wish of his heart gratified, Francis Ross was alike a stranger to self-denial, or the usual restraints of parental attention. To converse daily with Stella, to witness her various amiable qualities, her uncommon superiority of mind and cultivated understanding, all of which, from the easy, indifferent light she viewed him in, appeared in their genuine lustre, unrestrained by any sensations she would not, in similar situations, have entertained for a brother—together with the striking elegance of her manner, her fine proportioned form, and beautifully interesting countenance, was not to be thought of with indifference; and the only son of the haughty Nabob was already gone an age in love for the humble Foundling of the Hermitage, before he suspected himself in the smallest danger of such a dereliction from the precepts and practice of his father, or that inherent pride of heart hitherto so strongly entertained by himself on every former occasion of the kind.

Of this circumstance, however, Stella (who thought of nothing less) had not, for some time, the most distant suspicion of his sentiments:—not so with her partial friend Emma: she soon perceived the attachment of her brother; but sensible he required no addition to his pecuniary prospects in the matrimonial line, and convinced in every other respect her beloved Stella was the identical woman born to suit his temper, and constitute his domestic happiness beyond any other being in the world, the favourable opinion he entertained of our heroine, so far from meeting with the least check on her side, experienced every encouragement calculated to stimulate perseverance, and render his sentiments of a permanent nature.

The marked approbation and friendship Mrs. Ross uniformly evinced for the object of his choice was equally, or rather in a greater degree, productive of this effect; for the more he knew of his valuable mother's character and disposition, the more he loved and respected her; while, on the contrary, though formed with similar violent passions, and a temper no less apt to become restive on every appearance of opposition, his father nevertheless stood by no means so high in his opinion, or so dear to his affections; for he well knew that family consequence proved the chief source of all his actions, and that he regarded no rule of conduct but that of the Thelemites—

“Do what thou wilt.”

It is true this same rule was overlooked by Francis himself: but there happened to be this difference—that when practised by the father, it generally militated against some favourite pursuit of the son; whereas it was never adopted by the latter, unless to secure the great point of uncontrolled self-indulgence:—a clear proof that one and the same thing may be viewed in a very opposite light, by (however paradoxical it may appear) two persons exactly of similar dispositions and temper.

Contests of this description were not, however, very frequent; for Francis had, as yet, given no serious cause to apprehend any formidable defalcation from the system of his father, in regard to notions of family importance. The attachments hitherto formed by the young man were, indeed, rather those of the day than the heart; and the Nabob, fully persuaded of this circumstance, seldom judged them sufficiently dangerous to risk injuring him by an unnecessary

exertion of authority, as the long, dubious, and critical state of health enjoyed by the sole male heir of all his well-acquired oriental possessions made him cautious.

To adopt any means *pour passer le tems*, that happened not to be inimical to the favourite views of this considerate parent, were consequently supposed allowable in the present instance, where the prospects for futurity proved so dazzling: and the wary Nabob so managed on all occasions of the kind, as to prevent every probable chance of disappointment by the previous, but secret precautions he took for the purpose. These would not have been neglected now more than formerly, had not two unfortunate events occurred to render them in a great measure impracticable. The accident that confined him to his chamber constituted one of them; the other proceeded from the absence of the confidential agent long entrusted with the honourable office of a spy on the conduct and actions of Francis. This man, under the character of a travelling companion, had been of essential service in more instances than one, to his employer: but a short time prior to that employer's indisposition, he had found it necessary to send him on some private business to Holland; from whence his return proved uncertain, though not impatiently expected.

Had young Ross been more attentive to his father's motions, he would probably have known the precise period at which he purposed, for the first time, quitting his chamber: he either heard it not, or the circumstance totally escaped his memory; and the Nabob had already ventured to the farthest limits of a very romantic garden, before his son thought of the matter.

Mr. Ross finding himself much refreshed by this little excursion, determined on repeating it the next evening, pleasing himself with the thoughts of the agreeable surprise his emancipation from so long a confinement must produce in the mind of his heir, who had been from home during the two preceding days on a shooting party, and was not expected to return before the end of the week.

Francis had for some time been occupied by reflections of the nature of his sentiments in favour of Stella; but pride, combating with inclination, hitherto held the beam nearly equal, and prevented him from coming to any decisive resolution. In the course of his present absence, the longest which had yet taken place since his first acquaintance commenced with our heroine, several circumstances occurred to accelerate his alternately half-formed, half-renounced intentions on her account:—several of his present associates had seen her; and as to see and to admire her proved one and the same thing, she was frequently mentioned in terms of the highest eulogium. An English Baronet then on his travels, young, rich, and accomplished, seemed particularly interested on the occasion, and repeatedly toasted her with every appearance of an enthusiastic attachment too obvious to escape notice: this, of course, drew the raillery of his companions upon him; and the style in which he replied to it, confirmed Francis in the idea already entertained of Sir William's design to make a tender of his hand to his fair country-woman.

Prior to this event, Francis had scarcely experienced the excruciating pang of real jealousy in so tormenting a degree: that worst of human sufferings now took entire possession of his bosom and shook it with uncontrolled violence, and maintained its sway with more than common force. Had the Baronet declared his partiality? and was he a favoured lover? were questions he perpetually asked himself:—if the latter proved the case, the prize for which they mutually languished was not to be relinquished so easily to a comparative stranger: he would contend the point with him, or the first man upon the face of the globe, while a single drop of blood remained in his veins.—Was she not under his father's roof? under the protection of his parents? and had he not a just title to interfere in what so materially concerned her future

welfare? Yes, surely: he was then justified in doing so; and Sir William should be instantly interrogated on the subject of his subsequent intentions. Such was the hasty determination of a nearly sleepless night; and springing from his bed, he hurried on his clothes to put it in immediate execution.

Sir William Harley was then on a visit at the house of an acquaintance who resided in the neighbourhood; but he had spent the preceding day in company with young Ross and the other members of the shooting-party, when the glass circling pretty freely after dinner, *à l'Angloise*, the Baronet had been led on to give his opinion of our heroine, whom he had previously seen, with a degree of warmth not by any means suited to the taste of the auditor most interested on the occasion, who, with his characteristic impetuosity, would have lost no time in ascertaining the extent of his supposed rival's pretensions had an opportunity been then attainable for the purpose; but it so happened that that was not the case, and the succeeding night's meditations terminated as has already been related.

Another disappointment soon followed the above-mentioned; for an accident had happened to one of his horses, which occasioned an unavoidable delay; and before this circumstance could be remedied, the morning was pretty far advanced. He set out after breakfast, however; but on reaching the *chateau* of Sir William's friend, he had the mortification to learn that the object of his pursuit had accompanied the family on an excursion to a villa some miles distant, from whence they were not expected to return before the evening.

Extremely dissatisfied with the nature of this intelligence, he was retracing his steps again in no very pleasant humour, and had already formed the resolution of repeating his enquiries when the time arrived in which it was probable the Baronet might be met with, when some of his sporting companions appeared crossing a field that led in a direct line to the road. These gentlemen no sooner perceived his approach than they quickly advanced, and insisted upon his dismounting to join them. This request he would gladly have evaded, but their solicitations were of too urgent a description to be long resisted: perhaps the accidental discovery that the day's sport lay in that direction where the Baronet was most likely to be encountered in his way back to the *chateau*, contributed in no small degree to procure his compliance with their wishes: at any rate he knew he could contrive to leave them, and accomplish his design by one means or another; for, should he miss Sir William on the road, he had it still in his power to obtain the intended explanation by waiting upon him at his friend's house in the course of his rambles in the adjacent grounds. Making a merit therefore of necessity, and even persuading himself that this was a much better plan than his former arrangement, as it conveyed less the idea of a predetermined resolution to force an avowal of the Baronet's views—a suspicion of which might possibly have put a man of his spirit upon his guard, and defeated the very intention for which it was adopted, Francis secretly applauded the lucky thought that, by thus removing every appearance of coercion, apparently smoothed the way for the ready attainment of the much wished-for satisfaction; and astonished, on reflection, to find he possessed so unusual a portion of prudence, (on which score no great cause for self-gratulation had hitherto occurred) he no longer evinced his former reluctance to make one of the party, but proceeded to accompany them with the semblance at least, if not the reality of good-humoured acquiescence.

CHAP. III.

“Not think of her?
“Impossible!—She’s ever present to me—
“My life, my soul!—she animates my being!”
HUGHES.

THE ardour of pursuit (for in the sports of the field Francis became insensibly interested for several succeeding hours) had, by degrees, led him to some distance from his companions, till at length, overcome with fatigue and mental anxiety, he threw his fowlingpiece upon the grass, and seating himself on the sloping bank of a small rivulet, facing the direction in which the Baronet was expected to appear, gave free scope to the reflections which successively rose in his mind.

The young philosopher, till now unaccustomed to solitary meditation, could not at intervals refrain from experiencing sensations of the utmost astonishment at the new and inconceivable nature of his present cogitation. From surprise, his thoughts gradually turned to the cause in which this wonderfully intellectual revolution originated: and a very short survey served to convince him that Stella Bertram was the principle by which every movement of his mind was directed, as well as the object of every idea.

Her power over his mind had evidently become great, when its influence could thus teach him a lesson till now almost unknown; for, prior to this period, his life, as far as the precarious state of his health permitted, had never been burthened with much anxiety, or a bias to self-examination; neither had an inclination for serious reflection often obtruded itself in the course of any favourite pursuit: his mental faculties now seemed to have undergone an entire alteration on every subject particularly connected with the more tender feelings of the heart; and though no sensation of loose desire impelled him forward for its gratification, sentiments of a new and very different description now throbbed through his bosom with pure and indescribable delight:—in short, the longer he mused over every circumstance that had recently occurred, the more was he persuaded that he had found a congenial spirit in the lovely *protégée* of his mother, who appeared every way calculated to make him happy.

“I will bear this tormenting state of suspense no longer,” he cried, looking at his watch, as he had repeatedly done before, and springing on his feet with vivacity—“no! Sir William has certainly returned by some other road; I will therefore proceed directly to the *chateau* of M. Vancour, and endeavour to satisfy my mind without any further delay.”

Actuated by this impulsive and irresistible desire, he bent his steps once more to the habitation of the same gentleman; where he was informed by one of the domestics that the family were returned, but unaccompanied by their English friend, who had separated from them on the road to pay a visit in the neighbourhood.

“By G—d, then my suspicions are well founded!” muttered the enraged Francis as he turned from the Castle gate: “he is gone, no doubt, to make his proposals in form to my father: but the consent of that father’s son must likewise sanction his pretensions, else——”

Contending passions here stopped his utterance, and striking his forehead with violence, he rushed into the woods, through which a shorter, but well known path conducted him, in less than the space of an hour, to the confines of his father’s residence.

He entered the shrubbery by a small door, of which he always kept a key, and was hastening forward to the house, when his sister unexpectedly appeared, and in the following

moment joined him.

Impatient to procure the desired information, he scarcely allowed himself time to answer her affectionate enquiries relative to his health, and the cause of his unlooked-for return, before the question of "Where is Stella?" in almost breathless agitation, escaped him.

"She is reading to my mother," was the reply. "But tell me, my dear Francis, why you seem in such emotion?—You have not had a renewal of your former complaints, I hope?"

In place of satisfying her anxiety on this head, he again demanded, in a still more perturbed accent, if there were any visitors then in the house.

"None," said Emma, regarding him with increasing surprise.

"None!" he repeated emphatically: "are you sure there are none?—Is my father alone?—Has no one called upon him this evening?"

"No, upon my honour!—not a single being besides our own family have I seen enter the doors to-day. Now, my dearest brother, satisfy my curiosity in turn, and relieve me from those undescribable apprehensions of I know not what, which your strange unaccountable enquiries have given rise to!"

"Yes, Emma! dearest Emma! I will satisfy your curiosity; for you have partly removed a burthen from my heart I could hardly support much longer. Answer me one other query, however, ere my promise is fulfilled.—Has your friend Stella evinced any partiality for Sir William Harley, or ever granted him a private interview, to your knowledge?"

"Good Heaven, Francis, what a question!—how could such an idea possibly enter your head!"

"This is no direct reply, Emma—you evidently evade giving one: speak to the point, I beseech you!"

"Well, my dear peremptory brother, I will speak to the point. Stella, to the best of my knowledge, never had any private interview with Sir William Harley; neither does she, I am convinced, entertain the smallest predilection in his favour. Are you now satisfied? and will you take some pity on the impatience your own conduct has created, and at length endeavour to lay the spirit of curiosity that at this moment exerts its sway so powerfully over your poor little sister?"

He snatched her hand with a look of rapturous delight.—"You merit canonization!" he cried. "Come with me to that jessamine arbour, and I will tell you all: but first again swear that Stella is indifferent to the attentions of this presumptuous Baronet; repeat the charming assurance once more!"

"I will not break a commandment even to please you," she smilingly replied; "therefore, if my word is not as good as an oath, you must rest contented with what I have already told you: by that I abide, and on that you may implicitly rely."

By this time they had reached the arbour; and as Emma already more than half knew his secret, and expected the confession that now speedily took place, they soon came to a thorough understanding of each others sentiments relative to their mutual favourite.

It is probable, however, that the family pride inherent in his nature, would still have prevented, or at least retarded the present avowal, and the consequent determination that followed, of speaking on the subject to his father, had not the powerful bias of inclination triumphed over every intervening obstacle when a formidable rival was supposed to come in competition with his long-cherished, though half-repressed views on our heroine's account.

When any particular measure was once fully resolved on, it was usually put in immediate execution by the impetuous and ardent Francis:—it was not from any apprehension of parental

opposition that he had hitherto refrained from speaking to his father on the topic nearest his heart; he had been too long accustomed to carry every point of moment with the Nabob, to let himself suspect he would meet with a refusal on an occasion of so much importance to his happiness, on which indeed he was clearly persuaded all his comfort in this world entirely depended; neither did he much fear a rejection from Stella, for she appeared to treat him with a superior degree of attention to any other man who approached her in his presence. This circumstance had frequently been remarked with pleasure, without troubling himself to investigate the motive that procured the flattering distinction he experienced. Emma positively assured him that her affections were disengaged; and though Stella had never told her so, she herself was firmly convinced of her opinion being well founded, from the whole tenor of our heroine's conduct when subjects of that description happened to be discussed between them. Emma said what she certainly believed; but Emma was no great casuist in affairs of this nature: warmly attached to Stella, and conceiving her (as already observed) formed in every respect to constitute the domestic felicity of a beloved brother, with the romantic enthusiasm of youthful friendship, she imprudently strengthened the rash resolution he had now adopted, and seemed to imagine the haughty Nabob could not adduce one rational argument in opposition to the final arrangement of her visionary wishes.

It is said that "man appoints, and God disappoints:" it may likewise be said that "the philosophical schemes of sixteen are apparently made to be overturned by the riper wisdom of six-and-forty." Those planned at this period by Francis and Emma, proved exactly of this kind.

The time recently chosen by Mr. Ross for his evening walk happened to arrive soon after his son and daughter had seated themselves in the arbour. Hitherto he had confined himself to a very limited space on the best sheltered side of the garden: the uncommon fineness of this evening, however, unfortunately induced him to extend its usual boundary; and he gradually reached the vicinity of their private retreat, unsuspected by its incautious inmates: here he was upon the point of presenting himself, in order to rest a few minutes on one of the seats, but the sound of voices issuing from within, speedily caught his ear, and arrested his further progress.

A very short time now elapsed before he became sufficiently enlightened on the subject of their discourse, to which he listened with a mingled sensation of rage and the most violent indignation: but, however irritating to parental feelings appeared the decisive tone in which Francis repeatedly expressed his immovable adherence to his recent determinations, the Nabob well knew that nothing was to be carried by a high hand with his future successor; and he now mentally cursed the folly and mistaken indulgence of his own former conduct, which had injudiciously led him to give unchecked licence to a spirit of itself abundantly headstrong, without the encouraging aid of a father's sufferance giving it increased force.

Disagreeable retrospection, however, on causes which were no longer removable, could at present be of no avail; the emergency demanded active exertions: and no sooner had his first astonishment somewhat subsided, than to these he turned his thoughts.

Francis had declared his resolution of mentioning the subject without further delay: it appeared absolutely necessary to frustrate this design until time was obtained to arrange the precise mode of his future proceedings on a business so critically important: this circumstance seemed absolutely necessary; but how, in the existing agitation of his mind, was it to be effected?

Emma had engaged, in his hearing, to procure her brother a private interview with Stella about the same hour, and in the same place, on the succeeding evening: this was not to be tolerated with the smallest degree of patience: in the opinion of Mr. Ross, it must, if

accomplished, prove decisive of his son's destiny, since he was very well convinced that a girl, with Stella Bertram's humble prospects, would not hesitate a moment on the occasion. In the first paroxysm of rage and mortified pride, he thought of instantly repairing to the chamber of his wife, and upbraiding her with the consequences of her ill judged partiality to the innocent, but reprobated object of his fury:—a second reflection on the necessity of appearing totally ignorant of the whole affair, however, led him ultimately to the adoption of more cautious measures.

It had formerly been settled between him and his trusty agent, (the ostensible travelling companion of Francis) that on any appearance of the latter's inclination to form a permanent attachment, unsanctioned by parental approbation, the lady implicated in the business was immediately, but privately, to be disposed of in a Convent for life. The Nabob possessed the golden key most efficacious in all similar predicaments—that key which opens or closes even the holy immaculate gates of a cloister with at least as much facility as St. Peter is supposed to do those of heaven. The case in question appeared of a nature to require the application of caustics; and the chief physician was by no means averse to their administration.

Though it had been the first intention of young Ross to address his father without delay on the situation of his heart, he was advised by Emma ere they separated, to make his design previously known to Stella. This circumstance could not, however, be accomplished from several intervening causes, before the period already fixed upon for the projected interview: it was not therefore without much difficulty he was brought to acquiesce in an arrangement which contributed to procrastinate the termination of his wishes. But the Nabob had at length the satisfaction of learning that his sister had carried her point; though this concession was only obtained on receiving her solemn promise to give him instantaneous intelligence relative to the yet dreaded Baronet's motions, should it so happen that he appeared at the habitation of his father.

As the vehement manner in which Francis had at first expressed himself, seemed to afford no chance of so critical a respite, Mr. Ross found his mind considerably relieved by the time thus unexpectedly procured for the accomplishment of his schemes. He concealed himself behind the arbour, when they prepared to quit it; and, agreeably to the plan settled between the brother and sister, the former had no sooner taken the road back to his friend's villa, and the latter returned to the house, than he followed her example, and retired, unobserved, to his own apartment; from thence he softly stole into a room on the opposite side of the gallery, which commanded an extensive view of that part of the country in which Francis had for some days been resident:—here he saw him winding through the adjacent plantation; and having fully authenticated the certainty of his temporary absence, the Nabob re-entered his chamber, and proceeded to ruminate on the safest mode of commencing the predetermined plan of operation, on the successful result of which seemed to hang the future dignity of ancient blood, and the honour of his hitherto uncontaminated name.

On the supposed fidelity of one domestic alone, he flattered himself he might rely with a tolerable prospect of security. This man had been some time in his service, but was only recently come from England. To him his master now partially opened his mind; for the wary Nabob made it a rule never wholly to commit himself on any occasion whatever where an implicit confidence happened to be not absolutely necessary. He found his agent prompt at comprehending his wishes, and ready to execute them beyond his most sanguine expectations.

CHAP. IV.

“Glorious hypocrisy!—what fools are they,
“Who, fraught with vengeful or ambitious views,
“Wear not thy specious mask!”

MAHOMET.

MR. ROSS appeared at the supper hour with a smooth brow and every semblance of satisfaction, which in reality his heart did not experience.

His unsuspecting wife viewed him with pleasure; Emma secretly hailed this apparent placidity of temper as a propitious omen of her brother's success; and Stella strove to evince her participation in their happiness, in spite of an unaccountable oppression of spirits which hung heavy on her heart, and seemed to forbode the approach of some unforeseen disaster, though from what quarter she was totally unable to conjecture.

The assumed condescension of the Nabob, however, gradually began to vanish soon after the servants left the room, and gloomy fits of abstraction succeeded; from which, however, on recollection, he seemed solicitous to rouse himself. His eyes once or twice rested on Stella with a scrutinizing expression, that made her bosom thrill with something like a sensation of horror. Before the lapse of another half hour she became insensibly too drowsy to keep awake; and on Mrs. Ross's noticing this circumstance, her husband suddenly recollected he had yet letters to write, which must be performed before the time commonly allotted to the indulgence of repose could be enjoyed.

As he passed the chair of our heroine, she raised her heavy eyelids to his face. He seemed now, in turn, to shrink from observation, and hurried out of the eating-room.

The chamber occupied by Stella was situated at the farthest end of a long gallery, from which a door led into an adjoining forest: this door, however, was seldom used; and indeed had scarcely been twice opened since the family took possession of the house. What, then, proved the astonishment of the first domestic who had occasion to cross the gallery on the succeeding morning, to find it standing a-jar! She would hardly credit the evidence of her senses to a sight so extraordinary and unexpected: but determined to ascertain the fact, she advanced forward, and astonishment was speedily converted into terror; for near it lay a handkerchief stained with blood, which was quickly recognised as Miss Bertram's property. Aghast, trembling, and confounded, she instantly dropped it from her fingers; and suddenly casting an agitated look towards the chamber of our heroine, she perceived the door there in the same predicament with the other: she entered it—approached the bed—found it empty, and uttering a faint scream, sunk on a chair that stood near it.

Recollection, however, could scarcely be said to have left her entirely, for almost in the next moment her faculties returned: but the restoration was accompanied by additional circumstances of terror; for the observation which immediately succeeded their temporary suspension, no longer appeared to leave the fate of poor Stella doubtful. The window was in a similar state with the doors, and on the edge of it remained visible the print of a man's foot: some few articles of her wearing apparel lay scattered in confusion round the room; but every thing of any particular value had been removed, and the drawers and trunks completely emptied of their contents. The disappearance, however, of these articles seemed trifling when put in competition with the apparent loss of their owner; and the affectionate girl, who proved to be the identical Ann formerly mentioned as much attached to Stella, remained for some time fixed to the spot, wringing her hands in an agony of grief, and too deeply agitated to acquaint the family with the dreadful cause of her distress. In this state she was at length found by one of her fellow-

servants; and the alarming discovery soon became general throughout the house.

Emma received the intelligence with horror, and a series of fainting fits succeeded, which, during the period they lasted, marked the powerful nature of her feelings in a very striking manner; and when they ceased, left her too low and languid to quit her room for several hours; in the course of which various enquiries were directed to be made respecting this mysterious affair, but without procuring the smallest satisfaction on the subject.

Though Mrs. Ross could preserve sufficient calmness to give the necessary orders on the occasion, her sufferings and anxiety for the fate of our poor heroine were not less than what her daughter experienced; nor could she help being greatly shocked by the cold, unfeeling apathy displayed by her husband on so trying an event. It is true, he issued similar commands with her own for the purpose of discovery; but these, he insinuated, would certainly be attended with no manner of success, as he was firmly persuaded in his own mind the girl must have eloped with some favourite innamorato, whose participation in her escape particular reasons might render it requisite to conceal, as well as their private attachment to each other.

Mrs. Ross listened to these cruel and unfounded surmises with secret indignation; but she was too well acquainted with his temper and disposition to attempt controverting an opinion, which, in proportion to its fallacy, would, according to his usual practice, be supported with unyielding perseverance, if the whim seized him to do so. Her attention, however, to the main point, was not weakened by any thing he could either hint or say:—she continued her search after the fugitive with unceasing solicitude, though constantly unsuccessful; till her debilitated frame, sinking under the load of anxiety that perpetually preyed upon it, finally became inadequate to the task of further exertion.

Overwhelmed with the extent of a thousand frightful apprehensions, agitated and unhappy, her former complaints returned with increased violence; and before the termination of the third evening from the fatal event, she found herself once more confined to a sick chamber.

But this circumstance, which, in the present situation of affairs, she deeply deplored, may, in some measure, be considered as a fortunate occurrence; for it probably spared her the pain of witnessing the distressing altercation that speedily took place between the Nabob and his son.

Emma, during the first temporary interval of composure, had written a short, confused detail of the affair to her brother; who no sooner received the heart-rending intelligence, than he instantly flew to his father's abode in a state of mind nearly bordering on distraction. The Nabob was previously prepared for an appearance of this kind; and therefore listened to the ravings uttered by the young man with every semblance of his usual indifference to the fate of those who, like Stella, were considered in an inferior point of view:—nay, he even carried his hypocrisy so far, as to affect to believe that the visible interest taken by Francis in her destiny, was merely produced by his feelings on his mother and sister's account, who were both known to be particularly attached to her.

This interview took place in the garden, where the Nabob was waiting the arrival of Francis; whose approach had, in fact, been sedulously watched for by the trusty agent of the former, and announced accordingly.

To put him, in the sportsman's phrase, on a wrong scent, was a matter of no small importance; and even this he artfully found means to accomplish. Francis, convinced that no time was to be lost in a business of such moment, was easily persuaded to depart on the Quixotic scheme of enquiry, without seeing either his mother or Emma, whose lamentation and distress Mr. Ross assured him would only retard his movements, without producing any beneficial

consequence whatever. Had Francis suspected his father's prior knowledge of his sentiments in respect to Stella, he would probably have viewed his conduct in a very different light: at present it appeared exactly such as he had reason to look for from a man of the Nabob's character; and therefore, without giving himself time for further observation, he vociferated for his horses, vaulted into the saddle with the utmost rapidity, and instantly disappeared in the direction his father recommended him to pursue. This, it may possibly occur to the reader, was not precisely the one most likely to crown his exertions with success; on the contrary, it proved diametrically opposite to that he ought to have followed.

On the evening of the third day, the unhappy young man returned, as might be expected, without having obtained the smallest clue by which to direct his future motions. Mr. Ross now artfully insinuated, in the course of their succeeding interview, that, in place of the ruffians who were supposed to have robbed, and then carried her off, it was possible she herself had, as he formerly hinted to his wife, eloped with some person for whom she was either ashamed or averse to acknowledge a predilection.

The bare idea of such a circumstance proved sufficient to rouse every particle of zealous fury in the bosom of his credulous son, who, no longer able to command his feelings, and totally thrown from his guard by the emotion this suggestion produced, quickly made a disclosure of what was already no secret to his auditor; and the confession was greedily seized upon to ease the rancour of a heart labouring under the burthen of parental rage and indignation, hitherto, with the utmost difficulty, restrained from bursting forth on the head of its devoted victim.

A violent altercation succeeded; and the Nabob, either betrayed by his now ungovernable temper beyond the limits of the cautious scheme predetermined upon, or no longer fearful of consequences, having dropped some words of a suspicious tendency, which his son imagined contained more than met the ear, and seemed to convey an intimation of his being acquainted with circumstances relative to the mysterious event of our heroine's disappearance, which apparently involved him as a party in the business, no farther regard to decency was observed by the furious young man, who openly charged his father with a knowledge of her destiny in terms of the most bitter reproach; and the manner in which the accusation was received serving further to strengthen this suspicion, he rushed from his presence with a wild air and a hurried step, vowing to traverse the whole face of the earth in search of the lost Stella, and calling down the most dreadful imprecations on his own head if he ever more considered that man in the light of a parent who could meanly, cruelly, and unjustifiably condescend to the (as he supposed) perpetration of actions so nefarious and inhuman.

Before he reached the outer gate of the court, a strong inclination to bid his mother and Emma a last farewell induced him to return. He ascended the staircase leading to their apartments; but the door at the end of the gallery was locked: he demanded admittance, and was answered by one of the domestics on the other side, that his father had strictly prohibited his entrance; and further, to ensure obedience to this order, was determined to retain the key in his own possession while the young gentleman remained in the vicinage.

Francis uttered another imprecation, and pressing his hand on his palpitating heart, flew from the house with a full resolution either to return with Stella, or absent himself from his father's presence for ever.

CHAP. V.

