

1238

SELF-CONTROL:

1238

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 III.

EDINBURGH:

Printed by George Ramsay & Co.

FOR MANNERS AND MILLER, EDINBURGH;
AND LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
LONDON.

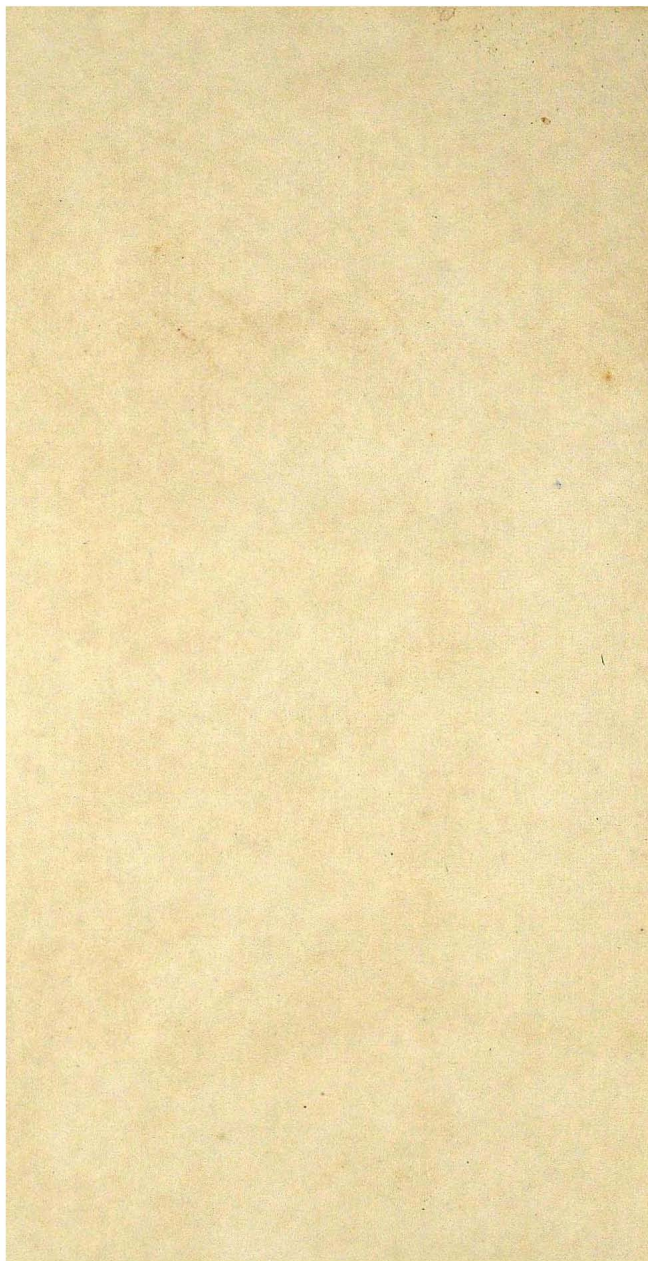
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SELF-CONTROL.

VOL. III.

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SELF-CONTROL,

Confession Royal 1827

1238

CHAP. XXVI.

THOUGH Laura could not escape the attacks of Lady Pelham, she sometimes found means to elude those of Hargrave. She watched his approach; and whenever he appeared, intrenched herself in her own apartment. She confined herself almost entirely to the house, and excused herself from every visit where she thought he might be of the party. He besieged her with letters; she sent them back unopened. Lady Pelham commanded her to be present during his visits; she respectfully, but peremptorily refused to comply.

She had thus remained a sort of prisoner for some weeks, when her aunt one morning entered

her room with an aspect which Laura could not well decipher. "Well, Miss Montreville," said she, "you have at last accomplished your purpose ; your capricious tyranny has prevailed at last ; Colonel Hargrave leaves ——— this morning."

"Dear Madam," cried Laura, starting up overjoyed, "What a deliverance !"

"Oh to be sure, mighty cause you have to congratulate yourself upon a deliverance from a man who might aspire to the first woman in England ! But you will never have it in your power to throw away such another offer. You need hardly expect to awaken such another passion."

"I hope, with all my heart, I shall not ; but are you certain he will go ?"

"Oh, very certain. He has written to tell me so !"

"I trust he will keep his word," said Laura ; "and when I am sure he is gone, I will beg of your Ladyship to excuse me for a few hours, while I walk to Norwood. I have been so shackled of late ! but the first use I make of my liberty shall be to visit my friends."

"I am afraid, my dear," returned Lady Pelham, with more gentleness than she was accustomed to use in contradiction, "you will scarcely find time

to visit Mrs De Courcy. I have long promised to pass some time with my friend Mrs Bathurst ; and I purpose setting off to-morrow. I should die of *ennui* here, now I have lost the society which has of late given me so much pleasure."

"Mrs Bathurst, Madam? she who was formerly"—

"Poh, poh, child," interrupted Lady Pelham, "don't stir up the embers of decayed slander—Will you never learn to forget the little mistakes of your fellow-creatures? Mrs Bathurst makes one of the best wives in the world; and to a man with whom everybody would not live so well."

Practice had made Laura pretty expert in interpreting her aunt's language, and she understood more in the present instance than it was meant she should comprehend. She had heard of Mrs Bathurst's fame, and, knowing that it was not quite spotless, was rather averse to accompany Lady Pelham ; but she never, without mature deliberation, refused compliance with her aunt's wishes, and she resolved to consider the matter before announcing opposition. Besides, she was determined to carry her point of seeing Mrs De Courcy, and therefore did not wish to introduce any other subject of altercation.

"Though I should accompany you to-morrow, Madam," said she, "I shall have time sufficient for my walk to Norwood. The preparations for my journey cannot occupy an hour; and, if I go to Norwood now," added she, tying on her bonnet, "I can return early. Good morning, Madam; to-day I may walk in peace."

Laura felt as if a mountain had been lifted from her breast as she bounded across the lawn, and thought that Colonel Hargrave was, by this time, miles distant from Walbourne; but as she pursued her way she began to wonder that Lady Pelham seemed so little moved by his departure. It was strange that she, who had remonstrated so warmly, so unceasingly, against Laura's behaviour to him, did not more vehemently upbraid her with its consequences. Lady Pelham's forbearance was not in character—Laura did not know how to explain it. "I have taken her by surprise," thought she, "with my excursion to Norwood, but she will discuss it at large in the evening; and probably in many an evening—I shall never hear the last of it."

It was needless, however, to anticipate evil, and Laura turned her thoughts to the explanation which she was bent upon making to her friends. The more she reflected, the more she was per-

suaded that De Courcy suspected her of encouraging the addresses of Hargrave ; addresses now provokingly notorious to all the neighbourhood. He had most probably communicated the same opinion to his mother ; and Laura wished much to exculpate herself, if she could do so without appearing officiously communicative. If she could meet Mr De Courcy alone, if he should lead to the subject, or if it should accidentally occur, she thought she might be able to speak freely to him ; more freely than even to Mrs De Courcy. " It is strange, too," thought she, " that I should feel so little restraint with a person of the other sex ; less than ever I did with one of my own.—But my father's friend ought not to be classed with other men."

Her eyes yet swam in tears of grateful recollection, when she raised them to a horseman who was meeting her. It was Montague De Courcy ; and, as he leisurely advanced, Laura's heart beat with a hope that he would, as he had often done before, dismount to accompany her walk. But Montague, though evidently in no haste to reach the place of his destination, stopped only to make a slight inquiry after her health, and then passed on. Laura's bosom swelled with grief, unmixed with resentment. " He thinks," said she, " that

I invite the attentions of a libertine ; and is it surprising that he should withdraw his friendship from me ! But he will soon know his error." And again she thore cheerfully pursued her way.

Her courage failed her a little as she entered Norwood. "What if Mrs De Courcy too should receive me coldly," thought she ; "Can I notice it to her ? Can I beg of her to listen to my justification ?" These thoughts gave Laura an air of timidity and embarrassment as she entered the room where Mrs De Courcy was sitting alone. Her fears were groundless. Mrs De Courcy received her with kindness, gently reproaching her for her long absence. Laura assured her that it was wholly involuntary, but "of late," said she, hesitating, "I have been very little from home." Mrs De Courcy gave a faint melancholy smile ; but did not inquire what had confined her young friend. "Harriet has just left me," said she, "to pay some visits, and to secure the presence of a companion for a very important occasion. She meant also to solicit yours, if three weeks hence you are still to be capable of acting as a bridesmaid." Laura smiling was about to reply, that being in no danger of forfeiting that privilege, she would most joy-

fully attend Miss De Courcy ; but she met a glance of such marked, such mournful scrutiny, that she stopped ; and the next moment was covered with blushes. “ Ah ! ” thought she, “ Mrs De Courcy indeed believes all that I feared, and more than I feared—What can I say to her ? ”

Her embarrassment confirmed Mrs De Courcy’s belief ; but, unwilling further to distress Laura, she said, “ Harriet herself will talk over all these matters with you, and then your own peculiar manner will soften the refusal into somewhat almost as pleasing as consent ; if indeed you are obliged to refuse.”

“ Indeed, Madam,” said Laura, “ nothing can be farther from my thoughts than refusal ; I shall most willingly, most gladly attend Miss De Courcy ; but may I—will you allow me to—to ask you why you should expect me to refuse ? ”

“ And if I answer you,” returned Mrs De Courcy, “ will you promise to be candid with me on a subject where ladies think that candour may be dispensed with ? ”

“ I will promise to be candid with you on every subject,” said Laura, rejoiced at this opportunity of entering on her justification.

“ Then I will own to you,” said Mrs De Courcy, “ that circumstances have conspired with pub-

lic report to convince me that you are yourself about to need the good office which Harriet solicits from you. Colonel Hargrave and you share between you the envy of our little world of fashion."

"And have you, Madam—has Harriet—has Mr De Courcy given credit to this vexatious report!" cried Laura, the tears of mortification filling her eyes. "Ah how differently should I have judged of you!"

"My dearest girl," said Mrs De Courcy, surprised but delighted, "I assure you that none of us would, upon slight grounds, believe any thing concerning you, that you would not wish us to credit. But, in this instance, I thought my authority indisputable; Lady Pelham"—

"Is it possible," cried Laura, "that my aunt could propagate such a report, when she knew the teasing, the persecution which I have endured!"

"Lady Pelham did not directly assure me of its truth;" answered Mrs De Courcy: "but when I made inquiries, somewhat, I own, in the hope of being empowered to contradict the rumour, her answer was certainly calculated to make me believe that you were soon to be lost to us."—

"Lost indeed!" exclaimed Laura. "But

what could be my aunt's intention. Surely she cannot expect still to prevail with me. My dear friend, if you knew what I have suffered from her importunities.—But she has only my advantage in view, though, surely, she widely mistakes the means.”

Laura now frankly informed Mrs De Courcy of the inquietude she had suffered from the persevering remonstrances of Lady Pelham, and the obtrusive assiduities of Hargrave. Mrs De Courcy, though she sincerely pitied the comfortless situation of Laura, listened with pleasure to the tale. “And is all this confidential?” said she, “so confidential that I must not mention it even to Montague or Harriet?”

“Oh no, indeed, Madam,” cried Laura; “I wish, above all things, that Mr De Courcy should know it; tell him all, Madam; and tell him too that I would rather be in my grave than marry Colonel Hargrave.”

Laura had scarcely spoken ere she blushed for the warmth with which she spoke, and Mrs De Courcy's smile made her blush again, and more deeply. But the plea which excused her to herself, she the next moment urged to her friend. “Ah, Madam,” said she, “if you had witnessed Mr De Courcy's kindness to my father; if you

had known how my father loved him, you would not wonder that I am anxious for his good opinion."

"I do not wonder, my love," said Mrs De Courcy, in a tone of heartfelt affection. "I should be much more surprised if such a mind as yours could undervalue the esteem of a man like Montague. But why did not my sweet Laura take refuge from her tormentors at Norwood, where no officious friends, no obtrusive lovers would have disturbed her quiet?"

Laura excused herself, by saying that she was sure her aunt would never have consented to her absence for more than a few hours; but she promised, that, now when Lady Pelham's particular reason for detaining her was removed, she would endeavour to obtain permission to spend some time at Norwood. "I fear I must first pay a much less agreeable visit," continued Laura, "for my aunt talks of carrying me to-morrow to the house of a Mrs Bathurst, of whom you probably have heard." Mrs De Courcy knew that Lady Pelham was on terms of intimacy with Mrs Bathurst, yet she could not help feeling some surprise that she should chose to introduce her niece to such a *chaperon*. She did not, however, think it proper, by expressing her opinion, to heighten

Laura's reluctance towards what she probably could not prevent ; and therefore merely expressed a strong wish that Lady Pelham would permit Laura to spend the time of her absence at Norwood. Laura, though she heartily wished the same, knew her aunt too well to expect that a purpose which she had once announced she would relinquish merely because it interfered with the inclinations of others. Still it was not impossible that it might be relinquished. A thousand things might happen to alter Lady Pelham's resolutions, though they were invincible by entreaty.

Laura lingered with Mrs De Courcy for several hours, and when at last she was obliged to go, received, at parting, many a kind injunction to remember her promised visit. As she bent her steps homeward, she revolved in her mind every chance of escape from being the companion of her aunt's journey. She was the more averse to attend Lady Pelham, because she conjectured that they would not return before Miss De Courcy's marriage, on which occasion Laura was unwilling to be absent. But she was sensible that neither this nor any other reason she could urge, would in the least affect Lady Pelham's motions. Derham Green, the seat of Mrs Bathurst, was

above ninety miles from Walbourne ; and it was not likely that Lady Pelham would travel so far with the intention of making a short visit.

Laura had quitted the avenue of Norwood, and entered the lane which led to that of Walbourne, when the noise of singing, for it could not be called music, made her look round ; and she perceived that she was overtaken by a figure in a dingy regimental coat, and a rusty hat, which, however, regained somewhat of its original shade by a contrast with the grey side-locks which blew up athwart it. This person was applying the whole force of his lungs to the utterance of " Hearts of Oak," in a voice, the masculine bass of which was at times oddly interrupted by the weak and treble tones of age, while, with a large crabstick, he beat time against the sides of a starveling ass upon which he was mounted. The other hand was charged with the double employment of guiding the animal, and of balancing a large portmanteau, which was placed across its shoulders. Laura, retaining the habits of her country, addressed the man with a few words of courtesy, to which he replied with the frankness and garrulity of an old Englishman ; and as they proceeded at much the same pace, they continued the conversation. It was, however, soon interrupted. At the gate of a

grass field, with which the ass seemed acquainted, the creature made a full stop.—“Get on,” cried the man, striking it with his heel. It would not stir. The rider applied the crabstick more vigorously than before. It had no effect ; even an ass can despise the chastisement with which it is too familiar. The contention was obstinate ; neither party seemed inclined to yield. At last fortune decided in favour of the ass. The portmanteau slipped from its balance, and fell to the ground. The man looked dolefully at it. “How the plague shall I get it up again?” said he. “Don’t dismount,” said Laura, who now first observed that her companion had but one leg—“I can lift it for you.”

As she raised it, Laura observed that it was directed to Mr Jones, at Squire Bathurst’s, Derham Green, ——shire. Though the name was too common to excite any suspicion, the address struck her as being to the same place which had so lately occupied her thoughts. “Have you far to go,” said she to the man. “No, Ma’am,” answered he, “only to Job Wilson, the carrier’s, with this portmanteau, for Colonel Hargrave’s gentleman. The Colonel took Mr Jones with himself in the chay, but he had only room for one or two of his boxes, so he left this with the

groom, and the groom gave me a pot of porter to go with it."

The whole affair was now clear. Lady Pelham, finding Laura unmanageable at home, was contriving that she should meet Colonel Hargrave at a place where, being among strangers, she would find it less possible to avoid him. Mrs Bathurst too was probably a good convenient friend, who would countenance whatever measures were thought necessary. In the first burst of indignation at the discovery of her aunt's treachery, Laura thought of retracing her steps to Norwood, never more to enter the presence of her unworthy relation; but, resentment cooling at the recollection of the benefits which she owed to Lady Pelham, she determined on returning to Walbourne, to announce in person her refusal to go with her aunt; conceiving this to be the most respectful way of intimating her intention.

As soon as she reached home, she retired to her chamber without seeing Lady Pelham; and immediately dispatched the following note to Mrs De Courcy: "My dear Madam, an accident has happened which determines me against going to Derham Green. Will you think I presume too soon on your kind invitation, if I say that I shall see you to-morrow at breakfast? Or will not

your benevolence rather acquire a new motive in the shelterless condition which awaits your very affectionate L. M."

She then proceeded to make arrangements for her departure, reflecting, with tears, on the hard necessity which was about to set her at variance with the only living relation who had ever acknowledged her. She knew that Lady Pelham would be enraged at the frustration of a scheme, to accomplish which she had stooped to such artifice ; and she feared that, however gentle might be the terms of her intended refusal, her aunt would consider it as unpardonable rebellion. She was, however, firmly resolved against compliance, and all that remained was to use the least irritating mode of denial.

They met at dinner. Lady Pelham in high good humour, Laura grave and thoughtful. Lady Pelham mentioned her journey ; but, dreading to rouse her aunt's unwearied powers of ob- jurgation, Laura kept silence ; and her just displeasure rendering her averse to Lady Pelham's company, she contrived to spend the evening chiefly alone.

As the supper hour approached, Laura began to tremble for the contest which awaited her. She felt herself more than half-inclined to with-

draw from the storm, by departing without warning ; leaving Lady Pelham to discover the reason of her flight after she was beyond the reach of her fury. But she considered that such a proceeding must imply an irreconcilable breach with one to whom she owed great and substantial obligations ; and would carry an appearance of ingratitude which she could not bear to incur. Summoning her courage, therefore, she resolved to brave the tempest. She determined, that whatever provocation she might endure, she would offer none but such as was unavoidable ; though, at the same time, she would maintain that spirit which she had always found the most effectual check to her aunt's violence.

The supper passed in quiet ; Laura unwilling to begin the attack ; Lady Pelham glorying in her expected success. Her Ladyship had taken her candle, and was about to retire, before Laura durst venture on the subject. " Good night, my dear," said Lady Pelham. " I fear," replied Laura, " I may rather say farewell, since it will be so long ere I see you again." " How do you mean ?" inquired Lady Pelham. " That I cannot accompany you to Mrs Bathurst's," replied Laura ; fetching, at the close of her speech, a breath longer than the speech itself. " You

won't go?" exclaimed Lady Pelham, in a voice of angry astonishment. "Since it is your wish that I should," returned Laura, meekly, "I am sorry that it is not in my power." "And pray what puts it out of your power?" cried Lady Pelham, wrath working in her countenance. "I cannot go where I am to meet Colonel Hargrave." For a moment Lady Pelham looked confounded; but presently recovering utterance, she began—"So! this is your Norwood intelligence; and your charming Mrs De Courcy—your model of perfection—sets spies upon the conduct of all the neighbourhood!"

Laura reddened at this vulgar abuse of a person whom she revered so highly; but she had set a guard upon her temper, and only answered, that it was not at Norwood she received her information. "A fortunate, I should rather say a providential accident," said she, "disclosed to me the whole"—the word 'stratagem' was rising to her lips, but she exchanged it for one less offensive.

"And what if Colonel Hargrave is to be there?" said Lady Pelham, her choler rising as her confusion subsided. "I suppose, forsooth, my pretty prudish Miss cannot trust herself in the house

with a man !" " Not with Colonel Hargrave, Madam," said Laura coolly.

Lady Pelham's rage was now strong enough to burst the restraints of Laura's habitual ascendancy.

" But I say you shall go, Miss," cried she in a scream that mingled the fierceness of anger with the insolence of command. " Yes I say you shall go ; we shall see whether I am always to truckle to a baby-faced chit, a creature that might have died in a workhouse but for my charity."

" Indeed, Madam," said Laura, " I do not forget—I never shall forget—what I owe to you ; nor that when I was shelterless and unprotected, you received and cherished me." " Then shew that you remember it, and do what I desire," returned Lady Pelham, softened, in spite of herself, by the resistless sweetness of Laura's look and manner.

" Do not, I beseech you, Madam," said Laura, " insist upon this proof of my gratitude. If you do, I can only thank you for your past kindness, and wish that it had been in my power to make a better return." " Do you dare to tell me that you will not go ?" cried Lady Pelham, stamping till the room shook. " I beg, Madam," said

Laura, entreatingly, " I beg of you not to command what I shall be compelled to refuse." " Re-

fuse at your peril?" shrieked Lady Pelham, in a voice scarce articulate with passion, and grasping Laura's arm in the convulsion of her rage.

Laura had sometimes been the witness, but seldom the object of her aunt's transports; and while Lady Pelham stood eyeing her with a countenance "fierce as ten furies," she, conscious with what burning shame she would herself have shrunk from making such an exhibition, sympathetically averted her eyes as if the virago had been sensible of the same feeling. "I say refuse at your peril!" cried Lady Pelham.—"Why don't you speak? obstinate"—"Because," answered Laura, with saint-like meekness, "I can say nothing but what will offend you—I cannot go to Mrs Bathurst's."

Angry opposition Lady Pelham might have resorted with some small remains of self-possession, but the serenity of Laura exasperating her beyond all bounds, she was so far transported as to strike her a violent blow. Without uttering a syllable, Laura took her candle and quitted the room; while Lady Pelham, herself confounded at the outrage which she had committed, made no attempt to detain her.

Laura retired to her chamber, and sat quietly down to consider the state of her warfare, which

she determined to conclude by letter, without exposing her person to another assault ; but in a few minutes she was stormed in her citadel, and the enemy entered, conscious of mistake, but with spirit unbroken. Lady Pelham had gone too far to retract, and was too much in the wrong to recant her error ; her passion, however, had somewhat exhausted itself in the intemperate exercise which she had allowed it ; and though as unreasonable as ever, she was less outrageous. Advancing towards Laura with an air intended to express offended majesty (for studied dignity is generally the disguise chosen by conscious degradation), she began, " Miss Montreville, do you, in defiance of my commands, adhere to your resolution of not visiting Mrs Bathurst ? " " Certainly, Madam ? " replied Laura, provoked that Lady Pelham should expect to intimidate her by a blow ; " I have seen no reason to relinquish it. " — " There is a reason, however, " returned Lady Pelham, elevating her chin, curling her upper lip, and giving Laura the side-glance of disdain, " though probably it is too light to weigh with such a determined lady, and that is, that you must either prepare to attend me to-morrow, or return to that beggary from which I took you, and never more enter my presence. " " Then, Madam, " said Laura, rising with her na-

tive mien of calm command, "we must part; for I cannot go to Mrs Bathurst's."

Laura's cool resistance of a threat which was expected to be all powerful, discomposed Lady Pelham's heroics. Her eyes flashing fire, and her voice sharpening to a scream, "Perverse ungrateful wretch!" she cried, "Get out of my sight—leave my house this instant." "Certainly, if you desire it, Madam," answered Laura, with unmoved self-possession; "but, perhaps, if you please, I had better remain here till morning. I am afraid it might give rise to unpleasant observations if it were known that I left your house at midnight."

"I care not who knows it—I would have the world see what a viper I have fostered in my bosom. Begone, and never let me see your hypocritical face again."

"Then I hope," said Laura, "your Ladyship will allow a servant to accompany me to Norwood. At this hour it would be improper for me to go alone." "Oh to be sure," cried Lady Pelham, "do go to your friend and favourite and make your complaint of all your harsh usage, and descant at large upon poor Lady Pelham's unlucky failings. No, no, I promise you, no servant of mine shall be sent on any such errand." "There is fine moonlight," said Laura, looking calmly

from the window, "I dare say I shall be safe enough alone." "You shall not go to Norwood!" cried Lady Pelham—"I'll take care to keep you from that prying censorious old hag. You two shan't be allowed to sit primming up your mouths, and spitting venom on all the neighbourhood."

Weary of such low abuse, Laura took her bonnet, and was leaving the room. Lady Pelham placed herself between her and the door. "Where are you going?" she demanded, in a voice in which rage was a little mingled with dread. "To the only shelter that England affords me," returned Laura; "to the only friends from whom death or distance does not sever me." "I shall spoil your dish of scandal for to-night, however," said Lady Pelham, flouncing out of the room; and, slapping the door with a force that made the windows rattle, she locked it on the outside. Laura, making no attempt to obtain release, quietly sat down expecting a renewal of the charge. Soon, however, all the household seemed still, and Laura having mingled with the prayer which commended herself to the care of heaven, a supplication for pardon and amendment to her aunt, retired to sound and refreshing rest.

On quitting Laura, Lady Pelham went to bed,

pride and anger in her breast fiercely struggling against a sense of blame. But the darkness, the silence, the loneliness of night assuage the passions even of a termagant; and by degrees she turned from re-acting and excusing her conduct, to fretting at its probable consequences.

The courage of a virago is no more than the daring of intoxication. Wait till the paroxysm be past, and the timid hare is not more the slave of fear. Lady Pelham began to feel, though she would scarcely acknowledge it to herself, how very absurdly her contest would figure in the mouths of the gossips round Walbourne. If her niece left her house in displeasure, if a breach were known to subsist between them, was it not most likely that Laura would in her own defence relate the treatment to which she had been subjected? At all events, if she went to Norwood before a reconciliation took place, she would certainly explain her situation to Mrs De Courcy; and Lady Pelham could not brave the contempt of the woman whom she disliked and abused. Anger has been compared to a short madness, and the resemblance holds in this respect, that in both cases, a little terror is of sovereign use in restoring quiet. Lady Pelham even feared the calm displeasure of Laura, and shrunk from meeting the reproving

eye of even the dependent girl whom she had persecuted and reproached and insulted.

By degrees, Laura's habitual ascendancy was completely restored, perhaps with added strength for its momentary suspension ; for she had rather gained in respectability by patient endurance, while Lady Pelham was somewhat humbled by a sense of misconduct. Besides, in the course of eight months residence under her roof, Laura was become necessary to her aunt. Her prudence, her good temper, her various domestic talents, were ever at hand to supply the capital defects of Lady Pelham's character. Lady Pelham could not justly be said to love any mortal, but she felt the advantages of the method and regularity which Laura had introduced into her family ; Laura's beauty gratified her vanity ; Laura's sweetness bore with her caprice ; Laura's talents amused her solitude ; and she made as near an approach as nature would permit to loving Laura. What was of more consequence, Laura was popular in the neighbourhood ; her story would be no sooner told than believed ; and Lady Pelham's lively imagination strongly represented to her the aggravation, commentary, and sarcasm, with which such an anecdote would be circulated.

But though these ideas floated in Lady Pelham's

mind, let it not be thought that she once supposed them to be the motives of her determination to seek a reconciliation! No. Lady Pelham had explained, and disguised, and adorned her failings, till she had converted the natural shame of confession into a notion that a candid avowal atoned for any of her errors; and no sooner did she begin to think of making concessions to her niece, than the consciousness of blame was lost in inward applause of her own candour and condescension. An observing eye, therefore, would have seen more of conceit than of humility in her air, when early in the morning she entered Laura's apartment.

Laura was already dressed, and returned her aunt's salutation a little more coldly than she had ever formerly done, though with perfect good humour. Lady Pelham approached and took her hand; Laura did not withdraw it. "I fear," said Lady Pelham, "you think I behaved very absurdly last night." Laura looked down and said nothing. "I am willing to own that I was to blame," continued her Ladyship, "but people of strong feelings, you know, my dear, cannot always command themselves." Laura was still silent. "We must forget and forgive the failings of our friends," proceeded her Ladyship. Laura, who dreaded that these overtures of peace only covered a projected

attack, still stood speechless. "Will you not forgive me, Laura!" said Lady Pelham coaxingly, her desire of pardon increasing, as she began to doubt of obtaining it.

"I do, Madam," said Laura, clasping Lady Pelham's hand between her own. "I do from my heart forgive all, and if you will permit me, I will forget all—all but that when I was an orphan, alone in the world, you sheltered and protected me."

"Thank you, my dear good girl," returned Lady Pelham, sealing the reconciliation with a kiss. "I knew you would think it a duty to excuse an error arising merely from my natural warmth, and the interest I take in you—'A bad effect from a noble cause.' It is a melancholy truth that those who have the advantages of a feeling heart, must share in its weaknesses too."

Laura had so often listened to similar nonsense, that it had ceased to provoke a smile. "Let us talk of this no more," said she; "let me rather try to persuade you not only to excuse, but sanction the obstinacy which offended you."

"Ah Laura," returned Lady Pelham, smiling, "I must not call you obstinate, but you are very firm. If I could but prevail on you to go with me only for a day or two, I should make my visit

as short as you please ; for, now it has been all arranged, I must go, and it would look so awkward to go without you !”

“ If the length of your visit depends upon me,” answered Laura, waving a subject on which she was determined not to forfeit her character for firmness, “ it shall be short indeed, for I shall long to offer some reparation for all my late perverseness and disobedience.”

At another time, Lady Pelham’s temper would have failed her at this steady opposition of her will ; but fear kept her in check. After a few very gentle expostulations, she gave up the point, and inquired whether her niece still intended to spend the time of her absence at Norwood. Laura answered that she did ; and had promised to breakfast there that morning. Upon this Lady Pelham overwhelmed her with such caresses and endearments, as she intended should obliterate the remembrance of her late injurious behaviour. She extolled Laura’s prudence, her sweet and forgiving disposition, her commendable reserve with strangers, and her caution in speaking of herself, or of her own affairs. Unfortunately for the effect of the flattery, Laura recollected that some of these qualities had at times been the subject of Lady Pelham’s severe reprehension. She had,

besides, sufficient penetration to detect the motive of her Ladyship's altered language ; and she strove to repress a feeling of contempt, while she replied to her aunt's thoughts as frankly as if they had been frankly spoken ; assuring her that she should be far from publishing to strangers the casual vexations of her domestic life. Lady Pelham reddened, as her latent thoughts were thus seized and exposed naked to her view ; but fear again proved victorious, and she redoubled her blandishments. She had even recourse to a new expedient, and for the first time made Laura an offer of money. With infinite difficulty did Laura suppress the indignation which swelled her breast. She had forgiven abuse and insult, but it was beyond endurance that her aunt should suppose that her pardon and silence might be bought. Restraining her anger, however, she positively refused the money ; and bidding Lady Pelham farewell, departed, amidst pressing injunctions to remain at Norwood no longer than till her aunt returned to Walbourne ; her Ladyship protesting that her own home would not be endurable for an hour without the company of her dear Laura.

Lady Pelham unwillingly set out on a journey of which the first intention had been totally defeated ; but she had no alternative, since, besides

having promised to visit Mrs Bathurst, she had made an appointment to meet Hargrave at the stage where she was to stop for the night, and it was now too late to give him warning of his disappointment. Even Hargrave's politeness was no match for his vexation, when he saw Lady Pelham, late in the evening, alight from her carriage, unaccompanied by Laura. He listened with impatience to her Ladyship's apology and confused explanations ; and more than half-resolved upon returning to ——— to carry on his operations there. But he too had promised to Mrs Bathurst, whom for particular reasons he wished not to disoblige. The travellers, therefore, next day pursued their journey to Derham Green, beguiling the way by joint contrivances to conquer the stubbornness of Laura.

CHAP. XXVII.

LAURA had proceeded but a short way towards Norwood when she was met by De Courcy, who, with a manner the most opposite to his coldness on the preceding day, sprung forward to meet her, his countenance radiant with pleasure. Laura delighted with the change, playfully reproached him with his caprice. Montague coloured, but defended himself with spirit; and a dialogue, more resembling flirtation than any in which Laura had ever engaged, occupied them till, as they loitered along the dark avenue of Norwood, a shade of the sentimental began to mingle with their conversation.

De Courcy had that morning resolved, firmly resolved, that while Laura was his guest at Norwood, he would avoid a declaration of his sentiments. Convinced, as he now was, that he had no longer any thing to fear from the perseverance of Hargrave, he was yet far from being confident

of his own success. On the contrary, he was persuaded that he had hitherto awakened in Laura no sentiment beyond friendship, and that she must become accustomed to him as a lover, before he could hope for any farther grace. He considered how embarrassing would be her situation in a house of which the master was a repulsed, perhaps a rejected, admirer ; and he had determined not to hazard embittering to her a residence from which she had at present no retreat. Yet the confiding manner, the bewitching loveliness of Laura, the stillness, shade, and solitude of their path, had half-beguiled him of his prudence, when, fortunately for his resolution, he saw Harriet advancing to meet her friend. Harriet's liveliness soon restored gaiety to the conversation ; and the party proceeded less leisurely than before to Norwood, where Laura was received with affectionate cordiality by Mrs De Courcy.

Never had the time appeared to Laura to fly so swiftly as now. Every hour was sacred to improvement, to elegance, or to benevolence. Laura had a mind capable of intense application ; and therefore could exalt relaxation into positive enjoyment. But the pleasure which a vigorous understanding takes in the exercise of its powers,

was now heightened in her hours of study, by the assistance, the approbation of De Courcy; and the hours of relaxation he enlivened by a manner which, at once frank and respectful, spirited and kind, seemed peculiarly fitted to adorn the domestic circle.

A part of every day was employed by Mrs De Courcy in various works of charity; and, joining in these, Laura returned with satisfaction to a habit which she had unwillingly laid aside during her residence in London, and but imperfectly resumed at Walbourne. Amiable, rational, and pious, the family at Norwood realized all Laura's day-dreams of social happiness; and the only painful feeling that assailed her mind arose from the recollection that the time of her visit was fast stealing away.

Her visit was, however, prolonged by a fortunate cold which detained Lady Pelham at Derham Green; and Laura could not regret an accident which delayed her separation from her friends. Indeed she began to dread Lady Pelham's return, both as the signal of her departure from Norwood, and as a prelude to the renewal of her persecutions on account of Hargrave. Far from having, as Lady Pelham had insinuated, renounced his pursuit, he returned

in a few days from Mrs Bathurst's ; again established himself with Lambert ; and, though he could not uninvited intrude at Norwood, contrived to beset Laura as often as she passed its bounds. In the few visits which she paid, she generally encountered him ; and he regularly waylaid her at church. But he had lost an able coadjutor in Lady Pelham ; and now, when no one present was concerned to assist his designs, and when Laura was protected by kind and considerate friends, she generally found means to escape his officious attentions ; though, remembering his former jealousy of Montague, and the irritability of his temper, she was scrupulously cautious of marking her preference of De Courcy, or of appearing to take sanctuary with him from the assiduities of Hargrave.

Indeed, notwithstanding the mildness of De Courcy's disposition, she was not without fear that he might be involved in a quarrel by the unreasonable suspicions of Hargrave, who had often taxed her with receiving his addresses, ascribing his own failure to their success. She had in vain condescended to assure him that the charge was groundless. He never met De Courcy without shewing evident marks of dislike. If he accosted him, it was in a tone and manner approaching to insult.

The most trivial sentence which De Courcy addressed to Laura, drew from Hargrave looks of enmity and defiance ; while Montague, on his part, returned these aggressions by a cool disdain, the most opposite to the conciliating frankness of his general manners. Laura's alarm lest Hargrave's ill-concealed aversion should burst into open outrage, completed the dread with which he inspired her ; and she felt like one subjected to the thralldom of an evil genius, when he one day announced to her that he had procured leave to remove his regiment to ——— ; in order, as he said, " that he might be at hand to assert his rights over her."

