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CAROLINE;

OR, THE

DIVERSITIES

OF

FORTUNE:

A

NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOLUME FIRST.

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MDCCLXXXVII.

CAROLINE,

OR THE

DIVERSITIES of FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

Description of a Family.

IN a beautiful vale near Kendal, in the county of Westmoreland, stands a small, but elegant, habitation, once possessed by the happiest pair that ever were united by virtue, sentiment, and affection. Nothing but interest opposed their felicity, and that they regarded as too sordid a consideration to be attended to; nor, till they became more anxiously concerned for others than for themselves, did its opposition give them the pain of a moment.

Mr. Henry Ashford, the youngest son of an opulent baronet, married, when only twenty-two years of age, a beautiful and accomplished young woman, whose father was vicar of a neighbouring parish to that in which Sir William resided; who, offended by this rash step of his favourite son, and disappointed in the splendid hopes he entertained for him by a match he had in view with a rich heiress, forbade him ever more to appear in his sight, or any of the family so much as to mention his name. Lady Ashford, though extremely fond of her son, was obliged to obey this severe injunction, well knowing that her husband was not of a temper to endure contradiction, listen to persuasion, or be softened by intreaty: her only hope was, that time would remove his resentment. To this she trusted; and, by letter, the only method in her power, advised her son to trust; begging of him not to endeavour to see his father till his anger was somewhat abated, but implicitly to obey the order he had sent him to avoid his presence, at least, till she should inform him that there was hope of a reconciliation; an event for which she assured him she anxiously wished, and to promote which she would do everything in her power.

Happy in his choice, and every day more enamoured of the amiable possessor of his heart, Mr. Ashford little regretted the loss of his father's favour; he detested the wife he had provided for him; and thought every creature had (from the moment he became of age to distinguish right from wrong, happiness from misery) an undoubted privilege to choose the person with whom the remainder of his life was to be passed, and upon whom the comfort, perhaps the virtue, of that life almost wholly depended. He did not think he had committed any offence, either against reason, honour, or even parental authority, and therefore experienced no self-accusation or sorrow for what he had done: the only concern he felt was for his mother; the softness of whose disposition, and the tenderness he knew she bore him, made it too probable that she would feel much pain on his account; a pain which, however, he endeavoured to soothe by assurances of his perfect happiness and contentment in the situation wherein his own deliberate choice had placed him.

He had indeed acted with more reflection and prudence than his friends, at first, suspected, having during his residence at Oxford regularly prepared himself for holy orders, with expectation of a good living, the promise of which he had received from a young man of large fortune, who, as well as himself, was a student of Christ-church. These steps he had taken, being fully persuaded that his father, with whose rigid severity of temper he was well acquainted, would never pardon the offence he had resolved to commit; and, in pursuance of them, in about a month after his marriage, he was ordained, and performed the service of the church as curate to his father-in-law.

During about seven months, that he continued in Sir William's neighbourhood, no intercourse passed between them; he remained inflexibly resolved to punish what he accounted his son's folly and ingratitude; nor could his lady, though constantly intent upon seizing every opportunity to soften his resentment, in the smallest degree mitigate its effects. As for the rest of the family, which consisted of a son and daughter, they willingly submitted to the orders of their father, and easily relinquished all pretence to intimacy and friendship with a brother, whose temper and disposition were too unlike their own ever to admit of more.

Mr. Ashford was in all respects, except one, the very reverse of his father; for, as the latter was cold, obstinate, and unfeeling, the former was rash, whimsical, and intirely governed by the inclination of the moment; excessive pride was the only point of character in which there appeared between them the smallest resemblance. He had, as well as his brother, cast the eyes of admiration upon their beautiful neighbour; but those charms, which, in the bosom of the generous Henry, gave birth to a virtuous, sincere, and lasting passion, which, while it ardently sought its own indulgence, kept in view the honour, safety, and happiness, of its object, in the breast of the violent and selfish Marmaduke could only raise a restless and unequal flame, which sought, as the sole means of gratification, the utter ruin of her peace and reputation.

He had laid a train of plots and devices, which, with the powerful influence of his rank, fortune, and personal accomplishments, he had no doubt would operate in such a manner as soon to put him in possession of all he at that moment desired, when his brother's unexpected marriage at once put an end of all his high-raised hopes of pleasure, and left him a prey to rage, envy, and disappointment. The object, which, had it been obtained, would probably have pleased but for a few thoughtless moments, and then been abandoned to shame, regret, and, perhaps, all the miseries of want and despair, appeared, through the medium of disappointed hope, the only one in nature that possessed the power of bestowing perfect happiness; and, though the natural fickleness of his temper, and a constant succession of new pursuits, soon drove the lovely Caroline from his remembrance, a lasting hatred to her husband was stamped upon his heart; a hatred, which never ceased to operate upon every occasion which afforded him the slightest opportunity to mortify or injure him, and which, stretching beyond the natural limits prescribed to human enmity and revenge, extended itself to his grave, and pursued his memory with unremitted virulence.

It is sufficient to say of Miss Ashford, that she united in her character all the leading traits of her father and brother; like the first, she was reserved, obstinate, and unforgiving; like the latter, violent, capricious in her humours, and hurried away with a thousand follies, which by turns took possession of a head that was none of the strongest, and a heart that was not the most pure.

To the excessive pride, natural to her family, she added an uncommon quantity of female vanity, which, as it was founded upon mere imagination, unsupported by any natural charms either of mind or person, (she being very tall, very thin, and very sallow,) was absolutely unbounded, and led her into a thousand affectations, which rendered her as ridiculous as she was unpleasing.

From such relations Henry parted without regret; his amiable mother alone, from whom he inherited every worthiness of mind and grace of person, was quitted with reluctance; but necessity admits not of hesitation; rich in a friend, a companion, who, by ten thousand little nameless circumstances, rendered herself every day more and more dear to his heart, he joyfully took possession of the living his friend had promised him, which the death of an old, rich, and worthless, incumbent put into his possession.

Mr. Ashford found the situation, upon which his house was placed, uncommonly healthy and delightful. It was upon a small plain, about half way up a gentle ascent, which formed the foot of a chain of high and distant hills; it was sheltered on the North and West by a fine hanging wood, and on the North East by a small conical hill cultivated to its summit; to the South and South-East it commanded the view of a large and beautiful valley, where peace, industry, and their constant attendant, plenty, appeared to have taken up their abode. A noble river flowed with majestic calmness through its bottom, forming many beautiful windings, sometimes appearing to lose itself in the bottom of the vale it fertilized, and then pouring again its ample flood with renewed vigour and nobleness. The meadows on each side were large and verdant; many of them covered with flocks and herds, whose size and fatness spoke the richness of their pasture; others, ready for the scythe, glowed with the finest enamel of nature; and the corn-fields, which just began to change colour and assume the lightest tinge of autumnal gold, added variety to richness. The view was bounded by bold and lofty mountains, some shaded by woods of oak, whose growth seemed coeval with that of the soil in which they rooted, others partly shrubbed and partly cultivated, and some bare, rocky, and romantic, formed a noble contrast to the soft scene below, and added a grandeur to the whole, which nature, unformed luxuriant nature, alone can attain, which art vainly strives to improve, and can only hope to imitate. The house was large, old, inconvenient, and much out of repair; but this was an object of little importance to the new rector, who had received the living with the condition annexed of building a new one upon the spot, where that, which was little better than a ruin, stood; in order to perform which, he was obliged to settle his family in a farm-house at a small distance, which, having been the family-mansion of his patron, was large enough to contain them in the most convenient manner, together with Farmer Williams and his wife, a remarkably decent young couple who had lately taken the farm to which it belonged.

Mr. Ashford lost no time in beginning to take down the old parsonage, his father-in-law having presented him with a few hundred pounds to begin the work and supply his wants of every kind, till the income of his living, which was four hundred a year, became due. He was fond of improvements of every kind, and not least of building; his taste and habits led him to elegance and expence, but he prudently checked so improper an inclination, resolving to keep within the limits of neatness, comfort, and convenience. Having reduced and corrected several plans, he at last fixed on one; and, after consulting with his builder, received from him an estimate of the expence, which was laid at twelve hundred pounds.

Though such a sum expended would unavoidably involve them in a disagreeable debt, Mr. and Mrs. Ashford comforted themselves with the resolution of living with the utmost prudence and œconomy when they were happy enough to get into their new house; a period which, before the foundation was laid, they began anxiously to wish for. Before, however, it was much farther advanced, their thoughts were, in a great measure, disengaged from that and every other less interesting consideration, by the birth of a son, whom his fond mother named Henry, after the two persons in the world she most loved, her father and husband. That happy husband hung over this new object of his care with rapture, more sweet and inexpressibly tender than any he had ever before experienced; and, for the first time, wished he could reconcile himself to his father; but this wish, being unsupported by hope, was but the transient effusion of affection, and died away without action or effect.

In less than two years the parsonage-house was finished; it was rather larger, and considerably more complete and elegant, than the builder at first intended to make it; of consequence, the expence was greater. By the time he could settle his little family, with what he esteemed mere comfort and decency, in his new habitation, a debt was contracted of rather more than fifteen hundred pounds; in consequence of which, it was resolved to appropriate half the income of the living to the payment of the interest and the gradual discharge of it, and to live with the strictest œconomy, in order to preserve, upon the remainder, that first of blessings, independence. He was naturally of a chearful, social, temper; and, though a man of abilities, fonder of conversation than study; in the former, indeed, his talents were of the first rate, and rendered him so entertaining and desirable a companion, that it was with difficulty he restrained his mode of living within the narrow limits prescribed by prudence; the neighbouring families, many of whom were of large fortune, courted his intimacy and that of his amiable Caroline with assiduity, inviting them to join all their parties and partake in all their amusements; invitations which would not have been disagreeable to either of them, could their fortune have admitted of such gratifications without breaking into the plan of expence they had resolved inviolably to adhere to.

There are few difficulties in life which resolution cannot surmount, few modes of living which habit and principle cannot render easy and even pleasant; it is not then surprising that Mr. Ashford, having declined the acquaintance of most of the neighbouring families, and a little accustomed himself to retirement, found in it sweets he had hitherto believed only imaginary. He found, in the heart, temper, and understanding, of his lovely wife, an unfailing source of pleasure and satisfaction; the indifference with which he observed her regard the superiour splendour of her opulent neighbours, and the ease and chearfulness with which she withdrew herself from every expence that exceeded the proper proportion their slender income would admit, made him ashamed of the weakness of repining at his situation, or of adding to the inconveniences they already experienced, by indulgences, which habit, not nature, had rendered desirable. He found that a single dish could as effectually satisfy hunger, and, in a short time, as agreeably, as nine, the usual family-course at his father's. That the fruits, gathered out of his own garden, formed as sweet a desert as any the most skilful confectioner could supply; and that a glass of cider, the production of his orchard, afforded as delicious and wholesome a refreshment as could be procured from Madeira or the Cape.

The care of his parish, which was extensive, took up much of his time; books, music, drawing, of which he was very fond, had their proper proportion, and every moment of leisure was delightfully filled up by the engaging prattle of his little Henry, in whom, before he had reached the age of two years, the eye of paternal fondness had discovered the dawnings of every human perfection, as clearly as the tender mother could trace in his features the exact likeness of him she most wished him to resemble.

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CHAPTER II.

Unexpected good Fortune.

ABOUT this time Mr. Ashford learned from the public prints that his brother Marmaduke was married to Miss Osburn, the heiress his father had intended for his wife; that Sir William had upon his marriage given up to him a considerable part of his estates, and was retired to Lady Ashford's jointure-house, about five miles from Ashford-Park. This intelligence raised the first idea in his breast of a possible reconciliation with his father. He had every reason to believe that in Marmaduke, instead of an advocate and friend, he had a constant and unrelenting enemy, always ready to place his actions in a wrong light, and supply fuel to his father's resentment, should it appear to abate in the smallest degree. Though ignorant of the principal cause of his hatred, he knew that he had from his childhood envied him the favour of his father, and still more the partial affection of his mother, which, though he would neither endeavour to deserve, or at all valued on its own account, he detested him for possessing. Now, therefore, that his enemy was removed to a distance, and his attention probably taken up with his own family and extended views, he hoped his father would be left to the voice of reason and nature, which he knew would want no force in the power of his mother to lend. He had some dependence upon her influence, which, if it was not strong, was regular and unremitted; and, as drops of water, constantly falling, will indent the surface of the hardest marble, he could not but hope that her soft remonstrances, when not counteracted, would in time produce the effect he so much wished.

These hopes he carefully concealed from Mrs. Ashford, unwilling to make her the partner of them, lest she should painfully partake their disappointment; but he resolved to do every thing in his power to facilitate their completion, and would at times secretly enjoy the delightful idea of communicating to her their success, of presenting her and his dear boy to his parents, of seeing her caressed and beloved by them, and beholding her placed in a situation worthy of her virtues.

In these pleasing dreams would he pass many a musing hour; and, though doubt would sometimes damp his pleasure, hope every day became more and more strong, till he was at last fully persuaded, that a letter written to his father, expressive of duty, affection, and submission, (though not of conscious guilt, or repentance of the act by which he had offended,) could not fail to rekindle in his breast some portion of that love he had once borne him. 'Can he forget (would he exclaim) the time when, like this dear infant, I played round his knees, hung about his neck, and prattled in his arms? Can he abandon a son whose greatest crime was obeying the dictates of honour and virtue? No; it is impossible that the human heart ever can become wholly hard and insensible; I have been to blame so long to neglect the steps which lead to forgiveness; I should have written, have thrown myself at his feet; it matters not that I am unconscious of offence, it is sufficient that he esteems me guilty; and submission from me is no more than he has a just right to exact.' A conflict would then succeed in his thoughts concerning the properest means to bring about this desired reconciliation, whether to write to or visit his father: he longed to consult his Caroline, whose advice habit had rendered almost

necessary to every determination; but a remaining fear closed his lips, and he at last resolved to write, as the method he believed his father would esteem most respectful, and give his mother the best opportunity of interceding in his favour.

Five anxious days did he pass in expectation of receiving the desired answer; days spent in painful vicissitude of hope and fear, doubt and confidence; on the sixth, a servant, who had been regularly dispatched every post-day to the neighbouring town, returned and presented a letter, which he immediately knew to be directed by his brother. There was something in the characters which seemed to forbode ill success; he hesitated a moment; then, breaking the seal, read as follows:

“SIR,

The commands of my father forbid me to address you by any epithet more expressive of friendship or consanguinity. After the conduct you have for so many years thought proper to pursue, he cannot but wonder at the confidence with which you solicit his favour; an advantage, when possessed, so improperly used, and so lightly forfeited. He wills me to inform you, that he who rejects his authority has no right to his protection, and desires you will no more remind him that he is father to a weak and ungrateful son.”

Indignation in the breast of Mr. Ashford, naturally warm and disinterested, instantly took place of disappointment: he perceived that the influence of his brother still prevailed, and regretted that he had afforded him such an occasion of triumph and insult. A few moments, however, calmed his mind; he felt a satisfaction in having done what he believed his duty, though attended by circumstances so mortifying; and rejoiced at the secrecy he had preserved, by which his beloved wife escaped becoming a sharer in the humiliation his ill-founded hopes had occasioned him. He plainly saw that the narrow path of duty, in which he had for some time trod, was the only proper one in which to persevere; and, in so doing, he more strongly than ever determined to fix his resolutions and his happiness.

Many have been the instances in which man hath been seen to labour without effect, to employ all the powers of his mind, and wear out his frame, with restless, uneasy, perturbation, without, in the smallest degree, influencing the object of his hopes and wishes; while, during a state of repose, when anxiety has given way to indolence, accident presents those favourable circumstances which design vainly sought, and the cup of success is presented to his lips when the delicious draught is least expected. By this observation I do not mean to discourage exertion; on the contrary, I believe it, in general, the only means of attainment; but, simply to remark, that thus it sometimes happens, and thus it befel the worthy rector of Elmwood, who had scarcely relinquished the last remaining hope of assistance from his family, and reconciled his feelings to the prospect of continued obscurity and restraint, than a sudden gleam of sunshine illumined his prospects, and produced a change in his situation, as pleasing as it was unexpected.

This alteration was occasioned by a visit from his uncle, Lord Walton, the only brother of his mother, who had lived many years in Italy, and of whose return he was ignorant. The viscount cordially embraced him the moment he alighted from his carriage, exclaiming, “So, Harry, I find thou art fairly driven from society, and no longer permitted to claim the honour of descending from the ancient stock of the Ashfords.” “I have been

so unfortunate, sir, (replied Mr. Ashford,) as to incur the displeasure of my father, and that, to a degree which precludes all hope of forgiveness; but my heart does not reproach me with the incurrance of such guilt as may justify his severity, nor can I repent having preferred happiness to splendour." "'Tis well said, (replied his lordship,) I like your honesty and choice; come, let us see the wife who has occasioned so much disturbance, whose charms have been powerful enough to rival an heiress with a hundred thousand pounds, and change a modern man of fashion into a grave, sober, divine." These words brought them to the door of the parlour where Mrs. Ashford was sitting; a table stood before her, upon which was placed her little playful, blooming, Henry; she was dressing his hat, a small brown beaver, with roses, some of which he was endeavouring to tie up in a nosegay. The uncommon beauty both of the mother and child struck Lord Walton, who had in the former part of his life been a man of gallantry, and was still a professed admirer of elegance, in the most forceable manner; he expected to see a rustic beauty, but beheld a form and face, and was met and addressed with an unaffected grace, which would have adorned a drawing-room.

Surprise for a moment superseded politeness, and he gazed upon her with unconcealed admiration; till, being recalled to recollection by her confusion and distress, he advanced towards her with a respect which apologized for his inadvertency, and taking her hand, which his nephew presented to him, "Permit, dear lady, (said he,) this first expression of affection from one who will be proud to hear the name of uncle pronounced by the lips of so lovely a relation."—At these words he saluted and led her to a small sofa that stood in the room, seating himself by her side.

Never did notes of liquid melody sound so sweetly in the ears of her delighted Henry: Lord Walton was the first of his relations who had paid her the smallest attention, he was fully persuaded that it was impossible to see and know, without admiring and loving, her, and he was charmed with the idea of her becoming the favourite relation of his uncle; he exulted in the thought that he would speak of her as she deserved, even at Ashford Park, where neither his father's frown or his brother's rage would prevent his declaring his real sentiments. These ideas crowded so swiftly into his mind, that they might be rather said to occupy it at once than to present themselves in succession; they took intire possession of it, and for some minutes excluded every thought of interest. The sight, however, of his lordship caressing his Henry, asking him a number of little questions, and appearing extremely pleased with his answers, agreeably reminded him that it was in his power, without the smallest inconvenience to himself, to render his little family perfectly happy and independent.

Lord Walton continued with his nephew and niece more than a week; during which time every day appeared more and more to attach him to them. He informed them that he happened to arrive at Ashford-Park the day after that upon which Sir William had received the letter from his youngest son. He and his lady were unluckily upon a visit to their son Marmaduke and his bride, who, as well as Miss Ashford, were present when it was opened. Lady Ashford privately told him she believed it might have been possible to have obtained from Sir William a more favourable answer to its contents, had he been left to his own feelings and reflections; that he appeared moved by the perusal of it, but the overpowering influence of her eldest son and daughter turned the balance, as it had ever done, in favour of persisting severity; and, notwithstanding her strongest remonstrances, Marmaduke was permitted, for he waited not for an order, to answer his brother in

whatever words he should judge proper. Lady Ashford having informed her brother of these particulars, besought him, with tears, not to be influenced by the selfish representations of her eldest son and daughter, but to see her poor Henry and his wife, of whom she had heard the most amiable character; she begged him to assure them of her warmest, though unavailing, good wishes, and that her prayers were never offered at the throne of mercy without an ardent petition for their prosperity and happiness.

Tears trickled from the eyes of Mrs. Ashford at this kind message; those eyes, which at once tenderly reproached her husband for concealing from her his intentions, and thanked him for the motive of that concealment. Nor were his feelings less exquisite; he had ever loved his mother with the most filial tenderness, and this proof of her continued affection, his knowledge of the constraint she lived under, from a principal of duty and the gloomy tyrannical temper of his father, to which she submitted with an almost unexampled patience and even cheerfulness, filled him with as much esteem as love; he sighed to think that she was not happy, and that his perverse destiny denied him the power of contributing to her comfort.

Lord Walton did not take leave of Elmwood before he had made his nephew and niece promise to spend as much of their time with him as their engagements would permit: his seat was not more than forty miles distant; and, as Mr. Ashford was active and not easily fatigued, it was concluded, that he could, in the summer, ride backward and forward in such a manner as to enable him to attend the duties of his profession, and yet spend the greatest part of his time with his family at Broomfield, where they promised to meet his lordship, together with their little Henry, as soon as he had finished a round of visits which ceremony demanded, in return for those made to congratulate him upon his arrival in England.

The visit was made, and attended with all those pleasant circumstances, which wealth and elegance have power to afford; and such a degree of intercourse and friendship established, as promised every thing to their future hopes, together with some considerable pecuniary favours; which, though offered rather as compliments than assistance, contributed much to the ease and comfort of their situation, and gilded the little circle, in which they moved, with a sunshine of affluence to which they had before been strangers.

CHAPTER III.

The uncertainty of human Felicity.

DURING this state of present comfort and future hope, perhaps the happiest human life affords, their pleasing cares were increased by the birth of a daughter, who was named, after her mother and grandmother, Lucia Caroline. Her birth, which, at first, appeared a source of additional happiness to her parents, proved, to one of them, the severest misfortune of his life; it was shortly followed by the death of his beloved wife; the absolute possessor of his whole heart, the inspirer of many and the strengthener and partaker of all his virtues!

An attempt to describe his sorrow, his anguish, upon this affecting event, would be vain; let it suffice to say, that the consideration of his children, so tenderly recommended to him by the last breath of his adored Caroline, alone precluded despair, and preserved the shattered remains of life.

Lord Walton kindly flew to his habitation the moment the unwelcome news reached his knowledge; and used every persuasive, with which the melancholy occasion furnished him, to prove the utility and propriety of his and his children immediately removing from the sad scene before them; purposing that they should go to his house, and leave him to attend the funeral of his niece, and see that every honour should be paid to her memory which could express esteem, tenderness, and regret. But nothing could prevail upon the disconsolate husband to quit the dear remains of his lost treasure; many times, each day, would he steal to the chamber of sorrow, and, fixing his sad eyes upon the pale, cold, face he had so often viewed with rapture, indulge the most violent grief! He would throw himself by her side, fold her in his arms, and, covering her, as it were, in his bosom, strive to warm her again to life. Ah! vain attempt! cold was that breast, so late the animated seat of virtue; those eyes, which wont to beam with sensibility, were closed for ever!

It was here, when every folly, every pleasure, had lost its power to charm; when life presented nothing that could excite desire; when all nature was clouded by sorrow, and disappointed hope turned her sickly eye from the painful view of futurity; that piety, sacred celestial guest, first deigned to illumine his breast. Hitherto the regularity of his life, and the propriety with which he discharged the duties of his profession, had rendered him a respectable character; but that profession had been chosen, not from any preference his inclinations gave it to others, but as the readiest road to independence, and its duties been discharged, not with the spirit of devotion, but with the cool steadiness of reason, to which it should have been united. His understanding was enlightened, but his heart was not sensible to that warm and elevated piety which renders religion at once the support and sunshine of life: it remained for this sad hour, when human pride and confidence lay humbled in the dust, when every hope of earthly happiness was flown, to prove, that she alone is the never-failing support of man. His afflicted heart received her sacred influence, and, amidst the deepest distress, felt consolation.

“Dear object of all my earthly hopes and wishes! (he would exclaim,) thou art taken from me but for a moment; heaven is now thy home, where thy benevolence, thy purity, thy cheerful, warm, devotion, shall meet that rich reward, the hope of which

inspired them. Oh! thou eternal Controuler of the universe, whose chastisement is mercy, accept the sigh which, bursting from the humbled heart, acknowledges thy justice: while it is thy will to prolong the life thou hast bestowed, oh! render it, like her's, useful and virtuous, and, when it shall be thy pleasure to end its present state of existence, make my happiness such as her's, and let us share it together!"

From the moment that the tomb received the sacred remains of his beloved partner, his whole attention was devoted to the duties of his situation in life; duties, which he now discharged with a degree of spirit and earnestness which proved that he was inspired by the highest motives; those prayers and exhortations, which were wont to be pronounced with cold elegance and propriety, were now delivered with all the solemn ardour of devotion, and the chaste earnestness of a heart deeply penetrated by the sacred truths he taught, and warmly interested in the welfare of those to whom he taught them. His charity and benevolence, which had often been checked by the ingratitude and baseness of those in whose favour they had been exerted, had now a higher source of action, knew no disappointment but from tenderness to others, no bounds but want of power adequate to performance.

But the first objects of his care, the objects in which all his earthly hopes and affections centered, were his children. Henry was now of an age to require the first attentions of a tutor; he was five years old, and remarkably forward in his understanding, which had been opened and cultivated with judgement and assiduity by his mother. It was her opinion that a child should not be teased even by learning the alphabet before that age; she thought enough was to be done in strengthening the constitution, directing the disposition, and forming the temper and general opinions; all of which greatly depended upon the first five or six years of life, and which were often injured irreparably by fatiguing the brain with useless labour, and exercising the turbulent and uncomfortable passions, which, once wearing themselves a channel in the youthful mind, became insensibly a part of itself, and were with difficulty, if ever, eradicated. Her judgement he had always held in high estimation; but, from the moment he was deprived of her society, every wish, every opinion, she had expressed or delivered, were held sacred; they appeared to him as the voice of heaven, were collected with care, and became, upon all possible occasions, the standard of his own; but more particularly in every thing which concerned their children. "Though removed from our sight, (he would say,) I have still a wife, and my babes a mother, who has a right to be consulted upon every occasion whereby their happiness and welfare may be affected."

His extreme fondness concealed from his apprehensions the fatiguing and difficult nature of the task he was about to undertake in the education of his son, and he entered upon the first stage with all the patience and cheerfulness necessary to render it useful; but his farther progress was prevented by Lord Walton, who declared his intention of adopting Henry, and having him brought up in his own house, as heir to his whole fortune; a proposal too flattering to a fond father not to be readily and thankfully accepted. The only circumstance, which caused the smallest hesitation, was the thought of parting with his son, and depending upon the care and abilities of a stranger for his manners and information, if not for his disposition and conduct: but, this objection was removed by his being allowed to choose his tutor, and superintend his education, which he would have ample opportunity of doing during his frequent visits at Broomfield.

The affair was accordingly settled without farther difficulty. Mr. Ashford fixed upon a gentleman who had been his fellow-student at Oxford, a man of great learning, excellent morals, and liberality of sentiment. These rare qualities had gained him a fellowship, which brought him about forty pounds a year, and, together with a curacy of thirty, was all the preferment he expected, at least during the next twenty years; it could not therefore be doubted but that he would gladly accept the offer made to him of a situation so comparatively eligible.

Mr. Ashford found himself eased of an oppressive load, which, though duty did not permit him to acknowledge that he felt, his present relief convinced him had been indeed a burden. Exclusive of his natural aversion to severe study, it was always his opinion, that though a father was in many respects the most proper tutor for his son, he ran a great hazard of losing his friendship and affection by the exertion of that authority necessary to enforce instruction; for, some force, he believed, must unavoidably be exerted, even with the most docile and ingenious; and he feared that, during a long course of lectures, sometimes difficult and often tedious, the parent should on both sides be sunk in the preceptor.

He had now no care but for his little Caroline, upon whom he doted with the most unequalled fondness. The ties of natural affection, the habit of constantly seeing and attending to her, and the usual engaging sweetness of childhood, were, of themselves, sufficient to have produced this effect in a heart ever open to generous and tender impressions; but the striking resemblance she exhibited of her mother, mingled these feelings with a sentiment not easily to be expressed; which, while it gave her all the privileges of tender infancy, seemed to entitle her to something more, and rendered her, in his eyes, an almost sacred object. Happily for them both, her temper was of that sweet and docile kind which needs not a frown to regulate, or a harsh expression to correct. In pursuance of the plan laid down by her mother he watched with care and assiduity to guard her from improper habits, to instil into her mind sentiments of honour, benevolence, and justice, and to give her a right idea and knowledge of the things about her, such as every day presented themselves to her eyes, of which the generality of people are ignorant much longer than is in common supposed. To keep her temper calm and cheerful was no less an object of his care. "Happiness (he would say) is the great end of all our attainments; he, who can teach us to arrive at it by the readiest road, is the greatest master of the most desirable and useful science. Nothing has, perhaps, so much influence upon this grand object as the sweetness and regularity of the temper: great evils happen but seldom in life, many are happy enough entirely to escape them; but small occasions of disturbance occur every hour, and he, who suffers his mind to be ruffled by trifling accidents, will be wretched amidst the most pleasing and splendid gifts of nature and fortune, as grains of sand will sink the stately vessel as fatally as if a mountain from the clouds fell upon its deck."

When the years for regular instruction arrived, it was attended to with steadiness and regularity: it was considered as a business; for, Mr. Ashford did not believe it possible wholly to deceive a child into improvement. The first attainments of knowledge are generally acquired with more or less difficulty; but by short lessons he avoided disgust, and by varying employment often gave it the name and effect of amusement. He had the happiness to find that the capacity of his beloved pupil was equal to any thing his fondest hope could reasonably aspire to; and her temper and disposition as remarkably

good as her person was beautiful. They frequently made long visits to Lord Walton, (with whom she became as much a favourite as her brother,) during which she had an opportunity of being instructed by the master who attended Henry, in the only part of modern education to which her father was not equal, I mean dancing; which, though certainly the lowest branch of polite attainment, is absolutely necessary to give ease and grace to all the rest.

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CHAPTER IV.

Another Description of a Family.

THUS passed the first seventeen years of our heroine's life; an uninterrupted scene of peace and tranquillity, sweetened by every indulgence her age and disposition required.

It had been, for some years past, a constant custom to celebrate her birth-day at Broomfield. Lord Walton, taking a pleasure in this expression of his affection, always gave a little ball, and made small elegant presents, not only to his niece and the rest of his family, but to all the young people who were invited to partake of the entertainment. Mr. Ashford never chose to be present upon these occasions, not because he was an enemy to cheerfulness, or even to well-regulated festivity, but he could not but remember that the same day, which presented him with a daughter, had in effect robbed him of a wife; and, happy as he was in the acquisition of the first, he could never cease to regret the latter.

Upon Caroline's arrival at Broomfield, she was met by Lord Walton in the most affectionate manner, who taking her hand with uncommon gaiety, "I am doubly rejoiced to see you to-day, my dear, (said he,) as it affords me an opportunity of introducing you to some of my most particular friends." So saying, he led her into the breakfast-room, where were seated, round the unremoved table, two ladies and a gentleman. "This, my dear madam, is the sweet girl of whom you have heard me speak so much; permit me, in her name and behalf, to beg your countenance and friendship," said his lordship, presenting Caroline to the eldest of the ladies. "Mrs. West, my love," turning to his niece, "the honour of whose attentions will, I am sure, be gratefully received by you." The lady, who appeared to be about forty, though she had never been a regular beauty, was altogether a very fine woman. Her scale of stature was large, and her features open and striking rather than delicate: she had an air of consequence, which, upon the first view, commanded respect and attention from the naturally humble; but was of that kind, which, in those of a contrary character, rather tended to excite an opposition to pretensions, which appeared to be founded upon sufferance and self-opinion, unsupported by any legal right. She received our heroine with the most condescending politeness; in addressing her, her features assumed a complacency, of which they did not, at first sight, appear capable: and she assured her, in a voice much softer than her figure presaged, that she should be happy to number her amongst her most favourite friends.

His lordship then led his niece towards the young lady, and, taking a hand of each, joined them in his, saying with a smile, "There is little need of ceremony to unite, in the pleasing bonds of intimacy, two young persons so happily formed to enjoy and enlarge its pleasures; I trust Miss West and my dear Caroline will, from this hour, date the commencement of the most agreeable and lasting attachment." "And may not I," (said the gentleman, who, by his air and dress, appeared to be a military man,) approaching with a gallant and respectful bow, "hope to be included in this charming alliance?" "You shall guarantee it, (replied his lordship,) I would by no means have my fair friends admit you as a simple ally." "At all events (answered the gentleman) let me be, some how or other, included in the treaty." "Well, well, (replied Lord Walton,) I will at least recommend Captain West to my Caroline as a man fit to be known; how far he is to be trusted, her future knowledge of him will best ascertain."

As the family I have now introduced to the reader will make no inconsiderable figure in the following pages, it will not be improper to give a short account of them. I have already described the person of Mrs. West; her father was a soldier of fortune, and dying, in the rank of a colonel, left her, at the age of eighteen, handsome, immersed in dissipation, and wholly unprovided for. Shortly after his death her good fortune threw her in the way of General West, to whom she was recommended as an object highly worthy of his compassion and liberality; and she had address enough to turn that compassion, in the breast of the old general, to something more tender. Being wholly free from passion herself, she was at leisure to make the best advantage of his, and, in a few weeks after her first introduction to his knowledge, she became his wife. During the first ten or twelve years of her marriage she was the toast of the whole corps which her husband commanded, and universally admired and followed by the men wherever she came. Her character however escaped gross imputation; and the General never appearing dissatisfied with her conduct, the fashionable world visited and received her as a woman of honour. Among her particular favourites Lord Walton had, for a considerable time, held a distinguished rank, and, till he quitted England, no rival, among the numerous ones who sued for her smiles, could contend with him in her favour. Soon after his return, the General's health had obliged him to reside in the South of France; which had, in a great measure, prevented a renewal of their intimacy. For some years she there pursued the same style of living which she had adopted in her native country; but the excessive derangement of her husband's fortune, which was never large, and her own near approach to forty, that period so much dreaded by the fashionable female world of beauty and dissipation, checked her career; and, to satisfy her vanity, which was one of her ruling passions, and make herself amends for the loss of that flattery which beauty and expence had secured, she began to affect a sentimental indifference to both, to take upon her the matronly character, and to hold in contempt the pretenders to what she had so lately made it her whole study to be. Instead of an air of levity, that of dignity was now assumed. Though the former would now and then appear for a moment, notwithstanding the constant guard she kept upon herself, and the art she naturally possessed of assuming what character best suited her at pleasure.

The death of her husband left her in the most distressed situation: upon her arrival in England she would have found it impossible to have preserved even a decent appearance, had not the advice and assistance, which Lord Walton afforded her in the settlement of her affairs, been accompanied by his bounty. He purchased a company in the guards for her son, and settled a handsome pension upon her and her daughter, giving them at the same time a pressing invitation to spend the summer at his house; an invitation which Mrs. West was not of a temper to decline from motives of extreme delicacy. Whatever scheme of life promised her most of pleasure and advantage was in her estimation the best; and, in the protection and friendship of Lord Walton, she foresaw more of both, than in a scrupulous adherence to what the rigidly virtuous esteem propriety of conduct, especially as what she wanted in action she could make amends for in sentiment and dignity of appearance.

Miss West was near twenty; her person was exactly the reverse of her mother's, she being very little and delicately made: she had dark hair and eyes, the latter of which were remarkably penetrating: her complexion was uncommonly brown, her hands and arms excepted, which were altogether as conspicuous for their excessive whiteness. She

had an aquiline nose, fine teeth, and a certain air of self-consequence and satisfaction, which, with the ease acquired by constantly mixing in the great world, altogether stamped her a perfect modern woman of fashion. Her accomplishments were calculated for the sphere of life in which she wished to move. She had received her education in a convent; was lively, spoke French fluently, played pretty well upon the harpsichord, and danced a good minuet.

As for the captain, he was only two years older than his sister. In his person he resembled his mother, being tall, and large in proportion; but his face was the very counterpart of his sister's, except that his complexion was fairer than became his profession. He had been entered into the army at sixteen; so that his education, having been little attended to, never arrived at higher attainments than speaking French, fencing, and dancing, all which he did moderately well. But, notwithstanding this mediocrity of ability and acquirement, Captain West was much admired in the female world, by which he was accounted very handsome and gallant: he had, indeed, about him none of that pleasing indifference and elegant languor which so happily distinguishes our modern men. He was warm even to bombast in his compliments, and romantic in his notions of attachment, in which he differed little from the sighing heroes of old, except in the article of constancy, wherein he was notoriously deficient. He did not want personal courage, and had, in several engagements, during an American campaign, behaved in a manner wholly unexceptionable. But the principal and most striking feature, in his character, was good nature, of which he had an uncommon quantity, and which rendered him a kind of favourite even with those that laughed at his follies; among which number were his mother and sister, who, if they did not laugh at his weaknesses, were sensible of them all; too much so to admit him into a participation of any of their schemes, which they thought the honesty and ardour of his nature ill-qualified him to be trusted with.

Such was the party to whom Caroline was, with so much ceremony, presented; and which, together, with her brother and his tutor, Mr. Haywood, made the whole of Lord Walton's present family.

CHAPTER V.

An accomplished Beauty.

THE following day was, according to annual custom, devoted to pleasure and festivity. When the family assembled at breakfast in the morning, the conversation naturally turned upon the expected entertainments, especially the ball; and Miss West asked Caroline what kind of partners they might hope for, they having been only three days at Broomfield, during which time they had seen none of the neighbouring families. "There will be a considerable variety, (replied Lord Walton,) but I know not whether you will esteem the choice it affords a good one: we shall have, however, some men of considerable fortune, which," (continued he, with a smile,) "is, I believe, in the female estimation, no bad quality." "Do they dance well? (rejoined Miss West,) that, at least, is a necessary quality for a ball-room." "Not (answered the peer) so well, perhaps, as Monsieur Vestris, but they will run through a country dance or hobble a cotillon decently; and we shall have two or three ladies who have had town educations, and, of course, are accomplished." "I need not inform Lord Walton, (replied Mrs. West,) that, if they have no better claim to accomplishments than what is derived from the common course of a London education, they will little merit that epithet so universally pretended to, and so seldom understood or deserved."

"Well, well, (exclaimed Captain West,) it little signifies whether they are accomplished or not, or whether I possess any pretensions superior to those of the esquires with whose company we are shortly to be favoured: it is sufficient for me that I am more fortunate, and, in having the opportunity of engaging Miss Ashford's hand for to-night, I shall, at least, this once, be the object of their envy." Caroline was about to answer with an assenting bow, when she was prevented by her uncle. "Hold, hold, young man, (said he,) I must not permit Caroline to infringe a right established by old usage and custom immemorial." "You know, my dear," (continued he,) addressing Caroline, "that, from the first of these little entertainments which I have given you, you have constantly danced with Mr. Craven; he will be mortified to find you engaged. I know he has come down from London, where a lawsuit now requires his presence, merely because he will not relinquish a privilege he considers as sacred; the least, therefore, that you can do, in return for such a piece of gallantry, is to consider yourself as engaged to him for this evening."

Caroline, to whom the person proposed by her uncle and he who solicited her hand were equally indifferent, acquiesced with this determination, and, smiling, told Captain West, that he would easily console himself among the agreeable young ladies, whom he would in a few hours see assembled. The florid suffusion and chagrin visible in the countenance of the young soldier too plainly spoke his vexation and resentment to escape the attention of Lord Walton, whose regular observance of the laws of politeness would not suffer him to let a dependent feel his situation a moment longer than was absolutely necessary for a particular purpose. "My worthy young friend (said he) will pardon the authority I use with my niece; we must not always exactly follow the inclinations of the moment. I know Henry intends himself the honour of dancing with Miss West, I and my old partner must not be separated, and should you and Caroline

make a third couple, our neighbours, several of whom are, from their connections and fortune, very respectable, might think themselves slighted, and that we make up a party among ourselves and leave them to manage as they can. Besides, I highly value and respect Mr. Craven, and would, by no means, give him just cause to believe himself neglected.”

The young gentleman, though disappointed, was obliged to submit, telling Caroline, however, that, let her dance with whom she would, he should consider her as his lawful partner, and the man who was so happy in her uncle’s interest as an usurper of his rights.

Among the other qualities of Captain West, he had a violent propensity to falling in love: a pair of bright eyes never lost their effect upon him: he had a taste for every kind of beauty, and willingly submitted to every kind in turn. His flames were indeed usually of short duration; having nothing but a shape or complexion to feed upon, they either died away of themselves or were extinguished by new charms, which, for the moment, appeared more powerful. It is not then surprising that the uncommon attractions of our heroine should, in a moment, subdue a heart so susceptible.

It was, indeed, almost impossible to behold her without admiration, or to know her without love. Her person was tall and delicately proportioned; her complexion transparently fair, and animated by a bloom of youthful health, which seemed to speak the purity not only of her blood, but of her soul whence it appeared to spring. Her hair, which was bright auburn, fell in abundance to the middle of her waist, and, having never been submitted to the destructive hands of a modern artist, retained all its native beauty. Her features were at once regular and striking; her teeth extremely fine; and her eyes, of the brightest and clearest blue, spoke the changes of a soul alive to every generous sensibility. Over this lovely countenance nature had cast an expression of cheerful sweetness which no description can paint, and which induced almost every one who approached her to pronounce her a perfect beauty. She had been educated by her father with uncommon attention; and his cares had been rewarded by a success altogether as uncommon. To a perfect knowledge of her own language, she united a more than general one of the French and Italian, especially of the latter, which she spoke with ease and fluency. She had an elegant taste for drawing, and her designs, which ornamented a dressing-room at Elmwood, were greatly admired by those whose taste was in any degree congenial to her own. But her principal passion was music; nature had given her an extensive and exceedingly melodious voice, and she had attended with so much assiduity to this pleasing branch of her studies, that few private performers excelled her, either in point of taste or execution.

So many charms were not necessary completely to subdue the heart of poor West, who was rendered extremely uneasy by the partiality Lord Walton had shewn and acknowledged in favour of Mr. Craven, of whom he began to entertain the most painful jealousy; nor did the events of the evening at all lessen his suspicions: that gentleman’s attentions to his fair partner were too pointed to escape the most uninterested observer; and he found it was the general belief of the company and report of the country, that his hopes were encouraged by Lord Walton, who intended him for her future husband. The antiquity of Mr. Craven’s family, which had for many generations represented a neighbouring country, (as he at that time did,) his vast fortune, and the respectableness of his character, appeared to justify these suppositions, and, having at first rendered the

report probable, occasioned it to be generally admitted as certain. His constant attendance at Broomfield, during the two last years, had kept all other pretenders at a distance, and promised him, at least, the advantage of being esteemed a first admirer. But his person was plain, to speak in the most favourable terms, and his manners far from being such as were likely to engage the affections of a young beauty. He was indeed sensible, and possessed much of that information which renders a man respectable and useful in the senate: but he was intirely deficient in the arts of pleasing; his address was naturally reserved and haughty: and when he wished to unbend, which was only the case at Broomfield, it appeared an effort, and was attended by an awkwardness, which excited a smile of ridicule in the countenance before clouded by disgust.

The perfect ease and disengaged manner of our heroine was her new lover's only comfort. From the closest observation, he could not perceive that she favoured her partner, or any other man in the company, with the smallest attentions, except such as politeness and good nature required; nay, he thought she sometimes appeared incommoded and half disgusted by the unwearied assiduities of his rival, and that the interruptions of their occasional and unavoidable tête-à-têtes always appeared a relief to her. From these circumstances he judged that her affections were wholly disengaged; and that, whatever he might have to apprehend from her prudence and the influence of Lord Walton, he had nothing to fear from that worst of obstacles, a prepossession in her heart. Encouraged by what he thought such a favourable circumstance, he made it his whole study to please and oblige, without giving her the smallest reason to suspect that his views extended beyond the amusement of the present hour. Mr. Craven's absence, occasioned by the prosecution of his suit, left him without a rival, except in the occasional visitors who surrounded Lord Walton's hospitable table, none of whom he saw cause to fear, as most of them, meriting no more, were treated with a polite indifference, and the few, who were more distinguished, appeared to owe that good fortune rather to their virtues than accomplishments, and possessed that degree of esteem, which we denominate good opinion; a cold approbation, perhaps, more distant from love than aversion itself. By artfully dividing his attentions between his mother and sister equally with herself, he effectually deceived the unsuspecting Caroline as well as his patron and relations; and his anxiety, to render himself useful and agreeable to them, appeared the effects of extreme good nature: a quality which never fails to make a favourable impression upon all who do or do not feel its influence in their natural tempers.

Caroline every day became more and more fond of Miss West; she was by far the most conversible and entertaining young woman she had ever met with. The stories and anecdotes which she told her of the great world, a world to which she was so much a stranger, were highly agreeable to a mind ever open to the acquisition of knowledge. They had all the charms of novelty; and, as the relater had address enough to disguise many defects in the scenes and characters she drew, and appeared to blame all those follies and vices which the good sense and penetration of her companion, in spite of her glossing, discovered, she preserved her esteem at the same time that, by constantly contributing to her amusement, she acquired her affection. Mrs. West was not so highly in her favour; the smiling condescension, with which she treated her, had something of art and design apparent in it, which raised disgust; and the flattery, which she every hour observed her offer in abundance to her uncle, completed her dislike. She did not,

however, fail to apologize for her on account of her circumstances. She would reflect, that dependence naturally lowers the mind, and that Lord Walton's generosity and delicacy of conduct, towards her and her family, must certainly raise in her bosom a degree of warmth and gratitude, which would excuse her often painting in colours a little too glowing: nor had she, perhaps, a right to blame her for doing every thing in her power to increase his friendship, upon which so much of their support depended. But, to excuse and approve are distinct things; and, though she sometimes prevailed upon herself to attempt the one, she never could do the other.

A month was spent in a variety of amusements, which the fertile genius of Miss West was never backward in planning, or the purse of Lord Walton in supplying ample means of execution. All the beautiful prospects and well laid-out grounds in the country, twenty miles round Broomfield, were viewed: parties made to dine, upon the neighbouring hills, or upon the banks of a fine lake which his lordship had lately taken into his pleasure-grounds. Upon these occasions nothing was wanting that the day could demand to increase its pleasures. An excellent band of music, which the county militia supplied, always attended; and the feast consisted of every luxury which the nature of a cold collation would admit. The old viscount appeared to have suddenly thrown off the weight of, at least, a score of years, and to feel a return of youth and gallantry.

The evenings were generally closed with a little ball, both Caroline and her friend, as she now began to esteem her, being particularly fond of dancing; an exercise in which they equally excelled. Or, if they were not a party sufficiently numerous for their favourite diversion, some amusement of a less active kind was proposed; of which Miss West had always a variety in readiness. *Consequences* were her most frequent choice; for, as she had a ready invention, and a happy turn of sprightliness, which was often mistaken for wit, nobody shone more in this kind of extemporary sallies than herself. Poor Caroline was here quite left behind: that perfect modesty, which shrinks even from an improper allusion, not permitting her to excel in an amusement which requires that freedom from unnecessary restraint, which one description of the polite world so happily possesses in their hours of social equality. She could not but feel concern at the liberties she observed her friend take upon these occasions; which, while they excited the laugh of applause, excited it, in her opinion, at the expence of qualities far more valuable than those they acknowledged. She ventured often to remonstrate against the impropriety of what she esteemed such violations of delicacy: but she was, sometimes, answered with raillery; sometimes, the words prudery and affectation gently sounded in her ear; and, sometimes, asked what possible harm there could be in a little innocent levity, which enlivened the spirits, injured no one, and was never thought upon after the short moment of continuance. It was in vain she urged that it injured, in its effects, every one present; injured them in that most valuable of all possessions, the purity of the mind. Such ideas were treated as the romantic offspring of hills and valleys, and only calculated for the region wherein they received birth; and Caroline was obliged, for the sake of enjoying many agreeable, to submit to some unpleasant, hours; and found she must not expect that perfection in a friend which she was too humble to pretend to herself.

Sometimes cards, of which Mrs. West was, and Lord Walton had once been, fond, were introduced; but Caroline never joined except when one was wanting to make up a table; and, when the party was complete without them, Captain West and his sister generally declined play from a desire to be in her society. It was upon an occasion of this

kind that they were standing at the drawing-room window, admiring the splendid appearance of the setting sun, which Miss West was comparing to a scene she had been delighted with in the opera at Paris, when they observed a whiskey, with a gentleman in it, attended by a single servant, coming up the driving-way. "What poor country curate is that?" (cried West.) "Don't be too rash in your conjectures; (replied his sister;) what has a country curate to do with a footman? Besides, in order to travel in a characteristic style, he ought to have his wife, and at least one brat, along with him." By this time the whiskey was approached near enough to discern the person of the driver; when Caroline suddenly exclaimed, "My father! my father!" And away she flew, with all the lightness of pleasure, to meet and welcome him.

The pleasures of Broomfield were, for a time, interrupted by Mr. Ashford's arrival, who came to demand his daughter. She had made a considerably longer visit than was intended when she left him; and, though his tenderness and the delight he felt in indulging her in every thing that could afford her pleasure, induced him cheerfully to consent to her frequent visits to her uncle, he was unable to live without her for any considerable length of time; and the last fortnight of her absence had appeared almost insupportably tedious.

He was much pressed, by Lord Walton, to stay a few days, having arrived early in the week, by way of making them some amends for the robbery he was about to commit in taking away his daughter, to which, at first, he appeared to consent; but, in the course of the following day, changed his resolution, and requested her to be ready for her return home the next morning. This alteration proceeded neither from fickleness or any defect in his social affections, but from disapprobation of the manners and appearance of the new acquaintance to whom he had been introduced. His former knowledge of the world enabled him to distinguish dignity from pretence, and levity from wit. He well knew what propriety required from the female character, and could easily discern whether the deviations from it proceeded from pitiable ignorance, blamable inattention, or a bold defiance of its laws; the latter he, without hesitation, pronounced to be the case with Mrs. West and her daughter; in which opinion he was confirmed by that of his son and Mr. Haywood, who related some little circumstances, which, exactly corresponding with what he had himself observed, left him not a doubt of their real characters, and therefore he thought them very unfit intimates for his Caroline. Reflection had refined his ideas, perhaps, too much for the world around him, and he seldom found any thing exactly according to his theory of right beyond the bounds of his own habitation.

The days, during which Mr. Ashford continued at Broomfield, were less gay and more restrained than they had been before his arrival; nobody but Caroline appeared to retain their usual ease and cheerfulness. Mrs. West was sentimental, her daughter half rude, and the Captain almost wholly silent; occasioned by a certain awe, with which Mr. Ashford inspired him, proceeding, perhaps, from the consciousness of his own designs and wishes. Even Lord Walton lost a part of his gallantry, and thought it necessary to introduce subjects of a nature different from those fashionable ones which had, for some time past, taken possession of his thoughts. The truth is, he had spent the younger part of his life in a succession of such dissipated pleasures as too often engross the time and attention of men of his rank and fortune. Nor did this career of false enjoyment end till his shattered constitution forbade its farther progress, and forced him to an unmeritorious sobriety. He spent some years abroad for the recovery of his health; and returned with a

fixed resolution to avoid, in future, those excesses to which he had sacrificed so many years of youth, and which had nearly endangered life itself. The family disagreement, which he found upon his arrival at Ashford-Park, the decisive part he took in favour of his youngest nephew, with the consequent disputes and disagreement which followed, had intirely divided him from one part of his sister's family; and, having no other near relations, he had considered Mr. Henry Ashford and his children as his own, had, in some degree, regulated his sentiments by his, had devoted to acts of benevolence that superfluity of fortune which was wont to supply splendour and ostentation; and, though his style of living was perfectly handsome, and (which is rarely to be met with in the house of a nobleman) hospitable, it differed little from that of the country gentlemen around him, with whom alone he conversed and associated. The arrival of Mrs. West, in whose company the gayest part of his life had been spent, revived, in his mind, ideas, which, having long lain dormant, were believed to be extinguished. He felt something like the ardours of his youth return; and, finding her little altered in person, but apparently in manners, and not at all in disposition, he gave way to the fascination of habits which had long possessed his inclinations, and now, by a strong association of ideas, again, in great measure, took the lead in his heart. The appearance of his nephew, to whom he knew his present conduct would appear both strange and ridiculous, gave a check to his gaiety, and a consciousness of his inferiority lowered him to a half dissimulation.

Thus circumstanced, it is not surprising that the family at Broomfield saw Mr. Ashford depart without regret; as for Caroline, she had voluntarily accustomed herself to consider his will as the law, not only of her conduct but inclinations; she readily therefore complied with his request: and, when they had taken leave, and the whiskey drove from the gate, none but Captain West followed it with a sigh, or wished its return.

CHAPTER VI.

Domestic Happiness.

THE moment Caroline arrived at home all her old habits and inclinations, which the pleasures of Broomfield had, in some degree, suspended, returned with increased alacrity. The variety of amusements she had partaken of, during the past month, had made it appear of great length; for, it will ever be found that time apparently passes most swiftly when there are the fewest incidents whereby to mark its progress.

The appearance of her beloved habitation, in which she had never experienced any thing but peace and indulgence, gave her a sensible pleasure; not unlike that which we feel, when, after a long absence, we embrace an old and faithful friend. Her books, her harpsichord, her drawings, all met her enquiring eye; which, though unsuspecting of change, seemed to receive satisfaction from seeing them all in the same order in which she had left them; and she visited every apartment as a returning intimate calls to say "how do ye" to those to whom she believes her presence will be welcome. Nor was her favourite linnet forgotten. The moment she entered the room where his cage hung, she took it down, and, with many tender caresses, placed it upon her finger; where, as if inspired by her presence, he seemed to celebrate her return with notes of sweetest melody.

It was evening when they arrived; and, having taken the refreshment of tea, Mr. Ashford invited his daughter to a walk in the garden, to see what perfection his peas and cauliflowers were in; an invitation with which she readily complied. The garden was, with the assistance of a labourer, entirely cultivated by Mr. Ashford's own hands. He was extremely fond of the amusement and exercise it afforded; and his pleasure was increased by the knowledge that his daughter subsisted almost entirely upon its produce: fruits, vegetables, and a little fish, being the food she ate with most pleasure. During their walk, in the course of confidential chat, the characters of Mrs. and Miss West became their subject, which he elucidated and laid before her in a light in which she had never before thought of viewing them. "It is not surprising, my love, (said he,) that you should be deceived by the mask with which politeness endeavours to cover the face of licentiousness. A well-bred woman will always in her public conduct imitate the manners of a virtuous one: for, nothing is in its own nature so vulgar as vice. But there is no companion more dangerous, to an innocent and unsuspecting mind, than a woman whose bad principles are varnished over by elegance of manner, and a certain degree of decency and refinement, which leads an inexperienced observer to mistake those occasional sallies (which startle delicacy, and are indeed the corruption of the heart, breaking through accustomed disguise) for the unguarded follies of a disposition naturally good, but in small matters seduced by the fashionable levity of the age. Such a companion, when once she has rendered herself agreeable, as you acknowledge Miss West has done to you, will first persuade you to think improprieties excusable, then indifferent: thus, the poison is taken to the heart before its malignant effects are suspected. For, when the barrier of delicacy is broken down, which may justly be said to divide the boundaries of virtue and vice, what bad consequences may not be feared? When the mine is worked and the train

laid, there will not long be wanting some cruel hand to supply the fatal spark which is to lay the stately edifice in ruins.”

The apprehension of our heroine was too quick, and her sentiments too just, not to agree intirely with her father in his general opinions as well as the inferences he deduced from them. But she still hoped he had made rather too severe a judgement of the character of Miss West, for whom (though disapproving many things she said and did) she had conceived a considerable degree of affection. Her heart, naturally open and sincere, could ill bear so soon to relinquish a favourable impression. She was sensible that her faults were numerous; but she persuaded herself, and laboured to persuade her father, that the principal traits of her character were those of rectitude. As for her mother, she had little to say in mitigation of the charge brought against her, since her own observation, exclusive of her father’s opinion, had convinced her that her dignity, and consequently appearance, was only a veil to a mean and interested disposition; and that, if she was proud to the humble, she could, upon proper occasions, be humble to the proud. Upon the whole it was resolved that Caroline should go no more to Broomfield during their stay there, her father’s apprehensions being awakened by what he had seen of their manners, and her pleasure intirely damped by the unpleasing light in which he had placed her new acquaintance.

This point being settled perfectly to the satisfaction of both, they naturally fell into the rational and regular plan of living, to which they had so long been accustomed.

Though Caroline’s books, harpsichord, and pencil, occupied a large portion of her time, it was not devoted to them at the expence of family œconomy, or a regular attention to any of the less duties of life. She rose early; seldom, in the summer, being in her apartment after six o’clock, or, in the winter, later than eight. A morning walk was not only one of Mr. Ashford’s greatest pleasures, but his grand recipe for health, and he, every fine morning, expected his daughter (without whose society pleasure itself wanted a relish) to partake with him that enjoyment. Their strolls seldom finished under two hours, and breakfast was always upon the table by the time of their return: after which the family-affairs were attended; which, never suffering any neglect or disorder, wanted but little to settle and regulate them. Dress was next adjusted, and, except in case of an evening ride, adjusted for the day. The remainder of the morning was leisure, which each spent as was most agreeable to themselves; generally the father in his garden or study, and the daughter in her dressing-room. Her time was not there employed as is usual with young ladies in the great world; namely, in fretting under the tedious hands of a hair-dresser, directing milleners and mantuamakers, regulating engagements, settling parties for public places, studying Hoyle, or, perhaps, turning over a few pages of a new play: Caroline’s dressing-room contained a pretty large collection of books, partly chosen by her father, partly by herself, and partly presents from her uncle and brother. It consisted of the best ancient and modern history, geography, travels, poetry, of which she was particularly fond, and many of the best plays, novels, &c. &c. works which, when well executed, Mr. Ashford esteemed not only highly entertaining but useful. Here she likewise kept her crayons and other materials for drawing, and several elegant pieces of needle-work, in which she greatly excelled.

Mr. Ashford was fond of long mornings; and, in compliance with his taste, the dinner-hour was four o’clock; their repast, usually, consisted of a single dish, with a tart or pudding, and a variety of the finest vegetables; nor were they ever without a desert of

the most beautiful and delicious fruits the season could afford. After dinner, Mr. Ashford regularly expected a few lessons upon the harpsichord, the pleasing effect of which usually lulled him into a refreshing slumber, from which he awaked as to a new morning. It was his custom to take up a book and read aloud, while his daughter worked, till they were interrupted by the appearance of tea, which, being a favourite liquid with him, especially in the afternoon, was seldom removed under an hour, being prolonged by chat, reading, &c. &c. Riding or walking succeeded; in the course of which they often made calls upon the neighbouring families with whom they were upon terms of intimacy. Nor were their visits confined to the genteel or opulent; the cottage more frequently received them, where their appearance relieved distress, soothed the pangs of affliction, revived old age, and made infancy happy: their approach was viewed with hope, and their return pursued with blessings.

Such was the general tenor of their lives; lives, sweetened by innocence and dignified by usefulness; so happily suited to the desires and disposition of both, that neither seemed to have a wish ungratified; the past day was reflected upon with satisfaction, the present enjoyed with gratitude, and the future expected with hope.

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CHAPTER VII.

Chapter of Cross Accidents.

AFTER a day spent in the manner described in the foregoing chapter, the evening being remarkably fine, Caroline proposed to her father to take a walk to her nurse's, which was about two miles distant from Elmwood; it was, with her, a favourite visit; for she still retained a strong affection for the person whose care and tenderness had preserved that life which the most amiable of mothers was not permitted to foster.

We have before mentioned Mrs. Williams, in whose house Mr. Ashford and his family resided during the building of the parsonage; she was the wife of a small but honest industrious farmer, remarkable for the mildness of her temper, and a degree of charity and benevolence of disposition which was not always exactly regulated by her circumstances; she could not endure to see a poor neighbour in want while she had milk in her dairy or bread in her cupboard; nor, while the broken meat held out, or any halfpence remained in her pocket, would she turn the hungry beggar from the door. Her house was cleanness itself, especially a small parlour and bed-room which Mr. Ashford had fitted up for his own use, and the furniture of which he left behind him at his removal, as an acknowledgement of the extreme civility with which he had been treated during his stay with them. These rooms were seldom used but at Christmas or the wake; (for, in this remote part of the kingdom there are still some remains of simplicity visible among the lower ranks of people;) they might then vie with the most splendid drawing-rooms for neatness. Her daughter, who was the same age with Caroline and her foster-sister, was one of the prettiest, as well as modestest, young women in the country: she and her mother often, upon a Sunday or day of leisure, dined at the parsonage, where Caroline took a particular pleasure in doing every thing that could render them happy, and a visit to her was their highest holiday. She would likewise frequently call upon them; and, while her father talked to the honest farmer about his husbandry, (a subject of which, being so nearly allied to gardening, he was very fond,) she would drink a cup of new milk, or eat a bit of bread and butter fresh from the churn; and, by these little condescensions, conferred more lasting and endearing obligations than any her purse enabled her to bestow. Of this latter kind, however, she was not sparing; if Williams wanted money to make up his rent, his wife always knew where to apply; and the new gown, in which Sally looked so smart every Christmas, was constantly given by the same kind patroness.

