The Advantages of Education

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“Let this great truth by all be understood,
“That all the pious duties which we owe
“Our parents, friends, our country and our God,
“The seeds of ev’ry virtue here below,
“From discipline alone and early culture grow.”

GILBERT WEST.

PREFACE

As the author's design, in composing the following pages, was to enstruct, rather than to entertain, she entreats her readers not to expect extravagance of character, or variety of incident. Writing professedly for the inexperienced part of her own sex, she thought it more adviseable to describe life as they are likely to find it, than to adorn it with those gaudy and romantic colours in which it is commonly depicted. She wishes to convince them, that it is but seldom that they will be called forth to perform high acts of heroic excellence, but that they will be daily required to exert those humble duties and social virtues, wherein the chief part of our merit and our happiness consists.

Great and sudden reverses of fortune are not frequent; yet little disappointments hourly occur, which fall with the greatest severity on those, whose amiable, though dangerous enthusiasm, induces them to expect too much, and to feel too severely.

To counteract the evils incident to the romantic conclusions which youth are apt to form; to place the maternal character in a dignified and pleasing point of view, and to secure happiness, by removing those capricious desires which undermine content, is the chief design of the author. Conscious of many defects in the execution, she entreats all the indulgence which candour will allow.

THE ADVANTAGES OF EDUCATION

OR, THE HISTORY OF MARIA WILLIAMS

A TALE FOR MISSES AND THEIR MAMMAS

BY

PRUDENTIA HOMESPUN

VOLUME I

I

Consulting a sensible friend upon my intended work, I read to her, as a specimen, the character of my heroine.

After a pause, “You say nothing,” said Mentoria, “about her beauty and accomplishments.”

“I did not think,” replied I, “that a particular description of her personal attractions was necessary for those, who only read her life.”

“You may put your manuscript in the fire,” said my friend, “not a soul will read it; who do you think will be interested in the fate of a girl, whom they do not know to be handsome and elegant?”

I answered, “she shall be simple in her manners, gentle in her disposition, possessed of an improved mind, and a benevolent heart. Her fortitude shall be tried, her patience exercised, her humility,”—

“My dear Prudentia,” interrupted Mentoria, laughing, “why you are describing the wife of Clericus, who starves upon a Welsh curacy. Does any one care for the distresses of merely good sort of people? Every body says, we are sorry for them, but the nerves of pity can never be affected, unless beauty, elegance, and refinement, constitute the character of the sufferers. Do not all novels turn upon this hinge?”

“I detest imitation,” said I, “and besides it is my intention to explode those notions which novel reading in general produces, by delineating human life in false colours, expectations are formed which can never be

realized; the consequence of which is, that life is begun in error, and ended in disappointment."

"Do not you intend then," said Mentoria, "to conduct your heroine through the severest trials, to wealth and felicity, and to reward her patience and humility by a faultless husband, and an immense fortune?"

"No," said I, pettishly, glowing with the spirit of female pride, "I do not chuse to hold up matrimony as the great desideratum of our sex; I wish them look to the general esteem of worthy people, and the approbation of their own hearts, for the recompense of their merit, rather than to the particular addresses of a lover. Men educate their youth upon this principle; they never say," do thus, "and the ladies will admire you. Indeed, we ourselves should think such an inducement would only form a coxcomb, or a petit maitre; and can we expect any other, than that our method should produce a romantic prude, or a flirting coquette."

"Your intentions," replied my friend, "are as romantic as those which you design to eradicate; at least, if improbability of success constitutes the romantic. Your work will, I foresee, rest peaceably on the shelves of your bookseller, unless you condescend to bind it in gilt paper, and send it into the world with a little alteration of its title, and call it The renowned History of Miss Williams, who, by being a very good girl, gained the love of all her friends and acquaintance."

"Cannot then," said I, "nature and simplicity please beyond the age of twelve years; will no one be interested about Polly Williams, because," my friend at the name of Polly, laughed so immoderately, that in compliance to her taste (for she is a woman of the world) I have adopted the name of Maria, and have even consented to allow her

beauty and elegance, lest I should not have one reader in her teens.

But as I have retained as much as possible of my original plan, I must premise that Maria's beauty was not of that striking kind, as can create universal envy in the women, and adoration in the men. In some of her accomplishments too, she may possibly have been equalled; and as to her husband, though not absolutely perfect, he will be, as the world goes, a decent character. In fine, I declare, with all the veracity of a faithful historian, I shall copy him from a gentleman who was once a lover of my own and allowed by every body to be—

—"A man, take him for all in all,"
"We ne'er shall look upon his like again."

But before I close this chapter, I will intreat those readers, whom patience and curiosity have induced to travel thus far with me, to peruse once more my title page; and if they are, although ever so trifling a period, on the wrong side of sixteen, to resign me to their younger sisters, for I am confident, that if they proceed, they will only find me a contradictious and stupid companion.

II

So much more agreeable is it to detect the faults of others, than to exhibit our own, that I might have proceeded in the desultory style for several pages; but having recollected, that by trifling, I should set my pupils an example of as great an enormity as those which I attempt to correct, I will, without further delay, introduce to their acquaintance, Maria Williams, an amiable unaffected girl, who, to all the enthusiasm of youthful innocence, united all its impetuosity and inexperience.

She had been separated from her father at too early a period, to retain the least recollection of him. Of her mother, who had left England about nine years, she had little more than a personal remembrance.

Pecuniary distresses had compelled her parents to quit their country; and as Mrs. Williams constantly hoped the period of her banishment would speedily terminate, she felt unwilling to expose her only child to the danger of the sea, or the unhealthy climate of the new world. Sacrificing her own feelings to her daughter's safety, she contented herself with the consciousness of having discharged her duty, and left her future reward to Providence.

A relation of Mr. Williams, afforded an asylum to Maria, during the two first years of her mother's absence, but dying without having performed the promise which she had given, of providing for the child, Maria was placed at a boarding school in ——shire. As her governess, Madame Du Pont, supplied to her all those attentions, which children more happily circumstanced, receive from their parents; the friendless girl naturally

looked up to her with all the affection which gratitude inspires for those, from whom we receive protection and support.

As she recollected little of her parents, she must inevitably have drawn their characters from the descriptions of those with whom she conversed. She remembered that her relation, Mrs. Arbuthnot, always told her, that her mother was a very severe and obstinate woman, and who, upon all occasions, would have her own way.

Young as she was, Maria discovered, that Mrs. Arbuthnot was no ways deficient in obstinacy herself; and with respect to severity, as it was a family rule that she should be corrected every day, she considered it an event of course, and did not regard it. Her only wonder was, that she was whipped one day for what she was caressed the next. She however always knew that the old lady meant well, and was her friend; and as Madame du Pont constantly taught her to expect very different treatment, when she returned to her mother, from what she had experienced at school, she never presumed to call Mrs. Arbuthnot's sagacity into question. As to her father, it was universally agreed, that he was a great villain, but particulars were never enlarged upon.

Maria corresponded with her mother. The letters passing under the eye of the governess, soon, on the daughter's side, degenerated into mere matter of form. The common place account of her masters, the number of boarders, what young lady took her home at the holidays, &c. &c. gave little insight into her character. Mrs. Williams rejoiced that Maria was well, and waited for clearer information till a happier period.

At length Mrs. Du Pont received a letter with a black signet, in which Mrs. Williams entreated her cautiously to inform her daughter of her father's death. She added, that as soon as she had settled her affairs, which she hoped a few months would effect, she should return to England. Enclosed was a draft for fifty pounds, which she requested might be appropriated to the purchase of mourning for Maria, whom she desired might, till her return, be raised to the situation of a parlour boarder.

The governess, who had a little tincture of the marvellous, and a high opinion of her own penetration, fancied the style of Mrs. Williams's letter was more consequential than usual, and being accustomed to annex great wealth to the idea of a Creolian, soon found, even in the form and seal of this epistle, convincing reasons for elevating Maria into a rich heiress. She did not indeed directly tell her that she was so, but it was soon whispered through the school, and the change in the behaviour of every one was astonishing. The masters took redoubled pains to render her perfect in their respective departments. The girls looked up to her as their umpire. She was introduced to all the company that came to the school, as the most accomplished pupil in the seminary; and nobody would be so destitute of taste as not to discern her beautiful features, her graceful air, and her fine form. The misses were continually interrogating her,

"What carriage will your mamma keep? where will her country house be? will she have a servant out of livery? shall you have more than six new dresses a year? do you intend going to all the race balls?"

Maria could not always tell how to answer these questions. Alternately the object of envy and admiration, it was impossible for her not to adopt some ideas of self-importance. She had heard of such things as beaux and

lovers, and she knew them to be appendages on beauty and fortune.

In the midst of a very agreeable reverie, she heard the sound of a chaise, and a moment after she was hastily informed by one of the teachers, that her mother was that moment waiting for her in the parlour.

III

Maria was suddenly overwhelmed by sensations which she had never experienced; and though anxious to see the person with whom she was to spend her future life, yet she very much dreaded her resentment, for ’till within these few months, she was reputed so incorrigible a dunce; that, as Mrs. Du Pont had a presentiment that she would never improve, she forebore the useless task of instruction, and remitted to her mother a punctual account of all her little errors and defects. Maria at first sprang eagerly forward to see her parent; then terrified and trembling, she caught hold of her conductor’s arm, dreading, yet wishing to meet the eye of one who was to be the arbiter of her fate. The door was opened, and the first object she beheld, was her mother lifeless in the arms of her governess. Mrs. Williams’s eagerness to see her child, was become agonizing, and she fainted at the moment she was told she should instantly behold her.

Maria had not time to reflect upon this fine trait of maternal tenderness; she rushed to embrace and support her, and bathing her face with tears, earnestly conjured her to look upon her; no restorative could be so reanimating to Mrs. Williams, as her daughter’s voice; she opened her eyes and gazed upon the lovely girl, in filial tears more lovely. Delighted with the pleasing object, she looked up to heaven with pious gratitude, and alternately with extacy and tenderness on Maria.

Madame Du Pont, who was by no means deficient in the characteristic garrulity of her nation, had too great an aversion to silence, to suffer a long vacuum in discourse.

Whilst Mrs. Williams and her daughter were conversing with their eyes, she was delivering a very copious harangue on the merits of the latter. She threw in indeed a little about her own merit, but that was only by way of inuendo. The chief of her discourse was referred to Maria's good sense, sweet temper, diligence, and gentility. She would not for the world have forgotten the last; and as her pupil's form was unusually graceful, she thought her mother would more readily give her credit for the rest.

Mrs. Williams at last complained of fatigue, said she had not been in bed the three preceding nights, and requested permission of the governess to stay a few days to recruit her health and spirits, which, by her late exertions, had been considerably injured.

Such a request, from a lady of Mrs. Williams's consequence, was highly flattering. A great number of compliments fell from the voluble French woman; whilst her guest hastily swallowed a cup of coffee, and declining any other attendant than her daughter, retired to her apartment.

When secure from interruption, Mrs. Williams again eagerly pressed Maria to her breast. No longer restrained by impertinent observation, she breathed those pious ejaculations which maternal tenderness and devotion alike inspired. She thanked Providence for having restored to her the beloved girl, from whom she had been so painfully separated. But as I do not mean to describe minutely every circumstance of this affecting interview, I will only observe, that in this instance, as in all the events of life, pain was mingled with enjoyment. Though Mrs. Williams was charmed with her daughter's aspect, yet she feared that nature had proved less liberal to her mind: and Maria had too much diffidence and timidity to suppress the

apprehension, that her mother’s transport and affection would abate, on a more intimate acquaintance.

The next morning was destined by Madame Du Pont, for the exhibition of her pupils; I should speak more precisely, if I said, for a display of her own merit. Mrs. Williams was compelled to be present at the examination of every genius in the seminary, in all their excellencies. She was forced to listen to a detail of the various methods by which this incomparable governess discovered their respective tastes. But Madame perceiving that the repetition did not interest so deeply as she had intended; for the support of the flogging conversation, she had at length recourse to the eulionec flattery. Never was there any one to compare to the sweet Miss Williams, in every respect so equally adroit and diligent! Mrs. Williams interrupted her by complaining of sudden faintness, said the air would be her only remedy, and seizing her daughter’s arm, hurried with her into the garden.

Having once more escaped from disgusting panegyrics, she looked steadily upon Maria for some moments; ’till perceiving that her serious air embarrassed the timid girl, she struggled to assume her former placid aspect. Having commended the fragrance and luxurience of the woodbines which covered the arbour at the end of the terrace; she proposed that they should rest a little under that agreeable retreat. She now attempted to promote an easy conversation; and as she knew that there are circumstances, in which to talk of common place subjects, is both distressing and evidently affected; she told Maria, that having been so long incapacitated from ministering to her wants and desires, she hoped in future to enjoy, in its greatest degree, the purest felicity which a parent could taste, in promoting the happiness of her offspring.

“I have been so unfortunate, my dear,” said she, “as to lose all those connexions which would have endeared to me any particular spot of earth. You probably may have some preference, and in any part of England of which you approve, I will willingly fix our future residence.”

Maria, encouraged by her mother’s goodness, asked her “if she meant to reside all the year in the country.”

“My health,” resumed the good lady, smiling, “will not allow me to think of living in London; and I have so deeply felt the misery of a wandering life, that I place most of my ideas of happiness in a settled abode.”

Maria felt a little hurt to give up the gaieties of the metropolis; but recollecting herself, soon answered, that as her mother kindly allowed her a choice, she must name Everdon, a delightful village, and the residence of her dear friend, Charlotte Raby, who about two years ago left school to be her father’s house-keeper, after Mrs. Raby’s death. She feared however, it was such a little rural place, that her mother could not find in it a suitable habitation.

“To gratify you, Maria, I will submit to some inconveniencies,” said Mrs. Williams. The conversation now stagnated; Maria expected, that having settled their place of abode, the carriage would be next discussed. On this head she would have been no contemptible adviser, as she had attentively watched all that came to her governess’s for the last six months, in order to ascertain the most fashionable colour, and form; but as her mother said nothing upon the subject, Maria thought it might have been already ordered, and fearing to be impertinent, was silent.

It happened that at that moment Mrs. Williams was not thinking of her equipage or retinue. She was anxiously endeavouring to gain a farther insight into her daughter’s

character; and at length asked her, with what young ladies at school she was particularly intimate.

This question opened an extensive field. My readers must have already discovered, that Maria herself was a most extraordinary girl, and will not wonder to hear, that all her friends were paragons. Delighted with the subject, she expatiated largely on the merits of each: they were good tempered, kind, and generous in the extreme, in short, the prototypes of Charlotte Raby, who still, amidst these tutelary goddesses, preserved the place of chief divinity. Candid and placable in her disposition, she would not have mentioned a word of her enemies, but then the merits of her friends could not have been rendered so conspicuous. She began (at first reluctantly) to name those girls who had used her intimates unhandsomely; 'till heated by the subject, she went on to delineate portraits, which, if they were not somewhat caricatured by the bold strokes of a pencil that had not yet acquired precision, were such redoubted originals, as the world rarely produces, and I profess to exhibit only common and unexaggerated characters.

The little seminary within doors, were by this time dismissed, to enjoy their morning relaxation: and Mrs. Williams, who saw them approach, after tenderly thanking Maria for relieving her head-ach by her sprightly sallies, told her, that as she would soon be separated from her friends, she would not entirely engross her conversation, but wished her to join them in their amusements. Maria flew to them in high spirits, delighted at the extraordinary marks of penetration which she had exhibited to her mother, who walked pensively toward the house, reflecting on what had passed.

"Her manner," said she, "is frank and ingenuous; her look animated and intelligent; a noble structure may be

built upon so fair a foundation. Gracious heaven! give me strength and firmness properly to discharge my important duty. Make me grateful for all the good which I have discovered; and when any latent error appears, enable me to counter-act its pernicious effects, by mild, but persevering fortitude. A tear stole down her face, as she concluded this ejaculation. Accustomed to make no parade of feeling, she carefully obliterated every trace of concern before she entered the dining-room.

IV

Determined to gratify her daughter, Mrs. Williams was musing upon the possibility of fixing at Everdon; and having hinted her desire speedily to meet with an house, Madame Du Pont began a long description of all the sumptuous chatteaus, palaces, and villas which she had visited, some of which she affirmed were now actually unoccupied.

Mrs. Williams asked her if she knew Everdon. The governess replied, “it was a sweet sequestered spot, but immensely dull in winter: besides, there was no house vacant in it but a little snug box, that Mrs. Williams could not possibly think of.”

That lady however begged a description of this box; and when she found that it contained two small parlours, a kitchen, and other correspondent apartments, a garden, and close, prettily diversified with flowering shrubs, to the astonishment of the whole company, she declared it was exactly what she wished for; and finding that was not far distant, she determined to take a ride that afternoon, to fix upon the terms of entrance.

Mrs. Du Pont was all amazement, and secretly all indignation too, at the meanness of the West-Indian lady. She exulted indeed at the thought, that the lessons on elegance and appearance, which she had given to her pupil, would somewhat counteract the mother’s sordid propensity. Respect for riches, a doctrine which she not only taught, but practised, prevented her from indulging even a look of disapprobation, in the presence of Mrs. Williams. But no sooner had that lady and her

daughter stepped into the post-chaise that was to conduct them to Everdon, than by the keenness of her saterical observations, she made ample amends for the silence which politeness had enjoined.

The etiquette necessary to entering upon a house, not being very interesting, my readers probably will forgive a chasm, and will suppose that Mrs. Williams has purchased her furniture, hired her servants, and fixed herself and daughter in her little habitation. I must however observe, that the avaricious humour which Madame Du Pont had discovered, was but too sensible in all those transactions. The furniture deserved no better name than neat and simple, and the family establishment was so shamefully deficient, as to consist only of one female servant and a foot boy. Indeed, besides having defrayed the school bill to the utmost, she had sufficient spirit to make the governess a present, as a mark of gratitude for her care of Maria; yet circumstances only denominated generosity. What Mrs. Williams gave, would have been called genteel, from a person of confined fortune, but it was thought pitiful, when annexed to the idea of a rich planter's widow.

There is a species of self ignorance, which greatly accelerates our comfortable progress through life. All the neighbourhood exclaimed against Mrs. Williams's parsimony; while she satisfied and contented, never suspected herself to be guilty of such an enormity. This may perhaps prove how little we know ourselves: but I only design it to shew how little we can guess what will be said of us by others.

Maria, though somewhat chagrined at moving in a sphere so much humbler than what was expected, in a few days overcame a mortification, which seldom entirely depresses the sanguine hopes incident to health and youth.

She applied herself with great assiduity to make every improvement to her mother's habitation; and made a plantation of roses, which was terminated by two stands for exotics, around which she determined to wind a profusion of eglantine and jessamine. She was happy to find that the shrubs that bounded the winding walk in the close, would readily admit of being disposed into an arbour at the end, which would derive an additional charm, from being contiguous to Mr. Raby's pleasure grounds. Charlotte assisted her in these undertakings, and also in composing little simple frames for her drawings and embroidery, which were to be hung up in the best parlour. The decorations of the common room were still less artificial, and consisted only of pots and baskets, which Maria promised even in winter to ornament with flowers, of which she intended to cultivate a profusion. Though some circumstances of her education had exposed her to the danger of vanity and affectation, she yet retained that sweetness and ingenuity, of which nature had, at her birth, been uncommonly liberal.

V

I have been prevented from proceeding in my narrative, from a fear, that if these pages should ever fall into the hands of people, who are fond of drawing general conclusions, they may, from misapprehension, conceive, that I mean to fix an implied stigma on a boarding-school education: and as I really think too highly of the importance of education in general, to wish to bring any species of it into contempt, I judged it necessary to subjoin an explanatory digression.

It is true, that ever since those perplexities, which the connexion between my niece, Elizabeth and Lady ———, occasioned (and which my brother has described very feelingly in a work, called the Mirror) my family dislike to fine people and fine things, has been greatly aggravated. I cannot but lament, that amidst the innumerable edifices appropriated to the reception of young ladies, the poor young women are never thought of. Mentoria tells me, that it is impossible to instruct non-entities, for the order of beings which I speak of, has been for some time extinct. As she allows, however, that they have been useful, she does not disapprove of my earnest endeavours to attempt their revival.

One of the methods which I advise for this purpose, is, that all governesses should hold forth moral and intellectual qualities, as the object of their pupil's ambition. Let the girl who has given the most unequivocal proofs of candour, modesty, gentleness, and benevolence, be considered as an example, by which all her associates should regulate their conduct, in preference to one, who

copies a drawing with the greatest nicety, or executes a tune with superior taste.

I am not a declared enemy to all personal accomplishments; on the contrary, out of my little stipend, I paid for half a year's instruction for my brother's two youngest daughters, who learnt of the best itenerant dancing master which our country produced: for I wished that the girls should know how to enter a room, and to go down the Highland Laddie, and the Banks of Endernay, with tolerable ease, and gracefulness; but, when Elizabeth insisted that the minuet de-la-cour, and the cotillion should be added to their attainments, a regard to consistency compelled me to stop.

Goodness of heart, regularity of temper, and propriety of conduct, are as equally necessary for the daughters of a mechanic, as for those of an Earl: but Kitty Spicer will be excusable, if Lady Bab Lardoan speaks French in a juster accent, and paints more naturally. Accomplishments like these, are the children of leisure; and there is no harm if Kitty's manner bespeaks the woman of business.

Elegant dress too, seems originally designed for the higher orders of life. A love of it is so congenial to the female heart, that it appears to be the duty of all instructors, to moderate this strong propensity. The conduct of schools in general, adds fuel to this irregular fire; and a child who has the misfortune to be ill-dressed, must submit to neglect and ridicule. In this I will allow, that parents are often reprehensible; and unless a kind of sumptuary law could be introduced, school mistresses can do no more than act as moderators.

The dispute concerning private and public instruction, has been long kept up; and there seems to be some difficulty in deciding to which must be given the

preference. I allow that many great advantages are annexed to the former; local prejudices are removed, habits of industry inculcated, and a spirit of emulation excited. I confess too, that many mothers are not possessed of sufficient information or leisure, to become the preceptors of their children; but I fear that few of those who, from a sense of their own inability, resolve to give their girls, what they call a good education, find their satisfaction proportionate to their expectations. Is not awkwardness held out as a chief object of ridicule? are these young satirists taught to distinguish between the neglect, and the want of opportunity for improvement? are they early assured, that the knowledge which they are to gain, is but superficial, and calculated rather to enliven their leisure hours, than to form their chief employments? I fear the negative is the just answer; they must therefore return pert and conceited, and too often inclined to despise the parents, to whose injudicious, but well-meant liberality, they owe their fancied consequence.

As an old maid, I may be allowed to be singular and positive; and I know that it will only be charged to the account of family predilection, if I affirm, that though the homespuns are now out of fashion, I do not think their successors are more worthy of public attention. These, fair goddesses, so fair, so blithe, so smooth, so gay, instructed only to dance,

“To dress, to troll the tongue, and roll the eye,”

Are by Milton affirmed to be destitute of all good, wherein consists

“Woman’s domestic honour, and chief praise.”

Suppose for one instant that the rage for idleness (I beg pardon, I mean refinement; I always mistake those words) should spread to the next order in society, and our housemaids and cooks, weary of their dirty occupations, should grow as refined as their young ladies. The industrious mother cannot perform all the domestic affairs herself; and as we do not live in Utopia, but in a country, where exertion must precede enjoyment, our elegant girls must either be useful or starve. This apprehension is indeed needless; real evils in abundance exist, to stem the torrent of refined whimseys, and sentimental extravagance. Our fine ladies bequeath ruined fortunes and domestic anguish to their relations; but they reserve lassitude, self-reproach, and spleen for their own bosoms.

I shall have many sensible people on my side, if I affirm that this inundation of affected fashion, which sweeps away before it distinction and œconomy, may be attributed to the prevalence of a boarding-school education. This error is in part, I allow, interwoven with their institution; but a sensible governess may greatly remedy this defect. Much attention must be bestowed on those accomplishments, of which a superficial observer can easily judge. Interest compels them to this; but let conscientious duty equally compel them, to guard their little seminary, as much as possible, from those errors which will poison their future life. This, I own, requires superior care, and superior abilities; yet let me ask, ought young people to be intrusted to persons incapable of such exertions? a worthy and judicious instructor of youth, is certainly a first character. Education is an extensive field; and to introduce into it ornamental plants, without injuring its regular and agreeable verdure, requires a correct taste, and a skilful hand.

VI

To resume the narrative. The affection of Mrs. Williams for Maria was too elevated to partake of that ridiculous partiality, which would have rendered her blind to her child's imperfections. She clearly saw that, like a rich neglected garden, her daughter's uncultivated mind ran into disorder and irregularity, through redundance; but she too well knew the extreme nicety of giving advice with propriety, to hazard any exertion of maternal authority, till secure that the filial deference would be founded on affection.

By confidence, cheerfulness, and apparent satisfaction, she endeavoured to recall a sentiment which absence had effaced. It is true, that had she directed Maria's choice, Charlotte Raby would not have been the first person whom she would have selected for her friend. Vivacity, and a desire of being admired, were the chief characteristics of that young lady. As they both rose to extravagance, they often unavoidably plunged her into unpleasant situations; but as she was too volatile to act upon system, nobody conceived that she designed to do wrong. Frequent repetitions of error, however, compelled her justifying friends, to have recourse to the jejune exages, that it was her way, that she was very young, but would in time know better.

Her father, after having spent the prime of life in a respectable line of business, had retired, at the age of sixty, to taste rural pleasures with a large fortune, and a vacant mind. As he had never heard of the sylvian deities, he could not be expected to sacrifice at their altar: but

continued his adoration to his favourite divinities, the gods of good cheer, and convivial hospitality.

As his ideas of happiness consisted in living in a crowd, and acquiring the notice of his superiors, he never felt it in so superlative a degree, as when surrounded by the neighbouring gentry; and when they found that his wine was excellent, his larder plentifully supplied, and his dinners well dressed, they were so affable as to make him frequent visits, and very condescendingly laughed at his city taste, and Change-Alley politeness.

The sprightly and eccentric Charlotte too, was no small allurement to the young foxhunters in that vicinity; and she was equally fortunate in affording entertainment to their mothers and sisters, by supplying a copious subject for declamation.

Miss Raby tenderly loved Maria, and pitied the dull sameness of her friend’s life. To diversify it as much as was in her power, she invited her and her mother to all their parties. These civilities Mrs. Williams declined, as often as politeness rendered it possible, and prevailed on the young people to confine their interchange of sentiments to their morning walks, except the Rabys had by chance a disengaged afternoon, when, to avoid the vacuity at home, they dedicated it to Mrs. Williams. That affectionate but uncommon mother, instead of forming genteel connexions for her daughter, enquiring after the most fashionable artists who presided over the different branches of female dress, and performing all the etiquette which is commonly called introducing a young woman into the world, was assiduously employed in instructing her charge, to perform her part in it with consistency and comfort. Perceiving that her knowledge was confined, she endeavoured, by every agreeable artifice, to familiarize to her mind, several branches of learning, fearful, lest the

austerity of science should discourage a beginner. History being most adapted to her purpose, she frequently, in the course of easy conversation, amused her daughter with some interesting narrative. They were not indeed so marvellous, or so much addressed to the passions as the stories which Maria was accustomed to read; but they bore the stamp of truth, were related in an agreeable manner, and enlivened by remarks judiciousiy adapted to her taste and understanding.

The Grecian and Roman empires furnished various narratives, in which the force of patriotism, the firmness of virtue, and the astonishing greatness to which independence and integrity elevate the human mind, are exemplified. From the story of eastern nations, and the luxurious effeminacy that marked the declining days of Rome, she endeavoured to inspire the attentive girl with an abhorrence of extravagence, corruption, and licentious pleasure.

In the annals of our own nation, she taught her to observe the gradual developement of the mental powers, and to trace with nice discernment, the varying manners of her countrymen, from the rude Briton to the haughty Baron, and from thence to the elegant politeness of the present age. By specifying the virtues of each description of men, Maria was led to admire the patience and courage of the untutored savage, the hospitality and spirit of the feudal tyrant, the mistaken piety and mortification of the Monk, and the steadfast firmness of our first reformers. Religious principles too were strengthened by these discussions; as the narrator would frequently remark the visible interpositions of Providence, and the wonderful and seemingly impossible means, by which its great designs were accelerated. Nor did she forget (indeed it was her constant inference) to trace the improvement

which morality received from the progress and clearer explanation of Christianity. Maria eagerly begged she might peruse the volumes from whence her mother had derived such copious information; and thus, at the sweet girl's desire, the evenings of the first winter they passed at Everdon, were dedicated to historical researches.

The day indeed was fully employed. It began with devotion. Some slight exercises in French and drawing; the arrangement and execution of domestic affairs, the needle and conversation occupied the time; 'till a walk with Miss Raby, or gardening, if the weather permitted, filled up the space 'till dinner. The afternoon generally commenced with music; but as variety was one of Mrs. Williams's aims, nothing was absolutely fixed, except that working and reading were to occupy the evening.

One day Mrs. Williams was concerned to see her daughter return from her morning walk, with great perplexity and apprehension in her countenance. She was prevented from enquiring the cause, by Miss Raby's eagerly telling her, that the officers of the ——— regiment, who were quartered in that neighbourhood, had politely resolved, in return for the many civilities they had received from the surrounding gentry, to give a public masked ball. Tickets had been given to her, and she was determined that her dear Maria should partake of the pleasure, if Mrs. Williams had no objection.

Anxiety and alarm were strongly depicted in Maria's face. Her mother made several excuses: as she had not been amongst the number of those who invited the officers, her daughter seemed to have no right to the festivity. This was soon answered by the lively orator. Her sweet friend's company must be acceptable. Mrs. Williams then pleaded, that as the party would

consist of the first people of the county, none of whom had visited her, Maria might be thought intrusive, and ambitious of society above her situation.

Miss Raby exclaimed, “that every body who had seen the dear girl, admired her, and she was certain that she would meet with a most cordial reception; besides, her Chaperon, a lady of high rank, had offered to extend her protection to Maria.”

Again the mother said, “that as a peculiar dress would be necessary, she thought such a preparation, for only one night, would in her circumstances be extravagant.”

Charlotte, who had all the liberality which young people, whose wealth exceeds their wants, intuitively possess, immediately offered her purse and wardrobe.

Driven from every resource, Mrs. Williams was forced to beg that she would urge her no more on a subject, upon which she was absolutely determined. Miss Raby coloured with indignation, and hastily wished her a good morning, while Maria, bathed in tears, retired to her own apartment.

VII

The stony heart of Mrs. Williams was not melted by tears, or terrified by menacing looks. She allowed her daughter to indulge her grief in solitude, ’till dinner was announced, and then sent up stairs to desire her company.

Maria appeared; her eyes swollen, her face pale, her bosom heaving with smothered sighs. She sat down indeed to the table, but pleaded an intense head-ach, as a reason why she could not eat.

The mother was sorry for her illness, and recommended a little simple prescription, which she had known to be of great service; but as soon as the cloth was removed, and the servant withdrawn, she enquired of her daughter the cause of her uneasiness.

No question could be so embarrassing. Maria was certain her mother knew as well as herself, the motive of her tears; it was therefore very extraordinary for her to ask. She must answer—the difficulty was how; for the sorrows of people of Maria’s age are frequently of that peculiar kind, that though they almost rive the heart that feels them, when they come to be described, they border more upon the ridiculous than the mournful,

She was forced to be a little disingenuous, and sobbing, answered, she was afraid Charlotte was offended.

Mrs. Williams was both surprised and concerned. She could not recollect that she had given any cause; but added, “if you think I have, I will immediately write a conciliatory note. A friend so justly dear to my daughter, can never be unworthy my concessions. Fetch the pen and

ink, my dear, however wrong I may have been, I trust Miss Raby's good sense and good temper, will readily excuse me."

Maria was so delighted at this unexpected panegeric on her friend, that she had proceeded to the harpsichord for the writing box, before she could recollect, that as her mother's style of refusing her friend's request had been perfectly polite; it was utterly impossible for any concession to be made on her side, unless, indeed, by giving up the point; and that, the character she had heard of her from Mrs. Arbuthnot, confirmed by her own observations, would not allow her to expect.

She considered too, that as Charlotte had rushed out of the room in a very angry manner, the offence seemed rather given by her; and fearing lest an apology might be construed into an oblique censure, she begged her mother would not write; for she said Raby was so thoroughly good-natured, that she knew ere this she had entirely forgot her, and forgiven all that had passed.

Mrs. Williams was glad Maria thought as she did of her friend's complacency; but asked, "if she was so sure of a speedy reconciliation, why she was so distressed?"

Compelled to acknowledge that her disappointment was the cause, she pleaded, as well as tears would allow, every peculiar hardship which attended it. She had never seen a masquerade in her life; this was expected to be extremely brilliant; it had been their constant conversation for some time; she had even fixed on her character—extreme distress prevented her from finishing the pathetic exculpation.

Mrs. Williams took her daughter's hand, and tenderly pressing it, asked, with a mild but penetrating look, if ever, since her return to England, she had, in any previous

instance, exerted the maternal negative? Maria, with hesitation, answered, never.

“Then surely, my child, I do not claim too much, in expecting that you will believe, that I would not have assumed this painful authority, unless impelled by reasons that are not only strong, but conclusive. I did not conceive there was a necessity for acquainting Miss Raby with every motive that influenced my decision; but as I wish for my daughter’s confidence, I will conceal nothing from her.”

“Maria, you have read many instances of the fascination of pleasure; but you are too inexperienced to know, that even amongst those to whom rank and fortune allow the frequent indulgence, not all the satiety and distaste that attends repeated enjoyments, are found effectual to stop the desire of inordinate pursuit. To you these amusements will appear yet more irresistible, as they have the inchanting addition of novelty to recommend them, still more forcibly to your imagination. Hitherto you have been happy. Your garden, the employments of your pencil and needle, have furnished you with a succession of pleasures, all within your reach; and your newly acquired taste for reading, prevents even the hazard of your ever perceiving time to be an intolerable burden.

“You are not ignorant, my dear girl, that balls and masquerades are diversions of which your situation in life does not allow a frequent repetition. I am anxious to keep you ignorant of pleasures, which it is not in my power to procure. Suppose I had yielded to your present wish, what security can you give, that after having once experienced the wild throb of tumultuary transport, you will preserve your relish for those calm delights which at present afford you so pure a satisfaction? I know you, Maria, to be void of self-conceit; nor can I believe that you will attribute to

yourself a share of forbearance and equanimity beyond your years."

Convinced, by her mother's arguments, Maria acquiesed, and endeavoured to resume her wonted cheerfulness of aspect. The effort was not unperceived; Mrs. Williams caught her to her bosom, and in a transport of maternal affection, proceeded in her harangue.

"I do not complain of the sufferings of my past life, since heaven affords me a prospect of serene and comfortable old age. For my hours of pain and watchful attention during your early infancy, and for the years of yet more agonizing mental suffering, while separated from my friendless girl, you promise richly to repay me. May you be happy, Maria, happy as my fond wishes can desire. Yet your highest felicity will fall short of the transport which I shall feel, if it is in my power to promote or secure that happiness."

This tender scene was interrupted by the Raby's. Charlotte, conscious of error, was come to apologise; but being too much of the woman to give up the point, she had persuaded her indulgent father to accompany her, and exert his endeavours to meliorate the austerity of Mrs. Williams. She began the grand attack with apologies, and when she thought she had sufficiently softened the good lady by declarations of respect for her, and love for her daughter; Mr. Raby, who only waited 'till Charlotte's absolution was fully confirmed, threw in his assistance.

His harangue was too common to be curious. It began by declaring, that he had once been young, and yet remembered what young folks were. That old people should not contradict and thwart their children's desires, for if they did, how could they expect the young ones should love them. That for his part, he saw no harm in

going to a ball, and he dared to say, that though they went in masks, there would be no mischief, for Lady Betty and Lady Sarah both went, and they were women of character. Charlotte, poor thing! had vowed she should have no pleasure without Maria; and if money was the prevention, he would gladly be at all the expence, to please the girls and make them happy.

The lady, to whom the discourse was addressed, did not in her reply attempt to controvert Mr. Raby's arguments. She only answered, that she had been talking to Maria on the subject, and was very willing that the affair should depend upon her decision. Charlotte kissed her hand in a transport, and declared that she should esteem herself forever bound to her by all the ties of gratitude and affection; and there was nothing she would not gladly do to oblige her; but upon turning to Maria to adjust some preliminaries for their intended appearance, she was inconceivably astonished to hear her declare that she would not go. The negative was determined; nor had Miss Raby's rhetoric any power to alter it, or even to gain from her the reason of such a peremptory decision.

The disappointed young lady retired much mortified, and at parting declared, that if she had not promised Major Pierpoint that she would dance with him, she positively would not go.

Her companion, with some degree of pensiveness, took up the Roman History: the part intended for that evening's perusal, contained the story of Regulus. A vivid imagination soon sketched a resemblance between her own self-denying virtue, and that of the illustrious patriot. The idea was highly gratifying; she read of his invincible fortitude with increasing complacency, and fancying herself a heroine of ancient times, resolved with all the

firmness of a Portia or a Lucretia, to smile in misery and triumph in suffering.

Elevated by these exalted ideas, she soon felt the calmness she at first only assumed. Her mind intensely occupied with other objects, was diverted from the recollection of her own distress. The records of the Williams family, (which to confess the truth, are somewhat minute) assure me that she actually slept that night with her usual tranquillity; that she visited her friend the next morning, whom she found surrounded by artists of every description, who displayed the various paraphenalia necessary for this important occasion; that she saw the bustle, and heard a circumstantial account of all the varieties of pleasure which Charlotte was going to partake, and then quiet and composed returned to her mother's. Even on the evening of the ball, she read with a firm voice her accustomed hour; and by some appropriate remarks, proved she was mistress of her attentive faculties, She wished her mother a good night without any symptoms of resentment or ill humour, and the next morning, stimulated only by a pardonable curiosity, she set out to hear from her friend, an account of the felicity she had enjoyed.

Sorry I am, that the visage of Charlotte was not quite so animated and complacent as Maria's. She had a violent head-ach and was dying, to use her own words, with lassitude and fatigue. The narrative too, which she had to relate, was different to what was expected.

Her Chaperon, Lady Twaddle (now a person of great consequence, though originally constrained to move in a very humble sphere) had previously resolved that a masked ball out of London, must be an horrid bore; and knowing that she had power to render it disagreeable, politely determined to do all she could to spoil the

pleasure, and improve the taste of all the young people in the neighbourhood. In the first place, concluding the entertainment would not begin ’till she came, she delayed setting out to the latest hour that was possible. Charlotte sat waiting in Lady Twaddle’s dressing-room; but as her ladyship declared, that nobody thought of a ball in town ’till twelve o’clock, she was forced to say that she hated an earlier hour, and concealed the impatience which secretly fretted her heart. But as the rural gentry did not so exactly know the rule of etiquette prescribed by the preceding winter in London, they concluded some misfortune had befallen the poor Countess, and had unmasked and begun dancing before she and her party appeared. Miss Raby consequently lost the fun of finding out her acquaintance, and the pleasure of saying a number of smart things, which she had studied and applied to her character. She had indeed the honour of dancing with Sir Harry, one of her ladyship’s cicesbeos; but as he danced ill, and took no notice of her, it was not a sufficient recompense for the pain she felt at seeing Major Pierpoint, with all the easy attention of martial elegance, devoted to his partner Miss Mandeville, the declared enemy of Charlotte.

At supper more satisfaction seemed to be promised, as she sat near her chaperon, whose consequence was here indisputable. She had the pleasure of hearing all the smart witticisms, I should have said severe sarcasms, which her ladyship whispered against the entertainment and company; and to detail those, which did not immediately affect the parties she addressed, to the anxious listners that sat a little below. But in the midst of the exulting laugh which this amusement afforded, she detected Miss Mandeville in the very act of taking her off, and she thought the handsome young officer looked as if he

enjoyed the mimickry. Miss Raby could proceed no further: she execrated balls, vowed she would never go to another, and burst into so violent a flood of tears, that Maria at once concerned and terrified, was alternately employed in applying hartshorn, and offering consolation. At length, seeing her a little composed, she left her, to dress for some company which her father had invited to dinner, and returned home with a melancholy look, musing on her friend’s unexampled disappointments.