“Mid cloister’d solitary tombs I stray;
“Despair and horror lead the cheerless way.”
SAVAGE.

IT is now high time to enquire into the fate of our unfortunate heroine, who may be supposed to have suffered no small degree of terror and distress during the foregoing transactions in the family of Mr. Ross.

The private directions of that gentleman had been so punctually executed, that a soporific dose, administered in a small glass of wine, which she drank at supper, soon produced the desired effect, even before the usual period of separating for the remainder of the night.

From the profound sleep which afterwards sealed her eyelids and drowned every mental faculty in oblivion, little he knew was to be apprehended. In this state of intellectual abstraction she was easily removed to a Convent in the neighbourhood, the Abbess of which was entirely in his interest, and had previously been prepared for incidents of a similar description long before Stella arrived in the vicinity: that holy lady happened indeed to be the very person with whom Mr. Ross had agreed, should such a circumstance ever occur, to receive any improper object of his son’s (as he might suppose) permanent selection.

Unhappily for poor Stella, she proved the first female who was imagined to stand exactly in this predicament: of course, the first experiment made on the sincerity of the venerable Abbess fell to her personally to ascertain.

So undesirable a distinction would no doubt have willingly been dispensed with had any preceding intimation of the affair transpired, or even the liberty of choice awaited her acceptance; but neither of these advantages happened to make any part of the Nabob’s arrangement: and the astonishment of his unsuspecting victim, on the perfect restoration of her late dormant faculties, at finding herself in an unknown habitation, and in the presence of entire strangers, is scarcely to be conceived. Her situation, however, was soon explained as far as permission had been granted for that purpose; and she learned, with inexpressible horror, that the gloomy walls of her present abode were henceforth to become her prison, till such time as the person who commanded her destiny, judged proper to give other orders.

In vain did the terror-struck Stella implore to hear the name of her unprovoked, inexorable oppressor; the most tormenting taciturnity was invariably observed on this subject, and whatever could possibly lead to a knowledge thereof was cautiously withheld.

The looks of Mr. Ross on the fatal night of her removal frequently recurred to her memory; and sometimes her suspicions would light upon him as the author of her misfortune: but the idea was instantly checked as unjust and chimerical; for what offence, she asked herself, had she ever given him?—or why, if he disapproved of his lady’s predilection in her favour, should so strange a mode of proceeding be adopted to effect their separation, when the slightest intimation of his wishes would have accomplished it in a far less censurable manner? Mr. Ross, therefore, could certainly have nothing to do with the outrage committed against her. But was she convinced his daughter, Mrs. St. Vincent, was equally free from blame in the affair? Ah, no!—in that quarter alone must the storm that now nearly overwhelmed her, have engendered; for who on earth seemed to bear her any degree of enmity but the unreasonable, the capricious Mrs. St. Vincent?—And must she then remain immured for years, perhaps even for life, in her

present dreary abode—never more to see her beloved Mrs. Bertram—never, possibly, to hear again from the Hermitage—Mrs. Ross, Emma, the Adairs—Alas! alas!” continued the weeping Stella, wringing her hands in agony of despair, “what must be the dreadful feelings experienced by the guilty, when the innocent are thus condemned to such acute misery?—But can it indeed be possible that all communication with my friends in Scotland will be actually prohibited for the future?—No; I have undoubtedly misunderstood the mysterious hints of the cruel people with whom I am placed: I will therefore ascertain the matter immediately; to know the worst will at least prove some relief to my lacerated bosom.”

Such were the reflections which occupied the mind of Stella on the evening of her arrival; for, during several hours after that event took place, her ideas were too confused, her thoughts too much agitated, to comprehend clearly the change that had been effected in her situation.

Determined to learn the extent of her misfortune, in one quarter at least, she started from the hard bed on which she had thrown herself a few minutes before, and, no person being at the time in sight, rushed from her dreary apartment, without knowing whither to direct her steps after she left it.

A long gloomy gallery wound round this side of the building; she proceeded along it in the expectation that it would conduct her to some of the Community, by whose means an interview with the Lady Abbess (who had not hitherto become visible to her) might be obtained. After traversing it for a short period, it terminated on a staircase; this she descended, and speedily entered a vaulted passage, along which the beams of a setting sun directed her progress, as they darted through a few thinly scattered Gothic casements, of small dimensions, placed near the roof.

No single human being had yet met her view; and the solemn silence that reigned amid scenes so new and impressive, filled her mind with a sensation of awful temerity, to which, until this period, she had proved a stranger. At length the faint sounds of distant voices gradually broke the stillness by which she had been surrounded; and after listening to ascertain the direction from whence it proceeded, the lonely wanderer again commenced her route. She was not permitted to continue it much longer ere the same voices were perceived to become more distinct, and immediately a solemn funeral dirge was heard through the arched roof under which she trod.

Stella had never before heard any thing so strikingly mournful, so sweet, so soft, yet so well calculated to speak energetically to the feelings: hers became insensibly and acutely affected, and her tears flowed in unison with the sad, yet not unpleasing sensation now experienced. Little time, however, was permitted for this melancholy indulgence: the pale glimmering of torches began to appear at intervals on various projections of the walls—approaching footsteps were heard—and Stella trembled with increasing violence, lest the proceeding she had adopted might be considered as dictated by the instigations of an impertinent and unpardonable curiosity, such as would incur the displeasure of the Abbess, and consequently render the object of her present pursuit abortive.

Terrified by an idea so inimical to her design, she now became suddenly as solicitous to avoid, as she had recently been anxious to meet with the Abbess: hastily turning, therefore, to the first opening that appeared most favourable for the purpose of concealment, she softly entered it. The extent of this place could not be discovered; for either no ray of light any longer darted from the heavens, or else the walls altogether shut out the sun's beams; and from the glare of the torches little appeared to be apprehended. If distance were to be ascertained by sounds, a

considerable space intervened between those from whom they proceeded and herself; and concluding the danger of discovery apparently eluded, she seated herself on something like a small stone bench, and waited in silent agitation the result of her anxiety.

The moments of suspense were not of long continuance: a door was suddenly thrown open in a distant quarter of her retreat; approaching lights again gleamed on her view, and several people, sad, silent, and slow in their movements, advanced to the threshold.

Stella started from her seat, and stole hastily behind an immense pillar, rows of which, by degrees, became visible in the vast extent of her now better seen abode, as the torch-bearers, with downcast eyes and measured steps, preceded a long train of Nuns, who, enveloped in thick and flowing veils, each holding a small crucifix in her left hand, soon after entered.

The whole procession took a winding course round a particular part of the floor, chaunting the funeral service for the dead as they glided along. At length they gradually stopped, and the light becoming stationary, she saw a new-made grave, in which a coffin was deposited with impressive solemnity. Another hymn rose in plaintive cadence, and as the vocal harmony ascended, the procession again moved slowly round the receptacle of the silent dead, discovering at intervals to the view of the shuddering Stella that what she had before taken for ruinous stones and rubbish, was, in fact, nothing less than mouldering tombs and humble monuments, simply erected to the memory of departed members of the Community: it proved indeed to be their common burial-place; and she soon perceived that her late seat was a tombstone. This conviction thrilled through her veins with a cold, chilling sensation hitherto unexperienced, and which increased to a painful height as she heard the first shovel of earth sound hollow on the coffin. At every affecting pause of the singers this noise was repeated, till the grave could contain no more; and gladly, most gladly, would our poor agitated heroine have ventured from her concealment to follow the retiring mourners, when the ceremony finished, and they began to depart, had not the recollection she was a stranger and a Protestant restrained her steps. She knew, or at least had been told so, that there were Orders of religious Communities in that part of the kingdom who never permitted any of the latter description to be present on occasions of this kind:—those with whom her lot seemed now cast, might possibly be of the number: at any rate, her spirits were too low at this juncture to risk an experiment that might subject her to an accumulation of ill usage she was but very inadequate to support; and though every succeeding apprehension arose almost to agony at the probable chance of being left behind and alone in such a situation, a situation from the horrors of which she knew not how to extricate herself, as darkness would pervade every corner of her gloomy retreat on the instant disappearance of the last torch-bearer, and, of course, throw next to insurmountable difficulties on her attempts for emancipation; yet, nevertheless, she dared not, or indeed could not, move from the spot, for the more active faculties of her mind became torpid, and her trembling limbs seemed equally incompetent to any immediate exertion. At length she sunk on the pedestal of the pillar, as the rusty closing hinges of the iron door grated upon her ears, while the motionless tongue clove to the roof of a parched and burning mouth, utterly refusing to assist her by emitting the smallest sound in this trying and dreadful emergency.

How long she remained in this condition is uncertain; but a faint noise that proceeded from the same quarter of the vault, first roused her attention from its seeming state of oblivion. A light, feeble and unsteady, once more gleamed around; but it was of too indistinct a nature to render the cause that produced it for some time visible. At last two figures in long flowing robes, one of them bearing a lamp, gradually approached, and having reached the newly-covered grave, prostrated themselves upon it. She who appeared the taller seemed most overwhelmed with grief;

her sobs were sometimes audible; and then for a moment silence would again prevail.

“Alas!” thought the terrified Stella, “what is now to follow? If the spirits of the dead are permitted to revisit their earthly tabernacles, perhaps at this instant something more than mortal is before me:—but, on the contrary, should they prove terrestrial beings like myself—Oh gracious Providence! how the cheering idea vibrates on every fibre of my heart!”

Determined now to risk every thing, and even meet the displeasure of the Abbess, rather than endanger her own safety by losing this second and, possibly, only chance of effecting her liberation from the horrors that on all sides surrounded her, Stella raised herself a little higher, in order to obtain a better view of her unknown neighbours, and to endeavour, from their appearance, to discover what she might most likely have to hope or fear from their visit.

She who had carried the lamp had already quitted her recumbent posture, and having trimmed it, had resumed it from off an adjoining tombstone, where it had been set on their entrance. Her whole attention was now turned to her companion, to whom she seemed solicitous of administering every degree of consolation in her power. The grief of her fellow-mourner, however, was apparently too deep-rooted to benefit by any thing that could at present be said to compose her, and evidently baffled the friendly exertions of her more tranquil comforter. She spoke not, indeed; but deep and heart-rending sighs sufficiently indicated the painful extent of her feelings; and, in spite of every entreaty to change her posture, she continued stretched on the cold, damp earth, that marked the newly-closed and final habitation of the person so bitterly deplored.

At length she was prevailed upon, but not without great difficulty, to rise, and move from the gloomy confines of this extensive and dreary abode, leaning on the arm of her friend: weeping, languid, and sad, she cast a farewell look of unutterable woe on the sacred spot thus reluctantly quitted, and then slowly proceeded forward.

Stella started at the recollection of what must succeed their departure: she no longer apprehended there was any thing supernatural in the appearances before her, and, determined to know her fate, with all the strength she could muster, was going to rush after them, and throw herself upon their mercy, when, after whispering each other in a low accent, and keeping their eyes fixed for some time on the gate by which they entered, the two strangers turned back, and apparently approached the place of her concealment.

The palpitation of her heart increased with the increasing sound of their foot-steps: the possible chance of deliverance, now perhaps within immediate attainment, caused every vein to throb, and produced an emotion so extremely violent, that she feared her senses would again desert her, and by that means render her destiny inevitable, for it did not appear likely another incident of a similar kind would speedily occur to avert the certain evils which otherwise awaited her.

The veil of her who seemed the principal mourner had been thrown back, in order, possibly, to afford more free respiration; that of her companion was likewise partially removed; and the reflection of the lamp displayed two countenances in the softened lineaments of which our heroine conceived she saw sufficient to encourage her to accost them. The features of the former were indeed truly lovely, and the powerful inclination that stimulated an address to her humanity, gained additional strength every moment: still, however, some unaccountable sensation restrained her tongue from a free exercise of its powers, and she continued to watch their motions with the deepest attention. The light now advanced so near, that longer to hesitate was only rendering the chance of alarming them by her too sudden appearance more probable, and, perhaps in that event, hastening their departure with a degree of precipitancy which, in her

present debilitated state, might make every subsequent attempt to overtake them ineffectual. Terrified, therefore, by the fearful prospect of further delay, she quitted her hiding-place to put the momentous design, so long projected, in execution; but either her extreme agitation deprived her of the necessary portion of attention, or else her trembling limbs ill seconded the mental solicitude produced by the occasion, for, just when they came opposite the place where she had concealed herself, as she tottered forward to meet them, her foot struck upon a stone—she stumbled and, uttering a deep groan, fell prostrate before them.

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CHAP. VI.

“Amazement and illusion!
“Rivet and nail me where I stand, ye Powers,
“That motionless I may observe her well!”
CONGREVE.

PANIC-STRUCK by an accident so strange and unexpected, the two females shrieked, and in the first start of surprise the lamp fell from the hand of her who bore it, and the light was instantly extinguished.

For some moments terror rooted their steps to the spot; but a second and more hollow groan from Stella recalled their wandering senses to the nature of their present situation; and better acquainted with the private entry than our poor unfortunate heroine, they endeavoured to reach it with the most sedulous anxiety.

Two minutes more would have accomplished this intention, had not the faintly murmured prayer for mercy and assistance which Stella now found means to utter, once more arrested their progress. The person whose grief seemed most acute immediately stopped, to listen from whence the low-breathed accents issued.—“It is the spirit of my beloved, my lamented sister!” said she: “Magdaline, I will not yet depart: her unembodied form certainly crossed our path—yes, her soft voice still vibrates on my ear! Fear not, Magdaline; she was as good as beautiful, and comes not to harm, but comfort this half-broken heart!”

Magdaline, however, felt far more disposed to retire than remain; but her companion refusing to accompany her, she could not prevail on herself to leave her alone, and agonized with a thousand distressing conjectures, in such a frightful situation.

At this awful crisis, when their succeeding motions were yet uncertain, a spark, feebly glimmering near the spot where the lamp still lay, caught their notice, and a faint ray of hope cheered their minds with the idea it might perhaps be yet possible to remedy the recent loss of its assistance.

A circumstance, however, now interfered to render its recovery a far more arduous undertaking than at first was imagined. By what means could the possession of the lamp be attained?—it fell near the unknown object of their alarm; and in the attempt to regain it, something might possibly again happen to deprive them of their remaining senses, and perhaps drive them to a state of permanent insanity. Even the sister of the deceased felt her courage begin to flag, as repeated groans, intermingled with broken, unintelligible sentences, escaped the half-fainting cause of their perturbation; and before any future mode of proceeding could be fully determined upon, the feeble spark of light suddenly became extinct, leaving them once more enveloped in utter darkness.

Prior to this circumstance, Stella had contrived to regain her feet; and, aided by her vicinity to the then unextinguished, but weak assistance afforded by the expiring lamp, a transient view of the fugitives was unexpectedly caught, and again she endeavoured to reach them; but her exertions for the purpose were attended with great difficulty. At length, however, this long-desired point seemed nearly accomplished; for the moonbeams that now shone through a small opening, a little beyond where they stood still, trembling, and irresolute, gave her a second glimpse of their figures, without affording them a like advantage in regard to her: she therefore crept on with renovated spirits, and her agitation continuing to increase as the object of

attainment appeared to become more practicable, she was going to pause for a moment until the palpitation of her heart should prove less ungovernable, and had almost stationed herself in a position, from whence she conceived it possible to follow them, should they suddenly depart, when the female hitherto addressed by the name of Magdaline, whose attention was now attracted by the loud and quick breathing of our poor heroine, turned abruptly round; and the light of the moon falling by her change of posture on the white dress of the latter, she uttered a piercing scream, expressive of extreme terror; and seizing the arm of her now equally alarmed companion, they rushed through the private entrance by which she had been admitted; and, in spite of her efforts to follow them, every trace of their steps soon escaped her vigilance amidst the complicated windings of the building.

Finding it at last no longer possible to continue the pursuit, and convinced that, though she had left the vault by the very door which first conducted her to the interior of that gloomy abode, the passage she happened now to be in was by no means the same through which she had then passed, the poor bewildered girl knew not on which side to turn herself: an oppressive sickness suddenly came over her heart, her senses gradually fled, her eyes again closed, and total oblivion once more resumed its reign over the mind of the harassed and worn-out Stella.

When the restoration of her exhausted faculties once more took place, our heroine found herself on her own bed, in the little cell to which she had been conducted on her arrival at the Convent, and attended by two of the Lay-Sisters.

This happy circumstance appeared so inexplicable, that at first she could scarcely believe it possible, and for some time conceived the whole an illusion of the mind; but before the expiration of another hour, the fact was fully ascertained: and one of the females having retired, the other, who proved to be Magdaline, acceded to her earnest entreaties for an explanation, and she was indulged with a relation of the following particulars.

At the period when Stella quitted her little apartment in order to procure an interview with the Lady Abbess, the Sisterhood happened to be in the Church belonging to the Community, attending the performance of the last service for a departed member of the society, who was to be interred immediately after the usual religious ceremonies observed on such occasions were concluded. This circumstance accounted for the silent and solitary progress of our heroine, the house being at the time totally deserted by all who occupied that particular quarter through which she had wandered.

The abovementioned place of general worship stood at some distance, on the opposite side of a large extensive court, surrounded by high and gloomy walls of an immense thickness. The burial-place lay on the left hand, between the Church and the Monastery, from each of which long vaulted passages led to it. The principal entrance was never opened but for the reception of the dead, who were admitted in this direction immediately on the accompanying procession quitting the Church. The private door was seldom locked, as it could only be used by those who wished to pour forth their petitions to Heaven for the repose of some deceased friend's or companion's soul, whose tomb they commonly visited for that purpose; while the larger gate, on the contrary, served for a greater range than was judged either safe or necessary for the unconditional accommodation of the Sisterhood. Had Stella pursued the first path she entered, it would ultimately have conducted her steps to the Church: by turning too soon into another, she landed in the place already described, where her subsequent difficulties and distresses might have proved of a very serious nature, had not the opportune piety of the two Nuns eventually brought them to a more fortunate termination.

On retiring with the rest of the Community from the last receptacle of mortality,

Magdaline perceived the stupendous iron gate was left unlocked from some circumstance with which she was unacquainted; and knowing the ardent inclination of the weeping Juliana to revisit more privately the remains of a beloved relative, though apparently too much enfeebled by excessive grief to bear the fatigue of returning by the other way, which, in their then quarter of the building required a long circling course to attain, she felt rejoiced at the discovery; and solicitous to profit by it, softly whispered the result of her observation to her friend, and they agreed to seize the earliest opportunity of quitting their companions and effecting their design. This was not difficult to accomplish, for the order of a regular procession was no longer observed; but, on wishing to retire in the same direction, from the idea that it would render their absence less liable to notice, as it was unauthorized by the Abbess's permission, the imaginary sound of approaching steps deterred them, and they proceeded to the other side of the extensive fabric. What followed their final retreat has already been related.

The fugitive Nuns, on entering an inhabited quarter of the Convent, met two of the Sisterhood retiring to their cells, to whom they recounted the recent adventure in the vaults; and their humanity being strengthened by an acquisition of numbers, it was ultimately agreed on to repair again to the burial-place with all possible celerity, and investigate the real cause of alarm.

It was not, however, found necessary to extend their progress quite so far as the burying-ground; for Stella, in the interim, attracted their notice. They quickly perceived nothing was now to be feared from supernatural agency; and finding their efforts to recover her at present ineffectual, she was at length borne to her own little apartment.

Stella, as well as her spirits and strength would admit, poured forth a thousand acknowledgments, after the Nun had ceased speaking, for the very critical assistance afforded her in the late distressing emergency; and overcome by fatigue and the complicated sufferings experienced through the course of this eventful day, she fell into a profound sleep, which produced a beneficial effect on her languid frame; for she awoke considerably refreshed in mind and body just as the Sisterhood were returning from their midnight vespers.

Too much afflicted by the recent loss of the deceased to wish for the society of a stranger, Juliana merely enquired after the state of our heroine's health as she passed her door, and then retired to her solitary cell at the other end of the gallery.

Not so Magdaline:—she stole softly back to Stella, after having apparently left her for the night, and again entered into conversation with the unfortunate prisoner; who now learned many circumstances necessary to be known in her present situation, as to the various forms observed by the Community, the different regulations to be complied with by all new comers, the temper of the Abbess, which was represented as remarkably stern and austere, with a long train of particulars too tedious to enumerate; but not one item of information could she receive relative to her own affairs. Magdaline appeared, and indeed was, totally unacquainted with every event that had befallen her previous to the affair from whence she had lately been extricated: neither was her friend Juliana, had she been with them, better qualified to remedy this defect; for they happened to be ignorant of her very appearance in the Convent before the preceding incident introduced her to their knowledge in a manner so unexpected; though one of the Lay-Sisters who assisted them in the task of discovery, immediately recognised her for the young woman whose arrival she had accidentally witnessed when it first took place.

In the course of Magdaline's low-whispered intelligence, many circumstances transpired which served to impress the harassed mind of her conscious auditor with increasing sensation of terror for the tyrannical and unfeeling disposition of the Lady Abbess, whose character appeared of a most forbidding kind. To remain in her present state of doubt and uncertainty as to the future

arrangement of her destiny, was, however, in the opinion of Stella, too insupportable to acquiesce in without a single effort to lessen the corroding burthen of suspense; and, in spite of all that had been said to intimidate her from the attempt, she resolved to bring the matter to an issue, by requesting an interview with the dreaded Lady Abbess on the ensuing morning.

The communicative Lay-Sister at length bade her good night, and retired to the cell of the disconsolate Juliana, who, she informed Stella, had enjoined her to relate what passed between them, as likewise the situation of our heroine's health at the period of their separation.

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CHAP. VII.

“Sweet are the slumbers of the virtuous man!
“A kind refreshing sleep is fall’n upon him:
“I saw him stretch’d at ease, his fancy lost
“In pleasing dreams;—as I drew near his couch,
“He smil’d, and cry’d—‘Caesar, thou can’st not hurt me!’”

CATO.

THE oppressed and unhappy, if innocence smooth their pillow, seldom fail to benefit by the soothing influence of balmy sleep; while the couch of prosperous guilt, strewed with its thousand torments, and composed of thorns instead of down, admits not of the coveted visitor. The slumbers of Stella were of the former description; and her eyes had not yet opened on the broad glare of day when Juliana entered her room, and advancing to her humble pallet, stood silently gazing upon the yet pallid, but beautiful features before her.

The mind of Stella seemed occupied on scenes of a retrospective nature; and as she faintly murmured the name of Mrs. St. Vincent, a soft smile of conscious mental superiority sported in the dimples which adorned her lovely cheeks, and shed a mild ray of chastened resignation over her whole countenance.

The musing Nun felt her affections inconceivably attracted, and gradually experienced a degree of interest for the sleeping Stella, which, on reflection, surprised her, as their knowledge of each other as yet amounted to nothing; but the train of ideas that occupied her mind was speedily interrupted, for the subject of them suddenly awoke: and her visitor, after apologizing for an intrusion which she feared had shortened the period of her repose, expressed her unfeigned satisfaction to learn that the degree of it already enjoyed had proved so refreshing and salutary as our heroine assured her was the case.

Juliana now summoned Magdaline to procure their new acquaintance some breakfast; and the humble meal was no sooner finished, than the latter declared her intention of requesting an immediate interview with the Lady Abbess.

“Alas!” said the pensive Nun, deeply sighing as she spoke, “this is a step, Mademoiselle, I would by no means advise you to take. Our holy Mother is at present confined to her own apartment with a complaint to which she has for some time past been occasionally liable; and during its continuance her temper, soured by illness, and naturally none of the best even when in health, is particularly severe: I fear too, she is by this time acquainted with the incident that befel you last night, for several of the Community are more solicitous to procure her favour, than scrupulous about the means adopted for its attainment. Should my suspicions on this head happen to be verified, believe me, Mademoiselle, you had far better relinquish your design; for our Abbess is not over indulgent to heretics in general, and would never pardon your witnessing the melancholy ceremony of my poor sister’s interment, as she has long decidedly prohibited all that come to the house of your persuasion from mingling with those of our’s on every similar or solemn event of a religious description. Do not therefore, I beseech you, rush thus forewarned, into danger: suspend your intention until I can ascertain the extent of what is to be apprehended on your account; and depend upon my exertions to serve you if possible.”

Stella felt the utmost reluctance to acquiesce in this proposal: protracted ignorance relative to the nature of her future destiny, appeared accumulated misery in her present situation:

she confined her thoughts, nevertheless, to her own breast; and having returned her acknowledgments for the friendly interest evinced for her welfare, she made a merit of necessity, and finally yielded to the remonstrances of her young adviser.

The succeeding hour which they spent in each others society apparently increased their inclination for a repetition of the same gratification; and, before they parted, it was mutually agreed to seize every opportunity that offered for a renewal of the like interviews.

Juliana, though in fact younger than our heroine, appeared notwithstanding her senior by a year or two at least. This circumstance probably originated in some secret cause of discontent which preyed upon her mind (for she did not seem happy), no less than in her style of dress and serious turn of character, without using any uncommon exertion to attain the distinction. She happened to enjoy the good opinion of the Abbess in a particular degree; and, on this account, was frequently intrusted to superintend the arrangements made for those who entered the Convent, either as boarders or for education; a circumstance extremely favourable to the reciprocal wishes of herself and Stella, as it rendered the communication between them infinitely more easy of attainment than could otherwise have been the case. In other respects, the partiality of the Abbess did not seem a matter of that consequence to the lovely recluse that might have been imagined from the visible avidity displayed by many of the Sisterhood to procure it. Juliana was apparently of a retired disposition, and rather appeared solicitous to avoid, than attract observation.

In the evening she returned again to the cell of the disconsolate Stella, and informed her that her suspicions, she flattered herself, were groundless, as every experiment, which could be attempted with safety, had been made to sound the Lady Abbess on the score of her supposed knowledge relative to the late adventure of our heroine; but she appeared totally unacquainted with the whole transaction.—“I am sorry, however,” added Juliana, “to say that orders have been issued to pay the strictest attention to all your movements, and particularly to preclude you from the use of writing materials of every description. These directions, I fear, will be strictly executed: endeavour therefore to exert your fortitude on the occasion; and of one thing be ever assured, that in me you have a faithful and steady friend, who will, to the limited extent of her power, serve and console you, whatever happens.”

The heart of Stella, in spite of this kind assurance, sunk at the very gloomy prospect these words brought before her view. Perpetual confinement, something seemed to whisper, was henceforth to be her allotted portion; and that her old irreconcilable enemy, Mrs. St. Vincent, was at the bottom of this cruel sentence, she remained fully convinced of. To be permitted to hear occasionally from the Hermitage might safely however, be allowed, she thought, though writing to every quarter of the globe was forbidden; such a gratification seemed necessary to restore a small degree of that peace of mind now so unaccountably broken in upon, and could not possibly interfere with the nefarious plans of her inhuman oppressors, since no answer from her could reach the dear inhabitant of that far distant and much-loved abode. The idea of the sufferings Mrs. Ross and Emma would experience on her procrastinated absence, proved another source of anguish; though at times a small ray of hope would illumine her desponding bosom, from the fondly-cherished idea that her fate would not remain uninvestigated by her late protector and her warm-hearted daughter.

“No longer, however,” said she, suddenly breaking a silence of several minutes’ duration, and speaking in a resolute tone; “no longer shall my former intention be delayed.—I will instantly see the Lady Abbess, and know the real evils henceforth to be apprehended. Conduct me then, Mademoiselle, to her presence!—my determination on this subject is fixed and

unalterable.”

Juliana again expostulated; but every argument she could urge against the execution of this favourite scheme, proved ineffectual for its prevention: and though strongly prepossessed with a prophetic conviction of its unsuccessful termination, she at length preceded her, in silence, to the apartment of the Lady Abbess.

At the door her conductor resigned her to the care of a Lay-Sister, and ejaculating a mental petition for the attainment of our heroine’s wishes, suddenly hurried back to her own little chamber.

The Lay-Sister was no sooner informed of her request, than she left her abruptly to know the Lady Abbess’s pleasure.

