

Sir F. J. Raja. 1822

SERAPHINA;

OR,

A WINTER IN TOWN.

A MODERN NOVEL,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BY CAROLINE BURNEY.



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CHAPTER XII.

Surprises.

As Lord and Lady Avondale had separate apartments, his lordship was unconscious of his lady's ill-fortune, as well as of the late hour at which the party broke up, for as Lord Avondale never played, he generally stole away to

his repose when he saw the company too deeply engaged to miss him. Dr. Melbourne had done the same, and therefore the trio met at an early hour in the breakfast-parlour, little imagining the painful reflections that had kept the throbbing temples of Lady Avondale's head from taking any rest, whilst they were enjoying the blessings of repose.

As soon as Dr. Melbourne saw Seraphina, "I have an appointment for you, girl," said he; "this morning you must go out with me, and as it is a fine morning, I think we will walk."

"Oh, papa," said Seraphina, what is to be done now; I am engaged to go out with Lady Delauny at twelve o'clock? Will your visit be over by that time?"

"Oh, you mountaineer!" said Lord Avondale, "to talk of paying visits *before twelve o'clock*; it is well Lady Avondale does not hear you."

"When Lady Avondale was Sophy Pembroke, she was a sensible girl," said Dr. Melbourne, "and then she has come to Rosemount many a time by eight o'clock in the morning."

"You do not think, I hope," said Lord Avondale, "that Sophia's *title* has been the cause of her dereliction from the sensible list."

"Her *title*," said the doctor, "is certainly not in fault, but the train of fools it collects around her, have been fatal to the humility that once constituted the greatest charm in her cha-

racter. Your lordship's happiness must be so deeply concerned in the good conduct of your wife, that I am astonished you appear so careless about the people she mixes with ; vanity and frivolity seem to be the order of the day with them all."

" My dear Dr. Melbourne," answered Lord Avondale, what can *I* do? I should be lampooned and ridiculed in every society, were I to pretend to prescribe rules for the conduct of my wife whilst she keeps within the bounds of decorum. Besides, whatever traits of humility Sophy might display whilst in the bosom of retirement, there remains not a single trace of that virtue in her character at this moment ; the least symptom of op-

position to her will, on my part, is the signal for rebellion on her's."

"Well, well," said the doctor, "if husbands can so calmly resign the prerogative of instructing their wives in their duty, they must e'en take the consequences. But come, Sery, notwithstanding the person I am going to introduce you to, is a man of fashion, I believe our early visit will be more acceptable to him than if we went later, as he wishes to see us without interruption; we shall therefore be back in time for you to keep your appointment with Lady Delauney, with whose amiable character I am well acquainted, although I have not the honor of being personally known to her ladyship."

“ And I hope you know, doctor, that her *nephew* is thought as amiable as herself,” said Lord Avondale, looking archly at Seraphina, whose blushes of the deepest crimson seemed to affirm that she was not inclined to *dissent* from the general opinion.”

“ I know nothing of her nephew,” said the doctor, “ but that he is rich and noble, and that may be the sole cause why he is nothing else. But come, girl, get your bonnet and pelisse, that we may catch my friend at breakfast.”

“ Upon my honor, doctor,” said Lord Avondale, laughing, “ I don’t know what to say to this visit to a man of fashion at his breakfast-table. Miss Melbourne has done mischief enough

amongst the men of fashion already, and I think it becomes not you to spread the evil farther."

"Don't fill the girl's head with vanity," said the doctor. "It is not in *her* power, nor that of any other girl, to do any *mischief* amongst the men of fashion; their hearts are cased up in the impenetrable mail of self-conceit, and are full proof against the simple charms of innocence and artless beauty. *They* may enthrall the unsuspecting heart by their blandishments, but no feeling of their own will beat responsive to the affection they awaken. The girl who is not *vain*, may escape their toils, for their bait is *flattery*; but she who admits vanity in her bosom is undone."

“With such an instructor as you, my dear papa,” said Seraphina, kissing his hand with a grace all her own.—“With such an instructor as you, how can I *widely* err? or if I should, will not your warning voice instantly recall me?”

“You are a coaxing puss,” said the doctor; “but like the rest of your sex, you preach about obedience whilst you are practising delay. Did not I tell you to make haste; and here you are loitering as if you had nothing to do.”

Seraphina smiled, and flew to repair the delay she had been reproached with, and soon returned with her bonnet and pelisse on, and the doctor and she set out on their intended walk.

When they arrived at Lord Storrton-

dale's, they found his lordship just returned from his ride, and going to his breakfast.

They were announced as Dr. and Miss Melbourne; but the old servant who conducted them to his lordship's library, started when he first saw Seraphina, and turning pale, he had scarcely power to articulate their names to his lord.

This circumstance passed unnoticed by Seraphina, who was too much absorbed in contemplating the splendor around her to think upon any thing else; but the doctor noted it well, and the penetrating glance he cast upon the countenance of the old man as he was retiring, seemed to disconcert him greatly.

Lord Storrondale appeared greatly agitated when he rose to receive his guests. "Yes, yes," exclaimed he, as he took Seraphina's hand, and looked earnestly in her face; "this is certainly the daughter of my poor Emily.—" My dear child," continued his lordship, "consider me from this moment as your only surviving parent; and although there must be stronger proof of your birth before I publicly acknowledge you, I shall from this instant provide for you as my grandchild."

Seraphina was thunderstruck, and looked the very image of surprise; at length, recovering her speech, she said, "Can it really be possible that I am the granddaughter of Lord Storrondale?"

"Even so," answered Dr. Mel-

bourne ; “ but I should never have informed you of that circumstance, had not his lordship chosen to acknowledge you. The fortune you already possess, insures you independence, and you are, besides, my heiress ; you would never therefore have missed your birth-right, had it been withheld from you. Your accession to it will place you in the sphere of temptation ; fortify your mind therefore to acquit yourself with honor, and do not disgrace the rank you will be raised to.”

Whilst the doctor was speaking, the countenance of Seraphina underwent the most rapid changes—now sparkling with vivacity, now full of pensive consideration.

Lord Storrondale watched her with delight ; then folding her to his bosom, he exclaimed in a tone of affectionate admiration, “ Lovely creature ! how blest may I yet be, if my indulgence can awaken sufficient interest in your heart, to make those speaking eyes beam with affection when they are bent on me ! ”

Seraphina blushed a deeper crimson ; but although covered with confusion at the newness of her situation, she was not unmindful of the feelings of the near relation who had just honored her with his notice, and throwing herself on her knees before Lord Storrondale in the most graceful manner possible, she raised his hand to her lips. “ For the first time since my birth,” said she, in a

tremulous voice, "I am permitted to call upon the revered name of parent; let me then thus humbly at his feet implore his benediction, whilst I kneel to offer the tender affection of a dutiful child."

Lord Storrondale raised her from the ground, and kissing her forehead—"Bless you, my sweet child," said he, "would to Heaven I were more worthy to call down benedictions on your head, but *you* will pray for me Seraphina, and I shall become a *better*, as well as a happier man!"

Tears stood in Lord Storrondale's eyes as he spoke, and Seraphina's trickled down her cheeks in abundance; even Dr. Melbourne's eyes glistened, although he called all his apparent

stoicism to his aid. I say *apparent* stoicism, because never was a tenderer heart hid under a blunt exterior, than that which glowed in the doctor's bosom.

“Your lordship will consider,” interrupted Dr. Melbourne, “that this poor girl was wholly unprepared for such an affecting scene ; we will therefore cut it as short as possible for her sake. She shall soon wait upon you again, but a little explanation of the wonders she has just heard, which I will give her as we return together.”

“Stay,” said Lord Storrendale, “do not be so barbarous to snatch away the blessing you have just bestowed upon me before I have had time to feel assured

that she is really mine. Surely you will not run away without partaking of my breakfast ?”

“ We have breakfasted, my lord,” answered Dr. Melbourne, seating himself, “ but we will wait until your lordship has done, if that will give you any pleasure. They then seated themselves round the table, and Lord Storrondale desired Dr. Melbourne to repeat before Seraphina, the particulars he had before revealed to him. It may easily be imagined how deeply the lovely girl was affected by a recital of her mother’s sufferings. At the mention of the jewels and the letter contained in the casket, Lord Storrondale mentioned a desire to look at them. “ Emily’s hand-writing,”

said he, " if proved by me, must certainly be considered an indubitable proof of Seraphina's identity."

" And her ladyship's picture too," said the doctor, " appears as if it had been drawn for Seraphina, so strong is the resemblance between them. But next time we come it shall be accompanied by every proof in our possession. My reason for not doing so now, was, that I did not chuse to say any thing upon the subject to Seraphina until she had been introduced to your lordship, and the jewels and the picture are in her possession. The letter is in mine."

" Who the impostor is that claims my child's inheritance remains to be proved," said Lord Storrondale, " and

woe unto the guilty when the fraud is detected. A severe investigation shall be immediately instituted."

Dr. Melbourne and Seraphina now took their leave, and the latter was so wrapt in wonder at the information she had just received, that she walked nearly home before she opened her lips. At length Dr. Melbourne said, "Is your mind absorbed in dreams of future grandeur, Seraphina, that you have not a word to bestow upon an old friend."

"If I thought," said Seraphina, "that any acquisition of grandeur could make me ungrateful to my earliest and best friends, I should lament attaining to it as the greatest evil that could possibly befall me; but," continued she, "the idea

of my mother's sufferings, and the uncertainty that seems to envelope every circumstance attendant on her death, fill my mind with distress and anxiety, and the ideas that might otherwise arise on such a sudden aggrandizement, fade into ether before the dark cloud that rests upon that fatal event."

"You are a good girl, Sery," answered Dr. Melbourne, "and I believe your heart is in the right place. God keep it so, for you will soon be placed in a perilous situation. You see the effect which grandeur has had upon the weak mind of Lady Avondale. When she was a plain country girl she seemed to promise to make a very amiable woman, but flattery and nonsense have

turned her brain ; let her example be a warning to yourself."

" The conduct of Lady Avondale gives me much concern," said Seraphina, " and shews me the fallacy of riches to make happiness ; for I am persuaded that her amiable qualities have not decreased in a greater proportion than her peace of mind. I am sure in spite of her forced gaiety she is very unhappy."

" Those who forsake the right path ever are so," said the doctor. " The roses of error conceal beneath their fairest foliage the deadly scorpions of repentance."

They were now arrived at Lord Avondale's, and the porter told Seraphina

that his lady requested to see Miss Melbourne in her dressing-room, as soon as she returned from her walk. Seraphina obeyed the summons, and found her ladyship stretched at full length on an ottoman, quite *en dishabille*, and with a countenance in which were pourtrayed in legible characters, vexation, disappointment, and fatigue.

“ My dear creature,” said her ladyship, the moment she saw Seraphina, “ I am so glad you are come, for I was afraid when I heard you were gone out so early, that Lady Delauny, who I think the greatest bore in nature, had taken you away for the whole morning, and I am in such distress you cannot imagine. I lost all my money last night, and got

over head and ears in debt besides, and here is a horrid creature of a tradesman who will not leave the house until his bill is paid, and should he apply to my lord, you can have no idea of the piece of work there will be about it. Do lend me the fifty pounds you have left, there's a sweet love—you shall have it again to-morrow."

"How can that be possible," said Seraphina, shocked at the careless extravagance of her friend, and the little remorse she evinced for the mean vices she was guilty of. "Your ladyship says you have lost all your money, and are besides, deeply in debt. How then is it possible you can repay me to-morrow?"

“What a formal creature you are,” said Lady Avondale, pettishly; “one would really think you were Edward in petticoats. Why, an old Jew money-lender could not have asked a question with more depth of calculation. I tell you I shall win enough to-night to pay all my debts, and you amongst the rest, so fetch me the money in a minute.”

“You are far more likely to lose as much again, and get deeper into difficulties,” said Seraphina. “Why, my dear Sophia, will you be so blind to the dangers that surround you? You stand upon the brink of a frightful precipice, and I tremble lest your next step should be fatal.”

“ *Vide* Edward Pembroke again,” answered Lady Avondale, “ I am sure one may say *ibid* to all your quotations, what an apt scholar you must have been, my pretty dear ; it is a pity its tutor is not here to hear it repeat its lessons. But badinage apart—do oblige me, there’s a love, and I will never laugh at its lectures any more, and who knows but I may take it in my head to grow good again, and leave off gaming entirely.”

“ I am sure,” said Seraphina, eagerly catching at the last sentence, “ I am sure if I thought my dear Sophia would conquer that dangerous propensity, there is nothing within the limits of my power that I would not do to serve her.”

“ Try me then, my good girl, and

lend me this paltry fifty pounds, or the man will be impatient, and I shall be exposed, and then your assistance will be too late."

Seraphina thought this almost amounted to a promise from Lady Avondale, to abandon the fatal infatuation, that threatened her with destruction, and fearful lest a refusal should, by irritating, drive her to desperation, she went, though reluctantly, to fetch the money she had asked her. It was the whole of her stock, excepting a few guineas, and she could not part from it without regret. Just as she returned into Lady Avondale's dressing-room, however, a servant knocked at the door, and said Madame —— was below stairs.

"Good Heavens!" said Seraphina,

“ I had almost forgotten that I had promised to pay my bill to-day ; how lucky it is Madame L—— came before I had parted with all my money.”

“ Silly girl,” said Lady Avondale, snatching the note Seraphina held in her hand, “ and would you really drive your friend to desperation for the sake of keeping your word with a paltry milliner ?”

“ Dear Lady Avondale, give me back my note, or I shall die with confusion when I see the milliner,” said Seraphina, her face pale with affright.

“ I don’t intend you shall see Madame L——” said Lady Avondale. “ Go into my bed-room, and leave the excuses to me, I am sure it will make no differ-

ence whether you pay her to-day or to-morrow."

Seraphina finding her ladyship determined to keep the note, and terrified at the thoughts of seeing the disappointed milliner, retired into the next room, her heart pierced with remorse for having been drawn into so unjust a proceeding as that of lending the money which was already promised to discharge a just debt. She was too much agitated to hear what passed between Madame L—— and Lady Avondale, although the door was open between the two apartments; but the milliner was soon dispatched, and Seraphina recalled into the dressing-room.

"I told her you was not at home,"

said her ladyship, "but if she left her bill you would call upon her in a day or two with a large order, and that has sent her away quite satisfied. So pray dismiss that April face, and come and examine the beautiful things she has brought you."

Seraphina looked at the elegant dresses that were made for her, with an eye of regret instead of pleasure. They had lost their charms in her estimation, for she could not appropriate what she thought did not belong to her."

"You shall wear this to the Opera this evening," said Lady Avondale, taking up one of the dresses, "and this Spanish hat too, will become you of all things, particularly with a handsome

diamond in the front. A-propos, Sery, let me look at your diamonds, Mrs. Melbourne has often told me that you had some very good ones, but I am afraid they must be horridly old fashioned. Shall I send Baily to Mrs. Evans for the precious casket?"

"No, I had rather fetch them myself," answered Seraphina, "if you *must* see them; but indeed they are not worth looking at."

So saying, she ran into her own apartment, and unlocking a cabinet, took the casket that contained her jewels, in order to carry them to Lady Avondale.

"For goodness sake, Miss Sery," said Mrs. Evans, "take care what you are about, and don't trust these jewels with

Lady Avondale, for she will steal them you may depend upon it."

"Fie! Evans," said Seraphina, "I am shocked at the liberties you take with Lady Avondale's name. I really cannot suffer such things to be said in my presence."

"I should be very sorry to offend you, Miss Seraphina," said Mrs. Evans. "but really I cannot mince the matter any longer; her ladyship has gambled and gambled until she has lost all the money she could get hold of, and now she has been so wicked, she has had her diamonds taken out, and false stones put in, and these her good lord knows nothing of the matter, and a fine hubbub there will be when all the mischief

comes out. I dare to say she will lay it all to her maid, and say as she has stole them, and that will be good enough for her, for she is nothing better than a painted jezabel, that she a'nt."

"My dear Evans, these are very serious charges," said Seraphina, "and I must beg to know what authority you speak upon."

"Lack-a-day! miss, the best authority in the world. Why, there was a poor jeweller below just now; for what I can tell, he may be there still, that is come about a sad long bill, that my Lady Avondale owes him, and he told me all about her rantipole ways, and he said as how, he hoped if so be you was an innocent young lady from the coun-

try, as you would not be trepanned away by her wicked ways, and he told me all about her selling her diamonds, and having paste, I think he called it, put in instead, and he said she would be the ruin of him if she did not pay him. La! miss, it would make your very hair stand an end if you was to hear the tenth part of her depravities, as the poor jeweller called them. He told me all this in confidence, you see, miss, because Mrs. Baily said as my lady was going to *devise* you to send your jewels to be new set; and when she was gone out of the room he said, says he, I hope I can trust you ma'am; but if your young lady sends her jewels to be new set, it's ten to one against her but she'll be *done*; for

Lady Avondale is up to every *rig*, I can assure you, and then he up and told me all what I have been telling you."

"Well, my dear Evans," said Seraphina, "this is certainly a very shocking story, but I must hear the rest another time, for Lady Avondale is waiting for me," and away she tript into her ladyship's dressing-room.

When the casket was opened, Lady Avondale began examining the jewels with the strictest scrutiny. "Here are some good stones," said she, "but they *must* be new set before you appear in them, my dear. Good Heavens! here is a Gothic necklace; really you would set the whole Opera-house in a titter if you were to appear in such an old-

fashioned heavy thing as this; it certainly must have been set in Queen Bess's days, and these ear-rings too, did ever any body see such cathedral things. Well, never mind, I can lend you some ornaments that will do very well for this evening, and you had better send these things to be new set immediately. I dare say Mr. Benson, my jeweller, will get them done in a very short time for you. A-propos, he is waiting below at this moment, we will send for him up stairs, and give him the order without delay."

"No, I thank you," said Seraphina, "I cannot take such important steps without informing Dr. Melbourne, and asking his permission."

Lady Avondale looked disappointed, but turning it off with a laugh, she said, "Well child, if you must continue in leading strings, I cannot help it, but really I think it is time to leave off such childish dependance, it makes you look very ridiculous. However, when I speak to the doctor, I dare say he will see the necessity of what I recommend. Whose picture is this, my dear girl?" continued her ladyship, taking up the miniature that lay among the jewels.

"I believe it is my mother's," said Seraphina.

"Really, I think you never knew your mother, did you? The features are good, but there wants expression; the hair too, is too light. I hate *blondes*.

beg your pardon, my dear, but every body you know is not of my opinion, so never mind. I dare say your mother was thought a beauty, but her face don't please *me*. A'nt this picture thought like you, child?"

"I have heard Dr. Melbourne say he thought there was a resemblance," answered Seraphina.

"Yes," said Lady Avondale, still examining the picture, "here is certainly your Grecian nose, and the *contour* of your face, but I will do you the justice to say, that there is more expression in your face, more *espieglerie*, don't you think so, child?"

"The utmost stretch of my ambition," said Seraphina, "would never

lead me to wish a greater share of beauty than what fell to the lot of my mother, but I am not so vain as to compare myself to her."