VIII

Maria’s intention of communicating the mournful tale, was suspended, when she saw that her mother’s face was too much inclined to the tragical. She asked the cause, and finding it only proceeded from a visit she had made to a poor family, resumed her design. At first she did not propose to give Miss Raby’s account in all its affecting circumstances, as she feared that in the present state of her mother’s spirits, it might depress her too much: but finding it had not that effect, she gradually, as she proceeded, threw in more of the pathetic. Perceiving the impression still less lively than she had expected, she was at last forced to ask, if she ever knew any thing so unfortunate and distressing.

Mrs. Williams, instead of answering, began her narrative.

“As soon as you left me this morning, our chairwoman came to beg a little white wine for the children of Edwards, who you know died last night of the small-pox; I seized this opportunity to enquire into the circumstances of the family, and was so concerned at what she told me, that I went to see if I could afford them any relief. The scene that I beheld, was truly deplorable; the corpse of the father, covered with an old sack, was laid on the ground, in the least frequented corner of a miserable cottage. On a bed that mocks description, lay the eldest girl, to all appearance expiring with the same dreadful disease, and a boy recently seized with its symptoms; a truss of straw, then unoccupied, was, I found, the mighty residence of two half naked children, who were sufficiently recovered

to crawl to the green wood that lay smothering in the chimney, and constituted what was called a fire. The mother of these unhappy creatures, feeble through fatigue, and emaciated by famine; with one arm held to her exhausted breast a little infant, and with the other, moistening the lips of her daughter with some warm water, poured through a broken tea pot."

Maria bitterly wept at the recital, and declared she could not think how human nature could support such affliction.

Mrs. Williams proceeded: "I sent for an apothecary, who humanely promised his assistance gratuitiously, and relieved part of the mother's distress, by saying there was a possibility of her eldest girl's recovery. I have ordered such things as seemed immediately necessary, but anxious to procure them a permanant relief, I represented their distress to the parish officers, who had refused them any assistance. The man had been dissolute and unworthy, and seemed, by idleness and insolence, to deserve affliction. Against the woman they alledge nothing, and her neighbours assure me, she has been humble and diligent. It was wrong (though it is what we are all apt to do) to transfer the resentment which the father deserved, to his unoffending family, who had been the principal sufferers by his crimes. I combatted this idea, and not without success; a nurse is ordered, and I have the satisfaction of knowing, that the unhappy creatures will not perish for want of future attention."

Maria was all indignation at the conduct of the overseers, and wished her mother had supported the family herself, without appealing to such hard hearted people.

"When ability is but small, my dear," resumed Mrs. Williams, "all who wish to be just before they are

generous, should take care so to husband their little, that none may have cause to complain of partiality. Extreme distress has indeed a forcible claim; but superior merit seems to have an equal right to assistance. In my way home, I called on several others of my poor neighbours, and met with many objects, that forcibly moved my commiseration. I wish, although I know wishes are fruitless, that my ability was equal to the relief of all.

“I was particularly interested at the behaviour of Nelly Waters, the young woman who lives nearly opposite; you know we have observed, that at whatever time we arose, or went to bed, we saw a light in that house, and heard her singing at her wheel. She labours, I am told, these extraordinary hours, to support a grandmother, who brought her up, and is now bed-ridden. The old woman dreads the idea of receiving subsistence from the parish; and the grateful girl has refused an offer of marriage from a young man whom she tenderly loved, that she might dedicate herself, during her grandmother’s life, to the discharge of a double portion of labour, in order to support her. Her disappointed lover has inlisted in the army; she is poorly clad and fares hard, as the object of her attention is blind and decrepid, and consequently takes up much of her time in ministering to her infirmities; yet she has never been heard to complain. I admire her untaught virtue, her intuitive greatness of soul, and am impatient, by some little rewards, to encourage her perseverance in this heroic task.”

“And cannot you, my dear mother?” said Maria eagerly.

“In a small degree, my love, I can; but I must add, if I had complied with all your wishes, I should have been deprived of this mental luxury. I have heard you talk of large houses, elegant furniture, and expensive pleasures, with admiration; and you have once or twice urged me to

exceed the sum I proposed, by saying that a trifle more would purchase something far more fashionable and genteel. I have previously calculated my expences, and have endeavoured to preserve order and proportion in every part, as nothing is to me so absurd, as a motley mixture of profusion and meanness.

“If I had indulged your wishes, I must either have been confined in some other department, or trespassed on the sum which I appropriated to charity. Thus, my child, you see the necessity of my refusals.”

“Are you sure,” said Maria, “that you cannot afford to do more? I have heard you say, that your income is as large as Mrs. Robson’s, and they live in a very different style?”

“Mrs. Robson,” resumed Mrs. Williams, “has but lately commenced house-keeping. I have heard her say she hated accounts, and would never give herself the trouble of attending to perplexing calculations. The consequence of this inattention will not at present be felt; as her resources are known, her credit is good. A tradesman will not risque offending, by commencing dun, while he knows the capital of his creditor is equal to his demand upon it. But this protracted payment will in time be attended with alarming consequences; when it is once known to be the method of the customer, exorbitant charges will indemnify the shop-keeper for his long trust: the purchaser has not ready money to go to a fresh shop, and besides must fear to offend her creditors, and to bring upon herself claims, which she knows not how to answer. Ever whilst you live, Maria, dread an existence dependant upon the lenity of others. Can your generous heart bear the thought, that it is owing to their forbearing from their legal rights, that you are permitted to indulge in grandeur and gaiety?

“This is the epidemical folly, I must say vice, of the present age. Our nobility and gentry are seldom deficient in aristocratic pride; they affect to condemn the manufacturer and the mechanic, yet, at the same time actually revel on their property, and depend, for a continuation of splendor, on their forbearance or inattention. For my own part, I must confess I am too proud to endure such obligations; not even for the pleasure of placing all around me in ease and happiness, could I voluntarily submit to them.”

Maria, with a deep sigh, wished she had Charlotte’s fortune.

“I was going to propose a scheme,” said Mrs. Williams, “which your friend’s liberal intentions towards you justifies. She offered her purse to contribute to your pleasures, and she shall contribute to those of the exalted and moral kind. Tell her what sorrow I have seen: I doubt not but she will wish to relieve them. You shall meet the benevolent design, and offer to be her almoner. While sickness and winter continue to afflict our poor neighbours, dedicate your time to their service; you shall buy suitable cloathing, and we will make it up. The little knowledge I have of medicine, will enable me, in cases not dangerous, to afford a safe, unexpensive relief. The ignorance of the poor is one of their chief misfortunes; we will visit, and endeavour to instruct those who would be ashamed of publickly receiving tuition: and we will try to support a little school, which will have the double advantage of informing children, and contributing to the support of some indigent old person, who can no longer labour to procure their own subsistence. It is incredible what essential services you may thus render your fellow creatures, and how almost miraculously multiply the widow’s barrel of meal and cruise of oil.”

Miss Williams, with alacrity accepted her mother's proposal; nor was the frank and open hearted Charlotte unwilling to give her assistance. She lamented exceedingly that she had not time to visit the poor herself; was shocked to hear that so much misery existed near her, which she knew nothing of, and giving her friend two guineas, promised a weekly donation while the present distress continued.

Maria assiduously entered on the active duties of social life. The garden, the pencil, the harpsichord, were all abandoned, even reading was neglected. One part of the day she was seen mixing a recipe, at another she was engaged in such culinary preparations as were proper for the sick; at one hour she visited her patients, and when she returned, cut out and made cloathing for those who were not only poor, but ignorant and helpless. Her morning walk indeed was still continued; her mother insisted that she should keep an exact account of her expenditure, and that was the time Miss Raby heard the particulars of her stewardship. The gay Charlotte was so deeply interested in the narrative, that she often declared, if her heart was less tender, she would have shared with Maria the trouble of distribution; but time blunts the edge of novelty; and feeling, when it depends upon so frail a support, cannot be durable.

Besides Major Pierpoint had described to her the gaieties of Bath, the season for which had commenced; and her attention was now engrossed by contriving ways and means to prevail upon her father to go thither. To compass this point, was in fact no great difficulty. Mr. Raby was one of those lovers of ease, who cannot bear to have their tranquillity interrupted by real or imaginary distress. A journey of a hundred miles was a less

inconvenience to him, than the importunities of his beloved daughter.

Delighted with her success, Miss Raby flew to Jenny, her faithful Abigal, to consult upon what preparations would be necessary in the article of dress; and Mrs. Jenny, as an adept in her profession, wisely considering the value of cast offs, soon found that a very large addition to her mistress's wardrobe was indisputably necessary. The difficulty was, how to procure materials in a hurry; but it was agreed to explore the riches of the adjacent market town. The chariot was ordered, and though the articles, particularly desired, could not be procured, industry and perseverance found out many substitutes, and they returned loaden with purchases.

At the instant the carriage drove up the circle, Maria, who had in vain waited for her friend in the shrubbery, proceeded to the manor house to enquire the occasion of her absence. Charlotte excused the disappointment by pleas of urgent business; and entreating her astonished friend to follow, hurried into her dressing room. There the mysterious cause of this bustle was fully explained. Maria, who by having become an eye witness of real wants, was less interested in those fastidious ones, which whim and caprice suggested, more than once interrupted a dissertation on the depth and width of the Countess's flounce, to state to her friend the situation of her pensioners. Every effort to engage attention, was however in vain, she was particularly hurt that Miss Raby should be so much engaged that morning, as it was the one, on which her promised contribution had been for some weeks regularly paid. Tired of waiting, and concluding Charlotte's hurry had made her totally forget it, at last she ventured to remind her of her promise. Miss Raby immediately drew out her purse, but in an instant

recollected that it was impossible to comply with her friend's demands; for the milliner at ——— had been so obligingly pressing, that she could not avoid exceeding her intended order, and had been obliged to have recourse to Jenny's pocket, to assist her to defray the bill.

The concern in the countenances of these young ladies, on this discovery, was very visible. Charlotte asked if the poor people were not well enough to do without her assistance. Maria answered, that indeed they were considerably better, but as they now required a larger portion of nourishment, and were still incapacitated from work, her charity was greatly requisite.

Charlotte asked her to advance the sum, but as Maria's pockets had been emptied by private gratuity, she could not do this without her mother's knowledge, and Miss Raby had many objections against intrusting Mrs. Williams with this secret.

Charlotte, bursting into tears, sat down on the sofa, and declared that it was cruel in Maria, to torment her at a time, when she was almost hurried and perplexed to death with her own concerns. My heroine also wept, anticipating the disappointments she should occasion, and the imputations that must fall on her friend's character, which could no way be avoided, but by a breach of the secresy she was enjoined.

As Charlotte's distress was very vehement, it soon reached her father's ears. Wondering what new disaster could have again awakened the tender sensibility of his daughter, he hastened into her dressing room, and by his entreaties and caresses, prevailed on her to confess the cause of her grief. He at first talked a little of extravagance, but perceiving the theme only aggravated her tears; he told her she should never feel any

unhappiniess which money could remove, and then presented her with twice the sum she had ventured to request.

She immediately gave her friend what Maria thought sufficient for the probable exigencies during her absence, and they parted mutually pleased. Mr. Raby, however, while he accompanied Maria down stairs, begged her never more to tell his poor girl any melancholy stories, for her temper was too meek to bear them; and as he perceived that they deeply hurt her spirits, he positively must not have her made unhappy.

IX

Maria could not forbear acquainting her mother with Mr. Raby's request, and added, "sure never was so affectionate a parent."

"My neighbour and I," said Mrs. Williams, "proceed upon very different plans in our parental conduct. I try to teach you fortitude, by familiarizing to your mind objects of affliction, and I wish to convince you, that you belong to an order of beings, whose prescribed rule of duty supposes suffering. By convincing you of the existence of real misery, I endeavour to guard you against that chimerical phantom, which often interrupts the smoothest course of human happiness. Do you think that Mr. Raby's affectionate care can always guard his daughter from the pressure of misfortune: or will your friend meet it, when it unavoidably falls on her own head, with more firmness, because she has hitherto been kept ignorant of its effects on others?"

"I will suppose for a moment, that your dear Charlotte will be one of those highly favoured beings, who escape real calamity. Let her life pass on in its present smooth tenor; answer me ingenuously, is she happier than yourself? you are taught to enlarge your philanthropy, and though you sometimes are grieved by the sorrows of others, you know the joy of affording relief. You have often described the transports which you felt, when viewing the effect resulting from the judicious application of your friends liberality. Charlotte, on the other hand, who only considers how she may most indulge her own desires, knows no happiness which does not immediately

arise from some pleasurable incident. Those desires, used to continual gratification, will in time grow irregular, perhaps contradictory; and as they cannot then be fully indulged, she will feel far more from chagrine and satiety, than you from commiserating the sorrows of others."

Maria could not controvert reasons, whose propriety a recent instance had evinced, but observed, in Charlotte's justification, that she possessed an excellent heart; and as Mrs. Williams did not contradict this assertion, the conversation ended.

After the departure of the Raby's from Bath, Maria, who by the recovery of her patients, enjoyed more leisure, resumed her usual occupations. The return of spring recalled her attention to her garden; and Mrs. Williams, who from being used to a warm climate, had been compelled to confine herself during the winter, accompanied her daughter in her morning walks. That judicious mother thought this a suitable time to introduce botanical knowledge; and by calling Maria's attention to the beauty of wild flowers, and by describing their essential characters, infused into her mind a desire of gaining a more intimate acquaintance with that amusing and useful science. With the growth of plants, natural history in all its branches, was intimately interwoven; and Maria gained sufficient knowledge of the mechanism of the universe, to have another agreeable fund of entertainment opened to her view. Her admiration, which was excited by the astonishing grandeur of design, and the minute exactness of execution, visible in all the works of creation, confirmed her religious principles, and elevated her devotion.

As her walks with her mother were a kind of easy lecture, there was leisure in the evening to introduce an entertaining geographical account of the known world. In

pursuing it, Mrs. Williams adopted the same method, by which they had prosecuted their historical studies. Taught to reflect, even when amusement was the object, Maria soon gained a competent knowledge of the effect of climate and situation, in forming local prejudice and national character. She saw less ridicule in customs different from her own; and felt her pity for those people, who seemed less favoured by nature, considerably abated, by reflecting that Providence had wisely given them attachment to customs and situations, which makes the inhabitants of Greenland exulting boast of their long night of revelry and ease, and induces the naked savage panting at the lines, to

"Bask in the glare, or stem the tepid wave,
"And thank the gods for all the good they gave.

GOLDSMITH'S TRAVELLER.

As the inhabitants of Everdon (I mean those whose fortunes were sufficient to enable them to cultivate society) had not entirely sacrificed all their leisure moments to *an idol called* cards; conversation and the needle were often allowed to occupy the time of an afternoon visit; so that Maria was able, at these intervals, to finish several pieces of work, expressive of her taste and ingenuity. Her ability in these greatly exceeding the younger part of the society; they often applied to her for assistance and instruction, which Maria's good temper and modesty, without any assumption of consequence, cheerfully gave.

She was astonished to find how much Madame Du Pont was mistaken in the supposed dullness and sameness of Everdon. Her amusements were diversified; and as her employments regularly followed each other, she did not

know a moment unenlivened by pursuit. Indeed, during her friend's absence, she had no one to whom she could so freely communicate her thoughts, as she had too much respect for her affectionate mother, to entrust her with any sentiments, that would not bear the test of reason; but as she was indulged with an uninspected correspondence, she had the pleasure of dispatching voluminous accounts of whatever reflections occurred to her mind.

Conscious that my readers must 'ere this be tired with the description of a life of rural retirement, altogether unenlivened by incident, and recollecting the opinion of a relation of our family, once Vicar of Wakefield, that we have a natural inquisitiveness after high living and high lived company, I will, for the sake of variety, conclude this chapter with an epistle from Miss Raby to Maria.

The inconceivable hurry we are forced to live in, has hitherto prevented me from acknowledging my dear Maria's kind letters, which with the utmost difficulty I have found time to read. You have no conception what fatigue I endure. The pump-room, shopping, morning visitors, dressing, and evening engagements, hardly permit me to swallow my food: and were I not forced to exert myself, I should die with the head-ach. I have had a vast deal of trouble in providing new dresses; since those which I made up at Everdon, were all gothic before I arrived here; and on entering the pump-room in one of them, Lady Jane Bellmour was convulsed with laughter, and declared my appearance reminded her of the tale of the beauty that slept one hundred years, and astonished the prince who awoke her, by the antiquity of her dress.

You may guess how happy I am, when I tell you I find the Countess has determined to stay here during the season. I am always of her parties. Some scribbling wit has been malicious enough to make satirical verses on her

and Sir Harry. Her ladyship, with the utmost good humour, laughs, and declares, when her woman has copied them, she will send them to Lord Twaddle herself. I never will believe there is any harm in her friendship for Sir Harry; I know her to be the most obliging charming woman in the world, and she really has an excellent heart. Sometimes, ’tis true, she is a little odd and distant, but if people of her rank may not be capricious, pray who should? Major Pierpoint is almost constantly with us, and the Countess rallies me about him incessantly. She vows he is deeply in love, because he is so absent. I deny it utterly to her ladyship, but upon my word, Maria, I begin to think his attentions are uncommon: he always endeavours to engage me for his partner, and if I refuse, his vexation is so evident, that I enjoy it excessively, and Lady Twaddle tells me I deserve neglect, nay, loss of beauty, if I reduce such a charming fellow to despair. Indeed sometimes I think I am wrong, for I hear he plays high; and doubtless that is to banish the thoughts of my indifference.

I am not able to answer your questions (for I never yet have been able to find an opportunity to go to church. As to the soil, productions, and face of the surrounding country, I am totally ignorant; all I can tell you is, that there are some fine prospects from different parts of the city, at which we cast just a cursory look, for it is too like a novice to admire them. Really, Maria, you have selected very odd subjects for your enquiries.

I repeated one day in a genteel company, your questions relative to the causes of the heat, and salubrious qualities of the water. Major Pierpoint told me, that as this spot has been long honoured by the peculiar assemblage of beauties, these properties were bestowed by nature, to improve the roses on their cheeks, and melt the ice in their bosoms. I only repeat this as an instance of the Major’s

wit and politeness; but as he is now below, waiting to escort us to the play, I cannot add more than an assurance of the unalterable truth and affection of

CHARLOTTE RABY.

P.S. I forgot to tell you that my father is well, but rather out of humour, and sometimes quite snappish to the Major, which makes me very unhappy.

X

Maria's sensations at reading the preceding letter, were of the mixed kind; if her heart exulted at one sentence, it turned with disgust from another. What most astonished her was, that Lady Twaddle should exult at finding her behaviour to Sir Harry had attracted public attention. She did not dispute Charlotte's opinion, that it was a proof of innocence; she only thought it odd that innocence should not resent, rather than be pleased at criminal imputations. As the letter, on the whole, was not what she wished her mother to see, she was glad to find only general enquiries were made after the health and happiness of her friend; and after perusing it, she carefully deposited it in her escritoire.

About this time Mrs. Williams's happiness met with a very agreeable addition. A friend, with whom she had been particularly intimate in Jamaica, came to live in England, and on her account fixed on Everdon for her residence. Mrs. Herbert was a widow lady of genteel fortune; her family consisted of only one son, who had been educated at Oxford, and was then gone to make the tour of Europe with a young nobleman, more in the capacity of a friend, than a tutor.

As Mrs. Herbert was one of those worthy people who are respectable even in their failings and infirmities, and had rendered Mrs. Williams many essential services, that grateful woman exulted in the thought, that her recovered health would enable her to administer to the wants of her declining and venerable friend, who was now advanced into the vale of years; and Maria, who had often deprived

herself of Miss Raby's society, from a reluctance to leave her mother alone, was pleased with the thought that she had recovered a companion, whose loss she had often regretted with gratitude and respect.

The Everdon party was soon after compleated by the return of the Raby's. Charlotte did not come back with all the eclat and gaiety which her friend expected. Her father too seemed to accost her with less cordiality; and when Maria enquired after the Major, Miss Raby forbade her, on any account, to mention his name. The good humour of the easy citizen, indeed soon returned, but his daughter grew more fretful every hour; the ostensible cause of which was, the dullness and sameness of country occupations.

Anxious to relieve her uneasiness, Maria strove to engage her in literary pursuits. The sciences she knew, required more attention than her friend was mistress of; but as she had lately been indulged by her mother in a perusal of lighter works, she thought Essays and Poetry might bid fair to please. She soon perceived, with concern, that unless love was the subject, Charlotte turned with disgust from the uninteresting volume. This circumstance, added to the charge, never to mention the Major, suggested an idea she would not for the world have communicated; it was however considerably augmented by her friend's bursting into tears whilst perusing the following verses:

Ah, happy nymph! who still can boast,
She chains the rover I have lost;
Happy, while yet she hears him breathe,
A tale that charms but too deceive;
Happy while yet her eye can trace
His manly forms, attractive grace.

His brows with chesnut ringlets crown’d,
As laurets once Apollo’s bound;
And like the god, his eye of fire
Might well the muses harp inspire.
Cupid, the god of amorous wiles
Has tip’d love’s arrows with his smiles;
He speaks, and the soft tones impart,
Conviction to the hearer’s heart.
He pleads, and feminine disdain
Confesses all resistance vain:
Nor but too late like me shall rue
A dream too pleasing to be true.
For on hopes brilliant morn full soon
Shall steal the clouded languid noon,
No more shall Florio seek to please
By blending tenderness with ease:
Each winning grace thine eye shall see,
No longer bloom, I mean for thee,
With anguish thou shalt first perceive
His brow can frown, his accents grieve;
His eye, whence loves warm glances flew,
Can gaze at careless distance too.
And when the youth shall coldly turn,
Or sternly thy fond dalliance spurn,
Wilt thou then praise his form divine,
Nor feel contempt and rage like mine?
But ah! nor anger nor disdain
Shall e’er thy ruin’d peace regain;
No longer shalt thou sit at ease,
Fan’d by the evening’s gentlest breeze;
And while the black birds chaunt in pairs,
Listen with spirits blithe as theirs:
But, like the deer who tries to rest,
While the barb’d arrow pains her breast,
Thy heart condemn’d to drag its chain,

Shall change its prison but in vain.
Nor meads nor shades shall give thee ease
Nor crowds divert, nor silence please;
’Till thou canst bid remembrance cease,
Shall Floria’s image murder peace.

Charlotte dwelt on the justness and applicability of these lines, with uncommon earnestness; and perceiving Maria was not so liberal of her commendations, plainly told her, she was determined never to be of her opinion.

Maria vindicated herself by saying, that though she admired the poetry, she was not pleased with the ardency of passion it suggested; for she thought neglect would instantly cure an ingenuous mind of the infatuation of misplaced love. Receiving no answer to this observation, she produced a little manuscript, which was more suited to her benevolent heart than the preceding. It was a translation from the Latin, and had been given her by Mrs. Herbert that morning. The good lady had apologized for its defects, by saying it had been done by her son for a school exercise, and was more to be commended for its fidelity than poetical ornaments.

“It pleases me,” said Maria, “as a specimen of the simplicity with which the ancients expressed their sentiments.” The subject is

A PRISON.

Approach, oh muse, who bidst the plaintive harp,
The flow of melting melody prolong;
Who guides the lyre with cadence bold and sharp,
Through all the mazes of enchanting song.
Leave for a while the verse-inspiring grove,
And Helicon’s green bank befring’d with flowers;

With me through misery’s horrid dungeon rove,
Where fancy marshals all her hideous powers.
How soul-appaling is the prospect! there
Rebellious discord scornful clanks her chain;
Loud hiss the snakes in her dishevel’d hair,
While keen impatience aggravates her pain.
There care in sombre vest desponding sighs
Here guilty fear anticipates his doom,
And while death’s dreaded image multiples,
His shrieks re-echo’s through the night’s pale gloom.
Am I deceiv’d, or does thine eye benign
Beam soft through mild compassion’s glittering tear,
To see the wretched unassisted pine,
To see the captive left to perish here?
He droops, he languishes, as withering plants
Languish beneath the sun beam’s noon-tide glare;
By fever scorch’d, in agony he pants,
No tender consort, sooths his mortal care.
Tir’d of oppressive woe’s continual weight,
He calls on death to close his weary eyes;
Anon his infants seek the iron grate,
And break the mournful silence by their cries.—
These scenes of anguish suit not thee, sweet muse,
To paint these horrors, I no more aspire;
In some cool grot or verdant mead I chuse,
To court the zephyr, strike the lyre.

Maria was going to explain some passages that she thought might appear less easy to her friend, but she was interrupted by Charlotte declaring, that she thought it very pedantic and uninteresting; then recurring to the verses with which she was charmed, observed, how particularly descriptive that part was, which pictures the lady’s

concern at the alteration in her lover’s countenance. She was going on, when Maria archly observed, that her friend spoke like an experienced votary of Cupid’s. Charlotte colouring, assured her, that she positively detested all men breathing; but added, if she could but live to see Maria deeply in love, she should be the happiest creature in the world.

XI

Determined as Miss Raby was, to bury in her own breast the cause of the uneasiness visible to all, she soon found herself unequal to the task enjoined. I would not have the younger part of my readers suppose, that nature had niggardly denied to the fair Charlotte the power of stifling her complaints, and burying in silence sentiments, which she was ashamed to discover. I only mean that her inclinations, by habitual indulgence, were now grown almost irresistible; and as she fancied it would be pleasant to converse with Maria on the subject of her distress, she did not chuse to give herself the pain of exerting sufficient fortitude to counteract that desire. After an oath of secresy, and a promise never to begin the subject in any future conversation, she disclosed her mournful narrative.

A little time after she wrote her letter from Bath, the Major actually made her declarations of love: but while she was debating in what manner to treat him after the discovery, her father, whose suspicions had long been excited, forbade her lover his house, and treated him so rudely, that Pierpoint, who was a man of great spirit and rigid honour, had, in a large company, where the affair was mentioned, laid his hand upon his sword, and in a peremptory tone declared, “that nothing but Raby’s age and insignificance, preserved him from his resentment.” This some invidious person had repeated, and in consequence of it, her father hurried her from Bath.

Previous to her departure, she wrote to the Major, and assured him of her disapprobation of her father’s behaviour; but she had received no answer; nay, worse,

Lady Twaddle sent her word, that his attentions to Miss Mandeville were so marked; that they furnished a subject for common conversation.

Miss Raby's indignation here, interrupted her story. She knew her rival's fortune was not sufficient to engage a matrimonial address; but even the idea of a flirtation was more than she could support, and whatever it cost her, she was determined to detach him from that odious girl.

Maria entered warmly into her friend's resentment. She was astonished that a man who had once loved her dear Charlotte, could even for a moment affect a preference for a person to whom, though entirely unknown, she had ascribed all the bad qualities which her candid and gentle mind would permit her to associate in any human being. But indeed the Major's whole conduct was totally irreconcilable with the deference, perseverance, and fidelity which she attached to the name of lover; and she supposed that it was only necessary to tell her friend's story, to cover him with reproach and detestation. My readers will perceive Maria was equally a novice to the manners of the world and to love.

Though partial to her friend in the extreme, yet she could not avoid (on a retrospect of her conduct) perceiving many circumstances of blame. Filial duty had now gained so great an ascendency over her mind, that it might be termed her ruling passion; and Charlotte's behaviour was totally irreconcileable with her sentiments on this head. She was too ingenuous to conceal her disapprobation, and Miss Raby very frankly confessed her fault, but extenuated them by saying, her subsequent conduct should be directed by the strictest rules which prudence could devise. Pluming herself upon the virtues she intended to practise, she soon suppressed all that uneasy consciousness of former error, which would have

introduced cautious timidity, and eagerly entered on her future trials, as easy steps to certain victory.

Mean time her father, whose paternal concern had been deeply excited by the anxiety of which he too well guessed the cause, had thoughtfully revolved in his own mind the likeliest means to remove it; and having heard much of the efficacy of a new lover, in effacing the image of an old one, he wrote to his banker in London, an account of his daughter's intended fortune; an encomium on her merit, and an enumeration of the requisites that must meet in the character of his future son. To form this happy being, three good things were necessary; good temper, good conduct, and a good fortune; but the last excellence was principally insisted upon.

A person was soon found, in general estimation, to answer this description, and Mr. Vandermulin, the only son of an eminent merchant, was justly deputed by the gods of wealth and love, to pay a matrimonial visit to Everdon. He seemed no bad representative of the two divinities, as his person was handsome, and his dress and retinue splendid.

Unfortunately, flattery had in his early youth whispered to him, that the immense wealth to which he was born, must irresistably enforce from the world that attention, which they, who at their birth were less favoured by fortune, can only hope to acquire by industry, or the pursuit of literary attainments. He therefore wasted in boyish diversions, the important hours that ought to have been sacred to instruction, and consequently he arrived at the age of manhood with a wish, rather than an ability, to enjoy the ample wealth he possessed. Too narrow in his conceptions to distinguish gentility from pomp, or the elegant gentleman from the mechanical automaton, which riches can purchase of the taylor and the hair-dresser, he

was contented with forming his external appearance by the etiquette of fashion; and as he was perfect in the small talk of the day, and abounded in servility which he mistook for complaisance, he mixed with great self complacency, in circles of which he was the constant jest. A natural insensibility of temper, and frigidity of heart, preserved him alike from feeling contempt, and from engaging in scenes of dissipation. This turn of mind, my readers will allow, is naturally unfavourable to the exertion of benevolence and virtue, unless called forth by some acquired principle. I am sorry to add, that selfishness was the sentiment most carefully instilled into the breast of young Vandermulin. The motive of his visit was announced by a letter from his father. He delivered his credentials, and Mr. Raby knew too well the largeness of trade and capital annexed to the house of Vandermulin, to hesitate a moment in giving him a most cordial reception.

He was soon introduced to Charlotte, and the father with great pleasure beheld the young lady receive his overtures with visible satisfaction.

Indeed, the transport she felt, was like her sorrows, too great to be confined to her own breast. She sent for Maria, and after again charging her never to breathe a syllable of her attachment to Major Pierpoint; she assured her friend that it was entirely conquered; that she felt a lively esteem for her new lover, and was resolved, by her ready acquiescence in her father’s will, to attone for all past indiscretions.

Maria was delighted with the news, and eagerly begged to be introduced to the young merchant, with whom, as the destined husband of her Charlotte, she wished to cultivate a friendly intimacy. With all the modest sprightliness, and ingenuous candour peculiar to her character, she endeavoured to draw him into conversation; but sorry I am

to observe, that conversation was not his forte. All the endeavours of the ladies could procure nothing further than an affirmative, or an observation quite as simple and acquiescent.

When people are determined to be pleased, they seldom plague themselves with refined disquisitions. The girls, when by themselves, readily joined in praising their beau. Charlotte admired his fine person, well dressed hair, and superb waistcoat; and Maria talked of his extream good nature, respectful obligingness, and she was going to add, modest timidity, but finding that her friend did not include that in the catalogue of male virtues, she shortened her panegerics.

A day of triumph was now projected, which was fully to indemnify Charlotte for all her past mortifications. She had received an invitation to dine with Mrs. Robson, and she knew that Miss Mandeville was returned from Bath, and would be of the party. Nothing more need be said to explain her intended happiness.

Mrs. Williams was prevailed upon to let Maria partake of her friend's exultation, and on the day appointed, she accompanied Mr. Raby in his chariot.

Miss Raby, dressed in a style of the highest elegance, was driven by Mr. Vandermulin in his phaeton and four, and followed by three out riders.

As I am writing to ladies, I chuse rather to trust to their feelings, than to flatten, by my inadequate description, the pleasure which they must suppose our fair coquette felt, when the carriages drove up the circle at Mrs. Robson's, and she perceived amongst the number which this extraordinary bustle had attracted to the drawing-room windows, the visage of Miss Mandeville, which was, in Charlotte's idea, much lengthened by malevolence. She

sprung up the steps, and swam into the room with all the ease of conscious pre-eminence; then taking a chair by her rival belle, strove to compleat her misery by the most condescending attentions.

Mr. Raby, meantime, was busily employed in introducing his friend (he looked very significantly when he spoke that word) to the company, and in exerting all the ingenuity of which he was capable, to impress an idea of his wealth and consequence. No circumstance happened, however trivial, but it served to assist his grand design. Did any one mention the storms, common at the summer solstice, he applied to the young merchant, to know if this did not make his heart ach for the safety of the large fleet which his father expected.

Did politics engross the conversation, Mr. Raby was only anxious to know what effect the consequences which they deduced, would have upon the three per cents. in which a worthy friend of his, that gentleman's father, had lodged near one hundred thousand pounds.

If any body spoke of a good house, it was nothing to Mr. Vandermulin's seat in ——shire. Even culinary subjects afforded an opportunity to enumerate the frequency of turtle and venison at his friend's table; in fine, the Vandermulins were paragons of excellence, and all competition was vain; while the smiling lover silently bowed assent to all these well meant panegyrics.

But fate, ever unpropitious to the wishes of Charlotte, prepared new mortifications. Just before tea was served, Major Pierpoint unexpectedly made his appearance; and though a common riding dress gave him an air of dishabille, an easy deportment and elegance of dress, announced the man of fashion, without any decorating appendages.

Charlotte coloured; Mr. Raby was struck dumb. The Major politely stepped round the circle, and said something in a low tone to every individual, which put them in good humour with themselves. He then seated himself; but with an air of recollection and respectful distance, addressed himself to Mr. Raby, expressing his hopes, that his residence at Bath had proved beneficial to his health.

To Charlotte he expatiated on his concern, that she left that agreeable place before she was thoroughly initiated into its amusements and beauties.

He then enlarged on a public breakfast given by Lord S——, but two days after her departure, and assured her that many of her friends, himself amongst the number, could scarce enjoy it, through regret at her absence.

Mr. Raby and his daughter were much too surprised and agitated, to reply, and our gay military blade now attacked Mr. Vandermulin.

Never, certainly, was there a more compleat contrast. The icy reserve in which the young merchant had hitherto been wrapped, was forced to dissolve instantaneously before the warm beams of the soldier’s irresistible versatility. This was unfortunate; for silence was as favourable to Charlotte’s new lover, as conversation was to her old one. The company soon began to smile, then to titter, at last a general laugh took place.

Pierpoint, who observed the strictest politeness of manner, and command of countenance, looked round with affected astonishment, to discover from what cause the laugh proceeded. This did but redouble the peal of merriment, and Vandermulin, who was really as ignorant of the cause as his rival appeared to be, by joining in it, rendered it compleat.

But Mr. Raby, who restrained by vexation and terror, had suffered his features to relax no farther than a smile, being informed the carriages were ready, hurried his daughter from the dangerous comparison. The Major sprang towards her, and respectfully taking her hand, led her to the phaeton, and then with a bow, which she judged indicative of love and despair, resigned her to the care of his competitor.

Miss Raby returned home silent and dejected. A person dissatisfied with their own conduct, is apt to transfer to others the resentment which properly belongs to themselves.

Charlotte, after making every one around her sensible of her displeasure, retired early to spend a sleepless night, in thinking of the happiness that would have been her portion, if Mr. Vandermulin and the Major could but change characters.

That philosophy which I wish my readers to possess, is constantly occupied in assimulating our desires with our situations. Sorry I am to observe, that my heroine's friend was totally ignorant of this useful science; had she known it, she would have found the vast weight of misery, under which she now sunk, a very supportable burden.

Mr. Raby was informed by Jenny, the next morning, that her young lady was dreadfully indisposed. The terrified father immediately sent for an eminent physician; but her disorder, which was violent hystericks, would not yield to any medical prescription. At last Jenny was bribed to confess, that love for the Major was the sole cause of her mistress's complaints, and that she must either die, or have her heart relieved of its insupportable anguish.

Mr. Raby, whose indulgent love had never known how to resist the least desire of his child, felt on this occasion

all that undetermined anxiety, which concern for her present situation, and regard for her future welfare, excited.

The fear of losing her, as her paroxysms grew hourly more violent, at length prevailed; and he assured her of his entire compliance with her wishes; which, with the intelligence that Mr. Vandermulin was absolutely dismissed, produced so amazing a change, that in a few hours she appeared perfectly recovered.

The difficulty now was, in what way to allure the Major to renew his addresses. Miss Raby was positive, that though he had entirely stifled his resentment, he still continued too susceptible of his former ill usage, to visit them without an express intimation that his company would be agreeable; and fearing a relapse, if her sentiments were opposed, her father reluctantly wrote to the young soldier, and expressed his wishes to see him at the manor.

XII

Let me now give a clue to the character of this all-conquering son of Mars; the favourite of the fair, distinguished for elegance, expence, and dissipation. The arrow of love, which had so deeply pierced Charlotte's heart, had but feebly tinkled on the Major's. If it did not appear like an attempt at wit, I could explain my reason for adopting an epithet applicable to metallic substances, by observing, that in his breast gold had entirely usurped what ought to have been the seat of the softer passions.

Shuddering at the idea of matrimony, lest it should abridge that valued liberty, which in the world's eye excuses licentiousness, he never thought of the fair sex but as an occasional amusement, unless, when an ill run of luck at the gaming table, convinced him of the necessity of employing some ways and means to recruit a decayed fortune.

He was in these circumstances, when he first made proposals to the fair heiress of Everdon; and his resentment at her father's behaviour, and her own coquetish humour, was raised by an unexpected influx of good fortune, to the most confirmed indignation of insulted honour. But as the manners of those, whose conduct depends on the turn of a die, are ever varying, a melancholy reverse, and the refusal of a woman, whose estate was superior, again returned this shuttlecock admirer to Miss Raby.

Her behaviour at Mrs. Robson's, convinced him of his interest in her heart; and he knew too well her father's tenderness, to doubt his ultimate compliance, or to fear the

wealth, or even the smiles of his handsome rival. Indeed, he judged it would be necessary to corroborate with her inclinations; and whilst he was reflecting in what manner he should renew his suit, Mr. Raby's letter informed him, that his kind mistress had removed every difficulty, and had left him no more to do, but to possess the reward of his triumph.

Major Pierpoint was not among the number of the few lovers, that feel their tender esteem confirmed, by perceiving that the lady entertains an attachment as forcible as their own. Instead of behaving at Raby-Hall with all the gratitude and tenderness of a man who is speedily to receive wealth and happiness from a beloved object, our military lover's manner was marked by that careless ease, and happy consciousness, which a man, sensible of his own worth, can assume. Perceiving even distant attentions, highly grateful to Charlotte, he consulted his own character, rather than her expectations, and deemed it quite sufficient to be civil and polite.

When Mr. Raby gently hinted the threats he had thrown out at Bath, he refused to be catechized for faults, which Miss Raby's conduct had convinced him were forgiven.

He answered enquiries about his rent-roll, by dissertations on his rank, situation, and connexions; yet to Charlotte, (who exulted in the idea of fixing the rover, against whom so many bright eyes had in vain directed their artillery) this non-obeisance had a charm, which the most passionate admiration from another could not possess.

Preliminaries are soon fixed, when one side is determined to yield; but Miss Raby, whose coquettish disposition had not yet entirely subsided, was desirous of exhibiting, for a little time, the accomplished beau, whom

she held in chains. Besides, it was her wish to appear with all the eclat of bridal splendor, in the gay circles of the metropolis; for these reasons, therefore, her nuptials were deferred till the commencement of the ensuing winter.

XIII

The interesting events at Raby-Hall, have long detained me from the domestic and serene life of the amiable Maria, to whom I now with pleasure return.

As her innocent mind, formed for confidence, delighted in the free interchange of sentiments with her inmates and friends, she felt happy in being released from the injunction of secresy, and frequently conversed with her mother upon the subject of her friend. Still partial to Charlotte, she endeavoured, with the sweetest simplicity, to excuse those errors which her candour forced her to allow; and she sometimes apologized for her past levity, by saying, that she was happy to think the dear girl would be exposed to no more trials, but would enjoy in the protection of the man she loved, all the peace and security incident to the matronly character.

Mrs. Williams, though unwilling to destroy the pleasure which this reflection afforded, thought it her duty to remove some erroneous ideas, which inexperience occasioned her daughter to entertain, and after having passed a compliment to Charlotte’s disinterestedness, in declining the addresses of the man of wealth whom she could not love, she thus proceeded.

