

ASHTON PRIORY.

ASHTON PRIORY:

A N O V E L.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

BENEDICTA AND POWIS CASTLE.

VOL. I.

LOVE is not Sin, but where 'tis sinful LOVE,
Mine is a Flame so holy and so clear,
That the white Taper leaves no Soot behind,
No Smoke of Lust.

DRYDEN.

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ASHTON PRIORY.

CHAP. I.

Characteristic Sketches.

SIR Bevil Grimstone had passed the meridian of life without having entered into the matrimonial connection. In the younger part of his life he had possessed the advantages of a showy person, an assured air, together with that facility of utterance, which, though certainly not wit, nor any ways related thereto, often passes with the multitude for the quality itself;—of course, he had figured in the beau monde with no inconsiderable éclat: but time, whose depredations, all things, sooner or later, confess, had wrought some unfriendly effects on the figure of the baronet; such as undermining a tooth or two, sallowing the freshness of his complexion, and planting a few wrinkles in his forehead. Yet, in spite of all, (as habit is allowed to become by long indulgence a sort of second nature,) his passion for dress still existed, though the smiles of the female world had long since been transferred to beaux of a more recent generation. In the circles of the fair, therefore, he could only discover the ghosts of his former pleasures, which induced him to retire in disgust to scenes in which he was in no fear of being overlooked as an insignificant person. The truth is, Sir Bevil, at the time we are now speaking of, was a professed gamester, and his finances were in that state of derangement, that his fortune might truly be said to depend on the four aces.

Miss Grimstone, who was about eight or ten years younger than her brother, (with whom she resided,) and though rather on the wrong side of forty-five, would, if the most flippant airs and girlish affectation could have affected the point, have passed herself on the world for a blooming lass of twenty. Her temper, indeed, was not very amiable; but as this was a circumstance discoverable only by her domestics, which class of people are usually supposed to possess neither feeling or discernment, we shall pass it over in silence. Suffice it to say, that by an outrageous affectation of delicacy, she had contrived to be esteemed by all her acquaintance as a lady of the most consummate prudence and rigid virtue, and her tea-table and routs were the resort of the fashionable of both sexes.

The baronet and his sister were lolling one day after dinner in an easy careless manner, with all that complaisant attention to each other which persons long used to the society of one another are commonly observed to bestow, when, after a profound silence, Sir Bevil, stretching himself in his easy chair, and extending his legs in a parallel direction towards the fire, exclaimed that the town was horridly dull.

“I think (said the lady, with a most becoming yawn) you were at White’s last night, brother: had you a good run?”

“No, faith! My unlucky star has prevailed for some months past, and I must devise a scheme of reimbursement, or take a trip to the continent.”

All was again silent. At length the baronet, rising from his chair, and leaning with his back against the chimney-piece, resumed,

“Charlotte Overbury is really a prodigious fine girl.”

“I wonder you can think so. There is nothing at all striking in her figure; and, as for her air, it is quite destitute of the majesty one sees in some women.”

Miss Grimstone, uttering the words *some women* with particular emphasis, had quitted her chair in order to exemplify her meaning by a solemn movement, to which, in her own opinion, she had affixed the appellation of dignity. “But indeed, Sir Bevil, (resumed she,) you and I always disagreed in our notions of these things.”

“Why,—did you ever see a more elegant shape? Her complexion, though purely natural, is not inferior to your own, sister;—and then her teeth and eyes”——

There was something or other in this speech which occasioned the lady to redden pretty deeply, could the blush have penetrated enamel; but, not choosing to discover her chagrin, she hastily interrupted him by saying, that, for her part, she never admired black eyes. “I prefer the dove-like softness of the blue; however, Sir Bevil, you must acknowledge her nose to be quite foreign to the standard of beauty.”

“Why so?”

“It is frightfully prominent I am sure, and not very unlike the beak of a hawk.”

“You have egregiously mistaken the matter, sister. Charlotte’s nose is the exact model of beauty, and the feature which of all others I admire.”

“You have an odd taste, truly. Well, since we are upon the subject, what say you to the colour of her hair? Is it not something like the hue of our curate’s canonical coat? Ha, ha, ha!”

“And even that grace (somewhat spitefully) would be preferable to an iron grey: but the truth is, Miss Overbury’s hair is an exact auburn,—the very colour so much extolled by the poets. However, to wave a point which I perceive you are no ways disposed to admit, I must tell you that, as she is now turned of seventeen, I think it high time she should be introduced to company, or, in other words, see something of genteel life.”

Now, as Sir Bevil possessed not the advantage of a window in his breast, which an ancient sage deemed so eligible a thing, and as Miss Grimstone was not endowed with the faculty of divining, it happened that she did not at all enter into his meaning, and therefore replied, “Indeed, brother, I should suppose Miss Overbury could not be more properly situated than at the school where she now is; but, allowing she ought to mix in public life, where could you find a proper family to place her with?”

“That question surprises me, sister.—Where could a young lady of fortune be so prudently placed as in the house of her guardian.”

“Surely you do not intend to make her one of our family?”

“Indeed I do.—Am I not her guardian, and of course in great measure responsible for her conduct to the world; nor, as a conscientious man, could I well avoid so cautionary a resolution.”

As in those actions, of which we suppose the world has a right to take cognizance, the motives are usually of two distinct kinds,—the one secret, the other ostensible. So the baronet had another, besides what he chose to avow to his sister, which will probably appear in due order. Mean time we shall observe, that it was by no means suitable to the aim which Miss Grimstone for the last dozen years had pursued, to have a blooming girl of seventeen perpetually at her elbow. It was actually worse than the affair of Penelope’s web; for, whereas that grave matron only unravelled by night the quantity she had woven by day, this would be unravelling the whole piece at one stroke.—It was not to be permitted, and therefore Miss Grimstone resolved to oppose the design by every method in her power. “Since (resumed she) the girl must be taken from school, it were surely better to place her with her other guardian in the country; for you know, brother, we see a vast deal of company, which circumstance must unquestionably render our family a most improper one for her.”

Sir Bevil at this suggestion burst into a loud laugh.—“Send her into the country!” (reiterated he.) “You most unconscionable creature, would you really have the cruelty to bury a lively young girl in a dormitory? for, on my honour, Butterfield’s mansion is no better. Some eight hundred years ago it was a Carthusian monastery: it is true, the present proprietor has not much the air of one of that austere order; for, by feeding pretty freely on roast beef and plumb-pudding, his bulk exceeds that of a city-alderman. His head bears a nice analogy to the attic story of his Gothic mansion; that is to say, it is the receptacle of lumber; for, excepting the fag-ends of acts of parliament, he has no idea above those of his fox-hounds; but what he wants of intelligence is amply compensated by self-consequence. Being a justice of the Quorum, he has been so long accustomed to harangue a parcel of petty constables and trembling paupers, that he believes himself possessed of all the wisdom and ability which the awe of the poor wretches before him would seem to imply, and, in fact, is in his own estimation, as great a man as Cæsar thundering in the Capitol.—His lady—”

“Aye, (cried Miss Grimstone,) pray let me have her character.”

“Is a person of excellent accomplishments.”

“Accomplishments!—really?”—

“Oh, very great ones!—Having kept her father’s house (who was a neighbouring fox-hunter to the justice) till she had attained her five and twentieth year, a maiden aunt took her to town, in order to put the finishing stroke to her elegant attainments, which consisted of an extensive knowledge in the culinary art, a small insight into the method of scrawling, for I will not say writing, and the being able to read a whole page without the necessity of spelling above a score or two of words; and, besides all this, she could go down more country-dances at a heat than any lady in the country. Three months residence in the metropolis was sufficient to compleat so accomplished a personage by giving her so refined an idea of the graces, that her behaviour is now the most ridiculous jumble of native rusticity and affected politeness.—She will talk an hour together on taste, elegance, and gentility; but, if you happen not to be uncommonly ready at comprehension, it is much if you understand five words out of ten that she speaks, she has so charming a knack of curtailng her mother-tongue, transposing the situation of verbs and substantives, and so wonderful a facility of illustrating her ideas by words of an opposite and contradictory signification.”

Miss Grimstone, all attention to her brother’s characteristics, waited in smiling silence for him to proceed, when, unfortunately, he again touched the discordant note by saying,—“Well, sister, would you really be so cruel as to immure poor Charlotte in a dismal old mansion amongst such a set of uncivilized beings?”

To this question there was no answer to be given, and the lady knowing her brother to be rather peremptory in his designs, thought it most prudent to wave the subject.

C H A P. II.

The Heroine introduced.

HOWEVER incongruous the opinions of mankind, there is one point in which all agree; namely, never to suppose the existence of merit, except attended by the adventitious circumstances of birth, wealth, or rank; to this prudent and liberal determination it is owing that, whenever a new character starts on the public, a thousand enquiries re-echo, "Who is it?" and, if the stranger (whether man or woman) chances not to have a good herald at hand to inform the world that such an one possesses a great deal of wit or other estimable qualities, he may perhaps pass a whole life without meeting with any body quick sighted enough to make the discovery. Now, though we cannot suppose but that the heroine of our piece will tolerably well answer for herself, yet, being about to introduce her to the world, we are desirous of observing all requisite etiquette on the occasion, and not expose a timid young lady to the whisper so mortifying in the ear of sensibility, "Who is she?"—"What is she?"—"Of what family?" All which interesting particulars we mean to specify in this place, that the kind reader may henceforth have nothing to do but attentively to mark the historic thread,—to smile as often as he can,—and pacifically fall asleep when he gets tired, which by the bye is a mode we would strenuously recommend to critical novelists in general, as calculated to lull those acescent humours which are apt to break forth in the exclamation, "A d——d dull thing!" for, according to the opinion of our friend Yoric, that every time a man laughs he adds something to the mortal span, we may affirm that the said acescent humour is altogether unfriendly to the delicate vessels of the human constitution,—it were actually better to go to sleep.

But, for shame, don't keep the lady waiting thus in the anti-chamber;—open the door.—It is Miss Overbury.

The father of this young lady was descended from a younger branch of the S—— family; but, wisely considering that the enumeration of a hundred noble ancestors would not, as to the purposes of life, prove an assignat worth a sous, and that, though every artery and vein in the animal system were filled with the best blood in Christendom, yet that circumstance could neither cause a man to look plumper,—nor line his pockets with l'argent,—nor add a shirt to his ruffles,—nor heighten the goût of his soup maigre; &c.—I say, considering all these things duly and properly, Mr. Overbury resolved to apply himself early to the mercantile profession, by which, with much honour and reputation he realized about fifty or sixty thousand pounds, and might have acquired as much more, had he not been troubled with some sneaking propensities, which led him often to remit of his just dues, where payment would have stretched the cord of ability beyond a convenient degree of tension,—and sometimes to lend considerable sums to those whose bond he would have deemed scarcely worth a farthing; by these, and similar odd practices, he prevented the tide of fortune from exceeding the limits before-mentioned. At his decease, his property was equally shared by his two children, viz. a son, whom he had appointed to the service of his country in the marine department, and the young lady, whose history will make a conspicuous part of these memoirs. "If my children (said the

old gentleman) are what I wish them to be, the fortune they will inherit will be sufficient; if they are not, it will be too much.”

Miss Overbury had now attained her seventeenth year. From the death of her father she had resided at a capital boarding-school near town, where she had gradually acquired every accomplishment which constitutes a genteel woman. Nature had endowed her both with an excellent understanding and great sweetness of temper, qualities which could not fail to ensure her the esteem of those concerned in the care of her education as well as the love of her young companions. When, Sir Bevil, on a morning ride, informed her that it depended entirely on her own choice, either to remain at school or make her residence in town, he received exactly the answer he had expected: for, as it is the property of young minds to exalt the idea of untried pleasures, Miss Overbury’s heart dilated with rapture at the opportunity of exchanging the dulness of a school for the variety of the capital. She therefore replied, that, although she felt herself quite happy in her present situation, she should like to see something more of life than hitherto she had been allowed to do.

“As I am confident, my sweet girl, (said the baronet,) that you cannot make an improper choice, I hesitate not to assure you that your will shall always determine mine, as both my duty and inclination prompt me to pay the tenderest regard to your happiness.”

Charlotte, who possessed one of the most grateful hearts in the world, melted into tears of rapture at an expression so replete with paternal indulgence; and, unable to express her feelings by any other mode, she took the hand of her guardian, and pressed it to her lips. Her engaging sensibility affected him in a very particular manner, but he judged it most prudent to give the conversation a different turn, by enquiring when she had heard from her other guardian Mr. Butterfield.

“Not very lately Sir Bevil. I am a letter indebted to him.”

“But, my dear Charlotte, the old Somersetshire justice must know nothing of this scheme of ours until we have actually put it in execution.”

“Surely he could have no objection.”

“Who knows what opinions so singular a being might entertain;—the country people commonly suppose that when a handsome young woman goes to London, she is running pell-mell to destruction. I must allow there is something hazardous in it, but in my house and under my eye, Miss Overbury”—

“There can be nothing at all to fear,” rejoined she with a *gaité de cœur* which the baronet thought infinitely agreeable; nor did he wish her possessed of one grain of seriousness more than her deportment on this occasion seemed to indicate.

In fine, within a few days, Miss Overbury was removed from the family of Mrs. T—— to Sir Bevil's house in town, where she was received by Miss Grimstone, with a sort of constrained civility,—a circumstance which in the hilarity of her heart she did not at that time much attend to.

C H A P. III.

A Masquerade-Scene,—or a Hint to Ladies of a certain Description.

SIR Bevil Grimstone's home was both spacious and elegant, and, in order to convince his ward of his solicitude to render her situation eligible, even in the minutest instance, he took care she should be assigned the best apartment in it. His attention was next directed to the establishment of her finances. Five hundred pounds, he said, for the article of pin-money, was the smallest sum which could with propriety be assigned her. "Yet, even thus, (added he,) I foresee we shall have some difficulty in prevailing on the old miser in the country to consent to the arrangement; but leave the affair to my management, Miss Overbury, and I will engage you shall have every requisite for appearing in a suitable manner."—Here Miss Grimstone observed, that times were much altered since the juvenile days of our grandmothers, when even fifty pounds per annum, merely for the purposes of pocket-money, would have been deemed an exorbitant sum.