"Sweet humility!" said Lady Avondale, "if it be indeed sincere; but come, child, put up your treasures, and prepare to go out with me; I shall be ready in about *two hours*."

"Your ladyship forgets I am engaged to go out with Lady Delauny," said Seraphina, "and I believe it is already the hour she appointed to call for me."

"And are you really going out such a dowdy?" asked Lady Avondale. "But I beg your pardon; I forgot that such beauty needs not the adventitious

aid of ornament. And pray, my dear, is the *marquis* to be of the party?"

"How can you ask such a question, Sophy?" said Seraphina; "I am sure you do not *think* what you say."

"Nay," said Lady Avondale, "I heard last night that the poor youth was smitten: but don't be vain, Sery; he is an inconstant swain—poor Fanny knows that to her cost."

As her ladyship was speaking, a servant knocked at the door to announce the arrival of Lady Delauny.

Seraphina was so much in haste to attend to her new friend, that she left her poor casket on the table, and flew down into the drawing-room to receive her guest.

Lady Delauny held out her hand to

her with a most engaging smile, and said, " Well, my sweet young friend, are you still as much inclined to indulge an old woman with your company as you appeared to be last night ?"

" I am as ready to receive the honor your ladyshlp is so good as to confer upon me, and as gratefully delighted to find you consider me worthy of such a favor."

" Ah ! you girls can all flatter," said Lady Delauny, smiling. But come, we must make haste, or Harriet will think the time long. Her music-master was late this morning, or she would have accompanied me hither, for she is all impatience to see the young friend I have promised her."

Seraphina kissed Lady Delauny's

hand, and ran up stairs to equip herself for her ride.

As she entered her own room, she recollected the casket she had left on Lady Avondale's table, and flew with eagle's swiftness to fetch it. What was her consternation, however, when she found the apartment empty, and the casket gone!

She knocked at the bed-room door. "Where are my jewels, dear Lady Avondale?" said she.

Lady Avondale answered through the door, without opening it. "I gave them to Bailly to carry up to your room, my dear."

"She has not brought them," said Seraphina.

“I will ring and order her to do it directly,” said her ladyship.

Seraphina ran to her own room again, and at the moment she entered it, Mrs. Evans followed her with the casket in her hand.

“Well, Miss Sery,” said that faithful servant, her face pale with the fright she had just suffered.—“Well, Miss Sery, I have just snatched this casket from the lion’s jaws.”

“How so, my dear Evans?”

“Ah! you may well call me *dear Evans*. What a careless young lady you must be to throw such valuable things about in this manner! Oh, I have been so frightened! But you cannot stay now to hear all about it, so

go along, and I'll tell you when you come back—the jewels are all safe, and God keep *you* so too, say I.”

“Amen,” said Seraphina; “but I think there is not much danger for *me*.”

Seraphina then descended to the drawing-room, and accompanied Lady Delauny into her carriage.

As they rode along, they conversed on a variety of subjects, and were mutually delighted with each other.

When the carriage stopped in Portman Square, at Lady Delauny's house, they got out, and found Miss Delauny ready to attend them in their morning ramble.

Harriet Delauny was an elegant girl

about sixteen, with dark eyes full of intelligence, and a countenance beaming with benevolence ; her features was not regularly beautiful, but she was extremely agreeable from the vivacity of their expression. She was a lively brunette, with a florid complexion, and her light sylph-like figure seemed well suited to the sprightliness of her disposition.

With the most graceful air, she held out her hand to Seraphina, and hoped this would be the last time they should meet as *strangers*. “ I am sure we are cut out to be friends, for you look as merry as myself ; and I have hitherto been only *half* happy, because I have had no young friend to partake of my pleasures.”

Seraphina assured Miss Delauny that she should feel herself highly honored by the friendship she promised her, and it should be her study to deserve such a flattering distinction.

“Now that is an abominable formal speech,” said the lively Harriet, “and not at all of a piece with the expression of your countenance. Such a girl as *I*, can receive, but not confer an honor; so pray let us be upon an equality, or there will be no real friendship.”

After a little more conversation, the trio set out on their morning's drive in Lady Delauny's barouche.

“I fancy,” said that lady, “if I read Miss Melbourne's countenance right, there needs no apology for taking her



upon a charitable expedition. I have received a letter this morning, couched in terms of the deepest distress, from an unfortunate woman, who describes herself to be dying in circumstances of the most abject poverty. She adds, that life would appear of little value in her eyes, were it not for a secret that presses heavily on her heart. She is, she says, the only surviving witness of a transaction of the blackest kind, and if she dies before she has revealed it, the diabolical perpetrators must escape the punishment due to their crimes. There is, however, she says, but one person to whom she can reveal the secret with any chance of being believed, and her illness prevents her seeking that person, who lives

at a considerable distance from London. There is something so extraordinary in the whole of this story, that I am determined to examine into the truth of it myself, and not trust to my usual method of sending first. Her direction is to a house in an obscure part of Brompton, and as the day is fine, we shall enjoy the drive through Hyde Park."

"Oh, I like it of all things," said Harriet, "for my curiosity is raised to the highest pitch; I have been making twenty mistakes with my music-master this morning, because I was employing all my wits to imagine what this secret could be about."

"Wild girl!" said Lady De-launy; "I hope Miss Melbourne's example will make you a little steadier."

“ Indeed,” said Seraphina, “ I am ill calculated to enforce steadiness, who am so giddy myself that I am continually getting into scrapes for being so, and I assure your ladyship that my curiosity is as much alive as Miss Delauny’s.”

After a pleasant drive, the carriage stopped, according to the direction, at a small shabby-looking house, near Brompton, and Lady Delauny desired the servant to enquire for Mrs. Perico.

The woman of the house came to the carriage-door, and courtesying low, told her ladyship that her poor lodger was very ill indeed. “ But if you please to alight, my lady, there’s nothing catching in the poor soul’s disorder,” said the woman, “ for it is my mind that it is only bad

living and fretting as is the cause of all her illness."

Lady Delauny ordered the servant to open the carriage-door. "You may go with me, or stay were you are girls," said her ladyship.

"Oh, go with you, dear mamma," said Harriet. "Pray let us go; we will *both* subscribe."

Seraphina at that moment recollected her poverty, and her cheeks were crimsoned over with confusion and regret. A few guineas which she had in her purse, were all that remained of the riches she had so lately boasted of to Lady Avondale, and she had seen too much of her ladyship's unsteady principles in money matters, to hope that she

would keep her word with her respecting the re-payment of what she had borrowed.

Lady Delauny observed the change in Seraphina's countenance, and little suspecting the real cause, she attributed it to a reluctance to part with her money, well knowing that a thousand temptations assail the young and inexperienced on their first arrival in such a place as London.

"Harriet," said her ladyship, softly, "what a thoughtless girl you are ! Answer for yourself in affairs of this kind, but never pretend to dictate to other people."

"Oh, I am sure," replied Harriet, "Seraphina will be as willing as myself

to part with a few dirty guineas to relieve a fellow creature."

Seraphina heard Miss Delauny's reply, and judged from that what her mamma had been saying, and her confusion redoubled.

By this time they had reached the room where the wretched Mrs. Perico lay stretched upon a miserable bed, the image of distress and suffering.

She lifted up her emaciated face from the pillow, as the ladies entered, and a faint gleam of joy stole across her countenance. "Heaven bless your ladyship," said the poor woman, in a weak voice, addressing herself to Lady Delauny, "for this great condescension, God will reward your goodness; and if

he restores me to health, you will rejoice in the good you have done."

Lady Delauny then made some benevolent enquiries respecting Mrs. Perico's situation, and her particular wants, and slipping a couple of guineas into her hand, she promised to call again in a few days, and in the meantime, assured her that she would send her own physician to her, and give orders to the woman of the house to improve her present accommodation as much as possible.

The poor woman endeavoured to express her thanks, but tears choked her utterance, and she could only lift up her eyes in silent gratitude.

Lady Delauny desired her to moderate her feelings, as she feared they would be

too much for her ; and nodding her head with a benevolent smile, bid her good morning.

The young ladies had been standing in an obscure part of the room whilst Lady Delauny was talking, and as soon as her ladyship moved from the side of the bed, the amiable Harriet drew near the poor sufferer, and said, in a gentle voice, " Accept of this trifle from me," putting a guinea into her hand. " And this from me," said Seraphina, following her example. But no sooner had the poor woman raised her eyes to Seraphina's countenance, than she started up in the bed, and screamed aloud, " Oh ! my lady, my lady, my dear murdered lady !"

Lady Delauny returned at hearing the screams, and the woman of the house ran in, terrified at the noise.

Lady Delauny desired the young ladies to go down stairs—a request they reluctantly complied with, as both their compassion and their curiosity were excited by the strange exclamation.

Her ladyship however remained, and as soon as Mrs. Perico recovered the use of her senses, she informed Lady Delauny that she had just seen the ghost of her departed mistress. “I am sure it was her, my lady,” said the poor woman, “for her face shone upon me like an angel’s, and she spoke in her own sweet voice; and see, she has put this purse into my hand,” shewing the

one Seraphina had given her. Oh! she is come to bid me find her poor baby; I am sure that is what has brought her from the other world."

"The angel you have seen," said Lady Delauny, "is a young lady that came with me."

"Oh, no, no, I am sure it was my dear lady; it was her own sweet beautiful face that I love so dearly."

"Indeed I think you are mistaken, my good woman," said Lady Delauny; "I think you mistook Miss Melbourne for the lady you lament."

"Melbourne! Melbourne!" said Mrs. Perico, looking wildly about. "What Melbourne is that? Is she any relation to *Dr. Melbourne*?"

“ Yes, my good woman,” replied her ladyship ; “ she is his daughter.”

“ Are you *sure* she is his daughter ?” asked the woman, eagerly.

“ Yes, I believe so,” said Lady De-launy. “ But why do you ask so earnestly that question ?”

“ Because it is of the utmost consequence to me to know it,” said the woman. “ Oh ! if Dr. Melbourne would come to me—if he would only speak five words to me, I should die easy. He is the very person I want to see—the person for whom I have prayed night and day, that I might live to see him once more ; but I thought he lived in Wales.”

“ His seat is in Wales,” said Lady

Delauny, "but he happens to be in London now ; and if I have heard a just character of him, he will not scruple to come to you, my good woman, and set your heart at ease."

"Will you send him, my lady," said Mrs. Perico. "Oh ! say you will send him to me soon, or it may be too late. Say, then, you will send him."

"I *will*," said her ladyship, "depend upon it, I will ; so compose yourself, my good woman, or you will not be able to see him when he does come."

"Your ladyship is very good ; I will do as you bid me. But could not I see the young lady again ? But no, I will not ask it, for it will be better I should not, as I must not say a word

until I have spoken to that good gentleman."

Lady Delauny then recommended the poor sufferer to the woman of the house, who promised to make her as comfortable as her means admitted of, and once more charging Mrs. Perico to be composed, she took her leave.

A thousand enquiries poured upon her when she returned to the carriage, but she answered them by saying, merely, that the poor woman had mistaken Seraphina for a lady she resembled, and then turned the conversation on another subject.

As they returned through the Park, they met the Marquis of Claredown, who appeared delighted at the en-

counter, and giving his horse to his groom, begged a seat in his aunt's carriage, and returned with them to town.

CHAP. XIII.

A Fashionable Lover.

As the Marquis of Claredown handed Seraphina out of Lady Delauny's carriage, he pressed her hand, and saw with pleasure, that whilst a deep blush mantled on her cheek, no expression of resentment marked her beautiful features; on the contrary, a smile even sweeter than usual, accompanied her parting adieu. It was true that she looked at Lady Delauny and her daughter when he kissed her hand; but love is ever san-

guine, and the vanity inherent in the heart of man, led Lord Claredown to hope that *he* also had a share in the kind emanation that beamed on her fine countenance.

Full fraught with this sweet idea, he took leave of his aunt and cousin at Lady Avondale's door, and proceeded to his own mansion, ruminating on the probable consequences of this hastily formed attachment. "If *any* woman could ever induce me to *marry*," said his lordship, mentally, "that woman is Miss Melbourne; but I must take *time* to consider of such an important step. Great indeed must be the temptation for which I forego my liberty. Poor Olivia too, will not readily part with me, I fancy."

Just as his lordship had finished his soliloquy, he reached the gates of Claredown House, and as he raised the knocker, he was joined by Sir Percival Egerton.

“Ha! Claredown,” said the latter, “I am glad I have met you; I have a thousand questions to ask, and some information to give that may be important to you.”

Lord Claredown held out his hand. “I am always glad to see Sir Percival Egerton,” said his lordship, with a smile, “but fraught with matter of such moment, surely he must be *doubly* welcome.”

The gentlemen entered Claredown House together; and after a few general

remarks upon politics, &c. the marquis enquired, with a smile, when the *thousand questions* were to commence.

“ Oh, A-propos !” said Sir Percival. “ Perhaps you may deem the first impertinent, and thereby prevent any more of them.—Will your lordship tell me candidly what you think of the new *star* in the hemisphere of fashion ?”

“ Miss Melbourne, I suppose ?” replied his lordship.

“ Oh ! call her by no *mortal* appellation,” interrupted Sir Percival, “ for she is a perfect divinity.”

“ I need not ask, at least,” said Lord Claredown, archly, “ what *you* think of her ; but however I will reply categorically. I think Miss Melbourne the most lovely woman I ever saw.”

“ And is that all ?” said Sir Percival, “ Is that positively *all* you think of the most enchanting creature that ever trod this terrestrial globe ?—Give me your hand, Claredown ; you have absolutely revived me from death—saved me from annihilation. I have neither eat, drank, or slept, since I saw your lordship devouring her gentle accents last night. I thought it was impossible to behold and not adore her ; and I must confess that the idea of the Marquis of Claredown for a *rival*, was not a little tremendous to a heart so far gone in the tender passion as your humble servant’s.”

“ You are an odd composition, Percival,” replied the marquis ; “ there is always such a mixture of the ludicrous with the serious, in your discourse, that

for the life of me, can I ever tell whether you mean what you say, or not."

"To a man of your lordship's *phlegmatic* temper," answered Sir Percival, "I may be unintelligible; but upon my honor, I think no other could doubt the sincerity of professions of love that had the angelic Seraphina Melbourne for their object. Thank Heaven, it is as it is, as I said before, it will save me from despair, or a duel, at least."

"You think yourself pretty sure of success then with the lady," said the marquis, a little sarcastically, "so that no very redoubtable rival contends for the prize."

"Not so sure as you imagine," replied Sir Percival; "there is more

mischief than tenderness in Miss Melbourne's countenance. She is neither romantic nor fantastical; therefore she will not *fancy* herself in love, as most of the pretty misses do now-a-days, before a man has had time to say six words to them. She must be won by merit, or *supposed merit*, in the object of her choice. She has a great deal of sense and penetration, so that unless Cupid ties his bandage over her eyes, poor Percival Egerton stands a bad chance of being elected, and had your *lordship* been a candidate, he would have had *none*."

The Marquis of Claredown rejoiced to find that Sir Percival took it for granted that he was indifferent to Sera-

phina, as he felt too doubtful as to the tendency of his own designs respecting her, to chuse to be explicit; he therefore gladly availed himself of his lively friend's error, and endeavoured to turn the conversation by asking him when the *nine hundred and ninety-nine questions* were to reach his ears.

“ Oh, my dear fellow,” replied Sir Percival, “ I am *perfectly* satisfied; there is no occasion for any more questions.”

“ Then I deserve the *information* you promised me,” said Lord Claredown, “ as a reward for my comprehensive answer.”

“ Most undoubtedly; and I will give it you.—The Duke of —— has made such brilliant offers to a certain fair

Opera singer, that she has accepted them; the preliminaries are already signed, and unless a certain marquis outbids the royal lover, the treaty will be ratified to-morrow.'

"What do you mean, Percival?" said Lord Claredown, rage sparkling in his eyes. "You surely do not allude to my Olivia?"

"Yes, I do allude to *your* Olivia—*every man's Olivia*; the faithless fair, like most of her sex, is bartering her charms for gold, and as I said before, unless you bid high you must lose her.

"May I perish if I do," said the marquis. "I will go instantly to her, and reproach the base deceiver with her perfidy.—What! leave me without the

slightest intimation of her design—Oh woman! woman! woman!”

“ Ah,” said Sir Percival, “ your lordship is not so phlegmatic on *all occasions*, as when descanting upon Miss Melbourne’s beauty.—Good Heavens! that *vice* should possess blandishments that shall enslave, whilst virtue, enshrined in loveliness, is viewed with indifference! Well, good morning to you, Claredown, I will not offer to accompany you in your *reproachful* visit. Oh, a-propos, do you mean to go to the Opera this evening?”

“ *C’est selon,*” replied the marquis, and taking his hat, they both left the house together. At the great gates, however, they parted, the marquis taking

the way to Clarges Street, and Sir Percival that of Grosvenor Square.

Lord Claredown had so thoroughly convinced his friend of his indifference to Seraphina, that no farther anxiety disturbed his breast on the score of so formidable a rival; but the noble marquis was far from feeling the indifference he professed. He admired Seraphina's beauty with all the enthusiasm of an amateur; but the charms of her mind had fascinated his imagination beyond the power of expression. There was a witchery in her gaiety that was irresistible; for her wit so playfully delicate, was pointed without being severe; it had the rare talent of delighting the ear without wounding the heart. Lord

Claredown's admiration was therefore of a more solid kind than what usually affected his mind, and had inspired him with the first serious thoughts of marriage he had ever entertained for any woman, but still he hesitated; Miss Melbourne was *untitled*, perhaps of obscure origin, neither did any brilliant fortune entitle her to his *honorable* devotion.

Thus reasoned prudence; but love, sanguine as warm, painted her in all the glowing colours of irresistible beauty, whilst vanity suggested the too probable chance, that his image might have made as favourable an impression on the heart of her he admired; if that were indeed the case, how easy might it prove to

undermine the principles that now protected her unsuspecting mind. The yoke of marriage would then be unnecessary, and the triumph glorious.

Such were the libertine ideas that filled the imagination of the marquis in his way to the house of his Italian mistress. When he arrived at the abode of that modern Circe, the recollection of her imputed perfidy revived all his anger, and banished for the moment every idea unconnected with that emotion.

Olivia Paulini was a very beautiful woman, but of a temper extremely vindictive, proud, and overbearing. Her disposition was selfish and avaricious, and like most women of her description,

she professed affection only to deceive. Her heart was as incapable of softness as her mind of weakness, and *interest* was ever the ruling motive of every action. Yet did she possess in an eminent degree the power of persuading her lovers that each was the peculiar object of her affection, and such had been her ascendancy over the mind of the Marquis of Claredown, that his mother, who knew of the intrigue, had felt the most serious alarm, lest he should follow the example of some other great men, and marry the mistress who disgraced him. But in this fear the marchioness had mistaken the disposition of her son ; Lord Claredown would lavish immense sums upon his favourite,

permit her to sport his equipage and arms, and give herself the thousand airs her vanity suggested, but an intention to marry her, had never entered his thoughts.

