Author:	**Jane Taylor**
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A novel featuring an unexpectedly awkward and plain heroine. Rachel triumphs over her silly but beautiful cousin Sophia to gain the affections of the hero, Mr. Tompkins. Interestingly, the novel ends before hero and heroine declare their undying devotion. We are told: 'time alone can discover in whose possession he left his heart; but it is expected his next visit to E------ will ascertain the fact'.

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RACHEL.

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RACHEL:

A Tale.

——————————— Be cured
Of this diseased opinion, and betimes;
For ‘tis most dangerous.

Shakspeare.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR TAYLOR AND HESSEY,
93, FLEET STREET.

1817.

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PREFACE.

You say, my good friend, it is absolutely necessary that I should write a Preface; now, for my part, I own I cannot see why: the world will be able to judge my work without my help; and, indeed, if it were not, I could afford it but little assistance; since modesty would prevent my extolling the merits of my own performance, and self-love as imperiously forbid my being the first to cry it down. Indeed, were I at the onset to assure my readers, that it was a composition of the greatest absurdity they ever met with, many might be inclined (as Goldsmith expresses it) to take me at my word, and decline the perusal altogether; while others, who were disposed to judge for themselves, might, perchance, accuse me of that most insufferable affectation, of painting things worse than the reality, in order to attract praise by the contrast.

Now, such a motive I utterly disclaim; and, on the contrary, will venture to assure those who may chance to be contented with a plain story and probable events, that they will find both in the following pages. That most of the characters are taken from life may, perhaps, be an inducement to some; and that all the incidents are fictitious may, probably, be a recommendation to others. At the same time, let me intreat the indulgence of all, for the errors of a first attempt; for such, indeed, it is. And here my Preface must inevitably conclude; for were I to write for a century, I could say no more on the subject.

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RACHEL.

CHAPTER I.

"I wish I had not promised to go!" exclaimed our hero, throwing aside a letter he had received by that morning's post: "I shall be tired to death before the end of the week; but," continued he, after a long pause, "I will go, and who knows (looking round his solitary apartment with a kind of half sigh) but I may find a wife amongst them."

The idea pleased him, for he was thirty, and had long been desirous of 'taking to his bosom a wife.' "In the name of wonder, why then did he not marry?" exclaims my fair reader. Alas! gentle lady, you have asked an awkward question. Be not then offended at the answer:—He was too old to lose his heart to a plume of white feathers, or a short-waisted spencer. Frown not, I beseech you, for in all probability he never knew *you*.

But to return to our hero. Anxious to put his scheme in execution, he set off that evening, and arrived safely the next day at E——. The good people received him with great hospitality, expressed their satisfaction at seeing him, and endeavoured, by every means in their power, to render their abode agreeable to the stranger. Tomkins, for that was our hero's name—"*Tomkins*! what a hideous name!"—Hush! must I apologize twice in this short space. I do confess it is neither romantic nor lover-like; but, alas! why should he be blamed? he chose it not, it was the name of his ancestors, and descended to him with his patrimony—

Tomkins then, I say, had every reason to be satisfied with the attentions of his host, who had been the intimate friend of his father, and in his last visit to London, had so earnestly pressed the young man to favour him with his company, that he had promised to visit E—— in the spring; though, when the time actually arrived, as we have already seen, he felt no great inclination for the journey; but not being one of those who consider no circumstance of sufficient importance to be put in competition with their own gratification, he immediately complied with the summons contained in the letter alluded to, though he was going to a place he had never seen, and his sole inducement was to please an old man and woman, the only beings with whom he was acquainted.

The day following his arrival being Sunday, Tomkins, who was a man of sober habits, accompanied the family to church. Mr. Simpson's pew, though a large one, could not conveniently admit our hero; for as the family was so small, general permission had been given to some aged females to occupy the vacant seats, whose constant attendance had now rendered their appearance as familiar as that of the owners. Tomkins, with his natural good breeding, begged he might not disturb the ladies; and whether it was owing to the true Lacedemonian spirit, which prompted this attention to the aged females, cannot be exactly told, but certain it is, he followed the pew-opener to a seat at some distance, without any visible marks of regret; though the pew he had left was comfortably lined, and contained a snug corner out of sight of the parson.

Having taken his seat, curiosity induced him to examine his companions. The eldest was a middle-aged woman, in whose face might be read marks of a strong understanding, mixed with great reserve; indeed, it was generally observed by those who

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were not intimate with her, that she was very proud. The second, though indeed the first that attracted the notice of our visitor, was much younger: to a tall genteel figure, she added a remarkably interesting countenance; and as Tomkins gazed on the pensive expression of her eyes, he thought he had at last found the wife he had so long been seeking. The third, and last of the party, appeared as if intended for a foil to her companion: she was tall, stout, and awkward in her appearance; while her face, devoid of all pretensions to beauty, expressed nothing to excite either interest or admiration. It will readily be supposed, that this last-mentioned object engrossed but little of the attention of Tomkins, and that he earnestly wished to inquire of his friends the name and residence of the interesting girl, to extend his acquaintance, if possible, beyond the parting bow.

With these ideas occupying his mind, the service began, and strange as it may appear, Tomkins withdrew his thoughts so entirely from the scene around him, that in all probability he had not bestowed another glance on his companions, had not the fair object of his former contemplations, either from a sudden visit from Morpheus, an involuntary motion of the hand, or some other cause, dropped her book; Tomkins instantly stooped to raise it, when, judge of his astonishment and dismay! he beheld a Latin Testament. Consternation chained all his faculties; he gazed two full seconds before he could prevail on himself to touch it; at length raising it by the extreme corner, he presented it with the worst grace imaginable, and really looked and felt as if relieved from some noxious animal; while his desire of a further acquaintance was greatly abated. When, however, his first surprise at this unexpected discovery had subsided, his curiosity increased, and for the first time in his life he felt inclined to renounce the prejudice he had cherished so many years against learned ladies; for Tomkins was one of those unreasonable beings, who expect to find women well informed, who never studied the classics; and most profoundly ignorant of Euclid and Archimedes, without believing the wonderful effects produced by them to be the work of magic. It is true, he had hitherto been disappointed in his search, but such fastidious people are seldom pleased; and he would have found it hard to say, whether the open-mouthed idiotic stare of wonder disgusted him more than a lecture on causes and effects, pronounced in the most elegant language by a more enlightened female.

Having, however, resolved not to pass judgment too hastily, he inquired of Mr. Simpson, on their return home, if he was acquainted with the ladies with whom he had sat?

"Perfectly," he replied; "but what opinion have you formed of them?"

"That one is very proud, another very pretty, and the third most incorrigibly stupid."

"Alas, poor Rachel!" cried Mr. Simpson, laughing; "tis well for you, young man, my wife did not hear you: Rachel is her favourite, and I would advise you to say nothing of this kind in her hearing."

Tomkins promised obedience, and was proceeding to make farther inquiries, when Mr. Simpson interrupted him.

"It is my intention," said he, "to introduce you at the Lodge, and give you an opportunity of judging for yourself; in the mean time let me caution you against being prejudiced by their appearance, for they all require to be *known*."

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The entrance of dinner put an end to the conversation, and the rest of the day passed in viewing the grounds.

The following morning, as they were seated at breakfast, Mr. Simpson invited his guest to share his morning walk. “Business,” he added, “obliges me to call on my friend Jenkins, and I intend, if they are not otherwise engaged, to prevail on him and his family to dine with us to-morrow.”

“Very well, my dear,” replied his wife; “and suppose you were to call at the Lodge, and tell our friends there that we shall be glad to see them.”

“A very excellent thought,” rejoined he; and smiling at Tomkins, he added, “you will have no objection. Did you know,” he continued, turning to his wife, “that Sophia Miller has stolen our friend’s heart?”

Mrs. Simpson smiled. “Sophia is, I believe, a good sort of young woman,” said she, “but—”

“You like Rachel better,” interrupted her husband.

“I do,” replied the old lady; “though that is not what I was going to say.”

“Well, well, my dear,” said Mr. Simpson, rising, “many people, many tastes—as the old proverb says;” and taking Tomkins by the arm, the gentlemen departed.

“It may not be amiss,” said Mr. Simpson, addressing his friend, “to give you some account of the family we are going to call upon. Jenkins is one of the richest farmers in our neighbourhood, and though somewhat inclined to good eating, is a worthy man in his way. Mrs. Jenkins (though no favourite of my wife’s) is well received in most of the families about us; some people, it is true, pretend to meet her advances very coldly, and indeed, a degree of caution is necessary to be used towards her, for the poor woman is subject to an infirmity that often occasions some perplexity to her friends.”

“But surely,” said Tomkins, with warmth, “she is rather to be pitied than condemned on that account.”

“Not exactly,” replied Mr. Simpson, “for it grows upon her by indulgence; and it is said, that had care been taken to check it in its infancy, she probably had not now felt the slightest inconvenience from it; in short, she is troubled with a most voluble tongue, and, unfortunately, having nothing to do but attend to the concerns of her neighbours, not the most minute circumstance can occur, but she is instantly acquainted with all the particulars.”

“What a dangerous character!” said Tomkins; “she must inevitably be the cause of endless misunderstandings?”

“Such consequences might naturally be expected,” returned his friend, “but her disposition is now so well known, that strangers only are likely to suffer from it.”

“Good Heaven!” exclaimed Tomkins, “can it be possible, that a rational creature, for the sake of indulging so childish a propensity, can voluntarily expose herself to the contempt of all who know her?”

Without noticing this apostrophe, Mr. Simpson continued— “Human nature, my young friend, has long been your favourite study; but I think I am now introducing a character to your notice which you have never before met with. Large cities, though undoubtedly affording the most ample means for observations of this nature, do not give opportunities to a disposition like that of Mrs. Jenkins to display its talents; it is only in a

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town or village, where it can claim acquaintance with every inhabitant, that it is seen to advantage."

"What family have they?" demanded Tomkins.

"Three daughters, good-natured, everyday sort of girls," replied Mr. Simpson; "but we are arrived; and, although I am not in the habit of betting, yet I will take any even wager, that before you again pass this threshold you will have informed the good lady when and whence you came."

"I am not usually very indulgent to idle curiosity," replied Tomkins, "and you have given me an additional motive for my non-compliance."

"I do not doubt your inclination, but your ability to resist her inquiries."

"Surely I am master of my tongue."

"We shall see," said Mr. Simpson, rapping at the door. Mr. Jenkins was not at home, but the lady of the mansion received them very cordially; probably the hope of learning the birth, parentage, and education of the stranger, whose appearance at church the preceding day had so greatly astonished her, contributed not a little to the kind reception they met with.

A few moments served for the introduction of our hero; and Mr. Simpson, having expressed his regret at the absence of his friend, concluded with intreating the ladies to honour his abode with their presence the ensuing day.

Mrs. Jenkins, in pursuance of her usual custom of never refusing an invitation, immediately complied; and the young ladies, pleased with the appearance of Tomkins, which did not *exactly* agree with his name, made no objection.

Unwilling to allow so propitious an opportunity to escape, and seeing no probability of gaining the desired information unasked, Mrs. Jenkins at length turned abruptly to Tomkins, and demanded, if he was not a stranger in that part of the country?

Tomkins, fully resolved to disappoint his friend's prediction, merely bowed. But the lady was too deeply skilled in her art to suffer a circumstance that would have repressed the spirit of inquiry in another, to have any effect upon *her*; and without appearing to notice Tomkins's evident reserve, though, in fact, it almost threw her into a fever of impatience to know the cause, she remarked, "It was very extraordinary she had never heard that Mrs. Mason expected company."

Tomkins, who could not perceive how this speech could at all concern him, made no answer.

"But, I presume," continued she, "you are related?"

Tomkins, thus called upon for an answer, replied, "He had not that honour."

"Well, really," exclaimed Mrs. Jenkins, "it is very unaccountable; I do not suppose such a thing was ever known in the memory of the oldest inhabitant; I am sure I pity those two poor girls with all my heart, but there is no advising Mrs. Mason; I am sure I have tried often enough, but to little purpose, you will believe, when I tell you, that no gentlemen are ever admitted within her walls, but the vicar and Mr. Simpson: —but what else can one expect," in a lowered voice, "from an old maid?"

Tomkins, by this time, began to conjecture that the Mrs. Mason alluded to could be no other than his church acquaintance, and knowing that the two ladies were to meet the next day, saw the necessity of undeceiving the loquacious Mrs. Jenkins; and therefore

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observed, “that so far from having any knowledge of Mrs. Mason, his acquaintance in E— was confined to Mr. Simpson and herself.”

The affairs of the nation were never of more consequence in the eyes of politicians, than the concerns of her neighbours were in those of Mrs. Jenkins; nor could the most important question that was ever debated, occasion a greater appearance of perplexity than that which overspread her countenance at this information, while in an almost peevish tone she asked, “if she had not seen him in Mrs. Mason’s pew?”

Tomkins, weary of endeavouring to baffle her inquiries, and hoping to put an end to the subject, explained the circumstance; but the lady was by no means so disposed, and put our hero’s patience to the test, by asking, “if he had been long in E——?”

Almost out of temper at her perseverance, he was on the point of returning a most uncourteous “No;” when chancing to encounter an expressive glance from Mr. Simpson, he changed his intention, and willing to mislead her, bowed an affirmative. Bowing was a language she never chose to understand, and provoked at his taciturnity, she resolved to exert her utmost art to bring him to confession. With an air of the greatest indifference she remarked, “That the little presence of mind evinced by even very sensible people, on trifling occasions, had often excited her greatest surprise.”

Tomkins stared with unfeigned astonishment; he felt conscious that her impertinent curiosity had betrayed him into something resembling ill humour, but he had shown little command of his temper indeed, if he had suffered it to appear; and if he had not, how could she discover she had irritated him? For a moment he was almost tempted to think he had encountered a dabbler in witchcraft.

In this, however, he was guilty of great injustice, for the lady possessed very little knowledge of any kind, much less of an art so intricate, and requiring so much study as the black one; and when Tomkins avowed his ignorance of her meaning, she speedily removed his suspicions by informing him, that she merely alluded to the circumstance of a bat, which had fallen from the roof of the church during the service, to the great terror and amazement of the congregation, many of whom forthwith fell into hysterics, which caused a considerable interruption to the service.—“Pray, sir,” she continued, “did you ever in your life see such a scene of confusion?”

“Really, madam, I cannot give an opinion on the subject,” replied he, “as the circumstance must have occurred before my arrival.”

“Indeed!” cried Mrs. Jenkins: “I understood you, you had been here some time; why, it was but yesterday week since it happened.”

Tomkins coloured to the ears. Could he have foreseen the snare that was spread for him, he might easily have avoided it; but he had now not only revealed that he had not resided a week in the village, but had acknowledged he had been guilty of a subterfuge, if not of an actual falsehood. There is something so repugnant to an ingenuous mind, in the idea of being known to have stooped to deceit, that though Tomkins entertained the most sovereign contempt for Mrs. Jenkins, and knew the affair would be but a source of laughter to his friend, yet at the moment he would have given a trifle to have been fairly out of the house; and when, on glancing round, he perceived the look of self-complacency that sat on the features of Mrs. Jenkins, as if she had brought some laudable scheme to perfection, the cool sarcastic smile of Mr. Simpson, and above all, the unmeaning simper

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of the young ladies, his situation became intolerable, and starting from his seat, he unceremoniously demanded of his friend if he had not some other calls to make.

Mr. Simpson took the hint, and wishing the ladies a good morning, followed Tomkins out of the house, leaving Mrs. Jenkins undisputed master of the field.

"Well," said Mr. Simpson, as they continued their walk, "am I to congratulate you on your victory?"

"If you had not known how the action had ended, you might have insulted the feelings of a fallen foe by such a question; but while I own myself conquered, I must beg leave to accuse you of great want of generosity in never offering to exert the slightest interest in my favour, but abandoning me to my fate, though you were aware of my danger, and saw me on the brink of the precipice long before I fell."

"Remember your boasts, young man; you despised the counsels of age, and would buy experience for yourself; and on the whole it may not be considered very unfortunate, as you will now perceive the contrast of character with which I am about to present you, in much greater force than you would otherwise have done."

"But may I not be favoured with some description of these characters?" asked Tomkins.

"The account I shall give you will be very confined," replied Mr. Simpson, "as I wish you to judge of the young folks yourself; but Mrs. Mason is what the world in general call a respectable character; that is, she pays her debts, goes to church, and makes no mischief."

"But are there not many positive duties that cannot be classed under any of these heads?"

"I am not going to inquire very closely into her moral character," replied Mr. Simpson; "I merely tell you what the world say. People in general pry no farther on this head than affects their own interest; and while she 'pays her way,' few will be found desirous of becoming her father confessor."

"I believe you are right," said Tomkins, thoughtfully; "but is this your opinion of her."