"And you might have included your own juvenile days, Grace, (replied he sarcastically:) but, as you say, times are since much changed, and as things at present stand, I am positive my amiable ward cannot appear with propriety on a less sum annually."

Charlotte's eyes applauded the munificence of her guardian's behaviour as much as they resented the ill-natured parsimony of his sister, whose temper already began to appear in its native colours on a variety of trifling incidents; nor could the pain she felt at having a rival to her imaginary charms perpetually near her be concealed by all the decorums of good breeding. The first instance of its becoming strikingly apparent was on occasion of Miss Overbury's first appearance at the theatre, when, notwithstanding the remonstrances of her brother, the lady positively refused to accompany her.—Sir Bevil was not unacquainted with the motives of his sister's disobliging deportment towards his ward, nor was he in fact really displeased with it;—the bringing Miss Overbury to regard himself as the only amiable person of the family was a point he thought much to be desired. "I am not at all surprised, (said he to her,) that my sister's jealousy of your superior charms should have this unpleasing effect on a temper naturally unamiable; but do me the justice, my sweet girl, to believe me most ardently devoted to the promoting your satisfaction."

He had introduced her to some respectable ladies of his acquaintance, in whose company she accompanied him to the play-house; but, before the performance was half-finished, he began to repent of his facility in ushering her to the attention of the public eye; the lustre of her beauty, together with the novelty of her person attracted so universal a gaze, that he determined henceforth rather to retard than accelerate her acquaintance with the beau monde; but it was not long before fortune shewed herself disposed to counteract so selfish a measure.

Miss Grimstone apparently to atone for her late unhandsome conduct invited Charlotte to accompany her to a masked ball; but, in reality, her complaisance originated in the reflexion that there was less cause to dread the force of comparison in a promiscuous group than in a side-box at the theatre. It was now the baronet's turn to demur. He expressed an abhorrence of masquerades in general, and adverted to the many ill consequences often attendant on them, but fired with impatience to mingle in so novel a scene, Charlotte espoused the point so warmly, that he thought it improper to make farther objection. On the appointed day the ladies prepared for the ball, and Miss Grimstone (very appositely no doubt) chose to appear in the character of Hebe.

As this lady's age was somewhat declining from the meridian of life, it will probably appear surprising that she should endeavour to personate immortal youth; yet such mistakes, we presume, are common enough in the grand masquerade of the world, where pride affects the exterior of affability,—rogues descant on honesty,—misers boast of liberality,—and canonical epicures preach of temperance. Is it a matter of wonder then that Miss Grace Grimstone should have mistaken her proper character at a masked ball.

“And you, Charlotte, (said she,) shall be an Arcadian shepherdess.”

“Truly, madam, I am no ways enamoured of the romantic taste; but, if it must be something in a rural style, suppose I were metamorphosed into a plain English milk-maid.”

“The very thing. I admire the character of all things.”

An elegant suit of rooms being open for the reception of the company, the usual flippant chit-chat began to pass between the different masks, but the general observation was soon turned on the singular attractions of our milk-maid's shape and air, around whom a motley groupe was presently assembled, to whose impertinencies she replied with all the gaiety of juvenile sprightliness, exhilarated by the whimsical novelty of the scene around.

An Apollo, distinguished by a sun on his breast, which was composed of brilliants of prodigious value, singled out the cup-bearer to the Gods, expressing surprise at her being absent from the ambrosial banquets, Hebe replied, that she had obtained leave of absence for that evening; but, unluckily, the lady having lost a tooth or two, her speech most impertinently betrayed the devastation. “O ho! (cried a harlequin) I doubt your Godships are somewhat riotous over your nectar, for it seems as though some of you had fallen foul of Miss Hebe's masticators.” A loud and universal laugh here succeeded at the poor lady's expence, who, overpowered with chagrin, hastened to conceal her confusion in the crowd, at the same time a mask in the character of time cried out, “I acquit their divinities of that uncivil act. Here stands the offender, the implacable enemy of beauty and all terrestrial excellence. Go, go, build your impregnable towers, rear your splendid monuments of architectural skill, and I will level them all with the dust as easily as I blast the lustre of a sparkling eye. Even you, fair maiden, (turning to the milk-maid,) shall, in

your turn, feel the effects of my power,—that sprightly air shall droop; I'll blast the lustre of those brilliant twinklers."

"I dread you not, insulting tyrant, (replied she,) nor value ought which you have power to destroy: yet know, to your mortification, that it shall be my care to acquire a treasure which your utmost malice shall not injure; nay, farther, even your own rapacious hand shall contribute to its improvement."

"Bravely said, (cried Time.) I pursue those who fly me with relentless cruelty, and smile only on them who defy me.—Since you, fair lass, have courage to make one of that number, henceforth know me for your friend; and, though I despoil half your sex of the power of pleasing, my influence shall serve but to establish your's."

The company beginning to prepare for dancing, our heroine's hand was solicited by a tall graceful figure, in a blue domino, who, during the evening had appeared to regard her with peculiar attention; nor, when unmasked at the side-table, was he less charmed with the beauty of her face than he before had been with the uncommon elegance of her figure. There was in the person of this young gentleman so many striking *agrémens*, as must have interested a heart less susceptible than was that of Miss Overbury;—a set of features which justly might be called handsome, a certain expression of superior intelligence, and upon the whole a *je ne sais quoi* so irresistably striking, as rendered him in her estimation the most agreeable man she had ever seen. This circumstance was doubtless the very one which prevented her from observing herself closely watched by a person in a white domino, who had been a close inspector of her actions for some time, and who now came up to her in an interval of dancing, as her partner was conversing with some masks at a little distance, and asked if she knew the name of the gentleman she had been dancing with.

In this address, Charlotte, much surprised, discovered the voice of Sir Bevil Grimstone, who, she understood, had not intended being at the masquerade. On her pleasantly rallying him on the privacy with which he had conducted himself on the occasion, he replied, "I did not, my dear Charlotte, intend being present at an amusement which I entirely dislike; but, upon reflection, I could not rest satisfied in leaving an amiable girl wholly unprotected amidst scenes so very inimical to her delicacy and character. From this motive I determined to follow you,—but pray inform me who it is to whom you have given your hand."

"Indeed, Sir Bevil, I am perfectly a stranger to his name."

The baronet was not, however, as much at a loss in this respect as herself: he well knew the name and family of the young gentleman; but, assuming an air of much solemnity, he resumed, "Not acquainted even with his name, Miss Overbury?—You astonish me!—Is it possible then you could consent to dance with a person you knew nothing of?"

“Good heavens! Sir Bevil, you alarm me.—What impropriety have I been guilty of?”

“The greatest, madam. Your character is perhaps ruined by this unguarded circumstance for ever. How could my sister be so unpardonably negligent of her valuable charge! But come, since it is so, let us make the best we can of it by retiring immediately.”

Too much alarmed by these terrible suggestions to be able to make any objection, Charlotte suffered him to conduct her to the carriage without so much as giving her partner the notice of a parting glance. Greatly to her surprise, she found Miss Grimstone already at home. It was a circumstance of a most displeasing aspect: Charlotte was inexpressibly hurt at it. To leave her in so ungenerous a manner, without one intimate acquaintance in a place so pregnant with danger as Sir Bevil had represented the scene she had left, was cruel,—was horrid. The alarming suggestions of her guardian now struck her in a most formidable light, and had so sensible an effect on her mind, that she retired to her own room with visible marks of uneasiness, and prudently vowed never more to go to a masquerade.

But, however unfriendly Miss Grimstone’s conduct on this occasion might appear, we must do her the justice to own that her motives at this time contained nothing hostile to the safety or reputation of Miss Overbury, nor indeed did she think on the predicament which her precipitate retreat might possibly have placed that young lady in. The simple fact was nothing more than finding herself wholly unable to conquer those mortifying feelings which the displeasing sarcasm of the God of Day had excited in her bosom, she had privately retired from a place where she could not but be assured the laugh was so much against her, intending to indulge her vexation at home, where she expected to have no witness of her chagrin, for she was very far from imagining her brother would be at hand to receive her; but such happened actually to be the case.—“What, sister! are you returned so early? Where is Miss Overbury?”

“How should I know?” peevishly.

“What do you mean? (alarmed.) Where is she? What has happened? What”—

“Don’t put yourself in a fright, brother. I left her very comfortably engaged in a cotillion.”

“Ungenerous, unfeeling woman, is it thus you discharge the obligations which youth, beauty, and inexperience, demand from you; or did you think her an object as unlikely to provoke danger as yourself?”

Ill-fated woman!—but just escaped from the most mortifying circumstances that ever befel female vanity, and now, when thou soughtest to pour out the feelings of thy wounded peace in retirement, to be cruelly insulted by a brother’s sarcasm, it was too much;—nor can so uncivil a speech, dropping from the lips of the polite Sir Bevil

Grimstone, be accounted for otherwise than by supposing that the interest he really felt in whatever concerned his ward, occasioned him to see the behaviour of his sister in so unfavourable a light, as to provoke him for once to over-step the bounds of ceremony in the warmth with which he reprov'd her conduct.

However that may be, the poor lady was dissolved in a paroxysm of grief and resentment, at the instant the baronet left her, which he now did in order to supply her place at the masquerade, equipping himself on the way with such an habit as he judged most proper for the occasion.

CHAP. IV.

The delicate Embarrassment.

TOO much dissatisfied within herself to relish the pleasures of conversation, Charlotte, on the following morning, breakfasted in her own apartment, where her thoughts were employed on a series of delicate and embarrassing reflections.—To have publicly danced with a person whose character might perhaps destroy her own, or who at best was a low fellow, was a subject of the most sensible mortification to her; yet there was something in his manners which declared the gentleman, if a polite address and refined conversation could give that denomination:—again, he was handsome, sprightly, and entertaining; and, farther, had discovered an attention to herself very different from the nature of common civility.—She would give the world for one more half-hour's conversation with him; probably he would call to enquire her health;—what then? must she not positively refuse to see him, or forfeit, in the opinion of her guardian, all pretensions to prudence?—Yet Sir Bevil might not chance to be at home, and where would be the harm of civilly answering a young gentleman's enquiries after her health? Oh! but cried Pride, he is no gentleman;—a fellow perhaps of despicable character,—one whom nobody knows. If he calls, said she to herself, I will be denied to him. No sooner had this prudent resolution passed, than a loud rap was heard at the door. “Is he come, Jenny?” cried she.—“I will be at home.” “Who do you mean, madam?” replied the girl. The question again awakened a very insulting reflection, and Charlotte once more determined not to be at home. No visitor however was at that time announced to her, nor did she quit her dressing-room till told that dinner was on the table.

“How do you do to-day, Miss Overbury?” said the baronet, with somewhat of a clouded aspect.

The emphatical to-day reminded her of yesterday. She only returned a bow to the enquiry.

“Has your partner, madam, sent his compliments this morning?”

Charlotte blushed, and returned a faint negative.

“Nor yet personally waited on you?”

“Neither, Sir Bevil,” coolly.

“A proof then, my dear, that his name can be no recommendation to a lady's acquaintance. You certainly acted very incautiously in the affair, nor can I yet acquaint you with the worst consequences attending it.”

The pride and delicacy of our heroine had already suffered too much by her own reflections, for her now to stand the shock of farther aggravation:—she burst into tears.

Sir Bevil, alarmed at her emotion, felt his heart smite him for what he had advanced, and, tenderly taking her hand, said, "Although, my sweet girl, there was much imprudence in accepting a partner whom you knew nothing of, yet you must not be too much alarmed. In a select assembly, the incident might perhaps have afforded room for much unfavourable discussion, but in the motley group of a masquerade, it probably was not noticed at all. Take courage then, madam, and only be more guarded for the future."

Charlotte felt herself much encouraged by this speech, and politely thanking Sir Bevil for his attention to her interest, said she hoped she should no more have occasion to appear in public without the advantage of his presence; "for, (added she, obliquely glancing at Miss Grimstone,) I am persuaded Sir Bevil will not retire unhandsomely from the scene of action."

The baronet understood the hint, and replied in a tone of sarcastic severity, "As our sex must, madam, reverence, not envy, the beauty of yours, there are occasions when you may safely place more confidence in our friendship than in that of the ladies, who are seldom well affected towards the possessor of accomplishments which nature denies to them; yet (recollecting himself) it is too often the melancholy fate of beauty to be no less the prey of the men than the envy of the women; where then shall youth and inexperience find safety?"

"In the counsels of so disinterested a friend as Sir Bevil Grimstone," replied she with vivacity; but, observing the countenance of Miss Grimstone to express feelings which, as much offended as she really was at the behaviour of that lady, she could not but pity, she endeavoured to give the conversation another turn, by asking her if she should be at home that evening. Miss Grimstone made no reply to the question; but, after a silence of some moments, she said, though colouring deeply at the same time,

"I do not wonder that my retiring so early from the ball appears both to you, Miss Overbury, and my brother, as an act not perfectly consistent with politeness; but, indeed, I felt myself much indisposed, and was unwilling, by signifying my intention, to interrupt the amusement I saw you engaged in."

The baronet would by no means admit the excuse, as in such a case he was certain Miss Overbury would have accompanied her home, and then with a look of severity added, "Indeed, Grace, I cannot but say the apology is positively the weakest I ever knew you to frame on any occasion, and its being so convinces me that you are ashamed of confessing the real motive."

Charlotte, though not more the dupe of so poor an excuse than Sir Bevil, yet, considering the bare endeavour of extenuating a fault as at least some palliation of it, begged that the subject might never more be resumed, since, whatever ill consequences might have accrued, they had all been happily avoided; of course, the incident was not worth their farther remembrance.