The evening was remarkably serene and warm; though almost the whole of their walk was through green shady lanes they felt themselves much heated before they came to the end of it; but Caroline was too good a philosopher to be discomposed by such kind of unavoidable inconveniences. Her father was indeed particularly disgusted when he heard young people complain of natural evils, especially such as were voluntarily encountered. A little rest and chat with the good people, who produced some delicate curds and cream for our heroine's refreshment, occasioned an entire forgetfulness of their little fatigue; and the pleasures of their return made them more than amends for having felt it. The sun was quite set, and the sweet and welcome coolness of evening induced them to stroll softly along, that their enjoyment might not be too soon ended. As they

approached the house, they saw two gentlemen leaning over a slight railing, which separated a small shrubbery from the field they were then crossing; who, the moment they observed them, started up, and came with quick steps to meet them: they soon knew them to be Henry and Captain West, whose presence occasioned no surprise, as the former often used to visit his father; and it was natural for the latter, who was an idle man and had never been in that part of the county, to accompany him both from motives of civility and curiosity.

The most perfect friendship subsisted between Mr. Ashford and his son; the extreme warmth and vivacity of his temper made his father somewhat apprehensive that perfect prudence would not always be among the number of his virtues; but the openness and sensibility of his heart (though often run away with by prepossessions rashly taken up and too earnestly supported) was conspicuous in every action; his notions of honour were as strict as his own; and his judgement, when not misled by his passions, clear and strong: the dutiful respect and affection he always expressed towards his father were unbounded; and he had ever been to Caroline the most kind and attentive of brothers.

The first civilities of meeting being over, they took two or three turns up and down the shrubbery, to enjoy the breeze which refreshed them after a day uncommonly hot, and then sat down to supper. As soon as the cloth was removed, Henry informed his father, that he had at last found the means of removing his uncle's extreme dislike to foreign travel, and obtained his permission to make the tour of Europe, accompanied by Mr. Haywood. Mr. Ashford expressed surprise at such an alteration in Lord Walton's opinions, which Henry endeavoured to account for, by saying, that he believed he was indebted to the obliging interposition of Mrs. West for the consent he had so long vainly solicited.

The reader will possibly wonder that a man of Lord Walton's rank and character should object to a part of education so common, and generally esteemed so necessary, in the higher classes of life: but he had, when very young, himself been the usual tour; and the use, he made of this supposed opportunity of improvement, had given him the worst opinion of travel in general, which, added to his unwillingness to part with his nephew for so long a time as even riding post (the usual mode) requires, determined him to oppose his inclination to what he believed rather injurious than profitable. Mr. Ashford was of a contrary opinion; he did not wish to send every fool and blockhead abroad to expose himself, disgrace his country, and add impertinence to ignorance; but he thought well-disposed young men, of promising abilities, might reap considerable advantage from this finishing part of education; and though he did not think it of essential consequence, he wished his son might have had an opportunity to experience its effects; he therefore felt pleased at the permission he had received, though not perfectly satisfied with the means of obtaining it.

Caroline was in the highest spirits; she sincerely loved her brother, and was delighted with every thing that afforded him pleasure. Mrs. West had her secret thanks for being the means of procuring it, and her son was treated with a more than ordinary degree of attention, both on that account, and as being, for the first time, a guest in her father's house.

The following morning, while Mr. Ashford and his son were talking over the intended tour, she conducted the captain through the shrubbery, at the farthest end of which was a little gate, opening into a field, the upper part of which was beautifully

swelled, and commanded a sweet view of the valley, together with a less one which opened between two cultivated hills. Just in this point of view stood a noble oak, under which a rustic seat was placed, supported by the roots of trees: here, at his request, they sat down and talked over the pleasures of Broomfield, which the Captain declared, had lost all its charms since she forsook it, and eagerly pressed, in the name, of Lord Walton, his mother and sister, for her speedy return. She assured him, with truth, that the time she had lately spent at Broomfield had been, by far, the gayest and most pleasurable she ever passed in her life; but added, that the retired way in which her father was fond of living, his unwillingness to part with her, and the satisfaction she felt in contributing every hour to his ease and comfort, would, in all probability, deprive her of the honour of again paying her respects to Mrs. and Miss West: and, upon his expressing the excess of his own disappointment, and describing what his mother and sisters would be, she enquired how long they intended to stay at Broomfield; to which he answered, with some hesitation, that he really did not know; that he must be obliged to leave it in three weeks, or a month at farthest; but, when Mrs. and Miss West would obtain Lord Walton's consent to follow him, he could by no means ascertain.

Caroline was not greatly pleased to find that their stay was likely to be of so long continuance, fearing that her uncle would wonder at her neither repeating her visit to them, or inviting them to Elmwood; neither of which her father's dislike to their characters would permit her to think of.

During the whole time that they had been seated in this charming spot, West was struggling between his inclination to declare his passion to our heroine and his fear of offending her by so doing. He had every reason to believe her affections, at least, as much inclined to favour him as any other; nay, he thought there were some appearances flattering to his hopes. She had always treated him with the greatest politeness, nay, with a degree of kindness; he never had observed her to be so familiar with any other; he had been her constant partner in every dance at Broomfield, her birth-night excepted, and then his disappointment had not originated from her; he had reason to believe she had rather have danced with him than with the partner her uncle assigned her. Then his last night's reception, could any thing be more flattering? Did not her eyes sparkle when she met him? Did she not again and again express the pleasure she felt on seeing her brother? It was a good cover for her real thoughts; brothers were not used to excite such lively sensations; he never in his sister had observed any thing that resembled it: then, had she not acknowledged, even since they had been there talking together, that the time she passed lately at Broomfield was the happiest part of her whole life; (for, according to the ideas of Captain West, the words gay and pleasurable signified happiness,) and who contributed so much to that happiness as himself? Encouraged by so many favourable circumstances, he was upon the point of throwing himself at her feet in a style the most passionate and heroic; he had actually turned himself half round upon the seat, preparatory to that humble prostration, when Caroline observed, that her father and brother were just come through the gate, and bent their steps towards them. West started up with all the suddenness and appearance of confusion, which he would have felt at being detected in the perpetration of a robbery; his quick motion and change of colour diverted his fair companion, who, far from suspecting the cause of his confusion, told him, with a smile, that she did not know he was so nervous, and begged pardon for alarming him. West was unable to reply to her raillery, nor had he by any means

recovered himself when they met the persons whose appearance had so greatly disconcerted him.

“I am sorry we disturbed you,” (said Henry gravely.) “You have not only disturbed but frightened poor Captain West,” (answered Caroline,) I dare say he never was more alarmed by the appearance of Washington at the head of an American army.” “But you, Caroline,” replied her brother, “have more courage.” “At least,” answered she, “I shall not start till I see the spectre; had you approached in the shape of farmer Wilson’s great dog, I will not be quite answerable for my steadiness.” “Different degrees of danger,” resumed Henry, “affect different constitutions; but, take my word for it, sister, a beau is often a more dangerous animal than a mastiff.”

By this time West had pretty well recovered his composure, and began, though at first with some awkwardness, to laugh at, what he called, his own unaccountable absurdity; but he neither spoke with his usual ease, nor did Henry regard him with his accustomed friendliness. He shuddered at the gulph he had just escaped; he plainly perceived, from the disengaged manner of our heroine that she did not at all expect the declaration he had been upon the point of making; a sure proof, as he well knew, that she did not wish it. The words and looks of her brother were, to his guilty apprehension, full of meaning; plainly declaring, that he disapproved any intimacy, between the young soldier and his sister, beyond friendly civility. He therefore perceived, that all his hopes must necessarily depend upon rendering himself agreeable to the object of his attachment, and gaining her consent to his happiness, independent of her relations. He could not indeed wonder that her friends should look higher than himself for her future establishment in life; her family, beauty, accomplishments, and understanding, gave them a right to expect a very genteel one; but, when to this was added the next, to certainty of her sharing a considerable part of Lord Walton’s vast fortune, which he had declared should be divided between her brother and herself, nothing became too considerable for their hopes. Notwithstanding these circumstances, which might have been a discouragement to spirits less romantic and enterprising, he still flattered himself that it was possible to overcome every obstacle which opposed his way; and, as to wish and hope were with him the same thing, he determined to embrace every opportunity of being near her, of insinuating himself into her good opinion, and, as the next and most easy step, to gain her heart.

Upon their return to the house they found Mr. Haywood just arrived. The remainder of the day, from dinner till supper, was spent, by that gentleman, Mr. Ashford, and his son, in examining maps, and fixing the intended rout, which Lord Walton had entirely left to be settled by his nephew. This obliged Caroline to entertain Captain West; which, as she always felt an inclination to render those about her happy, she performed with the utmost cheerfulness; though, his talents for country conversation not being of the first class, it was not done without some exertion. She would have given him a book had she not known that he did not profess to read aloud. Her drawings had all been looked over and admired in the morning; the harpsichord was her next resource; she, therefore, led him out of the study, where they were all sitting, into the parlour, in which it stood, and played for him a number of favourite lessons, while he stood behind her, sometimes attempting to join her with Mr. Ashford’s German flute, which he could seldom manage to do for more than a bar or two at a time. In this situation they were, when, suddenly attempting to turn over the leaf of her music-book, the hand with which he supported

himself against her chair, slipped off, and he stumbled in so awkward a manner, that he threw down the stand which held it, and half fell by the side of the affrighted Caroline.

Her colour, which rushed into her cheeks at the alarm, was heightened by the sudden entrance of her brother, who, with a surprised and angry voice, inquired what was the matter. The conscious intentions of West, though free from present blame, threw him into confusion, and he told the truth with a voice so hesitating, and a look so embarrassed, that, had any thing more probable presented itself, it might well have passed for falsehood. Caroline, who felt herself offended by the look of anger and suspicion which her brother cast upon her at his first entrance, and the preremptory manner in which he demanded an explanation of what appeared to her such a trifle, closed her harpsichord in silence, took up her work which lay upon it, and seated herself at a distant window. The entrance of Mr. Ashford and Mr. Haywood put an end to poor West's awkward apology: they came to propose a walk in the shrubbery, it being too late in the evening to venture farther; and, no one objecting, Henry stepped into the hall, where his sister's calash hung, and assisted her in putting it on, as if fearful that another should perform the office.

In the course of their walk he contrived to draw her on one side, and, after some chat concerning the journey he was about to take, asked her if she intended to go soon again to Broomfield: to which she answered, that her father did not wish her to visit it again during the time that the Wests remained there, and that, if her uncle was not particularly pressing in his invitations to her, she should certainly act as he desired. Henry greatly commended her resolution; adding, "They are not, my dear Caroline, proper intimates for you; content yourself, for the present, with the way of life you have been accustomed to; when I return to England I will persuade Lord Walton, nay he has already promised me, to take you to London for a whole winter, where he has friends of the first distinction, who will be happy to introduce you into such circles as the Wests will never be permitted to enter, where you may make proper connections for yourself. Do not in your present obscurity forget your future prospects; but remember that Caroline Ashford, who is descended from one of the most ancient families in the kingdom, cannot, without unpardonable meanness, listen to the addresses of an upstart of yesterday, whose fortune is little more than the lace upon his coat, and whose grandfather was never heard of."

Our heroine perfectly understood that West was the person alluded to: she was hurt at her brother's supposing it possible that such a man could engage her serious thoughts for a single moment. Not that the want of antiquity in his family appeared to her so strong an objection; but want of knowledge and sentiment were insurmountable ones. As yet she had never wished for, or received, the addresses of any one: almost every man, who approached her, professed himself an admirer of her beauty and understanding; but there was a certain conscious dignity, which she could at pleasure assume, not the effect of affectation, but of real delicacy, which repressed the first appearance of presumption: and many were deterred from indulging hope by the general persuasion that Lord Walton intended her for the wife of Mr. Craven, between whose father and himself the most particular friendship had subsisted. Her feelings were hurt at being suspected to entertain a partiality for any man: there was no character she more despised than that of a common-place love-sick girl; and she could ill endure to be ranked in so contemptible a class by one whose good opinion she was desirous of possessing. Full of these sentiments, a glow of mortified dignity upon her cheek, she was about to vindicate

herself, and, perhaps, reproach her brother for his unworthy suspicions, when the Captain joined them; complaining, in the name of Mr. Ashford, Mr. Haywood, and himself, of their withdrawing themselves from the party. "Come, come, you have had time enough, Ashford, (said he,) to turn Chamont for once, as your lovely Monimia is not quite in so destitute and forlorn a state as Otway's; a shorter speech may suffice to warn her from danger, and inform her that man is by nature addicted to false-swearing." "If my Monimia were destitute and forlorn (answered Henry) I should be less afraid to leave her; her own principles and goodness of disposition would, I doubt not, guard her from every danger such a state would subject her to. It is the legal robber, Mr. West, against whom I would guard her: the man, who, under pretence of love, honour, and virtue, would deprive her of every advantage her birth, connections, and accomplishments, give her a right to expect, and sink her to his own mean level." These words were spoken with a haughty and pointed asperity, which called the blood into the cheeks of West. Had not his future hopes prevented it, he would not have failed to make Ashford explain them; for, his temper was warm, and he did not want courage. But it hath ever been seen, that the most passionate men can restrain their tempers when the loss of pleasure or advantage is likely to be the consequence of indulging their violence. And thus Captain West, reflecting that a quarrel with Henry would completely ruin his future expectation, smothered his resentment in his bosom, only saying, he congratulated Miss Ashford upon having so excellent an adviser. He had, upon the whole, more reason to be pleased than offended; for, Caroline, knowing that he never had, in the most distant manner, offered to address her as a lover, was extremely shocked to hear her brother, in effect, accuse him of such a conduct. She feared he might suspect her of so low a piece of vanity as that of presuming upon conquests she had never made; a suspicion, which, even from Captain West, would exceedingly have hurt her. To attempt a refutation would almost be to confirm it; for, how could she be supposed to apprehend what never had entered her thoughts? Obligated, therefore, to silence, she could only give her brother a look of mixed disapprobation and concern, while the tear of vexation trembled in her eye, and a deep blush overspread her face. West did not fail to interpret this confusion and distress to his own advantage, while Henry observed it with an air of anger and contempt, nothing short of what he expressed upon entering the parlour after the bustle at the harpsichord.

The evening was far less chearful than the preceding one: Caroline could neither speak to, nor look at, West with confidence. The apprehensions of her brother's suspicions filled her with the most disagreeable reflections; yet, sensible of the injustice of treating a person with disrespect who had never offended, who was her father's guest, the friend of her uncle, and one who had always shewn her every possible attention, she strove at times to resume her usual ease; but it was plainly an attempt, and only more exposed the uneasy state of her mind.

Thus passed supper; after which Mr. Ashford and the governor pursued, upon paper, the intended route. Henry partly attended to them, and partly watched his sister, while the Captain sat enrapt in his own pleasing expectations, which the little events of the evening had greatly brightened. He viewed, with pleasure, the visible uneasiness both of brother and sister, enjoying the jealousy of the one and the perplexity of the other.

Our heroine retired unusually soon to her chamber, where a shower of tears a little relieved her mind; and, after thinking over the ridiculous circumstances which had occasioned her so much vexation, she resolved to explain them to her brother before he

left Elmwood, and not to suffer him to be absent for so long a time with an impression so much to her disadvantage upon his mind. She determined to rise early and meet him, it being his usual custom to take a morning walk in the shrubbery. By five o'clock she was dressed, and bending her steps toward the walk she knew he was most fond of, to which she was led by a close winding path: the first object that presented itself to her view was Captain West; he sat, or rather reclined, upon a seat which was placed under the shade of a spreading beech-tree, and appeared quite lost in thought.

Caroline started; but, seeing that he did not observe her, she stole softly back; when, just as she got to the middle of the close walk, she met Henry and Mr. Haywood. "You are up early, Caroline, (said the former,) are you often a spectator of the rising sun?" "Not often a spectator (replied she) but always an admirer, so much so, that I think those lazy mortals, who never behold it, lose the sight of the most splendid and beautiful object in nature. But had we not better turn to the right? (continued she,) the green walk is so much shaded we shall see it to no advantage." "I must take leave of my favourite retirement, (answered Henry;) I am particularly fond of that walk, there is something so pensively soothing in it: if I were in love, it is the spot of all others I would choose to entertain my mistress or sigh alone." "But as you are not, (replied she,) in my opinion the great walk is both pleasanter, and, at this time of the morning, more healthful." "Well, (answered he,) we will only go once to the end of it and back again, by way of saying farewell, and then you shall lead wherever you please."

Unfortunately for our heroine, every thought that rose in her bosom was impressed upon her face. Henry easily observed the unwillingness with which she accompanied them; but was unable to divine the cause, till entering the green walk he beheld the Captain, who, quite absorbed in his own designs and reflections, had not yet moved from the posture in which she had left him. A look of the most expressive kind, which he darted at her, overspread her face with the deepest blush: at the same time, roused by the sound of their approach, West quitted his seat, and coming forward, with a smiling bow, gave them the usual salute of the morning; adding, that he did not expect the felicity of seeing Miss Ashford up so early. "Then you have not seen my sister before?" (cried Henry.) "Certainly, not this morning," (answered West.) "You are excellently well qualified for intrigue, Captain, (replied Henry.) I find a lady may trust your discretion; at least, neither your candour or sensibility will be the cause of discovery. Come, Caroline, (continued he,) let me see if you are as promising a genius, and equally prepared. Tell me, now, have you, or have you not, seen this gentleman this morning before I met you?"

Poor Caroline was extremely hurt at this question: its being put to her before Mr. Haywood, and West himself, was a shock to her delicacy which she felt in the most sensible manner. Assuming, however, all her resolution, she replied, not without hesitation, "Yes, brother, I have seen Captain West, but——" "Seen me! (exclaimed West,) I protest I have not had the felicity——" "Hold, hold, (cried Henry, interrupting him in his turn,) I want no farther proof. I felicitate you, sir, upon your proficiency in the convenient art of appearing what you wish to be thought; but, as for Caroline, she must practise a little longer, as yet deceit sits very ill upon her." "When I have occasion for the art (replied she) I will endeavour to attain it, but till then, brother, I am injured by your suspicions." "I declare (cried West with earnestness) I have not seen this lady since I had the felicity of parting with her last night." "Is it consistent with the gallantry, upon which

Captain West values himself, to contradict a lady? (said Henry.) Did she not this moment acknowledge that she had seen you?" Caroline was upon the point of answering, when the appearance of Mr. Ashford put an end to the debate. Every one, except herself, appeared, in an instant, as if nothing had happened; and her father, attributing her gravity to concern at the thoughts of parting with her brother, took no notice of it.

After one turn in the great walk our heroine left them and returned to her chamber, where a few tears and a little reflection enabled her to join them at breakfast; which she did with an apparent composure, the effect rather of resentment than tranquillity. They were still seated round the table, when Lord Walton's chaise drove to the door, and in a few minutes Henry and West took leave.

Mr. Ashford parted from his son with a manly tenderness. He had before given him his directions and advice: the latter chiefly tended to guard him against the natural warmth of his temper, which, if indulged during his residence upon the continent, would, he assured him, draw him into many inconveniences and dangers.

When Henry approached his sister to take leave, it was with a coldness she had from him been little accustomed to. "Farewel, Caroline," (said he;) then, lowering his voice, "if ever you hope for my friendship and affection, let me, at my return, address you by the name of Ashford, unless you can change it for one equally ancient and honourable." So saying, he stepped into the carriage, forgetting to request Captain West to precede him; who followed, after having assured our heroine that he should not live till he had the felicity of seeing her again.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Short Journey.

NO sooner was Caroline alone, Mr. Ashford having retired to his study, than she sat down to write to her brother. Her temper was the most perfectly open, and duplicity, of every kind, her aversion. She could, therefore, ill endure that her brother should believe her guilty of so despicable a meanness. Her pride too was hurt when she reflected upon the very slender degree of merit possessed by her supposed lover, and she could hardly forgive Henry for entertaining a suspicion so little complimentary to her taste and understanding. She explained to him every circumstance which occasioned his uneasiness; assured him that Captain West had never made the most distant advances to her, in any character but that of an intimate acquaintance, which, the footing he and his family were upon at Broomfield considered, it was impossible she could refuse him; and concluded with declaring that she had never yet seen the man who, in the smallest degree, as a lover, could interest her affections. This letter she resolved to send the next morning by a purpose-messenger, that he might be sure to receive it before he began his journey, which she knew would not be till the day following.

Her mind thus relieved from the anxiety into which her brother's hasty suspicions had plunged it, soon resumed its wonted tone of easy cheerfulness. She sent her letter by Williams, the husband of her nurse, and, in a few hours after it was gone, had she not expected an answer to its contents, would scarce have remembered her late uneasiness. Nothing, indeed, from the natural goodness of her temper and spirits, sat heavy upon her mind longer than the cause, which produced it, operated. Real sorrows she had never felt, and she had early learned to treat trifles as trifles: a secret which, were it universally known and practised, would save many an hour's uneasiness to the fine gentlemen and ladies of this age.

When Williams came back, she was a little surprised and disappointed to find that her brother had only returned a verbal message to her letter; this, he told her, he had received from a footman; who said, that the young esquire, being engaged with company, desired him to thank her for her letter, and to let her know they were all well. It was very possible that Henry might be much occupied during the few hours he had to remain at Broomfield; Caroline, therefore, not doubting but she should soon hear from him when he was at leisure to give her his whole sentiments, her concern quickly gave way to the pleasing daily employments by which her time was filled up; and she felt no return of uneasiness till a letter arrived, dated Paris, in which, though it abounded with expressions of duty and affection to his father, she was only mentioned in the slightest manner. Her regard for her brother rendered his obstinate perseverance in so absurd an opinion as that of her attachment to Captain West extremely painful to her. She could no otherwise account for his silence than by supposing that he still believed such an attachment subsisted, notwithstanding her express declaration to the contrary. Her concern was, on this last account, deeply tinged with resentment, and she resolved to rest satisfied with the rectitude of her own heart, to trust to time for a confirmation of its sincerity, and make no farther efforts to convince him of an error, which seemed, for the present, to have taken entire possession of his mind.

After this little uneasiness was pretty well removed, some weeks passed without incident to vary or separate them from each other. When, one fine morning as our heroine and her excellent father, after a long walk, were sitting at breakfast, her favourite linnet pecking crumbs upon the table, they saw Lord Walton's travelling chaise drive to the gate, and, in a few minutes, a servant delivered a note from that nobleman to Mr. Ashford and another to herself. They both contained the same request, namely, that she would oblige him and his friends with her company for one fortnight, at the end of which he would give her father leave to fetch her home. The request was made in terms so very pressing, and the time asked so moderate, that, prejudiced as he was against his lordship's present visitors, Mr. Ashford could not refuse her his permission; and, though she felt very little inclination, or, rather, a considerable degree of reluctance to obey the summons, she could not recollect any proper cause of excuse, and she had never accustomed herself to the use of those little convenient falsehoods which the great world esteem so perfectly innocent. She, therefore, immediately set about the necessary preparations, which chiefly consisted in placing what clothes and trinkets she chose to take with her in a small travelling trunk; for, her wardrobe, and every thing that belonged to her, were constantly kept in such exact order that nothing more was at any time wanting.

About ten the next morning having breakfasted with her father, and made him promise not to prolong her absence a day beyond the requested fortnight, she affectionately bade him farewell, and, stepping into the carriage, drove from the door. While he, as was his usual custom, stood gazing after it till it disappeared, intreating heaven to pour down its choicest blessings upon the virtuous and innocent creature it inclosed. After a delightfully pleasant ride in a beautiful autumn morning, about half past three o'clock she arrived at Broomfield, where, upon her alighting, she was met by Mrs. Harris, the housekeeper, who, after many welcomes, told her that Lord Walton and the ladies were not yet returned from airing. "Will not they be late for dinner?" (said Caroline,) knowing that her uncle's hour was exactly four. "Oh! no, madam, (replied Harris,) my Lord has altered the hour of dining to five, and the ladies are seldom ready till half after, or nearer six. Ah! madam, (continued the good woman as she walked after her into the house,) to be sure our old regular way of living is wofully altered since these London ladies came. To be sure my Lord has a right to do as he pleases, but certainly nobody would have thought that he would have changed so much; I wish it may agree with his constitution. But, I hope, now your ladyship is come, things will be a little as they used to be: for, I know, madam, you are not for such rackety doings; and, to be sure, my Lord loves you a great deal better than such late comers."

Caroline put an end to this harangue as soon as possible, and, going immediately into her apartment, wrote a short letter to her father, merely to inform him of her safe arrival, he having, as was his usual custom, sent his own servant to attend her, both as he depended more upon the care of Ambrose, who had lived with him before his marriage, than upon Lord Walton's footmen, and as it gave him the satisfaction of hearing on his return of the safety of her journey, which she made it a rule to give him under her own hand. Having sealed her letter, she began to adjust her dress; and, hearing from Harris, that no company, except two or three gentlemen, were expected at dinner, she resolved not to take off her habit, and, having regulated her hair, was pinning on her hat, when

Lord Walton's coach crossed the lawn, and, in a few minutes, Miss West entered her room.

"Ah! my dear friend," (exclaimed that young lady,) advancing towards her with all the vivacity of pleasure and affection, "how do I rejoice to see you among us once more? Your father was a dear good man for letting you come. Do you know I was half afraid of a refusal?" "And why should you apprehend it (replied Caroline) from a father so remarkable for his indulgence?" "I don't know, (answered Miss West,) but I thought he looked a little grave when he was here; I believe we did not quite suit him, and I never like any body who does not like me. Pardon me, Ashford, I know you are a dutiful, good, creature. Come, come, don't be angry; I won't have a word of answer. When you are dressed come to my room, I know you will be finished long before I am." "I am dressed already, (returned Caroline;) Harris tells me we shall be a family-party, and I feel too idle to open my clothes." "Oh! do let Mrs. West's woman assist you, (cried Miss West,) I am sure she will spare her to regulate your things." "By no means," (answered our heroine,) politely concealing her surprise at hearing of this new attendant; "I shall be less idle tomorrow, and as able to wait upon myself here as I am at Elmwood. But, if (continued she, for in trifles her temper was of the most complying kind) you think my dress will be improper, I will change it immediately." "What signifies the dress of a woman of fashion?" (replied Miss West,) casting a glance of conscious approbation upon a dressing-glass which stood near, "whatever they choose to wear is proper. But come, as you are finished, you had better come with me than sit alone." So saying, away she tripped, and Caroline followed. They spent more than an hour and half in chatting upon various subjects before Miss West was completely dressed, though her mother's woman assisted her in regulating her hair, bringing at the same time compliments from her lady to Miss Ashford, and inquiries after her health. About twenty minutes before six, with some difficulty and hurry, she was quite ready, and with her fair companion entered the drawing-room.

The moment they appeared Lord Walton advanced to meet his niece, and, in the kindest manner, welcomed and presented her to Mrs. West, who received her, if possible, with more stateliness and greater condescension than ever she had done before; telling her she was happy to see her returned, for that Fanny had been quite lost without her. As she turned from that lady she was addressed rather abruptly by two gentlemen at the same instant, one was Captain West, who, with his usual complimentary softness, expressed the pleasure he felt in once more seeing her at Broomfield; the other was Mr. Craven, who, half pressing before him, cried, "I trust Miss Ashford will at least allow me the rights of an elder intimacy, unless, like the fashionable world, she prefers novelty to tried attachment." Caroline, surprised at so unusual an address, and offended at a claim of preference she had never intended to authorise, replied with some spirit, "I would wish, Mr. Craven, to value my friends according to their worthiness, not in proportion to the number of months I have been honoured with the the knowledge of them." No sooner were these words uttered, than a low bow from Captain West informed her what kind of interpretation it was most natural for a vain or a jealous man to put upon them, in which she was confirmed by the mortified and angry countenance of Mr. Craven: but that gentleman's particularity had, of late, become so very disagreeable to her, that she was not sorry to have an opportunity of checking it, though at the hazard of raising a little the

vanity of West, which she believed she could, at any time, repress, and from which she did not fear any inconvenience.

During the remainder of the day Craven spoke little; he sat with a kind of sullen importance in his looks, his eyes almost continually employed in watching the slightest movement of our heroine; nor could all the coquetry of Miss West, who tried every art to divert and engage his attention, call it, for a single moment, from her. Captain West still continued the same caution he had observed during her last visit to Broomfield, dividing his attentions equally between the three ladies, though in his address to Caroline the particular softness of his voice and eyes seemed to acknowledge that his feelings were of a nature different from those which a mother or sister could excite.

The reader may here wonder, encouraged as Captain West believed himself to have been at Elmwood, and flattered as he was by the supposed compliment he had just received at the expence of Mr. Craven, that (as diffidence was not a leading trait in his character) he did not, in some degree, lay aside the extreme caution he had hitherto observed, and a little presume upon his apparent good fortune. This would probably have been the case, had not a circumstance happened which effectually undeceived him in the imagined progress he had made in the affections of our heroine. The letter, which Caroline had sent by Williams, was delivered by a footman to Captain West, who promised to give it to Henry, who was then in the park with Lord Walton and the ladies, where he was going to join them. This, at the time of receiving it, he really intended to do; but, on his way, viewing the direction which he knew to be written by her, he was seized with a violent desire to peruse its contents, which his vanity, raised by the little events we have related, fully persuaded him contained at least an implied confirmation of his hopes. He knew that Henry was to leave the kingdom immediately, and that the footman from whom he received the letter would, in a few days, quit the family; so that, should it ever be known it was suppressed, no witness would be here to prove it had been in his possession. Encouraged by these favourable circumstances, and incited by the expectation of meeting with what might guide him in his future pursuits, he broke the seal, and, to his unspeakable mortification, read the contents, with which the reader is already acquainted. Filled with indignation and disappointment, with all the warmth of an Orondates, he tore the letter to pieces; but, recollecting that it might be imprudent to venture the scattered fragments to the disposal of the winds, like a tame modern, he condescended carefully to collect them together and place them in his pocket-book, till a convenient opportunity offered for committing them to the flames. Thus Henry still remained ignorant of his sister's sentiments; or, rather, he continued to believe them far different from what they really were; and the poor Captain fatally was convinced that he had nothing to trust to, in his hope of gaining the object of his passion, but future assiduity, and that the ground he believed himself to have gained was still to be laboured over.

The gentlemen took their leave early in the evening; so that at supper none but the family were present: the conversation turned upon Henry, and the tour he was about to make, and Caroline expressed much satisfaction at the pleasure she knew her brother would enjoy during its continuance, as likewise the improvement both in knowledge and manners it was likely to be to a young man so well formed for the acquisition of both. "You know my opinion of foreign travel, (said Lord Walton;) I believe for one young man who is benefited by it, fifty are made sceptics and coxcombs. Knowledge is to be

acquired every where, if the abilities are good and the mind disposed to receive it. A man of fortune, who has nothing to ask of the world, may acquire a sufficient knowledge of it in his closet. You shake your head, my dear madam, (to Mrs. West;) I know you think differently: I have every deference for your opinion; and, perhaps, Henry had never gained my consent to his present excursion, had not Mrs. West been an advocate for the custom. Yet, I will acknowledge, and you well know, I had a stronger motive: the fear of his forming an improper attachment, if, indeed, it is not already formed, was my principal reason for indulging a wish he has long expressed of visiting the continent, but which has, I am afraid, lately been absorbed in desires of another nature.

Caroline expressed her surprise at this account of an attachment she had never, in the smallest degree, suspected; having always looked upon her brother rather as an insensible, with regard to female merit and beauty, than one in danger of sacrificing prudence to affection. She felt the strongest curiosity to know the possessor of his heart, but could only learn, from Lord Walton, that he was perfectly convinced that his suspicions were founded upon truth, and that the object of his passion was every way unworthy of it, and such as never should obtain his approbation.

During this conversation Mrs. West observed a profound silence; only bowing in return to Lord Walton's compliment, and shewing, by her looks, the interest she took in his feelings. The captain sighed, and said he pitied every one who struggled with a hopeless passion. But added, that he believed the only cure for love was change of scene and variety of objects; and, as Mr. Ashford enjoyed both these helps, he did not doubt but he would soon experience their good effects. Miss West declared it was a thousand pities so fine a young fellow should be thrown away upon an obscure girl, when so many women of fashion would think themselves happy in his attentions. While they were engaged in earnest discourse the clock struck twelve, their usual hour of retiring, and put an end to farther observations. Caroline was attended to her room by Mrs. Harris; who, having known her from infancy, and been always treated by her with distinguished kindness, was particularly attached to her person and interest. "Ah! madam," (cried the good woman as soon as the door was closed,) "I wish these fine Londoners were gone, we were used to be in bed by this time, eleven was my Lord's constant hour; to be sure, it was very early for a nobleman's family, but I have heard my Lord say it agreed much better with him than the late hours he used to keep; and one would think nobody, who loves and respects him, would persuade him to do what is not for his good: but every thing must be as Mrs. West pleases; all the servants have orders to obey her as if she was their lady: it is more than ever was done for you, madam. To be sure there was no need; for, all of us love you as if you were our very lady; not a servant but is ready to fly if you but hold up your finger. But then there is a difference, you are a real lady, and have a right to be here, for who should my Lord love but his own relations? And then you are so sweet and good natured: you never meet a servant but it is "how do you do, Peggy," or "how do you do, Sally;" but Miss West passes by them as if they were not of the same flesh and blood; and, if madam speaks, it is as if she thinks it demeans her, and nobody is a bit better pleased than if she went by without it. As for the captain, he's good natured enough; but I should think it would be better for him to be with his soldiers than lounging here so long."

Caroline, as soon as the good woman's volubility would permit, put an end to this harangue, by gently reminding her that her uncle had a right to invite whom he pleased to

his house, and advised her to treat Mrs. and Miss West with all possible respect during the time of their stay, adding, that she had no doubt but every thing would return to its old course as soon as they quitted Broomfield. “Quitted Broomfield, (repeated Mrs. Harris:) I’ll be hanged if they quit it as long as the doors are opened to them. No, no, they like good living too well for that. Besides, they have both had a great many new clothes from London but the other day, which does not look as if they were going in a hurry. I wish with all my heart they had never come within the doors, with their fine new-fangled ways: not a footman but laughs at them the moment their back is turned. To be sure, as your ladyship says, my lord has a right to invite whom he pleases to his house, but without he could get better—. I say nothing; but they were bare enough when they came first, it was all but outside finery; but now, believe me, they have every thing in abundance; and a new maid too: when they came first they had only a shabby footboy at five pounds a year, but they are now enquiring for a complete valet; every body knows where it must all come from.” “Their want of fortune (replied Caroline) ought not to be imputed to them as a fault; and, if my uncle is generous enough to supply them with what they stand in need of, nobody has a right to murmur at the use he chooses to make of his own.” “To be sure you are very good, madam, (answered Harris,) but, if they were in your place,—I say nothing,—but things would not be as they be. Miss West tried hard to flirt with the esquire, but he never would have much to say to her; and Jones (meaning the butler) says he is sure the Captain casts a sheep’s eye at your ladyship; but, to be sure, I hope his betters will be sent a packing. I hope to see you, miss, one of the greatest ladies in the country; and so, to be sure, you have a right to be, every body knows who you are; but, as for these——” Here she was again interrupted by our heroine, who thanked her for her good wishes and the assistance she had afforded her in undressing, and, saying she was sleepy, begged she would leave her. With which request Mrs. Harris reluctantly complied, having a great deal more intelligence which she longed to communicate. But as Caroline had, at the same time that she acquired the love of her uncle’s domestics, preserved their respect, she did not venture to give farther vent to her aversion for her lord’s guests, but, having adjusted her pillow, drawn her curtains a little closer, and wished her a good night, she dropped a courtesy, and retired.

The housekeeper’s account of the increasing influence of the Wests was by no means pleasing to our heroine; not that she had in her disposition any of that little narrow jealousy which is constantly dreading a rival, and fearing to lose the smallest advantage to which nature or fortune have given it any pretension. The pecuniary favours bestowed on them by her uncle gave her not the smallest concern; but she was convinced of the artful and interested character of Mrs. West, and feared she might carry her power over him so far as not only to lessen his attachment to his nearest friends, but to the endangering of his future peace. She began to suspect that lady not to be without her designs in contributing so much by her advice and persuasion to the gaining his consent to the tour her brother was then making. He was not of a temper to be flattered, and never had shewn her much attention. It was an excellent expedient for getting rid of a satirical observer of their words and actions; for such Henry plainly was.

These unpleasing reflections, and the account she had heard of her brother’s ill-placed attachment, for some hours kept sleep from her eyes; the day began to dawn before they were closed by its friendly influence; and, the singing of the robins which were wont to rouse her from slumber, now soothed her to repose.

CHAPTER IX.

A Declaration.

THE moment our fair heroine awoke, the sight of the sun, shining full through the curtains of her chamber, made her spring from her bed. Upon looking at her watch she saw, with surprise, that it was half an hour passed ten o'clock. As her uncle's breakfast-hour used to be exactly ten, she rang the bell, and requested the servant, who attended to know her commands, to desire Mrs. Harris would send up a dish of tea as she was too late for breakfast. "Oh! mame, (answered Peggy,) you are quite in good time, my Lord never breakfasts now till twelve. The ladies are but just up, Mrs. Ettongue is just gone up stairs." "Is my uncle up?" (said Caroline.) "Yes, mame, (replied Peggy,) my lord takes a walk as usual in the park every morning, only he used to go about eight and now he seldom sets out till after ten." Caroline, having finished her dress, which was always remarkable for its neatness and elegance, knowing the walk he generally took, slipped on her calash and followed him.

She had not proceeded more than a quarter of a mile before she saw him. The morning was delightfully pleasant, it was just cool enough to render the sun agreeable: the verdure was, from some late rains, lively as that of spring, and the stately oaks, with which the park was chiefly adorned, still retained their greenness, while the birch, ash, elm, &c. which were interspersed among them, began to change their colour to various shades, the soft and beautiful painting of nature.

Captain West, who accompanied his Lordship, as soon as he perceived our heroine, advanced to meet her. "This is an unexpected felicity, my dear Miss Ashford, (said he.) How much are the beauties of this scene improved by your presence? It was all but perfect before; it can now admit of no addition." "Let me congratulate you (answered she smiling) upon having at last discovered the garden of Eden, and in the north too! It may lead to a new theory of the earth, I would have you think about it." "If I had the liberty to choose my Eve, (replied West,) I would find a Paradise under the Pole." Lord Walton now joined them, and they walked slowly towards the house. After a moment of thoughtfulness, he turned to her. "Let me (said he) after breakfast have a few minutes conversation with you in the library." Caroline only replied, that she would attend him. There was something peculiar in his manner of speaking, which deprived her of the power of saying more. The remainder of their short walk was silent, notwithstanding Captain West's endeavours to the contrary.

Upon entering the breakfast-room they found Mrs. West already there: a few minutes after, her daughter appeared. "My dear creature, (cried she,) how charmingly you look this morning! I thought yesterday you were thinner, but it was only your habit. What a pity it is that we have no beaux: where none admire, you know, 'tis useless to excel." "Pray what do you make of me?" (said Captain West.) "Oh! pardon, pardon! (exclaimed she,) I had forgot that you were not brother to Miss Ashford. Yes, yes, you may admire: but one admirer!—What a dull sound in the ears of a beauty! almost a matrimonial one." "And are matrimonial sounds so very dull, (said Lord Walton,) I thought young ladies esteemed them among the lively ones." "Oh! no, (returned Miss West,) there are a few bustling accompaniments which render them a little supportable, but the composition

itself is the most stupid in nature, all *andante* from beginning to end.” “And what are these accompaniments, (asked his Lordship,) which may one day render this dull piece acceptable to the lively Miss West?” “Oh! dress, houses, equipage, title, place, pin-money, and separate maintenance, (exclaimed that young lady in an affected rapture.) There’s variety for you! What signifies the heaviness of the ground-work if the superstructure is so light and elegant?” “These are the sentiments of a girl,” (said Mrs. West, gravely.) “Yes, and of a very giddy one too, my dear madam, (replied her daughter.) I know you are an advocate for matrimonial felicity, as my brother says: but it is time enough for me to learn such grave lessons when I have occasion to practise them.” “Miss Ashford is an example to prove (answered Mrs. West) that reason and propriety of sentiment are not incompatible with youth and sprightliness.” “Oh! Miss Ashford (replied Miss West) is a little phoenix. Ask my brother if she is not all perfection. It is in vain to imitate her; one may as well attempt to out-shine the sun or the Duchess of ——— upon a birth-night.” “The goodness of Miss West’s heart, and the agreeableness of her wit, constantly lay her friends under obligations, (said Lord Walton;) and I pity that man who would wish to alter or restrain either the one or the other.” “Now, my dear Lord, that was said like yourself. Oh! that I had been a belle of the last age, when the men knew how to love and compliment, (cried Miss West.) A woman was then a queen, and could now and then indulge herself in a little agreeable tyranny: but now, we are obliged to smile, and smile, and smile, and find it as difficult to get a civil thing out of a modern man as from one’s parrot or monkey. I envy you, Mrs. West, who had the good fortune to be thought handsome when gallantry was the ton.” This speech was succeeded by a retrospective to past times, which appeared to afford Mrs. West and the Viscount much pleasure, and continued till his Lordship, rising, informed Caroline, by a look, that he should expect her, and left the room.

The ladies proposed a ride round the lake; but Caroline excused herself, and, leaving them to pursue their own choice, followed her uncle to the library. The moment she entered, he arose, and, taking her hand with much gravity, seated her by his side. “I think my dear Caroline loves me,” (said he, still holding her hand;) “I think my happiness is dear to her: am I deceived?” “Is there any thing in my power to do, my Lord, (answered she,) that may convince you of my grateful, dutiful, affection? If so, my performance will be my best reply.” “Thank you, my love, (answered he,) I do not doubt your sincerity; but, at present, it is not action I require, but chearful acquiescence; acquiescence in a measure upon which the future happiness of my life depends. I know not how I have been led to a change of sentiments so little expected by myself or friends; but my honour, my inclinations, are engaged now, and I have determined to act according to their dictates. If my relations are satisfied, it will greatly oblige and convince me of their friendship; but, if otherwise, it will, it can now, make no alteration in my conduct.” “I perfectly understand you, sir, (replied our heroine,) may every step you take be productive of increasing comfort to yourself. So far from repining at the means, I will be the first to thank the author of your happiness.”

The eyes of Lord Walton brightened at these words. A consciousness of folly, perhaps of injustice, had before hung about his spirits, which, though not strong enough to deter him from commission, greatly damped the pleasures of expectation, and rendered him, to a certain degree, afraid, not only of the laugh of the world, but still more of the reproaches of his relations, to whom, by repeated promises, he had given a kind of right

to inspect his conduct. Pleased, therefore, to find so ready an acquiescence from his niece, he felt a kind of confidence that he should as easily reconcile her father and brother to the unexpected measure he had resolved to adopt, and, under the sanction of their approbation, screen himself from general censure.

“You beyond measure oblige me, my dear girl, (said he.) Narrowness and self-interest are so prevalent in the human breast, that I feared to find even yours infected by them. Yes, my love, I have resolved to marry. The choice I have made is the most unexceptionable. I have selected a woman, whose experience and knowledge of the world has corrected the natural ardour of youth without robbing her of its agreeableness. One for whom I have long entertained an habitual partiality, and to whom, I have reason to believe, I have long been more than indifferent. In her you will acquire a mother, both capable and desirous of introducing you into life, with a propriety which it would have been difficult for me to do: and, in her daughter, a lively, pleasing, companion, whose society will double all your enjoyments. I trust my marriage will be productive of happiness and advantage to all with whom I am or shall be connected.”

Caroline bowed. In spite of herself a tear stole down her cheek; she wiped it quick away, saying, “I trust, sir, it will. But when, sir, may we expect—” “As soon as possible, (interrupted his Lordship:) when once a thing of this nature is resolved upon, it cannot too soon be put into execution. Your father’s presence is only wanting; I shall not think my union sacred unless it receives his benediction.” “You are, sir, (replied our heroine,) the best judge of what will contribute to your own happiness. I am sure my father will feel no reluctance but what arises from the fear——” Again his Lordship interrupted her. “You say rightly, (said he,) that I am the best judge of my own happiness; I cannot, therefore, doubt of your father’s ready compliance with my request that he will perform the ceremony: it will be particularly agreeable to Mrs. West as well as myself. Perhaps the affair, as it is rather unexpected, will be opened more agreeably by you than any other person; if, therefore, you will write and inform him of it, at the same time letting him know that Thursday is fixed upon for the day, you will greatly oblige me, and add to the favour by accepting this trifle to furnish you with such little articles as you may want upon the occasion.” So saying, he put a note for one hundred pounds into her hand.

Caroline received his present with silence, and even a degree of reluctance. She felt as if it was a bribe, and, while her hand received, her heart rejected, it. She arose, and in a low voice promised to do all he requested, and, quitting the library, hastened up to her own apartment, where a shower of tears gave vent to her feelings, which were some of the most painful she had ever experienced. She plainly perceived that her uncle, whom she sincerely loved, was upon the point of sacrificing his peace and fortune to a mercenary, artful, woman, and how far her influence, which she foresaw would be absolute, might affect her brother’s interest, as well as her own, was, in her opinion, very doubtful. She saw, however, no means of avoiding the stroke, and therefore, like a true philosopher, resolved to submit with a good grace. To submit to necessity was her father’s favourite maxim: a maxim, without the practise of which, life, though attended by the most fortunate circumstances, will be vexatious and uncomfortable.

As soon as her first emotions were a little subsided, she sat down to give her father an account of the events of the day, which she did just as they had occurred, repeating to him every word Lord Walton had spoken during their conference, which her memory enabled her to do with ease, it being remarkably retentive. She neither palliated

any thing nor set down ought in malice; but simply told him plain facts, leaving it to her father to draw his own conclusions. She was too well acquainted with his understanding to fear, from his surprise or mortification, any violence or impropriety of conduct, and concluded her letter with desiring him, if it was not absolutely disagreeable, to come to Broomfield on Monday, as Lord Walton would esteem it a compliment, and to continue with them a few days after the marriage.

Having closed her letter she delivered it to a servant who waited, by his Lord's direction, to carry it to Mr. Ashford. She then changed her dress with great composure, and, when a summons to dinner brought her to the dining-parlour, entered with every appearance of her usual cheerfulness.

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CHAPTER X.

A Peep at the great World.

A Kind of consciousness sat upon the countenance of Mrs. and Miss West, a something like that which discovers an unsuspected thief. But it vanished in a moment; and the latter, taking the hand of our heroine, as soon as she entered the room, with her usual appearance of affection, exclaimed, "My dear creature, where have you been, and how have you disposed of yourself this morning? I have been out of temper ever since breakfast, and one of your sweet, placid, smiles would have brought me into tune again. Come sit on this side of the table, and tell me what you have been doing." "In the first place (answered Caroline) I have been writing to my father." "Miss Ashford is always well employed, (said Mrs. West;) I hope her example will teach Miss West to fill up her time a little better." Caroline only bowed to her compliment, and continued: "In the next place, I have been dressing, which, in a modern account of time, you know, may well suffice for the employment of a whole morning." "And, if all ladies dressed with as much taste as Miss Ashford, (cried Captain West,) there would be some excuse for their spending so many hours at the toilet. All I murmur at is their taking so much pains to disguise beauty. When they distort the shape, varnish the face, and render that finest of all natural ornaments, the hair, a paste of powder and perfumery." "Hush, hush, West, (cried his sister,) do just recollect that you are in a civilized company, and at dinner. You know I never contend with Miss Ashford, so no more comparisons if you please." "Caroline has been employed this morning in a manner which has greatly obliged me. She has been inviting her father to visit us next week, and is ready to do every thing that may contribute to the harmony and happiness of Thursday," (said Lord Walton, addressing Mrs. West.) That lady bowed in the most gracious manner; more could not be said, the servants being present; but no sooner were they retired than he resumed the subject, which, after a moment's hesitation, was discussed by them all in the freest manner. Mrs. West assured Caroline that one of the most agreeable circumstances, in her approaching union with Lord Walton, was the pleasure of considering herself as a mother to the most amiable and lovely young woman in the kingdom; adding, that it would be her pride to introduce her into the great world with every possible advantage. Caroline, though neither flattered nor deceived by these professions, thought it best to appear, nay, to be, satisfied. She entered, therefore, into all their little consultations, about dress and necessary arrangements, with ease and cheerfulness, though not quite with the avidity of Miss West.

In all affairs of preparation Mrs. West affected great indifference, professing to leave them intirely to Miss Ashford and her daughter: yet she would often interpose with a careless air, and change, or make additions to, what they proposed; and Caroline could not help observing, that all her alterations were in favour of splendour and expence, though, when Lord Walton was present, she would smilingly complain of their extravagance, saying, she must take care how she invested them with power again, for she feared they would quite ruin her.

In this manner passed the days till Monday, when, according to all their expectations, Mr. Ashford arrived. Upon his entering the drawing-room he saluted his uncle as well as Mrs. and Miss West with rather more gravity and form than was natural

to him: but, when he turned to his daughter, his eyes at once brightened, and his whole countenance expressed the pleasure her sight afforded him: nor was her lovely face less animated by affection and joy, though their separation had been but that of a few days; their satisfaction upon meeting was lively and sincere. Soon after the coffee and tea was removed, Lord Walton and his nephew retired. As they went out of the room, a look of apprehension was exchanged between the mother and daughter, and their cheerfulness, which had been a little damped by the presence of Mr. Ashford, was in danger of being wholly suspended, when Mr. Craven was announced. The natural gravity of this gentleman was but ill-calculated to revive gaiety; but the appearance of any stranger is a relief to a family-party, not quite at ease or at liberty to communicate their feelings to each other.

A walk was proposed; and, the moment they got into the park, Captain West offered his arm to our heroine, which she accepted. The eyes of Mr. Craven reproached her compliance, but, without any other expression of resentment, he paid the like compliment to Mrs. West, telling her daughter, at the same time, that he had another arm at her service, which she willingly laid hold of. She had, indeed, during the whole time she had spent at Broomfield, treated that gentleman with particular distinction, omitting no opportunity of rendering herself agreeable to him: not that his person, manners, or temper, were at all what she liked, but his fortune was, Lord Walton's excepted, the largest in the county; and every thing that could be desired, in her opinion, followed of course. She had, as yet, received no great encouragement to hope that her schemes would prove successful: but the trial cost her little; it was a kind of habitual compliment which she paid to every man of fortune, any one of whom she would readily have married, provided settlements, pin-money, &c. had been properly arranged.

At supper they were again joined by Lord Walton and Mr. Ashford. Some remains of chagrin remained upon the countenance of both, but no breach of friendliness appeared to have been the consequence of their long conference. Lord Walton attempted to be unusually gay. A little uneasiness appeared, at first, in the countenance of Mrs. West, but the attentions of his Lordship, in a great measure, dissipated her fears. She would have paid Mr. Ashford some compliments; she would have persuaded him of her esteem; of her affection for his daughter: but there was a simple, unaffected, dignity about him which flattery dared not assail. The latter subject was the only one which she ventured to touch; and, finding even that string too delicate for her management, she gave it up, and silently waited for the passing of the two days of constraint, by which her future hopes and expectations were bounded. Miss West was more at ease, and her lively sallies, in some degree, amused Mr. Ashford, to whom she began to grow less displeasing. Though habitually thoughtful himself, he loved cheerfulness in others, and considered it as one of the most natural and amiable characteristics of youth. In the conference with Lord Walton he had told him his sincere and undisguised opinion of the step he was about to take, which he painted in such colours as appeared half to alarm and half to offend him. His Lordship answered his objections by pleading honour and inclination; ties of which Mr. Ashford had felt the full force, and was the last man to persuade another to violate. All, therefore, ended at the same point where it began, and Thursday was finally appointed for the marriage. His Lordship then shewed him a sketch of the settlements he had made upon his intended lady, which were of the most liberal kind, and to which not the smallest objection was made.

The day arrived; a special licence had been procured, and the ceremony was performed with all its usual solemnities; though, as was the wish of both parties, in the most private manner. Mr. Craven was the only stranger invited upon the occasion, who, together with Captain West and the two young ladies, made the whole of the persons present at the ceremony. Lord Walton appeared a little embarrassed; a consciousness of something not exactly right still seemed to hang about his spirits. As soon, however, as the ceremony was over, and past recall, he assumed the utmost gaiety, appearing like a man who had got through a great difficulty and congratulated himself that it was over. Her Ladyship was quite upon her guard, the only alteration, which appeared in her, was her taking the lead more in conversation than she had for the last two or three days ventured to do. She likewise addressed more of her discourse to Mr. Ashford, who felt himself rather better disposed to listen to her as the wife of his uncle than while he could only consider her as a dependent flatterer. Miss West was in the highest spirits, which she took no pains to restrain, especially as her being so appeared highly agreeable to Lord Walton, who, two or three times, told Caroline she was not chearful, which naturally tended to lower her spirits, already too much depressed. The attempt to appear what he wished was painful to her. Her spirits were low, and the excessive gaiety of Miss West, occasioned by the same cause which deprived her of the share natural to her disposition, was by no means calculated to raise them. She smiled; but, in spite of herself, a tear would sometimes start into her eye. Every thing around her appeared already changed, and every look she gave seemed to be a farewell to the pleasing days she had spent at Broomfield.

This disagreeable state of mind lasted, however, but a day; with the succeeding morning all her usual sprightliness returned. Mr. Ashford continued only two days with them after the marriage, but was, in that time, prevailed upon, by the request of Lord Walton, and the earnest intreaty of his Lady and Miss West, (who wished for the countenance of so near a relation of his Lordship,) to leave his daughter behind him, and even to suffer her to accompany them to Bath, where they proposed spending a couple of months. But nothing could prevail upon him to consent to her going with them to town for the winter; an indulgence which was by no means requested, or wished for, by herself: on the contrary, when it was first mentioned to her by Lady Walton, she declared that nothing should induce her to leave her father for so long a time. Nor, was it with her knowledge, that it was at all proposed to him; all that she would consent to was to attend them to Bath, whence she resolved to return home at the same time on which they set out for London: and her father, before his departure, received from her the most unreserved promise of being with him again in two months at the very farthest: at which time he promised to send Ambrose to attend her on the journey, and to meet her himself a part of the way. Mr. Ashford's departure was an event secretly wished both by Lady Walton and her daughter, especially the former, who scarce felt herself mistress of the house while he continued in it. The excessive respect paid to him by all the domestics, and the pleasure and alacrity with which they flew to obey the slightest command given either by him or his daughter, were extremely displeasing to her, who had now a superior right to attention; a right which she had determined to exert to the utmost. The inquiries and congratulations of the neighbourhood were answered only by cards, and four days after the marriage they set out for Bath. Their journey was the most delightful that the finest October could afford; they all arrived, at the end of it, in the best health and spirits, and

took possession of an elegant house in the Circus, which had been hired for them before they left Broomfield.

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CHAPTER XI.

The Man of Taste.

BATH was very full. Many fashionable families, with whom Lady Walton had been acquainted during the first years of her marriage with General West, but who had declined distressing her by their visits in her widowhood, now eagerly renewed their intimacy, and were received with equal pleasure. Their door was thronged with visitants, and their appearance at the rooms attended with every circumstance of splendour and distinction. Her Ladyship was received into the first parties, played deep, and felt herself once more within that magic circle in which it was her delight and ambition to move. Miss West was admired, and Caroline universally pronounced the beauty of the season. The first evening that she appeared at the ball, the uncommon beauty of her person drew all eyes upon her. "Who is she? Who is she?" was whispered round: and, several persons being present who knew her uncle, it was immediately spread about that she was the niece of Lord Walton, and heiress to his whole fortune. This account did not lessen the admiration her charms had excited. When she danced a minuet, the men thought it worth their while to turn their faces to the top of the room; and Lord Danby, the most fashionable man at Bath, happening to cast his eyes that way, was so struck with her figure that he turned quite round, nor once took them off the lovely object before him till she was handed to her seat, where the enormous plumage of Miss West completely shaded her from view.

No sooner was the minuet ended, and our heroine returned to her seat, than his lordship, loud enough to be heard by the whole circle round, pronounced her the finest girl in Europe. Nothing more was wanting to establish her reputation as a beauty; his taste was universally acknowledged and subscribed to by the fashionable mob of the day, even to a critical nicety. Just at this time he led the ton, for which situation he was remarkably well qualified. He was just come into possession of a vast fortune, generally reckoned handsome, and one of the most accomplished men of his age. His style of living was in the first cast; his houses were elegant, his equipage splendid, his train numerous, and his whole expenditures laid at about double his income, which was one of the largest in the kingdom. He was just returned from Spa, and was accompanied to Bath by one of the finest women in England; she had already ruined a Duke and two Commoners; for, her taste and generosity were unbounded; she made a point of providing for all her friends, and few could reckon a larger number. His Lordship had never had the smallest enjoyment in her company, she was of late become even disagreeable to him; but he could meet with no other woman who possessed so much taste and beauty; such an appendage was absolutely necessary to his rank and character; and to discard her on account of the spirit and elegance, for which she was so much admired, would be mean, was impossible! All the world envied him the possession of so fine a creature, and he ought to be satisfied. His notice was universally sought by the women; the circumstance of Mrs. Birton's residence in his house not being, in their estimation, at all disgraceful, nor would any young lady of virtue and delicacy, who had been lucky enough to attract his momentary attention, entertain the least doubt of the probability of fixing him for life,

of possessing his affections in their utmost strength and purity, and, in short, of so charming a man making the fondest and most faithful of husbands.

His Lordship's family was, by marriage, connected with that of Lord Walton; so that, though not personally acquainted, it was no difficult matter to become so; the introduction of men of equal rank to each other is easy, and Lord Danby was, as soon as the minuets were ended, presented to Caroline, by her uncle, as a proper partner for the evening: a man of fashion was likewise introduced to Miss West by the Master of the Ceremonies; and, both being extremely fond of dancing, the evening passed away in the most agreeable manner. Every body was astonished to see Lord Danby go through every dance, who was used to declare the exercise insupportably fatiguing; nay, when the hour of retiring arrived, instead of being the very first to leave the rooms, as was his usual custom, he expressed the most passionate regret at the necessity of separating so early, saying, he hoped it would be his good fortune to meet with her in town the next winter, where pleasure was unfettered by such gothic restraints. He received, from Lord and Lady Walton, a polite invitation to honour their house with his company as often as his engagements would permit, for which he returned a bow expressive of gratitude and pleasure. From this time he was of all their parties, public or private. His whole time was devoted to them, even play was almost forgotten; he scarce ever appeared at the splendid entertainments given at his house; and while, at an immense expence, half the men of fashion in Bath were assembled there, he was dancing or playing whist in Lord Walton's parties, attending them to the theatre or concert, airing upon the Downs, or strolling on the parade.

Caroline, to whom all was new, felt the most lively pleasure from every thing around her. She had never before seen any kind of theatrical entertainments, and the delight they gave her is inexpressible; she could have lived in the theatre. She was passionately fond of music, in which her taste was more highly gratified than it had ever before been. She was very fond of dancing; even cards, when not introduced too often, were not disagreeable to her; and the general admiration she excited could not but be flattering to a young mind, though it was far from filling hers with that foolish vanity by which weak ones are so easily possessed. Miss West was not quite so well pleased; her mother's marriage was, in her estimation, only a step likely to promote her future establishment in a rank of life suitable to her wishes: that was now her grand point, and whatever appeared to prevent or retard its accomplishment became an object of disgust. She could not but observe the very open preference given to Caroline wherever they appeared together. She saw no other woman at Bath with whom she might not have hoped to divide the admiration of the men; when Caroline was absent she often bore the bell, but her presence immediately threw her into the shade. It was easy at Broomfield to submit to be second in beauty; there her principal object was the establishment of her mother; but now she could ill endure to see her designs counteracted, and all her expectations blasted, by a girl who knew so little of the world, and who had not spirit enough even to triumph in the conquests she made. It was intolerable, when she had, at the expence of many smiles, much wit, and patient perseverance, fixed the attention of a man of fashion, to see a careless girl, without any particular design of pleasing, enter the room, and in five minutes, rob her of the fruit of all her toil; it was scarcely to be endured! and her vexation was often visible to every one present, the object of it excepted, from whom it was concealed by the perfect unconsciousness of having done

any thing to provoke it. The only comfort she had was, that her rival was not to go to town with them, and she hoped, before another winter, to arrange things in such a manner as not to fear her.

Things were in this state, when, one morning as they were sitting at breakfast, a letter was delivered to Caroline, which, as she perused it, the changes of her countenance, from the highest glow to the most livid paleness, convinced Lord and Lady Walton that it contained something which gave her great concern; their enquiries were answered by a flood of tears; "My father, Sir, (said she, as she gave the letter to her uncle,) my dear father is ill, very ill!" she could say no more; his Lordship read the letter, (it was written by Dr. Seward, a physician of eminence, who lived in the neighbourhood of Elmwood, between whom and Mr. Ashford the most cordial intimacy had subsisted ever since the latter settled at that place,) it informed her, that her father had caught a violent putrid fever by attending a man in that disorder, who requested him to pray for him. That he expressed a very earnest desire to see her; and, as all human events were uncertain, the Doctor advised her to return; it being his opinion that her presence would be even medicinal to her father; he concluded with requesting that she would not alarm herself too much, and assuring her that there were considerable hopes of his recovery.