“You, perhaps, my dear, will wonder if I doubt the reality of your friend’s attachment. You will tell me, that the partiality to which she has sacrificed not only prudence, as it regards fortune; but I fear I must add, as connected with delicacy, must be real. Before you affirm it to be so, tell me, Maria, what qualities does Major Pierpoint possess, upon which love may, with propriety, be

founded? you say his knowledge is rather specious than substantial; this argues no intellectual pre-eminence; and when you own that his negligent behaviour to Charlotte often brings tears into her eyes, you militate sadly against the goodness of his moral qualities. I know that you will not urge advantages, merely personal, as a motive for love; let us then cast a retrospect on your friend's conduct.

"She first appeared to like him as a partner at a ball; she thought of him more seriously, when assured by Lady Twaddle, that he was in love with her; but when he actually made her proposals, she appeared in doubt how to act, and was only confirmed in his favour by her father's disapprobation. Mortified at his neglect, but anxious to have a lover, she seemed very well reconciled to the attendance of Vandermulin, 'till an unfortunate rencontre placed Pierpoint in a more agreeable point of view than his rival; and it is only from that time that she has seemed consistent in her conduct, and decided in her preference.

"Forgive me, Maria, but I must trace your friend's conduct to a passion very opposite to love, I mean vanity. You start—we have all our failings—I can reconcile her conduct to no other principle. To be the object of envy and admiration, is your Charlotte's ruling passion; and whether it fixes on immense wealth, or genteel deportment, it is still vanity; if you doubt it, answer two questions.

"Do you think your friend could be happy with her dear Major, in retirement, where no one but simple rustics could admire her choice; or do you think, if at Mrs. Robson's, the gentlemen, instead of displaying their wit, had exhibited their purses, and the applause of the company had been directed to him, who in this competition proved triumphant, that she would have changed her ideas of the young merchant so instantaneously?"

Maria smiled at this supposition, and confessed that she believed her friend had pictured to herself very strongly what the world would say of her conquest, and she thought it equally true, that Vandermulin would not have been so soon dismissed, if the laugh against him at Mrs. Robson's had not been so universal.

"I see, my dear," resumed Mrs. Williams, "that you must soon give up a passion which depends so entirely upon the opinion of others. I have no doubt but Miss Raby is firmly persuaded of its reality, and I must now wish that the delusion may last. May she never regret the too yielding temper of her kind father, or lament that she did not exert more self-command. Her prospects, Maria, appear to you agreeable; I look at them with concern. Major Pierpoint has not hitherto shewn himself to be a man capable of exalting a girlish fancy into rational esteem; and I greatly doubt whether your Charlotte will ever find herself so happy as she would have been, if she could have suppressed her idea of the necessity of always having a lover, and having buried in her own breast, an inclination which I must term the offspring of caprice, if she had resigned Vandermulin to his money bags, and the Major to Miss Mandeville, and waited till riper years produced a more rational attachment.

These reflections threw Maria into a fit of pensive recollection; to divert it, Mrs. Williams begged her to fetch her guitar, and adapt it to the words of the following song.

1

Still shall delighted taste revere
The peaceful groves to science dear,
The plain, the beech, the olive's shade,
All sacred to the Athenian maid;
With these the Heliconian bay,
Inspirer of th' immortal lay!

2

The happy few who here reside,
Safe from th'oppressor's wrongs abide,
Tempests of passion or of fate
May shake the mansions of the great;
Yet shall the sacred laurel guard
The studious sage, and raptur'd bard.

3

The myrtle Paphia's queen bequeaths,
May boast fair flowers and fragrant wreaths;
But can it like the bay defy
The rigour of the wintry sky;
Or, as Minerva's Olive bear
Rich fruits, as well as blossoms fair?

4

Oh! gather in life’s early prime,
The produce which despises time;
Waste not in pleasure’s soothing bowers
Youth’s irrecoverable hours;
Those hours in folly’s book enroll’d,
Or stamp’d by wisdom’s seal of gold.

5

Oh! seize the time, with happiest aim
Awake exertion’s powerful flame;
Now bend to reason’s calm controul
Each rebel passion of the soul:
And from th’ approving gods demand
Immortal glory’s starry band.

XIV

Mrs. Williams, who had for some time perceived, with unspeakable pleasure, that her daughter submitted to retirement, no less from motives of inclination, than from duty, began to fear, lest the approaching marriage of her friend should derange the system she wished to pursue, either by renewing her desire for the pleasures of the great world, into which Charlotte was about to enter; or by causing a vacuity in her employments, which it would be difficult to fill.

She had however the satisfaction to find, that her apprehensions were erroneous. So far from wishing to partake of the bride's gaiety, Maria congratulated herself on the thought, that she should know, by description, every party of pleasure in which they had been engaged, when the Major and his lady returned in the spring to Everdon, without feeling the fatigue and hurry incident to the reality. As to the time she used to spend with Charlotte, she had planed a number of fresh engagements, that would fully employ it. She determined to assign a large portion of it to Mrs. Herbert, and as that worthy woman's infirmities had greatly impaired her companionable powers, and rendered her interesting only to those who could value intrinsic worth, such a resolution indisputably proved the excellence of Maria's heart. She had besides determined to make her friend a wedding present; and as her finances would not admit of much expence, she resolved that her needle and pencil should give it an additional value; and lastly, she proposed to attend more regularly to the concerns of the litle school which she had established; and having selected a few of the best scholars,

she determined to give them such further improvement as was suitable to their situation, and superior to what their dame could bestow.

Such was Maria's plan. Her mother contemplated her with all the transport of maternal love, and with all its apprehension. This exemplary woman had hitherto been employed in improving her understanding, and elucidating her judgment; and she perceived the happy effect of her care in the temper and manner of her child.

There is a passion, whose influence is often most fatal in minds of superior excellence; a passion which blasts the sanguine glow of parental hope, and sinks with premature depression the lively chearfulness so agreeable in youth. My fair readers will wonder that an old maid can intend this animated description for love, but it was with that passion Mrs. Williams feared to contend.

An accurate observer of Maria's character, she perceived enthusiasm to be its predominate fault, and in the instance of her friendship for Miss Raby, she was convinced that the warmth of her attachments would be equalled by their durability; for though her consciousness of Charlotte's errors was often a source of distress, her love remained unaltered, or rather strengthened by time and intimacy.

Mrs. Williams had indeed wished to cultivate in her daughter a retired domestic turn of mind; but it was principally from her apprehension of Maria's forming some premature attachment, that she had endeavoured to seclude her from the danger of mixed society; and as care often defeats its object, perhaps in this instance she carried her presentiment of danger too far.

One fine autumnal evening, Maria, who had been to spend the day with her friend, then confined to the house

by a slight indisposition, to avoid the wet grass in the shrubbery, as it was later than usual, chose to walk home by the horse road.

She had proceeded to the middle of the lane, when she was overtaken by a gentleman, accoutered as a sportsman, who struck by the simplicity, neatness, and beauty of her appearance, entered into conversation with her about general topics; the fineness of the evening, and the beautiful scenes which the country at that season of the year presented.

There was no impropriety in this rencountre, yet when Maria perceived that her mother, alarmed at her stay, was coming to meet her, a visible confusion took place, of the ingenuous vivacity which previously distinguished her manner.

The stranger instantly accosted Mrs. Williams with equal politeness and freedom, but that lady, whose natural frankness had been considerably chilled by the unpleasant lessons which experience teaches, replied only with that cool civility which the laws of good breeding required; and Maria, on comparing the difference of her behaviour to her mother's, grew fearful of having been guilty of a fault, and continued silent the rest of the way.

When arrived at the gate which led to their garden, the ladies courtesied, the stranger respectfully took leave, and proceeded on his walk; but Maria, notwithstanding her mother's intimation that the evening was damp, continued looking down the lane until the gentleman was out of sight.

Error is so deeply intermixed with human affairs, that even those plans which at first view are esteemed perfect, contain, on a nearer inspection, a portion of ill. Thus, that retired way of life, which seems, on a first view, most

favourable to the culture of female virtue, unhappily engenders that romantic turn of mind which is frequently fatal to female peace. This humour is remedied by an early commerce with the world; and a girl, with half Maria's sense, who has been long accustomed to the general attentions of the other sex, will laugh to hear me say, that the extraordinary incident of being escorted an hundred yards, by an unknown beau, was sufficient to annihilate the cheerfulness, and disturb the attention of a lovely girl of nineteen, during a whole evening.

Her mother, by whom the least change of manners, did not pass unobserved, wondered, that instead of chatting with her usual ease upon the little adventures of the day, she mentioned not a syllable of her accidental companion; but as this exemplary parent carefully avoided the most distant appearance of prying curiosity, she forbore any enquiry. She knew Maria's mind was invigorated by sentiments, that would enable her with spirit and propriety to repress audacity, and resent insult, and cheerfully trusted to her conduct.

XV

I mean now to follow the stranger, whom I desire my readers to recognize by the name of Stanley. He was much struck with the agreeable aspect of the village nymph, and supposing her confusion, at the appearance of her mother, to be the effect which austerity naturally causes in a susceptible heart impatient of restraint, he resolved to be more fully satisfied of the truth of these his suggestions.

With this design he stopped at a public house at the end of the lane, and after calling for some refreshment, enquired of the host, to whom the neat house, which he had just passed, belonged.

My host, who for garrulity, scorned to yield the palm of superiority to Madam Du Pont; and delighted with a guest, whose appearance announced more gentility than he was accustomed to in his visitors, exerted all his powers of entertainment. But I should have premised, that Mrs. Williams had not confined her attention merely to the wants of her poor neighbours; she had also inspected their morals, and had ever, in her charity, given a preference to those who least frequented public houses, which she considered as the chief origin of the vices of the lower orders of mankind. I am not going to examine the truth of this position, but will observe, that amongst the enemies this opinion created, was the master of the Blue Boar, who determined, now he had an opportunity, to give vent to his indignation.

He began therefore by saying, “that she was a bookish gentlewoman, and counted deadly cunning, but as far as he knew, he thought she seemed to have a mort of pride,

and most folks thought her stingy. What was worse, she was wonderful strict with Miss, who was as pretty good humoured a looking kind of body as ever he wished to see. He told several anecdotes in support of his opinion, but as it is unnecessary to repeat them, I will only observe, for the information of such readers as are unacquainted with rustic characters, that when they mean to describe a person as wholly detestable, they in a laconic way call them proud and stingy; and again, good humour and freeness, by which word they mean liberality, comprises all the virtues of which they can form an idea. This little digression may be useful to those who wish to acquire rural popularity, and as it may often be gained by a nod or a smile, I would advise them to make the cheap purchase.

Mr. Stanley, who possessed a head, that would have done honour to a better heart, listened with exultation to a description which corresponded with the opinion he had already formed. From the simple outline given by the landlord, he finished full length portraits. He conceived it would be no difficult matter to persuade an unexperienced girl, tired of confinement, to quit the rigid rules prescribed by a severe mother, and fly to a protector who promised freedom and pleasure. From every circumstance of their cottage and appearance, he judged she had not been used to the indulgence of wealth, and it was in his power to increase the temptation he held out, by the strong allurements of affluence. What he principally depended upon, was the powerful efficacy of solicitations from a lover, whose person and manner far exceeded any one she had ever seen. This, self-love assured him must be irresistible, but at any rate this pursuit promised a relief from ennui, during the time, which through some awkward circumstances, he was obliged to pass in retirement, and if defeated in his projects, he could but

abandon them. For hitherto love, though he had often affected an intimacy, had, like a distant respectful guest, paid but short visits to his heart, and always departed exactly at the time prefixed.

It is the property of guilt, through timidity, to assume those disguises of low cunning, which virtue contemns, because ignorant of their use.

Stanley fancied, that the licentious design he dared to form against Maria, would become visible even to the indiscriminating eye of rustic simplicity, unless he cautiously concealed it by affected indifference.

Suddenly turning the discourse, he enquired after other neighbouring families; and his host, delighted with having an opportunity of displaying his store of intelligence, was copious in the recital. He did not need answers; it was lucky he did not, for his guest was too absorbed in thought to give any, till his attention was again roused by a description of the Raby family, after whom he casually enquired.

“Squire Raby,” said my landlord, “lives at the great house at the other end of the lane, a good open-hearted gentleman as ever lived. Why sometimes of an evening, when he has no company, he will walk here and taste my tap. Miss Charlotte, that’s his daughter, sir, for there is never a young squire; my cousin Jenny is her waiting gentlewoman, and she no more minds giving her a gown that she has worn but a day or two, than I do drinking your good health. Oh, she is so free and so merry, Jenny says, and if she ever quarrels with her, in a minute she is so good, and will give her any thing to make it up again. They keep a rare house; no locking of cellar doors, and whoever goes, why the roast beef stands ready, and they are welcome to the run of the knife.

All the gentry about visit Squire Raby, and Jenny says that they cut up more meat into outlandish dishes, that even the dogs wont eat, than all the folks in our parish can get. He loves jollity, good soul, blessings on his heart; his servants are rare friends to me.

“Miss is going to be married, if she is, poor Miss Williams will have a sad loss, for that’s the only place madam, her mamma, will let her go to.

“Adsbud, if the Squire ant coming ’cross our yard; sir, you’ll be glad of his company, for he is always pure merry.”

Nothing could be more desirable than an acquaintance with the father of an intimate of Maria’s.

He found the good humoured cit needed little introduction; they soon fell into chat, and Stanley informed Mr. Raby, that he came to reside a few weeks at a neighbouring market town, to enjoy the pleasure of shooting, a diversion of which he was very fond. The conversation then turned upon the quantity of game in the neighbourhood, and Stanley enumerated five counties, in which he had large manorial rights. He mentioned, quite by accident, the heads of a speech he had delivered in the house, relative to the game laws, and observed, that though it was over-ruled, most of the club at Brooks’s were of his opinion.

Who could resist desiring an acquaintance with a gentleman, who had estates in five counties; a member of the British senate, and of the club at Brooks’s?

Mr. Raby pressingly invited him to dine the next day, and the invitation was readily accepted; they soon after took leave for the evening, mutually delighted with the interview.

Maria, on account of her friend's indisposition, was to spend the next day with her. Whatever wish Mrs. Williams might entertain for her daughter's society, she always carefully concealed it, and even pressed her to gratify every inclination from which an innocent pleasure might be derived, and the more so, as she knew the slightest intimation from her, would make Maria abandon her purposes.

Miss Williams was that day unusually eager to see her Charlotte. The adventure of the preceeding evening was faithfully recounted; Miss Raby agreed that it was odd, uncommonly odd; declared she should not wonder if her friend had made a conquest; doubted not she would soon see the beau again, and by this, in plain terms, expressing what had passed unmentioned through Maria's mind, she covered her fair friend with smiles and blushes. They were thus engaged, when Mr. Raby, who had been from home all the morning, entered the room, and introduced Mr. Stanley.

Maria's confusion at this unexpected meeting, at once explained to Charlotte, that this was the hero of the lane, and convinced her that her friend was deeply in love. The manners of the gentleman, indeed, seemed to justify her attachment; he was easy, elegant, and well informed. Maria, as soon as she a little recollected herself, could not but be pleased with observations, replete at once with wit and sense.

When retired to the dressing-room, Charlotte felicitated her upon her lover, of whose inviolable regard, several intelligent glances had convinced this penetrating young lady. So highly did she rate him, that she declared he only wanted greater regularity of features, and the military air, to be as engaging as her Major.

Maria, in the expression of his countenance and style of conversation, traced an understanding superior to the idol of her friend, but wanted courage to assert the preference.

The gentlemen joined them at tea, and Stanley again displayed his brilliant powers. The conversation took a turn highly entertaining to Charlotte; the subject discussed, was the eccentricities of a lady with whom she was slightly acquainted at Bath, and who, though near her grand climacteric, was fond of being addressed in the passionate style applicable to youth and beauty. He was recounting the ridiculous manner in which a gentleman, as antiquated as herself, had accosted her; and to embellish the narrative by corresponding action, sunk upon his knees to Maria, repeating the hyperbolical epithets, with which the old gallant honoured his charmer of three score. At this instant Mrs. Williams, drawn by motives of politeness, to enquire after Miss Raby's health, entered the room.

The gentleman hastily arose; Charlotte coloured with indignation; Maria turned pale, and fixed upon her mother her anxious inquiring eyes. Mr. Raby, the only unembarrassed person present, wished Mrs. Williams had come a little sooner, for that gentleman was the comicalest actor he had ever seen, and had made his sides ach with laughing.

In spite of this explanatory speech, and the encouraging smiles of Mrs. Williams, the vivacity of the party was entirely lost. The good lady, who felt concerned that her presence should interrupt the flow of merriment, soon terminated her visit. Maria, perceiving that her mother was going, rose also, and took leave in spight of the entreaties, and even the denunciatory frowns of her friend.

In their way home Mrs. Williams asked her daughter who this entertaining stranger was.

She answered with great frankness, that she knew no more than that his name was Stanley; she believed him to be a new acquaintance of the Raby's, as she had never heard them mention his name. She assured her mother, upon her honour, she had never seen him in her life, till he accidentally overtook her in the lane. Their conversation, she added, was merely common place civility, and her meeting him again to day, was entirely owing to chance. Mrs. Williams smiled at this vindicatory speech. "Spare your exculpations, my love," said she, "until I charge you with error or deceit. I am far from thinking you was guilty of an impropriety in politely answering a genteel address. It was very natural that Mr. Stanley, perceiving you alone, should escort you to your own door; it would even have been a breach of that gallant sort of knight-errantry, which, as a gentleman, he owes to our sex, to have omitted it. I believe I answered him rather too coolly, when he addressed himself to me. From the unusual gravity of your looks, I was led to suspect that he had said somewhat impertinent, and am glad to perceive I was mistaken."

I must now reconduct my readers to the Raby's, who were much too fond of their new guest to suffer him to depart till a late hour. The hospitable citizen had some accounts to settle with his agent, but requested Stanley would take care of his daughter while he was gone, and partake of his bread and cheese in the evening. To say the truth, he was not without hopes, as he perceived Charlotte was exceedingly pleased with the stranger, that he might supplant the absent Pierpoint; and I need not add, that he had no innate dislike to a son in law who was a Parliament man, and had manors in five counties.

Charlotte thanked Mr. Stanley for his acquiescence with her father's entreaties, and declared it was a noble exertion

of charity in him, as she was dying with a cold, and mortified to her very heart.

“Only think,” said she, the moment her father withdrew, “was it not highly provoking in the old lady, to whisk her daughter away, and deprive us of the charming evening we should have had. Pray Mr. Stanley, don’t you think my sweet Maria a fascinating girl?”

These questions were somewhat blunt, but delicacy was not Miss Raby’s chief excellence.

Stanley prefaced his answer by a very melancholy sigh, and then burst into a profuse panegeric, closing his exordium with an enquiry, “if Mrs. Williams was not thought a very severe parent.”

Charlotte, who never in her heart entertained a very warm affection for her friend’s mother, whose good qualities, while they inforced esteem, inspired an awe that was not at all congenial to the turn of her mind, gave in reply a strong affirmation.

She declared, that as all the little pleasure the sweet girl was allowed to enjoy, was visiting her, she could not picture to herself a situation, more uncomfortable and confined, than Maria’s must be, after her departure from Everdon.

“And can you then, madam,” said Stanley, “associate the ideas of wretchedness and that charming creature, who is so exquisitely formed to give delight and happiness to every other heart? How can her cruel mother think to deprive the world of so bright an ornament, and to bury in oblivion a gem that would enrich a crown.”

“Your sentiments,” replied the enraptured Charlotte, “exactly coincide with mine. I constantly affirm, that if Mrs. Williams would but have suffered Maria to appear in

public, she would long ’ere now have made a conquest, that would have fixed her in the exalted sphere of life, which her uncommon merit (for I assure you her heart and understanding are as excellent as her face is beautiful) entitles her to fill.”

The gentleman answered with a tremulous voice, “that he had no reason to condemn a confinement, which had prevented this inestimable treasure from being placed beyond his reach.” He took a turn or two across the room in great agitation, in order to consider how he should proceed. Convinced that Miss Raby had all the qualities he could wish for in a confidant, he resolved to employ her as such; then seating himself by her, he eagerly grasped her hand, and after protesting his admiration of her unshaken friendship, he conjured her to be secret, as more than his own life depended upon what he was going to divulge. This the lady, whose curiosity was raised to the highest pitch, readily promised.

He proceeded to inform her, that his real situation in life far exceeded what his present appearance announced. An affair of honour, which he feared would terminate unhappily (here he faltered exceedingly, owing to some secret remorse) had compelled him to a temporary retirement, till he could collect evidence to attest his innocence.

Having got over the disagreeable part of his narrative, he proceeded with more volubility. His dislike of mercenary connexions, had induced him to form a plan for gaining the affections of the charming villager, without having recourse to the adventitious aid of fortune. He anticipated the pleasure she must feel, when she discovered that the man to whom she had given her heart, had rank and splendor to reward her generous disinterested love.

Miss Raby was in ecstacies. She applauded a scheme so congenial to her taste, and when he took leave, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, she employed herself in looking over the news-papers, to discover what Duke (for she could not conceive the pretended Stanley was any thing inferior) had lately wounded his antagonist in a duel. Though unsuccessful in her search, yet finding in the Herald an account that the Duke of E—— was supposed to be gone to the continent, and that there was something mysterious in the reason of his departure, she immediately dubbed Stanley with this title, and at one bound, over-leaping every impediment, married him to Maria.

To the honour of Miss Raby be it spoken, that though she clearly anticipated all the superior splendor and dignity which her friend was to enjoy, she felt no secret reluctance to the idea of yielding her precedence. She even intended always going to her Grace’s routs, and schemed the dresses she would wear on these occasions.

XVI

All the night Miss Raby thought of her promise to Stanley, and resolved it should be sacred; but with its sombre shades, her resolution gradually withdrew.

“Where was the harm of telling it to Maria?” she knew her friend was already deeply in love, and she knew she could trust her own life to her fidelity. Would she then betray this amiable nobleman, who was already master of her heart?

Impatient to behold the glow of rapture which this news would throw upon her friend’s cheek, forgetting her cold, and not intimidated by a very thick fog, she set off for Mrs. Williams’s, without even having patience to wait for the chariot.

She found her friend in the garden. Alarmed for her health, Maria entreated her to walk in, but it was impossible to persuade her to stir, till she had recapitulated every syllable of what Stanley had imparted, and to this she added her own discoveries.

With the deepest blush of virgin modesty, Miss Williams confessed she thought the gentleman uncommonly agreeable; but far from exulting in the splendid prospects which had so dazzled Charlotte, she expressed her unaffected wish that his situation had been more correspondent to her own, as his supposed rank must tear her from a parent she so tenderly loved, and from a manner of life, to which she was now partial.

Miss Raby was provoked at her insensibility; but her indignation had no bounds, when she found Maria

intended to acquaint her mother with the whole affair. She actually sobbed with vexation. It was in vain that she urged the folly and madness of such a disclosure. At length she told her, that whatever right she had to unfold to her parent her own secrets, she certainly had none to publish those of others.

“For you know,” said she, “your mamma is constantly at Mrs. Herbert’s, and I know very well amuses that superanuated old woman with every gossip’s tale she can think of. And pray, if the lives of two noblemen should be sacrificed (for his grace said, more than himself were concerned in what he told me) what shall you then think of your scrupulous nicety?”

Maria was offended at a suggestion, which militated so strongly against the faithful honour of her mother, and affirmed, that nothing should deter her from practising the indispensable duty of referring to the parental sanction, every proposal of marriage she should receive.

“At least,” said Miss Raby, “you may defer that reference ’till you actually receive the proposal. Recollect, what you heard from me was only told me in confidence, and do not brand my character in your mother’s opinion, with levity, because my warm attachment for you has made me divulge what I ought to have concealed. You may, if you please, sacrifice the uncommon good fortune that now courts your acceptance, but my reputation ought to be sacred.”

Maria hesitated: she tenderly loved Charlotte; it was impossible to tell Mrs. Williams, as she at first intended, without discovering a fault, which she knew the strict morality of her mother would consider very culpable. She gently cautioned Miss Raby to avoid bringing her into so distressing a dilemma in future, and then promised to wait

’till Mr. Stanley had formally disclosed his sentiments, before she discovered the affair to Mrs. Williams.

Friendship in affectionate bosoms, generally revives with redoubled tenderness, after a little interruption. My young ladies soon found, that they never loved each other with greater ardency, than after their little fracas. Maria lamented that her dear Charlotte’s friendly eagerness had exposed her to the danger of increasing her cold, and prevailed upon her to come into the parlour, whilst she dispatched their foot-boy for the chariot.

I have not hitherto exhibited Mrs. Williams as a character replete with curiosity; but it happened this morning that she was unusually solicitous to know why Charlotte, whom she knew to be rigidly careful in every thing relative to her own health, should, especially after her late confinement, come out in so unpleasant a morning. She questioned her daughter, after the young lady was gone, on the motive of this unexpected visit.

My heroine was very unskilful at the task of deception. A child might have discovered, by her faltering confusion, that there was somewhat she wished to conceal.

Mrs. Williams pittied the pain she gave to her native ingenuity. Some parents are apt, when they discover any thing like a secret, to exert their authority, and insist upon an immediate disclosure. Far otherwise, this amiable woman blamed herself for the dilemma to which she had reduced a mind, deeply impressed with the stamp of truth, and clasping her hand, affectionately said,

“In future, Maria, when I distress you by any unseasonable enquiries, plead your wish not to answer. I know the goodness of your heart too well, to fear that it entertains a thought, in a moral sense, improper for me to know. I do not consider any little pleasurable plan you

may form with your friend, in a dangerous light; hitherto you have never abused my indulgence; can I have a stronger proof that you never will?”

Pained by praise, of which at this instant she felt unworthy, Maria threw herself into her mother’s arms, and in the effusion of filial sensibility, was going to make a full confession, but she restrained herself by recollecting the charge of Charlotte. Distressed between her mother and her friend, she attempted to reconcile these jarring duties, by resolving only to wait for the formal discovery of Mr. Stanley’s passion, to avow every sentiment of her heart.

As Miss Raby’s morning expedition really increased her indisposition, Maria’s daily attendance at the Manor again became necessary. When she found that Stanley, profiting by Mr. Raby’s general and pressing invitations, was constantly there, she attempted to excuse herself from the frequency of her visits. But as her friend was loud in her complaints, at the glaring unkindness of deserting her in an illness, which she entirely placed to her account, she was forced to go. It was not from a desire of playing with the anxiety of love, but from that amiable modesty of manners, not obvious, not obtrusive, but retired, the more desirable, that like our grandmother eve, in her state of innocence, she turned from the addresses of Stanley, and avoided, with the utmost caution, the opportunities which Charlotte afforded, of private conversation.

But it was not possible for her long to elude the vigilance of artful adroitness, seconded in its designs by the mistaken kindness of a well meaning friend.

Mr. Stanley, with pleasure discovered, by the respectful distance of Maria’s manner, that Miss Raby had kept his secret exactly as he wished. Perfectly well read in the

theory of love, he saw through the veil of delicacy, that he was by no means disliked by his village charmer. He determined therefore to avow his passion, and bitterly complained to Charlotte, that her cruel friend forbade him every opportunity of disclosing the sentiments he entertained.

The frank hearted girl pitied a situation she would have considered intolerable, and the next morning pretending resentment against Maria for some ill behaviour, referred her astonished friend to Mr. Stanley for an explanation, and hurrying out of the room, locked the door.

Maria, who instantaneously discovered the design, looked more silly than she had ever done in her life.

Stanley, well knowing that the first moment of resentment at the trick which had been played her, would not prove most favourable to his intentions, diverted her a few moments by general conversation, till he saw she had recovered her usual good humour. He then avowed his love in similar terms to what my readers must have met with in at least an hundred of my predecessors in the novel line; the terms being invariable, and reduced to plain language, are, “I love you, and if you don't pity me, I shall die.”

But as all the Carolina’s, Sophia’s and Henrietta’s, do not give exactly the same answer as Maria did, it may not be unnecessary to say, that with a great deal of timidity, she confusedly replied, “that she did not think herself authorised to answer an address, which had not received the approbation of her mother.”

Stanley adored her for her high notions of parental authority, and declared, in his opinion, that a respectful deference to the wishes of a kind indulgent mother, added to all the blaze of beauty a moral grace, that was quite

irresistible. He assured her, that as these were his real sentiments, it was peculiarly distressing that some unfortunate, but at present insurmountable reasons, would prevent him for a little time, from declaring to Mrs. Williams his adoration of her angel child.

Maria assumed a more determined tone than before, and repeated her resolution never to encourage a lover, who could not plead the powerful recommendation of her mother’s approval.

The lover, who had a few *aristocratic* notions, (I use that word to prove my knowledge of modern politics) seemed to think it impossible that Mrs. Williams should object, when acquainted with his rank and character.

Maria was going to proclaim her indifference to the advantages of wealth and consequence, but recollecting that this would betray her friend, contented herself with saying, that her mother judged from principles very different from what influenced the generality of the world; and she begged Mr. Stanley would excuse her for repeating, that she had ever been accustomed to that veneration for her mother’s sentiments, that ’till acquainted with them, she durst not disclose her own.

Stanley now acted the passionate lover; he lamented, sighed, gazed, swore it was impossible to abandon her; raved about sacrificing his own life to her scruples with indifference; then recollecting that a friend’s safety was involved, he sat fixed in gloomy silence.

Maria, invincible to argument, was not proof to pity. She began to wish a method might be found, which would preserve her duty to her parent, without driving her lover to despair. She entreated him to be calm, and perceiving her entreaties unnoticed, burst into tears.

Stanley started and fell at her feet. He declared the tears she shed, were like the grateful dews of heaven, which refreshed the thirsty soil.

“Charmer of my soul,” said he, “if you indeed can pity the most wretched of men, drive me not to madness; suffer me to breathe my love; at least permit me to see you; I will ask for no return; nay, if you prescribe silence, I will not even breathe my passion. I will write to a friend, without whose permission I dare not explain myself to your mother; but ’till I receive his answer, strive to forget the unfortunate disclosure of my love. Consider me but as your friend; bless me by your society, and for this your invaluable compliance, the gratitude of my future life—yet why talk of life, if forbidden to pass it with the idol of my enamoured heart?”

Maria, already softened, was vanquished by this passionate address. It seemed at that moment, not very improper to conceal it from Mrs. Williams for a week or too longer. The letter would in that time be answered, and that she resolved should be the utmost period of time, in which her actions should not exactly coincide with her duty.

Stanley received her acquiescence with rapture. But Maria silenced him by observing, that the grant was only made on condition of his promised forbearance from the subject of love. The artless girl fancied, in this injunction, she discovered an uncommon share of prudence; she was ignorant that the female heart, which is guarded by native modesty and delicacy, against the direct solicitations of a lover, easily surrenders to those thousand insinuating attentions and attractive allurements, which a designing man knows how to practise, in the moment of unguarded confidence.

XVII

Every difficulty which Maria's delicacy threw in the way, served but to increase her lover's attachment; who, now compleatly caught in his own toil; really felt the affection which he at first pretended. His confidence of success sensibly diminished, but his increasing esteem kept up the ardency of pursuit.

Charlotte, who could no longer plead illness, hourly contrived some fresh inducement to allure her friend to the Manor. One day was to be spent in a gipsey scheme in the woods; another morning was to be dedicated to fishing; another was appropriated to the visiting some handsome seat, or fine ruin in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Williams was more ready to indulge her daughter in her friend's society, as the period of separation would shortly commence. She knew indeed that Stanley was frequently at the Manor, but her confidence in Maria was unshaken; and though many may blame her for a false security, I am forced to confess, that she never once questioned her servant, who was sent every evening to accompany her home, if there was any gentleman that day at Mr. Raby's.

During this time, Stanley's progress in Maria's heart was rapid. If in their morning excursions, the beauty of the scenes around them, or the wonderful productions of nature, were the subject of conversation, he treated them with the ease of a gentleman, and the perspicuity of a scholar. The awful grandeur of a ruined castle, or decaying Abbey, gave an opportunity of introducing, without pedantry, the exploits and studies of former times. On an

evening he took care to render his knowledge of the fine arts conspicuous; sometimes he sketched a flower; at another time recited a fine passage from an approved author; and one evening, seating himself at Charlotte's harpsichord, he in a masterly manner accompanied the following song.

1

Oh, nature! universal queen,
  Though mindless of thy power divine;
I long have left thy bowers serene,
  Gay follies vagrant band to join;
Who wander'd from thy simple fane,
To follow phantoms false and vain.

2

Behold, with pure devotion warm'd,
  Again the vagrant seeks thy grove;
I trace thy winding rivulet charm'd,
  Entranc'd I hear thy linnets love;
And as each touching charm I see,
I challenge art to rival thee.

3

But should'st thou ask what potent call
  Has wak'd the latent sense of wrong,
And bade me at the altar fall,
  Of her whom I neglected long;
Truth shall compel my lips to own,
That love conducts me to thy throne.

He blends with thine Maria’s name,
  Congenial charms in each I trace;
She perfect as thy faultless frame,
  Thou lovely as her angel face;
Thy dictates pure her bosom warms,
Like thee she smiles, like thee she charms.

Mr. Raby, delighted with the performance, declared it was wonderfully pretty, and Charlotte’s encomium was adorned with all the technical terms, that evinced her own scientific knowledge. But the plaudit which Stanley most valued, was Maria’s, when she assumed courage sufficient to raise her blushing face from the embroidery, and rewarded his exertions with the smile which he had described.

Attentions of this delicate kind were, to a young woman of Maria’s sentimental way of thinking, infinitely more dangerous than the most passionate address. Every day she found, that her inclination to comply with Charlotte’s invitation, grew more forcible; and her relish for the pleasures which her former occupations afforded, as insensibly declined.

An earlier frost than she expected, had killed some of her tenderest plants, which she had neglected to lodge in the green-house. She found some of her poor pensioners ungrateful, and many of her young scholars awkward and obstinate.

Mrs. Herbert, good woman as she was, tired her by continually dwelling on the merits of her son, whom she daily expected; and as to working and painting, that went

on much the best at the Manor, where she had the assistance of Charlotte and Mr. Stanley.

The time in which the letter from that gentleman's friend was expected, had indeed fully elapsed; but she suggested many reasons that might have prevented an immediate reply. When she had allowed time for every excuse, she began to reflect, that though, if the answer had been favourable, her lover would have flown to communicate its contents with rapture; on the presumption of the contrary, he would be silent, and it then became her to act. This idea was painful, as it was connected with a separation, which she knew not how to support. Shame at acting in a manner contrary to her avowed resolutions, at last determined her to invite the trial, though she was far from even daring to guess the result.

The question being of two perplexing a nature for her to propose, she had recourse to Miss Raby, who cheerfully undertook the office.

Stanley bitterly sighed before he gave an answer, at last confessed, that his friend had so strongly conjured him to secrecy, that he could not at present discover himself to Mrs. Williams; he added, that he had great hopes the time of concealment would be but short, and earnestly begged Charlotte's mediation with her friend in his favour, as he protested death must instantly follow banishment from her presence.

My readers are already acquainted with Miss Raby's benevolent disposition, and will not doubt her solicitude to prevent such a dreadful catastrophe.

She was indeed too well convinced of her friend's attachment, and too much of an adept in the sophisms of love, to apprehend any danger of breaking off the

connexion by a full disclosure of what Mr. Stanley had told.

Maria heard all that her friend urged, with silent attention, nor did she, when the fair pleader ceased, attempt a reply, and during the remainder of the evening, she was unusually thoughtful.

Stanley assiduously endeavoured to engage her in private, but she eluded his vigilance, and returned at an early hour to her mother.

On entering the parlour, she observed Mrs. Williams's eyes were filled with tears. An English history lay upon the table, and as it was opened at the period which treated of the melancholy catastrophe of Lady Jane Grey, Maria easily guessed the cause of her mother's sorrow.

"I have been thinking, my dear," said Mrs. Williams, "that a work very serviceable to young people might be formed, entitled the Morality of History. At an early period of life, the narrative works too strongly on the fancy of most readers, to permit their judgment to develop the chain of preceding causes, which led to an interesting event; and besides, history is put into their hands, rather to store their memory, than to rectify their conduct, for they are taught to refer for moral improvement to fictitious compositions, and exhibitions of feigned incidents and non-existant characters. A narrative of real events might, I think, be very aptly substituted in their room. The same benefit may undoubtedly be derived from the former, informed by the spirit of truth, and recommended by the consideration, that the plain and unornamented story is not likely to mislead the judgment, or to inflame the passions. I will produce what I have just read, to ellucidate my meaning.

You, my Maria, have often wept at the untimely end of that excellent and exalted lady. Too young to be charmed by the power, too studious and retired to love the pleasures annexed to royalty, it seems wonderful that ambition should rank her in the number of its victims. We are told that she cheerfully resigned the crown, which with reluctant tears she received, and with patient fortitude terminated her life upon the scaffold, while in the full glow of beauty and youth. Since the terrors of death did not discompose the heroism of her soul, what, we may ask, could have induced this admirable woman to a step which brought on her ruin, and which, at the instant, her conscience disapproved?—The persuasions of them she loved. Terror, my child, is only an instrument to subjugate mean and narrow minds; to a generous and exalted heart, the blandishments of entreaty and affection are infinitely more dangerous. Lady Jane Grey sacrificed her judgment and her life to oblige the parents whom she respected, and the husband whom she loved. She gave up the inoffensive way of life which her inclination taught her to pursue, and entered upon a road which she foresaw would lead to ruin. What an awful lesson does her lamented death convey, to deter young people from carrying to too great an excess, that amiable compliance of temper, which when properly sustained by fortitude and principle, is their greatest charm. And how strongly does it warn them to doubt the propriety of those concessions, which are extorted by the entreaties of those they love."

Maria was alarmed at this unintentional description of her own situation, and eagerly resolved to quit the maze in which she had been fatally bewildered. She could not indeed instantly resolve to confess to her mother all that had passed, as she feared the impropriety of her conduct would forfeit that esteem which she justly considered to be

inestimable; but she resolved that her future behaviour should justify herself to her own heart, and evince to others that she was not undeserving the esteem and affection of the best of friends.

Before she retired to rest, she dispatched the following epistle to the Manor.

“I must request you, my dear Charlotte, to inform Mr. Stanley, that whilst the circumstances he alludes to, continue to enjoin him secresy, I shall persist in my resolution of declining his addresses.

“As any further intercourse between him and me, can only give pain, and increase expectations, which can never, I fear, be realized, you must, my Charlotte, forgive my absenting myself from your house, while Mr. Stanley continues his visits to your father. Do not press me on this subject; I ought not, I will not see or hear from him more. Suffer me then, unresisted, to act as duty dictates, and you will eternally oblige your faithful

MARIA WILLIAMS.”

When she had sealed this letter, she lay down in her bed, and experienced the truth of that maxim, which asserts the pleasure that results from approving conscience. She found the tears which this sacrifice to virtue and duty cost, far preferable to the most agreeable reveries which a fertile imagination could form, when the passion that gave them birth, could not bear the penetrating glance of the God within the mind.

XVIII

I shall follow Miss Williams's note to the Manor, where the astonished Charlotte, after eagerly perusing it, presented it to Mr. Stanley.

Versed in all the artifices of the blind god, Maria's letter gave him no alarm; it was evidently written by an unsteady hand, and appeared dictated by a resolution equally variable. He had ever, in his former amours, found little hazard of success, when possessed of his mistresses heart; and of the situation of Maria's, her looks, words, nay this letter left him no doubt. He affected, however, great gravity, and informed Miss Raby, that since his hated presence deprived her of the society of an agreeable friend, he would instantly leave the country.

Charlotte was positive that Maria never could have firmness sufficient to support the severe resolve which she had adopted. She said so many arch things on her friend's attachment being far stronger than she herself knew, that Stanley's gravity gradually relaxed, and he joined with Miss Raby in laughing at the little love-lorn girl's attempt to walk upon heroical stilts.

It was however agreed that he should leave the neighbourhood, and Miss Raby assured him, she would faithfully inform him what steps she took to plague Maria, and induce her to break her vow.