Sir Bevil's profound knowledge of the world had, in the opinion of his ward, reduced all doubts respecting the quality of her masquerade-partner to an absolute certainty. He was unquestionably one whom nobody knew, and she blushed when, on examining her own heart, it obstinately persisted in giving a verdict in his favour.— However pleasing he might be, should she indulge a partiality for a man to whom she should be ashamed to give her hand? Pride and dignity of character were absolutely against it; but, then, was it not probable she might some time meet the same person again, and, if so, would he not endeavour to improve the acquaintance? Heavens! how should she be mortified at being familiarly accosted by him! In such a case, what was to be done?—She must affect a perfect forgetfulness of having ever seen him before; yet, how would her heart accord with this?—he was so engaging a creature. In fine, all she could do was to hope she should never meet with him again.

These embarrassing cogitations were however quite unnecessary, as nothing was farther from the young man's intentions than ever seeking to renew the transient acquaintance of the evening. He had not so much as enquired the name of the lady who had honoured him with her hand; not that he was indifferent to her attractions: on the contrary, he certainly thought her the most accomplished and amiable woman he had ever conversed with; but there were reasons which forbad him to encourage reflections of so tender a nature. In short, though Sir Bevil had insinuated that Charlotte had danced with a person whose name could not procure him admittance to polite company, he well knew to the contrary; but, for this conduct, he had two motives; one, the hope of extirpating from her breast certain remembrances which he feared might have gotten possession there; the other, by thus alarming her delicacy, he depended on inspiring her with a timid dread of every man's address but such as he himself should introduce to her. The project, in the latter instance, had in great measure taken effect; though, with respect to the former, his success was not altogether so certain. However, to return. Miss Overbury's partner happened to be one who both by birth and education was a gentleman, though as to pecuniary matters infinitely inferior to herself. Conscious of the mediocrity of his circumstances, he was, with all the accomplishments which ever adorned his sex, the most modest and unassuming of it. With merit sufficient to have demanded the first fortune in the kingdom, he had never dropped an expression of the tender kind to any lady whatever, before the person of our heroine excited such sensations in his bosom as it was perhaps impossible for him wholly to conceal; yet upon calm reflection he condemned himself even for those innocent sallies of sensibility, although they scarcely amounted to any thing more than the usual homage paid to the sex at large by every man of common politeness. The lady, who had been the object of his attentions, was probably a person of fortune; would she then condescend to honour him with her regard, or would it not be a meanness in him to solicit it? On the other hand, if she were not affluent, how could he ungenerously endeavour to obtain the affections of an amiable woman, when the only portion he could settle on her must be indigence? As for the fashionable mode of possessing a female heart, without the formality of marriage, his notions were too unpolished to admit the thought. These considerations sufficiently pointed out the impropriety of indulging a secret penchant for his fair partner. Perceiving she had abruptly retired, without making any enquiries for her, he soon after quitted the company, resolving, if possible, to forget the masquerade and all its attendant circumstances.

C H A P. V.

Fracas between rustic Hauteur and town-bred Insolence.

THE two ladies having amicably adjusted their preceding differences, Miss Grimstone one morning took her fair companion on one of those tours which are so much the delight of persons, who, having no station of importance to fill themselves, find pleasure in interrupting those who have;—in other words, called *shopping*. As they were exhausting the patience of an eminent tradesman in —— street, by tumbling over half the goods in his shop, with the generous purpose of purchasing none, they perceived a mob gathering near the door, in the midst of which stood an elderly gentleman, dressed in a suit of blue and gold, a kind of bashaw wig, and in his hand a strong oaken cudgel, which he brandished on all sides, vociferously exclaiming, “Disperse, I tell you, ye rogues, or I will order you all to the house of correction.—What! don’t you know me, you dogs, ant I justice of the quorum?”

The ladies, intimidated by the apprehension of disagreeable consequences, immediately retreated to their carriage. On their return home, they gave a ludicrous account of the scene to Sir Bevil, who replied, “By the description you give, I am positive it could be none other than the worshipful Justice Butterfield, whose ignorance and rusticity have doubtless drawn on him the insults of the populace. I cannot imagine what should have drawn him from his Gothic dormitory. However, if he is really in town, we may expect the pleasure of his company I presume.”

He had scarcely done speaking, when a violent rapping was heard at the door, which was no sooner opened, than a voice of the Stentorian cast exclaimed, “What! have ye got Charlotte Overbury among ye?—Eh,—her is here, is’nt her?”

Poor Charlotte, on hearing her name pronounced in so uncivil a manner, was ready to faint with apprehension, but the baronet assured her of his protection as he rose to receive his visitor, who indeed proved to be the identical Mr. Butterfield.

“How do, Sir Bevil (making a sort of school-boy scrape as he entered.) How do, Miss Grace.—Ho! there is the little rogue, (pulling Miss Overbury roughly by the arm.) Gad, how her’s grown! her was but a little thing when I zeed her last, but her’s a pretty one, I can tell ye that.”

“Pray be seated, Mr. Butterfield, (said Sir Bevil.) This is an unexpected favour: when did you arrive in town, Sir?”

“Only last night. We heard zomething of this young maiden’s being with you, and zoo, as I had a little business here as a body may zay, nothing would do but my wife must come to Lunnon too.”

“Mrs. Butterfield is then in town?”

“O aye, you may be zure of that, if I am here, her’s so main fond of her husband.”

“An excellent pattern, Sir, for our town wives;—but we shall have the pleasure of seeing your good lady I hope?”

“Aye, aye; you must come and see she,—you, Miss Grace, and my little ward there; and you and I, Sir Bevil, must crack a bottle or two together before I go back; but now we are upon the matter, as a body may zay, I suppose young Overbury is only on a holiday-visit or zoo.”

“Miss Overbury has entirely quitted school, Sir. I should have apprised you of it, but judging of your feelings by my own, I concluded you could have no objection to the young lady being obliged in so trifling a matter of choice.”

“Why no, as you zay it is her choice. My wife seems to think her had better staid at school; but I don’t zee why her mayn’t be here if her likes it.”

Miss Grimstone then observed, that she was afraid he had experienced something of the rudeness of the canaille that morning; to which Mr. Butterfield returned,

“Why look ye zee, madam; I was trudging along, only standing still now and then to look at the fine gewgaws in the shop-windows, and calling to the man within to tell me the price of this thing and that thing, when whip—up comes a puppy, and tweaked my wig, another twitched me by the cuff of my coat, and a third was very near running off with my hat. I told them that I was Justice Butterfield, of Zomersetshire; but all one for that: on they went with their fun, till I gave one or two of the dogs a handsome knock on the scull with my oaken towel here.—Add zooks, Sir Bevil, I thought as how you Lunnon folks had been a very well behaved sort of people.”

“You will not, I hope, Sir, form your estimate of us from the manners of the populace, who you know are in all countries an ignorant uncivilized set of beings.”

After some farther chat, Mr. Butterfield took his leave, charging Miss Overbury not to fail paying his lady a visit. “And now, my dear madam, (said the baronet,) what think you of your Somersetshire guardian? Could you endure the society of such a being?”

“The very idea is horrible, (she replied.) O Sir Bevil, how much am I indebted to your goodness for providing me so much more eligible a situation!”

This was considering the matter in the very light he wished her to do. “It will always be my study, my sweet girl, to render you happy. On the morrow you will give me leave to conduct you to the Justice’s lady, who, though a different character, is as great

an oddity as himself. I expect she will exert her utmost endeavour to prevail on you to go with her into the country.”

“I shall carefully avoid that, Sir Bevil; though, from the specimen I have had today, I fear I shall be incapable of coping with rustic hauteur, except you promise to encourage me.”

“Doubt it not, (with warmth.) It is,—it must be the first wish of my heart to secure your satisfaction. My regard for your dear father and your own merits, Miss Overbury, demand it.”

So friendly an assurance brought a tear of gratitude into the eyes of Charlotte; she would have expressed that sensation, but could only press the hand of her guardian; it appeared to her as the hand of a father.

C H A P. VI.

Sagacious Schemes planned by the wise Ones.

WHEN Mr. Butterfield arrived at his lodgings, his lady's first interrogatory was, whether it was true that Charlotte Overbury was in town.

"True enough, (replied he.) I zeed her with my eyes."

"Well, and how have you managed?"

"How should I have managed, sweetheart? Her has an inclination for staying in Lunnon, and zoo it must be as far as I can zee."

"*Redickerles*, (cried Mrs. Butterfield in a rage.) A very proper person truly are you to have the care of a young woman, and resolve to let her do as she pleases. You are worse than a brute, you are, to have no concern for your own family. Here now is this girl, with a fortune of five and twenty-thousand pounds, to be picked up by any body, and your poor son Arthur, for whom I always designed her, may look for a wife where he can.—O you vile man you!"

"Why, what a deuce ails the woman? Would you tie them together before they are out of leading strings? Arthur is not twenty till next hay-making time, and her is not sixteen."

"What of all that, you simpleton!—While she stays here, who can be sure of her? but were she safe in the country with us, the matter could be managed very easily."

"Suppose, duckling, we send Arthur word that he must come from college, and shew himself out of hand;—that will do, I warrant, for there's not a spark among them all has such a goodly countenance; her cannot withstand him when her zees him:—and then for speech, why he is such a main deep scholar, he will cut up forty of your finical puppies. Don't you remember how he used to talk of them there things? Zooks, I forget the name of them;—Met—Met—Metamorphoses, I think he called it."

"Metal physic,* you mean, (with a sagacious nod.) Aye, he is perdegis clever."

"Clever!—Goodness heart, how he will talk about matter and motion, and argue a man out of his seven senses, all by dint of them there things! Oh! it is a fine thing to be a scholar. Never do you fear; Charlotte Overbury cannot withstand such a fellow as this."

"All this is nothing, Mr. Butterfield.—*Prepositions* go a great way, and if some gay fop should step in and run away with the girl's affections, 'twill be too late for poor

* It is presumed the lady meant the word *metaphysics*.

Arthur. I know the world, and am sure it will not do for her to be left in London.—She must and shall go with us into the country.”

“But one cannot compel her to this;—one must proceed according to law, as my friend Martin zays.”

“Leave the matter to me; I’ll undertake to *concede* it. I thought you had known my skill and *redress*.”

“I know thou art a deep one, and zoo I leave it all to thee.”

“And you shall conceive that I am too Philip Butterfield. Arthur, I say, shall have the girl, and our Bessey at home shall marry Jack Overbury.”

“Why, that will be keeping the goot in the family, as the zaying is. Oh!—so then we shall be able to portion off Betsey, and the family be never the poorer?—Well said.’

“The very thing!—Though I zay it myself, there is not one of the bench that has a wife of greater *rapacity*.”

There are occasions in life when it may be a disadvantage to be too knowing. Now it unfortunately happened that Mr. Butterfield remembered to have heard the word *rapacity* used by a brother-magistrate, at the quarter-sessions, in a very different sense than the one to which it had just been applied by his lady. The mistake struck him in so ludicrous a light, as plainly to affect his risible muscles, which being instantly observed by Mrs. Butterfield, she flew into a violent rage, and, clenching her fist, applied it so forcibly to her husband’s nose, that a copious effusion of blood ensued; exclaiming at the same time, “What do you laugh at?—Eh, do you doubt my *rapacity*?”

“No truly, (returned the pacific husband,) nor your *ferocity* neither, love.”

It is said, that when the balance of power was so warmly contested by the several potentates of Europe, the plenipotentiaries assembled to settle the point were about to separate in dudgeon, till the English ambassador luckily called for another bottle, which operated so favourably, that Bellona with her thundering engines was for that time kicked off the stage.—The Justice indeed did not call for a bottle to determine whether it should be peace or war, but he did that which answered the purpose as well; for, happening to use the word *ferocity*, Mrs. Butterfield’s brilliant apprehension immediately understood him to have complimented her with the expression of *veracity*. She therefore felt herself so entirely gratified, that, in a few seconds, all was well again, and she declared herself ready to forgive the offence, provided he would promise to leave the disposal of Miss Overbury wholly to her management. Hostilities thus happily superseded, Mr. Butterfield retired to wash away the sanguinary stream, and his lady to adjust her head-dress, which had been somewhat discomposed by her Amazonian heroism.

When Sir Bevil Grimstone conducted his ward to pay her respects to Mrs. Butterfield, the latter, though prepared to expect a young lady of singular agréments, discovered in her appearance so ineffable an elegance and dignity, that she sat for some time overpowered by awe and surprise. The baronet, with his accustomed easy politeness, introduced the topics of the day, and, after chatting some time, Mrs. Butterfield, somewhat relieved from her embarrassment, opened the important business, by asking the young lady how she liked London. On her replying in terms of encomium, the other observed that she thought it of all places the most unfit for her residence; adding, “I hope, my dear, you will *incur* with the friendly wishes of Mr. Butterfield and myself, by making choice of our mansion for your abode.”

“I hope, madam, I shall always retain a grateful sense of the generous solicitude of my friends for my advantage; but really, at present, I find myself no ways inclined to a country residence.”

Mr. Butterfield, who was also present, remembering that he had bound himself to a strict neutrality, turning to the baronet, said, “You and I, Sir Bevil, will leave the women to settle the matter by themselves. What will you drink this morning?”

“I never drink in a morning, Sir.”

“Hey-day, what a milk-sop are you! You would cut a very sorry figure among us in Zomersetshire, let me tell you, if you could not toss off a good toast and ale by way of whet before dinner. Well, you may do as you will, but I must have my thimble-full;”—saying this, he rang a bell, and a footman, pursuant to order, brought in a two-quart tankard, with a toast, about the dimensions of a quartern-loaf. —The baronet feeling himself interested in the conversation of the ladies, directed his attention wholly to that quarter, and heard Mrs. Butterfield descanting with great volubility on the pleasures of a country-life. The Londoners (said she) have a notion that we are dull, but it is all a notion, and nothing else. We have sessions, assizes, races, and all manner of amusements:—then, was you to see the company which on those occasions meet at the Ball, you would be charmed. We have plays too, I assure you. You know, Butterfield, what an excellent company of comedians played last summer in our barn. I assure you I never saw a better performance.”