He conveyed this information as, rudely preventing Mr Bolingbroke and De Courcy, he led her from Mrs De Courcy's carriage into church. Laura durst not challenge his presumptuous expression, for Montague was close by her side, and she dreaded that his aversion to arrogance and oppression might induce him to engage in her quarrel. Silently therefore, though glowing with resentment, she suffered Hargrave to retain the place he had usurped, while Montague followed, with a countenance which a few short moments had clouded with sudden care. " Ah," thought he, " those rights must indeed be

strong which he dares thus boldly, thus publicly assert."

It was some time ere the service began, and Laura could not help casting glances of kind inquiry on the saddened face, which, a few minutes before, she had seen bright with animation and delight. Hargrave's eye followed her's with a far different expression. While she observed him darting a scowl of malice and aversion on the man to whom he owed his life, Laura shuddered; and wondering at the infatuation which had so long disguised his true character, bent her head, acknowledged her short-sightedness, and resigned the future events of her life to the disposal of heaven.

It was the day immediately preceding Harriet's marriage, and neither she nor Mrs De Courcy was in church; Laura therefore returned home tête-à-tête with Montague. Ignorant that Hargrave's provoking half-whisper had been overheard by De Courcy, she could not account for the sudden change in his countenance and manner; yet though she took an affectionate interest in his melancholy, they had almost reached home before she summoned courage to inquire into its cause. "I fear you are indisposed," said she to him in a voice of kind concern. De Courcy thank-

ed her. "No, not indisposed," said he, with a faint smile. "Disturbed, then," said Laura. De Courcy was silent for a moment, and then taking her hand, said, "May I be candid with you?" "Surely," returned Laura. "I trust I shall ever meet with candour in you." "Then I will own," resumed De Courcy, "that I am disturbed. And can the friend of Montreville be otherwise when he hears a right claimed over you by one so wholly unworthy of you?" "Ah," cried Laura, "you have then heard all. I hoped you had not attended to him." "Attended!" exclaimed De Courcy, "Could any right be claimed over you and I be regardless?" "It were ungrateful to doubt your friendly interest in me," replied Laura. "Believe me Colonel Hargrave has no right over me, nor ever shall have." "Yet I did not hear you resist the claim," returned De Courcy. "Because," answered Laura, "I feared to draw your attention. His violence terrifies me, and I feared that—that you might"—She hesitated, stopped, and blushed very deeply. She felt the awkwardness of appearing to expect that De Courcy should engage in a quarrel on her account, but the simple truth ever rose so naturally to her lips, that she could not even qualify it without confusion. "Might

what?" cried De Courcy eagerly; "Speak frankly, I beseech you." "I feared," replied Laura, recovering herself, "that the interest you take in the daughter of your friend might expose you to the rudeness of this overbearing man." "And did you upon my account, dearest Laura, submit to this insolence?" cried De Courcy, his eyes sparkling with exultation. "Is my honour, my safety then dear to you? Could you think of me even while Hargrave spoke!"

With surprise and displeasure, Laura read the triumphant glance which accompanied his words. "Is it possible," thought she, "that, well as he knows me, he can thus mistake the nature of my regard! or can he, attached to another, find pleasure in the idle dream. Oh man! thou art altogether vanity!" Snatching away the hand which he was pressing to his lips, she coldly replied, "I should have been equally attentive to the safety of any common stranger had I expected his interference, and Colonel Hargrave's speeches cannot divert my attention even from the most trivial object in nature."

Poor De Courcy, his towering hopes suddenly levelled with the dust, shrunk from the frozen steadiness of her eye. "Pardon me, Miss Montreville," said he in a tone of mingled sorrow and

reproach, "pardon me for the hope that you would make any distinction between me and the most indifferent. I shall soon be cured of my presumption." Grieved at the pain she saw she had occasioned, Laura would fain have said something to mitigate the repulse which she had given: but a new light began to dawn upon her, and she feared to conciliate the friend lest she should encourage the lover. Fortunately for the relief of her embarrassment the carriage stopped. De Courcy gravely and in silence handed her from it; and hurrying to her chamber, she sat down to reconsider the dialogue she had just ended.

De Courcy's manner more than his words recalled a suspicion which she had oftener than once driven from her mind. She was impressed, she scarcely knew why, with a conviction that she was beloved. For some moments this idea alone filled her thoughts; the next that succeeded was recollection that she ought sincerely to lament a passion which she could not return. It was her duty to be sorry, very sorry indeed, for such an accident; to be otherwise would have argued the most selfish vanity, the most hard-hearted ingratitude towards the best of friends, and the most amiable of mankind. Yet she was not *very* sor-

ry; it was out of her power to convince herself that she was; so she imputed her philosophy under her misfortune to doubtfulness of its existence. "But after all," said she to herself, "his words could not bear such a construction; and for his manner—who would build any thing upon a manner! While a woman's vanity is so apt to deceive her, what rational creature would give credit to what may owe so much to her own imagination! Besides, did not Mrs De Courcy more than hint that his affections were engaged. Did he not even himself confess to me that they were. And I taxed him with vanity!—Truly, if he could see this ridiculous freak of mine he might very justly retort the charge. And see it he must. What could possess me with my absurd prudery to take offence at his expecting that I, who owe him ten thousand kind offices, should be anxious for his safety?—How could I be so false, so thankless, as to say I considered him as a common acquaintance?—The friend of my father, my departed father! the friend who supported him in want, and consoled him in sorrow! No wonder that he seemed shocked! What is so painful to a noble heart as to meet with ingratitude? But he shall never again have reason to think me vain or ungrateful;" and Laura hastened down stairs that

she might lose no time in convincing De Courcy that she did not suspect him of being her lover, and highly valued him as a friend. She found him in the drawing-room, pensively resting his forehead against the window-sash ; and approaching him, spoke some trifle with a smile so winning, so gracious, that De Courcy soon forgot both his wishes and his fears, enjoyed the present, and was happy.

The day of Harriet's marriage arrived ; and for once she was grave and silent. She even forgot her bridal finery ; and when Laura went to inform her of Mr Bolingbroke's arrival, she found her in the library, sitting on the ground in tears, her head resting on the seat of an old-fashioned elbow-chair. She sprang up as Laura entered ; and dashing the drops from her eyes, cried, " I have been trying to grow young again for a few minutes, before I am made an old woman for life. Just there I used to sit when I was a little thing, and laid my head upon my father's knee ; for this was his favourite chair, and there old Rover and I used to lie at his feet together. I'll beg this chair of my mother, for now I love every thing at Norwood." Laura drew her away, and she forgot the old elbow-chair when she saw

the superb diamonds which were lying on her dressing-table.

The ceremonial of the wedding was altogether adjusted by Mrs Penelope; and though, in compliance with Mr Bolingbroke's whims, she suffered the ceremony to be privately performed, she invited every creature who could claim kindred with the names of Bolingbroke or De Courcy to meet and welcome the young bride to her home. Mr Bolingbroke having brought a license, the pair were united at Norwood. Mr Wentworth officiated, and De Courcy gave his sister away. Mr Bolingbroke's own new barouche, so often beheld in fancy, now really waited to convey her to her future dwelling; but she turned to bid farewell to the domestics who had attended her infancy, and forgot to look at the new barouche.

Mr Bolingbroke was a great man, and could not be allowed to marry quietly. Bonfires were lighted, bells were rung, and a concourse of his tenantry accompanied the carriages which conveyed the party. The admiration of the company whom Mrs Penelope had assembled in honour of the day, was divided between Mrs Bolingbroke's diamonds and her bride-maid; and as

the number of each sex was pretty equal, the wonders shared pretty equally.

“Did you ever see any thing so lovely as Miss Montreville?” said Sophia Bolingbroke to the young lady who sat next her. “I never can think any body pretty who has red hair,” was the reply. “If her hair be red,” returned Sophia, “it is the most pardonable red hair in the world, for it is more nearly black. Don’t you admire her figure?” “Not particularly; she is too much of the May-pole for me; besides, who can tell what her figure is when she is so muffled up. I dare say she is stuffed, or she would shew a little more of her skin.” “She has at least an excellent taste in stuffing, then,” said Sophia, “for I never saw any thing so elegantly formed.” “It is easy to see,” said the critic, “that she thinks herself a beauty by her dressing so affectedly. To-night when every body else is in full dress, do but look at her’s!” “Pure, unadorned, virgin white,” said Miss Bolingbroke, looking at Laura; “the proper attire of angels!” The name of Miss Montreville had drawn the attention of De Courcy to this dialogue. “I protest,” cried he to Mr Wentworth, who stood by him, “Sophy Bolingbroke is the most agreeable plain girl I ever saw.” He then placed himself

by her side ; and while she continued to praise Laura, gave her credit for all that is most amiable in woman.

The moment he left her she ran to rally Laura upon her conquest. " I give you joy, my dear," said she, " De Courcy is certainly in love with you." " Nonsense," cried Laura, colouring crimson ; " what can make you think so ?" " Why he will talk of nothing but you, and he looked so delighted when I praised you ; and paid me more compliments in half an hour than ever I received in my whole life before." " If he was so complimentary," said Laura, smiling, " it seems more likely that he is in love with you." " Ah," said Sophia, sighing, " that is not very probable." " Fully as probable as the other," answered Laura ; and turned away to avoid a subject which she was striving to banish from her thoughts.

During the few days which Laura and the De Courcys spent with the newly-married pair, Miss Bolingbroke's observations served to confirm her opinion ; and merely for the pleasure of speaking of Montague, she rallied Laura incessantly on her lover. In weighing credibilities, small weight of testimony turns the scale ; and Laura began alternately to wonder what retarded De Courcy's declaration, and to tax herself with vanity in ex-

pecting that he would ever make one. She disliked her stay at Orfordhall, and counted the hours till her return to Norwood. De Courcy's attentions she had long placed to the account of a regard which, while she was permitted to give it the name of friendship she could frankly own that she valued above any earthly possession. These attentions were now so familiar to her, that they were become almost necessary, and she was vexed at being constantly reminded that she ought to reject them. She had therefore a latent wish to return to a place where she would have a legitimate claim to his kindness, and where at least there would be no one to remind her that she ought to shrink from it.

Besides, she was weary of the state and magnificence that surrounded her. While Harriet glided into the use of her finery as if she had been accustomed to it from her cradle, Laura could by no means be reconciled to it. She endured with impatience a meal of three hours long; could not eat while six footmen were staring at her; started, if she thoughtlessly leant her head against the white damask wall; and could not move with ease, where every gesture was repeated in endless looking-glasses. With pleasure, therefore, she saw the day arrive which was to restore her to easy

hospitality, and respectable simplicity at Norwood : but that very day she received a summons to attend her aunt at Walbourne.

Unwilling as Laura was to quit her friends, she did not delay to comply with Lady Pelham's requisition. Mrs De Courcy judged it improper to urge her to stay ; and Montague in part consoled himself for her departure, by reflecting, that he would now be at liberty to disclose his long-concealed secret. " No doubt you are at liberty," said Mrs De Courcy, when he spoke to her of his intentions, "and I am far from pretending to advise or interfere. But my dear Montague, you must neither be surprised, nor in despair, if you be at first unsuccessful. Though Laura esteems you, perhaps more than esteems you, she is convinced that she is invulnerable to love ; and it may be so, but her fancied security is all in your favour."

Wearied of suspense, however, De Courcy often resolved to know his fate ; and often went to Walbourne, determined to learn ere he returned, whether a circle of pleasing duties was to fill his after life, or whether it was to be spent alone, "loveless, joyless, unendeared ;" but when he met the friendly smile of Laura, and remembered that, his secret told, it might vanish like the gleaming of a wintry sun, his courage failed, and

the intended disclosure was again delayed. Yet his manner grew less and less equivocal, and Laura, unwilling as she was to own the conviction to herself, could scarcely maintain her wilful blindness.

She allowed the subject to occupy the more of her thoughts, because it came disguised in a veil of self-condemnation and humility. Sometimes she repeated to herself, that she should never have known the vanity of her own heart, had it not been visited by so absurd a suspicion ; and sometimes that she should never have been acquainted with its selfishness and obduracy, had she not borne with such indifference, the thoughts of what must bring pain and disappointment to so worthy a breast. But, spite of Laura's efforts to be miserable, the subject cost her much more perplexity than distress ; and, in wondering whether De Courcy really were her lover, and what could be his motive for concealing it if he were, she often forgot to deplore the consequences of her charms.

Meanwhile Hargrave continued his importunities ; and Lady Pelham seconded them with unwearied perseverance. In vain did Laura protest that her indifference was unconquerable : in vain assure him that though a total revolution, in

his character might regain her esteem, her affection was irrecoverably lost. She could at any time exasperate the proud spirit of Hargrave, till in transports of fury he would abjure her for ever ; but a few hours always brought the "for ever" to an end, and Hargrave back, to supplicate, to importune, and not unfrequently to threaten. Though her unremitting coldness, however, failed to conquer his passion, it by degrees extinguished all of generous or kindly that had ever mingled with the flame ; and the wild unholy fire which her beauty kept alive, was blended with the heart-burnings of anger and revenge. From such a passion Laura shrank with dread and horror. She heard its expressions as superstition listens to sounds of evil omen ; and saw his impassioned glances with the dread of one who meets the eye of the crouching tiger. His increasing jealousy of De Courcy, which testified itself in haughtiness, and even ferocity of behaviour towards him, and Montague's determined though cool resistance of his insolence, kept her in continual alarm. Though she never on any other occasion voluntarily entered Hargrave's presence, yet if De Courcy found him at Walbourne, she would hasten to join them, fearing the consequences of a private interview between two such hostile

spirits ; and this apparent preference not only aggravated the jealousy of Hargrave, but roused Lady Pelham's indefatigable spirit of remonstrance.

The subject was particularly suited for an episode to her Ladyship's harangues in favour of Hargrave ; and she introduced and varied it with a dexterity all her own. She taxed Laura with a passion for De Courcy ; and in terms not eminently delicate, reproached her with facility in transferring her regards. Then assuming the tone of a tender mistress, and affecting to treat all Laura's denials as the effect of maiden timidity, she would pretend to sympathize in her sufferings, advising her to use her native strength of mind to conquer this unfortunate partiality ; to transfer her affections from one to whom they appeared valueless to him who sued for them with such interesting perseverance. Above all, she entreated Laura to avoid the appearance of making advances to a man who probably never bestowed a thought on her in return ; thus intimating that her behaviour might bear so provoking a construction.

Laura, sometimes irritated, oftener amused by these impertinences, could have endured them with tolerable patience ; but they were mere in-

terludes to Lady Pelham's indefatigable chidings on the subject of Hargrave, and Laura's patience would have failed her, had she not been consoled by reflecting that the time now drew near when the payment of her annuity would enable her to escape from her unwearied persecutors. She heartily wished, however, that a change of system might make her residence with Lady Pelham endurable; for strong as was her attachment to Mrs Douglas, it was no longer her only friendship; and she could not without pain think of quitting, perhaps for ever, her valued friends at Norwood.

Winter advanced, and Lady Pelham began to talk of her removal to town. Laura could not help wondering sometimes that her aunt, while she appeared so anxious to promote the success of Hargrave, should meditate a step which would place him at a distance from the object of his pursuit; but Lady Pelham's conduct was so generally inconsistent, that Laura was weary of trying to reconcile its contradictories. She endeavoured to hope that Lady Pelham, at last becoming sensible of the inefficacy of her efforts, was herself growing desirous to escape the Colonel's importunity; and she thought she could observe, that as the time of their departure approached, her

Ladyship relaxed somewhat of her industry in teasing.

But the motives of Lady Pelham's removal did not at all coincide with her niece's hopes ; and nothing could be farther from her intention, than to resign her labours in a field so rich in controversy and provocation. She imagined that Laura's obstinacy was occasioned, or at least strengthened by the influence of the De Courcys, and she expected that a more general acquaintance with the world might remove her prejudices. At Walbourne, Laura, if offended, could always take refuge with Mrs De Courcy. In London, she would be more defenceless. At Walbourne, Lady Pelham acted under restraint, for there were few objects to divide with her the observation of her neighbours, and she felt herself accountable to them for the propriety of her conduct ; but she would be more at liberty in a place where, each immersed in his own business or pleasure, no one had leisure to comment on the concerns of others. She knew that Hargrave would find means to escape the duty of remaining with his regiment, and indeed had concerted with him the whole plan of her operations.

Meanwhile Laura, altogether unsuspecting of their designs, gladly prepared for her journey, con-

sidering it as a fortunate instance of the instability of Lady Pelham's purposes. She paid a parting visit to Mrs Bolingbroke, whom she found established in quiet possession of all the goods of fortune. By the aid of Mrs De Courcy's carriage, she contrived, without molestation from Hargrave, to spend much of her time at Norwood, where she was always received with a kindness the most flattering, and loaded with testimonies of regard. De Courcy still kept his secret; and Laura's suspicions rather diminished when she considered that, though he knew she was to go without any certainty of returning, he suffered numberless opportunities to pass without breathing a syllable of love.

The day preceding that which was fixed for the journey arrived; and Laura begged Lady Pelham's permission to spend it entirely with Mrs De Courcy. Lady Pelham was rather unwilling to consent, for she remembered that her last excursion had been rendered abortive by a visit to Norwood; but, flattering herself that her present scheme was secure from hazard of failure, she assumed an accommodating humour, and not only permitted Laura to go but allowed the carriage to convey her, stipulating that she should return it immediately, and walk home in the evening,

She found the De Courcys alone, and passed the day less cheerfully than any she had ever spent at Norwood. Mrs De Courcy though kind, was grave and thoughtful; Montague absent, and melancholy. Harriet's never-failing spirits no longer enlivened the party, and her place was but feebly supplied by the infantine gaiety of De Courcy's little protégé Henry.

This child, who was the toy of all his patron's leisure hours, had, during her visits to Norwood, become particularly interesting to Laura. His quickness, his uncommon beauty, his engaging frankness, above all, the innocent fondness which he shewed for her, had really attached her to him, and he repaid her with all the affections of his little heart. He would quit his toys to hang upon her; and, though at other times as restless as any of his kind, was never weary of sitting quietly on her knee, clasping her snowy neck in his little sun-burnt arms. His prattle agreeably interrupted the taciturnity into which the little party were falling, till his grandfather came to take him away. "Kiss your hand Henry, and bid Miss Montreville farewell," said the old man as he was about to take him from Laura's arms. "It will be a long while before you see her again." "Are you going away?" said the child, looking sor-

rowfully in Laura's face. "Yes, far away," answered Laura. "Then Henry will go with you, Henry's dear pretty lady." "No no," said his grandfather. "You must go to your mammy; good boys love their mummies best." "Then you ought to be Henry's mammy," cried the child, sobbing and locking his arms round Laura's neck, "for Henry loves you best." "My dear boy!" cried Laura kissing him with a smile that half-consented to his wish; but, happening to turn her eye towards De Courcy, she saw him change colour, while, with an abruptness unlike his usual manner, he snatched the boy from her arms, and regardless of his cries, dismissed him from the room.

This little incident did not contribute to the cheerfulness of the group. Grieved to part with her favourite, and puzzled to account for De Courcy's behaviour, Laura was now the most silent of the trio. She saw nothing in the childish expression of fondness which should have moved De Courcy; yet it had evidently stung him with sudden uneasiness. She now recollected that she had more than once inquired who were the parents of this child, and that the question had always been evaded. A motive of curiosity prompted her now to repeat the inquiry, and she ad-

dressed it to Mrs De Courcy. With a slight shade of embarrassment Mrs De Courcy answered, " His mother was the only child of our old servant ; a pretty, meek-spirited, unfortunate girl ; and his father"—" His father's crimes," interrupted De Courcy, hastily, " have brought their own punishment ; a punishment beyond mortal fortitude to bear ;"—and, catching up a book, he asked Laura whether she had seen it, endeavouring to divert her attention by pointing out some passages to her notice. Laura's curiosity was increased by this appearance of concealment, but she had no means of gratifying it, and the subject vanished from her mind when she thought of bidding farewell to her beloved friends, perhaps for ever.

When she was about to go, Mrs De Courcy affectionately embraced her. " My dear child," said she, " second in my love and esteem only to my own Montague, almost the warmest wish of my heart is to retain you always with me ; but, if that is impossible, short may your absence be, and may you return to us as joyfully as we shall receive you." Weeping, and reluctant to part, Laura at last tore herself away. Hargrave had so often stolen upon her walks that the fear of meeting him was become habitual to her, and

she wished to escape him by reaching home before her return could be expected. As she leant on De Courcy's arm, ashamed of being unable to suppress her sensibility, she averted her head, and looked sadly back upon a dwelling endeared to her by many an innocent, many a rational pleasure.

Absorbed in her regrets, Laura had proceeded a considerable way before she observed that she held a trembling arm ; and recollected that De Courcy had scarcely spoken since their walk began. Her tears suddenly ceased, while confused and disquieted, she quickened her pace. Soon recollecting herself, she stopped ; and thanking him for his escort, begged that he would go no further. " I cannot leave you yet," said De Courcy in a voice of restrained emotion, and again he led her onwards.

A few short sentences were all that passed till they had almost reached the antique gate which terminated the winding part of the avenue. Here Laura again endeavoured to prevail upon her companion to return, but without success. With more composure than before, he refused to leave her. Dreading to encounter Hargrave while De Courcy was in such evident agitation, she besought him to go, telling him that it was her

particular wish that he should proceed no farther. He instantly stopped, and, clasping her hand between his, "Must I then leave you, Laura," said he; "you whose presence has so long been the charm of my existence!" The blood rushed violently into Laura's face, and as suddenly retired. "And can I," continued De Courcy, "can I suffer you to go without pouring out my full heart to you?" Laura breathed painfully, and she pressed her hand upon her bosom to restrain its swelling. "To talk to you of passion," resumed De Courcy, "is nothing. You have twined yourself with every wish and every employment, every motive, every hope, till to part with you is tearing my heart-strings." Again he paused. Laura felt that she was expected to reply, and, though trembling and breathless, made an effort to speak. "This is what I feared," said she, "and yet I wish you had been less explicit, for there is no human being whose friendship is so dear to me as yours; and now I fear I ought"—The sob which had been struggling in her breast now choked her utterance, and she wept aloud. "It is the will of heaven," said she, "that I should be reft of every earthly friend." She covered her face and stood labouring to compose herself; while, heart-struck with a disap-

pointment which was not mitigated by all the gentleness with which it was conveyed, De Courcy was unable to break the silence.

“Ungrateful! selfish that I am,” exclaimed Laura suddenly dashing the tears from her eyes, “thus to think only of my own loss, while I am giving pain to the worthiest of hearts.—My best friend, I cannot indeed return the regard with which you honour me, but I can make you cease to wish that I should. And I deserve the shame and anguish I shall suffer. She, whom you honour with your love,” continued she, the burning crimson glowing in her face and neck, “has been the sport of a passion, strong as disgraceful—disgraceful as its object is worthless.”

Her look, her voice, her manner, conveyed to De Courcy the strongest idea of the torture which this confession cost her; and no sufferings of his own could make him insensible to those of Laura. “Cease, cease,” he cried, “best and dearest of women, do not add to my wretchedness the thought of giving pain to you.” Then, after a few moments pause, he continued, “it would be wronging your noble candour to doubt that you have recalled your affections.”

“In doing so,” answered Laura, “I can claim

no merit. Infatuation itself could have been blind no longer."

"Then why, dearest Laura," cried De Courcy, his heart again bounding with hope, "why may not time and the fond assiduities of love"—

"Ah!" interrupted Laura, "that is impossible. A mere preference I might give you, but I need not tell you that I have no more to give."

"My heavenly Laura," cried De Courcy, eager joy beaming in his eyes, "give me but this preference, and I would not exchange it for the fondest passions of all woman-kind."

"You deceive yourself," said Laura, mournfully, "miserably deceive yourself. Such a sentiment could never content you. You would miss a thousand little arts of happiness which love alone can teach; observe a thousand nameless coldnesses which no caution could conceal; and you would be unhappy without knowing perhaps of what to complain. You, who deserve the warmest affection to be content with mere endurance! Oh no, I should be wretched in the bare thought of offering you so poor a return."

"Endurance, Laura! I should indeed be a monster to find joy in any thing which you could describe by such a word: But must I despair of

awakening such an affection as will make duty delightful, such as will enjoy the bliss which it bestows?"

"Believe me, my dear friend," said Laura, in a voice as sweet, as soothing, as ever conveyed the tenderest confession, "believe me I am not insensible to the value of your regard. It adds a new debt of gratitude to all that Montreville's daughter owes you. My highest esteem shall ever be your's, but after what I have confided to you, a moment's consideration must convince you that all beyond is impossible."

"Ah!" thought De Courcy, "what will it cost me to believe that it is indeed impossible." But Laura's avowal was not quite so fatal to his hopes as she imagined; and while she supposed that he was summoning fortitude to endure their final destruction, he stood silently pondering Mrs De Courcy's oft repeated counsel to let love borrow the garb of friendship, nor suffer him undisguised to approach the heart where, having once been dethroned as an usurper, all was in arms against him.

"If I must indeed renounce every dearer hope," returned he, "then in your friendship, my ever dear Miss Montreville, I must seek the happiness of my after-life, and surely"—

"Oh no," interrupted Laura, "that must not be—the part, the little part of your happiness which will depend upon earthly connections, you must find in that of some fortunate woman who has yet a heart to give."

"How can you name it to me?" cried De Courcy, half indignantly! "Can he who has known you, Laura, admired in you all that is noble, loved in you all that is enchanting, transfer his heart to some common-place being?—You are my business—you are my pleasure—I toil but to be worthy of you—your approbation is my sweetest reward—all earthly things are precious to me only as you share in them—even a better world borrows hope from you. And is this a love to be bestowed on some soulless thing? No, Laura, I cannot, will not change. If I cannot win your love, I will admit no substitute but your friendship."

"Indeed, Mr De Courcy," cried Laura, unconsciously pressing, in the energy of speech, the hand which held her's—"Indeed it is to no common-place woman that I wish to resign you. Lonely as my own life must be, its chief pleasures must arise from the happiness of my friends, and to know that you are happy."—Laura stopped, for she felt her voice grow tremulous. "But

we will not talk of this now," resumed she, "I shall be absent for some months at least, and in that time you will bring yourself to think differently. Promise me at least to make the attempt."

"No, Laura," answered De Courcy, "this I cannot promise. I will never harass you with importunity or complaint, but the love of you shall be my heart's treasure, it shall last through life—beyond life—and if you cannot love me, give in return only such kind thoughts as you would bestow on one who would promote your happiness at the expence of his own. And promise me, dearest Laura, that when we meet, you will not receive me with suspicion or reserve, as if you feared that I should presume on your favour, or persecute you with solicitations. Trust to my honour, trust to my love itself for sparing you all unavailing entreaty. Promise me then, ever to consider me as a friend, a faithful tender friend; and forget, till my weakness remind you of it, that ever you knew me as a lover."

"Ah, Mr De Courcy," cried Laura, tears filling her eyes, "what thoughts but the kindest can I ever have of him who comforted my father's sorrows, who relieved—in a manner which made

relief indeed a kindness—relieved my father's wants? And what suspicion, what coldness can I ever feel towards him whom my father loved and honoured! Yes I will trust you; for I know that you are as far above owing favour to compassion as to fear."

"A thousand thanks, beloved Laura," cried De Courcy, kissing her hands "and thus I seal our compact. One thing more; shall I trespass on your noble frankness, if I ask you whether, had not another stolen the blessing, I might have hoped to awaken a warmer regard? whether any labour, any cares could have won for me what he has forfeited?"

Silent and blushing, Laura stood for a few moments with her eyes fixed on the ground, then raising them, said, "From you I fear no wrong construction of my words, and will frankly own to you that for my own sake, as well as your's, I wish you had been known to me ~~as~~ the serpent wound me in his poisoned folds. I believe, indeed, that no mortal but himself could have inspired the same—what shall I call an infatuation with which reason had nothing to do. But you have the virtues which I have been taught to love, and—and—But what avails it now? I was

indeed a social creature ; domestic habits, domestic wishes strong in me. But what avails it now ?”

“ And was there a time when you could have loved me, Laura ? Blessings on you for the concession ! It shall cheer my exiled heart when you are far distant sooth me with delightful day-dreams of what might have been ; and give my solitude a charm which none but you could bring to the most social hour.”

“ Your solitude, my honoured friend,” replied Laura, “ needs it not ; it has better and nobler charms ; the charms of usefulness, of piety ; and long may these form your business and delight. But what makes me linger with you. I meant to hasten home that I might avoid one as unlike you as confidence is to fear ; the feelings which you each inspire.—Farewell. I trust I shall soon hear that you are well and happy.”

Loath to part, De Courcy endeavoured to detain her while he again gave utterance to his strong affection ; and when she would be gone, bade her farewell in language so solemn, so tender, that all her self-command could not repress the tears which trickled down her cheeks. They parted ; he followed her to beg that she would think of

him sometimes. Again she left him ; again he had some little boon to crave. She reached the gate, and looking back saw De Courcy standing motionless where she had last quitted him. She beckoned a farewell. The gate closed after her, and De Courcy felt as if one blank dreary waste had blotted the fair face of nature.

CHAP. XXVIII.

THE evening was closing, when Laura proceeded on her way. She had outstaid her purposed time, and from every bush by the path side she expected to see Hargrave steal upon her; in every gust of the chill November wind she thought she heard his footstep. She passed the last cottages connected with Norwood. The evening fires glanced cheerfully through the casements, and the voice of rustic merriment came softened on the ear. "Amiable De Courcy!" thought Laura. "The meanest of his dependents finds comfort in his protection, while the being on whom I have lavished the affection which might have rejoiced that worthy heart, makes himself an object of dread, even to her whom he pretends to love."

She reached home, however, without interruption, and was going to join Lady Pelham in the sitting-room; when happening to pass a looking-

glass, she observed that her eyes still bore traces of the tears she had been shedding, and, in dread of the merciless raillery of her aunt, she retired to her own room. There, with an undefined feeling of despondence, she sat down to re-consider her conversation with De Courcy.

Never was task more easy, or more unprofitable. She remembered every word that De Courcy had uttered; remembered the very tone, look, and gesture with which they were spoken. She recollected too all that she had said in reply; but she could by no means unravel the confused effects of the scene upon her own mind. She certainly pitied her lover to a very painful degree. "Poor De Courcy!" said she, accompanying the half-whisper with a heavy sigh. But having, in the course of half an hour's rumination, repeated this soliloquy about twenty times, she began to recollect that De Courcy had borne his disappointment with considerable philosophy, and had appeared to derive no small comfort from the prospect of an intercourse of mere friendship.

This fortunate recollection, however, not immediately relieving her, she endeavoured to account for her depression by laying hold of a vague idea which was floating in her mind, that she had

not on this occasion acted as she ought. Friendship between young persons of different sexes was a proverbial foment of the tender passion; and though she was herself in perfect safety, was it right to expose to such hazard the peace of De Courcy? Was it generous, was it even honourable to increase the difficulties of his self-conquest, by admitting him to the intimacy of friendship? It was true he had voluntarily sought the post of danger: but then he was under the dominion of an influence which did not allow him to weigh consequences; and was it not unpardonable in her, who was in full possession of herself, to sanction, to aid his imprudence? Yet how could she have rejected a friendship which did her so much honour? the friendship of a man whom her father had so loved and respected! of the man to whom her father had wished to see her connected by the closest ties! the man to whom she owed obligations never to be repaid? Alas! how had she acknowledged these obligations? By suffering the most amiable of mankind to sport with his affections, while she had weakly thrown away her own. But the mischief was not yet totally irremediable; and dazzled by the romantic generosity of sacrificing her highest earthly joy to the restoration of her benefactor's

quiet, she snatched a pen intending to retract her promise.

An obsolete notion of decorum was for once favourable to a lover, and Laura saw the impropriety of writing to De Courcy. Besides, it occurred to her that she might withdraw into Scotland, without formally announcing the reason of her retreat; and thus leave herself at liberty to receive De Courcy as a friend whenever discretion should warrant this indulgence. After the most magnanimous resolves however, feeling her mind as confused and comfortless as before, she determined to obtain the benefit of impartial counsel, and changed the destination of the paper on which she had already written "My dear friend," from De Courcy to Mrs Douglas.

With all her native candour and singleness of heart did Laura detail her case to the mistress of her youth. To reveal De Courcy's name was contrary to her principles; but she described his situation, his mode of life, and domestic habits. She enlarged upon his character, her obligations to him, and the regret which, for his sake, she felt, that particular circumstances rendered her incapable of such an attachment as was necessary to conjugal happiness. She mentioned her compliance with her lover's request of a continuance of their

former intimacy; confessed her doubts of the propriety of her concession; and entreated Mrs Douglas's explicit opinion on the past, as well as her directions for the future.

Her mind thus unburdened, she was less perplexed and uneasy; and the next morning cheerfully commenced her journey, pleasing herself with the prospect of being released from the harassing attendance of Hargrave. On the evening of the second day the travellers reached Grosvenor Street; and the unsuspecting Laura, with renewed sentiments of gratitude towards her aunt, revisited the dwelling which had received her when she could claim no other shelter.

Her annuity having now become due, Laura, soon after her arrival in town, one day borrowed Lady Pelham's chariot, that she might go to receive the money, and purchase some necessary additions to her wardrobe. Remembering, however, the inconveniencies to which she had been subjected by her imprudence in leaving herself without money, she regulated her disbursements by the strictest economy; determined to reserve a sum which, besides a little gift to her cousin, might defray the expence of a journey to Scotland.

Her way chancing to lie through Holborn, a

recollection of the civilities of her old landlady, induced her to stop and inquire for Mrs Dawkins. The good woman almost compelled her to alight; overwhelmed her with welcomes, and asked a hundred questions in a breath, giving in return a very detailed account of all her family affairs. She informed Laura, that Miss Julia, having lately read the life of a heroine who in the capacity of a governess captivated the heart of a great lord, had been seized with a desire to seek adventures under a similar character; but finding that recommendations for experience were necessary to her admission into any family of rank, she had condescended to serve her apprenticeship in the tuition of the daughters of an eminent cowfeeder. The good woman expressed great compassion for the pupils of so incompetent a teacher, from whom they could learn nothing useful. "But that was," she observed, "their father's look-out, and in the mean time, it was so far well that July was doing something towards her keeping. After a visit of some length Laura wished to be gone, but her hostess would not suspend her eloquence long enough to suffer her to take leave. She was at last obliged to interrupt the harangue; and breaking from her indefatigable entertainer, hurried home, not a little

alarmed lest her stay should expose her on her return home to oratory of a different kind.

Lady Pelham, however, received her most graciously, examined all her purchases, and inquired very particularly into the cost of each. She calculated the amount, and the balance of the annuity remaining in Laura's possession. "Five and thirty pounds!" she exclaimed—"what in the world, Laura, will you do with so much money?" "Perhaps five and thirty different things," answered Laura, smiling; "I have never had, nor ever shall have, half so much money as I could spend." "Oh you extravagant thing!" cried Lady Pelham patting her cheek. "But take care that some one does not save you the trouble of spending it. You should be very sure of the locks of your drawers. You had better let me put your treasures into my bureau." Laura was about to comply, when recollecting that there might be some awkwardness in asking her aunt for the money while she concealed its intended destination, she thanked Lady Pelham, but said she supposed it would be perfectly safe in her own custody; and then, as usual, avoided impending altercation by hastening out of the room. She thought Lady Pelham looked displeased; but as that was a necessary effect of the slightest contradiction, she saw it without vio-

lent concern ; and the next time they met, her Ladyship was again all smiles and courtesy.

Some blanks remaining to be filled up in Lady Pelham's town establishment, Laura took advantage of the present happy humour, for performing her promise to the kind-hearted Fanny, who was upon her recommendation received into the family. A much more important boon indeed would have been granted with equal readiness. Lady Pelham could for the present refuse nothing to her dear Laura.