Stanley took leave of Everdon with little reluctance, as his self-love anticipated a speedy recall.

For three whole days after his departure, Charlotte resolved to torment Maria by silence and absence; but

finding her friend's pertinacity proof against these punishments, she altered her mode of chastisement, and took a walk to Mrs. Williams's, not without expectation of finding Maria in the last stage of a consumption.

My cousin, Mrs. Primrose, was not more happy in premeditating the manner of a grand attack, than Miss Raby. Her plan was a little disconcerted, when she found Maria composedly at work, looking indeed a little graver and paler than usual, but without either swoln eyes or torn hair.

Charlotte began by chiding her for staying from the Manor. Her absence, she said, was more unkind, as by her last letter from Ireland, where Major Pierpoint had been some time on a visit to his friends, she might very speedily expect his return.

Maria answered in a very tremulous voice, that she knew the reason of her absence but too well.

"Indeed," replied Charlotte, "I cannot guess; if you mean on Mr. Stanley's account, you may come with the greatest security. Immediately on my shewing him your letter, he ordered his horses, hurried back to his lodgings, and in less than two hours left this part of the world, with a resolution to visit it no more."

Maria, in a still fainter accent, "declared she was glad that he was gone."

"If you are not sorry," said Charlotte, "to lose, through a scrupulous whim, an offer of such consequence, no one else need; and I feel perfectly satisfied at the part which I took, when I recollect that there was too much indifference on both sides to promise a happy termination."

Maria repeated the word, indifference!

“Certainly indifference,” resumed Miss Raby, “would any one have acted as you have done by a man they cared one straw for. But pray don’t distress yourself by thinking of the poor gentleman’s sufferings. I assure you, when he had read your letter, he turned upon his heel with an air of charming negligence, and smiling said, that it should be as you pleased.”

“It is at least,” said Maria, “fortunate for me, that I have discovered his perfidy. To know he is unworthy, will restore my peace of mind. Indeed Charlotte I now hate him,” and she confirmed this protestation by bursting into tears.

Her friend, who really tenderly loved her, needed no stronger proof of compunction, to induce her to retract. She soothed Maria with the most affectionate epithets, assured her that she only misrepresented Stanley’s behaviour, to try her regard; and then gave an account, as much exaggerated, of the concern, despair, and unalterable attachment of the lover.

Maria was exceedingly vexed with herself, for having been so easily made a dupe, and coldly answered, “that while Mr. Stanley persisted in a mode of addressing her which she disapproved, his regard could only be a source of wretchedness.”

Tired of this game at cross purposes, Miss Raby changed the conversation to her own views of happiness, which only waited for a confirmation till the Major’s return.

My young readers know too well what happiness means, for me to particularize, the dresses, invitations, balls, routes, and fetes that floated in the imagination of the intended bride.

Maria seemed dull, listless, and uninterested. Charlotte attributed this to the contrast of situation, and found that her pity for her friend overcome the censure she could not but throw upon her conduct.

Indeed my heroine's heart did sustain a painful conflict. She was repeatedly forced to recall her mother's precepts, and to enforce her staggering resolution, by the shame annexed to breach of promise.

In the evening she found herself much indisposed; a violent head-ach, added to an uneasy mind, effectually forbade sleep. After a miserable and restless night, she perceived in the morning every symptom of an alarming fever. Still inclined to refer her illness to the foolish partiality which she was resolved to combat, she arose at her accustomed hour, and met her mother in the parlour. But the effort was too violent; she had just power to articulate the morning salutation, when she sunk into her chair. Mrs. Williams springing forward, prevented her from falling, and Maria fainted in her arms.

The consternation which this incident caused in Mrs Williams's family, was much increased by the arrival of Miss Raby, whom uneasiness on her Maria's account, had drawn from her bed at an hour unusually early. Terrified at the sight of the dear girl, thus lifeless, falling a sacrifice, as she thought, to unnecessary nicety, she filled the room with shrieks, tore her hair, flung herself on the floor, and greatly aggravated the general distress and confusion.

Mrs. Williams, mean while, was busily employed in administering every restorative which her recollection could suggest. We cannot suppose her less interested in the life of a child, on whom her every hope, her every wish relied; but habitual suffering had taught her habitual

fortitude, and given her, on the most trying occasions, calmness and self command. A happy temper this, and productive of pleasures, which those who are so unfortunate as to suffer their feelings to incapaciate them for the duty of assisting distress, can never know.

Maria at length opened her eyes, and rewarded her mother by a look full of gratitude and love. At this instant Dr. Lewson arrived; he felt her pulse, declared great indication of fever, hinted danger, and enjoined the greatest quietness and composure in the treatment of his patient. Happily Mrs. Williams was able to attend to these directions.

But no injunctions, no entreaties, could restrain Charlotte; not that she would really have risked her friend's life for the world, but piquing herself upon her knowledge of the real cause of her illness, she despised the power of medicine, and trusted to Stanley's return, as the grand restorative.

At every unobserved moment that she could seize, she assured Maria, that a few hours would bring him back, with all the ardour of tender love; but perceiving Maria only gave wild incoherent answers, and that Mrs. Williams took post at her daughter's bedside, resolved to see the punctual execution of the physician's orders, she returned to the Manor, execrating the folly and conceitedness of the sons of Esculapius, and convinced that her friend did but droop like Clytica, from the absence of Apollo.

A messenger was immediately dispatched for Stanley; the necessity of whose speedy return, was stated in the following epistle.

Dear Sir,

Excuse my incoherent style—my heart is ready to break. Oh! my poor friend—she will die—her barbarous protestations will actually be her death. She bore your absence at first with great fortitude, but alas, it only preyed the deeper on her heart! Dr. Lewson says her fever is very alarming. For heaven's sake return with all speed, if I lose her, I shall never rest more.

CHARLOTTE RABY.

Stanley perused this letter with great agitation. His agony, at the idea of Maria's danger, convinced him, that the passion he admitted as an amusement, was become the tenacious possessor of his heart. He became a little calmer, on giving it a second reading; he knew Charlotte's disposition was inclined to the marvellous, and thought it more than probable that she had aggravated the alarm. The only circumstance that now distressed him, was Dr. Lewson's mentioning a fever. He had known love appear in the various shapes of consumptions, hysterics, and head achs; fever was rather an unusual symptom. But whatever form the disease assumed, he doubted not the same method would effect a cure, and therefore flew on the wings of love and exultation, to bid the charmer live.

XIX

Love and exultation, though very speedy imaginary couriers, prove but wretched hacks, when fastened to a post chaise. In spight of all his effort, it was three days from the date of Charlotte's letter, before the life-giving lover arrived at Everdon.

The self-complacent certainty of success which inspired him during his journey, gave way to a few perturbed fears, when Miss Raby, instead of flying to meet him, received him with a grave composed look. He eagerly asked after Maria.

"I have just left her," replied Charlotte, "her recollection is restored, her fever abated, and I was so happy as to hear Dr. Lewson say, that her disorder had taken a most favourable turn since the irruption."

"The irruption, madam!"

"Oh, yes, sir, soon after I wrote, we discovered that the dear girl had caught the measles."

Stanley was mortified; he coloured, bit his lip, and struggled to conceal his vexation.

Charlotte kindly relieved him, by protesting, that though the measles might make her a little ill, it was her agitated mind that caused every symptom of danger.

Perceiving her opinion was not controverted, she offered to go down to Mrs. Williams, and tell Maria the welcome news of his return. To this he assented, and endured, during her absence, all that distressing

contrariety of misery, which a mind at variance with itself ever feels in the hour of disappointment.

Charlotte found her friend sitting up in bed, supported by pillows. Mrs. Williams, whose strength, anxiety and fatigue had been much exhausted, was prevailed on by Charlotte to retire, and she faithfully promised to stay with her friend, whilst her mother endeavoured to recruit her spirits by a walk in the garden. To this she added an assurance, that she would consider her weak state, and not attempt to harrass her by conversation.

No sooner were they alone, than Charlotte bending gently over Maria's bed, softly whispered,

"I would not distress you my best love, for the world; pray don't be agitated, I have delightful news to tell you, Mr. Stanley is returned, and is distracted on account of your illness."

"Who informed him of my illness?" said Maria.

"I did; why do you shake your head? do you think I could bear the thought of your dying, without his even knowing you were in danger?"

She stopped, perceiving that Maria trembled violently, and recollecting her promise, not to disturb her by much conversation.

To speak two or three sentences in five minutes, could not imply a breach of that promise; and so small an exercise of the vocal powers, could not hurt even a dying woman. After a pause therefore of nearly that interval, she again asked Maria, "What answer she would send to Stanley's earnest prayers and wishes.

Maria closed her eyes for a few moments. She had recourse to the sal volatile she held in her hand, then

seeming to have recovered her composure, replied,

“To Mr. Stanley I have nothing to say, but those general declarations of good will, which philanthropy and politeness alike require. I could have wished, my Charlotte, that you would have foreborne this painful subject, at least during my present weak state. Be assured that the seriousness inspired by illness, and the recent marks of affection which I have received from the tender care of my adored mother, must render the resolution I made in the moment of health and vigour, inviolable.”

“Have you determined then,” said Miss Raby, “to give up Stanley for ever?”

“Spare me my dearest girl at present; spare that painful enquiry; I have determined to act as I ought; you know what that implies.”

Unable to procure a more favourable answer, Miss Raby was obliged to deliver this to Stanley, who impatiently waited her return. He received it with that violence and disorder, which a bad heart must endure from tyrannic passions, in the moment of disappointment. Scarce could he command himself, to assume an air of politeness to Miss Raby at taking leave. He hastened from the Manor with greater precipitancy than he had lately arrived there, and flinging himself into the post-chaise, ordered the drivers to return with all possible expedition.

Change of place never yet cured either mental or bodily suffering. Stanley found, that wherever he flew, his thoughts remained fixed at Everdon. Some circumstances, which will in their proper place be developed, prevented him from visiting any of those places of public resort, where remorse can sometimes drown its scorpions in dissipation or riotous excess.

He thought of going for some time to the continent, and to confirm himself in this intention, he endeavoured to ascribe Maria's conduct to levity, inconstancy, and coquetry. As often as he did this, truth disclaimed the ill-founded accusation, and placed the artless maid before his eyes in every charm of village simplicity and modest tenderness. He then cursed the pride which had robbed him of this treasure: for virtue and prudence are often branded with that hateful epithet, by people who are acquainted with them only by name.

Amongst the painful reflections which his supposed separation from Maria suggested, was that of a rival. No one, he thought, could see her without admiration, and a chance like his own, might throw some other in her way, who possibly might come recommended by that sanction which he had refused to solicit. He felt so much horror at the thought, that his tour to the continent was renounced, and he returned to Everdon, determined to try the remaining chance, whether ambition might not render the mother's mind more flexible than love could make the daughter's.

Not judging that Charlotte was now likely to prove an able assistant, instead of going to Mr. Raby's, he stopped at Mrs. Williams's, and sent in a polite enquiry after the health of the family, with a wish to speak to Mrs. Williams upon some important business.

Maria was gone out an airing. Her mother, though too good a manager, and too well bred to be confused at the appearance of unexpected company, felt a little surprised at this visit. But when she recognized in Stanley, the person whom she had formerly seen at Mr. Raby's, and in the lane, several perplexing circumstances crowded into her mind, and led her to anticipate his motives.

Stanley made a number of apologies for his intrusion. He praised the neatness, elegance, and sweet situation of her cottage. Master of every form of graceful address, he felt uneasy, disconcerted, and anxious to avoid the penetrating composed look of Mrs. Williams, which seemed to search into every secret of his soul.

He mentioned Maria's illness with a deep sigh, which had the greater appearance of being affected, as he immediately after exulted in her recovery. He talked of beauty, intelligence, and sweetness of manner, with enthusiastic rapture, and blendid with some degree of felicity her praises with those of her mother, beneath whose forming hand the lovely creature grew.

Mrs. Williams was mortified to find he thought so meanly of her, as to make flattery the vehicle of insinuation. She listened with a very grave aspect, and without affecting to deny the merit which he extolled, seemed waiting to know whither this rhapsody would tend.

Extremely disappointed, Stanley was at last forced to own, that his visit was designed to request her permission to express his passion for Maria.

Mrs. Williams answered, that in an affair of such importance as the admission or rejection of a lover, she ever intended that Maria should act for herself. The only privilege she would assume was, that of giving such advice, as her longer experience in the world would enable her to afford. She added, that as in the present case she was an entire stranger, she must beg that he would favour her with a little information, that she might judge with what propriety her daughter could listen to his addresses.

Stanley replied, "that at present unhappily he could not fully explain."

Mrs. Williams was extremely sorry, “but thought till he could, it would be far better for Maria to remain ignorant of his intentions.”

Stanley found his ingenuity again desert him; but at last he replied, “that he would place in her unlimited confidence, but enjoined the strictest secresy, with all but her angel daughter.”

He then informed her, that his real name was Henry Neville, and his rank a baronet. An unfortunate dispute with a friend, had necessitated him to use a temporary retirement, till evidence could be produced to clear his innocence. He added, that he loved Maria more than life, and if his rank and fortune could gain her, he should be the happiest of men.

Mrs. Williams was not one of those querulous beings, who hate affluence and quality, merely because of its name, and ever annex to the idea of a superior in fortune, that of an inferior in virtue. In her former acquaintance with the world, she had frequently seen the most exalted sentiments and consistent conduct, added to the lustre of wealth and nobility. When I say therefore, that she was not in ecstacies at discovering Sir Henry Neville to be an admirer of her daughter; I must observe, that she fancied that she discovered somewhat in the manner of his address, that abated her rapture.

Appearing to refer his apparent agitation to the distress which he felt at the unfortunate issue of an affair of honour, she replied, “that she pitied him exceedingly. No reflection,” said she, “can be so dreadful, as to know that we have deprived a fellow-creature of life. Even the consciousness of our having endeavoured to avoid the fatal conflict, can hardly support us; for though it abates our apprehension, that the final sentence will fall severely

on ourselves, it must increase our concern for our rash fellow-creature, who but for us might possibly have lived to repent."

Sir Henry Neville, "(I now drop the borrowed name of Stanley;) was much pleased with these sentiments, which he assured Mrs. Williams were so much in unison with his own; that it was to avoid the fatal consequences which he described, that he had retired from the world, till he could convince his rash and misguided friend of his innocence."

"Your conduct, sir," said Mrs. Williams, "is uncommonly heroical; but I must wonder that such a ferocious honour should exist, as can hunt a gentleman from society, and compel him to borrow a disguise, to escape from danger and from guilt."

"I cannot," replied Sir Henry, "fully explain my unhappy tale, yet such is my situation; nor can you, in this innocent retreat, form an idea of the depravity of the world. My wish is to escape from it, and that wish is connected with the possession of Maria. Will you, madam, permit your lovely daughter to make me a thorough convert to retirement, and the peaceful virtues?"

"My artless girl," resumed Mrs. Williams, "is likely to make but an uninteresting companion to one who is intimately acquainted with the gayer scenes of life: and believe me, sir, however you may (from the pressure of present vexations) now seem disposed to turn with abhorrence from those pleasurable pursuits, in which you have been accustomed to engage, long confirmed habits will inevitably return; and I should conceive myself to be highly reprehensible, if I suffered you to form engagements, which would render that return painful."

"When you are better acquainted with my story, and my sentiments, madam," resumed Sir Henry, "you will not

deny me the praise of energy and stability of character. Till then you must permit me to plead the reference, which you say you are determined to make, and allow me to expect your Maria's decision."

Mrs. Williams could not deny her permission, and he took leave with an intimation, that he should wait on her again the next day.

XX

He had not been long gone, before Maria, ignorant of all that had passed, returned. Mrs. Williams took the earliest opportunity of informing her of their visitor. At the name of Stanley, a vivid blush spread over her languid cheek, and catching hold of her mother's arm, she eagerly exclaimed,

"Has he, my dearest mother, obtained your consent?"

A deep sigh burst from the maternal bosom, in which Maria endeavoured to hide her blushes. Convinced of the partiality which her child entertained, Mrs. Williams's presaging heart explored a thousand dangers. She however calmly replied,

"As your future wretchedness or happiness must depend upon your own conduct, it is highly fit, that in this instance, you should have the power of acting for yourself: I will advise you, but I will do no more. Yet if the tenderness which I have lavished on you, calls forth your affection, restrain that agonizing burst of tears; I know, my love, that it does—tell me then all that has passed between you and your lover."

Never had Maria felt more happy than now, when permitted to disclose the secret which she had so long found painful and oppressive. The ingenuous manner in which she described her whole conduct; her artless confession of her error in concealment, and the unintentional effect which her mother's conversation had wrought upon her mind, all operated to procure a full and affectionate forgiveness.

“Yes, my Maria,” resumed Mrs. Williams, “you are free; exercise the discretion and the judgment you possess; examine your inclinations, and try them by the test of reason. All that I request is, your confidence: suffer me to know how you act, and permit me to scrutinize your motives. Rest assured, that as I can have no interest but what is connected with your’s, I can never be influenced by sinister designs. Fear not my severe censures, for love will blind me to your errors, even while I mourn their effects. Should you, which Providence forbid! meet only with disappointment, where you fix your fondest hopes, one asylum can never fail you, the bosom of your doating mother!”

Maria replied, “that whatever error she might fall into, she had too severely suffered from concealment, to repeat that fault; and she resolved in future, not only to entreat her mother’s advice, but to regulate her conduct by it entirely; and should she even desire her to dismiss Sir Henry, she would immediately comply.”

Mrs. Williams smiled to hear her daughter speak with firmness of a theory, which she feared, would in practice be found extremely difficult. She was too judicious, as well as too tender a parent, to exert such an authority. Sir Henry’s conduct appeared to her artful and prevaricating, and served to increase every suspicion which she had formed, respecting the merit of his character, and the nature of his designs. But there was evidently a veil before Maria’s eyes, and to tear it away by force, might be productive of fatal consequences.

Parental opposition generally increases love: she doubted not Maria’s dutiful acquiescence, but she feared that acquiescence would be attended by the silent consuming regret, which proceeds from the imputed excellence with which the imagination always adorns a

prohibited object. She considered, that in being possessed of Maria's confidence, she had gained a material point, and that her advice would be more efficacious on any accasion, from her not appearing at the outset as the Baronet's enemy. Determined therefore to preserve the strictest moderation, she told Maria, that she would only lay down a few general rules, and leave her to draw such conclusions as she judged best.

"Though," continued she, "when a young woman accepts the addresses of a lover, she only seems to make a tacit acknowledgment, that on her general knowledge of his character and situation, she finds no objection, but wishes, by a more intimate acquaintance, to gain a just and definitive opinion. Yet the customs of the world seem unfavourable to the dissolving of the connexion on either side, unless for very substantial objections. The young woman who for little scruples, discards the lover she has encouraged, is seldom mentioned in a respectable light; and the heart that has been offered to numbers of our sex, is rarely thought to be worthy the acceptance of any. This implies the necessity of extreme care in the begining of courtship. A prudent girl will consider as deeply, 'ere she admits a lover, as if she was actually contracting marriage. You must therefore, Maria, reflect on the little incidents to which you have been witness. Such reflection will give you an insight into Sir Henry's character, and you may then consider how these circumstances accord with your own sentiments on those essential points, which must be the foundation of your future happiness.

Maria, who in every recollection of her lover, could only see a magical image of perfect excellence, with great sincerity, answered,

"That to her he seemed perfectly agreeable, and in all respects the person, whom, if she had the liberty of

unbounded choice, she would to all others prefer."

"I have seen too little of him," returned Mrs. Williams, "to confirm or dispute your opinion; one thing however I must premise. I have ever had a strong objection to disproportionate marriages; and when I shall have informed you of some circumstances of my past life, you will not wonder at a dislike which reason and experience equally confirm. The esteem, confidence, and reciprocal acts of tenderness, which are the basis of conubial friendship, are in some degree incompatible with the idea of weighty obligation on one side. In whose society do we unbend with pleasure; is it not in that of our equals, and does not then the strict society of wedlock call for equality? generosity and gratitude awkwardly perform those offices which are gracefully discharged by free and unconstrained tenderness. But if you think this sentiment too refined, tell me, is it not probable that people will discharge the duties of that state of life in which they are originally placed, with more propriety than of one to which they are accidentally raised? consider the force of education, connexion and habit. Our youthful pleasures, and the way of life in our early years, always, on retrospect, appear most agreeable. An uneducated rustic could by no means enter into those literary pursuits, in which you find such a fund of entertainment; nor can you form an idea of the satisfaction which a fine lady feels in a crowd of people whom she despises, or in visiting those whom she hopes to find pre-engaged.

Those notions of oeconomy and retirement which I have instilled into your mind, would be improper for Lady Neville, who must encourage trade, and court popularity. Your native generosity and vivacity of temper will, I know, make you start from meanness and supercilious reserve; but how great is the danger of their betraying you

into an excess equally blameable? I pass over the thousand little awkwardnesses, which, for want of an early acquaintance with the world, you will probably fall into; for though the laugh they will raise against you, is very distressing, you will, I know, soon be able to accommodate your manners to the society of those with whom you converse. But I must mention to you a fear, that when novelty shall no longer endear you to your husband, he may cast his eyes on those numberless ladies of rank and fortune, who are equal to his expectations, and probably too, your superiors in external graces and accomplishments, I say, my dear, if from looking on them, he should throw an unavailing retrospect on his past conduct, and blame the rash preference which selected you for his wife, how, Maria, will you be able to conduct yourself in paths, which are to you new and intricate? can you be able to endure the fatigues and exertions necessary to your station, when the charm which endeared them to you is broken?"

"Oh my dear mother," resumed Maria, "if you knew Sir Henry Neville, you would not have drawn this terrifying picture. I cannot describe to you his fond attachment, his love for retirement, his anxiety to fly from a world, which he dislikes equally with yourself. I know he will permit me to live in the country, I shall then give up my time to the amusements of which I am so fond, as I shall only have the power of pursuing them on a larger scale. The poor shall bless my good fortune. I will fill my library with the most approved authors; we will taste in its highest degree the pleasures of the country, blended with those of science, and I shall have you, my dear mother, with me, to preserve me from every error."

Mrs. Williams thanked her daughter for her affectionate wish of retaining her society, and referred her answer on

that head to some future period. She expressed great pleasure at hearing the young Baronet's sentiments were so similar to her own.

"But are you certain, Maria," said she, "that you have not built positive conclusions on general observations. When I consider the graceful person and easy elegance of Sir Henry, I am astonished to find that a young gentleman like him, should so soon be disgusted with society, to which he has always been habituated, and in which he is so capable of appearing with eclat. Many disappointments rendered it necessary for me to wean my mind from amusements, into which I did not enter, till I was past the age in which they take deep hold of the heart. I have endeavoured, not unsuccessfully, to render my desires as retired as my fortune. I wish that I was acquainted with the reasons of Sir Henry's disgust; I confess I think it will terminate like the quarrels of lovers, in a fonder reconciliation. If therefore, my dear, you aspire to the honour of his hand, I would advise you to give up your books and your garden, and apply your mind to the duties of the card table and the toilette."

Maria laughed at her mother's presentiment, and assured her she should never find a scientific knowledge of those things necessary; but to secure the enjoyment of the quiet which she loved, she resolved to make a general residence in the country a preliminary article in her intended engagement.

They now parted for the evening, to spend a sleepless night, which was employed by the mother in apprehensive fears and anxious prayers to Providence, to direct and preserve her unsuspecting child. Maria, during the same interval, gave way to the pleasing reveries of love and hope, which were sometimes diversified by the agreeable thought of the charming news which she should have to

communicate to her dear Charlotte, on her return from town, whether she was just gone with her father that evening, to meet the Major, and prepare for her approaching marriage.

XXI

When I recollect the practice of my predecessors, and call to mind the magical attractions which most female readers find in the words, silver muslin, gauze flounce, pale blue tiffany, delicate pink sarsenet, embroidered sashes, white feathers, and wreaths of artificial flowers; I exceedingly blame myself for having so long delayed to ring changes upon those agreeable terms: and knowing that nothing will so happily prepare them for the important interview which I am going to describe, as a minute detail of the dress, in which Maria received the addresses of Sir Henry Neville, I resolved not to omit so fair an opportunity of gaining immortality. I therefore wrote to my niece Elizabeth, who is now an assistant to one of the principal new milliners in London, for a faithful account of all the paraphenalia necessary to be worn on such an occasion.

She was very punctual in her reply, and is so happily mistress of the appropriate terms, that in rather less than three sheets of double post paper, she briefly described the colour, form, and materials necessary to compose what she called, a genteel dishabille. I immediately began to transcribe it, but as my fingers do not move very alertly, and as I often stop to adjust my spectacles, stroke my cat, or take a pinch of snuff, I had not got half through my task, when I received a second letter, conjuring me to make no use of the first, as the fashion described in that was become obsolete, and Maria would appear in the greatest degree gothic, if dressed according to what was the ton three weeks ago. Compelled to an alteration, and vexed at my loss of time and paper, I had not made any great progress in my second transcript, when a third letter

from Elizabeth, with yet more modern patterns, necessitated me to give up my project, and to confess that fashion is too much of a Proteus, to be sketched by so hobbling an artist.

I am therefore forced to be general, where I meant to be particular, and must observe that Maria's dress was very emblematic of her mind. It was studied with such happy care, that the result was always an equal mixture of exact neatness and negligent simplicity. It was however sufficiently conformable to those prescribed rules of custom, by an attention to which, singularity is to be avoided; yet so well adapted to her own features and person, that it escaped the disgusting carricature which fashion charms from its professed admirers.

Sir Henry arrived, and Mrs. Williams unwilling to embarrass the lovers by her presence, after receiving his compliments, withdrew.

The Baronet flew to his mistress with the utmost transport, and Maria, with frank, yet modest smiles, expressed her pleasure at seeing him in the maternal mansion.

There is unfortunately a flatness in love scenes, which the most skilful artists can scarcely avoid. For this reason, I shall pass over this and several other interviews, as cursorily as possible.

Indeed, I do not feel myself thoroughly comfortable, whilst engaged with tender subjects. They bring to my mind too forcibly the kind things which were said to me forty years ago; when I was young, handsome, and surrounded by admirers, whom I treated with the most rigid cruelty.

Sir Henry having full permission to visit Maria, took lodgings in the neighbourhood, that he might frequently avail himself of that liberty. In all these interviews, he exerted to the full those powers of persuasion and attraction which he so largely possessed. It was however observable, that his vivacity received an immediate check on Mrs. Williams's approach: a gloomy reserve, or confused hesitation, plainly spoke his dislike of her society, and in spite of Maria's endeavours to call him forth, and the placid cheerfulness and friendly attention which he received from her mother, his constraint seemed to increase in every subsequent meeting.

Maria loved her mother too tenderly, not to be concerned at the distaste, which it was evident her lover had conceived; nor could her ingenuous mind long conceal the uneasiness she felt. She questioned Sir Henry, why he did not seem at ease in her mother's society. At first he affected to treat the observation as the effect of prying penetration, which delights in imaginary perplexities; but finding his raillery did not conquer her conviction, he confessed that he felt an unaccountable dread of Mrs. Williams, and that he fancied she was ever on the watch for something to censure.

Maria vehemently vindicated her parent. She dwelt with peculiar emphasis on her good nature, candour and complaisance.

"Those virtues," said Sir Henry, "I doubt not, but that she exerts towards those who fortunately gain her favour; but those, against whom she has adopted any prejudice, (amongst whom I unfortunately stand) I am certain she regards with very different sentiments."

"Who," said Maria, warmly, "has injured you with this erroneous apprehension? I know that my mother is

disposed to think favourably of you, and would you but endeavour to gain her good opinion, she would immediately reward the effort with her warmest esteem. Even now, little as she knows you, the principal objection which she starts, is, to your elevated rank. If you would promise to live chiefly in retirement, I am confident you would gain her cheerful consent."

Sir Henry was beyond measure transported at a hint which seemed to open an opportunity of disclosing the snare, in which he hoped to entrap unguarded innocence. He thought it, wise therefore, to abate his seeming apprehension, owned his mistake, and gallantly added, that love, intense and anxious as his, was apt to realize imaginary danger.

"When I consider," said he, "the power which Mrs. Williams has over your heart, a power, of which I confess myself almost jealous, I cannot help picturing to myself how dangerous it would prove to my hopes, if lodged in the hands of an enemy."

Whenever a lover assumes an unusual degree of tenderness in his looks and expressions, I would advise my fair readers to be guarded. A kneeling posture, with the words, angel, idol of my fond heart, queen of my soul, and a variety of similar expressions, have often far worse consequences than all the imprecations and coarse epithets of Billingsgate.

Sir Henry, who was quite master of every degree of plausibility, after gazing on Maria in silence for a few moments, broke out into rapture at the enchanting preference which her wish to live with him in retirement, conveyed.

"And dost thou then," said he, "my life, my love, dost thou then consider my society as affording thee more

satisfaction than all the pleasures of my rank and fortune; than that circle of gaiety, of which thou wouldst shine the brightest ornament? Oh, Maria! this goodness suggests a hope, that my happiness may be nearer than I lately feared. If you can indeed be content with the confined joys of domestic life, suffer me directly to call you mine. An unlucky change in my affairs may speedily call me to the continent, and can I leave you behind? can I abandon you to the cruel chance which may perhaps separate us forever? Oh! give me a proof of your kind regard; despise the mercenary forms which bind narrow minds, and relieve my oppressed heart of its most painful woes, by consenting to a private union."

"Not without my mother's knowledge," said Maria.

"Why need your mother," exclaimed he, "be precisely informed of such a circumstance? when she permitted my visits here, she clearly proved that she had no objection to me as her son."

"I will never again," said Maria, "take any step without her concurrence. You must not, sir, look at me with such displeasure. I feel that it is my duty to place the most unbounded confidence in my parent, and I dare not act contrary to its suggestions. I will inform her, sir, of what you propose; nay, I will endeavour to obtain her consent. If she approves, I will confess, that for my own part I shall be happy in shewing my disinterested regard by any method, not inconsistent with prudence and virtue. Far from lamenting any temporary inconveniencies which I may suffer, I shall rejoice in the thought, that they will convince you, that my consent is not venal, nor my heart fickle."

If Neville had proposed to Maria that she should for his sake have encountered a lion, there is no doubt but that the

generous romantic girl would have supposed her strength equal to the combat. She had heard much of the misery annexed to clandestine connexions, but she thought it was easy to endure the sarcasms of a censorious world, the pain of jealousy, the suspence of absence, and the terror of discovery. Love, she fancied, would render these very supportable: when alas, it is from love that they derive their poignancy of anguish.

It often happens that the resolution which stands firm against distant evils, falls to the ground at the attack of a slight present inconvenience. Maria trembled at the thought of her mother's displeasure, and found, that the plan which in idea appeared feasible, was liable to many objections when told in express words. Nay, when she saw Mrs. Williams turn an eye of doubt upon her face, her mind experienced some very painful sensations, and she abruptly concluded her relation.

The terrified mother listened with the most distressing apprehensions to her daughter's account, and with unspeakable anxiety asked, "if such a step was resolved upon."

Maria, with great confusion, answered, "that she would by no means consent with out her knowledge and approbation."

"And is only that wanting to reconcile you to the variety of wretchedness entailed upon clandestine connexions?"

"I thought," said the trembling girl, "that some strong mark of attachment was claimed from me, in gratitude to Sir Henry's disinterested love. I wished to convince him that it was my esteem for his virtues, and not regard for his fortune, which influenced my prompt consent. And as I know you would never accede to a criminal act, I thought your approbation would guard me from the reprehension

of such an union. Its inconveniencies I was willing to endure."

Mrs. Williams's maternal fears tempted her to exclaim, "mistaken, unsuspicious creature, how does your fond heart worship virtues of its own creation;" but with an admirable caution she checked the struggling words, and turning aside, endeavoured with her handkerchief to conceal her emotion.

Maria perceived her mother's distress, and flung herself into her arms. "Thou dearest, best of parents, indeed I will be guided entirely by you. Never, never will I, by any act of disobedience, pain your feeling heart, or forfeit your regard. I cannot support the thought of afflicting you. Speak, tell me what to do. I am all duty and cheerful resignation."

Unable to reply, Mrs. Williams continued for some moments with her arms folded round Maria, and her head reclined upon her bosom. When a little recovered, she assured her that she entertained no doubt of the goodness of her intentions. "You know," said she, "where you are concerned, I am very apt to feel alarms and fears. When Sir Henry next comes, give me an opportunity of talking with him alone; I shall be easier when he has solved a few doubts which now perplex me."

Maria readily promised. She could have staked her life upon his faith, and felt certain, that a little conversation would remove every obstacle to mutual esteem and confidence.

XXII

Mrs. Williams, who read in the mysterious conduct of the Baronet, every infernal scheme which his treacherous heart formed, armed herself for the interview, and resolved to meet, with coldness and complaisance, the intended seducer of her only child.

She was prompted to this painful self-command, by the danger of precipitancy. Maria's strongest, indeed her only guard, was her confidence and love to her parent. To hint therefore her suspicions to Sir Henry, would be but to irritate him, and expose Maria to the advantages, which she knew he would take of a difference in opinion between them. She recollected that her daughter might easily be surprised when taking a walk; and dreading the mingled efforts of force and persuasion, thought it best to oppose art to art, till a convincing proof of his character had deprived him of his strongest auxiliary, Maria's heart.

When she found herself alone with him, she began, by telling him, that she had been informed of the honour he had done Maria, in offering her his hand, and entreated him to believe, that both she and her daughter felt very forcibly the intended obligation.

Neville, who by no means expected such a beginning, recovered from the alarm he felt at his approaching catechism, and replied, "that her consent, and the dear girl's, would make him the happiest of men."

"Maria further informed me," continued she, "that it was your wish to have your nuptials privately solemnized. I agree with you perfectly, that it would be very

comfortable to avoid the confusion and impertinence of a public celebration. But from what my girl said, I was led to fancy that you wished your union to be kept entirely secret from the world. I am certain that you could not form such a design, without having some very powerful reasons to suggest. I cannot but think she misunderstood you. Do you really, sir, wish to form a clandestine marriage?"

A degree of severity in look and manner, which in spight of Mrs. Williams's endeavours, stole into her countenance as she pronounced this speech, shook Neville to the soul, and rendered a brilliant harrangue on his unhappy situation, and passionate regard, exceedingly incoherent and confused.

Mrs. Williams expressed her surprise, that the pain of injured honour which he appeared so strongly to feel, would allow him to employ his thoughts or time, on any object but its vindication. "Your sorrow too," said she, "appears to me of that kind, as will rather be aggravated, than receive alleviation, from the too exquisite sympathy of an apprehensive, affectionate, and inexperienced wife. It seems wonderful that you should wish to cloud the morning of marriage by those excruciating cares, which must attend the preservation of life and reputation."

"You have just notions, madam," resumed Neville, "of love and honour, and therefore cannot but know, that both are equally jealous and offended by injurious suspicions."

"Certainly," replied the lady with quickness, "it may also be their characteristic to construe the well meant attentions, and friendly enquiries of simplicity, into an oblique affront, without considering that this violent irritability is calculated to create the doubts which it resents."

“I stand corrected, Madam,” said Sir Henry, “but to remove, or if you please, to prevent your apprehensions, of giving Maria to a murderer or a villain, I have the pleasure to tell you, that the affair I first mentioned, will speedily come to an happy issue, nor will I, till it is concluded, receive your daughter’s hand.”

“There will then,” said Mrs. Williams, “be no further need of secresy.”

“My father,” answered the lover, with a sigh, “left his estates loaded with encumbrances, and my anxiety to support the splendor of our family, has prevented the diminution of them. It is to the estate of a maternal uncle, who is very rich, and has declared me his heir, that I look for relief. Unhappily his extreme avarice, and the pertinacity of his age, will not allow me to avow my attachment to your daughter while he lives; but as he is very old and infirm, the concealment can be but for a short period. During that time I would support her in affluence, though not with all the splendor and opulence to which she would hereafter be entitled.”

“Had you been so candid and explicit at our first interview,” returned Mrs. Williams, “I should have considered myself bound in honour to have rejected addresses, which wanted the sanction of so near a relation, on whose kindness you so greatly depend. And even now it is not too late for you to retract them. Maria would, I am confident, feel hurt at the idea of stealing into a family surreptitiously; and her fear of discovery on your account, would be much increased by her unwillingness to give pain your venerable friend in his last moments.”

Sir Henry walked to the window to conceal the perturbed marks which pride, rage and disappointment engraved on his countenance. Mrs. Williams’

disapprobation must, he perceived, prove fatal to his proposal of a private marriage, by which he had hoped to betray the ignorant and credulous Maria, to a fictitious celebration. As his difficulties increased, his resolution to surmount them grew more prevalent. To elude the mother's vigilance, seemed an harder task, than to escape the watchful guardian of the garden of the Hesperides: and to prevail on Maria to adopt any scheme without her knowledge, was alike impossible. It required the extinction of those sentiments of love and veneration, which seemed interwoven with every faculty of her soul. To surprise and force her from the parental mansion, was indeed possible; but how could this be done without exciting her terror and abhorrence? some method must however be adopted to gain time, but what that should be, it was difficult to determine.

Mrs. Williams misinterpreted Sir Henry's confusion. She was willing to hope it was the dawning of repentance, and fancied a little of her rhetoric might help the salutary conviction.

"Permit me," said she, "to plead the cause of that family, of whose honour and splendor you have confessed yourself to be tenacious: and let me entreat you not to disgrace them by a conduct, that must be productive of sorrow and shame. Ladies, whose high birth merit your alliance, may, I doubt not, be found, who, to all Maria's good qualities, can unite the essential requisites which she must ever want; I mean rank and fortune. By such an alliance you will secure your uncle's bounty, and at the same time render it less necessary. We will never follow you with complaints of violated promises: my daughter's principles must prevent her from resenting a proceeding, which she will own to be right. To the claims of your family I could add that of your unborn posterity; and still

more forcibly urge your future peace, which will be for ever murdered by a step, which, when the delusion of passion is removed, you will severely condemn.

Neville returned to this harangue no other answer, than that Maria was his choice, by which he would till death abide.

“I will not presume,” continued Mrs. Williams, “to dictate your line of conduct; but I feel it inconsistent with my own notions of honour, to encourage your addresses, whilst you urge the necessity of mystery and concealment.”

“If you are so determined,” said Neville, who just then thought of a happy plan, “I will hazard all my hopes to convince you that I am sincere. I will go to my uncle, avow my love, implore his consent, and either obtain it, or renounce his intended bequest.”

“If, after well weighing its inconveniencies, you determine on this plan,” said Mrs. Williams, “I shall urge nothing against it. Even rashness is preferable to fraud. But pray, sir, in what part of England does this gentleman reside?”

Sir Henry, who fancied that this inquiry would end in a request for a direction, and conscious that his uncle’s houses stood in Utopia, replied, “that he generally spent his time in travelling, and seldom staid long in any place.”

Mrs. Williams. “Indeed that restlessness of disposition is rather extraordinary, when we consider his age and infirmities.”

Sir Henry a little embarrassed, answered, “that such a method of life was prescribed by his physicians.”

Mrs. Williams. “His illness then must be of a different kind to those complaints with which old people are generally troubled. Rest and peace, both of mind and body, are, you know, the cordials commonly required by age.”

Sir Henry found so many inconveniencies attached to his uncle, that he thought it would be best to seem absent. Mrs. Williams therefore could not obtain any thing more during this interview, than a deep sigh or an exclamatory monosyllable.

Before she allowed her daughter a private interview with her lover, she deemed it prudent to fortify her mind against wrong impressions, by her account of the past conversation; which as it strictly corresponded with truth, I will not repeat.

Maria’s heart throbbed at the recital, and when her mother finished, she asked her, “If she did not think Sir Henry’s determination of applying to his uncle, an unanswerable proof of integrity and love.”

“I will tell you my sentiments,” said the good lady, “when he has given us the result of his application.”

Soon after this conversation, news arrived of the return of the Raby’s, with the intended bridegroom. Sir Henry, who had no great inclination to meet Pierpoint, and finding it necessary for the prosecution of his plan to leave Everdon, determined to be absent during the nuptials of the Major.

