

THE
SOLEMN
INJUNCTION.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

AGNES MUSGRAVE,

AUTHOR OF CICELY OF RABY; &c.

"In a solitary chamber, and midnight hour,

"How many strange events may arise."

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THE
Solemn Injunction.

CHAPTER I.

FOR three successive days with solemn knolls the bell of St. Mary had announced to the inhabitants of the village of St. Mary's Oak the death of one of the parishioners; and now, with deepened sound, throughout the vale, was heard by each pensive rustic, proclaiming that the hour of interment approached.

"Ah! poor Joshua, (sighed forth the pious Curate, as old Robin the clerk assisted in putting on his surplice) ah! poor Joshua, thy grey hairs have been brought with sorrow to the grave." A thick shower of snow was falling as the procession reached the church gates, and covered the head of the good priest, who, with much devotion, preceded the corpse, performing the last solemn office. Now they passed through the lowly porch—the service continued—the psalm was sung by voices which trembled with unaffected grief;—now they paused, and loud sobs broke the dead silence.—Again the procession mov'd, the coffin was lowered, and dust was resigned to dust. "Oh! give me way! I will not be held! (and a young and beauteous maiden, in all the wild delirium of grief, sprung forward and leaped into the grave) oh! cover me, hide me, fatherless, motherless, friendless!" she exclaimed, as she sunk in a strong convulsive fit on the coffin.

At that instant, from amongst the gaping and wonder-struck crowd, sprung a person, stranger to all, whose noble and commanding air awed the rustic beholders. Aided by Mr. Hammond, the curate, he lifted out the lovely, but apparently dying Eliza, who was carried into the parsonage, which was near at hand. Soon after she opened her large wild blue eyes on those busied in her recovery, and looking on Mr. Hammond, faintly said, "ah! now who is there living who cares for me! who now will harbour the friendless Eliza!"

"Fear not, my good child, (said the worthy parson) God will raise you up fresh friends in lieu of those he has seen fitting you should part from."

"Yes, (exclaimed the stranger, with a wild and agitated air) yes, I will! God has sent me to protect you—Alicia herself bids me—yes, I will harbour thee, gentle maiden, and though all the world forsake you, I will not."

The elegant person and handsome features of the stranger, over which sorrow had cast a deep shade that well accorded with his sable dress, at first sight struck Mr. Hammond with surprise; but the vehement, yet melting tone of voice with which he spoke, further roused his curiosity, and fearing he might alarm Eliza, he proposed leaving her.

No sooner were they in Mr. Hammond's study, (whither he conducted the stranger) than, at his request, those circumstances were related which had plunged the beauteous Eliza into such severe distress.

"It is, (said the good Curate) I think ten years ago, last May, when Joshua Wetherall took a farm in this parish; his family then consisted of a young woman his daughter, whose name was Joice, a son nearly of the same age, and this poor girl, then about five

years old; she was supposed his grand-child, and called Joice mother; but whether she was really so, or only her aunt, I cannot say; if the daughter of Joice she must have been an illegitimate one, as both father and daughter bore the same name.—About two years ago Joice quitted her father's house; he never gave a reason for her departure, nor ever said what was become of her. Twelve months ago Thomas, who was a sad graceless lad, after he had spent all he could get from the poor old man, enlisted into the train of artillery, and soon after was sent to America. Joshua's heart was almost broke at parting with him, nor has he ever held up his head since. He had before this been obliged to quit Woodcraft farm, and at the time Thomas left him, he lived in a cottage at St. Mary's Oak, which, except to church on Sunday, or prayer days, he seldom quitted. I saw he was bowed to the earth by his afflictions, and wished at least to talk to him regarding Betsey, whom I hoped to be able to recommend to those who could assist her, for my means are limited. Stopping him, therefore, one day by the church wall, I entered into discourse with him, bade him not despond, but trust in that power who had lengthened out his days. 'I am an old man, Mr. Hammond, and have through my long life met with various trials, severe afflictions, all which I have borne, by God's grace; but now I cannot bear misfortunes as formerly, and this poor unfortunate lad,—indeed, Mr. Hammond, my heart is almost broke; all I had is gone, and soon the parish must support me; and then, this dear child, my dear little Betsey, I wish to speak to you, sir, about her. I have oft meditated to do so, but always something or other prevented me, but to-morrow I will open my mind to you about her.' I then said, come to-morrow, and eat a bit of mutton with me, and we shall have leisure to talk matters over. Sir Robert Bertram, whose tenant you were, did he know your situation, would do something for you; Eliza is a good girl, and a clever notable housewife, can write a good hand, and knows sufficient of arithmetic for such a situation, and I think Lady Bertram may, perhaps, take her into the family as housekeeper.—No, she is too young for that, her own maid, or to wait upon Master Bertram, who is a sweet boy; or there is a little Miss lately come and will want attendants. The old man burst into tears: 'You are far too good, Mr. Hammond, but to-morrow, please God, I will see you, and then'—Joshua shook his head, grasped my hand, prayed for blessings on me, and crossed the green to his own house; but Joshua never saw the morrow.

"Eliza met him at the door, all spirits; 'Guess, grandfather, what I have got,' 'What, my dear?' 'Well, Dick Hobson has just been here, and look, he has brought from the North Oak post-office this letter; it has come, they told him, from America, I am sure it is from Uncle Thomas.' Joshua took it—glanced his eyes over the contents—it dropped from his hand—'he is dead!' he exclaimed; and death, which with slow and silent steps had long been advancing, now seized his feeble pulse, and he sunk from his seat. The screams of Eliza soon brought assistance, but all human aid was vain.—Joshua had paid the debt we all must pay sooner or later."

"Beauteous, young, and unprotected! Yes, I will be her protector; it shall be so, Mr. Hammond."

During the evening the good parson made some attempts to learn where the stranger had come from, or what conveyance he had to St. Mary's.

"I scarce know (said he) where I came from, and still less do I know whither I shall go next. Sometimes I am in a chaise, sometimes, and that in the worst weather, I am on foot, and in the pedestrian style I reached St. Mary's."

"You chose, indeed, bad weather for walking, sir, for I scarce ever remember a heavier fall of snow than we have had for two days; you must not, however, quit my roof to-night, for the roads are, by this time, choaked up; to-morrow, by day-light, if needful, your journey may be pursued."

"No, (said the stranger, rising), nor to-morrow will I pursue my journey; your hospitality shall shelter me, till you unite my fate to Eliza's; she shall, Mr. Hammond, she must be mine."

The vehement and hurried accents in which the stranger spoke, made the good clergyman suppose he was in a state of intoxication, and to this he attributed the proffer so hastily and rashly made. Finding to oppose was but to irritate, he endeavoured to wave the discourse; and, at an early hour, even for the inhabitants of the quiet village of St. Mary's Oak, proposed retiring for the night. To this his guest agreed, but was heard traversing his chamber almost the whole of the night. In the morning he however appeared more composed, and Mr. Hammond hoped the fumes of intoxication were dispelled.

Eliza was seated by her good friend, when his guest entered. With much native grace she rose, and paid her respects to him; a deep sense of grief clouded her sweet and gentle countenance, which was suffused with blushes that chased each other over her snowy neck, as the stranger, with anxious tenderness, inquired after her health. When they had breakfasted, she declared her wish to return home.

Mr Hammond was now under the necessity of informing her she no longer had a home; every article of furniture was seized whilst the funeral was in church, and her clothes were already removed to the parsonage. Eliza appeared as if petrified by this intelligence, whilst it was relating, but to this state of stupor tears and a strong hysteric succeeded.

The stranger, learning the name and residence of the surgeon of the village, was the messenger who summoned him to the assistance of Eliza; who, ere they reached the parsonage, was so far recovered as to feel ashamed of the trouble she had been the cause of, and begged Mr. Hammond would allow her to retire, as the stranger entered.

"I am sorry, (said Mr. Kirby) heartily sorry, parson, for this poor girl; she has far too much beauty, and, besides, has never been used to labour; and, indeed, it would be a pity she should be exposed to it; yet, unless Sir Robert or my Lady, who are both very good to any body in distress, I do not know of any one who would be able to recommend her, as an upper servant, and Betsey is not fit for such a service as she might have in this neighbourhood."

"She shall not, Mr. Kirby, be turned adrift, (replied his friend) she shall stay here till we can do something or other for her; by May Sir Robert will be at Malieveren, and it would be only two days journey if we were, one of us, to take her to Lady Bertram; then, when she saw her, she would know better what she might suit."

"True, true parson, you are right; so she would; was she to see her I am sure she would do something.—Then so good as she was to poor old Joshua—oh! her Ladyship will consider all that."

This conversation was interrupted by the return of the stranger, who, after Eliza had quitted the room, had been traversing with hefty steps an adjoining apartment, and now renewed his offers of protection for the lovely maiden.

"My name (said he) is Bouchier; to you my family signifies not; mean or illustrious, my actions can alone degrade, can alone confer honour.—Suffice it then for you, I have wherewith to bestow on Eliza those comforts various causes have deprived her of; I must seek to still the sense of my woes, by relieving those of others—I have lost all that rendered life desirable. I was wandering, if possible, from all I knew—from all the officiousness of friendship—from myself—when Providence guided me to St. Mary's, as you, Mr. Hammond, were performing the last solemn service for Eliza's aged parent. I followed into the church—sorrow is congenial to me—light and sunshine have long been obnoxious; amidst storms and tempest, surrounded by misery and desolation, (for such now appears to me the world) I would dwell.—Here I thought nature must shew herself, I should behold grief, like my own, unfettered by the customs, the odious forms of the gay world.—The impressive solemnity of your manner, Mr. Hammond, the indistinct and mournful voices of the responders filled my soul with all the softness of sorrow; the voices ceased, and the heart-rending sighs of Eliza filled their place.—I saw her—oh, yes! at that moment had I not painfully restrained myself—yes! at that moment I should have clasped her to my heart.—I thought again I beheld the dear saint—that she herself; had descended to calm the transports of my soul!—Ah! sure I was not wrong!—sure Eliza is doomed to be mine, and that by her means again shall the wretched Frederic know peace."

"Consider, sir, what importance the step is which you are about to take; you are amenable to those friends of whose kind officiousness you speak."

"I am not, Mr. Hammond, amenable to any friends—I hold not such to exist—I am my own master—and am alone the proper judge of my actions."

"As yet, Mr. Bouchier, you know not Eliza sufficiently to be able to judge whether she is calculated to render you happy or no. In years she is little above childhood, and though yet a very good girl, may not so sudden an exaltation make her forget herself? Your air, your manner, prove you entitled to an exalted rank in life; Eliza's descent I know little of, but what I do know, which alone is the relations I have spoke of, prove her of rank infinitely beneath, (if I guess right) that you fill. Can you, then, firmly stand the laugh of your equals, the sneers of those beneath you? Will not the world at large censure your choice?"

"For her I will, at least for a time, abjure the world; with her, if I return to it, her beauty shall be its wonder, and her virtue my happiness—my defence against the weak—the wicked and the vain—who shall dare to censure?"

"I applaud you, sir, (said Mr. Kirby, who as yet had not spoke, but now, advancing, shook Mr. Bouchier most cordially by the hand) I applaud you, sir, for your generous sentiment in regard to Betsey; was I a few years younger, or was I a few hundreds richer, I would marry her myself. I perceive you are an eccentric character; so the people of St.

Mary's reckon me, and as I don't think either of us as yet have asked her the question, why perhaps I may, should I change my mind, have as good a chance as you, who seem to make so sure about it; and perhaps she may not be in a marrying humour."

"Oh! tell me not she will refuse me; it is not—it cannot be possible, for sure it is the gentle soul of my sainted Alicia that beams through the eyes of Eliza—which lights up her countenance—no! she will not refuse me.—I tell you, Mr. Kirby, I charge you, sir, do not irritate me by such ideas; she shall, she must be mine! Again she points out happiness; Eliza shall be sheltered by my care. But it is my Alicia, restored all lovely and blooming as when first sheltered amidst rocks and woods I beheld her; Haste! lead me to her, let me declare my love!" He started, paused, and sighed. "Alas! do I then again love! No, Mr. Hammond, I will not deceive her, I love her not.—No! it is but the semblance of my lost Alicia I love; this heart is incapable of love, it is dead even to the calls of friendship. Yet give Eliza to me, (he continued, in a soft and supplicating tone) I will be to her—yes, I will be to her a friend, a tender and indulgent friend."

The expressive countenance of Mr. Bouchier had undergone many changes; he trembled in every limb, his eyes had been dimmed by tears, had melted with love, and sparkled with rage. Mr. Hammond and his friend Kirby withdrew, saying they would prepare Eliza to receive his proposals.

"What would you advise this poor girl to do, in regard to this stranger's offers,' said Mr. Hammond, with an enquiring and irresolute look.

"Pshaw! advise! why we had better advise nothing about the matter. If we say refuse, I am certain she will; but how shall we be sure that would be agreeable to what already Betsey feels in her own heart for a man whose elegant manners, fine person, and handsome face might well win the affections of a girl that had seen more men than poor Betsey has; and I think few such men as Mr. Bouchier will come to St. Mary's, or if here, would like him, interest themselves for her. True, you will tell me he is a stranger, but at her age it is not to be supposed love waits, and peeps, and considers, and then says 'no, I have not known you long enough.'—Ah! parson, parson, you have forgot those days; and if we, with our prudence, should biass the poor girl, against the dictates of her own heart, to refuse so advantageous an offer, may she not, with reason, lay all inconveniences she may hereafter sustain to our charge?"

"But, Mr. Kirby, how shall we be certified that Betsey, by marrying Mr. Bouchier, will avoid such? we cannot assure ourselves he has a fortune to provide for her; upon his bare assertion is the poor girl to rely? I think, doctor, it is a desperate remedy you propose."

"I can see, and so may you, Mr. Bouchier is a gentleman, and I dare wager all I am worth in the world, judging, I say judging, Mr. Hammond, from his countenance, from his eagerness to relieve her,—that he would do harm to no one, that he is good, generous, kind to all he is connected with, and that he would scorn to marry if he could not provide for her. No, no, Betsey's situation is desperate enough, but I never prescribe desperate remedies, as you call them."

"You are so sanguine, Mr. Kirby, and I hope you may be right; but (continued he, in a kind of whisper, and patting his forehead) I doubt, doctor, all is not quite clear here; such sudden impulses, such quick changes of spirit, and an air of wildness which shifts to melancholy, bespeak a derangement of intellect.

"Pshaw! all stuff, all nonsense, Mr. Hammond, (said Kirby, with an impatient tone) because you see this man a stranger, and see him not exactly like the folks of your own parish, why you suppose, I find, he is crazy, just as the wiseacres of St. Mary's Oak said twice or thrice of me, when I, without regarding their idle gossip, did what I had a right to do, and what I would do again if required. Then it was, you may remember, "Lord guide us, the Doctor for sartain is gone by himself!" But you, Mr. Hammond, though almost the only one in the parish that did say so, declared I had acted a commendable part, and told my accusers "Charity would cover a multitude of sins" Aye, aye, so it may, said I, in the other world, but here it seems but to expose them; for I dare say I never did a wrong thing, or a foolish one, that was not talked of then, and some sins were laid to my door I was guiltless of."

Whilst the conversation, of which I have related a part, was passing between her friends, Eliza had quitted her chamber, more composed and resigned to her fate, and in expectation of seeing Mr. Hammond, and to entreat his advice. She was on her road to the study, when Mr. Bouchier, who was traversing with hurried steps, the apartment in which he awaited its owners return, saw the fair object of his meditation pass, and begged she would favor him a few minutes with her company, as he had somewhat of importance to communicate.

Eliza suffered Mr. Bouchier to lead her in.

"Mr. Hammond has, my gentle girl, I suppose informed you of my wishes, I hope you have not refused."

"I have not seen him, sir, since I saw you, but whatever was the request, I cannot hesitate to comply; God forbid I should think of opposing Mr. Hammond's wishes, which must be for my good."

The friends of Eliza now made their appearance.

"Betsey, my dear, I hope you are better," said Mr. Kirby.

"O yes, much better, sir, I thank you."

"I suppose, Eliza, (said Mr. Hammond, as he seated her by himself) I suppose Mr. Bouchier has himself declared his intentions to you."

"Mr. Bouchier (said the unconscious girl) has told me he had made you, sir, the bearer of some request to me; I should be very ungrateful for all his kindness did I demur, if in any way I can show him the poor Eliza has not an ungrateful heart.—Pray tell me his request."

Mr. Kirby cast a kind of triumphant and significant look toward his friend, which seemed to say, did I not tell you at her age love never considered whether it was a stranger or no;—all's done by surprise.

Mr. Bouchier had, as they entered, sprung out, and was now, (though it was neither calm nor clear, but as bad a day as November could produce) walking in the church-yard, which was some feet deep in snow.

"I presume not, my good girl, to influence you in a matter which so nearly concerns your future happiness, nor think that to avoid any little trouble I may have to take regarding you, that I, at Mr. Bouchier's request, inform you of his wishes, that if you refuse not, he means to make you his wife. He tells me he has it in his power to shield you from the distress that poverty may involve you in; but be not rash to determine either way. Mr. Bouchier is a stranger here, and known to no one; his manners undoubtedly bespeak the gentleman, but even rank in life and wealth are insufficient to secure happiness. Mr. Bouchier may have many faults, or even vices, at best his disposition is unsteady, and this very proposal proves him rash; yet, I think, situated as you are, an offer apparently so generous ought not to be hastily rejected. Without fortune, almost without friends, (for I have heard you say you knew no relation you had) young and totally inexperienced, possessing too personal charms that must expose you to much hazard in a world to which, as yet, you are a stranger, and where your friends at St. Mary's have it not in their power to be any protection; and it seems to me as if Providence had sent you a protector. If you resolve to accept of Mr. Bouchier as such, we will endeavour to learn more of him, his character and connexions, but you shall not leave this house till we do; but if, Eliza, your heart declares not in the favor of this stranger, and you decline his offer, and resolve to live prudent and diligent in the station in which it has pleased the Almighty to place you, we will not, my dear child, forsake you.

Mr. Hammond paused, and fixed his eyes on the blushing and astonished Eliza, who appeared as if collecting the courage which had forsook her.

"You speak not, Betsey."

"Ah, sir, advise me, counsel me, I will indeed be governed by you."

"Do take your own way, my dear girl, (said Mr. Kirby) the parson says and then unsays; take my word you will never, the longest day you have to live, meet with such another offer: 'leave St. Mary Oak!' no, I hope not, till you are Mrs. Bouchier. No fear, if you were seen, you would be admired, and followed, and flattered, and the fellows, fine gentlemen too, would call you angel and goddess; and, and why Betsey they will turn your little brain, and from being a very good girl, though neither saint or angel, they will never cease, if you will listen, till they have made a devil of you."

Eliza, though well accustomed to such-like rhapsodies from Kirby, gave him a look which seemed to intimate at once her displeasure at the last metaphor of his speech; and also that he could suppose she would lend a willing ear to such people as he described.

"Nay, Betsey, do not be offended. What, though you are a good, nay a very good girl at St. Mary's, it might all happen; and you have heard me say before now, I thought the better half of the women are the very devil upon earth."

"Fye, fye, shame Doctor on you, (said the charitable Hammond) those assertions do not become you, they disgrace you.—I say, only for my share of knowledge of the sex, that I have met with more worthy, more amiable women than you could produce men; and have we not numerous examples in sacred, as well as prophane history, that virtuous women have existed in all ages worthy of record?"

"Sacred history, parson! nay, now you tread upon unsafe ground; quote it not; every book furnishes some instance of their depravity.—No, it clearly condemns them in the first page, aye in all ages, from grandam Eve, with her cursed curiosity, to this present day."

"Doctor, doctor, hear me but speak."—

This dispute would have lasted, as it generally did, till every illustrious, virtuous, and every celebrated, or infamous woman, recorded in ancient history, had been named and discussed, had not Esther, the good parson's old housekeeper, come to inform her master Mr. Bouchier wished to see him.

"What is it then, Eliza, I am to say?"

"Oh! tell him I admire, I esteem, I love him; his friendship shall never be forgotten; the generous stranger shall ever be remembered; for him shall my prayers importune Heaven.—But marry! ah, no, Mr. Hammond, I cannot marry him.—I wish I was his sister, I wish I was his daughter, that I might look for ever on him without blushing, that I might attend on him and prevent his wishes; but tell him, oh tell him, I cannot, indeed I cannot marry him."

"You had better tell him then, Betsey, yourself; Mr. Bouchier may take it more patiently from you."

"No, I cannot, I must not see him again—indeed I dare not refuse him; but you, my dear Mr. Hammond, or you, Mr. Kirby, as a favour I beg you to say to Mr. Bouchier, I decline his generous proposal."

"No, no, (said Kirby, clasping her shoulder, and archly nodding to Mr. Hammond) you had better tell him yourself; it will not appear grateful, or indeed barely civil, on such an occasion to send a message."

Eliza's friends left her, and no sooner was she alone, than a plentiful shower of tears relieved her full heart.

CHAPTER II.

WERE they tears of joy, of grief, of gratitude, or love? I believe, gentle reader, all those emotions were conjoined to produce the conflict Eliza felt.—Ere they were dried from her rosy cheeks Mr. Bouchier entered.

"Eliza, do you then (said he) refuse me? I had flattered myself—I thought that you possessed a soul congenial with my own, and hoped, fondly hoped, that by contributing to your happiness I should have drawn the stranger back to myself—but you refuse me, Eliza! Again, then, am I doomed to wander forth a miserable fugitive from home, from friends once dear to me; you too I must leave, and leave you, Eliza, with a friend whose limited powers makes him an unfit protector. Mr. Hammond has a family, which all his oeconomy must be barely sufficient to provide for."

"Ah! Mr. Bouchier, would to Heaven I could contribute to your comfort: that I might be the means of restoring you to happiness would cheer the poor Eliza under every difficulty; but she must not, cannot be your wife."

The conversation ended as it had began, without professions of love on the side of Mr. Bouchier, and without any signs of aversion on that of Eliza.

"I should like, (said Mr. Bouchier, who yet was a guest at the parsonage) I should like to take a house in this neighbourhood."

"There is a house at North Oak, which is our market town, untenanted at present, it is large and convenient."

"No, Mr. Hammond, I should not like a town: what I wish is a house retired, where I shall be free from interruption, and from impertinent remarks on my conduct."

"Then (said Kirby) I think we can suit you; the hall at Oakdale"—

"I thought you had taken it, Doctor, for Mrs. Swainston, and her sister, Mrs. Nancy."

Two whimsical old creatures! so I did; but who would ever do any thing for a woman, especially for old maids? Never do they know their own minds; now it is over far from church in winter time, the river is not always fordable, and to go round by the bridge lengthens the way; but all that is mere sham, for I believe the true reason is, the report of the house being haunted has frightened them."

"Ridiculous, it is not possible; why Mrs. Nancy Swainston was always reckoned a sensible woman, and I am amazed she should give way to such follies."

Well, sir, this sensible woman, as you call her, told me very seriously she could not think it was Dame Dorothy that disturbed the house, for she had been talking about her to some that knew the characters of all the family; 'but (said she) Mr. Kirby, during the civil wars between Charles I. and the Republicans, it is said strange things were acted at Oakdale hall: after which she told me of that lady of the Bertram family, and Lord Marsham of Thorpe, yet still not perfectly assured who was the ghost; talked of its having haunted the hall ever since Sir Philip Bertram's time. So I said, then you had far better go into the hall, and if you should see it, in as civil a way as you can, enquire its name and address. Want of faith on this score, I believe, has lost me one of my best patients; however, Mr. Bouchier, if the house suits you, I will give bail for the ghost. I have a

better opinion of the progenitors of our good Baronet than to suppose they would rise from their graves to disturb you."

"The house, if retired, said Mr. Bouchier, (and this foolish report bespeaks it so) will suit my disposition."

"My horse is at your service; I have some visits to make in the village, and I dare say the parson will go with you; he is fitter than I am to encounter the ghosts."

This affair being settled, Mr. Hammond and his new friend set out together, and after a short ride reached Oakdale hall, by whose gates the road lay, but so carefully had it been concealed by its stately owners from the gaze of the passengers, that little was seen from the road but the roof and chimneys of the house. A double row of limes that had been kept lopped and pruned, till art triumphing over nature had deprived them of beauty, pointed out the principal entrance, which was through two lofty gates, supported by a high wall, whose massy thickness might have stood a siege from the battering rams of antiquity.

In vain for some time did Mr. Hammond assault the solid gates with the but end of his whip.—"I wish, (said he) either Martha or her daughter may be within; but if you will wait a little, Mr. Bouchier, I will go round by the back court, and see if they are to be found." Soon after the heavy bolt was drawn back, and, slowly creaking on their rusty hinges, the gates opened. "You see I have got entrance, though without Martha's assistance."

The court into which Mr. Bouchier entered was covered with snow, on which no human foot had trod, save Mr. Hammond's; above the snow rose, at the corner of the grass plot, on each side of the way up to the house, a yew tree, cut in a conic form; as high as the first story, the now sapless branches of some spreading jessamine, intermingled with woodbine, hung laden with snow. The house appeared, from the style of architecture, to have been built in Queen Elizabeth's or James the first's time, when the nobility and gentry, finding the massy gothic castle no longer needful for their safety, reared buildings in another form; yet, still attached to that heavy species of magnificence, seemed reluctantly to abandon it, and the hall which succeeded the castle partook of the defects of the former style, yet was divested of that air of imposing grandeur attached to the baronial castles.—Thus the outside of Oakdale hall exhibited high arched windows, and small squares of glass, set in lead, loosened by time from their fastenings, and flapping too and fro with the wind. Two projecting wings were crowned with peaked turrets; in one of those wings a glass door announced the principal entrance, but this was fastened, as was also another, at which, after a few loud knocks, an old woman appeared.

"I thought, (said Mr. Hammond) you had left the old hall to itself."

"No, sir, I hope I shall never leave it till I die; I am sure Sir Robert will never turn me out."

"Never, without providing for you, Martha; but I have brought a gentleman to Oakdale to take a look at it, who has thoughts of renting it."

"I wish he may, for it is a great pity nobody lives in it; there has been several come to look at it since Sir Robert talked of letting it, and always something or other happens. This, sir, (turning to Mr. Bouchier) is the hall; look at that beautiful window, the coats of

arms painted on it are those of the families into which the Bertrams have married, since Reginald Baron Oakdale, whose Lady was of royal extraction; there you may see their arms upon the highest panes.—The armour that hangs round was taken mostly out of the old castle, and was put up here in Sir Philip Bertram's time; see that noble looking man, with the large whiskers, that is his picture."

Martha was not got a third part through her story, when Mr. Hammond complained it was very cold, and begged she would proceed to shew the house.

"I was never thinking about the cold, talking away; but I can tell the gentleman all about it after."

Martha now, followed by Mr. Bouchier and Hammond, led the way through the apartments, some of which were large, but all wore, except in one wing, the same gloomy appearance; the staircase and floors were of black oak, with which many of the rooms were also lined; the furniture was heavy, and had been costly: some apartments were hung with rich tapestry or damask hangings to correspond with the beds, the high cornices of which were many of them gilded, though from the tarnish years had given, no brightness relieved the sombre that reigned undisturbed by any appearance of cheerfulness, or ought that shewed like comfort.—The thickness of the walls, and the small panes of glass set in lead, were almost sufficient to exclude the light, whilst the fruit trees on the side next the garden, and the jessamine on the front to the court, equally proved in summer a leafy screen, scarcely penetrated by the ray of the sun. In the wing that much more than half a century ago had been modernized, the windows were sashed, and the furniture not so antique; by Martha they were considered as the very model of elegance, being fitted up only, she said, when Sir Henry, the present baronet's grandfather, was married, and his son was the last of the family who ever resided in them, and that only for a short time.

"This mansion, (said Mr. Bouchier on his return) well accords with my taste; in it I can shut out the world, and live to myself, and if Eliza yet would consent to share my solitude, I think all the happiness I can ever enjoy would be mine."

It was soon settled application should be made to Sir Robert's steward; at present he had not one at Oakdale; but Mr. Kirby offered to go to Bertram Castle himself, where Mr. Jackson had removed, as the baronet was making alterations there which required the steward's presence.

"I will pay (said Mr. Bouchier) a year's rent in advance. I am a stranger here, and without some security Sir Robert may be displeased at his agent."

"Mr. Bouchier drew out a Bank of England bill for 200l. and gave to Kirby, begging a lease might be drawn for six or nine years.

The number of bills from amongst which this was taken, served to convince both Mr. Hammond and the benevolent surgeon, that the stranger was a man of property, and both agreed it would be a great pity Eliza should refuse such an offer.

Mr. Kirby, after an absence of four days, returned; Oakdale Hall was let to Mr. Bouchier, and a lease was to be sent for Sir Robert to sign in a few days. The stranger therefore quitted the parsonage, and took possession of Oakdale; so urgent were his friends with Eliza in his behalf, and so powerfully did her own heart plead for Mr. Bouchier, that she suffered Mr. Hammond, the first visit he made at St. Mary's after his removal, to inform him Eliza no longer objected. From herself he listened to a confirmation of this, and then furnished his friends with money and directions to purchase furniture for the best apartments, and the carriage and horses of a gentleman who had lived at some little distance.

A month from the interment of poor Joshua, Eliza Wetherall became Mrs. Bouchier. The conduct of Mr. Bouchier on that day was marked, as all his actions were, with a wild eccentricity.—He came from Oakdale in his own chaise, he was married in black clothes, and the instant the ceremony was over, without assigning any reason, or saying whither he went, he threw himself into a chaise and four and drove away. At the hall an elegant dinner was provided, which Mr. Hammond and Kirby partook of with Mrs. Bouchier.

A week elapsed without news of the bridegroom. On the eighth day of his absence he returned, but yet said not what road he had been, or any thing regarding his journey, except that he had scarce ever been out of a carriage since he quitted St. Mary's. Mr. Bouchier brought back with him a choice selection of books, and he devoted his whole time to the improvement of his young and beautiful bride, who made a rapid progress under her beloved instructor, who appeared no longer subject to those hasty impulses of passion, nor to sink under melancholy depression, as he had when he first came to St. Mary's, and which bore to Mr. Hammond the appearance of insanity; for then, if opposed, his passions flamed out with a violence that if it was not absolute madness, sure nearly approached it. Now he was mild and gentle, yet appeared to possess a nobleness of spirit that towered above the littleness which mark alike the proud and ostentatious, and the abject minded. Mr. Bouchier seemed possessed of uncommon enthusiasm, and sensibility of character, from which distinguishing traits he had doubtless suffered much; yet were they not deadened by his sufferings, although he had arrived at an age when men who have a free intercourse with the world generally laugh at such boyish ideas, for Mr. Bouchier appeared to be thirty or upwards.

In the pleasing employment of cultivating the talents of Eliza, in watching the unfolding of her ideas, and in giving her a taste for music and painting, along with study, Mr. Bouchier seemed almost to forget he had come to Oakdale resolved to nurse his sorrows.—Nature seemed to wear another face, all creation smiled, and he loved Eliza now for herself; not as he did when to protect from misery a face and form whose imaginary resemblance to a beloved object was a claim he could not resist, and to guard her from distress seemed to give a pleasure nought beside could impart.

Thus, in calm retirement, Mr. Bouchier passed his time, and seemed to have regained tranquillity, if not perfect happiness. Eliza was his sole object; whatever he was engaged in she was the spring that directed his actions.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER III.

THUS passed away the blooming months of spring; and thus, unheeded by Eliza, wore away autumn. The roads grew bad, the trees were despoiled of their foliage, the garden had lost its charms, except that its spacious gravel walks allowed that exercise which both were partial to, and which at that season no other place round Oakdale afforded.

The worthy Mr. Hammond, and his friend the surgeon, oft visited at the hall, where, besides themselves, no one was admitted on those terms. The good parson was not inquisitive; yet his curiosity was highly roused by the air of mystery which hung over the husband of Eliza, who since his marriage, had never been at St. Mary's Oak.

"Why is it, (said he) my good friend, you come not to church with Eliza; do my doctrines displease you? If not of the established religion, at North Oak there are different meetings you might attend."

"From the pulpit I am satisfied, Mr. Hammond, you will deliver no doctrines that you do not practise; and as I converse with you, and as I investigate your character, I find such amiable lessons of morality, such a pure spirit of Christianity, that I am sorry it is not in my power to profit by your public teaching. I am of the church of England, and Mrs. Bouchier will vouch for my family observance."

But it was not alone from church Mr. Bouchier absented himself; when he went beyond the limits of the wood, which skirted the gardens, he chose the most unfrequented paths; or if in the chaise, as he rode out with Eliza occasionally on the more public roads, the blinds were always lowered on his side.—No letters had ever come for him since he went to Oakdale, nor had he ever been known to write to any person but once, and that letter was sent by a servant who could not read, to put into the York post-office, upwards of fifty miles distant. Mr. Kirby or Hammond had transacted all his business since he came to the country, and when his servants were hired, he desired such might be chosen as had never been ten miles from St. Mary, and had never been resident in a town. Various were the conjectures that Mr. Bouchier's friends formed concerning him; but as, perhaps, they were all wide from the truth, it is needless to trouble my readers with them, who perhaps may know as much of Mr. Bouchier's connexions as any body did at St. Mary's; though some of its inhabitants, as generally every village of its size affords such as have nothing else to do but to busy themselves in the most interesting way possible with their neighbours affairs, took infinite pains to find out who this Mr. Bouchier was that had married Betsey Wetherall; yet, after much enquiry, much kindness bestowed on every domestic of the hall for the purpose of investigation, all failed; and though many suppositions were formed, yet they were but suppositions, for no one could tell who the stranger was, or what were his resources; but all agreed money he had, though no one knew how long it would last: at present Sir Robert himself could not keep a more expensive table; and who was like her at St. Mary's! who would have thought Betsey would ever ride in her carriage!

Many such like comments were made on the inhabitants of the hall, and many questions were asked Mr. Kirby by his patients on this highly interesting subject.

"Now, pray Doctor, do tell us who is this strange man at the hall? I am sure you in the secret."

"Why, Madam, what the devil have either you or I to do with Mr. Bouchier's family or connexions; and if there is any secret, you may rest assured, if I am even entrusted, it shall remain one."

On Christmas eve Mr. Hammond visited Oakdale:

"I am come (said he, to Mr. and Mrs. Bouchier) with good news."

"Good news, Mr. Hammond, (said Mr. Bouchier) from your countenance I was preparing myself for the reverse."

"I am going to quit St. Mary's."

"To quit St. Mary's, sir? is that good news?" said Eliza.

"I ought to consider it so; I have just received an account of my presentation to a living in the diocese of Bristol of 500l. per annum. I am indebted to our worthy Baronet, I suppose, though the living is not in his gift, but in that of his most intimate friend."

Mr. Bouchier then congratulated his friend on his well-deserved preferment, yet regretted the distance to which he would be removed.

"I ought to be thankful for this change of fortune, and hope I shall not forget myself in easier circumstances; but I feel much at quitting St. Mary's, where, upon 80l. a year, I have lived twenty years contentedly, and I may say as happy as most men. In that time I married an amiable woman, who after bringing four sons into the world, quitted it for a better. Time has subdued the affliction I then sustained; my sons are healthy and well disposed; the youngest is lately gone to sea, and the eldest I mean for the church. This addition of income perhaps may render them careless or dissipated, and I fear, Mr. Bouchier, alike for them and myself."

On New Year's day Mr. Hammond preached his farewell sermon, after which he dined at the hall. Mrs. Bouchier presented him with a pocket book, at her husband's request, as a token of friendship, which he gladly accepted; but to his astonishment he found, when some miles the next day on his journey, that it contained bills for 150l.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was not long after Mr. Hammond had quitted St. Mary's, till Eliza saw a great change in Mr. Bouchier; he no longer was her preceptor, no longer hung over her with that fond yet delicate attention which marked his conduct to her hitherto; if she raised her eyes to his, they were instantly averted, a deep sigh would follow, and she was left alone; his nights were spent chiefly in the open air, walking by moon light in the garden, which was covered with snow, or shut up, (as indeed he passed most of the day) in a room which tradition for ages handed down to be the haunt of some restless spirit, whose guilty, or perturbed and injured shade, was there visible, at times to human perception.

Distressed at this sad change, Eliza resolved no longer to bear it in silence, for it was now some days since Mr. Bouchier had uniformly avoided her.

"Oh! tell me, (she said) kill me not by this cruel silence! Oh! tell your Eliza, my beloved Mr. Bouchier, what thus distresses you! Have I offended? alas! it is far from my heart; but you no longer love me—you avoid me—you despise me—and deem me unworthy to share your griefs."

"Love you, my Eliza! would to Heaven—but alas! what is it I would say I—Could I avert from you, my beloved, the misery, the agony I feel, my life should be freely sacrificed, but lovely, innocent as you are—you must share it."

The countenance of Mr. Bouchier appeared almost convulsed; a deep, an agonized expression sat on it. Eliza was alarmed, she threw herself at his feet—"Allow me then, oh now, to share your sorrows."

"No, Eliza not now!—no! not now! soon, too soon, will they reach you!"

Mr. Bouchier, regardless of the posture his beautiful wife had assumed, had, as if to avoid her sight, thrown his head on the table before him.

"Why not now, my dear sir, why not intrust your Eliza? Why, Mr. Bouchier, dignify her with your name; why join with her in the sacred tie of wedlock, if you deemed her unworthy of the duties it imposes? Try me, my dear sir, you will find your pupil worthy of her instructor; she will prove herself capable of exertion—she will not shrink under calamity, if by sharing she can lighten her husband's woes."

"Oh! rise my Eliza, my—every word pierces me to the heart.—Alas! I must not, dare not hear you!"

Mr Bouchier hastily rose, and retired to Sir Philip's room, where he had spent, for the last few days, so large a portion of his time; there he passed the remainder of that day and night, nor did the following morning restore him to the terrified Eliza, who in vain begged for admittance. Her fears were increased as evening advanced; she had sued and wept, but no answer had she received. Alarmed by the silence of Mr. Bouchier, she sent for Mr. Kirby, who no sooner learned how long his friend had been shut up than he broke open the door, but to the terror and astonishment of both no one was to be seen. Yet that

he went into that room was well known, but how he had quitted it was a mystery no one could unravel. The window was shut, and the door was locked, till, broke open, the key yet remained in the lock, to testify some person in the room had locked it. The wide chimney, it was true might afford a passage; this therefore was searched, as also the flat-leaded roof of the centre of the building, but nought afforded any proof that Mr. Bouchier had escaped this way; every apartment from the cellar to the garret was examined, and yet no signs of him so anxiously sought. Again Mr. Kirby visited Sir Philip's room, a place the servants liked not; upon the table he now found two letters, one of which was addressed to Mrs. Bouchier, the other, which was as follows, to himself:

"Ere I had taken the step I now am about to do, I would have wished to disclose many things to you, had I found I was capable of a connected conversation; but you would have opposed, you would have preached patience to a heart, to a soul which knows it not. Sure this being is composed of jarring atoms; never am I to taste of permanent happiness! Yet, Kirby, I have tasted it, but it was dashed from my lips, and days of misery succeeded!—At Oakdale,—yes, my friend, at Oakdale—again I fondly, madly hoped, I had seized the coy stranger, but, Kirby, it was but a phantom—a meteor—blazing but to deceive—which led to horror—to misery—to madness. Seek not, I conjure you, to learn what—seek not to learn who I was.—You are ignorant of my doubts; alas! let me not term them so—they are,—yes, they are, sad certainties of—of—Oh! of what! Is there a name to convey it in?—No, Kirby, buried for ever shall it be.—Infamy—remorse—distraction—what ideas do they convey to you? But weak are words.—Yet, why to a heart which is fraught with benevolence, should I seek to convey a portion of that misery which consumes me—which maddens my weak brain! God of mercy sustain me till—yet how shall I bear the trial? Pardon me—I wander—I meant but to implore your protection for Eliza.

"I have wrote, since I learnt the dreadful—, sheets of paper; but they are destroyed; they were the sad effusions of my soul; they were written with a madman's hand.—Alas! is not this also? Condemn me not too hastily; yet, O yet, I may return,—yet I may present Eliza to a distinguished circle of friends, accomplished as she is lovely!—How pleasing was the employment to cultivate her talents, to contemplate her virtues! Again, perhaps, I may never behold her, but I have taken care she shall be amply provided for. To your charge do I commit her—ah! may neither care nor sorrow come near her! In the strong chest that stands in the closet, through the library, you will find a sum for present use. Whatever fate attends the wretched—, may all evil, all griefs, be far from her."

Mr. Kirby, after having read this strangely incoherent epistle, put it, with that to Eliza, into his pocket, and sought her, and found her stretched on the ground, the image of terror and despair. He endeavoured at consolation.

"Mr. Bouchier had talked for some time, (he said) of undertaking a journey of considerable length; to save you the pain of parting, he has thus suddenly absented himself secretly."

"Oh! tell me not so, Mr. Kirby; rather, if you know it, say at once the dreadful truth. Nay, (continued she, rising, and laying hold of Kirby) nay, at once inform me,—why flatter me with ideal hope? I know some dreadful misfortune has overtaken my beloved

husband. Oh! tell me not he has secretly withdrawn;—no, it is impossible! What, would Mr. Bouchier do this?—plunge me in suspicion—doubt—give me up to keenest misery—to despair!" She paused, and throwing herself on the sofa,— "No, (she resumed) no, I will not, I cannot believe it! He who seemed but to live for me, every care, every uneasiness he chased from me.—What! Mr. Bouchier quit his Eliza! Oh, no! he would not inflict such sorrow on her!—He, whose heart was the throne of every virtue, whose eye melted at the tale of distant misery, and whose liberal hand has been opened but to draw blessings on his head from whoever approached him."

Again she paused; again, though his eyes, his countenance, held a far different language, did the worthy surgeon of St. Mary's urge various reasons why she should hope.

"No, Mr. Kirby, (she replied, with unlooked-for firmness) no! hope is not for me! I am doomed to misery, to despair, happiness is fled for ever. Had Mr. Bouchier been in possession of himself, had he not lost all command of his actions, now I should not mourn his loss, I had still been happy; but the mysterious journey upon our marriage day, did it not favor of a sad state of derangement of mind? And then, oft would I mark his agitated and wild look on the sad melancholy which oppressed him; oft has he left me, fearful of giving pain, till again able to see me:—yet these starts of mind subsided, and months elapsed, and I saw them not; but of late my society has been shuned, Oh! I saw the deep, the painful struggle his noble mind sustained!—Alas! the combat is over; he has flown from me, unable to conquer the malady caused by some hidden grief.—He has—oh! too sure I augur truly, he has flown to self-destruction."

Mr. Kirby saw the justice of Eliza's remarks, though he would not listen to what Mr. Hammond had formerly said on the subject of Mr. Bouchier's derangement; the proofs his unhappy wife adduced were what too plainly demonstrated it.—Scarcely could he so far command himself as not rather to increase than lessen Mrs. Bouchier's fears, whose mind seemed roused to its highest pitch; she would hear of no alleviation; she wept not; but bore her deep sorrows with a sternness of grief that made Mr. Kirby fear she might suffer under a malady as dreadful as Mr. Bouchier's.

"In such weather as this, when the snow, after laying so many weeks, is melting, when the roads are impassable, when every brook is become a river—Oh! let us haste, ere too late! let us search—"

Swift as lightning she darted out of the apartment; but Kirby, by passing through another door, prevented her going, as she intended, into the garden.

"Compose yourself; I will go in search of Mr. Bouchier; all the men servants shall go."

Eliza suffered herself to be led back into the apartment she had quitted, where, no sooner was she seated than she sunk in a deep fainting fit; when she was a little recovered, Mr. Kirby set out upon his melancholy expedition.

Deep footsteps in the softened snow were, by the pale light of the waning moon, distinguishable across the garden towards the canal which showed through it. Gladly the benevolent Kirby marked them on the opposite bank, and traced them out of the door which led into the wood; the morning now faintly dawning, the footsteps were discovered in the path which led thro' the wood to the river. Scarce now had the good friend of Eliza resolution to proceed; he made a momentary pause, then hastened along, tracing the deep prints; till, at the bank of the stream, where a lofty rock rose with a projecting boldness from it,—there the person, whoever it was, seemed to have lingered; but from there no step could be traced, and whoever had ventured onward could never survive to reach the opposite shore; yet Kirby hung over the rock till his heart sickened and his head turned round. The ice was loosened, and, piled one piece on another, was borne on the bosom of the river, whose muddy and turbulent stream was bearing along the trophies of its power; trees uprooted by the root were whirled round in eddies, till stopped by some projecting rock; whilst the stream, as if collecting fresh force from opposition, roaring at its sides, again drove all before it.

Was it possible, if these steps were Mr. Bouchier's, he could escape, had he attempted to cross the river? Yet, perhaps, ere the ice was loosened, it was possible: he determined, therefore, to search the opposite bank, and hastily rising, returned to the hall, and without seeing Mrs. B. mounted the fleetest horse in the stables, rode with all speed towards a bridge across the river, and gained the bank, from opposite which he had every reason to suppose the unhappy Mr. Bouchier had precipitated himself.—Here, vain was the search; the sun shone full upon it; and, aided by the soft breath of the south wind, had melted the snow, and obliterated all traces, if such there might have been, of footsteps.

Here Mr. Kirby paused, and cast a fearful look on the projecting rock: it was possible, had his friend reached it ere the ice was broke, he might have crossed the river; for on one side he saw the rock might, tho' not without hazard, be descended;—but this was a forlorn hope, it rose but to deceive, for too great reason was there to believe the unfortunate husband of Eliza had rashly ventured, uncalled, into the presence of an offended deity!

"Alas! for for pity! (sighed out the benevolent surgeon) alas! misfortunes, heavy ones, no doubt, yet too keenly felt, have deprived the noble-souled stranger of his reason. Stupid wretch! I might have seen, have prevented this, had I not wilfully shut my eyes against the many proofs he gave of insanity."

Slowly Mr. Kirby, turned his horse from the fatal banks; a few yards from this spot was a mill, from the owner of which he learnt that during the night the ice broke away, and he and his servants were employed in securing the mill, when they were alarmed by a loud shriek, and a crash of the ice, which remained adhering to the side of the river; and that, at day-break, a man's hat was found entangled in the wheel. Trembling with agitation, Mr. Kirby asked to behold the hat; it was produced—no doubt remained of its having been Mr. Bouchier's; as tho' it was rent almost to pieces, yet the name, in his own writing, was yet distinguishable in the crown.

To find the body was all the hope that remained, to this end he gave orders to the servant that attended him, and returned to the hall, where he knew his presence was necessary. To Eliza he devised a tale, which deprived her not entirely of hope, and concealed the horrid intelligence he had gained.

No sooner did Mr. Hammond learn the dismal tidings his friend Kirby had taken early care to communicate, than he set out for Oakdale, judging it a duty highly incumbent on him to endeavour at alleviating the troubles he, in some degree, had been the means of involving Eliza in. To his pious remonstrances she lent a patient ear; all meekness and gentleness, silently she bowed under her afflictions.

The letter left for her by Mr. Bouchier, and found in Sir Philip's chamber, was soon after Mr. Hammond's arrival given into her hands; like that to Mr. Kirby, it was strangely mysterious.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER V.

"ADIEU, oh, Eliza! perhaps for ever!—pray thou to heaven for me! thy prayers, flowing from a heart the seat of virtue, may avert the deep inflictions of almighty wrath, for the sin of—. My soul sickens as I think of thee; and wilt thou not, my Eliza, hate the wretch who has undone thee? Yet is it for thee to hate him, who—Oh! no, hate me not; and I charge thee,—yes, solemnly charge,—*love me not*; it is I who have brought guilt, ruin, misery, infamy on thee, yet, thou knowest it not!—Heaven still avert the sad knowledge from thee, else, like me, thy brain would be whirled round in a chaos of horror—of distraction.

"It is I, Eliza, who drive daggers to thy gentle heart!—Yes, I, who should have been thy shield against the ills of life, thy protector!—it is I, who with murderous and frantic hand blast the early spring of thy days,—that bid the new blown rose wither in thy cheek!—But I am a wretch doomed to misery from my cradle! What have I rashly dared! madly, blindly, I have rushed on to destruction.—Ah! the wild impulses of my soul! to what, ere this, have they urged me.—Alas! I dare not look forward! Yet, sure deeds more horrid exist not in the catalogue of human iniquity! Thou wert innocent!—but now—oh! now, what art thou?—My brain maddens—reasons flies from recollection!

"Too deeply is thy image implanted in my heart—long has it dwelt there—ah! long have I desired to behold thee!—Oh! how have I beheld thee!—Horror! Blot me from thy memory, if possible, Eliza; and if that is not to be attained, if yet my image haunts thy slumbers, think of me as a stranger whom thou knew but for a season, and whom again thou shalt never behold.—Would to heaven I could efface remembrance!—but no, it is linked with thee—with despair—with guilty horror round the heart of

"FREDERICK."

The declarations of guilt this letter contained, couched in such strange and ambiguous terms, seemed to bear more the appearance of being the wild effusions of distraction,—than that Mr. Bouchier, who had given so many proofs of possessing a heart replete with every virtue, would be capable of committing crimes of a horrid tendency, such as he accused himself of. No, it could not be; Eliza did not credit the assertion.

Mr. Hammond and Mr. Kirby were again bewildered in a labyrinth of conjecture; in this they agreed, that they were equally blameable in trusting the happiness of Eliza to a man whose actions were tinctured with an eccentricity that bordered on, if it was not, insanity. In vain were all the papers he left searched; but nothing was found that could lead towards even conjecturing who Mr. Bouchier was, where lay his property, or what were his connexions. Bills and receipts for what furniture, &c. he had purchased, were all the writings that could be found; and so careful had he been of concealment, that some books in which it was supposed remarks had been made that might lead to a discovery it was evident he wished to avoid, had those leaves cut out. The strong chest mentioned in the letter to Mr. Kirby was next applied to; in this a sum of money to a considerable

amount, in bank of England bills, was found; there was wrapped round them a slip of paper, on which had been written by Mr. Bouchier:

"Continue, Eliza, to practise your usual charity, nor curtail your expences; you have a right to share my fortune; it is ample; freely use this; ere it is gone, by applying at the bank in Newcastle on the Tyne, you will find a sum deposited there, for your use as Mrs. Bouchier; and long, perhaps, before you have expended that, you will know what are my resources, what you have a right to demand; or you will see me again restored to you and comfort—meanwhile, relax not from your studies."

Hoping this might lead to a knowledge who Mr. Bouchier was, the good Kirby set out to make enquiries at the bank; but no sum had there been deposited for Mrs. Bouchier, nor did it appear her husband was known to them. Mr. Kirby, however flattering himself that he had taken steps that must eventually discover who paid the sum, which he made no doubt would be placed into the Bank for Eliza, he set out on his return to Oakdale hall. In passing thro' a considerable village, where he recollected an old acquaintance resided, he stopped to enquire after him; his friend insisted upon his alighting to dine, to whom he related the cause of his journey, with the sudden disappearance of Mr. Bouchier, his ideas regarding the derangement of mind he laboured under, and his fears regarding his fate, with the pains that had been taken to ascertain it.

"A circumstance that has lately happened here, (said the person Mr. Kirby was addressing) strikes me that your fears are real; for, though the stream which passes Oakdale reached not this village, yet the river which runs near us is joined some miles above by that stream, which you say, doctor, was swelled by the sudden thaw, till it overflowed its banks; so was ours, and I think it probable the body of the unfortunate Mr. Bouchier might be borne by the torrent as far as here; and only four or five days ago a body of a person was taken up by some salmon fishers in the river. This person was a stranger here, it was supposed, and has been interred; but perhaps something might remain in the pockets that would enable you to ascertain whether it was or was not your friend."

All impatience, Mr. Kirby urged Mr. Pearson to inform him where the people were to be found.—"I will walk with you to the spot, doctor."

Arrived at the house of the fishers, they made such enquiries as were necessary; a remnant of the coat which been torn by the dashing of the body amongst the ice was produced, and yet retained its colour so fresh as to show it was the same as Mr. Bouchier wore at the time of its disappearing; for though he was married in black, and had worn it for some months, he had lately assumed a different dress.

"Was there not a picture round the neck."

This was denied, but a chubby face boy entered, and confronted the evidence of his parents, by exclaiming. "Tom had taken the bonny laiking his mammy had given him, with the black string, that belonged to the dead man."

Mr. Kirby gave the boy money, which dried up his tears, and persuaded him, spite of his mother's menaces, to accompany him to Tom, who was in a boat that lay for the purpose of ferrying over the river, into which he was dipping, as he held it suspended by a ribband, a miniature picture.

"Aye, Tom (roared out his brother) here is somebody coming to spoil your sport."

Mr. Kirby caught hold of the little culprit, who, turning round, and terrified by the long hunting whip, held by the hand which had seized him, dropped the portrait into the river, yet Mr. Kirby had seen that it was that of a beautiful woman. Mr. Bouchier, his wife knew, wore such a one; it was that of the lady whose loss he was mourning when he came to St. Mary's; this corroborated other circumstances, but was assuredly no certain proof.

Returning to the cottage, its inhabitants had quitted it,—a strong proof that other valuables had been taken from the deceased, which they were afraid that they might be obliged to restore. Mr. Kirby knew, that even had Mr. Bouchier no cash about him of consequence when he quitted Oakdale, yet the elegant gold watch he wore was a prize those people would not easily relinquish. A watch had been found upon the body, he heard from the children, and also learnt, that it had been sold to an outlandish man who had a vast of fine things. Such a person Mr. Person remembered seeing in the village a few days ago; and in hopes of retrieving what would be an almost certain proof, they set out to find him; but the pedlar, who undoubtedly was the person the fisherman had sold the watch to, they were informed was gone to a sea port in the neighbourhood. There Mr. Kirby followed, but had the vexation to learn he set sail that morning for Holland. Disappointed, yet certainly convinced in his own mind, he returned to his friend Pearson, with whom he left directions for a stone to be placed over the grave, signifying, that there were deposited the remains of Frederick Bouchier.

Returned to St. Mary's Oak, he summoned from the hall Mr. Hammond, to whom he related the issue of his enquiries. Both now felt a conviction of the fate of their unhappy friend; but the knowledge they had gained of his sad catastrophe, they resolved to conceal, at present, from Eliza, as no certain proof had been obtained it was the body of Mr. Bouchier that had been found.

In about a week after Mr. Kirby's return, Mr. Hammond quitted Oakdale, for his rectory, from which he thought he had already too long absented himself.

Sadly wore away the hours of Eliza's life. Mr. Bouchier had bade her pursue studies; alas! he who should have directed them was no longer by her.—The charm, which had animated, which had roused her exertions, that had astonished her beloved preceptor, had fled; the library, which had been selected with so much taste, and which was so admirably calculated for amusement in her search after knowledge, appeared now the monument of departed happiness.—Yet, she visited it at the hours she had been

accustomed, but not to beguile, by light reading, her sad minutes; not to follow in the track of acquiring knowledge, pointed out, and most pleasingly pursued, with Mr. Bouchier.—No! here the forlorn Eliza wearied heaven with prayers for his safety—here she used to imagine herself in his presence.—Ah! he would upbraid her for this weakness.—Then would she take up some volume of instruction, but she saw not the lessons it contained; her mind still fixed, deeply fixed on her husband, whose reasons for deserting her she was ignorant of—ah! why did he thus cruelly abandon her to sorrow.—Then again, the idea of his insanity presenting itself, made her feel still more anxious for his safety.

The grief of Eliza was not, after the first surprise was over, to appearance a violent one; but it was a deep rooted and never to be eradicated sorrow she felt, which in her gentle soul, unwilling to give pain to those around her was carefully concealed.—At Oakdale none visited but the good surgeon of St. Mary's, from whose sympathy Eliza alone felt comfort.

Spring, with its early snows, and late blossoms, had yielded to summer, when it was visible Mrs. Bouchier would shortly be a mother to a hapless infant, who must look up to her as its sole parent. To the hope of beholding this pledge of her late happy state, Eliza strove to calm those transports of grief which, when alone, she often indulged in. The love she had born Mr. Bouchier was such as he, aided by circumstances, was well calculated to inspire in a heart tender and amiable. Eliza was very young, she was romantic in her ideas of perfection; and, except in her husband, she had not beheld perfection. Elegant and graceful in his manners, with a face and countenance peculiarly interesting, he possessed a liberality of sentiment at once judicious and refined. At a moment when all earthly comfort was torn from her, when destitute of relatives, of home, of fortune, this accomplished, this fascinating being appeared; he snatched her from misery, he gave her his name, he became her instructor, her friend, and then her lover,—could it be wondered Eliza worshipped him as a creature raised above mortality. Strangely he appeared to her relief; heaven itself seemed to have interposed in her behalf; yet ere time, or perhaps her riper judgement, had dispelled the illusive ideas she entertained of this all-graceful deliverer, this fond, this attentive husband, he was suddenly, strangely, mysteriously withdrawn.

"Mr. Kirby, (said she, one day) I am persuaded, if Mr. Bouchier lives, he is somewhere concealed about this house."

"The idea is a strange one, (said Mr. Kirby) what caused its existence in your brain? Why, or for what end, (suppose there was a possibility of concealment, which I cannot suppose possible) why should Mr. Bouchier conceal himself?"

"Might not Mr. Bouchier wish to try my prudence; (she replied) he has left me a large sum of money in my possession, might he not also wish to prove my attachment. You, sir, who know his peculiar delicacy of mind, his eccentricity of character, do you not think he might be dissatisfied with me, whom he raised from a rank of life so much beneath his own, might he not judge me interested? The door of Sir Philip's room, from which he so oddly disappeared, was locked you remember, in the inside; can you account how he could escape? Martha talks oddly about that room; sometimes I think she believes

all the foolish stories which have been handed down, through every generation, since the death of the good knight in that chamber; and again, I am tempted to believe she knows where Mr. Bouchier is, and that she was the means of concealing him in that room from our search."

Such an idea as this finding existence in the head of Mrs. Bouchier, made her friend tremble, lest, like her unfortunate husband her senses were threatening to desert her. He therefore judged it necessary to call her attention from such vague ideas, to the true state of affairs, and made a declaration to her of all he knew regarding Mr. Bouchier, save that he, with his accustomed humanity, attributed that to accident, which, doubtless, was design; thus saving her from the pain of supposing her husband was a self-murderer.

At first she appeared, as she mourned the sad fate of her beloved Mr. Bouchier, to believe with Mr. Kirby the mournful tale. Yet again, as she thought of it, she doubted, for no road led through the wood; why then should he direct his steps thither? and that he had some certain destination both Mr. Kirby's letter and hers seemed to intimate. If this was his fate, all hope was destroyed; and to relinquish this fond, this delusive hope, she could not bear, which the simple Martha assisted in cherishing.

"She could, did she dare, tell such tales about the hall; stranger things had happened in it in her time, and before her time, than that Mr. Bouchier should vanish. She doubted not but he would, after this, be found; aye, nobody knew such things as she could tell of.—And as for Sir Philip's room, all St. Mary Oak, nay all the bishopric, knew what had been seen there, though nobody could tell why, except herself, those strange fights were seen."

Influenced by such-like insinuations, Mrs. Bouchier made a close inspection of the hall from the garrats to the cellars; not a closet was left uninspected, yet, as well might be supposed, no discovery was made. Yet Martha would not give up her belief, that yet Mr. Bouchier was alive, and witnessed every action of his wife.

CHAPTER VI.

IN the month of June Mrs. Bouchier became mother to a beautiful little girl, whom she named Alicia, from that name having been borne by some one very dear to its unhappy father. As Eliza pressed the helpless infant to her heart, she fondly imagined it wore the features of a parent who might never behold it.

When Mr. Kirby found Mrs. Bouchier able to quit her chamber, and that she was restored to much her usual strength, he informed her, that since the birth of her infant he had visited the bank of Newcastle, where no account had come from Mr. Bouchier, or any person, respecting the sum which was to be placed there for her use.—That she ought to reflect it was her duty to submit to the inflictions of her fate, and to endeavour to preserve her health for the sake of her child; that no doubt could now remain of the sad catastrophe, for had Mr. Bouchier lived, he would have provided for her, as he intended; it was therefore, he judged, wrong to encourage hopes of his return, which would only plunge her into difficulties. That Mr. Bouchier's property was large, said he, I do not in the least dispute; yet, hitherto all attempts made for discovering who he was, or finding out his connexions, have proved so vain, that I can no longer doubt the name of Bouchier was fictitious, and merely assumed, to screen from his friends the retreat he for a time chose. Mr. Kirby now advised that all supernumerary servants should be dismissed that her horses and carriage should be disposed of, and that she should remove into a smaller house; the money which then would remain might, by a strict oeconomy, bring up her child.

No longer Mrs. Bouchier dared to say that yet she flattered herself Mr. Bouchier yet lived, and acquiesced in the proposed reduction; except, that whilst Sir Robert Bertram would allow her to remain, and if the lease held good, he must be obliged to do so, she would never quit Oakdale.

A sale was made of all that was deemed superfluous, and all the servants, except old Martha and her daughter, were dismissed. The garden was let to the person who had it previous to Mr. Bouchier taking the hall. Eliza reserving only the court before the house, and the high-raised terrace walk, which, by a door in the wall, communicated with the front court.—This walk had been a favorite one with Mr. Bouchier; here, oft had Eliza been seated by his side, under the shade of the venerable walnut trees, which grew at each end of the terrace, in the midst of which their branches nearly met; round the boles of those trees she now was twining two woodbines, which the preceding year had been transplanted, by her beloved Mr. Bouchier, from a hedge where she had pointed them out to him.

"Cultivation would improve them, (said she) I am sure those wild flowers would glow with finer colours than those which are now mixing with the jessamine round the drawing room windows."

"We will try, Eliza," said Mr. B.

The woodbines were transplanted, to behold what effect culture would produce, and were endeared to the gentle Mrs. Bouchier by a long train of sweet remembrance. To have been prevented from visiting them, or to think any ruder hand should teach the tender shoots to clasp the tree that was to support them, would have pained her in a way any person who had lived a less secluded life can scarce form an idea of; but this was not the only privilege Eliza had reserved; she had also the liberty of walking through the garden into the wood, which lay between it and the river. This wood had been originally laid out in well disposed walks, which yet bore some remains of the flowering shrubs and plants that had bordered them, but since the death of the last of the family of Bertram, who had resided in Oakdale hall, those walks had been totally neglected; the dock and the hemlock covered the grounds with their spreading leaves, and filled the air with rank effluvia; the bramble and the wild briar stretched their tangling branches across the paths, and choaked the flowers that once graced their sides, save here and there, where each returning spring called into life a few lilies or hyacinths, whose tints were equalled by those which reared their heads by them, planted by the hand of nature, and unassisted by cultivation. Scarce a tree was seen in this little wood, whose topmost branches did not shew the nest where, secure from depredation, some mother had watched with patient care the sooty brood, which had been rocked with every passing blast of early spring.

Mr. Bouchier had obtained leave to restore those walks, and to repair the wall that inclosed them, but he was gone ere the returning season put it in his power.

The wildness, the gloom of these sequestered walks, the height, the apparent age of the moss grown and ivy bound trees, the cawing of the rooks, the sound of the water as it flowed over its rocky bed, all conspired to give a pensive melancholy to those, who frequented them; and to Eliza, the ideas they inspired were in unison with her own soul; here, with her infant in her arms, would she wander through each devious path, rendered still more pensive by the falling of the leaves, nor till the walks were so wet as to alarm Mr. Kirby for her health, did she desist from those wanderings which became a kind of instinctive habit.

Ere the returning spring, with mild breezes, had awakened the feathered songsters to hail its return, or had called into life the pale pimpernel or snow-drop to peep from amongst the ruins of the preceding autumn, Eliza had the misfortune to lose her pious and good friend Mr. Hammond. This gave a fresh shock to her spirits, and she again abandoned herself to the melancholy seclusion she had practised between the death of Mr. Bouchier and the birth of her little Alicia, oft passing the night in the apartment from whence Mr. B. had disappeared. The health of Eliza declined, and she wore the appearance of a person sinking by degrees into an early grave.

Mr. Kirby was alarmed, and questioning Martha, learned how Mrs. Bouchier spent nights after nights in Sir Philip's chambers. Mr. Kirby intreated, for her own sake, for that of her child, she would desist from a practice so detrimental to her health, and which served but to strengthen a sorrow which he now feared would prove fatal, and which till now he was not aware existed in the degree he found it did; for, calm and gentle in her

temper, she had never, except at the first, given way to any violent expression of that agony which was silently consuming her.

Unwilling to distress her friend by refusing, she gave up to him the key of the dismal chamber, but in doing this, she did not debar herself from what was an indulgence, as it nurtured her sorrow, for a key had been found by her which opened the door of the apartment called Sir Philip's; and thus did she continue to spend a large portion of time in the gloomy chamber, the report of whose terrors dismayed almost every individual in the parish of St. Mary Oak, few of whom there were who either had not themselves witnessed strange sights in this chamber, or were not acquainted with some one who had. Tradition corroborated living evidence, and all agreed Sir Philip's chamber was occupied by a being who was visible or invisible as it pleased. These reports, which since the time Mrs. Mildred Bertram lived in the hall had been little spoke of, as this room, since her niece, Mrs. Menell's death, had been locked up till Mr. Bouchier took the house, and his having disappeared from this room had strengthened every report concerning it; but so various and so wide of the truth were these reports, and surmises, that I would not at present trespass on my reader's patience by relating them, and shall leave them to their own conjectures concerning the connexion which the being who was said to inhabit this dismal chamber had with Mr. Bouchier, or that which was afterwards said to subsist in that spot between his departed spirit and his earthly spouse. Let every one, therefore, believe what they chuse; the simple villagers of St. Mary Oak were possessed of abundance of faith; and I have already shewn some of them were not deficient in others of the cardinal virtues, which, perhaps, afford a better example than the faith which strains at a gnat, yet will swallow a camel.

Whilst Eliza indulged a melancholy that consumed her health and strength, and which threatened to absorb by degrees every faculty of that mind, which under the instruction of Mr. Bouchier promised so much, the little Alicia, who partook not of her mother's grief, could almost walk alone; and had, from her first attempts at speech, in imitating the cawing of the rook, now learned to lisp out the name of mother, who surveyed her infant charms with a sad kind of mingled feeling. It was painful, yet pleasing to caress her, and a smile oft faintly played over the cheek that was wet with tears; the melancholy hours she spent in seclusion never encroached on the duties of the mother, for Eliza was the sole nurse, the sole attendant of her child.

In the autumn, after Alicia was a twelve-month old, the worthy Martha died; and her daughter, no longer held to Oakdale by this tie, resolved to quit a mistress who had been so uniformly kind, that to her she could not signify her intentions, but took an opportunity one day, when Mrs. B. was with Alicia in the wood, to acquaint Mr. Kirby.

"I'se boon away, sir, from our mistress, now mother's dead."

"Going away, Patty; what, my bonny lass, hast thou got a sweetheart? What, thou art going to be married?"

Patty wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron.—"Sweetheart! Lord guide us, Doctor! if I stay at the hall I'll be wedded to my grave.—I'se sure I wad not leave my mistress, if I could help it; but here I will not stay if she would give me twenty pound.

Martlemas hiring is just at hand, and she may get a sarvant that knows nothing about the hall, or what is seen in it. Why I am sure mather told me Madam Milched could never get any body belonged to the neighbourhood to live with her; all folks here-about know well enough what sort of a place Oakdale is."

Mr. Kirby, concerned that this faithful and affectionate creature should quit Eliza, followed her into the house, to learn if she had any reason to offer, except fears, which he thought as ridiculous as ill-founded, for he was not one of the people who, at St. Mary's, were renowned for faith; or, if you please readers, superstitious credulity.

Again poor patty had recourse to her apron; and, after having prefaced her speech, "to be shure and sartain if it was so, he was like, who was a doctor, and the like of that, to know far betterer than she, but she verily believed mistress was not quite right, no more than her poor master; and she was afraid it might be confectionous."

The gravity of Mr. Kirby's countenance was almost overthrown by this remark.—He, however, resuming it, assured her she had no cause to be alarmed on this score, but begged to know what had caused her to entertain such an opinion concerning Mrs. Bouchier.

The proofs she adduced were such as confirmed Mr. Kirby in the idea of the necessity of Mrs. B's quitting a situation where every thing conduced to nourish sorrows to which he feared her constitution was fast falling a prey; nor was he without doubts that her reason might desert her, if she continued to give herself up with a romantic enthusiasm to the indulgence of her grief; and learned, with deep concern, that still she oft passed the night without being in bed.

But it was not alone the fear of being infected by the malady of Mr. and Mrs. Bouchier that made Patty quit the hall; for she recounted a number of stories regarding strange appearances seen about it, to which Mr. Kirby lent an incredulous ear, but endeavoured, with his usual philanthropy, to reason away her fears, by saying how the people might have been deceived.

"Nay, nay, doctor, why you may as well persuade me I have never seen any thing since I lived in the hall; no, not in Sir Philip's chamber.—But I only wish you had seen, doctor, what I have seen there; or that you had but heard the groans and lamentations I have in that room; aye, marry doctor, but you would be like me then, glad to get away from Oakdale."

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Kirby left Patty, but saw it was in vain to combat such deep rooted prejudices, and sought Mrs. Bouchier, whom he found walking on the terrace; to her he proposed a removal from Oakdale, but after various efforts he was obliged to give up the idea, as Eliza declared she was unalterably determined to end her life in the hall.

Patty was, however, retained in her mistresses service, by the intervention of Mr. Kirby, who persuaded her a ghost never appeared to two people at once; and Frank the gardener, who for some time had been courting her, becoming her husband, they both remained under Mrs. Bouchier's roof, with an additional servant. Those affairs settled, tranquillity was restored, and the hours of Eliza still continued to be marked by a grief which knew no abatement; meanwhile the little Alicia improved in growth and beauty: she was the darling of Mr. Kirby, who lamented deeply she must be deprived of those advantages to which her father's fortune would have entitled her. Shortly, he feared, she would be left without a parent, and, except himself, without one friend in the world.

Mr. Kirby, with all that sanguineness of temper which marked his character, had sold his little patrimonial inheritance, to embark it in a scheme of colonizing land in North America. The splendid advantages proposed dazzled his imagination so far, as to make him represent it to Mrs. Bouchier in a way, which made her suppose she should be highly to blame if she should neglect such an opportunity of increasing the small property upon which Alicia must depend; she ventured it with her friend's.

A period of three years elapsed, when the scheme failed, and many opulent people were reduced by it to mean circumstances. Mrs. Bouchier had but about 300*l.* left, and poor Kirby lost all, for he had embarked his all in this unlucky adventure. Deeply did Mr. Kirby feel for Mrs. Bouchier, severely did he, on her account, reproach himself; and it was some days after he learned the ill success of his favourite scheme, ere he could summon resolution to go to Oakdale, or inform Eliza of her loss.

"Alas! (said she) my worthy friend, was it not for my child, this misfortune would be to me a matter totally indifferent; a heavier, a deeper grief sits on my soul, and drags me, an early victim, to the tomb. But for Alicia's sake I have no wish for life; God grant she may suffer less than I have done."

Mr. Kirby endeavoured to reason with Mrs. Bouchier on the impropriety of giving way to sorrow; that, at least for her child, she ought to command herself, and assured her he saw no dangerous symptoms at present she had; and hoped, would she but rouse herself, she might be spared to the sweet Alicia many years.

"No, Mr. Kirby, my days are numbered, my strength gradually wastes.—Alass! as yet you are ignorant of all I feel; you know not the extent of my woes! a secret sorrow, a sad, a misterious misery consumes me! I want fortitude to inform you, yet, ere I die, it is necessary you should know; but I will defer it for a time."

The solemn, the deep tones of the melting voice of Eliza affected Mr. Kirby greatly; in vain he endeavoured, both then and for some time after, to understand what was the mysterious misery to which she alluded, as he supposed he was in possession of every material circumstance of her life.

The first opportunity after this conversation, Mr. Kirby again gently hinted at the apparent necessity there now was for Mrs. Bouchier to quit the hall, for some less expensive place of residence, and slightly mentioned his house at St. Mary Oak, as large enough for two such families as his and Mrs. B.

"You think me obstinate; at present I must appear so; but hereafter I trust, in some measure, I shall be justified in your opinion for declaring I will never quit Oakdale."

This Mr. Kirby made, what he resolved should be, a last attempt to persuade Eliza to a removal she seemed so bent against.

It was not long after this that the faithful and attached Patty and her husband quitted the hall, for the province of New York, in America, where Frank had a relation settled in the farming business, who offered him any assistance that he required, if he would cross the Atlantic. Against such an offer neither Mr. Kirby nor Eliza had any thing to propose that could balance against the probable advantages; and to the mutual sorrow of all concerned, the honest couple set out from Oakdale early in spring.

An entire year passed away, unmarked by any single occurrence to vary the uniformity of Eliza's life; except, indeed, that the little Alicia, now almost six years old, began, under her mother's instructions, to read, and also to sew; but the period seemed rapidly to approach that was to leave her without her beloved instructress. Eliza was seized with successive faintings, which alarmed Mr. Kirby extremely; yet, from these fits, she recovered, and fell into a quiet sleep that lasted several hours, and which at midnight she awoke from, and with the assistance of the servant who was in her room arose, and wrapping herself in a loose gown, ordered Susan to call Mr. Kirby, who was in the next apartment, and to wake Alicia and bring her there.

"Why have you quitted your bed?" said the good surgeon, as he entered the chamber.

"I feel much better at present, and it may happen I shall continue on earth some time longer; yet I think it more probable the sun may never again be beheld by me; therefore is it necessary the secret should be revealed to you, which, till the near prospect of my decease made necessary, I could not summon resolution to do.—Oh! may the step I am about to take, answer the end I propose; may my child possess more fortitude of soul than her sad mother! may she not sink, as she had done, under accumulated horror!"

Alicia was brought, she clasped her arms around her mothers neck, and burst into tears.—Eliza was affected by this proof of sensibility:—"Oh! my child, my beloved, abandoned Alicia, thou must be taught to curb those tender, those dangerous

susceptibilities; thou must, my daughter, become as hard as the unfeeling world thou hast to encounter."

Alicia, though she listened, could not comprehend the import of her mother's speech, but the tones of her voice spoke a language she understood; and looking wistfully in her face, "begged she would be well; that she would stay at Oakdale, and not go to her father, and she would make haste and learn to read all the books in the library."

Eliza kissing her engaging child, arose, and leaned upon Mr. Kirby.
"Come, (said she) it must be done, would to heaven it was over."

The agitation of Eliza startled Mr. Kirby. "What is it you are about to do; why my dear Mrs. Bouchier this solemnity of manner, this agitated look?"

"Ask me not why; soon will you partake of my manner, nor will you behold what I am now about to disclose without agitation. Come, you must support me along the gallery."

"But Alicia, (said Mr. Kirby) she goes also."

"That bell has a solemn sound, (said Eliza, deeply sighing) it is one o'clock."

"We hear it from St. Mary Oak, the wind must be North-east."

They had by this time reached the door of Sir Philip's chamber, the key of which Mrs. Bouchier held.

"You see, Mr. Kirby, I found another way to enter here."

Kirby shook his head, with a mournful expression of countenance, as he turned the key.

They crossed the room; Alicia clung, terrified, to Mr. Kirby, as deep groans were heard to issue from beneath their feet.—Yet soon she recovered herself, and made to her mother the solemn promise she then required of her, but of what nature that promise was, or for what cause Mrs. Bouchier requested her amiable child to make it, I must beg my readers will defer inquiring, as at present I shall only inform them, that young as Alicia was, so deeply, so indelibly was the scene her mother judged it proper to disclose to her imprinted on her mind, that the promise she then made was never violated; sacred did she keep the solemn injunction; oft in the full height of childish sportiveness would rush on her recollection the awful scene she then witnessed. In about half an hour from her entering Sir Philip's chamber, was Alicia led along the gallery, by Mr. Kirby, and committed to Susan's care; but he returned to Mrs. Bouchier. The door of Sir Philip's room secured, she proceeded to inform him further regarding such matters as Alicia was as yet unable to comprehend: yet not to her friend were they disclosed, till she had laid him under an unconditional oath, taken with much solemnity, and with many awful accompaniments.

It was day-dawn, ere Eliza, faint and exhausted, returned to her chamber; yet her mind was more at ease than it long had been, but the anxiety she had sustained now seemed, like as the cloak of Elijah, which fell with his spirit of prophecy on Elisha, to settle on

Mr. Kirby, whose pallid and agitated features bore evident signs of astonishment, if not terror. But it was generally believed at St. Mary Oak, that Mrs. Bouchier had that night conjured up the spirit of her husband, to shew him to the doctor, with whom it was supposed she held in Sir Philip's chamber, frequent conferences.—From Mr. Kirby none could say they learned what passed, yet all the village agreed he was never like himself after that night, of course something extraordinary had happened.

After the violent exertion Eliza had made, Mr. Kirby concluded she would be visibly worse; but this did not appear to be the case; for, contrary to his expectations, she regained her strength, so as in a few weeks time to walk out, and resume the same melancholy course of life she had before led; except she passed not so large a portion of her time in the place from whence Mr. Bouchier disappeared; and now she appeared to regret quitting a world where her daughter would be exposed to numberless dangers, involved in various difficulties, without one friend to advise or protect, save Mr. Kirby, who in many ways was ill adopted for the charge which he proposed taking upon himself.

Eliza, though during the summer appearing to regain her health in some degree; yet, as the year began to decline, alarmed the attentive care of Mr. Kirby, by a violent cough, which deprived her of her strength: yet, still she appeared beautiful; her eyes seemed to have acquired fresh lustre, and her countenance, which never could fail of interesting, was generally suffused with a hectic glow, that rivalled the rosy blush of health, which, till the loss of Mr. Bouchier, overspread her cheeks.

Eliza was seated, unheeding of the damp so necessary she should avoid, under the shade of one of the spreading walnut trees on the terrace, in a fine evening the last week of September; the sun had sunk behind the highest western hill, upon the summit of which, still a trembling radiance remained.

Eliza had been reading, and the book lay by her; but her eyes were fixed upon the moon, which appeared as if rising out of a woody hill, that shut in the eastern side of Oakdale valley. Alicia was employed in running up and down the grassy slope of the high raised terrace, and playing with a dog which had been her father's; she heard a carriage, and sprung to the wall to see it pass.—A high phaeton appeared, in which was seated a lady, and a gentleman, who held the reins; and a black servant followed on horseback. Rinaldo, who had followed his mistress, and was standing on the wall, began to bark at the negroe, and leaped from the wall, over the horses necks, into the road. Alarmed by the uncivil salutation, the horses plunged violently, and the lady and gentleman were thrown over the wall, close by the terrified Mrs. Bouchier.

The gentleman seemed at first stunned by the fall, but quickly rose to assist his companion, who lay, as if dead, on the ground. The screams of Alicia alarmed the gardener, who came to enquire what had caused them; he, mounting the black servant's horse, galloped to St. Mary Oak. Mr. Kirby returning with him, opened a vein in the arm of the lady, who began to revive.—She had, ere the arrival of Mr. Kirby, been conveyed into the hall, and laid upon a sofa. It was now found her leg was dangerously fractured; to remove her from Oakdale was a cruelty, and far unlike every action of Mrs. Bouchier's

life, who instantly allotted the most commodious apartment for her reception; thither was she carried by Mr. Kirby, and her servant, and the fractured bones were reduced. As yet, no attention had been paid to the gentleman, who now complained of his bruises, and that he believed his collar bone was broke; this was found to be the case, but it was soon adjusted, and the worthy surgeon assured his patient a short time would re-unite the fracture.

Mrs. Bouchier, though her friend Kirby had forbade, now passed the largest portion of her time in Mrs. Dalrymple's chamber. That lovely and amiable woman had then been married but a few weeks to Mr. D. who was a planter of the Island of Jamaica, but came over to England on affairs of importance. From London, where those affairs had called, he went into Scotland, and at Edinburgh met with Miss Campbell; struck by her beauty, he quickly made proposals to Miss Campbell, who referred him to her father. Into Ayrshire went Mr. Dalrymple, as fast as four horses could go, where, from Mr. Campbell, who knew sufficient of the connexions and property of his daughter's lover, to warrant the prudence of the step, he obtained a full consent. The West Indian asked not for fortune, and the Laird of Glenmorden offered none; for gladly would he have transmitted the family estate unincumbered to his eldest son, a wish he scarce hoped it possible to accomplish, as there were three sons besides the heir, and the same number of daughters, of whom this young lady was the eldest. Mr. Campbell, therefore, happy in such a match, ordered the horses to the carriage, and with his eldest son, and Miss Jesse, his second daughter, accompanied Mr. Dalrymple to Edinburgh.

The marriage took place immediately as the settlements were finished, which were as liberal as if Miss Campbell had brought him a large fortune. After a few weeks spent in visiting friends and relations, in various parts of Scotland, the new married couple set out for London, and had quitted the great road to visit an old schoolfellow of Mr. Dalrymple's, at no great distance from Oakdale; but when they reached the house, it had changed its owner, Mr. Hartley having dissipated his fortune so far, that in order to redeem it he had sold his house, and a part of his estate, and purchasing a commission, had gone to join his regiment abroad. From Mr. Hartley's late abode they were driving with all speed, in order to regain the London road, at sixteen miles distance, when Rinaldo, surprised by the unusual appearance of Mr. Dalrymple's servant, was the cause of the before related accident.

In a fortnight's time Mr. Dalrymple was able to travel, and Mr. Kirby, pronouncing Mrs. Dalrymple out of danger, it was agreed she was to remain at Oakdale, being yet unable to quit her bed, much less undertake such a journey, as Mr. Dalrymple was obliged to be in London before, the sailing of the Jamaica fleet.

Alicia had made, ere Mr. Dalrymple quitted Oakdale, a rapid progress in his affections; yet, still more, with his lady was she a favourite; and the idea of her soon being left an orphan still further endeared her to this amiable woman, who looked on Eliza as an angel descended from heaven, to which she was shortly to return. Scarcely could she avoid murmuring at the decrees of providence, which had ordained such severe

trials on earth for a creature who appeared to her not to partake of the failings, the foibles, to which the wisest and best are subjected.

Mrs. Dalrymple, in less time than her surgeon had hoped, was able to sit up, and soon after began to recover strength. Not so Eliza, who grew visibly weaker; the cough which had teized her so long was gone, and a respiration succeeded; and, after a week of much suffering, the gentle Mrs. Bouchier expired, without a sigh, as her hand was locked in Mrs. Dalrymple's; who no sooner had recovered the first shock, than, in the presence of Mr. Kirby, she kneeled down by the bedside, and solemnly vowed to act the part of a mother to the orphan Alicia.

"Heaven, (said Mr. Kirby, as he raised Mrs. Dalrymple) will reward your charitable intentions; but the child of Eliza must remain at Oakdale, no relation is there to contend the guardianship, and you, my dear Madam, must allow my prior claims."

No more was said on this subject till after the interment of Mrs. Bouchier, who was buried by the side of her grandfather, and a plain unornamented stone marked her grave, with this simple inscription:

Here lies the unfortunate

Eliza,

Sunk by sorrow

Into an untimely

Grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE following week Mr. Dalrymple joined his lady at the hall, and again was the care of Alicia entreated for by both; she should be educated as their own child—already was she loved as one.

"Your offer, (replied Mr. Kirby) is generous, it is worthy of you; and I fear I should be wanting in my duty to the beloved orphan was I to refuse those advantages it is not in my power to procure for her. Yet it will pain me to part with her, and there are other reasons which at present I cannot explain, why it is not proper she should quit Oakdale."

"Excuse me, sir, (said Mrs. Dalrymple) when I remind you of having already explained to us the situation of Mrs. Bouchier's affairs. The small sum which is left for the sweet Alicia is insufficient to procure for her the bare necessaries of life; your own means you lament as limited; why then, my good friend, incur yourself with a charge which will to me be so pleasing; why then deprive her of advantages of education which at Oakdale, nor St. Mary's, she cannot have; why not allow us to testify our gratitude to the departed angel, her mother?"

In silence the guardian of Alicia kissed Mrs. Dalrymple's hand, but the tear which fell from it spoke the contest in his heart, between affection and judgment.

"Have I prevailed, (said Mrs. Dalrymple, with one of her sweetest tones) will you yield, my dear sir, to my entreaties?"

"Excuse me, my good friends, that I act with a degree of mystery, and also inconsistency in this affair; but I am bound by an oath, a strict, and as I shall hold it an inviolable oath; otherwise I could, by disclosing my reactions, make it perhaps appear that no consideration whatever should be strong enough to weigh with me, for Alicia quitting the hall. Yet, alas, so strangely is this beloved child situated, that was I to disclose those things to which I allude, it might ruin her irreparably; but spend another night here, and in the morning will I declare my resolution."

The Dalrymples agreed to this proposal and spent another night at Oakdale, where, since Mrs. Bouchier's death, Mr. Kirby had taken up his habitation.

That night was spent by Mr. Kirby wakeful and watching, for when he bid Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple good night, he passed along the gallery, and entering Sir Philip's chamber, bolted the door, which remained so till almost the dawn of one of the shortest days. When he met at breakfast the little Alicia and her newly acquired friends, he, with a solemn air, gave her into their charge, and delegated to them that trust he had before received from a parent.

The guardians of Alicia resolved to spend that day at the hall; and at night Alicia was led weeping and trembling, by Mr. Kirby, into Sir Philip's room, where, after some stay, she was consigned to Susan's care for the night. This sensible and affectionate child was greatly agitated when she parted with Mr. Kirby, who stood with his eyes fixed on the

chaise that held his little darling, till it was totally out of sight; then mounting his horse rode to North Oak, where he took proper steps for making a sale at the hall of such articles as remained belonging to his late friend.

The sale was finished, and the produce, with what little money Mrs. Bouchier had, made a sum of about two hundred pounds, which, being remitted to Mr. Dalrymple, was by him placed in the funds, for the use of the little Alicia.

Mr. Dalrymple, who had meant, prior to his marriage, to return to Jamaica, gave up all thoughts of doing so, and resided chiefly in London, where proper instructors attended Miss Bouchier, in every branch of fashionable education, whose quick progress astonished her teachers. Alicia seemed as if born with a kind of intuitive knowledge; for ere an idea was well uttered, she caught it, and it became her own; already the uncommon discernment of her character began to unfold itself; for early accustomed to reflect, and in infancy participating in the sorrows of a beloved parent, her mind was strengthened; for Alicia was, like her mother, all gentleness; but when led by her into the gloomy chamber, the deep, the indelible impression, which her tender soul there received, steeled her mind, and gave her a degree of fortitude beyond what, in general, the sex possess. Enthusiastic in every feeling, the sensible heart of this amiable girl gave proofs of the gratitude and affection she felt for her kind protectress, which seemed further to endear her.

Thus passed away the first four years of Alicia's life, after her quitting her native roof, which in that time she had twice visited, as Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple went into Scotland to visit their relations there.

Mr. Kirby continued to think Alicia would be what her mother augured,—no common character; and that she would prove herself worthy of the confidence which, at so early a period of life, had been placed in her: it was, indeed, that confidence which urged her to act as she did; which made her, with all the sportiveness of childhood, act at times, when she was called upon by urgent circumstances, very unlike her age; and which gave to her thoughts a consistency very rare indeed.

"Your soul, (said Mrs. Bouchier to her daughter) is formed in no common mold; were you, my Alicia, like most children of your age, I would not dare expose to you a sight that might drive reason from her infant reign; I would not trust you with a secret of such infinite importance! But whatk I this night disclose to you, my Alicia, shall be the guardian of your future days; shall be the surety for your conduct, in every trying occurrence this night shall rise to your mind."

Still the voice, the soft mellow voice of her sainted mother, sounded in the ears of Alicia. In every trial of her future life did the solemn scene float before her eyes; and to be worthy of such a parent, Alicia proudly sought how best to sustain herself; how best to follow the maxims she had been taught; how to follow with unremitted patience and fortitude, the path pointed out in the solemn interview. Even at the childish period of which I now treat; yes, even then, such were the sentiments of the high-minded Alicia.

Mr. Kirby still lived at the hall; which still was, by the inhabitants of St. Mary Oak, deemed the resort of unquiet spirits; a report he no longer contradicted with that heat of argument he used formerly; and he, who was always an eccentric kind of character, was now supposed to be almost insane. For why did he quit St. Mary Oak? who, if they were ill at night, could procure a messenger bold enough to go to the hall? A kind of mystery seemed to hang over, and constrain his actions; in short his residence at the dismal place, (where it was known for generations back all had not been right, at least in Sir Philip's chamber, as many people then alive were able to make oath what they had seen and heard there) was supposed to have deprived the poor doctor of his senses, as it had both Mr. and Mrs. Bouchier; if the former indeed, as it was said by many, was not worse than mad. Yet, all deplored the fate of a man whose connexion with the Bouchier's had been his ruin; for at Oakdale he was in a manner lost to his friends, who all loved the cheerful society, esteemed the virtues, and had, till now, only laughed at the peculiarities of Mr. Kirby.

It was not long after Alicia's second visit to her good friend at Oakdale, that a gentleman, in a hired chaise, attended by a servant, not in livery, arrived at North Oak. The gentleman was wrapped in a large drivers coat: over a wig of a very peculiar form he wore a very broad brimmed hat, flapped before; at North Oak he dined, but laid not aside his coat or hat; nor there did any one see sufficient of his face, had they ever known him, to say whom he was, as at dinner his own servant attended; therefore it was only in passing from the chaise, and entering another, which was, by his servant's orders, drawn close to the door, that he could be observed. At the gates of Oakdale hall the carriage was ordered to stop, at the instant Mr. Kirby was coming thro them. He started, as the stranger lifted his hat, and exclaimed, "Good heavens is it possible, or do my eyes deceive me!"—Instantly both passed into the court, whilst the servant staid without discharging the post-boy, who had drove them from North Oak. This man had lived as footboy in the hall with Mr. Bouchier, and convinced, from the view he had of the person he brought from North Oak, that he was his late master, ventured to say so to the man, who was talking to him about who now lived at Oakdale.

"You had better, my honest lad, keep your thoughts to yourself, (said the very consequential person he was addressing) if it is Mr. Bouchier, you will soon learn."

"Ah! God bless his honour, he was the best master every poor lad served; we all thought he had been drowned, but now he is alive I think I will not long drive from the Duke's Head, would you but be kind enough, sir, to speak for me to his honor."

"Yes, yes, depend on me, his honour shall know," said the important attendant, as he also passed into the court gates; and, without any ceremony but a sort of malicious grin, slapped them in the poor fellow's face, who was yet standing, cap in hand, to his honor's gentlemen.

"I don't much like thee, however (said he) as he mounted his horses) I am sure master liked no such saucy proud fellow, but mayhap he is changed."

The news of Mr. Bouchier's return was not concealed; for, stopping at the Cross Keys in St. Mary's Oak, through which he had to pass, he divulged the news, with the addition

of Mr. Kirby having shook hands with his old friend, and welcomed him back. The bells were rung, or, more properly speaking, jingled at St. Mary's on this occasion, and various conjectures were hazarded, what had caused Mr. Bouchier to absent himself so long.

What passed at Oakdale during those demonstrations of joy, I am not at present inclined to relate; but in the dusk a chaise and four horses were observed to be waiting at the terrace wall, and the same carriage drove furiously through St. Mary's. In it, afterwards it was supposed, Mr. Kirby's guest had taken his departure, but it was mere supposition, for no creature could say they had seen any person in the chaise.

The following morning Mr. Kirby mounted his horse, which he sent back from Durham with a message, importing he should not be at home for a few days. A fortnight however passed away, ere he returned to make his appearance to the impatient of St. Mary's.

"What took you away in such a hurry, doctor," enquired Mrs. Ellerly.

"The Devil, madam," replied Kirby, with a low bow, and a grave sarcastic air.

"Lord forgive you, doctor, you talk wickeder than ever."

"Pray, sir, (said Mr. Jackson) is not, jesting aside, Mr. Bouchier returned to Oakdale, though you have long declared he was dead."

Mr. Kirby changed colour, as he hastily enquired of his friend what had caused such a report.

"Why ask that, doctor, (interrupted Mrs. Ellerly) you know you shook hands with him, and said you were glad to see him look so well, and welcomed him back to Oakdale."

Kirby held up his hands in amazement.

"Who should tell all this stuff," he cried, and then, with an oath of a size that made the good old lady hold up her hands also, declared it was a lie.

Mr. Jackson, however, explained what the report had arose from, by recounting what the post boy from North Oak had declared at the Cross Keys.

"Have you no other foundation, then, for this story? Tom is a lying rascal, I only said, was it possible, or did not my eyes deceive me, or some such thing."

"Well, if you did then, doctor, (said Mr. Jackson) make some speech of the kind, it surely corroborated what the servant said to Thomas, who said he was certain the person so oddly muffled up was Mr. Bouchier; and you know he lived at the hall all the time Mr. B. was in it; and I must say, Kirby, you have put yourself into a passion, when no offence was, or could be intended."

Some apologies Mr. Kirby found himself obliged to make; which done, he said "that he granted he was alarmed by so unexpected a sight, and entirely off his guard, but they might believe him it was not Mr. Bouchier, really alive."

"Mercy upon us, Doctor, what was it then, his ghost, in open day-light?" said Mrs. Ellerly.

Again the Doctor slew out, and again swore a pretty round oath, by which he assigned all refractory ghosts, and all believers in such, to eternal perdition, and concluded his

speech, saying, "have I not told you, years ago, I believed no such folly and nonsense; I think every body is going mad."

Mr. Jackson was grieved to hear his friend talk in a way which to him appeared wild, flighty, and incoherent; and would have change the subject, but Miss Ellerly, whose curiosity was equal to her mother's, was determined not to suffer the Doctor to get off so.

"Pray, sir, (said she, in an affected tone of voice) pray, if not the real, identical Mr. Bouchier, nor yet his spirit, what could it be, that followed you into the court."—Here she smiled at her own wit.

"Ay, what could it be?" gravely echoed her sage mama.

"Why, what could it?" retorted Mr. Kirby, with a look and manner that momentarily imposed a dead pause in the conversation.

The silence was, however, broke by Mr. Jackson:—"You hear ladies, it was not Mr. Bouchier, then of what importance is any further enquiry; the stranger was, I suppose, a friend of Mr. Kirby's, and most probable not known to us."

"No, by the Lord Harry, no friend of mine; and I would sooner meet all the ghosts that have haunted Oakdale since Sir Philip's time, than stand a chance of encountering such another devil."

"What then, (said Miss Ellerly, again venturing to speak) what, Doctor, was it is his infernal highness himself that honoured you with a visit."

"You have guessed it, you have got right at last; for, (lowering his voice) I believe, (said Kirby) it was the very devil himself."

The ladies changed colour; Mr. Jackson laughed at what he deemed a jest upon the very impertinent questions that had been asked; and an involuntary exclamation of terror was made by the female servant, who was bringing in tea. She, therefore, at her return into the kitchen, did not fail to enlarge upon a topic so capable of receiving a little embellishment at her hand.

The postillion, who had not thought before of either horns or hoofs, when he so positively asserted it was his quondam master, now declared there was something very particular about the strangers feet, as he stepped out of the chaise, but could not positively assert they were cloven; and he was certain of this, when he stopped at the turnpike gate to let out some passengers he had taken up on the road, there was a strong smell of brimstone. That night too, was a high wind; it unroofed a part of the church, and had thrown down the chimney belonging to Oakdale hall. The chaise that was seen waiting by the terrace wall, with its four horses and driver, were now said to be all black; nay, one of the old women of St. Mary's who had lived in the hall in Madam Mildred Bertram's time, and whose stories knew no end about the strange things she had seen there, was told by a pedlar, who had it from the man's wife's sister's son, who saw the very chaise in which, as it was black, there could be no mistake, just beyond Darlington a little way, leap across the hedge from the road; and that this very man's wife's sister's son told the pedlar, that this relation of his, who was going to his work, followed it till it disappeared in a flash of fire, just as it reached the deep pit called Hell-kettle.

Indeed so very various were the reports propagated, that, I am inclined to believe, some wags, taking advantage of the credulity of the simple villagers, amused themselves a considerable portion of the winter following this mysterious visit to Mr. Kirby, in inventing stories which, however marvellous, were swallowed. What, indeed, I suppose made those tales, extravagant as they were, gain credit, was, that some people of the most consideration at St. Oak questioned the servants of Mr. Kirby, who both declared they had seen no one enter the hall that day, or indeed, any one depart; but that they remarked that night, and the next morning, previous to his setting out upon his journey, their master appeared engrossed by some weighty affair.

From this period Mr. Kirby was shunned by the idle, vulgar minded, of which class most of the neighbourhood of Oakdale was composed; and the strange mysterious kind of answer he had given, regarding his visitor, made his best friends suppose him not quite sound, either in his heart or judgment, although they did not, like the former, suppose he had dealings with the Devil.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER IX.

ABOUT this period Mr. Dalrymple received such unfavourable accounts from Jamaica, as determined him to visit his possessions there. Mrs. Dalrymple resolved to accompany her husband; but it was agreed Alicia should be left at school, in the vicinity of London; and Edgecome house, in the neighbourhood of Clapham, was fixed upon. Mrs. Dalryple accompanied her there.

"Alicia, (said she, during their drive) particular reasons there are which renders concealment necessary for you; what those reasons are, you shall learn hereafter; it is therefore requisite you should change your name for that of Sleigh. Of your discretion I am convinced, but I think you yet too young to be entrusted with a secret of such importance; my friends and acquaintance are informed you are to be returned to your own family. One gentleman, a particular friend of Mr. Dalrymple, is instructed with you, but he knows you by the name of Sleigh, and no other; by that name will I write you, my sweet girl, under cover to this gentleman, and your letters to me must be sent under cover to him: by this plan also a correspondence may be kept up with Mr. Kirby, only addressing him as Mr. Kirby, by which name I will speak of him to Mr. Meyrell."

Alicia was lost in amazement, and for some time she scarce could comprehend what Mrs. Dalrymple said to her, on a topic to which it was requisite she should attend.—Arrived at the place of their destination, Mrs. Dalrymple introduced Alicia, as Miss Sleigh, to Mrs. Selden. Sadly did she feel when separated from her second mother, who was to set out the following day for Falmouth, where they were to embark in the packet. Forcibly did this separation recall the loss she had sustained in her beloved parent. Recovering, by the kind attentions of Mrs. Selden, from her sorrow, she applied herself to the various branches of education she was taught; yet, spite of her fortitude, her thoughts oft turning upon this change of name, and she wearied herself in conjectures concerning it. Oh! why could she not, when separated from her beloved Mrs. Dalrymple, impart to her what she had seen, ere her mother's death, at Oakdale.—Ah! why the solemn injunction, the awful restraint laid upon her.—Mrs. Dalrymple, not knowing her exact situation, might have made her change her name, perhaps needlessly. To Mr. Kirby she resolved to write, whenever she could find an opportunity of doing so, without her letter being inspected, to enquire of him concerning this arbitrarily imposed name: this did not, however, happen till the next vacation, at which time she committed the following epistle to the care of one of the young ladies, to put into the post-office.

ALICIA TO MR. KIRBY.

"Your last epistle gave me, my dear sir, sincere pleasure; it told me you were in health; ah! why did I ever quit you—by so doing others have acquired a right over me, which belongs alone to yourself.—Ah! why is Oakdale so far distant!—ah! that now your poor Alicia was by you; she who is now deserted by all, then would look up with security to him, who was, and is almost the only friend she has in the world. Alas! my second

mother, my beloved Mrs. Dalrymple, is not now by me, to aid, to counsel, to restrain, my childish impatience!—Yes, she is far, far distant! the wide ocean rolls between us!

"Oh! how oft do I fancy myself by you, in that wood where you, last time I visited the hall, shewed me the rock from whence it was imagined my father had fallen, and found a watery grave.—On that subject I would further, if permitted, question, and much, much would I say: but, alas! you may deem me disobedient; you may tell me I infringe upon the solemn injunction of my beloved mother. I dare not, at this distance, hazard those questions; yet, must I ask, why did Mrs. Dalrymple impose on me a name, which, till the day I came to Edgcombe-house, was a stranger to my ears? I have been accustomed to think, to reflect; nor is it vanity which urged me to say, my dear sir, your Alicia is not like other children of her age. If my mother judged me, at eight years of age, capable of bearing what then she judged proper to disclose, sure now I can bear to hear, at least, the cause of the change of my name."

This was nearly the sum of Alicia's epistle, which, by the means she pointed out, Mr. Kirby speedily answered.

"You tell me, (he said) Alicia you are not like other girls of your age, prove yourself so—prove yourself worthy of the confidence a dying parent reposed in you. You ought Alicia to be different from other girls; what child, at so early an age, had an object placed before them to which they were to attain; and though at eight years old you appeared endued with qualities which authorised your mother's judgment in disclosing to you what almost every child but yourself would have shrunk from, yet there must several years elapse, ere your reason will be matured sufficiently to bear what remains to be unfolded.

"Does not now, my Alicia, the solemn scene rise to your mind? recall you not the conversation which passed when you were last at Oakdale, in Sir Philip's chamber?—Remembering that, you will also remember all enquiries on the subject you allude to are alike improper for you to make, and for me to answer. Resume yourself then, my beloved child; be once again the same uncommon character you were known when almost an infant; when you were, Alicia, solemnly, by your mother, committed to the charge of him she styled her only earthly friend."

This epistle produced the effect Mr. Kirby proposed by it; and Alicia, who had fretted herself sick with impatience, felt at once roused to exertion, and pursued, as Miss Sleigh, her education with the same unremitting ardour she had as Alicia Bouchier.

Meanwhile, her friends had arrived at Jamaica, and Mr. Dalrymple had the mortification to find all was in a state much worse than he had reason to expect. The overseers, behaving carelessly, and in many instances cruelly, to the slaves on the estates, had caused desertion; and the fear of returning to be punished, as some were who fell into the hands of those Mr. Dalrymple had incautiously intrusted the power with, made many of the strongest and most valuable of his negroes take shelter in woods, amidst almost inaccessible mountains; those who were left, insufficient for the labour enjoined, mostly sickened. This was the situation of the late so flourishing estates of Mr. Dalrymple, at his arrival upon them; the wretches who had caused the ruin fled, whilst every day restored to their owner some slave, who now gladly returned to his master, as their late overseers

were gone.—Mr. Dalrymple, however, found it would be necessary he should stay sometime in the country, ere his property would be of the same value it was previous to his marriage. Mrs. Dalrymple failed not to write frequently to Alicia, and informed her it would be some time ere she should return to England.

Three years had Alicia spent at Edgecumbe house, where she staid through each vacation, unnoticed by any of Mrs. Dalrymple's friends, who all were alike ignorant where she was, when she was one day summoned to the parlour, where she found Mr. Meyrell, the gentleman to whose guardianship she was left by Mr. Dalrymple, seated with Mrs. Selden, by whom she was informed Mr. Meynell had solicited permission for his ward spending a few days with him.

Alicia's heart bounded at the thoughts of liberty, and quickly was she ready to attend her guardian, whose carriage stood ready at the gate to receive them.

Mr. Meynell had twice or thrice visited Edgecumbe house on Miss Sleigh's account, but these visits were short, and he was almost an entire stranger to her. He viewed her with attention, nor was Alicia disconcerted by it, for she thought not of it; her mind was at that time occupied by the idea she should spend a few days, free from the unchanging uniformity of school. She was recalled, by Mr. Meynell's informing her one of her best friends was at his house waiting to behold—

"Ah! (said Alicia) I have so few friends, it must be, it can be only Mr. Kirby!"

"It is Mr. Kirby who I find is going abroad, and wished to see you ere he goes."

Soon was Alicia embraced by the worthy friend of her infant days.

"He informed her a relation of his had died in America, and in consequence of this he succeeded to considerable property in that country, which obliged him to cross the Atlantic."

"Miserable child that I am, (exclaimed Alicia) thus are all my friends torn from me! thus am I left abandoned—desolate—alone, as it were, in the world!"

Mr. Kirby, though he attempted consoling his beloved Alicia, yet appeared equally to need consolation.—For her sake it was evident he took so long a voyage, encountered a journey replete with fatigue, if not danger.

"At my return Alicia, (said he) you will be independant; in two years, most probably, I shall again, my dear child, see you."

After spending the greatest share of three days with Alicia, to part with whom was a task he found himself so far unequal to, that he bade her adieu in a letter, which he gave into the hands of his kind host, Mr. Meynell, when he quitted him. In this was she counselled by her early friend to be patient, to be prudent.

"As yet, Alicia, (he said) you are not sufficiently aware how needful it is you should cultivate those virtues; for yet you know not how you may be beset by danger—how strangely you are circumstanced; neither must you, my child, suffer your mind to dwell

upon your misfortunes, nor allow the mysterious scene beheld by you at Oakdale too deeply to oppress your spirits; as such it was not meant.—No, Alicia, it must spur you on to exertion; it is the idea of it which must animate you to bear, with a fortitude worthy of you, what yet remains for you to learn.—I need not say be secret—I will not, I do not suppose it possible you can ever infringe on the silence enjoined; nor let any consideration prevent, at the appointed time, executing the injunction of your parent, which in due time will be fully disclosed."

Within this letter was inclosed another, also addressed to her, on the cover of which was wrote—"open not this, Alicia, till you are sixteen, if before that I am not returned."

"Alas! (exclaimed she) how, how at that period shall the poor Alicia sustain herself, and you absent?"

For some time was she deprived of that fortitude she felt convinced it was her duty to assume. Recovering herself, the amiable girl wiped the tears that dimmed her eyes, and sought Mr. Meynell.

"I am come, (said she) sir, to thank you for the indulgence so kindly bestowed on me by you. The period is come, when I must return to school, where I shall do all in my power to finish those improvements my friends Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple put in my power to attain; nor shall my regret at parting with this dear friend retard them."

"I see, my dear girl, your merit in suppressing your feelings; and though I cannot hope to rival Mr. Kirby in your regard, I shall endeavour to make up by my future attention, the loss you have sustained in him."

"Will you then, sir, allow the poor forsaken Alicia to look up to you as a friend, in England the only one she knows?—Allow her then thus, (and she fell at his feet) to transfer to you her duty, will you condescend to accept it?"

Mr. Meynell, raising, promised the gentle Alicia to consider, in future, as his child:—"Confide in me, (he said) as far as your situation admits. I know you are peculiarly circumstanced; I know there are some mysteries regarding you; but these I wish not to penetrate; nor would I listen to you on the subject of your birth or connexions, which were assiduously concealed by my friend Dalrymple, who barely informed me you were an orphan of the Island of Jamaica; nor from Mr. Kirby had I other information. Your letters to him were directed to be left at the York post-office, till called for; and the same mystery hangs over him as you."

"Ah! would to heaven, my dear sir, I could divulge to you such parts of my story as already I am acquainted with; but a sacred promise, made to my mother—renewed to Mr. Kirby, forbids this; forbids even to speak of the feelings which have, which do agitate me.

"Gladly, my dear Alicia, would I share your solitary woes; gladly, if in my power, relieve them; but I am not allowed this; you are doomed, I find, to a silence which forbids the assistance I might happily afford; where I can be of service, rest assured I want but to learn how. I am sorry I so long have neglected you; the uniformity of school has, I fear, contributed to depress your spirits; but hereafter consider this house a home, the ensuing vacations must be spent here."

With such assurances of future protection and friendship, did Mr. Meynell cheer the drooping orphan, till the chariot was at the door to convey her back to school, whither he was her escort.

Settled again at Mrs. Selden's, Alicia had leisure to reflect on her situation. She felt, indeed, deserted, left without a single person interested for her. This idea vanished, as her late conversation with Mr. Meynell presented itself; and she was thankful to that providence, who had raised up such a friend and protector, when she was so widely separated from the only people who loved her.—Her mother she recollected having said God would raise up fresh friends to her, in lieu of those he thought fit to remove; and she felt a pleasing consolation in the remembrance that hitherto her mother's words had been prophetic.

"Ah! (sighed she) that beloved parent bade me look forward with hope; so did Mr. Kirby; they bade me sustain myself with fortitude.—Alas! I fear I have been very disobedient, but I will rouse those faculties implanted in me; it behoves me to exert myself more than other girls!"

Many and various were the conjectures formed by Alicia regarding the mystery which pervaded all that concerned her; yet, various as they were, none ascertained the truth. Her temper, naturally frank and open, spurned at the idea of concealment; and her soul, the seat of every virtue, was shocked at an idea, which oft intruded, that some terrible crime was the cause of her present change of name, and the secrecy observed, regarding her.—Treason and murder stalked in horrid forms through her brain; of these her mother,—yes—her beloved mother—was—must be innocent.—But her father—that way lay suspicion—strengthened, if not originating, with what she had seen in Oakdale hall.