Three days, "three wondrous days," all was sunshine and serenity. Lady Pelham was the most ingenious, the most amusing, the most fascinating of woman-kind. "What a pity," thought Laura, "that my aunt's spirits are so fluctuating! How delightful she can be when she pleases." In the midst of these brilliant hours, Lady Pelham one morning ran into the room where Laura was at work—"Here's a poor fellow," said she, with a look and voice all compassion, "who has sent me his account, and says he must go to jail if it be not paid instantly. But it is quite impossible for me to get the money till to-morrow." "To jail!" cried Laura, shocked—"What is the amount?" "Forty pounds," said Lady Pelham, "and I have not above ten in the house. "Take mine," cried

Laura, hastening to bring it. Lady Pelham stopped her. "No, my dear good girl," said she, "I won't take away your little store, perhaps you may want it yourself." "Oh no," said Laura, "I cannot want it, pray let me bring it." "The poor man has a large family," said Lady Pelham, "but indeed I am very unwilling to take—" Her Ladyship spared further regrets, for Laura was out of hearing. She returned in a moment with the whole of her wealth, out of which Lady Pelham, after some further hesitation, was prevailed upon to take thirty pounds; a robbery to which she averred that she would never have consented, but for the wretched situation of an innocent family, and her own certainty of repaying the debt in a day or two at farthest. Several days, however, passed away, and Lady Pelham made no mention of discharging her debt. Laura wondered a little that her aunt should forget a promise so lately and so voluntarily given; but her attention was entirely diverted from the subject by the following letter from Mrs Douglas.

"You see, my dear Laura, I lose no time in answering your letter, though, for the first time, I answer you with some perplexity. The weight which you have always kindly allowed to my

“ opinion, makes me at all times give it with timidity ; but this is not the only reason of my present hesitation. I confess that in spite of the apparent frankness and perspicuity with which you have written, I am not able exactly to comprehend you.

“ You describe a man of respectable abilities, of amiable dispositions, of sound principles, and engaging manners. You profess that such qualities, aided by intimacy, have secured your cordial friendship, while obligations beyond return have enlivened this friendship by the warmest gratitude. But, just as I am about to conclude that all this has produced its natural effect, and to prepare my congratulations for a happy occasion, you kill my hopes with a dismal sentence, expressing your regret for having been obliged to reject the addresses of this excellent person. Now this might have been intelligible enough, supposing you were pre-occupied by a stronger attachment. But so far from this, you declare yourself absolutely incapable of any exclusive affection, or of such a regard as is necessary to any degree of happiness in the conjugal state. I know not, my dear Laura, what ideas you may entertain of the fervency suitable to wedded love ; but had you

“ been less peremptory, I should have thought it
 “ not unlikely to spring from a young woman’s
 “ ‘ most cordial esteem’ and ‘ warmest gratitude’
 “ towards a young man with ‘ expressive black
 “ eyes,’ and ‘ the most benevolent smile in the
 “ world.’

“ From the tenor of your letter, as well as
 “ from some expressions you have formerly drop-
 “ ped, I am led to conjecture that you think an
 “ extravagant passion necessary to the happiness
 “ of married life. You will smile at the expres-
 “ sion; but if it offend you, change it for any
 “ other descriptive of a feeling beyond tender
 “ friendship, and you will find the substitute near-
 “ ly synonymous with the original. Now this
 “ idea appears to me rather erroneous; and I
 “ cannot help thinking that calm, dispassionate
 “ affection, at least on the side of the lady, pro-
 “ mises more permanent comfort.

“ All male writers on the subject of love, so far
 “ as my little knowledge extends, represent pos-
 “ session as the infallible cure of passion. A very
 “ unattractive picture, it must be confessed, of the
 “ love of that lordly sex! but they themselves be-
 “ ing the painters, the deformity is a pledge of the
 “ resemblance, and I own my small experience
 “ furnishes no instance to contradict their testi-

"mony. Taking its truth then for granted, I
 "need not inquire whether the passions of our
 "own sex be equally fleeting. If they be, the
 "enamoured pair soon find themselves at best in
 "the same situation with those who marry from
 "sober sentiments of regard; that is, obliged to
 "seek happiness in the esteem, the confidence,
 "the forbearance of each other. But if, in the
 "female breast, the fervours of passion be less
 "transient, I need not describe to you the suffer-
 "ings of feminine sensibility under half-retained
 "ardours, nor the stings of feminine pride under
 "the unnatural and mortifying transference of the
 "arts of courtship. I trust, my dear child, that
 "should you even make a marriage of passion,
 "your self-command will enable you to smother
 "its last embers in your own bosom, while your
 "prudence will improve the short advantage
 "which is conferred by its empire in that of your
 "husband, to lay the foundation of an affection
 "more tender than friendship, more lasting than
 "love.

"Again, it is surely of the utmost consequence
 "to the felicity of wedded life, that a just and
 "temperate estimate be formed of the character
 "of him to whose temper we must accommodate
 "ourselves; whose caprices we must endure;

" whose failings we must pardon, whether the
 " discord burst upon us in thunder, or steal on
 " amid harmonies which render it imperceptible,
 " perhaps half-pleasing. Small chance is there
 " that passion should view with the calm extenu-
 " ating eye of reason the faults which it suddenly
 " detects in the god of its idolatry. The once
 " fervent votary of the idol, finding it unworthy
 " of his worship, neglects the useful purposes to
 " which he might apply the gold which it con-
 " tains.

" I have other reasons for thinking that passion
 " is at best unnecessary to conjugal happiness ;
 " but even if I should make you a proselyte
 " to my opinion, the conviction would, in the
 " present case, probably come too late. Such
 " a man as you describe will probably be satisfied
 " with the answer he has received. He will cer-
 " tainly never importune you, nor poorly attempt
 " to extort from your pity what he could not win
 " from your love. His attachment will soon
 " subside into a friendly regard for you, or be di-
 " verted into another channel by virtues similar
 " to those which first attracted him. I only
 " wish, my dear Laura, that after this change
 " takes place, the ' circumstances' may remain in
 " force which render you ' for ever incapable of

"repaying him with a love like his own.' If
 "you are sure that these circumstances are deci-
 "sive, I foresee no evil which can result from
 "your cultivating a friendship so honourable and
 "advantageous to you, as that of a man of letters
 "and a Christian ; whose conversation may im-
 "prove your mind, and whose experience may
 "supply that knowledge of the world which is
 "rarely attainable by women in the more private
 "walks of life.

"To him I should suppose that no danger
 "could arise from such an intercourse. We are
 "all apt to over-rate the strength and durability
 "of the attachments we excite. I believe the
 "truth is, that in a vigorous, well-governed, and
 "actively employed mind, love rarely becomes
 "that resistless tyrant which vanity and romances
 "represent him. His empire is divided by the
 "love of fame or the desire of usefulness, the
 "eagerness of research or the triumph of dis-
 "covery. But even solitude, idleness, and ima-
 "gination cannot long support his dominion
 "without the assistance of hope ; and I take it
 "for granted from your tried honour and gene-
 "rosity, that your answer has been too explicit
 "to leave your lover in any doubt that your sen-
 "tence is final.

" I own I could have wished, that the virtues
 " of my ever dear Laura had found, in the sacred
 " characters of wife and mother, a larger field
 " than a state of celibacy can afford ; but I have
 " no fear that your happiness or respectability
 " should ever depend upon outward circum-
 " stances. I have no doubt that moderate wishes
 " and useful employments will diffuse cheerfulness
 " in the loneliest dwelling, while piety will
 " people it with guests from heaven.

" Thus, my beloved child, I have given my
 " opinion with all the freedom you can desire.
 " I have written a volume rather than a letter.
 " The passion for giving advice long survives
 " that which is the subject of our correspondence ;
 " but to shew you that I can lay some restraint
 " on an old woman's rage for admonition,
 " I will not add another line, except that which
 " assures you that I am, with all a mother's love,
 " and all a friend's esteem,

" Your affectionate

" E. DOUGLAS."

Laura read this letter often, and pondered it
 deeply. Though she could not deny that it con-
 tained some truths, she was not satisfied with the
 doctrine deduced from them. She remembered

that Mrs Douglas was the most affectionate of wives ; and concluded that in one solitary instance her judgment had been at variance with her practice ; and that, having herself made a marriage of love, she was not an adequate judge of the disadvantage attending a more dispassionate connection. Some passages too she could well have spared ; but as these were prophetic rather than monitory, they required little consideration ; and after the second reading, Laura generally omitted them in the perusal of her friend's epistle. Upon the whole, however, it gave her pleasure. Her conscience was relieved by obtaining the sanction of Mrs Douglas to her promised intimacy with De Courcy, and already she looked forward to the time when it should be renewed.

Since her arrival in town, her aunt, all kindness and complacency, had scarcely named Hargrave ; and, with the sanguine temper of youth, Laura hoped that she had at last exhausted the perseverance of her persecutors. This fruitful source of strife removed, she thought she could without much difficulty submit to the casual fits of caprice to which Lady Pelham was subject ; and, considering that her aunt, with all her faults, was still her most natural protector, and her

house her most proper abode, she began to lay aside thoughts of removing immediately to Scotland, and to look towards Walbourne as her permanent home.

In the meantime she promised herself that the approaching winter would bring her both amusement and information. The capital, with all its wonders, of which she had hitherto seen little, the endless diversity of character which she expected its inhabitants to exhibit, the conversation of the literary and the elegant, of wits, senators, and statesmen, promised an inexhaustible fund of instruction and delight. Nay, the patriotic heart of Laura beat high with the hope of meeting some of those heroes who, undaunted by disaster, where all but honour is lost, maintain the honour of Britain, or who, with happier fortune, guide the triumphant navies of our native land. She was yet to learn how little of character appears through the varnish of fashionable manners, and how little a hero or a statesman at a rout differs from a mere man of fashion in the same situation.

Lady Pelham seemed inclined to furnish her with all the opportunities of observation which she could desire, introducing her to every visitor of distinction, and procuring for her the particular attention of two ladies of high rank, who con-

stantly invited her to share in the gaieties of the season. But Laura, instructed in the value of time, and feeling herself accountable for its employment, stopped far short of the dissipation of her companions. She had long since established a criterion by which to judge of the innocence of her pleasures, accounting every amusement, from which she returned to her duties with an exhausted frame, languid spirits, or distracted attention, to be at best dangerous, and contrary to all rational ends of recreation. Of entertainments which she had never before witnessed, curiosity generally induced her for once to partake; but she found few that could stand her test; and to those which failed in the trial, she returned as seldom as possible.

One species alone, if it deserves to be classed with entertainments, she was unwillingly obliged to except from her rule. From card-parties Laura always returned fatigued both in mind and body; while present at them she had scarcely any other wish than to escape; and she quitted them unfit for any thing but rest. Lady Pelham, however, sometimes made it a point that her niece should accompany her to these parties; and, though she never asked Laura to play, was occasionally at pains to interest her in the game, by

calling her to her side, appealing to her against ill-fortune, or exacting her congratulation in success. A few of these parties excepted, Laura's time passed pleasantly. Though the calm of her aunt's temper was now and then disturbed by short gusts of anger, it returned as lightly as it fled; and the subject, fertile in endless chiding, seemed almost forgotten.

A fortnight had passed in this sort of quiet, when one morning Lady Pelham proposed to carry Laura to see the Marquis of ——'s superb collection of pictures. Laura, obliged by her aunt's attention to her prevailing taste, eagerly accepted the proposal, and hastened to equip herself for the excursion. Light of heart, she was returning to the drawing-room to wait till the carriage drew up, when, on entering, the first object she beheld was Colonel Hargrave, seated confidentially by the side of Lady Pelham.

Laura, turning sick with vexation, shrunk back, and, bewailing the departure of her short lived quiet, returned, half-angry, half-sorrowful, to her own room. She had little time, however, to indulge her chagrin, for Lady Pelham almost immediately sent to let her know that the carriage waited.

Disconcerted, and almost out of humour,

Laura had tossed aside her bonnet, and was about to retract her consent to go; when, recollecting that the plan had been proposed on her account, without any apparent motive unless to oblige her, she thought her aunt would have just reason to complain of such an ungracious rejection of her civility. "Besides, it is like a spoiled child," thought she, "to quarrel with my amusement, because one disagreeable circumstance attends it;" and, readjusting her bonnet, she joined Lady Pelham, not without a secret hope that Hargrave might not be of the party. The hope deceived her. He was ready to hand her into the carriage, and to take his seat by her side.

Her sanguine expectations thus put to flight, the habitual complacency of Laura's countenance suffered a sudden eclipse. She answered almost peevishly to Hargrave's inquiries for her health; and so complete was her vexation, that it was long ere she observed how much his manner towards her was changed. He whispered no extravagancies in her ear; offered her no officious attentions; and seized no opportunities of addressing her, but such as were consistent with politeness and respect. He divided his assiduities not unequally between her and Lady Pelham; and even without any apparent reluctance, permitted

a genteel young man, to whom the ladies curtsied in passing, to share in his office of escort, and almost to monopolize Laura's conversation. Having accompanied the ladies home, he left them immediately, refusing Lady Pelham's invitation to dinner; and Laura no less pleased than surprised at this unexpected turn, wished him good morning more graciously than she had of late spoken to him.

The next day he dined in Grosvenor Street, and the same propriety of manner continued. The following evening Laura again met with him in a large party. He did not distinguish her particularly from any of her fair competitors. Laura was delighted. She was convinced that he had at last resolved to abandon his fruitless pursuit; but what had so suddenly wrought this happy change, she could not divine.

He did not visit Lady Pelham daily, yet it so happened that Laura saw him every day, and still he was consistent. Laura scarcely doubted, yet durst scarcely trust her good fortune.

The violent passions of Hargrave, however, in some degree unfitted him for a deceiver; and sometimes the fiery glance of impatience, of admiration, or of jealousy, belied the serenity of his manner. Laura did not fail to remark this; but she possessed the happy faculty of explaining



every ambiguity in human conduct, in a way favourable to the actor—a faculty which, though it sometimes exposed her to mistake and vexation, was, upon the whole, at once a happiness and a virtue. She concluded that Hargrave, determined to persecute her no further, was striving to overcome his passion; that the appearances she had remarked were only the struggles which he could not wholly repress; and she felt herself grateful to him for making the attempt—the more grateful from her idea of its difficulty.

With her natural singleness of heart, she one day mentioned to Lady Pelham the change in Hargrave's behaviour. "I suppose," added she smiling, "that finding he can make nothing more of me, he is resolved to lay me under obligation by leaving me at peace, having first contrived to make me sensible of its full value." Lady Pelham was a better dissembler than Colonel Hargrave; and scarcely did a change of colour announce the deception, while, in a tone of assumed anger, she answered by reproaching her niece with having at last accomplished her purpose, and driven her lover to despair. Yet Lady Pelham was aware that Hargrave had not a thought of relinquishing his pursuit. His new-found self-command was merely intended to throw

Laura off her guard, that Lady Pelham might have an opportunity of executing a scheme which Lambert had contrived, to entangle Laura beyond the possibility of escape.

Many an action, harmless in itself, is seen, by a discerning bystander, to have in it 'nature that in time will venom breed, though no teeth for the present.' It happened that Lambert, while at Walbourne, had once seen Laura engaged in a party at chess; and her bent brow and flushed cheek, her palpitating bosom, her trembling hand, her eagerness for victory, above all, her pleasure in success restrained but not concealed, inspired him with an idea that play might be made subservient to the designs of his friend; designs which he was the more disposed to promote, because, for the present, they occupied Hargrave to the exclusion of that folly of which Lambert had so well availed himself.

It was Lambert's proposal that he should himself engage Laura in play; and having won from her, by means which he could always command, that he should transfer the debt to Hargrave. The scheme was seconded by Lady Pelham, and, in part, acquiesced in by Hargrave. But though he could consent to degrade the woman whom he

intended for his wife, he could not endure that any other than himself should be the instrument of her degradation ; and, sickening at the shackles which the love of gaming had imposed upon himself, he positively refused to accede to that part of the plan, which proposed to make Laura's entanglement with him the branch of a habit previously formed. Besides, the formation of a habit, especially one so contrary to previous bias, was a work of time ; and a stratagem of tedious execution did not suit the impatience of Hargrave's temper.

He consented, however, to adopt a more summary modification of the same artifice. It was intended that Laura should at first be induced to play for a stake too small to alarm her, yet sufficiently great to make success desirable ; that she should at first be allowed to win ; that the stake should be increased until she should lose a sum which it might incommode her to part with ; and then that the stale cheat of gamblers, hope of retrieving her loss, should be pressed on her as a motive for venturing nearer to destruction.

The chief obstacle to the execution of this honourable enterprize lay in the first step, the difficulty of persuading Laura to play for any sum which could be at all important to her. For ob-

viating this, Lady Pelham trusted to the diffidence, the extreme timidity, the abhorrence of notoriety, which nature strengthened by education had made a leading feature in the character of Laura. Her Ladyship determined that the first essay should be made in a large company in the presence of persons of rank, of fame, of talent, of every qualification which could augment the awe almost amounting to horror, with which Laura shrunk from the gaze of numbers.

Partly from a craving for a confident, partly in hope of securing assistance, Lady Pelham communicated her intention to the Honourable Mrs Clermont, a dashing widow of five-and-thirty. The piercing black eyes, the loud voice, the free manner, and good-humoured assurance of this lady, had inspired Laura with a kind of dread, which had not yielded to the advances which the widow condescended to make. Lady Pelham judged it most favourable to her righteous purpose, that the first attempt should be made in the house of Mrs Clermont, rather than in her own; both because that lady's higher circle of acquaintance could command a more imposing assemblage of visitors; and because this arrangement would leave her Ladyship more at liberty to watch the success of her scheme, than

she could be where she was necessarily occupied as mistress of the ceremonies.

The appointed evening came, and Lady Pelham, though with the utmost kindness of manner, insisted upon Laura's attendance. Laura would rather have been excused; yet, not to interrupt a humour so harmonious, she consented to go. Lady Pelham was all complacency. She condescended to preside at her niece's toilette, and obliged her to complete her dress by wearing for that evening a superb diamond aigrette, one of the ornaments of her own earlier years. Laura strenuously resisted this addition to her attire, accounting it wholly unsuitable to her situation; but her aunt would take no denial, and the affair was not worthy of a more serious refusal. This important concern adjusted, Lady Pelham viewed her niece with triumphant admiration. She burst forth into praises of her beauty, declaring, that she had never seen her look half so lovely. Yet with skilful malice, she contrived to awaken Laura's natural bashfulness, by saying, as they were alighting at Mrs Clermont's door, "Now my dear don't mortify me to-night by any of your Scotch *gaucheries*. Remember every eye will be turned upon you." "Heaven forbid," thought

Laura, and timidly followed her aunt to a couch where she took her seat.

For a while Lady Pelham's words seemed prophetic, and Laura could not raise her eyes without meeting the gaze of admiration or of scrutiny; but the rooms began to be crowded by the great and the gay, and Laura was relieved from her vexatious distinction. Lady Pelham did not long suffer her to enjoy her release, but rising, proposed that they should walk. Though Laura felt in her own majestic stature a very unenviable claim to notice, a claim rendered more conspicuous by the contrast offered in the figure of her companion, she could not with politeness refuse to accompany her aunt, and giving Lady Pelham her arm, they began their round.

Laura, little acquainted with the ease which prevails in town parties, could not help wondering at the nonchalance of Mrs Clermont, who, leaving her guests to entertain themselves as they chose, was lounging on a sofa, playing at picquet with Colonel Hargrave. "Mrs Clermont at picquet," said Lady Pelham. "Come Laura, picquet is the only civilized kind of game you play. You shall take a lesson;" and she led her niece forwards through a circle of misses, who, in hopes of catching the attention of the handsome Colonel

Hargrave, were tittering and talking nonsense most laboriously. This action naturally drew the eyes of all upon Laura, and Lady Pelham, who expected to find useful engines in her timidity and embarrassment, did not fail to make her remark the notice which she excited. From this notice Laura would have escaped, by seating herself near Mrs Clermont; but Lady Pelham perceiving her intention, placed herself, without ceremony, so as to occupy the only remaining seat, leaving Laura standing alone, shrinking at the consciousness of her conspicuous situation. No one was near her to whom she could address herself, and her only resource was bending down to overlook Mrs Clermont's game.

She had kept her station long enough to be fully sensible of its awkwardness, when Mrs Clermont, suddenly starting up, exclaimed, " Bless me ! I had quite forgotten that I promised to make a loo-table for the Duchess. Do, my dear Miss Montreville, take my hand for half an hour." " Excuse me, Madam," said Laura, drawing back, " I play so ill." " Nay, Laura," interrupted Lady Pelham, " your teacher is concerned to maintain your skill, and I insist on it that you play admirably." " Had not your Ladyship better play?" " Oh no, my dear; I

join the loo-table." "Come," said Mrs Clermont, offering Laura the seat which she had just quitted, "I will take no excuse: so sit down, and success attend you!" The seat presented Laura with an inviting opportunity of turning her back upon her inspectors; she was averse from refusing a trifling request, and rather willing to give Hargrave a proof that she was not insensible to the late improvement in his behaviour. She therefore quietly took the place assigned her, while the trio exchanged smiles of congratulation on the facility with which she had fallen into the snare.

Something, however, yet remained to be arranged, and Lady Pelham and her hostess still kept their stations by her side. While dividing the cards, Laura recollected having observed that, in town, every game seemed played for money; and she asked her antagonist what was to be the stake. He of course referred that point to her own decision; but Laura, in profound ignorance of the arcana of card-tables, blushed, hesitated, and looked at Lady Pelham and Mrs Clermont for instructions. "We don't play high in this house, my dear," said Mrs Clermont, "Colonel Hargrave and I were only playing guineas." "Laura is only a beginner," said

Lady Pelham, "and perhaps half-a-guinea"—Laura interrupted her aunt by rising and deliberately collecting the cards, "Colonel Hargrave will excuse me," said she. "That is far too great a stake for me." "Don't be absurd, my dear," said Lady Pelham, touching Laura's sleeve, and affecting to whisper; "why should not you play as other people do?" Laura not thinking this a proper time to explain her conscientious scruples, merely answered, that she could not afford it; and more embarrassed than before, would have glided away, but neither of her guards would permit her to pass. "You need not mind what you stake with Hargrave," said Lady Pelham apart; "you play so much better than he that you will infallibly win." "That does not at all alter the case," returned Laura. "It would be as unpleasant to me to win Colonel Hargrave's money as to lose my own." "Whatever stake Miss Montreville chooses must be equally agreeable to me," said Colonel Hargrave; but Laura observed that the smile which accompanied these words had in it more of sarcasm than of complacency. "I should be sorry, Sir," said she, "that you lowered your play upon my account. Perhaps some of these young ladies," continued she, looking round to the talkative circle behind—"Be

quiet, Laura," interrupted Lady Pelham, again in an under-tone; "you will make yourself the town-talk with your fooleries." "I hope not," returned Laura, calmly; but if I do, there is no help; little inconveniencies must be submitted to for the sake of doing right." "Lord, Miss Montreville," cried Mrs Clermont aloud, "what odd notions you have! Who would mind playing for half-a-guinea? It is nothing; absolutely nothing. It would not buy a pocket handkerchief." It would buy a week's food for a poor family, thought Laura; and she was confirmed in her resolution; but not willing to expose this reason to ridicule, and a little displeased that Mrs Clermont should take the liberty of urging her, she coolly, yet modestly replied, "That such matters must greatly depend on the opinions and circumstances of the parties concerned, of which they were themselves the best judges." "I insist on your playing," said Lady Pelham, in an angry half-whisper. "If you will make yourself ridiculous, let it be when I am not by to share in the ridicule." "Excuse me, Madam, for to-night," returned Laura, pleadingly. "Before another evening I will give you reasons which I am sure will satisfy you." "I am sure," said Hargrave, darting a very significant look towards

Laura, " if Miss Montreville, instead of cards, prefer allowing me to attend her in your absence, I shall gain infinitely by the exchange."

Laura, to whom his glance made this hint very intelligible, reddened ; and, saying she would by no means interrupt his amusement, was again turning to seek a substitute among her tittering neighbours, when Mrs Clermont prevented her, by calling out to a lady at a considerable distance, " My dear Duchess, do have the goodness to come hither, and talk to this whimsical beauty of ours. She is seized with an economical fit, and has taken it into her pretty little head that I am quite a gambler because I fix her stake at half-a-guinea." " What may not youth and beauty do !" said her Grace, looking at Laura, with a smile half-sly half-insinuating. " When I was the Miss Montreville of the day, I too might have led the fashion of playing for pence, though now I dare not venture even to countenance it."

The mere circumstance of rank could never decompose Laura ; and, rather taking encouragement from the charming though faded countenance of the speaker, she replied, " But, in consideration of having no pretensions to lead the fashion, may I not claim exemption from following it ?" " Oh by no means," said her Grace. " When

once you have entered the world of fashion, you must either be the daring leader or the humble follower. If you choose the first, you must defy the opinions of all other people; and, if the last, you must have a suitable indifference for your own." "A gentle intimation," returned Laura, "that in the world of fashion, I am quite out of place, since nothing but my own opinion is more awful to me than that of others."

"Miss Montreville," said Lady Pelham, with an aspect of vinegar, "we all wait your pleasure." "Pray, Madam," answered Laura, "do not let me detain you a moment; I shall easily dispose of myself." "Take up your cards this instant, and let us have no more of these airs," said Lady Pelham, now without affectation whispering, in order to conceal from her elegant companions the wrath which was, however, distinctly written in her countenance.

It now occurred to Laura as strange, that so much trouble should be taken to prevail upon her to play for more than she inclined. Hargrave, though he had pretended to release her, still kept his seat, and his language had tended rather to embarrass than relieve her. Mrs Clermont had interfered further than Laura thought either necessary or proper; and Lady Pelham was eager

to carry her point. Laura saw that there was something in all this which she did not comprehend; and, looking up to seek an explanation in the faces of her companions, she perceived that the whole trio seemed waiting her decision with looks of various interest. The piercing black eyes of Mrs Clermont were fixed upon her with an expression of sly curiosity. Hargrave hastily withdrew a sidelong glance of anxious expectation; while Lady Pelham's face was flushed with angry impatience of delay. "Has your Ladyship any particular reason for wishing that I should play for a higher stake than I think right?" said Laura, fixing on her aunt a look of calm scrutiny. Too much out of humour to be completely on her guard, Lady Pelham's colour deepened several shades, while she answered, "I child! what should make you think so?" "I don't know," said Laura. "People sometimes try to *convince* from mere love of victory; but they seldom take the trouble to *persuade* without some other motive." "Any friend," said Lady Pelham, recollecting herself, "would find motive enough for what I have done, in the absurd appearance of these littlenesses to the world, and the odium that deservedly falls on a young miser." "Nay, Lady Pelham," said the Duchess,

"this is far too severe. Come," added she, beckoning to Laura, with a gracious smile, "you shall sit by me, that I may endeavour to enlarge your conceptions on the subject of card-playing."

Laura, thus encouraged, instantly begged her aunt's permission to pass. Lady Pelham could not decently refuse; and, venting her rage, by pinching Laura's arm till the blood came, and muttering, through her clenched teeth, "obstinate wretch," she suffered her niece to escape. Laura did not condescend to bestow any notice upon this assault, but, pulling her glove over her wounded arm, took refuge beside the Duchess. The fascinating manners of a high-bred woman of fashion, and the respectful attentions offered to her whom the Duchess distinguished by her particular countenance, made the rest of the evening pass agreeably, in spite of the evident ill-humour of Lady Pelham.

Her Ladyship restrained the further expression of her rage till Laura and she were on their way home; when it burst out in reproaches of the parsimony, obstinacy, and perverseness which had appeared in her niece's refusal to play. Laura listened to her in silence; sensible, that while Lady Pelham's passion overpowered the voice of

her own reason, it was vain to expect that she should hear reason from another. But, next day, when she judged that her aunt had had time to grow cool, she took occasion to resume the subject; and explained, with such firmness and precision, her principles in regard to the uses of money and the accountableness of its possessors, that Lady Pelham laid aside thoughts of entangling her by means of play; since it was vain to expect that she would commit to the power of chance that which she habitually considered as the sacred deposit of a father, and as specially destined for the support and comfort of his children.

CHAP. XXIX.

HARGRAVE no sooner perceived the futility of his design to involve Laura in a debt of honour, than he laid aside the disguise which had been assumed to lull her vigilance, and which he had never worn without difficulty. He condescended, however, to save appearances, by taking advantage of the idea which Laura had herself suggested to Lady Pelham, and averred that he had made a powerful effort to recover his self-possession; but he declared, that, having totally failed in his endeavours to obtain his liberty, he was determined never to renew them, and would trust to time and accident for removing Laura's prejudice. In vain did she assure him that no time could produce such a revolution in her sentiments as would at all avail him; that though his eminent improvement in worth might secure her esteem, her affections were alienated beyond recal. The old system was resumed, and with greater vigour

than before, because with less fear of observation, and more frequent opportunities of attack. Every meal, every visit, every public place, furnished occasions for his indefatigable assiduities, from which Laura found no refuge beyond the precincts of her own chamber.

Regardless of the vexation which such a report might give her, he chose to make his suit a subject of the tittle-tattle of the day. By this manœuvre, in which he had before found his advantage, he hoped that several purposes might be served. The publicity of his claim would keep other pretenders at a distance ; it would oblige those who mentioned him to Laura to speak, if not favourably, at least with decent caution ; and it might possibly at last induce her to listen with less reluctance to what every one spoke of as natural and probable. Lady Pelham seconded his intentions, by hints of her niece's engagement, and confidential complaints to her friends of the *mauvaise honte* which made Laura treat with such reserve the man to whom she had long been affianced. The consequence of their manœuvring was, that Hargrave's right to persecute Laura seemed universally acknowledged. The men, at his approach, left her free to his attendance ; the women entertained her with praises of his person,

manners, and equipage; with hints of her situation, too gentle to warrant direct contradiction; or charges made with conviction too strong to yield to any form of denial.

Lady Pelham, too, resumed her unwearied remonstrances, and teased, chided, argued, upbraided, entreated, and scolded, through every tedious hour in which the absence of visitors left Laura at her mercy. Laura had at one time determined against submitting to such treatment, and had resolved, that, if it were renewed, she would seek a refuge far from her persecutors, and from England. But that resolution had been formed when there appeared no immediate necessity for putting it in practice; and England contained somewhat to which Laura clung almost unconsciously. Amidst all her vexations, Mrs De Courcy's letters soothed her ruffled spirits; and more than once, when she had renewed her determination to quit Lady Pelham, a few lines from Norwood made her pause on its fulfilment, reminding her that a few months, however displeasing, would soon steal away, and that her return to the country would at least bring some mitigation of her persecutions.

Though Mrs De Courcy wrote often, and confidentially, she never mentioned Montague further

than was necessary to avoid particularity. She said little of his health, nothing of his spirits or occupations, and never hinted any knowledge of his rejected love. Laura's inquiries concerning him were answered with vague politeness; and thus her interest in the state of his mind was constantly kept awake. Often did she repeat to herself, that she hoped he would soon learn to consider her merely as a friend; and that which we have often repeated as truth, we in time believe to be true.

Laura had been in town about a month, when one of her letters to Norwood was followed by a longer silence than usual. She wrote again, and still the answer was delayed. Fearing that illness prevented Mrs De Courcy from writing, Laura had endured some days of serious anxiety, when a letter was brought her, addressed in Montague's hand. She hastily tore it open, and her heart fluttered between pleasure and apprehension, when she perceived that the whole letter was written by him. It was short and cautious. He apologized for the liberty he took, by saying, that a rheumatic affection having prevented his mother from using her pen, she had employed him as her secretary, fearing to alarm Laura by longer silence. The letter throughout was that of a

kind yet respectful friend. Not a word betrayed the lover. The expressions of tender interest and remembrance with which it abounded, were ascribed to Mrs De Courcy, or at least shared with her, in a manner which prevented any embarrassment in the reply. Laura hesitated for a moment, whether her answer should be addressed to Mrs De Courcy or to Montague: but Montague was her benefactor, their intimacy was sanctioned by her best friend, and it is not difficult to imagine how the question was decided. Her answer produced a reply, which again was replied to in its turn; and thus a correspondence was established, which, though at first constrained and formal, was taught by Montague's prudent forbearance, to assume a character of friendly ease.

This correspondence, which soon formed one of Laura's chief pleasures, she never affected to conceal from Lady Pelham. On the contrary, she spoke of it with perfect openness and candour. Unfortunately, however, it did not meet with her Ladyship's approbation. She judged it highly unfavourable to her designs in regard to Hargrave. She imagined that, if not already an affair of love, it was likely soon to become so; and she believed that, at all events, Laura's inter-

course with the De Courcys would foster those antiquated notions of morality to which Hargrave owed his ill success. Accordingly, she first objected to Laura's new correspondence; then lectured on its impropriety and imprudence; and, lastly, took upon her peremptorily to prohibit its continuance. Those who are already irritated by oppression, a trifle will at last rouse to resistance. This was an exercise of authority so far beyond Laura's expectations, that it awakened her resolution to submit no longer to the importunity and persecution which she had so long endured, but to depart immediately for Scotland. Willing, however, to execute her purpose with as little expence of peace as possible, she did not open her intentions at the moment of irritation. She waited a day of serenity to propose her departure.

In order to procure the means of defraying the expence of her journey, it was become necessary to remind Lady Pelham of her loan, which appeared to have escaped her Ladyship's recollection. Laura, accordingly, one day gently hinted a wish to be repaid. Lady Pelham at first looked surprised, and affected to have forgotten the whole transaction; but, upon being very distinctly reminded of the particulars, she owned that she recollected something of it, and careless

ly promised to settle it soon ; adding that she knew Laura had no use for the money. Laura then frankly announced the purpose to which she meant to apply it ; saying, that, as her aunt was now surrounded by more agreeable society, she hoped she might, without inconvenience, be spared, and would therefore relieve Lady Pelham of her charge, by paying a visit to Mrs Douglas. Rage flamed in Lady Pelham's countenance, while she burst into a torrent of invective against her niece's ingratitude, and coldness of heart ; and it mingled with triumph as she concluded by saying.—“ Do, Miss ; by all means go to your precious Scotland, but find the means as you best can ; for not one penny will I give you for such a purpose. I have long expected some such fine freak as this, but I thought I should disappoint it.”

Not daunted by this inauspicious beginning, Laura taking encouragement from her aunt's known instability, again and again renewed the subject ; but Lady Pelham's purposes, however easily shaken by accident or caprice, were ever inflexible to entreaty. “ She possessed,” she said, “ the means of preventing her niece's folly, and she was determined to employ them.” Laura burnt with resentment at the injustice of this de-

termination. She acknowledged no right which Lady Pelham possessed to detain her against her own consent, and she considered the detention of her lawful property as little else than fraud. But perceiving that remonstrance was useless, she judged it most prudent not to embitter, by vain recriminations, an intercourse from which she could not immediately escape. Without further complaint or upbraiding, she submitted to her fate ; content with resolving to employ more discreetly the next payment of her annuity, and with making a just but unavailing appeal to her aunt's generosity, by asserting the right of defencelessness to protection. Lady Pelham had not the slightest idea of conceding any thing to this claim. On the contrary, the certainty that Laura could not withdraw from her power, encouraged her to use it with less restraint. She invited Hargrave to a degree of familiarity which he had not before assumed ; admitted him at all hours ; sanctioned any freedom which he dared to use with Laura ; and forced or inveigled her into frequent tête-à-têtes with him.