“Perhaps not, madam, (replied Charlotte, scarcely able to stifle a laugh;) but, though I should like a temporary visit to the country, I never can think of confining myself entirely to it.”

Mrs. Butterfield, finding this mode of arguing ineffectual, began to assume a more elevated aspect, and, addressing Miss Overbury in a peremptory style, said, “You know, my dear, you are not yet your own mistress, and therefore it is your duty to be guided by the discretion of your guardians. Now both myself and Mr. Butterfield are of opinion that the country is the most *properest* place for you, and I must beg you will not think of being *refectory*.”

“I should be extremely sorry, madam, to be thought capable of an improper conduct on this occasion, and therefore, as Sir Bevil kindly offered me the protection of his family, I deemed it both my duty and interest to accept it.”

Sir Bevil, thinking the subject had been pursued to its utmost limits of propriety, rejoined, “I am certain, my good madam, that Miss Overbury will always pay due respect to your family; but, since she appears averse to a country-life, I beg you will be assured of every attention on my part as the guardian of so valuable a charge.”—He then, observing that the hour of dinner approached, requested the honour of Mr. and Mrs. Butterfield’s company the next day in Bedford-square, and Charlotte, willingly embracing the hint, took her leave, with every demonstration of respect.

As soon as the visitors were withdrawn, Mrs. Butterfield severely reproached her husband for his passiveness on the affair.—“Why (said she) did not you second me by exerting your authority; but you care for nothing as long as you have your tankard of ale.”

“Surely, my dear, you forget that you commanded me to leave the business entirely to yourself?—I was not for fishing in troubled water, d’ye zee?”

“Oh! you are mighty complying when you know it will thwart your wife. Well, well, poor Arthur may marry a wench without a shilling for what you care, and then live as he can on the estate which your *successors* have mortgaged for more than half its value:—but I have done. We will set out to-morrow morning for the Priory, for I will not stay here spending money, since no good is to come of it.—Ah, poor Arthur!

The justice, perceiving a storm gathering in the domestic horizon, wisely determined to avoid its fury by taking shelter at a neighbouring public-house, where he dined on a beef-steak and a pot of porter, esteeming for once so humble a repast preferable to the entertainment of his own table, with the sauce which was likely to be served on the occasion.—

Consoling himself with a pipe, (that cordial-opiate for domestic care,) the evening was pretty far advanced before he returned to his lodgings, and when he did so, he found the whole family in commotion, preparing for the journey of to-morrow;—for Mrs. Butterfield had no ways relaxed of the resolution her resentment had prompted. — Early in the morning the Butterfields sat out for their habitation in the West, and thus ended the journey to London, as successfully as many a scheme planned by wiser heads have done before. But thus it will be, while, in the prodigious extent of our ideas, we are for stuffing the future into the shallow budget of the present,—or, in other words, as long as mankind will be content to button themselves in a strait waistcoat, in order that the coat may be cut of larger dimensions.

C H A P. VII.

*Contains what the Reader probably knows
before.*

THE sudden retreat of the Butterfields was a circumstance no ways displeasing either to Charlotte or the baronet, the latter of whom carefully maintained such a line of conduct as he judged most effectual to secure him her confidence and esteem.—The character of her other guardian was a sufficient ground of congratulation, on the good fortune of having the rusticity of the one counterbalanced by the generosity and politeness of the other. Her situation was therefore entirely to her satisfaction, except we consider the unamiable temper of Miss Grimstone, which now, irritated by perpetual mortifications of her vanity, often appeared intolerably petulant. Charlotte, however, was of too lively a disposition to be seriously affected with trifles, especially as she could not but perceive Sir Bevil's attention to augment in proportion as his sister was deficient therein. He was, indeed, too politic not to make the utmost advantage of this circumstance, and, lest the good nature of the one should overlook the incivility of the other, he took care, on every proper occasion, secretly to lament the inconveniencies of his domestic situation during the many years he had endured the petulance of his sister's humour. By such methods, he ingratiated himself into a kind of confidential familiarity with his ward, and actually inspired her with that sort of sympathy which he judged a favourable prelude to the sentiment he was most anxious to excite.

Charlotte had really a most perfect esteem for him, as she firmly believed his intrinsic merit to be equal to the elegance of his manners and the polished complaisance of his conversation. The sphere of life in which he had ever moved, united to a penetrating understanding, rendered him, in her opinion, so competent a judge of propriety, that she constantly paid the utmost deference to his judgment, and he was encouraged to believe himself so thoroughly acquainted with her heart, as that she would never engage in any important connection without previously consulting him. But casuists in human nature affirm, that a man might explore the whole terraqueous globe with more ease than he can develop the profound turnings and windings of a female heart.—So to his cost was poor Columbus convinced, when the same illustrious dame, whose munificence had enabled him to investigate the extremities of the ocean, could suffer him at his return to be ignominiously loaded with irons.

It would be paying the Reader but an ill compliment even to suspect that he has not already discovered Sir Bevil's designs to be levelled directly at the hand and fortune of Charlotte; but as, in spite of all his vanity, he could not but entertain some doubts of her cordially coinciding with his wishes, he was willing to wait the result of long and patient assiduity, rather than, by too precipitately discovering his sentiments, risk the destruction of the whole plan. He believed her affections at present totally disengaged, and as long as he should have address to continue them so, he could not doubt but that he was every hour gaining his ground, and at last should succeed to the highest bounds of his selfish hopes, particularly as he perceived her inclined to treat the regards of the other

sex more as a matter of diversion than any real concern. It might naturally be expected that a young lady of Charlotte's beauty, accomplishments, and fortune, would be attended with a train of admirers. She in fact was so; for, though the baronet by no means was fond of promoting her appearance in public, the fame of such a person could not fail of attracting to his house the young and gay, as well as the needy aspirer to beauty and affluence, and, as Miss Grimstone saw a great deal of company, their access could not be well avoided; yet the soft things perpetually whispered in the ears of our heroine seemed no otherwise to affect her than as a theme for exerting the lively sallies of her natural vivacity. If a tender compliment had given occasion to a smart repartee, it had had with her all the value she thought it deserving of.—Sir Bevil would often affect to rally her on this insensibility, telling her, in good humour, he doubted she would prove a very coquet; to which she replied,

“Indeed I should despise myself, were I capable of trifling with the real feelings of an honest heart; but, as I suppose the flattering speeches alluded to are meant no less to gratify the speaker's vanity than mine, I may be allowed the liberty of treating them as they deserve,—that is, to laugh at them.”

“I see, my dear Charlotte, your good sense anticipates all which my warm friendship would say on the occasion; yet, whenever I shall find among your train of admirers one whom I shall think deserving my amiable ward, I shall be the first to condemn this insensibility.”

“Then I sincerely hope, Sir Bevil, it will never be your chance to think so; for I really set so high a value on my liberty, that I cannot but dread your persuading me to give it up.”

This reply contained an insinuation so very flattering, that the baronet was assured the entire ascendancy of her affections belonged wholly to himself. Never could man be more enraptured than he was at the idea: his eyes sparkled with pleasure, and more than once was he prompted to express the whole of his sentiments; but he was too much the man of the world to suffer his heart to hang upon his lips, neither was his passion of that lively kind which is not to be restrained by the suggestions of policy or prudence. Sir Bevil, as has been observed, had long since passed the ardour of youth; besides, the passion of avarice, which was now his predominant one, allows not a deep impression of the tender kind.

Among the few who possessed the entire esteem of Miss Overbury was a Mrs. Danby, the widow of an officer who had formerly lived on terms of the strictest intimacy with Mr. Overbury, and, indeed, had experienced the benevolence of his temper at a period when every hope of relief from impending ruin was obscured. This lady, being one of those singular characters who retain a warm sense of past favours received, had ever borne a tender regard to his family, and was no sooner apprised of his daughter's being in town, than she hastened to pay that respect she thought so justly her due.—Mrs. Danby's income was by no means large; yet, having always moved in genteel life, and her reputation as a person of singular merit being generally allowed, she had many

cordial friends in that sphere, whose kind attentions rendered her situation tolerably comfortable. At her house, Charlotte passed many agreeable hours, for she was a woman in whom a brilliant understanding had received the highest improvement which a polished education could bestow. She was moreover of an amiable temper, and naturally so cheerful, that her company was in an uncommon degree entertaining; it is therefore no wonder, that, notwithstanding a disparity of years, our heroine should discover an extraordinary fondness for her society; nor could she form any probable conjecture as to the reasons which often led her guardian to suggest something of disapprobation in her choice of a companion. The truth is, Mrs. Danby had a son;—but that son being then at Cambridge was a circumstance which rather alleviated his anxieties; nor had he as yet devised any expedient for breaking off so hazardous a connection.—Visibly to put a restraint on the young lady's visits would be destroying his own interest, particularly as, besides her own personal merit, Mrs. Danby came recommended to her esteem by the friendship of her deceased father. We must however do him the justice to suppose his prolific brain was not unemployed in contriving some decent method of interrupting this inauspicious intimacy, in which he hoped some lucky contingency might concur with his own diligent endeavours. But, before any thing of this kind could be effected, Chance, who is never better pleased than when outwitting human contrivance, had decreed what will be shewn in the next chapter.

C H A P. VIII.

The unexpected Rencontre.

MISS Overbury having received a card of invitation from Mrs. Danby, found that lady, on arriving in Great Ormond-street, quite alone. After a social *tête-à-tête* over their tea, they agreed to sit down to a game of picquet. Soon after a young gentleman suddenly entered the room, at whose appearance Charlotte instantly changed colour, the cards dropped from her hand, and a universal trembling succeeded. Mrs. Danby also expressed some surprise, and exclaimed, as she rose from the table, "My dear George, I was far from expecting this happiness. What brought you from Cambridge at this time?" Whether the enquiry was distinctly heard we will not undertake to say;—it is certain it was not answered: the young gentleman's attention was directed to another quarter. Recollecting himself however, he respectfully addressed his mother, and then profoundly bowed to Miss Overbury.—"My dear, (resumed Mrs. Danby,) give me leave to introduce to you my son.—George, this lady is the daughter of your father's benefactor, Mr. Overbury." After some hesitation he was able to articulate that he was happy to see her, and hoped she had found no inconvenience from the masquerade.

"You are old acquaintance then I find."

Charlotte blushed, and Mr. Danby, a little confused, acknowledged that he had had the honour of seeing Miss Overbury before.—We presume it would be superfluous here to remark that the young couple recognized in each other the milk-maid and the blue domino. After a surprise natural to the occasion had subsided, a general frankness and good-humour took place. Mr. Danby leaned on the back of Charlotte's chair as she played,—not indeed much to her advantage, for his proximity seemed to be particularly inauspicious. The cards were all her own, yet, by a strange fatality, the game was absolutely lost:—possibly she was congratulating herself on the fortunate circumstance of not having danced at the masquerade with a person whom nobody knew. Sir Bevil could no longer terrify her with the frightful insinuation; the world could report no such mortifying an incident concerning her.

Mrs. Danby, being here called out of the room, desired her son would take her cards.—"Most willingly, madam." Charlotte was never less disposed for play, but to refuse it now would have been improper.—The deal was forgotten.

"It belongs to me, Sir."

"Pardon me, madam, it is mine."

"We will cut for it."

She did so, and turned up the queen of hearts.

“I acknowledge you the sovereignty, madam,” with a gentle sigh.

“It is a doubtful title, Sir.”

“Here is a subject (laying his hand on his heart) wishes to avow allegiance.”

Charlotte blushed.—Mr. Danby was silent. He feared he had expressed more than he ought to have done. His mother returned, and he resigned to her his seat, retiring once more behind Miss Overbury’s chair, where, in spite of every effort to repress, a sigh now and then escaped him, vibrating as it passed on the gentle ear of her whose presence had excited them. Charlotte now looked at her watch, and found she had already transgressed the rules of etiquette in the length of her visit. She arose to take her leave. Mrs. Danby entreated the happiness of her company at supper.—George’s looks more than seconded the request.

“Don’t go,” said Inclination.

“Do go,” said Prudence.

“I will go,” said Resolution.

The chair was ordered and Mr. Danby respectfully conducted her to it. As he did so, an involuntary pressure of the hand convinced her he was actuated by something more than politeness. “Adieu, madam,” said he, as she hurried to her chair; and, if we mistake not, the plaintive accent in which it was uttered resounded on the ear of Charlotte some hours afterwards.

On his return to the drawing-room, he found his mother walking across the room apparently in a very thoughtful mood. She had not indeed seen much to draw a serious conclusion from, but she had discovered something which awakened suspicions rather of the unpleasing kind.

“Miss Overbury is a very amiable young lady, George; do not you think so?”

“Most certainly, madam, I do.”

Whether that reply was uttered with unusual warmth or not we shall not determine; but Mrs. Danby, turning towards him with a solemn air, fixed her eyes most expressively on his face.—“Do you know who she is, George? (resumed she.) Miss Overbury is the daughter of that excellent man who saved your father from misery,—from a jail.”

We suppose there must have been something more in this speech than a bare reiteration of a fact he was already informed of, as the young gentleman, without making any reply, immediately cast his eyes on the floor, in a sort of modest confusion, which Mrs. Danby observing, she put her handkerchief to her eyes.—“Sit down by me, my good

George,” resumed she. He implicitly obeyed, and for some moments both kept profound silence.

“It has been my peculiar happiness (continued Mrs. Danby) to possess a son, who, to the obligations of filial reverence, has added the ties of love. Hence that sweet confidence has ever subsisted between us which does not always accompany the relation we stand in to each other. I will, therefore, address you with the frankness of a friend rather than the authority of a mother, and doubt not but your amiable and ingenuous temper will readily accept of that mode.—Excuse me, George, if the watchful solicitude of a parent causes me to appear ridiculously suspicious;—but indeed,—indeed I think you see Miss Overbury with no indifferent feelings.”