"Certainly not," answered he; "though Mrs. Mason must be known long to be rightly estimated, for in society she is very reserved. I believe her to be an excellent woman; and though the portion of virtues I have allotted her appears to you so scanty, while opposed to many I have known, they would constitute a virtuous character, —yet, I believe her to possess many, and far more estimable qualities; and were I to pass my judgment upon her, I should say, she is the friend of her neighbour, and the servant of her God. She is one of three sisters: the other two married early in life; the one a clergyman, the other a tradesman. Mrs. Mason for many years kept a boarding-school; and the charge of so many young persons, added to her natural disposition, has given a reserve to her manners that is often mistaken for pride. Having amassed a handsome property in this situation, she retired to our village; when finding the hours hang heavy on her hands, for want of her accustomed employment, she wrote to each of her sisters, requesting them to permit their eldest daughters to reside with her; which request being complied with, they have remained with her ever since. Time has changed the appellation of Miss into Mrs. and here ends my account of Mrs. Mason."

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This discourse brought them to the gate of that lady's abode, and a few minutes more into her presence. They found her knitting stockings, somewhat coarse for her own wear, though very suitable for a labouring man,—Miss Miller copying a beautiful group of flowers, and Rachel seated in a corner mending a sheet.

The usual salutations of the morning having passed, Mr. Simpson said, "I am afraid I am trespassing on your goodness by bringing my friend unasked, but—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Mrs. Mason, "though I am not in the habit of receiving gentlemen as visitors, yet *with* Mr. Simpson any friend of his will be welcome," and she bowed to Tomkins.

He bowed in return, though he was not determined whether to consider it a compliment or not, for the lady's manners seemed very strongly to wish him away. The girls exchanged a glance, which seemed to express—'Tis always her way. Sophia laid an unlucky shade on a flower; Rachel pricked her finger in threading her needle—but this might be accidental.

Mr. Simpson entered into conversation with Mrs. Mason; and Tomkins, thinking to employ himself more agreeably, turned to Sophia, and having admired her performance, remarked, "that undoubtedly she must be fond of an art in which she so greatly excelled."

Sophia blushed; she had been pleased with the appearance of Tomkins, at church, and scarcely knowing why, had thought of little else all the morning. The manner in which he had presented her book was certainly by no means prepossessing; yet still she fancied he had noticed her, and her vanity was flattered. She was, therefore, very well disposed to receive his compliment with civility, and answered, "He judged rightly, that she was very much attached to it."

"Do you ever attempt landscape?" inquired Tomkins.

"Very seldom," was the reply.

"I am rather surprised at that; for beautiful as Nature is in all her works, she can present nothing in the form of flowers, that can be compared to the endless variety afforded by an interesting landscape. These flowers are beautiful, and delight our eye; but landscapes do more—they mingle the sublime with the beautiful; and if taken from nature, raise in the mind love and admiration of the works of the Creator."

"I am quite of your opinion," returned Sophia; "but I have not had sufficient instruction to enable me to enjoy so great a gratification; yet, believe me, the feelings you mention are not unknown to me. Often have I stood for hours, on a calm summer's evening, to contemplate the varied scene presented to my view, till all my faculties have been absorbed in delight, and I have regretted to have been obliged to awake from the enchanting delusion."

Rachel, who for some time had been shut out from all conversation, and had sat looking wistfully at her work without presuming to touch it, now grew tired of her situation, and cried out to Sophia, "Pray, cousin, are you describing the Elysian fields?"

"I am describing my own feelings on a summer's evening," replied the discomfited Sophia.

"I do not know how it happens," said Rachel, "but I never *felt such feelings* in my life."

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“And believe me, Rachel, you never will, unless you discontinue your present employments,” returned her cousin.

“Why, really, I cannot promise to do that, unless you will promise not to give me any further occasion for such employments: however, I do think I will try, the first fine night, if I have finished my work, otherwise I cannot spare time.”

Sophia, with her neck and face glowing with indignation, turned away, while Tomkins could scarcely refrain from uttering an exclamation of disgust.

Mr. Simpson’s rising was the signal of departure, and Tomkins took leave of the party with a variety of sensations, among the strongest of which was aversion to poor Rachel.

On their return home, Mrs. Simpson informed them that the vicar had called during their absence, and that she had prevailed on him to join their party the next day.

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CHAPTER II.

The company, when assembled the following day in Mr. Simpson's drawing-room, consisted of Tomkins, the hospitable owners of the mansion, the vicar of St. Christopher, Mrs. Jenkins and her daughters, Mrs. Mason, her nieces, and a young man, a relation of Mrs. Simpson, whom the good lady, though no match-maker in general, had destined for her favourite Rachel. Their dispositions indeed appeared very suitable, for young Clarkson was universally noted for his stupidity; and what was very remarkable, and might have misled more profound judges than Mrs. Simpson, Rachel never talked so much to, or appeared so much at ease with any one as Mr. Clarkson: yet, notwithstanding his presence, she would gladly have foregone her visit, when on entering the room she beheld the vicar. Nothing can more effectually repress the natural spirits than timidity, and Rachel never appeared to so little advantage as in the presence of the vicar. In all company she was so remarkably silent, that her acquaintance had long since agreed, that she could be but little short of an idiot; for as a woman's *inclination* to talk was never disputed in any age, a far more fallacious conclusion might have been drawn, than that if she was silent it was from want of *ability*. But besides this habitual silence, her manners were more than usually awkward when the divine was present; and as Rachel possessed sense enough to be conscious of this, his appearance, in any of the parties to which she was invited, never gave her that gratification which perhaps she ought to have experienced. On this occasion she was more than usually displeased at beholding him; probably because Mr. Clarkson was of the party; or, as coquetry is said to be the inmate of every female breast, she might wish to appear agreeable in the eyes of Mr. Tomkins. Be this as it may, she took her seat without uttering a word; and fixing her eyes on the carpet, remained an excellent representative of a statue.

Shortly after their arrival, dinner was announced; and as good eating generally supersedes good conversation, little more transpired than what the objects before them gave rise to. Rachel, who was placed at the bottom, next Mr. Simpson, seemed somewhat more in her element; and Tomkins, wondering what could have induced her to open her lips, tried in vain to catch some part of their discourse. "She *can* talk, however," thought he, "and I will certainly endeavour to find out about what."

Dinner being ended, and the ladies withdrawn, Tomkins remarked, "that Mr. Simpson possessed an art that was unknown to the rest of the company."

"And pray what may that be?" asked Mr. Simpson; "for if it be transferable I will willingly communicate it."

"It is an art for which I should suppose you cannot have much practice: I mean the secret of inducing a lady to open her lips."

"Oh! I comprehend you," said Mr. Simpson; "but I assure you it is by no means so great a secret as you imagine. My friend Clarkson will be a far better instructor than myself; for, I assure you, he can make the lady in question converse with great fluency."

"I am sure I don't know how it is," said Mr. Clarkson, whose vanity was tickled at the idea of being able to perform what Tomkins had tacitly acknowledged his inability to do; "I believe she is very fond of talking to me; but to tell you the truth, sir, if you want to make her talk, you have only to tell her a story about your coat being nailed to the wall,

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while you were looking into a picture shop in London, as mine was once, and, do you know, she never lets me hear the last of it."

Tomkins having no inclination to prolong such *interesting* discourse, turned to the vicar, and asked his opinion on some important public business; when, the conversation taking a political turn, the attention of three of the gentlemen was entirely engrossed; while Mr. Clarkson, not understanding a word that was spoken, with great difficulty kept himself awake till they were summoned to tea.

On joining the ladies, Tomkins perceived Rachel in earnest conversation with Miss Jenkins at a window, and approaching them, he asked, "if he might be permitted to interrupt their *tête-à-tête*."

"Oh, yes, pray do," cried Miss Jenkins, highly delighted to attract the attention of the Londoner; "for I am almost tired to death: Miss Porter has done nothing but moralize this half hour."

"Miss Porter moralizing!" exclaimed Tomkins, scarcely able to repress a smile; "may I inquire on what subject."

"It is not worth repeating," said Rachel, hastily; "I am sorry I have tired you, Miss Jenkins;" and retiring from the window she seated herself by Mrs. Simpson.

Tomkins was disappointed: he had joined them with the hope of discovering something of Rachel's character; it appeared to him an extraordinary, though a disagreeable one, and he was fond of contemplating any thing that had oddity to recommend it: but he had no such intention towards Miss Jenkins; for he saw at once, that she was one of those commonplace beings, known by the name of young ladies. No alternative, however, remained, and he was obliged to entertain his companion with such conversation as he thought most suitable to the occasion; namely, a description of the last fashions, which, as he was not a very exact observer, and seldom remembered what he did observe, might have served nearly as well for the year 1700; while Miss Jenkins, with a heart beating high with delight, cast a look of triumph round the room. Her sisters pretended not to make any observations on the subject. Sophia bit her lip in silence, and Rachel chatted quietly with Mr. Clarkson. The tea service being at length removed, and the evening proving uncommonly fine, a walk round the grounds was proposed, and unanimously agreed to.

Miss Jenkins, who looked upon Tomkins as her property for the evening, passed her arm through his, with an assurance that would have done credit to the most finished fine lady about town. The deplorable ignorance of her neighbours was so great, that many had gone so far as to say, that Miss Jenkins's conduct was a disgrace to her family. Ignorant rustics! little did they imagine, that the manners they so much condemned were considered as marks of a genteel education, and had been purchased at a great expense at a London boarding-school.

Tomkins, who was not a total stranger to such manoeuvres, though greatly surprised to find them so far removed from what he had always considered their proper sphere, submitted with so good a grace, that he afforded no room for the lady to suppose he was not perfectly delighted with her condescension; though, in fact, he was heartily tired of her company; for Miss Jenkins having accidentally heard, that great confidence in one's own judgment was particularly disgusting in a female, had adopted a contrary course of behaviour; and though every look and action plainly shewed she was at perfect

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peace with her own opinion, yet was she so amiably diffident, that it was with great difficulty she could determine whether her tea was sufficiently sweet, without asking Tomkins's opinion: it was, therefore, scarcely possible to address her, without being tormented for an opinion on subjects so trifling as would scarcely admit of any; and Tomkins, who had eagerly seconded the motion of the walk, in hopes of getting rid of this teasing companion, saw himself fixed for the evening, unless some unexpected circumstance released him.

Sophia, the gentle, the interesting Sophia, was committed to the care of Clarkson, but Rachel was disengaged; and disagreeable as he thought her, she would still have been a change: but the case was desperate, and admitted of no remedy. The other Miss Jenkins's walked with Rachel; the vicar and Mr. Simpson talked of some parish business; and the three elderly ladies discussed the affairs of their neighbours,—that is to say, Mrs. Jenkins *talked*, and the others *listened*: but as silence is said to give consent, had the lady-orator been asked the question, she would undoubtedly have said they *all* talked; for though no one could have a more decided preference for the sound of their own voice, or bear the interruption of another with less patience, still, as she had more than once found the ill effects arising from the said propensity, she was always willing to allow her friends the credit of contributing their share to the entertainment, that in case of an emergency she might have another pair of shoulders to assist in sustaining the burden.

They had proceeded some time in this order, when a part of the grounds which was separated from the high road only by some pales, afforded an opportunity, to a poor sickly-looking woman, to solicit the party for alms.

"Poor soul!" cried Miss Jenkins, shrinking behind Tomkins; "do, pray, give her sixpence for me, and send her away."

"I have surely seen her before," said Mrs. Mason, interrupting Mrs. Jenkins in the most critical part of one of her choicest anecdotes: "tell me," she continued, addressing the woman, "where do you live?"

"At the other end of the village," was the reply.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Mason, "I am surprised—" and suddenly checking herself, a faint blush overspread her countenance; yet it was not the blush of shame or anger—it was occasioned by having been on the point of betraying how greatly the sorrows of her poorer neighbours concerned her; and as she considered it a duty never 'to let the deeds of her right hand be known by her left,' she always most carefully guarded against the slightest appearance of ostentation. She was not, however, mistaken in supposing she had seen the woman before; few of the poor inhabitants were unknown to her, and her surprise was great that she had not heard of her misfortunes. She, however, made no remark on the circumstance; and Mrs. Simpson, having desired the woman to go round to the house, went to see her supplied with food, while the rest of the party walked on.

"Do you not think," said Miss Jenkins, addressing her companion, "that sensibility may be reckoned almost a misfortune to its possessor? I am sure," she continued, without allowing him time to reply, "that I could not have questioned the poor woman in the manner Mrs. Mason did, for the world; and, though I do not doubt but she intended to relieve her, yet I do not think any one has a right to take advantage of poverty, to gratify an idle curiosity."

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Miss Jenkins, who was as great a manager in her way as her mother, and intended this speech as an unquestionable evidence of the exquisite goodness of her heart, was greatly disappointed at the effect it produced; for Tomkins had marked the interest with which Mrs. Mason had inquired into the concerns of the woman; and anger mingled with his contempt, at the artful sophistry which thus endeavoured, by giving a selfish motive to an act of pure benevolence, to draw praise upon itself.

"Though I concur with you," said he, "in thinking curiosity generally idle and impertinent, and when carried to the extent of wounding the feelings of another, absolutely criminal; yet I will venture to assert, that the solicitude evinced by Mrs. Mason could not be traced to any such motive; and true sensibility, so far from shrinking from, would rather have prompted such inquiries."

"I hate sensibility in all its moods and tenses, as my cousin would say," said Rachel, stooping to remove a snail which was crawling across the path.

"Surely the words are not suited to the deed," thought Tomkins, as he regarded her with a degree of complacency he had never before felt towards her.

Miss Jenkins, who had not been very much pleased with his last observation, and willing to say any thing rather than remain silent, since it might lead him to suppose he had mortified her, exclaimed, "Bless me, Miss Porter, how can you endure to touch such vermin! I declare the sight of such reptiles always makes me shudder."

"And does sensibility teach you to crush them to death with your foot, rather than save their lives by touching them with your finger?" asked Rachel.

Tomkins was astonished. The tone of her voice might have been mistaken for sarcasm; but he was soon convinced of his error, for when he looked at her, no such expression could be read in her countenance.

"What a lovely evening!" cried Sophia to Mr. Clarkson; "how beautifully the setting sun tinges the ambient clouds!"

"Ah! it's a very fine sight," said Mr. Clarkson, intending to be particularly complaisant; "that cloud to the right is as red as our parlour curtains."

"Or a fire, after it has been well blown," added Rachel.

The accent—the manner in which this was uttered, appeared so natural, that Tomkins's old prejudice returned in full force. "Wretched ignorance!" thought he: "how could I for a moment suppose this girl had sense enough to be *satirical*!"

Some of the ladies complaining of cold, caused the whole party to return to the house; when, as it wanted some time to the supper-hour, cards and music were introduced to pass away the time. Miss Jenkins, her sisters, and Sophia, had successively performed, when Tomkins rose to lead Rachel to the instrument.

"I don't play," said she, declining his offered hand.

"What, in the name of wonder, can you do?" thought he, resuming his seat.

"Pray, sir," he said, addressing the vicar, "may I inquire your opinion of Miss Porter?"

"Really I have not troubled myself to form one respecting her. She is one of those many insignificant beings, who bring so much discredit on the sex: her best qualification is, that she is too harmless to do much evil, and her intellect is too weak to suffer her to do much good."

"You are, I think, rather severe upon the sex," said Tomkins.

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“I think not,” returned the vicar; “I consider the abilities of women, in many instances, equal, if not superior, to ours; but at the same time I am of opinion, that the light and frivolous part of the sex will go to greater lengths of absurdity than any among us.”

“But you cannot call Miss Porter a light or frivolous character, at least I have seen no instance of it.”

It was an unfortunate speech; the vicar had got on his favourite hobby-horse; and had not Tomkins interrupted him, he would probably have harangued for an hour on the subject.

“Pshaw!” said he, impatiently, “that is playing upon the words to little purpose: by the light and frivolous part, I meant to include all those who could not be ranked among the intelligent; and upon a fair calculation these will be found considerably to exceed the others; for though I do not think there are a *great* number naturally deficient, yet I have no doubt that by reckoning those, who by perverting their talents exclude themselves from the intelligent list, you will find my statement correct. The present plan of education is indeed very well calculated to remedy the evils, by which this class of females are rendered so insignificant, by giving them subjects more worthy to engross their attention,—by substituting Virgil and Horace for romance and novel-reading.”

“But may not this be raising them as much *above* their proper sphere, as the other sinks them *below* it?” demanded Tomkins.

“I am tired,” answered the vicar—(though very well pleased at having an opportunity of going over the oft-trodden ground again)—“I am tired with endeavouring to confute an opinion as mistaken as it is selfish. Why should the page of science be denied them, if they have the desire to peruse it? Will it not make them more intelligent and sensible companions—more worthy the attention of every well-informed man?”