"What shall we do, my dear?" (said Lord Walton.) "Oh, sir, (said Caroline,) I will return immediately; be pleased to let a chaise be ordered directly; I will not lose a single moment." "You cannot go alone," (answered his Lordship.) "Why not? (exclaimed she,) I will walk rather than not attend him; oh Heaven grant I may ever see him alive!" "I fear, (said his Lordship,) there is great danger in your going; his fever, you hear, is of an infectious kind." "Oh, my dear sir, (exclaimed she,) do not talk of danger: what signifies danger, when I can comfort a dying parent! Pray let the chaise be ordered! I will not lose another moment." "I cannot venture you alone," (repeated Lord Walton.) "Miss Ashford need not go alone, (said Captain West,) if she will accept of my protection I shall attend her with joy. Lady Walton and Miss West both joined in persuading Caroline to permit him to escort her, and, as she was eager to be gone at any rate, she made no objection. So earnest was the latter lady in forwarding her expedition, that she herself assisted Mrs. Ettongue and a chambermaid in putting up her clothes. All was ready in half an hour, the chaise drove to the door, she took a hasty leave, threw herself in, and, accompanied by Captain West, with the attendance of his servant and one of Lord Walton's, drove away as fast as four good hunters could carry her.

All parties, poor Caroline excepted, were pleased with this sudden departure. Lady Walton got rid of one she considered as a spy upon her actions; Miss West of an overpowering rival. Nor, was Lord Walton himself very sorry that she was gone. He found the influence of his Lady grow every day more and more strong, while his power of resisting it weakened in proportion. Upon every occasion, on which they differed in opinion, he was obliged to submit: these occasions occurred every day, and he could not help feeling ashamed that his niece should witness a meanness for which he believed she would despise him. He, therefore, felt relieved by her absence: he could now indulge his indolence, and insure peace by investing his Lady with absolute command. He believed her perfectly capable of making a proper use of it, and persuaded himself that he should be a great gainer in ease and happiness by resigning himself and all his affairs into her hands. She was of an active turn of mind, his interest was hers, business was always disagreeable to him; could he have a better opportunity for consulting his own ease? As

for Captain West, his hopes, which had been sadly damped by the excessive admiration excited by our heroine upon her first appearance, and the crowd which she continued to collect round her wherever she came, now revived when he beheld her upon the point of quitting the scene of pleasure and dissipation without the smallest reluctance, nay, with eagerness; and that for so dismal a task as nursing a sick father. Had her heart been possessed by any secret attachment she would have shewn some disinclination to the journey. Lord Danby had been the rival he most dreaded; but, as they passed by his house in their way out of the town, he watched her narrowly, and could not discover any change of countenance or other indication of inward emotion: she did not bestow a single look upon it. During their whole journey she spoke little; that little was about her father. Once she blamed herself for having left him, and wished she had stayed at home with him, as she knew he would have chosen her to do, but from fear of disappointing her of a pleasure he thought she desired. When they stopped only to change horses she was all impatience; continued to pursue her journey night and day, scarcely took any refreshment, and appeared to find comfort only in the celerity of their motion and the decreasing distance between her and the place where she so anxiously wished to be. From all these circumstances, though West could not flatter himself that he had much interest in her heart, he had reason to hope it was uninfluenced by any other. He began to depend something upon family connections, more upon persevering attentions, and he ventured to found some hope upon personal merit. He omitted no little service her present situation gave him an opportunity of performing, and she had every reason to be satisfied with him in the character of a principal travelling attendant.

After a fatiguing journey they arrived at Elmwood. The moment the carriage stopped, the door was opened by Ambrose, who, with a mixture of melancholy and joy in his countenance, cried "Dear Madam, we did not look to see you before tomorrow night at soonest." "How is my father, Ambrose?" (interrupted Caroline, half out of breath with apprehension.) "Better, I hope, madam; the fever is quite gone; nothing now is to be feared (the doctor says) but weakness. But I am glad you are come, (continued he;) the sight of you will do my dear master more good than all the physic in the world." "Who is with him?" (said she.) "Only Nurse Williams, (replied he:) the doctor has been gone about half an hour." Caroline then tripped lightly up stairs, the hope of her father's amendment, though ever so slight, a little reviving her spirits. She was just upon the point of opening the door of his chamber, when, recollecting that her sudden appearance might affect him too much in his weak state, she stopped, and desired the upper woman-servant, who had followed her up, to go in and inform her nurse that she was there. In a moment that good woman came out to her, and, with looks of great pleasure, told her that her father had fallen into a sweet and profound sleep, which they hoped would be of great use to him.

Caroline then stole softly to the side of his bed, and, drawing aside the curtain, with inexpressible concern, beheld the ravages made by the cruel disorder in his altered and emaciated countenance. The silent tear stole down her cheek as she gazed upon his pale face: then, lifting up her hands and eyes to heaven, she stood, for some moments, a model of speechless anguish. Perceiving that he began to move and awake, she sat down upon a chair which was concealed by the curtain. "Williams, (said he, faintly,) what o'clock is it?" "It is just past three, (answered she.) How do you, sir? You have had a fine sleep." "Yes, thank God, (answered he,) it has greatly refreshed me." "We may now

every hour hope to see my young lady, sir, (continued Williams:) no doubt, sir, you would be glad to see her." "Yes, Williams, (answered he,) it is all I have to wish for in this world. My son is too far from me, I cannot hope to see him; but, if it be the will of the Almighty, methinks I would not die till I have embraced my Caroline. Oh! bless her, bless her, heaven!" continued he with fervour; then, as if wearied by so small an effort, his head sunk upon the pillow. Caroline could no longer contain her emotions; her heart seemed ready to burst, and sobs, which she vainly strove to smother, convulsed her whole frame. Mrs. Williams observing that he listened with surprise in his countenance, and that no farther time could be had for preparation, gently drew aside the curtain which concealed her. "Your wish is granted, sir, (said she,) here is my dear lady."

Caroline was by this time upon her knees by his side, his hand close to her lips and plentifully watered with her tears. "Dear image of thy angel-mother, (cried the fond father,) welcome! welcome, once more! heaven has heard my prayers! I see thee again, and shall die within thy arms!" The heart of our heroine was too full for words, she sobbed aloud. "Be comforted, my love," (said he, kissing her wet cheek,) "I shall now be better: the sight of thee will be a cordial to my spirits. But have you not travelled very hard? Those pale cheeks and languid eyes speak fatigue and want of refreshment. Go, my child, get something, and then come to me again." It would have been difficult to persuade her to leave her father for a moment, had not Mrs. Williams informed her that she had been strictly forbidden by Doctor Seward to let her master speak much. This argument prevailed, and she reluctantly left the room.

The moment she got down stairs she dispatched Ambrose to the house of Doctor Seward, requesting that he would favour her with half an hour of his company sometime that afternoon. She then entered the dining-parlour, where Captain West was sitting wholly unthought of by any one of the family. She obligingly apologised for the neglect with which he had been treated. For, nothing could rob her of that polite attention which minds of sensibility feel themselves bound to pay those who are under the roof where they command. Dinner was served, but vainly served to her. It was in vain that West, with a mistaking officiousness, pressed her to eat, that she strove to set him an example, her food was denied a passage. Scarcely was wine placed upon the table, when, begging him to help himself, and excuse her absence, she again returned to her father's chamber. She found him endeavouring to take a little broth which his nurse had prepared for him; but a few spoonfuls were all his weak stomach would bear, nor could he touch more though the bason was held by his Caroline, whose anxious eyes spoke ten thousand tender things, which that anxiety and tenderness would not suffer her to utter.

While she was sitting by his side, his cold hand held between hers, she was requested to walk down, and, in the hall, met Doctor Seward, who, with all the benevolence in his aspect which should ever characterise his profession, took her hand. "I am rejoiced to see you, my dear Miss Ashford, (said he:) you have travelled well. How does my patient?" "Ah! doctor, (answered she,) it is to ask you that question that I requested the favour of seeing you. Tell me, I beseech you, is he in danger? pray do not deceive me!" "My dear madam, (he replied,) I have nothing certain to pronounce. I am not without hope, yet I will not flatter you, the danger is great. A few days, perhaps a few hours, will decide. But, in the mean time, I trust, my dear Miss Ashford will act like herself, and shew us that the precepts she has learned from her excellent father are not mere theories." "Ah! sir," (cried she, bursting into tears,) "how shall I endure to lose my

father, preceptor, guide, and friend! All these he is to me, and can you expect me to bear his loss with patience!" "Recollect yourself, madam, (answered the doctor:) is this acting worthy of such a father, such a preceptor, and such a friend? Do not, by this weakness, convince him that all the pains he has taken to form your principles, and raise your mind above the common events of life, have been wholly thrown away; but rather, by a noble exertion of those principles which you profess, and of that fortitude of which I know you capable, afford him the comfort of seeing you act, upon this trying occasion, as he could wish, with firmness and resignation; and do not, by an improper indulgence of useless sorrow, disturb those moments it is your duty to soothe."

The grave, the almost severe, tone, in which these words were pronounced, struck the heart of Caroline in the most forceable manner. The knowledge of, and esteem she had for, the character of the speaker, remarkable for every humane and social quality, added weight to the remonstrance. Wiping away her tears, and half suppressing a sigh, which, in spite of her efforts, burst its way from her heart, "Yes, (said she,) I will be calm; I will act as my dear, dying, parent would wish me to do. I will not disturb those moments it is my duty to soothe!" The doctor perceiving how much her mind was raised, took her hand, with parental tenderness: "Amiable young lady, (said he,) I doubt not but you will do every thing which becomes you, and honour the example upon which you have been formed. We will now, if you please, see your excellent father." So saying, he led her to the chamber, where, the moment they entered, he perceived that the most worthy of men was fast drawing to the last moments of life.

They approached the bed, upon one side of which Caroline kneeled down, a solemn composure in her looks; she took her father's hand, which he feebly held out to her, and, lifting up her ardent eyes to heaven, bowed her face upon it, and remained silent. "My good friend, (said the dying man,) you are come in happy time to comfort and direct my dear orphan. She has many friends, but they are now, unfortunately, too distant from her to be of use. I know the moment of my dissolution draws on apace: I do not fear to encounter it: I have nothing farther to do in this world; my confidence in the promises and mercies of my Creator is absolute, and leaves me not a doubt concerning the future." He paused. The affrighted Caroline had raised her eyes, with eagerness, to those of Doctor Seward, in which she saw a mournful resignation, which, at once, confirmed her fears. "Oh! my father! my father!" (she exclaimed, with an involuntary emotion which she had no power to suppress. "I am going, my beloved child, (resumed he,) where in a few short years we shall again be united. I am going to thy dear mother, to partake, with her, the heaven she already possesses. Will my Caroline grieve that her father is happy? I know thy heart, thy disposition, and understanding. Thy innocent and virtuous life will be a constant preparation for this sacred moment. Oh! may that life be blessed with all that can render it desirable, and may its end be peace!" He was so much exhausted as he spoke the latter words, that they were scarcely articulate: but, a little recovering, "I know, doctor, (he continued,) you will regulate every thing that may be necessary to the decency of my funeral. More, you know, I do not approve. Your friendship for me let me intreat you to transfer to this dear girl, and——" He would have proceeded, but his strength intirely failed, and, unable to support himself, he fell back in the bed. Caroline hastily arose, and, with the assistance of the doctor, raised him forward. His head reclined upon her bosom, and his eyes fixed upon her face for a moment, with tenderness inexpressible;

then, faintly raising them to heaven: "Bless! bless—" (he cried.) Something inarticulate followed, and he expired in her arms.

The moment, which robbed her revered father of life, for a time suspended hers; she was borne to her apartment in a state of perfect insensibility; nor could all the doctor's efforts for some minutes recal any appearance of returning sensation. He ordered her to be put to bed and some restoratives to be given her, apprehending much danger from the excessive fatigue she had undergone, and the disturbed state of her spirits. He then dispatched a servant with a note to his sister, a maiden lady of about forty, who was always a great favourite with Caroline, requesting that she would come immediately to her lovely friend. He thought a female companion, who had tenderness to console, and strength to support, (of both which he knew Mrs. Margaret Seward was possessed,) would be the most effectual consolation he could possibly procure her. He then wrote a short account of all that had passed to Lord Walton, at the same time informing him of the farther steps he proposed to take. Of this letter Captain West requested that he might take the charge; at the same time asking Doctor Seward, if he might not be favoured with an opportunity of wishing Miss Ashford her health, and receiving her commands, before he left Elmwood. To this he received an absolute negative: the doctor assuring him that his request was improper, and, in Miss Ashford's present state, impossible to be complied with. He was, therefore, obliged to content himself with leaving a polite card for that young lady; and, at six o'clock the next morning, set out for Bath, with the same expedition with which he had left it.

CHAPTER XII.

A Removal.

MRS. Seward arrived early at Elmwood the same morning upon which Captain West left it, and administered to the afflicted Caroline every comfort she was capable of receiving. I have said before that she was a maiden lady about forty. Some disappointments, in the early part of her youth, had determined her choice to the single life, and, though often solicited to alter it, she had kept her resolution unshaken. Her person was handsome, though rather masculine: her features were very like her brother's, with this difference, that the benevolent kindness, with which his were habitually impressed, was only to be perceived in hers by her favourites, or when she was pleased. Whereas, that piercing and almost severe look which he was, upon occasion, capable of giving, was her usual physiognomy. Thus it happened, that, while he was a general favourite, she was liked by few; but those few were particularly attached to her. She despised the follies of the age, which it was her custom to lash with severity, and held in the most sovereign contempt those common-place characters among her own sex, who are only to be distinguished from each other by a cast of features or the colours of a gown. Nor did the beaux find better quarter: her appearance would, at any time, fright away half the young men in the neighbourhood; and there was not one of the misses, as she used to call them, who durst venture to speak before her. Our heroine had, from her childhood, been one of her greatest favourites; she early distinguished in her a superiority of understanding, and amiableness of disposition, not often to be met with, and, when a mere girl, would often say, that her pretty little Caroline had more sense than half the women in the neighbourhood. She had been very fond of Mrs. Ashford; and, after her death, had paid such friendly attention to her disconsolate husband and the infant she left behind her, that more than one of the neighbours suspected her of a design to succeed her. Such kind of reports, however, never gave her a moment of concern; and the intimacy between them, increasing as Caroline became more sensible of the value of her friendship, had never suffered the smallest suspension or abatement.

Nothing could be more consoling to our heroine than the company of a person she so much loved and esteemed; who, at the same time that she indulged her sorrows and accompanied her tears, could furnish motives for resignation both from the sources of piety and reason, and possessed judgement to seize the proper moment to soothe or strengthen.

The funeral ceremonies were conducted by Doctor Seward with all the respect which was compatible with his notions of propriety, and what he knew to be those of his deceased friend. A pompous funeral being, in his opinion, a satire upon human frailty, and one of the most absurd of its vanities. At the same time, he wished to observe a decent solemnity, expressive of the love and veneration in which the memory of a virtuous man should be held by his friends and posterity.

A few days after this melancholy ceremony had been performed, a packet arrived from Bath, containing letters for Caroline from Lord and Lady Walton, and one from the former for Doctor Seward. His Lordship's to Caroline was kind and affectionate; it contained expressions of condolance, and assurances of protection and tenderness. Within

it was inclosed a note for one hundred pounds to defray any expences she might be subject to in leaving Elmwood. He advised her to have every thing there sold immediately, as she must quit it in forty days, and to take up her residence at Broomfield for the winter, where Lady Walton would direct Harris to prepare for her reception, and where, he added, he should be happy to find her at his return. That from Lady Walton was as follows:

“My dear Miss Ashford,

I am truly sorry for the very great loss you have lately suffered. Your own good sense will suggest more motives for resignation, and be a greater comfort to you, than any thing that can be said by your friends.

As you must so soon quit Elmwood, your uncle thinks it will be best for you to go to Broomfield for the winter, where I hope you will make yourself happy till our return. I shall send orders to Harris to render every thing as comfortable to you as possible.

We set out for London next week; so you will easily believe we are much engaged in taking leave of our numerous friends, which will, I hope, excuse the shortness of this letter. Lord Walton has a good house in Cavendish-Square, which luckily happens to be vacant, the family who resided in it being gone abroad for the regulation of their affairs. As soon as we are settled, Miss West will write to you, and we shall hope to hear that you have quite recovered your spirits.

P.S. Lord Walton thinks you had best get some friend to be with you during the winter; you will easily procure some young person to spend a few months with you, but I must beg of you to send her away before we return, as you will then have no occasion for her company.”

The tears which poor Caroline shed over these letters were of a very different nature. Those, which fell upon Lord Walton’s, were drops of affection and gratitude; but those, excited by his lady’s, were mixed with resentment and disdain. During the first emotions, occasioned by her cold, and almost insolent, address, she resolved not to go to Broomfield at all, but to accept the invitation which the doctor and Mrs. Seward had already given her to spend the winter with them. Yet a moment’s reflection convinced her that this would be rash and improper, at least, without her uncle’s consent; and that, she but too plainly perceived, would, in future, be wholly regulated by the opinion of his lady. For the first time in her life she felt herself a dependent; and the mortifying idea filled her mind with inexpressible anguish. “Ah! my dear father, (she exclaimed,) already do I feel the want of your protection! Safe sheltered beneath a dear paternal roof, I could smile at that insolent meanness which had no power to affect my happiness; but I must now submit to receive benefits from one I despise, and acknowledge as favours those privileges which I have hitherto considered as natural rights.”

The doctor omitted nothing to comfort and encourage her: he offered to write to Lord and Lady Walton, and propose her spending the approaching winter with him and his sister; but this Mrs. Seward opposed. She observed how much her fair friend’s melancholy was fed by the constant sight of objects which every moment recalled the idea of her father; and, reflecting that her brother’s house was not more than a mile

distant, and that, while she remained in the neighbourhood, she would be furnished by every one who appeared in her sight, and by every object she approached, with something to renew her distress, she, therefore, advised her complying with the request of her uncle by removing immediately to Broomfield, and offered herself to accompany her, at least for two or three months. Caroline, who in matters of this nature was easily guided by those she esteemed, readily consented; and the very next day was appointed for her removal. Her books, harpsichord, and drawings, together with two or three pieces of furniture for which she had a partiality, particularly the arm-chair in which her father usually sat, were removed to Doctor Seward's. The only thing that she took with her to Broomfield, except wearing apparel, was her favourite linnet, which was now endeared by the remembrance of the caresses her regretted parent had so often bestowed upon it.

Doctor Seward undertook to regulate the sale, and to settle every kind of business which might occur. He took the faithful Ambrose into his own family; and, with a delicacy peculiar to himself, accepted Mr. Ashford's favourite horse as a present, knowing how much he should, by so doing, gratify the generous heart of the giver. Thus, every thing being settled, and six the next morning appointed for their journey, the ladies retired to their chambers to pass the last night they should probably ever spend at Elmwood.

To Caroline it was a night of sleepless sorrow; ten thousand soft and mournful images filled her mind, and all the happy days she had spent there presented themselves to her imagination, not to soothe and charm, but to afflict her with the sad reflection that they were now no more, that they were fled for ever! Restless, and unable to close her eyes, she arose, and, drawing aside the curtain of her window, lifted it gently up. The moon was shining in its fullest splendour, and cast a soft lustre upon the projecting hills. Not a breath of wind ruffled the majestic river below, or waved the beech-trees which shaded its sloping banks. The sky was perfectly clear, and innumerable glorious heavenly bodies, shining with serene magnificence, illumined the vast expanse of heaven. A perfect stillness prevailed, only interrupted by the distant flowing of the river, which, though unheeded during the busy day, was now distinctly heard. Caroline was particularly fond of moonlight. Many an hour had she spent at that very window, viewing the charming scene before her, watching the rising of the planets, or attending to the flowing of the water. Her heart, naturally formed to admire the sublime and beautiful, never failed upon these occasions to lift itself up to the great Source of both, in love, gratitude, and admiration. That piety which had brightened her happiest, and sanctified her most lonely, hours, did not forsake those of melancholy and dejection; and though the eyes which she raised to heaven were filled with tears, they were the tears of tenderness and submission, not of thankless perverseness. A full hour did she indulge a train of sadly-soothing reflections, again and again did her eyes bid adieu to the sweet scenes she had so often beheld with delight. The striking of the village-clock at last roused her from the soft melancholy in which she was absorbed, and she again sought that rest to which reflection is the greatest of all enemies. The clock struck three before sleep visited her eyes; but it is probable that she would long have continued under its gentle influence, had not a servant, in pursuance of her orders, knocked at the door and informed her that it was half an hour past five o'clock; a summons which, notwithstanding the extreme heaviness which then oppressed her, she instantly obeyed; and, every thing having been put in order the evening before, was completely dressed by the appointed hour.

Doctor Seward proposed that they should breakfast at the end of the first stage, alleging that the air and exercise would sweeten their repast; but, in reality, that he might allow his fair friend as little time as possible for useless regret. He wished he could have prevented the neighbours, and even the servants, being privy to the time of her departure; but, from the first, it was impossible to conceal it, and the love of communication soon made all, with whom they were acquainted, partakers of their knowledge, by which means the whole circle round were apprised that upon this morning they were to lose for ever their favourite patroness. Ambrose was appointed to attend her to Broomfield; but the old gardener, whose services had commenced from the time Mr. Ashford took possession of Elmwood, now two and twenty years, and the two women servants, who were neither of them late comers, had placed themselves in the hall, and, drowned in tears, waited to take their last farewell. The doctor would have persuaded her to order the chaise round to the back door, and to slip away without seeing them, but to this she would by no means consent. "No, my dear sir, (said she,) these honest creatures love me; a few kind words will afford them pleasure; and, perhaps, they may hereafter have a satisfaction in reflecting upon them. I know the full value of what I have lately lost, and this last ceremony can add but little to the pain it has cost me." So saying, she walked forward with much composure.

The moment she entered the hall, honest Joseph, whose head was silvered over by age, fell upon his knees, and, lifting up his hands, embrowned by toil, with a voice interrupted by his emotions, began to pray, in the most fervent manner, for everlasting blessings upon her head. The women only approached a few steps, and wept aloud, unable to speak. With a look of ineffable sweetness she bade them adieu; thanked them for their faithful services, and assured one of them, who had not yet hired herself to another place, that she should be always ready to give her such a character as she deserved, which would be the best in her power to give. She then presented to each a small remembrance, and, stepping into the chaise where Mrs. Seward had some minutes been, drove from the door.

This was but a small part of what she had to undergo. Not a cottager lived in the neighbourhood who had not, some way or other, tasted of her bounty; many had been half supported by it. The sight of these, especially, those of the latter description, standing by the road side, some with their infants in their arms, some supporting their aged parents, who, grateful for her past favours, would not lose this last view of their benefactress. Some, but lately recovered from illness or accidents, which, but for the timely assistance she had procured them, must have proved fatal, occasioned in her breast the most lively sorrow. The sight of so many persons, all gratefully acknowledging benefits received from her hand, might, in other circumstances, have given her the most heartfelt satisfaction, but, at present, her thoughts were wholly occupied with the loss they would sustain, the many wants to which they would be exposed. The sight of two or three pretty children whom she used to clothe, who had often run out to meet her, clapping their little hands, and expressing every token of delight, and whom she had so often, by a variety of little indulgences, made happy, filled her heart with anguish. She reflected upon the many scenes of distress she had converted into joy and gladness. "And, ah! who (she softly cried) will now administer to your wants, or supply you with those comforts I once had the happiness to bestow! Oh! that my power were still the same! the distance to which I am removing should not rob you of its influence."

Such were her reflections, which continued wholly to possess her mind long after the object which excited them were lost to her eye. Notwithstanding Mrs. Seward's kind endeavours to amuse her, the journey was of the most displeasing kind; the nearer she drew to the end of it the more did her dejection increase, nor could she help comparing her present feelings with those she used to experience when Broomfield was considered as a second home, and its possessor as another father; but the case was greatly altered, she was now become a dependent. To depend upon Lord Walton would not, some months before, have had any thing in it mortifying; but, since his marriage, the knowledge she had of his lady, and the increasing influence she observed her to gain over him, had greatly changed her prospects; a dependence upon Lady Walton was a thought scarcely to be supported. Yet how much different from it was her future state likely to be!

Upon their arrival at Broomfield they were received by the kind-hearted Mrs. Harris with every possible mark of respect and affection. They found every thing in the highest order for their reception; Mrs. Seward was put into possession of one of the best apartments, and Caroline of that which was always called hers, being distinguished, through the whole family, by the name of Miss Ashford's room. The very next morning she wrote to Lord and Lady Walton. Her letter to the former was filled with every expression of duty, gratitude, and affection, sentiments which easily flowed from her pen, because they were the dictates of her heart. That to her ladyship was short and respectful, rather what the title than the character of the person, to whom it was addressed, demanded. In the same packet she inclosed a note for Miss West, in which she expressed the most obliging good wishes for her health and pleasure, and reminded her of the promise contained in Lady Walton's letter, a performance of which she assured her she should esteem a favour.

These matters of form being dispatched, for she was but too sensible they were little more, she next proceeded to give her brother a full account of every thing that had happened since her father wrote to him. In this letter, which was unusually long, she opened her whole heart, and gave vent to every feeling it contained. She tenderly condoled with him upon the irreparable loss they had sustained; at the same time that her affecting accounts of her father's illness and behaviour tended to aggravate the most painful sense of it. Of this indeed she was not aware; soothed by the indulgence these relations gave to her melancholy, she reflected not that she was strengthening those regrets which it was her interest to weaken. Her late distress had wholly banished from her mind the little unmeaning coolness which had, for some time past, subsisted between them, and she addressed Henry with all the confidence and warmth of a sincere friend and affectionate sister. This letter she likewise inclosed in the packet to her uncle, requesting him to forward it to whatever place he at present supposed her brother to be in.

CHAPTER XIII.

A Winter's Retirement with an old Maid.

THE arrival of our heroine at Broomfield brought all the neighbourhood about her. Not a family, who spent their winter in the country, that failed to pay their visit of condolance and express their desire of very often seeing her during the absence of Lord and Lady Walton. Nor was Mr. Craven among the last to assure her of his continued respect and attention; an attention which he appeared to think particularly authorised. After a longer visit than ceremony required, or even permitted, he seemed to move with reluctance, and, before he took leave, requested that he might be honoured with her permission to inquire sometimes after her health. Caroline, though extremely frank and open in her disposition, and very far from being what is generally understood by the disgusting appellation of prude, felt a kind of impropriety in granting his request, even had she wished to do it. Had he called sometimes without having made it, she could neither have refused to see him, or should have thought his civility more than she might naturally have expected; but to grant him such a privilege was quite another thing.

We easily persuade ourselves to approve what we desire, and with equal ease we disapprove that for which we feel a repugnance. Caroline replied to his request with some stiffness; telling him she did not intend to see any company, which it was in her power to avoid, during the winter, and that she hoped her acquaintance would pardon the preference she, at present, gave to solitude, as it did not proceed from insensibility of the favours she rejected, but the state of her spirits, which rendered her unfit for the society of any but very particular friends. Mr. Craven answered, that it would be his pride and happiness to be ranked in that distinguished number; adding, that he thought an old and approved acquaintance might, without presumption, hope for such an honour. "Our acquaintance, sir," (replied Caroline, her colour a little raised,) "are not always of our own selecting; esteem, and equality of situation, are sufficient to prolong intimacy, but friendship requires a principle of union independent of the latter circumstance and more interesting than the former; a principle we can seldom hope to find, and, without which, confidence, the soul of friendship, is impossible.

The eyes of Craven, at this answer, spoke a language perfectly intelligible: vexation and restrained resentment sparkled in the glance he cast upon the fair speaker and her friend; who, upon this occasion, he seemed to consider as a party in the mortification he received. What men entreat for as the highest of all favours, if refused to their hopes, immediately becomes an object of resentment. This is unreasonable; no man has a right to a favour, therefore none should be offended when it is denied. Thus Craven, who, had our heroine granted the suit he thought proper to prefer, would have been beyond measure obliged, now felt himself deeply injured, and, without condescending to utter a single word of reply, took his leave with a formal bow.

The mind of Caroline was greatly relieved by the assurance his looks gave her that he had perfectly understood the force of her words and meaning, as she hoped it would effectually deter him from ever making any proposals to her uncle of the nature she dreaded. She had many reasons to believe that Lord Walton wished her to marry Mr.

Craven in preference to any other man, and she ardently desired to avoid the necessity of formally refusing a person recommended to her by him.

The necessary returns of civility in the neighbourhood over, and Caroline's desire of being unmolested generally known, her time became perfectly her own, and was filled up in such a manner as to give her no cause to envy those who mingled in the world of bustle and dissipation. The conversation of Mrs. Seward was an unfailing source of entertainment and knowledge; not the smallest circumstance occurred which did not afford her subject for observation. One idea seemed to follow another, or rather to start out of the preceding one, in so agreeable a succession, that there appeared not the smallest danger of exhausting them; and unrestrained intimacy, instead of rendering her company flat and uninteresting, hourly seemed to improve it. Such a companion could not fail of being highly useful and agreeable to a young person so fitted for every attainment: she completely filled up all her moments of leisure, and did more towards reconciling her to her late loss than all the pleasures of the great world could ever have effected. Mrs. Seward was extremely fond of music, and Caroline's performance, upon a very fine organ which was at Broomfield, constituted one of her greatest enjoyments. She would, likewise, often point out subjects for her pencil, and her lovely friend took a particular pleasure in executing her designs. Lord Walton's library was a never-failing source of amusement. Walking, when the weather would permit, was never neglected; and the pleasure-grounds at Broomfield, being every where ornamented with abundance of fine evergreens, were, even in the depth of winter, delightful.

The worthy doctor often visited them. He soon settled Mr. Ashford's affairs, which were neither wide nor complicated. He found the whole debt which he had contracted, at the building and fitting up of his house, had some years back been intirely discharged; but, notwithstanding the increase of his income since the removal of so heavy an incumbrance, he had saved very little money. Depending, as he had every possible reason to do, upon the repeated promises of Lord Walton for an ample provision for his children, as his income enlarged, his charities multiplied, and, seconded by the benevolent disposition of his daughter, the overplus of his yearly salary was devoted to the necessitous and unfortunate. After collecting some debts which were due to him, and the sale of all his effects, a sum rather more than nine hundred pounds was produced, which the doctor, without informing even his sister, made up a complete thousand, as the only opportunity he could have of paying for his horse without hurting his own sensibility or that of the generous giver. This sum Caroline begged he would keep in his hands, saying, "It is a comfortable resource in case of misfortune, and it is very probable that I may soon have cause to apply to it." The doctor readily consented to oblige her, but not before he had given her a proper security, and informed her that she must receive the regular interest in the same manner she would have done from a stranger.

We must not here forget to inform our reader that Mr. Ashford had, by will, bequeathed every thing, of which he died possessed, to his daughter, and appointed Lord Walton her guardian, and that Doctor Seward acted, in all he did for her, by his Lordship's authority.

Small as was the sum of which our heroine was now possessed, she considered it as an independence, and determined to make it so if the conduct of Lord and Lady Walton, as she had too much cause to apprehend, should render her situation uneasy. The comfort her mind received from this circumstance was very great, and she every day

became more serene and cheerful. Her father was still the frequent subject of her retired thoughts and social conversation, but her reflections were no longer painful; on the contrary, she took pleasure in reciting his actions, opinions, and sentiments, and in making his will, as it were, a still living law for her own.

Thus glided away the short winter day, and what many in her situation would have thought the long night; to her, however, it was never tedious; and spring stole upon her fast, before some of the reading and working schemes she had planned were half executed. The only circumstance which gave her uneasiness was the intire neglect of Lord and Lady Walton, and her brother, from neither of whom she had been favoured with a single line during her residence at Broomfield. The neglect of the latter she could conceive might arise from his continually moving from place to place, which possibly had occasioned the loss of the letter she had written to him: but why her uncle should appear so intirely to forget her she was wholly at loss to imagine. She once resolved to inquire the cause of his silence, but the consideration that his lady inspected all his letters checked her resolution. A little resentment, and a great deal of pride, (a principle which the idea of dependance had, for the first time, raised in her bosom,) at last determined her to wait for an explanation till they either thought proper to afford her one, or should confirm her suspicion of an intended neglect.

In this resolution she continued till April was nearly expired; Mrs. Seward began to grow impatient, her brother had once or gently twice intimated that he greatly wanted his housekeeper, and she wished to persuade Caroline to accompany her home till she should hear of her uncle's intention of returning into the country. But this she absolutely declined, resolving, as she had continued there so long, patiently to wait the event. They had just discussed this subject, when Mrs. Harris delivered a letter to Caroline which she knew to be written by Miss West, and, upon opening, found as follows:

“My dear Caroline will, I fear, before this time, accuse me of neglect and breach of promise: I believe I may as well plead guilty to both, and, knowing her natural clemency, throw myself upon her mercy. But did you know, my dear creature, what a hurrying winter we have gone through, how difficult I have found it to spare a moment to matters of the greatest consequence, I am sure you would forgive me. It is in vain to enter into particulars or attempt to give you any notion of what we have been doing. All the world are still in town, and we are constantly in the middle of them.

Do you know we are got wonderfully intimate with all the Ashfords? Your uncle and his family live in Chandois-street, just by us, and really are very agreeable, good, sort of people, and much noticed considering Mrs. Ashford is a woman of no family. Your cousin Eleanor is a sweet girl; but I shall tell you all when we meet, or rather you will have an opportunity of judging for yourself, as they have promised to spend part of next summer with Lady Walton at Broomfield.

Lady Walton has written to Harris to prepare for our coming down immediately after the birth-day. The town already begins to be hot, and we are half worn out, but there is no stirring before the rest of the world.

The constant hurry I am in will, I hope, excuse the shortness of this, as well as all former neglects; believe me to be, my dear Caroline, your much obliged and faithful

F. West.

P.S. Lord Walton has been indisposed two or three times during the winter, but is now tolerably well.”

After the perusal of this epistle our heroine readily consented to accompany Mrs. Seward home, and to spend a month with her there. Some passages in Miss West’s letter greatly surprised her. The sudden intimacy commenced between the Ashfords and Lord Walton was not the article which struck her the least forceably: it immediately occurred to her that Lady Walton, in order to weaken his affection for her and her brother, had wrought this reconciliation; in hopes to substitute them, for the present, in his favour, and acquire the character of disinterestedness by appearing to introduce so many of her husband’s near relations into his house, when, in reality, she was serving her own mercenary purposes by banishing from it those whom alone she had reason to fear. The penetration of our heroine was naturally quick, and what she had observed of her Ladyship, while at Bath, gave rise to suspicions which pointed it upon this occasion. She was sensible that her uncle’s affection must be greatly decreased towards her, or he would never have suffered the whole winter to pass without writing, or taking the smallest care about her, except merely to supply her with the conveniences of life; and she knew no cause could be assigned for such a change, but the influence his wife had acquired over even his understanding. The last reflection was, however, of the most agreeable kind, and enabled her to support the uneasiness occasioned by others.

Her journey with Mrs. Seward, and the sensations occasioned by the sight of a place once so dear to her, contributed to dissipate the chagrin she had lately felt; and, though the sight of many objects awakened sorrows which the soft influence of time had begun to soothe and consign to the sweet slumber of forgetfulness, yet the diversion they afforded to her anxiety more than repaid her for the pain they occasioned.

There is a pleasure in the indulgence of soft melancholy, which none who have not felt can imagine; but anxiety is all pain; it corrodes the unfortunate heart that feels it, and shuts up every avenue to joy.

Caroline did not return to Broomfield till the last day of May, she then reluctantly took leave of her kind friends, who, on their parts, were as reluctant to part with her. On her arrival she found every thing in readiness for the reception of Lord and Lady Walton, and that the latter end of the next week was appointed for their leaving London.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Proposal.

THE morning of the day, upon which Lord Walton and his family were expected, at length arrived. Our heroine felt a mixture of impatience and anxiety, difficult to describe and most unpleasant to experience; and, when the carriage drove up to the door, her disorder increased so much as to render her incapable of moving farther than the door of the breakfast room to meet them. The coolness she had reason to expect from her uncle, and the neglect, perhaps insult, from Lady Walton, deprived her, for a moment, of half her natural powers. The sound of Miss West's voice inquiring for Miss Ashford, and asking if she was not in the house, roused her from a state of almost insensibility, and, summoning all her resolution, she advanced to meet them. Lady Walton was the first who met her: she embraced her in the tenderest manner, and, with a voice full of affection, inquired after her health, expressing the satisfaction it gave her to see her look so well. She had not ended her speech when Miss West interrupted her with a smile, saying, "Dear Lady Walton, you quite monopolize Miss Ashford; consider there are others who have not seen her these thousand years as well as yourself." Then, eagerly embracing her, "My dear creature, (cried she,) how have you past the long winter? how do you? and have you forgiven my neglect in not writing? Come, tell me you love me as well as you used to do; and don't look stiff now you see your repenting prodigal returned to confess and amend." Caroline's surprise at being addressed in a manner so different from what she expected was very great. She could only return tears and half sentences to their inquiries. Not that her emotion was wholly occasioned by the unexpected kindness with which she was treated; the sight of her uncle brought to her mind many affecting images, and when, with great tenderness, he embraced and assured her of his fatherly care and protection, she was quite overpowered, and unable to speak but by looks of gratitude.

Captain West was the last who approached her. He ventured to take her hand, and impressed upon it a respectful kiss. "I cannot (said he) express my felicity in seeing my dear Miss Ashford look so charmingly: the eager desire I have felt of seeing her again has made the past winter, with all its pleasures, appear the longest I ever experienced; but, had it consisted of nothing but disappointment and vexations, all would now have been forgotten." "I have many thanks to offer you, sir," (said Caroline, interrupting this florid harangue,) "for the attention you paid me when I was too much engrossed by my own misfortunes to be sensible of your kindness; and many apologies to make for the very unceremonious treatment you met with after so much fatigue." "Ah! madam, (interrupted West,) an age of fatigue would be well repaid by such charming condescension. Beauty like yours should command the services of all mankind." Caroline smiled at the extravagance of these compliments, and suffered him to hand her into the room where the ladies were seated. After a little chat about their journey, Lady Walton and Miss West retired to their dressing-rooms, where, at the request of the former, Caroline attended her. Here her inquiries concerning her health, and the manner in which she had past her time during the winter, were renewed. She expressed the highest satisfaction at the good state of the first, and paid her many compliments upon the disposition she had made of the

latter; telling her, that the months she had lately past might be considered as a probationary state, and that she might now be fairly admitted into the school of wisdom.

Dinner past in the most chearful manner. Lord Walton appeared to enjoy the highest satisfaction from the happy terms his family were upon with each other. His looks were much altered since his residence in the capital; he was pale and emaciated, which Caroline rightly attributed to the late hours and irregular mode of living he had there been accustomed to.

The following day several elegant little presents were made to our heroine by Lady Walton, who assured her they were only small tokens of her affection; an affection which she hoped would every day mutually increase, and, which she looked forward to as one of the principal pleasures of her future life. Her whole behaviour was, indeed, so very kind, so much the reverse of every thing which Caroline had expected and feared, that she could not help accusing herself with want of candour; for, as no motive could be assigned for Lady Walton's conduct but a desire to make her happy, she concluded that she must have mistaken her real character, and that mistake could only arise from a narrow prejudice, for which, though before unconscious of its existence, she severely accused herself.

No sooner was the news of Lord Walton and his family's arrival spread in the neighbourhood than the house was crowded with visitants. Among others Mr. Craven made his appearance. His compliments were paid to Caroline with great stiffness, and received by Lady Walton in a manner equally reserved. The difference of her behaviour to him now and the last summer, when he had been treated upon every occasion with particular distinction, was visible to every one, and, from whatever cause it proceeded, highly agreeable to Caroline, whose earnest wish was to be fairly rid of his pretensions without a formal refusal: yet she could not but wonder at the change. She had herself been witness to their parting the last autumn, which was of the most friendly kind, and nothing could since have happened to occasion any coolness, as they had not seen each other, Mr. Craven having chosen to remain in the country all the winter, even to the neglect of his favourite employment, attendance upon the House of Commons. His pride was instantly alarmed by the alteration in her Ladyship's conduct towards him, and he seldom came to Broomfield except upon visits of form and invitation, when he constantly addressed his conversation to Miss West, from whom he was secure of the most polite attention, and took little or no notice of Caroline, who now felt herself at ease with respect to him, and, upon the whole, much happier than ever she expected to be again in her uncle's house. Nothing now gave her any disturbance but the excessive assiduity of Captain West, which, since his return, had every day become more and more troublesome. His good humour, and the respect he mingled with his officiousness, made it impossible for a mind like hers to treat him with contempt or severity, exclusive of her desire to avoid offending Lady Walton by any appearance of disrespect towards her son: yet she took every opportunity to discourage his hopes: but they seemed to grow stronger in proportion as she endeavoured to repress them, and she was every day in expectation of an open avowal of his passion, and fully prepared to answer him in such a manner as to put a stop, she hoped, to its farther progress, without insulting his feelings, or provoking his enmity.

Such was her situation, when, as she was one morning preparing to take a ride with Miss West and her brother, she was requested by her uncle to give him half an

hour's conversation in his library. "Or rather, my dear," (continued he, addressing his lady,) "if you will do us the favour to make one in our conference, we will attend you in your dressing-room." To this both readily consented, and, leaving the captain and his sister to pursue their proposed ride, went immediately to the place of appointment, where, in a few minutes, they were joined by his Lordship, who, seating himself in a chair between them, and taking a hand of each: "It gives me inexpressible pleasure (said he) to observe the friendship and cordiality which subsist between two persons so dear to me: it was what I always hoped; and though, during absence, some misunderstandings have arisen, and for a while clouded our happiness, it was, I trust, but a temporary obscurity, which only adds to its present brightness.

"You know, my dear Caroline, the affection I have always borne you; the death of your father has now left you no other protector, and I shall not think I have discharged the duty of a good guardian till I see you settled with some worthy man, who loves and will make you happy. Such an one I have found; one who is possessed of all those accomplishments that distinguish the man of birth and fashion, and which are seldom to be found in this age; one who is untainted with the vices that too often render such an exterior contemptible. You can, I think, be at no loss to guess that I mean Captain West, in whose favour, if I mistake not, you are already prepossessed. He is the son of my most esteemed friends, and a person for whom, exclusive of our late near connection, I have the greatest value. By this marriage you will establish yourself in my esteem, and become doubly dear to us all. I have chosen to speak upon this subject before this best of women, (continued his Lordship,) because I know the good opinion she favours you with has interested her in the alliance, and you may be assured that your cheerful and unaffected concurrence in our wishes will greatly oblige her as well as myself."

He paused.—Poor Caroline was unable to speak; such a proposal from her uncle was a blow for which she was wholly unprepared: and, though her resolution was formed in a moment, no words offered themselves in which to convey it. Lady Walton, interpreting her silence into a favourable symptom, as is generally the case where affectation is substituted for delicacy, pressed her hand with tenderness, and, half smiling, said, "My dearest Caroline has too much goodness to wonder at the interest a mother takes in the welfare of an only son. All his,—I had almost said, all my, happiness depends upon your answer: let it be favourable! I know you are above dissimulation, and——"
"Ah! madam," (interrupted Caroline, a little recovered from her confusion,) "I beseech you press me no farther. I will do every thing in my power to deserve your esteem and affection, but I cannot, indeed, I cannot, accept the honour you now propose to me."
"How, how!" (exclaimed Lord Walton, his countenance suddenly changing from calmness to anger,) "have I not myself observed your partiality to Captain West? Has not all the world observed it? What else has induced Craven to desist from his visits? Come, come, Caroline, no womanish affectation; it is beneath your understanding. I have chosen a worthy and amiable man for your husband; if you choose to reject him, only observe this, I will no more trouble myself about your affairs. You have coquetted with Captain West till you have disgusted Mr. Craven, and you are now about to play the fool and reject him who was so lately your favourite. I shall leave you to consider of your final answer: to Lady Walton perhaps you may be more reasonable; but remember, there is no character which, in itself, betrays more meanness, or which I hold in more perfect contempt, than that of a jilt." So saying, he suddenly quitted the room, leaving both the

ladies in a speaking attitude, both being on the point of requesting him to stay a moment longer.

A silence of a few moments succeeded; it might have lasted longer, Lady Walton feeling her pride too much hurt to speak first, had not Caroline interrupted it. "My uncle, madam, (said she,) commands me to be explicit; I will obey him in that and every thing else which does not violate my sense of rectitude or endanger my happiness. I am sensible how much I am obliged to Captain West for the partiality he expresses in my favour; but, pardon me, madam, if sincerity obliges me to say I cannot return it. This is surely sufficient to be said to a man of honour, who has a proper sense of his own worth, and, I trust, all that can be required by a woman of delicacy. The subject is painful to me, nor should I have prevailed upon myself to say so much, did I not hope it will never be renewed." Lady Walton rose, her face overspread with crimson, and her eyes sparkling with rage: "It is quite sufficient, Miss Ashford, (said she,) Captain West will not persecute you with his addresses. It was false tenderness in me to indulge his absurd inclination so far; but I hope this disappointment, if such it be, will be an useful lesson, and teach him not to be caught by every red-and-white face that comes in his way, or trifle his affection upon every poor dependent who excites his pity." At these words our heroine, casting upon Lady Walton a look of calm disdain, replied, "I wish not, madam, to hurt your feelings or those of Captain West by this refusal, but my resolution is unalterable. There was a time when the pity, which you say was the foundation of your son's attachment to me, was more properly bestowed upon, than received from, him; and, had dependence been always held an object of contempt, your Ladyship had not now possessed the power of reproaching me with it." So saying, she quitted the room, and, retiring to her own apartment, indulged a train of reflections not very pleasing or conducive to ease of mind.

She now saw through the sudden kindness of Lady Walton; the motive of all her friendly behaviour lay disclosed, and she again appeared in her true character, stripped of the disguise which had, of late, almost intirely concealed it.

Perplexed in her future views, and uncertain how to act in her present uncomfortable situation, she leaned thoughtfully against the window of her apartment which overlooked a shrubbery that skirted one side of the park; into which she saw Lord and Lady Walton enter. She was leaning upon his arm in deep and earnest discourse, of which our heroine had little doubt but herself was the subject. In a few minutes she saw the Captain and Miss West (who had alighted at the entrance of the park and walked round) meet and join them. They would sometimes stop as in the warmth of argument; and she could observe Lady Walton make use of much vehement action. Their walk was short; and, the moment they returned, each went up to their separate apartments.

A large company being present at dinner prevented any thing particular from passing, and greatly relieved poor Caroline, who found all her resolution necessary to approach her uncle, whom she had for the first time in her life, disobliged. He neither spoke nor looked at her during the whole day; a circumstance which was little noticed by the company, but severely felt by her. Lady Walton followed his example, and Miss West paid her very little attention, almost constantly conversing with Miss Craven; a favourite for the day being absolutely necessary to her. Captain West was the only person unaltered in his conduct, which was officiously attentive, but more grave than was usual with him. Caroline treated him with the utmost politeness, but at the same time, by the gravity of

her looks and a certain ceremony she used towards him, strove to convince him that he had nothing farther to hope from her.

Soon after the ladies left the dining-parlour, a walk being proposed by Lady Walton, she and Miss West, as by accident, took up the attention of the whole party, and Caroline, finding herself quite alone and neglected, left the shrubbery with an intention of reading in her own room; when, just as she was crossing the lawn, Captain West appeared before her. "Loveliest of women! (said he,) forgive the intrusion I am now guilty of, or rather add it to my other offences, and kill me by your displeasure." "Stop where you are, sir, (answered Caroline;) what you have hitherto done is inconsistent neither with the laws of honour or politeness; but you have heard my sentiments, they never can alter, nor can you press me farther upon the subject of this morning without a breach of both." "Permit me, charming Caroline, (said he,) only one half hour's conversation, it is the last favour I will, without your permission, sue for: grant it to me as a friend, though you deny me the name of lover." "As a friend your society will always be a pleasure to me," (replied our heroine.) And, suffering him to take her hand, he led her into an adjoining walk.

"I know not, madam," (said he, after a moment of silence,) "how to apologise to you for the presumption I have been guilty of. You have promised to forgive me; you must do more, you must pardon me when I declare that I cannot cease to love you, that my whole life must be devoted to the deepest regret, and that, from the moment in which I tear myself from your sight, never shall I enjoy another of happiness or content." "I hope, sir," (answered she, smiling,) "you much mistake the nature of the passion you profess to feel. Everlasting regrets are not the usual attendants upon disappointments in modern love. Permit me, however, to say, that I feel myself greatly obliged by the generous manner in which you desist from a pursuit so very unpleasing to me, and that I shall always esteem your friendship." "Ah! Miss Ashford, (exclaimed he,) how cold a return is friendship for love so warm and faithful as mine! You frown! I have done. Never, never more, will I offend you by the mention of my most unfortunate passion: nor, after this evening, will I venture into your sight till I can bear it with calmness! No! I will give a proof, a silent proof, of my devotion, by banishing myself from all that makes life desirable——" He was proceeding with great energy of voice and action, when the appearance of Mr. Craven, at a small distance, standing with his eyes fixed upon them, stopped the career of his tender eloquence. Caroline, whose attention was wholly engrossed by what she was hearing, gave an involuntary start; Mr. Craven approached a few steps, then, making a slight bow, suddenly turned into a retired walk, and disappeared.

Though little solicitous about his opinion, our heroine felt the impropriety of her situation. The consciousness of the surprise she had betrayed gave her pain, and she insisted upon returning immediately to the house. "Ah! Miss Ashford," (cried West in a plaintive tone,) "have I at last discovered the cause of your coldness to me! Is Mr. Craven then the happy man who is blessed with your affections? Happy, happy, man, indeed! Yet, how could he turn so calmly from us? Why did he not rush forward, and, by plunging his sword into this unfortunate heart, rid me at once of all my troubles!" "You have no such danger to fear upon my account," (answered Caroline, smiling at a romance which, however deeply felt by the poor Captain, she could not listen to with seriousness,) "Mr. Craven has no more right over my actions than yourself; but you must excuse my

walking any longer, the appearance of privacy and caution is disagreeable to me who have no designs to conceal, or attachments but such as the whole world may witness.” “What delight do you give me, (cried West;) is it possible that your heart can be still disengaged?” “That is a question in which you have no interest, (replied she;) if, while my heart is free from attachment, it can make no return to your professions, what can futurity afford to hope? But we are returning to a subject which we had quitted for ever: we must absolutely choose some other.” “It must, it shall, be quitted for ever,” (exclaimed West, resuming all his energy.) “This is the last sigh with which, if possible, I will ever offend your ear, and, with one kiss of the glove which touches that lovely hand, do I finally take leave of every hope.” So saying, he impressed upon her covered hand an ardent kiss. She pushed him gently from her, and was about to speak, when the rustling of the shrubs, which divided the walk they were in from a winding path that led to a dell, caught their attention, and, through an opening exactly opposite to the spot upon which they stood, Caroline, to her no small surprise and confusion, beheld Lord Walton, who, with marks of astonishment in his countenance, had witnessed the scene just described without being near enough to hear the words that past between the actors.

His wonder almost immediately changed to anger; advancing towards them, with a voice highly expressive of that passion, he was beginning to reproach our heroine with duplicity and meanness, when Lady Walton, Miss West, and the rest of the ladies, together with a party of gentlemen who had followed them into the walks, appeared, and prevented all possibility of an explanation. Caroline was rallied a little by the ladies upon her sudden disappearance and the companion she had chosen for her ramble. She was mortified by the reflection that, trifling as this incident in itself was, it might give rise to suspicions greatly to her disadvantage in the breast of her uncle, and afford matter for general report highly offensive to her delicacy and pride.

Lady Walton, perceiving by the dejected countenance of her son that nothing favourable had taken place during their tête-à-tête, continued her reserve and distance, now and then darting at our heroine a look of particular displeasure; but, the company staying supper, nothing past during the remainder of the evening but that usual mixture of ease and ceremony which constitutes polite society.

CHAPTER XV.

A Bustle.

DURING the night Caroline rested little; the events of the day had been of too disagreeable a nature to prepare her for undisturbed repose. Toward morning, however, sleeping sound, it was pretty far advanced before she awoke: when, hurrying on her clothes, she went down to the breakfast-room, where the first object which presented itself to her eyes was Lady Walton drowned in tears, and her Lord sitting by her side vainly striving to comfort her. "No, no," (said she, as Caroline entered the room,) "he is lost, ruined, for ever! I know the ardour of his temper, he will plunge into every species of dissipation in order to forget the deceitful creature who is unworthy of his attachment; he will ruin his health, destroy his honour, and blast every hope and comfort of his wretched mother!" "She is, indeed, unworthy of his attachment, (cried Lord Walton;) I have myself been a witness of her coquetry and the arts she has made use of to engage his affection. Yes," (continued he, sternly looking at the trembling Caroline,) "your conduct has been of the basest kind, and deserves my warmest resentment. You have disturbed the peace of my family, and may probably be the ruin of a worthy young man who loves you, and who more than deserves you were all your pretended virtues real.

Caroline advanced. Every feeling of her soul called upon her to clear herself of a charge so unjust, and her resolution enabled her to throw off the fear with which her uncle's displeasure had impressed her mind. She was about to speak with that majestic calmness which dignifies injured virtue, and sometimes abashes vice, when her Ladyship's screaming out, with such violence as to alarm even her, brought Miss West from a distant window where she was carelessly looking over a Review, and frightened her poor Lord into almost as bad a condition as that in which she appeared to be. "Take her, take her, from my sight! (she exclaimed,) she is the murderer of my son! She has killed his peace, his happiness, for ever! Take the sorceress from my sight, I say." A fit succeeded, during which Lord Walton, with a look which terrified his innocent niece, at the same time stamping his foot against the floor, bade her be gone. An order which she most readily obeyed; and, running as fast as her trembling limbs would carry her to her chamber, shut and locked the door as if she were apprehensive of a pursuer.

Assisted by conscious rectitude, and the most perfect disdain of her persecutors, a few minutes sufficed to recover her spirits, and she began seriously to consider the probable effects the scene she had just seen acted was likely to produce. She plainly saw that it was Lady Walton's resolution (finding from her refusal of Captain West that she could not by her means possess her family of part of her husband's fortune) to banish her wholly from his house and protection; and, finding insinuation and detraction instruments too weak and slow in their operation to work her purpose, had seized this opportunity for bringing about an open quarrel, in which she was too sure of her influence over her husband to doubt of his support. What could innocence and reason oppose to such protected art and overpowering violence? Could she hope that submissions, should she be mean enough to make any such, would appease one whom interest alone had made her enemy, and who knew that every accusation she had brought against her was absolutely false? But, even supposing that submissions would avail, her nature revolted at the idea

of making them, and, after much reflection, she resolved voluntarily to quit a house where nothing but insult and detraction awaited her, and to seek shelter, at least for the present, with her good friends the Doctor and Mrs. Seward, under whose hospitable roof she had no doubt of meeting a kind reception.

Several hours had past in these reflections, when she was roused from her bed, upon which she had reclined, by some one who tapped gently at the door. She arose, and, upon opening it, Mrs. Ettongue entered, and, with much civility, begged to know if she would not choose to have a dish of chocolate as she had eaten no breakfast. Caroline accepted the dish, which she brought upon a salver with rusks, and, while she was drinking it, asked the good woman if she knew what had occasioned the bustle that morning. Mrs. Ettongue had, since Lady Walton returned from town, been appointed housekeeper in the room of poor Harris, who spoke her sentiments too freely, and was too fond of the Ashfords, to continue long in her post, under an administration so opposite in principles and interest; and her Ladyship had sent for a French waiting woman from London to place about her person. Though Ettongue was one of Lady Walton's creatures, of whom, indeed, by this time the whole household was composed, she was naturally good-humoured, and had been so won by the equal sweetness of our heroine's temper, that she saw, with regret, the treatment she that morning received; for, the disturbance, which began early, having excited her curiosity, a principle particularly strong in persons of her rank in life, she had been upon the watch ever since, and, by constantly passing backward and forward, or listening in a closet which adjoined the breakfast-room, had overheard all that past.

"Bustle, indeed, mame, (said she,) some folk should be ashamed of making such a fuss about nothing. Why, mame, Foigaué, my Lady's French woman, told me that last night Captain West came into his mother's dressing-room, and told her that he had resolved to set out the next morning for London; upon which she said very well, and nothing past but what might be expected. So, when he was gone, my Lady, after considering a few minutes, told Foigaué to fetch my Lord, and to say she was not well. So my Lord came directly, and, as soon as he came into the room, she burst into tears, and told him that her son was going, in a fit of despair, she knew not whither, and that it was love of you that drove him to it. And that she was an undone woman, and a great deal about your having tried to draw him in to court you, and I know not what. So my Lord did all he could to comfort her, and said he would talk to the Captain the next day and persuade him not to go. So she seemed a little satisfied, and Foigaué left them with orders to call them before the captain went away. So they were up very early; and, my Lady hearing that the Captain was stirring, desired to speak to him: for, she would not let my Lord go to him, or speak to him without her being by. So he came, and she began to ask him the reason of his going, and to desire that he would not go; and to ask him if it was not for your sake that he went. He owned that it was; but said you were an angel, and he wished you riches, and a good husband, and every thing that could make you happy. So, as soon as he was gone, my Lady fell into a fit, and she was but just come out of it when you, mame, came down. I am sure I was sorry to see you sent up so; for why, the Captain said all the handsome things of you that man could say of woman, and said you had never used him ill at all; but, when he was gone, my Lady said that was only his great generosity; for, she knew you had made him believe you were fallen in love with him, and called you a jilt, and I know not what. I know, mame, (continued the voluble

Ettongue,) that you are above hurting a servant by telling again what they say: not that my place is any thing extraordinary; for, though my Lady loves to make a great show, she cares not how much she screws the family; and, as for the poor, to whom they say my Lord used to be so generous, not a bit nor drop is suffered to be given to them, and Jowler was bought on purpose to worry the beggars, of whom my Lady says she cannot bear the sight. She says all that is given she chooses to give herself that it may be given properly. I believe all is little enough, for I never could hear who received it.”

Mrs. Ettongue was proceeding when Foigau came to the door to let her know that her lady wanted her; upon which she hastily left our heroine to ruminate upon what she had heard. All together only confirmed her former belief, that Lady Walton had determined at any rate to get her out of the house, and, disdaining the thought of staying a moment in it as an unwelcome intruder, she resolved to write to her uncle; and, after explaining her conduct to him in the clearest manner she was able, beg his permission to remove to Doctor Seward’s, where she proposed to spend the remainder of the summer.

Having written her letter, which she comprised in as few words as possible, she rang her bell, and, a chambermaid attending to know her commands, she desired it might be sent to her uncle. She then put on a riding-dress with great composure, and having, when she gave the letter, requested the servant to send her travelling trunk into her room, proceeded to place her clothes in it with the same calmness as if she had been preparing for a mere journey of pleasure. While she was thus employed, the servant returned with a note containing theses words.

“Your endeavours to exasperate me against the best and most beloved of wives is vain. You are at liberty to go and carry confusion and uneasiness wherever you please. A carriage will be in waiting for you in an hour.”

Though the substance of this note contained exactly what Caroline expected, knowing her uncle’s weakness, and that it must be written under the immediate inspection of his wife, yet its extreme shortness, his refusing to sign even his name, was more than she looked for, and a shower of tears fell upon the paper as she held it in her hand. At this instant Ettongue again entered, exclaiming, “Bless me, mame, what is it I hear? They tell me you are going away.” “They tell you true, Mrs. Ettongue,” (answered she, folding up the paper and putting it into her pocket,) “I am, indeed, going, it is my uncle’s wish that I should.” “Dear me, (cried Ettongue,) why should you leave us? I am sure my Lord loves you very much, whatever other folks may do. Dear me, when I first came to live with my Lady what things I have heard him say of you! if you had been his own he could not have said more or loved you better.” “Oh!” (replied Caroline, the tears bursting afresh from her eyes;) “those days are past, my uncle has now new favourites, and I am a poor forlorn outcast, left to wander as chance and fortune may direct.” “Dear me,” (answered the housekeeper, greatly moved by her tears,) “let me go to my lord, let me tell him that you are not well, that you are not willing to go.” “I am well,” (answered our heroine, rising and wiping her eyes,) “and willing, nay, desirous, to go from a house where I am considered as an unworthy incumbrance.” So saying, she began to put up the remainder of her clothes, in which Ettongue, seeing her resolute, assisted.

Lord Walton’s travelling post-chaise, attended by one footman, drove to the door just as they had finished their talk; and, the trunk being fastened behind, and all things in readiness, she sent Ettongue to her uncle to request that she might be indulged with the favour of seeing him before she left the house. To which she received for answer, that

Lady Walton was very ill, and he could not leave her for a single moment. Ettongue added, that when she delivered the message to Foigaue at her Lady's dressing-room door, she heard her say in a faint voice, "Oh! do not let me see her, the sight of her would destroy me."

The indignation of our heroine, which was raised by this account, supported her in quitting a house, which she had so long considered as a home. With all the appearance of perfect calmness and indifference, she stepped into the carriage without once turning her eyes to Lady Walton's window, where, half concealed behind a festooned curtain, Miss West was placed to observe her departure.

END OF VOL. I.

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CAROLINE;

OR, THE

DIVERSITIES

OF

FORTUNE:

A

NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOLUME SECOND.

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MDCCLXXXVII.

CAROLINE,

OR THE

DIVERSITIES of FORTUNE.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Retreat.