Fretted beyond her patience, Laura's temper more than once failed under this treatment, and she bitterly reproached Hargrave as the source of all her vexation. As it was, however, her ha-

bitual study to convert every event of her life to the purposes of virtue, it soon occurred to her that, during these compulsory interviews, she might become the instrument of awakening her unworthy lover to more noble pursuits. Like a ray of light, the hope of usefulness darted into her soul, shedding a cheering beam on objects which before were dark and comfortless; and, with all the enthusiastic warmth of her character, she entered on her voluntary task; forgetting, in her eagerness to recal a sinner from the error of his ways, the weariness, disgust, and dread with which she listened to the ravings of selfish passion. She no longer endeavoured to avoid him, no longer heard him with frozen silence or avowed disdain. During their interviews, she scarcely noticed his protestations, but employed every interval in urging him, with all the eloquence of dread, to retreat from the gulf which was yawning to receive him; in assuring him, with all the solemnity of truth, that the waters of life would repay him a thousand-fold for the poisoned cup of pleasure.

Truth, spoken by the loveliest lips in the world, confirmed by the lightnings of a witching eye, kindled at times in Hargrave a something which he mistook for the love of virtue. He declared

his abhorrence of his former self, asserted the innocence of his present manner of life, and vowed that, for the future, he should be blameless. But when Laura rather incautiously urged him to give proof of his reformation, by renouncing a passion whose least gratifications were purchased at the expence of justice and humanity, he insisted that she required more than nature could endure. She vehemently protested that he would never, with life, relinquish the hope of possessing her.

Her remonstrances had however one effect, of which she was altogether unconscious. Hargrave could not estimate the force of those motives which led her to labour so earnestly for the conversion of a person wholly indifferent to her ; and though she often assured him that her zeal was disinterested, he cherished a hope that she meant to reward his improvement. In this hope, he relinquished for a while the schemes which he had devised against the unsuspecting Laura, till accident again decided him against trusting to her free consent for the accomplishment of his wishes.

Among other exercises of authority to which Lady Pelham was emboldened by her niece's temporary dependence on her will, she adhered to her former prohibition of Laura's correspondence with De Courcy. Laura, unwilling to make it

appear a matter of importance, promised that she would desist; but said that she must first write to Mr De Courcy to account for her seeming caprice. Lady Pelham consented, and the letter was written. It spoke of Laura's situation, of her sentiments, of her regret for Hargrave's strange perseverance, of the dread and vexation to which he occasionally subjected her. To atone for its being the last, it was more friendly, more communicative than any she had formerly written. Laura meant to disguise under a sportive style, the effects which oppression had produced upon her spirits; and the playful melancholy which ran throughout, gave her expressions an air of artless tenderness.

Lady Pelham passed through the hall as this letter was lying upon the table, waiting the servant who was to carry it to the post. She looked at it. The sheet was completely filled. She wondered what it could contain. She took it up and examined it, as far as the seal would permit her. What she saw did but increase her curiosity. It was only wafered, and therefore easily opened; but then it was so dishonourable to open a letter. Yet what could the letter be the worse? A girl should have no secrets from her near relations. Still, to break a seal!—It was punishable by law.

Lady Pelham laid down the letter and walked away, already proud of having disdained to do a base action; but she heard the servant coming for his charge; she thought it best to have time to consider the matter. She could give him the letter at any time—and she slipped it into her pocket.

Sad sentence is pronounced against 'the woman who deliberates.' Lady Pelham read the letter; and then, in the heat of her resentment at the manner in which her favourite was mentioned, shewed it to Hargrave. As he marked the innocent confiding frankness, the unconstrained respect, the chastened yet avowed regard, with which Laura addressed his rival, contrasting them with the timid caution which, even during the reign of passion, had characterized her intercourse with himself,—contrasting them too with the mixture of pity, dislike and dread, which had succeeded her infatuation,—all the pangs of rage and jealousy took hold on the soul of Hargrave. He would have vented his frenzy by tearing the letter to atoms, but it was snatched from his quivering grasp by Lady Pelham, who, dreading detection, sealed and restored it to its first destination.

The first use which he made of his returning powers of self command, was to urge Lady Pel-

ham's concurrence in a scheme which he had before devised, but which had been laid aside in consequence of his ill-founded hopes. He entreated that her Ladyship would, by an opportune absence, assist his intention ; which was, he said, to alarm Laura with the horrors of a pretended arrest for an imaginary debt, and to work upon the gratefulness of her disposition, by himself appearing as her deliverer from her supposed difficulty. Lady Pelham in vain urged the futility of this stratagem, representing the obstacles to its accomplishment, and the certainty of early detection. Hargrave continued to importune, and she yielded.

Yet Hargrave himself was as far as Lady Pelham from expecting any fruits from the feeble artifice which he had detailed to her. He had little expectation that Laura could ever be induced to receive any pecuniary obligation at his hands, and still less that she would consider a loan which she might almost immediately repay, as a favour important enough to be rewarded with herself. He even determined that his aid should be offered in terms which would ensure its rejection. Though he durst not venture to unfold his whole plan to Lady Pelham, his real intention was merely to employ the disguise of law in remov-

ing Laura from even the imperfect protection of her aunt, to a place where she would be utterly without defence from his power. To the baseness of his purpose he blinded himself by considering the reparation which he should make in bestowing wealth and title on his victim ; its more than savage brutality he forgot in anticipation of the gratitude with which Laura, humbled in her own eyes, and in those of the world, would accept the assiduities which now she spurned. He little knew the being whom he thus devoted to destruction !

Incited by jealousy and resentment, he now resolved on the immediate execution of his design ; and he did not quit Lady Pelham till he had obtained her acquiescence in it so far as it was divulged to her. He then hastened to prepare the instruments of his villany ; and ere he gave himself time to cool, all was in readiness for the scheme which was to break the innocent heart that had loved and trusted him in seeming virtue, and pitied and prayed for him and warned him in guilt. How had the shades of evil deepened since the time when Hargrave first faltered between his infant passion and a virtuous purpose. He had turned from the path which "shineth

more and more unto the perfect day." On that in which he trode the night was stealing, slow but sure, which closes at last in "outer darkness."

One morning at breakfast, Lady Pelham, with more than usual civility, apologized for leaving Laura alone during the rest of the day, saying, that business called her a few miles out of town, but that she would return in the evening. She did not say whither she was going; and Laura never imagining that it could at all concern her to know, did not think of inquiring. Pleasing herself with the prospect of one day of peace and solitude, she saw her aunt depart, and then sat down to detail to the friend of her youth her situation, her wishes, and her intentions.

She was interrupted by Fanny, who came to inform her that two men below desired to speak with her. Wondering who, in that land of strangers, could have business with her, Laura desired that they might be shewn up stairs. Two coarse robust-looking men, apparently of the lower rank, entered the room. Laura was unable to divine what could have procured her a visit from persons of their appearance; yet, with her native courtesy, she was motioning them to a seat, when one of them stepped forward; and, laying on her shoulder a stick which he held, said,

in a rough ferocious voice, "Laura Montreville, I arrest you at the suit of John Dykes." Laura was surprised but not alarmed. "This must be some mistake," said she, "I know no such person as John Dykes." "He knows you though, and that is enough," answered the man. "Get away, girl," continued he, turning to Fanny, who stood lingering with the door a-jar, "You have no business here." "Friend," returned Laura, mildly, "you mistake me for some other person." "What, Miss," said the other man, advancing, "do you pretend that you are not Laura Montreville, daughter of the late Captain William Montreville, of Glenalbert in Scotland?" Laura now changing colour, owned that she was the person so described. "But," said she, recovering herself, "I cannot be arrested. I do not owe five shillings in the world." "Mayhap not, Miss," said the man, "but your father did; and you can be proved to have intermeddled with his effects as his heiress, which makes you liable for all his debts. So you'll please pay me the two hundred pounds which he owed to Mr John Dykes." "Two hundred pounds!" exclaimed Laura. "The thing is impossible. My father left a list of his debts in his own hand-writing, and they have all been faithfully discharged by the

sale of his property in Scotland." The men looked at each other for a moment, and seemed to hesitate ; but the roughest of the two presently answered, " What nonsense do you tell me of lists ? who's to believe all that ? I have a just warrant ; so either pay the money or come along." " Surely, friend," said Laura, who now suspected the people to be mere swindlers, " you cannot expect that I should pay such a sum without inquiring into your right to demand it. If your claim be a just one, present it in a regular account, properly attested, and it shall be paid to-morrow." " I have nothing to do with to-morrow, Miss," said the man. " I must do my business. It's all one to me whether you pay or not. It does not put a penny in my pocket : only if you do not choose to pay, come along ; for we can't be staying here all day." " I cannot procure the money just now, even though I were willing," answered Laura, with spirit, " and I do not believe you have any right to remove me." " Oh, as for the right, Miss, we'll let you see that. There is our warrant, properly signed and sealed. You may look at it in my hand, for I don't much like to trust you with it."

The warrant was stamped, and imposingly written upon parchment. With the tautology which

Laura had been taught to expect in a law-paper, it rung changes upon the permission to seize and confine the person of Laura Montreville, as heiress of William Montreville, debtor to John Dykes of Pimlico. It was signed as by a magistrate, and marked with the large seals of office. Laura now no longer doubted; and, turning pale and faint, asked the men whether they would not stay for an hour while she sent to beg the advice of Mr Derwent, Lady Pelham's solicitor. "You may send for him to the lock-up house," said the savage. "We have no time to spare." "And whither will you take me?" cried Laura, almost sinking with horror. "Most likely, answered the most gentle of the two ruffians, "you would not like to be put into the common prison; and you may have as good accommodations in my house as might serve a duchess."

Spite of her dismay Laura's presence of mind did not entirely forsake her. She hesitated whether she should not send to beg the assistance of some of Lady Pelham's acquaintance, or at least their advice in a situation so new to her. Among them all there was none with whom she had formed any intimacy; none whom, in her present circumstances of embarrassment and hu-

miliation, she felt herself inclined to meet. She shrunk at the thought of the form in which her story might be represented by the malignant or the misjudging, and she conceived it her best course to submit quietly to an inconvenience of a few hours continuance, from which she did not doubt that her aunt's return would that evening relieve her. Still the idea of being a prisoner; of committing herself to such attendants; of being an inmate of the abodes of misery, of degradation, perhaps of vice, filled her with dread and horror. Sinking on a couch, she covered her pale face with her hands, inwardly commending herself to the care of heaven.

The men, meanwhile, stood whispering apart, and seemed to have forgotten the haste which they formerly expressed. At last one of them, after looking from the window into the street, suddenly approached her, and, rudely seizing her arm, cried, "Come, Miss, the coach can't wait all day. It's of no use crying; we're too well used to that, so walk away if you don't choose to be carried." Laura dashed the tears from her eyes, and, faintly trying to disengage her arm, was silently following her conductor to the door, when it opened and Hargrave entered.

Prepared as he was for a scene of distress, de-

terminated as he was to let no movement of compassion divert his purpose, he could not resist the quiet anguish which was written in the lovely face of his victim ; and, turning with real indignation to her tormentor, he exclaimed, "Ruffian ! what have you done to her ?" But quickly recollecting himself, he threw his arm familiarly round her, and said, "My dearest Laura, what is the meaning of all this ? What can these people want with you ?" "Nothing which can at all concern you, Sir," said Laura, her spirit returning at the boldness of his address. "Nay, my dear creature," said Hargrave, "I am sure something terrible has happened. Speak, fellows," said he, turning to his emissaries, "what is your business with Miss Montreville ?" "No great matter, Sir," answered the man ; "only we have a writ against her for two hundred pounds, and she does not choose to pay it ; so we must take her to a little snug place, that's all." "To a prison ! You, Laura, to a prison ! Heavens ! it is not to be thought of. Leave the room fellows, and let me talk with Miss Montreville." "There is no occasion, Sir," said Laura. "I am willing to submit to a short confinement. My aunt returns this evening, and she will undoubtedly advance the money. It ought to be much the

same to me what room I inhabit for the few intervening hours." " Good heaven ! Laura, do you consider what you say ? Do you consider the horrors—the disgrace ? Dearest girl, suffer me to settle this affair, and let me for once do something that may give you pleasure." Laura's spirit revolted from the freedom with which this was spoken. Suffering undeserved humiliation, never had she been more jealous of her claim to respect. " I am obliged to you, Sir," said she, " but your good offices are unnecessary. Some little hardship, I find, I must submit to ; and I believe the smallest within my choice is to let these people dispose of me till Lady Pelham's return." Hargrave reddened. " She prefers a prison," thought he, " to owing even the smallest obligation to me. But her pride is near a fall ;" and he smiled with triumphant pity on the stately mien of his victim.

He was, in effect, almost indifferent whether she accepted or rejected his proffered assistance. If she accepted it, he was determined that it should be clogged with a condition expressly stated, that he was for the future to be received with greater favour. If she refused, and he scarcely doubted that she would, he had only to make the signal, and she would be hurried, unre-

sisting, to destruction. Yet, recollecting the despair, the distraction, with which she would too late discover her misfortune; the bitter upbraidings with which she would meet her betrayer; the frantic anguish with which she would mourn her disgrace, if, indeed, she survived it, he was inclined to wish that she would choose the more quiet way of forwarding his designs, and he again earnestly entreated her to permit his interference.

Laura's strong dislike to being indebted for any favour to Hargrave, was somewhat balanced in her mind by horror of a prison, and by the consideration that she could immediately repay him by the sale of part of her annuity. Though she still resisted his offer, therefore, it was less firmly than before. Hargrave continued to urge her. "If," said he, "you dislike to allow me the pleasure of obliging you, this trifling sum may be restored whenever you please; and if you afterwards think that any little debt remains, it is in your power to repay it a thousand fold. One kind smile, one consenting look, were cheaply purchased with a world."

The hint which concluded this speech seemed to Laura manifestly intended to prevent her acceptance of the offer which he urged so warmly. "Are you not ashamed, Sir," said she, with a dis-

dainful smile, "thus to make a parade of generosity which you do not mean to practise? I know you do not—cannot expect that I should poorly stoop to purchase your assistance." "Upon my soul, Laura," cried Hargrave, seizing her hands, "I am most earnest, most anxious, that you should yield to me in this affair; nor will I quit this spot till you have consented—nor till you have allowed me to look upon your consent as a pledge of your future favour." Laura indignantly snatched her hands from his grasp. "All that I comprehend of this," said she, "is insult, only insult. Leave me, Sir! It is unworthy even of you to insult the misfortunes of a defenceless woman."

Hargrave would not be repulsed. He again took her hand and persevered in his entreaties, not forgetting, however, to insinuate the conditions. Laura, in silent scorn, turned from him, wondering what could be the motive of his strange conduct, till it suddenly occurred to her that the arrest might be a mere plot contrived by Hargrave himself for the purpose of terrifying her into the acceptance of the conditions necessary to her escape. This suspicion once formed gained strength by every circumstance. The improbability of the debt; the time chosen when Lady Pelham was

absent ; the opportune arrival of Hargrave ; the submission of the pretended bailiffs to his order ; his frequent repetition of the conditions of his offer, at the same time that he appeared to wish for its acceptance ; all conspired to convince Laura that she was intended to be made the dupe of a despicable artifice. Glowing with indignation, she again forced herself from Hargrave. " Away with this contemptible mockery," she cried, " I will hear no more of it. While these people choose to guard me in this house, it shall be in an apartment secure from your intrusion." Then, before Hargrave could prevent her, she left him, and shut herself into her own chamber.

Here, at greater liberty to think, a new question occurred to her. In case of her refusal to accept of Hargrave's terms—in case of her entrusting herself to the pretended bailiffs, whither could they intend to convey her ? Laura's blood ran cold at the thought. If they were indeed the agents of Hargrave, what was there of dreadful which she might not fear ! Yet she could scarcely believe that persons could be found to attempt so daring a villany. Would they venture upon an outrage for which they must answer to the laws ! an outrage which Lady Pelham would certainly feel herself concerned to bring to immediate de-

tection and punishment. "Unfortunate chance!" cried Laura, "that my aunt should be absent just when she might have saved me. And I know not even where to seek her.—Why did she not tell me whither she was going? She who was wont to be so open!—Can this be a part of this cruel snare? Could she—Oh it is impossible! My fears make me suspicious and unjust."

Though Laura thus endeavoured to acquit Lady Pelham, her suspicion of Hargrave's treachery augmented every moment. While she remembered that her father, though he had spoken to her of his affairs with the most confidential frankness, had never hinted at such a debt, never named such a person as his pretended creditor—while she thought of the manner of Hargrave's interference,—the improbability that her own and her father's name and address, as well as the casualty of Lady Pelham's absence should be known to mere strangers—the little likelihood that common swindlers would endeavour to extort money by means so hazardous and with such small chance of success—her conviction rose to certainty; and she determined that nothing short of force should place her in the power of these impostors. Yet how soon might that force be employed! How feeble was the resistance which she could offer! And who would

venture to aid her in resisting the pretended servants of law! "Miserable creature that I am!" cried she, wringing her hands in an agony of grief and terror, "must I submit to this cruel wrong?—Is there no one to save me—no friend near?—Yes! yes, I have a friend from whom no treachery of man can tear me—^{Laura, that she was}—who can deliver me from their violence—who can ^{be} ~~more~~—can make their cruelty my passport to life eternal. Let me not despair then—Let me not be wanting to myself.—With His blessing the feeblest means are mighty."

After a moment's consideration, Laura rang her bell, that she might dispatch a servant in quest of Mr Derwent; resolving to resist every attempt to remove her before his arrival, or, if dragged by force from her place of refuge, to claim the assistance of passengers in the street. No person, however, answered her summons. She rang again and again. Yet still no one came. She perceived that the servants were purposely kept at a distance from her, and this served to confirm her suspicions of fraud.

The windows of her chamber looked towards the gardens behind the house; and she now regretted that she had not rather shut herself up in one of the front apartments, from whence she

could have explained her situation to the passers by. Seeing no other chance of escape, she resolved on attempting to change her place of refuge, and was approaching the door to listen whether any one was near, when she was startled by the rough voice of one of the pretended bailiffs, "Come along, Miss," he cried, "we are quite tired of waiting. Come a' . . ." Laura made no reply, but throwing herself on a seat, strove to rally the spirits she was so soon to need. "Come, come Miss," cried the man again; you have had time enough to make ready." Laura continued silent, while the ruffian called to her again and again, shaking the door violently. He threatened, with shocking oaths, that he would burst it open, and that she should be punished for resisting the officers of justice. Still was in vain. Laura would not answer a single word. Trembling in every limb, she listened to his blasphemies and vows of vengeance, till she had wearied out her persecutor, and her ear was gladdened with the sound of his departing steps.

He was almost immediately succeeded by his less ferocious companion, who more civilly begged her to hasten, as their business would not permit any longer delay. Finding that she did not answer, he reminded her of the consequences of

obstructing the execution of law ; and threatened, if she continued obstinate, to use force. Laura sat silent and motionless, using every momentary interval of quiet, in breathing a hasty prayer for deliverance. The least violent of the fellows proved the most persevering ; yet at last she had the satisfaction to hear him also retire.

Presently a lighter step approached, and Hargrave called to her. " Miss Montreville ! Laura ! Miss Montreville !" Laura was still silent. He called again without success. " Miss Montreville is ill," cried he aloud, as if to some one at a distance. " She is insensible. The door must be forced." " No ! no," cried Laura, determined not to leave him this pretence, " I am not insensible, nor ill, if you would leave me in peace." " For heaven's sake, then," returned he, " let me speak a few words to you." " No," answered Laura, " you can say nothing which I wish to hear." " I beseech you, I implore you," said Hargrave, " only by one word put it in my power to save you from these miscreants—say but that one little word, and you are free." " Man, man !" cried Laura, vehemently, " why will you make me abhor you ? I want no freedom but from your persecutions. Begone !" " Only promise me," said Hargrave, lowering his voice, " only promise me that you

will give up that accursed De Courcy, and I will dismiss these men." "Do you curse him who saved your life! Monster! Leave me! I detest you." Hargrave gnawed his lip with passion. "You shall dearly pay this obstinacy," said he, and fiercely strode away.

In the heat of his wrath, he commanded his coadjutors to force the door; but the law which makes the home of an Englishman a sacred sanctuary, extends its precious influence, in some faint degree, to the breasts even of the dregs of mankind; and these wretches, who would have given up Laura to any other outrage, hesitated to perpetrate this. They objected the danger. "Does your Honour think," said one of them, "that the servants will stand by and allow us to break open the door?" "I tell you," said Hargrave, "all the men-servants are from home. What do you fear from a parcel of women?" "Women can bear witness as well as men, your Honour; and it might be as much as our necks are worth to be convicted. But if your Honour could entice her out, we'd soon catch her."

Hargrave took two or three turns along the lobby, and then returned to Laura. "Miss Montreville," said he, "my dearest Miss Montreville, I conjure you to admit me only for a moment.



These savages will wait no longer. They are determined to force your door. Once more I implore you, before it be too late, let me speak with you. I expect them every moment. Laura's breast swelled with indignation at this vile pretence of kindness. "Acting under your commands, Sir," said she, "I doubt not that they may even dare this outrage. And let them at their peril. If the laws of my country cannot protect, they shall avenge me." For a moment Hargrave stood confounded at this detection, till anger replaced shame,—“Very well, Madam,” he cried; “insult me as you please, and take the consequences.” He then rejoined his emissaries; and by bribery and threats endeavoured to prevail upon them to consummate their violence. The men, unwilling to forfeit the reward of the hazard and trouble which they had already undergone, allured by Hargrave's promises, and fearing his vengeance, at last agreed to drag their hapless victim to her doom.

Having taken such instruments as they could find, for the purpose of forcing the door, they followed Hargrave up stairs, and prepared to begin their work. At this near prospect of the success of all his schemes, Hargrave's rage began to cool, and a gleam of tenderness and humanity reviving

in his heart, he shrunk from witnessing the anguish which he was about to inflict. "Stop," said he to his people, who were approaching the door; stay a few moments;" and, putting his hand to his forehead, he walked about, not wavering in his purpose, but endeavouring to excuse it to himself. "It is all the consequence of her own obstinacy," said he, suddenly stopping. "You may go on—No; stay, let me first get out of this house. Her cries would drive me mad—Make haste—lose no time after I am gone. It is better over.

Besides the motive which he owned, Hargrave was impelled to depart by the dread of meeting Laura's upbraiding eye, and by the shame of appearing even to the servants, who were so soon to know his baseness, an inactive spectator of Laura's distress. He hastened from the house, and the men proceeded in their work.

With dread and horror did Laura listen to their attempts. Pale, breathless, her hands clenched in terror, she fixed her strained eyes on the door, which every moment seemed yielding; then flying to the window, surveyed in despair the height, which made escape an act of suicide; then again turning to the door, tried with her feeble strength to aid its resistance. In vain! It

yielded, and the shock threw Laura on the ground. The ruffians seized her, more dead than alive, and were seizing her lily arms to lead her away; but, with all her native majesty, she motioned them from her. "You need not touch me," said she, "you see I can resist no further." With the composure of despair, she followed them to the hall, where, her strength failing, she sunk upon a seat.

Some of the servants now in pity and amazement approaching her, she addressed herself to one of them. "Will you go with me, my good friend," said she, "that you may return and tell Lady Pelham where to find her niece's corpse?" The girl consented with tears in her eyes; but one of the fellows cried, "No; no; she may run after the coach if she likes, but she don't go within side." "Why not?" said the other, with a brutal leer. "They may both get home again together. They'll be free enough soon." Laura shuddered. "Where wandered my senses," said she, "when I thought of subjecting any creature to the chance of a fate like mine! Stay here, my dear, and tell Lady Pelham, that I charge her, by all her hopes here and hereafter, to seek me before she sleeps. Let her seek me wherever there is wickedness and woe—

and there, living or dead, I shall be found." "Let's have done with all this nonsense," said one of the men. "John, make the coach draw up close to the door." The fellow went to do as he was desired; while the other with a handkerchief prepared to stifle the cries of Laura, in case she should attempt to move the pity of passengers in the street. Laura heard the carriage stop, she heard the step let down, and the sound was like her death-knell.

The man hurried her through the hall. He opened the street door—and Fanny entered with Mr Derwent. Laura raising her bowed down head, uttered a cry of joy. "I am safe!" she cried, and sunk into the arms of Fanny.

The faithful girl had witnessed the arrest of her young mistress, and with affectionate interest had lingered in the anti-room, till Laura's request that she might be allowed to send for Mr Derwent had suggested to her what was most fit to be done, and the refusal of the pretended bailiff had warned her that it must be done quickly. She had then flown to Mr Derwent's—and, finding him just stepping into his carriage, easily persuaded him to order it to Grosvenor Street.

Mr Derwent immediately directed his servants to seize the fellow who had held Laura, the other

having made his escape upon seeing the arrival of her deliverers. Laura soon recovering, told her tale to Mr Derwent, who ordering the man to be searched, examined the warrant, and declared it to be false. The danger attending forgery, however, had been avoided, for there was no magistrate of the same name with that which appeared in the signature. Hargrave's villany thus fully detected, Laura wished to dismiss his agent; but Mr Derwent would not permit such atrocity to go unpunished, and gave up the wretch to the arm of law. He then quitted Laura, leaving his servant to attend her till Lady Pelham's return; and worn out with the emotion she had undergone, she threw herself on a bed to seek some rest.

Early in the evening Lady Pelham returned, and immediately inquired for her niece. The servants, always attentive and often uncharitable spectators of the actions of their superiors, had before observed the encouragement which their mistress gave to Hargrave; and, less unwilling to suspect than Laura, were convinced of Lady Pelham's connivance in his purpose. None of them, therefore, choosing to announce the failure of a scheme in which they believed her so deeply implicated, her questions produced no information

except that Miss Montreville was gone indisposed to bed. The habitual awe with which the good sense and discernment of Laura had inspired Lady Pelham, was at present augmented almost to fear by the consciousness of duplicity. She shrunk from encountering the glance of quiet scrutiny, the plain direct question which left no room for prevarication, no choice between simple truth and absolute falsehood. But curiosity to know the success of the plot, and still more a desire to discover how far she was suspected of abetting it, prevailed over her fears ; and having before studied the part she was to play, she entered Laura's apartment.

She found her already risen, and prepared to receive her. " My dear child," said her Ladyship in one of her kindest tones, " I am told you have been ill. What is the matter ?" " My illness is nothing, Madam," answered Laura, " but I have been alarmed in your absence by the most daring, the most unprincipled outrage !" " Outrage, my dear !" cried Lady Pelham in a voice of the utmost surprise ; " What outrage ?" Laura then, commanding by a powerful effort the indignation which swelled her heart, related her injuries without comment ; pausing at times to observe how her aunt was affected by the recital.

Lady Pelham was all amazement ; which,

though chiefly pretended, was partly real. She was surprized at the lengths to which Hargrave had gone, and even suspected his whole design, though she was far from intending to discover her sentiments to her niece.

"This is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of!" cried she when Laura had ended. "What can have been the meaning of this trick? What can have incited the people?"

"Colonel Hargrave, Madam," said Laura without hesitation.

"Impossible, my dear! Hargrave can be no further concerned in it, than as taking advantage of the accident to extort the promise of a little kindness from you. He would never have ventured to send the men into my house on such an errand."

"One of them confessed to Mr Derwent before the whole family, that Colonel Hargrave was his employer?"

"Astonishing!" cried Lady Pelham. "And what do you suppose to have been Hargrave's intention?"

"I doubt not, Madam," returned Laura, commanding her voice, though resentment flashed from her eyes, "I doubt not that his intentions were yet more base and inhuman than the means

he employed. But whatever they were, I am certain he would never have dared to entertain them, had it not been for the encouragement which your Ladyship has thought proper to give him."

"I, child!" cried Lady Pelham, truth in her colour contradicting the falsehood of her tongue, "Surely you do not think I would encourage him in such a plot."

"No, Madam," answered Laura, "I hope and believe you are incapable of consenting to such wickedness. I allude only to the general countenance which you have always shewn to Colonel Hargrave."

Lady Pelham could implicitly rely upon Laura's word; and finding that she was herself unsuspected, she had leisure to attempt palliating the offence of her *protégé*. "That countenance," returned she, "shall be completely withdrawn for the future, if Hargrave do not explain this strange frolic entirely to my satisfaction."

"Frolic, Madam!" cried Laura indignantly. "If that name belong to crimes which would disgrace barbarians, then call this a frolic!"

"Come, my dear girl," said Lady Pelham, coaxingly throwing her arm round Laura, "you are too much, and I must own, according to pre-

sent appearances, too justly irritated, to talk of this affair coolly to-night. To-morrow we shall converse about it. Now let's go to tea."

"No, Madam," said Laura with spirit, for she saw through her aunt's intention of glossing over Hargrave's villany—"I will never again expose myself to the chance of meeting a wretch whose crimes are my abhorrence. I will not leave this room till I quit it for ever. Madam, you have often called me firm. Now I will prove to you that I am so. Give me the means of going hence in a manner becoming your niece, or my own limbs shall bear me to Scotland, and on the charity of my fellow-creatures will I rely for support."

"I protest my love," cried Lady Pelham, "you are absolutely in a passion, I never saw you so angry till now."

"Your Ladyship never saw me have such reason for anger," replied Laura. "I own I am angry, yet I know that my determination is right, and I assure you it will outlive the heat with which it is expressed."

Had Laura's purpose been more placidly announced it would have roused Lady Pelham to fury; but even those who have least command over their tempers have generalship enough to

perceive the advantage of the attack ; and the passion of a virago has commonly a patriarchal submission for its elder-born brother. Lady Pelham saw that Laura was in no humour for trifling ; she knew that her resolutions were not easily shaken ; and she quitted her niece upon pretence of fatigue, but in reality that she might consider how to divert her from the purpose which she had so peremptorily announced.

Laura was every day becoming more necessary to her aunt, and to think of parting with her was seriously disagreeable. Besides, Laura's departure would effectually blast the hopes of Hargrave ; and what would then become of all Lady Pelham's prospects of borrowing consequence from the lovely young Countess of Lincourt ?

Never wanting in invention, Lady Pelham thought of a hundred projects for preventing her niece's journey to Scotland. Her choice was fixed by a circumstance which she could not exclude from her consideration. The story of Hargrave's nefarious plot was likely soon to be made public. It was known to Mr Derwent, and to all her own household. Her conscience whispered that her connivance would be suspected. Mr Derwent might be discreet ; but what was to be expected from the discretion of servants ? The

story would spread from the footmen to the waiting-maids, and from these to their ladies, till it would meet her at every turn. Nor had her imprudent consent left her the power of disclaiming all concern in it, by forbidding Hargrave her house, since he would probably revenge himself by disclosing her share in the stratagem.

Lady Pelham saw no better means of palliating these evils, than by dismissing her establishment and returning immediately to Walbourne; and she hoped, at the same time, that it might not be impossible to prevail on Laura to change the direction of her journey. For this purpose she began by beseeching her niece to lay aside thoughts of retiring to Scotland; and was beginning to recount all the disadvantages of such a proceeding; but Laura would listen to no remonstrance on the subject; declaring that if, after what had happened, she remained in a place where she was liable to such outrage, she should be herself accountable for whatever evil might be the consequence. Lady Pelham then proposed an immediate removal to Walbourne, artfully insinuating, that, if any cause of complaint should there arise, Laura would be near the advice and assistance of her friends at Norwood, and of Mrs Bolingbroke. Laura was not without some wishes which

pointed towards Walbourne ; but she remembered the importunities which she had there endured, and she firmly resisted giving occasion to their renewal.

Lady Pelham had then recourse to tender upbraidings. " Was it possible that Laura, the only hope and comfort of her age, would quit her now, when she had so endeared herself to the widowed heart, reft of all other treasure—now when increasing infirmity required her aid—now when the eye which was so soon to close, was fixed on her as on its last earthly treasure ! Would Laura thus cruelly punish her for a crime in which she had no share ; a crime which she was willing to resent to the utmost of her niece's wishes ! " Lady Pelham talked herself into tears, and few hearts of nineteen are hard enough to resist the tears of age. Laura consented to accompany her aunt to Walbourne, provided that she should never be importuned on the subject of Hargrave, nor even obliged to see him. These conditions Lady Pelham solemnly promised to fulfil, and, well pleased, prepared for her journey.

Hargrave, however, waited on her before her departure, and excused himself so well on the score of his passion, his despair, and his eager desire of being allied to Lady Pelham, that, af-

ter a gentle reprimand, he was again received into favour, informed of the promises which had been made against him, and warned not to be discouraged if their performance could not immediately be dispensed with. Of this visit Laura knew nothing; for she adhered to her resolution of keeping her apartment, nor ever crossed its threshold, till, on the third day after her perilous adventure, the carriage was at the door which conveyed her to Walbourne.

CHAP. XXX.

As Lady Pelham's carriage passed the entrance of the avenue which led to Norwood, Laura sunk into a profound reverie ; in the course of which she settled most minutely the behaviour proper for her first meeting with De Courcy. She decided on the gesture of unembarrassed cordiality with which she was to accost him ; intending her manner to intimate that she accounted him a friend, and only a friend. The awkwardness of a private interview she meant to avoid by going to Norwood next day, at an hour which she knew that Montague employed in reading aloud to his mother.

All this excellent arrangement, however, was unfortunately useless. Laura was taking a very early ramble in what had always been her favourite walk, when, at a sudden turn, she saw De Courcy not three steps distant. Her white gown shining through the still leafless trees had caught

his attention, the slightest glimpse of her form was sufficient for the eye of love, and he had advanced prepared to meet her; while she, thus taken by surprise, stood before him conscious and blushing. At this confusion, so flattering to a lover, De Courcy's heart gave one bound of triumphant joy; but he was too modest to ascribe to love what timidity might so well account for, and he prudently avoided reminding Laura, even by a look, of either his hopes or his wishes. Quickly recollecting herself, Laura entered into a conversation, which, though at first reserved and interrupted, returned by degrees to the confidential manner which De Courcy had formerly won from her under the character of her father's friend.

This confidence, so precious to him, De Courcy was careful never to interrupt. From the time of Laura's return, he saw her almost daily. She made long visits to Mrs De Courcy; he came often to Walbourne; they met in their walks, in their visits; they spent a week together under Mr Bolingbroke's roof; yet De Courcy religiously kept his promise, nor ever wilfully reminded Laura that he had a wish beyond her friendship. Always gentle, respectful, and attentive, he never invited observation by distinguishing her above others who had equal claims on his

politeness. She only shared his assiduities with every other woman whom he approached; nor did he betray uneasiness when she, in her turn, received attentions from others. His prudent self-command had the effect which he intended; and Laura, in conversing with him, felt none of the reserve which may be supposed to attend intercourse with a rejected admirer. His caution even at times deceived her. She recollected Mrs Douglas's prophecy, that 'his attachment would soon subside into friendly regard,' and imagined she saw its accomplishment. "How happy are men in having such flexible affections," thought she with a sigh. "I wonder whether he has entirely conquered the passion which, three short months ago, was to 'last through life—beyond life?' I hope he has," whispered she, with a deeper sigh; and she repeated it again—"I hope he has,"—as if by repeating it, she would have ascertained that it was her real sentiment. Yet, at other times, some little inadvertency, unheeded by less interested observers, would awaken a doubt of De Courcy's self-conquest; and in that doubt Laura unconsciously found pleasure. She often reconsidered the arguments which her friend had used to prove that passion is unnecessary to the

happiness of wedded life. She did not allow that she was convinced by them; but she half-wished that she had had an opportunity of weighing them before she had decided her fate with regard to De Courcy. Meanwhile, much of her time was spent in his company, and his presence had ever brought pleasure with it. Week after week passed agreeably away, and the close of the winter atoned for the disquiet which had marked its commencement.

