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SELF-CONTROL.

SELF-CONTROL:

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A NOVEL.

His warfare is within.—There unfatigued
His fervent spirit labours.—There he fights,
And there obtains fresh triumphs o'er himself,
And never-withering wreaths, compared with which
The laurels that a Cæsar reaps are weeds.

COWPER.

FOURTH EDITION.

VOLUME II.

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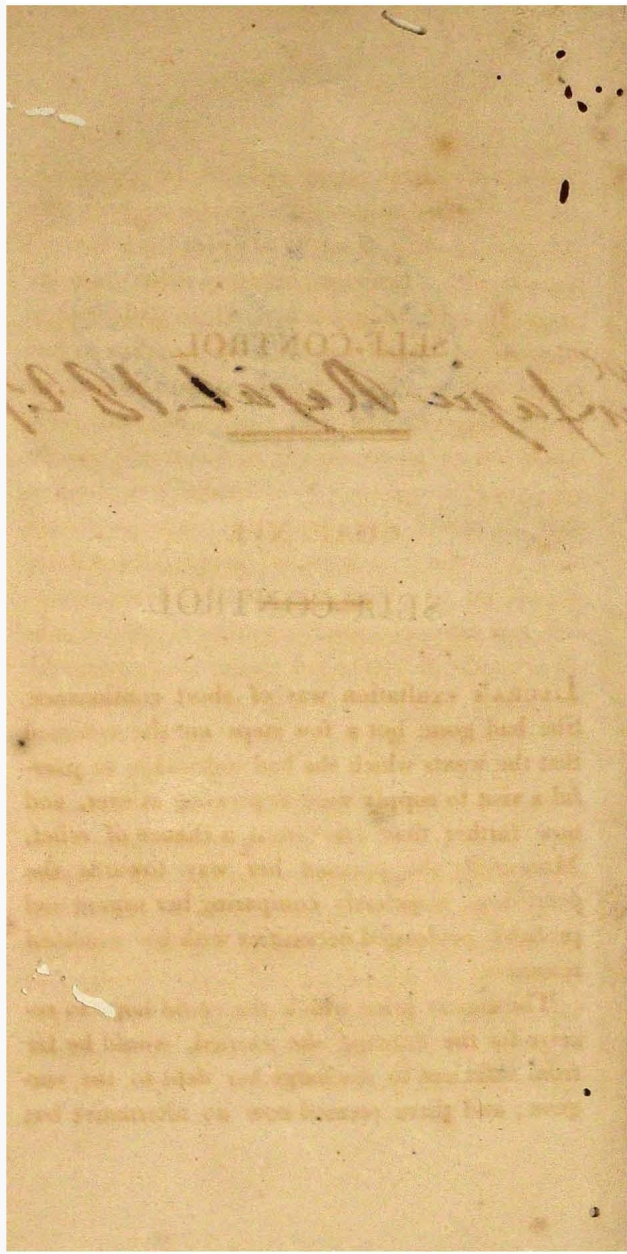
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VOL. II.

A



SELF-CONTROL.

Infante Rajah. 1827.

CHAP. XVI.

LAURA's exultation was of short continuance. She had gone but a few steps ere she reflected that the wants which she had undertaken so painful a visit to supply were as pressing as ever, and now further than ever from a chance of relief. Mournfully she pursued her way towards the print-shop, hopelessly comparing her urgent and probably prolonged necessities with her confined resources.

The utmost price which she could hope to receive for the drawing she carried, would be far from sufficient to discharge her debt to the surgeon; and there seemed now no alternative but

to confess her inability to pay, and to throw herself upon his mercy. To this measure, however, she was too averse, to adopt it without considering every other possible expedient. She thought of appealing to the friendship of Mrs Douglas, and of suffering Dr Flint to continue his visits till an answer from her friend should enable her to close the connection. But Mrs Douglas's scanty income was taxed to the uttermost by the maintenance and education of a numerous family, by the liberal charities of its owners, and by the hospitable spirit, which, banished by ostentation from more splendid abodes, still lingers by the fireside of a Scotch clergyman. Laura was sure that Mrs Douglas would supply her wants at whatever inconvenience to herself; and this very consideration withheld her from making application to her friend.

Laura had heard and read that ladies in distress had found subsistence by the sale of their ornaments. But by their example she could not profit; for her ornaments were few in number and of no value. She wore indeed a locket, which she had received from her mother, with an injunction neither to lose it nor to give it away; but Laura, in her profound ignorance of the value of trinkets, attached no estimation to this one, except

as the only unnecessary gift which she had ever received from her mother. "It contains almost as much gold as a guinea," said she, putting her hand to it, "and a guinea will soon be a great treasure to me." Still she determined that nothing short of extremity should induce her to part with it; but desirous to ascertain the extent of this last resource, she entered the shop of a jeweller, and presenting the locket, begged to know its value.

After examining it, the jeweller replied that he believed it might be worth about five guineas, "for though," said he, "the setting is antiquated, these emeralds are worth something."

At the mention of this sum, all Laura's difficulties seemed to vanish. Besides enabling her to pay the surgeon, it would make an addition to her little fund. With rigorous abstinence on her part, this little fund, together with the price of her incessant labour, might pay for her lodgings, and support her father in happy ignorance of his poverty, till he was able to remove to Glenalbert. Then, when he was quite well and quite able to bear it, she would tell him how she had toiled for him, and he would see that he had not lavished his fondness on a thankless child.

These thoughts occupied far less time than the

recital ; and yet, ere they were passed, Laura had untied the locket from her neck, and put it into the hands of the jeweller. It was not till she saw it in the hands of another, that she felt all the pain of parting with it. She asked to see it once more ; as she gazed on it for the last time, tears trickled from her eyes ; but speedily wiping them away, and averting her head, she restored the locket to its new owner, and taking up the money, departed.

She soon arrived at the print-shop, and finding Wilkins disengaged, produced her drawing, and asked him to purchase it. Wilkins looked at it, and inquired what price she put upon it. " I am quite unacquainted with its real value," answered she, " but the rapid sale of my work is at present such an object to me, that I shall willingly make it as cheap as possible, or allow you to fix your own price." " Have you any more to dispose of, Ma'am ?" asked Wilkins. " I have none finished," answered Laura, " but I think I could promise you six more in a week if you are inclined to take them." " I think," said Wilkins, after some consideration, " I might venture to take them if you could afford them for half-a-guinea each." " You shall have them," said Laura, with

a sigh ; “ but I think half-a-guinea rather a low—a high, I believe, I mean.—”

Laura did not at this moment exactly know what she meant : for her eyes had just rested on a gentleman, who, with his back towards her, was busied in examining a book of caricatures. She thought she could not be mistaken in the person. Only one form upon earth was endowed with such symmetry and grace ; and that form was Hargrave’s. He slightly turned his head, and Laura was certain.

Though Laura neither screamed nor fainted, this recognition was not made without extreme emotion. She trembled violently, and a mist spread before her eyes ; but she remembered the apparently wilful desertion of her lover ; and, determined neither to claim his compassion nor gratify his vanity by any of the airs of a forsaken damsel, she quietly turned away from him, and leant against the counter to recover strength and composure.

She was resolved to quit the shop the instant that she was able ; and yet, perhaps, she would have become sooner sensible of her recovered powers of motion, had it not been for a latent hope that the caricatures would not long continue so very interesting. No one, however, ac-

costed her ; and next came the idea that Hargrave had already observed her, without wishing to claim her acquaintance. Before the mortifying thought could take a distinct form, Laura was already on her way towards the door.

“ You have left your half-guinea, Ma’am,” said Wilkins, calling after her ; and Laura, half angry at being detained, turned back to fetch it. At this moment Hargrave’s eye fell upon her half-averted face. Surprise and joy illuminating his fine countenance, “ Laura !” he exclaimed, “ is it possible ! have I at last found you ?” and springing forward, he clasped her to his breast, regardless of the inquisitive looks and significant smiles of the spectators of his transports. But to the scrutiny of strangers, to the caresses of Hargrave, even to the indecorum of her situation, poor Laura was insensible. Weakened by the fatigue and emotion of the two preceding days, overcome by the sudden conviction that she had not been wilfully neglected, her head sunk upon the shoulder of Hargrave, and she lost all consciousness.

When Laura recovered, she found herself in a little parlour adjoining to the shop, with no attendant but Hargrave, who still supported her in his arms. Her first thought was vexation at her own ill-timed sensibility ; her next, a resolution

to make no further forfeiture of her respectability, but rather, by the most stoical composure, to regain what she had lost. For this purpose, she soon disengaged herself from her perilous support, and unwilling to speak till secure of maintaining her firmness, she averted her head, and returned all Hargrave's raptures of love and joy with provoking silence.

As soon as she had completely recovered her self-possession, she rose, and apologizing for the trouble she had occasioned him, said she would return home. Hargrave eagerly begged permission to accompany her, saying that his carriage was in waiting, and would convey them. Laura, with cold politeness, declined his offer. Though a little piqued by her manner, Hargrave triumphed in the idea that he retained all his former influence. "My bewitching Laura," said he, taking her hand, "I beseech you to lay aside this ill-timed coquetry. After so sweet, so interesting a proof that you still allow me some power over your feelings, must I accuse you of an affectation of coldness?" "No, Sir," said Laura indignantly, "rather of a momentary weakness, for which I despise myself."

The lover could not indeed have chosen a more unfavourable moment to express his exultation ;

for Laura's feelings of humiliation and self-reproach were just then raised to their height, by her perceiving the faces of two of the shop-boys peeping through the glass door with an aspect of roguish curiosity. Conscious of her inability to walk home, and feeling her situation quite intolerable, she called to one of the little spies, and begged that he would instantly procure her a hackney coach.

Hargrave vehemently remonstrated against this order. "Why this unkind haste?" said he. "Surely after so tedious, so tormenting an absence, you need not grudge me a few short moments." Laura thought he was probably himself to blame for the absence of which he complained, and coldly answering, "I have already been detained too long," was about to quit the room, when Hargrave, impatiently seizing her hand, exclaimed, "Unfeeling Laura! does that relentless pride never slumber? Have I followed you from Scotland, and sought you for three anxious months, to be met without one kind word, one pitying look!"

"Followed me!" repeated Laura with surprise.

"Yes, upon my life, my journey hither had no other object. After you so cruelly left me,

without warning or farewell, how could I endure to exist in the place which you once made delightful to me. Indeed I could not bear it. I resolved to pursue you wherever you went, to breathe at least the same air with you, sometimes to feast my fond eyes with that form, beyond imagination lovely—perhaps to win that beguiling smile which no heart can withstand. The barbarous caution of Mrs Douglas in refusing me your address, has caused the disappointment of all my hopes.”

Hargrave had egregiously mistaken the road to Laura’s favour when he threw a reflection upon her friend. “Mrs Douglas certainly acted right,” said she. “I have equal confidence in her prudence and in her friendship.”

“Probably then,” said Hargrave, reddening with vexation, “this system of torture originated with you. It was at your desire that your friend withstood all my entreaties.”

“No,” answered Laura, “I cannot claim the merit of so much foresight. I certainly did not expect the honour which you are pleased to say you have done me, especially when you were doubtful both of my abode and of your own reception.”

“Insulting girl,” cried Hargrave, “you know too well, that, however received, still I must fol-

low you. And, but for a series of the most tormenting accidents, I should have defeated the caution of your cold-hearted favourite. At the Perth post-office, I discovered that your letters were addressed to the care of Mr Baynard; and the very hour that I reached London, I flew to make inquiries after you. I found that Mr Baynard's house was shut up, and that he was gone in bad health to Richmond. I followed him, and was told that he was too ill to be spoken with, that none of the servants knew your abode, as the footman who used to carry messages to you had been dismissed, and that your letters were now left at Mr Baynard's chambers in town. Thither I went, and learnt that, ever since Mr Baynard's removal to Richmond, you had yourself sent for your letters, and that, of course, the clerks were entirely ignorant of your residence. Imagine my disappointment! The people, however, promised to make inquiries of your messenger, and to let me know where you might be found; and day after day did I haunt them, the sport of vain hope and bitter disappointment. No other letter ever came for you, nor did you ever inquire for any."

"After Mr Baynard's removal to Richmond,"

said Laura, "I directed Mrs Douglas to address her letters to our lodgings."

"Ah Laura, think what anxieties, what wretchedness I have suffered in my fruitless search! Yet you meet me only to drive me coldly from your presence. Once you said that you pardoned the folly—the madness which offended you; but too well I see that you deceived yourself or me—that no attachment, no devotion can purchase your forgiveness."

"Indeed," said Laura, melted by the proof which she had received of her lover's affection, yet fearful of forfeiting her caution, "I am incapable of harbouring enmity against the worst of human beings, and—"

"Enmity!" interrupted Hargrave, "Heavens, what a word!"

"I mean," said Laura, faltering, "that I am not insensible to the regard—"

"Madam, the coach is at the door," said the shop-boy, again peeping slyly into the room; and Laura, hastily bidding Hargrave good morning, walked towards the carriage. Having herself given the coachman his directions, she suffered Hargrave to hand her in, giving him a slight bow in token of dismissal. He continued, however, to stand for some moments with his foot upon the

step, waiting for a look of permission to accompany her ; but, receiving none, he sprung into the seat by her side, and called to the man to drive on. Laura offended at his boldness, gave him a very ungracious look, and drew back in silence. " I see you think me presumptuous," said he, " but, just found, how can I consent to leave you ? Oh, Laura, if you knew what I have suffered from an absence which seemed endless ! Not for worlds would I endure such another."

" The stipulated two years are still far from a close," said Laura coldly ; " and, till they are ended, our intercourse cannot be too slight."

" Surely," cried Hargrave, " when you fixed this lingering probation, you did not mean to banish me from your presence for two years !" Laura could not with truth aver that such a banishment had been her intention. " I believe," said she, suppressing a sigh,, " that would have been my wisest meaning." " I would sooner die," cried Hargrave, vehemently. " Oh, had I sooner found you," added he, a dark expression which Laura could not define clouding his countenance, " what wretchedness would have been spared ! But now that we have at last met," continued he, his eyes again sparkling with love and hope, " I will haunt you, cling to you, supplicate you, till

I melt you to a passion as fervent as my own." While he spoke he dropped upon his knee by her side, and threw his arm passionately round her. Time had been when Laura would have withdrawn from the embrace, womanly shame alone rejecting caresses which yet she never imagined to be less holy than a mother's kiss. But Hargrave had himself torn the veil from her eyes; and shrink-
 ink from him as if a serpent had crossed her path, she cast on him a look which struck like an ice-bolt on the glowing heart of Hargrave. "Just Heaven!" he cried, starting up with a convulsive shudder, "this is abhorrence! Why, why have you deceived me with a false show of sensibility? Speak it at once," said he, wildly grasping her arm; "say that you detest me, and tell me too who has dared to supplant me in a heart once wholly mine."

"Be calm, I implore you," said Laura, terrified at his violence, "no one has supplanted you. I am, I ever shall be, whatever you deserve to find me."

Laura's soothing voice, her insinuating look, retained all their wonted power to calm the fierce passions of her lover. "Oh I shall never deserve you," said he in a tone of wretchedness, while his face was again crossed by an expression of an-

guish, which the unsuspecting Laura attributed to remorse for his former treatment of herself.

The carriage at this moment stopped, and anxious to calm his spirits at parting, Laura smiled kindly upon him, and said, "Be ever thus humble in your opinion of your own merits, ever thus partial in your estimate of mine, and then," added she, the tears trembling in her lovely eyes, "we may meet again in happier circumstances."

"You must not, shall not leave me thus," cried Hargrave impatiently, "I will not quit this spot, till you have consented to see me again."

"Do not ask it," replied Laura. "A long, long time must elapse, much virtuous exertion must be undergone, ere I dare receive you with other than this coldness, which appears to be so painful to you. Why then sport with your own feelings and with mine?"

"Ah Laura," said Hargrave in a voice of supplication, "use me as you will, only suffer me to see you."

Moved with the imploring tone of her lover, Laura turned towards him that she might soften by her manner the meditated refusal; but, in an evil hour for her resolution, she met the fine eyes of Hargrave suffused with tears, and, wholly un-

able to utter what she intended, she remained silent. Hargrave was instantly sensible of his advantage, and willing to assist her acquiescence by putting his request into a less exceptionable form, he said, "I ask not even for your notice, suffer me but to visit your father."

"My father has been very ill," returned Laura, who, unknown to herself, rejoiced to find an excuse for her concession, "and it may give *him* pleasure to see you; but *I* can claim no share in the honour of your visits."

Hargrave, delighted with his success, rapturously thanked her for her condescension; and springing from the carriage, led her, but half-satisfied with her own conduct, into the house. She ushered him into the parlour, and before he had time to detain her, glided away to acquaint her father with his visit. She found the Captain wrapt in the same listless melancholy in which she had left him; the book which she had meant to entertain him, used only as a rest for his arm. Laura was now beset with her old difficulty. She had not yet learnt to speak of Hargrave without sensible confusion; and to utter his name while any eye was fixed upon her face, required an effort which no common circumstances could have tempted her to make. She therefore took re-

fuge behind her father's chair, before she began her partial relation of her morning's adventure.

"And is he now in the house?" cried Montreville, with an animation which he had long laid aside. "I rejoice to hear it. Return to him immediately, my love. I will see him in a few minutes." "As soon as you choose to receive him," said Laura, "I shall carry your commands. I shall remain in the dressing-room." "For shame, Laura!" returned Montreville. "I thought you had been above these silly airs of conquest. Colonel Hargrave's rejected passion gives you no right to refuse him the politeness due to all your father's guests." "Certainly not, Sir, but"—she stopped, hesitating—"however," added she, "since *you* wish it, I will go."

It was not without embarrassment that Laura returned to her lover; to offer him another tête-à-tête seemed so like soliciting a renewal of his ardours. In this idea she was stopping at the parlour door, collecting her courage, and meditating a speech decorously repulsive, when Hargrave, who had been listening for her approach, impatiently stepped out to look for her, and in a moment spoiled all her concerted oratory, by taking her hand and leading her into the room.

Though Hargrave could at any time take Lau-

ra's feelings by surprise, an instant was sufficient to restore her self-possession; and withdrawing her hand, she said, "In a few minutes, Sir, my father will be glad to see you, and at his desire I attend you till he can have that honour." "Bless him for the delay!" cried Hargrave, "I have a thousand things to say to you." "And I, Sir," said Laura, solemnly, "have one thing to say to you, of more importance to me, probably, than all the thousand."

Hargrave bit his lip; and Laura proceeded, her colour, as painful recollection rose, fading from the crimson which had newly flushed it, to the paleness of anguish. "Six months ago," said she, speaking with an effort that rendered her words scarcely articulate—"Six months ago you made me a promise. Judge of my anxiety that you should keep it, when to secure its fulfilment I can call up a subject so revolting—so dreadful." She paused—a cold shudder running through her limbs: but Hargrave, abashed and disconcerted, gave her no interruption, and ventured not even to raise his eyes from the ground. "My father," she continued, "is no longer able to avenge his child;—the bare mention of her wrongs would destroy him. If then you value my peace—if you dread my detestation—let no

circumstance seduce, no accident surprise from you this hateful secret."

While she spoke, the blushes which had deserted her cheek were transferred to that of Hargrave; for though, to his own conscience, he had palliated his former outrage till it appeared a very venial trespass, he was not proof against the unaffected horror with which it had inspired the virtuous Laura. Throwing himself at her feet, and hiding his face in her gown, he bitterly, and for the moment sincerely, bewailed his offence, and vowed to devote his life to its expiation. Then starting up, he struck his hand wildly upon his forehead, and exclaimed, "Madman that I have been! Oh, Laura, thy heavenly purity makes me the veriest wretch. No—thou canst never pardon me!"

The innocent Laura, who little suspected all his causes of self-reproach, wept tears of joy over his repentance, and, in a voice full of tenderness, said, "Indeed I have myself too many faults to be unrelenting. Contrition and amendment are all that Heaven requires—why should I ask more!" Hargrave saw that she attributed all his agitation to remorse for his conduct towards herself; but the effects of her mistake were too delightful to suffer him to undeceive her; and per-

ceiving at once that he had found the master-spring of all her tenderness, he overpowered her with such vows, protestations, and entreaties, that, before their conference was interrupted, he had, amidst tremors, blushes, and hesitation, which spoke a thousand times more than her words, wrung from her a confession that she felt a more than friendly interest in the issue of his probation.

Indeed Montreville was in no haste to break in upon their dialogue. That any woman should have refused the hand of the handsome—the insinuating—the gallant Colonel Hargrave, had always appeared to him little less than miraculous. He had been told that ladies sometimes rejected what they did not mean to relinquish; and though he could scarcely believe his daughter capable of such childish coquetry, he was not without faith in a maxim, which, it must be confessed, receives sanction from experience, namely, that in all cases of feminine obduracy, perseverance is an infallible *recipé*. This *recipé*, he had no doubt, was now to be tried upon Laura; and he fervently wished that it might be with success. Though he was too affectionate a father to form on this subject a wish at variance with his daughter's happiness, he had never been insensible to the

desire of seeing her brow graced by a coronet. But now more important considerations made him truly anxious to consign her to the guardianship of a man of honour.

The unfortunate transaction of the annuity would, in the event of his death, leave her utterly destitute. That event, he imagined, was fast approaching ; and with many a bitter pang he remembered that he had neither friend nor relative to whom he could entrust his orphan child. His parents had long been dead ; his only surviving brother, a fox-hunting squire of small fortune, shared his table and bed with a person who had stooped to these degrading honours from the more reputable situation of an innocent dairy-maid. With Lady Harriet's relations (for friends she had none), Montreville had never maintained any intercourse. They had affected to resent his intrusion into the family, and he had not been industrious to conciliate their favour. Except himself, therefore, Laura had no natural protector ; and this circumstance made him tenfold more anxious that she should recal her decision in regard to Hargrave.

He had no doubt that the present visit was intended for Laura ; and he suffered as long a time to elapse before he claimed any share in it, as

common politeness would allow. He had meant to receive the Colonel in his own apartment, but an inclination to observe the conduct of the lovers, induced him to make an effort to join them in the parlour, where he with pleasure discovered by the countenances of both, that their conversation had been mutually interesting. Hargrave instantly recovered himself, and paid his compliments with his accustomed grace ; but Laura, by no means prepared to stand inspection, disappeared the moment her father entered the room.

This was the first time that the gentlemen had met, since the day when Montreville had granted his fruitless sanction to the Colonel's suit. Delicacy prevented the father from touching upon the subject, and it was equally avoided by Hargrave, who had not yet determined in what light to represent his repulse. However, as it completely occupied the minds of both, the conversation, which turned on topics merely indifferent, was carried on with little spirit on either side, and was soon closed by Hargrave's taking leave, after begging permission to repeat his visit.

Colonel Hargrave had promised to spend that evening with the most beautiful woman in Lon-

don ; but the unexpected rencounter of the morning, left him in no humour to fulfil his engagement. He had found his Laura,—his lovely, his innocent Laura,—the object of his only serious passion,—the only woman whose empire reached beyond his senses. He had found her cautious, reserved, severe ; yet feeling, constant, and tender. He remembered the overwhelming joy which made her sink fainting on his bosom ; called to mind her ill-suppressed tears—her smothered sighs—her unbidden blushes ; and a thousand times assured himself that he was passionately beloved. He triumphed the more in the proofs of her affection, because they were not only involuntary but reluctant ; and, seen through the flattering medium of gratified pride, her charms appeared more than ever enchanting. On these charms he had formerly suffered his imagination to dwell, till to appropriate them seemed to him almost the chief end of existence ; and, though in absence his frenzy had a little intermitted, his interview with Laura roused it again to double violence.

No passion of Hargrave's soul (and all his passions were of intense force), had ever known restraint, or control, or even delay of gratification, excepting only this, the strongest that had

ever governed him. And must he now pine for eighteen lingering months, ere he attained the object of such ardent wishes? Must he submit, for a time that seemed endless, to the tyranny of this intolerable passion,—see the woman on whom he doated receive his protestations with distrust, and, spite of her affection, shrink from his caresses with horror? No!—he vowed that if there were persuasion in man, or frailty in woman, he would shorten the period of his trial,—that he would employ for this purpose all the power which he possessed over Laura's heart, and if that failed, that he would even have recourse to the authority of her father.

But he had yet a stronger motive than the impetuosity of his passions for striving to obtain immediate possession of his treasure. He was conscious that there was a tale to tell, which, once known (and it could not long be concealed), would shake his hopes to the foundation. But on this subject he could not now dwell without disgust, and he turned from it to the more inviting contemplation of Laura's beauty and Laura's love; and with his head and his heart, every nerve, every pulse full of Laura, he retired to pursue in his dreams, the fair visions which had occupied his waking thoughts.

While he was thus wilfully surrendering himself to the dominion of his frenzy, Laura, the self-denied Laura, was endeavouring, though it must be owned without distinguished success, to silence the pleadings of a heart as warm, though better regulated, by attending to the humble duties of the hour.

When she quitted Hargrave, she had retired to offer up her fervent thanks to heaven, that he was become sensible of the enormity of his former conduct. Earnestly did she pray, that, though earth should never witness their union, they might be permitted together to join a nobler society—animated by yet purer loves—bound by yet holier ties. She next reconsidered her own behaviour towards Hargrave; and, though vexed at the momentary desertion of her self-command, saw, upon the whole, little cause to reproach herself, since her weakness had been merely that of the body, to which the will gave no consent. She resolved to be guardedly cautious in her future demeanour towards him; and since the issue of his probation was doubtful, since its close was at all events distant, to forfeit the enjoyment of her lover's society, rather than, by remaining in the room during his visits, appear to consider them as meant for herself.

As soon as Hargrave was gone, Montreville returned to his chamber; and there Laura ordered his small but delicate repast to be served, excusing herself from partaking of it, by saying that she could dine more conveniently in the parlour. Having in the morning bestowed on the beggar the meagre fare that should have supplied her own wants, she employed the time of her father's meal in the labour which was to purchase him another; pondering meanwhile on the probability that he would again enter on the discussion of Hargrave's pretensions. To this subject she felt unconquerable repugnance; and though she knew that it must at last be canvassed, and that she must at last assign a reason for her conduct, she would fain have put off the evil hour.

She delayed her evening visit to her father, till he grew impatient for it, and sent for her to his apartment. The moment she entered the room, he began, as she had anticipated, to inquire into the particulars of her interview with Hargrave. The language of Laura's reply was not very perspicuous; the manner of it was more intelligible; and Montreville instantly comprehended the nature of her conference with the Colonel. "He has then given you an opportunity of repairing your former rashness," said Montreville, with ea-

gerness,—“and your answer?” “Colonel Hargrave had his answer long ago, Sir,” replied Laura, trembling at this exordium. Montreville sighed heavily, and fixing his eyes mournfully upon her, remained silent. At last, affectionately taking her hand, he said, “My dear child, the time has been, when even your caprices on this subject were sacred with your father. While I had a shelter, however humble—an independence, however small, to offer you, your bare inclination determined mine. But now your situation is changed—fatally changed; and no trivial reasons would excuse me for permitting your rejection of an alliance so unexceptionable, so splendid. Tell me, then, explicitly, what are your objections to Colonel Hargrave?”

Laura remained silent, for she knew not how to frame her reply. “Is it possible that he can be personally disagreeable to you?” continued Montreville. “Disagreeable!” exclaimed Laura, thrown off her guard by astonishment. “Colonel Hargrave is one whom any woman might—whom no woman could know without——” “Without what?” said Montreville, with a delighted smile. But Laura, shocked at the extent of her own admission, covered her face with her hands, and, almost in tears, made no reply.

"Well, my love," said Montreville, more cheerfully than he had spoken for many a day, "I can interpret all this, and will not persecute you. But you must still suffer me to ask what strange reasons could induce you to reject wealth and title, offered by a man not absolutely *disagreeable*?"

Laura strove to collect herself, and deep crimson dyeing her beautiful face and neck, she said, without venturing to lift her eyes, "You yourself have told me, Sir, that Colonel Hargrave is a man of gallantry, and, believe me, with such a man I should be most miserable."

"Come, come, Laura," said Montreville, putting his arm round her, "confess, that some little fit of jealousy made you answer Hargrave unkindly at first, and that now a little female pride, or the obstinacy of which we used to accuse you fifteen years ago, makes you unwilling to retract."

"No, indeed," returned Laura, with emotion, "Colonel Hargrave has never given me cause to be jealous of his affection. But jealousy would feebly express the anguish with which his wife would behold his vices, degrading him in the eyes of men, and making him vile in the sight of Heaven."

"My love," said Montreville, "your simplicity and ignorance of the world make you attach far too great importance to Hargrave's little irregularities. I am persuaded that a wife whom he loved would have no cause to complain of them."

"She would at least have no *right* to complain," returned Laura, "if, knowing them, she chose to make the hazardous experiment."

"But I am certain," said Montreville, "that a passion such as he evidently feels for you, would ensure his perfect reformation; and that a heart so warm as Hargrave's, would readily acknowledge all the claims upon a husband's and a father's love."

Laura held down her head, and, for a moment, surrendered her fancy to prospects, rainbow-like, bright but unreal. Spite of the dictates of sober sense, the vision was cheering; and a smile dimpled her cheek while she said, "But since this reformation is so easy and so certain, would it be a grievous delay to wait for its appearance?"

"Ah Laura!" Montreville began, "this is no time for—" "Nay, now," interrupted Laura, sportively laying her hand upon his mouth, "positively I will be no more lectured to-night. Be-

sides I have got a new book for you from the library, and the people insisted upon having it returned to-morrow." "You are a spoiled girl," said Montreville, fondly caressing her, and he dropped the subject with the less reluctance, because he believed that his wishes, aided as he perceived they were, by an advocate in Laura's own breast, were in a fair train for accomplishment. He little knew how feeble was the influence of inclination over the decisions of her self-controlling spirit.

To prevent him from returning to the topic which he had quitted, she read aloud to him till his hour of rest; and then retired to her chamber to labour as formerly, till the morning was far advanced.



CHAP. XVII.

LAURA had it now in her power to discharge her debt to the surgeon, and she was resolved that it should immediately be paid. When, therefore, he called in the morning to make his daily visit, she met him before he entered Montreville's chamber, and requested to speak with him in the parlour.

She began by saying, she feared that medicine could be of little use to her father, to which Dr Flint readily assented, declaring, in his dry way, that generous food and open air would benefit him more than all the drugs in London. Laura begged him to say explicitly so to the Captain, and to give that as a reason for declining to make him any more professional visits. She then presented him with a paper containing four guineas, which she thought might be the amount of his claim: He took the paper, and deliberately unfolding it, returned one-half of its contents; say-

ing, that his account having been settled so lately, the new one could not amount to more than the sum he retained. Laura, who having now no favour to beg, no debt which she was unable to pay, was no longer ashamed of her poverty, easily opened to Dr Flint so much of her situation as was necessary to instruct him in the part which he had to act with Montreville. He made no offer to continue his visits, even as an acquaintance, but readily undertook all that Laura required of him, adding, "Indeed, Miss Montreville, I should have told your father long ago that physic was useless to him, but whimsical people must have something to amuse them, and if he had not paid for my pills, he would for some other man's." He then went to Montreville, and finding him in better spirits than he had lately enjoyed, actually succeeded in persuading him, for that day at least, that no new prescription was necessary, and that he might continue to use the old one without the inspection of a surgeon.

Laura's mind was much relieved by her having settled this affair to her wish; and when the Doctor was gone, she sat down cheerfully to her drawing. Her meeting with Hargrave had lightened her heart of a load which had long

weighed upon it more heavily than she was willing to allow; and, spite of poverty, she was cheerful.

“ I have now only hunger and toil to endure,” thought she, smiling as gaily as if hunger and toil had been trifles; “ but light will be my labours, for by them I can in part pay back my debt of life to my dear kind father. I am no more forlorn and deserted, for he is come who is sunshine to Laura’s soul. The cloud which darkened him has passed away, and he will brighten all my after life. Oh fondly beloved! with thee I would have been content to tread the humblest path; but, if we must climb the steep, together we will court the breeze, together meet the storm. No time shall change the love I bear thee. Thy step, when feeble with age, shall still be music to Laura’s ear. When the lustre of the melting eyes is quenched, when the auburn ringlet fades to silver, dearer shalt thou be to me than in all the pride of manly beauty. And when at last the dust shall cover us, one tree shall shelter our narrow beds, and the wind which fans the flowers upon thy grave, shall scatter their fallen leaves upon mine.”

Casting these thoughts into the wild extempore measures which are familiar to the labourers of

her native mountains*, Laura was singing them to one of the affecting melodies of her country, her sweet voice made more sweet by the magic of real tenderness, when the door opened, and Hargrave himself entered.

He came, resolved to exert all his influence, to urge every plea which the affection of Laura would allow him, in order to extort her consent to their immediate union; and he was too well convinced of his power to be very diffident of success. Laura ceased her song in as much confusion as if her visitor had understood the language in which it was composed, or could have known himself to be the subject of it. He had been listening to its close, and now urged her to continue it, but was unable to prevail. He knew that she was particularly sensible to the charms of music. He had often witnessed the effect of her own pathetic voice upon her feelings; and he judged that no introduction could be more proper to a conference in which he intended to work upon her sensibility. He therefore begged her to sing a little plaintive air with which she had often drawn tears from his eyes. But Laura knew that, as her father was still in bed, she could

* See Jamieson's Popular Ballads, Vol. ii. p. 558.

not without rudeness avoid a long tête-à-tête with Hargrave, and therefore she did not choose to put her composure to any unnecessary test. She excused herself from complying with his request ; but, glad to find any indifferent way of passing the time, she offered to sing, if he would allow her to choose her own song, and began a lively air, which she executed with all the vivacity that she could command. The style of it was quite at variance with Hargrave's present humour and design. He heard it with impatience ; and scarcely thanking her, said " Your spirits are high this morning, Miss Montreville."

" They are, indeed," replied Laura, gaily, " I hope you have no intention to make them otherwise."

" Certainly not ; though they are little in unison with my own. The meditations of a restless, miserable night, have brought me to you."

" Is it the usual effect of a restless night to bring you abroad so early the next morning ?" said Laura, anxious to avoid a trial of strength in a sentimental conference.

" I will be heard seriously," said Hargrave, colouring with anger, " and seriously too I must be answered."

"Nay," said Laura, "if you look so tremendous, I shall retreat without hearing you at all."

Hargrave, who instantly saw that he had not chosen the right road to victory, checked his rising choler—"Laura," said he, "you have yourself made me the victim of a passion ungovernable—irresistible; and it is cruel—it is ungenerous, in you to sport with my uneasiness."

"Do not give the poor passion such hard names," said Laura, smiling. "Perhaps you have never tried to resist or govern it?"

"As soon might I govern the wind," cried Hargrave vehemently,— "as soon resist the fires of Heaven. And why attempt to govern it?"

"Because," answered Laura, "it is weak, it is sinful to submit unresisting to the bondage of an imperious passion."

"Would that you too would submit unresisting to its bondage!" said Hargrave, delighted to have made her once more serious. "But if this passion is sinful," continued he, "my reformation rests with you alone. Put a period to my lingering trial. Consent to be mine, and hush all these tumults to rest."

"Take care how you furnish me with arguments against yourself," returned Laura, laughing.

"Would it be my interest, think you, to lull all these transports to such profound repose?"

"Be serious, Laura, I implore you. Well do you know that my love can end only with my existence; but I should no longer be distracted with these tumultuous hopes and fears if—"

"Oh," cried Laura, interrupting him, "hope is too pleasing a companion for you to wish to part with that; and," added she, a smile and a blush contending upon her cheek, "I begin to believe that your fears are not very troublesome."

"Ah Laura," said Hargrave sorrowfully, "you know not what you say. There are moments when I feel as if you were already lost to me—and the bare thought is distraction. Oh if you have pity for real suffering," continued he, dropping on his knees, "save me from the dread of losing you; forget the hour of madness in which I offended you. Restore to me the time when you owned that I was dear to you. Be yet more generous, and give me immediate, unalienable right to your love."

"You forget, Colonel Hargrave," said Laura, again taking sanctuary in an appearance of coldness; "you forget that six months ago I fixed two years of rectitude as the test of your repentance,

and that you were then satisfied with my decision."

"I would then have blessed you for any sentence which left me a hope, however distant ; but now the time when I may claim your promise seems at such a hopeless distance—Oh, Laura, let me but prevail with you ; and I will bind myself by the most solemn oaths to a life of unsullied purity."

"No oaths," replied Laura, with solemnity, "can strengthen the ties which already bind you to a life of purity. That you are of noble rank calls you to be an example to others ; and the yet higher distinction of an immortal spirit bids you strive after virtues which may never meet the eye of man. Only convince me that such are the objects of your ambition, and I shall no longer fear to trust with you my improvement and my happiness."

As she spoke, unusual animation sparkled in her eyes, and tinged her delicate cheek with brighter colouring. "Lovely, lovely creature !" cried Hargrave, in transport, "give but thyself to those fond arms, and may Heaven forsake me if I strive not to make thee blest beyond the sweetest dreams of youthful fancy."

"Alas !" said Laura, "even your affection

would fail to bless a heart conscious of acting wrong."