Mr. Danby hesitated for a reply.

“You do not answer me, my son. Does my officious earnestness offend you?”

“Offend me!—Oh! do not, my beloved mother, adopt that expression. I will be as explicit as your tenderness has an undoubted right to expect. If I was silent, perhaps a painful consciousness was the cause. O madam, you have seen what I scarcely dared to avow myself;—Miss Overbury has indeed——”

“Then I am truly wretched.”

“Why, my dear madam?”

“Because you must unavoidably be either ungrateful or unhappy.”

“I comprehend all which my mother would urge on the occasion. But, madam, your son will not disgrace his father’s principles: he will not repay the generosity of Mr. Overbury by endeavouring to make a beggar of his daughter.”

Here Mrs. Danby burst into a flood of tears, and, folding her arms tenderly around him, exclaimed, “My noble George, there spoke your father’s spirit; but, while I applaud so heroic a sentiment, I cannot forget the feelings of a mother. O my son, can I bear to see you miserable!”

“No, madam.—I will not be so. A generous mind cannot be miserable while conscious of pursuing the laws of rectitude. The tenderness I confess to feel for Miss Overbury is yet an infant-passion; time and resolution I trust will overcome it. Rest satisfied, my honoured mother, that, as it has hitherto been my study to imitate your virtues and my father’s honour, so it shall still be, nor will I indulge a sentiment which either might condemn.”

The scene here became too tender for Mrs. Danby’s feelings to support. She retired to her closet to vent the effusions of an overflowing heart in tears.

CHAP. IX.

Romantic Enthusiasm.

WHATEVER Charlotte's cogitations might have been after her return from Ormond-street, it is certain that the next morning she was observed to spend a much longer time than usual at her toilette. Though in the article of dress ever accustomed to observe an elegant exactness, yet, on the present occasion, she was singularly attentive to that point. Her reflections were now of a very different nature from those which had immediately succeeded the masquerade; much then as she dreaded recognition, she had now no intention of being denied, should the blue domino endeavour to improve the acquaintance.

Miss Grimstone, observing her when in the parlour to run often to the window, and to appear particularly attentive whenever a rap was heard at the door, could not help asking her if she expected any visitor. A little abashed at the question, Charlotte hesitatingly replied, "Me, madam,—no, indeed."

"I thought you had by your going so often to the window."

"I was only looking at——"

At that instant a servant delivered a letter inscribed to Miss Overbury, who, eagerly snatching it with a trembling hand, felt not a little disappointed when she saw a country post-mark on the outside. By this circumstance her impatience received a complete check. She opened it with a careless air, and found it an epistle from Miss Butterfield, the contents of which were as follow.

"If it be true, my dear Charlotte, that souls are often congenial, then surely yours and mine are of this nature. They must be of a kindred order; for, though I have never been so happy as to see you, I feel myself attached to your dear self by the warmest ties of friendship. My mother, indeed, is eager in your praise, but there needs not her description to familiarize me to your idea. I have already pictured in my mind your charming person, and that so exactly, that I am confident among a hundred I should recognize my Charlotte Overbury. Your mind,—I know its minutest sentiment, and all I wish for is the supreme satisfaction of your amiable conversation. And why cannot I possess this inestimable bliss, or how is it possible you can be enamoured of the scenes around you? The dense atmosphere of a crowded city is not only unfriendly to the functions of animal life, but also to the sublime aspirations of the soul: the uncontaminated air of verdant hills and flowery vales is that in which she becomes truly exhilarated. Here springs that genuine hilarity of heart, which, like the sun, gilds every object in nature, and here expand those delicious meditations in which the sentimental mind finds a luxurious banquet;—but the sweet emotion dwells not amidst the polluted breath of thronged assemblies; it evaporates in noise, and is annihilated by the buz of impertinence and folly. Come then, my sister,—my friend, and share the ineffable

pleasures enjoyed by your Eliza in the calm shades of Ashton; come, listen to the music of the purling rills or sweet cascades, dashing from rock to rock. We will roam together over the enamelled meadows, following the snowy lambkins, or in the embowering shade exchange the delights of sentimental converse. Here, my lovely maid, your beauty will bloom fresher than the opening rose-bud; you will no longer hear the odious flattery of those, who, in the praises they bestow on you, pursue their own applause, but you will receive the homage of uncorrupted hearts, and be accosted only in the pure strains of artless love.

“What shall I say more to prevail on my charming friend to quit the noisy scenes of the metropolis? Much I suspect the efficacy of my humble pen in painting the unadulterated joys of a country life. Come, then, and detect the vanity of my attempt. This is now the season when the rosy-footed spring strews the meadows with a thousand sweets, when the fragrant hawthorn scents the fanning gale, and the charming nightingale gives pleasure to the soft hour of eve. Can you be insensible to these accumulated beauties?—No; you are formed with the most refined sensibilities. Come, then, my beloved Charlotte, and bless with your presence this venerable mansion; come, bestow a new untasted joy on your own

Ashton-Priory, April 20.

ELIZA BUTTERFIELD.”

Charlotte could not help smiling as she ran over this curious epistle. The invitation it contained had something in it frank and good natured though the romantic taste of the writer was not at all suited to her disposition. “I little expected (said she to herself) to find any of the Butterfield’s of so sentimental a cast. A medium, between the romantic softness of this girl and the shocking rusticity of her parents, would form a tolerable character.” She put the letter however into her pocket-book, intending to answer it at some convenient period.

Scarcely had she done so, when the baron Vanhawsen was announced. As this was no more than the second visit that nobleman had made at the baronet’s, and Charlotte having been from home at the time of the former one, she had not seen him before, though she was no stranger to his title, which being recognized by many of the nobility; he was well received in every polite circle, in one of which some acquaintance having commenced between him and Sir Bevil, he did the family the honour of calling on them in a style of familiarity highly pleasing to Miss Grimstone. The baron was of an ancient house in Germany, and, by some lucky demises, heir to the fortunes of his whole family. He was therefore extremely rich, and had come to England on much the same purpose to which many of our countrymen visit the continent;—that is, to waste money and glean folly; for we do not think our dear island deficient in the latter commodity any more than some other parts of the world. His age was about thirty, his form much inclining to the gigantic,—features rather calculated to terrify than please,—voice harsh and unpleasing,—and manners as inelegant as his person. This accomplished nobleman, struck with the figure of Miss Overbury, did her the honour of staring for some minutes most earnestly in her face, and, when she arose to retire, (which she did in about ten

minutes after his arrival,) he seemed as though about to lay hold of her gown in order to detain her.

Such a sentiment, however coarsely expressed, could not be very agreeable to Miss Grimstone; for, though we believe the baron beheld that lady with as chaste a veneration as he did the marble image of his patroness St. Ursula, yet so it was, that she fancied the visit wholly designed to herself, and translated some unpolished compliments into the language of actual attachment to her person. The idea of becoming the Baroness Vanhawsen was not to be relinquished without reluctance; and, however slight the grounds of jealousy might be, even an ideal interruption of so charming a hope was not to be patiently borne.

Some days after the above incident, the breakfast things being removed and the servants withdrawn, Sir Bevil, gaily addressing his sister, asked whether she should like a trip to Germany.—“Nothing in the world (answered she, bridling) could delight me so much.”

“I dare say then you will cheerfully shew your respect by accompanying thither Madam the Baroness Vanhawsen.”

Miss Grimstone turned pale. Charlotte, with a look of curiosity, demanded if the baron were about to be married.—“You best will determine that question, madam.”

“What do you mean, Sir Bevil?”

“I will tell you, my dear Charlotte and at the same time may, I hope, congratulate you on so important a conquest. The baron is your avowed admirer. I yesterday received a card, requesting my attendance at his house. After a polite reception and apologies for the step he had taken, since he said it was rather his place to have waited on me, he frankly acquainted me with his penchant for my lovely ward, to which he flattered himself I could have no objection, as his family was not unknown to several Englishmen of the first distinction, and, for his fortune, he should give me the most indubitable proofs of its being extremely ample, the whole of which he would settle on yourself in any manner you approved.—You may suppose, my dear, (continued Sir Bevil,) that I could make no objection to so liberal a proposal.”

Miss Grimstone, not choosing longer to witness a discourse so far from being to her taste, thought proper to retire, and the baronet, perfectly to his satisfaction, read in the countenance of Charlotte an entire disapprobation of the overture. He was therefore emboldened to proceed with more warmth than probably he might otherwise have done. Without stopping to hear the objection she was about to express, he proceeded as follows.

“I have your interest so much at heart, my dear Charlotte, that I cannot but rejoice in the prospect of an alliance so entirely to your advantage, and I am persuaded that you will overlook the trifling consideration of personal attractions in the opportunity you now have of acquiring rank and splendor.”

But, in reality, the sagacious baronet was assured she was the last person in the world to do this. He well knew her soul was insensible to the sordid considerations of avarice;—that, young, gay, and susceptible of the finest feelings, he could not suppose a person of Baron Vanhawsen’s description in the least likely to acquire her favour, nor was her temper of that kind to be dazzled by the splendor of rank. From these convictions, he was induced to hazard the above insinuation, to which he received exactly the answer he had expected.

“My good Sir Bevil, (said she,) can you possibly shew me one reason in nature why a girl, blest as I am with a fortune sufficient to all the purposes of life, should give her hand to a man she dislikes, merely to have more wealth than she can have occasion for? Titles, I assure you, are in my estimation very empty things; and, since I can discover nothing attractive, either in the baron’s person or manners, I beg you will be so good as to make my reply, by acquainting him that I can never accept the honour he proposes.”

“My dear child, (returned he, more pleased than he chose to discover,) do not suppose me of so sordid a principle as really to be a zealous advocate in behalf of this suit, although, as your guardian, it might be my duty to urge those advantages which the world would condemn me for overlooking; yet, I confess, I would not wish to see my Charlotte Baroness Vanhawsen.”

“Ah! Sir Bevil, was this kind? Where shall I now look for sincerity, for paternal frankness, since I must no longer expect it from you?”

Her emotion affected him, for the tears glistened in her eyes, and for once, we presume, Policy might be said to have outwitted itself. Had he not been morally assured the baron’s suit would be absolutely rejected, it is probable he had never stood forth as an advocate for it. As it was, he believed it might do so without hazarding the least detriment to his own affairs, and at the same time inspire her with a higher opinion of his candour and disinterestedness.—Her distress convinced him he had gone too far, and had certainly over-acted his part. It was a point of the greatest moment to him that the cause of such reflection should be speedily removed.

He proceeded now to explain himself on the motives of his conduct, in doing which something would probably have escaped him which it was not yet the proper period for introducing, had not a footman announced the arrival of Mrs. Danby. The baronet’s countenance fell at the name,—the very sound of which had something in it he did not like; and, bowing slightly to the lady as she entered, he immediately withdrew.

CHAP. X.

More disappointments than one.

NOTHING could be more agreeable to Charlotte than the presence of Mrs. Danby. She had not seen her since the rencontre mentioned in a preceding chapter,—not but that she much wished it, but, supposing George Danby to be still at her house, delicacy, arising from the consciousness of certain ideas, rendered her visiting there highly improper. Mrs. Danby, having in the interim called in Bedford-square, and not finding Miss Overbury at home, had left a card, (agreeably to the familiar nature of their acquaintance,) requesting too see her at her house the next day, to which the other returned a polite excuse. This incident, and other correspondent proofs of the shyness of her young friend, induced that lady to suppose that what she had discovered of her son's attachment was also suspected by Charlotte, who, in consequence, feeling her pride hurt, had thought proper to refrain her visits: This was just as she wished it to be: however, not willing to lose entirely the society of one for whom she had a most unfeigned affection, she determined to make one more effort to regain so valuable an acquaintance.

“I am come, (said she,) my dear Miss Overbury, to upbraid your unkindness.—Why am I so unfortunate as not to have seen you of so long a time?”

Charlotte in excuse pleaded company and engagements, assuring her however, and with the strictest truth, that she should at all times find the sincerest satisfaction in her company.

“If you would have me believe this, (resumed Mrs. Danby,) you must consent to give me more of your company than you have done of late. Besides, it will now be charity, as I am quite alone.”

“Is Mr. Danby then returned to Cambridge, madam?” anxiously.

“He is gone to France, my dear, from whence I do not yet expect his return.”

“To France!—(in a tone of surprise;) Really?”

The intelligence was not pleasing:—that he should engage in so long an absence, without bidding her so much as an adieu, had something in it rather ungentle. Yet, what right had she to expect that ceremony?—she was nothing to Mr. Danby,—he ought to be nothing to her. While this reflection was making unwelcome entrance into her mind, Mrs. Danby resumed:

“You may remember, Miss Overbury, that his presence, when last you did me the honour of a visit, was wholly unexpected; but it was to communicate an advantageous proposal which had been made to him.”

Charlotte, affecting an air of indifference, turned the conversation to another subject; but, no sooner had Mrs. Danby taken leave, after chatting with her a considerable time, than she fell into a very serious meditation. I have then deceived myself (thought she) in supposing George Danby's behaviour to have been any thing more than the effect of civility; true, I have heard as many tender things a hundred times over from all the young gentlemen of my acquaintance,—but from his mouth it had a weight, which, I perceive, I was extremely weak in allowing it;—it was all mere bagatelle. But, perhaps, there is in the matter something worse than this. How did I behave that evening? May not my surprise have discovered too much? Perhaps he read my partiality to himself, and despised it. If so, then, Charlotte, be thyself. He was so condescending as to give a poor love-sick girl some soft insinuations to encourage her. Yes, yes, this was the case. Oh! I shall expire at the mortifying thought: yet (rising from her seat with an animated air) the daughter of William Overbury, though open to the impressions of genuine merit, can yet despise the heart which holds her cheap.—

The advantage which Mrs. Danby had intimated was simply an invitation, from a young nobleman at the university, to Mr. Danby, of accompanying him and his tutor on the tour of Europe. The young gentleman, having nearly completed his studies, had come to town, in order to consult his mother, for whose opinion he had the profoundest respect. It was an opportunity she warmly desired, though she had despaired of obtaining it. Her little abilities had been exerted to the utmost in supporting her son at college; the expences of a travelling plan were absolutely beyond the limits of her purse, yet she wished her beloved George to acquire the accomplishments of a gentleman, not in order to adorn a fortune, for he was born to none, but, if possible, to acquire one. The proposal being cordially accepted, he had taken his leave of her on the evening of the next day, and, after the conversation related between him and his mother, the reader will, we believe, consider his departure from England in a different light from that in which it appeared to Miss Overbury.