It was some days before Alicia, who, tho' yet a child in years, possessed more fortitude and nobleness of mind than most women; or, indeed, of men either, could recall her ideas to the methodical arrangement of instruction which she went through at that period with much the same benefit any automaton would have received.—But from this wandering of ideas, and absence to all around her, was she recalled by the contempt, the insult, to which she found herself exposed from some of her schoolfellows. If they walked, all avoided being her companion; and in the hours allotted for relaxation she appeared an intruder, of whose presence they were weary; forming into groups, she could distinguish the titter of malice, and in the half whisper was her name, with sarcastic tones, repeated.

Distressed, and conscious it was undeserved, although unacquainted what had wrought such a change in the behaviour of her companions, Alicia recalled all the lessons of patience, of fortitude she had been taught, and resolved not to mention to Mrs. Selden, or the governesses, the indignities at which her high and upright spirit revolted. Her quick and lively imagination displayed itself in so many various shapes in those hours allotted for play, that in despite of the insinuations and misrepresentations of some of the elder girls, Alicia's superiority was too striking to be overlooked; and ere she was aware of its forming, she found herself at the head of a party composed chiefly of the youngest and

second classes of girls; who, though taught to laugh at, and ridicule Alicia, had not been intrusted with the grand secret, which was kept amongst the chief of her enemies, as carefully guarded, and with as many signs and symbols attached as that of masonry itself.

"I know, (would some of Alicia's little friends say) Oh! I know the tall ladies dislike Miss Sleigh, because she is so handsome. Yes, (would another say) and because they envy her the praise of Mrs. Selden, and all the teachers and masters:—what lady in the school learns every thing so quick as Miss Sleigh? Because those sad ill-natured misses find their tasks a trouble, they dislike her, who finds them none; and I am sure she often assists those who treat her the worst."

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER X.

THUS stood affairs at the commencement of the first holidays after Mr. Kirby left England; and Alicia sometimes feared Mr. Meynel might forget the promise he had made of bringing her to his house at the holidays.

Alicia had heard some of her enemies, as they talked of the approaching joyful season, say Miss Sleigh would be left to keep the beds aired against they returned to school. Many of her little friends had begged she would accompany them home, "it was so very, very hard she should always be left at school; her friends, were very cross, they thought; but my papa and my mama, if I only say to them how I love you, will beg of Mrs. Selden, and you shall go with me. "

All invitations, had they even been given by the parents of her young admirers, Alicia must have refused; therefore assured them she was extremely happy at school, which she could not quit without permission from her guardian.

The second carriage which drove up to Mrs. Selden's door, the day the school gave up, was an elegant coach with four bays, the servants belonging to which were in splendid liveries.

"Ah! who does that beautiful equipage come for!" said one of the misses.

"For Miss Sleigh, most probably," replied, with a sarcastic and pointed emphasis, Miss Aislabie, who was at the head of the combination against the peace of Alicia, who remained at the window with a countenance perfectly unmoved by the reply of Miss Aislabie, or the malicious titter which ran through her confederates.

Mr. Meynell Alicia saw alight from the coach so much admired, and hand out an elegant looking woman about forty, and a lovely girl that appeared near her own age; yet did she check the triumph she felt at finding Mr. Meynell had not forgot her, as he bowed in passing from the carriage.

"Who is it? (cried some of the misses) Oh! what a charming woman! (said another) What a beautiful girl!" (said a third). Yet Alicia spoke not, though another remarked, "the gentleman had bowed to some one at the window."

"Oh! doubtless to Miss Sleigh! I cannot imagine any young lady in the school but she will have such a carriage sent for them."

The next vehicle that drove to the gate was, oh! shocking to relate, that it should ever have disgraced so polite a seminary by so doing, was a hackney coach. It was therefore concluded, that no inhabitant of that house could it be sent for, unless one of the half-boarders. One of the governesses entered; all but Alicia crowded around her to enquire if she knew who that elegant equipage belonged to, or which of them it had come to take home.

"For none of you ladies, (she replied) but the coach which now stands at the gate, waits Miss Aislabie for you; as your aunt is out of town, she left orders with her housekeeper to come for you, lest you might wonder at the delay. Miss Sleigh, (Alicia advanced) come my dear, the carriage you have been admiring is come for you; Mr. Meynell, with Lady and Miss Bertram, are now in the parlour with Mrs. Selden, and are impatient to see you."

Alicia now, with a dignity of manner which seemed inherent in her, and a grace which at all time marked the most trifling of her actions, thanked Miss Farrer for the trouble she had taken. Then turning to the misses, on whose countenances shame and mortification were strongly painted, she said, "You are, Miss Aislabie, quite a prophetess, for you declared that coach contained my friends before the servant opened the door."

Miss Aislabie flounced away, but the others returned the adieus of Alicia with distant curtsies.

"This, my dear ward, (said Mr. Meynel, as he took her hand on entering the parlour) is Lady Bertram."

The name, which Miss Farrer mentioned before, was then scarce heard, but it now struck her with an electric force. Was she of the Oakdale family? was the question the heart of Alicia instantly asked. Recovering herself, she paid her compliments to Lady Bertram, who introduced her to Miss Bertram.

"At the desire of Mr. Meynel, I have brought my daughter, (said her Ladyship) to entreat for her your friendship; you are of nearly the same age, and the account I have received from Mrs. Selden so fully confirms the character Mr. Meynell has given of you, my dear girl, that the advances I now make to you are with the hope of securing such a friend to Mary, as will guard the good qualities she now possesses."

"Refuse me not (said Miss Bertram) your heart and confidence," as she took Alicia's hand.

"I shall (she replied) feel honoured, and grateful, for Miss Bertram's confidence; and the poor Alicia, as yet is a stranger to the happiness of loving, and being loved, by a friend of her own age. Her heart, or she strangely mistakes, shall be devoted to you for life."

Mrs. Selden, who had been absent when Alicia entered, now returned. To her Alicia paid her acknowledgments for the favourable opinion she had so kindly expressed, and which had contributed to Lady Bertram's decision respecting her.

"Had I, Miss Sleigh, (said Mrs. Selden) supposed you capable of being rendered vain by praise; you would have been unworthy of what I have said; but praise will but stimulate you to fresh exertions, and it is, perhaps, the highest encomium I can bestow, when I say you are almost the only girl I know who is capable of bearing it."

Mr. Meynell, leading Alicia and the beautiful Mary Bertram, was passing to the carriage, whilst her ladyship lingered with Mrs. Selden.

"I have marked (said the latter) a greatness of mind, and noble fortitude of character in Miss Sleigh, which argues a most exalted soul, and an understanding far beyond her years; so much so, that I might deem it almost supernatural, did I not suppose it caused by some singular circumstances of her short life; some mystery hangs over her I am certain, though I am perfectly ignorant what."

"I understand, (said her ladyship) she is an orphan of West India parentage."

"So, my lady, I have been informed; but on this subject she has maintained a reserve that I am conscious has thrown her into some unpleasant situations."

Lady Bertram had now reached the carriage, into which she stepped, bidding Mrs. Selden good morning.

Mr. Meynell had, in crossing to the coach, informed Alicia they were going strait to Acornbank, a seat of Sir Robert Bertram, in Hertfordshire—"I thought you, my dear ward, would neither receive pleasure or improvement beneath my roof, whilst both awaits you at Acornbank."

Alicia bowed, but spoke not; scarce could she support herself, as Mr. Meynell assisted her into Sir Robert Bertram's coach, whose name had chased the colour from her cheeks; for sure, thought she, it must be the Baronet of Oakdale, yet dared she not ask a question which might thus betray her; nor, in the kind of hurry which being seated caused, was her agitation remarked; and recovering herself, Alicia chased, as far as her situation would permit, the idea of Oakdale hall, an idea that would willingly have absorbed all within itself, and roused to animation, by the remembrance of Mr. Meynell's kindness, exerted herself to please, where she had been so partially praised.

They reached Acornbank, after a pleasant drive, against the hour of dinner. The house was not very large, but every way calculated for comfort, more than that grandeur, which the large fortune of its owner might have tempted him here to display. The situation was beautifully chosen,—few indeed in the charming country in which it was could exceed it; the pleasure grounds were laid out with much neatness, and picturesque variety, yet, as well as the house, not upon a large scale. Such was the retreat to which Alicia was welcomed by Miss Bertram's embrace, accompanied by the hope she expressed of spending many happy days there with her new friend. Lady Bertram too, kindly saluted and welcomed her guest.

To the vexation and disappointment of Miss Bertram, it was nearly dark ere they had reached Acornbank; for she proposed great pleasure in shewing Alicia the grounds, the observatory, the green-house, and aviary. Lady Bertram had allowed her to promise all these should be seen by her friend that day.

"You should, Mary, have wings, (said her mother) you are so rapid; look, my dear, the sun is already set; tomorrow you shall drive round the pleasure grounds, another day you

may walk to the aviary and green-house. Miss Sleigh cannot, at school, be accustomed to half the degree of exercise you are."

"O dear! well, I never thought about the sun setting; but to-morrow! oh, to-morrow, mama, Miss Sleigh may look at all I wish to shew her."

"Your to-morrow's, my dear Mary, are, (said her ladyship, with rather a grave air) your to-morrow's are often made of more importance than they ought, and take place of their elder sister."

Miss Bertram attended her friend at the usual hour of retiring to her chamber, where she staid a considerable time, laying down plans for the disposal of the following days, then bidding Alicia good night, she retired. Left alone, she enjoyed a freedom which at school she was unaccustomed to, and seated herself by the fire, musing on the unexpected unwished for introduction she that day had, through Mr. Meynell, to the Bertram family; for she now was fully certified, that the Sir Robert of Acornbank, and the Baronet of Oakdale hall, were the same.

"Oh! my mother! (she softly exclaimed) my beloved, my unfortunate mother, what were your sufferings!—Ah! what was the horrid, the mysterious misery you so meekly sustained, but which dragged you, an early victim, to the tomb!—Did, as oft I suppose, your sorrows originate with the possessors of Oakdale!"

Alicia ceased speaking, and sat, her eyes fixed on the fire, revolving in her mind all she had, at different times, heard fall from the unguarded Kirby; all she could remember hearing from her mother. The former served but to stimulate her curiosity, yet could scarce lead even to conjecture; for except his having informed her that her father was supposed to have fallen from the rock he had pointed out to her, into the river which flowed at its foot, and had there found his death, nothing could she ascertain from what, at various times, he had given hints of to her; but dark and mysterious, they were remembered but to perplex,—but to add more gloomy ideas, if indeed that were possible,—as she thought of the awful scene at the hour of midnight, revealed to her in the hall of Oakdale by her mother, whose solemn injunction seemed afresh to sound in her ears; yet, not from them, any more than what Mr. Kirby had said, could she draw any certain inference; altho' various conjectures had been formed by her, all had included the family under whose roof she now was.

"God grant me (said Alicia, rising) fortitude to bear, as becomes me, the interval! and when the day of trial comes, may I meet with resignation the fate I am to sustain."

Throwing back the curtains, and opening the shutters of the window, Alicia stood gazing on the moon, as she rode through the dark azure of an unclouded sky, thickly studded with stars, whose paly fires shone with added lustre from the frost. The windows of the high seated observatory reflected the moon beams with a brightness, that at the first view alarmed Alicia with the idea of fire; soon she found the mistake, and marked the long shade of gloom the hill, on which it was seated, threw across the winter embrowned woods that skirted the banks of a glassy stream, which in spots was seen glittering in the silver light. The house clock had twice been answered by that of the village church,

proclaiming the morning hour, ere Alicia retired to seek the repose her spirits so much needed.

In the morning she was accompanied by her lively young friend in the proposed round; every object charmed—all was new to Alicia.

"What a delightful place (said she) will this be in spring, how beautiful in summer; here could I wander for days. See, my dear Miss Bertram, there, over yonder gate, where as the hill breaks off to the west, and you catch as it were a glimpse of the village and church, I should like to take that view."

"Can you take views? I knew you were a proficient in drawing, but thought not it was possible you could design from nature; and, (continued the gay Mary) you are fond of reading and work.—Oh! Alicia, I fear you will despise the giddy girl whom you have promised to love; she is inferior, far inferior in every accomplishment, which, equally with yourself, she has been taught; but your example will reform me; I will attend more steadily; you have patience, I have none: if I can play a tune once well, I think I shall remember it, then I try something else, and the music is forgot; if then I go to it, I no longer remember what I have been learning in the interval, so it is; and my governess tells me I talk far, far too much; that it would be better was I listen."

Miss Bertram was a year or more older than Alicia, but she was, indeed, far inferior, not in useful acquirements alone, but also in accomplishments; except dancing, in which Miss Bertram scarce could be rivalled; and her smart air and graceful person were shewn to peculiar advantage by her elegant movements; her figure was neat and light, and she was rather low than tall of her age: volatile in her temper, and relying on the indulgence of her parents, Miss Bertram, who had an aversion to aught which bore the appearance of study, never applied herself steadily to any thing a sufficient length of time to acquire it. Her heart was truly amiable, and she had a good though not, as had Alicia, a strong understanding; thus, if we may be allowed to rank their souls under different genders, Alicia's might be called a masculine, Mary Bertram's a feminine understanding. Her perception was uncommonly quick, but she either wanted the wish or the power to retain what the few first lessons always taught her. Lady Bertram had cautiously avoided introducing to her daughters acquaintance any young lady of her own age, conscious that the character is oft formed from friendships so early contracted; and vainly had her ladyship sought, in the circle in which she moved, for such a friend as she wished to introduce to her daughter.

Mr. Meynell, when he preferred his request to Lady Bertram, entreating she would notice his orphan ward, had launched out into warm, but deserved eulogiums. Struck by an account, which rose to her wishes, yet seemed as if exaggerated, she wrote to Mrs. Selden; Mr. Meynell, she said, could not, in speaking of his ward, exaggerate. This then was the friend so long sought for her beloved Mary; her example would be more powerful than precept, and to pay Mr. Meynell at once a compliment, and to shew her approbation of Miss Sleight, did Lady Bertram go in person to Mrs. Selden's for Alicia, who felt the full force of so distinguished a proof of kindness. Every day during the stay

of our young heroine at Acornbank, did her ladyship suppose she discovered some new and pleasing trait in her character.

Sir Robert Bertram joined his lady at Acornbank in the course of a few days, he having been detained in London by some important affairs being before the House of Commons, of which he was one of its most upright members, therefore deemed it not right to desert his place in it, till the house was prorogued for the holidays.

Alicia saw the good baronet's carriage driving up to the house, and felt happy she was in her dressing room, where she resolved to remain, till she recovered from the flutter of spirits she found; but here was she sought by Miss Bertram.

"Come Alicia, you must go see Robert, he has enquired for you; but neither Henry nor William are come.—Oh! it is so very provoking, when I expected to have surprised you so, and had begged her ladyship to say nothing about them; they would have walked with us—rode with us—read to us. Ah! Alicia, you would have loved them;—so chearful, so good humoured, I am sure I scarce can tell whether I love my brother or William March better; this is cruel indeed."

Miss Bertram talked away all her spirits, all her composure, and she wept and railed by turns at the disappointment she had sustained; and the bell had rung for dinner ere Alicia could prevail with her to be comforted, and accompany her down stairs; which done, Lady Bertram introduced her guest to Sir Robert, on whom no sooner had she cast her eyes, than she trembled, and changing colour, fruitlessly attempted to answer the friendly greetings she received, and sinking on a chair, fainted. Miss Bertram was in agonies; in vain Lady Bertram endeavoured to still the exclamation she uttered. The eyes of Alicia again opened, but they opened on Sir Robert; she seemed to shut them with a kind of horror in her countenance, and heaving a deep and painful sigh, again fainted. She was laid on the sofa, and Sir Roberts, whose appearance it was evident had somehow, awakening her sensibility, caused the emotion that produced his guest's illness, quitted the room, from whence Miss Bertram had been before commanded to retire. It was, however, a considerable time, notwithstanding her ladyship's attentions, ere Alicia was sufficiently recovered to apologise for the trouble she had given, and added, "it was the resemblance I saw in Sir Robert to—"she paused, and hid her face with her handkerchief.

"I am highly concerned, my sweet girl, (said Lady Bertram,) to find you possess a degree of sensibility which must expose you to many severe trials; I saw it was the recollection of some painful event which Sir Robert's appearance caused; the resemblance, or such as you supposed so, to some dear friend; if your loss is a recent one, I wonder not, but if years have rolled away, I hope it might be owing to surprise that the likeness struck you so forcibly, and that you will be enabled to see Sir Robert again with less emotion."

"Oh! my beloved lady, it is no resemblance to any friend of mine that Sir Robert bears; but his presence recalls to me a scene deeply imprinted on my mind, ever present to it."

"Have you never then, Alicia seen Sir Robert before this day?"

"Never, my lady, I am to Sir Robert equally a stranger as I was to you, previous to your kind visit at Mrs. Selden's."

"Then why were you agitated so strongly?"

"Excuse me, Lady Bertram, on this painful subject; would to heaven I could freely disclose why I was agitated at beholding Sir Robert, whose resemblance to an object I once beheld is indeed very striking; but when, how, or where beheld, I am obliged by a solemn promise to conceal.—Alas! my beloved lady! the fate of the orphan Alicia is wrapped in mysteries, which she dreads to develop."

"On this subject, my dear Alicia, I will press you no farther," said Lady Bertram.

Alicia retired to her chamber, where she spent the remainder of the day. Ah! where thought she is now my boasted fortitude—vain of those powers of mind providence has thought fit to endue me with, I proudly have supposed myself equal to all occurrences!—How—how shall I—how can I hope to sustain the dreaded trial, when weakly I have shrunk at beholding Sir Robert?—Yes, I am deeply humiliated, the moderation I boasted myself upon at Mrs. Selden's originated in pride, for was it not pride which urged me to stay—to haughtily overlook insult?—No—it was not, as I vainly taught myself to suppose, that true fortitude of mind which rises to occasion.

Alicia now, with enthusiastic tenderness, invoked the spirit of her mother; then, with every pious, every virtuous feeling roused, kneeled, and prayed to the Almighty for his aid. "Too proudly have I, (she fervently ejaculated) trusted in my own strength! Alas! I had almost learned to forget how little—how less than nothing I am, without the informing spirit of that beneficent being, who sent me a helpless infant into the world—who had endued me, as I grew, with strength of body and mind, which will, if I rely on him who bestowed them, enable me to surmount difficulty and danger."

CHAPTER XI.

IN the morning Alicia met the family at breakfast with her usual composure, but it was some days ere she felt herself in her accustomed spirits.

The remainder of the time our heroine spent at Acornbank, the house was crowded with company, chosen out of the first ranks in society. Lady Bertram detained Alicia, with Mr. Meynell's permission, (who had quitted Acornbank after a fortnight's stay) till their return to town; at which period her ladyship and Miss Bertram accompanied her to Mrs. Selden's. Scarce would the weeping Mary listen to comfort, as she parted with her friend, who it was agreed should spend the midsummer vacation with her, and in the interim a regular correspondence was to be kept up; but this, Miss Bertram declared, would ill supply to her the conversation of her friend, whom she would however, she informed her mother, strive to emulate. "I trust, when I again see Alicia, she will think me more worthy of her love and esteem; indeed I will be less volatile."

As our heroine is again at school, again subjected to the insults of a few illiberal minded girls, I think it is needful to explain to my readers from whence arose the cruel and unmerited treatment she received.

When Mrs. Dalrymple consigned her lovely charge to the care of Mrs. Selden, she had informed her, Miss Sleigh was an orphan, both her parents having died in Jamaica. This soon was known in the school, where there were a number of West Indian girls, on which account it was a rule, strictly adhered to, that no child of colour, (that is no child of mixed blood whose ancestors within the fourth degree of descent were negroes) were admitted there, however exalted her fortune, or future rank in life might be; conscious a girl so situated would, from the creole young ladies, meet with many slights, and that it would prove a certain source of trouble, as in the West Indies the distinction is kept up by the women with so scrupulous an exactness, as never to mix, on equal terms, with people so descended.

The abilities of Alicia excited envy in the hearts of some of the young ladies at Mrs. Selden's, whose junior she was, yet excelled them in every thing she was taught; and sorry am I to add, the amiable dispositions of our youthful heroine served but to add fuel to the fire her talents had kindled.

At the head of the party was Miss Aslabie, a creole of Jamaica, whose father possessed large estates in that island. This girl, finding it out of her power to render Alicia disliked, or to make her the object of ridicule to her companions, after making various efforts, at length insinuated she was a girl of colour. As none of the young ladies belonging to Jamaica could remember any person of consequence whose name was Sleigh, therefore, "it might be, as Miss Aislabie said, she might be a girl of colour; and what a strange thing it was of Mrs. Selden to take such a girl into the school; they all agreed their papas and mammas would be highly offended."

Yet, notwithstanding Miss Aislabie's arts, our heroine had a powerful party who espoused her cause, consisting chiefly of the younger and middle classes of girls, whose hearts felt the full force of her numberless amiable and engaging qualities; by these was she considered as deeply injured, and the spirit of party ran as high in the youthful society of Edgcombe house, as it can do in a more august assembly; or, as it can do in electing the members of that honorable house.

Sometimes, in the bitterness of her soul, Alicia meditated applying to Mr. Meynel for a removal from her present situation.—But no, she thought, by quitting Mrs. Selden's, where, from its owner, she had received repeated proofs of regard, she would but give cause of triumph to the malicious Miss Aislabie, and her party.—Shrink not, had Mr. Kirby said, from danger or difficulty; it is but by such trials I shall obtain that fortitude I have been told is so needful I should acquire; it is but by exercising them the faculties of the mind attain strength.

Such were the reasons Alicia confessed to herself, as actuating her conduct; but a latent, though perhaps not altogether improper pride, urged her stay, checked all complains, and taught her to overlook, with an air of conscious superiority, the indignities her adversaries meanly stooped to practice: destitute of all studied revenge, tho' unyielding, she steered a course, which in a more extended circle might serve as a model for prudent conduct. Vainly the little party who looked up to her, as the model of all perfection, entreated leave to speak of the persecution raised against their favorite, and oft had she to refrain their ardour in her cause.

Returned to school, noticed by Lady Bertram, protected by Mr. Meynell, laden with presents of various elegant trifles, Alicia no longer appeared the same being. Miss Aislabie's party decreased, every day was some one of Alicia's persecutors begging to be received into her favour, so that at the commencement of the midsummer holidays scarce a girl in the school, except Miss Aislabie and her sister, but what believed and declared Miss Sleigh had an equal right with themselves to the very brilliant complexion she possessed.

Mr. Meynell came himself to Mrs. Selden's for Alicia. In London they joined the Bertram family, and together went into Devonshire, where Mr. Meynell had a very beautiful seat: at this place the family of Bertram was to be guests for a month at least, its owner expected. Here was, by the happy Mary, Alicia introduced to her brother, and William March, who was an orphan, our heroine understood, brought up by Sir Robert.

"This (said Miss Bertram) is Henry, this is William, both my brothers; and you, Alicia, shall share them with me."

Henry was a manly and interesting figure; whatever were his employments or amusements, *that*, you would have supposed, from his excelling, he had alone studied. Henry Bertram was at an age, when the boy is nearly lost in the man; yet Henry still retained the glossy ringlets of his chesnut brown hair, unsoiled by powder, unrestrained

by art. In this hasty sketch of Henry Bertram I have taken also the outlines of his friend, who was not eclipsed by the Baronet's promising heir: there was, indeed, a likeness between them, that warranted in some measure the surmise which had been made in regard to William's birth, and the kindness of Lady Bertram, who thus had adopted the boy, was loudly praised. Those young men had, as well as Miss Bertram, chiefly a home education, which was at the earnest request of Lady Bertram.

"How powerful, (said he) is example—how arbitrary often proves false shame;—let us not, Sir Robert, expose our son to temptations, his mind must yet be too weak to stem; let Henry chuse his friends when his judgement is formed: need I recall to you the early fate of my only brother?—alas! Sir Robert, you well know Lord Malieveren promised all that Henry now does, but he fell a victim to the connexions he formed at the college; led away by example, ashamed to acknowledge the virtuous principles implanted in his breast, soon—soon he threw off all restraint—too soon he died, a martyr to dissipation; and I shudder at the probability of my child also exposed to vice, ere he is aware how necessary it is he should love virtue.

Such were the fears, such the reasons, Lady Bertram gave for the plan of education that was adopted, and which so far had been successful; but in saying this, I pretend not to teach, but merely relate.

Time flew with rapid wing at this period with Alicia, who advanced quickly in the good graces of Mr. Meynell, Sir Robert and Lady Bertram, whilst with the lively Mary she had become almost the sole object. From Henry and William she received every mark of polite attention, and already she seemed to divide with Miss Bertram their affection.

A month had flown by, unmarked by care, chearfully, and oft improvingly, diversified; now in rambling round the beautiful grounds with her young friends, or joining in instructive conversation with her elder one; beloved and esteemed, Alicia at Elmwood forgot the slights, the heart wounding insults she had received from her haughty schoolfellows at Mrs. Selden's, to whose roof she must shortly return; when one evening, with Miss Bertram, Henry and William, Alicia was sauntering along the side of a brook, that skirted Mr. Meynell's ground. Mary, who knew no part of William's story, or had ever enquired who he was, said, in her usual careless way—

"I wonder, William, who was your father, did I ever ask you before."

"Mary, (cried Henry) I well know you are heedless, but recollect yourself."

"Why, brother, you oft chid me for not thinking, now when I do I displease you; and I was thinking to be sure William is some relation to us, else why should all the family love him?"

"Who, (replied Henry) that knows my friend, but must esteem him? What need Mary of the ties of blood to render us sensible to Miss Sleigh's amiable qualities."

Alicia bowed; William, who equally with Henry had heard it suggested they were very nearly connected, looked confused by this inadvertent speech.

"Come, (said his friend, taking his arm) let us quit Miss Bertram, and her sagacious interrogations."

Mary could not bear this, but bursting into tears, assured Henry, "if he and William were offended she meant it not."—Both hummed, both apologised, both soothed.

"This scene, (said Mr. Bertram) will, I fear, lower the whole party in your regard, Miss Sleigh; but I will explain why I was displeased by the question."

At that instant Sir Robert joined them, and when they reached the house a carriage was just driving up, which was followed by another, and Sir Robert introduced Alicia to the Earl of Knasborough, and his son Viscount Morville, who alighted from the first carriage; the other contained Lord and Lady Mountsorrell, whom Alicia had seen at Acornbank. This party staid a few days only, and when they quitted Elmwood, were accompanied by Sir Robert, his son, and William March, into Wales, where they were going to visit the Earl of Llandovry, after which a tour was to be taken through the principality; from there, accompanied by the Llandovry family, they were to visit the lakes of Cumberland, and in autumn to join Lady Bertram, at Bertram Castle, in Northumberland; soon after which Viscount Morville was to go upon the Continent, as it was intended he should travel till he was of age. The earl of Knasborough was very urgent with his friend Sir Robert, to allow Henry and William to accompany Lord Morville, but this her ladyship was highly averse to.

"What could it be, (said Miss Bertram to Alicia, the evening after the guests of Mr. Meynell quitted Elmwood) what could it be that I said that evening to vex Henry and William so. I am sure it was a very simple question, he was likely to know, and it could be no secret, then what do you think it was that offended them."

"I could imagine many circumstances, but perhaps wide of truth; but do you not know Mary, who were the parents of William?"

"Indeed, Alicia, I do not, at least I never recollect hearing; and I am sure I never will again enquire. Do you recollect the look Henry gave me, and how agitated poor William looked? I dare say he is some relation, for I have often heard it said he was like Henry."

"There is, (replied Alicia) a resemblance, but it is more I think in the countenance than features; and two boys, with nearly the same dispositions, brought up together and following the same pursuits, I think might have their countenances a counterpart of each other, and still be no relations."

"Well, but my dear Alicia, do not you think there is some secret about William I am not to be informed of.—Oh! I know my mother thinks I am too giddy, and not fit to be trusted; but Susan once told me Mr. March was my cousin; that Lord Malieveren, my uncle, was his father."

The mystery which appeared to hang over the birth of this youth, strongly recalled to Alicia her own misfortunes, and stifling a sigh, she said. "Whoever are or were Mr. March's parents, they need not have disowned him; if they live, he ought to be their pride and glory. True, protected by Sir Robert, his fate is an enviable one; yet, if he knew not his parents, I feel for him, and deeply commiserate what such a soul as his may, on that

account, be doomed to suffer; let not us then, my beloved friend, add to the inquietude he may feel, by childishly endeavouring to remove the veil which guards the secret."

In about a week after Sir Robert's departure, Lady Bertram, with her daughter, Alicia, and Mr. Meynell, quitted Elmwood. In London our young heroine bade adieu to her ladyship and Miss Bertram, who were going down into the north; by Mr. Meynell, therefore, was she accompanied to Mrs. Selden's.—Alicia's old friends, and new acquired followers crowded round her; Miss Aislabie was neglected, and appeared sullen and reserved; her malicious temper rested not, though deprived of her late associates; deeper plots were laid, in concert with a young man of inferior station, with whom, during a visit to her aunt, she clandestinely formed an acquaintance; and bent upon revenging herself upon the amiable and conciliating Alicia, she promised, as the reward of success, her hand, (to which was annexed a large independent fortune) to the associate. From this rash union, unknown to Mrs. Aislabie, was she saved by Alicia, defeating at once her plot upon herself, and the plan of purposed elopement; but the lover not willing to forego so rich a prize, resolved to make another effort, that effort was a desperate one: fire was put into a stable that belonged to Mrs. Selden, in the idea the inhabitants of Edgecumbe house, alarmed by the fright which such an accident would cause at midnight, might leave Miss Aislabie at liberty to reach him in the garden, where he took care to inform her he waited.

The wind was loud, the flames were quickly communicated to the dwelling-house; a few minutes and all was wrapped in smoke—a few minutes more and all had perished; but Alicia, whose mind had been greatly agitated, and whose suspicions had been highly roused by Miss Aislabie's conduct, was awake; and to her presence of mind,—to her fortitude and exertions, was the worthy Mrs. Selden and her family indebted, in a very high degree, for their preservation; and on that night did Alicia save, at the hazard of her own life, that of Miss Aislabie, who had been her uniform but unprovoked enemy.—No longer so; this last act of generosity melted even her heart, and wrought a change in her manner, and future conduct in life.

The news of the accident at Edgecumbe house reaching Mr. Meynell; he instantly set out for his ward, who accompanied him to his house in London, where he at that period resided. Painfully had Alicia felt at humiliating concessions Miss Aislabie had made, and modestly had she received the praises lavished by Mrs. Selden, and the thanks of the family for her conduct; in these did Mr. Meynell triumph, for he had become highly, warmly attached to our heroine, and was proud of being her protector.

Mr. Meynell wrote to Sir Robert, as did Alicia to Lady Bertram, giving an account of the accident which had befallen Edgecumbe house. Those letters were speedily answered.

"Come to us, (said the good baronet to Mr. Meynell) bring your ward with you; I am yet not sufficiently recovered to travel; Miss Sleigh's society will be joy to Mary, who begins to complain of the dullness she experiences at Malieveren."

Lady Bertram, and her daughter also, in their letters to Alicia, urged, warmly urged her to visit them at the Castle.

Our heroine however felt a strong repugnance to go into Yorkshire; she would not be at Malieveren above forty miles from Oakdale, and though she knew it was seldom or ever visited by the family, yet she felt a dread that some circumstance might carry her there; and the Bertram family, as they associated in her mind with the gloomy hall of their ancestors, and that same family, as she had known and loved them, appeared widely dissimilar.—No, she could not support it;—no, with feelings so divided, how could she endure to visit the place of her birth,—the place where her mother's life was worn down by sorrow, of a deep, a mysterious kind, to which her fancy presented no clue, but as she traced it back to the Baronet's family; yet she had no plausible reason to alledge why she wished to refuse the polite and friendly invitation she had received. Alicia therefore, accompanied by Mr. Meynell, after three easy days journey, reached the stately Castle of Malieveren.

Sir Robert paid our young heroine those eulogiums she so justly merited, and as Lady Bertram embraced her she wept over the dangers she had so nobly sustained.—Tears, caresses, and enquiries rapidly succeeded each other in Miss Bertram, whilst the two friends, Henry and William, scarce knew whether, as they conversed of Alicia, to talk of her improved grace and beauty, or her wonderful presence of mind, and promptitude in danger.

Sir Charles Hutton and his family, with Mr. and Mrs. Manby, were upon a visit at the Castle, which was seldom without guests; when those families quitted it, who were of the neighbourhood, others succeeded, and although Malieveren was at a distance from any considerable town, yet the social dispositions of its owners made it always chearful; and Lady Bertram would sometimes say, "though she was fond of society, yet she hated the dissipation of eternal engagements, and dreaded returning to London on that account." Sir Robert was recovered, and able to travel; but ere he went south, it was necessary he should visit his estates in Northumberland, where he was making some considerable improvements.

At this period Mr. Meynel was gone to York, to visit a friend, who chiefly resided there, and Lady Bertram proposed to the Baronet all the family should accompany him into the north.

Sir Robert said, "his stay would be so short at Bertram castle, that the journey at that season would be a fatigue, unaccompanied by any pleasure."

The two young men, whose plan it at first was, were now joined by Miss Bertram, in representing the unusual fineness of the weather and goodness of the roads; Sir Robert therefore consented. The baronet, his lady, with their daughter and Alicia, set out in a coach, in which Henry and William were occasionally to have seats, as they rode, at going off, their own horses.

Ten days were spent at Bertram Castle; a name it retained, though it was no longer one, the last Baronet having pulled down what time had spared of the venerable fabric, and erected on its site a large and elegant modern mansion.

During the stay Alicia made in Northumberland, her time was chiefly spent, accompanied by her young friends, in various little excursions; nor was there a high hill, an ancient tower, in both of which that country abounds for several miles round Bertram, left unvisited by them.

Sir Robert having finished the business which took him north, set out on his return, which, as they had their own horses, was to be a journey of two days; in pursuance to this plan they slept at Durham, from which city they had gone a short way, when Henry enquired what distance it was to Oakdale. Sir Robert answered the question, and Henry said it would not take them many miles out of their road; if it was agreeable to Sir Robert and her ladyship they might go that way, as Mary never saw it.

"Oh! pray sir, (said Miss Bertram) do allow the coach to go that road; Miss Sleigh never saw Oakdale either."

"It can be little gratification, I think Mary, to either you or your friend, to see an old house, that is, I dare say, falling to ruins."

"Well, that is the very reason; I am sure both Alicia and I have gone twice as far to see a ruin; have we not William?"

Lady Bertram smiled at the earnestness of her daughter: Sir Robert said, he rather wished to visit Oakdale, but would not go at present if Lady Bertram thought the journey would be too much lengthened by doing so.

"Have you, Sir Robert, (enquired her ladyship) business at Oakdale?"

"Yes, I wish to search there for some papers I expected to have found at Bertram, and think it is probable they may be there; a foolish kind of claim is made for the Oakdale estate, though as yet scarce known by whom."

Lady Bertram declared her acquiescence, to the great joy of Mary, and distress of Alicia, who feared the visit to Oakdale might, by the agitation she would feel, betray the secret she was commanded to keep; but endeavouring to exert herself, and conceal her emotions, she enquired of Sir Robert if Oakdale was uninhabited, and if it had long been so?

"At present, (he replied) the garden, I believe, is let; but the house itself has no inhabitant but a woman, who keeps fires to prevent its quite going to decay, which I would not wish, as it is the most ancient seat belonging to the family; and which, at one period, they took the title of baron from. My father, after his marriage, scarce ever visited it, I have been told, as Acornbank came into the family by my mother, she preferred it to Oakdale; nor did she often visit the north, which she disliked so much, that it was with difficulty she consented to the building Bertram castle."

"And has then, Sir Robert, (enquired Mary) no one lived at Oakdale-hall since before you were born."

"Yes, my aunt Mildred Bertram lived there, chiefly, all her life, and also died at Oakdale. Since my father's death, there also my sister Jane, who was several years elder than me, sought refuge with Mrs. Mildred from the distress which surrounded her; Jane married very young, a gay and dissipated man, of her own age, who after living in a way which a ducal income could scarce support, was obliged to quit England on account of the debts he had contracted; in the East he acquired a large fortune, with which he returned to England, soon after my sister had, at Oakdale, ceased to exist; and his son, the only child they had, no one knew what had become of. My aunt Mildred had bought him a commission: but this, and every thing he could spend was gone, and I suppose he died in France, from whence his last letters to me were dated. Mr. Meynel, (said Sir Robert, turning to Alicia) your guardian Miss Sleigh, though now one of the worthiest and most respectable characters I know, was the gay dissipated husband of my sister."

"I thank you, Sir Robert, (replied Alicia,) for I might, by speaking of Oakdale to Mr. Meynell, have recalled his griefs."

"The hall has though, I think, (said her ladyship) been tenanted since Mrs. Meynel's death."

"For a short time it was, and I was talking to Jackson only the other day about the person who took it, of whom I knew nothing, except his being a stranger; but I have learned quite a little history of him, in which I felt much interested."

"O! pray do then indulge us, by communicating it, my dear sir," said Miss Bertram.

"I was about to do so Mary," replied the baronet.

Alicia sickened at the sound, and pulling down the glass, called Sir Robert's attention to the prospect, which, although in the month of February, was, notwithstanding, beautiful; for they were descending the hill to North Oak, and the beautiful vale of Oakdale lay stretched in full perspective below them.

"Can we see the hall?" enquired Mary.

No, was the answer given; "but there, almost at the extreme end of the vale, that little wood lays on a rising ground near, and yonder is the river which winds through the vale, and runs close past the hall;" but Mary again begged for the story that had interested the baronet, and which was yet fresh in his memory.

"Of the person who originally took Oakdale, Jackson knew little but his name, which was Bouchier; he married a young woman of the name of Wetherall, whose grandfather I believe it was, rented a farm in the vale of mine. Bouchier, it was said, fell over a rock which overhung the river that runs past the house, leaving this poor young woman with a very slender provision; although, during his life, he kept a carriage and a retinue of servants; and it was suspected this Mr. Bouchier had been some person that had acquired money in a sad way, as he was never almost seen by any one. Some months after his death, the poor young woman he had married gave birth to a daughter, soon after which it was conjectured she found out what sort of a person she had so hastily connected herself with, and died when her child was about eight years of age, broken hearted.—So amiable, so young, and so lovely, I with Jackson severely blamed her advisers to a match with a person, whom four weeks previous to marriage she had never seen."

"But the child, (enquired William March) pray Sir Robert what became of the child?"

"A Scotch lady of some fortune took it to bring up, and I understand it is now in Scotland."

Alicia with her head out of the coach window, strove to conceal her emotions.—Had she at the moment followed the dictates of her heart, she would have exclaimed, "yes, I am the helpless orphan! I am the daughter of the unfortunate—not guilty Mrs. Bouchier! I am the child of the wretched Eliza!" Trembling, and at the point of fainting, the pity she heard expressed as the conversation continued, equally for her mother and herself, brought tears to her aid; they were observed, but attributed to the sensibility of her soul, which felt for the sorrows of those to whom she was a stranger. At length rousing herself, she apologized for the effect the conversation had produced on her, who was similarly situated:—"I too, (said she) am an orphan, like the child of the unfortunate Mrs. Bouchier, am protected by strangers."

"Had Mrs. Bouchier no friends," enquired Henry.

"Yes, a person of the name of Kirby, a surgeon at St. Mary Oak, who, after her decease, by my permission, lived in the hall till within a few years, when quitting it he went no one knew whither; but he was, I find, always an eccentric character and of late his brain was much affected."

"Oh! I dare say, (said William) by this time the inhabitants of St. Mary Oak have seen his spirit, whether he is dead or alive."

"It will indeed, (said Henry) perfectly agree with the idle and superstitious tale, those credulous people, I understand, believe regarding the hall."

"What kind of tales, Henry?" enquired Miss Bertram.

"Such, Mary, as I want patience to repeat, as I did at the time I heard them to attend, which was when William and I last autumn called at Oakdale, in our road from the Lakes; and if you are any way solicitous to learn the gambols held by the ghosts who visit or reside in the hall, our informer still lives in it."

"Why did you not inform me of this before? Well, it is charming; oh! how much I should like to sleep in the hall, and to hear a dialogue between Alicia and a ghost."

"Fye Mary, (said Lady Bertram, with a chiding look) why do you run on in such a giddy way? What sort of pleasure could possibly result to you from spending a night at the hall, which must be destitute of every thing like comfort, and where beds doubtless must be damp? Always pause before you speak."

Again the conversation turned upon who this Mr. Bouchier could be, and again the sorrows of his widow and child were the topic, till the young men were wrought up to a kind of enthusiasm on the subject. So young—so amiable—so lovely—and unbefriended—were epithets Alicia, with a heart agonized by her suppressed feelings, heard bestowed on her beloved and unhappy mother.

"And she was buried at St. Mary's Oak," said Henry.

"Yes, (replied Sir Robert) her friend, the benevolent but eccentric surgeon of the village, Jackson told me, erected a white stone to her memory, which, in the most elevated spot in the church-yard, marks her grave."

"Gentle sufferer, (said William) in heaven I trust she is rewarded."

"There is the church," said Mary, her eyes now glistening with the soft drop of pity, and all her late gaiety fled.

Sir Robert ordered the coachman to stop when opposite the church.

"Ay, there, (said he) that is the spot," and the good baronet passed his hand across his eyes.

Henry and William were preparing to leap out, that they might read the inscription friendship had erected to suffering virtue, when Alicia, no longer able to contend with her feelings, sunk insensible on the shoulder of Henry.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XII.

THE coach was ordered slowly to proceed.

Those faintings, (said Lady Bertram, as she bathed the temples of Alicia with hartshorn) argue an alarming delicacy of constitution; her mind is too keenly susceptible; she has I fear to suffer much, ere her feelings acquire that state of apathy necessary in a free commerce with the world."

A servant, who had been dispatched to procure the assistance of Mr. Kirby's successor at St. Mary Oak, now returned, with intelligence he was from home. The carriage was ordered to proceed quickly, and by this time Alicia opened her eyes, yet when they reached the hall she was unable to walk across the court. Henry insisted on carrying her, which he did, into the Oak dining room, where, having seated her on the couch, he enquired, with much earnest tenderness in his looks and voice, how she felt herself.

"Oh! Henry, I am very childishly weak! you must despise me, and I cannot bear the idea!"

The tears of Alicia fell on the supporting arm of Henry.

"Despise you Alicia, no; the sensibility of your character but endears you to my soul; never, Alicia, can Henry Bertram cease to esteem, to love you."

Alas! Henry, my dear friend, I am—(he paused as if recollecting herself) Oh! this sad, this cruel journey—oh! you know not the agony this morning I have sustained!—If you love my peace—if you regard my happiness—I conjure you to entreat Sir Robert quickly to leave Oakdale; indeed I cannot much longer bear the contest I feel."

Lady Bertram and Mary, who had been detained a few minutes; the former by giving orders, the latter by looking at the armour in passing through the hall, now entered; a servant followed with wine and biscuits from the coach, of which, at her ladyship's desire, Alicia partook, and declared she was greatly refreshed, nay quite well, and apologised for her weakness of mind and body.

Sir Robert and William now joined the party, and he informed them that the coach, in passing the corner of the wall, was overturned, and so damaged, it would take a considerable time to repair it, "and I fear we shall not be able to proceed in it today."

Henry, mindful of what Alicia had said, proposed sending to North Oak for post chaises.

"I thought of doing so, (replied the baronet) and ordered James to set out instantly as I learned the accident; but he says only three chaises are kept at North Oak, two of which

we met this morning on the road to Durham, and the third is gone west, through St. Mary's, therefore we must either sleep here, or procure beds in the village."

"Carriages, (said Henry, might be had, doubtless, from Durham or Darlington."

"The distance from both places, Henry, (said his mother) will render it impossible; a servant could not go and they reach us till after it was dark, and I think we had better rest satisfied in this old mansion, than endanger all our lives by travelling after dark in such a crazy equipage as we may chance to procure."

"By all means, (said the baronet) I have already given orders to send to the cross keys, the village tavern, in order to procure assistance towards a dinner; and you, Lady Bertram, will prefer staying here, I suppose, to such kind of paltry accommodations as St Mary Oak can afford."

"I dare say I shall, (replied her ladyship) but will look over the apartments, when I shall be better enabled to judge."

"Oh! I am sure you will stay here, (said Mary) it would be very wrong indeed to quit the poor old house for a cottage at St. Mary's."

Miss Bertram attended her mother in the investigation she made of the apartments, and fixed on that she and Alicia were to occupy. Fires were instantly lighted in the chambers, and her ladyship took every possible precaution against the danger of taking cold from the damp.

Alicia, whose late indisposition was a very sufficient excuse, did not accompany her ladyship and Miss Bertram in the visitations they made, but remained in the Oak dining parlour with Henry, who vainly endeavoured, by varying the conversation to enliven his fair companion.

"I think, (said he at length) this gloomy house is sufficient to depress the most lively spirits; I dare say a months residence here would render Mary herself dull."

"Gloomy indeed, (sighed out Alicia) mournfully sad it appears to me! yet, Henry, you know not why thus I talk; I would, oh yes, fain I would disclose to you what swells at my heart; with a painful sense of grief—of—of horror! Alas! I have seen—though I understand not—and, what I beheld may equally concern you Henry as myself; but blame me not--condemn me not for a reserve on this subject; I have been awed to silence, and I have sworn, yes, solemnly sworn, never to reveal, at least never till—but even now do I not infringe on that promise? Alas! I am inadequate to the talk required of me, but you, Henry, will not betray me as I have done myself."

The promises of Henry might ever be depended upon, of whatever nature they were; and Henry now promised, and Alicia firmly relied on that promise, as he assured her no circumstance should ever tempt him to reveal the hints she had given.

"If hereafter, Alicia, you deem yourself at liberty, and then think me worthy of your confidence, reveal to me the mystery that now so painfully oppresses you, my fortune, my services, my whole life shall be devoted to the friendship I am inspired with."

Alicia's words, but her countenance, more forcibly expressed her gratitude, her firm reliance on his friendship, which, she said, might hereafter be called upon to assist her: "Already, Henry, I have told you a part of my various feelings, yet so mysterious is the cause of my emotions, that you must be left only to supposition to trace their source.

Lady Bertram and Mary returned, ere a conversation so interesting to Henry, so soothing, yet so agitating to our heroine, was concluded.

"Ah! Alicia, (said Miss Bertram) I declare you and Henry look as if you had seen some of the spectres belonging to the hall; pray tell me how it appeared, what it said, and how it vanished?"

"I wish Mary you had to reside here for twelve months, (said her ladyship) I think this gloomy, desolate, and forsaken mansion would give a different shade to your mind; you are so volatile; I tell you child, though I am myself not superstitious, nor a believer in ghosts and goblins, yet I think the light jest, and the frivolous remarks made on such subjects, improper; every thing is possible with the Creator of all, and you may be punished, by your own imagination figuring to you an appearance of reality where none exists; people of brighter and more enlightened talents have so suffered."

Mary looked, and was grave for a few minutes, but Lady Bertram quitting the room, she rose to examine the old-fashioned carved work above the wide extended chimney piece; there was sufficient fund of entertainment for the lively girl, who soon forgot the grave lesson she had so lately received.

"Will you go Alicia and look at your chamber, it is a charming room; I am sure you will be quite enchanted; well then, you will not go, it will greatly surprise you.—Oh! I dare say we shall see the ghosts, so I told my mother, and she gave me a reprimand then; such dismal apartments—the moths have so eaten the damask bed and hangings—the chimneys are so wide—and the windows so dark—the floors, I never saw such, all oak—black oak—cut, Sir Robert said, when all this vale was covered with wood."

Thus rattled the light hearted Mary till dinner was announced, which was served in the new dining room with no great degree of elegance, yet with more appearance of comfort than could have been supposed. The remainder of the evening was spent by Sir Robert in the search after the papers he had spoken of; Lady Bertram chatted with the young people, till the baronet's return, who appeared not in his usual chearful spirits, but gloomy and abstracted; at an early hour he proposed retiring for the night, and followed by Lady Bertram, quitted the apartment.

Alicia as she passed the room generally occupied by her mother, in her way to the staircase shuddered; the door was open—the furniture was gone—it looked desolate and abandoned; slowly, heavily, she began to ascend the lofty staircase, whilst Mary was gaily commenting on the pictured forms of her ancestors, which hung against the sides, darkly wainscoted with oak. Scarcely could Alicia support herself, scarce drag her trembling limbs up those steps, that in early childhood she had oft playfully run. Henry advanced.

"You yet, Alicia, seem ill, allow me to assist you; (then lowering his voice, he continued) you are agitated by no common cause—sure something in this house recalls past scenes; would to heaven I was suffered to partake of your grief! I will not dare to enquire, if the surmise is a real one that I have made—but circumstances concur in some measure,—the orphan child of the unfortunate Eliza—"

The speech was never finished by Henry, for Alicia lifted her tearful eyes from the ground to his; the look of anguish—the sad expression they contained—chained in icy fetters the tongue of Henry, and spoke to his heart in a language painfully eloquent.—They had reached the gallery that ran along the whole length of the house; here Miss Bertram met with a fresh source of entertainment, and continued, in her lively way to criticise on whatever presented itself, to the high entertainment of Mr. March.

Alicia lingered at a large window, partly of painted glass, which lighted one end of the gallery; the moon had risen, but shrouded with clouds, cast a dull and uncertain light, yet sufficient to shew her, on whose memory these scenes were deeply imprinted, the dark wood where oft she had wandered with her mother—she sighed sadly, deeply—the hand of Alicia was pressed to the sympathising bosom of Henry, who endeavoured to draw her attention to the remarks of his lively sister; but engrossed by painful recollection, she observed not the attempt.

"Oh! Henry, (said she) this is agony; every scene so freshly—" she paused.

Agonised by her own feelings, soothed by the kind sympathy of Mr. Bertram, Alicia was thrown off her guard, and painfully, did she feel the silence imposed upon her. Could she have disclosed her doubts—her fears—the terrors of Oakdale would have been lessened; but her feelings were roused to agony when they reached the door of Sir Philip's chamber, that chamber where at the hour of midnight she had listened to her mother; and where she disclosed to her, when a child, scarce past the years of infancy, a scene which had power to awe her to silence for years. At the door of this room, the terror of the parish Miss Bertram stoped, whilst the servant who lighted them opened the door. Alicia shrunk back, and uttered a low involuntary scream: "not here—Oh! not here," she exclaimed, with a trembling voice.

"Nay, Alicia, do not be frightened, I am sure I am not."

Alicia grasped the arm of Henry with a convulsive kind of motion.—"Oh! not here, I cannot sleep here, Miss Bertram."

Her friend drew her in gaily: "Now look round, there is nothing to alarm you."

"Very true, (sighed out Alicia, as she threw herself upon a seat) here is nothing to terrify me." The eyes of Alicia, were, however, roving round the room with an expression of terror unspeakable.

"Your mornings illness (said Henry) has caused you present discomposure."

"I suppose it has, (replied Alicia) for I am fully sensible of my weakness in this affair."

"I was, indeed, astonished, (said Miss Bertram) for on every other occasion you used to be quite an heroine compared to me."

Henry and William bidding them good night, the two friends seated themselves by the fire, which was large enough almost to have roasted an ox.

"I am sure, (said Alicia) this chearful blaze is sufficient to dispel the gloomy ideas which have filled my brain to day."

"Do you feel oppressed by those fears now, Alicia?"

"No—oh! no.—It was a nervous indisposition of my mind which made me dread every thing, but now I feel it not."

"Then, my sweet girl, be not offended, and I will tell you why I chose this room; when we came to the door it was locked, and the woman who lives in the house scarce would own she had a key, which, you may be sure, made me very impatient; at length the key was found. 'Your ladyship for *sartain* does not know this is Sir Philip's room.' Open the door, said I, and when we got in she told me such a story—but I will not tell you now Alicia; however, I resolved that this should be the chamber we would occupy, as it would be so charming if we could find out what it is that frightens every body regarding it; and I have been puzzling myself all this evening thinking what it can be."

Miss Bertram proposed to Alicia sitting up all night, but this she strongly opposed; and soon after, Mary finding she grew sleepy, went to bed; Alicia promised to follow her, but again seated by the fire, sat forgetful she had done so. Thoroughly absorbed in her own reflections, sad and mournful images rose in painful succession, and doubts of a horrid, but uncertain nature, filled her soul.—What—who was her father? how was she, by some mysterious way, connected with the family under whose roof she was sheltered? For there were circumstances had almost certified her some such connexion existed.—Now the softened recollection of her mother dimmed her eyes she recollected her gentleness—her piety—and the virtues for which she that day had heard her praised; to obey implicitly such a mother should be her pride.—Yes, the awful promise should ever be held sacred, but as Alicia thought of that promise, different ideas intruded—vague and terrible images again usurped the dominion—and a thought crossed her mind that then, even then, the truth of those uncertain but horrible surmises should, however horrid, yet be decidedly ascertained; she rose, and relighted her candle, yet, spite of the desperate resotion she had taken, it trembled in her hand.

I will, however, thought she, first read this, taking out the letter, left by Mr. Kirby for her, when he quitted England; the address upon it was an injunction not to open it till she was sixteen, unless he returned before. Alas! thought she, never will Mr. Kirby return to the forsaken Alicia.—Here no promise binds me—and, with a kind of desperation, she turned over the packet;—her fingers rested on the seal, when a deep sigh arrested her attention; thrice she heard her own name repeated, the letter dropped from her hand, and fearfully her eyes wandered round the room, as if expecting they would encounter some frightful and unusual appearance, but none such was seen; then recalling her recollection and fortitude, she rose, and looked upon her friend, whose voice she now supposed it was which had called her, as frequently she had been known to talk whilst asleep.

"I am weak, very weak indeed, thus to be startled, (she softly said, as she walked across the floor;) the horrid scenes here acted should not effect me, who am innocent of

such crimes; why then need I fear?" But at that instant, as if beneath her feet, groans deep and deadly seemed to issue, and lifting her eyes, a spectre pale, ghastly, and disfigured with wounds started from the dark wainscot, with a mournful movement of its head. For a second of time Alicia fixedly observed it; but here the early lesson of fortitude she had in that very room been taught, deserted her; the eyes of Alicia closed, and she sunk on the floor. It was but a short insensibility she experienced; yet, as she recovered, scarce dared she lift again her sight to the spot where so strange, so dreadful an appearance had been disclosed; it was gone, but a loud noise echoed through the house—again it ceased—again it was heard—the hollow rumbling sound now convinced Alicia, though the season was an unusual one for it, that it was thunder; terrified she hastily undressed, and went to bed, but sleep was banished; what was the horrid appearance she had seen was the first question that occurred to her.

Lady Bertram had said to her daughter, she might be punished for her giddy trifling that her imagination might be so far embodied as to present to her senses an appearance of reality where none existed; all things are, as her ladyship remarked, possible to the being who made all; by some such appearance, thought Alicia, my senses have doubtless been imposed upon; the subjects that have engrossed me all night, the vicinity to horrid realities, were well calculated to disturb my mind. Alicia then recollected the place where she had seen this ghostly form. The candle had, with the letter, dropped from her hand, and was extinguished, and the light from the fire, which was no longer a bright blaze, reached very partially that part of this spacious apartment; she was under the influence of fear—she might be wholly mistaken—thus reasoned Alicia with herself, when another idea rose to her mind, in which herself, and the memory of those who were most dear to her heart, were strangely and mysteriously connected with what had been unfolded to her; but this idea was too horrid, she could not bear it—no—it was impossible it should be so.

Alicia rose, and wrapping her gown round her, kneeled by the bedside; fervently she prayed for the protection of the Almighty, to guard her alike from real or supposed dangers; from the latter she humbly entreated for that fortitude she had been early taught to cultivate in her soul.—"Alas! the lesson has, (she exclaimed) been ill remembered by me; impatiently this night did I seek to evade the solemn promise I made to wait the appointed time."

The thunder, which had continued with little intermission, now ceased, and the rain which had poured down in torrents, was no longer heard as it fell with violence from the projecting spouts of the roof. As Alicia rose from her devotions, she felt the storm in her own breast also calmed, and putting aside the curtain, she stood gazing on the sky, as the moon broke through the dark bosoms of the heavy clouds, which receded from the western wind, and shewed her the terrace where many a happy hour had, in infancy, been spent by her. Freshly was the scene recalled when Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple were thrown from their phaeton over the wall, and Alicia stood with her eyes fixed on the spot; the moon beams fell on the bare boughs of the walnut tree, and piercing through them, shewed a figure seated on the place Alicia had oft seen her mother. It rose, and passing along, was lost in the gloom; momentarily it imerged, and again disappeared, but Alicia felt no alarm; this was by no means connected with the terror she so lately felt, and she

feared not the figure was a midnight ruffian, who lurked there for robbery and murder; it was, she supposed, some poor, desolate wanderer, who there had taken refuge from the fury of the storm. The clouds thickened and obscured again the moon, whilst a heavy shower fell; Alicia sighed, as she thought of the unhoused wretch exposed to it, whom the darkness now prevented her from beholding, and again returning to where Mary lay wrapt in sleep, she stretched herself on the bed, which many years had been un-occupied.

The spirits of Alicia, harrassed by the occurrences of the day, by the terror which had filled her mind to a degree that she had reason to think had conjured up false appearances to her sight, now sunk under the heavy influence of sleep; but not quiet and gentle slumber, as in general hovered over her pillow, even in sleep she felt the heavy oppression that sat on her soul, and her visions partook of the agitation she had sustained.

Alicia seemed again to behold her mother, who appeared but to chide. Is this then the fortitude I hoped my lessons had taught; my last SOLEMN INJUNCTIONS are forgotten by my child—she disregards them—the secrecy enjoined oppresses the weak mind of Alicia—she shrinks before imaginary terrors; but remember the trial—remember if such is your conduct you are unworthy of the early confidence reposed in you—and unworthy the fate which yet may be yours.

As Alicia waked, she mentally promised future obedience to the commands of her mother.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XIII

THE morning was clear and frosty, notwithstanding the terrible night, and William proposed to the young ladies a walk in the garden, the style of which was equally as antique as that of the house.

Miss Bertram, however insisted on having another peep at the apartments, and told Alicia, if she did not also go, she should suppose she really was afraid. Henry was about to speak, but Alicia gaily complied with her friends request, who led the way to the suite of apartments fitted up on the marriage of the present baronet's grand-father; these were never remembered by Alicia, otherwise than as now she beheld them, unfurnished and desolate, for so they were when Mr. Bouchier came to the hall, and so they remained, after the elegant furniture he had bought was sold; but on entering her mothers apartment, which afterwards had been occupied by Mr. Kirby, it acquired all the fortitude she could collect to support her against the many tender recollections it recalled; she dreaded again a repetition of the faintings her suppressed emotions had caused the preceding day.

Henry assiduously watchful of her expressive countenance, marked she agitation it displayed, and hurried his sister along.

"Oh! now for one more look into Sir Philip's chamber, (said Miss Bertram) was it not very cross of the ghost last night never to take a peep at us."

"Perhaps it might, Mary, (said William) and you, equally as insensible to the honour as you were to the thunder, which never waked you."

When they were in the dreaded apartment, Miss Bertram, in her usual gay manner, commented upon the furniture, and the most probable form the spirit would make its appearance in. "If, (said she) it is Sir Philip, I am almost sure of the very dress."

"And pray, Mary, what may that dress be, which, like our natures, can partake of the material and immaterial, (said Henry, gravely) but have done with this trifling, we shall spend all the day here."

"Henry, you are grown so grave and demure, I protest I shall be as afraid to open my mouth to you as if Sir Philip was to stand before me there, in the suit of armour which hangs in the hall, that he wore at the taking of Cadiz, for I dare say that is the dress he appears in."

"Come along, you giddy thing, (said Henry) taking hold of her arm."

"Nay, only let me look at myself in this glass, which I have not dared to do yet, lest I should see more faces than my own.—Now Henry and William you stand there, whilst Alicia and I walk up to it; so, taking hold of her friend, she began to advance, laughing as she went, then raised her eyes, as did Alicia, but instantly, with a loud shriek, fled out of the room; whilst Henry advancing to the pale and trembling Alicia, would have led her to a seat.

"Let us go, Henry, (said she in a voice scarcely articulate,) oh! this room, this horrid room."

What has alarmed you," enquired Henry, as he led her out.

"It was but a shadow I saw nothing but a reflection, though a terrible one."

They had reached the staircase, but the steps of the terrified Mary, who was followed by William March, were heard in the stone passage at its foot.

My late apparent gaiety, my again yielding to fear, alike unintelligible to you, Henry, requires an apology.—Alas! I dare offer none, and you will accuse me of a levity, far, at this period, from my heart. I must, however, (continued Alicia, as they reached the bottom of the staircase) endeavour to collect myself, and will pass through the saloon into the court, where, or on the terrace, you will find me ready to accompany Miss Bertram round the garden."

Henry would have dissuaded Alicia from revisiting scenes that must again awaken her sensibility.

"No, Henry, (she said) I must, it is my duty to oppose, not sink under my feelings."

Henry joined the party in the dining room, whilst Alicia, going through the saloon, and crossing a corner of the court, reached the terrace; still the woodbine was twined round the walnut-tree, but the seat, the favorite seat of her mother was gone, save some worm eaten rails that yet lay heaped in one corner; hastily she turned from what filled her with painful recollection.

"Alas! my beloved mother, what a sad inheritance did you bequeath your child," sighed out Alicia, as hastily she paced the terrace walk; soon she saw her friends enter the garden, by the door which opened from the dining room; and endeavouring to give a gay cast to her countenance, an expression foreign to her heart, she advanced to meet them.

"Oh! Alicia, (said Miss Bertram) pray what did you see; for these wretches are, one of them scolding, and the other ridiculing me, till I have lost my patience, so do convince them that I saw a pale, ghastly face peep over Henry's shoulder."

"I cannot pretend to say what you saw, Mary, (replied Alicia) I was looking in the glass."

"So was I, dear Alicia; you are as vexatious as Henry and William, it was in the glass I saw it, what did you see?"

"What should I see, do you suppose, but your face and mine."

"I declare now, Alicia, I believe you only mean to vex me however, I know, that if Sir Robert would give me the Oakdale estate, it should not tempt me to spend another night in the hall, or to look in that frightful glass again."

They passed through the door which opened into the wood, and took the path that led to the projecting rock, from which the unhappy Mr. Bouchier had, in all probability, precipitated himself. Henry had opposed quitting the garden, but Alicia felt a kind of impulse that hurried her along.

"Yes Henry, I will go, encourage not my weakness," she said.

"And this is the spot; alas! then here it was, (said the gentle hearted Mary) that the rash Mr. Bouchier threw himself down. I cannot suppose he was a person inured to guilt, he had been oppressed, perhaps, by some peculiar circumstances."

"So I should suppose, (said William) and lament his sad fate."

"And then, oh! William, (said the weeping girl,) his young, his lovely wife, I think how oft she would come, and walk in this gloomy wood."

Mary stooped down, and looked over the rock to where the river rolled far over its pebbly bed. Alicia, with a heart agonised by the ideas that whirled in sad succession through her brain, leaned against a tall ash, and whilst the arm of Henry supported hers, it trembled, and the anxious solicitude he felt was strongly imprinted on every feature.

"Oh! why Alicia thus expose yourself to scenes so painful; I fear greatly for the effect they must have upon you."

A servant now came to inform them Sir Robert and Lady Bertram waited their return, the coach already at the gate.

"Mary now rose, and with William led the way, and ere they reached the court, where the baronet and his lady joined them, Alicia had, (soothed by the affectionate friendship of Henry,) regained, in some degree, her composure; whilst Mary, whose tears so short a time before had been shed to the sorrows of the late inhabitants of Oakdale, now had resumed her usual gaiety of heart and manner.

Seated in the carriage, Alicia's eyes remained fixed upon the high walls that inclosed the hall and its garden till they were no longer visible; then pensive, lost in thought, she joined not in the conversation, of which, indeed, she scarce was sensible, till her attention was recalled by Miss Bertram lowering the window to look at the prospect, which from the ascent they had gained lay in full perspective behind them.

Alicia again beheld the village and church of St. Mary Oak, where rested the bones of her beloved, her unfortunate mother; the river too was seen meandering through the vale; there its glassy surface, reflecting the then scanty rays of sunshine, there closed in by high rocky banks, it flowed deep; removed from distant sight; the peaked turrets of Oakdale, and one entire front were visible rising out of the dark bosom of the surrounding wood.

"Adieu, (cried the lively Mary, as she closed the window) never again do I desire to behold thy thick walls, or the gloomy chambers they encircle, oh! thou hall of my ancestors."

All smiled at the apostrophe, and William said she was under some obligation, however, to Oakdale, for she appeared quite poetically inspired.

"Inspired, William, I am, with dread and horror, and no consideration shall ever tempt me, again to visit Oakdale; I shall not recover myself for some days."

"It was, Mary, you will recollect, your proposal first, that we should visit it," said Henry.

"Pray what sudden dislike is this, (enquired Sir Robert) you declared yourself delighted with the gloom of Oakdale this morning."

"Oh! I dare not, Sir Robert, tell you my reason; Henry and William have teased me to death about it, and even Alicia, who saw it as well as I, denies what she did see."

"Saw! saw what child, (said the baronet) I hope there is not infection in the air of Oakdale, and that you have not already caught the idle superstition which has seized the neighbourhood."

"I will inform you, Sir Robert, (said his son) of the fright poor Mary got, who we all know chose Sir Philip's chamber, in order to hold converse with the spirits of her departed ancestors; and, with Alicia, would look in that large glass, which hangs there, this morning; I was ordered to stand at some distance; so, whilst she did not observe what I was about, I lifted up a picture of some of the family, that had been placed against the wainscot, which so terrified her that she declared a ghost peeped over my shoulder."

"I did not say I saw a ghost brother; I only said a face pale and frightful—and so it was frightful; and if you did this I think you were less excusable than I was."

Sir Robert declared he was so far of Mary's opinion, and felt concerned to think Henry would trifle so childishly.

"Mary was, (said her ladyship) punished for the levity she displayed on the subject; if she was divested of a belief in supernatural appearances, why so terrified by Henry's frolic? for by daylight the most superstitious lay aside their fears; but if she entertains a belief, which her conduct gives me reason to suppose she does; how can we account for her choosing to sleep in an apartment to which such strange tales are annexed?"

Miss Bertram frankly acknowledged she had never thought upon the subject seriously; a sufficient proof of which was her sleeping when the storm had waked every person the preceding night but herself; that she was frightened by beholding something in the glass, which she did not believe was, as Henry averred, a picture; but that the glimpse she had of it, though sufficient to terrify, yet was not sufficient to convince her accurately of the nature of the appearance."

"I wish you had, Mary, mentioned it to me, (said the baronet) I then would have visited the room, of which, when a boy, I recollect a servant belonging to St. Mary's telling me strange tales; the deep impression they then made is not perfectly obliterated."

Alicia was, though she gave not her opinion, of the same way of thinking as Miss Bertram, for where she saw the face was also over Henry's shoulder; nor was the face she saw in the least resembling that of the portrait which the preceding evening she had observed for its beauty; but this was pale, with loose dishevelled hair, and as well as the transitory glimpse she had of it enabled her to judge, wore a countenance of fixed horror and despair. Certainly, thought she it was the same I beheld during the night, and which, I was led to believe, or rather wished to believe, was but an illusion of my own imagination, oppressed as it had been by gloomy remembrances.—Sometimes she

meditated speaking to Mr. Bertram on the subject, yet that would infringe on her vow; for sure this appearance was connected somehow with what her mother had disclosed to her astonished sight; but if so connected, it was a mystery too horrid for her to dare penetrating or even to think upon.

During the journey Mr. Bertram enquired of Sir Robert if he had found the papers he expected.

"Indeed, I have not, (the baronet replied) but from such as I did find I have reason to fear the business may turn out more serious than I imagined."

At a late hour of dining they reached Malieveren, where Mr. Meynel had already arrived.

"Oh! thank heaven, Mr. Meynell, we have got safe back to the castle, (said Miss Bertram) where do you think we slept last night but at that horrid dungeon, that mausoleum of joy, Oakdale hall."

Mr. Meynell's countenance betrayed much agitation, and heaving a deep sigh as he turned to the fire, exclaimed, "a mausoleum indeed, Miss Bertram!"

During dinner Mr. Meynel appeared absent and thoughtful, and scarce was the cloth removed when he and Sir Robert quitted the dining room; soon after Lady Bertram was desired to attend them in the library, where they staid two hours or more, and when they again joined the young people, the agitation of Mr. Meynell's countenance seemed to have now communicated itself to the baronet and his lady.

Sir Robert informed William that Mr. Meynell's chaise would be ready at six o'clock in the morning, when he was to accompany that gentleman to London, whilst you Henry, (he added) will follow with the ladies in a few days.

The reason of this sudden removal was not even hinted at, and Sir Robert's manner awed even Miss Bertram from enquiry. At an early hour they separated, Mr. Meynell saying to Alicia, he would, when they met at Sir Robert's house in London, talk of her future plans.

Though Alicia was destitute of impertinent curiosity, yet she could not avoid feeling her wonder completely roused by this sudden departure of Sir Robert. Yet she supposed it originated with the law suit that impended, and how far she might be involved in that she knew not; though somehow she imagined herself connected with the Bertram family, she had no clue to guide her various conjectures; her mother's parentage was well known at St. Mary's, therefore if any connexion subsisted it must be through her father; yet it was evident he had been a stranger to Sir Robert, but so closely was the veil of mystery drawn over what had been partially disclosed, that, as the more ardent grew her wish to penetrate it, so the more obscure it appeared to become, and in particular regarding the imaginary connection between her and the Bertrams, the idea of which first arose from a few words

Mr. Kirby had said; but, as she reflected upon the indefinite expression, and the difficulty she found, if the Bertram's were alluded to, of reconciling it with probability; so incongruous did it seem, so wholly inconsistent, that as Alicia again reviewed the meaning of those words, she supposed herself mistaken in the reference she had made.

The day following the return of the family to Malieveren, Lady Bertram went, accompanied by her daughter, to call upon some neighbouring families, and Alicia, who was evidently though slightly indisposed, not attending her ladyship, Henry insisted upon staying to bear her company. Alicia felt a kind of constraint, which she imagined she also saw in Mr. Bertram's manner.

They spoke of the law suit which threatened Sir Robert, but even his son knew not who was the claimant, nor had any certainty regarding the cause of the Baronet's sudden departure from the castle. Their conversation next turned upon Oakdale, and the fright Miss Bertram had sustained from having beheld the pale ghostly face in the glass which hung in Sir Philip's chamber; but Alicia resolved to conceal even from Henry what her opinion was regarding the cause of her friends alarm and her own.

"I saw, (said Mr. Bertram) you wished no kind of enquiry to be made, therefore hurried Mary into the garden, without allowing time for explanation to Lady Bertram; and devised the tale regarding Dame Gertrude's portrait, to prevent those which might hereafter have been made. Excuse me, Alicia, if I say you perhaps yet are not an orphan;—that in Sir Philip's room,—or some adjoining one—but I have done!"

"Oh! Henry, why I was alarmed, seek not to learn; I have, indeed, weighty reasons;—but Sir Philip's chamber, alas! contains no parent now for the sad Alicia; but speak not to me on this subject, I conjure you; your kind, your partial attention many may make me forget how I am bound."

"I obey, Alicia, yet deem me, though condemned to silence, not insensible to your sufferings; believe me not insensible to your merit, and rely on my wishes to serve you; if ever you deem me worthy of your confidence, trust to the friendship—"

Henry paused, the words died on his lips; he would have added, to friendship—love—an expression oft before used to Alicia, but then to convey a different signification, for now, though not articulated so as to reach her ears, a blush of consciousness overspread his fine features, and his eyes, averted from her face, were cast on the carpet; but the fair companion of Henry saw not the confusion he felt, and replied to the unfinished speech.

"I do, (said she) deem you worthy of my confidence; fully do I rely on your honour—firmly do I trust to your friendship; ah! Henry, would to heaven you could share with me the secret which oppresses my heart, then would I appear to you as I really am, divested of the strange mystery which envelopes my fate, even from myself."

CHAPTER XIV

IT perhaps may appear strange that Alicia should, with Henry, feel that perfect confidence she reposed in no other person; and that, urged by this feeling, she had in some degree even violated her promise, by imparting to him what she had so carefully concealed from Mr. Meynell and Lady Bertram.

I do not pretend to define causes, though I may make a conjecture, as I describe the effect. The amiable disposition, the various talents, accomplishments, and elegant manners of Mr. Bertram, with the lively interest he took in whatever concerned our heroine, must doubtless have influenced her in his favor, without reckoning upon those personal graces of face and figure which surely ought; in forming a friendship, but especially one between the two sexes, to have no weight. William, equal in every thing to Henry, paid not those silent, yet marked attentions to her; and Mary, lively to an extreme, was too volatile for to tempt confidence, though her temper was amiable and her heart good. Miss Bertram's understanding was not as Henry's, an elevated one; and her manner, although she was older than Alicia, was trifling, and oft childish; thus at Oakdale the kind, the soothing attentions of Mr. Bertram threw Alicia off her guard, and she momentarily forgot that reserve she had been commanded to maintain. The first step taken, she had a painful struggle to avoid the temptation that presented itself, to repose in the sympathising heart of Henry Bertram the mysterious sorrows which so deeply at Oakdale agitated her.

At Mrs. Selden's Alicia had formed no friendship; the only young person there she had ever known, who particularly interested her, was Miss Olivia Harman, who had so generously protected her, but she left the school, ere the attention she so kindly paid our heroine had time to ripen into friendship; therefore deprived by this circumstance of that young lady's future acquaintance, and persecuted, nay almost deserted by the girls of her own age for a time; when the tide of favour again turned, and Miss Aislabie was neglected; Alicia courted and caressed, she carefully avoided any degree of intimacy with her mutable companions, except such as politeness and the natural gentleness and amiability of her own heart urged; thus, as to all she was alike attentive, all were satisfied, as no one enjoyed in the heart of Miss Sleigh an exclusive preference. Henry Bertram's obtaining a preference in our heroine's affections is therefore not to be wondered at, for in his society she felt a degree of animated pleasure, she, till then, had been estranged from; amusing and instructive, the conversations she held with Henry on those points of education, which, as yet, were unfinished by practical study, formed, perhaps, the basis of the friendship she felt; for so studious did he appear for her improvement in those branches of knowledge in which he was a proficient, so gentle were his precepts, so elegant, yet so clear was the language in which he conveyed instruction; that, as Alicia listened, as the lessons sunk with the graceful manner of her preceptor on a heart tender and amiable; she, relying on the virtues, on the honour of Henry Bertram, thought not of the difference fortune had made, but chose, as the friend best able to direct, most willing to soothe or console, the heir of Sir Robert Bertram, though she was but a dependant on the charity of Mr. Dalrymple.

That Henry delighted in the company of Alicia, in the chearful conversations he held in her society; or that, by degrees he had in a manner assumed the office of preceptor to her, will not seem wonderful, as I remark that Mr. Bertram's mind was yet unvitiated—that yet he had mingled with no women but of reputation—and amongst those whose age approached his own, he had seen none so amiable as Alicia, none so beautiful, at least so he imagined. This however is certain, for none had he felt himself so interested; and to befriend the lovely,—the amiable—and almost deserted orphan, appeared to the romantic soul of Henry the first of his enjoyments; her artless yet unrestrained expressions of the firm confidence she felt in his friendship, and the strange mystery that was half unfolded to his view, made him assume a kind of tenderness in his manner to Alicia, but he did not imagine he felt any other sentiment than friendship for her, before they were at Oakdale, even there he was scarce sensible of the nature of his feeling; nor, till the conversation he held with her, after their return to Malieveren, was he sensible of the change, if indeed a change it was.

Three days only intervened between Sir Robert's quitting Malieveren and the departure of his lady, who, accompanied by her son and daughter, with Alicia, safely reached Sir Roberts house in London, where they learned William March was set out for France.

"For France! (echoed Mary."

"Who, (enquired Lady Bertram) has accompanied him."

Mr. Meynell, (said Sir Robert) insisted upon going, but I could by no means consent to a journey so improper for his very advanced age, and therefore proposed Mr. Blackmore, the late tutor to the young men; but the Earl of Knavesborough kindly offered himself to accompany William, saying, that though I was too nearly interested to be of the party, yet it ought to be a person of consequence that went, whose presence might be a check upon the insinuations which might be made to William by this fellow Ayscough; also a check, upon the arts of his base employer, for such doubtless there is.' I listened, (continued the baronet) to the generous proposal, and his lordship and his charge set out this morning."

" 'Tis sudden, indeed, (said Henry) may I presume now to enquire if this journey related to the lawsuit of which you spoke, Sir Robert."

"It does, Henry, yet so perplexed, so intricate at Malieveren the whole seemed, so agitated I felt on the subject, that I deferred an explanation with you, till I better knew how the affair stood, which I will now communicate, as you are equally concerned with myself."

Alicia rose to withdraw, but the good baronet begged she would be again seated, as he by no means wished to exclude her from the knowledge of what he was about to say.

"Before I quitted Malieveren for Bertram Castle, I had some intimations of a claim that was about to be made for the Oakdale and Northumberland estates; the claimant I was told was a person nearly of my own age, but this intimation I disregarded, being satisfied no title could be clearer than what I held my estates by; my father had long survived his two younger brothers, who were not any more than my aunt Mildred ever married. My grandfather, Sir Henry, was an only child, and I now, with my children, are

the only remains of a family never very numerous, as I have great reason to suppose the son of my sister, (who alone with myself survived infancy out of a numerous issue) has long since fallen a victim to his vices; as, on his father's return, every enquiry possible was made, not only in this kindom, but also in France, where he had resided; and as riches and restoration to his parent were the allurements held out, had he lived, long, many years ago would he have claimed those advantages; but when he quitted Paris, it was supposed he could not survive many months. Why I am so particular, (continued the baronet) regarding this person is, that Mr. Meynell, who has suffered much remorse, as accusing himself as the primary cause of his sons ill conduct, started an idea, that this claimant might be my nephew; but it had a rise in a hope of again beholding, however depraved, the son whose childhood he recalled as amiable. The folly of such a claim destroyed with me all probability of Mr. Meynell's having conjectured rightly, and I scarce, when at Bertram castle, should have recalled the hints I had received, had it not been for what happened two days after our arrival there.

"I was seated in the library, examining some plans regarding the improvement I am making, when a servant informed me a gentleman and lady in a chaise and four had drove into the back court, and begged to see me, but would not send their names.—I told James to give my compliments, and to desire they would alight; ere I had time to reflect on the singularity of refusing to give their names, James returned, and announced the lady, who closely followed him; she was a tall elegant figure, clad in deep mourning, with a veil that fell almost to the ground; this she threw back, when James quitted the room, and discovered a face extremely handsome, which I could distinguish, though it was nearly dusk.

'You appear, said she, surprised, yet sure this face cannot, and she sighed deeply, be forgot by Sir Robert Bertram.'

'I am very sorry, said I, bowing to acknowledge madam, if ever your face was known to me, I am now so unfortunate as not to recollect it.'

'What say you, Sir Robert, not recollect me?'

'Favor me with your name, you now have the advantage.'

'Twice has my name been changed, my face is nearly the same; still do you say you know me not?'

'Upon my honor, madam, I do not, and wish to be informed why I am favored with this visit from a person to whom at present I suppose myself a stranger.'

'Your honor, Sir Robert, will shortly be put to the test; if it stands that test it will save you much needless trouble and expence; even now had you chose to remember me, it would have saved much vexation; to avoid which I visited you, but now you shun the explanation I came to make. Now, Sir Robert, I bid you consider whither this denial of your knowledge will lead you; dearly will you repent when in a court of justice you must answer to the accusation that will be made, and your lands—your title go to their legal heir.'

"Amazed at this accusation, I attempted not to detain her, as throwing her veil over her face she hastily quitted the room.—Recovering my surprise, I followed, but ere I reached the door which opens into the court, the carriage in which she had reseated herself was driving through the gates. When I reflected on so sudden, so strange a visit I could scarce believe that I was awake.—Recovering, however, my surprise, I sent a servant to follow the carriage, of which, however, he could gain no information, the enquiries made at the

neighbouring towns were equally fruitless. Certain now some scheme was on foot, though ignorant of what was the exact nature of the pretended claim, I wrote to my solicitor in London regarding the former intelligence I had received from him. I learned, on the day preceding the arrival of any letter, he had received certain intelligence of some claim being about to be made, but that, as yet, he was wholly ignorant upon what it was founded. Intending therefore to come to London, prepared with all the particular information I could gather concerning every branch of the family, I searched at Bertram castle for some papers I imagined I should have found there; in this not succeeding as I hoped, I expected that at Oakdale they would be met with, and there, though I found not what I sought, yet I chanced to light upon some letters of my fathers to my aunt of a strange import, if I comprehend them right; but they are worded in so mysterious a way that I, who have no clue to the story, can by no means comprehend them, further than to say they have given me serious uneasiness. From this was my attention recalled by a letter which lay at Malieveren waiting my arrival, containing a notice of the suit that was about to be instituted against me and Lady Bertram for the Malieveren estates, enjoyed by her ladyship as supposed heiress to her brother the late Lord Malieveren; but that his lordship's true heir, an only son born in wedlock, was found, and to him were the estates to be delivered up; for him his maternal uncle, a person of the name of Ayscough, had, as the heir was yet a minor, instituted the suit."

"But who, Sir Robert, was said to be the heir?"

"Who Henry? your friend, the worthy, the amiable William March, is pitched upon as the pretended heir to the title and estate of your uncle, and thus have my enemies chose by this way to wound me in every quarter at once."

"But sure, sir, (said Miss Bertram) William does not, cannot believe the tale, he does not league with your enemies."

"No, Mary! I trust the principles of William are too deeply rooted in virtue to be led astray by the dazzling allurements which will be held out to him; and the clear perception, the unbiassed understanding that distinguishes him, will prevent his falling into the snare prepared to work his ruin, and thus give pain to us all, and that he will avoid the various artifices by which he will be encompassed; to disappoint the hopes I have indulged regarding him, would give equal pleasure to my enemy as grief to me. But the letter I received at Malieveren was not the only information I received regarding this iniquitous affair, for such I deem it.—Mr. Meynell, who reached the castle before us, had met at York with a Mr. Evans, a lawyer of some eminence, who had at times transacted business for Mr. Meynel, who expressed his surprise at seeing him in that city. Mr. Evans then informed him he had come into the north in order to collect evidence for one of the most important trials which had appeared before any court of judicature for some time; he then, at Mr. Meynell's request, informed him that the suit was instituted against Sir Robert and Lady Bertram, for withholding the estates of Malieveren from the lawful heir.

'And who, (enquired Mr. Meynell,) is that heir? I always understood, that although the title was extinct, Lady Bertram was the heir at law had not Lord Malieveren, by will, constituted her so.'

'But then, (replied Mr. Evans) if a son of Lord Malieveren exists.'

'No such son, (replied Mr. Meynell) I presume could inherit, as Lord Malieveren was never married.'

'To prove that his lordship actually was, said Mr. Evans) is now my principal business in the north; my client informs me that Lord Malieveren died before he acknowledged his wife publicly, but revealed his marriage when on his death bed to Sir Robert and Lady Bertram. Unconscious of the death of her lord, (to whom she was supposed hastening) Lady Malieveren was travelling towards London from the North, was suddenly taken ill, and a poor cottage safely delivered a fine boy; but the child was concealed by the servants who Lady Bertram had placed about Lady Malieveren; the people of the cottage were also bribed, and she was informed the infant was still born.—By this means Lady Bertram remained the heiress of her brother, whose unhappy wife was also, by no provision being made, at least none that was produced, become a poor dependant on the bounty of the Bertram's, for she was ignorant how far the right she had would go, and accepting a certain sum quitted England; her child was for some time brought up in privacy, but Lady Bertram not willing wholly to desert it, had the hapless infant exposed by the road-side, near where she with Sir Robert passed; she instantly adopted the child, giving him the name of the month in which he was found, and he has, by the name of March, received an education which will fit him for his station.'

'But how came the discovery to be made,' enquired Mr. Meynel.

"It is a long tale, (replied Evans) but the discovery was made to Mr. Ayscough, who is the brother of Lady Malieveren; but was abroad at the period I speak of, he has only lately returned, indeed, from the East, where he has, I find, acquired a considerable fortune, which he informs me he will freely spend to procure his nephew justice. He it is who instituted the necessary enquiry; the cottagers are ready to swear to the birth of the child, and had we but the certificate, I dread not a defeat for my client.'

"Mr. Meynell quitted York, and impatiently waited my return to Malieveren, whilst the same day Evans, summoned by Ayscough, went South. It was necessary to go to London; I wished William not to be informed of particulars till I arrived there, and I received other information, I took him with me, that as early as possible I might learn his sentiments. To you, my children, or to you, Miss Sleigh, I trust all vindication on this subject is needless."

"That Lord Malieveren was gay and dissipated, (said Lady Bertram) alas! I am too well convinced; yet that he had a soul capable of abandoning a woman he had thought worthy of bearing his name, I can no more credit than I trust you can the enormous crime of which I am accused!—No! the heart of my unfortunate brother was not abandoned so far!—No! he would have shrunk from such a deed! He carefully provided before his decease for two children who had no legal claim upon his fortune, then could he possibly have deserted a woman he had made his wife? But this is of a piece with the rest of the villainous tale, and like it, will be proved false."

"You all know of Williams being found, I dare say, said Sir Robert, a little distance from Rippon, wrapped in rags; one servant, James, yet remains in the house, who attended us that day, and every search which was then made for his parents failed of success. The whole of this affair is the work of malice, cool, deliberate, and diabolical: nor can I hesitate in affirming I know that the quarter in which the plan has originated is too fruitful in expedients for me to hope the affair will quickly terminate, and tho' certain of the falsity of the claim, I yet must remain long uncertain of the issue of a suit, where no expence will be spared by my antagonist, and where it is certain wretches are already bribed to swear whatever is dictated to them."

"That it proceeds from malice, (said Henry) is certified by the suit being changed, which doubtless was intended at first to claim the Bertram estates, though now the pretensions are levelled against those of Malieveren; has this Ayscough proved his relationship to the pretended heir?"

"Yes, (replied Sir Robert) that is already done, and he claims the guardianship of the heir for the mock Lady Malieveren, to bring whom over to England, and a servant, who is also to prove the marriage, is William gone. Ayscough proposed at first going alone for this purpose, but my lawyer said it would be requisite some one should accompany him, as a witness upon my side, to prevent collusion. Ayscough then said his nephew, for so he stiles him, might accompany him, and any other person I should please to appoint, that all matters might be carried fairly; William then would meet his mother, where nature would not be warped by the imaginary gratitude he supposed my right, and yet some one would be present less nearly interested, who in court would be considered as an impartial evidence. Such were the reasons that influenced me to consent to the journey being made by William. The Earl of Knasborough and Mr. Blackmore, who when he learned the occasion offered himself, filled one chaise, James and his lordship's servant another, whilst Ayscough followed with two people in a third."

"It is indeed, (said Alicia, who as yet had not spoke on the subject) it is indeed most cruel to fix upon Mr. March as an instrument of these diabolical schemes; if I might venture to give my opinion, I should say some latent and as yet undiscovered cause must have induced them to change the direction of the law-suit, and that William for some reason is obnoxious to those who wish to make him the instrument of their malice, and thus at once is your peace destroyed, and (as they hope) the future prospects of the unfortunate William; yet this, it is evident, is a recent idea, and I therefore think his ruin is the aim at which those wretches aspire, perhaps more than what anxiety it may cost the family, whose estates they, falsely claim."

Sir Robert rose with an expression upon his countenance Alicia had never before observed it wear, it was indignation mixed with rage. "Thank you, (he said) Miss Sleigh, I see it in the same light now you have given the hint. It must be so, I am convinced, every thing proves it."

"Yet why should this unfortunate young man, Sir Robert, be the object of dislike to any one? it is but through him, (said Lady Bertram) you are wounded, and if he falls, he falls a victim to the diabolical wish of vengeance those wretches have formed against you, for who but he can have harboured such a wish."

"It is evident the ruin of William is also aimed at; wretch! (exclaimed Sir Robert) he could never have offended! he never, as I did, thwarted thee! But yet, (he continued, raising his voice) detested, abandoned wretch! Yet, I trust in God, who knows the extent of thy crimes, that even in this world they will meet detection; that even here thou shalt be covered with obloquy and scorn—that thy infernal schemes shalt ere long rebound on thy devoted head—and even by the vicious shalt thou be marked out as an object of hatred—the wrath of heaven will not sleep for ever—the stroke is but deferred!"

Sir Robert was about to quit the apartment, when Lady Bertram rose, and laying her hand on the lock, said, with an air of resolution, "whither is it you go?"

"Detain me not, Frances!" replied the baronet.

"Say then, why you so hastily quit us? recollect, Sir Robert, the hour."

"There are weighty reasons, Lady Bertram, (replied the Baronet) why I should again examine the evidence who spoke to the birth of William March, (perhaps we have treated the affair too lightly)."

"But not to night, (said her ladyship) it is much too late, Sir Robert, to-morrow will be the same if still they resolve to perjure themselves.

The baronet grew more composed, and was again seated.

Though they continued to converse till a late hour, no other topic was discussed, although this was varied.

"Yet, (said Sir Robert to Henry) you are inexperienced, my son in the world; you have *heard* of its arts—of its villainies—but you have not found their effects; long may you continue a stranger to what I have felt—may you be blessed as I was in a friend—and oh! may heaven avert from you the deep sense of misery that I have sustained on that friends account—may you never behold that friend as I beheld—"

The good baronet seemed for a few minutes too agitated to proceed, then recovering himself, continued.

"No, my son, for you I trust no such trial is reserved; you know the silence I have imposed on myself concerning the subject—you know the exertions I have made—you are also conscious that as I attempted to unmask villainy, I wounded myself.— The wretch whom I hate and detest laughs at my efforts—and knows his security—knows that in attacking him I shall but wound the reputation of my friend, therefore I am and will be silent; but now I was betrayed to speak on this hateful subject by the late events raising a suspicion of their origin."

Sir Robert spoke during the evening of William's reluctance to the journey he had undertaken. "It will, (said he) appear as if destitute of gratitude to those benefactors to whom I owe life—ininitely more than life—as if I wished to countenance the unjust claim which is made by villains envious of the good fortune I enjoy."

"He fell (said Sir Robert) at my feet, imploring I would allow him publicly to disavow the proceedings made in his name.

'I will loudly, (said he) proclaim my obligations, my gratitude, your charitable benevolence.' 'No, William, this shall not, must not be. I insist upon your complying with what this Aycough requires; accompany him to France—it is not by shunning inquiry that my honour will be cleared—no, the law now must investigate the whole—there is no alternative left; by delay my character, which as yet has been unsullied, may suffer; it is now only to a fair, open, public trial I trust for proving my integrity. It is not in your power, by saying I preserved your life—by proclaiming I have bestowed on you an education equal to that I have given my heir—that my name will remain unsullied. These might well be judged a trifling recompence for the lands of Malieveren, which I have enjoyed since about the period you were born.'

'But hear me, Sir Robert, (said the generous youth) remember my inexperience—recollect I must be exposed to artful people who will doubtless seek how to work my ruin; by wanting knowledge of the world I may be imposed upon by their arts—I am not destitute of ambition—alas! I tremble—I dare not trust myself!"

"This diffidence, (continued Sir Robert) I assured him made me but the more firmly trust in those principles I had taken care to have implanted in his heart, and bade him speak without reserve to those friends who accompanied him. Yet he was not encouraged, and this morning he sorrowfully bade me adieu.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XV.

THE day following Lady Bertrams arrival in town, at Sir Robert's request his solicitor waited upon the lawyer who was employed for Ayscough, signifying the baronet's desire to see the witnesses who were to swear to the birth of the pretended heir.

"This, (said Mr. Evans) is a request I am not bound to comply with; yet, to shew your client our claims are not slightly founded, and as Mr. Ayscough wishes no concealment to be made, I will this instant accompany you to hear what those two simple folks say; then, if Sir Robert is not satisfied with your report, he may afterwards visit them."

This proposal was agreed to, and the two gentlemen of the law proceeded to a very good house in spring gardens, which Mr. Ayscough had hired, it seemed, some time before, and in which he resided at the time he went to France. Here Mr. Raynton, Sir Robert's lawyer, was introduced to a well cloathed man and woman, whose simple tale was told in the broadest Yorkshire dialect.—It consisted in a recital of what Mr. Meynell had, at York, learned from Mr. Evans:—"that a lady had been, (they said) taken to their house by another lady and gentleman, though the first was the mistress; and that the gentleman went to the next town for assistance, (as he said) but staid so long that the child was born before he came back; that it was a fine boy, though the lady had been told it was still born; that the person who attended the lady gave the women of the cottage money to assist in the fraud; that the lady was soon so far recovered as to leave the cottage, where the child still remained. After some months had passed, the man who was with the lady returned, saying he had come for the infant; that the woman was unwilling to part with it, but he took it from her, and stripping it, put some old rags about it, then wrapping his great coat over it, and leaving his horse, walked away, followed, though unseen, by the owner of the cottage; that he laid it under a bush, close by the road to Rippon, and ran back to the horse, which mounting, he galloped off. The coach of Sir Robert Bertram, (continued the apparently artless narrator) was driving up, and her ladyship bade the carriage stop, and the child was taken in."

This was the chief substance of what, after much tedious delivery, Mr. Raynton obtained, who informed them Sir Robert would visit them that day or the next.

"Ah! God bless his Honour, (said the man) I wish this young Lord may ever do the good he has done."

"But let him have his right, and then we will know, (said his wife); but seldom comes a better, as the saying is. What, mayhap, ye think I do not know Sir Robert or my Lady, but you are mistaken—what, when I was bred, born, and brought up, as I may say, in Malieveren parish.—Aye, many a 'How do you, Barbara?' have I had in my time from her Ladyship, I am sure I am very sorry, and had it not been as how Mr. Ayscough was thrown off his horse just at our door, I would never have told, for I am sure we were well paid, were we not Johnny? But was it not very miraculous that the very lady's brother his ownself should be so unfortunate as to fall?"

"Very miraculous, indeed, (said Mr. Raynton) but have you told me all you know regarding this affair."

"No, no, we know a great deal besides, but nobody shall know nothing at all besides till the trial; then, tell Sir Robert, all shall out."

The Baronet, at Mr. Raynton's return, with Mr. Meynel and Henry, resolved to lose no time in visiting those people; but, when they reached Spring Gardens, they were informed by a servant that the people they sought had quitted the house soon after them. Mortified at this disappointment, they drove to Mr. Evan's, who either could not, or would not, give any intelligence.—The next day, however, he attended Sir Robert to Ayscough's house, where they were informed the witnesses had set out in a chaise the preceding evening about dusk, and left a message for Mr. Evans, the import of which was that they would answer no more questions till the trial, and that then they would appear, Mr. Ayscough knowing where they might be found; that a chaise had been observed to drive from this house in the dusk, was confirmed by several people.

Sir Robert, convinced that all enquiry would be needless, as whoever had thus spirited them away would doubtless conceal them, took no further step in the affair.

Mrs. Selden had fixed on a fresh place of residence, and her school was re-established; but Lady Bertram proposed to Mr. Meynel, if agreeable to Alicia, she should for the future seek no home but her house; to this our heroine could form no reasonable objection, and gratefully accepted the proposal on this condition, that if hereafter her West Indian friends approved her determination. She was at this time flattering herself with beholding those friends, as Mrs. Dalrymple's letters spoke with almost certainty of Mr. Dalrymple's having put his affairs in such a train as would speedily allow of their quitting Jamaica.

From Calais Sir Robert and Henry had letters; the former from the Earl of Knasborough, which informed him he had just heard his son Lord Morville was wounded, and it was feared dangerously; to him he must hasten, therefore he was obliged to relinquish the charge he had undertaken. Mr. Blackmore, he doubted not, would do every thing in his power, and that Ayscough as yet had not offered to intrude himself upon William.—From his friend the account Henry received was much the same, only mentioning the route they meant to take, and the time when he hoped to return.

Sir Robert and his son had few leisure hours, as the lawsuit engrossed a large portion of every day in collecting evidences, examining them, and consulting the gentlemen of the long robe, amongst whom already no inconsiderable sum had been divided; but this was a trifle to the Baronet, and had never cost him a moment's uneasiness; but it was, (he said) the stab his character had received. Ayscough, would he sometimes say, though a villain himself, was doubtless only a tool in the hand of some other, who lurked in ambush unseen, yet was the moving spirit.

Doubly keen was Lady Bertram's feelings; her own, her husband's character at stake, and the memory of an imprudent, though beloved, and in many ways amiable brother,

blackened by a stigma she was perfectly convinced was as undeserved as she judged it infamous.

From every town they had stopped at in their road to Soissons, where the supposed mother of Mr. March, it was said, resided, either he or Mr. Blackmore had written; all had gone smoothly on, and they were daily expected in England, although no letter had reached Sir Robert or his family from the end of their journey.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

Chawton House Library

THE
SOLEMN
INJUNCTION.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

AGNES MUSGRAVE,

AUTHOR OF CICELY OF RABY

"In a solitary chamber, and midnight hour,

"How many strange events may arise."

VOL. II.

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M.DCC.XCVIII.

THE
Solemn Injunction.

CHAPTER I.

THE family of Sir Robert had been held in this state of anxious expectation for about a fortnight; during which, to their infinite surprise, through the medium of Mr. Megrel, they learned, that all proceedings on the side of the plaintiff were suspended.

Mr. Megrel had dined in Cavendish-square, with the Baronet and his family, who were too much engaged to see much company besides himself; indeed few were admitted: they were sitting talking of the news Mr. Meynell had brought, when a chaise drew quickly up to the door, and stopped. "They are come, they are come," cried Miss Bertram, as she jumped from her seat, and ran into the entrance hall. The porter had got the door quite open. Mr. Blackmore, as he stepped out of the carriage, justified the assertion she had made. Henry, who had followed his sister, as he looked into the carriage, enquired of Mr. Blackmore for William.

"Would to heaven (said he emphatically) I could answer you, Mr. Bertram, as I wish, but he is not with me."

"Not with you, sir! O tell me, is he well? why did you, Mr. Blackmore, desert him?"

Mr. Blackmore answered not; but cast a grave, and rather reproachful glance, on Henry; which seemed to say, you question harshly; so was it understood by him, to whom it was addressed; and who, with much native politeness, and his usual sweetness of manners, as he again repeated his question, effaced from Mr. Blackmore's memory, 'The why did you,' of the former; which his anxious solicitude had caused to escape.

"If disease is extended to the mind, (replied Mr. Blackmore,) Mr. March is sick indeed: I did not desert him, but he has, I fear, for ever, his friends."

Mr. Blackmore learning Sir Robert was in the dining parlour, went to him, followed by Mr. Bertram, Mary, and Alicia.

The countenance of Mr. Blackmore prepared his auditors for ill-tidings: he appeared harrassed from fatigue; yet seemed as if he had still more severely suffered from agitation of mind: grief, vexation, and disappointment, sat on his features, whose general expression was that of serenity, mixed with that kind of knowledge, which books, not mankind, give to the mind. "The surprize I see, said Mr. Blackmore, all evince, as my return without Mr. March, makes me suppose my last letters have not reached you, Sir Robert."

The date of the last received account was mentioned:

"I shall then have (said Mr. Blackmore) much to recount: you have all to encounter much pain, and I may justly say, I still more; for I was the guardian, the tutor of the misguided youth; to my care afresh was he committed; ah! would to heaven I had been allowed to return him safe to these friends, whose benefits at present, I fear, are forgotten by him.

"In my last letter that came safe to hand, I informed you, Sir Robert, we were within a day's journey of—

"Ayscough and we drove at the same pace; stopped at the same house; and we had occasionally eat together; and the day that I wrote he dined with us: the subject of our journey had, till that day, never been mentioned by either party; but he now introduced it, by saying we were such a number of miles from—and pulling out his watch, began computing what hour we should arrive there, and said the gates of the convent would be shut; 'so, my Lord (for thus he always stiled poor William) to-night we must rest satisfied; perhaps, indeed, I feel more impatient to behold a sister than you do a parent whom you never saw; but, if to-morrow we find her as amiable and interesting as when I left England for the East, she will soon make you feel your happiness in having such a mother; soon you will be convinced, such a woman as Lady Malievern, is above imposition.'

"William bowed coldly, and Ayscough proceeded, 'her ladyship will, I doubt not, return to England with us; and, I trust, we shall have a more pleasant journey than hitherto; you, Mr. Blackmore, will not then eye me with suspicion, when you find my character cleared by such indisputable evidence: from you, my Lord, for whose sake already I have done so much, and to whom I am so nearly allied, I shall then meet with the respect I deem my due.'

"The colour mounted into poor William's face; it was, I saw, the blush of contempt; and, as if he dared not trust himself to reply, again distantly bowed.

'Gladly (said I) if justly founded, will I Sir Robert acknowledge the claim of this deserving young man.'

"A smile of contemptuous malice spread over Ayscough's countenance, which always bore, in my eyes, a cast of designing villainy.

"Again we sat out, but, in about the midst of the stage, our carriage broke down. Ayscough offered one of us a seat in his, but could not accommodate both, as one of his attendants was rendered unable to sit on horseback, by reason of a fall; and, at the last post, it was with some difficulty we could procure even two chaises: this proposal was, therefore, accepted, in preference to another which was made, of Ayscough's staying by us, till his servant, or ours, went forward to Soissons, and procured us a carriage.

"William insisted upon riding the horse upon which James had been mounted; who was to remain by the carriage we quitted, to take care of the baggage.

"After travelling about a quarter of a mile, I was alarmed by having lost sight of my charge, and Ayscough's servants, who, it was agreed, were to keep close to the chaise, we were certain they had not passed, and ordering the driver to stop, heard the report of a pistol at some little distance behind us; we immediately ordered the postilion to drive back; this he refused to do; saying, that road had of late been infested by a set of desperadoes, who gave no quarter. Ayscough swore and threatened, whilst I offered money and entreaties; but alike without effect: the fellow saying, if he was to be killed, he would rather suffer death from a gentleman than a thief; and though we might kill him, we could not oblige him to return, for had it been an hour later, all the gold we had should not have tempted him to have drove us.

"Ayscough leaped out, and cut the traces, and taking out pistols, he mounted our horse, and I the other, we galloped back to where we supposed the report we heard had proceeded.

"A wood here adjoined the road, from which two ruffians spring, and seized the bridles of our horses: we both fired, and the fellow who had attacked Ayscough fell; but at that instant two others advanced, who dragged us from our horses into the wood, where it was, from the dusk of the evening and the thickness of the wood, perfectly dark: after rifling our pockets, and binding us to a tree, they quitted us; and, no sooner were they gone, than we distinguished some person groaning, near us; guessing it must be him we sought, I enquired who it was in such distress.

"It was the servant of Ayscough who spake; and of him, his master hastily enquired after Lord Malieveren.

'I know not (replied the fellow) I wish he may be alive; for he fought desperately.'

"Another voice now spake, which I knew to be that of James, who had been left, as I before said, with the broken chaise: of him I enquired for Mr. March, 'alas! I fear he is (said the poor fellow) in as bad, or worse a condition than I am, and I fear I shall never live morning."

'How came you her (said I) James? are you able to give any account concerning Mr. March.'

'The carriage (he replied) is not above half-a-mile from this spot; and, when I heard the report of a pistol, I sat out as fast as I could run; Mr. March was then engaged with two ruffians, whilst another had just dragged Caleb from his horse; I fired, but without effect; and a pistol was instantly discharged at me, which disabled me from knowing any more; for, I imagine, they supposed I was dead, so drew me, (Caleb says) like a dead dog, into this wood.'

"Ayscough began to curse and storm at his servant, for what, when he allowed him to tell his story, appeared as if it had not been in his power to prevent.

"As soon as he could be prevailed upon to listen, the man began his account, by saying, that almost immediately as they set out after the chaise, his horse took fright, and

refused to move; that he begged his lordship to proceed after the carriage, which he, with his accustomed goodness, would not.

"This unruly animal, (said he) Caleb, will be throwing you; and should any accident happen, I could not excuse myself for quitting you.'

Indeed, (said the fellow) it was rather dangerous, for the beast kicked and plunged, and was down upon his knees twenty times in as many yards; and those French devils of horses have no mouths: lord send me back to England.'

Ayscough let fly a volley of oaths at the fellow and his remarks, who again proceeded:

'Well, your honours by this time was far before us; but the beast had begun to get forward; we hoped to be up with you presently, when four thieves set upon us all at once; his Lordship fought till we were all over blood; we both fired when they first attacked us, and I saw two of the fellows fall, I dare say dead; but then more came out of the wood to help the others; so when James came there we were at it; but who could stand against so many; and yet, I think, had they not shot, my lord's horse, he would have escaped, and then—'

'What then, rascal?" interrogated his master.

'I saw him fall; and—'

'And what!' said I, scarce able to respire.'

'And then, sir, he died, for I saw them take him up.'

'And how did you escape?'

'Only a little wounded, sir; and so fearing, I suppose, I would alarm the country, they tied me to a tree.'

"Ayscough wept, and swore, by fits; now bewailing his own, now his nephew's fate; then the cruel disappointment his sister would sustain; then he railed at Sir Robert and Lady Bertram; then his own servant—the postilion—the horses—every thing that was connected with his present situation: and, I really supposed, so violent and loud were his exclamations, he had lost his senses; and I also feared, if the wretches were yet within hearing, they would return, and him finally dispatch, as his voice might alarm any passenger on the road; thus, in my endeavours to moderate Ayscough, I seemed to have forgot all beside.

"At length he grew a little more calm; and I asked James if he thought he could crawl to where we were bound, and endeavour to unlose us; this he attempted; but it was some time ere he reached the spot; as he was, from pain and weakness, obliged to make many stops; he with much difficulty rose, but almost sunk at my feet, in a swoon, where he lay, as I supposed, dead.

"To the anguish of mind I endured, was also added the sufferings of body; for, fixed to the tree, and unable to move, I felt equal pain from the cold of the frosty night, to which I was exposed; and the tight cordage with which I was bound.

"Thus passed the most hard night I ever endured: morning however faintly dawned, and shewed me James alive; but in a state which declared he would not long be so: impatiently I wished for liberty: poor William might also breathe; at this time we heard the sound of horses feet from the road; and soon one of the horsemen was seen in the wood, who unloosened us; and at the same time informed us, the postilion, whom we left with the broken carriage, had, upon hearing the noise of the arms, rode to the nearest village for assistance, but that all were so afraid of the desperadoes who infested the road, that nobody would venture till near day-break, to our relief.

"The road was searched for the body of William, but without success: it was suggested he might not have been so severely wounded as Ayscough's servant had represented, and that he might have escaped; for had he been killed, or wounded desperately, still the soot would have remained; this hope was checked by the recollection, that two of the ruffians, Caleb had said, were either killed, or wounded; and him, who Ayscough had fired, also fell; none of those were now to be seen, but the grass was stained with blood, in many places; although the horse, which had been shot under William was found in a deep ditch, secure from a slight observation; it was therefore supposed, the dead and wounded had been removed, and Ayscough agreed with me, in thinking we had best proceed to Soissons, and procure assistance from the police of the city.

"The wounds of James were bound up, and Ayscough and I set out, leaving James, with Caleb, who was only slightly wounded; but much bruised, he said, to the charge of the people who released us; 'I fear (said Mr. Blackmore) you will think me tedious in reciting so minutely, every seemingly trifling particular; but it is necessary you should be exactly informed, that you may have it, Sir Robert, in your power to judge of every thing; as every little minutiae tends to strengthen, or weaken, the conjectures I have made: perhaps I have made them rashly.'

"But, pray, my dear sir, do only say what has become of poor William?" said Mr. Bertram.

"I can (replied Mr. Blackmore) only relate what I know; and when I finish my tale, Sir Robert, I dare to say, Sir Robert will be better enabled to guess at the cause of this strange affair, than was I now to tell you the conclusion of my adventures in France."

The baronet and his lady fully agreed with Mr. Blackmore, and begged he might proceed, without attending to the question of Mary.

"On two of the horses, (continued Mr. Blackmore) Ayscough and I reached Soissons, from whence I sent a surgeon, with a carriage for James; and making application, through the medium of the gentlemen on whom we had letters of credit, I procured a party of chauffeurs, with whom I was about to set out, when I was met by Ayscough, who said, he had been to visit his sister, on his return from whom, he learned what I had done; 'in this, (said he) Mr. Blackmore, we are equally concerned; you for your late pupil, I for my nephew; our honours too are equally at stake; therefore, the surest way to find out the wretches who have, I fear, murdered him, is, for us to take different routes; you may go towards Boulogne, searching the country as you pass along, whilst I will take the road to Dieppe.'

'You will excuse me, said I, Mr. Ayscough, in saying I consent not to your proposal; wherever you go, I shall accompany you; our honour is equally, as you observe, at stake, in this affair; therefore, we stand mutually answerable for each other's conduct, if together—which, if separated, we cannot.'