Not so the lady, puffed up by the conceit natural to her disposition, and the favours her noble lover had lavished upon her, she had conceived the most towering expectations, and formed the most ambitious projects. She longed for a coronet, and as too many instances existed of female depravity, raised to high rank by the blind partiality of their lovers, Olivia doubted not that her brows would soon be adorned by the magic circle.

It was for this reason she had listened

to proposals from the Duke of —, and she was just writing to Lord Claredown to inform him of the splendid offers she had received, when that nobleman knocked at her door. He was instantly admitted to her boudoir, where, instead of saluting her with his usual affection, he burst out into the most violent invectives against her perfidy. Olivia listened with the utmost composure to all his rage dictated; and when his lordship had exhausted both his anger and his eloquence, she replied thus—
“ You have long known, my lord, how perfectly I doat upon you, and therefore must suppose what it will cost me to leave you for ever. I must, however, consult my interest rather than my in-

clination. The reign of beauty is short, and when mine begins to decay, I may expect to suffer by the inconstancy natural to your sex. If I am, *indeed*, dear to you—if an affection superior to the frail tenor of ocular admiration attaches you to me, make me your wife, and then you may rely upon my faith; your interest will then be mine, and *your* honour in *my* keeping.”

“And have you really the vanity to suppose,” said the marquis, with a look of contempt, “that I will ever so far degrade myself as to make a woman of your description, Marchioness of Clare-down? Surely your ignorance must be even more consummate than your conceit.”

It is impossible to describe the rage that shook the frame of Olivia at this mortifying speech of Lord Claredown's. She loaded him with every epithet of abuse, and throwing off the veil of hypocrisy, that had so long concealed her, she appeared the fury she really was.

The marquis contemplated her altered countenance with astonishment and disgust.

"Is this the woman," said he, "that I have so long, so tenderly admired? Thank Heaven, you have shewn yourself in your true colours, serpent!"

"A serpent you shall find me," said Olivia, "a serpent whose sting shall poison all your happiness. Beware, then, proud lord, and remember that no rank

is secure from the shafts of malice, no riches can protect you from an exasperated woman's vengeance."

The marquis smiled at the threats of Olivia, and bidding her do her *worst*, hastened out of the house.

"She shall feel at least," said his angry lordship, as he walked towards his own mansion; "the insolent coquet shall *feel*, how indifferent I am to all her boasted charms. She shall know that I love a woman as much her superior in beauty as in virtue; and mortification shall reach her heart, callous as it is to every better feeling."

When Seraphina returned home she was very curious to learn from Mrs. Evans the history of her diamonds, but

that good woman was so full of invectives against the inhabitants of the house she was in, from the lady at the head of it down to the domestic circle in the steward's room, that it was with difficulty she collected the following particulars :

Mrs. Evans had luckily entered the steward's-room in the morning just after Mrs. Baily, who had no sooner been entrusted with the casket containing Seraphina's jewels, than she assured her lady that she would give a good account of their value by her ladyship's dressing-time: to fulfil this promise she took them into the steward's room, where she thought the jeweller was waiting, to ask him what the stones

might be worth, and what would be the expence of having them replaced by paste, for such she did not doubt would be the purpose for which they would be sent to him.

When she came there, however, the jeweller was gone, and an old Italian was there, with whom Mrs. Baily was very intimate. She enquired how long Mr. Benson had been gone.

"He gone just three minutes," said the Italian; "but what you got there, Mrs. Baily, any ting var pretty; want any money for my lady?"

"Oh, no," replied the abigail, "these don't belong to my lady, they belong to the beautiful Miss Melbourne, who is visiting here."

“ Let me see dem, pray do,” said the Italian, “ me love jewels and pretty ladies.”

Mrs. Baily laughed, and opened the casket, but no sooner had the man taken the necklace in his hand, than he turned pale, and trembling like a leaf, asked where she got them.

“ La ! don’t be foolish, Mr. Perico, did not I tell you they belong to Miss Melbourne, my lady’s visitor ; why, you have been drinking, to be sure, this morning, your hand shakes so, you will drop the things.—Give me the necklace.”

The man, however, recovered himself enough to examine the casket farther. The picture of Lady Cremona next at-

tracted his attention. "Santa Maria!" exclaimed he, "what do I see. O let me have dis casket—dear Mrs. Baily, me give you a thousand pounds;" and he was closing it up with the intention of carrying it off.

At this critical moment Mrs. Evans entered—"you shall not have my lady's jewels for *ten thousand* pounds," exclaimed she, snatching the casket out of his hands before he was aware of her.

Mrs. Baily endeavoured to apologize for having brought the jewels down stairs, and assured Mrs. Evans that the gentleman was merely admiring the beauty of Miss Melbourne's mother's picture; but Mrs. Evans with a true

Cambrian spirit, would not admit of any extenuation of what she deemed an unpardonable crime, and she spared neither Mrs. Baily or her visitor, but flew up stairs with her rescued treasure, in the manner we have already described.

Seraphina laughed at Mrs. Evans's account of her fright, and reprimanded her gently for her rudeness to the poor foreigner.

"You should not have snatched the jewels out of the stranger's hand without making an apology, Evans," said she.

"Don't talk so foolish, Miss Sery, for you know nothing of the matter. I beg your pardon to be sure, but it is very provoking to hear you take those

wicked people's part that were going to rob you."

"O fie, Evans!" said Seraphina, "why are you so uncharitable as to suppose such a thing as that?"

"Why, what else could that minx mean," replied Mrs. Evans, "by carrying your casket down stairs, and that old foreigner who was there, I dare say on purpose, was offering a thousand pounds for the jewels, and he was bundling them up as fast as possible when I took them out of his nasty yellow paw; and I'll tell you what, Miss Sery, I am sadly afraid I have seen his ill-looking phiz before—and if I have, he is a great rogue indeed; but I mean to talk to his reverence about it, and I

dare say he will be able to make something of my story, and take us out of this wicked house."

"Well, come, my good Evans," said Seraphina, "let me dress as quick as possible, for I want to speak to Dr. Melbourne before dinner, and if I am not down before the family assemble I shall not get an opportunity. I shall put on the new dress that came from Madame L—— to-day, and my Spanish hat. How do you like that dress, Evans?"

"Oh, I like the dress very well, Miss Sery, but I don't like your proceedings about it, I can tell you that."

"What do you mean, Evans?"

"Why, miss, I must say, I don't

think it very pretty in you to promise the poor milliner ready money, and then disappoint her. She came crying to me, and said she had a payment to make, and depending on your money she had not provided herself elsewhere, and she could not tell what the consequence might be to her. Dear me, says I, why didn't you tell my young lady so, I am sure she would have paid you in a minute."

"I could not see Miss Melbourne," says she, "Lady Avondale told me she was out."

"O fie!" says I, "what a fib—my young lady is in Lady Avondale's dressing-room at this minute."

"Oh, then," says the milliner, "it is

all a contrived thing, for I heard somebody in the next room, so I suppose Miss Melbourne is like Lady Avondale, has lost all her money at play, and so can't pay her tradespeople."

"Indeed," says I, "you are quite mistaken ma'am, Miss Melbourne hates gaming and gamblers, and she would not cheat a tradesperson for the world."

"Then I hope she will not stay long with Lady Avondale," says the milliner, or she will stand a bad chance of being spoiled.

"Pray," says I, "how much is your bill, ma'am?"

"Thirty pounds," says she.

So I stared like any thing, to think of thirty pounds for such a few bits of

trumpery ; but she assured me it was very cheap indeed, and that if so be she had thought you did not mean to pay ready money for the things, she should have charged ten pounds more. So I thought she would go down stairs, making an oration before all those good for nothing people, about not being paid, and therefore I fetched her the money from the little hoard I have brought with me to put into the Stocks ; for I knew you would give it me as soon as ever you heard of what I had done."

" Oh my dear Evans, how kind you are, but I am so afraid it will be an inconvenience to you, for I have not the money to give you directly," said Seraphina, blushing.

“ Dear heart, Miss Sery,” replied Mrs. Evans, “ sure, sure, you have not been gaming, and losing all your money; why, it will break my lady’s heart if you were to do such a thing. Dear, dear how you frighten a body, but I dare say it is only one of your frolics.”

“ No, indeed, my dear Evans, you are quite mistaken, I have not been gaming; neither did I tell you I had no money to frighten you, for really I have none.”

“ Ah! then, I guess what you have been doing, Miss Sery—some of your charitable actions. Yes, yes, that blush tells tales,” said Mrs. Evans; “ well, you are a good creature.”

“ You cut me to the heart, my dear

Evans," said Seraphina, "indeed you do. I have not been doing any charitable action, I am not so happy. I have disposed of my money, not according to my inclination, I assure you, but according to circumstances that I could neither foresee nor avoid; but you must not ask me any questions about it, for I am not at liberty to tell what I have done with it. So get my things, and let me dress."

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. Evans, "some *conspiration* of Lady Avondale's, I warrant me. I wish we were well out of her clutches."

Seraphina was not long dressing, and as soon as her toilet was finished, she descended to the drawing-room, where

she found Dr. Melbourne. He appeared full of thought, for he had received a note from Lady Delauny, requesting him to pay an early visit to Mrs. Perico, and his head and heart were both full of what might possibly be the result of his journey; he however concealed the whole from Seraphina, who came bounding into the room with her usual vivacity. The grave looks of the doctor, however, checked her liveliness, and she enquired if any thing disagreeable had happened.

He replied, "*Nothing material.*"

She then began to relate the incidents of the morning.

At the mention of the foreigner and the diamonds, the doctor started.

"Where is Evans?" said he; "I should like to speak to her."

"She is in my dressing-room," replied Seraphina.

"Then I will go to her," said the doctor, "for I have a great deal to ask her about;" and he immediately left the room.

He did not return until the dinner was on the table, and then Seraphina sat too far from him to ask any questions.

As soon as the ladies withdrew, he took his hat, and calling a coach at the first stand, proceeded to Brompton.

A large party assembled at Lady Avondale's in the evening, amongst

whom were the Ladies Hamilton and the Marquis of Claredown.

The attention of the latter to Seraphina, was more pointed than ever; and it must be confessed, that dazzled by the exterior graces of that fascinating nobleman, the inexperienced heart of Seraphina felt pleased with the conquest she had made. The smiles that dimpled on her ingenuous countenance, evinced the serenity of her innocent mind; and Lady Avondale beheld with all the rancour of malice, the increase of beauty which those smiles bestowed.

“Your brother seems quite enchanted with my fair friend,” said her ladyship to Lady Charlotte Hamilton; “it will be rather a degrading match for the

marquis—the daughter of a *country clergyman*!”

The moment Lady Avondale had uttered the latter part of that sentence, she recollected her own origin, and blushed with confusion.

Lady Charlotte stifled the laugh that was just ready to burst forth, and observed, that her brother coquetted with every pretty girl he met, without once thinking seriously of them for five minutes afterwards. “Every body,” said her ladyship, sarcastically, “is not so honorable as *Lord Avondale*.”

Lady Avondale bit her lips, and determined to be revenged of both brother and sister whenever opportunity offered.

After tea, the party adjourned to the

Opera. Lady Avondale's box joined that of the Marchioness of Castledown, so that the company still remained intermixed.

In the pit, Lady Avondale observed Mr. Lessingham and Sir Percival Eger-ton. The latter joined them, but the former contented himself with a stiff bow, and remained where he was.

Lady Avondale was quite disconcerted at this proceeding, and the uneasiness she evinced, induced Lord Claredown to go to him, and enquire into his reasons for absenting himself from his accustomed party.

His lordship found the honorable gentleman lolling against the orchestra, with his tooth-pick in his hand, and his eyes fixed on vacancy. "Lessingham,"

said Lord Claredown, " what is the reason you do not join Lady Avondale's party to-night ?"

" Oh, Heavens ! don't mention it," exclaimed Mr. Lessingham, yawning ; " the very thoughts of that Welch girl gives me the vapours. I cannot imagine how you endure the bore of her society ; but I have been told your lordship is *caught*—is it true ?"

" In what manner ?" asked Lord Claredown, rather haughtily.

" Nay, don't be angry ; I only meant caught in the snares of the young adventress. Lady Avondale played the same game successfully, and now she has given her cards to Miss Melbourne ; but unless your *lordship* is compas-

sionate, I fancy the girl will find some difficulty in obtaining a partner."

"She is a beautiful creature," said Lord Claredown, casting his eyes towards the box where Seraphina sat.

"A mere laughing idiot," said Mr. Lessingham, "without sense, grace, or discrimination; but I perceive your lordship is infatuated, and *je vous en fait mon compliment*. She is no doubt *highly descended*, perhaps her father's house is on the summit of Plinlimmon.—'The Marquis of Claredown to the fair Welch heiress.'—A charming paragraph may be made from the union of such high names. Upon my honor, I should think a marriage with an *actress* of cele-



brity, were preferable to such an alliance; but *chacun a son gout*."

"Miss Melbourne," said the marquis, is too little *au fait* of the great world, to please a man of Mr. Lessingham's refined good-breeding; but there is something so graceful in the *naïveté* of her expression, so modest in the diffidence of her carriage, that I must confess I am charmed as much by the novelty of manners she displays, as by her exquisite beauty."

"A confession! a palpable confession!" exclaimed Mr. Lessingham. "Your lordship then admits that you are *charmed*, and we may guess at the subsequent steps in the labyrinth of love. Well, you must excuse my can-

dour, when I tell you, that in the *nai-veté* you admire, I see the *niaserie* of an overgrown child ; and her boasted modesty is, to my ideas, nothing more than downright *mauvaise honte*."

Although Lord Claredown plainly perceived by the malicious manner in which Mr. Lessingham spoke of Seraphina, that she had somehow, unconsciously perhaps, offended that gentleman's vanity, and although he well knew that whoever did so, drew down upon themselves all the malice he was capable of, yet such is the power of fashion on the minds of those who have been accustomed to make her approbation the law of their lives, that his lordship, notwithstanding his natural good sense, could not forbear

feeling mortified at finding the voice of her acknowledged oracle against the choice of his heart; he therefore not only meanly denied the passion she had kindled in his bosom, but affected to speak of her in the light of an object worthy only of his attention as an *amour passagere*.

This confession delighted Mr. Lessingham, and he called Lord Claredown *a fellow of spirit*. “In that light,” said he, “the girl may do *well* enough, but the idea of *marrying* her, for a man of your lordship’s rank, was absolutely *outré*.”

In the meantime, Seraphina, wholly unconscious that she was the subject of interest to any body present, was wrapt in the most enthusiastic delight whilst listening to the syren notes of Catalani.

Lady Avondale observed with a sneer, the air of science with which Seraphina attended to the music, and said, with a laugh, “Not only an *amateur*, but a *connoisseur*, I perceive. Young ladies are so *scientific* in these days, that upon my honor, they give me the horrors, for nothing do I detest equal to a *monster* of any kind.”

This observation was made to Lady Charlotte Hamilton, who immediately joined in the laugh. “Your ladyship is so droll,” said she: “but you do not observe the metamorphose before you; Sir Percival Egerton is perfectly planet-struck.”

“*Sympathy—divine sympathy!*” replied Lady Avondale. “His *dulcinea*

is pensive, and he *must* follow her example."

All this conversation passed unheard by Seraphina, who was too much absorbed in the harmony she was listening to, to be conscious of any thing that was passing near her.

As soon as the Opera was over, the party adjourned to the coffee-room to wait for their carriages.

Lady Avondale was busily employed in chatting first with one friend, and then with another ; and Lady Charlotte Hamilton, who had determined, if possible, to steal Sir Percival from Seraphina, began to roast him on his invincible passion, as she styled it, rallying him with all the wit she was mistress of, to the no small annoyance of the poor

baronet, whose eyes were fixed upon Seraphina the whole time the unmerciful Lady Charlotte was talking to him.

Seraphina was, however, otherwise engaged, for the moment she came into the coffee-room, she observed two ladies who were looking at her in a manner too striking not to attract her attention. The one was elderly, but dressed in the most ridiculous imitation of youth—her cheeks were loaded with rouge, which gave a fierce look to her large dark eyes, that was truly terrific; her features appeared to have been once handsome, but were now too emaciated to lay claim any longer to that distinction. The young lady appeared to be the picture

of what her mother had been, for it was plain that they stood in that relation to each other. She was dressed in a black lace dress, over a pink sattin slip, and on her head she wore a tiara of diamonds, over which was thrown in the most graceful manner possible, a long black lace veil of the finest texture. It is impossible to describe the beauty of her form, or the fascination of her countenance; her eyes were as dark as those of her mother, and quite as large, but there was a softness in them that rendered them beautiful. "Can you think it possible?" said she to her mother, in Italian; and as she spoke, she turned a penetrating glance upon Seraphina."

"Yes," replied her mother, in the same language; "it must be so, or else

some fiend has assumed that form to harrow up my soul with agony."

Seraphina felt an indescribable horror as these words caught her ear, and she shrunk involuntarily from the gaze of the terrific strangers. It was plain they took her for some person who was disagreeable to them, and although she felt certain they had mistaken her, she could not divest her mind of the fear that had seized it."

At this moment, Lord Claredown entered the room, and observing Seraphina standing alone, and as it were, wrapt in pensive thought, he approached her.

"Will Miss Melbourne pardon my impertinence," said his lordship,

“should I presume to ask what happy object at this moment engrosses her so serious attention?”

Seraphina started, and casting a look of terror towards the two ladies, she replied, with a deep blush, that the objects of her contemplation were far from agreeable to her.

The marquis saw the fear expressed by her ingenuous countenance, but although he turned his eye with the quickness of lightning to trace the objects she alluded to, he was too late; they had mixed with the thickest crowd. the instant they perceived his lordship approaching Seraphina, and she would have supposed they had withdrawn, had not the sound of their voices close behind her soon afterwards revived her

alarm so much that she caught hold of Lord Claredown's arm.

“What alarms you, angelic Miss Melbourne?” said he.

The pale cheek of Seraphina assumed a deep crimson when she recollected what she had done, and she withdrew her hand in haste, but the words she had heard, sunk deep into her heart, and filled it with dismay.

“Tell me, lovely creature, what has terrified your gentle nature?” again asked the marquis, with encreased earnestness, for her cheek was again become so pale that Lord Claredown thought she was fainting.

Seraphina could not answer, and the marquis led her to a seat; and after he had placed her there, he turned round

to get a glass of water for her recovery.

The cause of her terror was immediately explained, for he beheld Olivia, her eyes sparkling with rage, gazing at them both.

When she saw that he observed her, she gave a smile of contempt, and instantly disappeared.

Lady Avondale came to the sofa where Seraphina was sitting. "Good Heavens!" exclaimed her ladyship, "what is the matter here? Are you and the marquis getting up a tragedy, Miss Melbourne? Why you have rubbed off all your rouge, my dear; you look absolutely as pale as death."

"I never wear any rouge," replied Seraphina, naively; "but I have been

so frightened just now, that I thought I should have fainted."

"It is a great misfortune," said Lady Avondale, "to have too much susceptibility. The texture of your nerves, my dear, is of the Gossamer kind; I think we must have a glass case to keep you in."

This was spoken in a tone so sarcastic, that Seraphina felt the full force of the ill-nature, and her eyes filled with tears.

