DIURNAL EVENTS.

A NOVEL.

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DIURNAL EVENTS;

OR THE

Antipodes to Romance.

A Novel.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE SAILOR AND SOLDIER BOY.

Hail, Social Life! into thy pleasing bounds
Again I come, to pay the common stock
My share of service, and, in glad return,
To taste thy comforts, thy protected joys. THOMSON.

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DIURNAL EVENTS.

CHAPTER I.

AT the appointed hour the united parties proceeded to Mrs. Delmore's garden, where a great many fashionables were already assembled, amongst whom Caroline soon perceived, and pointed out to her sister, the lovely, though haughty East-Indian. As Elinor, leaning on Mortimer's arm, passed her on the terrace, she cast a look of mingled *hauteur* and disdain upon them; he did not however appear to observe her, but seemed more than usually attentive to his companion, and particularly anxious to place

her and her little nephew in the most advantageous station for viewing the whole of the launch.

Several of the company had preferred a small summer-house, which also overlooked the sea, amongst whom was the East-Indian. Mr. Egerton remarking it to Caroline, she immediately bent her steps thither, accompanied by him. Miss Alesford looked attentively at her as she entered; and Caroline, as she seated herself by lady Egerton, overheard lady Tankerville whisper her friend—"That is the youngest sister."

Lady Egerton, not seeing Elinor, now inquired of her sister where she had left her—"Quite safe with major Mortimer," she replied, "at the other end of the terrace; look, there they both are, with my brother and little Edward, mounted in full view on the top of that high garden-chair. What a convenient seat they have chosen, and how very comfortable they look!"

Caroline,

Caroline, as she concluded, involuntarily cast a glance towards the East-Indian, whom she observed change colour, and her companion hurrying her from the summer-house, they approached the spot where Elinor was sitting. In another moment she saw Mortimer quit his station, and offer it to a young lady near him, who instantly accepted it, whilst he retreated as quickly as possible from the garden. Her curiosity was again much raised to discover why he left her sister so suddenly; she hastened from the summer-house, still accompanied by Mr. Egerton, and darting past the foreigner, who appeared to recoil from the touch even of her garments, was quickly beside Elinor, of whom she inquired if there were room for her, as the terrace was lined with spectators, and the place she had quitted was so insupportably hot, it was nearly suffocating?

"You shall have my seat," said Mr. Coleridge, "where you will be able to see

every thing to the greatest advantage;" and immediately dismounting from his high station, he assisted her to ascend.

"And what is become of Mortimer?" said Caroline to her sister, who was looking earnestly towards the water.

"He is yonder," replied Elinor, pointing to a boat now rowing towards them, "with some other gentlemen."

"One of whom is Clarenville," returned Caroline. "But look, Elinor, there is our friend the East-Indian; she has at length squeezed herself into a convenient situation for seeing and being seen; and now you must look again at the boat, which contains the noble dragoon, who is kissing his hand to you with all proper fervency. There, that will do, my good friend," she continued, as she nodded to Mortimer; "you have had one bow in return for those killing salutations; now rest yourself, and allow some of your companions the same honour."

Clarenville, as the boat passed, bowed

to

to the sisters, and Caroline exclaimed—"I shall insist on Mortimer's taking a few lessons in that graceful art, wherein Clarenville has attained perfection."

"These gentlemen," said an elderly naval officer, who was standing near, "would be wiser, if, instead of lingering under this wall, they would row to the other side of the ship. If she should go off before they were safely past her, I would not answer for their safety."

Scarcely had he spoken when a loud shout proclaimed all was ready, and in another instant the noble vessel dipped her head into the water. Several piercing shrieks from the ladies present, and the reiterated cry of "the boat, the boat!" made Elinor, who had been engaged in encouraging little Edward, much terrified by the noise, hastily look towards the sea, where she perceived the boat that contained Mortimer and his companions driving rapidly before the

ship, which threatened every moment to overwhelm it.

"Mortimer is drowned!" issued with a shriek from the lips of the East-Indian, as she sunk senseless into the arms of her friend.

All was now confusion; the terrace was quickly cleared, and in a few minutes every person had disappeared from the garden, except Elinor, who remained sitting on one of the steps she had descended by. Her hands were clasped together in silent agony; her countenance, on which the hue of death was imprinted, by its expression of fixed despair, terrified the little Edward, who, having been unconsciously lifted from his seat by the young lady sitting near him, had by her been taken to the house, and was now returning to seek his favourite.—"My dear aunty," he exclaimed, as, taking her hands, he endeavoured to draw her forward, "why don't you too come

and

and have some wine? Mrs. Delmore will give you a glass of it, if you like."

Elinor heard not—moved not; and the little fellow, looking piteously at her, continued—"Why don't you speak to me, aunt Elinor? What makes you look so grave? and your face too looks as white as that lady's did who died away just now. Dear, dear aunty, you are not going to die too, are you?" and poor Edward burst into tears.

General Clarenville now appearing, he ran hastily to meet him, crying—"Aunt Elinor is here, sir, but she wont, either look at or speak to me."

"Elinor, my sweet love! my darling Elinor!" said the general, rapidly approaching, and taking her cold, chilled hands in his, "be comforted; all danger is over, and Mortimer, thank Heaven, is safe."

Elinor started as, in a mournful and almost-inarticulate voice, she exclaimed—"Clarenville then only is lost!"

"God forbid!" returned the general; "my son never was in danger."

Elinor clasped her hands together, raised her eyes to Heaven, then, with a convulsive laugh, fell senseless to the ground.

Little Edward's loud shrieks first recalled the general to recollection, as, overpowered with surprise and agitation, he hung almost motionless over the lifeless form of Elinor. Observing a small watering-pot at a little distance, he now sprinkled a few drops on her deathlike countenance, and in a few moments had the happiness to see her eyes open, whilst a deep-drawn sigh announced returning animation.

A tear that now strayed down the sunburnt cheek of the general fell upon the hand of his favourite as it hung motionless over his arm; the sympathizing drop seemed to make its way straight to the heart of Elinor; for, starting as it fell, she raised her head to the shoulder

of

of the general, heaved another deep sigh, and burst into tears.

General Clarenville did not attempt to check them, convinced they would be of service to her, until perceiving them flow more gently, and hearing the voices of her mother and sister approaching, he whispered—"Yonder door will conduct you by a private way to the street in which we reside." Then putting little Edward's hand into hers, he supported her to it; and Elinor, then exerting herself to the utmost, hastened forward as swiftly as her trembling limbs would allow, when, arriving at the house, she gave Edward into the care of a servant, and retreated to her own room, where, throwing herself upon the bed, and concealing her burning face in the pillow, again gave a free course to her tears. Her agitation increased with every passing moment; and when Mrs. Belvington came to seek her, Elinor, unable to answer her mother's tender and anxious

inquiries, threw her arms around her neck, and almost hysterically sobbed aloud.

Mrs. Belvington attempted to sooth her by assurances of Mortimer's safety; but she knew not the true cause of her child's distress, and Elinor dared not reveal it to her mother.—"I must entreat you, my dear child," said Mrs. Belvington, after a few moments' silence, "not only for your own sake, but on mine and poor Mortimer's account, to endeavour at least to compose yourself; poor fellow! he is already sufficiently miserable in being obliged to leave S—— to-morrow, without the addition of leaving you ill, as he did the last time he left Hampshire; and that will be the case if you do not exert yourself to overcome this excessive agitation. I must leave you now to return to the general and Mrs. Clarenville, as they are anxiously expecting information of their dear Elinor;

shall

shall I say she will soon recover from the effects of her alarm?"

"Say that I am so already," cried Elinor, making a violent effort to restrain her tears; "tell them both so, my dear mother," she continued, as Mrs. Belvington was leaving the room; "and beg of my sister to come hither."

Caroline soon attended this summons; but as Elinor listened to her lingering steps, she could scarcely believe it to be her sister's usually-elastic bound which now approached her chamber; for never before had Elinor been in distress that the affectionate Caroline did not fly to sooth and console her. Slowly she opened the chamber-door, and gravely advancing, said—"I understand you wish to see me, Elinor."

"My dear Caroline," cried her sister, alarmed at her manner, "what is the matter that you look so unlike yourself?"

"I merely look grave in compliment

to you, Elinor, as general Clarenville tells me you were so extremely concerned for Mortimer's accident, even after he had informed you of its having proved so slight."

"Did general Clarenville say that was the cause of my agitation?" inquired Elinor, eagerly seizing her sister's hand.

"Certainly," replied Caroline, as she pettishly withdrew it; "and my mother, on her return from you, confirmed his account, and added, in a low voice to the general—'Though I am sorry for Elinor's sufferings, yet my heart is lighter on her account, as I am now convinced she returns Mortimer's affection, which, until this moment, has been, I own, a doubtful point to me."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Elinor, "did my mother say this to general Clarenville? what must he think of me?"

"Think!" interrupted Caroline, "why that you are the most deceitful girl in the

the universe; for I make no doubt he before believed with me, that you cared not a rush for Mortimer, and must now feel rather surprised at your violent emotion."

"I fear he must indeed think very ill of me," said Elinor, in an agitated tone; then seeing Caroline look earnestly at her, she continued, turning away her head as she spoke—"I wish you would tell me how the affair ended, as I saw nothing more than the beginning of it."

"You have to thank our kind friend Clarenville for the preservation of Mortimer's life," returned Caroline; "indeed, had it not been for his strength, activity, and presence of mind, none of the party would have been saved. I need not tell you, Clarenville, almost the instant you had returned his bow, sprang from that boat into another, which kept close under the wall of the terrace, whilst Mortimer and his companions rowed completely into the track they might have been certain

certain the vessel would take. I believe you did see the boat driven before the ship; but you saw not, as I did, Clarenville instantly row to their assistance, and at the hazard of his own life, catch the sinking Mortimer by the arm (for the boat by this time had filled with water), and succeed in drawing him into his own, whilst he directed the men to throw ropes out to the rest, till they could be taken up by others, which now came to their aid. I cannot describe to you, Elinor, nor would you feel it if I did, the conduct of Clarenville on this occasion; his orders, given so coolly, so clearly, yet in such an animated tone, seemed to inspire the men who acted under him with energy and resolution almost equal to his own; and I should have remained to watch him till he returned to shore, had I not heard Mrs. Clarenville's voice, in a tone of agony, inquiring if her son were safe. I flew to her as speedily as possible, and finding her as delighted

to hear as I was to relate, should scarcely have thought of returning to you, had not my mother, who had been assisting to recover Mortimer's East-Indian fair one, missing you, called me to accompany her in her search; but we were soon met by general Clarenville, who informed us you had just left the garden, terribly agitated on Mortimer's account. He is a most wonderful creature to cause so much uneasiness to two of the fairest objects in creation; how flattered he will be to find two young ladies betrayed their love for him at the same moment!"

"Oh Caroline!" exclaimed Elinor, again bursting into tears, "what can induce you to speak to me in so unkind a tone? How have I lost your affection, from which I expected such comfort and support? If you were aware of half my unhappiness, you could not thus cruelly wound me by this conduct so totally unlike yourself."

"Forgive me, my dearest Elinor," cried Caroline,

Caroline, the tears starting to her eyes, and throwing her arms around her sister's neck, " forgive this petulance, though I think I never can pardon myself for thus cruelly and unkindly adding to your distress, instead of endeavouring to console you under it, as I know you would have done had our situations been reversed. But I will frankly own I have all along been of the same opinion which I informed you my mother expressed to general Clarenville, and felt childishly angry to find my sagacity so much at fault, when I ought, like her, to have been happy at discovering my mistake. This is my only excuse for such unpardonable pettishness, and a very bad one I acknowledge it is. But say you forgive me, my dear sister, or I shall be miserable indeed."

Elinor, though extremely agitated, assured Caroline of her entire forgiveness; and the latter now endeavoured to sooth

and

and compose her sister's spirits, and at length was tolerably successful.

Mrs. Belvington now again entered, and addressing Elinor, said—"Your friend Mr. George Fitzmorton is in the dining-room, my love; he came hither at Mr. Clarenville's request, who is still with Mortimer, to inform you the latter has consented to defer his journey for a day, and has complied also with the wish of his preserver to retire to bed, and follow the advice of Dr. ——, whom Mr. Clarenville insisted upon his admitting. Our friend Montague is likewise below, and is very anxious to see you; will you not come down to him?"

"Is general Clarenville with him?" inquired Elinor, as a crimson blush suffused her cheek.

"He is just walked out with your father and Mr. Egerton; Coleridge is also absent; therefore I much wish you to come down if you can, as he has called purposely to inquire after us, having heard

heard of our recent alarm, which, had not both he and young Fitzmorton been detained by company at home, they would probably have been participators in."

Elinor now taking the arm of her mother, descended with Caroline to the dining-room; and as the latter preceded them into the apartment, she exclaimed —"Why, here is lady Egerton and all the gentlemen returned again."

Elinor, starting, would have retreated, but Mrs. Belvington gently drew her forward; and Mr. Coleridge, quickly approaching them as they entered, exclaimed—"Misfortunes never come singly, my dear mother. I have this moment received a letter from Rosebrook, bringing me the distressing intelligence of the two younger children being extremely ill, and the apothecary is fearful their disorder will prove the measles. I own I dread the effect this intelligence will produce on Henrietta, who is very far from well this evening."

"Why

"Why should she be informed of it before to-morrow?" said Elinor, hastily. "You intend, I doubt not, returning home this evening; let me be your companion instead of my sister, who had better not, if what is apprehended should prove to be the case, return thither at all, at least for the present. Lose not a moment then, my dear brother, in ordering the carriage, as I shall be ready to accompany you in five minutes."

"My kind sister," returned Mr. Coleridge, "I do not like the idea of taking you from hence at such a time. Poor Mortimer! what will he say to my selfishness?"

"Let me entreat you, my dear brother," said Elinor, deeply blushing, "not to think of any one at present but your dear children; hasten your preparations as much as possible, that not a moment may be lost."

"If you find," said Mrs. Belvington, "our little darlings better than you expect,

expect, Elinor can return again to-morrow for a few hours; should the contrary be the case, which Heaven forbid! Caroline shall join her sister at Rosebrook, as I perhaps had better remain with poor Henrietta."

Elinor now again entreated her brother to be expeditious, and was following him from the room, when Mr. Montague, taking her hand, and detaining her, cried—"One word to an old friend before we part, fair lady, as it is not, I suppose, likely that we shall ever meet again."

"Never meet again!" repeated Elinor, in a tone of the greatest surprise. "My dear Mr. Montague, what can you mean?"

"Is it then probable," he, smiling, returned, "that I shall see again Elinor Belvington?"

"Oh yes, very, very probable: let me entreat you not to detain me now," cried Elinor, not a little angry with her cousin for

for this question, and deeply colouring as she saw the general hastily remove his eyes from her, and retire to the other end of the room. "I shall be here again to-morrow; but my brother will soon return for me, therefore I must now wish you a good evening;" and hastily disengaging her hand, she flew past him to her own chamber, from whence she soon received a summons from Mr. Coleridge, informing her all was in readiness for their departure.

As Elinor was descending the stairs, she suddenly encountered Clarenville; his colour changed as he said—"I had a message to deliver to you, Miss Belvington, from major Mortimer, who, let me again assure you, is quite recovered; but as you are in such haste, I will not detain you by repeating what you will hear from himself to-morrow."

Elinor attempted, but in vain, to answer him; finding it therefore impossible, slightly bowing, she was hastily passing

passing him, when, in a hurried, agitated tone, he continued—" Will you not allow me to wish you every happiness before we part, as I shall have left S—— to-morrow before your return for Elmsly Park, from whence it is my intention to proceed to ——, and embark for the Continent? it is therefore probable, Elinor," he now, in an almost-inarticulate voice, continued, as he took her passive hand, " we may not again meet for many, many years; but to the last day of my existence, my most sincere wishes for your happiness will attend you, though I can never bear to be a witness of it."

Then, fervently pressing her hand to his lips, Clarenville quickly retreated, and the voice of Mr. Coleridge inquiring for her aroused the almost-stupified Elinor to exertion, and rapidly descending the stairs, she sprung into the carriage without staying to bid adieu to her family; and Mr. Coleridge following her imme-

immediately, the horses set off at full speed, and soon conveyed them to Rosebrook Hall.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Coleridge returned early on the following morning to S——, and Caroline, who had stationed herself at a window, watching his arrival, perceiving he was unaccompanied by her sister, flew to the door, exclaiming, as she held out her hand to him on his entrance—"Ah, my dear brother, your countenance, and the absence of Elinor, assure me you are not the bearer of good tidings."

Mr. Coleridge, as he mournfully shook his head, replied—"I grieve to say your apprehensions, my dear Caroline, are too well founded; my darling children are indeed extremely ill; Elinor and myself have

have sat up with them throughout the night, in the course of which I dispatched an express for our kind friend Dr. Morton; he has confirmed Mr. Dawson's opinion, that the disorder is the measles, and has, I am sorry to add, confessed he thinks my darlings are in great danger. Will you therefore return with me, and assist poor Elinor in the task of nursing them? And I think I must entreat your mother to break the afflicting intelligence to our dear Henrietta."

"She knows it already," replied Caroline. "My mother, finding it was not your intention to return hither last night, and seeing my sister much alarmed by your absence, thought it better she should at once be acquainted with the cause of it; and though at first much agitated upon hearing Elinor was your companion, she assured my mother she was confident her dear children could not have, even in herself, a more attentive or anxious nurse; and my mother has likewise

wise prevailed on her to remain at S—— for the present, if Elinor will continue at Rosebrook."

"And now, my dear brother, let me entreat you to lie down for an hour; indeed you must be careful of your health, if only for your poor wife's sake; and as both lady Neville and lady Egerton have offered the use of their carriages, if required, you can at any hour return home. So now be a good man; follow my advice, and I will set off in a moment."

"My kind, thoughtful Caroline," returned Mr. Coleridge, "I cannot consent to your returning to Rosebrook unattended."

"Let me obviate that objection," said Mr. Egerton, who had unperceived entered the room soon after Mr. Coleridge, "and allow me the honour of being your sister's escort. My aunt," he continued, addressing Caroline, "would have proposed accompanying you to Rosebrook,

had she not feared Mrs. Belvington was unequal to being left without a friend to assist her in supporting the spirits of Mrs. Coleridge, and attending upon your father, whose nerves are not a little shattered by the terrors of yesterday. The general also will be prevented offering himself as your companion, from Mrs. Clarenville never having had the measles, on whose account, he said last night, they must give up the pleasure of meeting your sister again, not daring to take his wife back to Willowfield whilst the disorder was so prevalent in the villages around it."

Mr. Coleridge having expressed his gratitude to Mr. Egerton, and thankfully accepted his kind proposal of accompanying Caroline, she was hastening to equip herself for the journey, when her brother stopped her by inquiring what they were to say to poor Mortimer for running away with his bride-elect?

"No apology is necessary," replied Caroline,

roline, laughing; "Mortimer has followed her example, and accompanied by lady Tankerville and Miss Alresford, set off for London this morning at daybreak."

"Are you certain your information is correct, Caroline?" said the greatly-astonished Mr. Coleridge.

"I can answer for its being so," replied Mr. Egerton, "having myself this morning been to the hotel where you left Mortimer last night, which is the same those two ladies have resided at since their arrival at S——. I saw his own servant, who is to follow his master in the stagecoach, and inquired of him whether the major had not left some message or letter for his friends, but received an answer in the negative."

"The man shall not leave S——," cried Mr. Coleridge, "without taking a letter from me to his master, requiring an explanation of this strange conduct; for after the attention he received last night,

and the promise he gave us of deferring his journey till to-morrow, his behaviour is inexplicable.