"Where is the wrong," said Hargrave, gathering hope from the relenting tenderness of her voice, "Where is the wrong of yielding to the strongest impulse of nature—or, to speak in language more like your own, where is the guilt of submitting to an ordinance of Heaven's own appointment?"

"Why," replied Laura, "will you force me to say what seems unkind! Why compel me to remind you that marriage was never meant to sanction the unholy connection of those whose principles are discordant?"

"Beloved of my heart," said Hargrave, passionately kissing her hand, "take me to thyself, and mould me as thou wilt. I swear to thee that not even thy own life shall be more pure, more innocent than mine. Blest in thy love, what meaner pleasure could allure me. Oh yield then, and bind me for ever to virtue and to thee."

Laura shook her head. "Ah Hargrave," said she, with a heavy sigh, "before you can love and practise the purity which reaches the heart, far other loves must warm, far other motives inspire you."

"No other love can ever have such power over me," said Hargrave with energy. "Be but thou and thy matchless beauty the prize, and every difficulty is light, every sacrifice trivial."

"In little more than a year," said Laura, "I shall perhaps ask some proofs of the influence you ascribe to me; but till then"—

"Long, long before that time," cried Hargrave, striking his forehead in agony, "you will be lost to me for ever," and he paced the room in seeming despair.

Laura looked at him with a pity not unmixed with surprise. "Hear me for a moment," said she, with the soothing voice and gentle aspect, which had always the mastery of Hargrave's feelings, and he was instantly at her side, listening with eagerness to every tone which she uttered, intent on every variation of her countenance.

"There are circumstances," she continued, her transparent cheek glowing with brighter beauty, tears in her downcast eyes trembling through the silken lashes—"There are circumstances which may change me, but time and absence are not of the number. Be but true to yourself, and you have nothing to fear. After this assurance, I trust it will give you little pain to hear that, till the sti-

culated two years are ended, if we are to meet, it must not be without witnesses."

"Good Heavens! Laura, why this new, this intolerable restriction—What can induce you thus wilfully to torment me?"

"Because," answered the blushing Laura, with all her natural simplicity, "because I might not always be able to listen to reason and duty rather than to you."

"Oh, that I could fill thee with a love that should for ever silence the cold voice of reason!" cried Hargrave, transported by her confession; and no longer master of himself, he would have clasped her in his arms. But Laura, to whose mind his caresses ever recalled a dark page in her story, recoiled as from pollution, the glow of ingenuous modesty giving place to the paleness of horror.

No words envenomed with the bitterest malice, could have stung Hargrave to such frenzy as the look and the shudder with which Laura drew back from his embrace. His eyes flashing fire, his pale lips quivering with passion, he reproached her with perfidy and deceit; accused her of veiling her real aversion under the mask of prudence and principle; and execrated his own folly in submitting so long to be the sport of a cold-hearted, tyrannical,

obdurate woman. Laura stood for some minutes gazing on him with calm compassion. But displeased at his groundless accusations, she disdained to sooth his rage. At last, weary of language which, for the present, expressed much more of hatred than of love, she quietly moved towards the door. "I see you can be very calm, Madam," said Hargrave, stopping her, "and I can be as calm as yourself," added he, with a smile like a moon-beam on a thunder-cloud, making the gloom more fearful.

"I hope you soon will be so," replied Laura coldly. "I am so now," said Hargrave, his voice half-choked with the effort to suppress his passion. "I will but stay to take leave of your father, and then free you for ever from one so odious to you."

"That must be as you please, Sir," said Laura, with spirit; "but, for the present, I must be excused from attending you." She then retired to her own chamber, which immediately adjoined to the painting-room; and with tears reflected on the faint prospect of happiness which remained for the wife of a man whose passions were so ungovernable. Even the ardour of his love, for which vanity would have found ready excuse in many a female breast, was to Laura subject of

unfeigned regret, as excluding him from the dominion of better motives, and from the pursuit of nobler ends.

Hargrave was no sooner left to himself than his fury began to evaporate. In a few minutes he was perfectly collected, and the first act of his returning reason was to upbraid him with his treatment of Laura. "Is it to be wondered that she shrinks from me," said he, the tears of self-reproach rising to his eyes, "when I make her the sport of all my frantic passions? But she shall never again have cause to complain of me.—Let but her love this once excuse me, and henceforth I will treat her with gentleness like her own."

There is no time in the life of man so tedious, as that which passes between the resolution to repair a wrong, and the opportunity to make the reparation. Hargrave wondered whether Laura would return to conduct him to her father; feared that she would not—hoped that she would—thought he heard her footstep—listened—sighed—and tried to beguile the time by turning over her drawings.

Almost the first that met his eye, was a sketch of features well known to him. He started and turned pale. He sought for a name upon the re-

verse: there was none, and he again breathed more freely. "This must be accident," said he; "De Courcy is far from London—yet it is very like;" and he longed more than ever for Laura's appearance. He sought refuge from his impatience in a book which lay upon the table. It was the *Pleasures of Hope*, and marked in many parts of the margin with a pencil. One of the passages so marked was that which begins,

"Thy pencil traces on the lover's thought

"Some cottage home, from towns and toil remote,

"Where love and lore may claim alternate hours," &c.

And Hargrave surrendered himself to the pleasing dream that Laura had thought of him, while she approved the lines. "Her name, written by her own snowy fingers may be here," said he, and he turned to the title-page, that he might press it, with a lover's folly, to his lips.—The title-page was inscribed with the name of *Montague De Courcy*.

The glance of the basilisk could not have been more powerful. Motionless he gazed on the words, till all the fiends of jealousy taking possession of his soul, he furiously dashed the book upon the ground. "False, false siren," he cried, "is this the cause of all your coldness—your loathing?" And without any wish but to exclude her for ever

from his sight, he rushed like a madman out of the house.

He darted forward, regardless of the snow which was falling on his uncovered head, till it suddenly occurred to him that he would not suffer her to triumph in the belief of having deceived him. "No," said he, "I will once more see that deceitful face; reproach her with her treachery; enjoy her confusion, and then spurn her from me for ever.

He returned precipitately to the house; and, flying up stairs, saw Laura, the traces of melancholy reflection on her countenance, waiting for admission at her father's door. "Madam," said he, in a voice scarcely articulate, "I must speak with you for a few minutes." "Not for a moment, Sir," said Laura, laying her hand upon the lock. "Yes, by Heaven, you shall hear me!" cried Hargrave: and rudely seizing her, he forced her into the painting-room, and bolted the door.

"Answer me," said he fiercely, "how came that book into your possession?" pointing to it as it still lay upon the floor. "Whence have you this infernal likeness? Speak!"

Laura looked at the drawing, then at the book, and at once understood the cause of her lover's frenzy. Sincere compassion filled her heart; yet

she felt how unjust was the treatment which she received ; and, with calm dignity said, " I will answer all your questions, and then you will judge whether you have deserved that I should do so."

" Whom would not that face deceive ? " said Hargrave, gnashing his teeth in agony. " Speak sorceress—tell me, if you dare, that this is not the portrait of De Courcy—that he is not the lover for whom I am loathed and spurned."

" That is the portrait of De Courcy," replied Laura, with the simple majesty of truth. " It is the sketch from which I finished a picture for his sister. That book too is his," and she stooped to lift it from the ground.

" Touch not the vile thing ! " cried Hargrave, in a voice of thunder. With quiet self-possession, Laura continued, " Mr De Courcy's father was, as you know, the friend of mine. Mr De Courcy himself was, when an infant, known to my father ; and they met, providentially met, when we had great need of a considerate friend. That friend Mr De Courcy was to us, and no selfish motive sullied his benevolence ; for he is not, nor ever was, nor, I trust, ever will be, known to me as a lover ! "

The voice of sober truth had its effect upon

Hargrave, and he said, more composedly, "Will you then give me your word, that De Courcy is not, nor ever will be, dear to you?"

"No!" answered Laura, "I will not say so, for he must be loved wherever his virtues are known; but I have no regard for him which should disquiet you. It is not such," continued she, struggling with the rising tears—"it is not such as would pardon outrage, and withstand neglect, and humble itself before unjust aspersion."

"Oh Laura," said Hargrave, at once convinced and softened, "I must believe you, or my heart will burst."

"I have a right to be believed," returned Laura, endeavouring to rally her spirits. "Now, then, release me, after convincing me that the passion of which you boast so much, is consistent with the most insolent disrespect, the most unfounded suspicion." But Hargrave was again at her feet, exhausting every term of endearment, and breathing forth the most fervent petitions for forgiveness.

Tears, which she could no longer repress, now streamed down Laura's cheeks, while she said, "How could you suspect me of the baseness of pretending a regard which I did not feel, of confirming engagements from which my affections re-

volted!" Hargrave, half wild with the sight of her tears, bitterly reproached himself for his injustice; vowed that he believed her all perfection; that, with all a woman's tenderness, she possessed the truth and purity of angels, and that, could she this once pardon his extravagance, he would never more offend. But Laura, vexed and ashamed of her weakness, insisted on her release in a tone that would be obeyed, and Hargrave, too much humbled to be daring, unwillingly suffered her to retire.

In the faint hope of seeing her again, he waited till Montreville was ready to admit him; but Laura was not with her father, nor did she appear during the remainder of his visit. Desirous to know in what light she had represented their affairs, in order that his statement might tally with hers, he again avoided the subject, resolving that next day he should be better prepared to enter upon it. With this view, he returned to Montreville's lodgings early in the next forenoon, hoping for an opportunity to consult with Laura before seeing her father. He was shewn into the parlour, which was vacant. He waited long, but Laura came not. He sent a message to beg that she would admit him, and was answered that she was sorry it was not in her power. He desired

the messenger to say that his business was important, but was told that Miss Montreville was particularly engaged. However impatient, he was obliged to submit. He again saw Montreville without entering upon the subject so near his heart; and left the house without obtaining even a glimpse of Laura.

The following day he was equally unsuccessful. He indeed saw Laura, but it was only in the presence of her father, and she gave him no opportunity of addressing her particularly. Finding that she adhered to the resolution she had expressed, of seeing him no more without witnesses, he wrote to her, warmly remonstrating against the barbarity of her determination, and beseeching her to depart from it, if only in a single instance. The billet received no answer, and Laura continued to act as before.

Fretted almost to fever, Hargrave filled whole pages with the description of his uneasiness, and complaints of the cruelty which caused it. In conclusion, he assured Laura that he could no longer refrain from confiding his situation to her father; and entreated to see her, were it only to learn in what terms she would permit him to mention their engagement. This letter was rather more successful than the former; for, though

Laura made no reply to the first part, she answered the close by a few cautious lines, leaving Hargrave, excepting in one point, at full liberty as to his communications with her father.

Thus authorized, he seized the first opportunity of conversing with Montreville. He informed him that he had reason to believe himself not indifferent to Laura ; but that, some of his little irregularities coming to her knowledge, she had sentenced him to a probation which was yet to continue for above a year. Though Hargrave guarded his words so as to avoid direct falsehood, the conscious crimson rose to his face as he uttered this subterfuge. But he took instant refuge in the idea that he had no choice left ; and that, if there was any blame, it in fact belonged to Laura, for forcing him to use concealment. He did yet more. He erected his head, and planted his foot more firmly, as he thought, that what he dared to do he dared to justify, were he not proud to yield to the commands of love, and humanely inclined to spare the feelings of a sick man. He proceeded to assure Montreville, that though he must plead guilty to a few youthful indiscretions, Laura might rely upon his constancy and fidelity. Finally, addressing himself to what he conceived to be the predominant failing of age, he offered to

leave the grand affair of settlements to Montreville's own decision ; demanding only in return, that the father would use his interest, or even his authority, if necessary, to obtain his daughter's consent to an immediate union.

Montreville answered, that he had long desisted from the use of authority with Laura, but that his influence was at the Colonel's service ; and he added, with a smile, that he believed neither would be very necessary.

In consequence of this promise, Montreville sought an opportunity of conversing on this subject with his daughter : but she shewed such extreme reluctance to enter upon it, and avoided it with such sedulous care, that he could not immediately execute his design. He observed, too, that she looked ill, that she was pale and languid. Though she did not confess any ailment, he could not help fearing that all was not right ; and he waited the appearance of recovered strength, ere he should enter on a topic which was never heard by her without strong emotion. But Laura looked daily more wretched. Her complexion became wan, her eyes sunk, and her lips colourless.

Hargrave observed the change, and, half persuaded that it was the effect of his own capricious

behaviour at their last interview, he became more anxious for a private conference, in which his tenderness might sooth her to forgetfulness of his errors. When she was quitting the room, he often followed her to the door, and entreated to be heard for a single minute. But the utmost he could obtain was a determined "I cannot," or a hasty "I dare not," and in an instant she had vanished.

Indeed watching and abstinence, though the chief, were not the only causes of Laura's sickly aspect. Hargrave's violence had furnished her with new and painful subjects of meditation. While yet she thought him all perfection, he had often confessed to her the warmth of his temper, with a candour which convinced her (anxious as she was to be so convinced) that he was conscious of his natural tendency, and vigilantly guarded it from excess; consequently, that to the energy of the passionate he united the justice of the cool. She had never witnessed any instance of his violence; for since their first acquaintance, she had herself, at least while she was present, been his only passion. All things unconnected with it were trivial in his estimation; and till the hour which had roused her caution, she had unconsciously soothed this tyrant of his soul with perpe-

tual incense, by proofs of her tenderness, which, though unobserved by others, were not lost upon the vanity of Hargrave. Successful love shedding a placid gentleness upon his really polished manners, he had, without intention to deceive, completely misled Laura's judgment of his character. Now he had turned her eyes from the vision, and compelled her to look upon the reality; and with many a bitter tear she lamented that ever she suffered her peace to depend upon an union which, even if accomplished, promised to compensate transient rapture with abiding disquiet.

But still fondly attached, Laura took pleasure in persuading herself that a mere defect of temper was not such a fault as entitled her to withdraw her promise; and having made this concession, she soon proceeded to convince herself, that Hargrave's love would make ample amends for occasional suffering, however severe. Still she assured herself that if, at the stipulated time, he produced not proofs of real improvement, much more if that period were stained with actual vice, she would, whatever it might cost her, see him no more. She determined to let nothing move her to shorten his probation, nor to be satisfied

without the strictest scrutiny into the manner in which it had been spent.

Aware of the difficulty of withstanding the imploring voice, the pleading eyes of Hargrave, she would not venture into temptation for the mere chance of escape; and adhered to her resolution of affording him no opportunity to practise on her sensibility. Nor was this a slight exercise of self-denial, for no earthly pleasure could bring such joy to Laura's heart, as the assurance, however oft repeated, that she was beloved. Yet, day after day, she withstood his wishes and her own; and generally spent the time of his visits in drawing.

Meanwhile, her delicate face and slender form gave daily greater indications of malady. Montreville, extremely alarmed, insisted upon sending for medical advice; but Laura, with a vehemence most unusual to her, opposed this design, telling him, that if he persisted in it, vexation would cause the reality of the illness which at present was merely imaginary.

The Captain was however the only member of the family who did not conjecture the true cause of Laura's decay. The servant who attended her, reported to her mistress, that the slender repast was always presented, untouched by Laura, to

her father ; that her drink was only water, her fare coarse and scanty ; and that often a few morsels of dry bread were the only sustenance of the day. Mrs Stubbs, who entertained a suitable contempt for poverty, was no sooner informed of these circumstances, than she recollected with indignation the awe with which Laura had involuntarily inspired her, and determined to withdraw part of her misplaced respect. But Laura had an air of command, a quiet majesty of demeanour, that seemed destined to distance vulgar impertinence ; and Mrs Stubbs was compelled to continue her unwilling reverence. Determined, however, that though her pride might suffer, her interest should not, she dropped such hints as induced Laura to offer the payment of the lodgings a week in advance, an offer which was immediately accepted.

In spite of Laura's utmost diligence, this arrangement left her almost pennyless. She was obliged, in that inclement season, to give up even the comfort of a fire ; and more than once passed the whole night in labouring to supply the wants of the following day.

In the meantime, Hargrave continued to pay his daily visits, and Laura to frustrate all his attempts to speak with her apart. His patience

was entirely exhausted. He urged Montreville to the performance of his promise, and Montreville often approached the subject with his daughter, but she either evaded it, or begged with such pathetic earnestness to be spared a contest which she was unable to bear, that, when he looked on the sickly delicacy of her frame, he had not courage to persecute her farther. Convinced, however, that Laura's affections were completely engaged, he became daily more anxious that she should not sacrifice them to what he considered as mistaken prudence ; especially since Hargrave had dropped a hint, which, though not so intended, had appeared to Montreville to import, that his addresses, if rejected in the present instance, would not be renewed at the distant date to which Laura chose to postpone them.

The father's constant anxiety for the health and happiness of his child powerfully affected both his strength and spirits ; and he was soon more languid and feeble than ever. His imagination, too, betrayed increased symptoms of its former disease, and he became more persuaded that he was dying. The selfishness of a feeble mind attended his ailments, and he grew less tender of his daughter's feelings, less fearful to

wound her sensibility. To hints of his apprehensions for his own life, succeeded direct intimations of his conviction that his end was approaching ; and Laura listened with every gradation of terror, to prophetic forebodings of the solitude, want, and temptation, to which she must soon be abandoned.

Pressed by Hargrave's importunities, and weary of waiting for a voluntary change in Laura's conduct towards her lover, Montreville at last resolved that he would force the subject which she was so anxious to shun. For this purpose, detaining her one morning in his apartment, he entered on a melancholy description of the perils which await unprotected youth and beauty ; and explicitly declared his conviction, that to these perils he must soon leave his child. Laura endeavoured, as she was wont, to brighten his dark imagination, and to revive his fainting hope. But Montreville would now neither suffer her to enliven his prospects, nor to divert him from the contemplation of them. He persisted in giving way to his dismal anticipations, till, spite of her efforts, Laura's spirits failed her, and she could scarcely refrain from shedding tears.

Montreville saw that she was affected ; and fondly putting his arm round her, continued, " Yet

still, my sweet Laura, you, who have been the pride of my life, you can soften to me the bitterness of death. Let me but commit you to the affection of the man whom I know that you prefer, and my fears and wishes shall linger no more in this nether world."

"Oh Sir," said Laura, "I beseech, I implore you to spare me on this subject." "No!" answered Montreville, "I have been silent too long. I have too long endangered your happiness, in the dread of giving you transient pain. I must recur to"—

"My dear father," interrupted Laura, "I have already spoken to you on this subject—spoken to you with a freedom which I know not where I found courage to assume. I can only repeat the same sentiments; and indeed, indeed, unless you were yourself in my situation, you cannot imagine with what pain I repeat them."

"I would willingly respect your delicacy," said Montreville, "but this is no time for frivolous scruples. I must soon leave thee, child of my affections. My eyes must watch over thee no more! my ear must be closed to the voice of thy complaining. Oh then, give me the comfort to know that other love will console, other arms protect thee."

"Long, long," cried Laura, clasping his neck, "be your affection my joy—long be your arms my shelter. But alas! what love could console me under the sense of acting wrong—what could protect me from an avenging conscience?"

"Laura, you carry your scruples too far. When I look on these wan cheeks and lustreless eyes, you cannot conceal from me that you are sacrificing to these scruples your own peace, as well as that of others."

"Ah Sir," said Laura, who from mere despair of escape gathered courage to pursue the subject, "What peace can I hope to find in a connexion which reason and religion alike condemn."

"That these have from childhood been your guides, has ever been my joy and my pride," returned Montreville. "But in this instance you forge shackles for yourself, and then call them the restraints of reason and religion. It were absurd to argue on the reasonableness of preferring wealth and title, with the man of your choice, to a solitary struggle with poverty, or a humbling dependence upon strangers. And how, my dear girl, can any precept of religion be tortured into a restriction on the freedom of your choice?"

"Pardon me, Sir, the law which I endeavour to make my guide is here full and explicit. In

express terms it leaves me free to marry whom I will, but with this grand reservation, that I marry 'only in the Lord,'—'that I marry no one who is not in heart and life a Christian,'—for it cannot be thought that this limitation refers only to a careless assent to the truth of the Gospel, shedding no purifying influence on the heart and life. And can I hope for happiness in a wilful defiance of this restriction?"

"If I could doubt," said Montreville, avoiding a reply to what was unanswerable—"if I could doubt that a union with Colonel Hargrave would conduce to your happiness, never should I thus urge you. But I have no reason to believe that his religious principles are unsound, though the follies incident to his sex, and the frailty of human nature, may have prevailed against him."

"My dear Sir," cried Laura, impatiently, "how can you employ such qualifying language to express—what my soul sickens at. How can my father urge his child to join to pollution this temple (and she laid her hand emphatically on her breast), which my great Master has offered to hallow as his own abode? No! the express command of Heaven forbids the sacrilege; for I cannot suppose that when *man* was forbidden to degrade himself by a union with vileness, the pre-

cept was meant to exclude the sex whose feebler passions afford less plea for yielding to their power."

"Whither does this enthusiasm hurry you?" said Montreville, in displeasure. "Surely you will not call your marriage with Colonel Hargrave a union with vileness."

"Yes," returned Laura, all the glow of virtuous animation fading to the paleness of anguish, "if his vices make him vile, I must call it so."

"Your language is as much too free, Laura, as your notions are too rigid. Is it dutiful, think you, to use such expressions in regard to a connexion which your father approves? Will you call it virtue to sport with your own happiness, with the peace of a heart which doats upon you—with the comfort of your dying parent?"

"Oh my father," cried Laura, sinking on her knees, "my spirit is already bowed to the earth—do not crush it with your displeasure. Rather support my feeble resolution, lest, knowing the right, I should not have power to choose it."

"My heart's treasure," said Montreville, kissing the tears from her eyes, "short is ever my displeasure with thee; for I know that though inexperience may mislead thy judgment, no pleasure can bribe, no fear betray thy inflexible recti-

tude. Go on then—convince me if thou canst, that thou art in the right to choose thy portion amidst self-denial, and obscurity, and dependence.”

“Would that I were able to convince you,” returned Laura, “and then you would no longer add to the difficulties of this fearful struggle. Tell me then, were Colonel Hargrave your son, and were I what I cannot name, could any passion excuse, any circumstances induce you to sanction the connexion for which you now plead?”

“My dear love,” said Montreville, “the cases are widely different. The world’s opinion affixes just disgrace to the vices in your sex, which in ours it views with more indulgent eyes.”

“But I,” returned Laura, “when I took upon me the honoured name of Christian, by that very act became bound that the opinion of the world should not regulate my principles, nor its customs guide my practice. Perhaps even the worst of my sex might plead that the voice of a tempter lured them to perdition; but what tongue can speak the vileness of that tempter?—Could I promise to *obey* him who wilfully leads others to their ruin? Could I honour him who deceives the heart that trusteth in him? Could I *love* him, who can look upon a fellow-creature—once the image

of the Highest, now humbled below the brutes that perish—upon the heir of immortality, immortal only to misery, and who can, unmoved, unpitying, seek in the fallen wretch a minister of pleasure!—Love!” continued Laura, forgetting in the deformity of the hideous image that it was capable of individual application, “words cannot express the energy of my abhorrence!”

“Were Hargrave such—or to continue such”—said Montreville—

“Hargrave!” continued Laura, almost with a shriek, “Oh God forbid—And yet”—She covered her face with her hands, and cold drops stood on her forehead, as she remembered how just cause she had to dread that the portrait might be his.

“Hargrave,” continued Montreville, “is not an abandoned profligate, though he may not have escaped the follies usual to men of his rank; and he has promised, if you will be favourable to him, to live henceforward in irreproachable purity. Heaven forgives the sins which are forsaken, and will you be less lenient?”

“Joyfully will I forgive,” replied Laura, “when I am assured that they are indeed abhorred and forsaken—

“They are already forsaken,” said Montre-

ville ; “ it rests with you to confirm Hargrave in the right, by consenting to his wishes.”

“ I ask but the conviction which time alone can bring,” said Laura, and then—

“ And how will you bear it, Laura, if weary of your perverse delays, Hargrave should relinquish his suit? How would you bear to see the affections you have trifled with transferred to another?”

“ Better, far better,” answered Laura, “ than to watch the deepening of those shades of iniquity, which close at last into ‘outer darkness.’ better than to see each guilty day advance and seal our eternal separation. To lose his affection,” continued she with a sickly smile, “ I would bear as I strive to bear my other burdens ; and should they at last prove too heavy for me, they can but weigh me to the earth, where they and I must soon rest together.”

“ Talk not so, beloved child,” said Montreville, “ a long life is before you. All the joys that ambition, all the joys that love can offer, are within your power. A father invites, implores, I will not say commands, you to accept them. The man of your choice, to whom the proudest might aspire, whom the coldest of your sex might love, entreats you to confirm him in the ways of virtue.

Consent then to this union, on which my heart is set, while yet it can be hallowed by the blessing of your dying father."

"Oh take pity on me," Laura would have said, and "league not with my weak heart to betray me," but convulsive sobs were all that she could utter.

"You consent then," said Montreville, choosing so to interpret her silence—"you have yielded to my entreaties, and made me the happiest of fathers."

"No! no!" cried Laura, tossing her arms distractedly, "I will do right though my heart should break. No, my father, my dear honoured father, for whom I would lay down my life, not even your entreaties shall prevail."

"Ungrateful child," said Montreville; "what could you have pleaded for, that your father would have refused—your father, whom anxiety for your welfare has brought to the gates of the grave, whose last feeling shall be love to you, whose last words shall bless you."

"Oh most merciful, most gracious," cried Laura, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes in resigned anguish, "wilt thou suffer me to be tempted above what I am able to bear!—Oh my dear father, if you have pity for misery unutterable,

misery that cannot know relief, spare me now, and suffer me to think—if to think be yet possible.”

“Hear me but for one moment more,” said Montreville, who from the violence of her emotion gathered hopes of success.

“Oh no! no!” cried Laura, “I must leave you while yet I have the power to do right.” And, darting from his presence, she shut herself into her chamber. There, falling on her knees, she mingled bitter expressions of anguish with fervent prayers for support, and piteous appeals for mercy.

Becoming by degrees more composed, she endeavoured to fortify her resolution by every argument of reason and religion which had formerly guided her determination. She turned to the passages of Scripture which forbid the unequal yoke with the unbeliever; convinced that the prohibition applies no less to those whose lives are unchristian, than to those whose faith is unsound. She asked herself whether she was able to support those trials (the severest of all earthly ones), which the wife of a libertine must undergo; and whether, in temptations which she voluntarily sought, and sorrows which she of choice encountered, she should be entitled to expect the Divine

support. "Holy Father," she cried, "what peace can enter where thy blessing is withheld! and shall I dare to mock thee with a petition for that blessing on an union which thou hast forbidden? May I not rather fear that this deliberate premeditated guilt may be the first step in a race of iniquity! May I not dread to share in the awful sentence of those who are 'joined to their idols,' and be 'let alone to wander in the way which leadeth to destruction.'"

Yet, as oft as her father's entreaties rose to her recollection, joined with the image of Hargrave—of Hargrave beseeching, of Hargrave impassioned—Laura's resolution faltered; and half-desirous to deceive herself, she almost doubted of the virtue of that firmness which could withstand a parent's wish. But Laura was habitually suspicious of every opinion which favoured her inclinations, habitually aware of the deceitfulness of her own heart; and she did not, unquestioned, harbour for a moment the insidious thought that flattered her strongest wishes. "And had my father commanded me to marry where I was averse," said she, "would I then have hesitated? Would my father's command have prevailed on me then to undertake duties which I was unlikely to perform? No: there I would have resisted. There, autho-

city greater than a father's would have empowered me to resist; I know that I should have resisted even unto death. And shall mere inclination give more firmness than a sense of duty! Yet, Oh dear father, think me not unmindful of all your love—or forgetful of a debt which began with my being. For your sake, cold and hunger shall be light to me—for you, poverty and toil shall be pleasing. But what solitary sorrow could equal the pang with which I should blush before my children for the vices of their father! What is the wasting of famine to the mortal anguish of watching the declining love, the transferred desires, the growing depravity of my husband!"

In thoughts and struggles like these, Laura passed the day alone. Montreville, though disappointed at his ill success with his daughter, was not without hope that a lover's prayers might prevail where a father's were ineffectual; and believing that the season of Laura's emotion was a favourable one for the attempt, he was anxious for the daily visit of Hargrave.

But, for the first time since his meeting with Laura, Hargrave did not appear. In her present frame, Laura felt his absence almost a relief; but Montreville was uneasy and half-alarmed. It was late in the evening when a violent knocking at the

house-door startled Montreville, who was alone in his apartment; and the next minute, without being announced, Hargrave burst into the room. His hair was dishevelled, his dress neglected, and his eyes had a wildness which Montreville had never before seen in him. Abruptly grasping Montreville's hand, he said, in the voice of one struggling for composure, "Have you performed your promise—have you spoken with Laura?"

"I have," answered Montreville; "and have urged her, till, had you seen her, you would yourself have owned that I went too far. But you look"—

"Has she consented," interrupted Hargrave—"will she give herself to me?"

Montreville shook his head. "Her affections are wholly yours," said he, "you may yourself be more successful—I fervently wish that you may. But why this strange emotion? What has happened?"

"Nothing, nothing," said Hargrave, "ask me no questions; but let me speak instantly with Laura."

"You shall see her," returned Montreville, opening the door, and calling Laura, "Only I beseech you to command yourself, for my poor child is already half-distracted."

"She is the fitter to converse with me," said Hargrave, with a ghastly smile, "for I am upon the very verge of madness."

Laura came at her father's summons; but when she saw Hargrave, the colour faded from her face, an universal tremor seized her, she stopped and leaned on the door for support. "Colonel Hargrave wishes to speak with you alone," said Montreville, "go with him to the parlour."

"I cannot," answered Laura, in words scarcely audible—"this night I cannot."

"I command you to go," said the father in a tone which he had seldom employed, and Laura instantly prepared to go. "Surely, surely," said she, "Heaven will not leave me to my own weakness, whilst I act in obedience to you."

Perceiving that she trembled violently, Hargrave offered her the support of his circling arm; but Laura instantly disengaged herself. "Will you not lean on me, dearest Laura," said he; "perhaps it is for the last time."

"I hope," answered Laura, endeavouring to exert her spirit, "it will be the last time that you will avail yourself of my father's authority to constrain me."

"Spare your reproaches, Laura" said Har-

grave, "for I am desperate." All that I desire on earth—my life itself depends upon this hour."

They entered the parlour, and Laura, sinking into a seat, covered her eyes with her hand, and strove to prepare for answering this new call upon her firmness.

Hargrave stood silent for some moments. Fain would he have framed a resistless petition; for the events of that day had hastened the unravelling of a tale which, once known to Laura, would, he knew, make all his petitions vain. But his impatient spirit could not wait to conciliate; and, seizing her hand, he said, with breathless eagerness, "Laura, you once said that you loved me, and I believed you. Now to the proof—and if that fail—But I will not distract myself with the thought. You have allowed me a distant hope. Recal your sentence of delay. Circumstances which you cannot—must not know, leave you but one alternative. Be mine now, or you are for ever lost to me."

Astonished at his words, alarmed by the ill-suppressed vehemence of his manner, Laura tried to read his altered countenance, and feared she knew not what. "Tell me what you mean?" said she. "What mean these strange words—

these wild looks. Why have you come at this late hour?"

"Ask me nothing," cried Hargrave, "but decide. Speak. Will you be mine—now—to-morrow—within a few hours. Soon, very soon, it will be no longer possible for you to choose."

A hectic of resentment kindled in Laura's cheek at the threat of desertion which she imagined to lurk beneath the words of Hargrave. "You have," said she, "I know not how, extended my conditional promise to receive you as a friend far beyond what the terms of it could warrant. In making even such an engagement perhaps I condescended too far. But, admitting it in your own sense, what right have you to suppose that I am to be weakly terrified into renouncing a resolution formed on the best grounds?"

"I have no right to expect it," said Hargrave, in a voice of misery. "I came to you in desperation. I cannot—will not survive the loss of you; and if I prevail not now, you must be lost to me."

"What means this strange, this presuming haste?" said Laura. "Why do you seem thus wretched?"

"I am, indeed, most wretched. Oh Laura,

thus on my knees I conjure you to have pity on me;—or, if it will cost you a pang to lose me, have pity on yourself. And if thy love be too feeble to bend thy stubborn will, let a father's wishes, a father's prayers, come to its aid."

"Oh Hargrave," cried Laura, bursting into tears, "how have I deserved that you should lay on me this heavy load—that you should force me to resist the entreaties of my father."

"Do not—Oh do not resist them. Let a father's prayers—let the pleadings of a wretch whose reason, whose life depends upon you, prevail to move you."

"Nothing shall move me," said Laura, with the firmness of despair, "for I am used to misery, and will bear it."

"And will you bear it too if driven from virtuous love—from domestic joy, I turn to the bought smile of harlots, forget you in the haunts of riot, or in the grave of a suicide?"

"Oh for mercy," cried the terrified Laura, "talk not so dreadfully. Be patient—I implore you. Fear not to lose me. Be but virtuous, and no power of man shall wrest me from you. In poverty—in sickness—in disgrace itself, I will cleave to you."

"Oh, I believe it," said Hargrave, moved even

to woman's weakness, "for thou art an angel. But wilt thou cleave to me in——"

"In what?" said Laura.

"Ask me nothing—but yield to my earnest entreaty. Save me from the horrors of losing you; and may Heaven forsake me if ever again I give you cause to repent of your pity."

Softened by his imploring looks and gestures, overpowered by his vehemence, harassed beyond her strength, Laura seemed almost expiring. But the upright spirit shared not the weakness of its frail abode. "Cease to importune me," said she;—"everlasting were my cause of repentance, should I wilfully do wrong. You may break my heart—it is already broken, but my resolution is immoveable."

Fire flashed from the eyes of Hargrave, as, starting from her feet, he cried, in a voice of frenzy, "Ungrateful woman, you have never loved me! you love nothing but the fancied virtue to which I am sacrificed. But tremble, obdurate, lest I dash from me this hated life, and my perdition be on your soul!"

"Oh no," cried Laura, in an agony of terror, "I will pray for you—pity you,—what shall I say—love you as never man was loved. Would that it were possible to do more!"

"Speak then your final rejection," said Hargrave, grasping her hand with convulsive energy, "and abide by the consequence."

"I must not fear consequences," said Laura, trembling in every limb. "They are in the hands of Heaven."

"Then be this first fond parting kiss our last!" cried Hargrave, and frantically straining her to his breast, he rushed out of the room.

Surprise, confusion, a thousand various feelings kept Laura for a while motionless; till, Hargrave's parting words ringing in her ear, a dreadful apprehension took possession of her mind. Starting from her seat, and following him with her arms as if she could still have detained him, "Oh Hargrave, what mean you?" she cried. But Hargrave was already beyond the reach of her voice; and, sinking to the ground, the wretched Laura found refuge from her misery in long and deep insensibility.

In the attitude in which she had fallen, her lively arms extended on the ground, her death-like cheek resting upon one of them, she was found by a servant who accidentally entered the room, and whose cries soon assembled the family. Montreville alarmed hastened down stairs, and came in just as the maid with the assistance of

the landlady was raising Laura, to all appearance dead.

“Merciful Heaven!” he exclaimed, “what is this?” The unfeeling landlady immediately expressed her opinion that Miss Montreville had died of famine, declaring that she had long feared as much. The horror-struck father had scarcely power to ask her meaning. “Oh, Sir,” said the maid, sobbing aloud, “I fear it is but too true—for she cared not for herself, so you were but well—for she was the sweetest lady that ever was born—and many a long night has she sat up toiling when the poorest creature was asleep—for she never cared for herself.”

The whole truth flashed at once upon Montreville, and all the storm, from which his dutiful child so well had sheltered him, burst upon him in a moment. “Oh, Laura,” he cried, clasping her lifeless form, “my only comfort—my good—my gentle—my blameless child, hast thou nourished thy father with thy life! Oh why didst thou not let me die!” Then laying his cheek to hers, “Oh she is cold—cold as clay,” he cried, and the father wrung his hands, and sobbed like an infant.

Suddenly he ceased his lamentation; and pressing his hands on his breast, uttered a deep groan,

and sunk down by the side of his senseless child." His alarm and agitation burst again the blood-vessel, which before had been slightly healed, and he was conveyed to bed without hopes of life. A surgeon was immediately found, but he administered his prescription without expecting its success; and, departing, left the dying Montreville to the care of the landlady.

The tender-hearted Fanny remained with Laura, and at last succeeded in restoring her to animation. She then persuaded her to swallow a little wine, and endeavoured to prevail upon her to retire to bed. But Laura refused. "No, my kind, good girl," said she, laying her arm gratefully on Fanny's shoulder, "I must see my father before I sleep. I have thwarted his will to-day, and will not sleep without his blessing." Fanny then besought her so earnestly not to go to the Captain's chamber, that Laura, filled as every thought was with Hargrave, took alarm, and would not be detained. The girl, dreading the consequences of the shock that awaited her, threw her arms round her to prevent her departure. "Let me go," cried Laura, struggling with her, he is ill: I am sure he is ill, or he would have come to watch and comfort his wretched child."