Lord Claredown was provoked, and taking Seraphina's hand, "Permit me, Miss Melbourne," said he, "to lead you to your carriage; you are indeed very unwell. Would to Heaven that the susceptibility of your feelings were contagious! We should not then have to lament the intolerable bore of *automaton*

beauty, so disgusting to the man of taste and discrimination. Apathy is hateful in men, but in women it is peculiarly repellant. We may *admire*, but we cannot *love a statue*." As he spoke, he cast a look at Lady Avondale that mortified her.

The carriage being now announced, however, she took no notice of the sarcasm, but turning to Seraphina, said, "Come, Miss Melbourne, you will be glad of an opportunity of escaping from the *terror* you complain of, no doubt."

Seraphina retired to her room as soon as she returned home, but Lady Avondale, who had a party to supper, passed the greatest part of the night at the fatal amusement that enslaved her every faculty.

The next morning, Seraphina found the

breakfast-room empty, but she was presently joined by Dr. Melbourne, whose countenance, full of thought, and tinged with melancholy, struck her as soon as he entered.

“What is the matter, dear sir?” said she, “your looks alarm me.”

“I have been a good deal affected,” said he, “by the explanation I have had with the poor woman I have been to see. She has made a wonderful discovery, if it be but true, and other circumstances that have happened seem to confirm the probability.”

“What woman have you been to see, dear sir?” said Seraphina.

The doctor then related the circumstance of Lady Delauny's note, and his

visit to Mrs. Perico. "I found the poor woman," said he, "extremely weak and emaciated, and although she instantly recognized me, it was impossible that I should do the same by her, as I had only seen her once before by candle-light, and that too, whilst she was in the bloom of life. She proves to be the very woman who led me to the couch of your unfortunate mother, my dear Seraphina, and she has related some circumstances connected with the death of that amiable woman, truly horrid. It would not be right to torture your heart with any of the particulars, until they have been confirmed by other testimony, to which she has referred me, and which it will take some time to procure. Do

you recollect the name of the foreigner that Evans says was going to take away your diamonds ?”

“ I do,” said Seraphina, “ for it struck me when she mentioned it, as being similar to that of the poor woman we visited yesterday morning. It was *Perico*, I believe.”

“ Then he is the wretch who became the husband of that unfortunate creature for no other purpose than to deprive her of the power of fulfilling her deceased mistress's will, and this circumstance corroborates the wretched woman's story. His eagerness to get possession of the diamonds proves that he knew their former owner. His accomplice in wickedness, however, resides at Brighton, and thither I must go to get the docu-

ments necessary to prove your birth. Of the fact I entertain no doubts myself. You are certainly Lady Cremona's daughter, but to establish you as such with the world, some strong proof is necessary, and I hope to obtain it from the workings of an accusing conscience—but of this, more by and by. We must now go to Lord Storrondale's, and I dare say he will concur with me in advising that you should comply with the poor creature's request to see you as soon as possible; if he does, I beg you will present her with ten guineas, as I entertain no doubt of her being the identical person she describes herself, and in that case she was the sole friend, though an humble one, on whom your poor mother could rely in the last trying

moments of her life : she deserves therefore some immediate token of her daughter's gratitude, whose life she assisted in saving."

The eyes of Seraphina overflowed with tears, whilst listening to the doctor's injunction relative to Mrs. Perico, and her cheeks were dyed with crimson whilst she confessed that it was out of her power to comply with his request.

" My dear Seraphina," said the doctor, looking very grave, " you have been extravagant, I am afraid ; only three days in town, and dissipated all your money already."

" Do not say *dissipated*, dear sir," said Seraphina. " I have parted with it, 'tis true, but not extravagantly, I assure you.

The only dress I have indulged myself in purchasing, are unpaid for, and that distresses me worse than any thing else."

"My dear girl," replied the doctor, "beware of debt. I thought indeed such a caution must be unnecessary to you, but I see young people are not to be trusted without leading-strings, however prudent they may appear to be; but tell me, how have you disposed of your money, for I fear imposition?"

"Pardon me, dear sir," said Seraphina, "but indeed, I am not at liberty to tell you. I have committed this error against my judgment, and contrary to my inclination; but I will do so no more, forgive me this once."

"I forgive you, my dear" said the

doctor, "upon condition that you fulfil your promise of doing so no more; it is of far greater consequence than you may imagine, that you should not dispose of your money in a clandestine manner, however plausible the pretext; but no more of this—here is a cheque-book; I have given you credit with Sir ROBERT HERMES, the banker, so draw for what you think necessary. You see the confidence I place in your word; but I nevertheless entreat that you will let œconomy go hand in hand with generosity in all pecuniary transactions; extravagance is injustice both to yourself and others, and ought therefore to be held in the utmost abhorrence."

After this short lecture, the doctor and Seraphina sat down to breakfast, as

it was a rule at Lord Avondale's that the early risers should not wait for the *dormice*. Before they had concluded their meal, Lord Avondale joined them.

"I am happy to observe," said his lordship, after his morning salutation, "that Miss Melbourne persists in her habit of rising early. I trust it will induce her to resist the temptation that occurs in our house too often. I mean a late attendance at the Pharo-table."

"When Seraphina becomes a gambler, I will renounce her," said Dr. Melbourne.

"Ah!" said Lord Avondale, with a sigh, "if all the ladies addicted to that folly were renounced by their friends, half London would have new connec-

tions to seek. Sophy lost three thousand pounds last night, I am told. I have not seen her yet, but I am afraid the information is but too correct."

"Good Heavens!" said Dr. Melbourne, "and do you suffer such a scandalous waste of money? Pardon me, my lord, for I must say I think your lordship the most to blame."

"Perhaps I am," replied Lord Avondale, "but when remonstrance fails, I know not what other method to adopt. Sophia is become callous alike to reproof as to indulgence; she is neither won by the latter, nor reclaimed by the former: I tremble alike to grant, or deny her money, the first will eventually ruin my fortune, the latter may endanger my honor."

“ Who would ever have supposed that the timid Sophy Pembroke would become so soon the dissipated woman of fashion.”

Seraphina was deeply affected by the picture Lord Avondale drew of his lady, for she reflected with sorrow that it was a just one ; and she could not help reverting to the moment, when as innocent as beautiful, she had quitted the vale of retirement for the seducing circles of elevated life. “ If such be the contagion of example,” thought she, “ Heaven send me soon out of the reach of its baleful influence !”

Seraphina was not one of those virtuous ladies, who feeling conscious of the rectitude of their *own* conduct, condemn with scorn the errors of *others*.

She pitied the victims of temptation, because she felt the blessings of having kept the right path. Nevertheless, she feared to encounter what had proved fatal to their virtue, and by dreading her own weakness, became eventually strong.

As soon as breakfast was over, the doctor and Seraphina walked to Lord Storrondale's, the former taking in his pocket, the casket containing the jewels his lordship had wished to examine. The sight of the miniature affected his lordship exceedingly, and he shed tears as he held it in his hand. After looking at it for some time, he turned his eyes to Seraphina.

"Was there ever such a likeness?" exclaimed he, holding the picture up

as he spoke. "This girl wants no stronger testimony than her face, to claim her inheritance with those who knew her mother; but I am aware that will not do in the Court of Chancery, and therefore am most anxious to obtain such proofs as will establish her rights upon a firm basis."

"I have some particulars to relate to your lordship," said Dr. Melbourne, "which I collected yesterday, that I flatter myself will be found of material consequence; but I must wave them for the present, and content myself with saying, that a woman of the name of Perico, who says her maiden name was Nancy Brown, sent for me yesterday: she describes herself to be the person who delivered the note to me, by which

I was induced to pay the nocturnal visit which put Seraphina into my hands. She declares that the lady I saw was indeed Lady Cremona, and that she had been her attendant some years before her marriage."

"I remember a girl of that name who was educated by Emily's mother, who was afterwards made her attendant," said Lord Storrondale; "but how came she so long to conceal circumstances of such importance to the welfare of her deceased lady's child?"

"Her reasons will appear from her narrative," replied the doctor, "when your lordship hears it. She wishes to see Seraphina, and if your lordship approves of it, and will lend us a carriage, I will take her there this morning."

“By all means,” replied Lord Storrondale, and rang to order his chariot.

“Whilst we are waiting for the carriage,” said the doctor, “I have another subject to touch upon, of the utmost importance to this poor girl’s welfare. I am thoroughly displeased with her present residence. I think Lady Avondale the most improper chaperone for a young person, that can possibly be found, and I think the sooner she is removed the better. I want your lordship’s advice upon the subject of finding a more eligible situation for her.”

“With what pleasure should I receive my dear Seraphina under my own roof,” replied Lord Storrondale, “could I offer her a more respectable guide; but alas! Lady Storrondale is addicted

to all the fashionable follies that disgrace Lady Avondale. Nevertheless, as she is the child's *grandmother*, a shocking thing for a lady who chuses still to be thought a *beauty*, I thought I would mention my wishes upon the subject to her, as the society of my daughter was at least unexceptionable, but she cut the matter short, by assuring me that she had a decided dislike to *adventresses*, and begged I would not name such a thing to her any more. You will judge therefore how pleasantly Seraphina would be situated, were I to insist upon her being received as an inmate in my family before her claims to their notice had been established."

"A-propos; you mentioned Lady De-launy yesterday, do you think it likely

she might be prevailed upon to take Seraphina under her protection ?”

“ Their acquaintance is too short to hint at such a thing at present,” replied the doctor, “ but should the offer come from her ladyship, which is by no means unlikely, we will not refuse it.”

The carriage was now announced, and Seraphina took an affectionate leave of her grandfather, but the doctor promised to return after having set her down at home, to relate the promised narrative to Lord Storrondale.

Poor Mrs. Perico was much affected by seeing Seraphina, and expatiated on the striking likeness that existed between her and her unfortunate mother. “ Alas !” said she, clasping her hands together, “ my poor bewildered head

made me think when I saw miss, yesterday, that she was the ghost of my poor murdered lady."

"Hush!" said the doctor, "Seraphina is unacquainted with any of the particulars of that shocking story."

Mrs. Perico took the hint, and changed the subject, by asking to look at the picture and the jewels the doctor had promised to shew her. When they were produced she burst into tears. "Ah!" said she, "I helped to pack these into that very casket the night I fetched you, sir, to my poor lady. Her agonies were so great, she was unable to do it herself."

Dr. Melbourne mentioned the circumstance of the foreigner wanting to take the jewels in the morning, and

added, that he believed his name was Perico. When he said this, the poor woman shrieked out, and began to tremble in the most violent manner.

“ Oh Heavens !” said she, “ it is my husband’s brother and accomplice. Pray take care that he does not get the smallest intelligence of my existence ; if he should, he will murder me, you may depend upon it, for he is capable of any thing.”

“ Fear not,” said Dr. Melbourne, “ I will take care you shall be removed to a safe and commodious lodging in London this evening, where, under a feigned name you may bid defiance to his malice. As he supposes you dead, he will not readily suspect you, therefore you have little cause to fear.”

The doctor, fearful lest Mrs. Perico should say more than he wished Seraphina to hear, shortened the visit; and as she took her leave, Seraphina slipped a ten pound note into Mrs. Perico's hand, which Dr. Melbourne had previously given her for that purpose. The poor woman could only lift her eyes to heaven, for her heart was too full to speak, and the doctor and his charge returned to the carriage which conveyed them to London.

During the ride, Seraphina adverted to what had fallen from Mrs. Perico respecting her mother being *murdered*. "The dreadful words," said she, "sunk into my heart with the same degree of horror that I felt last night, when the

threats of those dreadful foreigners struck my ears."

"To what do you allude?" asked Dr. Melbourne. "What foreigners could be induced to threaten you?"

Seraphina then related the circumstance that occurred in the coffee-room at the Opera-house, and added the sentence whose dreadful tendency had occasioned that terror which induced her to catch hold of Lord Claredown's arm, as has been before related.

"Poor victim, destined to immediate destruction, I cannot behold without pitying you!" were the words uttered in Italian, by the youngest of the two strangers; whose observation had so much distressed her and Seraphina, although convinced their being addressed

to her originated in a mistake, could not hear them without a sensation of fear, for which she could not account.

“ It must certainly be some person who took you for somebody they knew,” said the doctor, when he had heard Seraphina’s account, “ therefore dismiss all fear from your mind. My dear, it is impossible any body can have any enmity to you, who are as new to the world as if you were born yesterday ; and as to what that poor woman said about your lamented mother, we must not speak upon slight grounds in matters of such importance. Ignorant people are but too apt to use the strongest expressions, if their minds are at all irritated, therefore moderate your feelings, my dear girl, until I can speak with certainty

upon the subject; you shall then be made acquainted with every circumstance relating to this dark affair."

The carriage now set down Seraphina in St. James's Square, and then proceeded with Dr. Melbourne to Lord Storrondale's.

CHAP. XIV.

WHEN Seraphina met Lady Avondale at dinner, she was astonished to find her in the highest spirits imaginable. The idea of the heavy loss her ladyship had sustained, had haunted Seraphina from the moment she had heard it, and she dreaded to see Lady Avondale for fear of a new persecution for money. No traces of vexation or regret, however, were to be observed upon the countenance of the thoughtless Sophia, and

Seraphina concluded that Lord Avondale had been misinformed.

A large party dined in St. James's Square, and amongst the rest were Lord Claredown, Sir Effingham Wilson, and Sir Percival Egerton. Lady Avondale seemed to divide her attention between the two former, and Seraphina thought she observed some secret intelligence between them. Little did her pure heart imagine what had occasioned it; little did she suppose that a sum of money had been accepted by the degenerate countess from *both* those gentlemen to forward their interest with the unsuspecting Seraphina.

That such is the fatal consequence of a propensity to gaming, it leads its votaries into embarrassment, and then

tempts them to commit the basest actions to free them from its influence. Honor, principle, nay, even pride itself, yield to the powerful mania, until the hapless victims sink into the gulf of infamy, and are lost for ever.

The views of Sir Effingham Wilson were perfectly honorable. The old gentleman was bent upon having a handsome wife, and as Fanny Pembroke had rejected his offer, he was happy to meet with a still more beautiful girl, whom Lady Avondale described to be in such a state of dependence as rendered it more than probable that she would gladly accept his offers.

The Marquis of Claredown, although he professed the same designs, was far from intending to marry Seraphina, if

it were possible to obtain her upon easier terms, and he was not without hopes that Lady Avondale's example might tend to corrupt the purity of Seraphina's principles, and he flattered himself that his handsome figure had not been seen with indifference by her whose affection he wished only to engage, in order to abuse it. "*Ainsi va le monde;*" and thus it is that innocence is so often sacrificed at the shrine of avarice.

The sum of money Lady Avondale had borrowed of Lord Claredown, her subsequent ill-luck had made it impossible she should repay, and her eagerness to recover her losses had involved her still farther in debt.

The purse of Sir Effingham Wilson had more than once supplied her exi-

gences, whilst his hopes had been kept alive respecting Fanny. The admiration he expressed of Seraphina's beauty, seemed to open a new field to Lady Avondale's avarice, and she artfully endeavoured to inflate his vanity by repeating some favorable expressions she pretended to have heard drop from Seraphina, respecting the accomplished manners of the old dotard.

This had the desired effect, and he said, "Forward my views with the divine Seraphina, and command my fortune in any way that you please, Lady Avondale."

This point had been settled the preceding evening, just after Lady Avondale had been making exactly the same promise to Lord Claredown, who had accepted

Lord Avondale's invitation to supper, in hopes of passing more time near the object of his adoration.

When his lordship found that Miss Melbourne had retired to rest, he determined to avail himself of the opportunity of conciliating Lady Avondale, whose vanity had received a wound by his severe retort at the Opera-house, and who looked at him with evident displeasure when he entered the room with Lord Avondale.

In the art of flattery, Lord Claredown was a complete adept; he was therefore not the least intimidated by Lady Avondale's angry glances, but set about making his peace in so scientific a manner, that he was presently reinstated in her ladyship's good graces, and the

gaming debt cancelled in consideration of the promised negociation.

But to return from this long digression.—Soon after the ladies retired from table to the drawing room, Sir Effingham Wilson joined their party, and seating himself next Seraphina, after an elaborate eulogium on her beauty, and his own extensive fortune, he made her a most unequivocal tender of his hand.

Seraphina was so astonished at the unexpected address, and so diverted at the ridiculous figure of her antiquated lover, that she was unable to answer for some minutes, lest she should yield to the risibility excited by such a curious circumstance; but when Sir Effingham imagining her silence proceeded from maiden bashfulness, entreated her to

spare her blushes, by permitting him to construe her silence into an assent to his proposals, she could no longer command herself, but burst into a fit of laughter.

The poor baronet felt much disconcerted, and said, with a serious face that increased Seraphina's mirth, "Surely Miss Melbourne does not doubt my honor?"

"Not in the least," replied she, as soon as she could speak; "but I doubt my own merits, and therefore cannot think of accepting an offer so transcendantly above my deserts."

Just at that moment, Sir Percival Egerton came and seated himself on the other side of Seraphina, and put an end to the conversation. "For Heaven's

sake, dear Miss Melbourne, do let me make one of your convivial party," said he. "I perceive that Sir Effingham is displaying his usual flow of wit, and your fine discrimination enables you to feel the full zest of it. What is the subject of your mirth, if it is not impertinent?"

Sir Effingham felt the irony of this speech, and fearing to become an object of ridicule, he rose from his seat, and looking at his watch, observed that he must call for his carriage, as he had appointed to meet some of the opposition on political business that evening, and should take another opportunity of renewing the subject they had been discussing.

This was addressed to Seraphina, who only bowed and smiled.

The baronet then departed with a stiff bow to Sir Percival ; and going up to Lady Avondale to take his leave, he reproached her ladyship for her carelessness in not apprising Seraphina of the honor he intended. " She is very pretty to be sure," said he, " but she is a mere girl ; knows nothing of life—nothing of life."

" So much the better, Sir Effingham," replied Lady Avondale ; " she will be the easier managed."

" Does your ladyship think so ?" asked the old lover, with a significant look. " I wonder whether *Lord* Avondale would be of the same opinion ?"

" Sir Effingham Wilson has been drinking *imperial*, I believe," said Lady Avondale, when he was gone, " and

the *cream* of *tartar* sticks in his *throat*;
I never saw him so testy before."

"He has been making love, and had his suit rejected, if I augur right," said the Marquis of Claredown, to whom her ladyship addressed herself, "for I saw him fly the field when Sir Percival Egerton seated himself by Miss Melbourne just now. Pray does your ladyship think that butterfly is in earnest in his attentions to that lady; he is always fluttering near her?"

"He professes to be *dying* for her," answered Lady Avondale; "but you know what a coxcomb he is, therefore your lordship need not fear a rival in that quarter."

"Who—I!" replied the marquis.
"Indeed I have no fears on that head."

Miss Melbourne appears to want neither sense nor taste, and therefore I should not imagine Sir Percival Egerton would appear very attractive in her eyes ; but when girls receive a great many overtures, it generally makes them intolerably vain ; and if that fool is really as much in love as he pretends to be, I dare say he will be making proposals in form, before another week has elapsed."

"Your lordship had better forestall him," said Lady Avondale.