Some minutes elapsed before she re-appeared; after which Stella was desired to follow her.

A heavy door, that grated on its hinges, was now thrown open, and our heroine ushered into the presence of a diminutive looking woman, wrapped up in flannel, and seated in a large oldfashioned chair, with a table placed before her, on which stood a crucifix, and near it a book of devotions. Her countenance, though sickly and wrinkled, bore evident marks of a haughty disposition: her eyes seemed to have a suspicious malignant cast; and the *tout-ensemble* of the whole figure was so completely repelling, that Stella, almost at the first glance, was tempted to wish she had paid more respect to the opinion of her young companion. It was, however, now too late to retract; and therefore summoning all her remaining fortitude into action, she proceeded to state her case, to request to learn the name of the person who had ventured thus to dispose of her; and finally desired to know whether or not she was to be permitted to keep up any degree of epistolary correspondence with her friends at the Hermitage.

The Abbess coolly eyed her while she spoke, nor once shewed the smallest inclination to interrupt her. A pause of considerable length ensued without any answer being returned; and Stella thinking her interrogatories not properly understood, ventured to repeat them.

The Abbess taking a pinch of snuff, replied, with a contemptuous smile, that she knew neither the Hermitage nor its inhabitants; and as she permitted no communication whatever with distant heretics, whose principles were her detestation at all times, and whose particular character in the present instance was utterly unknown to her, Stella must take the unavoidable consequence of her disobedience, should this order happen to be infringed.—“In regard to your other questions,” added the Abbess, in an accent of visible displeasure, accompanied by a stern severity of manner that made Stella tremble, “I am too little accustomed to be interrogated by my inferiors, to grant the requested satisfaction; and I cannot help wondering at your temerity in hazarding the experiment. Those who committed you to my care had, no doubt, sufficient reason to authorize the step: their confidence shall not be misplaced; I will prove faithful to the trust reposed in me. Retire therefore—rest contented with what I have said, and presume not again to appear in my presence, unsanctioned by a previous command for the purpose. The walls of that enclosure there” pointing with her finger to the window, “must be the extent of your limited excursion: should I find you attempt to exceed the prescribed boundary, even that indulgence is no longer granted. Our Daughter Beatrix knows my pleasure on this topic, and I am convinced will see it executed with punctual exactness and fidelity. Go—retire! I have nothing further to say to you.”

“But, Madam,” said Stella, with a quivering lip and imploring eye, “is no letter permitted to reach me from Scotland?—Mrs. Ross—my dear Emma—Oh Madam!—”

“Begone!” cried the inexorable Abbess, in a voice of fury; “dare you presume to

controvert my arrangements? Mrs. Ross and her daughter! they disown you: does not their visible indifference to your present destination sufficiently prove their total and merited estrangement?—Quit this room instantly—retire to your own, learn obedience, and endeavour to expiate former errors by succeeding contrition!”

Stella saw the danger and inutility of further perseverance, and, drowned in the bitter tears of disappointment, slowly returned to her chamber; which having entered, she threw herself upon the bed, where her bursting heart was allowed for some time to vent its feelings free from restraint or observation.

Though too much agitated to recollect the whole of the Abbess’s words relative to Mrs. Ross and Emma’s imputed neglect, enough of the distressing sentence remained impressed on her tortured memory to convince her, in conjunction with other circumstances, that she had no longer any reason to hope for their interference in her favour. Why such a defalcation from their former behaviour should have taken place, she knew not; for no explanatory cause could be drawn from any part of her own conduct, to elucidate the motives of theirs on the present occasion. It appeared but too evident, however, that her destiny had ceased to interest them; other wise, through the influence they necessarily derived from their superior station and riches, her retreat must indubitably have been discovered.

Stella reasoned more from her feelings than the cooler dictates of reflection: had she attended to the latter, they would have told her that the influence of monastic power was in this country paramount to any other whatever; and disposed of the luckless victims consigned to its care as best suited the particular nature of its own views, without troubling itself about the little trifling articles of right or wrong, of moral rectitude or moral depravity, beyond the narrow but prudential limits of individual consideration, whether taken *in toto* as a community, or a single unconnected body.

CHAP. VIII.

“How happy is the blameless Vestal’s lot!
“The world forgetting, by the world forgot;
“Labour and rest that equal periods keep;
“Obedient slumbers that can wake and weep;
“Desires compos’d, affections ever even;
“Tears that delight, and sighs that waft to heaven.”

POPE.

JULIANA was not much surprised when Stella related the result of her conference with the Abbess, which, with a heavy heart, she had an opportunity of doing soon after she returned to her gloomy apartment, where her new friend, in the course of the succeeding hour, joined her.

Day succeeded day in the same dreary, monotonous manner, unvaried by the smallest change, or the most distant ray of hope: every avenue to the latter seemed eternally closed on earth to our heroine, whose repeated exertions to procure some intelligence of Mrs. Ross and her family proved continually unsuccessful, as did likewise those yet more eagerly attempted for the purpose of hearing from Scotland; for, though she had found means to get one or two letters privately sent off to her beloved Mrs. Bertram, no answer in return ever reached her; and perpetual disappointment at length teaching her the vanity of expectation, she concluded herself no longer remembered beyond the walls of her present prison, to which limited space it seemed now become necessary to confine all her future prospects in this life.

“I have been from my birth an outcast from society!” sighed she to herself, as she sat one evening musing over various incidents which had befallen her. “Before this once unlooked-for termination to my sad fate, the ties of humanity (I may add charity likewise) alone bound me to the world, where, unconnected and forlorn, I possessed no claim to a natural protector! From that world I seem at last to be thrown for ever.—Well, what then?—suppose it is so, I have no right to complain, because not a single being whatsoever is interested in my weal or woe; and consequently none can in that case be stigmatized for a failure, where no duty could be infringed on account of the unacknowledged and finally forgotten Stella.”

This train of thought was too bitter to be pursued without experiencing the most acute anguish; and for several weeks after the heart-rending conviction of her friendless, desolate condition, and the futility of all succeeding expectation became fully ascertained, a slow fever preyed upon her spirits, her health gradually declined, and she was in the end necessitated to keep her bed for a considerable time, during the greater part of which Juliana seldom quitted her pillow, unless to attend the unavoidable duties attached to her situation.

Happily for them both, Beatrix, to whom the ostensible charge of our heroine had been consigned by the proud and unfeeling Abbess, was of a very different disposition from the latter; for, though of a character to justify the confidence reposed in her, and impenetrable to every degree of corruption, or any attempt to make her deviate from the smallest item of what she conceived a duty, that duty was never carried beyond the verge of humanity, nor a fellow-creature intrusted to her care suffered to experience the least uneasiness in her power to avert without trenching on the sacred nature of the offices, she had undertaken to perform.

Stella had the particularly good fortune to please this worthy woman on her first arrival; and through her means enjoyed several little indulgencies, to which, in other circumstances, she

would probably have been a stranger. Youth, with a good constitution, in conjunction with the above advantages, triumphed in time over the nature of her indisposition; and, what was yet of greater importance, the leisure afforded for reflection on the necessity of submission to irremediable evils (a lesson likewise continually inculcated by her friendly companions) insensibly soothed her mind, if not to a state of perfect contentment, at least to one of comparative ease.

Stella alive in every condition of life to the warm impulse of gratitude, conceived the large demands now made upon it required something more than mere words to display its extent; and, under this impression, endeavoured to render herself as useful as possible to Beatrix, by paying the most unremitting attention to the execution of every little piece of service the good Nun intrusted to her management.

This was one of the wisest resolutions she had ever formed, and finally proved its own reward; for mental inertness always increases the existing evil; whereas a contrary mode of proceeding, by keeping the mind and body in constant employment, detaches the former from the influence of corroding reflections, and strengthens the latter, by calling the active propensities of our nature into play.

Had Major St. Vincent remained unmarried, our heroine might not perhaps have found the task of conformity and resignation quite so easy: but a fatal bar was for ever placed between them; and he, like the rest of the world, could apparently be no longer any thing to her. This circumstance, so often secretly deplored in the course of other days, now presented a much altered aspect, and served to make her still more indifferent as to the future termination of her fate: nay, at times, it almost reconciled her to what had happened; for where hope was in every quarter extinct, disappointment could not again reach her. This proved indeed the philosophy of necessity; but if it acted so as to assimilate the mind to its allotted station, the effects it produced were certainly of a more efficacious description than the generality of those usually emanating from sources of a far different kind.

Though a considerable proficient in the French language, and able to read and speak it with ease, Stella still preferred that of her native land to any other in which to convey her sentiments. It was not therefore without sensations of infinite pleasure, that she discovered Juliana was able to converse with her in English: this gratification, however, she was not permitted to enjoy till several weeks had elapsed after her arrival, when a very unforeseen accident procured her the information.

It may be remembered that a considerable part of her most valuable personal property had been removed with herself from the habitation of the Nabob. Stella, too much dispirited and indisposed to pay much attention to its arrangement in her new abode, had allowed the greater portion of it to remain in the state it was then in, without troubling herself to look it over. Hitherto the quarter of the globe from whence she came had never transpired, as she continually spoke French, and Juliana did the same, neither of them supposing the other acquainted with any other language in which to communicate their sentiments: no suspicion of the truth in this respect was therefore harboured on the occasion: but the veil of ignorance was soon to be rent asunder; and the two friends, by the sympathy produced from succeeding events, yet more endeared to each other.

Finding herself one day more than usually inclined to substitute order for confusion, Stella set about the task of replacing her things in the best manner the limited nature of her few accommodations would admit. The ruffians by whom she had been conveyed to the Convent, had thrown her clothes and the other little articles she possessed into a large trunk just in the

same confused manner in which they were hurried from the drawers that contained them in the chamber she then occupied: to effect a thorough reform, it therefore became necessary to empty the whole contents on the floor, from whence they could be taken in the succession that best suited their future destination and her convenience.

In the midst of this employment, Juliana entered, but was instantly retiring again upon perceiving our heroine's present occupation, when the latter requested her visitor to return and be seated. This invitation was accepted, and Stella continued the business she was previously engaged in.

"I will thank you for that small parcel, Mademoiselle," said she, pointing to something wrapped in a piece of paper that lay on a chair near the one in which the Nun was placed.

Juliana immediately took it up; but the paper happened to be loose, and the article it contained slipping from it, dropped upon the floor. The force with which it fell burst open the spring of a shagreen case; and the small miniature so frequently commemorated, caught the eye of the recluse as she stooped to lift it up.

A circumstance nearly similar had formerly made a like discovery to Captain Montague. The present incident brought the preceding one forcibly to remembrance; and Stella, overcome by the numerous recollections that speedily followed, rested her head on the corner of a table by which she happened to be kneeling on the floor, and became suddenly so absorbed in thought that she observed not at first the new and unaccountable emotion of her companion, whose whole attention seemed rivetted on the inanimate object before her.

CHAP. IX.

“Though now through Fate’s dark path we devious stray,
“Maturing time shall smooth the wand’ers way.”

“WHAT do I see?” cried the Nun, in a voice of surprise; then, as if suddenly recollecting herself, she added with an air of more composure, “this is your own picture I presume, Mademoiselle?”

“No,” replied Stella, starting from her reverie, “it is not.”

“No!” repeated Juliana, with increasing emotion; “the resemblance is so amazingly striking, I could not have supposed myself mistaken.”

“It is not mine, however.”

“I ask your pardon then; the likeness misled me: but the same idea has, probably, ere now, produced the same conclusion?”

“It has,” answered Stella: “nevertheless, such accidental circumstances frequently occur without the appearance of any previous cause.”

Juliana seemed by no means satisfied with this reply; and after regarding Stella and the miniature alternately, again renewed the subject, by enquiring if it was not designed for some near relation.

“It may perhaps be,” she added, in a tremulous, hesitating tone, while her late pallid cheeks became heightened to the deepest shade of crimson, “it may perhaps be intended for a parent’s—a—mother’s portrait!”

“Alas!” sighed Stella, “I never had the happiness to be acknowledged by——” maternal tenderness, she would have said, but here articulation failed her; and again reclining her face on the side of the table, she permitted the tear to flow that painful recollection had already swelled to the verge of its last boundary.

Juliana was evidently no less affected by the influence of some sad and oppressive remembrance. At length, however, she rose, and approaching Stella, solemnly adjured her to say by what title, if not a filial one, that picture became her property.

“First tell me,” returned our heroine, raising her swimming eyes with astonishment to the speaker, “first tell me from what motive this interrogatory originates; why is the enquiry made?”

“Because,” replied the other, in extreme agitation, “because she whom that painting indubitably represents, was——my mother!”

“Oh God of heaven and earth!” exclaimed Stella, abruptly, “can it be possible!—But, no,” she continued, after a temporary pause; “she whom I have reason to believe the original of that miniature was not a Frenchwoman, consequently could not be your mother.”

“The imaginary objection instantly ceases,” said Juliana, with quickness, “when I tell you my unfortunate parents were of English extraction.”

“Indeed!” cried Stella, with a look expressive of agreeable surprise; “I knew not I was so happy as to have the daughter of a countrywoman for my friend in this dreary abode.”

“Your countrywoman! are you likewise from Great Britain, Mademoiselle?”

“I am,” again sighed Stella; “and flatter myself the discovery will not lessen the reciprocal regard already entertained for each other.”

On this topic, Juliana’s sentiments entirely coincided with her own. The picture, however, seemed still to be uppermost in her thoughts; and again she reverted to it, by once more requesting to know how Stella came to obtain possession of it.

“It is now upwards of seventeen years since it was accidentally left in a house I afterwards inhabited near Port Patrick, in Scotland, by a gentleman and lady who lodged there a short time after their arrival from Ireland; the dear mistress of which house, having vainly endeavoured to discover the legal owner, finally gave it to me from the circumstance of that very resemblance you mention.”

“Exactly about that period,” said the Nun, trembling excessively, “I have been told my mother lay in near, or at the very place you specify. No living child, however, saw the light, I believe: and the departure of her and my father was accelerated by a very unexpected incident, and indeed which had nearly endangered her recovery in the then precarious state of her health; but which, in short, rendered a precipitate retreat immediately necessary.”

“Go on, my dear Juliana!” said Stella, observing she paused at the conclusion of the above sentence; “I am all ear, and most anxious to learn the residue of your intelligence. Why was the departure of your parents thus critically accelerated?”

The poor Nun, however, after an ineffectual struggle with her feelings to proceed, at last burst into tears; and it was some time before she could recover sufficient composure to resume the conversation. At length she became more tranquil, and drying her eyes, with a look of mild resignation, calmly said, she would willingly gratify the curiosity of her auditor, who, as possessor of that picture, seemed to have a claim upon her confidence, which she found too irresistible to combat.

“But do not detest me, Mademoiselle,” she added, emphatically; “hate me not, I beseech you, for errors which commenced before I saw the face of day, for the conduct of my unhappy parents, which depended not on me either to prevent or to remedy!”

Again the fortitude of the fair recluse seemed fluctuating; but the seasonable kindness of our sympathizing heroine gradually reassured her, and rendered it once more stationary. After the lapse of a few minutes she resumed her discourse, and spoke as follows.

“You enquired, I think, what occasioned the abrupt departure of my parents from the coast of Scotland. Alas! suspicion is a constant attendant on error:—my mother, my unhappy mother,” continued Juliana, deeply blushing, “had, in the opinion of the world, forfeited all claim to propriety of conduct by flying from the arms of an acknowledged and respectable husband, to those of—yes, pardon your wretched daughter! the confession——my father——to those of a man who possessed not any legal title to such a distinction.

“At the period to which I allude, they were anxious to escape public notice; an apprehension of incurring which led them to quit Ireland, whither they had first fled in order to secrete themselves from discovery.

“One day as my mother’s confidential maid happened to be conversing with the landlord of an inn at Port Patrick, in Scotland, a stranger suddenly made his appearance, whom she instantly recognised for an intimate friend and near neighbour of my grandfather’s. Alarmed by the circumstance, and persuaded he came at the old gentleman’s request in pursuit of his daughter, she hastened home to their lodgings, and reported her suspicions: but, though these were afterwards found to have been groundless, the conviction of her mistake reached them not in due time to prevent the natural consequence of such information; and they once more became wanderers on the face of the earth.”

This part of the story Stella knew nothing about, though she already more than half suspected the lady in question was the identical mother of her friend Captain Montague, whose story she had formerly heard from the lips of that gentleman. Strongly prepossessed with this idea, and finding herself unaccountably interested on the occasion, she exerted all her energy to

obtain a more circumstantial detail of facts on which to ground the basis of her subsequent opinion; and at length prevailed upon her companion to grant her the requested gratification; a compliance that ultimately convinced her the conjecture previously formed was but too well founded.

In the course of the little narrative, which the agitated speaker related with inimitable grace, several leading incidents in Lady Montague's life appeared totally unknown to her daughter. Stella, however, learned that the fair historian, with a younger sister, whose funeral she had so unfortunately witnessed, was born in the South of France, not far distant from their present habitation; and being early destined by their father for a conventual life, the first stages of their education had commenced and been carried on under the inspection of the worthy Beatrix, with whom their parents were previously acquainted, owing to a circumstance no way connected with these pages, but which had enabled the father of the young ladies, soon after his first arrival in that quarter of the country, to render a very essential piece of service to the family of the Nun, who then resided in the neighbourhood: and this good office being ever gratefully remembered by Beatrix, had effectually secured her friendship and attention to the daughters of him she uniformly viewed in the light of a benefactor.

Early impressed with the notion that their destiny was unalterable, Juliana and her sister had insensibly brought their minds to acquiesce in the determinations of their father, and quietly submitted to a lot which his tyrannical and unhappy temper in the domestic circle made them consider as comparatively desirable.

A novitiate commenced and continued under similar ideas could not, of course, be supposed to present any thing very terrific to their imaginations: in fact, they calmly saw the hour for taking the veil approach; for hitherto no particular tie had bound them to the world, in which from an accidental discovery of their mother's real situation, little seemed to await them but contumely, mortification, and neglect.

Uncommonly attached to each other, they experienced a considerable degree of pleasure in the conviction they were no longer to be separated on earth; and one day saw them both become lasting members of the same Community. But human tranquillity was never intended to be permanent in any condition of life.—A young man, brother to one of the boarders, frequently appeared at the gate of the Convent, and became acquainted with Juliana, who now gradually discovered, though too late to profit by her accession of knowledge, that all the sensations incident to our nature, are not of a description to obey implicitly the dictates of reason, or even religion itself.

Heroically determined, however, to combat these sensations, and conform to the imperious necessity of existing circumstances, Juliana, though she could not entirely expel the enemy, kept him nevertheless at a proper distance: her peace, it was true, fell a sacrifice to the effort; but that it was yet in the power of time and reflection to restore; whereas one wrong step in her situation could never be retrieved. Her sister comforted, strengthened, and applauded her resolution to walk in the narrow path of rectitude: but that beloved sister was prematurely snatched from her bosom by an epidemical disorder which had proved fatal to one or two more in the Convent; and Juliana now groaned under the weight of a double misfortune, unsupported by the friendly and soothing voice of the dear girl who seemed to have had but one heart, one mind, and one interest with herself.

Fast flowed the tears of the poor Nun as she dwelt on this melancholy event, and not slowly were they accompanied by those of the compassionate Stella: she seemed, indeed, to be little less affected than Juliana herself, but curiosity prompted a greater degree of self-command;

for the conclusion of the distressing narrative was not yet accomplished, and she felt a most ardent desire to learn something farther of the parties concerned in it. But in regard to the latter part of her mother's situation and transactions, Juliana seemed equally ignorant with her auditor. Lady Montague had left the South of France soon after her daughters took the veil; and no intelligence whatever had since been obtained of her motions. It was easy, however, to perceive, that the strongest filial attachment was still experienced for this unfortunate parent; whose gentle temper, and many amiable qualities were of that description which took a powerful hold on the heart, although the cooler dictates of judgment could not but condemn the general tenor of a conduct so open to censure, so erroneous, and apparently so culpable. But the predilection of Juliana for her father seemed by no means so ardent, or of so sanguine a nature: and, in spite of her endeavours to conceal it, a thousand different expressions escaped her in the progress of her communication, which indubitably ascertained his disposition and turn of mind to be very different from that possessed by his ill-starred partner.

When the retrospective part of the subject was finished, the striking, but unaccountable resemblance so frequently observed to exist between Stella and the picture of Lady Montague, furnished ample field for surprise; and even conjecture itself was not altogether excluded; for there were moments when, yielding to the magic of imagination, our heroine gave the reins to Fancy, and took a wide range in the regions of possibilities, where she would gladly have traced the source of consanguinity, which the similitude of features seemed to say, in one degree or another, connected her with the family of Montague's mother: for, though many mortifying circumstances unavoidably attended such a discovery, still, in her present friendless state, the conviction that she belonged to some person—that on the extended face of the globe there were beings on whose nature she had a claim to look for support, for protection, should it yet so happen that future events rendered her back the power of requiring their assistance, were reflections which produced the most pleasing sensation, and shed a transient ray of satisfaction and delight over the dark shade of her apparent destiny: such a brother, such a friend as Captain Montague, to ward off the evils of life—to emancipate her from the gloomy prison in which she now languished—to restore her to her country, to the arms of her dear, dear Mrs. Bertram—Oh what ecstasy in the bare idea!

The mind of Stella, absorbed in contemplation so soothing, so congenial to her wishes, recollected not on these occasions the too evident impracticability of profiting by such a relationship, even had she really been entitled to claim it; and all remembrance of the former inutility of every attempt to make her situation known, or to receive in return any intelligence from Scotland, vanished before the ardent inclination she experienced, to consider herself as a link of the common chain by which the inhabitants of the world are, in general, more or less connected with each other.—It would not do, however: second thoughts perpetually intruded to destroy the mental illusion, and to convince the weeping girl that probability was her foe.

Lady Montague had certainly indeed landed at Port Patrick about the period that she herself was ushered into life; and it was no less ascertained as a fact, that the misguided woman had been delivered of a child shortly after her arrival in Galloway: but, alas! beyond this point nothing further appeared to authorize the suggestion, which thus at times recurred with the most tantalizing perseverance; for the infant, it was positively known, had been committed to the silent grave in a very short period after its birth: all possible chance on this subject was consequently done away; and so acute were her feelings on every temporary conviction, that she was frequently under the necessity of calling to remembrance the undeniable infamy of Lady Montague's character, in order to afford some degree of consolation for the previous

disappointment occasioned by finding it impracticable to claim any tie of a family nature with her worthy and amiable children.

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CHAP. X.

“With sword and fire
“Drive out all other faiths, and let the world
“Confess ours only.”

ROWE.

THE intelligence Stella was enabled to give in return for Juliana's communication, drew the bonds of friendship still tighter between these two young women; while the lessons of religion and fortitude constantly inculcated by their mutual comforter, the good and sensible Beatrix, proved of singular service to both, particularly in respect to the disagreeable temper of the Lady Abbess, who, whenever her declining health proved equal to the task of tormenting the Sisterhood by her presence, seemed to evince a strong predilection for coercive measures on the most trifling occasion that happened to afford an opening for the display of her collective abilities, which, it must be acknowledged, were so exercised as to be generally productive of more dislike to the inflicter, than either gratitude or reformation in the culprit who had the honour of experiencing such unenvied marks of her attention in their spiritual welfare. But although Stella mildly listened to the precepts of Sister Beatrix, and from many of them derived no small advantage, her early friend and ever-regretted benefactress had previously rendered her religious principles too stationary to endanger their present existence; and she patiently submitted to all the taunts and hardships those stigmatized with the appellation of heretics are sometimes necessitated to sustain in similar friendless situations.

Four years slowly dragged their sullen course along in the same monotonous and joyless manner ere any change, either for the better or worse, took place in her condition. About the conclusion of that period, Stella found it was possible to encounter greater evils than what had yet fallen to her share in the foregoing term of her confinement.

Avarice, as has elsewhere been observed, happened to prove the predominant failing in the Lady Abbess's disposition.

When the preliminary articles for our heroine's admission were first settled, Mr. Ross paid a handsome gratuity in advance for four years certain; after which, should circumstances still require her detention, an annual pension was to be punctually received for her succeeding maintenance while she remained in the Convent.

From some incomprehensible cause which the Lady Abbess could not develop, the latter part of the agreement appeared to have totally escaped his memory, for no remittance was made; nor, what seemed equally extraordinary, was the smallest notice taken of this defalcation in the execution of the above arrangement.

The retentive faculties of the Abbess happened, however, to be formed of more durable materials; and, of course, all possible means of enquiry were set on foot to procure information on the subject. Every attempt of the kind nevertheless failed:—Mr. Ross and his family had removed from the neighbourhood; and in whatever quarter of the globe he had afterwards fixed his abode, neither she nor her emissaries, alike unacquainted with his usual place of residence, could, in any probable degree, ascertain.

Thus deprived of the expected panacea, which alone possessed the power of partially smoothing the rugged surface of a most uneven temper, our *holy Mother* the Abbess began to consider her English boarder as verging towards that nearly useless and most unproductive piece

of lumber vulgarly denominated “*an incumbrance*,” and, in the progress of this idea, charitably resolved to make her smart under the galling lash of dependance as a *scape-goat*, for the deficiencies of others, since no indemnification could be procured for her own.

Stella, of course, gradually became sensible of a very disagreeable alteration in her situation: she had not only an additional portion of ill-humour to bear from the head of the Community, for that her ability in the province of bearing and forbearing would have taught her to sustain with a tolerable degree of magnanimity; but, whatever omissions of a menial description the Lay-Sisters, or even the still lower classes of the domestic establishment were found guilty of, now fell to her share to remedy; while the cheering, instructive conversation of Beatrix, and the tender, soothing sympathy of Juliana, were by degrees denied her through the medium of the unfeeling Abbess, who frequently contrived to render all intercourse between the parties impracticable, from the opposite and various employments purposely assigned them. Stella, however, could have no reasonable cause of complaint; for her considerate oppressor declared that it was all for the sake of her soul’s salvation, and to effect the great work of conversion, that coercive measures had at length been adopted; with which view she was determined to continue them, as the surest method of subduing that vile spirit of perseverance in error by which the little heretic had so long rendered herself conspicuous, in spite of her own most meritorious endeavours to effect a change of principles so repugnant to the true, genuine nature of the Roman Catholic doctrine, and the blessed institution of her holy Mother the Church.

Whether the Abbess really wished to have the merit of making a new convert as some small indemnification for the loss of what sat infinitely nearer her heart, or that she wanted to free the Community of the burden of her maintenance by driving her to some act of desperation, remains problematical to all but herself, and the great Director of human concerns. If the latter motive swayed her conduct, it proved nevertheless as unsuccessful as the means by which the former was ostensibly to be accomplished; for Stella, however secretly depressed or humbled, shrunk not from her allotted task, but exerted herself to the utmost of her power to give satisfaction—satisfaction! vain expectation!—it beamed not on any labour of hers, to cheer the dreary path of oppression:—but, taught as she had been by sad experience to believe herself totally renounced by the happier inhabitants of the world, and void of every claim whatever on society, where could she fly were the doors of her present prison to be shut against her? All good and evil she justly considered in a comparative light; and therefore whatever might prove her actual portion of the latter, it seemed at any rate preferable to encountering the “thousand untried ills that flesh is heir to” when thrown friendless on the world at large in a state of beggary: and what else, she frequently asked herself, had she to expect if emancipated from the bondage under which she now groaned? Nothing, surely! for it appeared too evident after the lapse of so long a period, that no other roof remained to shelter her defenceless form—no hand would be stretched forth to snatch her from insult and penury, should the gloomy gates of the Convent once be decidedly closed upon her fugitive steps. Here at least, though fatigue and ill-humour proved her daily lot, she was yet secured from the various misfortunes young women are often subjected to meet with in a situation similar to hers; and, besides, food and clothing, such as it was, were still allowed her, however other limited indulgencies were withdrawn from her reach: Beatrix too, and her beloved Juliana, were inmates of the same dreary abode; and, though now seldom permitted to enjoy much of their company, still the idea afforded some degree of consolation, when she reflected that she was within the very identical walls which enclosed the only two human beings on earth apparently interested in her welfare.