That young lady's pride being effectually piqued by the incident, the idea of George Danby never occurred to her but it was dismissed with the resolution of thinking of him no more. Whatever might have been her former remembrances, she was now persuaded of his being an object of total indifference to her; yet, in spite of this opinion and her natural vivacity, she was much more addicted to the pensoroso style than before. She often visited Mrs. Danby, but, as both ladies had different reasons for avoiding the mention of his name, neither had an opportunity of discovering the other's sentiments.

About this time there was a certain young viscount, who, in a very particular manner, paid his court to our heroine. Sir Bevil was not ignorant of the circumstance, but he had at the same time the pleasure of knowing she discovered no greater sensibility of his attachment than she had before done that of the baron. It was nothing, indeed, very surprising, to one who knew her disposition, that she should reject a Baron Vanhawsen; but absolutely to refuse a young nobleman, whose personal and mental accomplishments were far superior to the common standard, was an incident which must have excessively puzzled the baronet, had not his own vanity helped him to a clue for unravelling it.—The improbability of a girl of sixteen falling in love with an old beau of threescore was a

circumstance he had entirely forgotten; and, as Charlotte (though the sentiment was purely filial) had constantly manifested a behaviour full of affection and gratitude towards him, he actually believed himself the subject of some tender sighs which now and then escaped her, for nothing is more common than to frame our ideas of things correspondent to the nature of our hopes.

“What can be the cause, my dear Charlotte, (said he one day,) that a heart so eminently susceptible should yet remain unmoved by all the soft solicitations it receives? The baron’s rejection cannot surprise me, but Lord P— has surely too many *agrémens* to be wholly disregarded. What can be the meaning of all this coldness, my sweet girl?”

“Surely (replied she laughing) affairs are not yet so desperate, Sir Bevil? Sixteen, I hope, is not the age of despair.”

“No; but it perhaps is the age when the heart is most susceptible of impression, and therefore I cannot think your’s, my Charlotte, absolutely insensible to every tender emotion. What means, may I ask, (looking tenderly at her,) what means that pensiveness which so often steals across that lovely brow?”

At that question Charlotte was covered with blushes, and hesitatingly replied, “Pensive, Sir Bevil?—Surely you have not seen—?—Indeed, I hope my behaviour has discovered no improper——”

She would have said *gravity*; but, translating her meaning as most agreeable to the visionary hopes he had indulged, he seized her hand, and exclaimed with rapture,

“Improper, my adorable girl!—No. It transports me even to ecstasy. O Miss Overbury, you have made me the happiest of men by this sweet hope, that my tenderest wishes will receive their blest accomplishment. I will say,—it is all I can say,—that the happy object of those soft sensations, though certainly unworthy, will at least repay them by a life of the sincerest love,—the warmest gratitude.”

“Heavens! (cried she, in a kind of joyful confusion,) is it possible! Has he then discovered himself?—has George Danby declared his sentiments?”

“George Danby, madam! (starting back.) O Miss Overbury, it is not for him I would solicit. The man, who presumes to hope for your favour,—who loves you with the extremest ardour,—whose life shall be devoted to your happiness, is now before you. I offer you, most amiable of women, a heart devoted to your charms,—a heart which not the combined attractions of your whole sex could have power to impress, till your incomparable perfections have entirely subdued it.”

“Sir Bevil Grimstone! (cried the astonished Charlotte,)—my guardian, whom I have honoured as a father!—Can it be possible he should address me in a strain like this?”

“And why not, my Charlotte? The difference of our years is adapted rather to warrant the stability of love than to be a barrier to its access. Passion, madam, in a younger man, may be more ardently expressed, but its refinements can only exist in minds matured by reflection; consequently an expectation of permanent felicity is, on such a basis, the most rationally founded.”

“Mention the hated subject no more, I entreat, Sir Bevil,” with an air of resentment.

“Your affections are engaged then, Miss Overbury, and by whom?—a young fellow not worth a shilling. Consider, I beseech you, of the imprudence of such a measure; for, however speciously he may have varnished his tale, I know the Danbys, and I know them to be indigent.”

“Possibly;—I believe indeed they are so; but I must do him the justice to acquit him of the baseness you have insinuated. George Danby has never entertained me a moment on the subject you suspect.”

“Ah! Charlotte, do not tarnish that admirable frankness for which I have ever adored you;—how happened it then that his name dropped so promptly from your lips?”

“It proceeded merely from my foolish inadvertence. I will be frank, Sir Bevil, and acknowledge that I have regarded Mr. Danby with partial eyes; yet, on my honour, he is still a stranger to that sentiment, and ever must remain so.”

“There, indeed, you are my sweet ingenuous girl; but, give me leave to ask, are you aware, my Charlotte, of the imprudence,—nay, the destructive tendency of the sentiments you so generously confess?”

“I am aware, Sir Bevil, (melting into tears;) I have seen the folly of it,—I lament it;—what shall I say?”

“Nothing, my angel. Your charming frankness already atones for the error which cannot in the least diminish the fervor of my affection; banish, therefore, so chimerical an idea, and consent to receive the vows of a man whose attachment to you, though ardent, is rather the result of reason than passion.”

“No more, Sir Bevil. I cannot allow this language from you. I have honoured,—nay, loved you as a father, and it has been my pride to manifest that sentiment; but you have now laid an unhappy restraint on those feelings. I would be grateful, yet the pleasing demonstration of that principle must henceforth be denied me. You have distressed me more than I can express, since, by the avowal of a passion so unworthy yourself, you restrain me from evincing the proper sense I ought to have of your goodness. Indeed, indeed, you have rendered me most unhappy.”

“Then, madam, I am most miserable;—yet, to possess that endearing confidence with which you have hitherto favoured me, whatever the sacrifice may cost me, I am ready to promise all you require.”

“I insist then that you never more indulge a thought of this unbecoming nature.”

“A thought, my Charlotte?—not one sweet reflection on the happiness I had so deliciously painted?—But you shall be obeyed, madam. I would sooner die than occasion you one moment’s uneasiness. Say that you forgive me,—nay, that you pity me. O Charlotte, shall I not be entitled to your pity at least?”

An affectation of feelings so unsuitable to his years almost impelled a smile on her countenance, at the same time it forced her to consider him in a very ridiculous and contemptible light. “Rely (said she firmly) on my feeling every sentiment due to the character of Sir Bevil Grimstone, as long as he chuses properly to support it.”

Somewhat abashed at the severity of her manner, he promised never more to importune her on the subject, provided she would allow him that share in her confidence which hitherto he had been so happy as to enjoy. However unfavourably she had received the declaration he had made, nothing could ever make him abate of that zealous regard it was his duty to retain for her happiness; and, to prove the heroic nature of his feelings, insinuated that he would, if she approved, endeavour to promote her union with the man whom she honoured with a secret attachment.

Charlotte, highly offended at so indelicate an intimation, absolutely forbid his interference on the subject, assuring him, that, whatever her thoughts might have been, she never would accept an overture of the kind from Mr. Danby.—The entrance of Miss Grimstone here put an end to the *tête-à-tête*.

CHAP. XI.

Shews there are Stratagems in Love as in War.

JUSTLY offended as Miss Overbury was at the gross intimation of Sir Bevil, as well as disgusted at the meanness of his conduct, there was certainly nothing farther from his intentions than the very measure he had so indelicately proposed; on the contrary, he took a resolution the same hour of waiting on Mrs. Danby, in order to cut off all hopes she might have entertained of seeing her son allied to his ward. Rather surprised at so unexpected a visit, Mrs. Danby received the baronet with her accustomed politeness, and, as she happened to have no company, they were no sooner seated than the following conversation took place.

“I have been induced, my dear madam, to do myself the honour of this visit solely by the opinion, which, in common with the rest of the world, I have justly entertained of Mrs. Danby’s uncommon candour and discernment. (The lady bowed.) An apology for the motives of this visit would be an affront to both.”

“Be explicit, Sir Bevil: you have both interested my attention and curiosity.”

“Then, madam, give me leave to ask one question.”

“As many as you please,” with a smile of candour.

“How long has there subsisted a tender connection between Miss Overbury and Mr. Danby, your son?”

“You infinitely astonish me by the enquiry, Sir Bevil. There never has subsisted any connection. What reason can you possibly have for supposing so?”

“Pardon me, madam; I am sufficiently sensible of the merit of every part of your amiable family, and beg you will believe, could my wishes effect it, every desired happiness would attend it.”

“But your reasons for asking the question, Sir Bevil.”

“Common report, madam; I have not been favoured with a better authority.”

“That is at best but a vague one, and is founded in mere conjecture on the intimacy so happily subsisting between Miss Overbury and myself. You are no stranger, Sir Bevil, to the character of that young lady’s father, though possibly you are to the obligations which he conferred on my family, the remembrance of which has prompted me to shew every possible respect to his amiable daughter, whom I entirely honour for her own personal merit.—I know of no other connection.”

“It is not an infallible consequence (smiling) that Mrs. Danby must be apprised of a fact of that kind.”

“Excuse me, (speaking in a more elevated tone;) the consequence is indubitable. George, and I glory in the assertion, has a soul superior to disguise, and would blush to be thought capable of sordid or dishonourable views.”

“Nobody in the world, my dear madam, can possibly have a more perfect conviction of Mr. Danby’s exalted merit than myself; and, had I a daughter of my own, such an alliance would be my pride: but, as the guardian of Miss Overbury, a different mode of conduct may be necessary. She has a fortune, and the world, you know, my good Mrs. Danby, will not permit her marrying without one. You comprehend me, I see.”

“Perfectly, Sir Bevil. I honour and applaud your sentiments, and am extremely happy to be convinced that the daughter of my friend is blest with a guardian so duly attentive to her interest. For your more entire satisfaction, give me leave to assure you, that I should despise my son, did I suspect him capable of endeavouring, by any means whatever, of seducing Miss Overbury’s affections, who, for more reasons than one, never could be his. George’s behaviour to me warrants me to say that I know every secret disposition of his soul, and therefore do now assert that he entertains not the remotest thought of aspiring to the honour of Miss Overbury’s hand.”

“I am perfectly satisfied, good madam; this frankness and condescension fully justifies the expectations I had formed on the occasion; but, as such a report may possibly be of some disadvantage to the young lady, we ought to suppress it as far as lies in our power.”

“It will drop of itself. My son is gone to the continent, and his absence (which I expect will be for some time) must of course be a proper refutation.”

“Something more effectual may be done. As Mrs. Danby’s superior judgment convinces her of the importance of quashing so idle an opinion as this which the public has imbibed, she will, I am confident, readily concur in any innocent measures to that purpose. I have just thought of a scheme. Suppose we insert a paragraph in some morning-paper, importing that Mr. Danby is actually married to another lady.—This will do the business at once.”

By this method the baronet secretly hoped to give the last blow to Charlotte’s acknowledged tenderness for the young gentleman, a circumstance which he did not think proper to divulge to Mrs. Danby. That lady, however, reddening with indignation at the proposal, replied with some warmth, “I have ever found truth, Sir Bevil, so abundantly effectual to all the purposes of honour and generosity, that you must pardon me for refusing, in this case, to deviate therefrom.”

Stung at an expression which conveyed, though tacitly, a pointed reflection on his principles, Sir Bevil at first felt a little chagrined; but, as it was not the first time he had been called on to put a clean gloss on a dirty sentiment, he soon recovered himself, and, with a good deal of effrontery, resumed, with a laugh, "How necessary it is for us to have a prudent and amiable mistress sometimes at hand! 'Pon honour, madam, you have saved me from making a slip I was scarcely aware of;—it would indeed be a subterfuge unworthy either you or me."

He then, politely thanking her for the frankness with which she had received his visit, took leave, apparently impressed with the highest opinion of her candour and generosity.

But, as we generally draw the characters of our neighbours as much like the dark side of our own as possible, the baronet was very far from giving entire credit to all which Mrs. Danby had asserted. To think one thing and speak another was, he knew, extremely practicable, and therefore he concluded it might be very possible for her to facilitate the connection between the young people, notwithstanding all she had urged to the contrary, especially since it was her interest so to do. In short, he resolved to break off all further acquaintance between the two ladies. With regard to the promise he had given Charlotte, of no more importuning her on the subject of his passion, he did indeed literally observe it. Yet, as the acquisition of twenty-five thousand pounds was so very convenient to his deranged finances, he could not tamely submit to the relinquishing it. While, therefore, his discourses manifested the utmost confidence in her sincerity, and implicit submission to her will, he was, in fact, acting the part of a jealous spy on all her actions. Under colour of paying her the highest respect, he was become her constant attendant wherever she went, and even proceeded so far as to forego the business of the gaming-table rather than not be the witness of her conduct when at home. Finding it impossible for her to visit even her beloved Mrs. Danby without the impertinent attendance of a third person, she had declined going as often as usual to Ormond-street, yet the intimacy was still supported by the exchange of the most friendly billets. A longer time than she expected having elapsed since she had heard any thing of that valuable acquaintance, she expressed her surprise in a short note, which, having sealed, she delivered to a footman, with orders to convey it. About half an hour afterwards, happening to pass swiftly through the lobby, she perceived the same servant putting a letter into Sir Bevil's hand, which a glance of the eye was sufficient to convince her was the identical one she had addressed to Mrs. Danby. The nature of her situation (of which before she had some suspicion) was now clearly demonstrated, and the circumstance, added to the behaviour of Miss Grimstone, who had never forgiven the affair of Baron Vanhawsen, operated so sensibly on a temper naturally warm and open, that, in the first emotions of resentment, she determined on accepting the offers of the Butterfield family, rather than longer reside in a house where she was guarded with Spanish jealousy. Without condescending to notice the excessive meanness she had just discovered in the baronet's conduct, she immediately dispatched the following letter by the hand of her own woman to the post-office.