"Not so fast, my dear lady," replied his lordship, laughing ; "I shall rely upon your ladyship's good offices, and my own assiduities, and try to make some impression upon my fair one's heart, before I tender my own."

After this conversation, the marquis

and Lady Avondale joined Miss Melbourne, and the former endeavoured, by the most delicate attentions, to recommend himself to the woman whose destruction he was secretly planning.

The evening passed away in the usual routine of fashionable nonsense, and concluded with a full display of fashionable vice at the gaming-table.

As soon as Seraphina saw the parties assemble round that vortex of ruin, she availed herself of the permission Lady Avondale had given her, of retiring when she pleased, and she went to her repose.

In the morning, she had another conversation with Dr. Melbourne, who informed her that he had seen poor Mrs. Perico removed to a comfortable lodg-



ing, where she appeared to enjoy all the refreshment of her new situation. "I am going to Brighton," added he, "and shall most likely be absent several days, as the person I am to seek for there, has made a practice of changing his name so often, it may be difficult to find him. I am sorry to be under the necessity of leaving you in the care of Lady Avondale; however I rely upon your prudence for conducting yourself with propriety. I see plainly that you hold fashionable folly in the utmost detestation, and therefore am the less afraid. Cultivate the friendship of Lady Delauny and her daughter; it will be a pleasing relief from the empty folly that prevails in this house; nevertheless I would not have you offend Lady

Avondale, though I desire that no fear on that head may induce you to act in a manner contrary to your own ideas of right and wrong."

Seraphina assured Dr. Melbourne that she would attend strictly to his injunctions; at the same time, she lamented the necessity there was for his leaving her in a house where she had not one adviser to assist her inexperience.

Lord Avondale coming in, the conversation terminated; and at an early hour, Lady Delauny called to take Seraphina out, who embraced the opportunity with pleasure, of driving to see Mrs. Perico in her new habitation; she also called at the banker's to replenish

her purse, and at her return, repaid the thirty pounds to Mrs. Evans.

Every interview with Lady Delauny increased her esteem and veneration for that amiable lady, and the society of Miss Delauny soon became the greatest pleasure Seraphina could taste of.

Dr. Melbourne set off the next day for Brighton, and Seraphina spent the whole of it with her new friends, in rational conversation and useful employment.

In the evening, the marquis called at his aunt's, and expressed his delight at the prospect of the friendship that promised to be cemented between the *beloved trio*, as he styled them. His lordship's natural good sense and profound information, joined to a wit at

once playful and good-humoured, added much pleasure to the party, and Seraphina returned home delighted with her new friends, amongst whom the fascinating marquis was not esteemed the *least* agreeable.

Several days passed on in which nothing material occurred. Seraphina continued to divide her time between the giddy parties in which Lady Avondale engaged her at home and abroad, and the more rational, and far more agreeable ones, at Lady Delauny's.

Miss Melbourne's beauty was by this time, become an universal topic of conversation. The gentlemen said she was an *angel*, whilst the ladies would only admit that she would be *really* a very pretty girl, if her complexion.

was not so rosy as to preclude the possibility of wearing *rouge*, and her manners would be really pleasing, if she could divest herself of that provincial rudeness of *blushing* at every thing that was said.

In vain did the Honorable Mr. Lessingham swear that she was *quite a bore*; the oracle of fashion was, for once, disregarded, and lovely Seraphina was followed wherever she moved, by a crowd of admirers, who all vied with each other in presenting her with adulation fit for a goddess rather than a mortal. Yet did not the sweet girl become vain or assuming, nor did she find any pleasure in any of their addresses. The lively conversation of Sir Percival Egerton amused and diverted her, and the

delicate attentions of the Marquis of Claredown flattered the best feelings of her heart; yet did that heart often sigh for the accustomed severity of her dear Edward, and frequently did she wish that he were near to guide and direct her.

The hints which Lady Avondale had let fall respecting the Marquis of Claredown's attentions to Fanny Pembroke, made her listen to him with a degree of caution very salutary at the beginning of an intimacy with so fascinating a young man.

It is impossible to say what might have been the consequence of her introduction to that nobleman, skilled as he was in all the arts of love, had it not been for this reflection. Seraphina's

heart was as yet untouched; but how long she would have retained her indifference cannot be ascertained, had she not felt that noble pride—the best defence of women, which forbid her to give the reins to her imagination. “If he be a deceiver,” said she, mentally, “Lord Claredown is unworthy of my *esteem*; and what must must that woman be who listens to the addresses of a man she cannot esteem? My amiable Fanny is deserving of the best of hearts, and he who could trifle with *her* happiness, shall never endanger *mine*.”

In the meantime, Lady Avondale continued in the career of folly, sometimes winning large sums, but much oftener losing still larger. The methods she was obliged to resort to in the

moment of embarrassment, initiated her into every species of meanness and fraud.

She was astonished beyond measure, that Seraphina had escaped the toils she had spread for her, by inducing her to run into debt, for Madame L—— had informed her ladyship that her bill had been honorably paid on the delivery of the dresses—a method which had been uniformly pursued in regard to every other article Miss Melbourne had since purchased.

“A sly puss!” said her ladyship; “I thought I had emptied her purse, but you see, with all her provincial ignorance, she is more than a match for us all.”

“Well, my lady,” answered Mrs.

Baily, to whom this speech was addressed, "if I was your ladyship, I'd shew her the difference, for I'd have some of her money by hook or by crook. Why there's that sly old parson, he indulges her in every thing she likes, but he has taught her to be as close-fisted as himself. He has given her leave to draw upon his banker for what she pleases, and I know the banker's name; and so if I a'nt mistaken, something may be made of that whilst he is away—indeed something must be done, for money must be had—Mr. Pignitelli vows he will wait no longer; and if your ladyship should be exposed, my lord will make such a rumpus, and turn us all out of doors."

"But *what can* be done, Baily?"

asked Lady Avondale, pale with fright at the ideas Mrs. Baily had raised in her imagination.—“What can be done? I am at my wit’s end. I have drawn upon Sir Effingham Wilson till I can do so no longer, for that perverse girl has treated him with such contempt, that he no longer believes me, when I assure him that she will marry him when she has teased him a little longer. The marquis too, grows rather cool; his vanity makes him imagine he stands well enough with her not to need my assistance, and his canting old aunt is for ever inviting the pair of doves to coo at her house; so he thinks my invitations no favor.”

“Dear me, my lady, I am not depending upon any such broken reeds; I

have something more substantial to offer.—Look here, my lady ;” and the delectable confident produced a sealed note.

Lady Avondale snatched it eagerly, and opening it, read as follows :—

“ If Lady Avondale has occasion for any money, her ladyship may be supplied with sums to any amount, in consideration of a slight complaisance which will neither interfere with her honor or happiness.”

“ What does this note mean ?” asked her ladyship, as soon as she had read it ; “ and who does it come from ?”

“ A very particular friend of mine gave it to me, my lady,” said Mrs. Baily ; “ and he bade me say, that if your ladyship thought proper to con-

sider of what it proposed, you should receive another letter, mentioning time and place for the settling of conditions."

"Who is this friend?"

"His name is Perico, my lady," replied the suivante; "he is an Italian, and knows Mr. Pignitelli, and knows, through his means, of your ladyship's embarrassment. Perico is as good a creature as ever lived, and worth a power of money, I believe; so I think your ladyship had better hear what he has got to say."

"I will consider of it," answered Lady Avondale, who felt an indistinct fear she could not account for, at the idea of engaging in a transaction so full of mystery.

It has already been stated, that

Lady Avondale had once been amiable, benevolent, and pious, but vanity had first seduced her from the strict rectitude of early imbibed principle. To follow the fashion, she had first become a trifler, and to support the expences incurred by dissipation, she had been induced to become a *gamester*. What at first was only for convenience, soon became the habit of inclination, until every noble feeling had been stifled—every generous principle annihilated.

The path of vice is of a rapid descent, and the first sliding step foretells the ultimate fall.—Lady Avondale had become depraved, but she was not yet so hardened in vice, as not to dread an increase of guilt. Her *person* was as yet inviolate, and she feared, beneath the

mystery of the note she had just received, there lurked some insidious design against her honor.

She therefore hesitated; but the indecision was of short duration. A series of ill-luck the following evening, determined her to accept the terms, be they what they might, since they offered unlimited power to relieve her from her embarrassments. She therefore told Baily she might inform her friend she would listen to his proposals; and the next day her ladyship received a letter, appointing her to meet the writer at a particular place on the following evening, where every thing would be explained to her satisfaction.

Lady Avondale kept her appointment faithfully, although she could not

divest her mind entirely of those reproaches of conscience which ever attend upon any fresh step in the progress of vice.

What the result of that meeting was, will be seen in the sequel; suffice it now to say, that Lady Avondale found herself entirely deceived in her expectations respecting its portent; and that although shocked and surprised at the first opening of the proposals, she at length acceded to them, and received in compensation, a draft for five thousand pounds.

CHAP. XV.

An Arrival.

TEN days had elapsed since Dr. Melbourne set off for Brighton. Seraphina had received several letters from him, complaining of his protracted stay, which was occasioned by his not having yet been able to obtain an interview with the person he was in search of, although he had traced him in a manner too clear to leave a doubt as to his

identity. From Mrs. Melbourne too, she frequently received letters, breathing the tenderest maternal affection. From Edward, however, she had not once heard—a circumstance which astonished her, as he had promised he would write to her very often to remind her of those duties the scenes she was about to mix in, were most likely to make her forget.

At length, the postman brought the long wished-for letter. When she saw the well known hand, joy sparkled in her eyes. “Edward has not then forgot me,” said she; and she broke it open. It contained the following words:

“I have forborne to address my dear Seraphina thus long, because I have been in hourly expectation of being

called to London. Robert is arrived at Portsmouth, and has written to entreat I will meet him in St. James's Square as soon as he gets leave to quit his ship. A letter I received yesterday, has determined me to set out next Monday, and I write this letter to request my dear Seraphina to inform my sister of my intention. You will be surprised that I did not rather address Lady Avondale myself, but a lecture I took the liberty of writing upon some of her fashionable follies, some time ago, induced her so far to forget the sister, as to forbid me to address her by letter any more. Her giddy brain may ere this have forgotten the hasty prohibition, but my spirit is too high to suffer me to incur the probability of a second.—I shall

lodge at a hotel during the time I remain in London; but propose meeting Robert the day of his arrival at Lord Avondale's. Endeavour to procure me such a welcome as shall spare my wounded feelings the reflection that I am only nominally the brother of Lady Avondale. And ah! above all things, let me find the sister of my choice, my sweet Seraphina, the same unsophisticated being as when she bade adieu to her affectionate friend,

“EDWARD PEMBROKE.”

Seraphina was delighted to find that she was so soon to behold the friend of her infancy, and she ran down stairs to communicate the joyful tidings to Lady Avondale, not doubting, that how-

ever fastidiously Edward had remembered his sister's resentment, her pleasure at the thoughts of seeing him after so long a separation, would surmount every other feeling of her heart.

In this, however, as in most points that concerned the heart and the affections, Seraphina was mistaken in her judgment of Lady Avondale.

It has been justly observed, that a gambler has *no* feeling but insatiable avarice ; but in this one instance I must beg leave to add that of *vanity*, which was the ruling passion of Lady Avondale's mind, and frequently contended for the palm with Pharo himself. To the tidings, therefore, of Edward's expected arrival, Lady Avondale was wholly indifferent ; but a letter she had re-

ceived from Robert Pembroke, and which she was reading when Seraphina entered, had excited very different emotions.

“What a talk Robert will make,” said her ladyship to Seraphina, after she had read the part of the letter aloud, which spoke of his arrival as fixed for the approaching Thursday. “This brilliant victory will be the theme of every company, and we shall be so delightfully crowded wherever we go, on account of the hero that accompanies us.”

“It is merely in a *patriotic* sense then,” said Seraphina, “that you rejoice to see your brother, and that accounts for your indifference about Edward.”

“Not at all, my dear, I like one bro-

ther just as well as I do the other ; but you know it is such a charming thing to make a buz. If one has nothing remarkable in one's self, or any body belonging to one, Westminster Abbey would be as good as a ball-room. *You* have been the wonder for some time ; but it begins to decline now. Robert will revive the flame, and we shall again be talked of."

Seraphina was shocked at Lady Avondale's levity, but without noticing it, she said, " You will receive Edward kindly, I hope, for he seems to lay great stress upon that expectation."

" You may depend upon that, Miss Melbourne," replied her ladyship, with some asperity. " I should hope I need not be taught how to behave in my

own house ; but if the sweet sentimental soul is not satisfied with the warmth of my reception, no doubt *his lovely* friend will console him for the deficiency."

Seraphina was so much disgusted at the total unfeelingness displayed by Lady Avondale, that she returned to her dressing-room, where she found Mrs. Evans in the utmost consternation.

" Dear heart, Miss Sery," said the good woman, " I am in a peck of troubles. There have I been out to visit that poor creature Mrs. Perico, and lack-a-day! do you know, she is not to be found."

" Not to be found !" exclaimed Seraphina, " What can you mean ?"

" I mean just what I say," answered

Mrs. Evans; " she is not to be found. A man came in a coach yesterday, and said as he was come from Dr. Melbourne to fetch her away from the house where she lodged, and he tooked her, bag and baggage, as a body may say, and paid her lodging and all, and you know, miss, that must be a take-in, because his reverence is not in London, you know; and he would not have sent to her without telling you."

" Certainly," said Seraphina, " some mischief has befallen her."

" That wicked husband of her's has got her into his clutches, I am afraid," said Mrs. Evans. " Well, well, God is stronger than the devil yet, and so I trust the poor creature will escape. Lack-a-day, I wish his reverence would

come back ; for I think there is such a nest of vipers here, that I am afraid of a conspiracy against us all."

" Oh never fear," said Seraphina, laughing, " nobody will run away with you and I."

" I can't tell that," answered Mrs. Evans, " for this London is the wickedest place that ever was, miss. I am sure you would say so if you were to see the goings-on in the steward's-room. Nothing thought of but gambling. I do believe in my heart, they would any of them sell their grandmother to get money to squander away at cards."

" Well, my dear Evans, you never play at cards, so never mind."

" Oh, but I can't help it, miss. You was at Lady Delauny's last Sunday, and

the Sunday before my lady was not at home, and so you know nothing of the wickedness that is practised here. Why, do you now, ma'am, they play at cards here of a Sunday, all the same as a week day."

"Surely Evans, you are mistaken," said Seraphina, quite shocked at what she heard.

"No, indeed, ma'am, I saw them my own self, when I came home from evening prayers, and when I lifted up my hands and eyes, they laughed, and said every body did it in France."

"Well," says I, "so much the worse, for they are heathens in France now. A'nt their emperor a Jew, and a Turk, and a Mahometan?"

"So then they laughed again, and said

I was a methodist, and that was worse than all those things put together. So I went up stairs and had a good cry, but I would not tell you to vex you ; for as you were out, you did not see that the grand folks were doing just the same up stairs. If his reverence had been at home, I should have asked him what I ought to do ; for you know, miss, he always gives people leave to ask him any religious questions they like ; but as he was gone to stay away some time, I thought there could be no harm just to go and speak to the parson of the parish. So I asked where he lived, and I went to his house, and he was not home ; so they directed me to his curate ; and when I came there I was shewn up into a fine drawing-room, and there was he

with two or three young prigs just like himself, and they had been drinking till their noses were red, and so I drew back, and said as I wanted to speak to his reverence by himself. So they all laughed, and said I was some nurse that wanted a child christened; but the young gentleman came out to me, and he was very civil, but when I told him what I was come about, and asked him what I ought to do, he seemed so queer like, you cannot think, and hesitated, and stammered, and said, he could not tell how to advise me, for he thought it a very bad thing to affront our superiors."

"Well then," says I, "sir, God is superior to every body else, so one ought not to make *Him* angry; and sure

He will not be pleased at my seeing the sabbath-day profaned without reprimanding them, be *um great* or *be um small*. So then he was quite confused like, and said it was so unusual to be asked such kind of questions, that he professed he was at a loss what to say. ‘ Well, more shame for the church of England,’ says I, ‘ if ignorant people must not ask questions of the clergy, where are they to go for advice? If my poor master, God bless his reverence, had been in town, I should not have come here.’ And so then I was going away, and out came all the young gentlemen from behind a screen, and did so laugh, you cannot think, miss, and said I was a Roman Catholic, and wanted a father confessor, and then they offered

to absolve me of my sins ; and I told them they had better get absolution for their own, and then I walked off, determined never to go about after strange parsons any more."

"Dear me, Evans," said Seraphina, "how could you go to make yourself so particular?"

"There, Miss Sery, you are going the way of the world. Afraid of being particular, and so then you must be exactly like all the wicked people you meet with," answered Mrs. Evans.

"There is some justice in what you say, Evans," replied Seraphina, "and I shall not forget it, for I believe the fear of being particular, often goes much farther than the fear of God."

Seraphina wrote to inform Dr. Melbourne of what had happened in regard to Mrs. Perico.

The next day, to the surprise of Lady Avondale, Mr. Robert Pembroke arrived in St. James's Square. His letter had mentioned the Thursday following, but the reason of his early arrival was, that he had been entrusted with some dispatches of importance to the Admiralty, relative to some papers which had been discovered secreted in one of the vessels he had taken.

The young naval hero told Seraphina with all the bluntness natural to a British tar, that she was grown the prettiest lass he ever saw in his life, and he was glad to find she had not left off blushing

yet. He asked a thousand questions in a breath, concerning all his dear friends at Llanfallen, and entered into a retrospective description of their juvenile sports, with a precision that put Lady Avondale out of patience.

“ Robert,” said her ladyship, “ you seem very fond of that childish nonsense, I wish you would talk upon some more interesting subject.”

“ Dear Sophia, how can you slight the recollection of your early years? To me it gives more pleasure than any other reflection,” said Robert; “ but I suppose you are grown too fine a lady to care what half a dozen Welch children used to employ themselves about, although you were one of them.”

This was said in such a good-natured

voice, that Lady Avondale could not be angry, although she was half inclined to be so.

At this moment Lord Avondale came in, and greeted his brother-in-law with the most affectionate joy. His lordship spoke of Captain Pembroke's recent victory with the enthusiasm of a patriot; but the rough sailor did not relish the voice of adulation.

"For Heaven's sake, don't make such a rout," said he, "my lord, about a man's doing his duty. Shew me a sailor in the British navy who would have done less than I did under such advantageous circumstances, and then I'll believe *Bony* may cross the herring pond, and put old England in his pocket. No, no, we are all of a mind—fight when

we can, and conquer when we fight, that's our motto, from the admiral to the cabin-boy. But come, as my sister Soph says, let's talk of something more interesting."

"Sophy has not much relish for politics," said Lord Avondale. "She will entertain you with the account of all the galas in London, and perhaps they do not suit *your* taste."

"Oh yes," replied Robert, "everything in its place. I am at home for a holiday now, and intend to make merry, I assure you."

"I am glad to hear it," said Lady Avondale, "for I shall be very proud of taking you about every where."

"Take care of your money," said

Lord Avondale, laughing. "Sophy keeps company with a gang of pick-pockets."

"Upon my honor, my lord, you grow quite intolerable," interrupted Lady Avondale.