AS the carriage drove along, ten thousand different reflections, partly afflictive and partly consolatory, filled the mind of our fair heroine. The perfect innocence and goodness of her own heart could not but administer to it the greatest comfort and even pleasure; a pleasure, of which no outward circumstances could deprive it; but those circumstances were perplexed and distressing. She had, from infancy, been accustomed to protection and tenderness. Her disposition was naturally timid, and, though corrected by her understanding, was far from enabling her boldly to enter the world unsupported and alone; a world in which she was only acquainted with one flowery path, and to whose dark and intricate mazes she was wholly a stranger. She had great confidence in the friendship of Doctor Seward and his sister, but the idea of obligation and dependence was irksome to her, and she was sensible that with her slender income she could not, in their manner of living, be independent. To them, however, she determined to go, to consult them upon the steps it would be proper for her to take, and to regulate her future conduct and way of living by her own feelings, corrected by their advice.

After a journey, which, to her, appeared of unusual length, the chaise stopped at Doctor Seward's door, which was opened by Ambrose. "Oh! dear madam, (cried the honest creature,) is it you?" "Yes, Ambrose, (answered Caroline;) how do your master and mistress? Are they at home?" "No, madam, (replied Ambrose,) the Doctor is gone to visit a patient twenty miles off, and will not be back till tomorrow, and madam was sent for last week to take care of her sister, who is very ill, and lives on the farther side of Yorkshire. But pray, madam, walk in, (continued he,) my master will be right glad to see you when he comes home, and the cook will take care to provide a well-aired bed for you the same as if madam was here." Caroline considered for a moment: it might be some weeks before Mrs. Seward returned; her situation would, during that time, be very improper. Yet where could she go? At that instant Nurse Williams entered her thoughts, and she immediately resolved to take up her residence at the house of that honest and affectionate woman. Desiring Ambrose, therefore, to give her best respects to his master, and to inform him that he would probably hear from her in a short time, she directed the postillion to drive the way which led to Farmer Williams's. Upon her arrival she found the whole family out in the fields, it being just the beginning of hay-harvest, except the good woman and her daughter, whose business it was to provide victuals for the labourers.

Sally, whose wonder was excited by the sight of a carriage driving up to their door, ran to it, and, the moment it was opened, exclaimed, "Oh! mother, mother, here is Miss Ashford, it is Miss Ashford herself!" The good woman, who was employed in cleaning up her house, suddenly wiping her face and hands upon her apron, and running up to the side of the chaise, cried, "Oh! dear madam, who could have thought of seeing you?" "I am afraid, nurse, (said Caroline,) I am come at an inconvenient time; but, if you can take me in, and give me a bed for a few nights, I shall be greatly obliged to you, and will give no trouble that shall take you from your business." "Take you in, dear creature, (exclaimed Mrs. Williams;) yes, if my house was no bigger than a nutshell. I hope the time will never come when we shall think any thing a trouble that we can do to serve you." So saying, she endeavoured to open the chaise-door, but, not being expert enough to effect it, was obliged to give way to the footman, who, stifling a laugh at her awkwardness, assisted our heroine in getting out, and appeared not a little surprised to see her embrace a person of such mean rank with great affection, and, ordering her trunk to be unbound and taken into the house, walk in herself with the young woman as if she intended to remain there. Mrs. Williams having seen the trunk taken down, asked the servants to drink, which, notwithstanding their contempt for her appearance, they thought proper to accept. She was then proceeding to desire they would take their horses out of the harness and give them some corn, when Caroline, happening to over-hear her, stepped out and directed that they should be taken to a public house which stood at some distance, adding, that they might return as soon as they thought proper, she having no farther use for them. The fellows, who were just upon the point of accepting Mrs. Williams's offer in order to give themselves an opportunity of tasting a little more of her ale, which was always remarkably good, bowed with a look of some wonder mixed with disappointment, and, remounting their horses, drove away.

Sally had by this time opened the shutters of the parlour-windows; which (the room being only used upon extraordinary occasions) were kept closed to preserve the paper from the effects of the sun. She then removed a couple of spinning-wheels which were standing in it, and, with a clean rubber, dusted every chair, table, and other piece of furniture: which done, she went, by her mother's order, to put on the tea-kettle, to make a dish of that best of all travelling liquors for our heroine after her journey, she absolutely refusing any other kind of refreshment. Nothing could be more truly delicate than her repast. The mahogany board upon which it was placed might almost have served for a mirror, as might likewise the table round which they sat. The butter was fresh from the churn, the bread fine, and the cream the best a dairy could supply. As soon as it was ended, her kind friends were obliged to leave her in order to prepare a supper for their family, which, at this season, was very large. She then took a walk in the gardens, which were extensive. A small part of them was well cultivated for the use of the kitchen; the rest was laid out in shady walks, terraces, and regular quarters, which had been planted with choice shrubs, and ornamented with waterworks and statues. Having been for many years wholly neglected, it was, in some parts, quite overgrown, and little better than a thicket; but, in others, where the walks were wider, the trees and clipped hedges having recovered their natural growth, and shot forth in unbounded luxuriance, formed delightful shades, beneath which the noon-day sun was powerless. Among these romantic mazes, in happier days, Caroline often took a pleasure in wandering: she now viewed them with a melancholy satisfaction as a safe retreat from injury and malice. "Yes," (she cried,)

addressing a group of stately oaks, with all the ardour of enthusiasm, “under your venerable shelter I shall be unenvied and secure. Solitude is the nurse of wisdom and virtue: here will I court her instructions: she shall teach my heart to submit to the hard lessons of adversity, and to endure the vicissitudes of fortune without repining. I will bless the hand that corrects me; and, if the imperfection of my reason and virtue be too great to insure happiness, I will, at least, learn to be content.”

These, and a long train of succeeding reflections, took such intire possession of her mind, that evening stole upon her ere she was aware of its soft intrusion; and she was slowly returning to the house, enjoying the cool breeze after a day of uncommon heat, when she met Sally coming to seek her, who told her that supper was ready, and her mother was afraid she would catch cold by staying out so late. She thanked her for the kindness of her intentions, but told her she was fond of walking late. “Dear me, mame, (said the innocent girl,) I wonder, a fine lady, like you, can venture to be among these places at night; I, who am used to them, don’t much like it when it gets dark, for, they say, some of the walks are haunted. They say a young ’squire once drowned himself for love, and that often, in an evening, sighs and groans are heard: and, indeed, I have heard strange rustlings among the bushes myself.” “You heard the wind blowing, Sally, (answered Caroline;) nothing else, believe me. If so good a girl as you are can escape injury from the living you have nothing to fear from the dead.” “Why, so my mother says, (answered Sally,) and, that it was the opinion of your honoured father, that they neither can or wish to do us any harm: and, in the day, I think so too, but, I don’t know why, at night I can’t help being afraid.”

This sort of chat brought them to the house. The apartment of which Caroline had taken possession was divided, from that part of it which the family inhabited, by a large hall, once the scene of festive plenty, but now wholly useless. Through the door of this room, which was opened for the purpose, she past into the garden, to which it led, without seeing, or being seen, by the people belonging to the farm, which Williams had lately enlarged by renting a considerable quantity of ground adjoining to it. Upon entering the parlour, she saw the cloth laid in the neatest manner, and a variety of things, of which her nurse knew she was fond, placed upon the table. These delicacies consisted of radishes, new cheese, a gooseberry tart, and a fine plate of wood-strawberries, with a bowl of excellent cream. A more delicious repast could not have been placed before our heroine, who had no taste for high-seasoned dishes, and would, at any time, have eaten a tart or a pudding in preference to turtle or venison. After partaking moderately of the agreeable refreshment set before her, she retired to her chamber, which she found in the neatest order, the linen upon her bed being white as snow, and every thing round the picture of cleanliness and comfort.

She lay down with thankfulness. The affectionate kindness of the honest, worthy, people under whose roof she reposed, soothed her wounded mind. Her situation was endeared by the reflection that her revered father, and her mother, whose idea was dear to her heart, had inhabited the same comfortable apartment. She seemed to be placed, as it were, under their protection; and, when from these pleasing elusions her mental eye turned to serious reality, it presented assurances still more satisfactory; the assurance that she was under the immediate care of the best and greatest of Beings. A Being who perfectly knew the heart, and whose favour was only to be obtained by its purity and rectitude.

The sleepless night she had last past at Broomfield, her journey, the long time she had walked in the evening, all contributed to sweeten her repose, and she slept, unconscious of the world and its disappointments, till the morning was far advanced. Upon coming down she found her breakfast placed upon the table in as much order and nicety as the most delicate epicure could have wished. All the family, except Mrs. Williams and Sally, had been in the fields several hours. When, the former hearing her coming down, brought the tea-kettle into the parlour: she inquired, with the greatest tenderness, how she had slept, and whether the bed was made to her liking. Caroline having given her the most satisfactory assurances of the comfortable night she had past, took that opportunity of opening to her the intention she had formed of remaining at her house. She had the evening before told her that, finding Mrs. Seward out, to whom she intended a visit, and, not thinking it proper to remain at the Doctor's during her absence, she meant to pass that time with her. But she now explained some part of the cause which had induced her to quit Broomfield, namely, a misunderstanding with Lady Walton, which she mentioned in general terms, without entering into the particulars that gave rise to it. She then told her that, peace and independence being her first wish, she thought there was no place wherein she could so perfectly unite them as under her roof. That she would give her thirty pounds a year, to be paid quarterly, for her board, and the use of the room she was then in, and the bed-chamber above it. That she should supply herself with tea, wine, or any other little articles of superfluity she might have occasion for; and, as for her food, it would, as her nurse well knew, almost wholly consist of the production of the garden and dairy, for she ate very little else except eggs and fish. Such a boarder could not but be very acceptable to Mrs. Williams, exclusive of the great affection she bore our heroine, as the price she offered was, in that part of the kingdom, uncommonly good. She assured her that it should be their study to render her situation as comfortable as possible, adding, that she should be waited upon intirely by Sally, whom, she hoped, she would consider as her own maid.

These preliminaries being settled, she wrote a note to Doctor Seward, which she requested Mrs. Williams to send to him any part of the day in which she could most conveniently spare a messenger. It was dispatched immediately, and the Doctor, having returned early in the morning, attended her in less than an hour after it had been given to him. The surprise he expressed upon seeing her in her present situation was very great; but still greater was his concern when she had fully explained the cause of her so suddenly quitting the protection of her uncle. He saw the affair in exactly the same light that it had appeared in to her, and execrated the cruelty and artifice of Lady Walton in the severest terms. He offered to go himself to Broomfield and represent it to Lord Walton in its proper colours. To this friendly proposal she returned the warmest thanks; but said she had not, at least, for the present, a single hope of a reconciliation being effected by any possible means. She had already informed Lord Walton, by letter, of every circumstance she had related to him, but her account had been treated as art and falsehood, nor could she expect the same delivered by a person he knew to be her particular friend would have greater weight, or in the smallest degree alter his sentiments and opinion, supposing he really believed her guilty of the follies laid to her charge: but of this she was by no means convinced; she rather thought that he had, in part, submitted to an imposition which he knew to be such, and preferred ease and quietness to justice and humanity.

The Doctor then invited her in the politest and kindest manner to his house, telling her that his sister would, he hoped, be absent but a few weeks, during which time he would engage a young lady of the neighbourhood to be with her by way of companion, as he was obliged to be so much from home. The delicacy of this proposal, as well as its friendliness, was deeply felt by our heroine; but she thankfully declined accepting it, telling him, that she had absolutely resolved to remain where she then was. That independence was necessary to her peace, and that she had laid her plan in such a manner as to enable her to possess it without forfeiting the comforts of life. She then told him the agreement she had made with Mrs. Williams, and the manner in which she was to be accommodated. The Doctor said he could by no means approve of so young a lady living alone, or in so retired a manner: that her residence in his house would be both a pleasure and an obligation conferred upon him and his sister, who would think themselves greatly honoured by her acceptance of their protection. He would, however, refer the matter to Mrs. Seward, who would, he hoped, have influence enough to prevail upon her to comply with their wishes. He then, with the utmost delicacy, inquired if she had any commands with him in the character of her banker, requesting that she would, at all times, consider him as such. Caroline answered that she had money more than enough to supply her necessities till the interest of her thousand pounds became due, adding, that she should take care to live within her income, which the smallness of the expences she should, in her present situation, be subject to, would well enable her to do. The Doctor took his leave, after paying her many compliments upon the strength of her resolution and independence of spirit, qualities of which no man was a warmer admirer than himself. In pursuance of her request, he that evening sent her harpsichord and music-books: and the next morning she received her books and book-case, together with her implements for drawing. In the putting up and arrangement of them she spent the whole day; after which she began to feel herself quite at home, and reconciled to her humble state. The return of Mrs. Seward was the only additional pleasure to which she looked forward, which the Doctor assured her should be hastened as much as her sister's state of health would possibly admit.

Thus had a few short days strangely altered the views and situation of our heroine. From being admired and caressed by every one who approached her, surrounded by ease and affluence, the favourite relation of Lord Walton, and the presumptive heiress of a considerable part of his large fortune, she was suddenly deserted by all these flattering circumstances, and left a defenceless, unprotected, orphan, unsought, unattended; the humble possessor of one poor thousand pounds.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Gamester.

MANY wise men have said, and daily experience proves, that happiness is confined to no situation of life; but that, provided health and the mere conveniences of life are enjoyed, the peasant may be as blest as the prince; but this does not suppose the peasant to have once been invested with royal dignity, and to have tasted all the luxuries and splendours of greatness. In this case the mind will painfully dwell upon past scenes, which regret will paint in colours far more attractive than they ever appeared while in possession. We can hardly persuade ourselves to believe that Dionysius was happy at Corinth. Thus our heroine, though possessed of more philosophy than usually falls to the share of a young beauty, could not sometimes prevent the intrusion of uneasy reflections: upon these occasions her harpsichord was her general resource, and a lesson from some favourite composer would, at any time, reharmonize her mind. Doctor Seward had moreover sent her several new books, of the entertaining kind, which he particularly recommended to her perusal.

There were few days on which she did not spend some hours under the shade of the stately oaks mentioned in the foregoing chapter; and sometimes she would stroll as far as the neighbouring cottages, where her appearance caused the highest degree of transport. Her visits, indeed, were not so frequent as they had once been, because she had less to give, and could not endure to raise hopes which she possessed not power to satisfy. One evening, recollecting a small cottage which stood in a retired corner of a coppice, at no great distance from one of the garden-gates, where a very old woman used to live who was extremely afflicted with the rheumatism, she crossed a couple of fields which divided her from it, in order to inquire if she was still alive, as well as her son and daughter-in-law, an honest labourer and his wife, who had a large family to maintain, besides their aged mother, of whom they always appeared very careful.

She found the little wicket, of the inclosure wherein the house stood, open, as was its door, the inhabitants fearing none of those rapacious intruders who are lured by opulence. Richard and his wife were out at harvest-work, and there appeared to be only three or four children playing about the garden. Caroline called the eldest, a girl of six or seven years old, and asked if her grandmother was alive. The child was, at first, frightened, hung down its head, and remained silent, but the sight of two or three halfpence soon brought her to the use of her speech, and she told her that her grandmother had been dead a long time, adding, that, when she died, her mammy cried sadly, and said she was sure she was gone to heaven. "Well," (replied Caroline, who was fond of amusing herself with the simple prattle of children,) "she should not have cried for that, because, you know, heaven is a very fine place, and your grandmother is a great deal happier there than she was when she lived with you." The child stared with vacant attention. "Did you not love your grandmother?" (said Caroline.) The child made no answer; upon which she repeated the question, and the girl replied, "I loves mammy." By this time the rest of the children were gathered round her, and she was about to put some little questions to some of them, by way of trying if their intellects were stronger than those of the eldest seemed to be, when her attention was entirely fixed by the appearance of a beautiful little face which

she saw peeping out at the door. The part of her frock which was in sight added to her surprise; it was of muslin, and perfectly clean. The child now ventured to shew herself intirely, and the cottagers cried out, all at once, "Oh! there's miss! take her back to madam." "Stay, stay, (said Caroline,) let me speak to her. Will you come to me, my love?" (continued she, with an inviting tone and action.) "Come and see what pretty things I have got." "Yes," (cried the child, running to her with eagerness,) "will you take me a walking?" "That I will, (replied our heroine;) we will go all round this field." And away the little creature ran, with all the rapture of a bird who, having been a short time confined to the narrow limits of a cage, on a sudden regains its liberty.

Delighted with its beauty and activity, Caroline asked it several questions, such as where its mamma was, to which the little cherub answered, "Poor mamma is not well, she is asleep upon the bed. Don't tell her I came out." "Would she be angry with you?" (said Caroline.) "Oh! yes, (answered the child,) she won't let me go out now. I used to go out every day with Molly, but Molly is gone now." "And where did you live before you came here?" (asked our heroine.) The child, instead of answering her question, fixed its eyes upon her watch, which was hanging by her side. "You've got a watch; mamma had a watch, but Molly took it away, (cried the little creature,) and papa's picture, and mamma's pretty pins, she took all, and has left mamma hardly any thing." "Shall I come and see your mamma?" (cried Caroline, who began to feel strongly interested in the distress of this unknown person.) "Yes, (replied the beautiful prattler,) as soon as she is awake, but she told me not to make a noise because she was very sleepy." This and such kind of little chat brought them round the field to the house again; whence, while at a small distance, Caroline heard a female voice speaking in much agitation. "Which way did she go?" (exclaimed the unseen inquirer.) "With a lady! What lady? Tell me which way." So saying, she came out of the little inclosure into the field, where our heroine, to her great surprise, beheld an elegant-looking young woman, dressed in the most fashionable manner, though her clothes were rather soiled and carelessly put on. The moment she beheld her little one, joy flushed her pale cheeks; and she met and kissed her with tenderness, half-mixed with anger, for her running out without permission: but in a moment, casting her eyes upon Caroline, confusion covered her face with crimson. "Can you pardon, Madam," said our heroine, "the theft I have been guilty of? I have at least strength of temptation to plead in my excuse; for never did I behold so lovely a little creature!" The countenance of the fond mother brightened at this compliment paid her child: she thanked her in the politest terms; and, taking hold of the hand which her little daughter held out to her, bid her wish the lady a good night. Caroline kissed her with great affection; and, taking hold of her other hand, said, "But when, my dear little new acquaintance, shall I see you again? Will you ask your mama, if she will give me leave to call upon you? You know you promised to introduce me to her." 'Alas, Madam!' answered the lady, 'I have no place, no accommodations to receive a person of your appearance. You see,' continued she, pointing to the cottage, 'you see our only habitation: and how long we shall be suffered to shelter ourselves there, Heaven knows!'

The tear of involuntary pity glistened in the eyes of Caroline. "Your situation, "Madam," cried she, "appears to be indeed unworthy of you; but we every day visit those who are unworthy of their situation; why, then, should we shun the reverse, when it so seldom falls in our way?" 'Do, come in,' exclaimed the little one; 'pray do; you shall have some of my bread and milk; shan't she, mama?' So saying, she pulled her towards

the door, through which our heroine had too much inclination to pass, greatly to oppose her; especially as the lady did not seem unwilling that she should enter.

The description of this cottage would have adorned a pastoral poem. The walls were white; the thatch neat and good; both were almost covered with woodbine, which, though not yet in flower, made a very pleasing appearance. The hedge round great part of the inclosure was made of sweet brier, here and there intermixed with hawthorn; which being in bloom, together with its fragrant neighbour, scented the air. The garden was very clean, and well stored with useful vegetables. The house consisted of two rooms upon the ground floor, and a kind of cock-loft above, to which you ascended by means of a step-ladder. The furniture of the first room was such as one might expect to see in so poor a habitation, which, the number of children considered, was kept in very decent order. Through this room they passed to an inner one, which was rather larger, and perfectly clean; but furnished exactly in the same style. There was nothing that struck the eye as uncommon in such a place, except a large travelling trunk, which stood on one side of the room, and a very fine damask napkin, that was spread over an old three-legged stool, which served by way of table.

As soon as they entered, the lady, in the most polite and obliging manner, reached the only chair the room afforded for our heroine, seating herself upon the side of a small uncurtained bed, and taking her child upon her lap. Then addressing her fair guest with a faint smile, "It is probably the first time you ever sat in such an apartment," said she. 'By no means,' answered Caroline; 'though I must acknowledge that it is the first time I ever met with such an apartment so inhabited.' "You are, no doubt, Madam," said the stranger, "surprized to find a person of decent appearance in so wretched a place. As nothing but the goodness of your disposition can interest you in my affairs, I have no way left in my power to return the kindness of your pity, but by gratifying so natural a curiosity.

"A few words will suffice to give you a general knowledge of my follies and misfortunes. My father is a Baronet; you will pardon my waving his name; I have already sufficiently disgraced it. His profuse manner of living greatly reduced his fortune, and rendered his house a continual scene of dissipation, in which I and one sister, older than myself, were educated. Of his son he was more careful; he was early committed to the tutorage of a respectable gentleman of small fortune, whose education, abilities, and turn of mind, rendered him particularly well qualified for the office of preceptor; while we were left to the care of an ignorant French governess, whom my father hired at a small salary, more for the appearance of improvement than the reality; well knowing that the latter was not within her power to bestow. Our studies were such as you will suppose; learning bad French, reading novels, dressing, and, as we began to grow up, frequenting public places.

"In spite of all these disadvantages, my sister became a sensible elegant woman; she had understanding enough to despise the way of life into which she was initiated, and resolution to change it. She requested that my father would dismiss our French instructor, and give us leave to be attended by a good master of that language, and another who could properly improve us in the knowledge of our own: in which, as her plan was attended with no additional expence, she was indulged. This alteration was by no means agreeable to me, who began but too much to relish the pleasures, as I then thought them, in which we had been accustomed to live: and what added to my chagrin, my sister would scarce ever appear to any of my father's parties; so that I was deprived of the company of

a gentleman who had begun to render himself but too pleasing in my eyes. His person and manner were as agreeable as his morals and conduct were despicable. Mr. Forester was a man of family; who, having lost a good fortune at the gaming-table, had acquired the art by which his ruin had been effected, and now subsisted by stripping others, as he had once himself been stripped. He was not much younger than my father; but his person was fine: and he so completely possessed the art of pleasing, that nobody ever thought of inquiring his age. I was not ignorant of his profession; but the horror it should have excited, was in me not merely weakened, but quite obliterated, by constantly mixing with such characters, and seeing them treated by my father with friendliness and distinction. I entered into secret engagements with him; and in a few months after our acquaintance first commenced, suffered him to conduct me to Scotland, where we were married.

“Upon our return to town, my father refused to see us; and was as much offended by my misconduct, as if he had bestowed upon me the best education, and set me the most perfect example. I was at first affected by his displeasure; but my husband’s fondness, and the light manner in which he treated the affair, often saying he did not want money, and cared for my father as little as he could for him, in a short time wholly dissipated my chagrin. We took a house in Portman-Place, furnished it in the most elegant manner, bought a handsome coach, and in every respect lived like people of large fortune. This, however, did not continue long; our coach, and every thing valuable in the house, was seized for the payment of a play-debt, and I was removed to a ready-furnished lodging in St. James’s-street. Here for some months we experienced numberless vicissitudes of fortune; sometimes rolling in affluence, and sometimes wanting the necessaries of life.

“During this uncertain state, the dear child, who now sleeps upon my lap, was born. The sight of her seemed at once to open my soul to a new perception of every thing around me. While I gazed upon her dear face in speechless fondness, I felt all my follies; and my anguish was equal to my love. What tears have I not shed, while the sweet innocent lay by my side, unconscious of the pangs I endured!

“My husband expressed neither pleasure nor sorrow at the sight of her; he seemed, indeed, to regard her only as a useless expence and incumbrance! nor could all my tears or entreaties prevail upon him to permit me to nurse her! he absolutely forbade me to think of it; swearing he would not live in the compass of a lodging with a squalling brat, for all the women in Europe. At the end of six weeks, therefore, I was obliged to part with my little darling, and to deprive her of that sustenance which nature intended much longer for her support. You are not a mother, my dear Madam,” continued Mrs. Forester; “and though the tears you now shed, prove you to possess the most tender of hearts, yet can you not feel the tortures mine endured, when I took the dear infant from my breast, and committed her to the care of a mercenary hireling. I will not pain you, by attempting to describe it; but only observe, that Mr. Forester, who was present, appeared absolutely unmoved, called me a fool, and said I should in a day or two be as glad as himself that the troublesome little thing was out of the way.

“Before the event I have just related, by awakening maternal affection, had roused my soul to a sense of rectitude and virtue, Mr. Forester and I had lived together in an amicable manner. When in good humour, he was very fond of me; and when his temper was ruffled, I generally left him to fret alone, and sought, among a numerous acquaintance of such dissipated beings as myself, relief from uneasy reflections. When he

was rich I shared his affluence, and when poor, I was forced to submit to a temporary inconvenience, in hope that Fortune, who, we had good reason to know, was prone to change, would soon smile again. But I now saw things in a different light: my husband's profession appeared to me not more precarious than disgraceful; and I was constantly insinuating my opinion, and pressing him to lay out the next sum of money that fell into his hands, in the purchase of some post, which would afford us a regular maintenance, and put it into his power to alter his way of life, and in some degree retrieve his reputation. He at first laughed at, and rallied my seriousness; but finding my sentiments continue the same, and that I had altered my mode of living in conformity to them, he treated my methodism, as he used to call it, with the utmost contempt, and took a pleasure in expressing such opinions and resolutions as he knew would shock me; particularly that of quitting the kingdom, and leaving our dear child behind him, to take its chance in a work-house; which he more than once, when he was in an ill run, declared it was his intention to do. Upon these occasions, I never failed to assure him that I would stay behind, and sing ballads about the streets to maintain it: to which he would answer, that I might begin the experiment as soon as I pleased, for he did not believe it would be long in his power to support us.

“One day, as I was sitting full of uneasy reflections, happening to cast my eye upon a newspaper that lay near; the first paragraph which met it, was an account of the marriage of my sister. I found she had married a foreign nobleman, and was in a few days to set off for the Continent. I immediately resolved to write her an account of my present sad situation. While she continued in my father's house, I knew it was in vain to solicit her assistance; I knew she possessed no more money than was absolutely necessary for her expences, and that she had not the smallest influence over him that could be at all useful to me, were she ever so well inclined to exert it in my favour: but it seemed now probable that her power was enlarged: and, from my knowledge of her natural disposition, and the affection she always professed to bear me, I had little reason to doubt of her kindness. This hope, like a ray of light breaking into a gloomy dungeon, for a moment illumined my soul; but upon examining the date of the paper, I found it was five weeks old, and of consequence she must have left England long before that time. My disappointment was excessive; the tears were still falling from my eyes, when Mr. Forester, whom I had not seen since the morning before (such absences being frequent) entered the room. I asked him if he had never heard of my sister's marriage? ‘Yes,’ answered he, ‘long since.’ “Why did not you inform me of it?” said I; “from this paper, which came to my sight by mere accident, I have received the first and only account of it.” ‘And so,’ answered he, ‘with all your goodness and patience, you are crying because your sister is a Countess! Come, Mary, confess the truth; is not that the case?’ As I had not for a long time seen him smile, or look upon me with any degree of kindness, I endeavoured to be cheerful, and only answered, that when I married him, I would not have accepted of a Duke.—‘We won't inquire,’ said he, seating himself by me, ‘into the different meanings of the words *then* and *now*. I,’ continued he, with some emotion, ‘have not always used thee as thou deservest; but we must forgive each other in turn.’ Then after a moment's pause, ‘Tell me, my dear Mary,’ said he, ‘can'st thou forgive me, who have ruined and treated thee so unkindly?’

“I was startled at a conduct so new: I readily assured him of my forgiveness, nay of my tenderest affection; for I still loved him. He then began to talk upon indifferent

subjects; telling me several particulars of my sister's marriage; which I found had been celebrated with great pomp. He continued all the morning in the house; and when dinner-time approached, asked me what I had provided? adding, that he should dine at home. My amazement increased: I could not remember the time, except when we were first married, that he had ever dined at home when we had no company. I had only one servant, a girl who had always seemed particularly attached to me: I immediately sent her for something which I knew he liked; and he appeared to eat with great comfort and satisfaction. A bottle of wine was ordered after dinner; for as several months had passed since he had eaten a meal with me before, and I had disused myself from the habit of drinking that liquor, on account of its expence, I had not one to set before him.

"When the glasses were removed, to my utter astonishment, he proposed a walk to see our little girl; to which, you may be sure, I gladly consented. The house in which she was nursed was not more than two or three hundred yards from Buckingham-Gate; which situation I had chosen, both on account of its airiness and nearness to St. James's-street. It was my custom to walk to see her twice every day. Indeed, I might be said to have nursed her; for I often staid two or three hours at a time, during which she was never out of my arms. I had the pleasure to see her as healthful and thriving as I could wish; and when she began to distinguish one person from another, her constant and open preference of me to every one, afforded me delight which I have no words to express. As soon as she began to prattle and run alone, I was always met by her at the door; for she perfectly knew the rap I was accustomed to give, nor would she ever leave me for a single moment till I quitted the house.

"Pardon, my dear Madam," continued Mrs. Forester, "my detaining you with a relation of such trifles; they are what the heart of a mother dwells upon with particular delight, and I am apt to forget that they cannot interest any other so deeply. But I will conclude my story.

"In walking across the park, he desired me to take hold of his arm. As we were going forward, I saw two gentlemen approaching, one of whom I instantly knew to be my father: I trembled; the blood forsook my cheeks, and I could but just totter to a seat which happened to be near us. My father cast his eyes upon us as he passed by; he started at the first view: but disdain succeeded surprize, and he gave me a look so full of contemptuous severity, that my heart sunk within me, and I fainted away.

"Upon my recovery, I found myself in the house of my child's nurse; my husband, with concern in his countenance, supporting me, and my dear little Mary crying at my knees. I soon began to grow better; and the sight of Mr. Forester, sitting with his little cherub on his knee, was a cordial to my spirits. He ordered tea, and sent for cakes to treat her with; asked many little questions, and appeared highly pleased with her prattle; often declaring, he never before saw so lovely a child; and once adding, that he wished he had known how engaging the dear little creature was sooner. I seized that opportunity to propose our having her home: to which he readily consented, telling me, that if I liked it, we might take her with us that evening.

"At that moment, I thought myself perfectly happy; I was in a delirium of joy: I embraced my husband with transport, then my child; and thanked him again and again for the permission he had given me. He accordingly paid the nurse all that was due to her, and calling a coach, we got in; and when the door was closed upon us, I thought that

small wooden vehicle contained every thing within it, and that all the rest of the world was a noisy nothing.

“Our little Mary was so lively and entertaining, that it grew late before we could prevail upon ourselves to part with her. At last, tired out with the constant exercise of the day, she fell asleep in her father’s arms; who carried her up stairs; and when I had opened the bed, laid her gently upon it. Never did he appear in my eyes so manly, so amiable! I seemed to be beginning a new life; to be almost in Heaven! After talking some time about the beauty and understanding of our dear little one, we agreed to follow her. I accordingly went up to my chamber, where (our bed being very large) she slept. After offering up my prayers and praises to the awful Disposer of events, I went to bed; where, in a short time, I was followed by my husband.

“Soon after five, the next morning, we were awoke, by some one rapping loud at the door. My husband started up, and began to dress himself in haste.—“Are you going out so early?” said I. ‘Yes,’ replied he; ‘I have promised to take a walk with Major Darnley: it is he who is at the door.’ “Will you be back to breakfast?” said I. ‘I hope so,’ replied he; ‘but don’t wait for me; I shall probably take a long walk. Perhaps,’ continued he, after a moment’s pause, ‘you may want money before I return; I’ll leave my purse behind me: that, and this pocket-book, which I will likewise give to your care, contain all my worldly possession.’—By this time he was dressed, when, stepping to the side of the bed, he tenderly embraced me, and imprinted a kiss of cordial love upon the lips of his sleeping Mary. As he left the chamber, stopping short, as it were, to take one more look, a sigh burst from him, which seemed to issue from the bottom of his heart.

“Judging of his feelings by my own, I easily attributed such a proof of concern to regret for past follies: and, as sorrow is the parent of penitence, I felt the most lively hope that I should soon see the fruits of so desirable a change; a change which I now fervently longed for, though want and beggary were to be the consequence.

“In this soothing disposition of mind I fell asleep, after having followed my husband’s example, in tenderly kissing my little darling, who lay by my side a picture of innocence and peace.

“In this blessed state I remained, till I was awakened by my servant’s suddenly rushing into my room, exclaiming, ‘Oh, Madam! Madam! my master is killed! he’s killed in a duel!’ How I arose, supported myself, unassisted as I was, to the dead body of my wretched husband, and went through all the dreadful scenes that followed, I hardly know; nor will I pain myself to relate, or you, Madam, to hear. Next to the support of Heaven, I believe, I owe to my little Mary the strength of mind which was inspired, by the desire of preserving and protecting her.

“I will pass by the whole melancholy train of events which took place during my short stay in London. My petition to my father; his cruel reproaches and utter refusal of assistance; the coolness of my friends, and the severity of my enemies;—let it suffice to say, That when I had fully answered all the demands which were made upon me, I found myself in possession of rather more than thirty pounds, besides my own watch and my husband’s, a few diamonds, and some valuable trinkets.

“After much consideration, I resolved to quit London; where I knew this small sum would last but a short time, and go to the house of a relation, who lived at the distance of a few miles from this place. I set out accordingly, full of hope that I should be received with some kindness, as she was very rich, my godmother, and had, in the

younger part of my life, been very kind to me. Add to which, that she was remarkable for her fondness of children; having had several of her own, which she had lost. All these circumstances gave me the most comfortable reliance upon her protection. Judge then of my disappointment, when I was informed at her door, that she had been dead upwards of six months, and her fortune (having died without a will) fallen into the hands of her nephew, who was then in London; and none but servants, upon board wages, left in the house.

“I had come in a stage-coach all the way from London, which, passing through the further part of this village, set me down at a small inn; from whence, with a boy, to whom I promised a shilling, by way of guide, I walked to Glendhall, the house of my relation, without once thinking of making any inquiry about her; which, had I taken the precaution to do, I might have saved myself much loss and vexation. On my way I was particularly struck with the situation and appearance of this cottage, and ardently wished that, furnished with the mere conveniences of life, I could end my days in such a retreat. I found the walk longer than I expected; but hope supported me. On my return, however, I had no such comforter; and it was with much difficulty that I crawled along. Just as I was crossing this field, almost ready to faint with fatigue, the mistress of the cottage, with one or two of her children, were going in. I called to her, and asked if she would give me leave to rest in her house for a few minutes? which she readily permitted me to do. I was no sooner within the door than I fainted away; and, upon my recovery from the fit, found myself so very ill, that I was incapable of moving. With considerable difficulty I wrote a few lines to my servant, ordering her to bring Mary to me, and my trunk; which I did not choose to have left at a public-house.

“The clean honest appearance of the people with whom I was, pleased me more than the confusion, dirtiness, and imposition of an ale-house: and I resolved, as they told me they had a room they could spare, to stay with them till I was able to pursue my journey. The honest man of the house went with the boy, and assisted in bringing my trunk; in which I had some linen, both for the bed and table.

“This room, into which my hostess conducted me, was quite clean. She told me, her mother, who had seen better days, and lived housekeeper in many good families, used to sleep in it; but that, since her death, which was about three months, it had never been used. A pair of my own sheets being put on the bed, I drank a bason of balm-tea; which the good woman assured me, was the best thing in the world for a cold or fever: and indeed I found it both an agreeable and efficacious medicine.

“I was rather better the next morning; but finding myself so very quiet, and having no particular place where I had resolved to go, I determined to remain where I was, till I was perfectly recovered.

“When I had been here three days, and could just get up and walk about, my servant began to make heavy complaints of the wretchedness of her accommodation, though the poor children had given up their bed to her, and lay themselves in the kitchen upon straw, which they brought in at night for the purpose, and regularly removed every morning. I told her, she must not expect with me the comforts she had been accustomed to, as I no longer had them for myself; but that we should soon go back to town, where, if she chose to leave me, which I would advise her to do, I would be ready to give her such a character as, I hoped, would secure her a better place. She made no answer; only muttering something about fine folks and poor servants. I went to bed early in the

evening, being still very weak, and took my little Mary with me. I had a good night; and when I awoke, was about to call Molly, as usual; when, to my great surprize, I beheld my trunk open, and all the things tossed and tumbled in a strange manner. I called the woman of the house, and asked where Molly was? To which she answered, that she could not think; for they sat up for her till it was light in the morning, but she never came home. Upon asking when she went out? I was told, in about an hour after I went to bed: That she came out of my room, and told them she was going to the public-house, to fetch some things that I wanted; and should be back in a couple of hours.

“I instantly got up, and, upon looking into my trunk, found that a purse, which contained all my money, except one guinea and some silver that happened to be in my pocket, was gone. She had likewise taken my diamonds, some valuable lace and trinkets, among which was a picture of my husband, set round with brilliants. And casting my eyes upon the table, where my watch generally lay, I perceived that was gone likewise.

“This, my dear Madam, completed my misfortunes, and left me in a situation the most forlorn and wretched that ever poor creature was reduced to. I have not a friend in the kingdom to whom I can apply for a single guinea in my extremest necessity: I know not where to write either to my brother or sister; the former being at this time upon his travels. Had not this distressing event taken place, it was my hope to have lived upon the little of which I was possessed till his return, which will be in a few months. Upon the benevolence and generosity of his disposition I place my last and only dependence. At the age of twenty-five, of which he now wants but a short time, he will, by the will of an uncle, be possessed of five thousand pounds a year, independent of my father: and, if an absence of six years (for so long it is since he left England) has not greatly altered his temper and affections, he will not suffer a sister to feel distress, which it is in his power to relieve.”

Here Mrs. Forester ended, apologizing to our heroine for having detained her so long with a tale so melancholy and little interesting. Caroline assured her, in the kindest manner, of her pity; adding, that every assistance in her power to give, she should command. The close of the evening warned her to shorten her stay; and she took leave, after having promised, with the permission of her new acquaintance, to call again the next day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Pleasures of Benevolence.

THE attention of our heroine was wholly occupied during the night by the affecting little story she had just heard. Her own situation, compared with that of Mrs. Forester, was affluence and happiness; but she sighed for the power to remove her distress, to soothe her afflicted heart, and restore her to the ease and independence she had once enjoyed, and which her present altered disposition rendered her more than ever worthy to possess; but she was not one of those who could satisfy themselves with sighing for the misfortunes of others, or fancy, as many good-natured people do, that when they have wished relief to the unfortunate, they have done all benevolence can demand: nor did she think that, because it was not in her power wholly to supply the wants of the necessitous, she should therefore withhold the little she was able to bestow. Upon her arrival at home she unlocked the drawer wherein her cash was deposited, and counting it over, found it amounted to nine guineas and a half. In about three months, the interest of her thousand pounds would be due from Doctor Seward; and she had already paid in advance for her first quarter's board, thinking the money would be better employed in the hands of Farmer Williams, than by keeping it locked up in her drawer. Upon this review of the present state of her finances, she thought five guineas might be spared without inconvenience; and accordingly placed that sum in an elegant little French box, which she resolved to present her new favourite, the beautiful little Mary, with the next morning.

Full of the pleasing hope of bestowing comfort, she rose early, and could hardly allow herself time to breakfast; so impatient was she to repeat her visit to the cottage; but just as she entered the field in which it stood, recollecting that it was probable Mrs. Forester would not be up, at least that her little chamber would not be in such a state as her delicacy would let her think proper for the reception of a visitor, she turned back, and seating herself under the shade of one of her favourite trees, pulled out a book (a companion she never was without) and amused herself, till her watch informed her it was eleven o'clock. She then gathered a nosegay of rose-buds, which flourished in abundance throughout every part of the garden, and again bent her course to the habitation of her new friend.

There is nothing that endears a worthy fellow-creature to a benevolent heart so much, as the power of doing him good. The pleasures resulting from conscious virtue and active goodness, are far greater than can be felt by the object who is benefited from their effects; or, to speak in the expressive language of him whose wisdom was only equalled by his benevolence, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' With a heart full of kindness, and a countenance dressed in smiles such as angels may be supposed to wear when sent on errands of mercy, she approached the cottage; the native inhabitants of which, strangers to want or care, were playing about the door, as the day before. "Sorrow," said our heroine, as she gazed at them, "is the offspring of refinement; health, food, a sunshine-day, or warm hovel, are all that simple, untaught nature requires." Thus reflecting, she entered the house, and seeing the door of the inner apartment half-open, was going to knock, in order to give notice of her coming; when little Mary, hearing a noise, came to it. The moment she beheld her, she cried out, in a rapture, "The lady,

mama! the lady!” and ran to her with open arms. Caroline took her up, and kissing her lips and cheeks, gave her the flowers; which she had no sooner received, than struggling to get down, she flew back to her mother, crying, “Look, look, mama! see what I have got!” At that moment Mrs. Forester appeared. “It is in vain,” said she, smiling through a tear, “to strive to make my poor chamber fit for your reception. Should I put every thing away that offends the eye, I should strip it of all its wretched conveniences; but Miss Ashford has goodness to enter as it is; I will therefore open the door without apology, as the best compliment I can pay to her benevolence.”

Caroline was surprized to hear her name mentioned; which, however, she would not have been, had she considered the many visits she used to pay to this and the neighbouring cottages, while an inhabitant of Elmwood. Mrs. Forester assured her, that the compassion she had the last night expressed for her sufferings, had greatly soothed her mind; and the liberty of relating them had seemed to remove part of the load with which it was oppressed. In return, her fair comforter said all that was kind and worthy of her understanding and goodness: she gave it as her opinion, that as Mrs. Forester had no place to which she particularly wished to go, and was so well satisfied with the honesty and civility of the people with whom she then was, it would be the best measure she could take to remain in her present humble habitation, till she heard of her brother’s arrival in England. To this she readily assented; but said her only fear was, that her little stock would not hold out to pay the small weekly salary she had promised for her room, exclusive of bread for herself and child. Caroline replied, that it would be hard if so small a sum could not be procured; then rising to take leave, she invited her and her little one to drink tea with her at Mr. Williams’s. “You will there see, Madam,” said she, “that mere comforts are all I possess: I have known some changes of situation as well as yourself, though none so painful as yours.” Mrs. Forester willingly promised to attend her; and Caroline having directed her to the garden-gate, at which she engaged to meet and conduct her to the house, stooped down to kiss her little favourite before her departure; and slipping the box, which contained her present, into her hand, quitted the house, with a request that they would make her an early visit.

With a heart much the lighter for the loss of her guineas, Caroline returned home; she no longer felt herself poor, she had something to spare for the distressed; and if she could not do all she wished, at least she resolved to omit nothing within her power to do. As soon as dinner was over (which, in order to consult the convenience of her nurse, she now eat at one o’clock) she began to prepare for the entertainment of her expected guests, by gathering a small basket of cherries and another of apricots, of which (Williams being a good manager of his trees) the garden produced a considerable quantity. At the appointed hour she repaired to the gate where she expected to meet them, and in a few minutes after she had opened it, they appeared.

It would be difficult to paint the confusion, the gratitude, which appeared in the countenance of Mrs. Forester when she approached our heroine: her feelings were too strong for words; and only could express themselves in tears. At length, somewhat recovering, “Generous Miss Ashford,” cried she, “how shall I thank you! how shall I express my gratitude!” ‘If I can be happy enough to serve you, my dear Madam,’ interrupted Caroline, ‘the pleasure it will afford me will ten thousand times pay me for the trifle, which nothing but the narrowness of my present circumstances can excuse my having offered you. Your acceptance of it is a favour done to me; and I beseech you to

consider it as such.' She then began to caress and gather flowers for her little blooming favourite, in order to divert the thoughts of her mother from what so entirely possessed them.

From this evening, which was spent in the most cordial manner, a perfect intimacy took place between them; and they seldom spent a day apart. Besides the present which Caroline had made her new friend, she was constantly sending her every thing that she thought would contribute to her health and comfort: and the extreme delicacy with which all her kindnesses were bestowed, doubled their value. Her chamber became convenient, by the number of little things which she received from her: and not only the table upon which she eat, but the viands that were placed upon it, were daily proofs of her attention and friendship. Little Mary became every day more and more dear to her: she lived more with her than with her mother; passing many succeeding nights with her little mama, as Caroline had taught her to call her.

About a month had passed in this manner, when, one evening upon which Caroline was gone to the cottage, to ask her friends to dine with her the next day, upon some delicacy which Dr. Seward had sent her, and was walking with them backward and forward in the field before their habitation, she saw Sally running, with unusual swiftness, across the meadow, from the garden-gate. Believing that something extraordinary must have occasioned this haste, she kissed Mary, bade adieu to Mrs. Forester, and walked with a quick pace to meet her. Half out of breath, Sally informed her that an old lady in a fine coach, with all the servants in mourning, was at their house, inquiring for her: and, upon hearing that she had walked out, desired she might be sent for immediately. Caroline was lost in conjecture: she knew not any person who, in the smallest degree, answered the description given by Sally. She therefore entered the house in a considerable degree of solicitude and perfect uncertainty.

She was met at the door of the parlour by a pleasing venerable-looking old lady, dressed in deep mourning. A genteel middle-aged woman, who seemed to be her attendant, was standing behind her. Caroline courtesied upon entering, in the most graceful and respectful manner; which was returned by the old lady, with a look of mixed surprize, pleasure, and affection. "Are you Miss Ashford, my dear?" said she, in the tenderest accent. 'I am, Madam,' replied our heroine. 'May I beg to know the cause to which I owe the honour of seeing you in this retirement?' "It is my child!" exclaimed Lady Ashford; "for it was no other: it is the daughter of my poor unfortunate Henry! Her voice, her manner, all are his!" So saying, she embraced her with inexpressible affection, while our heroine sunk at her feet, dissolved in tears, and speechless with surprize and joy. 'Are you then, indeed, Madam,' sobbed she, 'the revered mother of my dear, dear father? her of whom I have so often heard him speak with such duty and affection? And will you permit his poor forlorn child to ask your blessing—to claim your parental love?' "Yes, my child," replied her Ladyship, again, embracing her in the fondest manner: "the love, the protection I was not suffered to extend to thy dear father, shall be thine. My house shall be thy home; nor shall all the malice of thy enemies rob thee of thy natural right in my heart and fortune. See here, Mrs. Ausburn," continued she, turning to her companion. "Behold the deformed, weak, untaught girl I have been persuaded to expect! I always knew Marmaduke was mean and selfish; but I did not before believe that he was capable of framing such malicious falshoods. If she has been guilty of some levities; at her age, with such a person, they are excuseable, and have been too severely punished."

The tears which fell from the eyes of our heroine, and wet the hand of her grandmother, which at the conclusion of this tender speech she raised to her lips, spoke the grateful sensations of her soul. She was at a loss to explain the meaning of her last words, till she understood that her grandfather, being dead, and of consequence his widow freed from those ties which separated her from her brother, he and his lady, who were before upon terms of intimacy with the present Sir Marmaduke and his family, paid her a visit; and by them she was informed of the many follies her granddaughter had been accused of; and of her leaving her uncle's house in consequence of a slight reprimand she had received from Lady Walton. This account, which was given by the last-mentioned lady, with all the false colouring of malice, could not wholly deceive the penetration of Lady Ashford. Removing the facts from the glaring light in which they had been placed, by one whose interest stood in opposition to that of the accused, and with whose character and manners she was by no means satisfied, what had been alledged against Caroline more than a few youthful follies, such as she by no means thought sufficient to justify her relations in abandoning a young creature, who stood so much in need of their protection and assistance. She had often privately inquired about her and her brother, during the lifetime of her husband; when to inquire was all in her power to do; and had been told that she was much deformed, and very deficient in her understanding: but questioning Lady Walton upon these particulars, she learnt that Caroline was reckoned handsome, and that her understanding was very good: that lady adding, That if her heart and disposition were equal to her sense, she would do very well. Thus, Lady Ashford finding she had been in part deceived; and having, as was before observed, no very high opinion of Lady Walton, resolved to judge for herself, by going immediately to the place where her granddaughter resided. If she found her amiable, it was her resolution to bring her back with her, and to treat and provide for her as one of her children: if otherwise, to see that she was accommodated with all the comforts her disposition and degree of understanding would admit of; and, by settling a proportionate annuity upon her, to secure them to her for the remainder of her life.

Such being the intentions and disposition of Lady Ashford, it is easy to conceive the pleasure her granddaughter's uncommon beauty and elegance of manner afforded her. She was never tired of gazing upon her; and when at her particular request she gave her a full account of all that had occasioned her quitting Broomfield, and shewed her the note she received from Lord Walton, upon the morning of her departure, her indignation flashed in a pair of eyes which had once been remarkably fine, and still retained much of their native lustre; and she walked two or three times across the room, in an agitation of spirits very unusual to a temper so gentle. At length, composing herself a little, she again sat down by the side of Caroline; and looking upon her with inexpressible tenderness, "Is it possible," said she, "that any human creature could wish to injure thee? But there are some who disgrace the species to whom they belong. It shall be my care to put thee beyond the reach of their malice." Then, after a moment's pause, "You must return with me tonight, my love," continued she: "never mind your things, bring such as are of most value; and if the people of the house have been civil to you, leave the rest as a reward for them."

Caroline then told her in whose house she was, and the unbounded respect and kindness she had received from the worthy inhabitants of it. She then gave her a short sketch of the story of Mrs. Forester, as well as her manner of meeting with her; and

proposed to Lady Ashford that she and her daughter should take possession of the apartments her goodness was about to take her out of; adding, 'I can afford to maintain them out of the little fortune I am possessed of, a part of which will now be unnecessary to me.' "There spoke thy dear father! voice, sentiment, and soul!" exclaimed Lady Ashford. "Do as you think proper, my love; I will not rob you of so much pleasure as I perceive this arrangement gives you. Dispose of your present little income as you think proper; it will not be necessary to you in future."

Just as they were settling these affairs, Mrs. Williams and Sally brought in dinner, which they had prepared on purpose for the strangers, though Caroline had been too much taken up in conversation to request them to do so. Lady Ashford thanked them for their kindness to her child, who, she said, would now have it in her power to reward them for it. Tears of pleasure trickled down the face of the affectionate nurse, which were almost converted into sorrow, when she learnt that her dear lady (as she usually called her) was to go away that very night. Caroline asked the kind-hearted woman if she should have any objection to boarding Mrs. Forester and her daughter for ten pounds a quarter? To which she replied, that she should be very glad to do it. And upon being informed that they would be with her the next morning, promised to have every thing in readiness for their reception. She then wrote to Doctor Seward to inform him of the good fortune that had befallen her; to thank him for all his and his sister's goodness to her, and to request that he would pay the interest of her thousand pounds to Mrs. Forester, who, she told him, was her particular friend. Lastly, she wrote a letter to that lady, in which she repeated the first-mentioned piece of information; then told her of the regulation she had made for her, requesting that she and her dear little Mary would the next morning take possession of the quarters she was about to quit. As for the trifles of furniture which she had from time to time supplied her with, she requested that they might be left as a present to the honest people, with whose behaviour, during her residence in their little habitation, she had so much reason to be pleased; and, wishing her every comfort that health and peace could bestow, concluded in terms the most friendly and affectionate. She then gave Williams directions about the packing of her books, harpsichord, and the two pictures upon which she set so high a value, and which her grandmother was as desirous of possessing as herself. Her book-case, and what other things she had there, were, by the old lady's direction, left behind; who likewise gave Caroline a ten-pound note to present to her nurse before she left the house: a command which was most readily and cheerfully obeyed. The rest of her cash was distributed among the people of the family; and she followed her grandmother into her coach, amidst the tears and blessings of all who were present at her departure.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Family Party.

AFTER sleeping one night upon the road, our travellers arrived at Crayfort, the name of the Dowager Lady Ashford's jointure-house. It was a small elegant retreat, fitted up with great neatness, and well suited for the residence of a lady of her age and disposition. Sir William and herself had lived at it for many years, having given up their principal house, which stood at about five miles distance, to their son, upon his marriage. Her house was not proportioned to her income, which was large; her fortune having been a very good one. Besides a jointure of three thousand pounds a year, Sir William had left her twelve thousand pounds, to be disposed of at her pleasure, together with the furniture, &c. of the house she lived in; expressing, at his decease, a respect for her virtues, which, during his life, he had too much neglected.

Her daughter had an apartment in her house, which she called her home; but the principal part of her time was spent at Ashford Park, where she saw more company: a loss at which her mother did not repine, their tempers, sentiments, and opinions being too different to admit of pleasing society.

Mrs. Ausburn had lived with her as a companion, ever since her removal to Crayfort. Her husband, a clergyman, having died young, and left her unprovided for, she gladly accepted Lady Ashford's invitation to reside in her house; and being remarkable for the inoffensiveness of her temper, at the same time that she possessed a very tolerable understanding and considerable knowledge, reading being her principal enjoyment, she had kept friends with every part of the family, without being under the necessity of cringing to any of them; and was much esteemed and beloved by Lady Ashford, for whom she had the highest reverence.

An elegant apartment was immediately assigned to our heroine, and a genteel young girl hired to attend upon her. Nothing was omitted that could render her situation agreeable; and her sweetness of temper and manners, together with the constant attention and respect, united to ease, cheerfulness, and affection, which she preserved towards her grandmother, endeared her so much to the heart of that indulgent parent, that she could scarce endure her to be a moment out of her sight: and often, during the short and unavoidable absences, would declare to Mrs. Ausburn, that the company of that dear child had renewed her youth, and that she never was happy before. These tender expressions, which were constantly repeated to Caroline, afforded her the most heartfelt pleasure, and redoubled those endeavours to oblige and please, which never failed of their full effect.

A fortnight had passed in this comfortable manner, before they either saw or heard any thing of the family at Ashford Park; an absence which being unusually long, the old lady attributed to their displeasure at the late addition she had made to her family, by bringing Caroline home. One evening, however, as our heroine was sitting at her harpsichord, a servant arrived with a card, implying that they intended themselves the pleasure of spending the next day with their mother. The moment Mrs. Ausburn had read the card, which she did aloud, the colour forsook the cheeks of Caroline; her fingers refused to strike the keys, and she was near fainting. Her grandmother observing her

agitation, took her hands, and looking with pity and affection, "Why is my dear child so much fluttered?" said she; "it is your relations who should be afraid of seeing you: why should you fear them?" "I do not fear them," answered Caroline; "but my uncle——" "I am not surprized," interrupted the old lady, "that you should have contracted an aversion to him; but you must endeavour to conquer it. I need not preach the doctrine of forgiveness to a disposition so gentle and good as yours." "I do forgive him, Madam," answered she; "and had he only injured me, could respect him; but his enmity to my father——" "I feel for you, my love," cried her kind parent; "but from my Caroline I expect something superior to what common minds are capable of. I am sure you will oblige me by concealing, and, if possible, overcoming your dislike to my son." "His being such," replied our heroine, "shall entitle him to my respect; my affections are not in my power." "It is enough," answered the old lady; "you are too just to carry your resentment beyond the person of the offender; his wife is a respectable woman; and though Eleanor is not a Caroline, she is generally reckoned a fine girl, and will, I hope, deserve your affection."

During the whole morning preceding their expected visit, Caroline felt the most uneasy sensations; every noise set her heart in a palpitation; and when the coach stopped at the door, she could scarce breathe. The first person who entered was Lady Ashford. Her dress (for that is the first thing which strikes an observer) was fashionable, but put on rather with neatness than taste: her person was little and plain; her aspect reserved, and a certain stiffness thrown over her whole appearance, by no means pleasing; but upon conversing with her, this in some measure wore off, and you could often perceive an apparent goodness of disposition which excited esteem. Her favourite subject of conversation was books, though she knew very little about them, and often made gross and laughable mistakes in her quotations, and sometimes in her pronunciations; for having been educated in the most confined manner by a father, whose sole object in life was saving money, at her marriage with Sir Marmaduke Ashton she was very ignorant and awkward; nothing but her vast fortune could have induced that family to receive her among them; but a hundred thousand pounds was not every day to be obtained; and as their younger son had been absurd enough to refuse it, no way was left to secure it, but by uniting its possessor to the eldest. During the first months of her marriage, she was treated by her sister-in-law, Miss Ashford, with airs of superiority, bordering upon contempt. She took upon her to direct her in every thing, and to let her understand that no alterations must be made in the smallest article of the accustomed way of living at Ashford Park. For some time she patiently submitted to her management; till finding her situation become little better than mere servitude, with an exemption from manual labour, she began to rebel against this usurped authority, and to hint to Miss Ashford, that she chose to command in her own house. This occasioned an absolute quarrel between them; which was carried to such a height, that the last-named lady was several years without entering Ashford Park.

Mrs. Ashford (as she then was) by degrees wore off the rusticity of her manner; but in its place a stiffness succeeded, almost equally distant from gentility, though less offensive to it. Public places and large companies being awkward and unpleasant to her, she staid much at home; and becoming very intimate with the Rector of the parish and his wife, a couple of good kind of bookish people, she began to regret her own want of education, and by constantly puzzling herself over books of their recommending, great

part of which she could not comprehend, became a complete pedant, and thought nothing valuable but learning, or worth attending to but books, or the improvement of the mind, as she used to call it. It was now several years since a reconciliation had taken place between her and her sister, who had in a great measure relinquished the care of the family, and taken upon her that of her niece, of whom she was very fond, or rather vain, and whose disposition she had in many respects contributed to spoil.

Sir Marmaduke we have already described in a former part of this work.—Time had made some alteration in him; he was less violent and less whimsical, though his temper was still strongly tinctured with both these defects: but what he had lost in warmth and fickleness, was amply compensated by another quality, which, when once it gets possession of the mind, every day gathers strength, increases with age, and seldom loses any part of its influence but with the loss of life: I mean avarice; by which he would now have been wholly swayed, had not vanity and excessive pride formed a balance in his bosom against that prevailing passion. His health had for some years past been very moderate, having been troubled with a nervous disorder, which added peevishness to the rest of his amiable characteristics. A gloomy day threw him into the horrors! and a ride in the morning, and the cardtable in the afternoon, were necessary to his very existence. He never had liked the person of his wife; and her understanding and manners he despised: but a regard to the opinion of the world, and large pin-money, which was settled upon her at marriage, one half of which she never demanded, kept him upon terms of civility; though he often attempted to display what he thought wit at her expence, and would sometimes, with an affected good humour, expose her ignorance, when it would otherwise have passed unobserved.

His sister still continued nearly what she was twenty years before, except that the wrinkles of fifty now adorned a face which even in youth could boast no charms. She was envious to excess of the beauty of every handsome woman she saw; not on her own account, for time had now put all chance of conquests even beyond her hope, but on that of her niece, who was her little idol; and of whose fancied perfections she was as vain as ever she had been of her own. Every man who approached this little phœnix was, in her idea, a lover; and she formed to herself the most extravagant expectations of her future settlement in life. Since the death of her father, having lost all right to the appellation of Miss Ashford, she had taken that of Mrs.; and would have been as much offended at any one who now addressed her by the former title, as she would three months before have been, had they made use of the latter.

As for Miss Ashford, she was what her grandmother had styled her, a fine girl. She was of the middle size; rather inclined to plumpness, with a tolerable complexion, dark eyes and hair, agreeable features, and an air of fashionable self-consequence. She had been educated in Queen's Square; and knew something of all the branches of modern female improvement. Dancing was that in which she most excelled, and the only one of which she was at all fond; for she disliked her harpsichord, and had been so much teased by her mother about reading, that she hated the very sight of a book. Although she had been three years at home since her education was said to have been completed, she still, in many respects, retained the manners of a school-girl, seldom joining in a general conversation, but drawing some one into separate chat. She was fond of relating stories and anecdotes; but they were generally delivered in such a confused and roundabout manner, that nothing but politeness could induce any one to attend to their conclusion.

From her appearance, a stranger would have judged her to be good-natured; but it was an appearance only; for her natural disposition was vain and selfish.

Such was the party to which our heroine was introduced by her grandmother. Lady Ashford received her with civility; Sir Marmaduke with a hurrying kind of negligence; her cousin with extreme coldness; and her aunt, with a broad stare of curiosity and insolence.

As soon as they were seated, Sir Marmaduke began to complain of the heat; said the dust of the roads was intolerable. This introduced an account of one of the horses which had fallen lame. A subject that continued till dinner was announced, when the whole family left the room in a kind of party, leaving Caroline to follow with Mrs. Ausburn; which the old lady observing, addressed her in the kindest manner; and during the whole repast, treated her with particular attention.