During all this time, Laura saw nothing of Hargrave. His visits, indeed, to Walbourne were more frequent than she supposed; but the only one of which she had been informed, Lady Pelham affected to announce to her, advising her to avoid it by spending that day at Norwood. Since their return from town, her Ladyship had entirely desisted from her remonstrances in his favour, and Laura hoped that his last outrage had opened her aunt's eyes to the deformity of his character. And, could Lady Pelham's end have been pursued without annoyance to any living being, it would long before have shared the perishable nature of her other purposes. But whatever conferred the invaluable occasion of tormenting, was cherished by Lady Pelham as the dearest of her concerns;

and she only waited fit opportunity to show that she could be as stubborn in thwarting the wishes of others, as capricious in varying her own.

De Courcy's attachment could not escape her penetration ; and as she was far from intending to desert the cause of Hargrave, she saw, with displeasure, the progressive advancement of Laura's regard for the friend of her father. Though she was sufficiently acquainted with Laura to know that chiding would effect no change in her sentiments or conduct, she had not temper enough to restrain her upbraidings on this subject, but varied them with all the skill and perseverance of a veteran in provocation. " She did not, she must confess, understand the delicacy of ladies whose affections could be transferred from one man to another. She did not see how any modest woman could find two endurable men in the world. It was a farce to tell her of friendship and gratitude, and such like stuff. Everybody knew the meaning of a friendship between a girl of nineteen and a good-looking young fellow of five-and-twenty. She wondered whether Laura was really wise enough to imagine that De Courcy could afford to marry her ; or whether, if he were mad enough to think of such a thing, she could be so ungenerous as to take advantage of his folly, to

plunge him into irretrievable poverty; and this too, when it was well known that a certain young heiress had prior claims upon him."

Laura at first listened to these harangues with tolerable *sang froid*; yet they became, she was unconscious why, every day more provoking. Though she had self-command enough to be silent, her changing colour announced Lady Pelham's victory, and it was followed up without mercy or respite. It had, however, no other effect than that of imposing a little restraint when her Ladyship happened to be present; for De Courcy continued his attentions, and Laura received him with increasing favour.

Lady Pelham omitted none of the minor occasions of disturbing this harmonious intercourse. She interrupted their tête-à-têtes, beset them in their walks, watched their most insignificant looks, pried into their most common-place messages, and dexterously hinted to the one whatever foible she could see or imagine in the other.

A casual breath of scandal soon furnished her with a golden opportunity of sowing dissension, and she lost no time in taking advantage of the hint. "It is treating me like a baby," said she once to Laura, after opening in form her daily

attack ; "it is treating me like a mere simpleton to expect that you are to deceive me with your flourishing sentiments about esteem and gratitude. Have esteem and gratitude the blindness of love ? Don't I see that you overlook in your beloved Mr Montague De Courcy faults which in another you would think sufficient excuse for any ill treatment that you chose to inflict ?"

Laura kept silence ; for of late she had found that her temper could not stand a charge of this kind.

"What becomes of all your fine high-flown notions of purity, and so forth," continued Lady Pelham, "when you excuse his indiscretions with his mother's *protégée*, and make a favourite and a plaything of his spoilt bantling ?"

Laura turned pale, then reddened violently. "What *protégée* ? what bantling ?" cried she, quite thrown off her guard. "I know of no indiscretions—I have no playthings."

"What! you pretend not to know that the brat he takes so much notice of is his own. Did you never hear of his affair with a pretty girl whom his mamma was training as a waiting-maid for her fine-lady daughter."

"Mr De Courcy, Madam !" cried Laura, making a powerful struggle with her indignation — "He seduce a girl who as a member of his

family was doubly entitled to his protection! Is it possible that your Ladyship can give credit to such a calumny!"

"Hey-day," cried Lady Pelham, with a provoking laugh, "a most incredible occurrence to be sure! And pray why should your immaculate Mr De Courcy be impeccable any more than other people?"

"I do not imagine, Madam," returned Laura, with recovered self-possession, "that Mr De Courcy, or any of the human race, is perfectly sinless; but nothing short of proof shall convince me that he is capable of deliberate wickedness; or even that the casual transgressions of such a man can be so black in their nature, so heinous in their degree. It were next to a miracle if one who makes conscience of guarding his very thoughts, could, with a single step, make such progress in iniquity."

"It were a miracle indeed," said Lady Pelham, sneeringly, "if you could be prevailed upon to believe any thing which contradicts your romantic vagaries. As long as you are determined to worship De Courcy, you'll never listen to any thing that brings him down from his pedestal."

"It is wasting time," returned Laura calmly, "to argue on the improbability of this malicious

tale. I can easily give your Ladyship the pleasure of being able to contradict it. Mrs Bolingbroke is at Norwood. She will tell me frankly who is the real father of little Henry, and I shall feel no difficulty in asking her. Will you have the goodness to lend me the carriage for an hour?"

"A pretty expedition truly!" cried Lady Pelham, "and mighty delicate and dignified it is for a young lady, to run about inquiring into the pedigree of all the bastards in the country! I assure you, Miss Montreville, I shall neither countenance nor assist such a scheme!"

"Then, Madam," answered Laura coolly, "I shall walk to Norwood. The claims of dignity, or even of delicacy, are surely inferior to those of justice and gratitude. But though it should subject me to the scorn of all mankind, I will do what in me lies to clear his good name whose kindness ministered the last comforts that sweetened the life of my father."

The manner in which these words were pronounced, shewed Lady Pelham that resistance was useless. She was far from wishing to quarrel with the De Courcy family, and she now began to fear that she might appear the propagator of this scandal. Having little time to consult the means

of safety, since Laura was already leaving the room, she hastily said, I suppose in your explanations with Mrs Bolingbroke, you will give me up for your authority?" "No, Madam," replied Laura, with a scorn which she could not wholly suppress, "your Ladyship has no right to think so at the moment when I am shewing such concern for the reputation of my friends." Lady Pelham would have fired at this disdain, but her *quietus* was at hand—she was afraid of provoking Laura to expose her, and therefore she found it perfectly possible to keep her temper. "If you are resolved to go," said she, "you had better wait till I order the carriage; I fear we shall have rain." Laura at first refused; but Lady Pelham pressed her, with so many kind concerns for a slight cold which she had, that though she saw through the veil, she suffered her Ladyship to wear it undisturbed. The carriage was ordered, and Laura hastened to Norwood.

Though she entertained not the slightest doubt of De Courcy's integrity, she was restless and anxious. It was easy to see that her mind was pre-occupied during the few minutes which passed before, taking leave of Mrs De Courcy, she begged Mrs Bolingbroke to speak with her apart. Harriet followed her into another room; and

Laura, with much more embarrassment than she had expected to feel, prepared to begin her interrogations.

Harriet from the thoughtful aspect of her companion, anticipating something of importance, stood gravely waiting to hear what she had to say ; while Laura was confused by the awkwardness of explaining her reason for the question she was about to ask. " I have managed this matter very ill," said she at last, pursuing her thoughts aloud. " I have entered on it with so much formality that you must expect some very serious affair ; and, after all, I am only going to ask a trifling question. Will you tell me who is the father of my pretty little Henry ?" Harriet looked surprised, and answered,—“ Really, my dear, I am not sure that I dare. You inquired the same thing once before ; and just when I was going to tell you, Montague looked so terrible, that I was forced to hold my tongue. But what makes you ask ? What ! you won't tell ? Then I know how it is. My prophecy has proved true, and the good folks have given him to Montague himself. Ah ! what a tell-tale face you have, Laura ! And who has told you this pretty story ?" " It is of no consequence," replied Laura, " that you should know my authority, provided that I have

yours to contradict the slander." "You shall have better authority than mine," returned Harriet. "Those who were malicious enough to invent such a tale of Montague, might well assert that his sister employed falsehood to clear him. You shall hear the whole from nurse Margaret herself; and her evidence cannot be doubted. Come, will you walk to the cottage and hear what she has to say?"

They found Margaret alone; and Harriet, impatient till her brother should be fully justified, scarcely gave herself time to answer the old woman's civilities, before she entered on her errand. "Come, nurse," said she, with all her natural frankness of manner, "I have something particular to say to you. Let's shut the door and sit down. Do you know, somebody has been malicious enough to tell Miss Montreville that Montague is little Henry's father." Margaret lifted up her hands and eyes. "My young master, Madam!" cried she—"He go to bring shame and sorrow into any honest man's family! If you'll believe me, Miss," continued she, turning to Laura, "this is, begging your pardon, the wickedest lie that ever was told."

Laura was about to assure her that she gave no credit to the calumny, but Harriet, who had a

double reason for wishing that her friend should listen to Margaret's tale, interrupted her, saying, "Nurse, I am sure nothing could convince her so fully as hearing the whole story from your own lips. I brought her hither on purpose; and you may trust her, I assure you, for she is just such a wise prudent creature as you always told me that I ought to be." "Ah, Madam," answered Margaret, "I know that; for John says she is the prettiest behaved young lady he ever saw; and says how fond my lady is of her, and others too besides my lady, though it is not for servants to be making remarks." "Come, then, nurse," said Harriet, "sit down between us; tell us the whole sad story of my poor foster-sister, and clear your friend Montague from this aspersion."

Margaret did as she was desired. "Ah, yes!" said she, tears lending to her eyes a transient brightness, "I can talk of it now! Many a long evening John and I speak of nothing else. She always used to sit between us,—but now we both sit close together. But we are growing old," continued she, in a more cheerful tone, "and in a little while we shall see them all again. We had three of the prettiest boys!—My dear young lady, you will soon have children of your own, but never set your heart upon them, nor be too

proud of them, for that is only provoking Providence to take them away." "I shall probably never have so much reason," said Harriet, "as you had to be proud of your Jessy." The mother's pride had survived its object; and it brightened Margaret's faded countenance, as pressing Harriet's hand between her own, she cried, "Ah, bless you! you were always kind to her. She was indeed the flower of my little flock; and when the boys were taken away, she was our comfort for all. But I was too proud of her. Five years since, there was not her like in all the country round. A dutiful child, too, and never made us sad or sorrowful till—and such a pretty modest creature! But I was too proud of her.'"

Margaret stopped, and covered her face with the corner of her apron. Sympathizing tears stood in Laura's eyes; while Harriet sobbed aloud at the remembrance of the play-fellow of her infancy. The old woman first recovered herself, "I shall never have done at this rate," said she, and, drying her eyes, turned to address the rest of her tale to Laura. "Well, Ma'am, a gentleman who used to come a-visiting to the castle, by ill-fortune chanced to see her; and ever after that he noticed her and spoke to her; and flattered me up, too, saying, what a fine-looking young crea-

ture she was, and so well brought up, and what a pity it was that she should be destined for a tradesman's wife. So, like a fool as I was, I thought no harm of his fine speeches, because J [redacted] he behaved quite modest and re- [redacted] hn, to be sure, was angry, [redacted] an was her equal, and that he hoped her rosy cheeks would never give her notions above her station; and, says he,—I am sure many and many a time I have thought of his words—says he, ‘God grant I never see worse come of her than to be an honest tradesman's wife.’ My young master, too, saw the gentleman one day speaking to her; and he was so good as advise her himself, and told her that the gentleman meant nothing honest by all his fine speeches. So after that, she would never stop with him at all, nor give ear to a word of his flatteries; but always ran away from him, telling him to say those fine things to his equals.

“So, one unlucky day I had some matters to be done in the town, and Jessy said she would like to go, and poor foolish I was so left to myself that I let her go. So she dressed herself in her clean white gown.—I remember it as were it but yesterday. I went to the door with her, charging her to be home early. She shook hands

with me. Jessy, says I, you look just like a bride. So she smiled. No, mother, says she, I shan't leave home so merrily the day I leave it for all—and I never saw my poor child smile again. So she went, poor lamb, little thing. I stood in the door looking at [redacted] a fool as I was, that night. [redacted] have thought it strange though a gentleman had taken her for a wife, for there were not many ladies that looked like her."

Margaret rested her arms upon her knees, bent her head over them, made a pause, and then began again. "All day I was as merry as a lark, singing and making every thing clean in our little habitation here, where I thought we should all sit down together so happy when John came home at night from the castle. So it was getting darkish before my work was done, and then I began to wonder what was become of Jessy; and many a time I went across the green to see if there was any sight of her. At last John came home, and I told him that I was beginning to be frightened; but he laughed at me, and said she had perhaps met with some of her comrades, and was gone to take her tea with them. So we sat down by the fire; but I could not rest, for my mind misgave me sadly; so says I, John, I will go and see after

my girl. Well, says he, we may as well go and meet her.—Alas! alas! a sad meeting was that! We went to the door; I opened it, and somebody fell against me.—It was Jessy. She looked as dead as she did the day I laid her in her coffin; and her pretty cheek!—and her pretty mouth, that used to smile so sweetly in my face when she was a baby on my knee.—And her pretty shining hair that I used to comb so often!—Oh woe, woe is me! How could I see such a sight and live!”

The mother wrung her withered hands, and sobbed as if her heart were breaking. Laura laid her arms kindly round old Margaret's neck, for misfortune made the poor and the stranger her equal and her friend. She offered no words of unavailing consolation, but pitying tears trickled fast down her cheeks; while Mrs Bolingbroke, her eyes flashing indignant fires, exclaimed, “Surely the curse of heaven will pursue that wretch!”

“Alas!” said Margaret, “I fear I cursed him too; but I was in a manner beside myself then. God forgive both him and me! My poor child never cursed him. All that I could say she would not tell who it was that had used her so. She said she should never bring him to justice; and always

prayed that his own conscience might be his only punishment. So from the first we saw that her heart was quite broken; for she would never speak nor look up, nor let me do the smallest thing for her, but always said it was not fit that I should wait on such a one as she. Well, one night, after we were all a-bed, a letter was flung in at the window of Jessy's closet, and she crept out of her bed to take it. I can shew it you, Miss, for it was under her pillow when she died." Margaret, unlocking a drawer, took out a letter and gave it to Laura, who read in it these words :

" My dear Jessy, I am the most miserable
 " wretch upon earth. I wish I had been upon the
 " rack the hour I met you. I am sure I have been
 " so ever since. Do not curse me, dear Jessy! Up-
 " on my soul, I had far less thought of being the
 " ruffian I have been to you, than I have at this
 " moment of blowing out my own brains. I wish
 " to heaven that I had been in your own station
 " that I might have made you amends for the in-
 " jury I have done. But you know it is impos-
 " sible for me to marry you. I inclose a bank-
 " bill for L. 100, and I will continue to pay you
 " the same sum annually while you live, though

"you should never consent to see me more. If
 "you make me a father, no expence shall be
 "spared to provide the means of secrecy and com-
 "fort. No accommodation which a wife could
 "have shall be withheld from you. Tell me if
 "there be any thing more that I can do for you.
 "I shall never forgive myself for what I have
 "done. I abhor myself; and, from this hour,
 "I forswear all woman-kind for your sake.
 "Once more, dear Jessy, pardon me I implore
 "you."

This letter was without signature; but the
 hand-writing was familiar to Laura, and could
 not be mistaken. It was Hargrave's. Shuddering
 at this new proof of his depravity, Laura inward-
 ly offered a thanksgiving that she had escaped all
 connection with such a monster. "You may
 trust my friend with the wretch's name," said
 Harriet, anxious that Laura's conviction should
 be complete. "She will make no imprudent use
 of it." "I should never have known it myself
 had it not been for this letter," answered Margaret.
 "But my poor child wished to answer it, and she
 was not able to carry the answer herself, so she
 was obliged to ask her father to go with it. And
 first she made us both promise on the Bible, ne-

ver to bring him either to shame or punishment ; and then she told us that it was that same Major Hargrave that used to speak her so fair. Here is the scroll that John took of her answer."

" Sir, I return your money, for it can be of
 " no use where I am going. I will never curse
 " you; but trust I shall to the last have pity on you,
 " who had no pity on me. I fear your sorrow is
 " not right repentance; for, if it was, you would
 " never think of committing a new sin by taking
 " your own life, but rather of making reparation
 " for the great evil you have done. Not that I say
 " this in respect of wishing to be your wife. My
 " station makes that unsuitable, more especially
 " now when I should be a disgrace to any man.
 " And I must say, a wicked person would be as
 " unsuitable among my friends; for my parents
 " are honest persons, although their daughter is
 " so unhappy as to bring shame on them. I
 " shall not live long enough to disgrace them any
 " farther, so pray inquire no more for me, nor
 " take the trouble to send me money, for I will
 " not buy my coffin with the wages of shame;
 " and I shall need nothing else. So, wishing
 " that my untimely end may bring you to a true

"repentance, I remain, Sir, the poor dying disgraced,"

"JESSY WILSON."

"Ah, Miss," continued Margaret, wiping from the paper the drops which had fallen on it, "my poor child's prophecy was true. She always said she would just live till her child was born, and then lay her dishonoured head and her broken heart in the grave. My Lady and Miss Harriet there were very kind, and my young master himself was so good as promise that he would act the part of a father to the little orphan. And he used to argue with her that she should submit to the chastisement that was laid upon her, and that she might find some comfort still; but she always said that her chastisement was less than she deserved, but that she could never wish to live to be 'a very scorn of men, an outcast and an alien among her mother's children.'

"So the day that little Henry was born, she was doing so well that we were in hopes she would still be spared to us; but she knew better; and, when I was sitting by her, she pulled me close to her and said, 'Mother,' says she, looking pleased like, 'the time of my release is at hand now,' and then she charged me never to give poor little Hen-

ry to his cruel father. I had not power to say a word to her, but sat hushing the baby, with my heart like to break. So, by and by, she said to me again, but very weak and low like, 'My brothers lie side by side in the churchyard, lay me at their feet; it is good enough for me.' So she never spoke more, but closed her eyes, and slipped quietly away, and left her poor old mother."

A long pause followed Margaret's melancholy tale. "Are you convinced, my friend," said Mrs Bolingbroke at length. "Fully," answered Laura, and returned to silent and thankful meditation.

"My master," said Margaret, "has made good his promise to poor Jessy. He has shewn a father's kindness to her boy. He paid for his nursing, and forces John to take a board for him that might serve any gentleman's son; and now it will be very hard if the end of all his goodness is to get himself ill spoken of; and nobody saying a word against him that was the beginning of all this mischief. But that is the way of the world. "It is so," said Laura. "And what can better warn us that the earth was never meant for our resting-place. The 'raven' wings his way through it triumphant. The 'dove' finds no rest for the

sole of her foot, and turns to the ark from whence she came."

Mrs Bolingbroke soon after took leave of her nurse, and the ladies proceeded in their walk towards Walbourne. Harriet continued to express the warmest detestation of the profligacy of Hargrave, while Laura's mind was chiefly occupied in endeavouring to account for De Courcy's desire to conceal from her the enormity which had just come to her knowledge. Unable to divine his reason, she applied to Harriet. "Why my dear," said she, "should your brother have silenced you on a subject which could only be mentioned to his honour?" "He never told me his reasons," said Harriet smiling, "but if you will not be angry I may try to guess them." "I think," said Laura, "that thus cautioned, I may contrive to keep my temper; so speak boldly." "Then, my dear," said Harriet, "I may venture to say that I think he suspected you of a partiality for this wretch, and would not shock you by a full disclosure of his depravity. And I know," added she, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "that in him this delicacy was virtue; for the peace of his life depends on securing your affectionate, your exclusive preference." "Ah, Harriet, you have guessed right.

—Yes! I see it all. Dear generous De Courcy!" cried Laura, and burst into tears.

Harriet had not time to comment upon this agitation; for the next moment De Courcy himself was at her side. For the first time, Laura felt embarrassed and distressed by his presence. The words she had just uttered still sounded in her ear, and she trembled lest they had reached that of De Courcy. She was safe. Her exclamation was unheard by Montague,—but he instantly observed her tears, and they banished from his mind every other idea than that of Laura in sorrow. He paid his compliments like one whose attention was distracted, and scarcely answered what his sister addressed to him. Mrs Bolingbroke inwardly enjoying his abstraction and Laura's embarrassment, determined not to spoil an opportunity which she judged so favourable to her brother's suit. "This close walk," said she with a sly smile, "was never meant for a trio. It is just fit for a pair of lovers. Now I have letters to write, and if you two will excuse me"—De Courcy colouring crimson, had not presence of mind to make any reply, while Laura, though burning with shame and vexation, answered, with her habitual self-command, "Oh pray my dear, use no ceremony. Here are none but *friends*." The emphasis which she laid

upon the last word, wrung a heavy sigh from De Courcy; who, while his sister was taking leave, was renewing his resolution not to disappoint the confidence of Laura.

The very circumstances which Mrs Bolingbroke had expected should lead to a happy eclaireissement made this interview the most reserved and comfortless which the two friends ever had. Laura was too conscious to talk of the story which she had just heard, and she was too full of it to enter easily upon any other subject. With her gratitude for the delicacy which De Courcy had observed towards her, was mingled a keen feeling of humiliation at the idea that he had discovered her secret before it had been confided to him; for we can sometimes confess a weakness which we cannot without extreme mortification see detected. Her silence and depression infected De Courcy; and the few short constrained sentences which were spoken during their walk, formed a contrast to the general vivacity of their conversations.

Laura, however, recovered her eloquence as soon as she found herself alone with Lady Pelham. With all the animation of sensibility, she related the story of the ill-fated Jessy; and disclosing in confidence the name of her destroyer,

drew, in the fulness of her heart, a comparison between the violator of laws human and divine, owing his life to the mercy of the wretch whom he had undone, and the kind adviser of inexperienced youth, the humane protector of forsaken infancy. Lady Pelham quietly heard her to an end ; and then wrinkling her eyelids, and peeping through them with her glittering blue eyes, she began, " Do you know, my dear, I never met with prejudices so strong as yours ? When will you give over looking for prodigies ? Would any mortal but you expect a gay young man to be as correct as yourself ? As for your immaculate Mr De Courcy, with his sage advices, I think it is ten to one that he wanted to keep the girl for himself. Besides, I'll answer for it, Hargrave would have bid farewell to all his indiscretions if you would have married him." " Never name it, Madam," cried Laura warmly, " if you would not banish me from your presence. His marriage with me would have been itself a crime ; a crime aggravated by being, as if in mockery, consecrated to heaven. For *my* connection with such a person no name is vile enough." " Well, well," said Lady Pelham, shrugging her shoulders, " I prophecy that one day you will repent having refused to share a title with the handsomest man in England."

"All distinction between right and wrong," returned Laura, "must first be blotted from my mind. The beauty of his person is no more to me than the shining colours of an adder; and the rank which your Ladyship prizes so highly, would but render me a more conspicuous mark for the infamy in which his wife must share."

Awed by the lightnings of Laura's eye, Lady Pelham did not venture to carry the subject farther for the present. She had of late been watching an opportunity of procuring the re-admission of Hargrave to the presence of his mistress: but this fresh discovery had served, if possible, to widen the breach. Hargrave's fiery temper submitted with impatience to the banishment which he had so well deserved, and he constantly urged Lady Pelham to use her authority in his behalf. Lady Pelham, though conscious that this authority had no existence, was flattered by having power ascribed to her, and promised at some convenient season to interfere. Finding herself, however, considerably embarrassed by a promise which she could not fulfil without hazarding the loss of Laura, she was not sorry that an opportunity occurred of evading the performance of her agreement. She therefore acquainted Hargrave with Laura's recent discovery, declaring that she could

not ask her niece to overlook entirely so great an irregularity.

From a regard to the promise of secrecy which she had given to Laura, as well as in common prudence, Lady Pelham had resolved not to mention the De Courcy family as the fountain from which she had drawn her intelligence. Principle and prudence sometimes governed her Ladyship's resolutions, but seldom swayed her practice. In the first interview with Hargrave which followed this rational determination, she was led by the mere vanity of a babbler to give such hints as not only enabled him to trace the story of his shame to Norwood, but inclined him to fix the publishing of it upon Montague.

From the moment when Hargrave first unjustly suspected Laura of a preference for De Courcy, his heart had rankled with an enmity which a sense of its ingratitude served only to aggravate. The cool disdain with which De Courcy treated him—a strong suspicion of his attachment,—above all, Laura's avowed esteem and regard—inflamed this enmity to the bitterest hatred. Hopeless as he was of succeeding in his designs by any fair or honourable means, he might have entertained thoughts of relinquishing his suit, and of seeking, in a match of interest, the means of escape

from his embarrassments: but that Laura, with all her unequalled charms, should be the prize of De Courcy, that in her he should obtain all that beauty, affluence, and love could give, was a thought not to be endured. Lady Pelham, too, more skilled to practise on the passions of others than to command her own, was constantly exciting him, by hints of De Courcy's progress in the favour of Laura ; while Lambert, weary of waiting for the tedious accomplishment of his own scheme, continually goaded him, with sly sarcasms on his failure in the arts of persuasion, and on his patience in submitting to be baffled in his wishes by a haughty girl. In the heat of his irritation, Hargrave often swore that no power on earth should long delay the gratification of his love and his revenge. But to marry a free-born British woman against her consent, is, in these enlightened times, an affair of some difficulty ; and Hargrave, in his cooler moments, perceived that the object of three years eager pursuit was farther than ever from his attainment.

Fortune seemed in every respect to oppose the fulfilment of his designs, for his regiment at this time received orders to prepare to embark for America ; and Lord Lincourt, who had discovered his nephew's ruinous connection with Lambert,

had influence to procure, from high authority, a hint that Hargrave was expected to attend his duty on the other side of the Atlantic.

The news of this arrangement Hargrave immediately conveyed to Lady Pelham, urging her to sanction any means which could be devised for making Laura the companion of his voyage. Lady Pelham hesitated to carry her complaisance so far; but she resolved to make the utmost use of the time which intervened to promote the designs of her favourite. Her Ladyship was not at any time much addicted to the communication of pleasurable intelligence, and the benevolence of her temper was not augmented by a prospect of the defeat of a plan in which her vanity was so much interested. She therefore maliciously withheld from her niece a piece of information so likely to be heard with joy. It reached Laura, however, by means of one who was ever watchful for her gratification. De Courcy no sooner ascertained the truth of the report, than he hastened to convey it to Laura.

He found her alone, and was welcomed with all her accustomed cordiality. "I am sorry," said he, with a smile which contradicted his words, "I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news to you; but I could not deny myself the edification

of witnessing your fortitude—Do you know that you are on the point of losing the most assiduous admirer that ever woman was blessed with? In three weeks Colonel Hargrave embarks for America. Nay, do not look incredulous. I assure you it is true.” “Thank Heaven,” cried Laura, “I shall once more be in peace and safety!” “Oh, fie! Is this your regret for the loss of so ardent a lover! Have you no feeling?” “Just such a feeling as the poor man had when he escaped from beneath the sword that hung by a hair. Indeed, Mr De Courcy, I cannot tell you to what a degree he has embittered the two last years of my life. But I believe,” continued she, blushing very deeply, “I need not explain to you any of my feelings towards Colonel Hargrave, since I find you have I know not what strange faculty of divining them.” Assisted by a conversation which he had had with his sister, De Courcy easily understood Laura’s meaning. Respectfully taking her hand, “Pardon me,” said he, in a low voice, “if I have ever ventured to guess what it was your wish to conceal from me.” “Oh, believe me,” cried Laura, with a countenance and manner of mingled candour and modesty, “there is not a thought of my heart which I wish to conceal from you; since from you, even my most humbling weaknesses

are sure of meeting with delicacy and indulgence. But since you are so good an augur," added she, with an ingenious smile, "I trust you perceive that I shall need no more delicacy or indulgence upon the same score."

The fascinating sweetness of her looks and voice, for the first time beguiled De Courcy of his promised caution. "Dear, dear Laura," he cried, fondly pressing her hand to his breast, "it is I who have need of indulgence, and I must—I must sue for it. I must repeat to you that—" Laura's heart sprung to her lips, and unconsciously snatching away her hand, she stood in breathless expectation of what was to follow. "Madman, that I am!" cried De Courcy, recalled to recollection by her gesture,—“whither am I venturing!” That was precisely what of all things Laura was most desirous to know; and she remained with her eyes fixed on the ground, half dreading the confidence, half the timidity of her lover. A momentary glance at the speaking countenance of Laura, glowing with confusion, yet brightened with trembling pleasure, awakened the strongest hopes that ever had warmed De Courcy's bosom. "Beloved Laura," said he, again tenderly approaching her, "remember I am but human. Cease to treat me with this beguil-

ing confidence. Cease to bewitch me with these smiles, which are so like all that I wish, or suffer me to—" Laura started, as her attention was drawn by some one passing close to the ground window near which they were standing. "Ah!" cried she, in a tone of vexation, "there is my evil genius. Colonel Hargrave is come into the house. He will be here this instant. Excuse me for driving you away. I beseech you do not remain a moment alone with him."

Laura was not mistaken. She had scarcely spoken, ere, with a dark cloud on his brow, Hargrave entered. He bowed to Laura, who was advancing towards the door. "I am afraid, Madam, I interrupt you," said he, darting a ferocious scowl upon De Courcy. Laura, without deigning even a single glance in reply, left the room.

Hargrave, as he passed the window, had observed the significant attitude of the lovers; and his jealousy and rage were inflamed to the uttermost by the scorn which he had endured in the presence of his rival. Fiercely stalking up to De Courcy, "Is it to you, Sir," said he, "that I am indebted for this insolence?" "No, Sir," answered De Courcy, a little disdainfully. "I have not the honour of regulating Miss Montreville's

civilities." "This is a paltry evasion," cried Hargrave. "Is it not to your misrepresentations of a youthful indiscretion that I owe Miss Montreville's present displeasure?" "I am not particularly ambitious of the character of an informer," answered De Courcy; and taking his hat wished Hargrave a stately good morning. "Stay, Sir!" cried Hargrave, roughly seizing him by the arm. "I must have some further conversation with you—You don't go yet." "I am not disposed to ask your permission," returned De Courcy: and coolly liberating his arm, walked out of the house.

Boiling with rage, Hargrave followed him. "It is easy to see, Sir," said he, "from whence you borrow a spirit which never was natural to you—Your presumption builds upon the partiality of that fickle capricious woman. But observe, Sir, that I have claims on her; claims which she herself was too happy in allowing; and no man shall dare to interfere with them." "I shall dare," returned De Courcy, anger kindling in his eyes, "to inquire by what right you employ such expressions in regard to Miss Montreville; and whether my spirit be my own or not, you shall find it sufficient to prevent your holding such language in my presence." "In

your presence, or the presence of all the devils," cried Hargrave, "I will maintain my right; and, if you fancy that it interferes with any claim of yours, you know how to obtain satisfaction. There is but one way to decide the business." "I am of your opinion," replied De Courcy, "that there is one way, provided that we can mutually agree to abide by it; and that is, an appeal to Miss Montreville herself." Hargrave turned pale, and his lip quivered with rage. "A mode of decision, no doubt," said he, "which your vanity persuades you will be all in your favour! No, no, Sir, our quarrel must be settled by means in which even your conceit cannot deny my equality." "By a brace of pistols, you mean of course," said De Courcy, coolly; "but I frankly tell you Colonel Hargrave, that my notions must have changed before I can find the satisfaction of a gentleman in being murdered; and my principles, before I shall seek it in murdering you." "Curse on your hypocrisy!" cried Hargrave. "Keep this canting to cozen girls, and let me revenge my wrongs like a man, or the world shall know you, Sir." "Do you imagine," said De Courcy, with a smile of calm disdain, "that I am to be terrified into doing what I tell you I think wrong, by the danger of

a little misrepresentation? You may, if you think fit, tell the world that I will not stake my life in a foolish quarrel, nor wilfully send an unrepenting sinner to his great account; and, if you go on to ascribe for my forbearance any motive which is derogatory to my character, I may, if I think fit, obtain justice as a peaceable citizen ought; or I may leave you undisturbed the glory of propagating a slander which even you yourself believe to be groundless."

De Courcy's coolness served only to exasperate his adversary. "Truce with this methodistical jargon!" cried he fiercely. "It may impose upon women, but I see through it, Sir—see that it is but a miserable trick to escape what you dare not meet." "Dare not!" cried De Courcy, lightnings flashing from his eye. "My nerves have failed me, then, since"—He stopped abruptly, for he scorned at such a moment to remind his antagonist of the courageous effort to which he owed his life. "Since when?" cried Hargrave, more and more enraged, as the recollection which De Courcy had recalled, placed before him the full turpitude of his conduct.—"Do you think I owe you thanks for a life which you have made a curse to me, by cheating me of its

dearest pleasures. But may tortures be my portion if I do not foil you!"

The latter part of this dialogue was carried on in a close shady lane which branched off from the avenue of Walbourne. The dispute was proceeding with increasing warmth on both sides, when it was interrupted by the appearance of Laura. From a window she had observed the gentlemen leave the house together; had watched Hargrave's angry gestures, and seen De Courcy accompany him into the by-path. The evil which she had so long dreaded seemed now on the point of completion; and alarm leaving no room for reserve, she followed them with her utmost speed.

"Oh, Mr De Courcy," she cried, with a look and attitude of most earnest supplication, "for mercy leave this madman!—If you would not make me for ever miserable, carry this no further—I entreat—I implore you. Fear for me, if you fear not for yourself." The tender solicitude for the safety of his rival, which Hargrave imagined her words and gestures to express, the triumphant delight which they called up to the eyes of De Courcy, exasperated Hargrave beyond all bounds of self-command. Frantic with jealousy and rage, he drew, and rushed fiercely on De Courcy; but Montague having neither fear nor anger to dis-

turb his presence of mind, parried the thrust with his cane, closed with his adversary before he could recover, wrested the weapon from his hand ; and having calmly ascertained that no person could be injured by its fall, threw it over the fence into the adjoining field. Then taking Hargrave aside, he whispered that he would immediately return to him ; and, giving his arm to Laura, led her towards the house.

She trembled violently, and big tears rolled down her colourless cheeks, as, vainly struggling with her emotion, she said, " Surely you will not endanger a life so precious, so"—She was unable to proceed ; but, laying her hand on De Courcy's arm, she raised her eyes to his face, with such a look of piteous appeal as reached his very soul. Enchanted to find his safety the object of such tender interest, he again forgot his caution ; and, fondly supporting with his arm the form which seemed almost sinking to the earth, " What danger would I not undergo," he cried, " to purchase such concern as this ! Be under no alarm, dear Miss Montreville. Even if my sentiments in regard to duelling were other than they are, no provocation should tempt me to implicate your revered name in a quarrel which would, from its very nature, become public."

Somewhat tranquillized by his words, Laura walked silently by his side till they reached the house, when, in a cheerful tone, he bade her farewell. "A short farewell," said he, "for I must see you again this evening." Laura could scarcely prevail on herself to part from him. "May I trust you?" said she, with a look of anxiety which spoke volumes. "Securely, dearest Laura," answered he. "He whom you trust needs no other motive for rectitude."

He then hastened from her into the field, whither he had thrown Hargrave's sword; and having found it, sprung over into the lane where he had left its owner. Gracefully presenting it to him, De Courcy begged pardon for having deprived him of it, "though," added he, "I believe you are now rather disposed to thank me for preventing the effects of a momentary irritation." Hargrave took his sword, and, in surly silence walked on; then, suddenly stopping, he repeated that there was only one way in which the quarrel could be decided; and asked De Courcy whether he was determined to refuse him satisfaction. "The only satisfaction," returned De Courcy, "which is consistent with my notions of right and wrong, I will give you now, on the spot. It is not to my information that you owe Miss Mon-

traville's displeasure. "Circumstances which I own were wholly foreign to any consideration of your interests, induced me to keep your secret almost as if it had been my own ; and it is from others that she has learnt a part of your conduct, which, you must give leave to say, warrants, even on the ground of modern honour, my refusal to treat you as an equal." " Insolent !" cried Hargrave, " Leave me—avoid me, if you would not again provoke me to chastise you, unarmed as you are." " My horses wait for me at the gate," said De Courcy, coolly proceeding by his side, " and your way seems to lie in the same direction as mine."