"Nay, my lady, can you deny that assertion? What name can be given to a set of sharpers who meet every evening for the express purpose of plundering each other?"

"*Sharks*, to be sure," said Captain Pembroke, "that's their proper title. D—n them, if they come alongside of me, I will give them a broadside, that shall send them to the devil in a jiffy."

"My good friend," said Lord Avondale, "you must not treat them so

roughly, or you will send half the people of fashion to Old Harry before their time."

"So much the better, if that's their *fashion*. There'll be the more sea-room for the sound vessels that are left floating."

There was something so droll and good-humoured in the honest sailor, that he pleased universally, and although Lady Avondale could not help wishing he was a little more refined, yet as he was much talked of for his late exploits at sea, she felt gratified in being pointed out as the sister of the celebrated naval hero.

Two days after Captain Pembroke's arrival, Edward was announced in St. James's Square. It is impossible to de-

scribe the joy that pervaded the bosoms of both brothers at this meeting; for although there never existed a greater contrast than was displayed in their dispositions, their hearts were united in the firmest bonds of friendship. As soon as their first emotions had subsided, Edward enquired for Seraphina.

“ Oh, she is gone out,” said Lady Avondale, “ with her new friend Lady Delauny. There never were such inseparables as Seraphina Melbourne and Harriet Delauny; but there are *cogent reasons* on *both* sides, I believe, for this mushroom friendship,” added she, with a smile.

“ Similarity of taste, most probably,” said Edward. “ Miss Melbourne has great discrimination.”

“ Yes, my dear sentimental brother,” answered her ladyship; “ and so you will say, when you have seen the Marquis of Claredown. He is certainly the handsomest young fellow about town.”

“ The Marquis of Claredown!” repeated Edward, turning pale, and unconscious of the emotion he displayed.

“ Yes, the Marquis of Claredown,” repeated his mischievous sister. “ What is there so terrific in his lordship’s name? He has selected Seraphina for the object of his adoration, and she fancies him the most charming man she ever saw, and so that she may have the indulgence of his sweet company as often as possible, she has taken a sudden and violent fancy to an old quiz of a dowager, who

is aunt to her enamorata, and where's the great wonder of that? The young girl, however, who is the ostensible reason of her frequent visits, is as much in love with her cousin as Seraphina, and so by and by, this divine friendship will end in a pulling of caps.

“ Oh, Sophia,” said Edward, with a look, replete with anguish, “ how lightly do you treat the most serious of subjects.”

“ Ha! ha! ha! Edward, you make me laugh; the most serious of subjects! and so you think the loves of Seraphina and Horatio are the most serious of subjects! Now I warrant, Fanny has been telling you a long dismal story about his faithless vows to her, and so you are

afraid he will be equally cruel to Seraphina ; but never fear, Daddy Melbourne will take care of his pet."

"Where is Dr. Melbourne—is he at home?" asked Edward, glad to change the subject of a conversation that displayed the unfeeling levity of his sister's disposition so pointedly.

"The old quiz is at Brighton, upon some intriguing business, I suppose," said Lady Avondale. "He is very intimate with Lord Storrondale, and every body knows his lordship's character for gallantry. If he had not lately taken unto him a third wife, I should really think Dr. Melbourne meant he should have Seraphina ; for he has taken her there to breakfast two or three times ; it

is very odd, for she is not yet introduced to the marchioness."

"Sophia," said Edward, "I am shocked at your depravity. Have you lost all reverence for virtue, that you thus wantonly ridicule the most respectable of characters? O dissipation! dissipation! if such your effects upon the female mind, I tremble for the innocent Seraphina."

"Upon my honor, Edward, you will give me the vapours if you preach at this rate. A-propos, when do you take orders?" said Lady Avondale.

"Never," replied Edward, with an emphasis. "The world is too depraved for one of my poor abilities to cherish a hope of reforming it. The care of their

souls would therefore distract my brain, and finally break my heart."

"Very sensibly resolved indeed," said Lady Avondale with a sneer; "but pray, if I may ask without impertinence, what profession do you intend to follow?"

"None," replied Edward. "I think I can be more generally useful by filling up the station of a plain country gentleman; it is a rare character now a-days, and therefore the more respectable."

"*Je vous en fait mon compliment,*" answered Lady Avondale; "and where does your gravityship expect to find the needful to support your *very respectable character*?"

"My uncle, Edward Pembroke, who went to the East Indies soon after my

father's marriage, has realized an immense fortune in that country, and as he is my godfather, he has appointed me his heir; but in order, as he expresses himself, that I may not 'wish the *old fellow* in his grave,' he has settled five thousand pounds *per annum* upon me, commencing last January twelvemonths, the time when the deed of gift was executed. His agent wrote to my father upon this subject, about a fortnight ago, and requested that I would be in London to settle some necessary forms, as soon as possible. Robert's letter arrived soon afterwards, and I am so fortunate as to be able to add the pleasure of my beloved brother's society to the enjoyment of my uncle's generous gift."

It would be a difficult task to describe the transformation that took place in Lady Avondale's countenance during the above recital. The sarcastic look vanished, and she became suddenly the most affectionate sister in the world. "My dear Edward," said her ladyship, "how could you conceal this circumstance from me? You surely must know how sincerely I should rejoice at your good fortune. Accept my warmest congratulations on this happy occasion, and be assured that no effort of mine shall be wanting to render your stay in town agreeable to you. Give me leave to shew you the apartments I have allotted for your use."

"I am very much obliged to you, Sophy," replied Edward, "but I prefer

remaining at the hotel where I am, the little time I shall be in London ; I have a great deal of business to transact, and shall feel more at liberty to have a number of people calling upon me at a place like that, than I possibly could do at Lord Avondale's."

" Indeed, Edward, you are quite fastidious," answered her ladyship, in the sweetest tone imaginable, " and I am sure Lord Avondale will be quite hurt, if you refuse his invitation."

Edward was firm, however, in his resolution of remaining at his hotel. He had observed the coldness with which his sister first received him, and her subsequent kindness the moment she knew of his increase of fortune, rendered her despicable in his eyes.

Whilst they were talking together, Lord Avondale came in, and welcomed Edward with all the urbanity natural to his disposition.

His lordship learned with concern, his determination not to be a guest in St. James's Square, but when he found him firm, he acquiesced.

Seraphina was some time before she returned from her drive, she having been with Lady Delauny to Mrs. Perico's lodgings to make enquiries respecting her removal. No light, however, could be obtained upon that transaction, which still continued in mystery, and Lady Delauny gave it as her opinion that the whole story was a fabrication, and Mrs. Perico an impostor.

At length, Seraphina arrived, and came bounding into the room where Edward was, with her usual vivacity. My dear Edward ! and my dear Seraphina ! was repeated at the same moment, and the friends embraced each other with a warmth equal to their joy.

“ Edward,” said Captain Pembroke, “ you are a happy dog. I would give half I am worth to be received with such joy by a lass half as pretty as Miss Melbourne.”

Seraphina blushed like crimson at this observation, and Edward appeared greatly confused. The joy of seeing the mistress of his soul had thrown him off his guard in the first moment of surprise, but he instantly checked

the emotion, and assumed the distant air he had obliged himself to adopt towards Seraphina from the first moment he discovered his passion for that fascinating girl. His late acquisition of fortune would have emboldened him to offer himself as a candidate for her heart, had not the information his sister had just given him respecting the Marquis of Claredown, determined him to bury the secret for ever in his heart.

At dinner, both his sister and Lord Avondale roasted him for his gravity, but he found it in vain to attempt to throw it off.

Although Seraphina, delighted at once more finding herself near the friend of her infancy, was in the highest spirits

imaginable, she talked to him incessantly of the dear circle at Llanfallen, and asked him why he had not brought Fanny with him to London. "I should then have been completely happy," said she, "and so would Fanny too, I am sure."

"I believe," said Edward, with emphasis, "that Fanny's mind is capable of the noblest sacrifices, but her frame is not equally strong, and therefore I think the vale of retirement is the safest shelter for the unfortunate. I shall return thither myself shortly, to quit it no more."

"Dear Edward, you are so solemn; and so mysterious, you are enough to make one melancholy."

"I should be sorry to do that, for to

contemplate Miss Melbourne's gaiety, is the sweetest solace my heart is capable of feeling, *Miss Melbourne.*"

"Dear Edward, why do you speak so formal? Have I offended you, or do you no longer love me?"

"That my regard for you is not in the smallest degree lessened, the restraint I put upon myself, by treating you with formality, is best proved, and I trust my sweet friend will not be offended, if I entreat her to use the same precaution towards me. The beloved appellations of Seraphina and Edward, so endeared by the pleasing recollections of infancy, must now give place to the cold titles of Miss Melbourne and Mr. Pembroke. The observation my brother made at our first meeting, must convince you of



the propriety of what I urge ; but the heart, my dear girl, will remain the same, in spite of outward formalities."

" Well, if it must be so," said Seraphina, " it must ; but I am sure I shall make fifty mistakes in an hour. But mind your promise about the *heart*," said she, in rather a louder voice than the former part of her speech had been spoken in.

Lady Avondale caught the latter part of the sentence, and asked, with a smile, whether Seraphina was at confession. " Take care she is sincere," added she, nodding significantly, " or I shall tell tales."

" Miss Melbourne," said Edward, gravely, " has not yet been long enough in the great world to lose the candour

that so peculiarly adorns her ; I therefore cannot doubt her sincerity."

" I hope," said Lady Avondale, gaily, that my grave brother Edward will soon lose his precision in the great world, as he calls it, or he will turn us all Puritans."

" My gravity originates in a cause not likely to be removed by an intercourse with the great world," said Edward ; " but as I do not intend to *receive* any impression from the gay circle that composes it, I am not vain enough to expect to make any."

" I am sorry you are not a little vainer than you are," said Lady Avondale ; " a sprinkling of vanity would make an agreeable melange with your solidity."

"Vanity is the cankerworm of virtue," said Edward, "and it is impossible the latter should exist long where the former has attacked its root."

"Moralising, everlasting moralising!" said Lady Avondale, "and yet rejecting the title of a reformer."

That evening there was a large party, as usual, in St. James's Square, and Edward had the mortification of witnessing the realization of all his fears in the addiction of his sister to the destructive vice of gambling.

As he stood behind her chair pensively observing her, she turned gaily to him, and saying she had shocking luck, asked him to lend her a roleau.

• Edward took out his pocket-book, and presented his sister with a twenty

pound note. "For any *other* purpose, Sophy," said he, "you may command my purse, but for gaming, this is the last complaisance you must expect from me."

"Oh, you cynic!" said Lady Avondale; "you must certainly turn hermit—you are much too good for this world."

The levity of Lady Avondale gave the most poignant anguish to the heart of her brother; but that was a slight sensation when compared with the agony he suffered whilst observing the pleasure he fancied Seraphina took in the attentions of Lord Claredown.

The gallantry of Sir Percival Egerton she received with a vivacity similar to

his own, and it was plain that he was nothing less than indifferent to her.

Not so the fascinating marquis. There was a delicacy so flattering in every word he spoke, a tenderness in the tone of his voice so affecting, that he never approached Seraphina without occasioning a flutter at her heart that mantled on her cheek in blushes of the deepest crimson. To an observer such as Edward, this circumstance was conviction strong as holy writ, and his deep drawn sighs bore testimony to the anguish of his heart. Yet was his penetration for once mistaken. Seraphina felt, it is true, the fascination of the marquis's addresses, but her mind had imbibed a doubt of his intrinsic worth, that insured the safety of her heart.

The flutter his approach occasioned, originated therefore, in the distrust she felt of her own prudence. She feared to trust herself, and therefore she had no cause to fear.—The confident only are in real danger from the artful.

The next day Seraphina received a letter from Dr. Melbourne, saying that he had at length found out that he had been entirely duped by the artful Mrs. Perico, since the person she had directed him to, had been leading him on in expectation of finding her pretended husband's accomplice, until no longer able to carry on the fraud, he had absconded. Her removal from her lodging confirmed his suspicions; and he charged Seraphina to be upon her guard against impositions of every kind.

Seraphina shewed this letter to Edward, and gave him a full account of all that had occurred since her arrival, in which she included her visits to Lord Storrondale, and his having acknowledged her as his grand-daughter.

Edward did not coincide with Lady Delauny, or Dr. Melbourne, in regard to Mrs. Perico. His opinion led him to think that some stratagem had been adverted to secret so important a witness, and he entertained many fears for the safety of Seraphina, whose birth he was apprehensive had been by some unaccountable means discovered ; he therefore entreated her to attend to Dr. Melbourne's caution, and beware of imposition.

Seraphina assured him that she would,

and begged, with a laugh, that he would not be afraid, like Evans, that she should be run away with.

A few minutes after this conversation had taken place, Captain Pembroke came into the room where Seraphina and Edward were sitting, and asked his brother if he would accompany him in a little excursion he was going to take about twenty miles out of town. "I am going to dine," said he, "with an old shipmate whose father has a beautiful seat on the borders of Windsor Forest. We shall be home in time to go to the masquerade on Thursday evening, that my sister makes such a fuss about."

"Are you going to the masquerade, Miss Melbourne?" said Edward, without answering his brother's question.

“ Yes,” said Seraphina, “ all the world are to be there ; and Lady Avondale and I have superb dresses making for the occasion.”

“ I am sorry for it,” answered Edward, “ for I detest that species of amusement.”

“ What a blockhead you are !” said Captain Pembroke. “ Would you have Miss Melbourne turn nun ? Why I shall be inclined to think you as puritanical as Sophia does. But tell me, Edward, will you go, for the chaise is coming directly ?”

Edward answered in the affirmative, and the two brothers took their leave of Seraphina, and ran up to Lady Avondale’s dressing-room to bid her farewell.

She made them promise to return to the masquerade, and they departed.

This grand fête was the one which had so long been talked of at Claredown House, and Seraphina's little heart anticipated the pleasure such a novel scene would procure her.

On the present evening, she attended Lady Avondale to a concert at the Argyle Rooms, and was pleased both with the music and the splendor of every thing around her. When the concert was over, Lady Avondale came up to Seraphina, who was sitting by Lady Delauny, and asked her if she was ready to go home.

Seraphina answered in the affirmative, and immediately rose to go.

When they were seated in the carriage, Lady Avondale ordered the servants to drive to Lady Martington's.

"Are we going any where else to-night?" asked Seraphina, with surprise.

"*I am,*" answered Lady Avondale, "but as I know you are no friend to Pharo, I will not insist upon *your* going with me. Lady Martington's house is in Berkely Square; you will not surely be afraid to go from thence in the coach alone? But do as you like—I will accompany you if you wish it."

"By no means," answered Seraphina; "I shall not feel the least alarm."

At Lady Martington's door, therefore, Lady Avondale was set down, and the carriage proceeded with Seraphina, down Bruton Street into Bond Street.

A great number of carriages were tearing along with the utmost velocity, and several coming from different directions, a young woman who was attempting to cross over, was knocked down just as Seraphina passed.

The glare of the flambeaux shewed the accident, and the shrieks of the young woman filled Seraphina with terror. She pulled the check-string, and ordered the servants to enquire into the situation of the poor young woman.

The man returned and told her that they believed the girl had broke her leg.

"Bring her hither," said Seraphina; "let her be put into the carriage."

The man hesitated.

"Why do you hesitate?" cried she,

impatiently. "For God's sake, don't let the poor creature lie in the street."

"Ma'am," said the man, bowing respectfully, "I fancy you are not aware that the woman is not a fit object for your compassion; she is one of the unhappy creatures that walk the streets by night."

"Make haste, and do as you are bid," said Seraphina. "*Pity* belongs to the wretched, be they what they will."

The man instantly obeyed, and assisted by the other footman, he lifted the poor terrified girl into Lady Avondale's beautiful carriage.

"Oh! my lady," said the trembling creature, "God will surely bless your ladyship for your goodness to me."

“Are you much hurt?” asked Seraphina, in a voice of compassion.

“My leg is very much bruised,” said she, “my lady, but I hope it is not broke, as they thought at first. But oh! if your ladyship will have the goodness to set me down at my father’s, I will for ever bless you, and God will bless you too, for you have saved me from ruin.”

Seraphina desired her to give her direction to the servant, and she would take her home.

The young woman did so, and the carriage proceeded.

Seraphina’s heart felt all that sweet glow ever attendant on true benevolence, that she had been the happy instrument of rescuing a fellow creature from

distress; nor was her pleasure decreased to find, by the young person's wish to be set down at her father's, that she was not the worthless creature the servant had supposed her.

Whilst her mind was revolving these reflections, the carriage stopped at a very large house in a dark street.

The footman thundered at the door, which was a considerable time before it was opened. At length, an elderly man came to the door with a candle, and the young woman saying it was her father, the servants carried her into the house.

Seraphina leant out of the coach, and desired to speak to the old man.

When he came to the window with the candle in his hand, Seraphina invo-

luntarily started, for the countenance he displayed, bore the most horrid expression of wickedness; however she instantly recovered herself, and slipping a guinea into his hand, she desired him to let her know the next day, how his daughter did. "The servant will give you my card," said she.

The old man thanked her in the broken accents of a foreigner; but even at the moment his tongue was blessing her, there was a look of horror in his eyes that perfectly dismayed her, and glad to escape from his gaze, she ordered the servants to go on, and a few minutes afterwards, she arrived in St. James's Square.

Whilst she was undressing, Seraphina related the particulars of her ad-

venture to Mrs. Evans, who praised her for her humanity, adding, that she warranted Lady Avondale would not have taken the poor creature into the carriage, if *she* had been there.

When Seraphina described the frightful foreigner, Mrs. Evans observed, that for her part, she could not abide those outlandish people; but howsomdever, when any good was to be done, it was not right to stand asking people where they came from.

Some days after this occurrence, which was the day of the grand masquerade at Claredown-house, Seraphina in the morning was busy in preparing for it; whilst Mrs. Evans continually lamented that her dear young lady should think of going to so profane a place.

At length she was called down stairs, and returned with a letter that had come by the Twopenny Post, directed for Miss Melbourne. Seraphina opened it, and read a most piteous tale of misery, imploring her immediate aid to save a whole family from perishing. When she had read it, she put it into Mrs. Evans's hands, and asked her opinion of it.

"Dear heart, miss," said that good woman, "this is a sorrowful story. To be sure you must give the poor creatures something, and then God will forgive you for going to that wicked place to-night."

"But we must endeavour to find out whether the statement be true or not,"

said Seraphina, " for Dr. Melbourne bid me beware of imposition."

" Very true, miss ; and if you please, I will step to the place myself directly."

" And I will go with you," said Seraphina, " so send for a coach, for I will not ask for Lady Avondale's carriage. She keeps her poor horses and servants out so late at night, that I am sure they ought to have a little respite of a morning."

" Very true, Miss Sery," answered Mrs. Evans. " You are so considerate—I will send Abraham for a coach directly, and as we shall not be long gone, we will say nothing to any body."

Seraphina assented to Mrs. Evans's proposal, and having put on a close bon-

net and a pelisse, she accompanied her faithful servant in the charitable expedition.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, Dr. Melbourne arrived in St. James's Square, from Brighton. He found Lady Avondale at breakfast, and enquired for Seraphina as soon as the first salutation was over.