It was the Dowager's custom, every day after dinner, to retire to her apartment for an hour, where she usually slept: a custom, of all others, the most refreshing and beneficial to old age; and Caroline had, ever since her coming to Crayfort, regularly attended her up stairs, placed a handkerchief over her head, and let down a curtain to shade the sofa upon which she reposed. She now arose and followed her, as usual: and having performed these little filial offices, returned to the drawing room; where the ladies, attended by Sir Marmaduke (who, not knowing how to amuse himself alone, seldom favoured them with his absence) had removed at the same time that their mother left them. Upon entering, she observed a smile of contempt exchanged between Mrs. Ashford and her niece. Sir Marmaduke was walking backward and forward across the room; and neither honoured nor offended her by a single look: but Lady Ashford, laying down a book which she had in her hand, asked her if she had ever read Homer? As this was the first word any of the family had condescended to address to her, she was for a moment unable to speak; but recovering, she answered, that she had read Mr. Pope's translation of that admired poet, with particular pleasure. "And pray," said her Ladyship, "do you like his Iliad or Æneid best?" "I greatly admire the writings both of Homer and Virgil," answered Caroline. "And what do you think of Mr. Pope's translation of the Rape of the Lock?" asked her Ladyship; "is it not the finest thing that ever was written?" "The Rape of the Lock," answered our heroine, scarce able to suppress a smile, "is certainly a very beautiful poem."—"You seem to have a great deal of taste," exclaimed Lady Ashford. "I suppose you have spent much of your time in reading?" "Reading is an amusement of which I am fond," said Caroline. "By the Heavens!" exclaimed Sir Marmaduke, "I would rather hear of plague and famine, than be constantly stunned with the names of a parcel of antiquated writers, with whom every school-boy is familiar. What, in the name of folly, can you find so entertaining in perpetually repeating, 'This is fine, and that's beautiful?' Can you find nothing new to say, which may at least make your subject supportable?" "If every master of a family," answered Lady Ashford, "was as great an encourager of ignorance as yourself, we should soon plunge again into Gothic barbarism!" "Better be ignorant than pedantic," returned her husband; "a pedantic woman is the greatest pest of society. By the Heavens, I would advise a young man who is about marriage, to seek out for a girl who has never been taught her letters." "It is a pity but you had done so, Sir Marmaduke," replied her Ladyship, with some warmth. "Nay," answered he, "if ignorance could have preserved me from such a misfortune, I stood as fair a chance to escape it as most men. But 'faith I believe the surest way is to tease a girl well

with masters! I warrant Eleanor now will never be a pedant." "If it is in your power to make her so," cried Lady Ashford, "she will be illiterate enough; but I see no harm a little knowledge does to women: why should not they be made companions for their husbands, and be able to fill up their time, without cards, or sauntering about; wearying themselves, and every body else, with the sight of them?"

Much of the same kind of entertaining conversation passed between the husband and wife; which, as soon as it ended, seemed to be forgotten by both. Indeed, such kind of dialogues were so frequent between them, that they were little remarked by their particular friends, who knew it was their way, and never interfered. The entrance of the old lady now put an end to the dispute, and a more general conversation took place; in which her grandmother took care that our heroine should bear a part; which she did in such a manner, as induced even her uncle to pay her some attention. But Mrs. Ashford continued throughout the whole day to preserve the most contemptuous silence towards her; often endeavouring to look and speak in such a manner as should confuse and fright her.

The coach drove early to the door; for the old lady not having admitted cards into her sight since her widowhood, the evening appeared tediously long to Sir Marmaduke and his sister; and they took their leave, after Lady Ashford had requested her mother to spend a day with her the next week, and to bring Caroline with her; from whom she parted in a very gracious manner.

After they were gone, the old lady expressed some resentment at the behaviour of her daughter. "I perceive with pleasure," said she, "how much you gained upon the good opinion of Sir Marmaduke and Lady Ashford: I rejoice to see it; for should I be taken from you, which is an event you must every day look for, who can you so properly reside with, while you remain single, as them? I wish," continued she, "my grandson was returned from his travels; I have great hope in him; he is the reverse of his, and the image of your father in every thing. How happy should I be to see you his wife! At all events, you will be independent of them; and if you cannot live happy in their house, you must go back to your worthy friend Mrs. Seward." Caroline replied, that she hoped many happy years would pass before she should be deprived of the protection of the dear maternal friend she now possessed. "You must not think of that, my love," answered the excellent lady: "every night that I close my eyes, I conceive it a matter of great uncertainty whether they will ever again be opened; and were I not anxious for thy safety and comfort, I should likewise esteem it indifferent." So saying, she embraced and left her; it being her custom to spend some time alone in her dressing-room every night, before her woman came to undress her.

CHAPTER XX.

A Removal.

WHEN Caroline came into the breakfast-parlour the next morning, she was surprized to see no table laid, nor any preparation making. She had not stood more than a moment, before Mrs. Ausburn appeared: her eyes were red, and her countenance much discomposed. Caroline eagerly inquired the cause of her disturbance; and, after some hesitation, and a fresh burst of tears, she learnt that her revered grandmother was found dead in her bed by her woman, who went as usual to assist in dressing her. The shock our heroine felt was inexpressible; she turned pale; her limbs trembled, and she sunk upon the floor in a state of perfect insensibility. While she was in this condition, Sir Marmaduke and his lady entered, followed by Mrs. and Miss Ashford; they had been sent for the moment their mother's decease was known; and setting out immediately, arrived before Caroline had recovered from her first surprize.

Mrs. Ausburn gave them the few particulars of their first discovering the melancholy circumstance; and Sir Marmaduke, his lady, and Mrs. Ashford, went up stairs; but Eleanor not chusing so dismal a sight, remained still below. Caroline by degrees recovered her senses; but such was the oppression she felt, that she was unable to speak or look up. Two of the servants assisted in lifting her up, and seating her upon a sofa; which they had just effected, when Mrs. Ashford, whom a short view of her excellent mother had satisfied, returned into the room, with a handkerchief held to her eyes. The moment she entered, casting them towards Caroline, she exclaimed, in a voice of anger, "What, is not this farce ended yet?—But she has reason to be grieved; this sudden death cuts off all hope of her promised independence."

So entirely had our heroine been absorbed in the loss of a beloved parent, that the thoughts of fortune had not mixed themselves at all in her distress; but this cruel triumph of her aunt's, painfully reminded her of the double misfortune she had sustained: the latter, however, made but a slight impression upon her mind, which, at that moment, resentment hardened against despondency. She rose, and with some dignity walked out of the room; and going to her chamber, indulged a plentiful shower of tears, which greatly relieved her spirits. 'Yes,' cried she, 'I will return to my humble habitation; since there, and there only, I shall meet friendship and kindness.' Her greatest disturbance arose from the thoughts of removing Mrs. Forester from the comforts she at that time enjoyed, and obliging her again to submit to the narrow limits of her cottage. She hoped, however, that her presence would make her some amends for the change.

While she was ruminating upon these things, some body knocked at the door; and, upon opening it, she, to her no small surprize, saw Lady Ashford, who, with much kindness, asked her to accompany them to Ashford Park; telling her, both her uncle and herself thought it was quite improper for her to remain behind, as she had now no interest there. Caroline severely felt the latter part of her words: she hesitated a moment; but recollecting the wish her grandmother had so warmly expressed of their living upon terms of amity, though she scarce believed it possible to be accomplished, resolved that the fault should not rest upon her stiffness and prejudice, however well founded. She therefore thanked her Ladyship politely for her invitation, and promised to attend her in

half an hour. No sooner was she left alone, than giving her maid orders to put up a few necessaries to be taken with her, and telling her that she should not want her attendance during her stay at her uncle's, she went softly to the apartment of her grandmother, where she found only Mrs. Ausburn, who was sitting at some distance from the venerable remains of her benefactress, reading. Caroline approached the body: her heart overflowed with tenderness: she knelt by its side; and gazing for a few moments upon it with reverential awe and love, she arose. Then stooping down, she imprinted a kiss upon the cold pale lips, and retired, without speaking a word.

A flood of tears, upon her return to her chamber, somewhat relieved her full heart; and after reflecting a short time upon the affecting sight she had just quitted, happening to turn her eyes upon her watch, she perceived the half hour, in which she had promised to attend Lady Ashford, was expired. She therefore directed her maid to carry the parcel she had put ready down to the coach; and desired the rest of her clothes, &c. might be packed up in readiness, as she did not know how soon she might have occasion to send for them. At the same time, she desired Kitty to look out for a place that would suit her; telling her she could no longer afford to keep a servant.

These affairs being regulated, she walked down to the breakfast-parlour. Just as she reached the door, Mrs. Ashford was speaking in an elevated tone. "I tell you sister," said she, "you will repent what you are about to do; it is easier to bring incumbrances into your house than to get rid of them." 'I think,' replied Lady Ashford, 'it is our duty to take care of the poor thing; she has never done any thing to offend us; and it would be cruel to leave her here.' "I think Lady Ashford is right," said Sir Marmaduke; "the world would blame us; and she need stay with us as little time as you will."

Caroline, who despised the meanness of listening, now opened the door. "Are you ready, Miss Caroline?" said Lady Ashford. 'Yes, Madam,' replied our heroine; 'for a few days I will have the honour of waiting upon you; after which, I am resolved to return to the valuable friends from whom my dear grandmother lately took me.' "I am glad to hear you have any friends to go to," answered Mrs. Ashford; "as you have now nothing else to depend upon, it is a fortunate circumstance." 'Independence, Madam,' answered Caroline, 'doth not consist in the largeness of fortune, but in the turn of mind of its possessor. He who can resolve to be independent, is so.'

There was a firmness, a superiority of understanding, and dignity of manner, conspicuous in the voice and looks of the fair speaker while she pronounced these words; which silenced, and even awed her cruel insulter.

The whole party got into the coach, without uttering another word. Mrs. Ashford, who went in first, took her place in front; her Ladyship then requested that Caroline would follow, which she accordingly did, placing herself by her aunt's side. Lady Ashford sat opposite to her sister, and Miss Ashford to Caroline; but when Sir Marmaduke appeared, who had stopt to give some directions to a servant, the aunt and niece looked at each other; the latter with a half-laugh, the former with a discontented shrug, and lifting up of the eyes; at the same time crying in a peevish accent, "Come, come, Eleanor, you must sit here," making room for her between herself and Caroline; "we shall be charmingly packed!" Miss Ashford did as she was requested, often apologizing to her aunt for the necessity she was under of crowding her; without taking the least notice of Caroline, who suffered the same inconvenience.

After a tedious ride they arrived at Ashford Park; for Sir Marmaduke never would suffer his carriage to move at more than the rate of three miles an hour. As they drove up a long avenue leading to the house, Miss Ashford exclaimed, "Bless me! there's a travelling chaise at the door!" And her father, putting out his head, replied, 'I warrant, it's William!' Joy sparkled in the eyes of Lady Ashford; and even his aunt and sister appeared pleased at the expectation of seeing him. They were scarce alighted from the coach, when a fine-looking young man flew to meet them; and Caroline immediately knew, by the pleasure they all expressed, and the names of son, brother, and cousin, which she heard pronounced, that their conjectures were not ill-founded.

Mr. Ashford had no sooner paid his respects to those present, with whose right to demand them he was acquainted, than turning to Caroline, he asked if he might not hope to be honoured with an introduction to that lady? "That is your cousin Caroline Ashford," answered his mother. 'Then,' returned the young gentleman, 'I will take the liberty of introducing myself. The name of cousin, my dear Madam,' continued he, approaching her, 'is my privilege.' So saying, he saluted her in the most respectful manner; adding, with a smile, 'If all my cousins resemble you, I should wish to be introduced to them to the hundredth generation.' Caroline could not speak: the perfect resemblance she saw of her father deprived her of all power but that of gazing. The difference of years excepted, she beheld his very image before her: so he looked, so he walked, and so he spoke!

The good-humour into which the arrival of Mr. Ashford had put the whole family, seemed to have obliterated every remembrance of the event which had so lately taken place, and might have been expected to have occasioned at least an appearance of seriousness among them; but, except in our heroine and Lady Ashford, who several times declared, during their ride, that she had lost one of her dearest and best friends, no alteration seemed to have been made in the tempers or spirits of the family, after the moment they left the house of their deceased mother. But when the circumstance of her death was told to her grandson, the strongest expressions of surprize and grief took possession of his countenance; and he hastily quitted the room, with every appearance of real sorrow.

"William was always very fond of my mother," said Sir Marmaduke. 'He would have been very ungrateful if he had not,' answered Lady Ashton; 'for never parent loved a child more than she did him.' "She was always fond of favourites," answered Sir Marmaduke; "but I wonder she did not fix upon a younger son, according to custom." 'I think,' said Miss Ashford, addressing her aunt, 'I must have some new mourning, because you know my best suit is really got shabby. What do you think of a crape chemise?' "Nothing can be more elegant," replied Mrs. Ashford. "Do you mean it to be black or white?" 'A chemise!' exclaimed Lady Ashford; 'you know I never could bear you in your gauze one: you looked a mere bundle!' "A bundle!" replied the aunt; "who ever said she was a bundle? I think no girl ever looks well that's taller than Eleanor; they are always awkward." 'I wish she would attend a little to the improvement of her mind,' returned her Ladyship, 'and less to dress and dissipation. There's the Roman History unopened, though I had taken the trouble to mark the most beautiful passages.' "I wish," interrupted Sir Marmaduke, "she would attend a little to her expences! Her bills last quarter ran shamefully high; and I must and will have them lowered." 'I am sure,' answered Mrs. Ashford, 'she had nothing but what was absolutely necessary; and surely, brother, you can now afford her a little more. Consider, you have three thousand pounds

added to your income; besides, probably, a considerable sum of ready money; for, as my mother has made no will, you know her personality will be divided between us.' "I rather believe," answered Sir Marmaduke, "that you will find the whole is mine. You have been lucky enough; for had not your father reserved to himself the power of disposing of the sum settled upon younger children, according to his own pleasure, your fortune would have been but half so large as it is." Caroline felt her colour heighten at these words: she no longer wondered at the enmity her father had experienced from his family, since their interest and his were so directly in opposition. But her aversion to them all, Lady Ashford excepted, in spite of herself, increasing every hour, she resolved to spend but one more day among them, but to hasten back to her old retreat; where, in comparison to her present situation, she was perfectly happy.

Accordingly, at breakfast the next morning, she informed Lady Ashford, that she intended to leave her about that hour the next day. Her Ladyship made some opposition to her design; and Mr. Ashford protested against it with the utmost earnestness: but she was steady to her purpose; and anticipated the comfort of quitting a society, who seemed to think wrangling the principal use of conversation, and who were united together by no tie but that of consanguinity. The generosity of her grandmother had made her very rich; and she was delighted with the thought of visiting her old friends and dependents with a full purse.

The moment breakfast was over, Mrs. Ashford and her niece proposed to each other a stroll in the shrubbery; and after a little consultation about which walk they should chuse, arose and left the room; only asking Mr. Ashford, as they passed by him, if he would come along? To which he only answered by a shrug of his shoulders, and an expressive negative in his countenance.

A servant then appeared, to inform Sir Marmaduke that Mr. Alton, an eminent attorney in the neighbourhood, had just called at the door, and left a note for him; which, upon opening, he read with some surprize, that he had in his hands a will, made by the late Lady Ashford, some little time before her death, which he was ready to produce, whenever Sir Marmaduke should chuse to have it read. This piece of information seemed not at all agreeable to the selfish Baronet; who now began to fear that there were sharers in the treasure he hoped wholly to possess. Mrs. Ausburn was the person he most feared; for he had no doubt of its having been made prior to her personal knowledge of Caroline. However, as it was proper that all her relations who were immediately upon the spot should be present when it was read, he desired Caroline to delay her journey till the funeral was over; and in a note to Mr. Alton, fixed the day after it for his attendance on that business.

Mr. Ashford expressed the highest satisfaction in the prospect of enjoying her company three days longer; and asked if she would allow him the pleasure of attending her into some part of the grounds, the present cloudiness of the morning being particularly suited to walking. Caroline politely inquired if Lady Ashford would not favour them with her company? To which she answered, that she had entirely disused herself to walking; and therefore requested they would leave her, without ceremony, as she could always find in a book a delightful and improving companion.

Their walk was long and pleasant: they conversed upon a variety of subjects in the most agreeable manner, among which some family ones were introduced and discussed. Mr. Ashford lamented the unfortunate division which had so long subsisted between the

several parts of it; adding, that, as was the case in all domestic disputes, resentments had been carried to the most unreasonable lengths, and the innocent and worthy became the sufferers.

Caroline was much pleased with the candour and understanding of her cousin, and he was charmed with her beauty, sweetness, and sensibility. Thus mutually satisfied with each other, they returned to the house; and he took care to renew the pleasure he had enjoyed, by proposing a stroll every morning and afternoon; to which, being fond of exercise, she never objected. At other times, he was never from her side; and appeared to enjoy so much delight in her society, that it would have raised the suspicion and jealousy of her uncle and his sister, had she been intended to remain long in the family: but as her stay was to be only three days, they let things take their own way; thinking no serious consequences could be feared from so transitory an intimacy.

Thus passed the days, till the burial of the worthy old lady was over, and that arrived upon which her will was appointed to be opened; for which purpose the whole family were assembled in Sir Marmaduke's library; every one, our heroine excepted, in high expectation of a handsome legacy. Sir Marmaduke thought that, as his mother had made a will, he must expect some deductions from what he conceived to be his natural right; but he had no doubt of finding the principal part bequeathed to him, as her heir and only son. She had always shewn great attention and kindness to Lady Ashford, and therefore she did not think it impossible but she might be handsomely remembered. Mrs. Ashford, as a daughter, who had devoted her whole life to her family, out of which she had never been prevailed upon to transplant herself (though it was well known she had been addressed by a German Count, and two Irish gentlemen of large fortune) thought she had a right to every thing of which her mother died possessed; and could not help wondering at the mercenary unreasonable temper of her brother, in thinking himself entitled to any share. Miss Ashford hoped her grandmother would not quite forget her; especially as she knew that her father's close temper occasioned her often to want a number of little things which a young woman of fashion ought to have. Two or three thousand pounds would quite set her up; and she should be able next winter to equal the finest of them! As for Mr. Ashford, he felt very indifferent about the matter: and Caroline, having no hope of advantage, would gladly have been excused from giving her attendance at so uninteresting a ceremony.

Such was the disposition of mind in which each individual attended, while Mr. Alton perused the parchment which was to satisfy or disappoint their hopes. He began with a legacy of one thousand pounds to Mrs. Ausburn! at which Sir Marmaduke knit his brows, and Mrs. Ashford drew up her head. Then followed small bequests to all her servants, and several of her acquaintance, altogether amounting to another; at which the contraction became a perfect frown, and the bridle a toss. Lastly, all and every thing besides, of which she died possessed, she bequeathed to her beloved granddaughter, Caroline Ashford, as a small proof of her maternal affection, and amends for the many injuries her father and herself had received from several of their relations.

Never was astonishment and disappointment greater than that of the mercenary expectants! They gazed upon each other; upon Mr. Alton and Caroline, with looks almost of incredulity; nor was the object of their envy less amazed and confounded.

How long the silence might have lasted is difficult to affirm, had it not been broken by Mr. Ashford; who, going up to his cousin, with pleasure in his eyes; wished

her joy of her fortune; assuring her, that he was much better pleased with the disposition his grandmother had made of it, than he should have been had she bequeathed it to himself.

It was some time before any other part of the family could prevail upon themselves to follow his example. At length, Lady Ashford paid her a kind of stiff congratulation; and Sir Marmaduke, reflecting that the thing was past recal, condescended to tell her that, as his mother had thought proper to put her and her fortune under his care, he should consider it as his duty to direct her in the best manner: and that he thought she had for the present, till her affairs were properly regulated, better remain in his house. Caroline thanked him for the promise of his protection, and said she would in all things be ready to follow his advice.

Mrs. Ashford and her niece made no attempt to conceal their chagrin and resentment: and while Sir Marmaduke was speaking, left the room, with every mark of both. Caroline retired to her apartment; where a shower of tears, shed in grateful love to the memory of her to whom she owed her present comfortable prospects, was succeeded by fervent thanks to the Giver of all good; who can, in a moment, convert sorrow to gladness; the tear of affliction into the smile of triumph.

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CHAPTER XXI.

A Sudden Journey.

Notwithstanding the dislike with which our heroine was regarded by some part of her family, she found her treatment much mended by the change in her circumstances. She was no longer a poor dependent; one whose situation reproached the opulence of her relations. By the time every thing was properly disposed of at Crayfort, and the legacies paid, she found herself in possession of upwards of eleven thousand pounds, which, together with that in the hands of Doctor Seward, made a fortune, which, though far short of the expectations she had once entertained, was fully equal to her wishes. She settled the terms of her continuance in her uncle's house, in such a manner, as to keep her free even from the shadow of obligation. It was agreed that she should pay two hundred pounds a year for the accommodation of herself, a woman servant, and a footman: in consequence of which, a genteel apartment was assigned her; her books, harpsichord, &c. sent for, together with the two pictures she so highly valued; all the rest of the family ones she presented to her uncle, only reserving one of her grandmother, which, at the request of Mr. Ashford, had been taken by an eminent painter, about three years before her death. As for that of her grandfather, Sir Marmaduke, Mrs. Ashton, and a long list of great aunts and uncles, she most willingly parted with them all, and they were esteemed by the Baronet a valuable present.

The three she retained, were placed in her dressing-room; where, as at Elmwood, she collected every thing that could afford amusement to her retired hours, and in which she regularly spent a part of every morning. This custom was the greatest comfort and relief to her; for though Mrs. and Miss Ashford began to treat her with rather more civility than when she first came among them, their conversation, even when they wished to be agreeable, was by no means suited to her taste; and when otherwise, which was oftener the case, their insolence was intolerable. She therefore made a practice, the moment a family wrangle was commenced, to leave the room, and seek more peaceable society among her books; where, if she sometimes met with disputes, they were carried on with some method and order, and her ear escaped the horrible dissonance of Mrs. Ashford's voice, which, when raised a little above its natural key, was, beyond measure, harsh and unpleasant.

With her Ladyship she every day became a greater favourite. She really possessed what Lady Ashford wished for, and esteemed the first of all attainments, an extensive knowledge of books: of this she was so far from making any parade, that a person who had no taste for reading, might be very frequently in her company before they suspected her of having any; but she never declined to speak of them when she conversed with any one with whom they were a favourite subject. She frequently took pains to explain passages to her, with which she was more than usually puzzled; and often, by a timely hint or assistance to her memory, would prevent her becoming an object of ridicule; and though Lady Ashford had not sensibility sufficient to guard her against exposing the ignorance of which she ought to have been conscious, she possessed enough to render her grateful for these little kindnesses; and the obliging attentions of Caroline, which were the common and natural effects of her sweetness of temper and disposition, formed too

strong a contrast to the insolence of her sister, and the carelessness of her daughter, not to be remarked by her, and every one who visited in the family.

Mr. Ashford was constantly of his mother's parties, because he was there more likely to find our heroine than with his aunt and sister, who generally made a separate one for themselves. They had a few favourites in the neighbourhood, and were constantly rude to every other person who came to the house. Sometimes, if they were people of little consequence, such as the Rector and his wife, or the family of a country gentleman of small fortune, they would never appear at all; or if they did, scarce condescended to speak, but in whispers to each other; whereas Caroline and Mr. Ashford were the favourites of the whole country, and by their talents for conversation, rendered Ashford Park far more cheerful and pleasant than it had ever before been.

Every body began to foretell an attachment between the cousins, and to pronounce that they were made for each other. Mr. Ashford was often told the opinion of the neighbourhood, and secretly wished that the event might do credit to their discernment. Every day afforded him fresh occasion of esteem and admiration. Her heart was the temple of virtue; the graces had clothed it in so lovely an exterior, that every one who beheld it was, at least for the moment, irresistibly impelled to become her votary; and he who had always professed himself of that number, then adored his divinity with double ardor. With such a wife, such a friend, and companion, how sweetly would life glide away! how little should he value the greatness, pomp, and pleasures of which the world was so enamoured! His father, perhaps, might oppose his happiness. What then? Why, he would follow the example of his uncle Henry, and be happy in spite of paternal tyranny. But was he sure that he should be equally fortunate? Would the charming object of his passion afford him the dear much wished-for opportunity of sacrificing prudence, cold, unfeeling prudence, to love? Of this he was doubtful, and this was his only doubt. He determined not to remain long under its tormenting pressure, but to embrace the first opportunity of declaring the situation of his heart to the fair tyrant who enslaved it.

His feelings, indeed, were a secret to none but her. Sir Marmaduke had again and again warned him against the folly of an imprudent marriage; and his aunt had given him the whole detail of Caroline's ill behaviour at Broomfield; adding, that Captain West was not the only one she used so ill; that Mr. Craven, a man of the first fortune and consequence, had met with the same treatment, and that she was the veriest coquet and jilt that ever deceived by false appearances. But all these warnings were vain; he treated them as the offspring of malice, who is the never-failing attendant of envy, and capable of giving a dark hue to innocence itself.

An opportunity soon offered for the desired purpose of opening his heart to her who so entirely possessed it. During a walk upon a delightful morning, he introduced the subject of love. Caroline said she hoped she never should have any lovers; because she did not think her heart was at all formed for the entertainment of that passion. "If you would not inspire love," replied Mr. Ashford, "you must be less amiable, or converse only with the stupid and insensible. But you will pardon me, if I cannot believe that a heart, susceptible of every generous worthy sensation, can be incapable of admitting the perfection of them all: if so, happy had it been for your unfortunate friend if he had never enjoyed the dangerous pleasure of beholding you! never had been flattered by your friendly smiles; which, while they warmed and delighted his heart, inspired it with a

passion the most tender and fervent. Yes, my dear cousin; the whole future happiness of the man before you, depends upon the degree of estimation with which you honour him.”

‘If,’ replied Caroline, ‘my highest esteem and warmest friendship can afford you the smallest satisfaction, be assured you entirely possess them; but to more, you have already heard me declare, my heart is a stranger; and if I have any knowledge of its disposition, will for ever remain so.’ Mr. Ashford used many arguments to persuade her to admit his addresses; to permit him to hope that time, and his persevering constancy and attention, might prevail upon her to alter a resolution so unnatural, so prejudicial to her own happiness, and so destructive of his; but she absolutely refused in future to listen to any thing he might wish to say upon the subject; and intreated him to forget that he had ever thought of her in any light, except that of a friend: a character in which she should always be proud to be considered by him.

Grief and disappointment were visible in the countenance of Mr. Ashford; and Caroline was extremely hurt to see a tear of mortified sensibility fall from his eye. She endeavoured to change the subject of conversation to something amusing and indifferent; but sighs were the only answer he was capable of making: so that seeing how deeply he was distressed, she forbore to increase his pain, by attempting to divert it; and they walked in silence to the house; where, the moment they entered, Mr. Ashford retired to his chamber; and our heroine finding herself wholly unfit for company, disposed of herself in the same manner.

Caroline was no sooner alone than she began to reflect upon the occurrence which had just happened; and could not help accusing Fortune, who seemed to delight in persecuting and disturbing her repose. No sooner was she fixed and reconciled to one situation, than she was obliged to relinquish it for a new one. She had no doubt but her uncle or Mrs. Ashford would soon discover her cousin’s partiality, and the consequence would be her immediate removal from Ashford Park. She was by no means attached to it, or its inhabitants; but there was something disreputable in being thus discarded, first by one family of her relations, and then by another: and though conscious rectitude was the first object of her attention, she by no means despised the good or bad opinion of the world, in which Providence had placed her; but, on the contrary, greatly desired to preserve the one and avoid the other. She loved her cousin as a brother: had she considered him less in that light, he might perhaps have had more room to hope for a higher distinction in her heart. Perhaps, too, his resemblance to her father, while it endeared him as a friend, in some degree prevented his good fortune as a lover. Upon the whole, she felt it impossible to receive him in that character, though she knew nothing in him to which she could reasonably object, except the dislike his father would express to such an union; and this she believed would have been sufficient, had her sentiments in his favour been more tender. After much reflection, she resolved to leave Ashford Park for some weeks, and pay a visit to her good friends, the Doctor and Mrs. Seward, who, she was certain, would receive her with joy: and during this absence, she hoped the good sense of her cousin would enable him wholly to conquer a passion prejudicial to his interest, and unsupported by hope.

This resolution, which she determined to execute the very next day, soothed her mind, with the hope that no disagreeable consequence would happen from this displeasing affair; and she ventured into the breakfast-room, though half-afraid to encounter the eyes of Mrs. Ashford. Mr. Ashford’s servant appeared soon after her entrance, with his

master's request, that they would not wait for him, as he should breakfast in his apartment. In a few minutes he returned, presenting a letter to Lady Ashford, which he said was brought from London, by a special messenger. She immediately broke the seal, and perused it; then giving it to Sir Marmaduke, "See here, my dear," said she; "you will find that my uncle Harvey is very ill, and desires to see me immediately." "Oh, go by all means," answered the Baronet: 'a few of his thousands will suit me exactly: just at this time, I want to make a purchase; and he could not die at a better.' "You see," said Lady Ashford, "I shall be expected immediately." "Well," answered he, 'you had better set out this afternoon; sleep upon the road, and get to London by dinner-time to-morrow.' "That will do very well," replied her Ladyship. "I suppose, Eleanor, you will have no objection to going along with me?" "Dear mama," answered Miss Ashford, 'how can you ask me such a thing? what could I possibly do in town at this season? It would be quite ridiculous! I should be ashamed to put my head out of the coach-window, for fear of being seen.' "Sure, sister," cried Mrs. Ashford, "you are not in earnest? Would you shut up Eleanor in the horrid dust and heat of the city? I think your uncle lives in Bishopsgate-street:—a very proper summer-residence for Miss Ashford, truly!" "I fancy," exclaimed Sir Marmaduke, 'she will have no objection to city-money. By the heavens, the folly of women is without bound or termination! What harm will the city air do her for three or four days?' "I should not wonder," replied Mrs. Ashford, "if it threw her into a fever. People who have been used to such close wretched places, may endure them well enough; but where there is the smallest delicacy——" "If fat be a sign of delicacy," interrupted her brother, 'Eleanor may claim it: I know no other pretensions she has to make.'

"Pray, don't press her to go against her inclinations," cried Lady Ashford; "she will do nothing but grumble, and be out of temper the whole journey, if she does. Besides, I think I can procure a more agreeable companion; one who will venture herself into the city air, though she has been no more accustomed to it than Miss Ashford. Will my dear Caroline," continued she, turning to her, "favour me with her company?" "I will attend you with pleasure," answered our heroine, bowing. "Then I shall have cause to thank Eleanor for her refusal," cried her Ladyship: "however, when she next wants an extra bill to be discharged, I may remember her present behaviour."

Breakfast was no sooner over than Lady Ashford and Caroline retired to their apartments, in order to give directions for their journey. At dinner-time Mr. Ashford joined them: he appeared very grave; and though desirous of concealing his chagrin, disappointment and vexation were deeply characterized in every look. He spoke little; till hearing of his mother's intended journey, and by whom she was to be accompanied, his countenance brightened up at once; and he told her he would certainly attend her. Sir Marmaduke and Mrs. Ashford appeared alarmed, and opposed the measure strongly. Their opposition, however, would have had very little effect, if a look from Caroline had not given him to understand that she disapproved his intention. It was with reluctance he submitted even to her; to her only he could in this affair think of submitting.

All things being in readiness, Sir Marmaduke conducted his lady, Mr. Ashford, and Caroline to the coach. Just as they got in, the former said, he thought in their way back, they had better take the opportunity of calling upon Mrs. Murray: adding, "If you can bring me an account that she is dead, and has left me half her estate, I shall not follow her with grief." When they were seated, and the carriage drove away, Lady Ashford told

our heroine that Mrs. Murray was a very old lady: that she was first-cousin to the late Lady Ashford, and worth at least sixty thousand pounds. She added, That she had several relations equally near, who were all striving to ingratiate themselves into her favour: That she was a woman of a masculine mind and manners, and rendered insolent by the flattery of her relations, whom she generally treated with the greatest rudeness. She then informed her, that her uncle Harvey, who now lay ill, was likewise worth a large sum of money: that he was a bachelor, who had gained his fortune in trade; from which he had been a few years retired: and having no relation so near as herself, she had reason to believe every shilling of which he died possessed would be hers.

Their journey was safe and pleasant. Upon the second day, about noon, the great city appeared in view, of which our heroine had heard so much; and a little before three they were set down at the house of Mr. Harvey, in Bishopsgate-street.

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CHAPTER XXII.

A Fright.

LADY Ashford found her relation very ill, though not in the immediate danger she expected, and perhaps wished. He expressed great joy upon seeing her; and requested that she would stay with him till he was perfectly recovered, or the reverse. In the latter case, he said all his fortune and effects would be her own; and he wished her to be upon the spot, in order to superintend her own affairs, and take care of her interest.

The day after their arrival, Caroline told Lady Ashford that she had an uncle in London, the only brother of her mother; and that she was resolved, if possible, to find out where he lived. Her Ladyship asked what was his profession? To which our heroine answered, that he was a soap-boiler. A Directory being then inquired for, they soon discovered that Saunders, Whitehouse, and Glynn, soap-boilers, lived in Mincing-lane. Caroline was not greatly pleased with the name of the street in which his house stood; she feared it did not speak his circumstances to be very good: "but if they are otherwise," said she, "I can afford to assist him, and will to the utmost of my power: it is the only respect I can now pay to the memory of my dear mother."

Lady Ashford had requested that Caroline would make use of her coach in the same manner as if it was her own, and order it upon all occasions, without scruple; for as she should go very little out, the horses and servants would have nothing to do but attend upon her. Of this privilege she availed herself, and directed the coachman to drive to Mincing-lane. They stopped at the number she had mentioned; the outside appearance of which gave our heroine no very pleasing presage of what she should find within. Upon asking if Mr. Saunders was at home, she was told that he was not; but that she might see one of his partners. To which she replied, That would not do; but if Mrs. Saunders was within, it would equally answer her purpose. "Oh, Ma'am," replied the man, "this is only the manufactory: Mr. Saunders lives in Ely Place, Holborn." Caroline thanked him for his information, and ordered the coach to Ely Place.

They stopped before an elegant-looking house, the door of which was opened by a servant in livery: and being informed that Mr. and Mrs. Saunders were both at home, she alighted, and was shewn into a handsome parlour, where she was told Mrs. Saunders would wait upon her immediately. In a few minutes entered a little fat fair woman, with great good humour in her countenance, who begged she would be seated; and requested to know her commands. Caroline told her, she had the honour of being nearly related to Mr. Saunders; that her name was Ashford, and that, being in town upon business, she could not excuse herself from paying her duty to her uncle and his family. "Oh," cried Mrs. Saunders, "I have heard my husband speak of his sister, who married the son of a very great gentleman; for which he was disinherited. My husband says, she was as fine a creature as ever eyes were laid upon; but that she never looked up afterwards; but a few years after her marriage she died of a broken heart." 'My uncle has been misinformed, Madam,' answered Caroline: 'my mother and father lived in the happiest manner, till my unhappy birth put an end to the life of the former; but the great distance at which she lived, and no correspondence being kept up between them after the death of my grandfather, Saunders, easily accounts for such errors.' "And so you are her daughter,"

cried, Mrs. Saunders. "Well, my husband will be right glad to see you; for he has often wished to know what family your mother left behind her, and how they were provided for: it was not always so well with him as it is now. Since his marriage with me, he can afford to live himself and help others: and many is the one that he hath helped. Yes, yes; my first husband left a fine business behind him; and between that and the alley, he turns a pretty sum in the year. There are not many warmer men between Temple Bar and the Royal Exchange."

Caroline assured her, that she felt the sincerest pleasure in this account of their prosperity; of which she wished them a daily increase. Just as she spoke these words, the door opened, and a tall handsome man, of about forty, made his appearance. "Look here, my dear," cried his wife; "here is your sister's daughter, Miss Ashton." "You need not tell me so," answered Mr. Saunders; she is her very picture. I am glad to see you, my dear. But whose coach is that at the door with a bloody hand upon it? no fashionable doings I hope?" "That coach, Sir," answered Caroline, "belongs to my uncle Sir Marmaduke Ashton, in whose family I now live." "That's well," said Mr. Saunders, embracing her with affection. "Be your situation what it will, if you are a good girl, I am heartily glad to see you. Pardon my suspicions, my dear," continued he, "such faces as yours are not seen every day; and our great folks are upon the watch for the destruction of beauty and innocence. But where is Charlotte? Does she know that her cousin is here?" At these words he rang a bell; and a footman appearing, ordered him to tell Charlotte he wanted her immediately "Her music-master is at present with her, Sir," said the man. "No matter," replied his master; "tell her I want her."

Chocolate now was brought in; and while our heroine was drinking a dish of chocolate, Miss Charlotte entered. She was a handsome-looking girl, good shape, and her features open and agreeable; but there was a boldness, a certain sauciness diffused over her whole appearance, which disgusted a delicate and sensible mind. "Lord, papa," said she, without observing any person was in the room, "how could you call me away in the middle of a lesson? You complain that I don't come on, how should I, when you won't let me mind it?" "I sent for you," replied her father, "to see your cousin, Miss Ashford, who has been so good as to call upon us." "Yes, my dear" cried Mrs. Saunders, "that young lady is your cousin, the daughter of your father's handsome sister, of whom we have often heard him speak; and he says, she is so like her, that he should have known her, if he had never heard her name."

Caroline now advanced towards her cousin, who courtesied, and said she was very glad to see her in London; to which compliment our heroine replied, she was happy in an opportunity of becoming acquainted with such near relations, to whom she had long greatly wished to be known. "That's very obliging," answered Mrs. Saunders, "and I am sure we are very glad of the pleasure of your company, and shall be happy if you will come and be with us as long as you stay in town." "Yes," rejoined her husband; "if you will come and spend a few weeks with us, we will take you about a little, and make it as pleasant as we can." "Oh! pray do come, cousin," exclaimed Charlotte, "and then my papa will let one go out a little. Do you know I have been only twice at Ranelagh, and once at Vauxhall, this summer! and we haven't seen the inside of the Little Theatre since it was opened, though Mrs. Alderman Perks offered to take me every night; and no body has genteeler parties, which my papa very well knows: but if you will come, he can't refuse our going every where. Pray do come!" Caroline thanked them for their kind invitations,

but excused herself, on account of Lady Ashford, who she said it was impossible for her to leave; but she promised often to see them during her stay in town. She then received an invitation to dine with them the next day, of which she readily accepted; and, taking leave in the most friendly manner, ordered the servants home.

It was a great and unexpected pleasure to our heroine, to find her maternal relations in such happy circumstances; and the satisfaction was greater, from her expecting the reverse. She was much pleased with the appearance of her uncle: and the love he bore the memory of her mother, made her willing to overlook and excuse the little defects she had observed in his wife and daughter, which she thought originated rather from want of information, than any thing wrong in the heart, or materially in the head. While she was busily amused with these reflections, the horses, which were wholly unused to the hurry of a great city, suddenly took fright, and running full against a post which stood at the corner of a small street, tore off one of the wheels, and threw the coachman from his box. They were galloping along at full speed, amidst the cries of a multitude of people, and our heroine every moment expecting to be dashed in pieces, when a gentleman, who was coming in an opposite direction, with a courage and strength which astonished every one, caught violently hold of the reins of one of the horses, and, plucking him suddenly on one side, stopped their dreadful career: the mob flying instantly to his assistance, the furious animals were secured from the danger of further mischief. The gentleman then flew to the door of the coach, in order to see who his resolution and bravery had rescued; where he beheld the lovely Caroline all pale and breathless, sunk to the bottom. He instantly bore her in his arms into a large silversmith's shop, the master of which, and his wife, having beheld the whole affair, readily conducted him into a back parlour, where they did every thing that could contribute to her recovery.

In a short time she opened her eyes; and the blood began to revisit her face, which, when perfect sensibility returned, rushed there in unusual quantities, upon beholding herself supported in the arms of a stranger. She clearly recollected every thing that had passed; and gently withdrawing her hand from his pressure, "Is it to you, Sir," said she, "that I am obliged for my escape from so dreadful a death?" "Faith," cried the master of the house, "it was an escape, indeed! I believe this gentleman may boast of an act which no other man in London would venture to do. How you came off, Sir, without being killed on the spot, I cannot imagine!" "Are you hurt, Sir?" exclaimed Caroline. "I hope not: I shall never be happy, if you suffer by your humanity." "I don't know," replied the gentleman, half-smiling; "I believe I am a little." "Bless me! where?" cried the affrighted Caroline. "Do, send for a surgeon! Is it your arm?" "Do not be alarmed, my dear Madam; I need no surgeon," said the gentleman: as soon as you find yourself able to remove, I will have the pleasure of conducting you safe home.' At these words Caroline arose and, finding herself perfectly recovered, said she was ready to go; and asked if the coach was waiting? The master of the house told her that it was too much damaged to be fit for present use: that the servants had taken it home; and her footman said he would be back immediately, but was not yet come. The gentleman then begged she would trust herself to his care; which he said he should esteem the highest compliment he could possibly receive: and, as she made no objection, sent for a hackney-coach, into which, after thanking the people of the house for their civility, he handed her; and, at her desire, directed it to be drove to Ely Place; she choosing that, as being nearer, and which

rendered her choice necessary, not being able at that moment to recollect the name of Bishopsgate-street.

The family were much surprized and alarmed, by seeing her return in so different a vehicle; and expressed much joy at her escape. Mrs. Saunders said it was a wonderful deliverance indeed! and that the least she could do was, to give her heart to the gentleman, in return for his bravery. The cheek of our heroine was crimsoned over by this speech; and the stranger observing her distress, instantly removed his eyes from her face, and replied, that it was impossible to express the happiness he felt at having been the means of safety to so charming a lady; and that, however long or happy his life might be, he should always number that among his most fortunate days. Upon his rising to take leave, he respectfully begged that he might be permitted to call and inquire after her health the next morning; saying, that however well she now appeared to be, he could not help dreading the effects of such a fright, upon a frame and mind so apparently delicate. To which Mrs. Saunders replied, by inviting him to dine with them the next day; saying, she thought they could not shew too much respect to a person who had saved the life of their cousin; especially as it was easy to see that he was a gentleman, whose acquaintance would do them honour. The stranger thanked her, in the most polite and grateful manner, and, promising to attend them the next day, took his leave.

He was no sooner gone than Charlotte exclaimed, "I'm glad he comes to-morrow; for I never saw so handsome a man in my whole life! Don't you think him very handsome, cousin?" "I really do not know," replied Caroline, with an affected indifference; "I took but little notice of his person; but his gallantry and courage I never ought to forget."—"Well," answered Charlotte, "I wish with all my heart I had been in your place. What eyes he has! and how charmingly he smiles! I am sure you have made a conquest of him. If you had seen how he seemed to admire you, and what a look he gave you at parting! But you did see that; for you coloured as red as scarlet!" "Sure you mistake," cried Caroline, the blood again diffusing itself over her cheeks: "yet, ought not my looks and words to express my gratitude for such a service?" "To be sure they ought," replied Mrs. Saunders. "I don't think you coloured a bit too much: and I am sure, if I can believe eyes, the gentleman thought so too; for I'll be sworn, his sparkled with joy."

While they were thus conversing, a coach, attended by Caroline's footman, drove up to the door. In it was Lady Ashford's woman; whom she had sent to conduct her back, being afraid she would not like to come alone, after such a fright, the servants having related the accident which had happened.

Our heroine having therefore again taken leave of her relations, and renewed her promise of being with them the next day, once more set out for Bishopsgate-street; where she arrived without further accident.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Fracas.

THE moment breakfast was over, our heroine retired to her apartment, and began to look over her clothes, in order to select a dress for the day: She had brought but few with her; none of them pleased her. There was not time to procure new ones; she wished she had brought greater choice; an elegant cap and hat might be had, and she resolved to send Kitty for them. But how could she trust to her taste? She would go herself. No, that would not do, she should not then have time to get her hair properly dressed; for she was to dine exactly at four. It was at length resolved that John should order a milliner to send a number for her to look at. This being settled, and a gown put in readiness, she sat down to have her hair dressed. Kitty found her unusually exact; she always dressed with great taste, but to-day she was scarce to be satisfied; one curl dropped too low, another was stiff; and though her head looked uncommonly well, she could hardly be persuaded that it was not frightful.

When the milliner arrived she tried first one cap and hat, then another; at last she fixed her choice; and having directed the white plume, with which it was ornamented, to be placed a little different, when her dress was completed, she looked elegance and beauty itself. Never did a birth-night belle look in her glass with more attention and anxiety, till unable to find any more faults, she was forced to be content; and the coach being ready, with job horses (Lady Ashford resolving not to use her own again during her stay in town) she drove to Ely Place.

It was not more than half an hour past three when she arrived; but she had promised to come early, and wished to be there before the stranger, upon whom her thoughts were every moment involuntarily turning. She was taken up stairs to a handsome drawing-room, where every thing that money, without much taste, could supply, was seen in profusion. A moment after, Charlotte entered: she was in a summer half-dress, made, trimmed, and put on in the very extreme of the fashion. "Dear me," cried she, coming up to Caroline, "how sweetly you are dressed! but why don't you put on your hat more on one side? Don't that plume hang lower than they wear them?" "I like to dress a little like other people," answered Caroline; "but I do not think it necessary to adopt all their whims and absurdities, or entirely to give up my own taste. In short, my dear," continued she, smiling, "I like to have a few follies of my own, and not constantly to follow those of other people." "Well," returned Charlotte, "so I am but in the fashion I don't care; if things are ugly it is the fault of the fashion-makers, not mine." "Very true," answered Caroline, smiling, "it is a method which certainly saves you much trouble." Just as she pronounced these words the door opened; her heart fluttered; but it was not the stranger, it was Mrs. Alderman Perks and her daughter.

After many compliments, and much ceremony, they were seated; and being joined by Mrs. Saunders, inquiry was mutually made after their husbands. Mrs. Perks assured her friend, that the Alderman fully intended himself the pleasure of dining with Mr. Saunders; but a Court being that day held, he was obliged to attend, and hoped they would have the goodness to excuse him. She then turned to Charlotte, crying, "Well, my dear, and how do you do? Why don't you let her come a little more among us, Mrs.

Saunders? We were last night at Hughes's. Upon my word, his exhibition is very entertaining; we saw Chilliby, the wild horse, rode. Sir Timothy Glymp was there and his lady, and the three Miss Glymps, and Mr. Clare of Bondstreet, who is, they say a humble servant to Miss Molly. We were the most comfortable party you can imagine, and were very well amused indeed.' "Well," cried Charlotte, "I long to see Chilliby rode, of all things, and so my mama and papa know very well, and yet they never will let me go; but they hate for me to go any where." 'Upon my word, Mrs. Saunders,' answered Mrs. Perks, 'you should let her go out a little more, it does young people good to see the world, and the manner of genteel places. Let her come with us to Sadler's Wells on Monday; we have taken two boxes, and shall be quite snug.' "I can make no promises without her father's consent," answered Mrs. Saunders, "if I do, he'll be sure to unsay all the agreement. If he likes for her to go, I never makes any objections when she is in proper company, that's all I cares about. Let her go in proper company, and go every day in the year, with all my heart."

Charlotte was about to reply, when the door was opened again, and Mr. Rivers was announced. As the name was strange to all present, a momentary suspence took place; but it was quickly put an end to by the entrance of Caroline's preserver. The flutter she had felt before now returned with double violence; and she was so much agitated by his appearance, that it was with difficulty she could answer his tender and respectful inquiries about her health, or renew her thanks for the life she owed him. Her confusion, however, wearing off by degrees, she entered into that easy kind of chat, partly made up of trifles, and partly of sense and information, which she was so remarkably qualified to support, and in which she found Mr. Rivers excelled any man she had ever conversed with. At dinner he placed himself next to her; but his attention was not so utterly ingrossed by her as to prevent his treating every one present with politeness, and the young ladies with what a common observer would have stiled a greater degree of gallantry than he shewed to our heroine; though it was easy for one of more penetration to perceive, that she was his principal object. The attention he paid to all she said was greater: he was more careful of what he addressed to her; and above all, his eyes spoke an admiration which rendered words perfectly unnecessary.

Nor was Caroline, on her part, less pleased and interested than himself. The gratitude she owed him gave a licence to her esteem, to her admiration. And how slight the distinction is between these united and Love, I leave to the casuists in that passion to determine. She found in Mr. Rivers that something which she had in vain sought in all others; that mixture of ease and respect, of tenderness and spirit, which, in her estimation, constituted the finished character. Short as had been their acquaintance, she had experienced, in her own person, that he possessed two of the noblest qualities that can adorn the human heart,—Courage and Humanity: qualities with which vice is almost incompatible. His manners were inexpressibly pleasing: he was well informed: she had no doubt but he was learned and accomplished. His sentiments were manly and generous: and last, perhaps not least, his person was remarkably graceful; and his face possessed a share of masculine beauty not often to be met with.

After dinner Mrs. Perks proposed their going to Vauxhall. Caroline would have preferred the theatre: but every one appearing pleased, she only requested Mrs. Saunders to permit her to send a note to Bishopsgate-street, to let the family know that she should not be at home, having been prevailed upon to stay at her uncle's all night; which done,

and an early dish of tea being ordered, soon after eight Mrs. Perks's coach drove to the door, which was followed by Mr. Saunders's: and the whole party set off in the highest good-humour to this scene of general amusement. There were no gentlemen attendants but Mr. Saunders and Mr. Rivers: and Mrs. Saunders told Caroline, in a half-whisper, that Mrs. Perks was remarkable for proposing parties of pleasure when her husband was absent; by which means she and her daughter escaped free of all expence; and that, tho' they were constantly in public places, she did not believe it cost them five guineas in diversions the whole year round.

The lights, the music, and the gay happy appearance of every one around her, gave Caroline, upon her first entrance, a sensible pleasure; but she soon perceived a mixture of company and manners which disgusted her. She had none of that pride which stands aloof, and turns from those whom Nature made equal, with scorn and derision. She could descend to poverty, and even rusticity, without feeling that she had merit in so doing: but vulgar merriment and finery were what she loathed to mix with; and there was too much appearance of that kind, to permit the place to afford her much pleasure.

Among those who appeared to figure as the principal bucks of the night, one party rendered themselves particularly conspicuous. They talked louder, swore faster, looked fiercer, and stared more confidently than any in the gardens. Every time they passed, Caroline, from a natural aversion to such kind of beings, had turned aside her face; and Mr. Rivers observing her fear, had constantly put himself between her and the enemy. At last, however, one who seemed to be a principal leader of the band, coming close up to our heroine, and looking under her hat, exclaimed, "By Heaven, it is her! It is Miss Ashford herself! This is an unlooked-for felicity!"

Caroline instantly recollected the voice of Captain West, and, recovering a little from her fright, received a torrent of compliments, and such kind of extravagant fine things as he was remarkable for saying. It was easy to perceive that he was in a state of half-intoxication; and she could not but esteem him a disgraceful acquaintance; but it was impossible to get rid of him. He insisted upon being her escort for the evening; saying, with a fierce look, that he believed no man in the gardens could pretend a greater right to that honour; and if any such would come forward, he was ready to answer them, and let them know that he was a gentleman, and would act as such, be they what they would. These words he addressed full to Mr. Rivers; who had at first, seeing Caroline acknowledge him as an acquaintance, drawn back, and, to her no small mortification, resigned her, as it were, to superior pretensions; but now observing her distress, he again advanced, and told Captain West he was not entitled to inquire the cause of a preference which that lady might think proper to favour any other with: but he would defend her from insult, though a prince should offer it; and would chastise upon the spot any man who should so far forget what belongs to his character, as to give her the smallest disturbance. "And who are you?" cried West, "who so valiantly set up for her defender?" "Sir, I am her old acquaintance, her old friend, her old lover, Sir; what do you say to that?" "If the lady admits your claims, Sir, I have nothing to say," answered Mr. Rivers. "What! What is all this about?" exclaimed Mr. Saunders, interposing. "I know no claim either of you have to my niece. What the devil! are we to be made the gaze of the whole gardens, because a couple of hot-headed young fellows don't know what they would be at? Nay, you need not look fierce, I shan't fight either of you: I shall only take the liberty of conducting the girl safe out of your reach. Come, Mistress, bring your charge,"

continued he, addressing his wife; 'I warrant I'll rescue them both from the present danger.' So saying, he took the arm of the trembling Caroline under his, and, followed by the rest of the party, quitted the gardens unmolested.

They were no sooner in the coach (each family going in their own, separate roads) than Charlotte began to grumble at her father, for bringing them home so soon. She said he might easily have put an end to the quarrel without leaving the gardens: that she did not see why both the gentlemen might not have supped with them; for the Captain seemed a charming man; only a little too warm. "Thy ideas of men," replied her father, "will never extend beyond the lace upon their coats, and the powder on their heads! But observe me: I'll have no more Vauxhall; a place only fit for young rakes to stare at modest girls, till they become as impudent as themselves. For your part, Miss, I see their stares give you no concern; you can stand and almost return them." 'Lord, papa!' cried Charlotte, 'you'd have one like a country milk-maid, blushing at every man who looks at one. Truly, one should have enough to do in London.'

Poor Caroline was too deeply mortified to be able to utter a syllable: Nothing could have happened more unfortunately. She had probably lost the good opinion of the only man she ever saw, relatives excepted, whose good opinion she was anxious to obtain. No doubt he must despise her; despise her too much ever to give her an opportunity of clearing herself. The vexation she endured was far more painful than any she had ever before experienced; and she felt a dislike to Captain West, little short of aversion. This unpleasing train of reflections effectually banished sleep. She arose without having closed her eyes; and the moment breakfast was over, requested that a hackney-coach might be sent for: and one of her uncle's servants attending her, she returned once more to the house of Mr. Harvey.

Finding that Lady Ashford was in her chamber, she went to it, and, knocking gently, was let in by her woman; who told her that her lady had a bad headach, and was laid down upon the bed. She therefore took up a book which her aunt had been reading, and waited in the room till she awoke. As soon as she raised her head, seeing our heroine, she told her she was glad to see her again: that if she had not returned that morning, she intended to have written, to let her know it was her intention to leave London the next day; the heat and closeness of it being very hurtful to her health; and her uncle so far recovered, as no longer to stand in need of her attendance. Caroline readily agreed to accompany her; saying, with a sigh, that she believed the air of London was indeed infectious. Orders were accordingly given for their leaving town the next morning; and in the afternoon she returned once more to Ely Place, to bid adieu to her relations there. They all appeared extremely sorry to part with her; and pressed her much to let her aunt return alone, and spend a few weeks with them. She was once upon the point of accepting their invitation, as the only possible means of ever again seeing Mr. Rivers; of clearing up the seeming mystery or impropriety of her conduct; yet, recollecting how ungentle her behaviour to Lady Ashford would be, in suffering her to travel alone, when the professed purpose of her journey was to accompany her; and sensible that she ought rather to combat than encourage a passion for a man, to whose family, connections, and real character in life she was an entire stranger; summoning at once all her resolution, she bade them adieu, and returned to Bishopsgate-street; from whence, early the next morning, they set out upon their way to Ashford Park.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Dependents.

I HAVE before mentioned, that it was Lady Ashford's intention to make a short visit to Mrs. Murray, a rich relation of her late mother-in-law's. She accordingly gave orders to drive to her house, which was rather more than five miles from the main road. Upon their arrival, her Ladyship desired a servant, who attended at the gate, to let his lady know she was there, and begged the favour of being permitted to see her. This message, which was received in a surly impertinent manner (the fellow saying he did not suppose his lady would let her come in) was taken up stairs; and after they had waited at least a quarter of an hour, he returned, telling them they might alight, if they pleased; and if his lady found herself well enough by and by, she would see them. This permission, almost unhopd for, was received by Lady Ashford in the most gracious manner: and she followed him into the house with as much alacrity as if she had been going to take possession of it. They were shewn into a large parlour, almost unfurnished. Mrs. Murray not having quitted her chamber for many years, the lower part of the house was of course exposed to the depredations of her servants, who had pretty nearly stripped every part of it. She was wholly governed by her housekeeper and butler, who were husband and wife; and ruled her in every thing, so far as the natural suspiciousness and obstinacy of her temper rendered her managable. Here they waited till any patience, except that of a dependent, would have been exhausted; but Lady Ashford felt herself quite in that predicament (for she was not wholly free from her husband's foible, covetousness) and therefore uttered not a word expressive of impatience, till a full hour had escaped, when the door was opened by the housekeeper; who informed her, with some shortness, that her lady was ready to see them. "And how do you do, Mrs. Broome?" said Lady Ashford, with great condescension. "How does your husband and family do? I expected to have seen you at Ashford Park before this time: I thought the last time I was here, you promised to come." Mrs. Broome thanked her with rather more complaisance than she had used in speaking to her before; but said she was greatly confined; for her lady thought well of nothing but what she did; and she could hardly get out three days in the year. "Upon my word," answered her Ladyship, "that's somewhat hard: I think you ought to go out a little for the sake of your health. I shall desire my aunt to part with you for a few days; and then you must come, and bring one or two of your children; the change of air will do them good."

By this time they were arrived at the chamber-door; which Mrs. Broome opening, desired them to walk in. Mrs. Murray was sitting in a large easy-chair, with her foot, which was violently swelled by the gout, resting upon a covered stool. She was muffled up with flannel, from head to foot; and being a masculine figure, with hard features and a dark beard, made a most forbidding appearance. Though the day was one of the warmest in July, there was a fire in the grate; and upon the sides of the Bath-stove stood several saucepans; and a small table, which was placed before her, was covered with various messes, which she chose to have cooked under her own inspection. Before the fire lay a large female spaniel; and in one corner of the room was a piece of old carpeting, which three of her young ones were sleeping upon. The windows, not being ever permitted to be

opened for the admission of fresh air, the closeness of the chamber, out of which its principal inhabitants never moved, was almost intolerable.

Lady Ashford approached her rich relation with all the respect that she could have paid to an empress; telling her, that it was so long since she had heard from her, that Sir Marmaduke and herself began to grow uneasy; and she had resolved to make personal inquiries after her health, as being more satisfactory than any other. "Well," replied Mrs. Murray, "I am here yet, and here likely to be. I suppose you was in hopes to find that I was upon the point of slipping off? And faith, if that was the case, I don't believe, with all your speeches, that one among you would lend a finger to keep me up." "I am sorry," replied Lady Ashford, "that you should have so bad an opinion of us as to think we could wish to lose so valuable a relation and friend. What can make one amends for the loss of a friend? Not all the wealth they can possibly leave one." "As for friends," replied Mrs. Murray, "I believe money is the best in the world; and if I was not possessed of a little, neither Sir Marmaduke nor yourself would trouble your heads about me. As it is, I don't doubt but you'd be both glad to see me potted." "I am sure," cried Lady Ashford, without betraying the least signs of impatience or resentment, "my dear aunt cannot think so ill of her relations. People indeed who spend all before them, and can never get enough to supply their extravagances, may become such wretches; but that is not the case with Sir Marmaduke, he always lived within his income, and need not wish the death of any body." "I am glad of it," answered Mrs. Murray; "then he needs the less from me: I hate to give to them that have too much already." "I did not mean to say," rejoined her Ladyship, "that Sir Marmaduke's income was large: on the contrary, he is often distressed for money, and has younger children to provide for: and I should think, a person of my dear aunt's prudence and understanding, would wish to leave her fortune where it will be well used, and not be thrown away upon mistresses, gaming-tables, and such kind of fashionable methods." "I am not going to leave it to any body," answered Mrs. Murray; "and so you may all make yourselves easy upon that head. I may very likely marry, one of these days, and disappoint you all. Which of you, I wonder, will come after me when I have got a flock of children running about the house? I warrant 'dear aunt' and 'good Madam' will be changed into 'old fool.' What say you, young woman?" continued she, addressing Caroline; "would it not be serving them as they deserve?" "I think, Madam, you have a right to consult your own happiness," replied Caroline. "Well said!" answered the old lady; "if you are rich, child, get married, and have a family of your own, or else you see what will be your lot: all your relations will gape round you, as if they could get no breath till you lost yours: and, if you don't take care, it's ten to one but they grow impatient, and pot you before your time!"

Caroline could not help smiling at this representation; the truth of which she in some degree witnessed. Lady Ashford, in order to give a change to the discourse, was beginning to inquire if she had much pain from her foot? and was prepared to rejoice or lament, according to the account she received, when Mrs. Broome made her appearance, and told her lady that a fine young gentleman was at the door, in a beautiful vis-à-vis; who said he was one of her near relations, and begged to be permitted to pay his duty to her. "What! more relations!" exclaimed the old lady: "I shall be assassinated! Bid him get about his business; I want none of his duty." "Nay, Ma'am," cried Broome, "he says he has come a great way, on purpose to have the honour of seeing you; and he knows by the coach, that stands by the gate, that you have company with you. Do let him come up; you

can't think how handsome he is.' "Well," replied her mistress, "he may come if he will; since I am to be plagued, its as well have all as some." The house-keeper immediately went down stairs, and in a few moments returned to open the door, as she had done for Lady Ashford, when who should enter but Caroline's Bath admirer, Lord Danby. He started upon seeing our heroine, but instantly recovering himself, went up to Mrs. Murray, and in the most gallant and respectful style, thanked her for the honour she had done him, in admitting him into her presence, and assured her that he had long panted for the happiness he now enjoyed. 'And pray who may you be, who have so vast a regard for me?' asked Mrs. Murray; 'tis amazing how I inspire people with so much love and respect, before they have ever seen me!' His Lordship apologized for the solecism, in etiquette, of which he had been guilty; and having informed her of his name, and the degree of relationship to her, in which he had the happiness to stand, begged she would in future give him leave to number himself among those whom she honoured with her friendship.

He then turned to Lady Ashford, with whom he was not acquainted, and bowed in respectful silence. Passing from her to Caroline, "Need I express the pleasure I feel at this unexpected happiness," cried he: "where have you concealed yourself so long? I quitted Bath in a week after you; there was nothing left that could detain me. I hope you had an agreeable winter in town?" 'I spent the whole of last winter in Westmoreland,' answered Caroline. 'Then my loss was not so great as I imagined,' replied his Lordship. "I was absolutely forced into a party to the south of France, which obliged me to abandon the hope of meeting you in London, and I now lived upon that of seeing you next season." 'And so you are a Lord,' interrupted Mrs. Murray. 'Are you rich?' "That is a question, my dear madam," answered his Lordship, "not very easily answered. In comparison to many, perhaps, I ought to account myself so; but if to be rich signifies to possess as much as we wish to use, I answer No: on the contrary, I am not many degrees removed from absolute poverty." 'And so a few thousands would do you no harm,' said the old lady. "My dear madam," replied Lord Danby, "I did not wait upon you with an intention to trouble you with an account of my wants: perhaps there are some among them," continued he, glancing his eyes upon our heroine, "which even thousands could not supply. I am ambitious of being known to a lady, to whose most valuable character I have long ceased to be a stranger; and if I am happy enough to gain the lowest place in her esteem, I shall for the present think myself rich enough."