"Do not turn so pale, my dear Caroline," continued Mr. Coleridge, smiling; "I am not going to send Mortimer a challenge, but merely intend inquiring his reasons for breaking the promise he gave us, and why he did not leave some message at least to account for so sudden a departure. In the mean time, till we can receive some answer, Elinor had better remain in ignorance of our proceedings."

Caroline having assured her brother she would be silent upon the subject, and again entreated him to follow the advice she had given him, with Mr. Egerton as her companion, departed for Rosebrook; where, upon their arrival, they learned Dr. Morton had again been, and pronounced the little boy better, but much feared for the life of his sister, whose

whose bedside Elinor had not for a moment quitted.

Caroline immediately hastened to her relief, and for three succeeding days they watched alternately the poor little sufferer, scarcely daring to cherish the slightest hope of her recovery. Lady Egerton continued at S——, endeavouring to support Mrs. Coleridge and her mother, under the anxiety which every intelligence from Rosebrook served to increase.

Mrs. Belvington had been prevented joining her children on her husband's account, who was now very far from well; and she equally apprehended their health would materially suffer from the fatigue and anxiety they endured.

Caroline wrote daily to her mother, and at the end of a week had the pleasure of informing her Dr. Morton's and their own fears for the little girl had subsided. Cecilia's had taken the disorder, but very mildly; and the Wardleys had

left Edgewold for London to secure the safety of theirs.

The S—— party now began to think of returning home, as all idea of pleasure was put an end to by the separation of the families. Dr. Morton had advised Mrs. Coleridge not to take her other children back to Rosebrook at present, and she was therefore going with them and her husband to a relation of his who lived some few miles from S——.

When Mrs. Belvington, with her husband, returned to Rosebrook at the conclusion of another week, and met her daughter Elinor, she was both shocked and alarmed at perceiving the alteration a few days had made in her appearance; and when alone with Caroline, anxiously inquired if she were acquainted with the cause.

Caroline professed herself entirely ignorant of it, but acknowledged the depression of her sister's spirits was too visible to escape observation.

Mrs.

Mrs. Belvington then requested to be informed if Elinor had heard from Mortimer since his return to town, or had mentioned his name?

To both these questions Caroline answered in the negative, and then hastily left her mother to join lady Egerton, whom she saw advancing towards the parsonage, where she and her sister, with their little charges, had removed the day before their parents returned to it.

Lady Egerton soon inquired for Elinor, and Caroline answered—"She is gone to her usual haunt, the churchyard, which scarcely a day now passes without her visiting. My dear lady Egerton," continued Caroline, tears starting to her eyes as she spoke, "you cannot think how unhappy I am on our dear Elinor's account, who is so altered you will scarcely recognise her to be the same being you parted from only a fortnight since. Her animation is gone, her colour fled; and I greatly fear the un-

easiness she appears to suffer from will, in time, undermine her health; for that she is very unhappy cannot for a moment be doubted."

"Let us not alarm ourselves too hastily," replied lady Egerton; "it shall be my endeavour to discover the cause of our dear Elinor's altered appearance; and I flatter myself she will not long remain impenetrable to my entreaties; and surely Mortimer's unaccountable silence may in some measure account for her unusual depression."

"I confess," returned Caroline, half-smiling, "my sagacity is for once completely puzzled; had not the danger Mortimer escaped from the evening before I left S—— betrayed Elinor's affection, I should have answered you she was perfectly indifferent to him; but her agitation, even after she knew of his safety, has completely shaken, if not destroyed, an opinion I had previously formed, and which, as it has proved to be a mis-

a mistaken one, I will not, for my own credit's sake, divulge."

"Elinor is now coming this way," said lady Egerton; "we must therefore defer the remainder of our conversation to another time."

As the former advanced, lady Egerton perceived, with the sincerest grief of heart, her beloved child was indeed much altered; for her greeting, though affectionate, had lost that animation which was wont to make the hearts of those who loved her rejoice; the bloom no longer mantled on a cheek now invariably pale; a serious, absent manner had succeeded the cheerful smiles and ready conversation which had been the delight of her partial friends; and during the time lady Egerton remained at the parsonage, she sat silent, unmoved, and apparently absorbed in thought. To lady Egerton's invitation of returning home with her, she pleaded, in excuse for declining it, her unwillingness to leave her

little niece, who still continued extremely weak.

Mrs. Belvington would have obviated this objection by assurances of never suffering the child to be absent from her sight; but lady Egerton interrupted her by saying—" No, my dear madam, we will neither of us press Elinor to comply with a request which is evidently so unpleasant to her. Another day she will perhaps be less unwilling to visit an old friend."

Lady Egerton then wishing the party a general good morning, left the room, accompanied by Mrs. Belvington; whilst Elinor, scarcely able to refrain from tears, took up the work her mother had laid down, and endeavoured to appear deeply engaged with it, as she saw Caroline remained attentively observing her.

" I am thinking, my dear Elinor," said the latter, after a pause, " of entertaining myself with writing a novel, and

the

the moral of it shall be a most edifying one."

"Indeed!" returned Elinor, attempting to smile; "and may I inquire what the subject of your book is to be?"

"When I tell you the title of it," replied Caroline, her penetrating eyes fixed upon her sister's, "perhaps you will be able to form some idea of the plan. It is my intention to give the heroine of this little tale my favourite name of Elinor; to which I shall add, 'or, The distressing Consequences of untimely Reserve."

"I make no doubt, my dear sister," returned Elinor, as a slight blush passed across her pallid cheek, "your tale will be every thing that is excellent, and will leave you to indite the first chapter of it whilst I take Henry a little walk; tell my mother we shall return in excellent time for dinner;" and, without waiting for any reply, she hastened from the

room, leaving the affectionate and generally-lively Caroline to mourn the alteration in her beloved sister.

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER week now passed without any letter arriving from Mortimer, whose name or existence Elinor never reverted to. Mr. Belvington felt not a little surprised at this continued silence, and hurt with his daughter for that she preserved on the subject.

Mrs. Belvington's anxiety for her beloved child's health daily increased. Elinor appeared to avoid her mother as much as possible, whilst lady Egerton vainly endeavoured to draw from her the cause of that depression which she feared would ultimately undermine her health.

To

To all lady Egerton's inquiries if she were ill, Elinor returned a negative, and never could be prevailed on to visit her friend, unless Caroline accompanied her.

Much grieved at this reserved line of conduct, lady Egerton at length ceased to press her invitations, and Elinor now seldom saw her old friend.

Often when Caroline entered the parlour where her sister passed her mornings, could she perceive the traces of recent tears upon her cheek; and the mournful pathos of her voice was most touching as she replied, though in an evasive manner, to her sister's affectionate inquiries.

Caroline greatly regretted lady Neville's absence, who had accompanied general and Mrs. Clarenville to their daughter's residence, and was not expected to return home for some weeks.

Time now passed heavily with the once-happy inhabitants of Rosebrook; Elinor saw and deeply regretted the change,

change, which she felt too conscious originated in her own altered conduct; and she was one morning sitting as usual in the parlour which opened into the garden, and endeavouring to argue herself into a more cheerful behaviour, when the sound of hasty steps along the gravel walk made her turn to discover whose they were; but not perceiving any one, was resuming the employment she had been engaged in, when a sigh, almost amounting to a groan, startled her; and again turning her head, she perceived Mortimer leaning against the glass door, his countenance nearly convulsed with agitation, and his form trembling with emotion the most powerful.

"Mortimer!" she exclaimed, almost gasping for breath, and clasping her hands together, "are you then returned?"

"Yes, Elinor!" he replied, rapidly advancing towards her, "Mortimer is returned. But do not be too much alarmed,"

alarmed," he continued, with a bitter smile, and folding his arms before him; "I am not come to claim the fulfilment of that promise you so lately made me; no, you are now released from it; therefore be happy, if you can."

"What can you mean, Mortimer?" faltered the almost-overpowered Elinor; "I cannot in the least understand you."

"Indeed!" he replied, in a still more bitter tone; "then I will endeavour to explain myself more clearly. Your conduct the last evening I parted from you betrayed to me the total indifference you felt for my welfare. Why that look of surprise, Elinor? Is it your intention to persuade me you were ignorant of the danger I had escaped from? or was it the eagerness of your companion alone to be gone, that induced you to join the party of pleasure which had been before agreed upon, without leaving even one kind word of remembrance for me?"

"Major Mortimer is perfectly aware

of

of the falsehood he has now dared to utter," said Elinor, rising with a calm dignity of manner, " and must therefore excuse my remaining any longer to be thus insulted. I will only reply to it, that when he wished to frame an excuse for receding from the engagement entered into between us, entirely at his own desire, it would have been more manly to have explained his wish, instead of descending to employ so mean, so palpable an artifice."

She was now leaving the room, when Mortimer, almost frantically detaining her, exclaimed as he caught her hand— " Gracious God! can I possibly have been deceived? oh, surely not! Tell me, Elinor, I beg, I entreat you, where you went, and with whom, on that fatal evening? Oh, in pity tell me!" he continued, as Elinor, making an effort to disengage her hand, was turning hastily from him.

" Major Mortimer," she exclaimed, " how

"how can you continue to plead ignorance of that event? Did you not see my brother Coleridge on the following morning, and learn from him the cause of my leaving S—— for Rosebrook, and the reason of my not returning with him, as had been my intention?"

"Left S—— for Rosebrook!" he wildly repeated; "what would you—what is it you tell me?"

"When your memory returns," replied Elinor coolly, "you will perhaps recollect the circumstance, and the message my brother, I make no doubt, delivered to you from me."

"I never saw Coleridge—I never have seen him since he left me at the hotel on that fatal evening. Let me entreat you, Elinor, to be more explicit, if you wish me to retain my reason."

"Here is some mystery which I cannot penetrate," said Elinor after a pause, in which she had viewed with alarm the wild, distracted countenance of Mortimer.

mer. Answer me sincerely," she continued, again addressing him; "did you not see my brother the day after your accident? and were you not by him informed of the illness of his children, the intelligence of which reached us the evening before, and induced me to offer accompanying him to Rosebrook, that my sister might not be too suddenly alarmed? and that the reason of my not returning with him that day, wa the increased danger of his little girl? Did he not also repeat to you the message I transmitted by him?"

"I heard not the message—I saw not your brother," f ar ticly interrupted Mortimer; " for before he could have arrived at S——, I was many miles on the road to London—miserable in the conviction of your indi ere ce, and m eyes opened, I believed, to your partiality for another. Tell me, Elinor," he continued, again taking her hand, and looking earnestly

nestly at her, "is your heart mine, or is it Egerton's."

The blood, which had receded to Elinor's heart, now again flowed rapidly as eagerly she exclaimed—"Mr. Egerton! no—never, never!"

Mortimer, staggering to a chair, threw himself upon it; and as he covered his face with his hands, exclaimed—"What a treasure then have I irrevocably lost! for am I not the husband of another?"

Elinor, stupified with surprise, stood wildly gazing at him, as, again starting from his seat, and pressing his hand to his burning forehead, he continued—"You will forgive me, Elinor, when you learn how cruelly I have been deceived, which, as soon as I can summon sufficient resolution, you shall be informed of. At present I can explain nothing; and if I allow myself to remain longer with you, my reason will indeed desert me. Farewell now, my best-beloved, my idolized Elinor," he, in a tone of agony, exclaimed,

ed, as he pressed her almost-lifeless form to his heart, and imprinted a fervent kiss on her pale lips; "may you enjoy the happiness you so truly deserve! and never, never may your heart feel the pangs mine is at this instant torn with!"

The next instant Mortimer had disappeared; and as her mother entered the room, Elinor fell senseless to the floor.

Mrs. Belvington, in an agony of alarm, flew to the bell, the loud ringing of which brought Caroline to her from the garden, by whose active and judicious measures Elinor soon revived; and as she glanced her eyes around the room, in a low voice said—"Was it then only a dream? Yet surely I have seen Mortimer."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Mrs. Belvington, "my child's senses have forsaken her!"

"No, dearest mother!" replied Caroline, "do not be alarmed; Elinor has very

very likely seen Mortimer, who passed me in the garden not five minutes since."

"It is then true!" exclaimed Elinor, clasping her hands together in wild delight; "Mortimer is married, and I am rescued from misery!"

The astonished Mrs. Belvington and Caroline looked at each other for an explanation; and Elinor, throwing herself into her mother's arms, burst into tears.

After a few minutes' pause, Caroline, who had remained standing, the picture of surprise, exclaimed—"Mortimer has married the East-Indian. Am I not right, dear Elinor?"

"I know not," replied her still-weeping sister; "he only told me he was married; I thought not of inquiring to whom."

"What passed between Mortimer and yourself, Caroline?" inquired Mrs. Belvington, in a tone of strong emotion.

"I really can scarcely recollect," she replied;

replied; "he took me so much by surprise, and I was so puzzled to account for the wild agitation of his manner, that I felt quite stupified, and can now only remember the words, 'I have lost Elinor—lost her by my own folly and credulity!' I heard also the name of lady Tankerville; but the parlour-bell then ringing violently, I flew past him to learn the occasion of its loud peal."

"My dearest mother," said Elinor, endeavouring to recover her composure, and raising the hand of this beloved parent to her lips, "I have much to tell you, and many errors to confess; but you shall now be acquainted with all that has passed in my heart relative to Mortimer since our first meeting."

"Not till you are a little more composed, my dear child," returned Mrs. Belvington, as she pressed her lips to the forehead of her darling, whose head had again sunk upon the bosom of her mother. "I will now go to your father,

and

and acquaint him with Mortimer's marriage; the intelligence must be broken to him gently; and when I return, you will inform me of what I so much wish to know; at present you are better alone." And Mrs. Belvington, again kissing her beloved daughter, accompanied by Caroline, left the room.

Mr. Belvington was much agitated when informed by his wife of Mortimer's visit and marriage, and in an agony of alarm, lest Elinor's peace of mind should be destroyed by the blow; but when Mrs. Belvington proceeded to inform him of their daughter's involuntary confession, his astonishment exceeded all bounds; and he earnestly requested his wife to return to Elinor immediately, and learn the motive that had induced her to continue an engagement her heart revolted from.

Mrs. Belvington found her daughter, though still much agitated, anxious to commence her promised recital; and the mother's

mother's tears flowed fast as she listened to the simple but affecting account Elinor now gave of the anguish her heart had sustained, whilst divided between affection for her father and repugnance to an union with Mortimer; but when she proceeded to mention the determination lady Egerton's advice had induced her to form, and the terrible conviction her mother's condemnation of a similar conduct had conveyed to her heart, that every idea of breaking off her engagement with Mortimer would be totally, if not severely, discouraged, Mrs. Belvington's emotion could no longer be controlled; and as she pressed her beloved child to her maternal bosom, she exclaimed—"It was your mother, then, who would willingly lay down her own life to secure the happiness of her children, that was so nearly sealing the wretchedness of one so tenderly, so deservedly beloved! How much misery," she continued, "has this mutual reserve occasioned!

Ah!

Ah! why, when I so plainly saw my Elinor was unhappy, did I not make a point of entreating her to reveal the cause?"

"It is I only who deserve censure," returned Elinor, "for doubting even for a moment your affection, my beloved mother, which would have led you to pardon even my apparent inconsistency of conduct. But allowing myself no time for reflection, I instantly formed the resolution of concluding my engagement with Mortimer, and securing, as I imagined, the happiness of my father. One consolation, my dearest mother," continued Elinor, with a mournful smile, "you in your little tale unconsciously gave me; it was the information of your former friend, though evil counsellor, having soon fallen a victim to a foreign climate."

"Elinor, Elinor, my beloved, my precious child!" exclaimed Mrs. Belvington, convulsively shuddering, "do not talk in

this dreadful manner;" and she again pressed her darling to her heart, as if fearful the terrible moment of separation was at hand.

Elinor, after a moment's pause, proceeded to inform her mother of Mortimer's conversation at the S—— ball, the strangely-rude behaviour of Miss Alresford to her on that evening, and his earnest request of an immediate union.

When she had concluded, Mrs. Belvington hesitated not a moment in pronouncing it her decided opinion Mortimer's wife and Miss Alresford were the same person, and that he had been entangled in some promise to that effect before he left India.—"And now," she continued, "I must return to your father, and inform him of these particulars; the mystery attached to Mortimer's conduct he will himself, I hope, in a few days explain. But before I leave you, my dear Elinor, let me entreat, if you value the peace of your mother, as well

as

as your own, never again to persevere in a line of conduct which, though entered into from the best of motives, has nearly ruined your every hope of happiness in this world. You have not now, I trust, concealed any thing from me; and again let me entreat you, my dear child, to make a friend of your mother while you continue under her protection."

Mrs. Belvington was then leaving the room, but Elinor, in a trembling voice, begged her to remain and hear what else she had to say.

Again returning, and folding her arms around her beloved child, the former tenderly inquired what she wished to impart.

Elinor's agitation for some moments prevented her replying; at length, in a low and almost-inarticulate voice, she said—"Not one secret of my heart shall be concealed from my beloved mother." And now, while her whole frame shook with emotion, and her blushing counte-

nance was hidden on the bosom of her mother, Elinor acknowledged that the heart she could not give to Mortimer had, before her meeting him, been in the possession of another.

Mrs. Belvington, after again and again thanking her darling child for this proof of confidence and love, continued—"I wonder not at your regard, if it is given, as I suspect, to the son of my old friend. Alfred Clarenville is in every respect worthy of it, yet still I must caution you to be upon your guard against encouraging his remembrance, if you have no reason to believe yours is not cherished by him."

Elinor now could not forbear informing her mother of the manner in which Clarenville had taken leave of her the morning she returned from Ashgrove, and again when she left S——.

Mrs. Belvington had before felt convinced Clarenville had not been an unconcerned spectator of her daughter's engagement;

gagement; but so guarded had the latter been in her conduct, that only a suspicion, and that a very slight one, had glanced across the mind of her mother, that her evident indifference for Mortimer had been occasioned by attachment to another. Yet, though she felt assured Elinor was not mistaken in her opinion of Clarenville's regard, she ventured not to encourage the idea of its continuance, not being certain it would stand the test of absence. He was now far distant, and, in the enjoyment of new scenes, might lose the remembrance of her he had once loved, and whom he believed irrevocably engaged to another.

Caroline now entering with a message from her father, obliged Mrs. Belvington to hasten to him, but not before she had whispered to her daughter the assurance of her secret being safe in her mother's possession.

"Mortimer must certainly be mad," said Caroline, after Elinor had, at her re-

quest, repeated the conversation that had passed between them, " or he would never have suspected you of losing your heart to our poor benumbing torpedo—that idea is most truly ludicrous; who or what could have put such a fancy into his poor weak head? Why, you have scarcely seen any thing of Mr. Egerton, and I do not think I have ever observed you bestow even one of your numerous blushes upon him—no, not even at the mention of his name or his sudden appearance; therefore I pronounce you guiltless upon that point. But I wish Mortimer had mentioned this ridiculous jealousy to me; he should soon have been made completely ashamed of it. Oh, how highly would our torpedo's vanity be raised, were he to know of this fancy having crept into the weak brain of our noble dragoon! even his cold heart would glow at the idea. I should much sooner," she continued with an arch smile, " have expected the man's jealousy would have been

been raised by young Fitzmorton's or Clarenville's attentions."

Elinor blushed deeply at the mention of a name she had lately so carefully avoided alluding to; and wishing to turn her sister's attention from it, said—"My dear Caroline, is it not rather ungrateful in you to accuse Mr. Egerton of having a cold heart? Surely his late kindness to us during the time we were under so much alarm for the safety of our darling niece was alone sufficient to prove the contrary; who could then have surpassed him in every friendly attention and regard?"