In the farewell interview with Maria, he bitterly lamented, that though he had evinced the strongest marks of generosity and confidence, he had found every avenue to her mother’s heart so barred by suspicion, that he despaired of ever gaining her consent to his happiness.

“My mother,” replied Maria, “has a generous, exalted, and independant mind. These sentiments prompt her to behave with greater reserve and caution to you, than she would to a person merely my equal. She fears that the world may accuse her of having artfully made you the dupe of your attachment to me. Do but bring your uncle’s consent, and all will be well.”

“I have a scheme,” said Sir Henry, “to engage him as it were by accident, to make you a visit. Your lovely face and enchanting sweetness, must plead more powerfully toward the attainment of my wishes, than any thing which I can urge. But, my Maria, can I be certain that your mother will not ruin all the happy effects which the sight of you would produce, by her severe and uncomplying philosophy. My uncle is not a man of literature, nor does he preserve the personal appearance of a gentleman. Even his presence would not, I fear, convince her, that all my intentions are pure as is the angel I love.”

Maria was offended at his thinking so meanly of the candour and frankness of her beloved parent. “Alas,” said he, “if I lose thee, life will no longer be an object worthy of my care. Dost thou then think a visit from my uncle will prevent Mrs. Williams from starting any fresh difficulties?”

Maria vehemently protested, that she was confident it would. Her agitated state of mind prevented her from recollecting, that the difficulties already started, originated from himself.

He sighed the word, adieu, and a thousand times repeated his protestations, that it was easy to resign affluence, pleasure, life, and even any thing but her.

Maria grieved that so severe a test of his affections was requisite, but doubted not, but that his love would meet the

trial, and prove victorious.

End of Volume I

VOLUME II

I

As soon as Miss Raby's return was known, Maria flew to the Manor; and to the eternal honour of female friendship be it mentioned, that Charlotte suspended all the agonizing anxiety occasioned by her uncertainty of the fate of a silver muslin, which had not arrived at the time expected, and listened with entire attention to her friend's narrative.

All her entreaties to know the name of the dear man were however ineffectual. Maria held herself bound in honour, and would not divulge it, though Charlotte, to encourage her confession, urged, that if a man of fashion, he must be one of Pierpoint's acquaintance, and by applying to him, she could have a most satisfactory account of his character.

This hint, though it failed of the desired success, did not pass Maria unregarded. At the first opportunity she could seize, she affected carelessly to ask the Major, if he was acquainted with Sir Henry Neville.

It is in the power of cunning to affect simplicity, but simplicity itself, when it would assume art, finds it too thin a disguise. A hesitating way of uttering the name, and the known intriguing character of that gentleman, gave Mr. Pierpoint an idea, that this was the fictitious Stanley, whose story he had heard from Miss Raby; and his suspicion was confirmed by Maria's blushing, when he fixed his eyes on her, and interrogatively repeated the word Neville. Being therefore too much a modern man of honour, to spoil the Baronet's design, he gave only such general outlines of character, as would attract the

approbation, rather than the abhorrence of an unexperienced girl.

He said that he was quite a man of fashion; appeared in the first circles, and was universally admired."

"Was he dissipated," Maria asked.

Hum.—"A little perhaps—for he was of a lively turn, but he had a generous spirit, and a good heart."

As I always love to define words that convey a general meaning, I will inform such of my readers, who want information, that a generous spirit means a man, who squanders, with indiscriminating prodigality, the superflux of wealth, which he knows not properly how to bestow; and a good heart only implies, a being capable of compunction, when alarmed by the unexpected consequence of some criminal act, but who never carries his penitence so far as to lead to reformation. As they are generally liberal and entertaining associates, the world is very kind to those classes of sinners; it dignifies the profusion of the former with the names of benevolence and generosity, and loses in pity, for the transient starts of conscience which the latter feel, all the horror that should be excited by reiterated crimes.

If any person, charmed with the above account, wishes to adopt the characters I have described, I must warn them, that unless fortune has bestowed on them rank and birth, their efforts will be to no purpose. They may be as extravagant and licentious as his Grace, but they never will obtain more honourable epithets, than those of a thoughtless dog, or an incorrigible scoundrel.

When we are pleased with the speech, we seldom scrutinize the speaker. Though Maria's small stock of penetration had been sufficient to enable her to discover

the pride, self-conceit, and ignorance of the Major, even his fiat had great weight, when thrown into the preponderating scale that adjudged the merit of her idol: nor could she, in the pride of her heart, avoid informing her mother, that Major Pierpoint knew Sir Henry, and gave him an excellent character.

I shall not expatiate at large on the nuptials of Mrs. Pierpoint. In compliance with her father's express desire, they were celebrated at the Manor with all imaginable festivity and hospitality. Maria attended her friend through all the ceremonious round of visiting. Her affectionate breast was truly disposed to rejoice at an event, which, she concluded, must confirm the happiness of her beloved Charlotte: but she soon perceived, with concern, that the same sorrows which had persecuted Miss Raby, continued to harrass the soul of Mrs. Pierpoint. Her gowns, though made by the first artist in London, did not fit with all their expected niceness. She had used every effort to exhibit in her dress a model of the newest fashion, yet Miss Mandeville had anticipated a trimming, upon which she so much piqued herself, that she had reserved it for her most splendid visits. Add to this, the colour of her chariot was two shades darker than she had desired, and her diamond ear-rings, though ordered to be exactly the same as Lady Twaddles, were inferior in size and lustre.

Maria wondered that such disappointments should be of sufficient consequence to cloud with chagrin the morning of wedded love. She knew not that the heart often tries to escape the pressure of real sorrow, by ruminating on trivial vexations. Charlotte's bled with a species of anguish which she would not, even to herself, avow. The cool lover had not been converted by the marriage ceremony, into the affectionate husband; Major Pierpoint thought too

highly of his own merit, to consider his wife's fortune as equal to his deserts. I have already observed, that her avowed attachment rather sunk, than raised her value in his estimation; he was besides a man of fashion, and never from principle wished to be thought more than a genteel, negligent, and civil husband. When the bride found that she could not excite all the envy and wonder she expected, by the splendor of her appearance, and the tender attentions of her universally admired bridegroom, she grew tired of the country, and impatiently wished to enjoy the amusing novelty of the metropolis. She parted from Maria with lively regret; my heroine's feelings were by no means less poignant, but she would not allow herself to indulge the selfish concern that militated against her friend's happiness.

Lest my readers should think this sacrifice too heroical, I must remind them that it is possible that the expectation of a young Baronet's society, might soften the horrors of solitude, and reconcile her to Everdon after the loss of her friend.

The day after the departure of the newly wedded pair, a note from Mrs. Herbert summoned Mrs. Williams and her daughter to meet her long expected son. Miss Williams had so often listened to long narratives, which extolled his goodness and sense, and were accompanied by the tears of maternal love and anxiety, that she took a great interest in the safety of the person, whom she conceived to be not only one of the worthiest, but most enchanting of men.

It generally happens that the subject of exaggerated praise is injured by the well meant efforts of its eulogists. Maria felt so disappointed at the appearance of Mr. Herbert, that she could not avoid telling her mother, when they returned, that the good old lady was certainly too partial.

“He may be a worthy man,” said she, “and his long collegiate life proves him, in all probability, a scholar; but as to elegance of person, and gentility of manners, I can scarce think that even maternal fondness can ascribe to him those qualities. His external appearance is barely not disagreeable, and he has a humorous address in his expressions, which though characteristic and entertaining, is exceedingly remote from the elegant polish, which marks the conversation of a gentleman.”

Mrs. Williams, whom friendship induced to favour the son of her beloved Mrs. Herbert, cautioned Maria against hastily deciding on a superficial knowledge.

“You forget, my dear,” said she, “that as we are principally indebted to nature for those external advantages which strike at first sight, they must be more evident than those solid virtues which are seated in the soul, and which are only discoverable by a long acquaintance.

In my journey through life, I have seldom found the most pleasing companion convertable into the most estimable friend. Vanity, and a want of stability, often accompany shewy talents. Do not however think, that I mean to insinuate, that worthy people are generally disagreeable; on the other hand, I can strictly assure you, that I have almost always found an excellent heart expressing its benevolence even to strangers, by a captivating loveliness of manners. To distinguish this fine effect of innate goodness, from its sophistical resembler, polite insincerity, requires a greater share of discriminating knowledge than youth can be expected to possess.”

Maria perceiving her mother hurt by her reflections on Mr. Herbert, replied, “that she did not in the least mean to

impeach his moral excellence, but, on the contrary, that she was inclined to think he had a truly worthy heart."

"So," replied the calm monitress, "charity instructs us to think of all, until we discover the contrary; yet a portion of the serpent's wisdom may be mixed with the dove's simplicity. Of those with whom our commerce is but transient and unimportant, it behoves us to form the most candid judgment; yet while artifice and deceit are so prevalent in the world, we ought (even before we form an intimate connexion with any one) to examine every action, and to applaud no virtue, of whose existence we are doubtful. As this cautious conduct is totally incompatible with a quick decision, we should ever beware of forming hasty conclusions, and habituate our minds to suspect a spontaneous plaudit."

Maria could not accede to her mother's opinion. She was inclined to think that the disappointment Mrs. Williams had formerly sustained, had in this instance affected her usual candour, and to confirm her in the orthodoxy of her own sentiments, that the most agreeable are generally the most estimable, Sir Henry Neville arrived the next day, to present an example of the graces united to the virtues.

II

Every thing during the Baronet's absence, had happened exactly according to his wishes. His uncle's dislike to disproportionate marriages, proved to be not near so violent as he expected; he had even ventured to discover the story of his love; and the passionate description he gave of his charmer's graces, had so wrought upon the good old man, that he had consented to see her, and had promised, in case her merits proved adequate to his expectation, that he would not withhold his consent to his nephew's happiness.

Good fortune seldom comes single; he had had an interview with his adversary, and every thing was in train for a speedy accommodation.

Maria met this full tide of felicity, with all the sanguine warmth and confident hope of lively youth, unpractised in the ways of man, and unconscious of those depressing apprehensions arising from the recollection of past disappointments, which make people of more experience

"Hardly enjoy the pleasurable taste,
"Or deem it not sincere, or fear it cannot last."

PRIOR'S HENRY AND EMMA.

After having a little recovered herself from her first transport of joy, she readily promised to reward him with the gratitude and attachment of all her future life. But in expressing even these pleasing sentiments, she made use of terms no way agreeable to her lover. She talked of

principle, virtue and duty, which words he would very gladly have banished from her vocabulary.

Her agitated spirits gradually subsiding, she entertained Sir Henry with a recital of the events which had happened during his absence. Her friend's marriage furnished matter for an ample discussion, and she had just mentioned Mr. Herbert's arrival, when that gentleman entered at the little wicket which I have formerly mentioned, and announced to Sir Henry an unpleasant discovery, that he was no other than his old college acquaintance, and once intimate friend.

The Baronet had but one moment to determine in what manner he should receive him; and as it was impossible to avoid him, he was resolved to meet him with a frank and cordial air.

The first salutation over, Neville asked Herbert, "If he was not surprised to find him in this retired solitude."

"Not at all," answered the other, "I have been absent from England two years; I know the quick transition to which fashion is subject, and conclude that it is now characteristic of the men of the world to worship the echo."

The conversation took a lively turn. Herbert supported his part with a blunt pleasantry, which was agreeably contrasted with the pliant ease of Sir Henry. Indeed the latter did not appear with his usual brilliancy; nor will the reader think me partial in decreeing the palm to the accademic traveller, when it is considered, that he had no designs which he wished to conceal, and the man of the world none, which he chose to discover.

When Mr. Herbert rose and took leave, Sir Henry accompanied him in his walk back to his mother. I have

already observed a characteristic frankness in the former gentleman, which, if not a certain proof of integrity, was a strong indication of that manly virtue which acts with full force upon a heart conscious of independance, and glowing with courage and honour.

He had not walked far, before turning to Sir Henry, he asked him to explain an enigma which had very much puzzled him.

“When,” said he, “I first arrived at Everdon, my mother informed me that Miss Williams, of whose merit she spoke enthusiastically, was on the eve of marriage with a gentleman of the name of Stanley; how comes it then, that you address her with such marked attentions, and that she receives them with so apparent a satisfaction.”

Sir Henry perfectly knew that he had got into hands, which would not be satisfied with half a story; he was therefore forced to own, that he passed in the neighbourhood by a fictitious name.

“I am tormented,” said he, “by a curssed dispute with Captain Seymour. His sister, an amorous silly girl, who fancies every man who pays her the casual notices which gallantry requires, is her betrothed husband, has thought proper to wish to fasten on me that honourable appellation. I declare solemnly, Edmund, I never had such a thought. But she has told her tale with such art, that her Quixote brother is enraged against me to that degree, that a temporary retirement is necessary for my safety. I saw no necessity of confiding my history to the boors about me, but Mrs. Williams and her daughter are perfectly acquainted with every particular.”

Herbert answered, “I believe you, Sir Henry, when you say that you never thought of marrying Miss Seymour; but can you with equal truth affirm, that your conduct never

gave her rational ground to hope that you had such a design. If you cannot say this, you skulk under a mean excuse; it was impossible she should know your thoughts, she could only judge of them by your words and actions."

"There is no necessity," said Neville, "that I should account for mine to you; it is sufficient for my own satisfaction, that I have the acquittal of my own heart. "

"But," said Herbert, "your character must suffer in the eyes of the world, and the more so on account of your absenting yourself. I shall with pleasure render you any service in my power; you know I can be cool and determined; shall I wait on Captain Seymour, and bring on an explanation?"

"By no means," interrupted Sir Henry; "there is that captious warmth in his disposition, that he would say I had, by employing you, further exposed his sister's weakness, and would make that a fresh ground of complaint."

Then, enquired the collegian, "What is it that you propose to do?"

"To wait," said Neville, "the effect of time; his regiment is ordered to Gibraltar in a month, and he must join it."

"And shall you rest satisfied with such an exculpation? oh, Sir Harry, does this charming villager fully know the stain that rests upon your honour? pardon my warmth; if you betray her unsuspicious ingenuous mind, what infamy, what horror, must be your portion?"

"You treat me, sir," replied Neville, "with great emotion, in a style to which I am unused. Who dares to whisper a doubt against the honour of my intentions to Maria?"

“There is no other whisper,” said Herbert, firmly, “but my knowledge of your past conduct, and the mysterious air of what you have just related.”

“I have an arm,” returned Sir Henry, “to punish the impertinent tale-bearer, that dares to sow suspicions in a heart, which I have taken such pains to acquire.”

“You need not assume that stern look,” answered Herbert, “recollect the temper of the man whom you try to intimidate. Though I shall ever carefully avoid profaning, by broils and contentions, the sacred and peaceful character which I mean one day to adopt; yet there is an awkward obstinacy in my disposition, which only needs the conviction of right to enforce a steady perseverance in the execution of its designs; and I again assure you, Sir Henry, that if you have dared to form a view injurious to the honour of the young creature, whom you now address, you shall not accomplish it, if it is in my power to prevent you. The world and you may call my interference impertinent, but I feel myself bound to preserve innocence, and detect guilt.”

“There was a time,” exclaimed Neville, with a deprecatory look, “that I esteemed you my warmest and most valuable friend.”

“And never,” said Herbert, “did I better deserve that title, than at this moment. I would rescue you from the horrors of remorse, and I would preserve you from an action, which though ruinous in its effects to others, will be most destructive to yourself.”

Sir Henry, who really had as many affairs of honour on his hands, as he well knew how to manage, was not displeased to discover a loop hole, by which he might escape this. He therefore asked Herbert, “if he really

thought him villain enough to attempt the seduction of Maria."

"God forbid!" answered Herbert, "you have been licentious and dissipated, but I yet trust that your heart is incapable of such systematic depravity."

"Then," continued Neville, "as you profess yourself my friend, I will freely declare to you, what terror should never have extorted. I feel so disgusted at the recollection of my past pursuits, that I am convinced of the necessity of adopting a different conduct. Maria's excellent principles afford an assurance, that her society will confirm all my resolutions of amendment, and in that hope I am determined to make her my wife."

"Execute that determination, and imitate the excellence which you admire," said Herbert, "and happiness must be your portion. Wherever the world may seek it, it can only be found in the walks of virtue. By the improvement of our moral endowments, we enlarge our capability of enjoyment. On this sublime idea, is formed the most rational and exalted conception of the felicity of a future world. Your pardon, my dear sir; my fondness for theological studies, makes me often deviate into the style of a preacher; but to return to your intended bride. I was uncommonly struck this morning with the tender sensibility and ingenuous pleasure visible in her countenance, when you made a brilliant, or a perspicuous remark. It is evident that she loves you. How did you gain her estimable heart? surely she is above the mean exultation commonly ascribed to her sex, which triumphs in the conquest of a heart, which has been a tyrant to others."

Neville owned that there was a delicacy and niceness in Maria's sentiments, which would make him extremely

averse to her being informed of his juvenile errors; and as he was fully resolved to renounce them all, he hoped Mr. Herbert would not rob him of the esteem which was to reward his penitence, by an invidious discovery.

That gentleman doubted the rectitude of this injunction, which would cause him to withhold from an inexperienced young woman, the information necessary to her peace, and which it was impossible for her intuitively to know: in his opinion it seemed much like that cruelty, which suffers a blind person to fall down a precipiece, without having previously informed him, that he stood on its extremest verge. Unwilling, however, to do a mean and ungenerous action, to a man who placed a confidence in him, he resolved to wait the effect of this expostulation, and answered in general terms, that he would not be guilty of any thing base; and he concluded with expressing a wish, that time might prove the stability of Sir Henry’s virtuous resolutions. They separated reciprocally dissatisfied, and determined to watch each other’s conduct.

III

One mark that the human soul still retains somewhat of its original purity, is the necessity which vice finds to adopt disguises even to itself. The practised villain shudders at the plain narrative of his own crimes; nor is the deceitful sophistry of sin more evident in discovering motives to engage us in iniquity, than in dressing the offence in the softest terms. Nothing has contributed to increase the licentiousness which is but too visible in the manners of the world, more than the soothing epithets which folly and levity have made it customary to bestow on immorality. The irreligious infidel is complimented with the character of freedom and liberality of sentiment; the incontinent profligacy of the libertine is softened into the venal error of youth, and prodigality is excused by the pitiable complaint, that the gentleman's fortune was not equal to his mind.

When virtue loses its abhorrence of vice, she dismisses one of her most vigilant guards. Let but self-interest surmount principle, and her ruin is compleat. I was led into these reflections, by considering the motives which induced Sir Henry Neville to add to his other crimes, the guilt of deliberate and malicious falsehood.

As jealousy must be the inseparable companion of love in the breast of a libertine, that gentleman's mind, destitute of the candour of virtue, could ascribe no other motive for Herbert's warm interference, than the seducing prevalence of Maria's charms. He had answered him so very equivocally when he strove to extort a promise of secrecy, that he was resolved to think that he meant to supplant him

by avowing his knowledge of his former conduct. It was necessary therefore to ward off this fatal blow; and if truth would not assist in his defence, he might borrow aid from fiction, or in the vulgar home-spun dialect, tell a lie. He persuaded himself that it was justifiable by the same reasons, which exculpate a man who commits homicide in his own defence.

As to his ultimate design respecting Maria, he did not like to probe his heart on that subject. He loved her to desperation; to lose her was impossible; if his other schemes did not succeed, he would marry her; yes, marry her; where was the impropriety of terminating in honour, a courtship that was commenced in fraud. Romantic love would think the strictest connexion with its intended deceiver, a fit reward for the purity of its wishes, and the constancy of its attachment.

Determined to prosecute a design, the success of which appeared evident, Neville resolved to invalidate Herbert's evidence, by prepossessing Maria with the strongest abhorrence of his character. He represented him to her as one of those extraordinary productions of nature, that conceal, under the appearance of superior goodness, an unusual share of depravity. He dwelt particularly on his licentious pursuits, violent passions, and masterly dissimulation.

Maria's chief fault was pliancy of temper, which credulously received every impression from the sentiments of those she loved. She pitied the worthy Mrs. Herbert indeed, for placing such unbounded tenderness on such a consumate hypocrite; but her love for that lady did not prevent her from entertaining the same abhorrence and detestation against her son, which she had long felt for the rival of her dear Charlotte, Miss Mandeville. Nor did she need her lover's persuasion to

determine, that she would avoid Herbert with the same care that she would a wild inhabitant of the forest.

As Sir Henry knew that it would be impossible to introduce his uncle, which was the next step he proposed, during Herbert's stay at Everdon, he chose, by absence, to avoid those interviews, to which he found even his superlative deception unequal. He trusted to Maria's aversion, and the constraint which she already shewed, when in company with that gentleman, to prevent any ill effects of his dreaded knight errantry. He took leave of Maria under the pretext of prosecuting his plan of bringing his uncle to visit her.

To Mr. Herbert he held out another reason; it was his design, he said, to reconcile himself to Captain Seymour, which if he could happily accomplish, he promised he would immediately return, and give his hand to the charming villager, as they both called her.

In spight of his fair promises, suspicions of the most anxious kind lurked in Mr. Herbert's soul. He frequently conversed with his mother on the subject, but all that he could learn from her was, that though Mrs. Williams did not entirely approve of, Maria's affections were irrevocably fixed. He perceived her anxious parent often threw on him glances, strongly expressive of the curiosity which it was natural to feel, respecting the person on whom the future peace of her beloved child must entirely depend.

He wished not to sow the seeds of discord, and Maria's manner was so constrained and distant, so different from the candour and affability that was conspicuous in their first interviews, that as he was unconscious of offending her, he could not ascribe the alteration to any cause but caprice. Distracted how to act, but feeling his interest in

her cause hourly increasing, he determined, if possible, to bring on an explanation.

A few days after Sir Henry's departure, Maria went one morning to call on Mrs. Herbert, who was indisposed. The anxious Edmund seized the opportunity of escorting her home, to inquire in what he had displeased her? Maria very ingenuously replied, in nothing.

Mr. Herbert answered, "I am delighted to hear you acquit me. Since I first saw you, I have anxiously, but respectfully wished to gain the honour of your esteem; yet when I ventured to address you in the style of confidence, I fancied that I discovered a degree of displeasure and reserve in your countenance; and though my heart acquitted me of designed offence, I feared that I had been guilty of some inadvertent fault."

Maria called to mind all the cautionary suspicions which Sir Henry had suggested; and fearing to converse with a man who would turn her most innocent expressions into some malicious meaning, was silent.

"Will you, Miss Williams," continued Herbert, "instruct me in the happy art of pleasing. We academics are too apt to prosecute the severer studies, at the expence of those graceful proprieties which ornament society. Excluded from the conversation of your sex, our attempts at politeness are at best but awkward imitations. Can you propose to me any model, by copying of which I shall grow agreeable to those fair judges whom I am solicitous to please."

As he spoke this with an arch look, Maria laughed at the implied raillery; but her apprehensions soon returned, and she resumed her former gravity.

“Do not misconceive me,” proceeded Herbert, “I know Sir Henry Neville is justly entitled to the possession of your heart. He has many pleasing qualities; I admire his address, information and generosity. But sure, if I yield him the uncontested possession of your love, you may think such a sacrifice not undeserving some reward, and all I ask is your friendship.”

Maria’s love was too innocent and too sincere to need the disguise of concealment. She replied, blushing, “that Sir Henry’s friend had an undoubted right to her good opinion.”

“And may I, without being accused of impertinence, ask, when will my friend’s happiness and virtue be confirmed by an union with you.”

She answered, “that they waited for the sanction of Sir Henry’s uncle.”

“His uncle!” interrogated Herbert, with an astonished look.

Little as Maria had said, she trembled with fear, lest she had proceeded too far, and anticipated an invidious design in Herbert, to transmit to the old gentleman some malicious representation of her, which would render all poor Sir Henry’s designs abortive, even at the moment of their expected completion. But recollecting that so intimate an acquaintance must know all his connexions, she answered, “Yes, his uncle. Sir Henry is now gone to solicit his permission.”

“I could have sworn,” exclaimed Herbert, “that he had no such near relation; I have known him these ten years, and never heard him mention such a one.”

“You forget,” answered Maria, “it is his mother’s brother, an infirm old man, who has adopted him for his

heir.”

In the mind of Mr. Herbert, the polished virtues were but secondary qualities. He thought it right rather to break the laws of good breeding, than to trespass against probity. Though this blunt habit frequently displeased the fine gentlemen of his acquaintance, it secured him the esteem of the discerning few, who know how to value integrity and truth. He vehemently assured her that it was false; he knew Lady Neville had no brother; she was an heiress; and Sir Henry inherited most of his present possessions from his mother’s family.

The alarm which Miss Williams felt, was extreme. She doubted Neville’s veracity, but in an instant abandoned the unpleasing apprehension. It was ungenerous to suspect him only on the testimony of a consummate hypocrite. With pleasure she perceived herself near her mother’s, and hurried on to terminate the conversation.

Her escort, no less agitated than herself, eagerly asked her, “if Sir Henry had himself told her of this fictitious relation.”

Unwilling to hear the man of her heart accused of falsity, and incapable of speaking one herself, she made no answer.

“Oh, Miss Williams!” said Herbert, “Why do you preserve this obstinate silence; it is agonizing to me, but fatal to yourself. I would serve you even with my life—you know not the character of the man in whom you confide.”

At this undisguised attack, Maria’s resentment rose to its extremest height.

“At least,” said she, “I know the character of his traducer. If, sir, calumny is the effect of your friendship, I

renounce it; I see your treacherous purpose; yet will I be too generous to betray you to your mother, or to rob her of the delusive idea, that her son deserves her esteem."

Sorry I am to observe, that though Mr. Herbert possessed many exalted virtues, he yet fell short of perfection. There was too much warmth in his temper; and Maria's accusation had touched the master spring which set it at work. His veneration for sincerity and truth was enthusiastic, and she had accused him of treachery. It was evident she had been prejudiced in his disfavour; but his resentment at the undeserved reproach was too vehement to allow him to pity her delusion. He would have replied; but finding he could not command his passion sufficiently to bring his words within the bounds of politeness, he suddenly wished her a good morning, and withdrew.

Left to reflection, Maria soon became sensible of an impropriety in her conduct; and though she still resolved to confide in Neville's veracity, and to suppress every suspision, she had no sooner rejected one, than another rose, and in infinite succession crowded upon her mind. Was it probable that Mr. Herbert, however malevolent his designs might be, would affirm a falsehood that could instantly be disproved. An attack upon Sir Henry's character might have been made by a thousand preferable methods; yet again if he spoke true, her idolized Neville must have fabricated a deliberate lie. No virtue, however splendid, could in her idea preponderate against so black a charge. Perplexed in the extreme, she resolved to write to Mrs. Pierpoint, to disclose the secret which she had hitherto so closely concealed, and to conjure her, by their former friendship, to make the most minute enquiries after the character of Sir Henry Neville, and in particular to certify the reality of his uncle's existence. Until she received an answer, she chose to conceal from her mother

the purport of her conversation with Mr. Herbert. She knew Mrs. Williams entertained an high opinion of that gentleman, and she felt unwilling to enter into any painful discussions.

Edmund's mind was yet more violently agitated. He perceived that the rash impetuosity of his temper had destroyed the good effects which his honest heart had laboured to attain. Maria's confidence in Neville was confirmed, and her dislike to himself aggravated to abhorrence. His mind was too generous long to retain the sullen quality of resentment; and his anger against the credulous and partial girl, soon softened into the liveliest pity. "What step should he take? should he communicate to Mrs. Williams the deceitful artifices of her daughter's lover?" it was evident by that lady's dejected anxious look, and the tears which frequently started into her eyes, that her suspicion was already roused, and that she lamented her child's insensibility to danger. "Of what avail then was it, to increase her fears and uneasiness?" Sometimes he determined to apply to his mother, and urge her to persuade Maria to doubt the honour of her lover; but he was checked by reflecting, that as all her information must avowedly be derived from him, her advice would carry with it no weight, but would be rejected as the second effort of malice and treachery.

Perceiving his presence was of no service at Everdon, he resolved to go to town, and endeavour to discover the ground of dispute between Sir H. and Captain Seymour.

IV

The very morning Mr. Herbert set out on his expedition, Mrs. Williams, who placed the most implicit confidence in his honour, arrived at his mother's. Determined to intrust him with the suspicions which she entertained of Sir Henry's real designs, and to discover his sentiments of the principles and character of his friend. Her disappointment at Herbert's departure was extreme; she condemned herself exceedingly, for permitting the favourable opportunities that had before occurred, of knowing his opinions, to escape unimproved; but whilst she was endeavouring to form other plans, the desired ecclaircissement took place, by a method which she little expected, I mean, by Maria's receiving the following epistle from Mrs. Pierpoint.

"I am concerned, my dear Maria, to inform you, that Sir Henry's character does not, upon enquiry, fully answer the expectations which we had formed. I must confess, I never was so deceived in my life; I thought him possessed of every exalted virtue. I received your's just as I was stepping into my chariot, to pay a morning call to Lady Jane Bellmour. She is quite the woman of fashion, and as we are very intimate, I determined to commence my inquiries with her, and to engage her to be sincere in her account; I swore her to secrecy, and then told her your whole story. Her ladyship seemed delighted with the narrative, and assured me at the conclusion, that Neville was a divine fellow. All girls," said she, "are dying for him, and that married lady is happy, who can get him for her cicisbeo; but let your friend take care that she holds him fast, for he is too agreeable a creature to be constant."

“Though this account was very pleasing, I determined not to rest entirely upon her evidence, in an affair of such importance. I went that night to the Duchess of R——’s rout, and there I declined taking a card, on purpose that I might prosecute my inquiries. I had applied to every one that I thought was capable of giving me information; when Lady Jane pulling my arm, whispered, that if I wanted very circumspect intelligence, Captain Seymour, who just then entered the room, could satisfy me. I did not suspect her ladyship was in a spiteful humour, for she is at times malicious, though on the whole, one of the most agreeable companions I ever knew; and as I was slightly acquainted with the Captain, I endeavoured to draw him into conversation, and after several questions, I asked him in an easy manner, if he knew Sir Henry Neville.

“I yet tremble, Maria, at the idea of his countenance; it was furious beyond description.”

“Do you mean to insult me, madam,” said he, in a voice which rage rendered inarticulate.

Quite terrified, I assured him, “that I was ignorant of any reason that could convert that question into an offence. I added, that that gentleman was on the eve of marriage with a friend of mine, and that was my sole motive for asking information.”

“This, madam,” said he, “is not a proper place for explanation. I will do myself the honour of waiting upon you to-morrow.”

He left the room immediately after; I was ready to faint through confusion. Some laughed, others blamed, others pitied me; I could not help being very angry with Lady Jane, for betraying me into an error; but she is so much the ton, that I shall not break off our acquaintance. I was so

much affected, that I could not go to Lady Twaddle's petit soupre, where I was engaged, but returned home directly.

I did not dare to tell Mr. Pierpoint a word of what had passed. He is perpetually chiding me for my awkwardisms and vulgarities. He would, I know, have laid all the blame entirely upon me; fortunately he was not at home when Captain Seymour called. He made a genteel apology for his peremptory manner the preceding evening, and was pleased to say he was certain I had not been informed of what had passed between his family and the villain Neville (such were his shocking words.) "I now come, madam," said he, "to request a favour, for which your friend shall find me grateful; it is to wait upon the lady myself. The narrative I have to communicate, is not of a nature to bear frequent repetitions."

If I had refused, I fancied that he might have thought me ashamed of you; I therefore gave him your direction. Since I have done so, I am apprehensive I was wrong. My letter will, however, prevent your being surprised at the appearance of a visitor, whom from the precipitancy of his manner, you may soon expect.

I find that some story about his sister and your Sir Henry, had been greatly talked of, before I came to town; but as it is now buried under new wonders, nobody cares to revive it. Lady Twaddle declares, that the Captain is a terrible revengeful fellow, and that the Baronet only acted as any young man of pleasure would have done. So you see there are two opinions about him; and if I was to advise you, I would enquire no further, but if possible, marry him before Captain Seymour comes. That you know must terminate their quarrel, as his sister could have no further hope; and I more strongly advise you to do so, as I am positively assured that he has no relation in the world, on whom he is in the least dependant; but is the

uncontrouled master of a monstrous fortune; so it will be an amazing good match.

I do not find town quite so agreeable as I expected. This, my dear, is a strange world, I am almost tired of it. In London one has nothing but amusements, ’till one is sick of them, and giddy from their quick succession; and in the country one is dying of the vapours for want of a single diversion. You know I had used to check you for your philosophizing humour, and tell you it was splenetic; yet I now give way to it myself, and I often wish for a plan of life, I hardly know how to describe. I wish you would marry Sir Henry, and come to town, I think then I should be happy.

CHARLOTTE PIERPOINT.

Three times did Maria peruse this letter; but it was still the same. “The villain Neville,” and, “he has no relation in the world on whom he is in the least dependant,” every time met her startled thought. In agony unspeakable she clasped her hands, and raised her wild streaming eyes to heaven.

Mrs. Williams had ever, on the pressure of any great affliction, accustomed herself to a practice, which she found very productive of resignation and patience. Instead of permitting her mind to dwell on those relative appendants that aggravate distress into desperation, by a vigorous exertion of her powers, she turned her mental eye on those alleviating circumstances, which Providence kindly allows in every condition of misery, could we but permit ourselves to see them. She had strongly recommended this practice to her daughter; and as good habits improve into virtues, Maria, accustomed to this happy self-command in trivial instances, preserved her

natural sweetness of temper unimpaired, and laid the foundation of submission and fortitude.

If a wet morning prevented an agreeable party, Maria forgot her own disappointment, by thinking of the benefit which the husbandman would derive from the salutary showers; and when her sattin gown was, through mistake, so spoiled in dying, that it was unfit for herself, she was still pleased with the thought, that Betty, her maid, would be happy in having it for a Sunday dress.

My readers must not despise these trivial particulars; it cannot be too often inculcated, that the neglect of those little humble duties, which many contemptuously refuse to admit into the family of the virtues, leads to serious habits of error. Providence is not always calling us forth to great exertions, either of positive or negative duties; in what then consists that life of continual warfare which we are commanded to lead? every hour we ought to be amiable and worthy; but our opportunities of performing exalted acts of goodness, may not, even in the course of our lives, repeatedly occur. The often neglected, but highly important preparatory duties, may be compared to the military exercises which are practised in times of peace. The soldier, who does not make himself master of these introductory evolutions, can never acquit himself with honour in the day of battle.

Maria found, that the habit which she had adopted in the small disasters of her formerly tranquil life, extremely serviceable at this bitter moment, when she was visited by an affliction most poignantly felt by amiable minds, the unworthiness of the man she loved. Yet though busy in finding out consolation, she could only cling to one idea for support.

“Thank God!” said she, “I have not, by artifice or disobedience, forfeited the love of my kind indulgent mother. She will sooth her poor deluded girl, and think her yet more endeared by her distress. Her love and pity will be my solace; her excellent judgment, my guide. She is too good to condemn me for wanting that caution which my years and inexperience did not allow; and I shall learn of her, fortitude and prudence to direct me through this world, and pious resignation, to guide me to a better.”

Saying this, she resolved to find her mother, and meeting her entering into the room, she flung herself into her arms.

“My dearest child,” exclaimed the terrified parent, “Why this severe distress?”

“Alas,” answered Maria, “Sir Henry has deceived me!” she could say no more, but held out Mrs. Pierpoint’s letter, which while Mrs. Williams was reading it, she leaned against the window, and found some relief in a plentiful flow of tears.

The good mother read the confirmation of her fears with pleasure, rather than surprise; and ’ere she addressed her daughter, breathed a silent ejaculation of gratitude to Providence, that the deception of the intended betrayer was become apparent to the unsuspicious victim.

Miss Williams having again recovered her speech, gave way to all the frenzied exclamations of abhorrence, which, though the mourner who utters them is at the time sincere, are always known by those who hear them, to be indicative of the strongest attachment.

Anxious that reason should remove the partial affection which juvenile indiscretion had introduced, Mrs. Williams affected to become a mediator for the Baronet. She told

Maria, that as she had indulged her fancy by creating imaginary virtues, ’till the ideal idol soared above humanity, so now she distressed herself by taking crimes for granted, which still in some degree wanted confirmation.

“You must remember,” said she, “that this severe word, *villain*, is spoken by an enemy, and I should think, by his behaviour to Mrs. Pierpoint, a revengeful and passionate one. The only fault which seems clearly proved, is, that he deceived us by a fictitious tale.”

“And can my mother,” said Maria, “so far forget the purity of her morals, as to use the palliative only, when she speaks of a lie? why did he tell it me? that question leads to a yet more horrid discovery. If it is possible, if he indeed meant to practise against my honour, let poverty and misery be my portion without him. Never shall affluence and felicity court me to his nuptials. Nay, did he entreat my pardon, and in the most solemn manner attest his penitence, I would abjure and hate him.”

Mrs. Williams, though sensible that her daughter’s energetic expressions were but like the false strength that attends a delirium, was yet pleased with sentiments indicative of mental rectitude. She applauded her resolution, and strengthened it by observing, that marriage with a man whom we ceased to esteem, was a horrid act of solemn perjury.

“Guilt,” said she, “is often so attrocious as to suppose that the innocence which it fails to subvert, ought to be its reward; but a woman possessed of moral principle, I should use a higher term, of religious hope, will be cautious how she risks sentiments to herself so dear, by a permanent connexion with one, who proves himself the enemy of virtue. If she can so far forgive her intended

seducer, as to marry him, the world may justly attribute her resistance to pride and cunning, rather than to virgin purity; but I will yet hope, that Sir Henry had no such design."

At this instant a gentleman's servant stopped at the gate, he brought Captain Seymour's compliments, and announced that he would wait on the ladies that morning, upon some important business.

Maria trembling and agitated in the extreme, caught hold of her mother's arm, and entreated that she might be absent from the dreaded explanation.

Mrs. Williams strongly advised her to stay; "Oh," said Maria, "I shall discover all my folly by my confusion."

"More unfavourable conclusions, my dear," replied the mother, "may be deduced from your absence; it may be inferred that you are absolutely bent against conviction. And why should you blush at discovering your susceptibility for a man, with whom Captain Seymour knows that you intended to form the strictest tie. Summon your fortitude; I will be with you, and assist you to the utmost of my abilities. Remember, it is you that must judge; and it is only by hearing Captain Seymour yourself, that you can ascertain the validity of his testimony."

Thus encouraged, Maria endeavoured to collect her presence of mind, and in a few moments the gentleman appeared.

V

Captain Seymour discovered at his entrance a haughty superciliousness, which seemed the result of fancied superiority. It was considerably diminished by the genteel dignity of Mrs. Williams's manner, who perceiving that he hesitated in what way to begin, informed him, that Mrs. Pierpoint had announced the purpose of his friendly visit, and that they depended on his sincerity as a gentleman, and his honour as a soldier.

"When I consider, ladies," said the Captain, "that you are probably pre-possessed in favour of the person whom I mean to accuse, there seems a degree of romantic improbability in my present undertaking; but when you find that truth extorts from me the disclosure of a sister's disgrace, my veracity must be unimpeached."

"If," replied Maria, (a blush of generous shame glowing upon her countenance) "you mean to infer from my known attachment to Sir Henry Nevill, that I am obstinately bent against conviction, I must affirm, sir, that you charge me with a determined error, of which I am incapable. My esteem for him only exists while he appears to deserve it. Remove that confidence, and it ceases."

Our officer, who from his knowledge of Mrs. Pierpoint, had formed no very high idea of her friend, was at a loss to discover, in the preceding speech, that romantic fondness and conceited ignorance which his expectations had associated with the rural beauty. On the contrary, he found himself compelled to admire the justness of her sentiments, and the composed propriety of her behaviour.

After a sigh, which seemed with great reluctance to force its way, he addressed Mrs. Williams in the following words.