MISS BUTTERFIELD,

ASHTON PRIORY,

SOMERSET.

“I know not how to atone for the rudeness of suffering my dear Eliza’s letter so long to remain unanswered, otherwise than by asking her permission to make my apologies in person. The politeness and friendship expressed therein demand my gratitude, which I cannot better demonstrate than by immediately complying with the invitation; but, as, for some particular reasons, I cannot absolutely fix on a time for leaving London, I would wish to submit that point entirely to your good mother, whose commands in that and every other respect will always be properly regarded by,

My dear madam,

Your obliged and affectionate

CHARLOTTE OVERBURY.”

C H A P. XII.

New Arrangement of Family-Matters.

THE foregoing epistle was received at the Priory with a satisfaction greater than Charlotte could possibly have expected. Mrs. Butterfield was no sooner apprised of its contents than her rapture was beyond all bounds of moderation; for it is to be noticed, that, though her daughter had been the means of conveying the invitation, and certainly did wish for the society of one of her own sex and age, yet she durst not have taken that measure but at the express command of her mother, who, finding her policy hitherto ineffectual, rationally supposed that the most likely way of obtaining her point would be by setting a correspondence on foot between the two girls. The project seemed now ripening beyond her hopes, and, after exhausting her breath, in an eloquent speech, in praise of her own abilities, she declared it to be absolutely necessary that the coach should be sent to town to fetch the young lady.

“A good thought, (said Mr. Butterfield,) and I will go vor her myzself.”

“You go! (with a sarcastic smile.) I believe I know your *debilities* before to-day. No, Sir, I will go first; you may *precede* me if you will.”

“As you please, (cried the pacific magistrate.) I hate the being jolted along your Lunnun streets;—but won’t you take Bess with you?”

“Pray, madam, (said the young lady with an air of modest entreaty,) do give me leave to see the capital?”—Nothing could be more unfortunate for her suit than her father’s having moved it before; for Mrs. Butterfield, in all things valuing herself on the properties of a good wife, as one instance of her domestic qualifications, had resolved to have every thing her own way. To comply with the request of a husband was generally considered by her as a conduct too pusillanimous for a house-wife of talents and spirit to submit to.—“You go, child, (replied she,) a pretty request truly for one of your age. I was at least five and twenty before I went to London, and then, indeed, (drawing her head half a dozen inches higher,) I made some improvement by it.”

Eliza, however, as soon as her father had retired, exerted herself so effectually, that Mrs. Butterfield, for once, receded from her established maxim; and, although the proposal had come from her husband, consented that her daughter should accompany her.

It will not be necessary to insert a detail of the journey; suffice it to say that the lady, though extremely anxious to reach town, did not travel post, but by such easy stages as she knew the old family vehicle would bear, and arrived at length in the metropolis. Not much regarding the rules of etiquette, Mrs. Butterfield was no sooner set down at the inn, than, ordering the coachman to take care of the horses, she immediately sat off for Bedford-square; where, enquiring for Miss Overbury, she was introduced to her presence, and received with the satisfaction of a prisoner when the prospect of liberty is once more

afforded him. Miss Grimstone soon after joined them, as did Sir Bevil, when dressed; for, though his heart recoiled at the name of Butterfield, he could not possibly be seen by a lady before every minutiae of dress had been duly adjusted— Mean time, after the introductory compliments had passed, the following conversation took place in the parlour.

“You know the world, Miss Grace, as well as I do, and therefore must allow that it is not prudent for a young lady of remarkable *contractions* to live in this London. No, no, it is not the thing. Young women, instead of *perspiring* to be admired, should learn good housewifery in the country.”

Miss Grimstone, as yet unacquainted with the sentiments of Miss Overbury, and scarcely able to conceal her joy at the hopes of parting with so hated a rival, replied,

“You are perfectly right, my dear madam. My brother, Sir Bevil, indeed, out of a culpable softness of disposition, was fond of indulging his ward in whatever she made an object of choice; but, for my part, though excessively fond of dear Charlotte’s sweet company, I must confess, I always thought the measure an improper one.”

“There, do you see, Eliza. I was quite in the right. Ah! I know the world,—the arts of *undesigned* men,—the schemes of *contingent* fortune-hunters,—all these things should be considered; and, as Miss Overbury was intrusted to our care, it is my duty to act as a mother to her. Indeed, my dear child, (taking Charlotte fondly by the hand,) I love you with a true *fraternal* regard, as though you were my own daughter.”

“Though I shall suffer extremely by the loss of so charming a companion, (resumed Miss Grimstone,) I cannot but confess, Mrs. Butterfield, the propriety of your arguments, and, since you have been so kind as to take a second journey confessedly from a motive of pure regard to Miss Overbury, I hope she will not be so much her own enemy as to reject your very friendly overtures. I am compelled, my dear Charlotte, (affecting to weep,) thus to avow my sentiments, though the pain I shall suffer in parting with you is inexpressible.”

The hypocrisy of this declaration excited the utmost contempt in the candid bosom of Charlotte. Sir Bevil here broke in on the discourse, expressing the most entire satisfaction at the sight of Mrs. Butterfield, “Which (said he) is a happiness I could not so soon have presumed to expect.”

“Indeed, Sir Bevil, I should not have been here now, had it not been for the purpose of attending Miss Overbury back.”

“Attending Miss Overbury, madam! (agitated;) she does not wish to quit her London friends I believe.”

“Why not? She may find as good, though not as gaudy, ones in the country.”

Charlotte, to satisfy Sir Bevil's doubts at once, addressing herself to Mrs. Butterfield, said, she was quite ready to accompany her into the country. "And you shall, sweet one, (returned the lady.) We will set out to-morrow: but, now I think on it, it cannot be till the next day, as the poor horses must have some rest."

"Then, madam, give me leave to be with you till that time."

"Pretty soul;—you see, Miss Grace, she is very *dulcet*, and easy to be led. Let me alone for the management of young folks: I always *redress* them with such arguments as *infect* their reason. Our *sect* is not to be governed by contradiction: I never was in my life."

During this elegant harangue, Sir Bevil appeared half petrified with astonishment.—He perceived that all was lost. However, making one effort more, he said, "Surely, Miss Overbury, you will give us your company as long as Mrs. Butterfield stays in town?"

To this she replied, that, in order to spare Mrs. Butterfield the trouble of making another visit to the square, it would be full as well to accompany her now. Perceiving, as much by her looks as words, that she was peremptorily bent on quitting his family, he resumed, that, since this was her intention, it was necessary he should settle some affairs with her before she went into the country, and therefore requested she would give him her company for a few minutes in the library. The request being accompanied by a particular earnestness of manner, Charlotte judged the respect due to a guardian obliged her to comply with it, and therefore suffered Sir Bevil to conduct her to his library, where, taking her hand, he said with an impassioned tone, "I doubt, Miss Overbury, I have only to blame the temerity of my own conduct for this unexpected measure, and therefore conclude all attempts to alter your determination would be ineffectual. I am unhappy, and perhaps deserve to be so; yet, could I think you would remember me with pity, my situation would be rendered less insupportable."

"With pity, Sir Bevil?—No. I will suppose you capable of exciting a more exalted sentiment. I will consider you only in the light in which I formerly revered you; that is, as the best of guardians and most generous of men, and as such assure yourself of my gratitude and esteem."

"Your oblique reproaches, Charlotte, force me to blush; yet, could you read my heart:—but no more of this. May you be happy.—Might I but be assured in one point—"

"What is that, Sir?"

"That you will never give your hand to Danby, for then I am certain your ruin will be inevitable. Promise me only this."

“Of such an event there is not the most distant probability. Whatever might once have been the nature of my sentiments, I hope I have now suppressed every remembrance of Mr. Danby, but such as the respect I bear his mother entitles him to from me. Yet, Sir Bevil, give me leave to say, that I consider your endeavour to extort such a promise as a farther demonstration of that arbitrary meanness which your conduct of late has discovered, and therefore tell you, that Charlotte Overbury will be free.”

Had Sir Bevil, some months before, proposed such a promise to her, she would doubtless have considered it as the effect of a disinterested regard to her welfare, and consequently have returned a very different reply. It could now be esteemed only as the dictates of selfishness and hypocrisy, and consequently was received with that warmth which, on some occasions, was the characteristic of our heroine. The baronet plainly perceived, that, as much an adept as he was in the art of dissimulation, he had now to deal with one, who, though perfectly a stranger to artifice herself, was mistress of too much penetration to be long the dupe of his selfish policy. The only means of coming off, as he thought tolerably decently, was to affect a compunction for the weaknesses into which his affection for her had betrayed him, and this he did with so serious, contrite, and respectful, an air, that Charlotte, in spite of her resentment, was led to afford him the very sentiment he at first had demanded,—namely, pity. After assuring him of her readiness to forget whatever had given her displeasure, and to remember him only with gratitude and respect, she returned to the parlour, and soon after took a polite leave of Miss Grimstone, in order to accompany Mrs. Butterfield and her daughter. As for Sir Bevil, he had avoided the pain of a formal adieu by abruptly retiring. His feelings on this occasion were certainly not the most enviable; for, though pecuniary motives had been primarily predominant in his addresses to Miss Overbury, he really entertained for her a very tender regard. We do not mean that kind which is usually denominated love, but such as a man of common sensibility must unavoidably imbibe towards an amiable young creature, with whom he has long been intimately acquainted. The being thus unexpectedly deprived, as well of her company as her confidence, was a circumstance, which, abstracted from selfish considerations, afforded him sensible concern. His house, when no longer enlivened by Charlotte’s innocent vivacity, appeared a perfect vacuum. The conversation of his sister, more stupid than ever, and that intolerable petulance, which had so often been directed to the most engaging girl in the universe, was now too odious to be borne. In short, they saw each other as seldom as possible,—the lady devoting herself with great alacrity to redeeming, by augmented flippancy, the time she supposed had been lost during the blaze of rival beauty, and the gentleman to recruiting a broken fortune at the gaming-table, since Hymen had stubbornly refused to do him that good office.

C H A P. XIII.

Specimen of Economy.

ELIZA Butterfield, though a very different character from Charlotte Overbury, was nevertheless one of that description, in whom a person of tolerable good-nature might find a pleasing companion. Her understanding was by no means contemptible, and her temper was remarkably sweet. Conscious of her own inexperience, she was modest and unassuming, perfectly delicate in her manners and refined in sentiment,—qualities which she owed more to nature than the benefit of parental example or tuition; in short, she was in every respect the very reverse of her mother, whose rusticity and illiberal ideas formed the very opposite extreme to the mental refinement of her daughter. The young ladies experienced a sincere satisfaction in each other's society, and soon such an intimacy was formed between them as proved that friendship may subsist independent of entire congeniality of taste. Miss Butterfield materially differed from her companion, in that she was far gone in the romantic taste;—so far, indeed, that she had acquired exactly that softness of soul which is peculiarly inimical to the happiness of common life, by teaching the possessor to despise every satisfaction which is not rapture, and to overlook every virtue which is not heroic. Nor are its effects less pernicious with regard to honour and reputation. Too often the fair enthusiast nourishes a fatal sensibility, which lays her open to the designs of the artful and the vile: while fondly dreaming of chimerical perfection, she takes a serpent to her bosom, who stings her peace and fame. That Eliza was one of this cast was more her misfortune than fault. Immured in a country-village, without one companion of her own sex whose conversation could soften the rigours of solitude, her lively imagination panted for amusement of a higher kind than what the dull domestic circle in the Priory afforded. Books were a resource; she was fond of reading,—yet who should direct her literary pursuits? The justice read only acts of parliament, and Mrs. Butterfield knew one book from another merely as it treated of the culinary art or not. Some ancestors of the family had possessed the publications of their day, but these had long since been thrown by as useless lumber, and consequently were torn to pieces. Thus left to select her own subjects, it is no wonder that amusement rather than instruction was the object, and that such trash as chance afforded became the pernicious food of a mind naturally adapted to the highest improvement. Charlotte was not long ignorant of this part of her friend's character; she knew and pitied it. She did more, she hoped, with the assistance of time, to rectify so improper a taste.

But we are anticipating matters when we ought to be soberly pursuing the thread of our story.

Mrs. Butterfield, perfectly at ease in having effected her plan with so little difficulty, and finding she had now a whole day on her hands, resolved to employ this time to be spent in London in the most advantageous manner, which, according to her idea, (being what is called an excellent œconomist,) consisted in purchasing every thing she thought cheap, whether absolutely necessary or not; for, as long as her house was stored with pennyworths, the interest of money lost in such useless purchases was a point

to which her genius did not extend. As soon then as breakfast was over, she began her tour among the shops, cheapening every thing which caught her eye. Having picked up a quantity of upholstery and cabinet goods, &c. many of which she might have purchased equally cheap and good in her own neighbourhood. Her next business was to stock the wardrobes of the family, (which indeed were sufficiently stored before,) on which occasion her behaviour was absurd and affronting; for, concluding doubtless that she was dealing with some of those pedlars who hawk the country so much to the disadvantage of honest stationary traders, she would, when a piece of goods was shewn her, very modestly offer just half the given price.

“For shame, mamma, (whispered Eliza, with a gentle twitch of her cloak,) how can you do so?”

“Hold your tongue, child, Do you think I am so weak as to give people just what they ask for their goods?—Let me alone: I did not come to town to fling money away so foolishly.”