These words caused a kind of uneasy sensation in the mind of Tomkins. He did not consider himself quite a fool, yet he was forced to acknowledge that he never had felt any great predilection for those very sensible women; and resolving to defend his favourite position, he said, “That notwithstanding the great advantage the vicar appeared to think arose from this system of education, he was forced to lament many instances in which it had proved an evil, in the possession of females.”

“I confess,” said the vicar, “such instances may be found; but would it be generous, because some have proved unworthy, to with-hold the advantage from the rest?”

“It may perhaps answer with some few superior intellects,” returned Tomkins; “but I can never think, while such instances occur, that it will do as a general plan; and, after all, when they have acquired these accomplishments, which they gain by the neglect of what was formerly considered an useful education, we should not be pleased at seeing them in the pulpit or at the bar. Where then can be the use of qualifying them for stations which we are not willing they should fill?”

Whether the vicar considered Tomkins as too deficient in common sense to merit any more attention, or remembered the well-known couplet of Hudibras, and therefore resolved to give up the contention, is uncertain; but willing to put an end to the dispute, he said, “That during the infancy of any plan, so opposite to old-established custom as the one for which he contended, much resistance might naturally be expected; and, as it was

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impossible to convince the multitude of what they did not understand, time alone could settle the dispute."

To this Tomkins readily agreed, not without thinking that much mischief might be the consequence of the experiment.

Mrs. Jenkins, who had sat silent much longer than she liked, seeing no one, except Sophia, disposed to attend to her, put an end to her purgatory by admiring a set of figures that ornamented the chimney-piece.

Sophia blushed. "They do not," said she, "deserve so much commendation."

"Oh, now I am certain they are your performance," cried Miss Jenkins, raising her glass to her eye; "they are vastly pretty, but will you give me leave to say—"

"You need not be at the trouble of pointing out the defects," said Rachel, somewhat rudely; "my cousin never meant them to pass for perfection."

Miss Jenkins laughed. She never allowed herself to appear disconcerted; and as she felt rather at a loss for a smart repartee, nothing was so easy as to laugh, which served, not only to fill up the pause, and shew her white teeth, but to prove with what sweetness she could bear another's rudeness.

The unpolished manners of Rachel often caused the ready blush to suffuse the cheek of Sophia; and she endeavoured to palliate the offence by saying, "I am sorry, Rachel, you prevented Miss Jenkins from favouring me with her opinion of my drawings; for although the friends for whom they were done have amply repaid and gratified me by accepting them, yet I am always thankful to those who will take the trouble of pointing out the errors with which they abound."

"Oh, Miss Porter is quite right!" exclaimed Miss Jenkins; "I am no judge, I assure you; but if you wish for a decision on their merits, let us apply to the gentlemen."

"Do you consider, madam," said the vicar, "that a gentleman is always unwilling to say unpleasant things to the ladies, the consequence of which is, that as we never blame, we incur the charge of flattery; pray reflect again ere you condemn us to a task of so much importance, as that of judging a lady's drawing." It was a custom of the Reverend Mr. Brown, whenever he had given utterance to any thing he thought satirical, upon what he termed the frivolities of women, to give notice of such notion by a hearty laugh, in which he expected his hearers to join; but as it often happened that some did not understand, and others did not relish his witticisms, he generally had his laugh to himself.

While Miss Jenkins was in the act of replying, they were summoned to supper; soon after which, the party broke up and returned to their respective abodes.

"I am glad we are at home again," said Rachel, throwing herself with no very gentle shock into the first seat she came to; "I wish people would not invite me to meet Mr. Brown. I never can enjoy myself where he is; and what a prosing disagreeable man is that Tomkins!"

"I did not think him so," said Sophia; "you must allow him to be handsome, and you cannot dispute his being a gentleman."

"I am sure he scarcely spoke to me all day; and Clarkson was so intolerably sleepy, there was no getting a word out of him."

"I am afraid you have not been entertained, my dear?" said Mrs. Mason.

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“Entertained!” repeated Rachel, “why, my dear aunt, I am almost tired to death with an account of Mary Jenkins’s dog’s toothach. I wonder how people can talk such nonsense!”

“I am sorry to see, my dear Rachel,” said Mrs. Mason very gravely, “your constant inclination to ridicule the conversation of your companions: why should you condemn, as nonsense, every subject that does not give you pleasure?”

“Do I complain without a cause?” demanded Rachel. “Could you desire a more ridiculous subject?”

“I will not contend for the sense of such conversation,” returned Mrs. Mason; “but little as you are accustomed to mix with the world, you must know the impracticability of always finding such discourse as would bear the test of criticism; and even were such topics to be introduced, you would still be dissatisfied.”

“Most likely I should if I did not understand them,” said Rachel, gnawing the finger of her glove.

“Why, then, object to what you do understand? Believe me, Rachel, while you so obstinately persevere in such conduct, your company will never be sought nor esteemed.”

“My dear aunt,” interrupted Rachel, “I am perfectly contented to be despised and neglected, if they will but allow me a little peace."

“Rachel, Rachel!” said her aunt, with some asperity, “how often must I reprobate these sentiments? However you may, by a mistaken notion, be led to suppose the contrary, trust me they are by no means to be commended: an indifference to the opinion of the world should never be encouraged. Society has a claim on every one, and on young people particularly, which it is the neglect of an absolute duty to disallow. We are not authorised to live for ourselves alone, but to promote the welfare of others to the utmost of our abilities; which cannot be done while we consider their pursuits, their pleasures, and their sorrows, as matters of indifference, in which we have no concern: nor can such conduct, selfish as it appears at first sight, prove otherwise than detrimental to our interests; for by rendering such a person an object of general dislike, it rends asunder every tie that should bind them to society, excludes them from the enjoyment of friendship, and, in short, constitutes a character which I hope I shall never see either of you attempt to imitate. For Sophia I have little fear: the vanity inherent in every breast leads her, I am happy to observe, to endeavour to conciliate the esteem of her friends; while you, actuated by the same principle, affect a roughness of exterior I should be well pleased to see laid aside.”

“Indeed, madam,” said Rachel, weary of an address, the substance of which she had heard a score times before, “however disagreeable I may be, and I dare say *am*, I must say you are not just to accuse me of affectation. You should remember I have never been to school to learn fine manners, as Miss Jenkins has.”

“Miss Jenkins is a character I am far from wishing you to take for your model,” replied Mrs. Mason; “and though you will not allow the charge of affectation, you must at least acknowledge that you have never endeavoured to rub off the rusticity of your manners. I have often been greatly vexed to behold the total neglect with which you have been treated, for want of a little exertion on your part.”

“Well! I am sure it never gave me the least concern in the world!” said the incorrigible Rachel.

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“It is in vain to argue with you, I perceive,” said Mrs. Mason. “Time and experience will, I trust, teach you what I cannot.”

“Nay, my dear aunt, I will have no instructor but yourself; and since you wish it, I really will try to behave better for the future; though I do not know how it is, but I can never think of any thing to say.”

Mrs. Mason smiled, probably because she had gained her cause; and peace being thus restored, the ladies separated for the night.

Notwithstanding the disapprobation Rachel had expressed of Tomkins, she was better pleased with him than she chose to allow. She had heard his argument with Mr. Brown, and understood enough of it to perceive that he was not inclined to pay that devotion to female classics, which the vicar seemed to think was their due. She therefore considered him in some degree the champion of her cause; and happy in having found a person possessed of sufficient sense to contend with ‘Sir Oracle,’ and actually to dispute the propriety of his darling theme, she beheld Tomkins with a degree of complacency very unusual with her on so short an acquaintance.

Rachel, despite of her endeavours to conceal it even from herself, possessed her full share of female vanity. The desire of excelling, the thirst of admiration, glowed as strongly in her breast as in that of the more polished Sophia; and had Nature been equally liberal to her person, she had in all probability spread her snares with as much diligence and caution: but aware of the imperfections of her exterior appearance, (which, though not deformed, could boast of but few advantages), having also found by experience how little notice she attracted, the desire of conquest gradually declined. She had long learned to look on the adulation offered to others without envy, and felt perfectly contented when left to make her uninterrupted observations on the company. Still however it might be remarked, that if (which seldom happened) some slight attention had been paid her, she returned from her visit in better spirits; which proved, that if she was a stoic, it was through necessity, not choice.

Thus compelled to seek amusement in her own resources, she resolved to indemnify herself as much as lay in her power, by ridiculing the conduct and behaviour of her companions, for which she fancied she possessed a peculiar talent; nor did this opinion arise entirely from conceit: her parents (like most others) beholding in their offspring qualifications that would have escaped the observation of the most accurate observer, had persuaded themselves into a belief that their Rachel was a wit; and when any one ventured to intimate a contrary opinion, they were entertained with anecdotes so numerous and interesting, that the most incredulous were happy, by retracting their sentiments, to escape the overwhelming detail.

Since she had become an inhabitant of the Lodge, her aunt had sedulously endeavoured to correct a propensity so little calculated to render her respected; but the force of habit is hard to be overcome. Mrs. Mason reasoned—Rachel listened, but could never be convinced, that the talent which had been admired by her parents could be so dangerous as her aunt represented. Be it understood, that Rachel had been educated according to the rules of the old school, and taught to “Honour and obey her father and mother.”

The natural reserve, or, as it may perhaps more properly be termed, the awkwardness of Rachel, prevented this inclination from being troublesome to her

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acquaintance; and, excepting a casual speech, it went no farther than her own fire-side, where it was liberally displayed at the expense of every one.

Justice, however, requires it to be told, that no ill-natured motive influenced her conversation—it was merely for her amusement; and the greatest length to which she ever proceeded, was to endeavour, by assuming additional coarseness of manners, to ridicule what she termed her cousin's sentimentality.

During breakfast the next morning, Sophia expressed her approbation of Tomkins in the most animated terms; and scarcely was the repast concluded, and Rachel retired to assist her aunt in some domestic affairs, before our hero appeared, charged with the joint inquiries of Mr. and Mrs. Simpson after the health of the ladies. Sophia received him with great pleasure; she felt convinced, from the early hour, that it must have been his first visit; and the attention was the more welcome, as it established her triumph over Miss Jenkins, whom she had beheld (not with the most amicable feelings) engrossing the principal attention of the visitor the preceding evening.

"I trust," said Tomkins, taking the offered chair,—"I trust I shall not suffer in your opinion for this flagrant breach of established custom; but believe me, Miss Miller, though long trained in the school of modern refinement, I have proved a very hopeless pupil; nor could I have given you a greater proof of my disobedience to its laws, than by intruding at this early hour."

"You might have spared your long apology," said Sophia, smiling; "it is not possible you should be a greater non-conformist to such laws than the inhabitants of this house: we are glad to see our friends at all times. It has often struck me with astonishment, when I have reflected how much such rules militate against our happiness, that any one should be found willing to conform to them. Oh, how much do they sacrifice who comply with their dictates!"

"Your sentiments exactly coincide with mine:" replied Tomkins, who could not help forming a comparison between his present companion and Miss Jenkins, not much to the advantage of the latter. There was a soothing softness in Sophia's voice that expressed more than her words. "Certainly," thought Tomkins, "the vicar was right: Virgil and Horace have refined this girl, and made her capable of discriminating between real and imaginary pleasures."

His reflections were here interrupted by Sophia's remarking, "That though her acquaintance was confined to the inhabitants of E——, and consequently afforded little variety of character, yet even *she* had seen with what avidity some people exchanged the tranquil delights of home, for scenes of frivolity and dissipation. Surrounded as she is," continued she, "with every comfort, I have often wondered to see how much gratification Miss Jenkins has anticipated from a visit of some weeks, which would remove her from all *domestic* happiness."

Tomkins sighed; the soothing voice had lost its charm; detraction was a despicable quality that always excited his contempt. "Oh, woman, woman!" thought he, "must I be ever disappointed? Shall I never find one destitute of this derogatory failing? Where can I look now, since Greek and Latin have failed to correct it?" It has been truly said, that

"Thoughts from the tongue that slowly part,

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Glance quick as lightning through the heart;”

and his took no more time than served to cast a look of contempt and regret on Sophia; but before either had time to speak again, the door of the apartment opened, and Rachel entered in an apron!

“I wonder, Rachel,” said Sophia, hastily, “how you can make your appearance in that disgraceful apron!”

“Disgraceful!” repeated Rachel, spreading it out with both her hands; “I am sure it is neither dirty nor ragged;” then turning to Tomkins, she inquired after Mrs. Simpson.

Tomkins’s eyes had followed the direction of Sophia’s on her first exclamation: and having ascertained the truth of Rachel’s assertion by the ample display she had made, they unconsciously wandered back to Sophia; possibly desirous of discovering if she could make the like affirmation; when they accidentally encountered a spot of grease which had fallen on her dress.

What concatenation of ideas could be formed between a spot of grease and an apron, perhaps he only could tell; probably, as his eyes glanced from one to the other, he endeavoured to trace a similitude in the form of the spots—Rachel’s apron being a spotted one; or, more probably, he thought nothing, for it is very certain he said nothing. Rachel, finding he made no reply, repeated her question; when starting from his reverie, he apologized for his inattention, and informed her that Mrs. Simpson was perfectly well.

“I am glad to hear it,” rejoined Rachel: “I was afraid the party last night would have tired her.”

“Mrs. Simpson is so hospitable,” observed Sophia, “that in entertaining her friends I am sure she never thinks of fatigue.”

“Notwithstanding her forgetfulness, fatigue often thinks of her,” returned Rachel.

“Perhaps it would have been better had I said, she does not spare herself on such occasions,” said her cousin, mildly.

“Certainly there is more reason in that; for to say friendship feels no fatigue, is like saying ‘pride feels no pain;’ when, if the truth were to be told, one should say, it will not acknowledge any. But, good morning, Mr. Tomkins, my aunt is waiting for me to make the pie;” and taking a bunch of keys from a closet, Rachel abruptly made her exit.

“I have been reading Zimmerman on Solitude,” said Sophia, when her cousin had left the room; “and though I admire the work, yet I must acknowledge that I find theory and practice widely different.”

“But why practise it if repugnant to your inclination,” asked Tomkins, “when there are so many that would have occasion to rejoice, if by a change in your conduct they were to be favoured with more of your society?”

“I am not prepared with an answer suitable to such extravagant flattery,” said the blushing Sophia, “but can merely say, that I have no reason to suppose my society is so highly valued; and in reply to your question I must inform you, that the pursuits of my aunt and cousin are so diametrically opposite to mine, that I am unavoidably condemned to pass many lonely hours.”

“Can you complain of lonely hours with such companions as these?” cried Tomkins, pointing to a well-stored bookcase.

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“Again I must declare, that practice proves the fallacy of theory,” replied Sophia: “the best authors may in time grow tedious.”

Tomkins thought very differently; and desirous of knowing what authors Sophia had termed tedious, he advanced to the bookcase, saying, “Tell me of which of my friends you complain, Miss Miller, that I may discard him from my library?”

Sophia perceived that she had proceeded farther than she wished, that is, had expressed sentiments rather incompatible with the romantic sensibility she generally professed; and willing to redeem her character, said carelessly, “Oh, I do not make any particular complaint; I merely meant to observe, that there are moments when the spirits will not bear the application necessary to peruse the most excellent writers.”

During this speech, Tomkins had recognised among the collection some excellent Greek and Latin authors, most of the British poets, and many valuable prose writers; and resuming his seat, he said, “I differ so far from you, Miss Miller, as to think, that, excepting real distress of mind, nothing could prevent a true admirer from deriving amusement from such resources.”

Sophia was at a loss for a reply; and as no situation can be more unpleasant, she was not sorry to see him rise to depart: and Tomkins left the Lodge with somewhat altered sentiments, towards its beautiful inmate, from those he had at first entertained.

“I am more than ever convinced of the little benefit derived by women from such studies,” said he to Mr. Simpson, at his return, “since I have now met with a proof, that they do not experience even amusement from them.”

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CHAPTER III.

Mr. Porter (the father of Rachel) was a respectable haberdasher in London. He had, as was before intimated, married early in life the sister of Mrs. Mason. Their family at this time consisted of a son and two daughters: Robert, who was the eldest, had been intended by Mr. Porter to become successor to a concern, which had supplied his father not only with the comforts, but the superfluities of life; but the young man's dislike to business was invincible. Every effort had been vainly used to prevail on him to listen to the advice of his friends; till at length, wearied of opposition, his father had reluctantly resigned his long-cherished plan, and exerted his interest to procure a situation for him in one of the public offices, which would afford an opportunity for the display of those talents he undoubtedly possessed.

Rachel loved her brother with unfeigned affection, and was at this time anxiously expecting to hear the result of the application; when one morning, soon after she had risen, a note was put into her hands, the superscription of which she instantly recognised to be the hand-writing of Robert.