Mrs. Murray appeared highly pleased at a strain of flattery, to which she had not been accustomed; and looking with more than usual cheerfulness, she told him that he might not be the worse for his disinterestedness. Lady Ashford began to grow uneasy; she saw that Lord Danby was in a fair way to become a professed favourite, and had gained more upon the good graces of the old lady, in half an hour, than she had ever been able to do in many a tedious and mortifying visit. She endeavoured to divide her attention, by drawing a part of it to herself; but in vain. She would answer nobody but Lord Danby, and paid attention only to him. Her Ladyship coloured with vexation, which the old lady perceiving, exclaimed, "What, jealous! why I told you just now, that I had thoughts of marrying; and who knows but here is my match? What if I should take it into my head to leave him my whole fortune, who do I wrong? Did I ever promise to leave it to any of you?" Lady Ashford was about to reply, when Mrs. Murray again resumed, "I would not have you think that I am angry with you, or dislike you more than I used to do; but if I

chuse to have a favourite I'll have one; perhaps I may have more than one. I am apt to take likings at first sight; if I don't then, I never do. And so as I think your visit has been quite long enough, you are at liberty to take leave as soon as you please. I have something to say to this young man alone, and will excuse all the dear aunts and good madams that you are about to say; so farewell; take yourselves down stairs."

Lady Ashford was now constrained to rise. She said she knew no affront was intended, and therefore she should take none; and wishing her aunt all possible increase of health and happiness, got out of the room as fast as possible, fearing to be overtaken by something more gross and abusive than she had yet experienced.

It would be difficult to say, whether Lady Ashford was most mortified, or our heroine diverted, by the scene they had just quitted. The latter, however, could not help reflecting, with disgust, upon the mercenary disposition of mankind, when she saw persons of Lady Ashford's and Lord Danby's rank and fortune, paying court, in the most servile, abject manner, to a woman, whose person and mind were equally objects of aversion. She could not but wonder to see those, who were not only independent, but possessed even superfluity of wealth, still craving to swell the unnecessary heap, as was the case with the former; while, like the latter, others cringed and fawned upon those they despised, and stooped to all the drudgery and meanness of gross flattery, in order to acquire that which, when possessed, they flung away with undistinguishing carelessness.

The first question with which Sir Marmaduke saluted his lady upon her stepping out of the carriage, at Ashford Park, was, "Well, Eleanor, what news from the city? Are we to look out our sables, and pull out our white handkerchiefs?" "You may, for the present, save yourself that trouble," answered she, "my uncle is nearly recovered; however I have had an absolute promise from him of all he shall die possessed of, let it happen when it will." "Well, that's something," replied he, "the sooner promises are fulfilled the better, you know." He then condescended to ask Caroline, if she had had a pleasant journey; but, without staying to receive her answer, told his wife that he believed they should not see Lord and Lady Walton that summer; that they had sent to excuse themselves, on account of the latter not being very well, but that Miss West arrived the night before. Caroline, who had not heard a word of Lord and Lady Walton's intention of visiting Ashford Park, felt as though she had escaped something that would have given her uneasiness. The thought of seeing Miss West was not perfectly agreeable to her, her brother's late behaviour, and its apprehended effects, had heightened her dislike to a family from whom she had suffered so much; and she retired to her apartment, instead of following Lady Ashford to the drawing-room, wishing for a few moments to compose her thoughts. She was there met by Kitty, who presented her a letter, which she said came by the last night's post. She immediately knew the hand of her good friend Dr. Seward, and trembled to observe the black wax with which it was sealed. It was natural to suppose that his sister, who had been ill in Yorkshire, was dead. Yet she feared something worse, and her fears were prophetic. The doctor, in terms of the deepest, though manly, regret, informed her of the death of her beloved friend, which happened in consequence of catching the fever and sore throat, with which her sister was affected.

The distress of our heroine was greater than words can describe; she was deprived of the only friend for whom she felt a sincere union of esteem and affection; the only friend in whom she could repose perfect confidence, or from whom she expected comfort or assistance, should she stand in need of them. Her spirits, not high before, now sunk to

the lowest ebb. She was unable to mix in any company, had it been ever so agreeable, much less to encounter the party now assembled in the drawing-room. She therefore ordered her maid to give the doctor's letter to her footman, and direct him to deliver it to Lady Ashford; at the same time requesting that she would excuse her remaining alone for the rest of the day. She then resigned herself up to tears and sorrow. The loss of her friend deeply wounded her affectionate heart, and, joined to the other loss she believed herself to have sustained, quite overwhelmed her: her tears flowed in abundance. She believed they all flowed for her dear Mrs. Seward; but the amiable, and to her equally lost, Rivers had his share. The vacancy she now felt in her heart was inexpressibly painful. She appeared to herself a poor forlorn wanderer in a dreary world; one in whose sorrows no gentle bosom participated, and whose prosperity was interesting only to herself.

These melancholy reflections, for more than half the night, banished sleep from her eyes: at length, worn out by the fatigue of a journey, and the want of that soft restorer of nature, she sunk into a profound repose.

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CHAPTER XXV.

The Resolution.

IT was late the next morning before our heroine awoke; and Kitty informed her that Lady Ashford had been at her door to inquire how she rested; and that the young 'Squire seemed very uneasy about her. She still felt the strongest objection to going down; and told Kitty to bring her up a dish of tea, being very hot and thirsty; and let Lady Ashford know that she was too indifferent to venture down, but would be happy to see her in her dressing-room. In a few moments her maid returned with Lady Ashford's love to her; and to let her know that she and all the rest of the ladies would come up to see her after breakfast.

This was a compliment which Caroline could well have excused; however, it was better than going down to them; and having drank her tea, she leaned her head upon her hand, in which she held a cambric handkerchief, with which her face was half-concealed, and resting her elbow upon the corner of her toilet, indulged that soft and bewitching melancholy to which genius and sensibility are ever prone. She had not long enjoyed this dangerous pleasure, when she was disturbed by the entrance of Lady Ashford, her daughter, her sister, and Miss West. At a little distance, as if fearful of offending, they were followed by Mr. Ashford; who could not resist the inclination he felt to see his cousin, and convince himself of the real state of her health; for which he began to entertain many tender apprehensions.

Lady Ashford, in the kindest manner, inquired how she did? and expressed much concern upon feeling her hand, to find it so hot and dry. She said she was sorry that she had quitted her bed; and thought it would be best for her to return to it: in which opinion Mrs. Ashford joined; adding, with more than common civility, that she was sorry to see her so ill. They had scarce done speaking, when Miss West, with an air of the most perfect ease and unconsciousness, asked her if she did not recollect her old acquaintance? Caroline, roused by her uncommon assurance and insensibility, answered, That was she subject to want of recollection, too many circumstances had impressed the name of West upon her memory, ever to endanger its being lost in forgetfulness. Miss West coloured, in spite of the happy sangfroid which she had the art of assuming at pleasure; but instantly recovering her wonted air of self-satisfaction, she began to admire the room; declaring that the taste in which it was fitted up, was remarkably pretty; and though so much less expensive, in her opinion, more than equalled the Countess of ——'s, about which such a fuss was made. "Yes," rejoined Mr. Ashford, who had just paid his compliments to Caroline; "as much as the amiable planner of it excels that Countess, about whom such a fuss is made." "Oh," replied Miss West, "the Countess is certainly very handsome." "So I think," replied Mr. Ashford. "You really pay the handsomest compliments, friend," said Miss West, "of any body I ever met with; but they are often lost, for want of sensibility in the receiver." "For want of vanity, you mean," replied he: "nothing makes a woman so quick-sighted to a compliment as that." Just as he spoke these words, she cast her eyes upon the pictures, which were small half-lengths, in oval frames, and hung at equal distances, on one side of the room. "Bless me," cried she, "what have we here? your picture, Mr. Ashford! and Caroline's, I protest! hung on each side of the good old lady

your grandmother. What are we to think of this?' Mrs. and Miss Ashford, who had neither of them been before in Caroline's room since she had altered the taste of the furniture and ornaments, instantly turned their eyes towards the pictures; and with looks of anger and surprize, exclaimed, "I protest, and so there is!"

Mr. Ashford was divided between surprize at the circumstance, and concern for her to whom he believed himself indebted for so high a compliment. He longed to throw himself at her feet, to thank her for the favour she had bestowed even upon his shadow; when our heroine, with great composure of look and accent, informed them that the picture they had mistaken for Mr. Ashford's, had been painted for her father; as the other, which they supposed to be hers, was for her mother. This explanation at once put an end to their surprize and poor Mr. Ashford's triumph. He hung his head, in silent mortification; and felt how much happier it is never to hope, than to be subject to the cruel pangs of disappointment!

After a few remarks upon the wonderful resemblance between Mr. Ashford and the person from which the portrait they had mistaken for his was painted, Caroline received all their good wishes for her better health; and Lady Ashford told her she should order some whey; and begged she would go to bed, and keep quiet.

As soon as they were gone, our heroine, finding the heat and thirst, by which she was opprest, increase, and her head begin to grow painful, resolved to follow the advice she had received; and, in pursuance of it, immediately put on her night-clothes, and, drinking a bason of white wine whey, which Lady Ashford's woman brought for her, resigned herself to external quietness and inward perturbation.

Caroline had not continued in this state more than hour, when, some one knocking softly at the door, she heard Lady Ashford ask whether she was asleep? "Is it you, Madam?" said Caroline. "I am not at all inclined to sleep. Do walk in." Her Ladyship then came into her bed-chamber, and asked her if it would be disagreeable to her to see Doctor Layton, who had just then called? "I am afraid you have given yourself the trouble of sending for him," said Caroline. 'No,' replied she; 'he came quite by accident; and upon inquiring where you was; and being told you was not well, he requested to see you: so fearing that if I sent up a servant you might be disturbed, I came myself to see how you are, and to know if you choose to see him.' Caroline thanked her for her kind attention, and said, as the Doctor was there, she would take his advice. He was accordingly called up; and after the usual ceremony of feeling the pulse, and prescribed what he thought would be proper for her disorder, John was immediately sent to a neighbouring apothecary, to have the medicines made up.

The Doctor having chatted a little, and told all the family-news that was stirring in the neighbourhood, arose to take leave; upon which Lady Ashford, at Caroline's previous request, offered him his usual fee; but he absolutely refused to touch it; saying, he intended only a friendly call, and had visited Miss Caroline at his own request, not hers; and therefore could not think of being paid for it. His moderation surprized our heroine, as well as Lady Ashford; he being remarkable for never refusing a fee.

As soon as they were gone, Caroline directed Kitty to let down one of the window-curtains; for she felt herself sleepy, and wished to indulge the comfortable propensity. While she was executing her orders, "I am sure," said she, "I am glad the Doctor came; for I hope now, Ma'am, you will soon be better. It was very good of the young 'Squire to send for him, without saying a word to nobody." 'Did my cousin send

for him?’ asked Caroline. ‘How do you know?’ “Why, Ma’am,” answered Kitty, “I saw him send his man off the moment he came down from your room; and in about five minutes after his return, the Doctor came. So I asked Charles; for I thought where he had been: and he owned that he was sent to the Doctor with a note; and he says he is sure there was money in it.”—This accounted for the Doctor’s deviation from his general rule of practice.

Caroline was grateful for her cousin’s kindness and solicitude about her. She sighed that she could only be grateful. “How perverse a heart is mine!” whispered she in thought: “a worthy and amiable man sighs to possess it in vain, while it has most improvidently bestowed itself upon one who neither knows that it is his, nor probably wishes it to be so.” A few tears accompanied this thought, and in some degree relieved the oppression under which she laboured; but the sleep she hoped for was entirely flown, nor, till she had taken a composing-draught, could she obtain any. A gentle moisture, which, soon after she had taken it, diffused itself over her whole frame, removing the restless weariness she had before felt, she insensibly sunk into a sweet and refreshing slumber, which continued for several hours; and from which she awoke entirely free from any symptoms of fever, or other bodily disorder. And as the mind will ever partake the good or ill its earthly partner enjoys or suffers, hers felt greatly strengthened, and eased of much of the restless anxiety it had the day before endured. She was, upon recollection, ashamed of the extreme weakness she had betrayed; and resolved, let the effort be ever so painful, to drive from her heart a passion which, if indulged, she perceived would rob it of all that was amiable and worthy, and render her a poor forlorn restless creature, useless to others, and a burthen to herself.

In this resolution she arose and dressed herself, with her usual elegance, went down to breakfast, and resolved no longer to indulge herself in that dangerous luxury of tender thought wherein she had lately so much delighted; but, by keeping as much as possible engaged in company and conversation, to escape from ideas too pleasingly intrusive.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A Disappointment.

UPON entering the breakfast-room, she found the ladies engaged in earnest conversation. Something more than common seemed to be the subject, by the important swell of Mrs. Ashford, the simper and affected carelessness of her niece, and the extreme good-humour of Sir Marmaduke. Inquiries after her health being over, she took her place among them, and began to chat with Mr. Ashford, who appeared the only person disengaged; the rest being all in half-whisper consultations, about which she felt not the smallest curiosity, and wished to avoid the appearance of listening. At length Miss West, turning from Miss Ashford with an air of affected half-anger, "Well, well, my dear little Countess," said she, "if you will be obstinate, there's no help for it: but, if I know any thing of the matter, you'll change your mind yet." 'No, that I shan't,' cries Miss Ashford; 'you'll see if I do. I'll tell you what, West,' continued she, and then another whisper succeeded, which occasioned a laugh from both.

"I think," said Mrs. Ashford, "we ought to tell Miss Caroline this affair." 'By no means, if it is any secret,' answered our heroine. "Oh, it is no secret," replied Mrs. Ashford, with a significant look; "I hope Miss Ashford will never have any secrets of this nature: it is an affair of which she has no need to be ashamed; an affair that would do honour to the first young woman in England. In short, Eleanor will very soon be married to one of the first young noblemen in the kingdom: she will probably be a Countess before this day week." 'No, positively, aunt,' exclaimed Eleanor; 'not under a month, at the very soonest.' "Don't tell me!" answered Mrs. Ashford: "when my Lord comes to plead for himself, you will never be able to resist." 'So I tell her,' cried Miss West. 'In short, who can resist one of the handsomest men in England, when he throws his fortune, title, heart, and person at one's feet! Don't be jealous, my dear little Countess; but I was once more than half in love with him myself; and so was Caroline too, though she looks so demure.' "With whom?" replied our heroine. "Who do you mean?" 'Why, our old Bath acquaintance, Lord Danby,' replied Miss West. 'Don't you remember him?' "Lord Danby!" exclaimed Caroline. "Is my cousin, Eleanor, going to be married to Lord Danby?" 'Yes, to Lord Danby,' answered Mrs. Ashford; 'where pray is the wonder? She is not the first Ashford who has married a nobleman; and if her person and accomplishments will not procure her something above a shabby commoner, it is hard indeed! Besides, she will now be one of the first fortunes in England, and will be entitled to figure with the first women in town. See here,' continued she, presenting a letter; 'this will explain the matter fully; and then you will know what we are about.' Caroline took the letter, and, with some difficulty, made out the following words:

"Sir Marmaduke Ashford,

At the request of my nephew, Lord Danby, I sit down to inform you, that he is fallen violently in love with your daughter, and wishes to marry her. In case you will consent to the match, and she is willing, I will immediately give them up forty thousand pounds; and the rest of my fortune, which amounts to twice that sum, I will settle upon

them after my death. Let me know, by return of messenger, whether you like the proposal. If so, Lord Danby will be with you on Thursday, with deeds ready signed.

ANN MURRAY.”

The surprize of our heroine was visible in her countenance; which Miss West observing, exclaimed, “I protest Caroline is disappointed! Oh, I had forgot that he danced with you once or twice: however, we must both be content; I fear it is neither of our fates to be Countesses.” ‘What signifies dancing-acquaintance,’ cried Mrs. Ashford; ‘you may dance with a man for ever, and never make any impression upon his heart. You see, one glance from the eyes of Eleanor (for he never, that we know of, saw her but once) could do more than all the dancing upon earth.’ “I sincerely wish my cousin every possible kind of happiness,” said Caroline; “but I must confess that Lord Danby is one of the last men from whom I should have expected such an attachment.” ‘And why so?’ exclaimed her aunt. ‘What, because he has indulged himself in a few fashionable liberties? Mere trifles in a man of his consequence!’ “If you think them so,” answered Caroline, “it is very well; but in my opinion, such habits must be the ruin of all domestic happiness.” ‘Oh,’ cried Mrs. Ashford, ‘when he is united to the woman of his choice, reformation comes of course.’ “Oh certainly,” said Miss West; “but Caroline is jealous; I see that plain enough.” ‘Jealous!’ repeated Eleanor, with a scornful smile and toss of her head. “Aye jealous, truly,” exclaimed Mrs. Ashford. “I hope she has too much sense to make any such pretensions. Exclusive of Miss Ashford’s other accomplishments, she will be one of the first fortunes in the kingdom. Of fifty thousand pounds, the half of her mother’s fortune, my brother cannot hinder her: she will have every shilling of which I die possessed; and I make no doubt but Lord Walton, and several other relations, will leave her large legacies; so that I estimate her fortune, at least, an hundred thousand pounds.” ‘Well, that’s a bribe for Lord Danby certainly,’ said Mr. Ashford coldly. “A bribe!” exclaimed his aunt: “he wants no bribe. I have not the smallest doubt but he would marry your sister, if she had not a guinea in the world.” ‘He is much obliged to you, however,’ said Mr. Ashford, ‘for such a presumption in his favour.’

Sir Marmaduke here interposed.—He said that was an idle question, and had nothing to do in the business: That if Lord Danby liked Eleanor in her present circumstances, it was enough, as there was no great danger of their being altered. “There is but one thing,” continued he, “that gives me uneasiness; and that is, my promise to Sir Charles Beaumont.” ‘Of what consequence is that?’ answered Mrs. Ashford; ‘the man is dead, and cannot claim it.’ “True,” replied the Baronet; “but he recalled his son from his travels, on purpose to fulfil the engagement: and I know, in a letter he wrote to him upon his deathbed, he made it his last request that he would do so. I have likewise written to him since the death of his father, and invited him here; which certainly amounted to nothing less than a renewal of the agreement; and I have every reason to expect him shortly to claim my promise.” ‘Well,’ answered Mrs. Ashford, ‘it cannot be helped: nobody can wonder that we should give the preference to a nobleman.’

“Upon my word, Madam,” cried Miss West, turning to Eleanor, “a Viscount and a Baronet at your feet at one time! Do, bestow some of your superfluities upon your poor friends! you can have but one, you know; and here are a couple of poor forlorn damsels, who cannot procure one between them.” She had scarce pronounced these words, when

Sir Marmaduke, rising and going to a window, cried, 'Whose carriage can that be which stops at the porter's lodge?' Miss West, immediately taking up a small perspective which lay upon the chimney-piece, and fixing it to her eye, exclaimed, "It is the most beautiful vis-a-vis I ever beheld; four fine horses; and one, two, three servants in rich liveries." 'Whose can it be?' cried Eleanor. "I warrant," exclaimed Mrs. Ashford, "it is your Lord: too impatient to stay till to-morrow." 'Bless me!' exclaimed Lady Ashford, 'we are sadly unprovided in the larder: I must give orders immediately.' So saying, she hurried out of the room.

"Yes, yes," cried Miss West, still looking through the telescope, "I now see the coronet." 'Oh, let me see,' exclaimed Eleanor; 'let me see it!' "Aye, aye," said Mrs. Ashford, with a look of inexpressible triumph, "it will be no rarity to you by this day month." The carriage now approached. Sir Marmaduke and Mr. Ashton went out to meet their guest, while the ladies ran to a large looking-glass, and adjusted their hair and handkerchiefs. As for our heroine, she retired to a further corner of the room, conceiving herself perfectly uninterested in the affair; and, on account of the insinuations which Miss West had thrown out, wishing to appear what she truly was, wholly indifferent about it.

In a few minutes the gentlemen returned, introducing Lord Danby. As they entered, Sir Marmaduke was concluding a speech about the honour his family was receiving; and his Lordship at the same time muttered something concerning happiness, attachment, and many other fine things, which he seemed to feel better than arrange or express. He was first presented to Lady Ashford, who was just slipped into the room. She appeared half-frightened while he paid her his respects: next, to Mrs. Ashford; who, willing to display her superior address, and make amends for the deficiency of her sister, overwhelmed him with compliments. He was then let up to Eleanor; while the sparkling eyes of her aunt followed him, in hopes of beholding raptures the most lively and transporting; but what was her surprize to see him only bow respectfully, and, quitting her in a moment, hurry to the other side of the room, where our heroine stood.

Approaching Caroline with the most impassioned look, he took one of her hands, and, before she could disengage it, kissed it, with every appearance of delight. "Have I then at last the happiness to hope for your smiles?" said he. "Am I allowed, before our mutual friends and the whole world, to declare the passion which took possession of my heart the very first moment I beheld you?"—He was proceeding, when Caroline, withdrawing her hand, exclaimed, 'What do you mean, Sir? It is my cousin to whom these compliments should be addressed; I am not the daughter of Sir Marmaduke Ashford.' The countenance of Lord Danby expressed astonishment; but his feelings were faint in comparison of those endured by the group on the opposite side of the room. Rage, which decency could hardly suppress, blazed in the little gray eyes of Mrs. Ashford. Amazement seemed to have stopped the breath of her niece and sister. Sir Marmaduke had drawn himself up with a frown of haughty reserve and observation; Mr. Ashford appeared in a state of uneasy suspense; and Miss West sunk behind, turning away her face to conceal a violent inclination to laugh, with which she was seized.

"Not the daughter of Sir Marmaduke Ashford, Madam!" exclaimed Lord Danby. "By what means have I been deceived? Sure you only wish to amuse yourself at my expence!" Then turning to the company, "What am I to believe?" said he. "Is it possible that I can have been led into so strange an error?" 'Yes, you have been deceived indeed,' cried Mrs. Ashford, almost choaked with rage: 'you have mistaken a poor dependent for

one of the most accomplished young women and largest fortunes in England. See here, Sir,' continued she, 'this is Miss Ashford; as much superior to the doll you have been complimenting, as her fortune and expectations are greater.' "In what degree of relationship then does this lady stand to you?" said his Lordship, addressing Sir Marmaduke. 'She is my niece, Sir,' answered the Baronet, 'the daughter of a disinherited brother.' "I am sure," continued Mrs. Ashford, "if you will consult your own eyes and understanding, there is no comparison between them, no more than there is between a bare maintenance and an hundred thousand pounds. Your Lordship will take a little time to consider upon it; and if you should, as I have no doubt but you will, repent of your mistake, I will undertake to intercede with my niece in your behalf."

'I am greatly obliged to you, Madam,' said Lord Danby; 'but I have only mistaken the rank, not the person of the woman I admire. My affections are irremovably fixed; nor can difference of situation ever alter them. I came here, Sir,' continued he to Sir Marmaduke, 'to demand, as I believed, your daughter: I am sorry for the mistake that hath happened; which I hope you and your family will do me the justice to believe was far from being a wilful one. I am still ambitious of becoming a relation to so ancient and respectable a house; and if this lady,' turning to Caroline, 'will permit me to hope for her favour, I am sure Mrs. Murray will continue firm to her agreement: the forty thousand pounds she means to give, shall be considered as her fortune; and settlements be made accordingly.' "I am sure," exclaimed Mrs. Ashford, "my brother will never consent to any such thing! What! join in the insult which hath been offered to his daughter, and rob his own children to enrich a worthless girl, who has already stripped them of so much? Sure, Sir, you think us fools! people who know nothing of the world! If Mr. Ashford had a spirit worthy the ancestors from whom he descended, he would before this time have interposed, and let you see that the lady you have dared to affront in this outrageous manner, wants not friends to defend her honour and that of her family, who are all injured in her." 'I fancy,' replied Mr. Ashford, 'my sister would not wish to be forced upon Lord Danby. As for insult, I cannot think any hath been intended or offered; and for my cousin's acceptance of his last offer, it must surely rest entirely with herself; nor do I see any thing my father, or any of us, have to do in her decision.' "Mean-spirited wretch!" cried his aunt, half-frantic with passion; "and so you will tamely suffer your sister to be rejected with scorn and contempt, while a little pityful puss, who is maintained by the charity of the family, triumphs in her disappointment, and puts on the Countess under her very nose!"

'If that is all which disturbs you, Madam,' said our heroine, advancing with modest gracefulness, 'I will instantly make you easy. For the compliment your Lordship hath paid me I cannot do less than return my thanks,' continued she, addressing Lord Danby. 'I am sorry the unaccountable error you have fallen into has led you so much further than prudence would otherwise have suffered you to proceed; and am sure that, in a few hours, you will thank me for declaring, that were you a prince, and would enrich me with half your dominions, I would reject the offer, as I now beg leave to do that with which you have honoured me.' So saying, she courtesied respectfully, and quitted the room.

She had not been in her apartment more than twenty minutes, before she saw Lord Danby's vis-a-vis draw up, and his Lordship get in. He was attended to the door by Mr. Ashford, with whom he appeared to part in much civility.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Surprise.

IT hath often been said, "That perfect rectitude is a stranger to fear."—In the present instance, however, theory is contradicted by experience. Our heroine was as much afraid of encountering Mrs. Ashford and the rest of the family at dinner, as if she had actually committed some considerable crime, or done them a wilful and material injury. It was with difficulty she prevailed upon herself to go down; and when she arrived at the door, her feet made an involuntary stand. Mrs. Ashford's voice was loud. "I tell you, sister," said she, "there will be no peace in the house while she stays in it. To how many more insults will you expose your family, by your foolish partiality?" "It is surely very hard," said Lady Ashford, 'to punish her, because she is handsome! and I can really find no other fault you have to accuse her of.' "True," answered Mr. Ashford: "it would indeed be cruel!" "Oh, you are always ready to take her part," cried Mrs. Ashford: 'you are ready to defend every thing but your own honour! Had I been a man, Lord Danby should not have left the house before he had given me satisfaction, or made my sister amends for the affront he offered her.'

As she spoke these words a servant appeared in view, and Caroline was obliged to open the door; which she did with a trembling hand. The moment she entered, Mr. Ashford met her, and, with a more than usually cheerful countenance, led her to a chair; and when, in a few minutes, they were informed that dinner was ready, he conducted her to the dining-parlour in the same manner; and, seating himself by her side, endeavoured to prevent her observing the scornful and angry looks of his sister and aunt. They were, however, too visible to escape her notice.

Mrs. Ashford was every moment throwing out something which she thought would vex Caroline. Something about prudes and jilts, and paltry dependents coming into families to rob and disturb them. This treatment was so very disagreeable, that she suddenly resolved to make an excursion for a week or fortnight; by which time, she hoped, things would be at least in their old state again; or if, upon her return, she still found her aunt and cousin in the same bad humour, to quit her uncle's house entirely, and seek among strangers that peace and affection she found it vain to expect from her own relations.

In the course of the evening Caroline communicated her intention to Lady Ashford, who greatly approved it; saying, she was very sorry for the unreasonable behaviour of her daughter and Mrs. Ashford; but added, "You know, my dear, I have no power over them: the utmost I can do is to live with tolerable peace among them. If it was not for the amusement and consolation that books afford, I should find my life not the most comfortable."

Caroline was but too sensible of the truth of what she said. At her earnest request she promised to stay only one fortnight; and that evening dispatched her servant to the neighbouring town, to order a post-chaise to be at Ashford Park by six the next morning. She then gave Kitty directions to put up a good quantity of habit-linen, as she meant to take no other dress, it being her intention to pass the time she wished to be absent from her uncle, with Mrs. Forester and her favourite little Mary; for whom she took several

presents, such as afford children of her age inexpressible delight; a large dressed doll being one of the number.

After as pleasant a journey as the want of a suitable companion would permit it to be, she arrived at the house of Mr. Williams; where she was received with inexpressible joy by every inhabitant. She had the satisfaction of finding Mrs. Forester and her beautiful little daughter perfectly well, and quite pleased and comfortable in their new habitation. Her friend Dr. Seward was soon apprized of her arrival. The sight of him again revived the tender sorrow which the loss of her beloved friend had so lately occasioned. He presented her with a miniature of his sister; which was received by our heroine as the most valuable present he could possibly have made her.

Having continued the time she at first intended in this retreat of neatness, peace, and comfort, her promise to Lady Ashford obliged her to return; and quitting it with the utmost reluctance, after an absence of fifteen days, she again beheld Ashford Park.

Upon alighting at the door, she inquired whether her aunt was at home? The servant, who perfectly understood that she meant Lady Ashford (it never being her practice to use that appellation when speaking of her to whom it properly belonged) answered, that her Ladyship was in her dressing-room. She therefore sent her maid to inform her of her arrival, and to say that, if she was at leisure to see her, she should be glad to inquire after her health.

Caroline received for answer, that Lady Ashford would be happy to see her: upon which she went directly to her apartment. Nothing could be more kind than her reception: and after the first compliments usual upon meeting were over, Lady Ashford told her she would be received quite graciously by her aunt and cousin. "We are all in high good-humour," continued she: "we have got a new lover, who is worth ten thousand of Lord Danby: handsomer, more gallant, sensible, and accomplished. In short, Eleanor says she shall never be thankful enough for her escape from the last proposal; and that, were a Duke to offer himself, she would prefer Sir William Beamont."

'I rejoice to hear it,' cried Caroline: 'I hope indeed she will be a great gainer by the exchange, and have a much better prospect of happiness with this gentleman than she could have had with Lord Danby.' "I hope so too," answered Lady Ashford. "His character is uncommonly good; and, if one may believe appearances, he is possessed of every possible good quality."

While she was yet speaking, Mrs. Ashford and Eleanor entered. They said, hearing that Caroline was returned, they came to inquire how she did. They were uncommonly civil; but excused themselves from staying long; saying, Sir William expected them in the drawing-room: that they had just had a delightful walk, and must soon dress for dinner. Soon after they left Lady Ashford's room, our heroine followed their example, and retired to her own, in order to make similar preparations. As she wished to live, if possible, upon tolerable terms with them, she resolved not to appear stiff and distant now they seemed inclined to some degree of sociability.

The prospect of Eleanor's marriage was very agreeable to Caroline. She concluded that her aunt would remove along with her: and made no doubt of living in the most comfortable and easy manner with Lady Ashford when they were gone; and as she hoped that would be very soon, determined to exert every possible effort to continue in a state of amity with them till their departure: An event of which she made herself quite certain. No sooner, therefore, was she dressed, than, without waiting for a summons to

dinner, as was her usual custom, she walked down to the drawing-room, which finding quite empty, she sat down upon a sofa, and took up a book to amuse herself; but her mind being more inclined than usual to wander upon forbidden subjects, she threw it aside, and opening a door, which communicated with a smaller drawing-room, in which an organ was fixed, sat down and played several lessons in her usual masterly style. By degrees her mind was perfectly composed and harmonized. She sung; and the softness which, in spite of all her efforts, hung about her heart, added to her natural taste and expression, gave a pathos to her charming voice, which entered the very soul. She had just finished an elegant and affecting air, when she heard the words, charming! admirable! spoken behind her, in a voice of extreme rapture. She startled; and suddenly turning round, beheld Mr. Rivers. The moment he saw her face, his surprize appeared equal to her own; but it was quickly changed into fright and concern, when he saw her pale and almost insensible. He flew to her assistance, and, catching her in his arms, placed her upon a sofa, still holding her, with a gentle pressure, close to his bosom. She was but half-revived, but half-disengaged from his embrace, when the appearance of Lady Ashford, her aunt, and Eleanor, threw her almost into as bad a condition as that out of which she was recovering.

“Bless me! What have we here?” exclaimed Mrs. Ashford. “What is the matter, Sir George? Sure this girl has not been practising her old arts upon you?” “The affair, my dear Madam, is a mere accident,” answered Sir George. “This lady was playing upon the organ; drawn by the fineness of her voice and execution, I approached too unguardedly, and her fright occasioned the effects to which you have been a witness.” “She’s wonderfully delicate, no doubt,” rejoined Miss Ashford; “these kind of airs are really very ridiculous.” Caroline was, by this time, pretty well recovered, and apologized to Lady Ashford for the alarm she had occasioned. Her heart, however, still fluttered with astonishment; and she longed to know by what magic Mr. Rivers was become Sir William Beaumont. To this change she should have had no particular objection, had not Sir George Beaumont been the professed lover of Miss Ashford: a circumstance, upon which she could not reflect without anguish. During dinner, and the remainder of the day, he took little notice of her; the greatest part of his conversation was directed to Sir Marmaduke and Lady Ashford. It was impossible to imagine him the lover of Eleanor; Miss West seemed rather the object of his attention; but he was more complaisant to Mrs. Ashford than to either of them. If his eyes met those of our heroine, he instantly withdrew them; and, when she spoke, his attention generally seemed to be taken up some other way; and he affected to speak of something foreign to whatever she had mentioned.

How different was this from what she had experienced when she saw him last? when every word was compliment! every look admiration! Could the circumstance of Captain West’s rudeness occasion such a change? She could assign no other. But why should she trouble herself about the cause or its effects? What was he? What could he ever be to her? Ought she not to thank him for a behaviour which must so much assist her efforts to conquer an ill-placed passion? Yes, she would conquer it! Had she not reason to resent his conduct, in introducing himself to her under the disguise of a feigned name? Had his designs been such as honour would warrant, concealment of any kind had been unnecessary. No, it was plain, in spite of his pleasing manners and apparent goodness, that his attachment to her had been as dishonourable as his present one was mercenary,

and that he feared to acknowledge his past acquaintance with her, lest it should injure him in the opinion of her uncle and his family.

After much reflection, and often changing her resolves, she determined to see him as little as possible; never to mention her having met with him before; and, let her foolish obstinate heart feel what it would, suffer things to take their natural course, and patiently behold him the husband of Eleanor.

In pursuance of this resolution, Caroline seldom appeared but at meals, and then retired again the very first opportunity; in which she was never opposed by any of the family. She often spent an hour or two in Lady Ashford's dressing-room; who acknowledged to her that she wished the marriage of her daughter well over; but she feared it was at a greater distance than they had some time back believed. She said, when Sir George first arrived, he appeared willing to conclude the affair; but, after a few days, as if the knowledge of Eleanor had cooled his ardor, he became more indifferent; and lately avoided to speak at all upon the subject, either to her or to Sir Marmaduke; and she should not wonder if it yet came to nothing.

Returning one morning from a visit of this kind, she found the door of her dressing-room open; and happening to turn her eyes to that side on which the pictures hung, she missed that of her mother. Kitty was summoned; and the room, as well as her bed-chamber, carefully searched; but in vain: the picture was nowhere to be found. Kitty was ordered to inquire among the servants, and to offer each, separately, five guineas, if they could find out where it was, and restore it to her again.

A week had passed since this accident, and she had lost all hope of ever recovering her beloved picture, when, happening to walk in the shrubbery rather late in the evening, a favourite pleasure with her, she saw Sir William Beaumont reclining upon a seat, at a small distance from the place where she stood. The moon shone full upon him; and she distinctly saw it in his hand. He gazed stedfastly upon it, then kissed and pressed it to his heart. After he had repeated this several times, he carefully put it up, and walked to the house in a musing posture, his arms folded across his bosom.

Our heroine was irresistibly impelled to seat herself for a moment upon the bench he had quitted. A thousand tender thoughts crowded into her mind: but starting up, as from a dream, and reproaching herself for this momentary weakness, she endeavoured to amuse her imagination with other ideas. She began to think how she should recover her picture; and resolved, if possible, to get it out of his hands, both on account of the value she set upon it, and the great impropriety she conceived there was in its remaining in his possession.

At supper she watched his looks with more attention than she had lately allowed herself to do; but none of them were directed to her. In vain she strove to read the characters of guilt, meanness, or art, in his countenance: all there was openness, sense, and honour. Puzzled by facts and appearances so contradictory, she retired to rest,—or rather rest's worst foe, Reflection.

The following evening was serene and pleasant, beyond what is common to a northern climate; but Caroline resolved to trust herself with no more walks by moonlight. How are the wisest deceived! if indeed any man who loves can pretend to wisdom. To avoid giving nourishment to the dangerous passion whose influence she dreaded, she flew to its very food.

The little drawing-room in which the organ stood, had a large window fronting the rising moon, which now being in the full, shone with unclouded majesty. Hither our heroine came; and, carefully shutting the outward door, as well as that of communication between the two rooms, she drew down the window, that not a sound might issue forth: and to avoid even the possibility of intrusion, turned the key which stood on the inside of the door. Fully satisfied of her safety, she sat down, little dreaming that the care she had taken to exclude danger had only put her more absolutely in the power of an inclosed enemy.

She had not ventured to touch the organ since the fright she suffered from Sir William. The little air she then played presented itself to her fingers; she rejected it, and played another. Again it recurred; and so often, that at last she could not withstand its solicitation; yet, when her fingers had run over a few bars, they could move no longer: her voice faltered, and she burst into tears.

Long might Caroline have remained in this state of tender sorrow, had not a rustling, which she heard in the room, roused her attention. Looking round, with an eye of apprehension, what was her amazement when she beheld Sir William Beaumont at her feet!—"Be not alarmed, most lovely of women," said he, respectfully, taking one of her hands; "this is no intended intrusion. I saw you enter, beheld the caution with which you secured yourself, and have enjoyed a state of luxury which an eastern monarch might envy. It was my intention to have suffered you to depart, without knowing that I was present; but those tears, who could see them unmoved! Why, loveliest of women, why are you unhappy? Can my life, my fortune——" 'Hold, Sir,' exclaimed Caroline; 'neither of them can be useful to me. You have ungenerously intruded upon my privacy, and witnessed emotions I would die to conceal. But add not insult to rudeness, nor further disturb a mind already too much agitated.'

At these words she disengaged her hand from his grasp, and was about to open the door, when, gently opposing her intention, "Stay!" exclaimed he; "stay a moment, I beseech you! I know not what I would say! Sure, nothing but innocence and purity can inhabit such a form!" 'Let me go, Sir,' said she. 'What would my cousin think, if she beheld you now?' "Your cousin," replied Sir William, "is nothing to me: I am not such a villain as to think of marrying one woman, with an unconquered preference for another in my heart. When I first came here, I believed that I had power to subdue it; but I now find my mistake; and, from this moment, quit her for ever. It is my comfort that no declaration has ever passed my lips; for I never could prevail upon myself to make any, and that the natural insensibility of Miss Ashford secures her from feeling any pains, except those of vanity. Thus, if Fate has put an irremovable bar between me and happiness, I may at least escape misery."

Scarce had he uttered these words, when their ears were suddenly assailed by a violent knocking at the door; at the same time Mrs. Ashford's voice, at its highest pitch, exclaimed, "open the door this moment! open it I say! insolent creature, come out!" She went on, but the attention of Sir William was wholly taken up with his fair companion, who, all pale and trembling, exclaimed, "What will become of me! Oh, Sir William, what a situation have you brought me into!" 'I will protect you, my life,' cried he, 'from every insult.' "Unlock the door," answered she, recovering from her fright, "and at least do me the justice to inform my uncle of the truth." The door was then opened, and in rushed the whole family. "Are you not ashamed to look us in the face?" cried Mrs. Ashford; "what is

the meaning of such behaviour? what, must you lock yourselves up to abuse the family, under whose roof you are sheltered? As for that girl, after what has passed, I wonder at nothing she does; but for you, Sir William! a man of honour, a gentleman, and one received into the family as you have been!" 'In justice to this innocent sufferer by my folly,' answered Sir William, 'I must explain the cause of your present disturbance.' He then related the whole circumstance, just as it had occurred. The moment he had done speaking, "Very well, very fine," cried Mrs. Ashford. "Now pray how do you explain your words? what do you say to the disrespectful things I heard you utter about my niece?" 'I will, Madam,' answered Sir William, 'in a few words explain my whole conduct. A few weeks since, fortune (I then thought it good fortune) introduced me to this lovely woman. I had several times the dangerous pleasure of being in her company, though from whim, and a desire of being attended to for my own sake, without the sound of a title, I appeared before her under a false name and character. What my intentions then were, or why I have altered them, must remain for ever a secret in this bosom. Whatever impression she had made upon my heart I believed it was wholly effaced, and that nothing was wanting to restore my tranquility but another attachment, more fortunate. In compliance with the request of a dying father, and the invitation of Sir Marmaduke, I came to Ashford Park; but I came not as a slave, who was forced to take what others had chosen, but as a free man, unbound in honour or inclination, and at liberty to make my own election. That liberty, that honour, are still my own; I have entered into no engagements; I am fettered by no promise: my visit has been merely one of friendship: and I take my leave, in the full persuasion that I have done nothing to forfeit my pretensions to a continuance of that honour.'

He then turned to Caroline, who stood pale and motionless. 'To you, loveliest of women,' said he, 'before I take leave of you, perhaps for ever, let me declare, that whatever may be my future disposal in life, you, and you only, can possess my heart; and that honour never obtained a harder victory than it now can boast, in tearing me from you!'—The last words were almost inarticulate: and he quitted the room, casting upon our heroine a look, at once expressive of love, pity, and regret.

The whole group stood, for a moment, lost in passion and amazement. Mrs. Ashford first recovered the use of that never-failing instrument of disturbance, her tongue. "Very well!" said she; "this is complete! this crowns all! I hope, sister, you will still defend your favourite; still keep her in your house, that your daughter may receive a few more insults! But mark this: Either she or I leave this house to-morrow morning; I will not sleep a second night under the same roof with such a dangerous incendiary."

"You are right sister," replied Sir Marmaduke: "I have been a fool too long, to harbour a serpent that has so often stung me!" Then turning to Caroline, "Young woman," said he, "I have done with you. I see you know how to make friends for yourself. You must choose another guardian. From this hour you are a stranger to me; nor after to-night do I ever permit you to sleep again under my roof." So saying, he walked out of the room, with a severe and stately air. Even Lady Ashford followed him out in silence, not having a single word to utter in defence of her poor *protegee*.

Only Mr. Ashford ventured to hazard his father's displeasure, by staying behind. Approaching our heroine with a look of pity and affection, "Do not think," said he, "that you are yet without one friend in this inhospitable house. Tell me, my dear cousin, where will you go? Oh, that these arms might afford you shelter! but be assured, wherever you

go, there is one man in the world, whose heart, hand, fortune, and life, are at your command." 'Generous Mr. Ashford,' exclaimed Caroline, 'how shall I thank you! how be ever able to return the obligations I owe you! but be not uneasy on my account; I am resolved to chuse my mother's brother for my guardian, and in his house, which is a respectable one, I shall probably for some time remain.'

Having afforded Mr. Ashford this satisfaction, she hurried to her own apartment, where she directed Kitty immediately to put up her clothes for a journey; telling her she should make a long stay, and want every thing she had. She then ordered John to bespeak a post-chaise, to be at the door by five the next morning; hoping, by setting off at that early hour, to avoid the pain of again seeing Mr. Ashford. She next sent her maid to Lady Ashford's dressing-room, to request that she would permit her to take leave of her before she quitted the house; but received for answer, that her Ladyship was extremely sorry she could not have the pleasure of seeing her, as she had been obliged to promise Sir Marmaduke and Mrs. Ashford to the contrary; that she wished her a good journey, and should always be happy to hear of her prosperity.

All things being in readiness for the next morning, Caroline went to bed, where, as might be well expected, she passed a sleepless night. The day scarce began to dawn ere she was up, and had waited some time before the chaise drove to the door: she stepped in, and, without a sigh, took leave of a house, where she had experienced little but trouble and vexation.

END OF VOLUME SECOND.

CAROLINE;

OR, THE

DIVERSITIES

OF

FORTUNE:

A

NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOLUME THIRD.

LONDON:

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MDCCLXXXVII.

CAROLINE,

OR THE

DIVERSITIES of FORTUNE.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The City Beau.

VARIOUS were the reflections, which, by turns, possessed the mind of our heroine, during her journey. The certainty of being tenderly beloved by the only man in the world to whom her heart could ever give a preference, could not but be attended with pleasure, yet the apprehension of never beholding him more, and the strange mystery in which a part of his sentiments and conduct towards her were involved, clouded the sun-shine of her future hopes. Again and again did she revolve his words in her thought. If he loved her, what was that irremovable bar to his happiness, which obliged him to relinquish her? What was that cruel honour which tore him from her? By what would it be sullied in a union with her? Was not her family as ancient, as respectable as his own! Her fortune, perhaps, was not sufficiently large. She had heard that his father had considerably impaired his estate at the gaming table, but why, if that was the case, did he talk of honour? Prudence would have been a proper name. Thus musing she drew near the city, which had lately been the theatre of scenes so interesting; a something painful, yet not unpleasing, played about her heart, when she reflected that it probably at that moment contained the person upon whom her future happiness depended. Precarious dependence! Yet in spite of her struggles she felt that it was absolute. Her eyes watched every passenger, and examined every countenance in hopes of discovering the only one upon which they could dwell with delight; and when the carriage passed where she first beheld him, she seemed to expect a second disaster, and almost to wish it, in expectation of another deliverance; but not another deliverer, such an obligation from any other would, in her present disposition of mind, have been worse than suffering from the want of it.

Full of these ideas she alighted, at her uncle's, in Ely-place. She found the house entirely lighted up and full of company. Mrs. Sanders, being told who was below, immediately hastened down to receive her, which she did in the kindest manner, insisting upon her walking up into the drawing room, where she said there were none but friends; that her habit was very handsome, and no-body could expect any thing else after a journey. Our heroine, unwilling to detain her from her company, complied, and was introduced to about a dozen people, all dressed in the very extreme of the fashion, among whom she instantly recollected Mrs. Alderman Perks and her daughter. Charlotte, who was sitting at a card table, jumped up the moment she beheld her cousin, and flying to her with the greatest joy, exclaimed "Oh dear me, Miss Ashford, is it you? I am glad to see you! When did you come to town?" Before she had time to answer, Mrs. and Miss Perks advanced, and with great civility assured her how glad they were to see her in London.

She was next presented to a grave consequential looking woman, very showy and vulgar in her appearance—"This, my dear (said Mrs. Sanders) is my Lady Mason, with whom I hope you will soon have the honour to be better acquainted, and this is Miss Mason." Caroline courtesied respectfully to both, and her salutation was returned in the same silent manner. She was then introduced to Lady Glymp and her three daughters, who made up the whole of the female part of the company. The men consisted of Mr. Sanders, Sir John Mason, Sir Timothy Glymp, Mr. Clare, an admirer of one of the Miss Glymps, and two other young men, who seemed to be better pleased with, and to fancy themselves fitter for the drawing room than the counting-house.

Caroline was no sooner seated than one of the young men, who were cut out at the Whist-table, sauntered up to her with a conceited pertness, and enquired if she had come a long journey, to which she answered "Only seventy miles." "And pray how long do you think you might be in driving it?" said he. Caroline replied, that she had been upon the road all day. "You must have come very slow then (said he) why it was but the other day that I and another young fellow, a buck of my acquaintance, took chaise to Margate, which is about the distance you mention; we set out from Gracechurch-street, at seven—No, it was not seven, about six o'clock in the morning. Well, we stopped to breakfast at Shooter's-hill, we had something again at South-Shields, we dined at Rochester, refreshed ourselves again at Canterbury, and got to Margate by six in the afternoon." "You were better travellers than I pretend to be." Replied our heroine. "Oh I hates to drive slow (answered he). I have got one of the best trotters in town, and when I rides it is very seldom at less than fourteen or fifteen miles an hour. But the ladies are so fearful! Pray, Mam, have you been at the New Riding School? I think it beats either Hughes or Astley." Caroline answered, that she had never seen either of them. He was upon the point of adding something to this entertaining conversation, when Miss Mason, rising from the card-table, called out "Come, Mr. Young, you are wanted." "I am ready and willing, Mam." Replied he; and bowing affectedly, to our heroine, danced up to the table. "Yes, yes (cried Sir Timothy) Mr. Young is always ready to obey the ladies. Come, Miss Sanders, you are the gentleman's partner." "A good hint (rejoined Sir John) what say you, Mrs. Sanders, have you any objection to a partnership taking place between Mr. Young and Miss?" This piece of wit occasioned an universal laugh, and produced a great deal more of the same kind at the expence of Mr. Clare and Miss Molly Glymp. Between whom, Sir John affirmed, copartnership deeds were already drawn, if not signed and executed.

During all this merriment our heroine sat an unconcerned listener. Miss Mason and the youngest Miss Glymp, being cut out, had seated themselves on the opposite side of the room, and were conversing with much seriousness, not appearing at all to attend to the diversion which was going forward, when Mrs. Perks, coming up to Caroline, told her she was sorry to see young ladies so unsociable, and, taking her by the hand, led her across the room to that side on which Miss Mason and her friend sat in deep and earnest discourse, and telling them she had brought them another companion, seated her by their side and walked back to her own place. The young ladies gave Caroline a kind of half look, and as if restrained by her presence, entirely ceased their conversation. She strove to renew it by introducing several new subjects but in vain, a cold yes, Mame, or no, Mame, was all she could obtain, and she had just relinquished further attempts when Mr. Sanders coming up, took hold of her hand which he shook with great affectation. "Well,

my dear (said he) and how did you leave Sir Marmaduke and my Lady? Is your old good-for-nothing uncle, Lord Walton, dead yet? Why don't you kill half a score of them and get into possession?" "Are you related to my Lord Walton?" said Miss Mason, turning to Caroline with a look of complacency. "Yes (answered Mr. Sanders) if she was any the better for it, she is his great niece." He was that moment called for by Lady Glymp, but he had staid long enough to procure our heroine all the civility and attention from the ladies, by whom she was seated, that she could possibly desire.

Miss Mason said she should be happy to see her and Miss Sanders at Black-heath, where they generally resided in the summer; "we seldom come to be quite in town till near Christmas, continued she, and I would, by my own choice, never approach it from the birth-day till November; it is really frightful to drive along the streets at this time of year, but Lady Mason will visit her friends, and makes such a fuss to have me with her, that rather than be teased I sometimes prevail upon myself to come." Caroline answered that the country was certainly preferable during the heats of summer. "What do you think of Tunbridge?" cried Miss Glymp. "Why Tunbridge is tolerable (answered Miss Mason) but there is too great a mixture of company, but that indeed is the fault of all watering places. One can never be select. If it was not for that I should be fond of Bath; but it quite spoils one's pleasure to be seated by one does not know who. There is nothing like genteel private parties; when you are in the house of a person of real fashion you are secure from such mortifications and feel quite at your ease."

The driving up of Lady Mason's carriage, and her rising to be gone, put an end to Miss Mason's speech, and she took her leave after having renewed her invitation to Black-heath, where Mrs. Sanders promised that her niece and daughter should very shortly attend her.

As soon as they quitted the room, the whole company ran to the windows in order to look at their coach. "Is that their new coach?" cried Mrs. Sanders. "No, no (answered Lady Glymp) that is the coach they had new when Sir John was Lord Mayor." "That was before he was Sir John" said Mrs. Sanders. "Yes, yes (replied Mrs. Perks) he was then only plain Alderman Mason, and I remember before he was that. It is no disgrace to rise from a small beginning, but when people hold their heads so very high, it makes one think of it whether we will or no." "They may well hold their heads high (said Mr. Sanders) Sir John does not rise any day of the week worth less than a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. He has been a lucky man." "I suppose (said Mr. Young) Miss Mason is the first fortune in the city, she's really a very fine girl." "Dear me (exclaimed Miss Glymp) do you think so! in my opinion she was much handsomer two years ago." "And she was not so conceited then (cried Miss Perks) I used to like her well enough, but now I can't abide to be in the room with her." "Oh she thinks of nothing but Lords and Dukes; she's affronted if a merchant does but look at her to be sure (said Miss Molly Glymp) I can tell her, let her give herself what airs she pleases, her betters marry merchants every day." "Well, well (cried Mr. Sanders) it is hard if a hundred and fifty thousand pounds won't purchase a Lord now they are so plenty; all the city ladies may hope for titles if they can but supply money." Here they were interrupted by a servant, who informed Sir Timothy and Mr. Perks that their coaches were in waiting, and after a few usual compliments and invitations, those agreeable families took their leave.

As soon as they were alone Mrs. Sanders again welcomed her niece, saying, she hoped this visit would be a long one. Upon which Caroline told her and her uncle, that a

misunderstanding having happened between her and Sir Marmaduke, she was come to town with an intention of chusing another guardian, and if he had no objection to the trouble, for the short time it would be necessary, he would greatly oblige her by allowing her to name him. To this he readily assented, assuring her that he should think nothing a trouble which could render him useful to the daughter of his poor dear Caroline. She then turned to Mrs. Sanders, saying, that the other part of her request ought to be made to her, and having informed her upon what terms she had lived in the house of Sir Marmaduke Ashton, begged to know if she could be conveniently accommodated in theirs upon the same. No objection was made to this proposal by Mr. or Mrs. Sanders, and Charlotte was almost wild with joy when she understood that her cousin was actually come to live with them, saying she should not mind going to the country-house, at Highgate, now she had a companion, but it used to be so dull she could not bear the name of it.

The apartment assigned to our heroine being only one room, and that a small one, was at first a great inconvenience to her who had always been accustomed to two; however, as she thought her uncle's house a more proper situation for her than being alone in a lodging, which was her only alternative, she submitted to necessity. Her cousin had a good harpsichord which rendered it useless to unpack her's, and as she had no place in which to dispose her books they were likewise left in the state wherein they arrived from Ashford-Park, and Lane's circulating library supplied the want of them. The form of chusing a guardian was soon performed, and Sir Marmaduke, that he might entirely quit himself of what he esteemed so troublesome a charge, paid up the eleven thousand pounds belonging to her that he had in his hands; which was, for the present, placed in those of her uncle, till such time as proper land-security could be had for it, he being a strong anti-ministerialist, and no friend to the public funds.

Thus was our heroine once more fixed in a new habitation; it was not indeed exactly what she wished, but it was the best that at present offered itself, and she resolved to bear with its inconveniencies, at least till she could fix upon some other more eligible. The most displeasing circumstance she experienced, was the impossibility of being alone, or commanding an hour of leasure at her own disposal. She was constantly expected to visit with her aunt, and to receive all her company. Nothing could excuse her from making one at the card-table, which was placed as regularly as the return of the evening. If she offered to absent herself Mrs. Sanders thought she was not well, and teased her with slops and enquiries; or she believed that the company to whom she introduced her was not agreeable, and felt herself affronted in the persons of her acquaintance. This might have been supported, had her mornings been unmolested, but Charlotte was never out of her sight, she had good-nature and a disposition naturally affectionate; Caroline took great pains to improve her mind, and correct that forward petulance of manner which proceeded rather from want of information than any fault of temper. She was a great admirer of her cousin's accomplishments, and grateful for the trouble she gave herself about her, but she had no moderation in her demands, and would follow her about like a shadow. Caroline felt the inconvenience but had too much good nature to remove it; the pleasure of being useful to her cousin was the consideration which enabled her to endure it, for she every day saw her improve, both in mind and person, the sensibility of the one giving delicacy and character and increasing information to the other.

Caroline had hoped, when they were at their country-house, as their little villa, at Highgate, was styled, that their time would be less devoted to the disgusting round of

second-hand dissipation in which they lived in town; but she found not the smallest alteration; the neighbourhood was small, but they met the oftener, and the card-table was never unfurnished; so that the only difference between this and London was, that there she saw variety of disagreeable people, and here met the same again and again through the week.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

A Misfortune.

A few weeks passed in the manner above described. The approach of winter began to be perceivable in all the vegetable world, and Mrs. Sanders (who only lived in the country a part of the summer, because every body who was worth thirty thousand pounds did the same) began to talk with pleasure of returning to her beloved London, to concert plans of amusement, for the ensuing season, when a circumstance happened, which at once put an end to all her prospects of happiness, and plunged her into the depth of sorrow, disappointment, and despair. This was nothing less than the sudden bankruptcy of her husband. We have before hinted that besides Mr. Sanders's business of a Soap-boiler, he was a dabbler in the Alley. A man who has once acquired a propensity to gaming, of any description can seldom answer for the lengths he may be tempted to go by an apparently favourable opportunity. The eleven thousand pounds which he had received for our heroine furnished the temptation, he began to speculate, and led on by the prospect of sudden and immense advantage, ventured not only that but a sum equal to his own capital. An unexpected turn in public affairs ruined his expectations, he was unable to make good his payments, and obliged to give up the little that was left for the benefit of his creditors.

The family were removed to a barely decent ready furnished lodging, where our heroine, though so great a sufferer by the rashness of her uncle, was obliged to exert all her spirits and resolution, in any degree to support those of Mrs. Sanders and Charlotte, especially the former, who was, beyond measure, depressed. The perfectly honest character of Mr. Sanders, previous to this unfortunate affair, gave them hopes that his certificate would be signed by all to whom he was indebted, especially as his niece, who was his principal creditor, declared herself ready to do any thing for his advantage, and they had no doubt of his being able to procure credit, in order to begin business again; but, alas, how changed would be their situation! from independant affluence, they must number themselves among those who subsist upon the profits of the day. Nor were the real inconvenience they suffered those which occasioned them the greatest pain, the thoughts of what would be said by their old acquaintance, the insolent triumph of some, the coolness of others, and the self-satisfied pitty of all, stung them to the soul, and they were far more pained to be deprived of the appearance than the reality of happiness.

The situation of our heroine was not less distressful than theirs, but her understanding was stronger and her mind supported by motives of resolution and patience to which they were strangers. Upon seriously reviewing her present circumstance and future prospects, she was less alarmed or disturbed than at first she had been; the thousand pounds in the hands of Dr. Seward was still safe, and when the affair of her uncle's bankruptcy was settled she expected to receive at least another; with this she determined to go back to Mrs. Williams's where such a fortune would be affluence. She should give up nothing by this retreat which affected her comfort, on the contrary, peace and leisure were what she most ardently desired. The world had few charms for her, and those expectations of future happiness so naturally and useful to the human mind, were in her's clouded by disappointment, and almost sunk in despair. What at present gave her

the greatest uneasiness was the thoughts of disturbing Mrs. Forester, in the state of ease and comfort wherein she had herself placed her. The sum of which she was now possessed would not maintain them both in it; if she went down to Mrs. Williams's, Mrs. Forester and little Mary must seek shelter again at the cottage, which in the cold and damp of winter, they would find far more inconvenient than when they before resided there. She could not endure to think of it; a few months would probably take them off her hands. She was resolved to enquire whither it was not possible for her to support herself without being a burden upon her distressed relations, for that short time. The benevolence, the nobleness of the resolution, flattered her natural generosity, and she determined to go immediately and consult a couple of young women whose shop she had often visited.

They were the daughters of a clergyman, and having been genteelly educated, and by his death left in an unprovided state, had taken a shop in which they maintained themselves in credit and comfort, by executing works of taste and ingenuity. They embroidered, painted upon silk, made and taught fillagree, cloth, wafer, and foil works, in all of which Caroline excelled, and she had no doubt of obtaining from them as much employment as would enable her to support herself till Mrs. Forester should be provided for.

She was preparing to set out for Golden-square, where Miss Clarks lived, when the servant (for they had now only one) presented a note to her, which she said was brought by a man in a rich livery, who waited for an answer. Upon breaking the seal she found it to contain these words.

Dear Madam,

THE unexpected misfortunes of your uncle give us a great concern, and we are sorry to find that you are so deeply involved in them. If an apartment in my house will be acceptable to you, there is one at your service: I have long been looking out for an unexceptionable companion for my daughter, I believe you to be such, and she has taken a particular liking to you. If you chuse to come a carriage shall be sent for you to-morrow morning, and all things be made agreeable.

I am, Madam,

Your humble servant,

J. MASON.

Caroline remained some moments in doubt what answer to return to this invitation, but the persuasions of her aunt and cousin at last determined her to accept it; she therefore wrote a respectful note in which she thanked Sir John for the favourable opinion he had expressed of her, and the offer of his protection, which she thankfully accepted, and promised to be in readiness to attend Miss Mason at the time he had appointed.

Little preparations were necessary for her removal, poor Charlotte assisted her in that little, and saw her depart with tears of unfeigned sorrow and affection. A little before

five o'clock she alighted at her new residence, on Black-heath, and was desired by the house-keeper (who met her at the door) to walk into Miss Mason's dressing-room where she expected her. When she entered, that young lady was seated upon an embroidered Ottoman, dressed in a chemise of beautiful painted gauze with suitable ornaments of the most delicate and expensive kind; she was playing with a sanguine* of an uncommonly beautiful colour, it had a chain of enameled gold about its neck, to which was fastened a piece of silk-cord, with a tassel of gold at the end, by which she held her favourite to prevent its escape.