"No one," returned Caroline, warmly; "to him are we indebted for every comfort we then received; to his care also does poor little Henry owe so rapid a return of strength; and never can I feel sufficiently grateful for his kindness."

"Then never again," said Elinor, smiling at her sister's warmth, "let me

hear the accusation you just now brought against our attentive friend. And now, my dear Caroline, I must leave you for an hour or two, and endeavour, in my own room, to lose a terrible headache which this sudden surprise has given me."

The sisters now separated, Caroline to meditate, and endeavour to discover the real cause of Elinor's fainting at Mrs. Delmore's, whilst the object of these meditations retired to indulge her joy, and offer her thanks where they were most due.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Mrs. Belvington repeated to her husband Elinor's inducement for becoming the wife of Mortimer, the intelligence, though communicated with the greatest

greatest caution, agitated him so extremely, that, alarmed for the effect it might produce, Mrs. Belvington hastened to her daughter, and entreated her to go down to her father, and endeavour to sooth him into more composure.

Elinor instantly obeyed, and soon, by her gentle, filial attentions, succeeded in the attempt.

Mr. Belvington most deeply felt the sacrifice her affection for him would have induced her to make, and as deeply lamented the selfishness of his own conduct in requiring such a promise. But Elinor entreated him to forbear terming those motives selfish, which, she felt convinced, had alone been designed for her happiness. Seeing therefore how much his distress agitated her, Mr. Belvington forbore dwelling on the subject, though his heart gave him a severe pang as he reflected how much his excellent child had suffered for his sake.

Exerting himself now to appear more

composed, he entered into conversation with his wife and daughter upon Mortimer's marriage, and from the information they gave him of his manner towards Miss Alresford at the S—— ball, and her subsequent fainting in Mrs. Delmore's garden, coincided in their opinion of her being now the wife of his late favourite.

Each succeeding day was now looked forward to with increased impatience for Mortimer's promised explanation; several however passed without any letter arriving from him; and all hope of receiving one was nearly extinguished, when at length the post brought Elinor the following lines from Mrs. Wardley:—

"In what words can I address my beloved friend, upon a subject the knowledge of which has deeply wounded my heart, and has, I fear, materially injured the peace of my dearest Elinor.

"Alas! what can I say in excuse for my

my poor, deluded Basil? Yet judge him not too severely, if only for the sake of your sincerely-attached Eliza; for he has indeed been most cruelly deceived; and could my Elinor witness the agony of mind he at present suffers from, her gentle heart would pity more than condemn him.

"I have this morning only been acquainted with the artifices that have been employed to deceive and ensnare him; and he has just left me, after entreating I would communicate them to you—a task he is at present unequal to.

"I must begin my narrative from the time of our first quitting England, which, you will recollect, was soon after my brother left Rosebrook, and you had declined entering into any engagement with him. During our voyage you were the constant theme of our conversation; Mortimer would dwell for hours on every word or sentiment he had heard you express, and your image seemed engraven

on his heart, to the utter exclusion of every other. He ever found a ready listener in his sister; and often has colonel Wardley been obliged to interrupt us, and remind him of his military duties, which, when thus engaged, he was too apt to neglect.

"At length we arrived in India, and for some weeks after I saw but little of my brother, being confined by indisposition entirely to my own apartment. Colonel Wardley mentioned to me a family whom he had become acquainted with; it consisted of an English baronet, his wife, and a beautiful young woman of the name of Alresford. The latter, he told me, I should much admire; the baronet was fast approaching his second childhood; and of his wife, who was many years her husband's junior, colonel Wardley would not give me his opinion, but left me to discover what it was, and to form my own.

"As soon as I was sufficiently recovered

vered to admit visitors, lady Tankerville was the first to call; and seeing how much I suffered from the heat of the climate, and observing the inconvenience of the house we occupied, pressed us so earnestly to become her guests, that my husband, anxious for my health, entreated me to accept her offer; and in a few days we were established in sir George Tankerville's elegant abode, which was furnished with every comfort and luxury so usual in India.

"I soon learned to admire Miss Alresford, though I could never bring myself to feel the same affection for her I cherished for the beloved friend I had left in England. From the first of our acquaintance Miss Alresford appeared extremely partial to me; but I soon found it was regard for the brother that made her prefer the society of his sister to any other female acquaintance. Her friend, lady Tankerville, I never could approve. I had before heard she was one of our

English

English adventurers, and her conduct towards poor sir George excited both my anger and contempt.

"Miss Alresford looked up to her as the first of human beings, and lady Tankerville seemed fully aware of the ascendancy she had gained over her mind.

"At the end of a twelvemonth, colonel Wardley's regiment was ordered farther up the country—I, of course, accompanied him; but my brother, being at that time extremely ill, remained at Calcutta, and then it was his heart was softened by the attentions of Miss Alresford, and the solicitude she expressed to her friend for him, which the latter took care he should be acquainted with. But still that heart remained true to Elinor, and this he soon took an opportunity of hinting to his female friends, and declared his attachment never could be shaken.

"Nearly six months elapsed before he was sufficiently recovered to join his regiment, which remained absent from Calcutta

cutta two years. On our return there, we found lady Tankerville had become a widow, but remained still a resident in the house we had left her in, and which she again pressed us to consider as our own—an offer we positively declined.

"We now saw very little of Mortimer, as lady Tankerville was continually engaging him to accompany her and some other friends in the numerous parties of pleasure she formed, and in which she always left Miss Alresford to his care.

"At length colonel Wardley received orders to return to England, and you may easily conceive the delight I felt on hearing the time for our embarkation was fixed. I remarked also, with pleasure, my brother appeared equally happy, as it proved Miss Alresford had not gained possession of that heart which had so long been devoted wholly to my Elinor.

"I knew not then he had more than one cause to rejoice at leaving India, or the

the scene which had passed at lady Tankerville's when the intelligence was first communicated to him by his English servant, who, nearly wild with joy, entered the apartment where he and his female friends were sitting, and informed him of it. What then was my brother's surprise upon seeing Miss Alresford fall senseless to the floor, and hearing lady Tankerville exclaim—'Cruel Mortimer! you have destroyed this sweet girl!'

"Miss Alresford was immediately conveyed to her room, where her friend also retired, leaving poor Mortimer much agitated at the idea of being the cause of her sudden illness. In this state of mind he was found by lady Tankerville, who soon returned to him, and now tried, by every artifice, to work upon his susceptible feelings. She again accused him of cruelty, and declared he had wilfully endeavoured to win the affections of Miss Alresford, that he might triumph in the conquest of a heart which, till he came,

had

had been esteemed impenetrable. Mortimer protested against ever having acted the part she accused him of, and solemnly assured her, that in the many conversations he had lately had with Miss Alresford, their chief subject had been his beloved Elinor; and that he had also delightedly informed her of my having received a letter from you since my return to Calcutta, and in which you had answered in the affirmative the inquiry, whether your affections were still disengaged?

"Lady Tankerville, however, was not to be appeased, and was still continuing to upbraid him for having so constantly thrown himself into the society of her friend, whose state of mind he must have perceived, when the object of this contention suddenly stood before her, and earnestly entreated her to desist; then, haughtily turning to Mortimer, after assuring him she wished not to detain him

in

her country a moment longer, waved her hand for him to depart.

"Mortimer has confessed the remembrance of that moment has never been effaced from his mind. The suppressed tenderness which Miss Alresford's haughty, yet pale and deathlike countenance expressed, struck with anguish to his heart, and for many hours after, his mind was in a tumult of conflicting passions.

"Again, during our voyage, was Elinor the theme of our conversation; the nearer we approached our native shore, the more delightful were our anticipations. At length we reached England, and Mortimer was soon on the road to Rosebrook. His disappointment was extreme at finding you were absent; but Mr. Belvington's assurances of your affections being still disengaged, revived his drooping spirits; and they were exhilarated to the highest degree after the contents

contents of your first letter from Ashgrove were communicated to him.

"I will not, my dear Elinor, dwell upon the happy period that succeeded your return,, nor the pleasure I anticipated in soon being entitled to address you by the endearing name of sister. Those hopes are now completely crushed, and I must hasten to the conclusion of my painful task, by acquainting you with the plan lady Tankerville formed on our leaving India, and which she too successfully put in execution.

"Miss Alresford had soon after been seized with a violent fever, brought on by distraction of mind, at having betrayed the secret of her love to one who had felt indifference alone for her. When she became convalescent, lady Tankerville, without hinting her design, commenced preparations for a voyage to England; and not till every thing was ready for their departure, and their passage taken on board a ship then on the point of sailing, did she inform Miss Alresford

resford of her intention, and inquire if she chose to accompany her. This, as her ladyship expected, she had not sufficient strength of mind to refuse, and they reached this country, a fortnight only before you met them at S——.

"Lady Tankerville's unremitting endeavours, after her arrival in England, to discover Mortimer's residence, were soon crowned with success; and finding, from his servant, whom one of her own had met and recognised, that his master was going down into Hampshire, she determined upon instantly proceeding thither, and fixed upon S—— as her place of residence; from whence she intended reconnoitering the villages around, as the one you live in, Mortimer had informed her, was not far distant from that place.

"Miss Alresford was still kept in ignorance of her design, lady Tankerville being aware she would revolt from the idea of seeking one who had willingly forsaken

saken the country she was resident in. But all her friend's endeavours to discover you were unsuccessful, till the evening of your appearance with Mortimer at the ball. Miss Alresford had seen him enter the room, and had retired for air to the same window you afterwards, accompanied by my brother, approached. His start and change of colour upon discovering who were so near him did not escape the observation of lady Tankerville; and after he had left you, she almost forcibly drew Miss Alresford towards him, and insisted upon his recognising two old friends.

"It was my brother's dread of what might follow this meeting that made him so earnestly, on the following morning, press you to become his wife before he returned to London. But you were not aware of his motive for being thus importunate, or you would not have expressed so much displeasure at his request.—'No, Elinor knew not,' said my poor

poor Basil to me this morning, 'of the mournful presentiment my heart then felt that lady Tankerville's artifices would at length succeed in separating me from her.'

"Miss Alresford's terror the following evening betrayed to her watchful ladyship the affection she still cherished, which, since the time of Mortimer's leaving India, she constantly denied, assuring her friend his perfect indifference to her, and partiality for another, had entirely extinguished it.

"After my brother had been conveyed to his hotel, and his kind friends had left him, lady Tankerville, availing herself of the opportunity their absence afforded her, entered the room, on the pretence of inquiring after his health, as he was on the point of sending his servant to lady Neville's for intelligence of yours, which Clarenville had, on leaving him, promised to be the bearer of; but not returning immediately, Mortimer was led to fear

you

you were ill, and therefore dispatched another messenger on the same errand.

"This man, who had accompanied my brother to India, and was much attached to him, had felt not a little mortified when he found his master was to leave that country without the nabob's heiress as his wife, but preferred, on his return to England, one who, in his opinion, wanted the greatest, if not only requisite for happiness.

"Lady Tankerville had before discovered his sentiments, and availed herself of the knowledge she had gained to assure him she had heard, from undoubted authority, Miss Belvington preferred another to his master, whereas Miss Alresford, on the contrary, loved him alone.

"Lady Tankerville remained with Mortimer till from the window she saw his servant returning, when, meeting him as he was proceeding to his master, and hearing of your having left S—— with Mr. Coleridge alone, she prevailed upon

upon him to substitute Mr. Egerton's name for your brother's, assuring him it would contribute as much to your happiness as his master's, if the latter could be convinced Mr. Egerton was preferred to him. The poor fellow eagerly entered into her views, and informed his master Mr. Egerton had accompanied you to a friend's house a few miles distant from S——, and that lady Neville and your sister were to follow in the morning, and proceed with you on an excursion of pleasure, which had been previously agreed upon.

"Mortimer acknowledges he felt not a little angry at this intelligence, which appeared as if you were totally careless of what consequences might follow his late danger; and lady Tankerville then entering, and inquiring with great apparent anxiety after your health, he informed her of the account his servant had brought him.—'Then,' exclaimed her ladyship,

ladyship, 'the report now so current is not without foundation.'

"He hastily inquired her meaning, but could obtain no answer. Lady Tankerville smiled, shook her head, and again smiling as she looked towards his servant, left the room.

"Mortimer, his head confused, and himself flushed with agitation, angrily asked the man if he knew what her ladyship alluded to?

"He instantly answered in the affirmative, and added—'I have, sir, more than once heard that Mr. Egerton and Miss Belvington are extremely partial to each other.'

"Overpowered by surprise, my brother remained silent, and wholly unable to check the volubility of his servant as he continued—'Oh my dear master! how could you ever forsake that other poor young lady, so feeling-hearted, so true! for one who cares not a sixpence whether you live or die? I did not understand

Miss Belvington fainted when she saw you drowning, but they thought poor Miss Alresford would have died with alarm, and——'

"He was here hastily interrupted by his master, who gave him orders to have every thing in readiness for their return to town, as he intended setting off at an early hour in the morning, and also desired, if any gentleman inquired for, or called upon him that evening, to say he was too unwell to admit any one.

Lady Tankerville was immediately informed of these orders, and her carriage was also desired to be in readiness at an early hour: then again visiting Mortimer, with the excuse of bidding him farewell, and pretending ignorance of his intentions, she informed him Miss Alresford had insisted upon immediately quitting S——, and returning to their lodgings in London.

"This declaration produced the effect she expected. Mortimer, on hearing they

they would commence their journey at a very early hour, instantly entreated permission to accompany them; and after a night of distraction, joined this female Machiavel in the morning, without leaving any message for you or your father, who had promised to see him early in the day.

"The rapidity with which they travelled, and the distress of mind he suffered from, occasioned a most dangerous illness, through which Miss Alresford again became his nurse; and her anxious, attentive kindness and regard excited his warmest gratitude, being strikingly contrasted with your apparent indifference; and as soon as lady Tankerville's plan succeeded, Mortimer renounced Elinor, and became the husband of Miss Alresford.

"A few days after his marriage, he received Mr. Coleridge's second letter (the first had never reached him), requiring an explanation of his extraordinary conduct and long silence.

"Without mentioning his intention to any one, Mortimer immediately set off for Mr. Coleridge's residence, forgetting the latter had informed him of his being at present at ——. Not finding him at home, therefore, my brother proceeded by the well-known private path to the parsonage.

"The interview with his still-beloved Elinor, and the explanation she gave him of her leaving S—— so suddenly, nearly drove him wild; and he returned to London under the agonizing conviction of his wife being equally guilty with her friend.

"Her innocence however he was soon fully convinced of; and upon upbraiding lady Tankerville for her artifice and falsehood, she replied, her scheme had succeeded, therefore she gloried in the subterfuge by which it had been effected; and that it had ever been her plan through life to persevere in any thing she adopted till it proved successful.

"The

"The conversation ended by Mortimer's forbidding her the house, and she intends returning to India as soon as possible.

"My brother has changed his regiment for one ordered abroad, whither his wife has most earnestly entreated to accompany him. Poor girl! she is wretched in the discovery of lady Tankerville's turpitude, and the fear of never being able to gain the affections of her husband.

"A few words from you, my beloved Elinor, either to Mortimer or myself, I most earnesly entreat, as the only means of restoring that peace which is at present lost to them both. I cannot, I do not, pretend to excuse his conduct; her weakness of mind is equally blameable: but I sincerely love my brother; his heart is most excellent, and most deeply do I sympathize in its present misery. Will you not also believe I am sincere, my dearest friend, in my expressions of

sorrow for what your gentle heart also must have suffered?

"But, for the sake of your Eliza, your early-attached friend and companion, will you accord forgiveness to her brother, and continue to remember, with the same affection as ever, your sincerely attached and most affectionate friend,

ELIZA WARDLEY."

CHAPTER V.

MRS. Belvington, after reading Mrs. Wardley's letter, which Elinor put into her hands, retired with it to her husband, who generally passed the morning in his study; and Caroline, on finding herself alone with her sister, exclaimed—"To what a pitch of excellence has Mrs. Wardley attained in the art of glossing and varnishing! no one else could have decked

decked Mortimer in such advantageous colours; and I make no doubt she has succeeded in convincing you, Elinor, Miss Alresford was alone deserving of censure, who has proved herself to be a very naughty, disagreeable, forward girl."

"I do not think that is the opinion of Eliza any more than it is mine," returned Elinor, smiling; "and surely, Caroline, she has stated, in the most candid manner, every circumstance relative to her brother, who is certainly more deserving our pity than our censure."

"My dear sister," replied Caroline, "I should never have suspected your *extreme partiality* for Mortimer would so entirely hoodwink your judgment. What! can you then implicitly believe his assertion, or rather Mrs. Wardley's, that he never, even for a moment, allowed Miss Alresford to hope her regard was returned? Or, granting he was ignorant of the warmth of her sentiments, can you suppose his vanity, of which he had

an abundant share, was not gratified at observing the evident pleasure he must see she took in his society? Therefore, my dear Elinor, neither Mrs. Wardley nor yourself shall ever persuade me his attentions to her were those only a brother might pay; or, if he disguised them under so convenient an appellation, they were not, as sir Edward Ormsby would say, 'the less dangerous on that account."

"It is to sir Edward then," said Elinor, laughing, "that I am indebted for so edifying a discourse. Have you any more arguments to advance before I enter on poor Mortimer's defence?"

"I do really believe, Elinor, your indifference for him is, now you find he has escaped you, converted into love. 'How flattered poor Mortimer would be at hearing of this first proof! and that it is a very strong one cannot be denied; for the attempt to vindicate a conduct so palpably wrong admits of no other interpretation;

pretation: and such would be the opinion of any impartial observer."

"You do not, I hope, class yourself as one of those," returned Elinor, smiling; "you, who have ever been the most prejudiced against him, have you any thing more to say? I must take your vanity down a little, my dear sister, and then perhaps you will cease to provoke me by defending Mortimer, whom I have, in addition to his other offences, accused of being a little puffed up with conceit; you are not wanting on that score, if you really believe he would or could remain unchangeably true during the term of four long years, spent in total banishment from your fair presence, and surrounded by myriads of damsels, all anxious for, and probably courting, his most fascinating attentions. Now, mark how completely vanity can blind even the prudent, sensible Elinor, that she cannot perceive it was the intelligence she communicated to Mrs. Wardley, when in India, of her

name and state remaining still unchanged, that caused a tingling sensation in her brother's soft heart; and lady Tankerville's violence alarming his weak brain, he gladly retreated from her vicinity. The smothering heat which, I believe, had never wholly been extinguished, then burst into a flame, and Elinor was again the cry. Mrs. Wardley, by her judicious commendations, fanned and kept it alive; so, as they each succeeding day approached the shores of old England, the fire gathered strength; and upon reaching them, unable longer to endure the scorching heat, Mortimer posted off to Rosebrook, soon heard of the good fortune that awaited him; and his vanity, more puffed up than ever, blinded him to the indifference, not to say creeping aversion, with which you, on your return from Ashgrove, received all his vows of love, fidelity, and everlasting attachment. Yet now, Elinor, you are provoking me

by

by expressing pity, if not approbation, of his conduct."

"Mercy, my dear Caroline, mercy!" cried Elinor, unable to refrain from laughing at the indignant manner of her sister; "I acknowledge my vanity is completely humbled, if not entirely crushed, by the picture you have held up to my view; and how fortunate it is for me that Mr. Egerton is coming this way! his presence will, I hope, disperse this almost-overwhelming storm."

"I do not promise you all its fury is spent," returned Caroline, laughing also, as she rose to observe his approach. "But how terribly grave does our poor Torpedo look this morning—more petrifying than ever! surely something very particular must have occasioned this even more than common gravity."