Had Rachel been one of those exquisitely feeling persons, who cannot forbear shrieking when a coal starts from the fire, or a harmless insect presumes to wander over their apparel, she had undoubtedly given utterance to some sudden exclamation that would have excited the attention of her aunt. But few things could disarrange Rachel's usual composure, when her judgment pointed out the necessity of preserving it. Where the exertion of her fortitude was required, it had seldom been known to fail. It was in the common occurrences of life that the awkwardness, arising from the seclusion in which she had been educated, was particularly remarkable; whilst her collected firmness, on more trying occasions, had given some people reason to suppose that her feelings were not so acute as they might be, and others had gone so far as to accuse her of downright apathy.

Of so little consequence did Rachel deem such opinions, that they never once raised in her the slightest intention of reforming her conduct; and she now very quietly withdrew to peruse the unexpected billet. The astonishment she had at first experienced at the absence of the post-mark, was considerably heightened on reading the following lines:

"DEAR RACHEL,

"I ARRIVED this morning, and intend staying a few days. Do not mention my being here to any one, but meet me this evening at five o'clock, when I will explain every thing to you.

"Yours,

"R.P.

"P.S. As you cannot very properly come to the inn, I will meet you at the toll-bar."

Rachel was greatly perplexed: not that she hesitated a moment about obeying the summons; she would have done much more to serve, or merely please her brother, but she could not conjecture what could have brought him so far from home; and she dreaded to meet the inquiries of her aunt, should her appointment be discovered, of which there was

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some danger—five o'clock being Mrs. Mason's tea-hour. "I must contrive it some way, however," thought she, as she entered the parlour, and took up her work; and so completely did she succeed in composing her countenance, that neither Mrs. Mason nor her cousin had the least suspicion of what had happened.

The morning appeared to Rachel the most tedious she had ever known. At length the dinner hour arrived; but her impatience had destroyed her appetite, and it was with great difficulty she prevailed on herself to swallow a few mouthfuls.

"I am afraid you are not well," said Mrs. Mason.

"Oh, yes, I am quite well, thank you, but not very hungry to-day," replied she, sending away her plate.

Some time after the cloth was removed, Rachel, with an air of great indifference, said, "I mean to try your remedy for the head-ach, this afternoon, aunt; so shall go and ask Mrs. Simpson for the receipt we were talking about this morning."

"It seems a pleasant afternoon," said Sophia, "and if you have no objection I will accompany you."

Rachel had a very great objection, but dared not make any; she even tried to say she should be glad of her company, but the words choked her, and she could scarcely conceal her vexation; for the spirit of contradiction seemed to have influenced her cousin to make the proposal, as it was by no means a custom of Sophia's to attend Rachel on her visits to Mrs. Simpson.

"I dare say Mr. Tomkins will not be at home," said Rachel, involuntarily.

These words proved the speaker to possess more penetration than was generally attributed to her; for they at once developed the true motive of Sophia's offer, who, with great anger, replied, "That she hoped she might be supposed to visit Mrs. Simpson with as little desire as her cousin had of seeing Mr. Tomkins."

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" cried Rachel, who thought, notwithstanding, that the supposition would not be quite just; "but I think it would be better to walk over and see Sally Burton, for, now I think of it, we have not heard of her a long time."

"If you intend going so far, you had better go immediately," said Mrs. Mason, "as it is near four o'clock, and you will scarcely be back in time for tea."

"I think so too; Sophia, will you go?" asked Rachel.—"No, I thank you," said the offended Sophia.

"Good bye, then," said Rachel;—for the first time in her life pleased that she had offended her cousin.

Sally Burton, the poor woman who had been reduced to the necessity of begging alms of the party at Mrs. Simpson's, had been sought and relieved by Mrs. Mason, and had ever since been considered as one of her pensioners; but as she resided at a considerable distance from the Lodge, Rachel had usually been deputed to the office of visiting her. Her proposal, therefore, excited no surprise, and she set off with the intention of calling on Sally Burton in her way to the toll-bar.

On entering the cottage, she found if she proceeded directly to the place of rendezvous, she should be at least half an hour before the appointed time, and not choosing to wait so long in a public road, she sat down, and began to inquire after the health of the family.

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“They be all purely, thank ye, Miss,” said the woman; “and, as I tell my good man, I make no doubt but we shall do very well again, after a bit.”

Having conversed some time with Mrs. Burton, Rachel’s impatience to meet her brother prompted her to depart; and looking at the clock she inquired if it was right, but before Sally could return an answer, Tomkins, to her utter amazement, entered the cottage. The rencontre seemed equally unexpected on both sides. “I did not hope for the pleasure of meeting Miss Porter,” said he, refusing the chair that Sally had been dusting with the corner of her apron.

Rachel was not quite certain that he was pleased, but as he said so, she did not choose to contradict him.

It is an extraordinary difference which must have fallen under the observation of most people, that while the most callous of the female sex seem to think every reflection on their sensibility an insult, the male part of the creation scorn to acknowledge the possession of that very quality which females deem their greatest boast; and it was probably this reason that prevented Rachel from perceiving any marks of satisfaction in the countenance of Tomkins.

“Is your husband at home, Mrs. Burton?” he demanded.

“No, an please your honour,” said the woman, curtseying. “I think, Miss, you asked me if our clock was right?—It is, I take it, somewhat too slow.”

“It is nearly five, madam,” said Tomkins, looking at his watch.

“I thank you, sir,” said Rachel; “then I must bid you good afternoon.—Good day, Mrs. Burton:”—and she quitted the cottage, leaving Tomkins to wonder and comment on finding her there.

Tomkins, since his first introduction to the family at the Lodge, had always imagined the unpolished exterior of Rachel concealed qualities, which did not meet the eye of a careless observer; but whether these qualities were valuable, or otherwise, he had not as yet had an opportunity of ascertaining. But he thought he had now solved the mystery: he had seen her conversing with a poor cottager, without the slightest appearance of haughtiness or disdain; and yet avoiding that familiarity which allows the dependant to assume the language of an equal. Nor can our hero be accused of want of judgment, when he inferred from this circumstance, that Rachel was not so ignorant as he had at first supposed her; for perhaps a more general rule cannot be found,—as ignorance will either affect the manners of scorn and contempt, or sink into an almost equally reprehensible easiness of conversation.

His own visit to the cottage was on an errand of benevolence. The distress of this family had been occasioned by the husband being unable to procure work. Their immediate wants had been relieved by the beneficence of Mrs. Simpson and her friends; while the interest of her husband had been exerted to prevail on Mr. Jenkins to employ the man as shepherd; and it was to announce the success of this application that Tomkins had visited their humble abode.

Rachel, in the mean time, continued her way to the toll-bar, where in a few minutes she was joined by her brother. When the salutations, usual between relatives after a separation of some months, were ended, Rachel expressed her impatience to be informed of the cause of his unexpected appearance.—”My dear girl,” said he, drawing her arm through his, “you are to understand I am in a most deplorable mess. Some

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months ago I contracted a trifling debt; but as I had been a friend to the fellow, I never imagined he would presume to be troublesome."

"Why, surely, Robert, you meant to pay the man?" interrupted Rachel.

"Hold your tongue, and hear me through, child: I meant to pay him when it was convenient, but the wretch informed me the other day that he would wait no longer; and unless the money were paid directly, he should proceed to extremities. This, you may be sure, put me in a violent rage, and I was very near vowing never to pay him at all; however, considering that it would be rather awkward to be clapped up just now, I e'en applied to the old one, and in the most pathetic manner explained to him my misfortune; when—would you believe it!—he not only turned a deaf ear to my sorrows, but told me to my face not to expect any assistance from him, as he neither could nor would support me in such profligacy, but would deliver me up to the rascally bailiffs whenever they chose to fetch me! Seeing things were come to this pitch, I thought it high time to be off; and here I am."

"But, dear Robert, why did you come here?"

"Because I thought you would be glad to see me."

"Oh, so I am; but why did you come in this strange way?—why not come to my aunt's at once?"

"Zounds! Rachel, I thought you had been a girl of more sense than to ask so ridiculous a question: don't you know very well that aunty would read me a lecture two or three hours long, and then *send me home by the maid?* Besides, I suppose you will receive a full, true, and particular account of my bad behaviour in a few days; and it would be a great pity, after I had talked the old lady into good humour, to have all my work undone by it; let the storm that it will raise first subside, and then I may make my appearance without any hazard."

"But in the mean time where are you to live? as to being kept concealed, I am afraid that is quite out of the question."

"I do not see that it is out of the question at all: If I do not choose to tell who I am, how the deuce are they to find it out? But I want to consult you about where I am to live; for my funds are very low, and, as I have told you, there is no hope of a supply for the present. Your inn has lightened my pocket already; so rub up your memory, and see if you cannot recollect some decent place where I may take up my quarters."

"I think I know the most convenient place in the world for a person in your circumstances," said Rachel, as the remembrance of a spare room in Sally Burton's cottage darted across her mind: "the house stands quite out of the village; and though it is inhabited by very poor people, yet I can answer for your meeting with cleanliness and civility."

"Two scarce commodities among their fraternity," observed Robert; "but I cannot stand upon trifles, so lead on."

"If I am not to acknowledge you, I must not be seen with you at present," returned Rachel.

"True! I forgot: I shall make some confounded blunder I expect; but, Rachel, you will be sure to let me know the first moment I may make my appearance; for I shall not submit to this 'durance vile,' very patiently!"

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"As I am in the habit of calling upon Mrs. Burton, I shall see you sometimes, and be able to tell you how we go on." Then giving him a direction to the cottage, she bade him good night, and hurried home.

Notwithstanding she used her utmost speed, the clock was striking six when she entered the house; her face glowed with heat, and she had not quite recovered her breath.

"In the name of wonder, Rachel, where have you been?" exclaimed Sophia: "you look as if you had been running a race."

"I do not approve of your staying out so much beyond your time: pray what has detained you?" asked Mrs. Mason.

Rachel was confused. "I staid longer than I intended at Sally's," at length she articulated.

"There must be something wonderfully attractive in Sally, to induce you to keep me waiting an hour for my tea," said her aunt.

Reproof was never agreeable to Rachel; but as no more was said on the subject, she thought she had a fortunate escape.

According to Robert's expectation, in three days arrived a long letter from Mrs. Porter to her sister, filled with expressions of anxiety at the disappearance of her son. She spoke of his imprudence in terms qualified with all a mother's fondness; and lamented that she could not prevail on her husband to see his conduct in the same light. "So exasperated is he," she continued, "that he is resolved to condemn him to pass some time in confinement, if he can by any means hear of him. It is in vain I have with tears endeavoured to shake his determination: he says he is certain it will do him more good than all his reasoning or my fondness."

"I hope your brother will not come here," said Mrs. Mason, refolding the letter.

"May I ask why?" said Rachel.

"Because I should be under the disagreeable necessity of informing his father of his retreat."

Rachel's heart seemed ready to burst. "Surely, madam, you would not—you could not do it!" she exclaimed.

"I certainly could, and I hope you know me sufficiently well to believe I would do it," replied Mrs. Mason, firmly. "I do not blame your affection for your brother, neither can I consent to encourage him in disobeying his father."

So ended all Rachel's hopes; for it had never once entered her imagination, that her aunt would act so directly opposite to her wishes; and she had looked forward to the arrival of the expected letter, as the moment of release to Robert. She had not seen him since their meeting at the toll-bar; and the pleasure she anticipated in conveying to him what she had hoped would prove welcome intelligence, had enabled her to wait, with some degree of patience, the moment of its arrival: but she now almost dreaded to meet him; and the thoughts of his disappointment, added to her own, gave a most desponding cast to her features. Had she known the principal share of the vexation had fallen to her lot, her chagrin would have considerably abated; for Robert was one that set care at defiance: and after the few first uneasy sensations had subsided, he was always ready to extract sweet from the present ill.

How to convey to him the failure of their plans, was the next difficulty that occurred. Her last visit to the cottage was so recent that she dared not to propose another.

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She thought of writing; but where could she find a messenger on whom she could depend? It may appear extraordinary that Rachel did not seek the cottage, without giving her aunt any information on the subject; but those who have lived in a small family will be perfectly aware, how intimately acquainted every part of such a family must unavoidably be with the actions of each other; and when we consider, that concealment is always attended with inconvenience, and that the fear of discovery renders us desirous of giving an air of plausibility to every trifling circumstance, which at another time would have escaped our attention, Rachel's precaution will cease to excite surprise.

Mrs. Mason beheld the concern that was strongly depicted on her countenance, and, wishing to divert her thoughts, offered her a book.

"I cannot read," said she, putting it aside: "I think," fixing her eyes intently on the carpet, "I will take a walk."

It is said, that 'the mistress of a family must be either a fool or a physician by the time she is forty.' Mrs. Mason was undoubtedly no fool; and experience had taught her, that nothing so effectually tends to relieve the mind (let the cause of uneasiness be what it may) as employment. The extreme concern testified by Rachel had greatly surprised her. She had studied her character closely, and believed she was perfectly acquainted with her disposition; yet she had never before perceived any signs of extraordinary sensibility. She was, however, glad to hear her propose walking, which, by changing the scene, would probably remove her vexation; and therefore said, "I think you had better, but do not be late." The tone in which these words were uttered, plainly shewed she had not forgotten her last ramble.

Rachel promised obedience; and happy in having succeeded in leaving the house without exciting suspicion, ran, without stopping, until she reached the cottage. So great was her hurry and trepidation when she entered, that she had nearly inquired for her brother by his name; but, fortunately, recollecting herself, she sat down in the hope of learning from Sally what she dared not ask. The woman, however, seemed resolved not to satisfy her; but harangued, for a considerable time, on the goodness of Mr. Simpson, the kindness of Mr. Tomkins, and the generosity of her aunt, which had, she said, quite set them on their legs again.

Never had Rachel heard the commendations of her friends with so little patience; at length, unable to endure this torrent of eloquence any longer, she asked, "if it was true that she had taken a lodger." This interrogatory effectually answered the purpose for which it was intended: the poor woman instantly forgot the goodness, the kindness, the generosity of her friends, in her haste to give an account of her new inmate; and, after wondering how Miss Porter came to hear of him, she thus continued.

"I've a long tale to tell you about it, Miss: it's the most curious thing that ever happened, as you shall hear. The day after you was here, there came a fine gentleman, who said that he heard we had a room to let. I told him it was true, but that it was not good enough for him; but he *would* see it, and said it would do very well; and here he has been ever since. I thought it was odd such a fine gentleman should take up with our place; but it seemed as if he knew one's thoughts; for he said the other day, that he was come into the country for his health, and as the town was so noisy, he thought he should be better here."

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“Does not so fine a gentleman give you more trouble than he is worth?” asked Rachel.

“Lord love you, Miss! no: he gives no trouble in life; for he walks about all day, and just comes home to his meals.”

“And is he out now?” said Rachel, affecting curiosity: “I should like of all things to see him.”

“Lauk a daisy, Miss!” said Sally; “he is out from morning to night, walking up and down by the toll-bar.”

This was enough for Rachel: she bade her humble friend farewell, and hastened to meet her brother.

Probably Mrs. Burton suspected something from her abrupt departure, for she watched her out of sight; and having ascertained that she took the way to the high road—a path directly contrary to the one which would lead her home—she resumed her spinning; but whatever her thoughts might be, they were reserved for future explanation.

Rachel soon found her brother; who no sooner saw her approaching than he hastened towards her, impatient to receive the intelligence he doubted not she brought.

“My good soul, I am very glad to see you!” cried he, grasping her hand. “I hope you have brought me good news, for I can’t bear this life much longer: one might as well be locked up at once. I’ve not been treated with the sight of a decent phiz such an age, that, positively, it is quite a relief to look at yours; but come, you don’t tell me the news!—haven’t you heard from the old folks?”

“I wish, Robert, you would be a little serious,” said Rachel, mournfully; “I have no good news for you, be assured.”

“Halloo! Rachel, are you going to sing a funeral dirge? because, hark’ye, I am not ready. Now,” continued he, drawing out his pocket handkerchief, “you may begin; you know I like to do things in style.”

This was more than Rachel could bear. Few things could provoke her to tears; but the various sensations she had experienced during the day—regret for Robert’s imprudence, sorrow for the anxiety of her parents, vexation at the conduct pursued by her aunt, and the agitation she had undergone in effecting this meeting—had rendered her very unfit to cope with the high spirits of Robert, and she burst into tears.

Robert was serious in a moment. “Good Heavens, my dear Rachel!” he exclaimed, in a tone of great concern, “what has happened?—you have heard from home, and some of them are ill?”

“Oh, no; they are all well,” said Rachel; “it is not so bad as that, neither.”

Robert’s spirits returned as quickly as they had fled. “Then for what are you acting this tragedy?” demanded he: “I thought, at least, they were all dead and buried. Come, out with it! you need not be afraid of telling me any thing else.”

Rachel then explained to him the state of affairs; and when she had concluded, he said, “It is rather awkward, to be sure. Why, I say, Rachel, what a crusty old woman that aunt of our’s must be! well! (and a sort of half sigh forced its way) what must be must, you know; so I shall take wing again; for stay here I cannot. I thought aunty would have made peace for me; but since she declines the office, I shall accept Tom Stretton’s invitation, and spend the two next months in Cumberland.”