"Ayscough made several attempts to alter my resolution, but, finding all was in vain, submitted; saying, 'this was no time for altercation, and that the only way to learn what was become of the object of our search, was to heartily join our endeavours.'

"The country round Soissons was searched, partly by the people we went with, but in other directions by another party, under the direction of Mr. Gregory, the English merchant.

"After we had travelled a considerable way towards Dieppe, whether Ayscough had proposed to go, without hearing any account of the wretches I sought, I saw something glittering upon the road; without mentioning my design, I dismounted, and saw it was a seal, which I well knew belonged to Mr. March; I put it into my pocket, and perceived the mark of horses feet here striking from the highway across some uninclosed ground: without consulting Ayscough, or giving any reason for my doing so, I put myself at the head of the party, and set off full speed; nor slackened my pace till I espied a cottage, or rather hovel, by the way; enquiring there, I learned, that about day-break, several people on horseback had been observed to pass, as if guarding one of the party, whose horse was led by another person.

"Still hoping, though without communicating my idea to any one, we again set out, following the track the party were said to have taken; and which brought us to the sea coast the next day, by roads not fit for carriages. Ayscough had long before, and with much reason, complained of fatigue; as we had scarce stopped to eat, much less sleep; and had not the promised reward prevented desertion, I suppose I should have long been abandoned by the people I brought from—.

"I had generally contrived to keep Ayscough ignorant of a part of the information which from time to time I procured: it was, indeed, so trifling, that it would scarce have kept hope alive, had this not been the road he at first proposed going himself alone; and had I not perceived, spite of the eagerness he appeared to display to proceed, an evident disinclination to do so; perhaps even this had not been remarked by me, had not my suspicions been previously roused, first, by overhearing Ayscough, who pretended not to understand French, talking to one of the postilions in that language; and though I was not sufficiently near to precisely say the subject, yet, by what I could gather, I thought the fellow, who was the one that overturned us, was making a demand upon him for money; the second reason I had for suspicion, was, that whilst my hands, from the rightness of the cords which bound me to the tree, and the cold of the night, swelled to a degree which rendered them not only painful, but really benumbed to a degree which rendered application of some kind necessary to be made; his, although he complained much more than I did, appeared to have no marks of violence upon them; his servant, also, if at all

wounded, must have been very slightly so, and appeared in the morning more like a person in a state of intoxication, than one who had suffered as he pretended.

"When, therefore, we reached the sea-coast, not far from Diepe, and no tidings could be learned of these we sought, Ayscough proposed returning by another road, searching the country as we went: To this, I replied, I did not yet mean to return to—but should remain where I was.

'To what end:' said Ayscough, with an air of astonishment.

'For the express end, Mr. Ayscough, I undertook the voyage from England; for the express end I have travelled from Soisson to this spot.'

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER II.

"THE day was stormy, and the sea ran mountains high; and in the offing lay a vessel which appeared in imminent danger.

"The hut belonging to some fishermen appeared on the sea banks, near where we were; thither I went, and enquired of them 'Why that ship lay there, exposed to such peril?' one of the people belonging to this cottage informed me, that ship had laid there, for some days, which, if she persisted in doing, he could not ride out the storm, as the anchorage was very bad, and she was a large vessel: a boat, he said, had twice attempted to come from it to land that day, but had been obliged to desist from so hazardous an enterprize.

"The evident anxiety of Ayscough, though he endeavoured to conceal it, made me resolve to watch equally him and the vessel; for I felt a strange presentiment that some connexion subsisted between him and it; yet, by no means, could I say how.

"We took, with the leave of their inhabitants, our abode in some of the fishermen's boats; I did not endeavour at sleep, nor, I am persuaded, did Ayscough, though he pretended to do so, with a design, I suppose, to put me off my guard.

"The wind abated during the night, and at day-break a boat was seen putting off from the ship; I roused the people, who had accompanied us from Soissons, and armed, took my way, at their head, towards the sea; concealing ourselves behind some rocks, from, as if beneath which, we saw three men advance, guarding a fourth; as I beheld that fourth, I instantly recognized William; and fired at one of his guards, who, wounded, was unable to accompany the others, as they fled towards the boat, which had, at that instant, reached the shore; into this they leaped, and it instantly rowed back to the ship.

"Ayscough wept, embraced William, thanked heaven that had preserved him, and me, who was the chief instrument—The cords unbound, by which the late prisoner had been secured, he accompanied us back to the fishermen's hut.

'Have you, (I enquired) any clue, Mr. March, that may assist in developing this strange adventure.'

'I have, (he replied) casting a look of infinite disdain on Ayscough; who said,

'Let us then learn, my lord, on what your suspicions are founded?'

'I will give the history of my adventure; you and Mr. Blackmore, then, may make your comments as you chuse.'

"William then related what I have already: as his account nearly tallied with what I had before been told by Ayscough's servant and James; except that, he said, the wound he received was a trifling one, only on his arm; but which, after his horse was shot, made his further resistance madness: that they had dragged him from the road, and tied a handkerchief over his mouth, and bound his hands: he then was set upon a horse, to

which he was fastened; after which, they set out and travelled without stopping, except to change horses that waited for them on the road, till near day-break; 'when, (continued Mr. March) my hands were unbound, and they made me partake of the victuals which was ready for them, in a miserable looking hut, a little distance from the road. There, I heard, that as day dawned, we were to quit the highway, and strike into bye-roads; supposing you would soon discover I was not behind the chaise, and consequently when you found me not, search the country round Soisson.'

'I pulled from my watch, a seal, well-known to Mr. Blackmore, which I concealed in my mouth; this I let drop at the time we quitted the highway, as, if by chance found, I thought it would, at least, invigorate the pursuit after me: we reached the sea shore, where, I understood, a vessel waited to convey me somewhere: faithful to their trust, bribes and threats were equally lost upon my guards; both, I again tried during the day and night which I was constrained to lay concealed, in a cavern, till the minute I was so providentially relieved.'

'From this story (said Ayscough) it appears to me, that these villains have had some employer of consequence; whose name, though I may conjecture at, I shall not at present mention.'

'The wounded person, (said I) might perhaps throw some light on this dark affair.'

'Perhaps not (rejoined Ayscough) Lord Malieveren has already said, threats and promises were alike lost upon them.'

"I ordered the man to be brought into the cottage, who, upon my desiring he would inform us what had moved him to engage so villainous and hazardous an enterprize, he answered, he was a native of Picardy, and had merely been engaged as a guide by the others; that he had expressed his sorrow for the young gentleman, and wished his comrades to allow his escape; but that they threatened his life, should he assist him.

"I enquired if the others were also Frenchmen? he answered me, saying, they were not, but English, though they spoke the language of the country with fluency that a baron of England had employed them to take away that young man, who pretended he was heir to the baron's lands; though he had brought him up out of charity.

"Ayscough, pretending still he could not speak the language, though he now affected to, in part, understand, begged I would enquire, if he had heard the villains mention the name of their employer.

"The fellow said, he often had heard the name, as they talked in English to each other; it was Bertram, Sir Robert Bertram.

'Where, now, Mr. Blackmore (said Ayscough, with a cool instance of manner) pray sir, where now is the suspicion ultimately to rest?'

'There has, sir, (I replied with all the calmness I could assume) a strange effort been made—.'

'For what? (he hastily interrupted.)'

'To remove, Mr. Ayscough, the suspicion—'

"I wished not to have, at this place, any further altercation; and, fearing also, it would not be in my power to prevent Mr. March from breaking out in invectives against the slanderer of his kind patron; I gave order for securing the wounded man; after which we set out again for Soissons, where we were to behold the sister of Ayscough: this journey took us more than double the time we had so recently travelled it in.

"When we reached Soissons, Ayscough caused the fellow, who had been wounded, to make a formal deposition of the whole affair, as far as he was connected; of this, Ayscough had one copy, I the other.

'We will now, Mr. Blackmore (said Ayscough) if you please, accompany his Lordship to visit Lady Malieveren.'

"To this proposal, I agreed; and at a neat house, seemingly fitted up with some degree of elegance, in the suburbs, we were, by Ayscough, introduced to a woman, under forty, whose features were uncommonly fine, and who had, indeed, a most prepossessing countenance; she acted, for I am most thoroughly persuaded, it was but assumed, the part she had to perform, most wonderfully; the emotion she appeared to sustain on the sight of a child, so providentially restored, was admirable; though aware I was giving way to deception, so artfully did she counterfeit the feelings of nature, that I momentarily yielded to the illusion, and wept, so did William: a little, as it were, recovered from this first effusion of tenderness, the pretended Baroness lightly touched on the wrongs she had sustained from her Lord's relation; but this was done with such mildness, such an infinitude of artifice, that she seemed rather soliciting pity for her own youth and inexperience, that had caused such trouble to her child, than as if she meant to teach him ingratitude to his kind benefactor; then she thanked heaven, that had restored him to her, so amiable, so accomplished.

"To separate William from this artful and fascinating woman, I begged the servant, Ayscough had mentioned as living with his sister, might be called.

"The woman appeared, she was evidently older than her mistress: what was art in the one, seemed effrontery and boldness in the other, to a degree, which made her, in my opinion, fit to class with the most worthless and wretched of her sex. She confirmed all that Ayscough thought proper at that time to have substantiated; but as I farther interrogated, she said, then she would only answer such questions as she thought proper; that at present she was no ways obliged to submit to my interrogatories; that her mistress had too long patiently borne the oppression of the haughty sister of her lord; but, that for her part, she was endowed with very little, and it was best not to provoke her; that I might have patience till the trial, when I should hear all she knew regarding the whole affair; and it would be more than Sir Robert could confront, or than I would wish to listen to.—But more of the woman hereafter.

"I proposed we should quit Soissons on the next day but one; this, after much hesitation, was agreed to by her pretended ladyship; 'but then (said she) Mr. Blackmore,

in return for my obliging you, I hope you will be so kind as go round by Cambray, where I have an intimate friend, who presides over the convent of Benedictine Dames.'

"To this I objected.

'Nay, (she said) if this is the case, I shall not incommode myself, by quitting Soissons at the time you have prescribed, I should wish to dispose of my furniture in this place.

'I have no friend to act for me, as my residence here has been very short: since the death of my lord, I have been a border in a convent, principally, indeed, at Cambray, where I was chiefly educated, was I therefore to conduct either prudence or convenience, I ought not to quit Soissons for at least a fortnight.'

"Finding, upon recollection, that by going to Cambray, we should lengthen our journey very inconsiderably, I agreed to her terms, as she intended to set out the second day.

"Returning to our hotel, I found William almost wavering in his belief, so deeply had his feelings been interested; so artfully had the appeal been made to them; that he had need to recall, as he talked to me, the continued series of obligations which had been conferred on him, by Sir Robert Bertram and Lady Bertram, to efface the impression he had received, so amiable appeared the person to whom he had been introduced; so solicitous did she seem for his welfare.

'Sure (said he) the agitation she displayed was real; it communicated itself to me and you, even you, Mr. Blackmore, were affected by it.'

"I denied not the charge; 'but Mr. March, said I, even then was I sensible I yielded to an illusion, and feel now ashamed of my weakness—ashamed that thus an artful woman should triumph over my sense of rectitude; and at an age too which ought better to have fortified my mind.'

'But, my dear sir, (said this candid, and as then I thought him, ingenuous youth,) might not this lady herself be deceived; may not Ayscough have imposed on her this tale; she looks so unaffected, so undesigning.'

'This, said I, William, proves but the excellence of her art; she deceives you by hiding her artifice.'

"Such was a part of our conversation, which I relate, to shew what influence this first interview had upon the unfortunate young man.

"The lady would scarce suffer herself to be separated from her newly recovered son; for so she termed poor William, and insisted and entreated by turns, he should travel in the same carriage she did; but aware of her arts, I was peremptory in my refusal; and we quitted Soissons at the time I had appointed, she and her brother in one chaise, and the servants in another.

"James, unwilling, poor fellow, to be left behind, though in no fit condition to travel, occupied the third vehicle.

"Without any thing worth relating having occurred, we reached Cambray, by which route I had agreed to travel, as also to rest a day, that the pretended baroness should visit the holy mother of the Benedictines, in which convent, she said she had some time resided.—This, indeed, upon enquiry, I found strictly true; but that, then she had borne the name of Bosvylle.

"One day was spent by us in viewing Cambray and its environs. The next morning Ayscough informed us his sister was seized with a violent cold and sore throat; which made it highly improper she should proceed, which, however, she had determined upon doing, lest I should upbraid her with breach of promise; but this he hoped I would not insist upon; and that it was perfectly unknown to his sister, the request he made of our staying another day. In this request William joined, nor did I think of refusing.

"The more we had seen of this woman, the more engaging she appeared; there was at once dignity and good humour, blended with a large share of sensibility in her countenance; her figure was commanding, her voice clear and well modulated, perfectly fitted indeed for the tone of tenderness she chose to assume.

"When speaking to William, and as she conversed when we met at the inns upon various subjects, her understanding appeared clear and comprehensive.

"Softened by her manner, which was all that the tenderest parent could, in such a situation, have displayed; my charge was thrown off his guard, and, forgetting the caution which was necessary, indulged himself in vain reveries of happiness; even I had need of all my circumspection, to ward off her artful, insinuating manner.

"She tried, at first, flattery, in various forms; and talked often of obligations on her son's account; this, with that keenness of discernment, she possessed, she saw disgusted me; then of my integrity to Sir Robert Bertram: 'she hoped not (she said) to erase the very unfavourable sentiments I had imbibed against her:' this she also found not to answer; for I warmly averred the well-known liberality of the Bertrams.

"Next, with much seeming sincerity, she assailed me upon another score, in tones, and with a manner, that my heart involuntarily exclaimed, as William had done, 'she is herself deceived! that I would so far respect her maternal feelings, as to avoid infusing into the heart of her amiable son, those prejudices which governed me regarding her.'

'Respect! (said she emphatically) Mr. Blackmore; it is a mother long separated from her child, who thus entreats; alas! that child has so long been estranged from the arms of his only parent, it is not possible he can at first feel the same attachment she does to him.'

"I paused ere I returned an answer, then recalling my ideas from the interesting and supplicating figure before me, I answered, 'that as yet I had infused no principle into the mind of my late pupil, but such as were strictly conformable, I hoped, to every religious and moral duty; and I doubted not William's fulfilling, where due, every relative obligation; how far, madam, on that score, you are entitled, the law, I suppose, will shortly determine.'

"Never (so judiciously did she manage) once did she directly arraign the family to whom William owed so vast an obligation; and whom, according to Ayscough, had equally deprived herself and child of their right.

"To visit the sick lady, I returned with William to the Benedictine Convent; we were shewn into a chamber, where the mock Baroness was seated, and with her a beautiful young woman, to whom we were introduced; but she soon quitting us, we were informed by Ayscough's sister, 'that the young novice' who had left the room, was Mademoiselle Durand, daughter to the Count de Marigny; who, compelled by her friends to assume the veil, was to take the vow in a few days; it will be an interesting spectacle (said she) so young, so lovely, thus for life to be immured. I have long know her, for she was educated in this convent.

'We were discoursing on the subject of her being proposed as you entered, she declared, as a menial servant she could be happy, was she but not deprived of liberty; 'willingly, (said the lovely girl) would I sacrifice myself to my father's family pride, but not in this way, Lady Malieveren.'

"She then proposed escaping from the convent, and accompanying me to England, where she hoped to find subsistence: so just and affecting indeed were the arguments she urged, I perhaps might have suffered myself to have been prevailed upon, had it not been for the odium such a thing would throw upon the superior of this holy community, whose unvaried kindness to me merits a far different return.

"All joined in deploring the hard fate of Mademoiselle Durand, which formed our chief conversation whilst we stayed at the convent; quitting it, the pretended Lady Malieveren thanked me for my attention to her ease, said, 'she hoped to be able to travel the next day.'

"When we returned to the hotel at which we were, William again talked of the beautiful novice, and enquired of me 'if I thought it might not be possible to effect her escape.'

'It befits us not, (I replied) Mr. March, as strangers in this country, thus openly to violate its laws; and were we to engage in defence of all those, who like this young lady, are sacrificed to an idea of aggrandising the heirs of families, more noble than wealthy, we should engage in a herculean task, to you, to me also, it appears hard, a father, like the Count de Marigny, should be authorised by laws devised by superstition, thus to deprive a daughter of her liberty, and tie her down to perform a certain set of mechanical devotions, which, if not flowing from the heart, lose all merit: thus we judge, but born and educated in a country where those prejudices were linked with the religion you were taught, and authorised by custom, you would behold such sacrifices with in difference; when no longer an unusual circumstance.'

'No, Mr. Blackmore, (he replied) had I been born and educated in the most superstitious country in Europe, still I should think as I do; still, Mr. Blackmore, my soul would revolt against oppression, notwithstanding it was disguised by names and forms, I

might esteem sacred: nature revolts at the blooming sacrifice; reason loudly proclaims, that by deserting the station assigned us, we sin against the author of our being; that it is cowardice which tempts us to take shelter from temptation in a conventual life, where lost to society, our talents are hidden, our virtues, except patience, useless.'

"This was nearly the conversation we held on this subject; and the following morning we presented ourselves at the gate of the convent where we learned, that Lady Malieveren, for so was she stiled, was in a high fever, and utterly unable, as we expected, to accompany us; we proceeded to the parlour, where the superior informed us, that her guest was deemed by the physician to be in hazard, from not having taken early care of a disorder she had considered as trifling.

"William expressed a wish to see his supposed mother; and I attended him to her chamber, where we found again the fair novice, who again withdrew; but William's eyes followed her as she retreated:

"We found our late fellow-traveller so unable to proceed, that, on quitting the convent, I proposed we should set out without her, as we had no reason to suppose our doing so could injure the interest of Sir Robert.

'You must excuse me (replied William) Mr. Blackmore, when I say, I am resolved not to quit Cambray at present.'

'Reflect (said I) upon the artifice of those people; sure you have forgot your late adventure in the road to Soissons, on the subtle invention made use of to throw (when they found their purpose failed) the odium of the whole transaction upon your best and only friends; reflect but for a moment on the complicated villainy of this.'

'All this I am fully sensible of, sir, (he replied) I see that my ruin is to be the price by which the happiness of my benefactor is to be disturbed; they wish me to wound him by ingratitude—they wish to poison my mind by false tales, by incredible suggestions; but suffer me, Mr. Blackmore, to believe, I am not alone imposed upon; destroy not the illusion—suffer me to at least imagine I have a mother, and that it is my duty, to that mother, to alleviate her sufferings, not to add to them, by unkindly deserting her.'

'Mr. March, I said, (with at once surprise and reproof in my tone of voice) do I hear aright? are you, then, so credulously weak? this woman! do you then believe her your mother? do you believe her, then, the widow of Lord Malieveren? do you credit the absurd tale against a family whose actions speak for them, whose general benevolence blesses all within its influence? is it William March whom I have listened to?'

'Oh! Mr. March, (exclaimed the strongly agitated youth, as he seized my hand) I see you are displeased with me: oh! I shall lose all my friends; already I am miserable—already I augur ill from this journey; who can judge of my feelings! situated so strangely: you will despise me—already you call me weak;—how then shall I venture to disclose to you, a part of the varied emotion which so powerfully agitates me?'

"I bade him freely confide in me; that I pitied whilst I blamed, and thought the only way to extricate him from the arts of this woman, was to fly from her.'

'Thinking as I do, flight is out of the question: oh, Mr. Blackmore, had you been told you were the offspring of creatures the basest, the very dregs of society; unwilling, as I was, to trace to its source, a spring so defiled—had you met, as I did, with a woman, who appeared all that was amiable, and who possessed various pleasing talents, who was proud in calling an outcast, deferred and supposed meanly born young man, her son, would not in your breast every feeling of affection, of sensibility, been awakened by such an incident' would not you, Mr. Blackmore, with all your self-command, have forgot, in the enthusiasm of the moment, probabilities? O, yes, you would, like me, have yielded to the pleasing illusion; you would have then, like me, have built ten thousand airy castles, all to reconcile, as I have, gratitude, with the fond hope of rendering this idea a reality: would to heaven it was: oft, oft has my birth covered me with shame.'

"I argued with him on this last false construction, telling him, that evil qualities or good ones were not handed down to posterity by the blood; although his parents were, almost beyond a doubt, most despicable, yet his good qualities had put him on a footing with the son of one of the first gentlemen; and that it is a species of pride I thought his mind had been elevated far above."

'For myself, (said he, with a energy of manner) 'I heed it not, but as it crosses my dearest hopes!—Oh, no! what did I say?—alas! I dare not hope that my love would be sanctioned;—yet was I the son of Lord Malieveren:—but I talk idly, it is not so—it is impossible; then I should not have been abandoned. O! Mr. Blackmore, you are ignorant of the agony I have undergone, loving, and I have dared to suppose, beloved: yet, how can I ever hope the offspring of such wretches can even be sanctioned by parental authority; nor am I so abandoned, as to wish to drag beauty, rank, and innocence, down to my own level; but if the son of—: no, I will not suppose—but so pleasing, so flattering an illusion—so every way gratifying, I want strength of mind to dismiss it; and, I fear, alas, greatly I fear, being driven by it to some desparate, some rash deed, when I shall sink beneath the pity I now confine you to bestow..'

"Such was, as well as I am able to recollect, the strange, mysterious, and incoherent answer, Mr. March gave me.

"Twice that day he visited the convent; and in the evening I informed him, that, if in conformity to his wishes, I remained at Cambray, he was so far to comply with mine, as not to go out alone; to this he agreed, and we visited together, the following day, the convent—when we were told Lady Malieveren was too ill to receive us, however, on the next we were allowed to see her; and found that Mademoiselle Durand had, on the preceding one, taken the veil.

William was visibly affected by this intelligence; and I had reason to suppose he paid a second visit at the convent.

"An entire week passed away, when the sick lady declaring she was able to travel by short stages, it was agreed we should set out early the next morning.

CHAPTER III.

"AT the time settled for our departure, I had breakfasted, but William had not made his appearance; I went to his chamber and found him not; nor from the people of the house could I gain any intelligence concerning him; no one had seen him that morning: again I went into his chamber, flattering myself with the strange idea that there I should find him; on the table lay a letter, which I hastily opened, but at that instant his supposed mother entered the room, and instantly fainted; Ayscough followed, and bade me haste instantly to quit Cambray, as Mademoiselle Durand had escaped from the convent, where she so lately had taken the vow, with Lord Malieveren; and that they were seen on the road to Calais, and doubted not they were gone to England; the power of the Count de Morigny, equally with that of the Religieuse, would be employed, he added, to detain us as accomplices in this daring insult. I declared I would not move till I heard some more certain account of my charge.

"The master of the house now, with a terrified air, came to confirm the report, and to say also that the officers of justice were at the house: the carriages waited at a back gate; and Lady Malieveren recovering, fled; whilst Ayscough seized me by the arm, saying, I should not thus devote myself to destruction: at the same instant James entered, telling us, those who fought to detain us were actually in the house, and opened the window, saying, no other avenue of escape was left: by this way we were quickly in the carriages that waited for us, which set off at full speed. I now unfolded the letter I had taken from the table in William's room, in which he pleaded pity operating with love, and recalled to my mind, the conversation he had held with me, when he said, he feared his committing some desperate and rash action; but the knowledge which I would gain, must perfectly elucidate the whole of what he that day had said regarding the agonies he had undergone, and the despair he felt; and begged me to palliate his crime to Sir Robert and Lady Bertram, whose kindness he could never cease to remember, although the decided step he had taken, for ever banished him their presence, and the society of his friends.

"At Calais, we learned, two people that answered the account we gave of William and the fair Nun, had embarked in an open boat, it was supposed for England.

"At Calais we also saw their persons described, and large rewards offered for apprehending them.

"To linger in France was now useless; and with Ayscough and his sister I sailed by the first packet to Dover.

"Ayscough declared, the step his nephew had taken would make him for ever renounce him; whilst his sister said, as she wept, that could she but behold him, the mother would plead most powerfully in her heart; but that, if her brother gave up his cause, she had no chance, so limited were her means of contending with Sir Robert Bertram, for the estates of Malieveren.

"We both took, in different carriages, the London road; but after we reached the Obelisk in St. George's Fields, I never saw their carriage."

Mr. Blackmore's story finished, and Sir Robert having assured him of his entire approbation, all joined in expressing their sorrow for Mr. March, who had thus fallen into the snare prepared for him.

No one in the party but was satisfied, that the artful woman, who assumed the title of Lady Malieveren, had feigned the sickness which detained them at Cambray, till she had wrought upon the sensibility of poor William, in a way deemed most likely to prove his ruin.

"The misguided, unfortunate, young man (said Sir Robert) has, by this fatal step, thrown off all restraint; and, I fear, when he looks back, the distance between the path he has rashly taken, and that he has quitted, will appear too great for him ever to regain it; and that, lost in despair, he will madly rush on in his career."

"No, Sir Robert, allow me (said Henry) to vindicate my friend; allow me to say, I know the heart of William March can never be intentionally wicked; with my life I dare answer for his integrity being proved here-after: oh! that I knew where to find him! soon should he, at your feet, confess, with the noble frankness of his nature, he had erred—he had been deceived; but trust me, never deliberately guilty. Oh, no! William March, the friend of my inmost soul! no, he must have been artfully betrayed;—yes, you will find he has;—but I trust he will not fall the victim of those arts which at present envelope him."

Sir Robert and Lady Bertram agreed with their son, that William had been artfully beset; yet, aware that Ayscough was a rascal, who fought but to raise claims to perplex, he ought to have been more upon his guard; and that it betrayed a degree of ingratitude they had not deemed his heart capable of, even to listen to the tale told by the woman, who pretended to be his mother.

"Ah! my dear Sir Robert, and you, my mother, (said Henry) marked you not in Mr. Blackmore's recital, the struggle—the violent agitation, this virtuous but most unhappy young man underwent; his reason, his judgment his deep sense of gratitude, all revolved against the suspicions so insidiously infused.—Oh, think, so situated, who would not, as he did, have listened to the pleasing deception, even though he was conscious it was one."

"Henry, (said Sir Robert) you prove so strenuous an advocate for your friend, that it behoves me to offer something in vindication of my own character, which, as yet, is unsullied, and which I fondly hoped to have left so to my children."

"Alas! sir, have I uttered, in my zeal to vindicate my friend, any improper warmth! else, why this from you—?"

"I only wish, Henry, to recall your attention to the whole of this intricate affair; Providence, when it sees fit, will unveil the dark assassin of my peace. That such a lurking villain exists, I scarce doubt; and that Ayscough is but a tool in the hand of a

more accomplished rascal than himself; but on this I am silent, for reasons known to myself—most powerful ones: thus, I am accused of depriving an innocent child, ere it saw the light, of estates rightly its due; and that this child I have brought up a poor dependant on my capricious bounty; if this is proved, what have you to inherit, Henry, but infamy?"

"Ah! my father, is it possible you could suppose me so depraved as to doubt!—Why this from you, I again repeat? you, sir, and Lady Bertram, who have inculcated such lessons of morality—who have given such examples of every Christian virtue—shall any one dare to suspect that such were the betrayers of the widow and the orphan?—No, no; I say it is impossible; you derogate from yourself—from my mother, in thus stooping to vindicate, which implies a character wants support:—No, Sir Robert, I will not tarnish your honour, or my own, by listening on this subject; we will talk, if you chuse, of the betrayers of my friend, but not of the villifiers of your spotless name."

Sir Robert endeavoured to calm the perturbation he had raised.

"The whole (said Mr. Blackmore) appears a plot so artfully laid, so nice in the calculations, that I conceive every event was guarded against; and no step I could have taken, but they had a scheme to counteract it: thus, in the adventure before we reached Soisson, the fellow who drove us was doubtless bribed to break down; and the fall of Ayscough's servant, which allowed but of one seat in his carriage, was a part of the plot.—James, who ran to the aid of Mr. March, was severely wounded, of course I was left to pursue alone; and when the storm allowed not of the purposed embarkation, a tale had been artfully constructed for the ear of the guide, to throw the odium from Ayscough, and, by slow degrees, to work their ends; but it is useless to expatiate longer on the varied arts practised on the unhappy youth."

"Unhappy, indeed! (said Alicia, who yet had not spoke) warm and ingenuous in his temper, how many instances rise to my mind of his frankness and candour: alas! his unsuspecting temper has too hastily yielded to appearances so flattering: what chance had he of contending with the cool, deliberate villainy of Ayscough—the plausible and softly insinuating manner of his sister; ah, whilst Mr. Blackmore was flying from the pursuit of justice, perhaps poor William was carried by ruffians across the country."

"But the letter, Alicia, (said Lady Bertram) you have acknowledged it is his writing."

That, Lady Bertram, (replied she) makes strongly against him; yet, reflect, it is Ayscough who accuses; it is Ayscough perhaps, too, who has planned. Oh! recal the cheerful acts of attention that strongly spake his grateful heart.—Oh! I conjure you, my beloved, my honoured friends, discard him not totally, till he pleads his own cause."

"You plead it ably, Alice" (said Sir Robert).

"I also (Sir Robert) am, like him, an orphan; I too, like him, have unseen enemies, who by artifice, may deprive me of my friends; and like him, I may be an out-cast and a wanderer:—wonder not, so similarly situated, I should plead strongly."

Henry's looks thanked Alicia, and he seconded the cause she had undertaken, with less warmth and more method than he did at first; and Sir Robert and Lady Bertram promised, though the affair of William's carrying off, in defiance to every law, Mademoiselle Durand, appeared fully proved, that yet they would even on this subject defer their judgements till some news reached them regarding William.

The following morning, Mr. Megrel, (who had also been an advocate for William, though I gave not a detail of what he said) visited his friend in Cavendish-square, to consult upon steps being taken for the recovering the unfortunate young man; it was thought improper Mr. Blackmore should return to France; but a person, on whom Sir Robert could firmly rely, went over to gather such information as he could, concerning the elopement, &c.

A search was also set on foot for Ayscough and his sister: at the house occupied by him in Spring Garden, it was learned, he had punctually discharged the rent due, at the period of his going to France; but since that time no account could be gained.

Mr. Evans, the lawyer Ayscough had entrusted with the suit, was also applied to, by Mr. Megrel, who also informed him, the last letter he received from Ayscough was dated Calais; the purport of which was, that the young man for whose sake he had interested himself, had proved utterly unworthy of any further trouble regarding him; and begged his acceptance of the inclosed sum, which Mr. Evans said was a very generous acknowledgement for the trouble he had taken; and the letter concluded by saying, the suit would be dropped by Mr. Ayscough, at least for the present, as he even knew not what had become of his nephew:—nor could Mr. Evans give any account of the witnesses collected; as all, like those visited by Mr. Megrel, in Spring Gardens, had disappeared.

Sir Robert was now resolved to trace the birth of his foundling, if possible; and for this purpose published in all the London newspapers, as well as those of the five northern counties of England, an advertisement, offering a reward of one hundred pounds to the parents of a child found in such a year, in the neighbourhood of Rippon; if they would specify such particulars about the child so found, as to convince the parties concerned, they really were such.

This was advertised for several weeks, without success; when a letter reached Sir Robert, which informed him, that if ten pounds were sent inclosed in a letter directed to James Goodenough, to be left at the Post House, Bedale, Yorkshire; till called for, he would, by return of post, receive an account of the child:

This was answered by Sir Robert, informing the writer, that he must come freely forward, and rely upon his honour for the assured reward: at the same time Mr.

Blackmore, who had entered into the spirit of the cause, took care to reach Bedale privately the same day with the letter: and watched the Post House till towards evening; a person, muffled up, in a great coat, came to enquire for the letter; at the corner of the market place a boy stood holding a horse, upon which, the person who had got the letter mounted, and was instantly out of sight. Mr. Blackmore, though he saw not the face, yet was almost certain it was Ayscough; and had followed with an intention of speaking, which his mounting the horse had prevented.

In about a fortnight's time another epistle arrived to Sir Robert, ill written, and worse spelt; it was, indeed, with considerable trouble it could be deciphered, the which, when done, it was understood that if Sir Roberts would meet the writer on a certain spot of the Moor accurately described, that lay north-east of York, he should hear every particular he could desire from the father of the child found by him and Lady Bertram, in March 17—.

Sir Robert was to name the day, and an answer was to be sent, directed "Thomas Hardie, Reeth, Yorkshire."

This was, also, by the good baronet, attended to, and instantly answered, by his informing the writer of the epistle, "he had received it; that if his intentions were good, he would appoint such a place to meet him, as they could confer with safety."

An answer to this was quickly received, naming an obscure public-house in York.

Again Sir Robert wrote and fixed "that a meeting should take place a week after the date, at the Black Swan, in York;" and inclosed five pounds to bear his expences, as he pleaded poverty.

Miss Bertram and Alicia were left in Cavendish-square, whilst Sir Robert, his Lady, and son, went to York; where, true to the time and place appointed, a man made his appearance, whose dress, and manner corresponded with the stile of the letter.

The fellow seemed no way daunted in Sir Robert's presence, but boldly enquired of what signification it could be of to him, who were the parents of the child he had found on such a day, month, and year, at such a distance from Rippon?"

"To you, it is, I suppose (said Sir Robert) perfectly immaterial—I doubtless have reasons weighty enough, or I should not assign this bag, which contains one hundred pounds, to you, for ascertaining its parents, (if you have it in your power); but mark what I say, I must for this gold have an unreserved and circumstantial account—I must have certain proofs and evidences, in which I cannot be deceived; if, therefore, you are not provided with such, I will not listen, besides which, I require you to make, before the Lord Mayor of this city, a formal deposition, which you must swear is a just and true one."

The fellow turned up his striped woollen cap, and scratching his bare pate, said, "aye, your worship was always hard as nails, now I will have to go back to the Dales for our Susy."

"Have you, then, (enquired the baronet) known me before?"

"Ah! if your worship has forgot Tom the Tinker, Tom has not forgot your worship;—no, marry, nor ever will:—oft at the castle there, at Malieveren, have I stood before your worship;—why you were the very man, as I may say, that transported me beyond seas:—Lord help us poor tinkers, for we cannot make a few halfpence without such a piece of work:—why, your worship, I was committed to York Castle here for it."

"If it is necessary your wife should come (said the baronet) I will send a chaise for her, and you, Master Thomas, must please to remain here till she comes."

"She would fain have come to be sure, your worship; but (says I) you impudent jade, what would you do before his worship? all would not do, till I laid on a few hearty thwacks with my cudgel, and then Susy was fain to be quiet, though I would not wonder if she was here by this time after me."

A woman was passing crying laces, whose loud notes vibrating on the nerves of Tom's ears, he who now thought himself as good a man as his worship, threw up the sash without any ceremony, and swearing it was the jade herself, bawled out to enquire what brought her to York.

Susy did not make the retort courteous; and a crowd was beginning to gather around the vender of laces, when she espied Sir Robert Bertram, and cried, "ah, God bless your worship's face; that rascal knew well enough why I came to York; but he wanted to cheat me out of the reward, your worship was to give; but I am the woman that is to tell all about the lad; who has so good a right as myself."

Susy was rescued from the audience her eloquence had gathered and retained, by Sir Robert's footman; and ushered into his presence, where scarce this gentle couple could be restrained from coming to blows; at length, Sir Robert assured them if they would not cease scolding, and talk upon the subject for which he had condescended to meet them, he would at no future period listen to the tale; all their virulence was then suspended to attend to the question asked:

"The first was, if they were the parents of the child found near Rippon at such a time? this was affirmed: the next thing enquired by the baronet was, why they had abandoned the child?"

"Tom (said the amiable helpmate of the tinker) was then going beyond seas, for the first time; 'what was it for Tom?"

'Why for eating a bit of mutton I found upon Easingwald Common.'

'Ay, so it was; they sent you off for stealing three of farmer Ewbank's fat widders;—marry, they had better have hanged you at once: so your worship and your lady's honour, when Tom was just caught, I had twins; so then he was sent to the castle, and when I was able, I went to see him, and so he wanted me to go to Virginia with him;—no; marry, says I, not I, till the Lord Sisses sends me, as he is going to do you;—well, a weary time I had with the bairns, to be sure; I got Tom's ass, and there they rode like two princes, but then I had to toil and walk: however, for a year or so, I bore it, now begging honestly for them, or some times helping myself to any odd thing I could light upon; then the ass was stolen by some of our folks, so then I had both to carry; when being at Rippon, I saw, one day, your worship's coach stand in the market-place, just opposite the great inn door, so I knew your honour's ladyship was very charitable, so I watches till I saw you as you were coming out at the door, and begged for my poor fatherless twins, and you gave me money; well, thinks I, and a lucky thought it was—here is this fine rich lady been married a long time, and has had no bairn—marry, I wish she had one of those heavy lads, my back is just broke, since I lost poor Dickey; so I heard which way your worship's was going, and off I trudged, till I came about a stone's throw beyond the three mile stone on the road towards Malieveren, when I heard the coach coming along, then I took one of the lads, and laid him on a little bank, on which grew a whin bush all yellow with flower, and crept close behind a thick thorn bush which grew at the edge of a deep ditch, in which I laid.'

"Henry trembled with agitation, as he saw from the look that was interchanged between his parents, that thus far the tale carried conviction with it; but Henry could not deem it possible, that the dearest friend of his heart owed his birth to such wretches as these; gladly, at that minute, would the generous heir of Sir Robert and Lady Bertram, have resigned his future claim to the lands of the late baron of Malieveren, could it have been proved this evidence of William's birth was false; unwillingly he listened, whilst Susy continued her tale, saying, she had laid still in the ditch, and though she dared not peep up, yet had heard the carriage stop, and exactly and precisely repeated what both the baronet and his lady had said, as well as the servants.

"Sir Robert then enquired what dress the child had been left in; which Susy also minutely described; saying, that his under garment was of striped linsey woolsey, above which was a piece of an old red petticoat of her own."

'But was there, (enquired the baronet) no mark upon the child; nor was there no other part of his dress that you can remember and describe?'

'O yes! your worship, I was not done—he wants the first joint of two toes upon his left foot.'

'How did such an accident happen?' said Sir Robert.

'He was playing (she replied) on the ground, and a stone fell on his foot, and almost crushed it to pieces; and as for the dress, he had, tied round his neck by a piece of grey worsted, a piece of money, which had a hole punched through it; for, when I bid Tom farewell at the castle, he took out two silver pennies—no, I think they are more like groats, and laying one exactly upon the other, bored a hole through, and bid me give them

to the two lads, if he did not come back to remember their father by; so, when I laid the elder one down by the road side, I thought he should have his father's last legacy, for I never thought then I should have seen Tom again; and here, your worship, is the other groat! that I have kept ever since, and if the holes do not tally (if you have the other) why I ask no reward for what I have told you.'

"All convinced Sir Robert and his Lady of the truth of what they had with much attention listened to; as the date and apparent age of the child perfectly agreed, as did his complexion, with the way he had been exposed; for his little head appeared unused to be covered by a hat; and his face it was evident had been subjected to all weather and change of season: his tattered garments were such as described; and the left foot wanted, as she said, the first joints of two toes; yet these circumstances might have been noticed by the servants, but the piece of money tied round the neck of the infant, had not; nor could have been observed by them, as it was concealed by the rags he was clothed in."

"Lady Bertram, who with Sir Robert were alone in the coach, found it, and after examining it, had, upon her return home to Malieveren, deposited it in a secret part of her cabinet, where it had laid undisturbed, till Henry, by his mother's directions, found it, and brought it to York, from which place he went to Malieveren, the first day of their arrival. This piece of money, which was neither penny nor groat, but a Roman coin, nearly defaced, was, by Sir Robert fitted to its fellow; no other proof could be needed to attest the veracity of Susy."

'Is it possible!' exclaimed Henry, as he turned aside.

'It is possible (said the baronet, who fully comprehended his son's exclamation) and I feel most truly the extreme mortification this will cause to a mind keenly alive to degradation.'

'Why I did not make an earlier and stricter, or rather, when William grew up, why I did not renew my enquiries, was to spare the pain I knew it would inflict; but now it is a necessary step.'

"Turning to the tinker and his helpmate, Sir Robert said, he now only required they should swear, before the Lord Mayor, to the truth of the tale, which should be taken down in a formal deposition.

"No hesitation was made to this part of the business, and Sir Robert giving them the stipulated sum, they departed.

CHAPTER IV.

HENRY, whose mind was ill at ease, and who felt he should prove a stupid companion to Sir Robert and her Ladyship, quitted them to visit the theatre; the play was in the last act, when a kind of bustle in the pit drew his attention, which he saw was occasioned by a gentleman, in a great coat and slouched hat, handing out a young lady; the house being full, he found much difficulty: as the lady turned round, a voice from the other side of the pit uttered an ejaculation of surprize; Mademoiselle Durand was all Henry could distinguish; but it operated like a shock of electricity; he stopped not to weigh probabilities, but leaped instantly into the pit; the person was only two benches from him who spoke, and was standing yet, in an attitude of astonishment, when he was seized by Mr. Bertram, who loudly enquired 'what he knew of Mademoiselle Durand.'

"The man now appeared more astonished than at first; then, obsequiously bowing, informed his hasty interrogator, that Mademoiselle Durand had just quitted the house."

'Come with me, then, if you know Mademoiselle Durand,' and without waiting a reply, Mr. Bertram pulled the terrified Frenchman (for so his broken English proclaimed him) across the benches to the pit door.

"That this was the fair nun and William March, Henry felt fully convinced of; in quitting the theatre he supposed he saw them only a little way before him, but suddenly lost sight of them at the turning of the street; when, following on again, he imagined he beheld them; thus the pursuit was continued for some time, till hopeless, and resolving to return to the Black Swan, he took leisure to enquire of his companion, 'what Mademoiselle Durand it was he meant?' the man said, the daughter of Count de Marigny, who was in the convent of the Benedictines, at Cambray, and who was supposed to have eloped with an English gentleman:"

'But how came you (said Mr. Bertram) to know the lady?'

'Because, (replied the man) I was one of the count's domestics; and it is not two months ago since I quitted France, with an intention of commencing hair-dresser in London; but not finding I was likely to succeed, I came to York in the coach, and if I liked it, I meant to stay: but I think of proceeding to Edinburgh, where there resides, at present, a family who will befriend me.'

"Mr. Bertram, giving the man some money for the trouble he had given him, wished a good night at the inn door.

"Henry related his adventures to Sir Robert, who judged the hour too late to make any enquiries, yet thought it really might be William, who in his letter to Mr. Blackmore had said, he would not venture to behold his benefactors: that it was the fair nun, the evidence of the Frenchman made almost indisputable; and the evident disguise of her companion corroborated the probability that it was William, who seeing his late friend, Mr. Bertram, had instantly quitted the house.

"The following morning they found, that in the north stage a young gentleman and lady had arrived the preceding day, and had their baggage taken to a shabby public-

house, the master of which said, 'the lady was a foreigner; that in the evening they went out, with a design to return and sleep at his house, but that a chaise came and took them away soon after they returned back; nor had they been gone many minutes, when a gentleman came and enquired, if two people had not been there, dressed exactly as those who had gone away in the chaise; and when the gentleman heard they were gone he swore violently, and said, he was certain it was his nephew and Miss Durand; but if he had her she might depend upon it, she should be a nun, for all she had tried to prevent it.

"Sir Robert at last found the postilion who drove this young couple to Tadcaster, where they had taken a fresh carriage.

"Henry went to Tadcaster; there he learned they had been pursued by a gentleman, in his own carriage, who overtook them near Thorp Arch, when the Tadcaster chaise was discharged: this was all the information that could be obtained, as from Thorp Arch no account could be gained what road they had taken."

That the parties were the unfortunate William March and the daughter of the Count de Marigny, scarce a doubt could be entertained; or that Ayscough had pursued and overtaken them; yet Ayscough still believing, or pretending to believe, William was his nephew, when such certain, such incontrovertible proofs, had been adduced by the tinker and his wife, that he was their son, seemed quite, at present, incomprehensible; except as it further assured Sir Robert, that malice, and a hidden desire of revenge were the inexhaustible springs which had hitherto directed the operations of Ayscough.

The elopement from Cambray appeared in a different point of view to Sir Robert and Lady Bertram, as it now seemed too evident the wretches had accomplished their aim; for that they had found, whilst the heart and morals of their victim remained uncorrupted, he would never be brought to join in their infernal schemes; that they artfully awakened his pity, his sensibility, and insidiously drove him to the brink of a precipice, down which their infernal schemes had plunged him; and by this means they expected to cut off all intercourse with his former friends and benefactors; and that each step would but plunge him deeper and deeper in vice, and consequently, more in their power.

Sir Robert having nothing farther to detain him at York, set out again for London.

Mary, as she listened to the tale of William's birth, wept bitterly: no, she could not, would not believe such creatures were his parents; it had only been for the sake of the reward, they had sworn to the truth of what they said.

Although the whole was again explained to her, yet still Miss Bertram gave a reluctant assent to the truth of a story she no longer could pretend to say she disbelieved; and the first opportunity she had, when alone with Henry, she again questioned him regarding it; and if he really believed the story himself? which Henry assured her he did, though, at first, pride and prejudice had warmly combatted certain proofs of its authenticity.

Mary, however, said, she wished she had it in her power to punish the tinker and his wife.

During the absence of Sir Robert at York, the person who had been sent over to France, returned with an account of the elopement of Mademoiselle Durand, confirmed by the Superior of the Benedictine Dames of Cambray; also the Count de Marigny had set on foot a most diligent search after the fugitives; against both of whom he had vowed vengeance; but no news, although Sir Robert slackened not his endeavors, could be obtained of the misguided William.

Letters were received by the May packet from Mrs. Dalrymple, to Mr. Megrell and Alicia, which gave a free concurrence to the plan proposed, for Alicia's residing with the family of Bertram; an offer that had happened very opportunely, as Mr. Dalrymple's affairs were now in a very embarrassed state; a most dreadful hurricane had entirely destroyed all his sugar works, and the canes upon his estates.

Mrs. Dalrymple seeing no probability of speedily returning to Britain, had sent her two children over to Scotland.

The repeated misfortunes of her generous and amiable friend, deeply affected Alicia; and she sighed for an independancy, that would enable her to shew the sense of gratitude she felt to her early benefactress.

The summer and autumn were spent by the family of Sir Robert Bertram in various excursions; they had been at Malieveren, but their stay was short; not in any place had they resided long together; nothing, however, worth relating occurred to our heroine, who was, indeed, increasing the influence she had already obtained in the hearts of those esteemed friends.

In November Sir Robert was in Cavendish-square, attending the opening of parliament; and, as they usually did, the family quitted London for Acorn Bank, before Christmas.—This visit recalled to Alicia's mind, strongly, the impression she received, when first, at Acorn Bank, she saw Sir Robert Bertram, and wandered at the apathy she felt regarding her future prospects.

She was a dependant on the generosity of a family, with whom, in some way, she believed she was connected; yet now, as if forgetting all the anxiety she had sustained upon this subject, she reposed with safety upon their friendship, although she had reason to suppose, that from some branch of it, her own family had suffered injustice.

But from this state of apparent indifference to the future, our heroine was roused at Acorn Bank, where it was the annual custom of the good Baronet to inspect his affairs, which were methodized and presented to him by Mr. Heaviside, his chief agent, regularly, a few days before the commencement of the new year.

It was in the evening of one of the days Sir Robert had thus spent, when all the family were assembled in the room where they had supped, the conversation held by Sir Robert and his own son with Mr. Heaviside turned upon the improvement that might be made in the Oakdale estate; after talking some time upon this subject, Mr. Heaviside said, that by a plan he had in agitation, should Sir Robert approve of it, the estate might be made worth between two and three hundred pounds per year more, and that by being at no kind of expence either.

'You mean, (said Sir Robert) I suppose, by my bringing a bill into parliament for the inclosing Dale Head Moor, upon which the estate borders.'

'No, Sir Robert, (he replied) you have already disclosed to me your intentions on that head; what I allude to is, that the hall should be entirely pulled down, and the ground ploughed up; after the wood, which will now decrease from its age, in value, is cut down, then I would build a farm-house in the middle of the ground, which will divide into a neat, compact farm; the wood will pay all expenses, and leave, I think, a few hundreds.'

"But why, (said Lady Bertram, whom Sir Robert always made it a point of consulting) why, Mr. Heaviside, would you pull the hall down? it might serve for the farmers as it is.

'I grant your ladyship, it might, (replied Mr. H—) could I persuade any one to live in it; but I am certain not a man upon the Oakdale estate would venture to do so was I to let him the farm for a third of its value, was that the annexed condition.'

"Miss Bertram, putting her face forward as she patted Mr. Heavisides' arm, said, 'I believe you sir, for I would not enter it again for a thousand pounds; and I would not enter Sir Philip's chamber, or look in that horrid glass again, if Sir Robert would give me all Oakdale estate.'

All laughed, or at least affected to laugh, at the earnestness with which Mary had spoke.

Alicia rose, and was about to leave the room, but Lady Bertram begged she would stay a few minutes, as she wanted to speak with her, regarding their going the next day to Hertford.

"Pray sit down, Alicia, said Mary, drawing her back to her chair; you are frightened, I protest; see Henry, is not Alicia quite pale! O lord, you look just like the face I saw: Alicia now thought, to plead indisposition would be but to bring the raillery of her lively friend upon her; and was again seated."

The conversation of Sir Robert and Mr. Heaviside had not been interrupted by this movement of Alicia, who heard the baronet say, 'you wrote to me last spring regarding letting it.'

"I did so, replied Mr. H—, and the person was all over it; nay, if I recollect right, Jackson told me he slept there one night; I dare say he would be very glad to have let it, for he declared to me, the other week, he had been at more trouble, and had more vexation about the hall, than all the rest of the Oakdale estate; upon which he has been

steward a great many years now; even the foolish fellow who rented the gardens, and had them cheap enough I am sure, gave them up last Martinmas, with the old pretence, that a ghost haunted the hall.'

"Does it, said Jackson, spoil your garden stuff, or spoil your fruit?"

"The man stared at Jackson—'Nay, for the matter of that, I cannot say; but last summer I could feel nought for it, for the folks all round about used to come to walk in the garden, and buy my fruit: now, why I have gone twenty, ay thirty miles with it, nobody comes near me for the ghaist, since it overturned Sir Robert's coach.'

Jackson gave the stupid fellow a hearty reprimand, for delivering and propagating such idle tales; and told him, he should not have the gardens at any rent, for he proposed staying, if it was lowered.

'I have not enquired very recently, but when I did, no application had been made; therefore, I think it is a great pity to allow all that ground to lay waste; and waste it will lay, I am certain, while the hall stands.'

Henry had kept his eyes fixed upon Alicia; to him her agitation was visible, in spite of the efforts she made to conceal it.

"Pray, Mr. Heaviside, enquired Miss Bertram, does the same woman live in the hall that did when we were there last winter?"

"No, (replied the steward) she left it the next day; and Jackson, knowing it would be impossible to get any person in the neighbourhood, sent to Bertram, from whence an old man and woman were brought, and several advantages promised to them, but they no sooner, I suppose, got acquainted with the inhabitants of St. Mary's Oak, than away they went: soon after that, the application was made to Jackson to let the hall, and though the spirits were not given as a reason, I dare say they had operated as one; for the person told Jackson, that at first he supposed it would have suited him, but he now found it would not."

Several different servants Jackson hired, but, if they came at all, they scarcely staid time sufficient to light the fires and air the rooms.

"Jackson was quite wearied, and came to ask me what he should do; 'remove into it yourself;' he shook his head, and talked of his wife being infected with notions that would not allow him to do so; and I then told him to lock it up, for I would see the baronet at Christmas, and meant to offer my opinion in regard to its being a mere nuisance upon the estate."

"It is, (said Sir Robert) a nuisance which shall remain upon it for my life."

"If this, Sir Robert, (replied Mr. H—) is your determination, in regard to the house, I hope you will allow the wood to be cut, and the whole of the ground laid out in a farm, as the hall may continue to be shut up, and a house built at a little distance."

"In Oakdale hall, said the baronet, with a serious air, my ancestors have lived and died, till my father's time, from Queen Elizabeth's reign, when the brave Sir Philip almost rebuilt it; the pleasure ground and gardens were then the pride and boast of the country; nor shall they, in my life-time, be destroyed.

"I have been no prodigal; my income, you well know, Mr. Heaviside, is more than equal to my expenditure; it shall not be increased by this means; my grand children shall not be told, that in such a place stood the ancient mansion of their progenitor, which I levelled to the ground; and I have other reasons, best known to myself, why Oakdale Hall shall not be pulled down, or its gardens turned into fields."

'I have done, Sir Robert, (said Mr. Heaviside) and am sorry I mentioned it.'

Lady Bertram rising, was followed by her daughter and Alicia, to her ladyship's dressing room; where, after a short conversation, our heroine, bidding good night, retired to her own apartment, sadly depressed by the painful feelings excited by the purposed demolition of the hall; and felt truly thankful Sir Robert had not agreed to the proposal; yet the conclusion of his last speech seemed still sounding in her ears, and what are 'the weighty reasons best known to himself?' was the question Alicia mentally repeated "was it possible he knew what it contained? did he know of the deeds committed in it?—No; it is impossible!" she audibly exclaimed: 'no, Sir Robert has other reasons!' Now seating herself, every scene of her infantine days was recalled—the dark grove where she had rambled with her mother—the terrace—the two venerable walnut trees, even these would have fallen beneath the axe Mr. Heavisides would have raised for the destruction of all these beloved mementoes:—had he but spared these: but no, all would have gone; such were the reflections of Alicia, who, when she met at breakfast the next morning the light-hearted Mary, was rallied by her for looking so unusually serious.

Henry remarked it also, yet parried his sister's raillery; well aware the conversation of the preceding evening had caused the change he perceived in Alicia; but when a week had passed away, and he had seen her mingle in many a gay and cheerful party, wearing, as before, the same look of ease and vivacity; yet, if he found her alone, she was serious and thoughtful, fearing somewhat had happened to distress his fair friend, he ventured to hint his suspicions.

"Henry, (said she, with a collected and serious tone of voice) fostered in the lap of prosperity, I have learned to forget myself; I remembered not I was an humble dependent upon the bounty of Lady Bertram; but sharing in the affluence by which I am surrounded—treated upon equal terms with my benefactors—blest too with such friends as you and Miss Bertram, I seemed so fully to enjoy the present, that I forgot the past, and thought not of the future, will the conversation which was held regarding Oakdale, conjured up to my view every scene, over which oblivion, appeared as if fallen, and fully recalled to my mind, that the time fast approaches, when I have much to learn: to this period I had been commanded to look forward, as to a season of trials; though kept ignorant of what was their exact nature; yet this command, for a time, I seemed to have forgotten:—ah! how ill does the late heedlessness of manners I assumed, agree with the fortitude I was early bid to practise; ill, very ill did the apathy of mind and dissipation of

spirits I felt, fit me for bearing any change of fortune; but I have taken myself severely to task, and I am glad to find you think me serious, Henry."

"Unacquainted with the causes which influence you, Alicia, and conscious of the rectitude of your heart; conscious too of your possessing an understanding and discernment far above your years, it becomes me not to say, discard those gloomy ideas which rob you of your usual vivacity; for gay or serious, equally are you dear, equally are you pleasing to me."

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CHAPTER V.

SOON after this conversation passed between Mr. Bertram and Alicia, the family quitted Acorn Bank for London, where a few days afterwards, the Earl of Knasborough arrived: To him, Sir Robert had written a full detail regarding the affair of William March (for so he was continued to be stiled, although it was found his real name was Hardie) and in particular regarding the elopement.

Lord Morville soon recovered of his wounds, and his father had accompanied him to several of the Italian cities; but quitted him at Rome, from whence the earl set out, returning through France.—At Paris he had met with the Count de Mavigny, from whom he learned, his daughter had not been recovered though all means, both spiritual and temporal, had been tried; and that now his son had set out, resolving to visit every European country; nor to give up the search of his sister, till he had at least certain intelligence that she was beyond his reach.

"The retreat the rash couple have chosen, (said Sir Robert) seems, at present, quite impervious."

"It does, indeed, (said Henry) had it not been so, long ere now would poor William have been restored to the paths of rectitude, which he so foolishly quitted; for, could I but once more behold him, I would make him listen to the admonitions of friendship."

Much about the time of the Earl of Knasborough's return, Mr. Evans, the lawyer, called on Mr. Meynel.—I have brought (said he) a letter to shew you, from my old client, Ayscough; he and the young man he calls his nephew, wish me to take the affair in hand again; but I think nothing could have been more foolish than to have given it up when they did; at a time when the witnesses were ready and much expence incurred; now all *that* is to be gone over again. It is, Mr. Meynell, a strange business, a very strange business indeed; and I am determined to have nothing to do in it—I should have little regard for my character, after what has passed, were I to oppose Sir Robert Bertram, and defend the cause of an imposter; but here is the letter, you will find it a singular one: it has, you may see by the post mark, been a ship letter, and put in at the Portsmouth office."

Mr. Meynell took the letter, the contents to which were, nearly as follow:

"I have found my nephew, Lord Malieveren; I met with him and his fair nun in England, but, at his earnest request, (after he had received my forgiveness for the rash step he had taken) accompanied them abroad, on condition he did not marry Mademoiselle Durand as I had other views for him; to this he partly agreed, and is now fully satisfied I was right, when I told him, except for interested motives, he should not think of marriage at present; indeed the fair nun is neglected for a lady he has had the good fortune to render himself agreeable to, in the town where we reside.

"I have, therefore, (finding him flexible in such points as at first he was unwilling to arrange as I wished) again resolved to assert his claim upon the Malieveren estate; and beg you to accept the inclosed as a retaining fee in his behalf; and also, that you would

make the following proposal to Sir Robert Bertram—that, if he will give his daughter to my nephew, he will marry her, and make the same settlement his grandfather made upon Lady Bertram's mother; his lordship if this is agreed to, will exact no account of the sums received during his minority, by Sir Robert; nor will he ask any dowry with Miss Bertram: by this means, the baronet will avoid a tedious and expensive suit, and his daughter will be established in life; but should he refuse, beg he will put an advertisement into the London Evening Post, merely signifying Mr. A—'s proposals were not accepted by the baronet.—I shall be ready, at the receipt of this intelligence, to set out with my nephew for England; but shall not see you, sir, till I have collected the now dispersed witnesses."

"I shall not, Mr. Meynell, (said Evans) make the insolent proposal: the letter is, however, at your service; I shall give the bank bill, sent as my retaining fee, to counsellor Kilvington, to whom I find Ayscough has also written; he, I am convinced, will have no scruples, although he was certain of his client's knavery."

Mr. Meynell hastened to Cavendish-square, with this insolent letter in his pocket:—Sir Robert was greatly shocked at the depravity of William March; if the account Ayscough gave of him was just, he appeared lost to every hope which had been entertained, that he might yet return to the paths of virtue.

Of the issue of the suit no fear could be entertained; as Sir Robert had the deposition of the tinker, which proved the birth of the claimant of the estates of Malieveren beyond a doubt.

Lady Bertram and her son now joined the conference; and a message was dispatched, requesting Mr. Evans' company, to whom the baronet presented a sum which doubled that sent him by Ayscough, and desired his assistance against the artful villain; for such, none present in the least hesitated to supposed him.

By the way pointed out, an answer was sent to Ayscough, as follows:

"The baronet to whom Mr. A. thought proper to make certain proposals, deems them, as they were meant, insults: the unhappy young man, Mr. A. has seduced from his duty, will still be received by his benefactor, provided he does not long defer his return.—Mr. A. is also informed, that the contents of his letter, which contained these proposals, are placed with Mr. A.'s law friend, as Mr. E. could not accept any favours on the terms annexed by Mr. A."

The following day Mr. Evans again visited Sir Robert, informing him the business wore a serious aspect, Kilvington having told him the witnesses were all ready for bringing forward on the part of Ayscough; and that it behoved Sir Robert to be prepared for his defence.

"You, doubtless, have the tinker and his wife's deposition; but I think it necessary they should be found also; and in readiness to bring forward."

"I have (said Sir Robert) the deposition; this is it," turning to his escrutoire and taking from it a folded paper sealed up.

Henry took it: "This, Sir Robert, (said he) cannot be the deposition, for as I hold it to the light there appears nothing but blank paper."

Sir Robert examined it as Henry had done, and was of the same opinion; he then broke the seal, it was a sheet of blank paper folded.

That the deposition had been taken away with a bad intention, was evident, but how, no one could do more than conjecture, and those conjectures tended to the belief that the theft had happened at York.

"I suppose (said Mr. Evans) the tinker and his wife may be found, and the deposition, in that case, becomes immaterial."

Henry agreed with Sir Robert, that no time should be lost, but that the next day he should set out for York, in order, first to enquire concerning the change of the paper which contained the deposition, as it was most probably some contrivance of Ayscough's, who, doubtless, had been in York at the time.

Henry drove to the Black Swan, in York, but could gain no information respecting the theft, farther than that a servant, who had lived at the house when it was committed, was soon after convicted of illicit practices, and discharged; but no account could be obtained concerning what afterwards became of this person, who was supposed to have gone to London after quitting York.

Of the tinker and his helpmate Mr. Bertram received a more perfect account; he had been committed, the May after receiving the reward from Sir Robert, to York Castle; and tried at the Summer assizes for a robbery, and had been sentenced, on that account, to transportation; in this voyage, the loving Susy had accompanied her affectionate husband, having sailed from Hull in a ship for Virginia, in the month of September.

With this unpleasant intelligence Mr. Bertram returned to London.

The business now wore a very unfavourable aspect for the baronet; as, if Ayscough had really procured witnesses that would, for his gold, swear to the marriage of Lord Malieveren, and the birth of the child, his producing evidence of his finding it, would have no other effect than to serve, as it were, to corroborate the perjuries of Ayscough.

James, it was true, had been witness to the tinker's deposition, and he was also the only evidence that could swear to the finding of the child; as the coachman was since dead, and the other footman had rode forward to Malieveren, when they quitted Rippon.

When Mr. Evans had the conducting of the business, no certificate then had been obtained of the marriage; but Mr. Kilvington had told him, this was owing to Mr. Ayscough not having been properly informed upon the subject, by his sister; but that now, though he would not say at present where the marriage had been contracted; yet

upon the trial, ample and sufficient vouchers would be produced to prove it had been a legal contract.

The anxiety of mind Lady Bertram sustained, seemed visibly to impair her health. "Sir Robert's estates (she would sometimes say to Alicia) are sufficient to support the usual style we live in: Henry is neither proud, selfish, nor ambitious; and Sir Robert has taken care that the fortune of Mary will not burthen him; gladly would we all unite in giving up the lands of Malieveren to William March, was he really the son of my brother; and never could I feel sufficiently grateful to providence in making me the instrument of preserving his life; but it is indeed mortifying to think there is a possibility the possessions of my family must be resigned to an impostor, and that still more to aggravate the mortifications, that impostor has been reared in our very bosoms—cherished as a beloved child;—scarce, Alicia, as I think of it, can I deem it possible, that human nature can be so depraved; life, education, and a certain establishment for his future support (as Sir Robert had purchased him, some time back, a commission), all these were bestowed; in return we asked but his good conduct: alas! Alicia, William March, too sure, proves that vice is hereditary; that no education, no precept or example, will destroy, or effectually counteract the dormant feeds; for no sooner has he found associates to call them into action, than he turns on his benefactors, and leagues with villains to deprive them of lands, he well knows are theirs, by just and legal inheritance.

"O no, Alicia, it is not the loss of Malieveren; it is the base ingratitude of the claimant that thus unceasingly preys upon my spirits, joined to the odium cast equally upon the memory of a beloved brother, and the fair unblemished character of Sir Robert."

Henry still would endeavour at vindication, for his once amiable friend.

"On this subject, Henry, (would Sir Robert say) your natural generosity of character misleads you; William is every way despicable; reflect but upon the insult offered to your sister, by him; much rather would I have given Mary to William March, as I once knew him (though found to be the offspring of such wretches as we learned last year at York, he was,) than after his late trampling upon all laws of morality, and connecting himself with a woman who broke every tie she had been taught to look upon as sacred, even could it be proved he was the true heir to the late Lord Malieveren, and of course Lady Bertram's nephew."

Miss Bertram, whose attachments were always violent, now shewed as strong a dislike to William, as she had formerly a friendship, and was the loudest in her expressions of aversion; yet those testimonies of the alteration in her sentiments were generally conveyed in some light jest, regarding the proposal made for her union with him—or some sally of severely pointed wit, which was sure, if in Lady Bertram's hearing, to draw down reproof: she wished her daughter to feel a proper sense of the insult, but she could not patiently hear her treat a subject that sat so painfully upon her spirits with such levity.

It was William who formed, at this period, the chief topic of conversation between Henry and Alicia; they remembered him both, generous and virtuous, and although it was

impossible to deny the errors he had been guilty of, yet still his memory was dear to them; and scarce, as they recalled the innumerable instances he had displayed of the unvaried uprightness of his soul, could they believe that it was the William March so amiable, so every way estimable, whom they had loved so affectionately, who had carried off Mademoiselle Durand, and who finally had leagued with Ayscough to insult, to defame, and to plunder the family to whom he owed every thing: many a plan was suggested by the romantic and enthusiastic friends of William, all tending to reclaim him from his errors, and restore him to himself; but those plans at present appeared not feasible even to Henry and Alicia, as again they reviewed them.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE important period advanced when Alicia was to open the packet consigned to her charge, for in June she would be sixteen, the age fixed by her mother; but this did not so much engross her attention as might have been supposed; for she was now called upon, by every tie of affection and gratitude, to exert herself in order to support Lady Bertram, who reposed on Alicia with confidence; to her, and her alone did her ladyship, young as she was, freely disclose the sorrows which destroyed her health and peace; in our heroine, Lady Bertram found a friend, though sympathising, yet cheerful, whose judgment was matured far beyond her age, and whose resources of conversation amused, when all else failed; thus highly called upon, Alicia assumed the character all her life had been a prelude to; it was to her that her ladyship looked for comfort, for consolation; fearful of distressing Sir Robert, or Henry with complaints, Alicia was her friend her nurse;—it was she that made home pleasant to Sir Robert, cheerful to Henry; she too, it was, whose prudence restrained the giddy sallies of Miss Bertram; such were the employments of our heroine at Acorn Bank, where the family had gone early in April, and thus, in rousing the dormant powers of her mind, into active and constant exertion of the energy of her character, Alicia gave little heed to the nearness of her own approaching trial; yet as it drew nearer, it would, spite of all her resolution, obtrude on her thoughts: completely absorbed in thinking of such circumstances as related to this period, now near at hand, she was seated on a garden chair in the front of the observatory, one fine evening in the last week of May, she had taken out Mr. Kirby's letter, upon which her eyes were fixed, when Mr. Bertram advanced: "You seem, (said he) Alicia, too much engaged to observe your friends."

"I was indeed, (she replied) I was thinking, Henry, of those I shall never more behold, and of a period now fast approaching, when I have much to learn, and I have cause to believe, much also to sustain."

"Say, then, Alicia, at that period can my presence sustain, will my services be needful?"

"Ah! Henry, at that period your presence would give me a degree of fortitude beyond that which I shall feel: but there exists reasons why I must not ask your aid."

"This strange, this mysterious reserve almost distracts me, Alicia; the hints at various times you have given—your emotions at Oakdale—ah! rack me not thus with suspense!—alas! Alicia, you know not—but why do I complain; I who implicitly rely on your promise, to disclose to me this apparent mystery in your situation, at such a time as you judge it right; I know you deem me incapable of betraying you, or at Oakdale you would not have in part disclosed your terrors: ah, Alicia! those terrors! what were their import? I wish but to be allowed to know, as early as you can inform me, how is it you appear connected with a family, all of whom, myself excepted, are ignorant of your origin."

"Ah! Henry, even if I were not bound by my promise, why should I impart to your sympathising bosom the doubts, the horrors, which agitate mine; when doubt is changed to certainty, however horrid that certainty is, you, Henry, shall share my knowledge, unless my promise still binds me to silence."

Mr. Bertram taking the hand of his fair friend, said, with a kind of earnest solemnity of manner, "those doubts, those horrors, Alicia, already sit here; both of us would suffer less, was I allowed fully to participate; I have not, I cannot forget the pallid countenance seen in Sir Philip's chamber, and had it not been that your commands restrained enquiry on the subject, I should have never quitted Oakdale; were you and Mary suffered such an alarm—.

'O, Henry, speak not to me of the appearance; it convulses me with horror; with apprehensions horrible, yet vague; but I must not shrink from—I ought rather to accustom myself to think on subjects terrible and gloomy;—yes, every way repugnant to human nature, amongst such sights shortly must I learn what hitherto has been concealed from me; then, Henry, perhaps, I may be bid to hate you, and to look on the family from whence you spring as the foes of mine; but no, I cannot, (sobbed out Alicia, overcome by the idea); no! Henry, I can never hate you!"

"Alas! why talk you thus, Alicia! ah! why is this misery to hang over you? why should you be commanded to do what reason and friendship will condemn! judge me not, I conjure you, by false prejudices, but by my own conduct;—by it, Alicia, allow me to sink or rise in your favour;—this is more than I can bear;—O tell me not of the possibility of my being hated by you—sufficient is it I am obliged to confine to my own breast my feelings—sufficient is it you refuse to allow me to share your griefs."

"Ah! would to heaven I had been for ever silent on this subject! ah, would that at Oakdale I had practised my early taught lesson, that there I had preserved my presence of mind, and the fortitude I was bid to aspire to; then, Henry, my doubts and fears had rested with myself: alas! it is not her griefs, her terrors, that Alicia would have wished her dearest friend to have shared."

Mary, ere Alicia had finished her speech, came up running till she was out of breath.—"I thought (said the lively girl) I should never have found you, Alicia, just for the express purpose of complaining against Henry, who really is grown quite insufferable. After you said you would walk a little further, I went into the house, where I found my brother reading a very grave, tiresome book to my mother, who enquired after you; and, I said, you were gone into the wood, to listen to the nightingales. 'Mary, (said this very polite gentleman,) pray sit down and read a little, for I have letters to write this evening."

"Well, (said I, in high good humour) to oblige you, Henry, I will. Where did you leave off?"

"At that sentence, (he replied) begin there," Morality may exist."

"Very well, (said I, taking the volume); and if you believe me, I have read ever since; only hear how hoarse I am—my eyes ache, my head aches, my throat is sore!"

"Pray, (said Henry) does not your tongue also ache, Mary?"

To this question she replied with her usual gaiety, and without perceiving the agitation which sat on the countenance of her brother and Alicia.

Henry proposed returning; "it is high time, (said Alicia) it is quite dusk; I am sure I did not observe it; the day has closed in very quickly."

"I am quite of a different way of thinking, Alicia; for my employment has been a very tedious one," (said Miss Bertram); then turning to Henry, with an added archness of expression, she enquired, in which of Shakespeare's comedies it was said, "That time travels in divers places with divers persons, and that with some people it trots, and with others stands still."

This question produced the desired effect; for it disconnected Henry, and covered Alicia with blushes, of which she scarce knew the cause.

The following day after the conversation had passed, Sir Robert and Mr. Bertram went to London, where it was found necessary the Baronet should go to Bertram Castle, on account of some papers that were requisite, regarding the law-suit, which was then expected shortly to be determined, as it was to be tried at York Assizes in July.

Sir Robert proposed either Mary or Alicia accompanying him as far as Malieveren, which would only take him about fifteen miles out of his road to Bertram; and he had room in the chaise, and the whole of the family were to quit Acornbank for Malieveren, the 10th of June. Mary could not bear the idea of being left a few days alone at the Castle, whither Alicia instantly agreed to go with the Baronet, who leaving her there, proceeded to Northumberland, where his business detained him much longer than he had expected. Lady Bertram, in the meanwhile, was confined at Acornbank, with a slight nervous fever, which rendered it totally unfit she should travel; of this Alicia was informed by Henry, who, however, said, he doubted not his mother would soon be able to go into Yorkshire; but should that not be the case, before the period of which she had spoken, as a time when all her fortitude would be necessary to support her under the expected trial, he entreated she would, if possible, defer it till he was near enough to assist her in any difficulty she might have to sustain.

Alicia, though grieved for the cause which had occasioned Henry's writing to her, yet was soothed by the many expressions of attention to her happiness his letter contained.

Alicia felt her time pass slowly and heavily away. Too much agitated for mental occupation, she often slowly sauntered over the park, then suddenly rousing herself, would again quicken her pace, as if she imagined exercise would chase the ideas which tormented her; for now scarce three weeks intervened before she would be sixteen. Thus some days would she scarce spend an hour in the Castle; every rising knoll in the wide extended park was visited in those solitary rambles; and as she cast her eyes over the grounds, so elegantly planned, so carefully cultivated, by the present worthy possessor, "What pity, (would she exclaim) these should be wrested from Sir Robert, who so nobly, so charitably, so munificently spends the income of his estates, and to be so unjustly deprived of them is doubly mortifying! Henry likewise, the heir of the virtues, of the wealth of his father, he must, perhaps, resign a large portion to an impostor; but wealth cannot ennoble such an one, nor the want of it derogate from Henry Bertram."

Weary, listless, unoccupied, never did our heroine spend her time so little to her own satisfaction; she could have wished time annihilated, yet dreaded each day as it passed, when she reflected it brought her still nearer to the allotted time.

The stately apartments of Malieveren appeared gloomy and desolate; and Alicia would linger in the gallery for hours, as if conversing with the pictures of the family, to whom for so many ages it had appertained; sometimes imagining she could trace a resemblance between the features of the last Baron and the misguided William March; then again supposed, it was but fancy; yet Henry Bertram was universally allowed by all who knew the family of Malieveren, to bear a strong resemblance to them; and she was convinced the likeness between Henry and William, so oft remarked even by strangers, was not ideal.

It was the middle of June, when Sir Robert called at Malieveren, in his way to Acornbank, whither he went to escort Lady Bertram into Yorkshire;—he politely apologized to Alicia for having been the cause of her being left so long alone, and also informed her, that every thing conspired to make him fear an unfavourable issue of the law-suit; "and I suppose this place (added he) which has been so assiduously improved, must be yielded to an ungrateful impostor:—as I think of it, my heart sickens—my very soul burns with indignation and with grief, as I behold the effect it has had upon the health of my beloved Frances. I do not (continued the Baronet, after a short pause) often enter upon this distressing subject, Alicia; but I have recently learned, a very elegant house in York is taken, for the assize week, for the use of Lord Malieveren, who, with his pretended mother and uncle are to occupy it. I feel agitated still, from the surprise I felt at learning the effrontery, the hardened effrontery, with which this young man pursues his villainy."

"I mourn, indeed, over his depravity, (said Alicia,) yet I deem it not possible that at York he will dare to face the injured benefactors of his early days; I think it is but some trick of Ayscough's."

"No, do not thus deceive yourself; William must have been of age soon after his elopement from Cambray; the suit is now in his name, not Ayscough's, who, no doubt, will take care eventually to be reimbursed all his expences concerning the suit."

The conversation during Sir Robert's short stay at the castle of Malieveren, turned upon no other subject, and, having dined with Alicia, bade her adieu, saying, he hoped the whole family would join her in less than a week.

Ah! what, ere then, thought Alicia, as she turned from the carriage of her worthy benefactor; ah! what, ere then, is it I have to learn? yes, ere then, must my mother's letter be opened; ere then shall I know, perhaps, what meant the solemn scene she thought proper to disclose.

It was Saturday, and the following Thursday was the birth-day of Alicia; each day her agitation seemed to increase, and each day rendered her less able, by occupation, to divert her ideas from that sole and overpowering one that absorbed her very soul.

The long-looked-to time arrived—Alicia rose and breakfasted—"I will, at least, (thought she) preserve an outward composure. Retiring, however, as soon as she had finished her slender meal, to her own chamber, and fastening the door, she took out the letters so long, so carefully preserved.—Then, wrapped in the enthusiasm of the moment, she kneeled, invoking the spirit of her departed mother to hover over and inspire her with resolution; rising, she broke the seal with a kind of forced and unreal firmness in her manner, and read as follows;

"ELIZA TO HER DAUGHTER.

"Alicia, my beloved, my only child, in thee has thy sad mother put a confidence far beyond thy years; it is, I trust, rewarded; nor dost thou, prompted by a childish curiosity, defeat the purport of this:—no, my Alicia has strictly obeyed the injunctions of her dying mother, and thus secured to herself the blessings entailed upon dutiful children,

"The scene disclosed, when yet you were an infant in years, has not lost its effect; it has had with my Alicia all the power, all the weight of a mother's precept—of a mother's example; and you are now no giddy trifler. Impressed with the importance of what so early was entrusted to you, ever have you walked uprightly; your mind fixed upon this important period, you have acquired patience, you have been accustomed to reflect, you have learned to collect yourself, and look with undaunted resolution on the various ills of this mutable world; yes, or I augur wrong, if she has kept my commands—yes such at sixteen is my Alicia; nor will she, I trust, shrink from encountering alone, (if Mr. Kirby lives not) the horrors of Oakdale Hall. In secret must you visit it—ah! my child, there must you learn, what has been the cause of my deep, my unavailing sorrow; and there my Alicia will find, that to disclose it will cover her parent's memory with infamy—will but disgrace herself. Heaven, that knows my guilt was unintentional, that has beheld my days, my nights of sorrow, will, I trust, not thus condemn me, as I do myself, and will grant to the child what was denied to the mother—fortitude and strength of mind to enable her to hear that knowledge which brought me to an early grave.

"Go then, Alicia, be firm, be prudent and may Providence protect thee in the gloomy hall!"

Alicia next opened the letter which was inclosed in that Mr. Kirby had written to bid her adieu in, when he quitted England.

"MR. KIRBY TO ALICIA.

"My beloved Alicia, when you open this, you will much need my presence; and if not returned before the period allotted by your mother, you may conclude you never will behold me again in this world; but, if alive, depend upon it, nothing shall have power to

prevent me being with you to visit Oakdale. Ah! would it but please God to allow me to return to you! All your fortitude may be insufficient to support you, Alicia, under the trial you are now about to undergo; for it is requisite this visit to Oakdale should be made in secret, and alone.—The way from Sir Philip's chamber you well know, but should circumstances prevent you entering that way, another remains, though take it not, unless you cannot pass by the other, as it leads through vaults and passages where your soul will sink with terror; yet rather let these be dared than totally neglect the INJUNCTION you have received.

"At the north-west corner of the house, level with the ground, close to the place where the large apple-tree grew, you will observe a square stone, on which is a cross deeply engraven; in the midst of this, by close attention, you will find a spring, which pressed, discloses a key-hole.

"In the terrace, eight inches below the surface, and three feet east of the western walnut-tree, I have buried, in a wooden box, the key which will admit you through the first entrance, in which you will find a key to the second and third doors you will meet with.

"God preserve you, Alicia, and grant you strength of mind, and resignation to his will!

"Again, I say, be secret; your safety, nay, perhaps your life, depends on it."

Such was Mr. Kirby's letter, and neither it nor Mrs. Bouchier's gave Alicia the information she had flattered herself they had contained; and at Oakdale alone was this long kept secret to be unfolded; and it was evident that the packet, committed in so solemn a way to her keeping, had been only meant to prove her—to teach her patience, forbearance, obedience; and that the awful scene so early disclosed, was to impress her infant mind with ideas of a magnitude then too wonderful for her comprehension. To the unfolding of that scene she was bid to look forward; she was commanded silence and fortitude; deeply was the lesson imprinted; and her mind, her faculties, expanded in proportion as she understood how highly she had been intrusted. "My Alicia (her mother said) is no common child; her mind is an elevated one;" to merit the distinction the soul of Alicia spurned at the light and the trifling, and grasped in it the wonderful, the vast; she pitied the wicked, she assisted the weak, oft comforted the afflicted, and, soaring towards the perfection her mother had fondly augured she should attain; she concealed those shining qualities, and was humble and unassuming: with Henry alone did she allow those talents fully to display themselves; for with him was she in no danger of being deemed desirous of appearing more learned or accomplished than she really was.

CHAPTER VII.

BUT it is now time I should disclose to my readers, why Alicia felt a repugnance to visit Oakdale, and also what it was that there in her childish days had been partly disclosed to her.

It will, doubtless, be remembered, that Mrs. Bouchier had caused Alicia to be awaked at midnight, after she herself had a little recovered from some deep faintings, which had alarmed Mr. Kirby with an idea of her speedy dissolution; and that he, with Alicia, had accompanied her into Sir Philip's chamber; there they stopped, and Mrs. Bouchier said to her child, "I wish not, Alicia, needlessly to alarm you; had I reason to suppose my life would be prolonged, what I am going to disclose should yet have been deferred, but I now conjure you to exert that portion of fortitude, which, young as you are, I have endeavoured to inspire you with.—I have long, my child, bid you prepare for a severe trial—I have told you I must soon quit this earthly mansion, and you, Alicia, must be resigned to the will of the Almighty."

"I shall strive (said the weeping child) to be so.—Mr. Kirby still will be left, and I shall think you, my dear mother, will be in heaven, with my father, and will watch over your Alicia."

"God (said Mrs. Bouchier) will, by his care of you, supply the loss of your parents, if you obey his commands; and he will give you, Alicia, strength of mind to bear what it is necessary you should learn, and will enable you to support what I have sunk beneath.

"Strange events preceded your birth; long, dark, and intricate is the chain which you will hereafter, I trust, unravel.

"I shall leave you without one friend in the world, save Mr. Kirby, I shall leave you, Alicia, without fortune or inheritance; a long train of evil deeds, of late repentance, the gloomy chambers I shall disclose to you have witnessed. The guilty scenes, acted in this now almost desolated hall, have transferred property, of right your's, to those who are not the legal heirs; and though in these chambers exists full proof of your right, yet, alas! so complicated is the whole, you must not assert your claim. The reason why is most horrible to my recollection—as yet you are too young to bear the whole. But I am about to disclose a scene, sufficiently awful to imprint on your young mind a sense of the importance of what hereafter you must learn; at a period when your mind, I trust, will have gained fortitude to enable you to bear it, and prudence to conceal it. I might, it is true, commit certain papers, now, to your charge, but these, from your extreme youth, are too important a trust.—Mr. Kirby will repeat to you, at states times, what I have said now.

"Art thou now, Alicia, prepared for beholding a scene that will thrill thy young veins with horror?"

The amiable child assured her mother she would not be alarmed, whilst she and Mr. Kirby were so near her.

Mrs. Bouchier then directed Mr. Kirby to open the door of a closet, apparently hollowed out of the wall, the boards that formed the floor of which drew out in one part;

beneath those boards that remained was a spring concealed; this being pressed, the back of the closet sunk down, till its top became level with the bottom, and disclosed, to the astonishment of Mr. Kirby and Alicia, a very small chamber, perfectly dark, except what light issued through the opening; the whole furniture it contained was one stool and a table, with a bed, round which the curtains were closed. These were undrawn by Mr. Kirby; on the pillow (which, as well as the covering of the bed, was black) stood a human skull and an hour-glass, and suspended from the tester, by a slender thread, hung a bloody knife.

"What (said Alicia) means this? the floor, the walls are sprinkled with blood!"

"Ask not questions, my child, (said Mrs. Bouchier) they must not be resolved at present; hereafter all shall be explained; behold, remember, but be silent."

Mrs. Bouchier now opened a door which led from this chamber to a stair-case, so narrow, it was with difficulty Mr. Kirby could walk, so as to assist Mrs. Bouchier with his arm in ascending to an apartment much of the same size with that they had quitted.—This was not, like the former one, dark; for it was lighted by several chinks, rather than windows, which consisted each of one narrow pane, almost equal with the roof, which was very lofty; in this apartment Alicia remembered seeing nothing but a large oak chest; to which her mother pointing, bade her carefully remark it.

Mrs. Bouchier paused, sighed deeply, and proceeded; "in this, Alicia, (said she) is contained, what it is requisite you must learn; but Reason must be more matured, ere the strange, the dreadful secrets, that here are concealed, shall be unfolded to you. Were you now, my child, to be informed, Reason might be frightened from her infant seat; your young mind cannot fully comprehend the horrid import, the dreadful tenor of those crimes which have deprived you of your parents—of your legal inheritance, and cut you off from all hopes of your birth-right."

Alicia would have spoken, but was awed by the air of solemn command with which her mother spoke, and she remembered, beheld, and was silent.

Mrs. Bouchier, leaning on Mr. Kirby, again led the way to Alicia down the narrow staircase, passing the door of the blood-stained chamber, till she unclosed the door of an apartment which was below it. This room was hung round with paintings; one shewed a handsome youth seated on the floor; his countenance shewed evident marks of surprise and admiration; before him stood a lady, whose looks were bent upon him with a mixture of expression that was most admirably delineated; haughtiness and malice appeared to struggle with some gentler feelings, and to check the pity that seemed to rend her heart, and a kind of an anguished feeling of remorse appeared to intrude.—The person of this figure was tall and majestic; she appeared turned of forty; by her stood another person, a woman about half the age of the other; she it was evidently whose appearance had surprised the handsome youth, whose eyes were fixed upon her; she also was handsome; to judge her character by her countenance, she had talents and address; yet she had, as

well as the youth, a kind of resemblance to the haughty dame, which might lead the beholders to suppose they constituted one family.

The rest of the paintings were composed also from other scenes, interesting, doubtless to the painter—In all were seen the youth and younger lady; but this I have described, from the strong expression and the size of the piece, most attracted the attention of our young heroine, who again had to restrain herself, and behold in silence.

This apartment was unenlightened, save by the tapers held by Mr. Kirby and Alicia who quitted this room for another beneath it; or rather, it was a vault into which they now entered, for its roof was level with the foundation of the hall. This place disclosed to the wonder-struck Alicia a gloomy scene of horror.—It was hung round with black cloth, on which, in large letters, with white worsted, was marked the following inscription:

"Let not the gay, the giddy or the vain, enter here;—this is the house of mourning the house of death, for here shall the most wretched being upon earth end her miserable existence; here shall her unhallowed remains moulder into dust; nor shall, for her, be poured out the pious prayer; unworthy of the comforts which religion bestows, her life is doomed to despair. Shall a murderer dare presume to hope!—can a late repentance atone for the innocent blood spilled! ah! it cries aloud to heaven for vengeance; nor has it pleaded in vain; its voice was heard, and a dreadful retribution has been required; the family will be extinct, the curse of the Almighty rests upon me and them; child after child has been rent from the weeping parents, yet I am the cause; I was the instigation, the perpetrator of those dreadful deeds. Vain, proud, and ambitious, I supposed I could place myself beyond the reach of misfortune; I imagined I was to be the idol to whom all hearts should bow; the most diabolical passions inflamed my heart, and reigned there triumphant; revenge was the sole object I aspired to—I obtained it, and was miserable; yet that is a poor expression to my present tortures—I was miserable; compare misery with happiness; how vast the disparity—so vast, so awfully distant is common misery to the continued horrors I feel.

"Have then the gay, the giddy, or the vain entered?—have they witnessed this gloomy scene of terror?—do they tremble as they read?—do they resolve to walk up-rightly?—do they reflect a single false step, if not instantly regained, may lead to crimes black as are mine? go then, nor proudly fancy yourselves secure as I did; and say to evil, Though I listen for awhile, yet will I quickly abandon thee."

This was read slowly and distinctly by Mrs. Bouchier, which done, she turned towards a raised bier, in the midst of the vault, on which rested a coffin; over it was thrown a pall of black velvet, richly embroidered with various emblematical figures that reached to the ground. On the top of the coffin was seated the figure of an infant (for such only it was, Alicia afterwards supposed, although when first beheld by her, it wore the resemblance of life to her young ideas); the face of this infant-form bore a striking likeness to those seen by her in the paintings in the room above; in the hand of it was held a scroll, on which was written: "At the throne of God, who is alone able to avenge, as he alone knows the extent of thy crimes, shall I plead against thee, thou inhuman wretch!—justice is poured out upon thee—on earth no more shalt thou rest—sleep shall be banished from thee—no consecrated ground shall cover thy abhorred remains—and where thy crimes have been

committed, there shall thy guilty and disembodied spirit hover, till in some degree they are atoned for."

"As yet, (said Mrs. Bouchier, with a solemnity of manner, to which her clear, harmonious, and deep-toned voice, gave additional power), as yet, Alicia, you can scarce understand the full extent of what it is I require of you. You are ignorant of the nature of an oath, such as I am about to exact from you, although I have endeavoured to make you sensible of the importance of a solemn promise; and you know, to break a *Parent's Injunction*, is to err against the commands of God himself."

'I do (said Alicia) know this; I know I am bound to honour my parents by a positive command, even if I did not love them.'

"Though almost an infant in point of age, you are, Alicia, deeply entrusted. I have dared to reveal to you scenes, girls twice your age have shrunk from beholding; but I repeat, my Alicia is no common child—her soul is an elevated one—her understanding far beyond her years; yes, thus I think of you, at this early period, Alicia; and to the end you should attain that fortitude of character, that strength of mind, in which I have been so deficient, but which you are so well qualified by nature to acquire, it is that I thus entrust your tender age with a secret of such importance. I have said, strange events preceded your birth; you are, like your sad mother, the child of mystery and misfortune. Alas! Alicia, I have nought besides to bequeath; a sad inheritance is your's; you are called upon in no common way; it is indispensibly necessary you should exert yourself: I give you, Alicia, a period to look forward to; till that period, you must rest satisfied, without knowing the sad tale connected with what I have disclosed to you; till you are sixteen you must not open the packet I shall give into your keeping; then have you my permission to learn all I have in my power to communicate regarding those strange sights you have beheld; and you will then know how they are connected with yourself. In the large oak chest in the highest apartment, you will find the dreadful explanation; the key of the chest is fastened beneath this pall; dare you now, Alicia, remove it?"

She shrunk from the task enjoined,—and Mrs. Bouchier proceeded—

"I command it not now, my child; and when you do raise it, Alicia, I shall be as the mouldering tenant of the coffin it conceals. If at the age I have fixed for your visiting these gloomy chambers, you have not zealously endeavoured to make yourself beloved by the merciful Being who called you into life, by piety and virtue; if you have been heedless of the early lessons I have taught—if you have not strove to correct evil propensities in your heart—if you have not endeavoured to render yourself useful in the station you may be placed in—if you have not, as far as your means allowed, cultivated those talents Providence has been pleased to bestow—if you have not possessed them meekly, humbly, and charitably, and thus conciliated the good-will of those around you, enter not here, Alicia. But you will not, you dare not; you will be sensible how undeserving you are of the confidence I have reposed, and will shrink from a sight that must so forcibly remind you that oft, even in this world, vice is punished, and that a period will shortly arrive when you shall be called upon to give an account of your actions to an all-seeing Judge. Think then, Alicia, if you presume to open this letter till the appointed time, that your duty is forfeited, and you prove yourself unworthy of the

trust; dread then to enter here: but I augur differently; at sixteen you will be all you now promise—all my fondest hopes paint to my imagination. Kneel now, my child!"—

Alicia obeyed, and took the solemn oath dictated by her mother; the purport of which was, never to reveal the knowledge she had of the concealed apartments, or to open the letter entrusted to her charge, till she was sixteen; then rising, she was blessed and embraced by her mother; and Mr. Kirby taking her in his arms, conveyed her back to the apartment, where the servant waited.

Already have I related the effect this scene had upon the mind of our heroine. Her mother's *Injunctions* had been carefully repeated to her at each visit she had made to Mr. Kirby, but of this there was little need; indelibly were they imprinted—they appeared to be interwoven in her very existence—her heart had forcibly felt the solemn appeal—her sensibility, her curiosity, had equally been roused; the former made her dread to gratify the latter; and Alicia trembled as the thought of raising the mysterious veil, which, as it were, concealed her even from herself. She had been stimulated to exertions, and Alicia, as her mother augured, was at sixteen no common character; nor will I hesitate in saying, she would have instantly obeyed, when the permission was granted, and have gone to Oakdale, to learn what had been so long hidden from her, could she have done so; but the secrecy so constantly and strictly enjoined, forbade this; situated too, in a family which she had much reason to suppose were in some way concerned in the strange sights she had witnessed in the hall. With those sights her own fate was, she knew, connected, so perhaps was she also with the Bertrams; caution was therefore peculiarly necessary, as, for aught she knew, the caution so oft enjoined might relate principally to this family.

When a child at Oakdale, she had listened to conversations between the servants, that recorded strange and apparently well-authenticated tales of spirits, who rested not in their mansions beyond the grave, but delighted to walk at midnight their solitary rounds, where, when living, they had presided, and that the gloomy chambers of the hall were often visited by the restless and wandering ghosts of its former inhabitants. Spite of her judgment, these tales had sunk in her memory, yet had not influenced her to superstitious ideas; but she had heard them when few others had been imprinted, and they were not forgotten, when she, with Miss Bertram, slept in Sir Philip's chamber.

Alarmed by what she saw that night which, to her imagination, bore all the appearance of a spectre, (at least such as the idea her mind had in infancy received on the subject) Alicia was easily terrified; that she was no coward, her behaviour has, in many instances, fully proved, but that she felt, upon viewing this phantom, no small degree of apprehension, I have already related.

At one time, the tales heard in infancy, together with the scroll that said, "The guilty spirit of some person, who in the hall had in former time committed horrid crimes, should hover near the spot where they were perpetrated, till, in some degree, they were expiated," affected her belief: again Reason resumed its sway, and she spurned the superstitious thought;—a heavier punishment would be assigned the wicked wretch, whose remains mouldered unburied in those gloomy apartments. It was the vicinity of

those horrors that had disturbed her imagination so far as to conjure up this illusion of her senses; but when Miss Bertram also saw in the glass the pallid face—when she also was frightened by the horrid visage, Alicia's ideas took another turn; in those dismal chambers some miserable wretch might be condemned to linger out a wretched life—self judged, it might be a voluntary penance—or it might be a well-deserved imprisonment. That those gloomy apartments had once been thus inhabited, she was already certified; but such inhabitants sure had long ceased to exist; and it was the history of their crimes, their penitence, and their sufferings she was to hear, when she visited, at the appointed time, their mysterious apartments: perhaps, again, thought she, some midnight plunderers have taken up, in this desolate mansion, their abode, and have made those concealed chambers their retreat from justice.

Thus, alike awed by superstition—by the dread of violence—or of encountering some more shocking spectacle than that which she had a first witnessed, though her curiosity was so strongly stimulated, and though she knew her mother had judged it requisite she should at that period visit Oakdale, so deeply had the figure which she had seen in her last visit to the hall impressed her with dread, augmented too by the belief she entertained of the necessity she was under not to mention her apprehensions, that she felt happy, although she endeavoured to conceal from herself the feeling that she could not with secrecy at present, visit Oakdale, therefore she was absolved from her obligation till she could.

Alone was the visit to be made; had this not been the case, Henry Bertram could have accompanied her. Alicia would not have thought of danger or difficulty;—painful, indeed, when with him, was the imposed silence; it was secretly brooding over the idea of the figure she had seen that shook her courage; could she have spoke of it to Henry, her fears would have been lessened, if not conquered.

In revolving over the most probable means of secretly visiting the gloomy hall—in combating the dread she entertained—in summoning her fortitude—in forming conjectures, though many of them wide of the truth, regarding the appearance she had seen; Alicia spent the few days that intervened, between her opening the letters and the arrival of the family at Malieveren, whom she received with much pleasure, and without exhibiting any traces of the anxious interval of time she had passed.

Lady Bertram was yet considerably indisposed; Sir Robert was unhappy on her account, and anxious for the issue of the trial which was to take place in the course of less than three weeks. Miss Bertram, though concerned for her mother's illness, yet abated not of her gaiety, or thought of confining herself in any way on that score; Henry and Alicia were therefore the nurses, the cheerful and unremitting comforters of her ladyship.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT the appointed time the Judges reached York. The day preceding the commencement of the assizes, Sir Robert Bertram and the family quitted Malieveren Castle for York. Lodgings had been engaged for their reception very near the house taken in the name of Lord Malieveren; where in the dusk of the next evening, a travelling chaise with four horses stopped. Henry, who stood at the window, saw descend from it Ayscough, who handed out a lady in mourning, whom he supposed was his sister, the pretended Baroness. Another carriage drove up; from it leaped a young man, who, as well as the light would allow him to judge, he thought was William; and the title of Lord Malieveren, which was heard buzzed in the crowd, as they caught it from the servants, assured him he was not mistaken.

The following day was Sunday, but on Monday this important cause was expected to be heard in a city where Sir Robert Bertram was generally known, and universally esteemed; yet that so bold an attempt could be made against his property and reputation, without some foundation, appeared too wild, too daring a scheme, for any one to execute; and it was but a portion of the Baronet's friends who openly declared the whole was a villainous and treacherous plot between Ayscough and the ingrate William March: however openly these friends spoke their sentiments, the majority declared their judgments should be suspended till after the trial.

Early on the day when the Judges were expected to sit upon the Malieveren cause, Mr. Bertram dressed, and went to court, without informing any one of his intention, in expectation of beholding William March, and with a determined resolution to expostulate with him upon his ingratitude. Serjeant Ghyme, who was leading counsel for the plaintiff, opened the cause in a speech, in which he displayed great oratorical powers and well-penned sensibility. The feelings of the auditors were deeply interested as he spoke of the beauty and amiability of Lady Malieveren, her extreme youth and inexperience!—From the Baroness, he passed to the helpless infancy of her son; then of the almost miraculous knowledge his uncle, Mr. Ayscough, had obtained of him, which seemed as if the child had been the peculiar care of Providence. The Serjeant next spoke of the journey into France, and painted, in elegant terms, the restoration of the child to its parent, from whom he had been estranged ever since the hour of his birth!—this was a copious field;—at once did this skilful pleader interest all hearts, but those obstinately bent against conviction, in the favour of his noble client. Amongst the many ladies assembled, or rather crowded together, on this occasion, not one dry eye was to be seen; nay, the learned gentleman himself was so affected by the moving picture he drew, that his handkerchief was repeatedly applied to remove the proofs of his exquisite sensibility. This then was the happy climate of his speech!—from this he turned the attention of the listening multitude to the attempt made to carry off Lord Malieveren in France.—"Scarce is it possible (said he) to give credit to what I have witnesses of most unquestionable veracity to vouch for!—Is it possible human nature could be so depraved—is it possible such crimes, such black, daring, diabolical iniquities could so long be sheltered by a reputation otherwise unspotted!—it is indeed the hand of Providence that, by a concurrence of unexpected events, has at length unmasked villainy, and the justice of a

British Jury will rescue, I doubt not, the innocent from oppression, and restore the injured Baron to his rights."

From this, Serjeant Ghrime launched out in pointed sarcasms, and loudly arraigned the art, the inhumanity of those who had deprived so long the Baron of Malieveren of his right. Though this dissertation against injustice had already lasted a very considerable time, it was yet unfinished when Ayscough entered the Court; it was with some difficulty, so great was the crowd, that he could reach the bar, when making a motion with his hand, the Serjeant ceased speaking, and Ayscough requested liberty to be heard, which being allowed, he began:

"My unfortunate nephew, Lord Malieveren, by whose arts I shall not insinuate, but leave it to the decision of you, my Lord, and you, gentlemen of the jury; but by artifice, I doubt not, deep laid artifice, has Lord Malieveren been seduced away, at a crisis so highly important to his interests, at a period so long looked to, when your justice, my Lord and gentlemen of the jury, should restore to him, by means of the laws of his country, his long withheld possessions, My hopes, alas! are closed at the present juncture. Yesterday, most unfortunately, I was out of town, and am just returned to learn, that late last night a person alighted at the door of his Lordship's house from a chaise. This person delivered a letter to Lord Malieveren, which, after having read, he inclosed to me, merely saying, he doubted not the urgency of the case would prove a sufficient excuse;—this done, accompanied by the bearer of the letter, he left this place.

"This letter, (Ayscough continued) with the permission of the court, I will read; allow me to premise, it is supposed—I say, my lord, *supposed*, to have been written by the daughter of Count de Marigny, whose unbounded attachment to Lord Malieveren is no secret either in this kingdom or in France.

MADemoiselle DURAND TO LORD MALIEVEREN.

"Haste, Oh! haste, adored of my soul! haste, Malieveren, to the dying Charlotte!—Ah! why did you quit her? ah! why not allow her to accompany you? She cannot support the pangs of absence! Yes, my beloved Baron, with you can Charlotte support persecution; all, every thing. But divided, ah! how far divided! she sinks, she cannot support it. Yes, Malieveren, thou art the soul of the now wretched Charlotte! but thou inhuman as thou art, hast quitted her; she is ill, and they forbid her to write. Alas! I overheard them pronounce my doom; I shall not live to behold thee; I am commanded to desist, but I will not till I have conjured thee by our mutual love instantly to return. Oh! delay it not: at least I may die in your arms! that thought cheers her who subscribes herself

"CHARLOTTE DURAND."

"Had not, (said Ayscough, as he finished reading the letter) had not the sentiments this letter contains, so deeply agitated Lord Malieveren, he would have soon perceived this is not Mademoiselle Durand's writing; the hand I do not remember, but the seal is a very remarkable one, and leads to suspicion."

The letter was handed by Ayscough to some gentleman of the black robe, thence it reached the Jury, and, as it was handed from one to another, the whispers of surprise went round:—was it then possible? yet the seal so well known, so particular, sure was that of Sir Robert Bertram. All eyes seemed now to fix upon Mr. Bertram, whose heart felt bursting as it were with indignation.

When Ayscough took the letter, after it had been exposed to this public inspection, "I perceive, (said he) my suspicions are not singular, (in a kind of half whisper)." Then, raising his voice, he again addressed the Judge, saying, when he found what had occurred, during his absence, and that his nephew had with him papers which would effectually prevent the proper proceedings from going forward, he had instantly come to Court to lay the case before the Judge. He entreated his pardon for having so far encroached on his time; then bowing very profoundly, and followed by his counsel, he went out, saying, within the hearing of Mr. Bertram, he would instantly go after his nephew, in hopes of overtaking, or at least getting the papers, if he would not return; and flattering himself the cause might yet be heard at the present Assizes.

Ayscough then quitted the court, as did Mr. Bertram, whose heart was a prey to agitations, various and violent. Shocked with the thoughtless depravity of his former friends, burning with resentment against the cool, deliberate villain who had wrought his ruin; sorrowing for his fall, for the grief, the vexation, the illness it had caused Sir Robert and Lady Bertram, and wondering and surprised at the undaunted effrontery of the unprincipled Ayscough—these were a part of the sensations which swelled in the bosom of Henry; but so mingled did they seem, such a confusion of painful ideas rushed on him, as he listened to the base assertions, the false insinuations, regarding his father's conduct to William March, that his mind was a chaos which permitted no regular association! Thus passed he along with hurried steps, scarce conscious which way they bended. At the upper end of Carey-street he was met by Lord Morville:—"Ah! Bertram, (said he) I am glad to see you!"

This roused Henry, who shook hands with his Lordship, and welcomed him on his return to England.

"I have not been (said Lord Morville) a fortnight in my native country; in London I found nobody—all gone—the Earl, who did not expect me till next spring, was then in Derbyshire, and I have paid my respects to him; so, thinking it was full time I should see how affairs were going at Malton-park, I set out, and reached York last night, where I met with Charles Hutton, who told me about this devilish piece of business Sir Robert had got here about Malieveren.—William March, I hear, wants to call Lady Bertram aunt, and she, it seems, cannot bear a tinker's brat to use the appellation to her."

Lord Morville had put his arm through Bertram's, and they had walked back without Henry's being conscious whither they went, till reaching the castle-gates, he stopped, and enquired whither they were going?

"To hear the cause, doubtless—the Malieveren cause!"

Henry then, in a few words, explained the scene he had so recently witnessed, with the intention he had of speaking to William, could he have seen him.

"What, to challenge him, Harry?—if so, I am your second."

"No, Morville, such was not my intention."

"What the devil then, Henry?"

Mr. Bertram then informed his Lordship what were his views, and that he meant instantly to set out, and hoped to overtake William, before he could cross the sea, or Ayscough join him.

Lord Morville laughed at the romantic notions of his friend; but swore that, if he would follow March, he would go with him, if it was to Constantinople.—"Do you go, Harry, to ask leave, like a good boy, of your papa and mamma. Have you any knowledge which way this mad fellow is gone? I fear the chances are against us—ten to one he is flying after a favourite girl—your wife worship going to admonish!—"Again his Lordship laughed, and forgot instantly what he had said.

"We must lose no time, my Lord, (said Henry); I will take chaise at the inn before us, and instantly set off; on you I shall depend for calling on Sir Robert, and giving him the reasons for my departure."

"Upon my honour, Henry, you are wrong; I hate reasons, and I shall hate to carry any such message. I have offered to accompany you, and shall like the expedition for the sake of the frolic; and I think better of you, Bertram, than to suppose you would not do as much for me; and, (continued his Lordship, in a graver tone) I believe, if I know myself, I would do as much for a friend I esteemed as another would."

They had reached the inn door, and Henry thanking his Lordship, accepted the offer he made; and, while four horses were harnessing for the carriage in which they were to set out, Mr. Bertram wrote a short billet to Sir Robert, begging his excuse for the liberty he was about to take, without his knowledge; then briefly related the cause of his journey, which, he declared, should not be farther than Dover; where, if not before, he hoped to overtake William; but that, fearful his crossing the seas might distress his mother, he would not attempt it. Giving this to one of the waiters, Mr. Bertram followed Lord Morville into the chaise, and ordered the postillions to drive as fast as they could to Tadcaster.

"Do you know, Harry, which way to direct your pursuit?"

"Towards Dover, I imagine, (replied Mr. Bertram) the carriage in which I suppose William went last night, came from the south, and returned that road. We shall get intelligence as we go along."

Whilst the ardent-souled Henry was fast approaching towards Tadcaster, his brief epistle reached Sir Robert soon after he had learned what had happened at the Castle, relative to the important cause regarding Malieveren.

Lady Bertram felt partly consoled by the promise her son made of not quitting England; yet so conscious of the artful villainy of Ayscough, that she trembled for the

safety of Mr. Bertram, and would have wished Sir Robert to pursue him. This, he told her Ladyship, he was convinced must be a fruitless attempt, as he had been gone a full hour;—"Lord Morville is with him also, therefore what should we dread?"

"You know, Sir Robert, how gay, giddy, and thoughtless Morville was, before he went upon the continent, and I do not suppose he is much steadier."

"I know also, Lady Bertram, the generous, the noble heart of Lord Morville; that levity of character is but assumed; it is foreign to his soul: was he called upon for exertion, I dare trust him in almost any situation."

This conversation was interrupted by the entrance of some of Sir Robert's friends, who had just quitted the Castle; by them he was informed of the letter that Ayscough had read, with his insinuations regarding it.

"The seal (said Sir Charles Hutton) I was convinced was your's, Sir Robert; and though satisfied you neither caused the letter to be written, nor affixed your seal to it when written, I yet was certain it was your's, and took the opportunity to loosen and drop it, and afterwards stooped for it: here, (continued the honest Baronet) my good friend, it is."

"This is unaccountably strange! (replied Sir Robert)—my seal, you see, exactly corresponds with the impression on the wax; yet so constantly is the seal worn by me, that was I surrounded by villains, of which I have not the most distant suspicion, as few gentlemen have so good a set of servants as myself;—but was it so, no one of them could possibly find the means of doing this; from some former impression, I doubt not, a seal has been made to serve this diabolical rascal's ends! But sure my reputation is too firmly established, to be shaken by the arts of this villain, which might, ere there was time for reflection, impose; but I must have been equally stupid, as wicked, had I affixed a seal so well known to a forgery!"

All present attended to this last obvious remark, and all declared they could suppose only one sentiment could be formed on the subject, and that every one must conclude Ayscough a villain, who had ruined William in hopes of sharing with him the plunder of his benefactor.

A few hours after Mr. Bertram, Ayscough also quitted York; with him went the pretended Baroness and her servant. The counsel retained for Lord Malieveren were all complimented with presents by Ayscough, as if their eloquence had gained the cause, and he told them, that if he could but overtake his nephew, and procure from him those papers, which were so essential, one being the certificate of the marriage of the Baron and Baroness, he would return; and, if too late for being tried at York, he directed steps to be taken regarding its being brought forward before the Judges at Durham, to which city they next proceeded in their judicial capacity.

The witnesses were left at York, under the care of Kilvington, whom Mr. Evans pronounced as great a rascal as his client:—every debt contracted at York was faithfully discharged by Ayscough, ere he set out.—Thus was Sir Robert still left in uncertainty concerning the issue of his cause, which it was greatly feared would go against him, as

witnesses were doubtless procured by Ayscough to swear whatever was necessary to prove the assertions he had made, against which Sir Robert had but little to counter-balance, except the uniform tenor of his life, which had been upright, honest, generous and humane; yet where so large a temptation had been laid in the way, it was impossible to judge of any man's heart so certainly, as to say how far he might be able to resist; even the tinker's evidence, had he been able to produce it, might have been disputed as a collusion, for such was it whispered amongst the gentlemen of the law, who had fingered Ayscough's gold, nor did they scruple to say, that Sir Robert had been the instrument of having Hardie transported, lest he might repent of receiving a bribe, and declare himself perjured.