Mr. Egerton's manner, as he entered the room, confirmed her suspicion; it was serious even to melancholy; and when he informed the sisters his aunt

requested to see them, and that she hoped they would allow him to be their escort to the cottage, with one voice they both inquired if lady Egerton were ill?

"Not in the least," he replied, surprised at the alarm her request had excited; "but she wishes to see you as soon as possible, though I know not on what account."

"If you will have the goodness to wait for me a few minutes until I have spoken to my mother," said Elinor, rising, "I shall be ready to accompany you."

"Remember," said Caroline to her in a whisper, "you are not to be too lenient."

"I have not so soon forgotten your lecture," replied Elinor, smiling; and leaving the room, she hastened to the study, where her parents were conversing together.

"Elinor, my love," said Mr. Belvington as she entered, and affectionately kissing her as he spoke, "we must give your

your mother the permission she solicits, and allow her to write to Mrs. Wardley instead of yourself, as she thinks it will be in her power more effectually to dispel poor Eliza's apprehensions, and calm her anxiety for your happiness."

Elinor cast an apprehensive glance towards her mother, who answered it by one of serious, mild reproach; and Mr. Belvington, smiling, continued——" I suspect, my dear wife, by your child's hesitation, she is aware of your design, which, I honestly acknowledge," he added, addressing Elinor, as he pressed her to his heart, " was of your father's suggesting. Yes, Mortimer must be fully acquainted with the treasure he has lost, and which I had so nearly thrown away."

" Oh no, no, my dearest mother!" exclaimed Elinor in an earnest tone, " do not inform my beloved Eliza of the conflict I have undergone; the knowledge of it will add greatly to her present distress;

tress; and she will likewise feel much hurt at finding how little sensible I have been to her brother's regard."

"I should be more hurt," replied Mrs. Belvington, "if she were left to suppose you continued attached to one who has acted towards you in so unpardonable a manner. But if any other method than the one your father has proposed for assuring her to the contrary can be pointed out, have the goodness to inform me of it."

"My dear mother," said Elinor, perceiving she appeared much hurt by this unwillingness to confide in her discretion, "I submit to your better judgment; only pray assure Eliza my affection for her is as warm as ever; and tell her likewise——"

"You can add all this, my love, in a postscript to my letter," returned Mrs. Belvington; "I must now enter on another subject, just brought under review by

by a note I have received from lady Egerton."

"First, let me mention her nephew," said Elinor, smiling, "who is now in the parlour, waiting, at the request of his aunt, for Caroline and myself to accompany him to the cottage."

"I will go to him," said Mr. Belvington, "whilst your mother acquaints you with lady Egerton's proposal, with which you will, I hope, be induced to comply."

"Are you not a little curious, my Elinor," said Mrs. Belvington, smiling, "to hear me explain the nature of our friend's request? Does not vanity whisper, 'Mortimer's jealous fears are not then without foundation?"

"No, dearest mother," replied Elinor in the same sportive tone; "my vanity is, for this morning at least, completely humbled. Caroline has read me a long lecture upon it, and has so entirely shocked and convinced me of the abundant share

I possess,

I possess, that, for the future, I intend to entertain a more modest opinion of myself."

Elinor now repeated to her mother Caroline's observations and remarks upon Mrs. Wardley's letter and Mortimer's conduct.

Mrs. Belvington was much entertained by them, and, laughing, replied—"I candidly confess mine have been the same; but we must not now enter again on that subject, as lady Egerton's request still remains unanswered. It is for you and Caroline to accompany her into Sussex on a visit to her brother, sir Charles Egerton, where you will meet his numerous family of children and grandchildren, who annually assemble there to celebrate the birthday of the heir apparent. Your father willingly agrees to Caroline's accepting her invitation, provided you also are of the party; therefore I wish to know whether you are inclined to it before I mention the subject

ject to your sister, who shall otherwise remain ignorant of it?"

"Not one moment should I hesitate, my dear mother," returned Elinor, "to say I would with pleasure contribute to Caroline's gratification, had I another sister to remain as companion to you, who have already been left so much alone this summer."

"If it is on my account alone," said Mrs. Belvington, "that you hesitate to accept lady Egerton's invitation, my dear child, I assure you I shall infinitely prefer your quitting home now, and returning to me for the winter, when I shall most enjoy your society. It is also my wish that our dear Caroline should partake in the pleasure this excursion promises; therefore you had better see our kind friend as soon as possible, and settle every thing relative to the journey, which she intends commencing in a very few days. In the mean time, I will write my letter to Mrs. Wardley, and it will be ready for

for your inspection, I hope, before dinner, as I intend entering on my employment when you leave me."

Elinor, laughing at this gentle hint, immediately left the room, and returned to Caroline, who, eager to commence her walk, was impatiently expecting her; and as, accompanied by Mr. Egerton, they left the house, she whispered her sister he had not spoken ten words since his entrance. Elinor had likewise remarked the more than usual taciturnity of their companion; and in the course of their walk, as he stooped to gather a wild plant for her, Caroline again whispered—"More petrifying than ever!" not aware that, although the Torpedo appeared to have lost the faculty of speech, his sense of hearing was more than commonly acute; but of this she was convinced by the expression of his countenance as he presented the flower to Elinor, and, with something approaching to an arch smile, said—"I am afraid, Miss Belvington,

Belvington, you will find this flower has imbibed a little of those benumbing and petrifying attributes I have more than once heard ascribed to some poor mortals, unless I give it first to your sister, who will, if possible, breathe something like animation into it, if she can prevent herself from shrinking from its baneful vicinity."

Caroline, with a blushing cheek, turned hastily away, and quickening her steps, approached a cottage where some children were playing, and entered into conversation with the mother concerning them.

But Elinor would not long allow her to remain thus engaged; and reminding her lady Egerton was expecting them, Caroline again proceeded, though nearly as silent as Mr. Egerton had before been, but who now continued conversing with Elinor till they drew near the elegant and romantic cottage of lady Egerton. Caroline, wishing to pass the gate which led

led to the flower-garden it was surrounded by, without having occasion to look up or thank Mr. Egerton for unclosing it, bounded quickly forward; but swiftly as she ran, he reached it before her, and as he held the little wicket open, with a half-smile said—"Be cautious how you pass, for danger is near. Beware, I entreat you!" he with mock earnestness continued, "or your pelisse will touch the end of my stick, and we shall see it receding like the sensitive plant from its baneful touch."

"Oh Mr. Egerton!" exclaimed Caroline, blushing, though unable to refrain from laughing, "I acknowledge I deserve some little punishment for my rudeness, but indeed this is too severe."

"Then let us proclaim a mutual amnesty," he replied, as he held out his hand and took the one presented him in token of reconciliation; "and let me imitate your candour by confessing I have

have been more than usually stupid. Yet for this I can plead an excuse. Had I not cause to feel out of spirits, whilst reflecting this was the last morning I should spend in your society for many weeks to come, as I leave Rosebrook at an early hour to-morrow?"

Caroline started, and in an earnest tone inquired if he were serious, and what occasioned his sudden departure?

"I ought to have recollected long before," he replied, "the time was drawing near that would oblige me to return home. The heir of Alborough," he continued with a smile, "must not be absent on the anniversary of his natal day, and mine returns next week."

Lady Egerton now advancing from the cottage with Elinor, who had left her companions and proceeded thither, Caroline hastened to meet them; and as soon as her young guests were seated, the former repeated to them the request Mrs. Belvington had before informed

Elinor

Elinor of.—" It remains with you to decide, my love," she continued, addressing the latter, " and I hope to receive a favourable answer when I mention, we shall be able to take a peep at our friends of Elmsly Park, which we must pass in our way to Alborough."

" Now I am sure you have taken all power of refusal from Elinor," cried Caroline, " by giving her the least hope of meeting her dear general. Am I not right, Elinor?" she continued; " and are you not eager to be upon the road thither?"

But, to Caroline's great surprise, her sister appeared far otherwise; she blushed, hesitated, and at length stammered something of being afraid they should not find the family at home, as she had not heard from Emma for some time. Lady Egerton, equally surprised, remained for a moment silent; but seeing Elinor look distressed even to tears, she changed the subject by inquiring if the

time

time were yet fixed for Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby's return, who had been absent from home for the benefit of their little girl?

Caroline answered they were expected back in the course of that day, and she and her sister intended returning by Beechbrook to hear if they were arrived.

Lady Egerton then requested to be informed if Elinor and her sister would be in readiness to accompany her in the course of two days.—"If you can," she continued, "I shall venture to detain my nephew till that time, as he is a most able charioteer, and my poor old coachman is too ill to perform his accustomed office."

Caroline instantly answered for herself and Elinor; and lady Egerton, requesting the latter to leave her sister to dinner, promised to return with her to the parsonage in the afternoon.

Elinor, leaving Mrs. Wardley's letter

with

with her friend, left the cottage so absorbed in painful retrospection, she forgot her intention of calling at Beechbrook in her way home.

Mrs. Belvington instantly perceived by her daughter's countenance, as she entered the room where she was still writing, that something had occurred to agitate her; and tenderly inquiring what it was, Elinor, unable longer to restrain her tears, replied—"Oh my dear mother! how unfortunate it was that I consented to accompany lady Egerton, for she intends passing a day at Elmsly, where I must again meet general Clarenville, whom I so much wish to avoid at present, as the recollection of what occurred at S—— cannot have faded from his memory. Indeed, indeed," she continued in increased agitation, "you must allow me to stay with you; surely lady Egerton is sufficient protection for Caroline, and there can be no necessity for my

my subjecting myself to so distressing, so mortifying an interview."

"Elinor," said Mrs. Belvington seriously, though kindly, "I must entreat you will not thus give way to your feelings, which I sincerely grieve have been so painfully wounded. But I cannot see how this dreaded interview can be avoided, unless the excursion is entirely given up; and that, for poor Caroline's sake, you will be averse to. Exert then, my dear child," continued her mother, affectionately embracing her, "that fortitude you have hitherto displayed; the meeting between general Clarenville and yourself must take place some time or another; surely then the sooner it is over the better, unless you have any *particular reason* for wishing to defer it."

"Oh! no, no, my dearest mother!" returned the deeply-blushing Elinor, "I have no wish, no motive, except that of gaining a little more time, and that some

few months hence my foolish conduct may be forgotten by him. But now, when it must still remain in such vivid colours, will he not think, if I voluntarily throw myself in his way, that I wish it to continue so? Every principle of delicacy revolts at the idea, and I feel I never, never can meet him with any tolerable degree of composure, nay, very probably shall lower myself in his esteem even more than I have already done;" and Elinor now shed the bitterest tears of self-reproach and mortification.

Mrs. Belvington, greatly distressed, attempted in vain to sooth her; but, though grateful for her kindness, which she endeavoured to express by the most affectionate caresses, Elinor could not recover herself until her mother said—"You shall not then pass through so fiery an ordeal, for I am convinced our dear Caroline will not for an instant hesitate in giving up her promised plea-

sure, when she finds how unpleasant the excursion will be to her sister."

"Oh no!" she eagerly exclaimed, "I would not, on any account, be the means of depriving her of any amusement. But why, my dear mother, does that follow? For what reason does my father so strenuously insist upon my being her companion? I am perfectly convinced he has no cause to fear Caroline's discretion."

"Of that," said Mrs. Belvington, interrupting her, "he entertains not the shadow of a doubt; but at the same time he particularly wishes you to accompany her. His reasons for it I am not now at liberty to explain. Your father also entreats you will write me a daily account of every incident that occurs in which your sister is concerned, that he may be able to form some judgment on a point which at this time perplexes as much as it interests him. I can explain nothing farther at present,

my love," continued Mrs. Belvington to her surprised and attentive auditor; "yet, I hope, have, even now, proved your father's motives for wishing you to accompany Caroline are founded on anxiety for her happiness, which may perhaps be in your power to promote. Therefore, if you have no other objection to the plan than the one you deem insurmountable, allow me to set it aside, by acquainting our old friend with the reasons you have for wishing to avoid meeting any of the Clarenville family at present."

"Forgive me, dearest mother," cried Elinor, starting in renewed confusion, "forgive me, if I entreat you to be silent on that subject even to my beloved, revered lady Egerton; but I will cheerfully bear any mortification rather than permit my folly to be known. Let us then drop the subject; assure me only of your forgiveness for having thus distressed you. I will suppress every selfish consideration,

consideration, in order to promote, if possible, the happiness of a sister ever kind and affectionate to me."

Mrs. Belvington answered by a tender embrace; and putting the reply she had written Mrs. Wardley into her daughter's hand, desired her to read it whilst she finished the letter her entrance had interrupted.

Elinor, having perused the one addressed to her friend, and gratefully thanked her mother for the approval of her conduct respecting her motives for accepting Mortimer, sat down to add a few lines to his sister, when she was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Willoughby, who had returned the evening before, and now upbraided Elinor for allowing the morning to pass without inquiring if she were arrived.

Elinor blushed at recollecting how totally she had forgotten such an arrival was expected, and now endeavoured to apologize for her neglect. Her excuses

were soon accepted, and mutual inquiries succeeded each other so rapidly, that Mrs. Belvington at length insisted on their adjourning to the garden, where they would probaby find their father, and leaving her to finish writing, which was impossible whilst disturbed by such incessant talking.

Mrs. Willoughby was soon acquainted with the termination of Elinor's engagement, and laughingly congratulated her on the happy effects renewed liberty had produced on her countenance, which had regained its former bloom, and then, to her great confusion, inquired where Clarenville had hidden himself during the storm?

With tolerable composure she succeeded in answering—"On the Continent, I believe, and is not expected home for some months."

Mrs. Willoughby, smiling, and shaking her head, proceeded to ask how Caroline

roline and Mr. Egerton went on. On this topic Elinor could descant with great fluency, and repeated what had passed that morning, much to the entertainment of her sister, and then informed her of their projected excursion into Sussex.

Not finding Mr. Belvington, Mrs. Willoughby promised to return with her husband in the afternoon, as she could no longer remain absent from her little girl; then, again looking in on her mother, who was still earnestly engaged in writing, she left a kind message for her father, and departed.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Caroline met her brother Willoughby in the evening, she whispered him—"Oh the wonderful wisdom of fif-

teen! did I not tell you it would exceed that of five-and-twenty?" Then, without waiting for a reply, she advanced towards Elinor, who was employed at the tea-table; and leaning over the back of her chair, in a low voice said—"Have you seen what my mother has written Mrs. Wardley, and are you satisfied with her explanations, &c.?"

"Oh yes!" replied Elinor, in the same low tone, "she said every thing that was kind, tender, and affectionate of her child."

"And yet has not swerved from truth, I make no doubt," returned Caroline. "And now pray tell me," she continued, in a still lower voice, "what cause my mother assigned for the terrible alarm you were under in Mrs. Delmore's garden? did she say you were not aware of who had left or remained in that unlucky boat? she told the truth, I hope, in that respect also?"

Elinor, blushing, and bending over the

the cups to conceal her face, replied—"I believe she saw no necessity for even alluding to that unfortunate circumstance. But, my dear Caroline, your curiosity can be more effectually gratified by applying to my mother herself, though at present you may be more usefully employed in assisting me to pour out the coffee, as lady Egerton will not be sorry for a little refreshment after her walk."

Mr. Egerton now took his accustomed station beside Caroline; and her brother Willoughby, also drawing his chair to the table, engrossed her attention so effectually that Elinor continued undisturbed to pursue her employment, except only a gentle hint now and then on absence of mind, which displayed itself in forgetting to fill the teapot when requisite, or in putting a double quantity of sugar into the cups.

The children were now quite restored to health, and impatient for the return of

their brother and sister, who, with Mrs. Coleridge, arrived at Rosebrook Hall in the course of the following morning; and little Henry immediately began telling his mother how very kind Mr. Egerton had been in riding out and playing with him, whilst his aunts Elinor and Caroline nursed sister Eliza; but his brother Edward would not allow Mr. Egerton was so good-tempered as his favourite Clarenville; and on Henry's declaring the latter would not nurse him half so well if he were sick, he eagerly replied—"Yes, but he would; for you can't think how very sorry he was for me that night I cried so, and had such a bad headache, because aunt Elinor went away to you, Henry, without saying goodbye to me. Mr. Clarenville came up to me after I was in bed, and sat down by my bedside, and told me not to be so unhappy, for I should soon see her again; and when I kept crying, and said I did so much love my own dear aunty,

he

he kissed me so kindly, and said he did not wonder at it, for so did every body who knows her; so then I asked him if he loved her too."

"And he answered, 'Not at all,' did he not, Edward?" said the highly-entertained Caroline, who, with her mother and Elinor, was present.

"No," returned the little fellow, nodding his head, and looking very wise, "he did not say any such thing; but I must not tell you any more, because he told me not to say even that I had seen him that night."

"And extremely well you have kept your promise," returned his laughing aunt. "So," she continued, "Mr. Clarenville would not tell you what he thought of Elinor, except that he did not care a fig for her."

"He never said so," cried Edward, eagerly; "oh no, I am sure he never did; for when I asked him——"

"Edward," said Mrs. Belvington, "do

not break the promise you gave Mr. Clarenville."

"No, grandmamma, I will not; only I can't bear aunt Caroline should say he did not care for my own dear aunty, when I know he said he loved her better than all the world. Oh dear!" continued the little fellow, tears of repentance starting to his eyes, "I have told now what Mr. Clarenville desired me particularly not to say again to anybody."

"Well," cried Henry, in a triumphant tone, "then he is not half so good as Mr. Egerton, for he told me he loved my dear aunt Caroline even more than I did, and that he did not care if all the world knew it; and you know, Edward, mamma has always told us we should never be ashamed of loving good persons; and as I am quite sure both our aunts are very, very good, why Mr. Egerton is the best great boy."

It was now Caroline's turn to blush, and the crimson on her cheek was even deeper

deeper than Elinor's had before been, who, relieved by the laugh their little nephews' remarks had raised, was soon able to turn the conversation.

Edward lamented most grievously her intention of leaving him again just when he was come back to her; but upon receiving her repeated assurances of not going away this time without bidding him goodbye, and that when once she came back, it would be for a very long time, he appeared rather more contented; and taking him with her to the parsonage, as Caroline also did Henrietta before the day was over, succeeded in tolerably reconciling him to her departure.

At an early hour on the following morning, lady Egerton's carriage drove to the door. Caroline was impatiently watching for its appearance, but by Elinor its arrival was as much dreaded. Mrs. Belvington also could scarcely restrain her tears from mingling with those

those which the former vainly endeavoured to prevent falling as she bade farewell to her mother, who was fully aware of the excellent motive that led her to encounter a meeting which could not but prove extremely distressing, and her sympathizing tears flowed freely after her child's departure.

The travellers reached C—— that night, and on the following morning, Mr. Egerton persuaded Caroline to mount with him the barouche-seat, and give up hers in the carriage to lady Egerton's old servant Alice, who was equally pleased with the exchange.

The day was a most delightful one, and before noon, Mr. Egerton announced they were within a mile of Elmsly Park. Elinor's heart throbbed to a most painful degree, but she exerted herself to smile, that lady Egerton's attention might not be attracted by her pale countenance and trembling limbs, though

each

each step the horses took her agitation rapidly increased.

The carriage now passed the lodge, and Mr. Egerton, who knew the porter, stopped a moment to address him, and inquired after his family.—"Sir Edward, sir," said the man, after having, with many thanks, answered satisfactorily to the health of his wife and children, "will be main glad to see you, and so will our dear young mistress, with whom my master is as happy as a long day in summer."