Stella wisely endeavoured to encourage every alleviating circumstance that served to strengthen her mind and assimilate it to the difficulties of her unfortunate destiny: she therefore bowed her head in meek resignation to the fiat of the Almighty, who she was firmly persuaded ordered every thing for the best; and, without uttering a single murmur, persevered in her system of obedience to the commands of the Abbess, till the constantly accumulating nature of her sufferings, though inadequate to the supposed private views of her unfeeling task-mistress for overwhelming a spirit apparently so gentle, at length partly produced an effect probably emanating from a mode of treatment so barbarously inhuman:—the health of the persecuted victim of pecuniary disappointment visibly declined; and the utmost stretch of intellectual resolution was often barely able to assist her through the various fatiguing offices assigned to her daily performance.

The former apprehensions of the Abbess, lest contamination should be conveyed by the breath of an heretic, evidently no longer existed; for Stella, amongst her other employments, was now frequently appointed to set the necessary articles in order previous to the celebration of any public festival, and to prepare the Church on every occasion of moment for the reception, not only of the Sisterhood, but all those who might be disposed to visit it in general, from whose charitable donations a tolerable harvest was sometimes reaped by the mercenary head of the Society, and converted, without much ceremony, to her own private use.

As interested motives had ceased to require the concealment of our heroine from the observation of strangers, she was at length unconditionally permitted to mingle with the crowd, and witness the whole subsequent proceedings, after having executed the preparatory offices allotted to her.

Though this proved but a poor indemnification for the foregoing fatigue and hardships she had been forced to sustain, it nevertheless made an occasional breach in the sameness of her lot, which sometimes served to detach her thoughts from self-considerations of an unpleasant and distressing nature: the transient pause thus afforded was not, however, always productive of beneficial effects much beyond the transaction in which it originated.

The spectators retired full of what they had seen, gratified and eager to describe the scene to friends, to relations, to acquaintances, who had proved less fortunate than themselves in this respect; they had a home to receive them, to which they were possibly attached by all the domestic enjoyments that exist to bind the heart of man to his fellow-man: parents, brothers, sisters, rose to the view of the young moralizer, as fondly surrounding these fortunate beings with looks of cordial welcome on their return, and listening delighted to the detailed account of their observations, while she——“Oh what a desolate prospect!” sighed the half broken-hearted girl, “what a melancholy reverse is experienced by me!” Sickening at the mental picture that forced itself into notice, Stella, on such occasions, usually threw herself upon her straw mattress, and wept away those hours in which the balmy aid of sleep was denied her.

CHAP. XI.

“’Twas the milk of human kindness—benevolence personified; ’twas elegance, grace, beauty irresistible—every celestial emanation of the Divinity.”

IT was on the eve of a grand annual procession, held in honour of the foundress of the Order, when Stella having spent several hours in the execution of her usual employment, found her strength, from extreme fatigue, gradually failing; till at length no longer able to support her weary frame, she sunk upon one of the marble steps leading to the altar, (for she was then in the Church) and resting her aching head on the ornamental projection of a highly-finished monument near her, became shortly alike indifferent to the fate of the oppressed, or the command of the oppressor.

How long this state of mental inertia might have lasted is uncertain, had not the sound of approaching footsteps roused her attention to the cause from whence it proceeded. She slowly raised her eyes to ascertain this point, and discovered, through the increasing gloom of the evening, three or four people advancing up one of the isles leading from the principal entrance. Concluding they were probably deputed by the Abbess (who might, for any thing she knew to the contrary, prove herself one of the number,) to observe the progress of her labours, our poor dejected heroine immediately quitted her incumbent posture, and again resumed her task: but the whispered accents of the strangers once more attracted her notice; and she turned her head instinctively towards the direction in which they had first met her view.

Stella now perceived they had stopped at a convenient distance, for the purpose of observation, and saw they were regarding her with no common degree of interest, if their solicitude could be judged of by the evident eagerness with which they alternately looked at her, and then spoke to one of the Nuns who accompanied them. That Nun was soon discovered to be Magdaline; and from her long tried attachment, whether discoursing with friends or foes, nothing, she knew, was to be apprehended: Stella was therefore turning to continue her work, under the idea that her solitary and sickly appearance had alone fixed their eyes upon her, when the accidental movement of one of the strangers (for such they assuredly were) admitted a greater portion of light from a lamp suspended over the place where they stood, and displayed to her astonished view the dress of her countrywomen worn by two females, whose appearance proved extremely prepossessing and elegant; while a gentleman, whose *tout-ensemble* came exactly under the same description, made another of the little group, and seemed equally sedulous with his companions to pursue the discourse with their conductress.

A long period of time had elapsed since the agitated Stella had seen a sight that spoke so home to every feeling of her throbbing heart. It was still possible, however, that she might yet be mistaken in regard to their being British; and, with increasing emotion, she listened to catch the smallest word calculated to substitute certainty for doubt. That word at length reached her, as one of the ladies said something in a louder accent to the gentleman: it was English! English indeed! Overcome by the sensations of the moment, the fingers of Stella suddenly relaxed their hold on the side of the altar, and she dropped senseless at the feet of a massy crucifix contiguous thereto.

On recovering her recollection, she found herself supported by the gentleman, while his lovely and benevolent companions were administering to her every assistance in their power.

Stella, on opening her eyes, concluded she had shook off the earthly fetters of mortality, and joined the celestial inhabitants of heaven, as her view rested on the nearest of the two females, whose delicate and finely moulded form could only be surpassed by a set of features, and an expression of countenance, that exceeded in attractive beauty every thing of the kind hitherto witnessed: the other lady was taller, equally well made, less beautiful perhaps, but enjoyed the same fascinating manner and intelligent benignity of look, which at once and universally made their way to the heart wherever they came. Their male companion was all benevolence and real worth, and possessed a character in every respect well qualified to make a third of the number. They insisted upon conducting Stella back to the Convent; and alternately shared with Magdaline in the task of conveying her back to the Church.

Having performed this humane office, and discovered by the answers obtained to their questions from Magdaline, how the unfortunate invalid was situated in the Monastery, they left a handsome present to the Community, and, after a little conversation with the Lady Abbess, retired for the night; having first assured Stella of their determination to revisit her on the succeeding morning, when the unavoidable hurry of the approaching festival would leave them more at liberty to discourse with her, free from the probable chance of interruption, should (as they apprehended) her recent indisposition prevent her from taking any further active part in the various occupations of the day. In this conjecture the amiable trio were not mistaken: the debilitated frame of our heroine, completely exhausted by the unceasing exertion of several days previous labour, now totally succumbed under the intolerable burthen of fatigue she had suffered; and she found herself utterly unable to partake in the enjoyments of a period which, to the greater part of the Sisterhood, seemed fraught with considerations of particular importance.

Sir Frederic Delmore, like Mr. Ross, had made the chief part of his fortune in the East Indies; but, unlike that gentleman in every other respect, his principles, temper, and disposition were all of a description to do honour to human nature, and retrieve the national character from the too often merited obloquy entailed upon it by men of our northern Nabob's cast, who, unfit to be trusted to their own discretion, disgrace the country that gave them birth, by the abhorrent system of plunder and devastation practised on every possible occasion against the defenceless and unoffending inhabitants of the Asiatic world.

Sir Frederic had proved the friend, adviser, and benefactor of all the distressed Indians within the circle of his knowledge: these were not few; and by them he was considered as a being of a superior order, who could not possibly owe his birth to the same country that disgorged so many rapacious vultures in the shape of human creatures, on their ill-fated coast. The catalogue of his virtues was written on the hearts of the needy and afflicted; and their grateful prayers for his everlasting felicity were his constant attendants. Satisfied with the acquisition of a reasonable fortune, acquired in the most unexceptionable manner, the worthy Baronet returned to Europe, unpursued by one of those curses, more deep than loud, which frequently accompany the restored sons of Violence and Peculation from the groaning theatre of their crimes, to the bar of an English House of Commons.

Sir Frederic Delmore, on his arrival in Britain, happened yet to be a bachelor; for the adventurous votaries of the female fortune-hunting system were not much to his taste, and Fate had decreed him a helpmate of a more respectable character. At one of the places of public resort in the metropolis, he first saw the most charming of her sex; and as to see this fascinating woman without experiencing the influence of her attractive powers was impossible, he procured an introduction to her family, made his proposal, and, though some years her senior, he was finally accepted. Perhaps Lady Delmore could not have given a greater instance of sound sense and

superior judgment, than in her election of such a husband, as the result has fully shewn: for this very amiable couple are not only happy in themselves, but likewise a real blessing to all around them. The omnipotent voice of undisputed fame has pronounced the Baronet's choice to be the most beautiful woman in the capital of his Majesty's dominions; but those who know her well, also know that she possesses a better title to celebrity than even her incomparable loveliness, for Lady Delmore is good as she is beautiful. Of the former of these two enviable advantages, her sister (by whom she was accompanied in their present excursion to the Continent) justly shared the meed of equal applause; for her character and disposition proved exactly similar to those so happily enjoyed by her Ladyship. Though perhaps not so exquisitely gifted by nature with a faultless set of features, there was something in the countenance of Miss Mowbray uncommonly interesting, and her figure was rather of a more commanding height than the former's. In short, take this superior worthy trio, all in all, their like will seldom be encountered on the surface of the earth; and Stella soon had cause to bless the lucky chance that fixed their temporary residence in the vicinity of the Convent, no less than the impulse of curiosity that led them so critically to wish for a view of the ornamental arrangements in the interior of the Church, previous to the commencement of the anniversary of its foundress.

As Sir Frederic and the ladies had foreseen, the attention of the Community was too much engrossed by preparation for the ensuing ceremony, to interrupt the projected interview between them and their new acquaintance; and the hour now spent in each other's company, already seemed to have converted the prepossession mutually experienced, into a friendship of many years' standing: the favourable account given of our heroine by Magdaline, no doubt smoothed the way to those sentiments, which a personal knowledge of her character afterwards strengthened in the minds of the travellers; and they parted from her in the firm resolution of breaking her chain, and restoring her again to the more extended society of the world, from which she had now been so long excluded by the most unjustifiable means.

This undertaking was not an herculean one: Sir Frederic possessed not only the ability, but the inclination to serve her. The Abbess had for some time become heartily sick of her unprofitable boarder. A handsome gratuity has often the power of rendering the most unbending disposition flexible: the Baronet tried the experiment—it succeeded; for the Abbess, as usual, heard *reason*, and pocketed his arguments. Stella bade adieu to her old companions in thralldom. The parting with her beloved Juliana and the respectable Beatrix was extremely tender and affecting: alas! their destiny appeared fixed and immutable! and though the idea that her own had proved scarcely less so had rendered her almost indifferent to the prospect of liberation, no sooner was that prospect to appearance realized, than the long-relinquished sensation produced a thousand fresh-born anxieties, hopes, fears, and expectations, which seemed yet to link her future lot to the world, and constitute her once more its not unreluctant inhabitant.

CHAP. XII.

“Relentless Time! destroying pow’r,
“Whom stone and brass obey;
“Who giv’st to every flying hour
“To work some new decay;
“Unheard, unheeded, and unseen,
“Thy secrets saps prevail.”

PARNELL.

SEVEN tedious years had slowly passed over the head of Stella since she last found herself comparatively a free agent in the world; and the feelings that now swelled her grateful heart almost to agony, are hard to describe, as she turned her humid eyes on the receding walls of her late gloomy prison, and immediately afterwards entered the cheerful mansion of her benefactors: words are indeed inadequate to convey a just notion of the various and intermingled recollections that at this interesting juncture forcibly assailed her mind; and some time actually elapsed ere she could credit the evidence of her senses, or persuade herself such things could be. The first circumstance that recalled her wandering imagination was, the ardent inclination she experienced to ascertain the extent of her still existing connexion with the dear and valued friends, under whose maternal care and protection she had formerly been so happy. Of the ever-lamented Mrs. Bertram, the Adairs, the Ross’s, neither Sir Frederic nor the ladies could give her the smallest information, although her earliest enquiries were made for that purpose. The inhabitants of Woodside and the Hermitage were equally unknown to them; and the character Mr. Ross bore alike in the Asiatic and European quarters of the globe was not of a description to claim any congeniality of sentiment with such a man as our worthy Baronet; and of course, a knowledge of the motions of him and his family had not reached the amiable emancipators of Stella. Almost the first moments of her regained freedom were therefore dedicated to the interesting employment of writing to Scotland; and, lest intelligence should fail her in one direction, she applied to another, and addressed herself both to the Hermitage and her old companion at Woodside.

During the period that intervened ere an answer could possibly reach her, she likewise endeavoured to discover the present residence of her still fondly-remembered Mrs. Ross and Emma; for, though flattering herself with receiving this gratification, amongst others, from some one of her expected correspondents at Galloway, it nevertheless was not improbable such information might be partially obtained through the medium of a nearer channel, by applying to those whose mansion they had formerly resided in; for she was not ignorant that they no longer remained in the neighbourhood of her late abode.

In spite of all her efforts, Stella could learn nothing respecting the objects of her enquiry; and she was forced to wait the arrival of the much wished-for packet, as the only and last resource of her anxiety. Meanwhile no one circumstance was omitted by the Baronet and his family to restore her depressed spirits to their natural tone, and render her situation as easy as existing solitudes would allow.

Stella, grateful for every instance of their unceasing attention, evinced her sense of their goodness in a manner that rendered her doubly dear to her friendly and discriminating hosts, whose increasing attachment to their *protégée* became every day more apparent, though by no

means surpassed by the sentiments she herself justly harboured in their favour.

A fortnight had yet to elapse before their departure from France was to take place—and the impatience of Stella had already reached its height, when a solitary letter, with a well-known post-mark, made its appearance. She looked at the superscription—it bore the characters of Miss Adair's hand; but she trembled too much to break the seal; and, with a prophetic impression of evil tidings strongly throbbing at her heart, she retired abruptly to her chamber.—Here, after a few minutes of further irresolution, she tore open the envelope with an emotion not to be described, and speedily perceived her worst apprehensions too fatally verified. The contents of this interesting letter, we shall briefly state as follows.

Miss Adair began with expressions of the warmest congratulations on the pleasing prospect of once more seeing her beloved Stella, whom she hailed as a being risen from the dead, since from whom, or of whom, not the smallest intelligence had been received since the last letter she had written to Scotland when still under the care of Mrs. Ross. She then gave a long detailed account of all the various means adopted to discover the cause of the inexplicable silence of our heroine, and spoke with much feeling on the sufferings that circumstance, together with her mysterious disappearance, had occasioned at Woodside and the Hermitage. That Mrs. St. Vincent was the principal cause of the whole nefarious transaction, she seemed fully convinced, and entirely coincided with Stella in the previous opinion given in her letter on this subject; an opinion, the writer added, which was further confirmed by the nature of some epistolary communications made by that lady's servant Jenny, to two or three of her friends in the neighbourhood; all of which contained violent complaints relative to Major St. Vincent's total neglect of her mistress, who, the Abigail confidently asserted, had been deserted for Stella Bertram, and that the latter was then privately living with him somewhere abroad.

After making several judicious remarks on this absurd story, which she assured Stella was utterly discredited by every impartial person acquainted with the principles and character of either of the injured parties, Miss Adair proceeded to answer the numerous and minute enquiries of her newly-recovered correspondent in the rotation they were asked by our heroine: but, alas! what a series of heart-rending and melancholy vicissitudes now opened on her agonized view!—how great, how dreadful the revolutions the last eventful seven years had produced! Mrs. Bertram—the good, the maternal, the benevolent Mrs. Bertram, was no more! she had expired about eighteen months before the emancipation of her beloved and deeply-regretted *protégée*, on whom a thousand blessings were poured with her departing breath, if still in existence. The death of this valuable woman, like her life, proved exemplary, and much more composed than could almost have been hoped, from the unceasing anxiety she evinced on account of her lost adopted child's mysterious destiny. The once unfortunate Maria Campbell, with her hapless offspring, now likewise slumbered in the dust. The latter accidentally caught the smallpox, which the former never had had: ere the virulent nature of the disorder was properly ascertained, the infection happened to be communicated to the fond and much-alarmed mother, whom no arguments or entreaties could separate from her dying infant, and both were soon consigned to the same grave: but not before the ill-fated penitent had bequeathed the chief part of her fortune to her benefactress, (who survived her only a short period) with the reversion of the whole to our heroine, should she ever appear to claim it.

Francis Ross, prepossessed (from several suspicious and strangely corroborating circumstances) with the idea of his father's duplicity in regard to the fate of Stella, who, he firmly believed, had fallen a sacrifice to parental apprehensions on his account, had continued immovable in his resolution of seeing the Nabob no more from the moment every effort for her

recovery appeared ineffectual. To this determination he religiously adhered, in spite of his father's incredulity, or the agonizing entreaties of a half-distracted mother and sister, who, on their knees, implored him to alter his intention. Francis remained deaf to every sensation but that which Mr. Ross had raised in his bosom: resentment therefore taking the lead of filial duty, he yielded to its momentary impulse, bade his fainting, weeping female relatives an eternal adieu, and, without noticing his father in any respect whatever, quitted his roof, never to return.

Three days after his departure he waited upon Sir William Harley, whom he abruptly accused of being an accomplice with his father in the disappearance of our heroine. The Baron resented the imputation, as he was justly entitled to do—high words ensued—a challenge succeeded—they fought—the rash impetuous Francis Ross fell at the second fire; and before the dawn of the following morning this misguided, ungovernable young man had ceased to breathe for ever. The fatal result of this melancholy affair proved decisive of poor Mrs. Ross's long fluctuating destiny: but, though on the verge of the grave, she was not yet permitted to die in peace. Intelligence of a most disgraceful nature, relative to Mrs. St. Vincent's conduct, received about the same period, gave the finishing blow to her mental and corporeal sufferings:—she expired in the arms of the wretched Emma, whose health for several succeeding weeks remained in a state that occasioned the most serious apprehensions for her recovery: she did recover, however; and afterwards accompanied her father on a second voyage to the East Indies, whither some affairs of the utmost importance demanded his immediate return. A storm overtook them near the Cape—the vessel was driven out of her course—she struck upon a sunken rock—instantly bulged, and in the next moment, passengers and crew were alike launched into one watery tomb.

Miss Adair accounted for her knowledge of the foregoing melancholy circumstance, by informing her friend that Captain, now Major Montague, had occasionally corresponded with her since the loss of Stella, for whose fate he uniformly expressed the kindest solicitude; and from his obliging communications she had been enabled to state the abovementioned particulars, as likewise many others contained in her long epistle. She added, that he had received the hand of the amiable Louisa St. Vincent nearly three years prior to the present period; that he was then quartered in the south of England, and had become possessed of a handsome addition to the fortune derived from Mr. Howard, by the death of his father Sir Charles, who had only landed in his native country a very short time previous to his decease. Of Mrs. St. Vincent and her proceedings she spoke in the strongest terms of reprobation: the virtuous part of the world, it appeared, had now totally renounced her society; but the immense fortune to which she succeeded on the loss of her father (whom she had found means to soften in her favour, in order to save herself from being disinherited, as he had once threatened to do, on the premature death of her brother,) still procured her many associates, and supported her unblushing effrontery in repeated attempts to outface the public opinion and consequent disgrace she was frequently doomed to experience. With her amiable husband all manner of intercourse had long ceased to exist: he and his friends had often endeavoured to procure the necessary proofs of criminality on which to ground the commencement of a prosecution for adultery; but though her guilt remained no longer apparently equivocal, either with her old favourite Jones, or others of similar character; so artfully had she managed, that no legal evidence could be adduced against her sufficiently strong for the purpose of inserting her name amongst the worthies of a similar stamp in the Doctors Commons: in consequence of which failure she still retained the convenient title and privileges of a wife, however the moral turpitude of her actions might have rendered her undeserving of such a distinction.

The unfortunate and ill-used husband of this vile woman, indignant at so many instances of depravity, irritated by repeated disappointment, and, finally, sick of a country which presented nothing to his view but prospects of the most humiliating and distressing nature, had at length exchanged into a marching regiment, and accompanied it as Lieutenant-Colonel to Gibraltar, where he was yet stationed, and likely to continue for some time.

Mrs. Wallace, now some years a widow, resided almost constantly with her niece Sally Thompson; and both seemed equally to mourn the supposed hopeless absence of their much-regretted Stella.

Miss Adair having acquainted her friend with the marriage of her two younger sisters, one of whom was become the wife of our heroine's old admirer Mr. Johnstone, who had unexpectedly attained possession of a large fortune on the demise of a distant relation, and enumerated several other domestic occurrences in her own family, next proceeded to mention a few incidents of a more public nature, which she imagined would be acceptable to her reader; and then concluded the epistle with an urgent request for her speedy return, in which the writer said she was joined by her father, who being appointed Mrs. Bertram's sole executor by her last will and testament, ardently wished for her arrival, in order to give up his trust, by resigning the future management of a handsome independent property into her own hands; for which purpose he had been busily employed in the preparatory arrangement of her affairs ever since the first intimation of his ward's actual existence reached Woodside.

Such were, as succinctly as it appeared possible to relate them, the multifarious contents of Miss Adair's long and closely written epistle: the half of which, however, was scarcely perused, ere she to whom it was addressed, became suddenly unequal to the task of reading what yet remained unfinished, and alike indifferent to the sorrows of the past, as to the splendid prospects that offered for the future.

CHAP. XIII.

“Tout ce que je puis vous fouhaiter de mieux, est de ne vous jamais revoir.”

VOLTAIRE’S LIFE OF LOUIS XIV.

SOMETHING more than an hour and a half had already expired since our heroine quitted the sitting-room to examine her packet, and yet she returned not. The ladies began to be alarmed, lest the communication of some disagreeable intelligence had prolonged her absence beyond what appeared to them a reasonable time for the gratification of her curiosity; and Miss Mowbray, in order to investigate the cause of it, at length hurried to her chamber.

The first sight that presented itself on her entrance, was Stella extended on the floor, cold, pale, insensible, and apparently in the last stage of her earthly existence. The fatal letter lay open near her, and the envelope, torn through the middle, was discovered at a greater distance under the table.

The scream of astonishment and horror that escaped the terrified Miss Mowbray, soon brought the requisite assistance to her aid. Stella in due time recovered her faculties, and accounted for their suspension by the sad, sad detail of circumstances she had received; the heads of which, when more adequate to the recapitulation, were partially related to her sympathizing auditors—partially, I say, for she could not bring herself to mention the base surmises which had been propagated of her supposed connexion with St. Vincent; nor was the extent of his unworthy wife’s misconduct exposed to animadversion: it was a subject Stella dared not trust her feelings to dwell upon; and consequently, as little was said on the occasion as could possibly be done without breaking in upon the relative nature of her other intelligence.

Various were the effects produced by the foregoing information on the hearts of her benevolent and charming protectors; who, having now nothing of importance to require the prolongation of their residence in France, immediately determined on the commencement of their journey to the place of embarkation, as soon as their *protégée* found herself able to bear the fatigue of travelling.

Two days more produced this effect, and removed every apprehended difficulty on her side. The morning of the third was therefore fixed upon to put their design in execution; and on the preceding evening Stella entered the gates of her late gloomy habitation, in order to visit her former friends, but particularly Juliana and Beatrix, for the last time.

The leading features of the French Revolution had already begun to assume a serious aspect in the capital of the kingdom and its vicinity: seeds of the same sanguinary plant were even evincing a propensity to vegetation in the more distant provinces; and as no person could say “thus far and no farther” such things shall go, Stella now exacted a solemn promise from her weeping companions to consider her roof as their future asylum, and its mistress as one who would ever be ready to receive them with the open arms of friendship and real affection, should succeeding events render her the happy means of sheltering them from the vicissitudes of human affairs in the hour of adversity, and, through that medium, enable her to repay the many hours of comparative peace and soothing consolation so frequently experienced in their society.

It had recently been hinted in her hearing, she said, that a scheme was already in contemplation to lessen the number of religious institutions at present established in France. “Should this embryo plan be realized, and the Sisterhood happen to come within its circle,”

Stella again repeated, emphatically, “think on me—remember your promise, and carefully preserve this direction to my place of residence in North Britain.”

She then gave each of the Nuns a written address, which she particularly requested them to preserve, whatever befel them; who turning to the window while they examined the paper, she slipped three small parcels, containing a few valuable articles, such as she knew would be most acceptable to them, on the table: these were all much alike; but on returning to her cell, Juliana found she had been remembered in a superior degree to the other two Nuns; for Stella, by the assistance of the portress, had contrived to convey thither additional tokens of her lasting regard, to a considerable amount; amongst which were several religious books, and a curiously inlaid crucifix, composed of ebony and silver.

Though Stella could not help thinking it cruel to make them sharers in those apprehensions which some recent discussions on the subject had inspired her with, yet neither could she forbear to renew it more than once before her departure from the Convent. Sister Beatrix, however, entertained no fears of the kind: she was confident their tutelary Saint and the blessed Virgin would protect them, and shield the hearts of all good Catholics, like her countrywomen, from such sacrilegious proceedings, which she was sure none but the heretical enemies of her holy Mother the Church, could possibly attempt even to think of, far less to put in practice. In this opinion, Magdaline seemed likewise inclined to acquiesce; but candidly acknowledged her incompetency to decide on what might ultimately prove best, unless an optional power was permitted to ascertain the matter. Beatrix crossed herself at the bare idea of such a power, and cast a look of marked disapprobation on the speaker, who was rather suspected of being more partial to freedom than confinement. While the weeping Juliana, agitated and unhappy, sighed profoundly, said little, and remained apparently indifferent to every consideration, the approaching separation from Stella excepted. At length the latter tore herself from the clasping arms of the of the sobbing girl, and rushed from the the room. Beatrix having committed the fair fainting recluse to the care of Magdaline, who had long been particularly attached to her, followed the steps of our heroine; and finding she was hastening towards the outer court, without intending to pay a farewell visit to the Abbess, the good Nun strongly urged a change of measures, and represented the ungracious appearance such an instance of unchristian and persevering enmity exhibited in so striking a point of view, that Stella, who, in the present agitation of her mind had never once recollected such a woman as her former oppressor was in the world, instantly acceded to her wishes; and not being of a temper to return resentment or ill-will even to the most offending of her fellow-creatures, she gratefully acknowledged her obligations to her friendly adviser for thus recalling her to a proper sense of her duty, and accompanied her as she spoke, to the Abbess’s apartment.

The late mercenary tyrant, now a tyrant no longer, understanding the purport of her visit, and expecting some emolument would accrue from it—an idea originating in the already experienced munificent mind and temper of the Baronet, who, when presenting her with a handsome reward for kindness, care, and protection never bestowed on her unfortunate boarder, had informed her that he should amply supply Stella with the pecuniary means of following his example in this respect, before she took a final leave of the Community—received our heroine in so different a manner, and with so altered an aspect, that she scarcely knew which to admire most—the pliability of features and disposition thus exhibited, or the baseness of a mind that could impel her to a change of conduct so sudden and extraordinary. No tears of regret, no parting sigh, witnessed the separation that, after the lapse of a very short period, now took place. Stella listened in silent disgust to common-place sentences of advice, uttered by a person whose

corrupt heart had never felt the influence of human kindness, nor practised the precepts she appeared so urgent to teach others. The reflection that this was undoubtedly the last interview with the woman who had so long contributed her endeavours to render her life completely wretched, could not be supposed to inspire any sensations similar to the least of those which swelled her bosom when quitting the little affectionate group so dear to her heart: on the contrary, she was perfectly convinced the longer she continued in her presence, that one of the most fortunate things which could easily befall her was, never to be again subjected to the government, either mental or corporeal, of such a director. A small present was, however, tendered, which was readily accepted; but with what different feelings from those recently witnessed elsewhere! Stella then coldly, but with the semblance of respect, bade her adieu, and retired unreluctantly from her presence. She next paid a short visit to the rest of the Community, who were collected together in the refectory in expectation of her arrival.