The moment our heroine appeared she flew to her in a rapture, exclaiming, "Ah, my dear associate! I rejoice to see you! how happy shall I be in a companion of your sensibility and refinement! how good you are to oblige me with your company!" Caroline thanked her for the kind sentiments which had induced her to make such a request, and which had obtained for her a situation which so many would think themselves happy to gain. "Yes, my dear (answered Miss Mason) I might certainly have choice of companions, low minded girls who have neither birth nor accomplishments to recommend them; creatures with whom ones jewels would be unsafe; but they are not the kind for me. With Miss Ashford I may appear in public with propriety, I shall feel easy while I am conversing with you, and not be ashamed to hear people ask who I have got along with me. How should I blush to hear such a question answered with, it is Miss Sanders, the Soap-boiler, Miss Glymp, the Brewer—Oh! horrible! it is sufficiently mortifying that my father will still keep open his banking-house, though as he has carried it on so long, and is so universally known he may just as well go on with it, especially as the advantages of it every year add some thousand pounds to my fortune, which if he lives a few years longer, and follows business with assiduity, will be two hundred thousand pounds."

Our heroine found some difficulty in answering this voluble communicative young lady; she might, however, have saved herself the trouble of considering, a listener being what Miss Mason was fond of, not a speaker, she was delighted to have a woman of family for her dependant and companion; for though without the smallest pretensions to it herself, family consequence was the thing in which she delighted, and the grand, almost only wish of her heart, was to possess a title; this she conceived to be the height of human felicity, and to purchase it she would willingly have trusted her vast fortune in the hands of the most worthless and disagreeable man living.

In the dining-parlour Caroline was received by the Knight and his Lady with the utmost graciousness. They both expressed great satisfaction at having found an intimate and constant companion for their daughter, so every way suitable to their wishes, and told her that they should from that hour consider her as an established part of their family: Sir John added, that if she behaved with propriety, and contributed to the happiness of his Betsy, she should never want a friend, and he would make her such a present at the end of every quarter as should enable her to appear like a gentlewoman, as he understood she was. "Aye (cried the old Lady) we have only one child for all our riches, and it is hard indeed if we cannot make her happy. I assure you, Miss Ashford, if we find you can make yourself agreeable to her, we shall never think we can pay you high enough; you shall have no occasion to repent coming into our family."

* A small monkey.

Caroline was unused to make servile speeches or act the dependant; she strove to thank Lady Mason, but she could not find words which she believed would satisfy her without offending her own honour and sincerity, she therefore only bowed in silence. She already felt how unfit she was for the situation in which her perverse destiny had placed her, and wished she had continued with her uncle Sanders's family, and supported herself by the work of her hands rather than the labour of her mind. She found it was expected that she should keep Miss Mason constantly cheerful, that she should be ready to work for her, read to her, walk with her, or perform any other little office which could contribute to her ease and convenience. Few women were better qualified for such an undertaking, for she possessed talents for conversation very uncommon, could perform every kind of ornamental female work with particular elegance, and in superior accomplishments she was equalled by few; but the knowledge that exertion was expected from her damped the inclination, and even power of performance, and she was often graver than common because she knew that extraordinary gaiety was looked for. Miss Mason, however, appeared very well satisfied with her. She had constantly a person about her to whom (as she used to say) she was not afraid to speak; one who would listen to all her tales of distress, and if she did not flatter her foibles, by her good sense often relieved her fancied anxieties.

She had for some time passed fancied herself in love with a young Baronet, with whom she danced at the last Easter ball. He had made proposals to her father, but being much in debt, and having a number of younger brothers and sisters, he demanded sixty thousand pound to be paid down, and the old Knight refused to advance more than forty. This his daughter considered as the height of cruelty, and she would often when alone with our heroine lament herself as the most unfortunate girl upon earth. She would willingly have accompanied him to the North, but he had never made her such a proposal, and she could not mention it first. The obstinacy of her father was supported, not only by his knowledge of the value of money, but his desire of marrying his daughter to a great Dutch merchant, worth three hundred thousand pounds: this match he would often press, representing the immense advantages of it in comparison to one with a needy spend-thrift, who had only a feather to present her with in exchange for her bags of solid gold. The mention of this affair would at any time throw her into hysterics; she would upbraid her father with an intention to make her miserable—of killing her; and the contests generally ended in a promise from the old man that he would see what could be done. These promises, however, had been so often repeated that they began to lose their effect, and it is uncertain to what lengths of imprudence her impatience and resentment would have led her, had not the persuasions and arguments of her new friend in some degree abated and regulated her passions.

The task of perpetually combating folly, however useful, is irksome and fatiguing, and the sensible intelligent mind of Caroline felt its full effect. She was often upon the point of relinquishing a situation so unpleasant, but the fear of encountering difficulties of a still more disagreeable nature, and the comfortable reflection that a few months would release her from it, had hitherto enabled her to endure it, when the arrival of Mrs. Meadows, an intimate Bath friend of Miss Mason's, from whom she had long expected a visit, eased her of much fatigue and rendered her situation more tolerable.

Mrs. Meadows was young, handsome, and sprightly: she had been married while a girl to a man of at least double her age, and in no respect qualified to engage her

affection; after a few years of jealousy on his side, and aversion on hers, they parted; he continued to live at his family mansion with his horses and hounds, while she fled about the kingdom, in pursuit of her only idol, Pleasure. Her summers were generally spent at watering-places, where her person and situation (of all others the most disadvantageous to female virtue and honour) drew around her a croud of admirers. She had, however, by flirting with all a-like, and shewing particular favour to none, escaped every thing but general scandal; no one could point out any single instance of her misconduct, though every one was ready to blame her whole behaviour. She was received with transport by Miss Mason, and a few days after her arrival the whole family removed to town, which now, it being the latter end of October, began to fill pretty fast.

The very day after our heroine's arrival, in London, she visited her uncle and his family; she found them still in the state wherein she had left them six weeks before, but in hopes of shortly having their affairs settled in such a manner as to give them a prospect of beginning life again with better success. They appeared quite reconciled to their situation, and no longer to experience those disturbances of thought which they felt when she last parted from them, so naturally and happily does the mind accommodate itself to the different situations and vicissitudes to which human life is subject.

Upon her return Caroline found the two friends in earnest conversation; they were speaking of a gentleman who had just paid a visit to Mrs. Meadows, whom they mentioned in a high strain of commendation. "I think (said Miss Mason) Col. Vincent is one of the handsomest men I ever beheld." "And he is so very pleasing (answered Mrs. Meadows) so perfectly the man of fashion. Then he is the best tempered man in the world, and has all the warmth, generosity, and bravery of a hero." "I know but one man (replied Miss Mason, with a sigh) who is in my opinion more agreeable." "That one is, I must acknowledge, a stranger to me (answered Mrs. Meadows) if I was a single woman, and worth two hundred thousand pounds, I should know how to bestow it." "Good Heavens! (exclaimed Miss Mason) and would you actually bestow it upon a plain Mr.?" "Why not (cried her friend) what amazing happiness, my dear creature, do you expect in the possession of a title? Believe me, before you two I can speak in confidence; I had rather be the beloved wife of Col. Vincent than the first Duchess in the kingdom." "I think (replied Miss Mason) a title is an agreeable decoration, if it was only that it takes one up to the top of the room instead of dangling at the bottom among people one cannot venture to speak to. But exclusive of this my affections are engaged beyond a possibility of recal or exchange." A deep sigh succeeded these words, and she reclined upon the sofa on which they were seated in the most elegant and languishing attitude.

She had scarce pronounced these words when the drawing-room door opened, and Sir John entered with looks of the most consequential pleasure. "Well, Betsy (exclaimed he) I must have no more sighing and whining; no more crying after your Sir Williams and Sir Harrys; I have got a Lord for thee, my girl, a Peer of the realm, none of your paltry Scotch or Irish titles, but of Great-Britain. What say you to being Countess of D. hey!" "Lord, Sir John (cried she, her face crimsoned all over with surprize) how abrupt you are! sure a little preparation might have been judged necessary before such a circumstance was divulged! had you communicated your intelligence to Mrs. Meadows or Miss Ashford, they would have broke it to me by degrees, and not have shocked me in this manner." "Shocked you! (exclaimed Sir John) zounds, what would the girl be at? Shocked, indeed—at the thoughts of being a Countess! Why I know thou wouldst give

thy eyes for such a title. Have I not heard thee say, myself, that thou wouldst marry a Duke though he were a negro? so I fancy a handsome young Viscount won't make you faint." "Dear me, Sir John (cried she) you should not repeat what one says in the moment of levity. You know how much I have encouraged Sir Charles Woodhouse; how can I ever think of any other?" "Nay (replied her father, if that is the case I have done, if you can fancy none but that scape-grace, I must let Lord D. know that you are engaged, and there's an end of the matter." "Lord, Papa, you are so hasty! (cried she) if one wished to obey you and get the better of a weak inclination, you allow one no time." There is no time to be allowed (answered the Knight) my Lord expects an answer to-night, and if his addresses are received he will be here to-morrow morning, and it will be your own fault if you are not a Countess before the week is out. I have promised him fifty thousand down; there's for you, Betsy! Ought you not to be a good girl and make yourself happy to reward me for parting with such a sum?" "I acknowledge my obligations, Sir (answered she) and am resolved to act in every thing as you shall think proper." "That's a good girl (replied Sir John) then I shall tell my Lord that he may come. I need not tell you to put on your finery, I warrant that will be done without my telling. I leave you to consult one another, you women understand these affairs best." So saying he nodded to each and left the room.

The emotion of our heroine was almost as great as that of Miss Mason, when she heard her old lover Lord D. announced as the destined future husband of a city heiress. She easily conceived that a fashionable derangement in his finances might have rendered such a step convenient, and did not wonder that so immense a fortune as that of Miss Mason, should attract his attention? but that she should be thus repeatedly thrown in his way, in circumstances so awkward and embarrassing, filled her with confusion and uneasiness. She feared, least something of the same kind should happen here as at Ashford park, that is, that she should be the means of disturbing the expected happiness of a person who professed herself her friend. She resolved, however, to be upon her guard in every look and action, by which means she hoped to check any improper attentions from Lord D. should he be imprudent enough to pay her any such.

As for Miss Mason, having entirely conquered her passion for Sir Charles Woodhouse, the remainder of the day passed in a delirium of happiness, in planning parties for public places, to which my Lord was to escort her; in chusing wedding clothes, giving rich liveries, fitting up houses, and regulating a retinue. And she retired at night to dream of titles, plate, jewels, equipage, and the charming extravaganza of high life.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Fashionable Lover.

THE following morning Miss Mason was up sooner than usual; before eleven she sent her maid into Caroline's apartment, to request that she would favor her with her advice about her dress. Our heroine was reading, as she had been for more than two hours, when this message was brought; she immediately laid aside her book, and went to attend the important consultation.

Upon entering Miss Mason's room, she saw several elegant morning dresses exposed to view, upon which she was gazing with the most unresolved countenance, not able to fix upon one for her appearance this important morning. "Come hither, my dear Ashford, give me your opinion, which of those dresses shall I put on? I have a high opinion of your taste. If I could but look like you do in that dimity! Don't you think these are all frightful? I wish I had time to send to Chambaud, she would have got me something tollerable. How provoking it is that my clouded tiffany is not come home!" "In my opinion (answered Caroline) that India dress is extremely elegant, and particularly becoming to you; and suppose you put on the handkerchief and cap that you had from Paris, I think they will suit it exactly, they are in the same style." "So I will (exclaimed Miss Mason) that will do exactly! You have really more taste than any body I ever met with! The first time I go to court, I am resolved to be dressed entirely by your directions." Caroline thanked her with a smile, for such a proof of her confidence, saying she should take particular care to exert all her judgment upon such an occasion. "Nay, you will have yourself to decorate too, answered Miss Mason, for I am resolved you shall be presented along with me; your family and connexions make it very proper, and I would have the world know that my friend and companion is of consequence enough to receive such an honour."

Mrs. Meadows now entered, and happening greatly to admire the dress she had chosen, and declaring she would look quite irresistible, put her into so good a humour, that it was put on without either fretting or delay, and rather before twelve o'clock, they all walked down to breakfast, perfectly satisfied with the execution of this grand affair.

Though Sir John and his Lady indulged their daughter with her own hours, it was their custom to breakfast exactly at nine, having, in the younger part of their lives, been used to early ones, as well as to many other rational and comfortable practices, which, in compliance with her humours, they had given up. The three friends, therefore, sat down to that repast without any one to partake or interrupt their chat, which entirely turned upon Lord D——, and the probable consequence of his expected visit, till a servant delivered a note to Mrs. Meadows, which, as she read, the colour flushed in her cheeks, and she put it up, without mentioning any thing of its contents. A few moments afterwards, she proposed to Miss Mason their going that evening to the Opera, to which her friend readily consented, provided Lord D—— should happen to be disengaged, and would go with them; adding that she did not think it would be proper, in her situation, to appear in public attended by any other person. Our heroine smiled, and Mrs. Meadows raillied her upon her very extraordinary attention to propriety, saying, if that is the case, you must spare Miss Ashford for one evening, I can procure twenty beaus in town, and

we'll return after the Opera is over, for I have set my heart upon going, and am resolved not to be disappointed, if I venture alone. Just as she had spoken these words, a thundering at the door announced the arrival of some visitor of consequence. The ladies started up, and hurried into Miss Mason's dressing-room, which had been put into the highest order, for the reception of her expected guest. She flew to the glass, took a transient view of herself, then sinking into a fanteuil, waited with a fluttering heart, for his appearance.

In a few moments his Lordship was announced, and entered the room attended by Sir John, who in a manner he meant to be quite the thing, led him to his daughter. He thanked her for the honour she had done him in admitting his visit, with that easy respect and gallantry which a man of the ton can assume, when he stands in need of a certain number of thousand pounds, which the person to whom it is addressed, has in her power to bestow upon him. Having finished his compliments to her, he turned to Mrs. Meadows and Caroline, each of whom he favoured with a respectable bow, without expressing the least surprise at the sight of the latter, or appearing at all embarrassed by her presence; he only enquired when she left Ashford Park, and whether Sir Marmaduke and his family would be in town that winter? She answered that it was three months since she had left the country, and that she was intirely ignorant of any of her uncle's designs.

Miss Mason was not at all surprised to find that our heroine was acquainted with Lord D——, knowing that she had relations of equal rank; on the contrary, she was pleased that he should find a woman of fashion, whom he knew to be such, in her house. But when she observed him address his whole conversation to her, she began to feel herself neglected, and tried a thousand little affected airs to attract his attention. His Lordship asked our heroine if she had seen Mrs. Murray, since they met in her apartment, and upon her answering in the negative, he told her that he had intirely lost her favour, and that he verily believed she would leave her fortune to the people who took care of her house, for she now absolutely refused to see any of her relations; adding, that Lady Walton had been refused admission, and none of the Ashfords were permitted to come near her. She accuses us (continued he) of having endeavoured to cheat and deceive her, and vows that she will dispose of her riches in such a manner as shall vex and mortify us all.

During this conversation Miss Mason sat with great impatience, till being quite weary of expecting her turn of attention, she resolved to put an end to it, and at the same time inform her lover (as she accounted him) on what footing Caroline was in the family. Complaining, therefore, of a little head ake, Miss Ashford (said she, with affected negligence) reach me that smelling bottle. Meaning one which lay upon the toilet on the opposite side of the room. This was a liberty she had never taken before, neither when they were alone or in company: our heroine hesitated a moment, then stepping a-cross the room with an easy negligence was about to have brought it, telling her at the same time that as she was not well, she must be indulged, but Lord D. starting up insisted upon her keeping her seat, saying to Miss Mason, with a look that reproached her indelicacy, that such an office would to *him* be an honour. Notwithstanding the look and emphasis with which he spoke, she received it from him with much graciousness. Her manner reminded him of the business upon which he came, which was nothing less important than falling in love; had he been visiting a woman of quality with a matrimonial intention, such a ceremony would have been wholly unnecessary, but with the daughter of a citizen he

knew it would be insisted upon. Forcing himself therefore from the point of attraction he began to caress the sanguine which his mistress held on her lap, telling her that the tenderness she lavished upon that little animal was enough to render a lover uneasy. This she considered as an elegant declaration of his passion, and a few compliments which succeeded put her into such a perfect good humour that she appeared to have wholly forgot her head-ache, and proposed the party to the Opera. His Lordship readily offered to attend them; he said, he was engaged at dinner, but promised to slip away immediately as soon as it was over and call for them; adding, that he hoped they would honour his box. Miss Mason smiled and bowed her assent but Mrs. Meadows begged, if it was not quite disagreeable to them, that they would indulge her by sitting in the pit; Lord D. assured her every part of the house, would with such a party be the same to him, and the pit was accordingly fixed upon. The Viscount then took his leave promising to wait upon them again at the proper hour.

He was no sooner gone and Miss Mason and her friend had passed a few encomiums on his person and address, then the great work of dressing, which had ended not more than two hours before, again commenced, and fresh consultations were held upon the important subject. Caroline declared herself quite at liberty to advise and assist as she was in her own person uninterested in the preparation, being resolved not to make one in the party. As Miss Mason was properly escorted, she was not at all displeased by the absence of one who took up too much of that attention which she wished, and thought she had a right wholly to engross. They were with difficulty ready dressed by dinner, and soon after it was removed Lord D.'s coach, in which they had promised to go, drove up to the door. As soon as his Lordship had handed in Miss Mason and Mrs. Meadows, he asked where Miss Ashford was, to which the former lady replied, with a toss of her head, that Caroline did not always go with her to public places.

When our heroine was alone, a serious unpleasant train of reflections took possession of her mind. She reviewed her passed life, and sighed over that happy part of it which was spent under the dear regretted protection of a paternal roof. The mortifying vicissitudes she had since experienced next presented themselves, and lastly, her present uncertain and irksome situation. Such was her entertainment when the ladies returned. Lord D—— had an engagement for the evening, which prevented his staying supper, to which he was much pressed by Sir John and his Lady, who returned him many unnecessary thanks for the care he had taken of their Betsy. He made polite returns to all their fine speeches, without appearing by any change of countenance, to think them absurd, and took leave with no other compliment to our Heroine, than a very slight bow.

The ladies were full of the agreeable evening they had spent, and Caroline understood that Colonel Vincent had been of the party. Miss Mason began already to act the Countess; talked of people of the first rank as her intimates and equals, and diverted herself extremely, at the mortification her presence, attended by Lord D——, appeared to give Sir William Woodhouse, who, she said, looked frightful, and more like a fool than any creature she ever beheld; adding, that when he came to speak to her, she really could not help laughing in his face.

The next morning the subject was renewed, and appeared to afford, if possible, more amusement than the night before; when Miss Mason's gait was, for the present,

clouded by her friend Mrs. Meadows, who informed her she must, in a few days, put an end to her present visit, being under an engagement to join a party of friends in the South of France, where they purposed to spend the winter, and return again to England in the spring.

It was in vain that her friend made the strongest opposition to this scheme; she assured her the plan had been laid, and her promise given, before her arrival at Blackheath; that the party consisted of her particular friends, and she could by no means think of disappointing them.

This piece of information greatly damped the spirits of Miss Mason; she had been all her life too much indulged in every wish, to endure the smallest contradiction to her inclinations with patience. After telling Mrs. Meadows that she thought she had possessed one friend, but found she was mistaken, she left the room in tears of anger and disappointment.

The door was no sooner closed, than Mrs. Meadows began to animadvert upon the caprice and childishness of Miss Mason's temper, which she attributed partly to weakness of understanding, and partly to a bad education. "Do you know, (continued she) that she has taken it into her head to be jealous of Lord D—— and you. She says she is sure there has been more between you than a common acquaintance; which opinion is strengthened by a report his valet has spread in the family; namely, that his Lord offered to marry you the last time he was at Ashford Park, and that it would actually have been a match, but for some quarrel in the family. This account her maid has carried her, and she is now only waiting for some excuse to part with you. The smallest will do, for she is determined upon it."

"She need not trouble herself to find excuses (replied Caroline, a little warmly) had she expressed to me the most distant wish, it would have had all the effect of a formal dismissal. I am greatly obliged to you for saving me such a mortification, which I will secure myself against, by leaving the house this very day."

"I by no means blame your resolution, (answered Mrs. Meadows) but where will you go? Are you provided with any eligible situation when you leave this family? I have been informed of your late misfortune, as well as your intirely dependant circumstances, by Miss Mason, who gave the whole detail to Lord D——, the evening we went to the Opera, at the same time telling him that when she took you into her protection, you had not bread to live upon, and with the rest of your relations, had taken shelter in a wretched alley, up four pair of stairs."

"My uncle's family, with whom I lived (answered Caroline) have a first floor, in Red-Lyon Street, Holborn. Their circumstances, however, are very distressful, and I cannot think of taking from them the smallest part of their little, especially as after what has passed, they may think themselves obliged to support me."

“Believe me and so they are, in my opinion (answered Mrs. Meadows.) I think you have a right to divide their last bit of bread with them.”

“Whatever may be my right, (replied Caroline) I have no inclination to do it. They never wished or intended to injure me; on the contrary, I have every reason to believe myself greatly beloved by them; and if at present I can give them no assistance, at least I will not be a burthen to them.”

“Come along with me (said Mrs. Meadows) the journey I am about to take will, in all probability, be a pleasant one; I shall esteem myself happy in such a companion, and will omit nothing in my power to render your situation comfortable.”

Caroline thanked her in the warmest terms for her friendly proposal. She was fond of traveling, and next to Italy, she should like to visit the South of France, a fine climate was her delight. Mrs. Meadows was sensible, and apparently good natured. At all events, three or four months would soon pass, and by the time she returned, her little fortune would, in all probability, be her own. She resolved to venture, and after a minute or two of consideration, answered, that she would attend her.

Mrs. Meadows appeared highly pleased with her resolution, and Caroline retired to her apartment, to put all things in readiness for her removal from Great George-Street. She did not see Miss Mason till dinner, when she told her a circumstance had happened which obliged her to take leave of her that very afternoon.

“What (said the old lady) are you going to leave Betsy? I would have you consider of it, Miss Ashford. You will not find it easy to get into such another family; but people never know when they are well till they are worse.”

“Have you any thing to complain of, (said the Knight.) Have you not been treated like a gentlewoman?”

“I have no complaints, Sir, (answered our Heroine) but I must in some degree consult my own convenience, which at present obliges me to take this step.” Miss Mason was intirely silent, and when Caroline begged leave to send a servant to call a hackney coach, she made not the least opposition to her intention. He soon returned to let her know that it was ready, and all her things put into it. Upon which she arose, and taking a formal leave of the whole family, stepped in, and directed the coachman to drive to Red-Lyon Street.

CHAPTER XXIX.

An Expedition.

SHE found her relations still in the same situation, but in hopes that it would soon alter for the better. They were much concerned to hear of her having left Miss Mason, and almost frightened at the thought of her going abroad. Mrs. Sanders declared if any misfortune befel her, she should never be happy in her mind any more, and Charlotte wept to think that the sea would divide her from her dear cousin. Caroline endeavoured to reason them out of fears so ill grounded, and assured them that she looked forward to her expected journey as a very great pleasure, and what she should much prefer to staying in England. That evening she received a note from Mrs. Meadows, to inform her that she had resolved upon leaving London the very next day but one, and would call for her by ten in the morning.

At the hour appointed, that lady, in a hired post chaise and four, attended by a servant in, and another out of livery, stopped at the door of the house in which Mr. Sanders lodged, and our Heroine having taken an affectionate leave of him and his family, immediately joining her, they drove away at a considerable speed, taking the road to Dover. She found in Mrs. Meadows, now that they were no longer encumbered with the affected trifling of Miss Mason, a lively, sensible companion, who knew much of the world and its follies, which in the general course of her conduct, she countenanced and complied with; but in her better and unimpassioned judgment, despised. The weather being remarkably open and fine, their journey was extremely pleasant, and they embarked in the highest spirits, being joined, at Dover, by two female servants, who had arrived from town, that morning, in a stage coach.

During their passage, our Heroine and her new patroness appeared every hour more and more pleased with each other; the courage of Mrs. Meadows, which seemed intirely unmoved by the prospects of any difficulty they might encounter, removed, in a great measure, the fears of her companion. She laughed at the ideal necessity, as she called it, of always being escorted by men; as if, she said, a woman of sense, who had money at her command, and servants to attend her, could not take care of herself; but must, like a child, be perpetually dangled after, for fear she should fall down, or cut her fingers. Upon Caroline's inquiring some of the particulars of her intended rout, she told her she did not mean to go immediately to the place of general rendezvous, but to make a short visit to the Countess Du Barrongue, who was her distant relation, and lived within twelve miles of Paris, in which she had a magnificent house; but contrary to the general custom in France, she and the Count spent almost the whole year in the country. There, continued Mrs. Meadows, I hope to be joined by my friend Colonel Vincent, who will see us safe to the end of our journey.

Caroline was extremely surprised to hear of Mrs. Meadows being followed to the Continent by a person for whom she had more than once heard her profess so dangerous a preference. She remonstrated against her imprudence in having permitted him to take

such a step. Mrs. Meadows laughed at first, at what she called Caroline's prudery, but finding her very serious in her opinion, she assured her that if she knew the character of the Colonel, it would intirely remove her scruples. It is, continued she, of the most excellent and uncommon kind, and I shall esteem myself as safe under his care, as if I was surrounded by a whole guard of Spanish Duenas. Caroline replied, that though the honour of Colonel Vincent, and her own conscious integrity, might be a sufficient security against impertinance or insult, they could hardly be so universally acknowledged as to stop the voice of public censure, and she must, on such an occasion, expect its cries to be of the loudest kind; adding, that if the circumstance of his being to make one of the party, had been communicated to her before they sailed, she should certainly have declined the honour of attending her.

Much altercation took place between them upon this subject, and Mrs. Meadows at last appeared convinced, by the arguments of her friend, that she had been guilty of a real imprudence. She promised to write to the Colonel the moment she landed, and forbid his coming, a promise with which our Heroine appeared satisfied, and she accordingly wrote as soon as they got on shore. They travelled with as much expedition as the badness of the carriage would allow, till they arrived at the house, or rather palace, of the Count Du Barrongue, which was an elegant and stately edifice, situated in the finest part of one of the finest countries in the world.

They were received by the Countess, her husband being upon business in a distant province, rather with politeness, than affection or pleasure. Her coldness did not appear to disturb Mrs. Meadows, but sensibly hurt our Heroine, who would have persuaded her to leave the house the very next day; but she said it was the Countess's manner, exactly what she expected, and that she should continue there as long as it suited her convenience. A single day was sufficient to convince Caroline of the falsity of this account; the Countess's manner being particularly kind and obliging to all about her, by every one of whom she seemed exceedingly beloved, particularly by a young lady who lived with her as a companion, and who was her distant relation. All her coldness seemed to be reserved for her new guests. She expressed much wonder at their taking so long a journey with only the protection of domestics, and once or twice hinted her dislike to all violations of family duties, and the disgraceful state of voluntary widdowhood. Miss Dunford, that being the name of her young friend, behaved to them, especially to Caroline, with more attention. She appeared particularly pleased with her, and took every opportunity of conversing with, and shewing her marks of kindness, which were more than usually acceptable in her present situation, when she was dissatisfied with herself, and every thing about her.

She blamed her own hasty want of consideration, in accepting Mrs. Meadows's invitation to accompany her in so long a journey, without a further knowledge of her character, or the advice of some friend who knew the world better than herself; she might have consulted Doctor Seward; he would have pointed out the impropriety of her friend's situation and conduct. She admired the Countess Du Barrongue; the more she saw of her, the more was she convinced that Mrs. Meadows would not be treated by her with so little consideration, had she not deserved to forfeit her esteem; and she strove by every means

in her power, without further lessening that lady, to convince the Countess that she never had been a partaker of her follies. These endeavours appeared to be in some degree successful. The elegant simplicity of her manners, the unaffected rectitude of her sentiments, the strength of her understanding, and apparent goodness of her heart, all tended to change the opinion which she at first seemed to have formed of her, and she began upon every occasion to distinguish her by more of that benevolent friendliness which appeared so natural to her disposition, than she had before favoured her with.

One morning, when Mrs. Meadows and Miss Dunford were walking in the gardens, the Countess asked Caroline how long she had been acquainted with the former; her answer led to further enquiries, and ended in a short detail of all the events of her life. This she told in a summary way, without naming particular persons, except her near relations, and wholly omitting those circumstances which did most honour to her charms or benevolence. The Countess appeared much interested and affected by the account of so many vicissitudes and misfortunes having befallen so young and lovely a creature. She no longer blamed, but lamented her connection with Mrs. Meadows, who, though her relation, was, she said, by no means a proper director for a young woman of honour and virtue. She then asked her if she had not a brother at that time abroad upon his travels; and upon her answering in the affirmative, told her that he had been recommended to the Count and herself, by the father of Miss Dunford, who then lived in London, and had a few months past, favoured them with his company for some days. Caroline had never heard of the name of Dunford, and could not help wondering by what means he, who before he left England, had stirred so little from Broomfield, became acquainted with him.

When Mrs. Meadows and Miss Dunford returned from their walks, the Countess addressed the latter with a smile, saying, "Do you know, my dear, that I have made a discovery; Miss Ashford is sister to the gentleman of that name, who was recommended to us by your father: you know who I mean Harriot," continued she, archly. "Dear me, (exclaimed Miss Dunford, blushing excessively) Is it possible, Madam, you can be Mr. Ashford's sister? I have heard him say, indeed, that he has one, but I always understood that she was under the protection of relations, from whom she had large expectations." "Miss Ashford (answered the Countess) has just favoured me with an account of the accident by which she has been thrown out of that protection. Her history of her family and connections being exactly similar with that given us by her brother, immediately convinced me that they must belong to the same family." Miss Dunford then asked several questions, particularly what was become of the family who had taken up their residence with Lord W——, a little before Mr. Ashford left England. And upon being informed that the old lady was married to that nobleman, she exclaimed, that is exactly what I expected; I told Mr. Ashford what would happen. But when she heard of the use she had made of her power and influence over her husband, she appeared uncommonly affected, and her countenance expressed the utmost disdain and resentment. Caroline, who attributed this concern to the interest she kindly took in her welfare, felt the most lively gratitude, and a liking which she had conceived for this amiable and pleasing girl, began from that moment, to strengthen into affection and friendship. From that time the Countess continued to treat our Heroine with the most flattering distinction, seeming

anxious, by her present kindness, to make her amends for the past neglect she had suffered in her house. She warmly declared against her proceeding with Mrs. Meadows to the end of her intended journey, telling her, that though she was ignorant of whom the party she was going to join consisted, she had too much reason to believe it would not be composed of such persons as would prove agreeable to a woman of her delicacy and understanding; adding, that there was a family of her particular friends then at Paris, who would set out on their return for England in about a fortnight; that she would take care to recommend her to them in such a manner, as would not only induce them to afford her their protection till their arrival in London, but if she chose it, engage them to place her in an eligible situation, better suited to her merits and disposition.

The gratitude of our Heroine was without bounds, she informed the Countess that she hoped, in a few months to be possessed of a sum sufficient to maintain her in comfort and independence, and that till then she would thankfully accept such a situation as that she mentioned; upon which the Countess desired her to be quite easy, for it should be her business to see that such a one was provided for her; that she knew she might depend upon her friend, Mrs. Lane, whose connections put it often in her power to be useful to her acquaintance, and whose disposition rendered every act of kindness a pleasure to her.

Some days after these assurances had been received, the whole family were seated round a working-table; the Countess was embroidering the border of a skirt, Miss Dunford weaving lace, Mrs. Meadows playing with a squirrel, and our Heroine reading a comedy of Moliere's, when a servant entered the room and informed Mrs. Meadows that an English gentleman had just stopped at the gate and ordered him to inform her that his name was Vincent. Caroline had mentioned to the Countess some apprehensions of her attachment to that gentleman; the moment, therefore, that she heard his name announced she gave her a look of the most piercing and expressive kind. Her face was covered with crimson, not the artless blush of sensibility and innocence, but the deep one of guilty pleasure and apprehension. Recovering in a moment—"Have I your permission to ask my friend in for a few moments (said she) he is a gentleman of unexceptionable character, and being nearly related to some of those intimates with whom I mean to pass the winter, intends to join them for a few weeks only, and is, I suppose, polite enough to call upon us in his way, to offer himself as our escort for the remainder of our journey."

"He has taken a considerable round, in order to pay this compliment (replied the Countess) but request the gentleman to walk in (continued she, turning to the servant) I cannot let any person remain at my gate who belongs to a present part of my family." She spoke these words with a stately coldness which would have awed any one less blessed with convenient effrontery than was her relation, who with great composure thanked her for her politeness, and rising walked towards the door in order to be ready to receive her friend. The door opened, and the Colonel entering, flew to Mrs. Meadows, and taking her by the hand, which she held out to him—"My dear Madam (said he) how shall I express my felicity in seeing you!" At the same instant Caroline and he happening to cast their eyes upon each other, the words, Miss Ashford and Capt. West, were repeated with the greatest astonishment. Capt. West (exclaimed the Countess and Miss Dunford, in the same moment) is it Capt. West?

The Colonel had by this time approached our Heroine. "I do not wonder at your surprise, my dear Madam, if you have neither heard of my promotion or change of name. The first was his Majesty's pleasure. The second was a whim of an old uncle of my father's, who having spent his whole life in hoarding a fortune, chose to perpetuate his folly as far as possible by bequeathing his name together with the possession of it, both of which I at present acknowledge as my own." "I am glad, Sir (answered Caroline) that his whim has been of so much advantage to you." "But how, Miss Ashford (continued he) how shall I apologize for the folly, the madness of which I was guilty the last time I had the happiness of meeting you? Yet I have done all in my power to deserve forgiveness. Indeed I did not, till that evening, know how deeply I had unintentionally been the means of injuring you."

"What do you mean, Sir, (said Caroline) before this excellent lady, who honours me with her friendship, you may speak as freely as if we were alone; what injury do you speak of?" "It is an affair I cannot explain, (answered he) without exposing the injustice of a mother; but the guilty deserve shame; at all events the innocent should be righted. I need not remind you (continued he) of the disturbance I made the evening we met at Vauxhall; as soon as you and your party had quitted the gardens, the gentleman by whom you were attended, whose name, half-inebriated as I was, I do not recollect, insisted upon my giving him my address, which I was upon the point of doing when Mr. Craven, who I had before met in the gardens, joined us; he blamed your friend for the warmth he expressed about a matter so common, and told him that if he really had any serious thoughts of the girl he had just parted with (such was his expression) he might think himself happy in escaping her, for that she had long lost all pretensions to consideration from a man of honour; adding, that as one instance of what he asserted, and of my superior and prior right to her favour, it was on my account she was discarded from her uncle, Lord Walton's, and that all the rest of her family refused to take notice of her.

I was warm in my resentment of this scandal; but what is the resentment or assertion of a drunken man? Mr. Craven said much which I did not understand, but I recollect that he said I left the house early in the morning and you in the afternoon, and that the whole neighbourhood, who indeed had their suspicions before, were fully convinced of the cause; which Lady Walton, by every thing but words had acknowledged; he added, that you resided for some time in the neighbourhood where your father had been greatly respected, and that all your old friends were so well assured of your faulty conduct that they had refused to visit or take the smallest notice of you."

During this account the countenance of our Heroine underwent many changes. Shame, surprise, and indignation, by turns, took possession of her soul. The circumstance of her having been entirely neglected by the neighbourhood, during her residence at the house of farmer Williams, had, at the time, a little amazed her, but as it was exactly what she wished, and no accident happened to throw her into the way of them, she believed it to proceed from the mean disposition of mankind, who fly from misfortune as a pestilential disorder, and gave herself little concern about it. She could now account for the conduct of Sir William Beaumont, and clearly discern wherein his honour and love

stood in opposition to each other. A flood of tears accompanied this thought, and she cast her eyes to heaven in an agony of grief which greatly affected the Countess, who said every thing in her power to console her, telling her that now the cruel reports which had been spread were known, they would be easily refuted; adding, that she should herself be in England in a few months, and she would then take care to inform any persons whom she would point out to her, of the real state of the case, and did not doubt but it would be in her power to set all straight again.

Col. Vincent then proceeded to inform our Heroine, that when his senses returned and he began to reflect upon what had passed, which swam like a broken dream before his memory; he collected enough of the cruel situation which the barbarity of his mother, and the general propensity of mankind to believe tales of scandal and detraction, however improbable, had plunged her into; to induce him, as the only amends in his power to make her, to write a full account of all that had happened to Lord Walton; he informed him of every particular respecting the rise and progress of his passion for her, of the resolution which he knew his mother had formed to banish her from his house before she was acquainted with it, and the arts she afterwards made use of to engage her to accept him for her husband, affronting every one whom she thought likely to be his rival, among whom Mr. Craven was one; and at last, when her steady refusal had defeated all her schemes, he requested of him to call to mind the infamous arts by which, as he had been informed, she drove the lovely fugitive from his protection. The care she had taken, by falling ill, and various other pretences to prevent his meeting her during her residence at Ashford-Park, and the false and infamous tales which she every day invented to keep up his resentment against her. I concluded, continued Col. Vincent, with requesting his Lordship to do justice to his own honour and that of the loveliest and most amiable woman that ever adorned his family, by restoring her to the place in his favour which she had once so deservedly possessed.

Caroline thanked him for the friendliness of his conduct, but said she had little hope of reaping any advantage from it; that she knew Lady Walton's power over her husband extended further than the mere art of deceiving him; that she believed she had never done that more than in part, for she had reason to know that he feared her too much to appear to doubt any thing she wished him to believe. Col. Vincent shook his head in silence.

The Countess was so much pleased with an indisputable confirmation of Caroline's account of herself, that she politely invited the Colonel to stay all night, a permission which he thankfully accepted, and supper being served in, they all seated themselves, with some degree of satisfaction, at the table, except Mrs. Meadows, who appeared quite disconcerted, and out of all patience with the entire neglect she suffered during the whole evening. The Colonel seemed, for some time, to have forgot that such a person existed, and though a few hours before he was posting in pursuit of her, firmly persuaded that happiness was attendant upon her smiles, the sight of our Heroine, who had made a stronger impression upon his heart than any other had ever been able to do, instantly extinguished the transient flame she had raised, and he now heartily wished her ten thousand miles distant from his sight.

Supper was scarce removed when a note was delivered to the Countess, which, as soon as she had perused—"This is unlucky (she exclaimed) Mrs. Lane writes me word that she means to leave Paris the day after to-morrow. She has already been apprised of your intention, Miss Ashford, of returning with her to London, and she begs you will be with her as early to-morrow evening as will be convenient to you. She likewise promises to take you entirely under her care and protection, and to do every thing we wish."

"Miss Ashford returning to London! (exclaimed Mrs. Meadows) what do you mean?" "Do not, Mrs. Meadows (answered the Countess, with a look of piercing severity) ask an explanation which it would give you pain to hear? You know that it is not proper for Miss Ashford to attend you! rest satisfied with that consciousness." The assurance of Mrs. Meadows was not equal to answering this speech, she was silent, and the Countess told Caroline she was extremely mortified that her expectation of some relations of the Count's who were coming to spend a few weeks with them, and who would probably arrive the next day, put it out of her power to attend her to Paris, which she greatly wished to do. But that her carriage and servants upon whose attention she could depend should convey her safe to the house of Mrs. Lane. Col. Vincent respectfully offered to escort her, which she politely declined, till the Countess, who was very fearful in travelling, and had no notion of safety without a male protector, pressed her to accept his offered attendance, to which, with some difficulty, she was at last persuaded to consent, and it was agreed that she should set out the next afternoon, in the Countess's carriage, that lady not chusing to venture her in the hired one which brought Col. Vincent.

CHAPTER XXX.

A Rejection.

OUR Heroine had but just entered her apartment upon the evening preceding her departure, when she was followed by Mrs. Meadows, who strongly remonstrated against her design of going back to England. She promised, provided she would proceed with her according to her first intention, to be wholly guided by her advice, and positively to forbid Col. Vincent's following her. Caroline begged that she would not request what she could not grant. She advised, nay entreated that she would at all events forbid that gentleman's attendance, and by no means suffer him to follow or be with her, as she valued the smallest remains of honour and reputation. Mrs. Meadows, finding nothing she could say had the least effect in prevailing upon her to change the resolution she had made to return, began to upbraid her with caprice and suspiciousness of temper. She complained of the ill-usage with which she treated her, by going with her so far and then deceiving and leaving her without a companion, saying, if she had not appeared perfectly willing to accompany her she should have enquired for some other, and might probably have heard of one less full of false delicacy and affected scruples.

To this Caroline answered, that the purpose for which she was chosen as her companion, namely, that of leaving the kingdom in some degree of credit, was already answered; that she would find her extremely ill-suited to such a party as she feared she was about to join, and was convinced, that were she to accompany her according to her first intention, she should only be an incumbrance to her, a poor lifeless, preaching, old-fashioned being; and before the winter was half over she would wish to rid herself of a spy, a stupid monitor, and a dead weight upon her pleasures. In short, Mrs. Meadows, after having in vain exerted all her eloquence in endeavouring to prevail in a point upon which she had set her heart rather out of whim and a desire to disappoint the Countess than from any pleasure she hoped for in the company of our Heroine, took her leave, telling her, that if the truth was known, she believed her motive for leaving her was the desire of having Col. Vincent all to herself, and that the kind and excellent advice of which she had been so very liberal was rather the offspring of jealousy than of friendliness or prudence.

The next morning Mrs. Meadows did not make her appearance, sending word by her woman that she was not well and would drink a dish of coffee in her chamber. The moment breakfast was removed, the Colonel rising, begged he might be favoured by the Countess with five minutes walk in the garden. His request was immediately complied with; and while they were walking, many kind and obliging things passed between Caroline and Miss Dunford. They mutually expressed the utmost unwillingness to part from each other, promised to think of each other often, and to keep up a regular correspondence till they had again the happiness of meeting, of which the journey the Countess proposed shortly to take gave them the most agreeable prospect.

They had just finished these little arrangements so interesting to the sensible feeling heart new to the charm of youthful friendship, when the Countess and Col. Vincent returned; the former, without sitting down, requested Caroline to return with her

into the garden; she instantly followed her, and as soon as they had got to a retired walk, where the sun, glittering among the ever-greens, made a perpetual summer, she turned towards her with a smile, and said “Do you know, Miss Ashford, that I am commenced matchmaker, and have a great inclination to make the first trial of my talents in my new profession upon you. You look surprised! I will explain myself: it is with sincere regret that I see a young person of your beauty, merit, and accomplishments, in a situation so friendless and unprotected. The cruel injustice you have already suffered, and the constant injuries you have still to apprehend from enemies whom interest, and since they have ventured such unwarrantable lengths, self-defence will for ever continue such, alarms me for your future welfare, and there are few things that would afford me greater pleasure than seeing you the wife of a worthy man who loves, and will make your happiness his study. Such, if I am not much deceived, is Col. Vincent. He has commissioned, nay intreated me to lay his heart, hand, and fortune, at your feet. The first, he says, has long been yours, and the last, which is now considerable, shall be disposed of absolutely at your choice and direction. Nothing can be more generous than his proposal, nor could any thing be more respectful than the manner in which it was made—now, my love, what answer shall I return him? In my opinion, it ought to be favourable.”

“How much, my dear madam, (answered Caroline) am I obliged to you for the kind concern you express about me. The recommendations with which you have already favoured me, will, I doubt not, secure me from present inconvenience; but there is none I would not encounter, rather than become the wife of a man whom it is not in my power either to love or esteem.” “Is not my dear young friend a little romantic? (said the Countess, with a smile) Colonel Vincent does not appear to me to want understanding, good nature, or generosity; three qualities, believe me, of essential consequence in the married state. He may not, perhaps, be quite so refined, so elegant, and well informed, as your imagination may paint the irresistible mortal who is to conquer and possess your heart. But my dear Caroline, with all her charms, may pass through life without ever meeting with such an accomplished being.”

“And why not pass through life in my present single state? (interrupted Caroline) it is not surely necessary that I should alter it! on the contrary, it would in my present disposition of mind, be highly criminal. Colonel Vincent is exactly the same man whom I once refused; what should change my sentiments, but motives of the most mean and sordid nature? Passion may for a while render him blind to them, but passion will not last for ever; and when he begins to see things by the light of unclouded reason, what have I to expect from the resentment and disappointed affection of a man who has been accustomed to act only from feeling, without the restraint of principle? Should I not have cause to fear the worst evils, with that greatest of aggravations, the consciousness of deserving them? These are surely reasons sufficient to vindicate my absolute refusal of the Colonel’s generous offers. But there is still a stronger, a more unsurmountable one. I will be perfectly sincere with you madam, my affections are already in possession of another. I have not the smallest prospect of happiness from my attachment, nor do I know, or probably ever shall, in what part of the world the object of it resides; but it is unconquerable, and will for ever preclude all others.”

“I have done (answered the Countess) never will I again urge you upon a subject so painful. But surely, my sweet girl, nature never endowed you with so many perfections, only to distress others, without contributing to your own happiness! it cannot be, continued she warmly, this beloved wanderer will return, and I shall yet see you in a situation worthy of your merits.”

Our Heroine then requested the Countess to assure Colonel Vincent of her gratitude for the generous proposal he had made her, but at the same time to give him the most complete and absolute refusal. She likewise begged that a promise might be obtained from him, of never mentioning the affair to her during the ride they were to take in the afternoon, otherwise, she said, it was her determination to go alone. The Countess promised to do all she requested, and returned into the house for that purpose, while Caroline, who was in a few minutes joined by Miss Dunford, continued to walk till the dinner bell gave them notice to return.

They found the Countess, Mrs. Meadows, and Colonel Vincent, sitting at a distance from each other. The latter had his arms folded, and the most visible dejection in his countenance; Mrs. Meadows had a fretful impatience in hers, and when Caroline entered, rage sparkled in her eyes, which the presence of persons she knew to be so much attached to her rival, obliged her to suppress. Dinner had been removed but a few moments when a servant entered to inform the Countess that one of the wheels of the coach was in such a very bad condition that he durst not venture to drive with it so far as Paris till it was thoroughly repaired, the doing of which would at least take up half a day. She appeared greatly mortified by this account, it being then the only one she had then at home, one being gone to meet part of the company she expected, and the other with the Count. Caroline begged she would not give herself any uneasiness as the chaise in which Col. Vincent travelled would do perfectly well; upon which she ordered the servant to examine both that and the harness to see that they were in order, and upon his reporting that all was tight and strong, she consented that her fair friend should venture in it. Orders were accordingly given to have it got in readiness, and in a few minutes it drove up to the door, attended by two servants belonging to the Colonel.

With tears of affection and gratitude our Heroine approached to take leave of her noble friend, who, tenderly embracing, bade her adieu, repeating the assurances she had already given her of lasting friendship and amity; at the same time presenting her a small pocket book, she requested that she would keep it for her sake. Caroline kissed the little remembrance, promising never, voluntarily, to part with it but with life. Miss Dunford was drowned in tears. She affectionately embraced her, bidding her remember her promise of writing soon, and of continuing to love her. She returned her embrace with equal tenderness, and answering only by a look full of expression, hurried into the chaise, which, the moment the Colonel had followed her, drove away, leaving her friends to gaze after, and pursue it with their best and kindest wishes.

They had travelled some miles before either of them spoke; both, at last, began to wish a silence which appeared so unfriendly was broken, but neither could think of a subject proper for the purpose; at length the Colonel began by praising the understanding

and agreeable qualities of the Countess du Barrongue, he could not have pitched upon a better; Caroline seized the occasion to pour forth the effusions of her warmly grateful heart. She was in the middle of a panegyric upon the uncommon benevolence and sweetness of her disposition, when an elegant carriage, attended by three footmen, appeared in view; it drove at a considerable rate; notwithstanding which, as it passed, our Heroine distinctly beheld Sir William Beaumont. She was convinced that he knew her, for swift as the carriages passed each other, she saw him start and throw himself forward as it were to command a fuller view of her. Nothing could exceed her vexation at being seen, by him, in a carriage with Col. Vincent; could any thing be a stronger confirmation of his unjust suspicions? could any thing be more completely unfortunate?

The Colonel, surprised by her sudden change of countenance, and the abrupt manner in which her conversation broke off, began to fear that she was ill, and enquired with much respect and solicitude if he could do or cause any thing to be done for her relief; adding, that if she chose to turn back again, which he would really advise her to do, he would immediately give orders to the servants for that purpose. Caroline, roused by this enquiry, replied, that she only felt a transient faintness and should be well in a moment, desiring he would not be alarmed or think of returning, as what she then felt was the effect of a disorder to which she had been lately subject, which though painful and troublesome was by no means dangerous. The Colonel expressed the greatest concern for her indisposition, entreating that as soon as she arrived in London, she would take the advice of an eminent physician. She thanked him for his friendly anxiety about her, and said she would certainly omit nothing in her power entirely to eradicate a complaint which was attended with so much uneasiness.

Thus sometimes conversing, with long intervals of silence, they entered Paris, driving directly to the hotel, where Mr. and Mrs. Lane (who had been moving from place to place, and only spent a few days in that city) had informed the Countess she would find them. Upon ordering one of the servants to enquire if they were then in the house, he was answered in the affirmative, and that they had given orders if a young lady enquired for them to have her immediately shewn to their apartments. On hearing this the Colonel jumped out and offered his hand to our Heroine, when just as she was stepping down, the carriage she had lately met passed slowly by, and she saw Sir William looking at her with an earnest and observing aspect. The moment he perceived her eye meet his, he gave a signal to his servants, and the horses setting off at full speed were out of sight in an instant.

Caroline was for a moment unable to move, till reminded of her situation by Col. Vincent who asked her if it would not be more agreeable to her to walk in than to stand at the door of a hotel. She reached with some difficulty a room, that was close by, where, sinking into the first chair, she fainted away. The Colonel's fright was excessive; he ordered a servant to inform Mrs. Lane, that Miss Ashford was there, but too ill to attend her immediately. This message brought down both her and her husband, who had her carried up into their room, where with proper assistance she soon recovered, and was received by Mrs. Lane with the most cordial politeness; she assured her that nothing in her power should be omitted to serve her, and that till an eligible situation could be found for her reception, she should be happy to consider her as a part of her own family;

adding, that her duty as well as inclination would lead her to oblige and be useful to a person so strongly recommended by the Countess du Barrongue.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

The Dismission.

CAROLINE was a little mortified to leave a city so celebrated as Paris, without at least enjoying a transient view of it. She would willingly have stayed a few days longer, which she persuaded herself was in order to see the many things it contained so well worth inspection. But a conscious blush which spread itself over her fair face while she half expressed the wish, would have convinced any person of discernment that it was secretly prompted by a cause, a hope more interesting. She enquired if there was an Opera that night, upon which Mrs. Lane replied that there was, and if it would be agreeable to her she and Mr. Lane would attend her to it. This offer she gladly accepted and they went accordingly. During the first part of the performance her eyes were incessantly wandering from one box to another in hope of discovering the only object which in the present state of her mind could fix their attention, but her search was in vain, no Sir Wm. Beaumont appeared; she strove to confine her thoughts to the entertainments of the stage, but this was equally vain, and she returned with scarce the smallest remembrance of any circumstance which had passed, except her disappointment.

Soon after their return to the hotel, they retired to rest; and, early in the morning, quitted Paris, proceeding with all possible expedition towards Calais, where they embarked for England; and after a quick passage and pleasant journey, arrived at Mr. Lane's house, in Sackvill Street. There our Heroine was welcomed in the kindest manner, Mrs. Lane requesting that she would think herself at home till such time as a suitable situation could be found for her. This amiable and worthy couple lived in all the elegance and cheerfulness which youth, health, taste, and fortune, can be supposed to ensure. Nor were their enjoyments deadened by excess, or their hearts hardened by extravagance and dissipation. They were known and visited by all the fashionable world, but, except twice a year, none but a select and favoured number were ever admitted into their house, which was constantly filled with people of the first characters and abilities in the kingdom; their conversation and society being greatly preferred by them both, to the insipid affection of uninformed elegance. In their most favourite friends, as in themselves, politeness and understanding united, but where both could not be had they constantly preferred the latter.

Mrs. Lane was so much pleased with our Heroine, and so desirous of presenting her to such of her friends whose conversation she thought would afford her entertainment, that a week passed before she could find an opportunity of going to Red-Lyon Street. An hour of leisure at last presenting itself, she informed her friend where she wished to go, who immediately desired that she would make use of her coach upon that or any other occasion. But Caroline rather chusing to pay this visit in a hackney one, a servant was ordered to attend her, and she stopped at the house where Mr. Sanders used to lodge. The mistress of the house coming to the door, to answer to her enquiry, whether Mr. or Mrs. Sanders were at home, answered, that Mr. Sanders had been dead more than a month, and that his wife and daughter were gone down to Cornwall where she believed they intended to live with some relations who had sent to invite them. This account

greatly shocked her. She found the woman knew nothing of his affairs, and therefore ordered the coachman to drive directly back to Sackvill-Street.

As soon as she entered, Mrs. Lane's woman requested, in the name of her lady, that she would step into her dressing-room, having, she said, something to communicate to her, which she hoped would afford her pleasure. She instantly obeyed the summons, and as soon as she entered Mrs. Lane told her, that she had just received a letter from a lady in Oxfordshire, to whom she had written about her, knowing that she wished for a companion, provided she could meet with one whose education, manners, and connections, were unexceptionable; and that she was so much pleased with the account she had sent of her, that she wished her to set out for her house immediately. She is an old lady, continued Mrs. Lane, who lives upon a handsome jointure, in a very genteel though private manner. She will require nothing from you, but such little kind offices as your own good nature will prompt you unasked to perform. I have heard you several times say, that you did not wish to be placed in too gay a family, and that you should prefer a country to a town residence. On these accounts I hope the house of Mrs. Vincent will be agreeable to you, but should it prove otherwise, you have nothing to do but return to me, and I will look out for one more eligible.

Caroline returned a thousand thanks to her kind patroness for the obliging and friendly interest she took in her affairs. Said she could not wish for any-thing that appeared more promising for the time she should probably stand in need of it, than the settlement now offered her, and that she would with her permission attend Mrs. Vincent the very next day. This being settled to the satisfaction of both, she went into her apartment to arrange some little matters preparatory to her departure. Looking into the trunk in which her clothes were contained, the pocket-book that had been given to her by the Countess du Barrongue, which she had placed there for security, during her journey, presented itself to her view; she took it up, and imprinting upon it a grateful kiss, opened it, expecting to see the inside equal in elegance to its external appearance; when, to her excessive surprise, she beheld an English bank-note for one hundred pounds, with the words Miss Ashford written in that lady's own hand upon the back of it. Tears of affectionate sensibility flowed from her eyes, at sight of this generous testimony of friendship, and she replaced it more delighted by the motives which had made it hers, than with the possession of it; though she considered that as a comfortable security against any disagreeable accident that might befall her before the time on which she hoped to reclaim her own little independency.

The following morning she set out in a hired chaise, attended by one of Mr. Lane's servants, for Oxfordshire, and before the close of the evening arrived at the house of Mrs. Vincent, where she was received by the old lady with great kindness, and the weather being extremely cold, placed, in a great chair by the side of a large fire, the comfortable warmth of which revived her half frozen senses.

The house was large and convenient; but it was scantily furnished, and every thing in it was of a kind as little expensive as was consistent with common comfort. There were no more servants than were absolutely necessary to keep it in decent order, no

pleasure grounds, but a tolerable kitchen garden, no carriage but an old post chaise which just served to drag the old lady an airing; in short, every thing appeared to be for mere use, without the smallest regard to propriety, elegance, or pleasure. Our Heroine was not greatly delighted with the face of things in her new habitation, but she resolved to endure much restraint and inconvenience rather than change it before the time, when she expected to possess her little fortune. A great part of her time here was perfectly at her own disposal, but there were no means of spending it pleasantly. There was no books, no musical instruments; she had at the time of her uncle's misfortune sent hers, which had never been unpacked since her removal from Ashford-Park, to Mrs. Williams's. And as her continuance with Mrs. Vincent would in all probability be short, as it depended upon Mrs. Forester's removal, she did not think it worth while to send for them. The old lady never left her bed before noon; after she had taken her chocolate an airing regularly succeeded, on which she expected Caroline constantly to attend her; she never went but one road, and exactly to the third mile stone, at which her horses turned back without waiting for directions from the driver. Dinner, which consisted of some little dish delicately cooked up for herself and a plain joint for the family, was always ready by the time of her return. After which she slept for an hour in her easy chair, and when she woke was fond of hearing Caroline read some religious book, of which a small number, all of the methodistical kind, were ranged upon a shelf in her bed room, where, except at dinner time, she constantly sat. She never drank tea nor allowed it to any of her family, but as a particular favour and distinction granted permission to our Heroine to use it. From tea time to supper, if she was not too much fatigued, the book was resumed, for she used to say a large portion of each day ought to be devoted to acts of piety and the fulfilling of the law; and as reading and praying were the only good things she felt herself disposed to do, or rather could do without applying to her purse, she laid the greatest stress upon, and never omitted them be the occasion what it would.

Such was the life which the young, beautiful, elegant, and well-informed Caroline was condemned to lead. She strove to support her spirits with a reflection that it would not probably be long before she heard from Mrs. Forester an account of her brother's return to England. She remembered that she used to say he would be at home before Christmas; that festival was now at no great distance, and she might reasonably hope that a few weeks would bring her the welcome information. The hope of independence was still sweet, though the retirement of which she used to think with so much pleasure had lost all its charms. The death of Mrs. Seward had robbed her of the only person whose friendship and society she depended upon. The false and scandalous reports which had been so maliciously circulated and believed in the neighbourhood distressed her, and last not least, her heart which, while she so much enjoyed the sweets of retirement, was undisturbed and easy, now felt an anxious restlessness, which required something more to divert or sooth it than solitude could afford. No state could, however, be more completely irksome than what she at present experienced, and a whole long month passed away in which she had no pleasure except from the kind and affectionate letters which she received from the Countess du Barrongue and Miss Dunford, in answer to those she had written to them upon her first arrival in England; they were directed to Mrs. Lane, and by her forwarded to the place of her present residence: This satisfaction, which was of the

purest kind, excepted, not a circumstance occurred which could enliven a single moment; the evening was long and melancholy, the morning dreary and hopeless.

She had one evening been reading till both her eyes and voice were fatigued, and was still going on because any thing was better than the peevish enthusiastick conversation of Mrs. Vincent, when they heard a coach drive up to the door; it was the first sound of the kind, except that of Mrs. Vincent's own post-chaise, which she had heard since her residence in the house, and the surprise it occasioned in her was nearly as great as that of the old lady appeared to be. "Bless me (exclaimed the latter) who can it be? I am sure I expect nobody. My nephew is abroad, sure it cannot be my niece! Go down Martha (continued she, turning to her house-keeper, who happened to be in the room) and let me know who it is; let nobody come up till I know who they are. They may be thieves who have taken this method of getting into the house. Run down and tell John to know who they are before he opens the hall door." Away ran the housekeeper with the swiftness of fear, but in a few moments returned with all the joy of relieved terror in her countenance, crying, "O dear Mam, to be sure it is young madam herself, and she has got a fine young gentleman with her, who she bade me tell you is her husband, and that they have been at his uncle's, and have called upon you in their way to town. O dear me, Mam, she is so fine, and has got such a coach!"—"Hold your fool's tongue (exclaimed Mrs. Vincent) it is my niece, let her come up. I suppose she has married some wild extravagant young fellow, and wants me to give them something to live upon. Believe me I think her brother has had enough to satisfy one family, and I have relations of my own, and cannot bestow every thing upon my husband's." As she spoke these words the door opened, and what was the astonishment of our Heroine when Mr. Craven entered, leading in Miss West.

They walked directly up to Mrs. Vincent, and the latter in a few words informed her, that being lately married to one of the most considerable gentlemen in the county of Westmoreland, and a man whose excellent and agreeable qualities were far more valuable than his large fortune, she thought it would give her pleasure to see them, and therefore would not pass so near to her house without paying their duty to her; she had just finished her speech with her usual volubility and liveliness, when happening to turn her eyes towards Caroline, she gave an involuntary start; but instantly recovering, she drew herself up, and returned, for our Heroine's obliging enquiries after her health, only a very stiff courtesy. As for Mr. Craven, his looks betrayed not the smallest token of recollection, and during the whole evening they both behaved to her in all respects, except politeness, as perfect strangers. Mrs. Vincent was fond of politics, and delighted to hear that her new nephew was a speaker in the house; nay she remembered to have read his speeches and approved his sentiments and opinions. Before the evening was at an end she became so fond of him that all her own relations were wholly forgotten, and she promised to stand god-mother to his first child, and leave it all she was worth, which she told them, one way or other, amounted to a sum worth its acceptance.

As they seemed inclined to sit up late, Caroline, who was weary of being a mere cypher, attending to conversation so little pleasant or interesting, retired to bed, leaving the field clear to the enemy. So perfectly free from art or malice, was her own bosom,

that she could neither suspect or guard against them from others. Nor did her present situation appear to her sufficiently desirable to induce any one to disturb her in it. She therefore lay down without the smallest apprehensions concerning what was passing in Mrs. Vincent's apartment, or the least curiosity about it.

The next morning, upon entering the parlour where she usually breakfasted, she found three cups and saucers placed upon the tea-board, from which she understood that Mr. and Mrs. Craven intended to breakfast with her. A little resentment for their last night's behaviour, and dislike to the thoughts of giving them an opportunity of repeating it, determined her to return to her chamber, but just as she was leaving the room Mr. Craven entered: He approached her with more than usual softness in his eyes and manner. "How extremely am I concerned, Miss Ashford (said he) to find you in so friendless and disagreeable a situation. Is there any thing in my power to serve you? I beseech you to command my interest and fortune." "All the power you had to injure me, Sir, (replied Caroline) you have exerted. Your services I am not in want of. I must indeed be poor when I would owe obligations to a man I despise!"