"Are not general and Mrs. Clarenville with lady Neville here too?" inquired Caroline; "I hope they also are well and happy?"

"I am sure I hope so too, Miss," returned the man; "the ladies, *leastways*, seem to be so; as for the general——"

"Oh! what of him?" exclaimed Elinor, leaning from the carriage; "surely he is not ill?"

"Not that I know of, Miss; he was quite

quite well when he left home, and God forbid he should be otherwise till he comes back to old England again!"

"Has he left it then? said Caroline, "and where is he gone?"

"Where many of our gentry are gone, that is to ——, Miss."

"Here is some mistake," said Mr. Egerton as he again drove on, "which your friends will soon be able to rectify."

But Elinor feared the intelligence was too true; and Clarenville ill, perhaps dying, instantly arose to her imagination, as she again leaned from the window to relieve a sudden faintness which came across her.

Sir Edward and lady Ormsby were strolling on the lawn in the front of the house, and soon recognised Caroline as she waved and kissed her hand to them. Emma delightedly embraced her beloved Elinor, and sir Edward cordially welcomed the whole party.

The first greetings over, Elinor looked anxiously

anxiously at her friend's countenance, dreading to read there a confirmation of her fears; but it still retained the same placid expression, and hope again returned.

Neither lady Neville nor Mrs. Clarenville had yet appeared, and Emma now informed her guests they were gone out in the carriage, but would not be long absent.

"We hear strange news of your father," said lady Egerton; "on what or whose account is he taken with the national mania?"

"He is gone to ———, my dear madam," replied sir Edward, with a look of pretended gravity, "on an errand of great importance, as you will agree with me when I inform you it is to bring home his truant boy again, whom mamma can no longer live without."

"I will not have my dear mother's fears ridiculed," said Emma—"fears which even you, Edward, have acknowledged may

may not be unfounded. "Alfred," she continued, addressing lady Egerton, "was far from well when he left us, and we have heard from another quarter his illness increased after he reached ——; but still, till within the last week he has written pretty regularly either to my mother or myself; his silence therefore now alarms us, particularly as he mentioned in his last letter he should continue some time stationary at that place."

"My dear Emma," cried sir Edward, "you may rely upon it some of his gay companions have enticed him a few miles beyond it, and I very much suspect papa's anxiety to set off was merely a pretence that would enable him to follow his frisky son's example; therefore you are alarming yourself most needlessly, and I really think make yourself more uneasy on this idle boy's account than even your mother does."

"At least I will not torment either you or my friends by dwelling on the subject,"

subject," returned Emma, rising and ringing the bell for refreshments, which, on their appearance, Caroline assured her she had an excellent appetite for; Mr. Egerton professed himself equally willing to attack them, and they soon convinced the party they were in earnest.

"And now," said sir Edward, presenting Elinor a glass of wine, and taking one himself, "we must not forget our most esteemed though absent friends." Then, bowing to her, and smiling, he continued—"Health and happiness attend major Mortimer!"

"And his Indian bride," exclaimed Caroline, "with a safe return to Calcutta!"

The glass fell from the hand of sir Edward, as involuntarily looking towards the confused and blushing Elinor, he exclaimed—"Is it possible!"

"Very strange certainly," replied Caroline, laughing, "but very true."

"Yes," said Elinor, endeavouring to shake

shake off her embarrassment as she repeated the lines—

"The willow must be
A garland for me."

This song," she continued, with a smile, "you will soon hear me warbling in plaintive melody."

"But do not wear that odious wreath," cried Emma eagerly, "at least not long."

"How can I do otherwise?" returned Elinor, blushing still deeper at observing the arch smile of sir Edward, who quickly replied—"Oh! Emma will soon find means to break the garland, if you wish, or will allow of her doing so."

"At present," said lady Egerton, smiling, "Elinor appears perfectly content in her forlorn state, for I have never seen her looking better than she has done this last fortnight. And now, my dear lady Ormsby, will you indulge us in a walk through some of the beautiful grounds

we have this last hour been admiring as we passed by them?"

"I will accompany you with pleasure," she replied, "as I wish much to shew you the spot I have fixed upon for a grotto, which is to be, Elinor, in a similar style to our favourite one at Ashgrove."

"My dearest Emma," said sir Edward, "forgive me if I at once put a negative on your walking so far this warm morning."

"I can only say then," she replied with a smile, "I must at once obey, not being quite so free now as when you passed the same *fiat* at Rosebrook; Elinor, I dare say, has not forgotten it, nor the ride we enjoyed to Edgewold."

"Miss Belvington has some reason to remember it," returned sir Edward, "though not with any great degree of enjoyment. But as to this grotto of yours, Emma," he continued, "I suspect your friend is perfectly indifferent about seeing

seeing it; and indeed, to a lady of her exquisite taste, one scarcely began, and without the advantages of weeping-willows, water-lilies, and all other pleasing *etceteras*, will not even appear passable."

"As you fear that will be the case," said Elinor, endeavouring to seem unconscious of what he alluded to, "I will remain with your wife whilst you point out its intended beauties to lady Egerton; Emma and I can enjoy a comfortable chat in the mean time, therefore you have my free permission to depart immediately."

Sir Edward, laughing, shook his head at her as he left the room with his guests; and Emma then entreated to be acquainted with all that had occurred respecting Mortimer, and the name of the lady who had become his wife.

Elinor gave a brief account of his acquaintance with Miss Alresford in India, and of their meeting again at S——; but

as

as she did not enter into particulars, her friend was so indignant against Mortimer, that Elinor, fearing she had not given an impartial view of his conduct, and wishing in some measure to justify him, gave Emma his sister's letter to read; the perusal of it in some degree appeased her, though, with Caroline, she instantly affirmed his attentions to Miss Alresford, when in India, had been more particular than his sister would allow; and she was confirmed in this opinion when Elinor had, at her request, informed her of what had passed at S——, and the earnest manner in which he had pressed her to consent to an immediate and private union.—"Or why," she continued, "should he have entertained any reasonable fears of lady Tankerville? Surely a soldier could not tremble at a woman's tongue, that gives not half so great a blow to the ear as does a chesnut in a farmer's fire."

Elinor, delighted to see her friend in such

such excellent spirits, laughing, inquired if that quotation were a favourite one of sir Edward's? and then continued—"I know not what cause Mortimer had to dread her ladyship; but as to myself, I can assure you her very name inspires me with terror; and I have an equal aversion to the subject that generally succeeds, the repetition of which I am heartily tired of; therefore, dear Emma, let us wave it, and talk of your own happiness, which, I am delighted to perceive, promises to be most durable; sincerely do I participate in it, and as earnestly hope nothing will ever interrupt it."

"And I, dear Elinor, as sincerely wish your lot may be equally happy; nay, do not shake your head, and talk any more nonsense about the willow, for if you do, I shall certainly suspect even more than I do at present. But here comes my mother," continued Emma, wishing to relieve the confusion of her friend; "I must prepare her for seeing you, or she will

will be in danger of running wild with delight; yet I really think she is already acquainted with your arrival, or my aunt's horses would not be coming at so rapid a rate."

Mrs. Clarenville and her companion had heard from the porter some company were at the house; and immediately concluding *who they were*, had hastened home as fast as possible. The former embraced Elinor with the affection of a mother; and scarcely could lady Neville persuade her to allow her some share in Elinor's caresses, to whom she was anxious to express her pleasure at this unexpected meeting.—"How very unfortunate," she continued, "you and the general should have missed each other! one day earlier, and he could have seen his eldest daughter, as he constantly calls you."

Elinor attempted to say she was sorry for the cause of his absence; but Mrs. Clarenville's eyes were so intently fixed

on her blushing countenance, she could proceed but little way in her expressions of regret; and lady Neville, also interrupting her, said—"I will not allow of any more croaking; my rhetoric has been employed the whole morning in endeavouring to convince my sister that Alfred has written, and assured her he is quite well, only his letters and assurances are either at the bottom of the salt sea, or lying snug in the foreign post-office. I had flattered myself this eloquence would prove successful; but if you, Elinor, come with that terrible long face, and Emma with her April one, I shall be quite in despair."

"No, no," said Mrs. Clarenville, smiling, "my opinions are not quite so variable; you have pretty well convinced me there is not much cause for alarm; and were it not for the pleasure my good man is deprived of, I should say I am not sorry, on his own account, that I persuaded him to go in search of his truant

son,

son, as the excursion will most probably benefit his spirits, which have of late been very indifferent."

The entrance of lady Egerton and the rest of the party now interrupted any farther remarks, and Caroline was as much rejoiced at meeting her favourite lady Neville, as Mrs. Clarenville had been on seeing Elinor.

A more cheerful party than the one assembled that day at dinner scarcely ever met together. Elinor's mind was relieved beyond expression on finding her meeting with the general was deferred, and would now probably be so for many months, as lady Egerton did not intend returning home by Elmsly Park; and Emma's request of spending some part of the winter with her, Elinor had excused herself from complying with. Mrs. Clarenville's cheerfulness convinced her she apprehended nothing serious on her son's account; and each moment the former recognised more distinctly

the animated and intelligent Elinor she had at Ashgrove become so partial to.

After the cloth was removed, and the servants had retired, sir Edward, filling the glasses of his guests, said—" Come, let us once more drink to the health of our absent friends; and this time, I hope, my hand will prove more faithful to its trust, for surely it will be in no danger from a similar surprise, when I propose as a toast our beloved and revered general, with a safe return to his native land."

" Let us not forget his son's, my dear Edward," said Mrs. Clarenville, " whom we must also wish may be his companion."

Sir Edward, again filling his glass, repeated her wish; and lady Neville, following his example, added, with a smile—" But no foreign bride with him."

" Not even an Indian one," he returned, as he replenished the glasses of Elinor

nor and her sister, who were sitting beside him.

Caroline's attention at this moment was engaged by something Mr. Egerton was saying to her; and sir Edward, soon observing she allowed the wine to remain untouched in the glass, lifted it himself to her lips as he said—"I did not know you were so averse to brother Clarenville's returning home, and seeking a helpmate in old England. See," he continued, pointing to Elinor's empty glass, who had hastily drunk its contents, to avoid any comments on her dilatoriness, "your sister is not quite so cruel, for she has anticipated us all in expressing that kind wish; what then makes you so unwilling to follow her excellent example?"

"Elinor," said Caroline, laughing, "why did you not express your wishes in a more audible tone? I should then with pleasure have echoed them; but I will not now delay a moment repeating

the lesson you have given me. Listen then, sir Edward; this wine is drunk by me to the health and happiness of Alfred Clarenville, Esq. the latter of which can only be secured by his returning as quickly as possible to old England, and following the excellent example his worthy friend has set him, of taking unto himself a wife." And Caroline now took her wine amidst the loud applauses of sir Edward and Mr. Egerton, and the cheerful laugh of the ladies, Elinor excepted, who felt not a little provoked with her sister, though she ventured not, even by a look, to hint her displeasure, lest sir Edward should observe it, and require an explanation of its expression.

Caroline, however, seemed aware she had gone a little too far, and immediately united her efforts to Emma's, who felt much for the confusion of Elinor in giving a sportive turn to the conversation, which lady Ormsby, after her husband joined

joined them in the drawing-room, requested he would not renew.

The evening passed in the same cheerful way, and on the following morning the travellers were prepared to continue their journey immediately after breakfast.

"Why will you not retrace your steps, my dear madam?" said sir Edward to lady Egerton, when her nephew entered to inform her the carriage was at the door. "Cannot Emma persuade you to look in upon us as you return to your own pretty cottage, and make us a rather more sociable visit than the one we have now been favoured with?"

"I would, my dear sir, with the greatest pleasure," replied lady Egerton, "had I not promised an old friend whom I met at S—— to return from my brother's by Surrey, that I might pass a few days with her."

"You mean Mrs. Montague perhaps," said sir Edward; "then, if Ashgrove is the spot you are bound to, no

entreaty, either of mine or Emma's, would induce Miss Belvington to pass those few days with us, even were I to engage safely to escort her back to Rosebrook. But you must not forget your absent friends," he continued, addressing Elinor; "promise me, I beg, to recall them to your remembrance, when you, with your sister, again visit our favourite grotto; there point out to her observation and admiration the rustic bench where Emma used to sit, and listen to my soft though oft-repeated tale; then lead her to the placid stream, on whose green bank Clarenville and yourself, like guardian spirits of our love, were wont to sit and talk of other times and other things much more rational than those we daily conversed upon."

"But unfortunately," returned the blushing Elinor, "Ashgrove is not the residence of lady Egerton's friend; therefore this most poetic language of yours

is

is thrown away, and my memory taxed to no purpose."

"How much I wish, my dear Elinor, you would return to me!" said Emma; "indeed I should enjoy your society even more than Mrs. Montague herself could do."

"I am not slow of conviction on that point, my kind friend," returned Elinor; then, with an arch smile, added, "for you would not be obliged to introduce me to your more fashionable acquaintances as your rural cousin, or endeavour to forget such was the relationship I had the honour of claiming with you."

"Oh no," exclaimed Emma, affectionately embracing her, "I should be proud of acknowledging even the most distant connexion with my Elinor."

Sir Edward here gave a loud hem; and Caroline exclaimed—"What can you be alluding to, my dear sister? what is all this about rural cousins and

relationship? do pray tell me what you mean?"

"Another time, my dear Caroline," said lady Egerton, giving her hand to sir Edward; "at present we must attend only to my nephew, who is all impatience to be again in motion; and as we proceed on our journey, Elinor will entertain us with her account."

Mr. Egerton, now drawing the arm of Caroline within his own as they followed his aunt and sir Edward from the room, said to his companion—"You will not surely leave me to the society of poor old Alice to-day?"

"Why should you suspect me of so much cruelty?" returned Caroline, laughing.

"I feared your sister's promised history," he replied, "would entice you from me, and I should be left to mourn my lost happiness to my old deaf companion, who would be equally pleased or concerned if I were to remain in the taci-

turn

turn humour she usually sees me in, and which you only have power to draw me from."

"After such a high-wrought compliment," returned the still-laughing, though now-blushing Caroline, "it would be impossible to refuse accompanying you, even if enticed away by myriads of rural cousins, or by any of my still more fascinating and highly-elegant town ones, of whom, thanks to my good fortune! Mr. Montague is the only one I am tormented with."

Caroline, now arrived at the carriage, sprung, with her companion's assistance, into her elevated seat. Mrs. Clarenville, almost with tears, bade farewell to Elinor; and Emma, after receiving the promise of a letter very soon, allowed her friend to follow lady Egerton; whilst sir Edward, as he shook hands with them at parting, said—"Health and happiness attend you both! the latter, Miss Belvington,"

vington," he continued, "can only be secured by following my example."

Having had the satisfaction of raising a roseate blush on the cheek of his fair friend, he allowed the carriage-door to be closed, and again bowing and kissing his hand to Elinor, returned to the house.

CHAPTER VII.

As the evening closed in, Mr. Egerton drove up the long straight avenue leading to the hall of his fathers, as Caroline termed the ancient structure, and the old servants, in their equally-ancient liveries, appeared, with their master, at the door to assist the travellers in alighting.

Lady Egerton had married, when very young, the elder brother of the present baronet, who, at the time of his union with

with her, had passed his grand climacteric, and dying within two years after his marriage, the title and estate descended to his younger brother, who was not much his junior, and the father of seven female children.

The present dowager lady Egerton had, very early in life, met with a disappointment of the heart, and had afterwards united herself, solely by her father's wish, to her late husband, and on his decease willingly retired from the oppressive state he, like his fathers, delighted to live in, and in her elegant little cottage at Rosebrook found that happiness which had fled since the period of her youthful disappointment.

For Mr. Belvington and his family she had ever felt the warmest regard, but Elinor had from infancy been her chosen favourite; she had answered for her at the font, and each succeeding year more firmly cemented the affection which her

her playful, infantine manners had first called into being.

With the family of her brother-in-law lady Egerton had always been on the best terms, and was equally beloved by them; but the daughters having all married at an early period of life, and residing in a different quarter of the kingdom, she never saw them except at their annual meeting at Alborough Hall.

Charles Egerton, the only surviving son of the present baronet, was the youngest of the family, and had not seen the light at the time his father succeeded to the title. His appearance in the world was hailed by his numerous relatives with the greatest delight; but from infancy he appeared the only one who partook not in the general hilarity his each-revolving birthday produced.—Though ever affectionate and fond of his family, he shrunk with dread from the noisy congratulations and officious attentions the guests of his father offered at that

that period to the youthful heir of Alborough; and after he arrived at manhood, had requested sir Charles to confine his invitations at that time to his own numerous family and a few intimate friends who resided near them.

Mr. Egerton was now entering his six-and-twentieth year—a favourite with all who really knew his worth; but his usually grave and reserved manners were too apt to prejudice strangers against him.

Sir Charles having assisted lady Egerton from the carriage, and welcomed her young friends with great cordiality, led the way to the saloon across an immense, lofty, and gloomy-looking hall, now but faintly illumined by the last streak of daylight; and Caroline, as she caught the arm of Elinor whilst following the baronet and his sister, in the lowest tone of voice said—"This hall does indeed resemble the cave of Trophonius."

"And the whispering-gallery of St. Paul's

Paul's also," said a voice near her, which, on turning round, she discovered to be Mr. Egerton's, whom she had left at the door giving directions to the servants, but who now, to her great surprise, was close beside her.

"You certainly must also be endowed with a similar and almost-superhuman power," she, laughing, returned, "or you never could have overheard a remark so indistinctly breathed, that even Elinor, to whom it was addressed, could not understand it."

"You must at least allow," replied Mr. Egerton, in a tone almost approaching to an arch one, "that I sometimes make a proper use of this wonderful faculty, as, by the astonishing degree of knowledge I attain by it, I am enabled, in some degree at least, to rectify the numerous faults or foibles laid to my charge."

"Of which the loss of memory is not one," returned Caroline, as they now entered by large folding-doors a brilliantly-lighted saloon, which, though furnished in

in the most antique style, had a cheerfulness in its appearance, from the many smiling countenances assembled round a large fire the coldness of the evening (one at the latter end of September) rendered not at all unacceptable, and which gave an additional air of comfort to the scene, forming a striking contrast to the cold, gloomy hall leading to it.

Sir Charles now introduced the sisters to his wife and family, the members of which appeared so numerous, Caroline feared she should never have time to become acquainted with them all. Mr. Egerton particularly introduced his eldest sister to her, and Caroline was immediately struck with the great similarity Mrs. Davenport in person and manner bore to her brother. But though the former was full as much reserved towards strangers in general, she did not appear to consider Caroline as one; for, extending her hand, and pressing that of the young visitor in the most friendly manner,

ner, she expressed great pleasure at the introduction; and Caroline, to her infinite surprise, soon found herself perfectly at ease with her new acquaintance, whom at first she feared would prove a second Torpedo, even more petrifying than the former.

Elinor, in the mean time, had recognised in the second daughter of sir Charles, who was the widow of a baronet, a lady she had before met when at Ashgrove, and had been much pleased with; whilst lady Longbourne now appeared equally willing to improve the slight acquaintance they had then formed.

Their friend, the dowager lady Egerton, was surrounded by great nephews and nieces, who were all delighted at again seeing her.

Caroline's attention was divided between the party assembled in the saloon, and the curious furniture and decorations of the apartment, the walls of which were covered with old family portraits

portraits in massy gilt frames, vieing in size and heaviness with the large mahogany chairs and damask sofas. A beautiful, though antique India cabinet, decorated with china as ancient, occupied a station between the windows, whose crimson damask curtains, fringed with gold, were not the least remarkable; a heavy gilt chandelier, suspended from the curiously-carved ceiling, with numberless girandoles around the walls, threw a most powerful light upon every object.