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CHAPTER IX.

AT this interval Lady Bertram retired for comfort, for support, where she always sought, always found it—with Alicia. Miss Bertram's quiet was scarcely checked by the uneasy state of suspense Sir Robert and Lady Bertram sustained, "Oh! (would this lively and spirited girl exclaim) I wish Henry had but communicated his intentions to me! I quite envy him this jaunt; and I protest, Alicia, I would give the new diamond pin Sir Robert presented me with in May to have seen William!—Oh! it would have been so charming to have made him believe I was violently in love, and that I had run away from papa and mamma to follow him!—"

"And what then?" (enquired Alicia); for Miss Bertram made a pause.

"Well then, he would think the Malieveren estate was his, merely for saying. Yes; so then, when he talked in raptures as long as I chose to hear, I would burst out a-laughing, and beg my compliments to the fair nun of Cambray, and so have left him, fretting and fuming most delightfully."

"Is that all?" again asked Alicia, with a serious tone of voice.

"Not half all—I have a thousand schemes of revenge; are you not satisfied with this one?"

"Perfectly (replied Alicia); but if I am not deceived, this unhappy young man will need no other kind of mortification, than what he is at present, by his conduct, preparing for his future days!"

"Moralizing again, Alicia! pray now can you answer me this question—did you teach Henry, or he you? one way, I am convinced it is, and I can assure both you and my brother, that nothing is so disagreeable. Upon my word, you and him grow so much alike, and so very unlike me, that absolutely you should be Miss, or rather Mrs. Bertram; for I think you must be Henry's original half."

Miss Bertram attained her wish; she saw Alicia was disconcerted, then instantly changed the subject into a cheerful conversation, in which she made so many good-humoured illusions to various matters, which interested her friend—seemed so studious to please her, and rallied her own giddiness with such truth and satire, mixed with some self-reproaches, and well-concealed praises of Alicia, that she forgot Miss Bertram's intended sally of revenge, and the gay aggressor hoped Alicia would never remember what had passed.

But it is time we should now pursue the travellers, who found that Lord Malieveren had changed horses at Ferrybridge; from thence they traced him, stage by stage, till at Dartford, when they changed horses at the post-house, he was not above two hours before them, and they did not fear being able to come up with the object of their search before he reached Dover, or at least before he quitted it.

They did not, however, overtake William, but learned at Dover that he has supped, and since gone to bed, as the wind was not fair for crossing the channel.

"Your cousin has set an excellent example, Bertram; I hope you will not object to follow it."

"I will sup with you, Morville, nor shall I wish to detain you; but I shall not go to bed till I have seen William March."

To this end Mr. Bertram wrote the following lines:

"At York, my once beloved and estimable friend, I hoped to have obtained an interview with you; but, ere that could be accomplished by me, you were gone. I have travelled from that city hither with the same intention, the hopes, William, of bringing you back to your only real friends; sure you will not refuse to see Henry Bertram?"

Mr. Bertram insisted he should either be conducted to the chamber of Lord Malieveren, or that this billet should be instantly conveyed to him. The master of the house, after some little hesitation, undertook to deliver the few lines of Mr. Bertram, and to bring from his Lordship an answer, which was, that, at ten o'clock the next morning, he would be happy to meet Mr. Bertram. But Henry was by no means satisfied with this delay, and again desired to be shewn the apartment of Lord Malieveren; but this the master and servants of the house alike refused; the quiet of every person in it would be disturbed by such an interview; for the agitated appearance of Henry authorized the idea of a duel being about to take place, and in the house that night slept an English Duke and Duchess, as also some French nobleman of high rank.

Mr. Bertram, finding the refusal was persisted in, resolved to wait the hour appointed, but not to go to bed; Lord Morville approved of the determination, and declared he would not quit his friend.—Supper removed, Lord Morville drank freely, and insisted upon Henry doing the same;—those liberal potations and want of rest, with the fatigue of the journey, overcame the resolution formed by the pursuers of William March, of watching the night, for both slept till late in the forenoon; the waiter who sat up to attend them, had, after placing the wine upon the table, fallen fast asleep, nor awoke till the servants, who rose in the morning, roused and bid him go to bed, which he did, without recollecting the guests, to attend whom was his business.

When the master of the house, who had been engaged the first hours of the day with the departure of some of his guests, and the arrival of others, at length remembered he had left Lord Morville (whom he knew, though not his friend) up when he went to bed, enquired of his servants concerning them; but receiving no information, he opened the door of the room in which they were. This waked Mr. Bertram, who starting up, to his infinite mortification saw the sun shining through the shutters and curtains, and hastily interrupted the landlord's apologies by enquiries concerning Lord Malieveren? The reply was, that he had not seen his Lordship that morning.

"He is not gone I hope," (said Lord Morville).

"Not seen him, Sir!" (said Henry).

"I was up late last night, and have been so much engaged this morning by the departure of the French Count and his suite, that I have been rather remiss in my enquiries, but shall instantly make it my business."

In a few minutes they received the mortifying intelligence that Lord Malieveren had set out for Deal about two hours after having received Mr. Bertram's card.

Lord Morville swore at the Burgundy which had sent him to sleep; then said he was ready to accompany Henry to Deal; "we shall cut a poor figure when we return to York, after having travelled almost three hundred miles to see this fellow, should we return without our errand!"

His Lordship's speech was interrupted by the appearance of a waiter, who brought a note to Mr. Bertram; hastily was it broke open, and contained nearly the few following words:

"Why pursue me, Henry? I will not, cannot see you. I know you will reproach—you will talk of obligations, of ingratitude—but till I make my claim good to the title and estate of Malieveren, I shall hold no conversation with any part of a family, to whom, if those claim are authenticated, the whole nation will know what are my obligations, how far they are entitled to my gratitude!—You, Henry, did not participate—you are still dear to the heart of

"MALIEVEREN."

Upon enquiry, it was found the postillions who drove William to Deal were returned, and from them they learned he had crossed, in an open boat, from thence to France, at least they had seen him embark in one.

"Distanced all to nothing, Henry! (exclaimed Lord Morville;) what shall we do next?"

"Return (replied Mr. Bertram); for I hold myself bound by the promise I made at York to do so."

"What I shall do, you must determine; (said Lord Morville). I will cross the channel if you chuse; or if you prefer Old England, go back to Yorkshire. You find I am the most pliable fellow in the world, though I cannot but say, the laugh will go against us."

Henry persisting in his resolution to return, a carriage was ordered immediately, and they set off, meeting soon after Ayscough and his sister; but, except this, nothing happened worth relating during a journey, in which they drove as fast as four horses could go, and without stopping to sleep any where, and reached York, after an absence of scarce five days. His Lordship accompanied Mr. Bertram to Sir Robert's lodgings, where they related the ill success of their expedition. The having undertaken it at all was severely reprobated by the Baronet:—"It argued, (said he) Henry, a very considerable share of vanity in you to suppose you can detach this ungrateful and misguided young man from the connexions he has formed; you are not to learn that he possesses uncommon great abilities; he must with those abilities add a most surprising share of duplicity, or he could not have been able to conceal his natural evil propensities for so many years as he did, under the mark of virtue. With such a character, what chance is there of reformation? Reflect then, Henry, how knight-errant an undertaking you engaged in:—the weak or the ignorant may be deceived—the truth may be explained, and they

may be led to comprehend their folly; but William March comes not under this description—he is, I fear, systemically wicked!"

Lady Bertram, whose fears for her son had been powerfully awakened, from the knowledge she had of the arts and malice of Sir Robert's enemies, forgot to reprove in the joy she felt at Henry's safe return.

The countenance of Alicia disclosed to Henry she too had suffered from his absence—she too was overjoyed at his return.

No likelihood now appearing of Ayscough's return for the cause to be tried any where in the northern circuit; immediately after the Judges quitted York, the family of Bertram returned to Malieveren: with them: so went Lord Morville, as a guest to Sir Robert; his own house at Malton-park, (which was the estate of the late Countess, his mother, and to which, at the joyful period of twenty one, he had succeeded) being, from his unexpected return, not quite ready for his reception. Gay, lively, and good-humoured, Lord Morville, though giving way to fashionable follies and fashionable vices, had a heart naturally inclined to virtue;—he was generous and charitable, but it was the impulse of the moment, not the effect of reflection;—he could not bear to refuse, he could not bear to hear a tale of distress: with this liberality he joined, what is often, though originally meant for its companion, but generally separated from it, an uprightness of principle;—candid and frank, he thought not of displaying his virtues, or concealing his faults. The understanding of his Lordship was by no means despicable; but he never took much trouble in its cultivation, and as yet had given himself no leisure for reflection, though his mind was active.—Only lately become his own master, possessed of rank, health, independence, and a full flow of animal spirits, with a handsome and manly form—on the continent equally as in his own country, he found his company courted; and whilst his many engaging and amiable qualities were talked of, few reflected how far his Lordship might, if he chose, exceed the character he then was.

Such was the gay, good-tempered guest of Sir Robert Bertram, and mirth seemed, during his abode in it, to have taken up her residence at the Castle of Malieveren.

In about a fortnight Lord Morville went to reside at his own house, and the health and spirits of Lady Bertram seemed to be quickly recruiting. Oft would the idea of her visit to Oakdale present itself to the mind of Alicia!—oft she wished Mr. Kirby might yet return!—that hope was indeed an illusive one, which sunk as she reflected how little probability there was for the supposition. Since he quitted England she had received but two letters from him, the first written immediately upon his landing at New York, the second giving an account of his being ready to set out upon his journey to his plantation, which was situated far beyond the regular settlements, and bordering upon the nations of savage Indians. Alas! small appeared the prospect of his return, or even of his life; for he had expressly declared he would, if alive, return before Alicia was sixteen. As she reflected upon the number of years that had elapsed, and the dangers to which her friend was exposed during that time from fatigue, sickness, and various causes, hope died away, and despair succeeded: yet, on this subject Alicia thought as seldom as possible, for she

found how necessary it was she should rouse herself, and such thoughts ill qualified her for exertion.

The law-suit at present seemed to be dropped, as the lawyers, employed by Lord Malieveren, or rather Ayscough, had heard nothing from either since they quitted York; yet Sir Robert did not suppose he was, by the present suspension of operations, secured from the attacks of his enemies.

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CHAPTER X.

AT this time Miss Bertram, who used formerly to say, she disliked riding on horseback, and hated to drive even a low hung curricule, was now never so happy as when mounted on a spirited hunter she had begged from Sir Robert, or when driving, L'Amazon, a high phaeton belonging to Mr. Bertram; so quick was the metamorphose which vanity, love of admiration, or love itself wrought on Miss Bertram, who a few months back, would have screamed with terror, while being drove by her mother, who was allowed to be a proficient in the art, yet has from the same happy station flourished her whip, and squared her elbows, without fearing to risk her neck, or that of Alicia's, who generally accompanied her friend in these spirited expeditions, though fully satisfied of Mary's insufficiency in the management of a pair of mettled horses; yet Alicia would not yield to Henry's remonstrances on the subject, and continued, as he said, to risk her life by his sister's folly.

Alicia knew, was she to declare her opinion regarding Miss Bertram's skill, she should offend her, and also bring on her reproof from Lady Bertram.

Miss Bertram, though quite a heroine in her high-raised car, would yet scream herself into hysterics at the sight of a frog; for the change, however, Alicia was at no loss to account. Lord Morville had subdued Miss Bertram's fears, had brought her to rein the mettled steed, and guide the lofty phaeton, for a horse was the object of his Lordship's admiration, and a woman who could manage that noble animal with address, whatever besides were her attractions, that one ranked first in his opinion. To merit then his Lordship's encomiums, Miss Bertram threw aside her affected fears, and stepped on the other side of them: thus inspired, her progress in the noble art of horsemanship was wonderful, and so great an impression had this acquirement made upon Lord Morville, that he declared one day at his own table, he would sport Miss Bertram, provided she rode Miss Di—, for any sum against the field, "that is, (said he, in explanation) against any woman in the North Riding."

A hundred guineas was proposed by Mr. Huddleston, who named as the representative of all the female jockeys in the Riding, his sister Grace. The bet was accepted, and the place fixed for deciding this important affair, without these two hair-brained young men ever reflecting it was possible the ladies would neither risk their bones, nor forfeit their claims to the delicacy of their sex by so public an exhibition.

"Miss Bertram, (said Lord William Bottereux) drives well; I met her the other morning in a phaeton, and she looked divinely."

"No, hold there (cried Lord Morville); I am off upon the score—she is barely tolerable."

"I think, (said Mr. Hutton) she can only drive a pair."

"Yes, (rejoined Lord Morville) a pair she may; but I should laugh to see her with four in hand."

"That is out of the question," (said Lord William).

"I beg your pardon, my lord, by no means; Lady Harriet Marsden does, but I do not think Miss Bertram ever will."

Much more was said upon this interesting topic, for such it doubtless was to this jovial party that day assembled at Lord Morville's; but I only repeat that part which reached Miss Bertram's ears, through the medium of her woman, who herself had it from his Lordship's valet.

"I will drive four, (thought Mary) his wife Lordship shall see, though he had the assurance to say I never would, intolerable creature!"

A few days following this conversation, the Earl of Knaresborough came to Malton-park, upon a visit to his son, accompanied by his other child, Lady Augusta Morville, who had till this summer entirely resided with the dowager Countess of Wolverhampton, sister to the Earl.

Lady Augusta was almost an infant at her mother's death, upon which event her aunt had taken charge of her. The Countess was a widow before her niece arrived at the age of ten, and had resided since that period chiefly at her jointure house, in Staffordshire. Alicia had seen her in London the preceding spring, upon some occasional visits; nor did Miss Bertram know much more of her.—Henry was, however, better acquainted with Lady Augusta; for he had with the Earl, Sir Robert, and the misguided William March, accompanied Lord Morville in the farewell visit he made the Countess and his sister previous to his going upon the continent.

Mr. Bertram was warm in his praises of Lady Augusta; "you will in her, Alicia (said he) meet with your kindred mind; she is all accomplished, all amiable; but you must yourself judge; I ought not to impart my opinion till you have made some decision."

Lady Bertram was confined by a cold, but declared her wish that Mary and Alicia should call upon Lady Augusta at the park.

"I will ride over," (said Miss Bertram, with a careless air).

"In the coach, Mary, then, (replied her Ladyship); I have no idea you should make your visit to Lady Augusta on horseback, like the daughter of one of the farmers;—learn to respect yourself, and also learn what is due to others."

"Oh! horrid, Lady Bertram, in the coach! why it is hot as if it was still July. Heaven! why should I be cooped up in that nasty close carriage? I shall not visit her Ladyship on such terms; I am sure I shall look ten times better on my beautiful horse than in that great coach."

Miss Bertram had her plans—it was not on horseback, but in the phaeton, she wished to go to the Park; she knew her mother's attachment to ceremonies, now wearing fast out of date, and knew she would compound with her upon her own terms, if she gave up the scheme of visiting in a way Lady Bertram thought derogatory to her dignity.

The phaeton was proposed by her Ladyship, with the proviso of Henry's driving; but now Miss Bertram made objections to a single pair of horses, and at length it was settled the phaeton with four horses was to be drove by Mr. Bertram. Whilst he was speaking to one of the servants, Miss Bertram got in, placed herself in the driving seat, and took the reins. Henry begged she would resign them.

"Only, (said Miss Bertram) allow me to drive to the Lodge; I will give you the reins when we reach the turnpike. You shall see how cautious I will be."

Finding his sister would not submit to be dispossessed, without his insisting upon it in a way he did not chuse to do before the servants, he suffered her to keep the seat she had taken, especially as the road across the park was such as not to admit of fears.—Alicia entreated Miss Bertram to resign the reins to her brother.

"And so, my sweet girl, you think (said Mary) it will be pleasanter to have your bones broke by Henry than by me; but look how careful, how exact I am; trust me, Alicia, you are in no danger."

Miss Bertram had indeed drove very slow across the park.

"Come, Mary, (said Henry) we are close to the Lodge, resign your post."

"No, not yet; I wish to let you see how neatly I will take the gate; I will lay any sum Morville could not do it better."

"No sooner had they passed the Lodge of Malieveren-park, than she, with much address, whipped the leaders, and set off full speed. To contest the manner, Mr. Bertram feared would be more dangerous than to suffer this uncontrollable girl to have her own way;—safely they had almost reached the Lodge gate, (which opened from the turnpike to Malton-park) across which Miss Bertram hoped to flourish, contrary to Lord Morville's insinuations, that she never would drive four in hand:—full of this idea, elated by her success, she allowed not sufficient room in the turn she made from the road, and the front wheels came with such violence against the stone pillars of the gate, that she and Alicia were thrown over the heads of the first pair of horses by the shock. The carriage from its position filled the gateway; Henry stopped not to deliberate, but with one bold and active leap cleared the carriage, and cutting the traces of the leaders, dragged out the ladies from amongst the feet of the remaining pair of horses: meanwhile, by going over the wall, the two servants had come to his assistance. Both ladies appeared to be greatly hurt; both lay bleeding and fainting; the carriage was drawn back to allow a passage, and Miss Bertram and Alicia were conveyed into the house at the Lodge. One servant was dispatched to Middleham for a surgeon, whilst the other were to Malieveren in order to bring the coach and Mrs. Rowley, the housekeeper.

Henry, alive to the danger of his sister and Alicia, lost no time in fruitless lamentations, but gave at first his orders with calmness. Miss Bertram soon after being laid upon a bed, recovered from her fainting, but Alicia still lay insensible; no sooner did Mary become possessed of her recollection and saw her friend lay pale, senseless, and

bleeding, than she sent out a loud agonizing scream, and throwing herself again upon the bed, gave way to tears and accusations against her own folly:—Oh! she had killed, murdered her dear, her beloved Alicia, but she could not, would not, survive her!—A very violent hysteric succeeded these expressions of grief and self-reproach.

Miss Bertram was taken out of the apartment, and Henry despairing of ever again beholding life revisit the pale form before him, kneeled by the bedside with one of the cold hands of Alicia pressed to his lips, and gave himself up to grief, though not so loud as that of his sister, yet infinitely more painful. The lifeless hand of Alicia was bedewed with his tears; Henry seemed almost convulsed by his feelings, which he vainly strove to conceal. In less than half an hour the servants returned with Mr. Hoskins from Middleham, having met him at a considerable distance from the town.

As he entered, Henry started up;—Oh! speak, tell me does she live! but tell me not, Oh! I conjure you tell me not she has ceased to exist!"

"Are you frantic, Mr. Bertram? (said the surgeon); Miss Leigh does live, but it is necessary you should go out; I must have other assistants."

"O merciful Father! (exclaimed the miserable Henry, throwing himself again by the bedside) restore Alicia to me, or take this wretched being;—I will not leave her—you shall not force me hence!"

Henry was indeed incapable of listening to reason, and it was the united force of three people that removed him.

It was not till various applications had been tried by Mr. Hoskins, assisted by the woman of the house, that Alicia again opened her eyes, and it was some time after that he found her shoulder was dislocated; but she seemed unable to inform him what other hurts she had received; and he felt greatly alarmed by the state of stupefaction she appeared to be in, having scarce opened her eyes before she fell asleep again; that she lived was, however, some consolation to Miss Bertram, as well as her brother, who again endeavoured to compose himself. Miss Bertram had some slight bruises, and her face was scratched considerably.

Soon after the arrival of Mr. Hoskins, Sir Robert with Mrs. Rowley in the coach reached Malton-park Lodge; the news had been communicated to Lord Morville, as he was passing the gate, who alighted just as Mr. Hoskins was declaring to Sir Robert he feared a fracture in the head had been the consequence of Miss Sleigh's fall, and wished some other surgeon to be called, that a consultation might be instantly held, and named two people of eminence in the profession, one at York and the other at Newcastle.

Lord Morville, with his natural goodness of heart, sympathized in the distress he witnessed:—"Henry is unfit to go, (said he to the Baronet) from the fright and anxiety he feels; allow me, therefore, to be the courier to Newcastle; I will instantly mount, nor stop till I reach it, whilst a servant shall follow to order the chaise for my return with the surgeon, which I pledge myself shall be as soon as the person sent for from York can arrive, although it is not half the length of way."

Henry contested this point with Lord Morville, who would not yield his prior claim; the eyes, the heart of Miss Bertram declared how deeply she felt the generous offer, which determined him to persist; by this regulation also her brother would be able to stay and watch over Alicia. His Lordship's interest in this affair was the highest obligation he could bestow on Mr. Bertram.

Lord Morville, after giving directions to his servant concerning the relays he was to order, and bidding him follow with all expedition, leaped upon his horse, and galloped off.

Mr. Hoskins then ordered Miss Bertram to return to Malieveren, as rest and some application was necessary for the scratches and bruises she had received;—reluctantly she yielded, and was accompanied to the Castle by Sir Robert, who in the most favourable way informed Lady Bertram of what had happened to her favourite. Her Ladyship instantly went to the Lodge, where she found Alicia still asleep—Mrs. Rowley seated on one side, Henry and the surgeon on the other.

"This is by no means prudent, my Lady (said Mr. Hoskins); you may depend upon my care; Mrs. Rowley too is better calculated than you are for a nurse to Miss Sleigh. I entreat, nay I insist, upon your returning to the Castle; my patient shall be taken thither, as soon as possible—remember your late illness, your present indisposition: you must not trifle with your health—as a professional man, I ought to have authority."

To that authority Lady Bertram yielded, and said she would send the coach back, and thought Miss Sleigh might be taken in it upon the bed she now laid.

"I will send for the coach when we need it," (replied Mr. Hoskins.)

Again all was still!—Fearing, hoping, racked with suspense, Henry watched the heavy, death-like sleep of Alicia. Towards night she waked, but her head seemed quite light, and in a few minutes again slept;—about midnight the surgeon arrived from York, who agreed with Mr. Hoskins in his fears. Soon after Alicia waked tolerably composed, though without a recollection of the past; she enquired of Henry, who was kneeling by her, why he was there, and where she was? In a few words he informed her, and said Mr. Hoskins, and another gentleman of the faculty were in the room.

Upon Mr. Hoskins enquiring how she felt herself, she replied in great pain; but in answer to the enquiries concerning her head, she made no particular complaint. Henry now went into the outer room, cheered by the idea her head could not be so very considerably injured.

Alicia's hand, which had been deeply cut, had at first been dressed, but she was severely bruised in various parts, besides her shoulder being dislocated; immediate applications were made to reduce the swelling; her hair was also cut off from those parts of her head where a fracture was supposed likely. By this time Lord Morville, with the

surgeon from Newcastle, arrived: to his Lordship Henry could not say much, yet what he did say, was sufficient to assure him, that in such a heart as Mr. Bertram's the obligation could never be effaced.

The gentlemen of the faculty now held a consultation, in which they agreed Miss Sleigh had better be removed to the Castle, before her shoulder was reduced; and it was hoped no fracture had taken place on her head; but upon this they could not all agree.

Frequent messages had passed between the Castle and Malton-park Lodge; Sir Robert had been there himself; by the last messenger, a summons was sent for the coach, into which Miss Sleigh was put, supported by pillows, and attended by Mrs. Rowley, Mr. Hoskins, and Henry. The motion of the carriage renewed the faintings of Alicia. Lady Bertram was up, and ready to receive her; after a little rest, Alicia declared she was able to undergo any operation. The surgeons then (though not without much difficulty, arising from the swelling) got her shoulder restored to its proper position; an operation in which she sustained much pain, but bore it with a fortitude which astonished the three surgeons, who agreed to wait a few days, to ascertain whether her skull was damaged or not.

A violent fever quickly came on, and threatened the life of their patient. Physicians now succeeded the surgical gentlemen; Lady Bertram insisted upon acting as nurse to her beloved Alicia; but this was equally forbade by the doctors and Sir Robert, her yet weak state of health rendering every care necessary:—she therefore at length submitted to go to Malton-park, as whilst she staid at the Castle, no precautions could prevent her visiting Alicia. Miss Bertram also went with her Ladyship, by command of the doctors, whose tears and lamentations, when she was sensible of what she heard, disturbed Alicia.

Sir Robert divided his time between the Castle and Malton-park; whilst Henry's whole time was spent in the chamber adjoining Alicia's, to gaze on whom he oft stole into the apartments in which she lay. Her altered countenance flushed with fever, her eyes, wild with delirium, or glazed with stupor, sometimes fixed upon him, though unconscious of his presence, drove him at times to the brink of distraction. Vain was every endeavour to remove Mr. Bertram from this sad sight; whilst Alicia lived, he solemnly declared to Sir Robert, no act, no force, or entreaty should make him exist in any other place than the room he chose to occupy.

The delirious fancy of Alicia oft portrayed the blood-stained chamber, and all the horrors of Oakdale:—now she trembled, now screamed with horror; but the strange and mysterious expressions which escaped her, passed unnoticed by her attendants, otherwise than as indicating her fever was higher. The presence of Henry, though she was seemingly unconscious of it, still possessed a power over Alicia nothing else did; as all medicine was refused by her which he did not administer.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the ninth day, the physicians scarce entertained any hope of Alicia's recovery; and once more Sir Robert entreated his son to quit Malieveren; but not succeeding in that point, he changed his apartment to one nearer that occupied by Mr. Bertram, who had promised he would not that night enter Alicia's room.

Sleep had, during the period of our heroine's illness, been banished from the eyes of Henry, and he sat anxiously listening to what passed in her room: he imagined she was worse; steps were heard passing along the gallery, which he knew to be Doctor Dealtry, who he supposed had been called up (as he staid that night at the Castle); the sound of voices, and a kind of bustle succeeded. After an interval of a few minutes, Henry felt still more cruelly alarmed by the calm silence which reigned; all was still; his heart throbbed with terror, its vibrations were quick, and as he listened, seemed as if audible; this horrible silence shook every nerve of Henry, pervaded every sense—it was agony too keen to support.—Alicia was dead. He rose, and with a few hasty steps was at the bedside of his father.

"Oh! (he exclaimed, throwing himself on the floor) it is done—it is finished;—Alicia, my beloved, my adored Alicia is now a saint in heaven!—Ah! she is gone;—she never knew I loved her!—Look not then to me, my father, for the support of your old age;—look not to me as the heir of your lands; I too may be considered as she is.—I cannot support this wretched being!"

Henry ceased to speak: overcome by watchings, by continual grief and agitation, he sunk lifeless at the feet of his father, who calling for assistance, he was recovered from the fainting, undressed, and put into bed:—some medicine was also administered, to whose power grief itself submitted; for Henry slept.

Sir Robert, who doubted not the truth of the information he had received, now enquired at what time Alicia had expired; when, to his infinite surprise and joy, he learned she was then enjoying the most quiet sleep she had taken since the commencement of her fever. From this she awaked considerably better; and Doctor Dealtry, before he quitted Malieveren, at noon, declared he entertained lively hopes of his patient's recovery.

This was the news which saluted Henry upon his rising: but it was accompanied by a positive injunction from both the physicians, that he was on no account to be allowed to enter her room. It was with difficulty he was brought to believe the tidings; nor would he submit to the restriction enjoined, till, by looking on Alicia as she slept, he convinced himself he was not deceived.

Three days after this, Lady Bertram and Mary returned to the Castle. The following day they were allowed to behold Alicia; she was then able to sit up a short time, and her recovery had so far been rapid. Miss Bertram's expressions, though she had promised to

controul them, agitated Alicia greatly; therefore it was thought advisable her interview with Henry should be deferred a few days longer.—This period arrived, and he entered the apartment, where so lately he had listened to the wild effusions of Alicia's delirium—where he had heard her invoke his name, as she declared how dear he was to her heart;—in this apartment too he had given way to all the frenzy of grief.—Now the words died upon his lips, which were as pale as ashes; scarce could he attain articulation; and then it seemed not the ardent, the tender Henry who spoke. His expressions appeared cold and lifeless, as formally he saluted that hand, which a few days ago he wept over in agony.

"I fear, (said Alicia, with an enquiring air) I fear you are also unwell, Mr. Bertram, you look so pale."—Her eyes were fixed upon him as she spake; and the interest, the tenderness they declared, now softened by the langour of sickness, almost overcame him. Scarce could he command himself—scarce refrain the impulse he felt;—he could have fallen at her feet—he could have poured out the various emotions of his soul. But this was not to be; at present he thought it necessary to conceal them; yet, as they glowed at his heart, flushed even his countenance, and rose to his eyes, he found it a most painful task to perform.

The conversation between Henry and Alicia was short; and when he quitted her, he felt a sad weight hang about his heart. Henry was ill, nor was she any longer esteemed by him.—Alas! she had lost his friendship;—if so, on whom could she rely—to whom look for support?—Sadly this idea sat upon the spirits of Alicia, and brought back a slight return of her fever; but as she listened to accounts of his tender, his solicitous enquiries, she could not, she did not fear that she had lost her usual place in the heart of Henry Bertram;—and Alicia hoped, fondly hoped, that yet she was dear to him—that yet he loved her as a sister. Such were the sentiments with which, as she recovered, she again met him.—Now less agitated, Henry expressed himself with less restraint, and this every succeeding interview lessened.

Alicia was able to go out in a carriage sooner than could have been expected. Lady Bertram was now her constant companion; nor was the lively Mary deficient in attentions to her friend.

Henry spent almost his whole time in contributing to Alicia's amusement; who no longer doubted his friendship, as she marked the unremitting interest he took in whatever regarded her.

Lady Augusta Morville had, during the convalescence of our heroine, made frequent visits at Malieveren; and, as soon as it was judged prudent for her to go so far, she went to Malton-park; Miss Bertram and Henry accompanying her.—Alicia saw, or imagined the saw, a kind of agitation in Lady Augusta's countenance, as she addressed Henry, and in his own, embarrassment, very unlike his usual address;—she had seen them together before, but then had not remarked it.

As they returned, Mr. Bertram sat with his arms folded, and seemed lost in a deep reverie;—he appeared to have forgot any person was by him who claimed his attention. Miss Bertram would not have suffered him to be thus engrossed, had she not been occupied with something that also interested her, and sat with her head out of the coach-window for a considerable time; at last suddenly drawing back, she pulled her hat over her eyes, crossed her arms, and sighing dreadfully, said, "Pray look, my sweet brother; this is just you.—Heigho! was ever son of Knight so woe begone—so dolorous." Then changing her position, she assumed that of Alicia, which was also in the *penseroso* style:—"What a sweet couple you are—I am charmed by your entertaining conversation!"

"I am happy to find, Mary, you are restored to your usual spirits; for I think of late they appear to have evaporated."

At this moment Lord Morville rode up, and congratulated Alicia on her recovery.

"And pray, my Lord, congratulate Miss Bertram also," said Henry.

"As how, Henry?"

"On the recovery of her gaiety. She was quite dull till we reached the park, the air of which has had a most charming effect."

"Who, I, Brother?—I in spirits—I gay? Never, my Lord, had I such a disagreeable ride in my life.—I am so grave—so sedate—it is astonishing."

"Will you give me a corner in the carriage? and I will try if such good, sober, sedate people will work a reformation upon me."

His Lordship, being answered in the affirmative respecting the corner, alighting, gave his horse to his servant, and entered the coach.

"I have just parted with the Earl, who has been so obliging as to give me a detail of my faults, which has lasted about an hour and a half:—I am too gay, too inconsiderate; but I have almost forgot what were the mighty crimes.—No, no, that is too bad, not crimes—his Lordship did not go that far—he was so polite as merely to call them foibles; but prophesied, if I remember truly, that if I did not stop, I should become—nay, I cannot shock you by saying what a terrible fellow I should be. But the very cream of the jest, the winding up of the whole, was a recipe his Lordship proposed for my cure."

"Pray (said Miss Bertram), if the Earl has not got a patent for it, do inform us what are the ingredients."

"The ingredients his Lordship has not disclosed; but I can tell you the title of the medicine, which I think perfectly sufficient, without enquiring what particulars it is to consist of. Matrimony was the cure the Earl proposed; but I assured him I did not think my case so desperate yet, as to require my taking such a desperate remedy."

The countenance of Miss Bertram, which, as Lord Morville approached the carriage, was spread with that vivacity which was its natural expression, settled, during his last speech, into a gloom; but this was chased instantly, and she quickly rallied those gay spirits which had nearly forsook her. But though this was not remarked by the heedless Lord Morville, it did not pass unnoticed by Henry and Alicia.

The conversation was renewed, and much sprightly *badinage* was uttered by Miss Bertram before they reached the Castle.

"I will come more frequently to Malieveren (said his Lordship, at quitting it in the evening) than I have of late. You have all been either ill, or out of spirits."

"Stupid enough in all reason (said Miss Bertram), and shall remain so. If you come frequently here, we shall infect you with gravity; and then the Earl will find you have no kind of occasion for his recipe."

"A fair challenge, Mary," exclaimed Mr. Bertram.

"If so, Harry, I will not decline it;—was I (continued he, in a half whisper) to be obliged to have recourse to the recipe to cure my wounds."

From this period the visits of Lord Morville, at Malieveren, were regular and frequent; and Miss Bertram's vivacity returned; but she seemed to have parted with a large portion of her giddiness of temper.

A latent desire to render herself agreeable to Lord Morville had, from their coming into Yorkshire to the overturn of the phaeton, thrown her into various situations, which, had they been known to Lady Bertram, she would have judged highly indecorous. But when this misfortune happened through her means, remorse for her folly, and sorrow for the sufferings of her friend, sunk deeply on her spirits;—it was vanity—it was love of admiration which had stimulated her—both were most severely punished. Another passion lay in a manner dormant in her heart; and it was roused by Lord Morville so generously offering himself for a journey, attended with much fatigue, in order to alleviate the sufferings of Alicia. Then it was Miss Bertram felt herself interested in Lord Morville beyond the transient pleasure of being admired merely as a pretty girl. At Malton-park, his ease and good-humour restored him to her own good opinion: tenderly attentive to amuse, or to remove her anxiety, he then threw aside the giddy trifling character he generally assumed. Every day she discovered fresh graces in his manners or person; each day presented her with some amiable trait in his disposition, never before observed by her.

At Malton-park, spite of her friend's danger, she felt a kind of happiness for which she knew not how to account. Returned to the Castle, Miss Bertram was grave, absent, restless, and found a secret discontent pervade her heart, and influence her temper.

Three days after the visit of Lord Morville at the Castle, the Earl of Knaresborough, with his son and Lady Augusta, spent the day, *en famille*, at Malieveren. Each succeeding interview seemed to increase Alicia's admiration of her Ladyship. Her countenance was peculiarly interesting; and her features and complexion were those of a first-rate beauty; there sat upon her features a kind of expression, which, to Alicia, appeared like concealed sorrow.—"What can cause it?" said she to Miss Bertram; who laughing at the romantic ideas of Alicia, she resolved to make no further enquiries on this subject; and as she again and again viewed the same gentle countenance with the same expression, she imagined it was the traces of the highly wrought sensibility of Lady Augusta's heart, which was

displayed on her features. The goodness of heart, the affability of manners, and the clear unbiassed understanding of Lady Augusta, were oft praised by Alicia to Lady Bertram. Often, in her own mind, would she compare her with Mr. Bertram.—Alone are they worthy of each other, would she think; an union so every way desirable would make all happy. But, alas! how little do we know ourselves—how deceitful is the human heart—how insensible are we to its workings;—too late do we acquire a knowledge of them, and, as we look back upon ruined happiness, we wonder at our blindness.

When Alicia saw them at Malton-park, in her first visit, the agitation of Lady Augusta, and the ill-concealed emotions of Mr. Bertram, both were attributed by her to that passion they seemed born to inspire in each other; and Alicia felt unhappy. No longer did the assiduities of Henry please as before; the charm was broken, they had lost their value;—she filled at best, she thought, but a secondary station in his heart;—Lady Augusta was the object of Henry's love. Yet when at Malieveren she again saw Lady Augusta, heard her tender enquiries, Alicia dashed off the vagrant tear; and, as she listened to her, and joined in her interesting conversation, she thought not of the degradation she felt in being second to this lovely and interesting woman. But when she saw her Ladyship and Henry in earnest discourse, standing at one of the windows for a considerable time; and when she was again joined by them, and marked in their countenances the evident traces of emotion, and saw that Lady Augusta had wept, her spirits sunk, and she also could have wept;—it was with difficulty she could rally her spirits, or continue the conversation.

"Remember Thursday," said Lady Augusta to Henry, in a whisper; which escaped not Alicia, as she quitted the drawing-room. Retired to her chamber, Alicia gave a loose to her feelings, and burst into tears; thus relieved, she grew more composed, and chided her folly;—then began an enquiry into the cause of the agitation of spirits she felt; the result of this enquiry tended not to satisfy her. She accused herself of injustice, of envy;—why was it she envied Lady Augusta the place she held in Henry's heart?—still would he love her—still, as before, would he be her friend—still would he look upon her as a sister—and, for his sake, would the amiable Lady Augusta also love her. Such were Alicia's attempts at consolation as she retired to rest; yet, as the next day she listened to Lady Augusta's well-merited praise from Henry, her soul sickened. How is this? thought she; I am never weary of extolling this charming woman myself; why do I not listen then, with equal pleasure to Mr. Bertram?

On Thursday, Henry absented himself a great part of the day. Alicia fought amusement—fought to divert her thoughts, but all in vain; they were fixed at Malton-park, upon Lady Augusta and Mr. Bertram; who, when he joined the family at dinner, wore a pensive air, which his sister observed and rallied him upon; but he appeared not inclined to trifle, and quitted the room as soon as dinner was removed.

It was now the last week in October, and Alicia supposed, as was the custom of Sir Robert, they would, the beginning of November, go to London; and, as usual, spend Christmas at Acorn-bank. The Baronet had been at Bertram Castle, but went unaccompanied, as her Ladyship was ordered not to go farther North. Sir Robert declared

his intention of departing from this rule, and said he would spend Christmas at Malieveren, not meaning to attend the first call of Parliament.

"What! continue in Yorkshire, Sir Robert (exclaimed Miss Bertram)—at the Castle till next year? What must become of us all the winter? Oh! I am sure, Sir, you are merely jesting."

I beg leave to remark, that at the period of which I write, the country Members made it more a point, than at present, of constant attendance upon the duty they were elected to discharge towards their constituents; at least, such were the ideas of this upright Member of the Legislative Power, Sir Robert Bertram, that unless sickness prevented, he regularly attended the House of Commons upon all subjects.

Sir Robert replied to Miss Bertram, that he meant not to jest, but was perfectly serious. "The Earl (said he) also stays at Malton-park; Lady Augusta, I am sure, does not repine at his decision; she declares she shall be infinitely happier than if she was mingling in all the gaiety of the metropolis. And, I assure you, Lord Morville very politely has informed me, that the neighbourhood of Malieveren would render the Park bearable—very bearable—a little longer."

Sir Robert's speech produced in his daughter and Alicia very different effects:—Miss Bertram's eyes sparkled with pleasure, whilst she exclaimed against his Lordship's *bearable*, and *very bearable*.—"I wish (said she) I had power to remove mountains, and I would push the Park across the county, that he might discover what a fresh neighbourhood would enable him to support."

Alicia's countenance changed; Lady Augusta in Henry's society forgot all else. Yes it was very obvious she loved him; and if so, could it be wondered she thought no pleasure so great as she might receive in his company. How preferable, how far preferable was one hour's conversation with Mr. Bertram to those gay scenes of dissipation, which, to such a mind as Lady Augusta's, wanted power to dazzle, or force to please.

CHAPTER XII.

DURING a period of so many months, it was natural to suppose, interested as Mr. Bertram was for our heroine, he had talked with her concerning the letters of her mother; of the period which, she had said, was to decide, she supposed, her future life. She had in these conversations informed Henry she yet was ignorant of every particular she had expected to have learnt; that her fate, her birth, her connexions were yet wrapped in obscurity; that yet she was doomed to silence on those subjects; and, situated as she then was, it appeared still uncertain when she should be able to remove the veil of mystery which so strangely involved her.

"If the, Alicia, you are situated so that you cannot, or dare not, penetrate this closely guarded secret, might not my presence encourage; or could not the office be delegated?"

"Ah! would to heaven, Henry, I dared say you shall guide—shall protect the forlorn Alicia through terrors which may well appal! With you, Henry, they would lose their power;—then I would know no fear.—But, alas! Henry, already too well you know this is forbidden. Nay, the very speaking upon this subject, as already I have, is an indirect violation of my oath."

"I will not then my dear Alicia, again intrude this subject; only assure me, if you require assistance, you will seek that assistance from me only."

"Ah! Henry, if not from you, from no one shall Alicia require it. If not relying upon your honour, your courage, your friendship, on whom shall she rely? where, but with you seek to repose her griefs?"

Since the time of Alicia's being thrown from the phaeton, sickness and other causes had contributed to banish from her mind, in some degree, her purposed visit to Oakdale. It was now winter, and the probability lessened of her finding a plausible excuse for her absence to Lady Bertram; who knew she had neither friends nor connexions but what she formed by Mr. Meynel's means, in England.

The month of November, its short days and heavy skies, advanced to their close without any repinings having been heard in either the family at Malton-park or Malieveren; nor was there any want of amusement: sometimes large parties of the neighbouring families were assembled, and a ball or concert closed the evening, assisted by musical performers from York.

December came in more heavily; for the first week Lord Morville and Mr. Bertram were both absent. Both returned, as they had gone, on the same day; but his Lordship returned with his accustomed hilarity, whilst Henry, complaining of fatigue and indisposition, retired to his chamber; and when Alicia went to her's, the pale and agitated countenance Mr. Bertram wore, pursued her—he was ill—he was unhappy.

In the morning, Sir Robert and his son had a long conference in an apartment which joined Lady Bertram's dressing room, where Alicia was seated a few minutes alone before Miss Bertram came in; and she heard Sir Robert, with a voice louder than he

commonly spoke in, say, "Throw not thus away your happiness; check those strange romantic ideas; trust me, Henry, they will work your misery."—The reply was in a lower key; Alicia heard it not. Miss Bertram entered, and shortly after they learned that Sir Robert and his son were gone to Malton-park; from which place they returned in the evening, when her Ladyship enquired if it was settled. "Yes, pretty nearly so," was the Baronet's reply.

The following day the Earl of Knaresborough and Lord Morville visited at Malieveren. In the evening Miss Bertram came running into Alicia's dressing room—"Guess what all the fuss has been about, Alicia, between the Earl and Sir Robert."

"It is (replied Alicia, trembling as she spoke) very unlikely I should guess."

"Well then I will tell you: they have set their hearts upon a wedding."

"Mr. Bertram then (said Alicia, faintly) is to marry Lady Augusta."

"No, you are all wrong; they have discovered Lord Morville wants a help-mate, and so wisely concluded I was the fittest person to fix upon. But I have no idea of being forced to marry a man against his inclination, merely by way of reforming him; for that is, I am sure, the Earl's sage idea. You remember (said she, laughing) the recipe he prescribed to Morville. As for Sir Robert, I am sure he does it to please his old friend; and also, I believe, to get rid of his daughter whilst he can manage her."

Alicia, felt relieved by this information, and also knew, however Mary chose to treat the offer made, it was what she wished, as she was certain his Lordship had considerable interest in her heart; she therefore talked to Miss Bertram, in order to make her sensible of the state of her heart, till she was half offended.

The plain manner of fact was, that it had been a settled plan between the Earl and Baronet for many years back, to unite, if possible, the two families by a double marriage; for this plan being accomplished, the Earl proposed to Lady Augusta she should accept the addresses of Henry Bertram; but this she absolutely declared she never would; and when again urged on the subject, said, if her father insisted upon her compliance, she would be tempted to take some rash step rather than submit. Scarce could the Earl credit her positive assertions, for her manner to Mr. Bertram gave a flat contradiction to such a refusal.

This plan was the cause of the Earl's visit to Malton-park with Lady Augusta;—this, also, had kept both families so late in the winter in Yorkshire; for though Miss Bertram had taken little trouble to disguise her feelings in regard to Lord Morville, his Lordship had repeatedly declared he meant not to marry, at least not for many years.

Miss Bertram, it was evident, was the sole attraction which drew him to Malieveren; yet, at other times, she seemed to have no power over him, and he appeared as indifferent to her as the plainest and most disagreeable woman in a large circle. Various hints had been given to his Lordship concerning a match with Miss Bertram; but these hints furthered not in the least the wished for purpose; he inwardly laughed at the schemes of his father, and resolved to disappoint all parties.

Meanwhile all had been fixed regarding fortune and settlements, between the Earl and Sir Robert.

Sixty thousand pounds, payable out of the Malieveren estate, had been settled upon the younger children of Lady Bertram, by the will of Lord Malieveren, her brother, which of course would centre in Miss Bertram; but as yet there was a probability that William March might, by dint of corrupting witnesses, make his claim good of these estates; the Baronet therefore agreed to give his daughter, on her wedding-day, thirty thousand pounds, and the other thirty thousand, in case the Malieveren estates should be lost, to be secured on other property; but should no such claim succeed, the whole sixty thousand was, as by her uncle's will, to rest with the future Lady Morville, after the decease of her mother.

It was not till after Lord Morville's return from his late excursion with Henry, that his consent to this union was obtained. No time was lost; his Lordship came the next day to the Castle to prosecute a suit, in which he supposed he had nothing to dread from a refusal by the lady.

The wishes of Sir Robert, and intentions of Lord Morville, were disclosed by Lady Bertram to her daughter; soon after which the Baronet introduced his Lordship, and left him to make a declaration; which was done with such a degree of *non-chalance*, that Miss Bertram must indeed have been blinded by love, and dead to every feeling of female pride, had she consented to give the affirmative so heedlessly asked. But this was by no means the case; her vanity was not humbled, but most powerfully roused; and as she listened to the laughter-loving Viscount, all the preference her heart had granted him, fled, at least for the time; and had Miss Bertram possessed the power of Medusa, Lord Morville had shared the fate of that celebrated Lady's lover: but wishes are ineffectual, and she swallowed the vexation that almost prevented her utterance, and replied, with a gay air, that she felt no more inclination for matrimony than his Lordship.—"I dare (said she) bet my reversion of the Malieveren estate (upon which, I imagine, your affections may be fixed, in hopes your hedgerows may not have to be felled for a few years) that the Earl and Sir Robert have been laying their wise heads together upon this subject. But pray now tell me how they managed to get you so patiently to acquiesce?"

His Lordship was so astonished, he scarce could reply, for he was by no means prepared for this rebuff; at length, with a stammering kind of articulation, he said something about his having always admired her; and that she could be no stranger to the regard he felt for her, before his suit was backed by the Earl.

"Oh! I knew it was the Earl (said Miss Bertram, laughing); well, I shall take care to inform him what a good boy you are.—Oh! (continued she, with asserted grimace) what a blessing are dutiful children! what a comfort will you be to the Earl in his old age! (then resuming her former gaiety) I shall, however, thank your Lordship to inform the Earl, I am so extremely hurt, that I do not feel disposed to compliance; for I would as soon marry, was he alive, my grandfather, the tenth Lord Malieveren (his picture hangs somewhere in one of the rooms), as your insensible Lordship."

"Oh! I beg pardon; I had almost forgot what you had reason to expect. I believe I should have made the declaration upon my knees, with a face as long as my arm, and innumerable sighs, and flaming speeches."—His Lordship was advancing to Miss Bertram, who started up—

"Good by, my Lord; keep the speeches till you have another occasion."—And quitting the room, ran through the hall, and up stairs to her own chamber, where she gave way to an hysterical fit of weeping. Those tears were soon dried off, and she determined to make Lord Melville sensible of her power; to hear him sigh, and sue for her pity;—and then, Oh! then, would she scorn him. Thus did she feel when she communicated to Alicia, as she said, what all the fuss had been about; but her vexation, her bitter disappointment, she resolved equally with her meditated revenge to conceal.

Thus were the projects of the Earl and Baronet defeated; as, at present, no alliance was likely to be formed between their children.

Another interview, in a few days, took place between Miss Bertram and Lord Morville; when he, with his accustomed gaiety, enquired what was the sentence to be inflicted for his presumption.

"I believe (said Miss Bertram) the severest punishment I, in the plenitude of my power, can inflict, will be to command you to come to Malieveren every day, let it rain snow, or blow; whether it is a hunting day, or no hunting."

"Agreed, I submit, in hopes the epithet of *insensible*, you were pleased to bestow, will no longer be a just one;—by beholding you, it will surely be impossible to retain a title to it."

"This the is the essay you make;—well this speech may do for the first."

Lord Morville replied in the same style; and it was agreed he should visit as before at the Castle.

The Castle-gates were thrown open at Christmas: the gentry of the neighbourhood feasted with the Baronet, whilst the tenantry was regaled in the hall; nor were the poor forgotten—long tables were spread with good cheer, and the whole parish of Malieveren were entertained beneath the roof of Sir Robert Bertram; for such had been the custom of the ancient persons to whom the Castle belonged. Since the death of the last, this custom had been but once observed before; as the Baronet had only spent Christmas at the castle twice, and the second time he was confined by sickness.

On the first day of the new year, the same unlimited invitation was given; and after dinner, music being provided, agreeable to the ancient custom, the gentry danced with the tenants and superior servants of the Castle, the owners of which led off the first country-dance; the Earl of Knasborough danced with Miss Bertram, Lord Morville with Alicia, and Mr. Bertram with Lady Augusta. The last couple were seated apparently in deep and interesting conversation, when, by the change in dancing, Alicia stood so near, that she, who was more attentive to their discourse than either the music or figure, overheard her Ladyship say, as she drew from her pocket the case of a miniature picture, "For heaven's

sake then, Mr. Bertrand, be cautious."—Taking it, he put it hastily into his pocket, saying, "Depend on my honour, my secrecy."

This circumstance dwelt upon Alicia's mind. Sure it was her own picture Lady Augusta had given Henry;—was it then love which made him wear, as he had done for the last three weeks, that look of dejection?—yet why, if he loved Lady Augusta, not proclaim it?—sure no reason could exist why the Earl and Sir Robert would not equally approve of this match, as they had of Miss Bertram's marriage with Lord Morville.—When alone with him, if Alicia raised her eyes to Mr. Bertram's she found them as it were rivetted upon her, and then instantly withdrawn, and some trivial subject of conversation started; oft would he sit for a very considerable time without changing his posture or speaking; whilst in company, if only a third person was present, Mr. Bertram exerted himself as usual, yet this Alicia imagined appeared forced.

Henry was unhappy; and Alicia, as she witnessed it, felt how deeply she was interested in whatever concerned him; sometimes so anxious did she feel that she meditated enquiring of himself, but the words hitherto had died upon her lips.

On the sixth of January the two families from Malton-park and Malieveren reached London. At the first drawing-room Miss Bertram was presented, and at the Queen's birthday appeared at Court with much *eclat*. The beautiful symmetry of her features and figure, her fresh and unstained complexion, with the elegant and fanciful disposition of her dress, were alike subjects for admiration, and suppressed envy.

Miss Bertram possessed much vivacity, and more than an ordinary flare of beauty; that beauty was new to the universal stare with which it was received; and she became instantly the ruling toast of the day.—It was Miss Bertram who led every fashion; her colours, her caps, hats, and dresses were copied, and from the metropolis dispersed over the kingdom; and seldom has the goddess of variety been represented by a mortal who better preserved her attribute; willingly would every *marchand da mode* have contributed to the deposition of her present representative, for all declared there was no chance of keeping pace with her whims. In one thing alone was she steady, invariably wearing colours which, with her bright and dazzling complexion, could not disfigure her, yet were to most other women highly unbecoming.

Lady Bertram, to comply with her daughter's wish, spent her time in one constant unceasing round of engagements; though, as I have before remarked, it was not what she either approved or was fond of; nor was it pleasant to Alicia, who at times would hint to her gay friend the sad waste of time it caused.

On such occasions Miss Bertram would perhaps enquire if she had not sufficient leisure at Malieveren; or would, laughing, interrupt Alicia, and ask her if she had seen Lady Caroline Langden yesterday, dressed in a petticoat the same colour as the gown she herself had worn the preceding week.—"Oh! horrid—did you ever, Alicia, see any thing so delightfully ridiculous, such a fright she was; the colour of her gown so ill corresponded with the coat."

Alicia agreed with her friend it was ridiculous; that it was a foolish variety, which was best punished by laughter;—but she did not so fully enter into Miss Bertram's ideas, as to be able to conceive how it was Lady Caroline was *delightfully* ridiculous.

Henry sighed for the calm scenes of Acorn-bank, or the romantic hills and dales around Malieveren, where he had listened to Alicia, and where every plot of ground was endeared by the remembrance; now he seldom saw her except in company, and the mornings were equally engrossed as the evenings.—This racket after amusement agreed not with Lady Bertram's still not well-established health; and she was frequently obliged to delegate the charge of her daughter and Alicia to some of her friends, generally Lady Llandvry, and stay at home to nurse the cold caught the preceding evening.

The high health and spirits of Miss Bertram bore all the fatigue she imposed upon herself, without any visible diminution of either; but Alicia, Henry imagined, suffered from the late hours, fatigue of dress, and dissipation of spirits; and sincerely wished the time arrived which would send them back for the summer to Malieveren Castle.

Small indeed was the time Alicia now had to think of those affairs nearest her heart; at present her visit to Oakdale was impracticable, and its gloomy and mysterious horrors were a strange contrast to the gay and splendid scenes she now witnessed; nor could the gay, light, and trifling conversation in which she joined, recall, by any similarity of ideas, the last SOLEMN INJUNCTION of her mother, or the melancholy sights she had disclosed.—She now seldom met Lady Augusta but in mixed company; nor did she, as at Malieveren, feel, from the preference she supposed Mr. Bertram entertained for her Ladyship, as she saw him pay her merely such kind of attentions, as the natural politeness of his heart taught him was her right; but those attentions were by him indifferently paid to Lady Augusta, and every other lady present.

CHAPTER XIII.

ABOUT this time a circumstance happened, which revived in the mind of Alicia her former uneasy feelings:—it was one day when a select party had dined at Sir Robert's, consisting of the Llandovry family, and that of Lord Mounsorrel's, with the Earl of Knasborough, his son and daughter; when the young ladies were standing round the drawing-room fire, after quitting the dining-parlour, that Lady Augusta drew a small miniature out of her pocket with her handkerchief, and it fell on the floor.—Miss Bertram stopping for it, exclaimed she was determined to see whose likeness it might be; Mr. Bertram just entering at this instant, snatched it from his sister, and presented it to Lady Augusta, saying, he hoped she would excuse the giddy trifling of Miss Bertram.

"Oh! I am satisfied, quite convinced, my dear brother. I meant not to offend her Ladyship; and the giddy trifier, Mr. Bertram, can keep a secret, even though she has not been sworn to secrecy; so do not fear I shall betray you."

After much had been said on the subject, Miss Bertram declared she had not seen who the portrait was intended for; and that she only meant to tease her brother, in revenge for his interference. Lady Augusta could not wholly conceal her vexation; but this avowal of Miss Bertram's restored her to her accustomed cheerfulness and good-humour.

The party spent the evening at the Opera, and supped, after a considerable addition had been made to the number, at the Earl of Llandovry's.

"Oh! my dear Alicia (said Miss Bertram, after they reached home), I am just dying to tell you that I was certain, although it was but a slight glance I had of it, that it really and positively is Henry's picture which the sly Lady Augusta is so fond of; for once before I caught her looking at it, and she slipped it into her pocket. Well, is it not mighty strange? Morville told me that when we were at the Castle, she refused to marry Henry, though all parties but herself were for it. Did you not observe how sadly disconcerted both looked, till I said I had only been jesting?—But I'll bid you good night; we must be ready for our drive before one o'clock' we will talk this over another time.

Miss Bertram having disclosed this troublesome secret, quitted Alicia; who now felt little inclination for sleep.—Has Lady Augusta then one refused Mr. Bertram?—scarce could Alicia credit it; sure she could not refuse him!—yet the air of dejection which Henry had won, the last month of their stay at Malieveren, surely authorized the belief; and the picture Lady Augusta gave to Mr. Bertram, on New Year's Day, was certainly her own; it was given with charges, and received with assurances of secrecy. Mary had just informed her that Henry's picture was in her Ladyship's possession; this mutual interchange argued a mutual regard, which ill agreed with her having refused him.—Oh! no, thought Alicia, he has not been refused; the Earl has doubtless other views for his daughter;—this then must be the cause of the concealment of their love;—this then was why Sir Robert charged Mr. Bertram not to throw away his happiness, by cherishing romantic ideas; for his, equally with Lady Augusta's, must be a hopeless passion.

At the usual hour Alicia appeared in the breakfast-room; but, after a night of sleepless agitation, her looks spoke an indisposition that attracted enquiry: she pleaded a slight cold, as the cause of her appearance; and Lady Bertram insisted she should stay at home;—this, she replied, there was no necessity for, as the drive would make her quite well.—Miss Bertram declared she was of the same opinion, and she should hate to go without her.—Lady Bertram was, however, positive; Miss Bertram, therefore, accompanied by a party, went to Richmond, whilst her Ladyship also quitted Alicia to make some visits; when, for the first time since they left Malieveren, she found herself alone with Mr. Bertram.

I fear much for you, Alicia (said he); this gay life is injurious to your health; I have imagined you looked pale; and I also think some portion of that animation, which so distinguished your conversation and manner, has deserted you:—May I then enquire is this caused by indisposition, or does, at this period, some painful circumstance press on your mind?"

"I like not, it is true, Mr. Bertram, this constant round of dissipation in which I am immersed; yet I do not think it can affect my health. Miss Bertram, who always appeared, and is in reality, more delicate than I am, suffers not from it; nor, at present, have I any particular cause of anxiety, but what I for some time have sustained. Oft my conscience upbraids me for neglecting, as I yet have done, the last SOLEMN INJUNCTIONS of my mother; this oft renders my nights restless, my slumbers broken; no other cause exists, Henry, for the change you have remarked."

"It is, Alicia, the cruel restraint you feel that thus affects you; separated as we at present are, you cannot ever speak to me in your accustomed way on this subject; would you but repose in my friendship, and eternal silence, and freely disclose those sorrows which consume you, they would be lightened at least. Alicia, talk to me of your feelings, if even you speak not of their cause."

"Ah! Henry, why ask me to speak of my sorrows—why bid me disclose my feelings?—You too have griefs which you think me unworthy to be trusted with; I have marked your drooping spirits—I have seen you exert yourself when your heart, or I am much deceived, has been very sad;—you too, Henry, are changed; you confide not in me; you think lightly of my friendship—."

"Ah! Alicia, my woes are, like your's, strangely mysterious. You tell me I am changed; true, I grant, is the allegation—but from you, from all whom I love, shall the cause be concealed!—Yes, my fortitude shall not sink beneath the evil I endure, however painfully borne by me. But hear me, Alicia, (he continued, with so hurried and agitated a manner as to alarm her) it is by the hope of retaining your friendship that I shall be enabled to sustain myself; why then cruelly tell me I think lightly of it?—I am, alas! little disposed to bear this—I am little inclined to trifle at this moment; but you know not how I am situated—you are unconscious of the agony which now rends my heart, and that at some periods threatens nearly Reason herself. Remember then, Alicia, your promise, your sacred promise, given to me; remember I alone am to share your griefs—on me alone you promised to rely; remember this, that let whoever will gain your love, Henry Bertram claims your friendship; he asks but that—in so doing, he but refers to your promise."

"Henry (said Alicia, with all the calmness she could assume), I comprehend you not. Why is it I see you thus agitated? why bid me remember my promise? why thus, as it were, insist upon my friendship? It was not granted to your commands, nor have they power to retain it; no, it was the result of heartfelt conviction of your worth—of how justly you were estimable. Well you know how highly I have proved your friendship, how painfully I would feel were you to withdraw it;—why then remind me of promises, which my heart assented to, nor has ever entertained a thought of violating?"

"Do you then, Alicia, regard me as you once did? is my friendship still dear to you? Whatever you may hereafter learn of the miserable Henry, remember your friendship, your esteem, is valued above all else the world contains; remember (he continued, in a voice scarcely articulate), remember he never asked you to love him, but as a favourite brother!"

Alicia saw the deep agitation Mr. Bertram sustained, though ignorant from what source the discomposure originated; yet she pitied, and endeavoured to sooth, to console, and to restore his spirits to their usual bias; but those efforts seemed rather to increase, than allay his emotion.

Ah! why (he exclaimed) did I venture upon this interview—why not rather, as I have of late done, avoid you! why did I tell you I was miserable, and impart to that gentle heart my woes.—Alas! Alicia (said Mr. Bertram, as hastily he quitted the room), I will not again expose you to such a scene; your kindly bearing with me but adds to my misery."—

Whatever was the misery which Mr. Bertram sustained, he had communicated the same feeling to Alicia. In vain did she run over every probable cause in her own mind; but conjecture was at a loss, unless that Lady Augusta was inauspicious to his suit; yet, even in that affair, there was a contradiction of proofs, there was something mysterious regarding it;—in thinking over all Henry had said, in joining it with his hurried accent, his agitated manner, and in endeavouring to account for it, she spent her time till dinner was announced, and she was obliged to constrain herself.

In the dinning-room, Alicia had the pleasure to see Mr. Meynell, who was just come from Scotland, where he had been for the last three months.

"At Edinburgh (said he to Lady Bertram) I had the happiness to renew some pleasant acquaintances made early in life, which was the cause I prolonged my stay, after finishing the affairs that took me into Scotland."

Alicia hoped Mr. Meynell might have heard of Mrs. Dalrymple, but chose not to enquire till she was alone with him; and not being so well as to allow of her dressing, she did not accompany her Ladyship and Miss Bertram (who was returned from her excursion), to the Dutchess of Wakefield's route.

Mr. Meynell, when the ladies went to dress, was left alone with Alicia, whom he informed, that Mrs. Dalrymple, unable any longer to sustain the climate, had returned to Scotland; and was now with her father, and in a very poor state of health.

"Have you then, Mr. Meynell, seen Mrs. Dalrymple?"

"I did, she was so kind as to come from Mr. Campbell's as far as Dumfries, on purpose to give me a meeting; but she is so changed by sickness, I scarce could recognize her.—Mr. Dalrymple's affairs are, I find, by no means flourishing; and anxiety has largely contributed, I dare say, to the alteration I saw in the appearance of this amiable woman."

Alicia made particular enquiries regarding her early benefactress; the answers Mr. Meynell gave only served to increase her concern. Before he bade Alicia good night, he gave her a letter from Mrs. Dalrymple, who had for some time ceased to be a regular correspondent. In this she informed our heroine of having, by means of some of Mr. Dalrymple's friends at New York, enquired after Mr. Kirby; but could gain no other information, than when he left that place, he was well; but that those settlements where his property lay, had not long after been attacked by the Indians, who had burnt Mr. Kirby's house, as they had done several others, killing all who fell in their way; amongst which number, it was supposed, was the unfortunate Kirby.

"Alas! my beloved friend, my parent (ejaculated Alicia), it was for me you undertook the long voyage, the toilsome journey; for me you combated unknown danger; for me was your life forfeited."—Alicia gave free scope to those drops that coursed down her cheeks as she lamented over her earliest friend. "Thy heart was rich in every virtue! No, never, my beloved parent, for such thou wast to me—no never, never shall I forget thee! The goods of fortune thou estimated but as they dispensed comfort to others; thy wants were few—thy wishes limited—thy soul was the seat of kindness, which thy rough exterior promised not!"

The sorrows of Alicia were partly calmed by venting them, and she again took up Mrs. Dalrymple's letter; again she read that part where she seemed to hint at her approaching dissolution, and the dependent state of her two little girls.—Alicia wished for fortune, for independence, as she thought of Mrs. Dalrymple. A thought crossed her mind, but it was a transitory one, and soon vanished, that she had too hastily refused the offer Mr. Carleil had made, of marrying and settling two thousand a-year upon her; she ought to have left the determination of her fate to those friends whose bounty supported her; then, had she accepted this proposal, she could have offered her kind benefactress an asylum, her children too; but this idea was chased;—no, not even to save her beloved friend from poverty, could she consent to marry a man, whose highest claim upon her would be gratitude and esteem;—no, such a marriage would be but a legal prostitution; and her soul revolted, as it had before done, at the idea.

My fair readers may, I fear, deem me regardless of my duty, in neglecting to mention this offer of Mr. Carleil to our heroine at the precise time it happened, which was, however, only ten days preceding; but as it no way either agitated or interested Alicia at the time, I passed it over with other matters of less importance.—Mr. Carleil had received a polite, but steady refusal, and when that was done, Alicia thought no more of it, except,

as I have just mentioned, the fleeting idea which crossed her mind, as she mourned over Mrs. Dalrymple's misfortunes, and her own inability to assist her.

Perhaps it may be supposed that Alicia, accustomed to reject, and have lovers sighing at her feet, found it an easy task to refuse them, and that she was already well versed in rejecting such offers; but this was by no means the case;—truth obliges me to declare, however degrading to my heroine, that this was the only offer hitherto made her, although she had appeared almost for three months in the first circles of fashion, had frequented all public places, under the patronage of Lady Bertram, and was moreover a new face.

Yet the men all declared she was a divine creature, and not a few roundly swore Miss Bertram was infinitely inferior to Miss Sleigh, both in face and person; and those who were admitted into the select parties of the Baronet, agreed she was as much superior to Miss Bertram in accomplishments of every kind, as that lady was to many others in point of beauty.

Alicia had, save from Mr. Carliel, received no serious proof of her fascinating powers, whilst for Miss Bertram's hand coronets had sued in vain; various were the solicitations she had withstood, and it was now imagined the ambitious beauty had set her heart upon being a Dutchess, as all inferior titles had been rejected by her.

Sir Robert had allowed his daughter to make her own election, still secretly hoping Lord Morville would at last be the husband of her choice; for, as the good Baronet looked round on the gay world of admirers that fluttered round his daughter, he supposed the well-known fortune, which would be her's, possessed more charms than her face, beautiful as it was, with many of them, whilst he believed, that from Lord Morville this was not to be dreaded. His natural generosity gave little room for suspecting that interested views would govern his choice, and if he again offered himself to her acceptance, it would be uninfluenced by any such consideration; for the Baronet had marked in the son of his early friend an intrinsic goodness of heart, and he hoped an union with Miss Bertram, would render Lord Morville all that could be wished.

CHAPTER XIV.

MY readers will not wonder that Miss Bertram had received such proofs of the power of her charms; sixty thousand pounds it was publicly known would be her's at Lady Bertram's decease; and there was only Mr. Bertram between her and the succession to the united estates of Malieveren and Bertram;—the ancient Barony of the former was expected shortly to be granted to her Ladyship or her son, and failing him, to descend to her daughter. Very differently was our heroine situated; she was, it was known, a dependant upon the generosity of Lady Bertram; she was destitute of any relative connexion, and her birth so obscure, that no one could say who were her parents, or what was their station in life. What chance then had her personal charms, even if superior, of rivalling those of Miss Bertram? what chance was there of Alicia's various powers of mind, of her graceful, pleasing, and unaffected manners contesting the victories of her friend, whose thousands gave fresh graces to her person and accomplishments.

I do not say Alicia passed unnoticed, or that she was not admired by the men;—this was by no means the case; it would be an insult to the fashionable circles in which she moved to suppose so; but, though many a Right Honourable would have gladly made her a part of their establishment, and, for a season, have lavished on her all the fondness, all the love they were capable of feeling, and suffered her expences to know no bounds, as she presided the favoured mistress of the day; yet, to marry a girl nobody knew, though beautiful—to give their name to a portionless dependant, was what no one, except Mr. Carliel, had ever thought of; and this refusal of Alicia's was blamed, was wondered at;—she could never (said the women) expect such another offer;—it was (said the men) right of Carliel—he is very rich, and wished to settle in life soberly; Miss Sleigh is very amiable, was she not so proud, but no peeress in her own right can, at times, assume more haughty dignity than she does.

From this accusation I cannot defend my heroine, otherwise than by saying, it was but at times she assumed that proud and haughty manner, and that she had been forced to it by those around her knowing her dependant state. She was approached by the gay and dissipated men of fashion, with an affrontery and confidence her purity of mind revolted at; they talked of her charms, of her powers of fascination, and would, had she chose to listen, have depreciated every other woman, Miss Bertram not excepted.

Alicia's vanity was not flattered by such kind of adulation; she felt rather humbled by it, and determined, by throwing a proper portion of *hauteur* into her manner, to set at defiance the train of triflers that appeared willing, upon her first introduction into the gay world, to flutter round her. The native dignity of her character, the elevation of her mind, her own consciousness of superiority, with the quickness of her ideas, soon enabled her to do this. It was found she had no wish to become the means of idling away the vacant hour; some left her, mortified at the manner in which she had received attentions which other ladies had taken incredible pains to be honoured with; some indeed were less irritable, and thought not for a moment after they had received the rebuff, except Miss Sleigh was mentioned, and then they would swear at her pride.

Who then, it may be asked, was this Mr. Carliel, who so generously stepped forward, and, regardless of fortune, found Alicia's charms a balance against want of wealth?—It was not alone, I answer, the personal charms of Alicia that made him prefer her; Mr. Carliel looked forward to years of domestic comfort spent in her society; it was her amiable disposition which had rivetted his chains.

Mr. Carliel had gone highly patronized to Bengal, at a very early period of life, from whence, though not four-and-twenty, he had lately returned with an ample fortune, acquired honourably. His acquaintance had, when he came home, been most assiduously cultivated by the ennobled family from which he was descended; but he had evaded the hints, and refused the offers of alliance with the daughter of the nobleman, the head of the family. But upon seeing Alicia, her person and fascinating manners so forcibly struck him, and upon hearing the high encomiums passed by the Earl of Knasborough and all her friends, induced him to make the proposals before mentioned.

Lord Morville was always a zealous advocate for Alicia whenever she was mentioned; and the unremitting attention paid her by the Earl of Knasborough, made some people assert, it was in hopes of having a coronet that she had refused Mr. Carliel.

Thus stood affairs, in the eye of the public, the day our heroine had her morning interview with Mr. Bertram; the evening of the same day she saw Mr. Meynel, who spoke to her of Mrs. Dalrymple; and whilst Alicia was weeping over her misfortunes, and the fate of her revered and ever-lamented Mr. Kirby, her friends of the Bertram family were mingling with the splendid crowd of six hundred people of rank and fashion, which filled the elegant suite of rooms thrown open for their amusement that night at the Duke of Wakefield's; yet amongst the bevy of beauties who were assembled on this occasion, none was more, and few so much admired as Miss Bertram, who was particularly noticed by the Dutchess, and by her introduced to his Grace, to whom she was unknown.

The Duke and Sir Robert were nearly cotemporaries in point of age, and when both were young men, had been in habits of intimacy; this circumstance his Grace mentioned, and also intimated a wish to the Baronet, who happened to enter at the time, that he hoped the intimacy might be renewed.

The Marquis of Felton, the only son of the Duke, attached himself during the whole of the evening to Miss Bertram, in a way that excited observation.

Elated by a conquest so distinguished, Miss Bertram was mortified on her return home by finding Alicia in bed, and by the positive commands of her Ladyship forbidden to visit her, though she wished so much to communicate what had passed at the Dutchess's route.

In the morning Lady Bertram saw, in spite of Alicia's assumed cheerfulness, she was still indisposed, and resolved to spend the day at home with her, unengaged by any company, but their own fire-side circle, to which was added Mr. Meynel. Miss Bertram deserted the social party, being engaged that evening to a ball given by Lady Worlaby,

sister to the Dutchess of Wakefield, under whose protection she was to go, and had promised to dance the first dance with the Marquis of Felton.

The evening was spent at Sir Robert's in conversation. Alicia found her mind sufficiently exercised in supporting her spirits in their usual way; prudence demanded she should conceal the cause of their depression, and gratitude to those esteemed and beloved friends by whom she was surrounded, required she should not communicate any portion of her own uneasiness to them.

Mr. Meynel enquired of Sir Robert, if any thing had lately occurred concerning the claim made by William March.

"I suppose (replied the Baronet) it is dropped on their side; nor have I any inclination, by following the advice of the lawyers I employed, to again involve myself, as they wish I should, by commencing an action against Ayscough for defamation, and against the unfortunate William, for expences I have been at on account of him. As for Ayscough, I have, although I may be wrong in my conjectures, accustomed myself to look upon but as an instrument in the hands of a more complete villain than himself. And heaven forbid I should take any step that might be a means of preventing the return of William March to virtue! to reclaim him from vice I would freely disburse twice the sum he has already cost me."

"Ere now (said Henry) I should suppose William sensible of his errors; ere now must the delusion be at an end; for sure the passion he felt for Mademoiselle Durand could be but a transitory one, founded as it was in opposition to those principles of virtue and morality he was taught, and that once he revered. Thus, whilst a virtuous passion ennobles and animates to actions of heroism, such a love as my unhappy friend was the victim to, debases the soul to guilt: under the influence of that passion has William rushed to destruction. Alas! I feel for, and pity him."

"I think (said Lady Bertram), Mr. Meynel knew not of the last letter, Sir Robert, you received from Monsieur Durand, the second son of the Count of Mavigny."

"True, I have forgot to mention it to Mr. Meynel; he says, that his sister had been seen at Lausanne last November, where she was known by several people; that, upon this intelligence, the Count, her father, set out, but found upon his reaching Switzerland, his daughter and her lover had quitted Lausanne in December."

"The resources (said Alicia) must be very large, that could enable Ayscough to carry on for such a time so expensive a law-suit; and also support his pretended nephew, and conceal the fair nun from her friends."

"In vain have I strove (said the Baronet) to discover whence those resources proceeded. I have already informed you, Alicia, that I looked upon Ayscough but as an instrument in the hands of a more complete villain than himself; yet both have been watched, nor has it been in my power to discover any correspondence subsisting between them, or connection of any kind;—therefore my suppositions are merely founded upon this idea: that I could not believe such atrocious actions could spring from any breast but one; that no mortal heart, but one, could be so truly diabolical; but I waver in my opinion, and think at times I have formed too favourable an idea of human nature; and that within

my own knowledge there exist two villains, who ought rather to be ranked with the inhabitants of the infernal regions than those of earth."

The conversation was soon changed to more pleasing subjects; this was one that always agitated the good Baronet in a way which never appeared on any other occasion.

Mr. Meynell taking his leave, the family retired at an earlier hour than they had done for many weeks.

The next day, Alicia received from Miss Bertram a short detail of the ball of Lady Worlaby's; from this, however, she learned that the Marquis of Felton, if not a declared lover, was a professed and favoured admirer of her friend's.

Again the days and weeks ran round in one continued course of gaiety; the Marquis of Felton had become Miss Bertram's constant attendant in public, whilst awed by his superior endowments and high rank, as well as mortified by the visible preference Miss Bertram gave him, all other admirers kept aloof.

Lord Morville had hitherto beheld, with real or affected indifference, the lively Mary flirt with, or reject the numberless admirers that sued for her hand, whilst he saw their attentions reached not the heart they aspired to attain; from this state of apathy he felt himself roused as he beheld Miss Bertram listening, with apparent pleasure, to a lover whose amiable qualities adorned the high rank he held.

At Malieveren, previous to the declaration so strangely made by Lord Morville, Miss Bertram had given many proofs of attachment to him; but since then she had treated him as she would a person totally indifferent to her heart, though still the intimacy subsisted between the families; and Lord Morville was no otherwise distinguished by Miss Bertram, than that she used no more ceremony in her manner to him than she did to her brother, and no longer appeared to have any trace of that passion, which at Malieveren was the spring of her actions.

Lord Morville sighed not after the possession of Miss Bertram's heart, whilst he saw her careless and disengaged; but vanity and ambition were both powerfully roused as he saw the Marquis of Felton ready to carry off the prize so many had vainly contended for, and which self-love had whispered was yet his own. The dormant passion he had felt for the lovely Mary was awakened; he was restless and unhappy, yet unwilling to appear so, or to add to her triumph by declaring to her what he sustained; and he watched with jealous eye the happier Marquis, who seemed to live but upon her smiles.

The Marquis of Felton was rather grave than gay in his temper, possessed a strong and well-cultivated understanding, and well-regulated passions; for his disposition, generous, affable and humane, was also naturally hasty; but this was subdued by the efforts he had made.—The Duke of Wakefield, whose only child he was, had for some years vainly urged him to marry, which he had, though alledging to his friends no particular reason, always refused; and had withstood the artillery of many a pair of bright eyes directed

against his heart; yet the Marquis was no professed libertine, kept no mistress, and seemed by the attentions he paid the sex, to rather court than shun their company. But this was merely a general politeness, and no one lady could boast of a preference in her favour.

The Duke was almost in despair, for on the Marquis rested the ancient honours of the house; to him did his Grace look for their support. Since Christmas so anxious was he for the marriage of his son that he declared his consent should be no impediment, provided the lady he chose was not meanly born; fortune should be no object; nor would a title be a stipulated condition, as it had been; yet still from a titled ancestry must the woman draw her origin who dared to aspire to an alliance with the heir of the Duke of Wakefield.

The notice the Marquis took of Miss Bertram, the night of her Grace's route, filled the Duke with hope. He learned who the lady was, heard she was the daughter of a man he had once honoured with his friendship; that she was descended from a wealthy and ancient family by her father, and by her mother from the Barons of Malieveren, into which house that of Wakefield had twice married; and he felt overjoyed that no very material degradation could take place by an alliance with a young woman so descended, although she had not Lady tacked to her christian name. This it was which prompted his Grace to condescent soliciting a renewal of an intimacy with a plain Baronet; when years had elapsed, and many opportunities had ere then occurred for the same offer to have been made.

This intimacy had been renewed; his Grace's new spring hopes almost realized; for the match between his son and Miss Bertram was nearly concluded, although only a few weeks had elapsed since they were first introduced to each other. Settlements were soon talked of by the Duke, and no impediments were thought of by him; the purposed jointure was larger than had ever been made on a similar occasion by the house of Wakefield; and the thirty thousand pounds to be given by the Baronet was settled, together with the reversion upon the Malieveren estate, to be solely at the disposal of the future Marchioness.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

THE
SOLEMN
INJUNCTION.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

AGNES MUSGRAVE,

AUTHOR OF CICELY OF RABY &c.

"In a solitary chamber, and midnight hour,

"How many strange events may arise."

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THE
Solemn Injunction.

CHAPTER I.

THUS stood affairs between the families of the Duke of Wakefield and Sir Robert Bertram; and so far had Lord Morville endeavoured to conceal his love and his chagrin when he returned from a ball, given at the Baronet's house, where it was publicly spoke of by the two families and their relative connections, that Miss Bertram was so shortly to be the Marchioness of Felton, that this was probably the last time she would be seen as Miss Bertram beneath her father's roof.

Mortified, at his own pride, which had made him, till too late, reject all means for recovering a heart he had reason to suppose was once his, Lord Morville quitted, very early, the house of Sir Robert Bertram, muttering curses on his own folly, and at the power he found Miss Bertram had over him. Never till this night could he suffer himself to suppose that she would give her hand to the Marquis of Felton, and still had endeavoured to believe he held the station he once did in Miss Bertram's heart; but now she was lost for ever to him; and each grace and beauty she possessed, was heightened by the despair he felt. He could not bear, he was assured, to see her with calmness as the Marchioness of Felton; and the tortures he endured, made him resolve instantly to set out for Yorkshire. Such was the hasty determination made by his Lordship, upon quitting Cavendish Square.—Alighting from his chariot at his own house, he instantly gave orders for his travelling equipage to be got ready; but, in a few minutes, contradicted the order. No, it would add to the triumph of the fickle Mary; He would stay and compliment her upon her nuptials. This resolution lasted not many hours; for the servants had been only a short time in bed ere his Lordship rang his bell and repeated his former orders.

The sun had not long been risen when Lord Morville was in his chaise, and rattling along the North road, with as much speed as if happiness would be found at Malton Park, where every surrounding object would remind him of Miss Bertram.

When his Lordship reached Grantham, he was unresolved whether he should rest there for the night, or proceed without sleeping to Malton: he had, however, ordered supper, and was carelessly looking over a London newspaper, when his attention was arrested by the following paragraph:—

"Post-horses are at present much harrassed in the vicinity of the metropolis, owing to the rejected lovers of the fascinating daughter of a certain northern Baronet quitting town, to avoid witnessing her approaching union with the accomplished heir of a noble Duke."

Lord Morville threw down the paper, rung the bell, and ordered his carriage; into which he went, leaving supper untasted behind him, and ordered the postillions to take

the London road, to the utter astonishment of the people at the inn and his own servants, who hesitated not in supposing his Lordship was certainly crazy.

"No," thought he, "I will not be ranked amongst the rejected lovers of Mary Bertram; she shall see the disappointment she perhaps imagines I have sustained sits very easily upon me."

His Lordship tried various positions during the night in order to sleep; but those positions were either very uneasy ones, or the idea of the future Marchioness had banished Morpheus.

When Lord Morville reached the Earl of Knasborough's house in Piccadilly, whither he had ordered himself to be drove, it was near the hour of dinner: his appearance greatly alarmed Lady Augusta; for he was undressed, looked fatigued and agitated.

"What means," said she, "this disorder in your dress? your looks inform me, Morville, you have not been in bed all night."

"Perhaps not, Augusta; perhaps I shall not sleep to-night."

"Your manner joins with your appearance, to assure me you are either very unhappy, or that you have entered so deeply into habits of dissipation, as to seriously alarm me for you; your spirits are agitated, your mind ill at ease—what has caused this disorder?"

"Augusta, make no conjectures—I have nothing to agitate me; do you not know what an insensible being I am?—why talk then to me of my mind and my spirits! I feel no want but of my dinner."

"You know the party that are to dine with the Earl; you sure do not mean to meet them with your hair in this disorder, and in this dress?"

"Why not, Augusta? I shall not drive up to Harley-street to dress."

Again her Ladyship represented the absurdity of his appearance.

"Talk not to me, Augusta," said he, with a vehemence and asperity she had never before heard him at any time display—"Talk not to me, I cannot, will not bear it."

No further, therefore, was Lord Morville questioned by his sister; but after a moment's recollection, he submitted to allow the Earl's valet to assist him in making some little alteration in his dress.

Sir Robert and Henry Bertram, with the Marquis of Felton, were, with several other people of distinction, in the dinner party at the Earl of Knasborough's; the Duke of Wakefield had been expected; but particular circumstances prevented the fulfilling his engagement. Lord Morville contrived to place himself at table opposite his rival, and close by his friend Mr. Bertram.

Scarce able to command himself, Lord Morville, during dinner, drank repeated bumpers of Madeira; his spirits, which at first appeared sunk, now rose; he laughed, he talked—and Henry Bertram, who saw that he, very soon after dinner, was completely off

his guard, in vain tried to restrain the exuberance of his spirits. He had learned by accident the late journey and sudden return of his Lordship,—who had, even from the brother of Miss Bertram, concealed his feelings, nor ever once enquired of him concerning the probable state of her heart; yet, as Mr. Bertram marked his demeanour at table, he at once developed the cause; and fearing some evil consequences might arise from the turbulent state he saw the passions of Lord Morville were in, he called him into an adjoining apartment, to expostulate with him on his conduct; but his Lordship would not listen, and again seated himself as before at the table.

The Marquis of Felton saw the evident perturbation Lord Morville sustained, and guarded his expressions, quitting very early the party. No sooner did his Lordship observe the Marquis had left the room, than eluding the watchful eye of Mr. Bertram, he followed; but the Marquis had drove from the Door.

Ripe for all fears of mischief, Lord Morville sallied forth, and found himself in the morning stripped of a considerable sum at a noted gaming-house. At seven o'clock he alighted from a hackney coach in Harley-street, and went to bed, vexed and humiliated. Towards the evening he arose, and with very unpleasant reflections: his own folly stared him in the face, and he painfully remembered his reprehensible conduct the preceding day at his father's table. The natural candour and generosity of his temper again took the lead: he was sensible of the forbearance of the Marquis, which he well knew sprung not from cowardice; and resolved, without leaving time for further reflection, to write to him, and candidly account for his strange conduct. In this letter his Lordship spoke of Miss Bertram's having, during the winter, rejected his address; of his not having been sensible how excessively she was beloved by him, till he learned she had consented to give her hand to another. He next mentioned the distraction of mind which had urged him to quit London and as hastily return; that he owned he had done all in his power to draw the vengeance of the Marquis upon him; that he had thirsted after his blood, or rather wished his own life to be a sacrifice to his folly; that he acknowledged the moderation of the Marquis had prevented the sad consequences at which he had aimed; that his generosity had filled him with respect for his character; that he was infinitely more deserving of Miss Bertram than ever he had been, and that he would never attempt to break by any means an union so desirable.

No sooner had his Lordship finished his epistle, than he went to Cavendish-Square. Inquiring for Mr. Bertram, he learnt he was not within, and left a card, wishing to see him in Harley-street the next day. The wish was complied with at an early hour by Henry, to whom his Lordship apologized for the petulant and overbearing manner he had assumed when they last met; from this he made a digression to the cause relating to what my readers already know, and which Mr. Bertram had guessed at, regarding the former and present state of his feelings.

"Why, Morville," said Henry, when the recital was finished, "why not sooner disclose this? why not speak to me of the situation of your heart? trust me I should have then been your friend with Mary; now it is too late for any party to recede with honour; for the settlements are all ready for signing, and even the day is fixed for the marriage."

"I know it is now too late, Henry; it is to you, not to Miss Bertram, I have made this confession; I wish not at this period to awaken any remembrance of me in her heart. After the nuptials take place, I will see and pay my congratulations to her; and then quit England, till I learn to forget her whose image now wholly occupies my mind."

Mr. Bertram saw the spirits of Lord Morville so much agitated, that he spent the remainder of the day in endeavouring to calm them.

Alicia had, before Henry quitted Cavendish Square, received a card from the Marquis of Felton, requesting an hour's private conversation with her, and begged she would be so obliging as to name an early time. Alicia fixed two o'clock that day, when she contrived to be left a home alone.

Punctual to the hour, the Marquis made his appearance, apologising for the liberty he had taken, by saying he had sought the interview, in hopes of learning from her the state of Miss Bertram's heart; adding, it will doubtless appear strange that, when the day of our union approaches so near as the seventh of June, I should deem this a necessary inquiry."

When Miss Bertram," replied Alicia, "agreed to give her hand to the Marquis of Felton, "she had doubtless in her heart felt for him a decided preference, and, in her union with him, hoped for happiness. I am indeed concerned that from me the Marquis seeks to learn what Miss Bertram's fully declared by her acceptance."

"This is rather, Miss Sleigh, an evasive answer; but let me solemnly conjure you, as you value the happiness of your friend, to answer me frankly, when I assure you, no other end is meant or sought by me, than what tends to prevent misery resulting from an unhappy union. At Malieveren, was not Lord Morville a favoured lover?"

"I will be candid, my Lord—he was favoured by Miss Bertram, ere he declared himself a lover; but the manner in which that declaration was made, banished the regard she had felt; and since she has looked upon Lord Morville more as a brother than a lover."

"I thank you, Miss Sleigh, for your candour, but yet hold my opinion: I am strangely deceived if Miss Bertram attends to the impulses of her heart, if still she would not prefer Lord Morville. I blame her not; she was herself deceived when she listened to my suit; but she may, when married to me, recollect how dear his Lordship was once to her heart; some circumstance may inform her of his penitence, and I shall then be looked upon as the bar to their mutual happiness. Lord Morville is now sensible of his folly—so may Miss Bertram soon. But read this," said the Marquis, as he gave into the hands of Alicia Lord Morville's letter.

"I see it," said she, returning the letter, "in the same light you do, my Lord:—but say, what is it your require of me in this case?"

"In early youth my dear Miss Sleigh, I received an impression too deep for time, absence, or even the supposed death of the object to erase;—vainly have proposals for marriage been made me, enforced with entreaties from the Duke, my father—all were refused. I saw, admired, and, I may say, loved Miss Bertram; but not with that kind of passion which had once filled my heart. In marrying Miss Bertram, I hoped to secure equally her happiness and my own; and by so doing, gratify the earnest wish of the Duke. When all was fixed for my marriage, I learned some circumstances, that I will, if needful,

hereafter disclose; and, at nearly the same time, discovered Lord Morville's love for Miss Bertram. I am therefore now most desirous to forward the match between them;—but how, in honour, can I recede from positive engagements which I am resolved to fulfil, if Miss Bertram really does honour me by a decided preference. To you, then I apply for intelligence; to your prudence shall I trust."

Some other conversation passed before the Marquis took his leave. Alicia was wonder-struck at the intelligence the Marquis had given; for, a stranger to the motives which had actuated Miss Bertram in regard to Lord Morville, she had supposed he was indifferent to her; nor did she think his Lordship was attached to her friend;—but now, various, well-remembered circumstances rose to her mind, and assured her, the conjecture the Marquis had made was a just one; and that yet, Lord Morville retained his place in Miss Bertram heart. To Henry she divulged what the Marquis had said, but which, from motives of delicacy, he had not spoke of to Mr. Bertram; who, the following day, visited the Marquis, who then more fully disclosed his reasons than he had to Alicia.

Heartily did Henry join in the plot against Mary, and contrived that evening to draw Lord Morville into a *tête-à-tête* with her at the opera, which was what he had made strong resolution against, yet wanted firmness to avoid. The Marquis saw, or imagined he saw, the struggle Miss Bertram still felt between love and her own offended dignity.

The next day, under pretence of some alteration making at the house, which was to receive them upon their marriage, the Marquis quitted town for a week. Lord Morville, now inspired by what, during the week, Mr. Bertram communicated to him, paid a close attendance upon Miss Bertram, who seemed all at once to lose her vivacity; and his Lordship appeared to be deeply agitated by alternate hope and fear. At the Marquis's return, he held a long conference with Miss Bertram; after which, Lord Morville no longer was her public attendant.

The Marquis returned the last week in May; his Majesty's birth-day was on the following Monday, and on the Thursday it was expected the Marquis was to be united to Miss Bertram. On the Saturday he drove her to Richmond, to call upon his aunt the Duke's sister, the Dowager Countess of Ashforth; but Miss Bertram not having returned at nine o'clock, the family were alarmed at the Baronet's, and a messenger dispatched to St. James's-Square, to inquire if the Marquis had sent any message there concerning the long stay he had made. No account being gained at the Duke of Wakefield's, or at the Marquis's house in Berkley-Square, conjecture served but to heighten fears, which were allayed by a few lines, brought by the Marquis's footman, from Miss Bertram, begging excuses for the method she had taken to secure her happiness; but that, upon her return from Scotland, she would give such reasons as she hoped would at least meliorate her fault. From the servant they learned that the Marquis had drove beyond Barnet in the phaeton; but that his valet waited with a hired carriage, into which the Marquis and Miss Bertram removed.

The Duke received a similar card from his son: his Grace scarce could command himself before Sir Robert; scarce could he refrain from throwing out reproaches against

the giddy conduct of Miss Bertram, who had doubtless, he supposed, been the instigator of so foolish a journey.

"Had," said the Duke, "their wishes been opposed, some excuse might be alledged; but, as matters stood, it cannot be by any means accounted for."

The Earl of Knasborough thought his son had a very fortunate escape;—"For," said he, to Lady Augusta, "this foolish elopement proves her mode giddy and unthinking than I had imagined she was."

At length the day fixed for the return of the Marquis and his bride arrived; and as it was expected they would first go to the Duke's, Sir Robert and Lady Bertram were invited to be present at their reception.

The Duke had been at some pains to frame the speech with which he meant to receive the fugitives; and it consisted of dignity, reproof, and forgiveness.

It was almost dusk when the Marquis and Marchioness were announced. "I have brought," said the Marquis, as he led his bride up the large drawing-room, "your Grace a daughter, beautiful, amiable, and accomplished."

"I am sensible of all this," said the Duke, interrupting his son; but the absurdity of you and Miss Bertram going upon such an expedition, and the indignity two people of rank have thus subjected themselves to, by marrying like beggars behind a bush, needs many excuses."

"Had I married Miss Bertram, this step had not been necessary."

"Not married Miss Bertram!" exclaimed the Baronet.

"Not married Miss Bertram!" re-echoed his Grace.

"Equally deserving of your protection is she, who is Marchioness of Felton, and who now with me thus kneeling implores your forgiveness."

"Rise, Francis—rise, Madam," said the Duke; this affair, ere I can grant what you ask, requires explanations."

"Where then is my daughter?" inquired the Baronet.

"Under your own roof, Sir Robert, with Lord Morville, the husband of her choice; to them I shall refer you for an explanation of our conduct."

Candles were brought; and the bride the Marquis had chosen in preference to Miss Bertram, almost even in the eyes of that lady's parents, might justify him. Tall and finely formed, her face and figure was that of the most finished beauty; yet this uncommonly handsome woman was alike unknown to the parents of the Marquis; the Baronet and his lady, who, after congratulating his Lordship, took their leave.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Sir Robert returned home, Mr. Bertram led his sister on one side, Lord Morville on the other, and presented her to the Baronet and Lady Bertram as Lady Morville.

"Excuse me," said she, falling at their feet—"O forgive your giddy child, who had nearly, by giving her hand without attending to the impulse of her heart, sacrificed her happiness for ever: she thought she would have found it, divided from Lord Morville, but felt she was mistaken, at a period when no step but the one she took, could preserve her."

Lady Morville was raised by her father: "Your pardon is secured with me," said the good baronet; "to yourselves I leave it to determine, whether the union you have made will prove a blessing or punishment: the latter, I fear, if you do not both resolve to act with less levity than you have done."

The Earl of Knasborough, who had been already acquainted with the marriage of his son, now entered; of him also forgiveness was entreated, and he followed the example of his friend, by giving much the same lecture and pardon; except that he blamed his son entirely, in having trifled both with his own happiness and that of Miss Bertram.

The explanation was now called for, concerning the lady the Marquis had preferred, and why they all had chosen to take so long a journey; but as the conversation which contained this explanation may not so fully inform my readers as I think needful, I shall do it in my own way.

The Marquis of Felton had, as he informed Alicia, early in life fallen in love with the beautiful daughter of a minister of the church of Scotland, when upon a visit to his grandmother, the Dowager Dutchess of Wakefield, who, originally of that country had chose, upon her widowhood, again to retire there. This lovely girl, her grace had taken, when only eight years old, out of a charitable intention: Mr. Ross, her father, was moreover a distant relation to the family, from whom the Dutchess drew her own descent.

The attachment of the Marquis was quickly perceived, and the discovery communicated by the Dutchess to her son; Marian Ross was sent to a distant part of the country, and threatened with deprivation of every comfort, should she ever converse with her lover; whilst to Mr. Ross she was represented as artful and wicked. Fearful of irritating his patrons, and especially the Dutchess, to whom he owed many obligations, he was satisfied to entrust his daughter to her charge.

The Marquis, who could not be brought to make any promise, found out the retreat of Miss Ross, who, although she assured him whilst the Dowager Dutchess lived, she would never again consent to see him, yet was drawn into a correspondence, which continued till the death of her patroness, when she was by the Duke inveigled abroad, and confined in a convent; from whence she had made her escape, and found means to inform the Marquis (who had supposed her dead, after having first been married) that she then was

with her father in Edinburgh. But this account did not reach him till all was settled for his marriage with Miss Bertram; for it was the very morning of the day he arrived at the Earl of Knasborough's.

The Marquis did not see how, in honour, he could recede from his engagements with Miss Bertram; but he had heard at Malieveren, that Lord Morville was a favoured lover; and that his lordship still entertained sentiments in his heart for Miss Bertram, which caused his strange behaviour to him. The letter he received from Lord Morville fully confirmed the supposition, and relying upon the honour and prudence of Alicia, he made her the visit I have before related. The Marquis candidly disclosed his situation to Mr. Bertram, and at the same time assured him, that was it found Miss Bertram's heart decided in his favour, after Lord Morville had an opportunity given him of renewing his suit, he was still ready to fulfil the engagements he had entered into; but that, if the idea he had formed was just, it would be the height of madness to sacrifice the happiness of so many people, to gratify the mistaken notions of the Duke, who confined all merit within prescribed bounds; but as yet he was not satisfied whether, if he was at liberty to offer himself, Miss Ross would accept his hand on such conditions as he could tender it, when most probably she would encounter reproach, and perhaps persecution from the Duke.

It was agreed, before the Marquis and Mr. Bertram parted, that Lord Morville should have so much information on this subject as might encourage him to speak again of his love to Miss Bertram, during which time the Marquis, under pretence of visiting the house, which was to receive him after his marriage, flew upon the wings of love to Edinburgh.

Miss Ross, deeming herself no longer bound by the promise she had made the Dowager Dutchess, which the persecution she had sustained from the Duke had cancelled, now hesitated not, as she had done before, but consented, if it would contribute to his happiness, to become the wife of the Marquis of Felton. When he returned to London, he was informed that Lord Morville, had again apparently assumed the empire in Miss Bertram's heart, who felt restrained by her promise given to the Marquis, from which she was released by him on their first interview, after his visit to Miss Ross.

Lady Augusta had no intimation of this affair from any party concerned, and the whole of their future plan was concerted between the Marquis and Lord Morville, to which Miss Bertram consented; but it was not divulged either to Henry or Alicia, the Marquis observing to them, that now a perfect knowledge of each others wishes had been made known, no friend should be involved on their account; "but" he said to Mr. Bertram, "do not be surprised if you lose sight of us for a few days."

The duke had declared, he would rather see his son the last of the illustrious house of Wakefield, than it should be continued to the latest posterity, by the marriage of the Marquis of Felton with Marian Ross, and he positively swore never to give his consent to such an union. If the Marquis married Miss Ross, it was evident his father would not sanction it, and he feared if the Duke heard she was again at liberty, she would by some means be taken from him; he therefore resolved no delay should be made.

Miss Bertram's retraction of a promise so lately made, and avowal of her partiality for Lord Morville, would doubtless bring rebuke on her, and his lordship, when he found she declared her preference in his favour, was little inclined to trust his happiness to the probability of again being heedlessly cast away; he was not of a temper to brook delay, therefore quitted London two days before the Marquis and Miss Bertram, and joined them about fifty miles on the north road, and proceeded to Edinburgh, where the lovely Miss Ross became Marchioness of Felton, and at the same time Miss Bertram gave her hand to Lord Morville.

The Duke's displeasure was announced in terms which threatened irreconcilable aversion to his son's choice; and a command was given in the Marquis's hearing, that he should from that time no more be admitted into any house belonging to the Duke.

"Remember," said he to his son, "from this hour I shall consider you as an alien,—and shall do all in my power to deprive you of fortune: the title must descend to you, and the entailed estate; but you will find it very insufficient to support the lustre of the house from which you sprung."

The Marquis knew that at present to vindicate himself, would be only to enrage his father more; the persecution the Marchioness had suffered from the Duke he rather wished to be forgotten, than that it should be urged as a motive to influence him to do justice to her merit; for the amiable son of this haughty peer was convinced that such a suggestion as—that he was wrong—or, that Miss Ross had sustained injustice, which he was bound to atone for, would never be forgiven.

The Dutchess gave an encouraging look to her daughter-in-law, who had readily acquiesced with her Lord in his plan of presenting her at Wakefield-house, before the Duke had it in his power to know who she was. The Marquis had indeed flattered himself, her very distinguished beauty, and his father's desire of seeing him married, might have prevailed over his dislike, which now appeared unconquerable.

The next day the Dutchess wrote both to the Marquis and Marchioness, congratulating them on their marriage, and assuring them of her endeavours being used to restore them to the favour of the Duke, advising them to live for the present retired, nor attempt to see or write to the Duke, with whom she was the following day going down to Radstone-house, where the papers of the late Dutchess remained, amongst which she had lately seen something relative to the family of the Marchioness, which, if proved, would, she hoped, be one means of reconciling the Duke, but, she added, that she would write from Radstone again.

This letter was communicated to the family of Knasborough, and that of Sir Robert Bertram, who called upon the Marquis and Marchioness the day after their return from Scotland. All were struck by the fine figure and handsome features of the Marchioness, whose manners were at once interesting and unaffected. The natural grace and elegance of this beautiful woman suited the dignity of the station to which her marriage had exalted

her. Strong indeed, all concluded, must be the prejudices of the Duke, when beholding her, he could so harshly refuse his forgiveness. The Marchioness promised to correspond by letter with Lady Morville, and the Marquis made the same promise to Mr. Bertram.

The following day the Marquis and Marchioness left town for his seat in Dorsetshire, and Sir Robert Bertram's family, with Lord and Lady Morville, the Earl of Knasborough and Mr. Meynell, as guests to the Baronet set out for Yorkshire; Lady Augusta, who was to be a visitant at Malton, accompanied them.

In the parish church of Malieveren Lord and Lady Morville were united, with the consent of all their friends, according to the form of the church of England. On this occasion all ranks of people were invited to partake of the rejoicings, which lasted at Malton and Malieveren, for the space of one entire week. The most splendid entertainment given was at the castle, on the last day of those rejoicings, when Lady Bertram gave a *bal de champetre*. Alicia's fine taste, her lively imagination shone conspicuously on this occasion: to her judgment her ladyship committed the arrangement of the whole. The grounds around the castle were enlightened by the fanciful arranged illuminations, and for the light and elegant decoration of the pavillions, in which the music and refreshments were placed, and for the enchanting effect they produced, her ladyship was indebted to the elegant and simple genius of Alicia.

The varied entertainments given on this long wished-for union of the families of Morville and Bertram, were scarcely at an end, when they were agreeably surprised by a visit from the Marquis and Marchioness of Felton, who had come some miles out of their road to pay it. They were going down into Scotland, in consequence of a letter they had received from the Dutchess; who informed them she had found the papers alluded to when she had written before, and that they informed her Mr. Ross was descended from a baronet of the same name, and that, could he command money, to contend with the present possessor of the estate, there appeared little doubt, but his right was a superior one, and that he would be successful; the title was dormant, and the possessor of the estate had never claimed it; a proof he thought his right to both bad: her grace had also sent those papers to her son, which had belonged to Mr. Ross's aunt, the widow of his father's brother, who had been supported by the kindness of the late Dutchess of Wakefield, and died under her roof at the period of her grace's remaining in Scotland: thither the Dutchess now urged her son to go, and search if this could be properly authenticated, and if so, begged every step might be taken for Mr. Ross to assert his claim, drawing upon her banker for any sum that might be wanted; as, should Mr. Ross succeed, she made no dispute of the Duke's receiving the Marchioness as his daughter. Lady Felton had never, however, heard the circumstances mentioned by her grace. After spending two days at Malieveren the Marquis and Marchioness took leave of their friends to prosecute their journey into Scotland.

Although Alicia could not cease to reproach herself for disobeying her mother's injunctions; yet she hitherto had found no opportunity to visit Oakdale, as she was commanded to do so, secretly and alone; but the family were shortly to go to Bertram castle, and then she imagined she might form some sufficient excuse for quitting it for a

few days alone, at least with Henry's assistance; she resolved to speak to him on the subject; but he in general wore so dejected an air, when alone with her, that she was afraid to mention any thing on a subject which had agitated him so violently, when last they had had conversed regarding herself, and the mystery that surrounded her.

Sir Robert and Lady Bertram were alarmed by the visible alteration in the appearance of their son; he was grown pale,—his strength and flesh were alike wasted, and his spirits, which naturally were uncommonly equal and chearful, appeared no longer so. When he did assume a lively manner, it seemed forced, and far from a heart which appeared sunk in dejection.

With much reluctance Mr. Bertram submitted to see the physician Lady Bertram had sent for, to prescribe for him; this gentleman assured her ladyship, that Mr. Bertram's disorder appeared to him no way likely to be relieved by medicine: its seat was, he apprehended, in the mind, and that he thought change of scene might do much towards restoring him: exercise of mind and body is also necessary, continued the doctor, "but he assured me he was in perfect health and spirits; nor do I see, at present, any cause for alarm.

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CHAPTER III

HENRY the next day was alone with his father for a considerable time; and the following one, when Lady Bertram and Alicia were seated together in her ladyship's dressing room, she began to speak of Henry.—"Doctor Dealtry," said she, "persists in it, he has received some disappointment: that he has fixed his affections where they have not been returned. Have not you, Alicia, been oft made Henry's confidante? has he not spoke to you on this subject?"

"No, I assure your ladyship," said the blushing and faltering Alicia; "no, Mr. Bertram never spoke to me even of his love for the charming Lady Augusta, from whom I imagine the disappointment must originate."

"No, Alicia—not with Lady Augusta does the disappointment originate; but from an equally amiable, equally lovely young woman. You know her heart, her sentiments—tell me then, Alicia, has she refused Henry Bertram? is she insensible to the misery he now endures? can she behold, unmoved, the affliction of his parents?"

"Indeed, my beloved Lady Bertram, you err; I see you suspect that the destitute orphan, the object of your bounty, has ensnared the heart of your son; but on my knees hear me solemnly protest, Mr. Bertram never told me he loved me, otherwise than as a brother; and I call heaven to witness, (if my heart deceives me not,) tho' I love Mr. Bertram most sincerely, I love him with an affection that I would a brother, had it pleased heaven to have bestowed one on me."

Lady Bertram raised and embraced Alicia, who wept from agitation.

"To see you, my sweet Alicia, united to my son, would be the greatest happiness I could enjoy. I am satisfied my suspicions were false; for so strangely has he conducted himself regarding you, that of late I imagined he had been rejected by you, which he had generously concealed;—but compose yourself, and I will now inform you of what I know regarding the attachment of Henry; you may perhaps assist to develop the seeming mystery."

It had long been the intention of the Earl of Knasborough and Sir Robert, to cement their friendship by the union of their children; a secret which was carefully guarded, lest if known, it might with the young people, retard the accomplishment of what was ardently desired by their parents. When you, Alicia, was in danger, from the fever brought on by the bruises and fright you sustained from the overturning the phaeton, Henry was no longer able to conceal the passion he felt for you, and it was evident to Sir Robert, who remained at the castle, that on your life depended that of his son; upon your recovery. Henry again fought to conceal his feelings.

Sir Robert declared his fears to the Earl, that in respect to Mr. Bertram, their hopes of an union with Lady Augusta would be frustrated, for that his affections were fixed on you. The Earl absolving his friend from his former promises, urged him, not to prevent a match which promised so large a portion of felicity to his son. Sir Robert assured the Earl, he held their former engagements valid, till the match had been proposed to Lady Augusta and Henry; but should it not meet with their acquiescence, that he would then follow his lordships counsel, nor controul the affections his son had placed upon an

object so amiable. To this the Earl agreed, and the same day Henry and Lady Augusta were proposed to each other by their respective fathers. Both declared their esteem; but both refused the long looked to union.

"Some little time after this, Sir Robert, still further to prove his son signified his wish for his marrying, and said, if he would fix his choice upon a deserving object his consent should be easily obtained. Henry, thanking Sir Robert, assured him, at present he should prefer remaining single.

'Why that answer,' said Sir Robert;—'you are free to declare your choice;—I again tell you, I will not object.'

Again Sir," replied Henry, "I repeat the deep sense I have of your goodness; but again I say, I think not at present of marriage.'

'Henry,' said Sir Robert, with a severe tone, 'you meanly equivocate; I supposed your heart the seat of integrity; yet sure you are not so base—sure you dare not beneath my roof—I swear by heaven, and all it contains, if I find you guilty of such villainy, I will no longer acknowledge you as my son.'

"Sir Robert was about to quit the apartment, but was detained by Henry exclaiming, in an agonized tone of voice, 'nay, hear me, my father! alas! what is it you suspect? judge not so hastily, so cruelly, him who fears to accept the happiness you so kindly offer.'

'Tell me then, Henry,' said Sir Robert, 'nor again give me such equivocating answers—tell me Sir, for you must know the passion you feel for Alicia is no secret to me—have you then declared it to her? and have you won from that amiable girl a confession how dear you are to her, and now tell me you think not of marriage? what then, young man, am I to infer from such conduct?'

'Will you hear me with your wonted goodness? will you, Sir Robert, credit the solemn asseverations of a son, whom till now you suspected not of a wish to deceive;—from you, my father, I pretend not to conceal that I love Alicia; but believe me, she knows it not; she is indeed, Sir Robert, ignorant how infinitely dear she is to me; and excuse me, Sir, there are circumstances why at present I wish her to remain so. If you value her future happiness or my peace, I conjure you, allow my passion at present to rest in my own breast.'

"Sir Robert found, whatever were the reasons Henry had for his reserve, he was deaf to the arguments that he used upon the occasion, saying no more than that he would reconsider the affair, and upon his return from an excursion he was about to take with Lord Morville, he would make his final determination.

"You, Alicia, well recollect the agitation the countenance of Henry displayed on his return, and from that period do I date the decline of his health. He declared to Sir Robert, the following morning that he for ever renounced all hope of an union with you; that you were infinitely dear to him, and he feared ever must remain so; but that, whatever pain it might give him, he trusted he had fortitude to conceal his feelings.

"Various arguments were used by Sir Robert to influence Henry to declare why he thus acted so contradictory a part.