“I had a sister, madam, innocent once, and lovely as your daughter. For three years Neville endeavoured, by the most persevering assiduity, to convince her of his love. We did not ask the nature of his addresses, though her fortune was far inferior to his, yet her family connexions and rank in life seemed to stamp such monstrous arrogance on a plan of dishonour, that we formed no apprehensions of his infernal design. During great part of the time whilst I was with my company on garrison duty at Gibraltar, every account which I received from England, I fancied would contain the intelligence of Eliza’s nuptials. Judge then my horror, my inconceivable astonishment, when last April a letter from my widowed mother, almost unintelligible with tears, contained the soul-harrowing tidings, that the unworthy girl had yielded to her seducer’s arts; had eloped from her family, nay, lived with him in the contemptible character of his mistress.”

The glow which had hitherto illumined Maria’s cheek, turned at these words to a dying paleness. Her mother, fearful that she would faint, led her to the window. The air soon recovered her; for the feelings which overcame her spirits were not selfish. Her first words were, “Poor young lady, how I pity her!”

“You pity her, madam,” cried Seymour, “my feelings are of a different kind. Little did I think that I should live to hear my sister mentioned as an object of pity.”

“Your sense of honour, I perceive, is painfully accute,” said Mrs. Williams, “we do not wish to wound it. Be pleased, sir, to pursue your narrative; my daughter is recovered, and will listen with composure.”

“There is little to add,” replied the haughty son of Mars, “but my own ineffectual endeavours to revenge Eliza. The fear of my vengeance has hunted the coward from society. I know not his hiding place, but I stay in England with the fixed resolution to discover him. He shall not boast with impunity, that he made my sister his harlot.”

“But,” enquired Maria, with compassionate solicitude, “where is Miss Seymour now?”

“Possession,” answered the Captain, “soon satiated her seducer’s love, even before I could return to England. She has gained my mother’s forgiveness, and is gone into the country, from whence she frequently writes to me. Her penitence and sorrow have deeply affected her health; she entreats me to pardon her, and wishes to see me, but I cannot yield to such a meeting, ’till I have revenged her injured honour on Neville.”

“And does she,” said Maria, “approve of your sanguinary purposes?”

“She has all the easiness of her sex,” replied the brother, “and is, I doubt not, ready to forgive him; but if I do, may I perish—I live but to punish him, and if his heart’s blood does but glut my sword, I care not if mine flows the next instant,”

His countenance, as he spoke these words, assumed a more than savage ferocity. Maria, terrified at the fury of his aspect, no less than at his words, exclaimed, “Oh! surely, sir, you are too vindictive!”

“I thought, madam,” said he, “you had firmness sufficient to withdraw your esteem from a person whom I have proved unworthy of it.”

“I have,” returned Maria. “To the injured Miss Seymour,” continued she, with lifted eyes and hands, “I

resign every claim, every pretension to Sir Henry Neville. For millions of worlds I would not now be his. But is there no compassion, no charity due to a guilty wretch, who is highly unfit to be plunged into eternity?"

"I do not," answered the Captain, "often trouble myself with these considerations; or I might ask, if charity requires me to let him live, to practise on others the same arts which have undone my Eliza."

Agonized to the extreme, Miss Williams again attempted to reply, when her mother pitying her distress, and being sensible that her interposition did but increase the resentment which she wished to moderate, entreated her to retire. As she left the room, she cast on her mother an energetic look of supplication, which, with a pathos beyond what words could effect, solicited her to try to save him.

Mrs. Williams was an adept in that species of eloquence, which compliments the person whom we address, with the possession of the virtues we wish them to practise. Adopting this delicate mode of reproof, she commended his high sense of honour and fraternal tenderness, and expressed her own detestation of Neville so warmly, that Seymour became convinced that she never would consent to an union between him and Maria, and expressed his sentiments to that purpose.

"Did I not," said Mrs. Williams, "largely allow for the perplexing anxiety of distress like your's, I should feel offended at your supposing a possibility that Maria should forget what she owes to her sex, her character, and her future peace. At present my mind is fully engrossed by your sorrows, and those of your sister. What must be her anguish, when she reflects, that she has not only degraded your family, but that the means of reinstating its honour,

involves the safety of her only protector, who should have supplied the place of her lost father, to herself and to her widowed mother? how must she wish that a less violent method could have been discovered?”

“There cannot be any other,” interrupted the Captain.

“I grieve to hear you say so,” returned the lady, “you doubtless would not have adopted this, without the minutest investigation. You have examined every satisfaction which law could extort, or penitence offer, and found them all inadequate. It is hard indeed;—allow me to anticipate your mother’s agony; when to the wretchedness of a beloved daughter, the violent death, or necessary banishment of a beloved son, her only remaining hope, is added.”

“These,” said Seymour, “are the sacrifices which honour require. Life alone would be too small a purchase for the inestimable blessing of untainted fame. The anguish of our near connexions must enhance its price, and heighten its value.”

“Such sentiments I have always supposed, lived in the bosoms of duelists; and yet,” continued Mrs. Williams, “I have often rejoiced that their brave spirits were beyond the reach of this world’s censure or applause, when I have heard reflexions thrown out against the merit of those who perished in single combat.”

“Cowards,” replied Seymour, “are great admirers of those statutes which render it criminal in injured merit to resent infamy or insolence. I doubt not but Neville can expatiate very floridly on the illegality of my purposes.”

“The arguments which my friends pursued,” said Mrs. Williams, “were different. Will you excuse me if I repeat their sentiments? they ridiculed the folly of

innocence placing itself on a level with guilt, nay, in more eminent danger, as the challenger generally declines the first fire. They urged the absurdity of calling this redress of injuries. It only published the depravity of the wife, or the imprudence of the sister, which was before perhaps disputable, announced the folly as well as the rashness of the losing gamester, and stamped authenticity on a lie, that would be otherwise only repeated and forgotten. 'Till the world," said a gentleman of my acquaintance, "grows candid, I will never entrust it with my injuries; nor will I apply to chance for redress, 'till I know that Providence has deputed her to perform that office. I will take a nobler revenge. The villain that has wronged me, shall live to endure the stings of conscience, and the neglect of mankind, who are ever ready to take the part of those who seem least vindictive; and the mortification of knowing that I have discovered and despise him. As he shall be well assured that I will never give him an opportunity of acquiring praise by a public display of false courage, he shall have his present anguish increased by a loathsome prospect of protracted life, bending under the pangs of contempt, remorse, and infamy."

Captain Seymour was deeply attentive to Mrs. Williams. The rage which inflamed his countenance gradually softened into that melancholy gloom, to which it had long been accustomed. Oppressed by a variety of passions, to which he was unable to give utterance, he bowed, and silently withdrew.

VI

The moment he was gone, Maria rushed into the room. “Have you prevailed,” said she, “will he permit him to live?”

“I trust,” replied the afflicted mother, “that my persuasions have not been wholly ineffectual. But Maria, why thus dreadfully anxious for one whom you have abjured for ever?”

“If Captain Seymour will spare his life,” answered Maria, “I shall soon recover my peace of mind. His crimes, which have excited my abhorrence, increase my alarm for his safety. Is he fit to plunge into eternity? oh, madam! my resentment does not pursue him to a future state; I would have him live to repent. You look at me with suspicious terror. Come, then, try my resolution, I will forbid him my sight for ever: you shall write, but I will dictate.”

“Agreed, my love,” said Mrs. Williams, “only on one condition, that your style shall be more firm than passionate; that your refusal may appear the result of principle and reason, rather than disappointed affection.”

“Let it be expressive of both,” said Maria, “why should I disguise sentiments in which I suspected no harm.” Mrs. Williams then, by her directions, wrote as follows.

‘Sir,

Artifice, when discovered, excites abhorrence proportionate to the confidence which it has injured. I hold the pen for Maria, who proud of decent independance,

abjures the splendor that allured but to betray; and protests that she never will behold you more. Though tenderness and esteem have subsided with the imaginary merit on which they were founded; yet pity for a man who has stooped to depravity and fraud, compels her to inform you, that regard for your personal safety must deter you from coming to Everdon. Captain Seymour waits in its vicinity.

AMELIA WILLIAMS.'

After this letter was dispatched by a special messenger, Maria retired, as she assured her mother, to sleep, but in reality to spend a tedious night, in musing on disappointments, which if not the most severe human nature can sustain, are the most depressing, by happening at a period, when the heart is more peculiarly alive to sensibility.

Equally tedious and gloomy did the night appear to Mrs. Williams, in whose mind the maternal fervour glowed so intensely, that she never could behold even the imaginary troubles of her daughter, without a kind participation. Well might a real affliction like the present, excite the tenderest sympathy, and the most active attention.

Maria bent under the feelings of love, grief, and resentment, with all the delicacy and elegance of a broken lily. Ashamed to discover her sensibility for a villain, she disdained complaint, and assumed a shew of ease, which an idiot might have discovered to have been affected. Incapable of wilful deceit in her conduct with others, but extremely apt to delude herself with unfounded expectations, she fancied her uneasiness wholly ascribable to Neville's danger, and doubted not but the return of the messenger would restore her tranquillity, if it did but confirm the probability of his safety.

In two days he returned; the intelligence he brought was however very vague and inconclusive. Sir Henry, whom he had seen, sent no answer. Much to the astonishment of Maria, he found Herbert with the Baronet, and from him she received the following epistle.

‘I will use my utmost endeavours to prevent Sir Henry from returning to Everdon, and I trust I shall be able to preserve him from a rencountre with Captain Seymour. May I hope that Miss Williams will forgive the warmth which I injudiciously expressed the last time I had the happiness of conversing with her, and that she will accept the faithful services of her sincere friend,

EDMUND HERBERT.’

Though her asperity to Mr. Herbert was much softened, her mind had been too unaccustomed to violent transitions, from hate to esteem, to allow her to place implicit confidence in his assurances.

Her mother indeed encouraged her to rely on the steady truth of a man, who in every past transaction of his life, had evinced the strictest integrity.

“When a lad,” said she, “he was the soul of honour, and though no ways deficient in agreeable vivacity, was never hurried by the flow of juvenile spirits, into any action which seemed to border upon trick and artifice. Indeed this honesty seemed in him scarce a virtue, as there was an impetuosity in his temper which rendered disguise impossible.”

“How different,” replied Maria, “is this character, from what Neville described him to be, a dangerous master of the deepest arts of dissimulation. I do not controvert your opinion; but how dreadful is it for me to reflect that my

warm, imprudent, and undiscerning heart preferred the man, whose conversation was a continual insult to truth."

"And how grateful," said Mrs. Williams, "should you be to Providence, that it discovered your error, before it was impossible for you to retract it."

Maria, with unaffected piety, acknowledged the interposition of an all-seeing and merciful power. "But," added she, "regret for my folly must sadden all my future prospects."

"Had you obstinately persisted against conviction, or madly sacrificed the prior ties of duty to the supposed obligations of love," returned the mother, "I must confess your views would have been clouded by the painful gloom of self-accusation. Though not wholly free from error, your faults, my child, are only the venial indiscretions of youth. Experience teaches distrust and suspicion; but I always conclude, that somewhat depraved lurks in the youthful heart, in which they spontaneously grow."

Though these soothing consolations were often repeated, Mrs. Williams still continued unable to reconcile Maria to herself. Her health visibly declined beneath the pressure of mental misery; and her faded cheek and hollow eye gave fresh alarm to her mother. "Gracious heaven!" she used to say to herself, "have I been unthankful to thee for this precious child; or negligent in my duty to her, that thus thou threatenest to resume her. Perhaps my offence is of a different kind; the gift has engrossed my heart, and made me inattentive to the giver. I feel that I deserve correction in this particular, yet do not inflict it without supplying me with the consolatory aid of fortitude and resignation!"

Struggling to disguise her own distress and anxiety, as it ever was her custom, Mrs. Williams affected to conceal

her consciousness of Maria's indisposition, well knowing, that as it originated in depressed spirits, any apparent alarm on her side would but increase the cause of the evil, against which she wished to guard. She perceived with the greatest concern, that a habit of listless indolence superseded those customs of industry, which formerly distinguished Maria's active life. If she prevailed on her to walk in the garden, and applied to her for her opinion in the arrangement of the flowers, it was given with the air of a person, who wished not to see the produce. Her work was thrown aside; her paintings lay unfinished; she read indeed whenever she was requested, but the volume was restored to its place in the bookcase, without its accustomed remark. Even charity but coldly interested her tender and benevolent heart; or rather the spring of her mind was so broken, that she wanted spirits to prevail upon herself to make the exertions necessary for the revival of those transports, which she once so forcibly felt. She imagined that she should never know happiness more, and to think so, is to renounce it.

Her favourite amusement was to look at Nelly Waters, who still continued spinning to support her grandmother; and at the same time sang some melancholy ditty, applicable to her lover's absence.

Maria continually opposed this girl's heroism to her own weakness; and the contrast ended in several bitter reflections.

"Did this young woman," said she, "without any other incitement than uneducated goodness, resign the worthy object of her love to support a parent, and to fulfil the ties of gratitude; and shall I, who have been instructed in those nicer sentiments which ought to produce more elevated virtue, repine at my necessary resignation of a villain?"

The poignancy of this reflection daily increased. Hitherto it served for no other purpose than to embitter the distress which it ought to have diminished. Maria, though truly candid to others, preserved, in every thing relative to her own conduct, a strict severity that reprobated with abhorrence every appearance of wrong. But it often happens, that those who possess this nicety of sentiment in too great a degree, fall into a new error while lamenting the past. Thus it fared with my heroine; her resentment against herself for having been the dupe of Neville, wholly occupied her mind, and rendered her inattentive to the painful anxiety which her unhappiness excited in her mother.

VI

When we indulge in a cavilling humour, and complain of the scanty portion of happiness that Providence permits us to enjoy, we do not allow ourselves to consider how large a share of human misery originates from the disorders of our passions. My young readers are, in the character of Maria, presented with an instance of great goodness of heart, and purity of intention; yet the sufferings under which she appeared to sink in the last chapter, cannot be ascribable to any peculiar infliction of heaven, but rather to the extreme indulgence of love and grief. These are the passions most fatal to the tranquillity of youth. Volumes have been written to prove their fatal effects, yet until the lessons of instruction prove as forcible as the convictions of experience, we must leave them to be taught moderation, by the pain and inconveniencies which vehemence produces.

Filial piety, though it has for some time appeared a dormant quality, was the happy means of awakening in Maria's mind, those sentiments, which terminated in vigorous exertion and recovered peace.

One evening, after having parted with her mother, she was alarmed at over-hearing scarce audible exclamations of distress. Hastening to her mother's chamber, she perceived her fainting in Betty's arms. This sight banished every recollection of Neville, and she hastened to her assistance with all the alarm and solicitude of tender love. The maid perceiving her young lady's distraction, entreated her to be calm.

“My mistress,” said she, “will soon recover; she has had these kind of fits almost every night for this last fortnight. Her only concern has been lest you should know it. Indeed I do not wonder at her fainting, for she generally spends the night in tears.”

“Exemplary mother,” said Maria to herself, “and is all this kind concern for a child, who, absorbed in her own unhappiness, has scarcely thought of her anxious sympathy?”

At this moment Mrs. Williams recovered, and perceiving Maria bending over her with looks of unutterable affection, she smiling pressed her hand, assured her that she was perfectly recovered, and wished her a good night

Maria entreated that she might watch by her.

“No,” said Mrs. Williams, “I am so much better, that I have no other want than that of sleep; and the presence of any attendant always prevents my repose.”

Penetrated to the soul by these considerate marks of delicate tenderness, Maria withdrew, and resolved to render herself more worthy of the inestimable blessing of her mother’s love, by sacrificing that keen regret which might be compared to the unimportant rites of bigotted superstition which pretends to much merit, but in reality destitute of all, and only engrosses the time which is justly claimed by very important duties.

Determined to conquer a grief, which she never thought reprehensible, ’till she read its effects in her mother’s sufferings, she appeared at breakfast the next morning with a placid smile upon her countenance, instead of that melancholy composure which her features were wont to assume. Nor did she wait in silent dejection ’till her

mother began the languid conversation; she found, to her astonishment, that the powers of her mind were not, as she supposed, entirely annihilated. A heavy heart indeed somewhat impeded the lively flights of the imagination, but the stores of the memory were uninjured; and even benevolence proved that it only wanted the liberty of exertion to resume the enjoyments it so highly valued, and which would now acquire an additional zest from the experience of calamity. Mrs. Williams, with silent transport, beheld the happy change.

As soon as the tea table was removed, Maria proposed reading; and being permitted to determine the subject of their literary entertainment, she chose poetry. The natural warmth and romantic bias of her mind had ever rendered her highly susceptible of the enthusiasm of genius, and the flow of numbers; and the present state of her heart strengthened the native predilection. Amongst the miscellaneous pieces which she read that morning, the following was her decided favourite.

Ode to the Imaginations

1

Ye pleasing phantoms, soothing forms,
  Who people fancy's sunny beam,
When hope the buoyant bosom warms,
  And joy inspires the raptur'd dream;
Ye, who the fancied laurels wreath,
  Which animate the brave to dare;
Ye, who the soft enchantments breathe,
  Which spreads perfection round the fair;
Ye echos of the world's acclaim,
Ye visionary shades of unsubstantial fame.

2

Deluders of the mind! I own
  Life owes to you its happiest hours,
High seated on your elfin throne,
  Ye rival nature's plastic powers;
For ye can o'er creation throw
  Charms which reality denies;
And boast, amid the polar snow,
  Arcadian groves, Hesperian skies;
Oh crown me with your thornless rose,
Oh waft me to those isles, where joy's full current flows.

3

Benignant to a wretch distress’d,
For me your magic simples cull;
And when remembrance stings this breast,
With opiate charms my feelings lull:
Bid these dim eyes no longer mourn,
The faithless friend, or lover lost;
And to its hopeless, joyless urn
Confine affection’s wailing ghost;
Bid memory drop her useless hoard
Of vows that could not bind, of looks in vain ador’d.

4

Oh from a heart too much deceiv’d,
Banish the hill, the lawn, the grove,
Where fond credulity believ’d,
Where falshood wore the mask of love.
Ne’er let it paint the form divine,
Where every virtue seem’d to dwell;
Or tell how from his lips benign
The hony’d accents graceful fell:
Oh let not his idea reign,
E’en if my vacant heart no other form retain.

Come—bid the sense of honour rise;
Let female pride and female shame
Disperse in air those guilty sighs,
That heave but at a traitor’s name.
Who, all my confidence and truth
With undeserved wrong repaid,
Who for my unsuspicious youth
The artful snare of ruin laid.
Oh bid me a just vengeance take,
Bid this heart cease to love, or in the struggle break!

VII

The idea, said Mrs. Williams, of repairing to the imaginations for relief from distress, is pleasing and poetical; but like many of the soothing reflections which the muses afford, is proved fallacious by reason, and unavailing by experience. Fancy is an agreeable holiday companion, but if she visits us in a gloomy season, it is rather to torment than to entertain us. She generally contrives to increase our regret, by aggravating the value of what we have lost, or by exalting our ideas of our own deserts, she renders us querelous repiners. Sometimes she ingeniously teazes us, by shewing us how much better we could have employed our mis-spent time, and builds such charming fairy castles out of past lapses and future possibilities, that we are almost hurried to distraction by the contrasted dreariness of our present situation. Turn over, my dear, a few leaves; I know a poem in the collection you have in your hand, which explains these delusions with great propriety, and directs the sufferer to the only real supports in the hour of calamity.

Ode on the Consolations for Affliction

1

When sorrow barbs her murd'rous dart,
And nature's undefended heart
Receives the fatal blow;
No more the syren pleasure charms,
With languid head and folded arms,
The pensive mourner stands to brood on cureless woe.

2

Fancy, who oft in happier hours,
From her clear mirror's magic powers
Reflected pleasing forms;
Invited now to give relief,
But multiplies the shapes of grief,
Obscures the gathering night, and magnifies its storms.

3

She darts into the fever'd brain
Keen burning arrows of disdain,
Sneers of illiberal mirth;
She fills with horrors not its own,
Sad wants' reverberating groan,
And deepens love's regret, by height'ning beauty's worth.

4

Say, sons of sorrow! have ye e'er,
When summer breezes fan'd the air,
A sportive insect seen;
Bask in the sun, or sip the dew,
Or spread its wings of golden hue;
Yet soon the trifler flies, when winter's blast grows keen?

5

So with prosperity's warm gales
The soft enchantress fancy fails,
In elfin splendor fair;
Gay in her own arcadian reign,
She builds a visionary fane,
And bids deluded man adore the phantoms there.

6

More certain aid, more lasting fires,
Adversity's dim night requires,
Its horrors to relieve;
When love laments its oaths forsworn,
When friendship's rosy bands are torn,
When meekness must accuse, and firm-ey'd patience grieve.

7

Yet then, e’en then, despair shall fly,
If conscience with approving eye,
Views memory’s guiltless scroll;
If summon’d to truth’s awful bar,
No proud revengeful passions jar,
But only venial faults accuse the unpleaded soul.

8

Though innocence unhappy fails
To shield the breast, which wrong assails,
Or generous feelings press;
Yet the kind guardian can bestow
A firmness equal to the blow,
And teach th’ exalted mind to soar above distress.

9

As Daphne’s plant unchang’d can meet
The winter frost, the summer heat,
The light’nings blasting glare;
So innocence, a seraph mild,
Though figur’d by an helpless child,
Braves with its naked breast the arrows of despair.

10

Nor shall the wretch, whose heart forlorn
Feels aching guilt's corroding thorn,
Each future hope forego;
Though memory shrinking and aghast,
Turns from the record of the past,
And owns that former guilt produc'd each present woe.

11

Though all around th' horrizon lours,
Though summer friends no more with flowers
Bedeck his falling shrine;
Though conscience, faint and listless long,
Now rises like a giant strong,
And thunders in his ear the threats of wrath divine.

12

Still weeping by the sinner's side,
Repentance stands his steps to guide,
To mild religion's bower;
Mercy, inspirer of the strains
Which echo through the ethereal plains,
Gave to misjudging man that kind instructive power.

She lulls regret, she humbles pride,
She bids the doubts of fear subside,
And passion cease to jar;
The fiends of desperation fly
The clear effulgence of her eye,
As night's dire shades avoid the radiant solar star.

When she had finished the poem, Maria confessed the justness of the reflections which it contained, and acknowledged that fancy was a very deceitful comforter.

"I know," said she, "Rowe affirms that sloth and folly tremble at the impossibilities which they themselves create, and I find the observation just. In my trial, I indulged the idea, that my grief was insupportable, 'till I really made it so. I felt a pleasure in yielding to its impulse; and then fancied that a duty, which was only a blameable indulgence. Like Constance, whom Shakespeare so beautifully describes, I have given up to grief that space in my heart, which was formerly occupied by love. Last night, my dearest mother, roused my dormant reflection; the anxiety you have so deeply felt, and so kindly concealed, has struck me to the soul. The sorrow cannot be justifiable which afflicts you. My resolutions are too recent to allow me to boast of them; as one step however towards the recovery of my peace of mind, I will be always employed. At present I care too little about myself to be amused in decorating a person which I no longer regard; but if you will fetch the gown you bought for Nelly Waters, I think I shall have pleasure in making it. That good girl makes me ashamed; she is cheerful in real calamity, whilst I have lost nothing that deserved regard, and am possessed of a thousand

blessings, of which she is destitute. Do not, my dear mother, draw an inference which I too sensibly feel."

Mrs. Williams wept with pleasure, but knowing that her daughter's mind was not sufficiently strong to bear a discussion which would renew the melancholy she wished to divert, she fetched the gown, and was extremely happy in seeing Maria interested in the business of contriving and adapting it to its intended wearer.

A few days convinced Mrs. Williams, that Maria, from a sense of duty and affection, would persevere in the resolution of endeavouring to regain her lost serenity. Though the high opinion she had ever entertained of her daughter's understanding and rectitude, prevented her from being much surprised at the agreeable prospect of returning cheerfulness, the young lady was all astonishment at the effect of her own efforts. The aspect of every surrounding object in a few days amazingly altered; and the beauties which she supposed were banished from Everdon with the faithless Baronet, agreeably excited her wonder, by gradually emerging from the sombre veil of melancholy. She had given up every joy as lost; but on a second view could not ascertain the absence of any, but those tumultuary pleasures approaching to pain, which Neville's presence excited: and as these were the source of all her former misery, she resolved to exclude love, from whence they originated, from her future life, and to dedicate her heart to the calm enjoyments of friendship, filial duty, and benevolence.

Her admiration for her mother hourly increased; it rose to enthusiasm; nor could she forbear from often bursting into warm encomiums, which though uttered in the presence of Mrs. Williams, were too unpremeditated to look like flattery.

One day, after one of these spontaneous panegerics, the good mother tenderly checked her child's partiality, by observing, that she owed to adversity the little merit which she possessed.

"And did you," said Maria, "derive additional virtue from what nearly deprived me of every quality deserving praise?"

"Some minds," answered Mrs. Williams, "require the awakening voice of affliction, to rouse their energy, whilst the generosity and moderation of others appear most conspicuous in prosperity. Mine is of the former cast, and with regret I own, that the allurement of prosperity led me into errors, from which I was roused by what Gray finally calls, the stern rugged nurse of virtue."

"You have often," interrupted Maria, "promised me the history of your life."

"I have deferred a completion of that promise," answered Mrs. Williams, "from an unwillingness to depress your agreeable vivacity, but as it may now serve to recall your attention from your own sorrow, I will fulfil it."

She then began the narrative, which I shall present to my readers in the following chapters, not indeed exactly in Mrs. Williams's words, who often, through modesty; passed over her own merits, and in decent respect to the memory of the dead, extenuated the faults of one, who, whatever were his crimes, stood in a situation too sacred for severe censure.

VIII

“You have heard me,” said Mrs. Williams to her daughter, “mention my father with affection and gratitude. He was a clergyman more eminent for his learning and piety, than for the value of his benefices. As I lost my mother at too early a period for me to retain the least recollection of her; my education was conducted entirely under the directions of my father; who either not knowing, or not valuing the characteristic accomplishments of our sex, neglected every graceful polish, and initiated me into the severer studies, commonly confined to male pupils. He taught me the learned languages, and instead of permitting me to avail myself of the indulgencies commonly granted to our sex, he insisted that I should think justly, and reason correctly. My mind, under his tuition, acquired in strength, what it wanted in delicacy.

His life was a lesson of virtue, and his charity wore the amiable form of unbounded benevolence. The narrowness of his income indeed often restrained his liberal hand; but even to those objects thus apparently excluded, a number of little obliging offices, or at least the powerless wish, which as Johnson observes, is recorded in heaven, were extended. You are fond of poetry, Maria, perhaps you will not dislike to read a little manuscript I preserve with sacred veneration, which contains your grandfather’s sentiments upon a virtue, of which he now, I trust, reaps the reward.”

Ode to Charity.

1

Oh charity! thou radiant beam,
Reflected from that light supreme,
Creation’s guardian eye;
Best symbol of the Power who reigns
In perfect bliss, yet gracious deigns
To bend his pitying ear to sorrow’s lowly cry.

2

The heart in which thine ardour glows,
No more is chill’d by selfish woes,
Or feels unsocial joy;
Directed by thy light divine,
To griefs, which whilst they pain, refine,
To griefs which quickly end in bliss without alloy.

3

Such bliss the generous patron shares,
When rising at an orphan’s prayers
He vindicates his right;
Such bliss is o’er their bosom shed,
Who cheer with hope the sordid bed,
Where poverty and pain in deadly bonds unite.

4

Nor only with the affluent train,
Who open fortune’s golden fane,
Dost thou thy blessings share;
Alike to all thy votaries kind,
Where’er exists the feeling mind,
Thou giv’st soft pity’s sigh, and friendship’s soothing care.

5

If seated in life’s humblest vale,
Whene’er they check the slanderer’s tale,
They honour thy bequest;
On them thy purest pleasures wait,
When victors of revenge and hate,
They vindicate or aid an enemy distrest.

6

Thou dost a nobler system teach,
Than stoic virtues e’er could reach,
Or Pagan wisdom scan:
Diffusive, as the solar ray,
Which lightens all the ecliptic way,
Thy holy laws pervade, and fill the soul of man.

7

Oh! source of each connexion dear,
Of gratitude, of truth sincere,
Of candour, patience, peace;
Oh! worthy of the starry wreaths,
Which immortality bequeaths,
To crown thy hallow'd toils with joys that never cease.

8

When science dims her borrow'd fires,
When faith in certainty expires,
When prophesy shall fail;
Uninjur'd thou surviv'st alone,
Immortal as th' Eternal's throne,
While all the harps of heaven thy glorious triumphs hail.

When Maria had wept over this affecting memorial of departed goodness, Mrs. Williams proceeded.

"We lived in a romantic part of Yorkshire, which seemed even by situation secluded from the rest of the world. My acquaintance were almost wholly confined to my own village, and the companionable part of my own sex in it was very limited. You must rank in that number my esteemed Mrs. Herbert, who, to rescue her parents from impending want, had given up a lover whom she justly valued, and united herself to a man destitute of every recommendation, but the possession of wealth. Her name was then Anderson; she is fifteen years older than myself; but the disparity of our ages made her entertain a kind of maternal affection for me, and it is entirely to her

instruction that I owe every feminine attainment which I possessed in the early part of my days. Her life was rendered miserable by the brutality and ill conduct of her husband; and she has often said, that she was obliged to me for occupying many of her tedious hours.

“Another of my companions was Miss Letitia Thornville, the daughter of the Lord of the Manor, who, educated in all the pride and ignorance of feudal greatness, supposed Amelia Davenport, the parson’s girl, greatly honoured by the capricious marks of her uncertain favour: and so indeed, Maria, I then thought. All my little knowledge of dress and elegance, was derived from my visits at the Squire’s mansion; and in spite of my Roman and Grecian literature, these were too dear to the folly and vanity of a girl, not to be purchased at the expence, of what I should now call, cringing severity. While the fashions of London continued to be more interesting than the form of Helen’s veil, or the colour of the mantle which Andromache gave to Ascanius; I continued to accept every invitation with which I was honoured, and concealed the indignities which I knew my father would resent. But though Miss Thornville was frequently so kind as to make me a cap, or assist me in the alteration of a gown, after she had previously mortified me to the degree of humility which she thought necessary: my heart never felt more than a distant respect for her, while it glowed with the tenderest love for my worthy Mrs. Anderson. Yet I was concerned when Miss Thornville married a gentleman of the name of Brereton, who resided in London; and being by far the finest person I ever saw, must, I concluded, make her transcendently happy.

“My loss of a companion was soon followed by a real and deep affliction. My father, who had for many years suffered from the painful diseases incident to a sedentary

life, was attacked by a complication of disorders, which by their united efforts, threatened speedy destruction to a frame naturally vigorous, but debilitated by long and continued pain. The best medical assistance was procured. I need not mention my unwearied attention; it was no more than duty, gratitude, and love required. I was fixed to his bedside, and have at least the consolation of reflecting, that though I could not prolong existence, I smoothed the bed of death. Thirty years, my dear child, with all the strange contrariety of events produced in that period, have been unable to eradicate my love for his virtues, or my regret at his loss.

“He left me to all the miseries which an unprotected orphan, slenderly provided for, can feel. The sale of his library and effects discharged his debts, and I only inherited my mother’s portion of five hundred pounds for my future support. I at first sought an asylum with Mrs. Anderson. I could there have enjoyed that tranquil serenity into which violent grief gradually softens, had I not been a daily witness to the unkind treatment of her husband, who seemed to value her patience and gentleness no farther, than as it allowed him the unrestrained exercise of brutal ferocity.

“Compelled to quit my valued friend, or to behold her sorrows, aggravated by the cruel sarcasms with which unfeeling meanness loves to wound the virtues it cannot understand; yet ignorant where to hide my unfriended head, or by what means to make my little fortune adequate to my support, I was sinking under the load of perplexity, when Mr. and Mrs. Brereton came into the country on a visit to her father. I waited on her, and as she received me with great kindness, I ventured to make her the confidant of my distress. She seemed to pity me, and promised to consult her husband on some probable plan for my future

life. I called the next morning again, to know the result of this application. She then told me, with seeming satisfaction, that Mr. Brereton had entirely entered into her scheme, which was, that I should become an inmate in her family."

"We live," said she, "in style; you know I hate domestic management, and indeed our acquaintance is too numerous to allow me to dedicate my time to family duties. You shall undertake the direction of my houshold; I can rely upon your integrity, and shall be satisfied with your management. You shall be welcome to every accommodation which our house affords, and if your fortune proves inadequate to your personal expence, we will supply the deficiency. Besides" continued she, "Amelia, you are really handsome, and when we have removed your rural awkwardness, I do not think it at all improbable, but that you may make some fortunate conquest."

"Circumstanced as I was, Maria, I could not refuse this eligible offer. I knew Mrs. Brereton's temper too well, to think that she would make a dependant perfectly comfortable; but I flattered myself that the advantages she offered, would counterbalance this inconvenience. I was then unexperienced, and like all young people, annexed to the scenes with which I was unacquainted, the idea of superior felicity.

"I arrived at a splendid house in town, and in the capacity of Mrs. Brereton's humble friend, was introduced to the secondary pleasures of the great world.

"That situation which halts between the servant and the companion, is generally deemed miserable. Mine did not appear so at first. Mr. Brereton was uniformly civil, and his lady as little capricious as a superior benefactor, who is

not possessed of a liberal mind, can be. He was so kind as to enquire about my fortune, and finding that my property lay in the funds, remonstrated so warmly on the folly of not endeavouring to increase it, by the large premiums which he could procure me, if I would place it out on interest, that he soon persuaded me (then little conversant in money matters) to sell out, and to confide in his hands my only refuge from absolute penury.

"Soon after I had given this inconsiderate proof of confidence, I was alarmed by conclusive marks, that the income of the Brereton's was by no means equal to their expenditure. A difficulty of obtaining money for the round of daily expence, and repeated, though fruitless visits from importunate creditors, were too indisputable symptoms of falling fortunes, for me to turn my eyes any longer on the bright side of the portrait, or to consider Mrs. Brereton's splendid equipage, expensive dress, or fashionable society. As I really had an affection for her, and tenderly regarded two lovely children, of whom, as their innocent prattle could not interest their dissipated mother, I had principally the care; I felt more upon their account, than at the apprehension of my own destitute state. I reflected that I was able to procure my own subsistence, and endeavoured to reconcile my mind to a life of dependence."

IX

“I was one morning sitting in the dressing-room with Mrs. Brereton, when her footman informed her that the gentleman, to whom his master had been so frequently denied, had called again, and seemed determined to wait in the front parlour for his return. My friend appeared violently alarmed.”

“Upon my life,” said she, “this is the young merchant, who won a few thousands of my husband about a month ago. He is so immensely rich, that it is quite shabby for him to expect payment. How provoking, that fortune will ever be bountiful to those who do not want her favours. I am told he wishes to be considered as a man of fashion; nothing would so soon ensure him that appellation, as a willingness to play high, and an easiness in exacting his debts. I wish I could talk to him myself, but I feel too much fluttered. You, Amelia, are a professed orator; go and exert your rhetorical powers—plead—say—any thing; I know Mr. Brereton means to pay him; only just now it is a little inconvenient.”

“My concern for the poor lady could not prevent me from smiling at her desultory manner, and the whimsical idea that I could prevail upon an entire stranger to give up a claim to the amount of thousands, which though mentioned as a trifle by Mrs. Brereton, struck me as an immense sum. I reluctantly accepted the unpleasing commission, and upon entering the front parlour, for the first time beheld Mr. Williams.

“He soon learned, from my appearance and manner, the nature of my situation in the family; and as its morals were

well known to be not remarkably strict, he, without answering my excuses in justification of Mr. Brereton, addressed me in that gay style of passionate adulation, which I knew was always significant of licentious designs. My heart sunk with grief and terror: I was indeed secure from any immediate danger, but I considered the present as only a prelude to many subsequent snares, to which my dependent state, and the personal advantages I then possessed, would inevitably expose me. I thought of my father; of the honest indignation he would feel, if he knew the ungenerous insult to which his poor and unprotected orphan was exposed. The resentment which should have warmed my breast, yielded to the liveliest transports of grief, and I burst into a violent flood of tears.

“Your father was deeply affected. In deed, Maria, he possessed a compassionate heart, and a generous disposition. He was an instance of the fatal effects which a sudden influx of wealth generally has on an uninformed mind, when joined to easiness of temper and flexibility of principle. Mr. Williams was the uncontrouled master of his fortune and his actions, even before the legal age. He was surrounded by those base flatterers, who make their court to young men, by exciting in their minds those criminal desires which they themselves feel, but want ability to indulge. Initiated by these miscreants into an early course of dissipation, he had long, ’ere I knew him, acquired habits which he afterwards wanted resolution to renounce.

“Affected by the concern I shewed, Mr. Williams entreated my pardon, assured me he mistook my character, and offered to purchase his reinstatement in my good opinion, by a renunciation of his demand upon my friend. I coolly answered, that the plaudit of his own heart for having done a generous action, was a more noble and more certain reward than the praise of any individual. I

added, that after what had passed, his stay must be painful to us both. He made no answer, but bowed and withdrew.

“When I recounted to Mrs. Brereton what had passed, far from entering into my resentments, she congratulated me upon my good fortune.”

“You have made a conquest,” said she, “that promises to be advantageous to us both; I had foreseen that you would, for really you look divinely to-day. Manage it well, I dare say it will turn to your account.”

“Mrs. Brereton’s conjectures were in part right. After Mr. Williams had made several efforts to engage me in an illicit connexion, he thought proper to make honourable proposals. The only person to whom I could apply for directions how to act, was Mr. Brereton; and he found Mr. Williams’s friendship of too much consequence, to give any other advice than what would produce an immediate compliance.

“I was married. If ever, Maria, you enter into that sacred engagement, may different sentiments attend you to the altar. I felt neither esteem nor love for the man whom I made the arbiter of my fate. His past behaviour to me had not produced the former; nor was there any thing in his manner so peculiarly adapted to my fancy, as to excite the latter. I yielded to the persuasions of those around me; partly intimidated by the terror of poverty, and partly induced by a girlish wish to enjoy the splendor and affluence, which, ever since my residence in town, I had heard held out as the desideratum of our sex.

“Mr. Williams was anxious to justify his choice to the world, by giving every external advantage to my person and understanding. I yet think, with anxious regret, on the years which I passed in this giddy exaltation; when I was admired as a beauty, and applauded as a wit; when the

splendor of my appearance excited envy, and censure, under the mask of friendship, pretended to guard me from indiscretions, while it only sought to publish my faults.

“Numerous, I doubt not, were the opportunities I gave to exercise that unchristian temper. Rectitude of intention will not protect inexperience and credulity from many glaring errors. Fearful of losing my husband’s affections, which I was conscious that I held but by the slight chain of novelty; I did not dare to teaze him by applying to him for directions in any unpleasant predicament, in which I beheld myself involved. He expected that I should ever meet him with smiles, and constantly appear ready to engage in those scenes of amusement, which he chose to substitute in the place of domestic bliss and wedded friendship. How poor, my girl, is that woman’s boast, who is conscious that she rather gratifies the vanity, than charms the heart of her husband; yet this unavoidably was my lot.

“My correspondence with Mrs. Anderson, which had declined after my departure from the country, was entirely broken off, owing to some insinuations of the Brereton’s before my marriage; but our esteem for each other continued inviolate.

“I had been a wife about a year, when one morning I called at our bankers, to change a draft which Mr. Williams had given me, and was struck at perceiving in one of the clerks, the lover of Mrs. Anderson, whom, as I before told you, she renounced, to rescue her parents from poverty, by a mercenary marriage. He knew me, and warmly congratulated me upon my advantageous connexion.”

“But,” added he, smiling, “if madam you will excuse the freedom of the intimation, there is a person not far

from this house, who will be yet more interested in your good fortune."

"My inquiries led to a discovery, that he was now the husband of Mrs. Anderson, who resided in lodgings in the same street.

"I flew to my excellent friend, who held in her arms the son with whom you are acquainted, then but a few weeks old. I will not expatiate upon our mutual pleasure and surprise.