Caroline's eye at length rested on a large folding Indian screen at the back of lady Egerton, who, much advanced in years, and in an indifferent state of health, was sitting, wrapt in a shawl of the same country, safely secured beneath its shelter from the current of air which made its way into the room whenever the folding-doors behind her were opened, which were very frequently done by lady Longbourne's youngest son, a tall lad

lad of thirteen, who appeared to make a point of never remaining more than five minutes in one place, and now entered with great glee to announce dinner was ready, and then preceded the party to the dining-room, which was furnished in the same antique style, with the addition of an old-fashioned sideboard filled with massy plate.

Mr. Egerton's whole attention during dinner was directed to his mother, whom he carefully supported to her station at the table, and assisted in throwing off the still-warmer covering she had crossed the hall in; then, placing her own little fire-screen as she desired, seated himself beside her, and aided her in the hospitable attention she ever paid to her family and friends.

Caroline, placed between sir Charles and Mrs. Davenport, never felt more delighted than in contemplating the venerable figures of her host and hostess, and in observing the unanimity and affection

which

which reigned throughout this happy family, consisting of, besides those members already mentioned, sir Charles's other married daughters, two of whom were widows, and his elder grandchildren, several of whom appeared to be of the same age, or a little younger than Elinor.

The countenance of sir Charles a painter would have delighted to take as a model for that of a venerable patriarch; though rather serious in its expression, it beamed with benevolence; and the smile which the sportiveness of his grandchildren would frequently call forth might almost be termed a heavenly one; a few silver locks shaded his temples, and his eyes, though somewhat dimmed by age, expressed the affection his heart felt for the beloved objects by whom he was surrounded.

Lady Egerton's character seemed to have been of a more lively cast; she still enjoyed the sports of her younger grand-

children,

children, as she had before done those of their mother's, and had her health and strength permitted, would have joined in them with the same alacrity; but the former was now much broken; and although she seldom uttered a complaint, yet to her affectionate family the paleness of her in general animated countenance, and the languor of her voice, betrayed when she was more than usually unwell; and the return of cheerfulness to its tones was ever hailed with delight by her children, who were aware how severe would be their loss when the allotted period of their beloved parent's existence should terminate in this world, though their hearts were raised in thankfulness, and comforted by the hope of meeting her again in a far better.

Elinor exchanged frequent glances with her happy, animated sister during the cheerful repast; and when, after leaving the table, they together retired to change their travelling dresses, which

lady

lady Egerton would not allow of before dinner, the admiration they felt was mutually communicated. Caroline delightedly dwelt upon the manners of sir Charles and his eldest daughter, Mrs. Davenport.—"And did you not, Elinor," she continued, "observe and admire also our friend the Torpedo's attention to his mother? I wish your acquaintance, George Fitzmorton, could see it, and follow so excellent an example, as I have heard you say, lady Fitzmorton cannot feel much gratified by her son's attention."

"I am not going to defend George's disrespectful manner to his mother," returned Elinor; "but remember, my dear Caroline, I have likewise told you the appearance of the latter does not challenge the same respect we have observed with so much pleasure in our friend Mr. Egerton."

"Ah, Elinor!" cried Caroline, laughing, "you constantly defend, if possible, that

that rude, unpolished boy. I have always more than half-suspected his was the heart you preferred to Mortimer's; and I remember telling my friend Clarenville so, and he was entirely of my opinion."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Elinor, turning quickly towards her sister; then, blushing as she caught the arch eye of Caroline, she, in a less hasty tone, added, "you cannot, I am sure, be serious."

"My dear Elinor," returned Caroline coolly, "pray do not handle my necklace quite so roughly; you certainly will break the string, which will be a most serious misfortune to me this evening, as I have no silk to mend it with; besides, as our friends Clarenville and Fitzmorton have observed nothing is more becoming than a coral necklace, I should be sorry to appear less attractive than yourself to-night, which will infallibly be the case, if I am without one similar to that you have

have lately constantly worn, and are become so partial to."

Elinor, blushing deeply, threw the necklace on the toilet, and was hastening from the room, when Caroline entreated her to wait for her, or she should lose her way amongst the long galleries and passages that led to nothing.

Rather unwillingly Elinor consented; and her sister, having adorned herself with the admired coral necklace, was soon ready to accompany her; and as she drew the arm of the former within her own, affectionately pressing it, said—"You are one of the best girls in the world—nay, the very best, for you never bear malice."

Emily Longbourne, a pleasant girl of seventeen, now meeting them as they left their room, they together returned to the saloon, where the gentlemen soon joined the party.

Sir Charles was accompanied by several of his younger grandchildren, who had

not yet appeared, and now all surrounded their aunt, lady Egerton, who was a great favourite with them.

Mrs. Davenport called one of them to her; and Caroline, finding the little girl was the daughter of her new friend, made room for her on the sofa which she, with Egerton and his sister, occupied. Maria Davenport was a pretty but vacant-looking girl, apparently about thirteen, with a person and manners remarkably childish, even for those years; what then was Caroline's surprise when she heard her say to Mr. Egerton—"Ah! uncle Charles, our birthday will soon be here, and I shall be fifteen next week."

"Fifteen!" exclaimed Caroline, starting with amazement; "surely that is impossible!"

"It appears rather incredible to you, I dare say," replied Mrs. Davenport, smiling, "but it is nevertheless a fact, though Maria does not look more than twelve; two years will, I hope, increase her

her stature, and perhaps she may then astonish you as much by her height as her diminutive figure appears now to have done. How have you been employing yourself this afternoon, my love?" continued Mrs. Davenport to her daughter, who had been engaged in vacant observation of Caroline; "have you read any farther in your History of England?"

"Oh yes, mamma," returned Maria, "almost fifteen pages; hav'n't I been a very good girl?"

"And whose reign have you been reading?" inquired Mr. Egerton.

"Elizabeth's, I believe, uncle, but am not quite certain."

"And I make no doubt," said Caroline, "you like her better than her cruel sister, bloody Mary, as my little nephew always calls her."

"I don't think I am come to queen Mary yet," replied Maria, hesitating; "at least not that I recollect."

"My dear Maria, what are you thinking of?" said Mrs. Davenport, hastily; "recollect yourself a little, and you cannot but remember that cruel queen who persecuted all her protestant subjects, and put so many of them to death in the most dreadful manner."

Maria remained silent a moment, and then exclaimed—"Oh, I dare say that is the part my cousin Louisa has torn out of my book, for I am sure there is nothing about queen Mary in mine."

"That certainly proves you have never read it," said Emily, laughing. But seeing Mrs. Davenport much distressed at this instance of her daughter's folly and want of reflection, she requested the latter to fetch her netting from the table at which their aunt Egerton was sitting; and then, turning to her uncle Charles, inquired if he had lately heard or seen any thing of her acquaintances the Fitzmortons—"I mean," she continued,

nued, "since the young heir's accession to the title."

"Is sir Charles then dead?" said Caroline, surprised at the intelligence; "surely his death must have been very sudden, as I heard his younger son tell my sister at S—— his father was quite well."

"It was a very sudden event," replied Mr. Egerton, "and his family heard of it, I believe, on the day we returned to Rosebrook. I cannot imagine how I forgot to mention it to your sister, who, I had understood, was acquainted with him."

"Your time and thoughts, my dear Charles," said Mrs. Davenport, a little archly, "were too much engaged to allow of your recollecting so trivial a circumstance. But pray can you tell me," she continued, smiling at the heightened colour on her brother's cheek, "whether lady Fitzmorton and her son have settled their pecuniary affairs? I have heard

the present baronet has not behaved so handsomely as he ought to do, after having, by his marriage with lady Harriet Marsden, been enabled to clear off the embarrassments which his own extravagance very much contributed to lay his father under."

"I fear," returned Mr. Egerton, "Fitzmorton has behaved very shabbily towards his sisters, who are but slenderly provided for. Lady Fitzmorton's jointure is now her only property, whilst a very few thousands are left her daughters and second son. Even these Fitzmorton refuses to give up at present, declaring, when his father's debts are settled, and the mortgage on one of his estates paid off, he shall himself be a loser, for he will not borrow any of his wife's money for that purpose; therefore his brother and sisters must patiently wait a few years longer for their comparatively-small fortunes."

"Patiently they cannot wait," said Emily

Emily Longbourne; "Lucretia's irritable temper, at least, will not allow of her doing so."

"And if I may judge by the countenance of Miss Fitzmorton," said Caroline, "she will not be less impatient."

"If that is the judgment Miss Caroline Belvington formed on her appearance," exclaimed Mr. Egerton, "such is her disposition, for a disciple of Lavater can never be mistaken."

"You cannot deny," returned Caroline, half-laughing, "I was right in my opinion of yours being not a little severe."

"I never have disputed the correctness of your judgment," he replied, "particularly that you passed on my fascinating appearance."

"Oh that mischievous Mr. Clarenville!" cried Caroline, still laughing, but now deeply blushing; "how unfortunate I was not aware of his talkative dis-

position, and childish love of repeating nonsense!"

"Who is severe now?" retorted Mr. Egerton; "but I will not," he continued, "allow of your being so in this instance, and towards one to whom I esteem myself infinitely indebted; for have I not before informed you of the excellent use I make of all knowledge, even the most accidental, that I gain of myself, and, as an erring mortal ought to do, endeavour, by reflection, to correct my many errors?"

"I will not then interrupt your meditations," said Caroline, rising, unable longer to endure this raillery; but Mrs. Davenport detained her by asking some question respecting Elinor—"Whose countenance," she continued, "is one of the most expressive I ever saw. Are those beautiful eyes dark by daylight also? though, from the colour of her silken hair, I should conclude the contrary."

Caroline,

Caroline, in the pleasure she felt at hearing her sister thus spoken of, forgot the confusion Mr. Egerton's remarks had occasioned her, and remained delightedly listening to the continued observations of Mrs. Davenport and her niece Emily, who, totally devoid of envy, unaffectedly expressed her admiration, and was pointing out to her aunt the graceful figure of Elinor as she was bending to address the elder lady Egerton, when Maria Davenport, with a look of the most delighted surprise, came running back to Caroline, and eagerly seizing her hand, exclaimed—"Oh! is it true what aunt Egerton has been saying, that you are only fifteen? we are then nearly of an age; and what nice companions we shall be for each other!"

Mr. Egerton started, and coloured almost as violently as Caroline herself did, but who, quickly recovering, and good-humouredly shaking the hand that held hers, replied, with a smile—"Excellent

ones, I do not doubt; and to-morrow you shall initiate me into all your employments and amusements, which I shall be most happy to partake in."

"Maria," exclaimed Mr. Egerton hastily, "you are very much mistaken; there is a great difference in your age and that of Caroli—Miss Caroline Belvington."

"Oh no," returned Caroline, blushing with pleasure at finding he relished this proposal of his niece as little as herself, "there is not more than six months' difference, though, from Miss Davenport having escaped being so terribly spoiled as I have been, you may perhaps be ignorant that such is the fact. Yet, let me endeavour to exculpate myself, in some degree, by assuring you my elder sisters have not a little contributed to increase my natural sauciness of manner, for they have so long allowed me to become their companion, as at length to persuade me I am, by my own merit alone, entitled

entitled to so distinguished an honour; therefore, forgetting the age of childhood is scarcely past, I have now assumed the air, dress, and behaviour of Elinor's senior, while she very often suffers me to lecture her as such; and I really believe I sometimes succeed in convincing her she is indeed my junior. But now," continued Caroline, turning to Maria, who had been vacantly staring at her during the time she had been speaking, "how shall we spend to-morrow morning?"

"Can you play battledore and shuttlecock?" inquired Maria, rubbing her hands in delight.

"No amusement I love better," returned Caroline; "and the great hall will suit us most admirably for that purpose."

"And can you jump the rope and play trapball and marbles?" again inquired the still more delighted Maria.

"The two first you have mentioned,"

replied Caroline, "I flatter myself I am no mean proficient in, but must become your pupil for the last, as I have never tried my skill that way."

"Have done with this nonsense, Maria!" exclaimed Mr. Egerton, in no very gentle tone, and drawing her some paces from Caroline; "I can no longer endure your trifling."

"But I can," said Mrs. Davenport, taking the hand of Caroline, and pressing it between her own, "and feel equally grateful with Maria for Miss Belvington's condescension. Nay, look not so angry, Charles; you see not with a mother's eye the advantage that will accrue from it to our poor childish Maria. Cannot you perceive it is the intention of this sweet girl gently to lead her from those frivolous amusements she has hitherto alone delighted in, to employments more worthy a rational mind, and which, it is evident, she has herself so well profited by. If you will therefore,

my

my dear young friend," continued Mrs. Davenport to the now-blushing Caroline, as she again fervently pressed her hand, "indeed continue the same kindness you have just evinced, the grateful thanks of a mother will for ever attend you; for, under such tuition, our now-childish Maria will acquire every excellence a parent can wish her daughter to attain."

"My dear madam," replied the blushing, though delighted Caroline, "I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude for your kind partiality, though it does indeed lead you to say more than my conduct hitherto can justify; but, from this time, it will be my greatest ambition to deserve such approbation; and if you indeed think I am in any degree qualified to assist Miss Davenport, it will be my pride, my pleasure, to conform to your wishes; but allow me to add, in my dear Elinor you would find a far more able coadjutor with yourself, as it is to her excellent example

ample and instructions I am indebted for your flattering expressions."

"I doubt not the excellence of your sister," returned Mrs. Davenport, smiling with increased approbation at this affectionate reference, and on observing also the unusually-animated expression of her brother's countenance; "but it is the pupil of this able instructress I now wish to interest for my poor Maria. Will you then take her under your guidance? and doubt not she will prove grateful for any instructions she receives."

"I will then," returned the happy, animated Caroline, "recall all my beloved Elinor's instructions more fully to my recollection, and by endeavouring to impress them on the mind of Miss Davenport, prove myself worthy of your esteem; and if I can lead her in any respect to imitate my dear sister, how highly," continued Caroline, with a playful smile, "shall I estimate my own abilities!"

"Oh!"

"Oh! if Maria is at all like the pupil of Elinor," exclaimed Mr. Egerton, "every wish of my sister will be gratified; for who so amiable, so fascinating, can she resemble?"

The surprised and confused expression of Caroline's countenance recalled the hitherto-guarded Egerton to recollection; and starting from the sofa, he walked to the pianoforte, at which the Miss Longbournes had requested Elinor to sit down, who soon after summoned her sister to take a part in an instrumental duet; and Caroline, glad of an opportunity to be relieved from her present awkward situation, willingly obeyed; while Mr. Egerton, having placed a seat for her at the instrument, again returned to the sofa, where his sister still remained, who, smiling as he appproached and threw himself beside her, in a low voice said—"Where are all those excellent resolutions flown to, my dear Charles, with which your last letter to me was filled? Certainly your man-

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ner this evening has been exactly that of a disinterested observer; no one, not even Caroline herself, can dispute so evident a truth."

"My dear sister," returned Mr. Egerton, "this failure was involuntary; I promise to be more on my guard for the future."

"That is to say," replied Mrs. Davenport, "until the discovery of another excellent trait in her disposition, of which you were not before aware, tempts you again to the same error; and much I doubt, that, ere another fortnight is elapsed, Mr. Belvington's injunctions will be entirely forgotten. Nay, make no more professions, Charles, as you are now on the point of doing, for——"

"Are you not a little too severe, my dear sister?" said Mr. Egerton, interrupting her; "surely what just now escaped me, even a casual acquaintance would have been induced to remark there

there was nothing so very particular in the words."

"No, if you take not into consideration the particular tone of voice in which they were uttered. But repeat to me, Charles, the promise Mr. Belvington required, and your word was given steadfastly to adhere to."

"Not now, Maria—we may be overheard; besides, I wish to be informed whether you are as much pleased with this lovely, unaffected girl, on acquaintance, as from my account you expected to be? Was I not right in affirming her to be very far superior to any of a similar age, or indeed to some many years her senior?"

"She surpasses every idea I had formed," returned Mrs. Davenport, warmly, "although the high opinion I have ever entertained of your judgment had led me to raise my expectations to a very high pitch. But you told me, Charles, some time

ago,

ago, Caroline's manner, though perfectly easy with her other friends, was ever remarkably reserved towards you; surely they are no longer so?"

"Oh no; I am happy to say every day I can perceive this reserve lessens; but not till our return to S—— could I discern any difference. We were then much together, as, after little Henry's convalescence, I frequently persuaded her to accompany him and myself in our daily rides, and by degrees she appeared to become accustomed to my serious and reserved manner, which she has, though unconsciously, alone the power of enlivening. Every succeeding day her excellent understanding and cultivated mind, so far beyond her years, more fully displayed themselves; while her fascinating *naïveté*, and total unconsciousness of this superiority, contributed more firmly to rivet the chain she had bound me with."

"Your heart then, my dear Charles," said

said Mrs. Davenport, smiling, "hitherto esteemed so impenetrable, has been wholly subdued by a girl of fifteen! Ah! I much fear my poor Maria, even two years hence, will not have one-half of these attractions to boast. But have you any reason to hope your attentions are received with pleasure?"

"At present she does not appear aware of their being particularly directed to her; and you know I have given my promise to her father, they shall remain as quiet as they have hitherto been till I again meet her at Rosebrook."

Mr. Egerton was now interrupted by his niece Emily requesting him to sing a glee with her, in which Caroline had also consented to take a part; and during the evening, no further opportunity occurred for resuming the conversation with his sister, as the party remained at the pianoforte till supper, and soon after separated to their respective apartments.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Caroline found herself alone with Elinor, she related the anecdote of Maria's acquaintance with English history, and then desired her sister to guess the age of this remarkably-clever girl.—"Now do not be malicious," she continued, "and pretend to think her older than she really is."

"What motive can I possibly have for being so towards one so perfectly inoffensive?" returned Elinor. "Maria is not yet arrived at a teazing age, as she has scarcely, I should imagine, entered her teens."

"I rather imagine," replied Caroline, laughing, "she is even now at the teazing age, if fifteen is the period you are hinting at. But I am glad to perceive this

this discovery astonishes you likewise, as I must confess it was rather a mortifying one to me; and I will also acknowledge my vanity was not a little hurt at finding myself likely to be classed as a suitable companion to Miss Davenport."

"Who, my dear Caroline, could you suppose would think so? surely not Mr. Egerton?"

"Oh no, my dear sister," replied Caroline, blushing at the recollection of the sentiments he had expressed. "Mr. Egerton did not relish Maria's suggestion at all better than I did."

"It was Mrs. Davenport then who supported her daughter in such a ridiculous proposition," said Elinor indignantly.

"Mrs. Davenport!" exclaimed Caroline; "oh no! her behaviour has been most kind, and her expressions of regard almost too flattering for me to repeat."

But Caroline, though fully impressed with

with this conviction, could not withstand her sister's entreaties to relate these too-flattering expressions.—"And now, my dear Elinor," she continued, after having informed her of all that had then passed, excepting only the latter part, in which Mr. Egerton was concerned, "tell me what prospect of success you think I may entertain in my projected scheme of improvement to poor Maria."

Elinor, smiling, shook her head as she replied—"You have my best wishes for success. But, my dear Caroline, I have not yet been able to discover who it was that said you and Maria were suitable companions."

"I do not now think," said Caroline, with some little emphasis on the word *now*, "any one is of that opinion, though at first I could not help fearing the thought would strike Mr. Egerton."

"Then, after all," returned Elinor, smiling, "this mortifying idea was but a bugbear of your own creation. I should indeed

indeed have been surprised had Mr. Egerton expressed such a one; but what did he say that has so fully convinced you he thought far otherwise?"