'Urge me not, my father, I conjure you; no entreaties shall ever make me reveal, why I should not ask from Alicia a return of the passion she has inspired. My reasons are, trust

me, powerful ones;—but, I entreat you, ask them not of me:—alas! you may by so doing, drive me to some deed of desperation; some deed, Sir Robert, cruel as that which has placed me in this painful, torturing situation; to avoid which I may be obliged to sly friends, home, my fortune and my country. Oh! name it not, I again solemnly conjure you.'

Sir Robert, as he imparted the conversation Henry had held with him, his strange and agitated manner, which appeared as if oppressed by some weighty secret, almost imagined his intellects were deranged;—a short time relieved us, however, from this dread, as Henry regained his composure.

"When we went to London, and my son perceived the advances made by Mr. Carliel to you, he begged Sir Robert to forward the match, he quitted town till your determination was known; yet, at his return, he could not conceal the pleasure he felt that you had declined the offer.. Since our return to Malieveren, I have seen him grow evidently more unhappy; I have marked, with cruel anxiety, his altered looks. On you Alicia, do my hopes rest; to you, though against his wish, have I declared the passion which I dread will drag him an early victim to the tomb. To Sir Robert this disclosure is a secret; but I thought if it was in fact a secret to you, it was unfit it should remain so. The life of Henry is at stake; and I hoped that you would, if in your power, assist to develop the cause of his strangely persisting to declare he loves you, yet that he would conceal that love."

Alicia assured her Ladyship she had no clue to discover what motive had actuated Mr. Bertram in his refusal of the Baronet's offers regarding herself. "Ah! how shall I," said she, "in this conjuncture, prove to you, my dear Lady, as I ought, my gratitude, impressed as I now am with a deep sense of added obligation to you, my kind patroness, and to Sir Robert, who generously overlooked in me, deficiencies, that portionless, destitute of friend or relative, (save Mr. Meynel and yourselves) were rendered perhaps more exposed to observation; but you regarded not, for my sake, these disadvantages; you would have given your consent I should fill a place the fairest and proudest might envy. As I reflect on the sacrifices you would so generously, so kindly have made, I feel myself powerfully called upon to act as may best become the favored daughter of your choice. Absence will weaken the impression Mr. Bertram now feels; he will forget what now so deeply interests him and will form some new and more suitable attachment. I will hide myself in some distant country; I will retire to some convent, or, if it is the lot, my beloved Lady Bertram, you doom me to sustain, I will stay by you, I will exert myself in contributing to your comfort; I will endeavour at alleviating your woes; I will, the hardest task I can impose, conceal from Mr. Bertram the knowledge I have gained; I will treat him with coldness—with indifference."

Lady Bertram folded Alicia to her bosom as the tears of maternal tenderness choked her voice, "No, my beloved Alicia," at length she said, "I cannot bear the idea of losing your society; but if I could Henry would not suffer that on his account you should quit my protection, was I inclined to part with you; no other home shall you know, my charming girl, but beneath the roof of Sir Robert Bertram; yet I will hope time may

unravel what now appears so dark and mysterious; yet may we have more powerful claims upon you, Alicia, and from you and Henry shall our latter days seek comfort."

Twilight was shading the distant woods that surrounded, though not inclosed, the castle, when Alicia retiring to her chamber, sad and agitated, saw Henry slowly returning home across the lawn from one of his accustomed, solitary walks.—The window was open at which Alicia stood; and as he cast his eyes up, they fell upon her, and a faint smile lightened over his pensive-looking countenance.

"Why, Mr. Bertram," said Alicia, "are you so regardless of Doctor Dealtry's orders, as to expose yourself to the dew, which must ere now have fallen?"

"I wandered on, Alicia, till I came to your favourite seat, and there I believe I forgot I had so far to return."

Henry passed on; and Alicia, throwing herself on a chair, gave way for a few minutes to the feelings which Mr. Bertram's languid and changed appearance caused in her heart;—these softened emotions of pity and tender recollection brought tears which relieved her from the suffocating and painful sensation of feeling with which she had quitted Lady Bertram. "But this," said she, drying up her tears, "this must not be; it is not thus I am to fulfil the promises I have so lately made, and which my duty so forcibly commands; no, it is not by giving way to my own feelings that I am to support Lady Bertram under her afflictions."

Alicia assuming that fortitude she had been so early taught, met the family at supper with her usual composure, and conversed with Henry upon such subjects as she knew would amuse and interest him. The look of kindness and of approbation she received from Lady Bertram repaid our heroine for the painful exertion she was making.

Alicia's eyes were now open to the sentiments she had long, unknown to herself, felt for Mr. Bertram; and she found the soft, the tender, friendship she had entertained for him was no longer as before, placid and serene; she now found an aching sense of disquiet had taken possession of her whole soul. Henry loved her, he had declared he loved; but not to her had he made the declaration. Strangely mysterious in his conduct, he had assented she was dear—infinately dear to him; yet had he persisted in refusing the permission granted by Sir Robert, his health, his strength, Lady Bertram had said, were the sacrifices made to the concealed love which agonized his mind.

"Ah! would to heaven," sighed out Alicia, when again retired to her chamber, "I yet had been a stranger to what her Ladyship imparted. Alas! how now shall I support myself! how conceal the anguish she imparted!"

Alicia's thoughts were fixed on what means she could employ to come at the secret Henry so carefully guarded. Oakdale—its horrors, its mysteries, rose to her imagination;—yes, doubtless Henry had visited the gloomy hall; there had he by some means learned what yet was concealed from herself; yes, there doubtless had he found her connexions, her birth were so objectionable as to preclude Sir Robert's consent; yet

had he kindly, generously concealed them, lest that protection should be withdrawn from the child of some inimical person, which had been so amply granted to her as a stranger.

She would go to Oakdale—she would learn her fate—she would dare all danger, real, or such as might perhaps be, but illusive. The pallid form, seen starting as it were into view, rose to her thoughts.

"Oh yes!" said she, audibly, "I will dare all for Henry—for Lady Bertram—this strange mystery shall be searched; too long has the SOLEMN INJUNCTION of my mother been neglected by me."

Alicia now kneeling, prayed to him, to whom all hearts are open, for that composure of mind which threatened to desert her, and for such a portion of fortitude as would enable her to sustain the trial she must undergo. As Alicia arose from her devotions, she found the hurry and perturbation of spirits she had felt, calmed; and more composed, she again seated herself at the window.

The twilight of the sky in July, even at the midnight hour, not completely veiling objects, brought back (as she faintly marked them through the surrounding gloom) many a tender recollection of the friendship of Henry Bertram. Oft amidst those beloved scenes had she listened with raptured ear to his conversation; oft had she seen him mingle in every active sport;—the grace, the dexterity she had beheld him display, rose to her mind—sadly, mournfully contrasted with his present languid appearance. Painfully she felt convinced Lady Bertram's fears for her son were but too justly founded: his virtues, his talents, his amiable disposition were recalled by Alicia.

"Ah! why," she softly exclaimed, "did I ever know he loved me but as a sister!"

She paused, and momentarily glanced a thought upon her own feelings for an object so amiable, so interesting; she felt her heart throbbled with a passion stronger, more romantic, less easily controlled than friendship; but resolved, if yet in her power, to stem in her breast that tide of passion to which Henry was fast falling a victim.

"If more happily circumstanced," thought Alicia, "I might perhaps have forgot myself:—loved by Henry, approved by his parents, vanity and self-love might have soon rendered me unworthy of their esteem; but now called, forcibly called upon to exert myself, I yet may prove to Lady Bertram she has not vainly bestowed her protection, nor vainly lavished her bounty; I may be permitted to evince that I am not ungrateful."

Thus reasoned Alicia; thus strove, by setting her duty before her, to turn her ideas from the fascination which would, she foresaw, wreck her happiness for ever; for if at Oakdale Henry was deterred from speaking to her of his love, at Oakdale would she find fresh cause why it was necessary she should not think of him.

The day had, unperceived by Alicia, broke in the east, till lifting her eyes, she saw the tops of the trees waving with the first breath of morning, and tinged with the golden light of the rising sun.

"I am much to blame in giving way to my emotions," thought she, as hastily undressing, she retired to her bed.

Alicia, however, slept not till near the hour she usually rose, and then strange and frightful visions, connected with her waking thoughts, were presented to her fancy. In the morning, had not Lady Bertram been aware of the cause, the pale and agitated appearance of Alicia would have caused her Ladyship's inquiries.

Henry's eyes were fixed upon her with a scrutinizing look, but he spoke not to her on the subject.

Mr. Meynell had been above a fortnight at Harrowgate, and was not yet returned: he had promised the Earl of Knasborough to accompany him to his seat in Derbyshire, who was now impatient to set out from Malieveren, as his presence was necessary at Castle Cliffe. Preparations were also ordered to be made at Bertram Castle for the reception of the family. Henry insisted that no alteration should take place in the plans already fixed upon on his account, although the situation of Bertram was thought too cold for complaints, which it was feared his weak state threatened; nor would Sir Robert and Lady Bertram have acquiesced in this removal, had not Dr. Dealtry hinted that goat's whey would be beneficial to his patient, which at Bertram might be easily procured, by its vicinity to the wildest and best cultivated parts of Northumberland.

Two days after Alicia had the conversation with Lady Bertram, the principal part of which I have related, Henry drove Alicia to Malton, charged with an invitation from the Baronet and her Ladyship to Lord and Lady Morville, requesting they would accompany them into Northumberland. Scarce could Alicia restrain her tears as they passed the lodge where she had laid so many hours, insensible of her danger, or the agonies of Henry Bertram on her account. Scarcely did Henry speak till they reached Malton; he appeared, indeed, to be afraid of entering on any subject, lest it might lead to one he found himself unable to converse upon.

CHAPTER IV.

NEVER, in the eyes of Alicia, did Lady Augusta appear more amiable than as she beheld her that morning, with an affectionate concern painted upon her countenance, for the apparent weak state of Mr. Bertram—though this would only a short time before have filled her with disquiet.

Lady Morville refused to go to Bertram alledging it was the most horrid place she knew, Oakdale excepted. "Besides," said she, "we have promised to go into Derbyshire with the Earl."

"Then," said Henry, gravely, "I am to inform your mother, Lady Morville, you do not chuse to comply with the first request, of any consequence, she has made since you quitted her guidance. But this is no time to trifle—are you then, Mary, the only person to whom it is a secret that you soon will be the only child of your parents?"

Lady Morville looked full in Henry's face, and as if she had never, till that moment, observed any alteration in his appearance, hastily arose, and throwing her arms round him, burst into tears and passionate exclamations of grief, that ended in a kind of hysteric, from which, when Lady Augusta and Alicia returned to the room, from whence they had been absent, they found her recovering.

Lady Morville assured her brother no consideration should prevent her from accompanying him into Northumberland. Her fears were now so completely roused, that she absolutely insisted upon Alicia's driving back to Malieveren.

"My sister," said Henry, when he, with his fair companion, were seated in the phaeton, "would have been very amiable, had she ever known adverse circumstances: she is giddy, because happy; reflection is not necessarily imposed upon her, and it is painful; her heart has the seeds of every virtue implanted in it—so has her Lord's; yet both want cultivation, for want of positive exercise;—as are their hearts, so are their understandings; no deficiency can be found in either, unless it is want of prudence, and that is sometimes ranked but as a negative virtue; but it is the want of it, I observe alike in both, that makes me tremble for their future happiness. Hereafter, Alicia, all your fortitude may be wanted to support Lady Bertram against the misery this gay heedless couple may prepare for her."

"Talk not of my fortitude, Henry, as Lady Bertram's support under difficulties; to you will the Baronet and her Ladyship look for comfort under any affliction which may occur; you shall be Lady Morville's counsellor; you, Sir, shall restrain her volatile Lord; those tasks Alicia must be unequal to.

Henry sighed, but made no reply.

When they again reached Malieveren, they found Mr. Meynell returned from Harrowgate, and it was agreed the Earl, Lady Augusta, and he should set out on the same day for Derbyshire, that the Baronet's family went North.

Alicia, during the day, appeared with all the cheerfulness she could assume; but, when left at the hour of rest to her own reflections her spirits fled, and painful and gloomy ideas took possession of her soul, which had been banished by constraint; for she had resolved, whatever pangs it might cause her, to bury her sorrows in her own breast, and devote herself to the sustaining Lady Bertram, who relied on her affection for support.

The following morning, Sir Robert and his guests, accompanied by Lady Bertram, went to Malton, to fix with Lord and Lady Morville the time of their departure. Mr. Bertram was engaged, Alicia learned, with writing.

"I will go," thought she, "to the spot consecrated to me by the friendship of Henry."

This was a building on an eminence in the park, erected the preceding summer at the request of Mr. Bertram, during a short absence the family made from the castle, to gratify and surprise Alicia at her return, who was charmed by the beautiful, various, and extensive prospect the hill commanded; which was, from one side over a large and well-cultivated track of ground, interspersed with towns, villages, and gentlemen's seats; whilst, on the other hand, the eye fell upon a narrow vale, through which flowed a clear stream; on whose wood-crowned banks rose towering, solemnly majestic, the still stately ruins of — Abbey; whose mouldering fabric had, by falling, choaked the stream which washed its rocky foundation, and formed a cascade, the murmur of whose fall could, in a still evening, be heard on this eminence, from which it was not far distant. This narrow valley was crossed at its extremity by rough and broken hills, beyond which they swelled into a mountainous appearance, which reached to the horizon, and shut out all further view, although they oft exhibited a change of scene; oft their tops were clad with mists, thick and dense, on which Henry and Alicia loved to behold the effect of wind or sun, whilst raising, lowering, or dispersing them.

In this building was kept a small but judiciously chosen library, with some musical instruments; and the walls were decorated with sketches taken from nature—chiefly views of places in the neighbourhood of Malieveren.

The path Alicia took brought her, by a steep ascent, to the back of the building. Entering by the door on that side, she saw Henry standing at the window, with a book half closed in his hand.

"I thought," said Alicia, "you had been engaged writing, now I find you here studying."

"Rather moralising, Alicia," said he, offering the book for her inspection.

It was Dr. Young's Night Thoughts. Alicia cast a look of mournful expression as taking the volume, she closed it on the table. The tears started from her eyes, but dashing them off, and again turning to Mr. Bertram, "Why," said she, "do you thus, Henry, indulge in solitude? why, by chusing subjects of so melancholy a hue, see, as it were, to depress your spirits?"

"Alas! Alicia, life has lost its charms; my health is, I now find, gone; I totter on this side eternity; it becomes me to think, then, on a subject so near at hand as my dissolution probably is. I would not needlessly alarm you, Alicia, but it is necessary to guard you against a surprise; I have hinted this to you before, but you appeared not to wish to understand me. I have, Alicia, made up a packet, which will, when I have ceased to exist, inform you of the agony I have endured—the horrid, the mysterious cause is there explained."

Alicia had not power for a minute to speak; but recovering herself, "Why not now, Henry, explain to me the horrid mystery, of which you talk? say, have I not a right to be informed—does it not concern me;—alas! Henry, the season for reserve is past; whilst I listen to you I can think nothing worth balancing against a life so dear. How can you so calmly talk of your dissolution;—think you in quitting this world, Henry, you have nothing to regret; it is erring against your own heart to say you are regardless of the lasting grief of your parents, the deep sorrow of your friends. We are not now met, Henry, as oft we have in this place, so dear to both, to cheat time by conversation on amusing subjects—such times are past."

"I have," said Alicia, "a right to share your grief, because it relates to myself: I urge not friendship; it yields to paternal authority—to maternal tenderness; nor what you concealed from Sir Robert and Lady Bertram shall I a friend dare to ask; but I solemnly adjure you to answer me this one question—have you not, Henry, been at Oakdale, and learnt there what I have a just claim to know?"

Taking Alicia's hand, Henry seated her by him; and after a full pause, with his eyes fixed upon her, in a voice that trembled, he replied, "Yes, Alicia, I have been at Oakdale."—Again he was silent.

"Oh, tell me then, I beseech you, what did you learn there?"

"Fain, my beloved Alicia, would I be spared on a subject so exquisitely painful to me, fain would I have buried in my heart my grief, my disappointment; I would have fondly hoped Alicia would for ever have been spared the knowledge of the passion which prompted my visit. Ah! fondly I hoped you would not have shared my sorrow."

Though Alicia spoke not, yet her expressing countenance declared she had already participated in his sufferings.

"But you," continued Mr. Bertram, "are no longer a stranger to the passion I did feel; that I do yet, spite of all my efforts, feel for you, I know that the mistaken tenderness of Lady Bertram has imparted this to you; but she knows not, Alicia, that it is the sad knowledge I obtained at Oakdale, which told me my love for Alicia was a guilty, a forbidden one, that thus drags me to an early grave. Alas! I cannot conquer my love! in vain hitherto has been my endeavours—vainly, Alicia, have I strove to behold you, as I ought, so near a relative."

"What do you mean, Henry?"

"Alas! is it too true, Alicia—we are indeed nearly connected; but I will strive to inform you how I came into possession of your secret. Carefully had I guarded my love from all observation, fearful that, from the hints you had given concerning some

mysterious kind of connexion subsisting between you and the family from whom I was descended; that, upon your learning your birth and story fully, you might then find obstacles existed that might make an union with me not to be desired; till that period I waited, hoping, fearing; but when your danger made me no longer able to constrain myself, my love became known to Sir Robert. By him, by Lady Bertram was I urged to disclose my sentiments to you. During your illness, oft your delirious fancy portrayed to you the gloomy chamber of Oakdale; oft you raved of it in terms your attendants understood not, tho' I did. I found, from these disjointed sentences, that at Oakdale your fate was to be disclosed; which you dreaded to encounter its horrors; and I learned also the way to enter the concealed chamber, and likewise where the papers which contained the mystery of your birth were to be found. To Oakdale then Alicia, I went, for I could no longer evade the proposals of Sir Robert, when he censured and entreated by turns, and wrought me to agonies insupportable;—you I thought might long remain ignorant of your own fate—I could no longer bear the suspense. Oh my father! it is—it is you who have undone me!—my mother too—Oh, were not my sufferings sufficient without her mistaken fondness! imparting them to Alicia, who knew not that the heart of her son throbbed with a guilty passion, against which nature herself revolts. In vain does reason condemn; in vain does religion threaten; shuddering, I listen to the anathema God and man alike pronounce against me; I would have wished to have been spared this humiliating confession; I would have then retained your friendship; Alicia would not have been taught to hate the wretched Henry."

The extreme agitation Mr. Bertram sustained, communicated itself to Alicia; and as her countenance reflected that of his, though marked with an expression of surprise, which in Henry was despair of a wild and frantic kind.

"Henry, my dear Henry, torture me not; but at once say what you learned!"

Suddenly he interrupted her, hastily rising, and throwing as it were from him the hand he had held, "Dear Henry! is it you, Alicia, who calls me dear Henry? Have I not already told you it is right, it is necessary you should hate me."

The manner, the tone of his voice seemed wild and distracted. He was traversing the room with hasty and unequal steps—"I tell you, Alicia, look not on me thus; you seem as if you pitied and partook of my sorrows;—I say it is madness! you make my brain turn round!—know you not my danger? are you not sensible, foolish girl, that I stand upon the edge of a precipice? see you not the ground on which I stand shrinks beneath my giddy steps? see you not, Alicia, the gulph that yawns to receive me? Go, go, I charge you!"

Pausing, Henry turned full round upon Alicia, fixing his eyes with an air of distraction on her, that, as it were by magic, instantaneously roused these latent powers of her mind with which she was endowed.

"If I do fall," said Mr. Bertram, with a stern air, "eternity shall cover me; I cannot support the anguish I have endured much longer. Whilst you were a stranger to my

feelings, I strove to conceal, I strove to conquer them; but Lady Bertram has removed that restraint; she told you of my love; you know my guilt."

He now advanced almost close to Alicia, who, rising with an air of self-recollection, and that dignity which was inherent in her, with a solemnity of manner, addressed the frantic Henry:—"Recollect, Mr. Bertram, yourself; remember the respect due to your own character; give not way to such transports of mind as leave you not a free agent. Is it you, the exalted Henry, who shrinks before passions which it is your duty to subdue? is it possible I can behold you, whose virtues, whose intellectual powers soared above the common race of mortals, now talking like a wretch loaded with crimes, sinking under despair? Debase not yourself, Mr. Bertram, by making a supposition that you are capable of the one, or that your active and energetic mind can ever be the prey of the other. Your friendship has hitherto been my pride, my solace;—allow it still to be so; but deem me not, Henry, under the influence of a passion like your's, wild and ungovernable."

The recollection of Henry appeared to return; he attempted not to interrupt Alicia, nor to hinder her departure, till her hand was on the lock to open the door; then, with a sudden spring, he caught hold of her dress—"Nay, stay," he cried, "Alicia—look on this," and he led her to the largest piece of painting in the room: it was a view taken by Henry from recollection, and deeply imprinted on his memory.

Alicia was seen leaning against a tree, whilst Mary and William March looked over the projecting rock, from whence the unhappy Mr. Bouchier had rashly precipitated himself.

"Recollect you not, Alicia, this scene?" said Henry, pointing to it.

"I do recollect it, Henry."

"It was, Alicia, only the day preceding that you did, by imparting your emotions to me, at beholding the gloomy hall, awaken a passion, of the existence of which I was ignorant. Oh yes! Alicia, that visit to Oakdale was fatal to my peace. Alas! then was it I first knew that I loved;—yes, I saw you gave me a preference; I heard you declare an unlimited confidence in my friendship; and I no longer beheld you as before. Other sentiments filled my heart; less controulable passions usurped the dominion. Oh yes! then was I sentenced to misery for ever! Oh, then, that my sad fate had been arrested; that then I had learned Alicia was the daughter of—! (throwing himself at her feet)—Oh! no, no, I cannot, will not tell you."—Then hastily rising, with more of frenzy than despair, he exclaimed, "No, I will not profane the name of Bertram! I know it is false; Sir Robert is not, never could be such a villain! no, Alicia, he thus cruelly to have abandoned you—no, it must be false! it is the accursed, the diabolical invention of the arch fiend himself! I will go to Oakdale—its horrors shall perish—those bloody testimonies shall no more blast the sight—the gloomy hall shall blaze to the skies; yes, I will do this—so shall you be mine; yes, those lying documents shall no longer separate us—no longer hinder me from saying how ardently I love; you shall not forbid my transports!"

He had, before the conclusion of his speech, grasped her, with a frantic and empassioned air, to his heart; but Alicia, exerting all that strength (which I before have

had occasion to remark) she possessed, broke from his hold, and, pushing him from, her, "Go," said she, Henry, (with all the calmness she could assume) go and recover your recollection; your language and actions are alike tinctured with madness; I pity you, Sir, but will not tamely suffer insult."

Alicia seated herself, whilst Henry stood, as if immovable, against the wall where she had left him. A fixed and stupid kind of melancholy now rested on those features, which a few minutes before had been lighted by a frenzied wildness. To quit him now, to leave him to the despair to which he appeared abandoned, this she could not bear; she saw it was necessary to rouse him, for he had now stood some minutes perfectly still, with his looks bent upon her with all the stupor of an incurable melancholy.

Alicia rose and took his hand; yet his countenance changed not its terrifying and alarming expression. Then pointing to a portrait she had from memory drawn—"Mr. Bertram," said she, in a voice whose full, mellow, and deep tones were well adapted for her purpose, "Did you not, as you saw me give the last strokes to that portrait, solemnly invoke the spirit of my sainted mother? Remember, Henry, what then you said, what then you vowed. Did you not then swear to be, in her stead, my protector—that, as far as you could, you would lighten for me all the ills of life? Is it, by rendering yourself miserable, by suffering your passions to triumph over your reason, you are to do this? Is it, by the wild expression of misery that sits on your countenance, I am to be made happy? Do you deem me insensible to your uniform friendship, to your former virtues? Do you think I can know peace or happiness whilst Henry Bertram is miserable?"

The countenance of Henry had twice changed whilst Alicia spoke. From their fixed stupor his eyes quitted their object, and fell on the floor, as if afraid to trust them with a longer gaze, and a momentary flush crossed his cheek, which was succeeded by an ashy and death-like paleness; life appeared as if retreating; he seemed incapable of articulation, or even of respiration, as he sunk on a seat, and burst into tears. As Alicia stood by, she found her own cheeks moistened by her feelings. Bitter were her tears; her own happiness, and that of every one she loved and held dear, seemed blasted as she looked on Henry, whose perturbation of spirits she rejoiced to see thus seasonably relieved by tears; for she had feared, a confirmed distraction, or death itself; she went to the window, fearful of checking the kindly drops.

At length Mr. Bertram rose, and, advancing to Alicia, said, with a tolerable degree of composure, "This day has sealed my fate; this fatal interview dooms me to banishment, or it will accelerate the dissolution I have for months foreseen was near at hand. I ask you not, Alicia, to pardon me—I expect it not; you can no more forget the insult I dared offer, than I can forgive my own madness; but I was rent by contending passions, I was no longer indeed in possession of reason; but I have done—I will not now trust myself on this subject. Adieu, Alicia!" he said, without raising his eyes, "Oh, perhaps adieu for ever!"

"Oh! go not alone, Henry; you are ill, you are unable, unfit to go alone—I will walk with you to the Castle."

"I find, Alicia, you suppose I have meditated some desperate deed, but you are mistaken; I shall return straight home, but it must be alone; and if we meet not soon again, remember, as you value the peace of Sir Robert and Lacy Bertram—speak not, I conjure you, of Oakdale."

The calm and resolute manner of Henry quieted the fear that had taken possession of her. "Go, then," said she, "Henry; for our, for their peace, I assuredly shall not mention aught you have so strangely alluded to regarding Oakdale to Sir Robert or her Ladyship;—when next we meet, I shall ask an explanation."—Henry shook his head with a mournful air, as opening the glass-door that led out from the front of the building without speaking; then pulling his hat over his eyes, he descended, with faltering and unequal steps, the hill, whilst Alicia stood in the window with an agonized heart, looking till she could no longer behold him, as shrouded from sight, he passed along a close walk, that was, by its gloom, well suited to the present state of his spirits.—Now throwing herself on a seat, she gave way to the emotions she had so painfully suppressed; the dark mystery of her fate filled her with an underscribable horror. "Alas! who then am I? how am I allied to Henry, in whose guilt too surely I partake—deeply partake?" for she felt convinced his love could not exceed that which filled her own heart. Although he was sinking, for her sake, to an untimely tomb, she felt thankful that, in this trying interview, she had been enabled to sustain her fortitude, that her presence of mind had not forsaken her, and that she concealed from Henry the passion which must have contributed to his misery. She resolved to write to him, and beg he would disclose to her what he had learned at Oakdale regarding her birth; for she would not again seek an interview with him.

CHAPTER V.

ALICIA now, by a different road from what Henry had taken, returned to the castle, which she entered by a back way, and went to Lady Bertram's dressing-room, as less likely there to encounter Mr. Bertram. She had set some time when Mrs. Rowley hastily opened the door—

"My lady wishes to see you, Miss Sleigh.—Alas! Mr. Bertram!"

"What!—Oh! what of Mr. Bertram?"

"Too soon you must know—he is dead, or dying!"

"Dead! dying! said Alicia, with a frantic air, as she rushed past Mrs. Rowley;—but, ere she reached the door, she sunk on the floor in a state of insensibility. From Lady Bertram's dressing-room, Alicia was conveyed to her own chambers, where it was not, till a vein had been opened, that she recovered. When she came to herself, so far as to be sensible, she saw Lady Augusta seated, by the bed.

"Oh! tell me, my dear friend, is it so?" said Alicia, in a faint and trembling voice; "is Mr. Bertram"—she paused—"Oh! no, sure it is but some horrid dream, I have had many such lately."

"Be composed, my sweet Alicia, Mr. Bertram was taken suddenly ill; the family has been greatly alarmed; but he is now better, and Sir Robert and Lady Bertram are with him. I have orders to take charge of you—so submit—lie still, and endeavour to obtain rest; I will go and inform Lady Bertram you are recovering."

Lady Bertram returned with Lady Augusta, and tenderly embraced Alicia without speaking; who, smothering her own sorrows, said "God will, I trust, hear our prayers, and restore to health him we mourn for. Too amiable for the age in which he was born, he was but lent to me for a time: I ought to submit to the decrees of Providence; but I feel the task will be a severe one."

Lady Bertram soon quitted Alicia, who then enquired more particularly concerning the illness of Henry; and learned from Lady Augusta, that when he returned from walking, he had scarcely seated himself and desired Mrs. Rowley to give him a glass of wine, for he found himself much fatigued, when he fainted, and had continued in that state for some time, and when recovered, had again relapsed; that the family had been sent for from Malton—at the same time, Mr. Hoskins, from Middleham, and Dr. Dealtry, from York; that Mr. Hoskins had not scrupled to declare his fears that those deep faintings were but the prelude to a speedy dissolution, as they proved his extreme weakness; but the faintings now over, he slept—and yet," concluded Lady Augusta, "we will hope; Mr. Bertram's natural constitution the faculty have declared good; and was he but able to go to a warmer climate, wonders may be done towards restoring him."

Alicia sighed—she dared scarce hope.

When the physician arrived, he gave it as his opinion, that Mr. Bertram had sustained some sudden shock, and had undergone some severe agitation of mind, against which he had particularly ordered him to guard; that the danger was not yet over, as a fever was not

unlikely to take place, from the agitated state he was in; that he felt himself at a loss, and begged some other of the faculty might be called in.

Messengers were instantly dispatched, but, ere any other physician arrived, the disorder, Dr. Dealtry found, instead of settling, as he was at first inclined to suppose, chiefly on the brain, proved a low nervous fever, which racked all his friends with alternate hopes and fears for nearly three weeks, when the youth and strength of his constitution at length began to conquer; slowly the disease gave way; and the faculty, who were alternately, at this period, the inmates of the castle, still feared much for their patient. Dr. Dealtry who before this last illness entertained some fear of Mr. Bertram having a tendency to a consumptive habit, now dreaded it more than his brethren less acquainted with him.

Lady Morville had returned to Malton, after a few week's stay at Malieveren;—her grief, which broke out above all bounds, served but further to distress her mother, with whom, however, Lady Augusta continued and by her kind attentions administered to Lady Bertram and Alicia such comfort as she could draw from the anxious state of affairs.

At the expiration of five weeks from their interview on their favourite hill, Henry enquired after Alicia of Lady Bertram, but expressed no wish to see her; although oft, during the delirium of his fever, he supposed she was present.

The physicians entreated their patient, as soon as he was able, to be an hour together out of bed, to take the air in a carriage, into which, weak, feeble, and emaciated, Alicia saw him from a window lifted like an infant, and that very day it was that he enquired after her. She had been expressly ordered not to attempt, during his illness, to see him; as to Dr. Dealtry the Baronet had in part communicated the cause of his son's illness. Severely did Alicia feel this prohibition, which now she hoped would no longer exist, as Henry was able to sit up, and Lady Augusta had visited him for a few minutes.

Lady Bertram had questioned Alicia regarding the agitation of her son; but Alicia saying, she had pressed Mr. Bertram to declare what had sunk upon his spirits, and that he still carefully guarded the secret, evaded her ladyship's question.

So completely had her fears for Henry's life absorbed every other idea, so painful was the anxious state of suspense she had endured for the preceding five weeks; that the last interview she had with Henry, although his illness was doubtless caused by the extreme agitation he had sustained during that interview, was seldom thought of by her.

Henry recovered so rapidly, after his being able to set up, that in a week's time he rode as far as Malton-park in the chaise with Lady Bertram.

Alicia thought that Henry had at length triumphed over his passion. "I am not," said she, "suffered to behold him, except at a distance; surely he has forgot me! Happy Henry!" sighed she, as this painful truth pressed on her; that it was not by her to be

attained; but she found it was not in her power to forget how infinitely dear he was to her;—yet the love Henry declared at their last meeting certainly could not be obliterated by sickness. Severely had he, doubtless, suffered on her account; he had said it was a guilty and forbidden passion; why then did she feel regret at the dear-bought victory he had gained over himself?

Henry continued to recover, and Alicia, spite of her judgment, and although satisfied it was necessary for the peace of both, felt unhappy, anxious, nay at times miserable, that he had not solicited an interview with her. She wished also to learn what had been revealed to him at Oakdale regarding herself, but resolved not to enquire by writing—a plan she had once fixed upon for obtaining information.

Mr. Meynel yet remained at Malieveren, unwilling to quit the Baronet whilst under such distress; the Earl of Knasborough had also staid till Henry was pronounced out of immediate danger.

Alicia was summoned one day, when Mr. Bertram had rode out with Sir Robert, to attend on her venerable guardian, Mrs. Meynel; by whom, after some preparation, she was informed Mr. Bertram was speedily going to set out for the continent, the physicians having unanimously agreed, that, in all probability, unless he removed into a warmer climate, he would not see another summer; that he had made no objection, provided he might not be restricted to place, and travel with only one servant; but Sir Robert and Lady Bertram had insisted upon accompanying him, which he warmly objected to, "and principally," said Mrs. Meynel, on your account, Alicia, as you are not to be of the party; yet Mr. Bertram still refuses to see you."

"Not see me, Mrs. Meynel!" said the trembling and agitated Alicia; "does then Mr. Bertram refuse to behold me? will he go to a distant land, where I shall never, never look on him again, and not vouchsafe to say, Adieu?"

"No, my sweet girl, Henry does not, I dare say, intend that; he told me not an hour ago, you yet were too dear to him—that yet he dared not behold you; that many reasons concurred to render an absence from you necessary; but I will, Mrs. Meynel, said he, ere I quit Alicia and my native country, summon fortitude to see her; but I find my mind as weak as my body—I shrink from every trial."

The fine features of Alicia glowed with an animation that of late had forsook them, as she listened to Mrs. Meynel; love and hope played in quick succession over her countenance.

"I have, Alicia," continued her guardian, "entreated for your residing with me, but left it at length to Lady Bertram's decision; who delegated to me the office of informing you what is fixed for Mr. Bertram: go, then, my dear girl, her ladyship waits you in her dressing-room."

Alicia instantly obeyed, and found her ladyship's fortitude had so far forsaken her, that she received her with tears, silence, and caresses. Alicia spoke of Mr. Bertram's recovery;

and calmly talked of her hopes regarding the further re-establishment of his health, by the change of climate.

"I go," said Lady Bertram, "without flattering myself I shall behold my son ever restored to his former strength; yet I trust in the Divine Being, who blessed me with so amiable a child, that he will grant him longer to my prayers. From you, my beloved Alicia, you have been informed, I must be separated: to me it will be a grievous separation—but it is a needful one; never could Henry hope to forget his passion, if constantly beholding its object so lovely and interesting.

"Mr. Meynel has kindly offered to protect you, and treat you as his child, during my absence; but this worthy and truly respectable man is so far advanced in years, that I wish you not to take up your constant residence with him; though now in full possession of every faculty, and active as most men of half his age, yet a long state of debility may succeed; if then you were resident with him, you would be tied, perhaps, for all the spring of your days.

"Lady Augusta entreated for your company warmly this morning when I spoke to her of my leaving England; but there again an objection exists: the Earl's sentiments in your favour were the object of conversation last winter in the gay world, and his roof must not shelter you, unless your resolutions regarding the offer which his son and daughter alike wished you to accept, should change, and you, my dear Alicia, become Countess of Knasborough. With Lady Morville, therefore Alicia, must you reside: to your prudence do I trust for restraining the too giddy Mary. In pecuniary matters Sir Robert will leave such orders as he would had you been our daughter. I have in part engaged a young woman, as your servant; and we propose leaving the faithful and long tried James, as your footman, as you must, Alicia, not go into Lord Morville's family without some establishment. I shall hope to hear from you by almost every mail, and I shall also write frequently to you."

"I will, without repining, my beloved protectress, submit with patience to this separation from you; it is Mr. Bertram's desire: if still he will not behold me, and his health renders exile no longer needful, *I will* cheerfully banish myself. In Scotland lives a friend of my mother's, lately returned from Jamaica, who will, I doubt not, afford me an asylum." She thanked Lady Bertram for the noble generosity she and Sir Robert had evinced upon this occasion towards her: and in reply, her ladyship gave our heroine fresh assurances of her love and friendship; and concluded by saying, some change might take place, was Henry's health established, or would he divulge the mysterious secret; "and yet, my Alicia, I shall hope, fondly hope, that nearer ties may yet connect you to me."

CHAPTER VI.

THE day following that, in which Alicia had learned she was shortly to be separated from Henry, also from her dear Lady Bertram and Sir Robert, Lady Augusta, at the desire of Mr. Bertram, informed Alicia he would dine that day with the family, as he was sufficiently recovered to do so; and he found Lady Bertram was very anxious he should, but Alicia did not wish it.

"Mr. Bertram," said Lady Augusta, "sat down to write you this, Alicia; but the agitation he sustained was evident: he seemed afraid of saying too much; and I told him, that though I would take a message, I would not be the bearer of such a billet as he was beginning to write."

The blood mounted to the face and neck of Alicia, then fled in hurried streams to her heart. Henry had not forgot her; he was yet as solicitous to avoid giving her pain. "Say, then, my kind, my dear Lady Augusta—say, then, to Henry, his friend, his—, say that Alicia has no right to prescribe to him, but will rejoice—yes, most sincerely rejoice to see him as before."

It was some time after Lady Augusta had quitted Alicia, ere she could attend to dressing for dinner; and Henry was already in the room, where it was served, when she entered. Alicia advanced, and held out her hand to him, whose pale and languid appearance nearly overcame her. Scarcely dared she trust her voice: she saw too the agitation of Henry; and, in a few low and almost indistinct words, congratulated him on his convalescence. These compliments were returned by him in nearly the same kind of articulation. Henry sat with evident pain till the dessert was placed on the table, when he quitted the room. Lady Bertram, whose fears were roused, followed.

"Poor Henry!" said the Baronet, as he drew his handkerchief across his eyes—"how is every fond hope I had formed for him blasted!"

"I am sure, Sir Robert," said Morville, "Henry is vastly better."

Alicia had supported herself whilst Mr. Bertram was present, but found she was no longer able to do so, and left the table. Lady Augusta apologized for her, and said, "Miss Sleigh had been complaining of the head-ache all the morning."

In her chamber, for a few minutes, Alicia gave way to the tender sorrow she had experienced; and then, with apparent composure, returned to the company. Scarcely had she seated herself, when the Marquis and Marchioness of Felton made their appearance, calling again, as they had promised, on their return from Scotland. The Marquis felt much for the illness of Mr. Bertram, and declared they would have been of the party to the Continent, had there not been hopes of a reconciliation taking place with the Duke.

Henry kept his chamber the remainder of that day, but joined the family the following one. Both he and Alicia were less agitated at this second meeting; and the sweet manner

of the charming Marchioness, and elegant conversation of her Lord, contributed to banish the restraint of the party, and to give renewed life and spirits to Henry.

"Mr. Ross," the Marquis said, "had asserted his claim on the family estate; that the gentleman now in possession was far advanced in years, and without wife or child; and when he found Mr. Ross was supported so powerfully, he agreed to relinquish all claim, provided he might possess the seat-house, and a certain yearly sum; which, to avoid the tedious law-suit that his long and undisturbed possession would cause, was assented to by Mr. Ross, whose legal right to the title of Baronet no one offered to dispute; and certain forms were alone wanted to fully confirm it, which, when done, the Dutchess had assured her son she feared not the Duke's being willing to receive him and his fair bride with kindness.

After a short stay, this charming couple bade adieu to their friends at Malton Park and Malieveren; and then only three days intervened, before Alicia would be parted—alas! she feared for ever—from Henry. He would go too with the horrid secret unrevealed, which had brought him to the brink of the grave; yet his agitated and frantic manner, when he had spoke of it, deterred her from inquiry; and Alicia looked back on the days which were passed; she wondered how fast they had flown, for but one single night remained; for, ere noon the next day, Sir Robert and Lady Bertram intended to quit Malieveren—Henry likewise would leave her; and she felt as if at that time she should be forsaken by all who had loved her; that she should be forlorn, destitute, and abandoned. Alicia endeavoured, when she said "good night," to do it with her usual accent; but, as Lady Bertram held out her hand, and as Alicia pressed it to her lips, a tear fell on it; and, without daring to lift her eyes up, or trust her voice, she quitted the family, and retired to her chamber; where, finding it was impossible to combat her feelings longer, she gave herself up for some time to all the luxury of grief.

Her candle burnt out; she undrew the curtain, and, through the grey dawn of morning, caught an imperfect glimpse of Henry's favourite building, as it towered over the woods; her eyes were fixed on it, and wrapt in thought, she felt scarce conscious of her existence. The sun rose; and as its rays fell on the windows, they were seen reflecting the yellow splendour of the glorious planet; the mist slowly rose, steaming from the lake, mixing, as it ascended towards the heavens, with the lighter atmosphere; yet was each charm of early day unheeded by the sad Alicia; and the loud carol of the birds drew not her attention; for, insensible to these charms that used to open her heart to pleasing reflections, to calm and elevate her soul, she stood, as it were, immovable. One spot alone attracted her attention; for still her eyes were fixed upon the building where she had spent, the preceding year, so many happy hours, and where this she had known such exquisite misery. A figure issued from it, which, even at that distance, she imagined to be Henry, who, lingering a few minutes at the top of the hill, descended it. Alicia did not quit the window till she saw her conjectures realized. It was indeed Mr. Bertram who, issuing out of the close walk, crossed the lawn. Although Alicia withdrew from his observation, she yet kept a station from whence she could observe Henry, who looked paler and worse than he had done for many, many days; his countenance bore the traces of evident and recent agitation. He entered the castle by one of the back-ways; and

listening, Alicia heard him ascend the stair-case—stopping as he passed the door of her apartment, and the long-drawn sigh spoke the subject of his meditations, as softly he proceeded along the gallery to his own chamber.

Every idea now vanished from Alicia but one, which proudly domineered over reason, and triumphed over fortitude;—still was she beloved; for her had Henry watched the night, else why secretly revisit the spot she loved, which was endeared to both by a thousand pleasing and tender recollections; that he had gone to indulge these recollections, was proved by the time he had chosen to visit the building.

"Alas! why should this," thought Alicia, "fill my bosom with exultation, with pleasure? he will suffer from thus imprudently exposing himself to the midnight air, to the chill damp of early morning.—The tears again rolled over her cheeks; she threw up the sash; the clear air, fresh and pure, fanned her.—"I will go," thought she, "and, wandering through these delightful shades, endeavour to dispel painful ideas."

Alicia took a path which could not be seen from Henry's window, lest he might guess at her feelings by his own, and thus she might add to his sufferings. The air and exercise contributed, with her own endeavours, to calm her late perturbation of mind; and she returned before Lady Bertram's usual hour of rising, with an appearance of tolerable composure; and, changing her dress for one more suitable to the hour, she went to the breakfast-room, where she found her worthy guardian, Mr. Meynel; who, after much friendly conversation, said to her, "My dear Alicia, if you should hereafter find your situation in this family no longer eligible, remember, I have claims upon you which I expect then will be attended to: seek, then, Alicia, a home with me. Sir Robert has taken care to settle a sum upon you which will be sufficient for your expences;—but you have been Lady Bertram's almoner; you will lose that post, and I must, Alicia, constitute you mine. In this book you will find a sum for present use; and I shall also, my dear girl, delegate another office to you. Mrs. Dalrymple's daughters will, I fear, be left without those advantages which, had she possessed the power, she would have bestowed upon them: I therefore beg you to write, and entreat those girls may be entrusted to your care for a time. You, of course, will go to town with the Morvilles, when a school may be fixed upon by you for the daughters of your friend, for whose expences draw upon me."

Deeply did this instance of Mr. Meynel's attention to her, and of his own goodness of heart, penetrate that of Alicia; ere she had expressed the deep sense she entertained of his kindness, Sir Robert entered.

"Henry," said he, "insists upon setting out, as was proposed, to-day, although he appears much worse than he was yesterday, and is, I fear, very unable to begin his journey."

Alicia's heart sickened as she listened to Sir Robert's account; which was confirmed, indeed, by Mr. Bertram's looks, who made his entrance with her Ladyship;—he talked of the journey in a strain of cheerfulness, which ill agreed with the air of dejection that, spite of his efforts to banish it, clouded his features. Alicia also spoke of hopes which at that

moment existed not in her heart, nor animated her countenance; all appeared evidently to desire the others to believe, that Henry's restoration to health was reduced to a certainty by the purposed journey; and that, cheered by this thought, separation from friends was nothing; that, in looking to this period, time itself would be annihilated, and that happiness would follow him on his return to England; yet these hopes, these sentiments, were far from the hearts of all present. Frequent pauses were made; and it seemed as if the thread of discourse broken, would never be renewed.

The constraint which the party at the Castle felt was, however, relieved by the entrance of Lord and Lady Morville, who, instead of bidding adieu to their friends, as was expected at Malieveren, declared they would accompany them to Dover, and see them embark; and her Ladyship gaily insisted on Lady Augusta and Alicia adding to the party, and that Mr. Meynel should be their escort. The ladies, however, both declined. Mr. Meynel said, Lady Augusta and himself had always purposed attending Sir Robert and Lady Bertram to London, where the Earl had fixed to meet them; and that they were together to proceed to his house in Devonshire for a short time.

Lady Bertram was at length obliged to give a look of reproof, which silenced the entreaties of the heedless Lady Morville for Alicia's accompanying them to Dover, which she knew would be alike painful to her and Henry. In another room, Lady Bertram took a tender and affectionate farewell of our heroine, giving her, as a pledge of her friendship, her own picture, with that of Sir Robert, elegantly set, with several other valuable ornaments. "The levity Mary has displayed this morning," said her Ladyship, "has shocked me greatly; her heedlessness is truly unconquerable; and though she has felt severely from the illness of her brother, who is now about to quit his native country, perhaps never to return, yet the idea of the pleasure she will receive in a jaunt unthought of till this morning, has put her in as gay a train of spirits, as if no unpleasant circumstance attended the journey. Her heart is good; and yet, Alicia, I tremble for her future conduct."

Sir Robert sent to inform her Ladyship all was in readiness for their departure; and she again embraced and bade Alicia adieu.

The carriages and servants waited. Alicia took leave of all her friends but Henry, as they passed to their respective chaises—he stood talking to her upon some subject of little or no importance.—"Henry," said Sir Robert, "we wait for you; the Morvilles and Mr. Meynel are out of sight."

"Adieu," said Henry (putting a packet into the hand he had held); this, my Alicia, contains what you must soon otherwise learn.—With a sudden spring, he seated himself by Sir Robert in the coach; the door was shut, and they drove off.

CHAPTER VII.

WITH a very heavy heart, Alicia returned into the castle, and went into the apartment, where hung a picture of Mr. Bertram, drawn about the time when she first knew him—a manly-looking, but youthful figure, with bright glossy hair curling over his open forehead. "Alas!" said the agonized Alicia, "never, never, Henry, shall I again behold you; no, never shall the sad, the forlorn Alicia, again behold him who is deservedly dear to her; with you, Henry, is all happiness fled;—who now will be interested for Alicia? She is alone in the world—for all, all seems desolate, abandoned."

In some degree recovered from the first emotions of anguish she felt at the idea of separation, Alicia strove at least to change the cause, by substituting one sorrow for another, and sat down to investigate the packet Mr. Bertram had given her; but was obliged to desist, to attend Sir Charles and Lady Hutter, who, mistaking the day of their departure, had come to take leave of the family at Malieveren, previous to their quitting it. This visit detained Alicia till towards evening. Never did she feel exertion more painful or less successful;—no sooner did she see the Baronet and his Lady drive from the door, than giving orders not to be disturbed, she retired to her chamber, and unfolded the packet, which contained several sheets of paper; in the first of which, she read as follows:

"It would, Alicia, be superfluous, were I to attempt describing the agitation of my mind—Alas! you witnessed the temporary insanity I underwent (for such allow me to style it, in excuse for my words, and actions) when last we met at our favourite retreat. The illness which followed also proved the violence of my perturbation; but these proofs of the war in my soul tell you not, Alicia, what ere then I sustained; they speak of the efforts I had to subdue the passion which I knew was a guilty one. Yes, Alicia, I strove to subdue my love; I was deeply humiliated by it; but vainly I strove, fruitless were my endeavours, vain and ineffectual my efforts; for the passion, Alicia, I entertained for you before I was in possession of the fatal secret, had acquired a power over me I was not aware of; it mingled with every feeling, every sentiment; whatever I found in creation, that was lovely—whatever was noble or sublime, painted you out to me; every idea, every praise-worthy action I could perform, still seemed to draw its origin from you; you inspired—it was you who approved. How vain, then, must prove the attempts to remove you from a heart, whose every sentiment, whose every feeling was your own. Alas! God and man alike condemned the love I felt. And when I learned at Oakdale, Alicia, you were—Oh! what shall I call you?—yes, Alicia, that you were the daughter of Sir Robert Bertram, then was it I resolved to behold you as a sister—to tear the love I had cherished from my heart; but I found it was interwoven with my very existence; and, like the fatal present of Dejanira, whilst with frantic hand I strove to cast it from me, it added to my tortures, and I felt that the separation must also be that of soul and body.—For a time I concealed the conflict of the warring passions I sustained—Oft in despair I formed wild and desperate resolutions; flight, eternal seclusion, presented themselves, yet I had not fortitude to say, for a season I would quit you.—It was, Alicia, a secret flight that I meditated;—you knew not that I loved, though once in London I nearly was betrayed into

telling you so. Lady Bertram at length, tenderly officious for my happiness, told you that Henry, that her only son, was dying; that he loved, yet refused to acknowledge the passion to which he was falling a victim. The pain of concealment, and the consciousness that you shared not in all my woes, seemed, by the penance it imparted, to divest my unhallowed love of its guilt, and to sooth my grief; but when you learned its sad cause, ah! then I sunk in your esteem, in my own. Can you excuse, can you pardon?—Oh! no; but yet, tell me not, Alicia, you hate the wretched Henry;—again would he be driven to madness! I have called upon death;—the grim tyrant shook his dart at me, then left me for a season.—As I recovered from my illness, I resolved not again to behold you; I dreaded alike your resentment and your pity; yet we met, Alicia, and I strove to behold you, as it was fit I should.—Heaven, who knows my heart, who knows how earnestly I pray for it, yet may empower me to conquer my fatal love! should that be accomplished, I may see, I may again converse with you. My friends talk to me of the gaieties of Paris, where my late melancholy will vanish; whilst others speak in raptures of the pictures, the statues, the fine women of Italy:—Are these to banish you, then, from my heart? Ah! had I been born the child of some humble tenant of the Lords of Malieveren, and had you, my Alicia, been some village maid, whose love I had won—unharassed by the keenness of refined feeling, my nerves would have been braced by labour; I should have toiled for you, Alicia, unheeding of the great world, its vanities, its artificial glosses—But whither do I wander! I meant but to have said, Adieu! I meant but to have said, that I enclosed you a copy of the papers found at Oakdale: Go not, my Alicia, within its horrid chambers; alas! I tremble, as I think a wish may yet linger in your heart to explore them; and Oh! I solemnly adjure you, keep the secret inviolable—wound not the peace of those who have acted a parental character towards you.

"If I die, Alicia (as I think I shall), in a foreign land, you will find yourself entitled to all I can bequeath, though the provision, I doubt not, will be rendered needless. Mr. Meynel, who has no heir, considers you, equally with my parents, as a child. Oh! now adieu, Alicia—perhaps for ever! and sometimes recal the happy days we have passed in each other's society—Oh! sometimes think of

"HENRY."

Alicia laid down what she had read with such painful feelings, and took up the next paper, which retained on it visible marks of the agitation of the writer; it was blotted, and scarcely intelligible, and wrote with still less coherence of style than the preceding one.

"It is midnight—the last the wretched Henry shall ever spend beneath the paternal roof of his ancestors. This night, then, must not be devoted to oblivion of my woes; it shall be dedicated to remembrance dear to my heart—painfully dear. The night is calm—scarce a breeze rustles the leaves, or dimples the lake, whose waters are dimly beheld by the silver light of the moon as she sinks far beyond them;—the bright star of evening is set; now the moon also vanishes from sight—it sinks behind yon fir-crowned summit, whose top is clearly seen by its light. All is wrapped in darkness and silence; Alicia sleeps—not so Henry, whose passion hearkens not to the voice of Reason, or the mandates of Religion; and who goes, at this dark hour, to revisit the spot consecrated to friendship, where so

many happy hours have been spent in the society of Alicia. Alas! since that fatal day, it became the witness of my frantic passions; I have not dared to enter it, lest there I again might behold her who formerly endeared every scene. I shuddered as I passed along the close embowering walk; I reached the open ground, and paused as I crossed the bridge;—there oft with Alicia had I wandered. Again I proceeded, and gained the summit of the hill: I entered the building; my heart palpitated—the hour, the occasion, all contributed to strike an awe. I was about to quit Malieveren for ever; most probably I should no more behold the scenes of my youthful days, and every trifling, but well-remembered circumstance was recalled to my mind. The kindness of my parents, who, when I was yet a child, allowed my fancy to direct alterations in the grounds, filled my soul with tender grief. Ah! how fruitless their indulgence! The trees, which at that time were planted, how will their growth recal—daily recal to those parents, that he, whom they fondly hoped would still, from year to year, have continued to mark their increasing height, who should have dwelt within their shades, was already swept from the earth! Ah! vain were their hopes that he should be the staff of their old age! Heavy, deep will be your afflictions, Oh my parents! You saw not the faults of your son—his foibles you dignified with the name of virtues. Ah, my mother! you, who were the last of the ancient family of Malieveren, who looked, perhaps, too proudly on your child, as the legal representative of a race of heroes, heaven defeats your hopes, my mother;—I sink into an early grave, nor riches nor honours can avail me; they cannot confer happiness, they cannot prolong life.

"Such were the ideas that rose to my mind in sad succession; yet these gave way, and again appeared the image of Alicia to agonize, to upbraid. I paced with unequal and hurried steps this apartment; then, in the spot where madly I had dared to clasp her to my heart, I knelt, and prayed heaven to forgive me, to grant me fortitude, to resist and conquer a passion so fatal to my peace. Oh! guard Alicia, (I exclaimed), Oh! preserve her from suffering as I have suffered!

"I became more calm, more collected. As I rose, I saw the morning had dawned; and as I stood viewing each well-remembered scene, I seemed like the first man when about to be excluded from his Eden for disobeying, as he had, its laws;—yet I sunk not again into such despair; a ray of hope seemed to dart on my soul, though I saw not from whence it issued. I took the drawing, in which Alicia had endeavoured to portray the features of her mother, from the frame in which it was placed. It shall accompany me wherever I wander; as I look on it, I shall recall the early lessons of fortitude she taught Alicia, and will strive to emulate her. I shall write, however, on this subject to her, and she will not be offended at what I have done.—I saw the sun rise, for perhaps the last time, from this spot; I gazed with a kind of mingled pleasure and regret as I saw the blushing red spread from cloud to cloud, and tinge the summits of the far-distant hills; from behind which hastily rose the glorious lamp of creation, and darted his beams over the late cheerless world; the dark walls of Malieveren reflected them, and its numerous windows glittered with the bright rays; yet they seemed to cast a sickly splendour, and, like funereal torches, to shew but departed happiness. I turned my aching sight from beholding it, and descending the hill, again passed along the gloomy walk, and entering the castle, silently stole to my chamber; and thus has Henry passed the last night at the

Castle of Malieveren. I was chill with the damp air—I was ill; I am still so. Yet I have to seal the packet in which I have bid adieu to Alicia, and in which I have enclosed the fatal mystery I learnt at Oakdale.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER VIII.

ALICIA wondered why Henry had enclosed this paper, that had evidently been written with no design of her perusing it, but supposed it had been done by mistake, of which she was afterwards assured, by not finding the request regarding the picture, which he doubtless intended to have made, from what was said in the paper she had just read.

Alicia next, with trembling hand, unfolded an envelope to several distinct sheets, which were folded and numbered by Mr. Bertram; the writing on the cover was also his, and began as follows:—

"To you, Alicia, I commit the enclosed, but do not too severely blame me for anticipating you in the fatal secret;—already you are informed how I acquired the knowledge of entering the concealed chambers; you also, Alicia, know what urged me to visit them. Lord Morville and I quitted Malieveren together, in order, as you may recollect, to spend a week at York. Thither we went; I staid two days; then informed his Lordship that I had an affair upon my hands which required precaution and secrecy; that if he would promise to conceal my absence at our return home, I would leave him at York for two or three days, and again joining him there, by our returning to Malieveren together, no suspicion could be incurred. Morville, in his gay way, consented to my plan, and at night, in disguise, I quitted York, and left the chaise a few miles from Oakdale; walking forward till I came to an hedge alehouse, whose sign was the arms of the Bertrams, I stopped for refreshment, and pretending to have passed the hall, enquired concerning it and its owners. The idle tales I heard are not worth repeating.—Towards evening I quitted this house, and reached Oakdale, when twilight shrouded its grey walls. I had with me a rope-ladder, with crooks for fastening it to the wall, by which means I found entrance at a window in the second story, which I easily opened; I drew in my ladder, and struck a light, when I discovered I was in Sir Philip's apartment. Ah! Alicia, need I picture to you the blood-stained chamber—the bed, whose curtains yet remained closed—the knife—the scull—sad accompaniments! Alas! as I think, my soul sickens, my heart recoils—ideas will intrude—I banish them—I imagine myself a parricide for entertaining them; yet, per force, again they are presented;—horror! horror! my brain turns round! I say, Alicia, it cannot be!—no, it is impossible—every word, every action of his life forbids the supposition;—no, Alicia, Sir Robert could never consent to such deeds, would never delegate authority to any one capable of such crimes; and yet—Oh, Alicia!—but read, and yourself judge.

"I opened the chest, I took out the papers it contained;—I was overpowered by surprise and horror—I sat for hours motionless—my light was extinguished—all around me was dark; yet still I sat meditating on the papers I had read, till day broke through the narrow chinks. I then resolved to explore my way back to Sir Philip's apartment, in order to procure a fresh light. I had descended several steps, and nearly reached, as I supposed, the door of the bloody chamber, when my foot slipped, and I fell with a violence that for some time deprived me of sense or recollection. Recovering from my fall, I felt much bruised; I was, I found, in a spot where no ray of light reached me; I was, Alicia, in a

dismal dungeon, for such I imagined enclosed me. Murder here had been committed, and I felt as if sent to be offered a victim on the altar of retributive justice. Shall I attempt at description of the horrid forms I encountered; shall I speak of the terrors that assailed me; shall I talk of the long winding passages I traversed?—no, Alicia, I speak not of these, for ideal horrors might be presented amidst the darkness that surrounded me; and sure also the fall, which was from a considerable height, might likewise have contributed to what was a temporary derangement. I sometimes think that my senses were deranged; yet surely there exist amidst these gloomy cells some frightful *realities*. Go not, then, I conjure you, to Oakdale—venture not, my Alicia, to its horrid chambers.—Alas! I tremble alike for your reason and your life.

"An entire day and night were thus spent amidst horror, desolation, and death;—at length, after various attempts to escape, I found myself in the blood-stained chamber, and saw the apartment beyond it through the divided partition. Nature yet I think would have sunk under what I had recently suffered, had I not taken care to bring some refreshment with me, which I left in Sir Philip's chamber. Recruited by it, I sat down, and copied the papers I had found, as well as their mutilated state would allow; after which, restoring them from whence they were taken, I quitted the hall, and met at York Lord Morville, with whom you may remember I returned to Malieveren. I have enclosed the copies I took—Alas! I have no right to conceal the sad record of crimes, although at times I have meditated doing so. The paper No. 1. had been written with ink, that has faded till scarcely intelligible; you will see I have marked the parts, which were wholly illegible.

No. 1.

*To Alicia, the Daughter of Eliza and Robert Bertram, of Oakdale, B * * **

"To you, my child, my beloved Alicia, does thy sad mother write, yet in hopes future time may unfold to you your birth, which, alas! I am not permitted to do. Have you yet, Alicia, the tokens I gave; they will testify * * * * * you, my Alic * * * * * you are an orphan;—it is false; it is the cruel deliberate malice of Sir Robert Bertram;—yes, he, from whom you draw your being, the Baronet of Oakdale, imprisons me, where I ought to preside; it is he too who has torn me from my child, althou * * he is * * * * father; yet Sir Robert would not be thus cruel, was he not instigated by a love of wealth, by a desire of * * * For this he forsook his * * * for this he married the rich heiress of M * * * * It was a false, a deluding ambition that makes me thus unacknowledged, *that makes you disowned by Sir Robert*. Mark what I inform you of, Alicia; you are the legal heir of Sir Robert Bertram; his son, who is considered as such, may, to be sure, inherit the fortune of his mother, but the lands of Bertram, of Oakdale, you may prove your claim to. But why do I say that! Alas! Alicia, you have an enemy, equally your's and mine, who may never suffer you to behold this * * * * * * * Ah! why, Sir Robert, did you listen to the suggestions of this fiend in human shape, who spurred you on to forsake your once beloved * * * The life of Sir Robert Bertram seems to give the lie to my assertions; his well-known integrity, his uprightness—Ah! what chance, unless he relents towards us, my Alicia, what chance remains of contending

my rights and your's with Lady Bertram and her son; yet there are certain proofs of my marriage, of your birth * * * * * Ah! Alicia, never, I fear, will you be pressed to a father's bosom—never must you hope to bear the name of Bertram; you must live an alien, an outcast, and the name of Bouchier alone will distinguish you * * * * * I have nothing to bequeath you, my child, save the picture of your father, drawn by myself; the likeness is a striking one * * * * *

No. 2

"Alicia, I am dying— murdered; Sir Robert Bertram, thou hast done this * * * * *
* What crimes, what complicated crimes, have these gloomy and concealed dungeons witnessed?—murder is familiar here * * * * * Sure the vengeance of heaven will fall heavy on thee * * * * * thou hast instigated, thou—yes, thou, whom I solely confided in—yes, thou, more than Sir Robert, hast caused the woes I have sustained. Once he melted, once he promised to own his child; but thou stepped forward, thou intercepted, thou imprisoned—it is thou, then, rather than Sir Robert, I should accuse.—No, Sir Robert knows not what his child, what I have sustained * * * * * The wrath of the Almighty will fall heavy on the whole race. My life ebbs, but my mind yet is firm. Surely I feel a kind of prophetic spirit seize me! Child after child shall be mourned, yet my Alicia shall live, yet shall she avenge my fate, whilst death stalking abroad, shall crush the pampered heir of Sir Robert * * * * *

"If the spirits of the injured are, as I have been told, suffered to revisit the scenes they occupied when on earth, sure the sad Eliza will * * * sure she will on earth fly in shadowy forms before the accused * * * * * By night will she hover round the pillow, and pale, wan, ghastly, fright with horrid menaces * * * * * and gliding through the gloomy chambers of Oakdale * * * * *

"These lines, my Alicia, are written with blood; look on them, nor start, as I tell thee it is the blood that ebbs from the heart of thy dying mother; it calls aloud to heaven for that vengeance that is deferred but a while. Still my soul sinks not—it bends not beneath oppression * * * * *

"Adieu! Oh! for ever adieu! till beyond the grave, Alicia, thou again beholdest thy mother.

"ELIZA BERTRAM."

No. 3

Mr. Bertram to Alicia.

"How, Alicia, shall the son of Sir Robert Bertram dare to comment on those papers? True, Alicia, his father's life gives the lie to the bold assertions they contain; his well-

known integrity, his uprightness, are even in them acknowledged. Oh! say, then, is it possible that, urged by a desire of riches, prompted by ambition, he could be led to forsake a wife, to imprison her in these gloomy chambers, that he might marry the amiable, the wealthy heiress of Malieveren? Can two souls exist in one body? Can one lead to the basest actions, and shall the other be capable of performing deeds the most praise-worthy, the most noble? If this be admitted, Alicia, the whole is plain—the Baronet of Oakdale imprisoned your mother, and afterwards art of some kind was used to persuade you of her death. You too, Alicia, must have been born after his second marriage; yet you, the only offspring of the former, are the heir of his estates. Oh! is it Henry Bertram that writes this—is it then his father he dares to suspect of such complicated crimes? Surely, Alicia, the whole is a fabrication, a vile, a base contrivance, to ruin my peace, and Sir Robert's fair fame. Already do you know he has an enemy—a powerful, a dangerous enemy; already do you know, that the villain to whom I allude is capable of every art, of every diabolical action. I have endeavoured to trace the whole to him; I have supposed it was the infernal M'Rae himself, who one night, by leave of Jackson, the Oakdale steward, slept at the hall; that he had found means to enter the concealed chambers—that he had carried off the real papers left there by your mother—that he had substituted those I found in their stead; yet, Alicia, this is but a vague suggestion, made by a hope that fain would flatter me with more cheerful prospects. Alas! too well am I convinced the secret, known to so few, could never come to the knowledge of M'Rae;—your change of name, the caution which was observed towards you, even respecting your letter, whilst it proved a mystery was attached to your birth, also must have prevented M'Rae tracing the daughter of Sir Robert Bertram in Miss Sleigh. You always was conscious of being allied to or descended from the Bertrams; your mother was aware the secret was too weighty for your tender years. You doubtless have not forgotten Sir Robert's haste in quitting Oakdale; you may also remember the evident agitation he sustained at Acorn Bank, whilst it was the subject of conversation with Mr. Heaviside; and the determined and positive declaration the Baronet made against pulling it down. I have, Alicia, meditated at times, asking of Sir Robert an explanation; yet how can I do this? Alas! should it be true, what remains of happiness are left to him, must for ever be destroyed; if false, how can he again bear the sight of a child who dared suspect such a parent, so tenderly overlooking, as he does, my faults. Is it then I, Alicia, that shall hold up the glass, and bid him behold the horrid crimes that are reflected from the gloomy chambers of Oakdale?—No, I cannot, nor would your gentle nature wish I should thus inflict such torture, thus drive daggers to a parent's heart. You, I well know, will not wish by law to prove and assert your claims, of which, indeed, there appears little chance of succeeding in, as no mention is made (at least none such is legible) in the papers I found, where the proofs or witnesses are to be met with, to justify any claim being made on any positive accusation; but I have, Alicia, committed to your care a packet, sealed and addressed to my father, in which are copies of those papers, with a full account of the concealed chambers, and all I knew regarding them. If then you should hereafter receive more certain confirmation of the authenticity of the sad tale these papers contain, or if at any future period you should judge it proper to reveal yourself to Sir Robert, then give him, when the writer of this has ceased to exist, then give to my father the last sad, the cruel legacy of his son; do it not though, my Alicia, unless forced by circumstances which must bring on some explanation. Ill would it become me to raise

your arm against him who gave us—Oh! yes, gave existence to both; for then, in that packet, would Sir Robert learn the sad variety of pain I have felt on a subject that has brought me to the brink of the grave.

"Perhaps, Alicia, my mind has weakened with my body; or it may be, that the horrid night I passed in the dungeons of Oakdale, has left an impression on my brain. I used not to be subject to such weaknesses; I never laboured under superstitious ideas till of late, and now in vain I strive to combat them. I think my doom was foretold, that I am the selected victim; that the fatal passion which consumes me was ordained for me to sustain; that, through me, shall Sir Robert be punished by the disappointment of his fondest hopes.

"Is it then, Alicia, true, as has been asserted, that as the period approaches, when the soul and its earthly mansion are about to be separated, that the immortal spirit is suffered to expand itself, to look beyond its present state, and to speak of the future? So thought Eliza when she wrote in a prophetic strain, and denounced vengeance. 'Alicia (says she) shall live—she shall avenge my fate, whilst death stalking abroad, shall crush the pampered heir of Sir Robert.'—Ah! Alicia, is this not fulfilled, or at least near its completion? Unintentionally have you been, all gentle as you are, the instrument of vengeance.

"The pale and ghastly form seen by you and Mary, you, Alicia, would not easily yield your belief of; you would not have suffered merely under ideal terrors.—'Pale (says the bloody scroll) wan—ghastly—gliding through the gloomy chambers of Oakdale—fright with horrid menaces.'—Alas! Alicia, why do I raise such suggestions to you? why wish to impart to you the doubts which, in my late weak and debilitated state, have sunk on my mind! I did formerly believe the laws of nature were fixed, that the Almighty Creator had made them immutable as his power; but the horrid scenes I beheld sunk on my soul. Ah! a fatal chain of circumstances concur—they are linked with Alicia in mystery which I yet want fortitude to unravel. But what more would I learn regarding your birth; the portrait, Alicia, too fully proves—yes, it too surely confirms that you are the daughter of the Baronet of Oakdale; it is, indeed, as Eliza affirms, a striking likeness of Sir Robert Bertram, though taken, as its youthful air declares, some years ago—previous, indeed, I should suppose, to your birth. But I must lay down my pen, however painful the subject: yet it is to Alicia I write, and I forget the length of my paper. Ah! Alicia, all, every thing but you, at times are forgotten by

"HENRY."

After having finished the perusal of these papers, Alicia sat a considerable time absorbed in horrid astonishment, without seeking to investigate the probability of the story. Her senses seemed bewildered by terror and amazement: she felt herself seized by a kind of stupor that allowed not of reflection, and which, for a season, chained up every faculty. In this state of mortal suspension, she threw herself, towards day-break upon the bed, and fell into a sound and heavy sleep, nor awoke till so much beyond her usual hour,

as to alarm Mrs. Rowley, who was left at Malieveren with all the servants, whom Sir Robert neither chose to take abroad, nor to discharge.

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CHAPTER IX.

ALICIA, when she arose in the morning, had a more clear comprehension of what she had read; but her head felt light, as if she had not slept. Yet she offered not again to unfold the packet; no tear fell, nor did her countenance wear the expression of acute feeling; it was a deep cloud of stupid grief, that seemed to threaten an annihilation of her senses. Mrs. Rowley had watched with an anxious eye the change of her beloved Lady, and proposed to her, as the evening was fine, she should ride out. This, however, Alicia refused; "but," said she, "Mrs. Rowley, I shall walk out—the air may be of use—my head burns."

Slowly Alicia took, as it were instinctively, the gloomy path, along which Henry had lately gone to their favourite building; she trembled as her hand rested on the door he had closed, and perhaps would never again open it. On the table lay the frame, from which he had taken the drawing that contained the portrait of her mother. Every object recalled most painfully the assiduous friendship, the love of Mr. Bertram; the softened recollection brought those tears that had been dried up by horror and amazement. A little calmed after this effusion of tenderness, Alicia again unfolded the packet, and read the papers it contained with more composure than she had the preceding evening been able to do. She was assured Henry had found these papers where she had been informed by her mother the story of her birth was placed; yet those writings breathed a different spirit from what she imagined her mother possessed; they seemed the effusion of a proud and high-spirited woman, who bent not under oppression, but whose undaunted mind, even when dying, seemed to breathe a spirit of revenge, that vented itself in imprecations of future vengeance. Her mother, from all she could recollect concerning her, was gentleness itself; never did Alicia remember to have heard one impatient expression escape her; never heard her beloved parent reproach any one creature as the cause of her sufferings, but appeared to look beyond the grave for that happiness which for her was fled this world. "Sure," exclaimed Alicia, if a perfect model for piety and resignation existed on earth, it was my sainted mother. These papers (laying them on the table) talk of revenge; they display the writings of a heart, whose feelings, whose passions were uncontrollable;—no, (said Alicia, pushing them from her), these were not my mother's sentiments—these cannot be her writing—she bade me forgive my enemies, and to walk uprightly and humbly before God; yes, such were the first lessons my infant mind received. Yet (thought Alicia) who could fabricate such a tale? No one but Mr. Kirby and myself were in possession of the secret!"

As Alicia revolved the whole story in her own mind, it seemed, the longer she thought of it, to grow the more mysterious; for she knew not many particulars regarding her parents. Sir Robert had said who were the parents of Mrs. Bouchier? He had spoken of Mr. Bouchier, who had lived one entire year at Oakdale. Sir Robert and Mr. Bouchier could never be the same persons, although Mr. Bouchier had lived so retired as seldom to be seen; yet sure, in the very midst of his own estate, surrounded by his tenants and dependants, he must have been known. Alicia thought Sir Robert's conversation when in their journey from Bertram Castle to Oakdale; he had spoken of her mother, of Mr.

Kirby; he had spoken too of Mr. Bouchier; he appeared to be interested for Mrs. Bouchier's fate, and that of her child, and blamed the advisers of the match with a person so totally unknown as was Mr. Bouchier, of whom Sir Robert spoke as a suspicious, an abandoned character. The Baronet said he had lately been informed of the particulars he related, and his manner confirmed it. If, then, those papers were not a fabrication, Sir Robert possessed an artful duplicity of conduct, that completely evaded suspicion; for he was uncommonly frank, rather blunt and plain than wearing any air of reserve. One thing seemed to confirm the strange tale she had read—the very strange resemblance Sir Robert, though not now by any means a young man, bore to the pictures of the handsome youth she had seen in the concealed chamber; a resemblance that was the cause of the agitation Alicia sustained, my readers may recollect, when first introduced to Sir Robert at Acorn-bank. Alicia also remembered Mr. Kirby's once saying she had a better right to her name of Bertram than she had to that of Bouchier; and that, if she had what was her right, it would not be in any one's power to turn her out of Oakdale Hall. This speech of Mr. Kirby's had oft before this given much uneasiness to our heroine, and it has already been alluded to by me. Yet these circumstances, nor the papers joined to them, could fully convince Alicia that she was the daughter of Sir Robert Bertram, whose kindness to her dwelt on her soul, whilst her reason revolted at the idea of connecting this horrid tale of guilt with the other parts of a character eminent for the upright discharge of every public, every relative and social duty. The heart of Alicia too had now ceased to think of Henry as a brother, and refused his idea admittance in that view. The longer Alicia thought of this mysterious affair, the more it perplexed her; and she resolved to go the following day to Oakdale, not withstanding all its terrors, and the injunctions of Henry. True, as she thought of these terrors, she shrunk; but it was become absolutely necessary, that it should no longer be deferred.

The next morning Alicia was unable to sit up, much less take her purposed journey; she had caught a severe cold, that brought on her a degree of fever, which was heightened by the agitation she had sustained. This confined her chiefly to her bed during the period of Lady Morville's absence from Malton, who, returning at the end of a fortnight, found her friend just able to quit her chamber. Her Ladyship came home in high spirits; she was certain Henry would soon return to England, quite strong and healthy as he was formerly; he had embarked with a fair wind for France, and was much better than at the time he quitted Malieveren. Alicia was soon able to go to Malton, of which Lady Morville declared herself weary, and proposed, although autumn was nearly at an end, as the weather was yet very fine, they should go to Scarborough; she was certain bathing would be of infinite use to Alicia, who declined at first accompanying her Ladyship, saying she greatly wished to visit a Lady in Scotland lately arrived from the West-Indies, and who had been a friend of her mother's. Alicia strongly indeed desired to see Mrs. Dalrymple, though it was a subordinate wish to that of visiting Oakdale; but Lady Morville would not listen to any such proposal. "Do you not know, Alicia," said she gaily, "Lady Bertram committed you to my care? I promised nothing should take you from me, so only be a very good girl, and do what such a sage matron as I am, sees fit for your benefit; and next summer, Alicia, we will try to persuade Morville to take us a tour into the Highlands. Do you not remember, when we spent that single day at Edinburgh, how I teased Sir Robert

to take us all down into Scotland the next summer? Oh! I should like it infinitely—so pray defer your visit to the Creolian friend of your's—Is she not a Creolian?"

"I believe not," said Alicia.

"Well now, do not, my sweet girl, think of leaving me—it would be so cruel."

Alicia replied, still intimating her desire to go immediately; and Lady Morville then said she would also go. This proposal, as it defeated her plans, was rejected by Alicia, under the excuse of the roads in Scotland being broke up; and she resolved to defer her visit once again to Oakdale, and accompany her Ladyship to Scarborough, whom she found was positively determined not to go without her from Malton Park.

The fineness of the season prolonged the stay of Lord and Lady Morville at Scarborough till October was considerably advanced, from whence they went, still accompanied by Alicia, to a small house of the Viscount's in Berkshire, which had, when his marriage was at first talked of at Malieveren, been agreed to have been settled upon his Lady; but as they chose to manage their wedding their own way, the Earl and Baronet determined no fortune should be given, or jointure made, till it was seen how this couple conducted themselves. Letters had been received at Malton from Sir Robert, giving an account of their having arrived safely on the other side of the water; and at Scarborough again, both Lady Morville and Alicia had letters from Lady Bertram, dated Paris, which spoke of Henry's having borne his journey better than was expected. Before they quitted Berkshire, they learned he was considerably more cheerful, and was able to bear travelling as fast as it was judged necessary: they were then at Montargis, and meant to proceed through Orleanois, keeping nearly the course of the Loire; and as Sir Robert thought the season too late for crossing the Alps into Italy, at present they purposed spending the winter in Languedoc.

CHAPTER X.

LADY Morville now declared her intention of spending Christmas at Acorn-bank—all Sir Robert's houses being open for her reception during the absence of their owner. Thither, then, the gay Viscount and Viscountess, with Alicia, removed, and Acorn-bank, for about a fortnight, was crowded by gay women of quality, and fashionable loungers of various descriptions, one set giving way to another during the period of her Ladyship's residence there. They reached London in time for the lovely Viscountess to be presented on her marriage at the Queen's birth-day. The Earl of Knasborough and Lady Augusta were in London before the Morville's, as also were the Marquis and Marchioness of Felton, who had been received into favour with the Duke, as her Grace had expected, upon Mr. Ross being stiled Sir James. The charming Marchioness had, upon this reconciliation, been introduced at Court, and made her appearance with much eclat on the birth-day. Her elegance and beauty were the general topic of conversation, with the gracious manner she was spoke of by an exalted personage, who was pleased to say the Marquis of Felton had displayed his taste in beauty by his choice and his sound judgment of merit; for the lovely Marchioness was an ornament to the high rank he had raised her to, and that she would, from her amiable disposition and her virtue, prove an example worthy of imitation to the brilliant circle in which she moved. The Duke no longer appeared to think her alliance beneath him; but, by his kindness and attention, seemed to wish to obliterate all former disagreeable remembrances from the mind of his engaging daughter-in-law, who experienced from the Dutchess all the tenderness of a parent, and paid her in return all the affection, all the duty of a child.

Alicia most truly rejoiced in the Marchioness thus triumphing over the prejudices of the Duke, and her being as firmly established in his good graces as in the affections of the Dutchess. Alicia's only truly happy hours were spent in the society of Lady Augusta Morville or the Marchioness; but few were the hours she could thus spend; few indeed were the moments allowed her for reflection, for Lady Morville blazed forth one of the finest stars in the world of fashion, and every minute of her life was occupied in keeping up the character she had attained. The gay pursuit of pleasure her Ladyship had engaged in with so much activity, Alicia would in part have avoided; but the attempt she first made was so unsuccessful, that she found whatever career the gay Viscountess chose to run, she must either accompany or be subjected to a quarrel of a most unpleasant kind. Ill-suited indeed at present was the mind of our heroine to the light trifling of fashionable conversation, or to the gay and splendid scenes that were exhibited to her, whose heart acknowledged but one model of perfection, over whose sorrows it would have mourned in solitude. Alicia's ideas presented to her, amidst the brilliant circles in which she moved, Henry sick, languishing, dying; the strange mystery of her birth, and the gloomy chambers of Oakdale. Nearly had our heroine sunk beneath her feelings; but exerting her resolution and fortitude, she declared war upon herself, and checked the gloomy visions that haunted her sleeping and waking. Alicia found her exertions rewarded;—though she kept not pace with the lively sallies of her volatile friend, she no longer was remarked in public for the air of pensiveness which had, at her first return to town, distinguished her. Alicia sometimes supposed Lady Morville felt a transitory regret, as she heard of the

elegant presents of jewels the Marchioness of Felton had lavished on her by the Duke of Wakefield; nor as the Viscountess listened to the predictions of his Grace's short life, and the high rank the Marchioness would shortly fill, could she at all times suppress her envy at her good fortune, or mortification at the precedence which she had already obtained over her? The house of the Marquis had been furnished with great elegance by the Duke's orders at the time of his reconciliation to the match of his son with Miss Ross; and all the polite world were enraptured equally with the charming Marchioness, and the magnificent suite of rooms which, in the last week of January, were opened for their reception, when the Marchioness gave her first rout. Alicia was deeply concerned to see Lady Morville was completely out of humour with listening to the justly-deserved praises of the taste and elegance of the Marchioness;—a ball was given the same evening by the Dutchess of Wakefield. In driving from the Marquis's to St. James's Square, her Ladyship sat in silence; but Alicia soon heard her, when in the rooms, very eloquently descanting on the want of taste displayed in the apartments she had recently quitted. "Magnificent! Lord George," said Lady Morville, "pray what is it you can call magnificent? Oh la! yes, the gilding; the Duke is determined his daughter-in-law shall not want that now."

"If your Ladyship will not grant them magnificent with such costly ornaments, what do you term them?"

"Oh! the longest room is quite awful; for, as I looked up to the dome, I supposed I had got into St. Paul's."

"No bad idea, upon my honour," exclaimed the Earl of Ashford; "though had your Ladyship compared it to the inside of the pantheon, and yourself to one of the presiding divinities, it would have made a more applicable allusion."

To this speech Lady Morville replied, and another remark was made regarding the height of the dome; the chandeliers were too heavy, the lights ill dispersed.

This critique upon taste and magnificence was, however, interrupted by the Marquis, who solicited the hand of Lady Morville for the first dance; and by this mark of distinction, expunged for the present from her memory the bad taste and gilding of his apartments. Alicia was introduced to the Earl of Trewarne by Lord William Bottereaux: she was much pleased with the Earl, to whom she was till then a stranger;—he appeared upwards of forty; his manners and address were those of the finished gentleman, yet partook of that insinuating softness which wins upon the heart before you are aware, blended with a manly dignity; he danced with infinite grace; and at the conclusion of the second dance, Alicia declared to Lord Castle Mawn, who solicited her hand for the following one, that she meant to sit out. Lord Trewarne seating himself by her, entered into conversation—drawing a lively, though good-humoured, picture of the follies of those around him;—glaring vices he lashed with the severest satire, and as lavishly praised the virtues of others. Then changing the subject, his Lordship said he did not recollect having had the pleasure of meeting her before; "but (continued he) I have only lately come to town, and do not go much into public myself. I love the society of my friends; I love rational conversation; but, in the large circles of gaiety and dissipation, you meet with neither. Last winter I spent one month only in the metropolis; the rest was passed with a few chosen friends in retirement; for the deep, the heavy affliction I have undergone, though years have since rolled over, renders me, when the remembrance rises

to my mind, unfit for mixing in the gay world." Those scenes, those deep afflictions, now seemed to rise to his Lordship's mind; for, drawing his handkerchief over his face, he hastily bowed to Alicia, and withdrew. She felt for the Earl, sympathized with the deep and interesting sensibility of soul he possessed, so very rare to be met with at his apparent age. "Ah! (thought Alicia) he surely has deserved, though he possesses not, happiness; the mind of this nobleman appears an enlarged one, and his acquirements to have kept pace with his natural endowments."—These reflections were broke in upon by the Earl of Knasborough advancing to enquire of our heroine for Lady Augusta, who quitting the set with whom she was about to dance, instantly left the rooms.

Early the next day, the Earl of Knasborough called at Lord Morville's to take his leave, saying business of infinite importance called him into France, where he yet did not know how long he might remain, but should doubtless see Sir Robert Bertram and his family before he returned. The Earl took an affectionate adieu of Lord and Lady Morville, not omitting at the same time some prudent cautions regarding their future conduct, but gave not the slightest hint of his business upon the Continent; only saying he would write from Paris, to which place their letters were to be addressed. Lady Augusta was to reside at first with the Countess of Wolverhampton; and after a visit of a month, or some such time, she was to stay at Lord Morville's till the Earl returned.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XI.

LADY Morville, who passed so severe a critique upon the Marquis of Felton's elegant suite of rooms, began the morning after the Earl's departure a very eloquent harangue; in which she shewed no more partiality to her own apartments.

"Well, Lady Morville," said his Lordship, who was lolling in an indolent posture over the breakfast-table, "had we at Malieveren known our mind about marrying, the Earl intended to have new laid out the house whenever a lady came to preside in it."

"Then why, my Lord, was it not done before we came to town? I had no idea of the frightful appearance the furniture and decorations make."

"Upon my honour," said his Lordship, "I believe we shall go fast enough to the devil without making alterations where none are needed; the house was only furnished against I came of age."

"That is two seasons ago at least."

Lady Morville now gave orders to a footman to go to Monsieur Villeneuve, and desire him to attend her.

"Are you then determined," said Lord Morville, with infinite *sang froid*, to forget the prudent cautions given us yesterday by the Earl?"

"My dear Lord, do you know I dreamt all last night of such an elegant suite of apartments! "Oh! I shall die if Monsieur Villeneuve cannot produce a plan that will equal my—"

"Good morning," said his Lordship, "we shall meet, I suppose, at dinner in Hanover-Square;—am I not right? do we not dine with Ashford to-day?"

Her Ladyship set her Lord right as to the article of dining, and he humming a new opera tune, quitted the room.

"Oh! my dear Alicia," said Lady Morville, "what a charming taste this Villeneuve has! He planned out the Marchioness's rooms in a far more brilliant stile than they were finished in; it was all the Dutchess's fault, or they would have been done according to Villeneuve's first plan; but she said the sum was sufficient to build an hospital—was it not an odd idea of her Grace?—and so she would have them all her own way."

Lady Morville was now informed Monsieur Villeneuve would honour himself by waiting upon her Ladyship the next day; but he was so engaged for that, it was impossible.

The following day the plans were laid before her Ladyship; to which very important subject all other engagements gave way. At length a design was fixed upon, that, in brilliancy and eccentricity of taste, Lady Morville flattered herself would far exceed the apartments of the rival Marchioness; for so now was she deemed. Expence was never once thought of by her Ladyship; and she doubted not, if this plan was carried into

execution, of giving the ton for the remainder of the season; but as Lord Morville cast his eyes upon the figures, which contained the aggregate of the estimate made by Monsieur Villeneuve, after having consulted the different tradesmen to be employed on this occasion, his Lordship declared his surprise at the sum, by saying he did not believe the house itself, and all the present furniture, had cost so much. "The plan must be," said his Lordship, "reconsidered."

Her Ladyship did command herself, though as yet unacquainted with control, till this elegant fancy-monger took his departure, when her expostulations were pretty loud; but his Lordship, who had been roused from his usual heedlessness by the enormous expence, declared positively nothing should be done; yet still Lady Morville persisted.—"Were the Earl of Knasborough's estates equal to the Duke of Wakefield's, then such extravagance would be censurable: the Marchioness of Felton would not desire such a proof of folly from the Marquis; but she is a reasonable woman."

Her Ladyship's rage was now kindled; her smothered envy broke out, and Alicia was deeply concerned to find her friend, the once gentle, yet lively Mary, could so far be carried away by the tide of vanity, as to allow it to rouse passions which till then appeared not to have existence in her heart.

"Miss Sleigh," said Lord Morville, rising, "to you I refer myself;—her Ladyship cannot now hearken; but you are in possession of your reason, and know that till now I have never opposed Lady Morville's wishes; and yet, I am agreeable to lay out half the sum mentioned by Villeneuve; and that I am certain Sir Robert and Lady Bertram, equally with the Earl, would censure, as beyond—greatly indeed, Miss Sleigh, beyond the limits of my income. I may be deceived, and I may be ruined, but I am not yet so blind as to run headlong with her Ladyship to destruction.

Tears had succeeded to Lady Morville's phillipic on this occasion; but his Lordship remained perfectly undisturbed, and quitted the house, nor returned till a late hour in the morning.

Alicia was happy to find Lord Morville had at least more prudence than his Lady, at whose conduct she was sincerely grieved. "Alas!" thought Alicia, "I ought to pity rather than censure; Lady Morville scarce understands the value of money. Accustomed to affluence, to indulgence, she has no idea of the bounds of either; she thinks not of expence;—by lessening the former, limits should be prescribed to the latter; and this fracas forebodes many."

Such were the reflections of Alicia whilst seated by Lady Morville; nor did she attempt in the least to interrupt the fit of tears in which she was left by her Lord. Her Ladyship grew more composed, and then broke out into lamentations, of her own hard fate. Ah! why was she so hasty in her choice? Ah! why did she quit her parents' roof? To these *pathetic* ejaculations, Alicia made such kind of temporizing replies as were best suited to compose the spirits of her friend, without yielding too much to her opinion.—Again the plan of Monsieur Villeneuve was talked of, and Alicia said she

thought that her Ladyship had fixed upon would, when executed, appear too much like a copy from the Marchioness's apartments, which she did not think either light or elegant. By degrees Alicia thus brought her Ladyship to listen to her Lord's proposal, and meet him the next day with her usual good humour and vivacity.

The prudence of our heroine having adjusted what had borne a serious aspect for destroying the future comfort of her friends, she next found employment for that virtue in altering the expensive plan which Lady Morville had fixed upon. The fine taste of Alicia has been already mentioned, and the extravagant and costly decorations of Monsieur Villeneuve were changed by it for the simple and the elegant. Again this fanciful director of splendour attended her Ladyship, and assured her that this plan would come within the sum fixed, whilst its novelty would at once surprise and charm.

The next day the house resounded with the noise of the workmen employed, and Lady Morville insisted all should be finished that day six weeks; and informed her Lord and Alicia, on that day they should be opened by a ball; for which purpose cards were immediately sent to all the fashionable world that at this season were in the gay metropolis.

Whilst the alterations were making in the house of Lord Morville, the family removed to Sir Robert Bertram's, in Cavendish Square; and during the time the workmen were busily employed, day and night, in what her Ladyship had set her whole heart upon having accomplished. She ran on in her usual gay habits. Letters arrived from the Earl of Knasborough, who had reached Paris; but they spoke not to Lord Morville of what had caused the Earl's sudden journey. Alicia supposed it was known to Lady Augusta, as she appeared unusually serious, and had waited with evident anxiety and impatience for letters from her father. Mr. Meynel was yet in town, but Alicia had seen him less frequently than she wished, from her being constantly engaged: he talked of going shortly to Elmwood, his seat in Devonshire, as he imagined the air of the metropolis did not agree with him. The daughters of Mrs. Dalrymple had made a stay of a fortnight with this worthy old gentleman, before they were conducted by Alicia to the school fixed upon by her, which was with the successors of Mrs. Selden, at Clapham.

The Earl of Trewarne, to whom Alicia had been introduced at the ball given by the Dutchess of Wakefield, had assiduously attached himself to her ever since: in his elegant and refined conversation our heroine felt a sensible pleasure. This apparent attachment of the Earl had afforded a charming opportunity to Lady Morville to rally her friend. "It will indeed," sometimes she would say, "be very ill-natured of you to marry the Earl of Trewarne, when you know, Alicia, you might have had the honour of being my mother-in-law; and I dare say this favourite of your's is not above some ten years younger than my Lord's father." At other times she would gaily counsel Alicia to accept the Earl, whose immense estates, she had been told, were free of all incumbrances. "Oh! how I shall envy you the jointure that will be made; and, Alicia, a Countess must take precedence of such people as Lady Morville." Then again would she urge her to comply with the wishes of the Earl;—every body was charmed with him; Oh! she would be so

envied! it would be so charming to see the disappointment and mortification it must cause.

Alicia sometimes would reply in the same gay stile to her friend; at others, seriously assure her the Earl of Trewarne had given her no cause to suspect he ever intended her the honour of becoming his wife; an honour which, if she knew her own heart, she certainly, if offered, would decline; although, she confessed, notwithstanding his Lordship's age, she had seen few, very few men she thought so amiable, or so pleasingly interesting.

Lady Augusta and Alicia now seldom met, as the Dowager Countess of Wolverhampton confined her line of visiting within much narrower bounds than Lady Morville, who mixed indiscriminately with all who had rank or fortune to entitle them to admission in the gay circle in which she moved. Lady Wolverhampton seldom frequented public places, except the theatres; she had, in the first years of her widowhood, lived in seclusion, and but lately returned to these gay scenes on account of her son, and a daughter finishing her education. To Lady Wolverhampton these scenes had lost their relish they yet retained for the volatile Lady Morville. Lady Augusta's mind appeared in a state more suited to her present residence than to the house of her brother: Lady Wolverhampton had disobliged the Viscountess; for being her only relation in town, where age warranted the liberty, she gently hinted her disapprobation of the line of conduct Lady Morville had chosen, as detrimental to her health, and no way favourable to her character.—Lady Morville assured her aunt her health was never better; and as for her reputation, she would never do aught she was ashamed of, and therefore defied the world and its malice.

The Countess rose and took her leave, grieving for the consequences the tenets Lady Morville held might produce. Lady Wolverhampton wanted power to restrain the career her giddy relation had entered upon; but she had not an opportunity again afforded her, had she been inclined to give counsel so little attended to. The Earl of Wolverhampton was a constant attendant upon his fair cousin and Alicia; but the close and almost unremitted assiduity of the accomplished and elegant Earl of Trewarne, kept him at a distance from the latter.

The Dowager Countess therefore seldom met her nephew or his Lady; and though unwilling to part with Lady Augusta, yet hoping she might, by her prudence, restrain the volatility of Lady Morville, she agreed to her going with them, upon their return to Harley-street, which was the day preceding the apartments being finished. At length the long-expected time arrived; the workmen departed, and the company began to drive up ere her Ladyship had herself viewed the beautifully ornamented rooms, which, when first spoke of, had caused her so much uneasiness. A concert was succeeded by a masked ball, and Lady Morville's triumph was complete. The happy effect of the light and simply elegant decorations, enchanted and astonished the brilliant crowd that filled her apartments; the praises she heard from all parties of her taste, filled her Ladyship with a new species of vanity; yet these praises were due to Alicia which were engrossed by Lady Morville; for Alicia it was whose guiding judgment directed what she had planned,

and whose economical disposal of her time allowed her to inspect generally every day the alterations as they proceeded, and thus to judge of the whole; yet she envied not the high-sounding encomiums she heard so liberally bestowed, but felt secretly grieved at a fresh source of expence she saw opened for her thoughtless friends.

Our heroine overheard Lord Morville giving, to a circle of critical admirers, a direction to whom the praise of invention was due for the erection of this fairy palace; but Alicia found an opportunity to earnestly desire he would desist, to which he agreed without enquiring her reasons.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XII.

FROM this evening Lady Morville was considered as the very arbitress of taste and elegance; nought could please, either in dress, furniture, or decorations, which had not received the approbation of the beautiful and elegant Viscountess.

It was now some time since letters had been received from either Sir Robert, her Ladyship, or Mr. Bertram; the last spoke of their safe arrival at Nismes, from whence they meant to go to Montpellier, but were then undetermined upon a fixed residence. Sir Robert appearing inclined, from his letters, to cross over to Italy by sea, Lady B. seemed to prefer staying at Montpellier, if its air agreed with her son, who rather wished not to be stationary;—all agreed, however, in this, Mr. Bertram was evidently improved in his strength and looks. This account had given much pleasure to Alicia; but she now began to dread a reverse of tidings. This fear she had the joy of finding unfounded, by a letter she received from Lady Bertram, which proved, by allusions she made to a former, that at least one had miscarried. Henry, her Ladyship said, had recovered his accustomed health, but spoke not of his spirits, nor mentioned Sir Robert, further than by saying he was well when the last account had reached them; and Alicia judged from this the Baronet had, pursuant to his wish, gone into Italy, whilst Henry remained in Languedoc with Lady Bertram.

I shall not pretend to follow the volatile Lady Morville through the gay search she was engaged in after happiness; for so busily was her Ladyship engaged by keeping her ascendancy in the hemisphere of taste and fashion, so completely was she occupied, that to attempt to record with any exactness the movements of the gay Viscountess and, of course, Alicia would be a most arduous undertaking; suffice it to say, every moment was engaged between the night of Lady Morville's new rooms being opened for company, and the time when, as it was then just become the fashion to do, she resolved to give a play; in which she meant to take a principal part, assisted by some gay friends as the other performers. Lord Morville, who saw the whole world in love with his wife, and charmed by the brilliancy of her taste, thought not of refusing this new whim; and at Acorn-bank was a temporary theatre erected—the size of the house not allowing it to be within doors, and also accommodate the numerous expected guests. The arrangement and fancy of the decorations of the theatre were the produce of Alicia's taste, which before had acquired such unbounded applause: she and Lady Augusta both excused themselves, under plea of incapacity, from taking parts in the dramatical treat Lady Morville purposed giving.

Lord Morville had, previous to his quitting Berkshire the preceding year, proposed himself a candidate for a town of some importance, to represent it in Parliament; but in this attempt he did not succeed. Soon after the Earl of Trewarne became upon an intimate footing with Lord Morville, and understood the defeat he had sustained; the Earl offered, with the generosity and delicacy which appeared to distinguish him, a seat in the House of Commons to his friend, for a then vacant borough, which was perfectly at his disposal—begging at the same time no mention might be made of the terms on which the seat was procured; the Earl of Ashford being the ostensible giver of it to Lord Morville,

whose short acquaintance with the Earl of Trewarne authorised not his doing this, against the various former applications made for his interest.

Lord Morville had no sooner taken his seat, than, in order to cut a figure as well as her Ladyship, he had become a violent declaimer against the measures of government; for this, therefore, as the principal reason, was the theatrical exhibition of Lady Morville at Acorn-bank fixed for Easter holidays, when the house was not sitting.—Lady Augusta and Alicia received the company, and did the honours of the house; Lady Morville performing the first night the heroine of a modern sentimental comedy. After the performance, an elegant supper was served to her Ladyship's theatrical friends and audience; beds were provided for the majority, and the remainder returned to town.

Lady Augusta and Alicia on this occasion occupied the same chamber; to which, about six o'clock, they retired, mutually fatigued. The sun had already rose; and as it fell upon the surrounding objects, a thousand tender, but painful, ideas were awaked in the mind of Alicia. The giddy levity of Lady Morville, who could, during her parents' absence with her amiable brother (who might, for aught she knew, be sinking under increased illness), heedless of their sufferings, lead such revellings beneath the roof where she had been educated with far different maxims—"Oh! no," she at length exclaimed, as she threw her arms round Lady Augusta, who had been employed in a train of similar reflection—"Oh! Lady Augusta, to what will this lead! I cannot longer be silent on a subject equally, I am assured, distressing to you as myself; I tremble for my friend—I fear for Lord Morville."

"I see it, I feel it, Alicia; ruin will ensue, if a speedy stop is not put to the mad career this thoughtless couple are now equally engaged in; both have numberless good qualities, but both are alike vain and giddy. Alas! Alicia, my dear friend, we are unequal to the task which seems to be assigned us;—would to heaven my father and the Baronet were returned! they might, doubtless, insist upon a different line of conduct;—our remonstrances would not avail."

"What pain will Sir Robert and Lady Bertram feel at learning, whilst they are watching, anxiously watching, over the life of one child, the other was divested of sensibility so far as in their house to expose herself to the gaze of critical assurance, on the boards of a theatre, though that theatre is stiled a private one;—so expensive a proof of her vanity also, she has given!—it was, indeed, a painful exertion I have been making, Lady Augusta; for, spite of my efforts, I could not forget the impropriety I thought a beloved and, till lately, amiable friend was committing. You know I had, ere it was fixed, joined you in objecting to the plan, though (as, alas! I foresaw) ineffectually."

"The Earl of Trewarne, I find, is, Alicia, entirely of your opinion and mine upon this subject, by the hints he gave me regarding Lady Morville; and I dare say, many more of the guests at Acorn bank will censure with less delicacy than his Lordship."

"Ill indeed, my dear Lady Augusta, will the present instance of insensibility of heart agree with his Lordship's sentiments; for his soul is, alas! too deeply susceptible for his peace."

"Did not there exist too great a disparity in years, I should more than suspect, my dear Alicia, that the Earl was a favoured lover."

"No, Lady Augusta, no, he never professed, never told me he loved me;—the charm I feel in his society would for ever be destroyed was he to do so. I think I feel in

conversing with him a pleasure to which few others I now enjoy can be compared; but it is a melancholy and exquisitely refined sensation;—it is not that I feel happy by listening to Lord Trewarne, as he talks to me of a lamented wife, of the loss of his children death bereft him of; yet so powerful are the appeals, which his language, his voice, his accent, and countenance make to my heart, that every avenue to it is unlocked as I pity and sympathize."

"You talk, Alicia, of the Earl in so romantic a way, that, did I not believe you incapable of disguise, I should still think he had spoke of his love for you, and that you had not listened to these sentiments without feeling a reciprocal passion."

"I deny not, my dear friend, that I have listened to Lord Trewarne as he spoke of that passion, but not as now feeling it;—no, Lady Augusta, they were the youthful feelings of the Earl, in which, whilst he spoke, I felt most deeply interested, as I have done, when he talks of his present estrangement from happiness; and sure, in listening to a man, whose every word, every look and action breathes the virtue, the beneficence of his soul, I do not act wrong."

"You look grave, Alicia; I meant not, believe me, to censure;—I agree with you in thinking the Earl possesses uncommon powers of pleasing, with a clear and cultivated understanding, and a heart that appears the seat of virtue; so rational are his sentiments, so insinuating his address, that if you listen, no wonder you forget that it is not fit he alone should engross you."

Sleep soon after this put a period to their conversation. Alicia, however, slept not long—rising when scarce a single housemaid was up. Lady Augusta was still asleep; and the morning being a very fine one, in the last week of April, she stole quietly out of the house, and taking the path that led to the observatory, seated herself on one of the garden chairs before it, where oft, in more peaceful times than she now witnessed, had our heroine spent many a cheerful hour with the then truly happy Mary Bertram; many an hour thus seated had she listened to the fascinating conversation of Henry, whilst, unheeded, the sun had sunk below the horizon. Alicia gave way to the feelings that overpowered her soul with a kind of tender regret, and not displeasing sense of sorrow which these fond recollections occasioned; and, with her face covered by her dress, she leaned over the arm of the chair for some time; then rising softly, exclaimed, "Ah! happy days! dear is your memory to the heart of her who again cannot taste of happiness, cannot again know peace!"—Opening the door of the observatory, Alicia had advanced some steps across the lower apartment, before she perceived the Earl of Trewarne, who had at her entrance been employed in examining the orrery which stood in this room. Alicia felt mortified; his Lordship had doubtless been a witness to her recent agitation.

"You are," said the Earl, bowing, "an early riser, I find, Miss Sleigh."

"I like not to give way to a blameable indolence; and at all times, my Lord, I accustom myself to a modern portion of sleep; to exceed it is no indulgence to me."

"But yesterday you had much to exhaust and fatigue; you do not certainly think three hours sufficient to recruit your waste of spirits?"

"My spirits are good; nor have I, my Lord, that unhappy delicacy of constitution which cannot bear a little fatigue."

They next discoursed of the building, of the use to which it was assigned, and of the various mathematical and astronomical instruments it contained.—His Lordship could not refrain from expressing his surprise at the quickness of his fair companion's penetration, at the depth of her understanding, and her knowledge in sciences, of which women are in general little acquainted with but by name.

"I am indeed," said his Lordship, "now fully convinced that you do not like to give way to indolence, nor ever can have done so; it would have been unpardonable had you not, with such talents, aimed at acquiring knowledge; but you, Miss Sleigh, must, upon philosophical subjects, have had also an able master.

The subject was a very painful one to Alicia, nor could she repress the sigh which closed the sentence, as she named Mr. Bertram as her instructor.—The Earl endeavoured to draw Alicia into a further conversation regarding Mr. Bertram, but she avoided it. His Lordship then spoke of Lord and Lady Morville, expressing his fears, in very friendly terms, for the consequence of their conduct, and said Lord Morville's estates already had suffered.

"You surely, my Lord, have been misinformed; consider how short a period has elapsed since they have lived in a stile in the least likely to impair their property. Lord Morville's estates, and her Ladyship's fortune, is well known to be sufficient to authorise an elegant establishment."

Lady Morville's fortune is safe, Miss Sleigh; I know Sir Robert did not advance it, as he proposed, previous to the Scotch expedition. You appear as if offended; heaven knows I meant it not! To Lady Morville's gay parties, you, Miss Sleigh, have been my only inducement; of this you cannot but be conscious. For your peace, for their's, have I said to you what I did, in hopes your prudence might some how avail in stopping the ruin which undoubtedly every day increases and accelerates. Do not, therefore, think I meant an officious and ill-timed interference where I felt un-interested for the welfare of the parties; to Lady Augusta I also have given hints, which either she did not, or would not understand."

Alicia felt most powerfully alarmed, and conjured the Earl to fully inform her of what had come to his knowledge regarding the embarrassment of which he spoke.

"To this embarrassment I have, Miss Sleigh, most unfortunately, largely contributed."

"You! my Lord," said the astonished Alicia, "how have you contributed?"

"You know, I believe, Miss Sleigh, that it was by my interest his Lordship got his seat in the house;—intent upon making a figure, he was most desirous of getting into Parliament; with some of the members of the party he thought fit to espouse, he has closely connected himself, and, to a certain honourable friend, lost in one night nine thousand pounds. Had this cured Lord Morville of the unfortunate propensity he has of late been seized with, that loss would be a trifle; but, night after night, he has associated with a set of people, who, whatever rank is granted them in society, are, in fact, chiefly supported by plundering young men of fortune at the gaming-table, who, like Lord

Morville, are so unfortunate as to become connected with them. By this means he has lost very considerable sums; though I do not precisely know the exact amount, yet I can assure you the estate in Berkshire has now only a nominal owner in Lord Morville."

Alicia was thunderstruck at this intelligence. She had entertained no fears of his Lordship having attached himself to a set of gamblers, as, previous to his coming to London in January, she knew he had always professed a complete dislike to all kinds of gambling, racing excepted; but still more was she shocked, as she listened to the Earl's account of Lady Morville, who, he informed her, also played deep;—she had been drawn in by a set of female gamblers, whose station in life was such, that their houses were the resort of the first ranks, their company was courted, and they were visited by people of the highest fashion. Those ladies were pointed out to Alicia by his Lordship. At one of their houses, a few nights preceding, Lady Morville had lost upwards of two thousand pounds: the evening was well recollected by our heroine, for she never had seen her Ladyship's temper so much ruffled as it was when they returned home. Grieved, mortified, and distressed, Alicia inquired of the Earl what he judged was proper for her to do in this desperate situation of her friend's affairs.

"I think it necessary that at least Lady Bertram should be acquainted; her presence, doubtless, would check her giddy daughter. When a woman plays as Lady Morville does, she exposes herself to what her Ladyship may not be aware of till too late; when the finger of calumny is once pointed, it is not the season for honourable retreat."

Alicia shuddered at the picture.

"To speak to Lord or Lady Morville would not, Miss Sleigh, answer the end proposed. I gently hinted to his Lordship my opinion regarding the people I had of late heard he associated amongst, and he flew into a passion, that, had I not, upon another account, resolved to bear, must have made an entire breach between us. He, however, soon forgot I had offended; for, previous to coming here, his Lordship had 4000*l.* of me, which, I dare venture to affirm, will be transferred to other owners before the conclusion of the week."

Some of the gentlemen, Lord Morville's guests, who had risen, were seen sauntering towards the observatory, and Alicia with the Earl returned to the house.

CHAPTER XIII

THE party, after amusing themselves in different ways, all met at dinner, and the evening closed with a ball. A part of the company, amongst whom our heroine was concerned to see Lord Morville, preferred cards. Alicia standing up in a cotillion with the Earl of Wolverhampton, Lord Trewarne, who was sitting by her at the time, whispered to her his intention of going into the card-room, to prevent, if possible, Lord Morville's playing desperately; when Alicia, who never found much inclination for dancing, again sat down. She felt anxious and uneasy for the return of Lord Trewarne, who she thought suspected either Lord Morville of desperation, or some person of a design upon him. It was with much painful exertion that she had been enabled to support herself, and conceal her feelings; but now her alarm had risen to a height that rendered her restless and absent, and whilst the Earl of Wolverhampton was pouring into her ears a declaration of his love, she was thinking of all the long train of misery which seemed ready to overwhelm her careless friend, who, with a heart as light as the feathers in her head, was tripping it away to the full band that, at a most enormous expence, had been engaged for the week. Lady Augusta, complaining of fatigue, seated herself by Alicia, and inquired if she was well, for her looks had made her suppose she was not. Alicia complained she had sprained her ankle, and that the music had given her the head-ache; but these Lady Augusta saw were but pretences to avoid declaring the cause of the agitation she had perceived. Lady Morville now advancing, rallied the whole party; and Lady Augusta and the Earl of Wolverhampton were obliged to join the dancers.