Stella had enjoyed the good fortune to be almost a general favourite with the Sisterhood, at least the greater part of them, although strictly prohibited from associating much with any of the number: and the blessings they now poured upon her head, with the ardent petitions preferred for her lasting happiness, strongly affected her sensibility. Every attempt to articulate her gratitude, however, proved abortive; and at length, utterly unable to preserve any degree of composure, she abruptly departed, accompanied still by Beatrix, who left her not till the last boundary of conventual freedom opposed an insurmountable barrier to her further progress.

Every thing being previously prepared for the return of our heroine and her friends to England, the journey was commenced at the appointed time; and they reached the place of embarkation without encountering any unpleasant accident. Favourable gales speedily wafted them to the shores of Britain, where they had soon the satisfaction of landing in good health and spirits on *terra firma*; which the ladies seemed disposed to consider as a far more desirable circumstance than the finest aquatic excursion that ever was undertaken.

CHAP. XIV.

“The mind is its own place, and in itself
“Can make a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n.”

MILTON.

OUR heroine’s reluctance to quit her good and beautiful protectors, though greater than any she had hitherto experienced on a similar short-lived acquaintance, was not of that description to preclude the hopes of a second meeting; on the contrary, her favourite trio had faithfully promised to pass some part of the ensuing year at the Hermitage: and, with this prospect in view, the ladies separated from her two days after their landing, with mutual professions of lasting esteem, remembrance, and affection, and, attended by their domestics, took their road to the metropolis; while Stella, pursuing an opposite direction, bent her course to the north, with a throbbing heart, that seemed to shrink with horror from the recollection of all that time had effected since she last saw the scenes now so soon to be revisited.

She was not, however, permitted to travel alone; neither Sir Frederic nor the ladies would listen to such an idea: the worthy Baronet, therefore, continued to be her escort till she reached Carlisle; there, after seeing her seated in one of the stage-coaches, he left her to rejoin his lovely and amiable family in London; while pensive, moralizing, and sad, his grateful *protégée* pursued her northern route.

The coach stopped at the King’s Arms in Dumfries; and Stella started from a deep reverie on finding herself conducted to the same bed-room formerly occupied by Mrs. Ross during their short stay at that place. Unable to answer the girl who requested to know her further commands, she waved her hand for her to retire; and no sooner heard the door close behind her, than throwing herself on the well-recollected bed, she gave vent to her tears, and for some time allowed them to flow with unrestrained freedom. St. Vincent, Montague, all the absent, and all the dead, swam in mournful succession before her mental vision, which conjured up a thousand distressing images: their steps were no longer heard on the stair-case—their voices no longer vibrated on her ear from the sitting-room—her attendance was no longer required by the ever-lamented woman who then rested her head upon the very pillow, perhaps, that now supported her own.

“Alas! alas!” cried the throbbing Stella, “what a dreadful change has a few years effected! How dreary, how sad, how desolate appears all around me! To stay here all night is impossible!—no, I cannot indeed stay here all night!—the very thought almost rends my heart.”

The chambermaid again made her appearance, to know what the lady chose for supper, and to light her to the parlour.

The lady was not disposed for any supper; neither did she chuse to be lighted to the parlour: a post-chaise was all she wanted; and this was requested to be got ready with the utmost dispatch, as she was under the necessity of proceeding on her journey without further loss of time.

The girl stared at this unexpected turn of affairs, muttered something to herself as she turned to leave the room, and immediately retired to execute Stella’s orders.

As Stella descended the staircase when the carriage was announced, the sound of a trumpet caught her ear: she started, and for a moment became stationary. Though silent, the expression of her countenance seemed perfectly understood by the waiter who preceded her with

a candle, and who looking back upon finding she had stopped, said—"It is the military trumpet, Madam, and the last for the night."

Stella now instantly recollected herself, and affecting an air of indifference, enquired, in a voice that but ill seconded the attempt, what regiment was then quartered in Dumfries.

"The King's Own," replied the man; "a very fine corps, Madam: they succeeded Colonel Arabin's light horse, which have been twice here within these seven years, and we think these even surpass them."

Stella thought the latter could not be surpassed: she spoke not, however, but a profound sigh escaped her as she hastily entered the carriage, which immediately drove off.

The words "Colonel Arabin's light horse," again set the busy fancy of the lonely traveller at work; and she raised not her throbbing temples from the corner of the vehicle till it reached the next stage from Dumfries, about half an hour before midnight.

At first it had been her intention to proceed forwards after having a change of carriage and horses; but finding herself now extremely fatigued and languid, and dreading a recurrence of the same painful recollections which she had experienced at Dumfries, should inability to pursue her journey oblige her to sleep at —, our heroine finally yielded to the arguments of her hostess, who strongly urged the necessity of remaining till morning, in order to procure that repose of which she stood visibly in need.

As she was drinking some wine and water, with a small piece of biscuit, a chaise drove up to the door. The servant who attended, opened one of the window-shutters, and seeing a gentleman and lady alight, immediately left the room to offer his assistance. In a few minutes the door of the parlour again opened; and Stella, naturally supposing it was only the waiter who had re-entered, paid no attention to the circumstance, till, finding herself suddenly clasped in some person's arms, she hastily turned her head round, in order to discover what was to be hoped or feared from a salutation so abruptly alarming, and instantly recognised her old friend and late correspondent, Miss Adair! She was speedily followed by her father: and the joy produced by this meeting, though certainly of a mingled description, proved reciprocally gratifying, and sincerely felt by each of the parties.

Stella, on her reaching England, had lost no time in announcing her arrival and succeeding motions, to her friends at Woodside. Apprised of her intentions, Mr. Adair and his daughter instantly determined to give her the meeting at Dumfries, and accompany her from thence to the Hermitage, which had been prepared for her reception immediately after the arrival of her first letter; for, though once in contemplation to carry her first to Woodside, that idea had been wisely renounced by her guardian, from a persuasion that it would be better to get over the painful and distressing sensations occasioned by a first sight of her former cheerful, but now solitary abode, and all the heart-rending emotions a return under such circumstances must naturally create, as soon as possible, since it must be done at last; and procrastination in all such cases being, as he knew, only productive of additional misery, this change in their plans was accordingly adopted.

Some unforeseen impediment had, nevertheless, occurred to retard the hour of departure, and prevented their arrival at Dumfries, which it was hoped would otherwise have been accomplished the evening before she reached that place. The result of their expectations had not fallen far short of the original arrangement, as the present critical interview evinced; and the remainder of the night would have stolen away without the smallest idea of repose intruding itself, had not Mr. Adair at length insisted upon the female companions endeavouring to renovate their exhausted spirits by trying to obtain a few hours' rest, which the fatigued and exhausted

Stella principally seemed to require.

Convinced by her pale and languid look in the morning that every attempt for the purpose had proved ineffectual, and conceiving another day's residence in their present quarters absolutely necessary before she could be able to continue her journey, Mr. Adair once more exerted the authority of a guardian, and prevailed upon her to comply with his desire, though evidently much against her inclination.

The introduction of subjects supposed to be particularly interesting, had hitherto been carefully avoided as far as possible by her two friends: Stella, nevertheless, possessed too great a share of good sense and reflection, not to know such discussion would prove requisite before the expiration of a much longer time; and wishing to have so severe a trial of her fortitude over, she prepared to enter upon the topic of domestic occurrences, after having given a tolerably circumstantial account of all that had befallen herself in the course of the last seven years.

Mr. Adair was a man of sound understanding and superior abilities: he saw it was better to give way to the bias of inclination, and allow the luxury of unrestrained grief to have its scope, when the motion came from herself, than perhaps be reduced to the necessity of forcing her to commence the distressing task at some future juncture, equally inimical to her feelings. The afternoon and evening of the succeeding day were, therefore, allotted to information and explanations of various descriptions; and whatever might have been felt or suffered during this period, the ice once broken, each of the party found their mind considerably eased ere the hour of separation for the night arrived.

Sleep, however, again fled the heavy eyelids of our heroine, whose thoughts continued to wander over the past for the space of several long hours: but almost one of the first lessons inculcated on her young mind by the beloved instructress she deplored, had been—implicit resignation to the will of her Maker; and the arguments used to enforce this admirable precept now powerfully recurring to the memory of Stella, she determined henceforth to attempt the practice of it, as the surest means of procuring some degree of mental tranquillity, and evincing her lasting respect for the dear teacher, by thus proving the efficacy of an adherence to that line of conduct early marked out for her to follow.

This resolution once fairly settled, she soon fell asleep, and awaked not till the morning was pretty far advanced; when finding herself more refreshed than she had been for many preceding days, the party immediately commenced their journey to the neighbourhood of Port Patrick.

Stella had particularly requested they might neither stop to sleep at —, or Newtonstewart: though ignorant of the motives which dictated this strange request, the solicitude with which it was urged procured the ready acquiescence of Mr. Adair; and in due time the carriage entered the public road that wound round the memorable park at Ross Grove, and finally led to the Hermitage.

CHAP. XV.

“For thee my mem’ry learns to smart,
“Sure ev’ry vein contains a bleeding heart!”

SAVAGE.

STELLA once more experienced the instability of human resolution, as her eyes, swimming in the bitter tears of remembrance, glanced over the well-recollected scenes that now presented themselves to her view; and she mentally acknowledged that it was much easier to form systems of conduct, than to put them in practice.

This mortifying conviction, of which she had so frequently experienced the truth, bore yet harder upon her feelings when the chaise stopped at the little gate of the Hermitage: all her late assumed fortitude forsook her in this moment of trial; she shrunk from the offered hand of Mr. Adair, who first alighted from the carriage, cast an agonized look of unutterable woe on the now uninhabited abode, in which no Mrs. Bertram must ever again appear to welcome her home, to clasp her in the maternal embrace, or speak peace to the wounded bosom of misfortune; and then concealing her face on the side panel of the vehicle, she yielded to the irresistible impulse of conflicting passions, and sobbed aloud.

To check the first violent effusions of strong sensibility on any renewal of a heavy affliction, is seldom the surest method to bring the sufferer relief, though a very common one with *comforters* of a certain description; on the contrary, it is generally more productive of an opposite effect, by making the swelling pang of an overcharged heart afterwards burst forth with a force proportionably great to the severity of the former restraint imposed upon it. Nature ought, and in fact will have vent, where the feelings are acute; and the spirit of true consolation consists not in suppressing its sensations, but in permitting the mind to derive that relief which the omnipotent First Cause of all has evidently assigned it, from the free indulgence of a reasonable portion of human grief. Luckily for Stella, her present friends happened to view the matter in this light; and during the space of several minutes remained profoundly silent. At length Miss Adair, who had not yet left her side, softly whispered—

“Stella, my love, for Heaven’s sake recollect yourself! Come, let me assist you into the carriage; here is my father still likewise attending your motions; our good Mrs. Wallace too—see, she approaches to welcome you!”

Stella raised her languid head at the sound of the well-remembered name; and instantly hastening from the chaise, felt herself silently folded in that worthy woman’s arms, on whose bosom she once more dissolved in tears. Another affecting pause succeeded; after which she presented her hand to Mr. Adair, and holding her handkerchief to her face with the other, advanced to the door of the house; which, however, was no sooner opened, than the much-agitated Stella, unable to command the overpowering sensations that pressed upon her heart almost to suffocation, immediately rushed up the staircase to the room she had formerly occupied, and locking the door upon herself, continued for upwards of an hour deaf to the earnest entreaties of her friends, who repeatedly beseeched her to admit them.

When this request was at length complied, they found her so seriously indisposed, that her wishes were readily acceded to, upon expressing a desire to keep her chamber for the remainder of the evening: the family of Woodside always felt themselves at home in the Hermitage, therefore no consideration on the score of politeness interfered with this measure,

which her friends trusted would eventually contribute to the restoration of a greater degree of mental tranquillity. Mr. Adair, however, judged it unnecessary to prolong his stay any farther at the present juncture; and having business that required his presence at home, took the opportunity of returning with the chaise to Woodside.

Unwilling to leave Stella alone on the first melancholy night of her arrival, it was not without extreme reluctance Mrs. Wallace and Miss Adair retired to separate apartments, on a positive rejection of their several requests to become her bedfellow: partly satisfied, however, by her repeated assurances that she was infinitely better, they were forced to submit; and a little before the clock struck eleven, having prevailed upon her to take, with some negus, a small piece of toasted bread, she was consigned to the counsels of her solitary pillow; the house soon became quiet, and the rest of its inhabitants speedily sunk to repose.

No sooner was the latter circumstance fully ascertained, than Stella, who was still awake, prepared to execute a design which had recently taken entire possession of her thoughts: this proved no other than to visit the now forsaken chamber of her departed benefactress; a step which she persuaded herself would produce the most salutary effect, by the soothing influence such an indulgence could not fail to shed over her agitated spirits.

Such an undertaking created none of those weak terrors to which common minds are liable, in the superior one of our heroine, who had been too often condemned to perform many a solitary task through all the various hours of the night, surrounded by the silent mouldering dead in the awe-inspiring Church of her late prison, to feel any particular repugnance on the present occasion, where the interesting friend of her earliest youth was no longer near her—a deprivation deeply regretted in the state of mind she now experienced; for to have been able to weep over the cold inanimate remains of her beloved Mrs. Bertram, would, she imagined, have afforded her a superlative gratification: that gratification, however, was, alas! totally out of the question:—not so with what appeared on the point of attainment; it seemed at least within her reach, and she determined to accomplish the intention without further loss of time. A lamp had been left burning on the table; she took it up, and having slipped on a few clothes, softly left her apartment.

The door of Mrs. Bertram's chamber was unlocked; it yielded to the first tremulous touch of her hand, and she advanced forward, with a heavy heart, to the dark and empty fire-place. Here, having set her lamp on the hearth, she remained for some time stationary and sad, while her swimming eyes glanced mournfully round the untenanted and silent apartment. The bed and other pieces of furniture were the same she had formerly been accustomed to see, and exactly retained the positions they occupied when she left the Hermitage. Often had she watched by the dear invalid who once reposed in that bed; often had she seen her seated in those chairs, leaning on the table now before her.

“Alas!” sighed the young moralizer, “what memorials of times for ever fled are here! Every thing seems full of her who, to me at least, is no more!—How frequently placed at her side, or kneeling by her pillow, have I listened, delighted, to the mild voice of instruction as it issued warm from the heart that has ceased to beat, and the lips which are closed for ever! Alas! is it possible, can this sad reverse be real? can such vicissitudes happen?”

With her hands clasped in each other, and eyes intently rivetted on the vacant bed, she now hung over it for some time in silence, till Fancy exerting its creative magic, almost persuaded her the departed protector of her helpless infancy was again restored to her view, and stretched on the spot before her. For a short while the cherished idea was indulged, and past days of felicity permitted to rank themselves once more in the catalogue of the present; but this

soothing deception soon vanished before the returning light of reason and recollection, which gradually dispelled the baseless fabric of imagination, and bursting into a fresh flood of tears, she suddenly exclaimed—

“Oh my mother, guide, supporter, monitress, all that was friendly and good! must I indeed never see you more! never more be fated to enjoy your blessed society, your edifying example, on earth! No! ah, no! you are too surely lost to the wretched Stella, now nearly as much unconnected with the world as when your maternal arm first opened to receive the hapless object of parental neglect! Oh my friend, my benefactress! why was I not allowed to soften the pang of dissolution, to watch over your expiring moments, and to profit from the last impressive advice, from the solemn parting injunction, by the tenor of which your adopted child would henceforth have ruled her future conduct!”

Unable longer to support her agitated frame, she threw herself across the bed in the deepest affliction, and again yielded to the various and distressing sensations that pressed upon her grateful and affectionate heart.

This state of mental abstraction from her present situation proved not, however, of very long continuance, for it was speedily interrupted in a most unexpected manner by a hollow sigh that came apparently from near the window. Stella raised her head, but almost immediately resumed her former position, persuaded there was some mistake in the case, merely occasioned by the existing nature of her own meditations: nevertheless, a repetition of the same sound, deeper, and more prolonged than the first, again caught her ear: this was distinctly heard; but before any judgment could be formed on a circumstance so inexplicable, the most plaintive, melancholy, and sublime strains of harmony instantly succeeded to produce additional astonishment. These, no more than what had preceded them, could now possibly be considered as an illusion of the senses, for nothing of the kind could be plainer. The melody, however, had ceased; and, thunderstruck by an incident so perfectly unaccountable, she scarcely ventured to breathe, bewildered, and utterly at a loss what to think, or whether to wish or dread a renewal of strains so celestial, that they appeared to be produced by the agency of something more than mortal.

The fearful nights she had spent in the burying-ground of the Convent, at this period of awful suspense, flashed upon her memory; but the sensations resulting from that and the present occurrence proved totally different:—horror and terrifying apprehensions then occupied every idea; pensive, mournful feelings, not perhaps entirely free from some degree of anxiety for the conclusion of so extraordinary an event, were what she chiefly experienced during the moments of uncertainty under which she now laboured. Ere any resolution, however, could be finally taken on the subject, the light finger of the mysterious musician once more swept over the trembling strings, and the music swelled by degrees to a loud and full cadence that vibrated through the chamber, and then died away as before.

“Wonderful!” said Stella, who by this time had quitted her recumbent posture, and stood in a listening attitude: “surely the benignant spirit of her who once cheered this room with her presence, hovers over the child of her bounty, and comes to soothe my perturbed mind to peace! What should I apprehend!” she added, after a temporary pause; “evil never found entrance here, nor prefaced its approach in so pleasing a manner: why then should I hesitate to investigate the source of this perplexing affair? No, I will not hesitate, convinced as I am that nothing bad has produced it; I will not shrink from the examination reason and common sense demands.”

As she stooped for the lamp, something with a kind of rustling noise fluttered on the hearth, and presently fell at her feet. An involuntary start was not to be avoided; she held the

light, however, to the new cause of alarm, and discovered a couple of withered leaves on the floor. The window must certainly be open, thought Stella, and she immediately advanced in the direction that led to it, though not quite free from some small degree of terror; yet with a fixed determination to satisfy herself, if to be satisfied were practicable. The sash, it appeared, had indeed been left accidentally open, and an Æolian harp, which she now recollected formerly belonged to Maria Campbell, lay near it, over which partial gusts of wind had occasionally swept as they rushed with a sighing kind of sound through the almost leafless trees before the window.

Perhaps nothing of a similar description affects the feeling heart, if previously disposed to melancholy sensations, in a more powerful manner than the wild and pensive notes of this little instrument; and at this moment they happened to be in perfect unison with the thoughts of our heroine, and seemed to waft them to heaven with every soft ascending swell. She placed herself in an easy chair, which Mrs. Bertram had usually occupied when ill health confined her to her room, and resting her head on the back of it, remained for some time absorbed in the luxury of unrestrained, but chastened sorrow, silently listening at intervals to the soothing strains of the aerial musician, till her mind, insensibly tranquillized, appeared to acquire new strength by every succeeding reflection that filled it. A prayerbook accidentally caught her eye on the chimneypiece; it was immediately recognised for one particularly used by the late mistress of the house. Stella opened it with a sigh, dropped on her knees by the side of the table, and drawing the lamp nearer, continued to read, and address her Maker by turns, for a considerable period.

At length the clock struck four; the “music of the spheres” no longer floated round the chamber, for the breeze had ceased to lend its assistance; and the now expiring lamp barely served to render darkness visible. Though wrapped in a travelling cloak lined with fur, Stella began to feel the chill air of a frosty morning; and therefore, with a heart more at ease, and a mind finally resigned to the wise, but inscrutable dispensations of Providence, she glanced another look round the apartment, and then softly closing the door after her, stole back to her own room, where, having hastened into bed, she was speedily locked in the renovating arms of a repose more profound than any which she had enjoyed for a considerable time.

CHAP. XVI.

“Improves her charms
“With inward greatness, unaffected wisdom,
“And sanctity of manners.”

ADDISON.

STELLA appeared at breakfast with spirits unusually refreshed and tranquil; even her looks seemed to have partaken of the same benign influence, and beamed with some small emanation of their wonted serenity. Her two friends were no less astonished, than rejoiced by an alteration equally unexpected as agreeable; and with unremitting attention, continued to adopt every method most likely to render it of permanent duration. The good sense possessed by our heroine seconded their endeavours, which were finally crowned with a considerable degree of success in a much shorter period than they once supposed probable; for, though a certain expression of melancholy still cast its pensive shade over her lovely, intelligent features, the more violent effusions of acute grief soon gradually subsided, and all that remained visible of its former influence, only tended to render her countenance more interestingly beautiful and attractive.

Thus several weeks passed away. Miss Adair was still her visitor; her father occasionally so; and Mrs. Wallace, at the particular request of our heroine, became a constant member of her family.

The able and friendly executor of her beloved Mrs. Bertram's will had, by this time, resigned the management of her affairs into her own hands; retaining, however, at her earnest request, the office of chief counsellor and adviser when his assistance appeared necessary. She was now in the actual possession of a handsome fortune, for the bequest of Maria Campbell amounted to upwards of ten thousand pounds, independent of what descended to her by Mrs. Bertram's deed of settlement, which, though comparatively trifling, had increased to about forty pounds per annum, one half of which advance had been added by the death of that lady's former pensioner, the other by the judicious arrangement of Mr. Adair; so that the original twenty pounds, which at one time appeared all that she was likely to call her own, had now doubled its value; and rumour, as usual on such occasions, having generously thrown another ten thousand into the scale, Stella might, if so inclined, have mingled with the first circles in that part of the country, and figured as one of its chief ornaments: but, though wealthy beyond either her wishes or most sanguine expectation, our heroine secretly experienced the inefficacy of riches to procure happiness; and, while apparently encompassed with every thing best calculated for its attainment, disappointed hopes and corroding anguish embittered her days, when thought, as was too frequently the case, perversely strayed beyond the boundaries reason had assigned it, and recurred to what might have been, had not her ill-starred fate decreed otherwise.

The various afflictions under which she had laboured, were all of a nature to admit of participation, by which means their pristine force was gradually diminished, and at length finally subdued. While her mind was labouring under this afflictive influence, other subjects of regret were nearly banished; but no sooner had these ceased to become the predominant evils, and resignation with time blunted their edge, than her unfortunate predilection for the husband of her greatest enemy returned with renovated strength: and as this predilection was of that description which debarred all confidential communication, it silently preyed upon her mind, and frequently threw a shade over every surrounding gratification, though the apparent serenity of her air and

manner gave no indication of such being the case; and the uniform tenor of a well-regulated conduct rather seemed to imply a state of internal ease than otherwise, since, whatever might prove the extent of her sufferings, no consideration of a selfish nature was ever permitted to damp the enjoyment of another by the indulgence of feelings she had firmly determined never to avow.

A circumstance had now existed for some time which likewise increased her chagrin: Major Montague appeared to have dropped all correspondence with Miss Adair, to whose communication on the subject of our heroine's arrival in Scotland, no answer whatever had been returned: many unavoidable occurrences, to be sure, might have occasioned his silence; but still, after all the previous anxiety expressed on her account, it seemed particularly strange no notice should be taken of the very event he had hitherto so repeatedly wished to ascertain. Perhaps one of the chief sources of the disappointment this incident produced, arose, though unwilling to acknowledge it even to herself, from a latent desire to learn something of St. Vincent's motions. She concluded, however, that as he was undoubtedly still at Gibraltar, no material change had probably taken place in his situation; and, under this supposition, tried to consider his friend's apparent neglect of less consequence, persuaded that nothing relative to the topic in which she was most interested could, in the present state of affairs, be obtained through the channel of his intelligence; or if obtained, ought it to prove of importance to her?

It was verging towards the end of October when Stella revisited her native shores: the weather had for some time proved extremely unfavourable for out-of-door recreations, and therefore no temptation interfered to interrupt the course of some internal arrangements, which, convinced she ought never to let her mind remain unemployed, she now took the opportunity of executing.

As to be serviceable to her fellow-creatures was a duty early imprinted on her mind, and the ability for putting that humane precept in practice now greatly in her power, various plans for beneficial institutions were daily formed, and canvassed over in the course of every evening; one of which it was determined should be realized immediately. This was, to have a small habitation erected for a school-house, where the poorer class of children in the neighbourhood might be taught reading, and every kind of useful needle-work, gratis, by some woman of respectable character, if such could be found, properly qualified for the undertaking. Necessary enquiries for this purpose were of course set on foot; and in the meantime, a circumstance occurred that considerably accelerated one part of the benevolent scheme. It was discovered, upon examination, that a small cottage adjoining the old ruin, which had long remained unoccupied, might easily be repaired and fitted up for the occasion. The situation was certainly preferable, on account of several local advantages it enjoyed, to any other that could have been fixed upon; and Stella, fully sensible that these rendered it particularly adapted to her views, gave orders to have what was required for making it habitable, instantly accomplished. But undertakings of this kind did not occupy all her attention; those which came more properly under the denomination of amusement, sometimes had their turn: and the long deserted grotto formed a prominent feature in that number.

This romantic little spot was kept in tolerable order during Mrs. Bertram's life; but, after her decease, had been rather neglected, and now visibly wanted many repairs in various quarters. Stella recollected some ornamental improvements she had observed in a fabric of similar construction, during her residence with Mrs. Ross, in Provence: these at the time struck her as suitable to this place; and she now determined to have the design executed in a style of appropriate simplicity and elegant neatness.

The sensations experienced by our heroine on her first visit to this favourite retreat were certainly by no means of an enviable nature; but as she had settled her future mode of life, preferring retirement, and purposing to keep very little company either at home or abroad, she rightly concluded that the wisest plan to be adopted was, to beautify and improve her landed property, and to have every thing in and round the house made as consonant to her wishes as taste, situation, and command of money could accomplish. To lead a life of "single blessedness" was, at present, her determination: she possessed no acknowledged family tie in the world to have any after-claim upon her fortune; and as it was her determined resolution never to exceed the limits of her annual income, the principal consequently remained, to bequeath at her death to those with whose friendly attachment she had most reason to be satisfied. Stella therefore thought she was justly entitled to please her fancy on the above subjects; and consequently, when the weather would allow, her intended improvements were to be effected, and the Hermitage literally converted into a little terrestrial paradise.

Amongst other sources of rational enjoyment, one of the chief and most favourite with Stella was not forgotten. Mrs. Bertram had a small, but select collection of the most esteemed authors: to the increase of these she turned her attention, and soon procured a very considerable addition by the assistance of her former admirer, Mr. Johnstone, who was now clergyman of the parish, and, as has already been said, husband to one of the Miss Adairs. This gentleman had fortunately a friend in London, on whose discriminating taste and judgment he could perfectly rely for executing the commission in a proper manner; and Stella was so much pleased with his performance of it, that an appropriate apartment for the future reception of her valuable literary acquisitions, was immediately determined to be erected.

In planning arrangements for the future, in drawing amusement and instruction from her now voluminous library, and in the society of her faithful friend Miss Adair, and the other members of that family, the dreary months of winter imperceptibly stole away, and Stella soon saw her schemes realized by the exertions of the busy mechanics employed for that purpose.

An addition of two wings to the house supplied her with a most excellent apartment for the reception of her books, and a variety of well-chosen historical prints, procured at the same time. A music-room, which corresponded with the library, on the opposite side of the mansion, was fitted up in a more expensive style, though perfectly agreeable to the idea of elegant simplicity which pervaded all her plans of improvements; and on the ground floor were two excellent sitting-rooms. The grotto was again put in order, and embellished by improvements; the garden assumed a new appearance, and the school-house was fast advancing: this latter might, indeed, have been much sooner finished, had not its romantic situation tempted our heroine to extend her first intention, by making its dimensions larger, and giving to the whole an air of Gothic grandeur, though still on a comparative scale, which corresponded better with its vicinity to the old ruin, and formed at the same time a fine object from the windows of the library, which faced in that direction. This striking little edifice was so contrived as to admit of two families under its roof, without interfering in any manner whatever with each other: the larger and most commodious division was allotted for the afore-said purpose of education; the lesser designed for the habitation of the gardener.