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"I think, if you would stay a few days longer," said Rachel, "while I wrote to my father, perhaps, supported by my mother's interest, it might prevail on him to recal you."

"Faith, my dear girl, that's a bright idea! I have no doubt but it will do the business. You were always dad's darling, you know; so I'll e'en stay till you get an answer: it is not the first scrape you have helped me out of."

"Though I hope it will be the last," added Rachel, gravely.

"Come, don't preach, there's a good soul; you know it's an article I never much relished.

"I have no inclination to preach," said she, "for I have not now to learn how useless it is: I only want to know what you will do in case my father refuses our petition; as, I dare say, this Tom Stretton will not be very willing to support you?"

Robert's pride was roused: the very idea of depending for support on another is so humiliating to an independent mind, that his good humour could scarcely bear the test.

"Pray, may I ask the meaning of that very sensible speech?" said he, "for, upon my honour, it is quite beyond my comprehension. I trust I shall never be reduced to burthen any one for my subsistence; and, I hope, the next time I ask your opinion, you will endeavour to express yourself in terms more suitable to my capacity."

"Dear Robert, I did not mean to offend you! and, indeed, this is no time for disagreeing; so, pray answer me,—what are we to do in such a case?"

"There is little probability of our being put to the trial," replied Robert: "the election business must be concluded in a short time: and if I am chosen, (of which there is little doubt) I am confident my father will not suffer me to miss it, for want of being able to shew my face."

"I hope so too," said Rachel; "but if—"

"My dear girl! don't put in any buts; follow my plan, and never look beyond the bright side of any thing: it is high time to provide for trouble when it comes."

"I must go now," said Rachel, "as I was told not to be so late; so good night!"

"Good night!" returned her brother: "be sure and write directly; and let me know the first minute you receive an answer, that I may shape my course accordingly."

The influence of hope, in tranquillizing the mind, and exhilarating the spirits, has been felt and acknowledged ever since the human race have experienced the vicissitudes of grief and joy. Rachel left her brother in far better spirits than she had met him; for although his sanguine temper had often misled both of them, yet, as it is a principle implanted in our nature (unless, indeed, absolute impossibility is opposed to it) to hope what we wish, she now wondered that Robert's ideas had not occurred to her, and could have freely laughed at the concern that a short time before had possessed her.

So relieved did she feel of all trouble, and so greatly did she enjoy that relief, that as she walked hastily homewards, she actually attempted a song. Had Rachel entered the lists with a screech-owl, the decision would, no doubt, have been given in her favour; but few of her own species would have dreaded her as a rival. She had, after repeated efforts, raised her voice till she had shrieked out the highest note of a very high tune, when a five-barred gate impeded her progress. Rachel was by no means fond of climbing, so she endeavoured to open it, when she perceived that it had been fastened since she last passed it.

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“What must I do!” she exclaimed; and turning round to find some other passage, she beheld, to her great dismay, Tomkins close behind her.

It has been before hinted, that the confidence which Rachel possessed was not that which is acquired by an intercourse with the world: her natural good sense enabled her to decide, and act with promptitude, on all matters of importance; but totally unacquainted with that easy self-command which is usually denominated *manner*, her confusion, on occasions like the present, was indescribable; and she now stood beside the unfortunate gate, without advancing a step, or uttering a word.

“After all she must be an idiot,” thought Tomkins, as he approached, and offered his arm to assist her in climbing the gate. ‘After all what?’—is a question that requires a long answer; and whether the reader may be disposed to ask it, or not, it is almost absolutely necessary to give it, to account for Tomkins’s subsequent conduct.

It may be remembered, that he left Mrs. Burton’s cottage, with far more favourable sentiments towards Rachel, than he had before entertained; and so desirous was he of becoming more intimately acquainted with what he began to consider a valuable character, that he let slip no opportunity of effecting his scheme.

“That there is much rust about her, cannot be denied,” thought he; “but her heart is good;” and though he may be deemed a spiritless, droning, sanctified bore, it must be confessed that he felt more interested in promoting his acquaintance with Rachel, than with the intelligent, beautiful Sophia. To this end he had several times called at the cottage, in the vague expectation of meeting her; aware that the real character is most open to observation when all restraint is laid aside, and the feelings of the heart dictate every action. He had, in the course of his visits, learned the arrival of the stranger; but as he appeared desirous of remaining unknown, Tomkins’s curiosity had never led him to make any inquiries concerning him.

Rachel had scarcely left the cottage ten minutes, before Tomkins entered it; when Sally, full of amazement at beholding Miss Porter hasten to meet a man whom she thought no one knew, resolved to make out, as she said, whether he was as great a stranger as she took him to be; and with a look that by no means wanted expression, she observed to Tomkins, “that though her lodger thought to keep himself so snug, some of his friends had found him out.”

Tomkins saw the look, but not understanding her meaning, said nothing.

Sally was disappointed: she expected he would have said something that she might have construed into a desire of an explanation; but finding she must either proceed unasked, or relinquish the pleasure of telling the wonderful tale, she chose the former plan, and remarked, “That his honour would wonder to hear that Miss Porter seemed to know the gentleman very well, when every body else had much ado to make out his name.”

Still Tomkins said nothing; and Sally, unable to retain the secret any longer, informed him, “That Rachel had gone to meet the stranger not ten minutes before he entered.”

Again Mrs. Burton was disappointed: her auditor testified no astonishment, nor even uttered a single exclamation; but soon after took leave, and went home, pondering on the intricacy of the human character. He had been deceived in Rachel, in every respect. At first he had thought her a fool; afterwards he had imagined that amiable qualities were

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concealed beneath her apparent stupidity; but he had now learnt that she had wit enough to carry on an intrigue; and that her supposed virtues did not prevent her from making her apparently charitable visits subservient to a far different purpose.

Such were his reflections when he found himself but a few paces behind the object which had excited them. Rachel was at this time (as has been already told) chaunting forth a song. Habitual cheerfulness is no indication of a bad heart; and Tomkins could scarcely believe that Rachel was capable of so much deceit. It is true he was not captivated by the sound of her voice; but had not every jarring passion been hushed, and her heart at peace with itself, he argued (not without some shadow of probability) that she would not have sung at all; but when, on turning and perceiving him, she had shewn so little appearance of common understanding, he was tempted to think, that 'after all, she must be an idiot!"

Having assisted her over the before-mentioned gate, he continued, for some time, to walk by her side in profound silence; Rachel every moment wishing and expecting him to take leave: she had scarcely recovered her confusion, and was besides very desirous of reaching home.

Tomkins, however, did not offer to depart; but suddenly breaking silence, he asked her, "If she considered people at liberty to use virtue as a cloke, to screen some private action?"

Rachel did not understand him. The subject seemed so very abruptly introduced, and so unconnected with every object around them, that she paused a considerable time without answering; however, on his repeating the question, she said, "I should imagine, that those people who are in the practice of virtue, are seldom guilty of any action that requires concealment."

"Yet such instances occur," said Tomkins.

"Very rarely, I should think," returned Rachel; "and they must then be resorted to under very peculiar circumstances."

"What circumstances do you consider peculiar?" asked Tomkins.

Rachel looked surprised, and said, "It is impossible for me to enumerate all the particular incidents that may be included under that head; but I do not think any one should have recourse to such expedients, without the strongest and most imperative necessity."

"You think then such means justifiable in some cases?" said Tomkins.

"Not entirely," she replied: "we are told 'never to do evil, that good may come of it;' but our faith is not always strong enough to enable us to obey this commandment; and events may sometimes occur, that will render the strict performance of our duty a burthen we have not resolution to sustain: in such cases, though the means are not justifiable, they are less blameable than in any other."

Never was astonishment greater than that experienced by Tomkins at this speech; he could hardly credit his senses, that it was delivered by a girl he had so recently pronounced an idiot. It seemed as if the more he knew, the less able he was to judge. Her whole conduct was a mystery he could by no means understand; and while he retracted his late decision, he beheld her with sentiments almost amounting to admiration; until the information he had received from Mrs. Burton recurred to his remembrance. And although he believed the woman might have exaggerated the truth, still his delicacy

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revolted at the idea of taking any interest in a female, who had so far outstepped the bounds of propriety; for that the whole circumstance was unknown to Mrs. Mason, he could not for a moment doubt. He was on the point of leaving her, when she asked him "to gratify her curiosity, so far as to inform her how he came to introduce so singular a subject of conversation?"

"I was led into the reflection, Miss Porter," said he, "by having lately come to the knowledge of the real motives of a person, whom I had believed to have been influenced by none but those of the purest benevolence." As he spoke, he fixed his eyes intently on her countenance, but it changed not; while she said, "Probably the person you mention is mistaken as to his own real motives?"

"Pardon me," interrupted Tomkins, "I conceive that to be scarcely possible."

"Then you must conclude that the person alluded to is vicious?"

"Imprudent, is perhaps a more applicable term," he replied.

In a few minutes they reached Mrs. Mason's gate. Rachel invited him to enter; but he declined, and they parted:—Rachel to write to her father—Tomkins to consider in what class of the human species he should place the incomprehensible Rachel.

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CHAPTER IV.

On entering the house, Rachel experienced the first serious inconvenience arising from her visits to Robert. The grave looks of her aunt, and the almost spiteful ones of Sophia, plainly shewed that some extraordinary occurrence had happened during her absence.

"Pray, Rachel, where have you been?" demanded Mrs. Mason, in a tone so grave, that she was almost tempted to conceal her visit to Mrs. Burton; but recollecting that Tomkins had seen her in the fields leading to her house, and dreading that, by some unforeseen means, it might reach the ears of her aunt, she gave the required information.

"I told you so!" exclaimed Sophia; "it is very evident why she does not wish me to be her companion."

Rachel looked her surprise; for so greatly was she astonished, that words were denied her.

"The vexation and surprise, Rachel," said her aunt, "that I have experienced this evening, are beyond my power to express. Your disposition always appeared to me so different, that had not the information been given by so respectable a person as Mrs. Simpson, I confess I should have disbelieved it without a moment's hesitation."

Rachel sunk into a chair: she imagined that the retreat of her brother was discovered; and, without reflecting on the improbability of Mrs. Simpson's knowing any thing of the matter, she sat an image of despair.

"When I consider the short time you have been acquainted with this young man," continued Mrs. Mason, "the impropriety of your conduct strikes me more forcibly than ever; and I should have hoped that, at a time when your parents are lamenting the imprudence of one child, you would carefully have avoided every thing that could tend to augment their uneasiness."

Rachel felt greatly relieved: that her accusation had no concern with her brother she was convinced; and she boldly demanded of what she was accused?

"Do not think to mislead me by such dissimulation," replied her aunt; "your present behaviour entirely confirms my suspicions."

Rachel, however, persisted in her ignorance; and at length Mrs. Mason informed her, that Mrs. Simpson had called during her absence; and, in the course of conversation, had casually mentioned Tomkins's frequent visits to the cottage; adding, in a joking manner, some observations on his meeting with Rachel, of which he had accidentally spoken.

Mrs. Mason was far from thinking of it in so slight a manner; and when she afterwards reflected on (what now appeared to her) Rachel's solicitude to go out alone, she became seriously uneasy. She had resolved to bring her to a full explanation on her return; when the distress she had shewn, on supposing her secret was discovered, was mistaken by her aunt as an indisputable evidence of her culpability.

Sophia was not at all disposed to become peace-maker in the affair; her vanity was touched to the quick: that Rachel—the coarse, vulgar, illiterate Rachel—should think of contending with her, would have been a mark of presumption, for which the disgrace attending a failure might have been some atonement; but the thought of her success was

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intolerable; and as prejudiced people cannot be impartial judges, if Sophia said any thing, it tended to widen rather than close the breach.

During this explanation, Rachel had been considering what plan she had better pursue. She thought it so fortunate that the real cause of her visits still remained unknown, that though greatly provoked that such a motive was assigned her, yet, while she steadily denied the truth of the allegation, she was not sorry to see them persist in their opinion; knowing that the moment which relieved her brother, would free her from every stigma which was at present attached to her.

It may, perhaps, be supposed from these considerations, that had not a time of acquittal been expected by Rachel, she would have abandoned her brother to his fate; the truth is widely different: notwithstanding her professed indifference to public opinion, no one could pay it more respect where it did not interfere with her duty: that duty, she imagined, (how truly, time cannot be spared to inquire) led her to assist her brother; and though aware she was forfeiting the opinion she much prized, she would resolutely have performed her part at all hazards: but had she not looked on her exculpation as certain, the task, that now appeared lightsome and pleasant, would have seemed to require almost Spartan fortitude.

She was, however, much concerned at hearing the following speech: “You cannot, Rachel,” said her aunt, “think me either unjust or severe, when I prohibit your walking alone for the future: if, as you say, you are unjustly accused, you can have no reasonable objection to this arrangement; if you are not, it is a precaution I am every way justified in using.”

“It must not be,” thought Rachel, “or I shall see Robert no more.” “The only way, madam, in which you can shew your belief in what I have asserted,” said she, “is by allowing me my usual liberty.”

“I have not said that I do believe your assertion,” replied her aunt; “and by endeavouring to put aside this trifling restraint, you certainly confirm the contrary opinion.”

Rachel saw it was useless to contend, so she remained silent; and retired to rest, vexed with her aunt, her cousin, Mrs. Simpson, and, above all, with Tomkins, who had been the undesigning cause of all her difficulty.

Several days had elapsed, and Rachel saw little probability of an interview with Robert. During this time, the restraint, which Mrs. Mason had termed trifling, had increased every day; and every day the difficulty of making even a momentary escape seemed greater; till at length it appeared insurmountable. To add to her chagrin, no answer had arrived from her father; and she was, more than once, on the point of confessing every thing to her aunt; but the promise she had given her brother, and the well-remembered sentiments expressed by Mrs. Mason, withheld her.

About this time an incident occurred which was hailed by Rachel with delight, but which, in the end, proved only a fresh source of vexation.

The renewed disappointment of seeing the post-boy ride past the gate without stopping, had cast an additional cloud over the features of Rachel; and her aunt, who certainly had as great an antipathy to a mournful countenance (particularly when she fancied she possessed the means of removing it) as any person could possibly have, proposed a call on Mrs. Simpson.

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Mrs. Mason was by no means one of those beings who are described as possessing every unamiable quality, although she undoubtedly was an old maid, being upwards of fifty; nor did she, because she had never entered the state of matrimony herself, rail at and denounce it as the source of every evil: on the contrary, she saw nothing objectionable in the connexion she fancied her niece had formed, but the clandestine manner in which it appeared to have been carried on; which may account for her proposing to take her to the house—a circumstance which some old maids, *married* as well as single, will perhaps think she ought of all others to have avoided.

She was greatly surprised to perceive that her proposal seemed to give no satisfaction to Rachel, who, with a most unmoved countenance, said "she would accompany her if she wished it:" but the settled gloom was not for a moment displaced: no heightened colour, nor brightened eye, shewed that she derived the least pleasure from the intended visit.

"Surely I have been mistaken," thought Mrs. Mason; "for human nature is not capable of such consummate hypocrisy, at least *she* is not."

A perfect command of the countenance is, indeed, most difficult of attainment; and, notwithstanding Shakspeare has declared, "There is no art to read the mind's construction in the face," an attentive observer may often (though not infallibly) form a tolerably accurate judgment.

Not being able to account for Rachel's evident dejection in any other way, Mrs. Mason resolved to see Tomkins and her together, in the hope of having an opportunity of judging of their mutual sentiments; and she determined, should she be unable to bring things to a proper explanation, to send Rachel out of the way, during the time Tomkins staid at E——. Sophia declined being of the party; and in a few minutes she sallied forth with poor Rachel, who, as she passed the turning in the lane, cast a wistful look at the road that led to the cottage. The old couple were glad to see them; and as no previous engagement prevented, they were induced to stay to take tea. Mrs. Mason wished Sophia to be made acquainted with this arrangement, lest she should be uneasy at their not returning; and Tomkins begged he might be allowed to convey the information, which was accompanied by an invitation from Mrs. Simpson to join the party.

When he reached the Lodge, he found Sophia attentively perusing a book, which seemed to have excited the greatest interest in her feelings. Never, perhaps, had she looked more beautiful than at this moment: an expression of the most tender compassion overspread her countenance; while a tear in either eye seemed ready every instant to overflow its boundary.

On his entrance she rose to receive him, hastily closed her book, and, with a deep blush, offered him a seat.

"I am afraid," said he, "I have interrupted one of those illusions you described so well, the first time I had the pleasure of conversing with you?"

"I acknowledge it," replied Sophia, "but at the same time I thank you; for the contemplation of sorrows (though imaginary) was becoming almost painful."