The remainder of the way was passed in silence. At the gate De Courcy, mounting his horse, bid his rival good morning, which the other returned with an ungracious bow. De Courcy rode home, and Hargrave, finding himself master of the field, returned to Walbourne. There he exerted his utmost influence with Lady Pelham to procure an opportunity of excusing himself to Laura. Lady Pelham confessed that she could not venture to take the tone of command, lest she should drive Laura to seek shelter elsewhere ; but she promised to contrive an occasion for an interview which he might prolong at his pleasure, provided

such a one could be found without her apparent interference.

With this promise he was obliged for the present to content himself, for, during his stay, Laura did not appear. She passed the day in disquiet. She could not rest. She could not employ herself. She dreaded lest the interview of the morning should have been only preparatory to one of more serious consequence. She told herself a hundred times that she was sure of De Courcy's principles ; and yet feared as if they had been unworthy of confidence.

He had promised to see her in the evening, and she anxiously expected the performance of his promise. She knew that if he came while Lady Pelham was in the way, her Ladyship would be too vigilant a guard to let one confidential word be exchanged. She therefore, with a half-pardonable cunning, said not a word of De Courcy's promised visit ; and as soon as her aunt betook herself to her afternoon's nap, stole from the drawing-room to receive him.

Yet perhaps she never met him with less semblance of cordiality. She blushed and stammered while she expressed her hopes that the morning's dispute was to have no further consequences, and apologized for the interest she took in it, in

language more cold than she would have used to a mere stranger. Scarcely could the expression of tenderness have delighted the lover like this little ill-concerted affectation, the first and the last which he ever witnessed in Laura Montreville. "Ah, dearest Laura," cried he, "it is too late to retract—You have said that my safety was dear to you ; owned that it was for *me* you feared this morning, and you shall not cancel your confession." Laura's colour deepened to crimson, but she made no other reply. Then, with a more timid voice and air, De Courcy said, "I would have told you *then* what dear presumptuous hopes your anxiety awakened, but that I feared to extort from your agitation what perhaps a cooler moment might refuse me. My long-loved ever dear Laura, will you pardon me these hopes ? Will you not speak to me ?—Not one little word to tell me that I am not too daring." Laura spoke not even that little word. She even made a faint struggle to withdraw the hand which De Courcy pressed. Yet the lover read the expression of her half-averted face, and was satisfied.

CHAP. XXXI.

"PRAY," said Lady Pelham to her niece, what might you and your paragon be engaged in for the hour and a half you were together this evening?"

"We were discussing a very important subject, Madam," answered Laura, mustering all her confidence.

"May I be permitted to inquire into the nature of it?" returned Lady Pelham, covering her spleen with a thin disguise of ceremony.

"Certainly, Madam," replied Laura. "You may remember I once told you that if ever I received addresses which I could with honour reveal, I should bespeak your Ladyship's patience for my tale. Mr De Courcy was talking of marriage, Madam; and—and I—"

"Oh, mighty well, Miss Montreville," cried Lady Pelham, swelling with rage, "I comprehend you perfectly. You may spare your modesty.

Keep all these airs and blushes till you tell Colonel Hargrave, that all your fine high-flown passion for him has been quite at the service of the next man you met with !”

Laura’s eyes filled with tears of mortification, yet she meekly answered, “ I am conscious that the degrading attachment of which I was once the sport merits your upbraidings ; and indeed they have not been its least punishment.” She paused for a moment, and then added with an insinuating smile. “ I can bear that you should reproach me with my new choice, for inconstancy is the prescriptive right of woman, and nothing else can be objected to my present views.”

“ Oh, far be it from me,” cried Lady Pelham, scorn and anger throwing her whole little person into active motion, “ far be it from me to make any objection to your immaculate swain ? I would have you understand, however, that no part of my property shall go to enrich a parcel of proud beggars. It was indeed my intention, if you had made a proper match, to give you the little all which I have to bestow ; but if you prefer starving with your methodist parson, to being the heiress of five-and-forty thousand pounds, I have no more to say. However, you had better keep your own

secret. The knowledge of it might probably alter Mr De Courcy's plans a little."

"Your Ladyship," returned Laura, with spirit, "has good access to know that the love of wealth has little influence on my purposes; and I assure you that Mr De Courcy would scorn upon any terms to appropriate what he considers as the unalienable right of your own child. Though we shall not be affluent, we shall be too rich for your charity, and that is the only claim in which I could compete with Mrs Herbert."

This mention of her daughter exasperated Lady Pelham to fury. In a voice half-choked with passion, she cried, "Neither that rebellious wretch nor any of her abettors or imitators shall ever have countenance or assistance from me. No! not though they should beg with their starved bantlings from door to door."

To this intemperate speech Laura made no reply, but quietly began to pour out the tea. Lady Pelham continued to hurry up and down the room, chafing, and venting her rage in common abuse; for a scold in a drawing-room is not very unlike a scold at a green-stall. The storm meeting with no opposition, at length spent itself; or subsided into short growlings, uttered in the intervals of a surly silence. To these, as no answer

was absolutely necessary, none was returned. Laura did not utter a syllable till Lady Pelham's wrath beginning to give place to her curiosity, she turned to her niece, saying, "Pray, Miss Montreville, when and where is this same wise marriage of yours to take place?"

"The time is not quite fixed, Madam," answered Laura. "As soon as you can conveniently spare me, I intend going to Scotland; and when you and Mrs De Courcy wish me to return, Mr De Courcy will escort me back."

"I spare you!" returned Lady Pelham with a sneer—"Oh, Ma'am, if that is all, pray don't let me retard your raptures. You may go to-morrow, or to-night Ma'am, if you please.—Spare you indeed! Truly while I can afford to pay a domestic, I need not be dependent on your assistance; and in attachment or gratitude any common servant may supply your place."

The rudeness and ingratitude of this speech again forced the tears to Laura's eyes; but she mildly replied, "Well, Madam, as soon as you find a substitute for me, I shall be ready to depart." Then to escape further insult she quitted the room.

Lady Pelham's wrath at the derangement of her plan would not suffer her to rest till she had

communicated the disaster to Colonel Hargrave. Early next morning, accordingly, she dispatched a note requiring his immediate presence at Walbourne. He obeyed the summons, and was as usual privately received by Lady Pelham. He listened to her intelligence with transports of rage rather than of sorrow. He loaded his rival with execrations, declaring that he would rather see Laura torn in pieces than know her to be the wife of De Courcy. He swore that he would circumvent their schemes, and that though his life should be the forfeit, he would severely revenge the sufferings which he had endured.

Lady Pelham had not courage to encounter the evil spirit which she had raised. Subdued, and crouching before his violence, she continued to give a terrified assent to every extravagance he uttered, till he announced his resolution of seeing Laura on the instant, that he might know whether she dared to confirm this odious tale. Lady Pelham then ventured to represent to him that Laura might be so much offended by this breach of contract, as to take refuge with Mrs De Courcy, a measure which would oppose a new obstacle to any scheme for breaking off the intended marriage. She assured him that she would grant every reasonable assistance in preventing a connection so

injurious to her niece's interest, though she knew Laura's obstinacy of temper too well to hope any thing from direct resistance. She hinted that it would be most prudent to give the desired interview the appearance of accident, and she promised to contrive the occasion as soon as Hargrave was sufficiently calm to consider of improving it to the best advantage.

But calm was a stranger to the breast of Hargrave. The disquiet which is the appointed portion of the wicked, raged there beyond control. To the anguish of disappointment were added the pangs of jealousy, and the heart-burnings of hatred and revenge. Even the loss of the object of three years eager pursuit was less cutting than the success of De Courcy; and the pain of a forfeiture which was the just punishment of a former crime, was heightened to agony by the workings of such passions as consummate the misery of fiends.

The associates of the wicked must forego the consolations of honest sympathy. All Hargrave's tortures were aggravated by the sarcasms of Lambert; who, willing to hasten the fever to its crisis, goaded him with coarse comments upon the good fortune of his rival, and advices (which he well knew would act in a direction oppo-

site to their seeming purpose) to desist from further competition. After spending four-and-twenty hours in alternate fits of rage and despair, Hargrave returned to Lady Pelham, informing her, that whatever were the consequence, he would no longer delay seeing Laura. Lady Pelham had foreseen this demand ; and, though not without fear of the event, had prepared for compliance. She had already arranged her scheme, and the execution was easy.

Laura's favourite walk in the shrubbery led to a little summer-house, concealed in a thicket of acacias. Thither Lady Pelham had conveyed some dried plants, and had requested Laura's assistance in classing them. Laura had readily agreed, and that very morning had been allotted for the task. Lady Pelham having first directed Hargrave where to take his station, accompanied her unsuspecting niece to the summer-house, and there for a while joined in her employment. Soon, however, feigning a pretext for half an hour's absence, she quitted Laura, intending at first to loiter in the shrubbery, as a kind of safeguard against the ill consequences of her imprudent connivance ; but meeting with a gardener who was going to transplant a bed of favourite

auriculas, she followed him to watch over their safety, leaving her niece to guard her own.

Scarcely had Laura been a minute alone, ere she was startled by the entrance of Hargrave, and seriously alarmed by seeing him lock the door, and deliberately secure the key. "What is it you mean, Sir?" said she, trembling.

"To decide your fate and mine!" answered Hargrave, with a look and voice that struck terror to her soul. "I am told you are a bride, Laura," said he, speaking through his clenched teeth. "Say," continued he, firmly grasping her arm. "Speak? is it so?"

"I know no right," said Laura, recovering herself, "that you have to question me—nor meanly thus to steal—"

"No evasions!" interrupted Hargrave, in a voice of thunder. "I have rights—rights which I will maintain while I have being. Now tell me, if you dare, that you have transferred them to that abhorred—"

He stopped,—his utterance choked by the frenzy into which he had worked himself. "What has transported you to this fury, Colonel Hargrave?" said Laura, calmly. "Surely you must be sensible, that whatever claims I might once

have allowed you, have long since been made void by your own conduct. I will not talk to you of principle, though that were of itself sufficient to sever us for ever; but ask yourself what right you can retain over the woman whom you have insulted, and forsaken, and oppressed, and outraged?"

"Spare your taunts, Laura. They will only embitter the hour of retribution. And may hell be my portion if I be not richly repaid for all the scorn you have heaped upon me. I will be revenged, proud woman. You shall be at my mercy, where no cool canting villain can wrest you from me!"

His threats, and the frightful violence with which they were uttered, filled Laura with mingled dread and pity. "Command yourself, I beseech you, Colonel Hargrave," said she. "If you resent the pain which, believe me, I have most unwillingly occasioned, you are amply revenged. You have already caused me sufferings which mock description."

"Yes, yes. I know it," cried Hargrave in a milder voice. "You were not then so hard. You could feel when that vile wanton first seduced me from you. Then think what I now endure, when this cold-blooded—but may I perish

if I do not snatch his prize from him. And think not of resistance, Laura ; for, by all that I have suffered, resistance shall be vain."

"Why do you talk so dreadfully to me?" said Laura, making a trembling effort to release her arm, which he still fiercely grasped. "Why, why will you not cease to persecute me? I have never injured you. I have forgiven, pitied, prayed for you. How have I deserved this worse than savage cruelty?"

"Laura," said Hargrave, moved by the pleadings of a voice which would have touched a murderer's heart, "you have still a choice. Promise to be mine. Permit me only, by slow degrees, to regain what I have lost. Say that months—that years hence you will consent, and you are safe."

"Impossible!" said Laura. "I cannot bind myself. Nor could you trust a promise extorted by fear. Yet be but half what I once thought you, and I will esteem—"

"Esteem!" interrupted Hargrave, with a ghastly smile. "Yes! And shrink from me, as you do now, while you hang on that detested wretch till even his frozen heart warms to passion. No!" continued he, with an awful adjuration, "though the deed bring me to the scaffold, you

shall be mine. You shall be my wife, too, Laura—but not till you have besought me—sued at my feet for the title which you have so often despised. I will be master of your fate, of that reputation, that virtue which you worship—and your minion shall know it, that he may writhe under jealousy and disappointment.”

“Powers of Mercy!” cried Laura, raising her eyes in strong compunction, “have I made this mine idol!” Then turning on Hargrave a look of deep repentance, “Yes,” she continued, “I deserve to see thee as thou art, without mitigation vile; since on thee my sacrilegious heart bestowed such love as was due to the Infinite alone!”

“Oh, Laura,” cried Hargrave, softened by the remembrance of her youthful affection, “let but one faint spark of that love revive, and I will forget all your scorns, and feel again such gentle wishes as blest our first hours of tenderness. Or only swear that you will renounce that bane of my existence—that you will shrink from him, shun him like a serpent!—Or give me your word only, and I will trust it. Your liberty, your person, shall be sacred as those of angels. Promise then—”

“Why do you attempt to terrify me?” said Laura, her indignation rising as her alarm subsided.

"I have perhaps no longer the right—even if I had the inclination—to utter such a vow. I trust, that, in this land of freedom, I am safe from your violence. My reputation, frail as it is, you cannot harm without permission from on high; and if, for wise purposes, the permission be given, I doubt not that I shall be enabled to bear unjust reproach,—nay, even to profit by the wrong."

Hargrave suffered her to conclude; rage bereft him, for a time, of the power of utterance. Then, bursting into a torrent of reproach, he upbraided her in language the most insulting. "Do you dare to own," said he, "that your inclination favours that abhorred—that this accursed marriage is your choice—your free choice?" He paused in vain for a reply. Laura would not irritate him further, and scorned to disguise the truth. "Then, Laura," said he, and he confirmed the sentence with a dreadful oath, "you have sealed your fate. Think you that your De Courcy shall foil me? By Heaven, I will see you perish first. I will tear you from him, though I answer it with my life and soul. Let this be the pledge of my triumph"—and he made a motion to clasp her rudely in his arms. With a cry of dread and horror, Laura sprung from him, and, throwing open the casement, called loudly for as-

sistance. Hargrave forced her back. "Spare your alarms, my lovely proud one," said he, with a smile, which made her blood run cold. "You are safe for the present—But may I not even kiss this pretty hand, as an earnest that you shall soon be mine beyond the power of fate?" "Silence, audacious!" cried Laura, bursting into tears of mingled fear and indignation, while she struggled violently to disengage her hands. "Nay, this rosy cheek will content me better," cried Hargrave—when the door was burst suddenly open, and De Courcy appeared.

"Ruffian!" he exclaimed, approaching Hargrave, who, in his surprise, permitted Laura to escape. Her fears now taking a new direction, she flew to intercept De Courcy. "Ah!" she cried, "my folly has done this. Fly from this madman, I entreat you. I have nothing to fear but for you. Begone, I implore you."

"And leave you to such treatment! Not while I have life! When you choose to go, I will attend you. For you, Sir!—But I must stoop below the language of a gentleman ere I find words to describe your conduct."

"For Heaven's sake," cried Laura, "dear De Courcy, provoke him no farther. Let us fly this place;" and clinging to De Courcy's arm, she

drew him on ; while, with the other, he defended her from Hargrave, who had advanced to detain her. Her expression of regard, her confiding attitude, exasperated the frenzy of Hargrave to the uttermost. Almost unconscious of his own actions, he drew a pistol from his pocket and fired. Laura uttered a cry of terror, clasping her lover's arm more closely to her breast. "Be not alarmed love," whispered De Courcy. "It is nothing !"—and staggering forward a few paces, he fell to the ground.

Laura in desperation rushed from the summer-house, calling wildly for help ; then struck with the fearful thought that Hargrave might now complete his bloody work, she hurried back. During the few moments of her absence, De Courcy addressed his murderer, whose rage had given place to a wild stupor. "I fear this is an unlucky stroke, Hargrave. Save yourself. My horse is at the gate." Hargrave answered only with a groan ; and, striking his clenched hand on his forehead, turned away. His crime was unpremeditated. No train of self-deceit had reconciled his conscience to its atrocity. The remembrance of the courage which had saved his life ; the generous concern of De Courcy for his safety ; humanity, the last virtue which utterly

forsakes us, all awakened him to remorse, keen and overwhelming, like every other passion of Hargrave. Not bearing to look upon his victim, he stood fixed and motionless; while Laura, on her knees, watched, in dismay, the changing countenance of De Courcy, and strove to staunch the blood which was streaming from his wound.

De Courcy once more tried to cheer Laura with words of comfort. "Were it not," said he, "for the pleasure this kind concern gives me, I might tell you that I do not suffer much pain. I am sure I could rise, if I could trust this slender arm," laying his hand gently upon it. Laura eagerly offered her assistance, as he attempted to raise himself; but the effort overpowered him, and he sunk back fainting.

In the strong language of terror, Laura now besought Hargrave to procure help. Still motionless, his forehead resting against the wall, his hands clenched as in convulsion, Hargrave seemed not to heed her entreaties. "Have you no mercy?" cried she, clasping the arm from which she had so lately shrunk in horror. "He saved your life. Will you let him perish without aid?" "Off, woman!" cried Hargrave, throwing her

from him. "Thy witchcraft has undone me;" and he distractedly hurried away.

Laura's terror was not the passive cowardice of a feeble mind. She was left alone to judge, to act, for herself—for more than herself. Immediate, momentous decision was necessary. And she did decide by an effort of which no mind enfeebled by sloth or selfishness could have been capable. She saw that loss of blood was the cause of De Courcy's immediate danger, a danger which might be irremediable before he could receive assistance from more skilful hands than her's. Such remedy, then, as she could command she hastened to apply.

To the plants which their beauty had recommended to Lady Pelham, Laura had added a few of which the usefulness was known to her. Agaric of the oak was of the number; and she had often applied it where many a hand less fair would have shrunk from the task. Nor did she hesitate now. The ball had entered near the neck; and the feminine, the delicate Laura herself disengaged the wound from its coverings; the feeling, the tender Laura herself performed an office from which false sensibility would have recoiled in horror.

She was thus employed when she was found by a woman whom Hargrave had met and sent to her assistance, with an indistinct message, from which Laura gathered that he was gone in search of a surgeon. The woman no sooner cast her eyes on the bloody form of De Courcy, and on the colourless face of Laura, more death-like than his, than, with noisy imbecility, she began to bewail and ejaculate. Laura, however, instantly put a stop to her exclamations by dispatching her for cordials and assistance.

In a few minutes all the household was assembled round De Courcy; yet such was the general curiosity, horror, or astonishment, that he would have remained unaided but for the firmness of her who was most interested in the scene. She dismissed every one whose presence was unnecessary, and silenced the rest by a peremptory command. She administered a cordial to recruit the failing strength of De Courcy! and causing him to be raised to the posture which seemed the least painful, made her own trembling arms his support.

Nothing further now remained to be done, and Laura began to feel the full horrors of her situation; to weigh the fearful probability that all her cares were vain; to upbraid herself as the cause

of this dire tragedy. Her anguish was too great to find relief in tears. Pale and cold as marble, chilly drops bursting from her forehead, she sat in the stillness of him who waits the sentence of condemnation, save when a convulsive shudder expressed her suffering.

The mournful quiet was interrupted by the entrance of Lady Pelham; who, quite out of breath, began a string of questions, mixed with abundance of ejaculation. " Bless my soul!" she cried, " how has all this happened? For Heaven's sake, Laura, tell me the meaning of all this. Why don't you speak, girl? Good Lord! could not you have prevented these madmen from quarrelling? What brought De Courcy here? How did he find you out? Why don't you speak? Mercy on me! Is the girl out of her senses?"

The expression of deep distress with which Laura now raised her eyes, reminded Lady Pelham of the sensibility requisite upon such an occasion, which her Ladyship's curiosity had hitherto driven from her recollection. Approaching, therefore, to De Courcy, she took a hasty look of this dismal spectacle; and exclaiming, " Oh what a sight is here! Unfortunate Laura! Dear wretched girl!" she began first to sob, and then to scream violently. Laura motioned to the at-

tendants to lead her away; and she suffered them to do so without resistance; but she had no sooner crossed the threshold, than, perceiving the spectators whom curiosity had collected in the shrubbery, she redoubled her shrieks, struggled, beat herself; and, but for the untoward strength of her nerves, would have soon converted her pretended fit into reality. Wearied with her efforts, she was beginning to relax them, when the surgeon appeared, and her Ladyship was more vociferous than ever. Mr Raby, a quiet sensible man, undertook her cure before he proceeded to his more serious business; and, either guided by previous acquaintance with his patient, or by his experience in similar cases, gave a prescription which, though simple, was perfectly efficacious. He directed that the lady should be instantly secluded in her own chamber, with only one attendant; and the remedy proved so beneficial, that her Ladyship enjoyed a night of tranquil reposé.

He next turned his attention to De Courcy; and judging it proper to extract the ball without delay, advised Laura to retire. Without opposition she prepared to obey; and, seeing De Courcy about to speak, put her hand on his lips to save him the exertion, and herself the pain of a

farewell. Yet, as she resigned her charge, raising her eyes to heaven, once more to commend De Courcy to the divine protection, the fervour of her supplication burst into words. "Oh if it be possible! if it be possible!"—she cried. "Yes it is possible," said De Courcy, comprehending the unfinished sentence. "Your firmness, noble creature, has made it possible." Reproaching herself with having allowed De Courcy to perceive her alarm, she hastened away; and seating herself on the steps which led to the door, awaited in silence the event of the operation.

Here, as she sorrowfully called to mind the various excellencies of De Courcy, his piety, his integrity, his domestic virtues, so lately known, so soon to be lost to her, she suddenly recollected the heavier calamity of the mother deprived of such a son, and perceived the inhumanity of permitting the stroke to fall without preparation. Having access to no messenger more tender than a common servant, she determined, though with unspeakable reluctance, herself to bear the tidings to Mrs De Courcy. "I will know the worst," thought she, "and then"—

She started at a faint noise that sounded from the summer-house. Steps approached the door from within. She sprung up and the surgeon

appeared. "I have the happiness to tell you," said he, "that, if no fever take place, our friend is safe. The chief danger has been from loss of blood; and your presence of mind—Ah!—Do you feel faint?"

The awful interest which had supported the spirits of Laura thus suddenly withdrawn, the tide of various feeling overpowered them; and she sunk into one of those long and deep faintings which were now unhappily become in some degree constitutional with her. Mr Raby having given directions for her recovery, placed De Courcy in Lady Pelham's carriage, and himself attended him to Norwood; where he mitigated Mrs De Courcy's horror and distress by assurances of her son's safety, which he again delighted Montague by ascribing to the cares of Laura.

It was late in the evening before Laura was sufficiently collected to review with composure the events of the day. As soon, however, as she was capable of considering all the circumstances, a suspicion occurred that her unfortunate interview with Hargrave had been sanctioned, if not contrived by Lady Pelham. That he should know the place and the hour in which he might surprise her alone;—that to this place, which because of

its loneliness she had of late rather deserted, she should be conducted by her aunt;—that at this moment she should upon a trivial pretence be left in solitude,—seemed a coincidence too strong to be merely accidental. She recollected some symptoms of private communication between Lady Pelham and Hargrave. Suspicions of connivance in the infamous stratagem of her arrest again revived in her mind. Lady Pelham, she perceived, had afforded her a protection at best imperfect, perhaps treacherous. Hargrave's late threats too, as she revolved them in her thoughts, appeared more like the intimations of settled design than the vague ravings of passion. Prudence, therefore, seemed to require that she should immediately provide for her own safety : and indignation at her aunt's breach of confidence hastened the purpose which she formed of leaving Walbourne without delay. She determined to go the next morning to Norwood, there to remain till De Courcy shewed signs of convalescence, and then perform her long-projected journey to Scotland.

In order to avoid unpleasant altercation, she resolved to depart without warning Lady Pelham of her intention ; merely announcing by letter the reasons of her conduct. The affectionate Laura would not have parted from the meanest servant

without a kindly farewell ; but her innate abhorrence of treachery steeled her heart, and she rejoiced that it was possible to escape all present intercourse with her deceitful kinswoman.

As soon as the dawn appeared she arose ; and on her knees thankfully acknowledged the protecting care which had watched over her, since first as a destitute orphan she applied to Lady Pelham. She blessed the goodness which had softened in her favour a heart little subject to benevolent impressions, which had restored her in sickness, consoled her in sorrow, delivered her from the snares of the wicked, and opened to her the joys of virtuous friendship. And where is the wretch so miserable that he may not in the review of eighteen months find subjects of gratitude still more numerous ! Laura began no important action of her life without imploring a blessing on the event ; and she now proceeded to commend herself and her future prospects to the same care of which she had glad experience.

The proper business of the morning ended, she had begun to make arrangements for her immediate departure ; when she heard Lady Pelham's bell ring, and the next instant a noise like that occasioned by the fall of something heavy. She listened for a while, but all was again still. The rest

of the family were yet buried in sleep, and Laura, hearing no one stirring to answer Lady Pelham's summons, began to fear that her aunt was ill, perhaps unable to make any further effort to procure assistance. At this idea, all her just indignation subsiding in a moment, she flew to Lady Pelham's chamber.

Lady Pelham was lying on the floor, having apparently fallen in an attempt to rise from her bed. She was alive though insensible; and her face though altered, was still florid. Laura soon procuring help, raised her from the ground; and guessing that apoplexy was her disorder, placed her in an upright posture, loosened her night-clothes, and having hurried away a servant for Mr Raby, ventured, until his arrival, upon such simple remedies as she knew might be safely administered. In little more than an hour the surgeon arrived; and having examined his patient, declared her to be in extreme danger. Before he left her, however, he succeeded in restoring her to some degree of recollection; yet, far from changing his first opinion, he advised Laura to lose no time in making every necessary use of an amendment which he feared would be only transient.

From Lady Pelham, he went to Norwood; and returning to Walbourne in the evening, brought

the pleasing intelligence that De Courcy continued to do well. This second visit produced no change in his sentiments, and he remained persuaded that though Lady Pelham might continue to linger for a time, the shock had been too great to allow of complete recovery. Laura now rejoiced that she had not executed her purpose of leaving Walbourne; since, had her aunt's illness succeeded to the rage which her departure would have excited, she could never have ceased to blame herself as the cause.

She looked with profound compassion, too, upon the condition of an unfortunate being, whose death-bed was neither smoothed by affection, nor cheered by pious hope. "Unhappy woman!" thought she, as she sat watching an unquiet slumber into which her aunt had fallen, "to whom the best gifts of nature and of fortune have by some fatality been useless, or worse than useless; whose affluence has purchased no higher joys than half-grudged luxuries; whose abilities have dazzled others and bewildered herself, but lent no steady light to guide her way; whose generosity has called forth no gratitude, whose kindness has awakened no affection; to whom length of days has brought no reverence, and length of intimacy no friends! Even the sacred ties of nature have been

to her unblest. Her only child driven from her in anger, dares not approach to share the last sad offices with me, who, in performing them, must forgive as well as pity. Favourite of fortune! what has been wanting to thee save that blessing which 'bringeth no sorrow with it.' But that blessing was light in thine esteem; and amidst the glitter of thy toys, the 'pearl of great price' was disregarded."

For some days Lady Pelham continued much in the same situation. She suffered no pain, yet gave no signs of amendment. On the sixth morning from her first attack she grew suddenly and materially worse. It was soon discovered that her limbs were paralyzed, and the surgeon declared that her end could not be very distant. Her senses, however, again returned, and she continued free from pain. She shewed little apprehension of her own danger; and Laura debated with herself whether she should permit her aunt to dream away the last precious hours of probation, or endeavour to awaken her to a sense of her condition.

Laura had no faith in death-bed repentance. She knew that resolutions of amendment which there is no longer time to practise, and renunciations of sin made under the immediate prospect of

punishment, are at best suspicious. She knew that, in the ordinary course of Providence, the grace which has been long despised is at length justly withdrawn. Yet she saw that she had no right to judge Lady Pelham as wholly impenitent; and she considered a death-bed as highly suitable to the renewal, though not to the beginning of repentance. She knew, too, that the call *might* be made effectual even at the 'eleventh hour;' and the bare chance was worth the toil of ages. She felt how little she herself would have valued the mistaken pity which could suffer her to enter on the 'dark valley' without a warning to cling closer to the 'staff and rod' of comfort:—She therefore ventured to hint gently to Lady Pelham the opinion of her medical friends, and to remind her of the duty of preparing for the worst.

Lady Pelham at first appeared a good deal shocked; and lay for some time apparently meditating on her situation. At last, recovering her spirits, she said, "Your nerves, Laura, were always so coarse, that you seemed to me to take a pleasure in thinking of shocking things; but I am sure it is abominably barbarous in you to tease me with them now when I am ill. Do keep your horrid fancies to yourself, or keep away till you

are cured of the vapours—I dare say it is your dismal face which makes me dream so unpleasantly.”

Laura, however, was not to be so discouraged. She took occasion to represent that no harm could ensue from preparing to meet the foe ; since his march was not to be retarded by shutting our eyes on his advances, nor hastened by the daring which watched his approach. She at length thought she had succeeded in convincing her aunt of her danger. Lady Pelham *said* that she feared she was dying, and she believed that she said the truth. But Lady Pelham had had sixty years practice in self-deceit. The fear might flutter in her imagination, but was not strong enough to touch her heart.

Laura, however, made use of her acknowledgment to press upon her the duties of forgiveness and charity towards all mankind, and especially towards her child ; reminding her of the affecting parity of situation between offending man and his disobedient offspring. Lady Pelham at first answered impatiently that she would not be urged on this subject ; but as her spirits began to fail under the first confinement which she had ever endured, she became more tractable. “ God knows,” said she to Laura, one day, “ we have all much need to be forgiven ; and therefore we must

forgive in our turn. For my part I am sure I die in charity with all mankind, and with that creature among the rest. However, I shall take my friend the Spectator's advice, and remember the difference between giving and *forgiving*."

Laura often begged permission to send for Mrs Herbert ; but Lady Pelham sometimes postponed it till she should get better, sometimes till she should grow worse. Laura was in the meantime her constant attendant ; bearing with her peevishness, soothing her caprice, and striving to rouse in her feelings suitable to her condition. Finding, however, that she made but little progress in her pious work, she begged that she might be allowed to take the assistance of a clergyman. " A clergyman, child !" cried Lady Pelham. " Do you imagine me to be a papist ? Or do you think me capable of such weak superstition as to place more reliance on a parson's prayers than on your's or my maid Betty's ? No, no ! though I may be weak, I shall never be fanatical."

" It would indeed be superstition," answered Laura, " to expect that the prayers of any mortal should be useful to you any further than as they speak the language of your own heart ; but, as our divine Master has chosen some of his ser-

wants as guides to the rest, we may hope that he will grant a peculiar blessing on their labours. Besides Mr Wentworth has been accustomed to plead with men, and knows every avenue of persuasion."

"Oh, now I see the cloven foot. This is the true pharasaical cant. I forsooth am one of the unconverted. But in spite of your charitable opinion, I trust I have been no worse than other people, and I have too high a sense of the Divine Justice to think that our Maker would first give us ungovernable passions, and then punish us for yielding to them. A phlegmatic being like you may indeed be called to strict account; but people of strong feelings must be judged by a different standard."

"Oh, Madam," said Laura, "be assured that our Maker gives us no unconquerable passions. If we ourselves have made them so, it becomes us to be humbled in the dust, not to glory in the presumptuous hope that He will soften the sanctions of his law to favour our remissness."

Driven from the strong hold of justice, rather by the increase of her bodily languor, than by the force of truth, the dying sinner had recourse to mercy,—a mercy, however, of her own composing. "It is true," said she one day to Laura,

“ that I have done some things which I have reason to regret, and which, I must confess, deserve punishment. But Divine Mercy towards believers, we are told, is infinite ; and though I may at times have doubted, I have never disbelieved.” Laura, shuddering at this awful blindness, was offering an inward prayer for aid to frame a useful reply, when she saw her aunt’s countenance change. It was distorted by a momentary convulsion, and then fixed for ever in the stillness of death.

CHAP. XXXII.

LAURA was more shocked than afflicted by the death of a person whom she was unable to love, and had no reason to respect. She lost no time in conveying the news to Mrs Herbert, begging that she would herself come and give the necessary directions. Thinking it proper to remain at Walbourne till after her aunt's funeral, she refused Mrs De Courcy's invitation to spend at Norwood the time which intervened. De Courcy continued to recover fast; and Laura, thinking she might soon leave him without anxiety, again fixed an early day for her journey to Scotland.

Notwithstanding Laura's knowledge of the phlegmatic temperament of her cousin, she was surprised at the stoicism with which Mrs Herbert supported the death of her mother. She examined the dead body with a cold comment on its appearance; gave orders for the interment in an unfaltering voice; and neither seemed to feel

nor to affect the slightest concern. Nor did her philosophy appear to fail her one jot, when, upon opening the will, she was found to be left without inheritance. The paper, which had been drawn up a few months before, evinced Lady Pelham's adherence to her scheme for her niece's advancement; and this, with her obstinate enmity to Mrs Herbert, furnished the only instances of her consistency or perseverance, which were ever known to the world. Her whole property she bequeathed to Laura Montreville, and to her second son upon taking the name of Pelham, provided that Laura married Colonel Hargrave, or a peer, or the eldest son of a peer; but if she married a commoner, or remained unmarried, she was to inherit only ten thousand pounds, the bulk of the property going to a distant relation.

The very hour that this will was made public, Laura informed the contingent heir that he might possess himself of his inheritance, since she would certainly never perform the conditions which alone could destroy his claim. Not acquiescing in the justice of excluding Mrs Herbert from her natural rights, she would instantly have offered to share with her cousin the bequest of Lady Pelham; but considering that her engagement with De Courcy entitled him to decide on the disposal

of whatever belonged to his future wife, she hastened to ask his sanction to her purpose. De Courcy, without hesitation, advised that the whole should be given up to its natural owner. "We shall have enough for humble comfort, dear Laura," said he, "and have no need to grasp at a doubtful claim." Laura, however, differed from him in opinion. She thought she might, in strict justice, retain part of the bequest of so near a relation; and she felt pleased to think that she should enter the De Courcy family not altogether portionless. She therefore reserved two thousand pounds, giving up the rest unconditionally to Mrs Herbert.

These points being settled, nothing now remained to retard Laura's journey to Scotland. Mrs De Courcy, indeed, urged her to postpone it till Montague should acquire a right to be her escort; but Laura objected that it was her wish to give a longer time to her old friend than she thought it proper to withdraw De Courcy from his business and his home. She reflected, too, with a light heart, that a protector in her journey was now less necessary, since her mad lover, as Harriet called Colonel Hargrave, had embarked for America. Laura had heard of his departure immediately after her aunt's death; and she gladly

observed that favourable winds were speeding him across the Atlantic.

The day preceding that on which she meant to leave Walbourne, she spent with Mrs De Courcy and Montague ; who, though not entirely recovered, was able to resume his station in the family-room. De Courcy, with the enthusiasm of youth and love, spoke of his happy prospects ; his mother, with the sober eye of experience, looked forward to joys as substantial, though less dazzling ; while feminine modesty suppressed the pleasure with which Laura felt that she was necessary to these schemes of bliss. With the confidence of mutual esteem they arranged their plan of life,—a plan at once embracing usefulness and leisure, retirement and hospitality. Laura consented that one month, ‘ one little month,’ should begin the accomplishment of these golden dreams ; for she permitted De Courcy to follow her at the end of that time to Scotland. A few weeks they were to spend in wandering through the romantic scenes of her native land ; and then join Mrs De Courcy at Norwood, which was to continue her permanent abode.