Fanny then, with all the gentleness in her power, informed Laura that Montreville, alarmed by the sight of her fainting, had been suddenly taken ill. Laura, in terror which effaced the remembrance of all her former anguish, scarcely suffered her attendant to finish her relation; but broke from her, and hurried as fast as her tottering limbs would bear her to her father's chamber.

Softly, on tiptoe, she stole to his bed-side. His eyes were closed, and death seemed already stamped on every feature. Laura shuddered convulsively, and shrunk back in horror. But the dread of scaring the spirit from its frail tenement suppressed the cry that was rising to her lips. Trembling she laid her hand upon his. He looked up, and a gleam of joy brightened in his dying eyes as they rested on his daughter. "Laura, my beloved," said he, drawing her gently towards him, "thou hast been the joy of my life. I thank God that thou art spared to comfort me in death."

Laura tried to speak the words of hope; but the sounds died upon her lips.

After a pause of dread silence, Montreville said, "This is the hour when thy father was

wont to bless thee. Come, and I will bless thee still."

The weeping Laura sunk upon her knees, and Montreville laid one hand upon her head, while she still held the other, as if wishing to detain him. "My best—my last blessing be upon thee, child of my heart," said he. "The everlasting arms be around thee, when mine can embrace thee no more. The father of the fatherless be a parent to thee; support thee in sorrow; crown thy youth with joy—thy grey hairs with honour; and, when thou art summoned to thy kindred angels, may thy heart throb its last on some breast kind and noble as thine own."

Exhausted by the effort which he had made, Montreville sunk back on his pillow; and Laura, in agony of supplication, besought Heaven to spare him to her. "Father of mercies!" she inwardly ejaculated, "if it be possible, save me, oh save me from this fearful stroke,—or take me in pity from this desolate wilderness to the rest of thy chosen."

The dead of night came on, and all but the wretched Laura was still. Montreville breathed softly. Laura thought he slept, and stifled even her sighs, lest they should awake him. In the stillness of the dead, but in agony of suspense

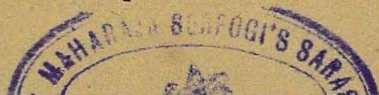
which baffles description, she continued to kneel by his bed-side, and to return his relaxing grasp, 'till she felt a gentle pressure of her hand, and looked up to interpret the gesture. It was the last expression of a father's love. Montreville was gone!

CHAP. XVIII.

COLONEL HARGRAVE had been the spoiled child of a weak mother, and he continued to retain one characteristic of spoiled children ; some powerful stimulant was with him a necessary of life. He despised all pleasures of regular recurrence and moderate degree ; and even looked down upon those who could be satisfied with such enjoyments, as on beings confined to a meaner mode of existence. For more than a year Laura had furnished the animating principle which kept life from stagnation. When she was present, her beauty, her reserve, her ill-concealed affection, kept his passions in constant play. In her absence, the interpretation of looks and gestures of which she had been unconscious, and the anticipation of concessions which she thought not of making, furnished occupation for the many hours which, for want of literary habits, Colonel Hargrave was obliged to pass in solitude

and leisure, when deprived of fashionable company, public amusements, and tolerable romances. In a little country town, these latter resources were soon exhausted, and Hargrave had no associates to supply the blank among his brother officers; some of them being low both in birth and education, and others, from various reasons, rather repelling, than courting his intimacy. One had a pretty wife, another an unmarried daughter; and the phlegmatic temperament and reserved manners of a third tallied not with Hargrave's constitutional warmth. The departure of Laura, therefore, deprived him at once of the only society that amused, and the only object that interested him. He was prevented by the caution of Mrs Douglas from attempting a correspondence with his mistress; and his muse was exhausted with composing amatory sonnets, and straining half-imaginary torments into reluctant rhimes.

He soon tired of making sentimental visits to the now deserted Glenalbert, and grew weary of inspecting his treasures of pilfered gloves and stray shoe-bows. His new system of reform, too, sat rather heavily upon him. He was not exactly satisfied with its extent, though he did not see in what respect it was susceptible of improvement. He had some



suspicion that it was not entitled to the full approbation of the "wise, the pious, the sober-minded" observers, whom he imagined that Laura had charged with the inspection of his conduct; and he reflected, with a mixture of fear and impatience, that by them every action would be reported to Laura, with all the aggravation of illiberal comment. For though he did not distinctly define the idea to himself, he cherished a latent opinion, that the "wise" would be narrowminded, the "pious" bigotted, and the "sober-minded" cynical. The feeling of being watched is completely destructive of comfort, even to those who have least to conceal; and Colonel Hargrave sought relief at once from restraint and ennui, in exhibiting, at the Edinburgh races, four horses which were the envy of all the gentlemen, and a person which was the admiration of all the ladies. His thoughts dissipated, and his vanity gratified, his passion had never, since its first existence, been so little troublesome as during his stay in Edinburgh; and once or twice, as he caught a languishing glance from a gay young heiress, he thought he had been a little precipitate in changing his first designs in regard to Laura. But, alas! the races endure only for one short week; Edinburgh was deserted by its glittering

birds of passage ; and Hargrave returned to his quarters, to solitude, and to the conviction that, however obtained, the possession of Laura was necessary to his peace.

Finding that her return was as uncertain as ever, he resolved to follow her to London ; and the caution of Mrs Douglas baffling his attempts to procure her address from any *other quarter*, he contrived to obtain it by bribing one of the under attendants of the Post-office to transcribe for him the superscription of a letter to Miss Montreville. Delighted with his success, he could not refuse himself the triumph of making it known to Mrs Douglas ; and, by calling to ask her commands for her young friend, occasioned the letter of caution from her to Laura, which has been formerly mentioned.

The moment he reached London, he hastened to make inquiries after the abode of Captain Montreville ; but his search was disappointed by the accidents which he afterwards related to Laura. Day after day, he hoped that Laura, by sending to Mr Baynard's chambers, would afford him the means of discovering her residence. But every day ended in disappointment ; and Hargrave, who, *intending to devote* all his time, to her, had given no intimation to his friends of his

arrival in town, found himself as solitary, listless, and uncomfortable as before he quitted Scotland.

One evening, when, to kill the time, he had sauntered into the theatre, he renewed his acquaintance with the beautiful Lady Bellamer. Two years before, Hargrave had been the chief favourite of Lady Bellamer, then Miss Walpole. Of all the dangles whom beauty, coquetry, and fifty thousand pounds attracted to her train, none was admitted to such easy freedom as Hargrave. She laughed more heartily at his wit, whispered more familiarly in his ear, and slapped him more frequently on the cheek than any of his rivals. With no other man was she so unreasonable, troublesome, and ridiculous. In short, she ran through the whole routine of flirtation, till her heart was entangled, so far at least as the heart of a coquette is susceptible of that misfortune. But whatever flames were kindled in the lady's breast, the gentleman, as is usual on such occasions, escaped with a very slight singe. While Miss Walpole was present, his vanity was soothed by her blandishments, and his senses touched by her charms; but, in her absence, he consoled himself with half a dozen other affairs of the same kind.

Meanwhile Lord Bellamer entered the lists, and soon distinguished himself from his competitors, by a question, which, with all her admirers, Miss Walpole had not often answered. The lady hesitated; for she could not help contrasting the insignificant starveling figure of her suitor with the manly beauty of Hargrave's person. But Lord Bellamer had a title in possession; Hargrave's was only reversionary. His Lordship's estate, too, was larger than the Colonel's expectations. Besides, she began to have doubts whether her favourite ever intended to propose the important question; for though, to awaken his jealousy, she had herself informed him of Lord Bellamer's pretensions, and though she had played off the whole artillery of coquetry to quicken his operations, the young man maintained a resolute and successful resistance. So, after some fifty sighs given to the well-turned leg and sparkling eyes of Hargrave, Miss Walpole became Lady Bellamer; and this was the only change which marriage effected in her; for no familiarity could increase her indifference to Lord Bellamer, and no sacredness of connection can warm the heart of a coquette. She continued equally assiduous in courting admiration, equally daring in defying censure; and was content to

purchase the adulation of fools, at the expence of being obliged to the charity of those who were good-natured enough to say, "to be sure Lady Bellamer is a little giddy, but I dare say she means no harm."

Her husband's departure with his regiment for the continent, made no change in her way of life, except to save her the trouble of defending conduct which she would not reform. She continued in London, or at her villa on Richmond Hill, to enter into every folly which others proposed, or herself to project new ones.

Meanwhile Hargrave's duty called him to Scotland, where Lady Bellamer and all her rivals in his attention were entirely forgotten amidst the superior attractions of Laura; attractions which acted with all the force of novelty upon a heart accustomed to parry only premeditated attacks, and to resist charms which were merely corporeal. From an early date in his acquaintance with Miss Montreville, he had scarcely recollected the existence of Lady Bellamer, till he found himself in the next box to her at the theatre. The pleasure that sparkled in the brightest blue eyes in the world, the flush that tinged her face, wherever the rouge permitted its natural tints to appear, convinced Har-

grave in a moment that her Ladyship's memory had been more tenacious ; and he readily answered to her familiar nod of invitation, by taking his place by her side.

They entered into conversation with all the frankness of their former intimacy. Lady Bellamer inquired how the Colonel had contrived to exist during eighteen months of rustication ; and gave him in return memoirs of some of their mutual acquaintance. She had some wit, and an exuberance of animal spirits ; and she seasoned her nonsense with such lively sallies, sly scandal, and adroit flattery, that Hargrave had scarcely ever passed an evening more gaily. Once or twice, the composed grace, the artless majesty of Laura, rose to his recollection, and he looked absent and thoughtful. But his companion rallied him with so much spirit, that he quickly recovered himself, and fully repaid the amusement which he received. He accepted Lady Bellamer's invitation to sup with her after the play, and left her at a late hour, with a promise to visit her again the next day. From that time, the freedom of their former intercourse was renewed ; with this difference only, that Hargrave was released from some restraint, by his escape from the danger of entanglement which necessarily attends

particular assiduities towards an unmarried woman.

Let the fair enchantress tremble who approaches even in thought the utmost verge of discretion. If she advance but one jot beyond that magic circle, the evil spirit is ready to seize her, which, before, feared even to rise in her presence. Lady Bellamer became the victim of unpardonable imprudence on her own part, and mere constitutional tendency on that of her paramour. To a most blameable levity she sacrificed whatever remained to be sacrificed, of her reputation, her virtue, and her marriage-vow ; while the crime of Hargrave was not palliated by one sentiment of genuine affection ; for she by whom he fell was no more like the object of his real tenderness, than those wandering lights which arise from corruption, and glimmer only to betray, are to the steady sunbeam which enlightens, and guides, and purifies where it shines.

Their intercourse continued, with growing passion on the side of the lady, and expiring inclination on that of the gentleman, till Lady Bellamer informed him that the consequences of their guilt could not long be concealed. Her Lord was about to return to his disgraced home ; and she called upon Hargrave to concert with her the

means of exchanging shackles which she would no longer endure for bonds which she could bear with pleasure, and himself to stand forth the legal protector of his unborn child. Hargrave heard her with a disgust which he scarcely strove to conceal ; for at that moment Laura stood before him, bewitching in chastened love—respectable in saintly purity. He remembered that the bare proposal of a degradation which Lady Bellamer had almost courted, had once nearly banished the spotless soul from a tenement no less pure than itself. In fancy he again saw through her casement the wringing of those snowy hands, those eyes raised in agony, and the convulsive heavings of that bosom which mourned his unlooked-for baseness ; and he turned from Lady Bellamer, inwardly cursing the hour when his vows to Laura were sacrificed to a wanton.

The very day after this interview was that in which he accidentally encountered Laura ; and from that moment his whole desire was to make her his own, before public report should acquaint her with his guilt. He durst not trust to the strength of her affection for the pardon of so foul an offence. He could not hope that she would again place confidence in vows of reformation which had been so grossly violated. When the

proper self-distrust of Laura refused him the opportunity of making a personal appeal to her sensibilities, he hoped that her father might successfully plead his cause; and that, before his guilt was known to her, he might have made it at once her interest and her duty to forget it. But the storm was about to burst even more speedily than he apprehended. Lady Bellamer little suspected that her conduct was watched with all the malice of jealousy, and all the eagerness of interest. She little suspected that her confidential servant was the spy of her injured husband, bound to fidelity in this task by ties as disgraceful as they were strong, and that this woman waited only for legal proof of her mistress's guilt, to lay the particulars before her lord. That proof was now obtained; and Lord Bellamer hastened to avail himself of it. He arrived in London on the morning of the last day of Montreville's life; and, charging his guilty wife with her perfidy, expelled her from his house.

She flew to Hargrave's lodgings, and found him preparing for his daily visit to Laura. Though provoked at being delayed, he was obliged to stay and listen to her, while she hastily related the events of the morning. She was about to speak of her conviction that, by making her his wife, he

would shield her from the world's scorn, and that he would not, by any legal defence, retard her emancipation. But Hargrave suffered her not to proceed. He perceived that his adventure must now be public. It must immediately find its way into the public prints; and in a few hours it might be in the hands of Laura. He bitterly upbraided Lady Bellamer with her want of caution in the concealment of their amour; cursed her folly as the ruin of all his dearest hopes; and, in the frenzy of his rage, scrupled not to reveal the cutting secret, that while another was the true object of his affections, Lady Bellamer had sacrificed her all to an inclination as transient as it was vile. The wretched creature, terrified at his rage, weakened by her situation, overcome by the events of the morning, and stung by a reception so opposite to her expectations, sunk at his feet in violent hysterics. But Hargrave could at that moment feel for no miseries but his own; and consigning her to the care of the women of the house, he was again about to hasten to Montreville's, when he was told that a gentleman wished to speak with him upon particular business.

This person was the bearer of a note from Lord Bellamer, importing that he desired to meet Colonel Hargrave on that or the following day,

at any hour and place which the Colonel might appoint. After the injuries given and received, their meeting, he said, could have but one object. Hargrave, in no humour to delay, instantly replied that in three hours he should be found in a solitary field, which he named, at a few miles distance from town, and that he should bring with him a friend and a brace of pistols. He then went in search of this friend, and finding him at home, speedily settled the business.

Nothing, in the slight consideration of death which Hargrave suffered to enter his mind, gave him so much disturbance as the thought that he might, if he fell, leave Laura to the possession of another. He willingly persuaded himself that she had an attachment to him too romantic to be transferable. But she was poor; she might in time make a marriage of esteem and convenience; and Laura, the virtuous Laura, would certainly love her husband, and the father of her children. The bare idea stung like a scorpion, and Hargrave hastened to his attorney, where he spent the time which yet remained before the hour of his appointment, in dictating a bequest of five thousand pounds to Laura Montreville; but true to his purpose, he added a clause, by which, in case of her marriage, she forfeited the whole.

He then prepared to meet Lord Bellamer ; and the ground being taken, Hargrave's first ball penetrated Lord Bellamer's left shoulder, who then fired without effect, and instantly fell. Hargrave, whose humanity had returned with his temper, accompanied his wounded antagonist to a neighbouring cottage to which he was conveyed, anxiously procured for him every possible comfort, and heard, with real joy, that if he could be kept from fever, his wound was not likely to be mortal. The gentleman who had been Hargrave's second, offered to remain near Lord Bellamer, in order to give warning to his friend should any danger occur ; and it was late in the evening, before Hargrave, alone and comfortless, returned to town.

Never had his own thoughts been such vexatious companions. To his own seared conscience his crimes might have seemed trivial ; but when he placed them before him in the light in which he knew that they would be viewed by Laura, their nature seemed changed. He knew that she would find no plea in the custom of the times, for endangering the life of a fellow-creature, and that her moral vocabulary contained no qualifying epithet to palliate the foulness of adultery. The next day would give publicity to his duel and its cause ; and should the report reach Laura's ear, what

could he hope from her favour? The bribes of love and ambition he had found too poor to purchase her sanction to the bare intention of a crime. Even the intention seemed forgiven only in the hope of luring him to the paths of virtue: and when she should know the failure of that hope, would not her forgiveness be withdrawn?

But Laura, thus on the point of being lost, was more dear to him than ever; and often did he wish that he had fallen by Lord Bellamer's hand, rather than that he should live to see himself the object of her indifference, perhaps aversion. Time still remained, however, by one desperate effort to hurry or terrify her into immediate compliance with his wishes; and, half-distracted with the emotions of remorse, and love, and hope, and fear, he ordered his carriage to Montreville's house. Here passed the scene which has been already described. Hargrave was too much agitated to attend to the best methods of persuasion, and he quitted Laura in the full conviction that she would never be his wife. He threw himself into his carriage, and was driven home, now frantically bewailing his loss, now vowing, that rather than endure it, he would incur the penalties of every law, divine and human. All night he paced his apartment, uttering imprecations on his own folly, and forming

plans for regaining by fraud, force, or persuasion, his lost rights over Laura. At last his vehemence having somewhat spent itself, he threw himself on a couch and sunk into feverish and interrupted sleep.

It was not till next morning that he thought of inquiring after the unfortunate partner of his iniquity; and was told that, too ill to be removed, she had been carried to bed in the house, where she still remained.

Intending to renew the attempt of the preceding night, he again repaired early to Laura's abode; but his intention was frustrated by the death of Montreville. On receiving the information, he was at first a good deal shocked at the sudden decease of a man, whom, a few hours before, he had left in no apparent danger. But that feeling was effaced when once he began to consider the event as favourable to his designs upon Laura. Left to solitude, to poverty, perhaps to actual want, what resource had she so eligible as the acceptance of offers splendid and disinterested like his. And he would urge her acceptance of them with all the ardour of passion. He would alarm her with the prospects of desolateness and dependence; he would appeal to the wishes of her dead father. Such pleadings must

he thought, have weight with her ; and again the hopes of victory revived in his mind. Should the principle, to which she so firmly adhered, outweigh all these considerations, he thought she would forfeit by her obstinacy all claims to his forbearance, and his heart fluttered at the idea that she had now no protector from his power. He resolved to haunt, to watch her, to lose no opportunity of pressing his suit. Wherever she went he was determined to follow ; “ and surely,” thought he, “ she must have some moments of weakness, she cannot be always on her guard.”

For some days he continued to make regular visits at her lodgings, though he had no hope of seeing her till after Montreville was consigned to the dust ; and he rejoiced that the customary seclusion was likely to retard her knowledge of his misconduct. To make inquiries after the health and spirits of Laura, was the ostensible, but not the only motive of his visits. He wished to discover all that was known to the people of the house of her present situation and future plans. On the latter subject they could not afford him even the slightest information, for Laura had never dropped a hint of her intentions. But he received such accounts of her pecuniary distresses, and of the manner in which she supported them,

as at once increased his reverence for her character, and his hopes that she would take refuge from her wants in the affluence which he offered her.

From Fanny, who officiated as porter, and who almost adored Laura, he received most of his intelligence ; and while he listened to instances of the fortitude, the piety, the tenderness, the resignation of his beloved, a love of virtue, sincere though transient, would cross his soul ; he would look back with abhorrence on a crime which had hazarded the loss of such a treasure ; and vow, that, were he once possessed of Laura, his life should be a copy of her worth. But Hargrave's vows deceived him ; for he loved the virtues only which were associated with objects of pleasure, he abhorred the vices only which threatened him with pain.

On the day succeeding the funeral, he ventured on an attempt to see Laura, and sent her a message, begging permission to wait upon her ; but was answered that she received no visitors. He then wrote to her a letter full of the sentiments which she inspired. He expressed his sympathy with her misfortunes, and fervently besought her to accept of a protector who would outdo in tenderness the one whom she had lost. He implored her to add the strongest incentive to the course

of virtue, in which, if she would listen to his request, he solemnly promised to persevere. He again insinuated that she must speedily decide, that, if her decision were unfavourable, he might be driven to seek forgetfulness amidst ruinous dissipation; and he adjured her by the wishes of her dead father, a claim which he thought would, with her, be irresistible, to consent to dispense with his further probation. He said he would visit her late in the following forenoon, in the hope of receiving his answer from her own lips; and concluded by telling her, that, lest the late unfortunate event had occasioned her any temporary difficulties, he begged to be considered as her banker, and enclosed a bill for a hundred pounds.

He gave this letter to Fanny, with injunctions to deliver it immediately, and then went to inquire for Lord Bellamer, whom it gave him real pleasure to find pronounced out of danger. Lady Bellamer, too, had ceased to reproach and molest him. She had recovered from her indisposition, and removed to the house of a relation, who humanely offered to receive her. His hopes were strong of the effect of his letter; and he passed the evening in greater comfort than had lately fallen to his share. Often did he repeat to himself that Laura must accede to his proposals. What

other course could she pursue—Would her spirit allow her to become a burden on the scanty income of her friend Mrs Douglas—would she venture to pursue, as a profession, the art in which she so greatly excelled—would she return to live alone at Glenalbert? This last appeared the most probable to Hargrave, because the most desirable. Alone, without any companion whose frozen counsel could counteract the softness of her heart, in a romantic solitude, watched, as he would watch, importuned as he would importune her, strange if no advantage could be wrested from her affection or her prudence, her interest or her fears! To obtain Laura was the first wish of his soul; and he was not very fastidious as to the means of its gratification: for even the love of a libertine is selfish. He was perfectly sincere in his honourable proposals to Laura. He might have been less so had any others possessed a chance of success.

He rose early the next morning, and impatiently looked for the hour which he had appointed for his visit. He wished that he had fixed on an earlier one, took up a book to beguile the minutes, threw it down again, looked a hundred times at his watch, ordered his carriage to the door two hours before it was wanted, feared to go too soon,

lest Laura should refuse to see him, and yet was at her lodgings long before his appointment. He inquired for her, and was answered that she had discharged her lodgings, and was gone. "Gone! Whither?"—Fanny did not know; Miss Montreville had been busy all the evening before in preparing for her removal, and had left the house early that morning. "And did she leave no address where she might be found?" "I heard her tell the coachman," said Fanny, "to stop at the end of Grosvenor Street, and she would direct him where she chose to be set down. But I believe she has left a letter for you, Sir." "Fool!" cried Hargrave, "why did you not tell me so sooner—give it me instantly."

He impatiently followed the girl to the parlour which had been Montreville's. The letter lay on the table. He snatched it, and hastily tore it open. It contained only his bill, returned with Miss Montreville's compliments and thanks. He twisted the card into atoms, and cursed with all his soul the ingratitude and cold prudence of the writer. He swore that if she were on earth, he would find her; and vowed that he would make her repent of the vexation which he said she had always taken a savage delight in heaping upon him.

Restless, and yet unwilling to be gone, he next wandered into Laura's painting room, as if hoping in her once-favourite haunt to find traces of her flight. He had never entered it since the day when the discovery of De Courcy's portrait had roused his sudden frenzy. Association brought back the same train of thought. He imagined that Laura, which she concealed herself from him, had taken refuge with the De Courcys ; and all his jealousy returned. After, according to custom, acting the madman for a while, he began as usual to recover his senses. He knew he could easily discover whether Miss Montreville was at Norwood, by writing to a friend who lived in the neighbourhood ; and he was going home to execute this design, when, passing through the lobby, he was met by the landlady. He stopped to renew his inquiries whether any thing was known, or guessed, of Laura's retreat. But Mrs Stubbs could give him no more information on the subject than her maid, and she was infinitely more surprised at his question than Fanny had been : for having made certain observations which convinced her that Hargrave's visits were in the character of a lover, she had charitably concluded, and actually asserted, that Laura had accepted of his protection.

Hargrave next inquired whether Laura had any visitors but himself? "No living creature," was the reply. "Could Mrs Stubbs form no conjecture whither she was gone?" "None in the world," answered Mrs Stubbs; only this I know, it can't be very far off—for to my certain knowledge, she had only seven shillings in her pocket, and that could not carry her far, as I told the gentleman who was here this morning." "What gentleman?" cried Hargrave. "One Mr De Courcy, Sir, that used to call for her; but he has not been here these six weeks before; and he seemed quite astounded as well as yourself, Sir." Hargrave then questioned her so closely concerning De Courcy's words and looks, as to convince himself that his rival was entirely ignorant of the motions of the fugitive. In this belief he returned home, uncertain what measures he should pursue, but determined not to rest till he had found Laura.

When De Courcy quitted Laura, he had no intention of seeing her again till circumstances should enable him to offer her his hand. No sacrifice could have cost him more pain; but justice and filial duty did not permit him to hesitate. Neither did he think himself entitled to sadden with a face of care his domestic circle, nor to

make his mother and sister pay dearly for their comforts, by shewing that they were purchased at the expence of his peace. Nor did he languidly resign to idle love-dreams the hours which an immortal spirit claimed for its improvement, and which the social tie bound him to enliven and cheer. But to appear what he was not, to introduce constraint and dissimulation into the sacred privacies of home, never occurred to De Courcy. He therefore strove not to *seem* cheerful but to *be* so. He returned to his former studies, and even prosecuted them with alacrity, for he knew that Laura respected a cultivated mind. His faults he was, if possible, more than ever studious to correct, for Laura loved virtue. And when occasion for a kind considerate or self-denying action presented itself, he eagerly seized it, saying in his heart, "this is like Laura."

Sometimes the fear that he might be forgotten, forced from him the bitterest sigh which he had ever breathed; but he endeavoured to comfort himself with the belief that she would soon be screened from the gaze of admiration, and that her regard for him, though yet in its infancy, would be sufficient to secure her from other impressions. Of the reality of this regard he did not allow himself to doubt, or if he hesitated for

a moment, he called to mind the picture, Laura's concealment of it, her confusion at his attempt to examine it, and he no longer doubted.

The arrival of the picture itself might have explained all that related to it, had De Courcy chosen to have it so explained. But he turned his eye from the unpleasing light, and sheltered his hopes by a hundred treasured instances of love which had scarcely any existence but in his fancy.

His efforts to be cheerful were however less successful, after Laura, in a few melancholy lines, informed Miss De Courcy that Montreville's increased illness made their return to Scotland more uncertain than ever. He imagined his dear Laura the solitary attendant of a sick-bed; no kind voice to comfort, no friendly face to cheer her; perhaps in poverty, that poverty increased too by the artifice which he had used to lessen it. He grew anxious, comfortless, and at length really miserable. Every day the arrival of the letters was looked for with extreme solicitude in hope of more cheering news; but every day brought disappointment, for Laura wrote no more. His mother shared in his anxiety, and increased it by expressing her own. She feared that Miss Montreville was ill, and unable to

write ; and the image of Laura among strangers, sick and in poverty, obliterated Montague's prudent resolutions of trusting himself no more in the presence of his beloved. He set out for London, and arrived at the door of Laura's lodgings about an hour after she had quitted them.

Mrs Stubbs, of whom he made personal inquiries, was abundantly communicative. She gave him, as far as it was known to her, a full history of Laura's adventures since he had seen her ; and, where she was deficient in facts, supplied the blank by conjecture. With emotion indescribable he listened to a coarse account of Miss Montreville's wants and labours. " How could you suffer all this ?" cried he indignantly, when he was able to speak. " Times are hard, Sir," returned Mrs Stubbs, the jolly purple deepening in her cheeks. " Besides, Miss Montreville had always such an air with her, that I could not for my very heart have asked her to take pot-luck with us."

The colour faded from De Courcy's face as Mrs Stubbs proceeded to relate the constant visits of Hargrave. " I'll warrant," said she, growing familiar as she perceived that she excited interest, " I'll warrant he did not come here so often for nothing. People must have ears and use

them too ; and I heard him myself swearing to her one day, that he loved her better than his life, or something to that purpose ; and that, if she would live with him, he would make her dreams pleasant, or some such stuff as that ; and now, as sure as can be, she has taken him at his word, and gone to him."

"Peace, woman?" cried De Courcy, in a tone which he had never used to any of the sex, "how dare you—?"

Mrs Stubbs, who had all that want of nerve which characterizes vulgar arrogance, instantly shrunk into her shell. "No offence, Sir," said she. "Its all mere guess-work with me; only she does not know a creature in London, and she had nothing to carry her out of it; for she had just seven shillings in her pocket. I gave her seventeen and sixpence of change this morning, and she gave half-a-guinea of that to the kitchen-maid. Now, it stands to reason, she would not have been so ready parting with her money, if she had not known where more was to be had."

De Courcy, shocked and disgusted, turned from her in displeasure ; and finding that nothing was to be learnt from her of the place of Laura's retreat, betook himself to the print-shop, where

he remembered that he had first procured Miss Montreville's address. Mr Wilkins declared his ignorance on the subject of Montague's inquiries; but, seeing the look of disappointment with which De Courcy was leaving the shop, good-naturedly, said, "I dare say, Sir, if you wish to find out where Miss Montreville lives, I could let you know by asking Colonel Hargrave. He comes here sometimes to look at the caricatures. And," added Mr Wilkins, winking significantly, "I am mistaken if they are not very well acquainted."

De Courcy's heart rose to his mouth. "It may be so," said he, scarcely conscious of what he said.

"There was a famous scene between them here about three weeks ago," proceeded the print-seller, anxious to justify his own sagacity. "I suppose they had not met for a while, and there was such a kissing and embracing"—

"'Tis false!" cried De Courcy, lightning flashing from his eyes, "Miss Montreville would have brooked such indignities from no man on earth."

"Nay," said Wilkins, shrugging up his shoulders, "the shop-lads saw it as well as I—she fainted away in his arms, and he carried her into

the back-room there, and would not suffer one of us to come near her; and Mr Finch there saw him down on his knees to her."

"Cease your vile slanders," cried De Courcy, half-distracted with grief and indignation, "I abhor—I despise them. But at your peril dare to breathe them into any other ear." So saying, he darted from the shop, and returned to his hotel, infinitely more wretched than ever he had been.

The happy dream was dispelled which painted him the master of Laura's affections. Another possessed her love; and how visible, how indelicately glaring, must be the preference which was apparent to every vulgar eye! But, bitter as was his disappointment, and cruel the pangs of jealousy, they were ease compared to the torture with which he admitted a thought derogatory to Laura's worth. A thousand times he reproached himself for suffering the hints and conjectures of a low-bred woman to affect his mind;—a thousand times assured himself that no poverty, no difficulties, would overpower the integrity of Laura. "Yet Hargrave is a libertine," said he, "and if she can love a libertine, how have I been deceived in her! No! it cannot be!—She is all truth—all purity. It is she that is deceived. He

has imposed upon her by a false show of virtue, and misery awaits her detection of his deceit. She gone to him ! I will never believe it. Libertine as he is, he dare not even to think of it. Extremity of want—lingering famine would not degrade her to this,”—and tears filled De Courcy’s manly eyes at the thought that Laura was indeed in want.

He had no direct means of supplying her necessities ; but he hoped that she might inquire at her former abode for any letters which might chance to be left for her, and that she might thus receive any packet which he addressed to her. “ She shall never be humbled,” said he with a heavy sigh, “ by knowing that she owes this trifle to an indifferent, forgotten stranger ;” and inclosing fifty pounds in a blank cover, he put both into an envelope to Mrs Stubbs, in which he informed her, that, if she could find no means of conveying the packet to Miss Montreville, the anonymous writer would claim it again at some future time, on describing its contents.

Before dispatching the letter, however, he resolved on making an attempt to discover whether Hargrave was acquainted with Laura’s retreat. He shrunk from meeting his rival. His blood ran cold as he pictured to his fancy the exulting voice,

the triumphant glance which would announce the master of Laura's fate. But any thing was preferable to his present suspense ; and the hope that he might yet be useful to Laura, formed an incitement still more powerful. " Let me but find her," said he, " and I will yet wrest her from destruction. If she is deceived, I will warn ; if she is oppressed, I will protect her."

He imagined that he should probably find Hargrave at the house of his uncle Lord Lincourt, and hastened thither to seek him ; but found the house occupied only by servants, who were ignorant of the Colonel's address. De Courcy knew none of Hargrave's places of resort. The habits and acquaintance of each lay in a different line. No means therefore of discovering him occurred to Montague, except that of inquiring at the house of Mrs Stubbs, where he thought it probable that the place of Hargrave's residence might be known. Thither, then, he next bent his course.

The door was opened to him by Fanny ; who replied to his question, that none of the family knew where Colonel Hargrave lived, and lamented that De Courcy had not come a little earlier, saying, that the Colonel had been gone not above a quarter of an hour. De Courcy was turning disappointed away ; when Fanny, stopping him,

said with a courtesy and half-whisper, "Sir, a'n't please you, my mistress was all wrong about Miss Montreville, for the Colonel knows no more about her, than I do." "Indeed!" said De Courcy, all attention. "Yes indeed, Sir—when I told him she was away he was quite amazed, and in such a passion! So then I thought I would give him the letter."—"What letter?" cried De Courcy, the glow of animation fading in his face. "A letter that Miss Montreville left for him, Sir, but when he got it he was ten times angrier than before, and swore at her for not letting him know where she was going. So I thought Sir I would make bold to tell you, Sir, as Mistress had been speaking her mind, Sir; for it's a sad thing to have one's character taken away; and Miss Montreville, I am sure, wouldn't do hurt to nobody."

"You are a good girl, a very good girl," said De Courcy, giving her, with a guinea, a very hearty squeeze of the hand. He made her repeat the particulars of Hargrave's violent behaviour; and satisfied from them that his rival had no share in Laura's disappearance, he returned to his hotel, his heart lightened of half the heaviest load that ever it had borne.

Still, however, enough remained to exclude for a time all quiet from his breast. He could not

doubt that Laura's affections were Hargrave's. She had given proof of it palpable to the most common observer ; and resentment mingled "with his grief while he thought, that to his fervent respectful love, she preferred the undistinguishing passion of a libertine. " All women are alike," said he, " the slaves of mere outward show :"—An observation for which the world was probably first indebted to circumstances somewhat like De Courcy's.

Restless and uncomfortable, without any hope of finding Laura, he would now have left London without an hour's delay. But, though he forgot his own fatigues, he was not unmindful of those of the grey-haired domestic who attended him. He therefore deferred his journey to the following morning ; and then set out on his return to Norwood, more depressed and wretched than he had quitted it.

CHAP. XIX.

ALL was yet dark and still, when Laura, like some unearthly being, stood by the bed where Fanny slept. The light which she bore in her wasted hand, shewed faintly the majestic form darkened by its mourning garments; and shed a dreary gleam upon tearless eyes, and a face whence all the hues of life were fled. She made a sign for Fanny to rise; and, awe-struck by the calm of unutterable grief, Fanny arose, and in silence followed her. They entered the chamber of death. With noiseless steps Laura approached the body, and softly drew back the covering. She beckoned Fanny towards her. The girl comprehended that her aid was wanted in performing the last duties to Montreville; and, shrinking with superstitious fear, said, in a low tremulous whisper, "I dare not touch the dead." Laura answered not; but raising her eyes to Heaven, as if there to seek assistance in her mournful task, she gen-

tly pressed her hand upon the half-closed eyes which had so often beamed fondness on her.

Unaided, and in silence, she did the last offices of love. She shed no tears. She uttered no lamentation. The dread stillness was broken only by the groans that burst at times from her heavy heart, and the more continued sobs of her attendant, who vented in tears her fear, her pity, and her admiration.

When the sad work was finished, Laura, still speechless, motioned to the servant to retire. In horror at the thought of leaving Laura alone with the dead, yet fearing to raise her voice, the girl respectfully grasped her mistress's gown, and in a low but earnest whisper, besought her to leave this dismal place, and to go to her own chamber. Scarcely sensible of her meaning, Laura suffered her to draw her away; but when the door closed upon all that remained of her father, she shuddered convulsively, and struggled to return. Fauny, however, gathered courage to lead her to her own apartment. There she threw herself prostrate on the ground; a flood of tears came to relieve her oppressed heart, and her recovered utterance broke forth in an act of resignation. She continued for some hours to give vent to her sorrow—a sorrow unallayed by any

less painful feelings, save those of devotion. She had lost the affectionate guide of her youth, the fond parent, whose love for her had brought him untimely to the grave ; and, in the anguish of the thought that she should watch his smile and hear his voice no more, she scarcely remembered that he had left her to want and loneliness.

The morning was far advanced, when her sorrows were broken in upon by her landlady, who came to ask her directions in regard to the funeral. Laura had been unable to bend her thoughts to the consideration of this subject ; and she answered only by her tears. In vain did Mrs Stubbs repeat that " it was a folly to take on so,"—" that we must all die ;" " and that as every thing has two handles, Laura might comfort herself that she would now have but one mouth to feed." Laura seemed obstinate in her grief, and at last Mrs Stubbs declared, that whether she would hear reason or not, something must without delay be settled about the funeral ; as for her part she could not order things without knowing how they were to be paid for. Laura, putting her hand to her forehead, complained that her head felt confused, and, mildly begging her persecutor to have a little patience with her, promised, if she might be left

alone for the present, to return to the conversation in half an hour.