Tomkins was no great admirer of such exquisite feelings. He was of opinion, that those persons who are in the habit of indulging imagination, so much as to suffer their finest feelings to be excited over every well-told pathetic tale, are, in time, led to consider the common troubles of life too insignificant to call forth that sensibility, which had

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learned to look on fraud, and rapine, and murder, as common occurrences. He, therefore, evaded any direct reply, by asking the title of the book she had been reading.

Sophia blushed as she presented it. “If you have not read it,” she said, “you will, perhaps, be at a loss to account for the interest I have evinced: if you have, I need say nothing.”

Tomkins looked at the title page: he certainly had read *part* of it; but could not recollect any passage calculated to excite any other tears, than such as “the passion of loud laughter might have shed,” at the high-flown, bombastical nonsense with which it was filled. He had been induced to attempt the perusal of it, at the request of a lady, who had recommended it to him as the sweetest thing that ever was written, printed, or read; but not all his respect for the whole female race could have enabled him to toil through more than the very small portion he did; yet, on this superficial reading, he thought himself qualified to judge the whole work; and though, when questioned by his fair friend, he had affected to lament his defective capacity, and said, “it might be all she thought it, but, to confess the humiliating truth, it was far beyond his comprehension,” he set it down in his own mind, as the most nonsensical composition chance had ever thrown in his way. He was greatly astonished to find it in the hands of Sophia. “What would the vicar say,” thought he, “were he to discover that Virgil and Horace give place to such absurdity as this!”

Supposing some observation would be expected, he returned the book, saying, “When I tell you I have read part of it, Miss Miller, you will allow there needs no further observation.”

Perhaps Sophia suspected something from the tone of his voice, or saw some unknown meaning lurking in his eyes; or perhaps it was accident that prompted her to ask his opinion more decidedly; for, with a degree of earnestness, she said, “Do not you think it an excellent thing?”

Luckily for Tomkins, he was spared the disagreeable necessity of having recourse to his old subterfuge, or of inventing a new one, by one of the servants bursting into the room, crying, “Oh, miss! Molly has scalded her arm in the dreadfullest way that can be, and what are we to do? for madam and Miss Rachel are both out!”

“I am very sorry,” said Sophia; “what is to be done?”

“I thought as how, miss, you might, for once, guess where them sort of things be kept!” said the girl.

“You know I never have any thing to do with such things,” replied Sophia, angrily; “so how is it likely I should know where to look?”

“But what must be done with Molly’s arm, miss?”

“I think you had better send the boy for my cousin,” said she. The girl dropped a curtsey, and left the room.

“Really,” said Sophia, “people do make so much trouble about mere trifles, that they almost exhaust my patience: if they were once to know what real trouble is, it might be of service to them.”

“So it will ever be!” ejaculated Tomkins; to whom this short conversation had appeared an admirable proof of his opinion, that ill-directed sensibility causes indifference to the minor evils of life.— “I should think, madam, the girl’s arm causes her some pain?”

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“Oh! no doubt; but had we not better go? Mrs. Simpson will be expecting us; and my staying here will do no good whatever.”

They had proceeded about half way, when they met Rachel and the boy running as fast as health and strength could carry them. Rachel took no more notice of them, than if they had been total strangers.

“You must long since have perceived the little attention my cousin pays to all outward appearance,” said Sophia; “but I never knew her to carry her rudeness to so great an extreme before.”

“It may well be excused,” replied Tomkins, “when we consider the cause: no doubt she recollected, that every moment she delayed in talking to us was prolonging the servant’s pain.”

Sophia was not pleased with this reply. She had not yet forgiven Rachel for her fancied conquest; and Tomkins’s words confirmed her in the belief, of what she had before entertained some doubt upon: she, however, merely said, “You are very good to excuse her!” and they finished their walk in uninterrupted silence.

Rachel in the mean time reached the Lodge. Another motive, as well as the one Tomkins had ascribed to her, had prompted her speed: the boy had arrived while Mrs. Mason, on some account, had left the room; and the message was delivered to Rachel in the presence of Mrs. Simpson, to whose great surprise she returned a simple “very well,” without offering to leave the room.

“My dear Rachel!” said Mrs. Simpson, “are you not going?”

Rachel coloured. “I must not, ma’am, without my aunt’s permission,” she replied.

“I have known the time when you would not have been so ceremonious; but you had much better go, and I will inform your aunt when she returns.”

Rachel required no second command. The long desired opportunity of seeing her brother was at length arrived; and so eager was she to embrace it, that, as before observed, she scarcely cast a look on Tomkins, or his companion, as she passed.

Having seen the proper remedies applied, she was about to leave the house as hastily as she had entered it, when she was informed, that a note had been brought for her while she was out. It was from Robert, wondering at and complaining of her silence, and desiring her to meet him in a field not far distant from the house. Rejoicing that it had not fallen into her aunt’s hands, she immediately prepared to obey the summons, and soon joined her brother, who was amusing himself with shooting in a neighbouring meadow.

“Why, Rachel!” he exclaimed, as he shook her violently by the hand, ”I am almost tempted to shoot you, for keeping me such an intolerable time in suspense. Did you think I had the patience of Job?—did I not tell you to let me know, the very minute you received an answer?”

“But I have had no answer, and to see you before was impossible: even now, I owe it to the most unexpected accident, that I am enabled to comply with the summons contained in your note.”

“Why then, my dear girl, don’t you tell me what has happened?”

“So I will, if you will give me time.”

“Rattle away, then, and make haste!” said he.

Rachel soon explained to him the reason of her silence; and concluded with expressing her vexation, at not having received any kind of reply to her letter.

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“It is bad, very bad, very unlucky, indeed! but it cannot be helped; so we must not fret:—I do seriously assure you, Rachel, I will never get into a scrape of this kind again! But I am most vexed at having drawn you into such a dilemma; and if any one had ever told me, that I should have exposed the character of either of my sisters to the most remote suspicion, by any of my frolics, I think he would have stood a good chance of being knocked down: but I shall do away that inconvenience by calling on Mrs. Mason to-morrow, and explaining the affair to her.”

“Bless me, Robert, how can you think of being so ridiculous!” exclaimed Rachel.

“We differ there, my dear,” replied Robert. “In a place where you are so well known, I think it would be far more ridiculous to give people an opportunity of chattering at your expense.”

“You are very good, and I am very much obliged to you; but, really, it would be a pity to spoil all our plans now! besides, no one has the least suspicion of the matter but my aunt, and I can soon convince her after you are gone.”

Rachel certainly rather deviated from the truth, in not mentioning Sophia; but in all her schemes her cousin was considered of no importance.

“If that be the case,” said Robert, “I think I shall remain concealed, as I had an intention of staying till the fair at the next town, which cannot be done if I make myself known: in the interim you will probably hear from dad, which may, perhaps, save me my jaunt into Cumberland; if you do not, I shall take my departure at that time.

At this moment they were interrupted by several voices, eagerly calling out, “How do you do, Miss Porter?” and to Rachel’s extreme mortification, she beheld the three Miss Jenkins’s approaching them. Women are said to be never at a loss for an expedient, and Rachel gave a proof of the truth of this maxim; for, turning to her brother, she said, “The road lies directly before you, sir!” adding in a low voice, “Look for me at the fair.”

Robert took the hint, bowed, and walked on.

“Who is that gentleman?” asked Miss Jenkins, giving her sisters a significant glance.

“A stranger, no doubt,” replied Rachel, “as he did not know which way to take, without being directed.”

“Will you allow us to share your walk?” said Miss Jenkins.

“I am homeward bound,” returned Rachel, desirous of shaking off the intruders: but vain was the attempt.

“Why, so were we before we met you,” cried Mary Jenkins; “so we may as well walk together.”

“Very well! but I must make haste,” said Rachel, not very cordially; and in a short time she again entered the Lodge; while Miss Jenkins, having seen her safely housed, went home, debating with her sisters who the stranger could be, and whether Rachel knew more of him than she affected to do?

“For my part,” said Miss Mary, “I think her directing him was all a pretence; for, don’t you remember what close conversation they appeared to be in, before we came up to them?”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Miss Jenkins; “the man was obliged to stop while she shewed him the way: but, really, Mary, you are always so ill-natured!”

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Now there was, in fact, as much ill-nature in Miss Jenkins as her sister; and she would as readily have joined in condemning the object of their suspicions, but that her vanity prevented her. She had employed the whole artillery of bows and blushes, smiles and sentimental speeches, to ensnare the affections or attentions (she cared not which) of Tomkins; and was just beginning to hope she had succeeded, when, on the evening he met Rachel at the gate, she had seen him conducting her home. From that moment she watched her with all the jealous care of a rival; and had Mrs. Mason known with what unwearied attention every action was remarked, she would have thought all precautions on her part totally unnecessary. She had seen Rachel, accompanied by her aunt, pass in their way to Mr. Simpson's; and though she knew not why or where they were going, yet it informed her that Rachel was from home, and set her on the watch. Soon after, Tomkins, unconscious of the pang he was about to inflict in the bosom of the fair lady, passed; and, to the torture of her curiosity, took the road to the Lodge. She, however, comforted herself with the knowledge that Rachel was not there; but scarcely had she soothed herself into tranquillity, before Rachel, breathless with running, repassed, and upset all her composure. Without allowing herself time for reflection, she started from her seat, and hurried to the Lodge, filled with the idea of interrupting their *tête-à-tête*.

"I wish to see Miss Porter," said she to the servant, who opened the door.

"She is not at home, ma'am," replied the girl.

"Do not tell me so, for I saw her come home not a quarter of an hour ago."

"Oh, yes, ma'am, but she is gone out again."

"And, pray," said she, hurried beyond all bounds of propriety, "has not a gentleman been here since Mrs. Mason left home?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And is he gone, too?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Miss Jenkins glanced at her sisters. "Pray, my good girl," said she, "can you tell me where Miss Porter is gone?"

"No, indeed, ma'am; but she went somewhere into yon fields."

"Shall we go?" said Miss Jenkins, as the gate closed after them.

"It is a sort of wild-goose chase," replied Miss Mary.

"Well, it will be but a walk," returned her sister.

"Oh, I have no objection," rejoined the other, and they crossed into the fields.

At length, partly by accident, and partly by design, they encountered Rachel; whom they no sooner perceived, than they saluted in the manner recorded.

The satisfaction Miss Jenkins received, from the conviction that her suspicions respecting Tomkins were unfounded, was greatly counterbalanced by the perplexity she experienced on finding a handsome, genteel-looking man, and, moreover, a stranger, in conversation with Rachel; and, though willing to allow her all the censure which the seeming impropriety of her conduct might have warranted, yet vanity, that indefinable, inexplicable passion, led her to become her defender; for, had she allowed her to have been culpable, she must also have allowed her the honour of a conquest, of which, even *she* might have boasted.

Rachel felt little inclination to return to the party at Mr. Simpson's; she, therefore, sent the boy with a message to that effect, and went to inquire after Molly's arm. While

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she was superintending the applications, the servant informed her of Miss Jenkins's visit; and, without waiting to be desired, proceeded to give a faithful account of the many questions she had addressed to her; which, though they made the girl wonder, were perfectly understood by Rachel.—"Yet, how could she suspect such a thing!" thought she, as she afterwards sat gazing at the parlour ceiling.—"What could ever put it in her mind! To be sure they are the most disagreeable family in the world, that's certain. Perhaps Mrs. Simpson has told them the same silly tale she told my aunt. Poor Robert! you have caused me almost as much trouble as yourself: I have a great mind to tell my aunt every thing, and send him word, that he may go away; but then he will think me the most inconsistent creature in the world! besides, he seemed to like the thoughts of going to the fair; and shall I drive him away, because Miss Jenkins chooses to be more disagreeable than ever? To be sure, she will tell every body; but then, the fair will soon be here, Robert will go away, and I shall be at liberty to explain every thing. So let her talk as much as she likes, she shall never frighten me into gratifying her curiosity; though I do hope Mr. Tomkins will not hear of it!"

Soon after she had come to this magnanimous resolution, Mrs. Mason and Sophia returned; and it was some comfort to the harassed mind of Rachel to perceive, that her aunt addressed her with more cordiality than she had done since their late disagreement. Sophia too was in good spirits, and even went so far as to tell her that Mr. Tomkins desired his compliments.

Mrs. Mason had not been very well pleased when she found Rachel had returned home in her absence; but being unwilling to evince any uneasiness before Mrs. Simpson, she resolved to wait Sophia's arrival; when, if Tomkins manifested any desire of again returning, she determined to accompany him. All her intentions, however, proved useless: Sophia came, and with her came also Tomkins, who, so far from seeming to think of any absent friend, appeared the whole evening to be perfectly at ease; and as he had been the innocent cause of Rachel's trouble, so was he now the unconscious means of removing all remaining doubts from the mind of Mrs. Mason; nor was her pleasure in resigning her suspicions, less than Rachel's in her restored confidence.

All who are acquainted with country towns, know how anxiously a fair is anticipated as an universal holiday. Most of the young people of the village of E—— had long settled the party, the mode of conveyance, and every other particular. Among the rest, Sophia and Rachel were desirous of going; but their acquaintance was not large, and it was some time before a party could, by any means, be formed. At length it was agreed, that Sophia and her cousin should accompany two of the Miss Jenkins's, attended by Mr. Clarkson and Tomkins, who had been pressed into the service by the indefatigable Miss Jenkins.

Rachel did not like any of the party. The Jenkins's she thought she had sufficient reason to dislike; Clarkson she was tired of; and her delicacy prevented her feeling at all easy in Tomkins's company. Too much, however, depended on her going, to allow her to object to the company: she knew Robert would expect her; and it was necessary he should be informed that no answer had been returned to her letter.

Accordingly, on the appointed day, they set out in the following order: Miss Miller and Mary Jenkins, supported by Clarkson; Tomkins conducting Miss Jenkins and Rachel. As the town where the fair was held was but two miles distant, the party preferred

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walking across the fields, to the pleasure of being jolted over a cross country road in a tilted cart.

Tomkins had now been a resident in E—— a considerable time. The opinion he had originally formed of Rachel, had long given place to one more favourable. Still he was undetermined whether to give her credit for a cultivated understanding, as she always appeared to shun all conversation which required much intellect or learning to support it; yet he had observed that she paid the most profound attention to it, when carried on by others. More than once he had seen her lips part, as if she were about to declare her sentiments; but the inclination was always repressed, and a slight blush usually succeeded the involuntary motion.

These observations induced him to believe that want of confidence, and not of ability, prevented her from joining the conversation: this was to him rather a recommendation than otherwise. He had been so often disgusted by the pert flippancy and undaunted confidence of many females, who really had some pretensions to a good understanding, that to find a woman of sense, possessed of sufficient resolution to keep her acquirements from becoming nuisances to her friends, had at length appeared to him a thing rather to be wished than expected. Rachel, he fancied, came nearer to his standard, than any he had ever met with; but she carried her taciturnity to the opposite extreme. A stranger's first impression generally was, that nature had been very sparing to her of intellectual endowments; and those who had not opportunity or inclination to make farther observation, would undoubtedly remain in the same opinion for ever. "A little more intercourse with the world would, however, remedy all this," thought Tomkins; and could the cause of her visits to Mrs. Burton's cottage have been satisfactorily explained, he would have considered her every way worthy of his regard. He had often of late vainly endeavoured to draw her into conversation; but from a cause that may be readily conjectured, she was more than usually silent in his company. Still he recollected, that "in a multitude of words there is folly;" and as, in spite of her reserve, some rational ideas would escape her, he was sometimes tempted to think that pride had a share in her silence.

This morning, however, all endeavours to induce her to speak were rendered unnecessary by Miss Jenkins, who talked incessantly. Her companions listened, sometimes with a degree of patience, but oftener with disgust, to a tedious repetition of various improbable adventures, which, as she said, happened on a similar occasion the preceding year; and she related such a number of "hair-breadth 'scapes," that had Tomkins placed implicit faith in the truth of the history, he would have repented taking charge of a person who seemed, by a strange fatality, to be more than commonly exposed to the dangers of life.

They had arrived, however, within a short distance of the town, without meeting with any "heart-riving scene, or awe-inspiring catastrophe," when Miss Jenkins, anxious to display to her companions her graceful agility, and finding they were come to the last place that would afford her an opportunity of shewing the said accomplishment, darted forward with great velocity; and, before any one was aware of her intention, mounted to the top rail of the gate, from whence, to the consternation of Rachel, she leaped to the ground. Tomkins could not conceive the motive for this action. He was not one of those who delight in seeing the weaker sex attempt the arduous achievements of men; and,

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though he would have rejoiced to have beheld her dexterity, had she been threatened with any danger, yet he would have been better pleased had she been contented to climb the gate in the usual mode, now there was no occasion for her extraordinary exertion.

When they reached the gate, they found Miss Jenkins had abundant cause to repent the performance of her late exploit: her muslin dress had been caught by an envious nail, and rent nearly from top to bottom.