"My dear creature (cried he) these slights are absurd and useless. You are not now that angel whom every one approached with love which bordered upon adoration. You have proved yourself a woman and must expect to be treated as such; but you are still a lovely, a bewitching one, and if my whole fortune will purchase your favour I shall esteem it well expended." A look of inexpressible amazement, which these words occasioned in our Heroine, was quickly changed into one of ineffable contempt, too strong to admit of any expression in which words could clothe it. Without deigning to speak she quitted the room, leaving the astonished Craven almost convinced that such real and unaffected dignity could only be the attendant of virtue. But this effort only supported her till she reached her chamber; there, throwing herself into a chair in an agony of mind not easily to be described, she sat a few moments almost unable to breathe; a shower of tears relieved her full heart, and gave vent to feelings too exquisitely painful to be long endured. "And am I (she exclaimed) sunk so very low! Am I so lost to honour and esteem as to be subject to so gross, so disgraceful an insult? Oh, my father! my preceptor, guide, and friend! what would you feel did you know the misfortunes to which your poor unhappy daughter is exposed?" A fresh torrent of tears followed these ejaculations, and she sunk back in her chair in a state of mixed mortification, resentment, and disdain. At length the latter principle, by degrees, began to gain possession of her mind; wiping away her tears she rose with calm dignity, exclaiming, in an even and steady voice—"Mean unworthy man! thou art below my resentment! The anguish I feel is a compliment to thy consequence which it never can deserve; but it is passed, neither thy malice nor insult shall cost me another tear."

While the mind of our Heroine was thus disturbed, having, by the utmost exertion of her reason, but half-calmed and composed it, she heard a coach drive up to the door, and in a few minutes saw Mr. and Mrs. Craven step in. The assurance that they were gone did more to re-establish her tranquility than any argument with which her understanding could furnish her; she had nearly regained her former serenity when Mrs. Martha came to her door to inform her that her Mistress would be glad to see her immediately. In a few

moments she went to her room, where she found the old lady half-dressed, with much ill-humour and vexation in her looks.

“I cannot imagine (said she, as Caroline entered) what Mrs. Lane could mean by sending such a person down who is so ill-suited to my purposes. I wanted a young woman who is not above being useful. One who can get up my small linen, sit up with me when I am not well, in turn with Martha, and make a bit of paste or a custard upon occasion.” “I think, indeed (replied Caroline, calmly) such a one would be much better suited to your family, and I am ready to make room for her this very day. If you will be obliging enough to let one of your servants step to Oxford (for they were not three miles distant from that city) and order a post-chaise I will quit your house in three hours.” “Oh, I suppose (replied Mrs. Vincent) you have places enough to go to; girls, of your stamp, never want friends or accommodations while you have whole faces; yes, yes, go along, I want no such. As for a post-chaise—I think the stage-coach will do very well. Your trumpery shall all be carried to Gooddy Hart’s, by the road side, and there you may go too, and wait for the first place you can get. Go, go (continued she) make no speeches; the sooner you are out of the house the better.”

Poor Caroline, before depressed, was for a moment stupified by this unmerited ill treatment. She was too well acquainted with the person from whom she now received it to attempt to persuade or undeceive her. She therefore instantly hurried out of her apartment, and returning to her own, in a few minutes put her things into travelling order, and her trunk being corded by the footman, was carried to a cottage by the side of the road, through which the stage coaches passed, to which place she immediately followed it. She had not waited more than half an hour when one of them appeared, and the coachman being asked if he had any room on the inside, answered, that he was full, but he could take the young woman on the box if that would do. The next which came in sight was hailed in the same manner, and answered that he had room in plenty. Upon the door being opened, Caroline found that the vehicle contained only one old lady, of a respectable appearance. This circumstance gave her much satisfaction, for never having before been in a conveyance of that kind, she had not conceived the most favourable opinion of the general manners of those who travelled in them. Getting in, therefore, with great alacrity, she directed her trunk to be put in the basket, and the carriage drove off on its way to London.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The Benevolent Man.

OUR Heroine and her fellow traveller soon entered into chat upon the different subjects that presented themselves as they passed along; the old Lady upon several occasions gave proofs of observation and understanding superior to what is every day met with; Caroline was greatly pleased with her conversation, and in return she appeared much taken with her. Indeed it was her general fortune to render herself particularly pleasing to old people, for whom she always professed great respect and tenderness, and never failed when the least benevolence and goodness was discoverable about them, to treat them with every possible mark of attention.

They were thus journeying on, enjoying the sunshine of a remarkably clear evening, when the word stop suddenly sounded in their ears, and a determined fierce looking man rode up to the door with a pistol in his hand, ordering them immediately to deliver their money; he had not much resistance to apprehend, both the ladies had watches, and each a purse, which they instantly offered; the old lady begging that he would be so good as to keep his pistol out of the coach; not satisfied with this prize he insisted upon searching them, and began with the old lady in so rude and violent a manner, that the terrified Caroline immediately pulled every thing out of her pockets, in one of which she had unfortunately put the present given her by the Countess du Barrongue. Having taken possession of every thing the travellers had about them, he politely wished them a good journey, and rode off.

Poor Caroline endured this loss with that resolution with which necessity always inspires a mind directed by philosophy and good sense; she submitted because resistance was impossible, and submitted with patience because she knew it was in vain to repine; the loss of her pocket-book was the only circumstance to which she found it difficult to reconcile her mind, she reproached herself for having been so careless as to travel with it about her, and with wanting presence of mind enough to request the highwayman to return it, which had he been put into possession of its contents, it was probable he would not have refused. These reflections were disturbed by her companion, who said she hoped she had some friend to meet her at the inn, in London, as she was now robbed of her money and of course would want the means of paying for her passage. To which Caroline replied, that the friends to whom she was going were of considerable consequence, and would readily supply her with what she had occasion for, but the cause of her coming to town being a sudden one, they were wholly unacquainted with it. "Well (answered the old lady) you must send a porter from the inn to let them know what has happened, that will be your only way." Caroline replied, that she had a pretty large trunk full of valuable cloaths, which if it was necessary she could put into the hands of the master of the inn as a security for payment; to which her fellow traveller answered, that would do very well.

It was early in the morning when the coach stopt at the Swan and Two Necks, Lad-lane. As soon as they alighted a young man stepped up to the old lady, crying "Well,

mother, I am glad to see you returned at last; faith, if you had staid much longer I must have got married, there's no living without a house-keeper." She seemed equally pleased to meet him, and desired him to call a coach and put her bundles into it, for she longed to be at home. Caroline, who was frightened at the thoughts of being left alone in her perplexed situation, begged she would have the goodness to stay till her payment was settled; upon which she related to her son the disaster that had happened to them, and desiring him to call the landlord, walked into a small room by the side of the bar, in order to adjust the affair. When the master of the inn appeared, he heard the case with great civility, and upon being informed that a good deposit would be put into his hands, said it would be the same as payment. The trunk was then ordered to be brought, but upon the return of the waiter, who was sent for it, they were informed that no such thing was to be found. It was in vain that a further search was made among the baggage, which came in and about the machine, it was no where to be met with, and as it was not entered, no account could be given of it.

This misfortune was of a serious nature, and our Heroine felt it in the severest manner; but this was neither a fit time or place for lamentation. What was to be done? While this question was debating, the young man asked what the money was that she owed? and being told, offered to pay it, saying, there was honesty in the young lady's face, and if she never paid it, he could not give so many shillings to a prettier woman. He accordingly satisfied the landlord, and taking five shillings out of a handful of silver which he held, offered it to our Heroine, telling her perhaps she might want it to pay coach hire.

Caroline thanked him in the most grateful manner, but declined further to increase her debt than was absolutely necessary, saying, the friends to whom she was going, would, she doubted not, both supply her present wants, and enable her to repay the sum she had borrowed, for which purpose he gave her his address. He then called a hackney coach, into which he handed her, and at her request, directed it to drive to Sackville-Street.

Upon her arrival, the door was opened by a woman servant, she was just stepping out of the coach, when to her unexpressible concern and mortification, she was informed that Mr. and Mrs. Lane were gone to their country seat, an hundred miles distant from town, to spend the holidays, and that no-body was left in the house but herself, who lived, during their absence, upon board wages. This intelligence completed her misfortunes. She was left without a shilling, without a friend to whom she could apply for the smallest assistance; in the midst of a city, to which she was utterly a stranger, and in which she knew not where to shelter herself from insult and barbarity. She looked at the coachman, who stood with his hat off, and the door in his hand, to receive her further orders, with terror, neither daring to get out (conscious that she had nothing wherewith to satisfy his demand) or to increase her debt, by ordering him to drive further. During this dreadful state of terror and uncertainty, she recollected the card given her by the young man who had paid her passage in the stage, and taking it out of her pocket, ordered him to drive to the Hay market.

It would be in vain to attempt a picture of her state of mind while she passed along; all her resolution and philosophy sunk before the dreadful apprehension of being turned into the streets a friendless wanderer, exposed to every danger of unprotected helplessness, every insult of wanton cruelty. Full of these fearful ideas she saw the coach stop before a grocer's shop, and the young man she had seen at the inn standing behind the counter serving a customer; he immediately came to the door, and seeing who was in the carriage, very civilly desired her to walk in, to which she making no objection, he pulled down the step and offered her his hand.

With trembling limbs and a palpitating heart she followed him into a little parlour at the back of the shop, where the old lady with whom she had travelled, sat looking over some papers, which a servant girl was shewing her. "Aye (aye cried she, just as Caroline crossed the shop) here has been fine doings indeed! well might Tom say he wanted a house-keeper; why what a quantity of bread has here been used; and for porter, I'm sure here's twice as much set down as ever was used by him." "Why Mam because my master keeps a great deal more company when you are out than when your at home (answered the servant) I'm sure nothing's wasted nor given away neither; and many's the day when my master dined out that I was short enough; there's not many servants would put up with it. "You're a saucy hussy (answered her mistress) you are too well used and don't know what you would have."

Here she was interrupted by her son, who leading in Caroline, told her the young lady for whom he paid the passage in the stage coach, was come to return the money; at which words her countenance, which before had been very cloudy, cleared up at once, and she begged her to sit down, saying she wished every body were as honest as her it would give people pleasure to assist them. Poor Caroline's agitation increased by these words to such a degree that she had hardly breath to inform her that finding her friend's family out of town, and not knowing any body to whom she might apply for assistance, she was come to intreat that they would recommend her to some person who would trust her with subsistance for one week, by which time she should receive remittances from the country.

The face of her auditor screwed up to the most supercilious coldness as our Heroine proceeded with her request, and when she had done speaking, she asked her how she could suppose they would venture to recommend her into any family, who were utterly unacquainted with her character? "For my part, continued she, I suffered enough already by taking strangers into my house; two years ago I lost all the linen of one of my beds, two table spoons, and an India handkerchief, and all by a girl as genteel and well spoken as yourself; there's no trusting to appearances; sharpers and girls of the town can take any shape, and look as honest and as modest as they please; besides you cannot expect that we should do any thing for you, who have already trusted you so far without knowing whether we shall ever be paid or not; believe me, a tradesman has much ado to live and pay every body their own without suffering himself to be taken in by every swindler: what with the shop tax, and the tax upon windows and maid servants, and one thing or other a man can hardly stand upon his legs, much more maintain all the

necessitous people he meets with; besides if I were inclined to let you be here, I have not a spare bed if I had the world for it.”

“It was not my intention (replied Caroline) to trouble you by remaining here, but I thought you could possibly be good enough to inform me where I might be taken in for only one week, I am certain of receiving a remittance by that time.”

“I can really do no such thing (replied the mistress of the house) I would not upon any account recommend you without I knew your character; as you go along the street you will see a great many lodgings to let, some or other of them may probably take you in, for there are some of all sorts; if ever you get any money I hope you will remember to pay Tom, if not, the first loss is the best; so I would not have you to lose your time, for I can do nothing more for you.”

“Good God! (exclaimed Caroline) what shall I do? how shall I pay for the coach?” “Nay (returned the woman) that’s your business; people ought to know how to pay for coaches before they ride in them; you cannot expect us who are quite strangers to lend you so much money.” At this moment the young man, who had been out in the shop, returned, and hearing his mother’s last words, asked what money she wanted; adding, that if a few shillings would be of use to her she was welcome to them. “Oh to be sure (exclaimed his mother) you are wonderfully generous! and pray when do you expect to have it again? but there are many kinds of payments, and I suppose she is one of those who will not stand upon trifles.”

At these words our Heroine started up, her cheeks glowing with indignation, which for a moment overpowered all other sensations. “Be assured, madam (said she) that the moment I possess such a sum you shall be repaid what I owe you; in the mean time I will rid you of the further trouble you seem to apprehend from me.” So saying she left the room, and was about to quit the house, when the sight of the coach, which still stood unpaid before the door, met her eyes; she started, a trembling seized her whole frame, and the coachman, (a large, dark, ill-looking fellow) appearing, completed her terrors; she turned pale, and fainted away upon the ground.

Upon recovering she found herself once more in the little parlour, supported by the old woman and a benevolent looking old gentleman, who seemed to view her condition with particular concern. “How do you do, young lady? (said he with tenderness) be comforted, your coach is paid, and I will furnish you with whatever you are in want of; I am a father, and upon this occasion wish to act the part of one to you.”

Tears of gratitude and thankfulness, broken by the violence of her emotions, were all that poor Caroline could return for the goodness of her unknown friend, who turning to the mistress of the house “Cannot you, Mrs. Glover, let this young lady board and lodge with you? (said he) I believe you will have no objection to taking my word for her security; but if you have I will pay you beforehand.” “No, no Sir, answered Mrs. Glover) I know your pay too well; upon those terms she shall be welcome to board with us as long as she pleases.”

“Very well (replied the old gentleman) I am truly glad that I happened to come in as I did.” “Oh, Sir exclaimed Caroline) from what wretchedness, what extreme danger have you saved me! but for you”—“No more of this my good madam at present (interrupted he) come Mrs. Glover, get a dish of tea, your boarder looks ill and wants refreshment.” This order was to Caroline truly acceptable; she was very thirsty, and began to feel great weariness, with an uncomfortable pain in her head and limbs; her eyes and cheeks burning, while her feet were cold as marble. After drinking several dishes of tea she told the mistress of the house that she would, with her permission, lie down upon the bed for an hour or two, as she found herself very weary and heavy; Mr. Wilson, for by that name the benevolent friend, to whom she was so much obliged was known, desired she would let him feel her pulse, which as soon as he had done, looking very grave, he requested Mrs. Glover to put her quite to bed, and make her plenty of white wine whey, saying she was in a very high fever. She was accordingly undressed, and the medicine prescribed administered; but the excessive perturbations of her mind had too much affected the delicate frame upon which it acted; she soon became delirious, and a physician who was called in, gave it as his opinion that her life was in considerable danger. In this state she remained near a week, during which time nothing was spared by the generous Mr. Wilson that could contribute to her recovery. The fever at length left her, but in so weak a state that she was unable to rise from her bed.

At the first return of her senses, the past distressful events appeared like an uneasy dream; it was some time before she could perfectly recollect the circumstances that connected them; and her weakened mind, unable long to support reflection, became confused as it endeavoured to pierce thro’ the vail which seemed to obscure it. By degrees, however, this vail removed, and she clearly recollected every situation thro’ which she had struggled, with so much difficulty and pain. In proportion as she became sensible of the past, her anxiety for the future increased, and the uneasiness of her mind had more than once endangered a relapse. Mr. Wilson often visited her, and constantly gave her the kindest assurances of his continued friendship and protection. He would neither suffer her to mention her obligations, nor the means by which she proposed to discharge the pecuniary part of them, telling her she must first get well, and he would then hear all she had to say, and assist her in every thing that lay in his power. I have a daughter of my own, would he cry, as young, as amiable, and almost as handsome as yourself; were she in such distress, how would I wish her to be treated? even so will I treat you; and till you are quite recovered, and able to return to your friends, you must look upon me as a father.”

“Ah! (replied Caroline) clasping her fair hands together, and raising her fine eyes to Heaven, I have no father, no friends! once I had both, but now I am forlorn and destitute.”

“Then I will be your father, your friend, (exclaimed the old gentleman, with a look of extreme tenderness and benevolence.) I am not now very rich, but I shortly expect to be so, and then I will consider you as my second daughter. My girl has a generous open heart, and will rejoice at the acquisition of such a sister.”

This encouraging kindness greatly contributed to facilitate the recovery of our Heroine, who, in a few days after the fever had left her, felt her strength so much restored, as to be able to rise, walk about the room, and venture to converse with freedom. She gave Mr. Wilson such a sketch of her history, as appeared extremely to interest him, and he often, during her recital, declared that she should never again undergo difficulties and distresses, so ill suited to the delicacy of her frame, and the sensibility of her heart. In return for her confidence, he informed her that his name was not Wilson, but being involved in a long and expensive law suit, upon which a principal part of his estate depended, he had broken up house-keeping, and his daughter being with a relation as companion, he had resolved to live in the most private and oeconomic manner, till it was finally decided, an event for which he hoped every day. That by changing his name, he the more effectually secreted himself from his former acquaintance, with whom, should the decree be unfavourable, he never more intended to mix; as the payment of arrears, the estate having been many years in his possession before the present claim was heard of, would reduce his fortune to only a comfortable maintenance. But if on the contrary, it should be given in his favour, as he had every reason to believe it would, the saving he had made, would pay the whole expence of the suit, and he should resume his old way of living, with double pleasure and security. He added, that the claimant was a man of very large fortune, and powerful connections, but he trusted in his right, and had great confidence that the decree would be such as he wished.

As soon as our Heroine found herself equal to the task, she wrote to Dr. Seward an account of all that had befallen her, begging that he would see Mrs. Forester, and let her know the situation she was at present in, and the necessity she was under of sharing with her the little income she had hoped to continue to her, till she was better provided for; but requested that if her brother was not yet arrived, she would continue where she was, till her coming down, when they would consult what further steps were best to be taken. She begged the Doctor to send her up 50l. out of the principal of her thousand, which she said she hoped would discharge all the debts she had contracted, and bring her once more to the only spot where she had a probability of finding peace and security. This task being performed, she felt her mind more at ease, not doubting but the Doctor would do every thing she wished, she already fancied herself the inhabitant of Mrs. Williams's little apartments, and after the dreadful anxieties and anguish of mind she had experienced, peace and independance, though in a situation the most obscure, appeared real blessings.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A Discovery.

THE very morning after Caroline had written to Dr. Seward, she was sitting in her apartment, making some linen she greatly stood in need of, with money to purchase which, Mr. Wilson had supplied her, when that excellent man knocked at her door to request that she would come down to his dining-room, saying, he had a good fire, and a change of rooms was better for the health than constantly sitting in one. She had every evening since her recovery drank tea with him there, and now readily accepted his invitation. He gave her his hand in coming down stairs, as she was still but weak, and placing her by the side of his fire, insisted upon her taking a cup of chocolate which he had prepared for her. He then took up a volume of Cook's last Voyages, and sitting down on the opposite side began to read; which though rather a monotonist, he did in a sensible and entertaining manner, frequently stopping to make remarks, which were often new, and always judicious.

While they were thus comfortably employed, a coach stopped at the house, and in a few moments they heard a smart rap at the door of the room in which they were sitting. Without waiting for an answer it was opened, and in rushed Miss Dunford. She flew to Mr. Wilson with extreme joy, who clasping her in his arms exclaimed "My dear Harriot! my own girl!" She threw her arms round his neck with all the fondness of an infant, crying "My dear, dear father, how glad I am to see you!" Caroline remained in the most pleasing wonder, when Miss Dunford turning her eyes upon her, started with amazement, exclaiming "Miss Ashford! is it possible!" Caroline met her embrace with all the ardour of affectionate friendship. "Is it possible, indeed (repeated she) is it possible, that it is to the father of my dear Harriot, I am indebted for the preservation of my life, for my escape from dangers far more dreadful than death! How wonderful is the guidance of providence (continued she, lifting her eyes to heaven) how little have I deserved to be so much the object of its care!" The old gentleman was quite transported; he had forbore to enquire particularly into her family from motives of delicacy, which ever declines to know more than it is wished; and she had avoided giving them, as believing it a subject uninteresting to him, and painful to herself, having so little that was worthy to relate of it. He joined the hands of the fair friends, calling them his daughters, fervently praying of heaven that he might be enabled to support them as such.

Being again seated Miss Dunford told our Heroine that the Countess du Barrongue, was then at Mr. Lane's in Sackvill Street, that they came sooner to England than they intended on account of business, and took possession of Mr. Lane's house, which they found uninhabited, except by one woman servant; that the family returned as soon as they were informed of their arrival, and were now all in town, as was a sister and brother of the Countess's. That they had sent a servant down to Mrs. Vincent's on purpose to bring her back, Mrs. Lane having heard a very strange character of that lady during her late visit to the country, quite different from that she had received before, which induced her to recommend her as her companion; and that the account of her being

returned to London a fortnight before the inquiry was made, had given the Countess, Mrs. Lane, and herself, extreme uneasiness. But it will now be all at an end (continued she) for you must come with me back, where you will be received with as much joy as affection. Caroline having expressed the pleasure she felt at the hope of so soon beholding such kind and amiable friends, Miss Dunford, with some hesitation, and not without blushes, told her she could likewise give her some account of her brother. "He was with us more than a week (continued she) a short time before our coming to England. The Countess gave him a minute detail of all that had befallen you from the time he saw you last, to your setting out for Paris; and shewed him the letter which you had written her from Mrs. Vincent's. He appeared extremely surprised, and equally pleased with the account, which I found was very different from those he had received from Lord and Lady Walton, which were full of complaints against your levity and disrespectful behaviour. And as (he said) he was not quite satisfied with your conduct when he left England they had made the deeper impression upon his mind; he had, till the Countess gave him this information believed that you lived with your uncle Sir Marmaduke, and being much offended by proceedings so different from those he once expected from you, had resolved to take no notice of you, either by letter, or any other way, till his return, as the most marked expression of his disapprobation. But he now longs to embrace and beg your pardon for the unjust and cruel neglect he has been guilty of. Indeed (continued Miss Dunford) he began himself to feel the effects of Lady Walton's malignant influence, a considerable part of his stipend was stopped, and he was forbidden to return at the time he intended. And I have no doubt but she would have compleatly ruined his expectations had not the death of his uncle put an end to her machinations."

"The death of his uncle (exclaimed Caroline) is Lord Walton dead?" "He has been dead this fortnight (replied Harriot) and your brother is in possession of Broomfield, and except the dowager's jointure, his whole fortune." The shock, the mixture of surprise, joy, and regret, which at once took possession of our Heroine's mind, was nearly too much for her weak frame. Mr. Dunford observing her paleness, stepped to a side-board where a bottle of water stood, and pouring out a glassful begged her to drink it. She swallowed part of it and immediately felt herself revived. A shower of tears which fell to the memory of her uncle's passed kindness still further relieved her, and in about half an hour she was well enough to accompany Mr. and Miss Dunford to Mr. Lane's.

When they arrived in Sackvill Street, they were informed that the ladies were all dressing, Miss Dunford therefore leaving her father in the breakfast parlour, desired Caroline to walk up with her; she put her into her own chamber which was next to that in which the Countess slept, then stepping to that lady informed who she had found, and in a few words related the accidents which had thrown her into the protection of her father. The Countess impatiently begged to see her, and the moment she appeared, embracing her with the greatest tenderness "My dear creature (exclaimed she) have we at last found you? how many hearts will your safety and presence rejoice!" She then sent her woman to Mrs. Lane, to inform her of the happy news; in a few moments that lady entering the room expressed the highest pleasure at seeing her, and begged her pardon, for the many uncomfortable hours she had occasioned her by so entirely mistaking the character of Mrs. Vincent, of whom he had heard the most respectable one. The Countess was

extremely surprised to hear that she was widow to the person from whom Col. Vincent inherited his name and fortune, and was filled with indignation at the insolent behaviour of his sister. When the name of Craven, was mentioned Miss Dunford exclaimed "What Mr. Craven of Westmoreland? He is the person who sues my father for the Cumberland estate. We are near relations and were upon the most intimate terms till about three years since, when my father happening to have a dispute with one of his neighbours about a private road, requested Mr. Craven to look over some of his papers, in which he either found or fancied a title to a large estate which descended to our family from a distant branch. It was at his house that my father became acquainted with your brother, Miss Ashford, and out of regard and friendship to him Lord Walton forbade all intercourse between them after the quarrel and law-suit was commenced." "I sincerely hope (replied the Countess) that a few days will make him smart for his folly. But, my dear Miss Ashford, do you know that we have a heavy charge against you? We have discovered that in the relation of your little history you have omitted transactions of a very important nature, in which your character is greatly concerned, and which shews your conduct and disposition in a light wherein you did not chuse to place them. You look surprised; but it is in vain to justify your sincerity, or deny facts; we have, in the house, witnesses that will testify against you." "Let us, however, give her fair play (said Mrs. Lane) she shall meet her accusers face to face. I just now heard them go into the drawing-room; come, Miss Dunford, bring the culprit along, she shall take her trial this moment." So saying, she took the hand of our Heroine, who, though conscious of no guilt, felt some uneasiness, and the Countess stepping before and throwing open the door of the drawing-room, the first objects which presented themselves to her eyes were Mrs. Forester and little Mary.

"Oh, my dear little Mama! (exclaimed the latter) look, look, Mama, it is Miss Ashford!" So saying, she flew to her in a transport of joy. Caroline, stooping down, received her in her arms, while the grateful mother, unable to express her feelings, seized one of her hands, upon which she impressed a fervent kiss. "These, my dear Caroline (said the Countess) are your accusers; these whom you have saved from perishing in want, whom you have supported, at the expence of your own comfort, almost of your life. Little did I think when you told me that you looked forward to a day of independance, that it was your goodness to my sister which kept it at a distance." "Your sister! (cried Caroline) Is it possible that I can have been so fortunate?" "Yes, my dear preserver, my friend, my protectress (exclaimed Mrs. Forester) this is the sister to whose superior virtues and understanding I bore testimony when you kindly listened to my melancholy story. But oh! how could I ever have endured reflection, had your goodness to us been attended by the dreadful effects of which my sister speaks! had I suspected the change in your condition, I would have begged for my support ere you should have suffered such inconveniencies while I enjoyed the comforts of life at your expence." "Let us not, my dear Madam (answered our Heroine) think upon the disagreeable events that are passed. Sincerely do I congratulate you upon the happy change in your circumstances, which will, I trust, both for your sake and that of this sweet child, continue in future as happy as you can wish them." "I have (replied Mrs. Forester) the kindest and most generous of sisters, who, like you, bids me forget all the pains that are passed. My father has been dead some months; the time of his decease happened while I was in my deepest distress at the cottage. My brother has likewise been in England, but as I was then cut off from all

intelligence, both these circumstances escaped my knowledge, till I last week read an account in a public paper of his election for the county which my father represented. I immediately came to town, and to my inexpressible joy had the good fortune of finding my sister. My brother (continued Mrs. Forester) I have not yet seen, nor can I think of his arrival, which is every hour expected, without fear.”

“Your apprehensions, my dear (replied the Countess) are altogether unnecessary: there is not a worthier, more amiable, or generous man upon earth than our brother. My father’s circumstances, at the time of his death, were much better than was generally expected, which, together with the estate left him by my uncle, which is more than five thousand pounds a year, puts it amply in his power to provide for you and our dear little Mary, especially as the Count absolutely refuses the fortune he has generously offered me.”

While this explanation was making, Mr. Dunford, who had stood quite still at a farther part of the room, advanced, and the Countess, her sister, and Mrs. Lane, surrounded him in a moment; as soon as he could disengage himself from them, he took the hand of our Heroine, and, kissing it with parental fondness “I have heard (said he) that men were subject to be deceived by false appearances; I thought I only had a beautiful woman under my care, but find it was an angel.” Caroline smiled at this affectionate piece of gallantry, and replied, that she feared a little further acquaintance would too certainly convince him that his benevolence and protection had been exerted in favour of a weak erring mortal.

Dinner being now announced they all walked down to the dining-parlour, Miss Dunford taking one of Caroline’s hands and little Mary the other; on their way down the former told her she was almost as much surprised as herself at the Countess’s accusations, for having been out when Mrs. Forester arrived, she had not heard any particulars of her story. In the parlour they were joined by Mr. Lane and the Count; and Caroline, who was a favourite with both of them, was again welcomed and congratulated. Having sat a short time after the cloath was removed, the ladies retired to the drawing-room, where they were soon joined by the gentlemen: a Whist-table being placed, the Count and Countess, Mr. and Mrs. Lane, Mr. Dunford and Mrs. Forester drew for places; the first and last couple sat down, while the other joined Caroline and Miss Dunford in sensible and lively chat, while little Mary ran prattling first to one and then the other, admired and caressed by all.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Another Discovery.

THEY had not long continued in this situation when a travelling chaise and four stopped at the door. "My brother (exclaimed the Countess) in a joyful accent, come, come, Mary, don't look as if you expected a Spanish Don full of rage and vengeance, believe me you have nothing to apprehend from his anger and resentment, they have long been changed into pity." Mrs. Forester still looked uneasy, and was scarce able to rise as the whole company did when the door opened; but judge the astonishment and confusion of our Heroine when the servant announced Sir Wm. Beaumont, and she beheld that so much beloved author of many an uneasy moment enter.

Every eye sparkled with joy when he appeared, and all present, Mrs. Forester and Caroline excepted, thronged round to welcome him. He returned their salutations in the most kind and graceful manner, and when the Countess presented her sister, telling him that the poor prodigal was returned both to them and to herself, he embraced her with the most unreproaching tenderness, assuring her that it should be his care to banish from her mind every remembrance of passed sorrows, and to render her future life as happy as the extent of his power could make it; he then turned to the beautiful little Mary, and bestowed upon her such praises and caresses as delighted the heart of her fond parent. While he was thus employed, and Mr. Lane was requesting him and the rest of the party to be reseated, the Countess took the trembling hand of Caroline, and leading her up more dead than alive towards her brother "I must not (said she) forget to present to you a third sister, and one who is worth the other two put together, nay, my dear Miss Ashford, surely you will not deny me the pleasure of beginning an acquaintance between two persons, who are so happily formed by similar virtues and excellences for intimacy and friendship."

Sir William approached our Heroine with visible emotion. "To behold Miss Ashford (said he) and to wish her happy must ever be the same act. Were it safe to judge of the mind by its proper index, I should without hesitation pronounce her faultless." As these words did not imply a former knowledge, Caroline endeavoured to recover herself, and courtesying with the distant civility of a stranger, was silently retiring to her chair, when Mrs. Forester taking hold of her other hand, with eyes full of affection "You tell me, Sir William, (said she) that my return to my family gives you satisfaction, behold in this most amiable of women the guardian angel who preserved me and this helpless innocent from perishing in want and obscurity; to her bounty were we many months indebted for the support of life, a bounty which her own severe distress could not induce her to withdraw." "I am sorry (replied Sir William, with a softened look and accent) that goodness and beauty ever should be subject to misfortune, but such is the inequality and imperfection of human things; while the sun shines in its fullest splendour on one part of the landscape, a dark and heavy cloud overshades the other." He spoke these words with a strong emphasis, and a sigh which seemed to struggle from the bottom of his heart.

Caroline was too much affected, she turned aside to hide her emotions, and it was with much difficulty that she kept herself from fainting.

In a few moments every body had resumed their places, Mr. and Mrs. Lane were called for at the card table, and the Count and Countess cut out; at the same time some more friends dropping in, a second was ordered, and Caroline and Miss Dunford drawn for by the gentlemen. Our Heroine fell to the share of Sir Wm. Beaumont, who with great politeness and gallantry informed her of his good fortune, and handed her to the table. As they passed the Countess, she turned to her Lord, and in a whisper loud enough to be distinctly heard by the whole company—"What a charming couple are they (said she) I sincerely wish the partnership was for life." The pale cheeks of Caroline were instantly in a glow, and the hand Sir William held, which before was very steady, trembled so much that the Baronet, who partook of her emotions, immediately relinquished it, but not without a gentle involuntary pressure which greatly increased its violence. During the whole rubber she never ventured to lift her eyes to his, scarce was she able to speak the few words necessary to the game, and when Miss Dunford, who as well as herself was naturally very chearful, said any lively thing which forced a smile, it resembled those of dying saints, patience and sweetness triumphing over anguish.

Sir William kept his eyes almost constantly fixed upon her face; his inattention to play was evident, and his countenance now expressed the highest degree of admiration, now the tenderest pity, and now the deepest regret. The Countess who watched him closely beheld these emotions with surprise, nor could she by any means account for those which appeared in her fair friend, but she was so much concerned for her apparent indisposition, that as soon as the rubber was ended she insisted upon her not beginning another, saying she plainly saw that the fatigue was too much for her, she accordingly arose, and followed by her partner seated herself by the fire. He enquired with much anxiety how long she had been ill, what advice she had had, and several other particulars, in which he appeared greatly interested. She longed to enter into an explanation of her conduct, once and again her lips were open to ask him if he recollected seeing her at Paris, knowing that the mention of Colonel Vincent would have led directly to the subject; but the effort was vain, something at the moment she was about to speak seemed to deprive her of breath, and they closed again in silence; she therefore gave up the design, leaving it to the course of events to clear her or not in his opinion, as chance and accident should direct. After a little time, however, her spirits were sufficiently recovered to enter into conversation with him, if not with her usual liveliness, in a manner so sensible, elegant, and pleasing, that Sir William seemed to be upon the point of forgetting that rigid honour which was wont to keep inclination in awe; when suddenly starting as from a dream, he arose, and folding his arms across his bosom, remained for some moments in a state of profound thoughtfulness, then assuming an air of easy chearfulness, "you mean to play no more this evening, Miss Ashford, said he, I think I shall undertake another rubber," so saying he bowed carelessly and walked to the card table, where, leaning over the back of Miss Dunford's chair, he continued to watch the progress of the game till it was ended, and it being the last of the rubber, he immediately cut in and sat down to play.

Mr. Dunford and Mrs. Forester being out, joined our Heroine the moment Sir William quitted her, and they were chatting upon a variety of subjects, when she was suddenly seized with such a shivering fit that the chair upon which she sat shook with the violence of her agitation. The company were extremely alarmed, and her altered countenance, which from paleness had assumed the highest flush of hectic crimson, increased their apprehensions. Sir William was among the first and most concerned who approached her; he took her hand which a moment before had been cold as marble, but now glowed as if scorched by an internal fire, and feeling her high and irregular pulse, his face was over-spread with a livid paleness, and he begged the Countess immediately to send for the best assistance.

All joined in intreating her to go to bed, with which she would willingly have complied, but found herself unable to stand, or rise from her chair. While all were offering their assistance, Sir William, with a tenderness and delicacy peculiar to himself, took her gently in his arms, and carrying her with the same care with which a mother bears her favourite child, placed her in an easy chair by the side of her bed. Every one then retired, except the Countess, her woman, and Mrs. Forester, who soon undressed and put her to bed, where she was no sooner placed, than they sent the servant to give particular orders to have the house kept quiet, and the knocker muffled.

As soon as she was gone, the Countess coming to the bed side, and taking the burning hand, which her fair friend, by way of bidding her good night, held out, she affectionately kissed it, and looking upon her with extreme tenderness “My dearest Caroline, my friend, my sister (exclaimed she) what is it that distresses you? Tell me, my love? I too plainly perceive it is the agitation and disturbance of your mind, which tears that delicate frame to pieces.”

“Ah! Madam (replied our Heroine) seek not to discover more of my weaknesses than you are already acquainted with. Add not to my misfortunes, the loss of your esteem.”

“That is impossible (replied she) my esteem, my warmest affection, you must for ever possess. But answer me one question. Have you ever before seen Sir Wm. Beaumont?”

“Oh yes! too, too often,” answered Caroline. “Good Heavens (exclaimed the Countess) is it possible, can he be the person for whose sake”——“Dear Madam, interrupted our Heroine, do not despise me, weak and absurd as I now appear, I am not the idle love-sick girl my present follies may lead you to suppose.” “No woman (replied the Countess) need be ashamed of an attachment to such a man as my brother. But if it will not fatigue you too much, will you favour me with a few particulars of what has passed between you?”

Caroline immediately informed her in what manner she first became acquainted with Sir William and that he was the unknown person whom she had heard Colonel Vincent mention her being with at Vauxhall to whom Mr. Craven gave so false and cruel

an account of her. She then related her meeting him again at Ashford Park, and the inconveniencies his declaration in her favour, had brought upon her; and lastly, her being seen by him in the chaise with Colonel Vincent at Paris, and again as she was alighting at the Hotel.

As soon as she had done speaking, the Countess exclaimed "I perfectly understand the whole affair! He loves you to distraction; of that I was convinced before I knew the cause of those struggles he so evidently endures. Good night, my sweet love, sleep and get well. I will take care that Sir William shall not close his eyes till he has received your pardon for daring to suspect what his heart has all along declared to be a falsehood." Both ladies then kissed her in an affectionate manner, Mrs. Forester saying that she was made for her brother, and no other man could ever deserve her.

The moment the ladies quitted the chamber of their fair friend, they joined the company in the drawing room, whom they found reduced to their own family, the strangers having taken leave, fearing to intrude upon uneasiness they could not alleviate. Mr. Dunford likewise having staid to know how she found herself when they left her, followed their example; and little Mary being gone to bed, they drew their chairs in a circle round the fire, each expressing their fears for the safety of their general favourite.

The Countess entered into a warm eulogy upon her manners and character, saying she thought her, in every respect, the most perfectly amiable young person of whom she ever had knowledge.

During this panegyric, Sir William sat in a thoughtful posture, his arms folded, and his eyes fixed upon the fire, insensible of its glare and heat. "My brother is a stranger to this lovely girl (continued the Countess) I will therefore give him a short account of the many injuries she has received, and the uncomfortable vicissitudes through which she has passed." She then related all the events of her life, in a clear and concise manner.

Sir William listened with the utmost attention when she gave an account of her quitting Broomfield, and the cause of it, so different from that he had received from Mr. Craven, the most lively emotion was visible in his countenance; and when she related Colonel Vincent's account of the evening at Vaux-Hall, his apology to Caroline, and the proposal he made her by his sister's mediation; the cause of her going with him to Paris, and her joining Mrs. Lane at the Hotel, he could no longer contain the satisfaction and pleasure he enjoyed, but rising and clasping his hands together, in an extacy "if so (exclaimed he) I am among the number of those who have most wronged her." He then acknowledged himself to have been the person who saved her; that the first moment he beheld her, he admired her person to a degree of rapture; and that every hour of her company and conversation increased his attachment so much, that he had resolved to declare his passion, and, if possible, unite himself for ever to one so lovely, engaging, and amiable, when the circumstances with which they were already acquainted, interposed between him and happiness. He then told them what they already knew, his having seen her at Paris with Colonel Vincent, which, he said, he esteemed equal to a positive proof of her guilt; and that instead of paying a visit to the Count and his sister as was his

intention, he had immediately quitted France, and returned to England, fully resolved to drive her from his thoughts; an effort in which he had flattered himself with having in some degree succeeded, when fortune again threw her into his way, at a place in which he so little expected to meet her, and the first glance convinced him that all his labour had been in vain, and that he was, if possible, more in love than ever. "It was my design (continued the Baronet) to have left this dangerous house to-morrow morning, had not the account I have just heard, altered my resolution; but I am now fixed here, till the recovery of my angel shall impower me to receive the future colouring of my days at her hands."

Supper was scarce ended, when an eminent physician arrived, and, attended by all the ladies, who were too anxious for his opinion, to be left behind, visited the fair invalid, whom he pronounced to be in considerable danger.

As soon as he had written a prescription, the Countess presented his fee, requesting that he would call again early in the morning, and continue his visits at least twice a day till they should become unnecessary.

With anxious and disturbed looks, they returned to the supper-room, where they found Sir William walking backwards and forwards in extreme agitation. The moment they entered "What is the opinion of Dr. ——, (said he) is Miss Ashford in danger?"

"The Doctor gives us hope (replied Mrs. Lane) but at the same time he wishes to arm us against the worst." "The worst (exclaimed Sir William) good God! but how does she herself appear to be? Is her fever higher?" "It is higher (replied Mrs. Lane) than when she was put to bed." Sir William then began to walk about the room again with a quicker pace, his arms folded, and his countenance expressive of the deepest anguish.

As no one could enjoy conversation, they all retired early to bed, except Mrs. Forester, who sat up the whole night, declaring her beloved friend should not be left a single moment to the care only of a mercenary nurse. She sat the whole night by the side of her bed, gave her such diluted liquids as she was ordered to drink, and watched every look and motion with all the anxious care of a fond mother, who trembles for the life of an only child.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The Female Physician.

EARLY the following morning the Countess entered Caroline's chamber; she found Miss Dunford already there, who insisted upon Mrs. Forester's going to rest for a few hours and leaving her fair charge to her care, in which her sister strongly joining, she at last consented. They found the lovely object of their attention in a state the most dangerous and affecting. She was in a high fever and quite delirious. While they were standing round the bed Dr. — entered, who with a look of apprehension begged she might be kept very quiet, and no one suffered to approach her whose presence was likely in any way to affect her; adding, that he feared something or other disturbed her mind, and that every thing depended upon her being kept quiet and easy. All, therefore, but Miss Dunford and the nurse, immediately retired; the Countess begged the Doctor would call again in a few hours and went back to her apartment, as did Mrs. Forester to hers. The Doctor was going down stairs to his chariot when he was met by Sir Wm. Beaumont, whose pale and disordered looks spoke a sleepless night and perturbed mind. They walked together into the breakfast parlour, where they conversed for some minutes; the Doctor then took his leave and Sir William returned to his apartment.

In about two hours they all met at breakfast, where each knowing how deeply the other was interested in the event of our Heroine's illness, suppressed a part of their own fears in compassion to those of their friends; yet unable to think of any other subject they remained almost silent; but the concern and anxiety of Sir William gave to theirs the appearance of mere coldness; they were excessive, and tore his mind with anguish, easier far to be imagined than described.

While they were still leaning over their tea a travelling coach stopped at the door, and they saw Mr. Dunford alight, followed by Mr. Henry Ashford and Dr. Seward. The moment they entered, Mr. Dunford, without attending to the civilities usual at meeting, enquired after the health of his dear Caroline, and upon being told that she was very ill, he exclaimed "She must be well! By heavens, this is no time for sickness! Tell her her uncle has left her fifty thousand pounds, with a full acknowledgment of the cruelty and injustice of which he was guilty in permitting her to be sent from his house when he was in his own breast convinced of the falshood of every accusation brought against her. Tell her her brother is here, and impatient to embrace and give her every testimony of his friendship. Tell her her old friend Dr. Seward is come to prescribe for her, both mind and body; and, lastly, Tell her that I have obtained a final decree in my favour, and that her friend, Harriot, will have as good a fortune as herself. Tell her all this and my life for it she is well and amongst us in four-and-twenty hours."

Every one expressed their satisfaction upon receiving each part of this intelligence, particularly the first and the last, which afforded them sincere pleasure. The Countess likewise expressed the greatest joy at sight of Doctor Seward, of whom she had heard her fair friend so often speak in terms of respect and gratitude.

Henry expressed great impatience to see his sister; he informed the Countess that he had in vain made enquiry after her, and began to be seriously alarmed for her safety, when Doctor Seward received a letter from her, by which he learned, to his great astonishment, that she was fallen into the hands of his good friend Mr. Dunford, with whose feigned name and place of abode he was well acquainted; that he lost not a moment in setting out to inform her in person of the happy change in her circumstances, in which journey the Doctor, from motives of friendly affection to his sister, resolved to accompany him: he added, that he could not express how great a disappointment her illness was to him, especially as he had a matrimonial scheme to propose to her which he had much set his heart upon, and which he hoped would prove agreeable to her.

Sir William, who had till then stood in a musing posture, at these words started, and looking steadily in his face, said he hoped, should Miss Ashford's wished for recovery afford them the happiness of seeing her make a choice, it would be uninfluenced by any thing but her own judgment and inclination, since no one who was acquainted with the one could doubt of its being strong enough to direct the other. The Countess observing Henry to look surprised, and as if doubtful whether he should answer him with civility or be offended by his interference, immediately made them known to each other in the usual form, a ceremony which in their present state of uneasiness had been omitted. This put all right again, and they exchanged every polite expression of esteem which a mutual knowledge of each other's characters inspired.

These civilities were interrupted by Dr. Seward, who requested that he might have permission to visit his fair friend, not, he said, in the character of a physician, except he should see a proper occasion to prescribe a mental dose. The Countess offered to attend him to her chamber; but by the way, begged he would indulge her with a moment's conversation in her dressing-room, previous to his seeing their dear Caroline. She there told him, that little as she was acquainted with the science he professed, reason informed her, that in order to prescribe with success, the physician must understand the disorder of his patient, and she believed it was in her power to give him some lights upon that head, which might be of use.

She then informed him of every thing that had passed between our Heroine and her brother, ending with a particular account of what happened the evening before.

The Doctor thanked her for such important information. They then proceeded to the chamber where Caroline lay, attended by her watchful friend. Upon opening the door, it was with the greatest pleasure that they heard her speak with perfect composure; and when the Countess came in sight, she stretched out her fair hand, and, with a faint smile, apologized for the trouble and disquiet she had given to such kind friends.

“You will more than make us all amends, my love (replied the Countess) by getting well as fast as possible. Every body is anxious for your happiness; and all our present comfort depends upon your recovery. But do you know what physician we have brought to visit you? What would you say if your friend Doctor Seward was arrived?”

A smile of pleasure illumined her countenance as she heard these words, and the Doctor appearing, she received him with more lively expressions of joy, than in so weak a state could have been expected.

As soon as the first salutations were over, the Countess proposed an airing to Miss Dunford, saying, Mrs. Forester and little Mary were going to take one, and she thought an hour of fresh air would be of use to her; adding, you must not look pale now; I must have no more of my friends sick, just when fortune is pouring her choicest treasures at their feet.

“But do you not rejoice to see our dear Caroline so much better (replied Miss Dunford) I believe let Doctor ——, or Doctor Seward either, think what they please, I have been her best physician.”

She then informed the Countess that she had taken the first opportunity which the abatement of the fever afforded, to relate to her lovely charge every circumstance that happened after she quitted the drawing-room the evening before, taking care to dwell particularly upon the concern Sir William expressed for her indisposition, and the excessive pleasure his sister’s account and explanation of the circumstances which had occasioned him so much pain, appeared to give him, together with his declaration that the future happiness of his life must wholly depend upon her. “I assure you, (continued Miss Dunford) my medicine had a wonderful effect, in ten minutes after it was administered, my patient was altered for the better, beyond what I could have supposed possible.”

While the Countess and her fair friend joined the company below, and related the happy change which they hoped had taken place in the person for whom they were all so deeply interested, Doctor Seward in the most judicious and cautious manner, informed her of all the agreeable circumstances which had lately taken place, and with which the reader is already acquainted. The acknowledgement her uncle had made of his own injustice, and her innocence and rectitude, appeared to afford her inexpressible satisfaction, far more than the large legacy he had annexed to it. He told her that lady Walton was now execrated by all who had lately approved her conduct, and that she quitted Broomfield, loaded with the curses of her inferiors, and the scorn of her equals. That the world did not scruple to say that since the death of Lord Walton, Mr. Craven was extremely dissatisfied with his marriage, being disappointed of a considerable fortune which Lady W. had persuaded him to believe her husband meant to bequeath to Miss West; and likewise undeceived with regard to her conduct, which great pains had been taken to set before his eyes in the falsest and darkest colours. The good fortune which had attended her worthy and esteemed friend Mr. Dunford, likewise afforded her extreme pleasure; and the hope which the Doctor gave her of shortly seeing her brother, appeared to complete her satisfaction.

In about an hour the Doctor left her, fearing to fatigue her too much, even with the most agreeable subject; he had not mentioned Sir William, further than to observe that he was one of the finest looking men he had ever seen; and, he presumed, a very particular

friend of hers, if he might judge by the extreme anxiety he appeared to be under about her.

A faint glow which overspread her face, informed him that she was not displeased by that intelligence, but he feared to disturb her spirits, by giving the smallest alarm to her delicacy, and therefore left a further explanation to her female friends; or as he now hoped, very shortly to her lover himself.

On his return to the parlour, every enquiring eye was turned towards him, anxiously expecting a confirmation of their new raised hopes; the cheerfulness of his countenance was sufficiently intelligible; but when he assured them that there was every reason to look for a complete and speedy recovery, their joy was unbounded.

Sir William got up in a transport, shook him by the hand, called him his good angel, and expressed the most lively raptures.

A perfect understanding had taken place between Henry and the Baronet, in consequence of which the former, finding his sister had favoured him with expressions of approbation, from which he flattered himself with a more than common interest in her affections, readily promised to give up the proposals he had to make her, which were from his uncle Sir Marmaduke Ashton, in favour of his eldest son. He said they were such, as had her heart been free from prepossession, might have proved an agreeable means of uniting a family, which had too long been divided; but as that was not the case, he had neither power or inclination to oppose her choice, nor had it been left to his own, could he have wished a more honourable alliance.

The company had likewise been informed of another attachment, which none but the Countess in the least suspected, between Mr. Henry Ashford and Miss Dunford; it had commenced before his setting out upon his travels, he having accompanied Mr. Craven upon a visit to her father: when he first mentioned his admiration of her to Lord Walton, that nobleman appeared greatly to approve the alliance, but as soon as the rupture broke out between her father and Mr. Craven, and in consequence one half of Mr. Dunford's fortune became, according to the representation of the former, more than doubtful, he absolutely forbade his nephew to think of it.

He was, however, too generous to be influenced by motives so mean; a regular correspondence was kept up between them during her continuance in England, and their meeting again in France, confirmed their attachment beyond the power of accident to weaken.

Upon Henry's arrival in town with Doctor Seward, he had taken the first opportunity to inform Mr. Dunford that the moment his Harriot would consent to his happiness, he was ready to fulfil his engagements, and make her, who possessed his whole heart, a share in his fortune.

To which the old gentleman, who had a few hours before had a decree in his favour, answered, that he was ready to bestow her upon him, together with 40,000l. which he would pay upon the day of marriage. Adding, that he should have a good twenty remaining, which they must wait for, till death should make a better provision for him.

This circumstance was more pleasing to Mr. Dunford, than the lover of Harriot, who felt a pride in demonstrating his affection, by the disinterestedness of his conduct, and whose fortune was too ample to make that of his wife a matter of consideration. However, as Lady Walton had a large jointure upon his principal estate, and having 50,000l. to pay his sister, he found it no inconvenient addition.

Henry expressed the most impatient desire to see his sister, but Doctor Seward would by no means consent to it, at least till Doctor —— had seen her. That gentleman arrived soon afterwards, and appeared quite amazed at the happy change which had taken place in his patient since his last visit; he begged she might still be kept very quiet, and said, if no relapse happened, he had little doubt but she would be able to leave her room in less than a week. Her Brother, therefore, was not permitted to see her till the next morning, when the comfortable night she had passed appeared so greatly to have refreshed and strengthened her, that Doctor Seward was of opinion his visit would be of use rather than hurtful to her.

Their meeting was of the most tender kind; he lamented the pain his mistakes had given her, and she thanked him for the warmth of friendship his very anger (believing what he believed) expressed for her. In the course of conversation, he told her he had received a letter from Colonel Vincent, in which he had acknowledged himself the suppressor of one she wrote to him the day before his leaving Broomfield to make the tour, which had he received, it would not have been possible for him to have entertained a doubt of the propriety of her sentiments and conduct, and that he knew his mother had stopped another which she wrote soon after the death of her father, and sent to Lord Walton who was then at Bath, to be forwarded to him. Caroline no longer wondered at her brother's suspicions, or blamed his anger, since not having received these letters, he had reason to believe she neither feared his contempt, or valued his good opinion. This eclaircissement having taken place, and the hearts of each perfectly eased of the apprehension of having lost the friendship of the other, Henry informed her of the proposal which he had to make from Sir Marmaduke, in favour of Mr. Ashford. She instantly stopped him, begging he would not distress her by the further mention of what could only give her pain. "I esteem my cousin (said she) and would do any thing to contribute to his happiness, but destroy my own."

"I have done (said Henry) but married I must have you, and since this proposal is not agreeable to you, I hope another, which was made me this morning, will be more so."

Caroline blushed, and, looking at her brother with a kind of bashful apprehension, begged he would postpone all such kind of affairs till she was perfectly recovered, or rather till he had set her an example. "Well, well (replied he) I believe, if I am not greatly

mistaken, Sir William Beaumont may be trusted to plead his own cause; I will only say, that should your choice fall upon him, it will meet with my warmest approbation; his character is uncommonly excellent, and in his mind and person, the virtues and graces, so often at variance, are perfectly united.”

A smile of pleasure from Caroline was answer sufficient, and gave her brother to understand, as much as words are capable of expressing. In return he promised, the next day, to introduce to her the lady he designed for her future sister, a promise with which she appeared greatly pleased, telling him he would then have a right to talk to her upon the subject.

While he was still with her, Doctor —— entered, and congratulated them both upon the rapid recovery she had made. Before he took his leave, he told the Countess, who had attended him to Caroline’s apartment, that he would advise her to be well wrapped up, and take an airing the next day; and that he would not have her keep her room any longer, or seclude herself from her friends, but hoped she would be cautious how she ventured to publick places, or exposed herself, either to cold or fatigue, for some time to come, until she found herself in full possession of her natural strength.

“When Mr. Ashford returned to the parlour, and informed his friends in how short a time they might hope to have his sister once more among them, their joy was sincere as lively; but that of Sir William was mixed with impatience; he wished the night passed which divided him from what he then accounted happiness, the sight and conversation of her he loved. Henry was scarce less impatient, Miss Dunford having promised to give him her hand at the same time that Caroline became the wife of Sir William Beaumont; nor had he much less reason to complain of absence than the Baronet, almost every moment of his Harriot’s time being spent in the chamber of his sister.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Conclusion.

THE next morning the whole family breakfasted together in Mrs. Lane's dressing-room, where they were joined by our Heroine, who was received by every one with the kindest and most joyful congratulations. Her countenance was pale, but speaking life was returned to her eyes which seemed to beam with content, and sometimes to sparkle with hope. Sweetness and sensibility were ever the characteristics of her countenance, both now appeared heightened, and united to a delicacy so exquisite, so truly feminine and interesting, as passes the power of pen or pencil to describe.

Sir William met and welcomed her, with a voice and look which at once spoke delight and apprehension. Fear is as constant an attendant upon true love as hope; both were lodged in his bosom; but the latter was predominant, and the smile and blush with which she received his congratulatory compliments, were sufficient in the opinion of any but a lover, to have put the matter out of all doubt. It was not indeed, her wish that it should, for a single moment, retain any. She felt a decided preference in his favour; she was assured he loved her; and her whole behaviour was such as, without the shadow of infringement upon the strictest real delicacy, informed him of her esteem and approbation. He had that evening an opportunity of declaring his sentiments without reserve, and was treated with an openness and delicate sincerity, which, while it insured his happiness, added to that love and esteem upon which it was founded.

They had conversed more than an hour in the drawing-room, when the door gently opened, and Henry entered, leading in the half reluctant Harriot.

“Nay, my dear Miss Dunford (said he, as they came in) you must permit me to perform my promise.” Then presenting her to Caroline, “I promised (continued he) to afford you an opportunity this afternoon of embracing the lady I hope to give you for a sister. Behold the dear girl who permits me to look forward to the felicity of calling her mine; and tell me if you approve my choice or not.”

“My dearest Harriot (exclaimed Caroline) is it possible! and shall I indeed have the pleasure of calling you sister? Surely my fate is uncommonly kind, and allies me to all those I most love.”

“You see, sister (said Henry) how happy I am likely to be, and know that it is in your power to make me so, as soon as you please; every day, therefore, that I remain in the uncomfortable state of batchelorism, I shall place to your account.”

He then told her the promise Miss Dunford had made him, of being married on the same day with her, which that lady confirming, our Heroine told him with a smile, that he must be a little merciful, and give her time to breathe, upon which condition she would ask for none to gratify affectation or caprice; adding, “I would not willingly

deprive you of happiness; and I am hard pressed by another, who, perhaps, I wish to oblige as much as you.”

Sir William kissed her hand in an extacy, and they soon afterwards joined their friends in the drawing-room, with looks that bespoke perfect satisfaction and pleasure.

In about a week, settlements being completed, and Caroline’s health perfectly restored, the whole party set out for Broomfield, where the marriage ceremony was performed, respectively uniting two of the happiest pairs that ever did honour to that sacred institution.

Having thus brought our Heroine to that state of which, if happy, little is ever to be recorded, we think it a duty we owe our readers, to give a short account of such persons as we have occasionally introduced in our history.

Lady Walton resided some time after the death of her Lord, in Cavenish Square, where Mr. and Mrs. Craven spent their winter with her; but her conduct, to the universally admired Lady Beaumont, being warmly censured by every one, and finding herself little noticed by the respectable part of the great world, with whom her vanity made her wish to mix, she returned to the South of France, where a good many years of her past life had been spent; but notwithstanding the fineness of the climate in which she breathed, her health began to decline, and she died in less than twelve months after her arrival there.

Mr. and Mrs. Craven lived together but moderately; his temper, naturally reserved, jealous, and obstinate, became still more soured by his disappointment in her expected fortune, and the loss of his suit with Mr. Dunford.

After the removal of Lady Walton, he refused to take a town house, gave up his seat in Parliament, and insisted upon her living the whole year in the country. As he had never been at all agreeable to her, this conduct, which disappointed all her matrimonial views, rendered him her aversion. She at first struggled hard, till finding resistance vain, she was at length obliged to submit; but takes every opportunity of railing at his sordid, unfeeling perverseness, which he returns, by reproaching her with artifice, deceit, folly, and a long train of defects and ill qualities.

Mrs. Sanders continued to live with her friends in the West; but Charlotte, at Lady Beaumont’s request, resided chiefly with her, and improved so much by her example and instruction, that she became an amiable and pleasing woman. About a year after her arrival at Beaumont Lodge, she was married to Colonel Vincent. They took a house in its neighbourhood, where they still live in a very happy and respectable manner.

Miss Mason, soon after our Heroine left her, was married to Lord Danby, who by the death of her father, shortly became possessed of his whole fortune. They live in the most splendid stile, each pursuing those pleasures, which most attract their inclinations, without thinking it necessary that they should be approved or participated by the other.

Mrs. Meadows resides chiefly with her Ladyship, whose way of living is exactly suited to her taste.

Sir Marmaduke Ashford died in a few months after the period which concludes this history; his lady removed immediately to her jointure house, the same in which the late Lady Ashford had resided, and prevailed upon Mrs. Ausburn, who had been companion to her mother-in-law, to live with her in the same capacity, her uncommon love of books being the strongest recommendation on both sides. Mrs. Ashford took a house in town, where her niece generally passes the greatest part of the year with her; she has had several lovers, but her excessive affectation and the evident motives of ambition and avarice by which both she and her aunt are actuated have disgusted those who were her equals in birth and fortune, and all others are driven away by the last mentioned lady with rage and disdain, who still hopes to see her favourite one of the first persons in the kingdom; but it is the general opinion that if both of them do not alter their conduct and manners it will be her fate to die in a state of celibacy.

Sir Wm. Ashford was some years before he could perfectly reconcile himself to his cousin's marriage; he made the tour of most part of Europe, and sometime after his return married a very valuable lady of high birth and large fortune.

The Countess returned to France soon after the marriage of her brother, taking Mrs. Forester and Mary along with her, but soon after their arrival there, having the misfortune to lose her husband, Sir William and his Lady went over and assisted her in settling her affairs; the Count having left her a large independant fortune, she immediately gave up part of it to his nephew, and with the rest came back with her brother and sisters to Beaumont-Lodge, where she still resides, a most agreeable addition to their family circle.

Mrs. Forester continued with them for some time, when a mutual esteem and affection being observed between her and Dr. Seward. The Baronet proposed a marriage between them, to which neither objecting, it was celebrated at the Lodge with great festivity, and he presented the Doctor with ten thousand pounds as her dower. Mary still continued such a favourite with her little mama that she spends more than half her time with her, though the Doctor having no family she is become very dear to him, and likely to inherit his whole fortune, as well as her mother's which he has already settled upon her.

Mr. Henry Ashford was soon after his marriage created Viscount Walton; he resides chiefly at Broomfield, living in the most noble and hospitable manner; his whole conduct and that of his Lady doing honour to their rank and title. They every summer visit Sir William and Lady Beaumont, or are visited by them, and each having a town residence, where they usually spend part of the winter, much of their time is passed in each other's society. Mr. Dunford has a house which he calls his home, but he almost constantly resides with one of his daughters, who are equally pleased with his company and desirous of contributing to his comfort, and his constant chearfulness is to them the most agreeable assurance that their endeavours are successful.

As for Sir William and Lady Beaumont they live in all the elegance and cheerfulness of genteel life without plunging into its follies and dissipation; fortunate in their friendships and connections, pleased with their situations, and happy in each other; every day is marked by some virtuous act, and every hour winged with satisfaction and pleasure.

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