"She informed me that Mr. Anderson, on his death, left her in possession of all his fortune, upon condition that she never changed her state of widowhood. If she married, she was to forfeit all, but a narrow stipend. I had lost my parents," said she, "nor had I a connexion with any one, whose welfare was dependent upon my conduct. I felt a proud unwillingness to be obliged by the fortune of one, whose memory I did not esteem. The man, who in early youth had gained at once my admiration and my love, generously excused a breach of promise enforced by filial duty, and tenderly importuned me to partake of the humble competence he could offer, which mutual affection would, he observed, magnify to redundant wealth. Was there, my dear Amelia, any reason why, after sacrificing my youth to duty, that I should not now assume the liberty I enjoyed, of following the impulse of an inclination, which a variety of trials had exalted into rational esteem? I knew of none.

After having given to Mr. Anderson's memory the time which custom and decency required, I cheerfully resigned his fortune to his relations, and became my worthy Herbert's wife. You too, my dearest girl, are married. Pardon me, I must still call you by those endearing appellatives—equal happiness is, I trust, your portion."

“I could not give a direct answer to this affectionate appeal. My heart abhorred the language of insincerity, and prudence forbade the disclosure of matrimonial infelicity, even to the faithful bosom of confiding friendship. I gave only a general reply, and expatiated on the pleasure which I should feel in her society, and the advantages which I should derive from her instruction.”

“You forget,” said she, “that you are no longer Amelia Davenport. A husband claims a kind of proscriptive authority over the friendships of our sex. You cannot doubt my desire to be with you, but I will not indulge the pleasing hope, ’till I am assured that Mr. Williams does not consider inferiority of fortune as an objection in the choice of his wife’s associates.”

“On my return home, I was anxious to urge a request, which I considered as too reasonable to be denied; but your father’s countenance soon convinced me, that my expectations were fallacious.”

“The world,” said he, “is not ignorant of your situation at Mrs. Brereton’s; I have endeavoured to palliate that and your want of fortune, by urging the goodness of your extraction, and the gentility of your connections. You know this, and yet inconsistently wish to form a strict intimacy with the wife of a banker’s clerk. Surely you do not care how much you degrade me.”

“I endeavoured to plead gratitude for early obligations.”

“If,” continued Mr. Williams, “you feel yourself indebted to these people, discharge it to the utmost; you may command what sum you please. I do not wish you to remain burdened by pecuniary obligations.”

“I attempted to urge her uncommon merit, and observed, that no gratuity was capable of repaying

innumerable acts of uniform kindness; but your father's temper was not proof to my repeated applications, which appeared in the least to militate against his pleasure."

"I do not doubt," said he sarcastically, "the superlative excellence of those whom you honour with your affection. It is my interest, however, to forbid your having any intercourse with beings so superior to myself, lest it should lead to dangerous comparisons. I should have thought that your sense, I might have said your gratitude, would have complimented me with a cheerful acquiescence." In speaking these words, he angrily left the room.

"I remained silent a few moments, pensively contrasting the elegant apartment in which I sat, with the humble dwelling in which my happy, though despised friend enjoyed every pleasure which virtue, prudence, and mutual affection could supply. I envied an union in which correspondent fortune had left no opportunity for the reproaches of a haughty benefactor, and instead of reconciling my mind to my duty, I indulged every suggestion which could aggravate my distress.

"Too proud to adopt a clandestine intercourse, and fearful that my mind would be unequal to a parting interview, I had recourse to my pen, and copiously informed Mrs. Herbert of what had passed, and of my own painful sensations. I inclosed a bill for one hundred pounds, and begged that she would allow me to be sponsor to her son, and to accept that as a christening present. I will read you her answer, which I carefully preserved."

"Before I reply to your affectionate letter, permit me to return your liberal present. Should death, or any unforeseen misfortune, prevent us from making a provision for your godson, I shall commend him to your

care. Be his foster-mother; I shall with implicit confidence commit my orphan to your protection and benevolence.

"As my fears predicted the refusal which you have met with, I am glad that I did not indulge the hopes which your presence inspired. Mr. Williams has acted as became a man tenaciously careful of his wife's character; and I trust that your prudence will not permit him to complain that disappointment clouds that countenance which his disinterested attachment may expect should always wear the smiles of gratitude. Recollect, my dear Amelia, I will not wound your feeling heart by a more distant address, that we give up nothing but a pleasurable indulgence—our esteem must continue the same; and if the circumstances which at present separate us, should ever cease to operate, we may again enjoy a satisfaction which can only be gratifying when it is unblameable. 'Till then I shall remember you in my affectionate wishes and prayers; yours, I know will be offered with equal warmth for

MARY HERBERT."

"This worthy woman soon after accompanied her husband to Jamaica. He went in quality of agent to a gentleman, who had large possessions in that island. Fortune met them there with favouring smiles. Honest diligence and patient industry, in a few years procured them the blessing of competent independance."

X

I felt my separation from Mrs. Herbert too deeply, to be able entirely to conform to the sage advice which she gave me. I did not indeed complain; but frequently after spending the evening in frivolous uninteresting society, or on receiving some fresh proof that Mr. Williams's love had degenerated into indifference, if not disgust, a tear would steal in silence down my cheek.

"I dressed, visited, formed parties, and entered into the amusements of the gay world, with a hope of finding them interesting; but the peculiar texture of my mind was sensible of a void, which only some tender sentiment could fill. Every effort which I made to enjoy the pleasures of conjugal friendship, was ineffectual; and I could not discover in the crowd by which I was surrounded, any with whom I wished to form an intimate connexion. They seemed the flattering followers of fortune, or those common characters whom we never can elevate above the rank of acquaintance. Thus I spent my time in a manner unsatisfactory to myself; without deriving from my mode of life, either improvement or content.

"Ever since our marriage, we had kept up an intimacy with the Brereton. Mr. Brereton having entirely spent his fortune, was dependent on the gaming table, for the means of preserving an appearance. His first efforts with Mr. Williams in that science were, as I have already observed, unsuccessful; but fortune made him ample amends. I soon found that my husband's account of the events of the evening was but a recapitulation of losses.

Alarmed at the fatal effects of this propensity, I endeavoured to detach him from this ruinous folly, by every means I could devise. My endeavours were unsuccessful; a gloomy sullenness took place of that airy cheerfulness, which was formerly his chief characteristic; and a fretful impatience, when not immediately stimulated by the prospect of amusement, plainly shewed that he and reflection were enemies.

"As Mr. Williams was less solicitous to have me move in the vortex of fashion, I grew domesticated, and spent my time in reading and pensive meditation. Every circumstance plainly convinced me, that poverty was coming upon us with hasty strides. But she no longer assumed that terrific aspect, with which seven years before she hurried me into a marriage, which I did not cordially approve. I had experienced every pleasure dissipation could bestow, and conscious of their vanity, was eager to resign them. I longed to fly from observation and parade, to some peaceful obscurity, like that in which I spent my earliest years. Those personal attractions too, which had alarmed me with the apprehension of danger, seemed no longer to suggest any occasion of fear. I cannot say that time had paled the roses on my cheeks; but they had faded before their no less certain destroyers, late hours and constant festivity.

"I seemed possessed of that equanimity which cheerfully waits the contrarieties of fortune, when I perceived myself in a situation which predicted, that I should quickly assume the maternal character. A discovery, which would at my first marriage have given me infinite pleasure, seemed now only a source of more poignant affliction: and the sufferings of the innocent victim I was about to produce to misery and want, overcame all my philosophy, and sunk me into the deepest

dejection; whilst the gloom which had before enveloped my husband's mind, gave way to the wild starts of phrenzy.

"You was born, my love, under the most melancholy auspices. An execution took possession of our house, and compelled me to remove, as soon as I possibly could, to lodgings far more humble than those of Mrs. Herbert's, from which I had been interdicted. To increase the agony I felt, Mr. Williams had absconded, and I was ignorant of the place of his retreat. I had every dreadful consequence to fear from his remorse and despair, and no consolating hope to sweeten my cup of sorrow.

"Mr. Brereton, who foresaw, I might say accelerated, our fall, wisely avoided the troublesome applications of a decayed friend, by forging a quarrel with us, a little previous to the discovery of our insolvency. The cruel sarcasms which his lady bestowed on our distress, could only be equalled by the mean submissions with which he had flattered my prosperity.

"Our other friends, I mean acquaintances, acted as the followers of wealth commonly act, they pitied our affliction, but referred to each other the general task of relieving it.

"You wonder, Maria, how I supported these accumulated miseries. Be not surprised at my affection for you, for it is to you that I am indebted for life. I dreaded your birth as the superlative aggravation of my distress; but when I held you in my arms, I found you a blessing more invaluable than the wealth of the Indies. Your innocent looks softened the throbs of despair; they bade me exert every dormant faculty, and by connecting your existence with mine, rendered it valuable. I had now a

motive for exertion, and I found myself equal to all my trials.

“At last a wild incoherent letter from your father, convinced me of his safety, but disclosed a dreadful tale. He had been betrayed by the man in whom he had confided, was seized by a merciless creditor, and lodged in prison. The horrors of his mind at his new habitation, were described in all the nervous eloquence of high wrought grief.

“I took you in my arms, and flew to the dreary mansion. I was not without hope, that your father who had never seen you, might derive the same consolation from gazing on you which I had done; but conscious of his want of parental duty, it drove him to madness. He vowed that he could not support the sight of what he had so cruelly wronged, and threatened immediately to terminate his loathed existence. I will not distress you by dwelling on these horrors. My tears, my prayers, and my expostulations, at length roused him from his insensibility. Our child, said I, is at least so happy as not to know the fortune from which she has fallen. We will educate her conformable to her station, and the labour of our hands shall contribute to her support. Oh! do not aggravate our misery! we are already destitute! do not expose us to feel the widow’s and the orphan’s wrongs!

“Your father clasped you in his arms, and mingled tears with his caresses.”

“Will you never, Amelia,” said he, “teach this child to curse my infernal folly; never tell her that it was her father who reduced her to infamy and beggary?”

“I must first,” said I, “learn to reproach you myself. You shall never hear from me the language of complaint. I will forget the wealth which you intitled me to possess, and

remember only the humble state from which you raised me." He seemed softened at these words, and sighing, wished that he could reward my goodness.

"Delighted at hearing these expressions, I endeavoured to console him with the thought, that his aunt, Mrs. Arbuthnot, was rich, childless, and possessed of ample power to relieve his wants."

"Do not name her," answered he, you know we have disagreed, and she is obstinate and implacable in her resentment."

"I told him I thought highly of her benevolence, and obtained his reluctant permission to apply to her for relief.

"I found Mrs. Arbuthnot's disposition too much resembled the idea which my husband had formed; no arguments could reconcile her to her nephew, but she affected to pity my distress, and appeared deeply interested in your preservation. She offered us an asylum in her house, and promised to provide for our future support; but as I found the condition annexed, was, that I should be separated from your father, I declined the intended favour. I had shared his prosperity, and my soul revolted from the idea of forsaking him in his distress. She at last promised to use her endeavours to free him from confinement, and to use her influence in gaining him some permanent support.

The former was speedily affected. A conscientious surrender of all his effects, procured an honourable discharge; and as it now became the fashion to pity us, every one of our acquaintance crowded round us with offers of immediate aid, and projects for our future subsistence. I am loath to think that a knowledge of Mr. Williams's disposition accelerated these offers; yet when it was found that he retained, even in want, the pride

of independence, it seemed as if every rejected friend deputed others to share the praise of cheap generosity. Bred in affluence and ease, you will not wonder that he reluctantly hesitated, and nicely pondered every plan that was proposed, by which he might obtain a future subsistence. At last was discovered what the confusion in which his affairs were involved, prevented him from at first daring to hope; that after defraying every debt, there would be a small surplus of his property left, and as a testimony of their approbation of his conduct, his creditors permitted him to reserve his estate in the West-Indies, which now appeared to us an inexhaustible mine, though formerly, from its insignificance, it was over looked in the redundance of our possessions.

“Your father enjoyed this intelligence with a transport that cannot be described. He was now under obligations to no one, and he determined to leave England, where every object reminded him of his former opulence, and dedicate his future life to the improvement of his property. I begged to accompany him, but from motives of tenderness, he refused my request.

“You was,” he said, “just arrived at the most dangerous period of infancy; and he feared, lest your life might be sacrificed to the inconveniencies of a long voyage. He observed too, that after the excrutiating distress which I had undergone, I needed repose, and he wished me to accept Mrs. Arbuthnot’s offer, and continue with her until he had prepared a comfortable house for my reception, and ’till my girl’s strength seemed more adequate to the undertaking.”

“We were separated. Need I, Maria, describe to you the life I led with Mrs. Arbuthnot? you recollect that she was in the highest degree capricious and whimsical; it was utterly impossible to avoid displeasing her; but she was at

heart very much my friend, and her resentments were not lasting. In one thing only was she uniform, her dislike to Mr. Williams; to whose indiscretions, magnified by ill will, I was daily compelled to lend a painful hearing.

“In every letter which I sent to Jamaica, I entreated the welcome summons. I pleaded your strength of constitution, and my own impatience, to exchange a life of idle dependence for the active duties in which I wished to engage. I broke open Mr. Williams’s answers with eagerness, but still met a confirmed negative. At one time he was tired of the country, and determined to return; then he represented that one fortunate year would give him the competence which he desired. There was always some vague excuse, and some distant scheme held forth to amuse my anxious wishes.”

XI

“Nearly seven years thus past, each opening with hope, and closing with disappointment, when I received a letter from Mrs. Herbert, that determined me to adopt a plan, on which I had often meditated. She began in the tenderest style of renewed friendship, and informed me that they had been for some years acquainted with Mr. Williams, whom they had just discovered to be my husband. She advised me, if no very urgent ties detained me in England, immediately to set out for the western world. She hinted, that the solemn bond of marriage was only dissoluble by death; and that a husband’s domestic affairs were seldom conducted with such propriety, as when under the direction of a wife. To these prudent reasons she added her own anxiety to see me; she entreated that I would, upon my landing, immediately send for her, and she rejoiced in the idea, that she could now evince the regard she had ever felt for me, by correspondent actions.

“Conscious that there was some concealed motive which stimulated Mrs. Herbert to give this advice, I lost no time in preparing for my departure. Your aunt reprobated the scheme, as dictated by the wildest enthusiasm, and reproached the folly and ingratitude that madly surrendered a faithful friend and zealous protector, for a husband who had avowedly deserted me, and proved unmindful of every sacred duty. Her arguments could not dissuade me; I knew that love would urge an affectionate wife to the step which I resolved to take, and I should have felt ashamed to have perceived that principle was a less powerful stimulation.

“When she found me determined, she pleaded for your stay; and the arguments she used, awakened every painful conflict which maternal tenderness and divided duty could feel. Uncertain as to my own reception, I was unwilling to expose you to the cold attention, or yet more painful neglect, which would probably be my portion.

“From a hint in Mrs. Herbert’s letter, I expected to find Mr. Williams’s affairs in extreme disorder. Mrs. Arbuthnot promised to leave you amply provided for at her demise; and as I thought that I was not warranted to sacrifice your future welfare to my own fond wishes, I at length consented to a separation, the most agonizing that I ever experienced.

“Can you, Maria, remember our parting? you certainly must. You was torn from my arms. I screamed, and entreated for another look; it seemed the last I should ever take. During my melancholy voyage, my whole employment was to gaze upon your picture, or to commend my deserted child to that Providence, which seems peculiarly attentive to the sorrows of orphans.

“My kind friend hastened to me as soon as she was informed of my arrival. Worn by distress and fatigue, her consolations were remarkably soothing. I begged her to be explicit, and assured her that I expected fatal news respecting my husband.”

“His faults,” said she, “are no more than the common vices of the island. The planters, generally speaking, countenance each other in irregularities, at which an English libertine would blush. The redundant fertility of these tropical climes, and the bad habits which slavery introduces, are not favourable to the cause of virtue. The lord of the soil, accustomed to the mean subservience of those around him, who think themselves honoured by

being made the instruments of his crimes, soon overcomes every restraint of conscience, and pleads example to conceal, if not to extenuate his fault. Mr. Williams is less culpable than many others. But surely, Amelia, you have been blameably wedded to ease and indulgence in renouncing the matrimonial tie, rather than the enjoyments which your own country afforded."

"So ungenerous and fallacious an accusation, the source of which it was too easy to trace, increased my agony to a degree, almost beyond endurance. Mrs. Herbert endeavoured to mitigate the sorrows that overwhelmed my breaking heart. She readily admitted my exculpations, and strove to persuade me that patience and prudence might yet recall my alienated husband."

"He speaks of you," said she, "in a manner which convinces me that your character enforces his involuntary esteem. He endeavours to reconcile himself to his own conduct, by censuring the goodness which he cannot but admire. Conceal my intimations, and allow him to attribute your arrival to tenderness and regard. Soften the severity of your virtue; affect not to see, what, if known, is beyond your power to remedy. There is a blindness, equally favourable to charity and to peace. Vice, while it fears discovery, cannot be avowedly profligate; and virtue, while she preserves the candour, retains the dignity of her character."

"Such were the invaluable instructions of my friend, to which I strove to conform. Our first interview was at her house. It was agreed, in order that I might judge of her sentiments, that he should not be previously informed of my arrival. How did I dread this excruciating meeting? with transport, far beyond what the fondest lover could conceive, I saw my husband's looks equally express surprise and pleasure; and I heard him inquire after his

little girl, in the interesting voice of paternal tenderness. Agreeably to Mrs. Herbert's advice, I mentioned nothing of the past; my thoughts were all turned to my future prospects.

"The necessity of my presence was but too evident. I bore my separation from you with greater ease, as I felt myself daily discharging my maternal duty, even at the distance of several thousand miles. As I was convinced that I must reside in the island, I frequently resolved to send for you; particularly after Mrs. Arbuthnot, by dying intestate, had left you deprived of a present protector, as well as a future provision. But I was deterred by my fears; I felt alike unwilling to expose your constitution to the baleful influences of the climate, or your tender mind to be vitiated by the no less pernicious examples of pride, cruelty, and luxury, which is unhappily prevalent in a spot, where there is too great distinction in the human species.

"I superintended the concerns of my family, and by introducing a degree of order and oeconomy, I rescued from profusion that competence, which is now adequate to our support. My presence restrained open profligacy, and enforced at least the appearance of decorum. I have yet a sublimer gratification. During the long illness which preceeded your poor father's death, I had the inestimable opportunity of awakening reflection, of combating despair, of inspiring religious hope, and of elevating devotion.

"During this painful interval, in which I saw nature struggling with agony, anxious, yet unable to dissolve the conflict, Mrs. Herbert was my sole consolation. Did I say my sole consolation? as if those could be destitute of comfort, who, though their fondest hopes are blasted, can still listen to the cheerful voice of approving conscience. He at length expired; and had I acted a part different from what I did, it would have been difficult in my situation to

have avoided the censures of the world. They would have stiled grief, affectation; and composure, insensibility. I did not ask the opinion of others. My grief was as sincere, as were my endeavours to conceal it. For human frailties, which are more the effect of situation, than intentional depravity, shall I defame the ashes of the dead? His death-bed scene, when he bid me supply the duty in which he had failed, yet more endears to me his precious orphan; and I often think that his spirit, now free from the taint of error, has stood near me, and smiled with pleasure whilst I performed his last bequest.

"I have brought my narrative to a conclusion. It exhibits no uncommon portrait of the vicissitudes of human life. It teaches the importance of forming our early connexions with propriety, and shews the insufficiency of human foresight. The marriage that I thought would preserve me from poverty, was the means of plunging me into the evil which I feared; and it is to the friend, whose society was once interdicted as a degradation, that I owe the peace and independence which I now enjoy."

XII

I will now leave Mrs. Williams, proceeding not unsuccessfully in her plans of amusement and consolation, and return to Mr. Herbert, who, as my readers may remember, set off in the second chapter of this my second volume, to discover the cause of the dispute between Neville and Seymour.

Some days were unavoidably spent in inquiring for the Captain's lodgings; and when he had found them, he was informed that the young officer was gone into the country to attend his sister, whose disorder was increased to a degree highly alarming.

His curiosity, I could call it by a more laudable name, was however gratified as to the ground of the inveterate quarrel which Sir Henry had mentioned. The generous heart of Herbert glowed with indignation at hearing the dishonourable tale. To conceal it from Maria, would, he thought, be to participate in Neville's guilt. Her pure and refined soul must shrink with abhorrence from a man, who had degraded himself by such systematic guilt; and her gentle sympathetic temper would warmly interest her in a lady's wrongs. He was going to write to her, but recollecting their last conversation with more of grief than resentment, he considered that this intelligence would only be referred to the mean arts of a calumniator.

He was prevented from concerting measures with Mrs. Williams by a doubt, which only a delicate sense of honour could suggest. Conscious of the power of beauty, and sensible that his interest in Maria's happiness rose to a degree of which he had thought friendship scarcely

capable; he feared to ask his heart if he should have been as anxious to protect the sweet villager, if she had been less amiable and attractive. But though he could not exactly determine the state of his mind, that uncertainty prescribed certain rules of conduct, and made him determine rather to rouse Sir Henry to a sense of his crimes, than by an invidious recital of them, to prejudice Mrs. Williams yet more in his disfavour.

He took therefore the only step which appeared consistent with probity and candour. Being well acquainted with the Baronet's secret haunts, he soon discovered his retreat. I shall not describe the reciprocal transport which the friends shewed at this unexpected interview. Their feelings were mutually too warm to be long restrained within the bounds of civility. Roused by some pointed sarcasms against impertinence and officious curiosity, Herbert threatened to acquaint Maria with every particular relative to Miss Seymour; and their dispute had arisen to a very considerable degree of acrimony, when Mrs. Williams's messenger arrived; and the letter which he brought, threw Neville into such a state of agonizing frenzy, that Herbert's bosom felt too much pity to add to his affliction, by reproaches.

Sir Henry knew too well the rigid honour of the Oxonion, to suspect that he had artfully affected a discovery, at which he appeared no less surprised than himself.

Mrs. Williams's servant being interrogated, and having described the person of the officer who called at his mistress's, the morning preceding his departure, explained the means by which the unwished intelligence had been communicated.

For some weeks Neville varied alternately to the contrarieties of rage and stupor. He was tormented by perceiving how dearly he prized the blessing which he had lost; and he was driven to desperation at discovering the oblique path which had diverted him from happiness as well as virtue. Maria, roused by a sense of honour, duty, and principle, to bid him an eternal adieu, was infinitely dearer than the same Maria, when yielding without suspicion to the insinuations of deceptious love.

The concern which Mr. Herbert felt for this unhappy man, was far more poignant than what his libertine friends could entertain. His exalted notions made him keenly sensible of the misery of those who dare to deviate from the injunctions of duty. He considered him as sinking under the double load of disappointment and remorse; and from a hope that compassion for his less guilty partner in criminal indulgence, might have some share in awakening his present distress, he mentioned Miss Seymour’s declining health, and urged the necessity of endeavouring to procure her pardon.

Sir Henry’s mind, though reduced by despair to that abject and dependant state, that as Shakespeare observes, the smallest twine might lead him, yet retained sufficient vigour to protest against a matrimonial connexion with any one but Maria. To extenuate any apparent injustice to the other lady, he urged the vehement resentment which her family entertained; a resentment which he could almost affirm, that no concessions on his part would mollify. He protested that he had for some time abandoned every scheme repugnant to Maria’s honour; and conscious that he could not remain in England, his plan was to have married her, and then to have retired with his charming bride to some part of Switzerland, there to dedicate his

days to the admiration of her virtues, and the improvement of his own.

He conjured Herbert by their former friendship, and what he knew would have greater weight, by his concern for his immortal interest, to assist him in rendering this plan practicable. He would immediately execute his part of it; nay, he would even submit all his future conduct to the nice and discriminating eye of the stoical mother. There was nothing which he would not do; nothing which he would not promise, to obtain the idol of his heart.

Prevented from making these proposals in person, on account of Mrs. Williams's interdiction, whose power he thought it dangerous to provoke; and terrified also by the intimation of Seymour's lying in ambuscade, (for he did not credit the story of his visit to his sister; and 'till he had totally lost all hope of gaining Maria, he thought his life worth preserving) he conjured Herbert to be his emissary. The commission was unpleasing, but it was urged with so much earnestness, that Edmund reluctantly undertook it. But lest he should execute any rash plans in his absence, he informed him that his assistance was only conditional, and depended upon his abjuring all sinister designs.

Before he arrived at Everdon, Maria had recovered in a great degree, her serenity of mind. Her subdued distress had indeed given an air of langour to her appearance, and a pensive cast to her manner; but it was so restrained by prudence, and animated by fortitude, that she certainly never appeared so irresistibly charming.

Conscious of former impropriety, she discovered, upon Mr. Herbert's approach, a degree of confusion, which that gentleman, by whom no turn of her countenance was unperceived, construed into remaining resentment. In consequence of this he felt all that embarrassment which is

natural, when our efforts are unsuccessful in gaining the favour of those whom we esteem. Recollecting at length, that it was not his own cause which he came to plead, he endeavoured to silence regret, and mentioned with compassionate tenderness the dreadful state of Sir Henry's mind, and his impatient anxiety to procure her pardon.

"You may," said Maria, frankly, "assure him that I entirely forgive his designs against my peace. I hope he has not forgotten to supplicate the forgiveness of that unhappy young lady, whose severer wrongs require not only ample acknowledgement, but reparation."

"You mean Miss Seymour," answered Edmund; "but Neville's thoughts are entirely fixed on you. It is your reconciliation which he implores; your kind commiseration which he solicits. There is nothing which he will not do to obtain you; his offers are unequivocal and honourable. I once thought him incapable of a sincere attachment; I now confess I have wronged him, and am convinced, that if you should favour him with your hand, that you would bestow it upon a person deeply sensible of your excellence."

Maria threw her eyes upon the ground, and paused for a few moments; she did not debate upon the nature of her reply, but in what manner to express it.

"As I cannot but recollect my former folly," said she with a dignified air, "I do not wonder that Sir Henry supposes I will accept his offer; and the weakness with which I once strove to vindicate him from your just reprehensions, must be too well remembered, to permit you entirely to believe that I am not still the victim of fond credulity. I must, sir, wait 'till my future conduct restores me to your good opinion; but in the interim, I will request

you to inform your employer, that I am determined in my rejection."

Charmed at the firmness of her look, voice, and above all, her wish to regain his esteem, Mr. Herbert was going to protest his warm admiration of her person and virtues; but scorning to betray his trust, he again resumed the character of a pleader.

"I would not for the world, Miss Williams, attempt to deceive you. I must allow Sir Henry's past conduct has rendered him totally undeserving of your regard, and the greatness of your mind cannot, I know, be allured by any adventitious persuasions, drawn from fortune or rank. The only argument on which I build my hopes of success, is, that he sincerely loves, and will deserve you."

"I dare not," replied Maria, with energy, "trust to contingent virtues; nor can I plunge my soul in perjury, by swearing to love and honour a man, whose conduct I not only disapprove, but abhor. The tenderness which I once felt for him, confirms my determination; my heart is so ready to adopt the manners of those whom it approves, that it would be presumptuous in me to risk, not only my peace, but my principles, by such an incongruous union. These motives are irrefragable, even if I can forget what is due to Miss Seymour; and that Sir Henry, by marrying me, instead of expiating his former faults, would involve himself in the aggravated crime of deliberate perjury."

"He is secured from such a charge," answered Herbert, "by the inexorable resentment of the lady's family; who, after the public disclosure of her frailty, would not consider marriage as any reparation."

"And does she join in this opinion?" interrogated Maria.

Herbert confessed that the Baronet had not tried her sentiments, and he believed never would.

“At least,” said Maria, “I will not be the impediment. By all the wronged friendship which you sir once offered me; by all the tender esteem subsisting between our mothers; I conjure you to convince Sir Henry, that my mind is unalterably fixed. Tell him that he has my pardon, my pity, and my prayers; you may add, if you do not think the expression too strong, my tears; but my love is alienated for ever.”

“Blessings innumerable are the portion of him, on whom you bestow it,” exclaimed Mr. Herbert with a warmth which he could no longer conceal. “But dear and amiable creature! consider that this answer plunges an unhappy being into desperation, whom your society and example might elevate to virtue.”

“I must recur to my former argument,” resumed Miss Williams, trembling, “and secure my own. Let me entreat you to urge me no more. Your pleas do but distress me; they cannot extort my consent. I admire the warmth of your friendship, and I am an entire convert to your sincerity and honour. Do not, sir, abuse the power which you have over me; a power still stronger, from the recollection of my past suspicions.” As soon as she had spoken these words, she rushed out of the room.

Mrs. Williams, who had been an attentive auditor to the latter part of the foregoing conversation, observed, with no little degree of pleasure, that Mr. Herbert’s inclinations had severely combated his words during the debate. When Maria left the room, he continued in a fixed posture, struggling with an emotion, which he vainly endeavoured to suppress. At length turning to Mrs. Williams, whom he

but then recollected was present, he exclaimed, “Your daughter, madam, is an angel.”

“She is affectionate, conscientious, and sincere,” replied the delighted mother. “Her disposition, though gentle and placable, possesses a stability and energy beyond her years. Sir Henry would, I am convinced, reap nothing from further solicitations, but repeated refusals.”

“How unfortunate,” said Herbert, “that a mind so formed for confidence and love, should have its susceptibility betrayed by a villain’s duplicity. She must surely forswear a passion, which has proved so baleful to her peace, and entirely renounce the sex which Neville’s conduct has disgraced.”

“Time,” said Mrs. Williams, “must determine this. At present I have not the smallest grounds, whereon to form my opinion.” Mr. Herbert fetched a deep sigh, and respectfully took leave.

XIII

Mr. Herbert was not tardy in fulfilling the promise which he had given Sir Henry Neville, of informing him of the result of his application to Maria; but that wretched, disappointed, and unworthy man's impatience to know her determination, was so great, that he would have thought an envoy slow, that had been horsed upon the sightless coursers of the air. He was no longer the man of ease and address, the ornament of society, and the delight of all who knew him: nor was he, to descend to his private character, the artful libertine, exulting in his triumph over unguarded beauty. He was a miserable being, disgusted at the folly of vice, because it was unsuccessful; infatuated by the charms of that virtue, which he could not ruin; and caught in the net which he had spread for the destruction of others.

Though his fears had anticipated the refusal which Herbert announced, they had not prepared his mind to meet it with equanimity. He imprecated her pride, with those curses which were due to his own duplicity; and when the first storm of frenzy had subsided, he enquired if the mother had been the orator on this occasion.

"So far from that," returned Edmund, "she did not even enter the room, 'till her daughter had given a decided negative; and had you witnessed the firm tone, in which she expressed her determination, you would have been convinced by her composure, that you have nothing to hope."

"Will you persuade me," exclaimed Neville, "that she has renounced her former character? her temper was once

placable and compliant; whence is this newly acquired and stoical firmness? I will see her myself; I will trust my cause to no other orator."

Mr. Herbert endeavoured to persuade him to abandon the useless pursuit. He urged Seymour's threatened intervention, and recapitulated every argument that could convince him of Maria's unalterable resolution. At length Neville appeared to acquiesce, and affected resignation; he even resolved to go to London, declaring that he no longer wished to avaid his threatening opponent, as life, without Maria, was not worth a care.

The same morning on which Sir Henry declared that he would return to London, Herbert ostensibly fixed for a journey to Oxford. To confess the truth, neither of the gentlemen were sincere in their intentions. The Baronet wished to get rid of a companion, whom he considered as a restraining spy; and Herbert could not depend on the calmness which so rapidly followed the most extreme marks of rage. Everdon was indeed the spot, to which they both meant to direct their peregrinations.

As they did not exactly take the same route, Herbert arrived first at an inn, which lay upon the great road from the north to London, and was about fifteen miles distant from Everdon. As he stopped there in the evening for some refreshment, a hearse, followed by two mourning coaches, drove into the yard. A young gentleman, clad in deep mourning, alighted, and with difficuly assisted an elderly lady, attired in similar robes of woe, in stepping from the carriage. As they passed his window to go into the house, Herbert perceived them to be Captain Seymour and his mother.

A presentiment of the melancholy reason of their appearance, filled the breast of Edmund with manly

sorrow. He wished that it were possible for him, without intruding upon the retired sanctity of grief, to inform the mourners how truly he sympathized in their wrongs. He wished to give them the consolation, which he imagined a knowledge of the generous conduct of Maria, must impart. He regretted that he was too slightly acquainted with the unhappy family, to put in practice these instigations of philanthropy. Whilst he was thus musing, a chaise stopped to change horses; and though the gentleman who was in it, sat very back, as if to escape observation, he plainly recognized Sir Henry Neville.

He flew to the gate, trembling with rage, but a person yet more vindictive than himself, had already outstripped him; I mean Captain Seymour.

Neville perceiving himself discovered, alighted, and called for an apartment, to which he was immediately followed by the other two gentlemen.

Breathless with resentment, they stood for some moments gazing on Sir Henry, who in vain endeavoured to conquer guilt and shame, and to preserve a composed and intrepid countenance. He made repeated efforts to speak, but his faltering voice, not less faithless than his palid cheek, betrayed the emotion and terror of his soul. Whenever his eye glanced on Captain Seymour's habit, his bosom heaved with deep-drawn sighs, that seemed to issue from an over-laboured heart. At length he faintly articulated, "I know your business with me, name the time and place, and I will meet you."

"Meet thee, villain," exclaimed the indignant officer, "and dost thou think by an honourable death, to expiate thy repeated crimes? thy cowardice, thy perfidy, thy meanness, thy diabolical—but I want terms to express what thou art—a despicable wretch, unworthy of my

sword. Monster, give me back my sister. Off," said he to Herbert, who caught hold of his arm; "if you knew my wrongs, you would not restrain me."

"Let him come on," said Neville, I cannot fear a madman."

"Thou liest, villain," returned Seymour, "a straw would appal thee. Dost thou not fear? follow me—I will shew thee what must strike even thy callous heart. Canst thou, darest thou see my Eliza's breathless corpse, and my distracted mother? tell me, thou murderer of innocence, darest thou look upon thy victim?"

"He shall accompany you," said Herbert, seizing Neville's arm; "Yes, he shall see the destruction and misery which he has caused."

Sir Henry's resistance to his powerful assailants, was ineffectual; they forced him to the funeral apartment.

It was lighted in that solemn manner, which served to make the awful object it contained, obscurely visible. The coffin was placed at the upper end, and some female attendants, in deep mourning, sat at a distance, recollected and silent.

It seemed as if Captain Seymour's rage was meliorated into grief, on entering the room. He ordered the coffin lid to be removed; then after covering his face with his handkerchief, for a few moments he gazed upon the corpse.

"My poor Eliza—my dear lost sister— deeply sensible, when too late, of an error which only death could expiate;" exclaimed he, in incoherent accents; "yet thou art now at rest, whilst I—gracious God! Yonder stands her seducer. Villain, confess that this awful visage was once expressive of beauty and innocence!"

Herbert’s heart throbbing with indignation and pity, seemed as if it would burst from his bosom. To describe the sensations of Neville, is impossible. He leaned silent upon the coffin; his eyes were fixed, and his cheek bloodless.

“Thou mean deceiver; thou base betrayer,” continued the vindictive brother; “does this sight wring thy soul? to aggravate thy agony, know that she forgave thee— her dying breath conjured me to spare thy life. Thy punishment then shall be to live; to live in infamy, execrated by all who deserve esteem, even shunned by the loose associates of thy less attrocious crimes. Thou shalt bear a hell in thy own bosom here, and despair shall plunge thee into endless misery hereafter.”

Saying these words, he rushed out of the room to attend his mother, who having been accidentally informed that Sir Henry was in the same inn, had been seized with violent hysterics.

Neville, after rolling his wild eyes around the apartment, and alternately darting them on the once lovely victim of his treachery, now senseless and inanimate, hurried down stairs. Mr. Herbert followed him.

“Just heaven,” thought he, “if I, who am guiltless of this ruin, feel so deeply, what pangs must rend Neville’s heart?”

The dreadful shrieks of the unhappy Mrs. Seymour, and the hurry of the attendants running to her assistance, disturbed the stillness of the night. Sir Henry sat in a gloomy stupor; his head resting upon his hands. Herbert, with mingled resentment and compassion, gazed in silence upon him. At length, looking round with a petrific glare, the former discovered Edmund, down whose wan cheeks tears streamed in a copious torrent.

Neville started. “Go,” said he, “inquire after Mrs. Seymour—tell her I am distressed at her sufferings—I wish to know how she does—don’t delay—go, prithee go— and bring her son back with you.”

Mr. Herbert asked “what he could propose from another interview.”

Sir Henry replied, “that he had something important to communicate, and urged him to be speedy in his return.”

On his entering the suite of rooms occupied by the Seymour’s, he found the lady much recovered. She was supported by her son. Her fears for his safety had greatly aggravated the painful feelings which naturally rose in her mind, on knowing that the seducer of her lifeless daughter was their inmate.

Seymour readily accepted Mr. Herbert’s apologies for his intrusion. “The sensibility,” said he, “which you express for our misery, evinces a benevolent and worthy heart. I feel anxious to justify my conduct to you. The pride of injured honour, joined to my love for my lost sister, raised me, on Neville’s unexpected appearance, to a frenzy of rage. My mother and myself were accompanying the dear reliques, to deposit them in our family vault, when the wretch, whom I cannot name without indignation, broke in upon our designs. Did he come to insult our sorrow? you, sir, seem to be his friend, can you tell what brought him here?”

“A villainous design, I fear,” answered Herbert, “but no ways relative to your family. He wishes now to see you. Let me entreat you, Captain Seymour, to be calm; he has something important to communicate; he seems deeply affected.”

Mrs. Seymour threw her arms around her son. “My only child,” said she, “do not instantly break this agonized heart.”

Mr. Herbert assured the terrified parent, “that he would prevent any rash consequences.”

“I need no sureties, madam,” exclaimed the young officer; “an unexpected interview left me no time for recollection; but I now remember the arguments which first gave a check to my sanguinary designs, and I think of my solemn promises to you, and above all, Eliza’s dying adjuration still resounds in my ears.”

Here a violent scream, which evidently proceeded from Neville’s apartment, terminated the debate.

“He is dead, poor wicked creature,” resounded from all parts of the house.

Herbert flew like lightning to the room, where he had just left the miserable man; his fears had anticipated the horrid catastrophe. Sir Henry lay almost lifeless upon the ground, weltering in his blood; a pistol, the fatal instrument of destruction, was still grasped in his hand.

A surgeon was immediately summoned, and his wound, upon examination, was pronounced mortal. During the few hours he continued to exist, his terrified attendants shuddered at his agonies. One moment he called on them to remove Miss Seymour’s corpse; and another to bring Maria Williams; then screaming out in torments yet more excruciating, he called for some friendly hand to give him instant death.

A few minutes of comparative ease and recollection, preceded his departure. Herbert, who never stirred from him, conjured him to employ that interval, in testifying his penitence, and desire of reconciliation with the Seymour’s.

It was not judged prudent that the mother should personally express her pardon, lest the effort should renew her suffering; but the Captain, who felt even his resentful heart soften into commiseration, communicated it with his own.

Sir Henry, then turning to Herbert, confessed that his intended visit to Everdon, was designed to terminate in the possession of Maria. If persuasion failed, force was to have been employed. “Implore,” said he, “for me, that angel’s pity and forgiveness; tell her, that even in these dreadful moments, her image is the only solace of my soul.”

“Oppressed by infamy, and galled by remorse, was it possible,” continued he, “that I could bear to live. You called me coward, Seymour; I feared to meet you, because I had injured you; but you see I dare to die.” Then pausing a few moments, “Say again,” exclaimed he, “did Eliza forgive me?” Seymour bending over him, confirmed the assurance, that long ’ere she breathed her last, every resentful thought was entirely subdued.

“Great God!” said Neville, gasping for breath, “whither am I going, Herbert?—I have been rash—desperate—is there any hope—any mercy, ah!—what no mercy for me—Speak,” continued he, convulsively, wringing the hand of his pitying friend; violent faintings succeeded, and he expired in inexpressible horrors.

A dreadful proof that neither external advantages, nor even the possession of agreeable or brilliant intellectual qualities, can secure happiness, if virtue and integrity are not resident in the mind. Guilt, even when triumphant, can never know repose; but when to the worm in its own breast, disappointments and misfortunes are added, it will

generally fly for relief to that despair, which seals its condemnation.

XIV

From scenes so full of terror, I will with pleasure conduct my readers back to Everdon, to shew the effect of compassionate sorrow upon the mind of innocence.