Lady Avondale replied, "that she had not seen her that morning, but believed she was in her dressing-room, making some arrangements for the grand fête at Claredown-house that evening."

Whilst they were speaking, Captain Pembroke and Edward entered together, and repeated the enquiry of, "Where is Seraphina?"

"Upon my honor," said Lady Avon-

dale, "there is no body of any consequence in this house but that young lady. I dare say you will find the precious jewel safe in her casket above stairs."

She then rang the bell, and desired the servant to request Miss Melbourne to come into the breakfast-parlour, and inform her that Dr. Melbourne was arrived. The servant replied, that "Miss Melbourne had been out ever since eleven o'clock."

"Out!" replied Lady Avondale. "How did she go out, and with whom?"

"Miss Melbourne went out, my lady, in a hackney-coach, attended by her own woman."

"Very extraordinary indeed!" said Lady Avondale.

"Oh," said Dr. Melbourne, "if Evans be with her, she is safe enough," and he took up the newspaper.

Edward, however, did not so readily reconcile her absence. He walked up and down the room, in evident perturbation, as the time stole on, and Seraphina did not appear. At length the dressing hour arrived, and he was obliged to adjourn to his hotel to prepare for dinner; and as he went out, he whispered his fears to Dr. Melbourne.

"Pooh! pooh!" said the doctor, "there can be no danger, as Evans is with her. Had she been alone, I should have felt uneasy. She is perhaps gone to Lady Delauny's."

"Had she done so, Evans would have returned home," said Edward, whose agi-

tation was now too apparent to escape his sister's observation.

"Don't be frightened, Edward," said her ladyship, laughing, "Seraphina is only gone to have a morning flirtation with the marquis."

Edward made no reply, but instantly left the house, and in spite of Dr. Melbourne's pretended serenity, he could not help participating in the terror of Edward.

CHAP. XVI.

An Alarm.

It is impossible to describe the terror and distress of Dr. Melbourne when Edward returned from dressing, and informed him that he had called at Lady Delauny's, and heard with consternation that Seraphina had not been seen there that day.

The servants were questioned as to the time of Miss Melbourne's going

out, but no information could be gathered, as Abraham who fetched the coach, was out. When he returned, he said that Mrs. Evans had desired him to fetch a coach, and that he remembered that the number was 27, because he noticed it, being the same as his own age.

Whilst Dr. Melbourne was making these enquires, Edward had run up into Seraphina's dressing-room ; and whilst his eyes turned with wildness upon every surrounding object, a letter partly torn, and lying on the ground, caught his attention ; he stooped and picked it up. It was the petition which had led her from home in the morning, and his mind instantly suggested some plot to betray the precious object of his affection. He

flew down stairs with the letter in his hand, and shewing it to Dr. Melbourne, communicated his fears to him. The doctor told him that he had learned the number of the coach that had taken Seraphina out, and was going to send the servants in search of it, whilst he went himself to Lord Storrondale's to inform his lordship of the alarm Seraphina's absence had occasioned.

“Be the task mine,” said Edward, “of seeking for the coach,” and without waiting for an answer, he flew out of the house.

Dr. Melbourne took his hat and stick, and set off for Lord Storrondale's; and the dining-parlour at Lord Avondale's was forsaken by all but its lord and lady, and Captain Pembroke, whose

good heart participated most sincerely in the general uneasiness, but from his brother's hasty departure, lamented that he could not render any assistance in tracing the fugitive.

Lady Avondale was the only person unconcerned. She laughed at the consternation pictured on every face, and observed, that there would be fine rejoicing when the lost sheep was found. "Though I will be bound," said her ladyship, "that we shall meet her at the masquerade, for it is only a frolic, I dare say, to surprise us in a character we know nothing of."

"Do you really mean to go to the masquerade, Sophy," said Lord Avondale, "should Miss Melbourne not be found?"

“Most undoubtedly I do,” answered her ladyship. “Have I not told you that I think that the most likely place to find her at.”

“Ridiculous!” said Lord Avondale; “there is not the shadow of probability in what you say. It is merely a subterfuge to excuse your want of feeling at such a moment as this. I am shocked at you.”

Lady Avondale replied only by a laugh, and soon afterwards retired to her dressing-room.

Dr. Melbourne did not return until near ten, and then found that Edward was not come back; nor had any tidings been heard of Seraphina. He threw himself upon a chair in the drawing-room, in an agony of distress, and re-

mained there without the power of stirring, for nearly half an hour, when he was interrupted by the entrance of Captain Pembroke, who had just returned from Bow Street, whither he had been with Lord Avondale, to put an enquiry on foot, in order to ascertain by what nefarious means Miss Melbourne had been spirited away.

At this office they had found a man under examination who had been stopped at Sir R. H—'s, the bankers, on suspicion of having forged a draft upon that firm. It was for two hundred pounds, and signed Seraphina Melbourne; but in a hand-writing very different from the fair characters generally made use of by that elegant creature.

Lord Avondale and Captain Pembroke

were too little acquainted with Seraphina's writing to form any judgment as to the resemblance, but justly supposing that this draft would lead to a discovery of the whole dark affair, they hastened back to St. James's Square, in hopes of finding Dr. Melbourne or Edward to substantiate the charge.

Any clue that promised to lead to a discovery of his darling was eagerly caught at by Dr. Melbourne, and he arose to accompany the two gentlemen back to Bow Street.

Lord Avondale's carriage was waiting at the door, and as they went to get into it, they saw Lady Avondale's coach had drawn up; and presently they beheld her unthinking ladyship attired in the costume of a Turkish Sul-

tana, pass through the hall, and get into it.

“Is it possible,” exclaimed Dr. Melbourne, “that there can be a creature so unfeeling as that !”

“It is indeed, too possible,” replied Lord Avondale, sighing ; “but such are the fatal effects of dissipation on the female mind. Sophy is no longer any thing more than the shadow of what she was. The beautiful outside remains, but the informing mind is perverted and destroyed.”

The gentlemen now got into the carriage, and it drove to Bow Street.

It is time now to return to Edward, who had continued his search for No. 27, with unwearied diligence for several hours, but without success.

At length he was so fortunate as to see the very coach drive upon a stand where he had been making enquiry, and he instantly hailed it. He got into the vehicle immediately to secure possession, and then began to question the man as to the lady and her servant that he took up about eleven o'clock, at Lord Avondale's, in St. James's Square.

At first the man positively denied all recollection of any such fare, but on being threatened by Edward if he did not discover what he knew, and farther induced by a *douceur* of five guineas, he owned that he had driven such a lady as Edward described, to Albemarle Street, where she got out, and he did not know which house she went into.

On being farther questioned, how-

ever, he acknowledged that he believed she went into one at the top of the street.

Edward ordered the coachman to drive him to the spot where he set the lady down, and to beware of deceiving him. The man got on the box, and drove to Albemarle Street. He stopped, however, at the end next Piccadilly, and came and opened the coach door.

“Is this the very spot where you set the ladies down?”

The man hesitated.

“Beware,” said Edward, “how you trifle with me. This is an affair of high consequence.”

The man twirled his hat upon his thumbs, and hoped his honour would not hurt a poor fellow who had a large

family dependent upon him, and he would discover all.

Edward promised he would not hurt him. On the contrary, he should be amply rewarded.

The man then acknowledged, that after he had set the lady down, he saw her and her servant enter a large house, at a little distance from the place where he set her down, and thinking it had rather a suspicious appearance, he stopped his coach at a public-house door just by, and stood at the door to observe when she would come out again. "For you must know," added the man, with a significant nod, "my mind *mis-gived* me, that there was some intrigue at the bottom, because the lady was such a pretty lady. So while I was

waiting there, a queer looking man came up to me, and putting ten guineas into my hand, he bid me go about my business, and hold my tongue, and then I was convinced I was right. So I said I don't know what you mean, sir, about holding my tongue, and then he said, why, if you are asked any thing about the lady you set down just now, you must not own you know any thing about the matter. The servant that called your coach took your number, so get off into the city as fast as you can. And I did so, please your honor; but all my fares that day laid at this end of the town, and I was so tired in the evening when you seed me, that I turned to the first stand I came to. So that, sir, is the long and the short of the matter,

and I hope your honor won't own that *I peached*, 'cause you see if that queer old jockey that gived me the ten guineas ever comes to know it, he will be apt to do me a mischief."

"You may depend upon protection, should your evidence be thought necessary," answered Edward.

The man now let down the step, and as he did so, a small piece of paper dropped on the ground; Edward perceived and stooped for it. On examining it, he found it was the piece of a letter torn off, which contained a direction: it was to No. 27, Albemarle Street; and Edward no longer doubted that such must be the place where Seraphina went to, and that she had dropped the direction whilst in the

coach. He therefore paid the man, and made immediately to that house. He found it all enveloped in darkness, and having knocked several times at the door, was almost ready to believe that it was uninhabited. However, he made another trial, and knocked a thundering rap at the door, which was then slowly opened by an elderly woman.

“I want Miss Melbourne,” said he, in a tone of authority.

“There is no such person lives here,” answered the woman, and was going to shut the door.

“Take care,” said Edward, “I will not be trifled with. The lady I name came here this morning, attended by her servant, and I insist upon seeing her.”

"I'll go and ask my master," said the woman, alarmed at Edward's manner, who immediately pushed forward into the hall.

Whilst he was standing there, he looked up, and perceived a figure in white, leaning over the balustrades of a gallery, that looked into the hall.

Whilst the woman was gone into a parlour, the person in the gallery said distinctly, in a whisper, "*Seraphina.*" Edward looked up, but at that moment the woman returned with her master, and the figure in white disappeared. The man who came out to speak to Edward was a foreigner of the most hideous aspect. He told Edward he must have been misinformed, as no such lady as he asked for had ever been at that

house. Edward insisted upon it that he was right, and produced the direction he had found. The man took the paper in his hand, as if to examine it, but setting his candle to it, he instantly destroyed it.

“It is very well, sir,” said Edward, “that action proves your iniquity, and you shall soon hear from an authority you cannot resist.”

So saying, he flung out of the house, and the door was shut after him. Full of a mingled sensation of terror and anger, he was bending his steps towards St. James's Square, but recollecting himself, he turned back ere he had reached half the length of the street, and walking on the opposite side of the way, he reconnoitered the dreary dwelling. It was an immense house, with a

great number of windows, some of which looked into a garden at the end. The whole appeared in the most wretched state of repair, though its dimensions seemed to speak of the grandeur of other times.

“Heavens!” ejaculated Edward, “and does that horrid mansion contain my adored Seraphina! What may not that angelic creature have endured since born on the wings of benevolence, she flew to succour the accursed hypocrite who pretended distress only to ensnare her.”

Whilst he was looking very earnestly at the house, a female figure appeared at one of the upper windows, with a light. Observing that Edward was looking at her, she waved her hand, and opening

the window gently, she put a small packet out, suspended by a string. Edward immediately crossed the way, and received the welcome message. As soon as he had got it safe, the figure waved her hand again, as much as to say be gone.

Edward understood the hint, and departed. He took the note he had received to a lamp, and read the following words :

“ Depart now, but if you are a friend of Miss Melbourne’s, return exactly at twelve o’clock this night, and assist her in her escape. Stand on the opposite side of the way until I give the signal, then cross over and place yourself close to the area next the dead wall. Bring no assistant : if we are found out it will

be fatal, and force from without will prove death to those within.

“AN UNKNOWN FRIEND.”

Edward read the friendly note with joy and astonishment. He was now convinced that Seraphina was indeed in the house, and comforted by learning that she was not without a friend. Yet he could not forbear trembling when he recollected the dreadful words, that any attempt at force from without would prove fatal to those within. “Seraphina’s *life* was then in danger. Heavens what an idea !” and he struck his hand upon his forehead in an agony of distress ; yet remembering the caution in the note, he determined to act as that directed, and he walked up one street and down another, until the eventful

hour drew near. The chimes of St. James's palace had struck the three-quarters after eleven, and Edward was making the best of his way to his appointment, when he was overtaken by Sir Percival Egerton in his masquerade habit.

"Ha! Pembroke," said he, "where are you going? Have you been to Claredown House?"

"No," replied Edward, "nor am I going; so pray don't let me detain you, Sir Percival."

"Nay, my dear fellow," replied the rattle, "you don't detain me, I assure you, for I have been there, and am only going home to Dover Street to change my dress, that the knowing ones may not smoke me. My rascals of servants

were not to be found, so I walked. But how came you not to be at the masquerade to-night? Your sister and the divine Seraphina are the very soul of the *fête*."

"*Seraphina!*" replied Edward. "Miss Melbourne is not at Claredown House, I am sure."

"Ah! my dear fellow," said Sir Percival, "for once your sapience is mistaken, for I have been conversing with Miss Melbourne these three quarters of an hour. The lovely girl is attired in a dress exactly suited to her; she is Hebe presenting nectar to the gods."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Edward, "far rather would I endure the torture I now do for the safety of that

divine girl, than believe her to be the creature you represent her."

"Apprehensions for the safety of Miss Melbourne, did you say?" exclaimed Sir Percival. "Oh, tell me when, where, and let me fly to her succour."

"If you are really anxious for Miss Melbourne's safety," replied Edward, "you must not accompany me, nor must you longer detain me, as the hour is come in which I am to assist in her escape. Read this note," said he, putting the one he had just received, into Sir Percival's hand. He then hastily bid him good night, and proceeded to Albemarle Street.

Sir Percival read the note by the light of

the nearest lamp, and then hastened after Edward, whom he followed at a distance too considerable to be perceived.

As Edward reached the appointed spot, the palace clock struck twelve, and in a few minutes afterwards, he perceived a light come to the upper window where he had before seen the friendly figure.

It appeared again, and waving its hand, instantly vanished.

Edward understood this to be the signal for him to take his station at the area gate. He did so, and had waited about a quarter of an hour in silent anxiety, for not a creature appeared any where in the street, when a creaking noise in the area below made him start. It proceeded from a door,

whose hinges being rusty, opened with difficulty ; it yielded however, at last, to the efforts from within, and two female forms appeared gently stealing along.

They approached the steps that led to the gate where Edward stood. His heart bounded with joy, for he plainly perceived that one of them was Seraphina.

They ascended the steps, and one of them said, " Open the gate with this key."

Edward attempted the task, but in vain ; the wards were so rusted by disuse, that it was impossible. He endeavoured to force the gate, but it would not yield, and the attempt occasioned a noise that made the prisoners tremble.

" Forbear," said the former speaker ;

“ a noise will be fatal. Assist us to climb over the rails.”

Edward spread out his arms and received Seraphina safely in them ; but scarcely had he time to set her on the ground, when a window in the second story was opened, and her companion exclaimed, “ Oh, save me, or I am lost indeed !”

Another arm was, however, extended to her assistance, and she was over the rails before Edward was well aware of the danger.

The gentleman who had so providentially lent his aid, was no other than Sir Percival Egerton, who, having watched the progress of the adventure at a distance, saw the light approach

the window above, and judging that it threatened a discovery, he ran across the way, and thus liberated the young woman who was the partner of Seraphina's flight, just in time to save her from the fatal effects of a blunderbuss which was discharged from the upper window at the very instant she had been removed beyond its reach.

Without waiting a moment, the fugitives proceeded towards Piccadilly, where a hackney-coach luckily passing at the moment, it was hailed by Sir Percival Egerton, and the party got in.

As soon as they felt in safety, they all spoke at the same time. As soon as Seraphina heard Edward's voice, she exclaimed in an ecstasy, " Oh,

Edward! is that you?" and immediately fainted in his arms.

The efforts of the young woman and the two gentlemen soon recovered her, and she opened her eyes. "Where am I?" said she. "Have I escaped that den of murderers?"

"You are in safety, my sweet young lady," replied the woman who accompanied her.

The coach now stopped at Lord Avondale's house, and the party alighted.

When Seraphina attempted to set her foot to the ground, she had nearly fallen, but was caught by Sir Percival, and born between him and Edward into the house, and carried between them into her own apartment, where

she would have sadly missed the tender care of her faithful Evans, had not her kind deliverer shewn herself an adept in the art of tender nursing.

The tidings soon ran through the house of Miss Melbourne's escape and return; and although not a single particular was known, a thousand incoherent stories were invented by the servants—some saying she had been carried off by force, by a party of gipsies who intended to murder her—a fate that had befallen poor Mrs. Evans; whilst others said she had eloped from the masquerade, whither she had gone *incog.* and having been detected by Mr. Edward Pembroke, she had been brought back, together with her lover, and was to be married the next

morning, and he was to be kept in custody until that time. Sir Percival Egerton's appearing in his masquerade habit, seemed to corroborate this statement.

About half an hour after Seraphina's arrival in St. James's Square, Dr. Melbourne came home, accompanied by Lord Avondale and Captain Pembroke, all of whom had been busily employed in putting things into a proper train, in order to detect the whole scheme of villainy which had been practised against poor Seraphina.

A great deal had transpired on the examination of the man who was in custody, and they flattered themselves that they should soon be able to trace

Seraphina, through his means, at his next examination. But what was the joy of Dr. Melbourne when he found that his beloved ward was returned! He ran up to her chamber, but she had just fallen into a slumber, and her attentive nurse would not suffer him to enter. He enquired, however, for poor Mrs. Evans.

The young woman told him that she did not know what was become of that faithful servant, but she was sure, at least, that she was not left in the house they had escaped from.

Consideration for the fatigue the young woman had sustained, made Dr. Melbourne wave all farther enquiries for that night, and he returned down stairs, where the friends mutually con-

gratulated each other on the happy termination of their search.

Dr. Melbourne wrote a note to Lord Storrondale, and sent it, although at so late an hour, to his house, in order that his lordship might receive it the moment he awoke in the morning.

The messenger, however, found his lordship still in his library, counting the tedious hours until some tidings of his lost grand-daughter should reach him.

His joy at hearing of her restoration was, therefore, great indeed, and he retired to bed satisfied, although he knew nothing more than that Seraphina was safe.

CHAP. XVII.

A General Elucidation of Mystery.

WHEN Seraphina awoke in the morning, she found the young woman who had effected her escape for her, sitting by her bed-side, where she had passed the night. She enquired with affectionate solicitude, after her health.

Seraphina thanked her, and assured her that she felt nothing to complain of but weakness, owing to the great anx-

iety and terror she had suffered ; she therefore insisted upon rising that she might satisfy Dr. Melbourne how well she was.

She did so, and with the assistance of the friendly Maria, was soon ready to descend into the breakfast-parlour.

It is time now to inform the reader who this Maria was.—It may be remembered that Seraphina assisted an unfortunate young woman who was knocked down by a carriage, and conveyed her to her home. This, then, was that identical person, and Seraphina owed the preservation of her life, to the grateful impression made upon that girl's heart by her benevolent condescension to her.

Seraphina found Edward alone in the

breakfast-parlour when she entered it, and holding out her hand to him, she endeavoured to express her gratitude for his providential assistance in the hour of danger ; her feelings were, however, too much for her, and she burst into tears.