"Was ever any thing so provoking!" she exclaimed, as the party joined her. "What must I do! Only look, Miss Miller! What can be done with it?"

"It had better be pinned up, till we get into the town," said Miss Mary.

"I am afraid," said Sophia, "we shall not be able to find pins enough: *I* do not carry a pincushion.

"Oh, no, nor I!" cried both the Miss Jenkins's, shocked that it should be for a moment supposed, that they stooped to the vulgarity of wearing a pocket.

"All that remains to be done, then," said Mr. Clarkson, "is, that you must walk on as you are; and we will buy a ha'p'orth of pins, at the first little shop we come to."

"Walk on as I am!" shrieked Miss Jenkins: "I will go home first!"

"There is no necessity for your doing either, if you will allow me to assist you," said Rachel.

"Oh, I shall be vastly obliged to you, I am sure, my dear!" replied Miss Jenkins.

Rachel drew off her gloves: and taking a thread-case from her pocket, threaded a needle, and began to sew up the slit. Miss Jenkins said nothing; but cast an expressive glance at her sister, who, with less ceremony, exclaimed—

"Bless my goodness! Miss Porter, do you carry your father's shop in your pocket?"

"No, madam," said Rachel, calmly, "only a sample of the goods."

Miss Mary blushed, and turned away; Tomkins smiled, and Rachel continued her employment.

As it appeared that it would take more time to repair the fracture, than suited the patience of either Sophia or Miss Mary, it was proposed that Clarkson and his companions should proceed, and Tomkins and the other ladies rejoin them at a fruit-shop in the town. Happy in being released, they gladly accepted the proposal, and were soon out of sight.

When at length they entered the town, they proceeded to the fruit-shop, and found that neither Clarkson nor the young ladies had been there.

"I thought it would be so, I declare," said Miss Jenkins; "and, really, my dear, though I am very much obliged to you, yet I now more than ever regret that you bestowed so much time and trouble on my dress."

Rachel coloured violently; probably, at that moment, she would have been well pleased had she seen Miss Jenkins's garment in its late deplorable condition; but she stifled the indignant reply that rose to her lips, and merely said, "That their absence was the more extraordinary, as the delay had given them more time."

Having waited a long while, and their patience being quite exhausted, Tomkins proposed seeking them.

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“But, pray, make haste!” said Miss Jenkins; “I am almost sinking with confusion, at the idea of staying so long exposed to the eyes of the vulgar multitude, in a public shop.”

The shop-woman, though she understood nothing of the delicate distress expressed in this speech, yet hearing something about staying so long in the shop, civilly asked her to walk into an adjoining parlour, which, as it commanded an excellent view of the street, she did not hesitate in doing. Rachel followed, and seated herself at a window, where, totally regardless of “the eyes of the vulgar multitude,” she watched, with eager anxiety, every passing object, in hopes of discovering her brother. She now found how vague was the appointment she had made with him; and experienced an additional dislike towards Miss Jenkins, whose sudden and unwelcome appearance had prevented her from giving him more certain directions.

Tomkins, in the mean time, had sought in every likely and unlikely place, for the stray sheep. He could gain no intelligence any where. The people of the town, with whom they were acquainted, had neither seen nor heard of them; and he was at last returning to the fruit-shop, when a concourse of people attracted his attention: “They cannot, surely, be there,” thought he; but scarcely had the idea crossed his mind, before a gentleman forced his way through the crowd, bearing in his arms a woman, whom Tomkins instantly knew to be Sophia!

“Good heavens, Miss Miller!” he exclaimed: “what can be the meaning of this!”

The stranger turned, and Tomkins recognised Mrs. Burton’s lodger. “How came this lady in this condition?” demanded he; for Sophia appeared perfectly senseless.

“And by what authority, sir, do you inquire?” retorted Robert.

“This lady left home under my protection; and I am answerable to her friends for her safety,” replied Tomkins.

“You have, undoubtedly, proved yourself worthy of such a trust, in leaving her exposed to a scene like this,” said Robert: “however, I acknowledge your superior pretensions, and wish you a good morning!”

Tomkins knew not how to proceed. Sophia could not be left in her present situation; and he doubted not that Mary Jenkins was in the crowd, and, possibly, in the same condition: his only resource was to make a friend of the stranger.

“If,” said he, addressing Robert,—“If you would do me the favour to convey this lady to the house opposite to us, I should conceive myself greatly obliged to you. I am in search of another female friend, who, I have some reason to believe, is in this crowd.”

“Fetch her out, then, as fast as you can!” cried Robert: “I will do as you have desired; and shall stay with her till your return.”

Tomkins mingled with the throng; and having, with some difficulty forced a passage through it, he beheld, to his utter amazement, Clarkson stripped and fighting. Without waiting to inquire the cause of this disgraceful spectacle, he looked hastily round for Miss Mary, whom he soon perceived pale with fear, and almost overcome with shame and vexation. He drew her arm through his, without speaking, and made the best of his way to the house to which Robert had carried Sophia, who was by this time recovered.

Robert was an entire stranger to his cousin; the families never having met since they were infants: Mr. Miller resided at too great a distance from the metropolis, to render visiting convenient to the time or purse of either. It might, therefore, be termed their first

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interview; and but for Tomkins's exclamation, which had thrown some light on the subject, he had, in all probability, betrayed himself, when on recovering she had, in the most plaintive voice, begged to know to whom she was so much obliged: but he now evaded the question, by saying, "To a gentleman, madam, who will be here, as soon as he shall have found a lady for whom he is seeking."

Not long after, Tomkins and Miss Mary entered, when the former having thanked Robert for his assistance, entreated to be favoured with an explanation of the extraordinary scene he had witnessed.

It appeared, that on entering the fair, Clarkson, who took a childish delight in the objects around him, was unwilling to remain at the fruit-shop, and proposed seeing some of the shows, to pass away the time that would elapse before the arrival of their companions. Miss Mary seconded the proposal; but Sophia objected—she was fearful of missing them. "Oh, there is no fear of that!" said Mr. Clarkson: "they cannot be here for some time, we know; and if they are at the shop a little before us, it will not signify." Still Sophia hesitated: she did not think it prudent to go with no better guard than Clarkson; but she could not say so; and she heartily wished she had stayed behind. Unable, however, to resist the persuasions of Miss Mary, and the teasing of Clarkson, she at length consented to go; and, accordingly, had been dragged out of one show into another, till she was completely fatigued. Clarkson still persisted in seeing them *all;* and attracted no little notice by his ridiculous exclamations. Their conduct, too, began to be noticed; and the people who had at first supposed they were of a superior class, now imagined them to be girls of light character. Unconscious, however, of this degrading circumstance, Sophia suffered herself to be taken to the last exhibition, which they were about leaving, when the proprietor, who had formed the same opinion as his neighbours, offered to salute her, which indignity was returned by a blow from Clarkson. The man's rage exceeded all bounds; and, after a furious contest in the show, they descended to fight it out: a ring was formed, and the combatants began. The terrified girls in vain endeavoured to make their escape: hemmed in on all sides by the crowd that quickly assembled, they were compelled to be witnesses of the scene, and to listen to language the most insulting; till overcome with contending emotions, Sophia had fainted, and had been carried out of the throng by Robert, who with the rest had been attracted to the spot.

"Had we not better join our friends at the fruit-shop?" asked Tomkins: "we have been absent so long, that I fear they will be alarmed."

"But what is to become of Mr. Clarkson?" said Miss Mary: "he will be looking for us all day!"

"He, surely, is old enough to take care of himself!" replied Tomkins. "At any rate, I do not see the occasion *we* have to look after *him*: in all probability he will go to the fruit-shop, where we can leave a message for him."

"Will you allow me to assist you in escorting the ladies?" said Robert.

"For my own part, I shall be glad of your company," replied Tomkins; "and I hope one of the ladies will enable me to repay part of the obligation you have laid me under."

After a few more replies and rejoinders they left the house. Robert offered his arm to Sophia, and Tomkins and Miss Mary led the way.

Rachel had been watching at the little parlour-window, till she had given up all hope of seeing her brother. She was also becoming uneasy on Sophia's account; for she

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was unable to conjecture the cause of Tomkins's long absence, without supposing some accident had befallen her cousin. As for Miss Jenkins, she was as disagreeable as fretfulness could make her; wondering at every thing, and blaming every body.

At length Tomkins and his party returned. "I am afraid you have thought us long," said he; "but—"

"You are the more welcome now you are come," interrupted Miss Jenkins, with one of her sweetest smiles.

Rachel, on her brother's entrance, with difficulty suppressed an expression of delight; and she turned to the window to recover her self-possession. She dreaded the unguarded temper of Robert so much, that she remained in the same position, even when Tomkins said, "Give me leave, ladies, to introduce a gentleman, who has rendered me material assistance this morning." "Well! it will only be thought a part of my usual character," thought she; "and I dare not face him, let them think what they will!" But Sophia had observed her motions, and as she thought that in the natural course of things, love must follow so romantic an introduction as hers had been, she had forgotten all her mortification, and was in excellent spirits: tapping Rachel on the shoulder, she said, "Why do you not bid the stranger welcome?"

Rachel was now obliged to turn; and the fear of Robert's surprise tinged her cheek with crimson, which was increased to the deepest shade, by his exclaiming, "Lucky beyond my hopes! my dear girl, how—" but suddenly recollecting himself, he retreated, asking ten thousand pardons: "the strong likeness to an intimate friend had misled him."

The party looked at each other with astonishment. Miss Mary cast a glance at her sister, that was meant to express—"Did I not tell you they were more intimate than they chose to appear!"

Sophia saw her high-raised hopes "fade like the baseless fabric of a vision;" and all the suspicions Tomkins had entertained, respecting the motive of Rachel's visits to the cottage, forcibly recurred to his remembrance.

Rachel felt herself the object of general observation; and willing to start any conversation, that by withdrawing their attention would put an end to her embarrassment, inquired for Clarkson. Tomkins very concisely related the cause of his absence; and when Miss Jenkins and Rachel had offered their condolements, and Miss Mary had sufficiently expressed her anger, and Sophia her regret at the circumstance, they agreed to repair to the house of the friend with whom they intended to dine. Rachel was in an agony: Robert must of course leave them; and probably she should not see him again. A few words would explain her business: and as the party left the room, she lingered, and said, "Dear Robert! all further stay is useless: go while our secret is safe; send me your direction, and I will write when any thing of consequence transpires:" then hastily adding, "God bless you!" she hurried after them.

Robert took his leave at the door; and as he turned the corner of the street, an unbidden sigh heaved the bosom of Rachel: it *said* nothing, but it conveyed a variety of sentiments to the minds of its auditors.

The ill consequences of the morning's adventure were sensibly felt by the ladies as they repassed through the fair; and so mortified were they by the sneers of the women, and the jokes of the men, that they unanimously resolved to return home directly after dinner; which they accordingly did, to the great satisfaction of Tomkins, who made a

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secret vow, that as it had been the first, so it should be the last time he would undertake to conduct four young inexperienced women to a fair.

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CHAPTER V.

“I have something of great importance to tell you, my dear,” said Miss Jenkins, passing her arm through Sophia’s, as they walked home, “if you are inclined to hear it!”

Sophia made no objection; and Miss Jenkins, thus authorised, unfolded all her doubts, suspicions, and surmises, respecting Rachel: “Now, for my part, I think Mrs. Mason ought to be informed,” she continued: “indeed, she ought to have known it long ago; for the acquaintance is evidently of long standing; but what a task, for any one to inform her of a thing of so much delicacy! I am sure it would make my heart bleed to be obliged to do it!”

“Fortunately,” said Sophia, “you are not under the necessity of doing it.”

“But do you not think she ought to be told?” eagerly demanded Miss Jenkins.

“Really, I scarcely know what to think about it: it is a very unpleasant business!”

“Unpleasant!” cried Miss Jenkins. “I should not at all be surprised if it ended in something worse than unpleasant, if it is not timely stopped!—but, pray, don’t let me persuade you! only, if I were in your place, I should think it my duty, that is all.”

“I am sure I do not know what to do for the best!” said Sophia: “how would you act, if it were one of your sisters?”

“I have already told you!” replied Miss Jenkins, with an air that expressed more than the most eloquent oration.

“You have convinced me of the propriety of your arguments,” said Sophia, after a long pause; “but I am afraid my resolution will fail me! If you would take the burthen off my hands, how greatly should I be obliged to you!”

This was exactly what Miss Jenkins had been aiming at. Sophia’s judgment was by no means the soundest in the world; and her companion was perfectly aware, that by a little management she might be brought to ask as a favour, what another would have considered an insult; but she resolved to enhance the value of her compliance, by a seemingly delicate unwillingness. “Consider, my dear,” said she, “the strange appearance of my interfering in your family: domestic concerns should never be exposed to a stranger’s examination!”

“How considerate you are!” exclaimed Sophia: “but it cannot be thought at all strange, when it is recollected that you have more knowledge of the affair than I have.”

“True!” said Miss Jenkins; “and only that consideration could induce me to oblige you.”

It was then agreed that Sophia should take no notice of the affair, and that Miss Jenkins should call the next morning, and give the necessary information; when Sophia, if called upon, might corroborate the truth of the statement.

“One great advantage,” thought Sophia, “that I shall derive from not being the informer is, that Rachel will not be able to accuse me of causing dissension between her and my aunt:” but this idea proved how little she was acquainted with her cousin’s disposition.

Rachel, unsuspecting the approaching storm, had, with her companions, walked in almost uninterrupted silence: she, ruminating on her brother—Miss Mary, tired and

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mortified—and Tomkins, filled with conjectures respecting Robert—felt little inclination to talk.

When they reached home, their quick return excited universal surprise, which was soon accounted for by a short relation of their adventures; and the grave looks of the whole party, though in fact proceeding from very different causes, were all placed to the same account.

The following morning, as Mrs. Mason and her nieces were conversing on the occurrences of the preceding day,—and just as the former had concluded a long comment on the disagreeable consequences, which had arisen from her too ready compliance with the wishes of others, and demonstrated how they might all have been avoided, had Sophia acted more firmly on the occasion,—Tomkins was announced. He had called, he said, to inquire after the health of his fair fellow-travellers, who, he hoped, had recovered their fatigue: "though," continued he, turning to Sophia, "I am afraid my hopes are without foundation, and that you still feel the effects of yesterday's indisposition!"

Sophia did, indeed, look pale—very pale! not, as he imagined, from her former illness, but from the momentary dread of Miss Jenkins's appearance; and scarcely had she time to assure him "she was perfectly well," before the object of her apprehensions entered.

She bowed gravely to Mrs. Mason, smiled at Tomkins, shook hands with Sophia, and, without taking any notice of Rachel, sat down. Her presence seemed to cast a damp on the spirits of every one; but on none more than Sophia, who trembled as if attacked by an ague fit.

Tomkins saw the indignant blush, which the pointed rudeness of Miss Jenkins had raised on Rachel's cheek; and willing to divert her mortified feelings, addressed some conversation to her, without attending to the former lady's remark on that endless topic, the weather. This roused all the malignant passions in her bosom to such a degree, that she resolved to expose her rival without delay; and, heedless of the presence of Tomkins, which, indeed, was a circumstance that gave her much pleasure, she thus addressed Mrs. Mason: "My present visit, madam, is paid for the purpose of explaining a disagreeable business, which my friend Sophia, and myself, join in thinking you should be made acquainted with."

"Why, then," said Mrs. Mason, not knowing what to understand by this preamble—"why, then, did not Sophia inform me of it herself?"

"The extreme delicacy of her sensibility is such," replied Miss Jenkins, "that she could not resolve to attempt it unaided; particularly as it is a business of much moment to your peace."

"What do you mean, Miss Jenkins?" demanded Mrs. Mason, somewhat alarmed:—"what am I to understand?—I must intreat you to speak more plainly!"

"I am only withheld by motives of consideration for that lady," said Miss Jenkins, glancing at Rachel, "who may perhaps object to its being mentioned before witnesses."

"Who? I?" exclaimed Rachel, with great astonishment: "what objection can I possibly have to your mentioning a business, in which, most probably, I have little, if any, concern?"

"Pardon me, madam!" replied Miss Jenkins: "this business greatly concerns you, and you alone."

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“I wish you a good morning, ladies!” said Tomkins, rising.

“Nay, sir!” said Rachel; “to prove how little I fear this dreadful accusation, I must beg you will remain.”

“Excuse me: not to-day.”

“Most probably you will not be presented with such a scene any other day,” returned Rachel; “and as you have heard part of my accusation, it is but an act of justice to stay and hear my defence.”

“Do not—do not ask him to stay!” articulated Sophia, gasping for breath: “he will witness against you!”

“Nay, then,” said Rachel, “I must insist on his staying. At present I do not at all comprehend your meaning; but with his assistance I may, perhaps, be made to understand. Indeed, sir,” she continued, observing he was about to object, “you must oblige me! Were you to leave the house now, judging from the solemnity of Miss Jenkins, and the distress of my cousin, your suspicions might be even worse than the truth.”