Accordingly, soon after the time appointed, the landlady was surprised to see Laura enter the parlour, her cheeks indeed colourless and her eyes swelled with weeping, but her manner perfectly calm and collected. "Here are my father's watch and seals," said she, presenting them. "They may be disposed of. That cannot wound him now,"—and she turned away her head and drew her hand across her eyes. "Have the goodness," continued she, "to order what is necessary, for I am a stranger, without any friend." Mrs Stubbs, examining the watch, declared her opinion that the sale of it would produce very little. "Let every thing be plain, but decent," said Laura, "and when I am able I will work day and night till all be paid." "I doubt, Miss," answered Mrs Stubbs, "it will be long before your work will pay for much; besides you will be in my debt for a week's lodgings—we always charge a week extra when there is a death in the house." "Tell me what you would have me to do, and I will do it," said the unfortunate Laura, wholly unable to contend with her hard-hearted companion. "Why, Miss, said Mrs Stubbs, "there is your beautiful rose-wood work-table and

the foot-stools, and your fine ivory work-box that Mr De Courcy sent here before you came ; if you choose to dispose of them, I will take them off your hands," " Take them," said Laura, " I knew not that they were mine." Mrs Stubbs then conscientiously offered to give a fourth part of the sum which these toys had cost De Courcy three months before, an offer which Laura instantly accepted ; and the landlady having settled this business much to her own satisfaction, cheerfully undertook to arrange the obsequies of poor Montreville.

Though the tragical scenes of the night had left Laura no leisure to dwell upon her fears for Hargrave, it was not without thankfulness that she heard of his safety and restored composure. Her mind was at first too much occupied by her recent loss, to attempt accounting for his extravagant behaviour ; and, after the first paroxysms of her sorrow were past, she retained but an imperfect recollection of his late conversation with her. She merely remembered his seeming distraction and threatened suicide ; and only bewildered herself by her endeavours to unravel his mysterious conduct. Sometimes a suspicion not very remote from the truth would dart into her mind ; but she quickly banished it, as an instance

of the causeless fears which are apt to infest the hearts of the unfortunate.

An innate delicacy which, in some degree, supplied to Laura the want of experience, made her feel an impropriety in the daily visits which she was informed that Hargrave made at her lodgings. She was aware that they might be liable to misrepresentation, even though she should persist in her refusal to see him ; and this consideration appeared to add to the necessity already so urgent, for resolving on some immediate plan for her future course of life. But the future offered to Laura no attractive prospect. Wherever she turned, all seemed dark and unpromising. She feared not to labour for her subsistence ; no narrow pride forbade her use of any honourable means of independence. But her personal charms were such as no degree of humility could screen from the knowledge of their possessor, and she was sensible how much this dangerous distinction increased the disqualifications of her sex and age for the character of an artist. As an artist, she must be exposed to the intrusion of strangers ; to public observation if successful ; to unpitied neglect if she failed in her attempt. Besides, it was impossible to think of living alone and unprotected, in the human chaos that surrounded

her. All her father's dismal forebodings rose to her remembrance; and she almost regarded herself as one who would be noticed only as a mark for destruction, beguiled by frauds which no vigilance could detect, overwhelmed by power which she could neither resist nor escape.

Should she seek in solitude a refuge from the destroyer, and return to mourn at her deserted Glenalbert the stroke which had left it like her lonely and forlorn, want lurked amidst its shades; for with her father had died not only the duties and the joys of life, but even the means of its support. Her temporary right to the few acres which Montreville had farmed, was in less than a year to expire; and she knew that, after discharging the claim of the landlord, together with some debts which the long illness of Lady Harriet and the ill-fated journey had obliged Montreville to contract, little would remain from the sale of her effects at Glenalbert.

Laura was sure, that the benevolent friend of her youth, the excellent Mrs Douglas, would receive her with open arms—guide her inexperience with a mother's counsel—comfort her sorrows with a mother's love. But her spirit revolted from a life of indolent dependence, and her sense of justice from casting a useless burden upon an

income too confined to answer claims stronger and more natural than hers. Mrs Douglas was herself the preceptress of her children, and both by nature and education amply qualified for the momentous task. In domestic management, her skill and activity were unrivalled. Laura, therefore, saw no possibility of repaying, by her usefulness in any department of the family, the protection which she might receive; and she determined that nothing but the last necessity should induce her to tax the generosity of her friend, or to forego the honourable independence of those who, though "silver or gold they have none," can barter for the comforts they enjoy their mental treasures or their bodily toil.

To undertake the tuition of youth occurred to her as the most eligible means of procuring necessary subsistence, and protection more necessary still. It appeared to her that, as a member of any reputable family, she would be sheltered from the dangers which her father had most taught her to dread. She reviewed her accomplishments, and impartially examined her ability to communicate them with temper and perseverance. Though for the most part attained with great accuracy, they were few in number, and unobtrusive in kind. She read aloud with un-

common harmony and grace. She spoke and wrote with fluency and precision. She was grammatically acquainted with the French and Latin languages, and an adept in the common rules of arithmetic. Her proficiency in painting has been already noticed; and she sung with inimitable sweetness and expression.

But though expert in every description of plain needle-work, she was an utter novice in the manufacture of all those elegant nothings, which are so serviceable to fine ladies in their warfare against time. Though she moved with unstudied dignity and peerless grace, we are obliged to confess, that the seclusion of her native village had doomed her to ignorance of the art of dancing; that she had never entered a ball-room less capacious than the horizon, nor performed with a partner more illustrious than the schoolmaster's daughter. Her knowledge of music, too, was extremely limited. Lady Harriet had indeed tried to teach her to play on the piano-forte; but the attempt, after costing Laura many a full heart, and many a watery eye, was relinquished as vain. Though the child learnt with unusual facility whatever was taught her by her father or Mrs Douglas, and though she was already remarkable for the sweetness with which she war-

bled her wood-notes wild, she no sooner approached the piano-forte, than an invincible stupidity seemed to seize on all her faculties. This was the more mortifying, as it was the only one of her Ladyship's accomplishments which she ever personally attempted to communicate to her daughter. Lady Harriet was astonished at her failure. It could proceed, she thought, from nothing but obstinacy. But the appropriate remedy for obstinacy only aggravated the symptoms; and, after all, Laura was indebted to Colonel Hargrave's tuition for so much skill as enabled her to accompany her own singing.

Laura had more than once felt her deficiency in these fashionable arts, on seeing them exhibited by young ladies, who, to use their own expression, had returned from *finishing themselves* at a boarding-school, and she feared that this blank in her education might prove a fatal bar to her being employed as a governess. But another and a greater obstacle lay before her—she was utterly unknown. The only patrons whose recommendation she could command, were distant and obscure; and what mother would trust the minds and the manners of her children to the formation of a stranger? She knew not the ostrich-like daring of fashionable mothers. This

latter objection seemed equally hostile to her being received in quality of companion by those who might be inclined to exchange subsistence and protection for relief from solitude ; and Laura, almost despairing, knew not whither to turn her eye.

One path indeed invited her steps, a path bright with visions of rapture, warm with the sunshine of love and pleasure ; but the flaming sword of Heaven guarded the entrance ; and as often as her thoughts reverted that way, the struggle was renewed which forces the choice from the pleasing to the right. No frequency of return rendered this struggle less painful. Laura's prudence had slept, when a little vigilance might have saved her many an after pang ; and she had long paid, was still long to pay, the forfeit of neglecting that wisdom which would guard "with all diligence" the first beginnings of even the most innocent passions. Had she curbed the infant-strength of an attachment which, though it failed to warp her integrity, had so deeply wounded her peace, how would she have lessened the force of that temptation, which lured her from the rugged ascent, where want and difficulty were to be her companions ; which en-

ticed her to the flowery bowers of pleasure with the voice and with the smile of Hargrave!

Yet Laura had resisted a bribe more powerful than any consideration merely selfish could supply; and she blushed to harbour a thought of yielding to her own inclination what she had refused to a parent's wants, to a parent's prayer. Her heart filled as she called to mind how warmly Montreville had seconded the wishes of her lover, how resolutely she had withstood his will; and it swelled even to bursting at the thought that the vow was now fatally made void, which promised, by every endearment of filial love, to atone for this first act of disobedience. "Dearest, kindest of friends," she cried, "I was inflexible to thy request—thy last request! and shall I now recede? now, when, perhaps, thou art permitted to behold and to approve my motive; perhaps permitted to watch me still—permitted with higher power to guard, with less erring wisdom to direct me! And Thou, who, in matchless condescension, refusest not to be called the Father of the fatherless—Thou, who in every difficulty canst guide, from every danger canst protect thy children, let, if Thou see it good, the Heavens, which are thy throne, be all my covering, the earth, which is thy footstool, be all my bed; but suffer

me not to wander from Thee, the only source of peace and joy, to seek them in fountains unhal-
lowed and forbidden."

Religious habits and sentiments were permanent inmates of Laura's breast. They had been invited and cherished, till, like familiar friends, they came unsolicited; and, like friends, too, their visits were most frequent in adversity. But the more ardent emotions of piety, are, alas! transient guests with us all; and, sinking from the flight which raised her for a time above the sorrows and the wants of earth, Laura was again forced to shrink from the gaunt aspect of poverty, again to turn a wistful eye towards a haven of rest on this side the grave.

Young as she was, however, she had long been a vigilant observer of her own actions, and of their consequences; and the result was an immutable conviction, that no heartfelt comfort could, in any circumstances, harbour with wilful transgression. As wilful transgression, she considered her marriage with a man whose principles she had fatal reason to distrust. As a rash defiance of unknown danger; as a desperate daring of temptations whose force was yet untried, as a desertion of those arms by which alone she could hope for victory in her Christian combat, Laura

considered the hazardous enterprize, which, trusting to the reformation of a libertine, would expose her to his example and his authority, his provocations and his associates. Again she solemnly renewed her resolution never, by wilfully braving temptation, to forego the protection of Him who can dash the fulness of worldly prosperity with secret bitterness, or gladden with joys unspeakable the dwelling visited by no friend but Him, cheered by no comfort but the light of His countenance.

Hargrave's letter served rather to fortify the resolution which it was intended to shake; for Laura was not insensible to the indelicacy which did not scorn to owe to her necessities a consent which he had in vain tried to extort from her affection. Though pleased with his liberality, she was hurt by his supposing that she could have so far forgotten the mortal offence which he had offered her, as to become his debtor for any pecuniary favour; and, as nothing could be further from her intention than to owe any obligation to Colonel Hargrave, she did not hesitate a moment to return the money. When she had sealed the card in which she inclosed it, she resumed the contemplation of her dreary prospects; and half-hopelessly examined the possibilities of subsist-

ence. To offer instruction to the young, or amusement to the old, in exchange for an asylum from want and danger, still appeared to her the most eligible plan of life; and again she weighed the difficulty of procuring the necessary recommendations.

Lady Pelham occurred to her. Some claim she thought she might have had to the patronage of so near a relation. But who should identify her? who should satisfy Lady Pelham that the claim of relationship did indeed belong to Laura? Had she been previously known to her aunt, her difficulties would have been at an end; now she would probably be rejected as an impostor; and she gave a sigh to the want of foresight which had suffered her to rejoice in escaping an interview with Lady Pelham.

After much consideration, she determined to solicit the recommendations of Mrs Douglas and the De Courcy family; and, until she could avail herself of these, to subsist, in some obscure lodging, by the labour of her hands. In the meantime, it was necessary to remove immediately from her present abode. The day following was the last when she could claim any right to remain there; and she proceeded to make preparations for her departure.

With a bleeding heart she began to arrange whatever had belonged to Montreville; and paused, with floods of tears, upon every relic now become so sacred. She entered his closet. His was the last foot that had pressed the threshold. His chair stood as he had risen from it. On the ground lay the cushion yet impressed with his knees—his Bible was open as he had left it. One passage was blistered with his tears; and there Laura read with emotions unutterable—"Leave to me thy fatherless children, and I will preserve them alive." Her recent wounds thus torn open with agony which could not be restrained, she threw herself upon the ground; and, with cries of anguish, besought her father to return but for one short hour to comfort his desolate child. "Oh I shall never, never see him more," said she,—“all my cries are vain,”—and she wept the more because they were in vain. Soon, however, she reproached herself with her immoderate sorrow, soon mingled its accents with those of humble resignation; and the vigorous mind recovering in devotion all its virtuous energy, she returned, with restored composure, to her melancholy labours.

In her father's writing-desk she found an unfinished letter. It began "My dear De Courcy,"—

and Laura was going to read it with the awe of one who listens to the last words of a father, when she remembered having surprised her father while writing it, and his having hastily concealed it from her sight. She instantly folded it without further acquaintance with its contents, except that her own name caught her eye. Continuing to arrange the papers, she observed a letter addressed to herself in a hand which she did not remember to have seen. It was Lady Pelham's answer to that in which Laura had announced her mother's death. She perceived that it might furnish an introduction to her aunt; and with a sensation of gratitude she remembered that she had been accidentally prevented from destroying it.

Lady Pelham was elder by several years than her sister, Lady Harriet. Her father, a saving painstaking attorney, died a few months after she was born. His widow, who, from an idea of their necessity, had concurred in all his economical plans, discovered with equal surprise and delight, that his death had left her the entire management of five-and-forty thousand pounds. This fortune, which she was to enjoy during her life, was secured, in the event of her demise, to little Miss Bridget; and this arrangement was one of the earliest pieces of

information which little Miss Bridget received. For seven years the little heiress was, in her mother's undisguised opinion, and consequently in her own, the most important personage upon the face of the terrestrial globe. But worldly glories are fleeting. Lord Winterfield's taste in stewed carp had been improved by half a century's assiduous cultivation. Now the widow Price understood the stewing of carp better than any woman in England, so his Lordship secured to himself the benefit of her talent by making her Lady Winterfield. In ten months after this marriage, another young lady appeared, as much more important than Miss Bridget, as an earl is than an attorney.

Fortune, however, dispensed her gifts with tolerable equality. Beauty and rank, indeed, were all on the side of Lady Harriet, but the wealth lay in the scale of Miss Price; for Lord Winterfield, leaving the bulk of his property to the children of his first marriage, bequeathed to his youngest daughter only five thousand pounds. These circumstances procured to Miss Price another advantage, for she married a baronet with a considerable estate, while Lady Harriet's fate stooped to a lieutenant in a marching regiment. After ten years, which Lady Pelham declared

were spent in uninterrupted harmony, Sir Edward Pelham died. The exclusive property of his wife's patrimony had been strictly secured to her; and, either thinking such a provision sufficient for a female, or moved by a reason which we shall not at present disclose, Sir Edward bestowed on the nephew who inherited his title, his whole estate, burthened only with a jointure of five hundred pounds a-year, settled upon Lady Pelham by her marriage-contract. Of his daughter and only child no mention was made in his testament; but Sir Edward, during the last years of his life, had acquired the character of an oddity, and nobody wondered at his eccentricities.

At the commencement of her widowhood, Lady Pelham purchased a villa in ——shire, where she spent the summer, returning in the winter to Grosvenor Street; and this last was almost the only part of her history which was known to Laura. Even before Lady Harriet's marriage, little cordiality had subsisted between the sisters. From the date of that event, their intercourse had been almost entirely broken off; and the only attention which Laura had ever received from her aunt, was contained in the letter which she was now thankfully contemplating.

Her possession of this letter, together with her acquaintance with the facts to which it related, she imagined would form sufficient proof of her identity; and her national ideas of the claims of relationship awakened a hope of obtaining her aunt's assistance in procuring some respectable situation.

Determined to avail herself of her fortunate discovery, she quitted her father's apartments; and carrying with her her credential, lost no time in repairing to Grosvenor Street. Nor did she experience the reluctance which she had formerly felt towards an interview with Lady Pelham; for she was fully sensible of the difference between a petitioner for charity and a candidate for honourable employment. Besides, there is no teacher of humility like misfortune; and Laura's spirits were too completely subdued to anticipate or to notice diminutive attacks upon her self-consequence. She still, however, with constitutional reserve, shrunk from intruding upon a stranger; and she passed and repassed the door, examining the exterior of the house, as if she could thence have inferred the character of its owner, before she took courage to give one gentle knock.

A footman opened the door, and Laura, fal-

tering, inquired if Lady Pelham was within. From Laura's single knock, her humble voice, and her yet more humble habit, which, in ten months use, had somewhat faded from the sober magnificence of black, the man had formed no very lofty idea of the visitor's rank. He answered, that he believed his lady was not at home; but half-afraid of dismissing some person with whom she might have business, he spoke in a tone which made Laura a little doubt the truth of his information. She inquired at what time she might be likely to gain access to Lady Pelham; and as she spoke threw back her crape veil, unconscious how successfully she was pleading her own cause. Struck with a countenance whose candour, sweetness, and beauty won a way to every heart, the man gazed at her for a moment with vulgar admiration, and then throwing open the door of a little parlour, begged her to walk in, while he inquired whether his lady were visible. He soon returned, telling Laura that Lady Pelham would receive her in a few minutes.

During these few minutes, Laura had formed a hundred conjectures concerning her aunt's person, voice, and manner. She wondered whether she resembled Lady Harriet; whether her own

form would recal to Lady Pelham the remembrance of her sister. At every noise her heart fluttered—at every step she expected the entrance of this relation, on whom perhaps so much of her future fate might depend ; and she held her breath that she might distinguish her approach. A servant at last came to conduct her to his mistress ; and she followed him, not without a feeling of awe, into the presence of her mother's sister.

That sentiment, however, by no means gathered strength when she took courage to raise her eyes to the plain little elderly person to whom she was introduced, and heard herself addressed in the accents of cheerful familiarity. Laura, with modest dignity, made known her name and situation. She spoke of her mother's death, and the tears trickled from her eyes—of her father's, and in venting the natural eloquence of grief, she forgot that she came to interest a stranger. Lady Pelham seemed affected ; she held her handkerchief to her eyes, and remained in that attitude for some time after Laura had recovered self-possession. Then, throwing her arms round her lovely niece, she affectionately acknowledged the relationship, adding, “ Your resemblance to my poor sister cannot be overlooked, and yet in saying so, I am far from paying you a compliment.”

After shewing Lady Pelham her own letter, and mentioning such circumstances as tended to confirm her identity, Laura proceeded to detail her plans, to which her Ladyship listened with apparent interest. She inquired into Laura's accomplishments, and seemed pondering the probability of employing them with advantage to the possessor. After a few moments silence, she said, "That short as their acquaintance had been, she thought she could perceive that Laura had too much sensibility for a dependent situation. But we shall talk of that hereafter," continued she. "At present your spirits are too weak for the society of strangers ;—and mine," added her Ladyship, with a sigh, "are not much more buoyant than your own." Laura looked up with the kindly interest which, whether she herself were joyful or in sadness, sorrow could always command with her ; and her aunt answered her glance of inquiry, by relating, that her only daughter and heiress had eloped from her a few days before, with an artful young fellow without family or fortune. "She deceived me by a train of the basest artifices," said Lady Pelham, "though she might have known that her happiness was my chief concern ; that my only possible motive for withholding my consent was to

save her from the poverty to which she has doomed herself. But she has unfeelingly preferred her own indulgence to the society and the peace of a kind mother. Her disobedience I might have forgiven—her selfishness, her deceit I never can ; or, if as a Christian I forgive, I never, never can forget it.”

Lady Pelham had talked herself out of breath ; and Laura, not quite understanding this kind of Christian forgiveness, was silent, because she did not well know what to say. She felt, however, compassion for a parent deserted by her only child ; and the feeling was legible in a countenance peculiarly fitted for every tender expression.

There are some degrees of sorrow which increase in acuteness, at least which augment in vehemence of expression, by the perception of having excited sympathy. Weak fires gather strength from radiation. After a glance at Laura Lady Pelham melted into tears, and continued, “ I know not how I had deserved such treatment from her ; for never had she reason to complain of me. I have always treated her with what I must call unmerited kindness, except indeed when natural abhorrence of vice hurried me into reproof, which alas ! I always found unavailing.”

Laura now ventured a few conciliating words.

"She will feel her error, Madam,—she will strive by her after-life to atone——" Lady Pelham immediately dried her eyes. "No, no, my dear," interrupted she, "you don't know her—you have no idea of the hardness of her unfeeling heart. Rejoice, sweet girl, that you have no idea of it. For my part, though sensibility is at best but a painful blessing, I would not exchange it for the most peaceful apathy that can feel for nothing but itself. I must have something to love and cherish. You shall be that something. You shall live with me, and we shall console each other."

On another occasion, Laura might have been disposed to canvass the nature of that sensibility which could thus enlarge to a stranger on the defects of an only child. Indeed she was little conversant even with the name of this quality. Her own sensibility she had been taught to consider as a weakness to be subdued, not as an ornament to be gloried in; and the expansion of soul which opens to all the sorrows and to all the joys of others, she had learnt to call by a holier name—to regulate by a nobler principle. But she was little disposed to examine the merits of a feeling to which she owed the offer of an unsolicited asylum. Her heart swelling with gratitude, she

clasped Lady Pelham's hand between her own, and while tears streamed down her face, " Kind considerate friend," she cried, " why, why were you not known to us while my father could have been sensible to your kindness !"

After Lady Pelham had repeated her proposal more in detail, and Laura had thankfully acceded to it, they remained in conversation for some time longer. Lady Pelham shewed that she had much wit, much vivacity, and some information ; and, after settling that Laura should next day become an inmate in Grosvenor Street, they separated, mutually delighted with each other. Lady Pelham applauded herself for a generous action, and, to the interest which Laura awakened in every breast, was added in Lady Pelham's all the benevolence of self-complacency. Laura, on the other hand, did not once dream that any fault could harbour in the unsuspecting liberal heart which had believed the tale, and removed the difficulties of a stranger. She did not once dream that she owed her new asylum to any motive less noble than disinterested goodness.

No wonder that her Ladyship's motive escaped the penetration of Laura, when it even evaded her own. And yet no principle could be more simple in its nature, or more constant in its ope-

ration, than that which influenced Lady Pelham ; but the Proteus put on so many various forms, that he ever avoided detection from the subject of his sway. In the meantime, the desire of performing a generous action—of securing the gratitude of a feeling heart—of patronizing a poor relation, were the only motives which her Ladyship acknowledged to herself, when she offered protection to Laura. An idea had, indeed, darted across her right honourable mind, that she might now secure a humble companion at a rate lower than the usual price of such conveniencies : a momentary notion, too, she formed of exciting the jealousy of her daughter, by replacing her with so formidable a competitor for favour ; but these, she thought, were mere collateral advantages, and by no means the circumstances which fixed her determination. The resolution upon which she acted, was taken, as her resolutions generally were, without caution ; and she expressed it, as her custom was, the moment it was formed. Laura was scarcely gone, however, when her aunt began to repent of her precipitancy ; and to wish, as she had often occasion to do, that she had taken a little more time for consideration. But she comforted herself, that she could at any time get rid of her charge, by re-

commending Laura to one of the situations which she had mentioned as her choice. She knew it would not be difficult to find one more lucrative than that upon which her niece was entering; for how could she possibly offer wages to so near a relation, or insult with the gift of a trifling sum a person of Laura's dignity of deportment? These reasons Lady Pelham alleged to herself, as sufficient grounds for a resolution never to affront her niece by a tender of pecuniary favours.

While these thoughts were revolving in Lady Pelham's mind, Laura had reached her home; and, on her knees, was thanking Providence for having raised up for her a protector and a friend, and praying that she might be enabled to repay, in affectionate and respectful duty, a part of the debt of gratitude which she owed to her benefactress. The rest of the evening she spent in preparing for her removal—in ruminating on her interview with her aunt, and in endeavouring to compose, from the scanty materials which she possessed, a character of this new arbitress of her destiny. From Lady Pelham's prompt decision in favour of a stranger, from her unreserved expression of her feelings, from her lively manner and animated countenance, Laura concluded that

she was probably of a temper warm, susceptible, and easily wounded by unkindness or neglect, but frank, candid, and forgiving. Laura wished that she had better studied her aunt's physiognomy. What she recollected of it was quite unintelligible to her. She laboured in vain to reconcile the feminine curvatures of the nose and forehead with the inflexible closing of the mouth, and the hard outline of the chin, where lurked no soft relenting line.

But however the countenance might puzzle conjecture, of the mind she harboured not a doubt; Lady Pelham's, she was persuaded, was one of those open generous souls, which the young and unwary are always prepared to expect and to love—souls having no disguise, and needing none. Now this was precisely the character which Lady Pelham often and sincerely drew of herself; and who ought to have been so intimately acquainted with her Ladyship's dispositions?

CHAP. XX.

It was not without hesitation that Laura formed her resolution to conceal from Hargrave her place of abode. She felt for the uneasiness which this concealment would cause him. She feared that her desertion might remove one incitement to a virtuous course. But she considered, that while their future connection was doubtful, it was imprudent to strengthen by habitual intercourse their need of each other's society; and she reflected, that she could best estimate his character from actions performed beyond the sphere of her influence. Her watchful self-distrust made her fear to expose her resolution to his importunities; and she felt the impropriety of introducing into her aunt's family, a person who stood on terms with her which she did not choose to explain. These reasons induced her to withhold from Hargrave the knowledge of her new situation; and, certain that if it

were known to Mrs Stubbs or her servants he would soon be master of the secret, she left no clue by which to trace her retreat. Perhaps, though she did not confess it to herself, she was assisted in this act of self-command by a latent hope, that as she was now to be introduced to a society on his own level, Hargrave might not find the mystery quite inscrutable.

She was kindly welcomed by Lady Pelham, and took possession of a small but commodious apartment, where she arranged her drawing-materials, together with the few books she possessed, intending to make that her retreat as often as her aunt found amusement or occupation independent of her. She resolved to devote her chief attention to making herself useful and entertaining to her patroness. In the first, she derived hopes of success, from Lady Pelham's declared incapacity for all employments that are strictly feminine. The second, she thought, would be at once easy and pleasant, for Lady Pelham was acute, lively, and communicative. This latter quality she possessed in an unusual degree, and yet Laura found it difficult to unravel her character. In general, she saw that her aunt's understanding was bright; she was persuaded that in general her heart was warm and generous; but

the descent to particulars baffled Laura's penetration. Lady Pelham could amuse—could delight; she said many wise, and many brilliant things; but her wisdom was not always well-timed, and her brilliant things were soap-bubbles in the sun, sparkling and highly coloured, but vanishing at the touch of him who would examine their structure. Lady Pelham could dispute with singular acuteness. By the use of ambiguous terms, by ingenious sophistry, by dexterously shifting from the ground of controversy, she could baffle, and perplex, and confound her opponents: but she could not argue; she never convinced. Her opinions seemed fluctuating, and Laura was sometimes ready to imagine that she defended them, not because they were just, nor even because they were her own, but merely because she had called them so; for with a new antagonist she could change sides, and maintain the opposite ground with equal address.

In spite of all the warmth of heart for which she gave her aunt credit, Laura soon began to imagine that Lady Pelham had no friends. Among all the acquaintances whom she attracted and amused, no one seemed to exchange regard with her. The gaiety of pleasure never softened in her presence into the tenderness of affection.

Laura could not discover that there existed one being from whose failings Lady Pelham respectfully averted her own sight, while reverently veiling them from the eyes of others. A few, a very few, seemed to be the objects of Lady Pelham's esteem; those of her love Laura could not discover. Towards her, however, her aunt expressed a strong affection; and Laura continued to persuade herself, that if Lady Pelham had no friends, it was because she was surrounded by those who were not worthy of her friendship.

As she appeared to invite and to desire unreserved confidence, Laura had soon made her acquainted with the narrative of her short life, excepting in so far as it related to Hargrave. At the detail of the unworthy advantage which Warren had taken of Montreville's inability to enforce his claim for the annuity, Lady Pelham broke out into sincere and vehement expressions of indignation and contempt; for no one more cordially abhorred oppression, or despised meanness in others. She immediately gave directions to her solicitor to attempt bringing the affair to a conclusion, and even to threaten Warren with a prosecution in case of his refusal. Virtuous resistance of injustice was motive sufficient for this action. Pity that Lady Pelham should have sought

another in the economy and ease with which it promised to provide for an indigent relative ! Mr Warren was no sooner informed that the poor obscure unfriended Laura was the niece of Lady Pelham, and the inmate of her house, than he contrived to arrive at a marvellous certainty that the price of the annuity had been paid, and that the mistake in the papers relating to it originated in mere accident. In less than a fortnight the informality was rectified, and the arrears of the annuity paid into Laura's hands ; the lawyer having first, at Lady Pelham's desire, deducted the price of his services.

With tears in her eyes, Laura surveyed her wealth, now of diminished value in her estimation. " Only a few weeks ago," said she, " how precious had this been to me.—But now !—— Yet it is precious still," said she, as she wiped the tears away, " for it can minister occasions of obedience and of usefulness." That very day she dispatched little presents for each of Mrs Douglas's children, in which use was more considered than show ; and in the letter which announced her gifts, she inclosed half of the remaining sum to be distributed among her own poor at Glenalbert. That her appearance might not discredit her hostess, she next proceeded to renew her

wardrobe ; and though she carefully avoided unnecessary expence, she consulted not only decency but elegance in her attire. In this, and all other matters of mere indifference, Laura was chiefly guided by her aunt ; for she had early observed that this lady, upon all occasions, small as well as great, loved to exercise the office of dictatrix. No person could have been better fitted than Laura to conciliate such a temper ; for on all the lesser occasions of submission she was as gentle and complying as she was inflexible upon points of real importance. In their conversations, too, though Laura defended her own opinions with great firmness, she so carefully avoided direct contradiction or sarcastic retort, impatience in defeat, or triumph in victory, that even Lady Pelham could scarcely find subject of irritation in so mild an antagonist.

In some respects, their tempers seemed to tally admirably. Lady Pelham had great aptitude in detecting errors, Laura a genius for remedying them. Difficulty always roused her Ladyship's impatience, but she found an infallible resource in the perseverance of Laura. In short, Laura contrived so many opportunities, or seized with such happy art those which presented themselves, of ministering to the comfort or conveni-

ence of her aunt, that she became both respectable and necessary to her; and this was, generally speaking, the utmost extent of Lady Pelham's attachments.

Lady Pelham sometimes spoke of her daughter, and Laura never missed the opportunity of urging a reconciliation. She insisted that the rights of natural affection were unalienable; that as they did not rest upon the merits, so neither could they be destroyed by the unworthiness either of parents or of children. The mother answered, with great impatience, that Laura's argument was entirely founded on prejudice; that it was true that for the helplessness of infancy, a peculiar feeling was provided; but that in all animals this peculiar feeling ceased as soon as it was no longer essential to the existence of the individual. "From thenceforth," added she, "the regard must be founded on the qualities of the head and heart; and if my child is destitute of these, I can see no reason why I should prefer her to the child of any other woman." "Ah!" said Laura, tears of grateful recollection rushing down her cheek, "some parents have loved their child with a fervour which no worth of her's could merit."

The gush of natural sensibility for this time

averted the rising storm ; but the next time that Laura renewed her conciliatory efforts, Lady Pelham, growing more vehement as she became herself more convinced that she was in the wrong, burst into a paroxysm of rage ; and, execrating all rebellious children, and their defenders, commanded Laura in future to confine her attention to what might concern herself. The humbling spectacle of a female face distorted with passion was not quite new to Laura. Undismayed, she viewed it with calm commiseration ; and mildly expressing her sorrow for having given offence, took up her work, and left the ferment to subside at leisure. Her Ladyship's passion soon cooled ; and making advances with a sort of surly condescension, she entered on a new topic. Laura answered exactly as if nothing disagreeable had happened ; and Lady Pelham could not divine whether her niece commanded her countenance or her temper. Upon one principle of judging the lady had grounds for her doubt ; she herself had sometimes commanded her countenance—her temper never.

Laura not only habitually avoided giving or taking offence, but made it a rule to extinguish its last traces by some act of cordiality and goodwill. This evening, therefore, she proposed,

with a grace which seemed rather to petition a favour than to offer a service, to attempt a portrait of her aunt. The offer was accepted with pleasure, and the portrait was begun on the following day. It proved a likeness, and a favourable one. Lady Pelham was kinder than ever. Laura avoided the prohibited subject, and all was quiet and serene. Lady Pelham at last herself reverted to it; for indeed she could not long forbear to speak upon any topic which roused her passions. No dread of personal inconvenience could deter Laura from an act of justice or mercy, and she again steadily pronounced her opinion. But aware that one who would persuade must be careful not to irritate, she expressed her sentiments with still more cautious gentleness than formerly; and perceiving that her aunt was far more governed by passion than by reason, she quitted argument for entreaty. By these means she avoided provoking hostility, though she failed to win compliance. Lady Pelham seemed to be utterly impenetrable to entreaty, or rather to take pride in resisting it, and Laura had only to hope that time would favour her suit.

Lady Pelham mentioned an intention of removing early to the country, and Laura rejoiced in the prospect of once more beholding the open

face of Heaven—of listening to nature's own music—of breathing the light air of spring. She longed to turn her ear from the discords of the city to the sweet sounds of peace—her eye from countenances wan with care, flushed with intemperance, or ghastly with famine, to cheeks brown with wholesome exercise, or ruddy with health and contentment—to exchange the sight of dusky brick-walls, and walks overlooked by thousands, for the sunny slope or the sheltered solitary lane. Lady Pelham took pleasure in describing the beauties of Walbourne, and Laura listened to her with interest, anticipating eagerly the time when she should inhabit so lovely, so peaceful a scene. But that interest and eagerness rose to the highest, when she accidentally discovered that the De Courcy family were Lady Pelham's nearest neighbours in the country.

The want of something to love and cherish, which was with her Ladyship a mere form of speech, was with Laura a real necessity of nature; and though it was one which almost every situation could supply, since every creature that approached her was the object of her benevolence, yet much of the happiness of so domestic a being depended on the exercise of the dearer charities, and no one was more capable of a dis-

tinguishing preference than Laura. She had a hearty regard for the De Courcy family. She revered Mrs De Courcy; she liked Harriet; and bestowed on Montague her cordial esteem and gratitude. This gratitude had now acquired a sacred tenderness; for it was associated in her mind with the remembrance of a parent. De Courcy's self-denial had cheered her father's sick-bed, his benevolence gladdened her father's heart, and his self-denial appeared more venerable, his benevolence more endearing.

Having written to inform Harriet of the change in her situation, she discovered from her answer a new proof of De Courcy's friendship, in the fruitless journey which he had made to relieve her, and she regretted that her caution had deprived her of an opportunity of seeing and thanking him for all his kindness. "Yet, if we had met," said she, "I should probably have acted as I have done a hundred times before; left him to believe me an insensible, ungrateful creature, for want of courage to tell him that I was not so." She longed, however, to see De Courcy; for with him she thought she could talk of her father—to him lament her irreparable loss, dwell with him on the circumstances which aggravated her sorrow—on the prospects which mingled that

sorrow with hope. This was a subject on which she never entered with Lady Pelham any farther than necessity required—real sorrow has its holy ground, on which no vulgar foot must tread. The self-command of Laura would have forbidden her, in any situation, to darken with a settled gloom the sunshine of domestic cheerfulness; but Lady Pelham had in her somewhat which repels the confidence of grief. Against all the arrows of misfortune, blunted at least as they rebound from the breasts of others, she seemed to “wear a charmed life.” She often indeed talked of sensibility, and reprobated the want of it as the worst of faults; but the only kind of it in which she indulged rather inclined to the acrimonious than the benevolent! and Laura began to perceive, that however her aunt might distinguish them in others, irascible passions and keen feelings were in herself synonymous.

After the effort of giving and receiving the entertainment which Lady Pelham constantly offered, and as constantly exacted in return, Laura experienced a sensation of recovered freedom when the arrival of a visitor permitted her to escape to her own apartment. She saw nobody but her aunt, and never went abroad except to church. Thus, during a fortnight which

she had passed in Grosvenor Street, she had heard nothing of Hargrave. She was anxious to know whether he visited Lady Pelham; for with rustic ignorance, she imagined that all people of condition who resided in the same town must be known to each other; but she had not courage to ask, and searched in vain for his name among the cards which crowded the table in the lobby. Though she was conscious of some curiosity to know how he employed the hours which her absence had left vacant, she did not own to herself that he was at all concerned in a resolution which she took, to inquire in person whether any letters had been left for her with Mrs Stubbs. She did not choose to commit the inquiry to a servant, because she would not condescend to enjoin her messenger to secrecy as to the place of her abode; and she continued resolved to give her lover no clue to discover it.

Accordingly, she early one morning set out in a hackney-coach, which she took the precaution to leave at some distance from her old lodgings, ordering it to wait her return. Fanny was delighted to see her, and charmed with the improvement of her dress, and the returning healthfulness of her appearance; but the landlady eyed her askance, and surlily answered to her inquiry for her

letters, that she would bring the only one she had got ; muttering as she went to fetch it, something of which the words " secret doings," were all that reached Laura's ear. " There, Miss," said the ungracious Mrs Stubbs, " there's your letter, and there's the queer scrawl it came wrapped up in." " Mr De Courcy's hand," cried Laura surprised, but thinking, from its size, that some time would be required to read it, she deferred breaking the seal till she should return to her carriage. " I suppose you're mistaken, Miss," said Mrs Stubbs ; " Mr De Courcy was here twice the day it came, and he never said a word of it."