"I did not say fully convinced," returned Caroline, blushing; "only that I hoped—I thought I was mistaken."

"But you will not tell me the cause of this hope, or thought, or pleasing idea," said Elinor, archly. "Ah, my dear Caroline, never again accuse me of blushing for trifles; my colour is nothing compared to this deep crimson," she continued, playfully patting her sister's cheek.

"Mine the damask, yours the Provence rose," returned Caroline, laughing. "Ay, I remember," she continued, looking archly in her turn, "having heard sir Edward Ormsby observe to Clarenville, the blushing rose and lily white ought to be colours worn by all true and loyal knights. Now, Elinor," she exclaimed, in a triumphant tone, and drawing her to the toilet, "look at yourself

self in that glass, and say whose crimson is the deepest."

Elinor, laughing, disengaged her arm, and their friend, lady Egerton, entering to bid them again good night, they mutually, and by tacit consent, avoided, after she left them, renewing their disquisition upon blushing, and soon sunk to repose, which, at an early hour in the morning, was broken by the entrance of Maria Davenport, who eagerly entreated Caroline to rise, that they might have a long game at battledore and shuttlecock before breakfast.

Caroline, unwilling to refuse, though not much inclined to leave her room so early, promised soon to join her in the hall; but Maria saying she might perhaps, if she left the room, fall asleep again and forget it, preferred waiting for her where she was; and during the time Caroline was dressing, continued congratulating herself, and appealing to Elinor if her sister might not consider it equally

fortunate

fortunate that they were such nice companions for each other.—"You know," she continued, "I am only six months younger, and I don't think it will be long before I shall be quite, at least almost, as tall;" and as she spoke, elevating herself on tiptoes by the side of Caroline at the glass, she was thus enabled to catch a view of her own diminutive figure in it.

Elinor, though extremely provoked with her folly and vanity, could not forbear joining in the perfectly-unaffected and unrestrained laugh of Caroline; whilst Maria, after gazing at them alternately a moment, in a tone of wondering surprise exclaimed—"What are you both laughing at? is there any thing you see odd or comical about me?" and she looked down and around herself to discover if there were, when, observing Caroline almost convulsed with laughter, after another vacant stare, she continued—"Well, I can't think what I have said to

make you so merry; it's very odd, but whenever I speak, every body is sure to laugh;" and Maria, as she found the mirth of her companions increase, now joined as heartily in it.

Caroline was the first to recover her gravity, feeling not a little angry with herself for having acted so contrary to the promise she had given Mrs. Davenport; and as she descended with Maria to the hall, Elinor, knowing lady Egerton was an early riser, proceeded to her room, and entertained her by relating the scene which had just passed.

"Poor Mrs. Davenport!" said lady Egerton, after lamenting the total deficiency of intellect Maria's conduct evinced, "how much is she to be pitied for this disappointment of her maternal hopes! For many years after she married, no prospect appeared of her giving Mr. Davenport, who was almost distractedly fond of children, one of his own to love. The birth of Maria at length was hailed

hailed by him with rapture, and the poor little child was in a few years completely ruined by her idolizing father's indulgence. Mrs. Davenport too soon discovered the natural weakness of her daughter's understanding, which, she justly feared, would be increased by such unqualified indulgence, and endeavoured, by gently pursuing a contrary line of conduct, to ward off the evil consequences that must attend it; but not till after the death of Mr. Davenport, which occurred two years ago, could she gain any influence over the mind of her daughter; and I fear Maria's will never repay her mother for the care and anxiety with which, since her husband's death, she has attended to its culture."

"Alas! how unlike our dear Caroline's!" said Elinor; "how cruelly will Mrs. Davenport feel the difference, as she becomes more intimately acquainted with the wonderful powers of my sister's!"

"It is more unfortunate," returned lady Egerton, "as Maria is an only child, and Mrs. Davenport has the additional fear of her being the prey of some designing fortune-hunter, which will most probably happen; for she is left sole heiress to all her father's large property, at the age of eighteen, without any restrictions annexed to it."

Elinor again expressed the pity she felt for Mrs. Davenport; and on lady Egerton's inquiring the cause of Caroline's sudden friendship with Maria, she repeated her sister's account of the conversation that had passed the preceding evening between the latter and Mrs. Davenport —"In whose request," she continued, with a smile, "Mr. Egerton, I believe, as earnestly joined. And now, my dear madam, tell me if I am right in the suspicion which, last night, for the first time struck me—is not the latter a little partial to Caroline? and are not my father

and

and mother aware of it as well as yourself?"

"You are perfectly right, my love," returned lady Egerton, "and perhaps you can now perceive the reason of Mrs. Belvington requesting a minute account of the events that occurred during our visit here. My nephew has given your father his promise not to discover his partiality to your sister until she returns to Rosebrook—'For much,' said your dear parent to me the last evening we were there, 'much as I regard Mr. Egerton, and highly as I respect his excellent character and principles, I will never again subject myself to the same bitter pangs of self-reproach that I experienced on the discovery of another beloved child's unhappiness, which my own precipitation occasioned, by sanctioning, or rather, I fear, urging her to accept the addresses of a man whom, upon farther knowledge, her heart could not approve. Caroline then shall have time given her for becoming

acquainted with the mind and character of your nephew; and as he at present is the only man from whom she has received any attentions, let us also wait the effect those of others may produce; for in the large party she will mix in at your brother's, some one perhaps may be as much pleased with her lively, artless character as Mr. Egerton has been; then, if we find Caroline remains unmoved by these flattering assiduities, and still continues to feel that regard for your nephew which her mother is assured she now, though unconsciously, entertains, their mutual happiness will rest upon a more solid basis, and I shall have no fears for its permanency."

"My dear, kind, excellent father!" exclaimed Elinor, "what cause had you for self-reproach, when your only motive was parental solicitude for my happiness!"

Lady Egerton, perceiving how much she was affected by this recital of her father's

ther's sentiments, and wishing to withdraw her thoughts from the painful recollections this recurrence to her late unhappy engagement had produced, now said—"Shall we go down and look at these choice companions? I think I still hear their loud-sounding instruments."

"One thing more, my dear madam," returned Elinor—"did Mr. Egerton mention his partiality for Caroline to you? and did you, by his desire, impart it to my father?"

"Not at the request of Charles; he knew not of my intention till I communicated the answer of your father to him. But my inducement for mentioning the subject to the latter was the distress I found him in on receiving sir Charles's letter of recall; and his fear lest Caroline should cease to remember him during his absence was so great, that I advised him to reveal his attachment to her before he left Rosebrook; but his appre-

hension of not having yet made any favourable impression on her heart, and his dread of Mr. Belvington's refusal also, were not to be overcome. In short, I found him so sincere in the anguish this separation occasioned, and knowing he could not return with me from his father's, that I took pity on his sufferings; and in a note to your mother, in which I solicited permission for Caroline and yourself to accompany me hither, I also mentioned the discovery I had just made, and requested she would communicate it to Mr. Belvington, and in the evening acquaint me with the result of their consultations. I have now only to add, Mrs. Davenport is likewise acquainted with what has passed, and have then informed you of every thing I know respecting my nephew and your sister."

"And for your kindness in acquainting me with all these particulars," returned Elinor, drawing the arm of lady Egerton through her own, "accept my warmest

thanks.

thanks. My curiosity has, I acknowledge, been extreme, to discover the cause of that long consultation which my father and mother had, on the same morning, only a few hours previous to the arrival of Mrs. Wardley's letter. Yes, I now suspect my mother is right in her opinion of Caroline being attached to Mr. Egerton, for she blushed most terribly last night upon only a very gentle hint of mine, and, I also suspect, concealed some part of the conversation that passed between him, Mrs. Davenport, and herself."

"Nay, my dear Elinor," returned lady Egerton, a little archly, "if blushing is a proof of guilt, what would become of some other folk? and as to a little concealment, that is a part which even the most free and disengaged heart sometimes finds occasion to practise."

Elinor's colour was now deeper than the Provence rose, as her eyes fell beneath those of her old friend, whilst attempt-

ing to laugh, she assisted her in throwing on her shawl.

Lady Egerton, smiling and shaking her head, again took the arm of her young companion and descended to the hall, where the battledore-players were still earnestly engaged. Mr. Egerton was also there, standing opposite Caroline, on whom his eyes were fixed, and holding in his hand the comb that had fastened her hair, which now, loose and dishevelled, was flowing down her shoulders.

Upon perceiving Elinor, he hastily approached her, and in an earnest tone said—"I wish you could prevail upon your sister to finish the game; see how fatigued she looks; Maria would go on for hours, as the shuttlecock has not fallen since they began."

"And you have employed all that time in watching them," said Elinor, smiling as she passed him to the spot where her sister was standing, when, dexterously taking the battledore from her

her hand, she slipped into her place in time to strike the shuttlecock as it returned from Maria.

Caroline, completely fatigued, sunk upon a chair as she held out her hand for the comb Mr. Egerton had so carefully preserved; whilst Maria, with eyes and mouth wide open, had been so intent upon the game as not to observe her companion in it was changed, till the voice of Caroline answering her uncle Egerton's anxious request to leave the cold hall for a warmer room, made her start; she looked forward, perceived Elinor standing opposite, and while, with a look of stupid amazement, she remained perfectly motionless staring at her, the shuttlecock fell to the ground.

Caroline, unable to refrain from laughing as Maria continued looking alternately from Elinor to her, now desired every one to remember she had not broken up the game; and Mr. Egerton, again entreating her to leave the hall,

and Emily Longbourne informing the party breakfast waited for them, they adjourned to the room; and as Caroline took her place at the table, Maria exclaimed—"Well, we have had a nice game this morning, and after breakfast we will have another at trapball."

Mr. Egerton darted a most angry glance towards his childish niece; and as Caroline, laughing and shaking her head, was on the point of answering in the negative, Mrs. Davenport gently said—"No, Maria, I think you have sufficiently fatigued your companion this morning, and had therefore better join our working party for an hour or two whilst your uncle Charles reads to us."

"But I don't love working," replied Maria, pouting, "and I hate reading; so, Caroline, if you wont play with me, I shall go to my cousins in the nursery."

Mrs. Davenport's colour heightened at this speech, and neither Mr. Egerton's nor Caroline's were less vivid; but the latter,

latter, after a moment's silence, replied—"If you like to remain below, Maria, I can shew you some beautiful paintings, which, I have no doubt, will entertain you, as they have often done Elinor and myself."

"Well, I should like to see them, of all things," returned the now-brightening Maria, "for I am very fond of pictures; and what are yours about?"

"They are chiefly paintings of animals, birds, and insects," replied Caroline; "and the extracts from natural history which are affixed are instructive as well as entertaining."

"Well, come make haste and get your breakfast," cried Maria, impatiently; "I am crazy to see the pictures; but as to reading all about them, that must be very stupid, so I shall skip all that."

"No," replied Caroline, laughing; "if you will not promise to read the account of them to Mrs. Davenport, I will not bring my treasures forth."

Maria

Maria at length consented to this arrangement, and Caroline soon displayed her beautiful collection of highly-finished paintings to the admiring circle—"And who was the accomplished artist and compiler of these?" inquired the elder lady Egerton, one of the most delighted of the party.

"They are all the performances of my dear mother," replied Caroline; "and she added these extracts from one of our favourite authors as an inducement for me to read their different histories more fully."

"And Mrs. Belvington's plan succeeded fully," said the dowager lady Egerton, addressing her sister; "for Caroline has become extremely partial to the study; and often, with Elinor, who has a similar passion for botany, have we rambled many miles from Rosebrook, engaged in our favourite pursuits, and heedless of the passing hours, till Mr. Belvington, not a little alarmed by our long absence,

sence, has been drawn to follow our footsteps, and chide the truants home again. Yet Caroline's collection of insects is but small, for she has not yet been persuaded to try the best mode for having them perfect, even by the example of a celebrated naturalist, who was last year down at Rosebrook on a visit to Mr. Coleridge, for he could not convince her it was not the most cruel."

"My uncle Charles," said Emily, "has often spoiled our dinner by following the same pursuit, and which, we at length found, he made a point of never returning from until the sun was set; nay, very frequently has he not a little terrified us, as we were retiring to bed, by his stooping cautious figure, armed with a dark lantern, gliding across the lawn, and disturbing the revels of those poor little insects, who prefer the stillness of night for their feasts and gambols, in the hope, which he soon renders a vain one, of their being undisturbed in their harmless frolics.

lics. And here is something in your own way," she continued, putting one of the paintings into her uncle's hand.

"Not all my mother's persuasions or lectures," said Elinor, laughing, on perceiving what Emily had given Mr. Egerton, "could ever induce Caroline to watch and admire the proceedings of those industrious little creatures."

"Oh no!" cried Caroline, half-shuddering, "I shall never love a spider if I live for ever."

"I hope you are not always so unsuccessful in your endeavours to become reconciled to strange-looking objects," said Mrs. Davenport, smiling, "for I am afraid you are a little apt to take sudden antipathies."

"No, indeed," returned Caroline, blushing, as she caught the eye of Mr. Egerton, "I am not quite so foolish, or at least soon overcome any fear or dislike, except that I have, almost from infancy, felt towards

wards a spider, to which I certainly have a natural antipathy."

Maria, after taking up several drawings, and as quickly discarding them for others, now exclaimed, as she held up one to her mother's view—"Oh mamma, look at this queer thing! did you ever see such an oddity? what can it be?"

"Some curious fish, I fancy," replied Mrs. Davenport; "is not the name written at the back of the paper? yes, here it is—the Torpedo."

"Oh give it me!" exclaimed Mr. Egerton, eagerly extending his hand, and taking the painting from his sister, "for I have never yet seen the original of myself." Then, carrying it round to his aunt, lady Egerton, he continued—"Really the resemblance is very striking, though, to confess the truth, I had no idea my appearance was so extremely fascinating."

"Oh Elinor!" cried Caroline, blushing

ing deeply, though unable to refrain from laughing, "how could you ever bring that tell-tale Clarenville to Rosebrook?"

"I bring him!" returned Elinor, now as much confused, and with as bright a blush as her sister's. "My dear Caroline, what can you possibly mean?"

"Come, Charles," said Mrs. Davenport, smiling, "let us hear the history of your friend the Torpedo, in which this poor Mr. Clarenville appears so deeply implicated; was he the ridiculous inventor of this fancied resemblance? and from what cause is Miss Caroline Belvington so indignant against him?"

"Mr. Egerton," said Caroline, now extremely distressed, and involuntarily catching his arm as he was turning towards his sister, "let me entreat you to drop the subject; and do not, I beg of you, by explaining it, lower me so much in the opinion of Mrs. Davenport, as the relation

relation of my childish nonsense cannot fail of doing."

"My sister's opinion will ever be the same as that of others who have the infinite pleasure of knowing you," he replied, in a low, yet animated tone, as he resigned the drawing into her hand, which was eagerly extended for it.

"So you really are afraid of spiders," said Emily, who had again taken up the drawing of that Mr. Egerton had thrown down. "Pray do you give your housemaid an additional premium to keep the parsonage free from their intrusion?"

Caroline, laughing, declared she would adopt so excellent a plan immediately on her return home, as they too often for her comfort made their appearance in some of the closets.

Maria, beginning to feel tired of throwing over the drawings, now approached her, and rubbing her hands together, exclaimed—"Well, now, Caroline, will you play a game at trapball?"

"You

"You had better all take a ride this fine morning," said sir Charles; "and as is the last you will have to yourselves, I would advise you to make the most of it; for remember our visitors arrive to-morrow."

This plan being universally approved, the party retired to equip themselves for their excursion. Mr. Egerton having assured Elinor her sister should ride his own horse, which was remarkably quiet, she saw them depart with tolerable composure, feeling confident Caroline could not have a more careful protector, but declined joining the party herself, wishing to write her promised letter home, and dispatch one by the same post to her friend lady Ormsby.

CHAPTER IX.

SEVERAL of the expected guests arrived in the course of the following morning, all either relations or particular friends of the family; amongst the latter, Elinor, to her great surprise, found, on entering the drawing-room before dinner, her *quondam* admirer, George Fitzmorton.

He eagerly advanced to greet her, and seating himself beside her at dinner, began making innumerable inquiries concerning the friends he had seen her with at S——.

"How is that noble fellow, major Mortimer?" he continued, without waiting to hear an answer to any of his questions; "and who was that beautiful, though desperately proud-looking lady he seemed so well acquainted with at the ball,

ball, and who would have killed you, if she could, with one of her murdering glances—who was she? why don't you answer me?"

"Because, as usual," replied Elinor, laughing, "you will not give me an opportunity. That lady's name was Alresford, and is now Mortimer."

"What!" exclaimed George, starting, "did she marry your major Mortimer, and are you now the same disengaged Elinor I first saw at Ashgrove?"

"The very same," replied Elinor, blushing, though attempting to laugh; "at least I am not conscious of any transformation. But you have not answered my question relative to your sisters—where are they at present?"

"Oh! fighting away like a couple of gamecocks with their baronet brother, from whose arbitrary will there seems at present no appeal; at least till the lawyers have given their decision, which may not be these hundred years. My kind

kind uncle, whom you saw me with at S——, has delivered me from that den, Fitzmorton Hall, by making me entirely independent of its noble owner. You remember my uncle, don't you?"

"Not sufficiently, I am afraid, to recognise him again, though I think the tone of his voice would sound familiar to my ear, as I unintentionally overheard a conversation which passed between him and lady Wallingford on the evening of the ball to which you allude, in which my name was more than once mentioned."

"Yes," returned George, "my uncle repeated the particulars of it to me, and has done nothing but talk of you ever since, and has lamented as much the idea of your carrying a knapsack, as if compelled to march a thousand miles a-day with one himself. How delighted will he be to hear you have escaped this impending danger! By-the-bye, what is become of Clarenville? is he still looking

as

as melancholy and wan as he did when I last saw him?"

Elinor, blushing deeply at George's association of ideas, answered—"Mr. Clarenville is not, I believe, in England at present."

"I am glad to hear it," returned George, hastily, "and the longer he remains absent the better. But have you seen our old friend the general lately?"

"If you are speaking of general Clarenville," said the young baronet, sir Henry Longbourne, who had that morning arrived at the Hall, and was now sitting opposite George, and by the side of Caroline at table, "I can inform you he is in all probability, ere now, at ——; at least such was his intention when I parted from him two days since."

"What could have induced him to take a trip across the water?" inquired George.

"He feared, from not having for some time received any letters from his son, now

now abroad, that he was ill, not being aware of the irregularity of the foreign post; but I was enabled to dispel his apprehensions, having left Clarenville not a week ago in perfect health, though not in his usual good spirits, from never having, since he left England, received any letter from his family, and when I parted from him, was seriously thinking of returning home, in order to obtain some intelligence of them—"

"And will seriously, I make no doubt," said Caroline, archly glancing a look towards Elinor, "put his designs in execution."

Elinor's eyes, bent on her plate, caught not the laughing ones of her sister, with whom sir Henry appeared much pleased, and entering into her artless gaiety of manner, had, before she left the table, induced to converse with him in the same sportive tone she addressed his sister and cousins in.

Elinor frequently observed the appre-

hensive expression Mr. Egerton's countenance assumed, as he earnestly remarked and listened to the lively repartees that passed between his nephew and her sister; and she felt also not a little fearful of the fascinating young baronet proving a powerful rival to the grave, serious Mr. Egerton.