Amongst the guests at Acorn-bank was a German nobleman, who had been about two months in England, bringing, upon his arrival, letters of introduction to several people of distinction. By all he had been more or less noticed; yet no one to whom these letters were addressed, had been more attentive to Baron Kaphausen than the Earl of Trewarne, who had seen him at Vienna; he remembered him at the house of the friend whose letter he had been the bearer of; and he introduced the Baron, not long after his arrival, to Lord Morville, with whom he soon became intimate. The Baron sung a good song, had a smattering of almost every language in Europe, through which he had been an universal traveller; had a story or anecdote to relate at all suitable times; was as supple and insinuating as we English were accustomed to represent the French before the late revolution; and was all things to all men—that is, as far as his abilities reached; for our heroine, who saw through the artful flattery which he bestowed upon her, gave him little credit for any virtue of heart, or depth of understanding; but she saw him possessed of a most consummate assurance, and imagined his countenance wore an air of deep-laid artifice and deceit.—Alicia had spoken to the Earl of Trewarne in the morning in French, in decided terms of Baron Kaphausen.—"Yes," said the Earl, "all this I now plainly see, and feel deeply the error I committed in trusting to the very slight knowledge I had of the Baron at Vienna, and to the recommendation of the acquaintances I formed in Germany; for I behold with regret Lord Morville's mistaken partiality to a man who I think is coolly taking advantage of him. I have endeavoured, though in vain, to open his Lordship's eyes to the Baron's true character, to his attachment to play, and the use he appears well inclined to make of his knowledge in that art; but he would not listen to me on the

subject."—The Earl concluded by assuring Alicia, that at least, while under the roof of Lord Morville, he would watch the man whom he had unfortunately introduced to his notice. Such were the sentiments entertained by the Earl of Trewarne of the Baron Kaphausen, who was one of the party engaged at play with Lord Morville.

Alicia, finding the Earl did not return as soon as she expected, was no longer able to contain her impatience, and quitted the ball-room. In the anti-room she met the Earl, who informed her Lord Morville was betting with so much warmth and want of judgment, as laid him open to the designs of his adversaries; that he had alternately lost and won. "When I quitted the room," said the Earl, "Lord Morville had just won 1500 guineas, and I think he may be about half that sum gainer; but a large bet is again depending."

"For heavens sake! return—you yet, my Lord, may prevent the ruin so eagerly courted."

The Earl obeyed, and the agitated Alicia returned to the dancers. Again she was besieged by Lord Wolverhampton—again she was scarce sensible of his presence.

Supper was at length announced; but it was not till after repeated messages that Lord Morville appeared. With grief, though not with surprise, Alicia marked the abstracted and agitated air which sat on his features, and saw him swallow bumper after bumper, whilst he sent from the table, untouched, the delicacies with which he repeatedly filled his plate. Lord Trewarne's looks spoke that concern which he could no otherwise impart to our heroine without exciting observation; nor was it in her power to obtain any information from his Lordship, the company not separating to their chambers till after he had left the supper-room. Lady Augusta complained of fatigue, and Alicia resolved not to communicate to her the unpleasant account the Earl of Trewarne had given, at least till morning, as it would only be adding to her Ladyship's fears, without lessening her own.

Alicia slept little, and rose, after being a short time in bed, with a design of going out to walk; but recollecting her meeting the Earl the preceding morning, she resolved to wait Lady Augusta's rising, and not to go alone. She therefore went to the library, and took a book, with which she meant to return to her chamber; but her feet, as it were, involuntarily turned to a small room which adjoined the library, and was Mr. Bertram's study when at Acorn-bank. Here Alicia had not sit long, when she heard voices from the library, which did not attract her attention till the foreign accent of Baron Kaphausen struck on her ear, and immediately she distinguished the other was that of the Earl of Trewarne, who upbraided the Baron for his conduct in regard to Lord Morville, whose guest he was, and reproached him with meanness in winning his Lordship's money at a time he knew he was off his guard. Kaphausen warmly defended himself, by swearing no unfair means were used; that it was Fortune which had favoured him, and he would have been a fool to turn his back upon her because she had jilted Lord Morville. The Earl also accused the Baron of designs against Lady Morville's honour, which the other very coolly denied, saying, whatever he might once have wished, he then was perfectly easy what sentiments her Ladyship entertained of him; it is her friend, my Lord, the charming Miss Sleigh, whose love I wish to obtain, and I cannot say I have any reason to despair."

The Earl now could no longer command himself, but flew into a rage when he heard Kaphausen make the last insinuation.—"Miss Seigh," said his Lordship, "entertains exactly the opinion of you that you merit; never will she, I am well assured, listen to the Baron Kaphausen after he has ruined the husband of her friend; and dare you, ungrateful and abandoned as I believe you are to every vice—I say, dare you look up with hope to the divine Alicia?"

The Baron laughed. "And you, my Lord, then, I suppose, dare look up to this divinity?"

"I have more respect for my own character, Baron Kaphausen," said the Earl, with a sarcastic tone of voice, "than to suppose that you and I should enjoy the same privileges."

"I shall," replied the Baron, in the same tone, "suppose my right to Miss Sleigh is equal to your Lordship's till she gives some proof of her preference, and then I do not feel disposed to yield her; for depend upon this, my Lord, you shall not prevent her being mine upon some terms, which at present she may, if she chuses, make matrimony."

"Wretch!" exclaimed the irritated Earl, "is it for you to profane the name of her who is dearer to Trewarne than all the world beside? can he then tamely hear thee talk of her thus?—no, by heaven, and all that is sacred, I swear thy blood shall atone for the insult thou hast dared to imagine to her who is infinitely more prized by me than the blood which mantles round my heart."

"Few women," exclaimed the Baron, with a cool kind of insolence, "are worth endangering one's life for; but on this occasion I am at your Lordship's service."

At this juncture some gentlemen came into the library, and Alicia heard the Earl go out. Distracted almost by what she had recently learnt, Alicia scarcely knew how to act; she was almost assured of Lord Morville's ruin, and she dreaded a fatal meeting between the Baron and the Earl, whom she saw slowly and alone enter a walk that led to the river which flowed through the grounds; and without thinking of the declaration of his sentiments she had listened to, so as to prevent her, Alicia took another path, which communicated with that the Earl had entered. When they met at the turning of the walk, his Lordship started, for he had been sunk in revery. Fixing his peculiarly fine eyes upon her, he inquired of Alicia if she had met with any thing that morning to agitate her, or if it was merely the traces of what she had sustained the preceding evening, which he marked upon her countenance.

"Both, my Lord; I am indeed much grieved. Alas! do, I conjure you, inform me how Lord Morville's and the Baron's losses and gains now stand?"

"I perceive, my dear Miss Sleigh," said the Earl, "that you are prepared for the tidings I have to impart; for I saw that you marked last night the desperation of Lord Morville's countenance, at which time he had lost (chiefly to the Baron) four thousand pounds. You observed, I dare say, Madam, with grief equal to mine, that Lord Morville was deeply intoxicated before we quitted the supper room, which I did earlier than the rest of the party; for I felt my spirits completely harassed, and then had no dread of what was about to happen. Poor Morville, desperate from his losses, and almost distracted by the wine he had swallowed, privately challenged Kaphausen to try again their fortune by dice; and when all the company were retired to their apartments, the instruments of his Lordship's ruin were produced. I arose early, with an intention of walking to the observatory; in

passing the room where we had supped, the door of which was ajar, I was shocked to hear Lord Morville's voice, in an elevated and sharp tone, wishing himself at eternal perdition; then swear, 'once for all, there it goes.' I rushed in, but the fatal dice had rolled on the table, and Morville, pale, breathless, and almost suffocated, had sunk in his chair. 'Good God! what means this!' I cried.—'Means!' said his Lordship, starting up with a wildness of manner, 'it means ruin, beggary, damnation! I have thrown away my own happiness; I have ruined the woman whom I should have protected—in her father's house too have I done this! but I will not live to hear his reproaches.'—Throwing up the sash, Lord Morville leaped out, and ran with all his speed down one of the walks opposite the house. I followed, with Kaphausen behind me; but the speed of Morville far exceeded our's; yet we were so near as to behold him mount the parapet of the bridge, and from thence dash himself headlong into the river, which there, you know, flows deep. My speed was redoubled at the sight; I leaped into the water, and caught him, but was obliged to relinquish my hold. The Baron now, however, reached me; and when Lord Morville again rose, with his assistance he was fortunately dragged to shore."

"Thank God!" said Alicia, who was breathless with terror, "thank God he is spared; yet may his virtues predominate, yet may Lord Morville be a blessing to all around him!"

Alicia wept plentifully, nor could the sympathising Earl refrain from tears as he beheld her's, by whose request he resumed his tale.

"His Lordship," said the Earl, "was soon so far recovered as to be able to walk into the house, and to the servants a plausible tale was told regarding their master's appearance, as well as our's, who now became more composed. I learned what had been the cause of the desperation he had committed, which was indeed total ruin:—the first and second throw with the fatal dice had more than repaid Morville's losses, but each succeeding one was against him; yet, urged by the distraction of his mind, he continued till all was gone."

"All!" said Alicia, looking aghast,— "sure, my Lord, you meant not that in its full extent—sure Lord Morville risked not his estates?"

"Would to heaven, my dear Miss Sleigh, I could reply as I could wish! would to heaven I could say the imprudent young man had left himself a house to shelter himself or Lady Morville!"

"Alas! my Lord, does my friend then know of this?"

"She does not, nor will, I hope, till matters are somehow settled."

"Oh! with such a cool, deliberate villain as Kaphausen, I doubt there are little hopes even of a compromise; say then, my Lord, how is it? you tell me of affairs being settled before Lady Morville is acquainted with what has happened?"

"I have, my dear friend, already so far interfered as to justify what I have said. I have taken measures to satisfy the Baron for the present, so that the world may remain ignorant of what has happened; and when all is settled, I shall have from Lord Morville bonds for what I advance, payable when he is Earl of Knasborough, at least such is the plan that I have in a hasty way proposed. In early life I was well acquainted with the Earl of Knasborough and Sir Robert Bertram, though years have elapsed since we have met, from my long residence in foreign countries, and my afterwards seclusion; with both, I flatter myself, I may prove a successful mediator."

From Alicia's first introduction to the Earl of Trewarne, she had considered his character in a most amiable light; but now he appeared to her as something above the common race of mortals; except Henry Bertram, no one, she thought, would have acted so nobly;—he had stepped forward like the guardian angel of Lord Morville, and had snatched him from death and despair; he it was, whose generosity would shield her dear, her beloved Lady Morville (for so yet, notwithstanding her follies, she was) from misery; it was the Earl, whose exalted friendship would save the hearts of Sir Robert and Lady Bertram from many a bitter pang. Alicia attempted to articulate her feelings; but, too powerful, they mocked at the weakness of expression, and the words died ere they reached the ears of the Earl, who beheld them more eloquently depicted on her finely expressive countenance.

"It is," said his Lordship, "a selfish pleasure when I confer happiness; and to merit your approbation, what yet I have done, or mean to do, is a comparative trifle."

"I am indeed sensible of your Lordship's friendship," said Alicia, sighing; "at present it is almost the only satisfaction I enjoy; you must not then deprive me of it, nor must you, my Lord, risk a life, spent in acts of benevolence, against the sword of such a villain as Kaphausen."

"Alicia," said the Earl, "what is it you mean?"

"You cannot, my Lord, have forgot the challenge which passed so lately in the library; nor can you, humane and nobly generous, approve of a practice which, it is true, custom authorises, and which honour proudly commands."

"Excuse me, Miss Sleigh, on this subject I dare not argue against the dictates of conscience; nor dare I, holding the rank in society I do, absolutely reject what a regard to my honour demands; but of this, rest assured Lord Morville's affairs shall be entirely settled ere I will venture my life against Kaphausen's; and many things may intervene which will utterly prevent any meeting of that nature. Pardon me now for inquiring how you, my dear Miss Sleigh, came by your knowledge, as, unless the Baron has informed you, it appears unaccountable; it is not yet half an hour since I took him into the library to talk upon matters that, I believe, were never mentioned, as he spoke of what put me off my guard so far as to produce the challenge to which you allude;—sure, then, the infamous Kaphausen dared not disclose this to you?"

"No, my Lord, I was in the room adjoining the library, and by that means came into possession of what passed."

"Then you are also, Alicia, in possession of a secret I have hitherto carefully guarded from you, and have learned that on you depends my future happiness or misery. Already you know in early life I loved - fondly loved; you know the sad deprivation of happiness I sustained. I forsook for a time my native country, my friends; my heart I had supposed was incapable of again loving: I saw you, Alicia, and felt I was mistaken, for the passion you inspired was violent as my first;—for you I again mixed in the gay circles in which you moved. Afraid to trust to the dictates of my heart, I scrutinized, I listened; but, from each inquiry, you rose with added lustre, superior to all who surrounded. I yielded then, without opposition, to the love inspired by an object amiable as lovely, and fancied happiness again was in my reach. Then it was, Alicia, I learned you were beloved by a youth, worthy even of you;—despairing I chafed, or rather tried to chafe, the delusive hope I had conceived; but I soon understood that, however strange I thought it, Mr.

Bertram's attachment was a hopeless one. I then wrote to Mr. Meynel and Sir Robert Bertram for permission to address you. As yet, even from Mr. Meynel, I have not heard; but should I obtain from him and the Baronet what I have asked, will you then, my beloved Alicia, listen to me on a subject so connected with every future plan of happiness? To the idea of your rejection such despair is annexed, that I now execrate the accident which has caused me to make a declaration of my feelings."

Alicia summoned that fortitude and presence of mind which the sad tidings the Earl imparted had nearly overthrown. Her present feelings, the deep sense of his generosity to her friends, all rendered her unfit to judge how she should answer the declaration she had listened to; and she dreaded being betrayed into making some promise to which her heart would not assent when the impulse which urged it had subsided. Rising, therefore, with as collected an air as she could assume, she replied, "I am, my Lord, sensible of the honour I have obtained in thus being distinguished by you; ever will I recal the idea of your partiality with pride. Insensible must I have been to superior merit, superior attainments, had I not, ere now, derived pleasure from the friendship with which you have honoured me; and now, my Lord, how can I determine to reject when I have been listening on a subject which has so deeply interested me in your favour, and given me ideas the most exalted of your character? I cannot now judge of my heart, when your generous conduct to my friends has unlocked every avenue; it is, my Lord, an unfair advantage you have taken;—speak not to me again on the subject, till you receive answers from those who have a right to direct me; then I may be less under the influence of circumstance, and more a free agent."

"Oh! tell me not, Alicia, I have taken an advantage of your generous nature, wound me not thus cruelly; you must be, you are satisfied I meant not now this declaration of my feelings, which has been wrung from me by accident. You know also the Baron entertains a passion for you; allow me to warn you of its consequences, for Kaphausen's soul is incapable of a worthy love; he seeks but his own gratification; he is insensible of the excellence of the object which has inspired the passion he feels, and he will stop at nothing to accomplish his ends. I tremble for your safety. Alas! dared I endeavour to prevail upon you to be Lady Trewarne, you would be safe from his attempts; then I should have it in my power to chastise his insolence."

"I thank you, my Lord, but Alicia can defend herself against the arts or insolences of such villains as Kaphausen."

"I will not urge you, I will not owe to a generous impulse of your heart, that which yet I hope love itself may grant; allow me but to retain your friendship, and bestow on me, Alicia, your confidence."

"That, my Lord," said Alicia, extending a hand the Earl respectfully raised to his lips, "that friendship is cemented for ever, I trust, between us; but speak not to me of love."

The Earl for the present obeyed, for he spoke of Lord Morville—describing to Alicia, from the bridge on which they now stood, how his Lordship's life had been endangered, how saved. The conversation then turned on Lady Morville, whom Alicia judged it was necessary should be acquainted with the derangement of her Lord's affairs; but the Earl said it was under the idea of concealing his folly from his Lady that Lord Morville had been brought to accept the terms made with the Baron.

"To Lady Augusta sure, then," said Alicia, "there can be no impropriety in revealing the truth"

"By no means," said the Earl; "Lord Morville has sworn, should his folly and ruin become known to his relations, he would instantly end a life he could not endure."

They were joined by Lady Augusta and the Earl of Wolverhampton. Lord Trewarne affected to be gay, and Alicia concealed her feelings.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XIV

THE company at Acorn-bank, during the morning, divided into separate parties, some strolling about the grounds. Lady Morville, with several of her guests, rode out on horse-back, whilst her Lord, under pretence of indisposition, remained in his chamber. Alicia had seated herself in Lady Bertram's dressing-room, as most likely to avoid intrusion, that she might have leisure to reflect on the strange events of the morning; when, without any ceremony, the door opened, and Baron Kaphausen entered to tell her what she already was informed of—that he loved, and wished to marry her;—to force her to which, he spoke of Lord Morville's ruin, and her own state of dependance.

Alicia's pride and resentment were equally roused; and, in cool and determined language, she gave, in such terms of sarcastic contempt, a refusal, as would have stung to madness almost any one but the phlegmatic Baron, who appeared not in the least moved, and inquired if she had well considered the importance of the offer she had rejected; that he was now going to quit Acorn-bank, but would see her again in London, and supposed by that time she would think differently; and bidding her good morning, left the apartment.

Soon after Alicia was joined by Lord Morville. "I have," said he, in a horrid tone of voice, "met Kaphausen, who tells me he means to marry you, and has insolently asked my consent."

"The Baron has, my Lord, this instant quitted me; I was obliged to listen to proposals that, you may be certain, I positively refused; I deemed them, my Lord, alike insulting to you and myself after his late infamous conduct toward you."

"Ah! Alicia, did he then dare to inform you what has passed?"

"In part he did, my Lord, but from the Earl of Trewarne I had the sad recital."

"Has then the Earl betrayed me? Does Lady Morville, does Augusta know my folly, my wretchedness, my ruin?"

"No, my Lord; though the Earl related the particulars, it was chance first revealed to me the events of last night; the Earl bound me to secrecy."

"Oh! Alicia, vainly did the noble Trewarne strive to prevent my ruin, vainly did he caution and point out to me the fiends who lurked to devour me; but for this generous friend, the heart of my beloved Mary must have been rent with anguish; but for him, Alicia, I should have rushed, unbidden, into the presence of an offended Deity."

Lord Morville was pacing the apartment with quick and unequal steps, but now made a full stop; and as he fixed his eyes on Alicia, said, "The Earl too loves you, Miss Sleigh; to me it has been known some time. I made him sensible of poor Henry's prior claims to your heart, and he concealed from you his attachment till he heard Sir Robert's sentiments respecting settlements, and also whether Mr. Bertram still, as before, despaired of an union with you. I know, Alicia, I have forfeited all claim to your esteem; my opinion therefore can have no weight, or I would say, if still Henry is rejected, where will you find a person worthy of you, if not the Earl of Trewarne?"

Ere Alicia could reply, a servant informed Lord Morville that the Earl waited him in the library—a summons which his Lordship obeyed, after he had made Alicia promise not to impart her knowledge of his misconduct to his Lady or sister. "Allow," said he, "a change in my future conduct to precede the information."

On the countenance of Lord Morville, whose general expression was an air of disengaged frankness and gaiety, was depicted deep humiliation, but mixed with a kind of wild despairing grief, which slashed over it by fits.

"Oh! would I was not thus restrained!" thought Alicia; "would that I could pour out to the kind consoling Lady Augusta the various sorrows that swell at my heart, and whirl my brain in a chaos of reflections, dark, gloomy, and distressing, where no one ray of comfort breaking in shews in perspective happier days, and bids me hope."

The declaration the Earl had made to her in the morning now presented itself; and with all the composure the present state of her mind would allow, Alicia reviewed her heart, from which she had endeavoured to drive the idea of Henry Bertram. Next to him, she found Lord Trewarne enthroned there;—she had admired his elegance of manners, his various and pleasing talents:—these had sunk, with insinuating force, on a heart which never lightly yielded its esteem; but that was his Lordship's; his virtues had enforced it; and the recent proof she had received of the noble generosity of his soul, of his attachment to herself, had placed him in her estimation far beyond any one she knew, save the favoured Henry. But she felt not for the Earl that romantic, that wholly engrossing sentiment, which was alone in the power of Henry to excite;—there, and there alone, he reigned unrivalled; for the Earl was admired, esteemed, and at present almost worshipped by Alicia, but it was Henry Bertram she loved, spite of her exertions to the contrary, and he it was, he who alone possessed the undivided power over her affections; and if he wished, if he desired she should marry Lord Trewarne, from the idea which her whole soul now revolted, she would endeavour to conquer her repugnancy, and consider him as her future husband;—yes, for Henry would she sacrifice all her present feelings, so that she might contribute to his happiness. Alicia, quitting the dressing-room, was passing along the gallery, in hopes of finding Lady Augusta returned from her little excursion, when she met the Earl of Wolverhampton, who, with a very serious air, entreated Miss Sleigh would favour him with a few minutes' conversation, as he wished to speak with her on a subject that deeply interested him. Alicia, whose thoughts instantly presented her with the idea of the Baron and Lord Morville, led the way to the apartment she had just quitted; when, to her utter surprize, which, had she attended to the eyes or gallant speeches of his Lordship, she might have expected, Alicia received from the Earl of Wolverhampton the third declaration of love she had that morning listened to.

"My Lord," said Alicia, "reflect upon the imprudence of which you are guilty;—I am doubtless honoured by the attachment you have declared, and shall ever remember it with gratitude, but must decline offers unsanctioned by your noble relations, who would never receive into their family a portionless orphan."

The Earl said no one had a right to object to his own election, and that Lady Wolverhampton had expressed her approbation of his judgment in selecting a woman whose amiability promised to ensure his happiness.

Alicia expressed her obligations for her Ladyship's good opinion, but added that her inclinations at present did not coincide with his Lordship's wishes, as her heart declared not in his favour, or that of any one.

His Lordship then expressed his hopes that time might make, with his assiduities, an alteration in his favour, as at present she felt no predilection for any more fortunate rival.

Lady Augusta entered, and the Earl almost immediately quitted the room. "Has my cousin," inquired her Ladyship, "at length, my sweet girl, ventured to declare to you his passion? and have you refused him, for so, from your countenances, do I infer?"

"You are right, Lady Augusta; but why did you so readily make the inference?"

"Because, Alicia, I have long been his Lordship's confidante; from me he never concealed the passion you had excited; but I encouraged not a declaration of his sentiments to you, whose heart I knew, although I was not your confidante, Alicia, was in possession of Henry Bertram—nor could I suppose he was already forgotten by you, or that my good cousin had any chance of proving a successful rival to Mr. Bertram. But, my dear friend, allow me to be the Earl's advocate with you; some hidden circumstance prevents an union with Henry, and, alas! I too well know our hearts will not obey at command the dictates of reason, nor is it in our power to transfer our affections; yet, Alicia, if this is possible, would it not contribute alike to the future happiness of you and Mr. Bertram? His conduct regarding Mr. Carleil plainly proved it was his opinion, that were you married, he should regain his peace;—it is necessary, Alicia, for your own sake also, you should have a home independent of the Baronet or his family, who, while you remain single, are banished from their's."

"Ah! my dear Lady Augusta, call not thus into action ideas so painful. I must not love Henry Bertram; time may effect what now I vainly strive to accomplish;—but tell me not of marrying—alas! my heart revolts against the idea. The Earl of Wolverhampton deserves a richer, a fairer bride than the poor Alicia, who will not impose on him by bidding him hope time may so far change her sentiments, as to enable her to say she prefers him to all his sex; and till then I shall never consent to give my hand at the altar to an amiable young man, who well merits that happiness which it is not in my power to confer."

"Yet, Alicia, reflect ere you finally refuse the Earl, who is endowed with so many truly amiable and pleasing qualifications, which, in the circle of domestic life, bids fair for insuring happiness;—loving you, Alicia, almost to idolatry, if united to him, ere long your gentle heart would do him justice."

"I know the Earl to be amiable, handsome, accomplished; but, Lady Augusta, why thus urge——"

"Because, Alicia, I wish his happiness; but yet think not I wish it independent of your's, for so it could not exist; and because, Alicia, I cannot bear you should prefer the Earl of Trewarne to Francis, merely for wanting a kind of plausibility of manner which makes the Earl credited for what, if he does possess, he cannot in a more eminent degree

than my cousin, of whose unaffected goodness of heart I could relate a thousand instances;—and I am actually, Alicia, at this moment not inclined to think the Earl all perfect; for though, perhaps, at present he is nearly what he wishes you to believe, yet there appears a somewhat at times in his countenance which implies he has not always been so; it is a look which carries a degree of libertinism—have you never observed this, Alicia?"

Our heroine defended the Earl of Trewarne in warm terms;—never in her presence had his countenance worn an expression so foreign to what she judged his real character.

"Excuse me, Alicia; perhaps," said her Ladyship, "in pleading the cause of Lord Wolverhampton, whose real worth I know, I may have gone beyond proper limits as I spoke of him I deem his rival."

"As yet, Lady Augusta, you know not all the merit the Earl of Trewarne possesses. Oh! did you know his candour, his generosity, his noble sentiments, his upright, his liberal soul, you then would with me think all eulogium falls short in speaking of them."

Any further conversation was put an end to by Lady Morville's sending to request Lady Augusta and Miss Sleigh would come to her instantly. The summons was complied with, and they found her Ladyship in the greatest spirits, busied about giving directions for some alterations in the dress which that night she was to appear in as the heroine of a deep tragedy. To consult upon this highly important affair had she sent to Lady Augusta and Alicia, who could not forbear deeply sighing as she recalled to mind the distress which, however lightened by the generous friendship of the noble Earl, must yet fall heavy on her gay friend. Having settled the important affair of the dress, Lady Augusta and Alicia left her Ladyship to attend the play.

The elegant little theatre at Acorn-bank was filled with a circle of the first connoisseurs of the drama the fashionable world could produce, who were divided in their opinions regarding the charming Lady Morville. The dispute was, whether she seemed more at home in the former performance, when she appeared as a modern lady, a part she performed every day, or in that she now personated, in all the wild and deep distress of a lofty tragic Queen?

Alicia felt not interested in this debate, which was agitated between every act. The Earl of Wolverhampton was seated by her, but spoke little, and appeared dejected. The countenance of Lord Morville wore a look of rather more composure than in the morning. The generous Earl of Trewarne appeared solicitous to dissipate his Lordship's chagrin; and the Earl, dividing his time between him and our heroine, seemed to live but as he could infuse happiness into her bosom; yet she felt it not. Anxiously passed the time; and it was a degree of comparative comfort Alicia felt when the company separated, and she retired to her chamber, where she found her mind too busily occupied to sleep. The strange occurrences of the day completely and fully engrossed her; the folly and imprudence of Lord and Lady Morville also filled her with a painful sense of future foreboding; and she had received that day offers of marriage from two noblemen, both of whom she highly esteemed, yet had she refused both. The visit to Acorn-bank seemed to team with fatality. Now Alicia recalled what Lady Augusta had urged respecting the Earl

of Wolverhampton. Alas! too certainly she it was who banished Henry Bertram, and with him her kind benefactors; was it probable then she should reject without consulting those benefactors? Had she a right to do this? Had not Henry, when Mr. Carleil offered her his hand, wished her to accept him? To contribute to his happiness, willingly would she make the sacrifice of her own; yet she knew not how far she had it in her power to decide her fate. Oakdale was still unvisited by her, and Henry might not have fully explored the secret; but, alas! again she thought that way little hope remained to cheer, for too certain was this one fact proved—Oh! too sure she was the sister of Henry! Again the incongruities of the story rose to her mind, and again, as oft before, was she lost in a labyrinth of wild and fearful conjecture.

Thus did Alicia pass the night, restless and anxious, and rose with her mind and body equally unrefreshed, but felt happy that this day the gay party at Acorn-bank would disperse. By noon none remained but the rival Earls; and the Earl of Wolverhampton, after having had another interview with Alicia, also set out with an intention of going instantly to France, to consult with his friend Henry on a subject so near both their hearts; and if he favoured the love he felt for Alicia, then to beg Sir Robert's permission to address her, although she still assured him that his friendship, though highly prized by her, could never be returned by the love he professed to feel. To Sir Robert and Lady Bertram he took letters, as also from Lady Augusta to the Earl her father, whom Lord Wolverhampton purposed to see in his road, as the Earl was at Versailles attending the French Court upon some important business, but of what nature Alicia knew not. Another day was spent at Acorn-bank, the Earl of Trewarne still remaining as Lord Morville's guest; and never did the Earl appear to more advantage in the eyes of our heroine, as she saw him kindly endeavour to support Lord Morville's drooping spirits, and in portraying the ill-timed raillery of his Lady.

The morning of the second day after the Earl of Wolverhampton quitted Acorn-bank, the remainder of the party returned to London. Alicia was drove by the Earl of Trewarne, which favour he solicited, and she did not refuse. The conversation soon turned to what occupied Alicia's mind—the situation of Lord Morville's affairs, on which subject she had not had an opportunity to speak to the Earl for the two preceding days. His Lordship informed his fair companion that Lord Morville had wished his Lady would not see the party which were invited for the following week; but this the Earl had opposed.

"His Lordship was, I think, right," said Alicia, "it surely would be more prudent."

"But then, Miss Sleigh, reflect on the consequences that would follow so public a declaration of all not going right, not to say any thing of Lady Morville, who must in that case be informed of what has taken place; for I understand the tradesmen's bills are pretty considerable, and I do not dispute, were these people to learn, as doubtless they would, of the company being forbid his Lordship's levee, there would be rather an unpleasant association of bills and bailiffs the following day;—such a thing happening would throw all into an additional confusion; and I do not fear but the Baronet will settle those accounts for his Lordship, but which, in that state of affairs, unless I or some friend at hand did, would prove a most unpleasant piece of business."

The Earl then informed Alicia that the Berkshire estate, which was but a small one, was all that the imprudent, Lord Morville had left, and even that was deeply mortgaged, as she before knew; but the Earl who had raised the money upon it, declared he would return the title deed upon his arrival in town. The Malton estate Kaphausen had given his Lordship a written promise should be his for a certain sum infinitely below its value, "by which," said this generous friend, "My dear Miss Sleigh, you will understand my hopes for concealing from the world the knowledge of Lord Morville's folly are well founded, as all the securities resting in my hands will enable me to do as I wish; and when Sir Robert advances her Ladyship's fortune, a part may be cleared, should the Baronet not think the Berkshire estate an adequate settlement."

The generous, noble, yet delicate manner in which the Earl had arranged the affairs, with his way of communicating what he had done to Alicia, made her ready almost to believe he was of a superior order of beings; and she expressed only in part her sense of his conduct. Almost was she afraid to trust herself to speak on a subject in which she was so deeply interested, lest the Earl might make inferences from the warmth of her expressions, which would too highly flatter hopes she wished, for his sake, might be extinguished; yet wished, in place of the passion from which these apparently disinterested actions spring, a friendship might arise, pure, yet strong, as her own.

In answer to these acknowledgments of our heroine's, he said his long retirement from the gay world had taught him to think differently from it. "To me," said his Lordship, "no happiness exists but in active benevolence;—I have, Miss Sleigh, felt misery and keen anguish, the recollection of which is yet at times insupportable;—to chase sorrow from my friends has been for years my only enjoyment; my fortune, from my retired life, has accumulated to an immense degree, although my charities have not been very circumscribed. Ah! Alicia, if it is in the power of Trewarne to shield one pang from that gentle heart, his whole fortune to himself were a comparative trifle; deem not then the exertion made for friends so dear to that heart an obligation, or to be viewed in any light but as a pleasure done to himself."

Alicia sighed, but spoke not.

"Fear not," said the Earl, "I am about to speak on a subject which, whilst it engrosses my every faculty, shall obey the injunction you have laid, and shall not be intruded."

"Alas! my Lord, I accuse myself of ingratitude, of an obstinate blindness to my own happiness; but my affections wait not on my will; they oppose my reason, my judgment. Whatever way I look, I suppose I am doomed to suffer; but you, my Lord, I shall never consent to involve in the misery which I imagine must be my lot, by giving a cold, lifeless consent to be your's. Again have I examined my heart; it esteems, it almost worships your virtues, but it does not love, nor ever will feel that sentiment."

"Oh! tell me not this, Alicia—dash not from me the cup of hope—drive me not to despair. Alas! you know not to what you will reduce the unhappy Trewarne;—misery, wild destruction, and moody melancholy already, Alicia, have been mine: I shudder as I recal what I have sustained, and dread a renewal of feelings too severe for reason; then

tell me not thus, my Alicia; suffer me to hope till I have answers from Sir Robert and Mr. Meynel."

"Ah! would to heaven, my Lord, my heart would accord with my friend's wishes! but ill must an union with me contribute to your happiness; ill could you brook the want of that ardour of attachment in the woman you selected from the world, and dignified with your name."

The Earl, as if fearful to dwell on a subject that appeared so deeply to agitate him, was silent, till he had collected fortitude to change the topic for one in which both were less interested.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN arrived in town, the Earl alighted at Lord Morville's, where he staid to dine: her Ladyship dressed in the evening for a rout at Lady Mountforrell's, Lady Augusta and Alicia accompanying. They had not been many minutes in the room, when Baron Kaphausen advanced, and paid his compliments to the party; he soon attached himself to our heroine, and laughed and chatted with the same insulting effrontery as before his visit at Acorn-bank. In vain did Alicia repel his impertinent assiduity by the marked contempt of her manner; it was with some difficulty she could refrain the Earl of Trewarne's indignation from breaking out as he beheld the infamous Kaphausen pester Alicia with addresses so odious to her heart and her ears.

Lord Morville had pleaded to his Lady engagements elsewhere; but was shut up at home, busied in examining papers preparatory to the settlement of his affairs which was to take place.

Early in the following week, his Lordship's steward arrived from Malton, and Alicia had the happiness to learn, before the conclusion of it, that Lord Morville's affairs were, by the generosity of his friend the Earl of Trewarne, put into a train of settlement. Kaphausen's debts were paid, a certain sum being fixed at the price of the Malton estate; and the London house, which, with the small estate already mortgaged to the Earl of Berkshire, was the whole of Lord Morville's fortune. The Berkshire estate was released from any particular obligation, and the bonds were preparing, which were to tie Lord Morville to the repayment of the sums advanced by the Earl upon the death of the Earl of Knasborough. To this Lord Morville had objected, proposing, by a retrenchment of expence, and by a partial disclosure of the derangement of his affairs to his father, to repay his generous friend by instalments. The contest had been very warm on this subject, and the Earl at length insisted upon doing his own way, or abandoning the whole management.

Whilst these matters were arranging, no difference was made in the household of his Lordship, or in her Ladyship's way of spending her time or money; the season advancing now near at hand for quitting London, and at Malton his Lordship meant to commence his plan of retrenchment.

Letters now reached the family of Lord Morville from Sir Robert, Lady Bertram, and Henry, dated Paris, where they then were, having come from Languedoc to give the Earl of Knasborough a meeting: these letters spoke of the improved health and spirits of Henry. Alicia received a letter also nearly about the same time from Mr. Meynel, in which no notice was taken of Lord Trewarne's application for his interest with our heroine, but spoke of an alarming fit of sickness which he had just recovered from, and informed Alicia he was ordered to Bath, but was not yet determined whether he should go there, or try a further change of air, but meant to quit Elmwood the following day. This gave sincere concern to the feeling heart of Alicia, which entertained the most unbounded respect for Mr. Meynel. A few weeks preceding this, the Duke of Wakefield had been

confined with complaints that, yielding not to medicine, made his friends fear for his life; and he was ordered, as the last resource, to take a sea voyage. Liston or Naples were the places fixed upon for his Grace's temporary residence; the Duchess, with the Marquis and Marchioness of Felton, were to accompany the Duke in this search after health. So hastily was the determination made, and so quickly put in execution, that Alicia had not an opportunity of saying adieu to her charming friend the Marchioness, who, however, wrote both to her and Lady Augusta ere she set out, although she had no leisure to see them.

Two days after the departure of the Duke of Wakefield and his family, was the evening on which Lady Morville gave a ball to a splendid crowd of rank and fashion;—on this occasion, during her Ladyship's stay at Acorn-bank, the elegant suite of rooms, so lately fitted up, had been almost entirely decorated anew. Again was Lady Morville's fine taste extolled, whilst painfully Alicia felt at the profusive waste and expence at a season when economy was so necessary.

The Baron had the assurance to take advantage of the invitation he had received some weeks before, and was one of the first who appeared in the rooms; and attaching himself to Alicia as at Lady Mountsorrel's, persecuted her with a haughty detail rather of the honour he did her by the offer of his hand, than any attempt he seemed to make towards gaining her affections. At length our heroine was relieved by the appearance of the Earl of Trewarne, who, no longer, as before, restrained by the hold the insolent German had upon Lord Morville, soon made him retreat, which he did, muttering curses at the interference of the Earl.

"Ah! would to heaven, Alicia," said his Lordship, "I had a legal right to protect you! I dread every thing from the infamous Kaphausen; situated as I am, my power to chastise his insolence is limited and restrained."

"Think not, my Lord, I feel in the least intimidated by the haughty manner in which the Baron urges his odious suit; and believe me, I feel a sufficient confidence in myself to protect me either from his arts or his insolence; but say, my Lord, what is it you dread for me? say what should I dread in a country whose laws protect the weak against the strong?"

"It is, Alicia, from the bold, undaunted, yet cool and determined insolence of the Baron's conduct towards you that I feel alarmed for your safety;—his character is unmasked, nothing will check his pursuit, and I dread for you an evil the most terrible; whilst he remains in England you are not safe from his machinations."

"I assure you, my Lord, I dread them not." said Alicia, smiling at the fears the Earl entertained for her.

Nothing particular occurred during the remainder of the evening. Lord Trewarne continuing to attend our heroine, the insolent Kaphausen did not approach.

The following morning Lady Augusta and Alicia went a short day's journey with the Countess of Wolverhampton, who was going into Shropshire. The Earl, her son, had set out the preceding day for the Continent, having been detained till then upon important

business; but, in the mean time, had not seen Alicia, or even his cousin Lady Augusta. When our heroine returned from this excursion, she found a letter from Lady Bertram, dated, as the last, Paris; but wrote in a style more satisfactory than that, which Alicia thought was cold, distant, and reserved. This gave a pleasing account of Mr. Bertram's health, and expressed hopes that the recovery of his friend, which was at length effected, would largely contribute to restore his usual vivacity. The letter referred Alicia to Lady Augusta, who had received from the Earl a full account regarding the enlargement of the unfortunate William March. Surprised, amazed, and almost overjoyed, scarce could Alicia believe what she read—William March restored to his friends! was it possible? was he then still worthy of Henry's friendship? Yet it appeared strange, very strange, Lady Bertram had not communicated to her before her hopes on this subject. Again Alicia glanced over the letter, and her suspicions were roused, that others had been carelessly lost, or villainously intercepted. She now sought Lady Augusta, whom she found in her own chamber employed in reading letters, which on Alicia's approach, were thrown on the floor, and she was folded to the heart of Lady Augusta, who exclaimed, in an accent of hysterical joy. "Oh! Alicia, he is restored, he is found! William March is as amiable as when you knew him. Oh! Alicia, how severe have been his sufferings, whilst we all believed him abandoned to vice, sunk in ingratitude."

Overpowered by her feelings, the voice of Lady Augusta was lost, and it was some time ere she was sufficiently composed to give to our heroine the following account, which she was so anxious to receive.

CHAPTER XVI.

“It was,” said Lady Augusta, “when I had more leisure hours than of late I have had minutes, that I was with my father spending a social evening with the Marquis and Marchioness of Felton, when the Earl mentioned the strange claim made upon the Malieveren estate. The story was unknown to the Marchioness, and in a great measure to the Marquis, he having been with the Duke and Duchess of Wakefield in Ireland, where his grace has, you know, large possessions, at the time that those claims were the topic of the day; the Earl therefore briefly recounted the material circumstances of the affair, in which was interwoven the history of poor William. ‘Where was the convent situated from whence this nun was taken?’ inquired the Marchioness. The Earl informed her, and also who the lady was with whom he had eloped. You can scarce have an idea of my agitation, of my joy, (which, however, was instantly damped, by the idea of the evil that had now no doubt overtaken this amiable young man) as I listened to the charming Marchioness. Already do you know, Alicia, of her having been decoyed abroad by the Duke, whilst a story was spread of her marriage with a foreigner, and her death; she had first been placed at Diepp, but removed from thence to the convent of Benedictines at Cambray, a few months previous to Mr. March visiting it. Mademoiselle Durand had engaged her heart, without the approbation of her parent, to a young gentleman of small fortune, which accelerated with her father for her taking the veil as soon as her noviciate would allow. In the chamber of the supposed Lady Malieveren, William March saw Mademoiselle Durand, who felt highly interested in her fate. Monsieur Villefort had received a considerable addition to his fortune, and petitioned the Count de Mavigny to grant him his consent to marry his daughter—but her doom was fixed; the following week she was to take the veil, and make vows that must sever them for ever. Despairing of moving the Count, Monsieur Villefort set out for Cambray, and strolled round these walls that contained the fair object of his wishes. In one of those perambulations he met the with ill-fated William, who, deeply concerned for the blooming sacrifice, spoke of the lovely Mademoiselle Durand, who was the following day to be professed; her lover told him of his passion, of his despair, and his new friend readily undertook to convey a letter through the channel of Lady Malieveren. On the evening of the very day in which the Mademoiselle’s fine hair had been cut off, and she had exchanged the gay garb of fashion for the coarse habit of the daughter of St. Benedict, and bound herself, by vows the most sacred, to abjure the world, Lady Malieveren put into her hand the letter of her lover; by the same means as an interview contrived, in which the fair nun yielded to the impulses of her heart, and the sophistry of March, who taught her to believe vows did not bind when the mind gave not assent. She then agreed to elope with him from the convent: Lady Malieveren abetted, and artfully pleaded the lover’s cause. Mademoiselle Durand has softened the rigour of Miss Ross’s fate by her friendship, and now resolved she should partake in her emancipation. This was disclosed to her lover, and Mr. March agreed to take charge of the friend of Mademoiselle Durand during the time of elopement, and Lady Malieveren promised she should accompany her to England. The night of the elopement being the one preceding the day she was to set out, safely had the fair nun and Miss Ross, by Lady Malieveren’s contrivance, gained the outside of the convent, where Monsieur Villefort and Mr. March waited to receive them; but had not

gone many paces, when they were stopped, and poor William arrested in the King's name; and when his friend offered to interfere, he was told, unless he wished to experience the same fate, to keep silence, which, on every account, circumstanced as he was, he knew was needful. To leave Miss Ross amongst strangers, Mademoiselle Durand could not bear; and however inconvenient it was, resolved she should accompany them in their flight. Crossing from Cambray through a part of France, they entered Switzerland, and wandered from one town to another, till at Geneva the Marchioness met with a Scottish family, whom she accompanied to Scotland. Plainly, from this recital, was proved the diabolical intention of the enemies of William, who by their various arts had accused him of a crime of which he was innocent, and ruined him in the good opinion of his friends, at a time when he was doubtless suffering imprisonment under a false pretext; as it was not for carrying off the daughter of Count Mavigny, for there again his name suffered, whilst, under a fictitious one, he underwent a different species of persecution. The Earl judged he was a victim to the suspicious tyranny of the French Government, and resolved to set out for the Court of Versailles, where he had once resided a considerable time in a public capacity, and doubted not of procuring his release, upon representing the affair properly, either by the British Ambassador, or by his own personal interest. The Marquis, Marchioness, and myself alone knew what was the business which so hastily carried the Earl abroad; to you, Alicia, I would have revealed the hope I entertained, but you were ignorant of the attachment between Mr. March and myself, which began before Lord Morville went upon his travels. At that period, you will remember, Mr. Bertram and his friend accompanied my brother in the visit he made at the Countess of Wolverhampton's, nor was it till I judged William unworthy of my regard that I became acquainted with you; then blame me not, my sweet girl, for reserve on this subject, for still I resolved, should he be ultimately found less deserving than I had known him, to hide from you, from every one, the love I still felt in my heart. The Earl, Alicia, knew of this, knew also the struggles I had made to surmount a passion so ill-founded as it appeared; and kindly solicitous for my happiness, assured me, on his quitting England, was my choice found worthy of me in other respects, he would waive what was by the world judged the most essential points, rank and fortune, and allow me to attend to the election my heart had made. From my father's letters I found little reason to flatter myself those pleasing hopes would ever be realized; at length it was discovered, after various disappointments, that a gentleman of Picardy, who had resided a considerable time in England, and had already returned to his native province, and who was strongly suspected of disaffection, had been seized at Cambray, and sent to the Bastile; after much application, the Earl was allowed to see, though not to speak to this person, whom he instantly knew to be the unfortunate Mr. March. He appeared thoughtful and emaciated from confinement. Sir Robert Bertram was already in Paris; and soon after this discovery, her Ladyship and Henry joined him. The Earl's interest was used in the favour of this unhappy young man; yet it was some time ere the Minister could be convinced of his innocence, as the gentleman who was supposed to have been arrested, could no where be heard of; and a number of treasonable papers were found sewed in the lining of the coat worn by the person apprehended, as also a portrait which he had, was found to contain cyphers, the particulars of a plot of a most dangerous tendency. This portrait was given, I understand, to William by his pretended mother, by whose arts also, I doubt not, those papers were sewed in his coat. Sir Robert, Lady, and Mr. Bertram's testimony, with that

of Mr. Blackmore, (who went over with the Earl) were for some time insufficient to gain credit; but now, Alicia, these letters assure me of his liberty, and that he is once more with friends, whose esteem is increased as they think of his sufferings."

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CHAPTER XVII.

WITH joy did Alicia receive the news of William's safety, of his innocence, whilst she shuddered at the miseries he had endured, and at the complicated art, villany, and power of his unknown and mysterious enemies. Now Alicia learned the cause which had oft filled her breast with inquietude, for Henry had been the confidante of Lady Augusta, and thus was accounted for the secret conferences they had held. The portrait too which Lady Morville had seen was that of William, though she supposed it was her brother's;—it was the same which Alicia overheard her friend mention, and give to Henry with such caution at Malieveren on the New-year's day, for the purpose that he should have it set.

Thus were these circumstances explained by Lady Augusta. The letter of William to her Ladyship spoke of his wasted strength, and that his friends had wished him to remain a few months abroad in a warmer climate, but hoped he might be suffered to return with the Earl, if it was even necessary he should again cross the sea. Of Henry he spoke as being much changed, and labouring under a fixed dejection;—the letter also contained the hopes and fears of the amiable William March on the subject nearest his heart; and Lady Augusta, though he was ill, yet felt happy he was again restored to liberty, and was the same virtuous, manly, and interesting character that had gained her early love. Her father had also approved the choice she had made, and she looked forward to many a white-winged hour spent in the society of her beloved William out of that giddy circle of gaiety in which she now moved.

Soon after the Morville's return from Acom-bank, the younger of the Miss Dalrymples had taken the measles; and before she was well recovered, her sister sickened with the same disorder: the day preceding that she and Lady Augusta received the letters which contained the joyful intelligence regarding Mr. March, they were fast recovering.

Engagements of various kinds had prevented our heroine for the last six days going to see her young friends—an office that had been daily performed by her own maid. The day before the King's birth-day the letters from Paris were received by Alicia; and the day following it a rout was given by the Countess of Llanderry, who intended to leave town the next morning. For this was our heroine dressing, when she received from Mrs. Heath, the governess of the school where the Miss Dalrymples were placed, a hasty billet, informing her Miss Harriet Dalrymple was attacked with a violent sore throat and fever, which had come on since the preceding day, when Miss Sleigh had sent, and that the utmost danger was apprehended; and begged, if possible, she would instantly come to Clapham, as Miss Dalrymple was most anxious to see her.

Alicia did not hesitate in complying with this request, which she communicated to Lady Morville and Lady Augusta; both of whom advised her to wait till morning, as it would be quite dusk, if not dark, before she reached Clapham.

Our heroine, whose courage was superior to most of her sex, declared she was no way alarmed, and would not scruple going in a carriage unattended, as she would not return to

town till morning. Lady Morville then spoke of the danger she would incur from infection; but this consideration had no weight with Alicia, set in opposition to what she deemed her duty, and looked upon as an indispensable obligation.

Lady Morville then insisted she should take the chariot, with an additional footman to her own. To this Alicia assented, only changing Lady Morville's servant for her own woman. She was in a few minutes ready to set out; in the entrance-hall she was met by the Earl of Trewarne, who, on seeing her in an undress, with a look of anxiety, almost started. To his Lordship our heroine related the errand she was going upon, saying one of the young ladies (wards of Mr. Meynel) at Clapham was taken dangerously ill.

"I conjure you, my dear Miss Sleigh," said the Earl, with evident earnestness, not to attempt going to-night, at least not slenderly attended. Consider the hour; it is past nine o'clock; it will be dark ere you reach Clapham."

Alicia again declared she had no fear, and that Mr. Meynel would not have acted so towards them; and she was determined to do all in her power to supply his place to the sweet girls, who had no one friend near them.

"But, my dear Miss Sleigh," said the Earl, with a serious tone, are you not aware of the opportunity this may afford the Baron? Are you sensible of the dangers you may have to encounter?"

Alicia smiled at the Earl's (as she thought) groundless fears. "What, my Lord, do you take this nobleman for a highwayman? you do the order to which he belongs (though an unworthy member) infinite discredit.

The Earl shook his head, and said; "I have lately entertained strange suspicions regarding the Baron, which, though they amount not to certainty, yet are more than sufficient to alarm me where I feel so deeply interested; but of this, I doubt not—Kaphausen is a deep, scheming, desperate villain—an abandoned libertine, whose head and heart are equally capable of conceiving and of executing the most diabolical plans. He is now in possession of a large sum in money and bills, that will enable him to do much if he wishes to carry his schemes into effect;—allow me then, my dear Miss Sleigh, to be your escort to Clapham."

This Alicia, however, peremptorily refused, "Why, my Lord, you would make me suppose we lived in the days of chivalry and romance, and that I was a beautiful damsel, whom some recreant Knight was about to carry off in despite of my inclination. Well, my Lord, should this terrible Kaphausen carry me to some enchanted castle, I trust to you for my release, so adieu."

The Earl led our heroine to the chariot, and, with a serious air, bade her good night, whilst, with her maid, and attended by the faithful James, she set out for Mrs. Heath's. Yet, as she drove along Westminster-Bridge, and saw the shades of evening now closing thick over the prospect, what the Earl had so recently said rose to her mind, and she

wished Clapham had been nearer town. She ordered the coachman to quicken his pace; but he, to her infinite concern, informed her that, although he had not perceived it when he left Harley-street, one of the horses had fallen extremely lame, but thought he would be able to proceed if she wished it. Already so far on her journey, Alicia was determined not to return, and Ann had ridiculed to her mistress the fears of the Earl at so early an hour. Such indeed were the sentiments of our heroine; yet Lord Trewarne's opinion had great weight, and he had perhaps other reasons than these he mentoined; and she ordered the man to proceed, which he did so slowly, that some time ere they reached Clapham Common, it was dark;—the night was thick, and a kind of drizzling rain fell. After driving a few yards across the common, the lame horse, stumbling, got entangled in the harness in such a way he was raised with difficulty, and then, unable to stand, again fell. The coachman and James both declared he would die. Alicia scarcely knew what to resolve upon; to wait there was almost impossible at that hour, for it was, she judged, almost eleven o'clock;—to get out and walk to West Clapham where Mrs. Heath lived, the ground slippery with rain, dark, and a considerable length of way, seemed equally impracticable, as she must, even though guarded by James, perhaps meet with insult, besides the danger of taking cold. In this dilemma a hackney-chaise came up, with the driver of which James agreed to take his mistress to Mrs Heath's; and Alicia getting into it with Ann, and James mounting behind, again proceeded: but scarce were they out of sight of Lord Morville's carriage, when three fellows rushed from the ditch, and seizing the horses, dragged the postillion and James off their horses, tying their hands behind their backs; which being done, one of the fellows mounted, and drove at a most furious rate, whilst one got inside of the chaise to prevent any attempt of escape. A carriage with four horses now was found waiting at the corner of a lane, into which our heroine, with Ann, was put;—resistance would have been vain; the fellows took care to inform them they carried fire arms, in order to silence the shrieks of Ann. One man again got into this chaise, which had wooden blinds, and the doors were fastened by locks. Alicia found they drove with the utmost rapidity, and that in a short time they were again in London: she then called aloud for help; but either her voice was not heard, or it was disregarded. Their strange companion in the meantime preserved a profound silence, till the shrill outcries of Ann brought forth a volley of curses. Alicia now was convinced the Earl's fears for her safety were but too justly founded; for the Baron it doubtless was who now had made this bold attempt, which yet she did not fear to frustrate. They went through a number of streets, and again were upon a turnpike-road, still driving for about an hour at the same violent rate, when they stopped a few minutes, and the horses were changed, and again they proceeded at their former pace. About sun-rise the silent guard unlocked one of the wooden blinds, and let it down: the country was new to our heroine; yet she conjectured, from the situation of the sun, and the length of their journey, they were some distance from town, though in rough, broken, and unfrequented roads, which obliged their speed to slacken; the flow rolling of a cart was heard at a little distance, and the ill-looking companion of our heroine closed the blind. They soon after stopped to change horses, and had got upon a better road, still proceeding with the same velocity, which lasted not long; for the carriage seemed to turn again into bye-lanes, when they stopped at a ruined cottage, where a fire had been kindled, and water heated for breakfast. Here were Alicia and her maid suffered to get out for this refreshment;—two fellows (equally villanous in appearance with the inside guard) acted as postillions; both wore pistols in

their belts. After breakfast Ann refused going into the chaise, for she was sure and certain, she said, they would murder them; but her mistress ordered her to go quietly, saying, "It will not be long, Ann, till we are overtaken, and these people and their employer must alike answer before a court of justice for this violence."—The fellows gave a kind of malicious and satirical grin, but spoke not. Again were they and one of the fellows (who hitherto had acted as postillion) for guard seated in the carriage, which drove with as much speed as before; sometimes the blinds were down, but then the roads were through bye-lanes or across commons;—they, however, passed through some towns, but without stopping; and as Alicia saw the sun sink red in the west, she found they were driving in that direction; but, from the retrograde kind of movements they had made, she could form no idea of what country she might then be in. The blinds were drawn up after sun-set, and they continued to drive for about an hour, when the carriage stopped, and the door was opened exactly opposite to the entrance of a house, into which she was commanded to go. This, however, she refused to do, till one of the postillions dismounted, and offered to force her out of the chaise.

"Go, fellow," said our heroine, "tell him whose instrument you are, Alicia fears him not; she is, and ever will be, superior to his wretched arts; she will not be forced out but will enter voluntarily, although conscious the villain is within."

She now leaped out, and bade the trembling, weeping Ann follow. One of the men conducted them into a room, with scarce any furniture, except a table which was spread in it for supper, and a chair stood at the head and foot of it. The dishes were instantly placed on the table by their attendants, which being done, the Baron Kaphausen entered, to whom Alicia, after casting a look upon Ann, meant to silence her scream, advanced with an unembarrassed air, and inquired to what end she was thus violently seized and carried from her friends?

"For your own good and my pleasure," answered the Baron, with his usual nonchalance.

"I ought to have been consulted on that head; as yet I do not think it is for my good, nor will you find any pleasure when called to an account by my friends, or when summoned to appear before a court of justice."

"The supper cools," said the phlegmatic Baron; "you have not eat since morning; sit down—we will talk of justice, and drink your friends' health after."

One of the fellows was about to put Ann out of the room, but her mistress insisted upon her staying where she was, and the Baron acquiesced. Alicia resolved not to abstain from eating what was set before her, and a seat was brought for Ann, whose hunger got the better of those fears of poison which she had declared to her mistress as supper was brought in.

The cloth removed, Alicia again demanded an explanation from the Baron regarding his intentions towards her.

"Oh! I shall soon inform you. I learned you were about marrying Trewarne, and I resolved to disappoint him for his cursed interference in Morville's affairs. So far my plan has succeeded in taking you from him; and if you will marry me in Scotland, where, after a zig zag kind of journey, we shall go, I will, if you wish it, attend you back to London, to be congratulated by your friends as Baroness Kaphausen. A ship lays in Leith Roads bound for Hamburgh, waiting for me and my suite; and if you do not chuse to return to London, then you must go on board this ship as Miss Sleigh, if you prefer that name to my title; and you may rest assured, when we arrive at Hamburgh, equal care shall be taken of you till we reach my castle, which you shall see repaired, and my estate improved, with the money I have had of your wife friend Lord Morville; and, perhaps, when these improvements are finished, I may allow you to return to England, to inform his Lordship how judiciously I have disposed of what he lost, and what a charming life you led as the mistress of a German Baron."

"And so the adventure is to end," said Alicia, with an ironical tone. "I am exceedingly obliged by the great condescension of Baron Kaphausen, but am afraid he has not calculated the chances with the same wonderful exactness he did that evening at Acornbank, when the money of Lord Morville was transferred to the Baron; for I am apt to believe Miss Sleigh will never embark with the rest of his suite, nor ever will have the honour to behold the castle of Baron Kaphausen."

"Your remark, Miss Sleigh, is by no means a just one; for I did not set out upon this expedition till I had carefully calculated the odds, which are with me fifty to one. Morville and Trewarne, I dare say, will be at the Land's End by this time, following a chaise with one of my people in it, who, I am convinced, will scream as loud as your fille de chambre has done."

"With you I will neither attempt to reason or remonstrate," said our heroine; "but know I fear you not; bend to you I never will, nor do I hold it possible to be in your power to make me quit Britain against my consent. You, Baron Kaphausen, as a stranger to its laws, customs, and manners, are not aware of the difficulty that must attend putting into execution your plan. In this point I, though a woman, have the advantage; and I know how far all, who are concerned in this infamous transaction, are amenable for their conduct."

"Here, or hereafter," said the Baron, with his usual flow and unmoved tone of voice—

"Both here and hereafter," said Alicia, rising from her seat—"here in this world, I doubt it not, punishment awaits you; and for the hereafter, may God pardon thee the crimes thou hast committed against his ordinances, and against the laws of civilized society!"

The Baron seemed to feel momentarily awed by the dignified and collected manner of Alicia, and attempted not to speak.

"I want rest," said our heroine; "order some woman to shew me my chamber."

"There is no woman here, Miss Sleigh, but yourself and your maid, whom I have been at the trouble of bringing on purpose to attend you."

Ann began to scream and cry, but was silenced by her mistress, who inquired of the Baron whether he purposed she should at that hour enter the carriage to proceed.

"No, not to night;—an apartment is provided for you and your maid, to which, when you chuse, you may retire."

Alicia, followed by Ann, and lighted by one of the Baron's people, entered a chamber, whose only furniture was a field bed. The window shutters were nailed to, the door being locked upon the outside; the bed was by Ann and her mistress pushed against it on the inside. After they saw there was no other entrance to the room, Alicia, aware, if she took no rest, she should be rendered unable to encounter the fatigue or danger to which she might be exposed, threw herself upon the bed, as did Ann, sobbing as if her heart would break at the thoughts of going to Germany. She, however, soon slept; but Alicia's thoughts for some time banished the composure of sorrow; yet shortly she enjoyed some repose, from which, when she had awoke a considerable time, she began to suppose they were to continue imprisoned in this dark room all day; but about eleven o'clock they were released by the Baron, and found breakfast on the table in the room where they had supped, which was eat by candle light.

This repast over, the chaise was drawn up close to the door, in which the Baron, our heroine, and Ann, being seated they set out driving as before. About sun-set they stopped at a cottage, which, like that where they had breakfasted the first morning, was in a ruinous state: here they supped, or rather dined, and again proceeded. Alicia was now certain they had entered Yorkshire, and hoped she might escape before they quitted a county where she would easily meet with protection from some of the friends of the Bertrams.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN our heroine and the Baron quitted the miserable hovel where they had supped, Alicia marked the pistols, which had been taken out of the carriage, and laid on the floor (for this place had no furniture but a portable table, that was brought by the chaise), and appeared to be forgotten. As the Baron led the way out without noticing them, Alicia, lingering, snatched them up, and putting them in her pocket, "Merciful God!" she softly ejaculated, "grant me thy protection—grant me fortitude!"

Alicia seated herself in the carriage, and felt, spite of her endeavours to the contrary, her eyes closed by sleep; nor did she awake thoroughly for several hours, and even then she felt a stupor from the effects of the dose which, she was certain, had been given in a glass of wine the preceding evening. Ann had also, she said, slept. Incapable of exertion, Alicia was lifted out of the chaise into a public house of mean appearance by the road side, in which was a simple-looking woman, who scarce seemed to understand how to prepare the breakfast the Baron ordered her to make ready, the materials for which he gave her. Alicia, after drinking coffee, found herself in some degree relieved from the stupefaction she had experienced; but of this she complained not. To attempt to escape here she saw would be useless, but determined, when they drove through the next town, to hold one of the pistols to Kaphausen's breast till he let down the blind; but they seemed to be now in roads little frequented, and she imagined they had, by crossing the west side of Yorkshire and Durham, now reached Northumberland, through which, in the same direction, they were about to pass. Although Alicia had anxiously watched for an opportunity to put her plan in execution, they had, during the course of the day, gone through no town; when, towards evening, she heard the Baron speak in German to one of his attendants, who replied in the same language. After which he informed Alicia they would be in Scotland in the space of a few minutes; and if she would consent to become Baroness Kaphausen, he would order the driver to go to the first town where they could be married.

Alicia gave a contemptuous refusal, and the Baron flew into a rage. Alicia supposed she heard a carriage behind them; and the blinds being down, she hoped, by the spirited reply she made, to irritate the Baron, so that he would not hear the rattle of the wheels that were now near at hand. A servant galloped up, whilst Kaphausen was so engrossed by his passion, he did not observe what was passing till the stranger had, with the butt-end of his whip, knocked the postillion off the horse (they having, for the greatest part of the last day, only drove with a single pair of horses). The Baron then sought for his pistols; and finding they were gone, broke out into curses just as the Earl of Trewarne appeared at the side of the carriage, the door of which he broke open; and taking out Alicia in his arms, exclaimed, as he pressed her to his heart, "Thanks to Providence, my beloved Alicia, you are restored!"—She sunk, almost fainting, from the violent perturbation of her spirits, in his Lordship's arms. Meanwhile Kaphausen had leaped out, and began to lay his cane over the shoulders of the servant who rode behind, who, from the fatigue of the journey, had fallen asleep when the Earl drove up. The Baron snatched a pistol from the holsters of his servant, and pointed it at the breast of Lord Trewarne.

Self no longer occupied Alicia:—the life of her preserver in danger, every dormant or sinking power was roused; and rushing forward, she clasped her arm round the athletic Kaphausen, from whom the Earl now wrenched the pistol; and no sooner had Alicia quitted her hold, than all fury, his Lordship exclaimed, "Take then, villain, thy reward;"—and drawing the trigger, would have lodged the contents in the heart of the Baron, had not the pistol missed fire. Pale and trembling, the Earl threw, with all his force, the useless weapon from him; yet still, as if mad with fury, sought for the pistols left in his own carriage; but those the servants had taken care to secure. In vain did Alicia exert her voice; the Earl attended not. Scarce could she credit the evidence of her own senses; scarce could she suppose it possible it was the Earl of Trewarne, late so rational, so calm, so judicious, and humane, whom now she beheld inspired with a degree of rage which bordered upon madness; and seeking, with a spirit of insatiable fury, the life of Kaphausen, who, though a villain, he had no right to exterminate from the world, where, it was true, his crimes were many. Rather Alicia would have supposed the amiable Lord Trewarne would have urged with mild, but firm remonstrances, his return to virtue, than thus send him, with all his crimes unrepented of, to make his appearance at that judgment-seat where art will not avail.

The Earl's servants had, however, secured the Baron, who seemed, by this attempt of the Earl's, to be most completely roused, and began to rail against his Lordship in pretty loud terms. At length the voice of our heroine was heard by the Earl, whose passion instantaneously subsided; and taking her hand, saying he would now be her escort, led her to his carriage, and then went to look after Ann, who during the conflict with Kaphausen, had hid herself behind the hedge, where one of the servants found her. Placing her by her mistress, Lord Trewarne now also seated himself in the carriage, which drove off, leaving the Baron and his ruffians, whom the Earl regretted having no legal power to detain. Alicia was deeply concerned to behold her generous preserver yet so agitated: she had heard him hint that the misfortunes of his early life had at times caused a derangement of intellects; she now feared a return of this dreadful malady would be occasioned by the rencontre with Kaphausen; for his manner seemed to her like insanity, so different and were his actions from what she had ever beheld. The countenance of the Earl was pale and distorted; every mild, every gentle virtue that had graced it, was fled. Rage, envy, revenge, and chagrin, with a long list of diabolical passions, had usurped their place; his whole frame trembled; and scarce did he appear to hear our heroine, who was pouring out her acknowledgments to him; and as she saw his Lordship still maintain the same distracted look, resolved, if in her power, to give his ideas another turn. "I am," said she, "my Lord, shocked to see you thus—shocked to see you, by the concern you have felt upon my account, lose sight of those amiable qualities which distinguish you so highly. Alas! is it the Earl of Trewarne I behold a prey to a passion the most debasing? Is it possible the man, whom I thought rose to a height few dared aspire to, can be subjected to such fits of rage—can he be so totally thrown off his guard?"

The voice of Alicia had again assumed its power; the Earl had listened, and now answered.

"Pardon me," said he, deeply sighing. "Alas! I have many faults though now scarce any circumstance can ruffle that equanimity of temper which has cost me much to acquire; yet, in early life, ere misfortune had assailed me, my temper was rash to an extreme if irritated; and painfully do I recal the sad state in which sorrow plunged my intellectual powers. From this, as I slowly recovered, I found it necessary to watch over myself, and then did I acquire that command over my passions, which has now grown habitual, and years have elapsed since I have been so thrown off my guard; but when I saw the being, who of all others is dearest to my hear, you, my beloved Alicia, in danger, the prey of the infamous Kaphausen, I no longer had the power of controlling myself, and a moment of fury, of madness, succeeded;—but you, who raised the whirl of passion, possess the art of subduing it: for now I am calm; and I reflect with horror how nearly I had taken the life of a fellow-creature, who, wretched as he is, may yet live to repent, and be more fit to die."

The Earl paused a few seconds, and then said—"With your approbation, Miss Sleigh, we will go forward to Kelso, from which we are only a few miles distant; it is the nearest place to where we now are that affords any tolerable accommodation, and you must have much need of rest after your fatigue and anxiety. In the mean time, I will send one of my servants back to London to acquaint the Morvilles of your safety."

Alicia, thanking his Lordship for the attention he paid to her comfort, acquiesced in the plan he proposed, and then inquired by what means he had thus providentially come to her relief.

The Earl said that her footman did not reach Harley-street till morning, as the driver and he had both been detained prisoners in the chaise till day-break. "Lord Morville sent for me, and I instantly imparted to him my suspicions regarding Kaphausen. Morville agreed with me in my idea of his having carried you off. We, with your own servant James, and attended by others less interested in the pursuit, immediately set out divers ways. His Lordship went west, James south, and I took the north road; upon which I was so fortunate as to overtake one of the Baron's domestics, from whom I gained the intelligence of his going into Scotland to embark for Germany. I doubted not you were with him. In Northamptonshire, with equal good fortune, I met a person, who gave me an account of a chaise, with wooden blinds, and the servants armed, having crossed the country to the W.N.W. To this direction I adhered, whilst I sent my valet, with one footman, forward to Edinburgh by the post-road. Sometimes I had an account which urged me to proceed; at others, for many miles, I lost all traces of you. Thank heaven, however, I have at length rescued you from the villain!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THEY soon reached Kelso, where Alicia procured some little change of dress, and sat down to supper with her preserver less fatigued, and in better spirits than she could have supposed.

"I have," said the Earl, "received letters from the Continent, which arrived the very day you quitted London. Mr. Meynel, I find, had waited till he had wrote to the Baronet ere he chose to answer me. This is Sir Robert's letter,"—giving it to Alicia, whose colour alternately flushed over her face, and again retreated as she read the eulogiums of her merit, and the free consent of the Baronet, could the Earl obtain her's. A copy was also added of Mr. Meynel's letter, which declared Sir Robert's approbation or refusal should be his, and that he meant to consider Miss Sleigh at his death in a way that might demand a handsome settlement, though not so large a one as the Earl had offered; which, with the general amiable character he bore, made it appear to him an undeniable match for their ward. Sir Robert said he looked forward to a renewal of that intercourse of friendship which in early life had given him such pleasure; and hoped, by an union with so amiable a girl as Alicia, his friend would be restored to that happiness which misfortune had long deprived him of.

His Lordship, when our heroine had finished this epistle, presented her with two others, which had come in the same envelope, and whose superscription to herself informed her, by the writing, they were from Lady Bertram and Henry. Alicia opened the former, in which her Ladyship congratulated her upon the conquest she had made of Lord Trewarne, whose merit was well known to her, as his father was guardian to Sir Robert;—and that the most intimate friendship subsisted between them for a number of years, till the loss the Earl sustained in a beloved wife and child, occasioned for several years an estrangement from all his connections; part of this time was spent in foreign countries, the rest in absolute seclusion, in which Sir Robert at different periods visited him in Cornwall. "The Earl," said her Ladyship, "is worthy of you, my Alicia. Alas! fate for ever denies you should be united where I wished; and if the happiness of Henry, if mine, if Sir Robert's is dear to you, refuse not your consent to become Lady Trewarne. Were you married, and married so advantageously, so happily, Henry would regain his tranquillity; at least so I fain would flatter myself."

This was nearly the whole of Lady Bertram's letter. Alicia could not summon resolution to open that of Henry: she turned it over, took it up, and laid it down; whilst a faint, sickly fluttering at her heart almost overpowered her. She broke the seal; scarce could she distinguish the letters. The Earl marked her agitation; and with that delicacy of manner which had endeared him to Alicia, quitted the apartment. Her tears fell on the paper as she traced the well-known characters, as she saw the varied emotions that had agitated the writer.

"For my sake," said Henry, "you are deprived of the paternal care of Sir Robert and Lady Bertram;—give yourself, Alicia, a protector; I shall endeavour at composure when I

know you are for ever lost to me;—when I learn you are happy, I shall be so too. Then I may be enabled to behold you as I ought—then may we meet; and I again return to my native country, from which, whilst you remain unmarried, I am banished. If then my memory is yet dear to you, if the peace of my parents are valued by you, hesitate not;—where can you find a man so worthy of you as the generous, the amiable Earl of Trewarne, whose worth I am well acquainted with?—yes, Alicia, this union, I trust, will insure equally your happiness, his Lordship's, and that of Henry."

"Oh Henry!" sighed Alicia—Oh my dear Henry! is this then your wish? Alas! it can never conduce to my happiness; you would regret deeply the advice you gave, should you see the air of constraint I must wear;—no, Henry, to no person interested would this union produce comfort. Lord Trewarne, whose heart is the throne of sensibility, could ill brook such a return as I should make to the love he feels for me. Alas! esteem, gratitude, that mounts almost to adoration of his character, yet have not banished the remembrances of Mr. Bertram—no, I will never marry."

Such was the resolution of our heroine when Lord Trewarne entered; and she resumed the fortitude which appeared to have forsaken her.

"My Lord," said she, "I have read those letters; they speak of you in terms that well accord with my idea of your character; they urge me to accept an offer so honourable to myself; but my heart still is refractory, still refused to obey the dictates of my judgment, and the wishes of my friends. Deeply am I sensible of your merit. You, my Lord, deserve, and may command, a far different alliance; a fairer, richer, more accomplished bride than the poor Alicia, who throws, with an improvident hand, the offered happiness from her; yet that Lord Trewarne so far distinguished her, will ever be deemed the highest honour of her life, the best eulogium of her merit; although for ever will her heart remain insensible to her own interest, and capriciously deny the request of a man she so highly esteems, and of friends to whom she is bound by every tie of duty and gratitude. Alas! my Lord," she continued, bursting into tears, "equally we should be miserable were we to be united, unless I felt differently, very differently from what I now do."

The Earl seated himself by his lovely charge, and soothed, by the most delicate attention, the perturbation she felt. When he saw she was a little more composed, he gently hinted she would appear more respectable as the Countess of Trewarne, on her return to her friends, than as Miss Sleigh, whom the licentious Kaphausen had violently carried off, and accompanied into Scotland. Alas! my beloved Alicia," said the Earl, "shall the finger of scandal be raised by this villain's arts; shall the whisper of calumny go around at the expence of the exalted woman I adore; no, this I could not bear—no, then the arm of Trewarne should not be idle!"

Alicia told his Lordship her sentiments, as she had before done, regarding the practice to which he alluded, and declared she would rather suffer under an unjust censure than have her honour defended at the risk of any one's life, particularly that of a person's she had so much reason to esteem.

The conversation was now changed by our heroine to her return to London. The Earl then said he wished to have gone round by Edinburgh, where he had some particular business to transact, and had fondly flattered himself that there she would have given him

a legal right to protect her; but as she had now declared she was determined against ever honouring him with her hand, he would on no account beg the favour of her going so far out of her road, but in the morning, intended to accompany her direct to London.

Alicia thanked his Lordship, but declined his offer, as she did not fear reaching London in safety with her own maid, and would take one of his servants with her. This, however, he would not agree to; and an early hour being fixed for their setting out for London, they parted for the night.

In the morning at breakfast his Lordship again resumed the subject of his love in humble and despairing terms; when our heroine (though I have represented her with as much partiality as was consistent with truth, and have wished my readers to believe she was superior in understanding to most of her sex) proved herself yet a mere woman, and that she partook of the capriciousness of their nature; for, to the infinite joy and evident surprise of Lord Trewarne, she now turned a more favourable ear to his suit; and intimating a desire of seeing Edinburgh, inquired how long his Lordship's affairs would detain him there?

He replied, "A day or two at least."

Alicia then said she had reflected upon the folly of her returning to London so slightly attended, and that she could by no means consent to put his Lordship to the trouble of having to return back to Edinburgh on her account, and would therefore accompany him round that way.

To this his Lordship joyfully assented; and they set out together on their journey. Long before they reached the end, Alicia consented not to leave Scotland till she has become the Countess of Trewarne; so would she for ever, she hoped, cement her own happiness by forming that of the Earl's whose attention to her in so many various ways demanded all the return she could make;—thus would she meet with the approbation of her friends, who doubtless would censure the refusal she had given; thus would she be rendered independent of the Bertrams, to whom obligations, situated as she now found herself, would become painful.

Such were the sentiments to which Alicia gave utterance during their journey. What had caused this revolution I am not at present able to inform my readers, who yet may rest assured our heroine had some cause, and that it was no mere levity of character.

Safely they reached Edinburgh, where the Earl wished the marriage to take place. This Alicia agreed to, and the next morning was the time appointed.

She quitted the Earl immediately after supper, and retired to her apartment, where she employed some time with Ann in arranging the dress she was to wear the following day, and which had been purchased after they had arrived at Edinburgh. Alicia then, apparently in cheerful spirits, retired to bed, and dismissed Ann, who no sooner was gone than our heroine rose and dressed herself. She heard Lord Trewarne retire to his chamber, which was at the further end of the gallery. The noise in the house ceased; all seemed still. Softly she unlocked the door of her apartment, and went down stairs with all the caution she could use, and throwing open a window, leaped into the street, where she accosted the first watchman she met; who, after some little difficulty that occurred from their different dialects, agreed to be her escort to Drysdale's Hotel, where she had been with Sir Robert Bertram, his son, and daughter, some time before. Here she ordered a chaise, with four horses; in which, in less than an hour after her leaving the house she had

drove to with Lord Trewarne, was Alicia seated, and rattling over the stones of Edinburgh.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

Chawton House Library

THE
SOLEMN
INJUNCTION.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

AGNES MUSGRAVE,

AUTHOR OF CICELY OF RABY

"In a solitary chamber, and midnight hour,

"How many strange events may arise."

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THE
Solemn Injunction.

CHAPTER I.

IT is, however, now requisite I should defend my heroine from the charge of levity, inconsistency, and duplicity which may be laid against her. My readers will doubtless recollect the scuffle between Kophausen and the Earl, and that the former had in loud terms threatened revenge; at which period the rage of the latter suddenly subsiding, he put Alicia into his own carriage, and went to seek Ann. During this interval the Baron, who appeared as if attempting to escape, came up to the door, and threw a pocket-book into the chaise, saying, "Here Miss Sleigh is the book I was villainous enough to take from you whilst you slept this morning; I will not now keep it."

Alicia thinking from its resemblance it was as Kophausen said, took and put it in her pocket, whilst he was again seized by his lordship's servants.—In the hurry of spirits she was in, our heroine thought not of the circumstance, till at Kelso she was undressing for bed. She had not suffered Ann to attend her, ordering her to go to rest, she having the same cause for fatigue as her mistress. In taking something from her pocket, Alicia perceived she had a book of a larger size than her own—it then occurred to her that this was the one given her by the Baron. Urged by curiosity, and a wish to know what he meant, she hastily opened it, and as she perused its contents, she trembled—her heart seemed full to suffocation—as alternate surprise, resentment, and dread took possession of her. Lord Trewarne, him whom to refuse had given her such exquisite pain, was there represented as a villain of the blackest dye—that he wore the mask of virtue but to deceive—that Kophausen was a mere agent who had served to betray her into the hands of his principal. In this depository of iniquity she found the route she had been carried accurately described—the hours at which they were to stop to change horses—and even the period and very minute of her rescue were calculated to a nicety; and further learned, that if at Kelso she refused to marry the Earl, or appeared to entertain any suspicions, she was, under pretence of returning, to be carried as far into Scotland as they could, without her discovering the deception, and then she was to be put into the chaise with the locked blinds, and so conveyed to a castle of the Earl's.

Ann also, bribed by his gold, was the creature of his power—and covered, by an affected simplicity, a heart abandoned to vice—and had co-operated with the infamous Dodds, (for that Alicia found was the real name of the pretended Baron) throughout the whole. To him there were directions how to proceed in every possible occurrence—all accidents were carefully guarded against. Ann, however, was not to throw off the mask as long as it could be avoided. Alicia knew Kophausen was a villain, but here she was informed he was a subordinate one. Yet how could she credit the tale these papers told her? was it possible that Lord Trewarne, whose delicacy and nobleness of sentiment she had repeatedly witnessed, was in league with this villain? Could she believe the assertion of such a wretch as Kophausen, against the established character of the Earl, to whom

Lord Morville owed his life, reputation, and fortune? Oh! it was—it must be—a scandalous—a shameful fabrication of the diabolical Baron! She would shew him the whole—she had not heard him go to his chamber, which was beyond her's, but contiguous to it—she would ring for the chambermaid, and enquire if his lordship was yet below—she would go down and give it to him—she could not wait till morning.—Alicia found the bell in her chamber did not ring, and resolved to go into Ann's to see if there she would have better success; and remembered, when she had chose her apartment, observing a door opened from that of Ann's into the dressing-room of her's, which way she preferred rather than going by the gallery. But ere she had turned the handle of the lock, she heard Lord Trewarne's voice proceed from the chamber of Ann, and she answer in a familiar way.—Alicia felt as if awaking from a dream, as she listened to the conversation between his lordship and her servant; scarce could she believe her ears received with accuracy the sound her sight corroborated the truth of; for looking through a crevice in the door, she saw the apparently till then modest and simple Ann seated on the knee of the sentimental and refined Lord Trewarne, who was promising largely to her, when he had married or seduced her mistress.

Ann was bargaining with his lordship not to send her to Kilcragie, for she had never liked it; this he promised not to do any longer than he could avoid, and assured her of going before winter abroad with him and Alicia.

"But (said Ann) should she get away from you before she reaches Kilcragie."

His Lordship said, "though he entertained no fear of that, yet he had given, and would give, such directions at every house they stopped at, that she could not."

Alicia had heard sufficient to convince her she had been most fatally deceived, and that she was in the power of a villain who would stop at nothing to attain his purpose, and, with trembling steps, returned to her own apartment, her heart rent by anguish. Lord Trewarne, the man she had supposed a model of perfection, was now stripped of this mask, and appeared a fiend in human shape; he would never be suspected by her friends of carrying her off, and was she at Kilcraigie Castle, a place even Ann dreaded, she had no hope of escape. How consummate appeared the art of this villain, (for so now was she too fully convinced he must be); never, except in the rencontre with Kophausen, had he for one moment in her presence forgot himself; uniformly had he appeared most amiable. Alicia fully comprehended that the Earl had intended to put it out of the power of his principal agent to divulge his schemes, by shooting him; truly was she grateful his intentions were defeated. As Dodds found what was his aim, and had, by giving her his pocket-book begun his plan of threatened revenge, she hoped he would further prosecute it, by informing Lord Morville; on this, however, she determined not to depend, but to effect, if possible, her escape. In Kelso she knew no one; she was certain her every movement was watched, and if she quitted the house she was then in, she knew not how to direct her steps to another; besides, the road they had travelled was such, as without delay she could not retrace. Was she in Edinburgh, and upon the great road, where Sir Robert Bertram was well known at all the principal inns, she would not fear to wait at one of them till Lord Morville came to her, (should she escape from the earl, and fear his

again overtaking her); she therefore resolved to deceive where she had been deceived, and accompany him to Edinburgh, under the idea that there she meant to marry him.

Deeply did our heroine feel humiliated; she thought she had too proudly trusted to her own powers. Lady Augusta, at Acorn-bank, had suspected the Earl was not what he appeared, and she had said so. Yet there, alas! thought Alicia, I relied on my own judgment, and with disdain did I repel the idea; ah! had I listened to Lady Augusta—had I not entertained too high an opinion of my own understanding, this would not now have befallen me.

Alicia, in the fulness of her heart, vowed if ever again she was mistress of her actions, to bear her qualities more meekly.

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CHAPTER II.

IN the morning, banishing all traces of the feelings which had agitated her so painfully, Alicia received Lord Trewarne with smiles, whilst her heart sickened at his sight; completely did she deceive both the Earl and Ann, whom at Edinburgh she employed in purchasing a dress for her, and appeared in chearful spirits, promising Ann, though not exactly in the same style, yet almost as largely as his Lordship, what she would do for her on her marriage. Thus both were lulled into a belief that our heroine had no other idea but of becoming the next day Countess of Trewarne. Happily however escaping, as I have already related, and seated in the chaise which she procured at—, she laid the pistols, which she had taken from Kophausen on the seat beside her, firmly resolving, should Lord Trewarne or any of his emissaries overtake her, to defend herself; but, with the advantage she flattered herself she had in point of time, it would not be the case; for she was determined not to stop or scarce to take refreshment. Fortunately Alicia had received a sum of money the day she quitted town from Sir Robert's banker, and having put the bills in her pocket-book, in her hurry forgot, when going to Clapham, to take them out; she had now wherewith to prosecute her journey, a circumstance she had carefully concealed, and at Edinburgh had said she was totally destitute of any cash, save a couple of guineas, which she gave to Ann to purchase something for herself, whilst Alicia allowed Lord Trewarne to buy her dress.

Safely did our heroine reach London, and was set down at Lord Morville's in Harley-street about two o'clock of the third day, wearied in body and mind.

The door was opened by James, her own footman, of whom she enquired for Lady Morville.

James shook his head, and then related, "that Lord Morville's affairs were in so deranged a state he was obliged to fly, and was gone with her ladyship to France."

"What means this lumber?" said Alicia, pointing to trunks, and packed-up furniture in the entrance-hall.

"The furniture is sold, (James replied) and these trifles that are left wait to be sent for. Lady Morville ordered me, Madam, to attend you to her in France should you return, and left this letter for you, ordering me to stay in the house as long as I could on your account.

Alicia opened the letter, in which Lady Morville advised her to marry Lord Trewarne, had she not already done so; but that if she did not, recommended it to her to quit England for a time, as the town had made very free with her character, and that James might attend her to France.

Alicia enquired if her trunks were left in her chamber; a negative answer was given, as also to the enquiry, if any other servant was left but himself. The suspicions of Alicia already roused, she suspected every one of artifice and deceit; and she thought that perhaps even James, the long tried servant of Sir Robert, might not have been proof

against the gold of Lord Trewarne; she therefore resolved to put no confidence in him, and ordered him to go and procure her a lodging, as she would not stay, as he informed her she might, in Lord Morville's house that night.

James said he would go instantly to a respectable house he knew, where she might be accommodated. His mistress bade him make haste, as she did not like to stay in the house alone; but no sooner was he out of sight, than she quitted Lord Morville's, and with all speed walked into Oxford-street, where, taking a coach, she drove to the Earl of Llandorri's in Piccadilly, although she knew the family would be gone out of town, but hoped to find the housekeeper, who was a woman much respected by her lady, and who was sister to Mrs. Rowley, the housekeeper at Malieveren, to visit whom Lady Llandorri had given her leave, and Alicia hoped she would be about returning from Malieveren; nor was she wrong in her conjectures, for she found the sister of Mrs. Rowley was returned only that morning. To her Alicia confided a part of her adventures, and in return learned the total ruin of Lord Morville; yet Mrs. Rowley, who feared to shock the spirits of our heroine too much was not very explicit on the subject, though she said the report of the town was, Miss Sleigh had gone off with Baron Kophausen, which had irritated Lord Trewarne, and induced him to take the steps he had done.

Alicia revolved in her mind, whether she should attempt to join Lady Morville in France. She could not go unaccompanied, and the confusion she imagined apparent in James's countenance, with the hesitating answers he had given to her questions, joined to his having recommended Ann as his sister to her, made her by no means deem it proper he should attend her. All the families with whom she was on friendly terms were gone out of town. Mr. Meynell's house was the first place she would have thought upon as an asylum, but he was not there, nor did she even know where to address him. Our heroine therefore determined to go down to Malieveren, as there she would find the good Mrs. Rowley, and a number of servants sufficient to protect her. Lord Trewarne would of course, she supposed, follow her to London, which he would reach, most probably, that evening; and she hoped, by setting out early the next morning, to elude him.

Alicia, thus determined, communicated her intentions to Mrs. Rowley, who offered to accompany her back to Malieveren; but this Alicia refused, thinking she could guard herself as well alone as if the good woman was with her, whose fears would only serve to increase her own. She therefore sat down and wrote a short account of her adventures to Lady Bertram, as also a letter to Lady Llandorri, apologizing for the liberty she had taken in coming to her house, and then retired to take that rest she so much required; but at four o'clock in the morning arose, and was assisted by Mrs. Rowley in dressing herself in some clothes of her housemaid's, in order to disguise her. Before five o'clock Alicia was seated in the chaise, and without stopping to sleep, she reached Malieveren before dinner the next day, to the great surprise of Mrs. Rowley, who saw with infinite concern the fatigued and agitated appearance of our heroine.

Lord Morville's valet, who belonged to one of the neighbouring towns, had been at Malieveren since his master quitted England, and from him Mrs. Rowley had the account she gave Alicia, and which fully confirmed her suspicions regarding James, who had

informed Lord and Lady Morville, that before they reached Clapham they were met by Baron Kophausen, when Miss Sleigh got out of the carriage she was in, and went into that of the Baron, ordering James to mount a horse which appeared to have been brought for him; that they then drove back through London, and about midnight changed horses, when Miss Sleigh wrote to Lady Morville a letter James, it was certain, gave her ladyship, which informed her that Alicia could not bear the idea of the Baron leaving her; that therefore she was now on her road to Scotland where she intended to marry, and accompany to Germany the only man she ever could love.

It was in the morning that James returned to Harley-street, being, he said, only detained till his mistress wrote the letter he had brought. Soon after James returned, Lord Trewarne called at Lord Morville's, and broke out in the most ungoverned rage upon hearing the account of Miss Sleigh, and reading her letter. The Earl and Lord Morville were alone, but so loud was the former in his reproaches to the latter that not only Lady Morville and Lady Augusta, but the servants also learned their master had left vast sums to Baron Kophausen, which money the Earl had advanced for his Lordship, in hopes of his interest being used for him with Miss Sleigh. He declared Lord Morville was in league with the Baron, and quitted the house, swearing if by the next day he had not every shilling lent his lordship, the law should have its course.

Lady Morville was taken extremely ill, and Brunton had learned from her ladyship's woman that she deeply lamented her own imprudence, but did not upbraid her Lord: the preceding evening she had gone from Lady Llandorry's route, escorted by Lord Trewarne, to the house of one of her gambling friends, where she lost a sum far above her power to discharge, and that his lordship had offered himself as her banker. This she accepted, but in coming home took off her diamonds, and insisted upon his Lordship keeping them till she could repay him what she had borrowed: this the Earl positively refused, but at length yielded to her ladyship's entreaties, and put them in his pocket.

Lady Augusta, who preserved her fortitude whilst her brother gave himself up to despair, advised him to write to some of his father's or Sir Robert's friends, who would doubtless take up the affair till the Earl and Baronet could come over. The miserable couple rejected this proposal, declaring they would not stoop to receive obligations again from any one. The following morning executions were put in fore both against the house and furniture in London, and at Malton. Lord Morville, (whose person was not safe from the malice of Lord Trewarne, as the Parliament was not sitting) had, after spending two days at Acornbank, set out for France, his lady and sister accompanying him. The furniture at Malton Park, with his lordship's stud, and every thing that could be disposed of, had been sold, and the house was now shut up:—so rapid had been the movements of Lord Trewarne and his emissaries.

Alicia now fully informed Mrs. Rowley of the consummate art and duplicity of the unprincipled and abandoned Earl of Trewarne, who had assumed a character the most insinuating, the most amiable, which she now found was the exact reverse of his real one.

Alicia agreed with Mrs. Rowley, that to guard against the schemes of this deep intriguing villain, who regarded neither difficulty nor expence, she must be very circumspect, and keep herself as much concealed as possible.

One piece of intelligence, however, Mrs. Rowley communicated that rejoiced Alicia: Brunton had taken care to bring her trunks to Malieveren, in which Lady Morville's woman had packed the clothes which James had denied all knowledge of.

Sad was the heart of our heroine when she again entered her chamber, where she poured out her thanks to the Almighty Preserver for her escape from the complicated villainy of Lord Trewarne, and humbly prayed for protection through the trials which yet might await her. From her devotions Alicia rose with more composure, and retired to seek that repose she so greatly required; but sleep hovered not near her pillow, which was wet by the tears of tender recollection, as she thought of those happy days that she feared were to be the only ones she must ever know; but not for herself alone did Alicia feel; for her beloved Lady Morville—for Lord Morville too she was distressed; but, for the passion she had been so unfortunate as to inspire the heart of Lord Trewarne with, he would perhaps never have been led into the destructive practice which had finally ruined him: such were the reflections of our heroine, which, spite of her fatigue, prevented her sleeping till a late hour.

The next day was spent by Alicia without stirring out, but the following Mrs. Rowley proposed that they should take a walk; "for, my dear Miss Sleigh, (said she) you need not here fear Lord Trewarne, for I am certain there is not a servant in the castle who would not lose the last drop of his blood to defend you, and revenge Lady Morville; if you chuse, one of the footmen can follow us, and I think you have much need of something to rouse your spirits and this is such a beautiful afternoon; will you allow me then to prevail on you, my dear Miss Sleigh?"

Alicia consented, and her feet involuntarily took the path which led to her favourite hill, whilst Mrs. Rowley spoke to her of James, whom (she said) was always a saucy fellow, and that she never liked him, for he was always making mischief about somebody or another. "The young woman (continued Mrs. Rowley) my lady engaged to attend upon you, Miss, before she quitted the castle, has told me it was all James's lies that made you send her away; and Brunton says, he never believed Ann was James's sister, and was certain that she was not so good as she should be."

They had now reached the top of the hill, and Alicia went to that side which looked towards Malton. Whilst she gazed on the house, the tears dimmed her sight: "And are all the people gone from about Malton, Mrs. Rowley? and are poor John and Sarah gone from the lodge? There is its high chimney peeping from amongst the trees," said Alicia, as she wiped off her tears, and as a sigh declared to her companion what caused the enquiry; for the care Sarah took when she was overturned by Lady Morville had never been forgotten by her.

"O yes! (replied Mrs. Rowley) all are gone; but Mr. Williams (whom Mr. Bertram had charged to be kind to John and his wife) put them into a cottage of Sir Robert's, and employs John, as I will Sarah."

At this moment a cloud of dust was seen rising from the road, and Alicia with Mrs. Rowley wondered what could cause it, as seldom a number of people travelled that way; soon, however, they were certified as to the cause, for through the park-gates passed a hearse, with several mourning-coaches and a long train of attendants on horseback; petrified by this sight Alicia stood motionless.

"Good God! (exclaimed Mrs. Rowley, clasping her hands in agony) this is—it must be Mr. Bertram come to Malieveren to be interred! Oh! that I have lived to see this day!"

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CHAPTER III.

THE eyes of Alicia closed on the mournful sight—her limbs refused their office—and she sunk fainting on the ground; with difficulty was she recovered by Mrs. Rowley. "Oh! Henry! my beloved Henry!" sighed out Alicia, and again sunk, insensible to her woes, on the shoulder of her companion: from this second fainting she, however, revived much sooner, and was informed that the procession, after having come half way across the park, had wheeled about, and again gone through the gates.—Cheered by what Mrs. Rowley said, our heroine now declared she was able to walk back to the Castle with her assistance, which when they reached, enquiry was made amongst the servants if any of them knew whose funeral it was that had entered the park-gates? One of the grooms who had been at Middleham, and was just returned, informed Mrs. Rowley that if it had not been for him, he believed they would have had him at the Castle by this time.

"Who! what do you mean Thomas?" said the good housekeeper.

"Why, Mrs. Rowley, the Lord there, that has sold all off at Malton; ah! he was never like to prosper."

"Follow me, (said Mrs. Rowley, leading the way into the parlour, where she had left Alicia). Oh! my dear Miss Sleigh, here is such good news!—he is dead—he is gone! but, Thomas, come tell Miss Sleigh whose funeral it was."

"It was (said Thomas) the Right Honourable Frederic Fitz Harman Mackenzie, Earl of Trewarne, and Baron St. Andrews, as one of the servants told me."

"Merciful God! (exclaimed Alicia) is then the abandoned Earl of Trewarne cut off in the midst of his sins!—his death must have been sudden."

"Did you hear, Thomas, (said Mrs. Rowley) whether he hanged himself or cut his throat? for I am sure he has not died a fair death."

"Oh! I heard all about it at Middleham, for they stopped there for the people to dine, and one of the undertaker's men had said his Lordship died very suddenly at Edinburgh, and it was thought he had made away with himself by some kind of poisonous stuff."

"Well, if he died in Scotland, (said Mrs. Rowley) what are they bringing the body this way for; sure he is not to be buried amongst the late Countess of Knasborough's family, in the vault of the Stapletons in Malieveren church?"

"No, Mrs. Rowley, not so bad as that either, bad enough as it is. The steward came last night, I hear, to Malton, and took people from Middleham to make all right, and the body is to lay in state there, as it is at I do not know how many houses that belonged to his Lordship between here and some place a great many hundred miles beyond London, where he is going to be buried; and a good journey to him, say I, Mrs. Rowley."

"But what was the reason, Thomas, (enquired Alicia) of the procession coming through the park-gates?"

"Yes, Madam, I know that too, for it seems they were all strangers to the road, and, mistaking the directions they received at Middleham, turned into the gates on the right hand instead of the left, and when I overtook them just by the great oak, and told them they were wrong, one of the men put his head out of the coach-window, and for all he was with the funeral of his master, began swearing, d'ye see Miss, the wickedest oaths I ever heard at the drivers, who spoke such broad Scotch I could not tell what they said."

Alicia had heard sufficient, and quitted Mrs. Rowley, who appeared no way inclined to part with Thomas whilst he had one particle of intelligence to communicate.

Deeply, indeed, was our heroine shocked at the sudden death of a man whom she had so lately highly esteemed, but whom since she had found so much reason to detest. Was he inured to vice, and had his whole life been a continuation of deceit and artifice? or had his passion for her tempted him to commit crimes that were new to him, and which, as he reflected upon, appeared in their true colours; and, unable to sustain the ignominy and disappointment of his schemes, had he rashly plunged into eternity, and thus added suicide to his other crimes? In those crimes Alicia felt as if in some degree she participated; by her attention to his lordship she might have fanned the flame of love, though undesignedly. Thus sat Alicia, ruminating on the past, and not without a dread of the future, when Mrs. Rowley entered, to enquire if she would come down, or would chuse tea in her own apartment. Alicia said she would follow her down stairs, but she soon returned to her apartment, for she could not bear the joy that sat upon the features of Mrs. Rowley, and indeed every servant, when they saw them as they passed the window in their road to Malton, to behold what to them was most truly the mockery of woe; for Fame, though she had not exactly represented the affair in a true light, had yet not failed to do his Lordship justice, and represented his conduct toward Lord Morville, who was much beloved in the vicinity of Malton, as infamous as it really was.

Alicia felt a deep dejection of spirits; the shock she had received, when she saw the funeral enter the park-gates, she yet felt the effects of, and the untimely end of Lord Trewarne gave her much painful recollection. Bidding Mrs. Rowley good night, who came to her chamber, she sat sadly occupied with her own thoughts; about midnight she heard the servants return from Malton, and soon after retired to rest. Next morning, rising at her accustomed early hour, after breakfast Alicia took her way, new not afraid of any attack from Lord Trewarne, to her favourite seat on the hill; where, as she looked towards Malton, she distinguished the long-extended train of funeral pomp stretching across the lodge, and Alicia, amidst the silence by which she was surrounded, could hear the heavy rumbling of the hearse, that contained the remains of a man, who, in the course of a few weeks, had inspired her with such different sentiments. Slowly moved along the mockery of grief, Alicia at times catching, over the tops of the high hedges, a glimpse of the nodding plumes; the whole soon disappeared, and listening till the last sound had died away on her ear, Alicia turned to the temple—"May God, (said she, with fervency) pardon the offences of this man, which, alas! I fear were manifold!" In the temple all remained as it did when she had been last there. Mrs. Rowley had said, "she could not bear to go into it herself, and she had allowed no one else to enter."

In this spot Alicia found much to call forth her feelings, and here she determined no longer to defer her visit to Oakdale, for now in safety she might venture alone; and returning to the castle, desired Mrs. Rowley would send one of the servants to Bedale to order a chaise to be at the castle early the next morning. "I have long wished (said she) to make a visit of a few days to a friend of my mother's, who lives in Westmoreland, and I think this a proper opportunity."

Mrs. Rowley offered to attend our heroine on her journey, which she refused, as also to have one of the grooms. This refusal did not satisfy the good woman: "Brunton (said she) Miss Sleigh, is only at Masham—you may safely depend on him to guard you; I cannot do much in that way myself, and you may not like to trust the grooms, though I believe all Sir Robert's servants are honest fellows." This proposal was also rejected. Would she but defer her journey till next week, Mr. Williams, the house steward, would be back at Malieveren; yet still Alicia was resolved (she said) to go, and go unattended; her mother's friend was in humble circumstances; she would not visit her in such a way as might shew any difference of situation; what had she to fear in a day's journey? Tears were added to entreaties, to the infinite pain of Alicia, who, however, persevered in what she intended.

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CHAPTER IV.

EARLY in the morning our heroine was seated in the chaise from Bedale, although Mrs. Rowley had very unwillingly ordered it. How could she account to Sir Robert and her Lady for allowing Miss Sleigh to set out from the castle, where all the carriages were left, in a hack chaise, and unattended. Alicia had dressed herself very plainly, taking with her a change of clothes, and she had not forgot her travelling companions, the pistols of the mock Baron Kophausen. She passed safely the deserted hall of Oakdale, and drove to the Cross Keys in St. Mary's Oak, where she bespoke a bed, after having drunk tea, and then said to the landlady, "she thought it appeared a pleasant country, and would walk out a little."

"Ye had better not, Miss, go far, (said the good woman), it looks like rain; but if ye like a walk, ye cannot have a pleasanter one than out by our back door, where a road leads by the banks of the river to the church; but the sun is set, and it will soon be dark."

The day had been uncommonly sultry, and towards evening the sky had been covered with low, heavy clouds, from amongst which the sun had transiently broke, as it was sinking in the west, with a fiery aspect, and foretold a coming storm.—As Alicia slowly wandered along the high banks of the river, the evening loured—the air was oppressive—the birds, surprised by night, seemed conscious of fear—and were silently winging their way to their nests.—Nature seemed to pause, and expect some great event; but Alicia wrapped in meditation, lifted not her eyes from the path, which brought her to the back of the church of St. Mary's, when it was so dusk as scarce to allow of her distinguishing objects. She passed through the wicket, and treading over many a mouldering heap, sought out the white stone which marked the grave of her unfortunate mother; there Alicia knelt, and with all the enthusiasm of her character, called upon the spirit of her departed parent, if it was permitted, to listen to her invocation. "Oh! may the lesson she taught, stand the sad trial—may my fortitude be proof against what I must sustain! Oh! my early lost—my beloved mother! may I emulate thy gentle virtues—may I bear with humble resignation my fate!" Such was the tenor of the devotions of Alicia; but, ere she rose, the livid lightning flashed from the clouds, and played along the ground; the thunder raised its tremendous voice, and was echoed back by the walls of the lowly church of St. Mary. Alicia paused, and as the thunder ceased, again resumed her prayers: "Oh! preserve, (she said) thou who commandest the elements—whose word created, and whose power governs, the universe, her who kneels over the cold remains of a mother!" Again the lightning clearly illuminated the horizon, and instantly the thunder rolled over her head; Alicia rose, but another flash struck her senseless on the grave of her mother, nor was she conscious of her existence, till she found herself borne in the arms of a man; and the rain now pouring down with violence, she was carried into the parlour, where she had drunk tea. The person who had brought her in gave orders to the landlady for her to be put to bed immediately, whilst the surgeon of the village, who was sent for, gave her some medicine, which soon composed her to sleep, and in the morning she awoke without any apparent illness, and arose. "Captain Barlow's compliments to the young lady, (said a stout lad who was son to the landlady) and if she pleases, he will be glad to breakfast with her."

"Who is Captain Barlow," enquired Alicia.

"The gentleman that brought you here in his arms last night, Miss, when the thunder frightened you so."

"By all means; my obligations are very great; I wish to have it in my power to acknowledge them. Be so good as to say I shall be gratified by the pleasure of Captain Barlow's company."

The Captain, on receiving the message of our heroine, attended her in the little parlour of the village inn. He was a plain soldier looking man, apparently about fifty years of age, whose regimentals shewed he was an officer of the artillery, and his face bore the marks of service, and change of climate.

"I hope you have taken no cold; I hope (said he, looking very earnestly in her face) you are"—he then paused as if at a loss for words, when Alicia returned him her grateful thanks for the humanity he had shewn towards her the preceding evening.

"Talk not, (said the veteran of these matters, as with one hand he led our heroine to a seat, and with the other wiped off the tears that rolled over his deeply furrowed countenance); talk not, my sweet girl, of these affairs till you have breakfasted."

This was soon over, for neither party was inclined to do justice to the comfortable meal that was placed before them, which being removed, they sat some time without speaking. Alicia broke the silence, by enquiring how it was Captain Barlow happened so providentially to come to her relief?—He appeared incapable of speaking, but made two or three faint attempts, whilst the tears chased each other over his cheeks. It would not do—the genuine feelings of nature predominated over every form or mode of speech; he rose—he clasped his arms round Alicia, and pressed her to his heart, whilst he exclaimed, "Oh! my dear, my beloved Eliza! alas! wretch that I was! I, and I alone was the cause of all thy sufferings! I brought the grey hairs of my parent with sorrow to the grave, and thou, sweet suffering angel, Eliza, wast abandoned! thou wast drove by necessity to marry the accursed—the mysterious stranger! Early wast thou called away, ere thy virtues, though severely exercised, had time to unfold themselves, and thou, my dear child, wast left to be brought up by charity!"

Alicia had withdrawn herself from the arms of Captain Barlow, upon whom she was gazing in astonishment; but he, now more composed, requested she would be seated, and placing himself by her side, begged she would excuse his thus hastily addressing her:—"Yet wonder not (said he) Alicia, at the remorse I feel, as I look on you; for know I am the uncle of your unfortunate mother, whose sad history, if you are acquainted with, you will not need be told by me, that my ill conduct ruined my father, and at last, I have every reason to think, was the cause of his death, as he instantly expired on the premature news of mine reaching him; for so a few years ago, when I visited St. Mary's Oak, after an absence of many years, I learned. I also was then informed, that Eliza had married a stranger of the name of Bouchier, a person of a most eccentric character; that he had rented Oakdale Hall, where he kept a carriage, horses, and servants in a stile equal to Sir Robert himself, yet he neither visited nor was visited by any person except the curate and surgeon of St. Mary's. When he walked, or rode out on the grounds, which was very rare,

he chose the most unfrequented paths; in short the whole of his conduct was highly singular. When he first came to St. Mary's, my father's funeral was in the church; it was a deep snow, and Mr. Bouchier was on foot.—The latter part of the time he lived at Oakdale, I understand he was shut night and day into a room, all the village believed to have been haunted ever since Sir Philip's time, and in the midst of a storm of snow this mysterious husband of Eliza's again disappeared. It was reported he was drowned, and a body being found in a river, that joins that which runs through this vale. Eliza was persuaded by Mr. Kirby it was her husband's. Some months after you were born, and your unfortunate mother, sinking under her grief, pined herself to death, leaving you to the charge of Mr. Kirby, of whom report speaks also as a singular man, though skilful in his profession, and charitable to the poor, warm in his friendships and temper, which made him easily offended; but you, Alicia, doubtless recollect him, though I heard he had not long the charge of you; for that a Scotch lady (whose name I could never hear) took you from the hall to bring up: vainly have I searched, vainly advertised, and my visit now at St. Mary's was made with a hope of hearing tidings from Kirby, who no one can give any account of. Tell me now, my dear girl, what has become of you for so many years? have you been a poor dependant on the charity of the lady who took you from Oakdale? what brought you to St. Mary's, where I beheld you kneel on your mother's grave? I then was in the church porch, come also to pay the tribute of a late repentance over a parent's dust!"

Alicia paused; she who so lately had escaped from the open and hardened villainy of Kophausen—from the deep laid schemes of Lord Trewarne—was taught suspicion; yet the frank and open countenance, the simple manners of the veteran, sure were not assumed; no, his was the language of nature, and spoke more forcibly to the heart than the tinsel oratory studied by the Earl of Trewarne to deceive. Briefly, therefore, our heroine recounted to Captain Barlow Mrs. Dalrymple's taking charge of her, with her own change of name at the period of that lady's quitting England, and of her entering the Bertram family, whom circumstances having carried abroad, she had determined, during Lady Bertram's absence, to visit the place of her birth; but begged of Captain Barlow to conceal those circumstances, and also said she at present had reasons which rendered caution so necessary, as even to make her conceal her name.

A message was now brought to this new found relation of Alicia, saying Mr. Jackson waited for him to go to Penrith.

"Ah! that is very true, so I intended yesterday; but say I cannot go now."

"I beg, Sir, (said Alicia) you may not be prevented on my account."

"Will you accompany us? I will send to North Oak for a chaise."

"You must excuse me, Sir; but I shall remain at St. Mary's till you return."

Captain Barlow sent a message, importing he would attend Mr. Jackson shortly—"I am going, (said he) about making a trifling purchase, to Penrith; a sum of money has lately become mine by the death of a relation, and a small estate, the situation of which I like, is to be sold there to-morrow, and Jackson, who understands these matters, and is an old acquaintance, has offered to assist me in buying it."

"Is this Mr. Jackson, of whom you speak, steward for the Oakdale estates?"

This was answered in the affirmative, and Alicia begged Captain Barlow would on no account speak of her to Mr. Jackson, as she did not wish her visit to St. Mary's to be known. This was promised to our heroine, who on her part assured her uncle that at St. Mary's she would wait his return, which, he said, should not exceed two days and nights. This settled, Captain Barlow bade adieu to Alicia, who soon after being left alone, sent for the landlady, and ordering something for her dinner, enquired how long she had lived at St. Mary's? She found her hostess was a native of the village:—the next enquiry made by our heroine was, if Sir Robert Bertram ever resided at the hall?

"At the hall! Lord love you, Miss, nobody can live there!"

"It did not, Mrs. Crofts, appear so ruinous as I passed; and I thought it so sweet a place, that if mine, I should never leave it."

The good woman shook her head. "Ah! Miss, you are a stranger in these parts, or you would not ax about the hall."

"Is it forbid to enquire?"

"No, no, not that either; but what matter, Miss—all hereabouts knows there is something. Ay, now I see well enough all ye fine folks from London laugh at such things; but, Lord presarve us, had you, Miss, but seen what has been seen—marry, it would be no laughing matter!"

"Do not think, Mrs Crofts, I was laughing; I should wish to know what objection it is that you allude to, which makes Oakdale-hall uninhabited; if nothing very particular, I have a friend whom I think would like to rent it, should Sir Robert Bertram be disposed to let it."

"Well then, Miss, nobody has lived in it, not even a servant, any length of time, for twelve years. Sir Robert, I believe, does not wish to let it; Mr. Jackson, the steward, is gone to Penrith with Captain Barlow, but if you wish to know, I can ax Mrs. Jackson."

"I thank you, Mrs. Crofts, I should wish to know. As for the hall having been uninhabited such a number of years, though an objection, as it must be out of repair and damp, yet for a good tenant, doubtless Sir Robert would do something to obviate one part of the objection, and good fires would the other; but pray what is the cause of the house standing untenanted?"