Laura remained with her friends till the evening was closing ; then, avoiding the solemnity of a farewell by a half-promise of stopping as she

passed the next day, she sprung into Mrs De Courcy's carriage, and drove off. Tears rushed to De Courcy's eyes as the carriage was lost to his sight. "I am still weak," thought he as he dashed them away. "She will soon return to bring gladness to every heart, and double joy to mine. To-morrow, too, I shall see her," thought he; yet he continued depressed, and soon retired to his chamber.

Mrs De Courcy and her son met early the next morning, expecting that Laura would early begin her journey. Montague stationed himself at the window to watch for her appearance; half-fearing that she would not keep her promise, yet every minute repeating that it was impossible she could go without bidding farewell. The breakfast hour arrived, and still Laura came not. De Courcy, impatient, forgot his weakness, and insisted upon walking to the gate that he might inquire whether a carriage had passed from Walbourne.

He had scarcely left the house when old John, with a face that boded evil, hastily came to beg that his Lady would speak with a servant of Lady Pelham's. Mrs De Courcy, somewhat alarmed, desired that the servant might come in. "Please, Madam," said he, "let me know where I may

find Miss Montreville. The carriage has waited for her these three hours?" "Good heavens!" cried Mrs De Courcy, in consternation. "Is Miss Montreville not at Walbourne?" "No, Madam, she has not been there since yesterday morning." Mrs De Courcy, now in extreme alarm, summoned her coachman, and desired to know where he had left Miss Montreville the evening before. He answered, that, by Laura's desire, he had set her down at the gate of Walbourne; that he had seen her enter; and afterwards, in turning the carriage, had observed her walking along the avenue towards the house.

Inexpressibly shocked, Mrs De Courcy had yet the presence of mind to forbid alarming her son with these fearful tidings. As soon as she could recollect herself, she dispatched old Wilson, on whose discretion she thought she might rely, to inform De Courcy that a message from Walbourne had made her cease to expect Laura's visit. Montague returned home, sad and disappointed. His melancholy questions and comments increased the distress of his mother. "Did she not even write one line?" said he. "Could you have believed that she would go without one farewell—that she could pass our very gate!" "She was willing to spare you the pain of a

farewell," said Mrs De Courcy, checking the anguish of her heart. "She will write soon I hope."

But day after day passed, and Laura did not write. Mrs De Courcy, still concealing from her son a misfortune which she thought him yet unequal to bear, used every possible exertion to trace the fugitive. She offered high rewards to whoever could afford the smallest clue to discovery. She advertised in every newspaper except that which De Courcy was accustomed to read. Her suspicions at first falling upon Hargrave, she caused particular inquiry to be made whether any of his domestics had been left in England with orders to follow him; but she found that he with his whole suite had sailed from Europe more than a fortnight before Laura's disappearance. She employed emissaries to prosecute the search in almost every part of the kingdom. Judging the metropolis to be the most likely place of concealment, she made application to the officers of police for assistance in her inquiries there. All was in vain. No trace of Laura was to be found.

For a while De Courcy amused himself from day to day with the hope of hearing from her; a hope which his mother had not the courage to

destroy. He calculated that she would reach the end of her journey on the sixth day after that on which she left him. On the seventh she would certainly write; therefore in four or five more he should undoubtedly hear from her. The expected day came and passed as others had done, without bringing news of Laura. Another and another came, and ended only in disappointment. De Courcy was miserable. He knew not how to account for a silence so adverse to the considerate kindness of Laura's character, except by supposing that illness made her unable to write. This idea gathering strength in his mind, he resolved to follow her immediately to Scotland, tracing her through the route which he knew she intended to take. Mrs De Courcy in vain attempted to dissuade him from the prosecution of his design, and to sooth him with hopes which she too well knew would prove deceitful. He was resolute, and Mrs De Courcy was at last obliged to prevent his fruitless journey by unfolding the truth.

The utmost tenderness of caution was insufficient to prevent the effects of this blow on De Courcy's bodily frame. In a few hours strong fever seized him; and his wound, which had hitherto worn a favourable appearance, gave

alarming symptoms of inflammation. Three weeks did Mrs De Courcy watch by his bedside in all the anguish of a mother's fears; forgetting, in her anxiety for his life, that he must for a time live only to sorrow. The balance long hung doubtful. At length the strength of his constitution and his early habits of temperance prevailed. By slow degrees his health was restored, though his spirits were still oppressed by a dejection which long withstood every effort of reason and of religion.

To divert his sorrow rather than in the hope of removing its cause, he left his home and wandered through the most unfrequented parts of England, making anxious, yet almost hopeless, inquiries for his lost treasure. Sometimes, misled by false intelligence, he was hurried from place to place in all the eagerness of expectation, but bitter disappointment closed the pursuit; and the companion of his relaxation, his encouragement in study, his pattern in virtue, the friend, the mistress, almost the wife, was lost beyond recal.

While De Courcy was thus languishing on a sick-bed or wandering restless and miserable, Laura too was a wanderer, a prey to care more deep, more hopeless.

From the unfortunate encounter in the summer-house Hargrave retired in all the agonies of remorse. The companion of his youth, the man to whose courage he owed his life, had been murdered by his hand ; had fallen unarmed and defenceless ; had spent his almost expiring breath in providing for the safety of his assassin. The feelings of natural compunction were aided by a sense of disgrace, for to attack the unarmed was pronounced base even by the only code which Hargrave was accustomed to reverence. For a moment, abhorrence of his crime extended to all its incitements ; and, while he flew to procure assistance for his victim, he cursed a thousand times the fatal charms which had undone him, and a thousand times abjured the innocent girl upon whom he would fain have rested a share of his guilt. In the height of his desperation he refused to fly, and retired to await at Lambert's house the issue of his crime.

But among the many distinctions between natural remorse and true repentance none is more striking than the difference of their duration. Hargrave's conscience, startled, not awakened, was soon restored to portentous quiet. His abjurations were forgotten. Laura's beauty regained its fascination, and Hargrave first shrunk from the

thought of its being appropriated by another, then renewed his wishes that it were his own, then his determination that it should be so.

The threats with which he had terrified Laura were not the mere ravings of frenzy. Aided by the more relentless though not more unprincipled Lambert, he had actually formed a scheme for withdrawing her from the protection of her friends ; and to this scheme, forgotten or detested in the hour of compunction, he again turned an approving eye as pity and remorse subsided with De Courcy's danger. The ill fortune, however, which had attended all Hargrave's designs against Laura once more pursued him. He received a peremptory order to join his regiment, and Lord Lincourt, alarmed by his nephew's increasing intimacy with Lambert, urged his departure in terms which could not be disregarded.

Had these remonstrances reached him in the first moments of remorse, he would probably have yielded without resistance. But before they arrived the paroxysm was past. De Courcy, no longer in danger, was again the detested rival ; Laura, on the point of being lost, was again irresistible ; and Hargrave, enraged at being thwarted in his designs, would, in defiance of all authority, have remained in England to pursue them, had

he not been dissuaded from this temerity by Lambert, who, knowing how much his own interest was involved in the question, used all his influence to prevent his friend from disobliging Lord Lincourt. He insisted that Hargrave's presence was not necessary to the seizure of Laura's person, and that his departure would rather serve to avert any suspicion of his being concerned in her disappearance. He offered to conduct the execution of their project, and pledged himself for its success. In this success he had now an additional interest; for he had been informed of Lady Pelham's danger, and foresaw that her approaching death would put Laura in possession of a fortune from which he hoped to be speedily reimbursed for the sums which he had advanced to Hargrave. Lambert's arguments, his promises, his habitual ascendancy, prevailed. Hargrave consented to depart, and his adviser remained at — to watch his prey.

In the course of his degrading profession, the gamester had acquired associates fit for any deed of darkness, and influence over them beyond what even the prospect of gain could bestow, for he could work upon their fears of punishment. With the help of these assistants, he arranged his nefarious scheme; and, in conformity with his

own inclination, as well as with the injunctions of Hargrave, he spared neither contrivance nor expence to render its success infallible. His arrangements completed, he only waited a favourable moment to effect his purpose. In hopes of finding the wished-for opportunity, he procured intelligence of all Laura's motions. He did not choose to hazard rescue or discovery, by seizing her in open day; and he was concerting the means of decoying her abroad alone at a late hour, when he was relieved from his difficulty by her parting visit to the De Courcys.

The soft shades of twilight were stealing on as she cast a last look back towards Norwood; and were deepening fast as with a sigh, half-pleasing, half-melancholy, she surveyed the sheltering chestnut tree where she had once parted from De Courcy. As she approached her home, the stars coming forth poured their silent language into the ear of piety. Never deaf to this holy call, Laura dismissed her attendants that she might meditate alone. She proceeded slowly along till she came to the entrance of a woody lane, which branched off from the avenue. She stopped, half-inclined to enter; a sensation of fear made her pause. The next moment the very consciousness of that sensation induced her to proceed.

"This is mere childish superstition," said she, and entered the lane.

She had taken only a few steps when she felt herself suddenly seized from behind; one person forcibly confining her arms, while another prevented her cries. Vainly struggling against masculine strength, she was hurried rapidly forward, till, her breath failing, she could resist no farther. Her conductors, soon quitting the beaten path, dragged her on through a little wood that sheltered the lawn towards the east; till reaching a gap which appeared to have been purposely made in the park wall, Laura perceived a carriage in waiting. Again exerting the strength of desperation, she struggled wildly for freedom; but the unequal contest soon was closed; she was lifted into the carriage; one of the men took his place by her side, and they drove off with the speed of lightning.

From the moment when she recovered recollection, Laura had not a doubt that she owed this outrage to Hargrave. She was convinced that his pretence of leaving the kingdom had been merely intended to throw her off her guard, and that he was now waiting, at no distant place, the success of his daring villany. At this idea, a horrible dread seizing her, she threw herself back in the

carriage and wept in despair. Her attendant perceiving that she no longer struggled, with a coarse expression of pity, released her from his grasp, and, taking the handkerchief from her mouth, told her "she might cry as long as she pleased, for he knew it did a woman's heart good to cry." Laura now besought him to tell her whither she was going. "You'll know that by and by," said he. "Let me alone. I am going to sleep; do you the same."

The bare mention of his purpose revived Laura's hopes. "Surely," thought she, "while he sleeps, I may escape. In spite of this fearful speed I may spring out; and if I could gain but a few steps, in this darkness I should be safe." Full of this project, she remained still as the dead; fearing by the slightest sound or motion to retard the sleep of her guard. At last his breathing announced that he was asleep; and Laura began, with trembling hands, to attempt her escape. The blinds were drawn up; and if she could let down that on the side of the carriage where she sat, she might without difficulty open the door. She tried to stir the blind. It refused to yield. She used her utmost force, but it remained firm. She ventured, cautious and trembling, to attempt that on the other side. It dropt; and Laura

thought she was free. It only remained to open the door of the chaise and leap out. She tried it; but the door was immoveable, and, in despair, she shrunk back. Again she started up; for it occurred to her that, though with more danger, she might escape by the window. Cautiously stepping across her guard, she leant out and placed her hands on the top of the carriage, that, trusting to her arms for supporting her weight, she might extricate herself, and drop from thence into the road. Raising herself upon the edge of the step, she fixed her hands more firmly. She paused a moment to listen whether her guard were undisturbed. He still slept soundly; and resting her limbs upon the window frame, she prepared to complete her escape.

A moment more and she had been free; when a horseman riding up, pushed her fiercely back, upbraiding, with tremendous oaths, the carelessness of his companion. The fellow, rousing himself, retorted upon the wretched Laura the abuse of his comrade, swearing that "since he saw she was so cunning, he would keep better watch upon her for the future."

The desponding Laura endured his reproaches in silence. Finding herself thus doubly guarded, she resigned all hope of escaping by her own un-

aided exertions ; and mingling silent prayers with her fearful anticipations, she strove to re-animate her trust that she should not be wholly forsaken. Sometimes her habitual confidence prevailed, and she felt assured, that she should not be left a prey to the wicked. Yet the dreadful threats, the fiery passions of Hargrave rose to her recollection, and she again shuddered in despair. She suddenly remembered *Jessy Wilson*. Starting, with an exclamation of horror and affright, she sought some weapon which might dispense to her a death less terrible ! and instinctively grasping her penknife hid it in her bosom. The next moment she shrunk from her purpose, and doubted the lawfulness of such defence. “ Will he dare his own death too ? ” thought she. “ Oh, Heaven ! in mercy spare me the necessity of sending a wretch to his great account, with all his crimes unrepented on his head—or pardon him and me ! ”

She continued to commend herself to Heaven, till her terrors by degrees subsided. She began again to feel the steady trust which is acquired by all who are habituated to a grateful consideration of the care which they experience ; a trust that even the most adverse events shall terminate in their real advantage ; that the rugged and slippery ways of this dark wilderness, shall, at the dawn of

everlasting day, be owned as the fittest for conducting us to the house of our Father. She began, too, to regain the confidence which strong minds naturally put in their own exertions. She resolved not to be wanting to herself; nor, by brooding over her terrors, to disable herself from taking advantage of any providential circumstance which might favour her escape.

Morning at length began to dawn, but the blinds being closely drawn up, Laura could make no observations on the country through which she was passing. She remarked that the furious speed with which she had at first been driven, had slackened to a slow pace; and she judged that the wearied cattle could not proceed much further. She hoped that it would soon be necessary to stop; and that during the few minutes in which they halted to change horses, she might find means of appealing to the justice of her fellow-creatures. "Surely," said she, "some heart will be open to me."

After proceeding slowly for some time the carriage stopped. Laura listened for the sounds of human voices, but all was silent. She heard the trampling of horses as if led close by the carriage. Some one was certainly near who had no interest in this base oppression. "Help! Oh help me,"

cried Laura. "I am cruelly and wrongfully detained. I have friends who will reward you. Heaven will reward you!—Help me! for kind mercy, help me!" "Heyday!" cried the fellow in the carriage, with something between a grin and a stare, "who is the girl speaking to? What! did you imagine we should be wise enough to bring you within holla of a whole yardful of stable-boys and piping chambermaids! Reward indeed! Set your heart at rest, Miss; we shall be rewarded without your friends or Heaven either!"

The carriage again proceeded with the same speed as at first, and Laura strove to support with composure this new blow to her hopes. Her companion, now producing a bottle of wine and some biscuits, advised her to share with him; and that she might not wilfully lavish her strength and spirits, she consented. Once more in the course of the day the travellers stopped to change horses, and Laura once more, though with feebler hopes, renewed her appeals to justice and to pity. No answer greeted her ear. Again she was hurried on her melancholy way.

The day, as it advanced, seemed rough and gloomy. The wind swept in gusts through the trees, and the rain beat upon the carriage. The evening was drawing on when Laura remarked

that the motion was changed. The chaise proceeded slowly over soft uneven ground, and she guessed with dismay, that it had quitted all frequented paths. In renewed alarm, she again besought her companion to tell her whither he meant to conduct her, and for what end she was thus cruelly forced from her home. "Why, how should I tell you what I do not know myself?" answered the man. "I shan't conduct you much farther—and a good riddance. As for the end you'll see that when it comes."

About an hour after quitting the road, the carriage stopped; and the man letting down the blind, Laura perceived through the dusk, that they were on a barren moor. Waste and level it seemed to spread before her; but the darkness prevented her from distinguishing its features or its boundaries. Suddenly, as the gust died away she fancied she heard the roar of waters. She listened; but the wind swelled again, and she heard only its howlings over the heath. The horseman, who had ridden away when the carriage stopped, now galloped back, and directed the postilion to proceed. They went on for a few hundred yards, and again they stopped. The roar of waters again burst on Laura's ear, now swelling loud, now sinking in a sullen murmur. She saw a light

glimmer at a distance. It was tossed by the billows of the ocean.

The door of the chaise was opened, and she was lifted from it. Gliding from the arms of the ruffian who held her, and clasping his knees, "Oh! if you have the heart of a man," she cried, "let me not be torn from my native land—let me not be cast on the merciless deep. Think what it is to be an exile—friendless in a strange land—the sport, the prey of a pitiless enemy. Oh! if you have need of mercy, have mercy upon me."—"Holla! Robert," shouted the ruffian, "take away this girl. She's enough to make a man play the fool and whimper." The other fellow now approaching lifted Laura, more dead than alive, from the ground, and, wrapping her in a large cloak, bore her towards the beach.

In a creek sheltered by rocks from the breakers, lay a small boat. One man sat near the bow, roaring a hoarse sea-song. As the party approached, he rose, and pushing the boat ashore, received the half-lifeless Laura in his brawny arms, cursing her with strange oaths for having made him wait so long. Then, on his uttering a discordant yell, two of his companions appeared; and after exchanging with Laura's guards a murmuring ac-

count of the trouble which they had undergone, pushed off from the land. The keel grated along the pebbles; the next moment it floated on the waves, and Laura starting up, threw back the cloak from her face, and with strained eyes gazed on her parting native land, till all behind was darkness.

A pang of anguish striking to her heart, she made once more a desperate effort to awaken pity. Stretching her clasped hands towards the man who sat near her, she cried, in the piercing voice of misery, "Oh take pity on me, I am an orphan. I have heard that sailors have kindly hearts—Have pity then—land me on the wildest coast, and I will fall down there and pray for you!" The person to whom she spoke having eyed her a moment in silence, coolly drew in his oar; and rising, wrapped her close in the cloak and laid her down in the bottom of the boat, advising her with an oath to "keep snug or she would capsize them."

In despair she renounced all further effort. Silent and motionless she lay, the cold spray dashing over her unheeded; till wet, chilled, and miserable, she was lifted on board a small brig which lay about half a mile from the shore. She was carried down to the cabin, which was more decent

than is usual in vessels of that size. A clean-looking woman attended to undress her; night-clothes were in readiness for her; and every accommodation provided which her situation rendered possible. Every thing served to convince her of the care and precaution with which this cruel scheme had been concerted, and to shew her the depth of the snare into which she had fallen.

She was laid in her narrow crib, ere it occurred to her that Hargrave might be near to watch his prey. Exhausted as she was, sleep fled at the thought. She listened for his voice, for his foot-step, amid the unwonted discord which disturbed her ear. Daylight returned, and no sound reached her more terrible than that of the gale rattling in the cordage and dashing the waves against the vessel's side. Worn out with fatigue and suffering, she at length slept; and a mid-day sun glanced by fits through her grated window ere she awoke to a new sense of sorrow. She rose, and going upon deck, looked sadly back upon the way she had unconsciously passed. Behind, the blue mountains were sinking in the distance; on the left lay a coast unknown to her; before her stretched the boundless deep, unvaried save by the whitening surge.

Laura spent most of her time upon deck, the fresh air reviving her spirits. One male and one female attendant seemed appropriated to her, and served her with even officious assiduity. Hoping that some opportunity might occur of transmitting an account of her situation to England, she begged these obsequious attendants to supply her with writing-materials; but was firmly, though respectfully, refused.

The third morning came, and Laura looked in vain for any object to vary the immeasurable waste. The sun rose from one unbending line, and sunk again in naked majesty. She observed that the course of the vessel was in general directly west; and if she had before doubted, this circumstance would have convinced her of her destination. She once ventured to inquire whither the ship was bound, but was answered that "she should know that when she reached the port."

It was on the fourth of May that Laura began her ill-omened voyage. On the twelfth of June, land! land! was shouted in the voice of joyful triumph. All ran to gaze with glad eyes on what seemed a low cloud, faintly descried on the verge of the horizon—all but Laura, who looked sadly

forward, as to the land of exile, of degradation,—of death. Day after day that dreaded land approached; till, by degrees, the boundless ocean was narrowed to a mighty river; and the unfrequent sail, almost too distant for sight, was multiplied to a busy fleet, plying in every direction their cheerful labours. At length a city appeared in view, rising like an amphitheatre, and flashing bright with a material unknown to European architecture. Laura inquired what town it was; and, though refused all information, surmised that Quebec lay before her.

Opposite the town, the ship hove to; a boat was launched, and Laura expected to be sent on shore. Nor did she unwillingly prepare to go. "Surely," thought she, "in this populous city some one will be found to listen to my tale, and to wrest me from the arm of the oppressor." The boat, however, departed without her, carrying ashore the man who had hitherto attended her. After remaining on shore for several hours, the man returned; and the vessel again proceeded in her voyage. Laura now imagined that Montreal was her destined port; and again she strove to hope that, among numbers, she should find aid.

A still cloudy evening had succeeded to a sultry day, when Laura observed an unusual bustle upon deck. It was growing dark when, as she leant over the rail, to watch the fire-flies that flashed like stars in the air, the captain approaching her, told her that she must go ashore, and immediately lifted her into a boat which lay along-side. Her attendants and baggage were already there; the sailors had taken their oars; and, roaring to their companions a rough "good night," made towards the land. Instead, however, of gaining the nearest point, they rowed into what in the darkness seemed a creek; but Laura soon perceived that, having left the great river on which they had hitherto sailed, they were following the course of one of its tributary streams. The darkness prevented her from distinguishing objects on the banks, though now and then a light glimmering from a casement shewed that the haunts of man were near. She could not even discern the countenances of the sailors; but she observed, that he who seemed to direct the others, spoke in a voice which was new to her ear.

All night the rowers toiled up the stream. The day dawned; and Laura perceived that, passing

an open cultivated plain, she was pursuing her course towards woods impervious to the light. Dark and tangled they lowered over the stream, till they closed around, and every cheerful object was blotted from the scene.

CHAP. XXXIII.



THE travellers had proceeded for some time shaded by the overhanging woods, the distance lengthened by the dreary sameness of their way, when a wild halloo smote Laura's ear; and she perceived that three Indians stood at the water-edge, making signs for the boat to land. To her unspeakable surprise, the sailors joyfully obeyed the signal. They ran their bark into a creek to which the Indians pointed, and cheerfully busied themselves in discharging their cargo.

Placed with her attendants on a little eminence, which rose above the swampy margin of the river, Laura took a fearful survey of the scene around her. Save where the sluggish stream opened to the day, her view was bounded to a few yards of marshy ground, rank with unwholesome vegetation. No track appeared to lead from this desolate spot. Between the gigantic pines, brushwood and coarse grass spread in sad luxuriance.

No trace was here of human footstep. All was dreary and forlorn, as the land which the first wanderers visited unwilling.

She had not long continued her melancholy survey, when the two stoutest of the Indians approached ; and one of them, after talking apart with her attendants, lifted her female servant in his arms, and walked on. The other, making some uncouth gestures, prepared to raise Laura from the ground. She shrunk back alarmed ; but the Indian in broken French, assured her that he would not hurt her ; and, pointing towards the woods, reminded her of the difficulty of passing them on foot. Her valet, too, represented the fatigue she must undergo, if she refused the assistance of the Indian. But Laura preferring a toilsome march to such a mode of conveyance, persevered in her refusal ; and, bidding them lead the way, followed into the pathless wild.

They continued their journey for several hours, no object meeting their sight which might mark the stages of their way. No work of man appeared, not even the faintest trace that ever man had toiled through this wilderness ; yet Laura perceived that the Indians proceeded without hesitation. The position of the grass, the appearance of the leaves, gave indications sufficient to guide them

in their route. One of them carried a bag of provisions ; and having reached a spot where the ground was firm and dry, he invited Laura to sit down and take some refreshment. Faint with fatigue, Laura thankfully acceded. Scarcely, however, had she seated herself on the grass, ere her attention was drawn by a slight though unusual noise ; and she was told that it was caused by a rattlesnake. At this intelligence her maid screaming started up, and was going to dart forward into the wood. The Indians beheld her terror with silent contempt ; while Laura calmly detained her with gentle force. " Stay, Mary," said she. " If you tread on the animal you are gone ! If we are quiet, we may probably see and avoid it." The influence which Laura always acquired over those with whom she lived, prevailed over Mary's dread ; and in a few moments the serpent was seen by one of the Indians, who killed it with a single blow.

Their hasty meal ended, the party proceeded on their way ; but they had not gone far ere Laura, worn out with toil and sorrow, sunk upon the ground. She had now no choice ; and the Indian, lifting her with the same ease as she would have done an infant, went on with more speed than before.

Towards the close of day, the woods suddenly opened into a small field, surrounded by them on every side, which appeared to have been itself imperfectly redeemed from the same state of waste luxuriance. In the centre stood a house, or rather cabin, rudely constructed of the material which nature so lavishly supplied. Around it a small patch, inclosed by a pallisade, bore marks of forsaken cultivation. Beyond this inclosure, logs of prodigious size lay scattered through the field; and the roots, which had not been cleared from the ground, were again shooting luxuriantly. With a faint sensation of gladness, Laura beheld traces of human kind. Yet no living creature appeared. Here reigned primeval stillness. The winds had died away. A sultry calm filled the air. The woods were motionless. The birds were silent. All was fixed as in death, save where a dull stream stole under the tall canes that deformed its margin.

Mary's exclamations of grief and surprise first informed Laura that she had reached her home. To Laura the dreariness of the scene was of small concern. No outward circumstances could add to the horrors with which her fears were familiar. While her attendant bewailed aloud that ever thirst of gain had lured her from happy England,

Laura was inwardly striving to revive the hope that sudden death might snatch her from the grasp of the oppressor; and renewing her oft-repeated prayer,—“Oh that Thou wouldst hide me in the grave.” But no selfish sorrow could make her regardless of the woes of others. “Courage, Mary,” said she, with a foreboding smile, “we shall soon be released; and both, I hope, find shelter in our Father’s house.”

The cabin was divided into three apartments, each entering from the other. To the innermost Laura was conducted; and she saw that it had been arranged for her. The window was secured with iron. The furniture, unlike that of the other rooms, was new and not inelegant. Laura looked round to observe whether any trace of Hargrave’s presence was visible. None appeared. She examined every recess and corner of her new abode, as one who fears the lurking assassin. She ascertained that Hargrave was not its inmate; and thanked Heaven for the prospect of one night of peace. It was in vain, however, that she tried to discover how long this reprieve might last. The servants either could not or would not give her any information. She was too well acquainted with the character of her oppressor to hope that he would long delay his coming. “To-mor-

row, perhaps"—thought she; and the cold shivering came over her, which now ever followed her anticipation of the future. "Yet why do I despair?" said she. "Is any time too short, are any means too feeble for the Power—for the Wisdom in which I trust? But since the hour of trial may be so near, let me not waste the time which should prepare for it,—prepare to cast off this poor clog of earth, and rise beyond its sorrows and its stains."

Laura's bodily frame, however, could not long keep pace with the efforts of her mind, for her health and strength were failing under the continued influence of grief and fear. The form, once rounded in fair proportion, was wasted to a shadow. The once graceful neck bent mournfully forward. The lily arms hung down in listless melancholy. The cheek, once of form inimitable, was sunk and hollow now. The colour, once quick to tell the modest thought, was fixed in the paleness of the dead. And death was ever present to her thoughts,—the only point to which her hope turned steadily!

One only desire lingered upon earth. She wished that some friend should pity her hard fate, and know that the victim had shrunk from it, though in vain. Intending to leave behind her

some attestation of her innocence, she besought Mary to procure for her the means of writing. "Why should you fear to trust me?" said she. "To whom upon earth can my complaint reach now? You may see all I write, Mary; and perhaps when I am gone you will yourself convey it to my friend. Your master will not prevent you then; for then he will have pity on me, and wish that he had not dealt with me so hardly." The irresistible sweetness of Laura had won the heart of her attendant, and Mary promised that she would endeavour to gratify her. She said that the writing materials were kept carefully locked up by Robert, the man-servant; that his master's orders on that subject had been peremptory; that she was sure he would not venture to disobey while there remained a possibility of conveying intelligence from the place of their confinement; that two of the Indians were to depart on the following day; that after they were gone, no means of access to the habitable world remaining, Robert might possibly relax his strictness, and permit Laura to amuse herself with writing.

Mary's words awakened in Laura's mind an idea that all was not yet lost. The Indians were suspected of favouring her. They might then

bear her appeal to human pity, to human justice. If she could find means to speak with them apart, she would plead so earnestly that even savages would be moved to mercy ! At these thoughts a ray of hope once more kindled in her breast. It was the last. All day she watched for an opportunity to address one of the Indians. In vain ! Robert guarded her with such relentless fidelity, that she found it impossible to effect her purpose. The Indians departed. Mary performed her promise, and the unfortunate Laura wrote the following letter, which was afterwards by Hargrave's permission conveyed to Mrs Douglas.

“ From this dreary land of exile, to whom
 “ shall I address myself save to you, mine own
 “ friend, and my father's friend ? Where tell my
 “ sad fate save to you, who first taught me the
 “ hope that looks beyond it ? And let it comfort
 “ your kind heart to know, that while you are
 “ shedding tears over this last memorial of your
 “ Laura, I shall be rejoicing in the full consum-
 “ mation of that hope.

“ There is indeed another friend ! One to
 “ whom my last earthly thoughts are due ! But I
 “ cannot tell him, that she who was almost the
 “ wife of his bosom is gone down to a dis-

" honoured grave. I have not time to soften my
 " sad tale to him, nor to study words of com-
 " fort ; for the moments are precious with me
 " now. A few, a very few, are all that remain
 " for preparation. I must not rob them of their
 " awful right. Tell him my story as he is able
 " to bear it. Tell him my innocence, and he
 " will believe it, for he knew my very soul.
 " But I must hasten, lest the destroyer come, ere,
 " in these lines, I close my connection with this
 " world of trial."

[She then proceeded to give a simple narrative
 of her wrongs. She expressed no bitterness a-
 gainst the author of them. She spoke of him as
 of a misguided being, and pitied the anguish
 which he was preparing for himself.] " Tell
 " Mr De Courcy," she proceeded, " that I
 " charge him, by all the love he bears me, to for-
 " give my enemy, even from the heart forgive
 " him. Let him do more. Let him pray for
 " him ; and, if they meet, admonish him. It may
 " be that his heart will soften when he remem-
 " bers me."

[The remainder of the letter was written at in-
 tervals. Laura spent her time chiefly in acts of
 devotion, of self-examination, and of repentance.
 It was only when exhausted nature could no

longer follow these exercises of the soul, that she returned to add another line to her picture of wretchedness.]

“ The saints who resisted unto blood striving
 “ against sin, who gave up their lives in defence
 “ of the truth, looked forward to the hour of their
 “ departure rejoicing. But I must go to the
 “ grave laden with shame and sorrow. My soul
 “ is weary of my life, and yet I must fear to die.
 “ Yet let my enemy a little while delay his coming
 “ and my death also will be joyful. Let him
 “ stay only a few days, and I shall be deaf to the
 “ voice of the oppressor. I am wasting fast away.
 “ If he haste not to catch the shadow, it
 “ will be gone.————

“ The people whom he has appointed to guard
 “ his poor prisoner, no longer watch me as they
 “ once did. It is useless now. A few short steps
 “ and my feeble limbs bend to the earth, reminding
 “ me whither I am hastening.————

“ When I am gone, Mary will carry you the

" ringlets which you were wont to twine round
 " your finger. Send one of them to her who
 " should have been my sister; but give not any
 " to my own Montague, for he will pine over
 " them when he might be happy in some new
 " connection. Yet tell him that I loved him to
 " the end. I believe he sometimes doubted of
 " my love; but tell him that I bore him a firm
 " affection. Passion is unfit for the things of
 " this world.—————

" I have a letter from my enemy. In two days
 " more—————

" I have a knife concealed in my bosom. All
 " night it is hidden beneath my pillow; and
 " when my weary eyes close for a moment, I
 " grasp it, and the chill touch rouses me again.
 " Mine own dear friend, did you think when
 " first you taught me to join my little hands in
 " prayer, that these hands should be stained with
 " murder?"—————

" Is it a crime to die when I can no longer live
 " with innocence? When there is no escape but
 " in the grave, is it forbidden to hide me there?
 " My mind grows feeble now. I cannot discern
 " between good and evil.—————

" Why is my soul bowed down to the dust, as
 " if the fountain of compassion were sealed? I
 " will yet trust Him who is the helper of those
 " who have no help in man. It may be that He
 " will melt the heart of my enemy, and move
 " him to let me die in peace. Or perhaps even
 " the sight of my persecutor may be permitted
 " to burst the rending heart—to scare the trem-
 " bling spirit from its prison.—————

" This day is my last, and it is closing now!
 " The silence of midnight is around me. Ere it
 " again return, a deeper night shall close for
 " me; and the weary pilgrim shall sink to rest.
 " It is time that I loosen me from the earth; I
 " will not give my last hours to this land of
 " shadows. Then fare you well, mine own dear

" friend! You first pointed my wishes to that
 " better world where I shall not long wait your
 " coming. And fare thee well, mine own Mon-
 " tague! Take comfort. I was not fit to linger
 " here; for I had desires which earth could not
 " satisfy; and thirstings after a perfection which
 " this weak heart could not attain. Farewell—
 " I will look back no more."

HARGRAVE'S LETTER TO LAURA.

" My dearest Laura—The tantalizing business
 " which has so long thwarted my wishes will still
 " detain me for two days. Your gentle mind
 " cannot imagine what this delay costs me. My
 " only recompense is, that it affords me an op-
 " portunity of shewing you somewhat of that
 " consideration with which I could always wish
 " to treat you. I willingly forego the advantage
 " of surprise for the sake of allowing you to ex-
 " ercise that decision which you are so well qua-
 " lified to use discreetly.

" You know, Laura, how I have doated on
 " you. For near four long years you have been
 " the desire of my soul; and now that my happy
 " daring has placed me within reach of my ut-

"most wishes, I would fain attain them with-
 "out distress to you. This is no time for con-
 "cealment; and you must pardon me if I am
 "explicit with you. I have known the disposi-
 "tion of Lady Pelham's fortune from the hour
 "when it was made. You know that with all
 "my faults I am not sordid; but circumstances
 "have rendered money necessary to me. Except
 "in the event of Lord Lincourt's death, I cannot
 "return to Engand otherwise than as your hus-
 "band. I will own, too, dearest Laura, that
 "after all I have done, and all I may be com-
 "pelled to do, I dare not trust for pardon to
 "your pity alone. I must interest your duty in
 "my cause.

"Consider your situation, my beloved, and
 "spare me the pain of distressing you. I have
 "watched you, implored you, pined for you—I
 "have borne your coldness, your scorn.—I have
 "ventured my life to obtain you. Judge then
 "whether I be of a temper to be baulked of my
 "reward. You must be mine, bewitching Laura.
 "No cool, insulting, plausible pretender can cheat
 "me of you now. Trackless woods divide you
 "from all human kind. I have provided against
 "the possibility of tracing your retreat. It rests

“ with you then to choose whether you will bless
 “ my love with a willing and honourable reward,
 “ or force me to extort the power of bestowing
 “ obligation.

“ My charming Laura, for now indeed I may
 “ call you mine, pardon, in consideration of its
 “ sincerity, the abrupt language I am compelled
 “ to hold.

“ One thing more. In three weeks I must re-
 “ turn hither. The engagement of your British
 “ attendants expires before that time. I cannot
 “ for a moment allow myself to suppose that
 “ you will prefer a hopeless solitary exile to the
 “ reparation which I shall even then be so anxi-
 “ ous to make ; to the endearments of a fond hus-
 “ band, of an impassioned lover ; to the envy and
 “ the homage of an admiring world. Suffer me,
 “ rather, dear lovely girl, to exult in the hope that
 “ you will receive, without reluctance, the man to
 “ whom fate assigns you, and that you will recal
 “ somewhat of the tenderness you once confessed
 “ for your own ever-devoted,

“ VILLIERS HARGRAVE.”