Laura now tremulously inquired whether she might be permitted to revisit her father's room ; but being roughly answered that it was occupied, she quietly prepared to go. As Fanny followed her through the garden to open the gate for her, Laura, a conscious blush rising to her face, inquired whether any other person had inquired for her since her departure. Fanny, who was ready to burst with the news of Hargrave's visit, and who was just meditating how she might venture to introduce it, improved this occasion of entering on a full detail of his behaviour. With the true waiting-maid-like fondness for romance, she

enlarged upon all his extravagancies, peeping side-long now and then under Laura's bonnet, to catch encouragement from the complacent simper with which such tales are often heard. But no smile repaid her eloquence. With immoveable seriousness did Laura listen to her, gravely revolving the strange nature of that love which could so readily amalgamate with rage and jealousy, and every discordant passion. She was hurt at the indecorum which exposed these weaknesses to the observation of a servant; and with a sigh reflected, that, to constitute the happiness of a woman of sense and spirit, a husband must be possessed of qualities respectable as well as amiable.

Fanny next tried, whether what concerned De Courcy might not awaken more apparent interest; and here she had at least a better opportunity to judge of the effect of her narrative, for Laura stopped and turned full towards her. But Fanny had now no transports to relate, except De Courcy's indignation at Mrs Stubb's calumny; and it was not without hesitating, and qualifying, and apologizing, that the girl ventured to hint at the insinuation which her mistress had thrown out. She had at last succeeded in raising emotion, for indignant crimson dyed Laura's cheeks, and fire flashed from her eyes. But

Laura seldom spoke while she was angry; and again she silently pursued her way. "Pray, Madam," said the girl, as she was opening the gate, "do be so good as to tell me where you live now, that nobody may speak ill of you before me?" "I thank you my good girl," returned Laura, a placid smile again playing on her countenance; "but my character is in no danger.—You were kind to us, Fanny, when you knew that we could not reward you; accept of this from me;" and she put five guineas into her hand. "No, indeed, Ma'am," cried Fanny, drawing back her hand and colouring; "I was civil for pure good-will, and—." Laura, whose sympathy with her inferiors was not confined to their bodily wants, fully understood the feeling which revolts from bartering for gold alone the services of the heart. "I know it, my dear," answered she, in an affectionate tone; "and believe me, I only mean to acknowledge, not to repay your kindness." Fanny persisted in her refusal, but took the opportunity to request Laura's recommendation to some service more comfortable than her present one. "Or if you need a servant yourself, Madam, added she, "I am sure I had as lief serve you as my own mother." Laura, with all the pleasure which a good heart receives from the expression of honest affec-

tion, promised that she would take the first occasion of endeavouring to procure Fanny's admission into the family with whom she herself resided. She obliged her humble friend to leave her at the gate, where, with tears in her eyes, the girl stood gazing after her till she was out of sight. "I'm sure," said she, turning towards the house as Laura disappeared, "I'm sure she was made to be a queen, for the more one likes her, the more she frightens one."

As soon as Laura was seated in her carriage, she opened her packet, and with momentary disappointment examined its contents. "Not one line!" she cried in a tone of mortification; and then turned to the envelope addressed to Mrs Stubbs. Upon comparing this with the circumstances which she had lately heard, she at once comprehended De Courcy's intention of serving her by stealth, foregoing the credit due to his generosity. She wondered, indeed, that he had neglected to disguise his hand-writing in the superscription. "Did he think," said she, "that I could have forgotten the writing which has so often brought comfort to my father?" She little guessed how distant from his mind was the repose which can attend to minute contrivance.

Delighted to discover a trait of character

which tallied so well with her preconceived opinion, she no sooner saw Lady Pelham than she related it to her aunt, and began a warm eulogium on De Courcy's temper and dispositions. Lady Pelham coldly cut her short, by saying, "I believe Mr De Courcy is a very good young man, but I am not very fond of prodigies. One can't both wonder and like at a time; your men with two heads are always either supposititious or disgusting." This speech was one of the dampers which the warm heart abhors; real injury could not more successfully chill affection or repress confidence. It had just malice and just truth enough to be provoking; and for the second time that day Laura had to strive with the risings of anger. She was upon the point of saying, "So, aware of the impossibility of being at once wonderful and pleasing, your Ladyship, I suppose, aims at only one of these objects:" but ere the sarcasm found utterance, she checked herself, and hastened out of the room, with the sensation of having escaped from danger. She retired to write to De Courcy a letter of grateful acknowledgment; in which, after having received Lady Pelham's approbation, she inclosed his gift, explaining the circumstances which now rendered it unnecessary.

Lady Pelham was not more favourable to the rest of the De Courcy family than she had been to Montague. She owned, indeed, that Mrs De Courcy was the best woman in the world, but a virtue, she said, so cased in armour, necessarily precluded all grace or attraction. Harriet she characterized as a little sarcastic coquette. Laura, weary of being exposed to the double peril of weakly defending, or angrily supporting her attacked friends, ceased to mention the De Courcys at all; though, with a pardonable spirit of contradiction, she loved them the better for the unprovoked hostility of Lady Pelham. The less she talked of them, the more she longed for the time when she might, unrestrained, exchange with them testimonies of regard. The trees in the park, as they burst into leaf, stimulated Laura's desire for the country; and while she felt the genial air of spring, or listened to the early song of some luckless bird caged in a neighbouring window, or saw the yellow glories of the crocus peeping from its unnatural sanctuary, she counted the days till her eyes should be gladdened with the joyous face of nature. Only a fortnight had now to pass before her wish was to be gratified, for Lady Pelham intended at the end of that time to remove to Walbourne.

Laura was just giving the finishing touches to her aunt's portrait when a visitor was announced; and, very unwilling to break off at this interesting crisis, Lady Pelham having first scolded the servant for letting in her friend, desired him to shew the lady into the room where Laura was at work. The usual speeches being made, the lady began—"Who does your Ladyship think bowed to me *en passant* just as I was getting out of the carriage?—Why, Lady Bellamer!—Can you conceive such effrontery?"

"Indeed, I think, in common modesty, she should have waited for your notice!"

"Do you know, I am told on good authority, that Hargrave is determined not to marry her."

Laura's breath came short.—

"He is very right," returned Lady Pelham. "A man must be a great fool to marry where he has had such damning proofs of frailty."

Laura's heart seemed to pause for a moment, and then to redouble its beating.—"What Hargrave can this be?" thought she; but she durst not inquire.

"I hear," resumed the lady, "that his uncle is enraged at him, and more for the duel than the *crim. con.*"

The pencils dropped from Laura's hand.—

Fain would she have inquired, what she yet so much dreaded to know ; but her tongue refused its office.

“ I see no cause for that,” returned Lady Pelham ; “ Hargrave could not possibly refuse to fight after such an affair.”

“ Oh certainly not !” replied the lady ; “ but Lord Lincourt thinks, that in such a case, Hargrave ought to have insisted upon giving Lord Bellamer the first fire, and then have fired his own pistol in the air.—But, bless me, what ails Miss Montreville ?” cried the visitor, looking at Laura, who, dreadfully convinced, was stealing out of the room. “ Nothing,” answered Laura ; and fainted.

Lady Pelham called loudly for help ; and, while the servants were administering it, stood by conjecturing what could be the cause of Laura’s illness ; wondering whether it could have any possible connection with Colonel Hargrave ; or whether it were the effect of mere constitutional habit.

The moment Laura shewed signs of recollection, Lady Pelham began her interrogations. “ What has been the matter my dear ? What made you ill ? Did any thing affect you ? Are you subject to faintings ?” Laura remained si-

lent, and closing her eyes, seemed deaf to all her aunt's questions. After a pause, Lady Pelham renewed the attack.—“ Have you any concern with Colonel Hargrave, Laura ? ” “ None,” answered Laura, with a smile of ineffable bitterness ; and again closing her eyes, maintained an obstinate silence. Weary of ineffectual inquiries, Lady Pelham quitted her, giving orders that she should be assisted into bed, and recommending to her to take some rest.

Vain advice ! Laura could not rest ! From the stupor which had overpowered her faculties, she awoke to the full conviction, that all her earthly prospects were for ever darkened. Just entering on life, she seemed already forsaken of all its hopes, and all its joys. The affections which had delighted her youth were torn from the bleeding soul ; no sacred connection remained to bless her maturity ; no endearment awaited her decline. In all her long and dreary journey to the grave, she saw no kindly resting-place. Still Laura's hopes and wishes had never been bounded to this narrow sphere ; and when she found here no rest for the sole of her foot, she had, in the promises of religion, an ark whither she could turn for shelter. But how should she forget that these promises extended not to Hargrave. How shut

her ear to the dread voice which, in threatening the adulterer and the murderer, denounced vengeance against Hargrave! With horror unspeakable she considered his incorrigible depravity; with agony revolved its fearful consequences.

Yet, while the guilt was hateful in her eyes, her heart was full of love and compassion for the offender. The feeling with which she remembered his unfaithfulness to her had no resemblance to jealousy. "He has been misled," she cried; "vilely betrayed by a wretch, who has taken advantage of his weakness. Oh how could she look on that form, that countenance, and see in them only the objects of a passion, vile as the heart that cherished it."—Then she would repent of her want of candour,—“I am unjust, I am cruel,” she said, “thus to load with all the burden of this foul offence, her who had perhaps the least share in it.—No! He must have been the tempter; it is not in woman to be so lost.”

But in the midst of sorrow, whose violence seemed at times almost to confuse her reason, she never hesitated for a moment on the final dissolution of her connection with Hargrave. She formed no resolution on a subject where no alternative seemed to remain, but assumed, as the foundation of all her plans of joyless duty, her

eternal separation from Hargrave; a separation final as death.

By degrees she became more able to collect her thoughts; and the close of a sleepless night found her exercising the valuable habit of seeking in herself the cause of her misfortunes. The issue of her self-examination was the conviction, that she had bestowed on a frail fallible creature, a love disproportioned to the merits of any created thing; that she had obstinately clung to her idol after she had seen its baseness; and that now the broken reed whereon she had leaned was taken away, that she might restore her trust and her love where alone they were due.

That time infallibly brings comfort even to the sorest sorrows—that if we make not shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, we save from the storms of life the materials of peace at least—that lesser joys become valuable when we are deprived of those of keener relish—are lessons which even experience teaches but slowly: and Laura had them yet in a great measure to learn. She was persuaded that she should go mourning to the grave. What yet remained of her path of life seemed to lie through a desert waste, never more to be warmed with the sunshine of affection; never more to be brightened with any ray of hope, save

that which beamed from beyond the tomb. She imagined that lonely and desolate she should pass through life, and joyfully hail the messenger that called her away; like some wretch, who, cast alone on a desert rock, watches for the sail which is to waft him to his native land.

But the despair of strong minds is not listless or inactive. The more Laura was convinced that life was lost as to all its pleasing purposes, the more was she determined that it should be subservient to useful ends. Earthly felicity, she was convinced, had fled for ever from her grasp; and the only resolution she could form, was never more to pursue it; but, in the persevering discharge of the duties which yet remained to her, to seek a preparation for joys which earth has not to bestow.

That she might not devote to fruitless lamentation the time which was claimed by duty, she, as soon as it was day, attempted to rise, intending to spend the morning in acts of resignation for herself, and prayers that pardon and repentance might be granted to him whose guilt had destroyed her peace. But her head was so giddy, that, unable to stand, she was obliged to return to her bed. It was long ere she was again able to quit it. A slow fever seized her, and brought her to the brink of

the grave. Her senses, however, remained uninjured, and she had full power and leisure to make those reflections which force themselves upon all who are sensible of approaching dissolution.

Happy were it, if all who smart under disappointment, would anticipate the hour which will assuredly arrive, when the burden which they impatiently bear shall appear to be lighter than vanity ! The hand which is soon to be cold, resigns without a struggle the baubles of the world. Its cheats delude not the eye that is for ever closing. A deathbed is that holy ground where the charms of the enchanter are dissolved ; where the forms which he had clothed with unreal beauty, or aggravated to gigantic horror, are seen in their true form and colouring.

In its true form and colouring did Laura behold her disappointment, when, with characteristic firmness, she had wrung from her attendants a confession of her danger. With amazement she looked back on the infatuation which could waste on any concern less than eternal, the hopes, the fears, and the wishes once squandered by her on a passion which now seemed trivial as the vapour scattered by the wind.

At last, aided by the rigid temperance of her

former life, and her exemplary patience in suffering, the strength of her constitution began to triumph over her disorder. As she measured back her steps to earth again, the concerns which had seemed to her reverting eye diminished into nothing, again swelled into importance: but Laura could not soon forget the time when she had seen them as they were; and this remembrance powerfully aided her mind in its struggle to cast off its now disgraceful shackles. Yet bitter was the struggle; for what is so painful as to tear at once from the breast what has twined itself with every fibre, linked itself with every hope, stimulated every desire, and long furnished objects of intense, of unceasing interest. The heart which death leaves desolate, slowly and gently resigns the affection to which it has fondly clung. It is permitted to seek indulgence in virtuous sorrow, to rejoice in religious hope; and even memory brings pleasures dear to the widowed mind. But she who mourned the depravity of her lover, felt that she was degraded by her sorrow; hope was, as far as he was concerned, utterly extinguished; and memory presented only a mortifying train of weaknesses and self-deceptions.

But love is not that irremediable calamity which romance has delighted to paint, and the vulgar to believe it. Time, vanity, absence, or any of a hundred other easy remedies, serves to cure the disease in the mild form in which it affects feeble minds, while more Herculean spirits tear off the poisoned garment, though it be with mortal anguish. In a few weeks, the passion which had so long disturbed the peace of Laura was hushed to lasting repose ; but it was the repose of the land where the whirlwind has passed ; dreary and desolate. Her spirits had received a shock from which it was long, very long, ere she could rouse them. And he who had ceased to be an object of passion, still excited an interest which no other human being could awaken. Many a wish did she breathe for his happiness ; many a fervent prayer for his reformation. In spite of herself, she lamented the extinguished love, as well as the lost lover ; and never remembered, without a heavy sigh, that the season of enthusiastic attachment was, with her, passed never to return.

But she cordially wished that she might never again behold the cause of so much anguish and humiliation. She longed to be distant from all

chance of such a meeting, and was anxious to recover strength sufficient for her journey to Walbourne. Lady Pelham only waited for her niece's recovery; and, as soon as she could bear the motion of a carriage, they left London.

They travelled slowly, and Laura's health seemed improved by the journey. The reviving breeze of early spring, the grass field exchanging its win-ter olive for a brighter green, the ploughman's cheerful labour, the rovers whistling to his measure, the fresh verdure of the woods, the birds springing busy from the thorn, were objects whose cheering influence would have been lost on many a querulous child of disappointment. But they were industriously improved to their proper use by Laura, who acknowledged in them the freshness of a father, mingling with some cordial drop even the bitter cup of sorrow.

The grief which had fastened on her heart she never obliterated upon her companion. She had always with composure, sometimes with cheerfulness, she never obliquely reflected upon Providence, by insinuating the hardness of her

CHAP. XXI.

THEY travelled slowly, and Laura's health seemed improved by the journey. The reviving breeze of early spring, the grass field exchanging its winter olive for a brighter green, the ploughman's cheerful labour, the sower whistling to his measured step, the larch trees putting forth the first and freshest verdure of the woods, the birds springing busy from the thorn, were objects whose cheering influence would have been lost on many a querulous child of disappointment. But they were industriously improved to their proper use by Laura, who acknowledged in them the kindness of a father, mingling with some cordial drop even the bitterest cup of sorrow.

The grief which had fastened on her heart she never obtruded upon her companion. She behaved always with composure, sometimes with cheerfulness. She never obliquely reflected upon Providence, by insinuating the hardness of her

fate, nor indulged in splenetic dissertations on the inconstancy and treachery of man. Indeed she never, by the most distant hint, approached the ground of her own peculiar sorrow. She could not, without the deepest humiliation, reflect that she had bestowed her love on an object so unworthy. She burnt with shame at the thought of having been so blinded, so infatuated, by qualities merely external. While she remembered, with extreme vexation, that she had suffered Hargrave to triumph in the confession of her regard, she rejoiced that no other witness existed of her folly—that she had never breathed the mortifying secret into any other ear.

In this frame of mind, she repelled with calm dignity every attempt which Lady Pelham made to penetrate her sentiments; and behaved in such a manner that her aunt could not discover whether her spirits were affected by languor of body or by distress of mind. Laura, indeed, had singular skill in the useful art of repulsing without offence; and Lady Pelham, spite of her curiosity, found it impossible to question her niece with freedom. Notwithstanding her youth, and her almost dependent situation, Laura inspired Lady Pelham with involuntary awe. Her dignified manners, her vigorous understanding, the inflexible integri-

ty which descended even to the regulation of her forms of speech, extorted some degree of respectful caution from one not usually over careful of giving offence. Lady Pelham was herself at times conscious of this restraint; and her pride was wounded by it. In Laura's absence she sometimes thought of it with impatience, and resolved to cast it off at their next interview; but whenever they met, the unoffending majesty of Laura effaced her resolution, or awed her from putting it in practice. She could not always, however, refrain from using that sort of inuendo which is vulgarly called *talking at* one's companions; a sort of rhetoric in great request with those who have more spleen than courage, and which differs from common scolding only in being a little more cowardly and a little more provoking. All her Ladyship's dexterity and perseverance in this warfare were entirely thrown away. Whatever might be meant, Laura answered to nothing but what met the ear, and, with perverse simplicity, avoided the particular application of general propositions.

Lady Pelham next tried to coax herself into Laura's confidence. She redoubled her caresses and professions of affection. She hinted, not obscurely, that if Laura would explain her wishes,

they would meet with indulgence, and even assistance, from zealous friendship. Her professions were received with gratitude—her caresses returned with sensibility; but Laura remained impenetrable. Lady Pelham's temper could never brook resistance; and she would turn from Laura in a pet;—the pitiful garb of anger which cannot disguise, and dares not show itself. Laura never appeared to bestow the slightest notice on her caprice, and received her returning smiles with unmoved complacency. She would fain have loved her aunt; but in spite of herself, her affection took feeble root amidst these alternations of frost and sunshine. She was weary of hints and insinuations; and felt not a little pleased that Lady Pelham's fondness for gardening seemed likely to release her, during most of the hours of daylight, from this sort of sharpshooting warfare.

It was several days after their arrival at Walbourne before they were visited by any of the De Courcy family. Undeceived in his hopes of Laura's regard, Montague was almost reluctant to see her again. Yet from the hour when he observed Lady Pelham's carriage drive up the avenue, he had constantly chosen to study at a window which looked towards Walbourne. Lau-

ra, too, often looked towards Norwood, excusing to herself the apparent neglect of her friends, by supposing that they had not been informed of her arrival. Lady Pelham was abroad superintending her gardeners, and Laura employed in her own apartment, when she was called to receive De Courcy. For the first time since the wreck of all her hopes, joy flushed the wan cheek of Laura, and fired her eye with transient lustre. "I shall hear the voice of friendship once more," said she, and she hastened down stairs with more speed than suited her but half-recovered strength. "Dear Mr De Courcy," cried she joyfully advancing towards him! De Courcy scarcely ventured to raise his eyes. Laura held out her hand to him. "She loves a libertine?" thought he, and, scarcely touching it, he drew back. With grief and surprise, Laura read the cold and melancholy expression of his face. Her feeble spirits failed under so chilling a reception; and while, in a low tremulous voice, she inquired for Mrs and Miss De Courcy, unbidden tears wandered down her cheeks.

In replying, Montague again turned his eyes towards her; and, shocked at the paleness and dejection of her altered countenance, remembered only Laura ill and in sorrow. "Good

Heavens !" he exclaimed, with a voice and manner of the tenderest interest, " Laura——Miss Montreville, you are ill—you are unhappy?" Laura, vexed that her weakness should thus extort compassion, hastily dried her tears. " I have been ill," said she, " and am still so weak that any trifle can discompose me." Montague's colour rose. " It is then a mere trifle in her eyes," thought he, " that I should meet her with coldness." " And yet," continued Laura, reading mortification in his face, " it is no trifle to fear that I have given offence where I owe so much gratitude." " Talk not of gratitude, I beseech you," said De Courcy, " I have no claim, no wish, to excite it." " Ah, Mr De Courcy!" cried Laura, bursting into tears of sad remembrance, " has all your considerate friendship, all your soothing kindness to him who is gone, no claim to the gratitude of his child!" Montague felt that he stood at this moment upon dangerous ground, and he gladly availed himself of this opportunity to quit it. He led Laura to talk of her father, and of the circumstances of his death; and was not ashamed to mingle sympathetic tears with those which the narrative wrung from her.

In her detail, she barely hinted at the labour by

which she had supported her father; and avoided all allusion to the wants which she had endured. If any thing could have exalted her in the opinion of De Courcy, it would have been the humility which sought no praise to recompense exertion—no admiration to reward self-denial. “The praise of man is with her as nothing,” thought he, gazing on her wasted form and faded features with fonder adoration than ever he had looked on her full blaze of beauty. “She has higher hopes and nobler aims. And can such a creature love a sensualist!—Now, too, when his infamy cannot be unknown to her! Yet it must be so—she has never named him, even while describing scenes where he was daily present; and why this silence, if he were indifferent to her? If I durst mention him!—but I cannot give her pain.”

From this reverie De Courcy was roused by the entrance of Lady Pelham, whose presence brought to his recollection the compliments and ceremonial which Laura had driven from his mind. He apologized for having delayed his visit; and excused himself for having made it alone, by saying that his sister was absent on a visit to a friend, and that his mother could not yet venture abroad; but he warmly entreated that the

ladies would wave etiquette, and see Mrs De Courcy at Norwood. Lady Pelham, excusing herself for the present on the plea of her niece's indisposition, urged De Courcy to direct his walks often towards Walbourne, in charity, she said, to Laura, who being unable to take exercise, spent her forenoons alone, sighing, she supposed, for some Scotch Strephon. Laura blushed; and Montague took his leave, pondering whether the blush was deepened by any feeling of consciousness.

"She has a witchcraft in her that no language can express—no heart withstand——" said De Courcy, suddenly breaking a long silence, as he and his mother were sitting tête-à-tête after dinner.

"Marriage is an excellent talisman against witchcraft," said Mrs De Courcy, gravely; "but Miss Montreville has charms which will delight the more the better they are known. There is such noble simplicity, such considerate benevolence, such total absence of vanity and selfishness in her character, that no woman was ever better fitted to embellish and endear domestic life."

"Perhaps in time," pursued De Courcy, "I might have become not unworthy of such a

companion—But now it matters not,”—and, suppressing a very bitter sigh, he took up a book which he had of late been reading to his mother.

“You know, Montague,” said Mrs De Courcy, “I think differently from you upon this subject. I am widely mistaken in Miss Montreville, if she could bestow her preference on a libertine, knowing him to be such.”

Montague took involuntary pleasure in hearing this opinion repeated; yet he had less faith in it than he usually had in the opinions of his mother. “After the emotion which his presence excited,” returned he,—“an emotion which even these low people—I cannot think of it with patience,” cried he, tossing away the book, and walking hastily up and down the room. “To betray her weakness, her *only* weakness, to such observers—to the wretch himself.”

“My dear Montague, do you make no allowance for the exaggeration, the rage for the romantic, so common to uneducated minds?”

“Wilkins could have no motive for inventing such a tale,” replied De Courcy; “and if it had *any* foundation, there is no room for doubt.”

“Admitting the truth of all you have heard,”

resumed Mrs De Courcy, "I see no reason for despairing of success. If I know any thing of character, Miss Montreville's attachments will ever follow excellence, real or imaginary. Your worth is real, Montague; and, as such, it will in time approve itself to her."

"Ah, Madam, had her affection been founded even on imaginary excellence, must it not now have been completely withdrawn—now, when she cannot be unacquainted with his depravity. Yet she loves him still.—I am sure she loves him. Why else this guarded silence in regard to him?—Why not mention that she permitted his daily visits—saw him even on the night when her father died?"

"Supposing," returned Mrs De Courcy, "that her affection had been founded upon imaginary excellence, might not traces of the ruins remain perceptible, even after the foundation had been taken away? Come, come, Montague, you are only four-and-twenty, you can afford a few years patience. If you act prudently, I am convinced that your perseverance will succeed; but if it should not, I know how you can bear disappointment. I am certain that your happiness depends not on the smile of any face, however fair."

"I am ashamed," said De Courcy, "to con-

fess how much my peace depends upon Laura. You know I have no ambition—all my joys must be domestic. It is as a husband and a father that all my wishes must be fulfilled—and all that I have ever fancied of venerable and endearing, so meet in her, that no other woman can ever fill her place.”

“That you have no ambition,” replied Mrs De Courcy, “is one of the reasons why I join in your wishes. If your happiness had any connection with splendour, I should have regretted your choice of a woman without fortune. But all that is necessary for your comfort you will find in the warmth of heart with which Laura will return your affection—the soundness of principle with which she will assist you in your duties. Still, perhaps, you might find these qualities in others, though not united in an equal degree; but I confess to you, Montague, I despair of your again meeting with a woman whose dispositions and pursuits are so congenial to your own;—a woman, whose cultivated mind and vigorous understanding, may make her the companion of your studies as well as of your lighter hours.”

“My dear mother,” cried De Courcy, affectionately grasping her hand, “it is no wonder that I persecute you with this subject so near my

heart; for you always, and you alone, support my hopes. Yet should I even at last obtain this treasure, I must ever regret that I cannot awaken the enthusiasm which belongs only to a first attachment."

"Montague," said Mrs De Courcy, smiling, "from what romance have you learnt that sentiment? However I shall not attempt the labour of combating it, for I prophesy that, before the change can be necessary, you will learn to be satisfied with being loved with reason."

"Many a weary day must pass before I can even hope for this cold preference. Indeed, if her choice is to be decided by mere rational approbation why should I hope that it will fall upon me? Yet, if it be possible, her friendship I will gain—and I would not exchange it for the love of all her sex."

"She already esteems you—highly esteems you," said Mrs De Courcy; "and I repeat that I think you need not despair of animating esteem into a warmer sentiment. But will you profit by my knowledge of my sex, Montague? You know, the less use we make of our own wisdom, the fonder we grow of bestowing it on others in the form of advice! Keep your secret carefully. Much of your hope depends on your caution."

Prétensions to a pre-engaged heart are very generally repaid with dislike."

Montague promised attention to his mother's advice; but added, that he feared he should not long be able to follow it. "I am a bad dissembler," said he, "and on this subject, it is alleged, that ladies are eagle-eyed."

"Miss Montreville, of all women living, has the least vanity," returned Mrs De Courcy; "and you may always reinforce your caution, by recollecting that the prepossessions which will certainly be against you as a lover, may be secured in your favour as a friend."

The next day found De Courcy again at Walbourne; and again he enjoyed a long and private interview with Laura. Though their conversation turned only on indifferent subjects, De Courcy observed the settled melancholy which had taken possession of her mind. It was no querulous complaining sorrow, but a calm sadness, banishing all the cheerful illusions of a life which was still valued as the preparation for a better. To that better world all her hopes and wishes seemed already fled; and the saint herself seemed waiting, with resigned desire, for permission to depart. De Courcy's fears assigned to her melancholy its true cause. He would have given

worlds to know the real state of her sentiments, and to ascertain how far her attachment had survived the criminality of Hargrave. But he had not courage to probe the painful wound. He could not bear to inflict upon Laura even momentary anguish ; perhaps he even feared to know the full extent of those regrets which she lavished on his rival. With scrupulous delicacy he avoided approaching any subject which could at all lead her thoughts towards the cause of her sorrow, and never even seemed to notice the dejection which wounded him to the soul.

“ The spring of her mind is for ever destroyed,” said he to Mrs De Courcy, “ and yet she retains all her angelic benevolence. She strives to make pleasing to others, the objects which will never more give pleasure to her.” Mrs De Courcy expressed affectionate concern, but added, “ I never knew of a sorrow incurable at nineteen. We must bring Laura to Norwood, and find employments for her suited to her kindly nature. Meanwhile do you exert yourself to rouse her ; and, till she is well enough to leave home, I shall freely resign to her all my claims upon your time.”

De Courcy faithfully profited by his mother's permission, and found almost every day an excuse

for visiting Walbourne. Sometimes he brought a book which he read aloud to the ladies; sometimes he borrowed one, which he chose to return in person; now he wished to shew Laura a medal, and now he had some particularly fine flower-seeds for Lady Pelham. Chemical experiments were an excellent pretext; for they were seldom completed at a visit, and the examination of one created a desire for another. Laura was not insensible to his attentions. She believed that he attributed whatever was visible of her depression to regrets for her father; and she was by turns ashamed of permitting her weakness to wear the mask of filial piety, and thankful that she escaped the degradation of being pitied as a love-sick girl.

But love had now no share in Laura's melancholy. Compassion, strong indeed to a painful excess, was the only gentle feeling that mingled with the pain of remembering Hargrave. Who that, in early youth, gives way to the chilling conviction that nothing on earth will ever again kindle a wish or a hope, can look without sadness on the long pilgrimage which spreads before him? Laura looked upon her's with resigned sadness, and a thousand times repeated to herself that it was but a point, compared with what lay be-

yond. Hopeless of happiness, she yet forced herself to seek short pleasure in the charms of nature, and the comforts of affluence; calling them the flowers which a bountiful hand had scattered in the desert which it was needful that she should tread alone. It was with some surprise that she found De Courcy's visits produce pleasure without requiring an effort to be pleased; and with thankfulness she acknowledged that the enjoyments of the understanding were still open to her, though those of the heart were forever withdrawn.

In the meantime her health improved rapidly, and she was able to join in Lady Pelham's rambles in the shrubbery. To avoid particularity, De Courcy had often quitted Laura to attend on these excursions; and he rejoiced when her recovered strength allowed him to gratify, without imprudence, the inclination which brought him to Walbourne. It often, however, required all his influence to persuade her to accompany him in his walks with Lady Pelham. Her Ladyship's curiosity had by no means subsided. On the contrary, it was rather exasperated by her conviction that her niece's dejection had not been the consequence of ill health, since it continued after that plea was removed; and Laura was

constantly tormented with oblique attempts to discover what she was determined should never be known.

Lady Pelham's attacks were now become the more provoking, because she could address her hints to a third person, who, not aware of their tendency, might strengthen them by assent, or unconsciously point them as they were intended. She contrived to make even her very looks tormenting, by directing, upon suitable occasions, sly glances of discovery to Laura's face; where, if they found out nothing, they at least insinuated that there was something to find out. She was inimitably dexterous and indefatigable in improving every occasion of inuendo. Any subject, however irrelevant, furnished her with the weapons of her warfare. "Does this flower never open any further?" asked Laura, shewing one to De Courcy—"No," said Lady Pelham, pushing in between them; "that close thing, wrapped up in itself, never expands in the genial warmth; it never shews its heart." "This should be a precious book with so many envelopes," said Laura, untying a parcel.—"More likely," said Lady Pelham, with a sneer, "that what is folded in so many doublings won't be worth looking into." "This day is cold for the season," said De

Courcy, one day warming himself after his ride. "Spring colds are the most chilling of any," said Lady Pelham. "They are like a repulsive character in youth ; one is not prepared for them. The frosts of winter are natural."

Lady Pelham was not satisfied with using the occasions that presented themselves ; she invented others. When the weather confined her at home, and she had nothing else to occupy her, she redoubled her industry. "Bless me, what a sentiment!" she exclaimed, affecting surprise and consternation, though she had read the book which contained it above twenty times before.—'Always live with a friend as if he might one day become an enemy!' I can conceive nothing more detestable. A cold-hearted suspicious wretch! Now to a friend I could not help being all open and ingenuous ; but a creature capable of such a thought could never have a friend." Lady Pelham ran on for a while, contrasting her open ingenuous self, with the odious character which her significant looks appropriated to her niece, till even the mild Laura was provoked to reply. Fixing her eyes upon her aunt with calm severity, "If Rochefoucault meant," said she, "that a friend should be treated with suspicious confidence, as if he might one day betray, I agree

with your Ladyship in thinking such a sentiment incompatible with friendship ; but we are indebted to him for a useful lesson, if he merely intended to remind us that it is easy to alienate affection without proceeding to real injury, and very possible to forfeit esteem without incurring serious guilt."—The blood mounted to Lady Pelham's face, but the calm austerity of Laura's eye imposed silence, and she continued to turn over the pages of her book, while her niece rose and left the room. She then tossed it away, and walked angrily up and down, fretting between baulked curiosity and irritated pride.

Finding every other mode of attack unsuccessful, she once more resolved to have recourse to direct interrogation. This intention had been frequently formed, and as often defeated by the dignified reserve of Laura ; but now that Lady Pelham felt her pride concerned, she grew angry enough to be daring. It was so provoking to be kept in awe by a mere girl ! a dependent ! Lady Pelham could at any time meditate herself into a passion ; she did so on the present occasion ; and accordingly resolved and executed in the same breath. She followed Laura to her apartment, determined to insist upon knowing what affected her spirits. Laura received her with a smile so

gracious, that, spite of herself, her wrath began to evaporate. Conceiving it proper, however, to maintain an air of importance, she began with an aspect which announced hostility, and a voice in which anger increased intended gravity into surliness. "Miss Montreville, if you are at leisure I wish to speak with you."

"Quite at leisure, Madam," said Laura in a tone of the most conciliating good humour, and motioning her aunt to a seat by the fire.

"It is extremely unpleasant," said Lady Pelham, tossing her head to escape the steady look of inquiry which Laura directed towards her; "it is extremely unpleasant (at least if one has any degree of sensibility) to live with persons who always seem unhappy, and are always striving to conceal it, especially when one can see no cause for their unhappiness."

"It must indeed be very distressing," returned Laura, mentally preparing for her defence.

"Then I wonder," said Lady Pelham, with increased acrimony of countenance, "why you choose to subject me to so disagreeable a situation. It is very evident that there is something in your mind which you are either afraid or ashamed to tell."

"I am sorry," said Laura, with unmoved self-

possession, "to be the cause of any uneasiness to your Ladyship. I do not pretend that my spirits are high, but I should not have thought their depression unaccountable. The loss of my only parent, and such a parent! is reason for lasting sorrow; and my own so recent escape from the jaws of the grave, might impose seriousness upon levity itself."

"I have a strong notion, however, that none of these is the true cause of your penseroso humours. Modern misses don't break their hearts for the loss of their parents.—I remember you fainted away just when Mrs Harrington was talking to me of Colonel Hargrave's affair; and I know he was quartered for a whole year in your neighbourhood."

Lady Pelham stopped to reconnoitre her niece's face, but without success; for Laura had let fall her scissars, and was busily seeking them on the carpet.

"Did you know him?" inquired Lady Pelham.

"I have seen him," answered Laura, painfully recollecting how little she had really known him.

"Did he visit at Glenalbert?" resumed her

Ladyship, recovering her temper, as she thought she had discovered a clue to Laura's sentiments.

"Yes, Madam, often;" replied Laura, who having, with a strong effort, resumed her self-possession, again submitted her countenance to inspection.

"And he was received there as a lover I presume?" said Lady Pelham, in a tone of interrogation.

Laura fixed on her aunt one of her cool commanding glances. "Your Ladyship," returned she, "seems so much in earnest, that if the question were a little less extraordinary, I should almost have thought you expected a serious answer."

Lady Pelham's eyes were not comfortably placed, and she removed them by turns to every piece of furniture in the apartment. Speedily recovering herself, she returned to the charge, "I think, after the friendship I have shewn, I have some right to be treated with confidence."

"My dear Madam," said Laura, gratefully pressing Lady Pelham's hand between her own, "believe me, I am not forgetful of the kindness which has afforded me shelter and protection: but there are some subjects of which no degree of

intimacy will permit the discussion. It is evident, that whatever proposals have hitherto been made to me, have received such an answer as imposes discretion upon me. No addresses which I accept shall ever be a secret from your Ladyship—those which I reject I am not equally entitled to reveal.”

“By which I understand you to say, that you have rejected Colonel Hargrave?” said Lady Pelham.

“By no means,” answered Laura, with spirit, “I was far from saying so. I merely intended to express my persuasion, that you are too generous to urge me on a sort of subject where I ought not to be communicative.”

“Very well, Miss Montreville,” cried Lady Pelham, rising in a pet, I comprehend the terms on which you choose that we should live. I may have the honour of being your companion, but I must not aspire to the rank of a friend.”

“Indeed, my dear aunt,” said Laura, in a voice irresistibly soothing, “I have no earthly wish so strong as to find a real friend in you: but,” added she, with an insinuating smile, “I shall never earn the treasure with tales of luckless love.”

“Well, Madam,” said Lady Pelham, turning

to quit the room, "I shall take care for the future not to press myself into your confidence; and as it is not the most delightful thing in the world to live in the midst of ambuscades, I shall intrude as little as possible on your more agreeable engagements."

"Pray don't go," said Laura, with perfect good humour, and holding upon her delicate fingers a cap which she had been making, "I have finished your cap. Pray have the goodness to let me try it on."

Female vanity is at least a *sexagénaire*. Lady Pelham sent a side-glance towards the cap. "Pray do," said Laura, taking her hand, and coaxingly pulling her back. "Make haste then," said Lady Pelham, sullenly, "for I have no time to spare." "How becoming," cried Laura, as she fixed on the cap, "I never saw you look so well in any thing. Look at it;" and she held a looking-glass to her aunt. The ill humour which had resisted the graces of the loveliest face in the world, could not stand a favourable view of her own; and Lady Pelham quitted Laura with a gracious compliment to her genius for millinery, and a declaration, that the cap should be worn the next day, in honour of a visit from Mr De Courcy and Harriet.