"Well then, Miss, if you must know, I will just sit down and tell you, for I am sure Sir Robert is not the gentleman who would do an ungenerous thing, or impose on any body; and if your friend took the hall, Sir Robert would like, I dare say, he should know all about it. Mr. Kirby was the last person, except servants, that lived at the hall; ah! poor Mr. Kirby, he was as good a soul as ever I knew till he went to Oakdale after Mrs. Bouchier died, and then he went all wrong, quite beside himself, and so was Mr. Bouchier, who married Captain Barlow's niece, old Joshua Wetherall's grand-daughter; but you do not know who she was,—you are, it seems, a stranger here, Miss; but poor Betsey was a bonny young creature when old Joshua was buried, and Mr. Bouchier came to St. Mary's, aye for all the world just such another as yourself! Ah! Lord presarve us, it was a sad thing Mr. Hammond did, to make her marry a man nobody knew nothing about; some said this Mr. Bouchier drowned himself, others say he sold himself to the Devil, who carried him away in a flash of fire out of Sir Philip's chamber; but you, Miss, don't know Sir Philip's chamber, but it is a room in the hall that is called that; so then, d'ye see, after her husband was gone, Mrs. Bouchier, Lord love you, Miss! would go, and

shut herself into Sir Philip's room all night, and there came her husband, in the likeness of a great black dog, and talked to her."

Mrs. Crofts ran on with a number of similar tales, but Alicia interrupted her by saying, "she had no fear her friend would be disturbed by ghosts."

"Now I was sure you would not believe me, nor may be winnot neither, when I tell you only two or three years back Sir Robert and my Lady, with their family, called at Oakdale, just as a body may say to see what belonged to them; and as the coach, d'ye mind me now, Miss, was going round to the stables, something came out of the wall at the corner with such a clatter, as frightened the horses, poor dumb beasts, and broke the coach, and a fine one it was I am sure, all to bits; so then, Miss, d'ye see, Sir Robert and all of them were forced to stay all night at the hall; I'm sure they had better have walked up to their knees in mire to St. Mary's, than have done so."

"Why, what happened to Sir Robert from sleeping at Oakdale?"

"Well then, Miss, in Sir Philip's chamber, my cousin Joyce, her own self, told me Miss Bertram would sleep, for all she was told all about it; and there it appeared to her at night, and Sir Robert and my Lady, and all the family saw it; and Sir Robert said, for all the King's dominions he would never sleep another night at Oakdale. But sleep! what do I say? Lord help us, not a creature in the hall got a wink! no, marry, nor at St. Mary's either! Whatever it is that haunts the hall, it does not come for good, that's for sartain; for it was vexed, I dare say, at being disturbed, and would let nobody rest that night."

Alicia found that whatever caused the report at first, nothing now could happen relative to Oakdale, that was not, at St. Mary's Oak, attributed to supernatural agency; and reminded Mrs. Crofts the hour would soon arrive when she had wished to dine, adding, "if the keys of the hall could be procured, and she would walk there with her, she wished to go through it, that she might be able to inform her friend regarding the apartments."

"All the grand furnitury is gone, Miss, and what is there to see, Lord love you, but a few old pictures? But if you wish to go, our Joe shall go with us, and I dare say Mrs. Jackson will let me have the keys for a word speaking; so I'll go see after the dinner, that we may not be benighted at Oakdale, like Sir Robert and my Lady."

So completely was the mind of our heroine engrossed by her purposed visit, that she had little time to reflect upon having met with her uncle, for that he was so she could not doubt.

CHAPTER V.

ALICIA set out in the afternoon for the hall, accompanied by her simple hostess, and her son Joe. During their walk, Mrs. Crofts entertained Alicia with a second edition of her morning's conversation, at which Joe laughed, and wished the ghost would but appear to him; and when they reached Oakdale, boldly did Joe turn the key in the outward gate, whilst his mother, keeping close behind our heroine, peeped over her shoulders into the court, whose appearance fully declared the hall had long stood uninhabited. The grass had grown through the joinings of the chequered pavement, which led up to the entrance, between what was formerly a smooth lawn on each side, but now a high meadow; the yews that grew at the corners of these square plots of ground had lost their conic form, and some were quite decayed by age and want of care; the fruit-trees had fallen from all support, the jessamine, that at this season was seen covering the walls with the highest green, now hung from them dry, sapless twigs; and the curious painted window in the great hall, loosened from its fastenings, flapped to and fro with the wind.

Joe tried the key in the door of the saloon, but it would not move. "I dare say this lock (said he) has not been opened since Sir Robert and my Lady staid all night here, when the coach overturned amongst the stones laid to mend the road. Well, we will try the hall-door." There access was easy, and once more Alicia crossed the threshold of Oakdale.

"Now this, in my mind (said Mrs. Crofts), is the most curious place in the hall, and was I you, Miss, I would go no further."

"I shall undoubtedly see all the apartments, but by no means wish to take you, Mrs. Crofts, if you do not chuse, as I am not afraid of encountering the ghosts."

"Marry, forbid, I should let a sweet young creature like you go alone, and I stay here! No, no, I will go with you." She then led the way to Alicia, who praised all she saw in a house, every corner of which brought back to her mind some painful recollection.

The wind was loud from the west, to which quarter the vale of Oakdale opened, and it blew through the house in a way that terrified Mrs. Crofts; as yet her son had shewed no other signs of fear than what was exhibited on his countenance. Alicia also found a kind of dread steal over her, which she strove in vain to subdue. When they reached the door of Sir Philip's chamber, she attempted to open it, but found it was fastened.

"Have you the key of this room, Mrs. Crofts?"

"Nay! why, Miss, for sartin you are not for going in that room?"

"Why not?"

"Because it is, d'ye mind me now, Miss, locked up."

"I perceive so, therefore ask for the key."

"I dare say the key is not here (said Mrs. Crofts, turning the bunch over which she held); this, Miss, is Sir Philip's chamber, all Oakdale should not tempt me to go in! No, I am sure the key cannot be here, why the room was locked up by Mr. Jackson after the night Miss Bertram got the great fright in it!"

Alicia took the keys, whilst her hostess wept and entreated; but finding no effect was produced by her admonitions, said she dare not stay, for she would warrant it would come out.

Alicia at length found the key, when Joe observing the door open, and having no mind to wait the appearance of the ghost, said, "he would go and see what had become of his mother, who was terribly frightened."

Our heroine, thus left alone, paused on the threshold; and had not motives stronger than curiosity urged her to proceed, she would have followed Joe, whose hasty stumbling steps she heard on the stairs. With a kind of painful effort she threw back the door, and entered the room; it exhibited the same appearance it did when, with Miss Bertram, Alicia saw the pallid form in the glass; the bed was unmade, the ashes and cinders filled the grate. She passed into the midst of the chamber, without venturing to raise her eyes to the dark wainscot, or throw them on the mirror which had shown the ghastly countenance. Now she looked round her, slowly turning about; the steps of her simple companions were no longer heard—all was silent. Alicia paused, as if fearing to break it, when she imagined she heard her own name pronounced, and fled into the gallery; but instantly ashamed of her fears, with a firmer step returned. "Does this become (she softly ejaculated) the child of Eliza, who here, whilst yet almost an infant, was taught the lesson of fortitude, which she forgets to obey!" She opened the closet and found she yet remembered the way pointed out by her mother to enter the concealed apartments; she then quitted Sir Philip's room, shut the door, and put the key in her pocket. At the foot of the staircase she met Joe, but his mother was in the hall; Alicia requesting the young man to go there, took the opportunity of entering one of the rooms which fronted the garden, and unfastened the shutters of the windows, and then joined the terrified pair in the hall.

Mrs. Crofts proposed leaving the house, and congratulated our heroine in escaping out of Sir Philip's chamber as she had done. Joe locked the door, and internally rejoiced at having preserved his character for courage, without being obliged to enter the haunted chamber, whose unhallowed threshold had never been crossed since Alicia had with Henry visited it, the morning after she and Miss Bertram slept in that room; Mr. Jackson having locked it up the next day.

Alicia said she ought also to see the gardens, but Mrs. Crofts had not the key, and said every thing was run wild. "The weeds were (said Joe) last week, as high almost as the yew hedge which runs across, just below the hall."

"Ah! it is a grievous thing, Miss," said Mrs. Crofts, still alluding to the mischief-making ghost.

It was beginning to grow rather dusk, when our heroine again reached the Cross Keys. Fatigued by her walk, and wearied by the incessant prattle of her hostess, she went to her chamber, where she made a strong effort at composure of mind, and soon retired to rest. At an early hour she again rose, and fervently recommended herself to the protection of the Almighty; she then breakfasted, and putting a small bottle of wine and some biscuits, with candles, and means to procure a light (all which she had brought from Malieveren),

up in a handkerchief, and with the pistols of Kophausen, or rather, indeed, Lord Trewarne, in her pocket, she quitted the village inn, telling its mistress she had recollected a friend in the neighbourhood, whom she wished to visit; and should Captain Barlow return before her, to inform him so, but hoped to be again at St. Mary's to sleep. Thus Alicia set out with more fortitude than she had dared to hope would be her's on her long protracted visit to Oakdale-hall.

"I am going (thought she) to obey the last injunction of my beloved mother, and the idea of fulfilling my duty cheers me; why should I ever have feared to enter the concealed chambers? Would a parent, anxious for the future welfare of a child, expose that child to any possibility of evil, which her tenderness could either foresee or avoid? I have given credit to idle superstitious tales—I have allowed them to dwell (although I was not sensible of it) on my mind."

The morning was clear—the birds sung forth their wild notes from every thickened hedge—and the woodbine's luscious scent perfumed the air.—The road Alicia took was one she recollected having gone with Mr. Kirby, in her last visit to him; it led, by a circuitous path from the village of St. Mary Oak, to the hall, winding along the rocky banks of the river, which passed near both: this was a way little frequented, and safely, without meeting any one except a parcel of chubby faced children, busied seeking bird nests, she reached Oakdale.—The gates all round were secured, but she found out a place in the wall of the terrace that was broken, and over that she mounted; there, however, she lingered not, resolving she would avoid, if possible, giving way to recollections that might weaken her mind, and she ran over the high grass that clothed the side of the once smooth shaven slope of the terrace, and with the same haste passed along the neglected walk, that brought her to the window she had the preceding day unfastened:—throwing up the sash, she leaped in, then took out her pistols; when having again secured the window, in opening the door of the room, she supposed she heard the echo of some steps on the staircase. Alicia paused, and stood for the space of a few minutes with the door on a jar, in a listening attitude, but all was still.—Ashamed of her fears, she proceeded along the stone passage, ascended the staircase, and passing through almost the whole length of the gallery, reached Sir Philip's chamber, opened the door, and went in; going towards the window, to lay on the table her bundle, that she might prepare for entering the concealed apartments, she perceived the casement yet stood open by which Mr. Bertram had entered again the apartment. With a trembling hand Alicia closed it, a deep and tremulous sigh announcing this circumstance was not unremembered by her. The curtains of the bed, which had remained closed from the time she had slept there, were heard by Alicia to draw back: she lifted up her eyes, and saw advancing, from the end of the chamber, the Earl of Trewarne, whilst his countenance and manner wore an appearance altogether new to her:—"Now thou art mine! (exclaimed he) nor man nor devil shall take thee from me! here thy arts will be in vain!"

Alicia gave a shriek of surprise, but instantly presented, ere she had a moment to reflect, a pistol at his Lordship, she drew the trigger, as fearless he advanced; the Earl staggered and fell; immediately two of the people, who had attended on him in the Scotch expedition, entered, and raising him from the floor, laid him on the bed, to all outward

appearance dead; but his valet used means to recover his master from what was but a fainting fit, and then pulled off his coat to examine where he was wounded; the Earl was in violent pain, and a very considerable effusion of blood had taken place. Our heroine would have left the room; but far from being allowed to do so, was compelled by the valet of Lord Trewarne to remain, where she saw all his operations.—The ball had passed through the shoulder of the Earl, and lodged in his back, for so his valet, who had some surgical skill, declared. He then tore the bed linen, with which he bandaged up the wound, in doing which Alicia was obliged to assist. This done, his Lordship was carried by his servants, in the blankets, into another chamber, where she understood he had slept the preceding night.

Alicia now thought she would escape, and was about descending the stair-case, when Watkins, the Earl's valet (having conveyed his master into his chamber) overtook, and insisted upon her returning.—"Give me up (she exclaimed) to justice! patiently will I abide the decision, but I will not wait here Lord Trewarne's recovery from wounds justly inflicted!"

"Here, however, Miss Sleight, you must be obliged to remain at present; if my Lord recovers he will provide a more cheerful habitation for you; if not, you are better here till he dies, for in that case you will have worse lodgings in Durham goal, where you will, in good time, have the justice you ask."

Alicia saw, unless she employed her other pistol, there was no chance of resisting; she therefore suffered herself to be taken back to Sir Philip's chamber, where she was shut in, and heard the door fastened, being (as she supposed) nailed up, or rather a staple drove in, to which a padlock was hung.

CHAPTER VI.

OUR heroine, whose promptitude in danger I have already had occasion to relate instances of, lost no time in deliberation; but when she heard Lord Trewarne's people quit the door, she placed all the furniture the room contained, which her strength was equal to removing, against it, and then fastening the remainder of the bed clothes together, and securing one end of them to a large cabinet, she threw the other out of the window, by this feint hoping to prevent any search being made in the room. She then, with her remaining pistol, and a lighted candle in her hand, opened the closet, unloosened the bolts, and passed into the blood-stained chamber, again securing the partition, and closet door.

"Oh give me! (she exclaimed, as she passed through the chamber without raising her eyes) Oh grant me, thou everlasting and Omnipotent Being! resolution to sustain myself, should the crimes which here have been committed and concealed, be this day revealed to me! Thou who for a season oft suffers the guilty to flourish—Oh! grant me prudence to conduct myself in an undertaking in which I, perhaps, am selected as an humble instrument of thy justice!"

With caution did Alicia descend the narrow staircase, and reached the vault where she had been led so many years before by her mother. The gloomy solemnity of the scene, the deep, the bitter remorse expressed by the black hangings, made her for a moment hesitate; but rousing herself, she lifted, as directed, the embroidered pall, beneath which she found the key she was to use; to it was affixed a slip of parchment, on which she saw written:—"Dost thou then, Alicia, venture here alone? and darest thou, stimulated by a parent's injunction, brave the gloomy horrors that surround thee? If so, I augured, though fondly, yet truly, my Alicia soars beyond her sex or age! Go then; a mother's last blessing waits on thy steps! Go, my daughter, and learn what my care for thy happiness concealed from thy tender age!"

"I ought (said Alicia, as she again ascended the stairs) to dare all—every thing—when so commanded." She reached the highest room, whose only furniture was the large chest she came in search of, the key of which, however, was not wanted, for the lid, though closed, was not locked, as it lifted up without turning the key; all the chest contained was the papers, almost mouldered into dust, which had been copied by Mr. Bertram, and the portrait which he mentioned. Alicia examined it with much attention—it was undoubtedly extremely like Sir Robert, yet the hair was of a different shade, and the expression of the countenance so different, it surely could not be intended for him, for the portrait wore a look of deep dejection, which ill agreed with that appearance of libertinism which must have marked the features of Sir Robert at that period,—a character that most certainly he never bore, and Alicia thought could never have merited. She felt at a loss how to proceed; this was the place she was commanded to search, and here she expected to have received a more full account. Surely some persons had found means, after Mr. Kirby had quitted the hall, to enter those concealed chambers; and breaking open the chest, had carried away the contents.—Once more she examined the

chest, and saw its apparent depth within corresponded not with its outward height; again she recalled her mother's injunctions, and applied the key to the lock; the side of the chest gave way, and fell down, disclosing another lock which the same key opened, and Alicia pulled out a drawer stuffed with papers, bundled up, and indorsed.—The first that attracted her attention was a letter addressed to herself, in the hand-writing of her mother, which contained a brief account of what is already known to my readers:—the death of her grandfather—the arrival of Mr. Bouchier at the time of the funeral—the kindness of Mr. Hammond and Kirby, together with her marriage, and several particulars relative to Mr. Bouchier whilst he lived at Oakdale—his disappearance from Sir Philip's chamber, with copies of the letters written by him to his wife and Mr. Kirby—and the reasons Eliza had for believing his death.—Next she related the seclusion she practiced in Sir Philip's room, chiefly with a kind of latent hope concerning Mr. Bouchier's return, as Martha (who she supposed had been sworn to secrecy regarding the concealed chambers, or perhaps had only suspicions regarding them) so far stimulated her curiosity, and flattered her wishes. Thus days and nights were spent by Eliza in searching for some private passage by which her beloved husband had so mysteriously quitted her, and by which she was led to hope, from Martha's hints, he might again return; for she had known as strange things happen since she had lived at Oakdale.—In these minute and repeated investigations did Mrs. Bouchier at length discover the way into the bloody chamber, and by degrees explored more of those gloomy vaults and passages beneath them. Those Alicia had been shewn; the large chest attracted her attention—she found it full of papers of infinite importance;—to them she refers Alicia, saying she will find them arranged in proper order for her perusal, and in them she will also find the reason explained of the mysterious conduct practised by both her parents. Alicia opened the first paper, which was marked No. 2; it was a letter written by her father, and addressed to Eliza.

CHAPTER VII.

"IF hereafter chance should conduct you hither, Eliza, as it did me, you will then learn my reasons for forsaking you, perhaps never to return. I ask your forgiveness, though I cannot obtain my own—I ask your pity too Eliza, for him whose sorrows, whose accumulated miseries have driven him to distraction! Surely I was marked from my cradle as the sport of fortune; though wretched myself. I have endeavoured to alleviate the woes of others. I despised riches, except as they allowed me to diffuse happiness to those around me; I loved virtue and strove to walk uprightly; yet, alas! Eliza, how far have I now strayed from the path. If I should return (yet I scarce dare hope on the subject) you will learn who has been your husband, under the feigned name of Bouchier; under that name I was beginning to taste of the happiness I lost under my own; but it is gone, Eliza, it is passed away like a dream—it will never revisit me.—But I would wish to be methodical, I would wish to inform you of many things; but my brain is unsettled—all ideas are lost save one, which presses painfully on me, bringing with it your image, Eliza, to torture me.

"Recollect you once said the aspect of Sir Philip's chamber was preferable for a winter room to that we occupied; I went into it, in order to examine what alteration would be necessary, and what furniture should be ordered for it; I meant to have made the alterations without your knowledge, and thus pleasingly have surprised you. The size of the mirror, and its large silver frame, arrested my eyes; I advanced up the room towards it; a deep groan issued, as if from beneath my feet, and I beheld a pale ghastly countenance in the glass. I turned round, yet could not distinguish what had caused the reflection I had beheld, although I carefully examined the room for some person I imagined concealed in it; again I advanced towards the glass, as I had done before, but saw not the figure. Aware it was a deception of some kind, although I know not how it was conducted, I resolved to search it out, and for this purpose spent a considerable part of several days, at times almost yielding to the belief so firmly established at St. Mary's regarding this chamber; at length I found out the spectre, which after an interval of a week was again visible to me, yet I spoke not of it to you, Eliza, and determined, if in my power, to discover the cause of this mysterious appearance. Again I was busied in my researches; again they succeeded; I entered the concealed chambers by the way I suppose you must, nor need I recapitulate what horrid sights have here appalled me; here, Oh Eliza! did I learn what drives me forth once more an exile from friends and home.

"I have dared to meditate deeds the most atrocious; for as I read those accursed papers, reason fled. More collected, I then resolved never again to behold you, till I could do so without guilt—yes, Eliza, I abandon you, and with you all hopes of happiness: my head is yet light—my ideas confused—no, I will not dare again to see you. Alas! how can I have courage to pronounce, Adieu! how say to you I am your father; for true, I fear it is too fatally true, are the accounts I have read, and which are contained in these papers; you too will read them, and you, Eliza, if hate can exist in that gentle heart, will be taught to hate me. I would have destroyed in my first transports these records of crimes at which humanity shudders; but as I grew more calm, I remembered I had no right—was not authorized to do so.

"I have written to you, Eliza—I have also written to the benevolent Kirby:—these letters will inflict pain. Alas! why is it I am thus marked out, as it were, for vengeance? I am wretched—I am yet worse. I now, Eliza, am guilty of a crime heaven and earth alike reprobate!—no, I will not behold you; unless as a wife, you are again clasped to the heart of Frederick."

"Oh, my father!" sighed out Alicia, "intentionally you could never do wrong! Ah! what a fatal chain of circumstances have concurred to render both my parents wretched! My father, like my mother, surely was most amiable; dear is her memory to me; and thou, my unfortunate father, thine, of whom till now I scarcely have been able to form an idea, shall not be less so!"

Alicia paused; she shuddered at the horrid recollection—"Mr. Bouchier and Eliza—mother, sister! Nature seemed to stand aghast at this union; and Alicia stood, as if irresolute how to proceed.—"No, I will not," thought she, "search into this terrible mystery; already I know sufficient.

So many, and such strange events had quickly followed each other during the last weeks of our heroine's life, upon which she had not leisure to reflect, that, as they mingled in her brain, it appeared a perfect chaos. First, she had learned William March had been falsely imprisoned, whilst the enemies of him and Sir Robert had used his name in carrying on an expensive law-suit, founded upon a strange, mysterious, but unjust claim. Alicia had herself been forcibly carried from her friends by a man she had every reason to believe a thorough bred villain, from whom she was rescued by a nobleman, whose pleasing and insinuating manner had sunk deep in her heart, and whose supposed virtues she almost worshipped. She is urged to marry him by letters from her dearest friends and benefactors; yet she refuses, her heart being guarded by its early and powerful attachment to Henry Bertram. At this period she learns Lord Trewarne's diabolical views, and, feigning compliance, escapes; her hurried journey to London—her surprise and sorrow for Lord and Lady Morville, who on her account had been ruined by the Earl, next succeeded; and, ere at Malieveren she had leisure to recover her fatigue of body, and her mental exertions, she views the pompous funeral of Lord Trewarne, whose death, she learns, was caused by his own hand. Free from constraint or dread, she sets out for Oakdale. At St. Mary's she meets the only relative she had ever beheld, except her mother, at a time she is so strongly agitated with hopes and fears; it scarcely had the power of more than momentarily interesting her: she reaches Oakdale, prepares for obeying the SOLEMN INJUNCTION of her mother, when he, whose untimely end she had deplored, starts on her astonished sight;—with a kind of instinctive movement (for sure it was not an act of reflection) she shoots the man whose crimes she was aware required length of time for repentance: she is again his prisoner, but instantly almost gets beyond his reach, and is shut into horrid chambers, whose terrors had never once ceased till then to appal her; but now her senses seemed as if blunted, and the keenness of her sensibility to have lost its acuteness of feeling.

Thus stood for some time our heroine bending over the drawer, whose contents were so highly important to her. At last Alicia shook off this kind of stupor, and drew forth a

manuscript of some size; it was marked No. 3, and entitled, "The Confessions of the wretched Penitant, Mildred Bertram," and addressed to Sir Robert Bertram, her nephew. The first pages contained strong expressions of remorse and deep contrition, and attributed her crimes to the wrong bent her mind in early life received: she then began a history of her life.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONFESSIONS OF MILDRED BERTRAM.

"I was the eldest of four children of Sir Henry Bertram. My mother died when my brothers were yet infants; I was my father's favourite, and indulged in every wish of my heart: thus I grew up without experiencing contradiction. I was addressed by a gentleman of considerable expectations, eldest son to Lord Masham, and imagined I was secure in the conquest I had made, when I danced with him at an assembly in a neighbouring town, where he was struck by the charms of a Miss Bryant. My empire was at an end; I did not again see Masham as a lover. His father soon after died;—he came into possession of the title and estate, and offered himself to Miss Bryant; but she refused, and by so doing, perhaps more fully raised my hatred than had she become Lady Masham. I have yet more material crimes to confess, as here I might relate the pains I took to sully the reputation, and ruin the happiness of a woman, amiable as she was lovely; her parents were dead; she was dependant upon friends, who threatened to forsake her, did she persist in her refusal of Lord Masham; but she remained resolute. Ere a year had elapsed after I lost my lover, Sir Henry died, and left me and my younger brothers dependant on his eldest son, without any other provision than what he chose to make out of the entailed estate. Bertram Castle was little more than a heap of ruins, and a long list of debts was left by Sir Henry to his heir, which, honesty required should be discharged. Alas! with grief, with shame, do I now recall the passions which rent my soul, when, a month after the interment of our father, Sir Robert introduced, as Lady Bertram, to me at Oakdale, Miss Bryant, who was, of all created beings, my aversion.—Conscious of having injured her, I knew that, was her disposition like my own, she might, without difficulty, work upon the easy temper of my brother, and exclude me his favour. Miss Bryant had been married to my brother some time previous to Sir Henry's death, although it had not been revealed. Ah! how different was the conduct of this amiable woman to mine! she saw my confusion, but developed not its cause, imputing it to the remembrance of my propagating some calumnies that had reached her ears. By every act of attention, she strove to banish from my mind all such recollections; yet still she saw the gloom of discontent hang over me, and resolved to make me at peace with myself, if in her power.

"One day when we were alone, she spoke of Lord Masham, declaimed against his fickleness, and at length, with much guarded delicacy, mentioned the stories that had been circulated to her prejudice, and said she attributed them to a passion too powerful to be resisted; and that, had a rival interfered with her in Sir Robert's heart, she would have gone greater lengths to have regained it.—'Sir Robert, my dear sister, tells me you love me. Is he not mistaken? I judge, Mildred, by my own heart, which loves you most truly; let us not look on the past—give me your confidence. Are you unhappy?—in me you will find a friend, warmly, sincerely interested for you.'

"Instantly I resolved to conceal my hatred, and rising, embraced Lady Bertram.—I wept to deceive. From this period, nothing could exceed the attachment I professed for

my sister; extolling her in a way she highly merited, whenever I imagined my praises would again reach her ear.

"Lord Masham, who hitherto had never resided at Thorpe Castle (his seat in the neighbourhood of Oakdale) now scarcely ever quitted it, even staying there without visiting London, during a winter remarkable for its storms. Lady Bertram had prudently proposed a plan of economy, which, if adopted, would in time enable my brother to discharge Sir Henry's debts, and allow him to provide for me, and in the mean time to allow me an annuity for clothes. Agreeable to this plan, little company was kept at the Hall, where Lord Masham had become a constant visiter. Sir Robert and he were almost inseparable. To me his Lordship behaved in a way that convinced me he penetrated my very soul, saw through my assumed character, and heartily detested, whilst he treated me with politeness. How different was his manner to her, whom I never ceased to look on as a rival: I saw, or imagined I saw, Lord Masham still loved Lady Bertram; but, afraid of giving her uneasiness, he concealed those sentiments of tenderness; and whilst his whole soul seemed engrossed by love, his approaches were made to her as to a being of some superior order.

"Thus passed away the first year after the death of my father; my soul sickening at the amiable qualities which I strove not to emulate, equally as at the well-merited happiness of Lady Bertram; and whilst she was abridging herself of many indulgences, suitable to her station, in order to render me independent, I lavishly expended, in foolish and expensive trifles, the allowance made me by Sir Robert, which, through her instigation, was larger than was consistent with the frugality otherwise observed. For the promised independence I waited with impatience, and at last determined upon hastening the period when I should no longer be under restraint.

"The general and prevailing character of the Bertrams is an unsuspecting easiness of temper, that would rather wink at imposition, than submit to exertion: this, more than actual extravagance, had deranged, by degrees, the affairs of the once wealthy family of Oakdale; none of whom could possess this easiness of disposition in a more eminent degree than my brother, Sir Robert. The rents of the estates were kept in an iron chest, a key to which I had procured during the life-time of Sir Henry, and now resolved to make a more frequent use of it than I had done; yet still the unsuspecting Baronet did not suspect any one had access to his cash but himself. 'Mildred,' said he one day to me, 'I fear I shall never get Sir Henry's debts paid, much less render you independent; for, notwithstanding all mine and Lady Bertram's economy, I do not know how it can happen, but, out of last year's rents, I paid 200l. of these old bills, and this half year I have liquidated nothing and have but 30l. left in my strong chest, and it wants a fortnight to May-day.

"I expressed my surprise, and with Lady Bertram hinted at the possibility of some person in the house entering the closet where the chest stood, and finding means to open it. This, Sir Robert said, was not possible; for the locks were of such a nature as effectually secured the honesty of his servants. 'We will, however, if you please, Sir Robert, keep so exact an account of our expenditures as will better enable us to judge;

and also an additional lock, if you object not, had better be added to the closet door.' My brother agreed to comply with this advice of Lady Bertram's, which for the future prevented my visiting Sir Robert's cash, and gave me a further cause of hatred to the amiable Alicia, who now proposed to my brother a further diminution of expence. 'I will (said she) be in future my own house-keeper, and one of the housemaids may be very well spared; I prefer riding on horseback to a coach, so I am certain does Mildred; but from you, Sir Robert, I had no right to expect any other conveyance but a horse, and if we do not keep a coach, and have fewer men servants, we shall have pleasanter reflections than those can bestow in discharging what I deem a necessary obligation.'

"Sir Robert would not agree to what he deemed a degradation, nor could he bear the idea that Lord Masham should behold the woman he would have preferred to all her sex, subjected by her refusal of him to this disagreeable situation.

"I had formed other plans, other schemes for the misery of this amiable woman, which I now resolved to put into practice; and by degrees had I already began to infuse suspicions into the mind of my brother, regarding the motive which prompted Lord Masham to reside constantly at Thorpe, a seat that had been abandoned by the family for some time. His frequent visits at Oakdale my wicked ingenuity often contrived should be made when Sir Robert was absent, and I took care that at different times on his return home, he should find his Lordship alone with Lady Bertram, whom I would draw into praising Lord Masham for his pleasing address, and those accomplishments in which he far excelled my brother; and when her Ladyship was absent, I have before Sir Robert artfully turned the conversation upon Lady Bertram, till in speaking of her Lord Masham so far forgot himself, as to break out in enthusiastic terms in her praise. In the summer Lady Bertram brought an heir to Sir Robert, who lavished on the mother and lovely infant the fondest attention. The colour of Sir Robert's hair, though at this time a bright chesnut, was when an infant red, as I well remembered, and such was the colour of his child's; such also was that of Lord Masham's.

"Have any of your family red hair, Lady Bertram!" said I one day in the presence of Sir Robert. 'Oh, no! (said the unsuspecting Alicia) the Bryants and Barlowes both have universally dark hair; I am sure this little fellow could not have those fiery locks from me; he must inherit them, Mildred, from the Bertrams.' 'Indeed, my sweet sister, you are deceived; not from the Bertrams; look at the pictures in the gallery; not one has red hair, nor any of the name I ever heard of.' 'I hate the colour, (said Sir Robert, in a tone quite unusual with him) I detest it; I hope the boy will not, as he grows up, have red hair; Masham would be handsome, was not his that colour.' 'Oh, (said I laughing) it is, I am sure, sister, from your looking so much at his Lordship, that the child's hair is red. Sir Robert at such another period you must not allow him to come to Oakdale.'

"My brother had fixed his eyes on Lady Bertram with a stare of inquietude, and lifting her's from the infant on her knee, she met the looks of her husband; the colour flushed over her face; Sir Robert bit his lips, and with an angry frown rose, and without speaking, left the apartment. The suspicions I had long been endeavouring to instil were now raised, and I knew all these trifling circumstances would be remembered, and have weight with

Sir Robert.—Lady Bertram appeared uneasy; I laughed and soothed by turns; leaving the room, and again returning, I assured her it was a violent pain in his head that caused the alteration she had seen in my brother's countenance, but that he was gone out quite well. Conscious of her own purity of heart, Alicia suspected not the jealousy of her husband, who from this time never caressed the infant as before. I took care to find means to keep alive the unjust suspicion I had laboured to instil. Sir Robert appeared at times as if he could not deem it possible his beloved Alicia had ever given cause to suppose any change in her sentiments towards him had taken place, and he was, as before, fondly attentive to her; at others he would appear gloomy, reserved, and for whole days together used to absent himself. I saw he was miserable, yet I knew unless he was so, my malice would remain ungratified.

"Alicia appeared at such periods deeply dejected; I acted the part of comforter, yet she complained not. I have seen the imperfect accents hang on the lips of my brother, but I have seen him check again the question he would have asked me, as if he thought it impiety to suppose Alicia was not virtuous, and as if he scorned the base suggestion he was about to make. Thus passed over the months of autumn, and when winter again came with its frosts and snow, still was Lord Masham at Thorpe. I found, that notwithstanding I believed his heart was yet Lady Bertram's, that the daughter of the rector of St. Mary's had charms sufficient to attract his attention; he had sought many opportunities of urging his suit to Miss Shaw, who had prudence sufficient to prevent her listening to him, when unsanctioned by her parents. I however contrived, by letters wrote in her name, to inform his Lordship it was but fear of her father, who had (as I knew was the case) affianced her to another, which prevented her from listening to him on the subject of his love. In this letter I named a certain tree between Oakdale and St. Mary's where Lord Masham's letters were to be deposited; he failed not to make use of this privilege, and a correspondence was thus established. Miss Shaw's name was Alicia, and no other was by his Lordship to be used, for fear of discovery. I now consented, in the lady's name, to an assignation with his Lordship; then informed him, that so closely did her father and her sister watch her, it was not in her power.—In answer to this Lord Masham said he was determined she should not long remain under the roof of her tyrant, and her sister, he believed, was envious of her charms; that if she was not resolved to drive him to despair, he begged she would suffer him to visit her in disguise the following night, when they could concert matters for her elopement. I answered this letter by praying, if he valued the peace of his Alicia, not to attempt coming to the parsonage; that her father suspected her attachment, and had confined her to her room, where he intended she should stay during his Lordship's residence at Thorpe; therefore conjured him to quit it instantly, but to return privately to North Oak, and she would then immediately fix with him the manner of her elopement, which would then be easy, as she would regain her liberty. Lord Masham followed this counsel, and I, who had taken care to let my brother see his last letter to Miss Shaw, also personated him, by passing quickly out of Lady Bertram's chamber in men's clothes, as Sir Robert entered. Her ladyship having gone early to bed, was already asleep; I was pursued by my brother, who had just been reading Lord Masham's letter; but I, by a back way, retreated to my own chamber, where slipping on a long wrapper, which concealing my dress, I appeared to him as he passed the door of my apartment, all rage and fury. I heard from him an unconnected tale—I assisted in his search—I censured

his base suspicions—I defended Lady Bertram, nor would I suffer him to see her. 'Alas!' said I, 'it cannot be—it is not possible; this is the work of some wretch, who envies your happiness: see not Lady Bertram till you are in possession of better intelligence.'

"The house, though every part was searched, was not found to contain Lord Masham. My brother mounted one of his fleetest hunters, and galloped to Thorpe Castle: his Lordship had set out at almost midnight—his servants knew not what road he had taken. The hour, every thing convinced my brother, who again returned to Oakdale, again wished to behold his once beloved Alicia; but I wept, entreated, and prevailed. To her I spoke of Sir Robert's jealousy, of his rage, of his swearing to sacrifice her to his resentment. Conscious of her innocence, she would brave it. 'Stay, my dear sister,' I said, 'till the first ebullition of his wrath subsides; then he will hear me plead for you.'—She, all gentleness, and void of any suspicion, sent a message by me to her husband: again I returned, and told her Sir Robert was now bent upon never more beholding her; that he meant that night to send her to Bertram Castle, and imprison her for life. She would submit, if such was his pleasure, but no force should prevent her from seeing him ere she went. I endeavoured to persuade her this would but further irritate him, and at present she shrunk from the trial.

"The rage of Sir Robert over, he gave himself up to deep despair; all his hopes of happiness were for ever blasted; he would quit England—he would end his days in some foreign land. To him I represented his lady as braving his resentment.

"I fixed with Lord Masham the next night for eloping with Miss Shaw;—the end of the terrace wall at Oakdale was the appointed place of meeting. I had the whole day been busied in preventing my brother and Lady Bertram from seeing each other, and had succeeded in making her suppose I had ineffectually endeavoured to meliorate his wrath, but that he continued obstinately fixed in sending her to Bertram Castle, which she knew was little more than a heap of ruins, and I painted it in yet more dreadful colours; it had long been uninhabited; and I talked of robbers issuing from it, and laying the neighbourhood under contributions; of travellers long lost to their friends, who had been found there sad spectacles of brutal rage, and humiliating proofs of morality. Alicia shuddered at the horrid picture; she could meet death from the hands of Sir Robert; but this horrid prison, she would do any thing to avoid. Thus she fell into the snare I so artfully had wound about her, and consented to quit Oakdale in disguise, whilst I was to provide all things ready for her flight. A chaise, with an old servant of her father's, I told her, should wait at a certain hour at the end of the terrace wall, and in London she was to wait the subsiding of the storm with her mother's brother.—Again she wavered; at Bertram Castle, however terrible it might be, would she await the pleasure of Sir Robert. Again I hinted at its horrors—again I wept, I entreated; and she submitted to wear the dress I had provided, which was a similar one to what Miss Shaw generally wore. The hour approached—I bade her adieu, saying, a short time I hoped would again restore her to Oakdale; meantime on me she might safely depend, and I would not fail of regularly writing to her. Lady Bertram now gave me a letter to her husband, as she had several before; those letters I said I as yet dared not offer to deliver; but for this, sure some favourable moment, which I should watch, would occur.

"With a heart rent with that grief, which I affected, Alicia bade me tenderly farewell; calling me her beloved sister, her only friend. Alas! I dare not comment on what I now feel, as I recal how she looked;—what an agonized expression sat on her countenance as she entreated me to allow her again to behold her infant! I feared her resolution, and refused. As she passed the room where Sir Robert was, she stopped; he was traversing the floor—she heard his step—she heard his sigh;—her hand rested on the lock—so nearly were my schemes defeated; but I dragged her away, and passing through the saloon, reached the court. Again she lingered—again I urged her to fly;—she crossed the terrace—I opened the door which led to the road, then bolted it, lest she should return, and hastened back to my brother, of whom I hastily enquired for Lady Bertram. He looked at me with an air of wildness, 'Why that question to me, Mildred?'—Oh! too sure it is she is gone! haste! fly! overtake her!—yet, too sure it was she who just now passed through the court. Oh! that fatal letter she received this morning! Lord Masham—it is him, my brother, Alicia flies to meet.'—Sir Robert snatched his pistols, and with a frantic air, ran out of the house. I alarmed the servants, and followed. We had not far to go, just beyond the limes that front the gate;—by the dim shade of moon-light was seen a chaise standing, and, ere we could reach it, was heard the report of a pistol; the lights the servants carried revealed the whole scene;—on the ground laid Lord Masham wounded by the hand of Sir Robert, who, in all the agony of despair, was throwing the other pistol from him as he fell by the body.—Lady Bertram had sunk in strong convulsions at the bottom of the chaise. For a moment I felt remorse at the distress I had brought on my brother; but I had now alike triumphed over Lord Masham, and her who dared rival me in his heart; I was revenged for the contempt which his Lordship had entertained for me.

"Lord Masham was conveyed into Oakdale Hall; so was Lady Bertram, in a state insensible of her misery. Sir Robert opposed me not, but silently allowed me to conduct him into the house; his rage was evaporated, and he was sunk in dejection. 'Fly, (I said) my dear brother, instantly fly! the wounds of Lord Masham, if not at once fatal, yet leave little room for hope; cross over to France; wait there the issue.'—'Alas, Mildred, I have nought worth living for! why wish me to prolong a life that is and must ever be a burthen to myself!'—He seated himself, and seemed as if in a fixed stupor, whilst I, with my usual celerity, gave orders regarding Lord Masham and Lady Bertram, and for the journey I was about to undertake. In a short space of time a carriage was ready, and assuming a kind of air, which seemed to forbid resistance, I took Sir Robert's arm, and led him to it. He spoke not as he seated himself by me; when we gained the top of the hill, and by the light of the sinking moon were seen the peaked turrets of the hall, he put out his head, and continued to gaze on them, till no longer they were distinguishable. 'Oh! false, perjured Alicia! accursed dissembler!' he exclaimed; again he drew back, nor once spoke till we reached Darlington, where my brother Henry was on the recruiting service. To him I explained such a part of the story as suited me, and entreated he would accompany Sir Robert to the Continent till the result was known regarding Lord Masham's wounds; to this my brother readily consented, as he knew he could easily procure leave of absence from his Colonel. 'Oh, Mildred! (said Sir Robert, at parting with me) to your prudent care do I commit the lost Alicia—she who was once so dear, so infinitely dear to me! Inspired by your example, she may yet regain the paths of virtue!

do not then you forsake her, guilty though she is! The child too, who bears my name, who must inherit my estate—Alicia's child! be you, Mildred, a parent to it! My brothers went south; I returned to Oakdale, where I found Lady Bertram delirious with fever, and the life of Lord Masham despaired of. I became the nurse of Alicia; so touching, so simple, so heart-rending were her complaints, that at times, had I been possessed of worlds, I would have given them that I had never injured her; but as these transitory fits of repentance subsided, I found I had embarked in an enterprize from which, unless I confessed myself one of the most depraved beings in the creation, there was no retreating; and though I was revenged, I found I was miserable, yes, most miserable; for I found Lady Bertram's virtues, her gentle and amiable manner, conciliated the love, the esteem of whoever approached her, and I saw the very domestics appear to detest me;—true, they obeyed me, but it was fear; I dreaded too they might have developed my secrets. I was jealous,—suspicious of all, every thing. On Lord Masham I had wreaked my malice; yet that had not conveyed happiness to me—far otherwise; I loved him, I had always loved him; his life now in danger, I could have watched over him, I could have performed the most menial offices for him, I should have felt comforted by it; but I was obliged to appear, though acting with humanity, as if remembering he would have carried off Lady Bertram, and that his wounds were justly inflicted. With a soul harrowed up by reflection, a prey to feelings that agonized me, I had a part to sustain most arduous; yet I shrunk not, and made exertions, which had they proceeded from motives that were praise-worthy, would have been highly meritorious. Alicia was brought back from the very brink of the grave, and this she attributed to my care; sadly did she deplore the fatal mistake which had caused so much sorrow to all parties, nor could she develop what had occasioned it, a chaise waiting at the appointed place, the step down, she had not hesitated, but instantly got in; nor had she discovered her mistake till Sir Robert made the postillion stop, and then she beheld Lord Masham. Miss Shaw was married the morning after this rencontre to the young clergyman to whom she had long been engaged, and set out from the church of St. Mary's to go South with him; I knew of the day being fixed ere I arranged my plans, and judged it a fortunate circumstance to avoid discovery. As soon as Lord Masham was sensible of his being at Oakdale, he insisted on being conveyed to Thorpe, which, at the hazard of his life was done. I had letters from Sir Robert, which, before I ventured to shew them to his Lady, underwent many alterations.

"It was some months before Lord Masham was out of danger, but ere then he wrote to the patient victim of my malice a true and particular account of what had caused the fatal mistake, by informing her of the affair with Miss Shaw, merely concealing names, in terms most highly expressive of the exalted sense he entertained of Lady Bertram's merit. He apologized for the misery he had caused her, and that it was not seeming appearances which that fatal night were against her, that could shake his belief of her not being one of the most perfect characters he knew; that he did not doubt it was in his power to clear up the mystery to Sir Robert; that he had wrote to him the same account he had to her Ladyship, and hoped a short time would restore her to the heart of her husband.

"Alicia wrote to my brother; I intercepted the letter, though I had it not in my power to do so with Lord Masham's, which, however, produced no effect, as Sir Robert deemed it

but an invention. To avoid reflections most painful, my brother fought the society of the gay and the dissipated.

"Lady Bertram, now despairing of a reconciliation, would have quitted Oakdale; but she was not to take the child, and she could not bear to leave him. She soon began, after the fever had left her, to have all the usual symptoms attendant on a consumption. As I beheld the meek sufferer gradually sinking into the grave, I was seized with a poignant sense of remorse, and I suffered a thousand times more than her, whose last days were cheered by conscious innocence. Oh! can I bear to recal the hours, can I write the agony I sustained, when Alicia, putting her child into my arms, 'take, (said she) my dear Mildred, this helpless infant into your protection! His father may desert—may disown him—but you, my sister, will prove to this child the same kind protector, the same prudent counsellor you have been to his unfortunate mother!' Ah! that then I had confessed my treachery; ah! that then I had implored her forgiveness, and hid myself in some distant country! But the measure of my iniquity was not full—I had but then began my career of wickedness! I trembled as I took the child, who clung, as if he divined my future malice, to his mother. I wept—I kneeled at the feet of Lady Bertram—I let fall expressions which amazed her, and had not at that instant the physician been announced, I had, by a candid declaration of my guilt, avoided perhaps the added load under which I now sink. But on what trifles do the greatest events of our lives hinge; my ideas took another turn, and I thought only of the best way to conceal my depravity. Alicia did not survive a month from this period; peaceful was her departure, who sure was an angel upon earth; her soul was the seat of truth—of virtue; every feminine grace was her's. No sooner was the interment of Lady Bertram over, than I set out for London upon a visit, leaving the nurse in charge of the child.

"Lord Masham was ordered to Lisbon by the physicians, and about this period left England; to his death may I also be deemed accessory, for before I left London, where I spent two months, I learned the ship was lost in which he embarked, ere it reached its port. Severely did I mourn; for still notwithstanding the cool contempt I had experienced from him, I loved Lord Masham; yet sure it was no gentle inspiration; it was the dart of love, steeped in the pit of Acheron, that filled my heart with hell-born passions, for from this source do I date my first glaring deviation from rectitude.—Stop then, reader, if such you have committed, stop at the first crime, nor let shame stimulate to concealment; if thou attempt it, thou art entangled for ever; the net of thy iniquities shall envelope thee!

"At Naples the news of Lady Bertram's death reached her husband, who instantly embarked for England, and ere I had any intimation of his return, he arrived at Oakdale. Deeply, severely did he condemn himself; it was not possible his beloved Alicia had been guilty; why did he believe it? he was her murderer—she was killed by his unkind suspicions—his friend too, the generous Masham, owed his death to him! I did not attempt to stop these violent effusions of grief; I knew my brother would not listen to me, did I attempt to depreciate the angel he mourned; nor did I suppose he would hear my consolations. At first he could not bear to behold his child, but on the second day, hung over him with fondness; the lovely boy had the mild and interesting countenance of his mother, and Sir Robert seemed but to live as he beheld him. In the favourite walks of

Alicia would my brother wander with his little son for days, and he took interest in nothing, but what nursed his sorrow, by reminding him of his loss.

"The gay life Sir Robert had led whilst on the Continent, added to the former embarrassed state of his finances, made his affairs desperate, and he was obliged to rouse himself, to retard the ruin which hung impending;—money was borrowed to satisfy the most importunate of the creditors. I perceived the mischief must shortly overwhelm my brother, of course me, whose entire dependance was upon his generosity. During his absence from home, I had the small-pox in so dreadful a manner, that those attractions, which my vanity made me suppose almost unrivalled, were gone. Destitute too of fortune, I had small chance of being provided for by matrimony; therefore, with my brother must I sink: his handsome face, and fine person, with the polished address he had now acquired, added to his rank in life, made me entertain no doubt of his obtaining the hand of some wealthy heiress, could I induce him to address such a one.

"I had, during my visit in London, become acquainted with a Miss Harris, the only child of a rich merchant, who died after Sir Robert's return from Italy, leaving his daughter an immense fortune, but subject, I was informed, to certain whimsical restrictions; one of which was, that if she married a Peer, or the son of one, her fortune was to build and endow an hospital for idiots; in the front of which was to be placed her statue, holding the coronet she was or would be entitled to wear, with an inscription below, signifying the sum it had cost her. This I knew was a mortifying clause to Miss Harris, whom I had heard repeatedly declare she would never marry unless she could be stiled Lady. My brother could confer the wished-for title, and was not within the objectionable clause of the will; yet I dared not attempt mentioning to Sir Robert that by this marriage, if he chose, his affairs might be redeemed, and the family be more opulent than for the three last generations it had been. To wean Sir Robert from his grief, I pretended the child was sick, and required change of air; I thus removed my brother from Oakdale to the seats of different friends.

"Sir Robert's melancholy gave way; I then declared the child was in perfect health, and proposed returning to Oakdale. It was the depth of winter. Sir Robert revolted from the idea; he could not bear to return to a place which recalled such gloomy thoughts.—'You are right, Sir Robert; I am certain,' said I, 'you would live at less expence any where than at the hall, where, however limited your means, you must keep up the ancient hospitality of the family.'—I then proposed London for our residence the remainder of the winter; and my brother, whose easiness of temper seldom allowed him to look beyond the present, and who hated to oppose, acquiesced.—Arrived in the metropolis, I soon found means to introduce Sir Robert to Miss Harris, whilst, by degrees, I estranged the child from its parent; till he, who at Oakdale was scarce an hour separated from him, would be days without beholding him. I had taught the boy to be terrified at his father, by frequent and unmerited punishments in his name, whilst to my brother I spoke of the evil propensities of his son Miss Harris and Sir Robert had from me been mutually assured of each other's passion, till what was but imaginary, became real. But why need I relate the arts I practised? suffice it to say, Sir Robert declared he loved Miss Harris, who rejected not his suit, and preparations were soon begun for their union; when, in preparing the

settlements, Mr. Harris's will being examined, it was found that he, who had suffered under the tyranny of a step-mother, had forbade his daughter ever to become one, under the penalty of losing one half of her fortune, which was to go to Christ Church Hospital, where he had been educated. Miss Harris declared this was a very reasonable restriction; she had no idea of making Sir Robert's son her heir, as she, if twenty children should come from this marriage, could not expect one to have a title, as that, with Sir Robert's entailed estate, must go to his eldest son; she therefore resolved to break off the match. My brother sued in vain, and I would gladly have compounded with the hospital for half Miss Harris's fortune. I, however, at length, by representing the infinite distress of Sir Robert, got the wealthy heiress to promise she would not marry for a year. The child, I said, was a sickly, puny boy, who I did not think could survive many months.

We returned to Oakdale, where we were surrounded by importunate creditors, and, but for the little Robert, affluence courted the acceptance of my brother. Scarcely any thing remained to be disposed of; already were the horses sold, and an execution was expected to be put in force at Oakdale. I now ventured to propose sending the child to some distant country, and then proclaiming his death. Sir Robert would not listen to me on the subject that day, but the next his person was arrested. I gave up on this occasion the family jewels.—'To save you, my generous Mildred, from poverty, from want, I would do much; yet I cannot consent that my child should be abandoned, that he should quit Oakdale.'—I promised he never should—that he should never be from under my care, yet be believed dead, if Sir Robert, trusting to my prudence, would suffer me to manage the affair as I chose. 'Alas!' said I, 'unless you marry Miss Harris, the child, as well as myself, may be abandoned to want.'—I then slightly hinted at Lord Masham's conduct regarding Lady Bertram, and said, I wondered why his Lordship had never produced the letter he spoke of having received from the young woman regarding the assignation at the terrace wall. This I perfectly comprehended, having taken care to secure his pocket-book the evening of his being wounded, in which was contained my letters. Sir Robert paused.—'True, (at last he said) that was strange, very strange indeed, Mildred.' Yet you do not suspect the truth of what I wished to believe; but now I beseech you, frankly say, what are your real sentiments; you defended Lady Bertram, you corroborated the tale told by Lord Masham.'

I was silent;—again he entreated—I eluded the question, and at length left the room;—Sir Robert followed.—'A child (said I) whose blood is tainted, ought not to inherit the lands and titles of the Baronets of Oakdale; ask me not, my brother, further questions; have I not to you defended Lady Bertram, have I not ever been studious of your happiness.' Sir Robert wrung my hand, sighed, and retired to his chamber, and the next day a mutual promise passed between us, on his side not to interfere with my plans, on mine not to send the child from Oakdale, or entrust him to the care of any one but myself. Sir Robert then set out, agreeable to my directions, for Northumberland.

"The hall of Oakdale, which was originally a Castle of considerable strength, gave under the reigns of the Plantagenets, the title of Baron to its owners—a privilege which was lost, however, when Randolph Bertram, the tenth Baron of Oakdale, was attainted by Edward the Fourth, for having sided with the house of Lancaster. The castle had been demolished during those desolating wars, and their estates laid waste; by the first prince

of the house of Tudor, a part of their lands was restored, and Henry the Eight, by the gift of some monastic lands, in some degree atoned for the losses the family had sustained. At this period, from the ruins of Oakdale Castle rose the hall, which in the time of Queen Elizabeth was greatly enlarged and beautified by Sir Philip Bertram, who was knighted for his valour by her Majesty, and rose to considerable distinction in her service. In this reign the Roman Catholic religion, which under the preceding one had been the persecutors, now in its turn became the persecuted. Attached to his religion, Sir Philip found out a way to practise it in secret, though he publicly abjured what would have prevented his advancement at court. The castle of Oakdale, in common with most other buildings of its age and style, had many private and concealed passages, which yet remained; and when Sir Philip added the wings to the house, he contrived a secret way that led through the closet of the room in which he slept, into a small chapel, where in private he exercised the duties of his religion and where he kept a priest to perform its sacred functions. From the chapel there was a communication with the vaults, that originally had been used as the burying place of the family, (though the greatest part of them had been interred at Bertram), for where this wing of the hall was built had stood the chapel of Oakdale Castle. From these concealed apartments a way, by the subterraneous passages of which I have spoken, led out into the garden, as also to the banks of the river. This secret, from the time of Sir Philip, had been carefully guarded in the family, as a certain place of refuge; such indeed it proved during the civil wars in the reign of Charles the First, for in it was saved from depredation the plate, linen, and most valuable furniture; here also lived for a considerable time a son of the family of Oakdale, concealed from a strict search made after him, in consequence of his engaging in the rebellion of 1715. It had been the custom for never more than two of the Bertrams to be in possession of this secret. At the death of a brother of my father's, his eldest son was too young, he thought, to be made acquainted with an affair that was deemed of much importance, and to me it was entrusted; my father died suddenly, or would doubtless, as had been usual in the like cases, have disclosed it to his heir; with me alone it rested, and I resolved so it should for the present remain. Into these apartments therefore, when Sir Robert quitted the hall, I conveyed what I judged would be requisite for my plan, and I administered to my nephew drugs that produced fever and sickness;—a physician was sent for, who attended a few days, when I gave him a sleepy potion, which imposed on the ignorant female servants about him so far that they did not dispute his death. I suffered after this no one to be in the chamber with the sleeping innocent, whom I conveyed into the concealed apartments once dedicated to piety, but from thence to deeds of darkness, and bitter—bitter repentance. I put into the coffin appointed to receive the body of the heir of Oakdale, a wax figure which I had made, an art I was expert in; the face, which bore an exact resemblance to that of the devoted boy, was seen when in the coffin by all the servants and most of the females, whose husbands were tenants of Sir Robert's, in the vale.

"The day after the interment my brother returned; scarce could I convince him the child was safe, even though for that purpose I brought him into Sir Philip's chamber, where his father beheld him, though I would not suffer him to speak.—In this room, which was seldom entered, and which I had kept locked up for some time, did Sir Robert suppose I meant to conceal his son; his anguish was extreme when he quitted Oakdale to

renew his addresses to Miss Harris, under the idea of the death of his heir;—but I will not recapitulate; suffice it to say; in a few weeks from this period the marriage took place I had been at such pains to accomplish, but the fortune of the wealthy heiress was so settled, that her husband had the disposal of no part without her permission. Soon after the marriage Sir Robert and Lady Bertram came to Oakdale, which she declared her utter aversion to; they shortly quitted it, and her ladyship was highly offended by my proposing to accompany her to Acornbank, which estate was the only landed property she brought into the family. In less than a year Lady Bertram was mother to a little girl, and then consented to the rebuilding Bertram Castle, and making such alterations and improvements on the estate as was necessary. Meanwhile I was a prisoner at Oakdale, and my innocent charge, who except at night was deprived of air and exercise, continued to grow, and remain healthy.

Lady Bertram almost every year had a child; yet all, except the eldest girl, died in infancy, and when she had been nine years married, it was thought she would have no more. Sir Robert had at different times endeavoured, by sounding his lady upon similar subjects, to pave the way for introducing his son to her; but she had uniformly declared, that was he to attempt imposing upon her in any way, she would instantly withdraw herself and fortune; nor was this an idle threat, for she had it in her power exceedingly to distress Sir Robert, as by her settlement, and the way in which the money had been advanced for the improvement of the estate, she could recover the whole for her own separate use. Alas! my dear nephew, truth obliges me to say, what from a child had better be concealed, Lady Bertram ever chose to consider her interest separate from that of her husband, and no doubt could remain, that had he produced his son, she would instantly have determined upon revenge, which would have rendered the situation of Sir Robert infinitely worse than when she married him;—by this means, and by the regard my brother had for her, Lady Bertram, availing herself of his natural easiness of temper (that even preferred imposition to contention), ruled implicitly. Spite of this attachment he felt to her, Sir Robert knew little happiness; the angel he had lost was sadly contrasted by the selfish-minded Lady Bertram, who doated on the child she allowed to govern her, as absolutely as her Ladyship did her husband. The want of a son to inherit the title and estates was to Lady Bertram a constant source of inquietude, whilst Sir Robert considered it, as it perhaps really was, a well-deserved punishment for disowning his child. He visited Oakdale with this idea in his mind, and insisted upon seeing his son, who was now grown almost as tall as himself. I was obliged to submit to my brother's wishes; he saw his son, but saw him uninstructed, ignorant of every species of education, and equally so of the most common occurrences of life; even the modes and forms of speech were nearly unknown to him. Ashamed of my neglect, I assured my brother no pains or care had been wanting, and that the youth was destitute of understanding. Sir Robert had meditated taking him from the hall, and presenting him as his son to Lady Bertram, who now began to despair of having one of her own, as three years had elapsed since she had a child. My brother therefore proposed sending his heir to a distant country, where, under the care of some person, he would learn to distinguish objects that surrounded him, and receive the rudiments of education. I warmly opposed this plan; and by promising to renew my endeavours for instruction, I prevailed upon my brother to leave his son with me at

Oakdale, repeatedly assuring him, I would do all in my power to render him fit for being introduced to Lady Bertram, if in two years time she had not a son.

I had long been weary of the confinement to which I had subjected myself, and had taken a young person of the name of Eliza Bouchier, whose mother was my first cousin, and daughter to the only brother of my father, who like him, improvident, had dissipated his fortune, and left his child unprovided for; she had married a gay young man, both died, and Eliza was left destitute. By taking her to reside with me I got credit for charity I possessed not, my principal motive being to secure myself a companion in my solitude. Over this young creature I often poured out the fits of passion to which I became subject, for I found no satisfaction save the malignant one of making all round me as miserable as myself. The world contained neither happiness nor pleasure for me, and a sure way to draw down my displeasure, was the appearance of enjoying either; my temper, joined with the idea of the unquiet spirits which were believed to haunt Sir Philip's chamber, obliged me to hire domestics from distant parts of the country, as no person in the neighbourhood chose their sons or daughters to live at Oakdale Hall, where often I should have been left perfectly alone, but for Eliza, who could not leave me. Since the days of Sir Philip, the idea of his chamber being the resort of some unhallowed guests prevailed at St. Mary's—a superstition never discountenanced by that part of the family possessed of the secret of his chapel, they deeming this belief a means of further guarding it; for this end was the apartment generally locked up, and a curious piece of mechanism occasionally employed as the agent of terror. A spring inserted in the floor, by being pressed down, drew back a part of the wainscot, from which advanced an armed figure; but this had, by time or accident, been so far spoiled, as not to open with this spring. But soon after Sir Robert's second marriage a travelling German came to Oakdale, and I found by the skill he displayed in repairing a very curious clock, that he would be able also to restore what was wanting to the movements of this figure. I bound him to secrecy by a sum of money, and paid him liberally for what he did, which was to make a piece of clock-work which, communicating in the same way as the former one with the figure, also disclosed it, but disclosed it momentarily, nor could the pannel which it removed be opened, as strong bolts instantly fastened it; this was also moved with a spring inserted curiously in the midst of the floor, which being pressed, instantly set the machine moving, with a noise which resembled deep groans; I also had it in my power to prevent the spring being affected by the strongest pressure. No sooner did I judge the contriver of this was at a distance, than I, who had substituted a waxen figure of a most horrid aspect for the figure in armour, tried its effect upon some of the servants, whom at night would call into the room, or send for something, which I had taken care to place so, that they could not avoid touching the spring; thus instantly was the terrible tale spread, which I affected not to believe. From this period no servant in the vale ever would venture into the hall, yet still upon the unfortunate beings who were strangers did I try the effect of my scheme, which cost the lives, I greatly fear, of several whom I terrified into fits. Eliza I had never suffered to behold the spectre, and she uniformly ridiculed the idea.

"Soon after Sir Robert's last-mentioned visit to Oakdale, a brother of my mother's died, who had bequeathed to me ten thousand pounds. The hall appeared to me a prison, which in fact it had long been; I resolved to regain my liberty, and determined in part to

entrust Eliza. I set forth the vast obligations she was under to me, and then reminded her of the large fortune which now was at my own disposal; this I told her should at my decease be solely her's, and that during my lifetime she should share it, provided she conducted herself as I wished. As an earnest of my intentions, I made her a present of money, and an entire new stock of fashionable apparel. Eliza promised as amply as I had done my will should be her's. I then said I had a secret in my possession, known only to myself, which I wished her to share with me, but that I required a solemn oath she should not divulge or use it to my prejudice. Eliza, without hesitating, took the oath I prescribed; and I informed her of the concealed apartments, where a youth of the family of Bertram (who in point of understanding was almost an idiot) was confined; as it was feared some artful person might, in his name, contest an estate now in the possession of Sir Robert, that all I required of her was, as stated periods to attend this person. I then led the way into Sir Philip's chambers, and shewed her into the concealed one, where we found my unfortunate nephew amusing himself, as he often did, with chalking on the floor the resemblance of those objects he had seen; he was now employed in tracing out his father, and without lifting his eyes, desired I would not walk upon that, for it was the man he had seen who talked of Alicia, and cried. Eliza stepped upon one of his lines; he struck at her, and raised his eyes from his employment; he appeared as if petrified by wonder; his eyes were fixed—his mouth open—whilst one hand rested on the floor, the other remained as he had raised it to repeat his blow. 'Rise,' said I, with my usual tone of command.—'Tell me then what is this; it is not like you; will you leave it when you go away? and I will never follow you again, and ask to go where I used when I was only that high.'

"The heir of Sir Robert was at this time tall, and finely formed; his features were uncommonly handsome, but his complexion was pale and sallow, from the want of air and exercise he had experienced; since I found, when I took him into the garden, at a time when all besides were asleep, he became too strong for me to bring back to his prison against his inclination. I had also till then suffered him to play for hours in the court, when I had sent the servants out, or by locking the doors, prevented them reaching that front of the hall. Was I to say a youth, destitute of all kinds of knowledge, had an intelligent countenance, I should not, perhaps, express myself with propriety; but it certainly was an interesting one, and far from conveying an idea of its possessor wanting understanding. 'What is it lady?' pointing to Eliza, was the question my nephew again, with an impatient tone, enquired.—'I told him it was a woman I had brought to talk to him, and give him victuals, and clothes, and chalk.'—'And will she stay here and make them, or will she let me go into that place where the apples live, and the birds, and where I used to run away from you, lady?' 'No (I replied), but if you are obedient, she will come again often to see you.'—'Will you then, woman, come back again?' Eliza assured him she would. This visit over, she began her attendance, and in a short time, supposing I might trust her with my charge, I set out for a fashionable place of resort, in a new carriage with suitable attendants.

"Till now I had admitted no one to share my secrets; I was at once the contriver and executor of my own plans; yet having now a handsome fortune at my disposal, I could no longer brook the solitary life I led at Oakdale, and buoyed up by that self-consequence from which my faults first originated, I ardently desired to mix again in the world, where

I doubted not of meeting admirers, and trusted to the oath I had exacted from a young woman who depended on my bounty, for keeping secret what had cost me so much trouble and anxiety to do. Eliza was twenty-four, had an understanding uncommonly quick and discerning; my treatment had taught her cunning and deceit; she had heard me talk of duties which she saw I did not fulfil, although I expected she should; and, like me, Eliza placed her chief good in the gratification of her passions, which she also from me learned to conceal;—thus was she rendered, by my example, well able to contend with me, who now had put it in her power to exercise those dormant powers of a mind uncommonly capacious.

"I had told Eliza a tale, which though not truth, yet in some degree varied not far from it. I had said he was heir to an estate, but excluded because of the imbecility of his mind. I had also told her he had not a friend but myself, and from the period when I first betrayed myself to her, Eliza, no less artful than I was, laid her plans, and thought of her oath only as it served as a cover to her schemes. To marry the youth, and claim his estate, was the foundation of her hopes of independency and greatness; but by instruction she knew it would first be needful to remove the charge of idiotism which I had laid against him. No sooner had I quitted Oakdale, than she allowed him free access into Sir Philip's chamber, where she spent the larger portion of her days in instructing him; and so successful was she, that in a month's time he was able to read a little, and she soon had made him understand I was his gaoler; but if he would learn those things she meant to teach him, she would take him away from his prison, and never leave him, but that he must carefully conceal his knowledge from the Lady, which was the name I chose he should distinguish me by. Treated with kindness, the unfortunate youth was perfectly obedient to his instructress, who was well qualified for the task she had undertaken. Her own education had been finished, or nearly so, at the death of her parents, and she had been taught all that was needful at present for her charge, such as writing, arithmetic, and drawing, (for which he had a natural genius) nor in the hearts of men more conversant in the world would the charms of Eliza have wanted force. She had an air of superiority which arose from the full regularity of her features, and the expression of her fine eyes and intelligent countenance, nor were her manners destitute of an elegance and ease which were inherent in her, and were not acquired by mixing in company, as since her residence at Oakdale she had seen few people but its inhabitants.

"I returned, after a few months absence, to the hall, and so satisfied was I of Eliza's care, and so implicitly did I confide in her, that I scrupled not to quit Oakdale frequently for weeks together, when Eliza contrived her charge should have both air and exercise, and he no longer was destitute of knowledge, though yet that was limited to books and Eliza's conversation, whom he informed he had a faint recollection of several places in the garden, which he had seen when he was a very little child; he also mentioned I was not then cross to him, and that I then called him Robert, and he me aunt; also that he had a father. Eliza was lost in conjecture, yet resolved to penetrate the mystery which hung over this unfortunate youth. She scrupled not to enter the place where I kept my papers, and there she found letters from Sir Robert, which convinced her the unhappy prisoner, to whom he often alluded, was his son and heir. Eliza had heard from me of the death of the child, whose existence had for some time prevented Miss Harris becoming Lady Bertram.

Miss Bouchier then bribed the sexton of St. Mary's, and descending into the vault, opened the coffin which was supposed to contain the body of the child; there she found sufficient to convince her that the child then believed to have been interred, was the youth who from that period I had immured in those gloomy chambers; yet as no person disputed the death of Sir Robert's heir, and as the secret remained only with me, she saw there was small chance of asserting his rights, unless Sir Robert would relent, and acknowledge him.

"At this period you, Sir Robert, were born, and I was summoned to Acornbank to stand sponsor. My brother already knew that Eliza was entrusted with the secret of the prisoner at Oakdale, which I had been obliged to confess after my first absence from it. No sooner had I set out on my journey, than Eliza informed the servants she was going to make a visit to some friends, and ordered a chaise to be ready at an hour in the morning when it was not light. The son of Sir Robert and Alicia was set at liberty, and waited, by Eliza's appointment, a mile from Oakdale; they reached London, and were married at the Fleet the very day of your being christened, Sir Robert, and the next day, at Acornbank, intended to beg pardon, and restitution of his father's kindness. But I had heard of Eliza quitting Oakdale, and fearing something wrong, hastened thither with my brother, where his son and Eliza followed. Sir Robert, moved by the melting language of nature, acknowledged his son, and as he clasped the handsome youth to his heart, vowed to make him amends, for what had passed, but that the discovery must not be made public as yet; a few years, nay months, might make a material change, as Lady Bertram's health seemed at present in a declining state, and he could not bear the idea of confessing to her the deception which had been practiced; in the meanwhile, and till he did publicly acknowledge him as his son, he would allow him a genteel sufficiency provided neither Mr. or Mrs. Bertram made any attempts to disclose the story. To this proposal the amiable and unfortunate youth instantly agreed, and Eliza, whose heart panted after rank and affluence, reluctantly consented to the plan, which she saw no way to avoid. A house was taken for them in a wild and retired part of Westmoreland, where they resided under a feigned name.

"Two years elapsed, Lady Bertram still lived, and Eliza no longer could bear the humble stile in which she moved, no longer could she brook the haughty manner in which I treated her. By various pretences I prevented Sir Robert from beholding his son, as I trembled at the idea of being exposed to the world in my true colours, and above all I dreaded Sir Robert's coming to the knowledge of my treachery regarding his beloved Alicia, and his friend Lord Masham. Yet I kept up appearances with my nephew, who with his spouse visited me at Oakdale, where she found means again to investigate my papers, and learned, during her stay, I was about to marry a Mr. Leger, a plain country squire of coarse manners, but large fortune. I informed her of the day being fixed, when she, before she quitted the hall, spoke to me of the report. The day after Mr. and Mrs. Bertram returned to their own house, Sir Robert, his Lady, and daughter arrived in order to be present at my nuptials. On the appointed day I went, accompanied by them, to St. Mary's church, where Mr. Leger was to meet me; a large concourse of people was assembled, but I saw not, as I expected, the elegant coach Mr. Leger had bought on the occasion, and as I alighted, his footman came up, pushing his way through the crowd, and

said, 'his master had sent him to tell me I need not wait, for he had changed his mind.' The affront was a public and a most mortifying one, yet I sunk not under it; my soul took fire, and I burned for revenge on the author. The whisper ran buzzing through the crowd; the pity of Lady Bertram, the astonishment of her daughter, and the agitated look of Sir Robert, (who I saw dreaded as I did some discovery relative to his son) were all calculated to depress me, and subdue that cool command of temper and manner which I wished to preserve. Had I at that instant possessed the power, I would have annihilated all who beheld my disgrace, for I imagined I saw a malicious pleasure in the countenances of those who surrounded me, which seemed to remind me of my former arrogance, and that I was justly punished for having, without mercy, exercised the iron rod of my power over some beloved relative or friend. I again entered the carriage, and begged sir Robert would accompany me to Brushwood Hall, where I would instantly go, to have an explanation from Mr. Leger. I bade Lady and Miss Bertram good morning with a gay air, and then threw amongst the crowd the content of my purse: 'Follow me, (I said) my friends, to Brushwood; the squire has provided a dinner, which was intended for me, and what company I chose, and you, who have heard of his ill usage, shall partake of it. I was saluted with three cheers, and then taking out the horses, we were thus drawn to the squire's house, before which we found him walking; but terrified at the shouts of "Long live Sir Robert and Madame Mildred," he retreated as I alighted, and I followed, to enquire of my expected husband, in a haughty tone, his reasons for acting as he had done. 'My reasons,' said he, 'are contained here,' giving a letter into Sir Robert's hands. I now told him I was resolved not to quit his house till he permitted the mob who surrounded it to eat the dinner which was, I knew, provided for the wedding. Glad at any rate to be clear of me, and moreover, I believe, afraid force would be used, he determined to do it with a good grace, and agreed to my proposal. I notified to my followers what I had done, and the house was instantly filled with guests, I staying till I saw the tables covered with provisions, and a proportionable quantity of ale and punch. During this Sir Robert was with Mr. Leger in another room; when my brother returned, he appeared pale and agitated, and taking my hand, led me to the carriage, where the servants had replaced the horses.

"During our drive to Oakdale, Sir Robert informed me the letter the squire had shewn him contained dark hints regarding my conduct for several years. Could I, Mildred, credit what is advanced, I should at this instant be the most wretched being upon earth; but these surmises are false; I will not, I dare not think of them! I cannot believe them, and retain my senses!—But here is the letter; I prevailed upon Leger to give it me.'

"With a trembling hand I took it, and saw it was Mrs. Bertram's writing; the hints given in it regarding my duplicity to the late Lady Bertram were such, as to convince me the writer was in possession of some intelligence, which if fully disclosed, must ruin me for ever in the good opinion of my brother; but couched in the manner they were, nothing certain could be ascertained. From my dislike to Lady Bertram, was traced my ill treatment of her child, and referred Mr. Leger to Sir Robert for a confirmation of the truth of my hatred to his son, though he knew not my hatred to his Lady. The letter concluded with several instances of my arrogant and overbearing spirit, and with advice to Mr. Leger, if he valued his peace, not to take me as his wife, and assuring him if he even at

the altar declined my hand, the rest of my transactions should be concealed; but that, if he persisted in marrying me, such a scene of iniquity should be disclosed, as should cover me with infamy, and of course he would be involved in it. Secrecy was enjoined, which the squire had not complied with.

"I shewed Sir Robert, on our return home, letters from Mrs. Bertram, which proved the writing was her's; and to falsify the account her rancour had given to Mr. Leger, I recalled various instances of the attachment which appeared mutual between Lady Bertram and myself. The sacrifice I had made of all I could command, my jewels to save Sir Robert from distress, and several instances of less importance were hinted at, which my brother had never ceased to remember. Disbelieving, therefore, what was advanced to my prejudice, he tore the letter to atoms, and again was he confident in my integrity, and denounced vengeance on Mrs. Bertram, who had, in her letter, said he was but a mere puppet in the hands of the artful Mildred. I failed not to magnify the wicked dissimulation of Eliza, whom I had treated as if she had been my daughter, and how ungrateful her whole conduct had been; yet I intreated no rash step might be taken, but that Sir Robert would, with me, pass this affair over in silence, as, if she was irritated, I doubted not of her acquainting Lady Bertram of all she knew, My brother acquiesced in my opinion, and after a week's stay at Oakdale, he with his family quitted it, and I was left a prey to the most turbulent passions. A thousand times I execrated my folly in even trusting any one with a secret of such importance as I had confided to Eliza, whom I now found had by some means come at my very thoughts, and I was assured it could be by no other means than gaining access to the place where I kept my papers. I knew, did no other reasons restrain her, she wished for nothing so sincerely as revenge on me, and I felt myself in the power of a woman who hated me. To anticipate her revenge, I acted in idea deeds of dreadful import; I saw I had been her dupe; I saw that she had assumed a frank simplicity of manner, far from her real character, that had thrown me off my guard. I had bequeathed my fortune to Eliza, and at her marriage declared it should remain so, therefore the hope of retaining this, I suppose, had joined in the wish of revenge which actuated Mrs. Bertram's letter to the squire of Brushwood. I had my will altered, making an illegitimate child of Lord Masham's my heir, whose memory was yet dear to me.

"My anger would have fallen heavy on Mr. Leger, had I deemed him worthy of any thing but contempt. He had informed Sir Robert he thought it was a pity he should have been at such a great expence for nothing, and thought he must marry somebody with a better character, though she had not, like me, thousands; and in pursuance of this plan he chose for a wife, in less than a week after, a young woman of fifteen, who was the daughter of one of his tenants. I resolved to triumph, and on the green of St. Mary's Oak had temporary booths erected, where for two days I feasted all that came in honour of this wedding.—During this time the new-married couple were besieged day and night by my noisy adherents, and the poor squire was at length obliged to disperse them by the help of constables. Aiming now at popularity in the vale, I no longer was the same character; I was kind, hospitable, charitable, and former dislikes were forgotten. Thus at Oakdale passed over another year, when my heart, rankling for revenge on Eliza, I went into Westmoreland to visit my nephew and her.—Mrs. Bertram had infused her discontent into her husband, and nothing but the fear of disobliging his father had power to restrain

him from publishing to the world the whole story. The annuity which was settled on them was not large; it suited not the generous spirit of Mr. Bertram, or the pride and extravagance of his wife, and I found them considerably embarrassed with debts they had contracted. In a letter my nephew gave me to forward to his father, he pressed him to do something to relieve their pecuniary distresses, but this letter I committed to the flames; in consequence Mr. Bertram was arrested, and thrown into prison.

"Eliza instantly resolved how to act; she was mother to a little girl, whose claims, and those of Mr. Bertram's, she would boldly assert; she would not stoop to again solicit Sir Robert—she would be revenged upon me. With this determination she went to Acorn-bank; to Lady Bertram she told her tale, who ordered her to be taken care of till Sir Robert's return home. To him she related what Mrs. Bertram had informed her of, and solemnly declared, had she spoken truth, she would harass him in every possible shape; that she would immediately withdraw herself and fortune from a man capable of so base a deception. Terrified at the idea of losing a woman who had become necessary to his happiness (for notwithstanding the dissimilarity of their characters, he loved her with the tenderest affection, and allowing her to acquire a complete ascendancy over him, implicitly yielded to her judgment), Sir Robert hesitated.—Was he, by owning his son, to declare to Lady Bertram he had for years deceived her—that he had trepanned her into a marriage? Was he to do this, and by so doing, acknowledge himself unworthy of her, and most surely be separated from her for ever, and at the same time render the estates of Bertram and Oakdale in much the same state they were at St. Henry's death? Did he disavow the tale told by Eliza, should he survive Lady Bertram, he could publicly own his son, who at all events he would take care should inherit the title and estates of the family. He partook of my dislike to Mrs. Bertram, and was irritated at her violating the promise he had exacted: urged by these motives, he determined on his conduct. and disowning the tale, Eliza was sent in disgrace from Acorn-bank.

"Meanwhile I released my unfortunate nephew from prison, and informed him what his wife had disclosed to Lady Bertram, and further added, Eliza was then at Oakdale in the chambers he had occupied. Agreeable to my wishes he incautiously accompanied me to the hall, and I resolved, when I had betrayed him into the concealed apartments, to confine him till I could confer with Sir Robert on the subject. Alas! how shall I relate the scene which the following morning was presented to my sight—how convey an idea of my horror, when entering I found my wretched nephew, whose life had been one series of misfortune, stretched a breathless corpse on the floor, which was deluged with blood! in his hand was yet grasped the pistol that had done the fatal deed! His blood is on my head, it sits heavy on my guilty soul! it sinks me to despair! it cries aloud to Heaven for vengeance! it has fallen on me! it has covered me with remorse! it has drunk up every vital spring! it has wasted me as with a flow consuming fire! Dare I hope the expiation is made!—dare I hope my sorrows—my late repentance can atone! Alas! I seldom feel a ray of comfort! all is dark—horrible—fearful! In futurity the Almighty is just; I bend before his inclinations, and I pray for mercy! But yet I must proceed—yet the catalogue of my crimes is not completed.

"In imprisoning the child of Alicia, I left him destitute of instruction, which was bestowed by Eliza, whose temper and his were widely dissimilar; nor was it in her power to rouse him openly to oppose the will of Sir Robert. Her spirit rose against oppression; she would have taught her husband the same sentiments, but his soul, mild and amiable, revolted at the lessons Eliza gave; yet, when again immured in the gloomy prison where he had been reared, his hand had nerved by despair, his breast steeled by the recollection of his Eliza's maxims, and he ended a life he thought unworthy the preservation. No sooner had I recovered the first shock I received, than folding the bed clothes around the body, I conveyed it to the vault, where the family had in times long past been interred.

"Sir Robert arrived, as I expected, in the evening; to him I related the tragical fate of his son. He scarce would listen to me; he would not credit what I said, till I produced a few lines addressed to his wife, that had been written in prison by my unfortunate nephew, and spoke in calm and resolved terms of the fatal deed. I offered to lead my brother by the way from the garden into the vault, but he shrunk from the sight. From this hour a gloomy melancholy rested upon Sir Robert; the world had no longer any charms for him, and he dragged out a joyless existence. On me the dreadful scene also acted; it seemed to steel my heart, and inure it to deeds of wickedness.

"Eliza, when she learned her husband was released from prison by me, hastened with the young Alicia to Oakdale. I told her my nephew was sent abroad; she would have instantly quitted the hall, but it was night, and she feared exposing her child to its damps. I then, by my conversation, gave her reason to suppose her husband was yet at Oakdale; she feared I had again inclosed him in the gloomy chambers, and, fell into the snare I had prepared for her; at night she rose, and sought him there. No sooner did I find she had entered, than I, closing the partition, secured her where she first had beheld my nephew. When Eliza found she was my prisoner, her outcries were so loud as to be heard without, and alarm the servants. I went to the door, and threatened to remove her to the farthest dungeon. 'You cannot, you dare not, Mildred Bertram; I will brave your utmost malice—I have now nought to dread—you have separated me from my husband and my child.' I promised to restore the young Alicia, provided she would cease her outcries; but that, did she not directly submit, she should never again behold her.—She promised this, and I took the little innocent to its mother, who then demanded where her husband was. 'Already have I said he is sent abroad.'—'Mildred, (said she, with a look which penetrated my heart) he is not gone abroad; these crimson stains certify me my husband is gone home; he did not act well, he should have waited for me—for the little Alicia—for we mutually sworn here, Mildred, we would not have left our child in thy power; she would have winged her way where thou wouldst not have dared to follow. Yet, (said she, haughtily quitting me) yet vengeance may overtake thee. Thinkest thou, Mildred, I will weep my husband's fate? No; tears are weak, they become not my injuries.'

"I saw her desperation; I knew she was capable of the most furious deeds. I acted with the calmest resolution, and infused opium in her food, and during its effects visited her, and found she had in her pockets pistols, a dagger, and poison. The mind of Eliza was adequate to the greatest exertions; her soul was capable of every impression that was noble, but I had given her a wrong bent, and she was restrained by no fixed principle of

religion, and I was fully convinced she meant to sacrifice me to her revenge; but from the strict search I had made, I supposed no instrument of vengeance remained, and that I had also secured her from committing the same crime the unhappy heir of the Bertram's had. I would be for days together without visiting her, taking care to supply her with whatever necessaries she wanted for herself and child, allowing her books and materials for drawing. Sir Robert had never again visited Oakdale, where I was once more a prisoner, and we had not met for two years. He now begged I would, if possible, take the little Alicia from its mother, and give her an education suitable to her station.

"Fearful from the state of mind in which my brother was, he would recognize this child, and thus publish his duplicity and my infamy, and also finding her engaging qualities gain an influence over me I was unwilling she should, I separated her from her mother when asleep, leaving a few lines signifying my brother's wish regarding Alicia;—that certain of not obtaining Mrs. Bertram's consent, I had taken her away privately, and if she did not patiently submit to the decision, the child should suffer for its mother's perverseness. I gave the little Alicia a sleepy potion, and by break of day, a hired chaise being at the gates, I put her into a trunk, which was placed within the carriage. At the first flags I released her; she walked and enquired for her mother; with sweetmeats and promises I quieted her, and her innocent caresses almost subdued me;—those marks of affection (which in the child was real) had been artfully encouraged by Eliza, who saw the influence her amiable and beautiful child (whose features recalled to my mind the angelic woman whose name she bore) had over me. In London, whither I went, I procured from my banker five hundred pounds, and purchased a complete wardrobe for Alicia, the exact list of which will be found, and may assist in recognizing her. Again I set out, scarce knowing which was to direct the postillion, and totally at a loss how to proceed; sometimes I thought of placing her at some school, but then the mystery which would hang over her, might cause dangerous enquiries; chance at length assisted my resolutions. Not many miles from Northwich, in Cheshire, I was overturned, and the carriage was so broken, it could not proceed; a little distance from the road stood a pleasant neat looking house, to which the driver went and brought assistance; the owner with his servant returned, night advanced, and the master of the house offered me shelter till the carriage could be repaired, thankfully I accepted the offer, and slipping two guineas into the hand of the postillion,, told him, if he would be in the same place by break of day with a chaise and fresh horses, I would double his reward. I then followed my conductor, whose appearance was that of a substantial farmer—his wife also seemed to be a decent respectable woman, they had a son about seven years old, and a daughter of Alicia's age, who was almost as lovely as herself. I was kindly and hospitably entertained, and at an early hour was shewn to a comfortable bed-chamber. After I had lain my innocent charge into bed, I changed my dress, and wrote on a sheet of paper, in which was folded the bills for the sum of five hundred pounds, 'The child which I leave is an illegitimate one, belonging to a wealthy family whom her birth disgraces; she has been taught to call herself Alicia Bouchier, which ought to be changed to avoid any suspicion; what her real name is, signifies not. I am a servant to the family, and was directed to dispose of the child, with the sum of 500l. as a portion for her, and to defray the expences of her bringing up. Be careful of the charge assigned you, as an eye will watch your conduct.'

"The morning broke, and without daring to look on Alicia, I quitted the house, and finding the chaise as I had appointed, I set out towards London; knowing I should from thence be less easily traced, I stopped not in the metropolis, but hastened to Oakdale. The horrid expression of despair which sat on the countenance of Eliza, as grasping my arm she wildly enquired for her child, struck a chilly coldness through every vein. I assured her she was well—she was happy. 'Happiness, Mildred, you have chased from this world; my child is with her father! If you talk to me of happiness—' 'Again I say Alicia is happy, yet she is not with her father.'—'Mildred, you refine upon cruelty; does your hatred reach innocent Alicia? could your barbarous heart be unmoved by her caresses? Why not send her to your nephew, whose spirit would have thanked thee for the deed? Go! sharpen your dagger! seek out my child, the lovely grand-daughter of the sainted Alicia! free her, kindly free her from future tyranny!'—I then quitted Eliza, and almost trembled to visit her again; her reproaches were loud, they appeared calculated to irritate me.—'I fear not death, I have suffered it twice (she would say) in my husband and in separation from my child; think not, Mildred, that, when softened by my fears for her, I will be tractable. I know you fear me—I know you tremble at the idea of adding my blood to your other crimes! But where is the difference, to see it flow ruddy from my heart, or thus to allow it to congeal in my veins, and to make me suffer a living death? But yet, Mildred, vengeance shall overtake thee.' She made various attempts to end her existence, when one night she rushed past me, and ere I could prevent her, opened the casement of Sir Philip's chamber to leap out; the servants were none of them in the part of the house, or they would have heard her—heard the wretched Eliza loudly call for that help she was never to receive. On the table lay the dagger I had taken from her when first she was imprisoned, and as I prevented her leaping out of the window, she flew to seize this weapon, but I, who was nearer the table, first reached it; the desperate Eliza, ere I could turn aside its point, rushed on it; the blood gushed out. 'It is well, (she cried) with an undaunted air; I am free! Mildred, thy power is weak—thy reign is over—repentance and remorse are thine! I go to join my husband!' She walked, quickly walked, though so deeply wounded, into the chamber stained with his blood. 'Go, (said she) Mildred, I wish to be undisturbed.' I left her to find something to staunch the blood, for I had no idea of the wound being dangerous. When I returned, I found Eliza writing with her blood; she refused all assistance, and with such fortitude bore the pain, that ere she had well laid aside her pen, she expired. This last effort of a strong, but misguided mind, you will find, Sir Robert, amongst my papers.

"Eliza was laid by her husband. I wrote to my brother requesting he would hasten to me. Lady Bertram was ill, was dying, and ere her funeral was well over, an apoplectic fit carried off Sir Robert.

"I was now left as it were alone in the world, for friends I had none, and my two younger brothers, who had both borne commissions, found early graves. You then, Sir Robert, was a little boy, and your sister, who was 14 years older, had at 16 married a gay young man of the name of Meynell, against the inclination of her parents; from me she therefore was also estranged. At the death of her mother she became entitled to a

handsome fortune, to spend which, with a splendid retinue, they soon after set out for France.

"I looked round; I saw I had failed to attach one being to me, nor had I an attachment to any living creature; and I was advancing to a period of life when our happiness must proceed from ourselves, when the remembrance of a well-spent life must cheer its evening, though we may be surrounded by friends our virtues and amiable qualities have endeared us to. To look back filled me with remorse—I had secured no one friend; and to look forward into eternity I dared not. The day of vengeance so oft denounced by Eliza was at hand; I who used to ridicule the weak and superstitious minds on whom I had been at so much trouble to impose, now started at my own shadow, and fearful of the vicinity which my room had to the concealed chambers, changed my apartment into the opposite wing, and had the door of Sir Philip's chamber nailed up. Nightly visions disturbed me—the bloody spectres of my nephew and Eliza seemed to denounce my doom.

"I quitted Oakdale, of which I had a lease, and resolved to take home the little Alicia, for whom my fortune should accumulate, as no provision had been made by my brother for her, he, as you know, Sir Robert, dying intestate. I went straight from the hall to the house where I had left Alicia, but I found her not; its inhabitants were gone no one could tell me where; it was believed they originally came from London,—they might be returned there; but their residence had been short in Cheshire, where they had taken a large dairy farm, though they were strangers to the management of it, and it not answering, they had left it very suddenly soon after I had been there. Hopeless of success, I went to London, where, by advertising and offering rewards, I made all possible enquiry; but finding my endeavours fruitless, I tried, amidst hurry and dissipation, to lull my conscience. In an excursion I made to Bath I was nearly becoming the wife of a sharper; and rejoicing at my escape, determined to avoid all offers of marriage, and in one of the most opulent towns in the north of England took a handsome house, which I made, by the elegant entertainments I gave, the resort and envy of the circle in which I lived and presided. But vain was every trial I made; happiness was fled; and whilst caressed and looked up to as a model of perfection, as a creature who lived so as to diffuse that comfort she enjoyed, I endured the keenest torments—I dared not to be one moment alone. Again I tried change of place, and had once more no settled abode. I had never been in Scotland, and resolved to make a journey there. In passing through the county of Durham I determined to visit Oakdale, where Martha, who had lived long with me, remained, as also the gardener, her husband. It was evening when I arrived—I entered by the hall door—I was overpowered by recollection, and threw myself on a seat; at that instant a peal of thunder seemed to shake the house, and the lightning flashed through the open door and the painted window—again the thunder rolled heavy over my head. Martha had left me on my entrance, and the men were gone to the stables; the third flash, yet more vivid than the former, attracted by the armour which hung near me, entered the hall; I fell senseless on the floor; the tremendous crash of this peal, and the falling of the armour, brought back Martha, who, as she beheld me, concluded I was dead; my clothes and hair were singed, as well as one arm, and I was also considerably bruised by the picture, painted upon wood, of Sir Philip Bertram (the fastening of which had been burnt equally with those of the armour) falling upon me. Restored to life, I

looked round and beheld the picture; my eyes rested on the sentence wrote below it, which was part of the oath taken when the secret of the concealed apartments was communicated to me, as had been always the custom: 'For ever accursed is the person who dares to tread with unhallowed steps, for guilty or profane purposes, the sacred retreat of piety.' I closed my eyes, and leaned upon the shoulder of Martha, who cried, and talked between each flash of lightning of death and judgment—words terrible to my ears. The storm abated, I went to my chamber, where a severe fever seized me. Oh! the terrible visions which my delirious fancy presented! they are yet present—they yet seem to pursue me!

"At last by slow degrees I recovered, but long laboured under extreme debility. No sooner was I restored to health, than dismissing my servants, all but those who before had been left at Oakdale, I set out on foot, and meanly clad, on a pilgrimage to seek Alicia; but though it lasted almost two years, I yet returned to Oakdale unsuccessful.

"Mr. Meynell had dissipated his own and wife's fortune, and was gone out to India. I took therefore Mrs. Meynell and her son to the hall; to her I in part confessed my crimes, and revealed to her the secret of the concealed chambers, where I had resolved to end my days. I entered on a life of penitence, and saw only Mrs. Meynell, or a certain times, in Sir Philip's chamber, Martha. Sometimes I would indulge myself by walking at midnight on the terrace, but no longer did the sun shine on me. I learned to handle the ax and the saw, and constructed a wooden tomb over the remains of my nephew and Eliza, on which were laid figures of wax, representing them bleeding and dying. My next employment was to work the black cloth, intended for hangings to the place where my remains were to be deposited, with emblematical figures on the pall for a covering; a wax image similar to that which I had caused to be entombed at St. Mary's, as the heir of Sir Robert Bertram, was my next sad task. I have slept in the chamber stained with the blood of my unfortunate kinsman and Eliza, whilst suspended over me hung the bloody dagger. My dress has been coarse, my food homely and sparing, and thus for eighteen years have I lived amidst scenes of horror, which for ever recalled my guilt, reminded me of mortality, and bade me prepare to render up to a just Judge an account of my actions. My days are now near their close; this packet will then, Sir Robert, be given you by your sister, after have been buried at St. Mary's Oak;—my last will too is in my niece's possession, in which I have constituted you, Sir Robert, executor and trustee for Alicia, should she be found; an annuity is set aside for Mrs. Meynell, at whose death, and after a certain period elapsing without tidings of Alicia, all centers in you."

Thus ended the narrative of crimes, the reading of which had most deeply shocked our heroine; oft had she laid it down, and looked fearfully around her, and as oft, resuming her fortitude, had again continued to read. It was morning when Alicia entered, and she now saw through the narrow windows in the roof, that the dun shade of evening had closed over the horizon.—Alicia thought not of those events which so recently had befallen her, and, sadly occupied with the horrid recital of Mildred Bertram, no longer found the idea of Lord Trewarne obtrude itself on her imagination, nor longer seemed to remember she had fled from his emissaries, or that if not dead, he was dying by her hand. The agonized cries of Eliza she almost imagined yet echoed through the gloomy

chambers, and the amiable heir of the last Baronet of Oakdale, bleeding and dying, appeared portrayed by her imagination. Now she again perused the nearly-obliterated writing of Mrs. Bertram, which accident had separated, she supposed, from the other papers, nor could she wonder at the strong impression which Henry Bertram had received from its perusal, the mutilated state it was in, and the similarity of names, sufficiently authorised also the idea, that it was written by the mother of our heroine.

It was nearly dark; Alicia rose, and lighted her candle by the means her prudent foresight had procured. She felt her head giddy, her ideas wandering and confused; she remembered what Mr. Bertram had said regarding his extreme sufferings of mind when last amidst these passages and vaults, and feared she might also, like him, sustain a deprivation of reason. Seating herself again, she took a part of those refreshments she had provided at Malieveren, and supposing she was able to go through the remainder of the papers, began to read that which was fastened to the end of Mildred's narrative.—This was written by Mr. Bouchier, and contained the following words:

"I it was, Eliza, who found retired, amidst wilds and woods, the blooming Alicia, the beautiful grand-daughter of Sir Robert Bertram! I saw her—I loved—I poured out at her feet the passion she had inspired, regardless of the difference which wealth and station had apparently made; she appeared as the queen amongst the village maids—she listened to my vows. The person, who I supposed was her father, told me the strange tale of her being left with him, and gave me an account of the money and clothes that had been provided for her use; the money was expended, but he gave me Alicia Bouchier. My father heard of my love, and we were separated by him soon after a daughter was born, who bore the name (which Alicia believed was that of her mother.) Eliza.—When I was at liberty to search for my child, it and its guardian had long quitted the village where it was born. Eight years was I separated from my adored Alicia; again we met—a few short years only flew over our heads before she quitted me for ever.—No child was left—all had died; in mourning their deaths and that of my beloved Alicia's, grief triumphed over reason. I forsook home—I eloped from the kind, but to me troublesome watchings of friendship—I wandered to St. Mary's. I beheld you, Eliza, and aided, perhaps, by fancy, by the derangement of my mind, and the enthusiasm of my character, imagined in you I beheld my lost, my worshipped Alicia restored to me, all blooming as when first I loved. Already do you know how I discovered the concealed apartments; anxiously solicitous to further investigate the story, in which I was so closely, so deeply interested, I found means, which now I will not relate, to trace the child of Alicia from whence I left her, to St. Mary's Oak. The funeral which I had witnessed when I first reached it, was that of the person who, then bearing a different name, had reared the daughter of Mr. Bertram and Eliza Bouchier—who had revealed to me her being abandoned by her friends—who at the sacred altar had joined my hand to Alicia's—and who, for reasons which I do not exactly comprehend, had by changing his place of residence and name, concealed my child.—Alas! fatal concealment! You, Eliza, I tremble as I write, you, Eliza, are the daughter of Alicia! You are, horror is in the sound, you are the child of the wretched Frederic, who goes to search for one person, who, if alive, can alone solve some doubts that yet remain."

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was yet another paper—it was a letter from Mrs. Bouchier to our heroine, and contained an exact description of the face and person of Mr. Bouchier, that if he yet lived, Alicia might recognize him by it; there was likewise a portrait of him, which he had himself given to Eliza. As Alicia Alternately gazed on it, and again recurred to her mother's description, her eyes swam, her heart sickened, and both papers and portrait fell from her hand. Recovering from the first emotion of surprise, and horrid astonishment, she exclaimed, "Do my senses forsake me, as I feared, amidst these scenes of terror! do I dream!" Then falling on her knees, "Mighty God! (she exclaimed) how intricate are thy ways! how weak, how short-sighted are we mortals thou hast created! how sinfully do we murmur at thy decrees! Oh! hast thou ordained a daughter's hand to punish—"

"Alicia rose, and again read the description, again gazed on the portrait; no, she could not mistake, Frederic Bouchier and Frederic Fitz-Harman, Earl of Trewarne, were the same. One mark of identity alone would have convinced Alicia it was so, had there been no other. Her mother said, that on the upper part of the right shoulder was a large red mark, and below that the scar of a wound which reached almost to the elbow, and was again seen below it. This Alicia had remarked when she assisted in binding up the wound she had inflicted, alike did the description of her father's features and person agree with those of Lord Trewarne; so did the portrait.—"It is, (said she, with a firm tone of voice) it is *my father!* The early misfortunes he sustained, his long estrangement from his friends, all convince me! —I will not shrink from my duty, but haste, and ere too late beg his forgiveness." Alicia descended the stairs, and passing through the blood-stained chamber, entered that of Sir Philip's, the door of which into the gallery stood open.

Silence and darkness filled the gallery; she threw her eyes along it fearfully.—Lord Trewarne, it was probable, was dead, and though doubtless she had already been sought, by the fastenings being removed from the door of the apartment in which she had been confined; yet the officers of justice might remain and seize her—a shameful imprisonment and ignominious death might be her's. Agonized almost to distraction by these reflections, Alicia, with a palpitating heart, passed along the gallery, determined to seek her father, dead or alive. A ray of light beamed through a half-closed door; without noise she pushed it open; a taper that burnt on the table, by its rays faintly illumined the middle of the chamber, whose sides, hung with dark green damask corresponding with the bed, received them not; the curtains were closed on the side Alicia entered. She paused; perhaps there might be stretched the dead body of the parent she had slain; a few steps, and this horrid sight might be disclosed. These steps were taken, Lord Trewarne lay on the bed, not as Alicia had feared, but asleep, and by him, on an easy chair, in the same state, sat his valet.

Alicia kneeled by the bed, and pulling out the portrait, compared it with the features of the sleeping Earl; they seemed the same, allowing for the difference between the ages, which must be more than twenty years; yet the countenance of Lord Trewarne wore not that air of ingenuousness which was displayed in his miniature resemblance, nor had his

Lordship, as he slept, that noble and dignified expression, or that look of extreme sensibility, which she had observed in his waking hours in a degree that precisely corresponded with the portrait she held. In a free commerce with the world frankness of character is very often lost, and the other change Alicia thought could be easily accounted for; her father, though naturally amiable, had yet, she feared, of late indulged himself in vices contrary to his original conduct. Thoroughly convinced she had found the parent whom she had till that night considered as having died ere she was born—with a low and empasioned voice, prayed the Almighty to restore her father to health, and to grant she might be allowed to shew her filial tenderness to him, and that she might, by her dutiful attention, obliterate the memory of his former sufferings. The sleep of Lord Trewarne grew disturbed; and though not yet awake, he talked in a quick and agitated manner; then hastily lifting his head, he beheld the kneeling Alicia.

"Oh! take her away, take her away!" he cried, in a voice loud enough to waken his valet, who on beholding our heroine, swore he thought she was one of the ghosts that lived in Oakdale, and were here and there, every where and no where. "Oh! take her away, hide her, bury her again," exclaimed Lord Trewarne, in a tone of agony.

"Who, my Lord! what bury Miss Sleigh?" said his unfeeling attendant, as with a careless air he threw his arm round her waist.

"Compose yourself," said Alicia, as darting a look of contempt on Watkins, she seated herself by Lord Trewarne.

"So now, (cried Watkins, with a saucy freedom in his manner) you have chosen to quit your hiding-place, to nurse the Earl."

"I do intend it; for this sole purpose am I here, and here, where a sense of duty has brought me, shall I stay."

"No longer, I assure you, than I chuse. My lord's life depends upon his being kept quiet, and no one shall disturb him; a pretty piece of work his Lordship has made of it, indeed (continued his valet, as he took our heroine's hand, and led her out, who saw to oppose would make an uproar that might be detrimental to the Earl); a pretty piece of work, indeed, (continued he); I knew what it would end in; no sooner had you your full swing, than back you came; had you but, after my Lord was at the trouble of taking you into Scotland, considered what you would be at, he would, to my knowledge, have married you; and had you, Miss Sleigh, been kind enough to have visited his Lordship two nights ago in the way you did this, he would not now be laying, as I think, a dying, nor would you stand the chance of having a halter about that fair neck of your's."

Watkins led Alicia to an apartment in the west wing of the hall, and locking her in, bade her good night, or rather, he said, good morning, for the day had broke ere she quitted the chamber of Lord Trewarne.—The room was a well-remembered one by our heroine, to whose use it had, in her childish days, been appropriated as a playroom, and it still displayed marks of those amusements; here lay a doll she remembered was presented her by Mr. Kirby, and in another place several trifles made by her mother. The tears gushed from the eyes of Alicia as she viewed these tokens of a mother's fond attention to her pleasure and infantine amusement; sadly she felt, as she recalled those days of happy infancy, when she was all her unfortunate mother had in the world to make her wish for life. "Ah! little (sighed Alicia) did I know, when kissing off the starting tear as my

mother bent over me, from what a deep sense of agony they flowed! Ah! my beloved parent, never till now did I know the vast extent of my obligations to thee, never till now was I fully sensible of thy worth! Kindly didst thou conceal the tale fraught with horror—alas! had I known it, how would my young mind have supported the sad knowledge! yet, by bidding me look forward to a certain period for unravelling the scene, you, when revealing, bade me conceal, I learned to suffer in silence; and by appointing a period when my reason had acquired some strength, and ere it might be supposed I had exchanged duty for love, thou hoped to save me from forming, as thou hadst done, some hasty connexion fraught with misery." Alicia paused; her thoughts, even amidst the horrors by which she was surrounded, turned to Henry Bertram. Her father would sanction her choice; she was not now a poor dependant on the bounty of the Bertrams; in early life Lord Trewarne had been the chosen friend of Sir Robert;—thus through the bloom that surrounded her a bright ray of hope streamed, and irradiated the future.

About eight o'clock Watkins brought some breakfast to his prisoner, but scarce deigned to answer her enquiries after his Lord. At four he again made his appearance with some refreshment, and as before gave short and unsatisfactory answers.

One window of the room in which Alicia was confined, gave a transient view of the road over the low wall of the terrace, and at this window she spent the greatest part of the day, in hopes of attracting the attention of some of the few passengers. Anxiously did she wish to escape, as little would her new-discovered affinity to the Earl have, if now disclosed, protected here from the insolence of his valet, which effectually prevented her wished attendance on her father. She wrote with her pencil on a slip of paper, a billet to Captain Barlow, who she supposed, ere this, would be returned to St. Mary's, and did not doubt, could she get her note conveyed to him, of being released from her present uncomfortable situation. But those passengers who passed Oakdale Hall, appeared as if they feared, by lifting their eyes towards it, they should behold one of its reputed inhabitants, and our heroine's attempts were without success. The apartment in which she was being at a considerable distance from that of Lord Trewarne, she heard no sound, save at times steps in that end of the gallery, out of which a separate passage led to the rooms in the west wing of the hall; yet these steps approached not her.

CHAPTER X.

THE evening closed in; Alicia felt heavy for want of rest; throwing herself on the floor, and leaning her head on her hand, she fell asleep, but was awaked soon after by a kind of bustle in a distant part of the house.—This lasted not long; again all was silence, and again Alicia slept, but was waked suddenly by a noise near at hand, and footsteps were heard in the passage. She rose; it was apparently midnight from the darkness; voices were distinguishable, which, from the echo, she supposed proceeded from people ascending the staircase; doors flapped, and all was noise and uproar. Looking from the window that fronted the court, she saw lights in the east wing, where she had seen Lord Trewarne, but they did not seem stationary, as by turns every room was enlightened. Alicia feared, conjectured, and was now almost certain her fears were verified—her father was dead—she was his murderer—and the body being removed had caused the bustle in the house; the idea chilled her with horror—she leaned against the wall—the light disappeared from the eastern side of the hall—the noise was hushed—and all was again profound silence, which to Alicia seemed that of death itself. Unable longer to bear the cruel uncertainty, she struck a light, determined, if in her power, to force the lock, and endeavour to gain information; but whilst she had slept, some one had entered the room, for the door stood open. Taking her taper, Alicia quitted the spot so oft the witness of her childish enjoyments, and reached the gallery, where, as she listened, no sound assailed her ears. Again she proceeded, and stopped as she heard the echo of her own steps returned from the solitary walls; then, resolving to give herself no time to deliberate, she turned into the chamber where she had beheld Lord Trewarne, and where now, she supposed, lay his breathless corpse. The room was wholly dark, save as far as the scanty rays of the taper she held, reached; the curtains were drawn round the bed, and as Alicia advanced, she felt her resolution almost desert her. Could she bear the sight of her father murdered by her own hand! she turned—she would search for some of the people she had heard—but again she banished the thought, as the saucy freedom of Watkin's manner darted across her mind, and her hand again rested on the curtain; with a sudden jerk she drew it back—her taper was extinguished.—Amidst all the horrors by which she had been surrounded of late, Alicia hitherto had preserved her presence of mind; but now, seized with all the wildness of fear, and totally destitute of that composure she hitherto had apparently preserved, she screamed aloud, as she supposed she saw, (for it was too dark to distinguish with exactness,) the body of Lord Trewarne stretched on the bed, and surrounded by the insignias of death. Rushing out, the terrified Alicia fled along the gallery, and entering an apartment, the door of which stood open, sunk on the floor;—at that instant she saw she was in Sir Philip's room; the closet-door stood open, and through the bloody chamber she saw advance a figure that bore the likeness of Lord Trewarne, but ere it reached her, deprived of sense and motion, Alicia lay breathless on the floor. It was some time ere she recovered, so as to become sensible of her existence, and then found she was laid on a bed, and Henry Bertram kneeling by her, who held one of her hands; with a look expressive of strong anxiety, "Thank God, (said Henry) she lives."

Alicia's eyes were fixed on Mr. Bertram, but yet she spoke not; raising her head she looked round—"Is this reality? are you, indeed, with Henry?"

"It is real, my Alicia, it is Henry, who kneeling by you, hopes never again to be parted from you."

Again she looked round; "sure I am not awake, or I may be deceived by my imagination—my head is light. I have suffered much, Henry, and just now I thought I saw Lord Trewarne, whom I supposed dead, well—alive—walking through the concealed chamber."

"You were not deceived, my beloved Alicia, said a voice which resembled that of his Lordship; and the same figure, she had before seen, advanced. It was, and it was not Lord Trewarne; a different expression sat on his countenance—he appeared older;—the hair of Lord Trewarne, even in powder, might be known to be a bright shade of pale brown—the hair of this person was grey.

"No, (said Alicia, shrinking from his touch, and hiding her face on the shoulder of Mr. Bertram) no, you are not my father! whoever you are, seek not to impose on me—I have murdered my father!"

"My dear child, (said the same person, who moving Henry, took his place) do not thus agitate yourself; I am indeed your father, now your only parent, Alicia! I was the husband of Eliza—I was the Earl of Trewarne, who assumed the feigned name of Bouchier. Since I have quitted Oakdale, I have met with many hardships—I have known much sorrow; after an absence of so many years, kill me not by seeing you thus! You are indeed my child—too long has an artful villain separated us."

"Alicia, (said Mr. Bertram) do you think I would impose on you? will you not credit Henry Bertram, when he tells you this is Lord Trewarne, the long lost friend of my father and the Earl of Knasborough? You have credited, Alicia, the artful villain who usurped your father's name and title, who dared not shew himself till Sir Robert had quitted England. It was this villain who defamed William March—whose intrigues threw him into prison; to this wretch, abandoned to every crime, does Lord Morville owe his ruin."

Alicia seemed to forget her late indisposition, as lightly springing from the bed, and throwing herself at her father's feet, she begged he would bless the child of his Eliza. Alicia was raised, and embraced by a parent she had till that hour never beheld.—Loud sobs from a person, who stood concealed by the curtains, attracted the attention of our heroine, and the next minute was she in the arms of this stranger.

"Kirby, (said her father) you terrify Alicia."

"Who I! No, no, she will not be terrified at me, it was you she was frightened at."

"Mr. Kirby, (said Alicia) my best, my dearest friend! how is it that I again, when I ceased to hope it, see you?"