Affected beyond measure by seeing her weep, Edward raised Seraphina's hand to his lips, but instantly checking himself, he let it drop again, and assured her with an assumed coldness, that he considered himself so truly her *brother*, that to become her protector was a duty he felt incumbent upon him, nor was it more his duty than his inclination, since to contribute to her happiness was the only means of becoming happy himself.

Seraphina felt hurt at the formality of Edward's behaviour, and she secretly feared that he had less cordiality towards her than before she came to London.

These unpleasant reflections were interrupted by Dr. Melbourne's entrance, who folded his darling girl to his paternal bosom the moment he saw her, and thanked Heaven for her preservation.

Lord Avondale soon after joined the party, but her ladyship, who had not returned from the masquerade until five in the morning, was still in her bed.

As soon as Seraphina had sufficiently recovered her emotion, and taken the refreshment of breakfast, she related the following particulars at Dr. Melbourne's request :

When the coach stopped in Albe-

marle Street, according to the direction on the petition, Seraphina and Mrs. Evans got out of it, and the latter knocked at the door of the house the number pointed out to her.

A woman opened the door, and courtesying low, told them the person who had addressed the petition, was very ill, and begged the lady would have the goodness to step into the room where she lay, without her attendant, as the person was of high rank, and used to better days.

From that moment, Seraphina knew nothing of what became of Mrs. Evans, for she followed the woman through several apartments, until she reached one, the windows of which were entirely shaded by thick blinds, so that only a

faint light was perceivable. On a sofa, sat a lady with a deep veil thrown over her.

She rose at Seraphina's entrance, and throwing it off her face, shewed the features of the eldest of the foreigners who had alarmed her so much at the Opera.

A smile of triumph lit up her countenance as she looked upon her victim. "Poor fly!" said she, in Italian, "I have caught thee in the flimsy net of thine own credulity."

At first, Seraphina was too much overcome by surprise and terror to be able to answer, but recollecting herself that the person who spoke to her, was a total stranger, she still imagined some great mistake must have occasioned her

present disagreeable situation ; she therefore exerted herself, and replied in the same language, that being wholly unconscious how she could have offended the lady before her, she flattered herself that she mistook her for some other person.

“ Oh, no,” replied the fiend, with a demoniac laugh ; “ I know you too well to mistake you. Emily Storron-dale was my detested rival, and you are her offspring. *She* perished beneath the arm of my just vengeance, but you escaped—it was for a time only however. You are now in my power, and my hatred shall be glutted. You have dared to rival my daughter, the peerless Olivia, with the faithless Marquis of Claredown ; she therefore shall enjoy

the pleasure of beholding you expire. In this house you received your breath—in this house you shall resign it; prepare, therefore, to die, for the moments are precious. I have taken my measures too securely to dread detection; even your friend Lady Avondale is too much involved in the labyrinth of debt, through my arts, to dare to open her lips against me. Through her means, I have learned all the machinations of that canting old parson to restore you to your rights; they are all vain however—he never can establish any claim, since every document relative to your birth, are in my hands; and a child of your father's, but not of your mother's shall enjoy the titles and estates of Cremona."

Whilst the wicked Marrinelli was speaking, for it was herself, Seraphina stood the very image of horror; her limbs seemed to stiffen, and every faculty to be suspended.

Marrinelli gave her a look of scorn, and waving her hand, bid her to take possession of her prison, and was going out of the apartment.

“At least, let me speak to my attendant,” said Seraphina, trembling; “allow me *that* consolation.”

“Your attendant will be taken care of,” answered the virago; “but we are not such children as to suffer a communication between you.” She spoke, and instantly disappeared.

Seraphina sunk upon the sofa, and remained in a torpor for several mi-

nutes ; at length the magnanimity of her soul rose above the painful trial of the moment, and she threw herself on her knees to implore the protection of which she stood so much in need, and which Heaven alone could bestow.

“ Why should I fear ? ” said the sweet girl, as she arose from her knees. “ Is not God equal to every exigence of his dependent creatures ? That wicked woman threatens me, but can she fulfil her vengeance, unless permitted by His divine authority ? ”

The confidence in her Maker thus awakened, Seraphina seemed no longer in the power of a cruel enemy, but relying on the promises that never fail those who trust in them, she rose above the malice of her fate.—Such is

the force of religion in the human heart, it softens the sharpest afflictions, and dissipates every terror with which mortality is beset.

Seraphina walked about the gloomy apartment, sometimes listening to the slight noises that were heard at a distant part of the house, and sometimes clasping her hands together, and uttering a prayer to Heaven for her deliverance.

Several weary hours wore away in this manner; the evening at length closed in, and the apartment where she was confined, became totally dark. Still no one appeared, nor did any sound break the stillness that reigned around.

Fatigued and exhausted with agita-

tion, fasting, and terror, Seraphina sunk down upon the sofa, and lost all recollection of her misery in the arms of sleep. How long she lay in that state, she knew not, but she was roused from her slumber by a gentle touch upon her arm, and on opening her eyes, she beheld a young woman standing before her with a taper in her hand.

“ Miss Melbourne,” said she, “ exert your fortitude, and endeavour to listen to a friend who would fain save you from destruction, but who must expose her own life by attempting it. Have you resolution to appear before a murderer ?”

Seraphina shuddered, but replied, that if it was necessary for her safety, she would do it.

“ I will then explain myself,” said the young woman. “ You see before you an unfortunate creature, who has been nurtured in wickedness from her earliest recollection, but who has instinctively loved virtue, and sighed to be admitted into the society of the good. The other evening, when returning from an errand on which I had been sent by my cruel father, I was followed and insulted by a young gentleman who was nearly intoxicated. The lateness of the hour, and my unprotected state, made him laugh at the repulses I gave him. Certain that if he followed me home, my father would sacrifice me to his brutality, I made an effort to cross Bruton Street, at the moment several carriages were coming rapidly along, in hopes of losing my troublesome follower. One of the

carriages, however, knocked me down, and I know not what might have been my fate, had not you, amiable Miss Melbourne, snatched me from the danger that threatened me."

As the young woman came to that part of her recital, Seraphina started, and looking up in her face, recollected the person she had rescued on the preceding evening.

The young woman continued. "At first," said she, "I was ignorant to whom I was indebted, for I thought you had been Lady Avondale; but the impression made upon my father when he looked at you, convinced me that you were not her ladyship, for he had spoken to her, and he said to my mother, (or at least to her I am forced to

call my mother,) that your countenance had frightened him, you were so like Lady Cremona. 'Then,' said she, 'that is certainly her child, and by this lucky chance, if we can but get her into our power, the thousand pounds will be ours that Signora Marrinelli has so often promised to bestow on those who should put that child into her hands.' 'She is so charitable,' said my father, 'we may easily trepan her; she will swallow the bait, depend upon it.' It was therefore agreed between the two, that a letter should be sent next morning to Signora Marrinelli, to inform her of the circumstance, and ask her advice. I then endeavoured to intercede for you, but only got called whining hypocrite for my pains, and fearful of my betray-

ing the secret, they have confined me to the house ever since, and denied me the use of pen and ink, excluding me from all their consultations. However, by dint of listening, I have obtained all the information I could, and more than I ever suspected. I have not time now for particulars; suffice it to say, that I know it is agreed between the diabolical Marrinelli and her daughter Olivia, to destroy you. My father is the agent that is to accomplish the dreadful purpose, and there is not any thing he would not do to obtain *money*. He is nevertheless, like all other guilty people, extremely afraid of ghosts. Your resemblance to the picture of Lady Cremona that hangs in the large drawing-room, is striking enough to convince

me, who never saw that unfortunate lady, that you may personate her with ease, and if you will follow my advice, and wrap yourself in this black mantle, which has been brought here this night by some of the masqueraders from Clarendon House—for this place, dilapidated as it appears, is the nightly rendezvous of half the gamblers in London. If you do that, I say, and follow me, I will engage to terrify my father so that he shall not dare to stir out of his room to-night. He is now sleeping on a couch in a room adjoining the drawing-room, which is his usual custom when he expects to sit up late.

To-night Marrinelli and Olivia are to return hither from the masquerade, as the latter is to enjoy the triumph of

seeing your distress before the final close of it, but I will disappoint her malice. You saved me, my sweet young lady, and I will shew the gratitude I feel, by risking my life in your defence. Lose no time, therefore, but follow me, it is absolutely necessary that you should pass the room where my father is sleeping; he wakes with the slightest noise. You must therefore go alone, take the taper in your hand, and if he wakes, wave it over his head, and point to the room behind you. In his terror he will call for me; you must then pass on, and when you have got into the next room, extinguish your light, and wait for me."

Seraphina most thankfully adopted the friendly Maria's scheme, and wrap-

ped herself in the mantle, and letting down her long hair to hang deshevelled over her shoulders, she followed her guide with trembling steps, until she reached the door of the room where the diabolical Perico was snatching a temporary slumber.

Maria then drew back, and Seraphina proceeded ; the paleness of her countenance, occasioned by the terror she felt, accorded well with the idea of a perturbed spirit, and Perico, whose wicked imagination had been dwelling upon all the horrors of projected murder, started at the slight noise Seraphina made in opening the door. His hair stood erect, and large drops of agony bedewed his forehead, when he beheld the horrid phantom before him.

"Oh, Santa Maria!" exclaimed he, as Seraphina passed him, and waving her hand, pointed to the door by which she had entered.

He then covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud, whilst the trembling object of his terror lost no time in availing herself of that moment to escape, and entering the next chamber, extinguished her light as she had been directed.

Maria then approached her father, and asked him the cause of his groans.

"Oh I have seen her, I have seen her!" said he, "she passed through the wall just at that spot," pointing to the part of the room opposite to him.

"Who have you seen?" asked Maria, with feigned surprise.

“ Lady Emily ! Lady Emily ! ” answered he. “ Oh I cannot, will not kill her child.”

“ You have been deceived by some frightful dream,” said Maria, “ but I wish you would not talk of killing people, it sounds so horrid.”

“ Hold your tongue, girl,” answered the old man, “ and go about your business. Get the things ready for the ladies.”

“ I will, father,” replied she, and gladly obeyed the mandate.

She found Seraphina trembling in the next room, and making signs to her not to speak, and follow her ; they both in silence descended a back staircase, until they came to the bottom of the house. Maria then ventured to whisper that a

friend was in waiting to assist them, and opening the door that led to the area, they appeared to Edward, as has already been related.

It may be readily imagined with what a degree of horror Dr. Melbourne and the rest of the party listened to this dreadful recital.

The moment it was finished, they unanimously exclaimed, that prompt measures ought to be instantly adopted to bring those monsters to justice.

“ But,” said Dr. Melbourne, “ you mention nothing of the draft you gave for an hundred pounds. It was extorted from you by terror, I suppose. The man is in custody at Bow Street.”

Seraphina assured the doctor, that she

had never given any draft, nor ever been asked for one.

This was a fresh source of surprise, but they determined to lose no time in conjectures, but instantly to procure a search-warrant for the dreadful den of iniquity.

By their active exertions, the wretches were soon in custody, and Perico, with the true spirit of a villain, immediately turned King's evidence, and discovered a tale of horror dreadful to think upon.

To keep the thread of the story distinct and plain, his confession may as well be inserted in this place.

He deposed, that he had lived servant with the late Earl of Cremona before his marriage, and that although he

bore the name of Perico, he was the brother of the detested Marrinelli. He described his late lord as a man of weak intellects, easily duped by the artful and designing, and declared, that from the first of his living with him he had possessed his unlimited confidence.

Lord Cremona became acquainted with Lady Emily Storrondale in Italy, where Lady Storrondale her mother went to reside, on being separated from her husband.

The countess was very partial to Lord Cremona, and in a manner obliged her daughter to marry him. She did not indeed use force, but the temper of Lady Emily was so gentle and obedient, that to know a thing was wished by her mother, was sufficient to induce her to

do it, however reluctant she might feel. Lord Cremona was anxious to marry Lady Emily, although he perceived he was not the object of her choice, and the match was concluded accordingly.

It was, as might be expected, very miserable, as Lord Cremona did not forget to retaliate upon his wife for her indifference, and he treated her with cruelty, notwithstanding her obedience and gentleness, which was never surpassed. Lady Storrondale saw the mischief she had occasioned, and she broke her heart in consequence.

After her death, Lord and Lady Cremona came to England, and then commenced his intimacy with Marrinelli, and she never rested until she had destroyed the small remains of regard Lord

Cremona retained for his wife; and so thoroughly was she abandoned by her cruel husband, that the Italian virago, with the aid of her accomplice, Perico, destroyed the unfortunate Emily, as has already been stated.

The child, however, escaped by the means of Lady Cremona's maid, and notwithstanding all their vigilance, they could not trace it until it was in safety. The papers which should have been delivered to the Lord Chancellor were obtained by the artful Perico, of the young woman to whom they were entrusted, to whom he immediately paid his addresses, and by dint of flattery obtained her hand in marriage: thus silencing her for ever.

Lord Cremona soon after these events

returned to Italy, his conscience became a burthen to him too great to bear, and his faithful valet fearful he should criminate him in some of his raving fits, took care to dispatch him by poison. He possessed all the papers of consequence belonging to his lord, and returning to England, took possession of his magnificent town house, the front of which he kept shut up, and as the estates were in Chancery, he kept quiet and unsuspected possession of it until the present time.

The claimant who had lately appeared to the Cremona estate was a girl, daughter of Lord Cremona, by Marri-nelli, who possessing all the documents necessary to prove the birth of Seraphina, entertained little doubt of substantiating her claims.

When Seraphina appeared at Lord Storrondale's, however, an old servant recognized the striking likeness to her mother, and reported it to Perico, who was terrified at the news. His wife, whom he had long ago forsaken, and left to the most abject poverty, was now diligently sought for, but she was not found until after her confession to Dr. Melbourne had elucidated a part of the mystery.

Her disappearance soon after the doctor's departure, was occasioned by her husband's having her conveyed to a mad-house, whence it was impossible she should escape.

In a receptacle of the same kind, poor Mrs. Evans was found by Perico's direction, whither she had been con-

veyed the day of Seraphina's disappearance, after they had obtained the contents of her pockets, in which Seraphina's check-book was found, and by that means the draft was forged which was stopped upon the suspected man.

Lord Claredown's attention to Seraphina had hastened her fate, as Olivia's jealousy had added fuel to the already raging fire of vengeance, and she had written to Lady Avondale that letter which Perico delivered, and which procured her the supply of cash she wanted. She had been merely required to promise, when she attended the mysterious appointment, that whenever Seraphina and her maid should both go out together, Lady Avondale would procure the casket containing her jewels, from

her apartment, and deliver it to the person who should be sent for it, intimating, that the transaction had Miss Melbourne's secret approbation.

This nefarious task was performed by her ladyship's agent the morning Seraphina went on her charitable mission, and the casket delivered to Perico, who left a note to Lady Avondale, desiring her ladyship to draw for *no more* money, as she might think herself well off if she was not *exposed*.

Mortified, distressed, and ashamed, Lady Avondale felt the compunction ever attendant on guilt, and found, when it was too late, that every step in the paths of vice leads to misery ; but she determined to drown her vexation in dissipation, and therefore persisted in

going to the masquerade, although Seraphina's disappearance alarmed her more than it did any body else.

Her terror when the dreadful discovery was made, may be imagined, and she fled from it, unable to bear the shame and obloquy that awaited her. She went not, however, to any companion in vice, but retired into an obscure corner to meditate with anguish on her folly.—A dreadful example of the danger of a propensity to gaming.

It is unnecessary to add that Seraphina was immediately acknowledged by her grandfather, and presented to the world as Countess of Cremona in her own right, and heiress to the immense estates pertaining to that title.

The Marquis of Claredown made

ormal proposals to her grandfather for the lovely Seraphina, and that nobleman seeing no objection to such a proportionate union, gave his consent, on condition that Seraphina should approve the proposal.

When Edward heard this, his heart died within him. He knew he had nothing to offer worthy of her attention, but an affectionate heart, and the shining qualities of the marquis left him no doubt that Seraphina already admired him. He therefore determined to go to the Indies, and without putting any one in his confidence, made every preparation for his voyage.

When every thing was ready, he came to take leave of Seraphina, who was overwhelmed with sorrow at the

bare idea, and with an energy not to be resisted, implored him to tell her his reason for this strange resolution.

At length he confessed that he could not support the sight of her union with the Marquis of Claredown; for although hopeless of a return, he had ever loved her, as the sole object of every wish in this life:

Seraphina started and blushed.—“Heavens, Edward!” exclaimed she, “is it possible you could suppose I would marry Lord Claredown without consulting you? Had I ever thought of him, *you* would have been my first confidant. But believe me, I have seen too much of the votaries of fashion to trust my happiness in the hands of one of them.—No,” continued she, blushing

and looking down, “ *that* is in the keeping of one who alone is worthy to possess an undivided heart. I am a novice in love, Edward; but if to prefer you to all the world—to dread your displeasure, and rejoice in your approbation, be worthy of that name, I love Edward Pembroke.”

The moment she spoke this, she hid her face in her hands, and was leaving the room, but Edward caught her hand. “ Stay one moment, lovely Seraphina,” said he. “ To be beloved by you is too much happiness for any mortal without alloy; I am therefore, in this ecstatic moment, obliged to own that I dare not hope for the approbation of your friends. My sister’s conduct, my own insignificance—all, all forbid the union; and I

must still depart, and even entreat you to forget me."

"You may entreat if you like," said she, smiling, "but for once I will venture to disobey my tutor. My grandfather has this morning declared, when I refused the marquis, that *my choice* shall rule his. Dr. Melbourne loves you, and I love you," added she, blushing; "therefore if you *will* go to the Indies, it is your own fault."

Edward seized her hand, and pressed it to his lips, and the scene concluded as love scenes generally do.

Every thing was soon after arranged to the satisfaction of all parties.—Lady Cremona was united to Edward, and the good-natured Sir Percival Egerton, when he found all his hopes were gone of

obtaining Seraphina, paid his addresses to the sprightly Miss Delauny.

The amiable Mrs. Melbourne and Fanny Pembroke came to town on the joyful occasion, and Miss Pembroke soon saw the penitent marquis at her feet.

After sometime, all parties were united, and the marchioness became a woman of rank and fashion, without being either dissipated or a gambler.

In the course of a few years, Lady Avondale died of a decline, and thus rid her family of the painful task of beholding her a prey to sorrow and remorse.

The wicked agents of the devil met with the punishment due to their crimes, and ended their days in ignominy and wretchedness ; but good Mrs. Evans

lived long and happily, and she frequently reminded Seraphina of the danger of fashion. "Ah! my lady," would she say, "it's a good thing you have got Mr. Edward to take care of you, for if you had married one of those heathen lords, perhaps you would have turned out just like poor Lady Avondale; but thank Heaven, he allows of none of their wicked goings on—playing at cards on Sunday, and running about half naked to masquerades, and nobody knows where, without pockets by their sides, or sense in their noddles. No, no; he has got a good lady and he will keep her so. To be sure, you are very modest and pious, and all that; but then 'Evil communication corrupts good manners' you know—poor Sophy for

that. I often think about your saying,
"Don't make yourself particular, Evans."
Lack-a-day! if I had not, the mad-
house where those wicked ones sent
me, would have been good enough for
me."

THE END.

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