Before the commencement of the approaching summer, our heroine received a very agreeable addition to her small society, by the almost unlooked-for arrival of her three old friends, Juliana, Beatrix, and Magdaline, who, on the dissolution of their Order, (which being very unpopular in that part of Provence where it happened to be situated, had been accomplished by the neighbouring peasantry under the pressure of many aggravating circumstances,) having

effected their escape to England, were come to throw themselves on her humanity, and to claim that protection, a presentiment of what was to befall them had induced her to offer at the time of their separation in the Convent. The reception they met with from the compassionate and warm-hearted Stella, proved such as to indemnify them for all they had previously suffered, and afforded daily scope to bless the moment of their first introduction and subsequent attention to her forlorn situation while under the dominion of the cruel and capricious Lady Abbess.

That unprincipled woman, they informed Stella, had sustained many indignities in the progress of their emancipation from her tyranny; till at last, humbled to the dust, and terrified by the instigations of a reproaching conscience, she had confessed a series of crimes which the good and innocent Beatrix shrunk from enumerating. One of her transactions, however, was too much connected with the former sufferings of their present benefactress not to claim an exception; for, in the course of the penitential fits with which she was occasionally seized, she confessed that her conduct to the patient, friendless, and ill-treated Stella, often lay heavy on her mind; and that, wishing to disburden it of one load at least, though comparatively trifling in enormity to many others, she desired Beatrix, on her arrival in Scotland, to acquaint her late victim with the compunction now experienced on her account; and likewise to tell her that the cause of her confinement, which she had frequently appeared so solicitous to learn, was Mr. Ross's apprehensions lest his son should form a matrimonial connexion with one so much his inferior; a connexion which the young gentleman, he affirmed, seemed bent upon effecting.

Stella expressed her astonishment at the latter part of this intelligence, declaring it must certainly have originated in some mistake, as nothing of the kind had ever been mentioned to her by Francis Ross.

The Nun, however, persisted in the story, and appeared fully convinced of its authenticity. She likewise added, that the Abbess was so much irritated by the neglect of the Nabob to fulfil the remaining stipulations of their engagement, that she had thought of taking measures to free the Community from the further burden of her maintenance, through the medium of means not quite so unexceptionable as those which fortunately offered to accomplish her liberation by the critical interference of Sir Frederic and Lady Delmore. The precise nature of those means Beatrix forbore to specify; but the deep blush that suffused her countenance at this part of her little narrative, seemed to indicate they were not of the most harmless description. Satisfied that such was the case, and grateful to the ruling arm of Providence for permitting her to escape the threatened evil, Stella pressed not for an explanation of nefarious intentions, which could only serve to heap coals of fire on the head of a fallen enemy; without benefiting herself; and Beatrix, secretly giving her credit for such an instance of self-command, proceeded to relate a number of corroborating circumstances, which evidently established the collusion between the mercenary Abbess and her unprincipled employer. She finished, by saying that the former expired under a variety of sufferings, mental and corporeal, closing her earthly career in one of the vaults of their late residence, where several of the Sisterhood had been forced to conceal themselves from the savage fury of their unfeeling persecutors.

This communication of the Nun convinced our heroine of the injustice done Mrs. St. Vincent by the suspicions formerly harboured against her, as having a hand in her confinement, and taught her to be more cautious in future of forming conclusions from her feelings or prejudices, however the corroborating nature of antecedent circumstances might apparently combine to warrant them.

Mr. Ross had never stood very high in her opinion; and what she now heard did not alter her former sentiments: but as his injustice to her had eventually proved its own punishment in

the loss of his only son, and he himself was no longer able either to persecute her, or defend his own nefarious proceedings, she wished not to war with the dead; and therefore requested the past might be buried in oblivion, in consideration of the many instances of friendship received from some of the other members of his family, and the lasting gratitude, remembrance, and regard she should invariably retain for them.

Beatrix commended this christian disposition, and promised to comply with her wishes on the subject.

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CHAP. XVII.

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot.”

POPE.

MEANWHILE our heroine heard frequently from Lady Delmore and her sister, and flattered herself she should have every thing in order for their reception prior to the period of their intended visit to Galloway; which, from some unexpected circumstances, she found was not likely to take place so speedily as had been hoped for at the time of her separating from them.

The building originally designed for the school-house, from its secluded and romantic situation, appeared so congenial to the ideas of the emigrants, whose predilection for retirement seemed rather increased than diminished by the nature of their recent misfortunes, that Stella changed her intention in regard to its first destination, and had it privately fitted up for their reception, upon finding their unconquerable reluctance to renounce the mode of life they had hitherto been accustomed to, and the solicitude they frequently expressed for a similar retreat.

Fully acquainted with all that was necessary to render it such as they desired, every convenience and accommodation suitable for the purpose to which it was now allotted, Stella directed to be procured.

A part of the old ruin was converted into a small chapel; and as its exterior appearance was carefully preserved, no suspicion of the real use for which it was designed could cause any murmurs amongst the lower class of the Scottish peasantry, who were seldom inclined to grant their Roman Catholic neighbours so public a mark of religious indulgence.

The friendly attention of our considerate heroine proved unremitting while this business was in hand, and every thing was at length concluded to her mind, before the future inhabitants entertained the most distant idea of what had been done in their favour; but when finally informed of this circumstance, language is inadequate to do justice to their feelings: suffice it to say, that the effusions of their gratitude were such, that Stella on no previous exertion of benevolence, had ever felt more sincerely gratified, or experienced a higher degree of self-approbation.

But public utility was not to be absorbed in the narrow limits of private gratification: another school-house, though on a different scale, was speedily erected. It consisted merely of two rooms, besides that set apart for the purposes of education, and lay so near the first building, without subjecting the occupiers to the chance of any disagreeable intrusion from its daily inmates, that the Nuns could easily overlook the children's progress in all the various kinds of needle-work—a task the religious of the Order to which they belonged were particularly qualified to perform; and which Beatrix, and her companion Magdaline, now undertook to superintend, aided by the assistance of Juliana, whose perfect knowledge of the English language rendered her an useful auxiliary on the occasion. A very respectable elderly woman, of superior birth and education, but decayed fortune, was ultimately procured to conduct the other branches of instruction: and our heroine had soon the supreme happiness of seeing her benevolent plans in a probable way to benefit numbers of her less affluent fellow-creatures.

Thus in the laudable pursuits of humanity, and every praise-worthy action calculated to keep her mind constantly occupied, Stella held her even course, and magnanimously determined to draw sources of self-congratulation from her exertions for the good of others, with a view to smooth their rugged passage through the chances and changes of life, however thinly, in some

respects, it had pleased Providence to strew her own path with roses.

Uniformly and firmly resolved by no mental imbecility on her side to increase, if she could not conquer, the fatal predilection secretly harboured for St. Vincent, every circumstance that could in any manner tend to produce that effect, was on all occasions sedulously avoided. Actuated by this principle, she had hitherto suppressed the latent inclination that sometimes instigated a wish to revisit particular spots, the situations of which were strongly impressed on her memory by the interesting nature of those occurrences of which they had formerly been the scene. It is true, the high-road leading to Woodside circled round a part of the park which came under the above description; but, though this was the case, and her sensations were such as, from her acute sensibility, must often have rendered the task of passing it extremely painful, Stella turned not from what was proper to be done, in consideration of any selfish or weak indulgence on her own account: she did not indeed willingly lay herself open to such trials of fortitude; neither did she fly from what appeared necessary to be encountered, when circumstances required a different mode of conduct. To approach nearer any of the well-remembered spots, scenes of days for ever passed, than could be easily avoided with propriety, had never yet been attempted: all her merely optional rambles were constantly made in a different direction; and, of course, neither the pleasure-grounds immediately adjacent to the house of Rossgrove, the house itself, nor pavilion, had ever been resorted to since her arrival from the Continent.

During the greater part of the foregoing time Miss Adair had seldom left the Hermitage, except when her presence happened to be particularly wanted at home. In this situation she found herself placed one afternoon about the middle of autumn; and in compliance with a message from her mother, set out for Woodside, from whence she was not expected to return for some days.

Scarcely had Miss Adair taken her departure, before Mrs. Wallace was sent for by her niece, on account of one of the children being suddenly seized with an alarming illness. This was the first time Stella had been deprived of both her companions at the same juncture; and tea was no sooner over than she prepared to visit her Gallic neighbours, and endeavour to prevail upon Juliana to accompany her back for the remainder of the night.

Though the latter, disgusted with the world, and hopeless of ever again meeting the man of her choice, who there were several reasons to believe had fallen a victim to the popular rage for reformation before she quitted France, no longer felt any inclination to mingle in society, and never left her favourite abode without much reluctance: yet, whenever Stella expressed a wish for her company, she yielded to the calls of gratitude and affection, without attending to any other sensation, and immediately obeyed the summons of her benefactress with apparent alacrity. She had never till now, indeed, been requested to sleep out of the cottage of St. Clare (as the habitation of the Nuns was styled, in remembrance of their former residence in Provence,) since it first became the abode of the emigrants; but our heroine did not despair of obtaining her acquiescence to her wishes even in this point.

The evening happened to be uncommonly fine, and as the distance to the cottage was but short, she determined to lengthen her walk by taking a more circuitous path than the usual one.

At the extremity of the late Nabob's pleasure-grounds, a sort of labyrinth had been formed in those plantations which lay most remote from the mansion-house, on the side nearest the Hermitage: this terminated on the ridge of fantastic rocks which surrounded that quarter of the latter where the grotto was situated; and several of the winding walks ran in a direction so far from Rossgrove, that Stella, accompanied by one or other of her friends, sometimes frequented them, without conceiving it any infringement on the secret resolution previously taken to avoid

every circumstance calculated to soften the heart, or recall dangerous remembrances, contrary to the rule of conduct she had prescribed herself.

In the course of her long absence from Scotland the trees and various evergreens, of which the labyrinth was chiefly composed, had considerably increased in size, and approximated more closely to each other; by which means, as well as by some alterations made during that time, the different paths were rendered exceeding intricate and difficult to follow, in proportion as they wound nearer the house of their proprietor: of course, the inhabitants of the Hermitage never ventured to any distance beyond their knowledge, but generally confined their rambles to the vicinity of the grotto.

The road Stella had now taken, led to this labyrinth; and by degrees she entered it, unconscious almost of the circumstance, so much had she gradually become absorbed in reflection. It was the first time that, alone, and unobserved, she had pursued the solitary direction which conducted her to its confines; but her mind happening to be in a frame peculiarly disposed to meditation, and conceiving there would still be sufficient time to call upon Juliana after the conclusion of her peregrination, she gave the reins to inclination, and proceeded insensibly forward, without remembering to pay a necessary attention to her steps, or the surrounding objects by which their returning motions were to be directed, till, after a progress of near an hour's length, she came, most unexpectedly, and all at once, upon the walls of the pavilion and bathing-house.

Stella started, as from a dream, at the unlooked-for discovery; and glancing her eyes around, seemed irresolute what course to pursue. She now perceived that the alterations made in the labyrinth had misled her most egregiously, and felt extremely dissatisfied with herself for indulging a degree of mental abstraction sufficiently powerful to lay the foundation of her present perplexities, by the inattention it naturally produced. After a short pause, curiosity, and something yet more impulsive, however, prevailed; but the latter sensation was carefully covered over by the plausible pretext of examining a book-case, which it was now conveniently recollected stood in the upper apartment. The particular construction of this piece of furniture it appeared requisite to examine, in order to procure a similar one for the grotto: and perfectly satisfied with this ostensible motive for her present defalcation from former resolutions, she permitted the intention to be speedily realized.

"I will venture once more to view the interior," she said; "perhaps the doorway may be unlocked, and, alas! there is no longer any fear of interruption from the members of a family, all of whom are now nearly swept from the face of the earth."

Deeply sighing at the melancholy recollection these few words forcibly produced, she laid her hand upon the lock, and found she was not mistaken in her conjecture. Having ascended the staircase, Stella immediately entered the room where Hammond's Love Elegies formerly were discovered.

Various changes had taken place in this well-remembered room since she had last seen it; the furniture was totally different, and the whole seemed to have undergone a thorough alteration. In the opinion of Stella, this alteration, however, was not for the better; and a sigh more profound than the first, marked her sincerity on the occasion.

Instead of the elegant simplicity which once characterized this sweet secluded retreat, an air of voluptuousness reigned in every quarter: the paintings, the artfully concealed recesses in which the sofas were placed, the mirrors—all, in short, evinced a taste repugnant to the nicer feelings of true female delicacy—all breathed a fascinating influence, rather calculated to derange the virtuous sensations of the heart, rather than to render them more permanent.

Stella turned from a cursory examination of the *tout-ensemble* with disgust, and proceeded to the small adjoining cabinet, in which the supposed object of her visit used, in other days, to occupy a distinguished situation. Disappointment, however, attended the search: the book-case no longer appeared; and arrangements similar to those in the larger apartments, also adorned this once more becomingly furnished apartment. At first these changes surprised, no less than displeased her. Mrs. St. Vincent, she presumed, had seldom favoured the Grove with her presence for any length of time since the fatal accident which constituted her its mistress; and her husband was at too great a distance to prove the director of decorations so expensive and improper. In a few minutes, however, Stella recollected Mrs. Wallace had one day mentioned something relative to Mrs. St. Vincent's spending part of a summer at the Grove, soon after it came into her possession; and even hinted that those who accompanied her during her residence there, were by no means noted for propriety of conduct: to this intelligence she had further added, that they frequently held their revels in the pavilion, which had been purposely fitted up for their reception. This information no sooner recurred to her memory, than the mystery at once vanished, and all that she saw was immediately accounted for.

Now more than ever disgusted and dissatisfied with the ultimate conclusion of her researches, she indignantly withdrew from the small apartment, and was hastily crossing to the door of the principal one, when a book, in the same window, and almost in the very identical spot from whence the Love Elegies had been purloined, attracted her notice; and she advanced, with a degree of emotion not to be repressed, in order to examine its titlepage.

The subject of her curiosity proved to be a late publication of some celebrity, and seemed to have been recently perused, for it remained only half closed, and a marker dropped from the leaves as she lifted it up. Stella picked up the latter, with a view to replace it, and perceived it was a visiting card, with the words "Lord Fitzhenry, New Bond Street," printed in the middle of an elegantly engraved border.

The name of Fitzhenry seemed not entirely new to our heroine; but so faint was the recollection retained of it, that she could not possibly call to mind where, or on what occasion it had ever been mentioned in her hearing. This circumstance might easily prove the case; for the old Lord bearing that title, had given up all intercourse with the world long before her departure from England; consequently, he was seldom spoken of in a family not personally acquainted with him, and to the members of which he was only known in the character of great-uncle to St. Vincent, whose prospect of succeeding to his fortune or honours, appeared at that period far too distant to merit any particular degree of attention.

Perfectly unable to form any conclusion from the nature of her confused ideas on this head, the titlepage was again resorted to. Whoever it belonged to must have been in that apartment very lately; and Stella, more and more puzzled, knew not what construction to put upon an incident so unaccountable: all intercourse between Rossgrove and the Hermitage had, to be sure, long ceased to exist; and, of course, the former might have many visitors unknown to the inhabitants of the latter: nevertheless, as things of the smallest importance, particularly if new, are speedily circulated in a country place, it still appeared probable, if any person of the rank this visiting-card announced was at present in the neighbourhood, the circumstance would certainly have transpired, and, through some channel or another, reached her. At length, after a variety of conjectures, she finally concluded that some distant connexion or acquaintance of the family, then on their way to Ireland, had taken the opportunity of viewing the Grove, and accidentally left the volume behind in the pavilion.

CHAP. XVIII.

“With the throb true passion proves,
“Shall fond affection greet the form it loves.”
MISS WILLIAMS.

SATISFIED with this solution of the mystery, Stella replaced the volume, and once more moved towards the door: but the wonder was not to cease with the finishing stroke thus assigned it. In retiring from the window, the train of her gown swept something along with it, which, from the sound, seemed of a hard substance: on stooping to examine what was there, she perceived a ring on the floor: it was a mourning one, with an appropriate device, elegantly executed; and the name of Mrs. Ross, together with the period of her death, richly enamelled upon the inside of it.

Hitherto the attention of Stella had been occupied by trifles, when put in competition with the object which now almost exclusively engrossed it; and she hurried back to the window, in order to view her new acquisition more minutely. What remembrances did not the little magic circle recall to her agitated mind!—what changes, what vicissitudes had befallen her since the time of which it bore the date!

“But,” cried our heroine, as if suddenly recollecting herself, “how came this mournful memento here? it surely could not have been dropped by the unworthy daughter of my dear lamented benefactress; for even admitting, which however is not very probable, that she paid her mother’s memory the respect of wearing such a thing, and had accidentally left it in this place, still it could scarcely have lain unnoticed from the distant period of her last residence at the Grove until the moment of its present discovery.”

A second inundation of conjectures succeeded this new and inexplicable incident: these, however, soon terminated in a manner similar to their predecessors, for she no longer doubted that the ring, like the volume, belonged to some person of the description already mentioned.

What to do with these apparently deserted articles, was now the question. The book she felt no inclination to remove: but the case proved different with its companion; for Stella could not help fancying a certain degree of disrespect seemed attached to the idea of letting it remain in such a state of total neglect, while the conviction that it rested not with her to remedy the negligence of its unknown owner, held her fluctuating and irresolute how to proceed, so as to reconcile the bias of her affectionate heart with those notions of justice and propriety which alternately interfered with her wishes on the occasion.

Before she had come to any decided resolution, her thoughts were suddenly diverted into another channel, and her whole frame petrified with terror and apprehension; for approaching steps were unexpectedly heard, and the murmur of voices ascended, which seemed to issue from persons either already on the staircase, or at least in the lower part of the pavilion.

“A ring is so small an object,” said one of the speakers, whose words now more distinctly reached the listening, trembling Stella, “that it might easily escape every attempt to find it in the green-house; but your Lordship may depend upon my utmost endeavours to recover it if possible.”

What answer was returned to this assurance, our heroine knew not; for, solely anxious to evade discovery, the fatal ring was hastily thrown upon the nearest sofa, after which she rushed into the little cabinet, and softly closed the door behind her.

Two persons almost immediately entered the room from which she had so precipitately

retreated; and in the space of a few minutes he, whose words were first recognised, suddenly exclaimed, in accents of exultation—"Here it is, my Lord—I have found it at last; it must certainly have happened as you suspected, and dropped from your finger when your Lordship's glove fell behind the sofa, where I see the latter still lies."

The expression of pleasure uttered by the other stranger on recovering his ring, marked the value he entertained for it: they did more; for the energetic, yet harmonious accents vibrated on the heart of the trembling Stella with a sensation too powerful, too unexpected for endurance. A deep and profound sigh burst from her bosom; and the succeeding noise occasioned by her fainting frame falling upon the floor, speedily brought the cause of her alarm to witness its effects. The door was abruptly thrown open, and our heroine, on the restoration of her faculties, found herself supported by the circling arms of St. Vincent!

For some time she could hardly credit the evidence of her senses; and when that ceased to be the case, the agitation of the moment was so great, that, totally thrown off her guard, a thousand unconscious indications of the real state of her heart mingled with the astonishment his unexpected appearance created, and to the ardent, penetrating eyes of her highly gratified companion, fully conveyed all he wished to be assured of.

When the first moments of surprise and joy began to subside, the impropriety of her present situation recurred to the recollection of our heroine with renovated force; for her sensations, no less than the imprudence which had led her to run the risk of such an interview by visiting the pavilion, appeared equally reprehensible; and therefore disengaging herself from his still supporting arms, she endeavoured to assume an air of more dignified composure; and, having attempted to apologize for her *mal-à-propos* intrusion, she arose to depart, while the tear that would swell to its utmost boundary, seemed to say her feelings and look were not entirely in unison with each other.

To part from her in this manner was not, however, the present intention of her companion; and neither remonstrances, entreaties, nor even appearance of displeasure, proved sufficiently powerful to effect her purposed retreat.

Convinced, from the nature of his present situation, that he might now address her in the most honourable and unequivocal terms, St. Vincent, though a respect to Stella still continued to direct his conduct, no longer seemed the serious, the unhappy, the reserved character she formerly remembered him. Ever energetic, manly, and noble in all his actions, an uncommon animation pervaded every feature at this juncture, and rendered all he said particularly impressive; his very air and manner conveyed the idea of having undergone a new and incredible revolution: he was no longer to be driven from her presence in obedience to the cold dictates of a repelling prudence, or restrained from evincing the unalterable sentiments of his heart by the influence of considerations which had once rendered him superlatively miserable.

St. Vincent was no longer a married man: the unfortunate woman, for years his torment and disgrace, had at length paid the debt of nature: he was free, unshackled by the galling chain of an ill-sorted union, and, from an unlooked-for combination of circumstances, henceforth at liberty to offer his hand and fortune to her who alone merited his most ardent and unalterable attachment.

The whole of this surprising intelligence was uttered with so much vehemence of expression, and in terms so strongly descriptive of his feelings, that Stella, overpowered by the influx of new ideas, which took entire possession of her mind, permitted him in silent perturbation to reseat her: and now first remarking his mourning dress, which (had any proof of his veracity been necessary) sufficiently witnessed the truth of what she had just heard, and

seemed to sanction a relaxation from the stern line of propriety hitherto so strictly observed, he was insensibly allowed to explain himself in a fuller and more connected style, without the smallest attempt from his now happy auditor to interrupt the communication, who listened with an increasing degree of interest to the history of former sufferings, in the bitterness of which she had but too deeply participated not to feel extremely affected by the recapitulation; while her heart, unusually softened, and irresistibly assailed in favour of the man who had ever remained master of its earliest movements, gradually yielded to the actuating impulse of tender affection; and as he held her enraptured to his bosom, she softly murmured forth acknowledgements of her sentiments continuing the same as, some years back, he had but too much reason to believe them.

The circling arms of St. Vincent returned a more fervent pressure as the blushing Stella pronounced this ecstatic confession of persevering regard, while a temporary, but most expressive silence marked the nature of their sensations. He then yielded to Stella's efforts to be disengaged from his arms, which, the moment she recollected herself, she attempted to effect, and in a short time each of the parties became more composed, and better able to converse on the astonishing alteration which had, since their last sight of each other, taken place in their affairs.

The person by whom St. Vincent was accompanied on his arrival at the pavilion, had retired the moment the restoration of our heroine's faculties was fully ascertained; they were consequently left at liberty to discuss all those various topics of communication which seemed to press for a particular and immediate degree of attention; and in the course of their conversation, Stella learned the following particulars.

CHAP. XIX.

"All things are ready, if our minds be so."

SHAKESPEARE.

IT appeared that soon after the late Mrs. Ross joined her husband in Provence, St. Vincent's brother fell an early victim to a long series of ill conduct, and almost every species of moral depravity. His father did not long survive him, bent to the grave by the irremediable errors of one son, and the misery which the consequences of those errors had, through his means, entailed on the other. The death of the latter happened just before St. Vincent left England; he had therefore the melancholy gratification of performing the last duties to this unfortunate parent, and doing every thing in his power to render his widowed mother's situation consonant to her wishes.

By his marriage articles with Margaret Ross, the Grove, in failure of her brother and his more immediate heirs, was to be the joint property of her and her husband for the term of their several lives; after which it descended, of course, to their children: but in case no issue resulted from this ill-sorted union, (and St. Vincent not only now survived his wife, but likewise the other branches of his family,) then the whole of the Nabob's landed possessions was finally to rest with his daughter's husband, provided they had been five years married at the time of her decease.

Many things which are considered as our greatest misfortune at the time of their being, are, in fact, frequently found to be productive of future benefit. Had St. Vincent's attempts to obtain a divorce succeeded at the time they were first set on foot, Rossgrove would have been ultimately lost to him; and, in that event, devolved on a man with whom his father-in-law had

constantly been at variance, and whose degree of propinquity appeared almost too distant to admit of being properly ascertained; a circumstance which might hereafter have proved the source of endless discord and unceasing litigation.

Disappointed in every endeavour to effect a legal and final separation from an artful and abandoned woman, who, in spite of his utmost exertions to the contrary, still contrived to preserve the title of his wife, and anxious to fly a country where mortification and domestic disgrace continually met him in the ideal form of one whom he no longer saw, though apparently bound to for life, St. Vincent, as Miss Adair had already related, changed into a marching regiment then under sailing orders for Gibraltar, whither he accompanied it with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

In the course of his last year's residence abroad he succeeded to the honours and fortune of his great-uncle Lord Fitzhenry, who died in the early part of the preceding summer, at an advanced age, leaving him a clear estate of some thousands per annum in the south of England.

Two months after that event took place, another, of still more importance to his peace, was announced from Britain; for he then learned that his vile wife had at length finished her guilty career; and, almost for the first time in her life, performed an act of justice, by vindicating our heroine with her dying breath, from the cruel aspersions formerly cast upon her conduct, by imploring her husband might be informed of her penitence and remorse; and finally, by recommending Stella as her successor in his affections, should the attachment she more than suspected he once entertained for her ill-treated, but worthy rival, still exist in his bosom.

Extremely affected by a proceeding so little expected from her late unfeeling persecutor, Stella permitted her tears to flow unrestrained for the space of several minutes; and in reply to Lord Fitzhenry's enquiry if she was ready to evince her forgiveness of past injuries, by a prompt acquiescence in the wishes so emphatically expressed by an expiring and repentant enemy, she instinctively, and silently presented her hand for his acceptance, which, it may be supposed, was not received with indifference. St. Vincent pressed it to his lips, to his heart; and forcing her blushing face from his shoulder, on which it had reclined, sealed the long wished-for and precious donation, with a warm and fervent embrace: he then recommenced the office of historian, and proceeded to conclude what remained of his little narrative, by adding that, as the situation of his affairs now required a speedy return to Britain, permission from the Commander in Chief was easily obtained for that purpose; when, after a prosperous voyage, he once more landed on his native shore, and directly set about the arrangements which more particularly demanded his attention.

No sooner was this in some measure accomplished, than, anxious to inform himself of the fate of an object far more interesting, he quitted the metropolis on the very first moment in which his presence could possibly be dispensed with, and proceeded to the North, with all the additional impatience so long and so painful a restraint on his feelings might naturally be supposed to create.

Stella here interrupted him, to enquire how he had become acquainted with her present residence in Galloway; and found by the answer she received, that Miss Adair's letter, containing her little history, as likewise another afterwards written by the same lady, had never reached Major Montague; a circumstance probably owing to his being at that time in Ireland, which might have occasioned their miscarriage. Conceiving, therefore, the imaginary silence of his Scottish correspondent merely proceeded from a miscarriage in the article of intelligence, he had forborne to trouble her by enquiries on the subject, convinced, had any thing occurred worthy of communication, it would not have been withheld from his knowledge.

The deficiency on the score of facts caused by this incident was, however, tolerably compensated for by the Delmore family, who happening to be acquainted with Montague, and discovering his anxiety for the fate of their beloved *protégée*, soon made him master of every event in which she was implicated, as far the extent of their own information enabled them to gratify him.

St. Vincent further added, that he had only reached Rossgrove at a late hour on the preceding evening; and though extremely solicitous to pay his immediate respects at the Hermitage, yet unwilling to make his first appearance there without a proper introduction, in order to do away every remaining shadow of those disagreeable rumours formerly propagated to their mutual disadvantage, he had endeavoured to restrain his impatience till the arrival of Montague and his sister Louisa, whom he left upon the road, and hourly expected to see at Rossgrove; and to whose subsequent arrangements it was intended to entrust the management of this affair.

“Happily,” he continued, smiling as he spoke, and raising our heroine’s hand to his lips, “part of this plan has already been effected without the interference of foreign assistance; what remains to be accomplished, they must manage in the best manner they can. This little magic ring, in conjunction with the advice of the gardener, who knowing I had been here, suggested the possibility of recovering it in this place, must account for the subsequent, though partial change of measures which has now taken place; I say partial, for we shall still make our appearance at your mansion in due form when that lazy fellow Montague and his wife arrives, who ought to have joined me ere this. You will receive us, my Stella, I trust?”