Sir Henry Longbourne's person and manners were extremely animated and pleasing; his lively remarks and conversation were a never-failing source of pleasure to all who knew him; elegant in his address, and handsome in person, it was no wonder that Mr. Egerton's spirits sunk to the lowest ebb during this evening, in which sir Henry was never absent from the side of Caroline. Seating himself by Elinor, the former conversed with George Fitzmorton and herself, though his eyes followed every movement of the lively, unconscious Caroline, whose gaiety increased when sir Charles proposed to the young folk adjourning

journing to the music-room, and entertaining themselves with dancing. Springing forward, she was the first to enter it, and was quickly followed by sir Henry, who immediately engaged her for a partner the two first dances. Elinor, as usual, was that of George; the rest of the party were also soon paired, except Mr. Egerton, who remained the only quiet, though not inattentive spectator.

"Is not Mr. Egerton well?" said Caroline to her sister as they passed each other in the dance, "that he looks so more than usually grave this evening."

"If you are apprehensive indisposition is the cause," replied Elinor, smiling, "why not inquire if your fears have any foundation?"

Caroline laughed, but said no more, till, having gone down the dance, and sir Henry leaving her to borrow a fan from one of his sisters, she passed Mr. Egerton as she was retiring to a seat; and her eye meeting his, the expression it conveyed made her involuntarily start, and, in

a tone of anxious inquiry, she said—"I greatly fear you are not well to-night."

"Why should you think me otherwise?" he replied, faintly smiling.

"Because you look more than usually——"

"Petrifying?" he inquired, again smiling.

"Yes, petrifying," returned Caroline, laughing, "for I have never seen you, since the first evening we met, look so determinately disapproving."

"If I acknowledge my fault, will you dance the two next dances with me?"

"If you will promise to amend, and look less gloomy; otherwise I shall feel a return of my old shrinking sensations."

"Oh, fear not!" he returned; "a lively dance, and a still more lively partner, will soon and effectually restore my spirits to their naturally-*high* pitch, which fear and despondency have this evening reduced to the lowest. But see, your fascinating partner is now approaching," pointing

pointing to sir Henry hastening towards them; "and I ought not, must not, nay, dare not detain you from him a moment longer."

Caroline in surprise looked at him as he now quickly retreated from her; and as sir Henry again led her to the dance, she continued lost in meditation on the peculiar expression of Mr. Egerton's countenance as he hastened from her.

Lady Egerton and her brother sir Charles now entered the room, and continued looking at and enjoying the gaiety and dancing of their young relatives, till they observed Elinor and her partner retire to a seat, when they also joined them; and whilst George was conversing with the baronet, lady Egerton, addressing Elinor, said—"You and Caroline will have cause for rejoicing at the intelligence I have this evening received, though to me it is a source of sorrow. My old friend in Surrey, at whose house we were to have spent a few days after

leaving this hospitable mansion, will be prevented by severe indisposition from receiving us."

"And why, my dear madam," returned Elinor, a little reproachfully, "can you imagine intelligence so afflicting to you will convey pleasure either to Caroline or myself?"

"You mistake me, my love," replied lady Egerton; "I know I have your fullest sympathy in the sorrow this intelligence of my old and much-esteemed friend gives me. But I suspect," she continued with a smile, "you will feel the reverse of disappointment when I inform you it is my intention to spend the week we were to have passed in Surrey at Elmsly Park. Another fortnight too, we may reasonably hope, will not elapse without our favourite general having returned to it, and Elinor will not have any *very* great objection to meeting her second father there. But, my dear

dear love, are you not well, or to what am I to attribute this sudden paleness?"

"I am not very well," replied Elinor, in a faltering voice, "but it is only the heat of the room, I believe;" and rising from her seat, she attempted to leave it, but her trembling limbs obliged her to accept the offered arm of lady Egerton, who accompanied her into an adjoining apartment, where, sinking on a chair, and bursting into tears, she involuntarily exclaimed—"Oh! do not, my kind friend, take me where I shall inevitably meet general Clarenville, whom I would avoid, if possible, for ever!" And Elinor covered her face with her hands, and wept most violently.

Lady Egerton's surprise prevented her from answering; and Elinor, after a few moments, continued—"Oh, take me back again to Rosebrook to my beloved mother, who will not again wish me to leave her!"

"Elinor," exclaimed lady Egerton,

now hastily, and in the greatest alarm, interrupting her, "what am I to understand by these wild expressions? I entreat, I implore you to explain their meaning, and your reasons for wishing to avoid your kind and partial friend."

"General Clarenville no longer regards me," she replied, in increasing agitation; "and I am sufficiently sunk in my own estimation no less than his, to induce me carefully to avoid meeting him again, at least for many, many years."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed lady Egerton, "is it possible any conduct of yours, hitherto so upright, amiable, and delicate, can have had the effect of lessening the partiality, the almost-paternal love general Clarenville has ever expressed and felt for you?"

"Oh yes!" returned the highly-agitated Elinor, "by one unguarded expression have I for ever forfeited all claim to his partiality; for have I not betrayed

to

to him that I felt for his son, without the certainty of its being returned, and even at the time I had every reason to suppose myself irrevocably engaged to another? Then never, never can I bear to meet his eye again, and read there the altered expression it will too surely convey to my heart, the proudest ambition of which has ever been the approval and love of those I respect and regard. And now that I can no longer hope thus to be remembered by one whom I love as a parent, let me entreat you, my dear madam, to allow of my returning home as soon as possible; Caroline can accompany you to sir Edward Ormsby's, and I shall easily find a conveyance in some of the public vehicles to take me into Hampshire; nay, sooner would I return alone and on foot, than endure the same feelings our last approach to Elmsly Park occasioned, where I then expected to find general Clarenville; and the anticipation of that meeting had destroyed all the

pleasure you so kindly held out, and I should otherwise have experienced, in visiting Alborough."

"My dear, impetuous Elinor," said lady Egerton, affectionately embracing her, "compose yourself, and banish these terrible apprehensions; for believe me they are most groundless, as I perfectly remember, the last time of your meeting general Clarenville (which was at lady Neville's after we returned from Mrs. Delmore's garden), remarking the tender affection which shone in his eyes as he looked at your pale countenance when you entered the parlour with your mother; surely you must have observed the expression of his?"

"Oh no! I dared not lift my eyes to look or speak to any other person than my brother Coleridge; and indeed I can never meet those of general Clarenville again."

"If I can prevent it," returned lady Egerton, smiling, "you never shall: and

am

am I also, my dear Elinor," she continued, tenderly kissing her, " to exclude his guiltless son from your presence ?"

" Oh my dear lady Egerton !" exclaimed the deeply-blushing Elinor, " do not, by ridiculing my apprehensions, add fresh poignancy to reflections that are already sufficiently mortifying and distressing; and would I had had sufficient command over my feelings to have enabled me to remain, as was my firm intention, for ever silent on the subject, which my beloved mother alone was acquainted with;" and again Elinor shed the bitterest tears of self-reproach and wounded delicacy.

Lady Egerton, taking her to her arms, endeavoured, by the most soothing expressions, to restore her to composure.— " Forgive me, my sweet love," she continued, " the additional wound I have given your too-sensitive feelings; they shall not again be tortured by the fear of meeting one who is still, believe me,

and ever will continue, your most partial friend. But to avoid the displeasure of Emma and her husband, we must return home, as we intended, by Surrey; and as we shall pass by Ashgrove, it will be better to remain there a day or two, which Mrs. Montague much pressed me to do when I saw her at S——, and her previous invitation will afford us some excuse for refusing that of our Elmsly friends."

At any other time, Elinor would have earnestly negatived this proposal, as her cousin, Mrs. Montague, had not risen in her esteem since she had quitted Ashgrove. But this plan now appeared the only one for avoiding a still more unpleasant visit, and she gratefully thanked lady Egerton for her kind consideration, which removed such a weight from her heart, that after a few minutes more had elapsed, she was enabled to return, at the request of her friend, to the dancing-room, where they found Caroline going down

down the set with Mr. Egerton, whose countenance had regained the animation it now usually wore when the former was his companion, either in riding, conversation, or, as at this moment, in dancing. George shook his head reproachfully at Elinor as she entered, whom he had, after she left the room, long sought in vain; and at length, finding his pursuit useless, requested Marian Campbell to dance with him, and they were now following the steps of Caroline and her partner.

Elinor, with sir Henry Longbourne, joined again in the amusement; and as she passed George, apologized, and obtained his forgiveness for her sudden desertion, promising only, as usual, she would dance the next set with him.

"What a fascinating little creature your sister is!" said Elinor's partner to her as they were resting themselves for a few minutes after going down the dance; and Elinor was now entertained with every

every *bon-mot* or repartee sir Henry had heard Caroline utter during the evening, to all which she lent a willing ear. The baronet was at length interrupted in these, to him, delightful repetitions by his young cousin, Maria Davenport, who, approaching Elinor, angrily exclaimed—"How very well Caroline has kept her promise of playing with me to-day—a pretty companion to be sure!"

"A companion to you, Maria!" cried sir Henry, laughing; "how could such an idea ever enter your little silly head?"

"Mine is not a little silly head," returned Maria, in a still more indignant tone; "it's quite as good a one as Caroline's, though she is six months older."

"Six years you mean, I suppose," said sir Henry, still laughing.

"No, six months only," screamed Maria; "is it not so, Miss Belvington?"

"So Caroline tells me," returned Elinor, smiling. "But why are you so angry

gry with your playfellow, Maria, whom I myself heard offer to engage you, after her return from riding this morning, at your favourite game?"

"Yes, but uncle Egerton would not let her play, because he said she looked tired; but that I am sure she was not, or she would not have coloured so when he told her to go up to you."

Sir Henry still continued laughing, whilst Maria, her indignation rising in tears of anger to her eyes, went on—"And now, this evening she has not spoken to me once, and every body keeps asking her to dance, or else talking to her, whilst nobody hardly speaks to me, and I am only six months younger."

"According to your own account, Maria," said Elinor, scarcely able to refrain from joining in sir Henry's hearty laugh, "Caroline has had no opportunity allowed her for playing with you today; but do not look so terribly angry, and to-morrow morning I promise, if my sister

sister is otherwise engaged, to be your antagonist at trapball, the game you appear most partial to."

Maria, now tolerably contented, walked off, whilst sir Henry continued bitterly inveighing against her folly in supposing Caroline was to be considered a companion to such a vain little idiot; till, interrupted by George, who exclaimed against his and Elinor's unfairness in so long forsaking the dance.—"You did not think it so at Lesford," he continued to the latter; "what makes you then dance this evening with so little spirit? Is it that my friend sir Henry is not so lively a partner as Clarenville then was, with whom I remember you were dancing when sir Edward Ormsby desired the general to admire the spirit with which you entered into the amusement? I suspect they would to-night have some little difficulty in recognising among this group the same

Miss

Miss Belvington who captivated all hearts in the Lesford ball-room."

"I forgot to mention to-day at dinner," said sir Henry, turning to Elinor, not aware of the cause which so deeply suffused her cheek, and scarcely observing its change of colour, "that my friend Clarenville has, by the death of an uncle on the maternal side, obtained an accession of fortune, which, added to the bequest of the late sir Alfred Clarenville, will make his nephew quite a rich man. Have you seen his little romantic villa at Woodley, in Devonshire?"

"Never," replied Elinor, endeavouring to answer in an unconcerned tone; "but I have heard from my friend lady Ormsby it is a most beautiful spot."

"Oh, it is one of the most lovely the eye ever beheld," returned sir Henry, "and is situated in one of the most romantic parts of that sweet county, where the prospects around are most enchantingly beautiful."

"You

"You intend visiting it, Miss Belvington, some time or other?" said George dryly.

"It is not at all improbable I may at some not very distant period accompany my kind friend Mrs. Clarenville to her son's residence," repliedElinor, provoked into answering him thus coolly; but," she continued, turning her now-blushing countenance from him, and attempting to smile as she addressed sir Henry, "I must not venture thither without an invitation from the lady of the mansion, who is not yet arrived there, I believe."

"If you wait for Mrs. Alfred Clarenville's invitation," returned sir Henry, laughing, "and I may believe my friend's assertion, it will be some time before you see Woodley. He talks with the most serious countenance of continuing a bachelor, or till he can bring himself to wed a golden goddess only; the latter of which, if I am (as I flatter myself) acquainted with the heart of my friend, never

never will happen. No, Clarenville's disposition is, like his estate, far too romantic to admit the idea of worldly dross adding to his happiness; therefore, if he really is serious, and you wait to be invited by the lady we have been speaking of, I fear there is little chance of your seeing Woodley."

"Then I must rest content with your description of its beauties," replied Elinor, as she rose hastily to join her sister, who had been eminently successful in dispelling the before-*petrifying* expression of her partner's countenance, which was now most brilliantly illumined; but at sir Henry's request of dancing the two next dances with Caroline, the sunshine vanished, though only to break out again in renovated splendour, as she replied Mr. Arthur Campbell had already engaged her, and Mr. Egerton was again to be her partner, if there were to be any more dancing afterwards.

Sir Henry inveighed against this unfair

fair monopoly to no purpose; Caroline only smiled, and Mr. Egerton remained unmoved by his reproaches.

"Have you seen Maria lately?" said Elinor to her sister; "she has been complaining most bitterly to me of her playfellow, who she declares has entirely forgotten her."

"I have indeed been very remiss," exclaimed Caroline, starting in confusion at recollecting how entirely her attention had been otherwise engrossed; "but has she not been dancing?"

"Have you ever passed her in the dance?" inquired Elinor, smiling a little archly. "No," she continued; "poor Maria has not been so fortunate in procuring partners as her playfellow; for except her very young cousins, whom she has not condescended to accept, no one has invited her to join in our amusement."

"I cannot, I fear," replied Caroline, with a little hesitation of manner, "pro-

cure

cure her a partner; but you, Elinor, perhaps might persuade Mr. Fitzmorton to dance with her these next two dances."

"Oh no," replied Elinor, laughing, "my attempt would be an unsuccessful one; his manly spirit would take fire at the slightest hint of such a proposal, and he would wrathfully inquire if I thought him alone a suitable partner for such a mere child?"

At this totally-unconscious insinuation Mr. Egerton's eyes appeared to strike fire; and Elinor, as she caught a glance of these fiery orbs directed towards her, stood for a moment lost in surprise; but at length, recollecting the words of the reply she had made her sister, and the inference which might be drawn from them and applied to Caroline, she no longer wondered at the sudden flash, and, smiling, added—"Mr. Fitzmorton is not the first person who has mistaken the age of Maria."

"How

"How very unfortunate!" said Caroline, who, in reflecting upon the omission she had been guilty of, heard not exactly what her sister said; "but I will ask Mr. Arthur Campbell," she continued, after a moment's pause, "to excuse my dancing with him, and then I can at least remain with Maria."

"Indeed you shall not give up any amusement for her sake," exclaimed Mr. Egerton hastily. "Come, Longbourne," he continued, addressing sir Henry, "do not be idle, but invite your young cousin to dance."

"My noble uncle," replied the baronet, bowing, "must excuse my non-compliance; I am already too much out of humour with his arrangements to agree to another still more disagreeable."

"Oh! you then are one of our fashionable dancing beaux," said Caroline quickly. "Ah Elinor!" she continued, "your friend Miss Benfield will never meet with

with a second baronet like sir Edward Ormsby, or even a Mr. Clarenville."

Sir Henry now eagerly inquired from what cause these two gentlemen ranked so high in her favour.

"They are Elinor's favourites, not mine," returned Caroline; "for she saw them one evening select for their partner a young lady who they found would otherwise remain uninvited to join the festive group. "But here comes Mr. Arthur Campbell," she continued, "and I must hasten to present my petition."

"Entrust your commission to me," said sir Henry, detaining her as she was hastening from him; then, smiling, added, "if you will permit me to exert my eloquence in persuading Arthur to resign his prize to me, I will procure Maria a partner for this set, and dance the next with her myself."

Caroline shook her head, and after a moment's pause, replied—"No, sir Henry, I cannot, even to gratify Maria, consent

sent to return your cousin's kind attention by such marked rudeness, though I can, without much regret, remain for her sake a quiet spectator of my favourite amusement."

Again she was leaving him, when, snatching her hand, he exclaimed—"Forgive my rudeness, my selfishness! and I will devote myself to Maria for the whole evening; only assure me you will not remember to my disadvantage the unamiable trait I have now displayed."

"Oh, it is already faded from my remembrance," returned Caroline, blushing, and hastily withdrawing her hand; "only let me beg of you to complete your happy arrangement as soon as possible; procure a partner for your cousin, and a heavy weight will be taken from my mind."

"I will be gone immediately; only answer me one more question, and let your reply be a favourable one. Will you,

you, if not otherwise engaged, dance with me the two first dances, at the ball we are to have on Egerton's birth-day?"

"Mr. Egerton has himself engaged me for those," replied Caroline, as her eyes fell for a moment beneath the scrutinizing glance of the baronet; but raising them again, she with a smile continued, "I now, however, make the same request to you for the two second."

"I consider myself as the most highly-favoured of mortals," exclaimed sir Henry, again seizing her hand, "and shall most delightedly avail myself of your condescension."

The baronet then would have gallantly raised the hand he had taken to his lips, but again hastily disengaging it, Caroline turned from him, and joined lady Egerton and her sister, till Arthur Campbell came to seek, and hand her to the dance. Mr. Egerton was again a spectator of it, and again looking so ex-

tremely depressed, that Mrs. Davenport, who then entered, feeling somewhat alarmed at the expression of his countenance, hastened towards him, and affectionately taking his hand, tenderly inquired the cause.—"Is Caroline in any way connected with it?" she continued, finding her questions remained unanswered, except by returning the affectionate pressure of her hand. "Tell me, dear Charles, if you have observed any thing in her conduct that is not exactly what you wish; and perhaps the influence which I flatter myself I possess with her, may be successfully exerted in correcting it."

"My kind, affectionate Maria," he replied, gratefully smiling, "forgive me for the alarm my gravity has occasioned you, but it proceeds not from the cause you suspect; no, it is only a jealous, apprehensive fear, which it is very wrong, very selfish in me to indulge: for, Maria, I can too plainly perceive every prospect

of

of happiness for me will be destroyed by my gay, lively, and fascinating nephew; therefore I must exert all my better principles, and endeavour unrepiningly to consign my loved Caroline to one who, in disposition, similarity of years, and every pleasing attraction, is qualified to attach a heart worthy of an emperor, though, after having so long been acquainted with its excellence, the struggle I cannot deny will be a hard one."

"Oh shame on this unwarranted despair!" exclaimed Mrs. Davenport, with a reproachful smile. "My dear Charles, can you expect Caroline is to pass unnoticed or unadmired, because you were the first man who experienced the effect of her fascinations? It is unjust, unreasonable, either to wish or expect it; yet I see no reason you have to fear she takes any particular pleasure in Henry's attentions; nay, I believe her to be at present as totally unconscious of their being di-

rected particularly to her as she is of your regard. And now, my dear Charles," continued Mrs. Davenport, "let me advise you to banish these apprehensive fancies from your countenance at least, or Caroline, seeing your face ever wrapt in gloom, may shrink in dismay from its expression, and thereby find double pleasure in contemplating the animated one of your rival, which, trust to my discernment, she is yet perfectly indifferent to. Follow also my advice, and join the dancers; you will see her then to greater advantage, and when more actively employed, will not view the picture in such gloomy colours, which magnify also every little alarm it is natural for a man in love to feel."

—Mr. Egerton attempting to smile, and pressing the hand of his sister, followed her advice; for, seeing his niece Emily disengaged, he offered himself as a partner to her, and as he passed Caroline in the

the dance, was rewarded for his exertions by one of her most animated, intelligent smiles; it communicated a glow of happiness to his heart, and added a sweeter expression to his countenance, which, for the remainder of the evening, continued unchanged.

END OF VOL. III.

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