The next day the expected guests dined at Walbourne. As Harriet had just returned from her excursion, this was the first time that she had seen Laura, and the meeting gave them mutual pleasure. Harriet seemed in even more than usual spirits; and Laura, roused by the presence of persons whom she loved and respected, shewed a cheerfulness more unconstrained than she had felt since her father's death. Montague, who watched her assiduously, was enchanted to perceive that she could once more smile without effort; and, in the joy of his heart, resumed a gaiety which had of late been foreign to him. But the life of the party was Lady Pelham; for who could be so delightful, so extravagantly entertaining as Lady Pelham could be when she pleased? And she did please this afternoon; for a train of fortunate circumstances had put her into high good humour. She not only wore the becoming cap; but had hit, without difficulty, the most becoming mode of putting it on. The cook had done her office in a manner altogether faultless; and the gardener had brought in such a sallad! its like had never been seen in the county.

Miss De Courcy was extremely anxious that Laura should pass a few days at Norwood. But

Laura, remembering the coolness which had of late subsisted between herself and Lady Pelham, and unwilling to postpone her endeavours to efface every trace of it, objected that she could not quit her aunt for such a length of time. Harriet immediately proposed to invite Lady Pelham.—“I’ll set about it this moment, while she’s in the vein,” said she. “This sunshine is too bright to last.” Laura looked very grave, and Harriet hastened to execute her purpose.

There is no weakness in their neighbours which mankind so instinctively convert to their own use as vanity. Except to secure Laura’s company, Harriet had not the slightest desire for Lady Pelham’s. Yet she did not even name her friend while she pressed Lady Pelham so earnestly to visit Norwood, that she succeeded to her wish, and obtained a promise that the ladies should accompany her and her brother home on the following day.

When at the close of an agreeable evening, Laura attended her friend to her chamber, Harriet, with more sincerity than politeness, regretted that Lady Pelham was to join their party to Norwood. “I wish the old lady would have allowed you to go without her,” said she. “She’ll interrupt a thousand things I had to say to you. However, my mother can keep her in conversa-

tion. She'll be so delighted to see you, that she'll pay the penalty without a grudge." "I shall feel the more indebted to your mother's welcome," said Laura, with extreme gravity, "because she will extend it to a person to whom I owe obligations that cannot be repaid." Harriet, blushing, apologized for her freedom; and Laura accepting the apology with smiles of courtesy and affection, the friends separated for the night.

CHAP. XXII.

NORWOOD had appeared to Laura to be little more than a mile distant from Walbourne. The swellings of the ground had deceived her. It was more than twice that distance. As the carriage approached Norwood, Laura perceived traces of a noble park, changed from its former purpose to one more useful, though less magnificent. The corn fields were intersected by venerable avenues, and studded with gigantic elm and oak. Through one of these avenues, straight as a dart, and darkened by the woods which closed over it, the party drove up to a massive gate. In the door of a turreted lodge, overgrown with hornbeam, stood the grey-haired porter, waiting their arrival. He threw open the gate with one hand, and respectfully stood with his hat in the other, while De Courcy checked his horse to inquire for the old man's family.

The avenue now quitted its formality, to wind

along the bank of a rapid stream, till the woods suddenly opening to the right, discovered the lawn, green as an emerald, and kept with a neatness truly English. Flowering shrubs were scattered over it, and here and there a lofty forest-tree threw its quivering shadow; while tall spruce-firs, their branches descending to the ground, formed a contrast to its verdure. At the extremity of this lawn stood Norwood, a large castellated building; and, while Laura looked at it, she imagined the interior dull with baronial magnificence.

The carriage drove up to the door, and Laura could not help smiling at the cordial welcome which seemed to await De Courcy. The great Newfoundland dog that lay upon the steps leapt upon him, and expressed his joy by a hundred clumsy gambols; while John, the old servant whom she had seen in Audley Street, busied himself about his master, with an officiousness which evidently came from the heart, leaving Lady Pelham's attendants to wait upon their mistress and her companions. De Courcy, giving his hand to Lady Pelham, conducted her, followed by Harriet and Laura, into the room where Mrs De Courcy was sitting; and the next moment his

heart throbbed with pleasure, while he saw the beloved of his soul locked in his mother's arms.

When the first joy of the meeting was over, Laura had leisure to observe the interior of the mansion, which differed not less from her expectations than from any thing she had before seen. Though it was equally remote from the humble simplicity of her cottage at Glenalbert, and the gaudiness of Lady Pelham's more modern abode, she saw nothing of the gloomy splendour which she had fancied ; every thing breathed comfort and repose. The furniture, though not without magnificence, was unadorned and substantial, grandeur holding the second place to usefulness. The marble hall through which she had entered, was almost covered with matting. In the spacious room in which she was sitting, the little Turkey carpet of our forefathers had given place to one of homelier grain but of far larger dimensions. The apartment was liberally stored with couches, footstools, and elbow chairs. A harp occupied one window, a piano-forte stood near it ; many books were scattered about, in bindings which shewed they were not meant for ornament : and in the chimney blazed a fire which would have done credit to the days of Elizabeth.

The dinner hour was four ; and punctual to a moment the dinner appeared, plain, neat, and substantial. It was served without tumult, partaken of with appetite, and enlivened by general hilarity, and good will.

When the ladies rose from table, Harriet offered to conduct Laura through the other apartments, which exactly corresponded with those she had seen. The library was spacious ; and besides an excellent collection of books, contained globes, astronomical instruments, and cabinets of minerals and coins. A smaller room which opened from it, used as De Courcy's laboratory, was filled with chemical and mechanical apparatus. Comfort, neatness, and peace reigned everywhere, and Norwood seemed a fit retreat for literary leisure and easy hospitality.

Between music, work, and conversation, the evening passed cheerfully away ; nor did Laura mark its flight till the great house-clock struck nine. The conversation suddenly paused ; Harriet laid aside her work ; Mrs De Courcy's countenance assumed a pleasing seriousness ; and Montague, quitting his place by Laura's side, seated himself in a patriarchal-looking chair, at the upper end of the room. Presently John entered, followed by all the domestics of the family.

He placed before his master a reading-desk and a large Bible, and then sat down at a distance with his fellow-servants.

With a manner serious and earnest, as one impressed with a just sense of their importance, Montague read a portion of the Holy Scriptures. He closed the volume ; and all present sunk upon their knees. In plain but solemn language, he offered a petition in the name of all, that all might be endowed with the graces of the Christian spirit. In the name of all he confessed that they were unworthy of the blessings they implored. In the name of all, he gave thanks for the means of improvement, and for the hopes of glory. He next, more particularly, besought a blessing on the circumstances of their several conditions. Among the joyous faces of this happy household, Laura had observed one alone clouded with sorrow. It was that of a young modest-looking girl in deep mourning, whose audible sobs attested that she was the subject of a prayer which commended an orphan to the Father of the fatherless. The worship was closed ; the servants withdrew. A silence of a few moments ensued ; and Laura could not help gazing with delight, not unmingled with awe, on the traces of serene bene-

volence and manly piety, which lingered on the countenance of De Courcy.

"Happy Harriet," said she, when she was alone with her friend, "Would that I had been your sister!" Harriet laughed. "You need not laugh, my dear," continued Laura, with most unembarrassed simplicity, "I did not mean your brother's wife, but his sister, and Mrs De Courcy's daughter."

Though Miss De Courcy was much less in Montague's confidence than her mother, she was not ignorant of his preference for Laura; but Mrs De Courcy had so strongly cautioned her against even hinting this preference to the object of it, that though she but half-guessed the reasons of her mother's injunctions, she was afraid to disobey. That Laura was even acquainted with Hargrave was unknown to Harriet; for De Courcy was almost as tenacious of Laura's secret as she herself was, and would as soon have thought of giving up his own heart to the frolics of a kitten, as of exposing that of Laura to the *badinage* of his sister. This kind precaution left Laura perfectly at her ease with Harriet, an ease which would quickly have vanished, had she known her to be acquainted with her humiliating story.

The young ladies had rambled over half the grounds of Norwood before the family had assembled at a cheerful breakfast; and as soon as it was ended, Harriet proposed that Laura should assist her with her advice in composing a water-colour drawing from one of her own pictures. "We'll leave Lady Pelham and my mother in possession of the drawing-room," said she, "for the pictures all hang in the library. I wanted them put up in the sitting-room, but Montague would have them where they are—and so he carried his point, for mamma humours him in every thing." "Perhaps," returned Laura, "Mrs De Courcy thinks he has some right to dictate in his own house." "Well, that's true," cried Harriet. "I protest I had forgotten that this house was not my mother's."

The picture which Miss De Courcy had fixed upon, was that of Leonidas, and Laura would far rather have been excused from interference; yet, as she could not with propriety escape, nothing remained but to summon her composure, and to study anew this resemblance of her unworthy lover. She took her work, and began quietly to superintend Harriet's progress. Their employments did not interrupt conversation; and though Laura's was at first a little embarrassed, she soon

recovered her ease. "Do touch the outline of the mouth for me," said Harriet; "I can't hit the resemblance at all." Laura excused herself, saying, that since her fever, her hand had been unsteady. "Oh, here's Montague; he'll do it. Come hither Montague, and sketch a much prettier mouth than your own." De Courcy, who had approached his sister before he understood her request, shrunk back. She could scarcely have proposed an employment less agreeable to him; and he was hastily going to refuse it, when, happening to meet the eye of Laura, in the dread that she should detect his consciousness, he snatched the pencil and began.

Harriet having thus transferred her work, quickly found out other occupation. "O, by the by, my dear," said she to Laura, "your Leonidas is the greatest likeness in the world of my old beau, Colonel Hargrave. Bless me, how she blushes! Ah! I see Hargrave has not been so long in Scotland for nothing!"

"Take away that thing, Harriet," cried De Courcy, quite thrown off his guard, and pushing the drawing from him. "I see no reason why Miss Montreville and I should both do for you what you ought to be doing for yourself."

"Heyday, what ails the man," cried Harriet,

looking after her brother to the window, whither he had retreated. "You need not be angry with me for making Laura blush. I dare say she likes it; it becomes her so well."

"If you are accustomed to say such strange things to your friends, my dear Harriet," said Laura, "the blushes you raise will not always have that advantage. The colourings of anger are not generally becoming."

"So, with that meek face of yours, you would have me believe that it is downright rage which has made you all scarlet. No, no, my dear—there is rage, and there is the colour of it too (pointing to Montague's face); and if you'll put your two heads together before the glass, you will see whether the colours are a bit alike!"

Montague, recovering his temper, tried to laugh, and succeeded very ill. "I don't wonder you laugh," said Laura, not venturing to look round to him, "at hearing Harriet, on such slender grounds, exalt such a matter-of-fact person as myself, into the heroine of a romance. But, to spare your imagination, Harriet, I will tell you, that your old beau, as you call him, being the handsomest man I had seen, I saw no harm in making use of his beauty in my picture."

"Well, I protest," cried Harriet, "it was

quite by accident I thought of mentioning it, for I had not the least idea that ever you had seen Hargrave."

"And, now that you have made that mighty discovery," said De Courcy, endeavouring to appear unconcerned, "I suppose you'll poison Miss Montreville; for you know you were so in love with Hargrave, that I was obliged to put a rail round the fish-pond to prevent *felo de se*."

"In love," said Harriet, yawning, "ay, so I was indeed, for three whole days once when I had nothing else to do. But only think of the sly girl never even to name him to me! Well! well! I shall worm it all out of her when we are by ourselves, though she won't blab before you."

"I will give you an opportunity this moment," said De Courcy, who, quite unable to bear the subject any longer, determined to make his mother interrupt it, and immediately went in search of her. In a few minutes Mrs De Courcy appeared, and dismissed her unwilling daughter to escort Lady Pelham to the flower-garden, while Laura preferred remaining at home.

At the next opportunity, Harriet executed her threat, in so far as depended upon her. She did what she could to rally Laura out of her secret,

but she totally failed of success. Laura, now upon her guard, not only evaded making any discovery, but, by the easy indifference of her answers, convinced Harriet that there was nothing to discover. Indeed, her suspicion was merely a transient thought, arising from Laura's confusion at her sudden attack, and scarcely outlived the moment that gave it birth; though the emotion which Montague had shewn, confirmed his sister in the belief of his attachment to Laura.

The subject thus entirely dropped which Laura could never approach without pain, the time of her visit to Norwood glided away in peace and comfort, every day lessening the dejection which she had believed, nay almost wished, would follow her to the grave. Still, however, the traces of it were sufficiently visible to the observant eye of love; and Montague found in it an interest not to be awakened by the brightest flashes of gaiety. "There is a charm inexpressible in her sadness," said he to Mrs De Courcy. "I think," replied Mrs De Courcy, "I can observe that that charm is decaying. Indeed, if it should entirely disappear before your fates are more closely united, you need not lament its departure. These cypresses look graceful bending over the urn there

in the vista, but I should not like them to darken the sitting-room."

The only habit, common to love-lorn damsels, in which Laura indulged, was that of preferring solitary rambles; a habit, however, which had been imbibed long before she had any title to that character. Delighted with the environs of Norwood, she sometimes wandered beyond the dressed ground into the park, where art still embellished without restraining nature. The park might, indeed, have better deserved the name of an ornamented farm; for the lawns were here and there diversified by corn fields, and enlivened by the habitations of the labourers necessary to the agriculturist. These cottages, banished by fashion far from every lordly residence, were contrived so as to unite beauty with usefulness; they gave added interest to the landscape even to the eye of a stranger, but far more to that of De Courcy, for he knew that every one of them contained useful hands or grateful hearts: youth for whom he provided employment, or age whose past services he repaid. Here the blue smoke curled from amidst the thicket; there the white wall enlivened the meadow; here the casement flashed bright with the setting sun; there the

woodbine and the creeping rose softened the colouring which would have glared on the eye.

Laura had followed the windings of a little green lane, till the woods which darkened it suddenly opened into a small field, sheltered by them on every side, which seemed to form the territory of a cottage of singular neatness and beauty. In a porch covered with honeysuckle, which led through a flower-garden to the house, a lovely little boy about three years old was playing with De Courcy's great Newfoundland dog. The child was stretching on tiptoe to hug with one arm the neck of his rough companion; while with the other hand he was playfully offering the animal a bit of bread, and then snatching it in sport away. Neptune, not used to be so tantalized, made a catch at his prey; but the child succeeded in preserving his prize, and laughing, hid it behind him. The next moment Laura saw the dog throw him down, and heard a piercing cry. Fearless of personal danger, she ran to his assistance. The child was lying motionless on his face; while, with one huge paw laid on his back, Neptune was standing over him, wagging his tail in triumph. Convinced that the child was unhurt, and that the scream had been caused merely by fear, Laura spoke to the dog, who immediately quitted his posture to fawn

upon her. She lifted the child from the ground and carried him towards the cottage. The poor little fellow, pale with terror, clung round her neck ; but he no sooner saw himself in safety, than, recovering his suspended faculties, he began to roar with all his might. His cries reached the people in the house, who hastened to inquire into their cause ; and Laura was met in the door of the cottage by De Courcy's grey-haired servant, John, who seemed its owner, and a decent old woman, who was his wife.

Laura prefaced her account of the accident by an assurance that the child was not hurt, and the old woman, taking him in her arms, tried to sooth him, while John invited Miss Montreville to enter. She followed him into a room, which, unacquainted as she was with the cleanliness of English cottages, appeared to her quite Arcadian. While Margaret was busy with her little charge, Laura praised the neatness and comfort of John's abode. " It is as snug a place as heart can desire, please you, Ma'am," answered John, visibly gratified ; " and we have every thing here as convenient as in the king's palace, or as my master himself has, for the matter of that." " I thought, John, you had lived in Mr De Courcy's house," said Laura. " Yes, please you, Ma'am,

and so I did, since I was a little fellow no higher than my knee, taken in to run messages, till my young master came of age, and then he built this house for me, that I might just have it to go to when I pleased, without being turned away like; for he knew old folks liked to have a home of their own. So now, of a fine evening, I come home after prayers, and I stay all night; and when it's bad weather, I have the same bed as I have had these forty years; not a penny worse than my master's own." "And if you are employed all day at Norwood," said Laura, "how do you contrive to keep your garden in such nice order?" "Oh! for the matter of that, Ma'am, my master would not grudge me a day's work of the under gardener any time; no, nor to pay a man to work the little patch for me; but only, as he says, the sweetest flowers are of one's own planting, so, of a fine day he often sends me home for an hour or two in the cool, just to put the little place in order." "Mr De Courcy seems attentive to the comfort of every body who comes near him," said Laura. "That he is, Madam; one would think he had an affection like, for every mortal creature, and particularly when they grow old and useless, like me and Margaret. I know who offered him twenty pounds a-year for this house and

the bit of field; but he said, old folks did not like moving, and he would not put us out of this, even though he could give us one twice as good."

"And your rent is lower than twenty pounds, I suppose?" said Laura. "Why, sure, Ma'am, we never pay a penny for it. My master," said John, drawing up his head, and advancing his chest, "my master has the proper true spirit of a gentleman, and he had it since ever he was born; for it's bred in the bone with him, as the saying is. Why, Ma'am, he had it from a child.—I have seen him, when he was less than that boy there, give away his dinner when he was as hungry as a hound, just because a beggar asked it.—Ay, I remember, one day, just two-and-twenty years ago come July, that he was sitting at the door on my knee, eating his breakfast, and he had asked it half a dozen times from Mrs Martin, for he was very hungry; and she did not always attend to him very well. So, up came a woman leading a little ragged creature; and it looked at Master Montague's bread and milk, and said, 'I wish I had some too.' So, says my master, 'here take you some, and I'll take what you leave.'—Well, Ma'am, the brat snapped it all up in a trice, and I waited to see what little master would do.—Well, he just laughed as good na-

turedly ! Then I was going to have got him another breakfast, but my Lady would not allow me. ‘ No, no, John !’ said my Lady, ‘ we must teach Montague the connection between generosity and self-denial.’—These were my Lady’s very words.”

By this time Margaret had succeeded in quieting the child ; and a double allowance of bread and butter restored all his gaiety. “ Come, Nep,” said he, squatting himself down on the ground, where Neptune was lying at Laura’s feet ; “ come, Nep, I’ll make friends ; and there’s half for you, Henry’s own dear Nep.” “ Will you sit upon my knee ?” said Laura, who was extremely fond of children. The boy looked steadily in her face for a few moments, and then holding out his arms to her, said, “ Yes, I will.” “ Whose charming child is this ?” inquired Laura, twisting his golden ringlets round her fingers. The colour rose to old Margaret’s furrowed cheek as she answered, “ He is an orphan, Ma’am.”—“ He is our grandson,” said John, and drew his hand across his eyes. Laura saw that the subject was painful, and she inquired no further. She remained for a while playing with little Henry, and listening to John’s praises of his master ; and then returned homewards.

She was met by De Courcy and Harriet, who were coming in search of her. She related her little adventure, and praised the extraordinary beauty of the child. Oh, that's Montague's protégé!" cried Harriet. "By the by he has not been to visit us since you came; I believe he was never so long absent before. I have a great notion my brother did not want to produce him to you."—"To me!" exclaimed Laura in surprise! "Why not?" But receiving no answer from Harriet, who had been effectually silenced by a look from De Courcy, she turned for explanation to Montague; who made an awkward attempt to laugh off his sister's attack, and then as awkwardly changed the subject.

For some minutes Laura gravely and silently endeavoured to account for his behaviour. "His generosity supports this child," thought she, "and he is superior to blazoning his charity." So having, as greater philosophers have done, explained the facts to agree with her theory, she was perfectly satisfied, and examined them no more. Association carrying her thoughts to the contemplation of the happiness which De Courcy seemed to diffuse through every circle where he moved, she regretted that she was so soon to exchange the enjoyment of equable unob-

trusive kindness, for starts of officious fondness mingling with intervals of cold neglect or peevish importunity.

“Norwood is the Eden of the earth,” said she to Harriet, as they drew their chairs towards the fire, to enjoy a *tête-à-tête* after the family were retired for the night; “and it is peopled with spirits fit for paradise.—Happy you, who need never think of leaving it!”

“Bless you! my dear,” cried Harriet, “there is nothing I think of half so much.—You would not have me an old maid to comb lap-dogs and fatten cats, when I might be scolding my own maids and whipping my own children.”

“Really,” said Laura, “I think you would purchase even these delightful recreations too dearly by the loss of your present society. Sure it were a mad venture to change such a blessing for any uncertainty!”

“And yet, Mrs Graveairs, I have a notion that a certain gallant soldier could inspire you with the needful daring.—Now, look me in the face, and deny it if you can.”

Laura did as she was desired; and, with cheeks flushed to crimson, but a voice of ‘sweet austere composure,’ replied, “Indeed, Miss De Courcy, I am hurt that you should so often have taxed

me, even in sport, with so discreditable a partiality. You cannot be serious in supposing that I would marry an"——adulterer, Laura would have said ; but to apply such an epithet to Hargrave was too much for human firmness, and she stopped.

" I declare she is angry," cried Harriet. " Well, my dear, since it displeases you, I shan't tease you any more ; at least not till I find a new subject. But, pray now, do you intend to practise as you preach. Have you made a vow never to marry ?"

" I do not say so," answered Laura ; " it is silly to assert resolutions which nobody credits. Besides my situation sadly differs from yours. Like the moon, which is rising yonder, I must pursue my course alone. Thousands around me might perhaps warm and enlighten me ; but far distant, their influence is lost ere it reaches me. You are in the midst of a happy family, endeared to you by all that is lovely in virtue ; all that is sacred in kindred.—I know not what would tempt me to resign your situation."

" What would tempt you ?" cried Harriet. " Why, a pretty fellow would. But I verily believe you have been taking your cue from Montague : these are precisely his ideas. I

think he has set his heart upon making me lead apes."

"What makes you think so?" inquired Laura.

"Because he finds out a hundred faults to every man who talks nonsense to me. One is poor; and he thinks it folly to marry a beggar. Another is old, though he's rich; and that would be downrightly selling myself. One's a fool, and t'other's cross; and in short there's no end to his freaks. Only the other day he made me dismiss a creature whom I believe I should have liked well enough in time. I have not half forgiven him for it yet. Poor Wilmot—and I should have had a nice barouche too!"

"What could possibly weigh with your brother against the barouche?" said Laura, smiling.

"Why, my dear, the saucy wretch told me, as plainly as he civilly could, that Wilmot and I had not a grain of prudence between us; ergo, that we should be ridiculous and miserable. Besides, poor Wilmot once persuaded a pretty girl to play the fool; and though he afterwards did every thing he could to prevail on her to be made an honest woman, the silly thing chose rather to break her heart and die; and, ever since, poor Wilmot has been subject to fits of low spirits."

"Is it possible, Harriet, that you can talk so

lightly of a crime so black in its nature, so dreadful in its consequences? Can it seem a trifle to you to destroy the peace, the innocence of a fellow-creature? Can you smile at remorse which pursued its victim even to the grave?"

Tears filled the eyes of Harriet. "Oh no, my dearest," she cried, throwing her arms round Laura's neck; "do not think so hardly of me.—I am a rattle, it is true, but I am not unprincipled."—

"Pardon my injustice, dearest Harriet," said Laura, "in believing, even for a moment, that you were capable of such perversion; and join with me in rejoicing that your brother's influence has saved you from witnessing, from sharing, the pangs of unavailing repentance."

"Indeed," said Harriet, "Montague's influence can do any thing with me; and no wonder. I should be the most ungrateful wretch on earth if I could oppose his wishes. I cannot tell you the thousandth part of the affection he has shewn me. Did you ever hear, my dear, that my father had it not in his power to make any provision for me?"

Laura answered that she had never heard the circumstances of the family at all mentioned.

"Do you know," continued Harriet, "I am certain that Montague is averse to my marrying,

because he is afraid that 'my poverty, and not my will consents.' But he has himself set that matter to rest; for the very morning after I gave Wilmot his *cong  *, Montague presented me with bills for two thousand pounds. The generous fellow told me that he did not offer his gift while Wilmot's suit was pending, lest I should think he bought a right to influence my decision."

"This is just what I should have expected from Mr De Courcy," said Laura, the purest satisfaction beaming in her countenance. "He is ever considerate, ever generous."

"To tell you that he gives me money," cried Harriet rapturously, "is nothing; he gives me his time, his labour, his affection. Do love him, dear Laura! He is the best of all creatures!"

"Indeed I believe it," said Laura, "and I have the most cordial regard for him."—

"Ah, but you must"—Harriet's gratitude to her brother had very nearly been too strong for his secret, and she was on the point of petitioning Laura to return a sentiment warmer than cordial regard, when, recollecting her mother's commands, she desisted; and to fly from the temptation, wished Laura good night, and retired.

It was with sincere regret that Laura, the next

day, took leave of her kind hosts. As De Courcy handed her into the carriage, the tears were rising to her eyes: but they were checked by a glance from Lady Pelham, in which Laura thought she could read mingled scorn and anger. Lady Pelham had remarked the improved spirits of her niece; but, instead of rejoicing that any medicine should have 'ministered to a mind diseased,' she was offended at the success of a remedy applied by any other than herself. She was nettled at perceiving that the unobtrusive seriousness of Mrs De Courcy, and the rattling gaiety of Harriet, had effected what all her brilliant powers had not achieved. Her powers indeed, had been sometimes directed to entertain, but never to console; they had been exerted to purchase admiration, not to win confidence; yet, with a common perverseness, she was angry at their ill success, not sorry for their wrong direction. She did not consider, that real benevolence, or an excellent counterfeit, is the only road to an unadulterated heart. It appeared to her a proof of an ungrateful temper in her niece, that she should yield in so short a time to strangers to whom she owed nothing, what she refused to a relation to whom she owed so much.

She had not been able to forbear from vent-

ing her spleen in little spiteful remarks, and sly stings, sometimes so adroitly given, that they were unobserved, except by the person who was by degrees becoming accustomed to expect them. The presence of the De Courcy family, however, restrained the expression of Lady Pelham's ill humour; and, as she detested restraint (a detestation which she always ascribed to a noble ingenuousness of mind), she nestled, with peculiar complacency, into the corner of the carriage which was to convey her to what she called freedom, namely the liberty to infringe with impunity the rights of others. Laura felt that her reluctance to quit Norwood was a bad compliment to her aunt, and she called a smile to her face as she kissed her hand to her kind friends; yet the contrast between their affectionate looks, and the "lurking devil" in Lady Pelham's eye, did not lessen her regret at the exchange she was making.

Lady Pelham saw the tone of Laura's mind, and she immediately struck up a discord. "Heaven be praised," she cried, "we have at last escaped out of that stupid place! I think it must be something extraordinary that tempts me to spend four days there again." Laura remained silent; for she disliked direct contradiction, and never spoke what she did not think. Lady Pel-

hain continued her harangue, declaring, "that your good sort of people were always intolerably tiresome; that clock-work regularity was the dullest thing in nature; that Norwood was another cave of Trophonius; Mrs De Courcy inspired with the soul of a starched old maid; Harriet animated by the joint spirit of a magpie and a monkey; and Montague by that of a methodist parson." Finally, she again congratulated herself on her escape from such society, and wondered how anybody could submit to it without hanging himself. Laura was accustomed to support Lady Pelham's attacks upon herself with perfect equanimity; but her temper was not proof against this unjust, this unexpected philippic against her friends; and she reddened with anger and disdain, though she had still so much self-command as to reply only, "Your Ladyship is fortunate in being able to lose, without regret, what *others* find it so difficult to replace."

Lady Pelham fully understood the emphasis which was laid on the word *others*, but the mortification to her vanity was compensated by the triumph of discovering the vulnerable side of her niece's temper. This was the first time that she had been conscious of power over it, and severely did Laura pay for the momentary negligence which

had betrayed the secret. Some persons never feel pleasure without endeavouring to communicate it. Lady Pelham acted upon the converse of this amiable principle: and, as an ill-regulated mind furnished constant sources of pain, a new channel of participation was a precious discovery. As often, therefore, as spleen, jealousy, or malice prompted her to annoyance, she had recourse henceforth to this new found weapon; and she varied her warfare through all the changes of hints, insinuations, and that mode of attack the most provoking of all, which, aiming at no particular point, becomes the more difficult to parry. During several months, she made it the occasional instrument of her vengeance for the jealousy which she entertained of Laura's increasing intimacy with the De Courcys; an intimacy which she chose to embitter, though she could not break it off, without depriving herself of acquaintances who were visited by the first people in the country.

Her industry in teasing was not confined to Laura. She inflicted a double stroke, by the petulance or coldness with which she sometimes treated the De Courcys. But though Laura was keenly sensible to these petty wrongs done her friends, the injured passed them over without

much notice. Harriet repaid them with laughter or sarcasm : while Montague seemed to consider them as wholly unworthy of attention. He continued his visits to Walbourne, and accident at last furnished an excuse for their frequency.

In the course of Lady Pelham's improvements, a difficulty chanced to occur, which a slight knowledge of the elements of mathematics would have enabled her to solve. To supply the want of this knowledge, she had recourse to Mr De Courcy, who removed her perplexity with the ease of one conversant with his subject, and the accuracy of one who speaks to a reasoning creature. Lady Pelham was charmed! She was convinced that "of all studies that of mathematics must be the most delightful. She imagined it might *not be* quite impracticable even for a lady, supposing she were so fortunate as to meet with a friend who could assist her." De Courcy, laughing, offered his services, not, it must be owned, with any idea that they would be accepted. Her Ladyship, however, eagerly embraced the offer ; for she was little accustomed to forecast the difficulties of any scheme which entered her brain. In the triumphant expectation that all difficulty would yield to her acuteness, and her brighter abilities gain in a comparison which the plain good-sense of

her niece, she obliged Laura to join in her new pursuit.

Upon the study of this science, so little in favour with a sex who reserve cultivation for faculties where it is least wanting, Laura entered with a pleasure which surprised herself, and she persevered in it with an industry which astonished her teacher. Lady Pelham was, for a little while, the companion of her labours; but, at the first difficulty, she took offence at the unaccommodating thing, which shewed no more indulgence to female than to royal indolence.—Forthwith she was fired with strong aversion to philosophers in bibs, and a horror at *she*-pedants, a term of reproach which a dexterous side-glance could appropriate to her niece, though the author of these memoirs challenges any mortal to say that ever Laura Montreville was heard to mention ellipse or parabola, or to insinuate her acquaintance with the properties of circle or polygon. Nothing moved by Lady Pelham's sneers, Laura continued her studies, impelled partly by the duty of improving the most valuable faculty of an immortal mind, partly by the pleasure which she derived from the study itself. It is true, that her Ladyship's indiscreet use of the secret, made Laura's labours the cause of much merriment to

titterers of both sexes; but we have never discovered that De Courcy esteemed her the less for her persevering industry, or loved her the less for this new subject of mutual interest. He watched with delight the restoration of her mind to its full vigour; and as he had never known her in the blaze of youthful gaiety, he was scarcely sensible of the shade which blended the radiance of her mid-day of life with the sober tints of evening.

The impression of her early disappointment was indeed indelible, but it was no longer overwhelming. She had given the reins to her imagination,—it had fatally misled her; but its power had sustained an irrecoverable shock, and the sway was transferred to reason. She had dreamed of an earthly heaven, and seen that it was but a dream. All her earthly joys had vanished—yet misery had been almost as transient as delight, and she learned the practical use of a truth which all acknowledge in theory. In the course of four months residence at Walbourne, she recovered a placid cheerfulness, which afterwards continued to be the habitual tenor of her mind. If she looked forward to the future events of her life, it was to resolve that they should be subservient to the great end of her being. If she glanced backward,

it was less to lament the disappointment, than to blame the error which had led to it; and she never allowed her thoughts to dwell upon her unworthy lover, except when praying that he might be awakened to a sense of his guilt.

She was chiefly concerned to improve and to enjoy the present; and in this she was successful in spite of the peevish humours of Lady Pelham, mixed occasionally with ebullitions of rage. Those who are furious where they dare, or when the provocation is sufficient to rouse their courage, sometimes chide with impotent perseverance where they are awed from the full expression of their fury: as the sea, which the lightest breeze dashes in billows over the sandbank, frets in puny ripples against the rock that frowns over it. If Lady Pelham's temper had any resemblance to this stormy element, it was not wholly void of likeness to another—for it “changed as it listed,” without any discoverable reason. It would have lost half its power to provoke, and Laura half the merit of her patient endurance, if it had been permanently diabolical. The current, not only serene but sparkling, would reflect with added beauty every surrounding object, then would suddenly burst into foam, or settle into a stagnant marsh. Laura threw oil upon the torrent, and

suffered the marsh to clear itself. She enjoyed Lady Pelham's wit and vivacity in her hours of good-humour, and patiently submitted to her seasons of low spirits, as she complaisantly called them.

Laura at last, undesignedly, opened a new direction to her aunt's spleen. From her first introduction to Lady Pelham, she had laboured assiduously to promote a reconciliation between her aunt and her daughter, Mrs Herbert. Her zeal appeared surprising to Lady Pelham, who could not estimate the force of her motive for thus labouring, to the manifest detriment of her own interest, she being (after Mrs Herbert) the natural heiress of her aunt's fortune. She had seized the moment of complacency; watched the relentings of nature; by turns tried to sooth and to convince; and, in the proper spirit of a peace-maker, adhered to her purpose with meek perseverance. According to the humour of the hour, Lady Pelham was alternately flattered by solicitations that confessed her power, or rendered peevish by entreaties which she was determined to reject, or fired to rage by the recollection of her wrongs. If the more placid frame prevailed, she could ring eternal changes on the same oft-refuted arguments, or adroitly shift the subject by some lively sally

of wit, or some neat compliment to her niece. In her more stormy tempers, she would profess a total inability to pardon; nay, a determination never to attempt it; and took credit for scorning to pretend a forgiveness which she could not practise.

Still Laura was not discouraged: for she had often observed that what Lady Pelham declared on one day to be wholly impossible, on the next became, without any assignable reason, the easiest thing in nature; and that what to-day no human force should wrest from her, was yielded to-morrow to no force at all. She therefore persisted in her work of conciliation; and her efforts at last prevailed so far, that, though Lady Pelham still protested implacability, she acknowledged, that, as there was no necessity for her family feuds being known to the world, she was willing to appear upon decent terms with the Herberts; and, for that purpose, would receive them for a few weeks at Walbourne.

Of this opening, unpromising as it was, Laura instantly availed herself; and wrote to convey the frozen invitation to her cousin, in the kindest language which she was permitted to use. It was instantly accepted; and Mrs Herbert and her husband became the inmates of Walbourne.

Mrs Herbert had no resemblance to her mother. Her countenance was grave and thoughtful; her manners uniformly cold and repulsive. Laura traced in her unbending reserve, the apathy of one whose genial feelings had been blunted by early unkindness. Frank, high-spirited, and imprudent, Herbert was his wife's opposite; and Laura had not been half an hour in his company, before she began to tremble for the effect of these qualities on the irascible temper of her aunt. But her alarm seemed causeless; for the easy resoluteness with which he maintained his opinions, appeared to extort from Lady Pelham a sort of respect; and, though she privately complained to Laura of what she called his assurance, she exempted him, while present, from her attacks, seeming afraid to exert upon him her skill in provoking. Laura began to perceive, that a termagant is not so untameable an animal as she had once imagined, since one glimpse of the master-spirit is of sovereign power to lay the lesser imps of spleen.

But though Lady Pelham seemed afraid to measure her strength with spirits of kindred irascibility, she was under no restraint with Mrs Herbert, upon whom she vented a degree of querulousness which appeared less like the ebullitions of ill-temper, than the overflowings of set-

tled malice. Every motion, every look, furnished matter of censure or of sarcasm. The placing of a book, the pronounciation of a word, the snuffing of a candle, called forth reprehension ; and Laura knew not whether to be most astonished at the ingenious malice which contrived to convert " trifles, light as air," into certain proofs of degeneracy, or at the apathy on which the venomd shaft fell harmless. Mrs Herbert received all her mother's reprimands in silence, without moving a muscle, without announcing, by the slightest change of colour, that the sarcasm had reached further than her ear. If, as not unfrequently happened, the reproof extended into a harangue, Mrs Herbert unmoved withdrew no part of her attention from her netting, and politely suppressed a yawn.

These discourteous scenes were exhibited only in Mr Herbert's absence ; his presence instantly suspended Lady Pelham's warfare ; and Laura inferred that his wife never made him acquainted with her mother's behaviour. That behaviour formed an exception to the general unsteadiness of Lady Pelham ; for to Mrs Herbert she was consistently cruel and insulting. Nothing could be more tormenting to the benevolent mind of Laura, than to witness this system of aggression ;

and she repented having been instrumental in renewing an intercourse which could lead to no pleasing issue.

But the issue was nearer than she expected. One day, in Herbert's absence, Lady Pelham began to discuss with his wife, or rather to her, the never-failing subject of her duplicity and disobedience. She was not interrupted by any expression of regret or repentance from the culprit, who maintained a stoical silence, labouring the while to convey mathematical precision to the crimping of a baby's cap, an employment upon which Lady Pelham seemed to look with peculiar abhorrence. From the turpitude of her daughter's conduct, she proceeded to its consequences. She knew no right, she said, that people had to encumber their relations with hosts of beggarly brats. She vowed that none such should ever receive her countenance or protection. Her rage kindled as she spoke. She inveighed against Mrs Herbert's insensibility; and at last talked herself into such a pitch of fury, as even to abuse her for submitting to the company of one who could not conceal detestation of her;—a want of spirit which she directly attributed to the most interested views;—views which, however, she absolutely swore that she would defeat.