LAURA'S ANSWER,

(sent with the two foregoing to Mrs Douglas:)

“ I thought my spirit had been broken, crushed
“ never more to rise. Must the glow of indigna-
“ tion mingle with the damps of death ! But I
“ will not upbraid you. The language of forgive-
“ ness best befits me now. The measure of your
“ injuries to me is almost full ; while those which
“ you have heaped upon yourself are yet more deep
“ and irreparable. My blasted fame, my life cut
“ off in its prime, even the horrible dread which
“ has overwhelmed me, are nothing to the pangs
“ of hopeless remorse, the unaccepted struggle for
“ repentance.—Yet a little while, and this dark-
“ ness shall burst into light ineffable. Yet a little
“ while, and this sorrow shall be as the remem-
“ brance of a troubled dream. But you—Oh
“ Hargrave, have pity on yourself !

“ It was not to warn, it was to plead with you,
“ that I won on my knees the consent of your
“ messenger to bear my reply. I will strive to
“ hope ; for you were not always pitiless. I have
“ seen you feel for the sufferings of a stranger,

“and have you no mercy for me? Alas! in those
 “pitying tears which I saw you shed, began this
 “long train of evil; for then began my base ido-
 “latry, and justly have you been made the instru-
 “ment of my punishment.

“My mind wanders. I am weaker than a
 “child. Oh Hargrave, if you have human pity
 “let the feeble spark expire in peace. Here,
 “where no Christian footstep shall hallow the
 “turf that covers me, nor song of Christian praise
 “rise near my grave, here let me lay me down
 “and die—and I will bless you that I die in
 “peace. I dare not spend my parting breath in
 “uttering unholy vows, nor die a voluntary part-
 “ner in your crimes. Nor would I, had my life
 “been prolonged, have joined to pollution this
 “dust, which, perishable as it is, must rise to im-
 “mortality—which, vile as it is, more vile as it
 “soon may be, shall yet ‘put on incorruption.’
 “Why then should you come hither? Will it
 “please you to see this poor piece of clay, for
 “which you have ventured your soul, faded to an
 “object of horror?—cast uncoffined into the earth,
 “robbed of the decencies which Christians pay
 “even to the worst of sinners? When you look up-
 “on my stiffened corpse will you then triumph in
 “the security of your possession? Will you again

“ exult in hope when you turn from my grave and
 “ say, ‘ here lies the wretch whom I have undone !”

“ Come not I charge you, if you would escape
 “ the anguish of the murderer. When did the
 “ evil of your deeds stop within your first inten-
 “ tion ? Do not amuse your conscience with the
 “ dream of reparation. I am fallen indeed, ere you
 “ dare insult me with the thought ! Will you wed
 “ the dead ? Or could I outlive your injuries, think
 “ you that I would sink so low as to repay them
 “ with myself ?—reward with vows of love a crime
 “ more black than murder ? Though my name,
 “ already degraded through you, must no more
 “ claim alliance with the good and worthy, think
 “ you that I would bind myself before heaven to a
 “ wretch who owed his very life to my undeserved
 “ mercy ? Inhuman ! Your insults have roused the
 “ failing spirit. Yet I must quell these last stir-
 “ rings of nature. Instant, full, and free must be
 “ my forgiveness ; for such is the forgiveness
 “ which I shall soon require.

“ Perhaps, as now you seem to think me fit for
 “ any baseness, you will suppose my forebodings
 “ a poor deceit to win you from your purpose.
 “ See then if you can trace in these unsteady lines
 “ the vigour of health. Ask him who bears them
 “ to you, how looks now the face which you call

“lovely ? Ask him if the hand which gave this
 “letter looks soft and graceful now ? I love to
 “gaze upon it. It bids me hope ; for it is like no
 “living thing Inquire minutely. Ask if there
 “remain one charm to lure you on to further
 “guilt. And if death has already seized on all,
 “if he has spared nothing to desire, will you yet
 “hurry him on his prey ? You have made life a
 “burden too heavy for the weary frame. Will
 “you make death too dreadful to be endured ?
 “Will you add to its horrors till nature and reli-
 “gion shrink from it in agony ?

“I cannot plead with you as I would. My
 “strength fails. My eyes are dim with weeping.
 “Oh grant that this farewell may be the last—
 “that we may meet no more till I welcome you
 “with the joy which angels feel over the sinner
 “that repenteth.”

The whole of the night preceding Hargrave's ar-
 rival, was passed by Laura in acts of devotion. In
 her life, blameless as it had appeared to others, she
 saw so much ground for condemnation, that, had
 her hopes rested upon her own merit, they would
 have vanished like the sunshine of a winter storm.
 Their support was more mighty ; and they remain-

ed unshaken. The raptures of faith beamed on her soul. By degrees they triumphed over every fear; and the first sound which awoke the morning, was her voice raised in a trembling hymn of praise.

Her countenance elevated as in hope; her eyes cast upwards; her hands clasped; her lips half open in the unfinished adoration; her face brightened with a smile, the dawn of eternal day—she was found by her attendant. Awe-struck, the woman paused, and at a reverend distance gazed upon the seraph; but her entrance had called back the unwilling spirit from its flight; and Laura, once more a feeble child of earth, faintly inquired whether her enemy were at hand. Mary answered that her master was not expected to arrive before the evening; and entreated that Laura would try to recruit her spirits, and accept of some refreshment. Laura made no opposition. She unconsciously swallowed what was placed before her; unwittingly suffered her attendant to lead her abroad; nor once heeded ought that was done to her, nor ought that passed before her eyes, till her exhausted limbs found rest upon the trunk of a tree, which lay mouldering near the spot where its root was sending forth a luxuriant thicket.

The breath of morning blew chill on the wasted form of Laura, while it somewhat revived her

to strength and recollection. Her attendant seeing her shiver in the breeze, compassionately wrapped her more closely in her cloak, and ran to seek a warmer covering. "She feels for my bodily wants," said Laura. "Will she have no pity for the sufferings of the soul? Yet what relief can she afford? What help is there for me in man? Oh be thou my help who art the guard of the defenceless! Thou who canst shield in every danger—Thou who canst guide in every difficulty!"

Her eye rested as it fell, upon a track as of recent footsteps. They had brushed away the dew, and the rank grass had not yet risen from their pressure. The unwonted trace of man's presence arrested her attention; and her mind, exhausted by suffering, and sharing the weakness of its frail abode, admitted the superstitious thought that these marks afforded a providential indication for her guidance. Transient animation kindling in her frame, she followed the track as it wound round a thicket of poplar; then, suddenly recollecting herself, she became conscious of the delusion, and shed a tear over her mental decay.

She was about to return, when she perceived that she was near the bank of the river. Its dark flood was stealing noiseless by; and Laura,

looking on it, breathed the oft-repeated wish that she could seek rest beneath its waves. Again she moved feebly forward. She reached the brink of the stream, and stood unconsciously following its course with her eye; when a light wind stirring the canes which grew down to the water edge, she beheld close by her an Indian canoe. With suddenness that mocks the speed of light, hope flashed on the darkened soul; and, stretching her arms in wild ecstasy, "Help, help," cried Laura, and sprung towards the boat. A feeble echo from the further shore alone returned the cry. Again she called. No human voice replied. But delirious transport lent vigour to her frame. She sprung into the bark; she pressed the slender oar against the bank. The light vessel yielded to her touch. It floated. The stream bore it along. The woods closed around her prison. "Thou hast delivered me!" she cried; and sunk senseless.

A meridian sun beat on her uncovered head ere Laura began to revive. Recollection stole upon her like the remembrance of a feverish dream. As one who, waking from a fearful vision, still trembles in his joy, she scarcely dared to hope that the dread hour was past, till raising her eyes she saw the dark woods bend over her,

and steal slowly away as the canoe glided on with the tide. The raptures of fallen man own their alliance with pain, by seeking the same expression. Joy and gratitude too big for utterance long poured themselves forth in tears. At length returning composure permitting the language of ecstasy, it was breathed in the accents of devotion; and the lone wild echoed to a song of deliverance.

The saintly strain arose unmixed with other sound. No breeze moaned through the imperious woods. No ripple broke the stream. The dark shadows trembled for a moment in its bosom as the little bark stole by, and then reposed again. No trace appeared of human presence. The fox peeping from the brushwood, the wild duck sailing stately in the stream, saw the unwonted stranger without alarm, untaught as yet to flee from the destroyer.

The day declined; and Laura with the joy of her escape began to mingle a wish, that, ere the darkness closed around her, she might find shelter near her fellow beings. She was not ignorant of the dangers of her voyage. She knew that the navigation of the river was interrupted by rapids, which had been purposely described in her hearing. She examined her frail vessel and

trembled; for life was again become precious, and feeble seemed her defence against the torrent. The canoe, which could not have contained more than two persons, was constructed of a slender frame of wood, covered with the bark of the birch. It yielded to the slightest motion; and caution was necessary to poise in it even the light form of Laura.

Slowly it floated down the lingering tide; and, when a pine of larger size or form more fantastic than his fellows enabled her to measure her progress, she thought that through wilds less impassable her own limbs would have borne her more swiftly. In vain behind each tangled point did her fancy picture the haunt of man. Vainly amid the mists of eve did she trace the smoke of sheltered cottages. In vain at every winding of the stream she sent forward a longing eye in search of human dwelling. The narrow view was bounded by the dark wilderness, repeating ever the same picture of dreary repose.

The sun went down. The shadows of evening fell; not such as in her happy native land blend softly with the last radiance of day; but black and heavy, harshly contrasting with the light of a naked sky reflected from the waters, where they spread beyond the gloom of impending woods.

Dark and more dark the night came on. Solemn even amid the peopled land, in this vast solitude it became more awful.

Ignorant how near the place of danger might be, fearing to pursue darkling her perilous way, Laura tried to steer her light bark to the shore ; intending to moor it, to find in it a rude resting-place, and in the morning to pursue her way. Laboriously she toiled, and at length reached the bank in safety ; but in vain she tried to draw her little vessel to land. Its weight resisted her strength. Dreading that it might slip from her grasp and leave her without means of escape, she re-entered it, and again glided on in her dismal voyage. She had found in the canoe a little coarse bread made of Indian corn ; and this, with the water of the river, formed her whole sustenance. Her frame worn out with previous suffering, awe and fear at last yielded to fatigue ; and the weary wanderer sunk to sleep.

It was late on the morning of a cloudy day, when a low murmuring sound stealing on the silence awoke Laura from the rest of innocence. She listened. The murmur seemed to swell on her ear. She looked up. The dark woods still bent over her. But they no longer touched the mar-

gin of the stream. They stretched their giant arms from the summit of a precipice. Their image was no more reflected unbroken. The grey rocks which supported them but half lent their colours to the rippling water. The wild duck, no longer tempting the stream, flew screaming over its bed. Each object hastened on with fearful rapidity, and the murmuring sound was now a deafening roar.

Fear supplying super-human strength, Laura strove to turn the course of her vessel. She strained every nerve; she used the force of desperation. Half-hoping that the struggle might save her, half-fearing to note her dreadful progress, she toiled on—till the oar was torn from her powerless grasp, and hurried along with the tide.

The fear of death alone had not the power to overwhelm the soul of Laura. Somewhat might yet be done perhaps to avert her fate, at least to prepare for it. Feeble as was the chance of life, it was not to be rejected. Fixing her cloak more firmly round her, Laura bound it to the slender frame of the canoe. Then commending herself to heaven with the fervour of a last prayer, she, in dread stillness, awaited her doom.

With terrible speed the vessel hurried on. It was whirled round by the torrent—tossed fearfully—and hurried on again. It shot over a smoothness more dreadful than the eddying whirl. It rose upon its prow. Laura clung to it in the convulsion of terror. A moment she trembled on the giddy verge. The next, all was darkness!

CHAP. XXXIV.

WHEN Laura was restored to recollection, she found herself in a plain decent apartment. Several persons of her own sex were humanely busied in attending her. Her mind retaining a confused impression of the past, she inquired where she was, and how she had been brought thither. An elderly woman, of a prepossessing appearance, answered with almost maternal kindness, "that she was among friends all anxious for her safety; begged that she would try to sleep; and promised to satisfy her curiosity when she should be more able to converse." This benevolent person, whose name was Falkland, then administered a restorative to her patient; and Laura, uttering almost incoherent expressions of gratitude, composed herself to rest.

Awaking refreshed and collected, she found Mrs Falkland and one of her daughters still watch-

ing by her bed-side. Laura again repeated her questions, and Mrs Falkland fulfilled her promise, by relating that her husband, who was a farmer, having been employed with his two sons in a field which overlooked the river, had observed the canoe enter the rapid: that seeing it too late to prevent the accident, they had hurried down to the bed of the stream below the fall, in hopes of intercepting the boat at its reappearance: that being accustomed to float wood down the torrent, they knew precisely the spot where their assistance was most likely to prove effectual: that the canoe, though covered with foam for a moment, had instantly risen again, and that Mr Falkland and his sons had, not without danger, succeeded in drawing it to land.

She then, in her turn, inquired by what accident Laura had been exposed to such a perilous adventure; expressing wonder at the direction of her voyage, since Falkland farm was the last inhabited spot in that district. Laura, mingling her natural reserve with a desire to satisfy her kind hostess, answered that she had been torn from her friends by an inhuman enemy, and that her perilous voyage was the least effect of his barbarity.

"Do you know," said Mrs Falkland, somewhat mistaking her meaning, "that to his cruelty you partly owe your life ; for had he not bound you to the canoe, you must have sunk while the boat floated on." Laura heard with a faint smile the effect of her self-possession ; but considering it as a call to pious gratitude rather than as a theme of self-applause, she forbore to offer any claim to praise ; and the subject was suffered to drop without further explanation.

Having remained for two days with this hospitable family, Laura expressed a wish to depart. She communicated to Mr Falkland her desire of returning immediately to Europe ; and begged that he would introduce her to some asylum where she might wait the departure of a vessel for Britain. She expressed her willingness to content herself with the poorest accommodation, confessing that she had not the means of purchasing any of a higher class. All the wealth, indeed, which she could command, consisted in a few guineas which she had accidentally had about her when she was taken from her home ; and a ring which Mrs De Courcy had given her at parting. Her host kindly urged her to remain with them till they should ascertain that a vessel was imme-

diately to sail, in which she might secure her passage; assuring her that a week scarcely ever elapsed without some departure for her native country. Finding, however, that she was anxious to be gone, Mr Falkland himself accompanied her to Quebec.

They travelled by land. The country at first bore the characters of a half-redeemed wilderness. The road wound at times through dreary woods, at others, through fields where noxious variety of hue bespoke imperfect cultivation. At last it approached the great river; and Laura gazed with delight on the ever-changing, rich, and beautiful scenes which were presented to her view; scenes which she had passed unheeded when grief and fear veiled every prospect in gloom.

One of the nuns in the Hotel Dieu was the sister of Mrs Falkland; and to her care Mr Falkland intended to commit his charge. But before he had been an hour in the town, he received information that a ship was weighing anchor for the Clyde, and Laura eagerly embraced the opportunity. The captain being informed by Mr Falkland, that she could not advance the price of her passage, at first hesitated to receive her. But when, with the irresistible candour and majesty

that shone in all her looks and words, she assured him of his reward, when she spoke to him in the accents of his native land, the Scotsman's heart melted; and having satisfied himself that she was a Highlander, he closed the bargain, by swearing that he was sure he might trust her.

With tears in her eyes, Laura took leave of her benevolent host; yet her heart bounded with joy as she saw the vessel cleaving the tide, and each object in the dreaded land of exile swiftly retiring from her view. In a few days that dreaded land disappeared. In a few more the mountains of Cape Breton sunk behind the wave. The brisk gales of autumn wafted the vessel cheerfully on her way; and often did Laura compute her progress.

In a clear frosty morning towards the end of September, she heard once more the cry of land! —now music to her ear. Now with a beating breast she ran to gaze upon a ridge of mountains indenting the disk of the rising sun; but the tears of rapture dimmed her eyes, when every voice at once shouted "Scotland!"

All day Laura remained on deck, oft measuring with the light splinter the vessel's course through the deep. The winds favoured not her

impatience. Towards evening they died away, and scarcely did the vessel steal along the liquid mirror. Another and another morning came, and Laura's ear was blessed with the first sounds of her native land. The tolling of a bell was borne along the water; now swelling loud, and now falling softly away. The humble village church was seen on the shore; and Laura could distinguish the gay colouring of her country-women's Sunday attire,—the scarlet plaid, transmitted from generation to generation, pinned decently over the plain clean coif,—the bright blue gown, the trophy of more recent housewifery. To her every form in the well-known garb seemed the form of a friend. The blue mountains in the distance,—the scattered woods,—the fields yellow with the harvest,—the river sparkling in the sun, seemed to the wanderer returning from the land of strangers, fairer than the gardens of Paradise.

Land of my affections!—when “I forget thee may my right-hand forget her cunning!” Blessed be thou among nations! Long may thy wanderers return to thee rejoicing, and their hearts throb with honest pride when they own themselves thy children!

The vessel at last cast anchor, and all was cheerful bustle ; every one eager to hurry ashore. Some hastened to launch the boat ; some ran below to seek out the little offerings of love which they had brought for their friends. Never had Laura heard sound so animating as the cry of " all ready !" followed by the light short stroke of the oar which sent her swiftly forward. Many a wistful glance did the rowers turn. " There's mother on the pier head !" cried one, " I see Annie and the bairns !" cried another ; and the oar was plied more swiftly. They landed. The shout of joy, and the whisper of affection were exchanged on every side. Laura stood back from the tumult, breathing a silent thanksgiving on behalf of herself and her companions. " Poor lassie !" said the captain, approaching her, " is there naeboddy to welcome thee ? Come ! I am going up to Glasgow the night to see my wife and the owners ; and if ye like to gang wi' me, ye'll be sae far on your way to your friends." Laura thankfully accepted the proposal ; and the fly-boat being just about to sail up the river, she placed in it the little packet of necessaries which she had collected at Quebec, and accompanied the good-natured sailor to his home.

She was kindly received by his wife and daughter, and furnished with the best accommodation which they could command. The next morning she gave the captain a draft for the price of her passage; and producing her purse and Mrs De Courcy's ring, offered them as further security; saying, that as she was now in her own country, a few shillings would support her till she reached her friends, since she might travel to Perthshire on foot. The sailor, however, positively refused to accept of any thing more than the draft, swearing that if he were deceived in Laura, he would never trust woman again. He then, at her desire, procured her a seat in the stage-coach, and once more she proceeded on her journey.

At a small village, a few miles from Perth, she desired to be set down. A by-road led from the village to Mr Douglas's parish. The distance was said to be only seven miles; and Laura, forgetting the latitude allowed to Scottish measurement, thought she might easily reach the parsonage before night-fall. Leaving her little parcel at the village, she hastened forward;—now pausing a moment as some well-known peak or cliff met her eye, now bounding on with the light

step of joy. She pictured the welcome of affection; already she saw the mild countenance of her early friend; already she felt the embrace of love.

Darkness surprised her when she had yet much of her journey to perform, and had shrouded every object ere she reached the well-known gate, and saw across the narrow lawn the light streaming from the window. She stopped—fear stealing on her joy. In five months what changes might not have happened! Her friend, her mother, might be ill, might be dead! So must weak man mitigate with the prospect of evil, the transports which belong not to his inheritance! She again proceeded. She entered the hall. The parlour door was open. A group of cheerful faces appeared, ruddy with youth and health; but Laura's eye rested on one of more mature, more interesting grace,—one shaded with untimely silver, and lighted up with milder fires. She remained motionless, fearing to surprise her friend by too suddenly appearing, till one of the girls, observing her, exclaimed, in a transport of joy, "Laura! Mama! Laura!" Mrs Douglas sprung from her seat; and the welcome of affection, the embrace of love were reality!

The first burst of gladness was succeeded by the solicitous inquiry, by the interesting narrative; and Laura beguiled her friend of many tears by the story of her sad voyage, her hopeless captivity, her perilous escape. Tears, too, of real bitterness rose to her own eyes, at the thought, that although she had escaped from the cruelty of her oppressor, yet its consequences must be lasting as her life; and that she was now pouring her story into almost the only ear which could be open to her protestations of innocence. But she would not cloud the hour of joy by calling the attention of her friend to the shade that rested on her prospects; nor diminish her own gratitude for deliverance from more real misfortune, by anticipating the scorns of the world. She uttered not the faintest foreboding of evil, but continued with serene cheerfulness to 'charm as she was wont to do,' till at a late hour the friendly party separated for the night.

Weary as she was, Laura could not rest. She had a task to perform too painful to be thought of with indifference. It was necessary to write to De Courcy; and to damp all the pleasure

which a knowledge of her safety would convey, by retracting engagements which had been made when her alliance inferred no dishonour. She well knew that De Courcy himself, convinced of her innocence, would spurn the idea of forsaking her in misfortune,—of giving, by his desertion, a sanction to calumny. And should she take advantage of his honour and his love to fix in his heart the incurable anguish of following to the wife of his bosom the glance of suspicion or of scorn! The world's neglect was trivial in her estimation. Even its reproach might be endured by one who could appeal from its sentence to a higher tribunal. But what should ease the heart whose best affections were turned to poison by domestic shame; the heart jealous of the honour which it could not defend, bleeding at the stab from which it dared not recoil?

Laura had already taken her resolution, and the next day saw it effected. She wrote to De Courcy, detailing minutely every event which had befallen her from the hour of their separation till her landing in Britain. There her narrative closed. She told not in what spot the wanderer had found rest. She did not even in-

imate in what part of the island she had disembarked, lest it should furnish a clue to her present retreat. Nor did she, by expressions of tenderness and regret, aggravate the pang which she was compelled to inflict. In words like these she proceeded :

“ And now, my respected friend, I imagine
 “ you pausing to offer a thanksgiving for your-
 “ self and for me. Let it not damp your just
 “ gratitude that somewhat of evil is permitted to
 “ mingle with this signal deliverance. Let not
 “ my escape from a misfortune the most dread-
 “ ful be forgotten, even though the world should
 “ refuse to believe in that escape. For thus it
 “ must be. Known to have been in the power
 “ of that bad man, will the harsh-judging world
 “ believe me innocent ? Will it be believed that
 “ he ventured to cast his very life upon my
 “ mercy, by dragging me unwilling from my
 “ home ? So long the sport of his ungoverned
 “ passions, will it be believed that I have not even
 “ seen him ?
 “ I know it will be difficult to convince you
 “ that an unjust sentence can be pronounced against
 “ me. Certain yourself of the truth of my story,

“ you imagine that it will find easy credence with
 “ others. But even if we could change the nature
 “ of man, and teach strangers to judge with the
 “ candour of friendship, who shall furnish them
 “ with the materials for judging? Not he, who,
 “ in corroborating my tale, must publish his own
 “ disgrace! Not the weak Laura, who, by a con-
 “ stitutional defect, shrinks even from the eye
 “ where she cannot read distrust!

“ Consider all this, and you will at once per-
 “ ceive the reasons which induce me to conceal
 “ myself from you for a time. Engagements
 “ formed under circumstances now so materially
 “ changed I cannot consider as binding. You, I
 “ fear, may think otherwise, and be hurried on by
 “ your generous nature to tempt a fate which that
 “ very turn of mind would render insupportable.
 “ My own part in this fate I think I can bear.
 “ The share which would fall upon you, I own
 “ would crush me to the dust. My spirits are not
 “ yet what they have been. I am weary of strug-
 “ gling with a perverse heart, ever leading me
 “ aside from duty. I will not lend it arms by ex-
 “ posing myself to entreaties and arguments to
 “ which I cannot yield without betraying my best
 “ friend to anguish unpitied and hopeless; an-

“guish which would bear with double pressure
“on myself.

“A stain is fallen on my good name, ‘and the
“glory has departed from me.’ Be it so! He
“who doth all things well hath chosen my lot,
“and his choice shall be mine. I trust I shall be
“enabled to act as becomes one who is degraded
“in the public eye. I have sometimes shrunk
“from the approbation of the world—that little
“circle I mean which we are apt to call the world.
“Now I will hide me from its censure; and shall
“find in the duties which peculiarly belong to the
“fallen—the duties of humility, of charity, and
“of devotion—enough to make life still no un-
“pleasing pilgrimage. A good name has been
“justly likened to a jewel—precious, not neces-
“sary. But if you, my dear friend, covet fame
“for me, look forward to the time when an as-
“sembled universe shall behold my acquittal,
“when a Judge, before whom the assembled
“universe is as nothing, shall proclaim me for his
“own.”

This letter Laura accompanied with another,
in which she begged Mrs De Courcy’s assistance
in reconciling her son to the change in his pros-

pects. Both were inclosed by Mr Douglas to a friend in London, who was directed to forward them by post ; thus avoiding any trace of the quarter from whence they came.

Her lot thus chosen, Laura began to make arrangements for entering on a mode of life befitting her situation. Fearing that the shaft of slander might glance aside from herself to the friends who still clung to her, she steadily resisted Mrs Douglas's warm invitations to make the parsonage her home. Her father's little farm at Glenalbert had been annexed to one of larger size. The cottage remained untenanted, and thither Laura determined to retire. Her fortune, however far from affluent, she thought would suffice to support the humble establishment which she meant to retain. One servant was sufficient for her who had been accustomed to make few claims on the assistance of others. To obviate the impropriety of living alone while yet extreme youth made even nominal protection valuable, she invited an elderly widow lady, poor, but respectable, to preside in her household.

In necessary preparations for her removal to Glenalbert, in affectionate assiduities to the friends with whom she resided, in compensating to her

own poor for her long though involuntary neglect of their claims, Laura sought a refuge from painful reflection; and, if a sigh arose at the review of her altered prospects, she called to mind her deliverance, and regret was exchanged for thankfulness. The vain might have bewailed a seclusion thus untimely, thus permanent; the worldly-minded might have mourned the forfeiture of earthly prosperity: any spirit unsupported by religion must have sunk under unmerited disgrace, embittered by keen sense of shame and constitutional timidity. Laura was a Christian; and she could even at times rejoice that the spirit of vanity was mortified, that the temptations of the world were withdrawn; even where the blow was more painful, she humbly believed that it was necessary, and thankfully owned that it was kind.

The arrangements for her new establishment were soon completed, and the time came when Laura was to begin her life of seclusion. The day before her intended removal she completed her twentieth year; and Mrs Douglas would have assembled a little group of friends to celebrate the occasion, but Laura steadily opposed it. "Let not one who is suspected," said she,

"assume the boldness of innocence! Yet since the suspicion wrongs me I will not wear the melancholy of guilt. Give the children a holiday for my sake, and I shall be as playful and as silly as the youngest of them." The holiday was granted; and Laura, amidst the joyful noisy little company that soon assembled round her, forgot that she was an outcast.

She was busily searching every corner for the hidden handkerchief, the little rogue who had concealed it in his shoe laughing the while and clapping his hands in delight, when she started at the voice of a stranger in the lobby, who was announcing that he had a letter for Mrs Douglas, which he could deliver to no person but herself. The next moment the stranger was shewn into the room, and Laura with amazement beheld her American attendant. The amazement on his part was still greater. He started, he trembled, and at first shrunk from Laura, then eagerly advancing towards her, "Bless my soul, Madam!" he exclaimed, "are you alive? Then Mary's words are true, and the angels watch over you."

It was some time before the man's astonishment permitted him to declare his errand. At last

when his curiosity had been partially satisfied, he was prevailed upon to enter on his narrative. "You may remember, Madam," said he, addressing himself to Laura, "it was the morning we expected my master, (though I told Mary, for a make-believe, that he would not come till evening,) that morning Mary took you out and left you; for which I was mortal angry with her, for my mind misgave me that some mischief would come of it. So she ran down to the place where she left you sitting, but you were not there. Then she looked all about, but she could see you nowhere. She was afraid to go among the canes, for fear of the rattlesnakes, so she ran home and told me. So I went with her, scolding her to be sure all the way. Well we sought and sought, till at last, half in the water, and half on the shore, we found your hat; and then to be sure none of us never doubted that you had drowned yourself; and Mary cried and wrung her hands like a distracted creature, saying that my master was a wicked wretch that had broken your heart, and often and often she wished that we could find you to give you Christian burial, for she said she was sure your ghost would never let her rest in her bed. But we had no

drags, nor any thing to take you up with out of the water.

“ Well, we were just in the midst of all our troubles when my master came. ‘ Well, Robert,’ says he, in his hearty way, ‘ Where is my angel?’ I had not the heart to say a word; so with that Mary ran forward sobbing like a baby, and says she, just off hand,—‘ Miss Montreville is in a watery grave, and I am sure, Sir, some heavy judgment will light on him that drove her to it.’ So my master stood for a moment thunder-struck as it were, and then he flew upon us both like a tiger, and shook us till he scarce left breath in us, and swore that it was all a trick, and that he would make us produce you or he would have our lives. So I tried to pacify him the best I could; but Mary answered him up, that it was all his own doing, and that he might seek you in the river, where he would find your corpse. This put my master quite beside himself; and he caught her up, and flung her from him, just as if she had been a kitten; and then he flew down to the river side, and I followed him, and shewed him where we had found your hat; and explained to him how it was not our fault, for we had both been very civil, and given

you no disturbance at all, which you know Madam was true.

“ So, close to the place where we found your hat we saw the print of your little shoe in the bank ; and when my master saw it he grew quite distracted, crying out that he had murdered you, and that he would revenge you upon a wretch not fit to live, (meaning himself, Madam), and so he would have leaped into the river ; but by this time one of the servants he brought with him came up, and we forced him back to the house. Then he grew more quiet ; and called for Mary, and gave her his purse with all his money, and bid her tell every thing about you, Madam ; how you had behaved, and what you had said. So she told him, crying all the while, for she repented from her heart that ever she consented to have any hand in the business. And sometimes he would start away and gnash his teeth, and dash his head against the wall ; and sometimes he would bid her go on, that he might run distracted at once and forget all. So she told him that you had written to one Mrs Douglas, in hopes that when you were dead he would take pity on you, (repeating your very words, Madam.) Then he asked to see the letter, and he carried it into your

room. And there we heard him groaning and speaking to himself, and throwing himself against the walls; and we thought it best to let him come to himself a little and not disturb him.

“ So by and by he called for pen and ink, and I carried them to him, thinking if he wanted to write it was a sign he was growing more calm. Then he continued writing for some time, though now and then we heard him restless as before. At last he opened the door, and called me. “ Robert,” says he, quite calm and composed like, “ if you deliver this packet as directed, you will earn three hundred pounds. But be sure to deliver it with your own hand.” I was going to ask him something more about it, for I did not just know what he meant about the three hundred pounds; but he pushed me out, and shut himself into the room. Then I bethought myself that there was something strange-like in his look, and that he was pale, and somehow not like himself. So I went to the kitchen to consult with the rest what we had best do. So I had scarcely got there when I heard a pistol go off, and we all ran and burst open the door, and there we saw my master, Madam, laid out upon

Miss Montreville's bed, and the pistol still in his hand ; though he was stone dead, Madam, for I suppose the ball had gone right through his heart."

Laura, dreadfully shocked, and no longer able to listen to this horrible relation, hastened out of the room, leaving Mrs Douglas to hear what yet remained to be told of the history of a man of pleasure !!!

The servant proceeded to tell that he and his companions had conveyed their master's body to head quarters, had seen it buried with military honours, and then had sailed in the first ship for Britain. That remembering the charge to deliver the packet with his own hand, he had come down to Scotland on purpose to execute his trust ; and hoped that Mrs Douglas would fulfil his master's promise. He then delivered the packet, which Mrs Douglas opening in his presence, found to contain a bill for L.300 in favour of Robert Lewson, not payable without her signature ; the two letters which Laura had written during her exile ; and the following lines, rendered almost illegible by the convulsive startings of the hand which had traced them.

" The angel whom I have murdered, was an
 " angel still. ' The destroyer came,' but found
 " her not. It was her last wish that you should
 " know her innocence. None can attest it like
 " me. She was purer than heaven's own light.

" She loved you. There is another too, whom
 " she protests that she loved to the last—but it
 " was I alone whom she loved with passion.
 " In the anguish of her soul she called it 'idola-
 " try;' and the words of agony are true. But I,
 " like a base fool, cast away her love for the
 " heartless toyings of a wanton ! and shall I,
 " who might have been so blest, live now to bear
 " the gnawings of this viper—this hell never to
 " be escaped ?

" She has said that she must go to the grave
 " laden with shame ; that her name is degraded
 " through me. Once more, then, I charge you
 " proclaim her innocence. Let no envious tongue
 " presume to stain that name. Let it be account-

“ ed holy. I will save what she loved better than
 “ life, though I have persecuted her—driven her
 “ to death—forced her to hide in the cold waters
 “ all that was loveliest in woman.

“ She says that she will meet you in heaven,—
 “ and it must be true, for falsehood was a stranger
 “ to her lips. Then tell her that he who was her
 “ murderer, was her avenger too. It is said that
 “ self-destruction is the last—worst crime. In
 “ others it may be so. In me it is but justice ;
 “ for every law condemns the murderer to die.
 “ He who destroyed that angel ought to die a
 “ thousand deaths. Justice shall be speedy.

“ VILLIERS HARGRAVE.”

Mrs Douglas had no sooner read the contents of her packet, than she hastened to communicate them to Laura. The horror inspired by Hargrave's letter, and the dreadful destiny of the writer, did not render her insensible to the pleasure of

being empowered to clear, beyond a doubt, the fame of her young friend. Laura was, however, for the present, in no state to share her joy. She could only weep ; and, trembling, pray that she might be enabled to guard against the first beginnings of that self-indulgence, whose end is destruction !

Mrs Douglas at last found means to rouse her by naming De Courcy, and reminding her of his right to immediate intelligence of this happy change in her situation. Laura, as superior to coquetry as to any other species of despicable cruelty, instantly sat down to communicate the news to her lover. To her plain unvarnished tale, she added copies of the letters which attested her innocence, with Lewson's account of the names and address of those persons who had been employed to carry her from England.

Evening was drawing on before Laura had finished her task ; and, desirous to recruit her spirits before she joined the family circle, she stole abroad to breathe the reviving air of her native hills. She had crossed the little lawn, and was opening the gate, when seeing a carriage drive quickly up, she drew back. The carriage

stopped. She heard an exclamation of joy, and the next moment she was pressed to the heart of De Courcy.

Laura first recovered utterance. "What happy chance," she cried, "has brought you here just at the moment when I am permitted to rejoice that you are come?" "Ah, Laura," said De Courcy, "could I know that you were alive and in Britain, yet make no effort to find you? I was convinced that Mrs Douglas must know your retreat. I was sure that I could plead so that no human heart could resist my entreaties. And now I have found thee, I will never leave thee but with life."

The little shrubby walk which led round the lawn to the parsonage was not half a quarter of a mile in length, yet it was an hour before the lovers reached the house; and ere Laura presented De Courcy to her friends, she had promised that in one week she would reward his tried affection; and had settled, that after they had spent a few days in delightful solitude at Glenalbert, she would accompany him to Norwood.

Laura has now been for some years a wife ; and the same qualities which made her youth respectable, endear her to the happy partner of her maturer life. She still finds daily exercise for her characteristic virtue ; since even amidst the purest worldly bliss self-denial is necessary. But the tranquil current of domestic happiness affords no materials for narrative. The joys that spring from chastened affection, tempered desires, useful employment, and devout meditation, must be felt—they cannot be described.

THE END.

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