"Oh! it is a long tale, it is not possible to tell you," said the worthy surgeon, wiping his eyes.

"For what am I (exclaimed our heroine) reserved! I am surrounded by wonders—I behold friends I have long known, that are very dear! and I have found a father I learned to love, when I knew not he existed!"

"When you are more composed, Alicia, you shall learn my story," said her father.

Henry walked to the window by which he had entered Oakdale when he visited the concealed chambers. "The sun has been risen some time; had we not better, my Lord, set out?"

"By all means; we shall, I hope, find the whole party by this time at Malieveren."

"Do we go then to Malieveren? (enquired Alicia); is Lady Bertram at the Castle?"

"Ere this I expect so," replied her father.

"Before we quit Oakdale, my father, let me inform you in one of its apartments lays the man who usurped your name, who has persecuted your daughter, killed by her hand." Briefly then she recounted her adventures since she entered the hall, every part of which was searched, but neither Lord Trewarne nor his servants could be found.—Alicia had seen him raving with delirium, from pain and fever, in the green damask chamber, and from thence, doubtless, his servants had in the dusk of the evening conveyed him, as the mattress and blankets had been taken away.

Again supported by Mr. Bertram, did our heroine descend the staircase of Oakdale Hall, but not now, as before, ignorant who were her parents, or that either of them lived. She was now accompanied by a father, whom she was convinced possessed many amiable qualities, of a rank in life which made no longer her alliance a disgrace to the noblest or proudest family. The carriage, which Alicia knew was Sir Robert's, drove up to the gates, and she was lifted into it by her father and Henry, who she saw had not yet regained his former look of health and strength.

"Mr. Bertram, (said the Earl) we forget every thing in our joy at finding Alicia; but some steps are necessary to be taken in order to secure this artful villain."

"Suppose we wait here, and send to Jackson, (said Mr. Bertram) who will omit nothing to prevent his escape; or I will take one of the horses, and ride over to St. Mary's."

Alicia, (who since she had beheld the friends by whom she now was surrounded) thought not till that instant of Captain Barlow, who would be uneasy, if he was returned, at her absence, proposed they all should go to St. Mary's.

The good doctor rubbed his hands, and clapping Alicia's shoulder, said, "Aye, aye, my dear, let us all go, if it is but to set the folks of the village a gaping; I believe, though we are in the Baronet's carriage, and the liveries so well know, if I put out my head, not a soul dare approach us; for when I lived at Oakdale it was supposed I held correspondence not only with the spirits in it, but with the very devil himself, after I had that visit from that infernal—"

Henry, laughing, told Kirby he was self-convicted.

"True, true, but I think the devil will soon, in my opinion, quit his burning chair, to let this fiend sit down, when I shall fear no more from his visits."

CHAPTER XI.

LORD Trewarne had ordered the postillions to drive to Mr. Jackson's, St. Mary's Oak, towards which they were now going. Much was said, but the discourse was so incoherent and unconnected, that was I to relate it, without the guiding clue, which was in the possession of the three gentlemen, my readers would, like my heroine, feel lost in a labyrinth of amazement.

When Sir Robert Bertram's carriage stopped at Mr. Jackson's door, all were in bed but the maid servant, who was opening the window shutters; but staring at the equipage, had the enquiry twice repeated to her, "if her master was at home?" ere she answered. She then said, "her master came home late last night, and had not got up."

"Go (said the Earl) tell Mr. Jackson Mr. Bertram wishes to see him instantly."

"Yes, your Worship, Mr. Sir Robert."

"Kirby, out of all patience, had got out of the other side of the carriage, and before the girl had finished her courtesies, was by Mr. Jackson's bedside, whom the noise at his door having awaked, was just going to rise to know what had caused it.

"Jackson, my old friend, how art thou? (said the good surgeon, holding out his hand) how goes the world?"

The face of Jackson turned as pale as the linen that surrounded it.—"Kirby! the Devil!"

"Aye, there now, so I said; no sooner am I seen, than you think of his infernal highness."

Jackson, recovering from his surprise, shook hands most cordially with his friend, and Mrs. Jackson also congratulated him on his return. On her Mr. Kirby passed some of his old jokes, that perfectly satisfied her as to his identity, after which he reminded Mr. Jackson Sir Robert's carriage stood at the door, to which they immediately went, and Mr. Bertram saying he would step in and speak to Mr. Jackson, the whole party were asked to honour him with their company to breakfast. This proposal was agreed to, and soon after Mrs. Jackson made her appearance, when after paying her respects to the company, she enquired of her husband if Captain Barlow had risen?

"Is Captain Barlow here," said Alicia.

"Yes, Madam, (replied Mr. Jackson) we were at Penrith yesterday, and we found the people at the Cross Keys in bed at our return, so he took up his quarters with us for the night."

The door opened; Captain Barlow appeared, and Alicia advancing took his hand, and introduced him to her father, as "Captain Barlow, the son, my Lord, of the guardians of my mother."

"I remember (said his Lordship) the features of this gentleman, though upwards of thirty, nay almost forty years have passed since I saw him. But why not, Alicia, introduce Captain Barlow as your relation, the only one, perhaps, on the side of your grandmother you now have?"

"Captain Barlow, my Lord, informed me of our supposed affinity; but since I saw him, I have visited Oakdale, and know who my unfortunate mother was."

This affair was still further discussed, but at present we will pass over the conversation on that subject. The business which brought the party to St. Mary's Oak was next talked of, and Mrs. Jackson said, "that after it was dark last night she went to the Cross Keys to enquire if Captain Barlow had returned, as she was uneasy at her husband's stay, and was sitting with Mrs. Crofts when four people brought a gentleman, apparently dying, upon a bed to the door, and offered any sum to have the sick person accommodated." Little doubt remained that this was the wretch that was sought.

Mr. Bertram and Kirby instantly set out for the village inn, where they found the ci-devant Earl in the utmost danger, as till this morning, when a surgeon had been sent for from North Oak, he had received no assistance but from Watkins, his valet.

Lord Trewarne now judged it needful he should remain at St. Mary's, in order to seize any opportunity that might occur of speaking with the usurper of his name; and Alicia, now she had found her father, was equally unwilling as he was to be separated, and Henry declared he would also remain where he was, as the Earl might require his assistance. It was therefore agreed that a servant should be dispatched with an account of the cause that detained the party at St. Mary's Oak, to Malieveren.—Alicia, with Lord Trewarne, remained at Mr. Jackson's, and the other three gentlemen were accommodated in the village.

The days of our heroine were clouded by the extreme anxiety she felt for the life of her persecutor:—so much was she shocked by being the cause of his untimely death, as to become almost insensible to the blessings she was surrounded by—approved by her father, loved by Henry Bertram, who now had no reason to conceal his attachment, which was fully sanctioned by the Earl. Assistance was called from all the neighbouring towns, and Mr. Kirby joined his skill with the most celebrated surgeons in the adjacent counties, to save the life of a man he most cordially detested. Vainly did her father and lover strive to reconcile our heroine to the probability of the death of a villain, by telling her she acted by in her own defence; and by repeating his consummate acts of wickedness, reconciled her to the justice of the deed. Each hour had been expected would be the last of this wretch's sufferings on earth, when Mr. Kirby entered, and announced that the inflammation had subsided considerably since they had been able to extract the ball from the wound, and that the fever was also abated; this, as it gave joy to Alicia, seemed to inspire all her friends with new life. The same day the party from Malieveren arrived at Oakdale, which had once more undergone some trifling repairs to render it habitable. In a few days the gentlemen of the faculty pronounced their patient out of immediate danger, and the now happy Alicia removed, with her father, to Oakdale Hall.

As soon as it was judged safe to do so, his real situation was explained to the ci-devant Earl of Trewarne, and he received a visit from the man he had injured, whose rights he had usurped, and who was accompanied by several of the party from Oakdale, amongst whom was the Baron Kaphausen, a title conferred by his Lordship. Whether the impostor,

finding all his schemes overturned, and most of them openly detected, thought the best plan for working upon Lord Trewarne, whose generous soul he well knew, was to act the penitent, or that, (which I would rather hope) he really was so, I, who cannot judge of other people's hearts, can by no means determine. Lord Trewarne accepted his repentance as an unfeigned one, and in return for one of the most valuable presents his Lordship ever received, settled on him an annuity for his life, after having listened to a full confession of his crimes; but as this confession is so inter-woven with the history of Lord Trewarne, I believe, by giving them together, they will be easier comprehended.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XII.

WILLIAM FITZ HARMAN, the eighth Earl of Trewarne of that family, married Mary Mackenzie, Baroness St. Andrews, who died after a few years, leaving one son, to whom her title devolved, although by a previous settlement it was supposed her estate remained the Earl's during his life—I say supposed, for it was not in the power of the Baroness to separate them. Lady Trewarne had taken, as a companion, a relation of her own, who was left at the death of improvident parents destitute of support. Warmly was Miss M'Rae recommended to the Earl's future countenance by the dying Countess, over whose loss they mutually wept. His Lordship offered this lady an asylum in his house; vain and artful, this was joyfully accepted by Miss M'Rae, who already in her own mind was Countess of Trewarne. In process of time the Earl's sorrows abated, and the charms of Miss M'Rae made the impression she had wished. She imagined the summit of her hopes was nearly attained, but Lord Trewarne was a man of the world, and had, ere his marriage, been well versed in the arts of seduction; he saw the aim of Miss M'Rae, and thus held himself excusable in parrying and retorting these schemes in which she was not sufficiently versed to cope with his Lordship, who made her the victim of them at the moment she had vainly fancied her triumph was at its accomplishment. Miss M'Rae was established, though not as the Countess of Trewarne, which she had expected, but as the mistress of the Earl, by whom she was placed at the head of his household. In this station her natural talents for intrigue were so far improved by the knowledge she gained of the world, and that part of it best calculated for improving those talents, that in a few years after Lady Trewarne's decease, had Miss M'Rae had the same part again to sustain, she would, in all probability, have succeeded in her high-raised hopes; nor did those hopes desert her, for various were the attempts she made to obtain the coronet worn by her cousin, but the time was passed.

Report says several children were born, who all died before they could lisp out papa to his Lordship; till about eight years after the death of the Countess, Miss M'Rae presented the Earl with a son, who was honoured by having the name of William conferred on him. This child was a striking likeness, his mother said, of his Lordship, but as he grew up, he yet more strongly resembled Lord St. Andrews; their features seemed, like their persons, cast in the same mould; but there was one most striking difference—Lord St. Andrews's hair was a light shade of brown, which inclined to the chesnut, and hung in glossy curls over his open forehead; young M'Rae's was a fiery red, with thick heavy eyebrows of the same colour, that at once gave a gloom and fierceness to his look, and disfigured his eyes, which, like those of his brother, were uncommonly fine and bright hazel.

Miss M'Rae had gained a most absolute ascendancy over the Earl, who made her will in general his, except that he uniformly declared he would never marry her, and, for her fake, never any other woman. Miss M'Rae had always appeared extremely fond of Lord St. Andrews, although she had secretly taken every pains to undermine the Earl's affection for a son, whose amiable temper, and whose goodness of heart, secured the esteem and love of all but herself.

Lord St. Andrews, now about seventeen, was, with his father's knowledge, upon a visit to a family in Herefordshire; from thence his Lordship, without declaring to the Earl his intention, set out on a tour into the neighbouring principality. Pleased with the situation of Llanmorden, a romantically seated village in Glamorganshire, he stopped at the little inn. At Llanmorden then dwelt Mr. Barlow, renting a considerable piece of ground, and apparently in opulent circumstances; his son vying with the neighbouring squires, and his two beautiful daughters the toast and envy of that and the adjacent parishes. Lord St. Andrews saw the lovely girls, and his heart, which yet had not learned to love, instantly bowed to the fascinating charms of the youngest Miss Barlow. Young, ardent in his temper, romantic in his ideas of happiness, Lord St. Andrews supposed it alone dwelt at Llanmorden, that alone could Alicia Barlow inspire his heart with those sentiments of love which engrossed his whole mind, which animated every look, and seemed to have infused a new being into his soul—she was alone capable of giving an impression no power on earth could erase! Too generous to think of disparity of fortune—too little attached to splendour of station to remember his rank or her humble lot, and too much in love to recollect his father would not approve his choice, Lord St. Andrew poured fourth, in impassioned tones, his animated hopes, his love to Alicia, who, disowning not a mutual flame, yet referred her lover to her father. Lord St. Andrews, hastening to Mr. Barlow, told his tale—begged he would trust to his honour, that through family reasons obliged him to conceal his name, yet he was the child of a wealthy parent, who would not, when once made, disapprove his choice.

Mr. Barlow had lived at an expence considerably beyond his income. Pleased by the open frankness of the stranger, by the dignity of his manner—also judging he was highly born, (Alicia he also imagined was so) thought himself authorised to unfold her tale, and give his consent to a match that promised to place her in a station suitable to her birth. Mr. Barlow then related to Lord St. Andrews the circumstances already mentioned regarding the child of Mr. Bertram and Eliza Bouchier being left at the farmhouse, near Northwich, mentioning the sum of money, which ere now was expended, and the schedule of her wardrobe, which was produced.

Lord St. Andrews, far from being discouraged in his addresses by this relation felt himself more interested for the beautiful Alicia Bouchier, abandoned by her friends, than for Alicia Barlow, surrounded by them. In a few days Alicia Bertram became his.—This match certainly was not a prudent one on either side, yet, when it is considered the united ages of this very youthful couple did not amount to thirty-three, it cannot be supposed a large stock was at that period in their possession. Alicia's choice too had been sanctioned by Mr. Barlow, who found he could no longer support her in the way he had done, and which, as I before observed, influenced his resolution.

After an absence that caused much enquiry to be made regarding it, Lord St. Andrews returned to Trewarne House, nor was it long before Miss M'Rae found out his Lordship's secret, and took care, though not from her, the Earl should also learn it. She, though appearing to act the part of mediatrix, artfully fanned the flame she pretended to allay. So closely was Lord St. Andrews watched, that he could not even get a letter conveyed to his

beloved Alicia, before he was sent with his tutor abroad, and then Miss M'Rae prevented his letters ever reaching her for whom they were intended.

At Llanmorden Lord St. Andrews was not known by his real name, for even from his lady had he concealed it, flattering himself with soon again visiting her, and, authorised by his father, declaring his title, introduce her to his family as his wife. At a time when she supposed she was abandoned by her husband, did Alicia give birth to a daughter, who, in memory of her mother, she christened Eliza.—Scarcely was she recovered, when she received a letter, as written by her husband, informing her of his father's displeasure, and of his sending him abroad; that he dared not cross the sea to attend her, but begged she would instantly set out as he would wait her arrival at Ostend, from whence his letter was dated, and inclosed money for the expences of her journey and voyage. This letter also spoke of the birth of her child which was desired to be left at Llanmorden.

Alicia, thus deluded by the insidious M'Rae, left her child at Llanmorden, and reached a place where in vain was the search she made for Mr. Mackenzie, the name Lord St. Andrews was known to her by.—Her money exhausted, and in a country to whose language she was a stranger, the charity of a British Lady relieved her, and brought her to England;—this was Miss M'Rae, and Alicia was in Trewarne House, when she was commanded to give up her claims on her husband, whose ruin she would be if she refused; that he already had promised not again to behold her, and if she attempted to see him, should he repent of his oath, he was for ever an outcast from his friends, deprived of a fortune that should otherwise be his; and if she agreed not to a separation, she should be imprisoned for life, and never behold her husband or child. The latter should have an ample fortune assigned her, and in a few years be restored to her; she also should have a handsome provision.

Alicia paused; her husband had doubtless abandoned her—he had, perhaps, been obliged to do so, and she was looked upon as his ruin.—Alas! to promote his interest could any sacrifice be too great?—nought should have weight with her—every selfish consideration should yield to that. But then, her child! was she to be separated from her beloved infant? maternal love strongly pleased for braving the powerful enemies with whom she had to contend; yet what chance was there, did she resist, of escaping the threatened punishment? her husband—her child alike might be the victims. She promised to submit, and with an agonized heart the young and lovely Baroness was conveyed into Scotland, where a small house was ready to receive her, situated on a mountainous estate belonging to the family of the Baron St. Andrew, and where spies of Miss M'Rae, under the name of domestics, surrounded her.

CHAPTER XIII

DURING these transactions, Lord St. Andrews suffered under apprehensions the most terrible. Alicia was, he feared, ill—she was dead—or no longer loved him.—The Earl, whose anger was kept alive by M'Rae, also directed his vengeance, and obliged Mr. Barlow to quit his farm.

At the period when Lord St. Andrews first arrived at Llanmorden, Miss Barlow had secretly married a young Cornet of a regiment quartered in one of the neighbouring towns. Mr. Barlow had learned he was a gay and dissipated character, and had commanded his daughter to drop the acquaintance she had commenced with him; this she was no way inclined to do, and when Mr. Meynel proposed a private marriage, she agreed, but no sooner was the ceremony over, than he made her solemnly promise never to reveal it, till he authorized her so to do, as he was entirely dependant upon his uncle, Sir Robert Bertram, his father being supposed dead in the East Indies; and that his friends, he feared, would not sanction his choice. My readers will easily discover, that the husband of Miss Barlow was the son of Mr. Meynel and the sister of Sir Robert Bertram, who then resided at Oakdale with Mrs. Mildred Bertram. Mr. Meynel was ordered to Ireland with his regiment, soon after which his wife gave birth to a daughter; her brother, now Captain Barlow, with Lady St. Andrews, alone were privy to the marriage, and with them also rested the secret of her child's birth, which remained at some little distance from Llanmorden, with a woman who had been a servant in Mr. Barlow's house some years. Three weeks after the birth of the little Meynel, the daughter of Lord St. Andrews was born, and ere that infant was six weeks old, its mother left Llanmorden. Mr. Barlow still remained a stranger to his daughter's marriage, who feared alike his displeasure and her husband's, who yet insisted upon concealment. The child of Lady St. Andrews survived her departure only a few weeks, dying in convulsions, when Mr. Barlow was absent at a neighbouring fair. With the assistance of her brother, Mrs. Meynel concealed the death of the little Eliza, and brought her own infant home; the change was not remarked by Mr. Barlow, who at that time was engrossed by his affairs being involved.—Soon after the whole family were obliged to quit Llanmorden by Miss M'Rae's arts, who, learning whither they went, still pursued them.

Was I to trace Lord St. Andrews through all his various efforts to again recover his lost, his beloved Alicia; was I to speak of his sorrows, or relate fully the duplicity and art of Miss M'Rae, it would far exceed the limits of a modern novel; suffice it then to say, that she insidiously kept alive Lord Trewarne's dislike to the amiable and beautiful Alicia, and that for the space of eight years she succeeded in separating this unfortunate couple. Again they were restored to each other, and for a time enjoyed as perfect a share of happiness as falls to the lot of mortals; absence had not weakened their attachment, which seemed to have acquired strength from their sufferings. Llanmorden and its neighbourhood had been searched by Lord St. Andrews for the Barlows, but without success; he at last traced them into Shropshire, but from thence all his attempts were fruitless. Miss M'Rae, in the character of the enraged parent of the supposed Mr. Mackenzie, had there visited them, and demanded the child, which was refused by Mr.

Barlow, and she retired denouncing vengeance. Yet, as she revolved it in her mind, she determined to make this family her instruments, and thus at once conceal the infant heir of Lord St. Andrews, yet suffer no fear from detection; she therefore wrote, in a feigned hand, to Mr. Barlow, announcing herself as the younger brother of Mr. Mackenzie, who had been sent abroad by his father on account of his marriage, that had utterly disobliged the noble family to which he belonged, and that he feared his brother was dead, from his not having been heard of for some time, in which case the writer, being heir to the estate, would, at his father's death, acknowledge his niece; and entreated they would conceal her from the attempts of his mother, whose violence he feared would take her by force, and whose temper was such as to make him fear some terrible fate for the child.—Change of name and place was entreated, and this request accompanied by a bank note of 50l, with a promise, provided they attended to the request made, and wrote, according to the direction given, an account of their proceedings, and the child's health, an annual sum should be remitted them. The scheme proved an effectual one. Twice had Mr. Barlow changed his name and place of residence, ere, assuming that of Wetherall, he took Woodcraft farm, and became a tenant of Sir Robert Bertram's in the pleasant vale of Oakdale; nor till after that did Miss M'Rae drop her correspondence with him.

The son of Miss M'Rae appeared to enjoy, by inheritance, those talents in which she excelled, nor had they wanted in her an able instructress; assiduously indeed did this artful woman cultivate the promising abilities of her son.—The same reason which made Miss M'Rae dislike Lord St. Andrews, subsisted, with added force, in her son, who had now reached an age when, the character beginning to consolidate, we may judge of the future bias.

Lord and Lady St. Andrews had not long been reunited, when the education of young M'Rae being finished, his mother grew very importunate with the Earl that he should make some provision for her son; but his Lordship, who submitted to the whims and caprices of a woman who had, in a manner, rendered herself necessary to his existence, yet had laid it down as a rule never to render her independent of him.

"Pray, Madam, (said the Earl) have I ever allowed Frederick an income suitable to his birth?"

"My Lord, is there not a material difference between a disobedient, obstinate character, and such a young man as William?"

"I grant it, (replied the Earl, with a satirical tone), the difference I fully comprehend. Frederick Fitz-Harman Mackenzie is the son and heir of Mary, Baroness St. Andrews, and the Earl of Trewarne; William is the son of Miss M'Rae, and the laws of the land allow him no inheritance."

The lady found she had gone beyond her bounds, and attempted to speak, but was silenced by his Lordship, who proceeded:—"Your son has as yet been perhaps more liberally provided for than Lord St. Andrews, who, if he chose to assert his claims against me, might for some years have enjoyed the Scotch estates. With a soul so exalted, a heart so amiable, and a spirit so nobly disinterested, William will never feel a state of dependance painful if left to Lord St. Andrews's generosity. Of this I am determined,

whilst I have a son who is my legal heir, no other shall be provided for by me, independent of him; Frederick shall not inherit an estate loaded with annuities for illegitimate children. Perhaps, Miss M'Rae, I may, I think I have, sufficiently disgraced myself, and had I not had an heir to my title and estate, I should long ere now have connected myself with some woman I deemed worthy of being successor tot the Countess of Trewarne."

His Lordship quitted the room, and Miss M'Rae resolved not again to tease him on this subject, lest he might be irritated so as to deprive her of what was settled on herself, but done so as to be reviseable at his Lordship's pleasure. Soon after this determination was made by Miss M'Rae, she had the mortification of learning Lady St. Andrews was expected, ere long, to give her Lord another heir. Unpleasant as this intelligence was, Miss M'Rae resolved to conceal her vexation, and finding the Earl was determined to leave her son dependant on Lord St. Andrews, hoped to secure his regard, by using her influence at this time to restore him to his father; and having fully effected this, she made William the bearer of the tidings to his brother. Cordially, ere his errand was announced, was he received by the amiable couple, who yet inhabited the small house assigned Lady St. Andrews some years before.

"The pleasing manner, the appearance of sensibility, of frankness, young M'Rae so well knew how and when to assume, soon won the esteem of his amiable relatives, and the few days preceding their quitting Summer Shiels for London, was spent in the utmost harmony. On the parts of Lord and Lady St. Andrews all was unreserved confidence; if they spoke of the loss of their infant daughter, of their efforts to regain her, M'Rae wept with them, and if they talked of their future happy prospects, his countenance was lighted by joy, and his eyes beamed with hope. Miss M'Rae's kindness to his Lordship in his childhood and in his boyish years was remembered with gratitude; she concealed her faults, and he thought but of whose virtues she displayed. Deeply did Lord St. Andrews lament his father's conduct towards her, and grieved that a brother so amiable should be deprived of those advantages which, as son to the Countess of Trewarne, would have been his.

They set out for London, and had reached Carlisle, when an express met them, hastening their journey—Lord Trewarne was supposed to be dying. They had dined at Carlisle, and being nearly dark, Lord St. Andrews meant to have gone no farther that night, but on receiving this intelligence, instantly set out, and had crossed Cumberland, when driving along a road which had been lately repaired with large stones, the carriage, in which was Lord and Lady St. Andrews, with M'Rae, was overturned, but little damaged, nor any person hurt.—They soon were able to continue their journey, but had not travelled many miles, when her Ladyship declared she was ill, and utterly unable to proceed. Appleby was the nearest town, and Lady St. Andrews said she hoped to support herself till they reached it; a small cottage was seen rising from amidst the surrounding heath, at some little distance from the road, and her Ladyship growing worse, she begged to be taken thither. Just as they were turning the chaise to comply with this request, a servant of Lord Trewarne's came up, who put a letter into the hands of M'Rae, which, when he had glanced his eye over it, he gave to Lord St. Andrews; it was written by Miss

M'Rae, who conjured her son to hasten his journey, as the Earl was not expected to live, and that he was anxious to behold Lord and Lady St. Andrews, declaring he could not die in peace without their forgiveness. Her Ladyship entreated she might be left—she would perhaps be better soon, and follow them. As Lord St. Andrews's presence seemed more necessary in London than M'Rae's, who offered to stay with her Ladyship, this plan was adopted, and reluctantly the fond couple parted.

With Lady St. Andrews remained a woman, who had been one of the people set over her by Miss M'Rae; Lord St. Andrews's servant had been dispatched to Appleby for assistance, but ere he returned, her Ladyship had given birth to a fine boy. M'Rae had already bribed the woman of the cottage, who, in conjunction with Morris, her Ladyship's attendant, informed her the infant was dead (a circumstance which the late overturn rendered probable); wrapped in flannel, the infant was given to M'Rae, who waited without, and by him concealed in a wheat-stack at the back of the cottage.—The man returning from Appleby was immediately dispatched with the news of Lady St. Andrews's situation after her Lord, and thus were left entirely in the power of M'Rae both child and mother.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XIV.

NO sooner was he relieved from the enquiries of the person who came from Appleby to attend her Ladyship, regarding the body of the infant, than dressing himself in an old hat and wig, and wrapped in a great coat, with the child in a basket, he set out on horseback, as yet undetermined what way to provide for the innocent infant. A few miles from Temple Sowerby, near the foot of the mountain called Cross Fell, he met a woman who carried a basket with laces, and sundry other wares on one arm, whilst the other brandished a stout oaken cudgel; a chubby faced boy was fastened on her back, and she appeared in a likely way soon to have an infant in her arms. This Amazonian, M'Rae, as he surveyed her, judged a fit nurse for the heir of the title and estates of the Earl of Trewarne. The bargain was soon concluded for a sum which was an hundred times more than the lady had ever at one time possessed; she promised to adopt the infant, and M'Rae assured her of the same sum, provided she, the same day of the following year, appeared with the child at the same place. He then enquired where she was going, and she informed him to Cockermouth, if she was able, where she expected to meet the next week with some of her comrades, for that Johnny and she had quarrelled at Reeth, about which neighbourhood he generally travelled with his tinker's budget, and she had come away and left him. Having thus disposed of the infant, M'Rae returned to the cottage where he had left Lady St. Andrews, who in a few days had a letter from her Lord, tenderly regretting his separation from her, but that at present he could not leave his father, whose life was yet despaired of.

As soon as it was judged safe for Lady St. Andrews, she set out, and by easy stages reached London, where she found the Earl, though better, yet in a very doubtful state. Nothing during this period could exceed the attention of M'Rae, or the tenderness of his mother. The Earl's disorder seemed now to quit him, and in a state of convalescence, he was ordered by the physicians into the country; at this time did Lord St. Andrews urge his father, if Miss M'Rae was necessary to his happiness, no longer to allow her to remain under the stigma her character had so long borne, but to marry her.—This Lord Trewarne positively refused.

"No, (said he) Frederick, Miss M'Rae's arts are now visible to me; she has lost her influence, and is no longer necessary to my comfort.—You tell me it is a just and a too late reparation—I tell you, Lord St. Andrews, she is, she ever was, unworthy of the place of your mother.—Miss M'Rae is the sacrifice not of my artifice, but of her own vanity."

In pursuance to the Earl's present sentiments, Miss M'Rae left the house of his Lordship, with an allowance which he said was sufficient for all reasonable and some unreasonable expences.

Lord and Lady St. Andrews, whom the Earl of Trewarne could scarcely bear a moment out of his sight, were now domesticated under his roof. The following autumn brought a return of the Earl's complaints, and a warmer climate was recommended, and he went upon the Continent, accompanied by Lord St. Andrews and his Lady. M'Rae was

also, by their desire, of the party, to which his pleasing manners made him a desirable addition. The Earl's temper was broke by his illness, and his spirits sunk as he reflected on the harshness of his treatment of his amiable son, and the deserving object of that son's choice, and the consequent loss of their first-born child; nor could the Earl look back on his life in a way that could yield him any great satisfaction. Weary of a fruitless search after health abroad, his Lordship returned to England, where a few months finished the period of his existence. M'cRae was left, as his mother had reason to suppose he would be, entirely dependant on his brother, who instantly made a provision for him, which M'Rae accepted, on condition he might in some degree earn it, by being made useful. Lord Trewarne insisted, yet M'Rae steadily refused:—"It was not (said he) the Earl's intention I should be rendered independent; allow me but to hold the place now vacant of your chief agent, the trouble in this station will be nominal; yet, by evincing my care for your interest, shall I prove my gratitude—I shall yet be in some degree dependant, and my father's will by this means will be obeyed. Lord Trewarne consented, and M'Rae gained a point he considered of more importance than the annuity, which, liberal as it was, he deemed far beneath his merit. The Earl now made a will, in which he constituted M'Rae his executor, and left Lady Trewarne and her children heir to all he could bequeath. At Florence her Ladyship had given birth to a daughter, whose infant beauty and sweetness promised all her fond parents could wish, and a few weeks preceding the death of the Earl she was mother to a lovely boy. The young Alicia was attacked by a malignant and infectious disorder, which was caught by her mother, who attended on her, nor did the infant boy escape—all three fell a sacrifice to its fury.

I will not attempt to describe the father's, the husband's feelings; passionately attached to a woman every way amiable—endeared too by mutual sufferings—possessed of a heart whose warmth and sensibility were rare—of a character that bordered on enthusiasm—Lord Trewarne saw himself, by these misfortunes, cut off from all hope of happiness, deprived of consolation; no one child remained whose features, whose virtues might recal to him his lost Alicia. He would listen to no offer of comfort—he sorrowed as them that have no hope—and shut himself up with the body of his beloved Lady, and her little son.

Between Sir Robert Bertram and the Earl a friendship had subsisted since they were boys, (originating from the late Earl of Trewarne, with the Earl of Knasborough being, under Lady Bertram's will, her son's trustees.) Sir Robert learned his friend's distress, and in vain entreated for admittance; the door was at length broke open by the Baronet, and the Earl forcibly taken from this scene of death. The infection displayed itself in him, but accompanied by a fever in the brain; to the care of Sir Robert was, perhaps, the Earl indebted for a life he would willingly have laid down; Reason seemed to fit loosely on her throne—at times he was furious, if opposed—at others sunk in melancholy.—M'Rae was, at Lady Trewarne's death, in Scotland, but hastened into Hertfordshire, where the Earl was, when he learned his situation, and with all the delicacy of attention he knew so well how to display, endeavoured to give his ideas an happier turn. Change of scene, and travelling, were prescribed, to which at length, urged by his friend's importunities, his Lordship gave a slow consent. Lord Morville, now the Earl of Knasborough, accompanied him, with M'Rae, into France, which they intended crossing, and thus

pursuing their route into Switzerland, where the Earl never having been, the country would be perfectly unconnected with any former recollections. The second night Lord Morville pressed his friend to drink more than was his usual custom, as he appeared extremely low; his spirits changed as he drank the last glass of wine, and an air of wildness took its place. Lord Morville proposed retiring, and the Earl, pouring out a bumper of brandy, drank it off ere he was observed. Frenzy succeeded, and he was for some days obliged to be held in bed; from this he in part recovered, and on the third night he was left by Lord Morville to the care of his servants. (M'Rae being indisposed, had also gone to bed.) Wearied by want of rest, the attendants slept; the Earl rose, dressed, and leaping out of a window, ran with all his speed till he met an empty carriage; heedless which way he went, he gave money to the driver, who conveyed him to a post town, from whence procuring a chaise, he again set out. When next he changed horses, he wrote to Lord Morville as follows:

It is you, my friend, you who was once so dear to me, that I fly; once I esteemed you—once your friendship was my solace in sorrow—now it is irksome! Return, Morville, to the amiable woman you love—to your children—abandon not such interesting objects for him to whom all nature is a blank! heed not my wanderings—yet I may become collected;—till then I fly you—I fly all that were ever known or loved by me—that yet remains to the wretched Trewarne!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE EARL was pursued, but so varied was his route, so desultory his road, that the pursuit was fruitless. At a small village on the Dutch coast he hired a fishing vessel, from which he was landed at Yarmouth; from thence he set out on foot, but in no certain way did he proceed; various conveyances were made use of, but he stopped at no town, and avoided such places as he judged probable he might be known at. He made a pilgrimage to Llanmorden—he visited in secret every well-remembered spot consecrated in his memory to his lamented Alicia, and again set out on foot; at Chester he, however, again took a chaise, and drove with all expedition into Westmoreland to visit the cottage where Lady St. Andrews was obliged to stop on her journey. The cottage was gone, but in its stead had risen a decent farm house, surrounded by new inclosures. Leaving his carriage he walked thither, and learned a fire had consumed the cottage, (the work of M'Rae the morning of his departure) and its then inhabitant did not long survive her fright. The gentle deportment of the stranger interested the good woman of the house to offer him a bed, as it was nearly dark, and no house near; the hospitable offer was accepted, as was the oaten cake and milk she set before him; the Earl slept, and awoke with more composure than he had long done. After breakfasting, he left gold on the table, and took his departure, with an intention of pursuing his way to Summer Shiels, so long the residence of Alicia; but heedless of his steps, he wandered on in the road he first chanced to take, till upon enquiry he found he had reached the little town of Brough; yet still he proceeded, leaving Westmoreland, and entering Durham, at the first town of which county he procured a chaise, in which he proceeded till he was about a mile from Oakdale, when, to the surprise of the postillion, in the midst of a heavy shower of snow he discharged him, and went forward on foot. Already do my readers know the Earl reached St. Mary's at the time of old Joshua Wetherall's, alias Mr. Barlow, interment, who it seems had intended revealing to Mr. Hammond the secret regarding Eliza, had he lived another day.

I need not again repeat the particulars of the marriage, except to beg my readers to recollect Mr. Bouchier (which name he assumed as being that of his Alicia) absented himself on his wedding day, and that he did not return for the space of several succeeding ones. He had learned M'Rae was in Scotland, and thither he went, but in a disguise that prevented his being known by any but his brother, whom he caused to swear he would conceal this visit, saying he was living in retirement, and informed him in what way he meant to draw upon him for money; and as he even did not trust M'Rae with the secret of his retreat, the method he took was such as even to elude all the enquiries of that artful wretch.

Already has it been related how Mr. Bouchier came to the knowledge of the way into the concealed chambers, where, by comparing the account given by Mr. Barlow, with that in Mildred's confession, he found them precisely the same. Every article of her wardrobe, her height, her features, and apparent age had been minuted down, alike by Mr. Barlow and Mildred Bertram' all corresponded, and all convinced the Earl that the daughter of the unfortunate son of Sir Robert Bertram and Eliza Bouchier was the same

person. When he entered the apartment where Eliza was, he found her busied in arranging some linen in an old trunk. "Look (said she) Mr. Bouchier, at this trunk; I have heard my grandfather say it was my mother's, whom I cannot remember; and when I have asked my grandfather after my father and mother, he would never give me any information, except that they were both dead, he believed, was it not very odd, Mr. Bouchier, he did not know? The very day, poor man! before he died, I was asking if my mother was very young when she was married, and where I was born, when he burst into tears, and said he was going the next day to speak to Mrs. Hammond, and then I should know all he could tell me."

"It is, indeed, (said the Earl) strange; it seems very odd your grandfather should wish to conceal such things from you, Eliza."

"Oh! here are some letters, Mr. Bouchier! I was about to read them when you came, but the ink is quite faded; I dare say they have been written many, many years ago; the writer perhaps has long been dead."

The Earl took the letter; it was addressed to Mrs. Mackenzie, at Mr. Barlow's, Llanmorden, Glamorganshire. He stood with the letter tightly grasped in his hands, with his eyes fixed on Eliza, where they remained unmoved; his face was bloodless, and wildly he bade her leave him. During the first weeks of her marriage, Eliza had frequently received a like command from her husband, when he found himself unable to repress the extravagance of his manner, but which had not occurred for some months. Eliza, hesitatingly, enquired if he was well.

"Go, Eliza, leave me! I am well—I am not sick! Go! I entreat—leave me!"

Terrified, she obeyed, and the Earl, fastening the door, examined the letters, and found a sad confirmation of his suspicions.—Three of his letters, all wrote between leaving Llanmorden, and reaching Trewarne House, remained to convince him that Eliza, the child he had supposed entirely lost, was found at St. Mary's Oak; alas! how found!—Several trifles given by him to Alicia were also contained in this trunk. The distraction of mind he sustained has been already mentioned, yet notwithstanding this he instantly resolved to conceal from the amiable and innocent Eliza, the sad knowledge of her birth, and put the letters in his pocket; yet others remained which were addressed to Miss Barlow, and written by a person of the name of Meynel, who called her wife. The last he read was from Mrs. Meynel herself, and dated New York; it was addressed to Mr. Wetherall, St. Mary's Oak, Durham, saying, she and her husband had arrived safely in America; it also contained a promise of writing to him again when they were settled, and hoped they would have it in their power to take Eliza, but begged he would not mention, to her or any one, where his daughter was, or speak of Eliza's birth. This letter had been written not many months preceding Mr. Barlow's death. As the Earl again perused it, a ray of hope glanced over his mind.—Miss Barlow had been secretly married when he first went to Llanmorden; Eliza might therefore be her daughter, and not Alicia's. Mrs. Meynel it was plain alluded to some secret regarding her, and sure had his child lived that was born at Llanmorden, the large rewards he had offered for its discovery would have urged Mr. Barlow, (had no motive of humanity,) to produce her. Those rewards had, by

Miss M' Rae, been represented as lures held out by the parents of Mr. Mackenzie, to get the child into their power.

In a state of mind that bordered on distraction, Lord Trewarne, as may be remembered, shut himself into Sir Philip's chamber. Afraid to again behold Eliza, and impatient of delay, he resolved to go himself to America to search for Mrs. Meynel, who alone he supposed could ascertain the truth—alone inform him of the birth of Eliza.

Chawton House Library

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. HAMMOND, my readers will recollect, was, by Lord Trewarne, presented to a living of considerable value in his gift; and it may be enquired how it happened that this circumstance did not discover the Earl's retreat. The order for the presentation was by him dated from Amiens in Picardy, to which place from Dover (where he went and returned in the space of five days) did the Earl send purposely a messenger, leaving a reward to be paid on his return by the master of one of the inns, who had lately begun there, and was a stranger to his Lordship's person.— M'Rae, as the Earl's agent, took the proper steps, and Mr. Hammond was inducted into a living which he did not long enjoy; if he had, his patron would in course of time have been discovered, and Mr. Bouchier known as the Earl of Trewarne—a circumstance not regarded by his Lordship, who had intended, upon Sir Robert Bertram's coming down to Malieveren in May, to have taken Eliza there, and to the Baronet and his Lady have announced her as Countess of Trewarne.

Amidst the wildness, the distraction which seized Lord Trewarne at the fatal discovery he had made, he thought of providing for Eliza, and had, previous to his quitting Oakdale by the passage through the concealed chambers into the garden, wrote to M'Rae to deposit a certain sum in the bank of Newcastle for the use of Mrs. Bouchier, which letter his Lordship put in at the Liverpool post-office, previous to his embarking for America; but being directed to Kilcraigie Castle, which M'Rae had left, it had by some means been mislaid, and put up amongst some old papers. From New York again the Earl wrote, repeating the order for Mrs. Bouchier, but the ship which should have brought over the letter, was lost upon the passage. Subsequent letters were, however, received by M'Rae, each of which begged he would be careful to regularly place the money for Mrs. Bouchier in the Bank as directed. At New York the Earl learned Mr. and Mrs. Meynel had quitted it for Philadelphia; thither he went, and found they had made no sojourning there, but was supposed to have gone to Williamsburg; from thence he traced them to Elizabeth Town in New Jersey, but his wanderings yet were not at an end; those he sought had set out from thence to take up their abode on a new plantation in the back settlements. Procuring a guide thither, did the Earl resolve to follow; ere the journey was accomplished, the guide fell sick, and was unable to proceed, and his Lordship, with that impatience which he had contracted from the malady which sickness and extreme grief had caused, would not wait the recovery of his guide, but taking in his stead a person he met with at the plantation where he had been obliged to stop, proceeded. After travelling through woods almost impenetrable, and taking a journey of much greater length than the Earl supposed he had to go, he began to find his new guide unequal to the task he had undertaken. Their provisions already were expended, the two last days they had subsided upon the casual support of their fire arms; no cultivated ground was to be seen from the eminences, or any signs of inhabitants;—at length the man declared he knew not which way to proceed, that he had been afraid of meeting with a party of Indians, who having once had him in their possession, would treat him barbarously did they again find him; on this account he had deviated from the road, and now he was at a loss how to regain it, or any place he knew. At last they reached the banks of a large body of water, nearly

perished; they advanced along its banks in hopes of falling in with some tribe of Indians to succour them, nor had they kept on their way long when a party of armed savages approached and surrounded them. The guide of Lord Trewarne was known by some of the Indians, who had been the preceding season with a tribe of their friends who dwelt beyond the Ohio; with this tribe had Green incorporated himself, and after having married one of them, deserted to the white people. Lord Trewarne was, with his faithless guide, made a prisoner; in vain did his Lordship assure them, by means of the Indian who acted as interpreter, the nation of their brethren on the Ohio were equally unknown to him—vainly assured them he was a stranger to Green, who acted only as his guide, and had led him astray. They believed not his assertions, nor would they listen to the offers he made of liberally rewarding them, if they would allow him to accompany them to Montreal, whither they were going with furs; but declared he should, with his companion, the traitor Green, be, on their return, delivered up to their brethren who dwelt on the Ohio, with whom, the preceding hunting season, they had smoked the calumet of peace; but that did they then find he was a true man, he should be conducted to his friends the white people. The traders set out on their journey, leaving Lord Trewarne and Green in charge of a tribe on the banks of the lake.

The unfortunate Earl grew into favour with his savage hosts, and by degrees found their food and way of life less disgusting, and amidst the wild scenes by which he was surrounded, he once more recovered a settled state of mind. No longer the hasty impetuous character he had appeared to all who had seen him in America, Lord Trewarne was now calm as in his early years, before he left his beloved Alicia; gentle and forbearing—patient under misfortunes—yet watchful to avoid them. Deeply did he regret the want of resignation he had displayed to the dispensations of Providence, who now perhaps thought fit to chastise his impatience, by placing him in a situation that was well calculated to make him sensible of his error, amongst a nation of unlettered barbarians, whose natural indolence of character was seldom roused, save by passions that disgrace human nature; revenge of injuries made them forget all fatigues to accomplish their purposed aim. The Earl was often sadly occupied with retrospective views of his conduct; he had, instead of looking beyond the grave for comfort, on the loss of his wife and children, abandoned himself to his grief which he took every method of nourishing. Without reflection, further than that the features of Eliza recalled, as did her age and manner, to him his Alicia, did he enter into a connection with her that death alone could dissolve; yet, more fortunate in some respects than he merited, her amiable temper, her many engaging qualities restored him to peace; but when he found she was in all probability the daughter of Alicia, whom she resembled, he had broke out into his former impatience, and the woman, who as wife or daughter he was alike bound to protect, he had left to sorrow, if not to infamy. Uncertain of his fate, her gentle spirit would sink before her unmerited misfortunes. If indeed she was the daughter so long lost, yet the crime was an involuntary one, and he who sees the heart, would not judge by the transgression.

It was nearly the same time the following year ere the traders returned, when taking leave of their friends, they set out with their prisoners; upon their march they encountered an hostile tribe, and a fierce battle ensued. On each side more were killed than

survived—of the former number was Green; the party which had made him and Lord Trewarne prisoners became so in their turns to their enemies, who with his Lordship, whose masters were changed by the fortune of war, set out for their homes. The course they took was west north west for some months, when at length they reached their habitations. Lord Trewarne was presented to the Chiefs of the nation, with high eulogiums on his valour and perseverance under fatigue and danger; for various had been the encounters they had met with on their march. Adopted in the room of a famous warrior slain in this expedition, his Lordship received his name, and was judged worthy of the rank he held. Hitherto no opportunity of escape had offered, and now, when thus entrusted, to attempt it would be instant death; nor had the Earl a wish to prolong his life upon the conditions he now held it, had not a hope still flattered him some future period might put it in his power to leave his savage friends, and return to England.

During this interval, it is necessary I should present my readers with some account of M'Rae, who, as before observed, did not receive either of the letters first written by the Earl, in both which a particular direction was contained regarding the money to be deposited for the use of Mrs. Bouchier in the Bank at Newcastle, which, had he received, of course he could not have avoided complying with. Three years had passed away since Lord Trewarne had quitted Lord Morville in France; during that period (except to M'Rae) he had not appeared, and the next heir to the title and estates of the Mackenzies, Lord St. Andrews, asserting his Lordship was dead, put in his claim:—M'Rae now stepped forward, and produced letters from his brother; the order for inducting Mr. Hammond, dated Amiens, into the rectory of St. Catherine, with different papers signed by his name, all proving his being alive within the last eighteen months. After this period M'Rae had recourse to a branch of his education which he had carefully studied, and arrived at uncommon proficiency in the art of forgery; for there were few hands indeed that he was acquainted with, that he could not copy in a way which would puzzle the writers themselves; but this accomplishment, with a diffidence not natural to him, was most assiduously concealed. This acquirement served at this time to satisfy the claimants of the St. Andrews estate that the Earl of Trewarne was alive in America not two months ago, and thus M'Rae remained possessed, in his Lordship's name, of his whole property; but he feared he would not long remain undisturbed, as Mr. Mackenzie was a man of an active temper, and he feared, was there any truth in the report of the Earl's death, he would not rest till he had proved it. M'Rae found means to satisfy himself, and learned that a person had come from America, who had known the Earl in England; that he had seen him at Elizabeth Town, where reports had come, just as he left it, of the Earl being, it was supposed murdered by his guide, a fellow of notorious character; as it was known he had a considerable sum of money when at Gunter's Farm he left the sick guide recommended to him, and set out with Green.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. Mackenzie now talked of going himself to America to enquire into the truth of the story, when death relieved M'Rae from his fears, as after Mr. Mackenzie his mother was next heir; but to her succeeded a family to whom she bore an inveterate hatred, as since her connexion with the Earl of Trewarne, though nearly allied, they had totally renounced her. To find means to secure those estates to her son, which his illegitimacy prevented his inheriting, employed the sleeping and waking thoughts of Miss M'Rae; at length she disclosed to him what at first appeared a desperate scheme, but the event proved it for a time a successful one. M'Rae fell sick; physicians were called in, who were at a loss how to prescribe for a person who laboured under such a complication of disorders; their skill was exerted, but it seemed without effect, for their patient departed, whilst his mother, and his own footman Dodds, sat by him. The Castle of Kilcraigie was at this time the residence of M'Rae, and it was filled with the lamentations of his disconsolate mother and the faithful Dodds; the dead body of their master was seen by all the servants, after which his mother shut herself up in the chamber, nor would allow any one to approach but Dodds, till the day of the funeral, when Mr. M'Rae's coffin was laid in the family vault of the Lord St. Andrews, close by the last Baron. Pompous paragraphs, that spoke of the virtues and accomplishments of Mr. M'Rae, and the infinite loss his sorrowing friends had sustained by his death, were sent to every paper in London and Edinburgh. Meanwhile the living M'Rae set out on a horse procured by Dodds for Greenock, where he embarked in a ship bound to Virginia, from whence on his arrival he went to Elizabeth Town in New Jersey, where he saw the person who had gone from thence as guide with the Earl of whose fate no doubt remained with all that heard the story, and knew the character of Green.

In America the Earl had been known as Mr. Mackenzie, a circumstance to which M'Rae was no stranger, from his letters.—Setting out on his return, M'Rae dyed his hair and eyebrows with a certain mixture, which changed them to nearly the same shade of brown as Lord Trewarne's, to whom, excepting the colour of his hair, he has already been said so uncommonly to resemble. A little change was also made in his complexion, which done, he had only to endeavour at his brother's countenance, (the one he already wore was assumed); he had only to change it for one more interesting, and yet farther from his real character. Reaching New York, he wrote in the Earl's hand and name to himself at Kilcraigie, desiring he would order the house in London to be ready for his reception, and meet him there on his arrival, as he was about to embark for England. He then gave a long detail of adventures, not so wide of truth as the inventor imagined, after losing his way in the woods, by the Indians, from whom he had at length escaped. Those marvellous adventures were repeated in letters to Sir Robert Bertram, the Earl of Knasborough, and other less intimate friends of Lord Trewarne. By these friends was M'Rae met on his return to England; all saw his Lordship was considerably altered, yet how no one could say; he was not so handsome, yet he appeared rather to have grown younger than older; his manner was much the same, but his voice Sir Robert thought was not so pleasant. M'Rae had undoubtedly as much assurance as any man can reasonably hope to possess; yet he felt disconcerted by the scrutinizing eye of the Earl of

Knasborough, and the hesitating doubting manner of Sir Robert Bertram, from whose observation he meant to withdraw himself, but was visited the following day by Sir Robert, who then was convinced that if this was his friend Lord Trewarne, he must have, by his misfortunes, been deprived of his memory; but that if this person was an impostor, he was one intimately connected with his Lordship, and so completely in possession of the family affairs, that it would be almost impossible to convict him. Sir Robert saw on this visit Miss M'Rae, who came to congratulate his Lordship on his return; nothing could exceed the acting of this lady and her accomplished son, who wept with her the death of his brother, Mr. M'Rae; and at parting Miss M'Rae promised his Lordship to comply with his invitation, and make him a visit at Trewarne House, whither M'Rae went the following day, declaring to the friends of Lord Trewarne he would no more mingle in the gay world.

A person, formerly a tenant upon the St. Andrews estate, had gone out to America in the same ship as M'Rae; but not finding the prospects which induced him to quit Scotland likely to answer, he returned to England. A sister of this man's lived in Sir Robert Bertram's family; to her, at his arrival in London, he mentioned Mr. M'Rae, of Kilcraigie, going out in the same ship; she laughed at the supposition, as M'Rae was dead before that time. To her lady, as she was dressing her, Mrs. Bailey mentioned her brother's disappointment and return, and what he had said regarding M'Rae. Sir Robert Bertram, as well as the Earl of Knasborough, now concluded that the impostor (for such they were inwardly convinced was the pretended Lord Trewarne) was no other than his brother; and Mr. Fitz-Harman, the next heir to the title and estate of the Earl of Trewarne, (the Earl failing his issue), was urged by Sir Robert to assert his claim, and offered any sum of money that might be wanted to carry on the suit, should the impostor persist.

The suit was commenced; M'Rae, skilled in all the doublings of the law, traversed it, but at length, after some delay, this important cause was brought before the House of Lords, Miss M'Rae at the same time asserting her claim to the title and estate of St. Andrews, which, if the present possessor proved an impostor, was her right. A material, and almost the only evidence the plaintiff had to produce, was dead; this was Bailey, who, wearied of waiting till he was wanted to give evidence, went down into Scotland, where it was known Miss M'Rae had conversed with him, and a few hours after he was seized extremely ill, and died, as Sir Robert did not hesitate to believe, of poison; but this was but a supposition, founded upon the idea, that a person who once steps from the path of rectitude, will stop at nothing to gain his ends or conceal his crimes. The Captain of the ship was ready to swear Bailey had told him the passenger that never came out of the cabin was M'Rae; and Sir Robert Bertram and the Earl of Knasborough would give their joint affidavits, that they believed the person who called himself Earl of Trewarne was an impostor. Thus slightly furnished with evidence, or proof, was the plaintiff when the cause came before the House.

Miss M'Rae, yet in mourning, appeared to enforce her claim as Baroness St. Andrews, and Mr. Fitz-Harman, attended by the Earl of Knasborough and Sir Robert Bertram, to prove the present possessor of the Earl of Trewarne's estate an impostor, and to pray for restitution to the heir.

M'Rae, who in eloquence was not surpassed by many of the members of that assembly amongst whom he wished to be ranked, assisted in pleading his own cause, and in a most pathetic speech spoke of his early misfortunes—of the deprivation of all comfort. "I sustained in America hardships almost unparalleled (said he), and on my return to my native country, I determined for ever to abjure the gay, the busy world, and in retirement seek repose, where, cheered by the society, at times, of a few chosen friends, I would strive at forgetfulness of the painful past, and look forward to the period, when beyond the grave I should be re-united to those who are hid by death from my sight. I am dragged from my retreat—I am exposed to assertions the most vile; my very existence is denied; the most scandalous stories are circulated; my name fills every public print; and whilst I would shrink from society, and am unfitted by my late malady for exertion, I am called forth as an object of general observation; I am compelled to assert my own cause, or sink under obloquy, and be deemed by the world an usurper of rights which my birth entitled me to, and which could not, would not have been disputed, but for the man who was once most dear to my heart, every secret of which has been laid open to him. Yes, my Lords, such and so valued was he, who now points a dagger to my breast (all eyes fell upon Sir Robert Bertram), who not satisfied with supporting the gentleman in his claims, who at my decease will peaceably inherit my estates, has even dared to violate, with sacriligious hands, the ashes of the dead. My father's son, a man infinitely dear to me, whose body was peaceably interred with his ancestors, was not suffered to rest in quiet; but, by the emissaries of him I so lately esteemed, was the coffin broke open."—The feelings of the speaker prevented his proceeding, and Miss M'Rae fell into hysterics.

Sir Robert had caused the inspection mentioned to be made, but after so long an interval, nothing further could be ascertained than that the coffin had doubtless contained the body of some person.

The counsel for the plaintiff then spoke, and such proofs as could be procured were produced, to prove the person, who called himself Earl of Trewarne, an impostor.—The captain of the ship swore to what Bailey had said, and declared that, except the wig which he saw this person wear, instead of his red hair, he appeared to him the very same man that Bailey had said was Mr. M'Rae, though he went on board the ship by the name of Graham. To confront this evidence, it was proved the hair of the defendant was growing on his head, and that he wore no wig, and evidence was called, that spoke of Bailey as a man of unsettled character, and given to a practice of lying.

The circumstances, that by the Earl of Knasborough and Sir Robert Bertram were adduced as proofs of the defendant being not Lord Trewarne, were, by his counsel, imputed to a loss of memory, caused by a derangement of intellect, under which witnesses were called to prove his Lordship had suffered. Letters were produced, and swore to by different people as his handwriting, which traced him, further corroborated by witness, from town to town in America, till his disappearance at Elizabeth Town in New Jersey; nor were there letters wanting, written at New York, mentioning his Lordship's (alias M'Rae's) return to England.

The counsel for Mr. Fitz-Harman now mentioned certain marks being on the person of the real Earl of Trewarne, which, could they be found on the defendant, would identify him.

"How easy (cried M'Rae) is the truth proved! declare by sufficient evidence in what those marks consist." A pause, and a kind of bustle ensued, when an old woman of respectable appearance stepped forward, and looked very attentively at his supposed Lordship, who asked her, in a tone of much gentleness, if she did not know him?—"Has, (said he) Mrs. Evans, years and misfortunes so changed me, that you no longer recollect the man who owes to your fostering care numberless obligations in his infant days?"

The face (said she, taking off her spectacles, and wiping her eyes) the face is that of my dear Lord, but—but the voice is not so sweet; my Lord too, (looking again at him) yes, my Lord was handsomer."

"You do not well know (said the defendant's counsellor), Mrs. Evans, whether to follow your own opinion, or your instructions. But it is you, I understand, who are (in concert with the person who lived some years ago as his Lordship's valet) to declare what are the identifying marks."

On the top of the right shoulder (said Mrs. Evans) is a red mark, as large as the palm of my hand, with which my Lord was born." The valet next deposed, that six years ago this mark retained the same appearance.

"Does no other mark, that may prove my identity, exist," enquired M'Rae.

A person now advanced, who appeared a foreigner, to whom the defendant bowed.—"You, Signior Galeano, have had the trouble (said M'Rae) of coming from Messina to prove my wounds?"

"I have," answered the Signior, in Italian, a language Lord Trewarne spoke with fluency, but which M'Rae, though he understood, could not converse in.

"It is (said M'Rae, in French) so long since I was in Italy, that I feel myself at a loss for words. You, Signior, I recollect, spoke French—will you be pleased to converse in that language?"

"I can also (said the Signior) speak a little English, and if you are the Lord I cured at Messina, in the year 17—, of a wound received from some banditti near the foot of Mount Etna, there remains the cicatrice of a wound, which reaches from the shoulder of the right arm to nearly the elbow, below which, across the arm, it is again seen."

"I thank you, Signior, for the cure you at that time performed, and again for your accuracy. To this point I apprehend you, Hillier, (continued M'Rae, turning to the late valet of Lord Trewarne) have also to speak."

This man's deposition being also taken, the successful impostor retired to undergo the necessary examination, when, to the utter astonishment of the Earl of Knasborough and Sir Robert Bertram, the identifying marks were found. An operation, painful indeed, had been sustained by M'Rae, at Kilcraigie, who was in fact ill from the pain he endured at the time of his supposed sickness and death, at which time his prudent mother, foreseeing such a step would banish incredulity, with the assistance of Doods, not only counterfeited a mark she knew the Earl of Trewarne was born with, but pointed out the place to Doods

where to inflict a wound, which, though not deep, yet was, by inflammatory application, made to bear the appearance of having been so.

After all these repeated proofs, the decision of course was in favour of M'Rae, alias the Earl of Trewarne; Mr. Fitz-Harman and his friends with difficulty escaping the mob who surrounded them on their quitting the bar of the House of Lords.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR a short time M'Rae exhibited himself in the metropolis, after which he went abroad, not returned to Britain for the space of four years, when, still afraid of detection, he spent his time chiefly at Kilcraigie, where he had a perfect seraglio of women, picked up from every nation in Europe.

It is here a natural question to occur to the mind of my readers, how it could happen a trial of such importance, in which the Earl of Knasborough and Sir Robert Bertram were so highly interested, should not be known to Lord and Lady Morville, which doubtless it could not; for had Lord Trewarne been known to them as M'Rae, he never would have been admitted on the intimate footing he was in the family. Lord Morville was at the time a little boy, and if ever the story reached his ears, he had forgot it; as he grew up he was seldom with the Earl his father, as from school he was sent to the University, and no sooner were his studies finished, than he commenced his travels.—Lady Augusta was also educated from home, residing with the Countess of Wolverhampton. Our heroine had heard M'Rae spoken of by Sir Robert Bertram, but never Lord Trewarne, unless as a friend regretted. It was indeed a painful subject, alike to the Earl and Baronet; both deplored their friend's probable fate—both were inwardly still convinced he who bore the title of Lord Trewarne was an impostor, and that M'Rae, from his perfect knowledge of many incidents of his brother's life, and of family affairs, alone could be that impostor; yet, their having asserted it had, for a length of time, rendered their characters to be considered in a very contemptuous light, and when the world seemed to have forgot the affair, they wished not to revive its remembrance; and except to Henry Bertram, neither Sir Robert nor the Earl had for years mentioned Lord Trewarne or M'Rae.

At Kilcraigie the specious impostor was busied in arranging, after his return from abroad, some papers, amongst which he found bundled up a letter that had never been opened;—he knew it to be his brother's writing; it was that which was written at Oakdale, and put into the Liverpool Post-office, containing the Earl's orders for a sum of money to be paid into the Bank of Newcastle, for the use of Mrs. Bouchier. This lady was judged to be, by M'Rae, a person with whom the Earl had formed a connexion of some kind, and he resolved to search her out, not with any view at that time of fulfilling his brother's intentions in her favour, but to discover of what nature the connexion was between them. This was easily accomplished, as Mr. Kirby had left Mrs. Bouchier's address at the Bank, in order that the money might be remitted to her, should it hereafter be received at the Bank. Accompanied by Dodds, (who since the change of name kept no outward correspondence with him) M'Rae went to North Oak, where he learned such particulars as he wished to be informed of.

M'Rae, therefore, my readers will readily suppose, was Mr. Kirby's mysterious visitant, that caused such enquiry and consternation amongst the inhabitants of St. Mary's, who were not so far mistaken in asserting he was the devil; for though not precisely his infernal highness himself, yet sure the worthy surgeon's guest might justly be called one of his prime ministers. Mr. Kirby supposed it was Mr. Bouchier, yet, as he

found him ignorant of every thing almost relating to him, except that there was a child left, which child he wanted to have possession of, he determined to believe it was not Mr. Bouchier. Kirby promised, when he disclosed Mr. Bouchier's real name and connexions, and by what authority he claimed Alicia, she should be given up to his guardianship—a trust reposed in him by Mrs. Bouchier, and which nothing should tempt him to desert, if not for the child's advantage.

M'Rae finding that if he was to offer a bribe, the inflexible Kirby would spurn it, quitted him, in order to find other methods to get possession of a child who might live to overturn his schemes; but Kirby instantly set out to inform Mrs. Dalrymple of his visiter, and both judging that if the intentions of this person had been good, he would have declared his right to Alicia, it was judged proper to conceal her from any search that might be made, by a change of name, and other precautions; soon after which she was left at Mrs. Seldon's, upon Mrs. Dalrymple going to Jamaica. Kirby's movements were watched for some time by Dodds, who, however, weary of the post in which his penetration was eluded, had quitted the vicinity of Oakdale, previous to the good surgeon embarking for America.—M'Rae did not stay long at Kilcraigie, but again went upon the Continent; returning to England a little before our heroine became an inmate in the family of Sir Robert Bertram. Dividing his time between Trewarne House and Kilcraigie Castle, passing through Yorkshire in a journey from one of those places of residence, a favourite horse of M'Rae's was stolen; but the offender did not long escape being taken, and was committed to York Castle. Returning some short time after, his supposed Lordship stopped all night at York, where he was visited by the wife of the man who was confined in the castle for stealing his horse; but how great was M'Rae's surprise to behold in the woman who pleaded for mercy being shewn by his Lordship to poor Johnny the tinker, her husband, the very wench to whom he had so many years ago committed the eldest son of his brother. Without discovering himself, he could not question Susy on the subject, but although he promised no favour to her husband, gave her money.

To his confidant Dodds, M'Rae revealed what, till then, he had been ignorant of, and this precious accomplice, in quality of the person who had given Susy the child, made enquiries concerning it. She declared, after having made many evasive answers, that finding the following year nobody to meet at Cross Fell (M'Rae was at that time abroad with his father) she supposed she would never see the man again that had given her the child, and Johnny being in prison, she was not able to support her own children and it, and so laid it down, not far from Rippon, by the road side, when Sir Robert Bertram, of Malieveren, came up with his lady in their coach, which stopping when they saw the child, he was taken up, and carried to Malieveren, and that he had now grown up into a fine young man.

M'Rae had long wished for an opportunity of revenging himself upon Sir Robert Bertram, but now was urged by another motive, and resolved to ruin the son of Lord Trewarne, and estrange him from his benefactors, fearing circumstances might reveal his birth, when he should be obliged to acknowledge him as his son and heir. Suspicion also again might be roused; for if, as M'Rae, he should be convicted of secreting his brother's child in such a way, might it not readily be believed he would stop at no action, however

base? enquiries might be again set on foot, and he might not, as before, baffle them. The inventive genius of M'Rae formed a double scheme, at once to ruin the youth whose rights he usurped, and to render him the instrument of his malicious revenge on Sir Robert Bertram.

The lady who at this time, though she did not possess the undivided heart of M'Rae, yet was honoured with his chief regard, was by him entrusted on this occasion, as far as he judged needful, and promised, in case the scheme succeeded in which she was to act a principal part, her reward should be the title of Countess of Trewarne. This woman was highly qualified for the plot in which she engaged; born in France, of English parents, she had received her education chiefly in that country, and had, after a residence in gay scenes in England, returned again to the Continent at the death of her parents, who left her unprovided for. It was at this period she became a pensioner in the Convent of Benedictines at Cambray, and here she was seen by M'Rae, who had but little trouble in persuading her to abandon a life she had lived too long in scenes of gaiety to relish; and, seduced by a promise of marriage, she quitted the convent, where it was generally known M'Rae was an English Lord, although his exact title had not come to the knowledge of the Abbess, who supposed Miss Boysville married. The first thought that had occurred to M'Rae, was to set up a claim on the Bertram estates, and it was Miss Boysville, who my readers will by this time conjecture visited Sir Robert in that mysterious way, at Bertram Castle;—this was the cause, if may also be recollected, of the Baronet's going to Oakdale, where he found yet remaining letters of his father to Mildred Bertram, which plainly shewed some elder child had existed; yet these letters were couched in terms so strangely ambiguous, that he could gather nothing from them, except hints to alarm him. He remembered, though quite a little boy, at the death of his parents, his father having charged him never to let Oakdale to strangers; and he also recollected he was unusually agitated, when, on the day of Lady Bertram's death, he said to him, "I have done too much for you, my son; I have sacrificed at the altar of ambition a child who was once most dear to me. Such an expiation as is in my power shall be made, though it covers me with eternal infamy; but as yet you are too young to be entrusted—I am to blame to speak on this subject."

There was, after the sudden death of Sir Robert, no other will than a paper which imported Lady Bertram's children would be amply provided for. The Bertram and Oakdale estates would revert to their right heir, to whom he constituted the Earl of Knasborough and the Earl of Trewarne guardians. It had always been understood that the present Baronet was alluded to of course as the right heir; yet now those circumstances rose to Sir Robert's mind, with what his father had said to him, and which he till then had not thought of as relating to any thing material, yet, united with the letters, served to shock and perplex him. This occasioned the earnestness and agitation of his manner at Acorn-bank when Mr. Heaviside proposed pulling down Oakdale, which Sir Robert feared might yet contain a secret that would cover a parent's memory with infamy. Thus deeply sunk these gloomy and fearful ideas on the upright mind of Sir Robert, who trembled for the honour of a family whose characters had been for ages unsullied. M'Rae soon found, that on this pretended claim he had no ground to go upon, which, when first made, was done with less foresight than usual with this artful impostor; therefore

changing the plan, and building upon the well-known dissipation of the late Lord Malieveren, William March (which was the name given by the humane Sir Robert and Lady Bertram to the child they found, who was the son of their friend) was asserted by Dodds, as the brother of Lady Malieveren, to be the heir to the title and estate of the last Baron, as his son. With this clue to the story, my readers will need little explanation from me on this subject.—The rewards offered for discovering the real birth of his nephew, alarmed M'Rae, as Susy was in possession of a part of the story he by no means wished to have disclosed; not that he had much to fear—the cottager he knew was dead, and the attendant of Lady St. Andrews at the birth of her child had, from the period of the Countess's death, remained with Miss M'Rae. Yet, careful to guard against all possible contingencies, he had the tinker released from goal, to whom he took care the reward should be known; nor did poor Johnny know but the child left by his helpmate by the road side, was one he had the same right to as the one she retained. Susy had spent in good living, or rather good drinking, with her comrades, the money she had received from M'Rae ere she again saw her husband; nor did the gentle Susan think she was guilty of any crime in sinking the material part of the evidence she did, and, adopting the son of the Earl of Trewarne, gain the promised reward, which Dodds had, in a very different style of dress and manner than as Mr. Ayscough, told her was the only way she could manage to obtain it, unless she could find the man who gave her the child, upon whom she then might, as he appeared rich, raise what contribution she pleased.—Poor Johnny was not suffered long to retain his reward, he was retaken, tried, and sentenced to hard labour on the Thames, one of his Lordship's servants appearing as prosecutor; for Johnny when he stole Lord Trewarne's horse, took care also of a pair of saddle-bags, in which was contained three times the value of the sum for which he now was indicted. The sentence was, however, remitted, and a pardon granted, on condition he enlisted into a regiment on the point of embarking for one of the African forts.—On this voyage Susy accompanied him, a sum of money being sent to her husband for that purpose, under his supposed son's name, to whose interest he imagined he was obliged for the change of his sentence, otherwise he would have perhaps applied the money to a different use. The deposition stolen at York was the work of the supposed faithful James, whose principles had been undermined by the gold of M'Rae some months before.

In France Providence seemed to interfere in saving the unfortunate victim of malice, as the ship seen by Mr. Blackmore waiting off the coast, would, had not the wind prevented, have taken William on board ere succour had arrived. With the master this vessel, which was Dutch, had M'Rae agreed, that for a certain sum a young man was to be taken by him, and left upon some unfrequented island in the Indian Ocean, upon his passage to Batavia. A story had on this occasion been invented, which, though it did not agree with probability, was swallowed by the Dutchman, richly gilded as it was. That scheme failing, another was in reserve, and the artful and insinuating Miss Boysville drew the unhappy William into the snare prepared for him, whilst Dodds gave to the French Government the intelligence which caused the arrest. Crossing over to England, no sooner had Lady Malieveren eluded Mr. Blackmore, than hastening to Trewarne House, she claimed, and obtained her promised reward, which M'Rae granted, yet extorted a promise of secrecy regarding it; nor did she, notwithstanding that exaltation, refuse to assist in the deep-laid scheme carried on at York, where one of the women from

Kilcraigie acted the part of William March. At this period my readers will not forget M'Rae's talent at imitation, and by counterfeiting his nephew's writing, he aided most powerfully the imposition.

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CHAPTER XIX.

WEARIED with his banishment from society, and longing for a scene better adapted for his talents, no sooner had Sir Robert Bertram quitted England, than M'Rae resolved to venture once more into that world from which he had been so long banished. The woman too, whose talents make one regret that she had not a better heart and more strict principles of rectitude, was now dead of the disappointment her hopes received when her husband still continued to refuse publicly declaring his marriage; the cause of which was, he imagined he should, by such a decided preference, raise the envy of a woman, who, by her knowledge of certain particulars, might yet ruin him.—M'Rae sorrowed, as much as his nature would admit of, for a woman whose various pleasing accomplishments, and insinuating manners had made an impression on him beyond any other.

Already was Alicia known to the fictitious Earl by character, and he longed to see that beauty in whose praise fame had not been sparing; he saw her, and was charmed.—Our readers may now account for his suddenly quitting our heroine, when seated by her at the Dutchess of Wakefield's route, as the Earl of Knasborough advanced; nor, had his Lordship continued in town, would M'Rae have ventured to expose himself to his observation. Alicia was surrounded by spies, as James had, by his lies, got the young woman discharged who was hired by Lady Bertram to attend upon our heroine, and introduced a creature of M'Rae's, as his sister, in her place, who was the identical woman that at York had personated William. Dodds again now made his appearance; as Ayscough he had not been seen by Alicia, and but transiently by Lord Morville;—with change of hair, dress, and complexion, he was now a German Baron, which language he spoke fluently. M'Rae, who in Britain as Earl of Trewarne, noticed not publicly Dodds, yet on the Continent (where he had of late chiefly resided) he was, under another name, his confidential friend; and thus had he gleaned a knowledge of the language and manners of almost every country in Europe. With these accomplishments, and properly instructed, Baron Kaphausen was, by the Earl of Trewarne, introduced to Lord Morville's notice. Admiring, nay loving (if in such a heart love could exist) Alicia, M'Rae resolved to marry her; thus would he disappoint Henry Bertram, and thus would Sir Robert be mortified by beholding the man he detested, united to a person he so highly esteemed. M'Rae had resolved upon marriage, in order to prevent Mr. Fitz-Harman from inheriting the title and fortune to which he was heir, after the present possessor and family, and Miss Sleigh was fixed upon as the future Countess. The difficulty that attended the attainment of his wishes, urged M'Rae more ardently to pursue them; but I need not repeat his various schemes, which all tended to the advancement of his purpose. During this period, James, in conjunction with Lord Morville's porter (who was bribed for the purpose) intercepted all letters from France; nor was there an epistle written by any of the family, which did not equally with those that should have been received, undergo M'Rae's inspection; some were altered to suit his purpose, other destroyed;—by this means were the Earl of Knasborough and Sir Robert Bertram kept ignorant of his intimacy in Lord Morville's family, as they were likewise how affairs stood with them in France. The letters received from Paris, which gave an account of William's imprisonment and release, referred to others never received; nor would these either, had

not they been brought by a gentleman, who himself delivered them. Lady Augusta had been more fortunate, as she had received some letters from the Earl, that had been addressed to the Countess of Wolverhampton's.

The schemes of M'Rae were hastened in their execution by his learning William March was at liberty; that the whole affair was suspected to have originated with himself, and that for further investigation the Earl and Baronet were about to return home. Driven to desperation, he resolved, if Alicia persisted in her refusal to marry him, to take her either to Kilcraigie, or somewhere abroad; yet she was not suffered to be the victim of this abandoned wretch, from whom at Edinburgh she escaped, and in London was informed of the ruin of Lord Morville. James found our heroine had then gone to Malieveren; M'Rae saw her suspicions were so completely roused, that unless he could find means instantly to allay them, the Bertrams would reach England, and all the schemes that he had, with such waste of ingenuity and money, laboured to establish, would be overthrown, and himself openly exposed to detection; for Dodds he was satisfied had deserted him in revenge, for the attempt he made upon his life near Kelso.

The pompous funeral answered the end; Alicia again was thrown off her guard, but M'Rae, deprived of the ready intelligence which James and Ann had conveyed, our heroine had accomplished the whole of her journey ere M'Rae knew she had quitted Malieveren: but he found no difficulty in tracing her to St. Mary's Oak; he had himself once slept a night at Oakdale.—My readers may, perhaps, remember, that a person who expressed a wish to take the house, requested leave to do so of Mr. Jackson: M'Rae's view then was to search if any traces could be found of his brother's child; but Mr. Kirby had taken care none such should be left, except in the concealed chamber, and Sir Robert had carried away, in his last visit, all papers he could find.—The terror the inhabitants of St. Mary's attached to Oakdale, was well known to James, nor was M'Rae ignorant of it; the hall therefore was judged a safe retreat, and they arrived there a few hours after our heroine with Mrs. Crofts and Joe, had quitted it. But at Oakdale M'Rae's good, or rather evil genius deserted him; from the daughter of the man whom he had so cruelly injured, did he meet with his punishment, and by a ball from one of his own pistols, loaded with the most unjustifiable intention, was his guilty soul nearly precipitated into Eternity.—Such instances sometimes occur, and we see the hand of Providence visibly interfering, and behold the guilty punished, unintentionally, by the person they have injured.

CHAPTER XX.

M'RAE, ere he set out to overtake our heroine, when she was carried off by the fictitious Baron Kaphausen, had charged his pistols with much care—a circumstance observed by one of his servants, who having some idea of what was going forward, and fearful of mischief, had taken out the ball previous to coming up with Dodds, who saw, from M'Rae's agitation and fury, his intention of ridding himself of a person who had him completely in his power. Dodds swore revenge, yet cooling, he followed him, the better to elude suspicion, to Kelso, where M'Rae affected to laugh at the fright he had thrown the Baron into, and asked him if he had not played his part admirably. Dodds agreed to go to Kilcraigie, but set out with all speed for Paris, satisfied, as was his principal, that the time was now arrived when one or both must fall. This soon was known by M'Rae, and was the principal cause of his pretended decease.

But it is now time I account to my readers for the long absence of Mr. Kirby, who, after having undergone numerous hardships, returned to his native country a hale old man. At the death of a near relation in America, without children, Mr. Kirby became, by his bequest, heir to a very extensive tract of land, great part of which had been more or less under cultivation. The good surgeon, I have already informed my readers, knew little of the world beyond the circle of St. Mary's, except what trifling knowledge he had gained in the market town where he served his apprenticeship. Of books, except a few relative to his own profession, he knew nothing; therefore when he heard of the extent of his new possession, he imagined was he but settled upon it, he should be a richer man than any in the country, and would have more wood upon his estate than the whole Dean and Chapter could claim throughout the Bishopric; he would fell his timber, and parcel out his estate in small farms: thus did he in idea settle every thing to his own satisfaction. Little did poor Kirby suppose that his timber, situated as it was, could be of little use except for fuel, and that nothing his estate produced was marketable within some days journey; but besides the idea of returning with a fortune that would render him independent, he imagined it would then be in his power to adopt Alicia.

Frank, who had lived as gardener at Oakdale, where he had married the faithful Patty, went (my readers will perhaps remember) to America, previous to Mrs. Bouchier's death. This honest couple, after many difficulties, had arrived to some degree of opulence, and were settled in the adjoining plantation to that which, at the death of his kinsman, had become Mr. Kirby's. Frank therefore it was, who had transmitted the account to Mr. Kirby, which was sent from New York, whither his affairs had taken him;—in this letter he spoke of having met, about half a year before, with a person of the name of Meynel, who had a plantation about sixty miles north. Frank said the name had struck him, together with a strong likeness which he bore to the family of Bertram, and when he went home and told his wife, she was convinced it was Mr. Meynel, Sir Robert Bertram's sister's son. Mr. Meynel, Frank said, was married, but had no family, and that at his return from New York he, with his wife, meant to visit Mr. and Mrs. Meynel. It was the hope of seeing in this lady, the person who alone could give the information regarding the birth of Eliza, which urged the sanguine-tempered Kirby to so long a voyage, and so

troublesome a journey; as in London he received more just ideas of the value of his possessions.

Safely Mr. Kirby landed at New York, where by the care of Frank, a proper person was engaged to attend him across the provinces through which he had to travel; and without any thing material happening to retard his journey, he reached the house of his old acquaintances; and scarce had he patience to rest himself, or do what was needful regarding his own affairs, till, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Laws, (alias Frank and Patty) he set out for Meynel's farm, where he now learnt, from his friends, dwelt the nephew of Sir Robert Bertram, whose wife was, to patty's utter astonishment, the person who at St. Mary's she had known as Miss Wetherall. An explanation was soon asked by the impatient Kirby, and given by Mrs. Meynel, regarding the birth of Eliza, with the change of children, and her reason for so doing; also the method employed by the supposed brother of Mr. Mackenzie, for the concealment of a child that then was not in existence; but the gifts of Miss M'Rae, as Mr. Mackenzie's mother, were too lucrative for Mrs. Meynel to undeceive her. Mrs. Meynel also had other reasons for concealment; her husband, whilst any correspondence was kept up, had uniformly commanded a strict observance of the oath he had caused her to take, and when this dissipated young man, about the period Mr. Barlow fixed at Woodcraft in the vale of Oakdale, utterly deserted her, Mrs. Meynel could not bring herself to disclose to her father the painful truth, which, notwithstanding, she did to Mrs. Meynel, her husband's mother, who at that time resided at Oakdale. Mr. Meynel, in answer to his mother's remonstrance on the subject, protested in one of his letters to her, that if she persisted in wishing him to declare his marriage, he would never either visit or write to her. Terrified by this threat, from a son on whom she doated, Mrs. Meynel acquiesced, and continued to support him in the same lavish style at Paris he then was figuring as *mi Lor Anglois*.

Mrs. Meynel had, at this time, the disposal of her and Mildred's fortune; and whilst she lived at Oakdale with the strictest economy, her misplaced indulgence supported her son in dissipation. By this means, at the death of Mrs. Mildred Bertram, Mrs. Meynel saw she must for ever forfeit her brother's good opinion, and remain dependant on him, by producing the will of her aunt, as the fund from whence her annuity was to be paid, was already expended on her son; another will was therefore produced, signed by Mildred a few days before her death, and which she imagined was a paper of a different kind. In this Mrs. Meynel was sole heir to her aunt's property; the real will, and Mildred's confession, were allowed to remain where she had placed them, lest it should at any future period be found necessary to produce them. Again was Mr. Meynel urged by his mother to return, and this request was accompanied by a hint, that if he did not, his wife and child should be acknowledged at Oakdale; he promised to comply, but repeated delays proved he had no wish to fulfil that promise. A claim was made, soon after Mildred's death, upon her landed property, which it was found she had no right to bequeath, it devolving at her decease, without children, to the heir at law.

Mrs. Meynel now saw she had, for an improvident and disobedient son, deprived herself of subsistence. To sir Robert she was ashamed to apply, though on the score of injustice she had salved her conscience at the time of concealing her aunt's will, by thinking her nephew's income was already too ample to need any addition, and that the

clause respecting the child of Robert Bertram and Eliza Bouchier was an unnecessary one, as neither that child nor its posterity were in all probability in existence; but her folly, her guild now stared her in the face, and added to the grief she had long sustained regarding her son, a quick decline took place, and Mrs. Meynel died without gathering resolution to acquaint her nephew with these circumstances.

At the death of Mrs. Meynel, her daughter-in-law collected what valuables she had left, and acquainting her father with her marriage, was preparing to set off to seek her husband, when she received a letter from him, dated Bristol, wherein, begging her forgiveness, he entreated she would hasten to him, as he was ill. To Bristol instantly Mrs. Meynel went, and found her late gay dissipated husband a prey to disease and wretchedness. The care she bestowed, and the relief she brought, promoted his recovery, when learning his mother's death, and the smallness of the sum which she had left, by a formal bequest, to Mrs. Meynel, as Miss Wetherall, he proposed going to America. To this his wife objected, pleading her child, and urged him to declare their situation to Sir Robert, who would, she was certain, relieve them; but Mr. Meynel was fixed; the child Eliza was not known to be the descendant of the Bertrams, nor would he stoop, by acknowledging it, to receive favours from Sir Robert Bertram.

The good Baronet, who was not much older than his nephew Meynel, had, for a length of time, supported him with large sums, after he had spent that money which, upon his coming of age, Sir Robert presented him with; and at length, wearied with repeated applications for money, which was spent without thought, in gay habits of expensive dissipation, the Baronet had refused to support Mr. Meynel, and after that, irritated by his conduct, dropped all correspondence with him. Mr. Meynel, with his wife, therefore embarked for America, without even her father being in such full possession of the story which could enable him to reveal it to Sir Robert. From New York Mrs. Meynel wrote to her father, and soon after had, with her husband, accompanied some other adventurers, who formed the settlements amongst which Mr. Kirby found himself, at a distance of a vast number of miles from any regular cultivated, or well-peopled country.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE good surgeon of St Mary's now related to Mrs. Meynel the history of her daughter, and the fatal mistake caused by the narrative of Mrs. Mildred Bertram, with the uncertainty of Mr. Bouchier's fate, who doubtless had been a man of fortune, if not rank; the story was at length concluded by informing her under whose protection the young Alicia had been placed by Mrs. Dalrymple. Mrs. Meynel at this time laboured under an ague, to which these new settled countries subjected its inhabitants, and Mr. Kirby, when he returned to his own plantation, left her, from the agitation she had undergone, exceedingly ill

It was determined by her husband and Kirby to endeavour at disposing of their property to some of the new adventurers (which every season then arrived from Britain) and return home. A year elapsed, during which Mr. Kirby had written to Alicia, and her friends Mrs. Dalrymple and Mr. Meynel; but these letters owing to the uncertain conveyance, never reached England. Mrs. Meynel at last fell a sacrifice to her disorder; she died about the same time the following year after Mr. Kirby had first visited her in America. Anxiously did the worthy surgeon look forward to the period of his return to England, when about three months after Mrs. Meynel's decease these hopes sunk.—A party of Indians from beyond the Ohio attacked by night the house of Mr. Kirby, plundered, and then set fire to what they could not carry away, making him accompany their retreat, which was effected ere the mischief was known to the adjacent settlers. This account, my readers may perhaps recollect, reached our heroine in London, when Mr. Meynel returned from Scotland, where he had seen Mrs. Dalrymple; it merely varying in this—Kirby was supposed to have fallen an immediate sacrifice to the fury of these savages, with whom (on his profession being made known) he became a person of great importance. The fame of his skill was widely diffused, and he was sent, as occasion required, with all possible accommodation, from one place to another, till he had travelled to the back of Canada, whither he had gone to cure an Indian Chief. This being done, a deputation arrived from their brothers upon Lake Superior, where the presence of the great doctor was solicited by the Chief, who had been wounded in battle. Thither went Kirby grumbling, and discontented at his fate, which seemed for ever to preclude all possibility of escape: He found the wounded Chief surrounded by his principal warriors; nor, as the great doctor passed into the wigwam, did he pay any attention to the attendants by whom the sick chief was surrounded, nor was it till the cure was nearly completed, that to his astonishment, and mingled joy and grief, he once more beheld Mr. Bouchier, whom my readers will remember some preceding pages ago we quitted in the station in which Kirby found him. The Earl instantly recollected the face, voice, and manner of Kirby in the great doctor, who had repeatedly passed him, without even remarking him as an European; but so well aware was he of the danger attending a discovery to a person so warm in his feelings, and so little guarded in his manner as Kirby, that he concealed his emotions on the sight of a man whose appearance so highly interested, and so deeply agitated him, till a period when he could safely do so; yet, even at this chosen opportunity, the Earl had much difficulty in composing Kirby, who for some time gave way to all the extravagance of joy, after it had taken place of incredulity and

astonishment; nor was it till sorrow for his friend's situation recalled him to his senses, that the Earl could make him comprehend how necessary it was to conceal both their former knowledge and present connexion with each other; nor did the Earl, who was now taught prudence, venture on another interview, till he pretended sickness, at a time when the whole tribe capable of fighting went out on an expedition against some nation that had of late encroached on their hunting limits. The Earl had, previous to this, prepared all for their flight, arms to defend themselves, and as much provision as they could carry. With these, embarking in a canoe, they ventured across the lake, and met with some white traders, from whom (in exchange for a small sum of money which Lord Trewarne had preserved amidst his various dangers) they procured such necessaries as they stood most in need of, particularly clothes, to screen them from the search that doubtless would be made for them. After almost incredible hardships, the travellers arrived at Montreal, where the Earl found most fortunately a person to whom he had once been known, who was the son of one of the late Earl's agents, and had, by the Earl of Knasborough's interest, gone out to Canada, with an appointment under Government, immediately upon its being ceded to the English in 1763. In the mercantile line Mr. Eldridge had rose to affluence at Montreal, and Lord Trewarne found him every way disposed to repay, as far as lay in his power, the obligation conferred by him, and his friend the Earl of Knasborough.

At this period Lord Trewarne found it impossible to learn what had become of Mr. Meynel, as America had asserted her independence, and all was in a state of confusion, the British troops at that time laying at Halifax. Amply supplied by Mr. Eldridge, the Earl and Mr. Kirby set out on their return home; sailing down the river St. Laurence, they reached Quebec, where they again embarked on board a ship bound to London. After a voyage peculiarly favourable, once more did the wanderers behold their native shores, and immediately upon quitting the vessel went to the house occupied by Mr. Meynel at the time Mr. Kirby had seen Alicia, previous to his embarking for America; there, though Mr. Meynel had not occupied this house for upwards of a year, they heard he was yet alive, and in good health at his seat in Devonshire, but on enquiring after Miss Sleight, they learned she had long resided in Sir Robert Bertram's family; that the Baronet was in France, but at his house in Cavendish-square they might learn further particulars.

We will now return to Dodds, whom I informed my readers set out with all speed from Kelso, breathing revenge, and hoping to escape the punishment which he saw suspended over his detestable patron. Already well accustomed to hasty and secret journies, in much less time than an honest man could have done, did the ci-devant Baron Kaphausen reach Paris, and introduced himself, with a less exalted title, to the Earl of Knasborough and Sir Robert Bertram; no delay was made, but all instantly set out for England. At Calais, to the astonishment of all but Dodds, they encountered Lord and Lady Morville, with Lady Augusta, slenderly attended; the cause of their journey was disclosed, and Dodds threw, as far as he could, the blame upon M^rRae, who alone reaped the benefit. Henry Bertram, all impatience, had continued with his friends on the journey from Paris till the meeting, when fired at the recital, he could no longer listen to the complicated villany of M^rRae, and sickening at the thoughts of his beloved Alicia's danger, finding the wind not fair, he left a note informing his parents of the step he intended to take, and

crossed in an open boat to Dover, where taking up a newspaper as he waited for horses, the first paragraph he cast his eyes upon, was the account of the sudden death of the Earl of Trewarne at Edinburgh. Hoping, yet fearing, Henry Bertram drove to Cavendish-square, supposing, if indeed Alicia had escaped, she would go to some house of Sir Robert's. The news of Miss Sleigh's being at Malieveren had reached the servant who had the charge of the house in Cavendish-square, and thither Henry resolved to go; a fresh carriage and horses had been ordered, and was driving into the square, as the Earl of Trewarne and Kirby alighted at the Baronet's door; the impatient Henry stood on the step ready to get in as the chaise drove up. The question asked by the Earl raised Mr. Bertram's curiosity, nor was it long till such an explanation took place as banished the doubts that had distracted him regarding the birth of Alicia; and in the chaise which Henry alone meant to have pursued his way to Malieveren, was he in less than half an hour seated with the beloved friend of his father, who joyfully owned the late orphan, Alicia, as his daughter, and Mr. Kirby, the kind guardian of that daughter's infancy. At Malieveren Mr. Bertram was informed by Mrs. Rowley of Miss Sleigh's quitting it, unattended, and immediately supposing she had gone to Oakdale, followed; and so certain was Henry that at the desolate hall would Alicia be found, and so fearful was he of her having similar dangers to encounter in the gloomy passages and vaults that alike threatened his life and reason, that he waited not for further information, but at midnight broke open the door, little thinking that one stood unfastened, through which, a few hours before, M'Rae had been carried in a dying state. Alicia had been sought by Henry in the apartment where she lay concealed from hasty inspection behind a piece of furniture, the key standing in the door giving no room for imagining that apartment contained the object of their search, which, hastily made in the house, was with more diligence renewed in the concealed chambers.

It is superfluous my repeating the meeting already spoken of between Lord Trewarne and our heroine, nor need I say, perhaps, that when she at Mr. Jackson's introduced Captain Barlow to her new-found parent, she was made acquainted that the affinity which he had claimed upon their first meeting, and which at Oakdale she supposed did not exist, was real, and that Captain Barlow was her mother's maternal uncle; and the worthy and venerable Mr. Meynel, whom she had long revered as a parent, she was in fact a descendant of. From his early marriage, and also that of his son and granddaughter, he had lived to see in Lady Alicia Fitz-Harman, for such we now ought to style our heroine, the fourth generation; nor was he, though a very old man, incapable at this period of participating in the general joy of Oakdale. Captain Barlow, going into Devonshire with the news, was accompanied back by Mr. Meynel, who by M'Rae's arts had been kept ignorant of Alicia, whilst she had, from the same quarter, received false intelligence. Mr. Meynel had never quitted Elmwood for more than a day for the last twelve months. yet declared the journey from thence to Oakdale had not fatigued him.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE hall was, during M'Rae's illness, so crowded, that its former imaginary inhabitants had not even Sir Philip's chamber left for their use; the Earl of Knasborough and his daughter, with Lord and Lady Morville, came from Malieveren there with Sir Robert and Lady Bertram, and William March, who yet felt effects of his close imprisonment. At Oakdale then, where almost twenty years before the Earl of Trewarne had been as Mr. Bouchier, was he welcomed to the hearts of the Earl of Knasborough and Sir Robert Bertram, who on his account had so severely suffered. Change of climate and years they saw had wrought great alteration in the appearance of their friend; but they failed not instantly to recognize in him the voice, the manner, the *soul* of the long-lost, lamented Earl of Trewarne. Thus, though M'Rae had presented to their sight the semblance, had uttered the sentiments of his Lordship, and even the voice in which those sentiments were uttered seemed nearly to possess the same softness, the same full and melodious tone yet he had, when he returned to England, in order to impose on the world as Lord Trewarne, appeared to Sir Robert and the Earl of Knasborough but as a well-constructed automaton; for the impostor M'Rae, to render him a Lord Trewarne, wanted the informing mind that inhabited the body of that nobleman, which makes that indescribable, yet distinguishing, characteristical difference, that is stamped by the Creator of all on every living creature, rational and brute. Thus his friends saw the face, the person, heard almost the same voice deliver in the same manner the very sentiments of Lord Trewarne, yet the voice went not beyond their ears; it reached not their hearts, which remained unaffected by the well-studied sentiments.

When the Earl of Trewarne had been introduced to William March at Oakdale, his story had been purposely concealed, as it would have been cruel to raise hopes regarding him should they not be realised; and Dodd's testimony was not, by Sir Robert, in this cause deemed sufficient, without some proof, or at least M'Rae's confession to the same purpose. The Earl gazed on him with wonder, nor when once seen, could he withdraw his eyes, or fix them on aught beside. The striking resemblance between this young man and the heir of Sir Robert Bertram had been already mentioned, and Mr. Kirby (who knew no more than the Earl regarding the way in which William had been found by his friends) now restored to his former hilarity, made such observations as he thought proper on the resemblance. The Earl of Trewarne sighed as he heard Kirby pass the light-hearted jest, for to him William March appeared a striking likeness of his beloved Alicia.

These resemblances are sometimes found running in families for several generations, and may be traced in each collateral branch; in few could it be more conspicuous or uniform than in the family of Bertram.—The sons of the late Baronet resembled each other so strongly, that Henry Bertram made no hesitation, upon finding at Oakdale his uncle's portrait, to suppose it was designed for his father, and William March, whose mother was niece to the present Baronet, and Alicia, to whose mother he was great uncle, were both thought to resemble their cousins, at a time when the relationship was utterly unknown.

When the Earl of Trewarne visited M'Rae, he was accompanied by William March, Alicia, and Dodds; the impostor concluding all was known, made, as before related, though intermixed with other matter, a full confession of his crimes.—Soon after this recital, which restored William March to a parent, whom, like Alicia, he had never till within the last month beheld, M'Rae was able to travel, and set out to visit his mother, who though alive, was in a state of infirmity.

On Dodds the Earl of Trewarne settled an annuity, which was to increase according as he behaved. James, the late servant of Sir Robert, with some other of M'Rae's emissaries, enlisted into a regiment on the point of embarking for America, where, at the first opportunity, they deserted, and through the gold procured by their iniquity had a good reception; with it they commenced planters, but I do not think, with habits so depraved, they would exert that industry which in such a situation is needful.

Captain Barlow had, ere this, informed his new friends at Oakdale, that at the time of the news of his death reaching St. Mary's he was slowly recovering from those wounds that had been supposed fatal in the field of battle. Ashamed of his former conduct, he had become sober and regular, and resolved not to contradict the account his comrade had sent, unless he had it in his power to assist the parent his extravagance had been the principal means of reducing to poverty. Ardently bent upon fulfilling the duties of his profession, Captain Barlow had from the ranks, by gradual and well-deserved promotion, reached the post he now held.—Visiting St. Mary's, when made a Lieutenant, he had spent a night in wandering around Oakdale, where his lamented niece had fallen a sacrifice to her grief; and Alicia judged, from comparing dates, that it was Captain Barlow whom, on the night she had slept in Sir Philip's chamber, she saw walking on the terrace.

At Oakdale, soon after M'Rae quitted St. Mary's, the friends separated. The Earl of Trewarne, with his son (now Lord St. Andrews) and our heroine, with her uncle Barlow and Mr. Bertram, set out for the Castle of Kilcraigie, whilst Mr. Meynel and Kirby accompanied the Baronet and his Lady to Malieveren;—with them also went the Earl of Knasborough and Lady Augusta, as did Lord and Lady Morville, who, if their parents would have listened, would have made public promises of alteration of conduct; but they were told resolutions were easy broke through, if not guarded by fortitude; yet that it was hoped the lesson they had received would serve them through life. M'Rae had made all the restitution in his power, and Malton House was already, by the command of Sir Robert, nearly refurnished, and when finished, its owners were to quit Malieveren, and resume their old habitation, at which time Sir Robert was to give Lord Morville the thirty thousand pounds talked of when he first offered himself to Miss Bertram.

At Kilcraigie were found the remains of M'Rae's former establishment, and the Castle totally unfit for the reception of Alicia. The party therefore took up their abode for the night at the nearest town, from whence our heroine, accompanied by her brother and Mr. Bertram, crossed the country to Ayr, in which town Mrs. Dalrymple (now a widow) had lived upon a very limited income since the death of her father. As she was clasped to the grateful heart of our heroine, joy and wonder took full possession of her; and when she

next offered up her prayers to the almighty Disposer of events, she was not unthankful for having been made the means of preserving the amiable Alicia from the evils which must otherwise have overwhelmed her at Oakdale. Warmly did the daughter of Lord Trewarne urge her first kind benefactress to accompany her to Malieveren; this request was seconded with equal earnestness by Mr. Bertram: "You are now, my dear Mrs. Dalrymple, well known, and already highly esteemed by the party there; Lady Bertram will not excuse our returning without bringing you with us, who were the cause of her knowing Lady Alicia." Mrs. Dalrymple spoke not, and Alicia fearing she yet hesitated, renewed her intreaties—

"You must see my father, my dear friend; if you do not accompany us, he will have to travel from Edinburgh to thank you for your kindness to his child. Your venerable friend, Mr. Meynel, to whom you are also a relation—sure you will not refuse him! Miss Dalrymples too can come from Clapham to embrace you; no, you will not, you cannot refuse your Alicia!"

It was not possible, and at the appointed time this kind protectress of our heroine accompanied her to Edinburgh, where soon arrived the Earl of Trewarne and Captain Barlow, having disposed of the late inhabitants of Kilcraigie in such a way as promised reformation to the elder, and better information to the younger. At this city Alicia again, by her friends' request, repeated her escape from M'Rae, whose arts, with Alicia's danger and presence of mind, were alike topics of discourse, and subjects for reflection. Without cause for fear, and with a grateful and happy heart, our heroine set out with her friends upon the same road she had about two months before so hastily, fearfully, and anxiously travelled alone.—When they reached Malieveren, they found Lord and Lady Morville had already taken possession of their house at Malton, but the rest of the party that had been at Oakdale yet remained at the Castle.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALREADY do my readers know the mutual attachment between Lady Augusta Morville and William March, to which name, given at the font by Sir Robert, was now added that of Fitz-Harman Mackenzie, Lord St. Andrews. This attachment between his Lordship and Lady Augusta, which commenced during a visit at Lady Wolverhampton's, had not, on Lady Augusta's part, yielded to absence; nor had she, notwithstanding her endeavours, been able to banish the recollection of William March, whom she knew and loved as most amiable. Her heart revolted at his idea in the depraved state in which it was supposed he lived; yet still she secretly cherished the passion for an imaginary being, for the youth she had allowed to gain her fondest affections; and the William March she had loved since she first saw him at her aunt's, still possessed her heart, divided from the man abandoned to vice, who claimed the title and estates of Malieveren. If then still he continued to possess the heart of Lady Augusta, surrounded as she was by admirers of rank, wealth, and accomplishments, supposing their regard equal, it will not appear wonderful, that in the heart of the unfortunate son of Lord Trewarne she yet reigned triumphant; for, except the artful snares of Miss Boysville, who would gladly have seen the heart of her victim captivated by the charms of the beautiful Mademoiselle Durand, he had little temptation to swerve from his allegiance.—It was the idea of Lady Augusta which irradiated the gloom of his prison; it was the love he felt for her, that by agitating his soul with various passions, kept the unfortunate Lord St. Andrews from sinking into mental imbecility. Hope—fear—jealousy assailed him by turns; now he dwelt on her perfections, and as he thought of her nobleness of soul, her steady uniformity of character, he would fondly flatter himself, should he ever regain his liberty, that his beloved Augusta would still listen, as before, to his vows.—When William found himself again restored to freedom, and learned he was principally obliged to the noble father of Lady Augusta for it, he felt the full weight of obligation—he felt his inferiority—the vast disproportion of situation between him and the object of his love, (which if possible was increased) and freely would have sacrificed all further hopes, whatever it might have cost him, if it would have promoted her happiness, or had the Earl required it, who had visited France with very different intentions, having promised his daughter, that was William March found, and proved innocent of the alledged charges, he would ratify the choice she had made by his consent.

I noticed not the meeting at Calais between this charming couple, as at that time it would have called off the attention from the heroine of my tale; nor shall I, at a period when so many weeks had since elapsed, attempt to describe it. I shall likewise pass over the triumphant joy that extended the heart of William, when at St. Mary's Oak the infamous M'Rae fully disclosed his birth; as the son of the Earl of Trewarne he would not disgrace the alliance of the Earl of Knasborough, who would gladly receive, as the husband of his daughter, the heir of his beloved and highly esteemed friend.

Preferring what he deemed his duty, Lord St. Andrews attended his father into Scotland, instead of following what his inclinations urged him to, accompanying Lady Augusta to Malieveren, at which place, when he again arrived, he appeared to have

completely recovered the effects of his long imprisonment, by having regained his health and strength, as also had Mr. Bertram, now relieved from his late anxiety.

The Earl of Knasborough, with Mr. Meynel, urged that the nuptials of Lord St. Andrews and his sister, with Lady Augusta and Henry Bertram, should take place at Malieveren, which the Earl of Trewarne objected to, till by having investigated his affairs, he could know what fortune to set aside for Lady Alicia; and Sir Robert and Lady Bertram also wished the marriage of their son deferred till he took the title of Lord Malieveren, which, so long borne by his maternal ancestors, was expected would be granted by his Majesty immediately upon the meeting of Parliament. Under these resolutions Alicia remained passive; for as she found at Malieveren her days glide away so serenely happy, she feared whatever change took place might lessen, though it could not increase, her present happiness.

A circumstance at this period reached the Earl of Trewarne, which was communicated by a letter from Mr. Eldridge, who, by dint of enquiry, had learned that Mr. Meynel (the father of Eliza, the last Countess of Trewarne, our heroine's mother) had engaged on the side of the Americans, and fallen in one of the first encounters. The mourning which was to be worn on this occasion was highly unsuitable to wedding gaiety, and was a further cause of the nuptials being postponed, although it was not to be supposed any deep or lasting grief could be felt for the death of a man whose misconduct had been one principal cause of Eliza's and Lord Trewarne's misfortunes, as also those which so narrowly threatened the infancy of Alicia. Mr. Meynel's life had at no period afforded happiness to his connexions; early indulged by his mother, whose character well agreed with what Mildred Bertram said of the family, the easiness of whose tempers would rather submit to imposition, than make exertion, Mr. Meynel had gone from one excess to another.—Soon after the news reached Malieveren of his son's death, Mr. Meynel was anxious to return home; Trewarne House was ready for its Lord's reception, and thither the Bertrams with their guests went, after staying on their road a few days with Mr. Meynel at Elmswood, who soon followed to Trewarne. Pleading his advanced age as the cause of his earnestness for the marriage of his great-granddaughter Alicia, upon whom he had settled his ample possessions at his decease; Lord Trewarne's former objection no longer existed; and Mr. Bertram having received the long-expected title of Malieveren, Sir Robert and Lady Bertram were anxious for the nuptials of their son, which were now only postponed till the arrival of Lord and Lady Morville from Malton Park, where her Ladyship had given an heir to her Lord. Two days after they reached Trewarne House, our heroine became Lady Malieveren, at which time Lady Augusta joined her hand to that of Lord St. Andrews. In these unions interest and equal circumstances had, when little expected, ranged themselves on the side of Love; for when the son and daughter of Lord Trewarne engaged the hearts of Lady Augusta Morville and Mr. Bertram, interest was not consulted and the disparity of circumstances were obvious; yet then, regarding the happiness of that son, who had placed his affections on so amiable an object, Sir Robert and Lady Bertram gave a free consent, and no sooner did the Earl of Knasborough learn his daughter had made choice of a lover so highly deserving as William March, than he sanctioned it by his approbation; when lo! Providence seemed to bless this purposed

match, and the late deserted orphans were found to draw their existence from noble lineage, and were heirs to large fortunes.

The ancient and almost ruinous castle of Fitz-Harman in Gloucestershire was put into repair for the nominal residence of Lord and Lady Malieveren; Kilcraigie Castle, with the whole of the St. Andrews estates, were given by Lord Trewarne to his son upon his marriage, where, during a part of every summer, they intended to reside. A small but elegant house was purchased by the Earl of Knasborough in the vicinity of Acornbank, and presented to Lady Augusta, in which neighbourhood Lord Trewarne had also a small estate, which he gave to our heroine; by those means the families were much together, Trewarne House and Malieveren Castle having accommodation with ease for them when united. Mr. Kirby remained attached for life to the Earl of Trewarne. Mrs. Dalrymple, at the request of the worthy Mr. Meynel, took up her abode, with her two daughters, under his roof; he lived enjoying his faculties, and a tolerable portion of strength, till he reached the age of eighty-five, long before which he had seen the fifth generation of his descendants.

At the close of the American war Captain Barlow quitted the service, and fitted up a house on the small estate he purchased in Cumberland, where he however seldom resided. At Mr. Meynel's death, who left Mrs. Dalrymple, as also her children, legacies, that lady retired to a house built and furnished some time before by the good old man for her use, and soon after consented to her friend's wishes, by becoming the wife of Captain Barlow.

Lord and Lady Morville, meeting at Calais with the Earl of Wolverhampton, he returned to England with them, and soon learning the disappointment of his hopes, again went to the Continent, where, after travelling for two years, he returned, and met at the house of Lord St. Andrews, in London, with Miss Dalrymple, whose beauty and amiable qualities made such an impression on his Lordship's heart, as determined him to offer it his hand to the lovely girl, who forming no objection to his Lordship's suit, soon after became Countess of Wolverhampton.

The Marquis and Marchioness of Felton did not return to England as Duke and Duchess of Wakefield, till Alicia had been Lady Malieveren almost two years. The former friendship with our heroine and her Lord was happily renewed. Lady Morville is now mother to a large and promising family, amongst whom she is perfectly domesticated; his Lordship has a large portion of the Malton estate under his own cultivation, which though perhaps not the most economical plan, yet has rendered the country around a perfect garden. Lord Morville is still famous for his breed of horses, but they are now of a more useful race than those he kept when first known to our readers; and thus does his Lordship employ his mind, which is too active to allow his body to remain in a state of lassitude. Constantly is he, as before, engaged, but more usefully, nor is her Ladyship without a wish, as before, to excel; but it is now in the arrangement of her household, and her chief vanity is in the opening beauty of her daughters. At present Sir Robert, (who has given up his seat in Parliament) with his Lady, seldom leave the Castle of Malieveren. The good Baronet resolved, soon after he learned the crimes which the

concealed chambers of Oakdale Hall had been the scene of, to pull it down, as he wished no memento should remain; but her Ladyship proposed, as the hall was by no means ruinous, that the concealed apartments alone should be demolished, and that the house should be turned into an hospital for a certain number of old men and women, decayed housekeepers, for which endowment she offered the savings of that part of her fortune which had been appropriated to her own use. Sir Robert agreed, only insisted half the endowment should be his. The plan was immediately put into execution.—The bodies of the unfortunate Mr. and Mrs. Bertram, with that of Mildred, were privately interred, after which the concealed apartments were pulled down, and the rubbish taken to fill up the vaults and entrance to the subterranean passages; the curious piece of mechanism was removed from Sir Philip's chamber, and its terrors vanished. The hall is now the hospital of Oakdale, and the name of Bertram is revered in the fertile vale.

My readers will perhaps wish to know, whilst our heroine and her brother are enjoying an unallayed happiness as falls to the lot of mortality, what fate has attended the infamous M'Rae and his principal abettors. Miss M'Rae abandoned herself to the practice of constant intoxication when she learned all her schemes were overthrown, and herself and son exposed to infamy; in this state she lived a short time, and at length died in consequence of a fall.—At this period the woman who had assisted M'Rae in concealing the son of Lord Trewarne (William March) now came forward with a full declaration. M'Rae staid not long in Britain, after quitting St. Mary's Oak; having wrote to Lord Trewarne, thanking him for his kindness to the late inhabitants of Kilcraigie, and saying he could not support his ignominy where his crimes were so publicly known, he requested his annuity might be payable to him on the Continent. To this the Earl objected not, and in the territories of the Venetians M'Rae took up his abode for some time; he then passed into Turkey, and became an inhabitant of Adrianople, where, had he not been deterred by the ceremonious ritual of Mahometanism, he had become a Musselman. In Turkey the news of the French revolution reached him, and he hastened to a scene for which his talents fitted him for a performer. Under the reign of the sanguinary Robespierre, distinguished by a French name, M'Rae cut no inconsiderable figure; he outlived the fall of the tyrant, and if I am not misinformed, is still acting a part upon the great theatre of that nation, with no small degree of power and eclat.

Far different was the fate of Dodds, whose income depending on his alteration of conduct, became a constant attendant upon the Methodists, amongst whom he has received the saving grace, and is, according to his own words, one of the elect—

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"In one low grave they both repose
Yet oft a pensive shade
Is seen to glide among the town'rs,
And with the twilight fade.

Oh! be their early fault forgot
The soft offence forgiv'n,
And let the erring world remit
What pardon meets in Heaven!"

BRITISH CRITIC for October, 1797.