In the energy of her declamation, she did not perceive that Herbert had entered the room, and stood listening to her concluding sentences, with a face of angry astonishment. Advancing towards his wife, he indignantly inquired into the meaning of the tumult. "Nothing," answered she, calmly surveying her handywork; "only my mother is a little angry, but I have not spoken a word." He then turned for explanation to Lady Pelham, whom the flashing of his eye reduced to instantaneous quiet; and, not finding, in her stammering abstract of the conversation, any apology for the insult which he had heard, he took his wife by the arm, and instantly left the house, giving orders that his baggage should follow him to a little inn in the neighbouring village.

Thus did the insolence of one person, and the hasty spirit of another, undo what Laura had for months been labouring to effect. The Herberts never made any attempt at reconciliation, and Lady Pelham would never afterwards hear them mentioned, without breaking out into torrents of abuse, and even imprecation, which made Laura's blood run cold. Yet, with her usual inconsistency, Lady Pelham was vexed at the suspension of her intercourse with the Herberts; because she thus lost even the shadow of power

over her daughter. Not that she acknowledged this cause of regret. No! she eloquently bewailed her hard fate, in being exposed to the censure of the world as at variance with her nearest relatives. She complained that, with a heart "warm as melting charity," she had no one to love or to cherish. Yet Laura could not always forbear smiling at the perverse direction of her aunt's regrets. Lady Pelham was angry, not that her own unkindness had driven her children from her, but that Laura's officious benevolence had brought them to her house; a measure from which, she was pleased to say that no person of common sense could have expected a different issue.

CHAP. XXIII.

IF Lady Pelham repined at the desertion of the Herberts, it was not because their departure consigned her to solitude. Never had Walbourne attracted so many visitors. Lady Pelham's beautiful niece drew thither all the gentlemen of the neighbourhood. The ladies followed them of course. The beauty and modesty of Laura charmed the men, while the women were half-inclined to think it an unfounded slander that such a good-natured, obliging, neat-handed creature studied mathematics, and read Tacitus in the original.

Among the society to which she was introduced by Lady Pelham, and still more among that in which she mingled at Norwood, Laura met with persons of distinguished ability, rank, and politeness. In such company she rapidly acquired that ease of address which alone was wanting to make her manners as fascinating as

they were correct. She grew accustomed to find herself the object of attention, and though no habit could reconcile her to the gaze of numbers, she gradually learnt to carry into these lesser occasions, the self-command which distinguished her in more important concerns. In real modesty and humility she improved every day; for it was the study of her life to improve in them. She retained all the timidity which is the fruit of genuine sensibility and quick perception of impropriety, while she lost that bashfulness which owes its growth to solitude and inexperience. Her personal charms, too, increased as they approached maturity. The symmetry of her form and features was indeed scarcely susceptible of improvement; but added gracefulness gave new attractions to her figure; while the soul lent its improving strength and brightness to animate her face with charms which mere symmetry knows not.

With such qualifications Laura could not fail to excite admiration; yet never perhaps did beauty so seldom listen to its own praises. It was labour lost to compliment one who never rewarded the flatterer with one smile of gratified vanity, or repaid him with one complaisant departure from the simple truth. To the everyday nothings of

the common herd she listened with a weariness which politeness could sometimes scarcely repress. "Oh would," thought she, "that civil things, as they are called, required no answer,—or that one obliging gentleman would undertake the labour of replying to the rest!" If addressed in the language of common-place compliment by one whom she respected, her look of mortification intelligibly said, "Has then your penetration searched me deeper than I know myself, and detected in me the more than childish weakness of valuing myself on such distinctions as those you are praising?"

Laura had no personal vanity; and therefore it required no effort to withstand such praise. She had more merit in the more strenuous but less successful exertions which she made to resist the silent flattery of the respectful glance that awaited her decision, besought her approbation, or reflected her sentiments. Sometimes she thought Montague De Courcy an adept in this sort of flattery. But more frequently when it was administered by him, she forgot to call it by that name; and she was the less upon her guard against his homage, because it was never offered in any more palpable form.

Fortified by the advice of his mother, who had

convinced him that a premature disclosure of his sentiments would be fatal to his hopes, and aware, that were he even successful with Laura, some further provision must be made for his sister, ere he could with justice increase the expence of his establishment, he acted with such caution as to baffle the penetration of common observers. The neighbouring tea-tables were rather inclined to consign his affections to a lively young heiress, whose estate had formerly been dismembered from that of Norwood; for he had flirted with her at a review, and danced with her at the county ball. Moreover, the charitable declared, "that if he was backward, it was not for want of encouragement; that Miss allowed herself strange liberties; though, to be sure, heiresses might do any thing."

In spite of the lynx eye in detecting embryo passion, which is ascribed to the sex, Montague's secret was safe even from Laura herself; or if a momentary suspicion had glanced across her mind, she chid it away with self-accusations of vanity, and recollections of the ten thousand opportunities for a declaration which he had suffered to pass unimproved. Besides, Mrs De Courcy had once hinted that Montague's little fits of melancholy

and absence were occasioned by his partiality for a lady whose affections were pre-engaged ; and Laura was sure that the hint could not refer to herself. Her humiliating secret, she was thankful, was safely lodged in her own breast, and could never be divulged to cover her with mortification.

That which any effort of imagination can ascribe to the influence of Cupid, no woman ever attributed to any other power ; and if, at any time, a shade crossed the open countenance of Montague, Laura called to mind his mother's hint, and added to her truly sisterly affection a pity which lent indescribable softness to her manners towards him. Indeed she always treated him with undisguised regard, and Montague tried to be satisfied. Yet he could not help longing to read in some inadvertent glance, a proof that all the heart was not freely shewn. In vain !—the heart was open as the day ; and all was there that could delight the friend, but nothing that could satisfy the lover.

He had, however, none of the temptations of jealousy to betray his secret, for his rivals were neither numerous nor formidable. Laura was known to have no fortune ; she had little talent for chit-chat, and still less for flattery : thus amid univer-

sal admiration and general good-will, she had only two professed adorers—one, who haunted her while present, toasted her when absent, and raved of her charms, both in prose and rhyme, without ever suffering his pretensions to become so serious as to afford her a pretext for seriously repulsing them—the other, a prudent elderly widower, who, being possessed of a good fortune, and a full-grown daughter, thought himself entitled to consult his taste, without regard to pecuniary views, and conceived that Laura might be useful to the young lady in the double capacities of companion and example. Laura's answer to his proposals was a firm but gentle refusal, while she assured him, that she would not abuse his confidence, nor betray the trust which he had reposed in her. Elderly gentlemen are seldom inclined to publish a repulse. The widower never mentioned his even to Lady Pelham; and Laura, on this occasion, owed to her principle an escape from many a tedious remonstrance, and many a covert attack.

The summer had almost glided away, and Montague continued to fluctuate between hope and fear, his mother to cherish his hopes and allay his apprehensions, Laura to be tranquil, Harriet to be gay, and Lady Pelham to exhibit,

by turns, every various degree of every various humour, when one morning Miss De Courcy, who had lately returned from a visit to a companion, accompanied her brother on horseback to Walbourne. Lady Pelham was, as usual, engaged in her garden, but the visitors had no sooner entered the room where Laura sat, than she observed that they seemed to have exchanged characters. Harriet looked almost thoughtful, while the countenance of De Courcy sparkled with unusual animation. He was gay even to restlessness. He offered to give Laura her lesson in mathematics; and before it was half over, having completely bewildered both himself and his pupil, he tossed away the book, declaring that he never in his life was so little fit for thinking. Pleasure spoke in every tone of his voice, or sported in his eye when he was silent.

After a short visit, enlivened by a hilarity which Laura found more infectious than the gravity of Harriet, he proposed leaving his sister with her friend, while he rode on to call for a gentleman in the neighbourhood. "Begone, then," cried Laura, gaily, "for I long to question Harriet what has given you such enviable spirits this morning." "Ah, she must not betray me," said De Courcy, half-smiling, half-sighing,

"or I forfeit my only chance of being remembered when I am out of sight. If she can be silent, curiosity may perhaps befriend me." "How very humble!" cried Laura,— "as if curiosity were the only name you could find for the interest I take in what makes you gay, or Harriet grave!" "Dear Laura," said De Courcy, ardently, "give the cause what name you will, if you will but think of me." Then snatching her lily hands, he pressed them to his lips, and the next moment was gone.

Confused, surprised, a little displeased, Laura stood silently revolving his behaviour. He had never before made the slightest approach to personal familiarity. Had her frankness invited the freedom? 'Dear Laura!' It was the first time he had ever called her by any name less respectful than Miss Montreville. "Well, and what then—it were mere prudery to be displeased at such a trifle. What," thought she, "can have delighted him so much: Perhaps the lady is kind at last. He need not, however, have vented his transports upon me." And Laura was a little more angry than before.

During her cogitation, Laura forgot that she might apply to her companion for a solution of the mystery; perhaps she did not even recollect

that Harriet was in the room, till happening to turn her head, she met a glance of sly inquisition, which, however, was instantly withdrawn. Harriet made no comment on the subject of her observation. "The man is as much elated," cried she, "as if I were five-and-forty, and had never had a lover before."

"You, my dear Harriet," exclaimed Laura, suddenly recovering her good humour, "is it a conquest of your's which has pleased Mr De Courcy so much?" "Even so," returned Harriet—"Heigho!"

"I congratulate you: and yet it does not seem to delight you quite so much as it does your brother."

"Really, Laura, I am not sure whether it does or not; so I am come to ask you."

"Me! Indeed you have too much confidence in my penetration; but you have, fortunately, abler, and more natural advisers. Your mother"—

"Oh, my mother is so cautious, so afraid of influencing me! when to be influenced is the very thing I want. I do hate caution. Then I can't talk it over with her as I could with you. And then, there's Montague looks so provokingly pleased; and yet he pretends to prim up his mouth,

and say, 'really it is a subject on which he neither can nor ought to give an opinion.'—Pray, advise me, my dear."

"What! before I know who the gentleman is; when perhaps you have even no right to inform me?"

"Pshaw! nonsense.—It is Bolingbroke. But I believe you have never met with him."

"So you would have me advise you to marry a man whom I have never seen; for of course that is the advice you want. Had the balance lain on the other side, no advice would have been thought necessary."

"Poh," cried Harriet pouting, "I don't want to be advised to marry him." "Are you sure," returned Laura, smiling, "that you know what you want."

"Saucy girl! I would have you tell me whether I am ever likely to marry him!"

"Do you think I am by birth entitled to the second-sight, that I should foresee this before I know any thing of the gentleman's merits, or, what is of more consequence, of their rank in your estimation?"

"The man has good legs," said Harriet, plaiting the fingers of her glove with great industry.

"Legs! really, Harriet, I was in hopes I had for once found you serious."

"So I am, my dear; I never was so serious before, and hope I never shall again. Yet I don't know what to think; so I shall just tell you honestly how the matter stands, and you shall think for me."

"I will not promise that; but I own I have some curiosity to hear your *honest* confession."

"Oh you need not peep so archly askance under these long eyelashes; I can stand a direct look, I assure you; for at this moment I have not the slightest preference in the world for Bolingbroke over half a score of others."

"Then what room is there for hesitation?"

"Why, my dear, in the first place, he has a noble fortune: though that goes for nothing with you; secondly, he is really a good creature, and far from a fool; then, to talk in your style I have had advantages in observing his temper and dispositions such as I shall never have with any other man; for his sister and I have been companions from childhood, and I have lived under his roof for months: then, which will weigh with you more than all, he is Montague's particular favourite."

"Great recommendations these, Harriet; suf-

ficient at least to bias any woman who intends to marry. I should like to know Mr Bolingbroke."

"Here is his letter, my dear," said Harriet; "it came inclosed in one to my brother. There is a good deal of the man's turn in it."

Laura took the letter, and read as follows :

"I will not wrong your penetration so much
 "as to suppose that this letter will surprise you,
 "or that you will fail to anticipate the subject
 "on the first glance at the signature. Nor do I
 "write to tell you, in the hackneyed phrase, that
 "the happiness of my whole life depends upon
 "you, because, next to your affection, nothing
 "is so desirable to me as your esteem, and the
 "hope, that, though you should reject my suit,
 "you will continue to respect my understanding.
 "But I may with truth declare, that I prefer
 "you to all women; that I love you not only
 "in spite of your faults, but, perhaps, even the
 "more for them; and that, to forfeit the hope of
 "your affection, would dispel many a long
 "cherished vision of domestic peace, and even
 "some lighter dreams of rapture. Dearest Har-
 "riet, do not, in return for this confession, write
 "me a cold profession of esteem. I know al-

“ ready that you esteem me, for you have long
 “ known me possessed of qualities which inevitably engage esteem ; but I am conscious of a deficiency in those which excite passion, and I
 “ dread that I may never awaken sentiments like
 “ those I feel. Yet it is no small compliment
 “ which I offer, when I suppose you superior to
 “ the attractions which captivate the vulgar of
 “ your sex ; and you may value it the more, because it is perhaps the only one I shall ever
 “ pay you.

“ To say all this, or something like it, has
 “ long been in my thoughts : and, during your
 “ late visit to my sister, occupied them more
 “ than I shall own ; but a dread of I know not
 “ what, forced me to let you depart without offering to your acceptance all that I have to offer. I felt a certainty that I was not yet beloved, and I believe I feared that you, in your
 “ lively way, (so I must call it, since no epithet
 “ which implies reproof must flow from a lover’s
 “ pen), would give utterance to the feeling of
 “ the moment, and bid me think of you no more.
 “ Is it presumption to say, that I hope more
 “ from a more considerate decision ? Ask your
 “ own heart, then, dear Miss De Courcy, whether
 “ time and the assiduities of respectful love can

“ beguile you of such tenderness as is due to a
 “ confiding affectionate husband. Ask yourself,
 “ whether you can ever return my warm at-
 “ tachment to such a degree as will make the
 “ duties of a wife easy and pleasant to you. I
 “ need not assure you that I am not the selfish
 “ wretch who could find joy in receiving those
 “ which were painfully and reluctantly perform-
 “ ed. Be candid with yourself then I adjure
 “ you. Fear not that I shall persecute you with
 “ importunity or complaint. If it must be so, I
 “ will see you no more for some months ; and, at
 “ the end of that time, I shall expect, in reward
 “ of my self-conquest, to be received with cordi-
 “ ality as your brother’s friend. If your sentence
 “ be against me, save yourself the pain of telling
 “ me so ; for I know that it must be painful to
 “ you. Yet judge of the strength of that regard
 “ which is thus anxious to shield you from un-
 “ easiness, at the moment when it anticipates
 “ such pain from your hands. If you can give
 “ me hope (and, observe, when I say hope, I do
 “ not mean certainty), do not tax your delicacy
 “ for studied phrases of acceptance, but write me
 “ even a common card of invitation to Norwood,
 “ and the tenderest billet that ever was penned
 “ by woman, never gave more pleasure than it

" will bring to your very affectionate and obedient
 " servant,

" EDWARD BOLINGBROKE."

Laura could not help smiling at the composed style of this epistle, so different from the only ones of its kind with which she was conversant. A lover confess that his mistress had faults, and that he was sensible of them!—insinuate that he expected not only duty, but willing and graceful duty from his wife! have the boldness to expect that, if his passion were unsuccessful, he should quickly be able to conquer it! Laura felt no inclination to envy her friend a lover so fully in the exercise of his judgment and foresight; but she was pleased with the plain honest rationality of the letter; and, with the materials before her, immediately busied her imagination in its favourite work of sketching and adorning character.

She was recalled from her meditation by another petition for advice. " You see," said Harriet, " he pretends not to expect certainty; but it is much the same whether one run one's neck into the noose, or get entangled so that one can't decently get off. If I could *creditably* contrive to keep him dangling till I had made up my mind," continued she, illustrating the metaphor

with her watch-chain. "Do assist me, my dear ; I am sure you have managed a dozen of them in your time."

"My experience is not so extensive," replied Laura, "and I can really assist you to no *credit-able* method of trifling."

"You would not have me resolve to marry a man whom I don't care a farthing for?"

"No, indeed ! but I think Mr Bolingbroke would have a right to complain, if you gave hopes which you did not fulfil."

"You would have me dismiss him at once then?"

"By no means ; but I would have you think for yourself on a subject of which no other person can judge ; and remember, my dear, that, as your decision has neither been wrested from you by surprise, nor seduced from you by persuasion, you have no excuse for forming a weak or wavering resolution."

Determined that on such a subject she would deliver no opinion, Laura was relieved from some embarrassment by the return of De Courcy. His reflections during his ride had effectually quelled the exuberance of his spirits, and he endeavoured to repair his unguardedness by distant civility. His manner increased the feeling of restraint of

which Laura could not at that time divest herself; and after a short and constrained sequel to a visit which had begun so differently, Montague hurried his sister away.

“ I shall never conquer her indifference,” said he to his mother, after relating the folly of the morning. “ Had you seen her frozen look of displeasure, you would have been convinced.” “ And how, my dear Montague, could you expect Miss Montreville to receive such freedom? like a little village coquette, gasping at the prospect of a first lover? If you are convinced that your secret would still be heard without pleasure, you must redouble your caution to preserve it. But suffer me to warn you against the extreme of reserve into which I have sometimes observed that you are apt to fall. It can only confirm suspicions if they are excited; if not, it will disgust by an appearance of caprice.”

Montague promised to be guarded; and withdrew to seek in his laboratory a refuge from despondence. Those who pursue worldly gains and vulgar pleasures, must cheerlessly toil on, waiting for their reward till their end be attained; but the pursuits of science and of virtue have this advantage peculiar to themselves, that there is reward in the labour, even though the success be

only partial: and, in half an hour, all Montague's cares were absorbed in the muriatic acid. In a few days he again saw Laura, and her sunny smile of welcome revived hopes which she little thought of fulfilling.

When a woman of ordinary delicacy is brought to hesitate upon the proposal of a lover, it is easy, provided prudence be on his side, to conjecture how the balance will turn. Mr Bolingbroke received his card of invitation to Norwood; and his suit advanced prosperously, though slowly. He was a plain unpretending man, seven years at least beyond excuse for any youthful indiscretion; habitually silent, though sure of commanding attention when he spoke. The perfect fairness and integrity of his mind had secured him the respect of all his acquaintance in a degree which he appeared to have precisely estimated; and he never seemed to expect less or to exact more. His calm unobtrusive manners never captivated a stranger, nor gave offence to an intimate. He was kind and generous to a sister, who, twenty years before, had succeeded as his play-thing to tops and marbles; and uniformly respectful to a maiden aunt who had, about the same date, replaced his mother as directress of the family.

His father had long been dead, and in consequence of his steady resistance of all the batteries of charms opened against him, or rather against his L.7000 a-year, the ladies had begun to shake their heads, and pronounce him a determined bachelor. But, notwithstanding their decision, Mr Bolingbroke was resolved to marry, for he considered marriage as one of the duties of his station.

Harriet amused, became customary, pleasing, necessary, to him. "Our dissimilarity will assist us to correct each other's failings," thought he, and his choice was fixed. He was aware that a grave elderly man might find some difficulty in attaching a volatile girl; and though he could not condescend to flatter even his mistress, he was assiduous to please. He bestowed an infinity of little attentions, which were the more gratifying, because, from a man of his temper, they were wholly unexpected. His books, his horses, his carriages, waited but a half-expressed wish. He planned little excursions and parties of pleasure, or contrived to add some agreeable surprise to those which were proposed by others. Far from shewing any paltry jealousy, he treated Miss De Courcy's favourites of both sexes with distinguished politeness; and perhaps he owed his success

with a heart which had withstood more attractive admirers, partly to the agreeable associations which he found means to raise, partly to vanity pleased with power over the philosophic Mr Bolingbroke.

Montague watched the progress of his friend with keen interest, but he conscientiously avoided influencing Harriet's decision. On the contrary, lest the dread of future dependence should weigh with her, he informed her, that should she prefer a single life, or should other circumstances render such a sum important to her, he was determined to double the little fortune he had already given.

While he was anxious to see his sister's happiness secured by her union with an estimable man, he felt that her marriage with Mr Bolingbroke would immediately remove one grand obstacle to his own wishes; for the little dower which he was determined, ere he settled in life, to save for Harriet, would form an addition altogether insignificant to the splendid settlement which was now in her power. There was nothing Quixotic in the justice and generosity of De Courcy, and he had no intention of incurring real difficulty and privation for the sake of adding a trifle to the stores of affluence. He there-

fore considered his sister's marriage as leaving him at full liberty to pursue his inclinations with regard to Laura, if the time should ever arrive when he could declare them without hazarding the forfeiture of even his present stinted measure of favour.

CHAP. XXIV.

One day Miss De Courcy expressed a wish to show Laura the collection of paintings at a celebrated seat in the neighbourhood. Mr. Bolingbroke immediately undertook to procure the permission of the noble owner, who was his relation; and the party was readily arranged. Mrs. Bolingbroke's society, as Mr. Bolingbroke always called it was to convey his aunt, his sister, Harriet, and Miss De Courcy to whom the general warmth of the season had partially restored the use of her limbs. Mrs. Bolingbroke packed herself upon the sofa with the lady, and enjoying the same whole some habit upon the whole household; the Bolingbrokes were, therefore, to take an early breakfast at Norwood, and then proceed on their excursion. Mr. De Courcy and Mr. Bolingbroke were to ride. Lady Pelham and Laura were to join the party in the grounds. The weather proved delightful; and, after

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The weather proved delightful; and, after

spending some hours in examining the paintings, in which Laura derived additional pleasure from the skilful comments of De Courcy, the party proceeded to view the grounds, when she, with almost equal delight, contemplated a finished specimen of modern landscape-gardening. Pursuing, as usual, his cautious plan, Montague divided his attentions pretty equally between the elder ladies and Miss Bolingbroke, bestowing the least part upon her for whom he would willingly have reserved all; while Harriet, in good humour with herself, and with all around her, frankly gave her arm to her lover; and sometimes laughing, sometimes blushing, suffered herself to loiter, to incline her head in listening to somewhat said in a half-whisper, and to answer it in an under tone; without recollecting that she had resolved, till she had *quite* made up her mind, to restrain her habitual propensity to flirting.

De Courcy was certainly above the meanness of envy, yet he could not suppress a sigh as, with Mrs Penelope and his mother leaning on his arms, while Laura walked behind with Miss Bolingbroke, he followed Harriet and his friend into the darkened path which led to a hermitage. The walk was shaded by yew, cypress, and other trees of dusky foliage, which, closing into an arch, ex-

cluded the gaudy sunshine. As they proceeded, the shade deepened into twilight, and the heats of noon gave place to refreshing coolness. The path terminated in a porch of wicker-work, forming the entrance to the hermitage, the walls of which were composed of the roots of trees, on the outside rugged as from the hand of nature, but within polished and fancifully adorned with shells and fossils. Opposite to the entrance, a rude curtain of leopard skin seemed to cover a recess; and Harriet, hastily drawing it aside, gave to view a prospect gay with every variety of cheerful beauty. The meadows, lately cleared from their burden, displayed a vivid green, and light shadows quickly passed over them and were gone. The corn fields were busy with the first labours of the harvest. The village spires were thickly sown in the distance. More near, a rapid river flashed bright to the sun; yet the blaze came chastened to the eye, for it entered through an awning close hung with the graceful tendrils of the passion-flower.

The party were not soon weary of so lovely a landscape, and returning to the more shady apartment, found an elegant collation of fruits and ices, supplied by the gallantry of Mr Bolingbroke. Never was there a more cheerful repast.

Lady Pelham was luckily in good humour, and therefore condescended to permit others to be so too. Laura, happily for herself, possessed a faculty not common to beauties—she could be contented where another was the chief object of attention; and she was actually enjoying the court that was paid to her friend, when, accidentally raising the vine leaf which held the fruit she was eating, she observed some verses pencilled on the rustic table in a hand-writing familiar to her recollection.

Sudden instinct made her hastily replace the leaf, and steal a glance to see whether any other eye had followed her's. No one seemed to have noticed her; but Laura's gaiety had vanished. The lines were distinct, as if recently traced; and Laura's blood ran chill at the thought, that, had she even a few hours sooner visited this spot, she might have met Colonel Hargrave. "He may still be near," thought she; and she wished, though she could not propose, to be instantly gone. None of her companions, however, seemed inclined to move. They continued their merriment, while Laura, her mind wholly occupied with one subject, again stole a glimpse of the writing. It was undoubtedly Hargrave's; and, deaf to all that was passing around her, she fell

into a reverie which was first interrupted by the company rising to depart.

Though she had been in such haste to be gone, she was now the last to go. In her momentary glance at the sonnet, she had observed that it was inscribed to her. "Of what possible consequence," thought she, "can it be to me?" yet she lingered behind to read it. In language half passionate, half melancholy, it complained of the pains of absence and the cruelty of too rigid virtue; but it broke off abruptly, as if the writer had been suddenly interrupted.

So rapidly did Laura glance over the lines, that her companions had advanced but a few paces, ere she was hastening to follow them. On reaching the porch, she saw that the walk was just entered by two gentlemen. An instant convinced her that one of them was Hargrave. Neither shriek nor exclamation announced this discovery, but Laura, turning pale, shrunk back out of view. Her first feeling was eager desire of escape; her first thought, that, returning to the inner apartment, she might thence spring from the lofty terrace, on the verge of which the hermitage was reared. She was deterred, by recollecting the absurd appearance of such an escape, and the surprise and confusion which it would oc-

casion. But what was to be done? There was no third way of leaving the place where she stood, and if she remained, in a few moments Hargrave would be there.

These ideas darted so confusedly through her mind, that it seemed rather by instinct than design, that she drew her hat over her face, and doubled her veil in order to pass him unnoticed. She again advanced to the porch; but perceived, not without consternation, that Hargrave had joined her party, and stood talking to Lady Pelham in an attitude of easy cordiality. Laura did not comment upon the free morality which accorded such a reception to such a character; for she was sick at heart, and trembled in every limb. Now there was no escape. He would certainly accost her, and she must answer him—answer him without emotion! or how would Mr De Courcy—how would his mother construe her weakness! What would Hargrave himself infer from it! What, but that her coldness sprung from mere passing anger! or, more degrading still, from jealousy! The truant crimson now rushed back unbidden? and Laura proceeded with slow but steady steps.

During her short walk she continued to struggle with herself. “Let me but this once com-

mand myself," said she. "And wherefore should I, tot? It is he who ought to shrink.—It is he who ought to tremble!" Yet it was Laura who trembled, when, advancing towards her, Lady Pelham introduced her to Colonel Hargrave as her niece. Laura's inclination of the head, cold as indifference could make it, did not seem to acknowledge former intimacy; and when Hargrave, with a manner respectful even to timidity, claimed her acquaintance, she gave a short answer of frozen civility, and turned away. Shrinking from even the slightest converse with him, she hastily passed on; then determined to afford him no opportunity of speaking to her, she glided in between Mrs De Courcy, who stood anxiously watching her, and Harriet, who was studying the contour of Hargrave's face; and offering an arm to each, she gently drew them forward.

Mr Bolingbroke immediately joined them, and entered into conversation with Harriet; while Mrs De Courcy continued to read the legible countenance of Laura, who silently walked on, revolving in her mind the difference between this and her last unexpected meeting with Hargrave. The freedom of his address to the unfriended girl who was endeavouring to exchange the labour of her hands for a pittance to support exist-

ence, (a freedom which had once found sympathetic excuse in the breast of Laura), she now, not without indignation, contrasted with the respect offered to Lady Pelham's niece, surrounded by the rich and the respectable. Yet while she remembered what had then been her half-affected coldness, her ill-restrained sensibility, and compared them with the total alienation of heart which she now experienced, she could not stifle a sigh which rose at the recollection, that in her the raptures of love and joy were chilled never more to warm. "Would that my preference had been more justly directed," thought she, her eye unconsciously wandering to De Courcy; "but that is all over now."

From idle regrets, Laura soon turned to more characteristic meditation upon the conduct which it was most suitable for her to pursue. Hargrave had joined her party; had been acknowledged, by some of them at least, as an acquaintance; and had particularly attached himself to Lady Pelham, with whom he followed in close conversation. Laura thought he would probably take the first opportunity of addressing himself to her; and if her manner towards him corresponded with the bent of her feelings, consciousness made her fear, that in her distance and constraint Lady Pelham's al-

ready suspicious eye would read more than merely dislike to a vicious character. Hargrave himself, too, might mistake what so nearly resembled her former manner for the veil of her former sentiments. She might possibly escape speaking to him for the present, but if he was fixed in the neighbourhood, (and something of the woman whispered that he would not leave it immediately), they would probably meet where to avoid him was not in her power. After some minutes of close consideration, she concluded, that to treat Colonel Hargrave with easy civil indifference, best accorded with what she owed to her own dignity ; and was best calculated, if he retained one spark of sensibility or discernment, to convince him that her sentiments had undergone an irrevocable change. This method, therefore, she determined to pursue ; making, with a sigh, this grand proviso, that she should find it practicable.

Mrs De Courcy, who guessed the current of her thoughts, suffered it to proceed without interruption ; and it was not till Laura relaxed her brow, and raised her head, like one who has taken his resolution, that her companion, stopping, complained of fatigue ; proposing, as her own carriage was not in waiting, to borrow Lady

Pelham's, and return home, leaving the other ladies to be conveyed in Mrs Penelope's sociable to Norwood, where the party was to dine. Not willing to direct the proposal to Laura, upon whose account chiefly it was made, she turned to Mrs Penelope, and inquired whether she did not feel tired with her walk; but that lady, who piqued herself upon being a hale active woman of her age, declared herself able for much greater exertion, and said she would walk till she had secured an appetite for dinner. Laura, who had modestly held back till Mrs Penelope's decision was announced, now eagerly offered her attendance, which Mrs De Courcy, with a little dissembled hesitation, accepted, smiling to perceive how well she had divined her young favourite's inclinations.

The whole party attended them to the spot where the carriages were waiting. On reaching them, Mr Bolingbroke, handing in Mrs De Courcy, left Laura's side for the first time free to Hargrave, who instantly occupied it; while Montague, the drops standing on his forehead, found himself shackled between Mrs Penelope and Miss Bolingbroke. "Ever dear, ever revered Miss Montreville"—Hargrave began in an insinuating whisper. "Sir!" cried Laura, start-

ing with indignant surprise. "Nay, start not," continued he in an under-voice: "I have much, much to say. Lady Pelham allows me to visit Walbourne; will you permit me to"—Laura had not yet studied her lesson of easy civility, and therefore the courtesy of a slight inclination of the head was contradicted by the tone in which she interrupted him, saying, "I never presume, Sir, to select Lady Pelham's visitors."

She had reached the door of the carriage, and Hargrave took her hand to assist her in entering. Had Laura been prepared, she would have suffered him, though reluctantly, to do her this little service; but he took her unawares, and snatching back her hand as from the touch of a loathsome reptile, she sprang unassisted into her seat.

As the carriage drove off, Mrs De Courcy again apologized for separating Laura from her companions; "though I know not," added she, "whether I should not rather take credit for withdrawing you from such dangerous society. All ladies who have stray hearts must guard them either in person or by proxy, since this formidable Colonel Hargrave has come among us." "He has fortunately placed the more respectable part of us in perfect security," returned Laura, with a

smile and voice of such unembarrassed simplicity as fully satisfied her examiner.

Had Laura spent a lifetime in studying to give pain, which, indeed, was not in all her thoughts, she could not have inflicted a sharper sting on the proud heart of Hargrave, than by the involuntary look and gesture with which she quitted him. The idea of inspiring with disgust, unmixed irresistible disgust, the woman upon whose affections, or rather upon whose passions, he had laboured so zealously and so long, had ever been more than he could bear, even when the expression of her dislike had no witness; but now she had published it to chattering misses, and prying old maids, and more favoured rivals. Hargrave bit his lip till the blood came; and, if the lightning of the eye could scathe, his wrath had been far more deadly to others.

After walking for some minutes surly and apart, he began to comfort himself with the hopes of future revenge. "She had loved him, passionately loved him, and he was certain she could not be so utterly changed. Her behaviour was either all affectation, or a conceit of the strength of her own mind, which all these clever women were so vain of. But the spark still lurked somewhere, whatever she might imagine, and if he

could turn her own weapons against herself."— Then, recollecting that he had resolved to cultivate Lady Pelham's favour, he resumed his station by her side, and was again the courtly, insinuating Colonel Hargrave.

Hargrave had lately acquired a friend, or rather an adviser (the dissolute have no friends), who was admirably calculated to supply the deficiencies of his character as a man of pleasure. Indeed, except in so far as pleasure was his constant aim, no term could, with less justice, have been applied to Hargrave; for his life was chiefly divided between the goadings of temptations to which he himself lent arms, and the pangs of self-reproach which he could not exclude, and would not render useful. The strait and narrow way he never had a settled purpose of treading, but his wanderings were more frequent than he intended, his returns more lingering. The very strength of his passions made him incapable of deep or persevering deceit; he was humane to the suffering which pressed itself on his notice, if it came at a convenient season; and he was disinterested, if neglect of gold deserve the name. Lambert, his new adviser, had no passions, no humanity, no neglect of gold. He was a gamester.

The practice of this profession, for, though a

man of family and fortune he made it a profession, had rendered him skilful to discern, and remorseless to use the weakness of his fellow-creatures. His estate lay contiguous to —, the little town where Hargrave had been quartered when he visited at Norwood; but the year which Hargrave passed at — was spent by Lambert almost entirely in London. He had returned however to the country, had been introduced to Hargrave, and had just fixed upon him as an easy prey, when the soldier was saved for a time, by receiving intimation of his promotion, and ordered to join his regiment in a distant county.

They met again in evil hour, just when Hargrave had half-determined to abandon as fruitless his search after Laura. The necessity of a stimulant was as strong as ever. Another necessity too was strong, for L.10,000 of damages had been awarded to Lord Bellamer; Hargrave could not easily raise the money, and Lord Lincourt refused to advance a shilling. "A pretty expensive pleasure has this Lady Bellamer been to me," said Hargrave, bestowing on her Ladyship a coarse enough epithet; for even fine gentlemen will sometimes call women what they have found them to be. He was prevailed on to try the gaming-table for the supply of both his wants,

and found that pleasure fully twice as expensive. His friend introduced him to some of those accommodating gentlemen who lend money at illegal interest, and was even generous enough to supply him when they would venture no more upon an estate in reversion. Lambert had accidentally heard of the phoenix which had appeared at Walbourne; and, on comparing the description he received of her with that to which, with politic patience, he had often listened, he had no doubt of having found the object of Hargrave's search. But, as it did not suit his present views that the lover should renew the pursuit, he dropt not a hint of his discovery, listening, with a gamester's insensibility, to the regrets which burst forth amidst the struggles of expiring virtue, for her whose soft influence would have led to peace and honour.

At last a dispute arising between the worthy Mr Lambert and his respectable coadjutors, as to the partition of the spoil, it occurred to him that he could more effectually monopolize his prey in the country; and thither accordingly he was called by pressing business. There he was presently so fortunate as to discover a Miss Montreville, on whose charms he descanted in a letter to Hargrave in such terms, that, though he aver-



red she could not be Hargrave's Miss Montreville, Hargrave was sure she could be no other; and, as his informer expected, arrived in ——— as soon as a chaise and four could convey him thither.

Lambert had now a difficult game to play, for he had roused the leading passion, and the collateral one could act but feebly. But they who often tread the crooked path, find pleasure in its intricacy, vainly conceiting that it gives proof of their sagacity; and Lambert looked with pleasure on the obstacles in his way. He trusted, that while the master-spirit detained Hargrave within the circle of Walbourne, he might dexterously practise with the lesser imp of evil.

Had his letter afforded a clue to Laura's residence, Hargrave would have flown direct to Walbourne, but he was first obliged to stop at ———; and Lambert, with some difficulty, persuaded him, that, as he was but slightly known to Lady Pelham, and probably in disgrace with her protégée, it would be more politic to delay his visit, and first meet them at Lord ———'s, whither he had information that they were to go on the following day. "You will take your girl at unawares," said he, "if she be your girl; and that is no bad way of feeling your ground." The vanity of ex-

torting from Laura's surprise some unequivocal token of his power, prevailed on the lover to delay the interview till the morning; and, after spending half the evening in dwelling on the circumstances of his last unexpected meeting with her, which distance softened in his imagination to more than its actual tenderness, he early in the morning set out with Lambert for —, where he took post in the hermitage, as a place which no stranger omitted to visit.