“And where pray is now my beloved and kind friend Mrs. Mortimer?” asked Stella, without answering the last question in any other manner than by a look sufficiently expressive to give him full satisfaction.

“She is at present confined to the house by the declining health of her husband, who has long been much indisposed; but scarcely any person more sincerely wishes to congratulate me on, I hope, a speedy approaching event, than your friend Fanny; the warmth of whose attachment to her future sister would certainly have excited jealousy in no small degree, had she been otherwise than a female admirer.”

Having conversed for some time longer on the various topics by which their attention was engrossed, Stella, on examining her watch, was astonished at the lateness of the hour, and, almost for the first moment, remarked that twilight, “clad in sober gray,” appeared verging on its darkest shade; she therefore prepared to return home: and her companion, convinced of the propriety of the motion, consented, though not without reluctance, to a short separation, but positively refused to quit her before she reached the Hermitage. As Stella found it totally impossible to controvert this design, she was forced to acquiesce at length in the measure, and permit him to have his own way.

During their walk through the labyrinth, St. Vincent informed her he had already visited all the well-remembered spots in the park and its vicinity, which past occurrences had engraven, never to be effaced, on his memory: “of the number, one, however, and a principal one too,” he added, in a gay tone of voice, “still remains to be explored. The grotto, I understand, has undergone many judicious alterations since I last saw it; let us now take the path that leads to it. Nay, my Stella, refuse me not this trifling indulgence; to review the interior of that spot where the conviction that I was not totally indifferent to the woman I so exclusively, so ardently adored, first reached my knowledge, appears too gratifying to every feeling of my heart patiently to bear a disappointment at this juncture.”

Stella was again under the necessity of granting a reluctant consent: she once more perceived with astonishment that he was no longer to be forced from her presence, as in other days, nor disposed to deny himself those trifling enjoyments which the mind of true sensibility knows best how to appreciate in all cases where either the real or imaginary interests of the heart are implicated. She listened to him in silence; and, with their minds greatly agitated, they at length entered the favourite retreat.

As a repetition of the scene that followed might not be quite so interesting to those who have no particular part assigned to them, as to the actual performers in the drama, we shall not fatigue our readers by dwelling on the minuter features of the subject, but merely observe, that nearly another hour elapsed before either the gentleman or lady recollected the flight of time, or the increasing necessity for a separation. At length, however, they parted, and returned to their respective habitations in a frame of mind very different from that experienced on the commencement of this eventful evening.

Stella no longer thought of requesting Juliana's company; on the contrary, she rejoiced to find herself alone, and at liberty to indulge the various reflections that pressed upon her mind. A change so wonderful, so utterly unexpected, had taken place in her future prospects, that there were times when the whole of the foregoing incidents appeared like an illusion of the imagination, and she almost feared to indulge a retrospection, lest a second view of the foregoing circumstances should establish the certainty of their being imaginary, and leave her once more a prey to corroding anguish and secret disappointment. When, however, the first tumultuous sensations produced by a mental recapitulation of the evening's occurrences began to subside, and the reality of their existence no longer appeared in a questionable shape, sober reason resumed its empire, and presented obstacles so insurmountable, so inimical to her wishes, that, sickening at the thought of what yet remained to be encountered, she almost regretted the hasty and, as it now seemed, ill-judged confirmation of her former predilection for St. Vincent which he had recently extorted from her.

"He knows not the circumstances of my birth," said she to herself; "he dreams not that she whom he would raise to rank and consequence may, perhaps, be the offspring of the lowest class of the community, or what is infinitely worse, the spurious issue of depravity and vice. Shall I then repay his long-harboured and generous affection by giving to his arms a woman who may ultimately be the means of entailing as much disgrace and misery on his head in the person of, possibly, her nearest relatives, as he has already had to encounter with from one who, by her erroneous proceedings, caused him so much unhappiness?—No, I will not be the selfish, the unworthy being, who, indifferent to the feelings of others, thinks but of gratifying its own. Fitzhenry must be still ignorant of my real situation—ignorant that I am merely the child of humanity, unacknowledged, unconnected by any tie of relationship with the wide extended circle of my fellow-mortals! Oh why, why did not Major Montague save me the humiliating task of such a confession!—why, alas! was not the whole truth laid before the noble St. Vincent when other parts of my mortifying story were mentioned to him! It is not, however, yet too late to be more explicit; he shall not take an impostor to his bosom—no, dear and beloved St. Vincent! hard and sad though the undertaking appears that may possibly separate us for ever, you shall know all; and the sacred immutable dictates of truth and justice be permitted to rise superior to every other consideration. I will explain to-morrow the mystery which envelops me, when those most interested in the discovery are assembled under my roof, and by their decision shall my future steps be directed, my conduct governed. Should that decision prove finally destructive of my too fondly indulged hopes, I must patiently submit to its fiat, and endeavour to tranquillize

my perturbed bosom with the best source of all consolation—the cheering voice of an approving conscience, and a conviction I have performed my duty by strictly adhering to the strict line of moral rectitude, which situation and circumstances have already marked out for my future conduct.”

Deep was the sigh that succeeded this determination; and Stella restlessly passed the remainder of the night. An air of anxious solicitude pervaded her features on the following morning; and when a note from Fitzhenry was put into her hands, announcing the arrival of their friends, together with their intention of visiting the Hermitage in the course of the forenoon, she became so extremely agitated, that, but for the timely aid of some hartshorn and water, her senses must inevitably have suffered a temporary suspension.

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CHAP. XX.

“Something must be done
“Of high import ere night, that I may sleep,
“Or wake for ever.”

BROOKE.

STELLA endeavoured to prepare her mind for the approaching interview by every assistance that reason, and a high sense of what her own character demanded, could possibly furnish for the purpose; and so far did the conscious recollection of moral integrity ultimately strengthen her intention, that she found herself infinitely more able to perform the allotted task, than at one time seemed likely to prove the case. The period assigned for the commencement of that task now rapidly advanced: it came, and she was speedily pressed to the bosoms of her friendly and fondly-beloved visitors.

When the first transports occasioned by this meeting were over, that agitation, originating in another cause, which Stella had been again endeavouring to suppress, returned, and taking possession of every faculty of her mind, prevented the explanation she wished to enter upon. At length, however, the tremendous design was undertaken; but no sooner was the point to which it tended fully comprehended by her impatient auditors, than an absolute negative was instantly put upon the subject, and the further continuance of it positively refused to be listened to.

With every circumstance she could relate, Fitzhenry was already acquainted; Montague had told him all; and the sole effect it produced on his mind was, only to add an additional argument for the speedy surrender of her hand, in order that she might no longer have cause to consider herself unconnected and, as heretofore, nearly alone in the world.

Neither Fitzhenry nor herself were now accountable to any human being for their actions; and consequently to persist in the idea of sacrificing a great portion of happiness within their reach, because the utmost extent of their prospects could not be realized, appeared too chimerical and fastidious to be acquiesced in. In short, overpowered, if not altogether convinced by the united and unyielding rhetoric of her three opponents, our heroine was finally necessitated to descend from her altitude, to renounce her intentions, and submit to the arduous task of consenting to follow her own inclination.

Before they parted, Montague using the privilege of an old friend, placed her hand in Fitzhenry's, who received it as the most precious gift of Heaven, while Louisa clasped her future sister in her arms, and repeatedly thanked her husband for accelerating the happiness of a justly beloved brother. One circumstance Stella, however, would by no means be prevailed upon to give up: on no account whatever would she hear of a change in her present situation till the year of mourning for her unfortunate predecessor had expired; and Fitzhenry, however he censured a determination so inimical to his wishes, finding Mrs. Montague on the side of his fair opponent, and the Major neutral, was at length forced to relinquish the animating hope of an immediate union with his destined bride. Every thing, nevertheless, was carried on with the prospect of that union in view; and the family of Rossgrove seemed henceforth to have but one interest and one heart with that of the Hermitage.

Miss Adair, in the course of the following week, returned to the latter, with the changes in which she and her friends at Woodside had been previously acquainted by Major Montague, who personally waited upon them with the information: nor were the Nuns less pleased with this

accession of rank, fortune, and happiness, which their amiable benefactress was soon to obtain, they participated in all her feelings; and, though the pensive melancholy that pervaded Juliana's appearance was rather augmented than diminished by the comparison she could not help drawing between their destiny, still she rejoiced in the opening prospects of her much-valued friend, and daily offered petitions to Heaven for their successful termination.

From the first moment of Mrs. Montague's introduction to the emigrants, she became warmly interested in favour of Juliana, and her husband appeared no less so. In consequence of her observing the increasing nature of their predilection, Stella ventured at length to disclose the connexion that subsisted between the parties; and though Montague seemed extremely agitated during the communication, yet he permitted not a single sentence to escape that could possibly wound the feelings of his amiable and newly-discovered sister; for his principles were too pure, and his heart too good, to punish the innocent daughters for the errors of their misguided parent.

Perhaps there never was a set of people more satisfied with each others society than the present inhabitants of Rossgrove and the Hermitage: two months had already passed with the rapidity of one; and no single day in that period elapsed without spending some part of it under the same roof. Louisa, Stella, and Juliana seemed informed by one mind, and never so happy as when in company with each other: the latter, however, seldom left the cottage without a sensation of secret reluctance; and the gratification experienced in their presence was always more sincere when she was permitted to enjoy it within the walls of her secluded retreat. Beatrix, entirely occupied by religious subjects, and the interests of the school, which she evinced an unceasing inclination to superintend, would never be prevailed upon to exceed the limits she had prescribed herself, and consequently remained always at the cottage; from whence Magdaline, however, sometimes departed, for the purpose of temporary recreation in the neighbourhood; and being of a more cheerful disposition than the other, with a natural turn for observation, she generally picked up something in the course of these little excursions, which, repeated in her broken English and accompanying manner, frequently entertained her auditors at the Hermitage for an hour or two when they met in an evening.

The first circumstance that occurred to interrupt the even tenor of their days was, the death of Mr. Mortimer, after a severe and lingering illness of several months' duration. This melancholy event requiring the presence of his wife's relatives in the vicinity of the metropolis, they found themselves under the unavoidable necessity of an immediate journey to the south of England.

When the subject of their departure was first discussed, Stella entertained not the smallest idea of accompanying them; but, though secretly averse to the measure, the united wishes of her friends at the Grove at length induced her to suppress every remaining degree of reluctance; and she finally consented to make one of the party.

This compliance with their request, however, was perhaps chiefly produced by the present condition of Louisa, who happened to be now far advanced in her second pregnancy; and, of course, less able to bear the fatigue of attending upon Mrs. Mortimer during the earliest stages of affliction, than, under other circumstances, might have proved the case.

Stella, on recollection, wondered how she could possibly hesitate on such an occasion; and ultimately flattered herself with the thoughts of supplying every deficiency of Louisa's. Gratified by the opportunity that thus offered for evincing her lasting remembrance of former attention, she seemed to have entirely sacrificed her own inclination in one respect, to that which had taken possession of her mind in another, and she prepared for her journey with apparent alacrity.

But though the propelling desire of enjoying her society had at first led Lord Fitzhenry to hint his wishes on the subject, a motive scarcely less powerful instigated the united perseverance of the party to effect their design:—by appearing thus publicly with his family, not only countenanced, but even visibly respected by every branch of it, the envenomed tongue of slander would probably be laid asleep, and no longer venture to propagate those cruel rumours once so malignantly levelled at a character not more justly than conspicuously supported.

At the time of Mr. Mortimer's death, Lord Fitzhenry was occupied in the superintendence of several judicious alterations then carrying on under his personal direction at Ross Grove; and something relative to them, in conjunction with county business of importance, unexpectedly interfering with their previous arrangements, the commencement of the journey was necessarily postponed to the beginning of the succeeding week.

On the evening of the day on which this unforeseen delay took place, Lord Fitzhenry, Montague, and Louisa happened to be with Stella at the Hermitage, when the latter was abruptly summoned from the library, where they were sitting, by Mrs. Wallace, whose agitated and hurried manner extremely surprised our heroine, and she instantly demanded to know the reason of it.

The good woman, while she evidently struggled to assume an air of external composure, which but ill accorded with the nature of her feelings, having drawn her companion to a window near the staircase, speedily proceeded to inform her in a low voice, that a person was at that very moment in the house who, she had reason to believe, was better acquainted with the mysterious circumstances of her birth than she appeared willing to acknowledge.

Stella, almost breathless with the emotion this surprising intelligence created, requested, in faltering accents, to hear upon what grounds the above supposition was founded; and Mrs. Wallace quickly gratified her ardent curiosity by the following intelligence.

"As the evening proved fine, I set out, when tea was over, to enquire if my niece Sally had executed a little commission with which I had entrusted her. Before I reached the corner of the barn, she appeared at the door of the house, and beckoning me to go round the back way, I took the path that led in that direction, and found her there ready to receive me.

'A surprising thing has happened,' said she, in a whisper; 'I saw you approaching, but wished first to speak with you in private. The woman who called herself Mrs. Norris, and who acted in the capacity of an attendant on the strange gentleman, is now in the house. She says she has just landed from Ireland, and is going to the neighbourhood of Dumfries, where some of her relations reside; but, upon enquiry, understanding I was now married and settled at this place, she could not think of quitting Wigtonshire without seeing me. At first I was quite at a loss, and could not recollect her after the lapse of so many years: however, upon learning her name, that was no longer the case; and I thanked her for so kind a proof of remembrance. Having prevailed upon my visitor to partake of some refreshment, we seated ourselves by the fireside, and naturally entered upon the subject of former days. Mrs. Norris, however, seemed solicitous to avoid every particular allusion to topics apparently tending to satisfy my curiosity relative to the history of those she accompanied at the commencement of our acquaintance; and as a recurrence to this kind of conversation was evidently disagreeable, I soon forbore to urge it, till, recollecting the circumstances of the picture, and the wonderful resemblance it had to Miss Stella, the thought struck me that something might now perhaps be discovered about an officer, which had so long puzzled all in the secret of her birth to account for; so, without mentioning the latter affair, I merely related the manner in which it had been found after their departure from the Hermitage, requesting at the same time to know whether it belonged to herself or the lady. Mrs.

Norris appeared surprised and much agitated by the enquiry, and, without returning a direct answer to my question, desired immediately to see the miniature, which, she said, had been lost somewhere in the course of their journey, though not having missed it at the time, they knew not the precise spot. I told her it was not in my possession, but I doubted not she might nevertheless obtain a sight of it, as I believed it was still at the Hermitage.'

'And who now inhabits the Hermitage?' she asked.

'A young lady,' I replied, 'to whom Mrs. Bertram bequeathed it at her decease.'

'I should like to see the place again,' observed Mrs. Norris, after a short pause. 'Perhaps the lady will indulge my curiosity in regard to the picture if you request it?'

'I said I was convinced that gratification could easily be obtained; and added I would accompany her with pleasure when my husband returned from the fields, which I expected would be the case in less than an hour. It was about this time I first bethought myself,' continued Sally, 'to mention the singular circumstance of discovering a child in my uncle's vessel when she and the other strangers landed at Port Patrick; but, while relating it, I took care not to give the smallest hint that could lead her to suppose I knew any thing further of the business, or the situation of the infant afterwards, as I wished to act with caution until your advice was procured on the occasion. Mrs. Norris seemed uncommonly struck with this intelligence, her colour repeatedly varied, and her tongue for some time refused its office. I observed her in silence, and began to conjecture she was not quite so unacquainted with this mysterious transaction as she seemed willing to make one believe; and just as I was going to send over to the Hermitage, you were fortunately discovered approaching at a distance. Finding my husband now returned from the superintendence of his labourers, I desired him to keep her in conversation during my absence, and immediately stole out to consult with you as to the proper steps next to be pursued, in order to obtain that information which, I am more and more persuaded, is in this woman's power to afford.'

"Such," continued Mrs. Wallace, "proved the substance of my niece's communication; and judging it of too much consequence to be neglected, we finally agreed that I should return here, without making my appearance before her visitor, who, after receiving an invitation to remain all night at the farm-house, was to be accompanied hither by Sally, chiefly with a view, as the latter pretended, to examine the miniature. I hoped to have preceded them half an hour at least; but in getting over the stile, I made a false step, which hurt my ankle, and prevented my reaching you at an earlier period; of course, they arrived almost as soon as myself; and Mrs. Norris is now below in the back parlour. What, dear Miss Stella, is your pleasure on the occasion? Sally has already asked for me; and, under pretence of enquiring for the picture, waits at the bottom of the stairs for further instruction."

Stella, in the utmost perturbation of mind and spirits, paused for a moment, and then desired her to take the miniature in her hand to shew to the stranger; and, by keeping her attention engaged, endeavour to prevent her departure till such time as the advice of her visitors in the library could be obtained. She then hastened back to that apartment, and, as well as the emotion under which she laboured would permit, recapitulated the foregoing particulars to her astonished auditors; after which they consulted on the proper measures to be adopted in so singular an emergency.

CHAP. XXI.

“Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind:
“The thief that steals thinks every bush an officer.”
SHAKESPEARE.

MRS. Wallace having acquainted her niece with the present result of her information, now followed her into the parlour, and was introduced to their guest as the aunt of the latter. The picture almost immediately became the topic of discourse, while the changing countenance of her who intently examined it was sedulously watched by her companions. At length Mrs. Wallace took an opportunity to remark, in a seemingly careless manner, that it extremely resembled a young lady of her acquaintance; and then turning to Mrs. Norris, repeated what Sally had previously told her relative to the inexplicable incident which happened four-and-twenty years back in her husband's vessel; abruptly adding, as she fixed a steadfast and penetrating eye on the visibly agitated person to whom she addressed herself—

“By the bye, Mrs. Norris, you can possibly give some insight into this strange affair; for, if I mistake not, you were one of the only two female passengers on board at the time: and as the infant foundling must certainly have crossed the Channel from Ireland, I presume a circumstance so extraordinary could not be altogether unknown to you, or some of the party you accompanied. This supposition, indeed, appears doubly probable from the total ignorance of the whole crew respecting it; and it seems pretty clear a new-born child could not long have existed in such a state as that in which it was found.”

The deepening colour that rushed over her features upon this sudden charge, the hesitation in her voice, and every other symptom of confusion that followed, alike united to evince the justice of Mrs. Wallace's suspicions, in spite of the awkward endeavours of the stranger to do them away, who, after some further conversation on the subject, and a positive denial of having had any share in the transaction, declared she must immediately return to Port Patrick, in order to give some directions relative to her journey, which had hitherto escaped her memory.

Mrs. Wallace expected a similar manoeuvre, and was prepared for it. She adroitly contrived to prevent this design in a manner Mrs. Norris could not evade, and soon after quitted the room, with the intention, she said, of procuring some refreshment for her visitors; but, in fact, to relate what she observed, which, in her opinion, amounted to little less than conviction.

Having accomplished this matter, and returned again to the parlour, she perceived Mrs. Norris had assumed a more composed look, and appeared quite collected. Determined not to let her off so easily, her tormentor renewed the attack, which the stranger again attempted to parry, by protesting, as before, that so far from possessing any knowledge of the circumstance now mentioned, she had not even heard of it till that day.

“But pray,” said she, in a gayer tone of affected ease, “what became of this wonderful child? Is it still alive? or, as it seems to have dropped from the clouds, did it find a cradle in the sea?”

“That was probably the fate designed for it,” replied Mrs. Wallace, with a look that indicated much, and instantly repressed the assumed levity of the enquirer, who hoped, by treating the story lightly, to shew she considered it merely as a jest. “The infant, however, was miraculously preserved by the critical interposition of Providence; adopted, educated, and finally

provided for, by the late worthy owner of this house, to whose more than maternal attention her conduct has uniformly done the highest honour; and she is now on the point of being united to an English gentleman of family, fortune, and merit, equal to the most sanguine wishes of all who know her. In short, the once deserted victim of unnatural parents now——”

Mrs. Wallace was prevented from proceeding, not by a servant with refreshments, as expected by some of the party, but the sudden entrance of Stella and Major Montague; on whose appearance, starting from her seat, she exclaimed—“I beg pardon, Madam! I have been so much engaged with my niece’s friend here, that I really forgot to look for the book you wanted.”

While she was thus addressing Stella, Sally took an opportunity of whispering her companion—“That is the young person who was found in my uncle’s vessel. Don’t you think she resembles the picture amazingly?”

But Sally and her aunt might now have spoken till Doomsday unheeded by their guest, whose every look and idea seemed intently rivetted on the face of our heroine, whose late pallid cheeks began to exhibit a faint colouring of rosy red, that rendered her countenance peculiarly striking at this interesting moment, and even heightened the likeness usually observed between her features and the miniature, in a very considerable degree.

“Here it is,” said Mrs. Wallace, reaching a volume from the table by which Mrs. Norris and Sally were standing. “Pray, Major Montague, hand it to Miss Stella.”

At the word “Montague” Mrs. Norris started, as if bitten by a serpent; and, turning her eyes hastily from our heroine upon him who had been accosted by that denomination, she drew her bonnet further over her face, and apparently shrunk from notice behind the table: her looks, however, still kept the same direction, and glanced alternately from one to the other, till a frenzied expression of horror and distraction gradually marked every distorted feature; when, totally overpowered by the complicated nature of her feelings, she at length caught the arm of Sally, to prevent her from falling upon the floor, and pressing it with a convulsive grasp, sunk by her side on a chair that happened to be near them.

“You are ill!” cried Sally, really terrified by her appearance. “Pray, aunt, assist me to support Mrs. Norris till something is procured to revive her.”

Hitherto Montague and Stella had taken their station nearly opposite her, so as to afford a full view of them both, and affected to be entirely occupied in examining some engravings in the book Mrs. Wallace had given them: the Major, however, now hastily raised his head, as did Stella, in evident perturbation. He whispered her, nevertheless, not to become an active assistant, as she seemed desirous of doing; and then advancing a few steps closer to the invalid, after regarding her with a stern and scrutinizing eye, said—“Your name, if my conjecture is right, has not always been Norris; answer me, were you not once known by that of Palmer?”

Before there was time to return an answer to the question, Juliana, for whom Miss Adair had flown to the cottage, joined the party assembled in the parlour; and having observed the stranger for a short period in silent emotion, soon recognised in the person of Mrs. Norris her mother’s old and confidential attendant; who now perceiving all her attempts at concealment ineffectual, and every subterfuge of no further avail, suddenly quitted her chair, and sinking at the feet of Major Montague, confessed she was the person he supposed, while, in accents of wild supplication, she implored for mercy and forgiveness—“for mercy on himself,” she added, with peculiar emphasis; “for, if you are the intended husband of that lady, as there is a God in heaven, she is your sister, and the daughter of her who bore you!”

Mrs. Palmer, on pronouncing these words, cast a ghastly and terrified look towards the scarcely less affected Stella; and those who were present at this scene, immediately concluded,

from the tenor of her words and manner, that she imagined Major Montague was the gentleman to whom the fate of our heroine was to be united. After a moment's pause, as if gasping for breath, she thus proceeded:—

“Yes, there is an Almighty, a ruling Power above us! and I am yet permitted to become the instrument of some good on earth, by proving the means of a discovery so critically momentous! Will you not then shew me compassion? will you not have pity on the guilty miserable being thus at your knees entreating for pardon?” and she motioned to approach yet nearer.

“Wretch!” cried Montague, indignantly, recoiling a few paces, “where is my unhappy mother? where the infamous Ormsby? I have since discovered he died not by the hand of his much injured antagonist, as was first supposed to be the case. Answer me quickly—answer me instantly, without further hesitation!”

Terrified by the vehemence of his voice and peremptory air, the trembling culprit could not immediately command the power of utterance; but, on a repetition of the same enquiry, in a tone that admitted not of procrastination, she faintly replied, that her master had indeed, against every appearance of probability, recovered the effects of the wound he received from Sir Charles; but his life was not to be preserved, for he afterwards fell in one of the popular tumults at Paris; and Lady Montague,” she added, with a deep sigh, “expired of a broken-heart some months ago in Ireland, whither she retired on the death of Captain Ormsby.”

“Of a broken-heart, did you say?” cried Montague, striking his forehead with violence.

“Oh my mother!” exclaimed Stella and Juliana in one voice, and falling into each others arms in an agony of grief, “what a destiny was yours!”

“A dreadful one!” rejoined Mrs. Palmer, speaking in a low hollow accent, and again raising her languid head from a neighbouring chair, on which it had rested; “for Captain Ormsby proved an unfeeling tyrant; and in sorrow, remorse, and repentance, she passed the lingering period of her earthly existence: but she is now beyond the reach of human inflictions; she has at length got to that happy country, ‘where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.’ Would to God——”

Here Mrs. Palmer's voice became still lower, and what she attempted to utter died away upon her lips, while a deep sigh burst forth, and her head once more dropped upon the chair. A solemn pause ensued, which neither Montague nor the ladies seemed desirous to interrupt. The former paced the room in much apparent agitation; the latter leaned upon each other, and covering their faces with their handkerchiefs, wept in silence.

Meanwhile Mrs. Wallace and Sally employed their utmost exertions to rouse the now torpid faculties of the late speaker; but every effort for that purpose proved at present ineffectual: faint, exhausted, and breathless, the variety of sensations that pressed upon her heart deprived her of the power to give them vent by words, and she remained totally unable to continue her interesting communications at this juncture.

Perceiving it in vain to hope for a further gratification of their curiosity till such time as the narrator was in a state more adequate to the distressing task, Montague led Stella and Juliana from the room; and as they declined returning to the library in the present agitation of their spirits, he assisted them to the nearest bed-chamber, where Mrs. Wallace, having left the care of the invalid to Sally and one of the maids, almost instantly followed; and by the application of proper restoratives, preserved them from fainting.

Here they were joined by Mrs. Montague and Miss Adair, to whom their good old attendant briefly related the substance of what had passed at the late interview; while Montague,

as well as the perturbed state of his mind would permit, went through a similar explanation to the hardly less agitated Lord Fitzhenry.

During these transactions in the other parts of the house, Mrs. Palmer had leisure to collect her wandering ideas; and, unmolested by the voice of enquiry, endeavoured to recompose her spirits, in order to finish the painful undertaking yet to be accomplished. In this attempt she was greatly assisted by the amiable character received of Stella through the medium of her two companions; and still more so, when, in the course of their communications, she found herself agreeably undeceived in respect to the intended husband of our heroine. This latter discovery seemed to have removed a considerable weight from her conscience; and sensible she must proceed with a narrative, the protracted delay of which appeared now only in the light of accumulating misery, she made a desperate effort upon her feelings to bring the remainder of the humiliating confession to a final conclusion; and, in a tremulous voice, requested the necessary measures might be taken for that purpose, by entreating the further attention of her former auditors. They were no less anxious than Mrs. Palmer for the prosecution of this interesting object; and being, like herself, now somewhat recruited, immediately obeyed the summons they received to the parlour, whither the rest of our heroine's visitors consented to accompany them.

On perceiving their approach, Mrs. Palmer half raised herself from the sofa on which she had been placed; and after taking some hartshorn drops presented by Sally, without lifting her eyes, or attempting to look at any of the party that now ranged themselves around her, made an effort to speak: her tongue, however, once more refused its office; and before she could obtain the command of it to render herself sufficiently intelligible, Montague spared her a further struggle by stepping forward, and, after a short pause, commenced the conversation where it had before broken off.

"You hinted at Ormsby's ill-treatment of Lady Montague, I think; if so, why did she not leave him?" said he.

"Because," replied Mrs. Palmer, in yet a feeble voice, though somewhat recovered by the company's indulgence, "strange as it may appear, she still continued fondly attached to him; and besides, he had always been regarded as her husband."

"Her husband!" repeated Montague, indignantly.