Mr. Herbert was busily occupied in performing the last duties to Sir Henry's remains, and in yielding every assistance in his power to his surviving relations, who were overwhelmed with consternation at his dreadful catastrophe. He however found leisure to send to Mrs. Williams a faithful narrative of the event. Tenderly anxious to preserve Maria's peace, he entreated that the shocking particulars might, if possible, be concealed, lest the tidings should severely pain her susceptible heart.

Mrs. Williams thought differently; she considered fortitude as absolutely necessary in the catalogue of female virtues. Abhorring duplicity, and unwilling to subject her own veracity to the dread or inconvenience of future discovery; after having prepared her daughter's mind, by a few pious reflections, she delivered to her the letter.

On perusing the shocking narrative, commiseration and horror were blended in her face; but gratitude was the first sentiment that her lips expressed. She looked up with humble resignation to heaven, and blessed the over-ruling Providence, that had, by this dreadful expedient, rescued her from destruction. Her tears then flowed for the unhappy man, whom shame and despair had violently driven from a life, which the smiles of youth and fortune might have endeared. Yet even the first expressions of her

grief, seemed more to resemble the benign philanthropy of pitying charity, than the stormy anguish of regretting love.

Sorrow, thus decently circumstanced, and guided by such proper restraints, becomes indeed commendable. It exalts, instead of weakening the faculties of the soul. No peevish complaint; no querulous enquiry presumed to arraign the merciful, yet severe dispensation. She did not even permit her fancy to paint the happiness which she might have known, if Sir Henry's agreeable qualities had been equalled by the goodness of his heart. But thankful that a timely discovery had rescued her from his artifice and her own credulity, she determined, that if at any future period, a murmuring thought should dare to invade her breast, to recollect this singular preservation, and to arm her soul with resignation and gratitude against contingent evils.

Mrs. Williams contemplated her daughter's conduct with admiration. Acquainted with every sentiment in Maria's mind, she saw no danger to apprehend from the composed and gentle melancholy, which perhaps a susceptible heart could not in her situation avoid. She trusted that time would restore the lovely and enchanting cheerfulness of youth, and felt satisfied that the tempest which threatened to wreck her peace, had subsided.

Maria spent much of her time in her bower, which covered with early woodbines, reminded her of the return of spring; and its agreeable concomitant, the return, of Mrs. Pierpoint. She was impatient to listen to the delightful recital of the felicity which she had enjoyed; nor was she without hope, that the pitying tear of friendship would flow over the melancholy narrative, that told the ruin of her dearest hopes.

Charlotte, since her assumption of the matronly character, had been a very remiss correspondent; and the few letters which she had written, could only be styled short and affectionate. The free vivacity which was formerly the chief characteristic of her epistolary manner, had entirely disappeared. But Maria, who now thought that the plaintive song of the nightingale was preferable to the lively carrol of the lark, was not displeased at the alteration; which, as she could not doubt her friend's happiness, she ascribed to Mrs. Pierpoint's sympathetic participation in her misfortunes.

After various delays, the new married pair arrived at Mr. Raby's, whose impatience to behold his daughter, was only equalled by that of her lovely friend. But from fatigue, or some unaccountable cause, the countenance of the fair bride did not exhibit a striking portrait of connubial felicity. This was the more astonishing to Maria, as the Major's high spirits plainly proved that he was perfectly well and happy. Mr. Raby, much affected by his daughter's dejection, repeatedly called upon her to be merry, and in order to enliven her, concealed his own feelings under the appearance of redundant mirth. Every jest was however unsuccessful, and seemed only to spread a deeper gloom over her mournful face.

As it was impossible to obtain a private conversation that evening, Maria was forced to suspend her friendly anxiety 'till her next morning's call. She was going to open the dressing-room door, with all the ease of intimacy, when the noise of an altercation, too loud to be amicable, made her consider whether company would be agreeable. Whilst she was debating how to act, she heard the words, folly, ignorance, city breeding, and the jest of every body, uttered by the husband; while Charlotte's tongue, equally voluble, and in rather a higher key, banded back pride,

poverty, and ingratitude. Before Maria could determine what to do, something was said relative to complaining to Mr. Raby: to this the Major replied, “With all my heart, and be sure do not forget to mention, amongst my other faults, that I married you out of pity to your tender sensibility.”

As he approached the door, in uttering these words, Maria found that retreat would be impossible. In passing her, he assumed his usual air of gaiety.

“Your poor friend, Miss Williams, said he, “is a little indisposed this morning; you have been so long acquainted, that you must know the disorders to which she is most subject, and can probably administer relief.”

Charlotte met Maria with the bitterest lamentations against the cruel inhumanity of her husband’s conduct. Her charge consisted of three points; that he neglected, contradicted, and laughed at her. The first might be endured, particularly in London, where she was surrounded by pretty fellows; but the two last must, by a woman of spirit, be deemed intolerable. She knew that her desires were not unreasonable, for her father had always indulged them, and it pierced her very soul, to think that the man, whom she had voluntarily selected to receive every obligation which she could bestow, who was bound by nature to take care of her, had infinitely less tenderness for her than her father. If, indeed, the Major’s opposition appeared to be dictated either by reason or affection, she might possible be conquered by argument, or won by gentleness; but, “Madam you shall,” or “Madam you shall not,” was language which she never would submit to. Yet the most aggravating circumstance of all was, that when he had urged her temper, (for she hated disguise) to that degree that she was ready to say, and to do a thousand ridiculous things, he would assume an easy air, wonder

what disturbed her, and generally stept out to invite company to dinner, by which means he compelled her, at least, to conceal her resentment, and perhaps, by the time of their friend's departure, his agreeable deportment during their stay, had entirely disarmed her anger, 'till he again roused it by some fresh provocations.

"Could you believe," continued she, "that though he was so entertaining yesterday evening, he had quarrelled with me all the way from London, only because I said my next new chariot should be exactly like Lady Jane's. And this morning, when I was almost determined to forget his ill usage, and be good humoured, he told me that my appearance was ridiculed at the birth-day. What a malicious and false intimation; he knows that I was complimented as one of the best dressed figures in the room."

"But as these differences are not relative to essentials, why, my dear," said Maria, "will you dispute about them?"

"You are a novice," answered Mrs. Pierpoint, "it is impossible not to support our own opinion, when we know that it is right, and that our husbands only oppose us on purpose to vex us. Besides, were I wrong, he ought to yield the point; let him remember the fortune which I brought, and the disinterested preference I shewed to him. I surely might expect all tenderness, and indulgeance; but I am resolved that my father shall know all."

"Can you, my dear," exclaimed Maria, "resolve upon so rash a step? would you murder his peace, by confessing your unhappiness in a connexion, from which death alone can free you. I would not pain you for the world; but you must remember that Major Pierpoint was not his choice."

"I cannot forget my own partiality," returned the young wife, "as my worthy husband every day has the gratitude

to tell me that I must forgive him a little indifference, because I did not leave him an opportunity of learning to make love. But I have yet sufficient spirit to retort, scorn; I feel ashamed of tenderness or complaint, and from this moment he shall know that I can hate, despise, and torment as well as he himself."

Maria was dreadfully affected at these expressions. To be in a continual state of warfare; to be bound to live with a person whom she hated and despised; what affliction, what misery could equal so deplorable a situation? on her return home, she told her mother all, and after execrating the Major's ungenerous conduct, dropped a pitying tear over her unhappy friend.

"True, my dear," said Mrs. Williams, "a susceptible mind, that placed its felicity in domestic harmony, must feel exquisite anguish on discovering its partner's unworthiness; but there are hearts of a different texture, and minds that pursue other objects. Notwithstanding Mrs. Pierpoint's passionate complaint, I will venture to affirm, that she will never fall a victim to conjugal sorrow.

"You know I love to give you my undisguised sentiments. I do not think the characters of either Mr. Pierpoint or his lady are likely to be improved by a commerce with the world. They are both airy in their manners, and uncertain in their tempers. You know I always thought the ruling passion in your friend's mind, was vanity, and to this I ascribed what she called love. It now, I perceive, takes a different turn, and she wishes to be thought a woman of the world. Disposed to imitation, she will naturally adopt all the habits which promise to facilitate her assumption of that appellation. Indifference and caprice are amongst the prominent characteristics of this inconstant age; and she decides too hastily, and reflects too little, to perceive that these are dangerous

errors. It is not six months since her imprudent and romantic attachment urged her to marriage; yet she already consoles herself for the negligence of this adored man, with knowing that she attracts the attention of a fluttering tribe of insignificant beaux. Her reason for hating, despising, and tormenting her husband, is, because he said that she was ill dressed. I think the Major's behaviour to her is very unjustifiable; for to make his wife an object of ridicule, is a meanness to which a man of sense and honour would scorn to stoop. But he must possess uncommon merit, who can preserve affection and gratitude for a person, who so plainly discovers the inconsistency and pertinacity of her own disposition.

"I have ever considered your Charlotte to be the woman from whom Pope drew his general idea of our sex, and thought that in order to sketch her mental portrait, we should

"Dip in the rainbow, trick her off in air;
"Chuse a firm cloud before it fall, and in it
"Catch, 'ere the change, the Cynthia of the minute."

"Parental indulgence greatly added to this incertitude. It is possible that a very judicious husband might, if he had fixed on a retired life, have given stability to her conduct; but with Pierpoint it is impossible. I fear she will learn nothing of the world, but its vices, which she will engraft upon her own follies."

Maria, at her next visit to the Manor, found her friend in a very different humour. She was surrounded by a circle of country ladies, to whom she was dictating fashionable dresses, and retailing fashionable scandal. With all the non-chalance of conscious superiority, she expatiated on the elegant amusements of the metropolis; pitied poor lady

Twaddle, against whom the Earl, her husband, has just commenced a crim. con. process; and spoke of Lady Jane Bellmour's having an execution in her house, as a circumstance which gave an eclat to her character. Mrs. Pierpoint thought herself extremely happy in this grand display; but her auditors had prejudices of their own, and felt unwilling to pay any great deference to one whom they used to consider as their inferior. 'Tis true that they borrowed her patterns; but in return affected to be scandalized at the familiarity with which she talked of her conversations and male visitors.

Mr. Raby, though he liked his daughter's wit, was offended at her ridiculing his house and furniture; but above all, at her declaring that the country had nearly killed her with ennui, which was a disorder he had never heard of.

Her husband, who was ready to faint with confusion, at hearing her discuss polite topics in inelegant language, had no other consolation than a half confidence in the ignorance of the company.

The astonished Maria took leave with the rest, and after relating to her mother the fashionable conversation she had just heard, expressed her satisfaction, that her situation secluded her from a world, which strongly excited her contempt and abhorrence.

"Content," answered Mrs. Williams, "is so amiable a virtue, that we are pardonable, if we suffer an attachment to our own station, to lead us to a degree of prejudiced partiality. Yet we should be careful of involving any condition of life in indiscriminate and general censure. Nor are you an adequate judge of the manners of the great, because you have seen a specimen of their vices in Sir Henry Neville, and their follies to day exemplified in

Mrs. Pierpoint. The behaviour of the former was truly agreeable, but unfortunately the graces were engrafted upon a bad heart; and the latter is but an awkward copy of a character, which is unpleasant in the original. She imitates its shades, but has not the art of preserving its excellencies.

“Folly and vice, my child, are the growth of every age, country, and station. They preserve their nature, but vary their appearance according to the soil in which they vegetate. What in the clown seems gross and brutal, wears in the gentleman a more refined exterior; and the consummate art of the courtier, is only cunning in the rustic. When I say that mediocrity of fortune is most favourable to virtue, I only give it the praise which must naturally result from its being less exposed to temptation. Honesty, fidelity, and gratitude, often exist in the meanest cottage, and honour, generosity, and elevation of sentiment, as frequently mark the man of exalted rank. The Supreme Being, who discriminates our merit according to our positive, not our negative qualities, will honour those with the most transcendant rewards, who have withstood the severest trials.”

XV

Everdon grew every day more horrid in the eyes of Mrs. Pierpoint; and as this was the only subject upon which she and her gay spouse intirely agreed, her determination to quit it may be adduced as an agreeable proof of connubial complacency. But unhappily a quality called taste, might safely contest, nay, justly claim, the wreath which duty presumed to arrogate.

This, in the lady's mind, was a new faculty, or at least, a very highly improved one. A very short period had elapsed, since with exuberant spirits she partook of all the enjoyments, which a walk in the meadow, a moon light ramble in the wood, a dance upon the lawn, or a gallop after the fox hounds, afforded. And could she have dared to be ingenious, they would still have given her the highest pleasure; but as she fancied that they were ungenteel; and as she knew it was fashionable to find fault with every thing, she employed her wit to ridicule what her caprice compelled her to relinquish.

A real connoisseur may be forgiven, if he sometimes appears fastidious; but to pretend to discover defects, without having a soul to relish beauties, is one of the most despicable pretences of affectation.

The poor father strove to please, and as every thing appeared to him much the same as it used to be, he wondered why his dear Charlotte should so constantly disapprove. Tired at finding all his efforts to give pleasure prove unsuccessful, he no longer opposed their departure; and Mr. Pierpoint and his lady set out on a tour to the lakes: for though Charlotte professed to despise rural

scenery and rural pleasures, she had no objection to an excursion which had in view a fashionable object.

Maria's regret at her departure was by no means so poignant as on their first separation. She too plainly saw the alteration in her manners and sentiments, to hope to preserve an intimacy. She gave a sigh indeed over the dear companion she had lost, but felt consoled for her double disappointment in love and friendship, by recollecting the uncommon blessing which she enjoyed in her mother.

I have left Mr. Herbert for some time, and am desirous to introduce him again to my reader's notice.

After performing every duty which the Neville family required, inclination would have hastened his steps to Everdon, but he felt it impossible to appear before Maria in any other character than that of a lover. He wished not to wound her delicacy by a premature address; and he recollected that her mother had mentioned time as the restorative of cheerfulness, and the moderator of distress. Determined to try its lethean qualities, he returned to Oxford. During his absence, he kept up a punctual correspondence with Mrs. Williams; and when a rheumatic attack deprived that lady for a short time of the power of writing, Maria, at her request, assumed the pen.

I never suspected that my heroine possessed very extraordinary epistolary powers; on the contrary, I should have supposed that ease, delicacy, and simplicity, were all the advantages which her letters could boast. But Mr. Herbert, who really was a sensible and well informed man, discovered in them all the wit of a Sevigne, and all the learning of a Dacier.

Filial piety shortened the period of his voluntary banishment, and drew him from his academic bower. His

mother’s weak and decaying state, called for his presence, and he flew with grateful affection to

“———Rock the cradle of reposing age,
“With lenient art extend a mother’s breath,
“Make langour smile, and smooth the bed of death:
“Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
“And keep a while one parent from the sky.”

They who can peruse these fine expressions of domestic tenderness harmonized by the sweet numbers of “the Swan of Thames,” without feeling in their bosoms the throb of approbation, will consider Mr. Herbert’s application of them to his own conduct, as the result of either folly or hypocrisy; particularly when it is known that he laboured to reillume a lamp that had burnt near seventy years; and was now the only bar to his unrestrained possession of a handsome fortune. Some of my fair young readers too, who are already enamoured with the windmills of modern Quixotism, will blame me for exhibiting the portrait of my hero, engaged in the common duties of domestic life. They will tell me, that a fairer field for reputation lies before me, that I should have given him the gloss of chivalrous honour, or the sacred flame of liberty; either of which would have added elevation and enthusiasm to his virtue, and rendered him much more the object of general admiration, than his administering to the wants, excusing the weaknesses, and mourning over the infirmities of age.

In my reply to these fair critics, I shall inform them that I am a member of a little book society, and constantly peruse every new publication, from whence I acquire my knowledge, not only of the politics, but the morals of the world. By these I discover, that one general spirit of philanthropy, honour, liberality and freedom, is gone

abroad; and I congratulate my own good fortune in living at a time, when all public virtues seem so well understood and practised. I even fancy myself an inhabitant of old Rome, and doubt not, that if the modesty of our eminent men would permit their actions to be published, we should have examples of disinterested patriotism, which would throw the Horatii, Decii, Fabricii, and Cincinatii of former times, quite into the shade.

But after indulging these glowing raptures, whilst I drink my tea, I take up a less classical production called a news paper. I there read, to my no small astonishment, of Right Honourables being seized at gaming houses, in company with notorious sharpers; of assertors of the rights of men evading the rights of creditors; of patriots who gain immortal honour by combating oppression, yet unluckily are absolute bashaws, wherever their influence can extend. These discoveries somewhat check my national exultation, and notwithstanding I do not pique myself upon singularity, yet I cannot help thinking, that in proportion as public virtue, or at least what passes current for it, flourishes, private goodness declines.

Those actions that pass before the world's eye, are equivocal: they may proceed from the sublimest motives, or they may be the offspring of vanity. We all act and speak well, when in the presence of those, whose esteem we are anxious to acquire. Nothing is easier, than by a flowery harangue on a popular subject, to influence the passions, and extort the applause of a prejudiced audience. But I would follow the man who thus speaks and acts, to his family. I would see him, when, free from the restraint of observation, his character assumes its natural aspect. Is he still the kind benevolent philanthropist? are there no latent marks of pride, tyranny, and cruelty? is he yet conscious that he is surrounded by fellow creatures,

capable of feeling ill usage, and detecting folly? Should an affirmative be the welcome reply, I will thenceforth give him my hearty plaudit, and cheerfully subscribe to the sincerity, as well as to the superiority of his character.

I know there are a sufficient number of originals possessed of this comprehensive merit, to justify my ascribing it to Mr. Herbert. But as it seems chiefly necessary for a rank in life, above that in which I have placed him, as the principles of government are well understood, and the cause of liberty and philanthropy need no additional defenders; I thought that in this speculative and declamatory age, a practical, instead of a theoretical reformer, would be a novel, and not unpleasant character.

So much for my female politicians and philosophers. To such of my readers who have escaped this fashionable infection, I would recommend a cautious doubt of that merit, which appears to obtrude and force itself upon their regard. There are now neither dragons, enchanters, nor giants, for these zealous night-errants to combat. The evils most dangerous to the damsels of the present age, lurk in the bosoms of their preten ed champions; and the drawcansir who sallies forth to attack the vices and follies of the world, should at least be careful that he does not make war against his own household.

XVI

Those readers who have passed over the sage and laborious reflections with which I concluded my last chapter, will be happy at seeing me in this, resume the narrative.

Mrs. Herbert's recovery, left her son's mind at leisure to indulge that tender passion, which when fixed on a worthy object, and unembarrassed by vexatious circumstances, forms the most agreeable reveries which the imagination is capable of enjoying.

Every successive interview with Maria, confirmed his high idea of her excellence, and increased the ardency of his wishes, to gain a heart which he judged invaluable. The plainness of his disposition rendered him averse to constraint and disguise, and urged him with blunt simplicity, to avow a passion which was at once his pleasure and his pride. But though he read in Mrs. Williams's eyes, an entire approbation of his pretensions, Maria's reserved and cautious pensiveness, seemed to indicate a confirmed resolution of repressing every hope that had more than friendship for its object. He trembled to offend her by an open avowal, and yet feared to be punished by a deprivation of that esteem, with which he was now favoured. The thousand respectful attentions which his heart hourly dictated, did but recall to Maria's mind the assiduities of a man, who once appeared like Herbert, clad in the robe of honour. She could not think that a person, who knew her former folly, could have any other design than to reconcile her to herself. She praised, with a sigh, the generosity of such an intention, and with

regret reflected, that she was unworthy the affections of a judicious and considerate man. Such, on a nearer appearance, the Oxonian appeared. Whatever, on a cursory view, seemed odd or ungraceful, on a more intimate acquaintance, lost its singularity.

She found that he possessed great good sense, and much literary improvement; this, enlivened by a characteristic view of humour, rendered him an agreeable and instructive companion. His attentions to his mother placed him in a still more elevated point of view; and his behaviour to his domestics, corresponded with this amiable conduct, and seemed equally expressive of benevolence and urbanity.

On his first arrival at Everdon, he was so affected at the story of Nelly Waters, that he procured her lover's discharge, and by setling a small annual pension on the old woman, rendered the young couple's future prospects comfortable.

Mr. Raby, since his daughter's visit, had fallen into a melancholy and dejected state of mind. Herbert frequently devoted a few hours to the entertainment or consolation of the forsaken old man, and won, from his gratitude, the sincere confession, that he found from a stranger the attention and comfort, his only darling indulged child neglected to give him.

Nor were these the only instances of his philanthropy. Every one who knew him, could tell of some little service which his good nature had agreeably rendered them; and Maria never heard his name mentioned in company, without somebody apostrophizing, "Ah! that is a friendly honest fellow."

She wondered at first how he came to escape the detraction which usually follows merit, and could give no

better reason for his popularity, than that though very vivacious in his conversation, he was a professed enemy to slander and personal ridicule, and to that wit which is founded on sarcasm. Every one knew that their character was safe in his hands; his own conscience never led him to suspect the worst of others, and when candour refused the vail which charity required, his indignation was rather pointed at the vice, than the vicious person. To this was added, an unassuming propriety of behaviour. He never appeared to arrogate more virtue, or more wisdom than his associates. In fact, he was rather in the habit of doing good things, than saying fine ones.

Esteem in Maria's mind soon rose to admiration. Void of any other design than that of securing his friendship, and unconscious of her own power, she felt an awkwardness in his company, which originated from conscious diffidence. She never so highly valued the literary instructions which she had received from her mother, as now. Yet Mr. Herbert's superior knowledge, made her think her own indigested and superficial. She wished to penetrate into the depths of those sciences, over which she had before thrown a cursory eye. She at last resolved to request Mr. Herbert would undertake the task of her instructor. This he accepted with a transport, which cannot be described. The new character made their interviews still more frequent, and Mrs. Williams, who had long been fully acquainted with Mr. Herbert's sentiments, perceived with pleasure that her master's merit was a very agreeable and frequent subject of the fair pupil's conversation.

That gentleman, soon after his mother's recovery, had discovered to Mrs. Williams his admiration of her child. But when she expressed her satisfaction in the warm terms of transported pleasure, the mind of Herbert, which was by

no means deficient in delicacy and susceptibility, foresaw a danger to the dear girl's peace, from a proposal so strongly seconded. Like generous Osmyn, he knew that marriage would make him wretched, if it made not his Zara happy; and he entreated, nay, extorted a promise from the good mother, that she would not only keep his secret in her own bosom, but that she would avoid saying any thing in his commendation, or even dropping the most distant hint, that she should feel satisfied at their being united. "You, madam," said he, "will excuse me, when I own that I have a whimsical jealousy of your influence over Maria's mind. I know filial duty would induce her ready compliance with any proposal that has your sanction: but though all my hopes of happiness are centered in obtaining her, I should be wretched, even in her society, if I imagined a latent reluctance rendered her less happy in the union than myself. I must be certified that I owe her hand to herself alone, and as you are the only rival I dread, you must suspend your influence."

Mrs. Williams, smiling, promised neutrality. "But perhaps," said she, "you will not be displeased if I occasionally give you a little information of the progress you make in my daughter's esteem."

This offer was gladly accepted, and at various times fulfilled. A lover who had less diffidence, would have felt exceedingly elated with the intelligence which he frequently received; but he saw through different optics to those generally used by modern Corydons. They magnified the lady's merits, and diminished his own.

While Maria and her adorer remained thus circumstanced, the world, which has long been possessed of predictive powers, not only discovered their latent affection, but even sealed their marriage contract, and fixed their future plan of life. Her young acquaintance

frequently charged her with her supposed attachment, and urged her, by an absolute avowal, to confirm the opinion which they were determined to entertain. She answered these attacks with that firm positive denial, which she thought most adapted to impress on them an idea of her resolution to spend the remainder of her life in a state of blessed singleness; but whether, through the incredulity of her auditors, or through somewhat suspicious in her own manner, Maria's endeavours to convince them of her indifference to Mr. Herbert, were remarkably unsuccessful.

I am so zealous an advocate for the honour of my own sex, that nothing but my regard to truth, could extort from me a confession, that amongst our few foiables, curiosity may, perhaps, be reckoned. The young girls, resolved to gratify this propensity at all events, planned a scheme to surprise her into a confession. They determined to tell her that they were now assured of her veracity, which Mr. Herbert's late behaviour to Miss Mandeville, rendered incontestible; and if she betrayed any concern at hearing a report of his being particular in his attentions to that lady, they would immediately enjoy the laugh of triumph, which so fair an occasion offered.

Maria fell into the snare, which was laid with some address, and diverted them exceedingly, by her evident embarrassment.

"It was," said she, "impossible that he could have any serious thoughts of a person, whose character was so compleatly opposite to his own."

They strengthened their insinuations, by urging every instance of improbable marriages that had fallen in their knowledge; and observed, that her extreme levity and

politeness, would be very agreeably contrasted with the no less remarkable steadiness and bluntness of his character.

Maria immediately entered upon his defence; she affirmed that these qualities were never exerted, but when milder means were ineffectual to restrain folly, or detect vice. She protested, that he possessed in an eminent degree, all the entertaining powers that could render conversation agreeable, as well as the less obvious, though more estimable talents, that distinguish him as a friend, and member of society. In the midst of her panegeric, she suddenly met her mother's eye, and as she well knew how to read its language, she speedily terminated her oration.

Her young friends praised her ingenuity, and took leave with some significant smiles.

Maria could not recover her equanimity; for though she knew it would be impossible that Mr. Herbert should really think of so dissipated a mistress as Miss Mandeville actually was, she felt uneasy that such an idea had gone abroad, and strove, though in vain, to drive it from her memory.

Mrs. Williams asked her, "Why she had been so warm in refuting what she was so fully convinced, was a falshood."

Maria could only answer, "that she owed such a justification to her friend, whose character she thought suffered, from the mistaken account."

"Your friendships, my dear," said Mrs. Williams, "preserve their wonted warmth, and Mr. Herbert is now the faultless being which Miss Raby was formerly. You cannot allow the shadow of error to those who possess your esteem. It is possible, however, that the world may give a different construction to your motives, and not

knowing that you are only platonic in your attachment, may fancy you a little selfish in disapproving his addresses to Miss Mandeville."

I cannot describe Maria's concern at this suggestion, nor the warmth with which she vindicated herself from such a charge.

Her mother affected to believe her exculpation, but amongst the incidents she recounted to Mr. Herbert, the above was mentioned as a circumstance by no means tending to inspire despair.

Such encouragement soon determined the lover to offer to the amiable girl, his sincere and affectionate heart. As his concealment had rather proceeded from reasonable apprehensions, than awkward shiness, he soon found an opportunity favourable to the discovery which he so ardently wished. His conversations with Maria generally took a literary turn; and he, without any apparent design, introduced the following verses, which he said were written by a friend of his, and addressed to a young lady, to whom he was tenderly attached.

Far from the altar of the Cyprian queen,
To virtuous love a sacred shrine I'll rear;
And every power shall ornament the scene,
That boasts a likeness to my angel fair.
Chaste as her fame, the lily there shall grow,
And blended with the rose of beauty vie;
There shall the azure hyacinthus blow,
Meek as the lustre of her downcast eye.
Loud, as if 'midst the Eleuvinian choir,
Hence ye profane! my warning lips shall say;
Hence every selfish wish and loose desire;
Here virtue darts her all-pervading ray.
The sylvan deities shall haunt the grove,

There truth, immortal goddess! shall repair;
To stamp her impress on my vows of love,
To tinge the blushes of my artless fair.
There will I lead my charmer, there impart
My warm esteem, my tenderness sincere,
My love disdains the colouring of art,
The cant of flattery would offend her ear.
My love I'll tell; unbounded is the theme,
My throbbing heart its fervour shall approve;
Each daily musing, every nightly dream,
Stamp'd by her image all confirm my love.
That image still, to these fond eyes appears
Grac'd with each excellence of mind and mein;
She smiles, and joy illumes my future years;
She frowns, and life is but a joyless scene.
Oh fair, though latent object of my vows,
Wilt thou accept affection's votive strain;
Receive a youth, who all unpractis'd bows,
And feels a passion he could never feign?
My tongue ineloquent but coldly pleads:
Let then my eyes my soul's fond wishes prove;
While generous sentiments and virtuous deeds,
Confess my wish to merit her I love.
Should'st thou to me thy valued hand resign,
My heart shall prize thee, and my arm defend;
Thy joys, thy fears, thy sorrows shall be mine,
Whilst in the husband each fond name I blend.
Retentive gratitude, unswerving truth,
My ever fond affections shall engage;
Raze every thorn that threats the peace of youth,
And scatter roses on the path of age.

Maria was so pleased with the sentiments expressed in the preceding lines, that she could scarce avoid felicitating the lady who had made this agreeable conquest. Her

approbation determined Herbert to own himself their author; nor did he leave her long in perplexity, as to the object to whom they were inscribed. In declaring his attachment, he used terms equally expressive of affection and esteem. His manner was respectful without servility, and he appeared desirous to gain her heart, through the medium of her understanding. Though anxious to meet with a favourable reply, he seemed more desirous that her answer should be agreeable to herself, than to his wishes; nor would he permit his impatience to prescribe a rule, that might pain her delicacy, by inforcing an immediate decision. On the contrary, he begged permission to introduce the subject at a future opportunity, and then left her to consult with reason and her own inclinations, and to follow their determinations.

Maria’s first reflection, when alone, was a parallel between the different modes of courtship, which her present and former lover had adopted. Mr. Herbert had not endeavoured to bewilder her in a maze of tender and unmeaning rhetoric; he had not set her heart and duty at variance; he had even wished her to consider and reflect. And as he had not uttered one passionate imprecation, or denounced his positive resolution of expiring the instant that she refused him, she had full liberty to weigh every objection, without considering what dreadful effects a denial would have on the discarded lover. She soon found, that the only dissuasives she could recollect, originated in her care to preserve the propriety of her own behaviour. Her attachment to Sir Henry Neville was publickly known; and though Mr. Herbert had not considered it as a reason against a second choice, the world probably might. Besides, her resolutions against marriage had been avowed to all her acquaintance, and to break them, would expose her justly to the ridicule due to inconsistency.

These were the only reasons that urged her to reject a man, whose merit she sincerely approved; and as they did not appear absolutely conclusive, she thought there could be no impropriety in consulting a casuist on the subject.

XVII

Mrs. Williams, who was the counsellor to whom Maria referred her scruples, did not immediately give a direct reply. She made some general observations to Mr. Herbert's advantage, and begged Maria would attentively consider whether she saw any peculiarity in his person, manner, or disposition, which appeared to be discordant to her own sentiments of agreeableness and propriety.

"A young woman, my dear girl," said she, "should never think of encouraging a lover, whom in any point of view she considers to be disagreeable; even if her dislike is rather ascribable to whimsical caprice, than any well founded notion of propriety. She ought, in this instance, either totally to subdue, or else indulge it. Taste is, I grant, by no means proper to be an implicit guide in a matter of such importance, as the choice of an husband: we should, however, give it some consequence, and allow it a kind of qualified negative. It may decide on what is pleasing, for that relates only to ourselves. The estimable qualities require a different criterion."

Maria saw nothing in Herbert's behaviour that she disapproved. "I could," said she, blushing, "say more, did I not fear that you would think me too apt to indulge favourable opinions. Do, I beseech you, give me yours."

"Young women," resumed Mrs. Williams, "especially those whose minds are formed for constancy and reflection, are apt to fall into an error, extremely prejudicial to their peace. The inconstancy of a lover wounds them so deeply, that they transfer to the whole

sex, the odium that is justly due to the perfidy or treachery of an individual. Hasty resolutions are formed, which if adhered to, lead to morbid melancholy. I am far from thinking that female happiness is of necessity connected with marriage; but though many sensible reasons may be adduced in favour of celibacy, I believe they generally are, and indeed experience teaches us they ought to be most valid, when we have no eligible opportunity of exchanging it for the conjugal state.

Of the miserable couples we daily see, some, I grant, would be happier if separated; and many wives who have made an imprudent choice, earnestly wish that it was in their power to return to the unencumbered leisure and self-indulgence which singleness allow. Many of the fraternity of old maids discover, by their good humour and cheerfulness, (Mrs. Williams and I are acquainted) that their situation by no means deserves the ridicule and odium generally affixed to it. But as candour must be the attendant on such characters, they will allow, that had they met with an agreeable offer, which they could prudently have accepted, they would not, in the early part of their lives, have refused to take the marriage vow.

“With respect to my opinion of Mr. Herbert, integrity seems the predominant feature of his soul. He has a greater share of independency of sentiment, than I ever knew a man possess. Nothing can persuade him to alter a conduct which he considers to be conscientious; and he fears no person’s resentment, when engaged in the cause of virtue. He appears to be a man, whom the allurements of ambition, avarice, and pleasure, can never detach from duty. The only spring, by which his heart is assailable, is tenderness; of which he possesses an infinitely greater share than any florid pretender whom I ever met. It is in this light that I view his filial piety; his behaviour to his

mother is strongly indicative of compassion and gratitude. How anxiously does he attend to all her wants and desires; with what respectful propriety does he bear those starts of petulance, which pain makes her sometimes give way to; how very amiable are his endeavours to conceal those lapses of memory, which are ranked amongst the imbecilities of age! a man who can, in the sprightliest period of life, give up even his favourite pursuits to these neglected and unfashionable duties, can never distress the female heart, whose only hope and solace, is his protection and love.

“His faults are warmth, and perhaps I may add, positiveness of temper; but he is too undisguised and generous to be resentful; and a superior share of good sense, preserves him from frequently falling into error. Mr. Herbert’s wife has only to exert a self-command, ’till her husband’s transient ebb of passion subsides; and she is then sure of meeting with every reparation which a candid acknowledgment of his fault can render. I grant this is a blemish in his character, and did it frequently appear, or was it carried to an extreme, I should view it in a more criminal light. But as it is in part subdued by reason and benevolence, I confess I consider it, but as the shade of humanity, in a soul truly desirous of attaining to perfect goodness, and it serves to place in a stronger light, many estimable virtues.

“In all my anxious cares, Maria, to form your mind, I never yet held out a lover as your reward. Had this been my chief view in your education, I should have directed my attention to your possessing more shewy accomplishments, which in this tinsel age, attract the general notice of men. But I rather wished you to pass through life unnoticed, than to be received with universal eclat, for qualities, which can boast no intrinsic merit.

Providence, indulgent in the extreme to my desires, has made you in every point of view amiable. It superadds an opportunity of securing your happiness, if an union with a man, possessed of honour, sense, and virtue, can secure it; one who tenderly loves you, and whose fortune is equal to your birth and wishes. I should blame you, if a fear of the ridicule of which your girlish determinations against marriage will draw on you, could influence you to renounce so pleasing a prospect."

Though this discourse exceeded the usual length of Mrs. Williams's harangues, Maria was too great an admirer of her mother's oratory, to complain of its prolixity. Respect for her opinion, prevented her from controverting arguments, which most daughters will, I hope, allow to be strong and conclusive.

Mr. Herbert, at his next visit, had the transport to hear his lovely mistress, with a timid and ingenuous air, express her acceptance of his proffered heart.

Very few preliminaries can intervene, to retard an union which is founded in equality of fortune, situation, and mind. It was agreed to accept of Mrs. Herbert's offer, of resigning her house to the young people; it being her express wish to reside with Mrs. Williams, in her pleasant little box, and to enjoy, through the small remainder of her life, the uninterrupted pleasure of conversing with the friend and companion of her early years.

Maria proposed to Mr. Herbert, that beside occasional calls, two days in every week should be dedicated to the society of their parents, which all parties agreed, that a little intermission would still more endear.

Though the fervour of Maria's friendship for Mrs. Pierpoint, had now greatly declined, she thought, from their long intimacy, that it was incumbent upon her

to inform that lady of her present prospects. The letter was dictated in the usual style of easy confidence, and in the conclusion she pressed her to be a more punctual correspondent. The answer was somewhat stiff, but I will subjoin it for the instruction of others, who wish to know how to get rid of an inferior acquaintance.

The honourable Mrs. Pierpoint presents kind compliments to Miss Williams, and assures her, that she possesses her sincerest wishes for her happiness; but she fears that it will be impossible, if Miss Williams persists in her design of marrying Mr. Herbert, for her to preserve the pleasure of her acquaintance, considering the very different line of life into which Mrs. Pierpoint is now thrown. She continues exceedingly Miss Williams's friend, and laments the necessity of declining the correspondence which Miss Williams has done her the honour to press, as her leisure is really very small, and her connexions numerous.

My readers will observe every turn in this epistle, upon which I shall make a short comment.

The term honourable, at the beginning, was a newly acquired title, on account of the father of Major Pierpoint having acceded to an earldom, though without a suitable addition to his income. I should have premised, that he had disinherited his son for marrying a cit, which is an unpardonable offence in the eyes of those, whose birth exceeds their pecuniary abilities. The same word honour, towards the conclusion of Mrs. Pierpoint's letter, conveyed a very different meaning, and was intended to express the proud humility, which the little great sometimes assume.

With respect to Mr. Herbert's birth, I can affirm that his father was the youngest son of the youngest branch of a

very respectable and dignified family, and his mother was actually the second cousin to a Scotch Baronet, by the male line. But my wellborn readers must have discovered this long ago. His sentiments, I flatter myself, sufficiently vouch his belonging to the Patrician order.

As this letter effected no change in Maria's intentions, marriage proved, as it frequently does, the grave of female friendship.

Mrs. Edmund Herbert regretted, that notwithstanding the instability of her once dear Charlotte's temper, she only altered from one foolish propensity to another; and the honourable Mrs. Pierpoint, whenever the subject of pretty women was mentioned, would recollect a rural beauty, whom she had formerly seen, and who really would have made some noise in the world, if she had not thrown herself away in marriage.

Having now conducted my heroine to the Temple of Hymen, the general termination of female adventures, I shall take leave of my readers with some reflections which were made by Mrs. Williams, on the evening preceding her daughter's marriage.

Mr. Herbert had just left the room, with all the transport of tenderness, which a near prospect of happiness inspired, when Maria, who during the whole evening appeared unusually pensive, turned aside her head to conceal from her mother's observation, the tears which streamed down her cheek. That attentive parent anxiously inquired the cause, and found that they proceeded from the delicate apprehensions, that she should not always appear equally amiable in her lover's eyes; that they should part with less regret, and meet with less pleasure.

"I have a fear," said Mrs. Williams, "but it is not that indifference should usurp the place of love. My

knowledge of both your characters, makes me think this impossible. My apprehensions arise from the extreme susceptibility of your mind; and I entreat you, from regard to your future peace, that you will recollect the candid observations of the amiable Desdemona, men are but men, nor must a wife always expect the behaviour of a lover, even from an affectionate husband. Somewhat of business will, at times, puddle the clearest temper, and little inadvertencies, or words foreign to the general tenor of their hearts, will escape from lips, accustomed only to express the laws of kindness. I charge you, by all your dearest hopes, forbear to ponder on these hasty expressions. Drive them from your mind; take no merit to yourself for excusing them, lest you should annex an idea of patient suffering to your own character, and unkindness to your husband's.

"I do not advise you to be placid, cheerful and prudent; you are not likely to err in these points. My fear is, that you should indulge your tenderness to a degree painful to yourself, and distressing to your husband. Shew him, my child, that you are his helpmate, not his incumberance. Let not his distress at any disastrous circumstance, be aggravated by the fear, that you will sink under affliction. Convince him that you have fortitude to bear the common ills of life, as well as patience to endure its common provocations.

Your future path, though it promises to be pleasant, cannot be entirely through arcadian scenes of felicity. Trials must occur, even to the happiest. It is the part of reason and religion, to mitigate their severity. Humility, which inspires a lowly mind and moderate desires, is the surest road to content. Such a disposition, though perhaps incompatible with the nice refinement of feeling, which it is now the fashion to affect, is not only consistent, but

congenial to the exertions of true piety, tenderness, and benevolence. I have seen much of human life, and will give you the conclusions which experience teaches me to form, in the words of our female Epictetus.

“To temper’d wishes, just desires,
“Is happiness confin’d;
“And deaf to folly’s call attends
“The music of the mind.”

VIDE MRS. CARTER’S POEMS.

FINIS