Growing weary of waiting, he dispatched Lambert as a scout; and, lest he should miss Laura, remained himself in the hermitage, till his emissary brought him information that the party were in the picture-gallery. Thither he hastened; but the party had already left the house, and thus Laura had accidental warning of his approach. No reception could have been more mortifying to him, who was prepared to support her sinking under the struggle of love and duty, of jealousy and pride. No struggle was visible; or, if there was, it was but a faint strife between native courtesy and strong dislike. He had boasted to Lambert of her tenderness; the specimen certainly was not flattering. Most of her companions were little more gracious. De Courcy paid him no more attention than bare civility required.—With

the Bolingbrokes he was unacquainted, but the character of his companion was sufficient reason for their reserve. Lady Pelham was the only person present who soothed his wounded vanity. Pleased with the prospect of unravelling the mystery into which she had pried so long in vain, charmed with the easy gallantry and adroit flattery of which Hargrave, in his cooler moments, was consummate master, she accepted his attentions with great cordiality; while he had the address tacitly to persuade her that they were a tribute to her powers of entertaining.

Before they parted, she had converted her permission to visit Walbourne into a pressing invitation, nay, had even hinted to De Courcy the propriety of asking Colonel Hargrave to join the dinner-party that day at Norwood. The hint, however, was not taken; and therefore, in her way home, Lady Pelham indulged her fellow-travellers with sundry moral and ingenious reflections concerning the folly of being "righteous over much;" and on the alluring accessible form of the true virtue, contrasted with the repulsive, bristly, hedgehog-like make of the false. Indeed, it must be owned, that for the rest of the evening her Ladyship's conversation was rather sententious than agreeable; but the rest of the party, in high good

humour, overlooked her attacks, or parried them in play.

Montague had watched the cold composure of Laura on Hargrave's first accosting her, and seen the gesture which repulsed him at parting ; and though in the accompanying look he lost volumes, his conclusions, on the whole, were favourable. Still a doubt arose, whether her manner sprung not from the fleeting resentment of affection ; and he was standing mournfully calculating the effects of Hargrave's perseverance, when his mother, in passing him as she followed her guests to the eating-room, said, in an emphatical whisper, " I am satisfied. There is no worm in the bud."

Mrs De Courcy's encouraging assertion was confirmed by the behaviour of Laura herself ; for she maintained her usual serene cheerfulness ; nor could even the eye of love detect more than one short fit of abstraction ; and then the subject of thought seemed any thing rather than pleasing retrospect, or glad anticipation. The company of his friends, Harriet's pointedly favourable reception of Mr Bolingbroke's assiduities, and the rise of his own hopes, all enlivened Montague to unusual vivacity, and led him to a deed of daring which he had often projected, without finding

courage to perform it. He thought, if he could speak of Hargrave to Laura, and watch her voice, her eye, her complexion, all his doubts would be solved. With this view, contriving to draw her a little apart, he ventured, for the first time, to name his rival; mentioned Lady Pelham's hint; and, faltering, asked Laura whether he had not done wrong in resisting it.

"Really," answered Laura, with a very *naïve* smile, and a very faint blush, "I don't wonder you hesitate in offering me such a piece of flattery as to ask my opinion."

"Do not tax me with flattering you," said De Courcy earnestly; "I would as soon flatter an apostle; but tell me candidly what you think."

"Then, candidly," said Laura, raising her mild unembarrassed eye to his, "I think you did right, perfectly right, in refusing your countenance to a person of Colonel Hargrave's character. While vice is making her encroachments on every hand, it is not for the friends of virtue to remove the ancient landmarks."

Though this was one of the stalest pieces of morality that ever Montague had heard Laura utter, he could scarcely refrain from repaying it by clapsing her to his heart. Convinced that her affections were free, he could not contain his

rapture, but exclaimed, "Laura, you are an angel ! and, if I did not already love beyond all power of expression, I should be"—He raised his eyes to seek those of Laura, and met his mother's, fixed on him with an expression which compelled him to silence.—" You should be in love with me," said Laura, laughing, and filling up the sentence as she imagined it was meant to conclude. " Well, I shall be content with the second place."

Mrs De Courcy, who had approached them, now spoke on some indifferent subject, and saved her son from a very awkward attempt at explanation. She drew her chair close to Laura, and soon engaged her in a conversation so animated, that Montague forgot his embarrassment, and joined them with all his natural ease and cheerfulness. The infection of his ease and cheerfulness Laura had ever found irresistible. Flashes of wit and genius followed the collision of their minds ; and the unstudied eloquence, the poetic imagery of her style, sprung forth at his touch, like blossoms in the steps of the fabled Flora.

Happy with her friends, Laura almost forgot the disagreeable adventure of the morning ; and every look and word mutually bestowing pleasure, the little party were as happy as affection and

esteem could make them, when Lady Pelham, with an aspect like a sea fog, and a voice suitably forbidding, inquired whether her niece would be pleased to go home, or whether she preferred sitting chattering there all night. Laura, without any sign of noticing the rudeness of this address, rose, and said she was quite ready to attend her Ladyship. In vain did the De Courcys entreat her to prolong her visit till the morning. To dare to be happy without her concurrence, was treason against Lady Pelham's dignity; and unfortunately she was not in a humour to concur in the joy of any living thing. De Courcy's reserve towards her new favourite she considered as a tacit reproof of her own cordiality; and she had just such a conviction that the reproof was deserved, as to make her thoroughly out of humour with the reprover, with herself, and consequently with everybody. Determined to interrupt pleasure which she would not share, the more her hosts pressed her stay, the more she hastened her departure; and she mingled her indifferent good nights to them with more energetic reprimands to the tardiness of her coachman.

"Thank heaven," said she, thrusting herself into the corner of her carriage with that jerk in her motion which indicates a certain degree of

irritation, "to-morrow we shall probably see a civilized being." A short pause followed. Laura's plain integrity and prudence had gained such ascendancy over Lady Pelham, that her niece's opinion was to her Ladyship a kind of second conscience, having, indeed, much the same powers as the first—its sanction was necessary to her quiet, though it had not force to control her actions. On the present occasion, she wished above all things to know Laura's sentiments; but she would not condescend to ask them directly. "Colonel Hargrave's manners are quite those of a gentleman," she resumed. The remark was entirely ineffectual; for Laura coolly assented, without inquiring whether he were the civilized being whom Lady Pelham expected to see. Another pause. "Colonel Hargrave will be at Walbourne to-morrow," said Lady Pelham, the tone of her voice sharpening with impatience. "Will he, Ma'am?" returned Laura without moving a muscle. "If Miss Montreville has no objections," said Lady Pelham, converting, by a toss of her head and a twist of her upper lip, the words of compliment into an insult. "Probably," said Laura, with a smile, "my objections would make no great difference."—"Oh, to be sure!" returned Lady Pelham, "it would be lost

labour to state them to such an obstinate, unreasonable person as I am! Well, I believe you are the first who ever accused me of obstinacy." If Lady Pelham expected a compliment to her pliability, she was disappointed; for Laura only answered, "I shall never presume to interfere in the choice of your Ladyship's visitors."

That she should be thus compelled to be explicit was more than Lady Pelham's temper could endure. Her eyes flashing with rage, "Superlative humility indeed," she exclaimed with a sneer: but, awed, in spite of herself, from the free expression of her fury, she muttered it within her shut teeth, in a sentence of which the words "close" and "jesuitical" alone reached Laura's ear. A long and surly silence followed, Lady Pelham's pride and anger struggling with her desire to learn the foundation and extent of the disapprobation which she suspected that her conduct excited. The latter, at last, partly prevailed; though Lady Pelham still disdained direct consultation.

"Pray, Miss Montreville," said she, "if Colonel Hargrave's visits were to *you*, what mighty objections might your sanctity find to them?"—Laura had long ago observed that a slight exertion of her spirit was the best *quietus* to her

‘aunt’s ill-humour; and therefore addressing her with calm austerity, she said, “Any young woman, Madam, who values her reputation, might object to Colonel Hargrave’s visits, merely on the score of prudence. But even my ‘superlative humility’ does not reconcile me to company which I despise; and my ‘sanctity,’ as your Ladyship is pleased to call it, rather shrinks from the violator of laws divine and human.”

Lady Pelham withdrew her eyes to escape a glance which they never could stand; but, bridling, she said, “Well, Miss Montreville, I am neither young nor sanctimonious, therefore your objections cannot apply to Colonel Hargrave’s visits to me; and I am determined,” continued she, speaking as if strength of voice denoted strength of resolution, “I am determined, that I will not throw away the society of an agreeable man, to gratify the whims of a parcel of narrow-minded bigots.”

To this attack Laura answered only by a smile. She smiled to see herself classed with the De Courcys; for she had no doubt that they were the “bigots” to whom Lady Pelham referred. She smiled, too, to observe that the boasted freedom of meaner minds is but a poor attempt to

hide from themselves the restraint imposed by the opinions of the wise and good.

The carriage stopped, and Laura took sanctuary in her own apartment; but at supper she met her aunt with smiles of unaffected complacency, and, according to the plan which she invariably pursued, appeared to have forgotten Lady Pelham's fit of spleen; by that means enabling her aunt to recover from it with as little expence to her pride as possible.

 CHAP. XXV.

LADY PELHAM was not disappointed in her expectation of seeing Colonel Hargrave on the following day. He called at Walbourne while her Ladyship was still at her toilette ; and was shown into the drawing-room, where Laura had already taken her station. She rose to receive him, with an air which shewed that his visit gave her neither surprise nor pleasure ; and, motioning him to a distant seat, quietly resumed her occupation. Hargrave was a little disconcerted. He expected that Laura would shun him, with marks of strong resentment, or perhaps with the agitation of offended love ; and he was prepared for nothing but to entreat the audience which she now seemed inclined to offer him.

Lovers are so accustomed to accuse ladies of cruelty, and to find ladies take pleasure in being so accused, that unlooked-for kindness discomposes them ; and a favour unhop'd is generally

a favour undesired. The consciousness of ill desert, the frozen serenity of Laura's manner, deprived Hargrave of courage to use the opportunity which she seemed voluntarily to throw in his way. He hesitated, he faltered; while, all unlike her former self, Laura appeared determined that he should make love, for she would not aid his dilemma even by a comment on the weather. All the timidity which formerly marked her demeanour, was now transferred to his; and, arranging her work with stoical composure, she raised her head to listen, as Hargrave approaching her stammered out an incoherent sentence, expressive of his unalterable love, and his fears that he had offended almost beyond forgiveness.

Laura suffered him to conclude without interruption; then answered, in a voice mild but determined, "I had some hopes, Sir, from your knowledge of my character and sentiments, that, after what has passed, you could have entertained no doubts on this subject.—Yet, lest even a shadow of suspense should rest on your mind, I have remained here this morning on purpose to end it. I sincerely grieve to hear that you still retain the partiality you have been pleased to express, since it is now beyond my power to make even the least return."

The utmost bitterness of reproach would not have struck so chilly on the heart of Hargrave as these words, and the manner in which they were uttered. From the principles of Laura he had indeed dreaded much; but he had feared nothing from her indifference. He had feared that duty might obtain a partial victory; but he had never doubted that inclination would survive the struggle. With a mixture of doubt, surprise, and anguish, he continued to gaze upon her after she was silent; then starting, he exclaimed—"I will not believe it; it is impossible. Oh, Laura, choose some other way to stab, for I cannot bear this!"—"It pains me," said Laura, in a voice of undissembled concern, "to add disappointment to the pangs which you cannot but feel; yet it were most blameable now to cherish in you the faintest expectation."—"Stop," cried Hargrave, vehemently, "if you would not have me utterly undone. I have never known peace or innocence but in the hope of your love; leave me a dawning of that hope, however distant. Nay, do not look as if it were impossible. When you thought me a libertine, a seducer—all that you can now think me, you suffered me to hope. Let me but begin my trial now, and all woman-kind shall not lure me from you."

“ Ah,” said Laura, “ when I dreamt of the success of that trial, a strange infatuation hung over me. Now it has passed away for ever. Sincerely do I wish and pray for your repentance, but I can no longer offer to reward it. My desire for your reformation will henceforth be as disinterested as sincere.”

Half-distracted with the cutting calmness of her manner, so changed since the time when every feature spoke the struggles of the heart, when the mind's whole strength seemed collected to resist its tenderness, Hargrave again vehemently refused to believe in her indifference. “ 'Tis but a few short months,” he cried, grasping her hand with a violence which made her turn pale; “ 'tis but a few short months since you loved me with your whole soul, since you said that your peace depended upon my return to virtue. And dare you answer it to yourself to cast away the influence, the only influence which can secure me ?”

“ If I have any influence with you,” returned Laura, with a look and attitude of earnest entreaty, “ let it but this once prevail, and then be laid aside for ever. Let me persuade you to the review of your conduct ; to the consideration of your prospects as an accountable being, of the

vengeance which awaits the impenitent, of the escape offered in the gospel. As you value your happiness, let me thus far prevail. Or if it will move you more," continued she, the tears gushing from her eyes, "I will beseech you to grant this, my only request, in memory of a love which mourned your unworthiness almost unto death."

The sight of her emotion revived Hargrave's hopes; and casting himself at her feet, he passionately declared, while she shuddered at the impious sentiment, that he asked no heaven but her love, and cared not what were his fate if she were lost. "Ah, Sir," said she, with pious solemnity, "believe me, the time is not distant when the disappointment of this passion will seem to you a sorrow light as the baffled sports of childhood. Believe the testimony of one who but lately drew near to the gates of the grave. On a death-bed, guilt appears the only real misery; and lesser evils are lost amidst its horrors like shadows in the midnight gloom."

The ideas which Laura was labouring to introduce into the mind of Hargrave were such as he had of late too successfully endeavoured to exclude. They had intruded like importunate creditors; till, oft refused admittance, they had ceased to return. The same arts which he had used

to disguise from himself the extent of his criminality, he now naturally employed to extenuate it in the sight of Laura. He assured her that he was less guilty than she supposed ; that she could form no idea of the force of the temptation which had overcome him ; that Lady Bellamer was less the victim of his passions than of her own ; he vehemently protested that he despised and abhorred the wanton who had undone him ; and that, even in the midst of a folly for which he now execrated himself, his affections had never wandered from their first object. While he spoke Laura in confusion cast down her eyes, and offended modesty suffused her face and neck with crimson. She could indeed form no idea of a heart which, attached to one woman, could find any temptation in the allurements of another. But when he ended, virtuous indignation flashing in her countenance, " For shame, Sir ! " said she. " If any thing could degrade you in my eyes it were this mean attempt to screen yourself behind the partner of your wickedness. Does it lessen your guilt that it had not even the poor excuse of passion ; or think you that, even in the hours of a weakness for which you have given me such just reason to despise myself, I could have prized the affections of a heart so depraved ? You say you

detest your crime; I fear you only detest its punishment; for, were you really repentant, my opinion, the opinion of the whole world, would seem to you a trifle unworthy of regard, and the utmost bitterness of censure be but an echo to your own self-upbraidings."

Hargrave had no inclination to discuss the nature of repentance. His sole desire was to wrest from Laura some token, however slight, of returning tenderness. For this purpose he employed all the eloquence which he had often found successful in similar attempts. But no two things can be more different in their effects, than the language of passion poured into the sympathizing bosom of mutual love, or addressed to the dull ear of indifference. The expressions which Laura once thought capable of warming the coldest heart seemed now the mere ravings of insanity; the lamentations which she once thought might have softened rocks, now appeared the weak complainings of a child for his lost toy. With a mixture of pity and disgust she listened and replied; till the entrance of Lady Pelham put a period to the dialogue, and Laura immediately quitted the room.

Lady Pelham easily perceived that the conversation had been particular; and Hargrave did not

long leave her in doubt as to the subject. He acquainted her with his pretensions to Laura, and begged her sanction to his addresses; assuring her that his intercourse with Lady Bellamer was entirely broken off, and that his marriage would secure his permanent reformation. He complimented Lady Pelham upon her liberality of sentiment and knowledge of the world; from both of which he had hopes, he said, that she would not consider one error as sufficient to blast his character. Lady Pelham made a little decent hesitation on the score of Lady Bellamer's prior claims; but was assured that no engagement had ever subsisted there. "She hoped Lord Lincourt would not be averse." She was told that Lord Lincourt anxiously desired to see his nephew settled. "She hoped Colonel Hargrave was resolved that his married life should be irreproachable. Laura had a great deal of sensibility, it would break her heart to be neglected; and Lady Pelham was sure, that in that case the thought of having consented to the dear child's misery would be more than she could support!" Her Ladyship was vanquished by an assurance, that for Laura to be neglected by her happy husband was utterly impossible.

"Laura's inclinations then must be consulted;

every thing depended upon her concurrence, for the sweet girl had really so wound herself round Lady Pelham's heart, that positively her Ladyship could not bear to give her a moment's uneasiness, or to press her upon a subject to which she was at all averse." And, strange as it may seem, Lady Pelham at that moment believed herself incapable of distressing the person whom, in fact, she tormented with ceaseless ingenuity ! Hargrave answered by confessing his fears that he was for the present less in favour than he had once been ; but he disclosed Laura's former confessions of partiality, and insinuated his conviction that it was smothered rather than extinguished.

Lady Pelham could now account for Laura's long illness and low spirits ; and she listened with eager curiosity to the solution of the enigma, which had so long perplexed her. She considered whether she should relate to the lover the sorrows he had caused. She judged (for Lady Pelham often *judged* properly) that it would be indelicate thus to proclaim to him the extent of his power ; but, with the usual inconsistency between her judgment and her practice, in half an hour she had informed him of all that she had observed, and hinted all that she suspected. Hargrave listened, was convinced, and avowed his con-

viction, that Lady Pelham's influence was alone necessary to secure his success. Her Ladyship said, "that she should feel some delicacy in using any strong influence with her niece, as the amiable orphan had no friend but herself, had owed somewhat to her kindness, and might be biassed by gratitude against her own inclination. The fortune which she intended bequeathing to Laura might by some be thought to confer a right to advise; but for her part, she thought her little all was no more than due to the person whose tender assiduities filled the blank which had been left in her Ladyship's maternal heart by the ingratitude and disobedience of her child." This sentiment was pronounced in a tone so pathetic, and in language so harmonious, that though it did not for a moment impose upon her hearer, it deceived Lady Pelham herself; and she shed tears, which she actually imagined to be forced from her by the mingled emotions of gratitude and of disappointed tenderness.

Lady Pelham had now entered on a subject inexhaustible; her own feelings, her own misfortunes, her own dear self. Hargrave, who in his hours of tolerable composure was the most polite of men, listened, or appeared to listen, with unconquerable patience, till he fortunately recol-

lected an appointment which his interest in her Ladyship's conversation had before banished from his mind; when he took his leave, bearing with him a very gracious invitation to repeat his visit.

With him departed Lady Pelham's fit of sentimentality; and in five minutes, she had dried her eyes, composed the paragraph which was to announce the marriage of Lord Lincourt (for she killed off the old peer without ceremony) to the lovely heiress of the amiable Lady Pelham; taken possession of her niece's barouche and four, and heard herself announced as the benefactress of this new wonder of the world of fashion. She would cut off her rebellious daughter with a shilling; give her up to the beggary and obscurity which she had chosen, and leave her whole fortune to Lady Lincourt; for so, in the fulness of her content, she called Laura. After some time enjoying her niece's prospects, or to speak more justly her own, she began to think of discovering how near they might be to their accomplishment; and, for this purpose, she summoned Laura to a conference.

Lady Pelham loved nothing on earth but herself; yet vanity, gratified curiosity, and, above all, the detection of a mere human weakness redu-

cing Laura somewhat more to her own level, awakened in her breast an emotion resembling affection, as throwing her arms round her niece, she, in language half-sportive, half-tender, declared her knowledge of Laura's secret, and reproached her with having concealed it so well. Insulted, wronged, and forsaken by Hargrave, Laura had kept his secret inviolable, for she had no right to disclose it; but she scorned, by any evasion, to preserve her own. Glowing with shame and mortification, she stood silently shrinking from Lady Pelham's looks; till, a little recovering herself, she said, "I deserve to be thus humbled for my folly in founding my regards, not on the worth of their object, but on my own imagination; and more, if it be possible, do I deserve, for exposing my weakness to one who has been so ungenerous as to boast of it. But it is some compensation to my pride," continued she, raising her eyes, "that my disorder is cured beyond the possibility of relapse." Lady Pelham smiled at Laura's security, which she did not consider as an infallibly sign of safety. It was in vain that Laura proceeded solemnly to protest her indifference. Lady Pelham could allow for self-deceit in another's case, though she never suspected it in her own. Vain were Laura's com-

ments upon Hargrave's character; they were but the fond revilings of offended love. Laura did not deny her former preference; she even owned that it was the sudden intelligence of Hargrave's crimes which had reduced her to the brink of the grave; therefore Lady Pelham was convinced that a little perseverance would fan the smothered flame; and perseverance, she hoped, would not be wanting.

Nevertheless, as her Ladyship balanced her fondness for contradicting by her aversion to being contradicted, and as Laura was too much in earnest to study the qualifying tone, the conference concluded rather less amicably than it began; though it ended by Lady Pelham's saying, not very consistently with her sentiments an hour before, that she would never cease to urge so advantageous a match, conceiving that she had a right to influence the choice of one whom she would make the heiress of forty thousand pounds. Laura was going to insist that all influence would be ineffectual, but her aunt quitted her without suffering her to reply. She would have followed to represent the injustice of depriving Mrs Herbert of her natural rights; but she desisted on recollecting that Lady Pelham's purposes were, like wedges, never fixed but by resistance.

The time had been when Lady Pelham's fortune would have seemed to Hargrave as dust in the balance, joined with the possession of Laura. He had gamed, had felt the want of money; and money was no longer indifferent to him. But Laura's dower was still light in his estimation, compared with its weight in that of Lambert, to whom he incidentally mentioned Lady Pelham's intention. That prudent person calculated that L.40,000 would form a very handsome addition to a fund upon which he intended to draw pretty freely. He had little doubt of Hargrave's success: he had never known any woman with whom such a lover could fail. He thought he could lead his friend to bargain for immediate possession of part of his bride's portion, and, for certainty of the rest in reversion, before parting with his liberty. He allowed two, or perhaps even three months for the duration of Laura's influence; during which time he feared he should have little of her husband's company at the gaming-table; but from thenceforth, he judged that the day would be his own, and that he should soon possess himself of Hargrave's property, so far as it was alienable. He considered that, in the meantime, Laura would furnish attraction sufficient to secure Hargrave's stay at —, and

He trusted to his own dexterity for improving that circumstance to the best advantage. He failed not, therefore, to encourage the lover's hopes, and bestowed no small ridicule on the idea that a girl of nineteen should desert a favourite on account of a little gallantry.

Cool cunning would engage with fearful odds against imprudence, if it could set bounds to the passions, as well as direct their course. But it is often deceived in estimating the force of feelings which it knows only by their effects. Lambert soon found that he had opened the passage to a torrent which bore all before it. The favourite stimulus found, its temporary substitute was almost disregarded; and Hargrave, intoxicated with his passion, tasted sparingly of the poisoned cup which his friend designed for him. His time and thoughts were again devoted to Laura, and gaming was only sought as a relief from the disappointment and vexation which generally attended his pursuit. The irritation of his mind, however, made amends for the lessened number of opportunities for plundering him, by rendering it easier to take advantage of those which remained.

The insinuating manners and elegant person of Hargrave gained daily on the favour of Lady Pel-

ham ; for the great as well as the little vulgar are the slaves of mere externals. She permitted his visits at home and his attendance abroad, expatiating frequently on the liberality of sentiment which she thus displayed. At first these encomiums on her own conduct were used only to disguise from herself and others her consciousness of its impropriety ; but she repeated them till she actually believed them just, and considered herself as extending a charitable hand to rescue an erring brother from the implacable malignity of the world.

She was indefatigable in her attempts to promote his success with Laura. She lost no opportunity of pressing the subject. She obstinately refused to be convinced of the possibility of overcoming a strong prepossession. Laura, in an evil hour for herself, thoughtlessly replied, that affection was founded on the belief of excellence, and must of course give way when the foundation was removed. This observation had just fallacy sufficient for Lady Pelham's purpose. She took it for her text, and harangued upon it with all the zeal and perseverance of disputation. She called it Laura's theory ; and insisted, that like other theorists, she would shut her eyes against the plainest facts, nay, stifle the feelings of her own

mind, rather than admit what might controvert her opinion. She cited all the instances which her memory could furnish of agricultural, and chemical, and metaphysical theorism; and, with astonishing ingenuity, contrived to draw a parallel between each of them and Laura's case. It was in vain that Laura qualified, almost retracted her unlucky observation. Her adversary would not suffer her to desert her untenable ground. Delighted with her victory, she returned again and again to the attack, after the vanquished had appealed to her mercy; and much more than "thrice she slew the slain."

Sick of arguing about the possibility of her indifference, Laura at length confined herself to simple assertions of the fact. Lady Pelham at first merely refused her belief; and, with provoking pity, rallied her niece upon her self-deceit; but, finding that she corroborated her words by a corresponding behaviour to Hargrave, her Ladyship's temper betrayed its accustomed infirmity. She peevishly reproached Laura with taking a coquettish delight in giving pain; insisted that her conduct was a tissue of cruelty and affectation; and upbraided her with dissimulation in pretending an indifference which she could not feel. "And does your Ladyship communi-

cate this opinion to Colonel Hargrave?" said Laura, one day, fretted almost beyond her patience by a remonstrance of two hours continuance. "To be sure I do," returned Lady Pelham. "In common humanity I will not allow him to suffer more from your perverseness than I can avoid." "Well, Madam," said Laura, with a sigh and a shrug of impatient resignation, "nothing remains but that I shew a consistency, which, at least, is not common to affectation."

Lady Pelham's representations had their effect upon Hargrave. They brought balm to his wounded pride, and he easily suffered them to counteract the effect of Laura's calm and uniform assurances of her indifference. While he listened to these, her apparent candour and simplicity, the regret she expressed at the necessity of giving pain, brought temporary conviction to his mind; and, with transports of alternate rage and grief, he now execrated her inconstancy, then his own unworthiness; now abjured her, then the vices which had deprived him of her affection. But the joint efforts of Lady Pelham and Lambert always revived hopes sufficient to make him continue a pursuit which he had not indeed the fortitude to relinquish.

His love (if we must give that name to a selfish

desire, mingled at times with every ungentle feeling,) had never been so ardent. The well-known principle of our nature, which adds charms to what is unattainable, lent new attractions to Laura's really improved loveliness. The smile which was reserved for others seemed but the more enchanting; the hand which he was forbidden to touch seemed but the more soft and snowy; the form which was kept sacred from his approach, bewitched him with more resistless graces. Hargrave had been little accustomed to suppress any of his feelings, and he gave vent to this with an entire neglect of the visible uneasiness which it occasioned to its object. He employed the private interviews, which Lady Pelham contrived to extort for him, in the utmost vehemence of complaint, protestation, and entreaty. He laboured to awaken the pity of Laura; he even condescended to appeal to her ambition; and persevered, in spite of unequivocal denials, till Laura, disgusted, positively refused ever again to admit him without witnesses.

His public attentions were, if possible, still more distressing to her. Encouraged by Lady Pelham, he, notwithstanding the almost repulsive coldness of Laura's manner, became her constant attendant. He pursued her wherever she went;

placed himself, in defiance of propriety, so as to monopolize her conversation ; and seemed to have laid aside all his distinguishing politeness, while he neglected every other woman to devote his assiduities to her alone. He claimed the station by her side till Laura had the mortification to observe that others resigned it at his approach ; he snatched every opportunity of whispering his adulations in her ear ; and, far from affecting any concealment in his preference, seemed to claim the character of her acknowledged adorer.

It is impossible to express the vexation with which Laura endured this indelicate pre-eminence. Had Hargrave been the most irreproachable of mankind, she would have shrunk from such obtrusive marks of his partiality ; but her sense of propriety was no less wounded by the attendance of such a companion, than her modesty was shocked by her being thus dragged into the notice, and committed to the mercy of the public. The exclusive attentions of the handsome Colonel Hargrave, the mirror of gallantry, the future Lord Lincourt, were not, however undesired, to be possessed unenvied. Those who unsuccessfully angled for his notice, avenged themselves on her to whom they imputed their failure, by looks of scorn, and by sarcastic remarks, which they

sometimes contrived should reach the ear of the innocent object of their malice. Laura, unspeakably averse to being the subject of even laudatory observation, could sometimes scarcely restrain the tears of shame and mortification that were wrung from her by attacks which she could neither resent nor escape.

In spite of the natural sweetness of her temper, she was sometimes tempted to retort upon Colonel Hargrave the vexation which he caused to her; and his officiousness almost compelled her to forsake the civility within the bounds of which she had determined to confine her coldness. He haunted her walks, stole upon her unannounced, detained her almost by force at these accidental meetings, or at those which he obtained by the favour of Lady Pelham. His whole conduct conspired to make him an object of real dread to Laura, though her watchful self-command and habitual benevolence preserved him from her aversion.

Sometimes she could not help wondering at the obstinacy of her persecutor. "Surely," said she to him, "after all I have said, after the manner in which I have said it, you cannot expect any fruit from all these rhapsodies; you must merely think your honour bound to keep them up, at whatever hazard to the credit of your understand-

ing." Laura had never herself submitted to be driven into a course of actions contrary to reason, and it never occurred to her that her lover had no reason for his conduct, except that he was not sufficiently master of himself to desist from his pursuit.

From the importunities of Hargrave, however, Laura could sometimes escape. Though they were frequent, they were of necessity intermitting. He could not always be at Walbourne; he could not intrude into her apartment. She visited sometimes where he was not admitted, or she could decline the invitation which she knew extended to him. But her persecutions by Lady Pelham had no intermission; from them she had no retreat. Her chamber was no sanctuary from so familiar a friend; and the presence of strangers only served to exercise her Ladyship in that ingenious species of conversation which addresses to the *sense* of one of the company what it conveys to the *ear* of the rest.

For some time she employed all her forces in combating Laura's supposed affectation; and when, not without extreme difficulty, she was convinced that she strove against a phantom of her own creation, she next employed her efforts to alter her niece's determination. She tried to

re-use her ambition ; and again and again expatiated on all the real and on all the imaginary advantages of wealth and title. The theme in her Ladyship's hands seemed inexhaustible, though Laura repeatedly declared that no earthly thing could be less in her esteem than distinctions which she must share with such a person as Hargrave. Every day and all day, the subject was canvassed, and the oft-confuted argument vamped up anew, till Laura was thoroughly weary of the very names of rank, and influence, and coronets, and coaches.

Next, her Ladyship was eloquent upon Laura's implacability. " Those who were so very unforgiving," she supposed, " were conscious that they had no need to be forgiven. Such people might pretend to be Christians, but in her opinion such pretensions were mere hypocrisy." Laura stood amazed at the strength of self-deception which could produce this sentiment from lips which had pronounced inextinguishable resentment against an only child. Recovering herself, she calmly made the obvious reply, " that she entertained no enmity against Hargrave ; that on the contrary, she sincerely wished him every blessing, and the best of all blessings, a renewed mind ; but that the Christian precept was never meant

to make the vicious and the impure the denizens of our bosoms." It might be thought that such a reply was quite sufficient; but Lady Pelham possessed one grand qualification for a disputant, she defied conviction. She could shift, and turn, and bewilder, till she found herself precisely at the point from whence she set out.

She had a practice, too, of all others the most galling to an ingenuous and independent spirit—she would invent a set of opinions and sentiments, and then argue upon them as if they were real. It was in vain for Laura to disclaim them. Lady Pelham could prove incontrovertibly that they were Laura's sentiments; or, which was the same thing, proceeded as if she had proved it. She insisted that Laura acted on a principle of revenge against Hargrave, for the slight his inconstancy had put upon her; and argued most convincingly on the folly and wickedness of a revengeful spirit. Laura in vain protested her innocence. Lady Pelham was certain of the fact; and she dilated on the guilt of such a sentiment, and extenuated the temporary secession of Hargrave, till a bystander must have concluded that Laura was the delinquent, and he her harmless victim. Her Ladyship declared, that "she did not wonder at her niece's obduracy. She had never, in her life,

known a person of cool temper who was capable of forgiving. She had reason, for her own part, to be thankful that, if she had the failings of a warm temper she had its advantages too. She had never, except in one instance, known what it was to feel permanent displeasure."

On this topic Lady Pelham had the more room for her eloquence, because it admitted of no reply; and, perhaps, for this reason it was the sooner exhausted; for it had not been discussed above half a dozen times, before she forsook it in order to assert her claims to influence her niece's decision. And here her Ladyship was suddenly convinced of the indefeasible rights of relationship. "She stood in the place of Laura's parents, and in their title might claim authority." But finding Laura firmly of opinion that parental authority extended no further than a negative voice, Lady Pelham laid aside the imperative tone to take up that of entreaty. "She would not advance the claim which her tried friendship might give her to advise; she would only beseech, conjure. She hoped her importunities would be forgiven, as they could proceed only from the tenderest regard to her dear girl's welfare. Laura was her only hope; the sole being on earth to whom her widowed heart clung with

partial affection—and to see her thus throw away her happiness was more than her Ladyship could bear.” Closely as Laura had studied her aunt’s character, and well as it was now known to her, she was sometimes overpowered by these expressions of love and sorrow ; and wept as she was compelled to repeat that her happiness and her duty must alike be sacrificed ere she could yield to the wishes of her friend. But as she never, even in these moments of softness, betrayed the smallest symptom of compliance, Lady Pelham had not patience to adhere to the only method of attack which possessed a chance of success.

Of all her arts of teasing, this was indeed the most distressing to a person of Laura’s sensibility, and she felt not a little relieved when, exasperated by the failure of all her efforts, Lady Pelham burst into vehement upbraidings of her niece’s hardness of heart. “She could not have conceived,” she said, “such obduracy in one so young ; in woman too ; a creature who should be all made up of softness. Laura might pique herself upon her stoicism, but a Zeno in petticoats was, in her opinion, a monster. For her part she never could resist entreaty in her life.”

"Then I beseech you Madam," said Laura, after having patiently submitted to be baited thus for three full hours, "do not make mine an exception; but for pity's sake be prevailed upon to drop this subject. I assure you it can have no effect but to distress me."

"You may be determined, Miss Montreville, that all my endeavours shall be vain, but I shall certainly never be so far wanting to my duty as to neglect pressing upon you a match so much for your honour and advantage."

"Is it possible," cried Laura, losing patience at this prospect of the continuation of her persecutions, "that your Ladyship can think it for my 'advantage' to marry a man I despise: for my 'honour' to share the infamy of an adulterer?"

"Upon my word, Miss Montreville," returned Lady Pelham, reddening with anger, "I am constrained to admire the delicacy of your language; so very suitable to the lips of so very delicate a lady."

A smile, not wholly free from sarcasm, played on Laura's lips. "If delicacy," said she, "be henceforth to find so strenuous a supporter in your Ladyship, I shall hope to be exempted in future from all remonstrance on the subject of this evening's altercation."

If Laura really entertained the hope she mentioned, she was miserably disappointed; for Lady Pelham remitted not a jot of her tormentings. Her remonstrances were administered in every possible form, upon every possible occasion. They seasoned every tête-à-tête, were insinuated into every conversation. Laura's attempts to avoid the subject were altogether vain. The discourse might begin with the conquests of Gengis Khan, but it always ended with the advantages of marrying Colonel Hargrave.

Teazed and persecuted, disturbed in every useful occupation, and every domestic enjoyment, Laura often considered of the possibility of delivering herself from her indefatigable tormentors, by quitting the protection of her aunt, and taking refuge with Mrs Douglas. But this plan she had unfortunately deprived herself of the means of executing.

Laura knew that her cousins, the Herberts, were poor. She knew that Mrs Herbert was in a situation which needs comforts that poverty cannot command, and it was vain to expect these comforts from the maternal compassion of Lady Pelham. She therefore determined to supply them as far as possible, from her own little fund; and fearing that a gift from her might revolt the

high spirit of Herbert, she inclosed almost all her half-year's annuity in a blank cover, and conveyed it to her cousin. What she retained was a sum far too small to defray the expence of a journey to Scotland ; and several months were to elapse before she could recruit her fund. Till then, she had no resource but patience ; and she endeavoured to console herself with a hope that in time the perseverance of her adversaries would fail.

Often did she with a sigh turn her eyes towards Norwood—Norwood, the seat of all the peaceful domestic virtues ; where the voice of contention was unheard, where courtly politeness, though duly honoured, held the second place to the courtesy of the heart. But Mrs De Courcy had never hinted a wish that Laura should be a permanent inmate of her family ; and, even if she had, there would have been a glaring impropriety in forsaking Lady Pelham's house for one in its immediate neighbourhood. De Courcy, too, she thought, was not the kind friend he was wont to be. She had of late seen him seldom, which was probably caused by the marked coolness of Lady Pelham's reception ; but it had happened unfortunately that he had twice surprised her in the midst of Hargrave's extravagancies, when she al-

most feared to speak to him, lest she should awaken the furious jealousy to which her tormentor was subject; and she dreaded that her father's friend (for so she loved to call him) suspected her of encouraging the addresses of such a lover. During these visits he had looked, she thought, displeased; and had early taken leave. Was it kind to judge her unheard? Perhaps, if an opportunity had been given her, she might have assumed courage to exculpate herself; but, without even calling to ask her commands, De Courcy was gone with Mr Bolingbroke to London, to make arrangements for Harriet's marriage.

END OF VOLUME SECOND

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