"Yes, her husband; you are possibly ignorant, Sir, of the engagement that existed between them prior to her union with Sir Charles Montague."

Stella and Juliana involuntarily started, and looked at each other; while Montague, in extreme emotion, called upon her to proceed.

"Captain Ormsby and Miss Cramond were privately married before she knew your father, Sir. An unexpected order to join a part of his regiment in a distant island, with which, as a military man, he was instantly necessitated to comply, separated them a few minutes after the conclusion of the ceremony; and a combination of circumstances seemed to corroborate a rumour of his having been lost in a vessel that foundered at sea, which the protracted nature of his absence apparently rendered but too probable. Sir Charles Montague, in the interim, appeared as the professed admirer of the self-supposed widow, who, broken-spirited, and too timid to avow the truth, which she well knew would not alter the mercenary views of Mr. Cramond, though such a confession might procure her his eternal malediction, yielded to the unfortunate, unresisting softness of her disposition, and became the acknowledged wife of one man, while the imaginary relic of another, for whom she would singly have mourned to the termination of her earthly career, had so melancholy an indulgence been permitted her. Mrs. Cramond was not insensible to the silent, though visible distress of her daughter; but she was likewise acquainted

with her father's temper and disposition, and therefore attempted not to controvert his designs. Captain Ormsby again appeared; and you already know, in some degree, what followed. Lady Montague found his arguments, when backed by inclination, too potent to combat; and at length renounced every thing in favour of the irresistible attachment she bore him who was uniformly considered as the chosen husband of her heart: the sequel, however, did not justify this sacrifice. His character, upon trial, proved by no means congenial to her own; and, though personal affection continued to blend her destiny with his, judgment condemned the steps she had taken, and frequently imbittered every prospect of the present and the future. The die, however, was cast—from its decision there was no appeal; and her sufferings, although sustained in silence, were acute. Fond of change, or fearful of discovery, we were perpetually on the wing. Ireland, where the Captain possessed a small property, was the first place of our intended residence when my Lady quitted her father's house; but some imaginary apprehension of being traced to the retreat selected for their concealment in that kingdom, produced a sudden change of measures even before we reached the spot; and again we embarked on board a vessel then upon the point of sailing for Port Patrick, from whence it was settled that we should proceed to the neighbourhood of Dumfries, for the purpose of procuring a temporary abode with a sister of mine, who lived in a retired part of the country. Lady Montague happened to be at this period fast approaching to the eve of an expected confinement; and the terror, anxiety, fatigue, and perturbation of mind she was now continually doomed to encounter, combined at this unfortunate juncture to accelerate the dreaded event. Under circumstances equally adverse to convenience or safety, during the course of an unusually tedious voyage and much tempestuous weather, my poor Lady was seized with the pains of a premature labour; and three hours before we could make the Scottish shore, with no other female attendant but myself to afford her the smallest assistance, was—was——”

Again Mrs. Palmer's voice faltered, and again her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth. She motioned for a glass of water that stood upon the table, which Sally immediately reached her; and either anxious to conclude the painful topic, or intimidated by the stern commands of the gentleman to proceed, in a few minutes once more recommenced her task.

CHAP. XXII.

“I’ve turn’d my eyes inward upon myself,
“Where foul offence and shame have laid all waste;
“Therefore my soul abhors the wretched dwelling,
“And longs to find some better place of rest.”

ROWE.

“LADY Montague was delivered of a child, which could scarcely be said to exist, so feeble seemed the state of its almost torpid appearance: she herself believed it already dead; and Captain Ormsby, who wanted not any addition of this description to his family, commanded me to confirm her in that opinion. In short, had the event of its birth taken place during the dark hours of the night, the devoted infant would speedily have fulfilled his wishes, and quitted the world for a watery grave almost as soon as it entered it; but an overruling Providence fortunately ordained it otherwise. This circumstance, so momentous in its consequences, happened in the day-time; and a succession of unforeseen occurrences rendered it impracticable to dispose of the poor baby in the preconceived manner, without subjecting ourselves to all attendant dangers of a discovery. It is true, the evening was far advanced before we left the ship; but the crew were too much in motion for the safe execution of our design. Indeed, the hand of Heaven seemed to shelter it from evil, and ward off the lifted arm of the murderer; for, in the course of the time that intervened from the period of its mother’s delivery, to our landing at Port Patrick, some one or other of the sailors was perpetually in the vicinity of our cabin, and thus defeated every attempt to throw it overboard. Captain Ormsby, however, suggested the possibility of this being effected during the bustle occasioned by Lady Montague’s removal, who was known to be alarmingly ill, though the precise nature of her indisposition, it may be easily supposed, was carefully concealed from observation. Disappointment, nevertheless, was once more our fate; for the men continued to cross our steps in every direction. At length, driven to the last extremity, and perceiving no prospect of escaping detection should procrastination longer prevail, I flew back to my own little cabin, under pretence of having forgotten something, just as we were all assembled upon deck ready to quit the vessel; and snatching up the helpless innocent from the bed where it had hitherto lain concealed, I darted into the first obscure opening that presented itself to my notice, threw it upon a hammoc in a distant corner of the place, and instantly ascending again, was immediately assisted on shore, where I arrived a minute or two before the chair which contained my Lady, was entirely lowered from the side of the ship, and received her as it touched the ground, for we did not land till tide had ebbed from the vessel, by which means the aid of a boat was unnecessary, and of course, made our task much less difficult to accomplish.

“Though the final disposal of the poor infant proceeded rather from a momentary impulse of despair, than the cooler dictates of sober judgment, I yet flattered myself that the circumstance would pass unheeded till the vessel was again under weigh, which, after landing some contraband goods, I knew was to return, without delay, to the Irish coast; and though the wind had proved adverse to us, it suited that intention so completely, that I became less and less apprehensive of a discovery before the object of my fears was sufficiently distant, to remove every probable chance of suspicion of the real perpetrators of a deed so atrocious: at all events, the child, I concluded, could not possibly survive any length of time; and should it happen to be dead when found by the owner of the hammoc, I doubted not but the incident would be naturally

ascribed to some Irishwoman who had been on board prior to our embarkation; and the tempestuous weather during the voyage seemed to favour this idea, by preventing any of the crew from occupying their hammocs while we were at sea.

“Thank God,” cried Mrs. Palmer, emphatically raising her clasped hands and humid eyes to heaven, “thank God, my nefarious expectations proved abortive, and that the dreadful crime of murder is not amongst the other sins I have to answer for! I understand that look, Sir,” continued she, as her eye casually met Lord Fitzhenry’s; “it says, as the deed was premeditated, and actually designed to take place, I can have little to congratulate myself upon as to the result. All this I perfectly know; but, nevertheless, no language is adequate to express the satisfaction I now derive from the real termination of this long deplored transaction; for, humbled as I am by the oppression of conscious guilt and the frowns of fortune, my education was much superior to the rank in life I have filled, and my principles uncorrupted, till Captain Ormsby turned them aside from the paths of moral rectitude by the influence he acquired over the avaricious and mercenary bias of my mind. But I wander from my story.

“The apparent success that attended the manoeuvre I have related, justified the subsequent opinion formed of it; the vessel sailed again immediately, and the affair seemed consigned to oblivion. Something like a pang of remorse would frequently indeed shoot through my bosom when the incident was recalled by any adventitious occurrence to my memory; but I usually contrived to blunt its poignancy by the reflection that I had only accelerated, not caused the fate of the child, whose destiny appeared irrevocably decided prior to my interference.

“Lady Montague’s indisposition, which had passed with the ship’s crew as the effect of sea-sickness, continued to increase after our arrival at Port Patrick, and by degrees became equally violent as before. We congratulated ourselves, however, (that is to say, Captain Ormsby and I,) on the adroit management of the child’s disposal; so that whatever might now prove the nature of her illness, it could no longer make her liable to suspicion in one instance, or render dubious the assertion of her being sister or niece to my master; in either of which characters she occasionally appeared, as best suited the necessity of the moment. There is no security, however, for the successful continuation of immoral prosperity. Her Ladyship’s disorder became more and more inexplicably acute; and, to our utter astonishment, in less than three hours from the time of our landing at Port Patrick, she was delivered of another infant, though not like its twin-sister, alive, for it gave not the smallest indication whatever of existence.

“A dispute with the landlady of the inn where this last affair happened, rendered a removal from her house necessary almost before Lady Montague’s state of convalescence proved equal to the undertaking; and the Hermitage being then unoccupied, we engaged it for a few weeks’ residence, or at least till the invalid became more able to bear the fatigue of travelling further into the country. From this habitation, however, as from the inn, a premature departure speedily took place; the cause of which originated in a circumstance that occurred while I was one day in Port Patrick, settling some marketing and shop accounts with our late landlord, who procured most of the articles we required for the house, and executed all our little commissions.

“While we were conversing together in the bar, a gentleman entered the passage, whom I instantly recognised as an intimate friend and neighbour of Mr. Cramond; and doubting not but he had come in pursuit of us, by the request of my Lady’s father, I stole out at a back door, and hurried to my master’s, in order to relate what I had seen, that the proper measures might be adopted on the occasion for the purpose of concealment and safety. It afterwards appeared that the object of our alarm had no intention to molest us, and was merely going to Ireland on some

private business of his own: this we knew not, however, at the time; and a construction similar to what I had formed, being put upon his appearance by the Captain and my Lady, we quitted the Hermitage with the utmost precipitation; and, instead of pursuing the intended route to Dumfries, hastened by unfrequented roads to Wales, where we remained for some time in a state of tolerable tranquillity; till at length the wish for change again placed us in the condition of travellers: and after visiting several places on the Continent, we settled, for a longer time than usual, at a small and delightful residence in Provence, where Miss Juliana and her sister first saw the light.

“In the neighbourhood of this place was situated the Convent of St. Clare, with one of the inhabitants of which an acquaintance had been formed, through the medium of a circumstance no way connected with my present communication, though it was probably the eventual means of inspiring Captain Ormsby with the idea of providing for his daughters, whom he seemed to regard in the light of incumbrances rather than in any other point of view, by obliging them to become members of the same Community with Sister Beatrix, and finally remaining there, for which purpose they had been early confided to her care, and brought up in the Roman Catholic persuasion. The whole of this arrangement was entirely contrary to my Lady’s wishes; but these were not much consulted upon the occasion, and she was therefore forced to submit in silence, satisfied of one thing at least, that if such was to be the irrevocable destiny of her children, they could not possibly have fallen into better hands than this worthy Nun, and the person who happened at that juncture to be the Lady Abbess of the house; though we afterwards heard the death of the latter had been a considerable loss to the Sisterhood, as her successor proved of a very different character.

“It was during our residence in Provence, that the failure of a man connected with my master in pecuniary affairs, obliged us to revisit England; when the disagreeable and most unexpected interview at Dover, which you, Sir,” looking at Montague, “probably recollect, took place. From that time Lady Montague’s health gradually declined, occasioned by the shock then sustained; and though her decease did not happen for many succeeding years, all enjoyment of life seemed entirely at an end, and every prospect considerably darkened during the remainder of her miserable existence. At length her weary pilgrimage finally closed in the peaceful grave, and removed her beyond the further reach of human afflictions. Lady Montague’s death proved exemplary; and in the eyes of a merciful Redeemer has fully, I trust, atoned for all her worldly errors: she died a saint in every sense of the word.”

Stella and Juliana again wept in each others arms, and Montague covering his face with his handkerchief, hastily retired to the window.

“As the small annuity purchased by Captain Ormsby for my Lady,” resumed Mrs. Palmer, after a short silence, “expired with her life, she frequently regretted her inability to reward what she was pleased to term my faithful services and attachment. She bequeathed me a trifle, however, sufficient to exclude actual want; and my nefarious conduct in regard to you, Madam,” addressing Stella, “entitles me to nothing further. I have been in Ireland some time with a near relation of my father, who has long resided in that kingdom, and am now on my return to the place of my birth in the neighbourhood of Dumfries.”

Such were the chief incidents contained in Mrs. Palmer’s communication, which appeared particularly connected with our present history: what else she related being totally foreign to the subject, we shall not repeat: neither did it seem necessary to notice every instance of the deep distress evinced by this unhappy woman in the course of her narrative; nor the various painful and affecting impressions it made upon her auditors. Suffice it to say, that Lady

Montague was considered, upon the whole, as more unfortunate than vicious; and the possibility of viewing her in this light afforded no small degree of consolatory satisfaction to her good and virtuous, though afflicted offspring, who, whatever might have proved the faults of their ill judging parent, recognised the existing and newly-discovered relationship to each other with every mark of the sincerest affection and delight.

As Mrs. Palmer professed to feel the keenest remorse; and had besides, made all the reparation for her former proceedings that could possibly be expected; and as it likewise appeared her deceased mistress was really satisfied with her services, Montague and Stella, instigated by sentiments of filial respect to their mother's memory, settled on her a small annual addition to her present little income; accompanied by this proviso, however, which Lord Fitzhenry insisted should make part of the bargain, that, after the following day, she should never more presume to revisit the neighbourhood of Rossgrove, as he vehemently protested he could not bear to look upon the intended murderer of his beloved Stella with any tolerable degree of patience.

Having finally concluded all that remained of this business, Sally, at the request of Juliana, conducted Mrs. Palmer to the cottage, where the fair Nun afterwards joined her, and spent the residue of the night in conversing on past occurrences with her old acquaintance, who departed at the appointed time from that part of the country.

CHAP. XXIII.

“Patience and time wear out the longest day.”
SHAKESPEARE.

THE nature of the recent communication proved sufficiently interesting to furnish a copious subject for reflexion during the short period the parties most intimately connected with the particular circumstances of it now continued in Galloway. Major Montague, with a degree of friendly warmth that did him infinite honour, repeatedly declared that, however some parts of Mrs. Palmer’s intelligence might distress his feelings as a son, those of a brother were peculiarly gratified by the certainty of an event which he had long felt a hitherto unaccountable presentiment would, at a future period, come to pass. Louisa seemed equally delighted with the discovery of her relationship to Stella; and Lord Fitzhenry protested, that if any one thing on earth could possibly have added to the value of the latter in his opinion, it was exactly the very incident that had happened, which, by ascertaining her propinquity to his friend Montague, rendered her yet more dear to his heart.

The mind of Stella, reassured by so many instances of kindness and seasonable attention, gradually overcame the first shock she could not avoid feeling on the painful and humiliating recital of Mrs. Palmer. Sensible of the delicate motives which dictated their unceasing assiduity for the restoration of her former tranquillity and cheerfulness, every exertion was practised on her side to second their wishes. These attempts, founded in good sense and gratitude, were not unattended with success; and as she had uniformly expected some such explanation of the mystery that enveloped her birth, the final result of the whole made a less permanent impression, than under a different view of the affair would probably have proved the case.

To render Juliana independent in her pecuniary circumstances, now became a principal consideration with her affectionate brother and sister: but on this occasion Lord Fitzhenry would not be excluded from a share in their consultations; and they found it equally impossible to prevent him from making over five thousand pounds of funded property in the five per cents to the fair recluse: Montague therefore engaged that himself and his brother Sir Frederic should double that sum. The latter had been under the necessity of going to the West Indies on account of some business his deceased father had left unfinished; and after a residence of a few years in that quarter of the globe, was expected home in the course of the next summer; when, from what he knew of the Baronet’s disposition, there was not a doubt but all he had promised in his name would be readily complied with.

As two orphan daughters of Mr. Adair’s youngest brother constantly resided with their uncle, Miss Adair’s absence from Woodside could, on most occasions, be more easily dispensed with, than if such substitutes had not been at hand to supply her place in the family. Solicitous to gratify his Stella in every thing calculated to afford her the smallest degree of pleasure, Lord Fitzhenry, seconded by Montague and Louisa, privately exerted their united influence to procure the company of our heroine’s favourite friend in the proposed excursion to England; and Mr. and Mrs. Adair, finally overcome by importunities they found it impossible to resist, at length acquiesced on condition that their daughter’s stay in the south did not exceed three months at the farthest. Scarcely any circumstance of the kind could have given Stella more real delight than this attention to her wishes; and she received it as a fresh proof of their increasing anxiety to oblige her.

On the evening preceding their departure, she paid a farewell visit to the pavilion and grotto, accompanied by Fitzhenry, who retraced the various incidents which had formerly happened in each of these places, particularly the last, with a minuteness of detail that proved the indelible impression they had made upon his memory; while the affecting contrast he drew between the nature of his past and present sensations in the memorable grotto, softened their hearts even to tears; which flowed, however, from a far different source from those which were once wrung from them by deep sorrow and a keen sense of their adverse situations.

Hammond's Elegies lay on the window-seat of the grotto, where they had been accidentally left the last time she perused them in that lonely retreat. Hitherto Lord Fitzhenry had not seen them; but his eye now caught a casual glance of the little volume just as Stella was upon the point of removing it from his view, and he instantly laid hold of it in spite of her struggles to prevent him.

No sooner was it discovered to have once belonged to himself, and the great length of time that had elapsed since he first recollected its disappearance, than it immediately struck him that it was the very same work he now remembered she seemed formerly so anxious to conceal from observation in the Park; and the value it must have possessed in her opinion, from the long time and care with which it had been preserved through several trying vicissitudes of life, seemed sufficiently obvious to mark the unalterable and deep-rooted nature of her predilection in his favour, when every adverse and unpropitious incident apparently interfered to render the present situation of affairs by no means likely ever to take place.

The thousand nameless sensations that now throbbed in their virtuous and faithful bosoms as they dwelt on several topics of a description too interesting to be easily dismissed, convinced them of what indeed they had long known—that the smallest deviation from the narrow path of moral rectitude in any part of their former conduct, would have poisoned the pure source of those innocent enjoyments they now mutually experienced, and rendered every succeeding reflection a burden too corroding to be supported with any degree of tranquillity to themselves, or comfort to their domestic connexions. Misfortune, in the common acceptation of the word, may be finally surmounted without materially injuring the peace of the human mind; but premeditated or persevering error, whatever contrition may afterwards follow it, cannot be so entirely effaced from remembrance as not to return with occasional acuteness; for the total exclusion of memory is not in our power—we cannot help recollecting that such things have been, nor still the harassing intimation of a wounded spirit and a reproving conscience. Happily, Lord Fitzhenry and our heroine had none of those mental tormentors to struggle against: thought came not fraught with any disagreeable ally; for self-reproach mingled not its lacerating ingredients in the cup of rational pleasure prepared for them; and the past, like the present and future, presented nothing to their view but a serene and unclouded sky.

The lovers next bent their steps to the cottage, where they found the Major, Mrs. Montague, and Miss Adair waiting their arrival. Here they remained till a late hour; and at parting took a most affectionate leave of Juliana, and a friendly one of her two companions Beatrix and Magdaline: each of the latter, however, seemed too much engrossed by the duties of religion, and the attention due to their pupils, to feel the separation equally severe with the former; but as she had declined all their entreaties to make one of the party, they had nothing to reproach themselves with on the occasion. Mrs. Wallace, whose little fortune had likewise received a considerable addition after the departure of Mrs. Palmer, undertook the charge of the Hermitage during the absence of its mistress. The eldest daughter of her niece Sally, a girl now nearly sixteen, had recently been taken by Stella into service in the capacity of her own maid;

and her father and mother had received a promise from his Lordship of sitting rent free for the period of ten years after his marriage with our heroine: meanwhile, orders were given to build a neat little commodious dwelling adjoining the farmer's habitation, for Mrs. Wallace, who was alternately to reside either under what she might call her own roof, or at the Hermitage, as best suited her inclination in future.

Stella having received a thousand blessings from this worthy woman, and finally bidden her adieu, accompanied her friends back to Rossgrove; from whence (having previously taken leave of the Adairs, and one or two other families in the neighbourhood with whom she was on visiting terms,) they set out on their journey at an early hour in the morning, and reached the metropolis about the end of the week, without meeting with any occurrence of consequence on the road to retard their progress.

Mrs. Mortimer, though in a state of the deepest affliction, received them in the kindest manner; and all the connexions of the St. Vincent family eagerly vied with each other in evincing their approbation of, and attention to, the future Lady Fitzhenry: but scarcely any circumstance afforded our heroine a greater sensation of heartfelt pleasure, than the frequent interviews that now took place between her and the Delmores, with whom she spent much of her time.

As neither Mrs. Mortimer nor her sister could at present quit the house of mourning to appear with her in public, the Baronet's family, accompanied by Mrs. Arabin and some of the gentlemen of their acquaintance, of which number his Lordship seldom failed to make one, conducted her to see every thing particularly worthy of observation in the great and extensive circle of the metropolis.

On their return one evening from visiting the Magdalene-Hospital, (where they discovered the once favourite, but unworthy maid of the late Mrs. St. Vincent, who had been placed there through the humane interference of Mrs. Arabin,) Montague found his brother Sir Frederic just returned from the West Indies. A stranger to all those events which had recently occurred, it was necessary to enter upon a brief detail of the whole, in order to make him properly master of incidents in which he was too deeply interested. This task Lord Fitzhenry and the Major undertook to perform; and had the pleasure to perceive on its conclusion, that Sir Frederic fully justified his brother's opinion of him by the subsequent part of his conduct. He received Stella as a sister in every sense of the word, and coincided with their intentions previously formed in favour of Juliana, with all the promptitude and warmth of a just and generous mind. Stella had the pleasure of introducing this newly-attained relative to the Delmore family; and the inexpressible delight of speedily perceiving the commencement of a mutual attachment between him and the amiable Miss Mowbray, which she flattered herself would, in time, arrive at the point she wished it.

But though admired and beloved wherever she appeared, Stella felt no reluctance to quit the busy scenes of London, except what originated in the idea of separating from friends so justly valued as the Delmores; who, however, positively engaged to spend some time at Rossgrove, when a certain happy event was once fairly over; a promise that considerably ameliorated the painful sensations occasioned by their parting interview.

This matter settled, at the appointed time for bidding adieu to the capital, Lord Fitzhenry, the Mortimers, Montagues, Stella, and Miss Adair set out for the former's country seat in Yorkshire. Sir Frederic found it impossible to quit the metropolis at this juncture, but gave his friends reason to believe he would speedily join them.

At Mount Fitzhenry Stella was introduced to her future mother-in-law, who had

constantly resided at this place from the time it came into her son's possession on the decease of his uncle. Mrs. Vincent, who was prevented visiting her daughter Mortimer by the return of a complaint to which she was subject at this season of the year, received our heroine with every mark of the most cordial affection. Conscious of the sacrifice her beloved Fitzhenry had formerly made of his own happiness at the shrine of filial duty, and perpetually reproaching herself with the share she had had in eventually imbittering the life of him who had resigned every individual feeling on his own account, in order to secure the peace and honour of his father's family, the good old lady imagined she could not more sufficiently recompense him for past sufferings, than by shewing the most distinguished and unequivocal proofs of approbation and esteem for the woman who, by his own free election, was now to reward him for all that his long meritorious self-denial had once cost him, through the medium of an extorted compliance with the wishes of his parents.

Louisa's little boy, who commonly remained with his grandmother, soon became so particularly attached to our heroine, that he was seldom seen from her side; while his cousins, the two Mortimers, appeared almost equally sedulous and successful in their endeavours to obtain her notice.

On the second week after their arrival, Miss Adair returned to Scotland, in compliance with the promise previously given to her parents; and at the expiration of the time appointed by Stella, our heroine bestowed her hand upon him who had uniformly possessed an exclusive right to her affections from the first hour of their acquaintance with each other.

As the newly-married couple were mutually partial to scenes of domestic tranquillity, and what might rather be called the more retired line of life, it was finally agreed to spend the depth of every succeeding winter at Mount Fitzhenry, and the summer and autumn at their northern residence, to which, on many accounts, they were both much attached; and whither they now prepared to return in a few days after the celebration of their nuptials. Montague and Louisa were again to be their travelling companions; while Mrs. Mortimer and the children remained with Mrs. St. Vincent, whose present state of health would not permit of her taking so long a journey with any degree of ease or safety to herself.

The last evening but one previous to their intended departure was now arrived, and Lady Fitzhenry was just putting on her bonnet to take a ramble with his Lordship through the pleasure-grounds, when the sound of carriage wheels was heard in the avenue that led to the principal entrance of the house; and in a few minutes more the Delmores, Miss Mowbray, and Sir Frederic Montague appeared in the saloon; when the latter agreeably surprised his friends at Mount Fitzhenry, by claiming their congratulations on his union with the amiable Maria, who was fervently pressed to the heart of her new relatives with every indication of the sincerest affection and pleasure.

No addition to the society of those previously assembled at the Mount could have possibly proved more acceptable than that which it had now received. A few days delay of their northern journey was the natural consequence; Mrs. St. Vincent particularly requesting to be gratified with their company a little longer. At length the travellers, accompanied by their visitors, bade farewell to that worthy lady and Mrs. Mortimer, and proceeded with all dispatch to Galloway.

At Rossgrove, they found the Adairs, Juliana, and Mrs. Wallace waiting to receive them; and the interview that succeeded their arrival was such as the reader may suppose: a happier group indeed had scarcely ever met, than that which was now to be seen under the hospitable roof of Lord Fitzhenry. Mr. Adair, to whose judgment and direction every thing about the place

had been left during the absence of its owner, appeared much gratified by the compliments paid to his taste for the judicious and well-conducted arrangements apparent, not only in the interior of the building, where, in conformity with his Lordship's wishes, several alterations had been made, but likewise through various other parts of the domain.

About a fortnight from the time of their arrival, while some of their neighbours were on a visit at the Grove, and the windings of the mazy dance were tracing in the drawing-room, where polite ease and cheerful good-humour reigned on every side, Stella, struck with the recollection of a similar scene formerly witnessed in this very apartment from her favourite grotto, and affected by the remembrance of the incident that followed, softly stole to one of the windows, and gave way to the grateful sensations that filled her mind as the long succession of painful events which had intervened in the course of that period crowded upon it. These were now for ever past; her situation was changed, wonderfully changed in every respect: but, for the blessings at present enjoyed, she was not more thankful to Providence, than for the power that Providence had given her to enjoy them free from the lacerating pang of remorse, or even the slightest degree of self-reproach. Lord Fitzhenry, whose eyes had been fixed on hers as they were raised to heaven with an air of sublime adoration almost more than human, soon after joined her, and speedily learned all that was passing in her pure, virtuous, and happy bosom. Absorbed in the delicious feelings that occupied each of their minds, they perceived not for some time that Sir Frederic Montague had left the room, and that Louisa, with the Delmores, and the Lady of the former, were also absent; till the Baronet entering again, approached them, leading in a stranger of the most elegant and prepossessing appearance, who was instantly announced as M. St. Lambert, the long-lost lover of Juliana, and one who had for some time been supposed an inhabitant of the other world.

An event so unexpected and agreeable, proved a source of additional felicity to the friendly and noble owners of Rossgrove; and the manner in which the stranger was received, fully evinced the pleasure his presence afforded them. This very desirable occurrence had been effected through the medium of Sir Frederic Montague and the Delmores' extensive acquaintance amongst the French Emigrants, to whom they had secretly applied for intelligence of the young Count's destiny; and thus finally obtained a knowledge of his existence.

As Juliana had never been partial to the line of life allotted her by her father, and uniformly cherished the most ardent, though hopeless affection for the man of her early choice, matters were soon adjusted for their speedy union; after which they retired to the Hermitage, where, at the particular request of Lady Fitzhenry, they fixed their residence; and, with their inestimable friends at the Grove, apparently formed but one family, bound together by the links of the sincerest attachment and congeniality of mind.

Miss Adair continues to enjoy the place she has long held in the heart of her now happy Stella, and, though addressed by men of the first rank and merit in the country, has hitherto declined all proposals of marriage, and appears determined to retain the reprobated appellation of "an old maid," in spite of the numerous opportunities which daily occur for making observations on that genuine felicity produced by the "feast of reason and flow of soul" continually experienced by the good and virtuous votaries of Hymen, where a similarity of sentiment, temper, and disposition exists, to render the connubial lot a state of rational enjoyment and cheerful content.

FINIS.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

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