Tomkins resumed his seat.

“Now we are ready to hear you!” said Rachel to Miss Jenkins, who began to be heartily sorry she had mentioned it at all. Rachel’s behaviour greatly disconcerted her, and she was apprehensive her tale would reflect as much odium on herself as on Rachel; but she had gone too far to recede; and, with great hesitation, she related the wonderful story, which amounted to no more, than that she had met Miss Porter, and a gentleman inquiring his way of her in a field: and the circumstance on which Tomkins was called on to give his evidence was, that the same gentleman had familiarly accosted her at the fair, but the next moment had asked pardon for having mistaken her for an intimate acquaintance—a circumstance not altogether so improbable, but that most people had met with the same, in some part or other of their lives.

“And this is all!” said Rachel, when she had concluded: “upon my word, Miss Jenkins, I am greatly obliged to you for alarming my aunt, distressing my cousin, and perplexing myself.”

But the real truth had darted into the mind of Mrs. Mason; and, when she compared the time of Rachel’s visits to the cottage, with that of Robert’s disappearance from London, she wondered it had never struck her before. Fixing her eyes stedfastly on Rachel, she asked her, “If she could with truth deny all knowledge of the stranger?”

Unprepared for this inquiry, Rachel coloured deeply, and before she could make any answer, Miss Jenkins exclaimed—

“I am sure I shall be very glad to hear it all explained; and Miss Porter must see the necessity of explaining it, if she can.”

Whether Miss Jenkins possessed penetration enough to know that this speech would effectually close Rachel’s lips, or whether it was dictated by chance, is uncertain; but it certainly had that effect.

Rachel possessed one foible in an eminent degree; and that was an invincible dislike to appear to be ruled by the opinions of others: and she would rather have acted directly opposite to her own judgment, than allow herself to be dictated to by any one. Never had she proved to what an extent this weakness would carry her, so much as on the present occasion. She had, from the first, suspected the subject of Miss Jenkins’s communication, and had enjoyed the idea of being at liberty to exculpate herself without

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injury to Robert, who was, she doubted not, by this time far on his road to Cumberland; but the moment these words escaped Miss Jenkins, her determination was instantly changed, and she resolved "to act as she pleased."

Turning, therefore, to Miss Jenkins, with a sarcastic smile, she said, "I am greatly obliged to you, madam, for your *directions*, but must take the liberty of judging for myself; and I shall therefore decline entering into any explanation on the subject, even though you so *decidedly* recommend it. And give me leave to say, that your interference on this occasion appears to me both unnecessary and impertinent: had my cousin acted as she ought to have done, she would have informed my aunt, and spared me the mortification of owing the obligation to you.—To you, madam," she continued, addressing her aunt, "more consideration is due; and though I do not choose to gratify an idle curiosity, yet I trust you will believe me when I assure you, that however imprudent I may appear, it is in appearance only. I have lived with you long enough for you to know how different my real disposition is, to any thing of the kind imputed to me; and, surely, you are too just to suffer one single circumstance to shake the experience of years. It is from our general conduct, and not from one incident, that our character should be judged. I wish you all good morning!" and with an air, almost amounting to dignity, she left the room.

Tomkins, who had been an unwilling spectator of this scene, was much pleased with Rachel's last speech: something like sense had appeared through the whole; and the sentiment with which it concluded served him as a maxim for the rest of his life: indeed, he made an immediate application of it; for had not Rachel's "general conduct" been that of an ignorant person, he would, from this "one incident," have pronounced her a sensible girl.

Mrs. Mason, on whose mind not the shadow of a doubt remained as to Robert's being the stranger, endeavoured to explain to her guests that it was a relation passing through the village; but a slight difficulty occurred to prevent their belief. Tomkins, though he said nothing, knew that this bird of passage had been a resident with Mrs. Burton a considerable time; and Miss Jenkins, less scrupulous, mentioned having seen him in the fields with Rachel, at least a week before the fair: besides, how came Mrs. Mason and Sophia to be unacquainted with this movement of their relation? Mrs. Mason did not choose to explain Robert's cause for concealment, and her visitors left her: one convinced, that however appearances might be against her, Rachel had not been guilty of any flagrant indecorum; and the other equally satisfied, that she ought to be expelled the company of all women of character.

Three weeks now passed, unmarked by any extraordinary occurrence; during which time, neither reasoning nor persuasion had been able to induce Rachel to explain the mystery; although she could not affect ignorance of the consequences of her conduct. The total neglect of the Jenkins's, and the frigid ceremonious politeness of those who did not entirely decline noticing her, while it mortified and distressed her, served only to strengthen her determination of setting them all at defiance; nor would she acknowledge, even to her aunt, that their behaviour gave her the least uneasiness. She knew, that if the truth were once confessed to Mrs. Mason, it would be explained to every one. "But never," thought she, "shall they suppose they have forced me to a confession, by their half-closed eyes, their contemptuous smiles, and the rest of their ridiculous

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foolery!—never shall they suppose their smiles or frowns have any influence on my happiness.—Oh, no! the contempt I have for them all will, at least, prevent that."

But in spite of these, and similar sentiments, when a half-averted glance had been all the notice she had received from a formerly intimate acquaintance, the deepest crimson would mantle her cheek, and for the moment cause her to wish she had been more explicit. But this regret was usually succeeded by—"What a fool I am to care a straw about it!"—and a soliloquy, similar to the above, restored her feelings to their wonted tranquillity.

What distressed her, above all, was Tomkins's approaching departure, who talked of leaving E—— the following week; and it required all her philosophy to enable her to persist in her resolution: for whether it was to mortify those he did not like, or gratify those he did, he had been particularly attentive to her ever since slander had been so busy with her fame. "I should not care," she would think, "if there were any chance of his hearing of the subject after he leaves us, but that in all probability he never will; to be sure, in that case he will most likely forget it altogether:—well! there is some comfort in that." But, with all the comfort it conveyed, she could not help regretting that he would not hear of it, and hear it explained.

Notwithstanding the declaration she had always made, that the opinion of the world had no weight with her, and never should induce her to act otherwise than as suited her own inclination, a considerable difference had of late been observable in her behaviour: three several times she had been seen to take off her apron before she entered the parlour, when she knew Tomkins was in it; and once had actually been heard to declare, that she wished she possessed a portion of Miss Jenkins's manners. Mrs. Mason, who beheld the change with equal surprise and pleasure, one day expressed a desire to be informed of the cause of this alteration in her sentiments.

"Do not think," she replied, "that I would make any great sacrifices to obtain that easiness of manners, which so eminently distinguishes some of my former acquaintance; but I begin to perceive, that a total want of refinement is almost as bad as a superfluity: in other words, I would say, that my awkwardness is becoming troublesome to myself, and I am, therefore, desirous of shaking it off; though I do not mean to learn either Latin or Greek to effect it."

"I am pleased with your resolution, and have little doubt of your success," said her aunt: "and though," continued she, smiling, "you some time ago told me you would have no instructor but myself, I perceive you have condescended to learn of those two able teachers, Time and Experience."

Rachel blushed: "Time and experience, madam, have merely proved the truth of your assertions."

This conversation had taken place some time previous to the fair-expedition; and Mrs. Mason was, therefore, more surprised at her present conduct than she would otherwise have been. She considered it due to her own reputation, as well as that of her neice, to have the present business satisfactorily explained; and finding all arguments on the subject useless, she came to the resolution of sending her home.

Rachel received the information as if it had been a thunder-stroke. The possibility of such a thing happening, had never entered her mind; but thinking it would now appear meanness to yield to menaces, what she had denied to intreaties, she felt less inclination

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than ever to comply with the conditions; and, accordingly, an early day in the ensuing week was fixed on, as the time of her removal.

With a heavy heart, but an unbending spirit, she beheld the necessary preparations; and one evening stole out to indulge her reflections without interruption. The evening was mild and serene: the unbroken silence suited well with her feelings; while the idea, that she was about leaving, perhaps for ever, the place in which she had known so many happy hours, filled her eyes with tears. She would willingly have parted with the thing she most valued, could Robert have surmised her situation, as she knew nothing would prevent his coming to vindicate her; but pride forbade her writing to inform him: and she was about returning to the house, with slow and irregular steps, when Tomkins's well-known voice accosting her, disturbed her meditations.

"I am happy in having met you," said he, "as I am going to your house to take leave, and should not otherwise have seen you."

"To take leave!" exclaimed Rachel: "are you going so soon?"

"Can you call it soon?" asked Tomkins: "do you recollect, that nearly four months have elapsed since my arrival?"

"Indeed! I should not have thought it: how short the time appears!"

"What a compliment you have paid me, Miss Porter! could I dare give it all the meaning of which it is susceptible, I should not be able to resist the temptation of prolonging my visit, in defiance of the many and urgent calls for my presence elsewhere."

"Were you disposed to be so imprudent," returned Rachel, with a faint smile, "I should have no reason to consider myself the inducement, as I also leave E—— next week."

"Indeed! is it not very sudden?"

"Yes—no—yes," replied Rachel, colouring: "Mrs. Mason—my aunt, I mean—that is, I am going home."

"You will, doubtless, regret leaving Mrs. Mason?" observed Tomkins, for want of something better to say.

"Very deeply!" replied Rachel, with a sigh; "but you know

> "Of chance or change, O, let not man complain!
> Else shall he never, never cease to wail!"

"How is this!" thought Tomkins: "how greatly have I been mistaken!—but I will try you a little further. The truth," said he, "contained in the first four lines of that stanza, is as indisputable as constant experience can make it: but do you not think the author has allowed himself rather too much latitude in the conclusion?"

"Read what our Saviour says, that even heaven and earth shall pass away, and you will then allow, that our poet has not exceeded the bounds of probability. Beattie was a Christian, and, consequently, would not, for the sake of his poetry, trespass on forbidden ground."

"Do you then call Imagination's flowery paths forbidden ground?" asked Tomkins.

"Not while they are confined to things, of which our own reason will justify the supposition; but when they presume to lead the mind, to an experimental examination of

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those which the Almighty has hidden from our understanding, it certainly becomes forbidden ground; and such as, in my opinion, no real Christian would venture upon."

"But, surely, you do not exclude all those, who have written on such abstruse subjects, from the list of Christians?"

"It is a subject on which I am not qualified to decide," answered she: "all I can say is, that I have been taught to consider them as, at least, mistaken."

This conversation brought them to the house; and during his visit, Sophia asked Tomkins on what day he purposed leaving them. "Information from London will determine the exact day," he replied; "but, at all events, I shall go some time next week;" and then, repeating his parting compliments, he withdrew; musing all the way home on Rachel, who, he was now convinced, possessed as much sense, if not as much sensibility, as her cousin.

The following day was one of triumph and exultation to Rachel: it brought a letter from Mrs. Porter, informing them, that Robert had been appointed to the situation, for which an application had been made some time previous. "Our only difficulty," continued she, "is in discovering the place to which he has withdrawn; as his father is now of opinion, that the length of time he has been exiled from his friends will have had the same salutary effect, that was anticipated from a temporary confinement; and we are now desirous of recalling and settling him in his new situation."

Rachel's delight on this occasion was beyond description. She could not, in justice to her brother, remain silent any longer; and it also ended all her perplexity, without allowing her enemies to suppose they had had any share in forcing the secret from her. With almost breathless agitation she acquainted Mrs. Mason with Robert's present abode; and submitted very patiently to a long lecture from that lady, on the serious consequences that had nearly followed her inflexible obstinacy.

Rachel, however, would not at that time own she lamented her conduct, though she readily acknowledged her extreme satisfaction in having escaped its effects.

Information was immediately dispatched to Robert, who, in a few days, again became an inhabitant of E——; but with this difference, that his presence, which had formerly been a subject of constant uneasiness to Rachel, now gave her the most unfeigned pleasure; whilst the returning smiles of her aunt completed her happiness.

Sophia was greatly surprised, and somewhat disappointed, to find the elegant stranger, into whose arms she had fainted, turn out to be a haberdasher's son, and, what was still worse, her own cousin. But she gave no words to her disappointment, well knowing it was not from either her aunt, or Rachel, that she could expect sympathy.

None could more sincerely rejoice at Rachel's exculpation, than her good friends the Simpsons. The old lady was perfectly delighted; and incessantly called on every one around her to testify to her constant declaration, that her favourite's innocence would one day be proved. Tomkins, too, was not at all displeased at beholding, in Rachel's brother, the mysterious inhabitant of Mrs. Burton's cottage. He had been pleased with Robert's manners at the fair; and as he now shook him cordially by the hand, he desired, with great sincerity, that that they might be better acquainted.

The vicar, during the time of Rachel's disgrace, had shrugged up his shoulders, and wondered how people could be at all surprised at the matter! "She has no inward resources," he would say, "and, consequently, must look for her amusements in outward

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objects. Had it, indeed, been her cousin, all this astonishment would have been very natural." But even he now declared, that he had mistaken Miss Porter's character; and that it required a mind somewhat stronger than he had imagined her to possess, to have acted with so much resolution.

The gracious smiles, nods, and *sincere* congratulations of the Miss Jenkins's, were received by Rachel with far more indifference than their late supercilious neglect: but as she had scorned to suffer her mortification at the one to appear, so she equally avoided any studied neglect of their attentions, lest they should suppose she condescended to think the other worthy of a similar return. When, therefore, they called to express their regret at past, and their satisfaction at present circumstances, and to hope that she would still rank them among her friends; she coolly replied, that she was much obliged to them, and could assure them, that the late occurrences would make no alteration in her sentiments.

As Robert's immediate presence in London was not required, and as he had not seen his aunt for some years, he determined to stay a few days at E——, and accompany Tomkins to town, to whom he had greatly attached himself.

Mrs. Simpson, who never enjoyed herself so much as when surrounded by her friends, insisted on giving, what she called, a farewel supper to the young men; at which Mrs. Mason, and her nieces, were of course to be present.

It was the evening before their departure, and none of the party were in very exuberant spirits; though they all assured the solicitous Mrs. Simpson, that they were never more comfortable in their lives.

"I wonder," said the good lady, "how long it will be, before I have the pleasure of seeing you all assembled beneath my roof again!"

"Not long, I hope!" said her husband. "Observe, Tomkins, I shall not allow you a very long leave of absence; for since you have at length found your way here, I shall suppose you consider us the most disagreeable people in the world, if you do not frequently pay us a visit."

"Believe me, sir," replied Tomkins, "the happiness I have enjoyed beneath your roof, will never be effaced from my mind. I have only to apprehend, that my visits will be so *frequent*, that you will shortly consider my appearance troublesome."

"Do not be under any fear of that kind," returned his host; "for be assured I will give you the first information when that is the case."

"As for you," said Mrs. Simpson, smiling kindly at Robert, "since I do not suppose you always intend raising such a commotion when you come, I shall be glad to see you at any time; which is, I think, more than Rachel will say: at least, I would not, if I was her."

"If I *were she*," said Sophia, with a marked emphasis, "I should consider the pleasure of serving my brother, an ample equivalent for the little disagreeables she has experienced."

The sentiment of fraternal affection reflected credit on Sophia's heart: but Tomkins could scarcely forbear exclaiming, "How disgusting is pedantry in a woman!"

"For my own part," said Rachel, "though I agree with my cousin, in thinking the pleasure of assisting my brother a sufficient recompence; and, were he to require it, I hope I should not shrink from performing as much again; yet I differ from her respecting the little discomforts I have experienced, and candidly acknowledge, that they appeared to me

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a severe trial: and so fully am I convinced of the folly of my former sentiments, that nothing, I think, would tempt me to proceed to such an extremity again. The opinion of the world, next to that of our own conscience, is necessary to our happiness; and it is wisely ordained, for the preservation of the order of society, that it should be so. I have gained it dearly, but I have learned a lesson that will, I hope, be of use to me all my life."

The next morning, Tomkins and Robert left E——; and it might have been remarked, that the latter was in far better spirits than his companion. He was returning, after a tedious and reluctant absence, to the scene of all his hopes and wishes. Tomkins left E—— with even more regret than he had entered it. Then, his reluctance had proceeded, not from his regret at quitting the busy scenes of London, but from the idea that his time would be spent, not only without advantage, but even with irksomeness; and being one that regarded his time as the most precious treasure he possessed, the sacrifice appeared to him very considerable. The result of his visit had been far different from his expectation: he had not only passed four months with pleasure to himself, but had found an intelligent being, with whom he would have been well contented to pass the remainder of his life.

As, however, he has made no one his confidant, time alone can discover in whose possession he left his heart; but it is expected his next visit to E—— will ascertain the fact.

Mrs. Jenkins, even now, whispers with a significant nod, and no less significant glance, that that period will prove *which of her daughters* is to be the wife of Mr. Tomkins.

THE END.

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