At the different shops where she chose to display her excellent talent of bargaining, some were seriously offended, others would bid her repair to Rag-fair. One among them, however, penetrating into the nature of her character, very coolly put back the piece of silk she had been cheapening, and, taking down some others, the price of which he prudently affixed at exactly half as much more as he chose to take, told her there were some goods, which, he believed, would suit her. Mrs. Butterfield could not but own they were elegant and good in their kind, though most extravagantly dear, and, according to expectation, offered her own price. The shopman, after a decent reluctance, consented to the bargain, and the lady, perfectly satisfied with having outwitted a Londoner, retired to her carriage with the trophies of her address and understanding.

It remained now for the several articles to be properly disposed for carriage, many of which were necessarily obliged to be committed to a stage-waggon; but, in order to save expence, it was resolved that as many, or indeed more than the strength of the coach could well sustain, should be packed in and on it, in the most commodious manner. Accordingly, behind was lodged a large mahogany dining-table, which served as the basis of looking-glass cases, &c. which, being piled in a very ingenious manner, supported the enormous load of boxes and trunks placed on the top of the carriage: neither must we omit to say that the minute attention of this good lady had provided that the fore part of it should also sustain a proportionable part of the general burden, by contriving to stow as much as she could in the vacancy between the axle-tree and the coach-box. As for parcels, there being only three inside passengers, they were deposited on the seats, leaving only as much space as would admit of themselves to squeeze in.—Robin, the coachman, muttered and swore that the horses were unable to draw such a luggage; but, Mrs. Butterfield observing, that, as they were not straitened for time, they could travel by easy stages, the matter was settled, and the next morning they began their journey to the West.

Moving in a sort of solemn state, by the third evening they had reached the city of Salisbury, where it was determined they should rest for the night. The uncommon appearance of this moving warehouse excited a good deal of mirth among the gentry of the inn-yard. The hostler, a lad of more vivacity than prudence, no sooner saw the coachman and footman properly settled by the kitchen fire, than, catching up a brush out of a pot of red paint which stood by, he wrote, in legible characters, on one of the pannels of the coach, Butterfield's common Stage-Cart.—Mrs. Butterfield, intending to set off early in the morning, retired, as soon as supper was over, as did also the servants, who had not been long withdrawn when there arrived a sailor, who some days before had landed at Portsmouth, and, being obliged to quit the service on account of ill health, was then on his way to his own parish. Perceiving the inscription with which the waggery of the hostler had honoured Madam Butterfield's vehicle, and not stopping narrowly to investigate particulars, he exclaimed, "What ship, my lads? I want a snug birth to the westward." The hostler immediately caught the joke, and told him if he would be content to wait a few hours, he would insure him a safe passage for sixpence. The poor fellow had no objection to repose his weary limbs over a jug of ale by the kitchen-fire, mean while the other contrived for the due completion of his plan. He had received orders to summon Mrs. Butterfield's coachman at four o'clock, which was at least then two hours before day-light. As the latter was busied in accoutring his horses in the stable, the hostler informed the sailor that the cart was ready to set out, who thereupon, paying the stipulated premium of sixpence, crept, unperceived, into the coach, and fell very comfortably asleep. It not being quite light when the ladies got in, it was not easy for them to discriminate their guest amidst such a profusion of luggage, and Robin was ordered to go on. They had drove about five or six miles, when their companion, endeavouring to shake off the bonds of Morpheus, yawned so loudly, that the ladies, dreadfully affrighted, uttered a most violent shriek. The sailor, not less surprized than themselves, bawled out, "Avast there,—avast there, I say;—what news from the deck?" By this time the coachman had stopped his horses, and the footman was come up, of whom Mrs. Butterfield demanded, in great wrath, what wretch he had suffered to get into the carriage. "Hold there, (cried the sailor,) let us have none of this lingo. We are all bound to the same port, I suppose, or somewhere about, and so let us sail quietly together, I say." The footman having opened the door, and let in the rays of the dawn, the son of Neptune was discovered jammed into a corner amongst the luggage. Mrs. Butterfield, perfectly outrageous, told him to be gone that instant.

"Not I truly, (replied the man,) I like my cot well enough. If you are not pleased, mistress, turn out yourself for me."

"Drag him out, Tom, this instant.—A pretty fancy, indeed, for such fragrants to get into a gentleman's coach!"

"D—n it, (cried the sailor,) why the woman is groggy this morning.—A gentleman's coach, eh!"

Charlotte, to whom the habit of a sailor was always a recommendation, discerning more in the affair than Mrs. Butterfield's passion would permit her to do, observed that

there must have been some mistake, and then, in a voice of good-nature, added, "Pray, honest friend, tell me by what means you got into this carriage."

"Aye, (answered the other,) now you speak civilly, I will say something to you. Why you must know, that, being half dead with the rheumatism and scurvy, I was looking out for some conveyance, when the hostler at the inn told me I might get a lift in Butterfield's stage-cart here; so, having paid my fare, I got quietly in, d'ye see,—that's all, my lass. What a deuce makes that old Jezebel set up her whistle so loudly?"

"I told you, madam, (said Charlotte,) there must have been a mistake. The poor fellow is not to blame.—My friend, (turning to the sailor,) you have been grossly imposed upon: this is a gentleman's carriage."

"Nay, then, I will get out this moment, and I heartily ask the lady's pardon;—but, by my soul, it was as I say, and I paid my sixpence to the bargain; but d—n the money, if that's all."

"Dear mamma, (whispered Eliza,) it can do us no harm if he goes a little farther,—he is so lame."

A look from her mother half petrified the compassionate girl. Mean time the sailor had quitted the coach, but Charlotte followed him with her eye till she saw they were not more than a couple of yards from a public-house, at which she desired they might stop and get a glass of water, though, in reality, it was a pretext in order to obtain some conversation with the poor invalid, who was but a few paces behind the coach when she stepped out of it. She saw him pallid with sickness, his crutch scarcely supported his emaciated limbs. "Take this, (said she, putting two guineas into his hand,) and procure a more peaceable conveyance.—From what part of the world are you last come, friend?"

"The West Indies, lady, (brushing off a tear of gratitude.) The Hector was my ship, Captain Overbury, commander."

"Jack Overbury! (clasping her hands.) Is he well,—is he?" Here she could utter no more, tears had choaked her voice.

"You know him then, lady?"

"He is my brother.—But, say, is he well, is the ship expected home?"

"You are then akin, madam, to the bravest gentleman that ever rode the wooden horse. Captain Overbury is a true-hearted lad as ever snuffed sea-air; and, though I am infirm now, if I live to recover, I would sail with him to the world's end."

"But is he well?"

“He was last June, and I hope will long remain so. It was the sorest trouble I ever knew in my life, when I was obliged to be put aboard the Swallow to come to England; I blubbered like a child when the captain bid me never fear; “for, though it be hazy weather at present, (said he,) it will clear up, my lad.”—Ah! he is true heart of oak, madam.”

“Honest soul, I honour thee for thy affection. Where is your home and what is your name?”

“Will Sanders, madam. My wife and children live about three miles from Ashton; though I am sure I had forgot Madam Butterfield as much as though I had never seen her in my life.”

Here, Mrs. Butterfield becoming impatient of the delay, Charlotte was obliged to resume the carriage, but not before Sanders had received an assurance that his honest zeal should be remembered on a future day.

“I wonder, Miss Overbury, (said Mrs. Butterfield, with an air of disdain,) how you could suffer such an *objectful* wretch to speak to you.”

“I could have heard him for ever, madam, on the subject we were upon. He gave me intelligence of my brother.”

“That alters the case, to be sure. The captain is coming home perhaps. Eliza, hold up your head, child: the captain is a worthy man.—I wonder if he is married.—What an ugly cast you have with your eye, child!—I dare say (musing) he is not married.”

Charlotte could give no decisive evidence on the point, and the subject was dropped.

C H A P. XIV.

Ludicrous Effect of excessive Sensibility.

OUR fair travellers once more reseated, they proceeded on their journey without farther interruption, till the spacious plain of Sarum lay far behind them, when an incident occurred, which, in order to illustrate the fine feelings of one part of the company, we think ought not to be omitted. —The person, who travels towards the extremities of this kingdom, must not expect the wheels of his carriage always to move with the same facility as if they were rolling over a bowling-green; for, though there is scarcely a village in the whole island which does not contain some one who, having filled an official character in the management of the turnpikes, will talk as loudly on the matter as a minister of state on opening the budget, yet it happens here sometimes as in matters of higher concern, much speaking is apt to produce an *afflatus*, and a good dinner, or a bowl of punch, becomes necessary to set all to rights again,—and here the business rests. Now Mrs. Butterfield's carriage was necessitated to pass through a long narrow dirty rugged lane, at the end of which was a collection of waters, not much resembling the pellucid streams of Pactolus; for, instead of golden sands, its bottom was composed of a deep black mud. Robin, nothing intimidated, lashed his steeds boldly into the dusky wave: but here, so fortune would have it, the old coach gave way;—crash went the axle-tree, and screams uttered the ladies. What was to be done?—Robin was preparing to unharness his coach-horses, in order to extricate the unfortunate dames from so unpleasant a situation, when, very fortunately, a single-horse chaise appeared, in which sat what is called in the country, by way of honorary distinction, a gentleman-farmer;—that is, one who, by dint of good seasons and long leases, can afford to tack a pair of wheels to the tail of his mare, and thus, if the gout or rheumatism makes an attack, comfortably lounges it in a “leathern conveniency.” This gentleman, considering the distressful scene before him, politely offered to take the three ladies into his chaise, which offer was readily accepted; but, alas! before the misfortune could be thus redressed, poor Eliza's brilliant eyes were closed in darkness,—or, in other words, she had, or pretended to have, fainted. She was, however, conveyed into the chaise, which soon brought them to a very decent house, where they were received by the farmer's wife with much hospitality, and very comfortably accommodated while the coach was repairing by a neighbouring carpenter.

Eliza, having been laid on a bed in the best apartment, recovered in due time.—Mrs. Butterfield was withdrawn to have some chat with her good hostess, and Charlotte only remained with the fair invalid, who now began to breathe such profound sighs as seriously alarmed her companion. “What is the matter?” said she anxiously.

“O Charlotte, why that distressing question? Would you wrest from me a secret which I dare not confess to myself?”

“Bless me, Eliza, what can you mean?—what secret is this?”

“Oh! ask me not, I intreat. Yet, my sweet friend, in your sympathetic bosom, I know it might be safely deposited, and perhaps your compassion may administer consolation to the ill fated Eliza.”

“Do not torture me, Eliza. Speak out, I beseech you, for you alarm me beyond expression.”

“Ill-fated day! (resumed the young lady, sighing most bitterly;) O most unfortunate accident!”

“If that be all, my dear, we shall do well enough. The coach is in a fair way to be repaired, and in the mean time we are very comfortably situated I assure you.”

“I doubt it not;—but where is he?—where is that all-accomplished youth, who, by redressing my misfortune, has rendered me the most miserable of human beings?”

Miss Overbury, actually concluding her to be in a state of delirium, quietly drew the curtains close around the bed, and seated herself in silence on the chair which stood beside it.

“Cruel girl! (exclaimed Miss Butterfield,) is it thus you repay my confidence? Is this the sympathy I was led to expect from you?”

“Compose yourself, my love; you want rest.”

“Name not rest!—that is ever more denied me, since I have seen this exalted, this divine creature. Did you not observe the enchanting grace with which he offered his assistance? What expression in his eyes! What delicacy, what sentiment, in his manner!”

“Whom can you mean, Eliza?”

“Happy Charlotte! That insensibility of yours has now been your security. Ah! why was I formed with such exquisite perceptions!”

“Seriously, my dear, there was not a single person near us but the friendly old gentleman at whose house we now are.”

“I see the aim of this. You have discovered the state of my heart, and would suppress a hopeless passion by persuading me those eyes could be deceived. The intention is kind, but, O my Charlotte, the mischief is beyond those means of cure. Never, never can I obliterate from my memory the idea of that lovely youth at the moment my enraptured eye beheld him approaching to our relief. Was it the effect of a too sanguine imagination that I thought his looks were directed to me with an expression which, though ineffable, my fond heart too readily understood?”

Here Miss Overbury could no longer repress her risibility; bursting into a hearty laugh, she replied, "Well, Eliza, I will not think this dreadful case absolutely hopeless. If a first sight has done so much mischief, the second I am sure will effectually redress it." We know not how the young lady might have been inclined to resent this want of sympathy in her friend, but, at this juncture, the good woman of the house, having provided a refreshment of tea, coffee, cakes hot from the oven, new butter, and cream, dispatched her daughter to request the two ladies' attendance. Scarcely were they seated when the farmer himself entered the room, hobbling on his crutch, with both legs swaddled in flannels, having but lately obtained a respite from a fit of the gout. He was a little fat swarthy man, of about fifty-five, with a face seamed by the small pox, and had on a blue coat, scarlet waistcoat, a small round black wig, and a silk handkerchief, tied round his neck by way of cravat. "Much good may it do you, ladies, (said he;) I hope none of you are now the worse for the fright."

"My dear Miss Butterfield, (said Charlotte, archly) this is the kind gentleman, who so opportunely arrived to our assistance. See, my dear, (with a particular emphasis,) the generous deliverer, to whom your acknowledgments are due."

Eliza, conscious of her folly, threw her eyes on the ground with a confusion incomprehensible to all but the confident of her romantic weakness. Both the farmer and his wife attributed her apparent reserve to a certain hauteur not uncommon in the behaviour of those who would blush at being thought in company of their inferiors; neither was it perhaps the first instance of the kind they had met with. Superior, however, to so despicable a sentiment, the good farmer replied, that there were no acknowledgments necessary,—the being at hand to render assistance, when needful, was to him a sufficient satisfaction. Charlotte, though more disposed to pity than ridicule so palpable a weakness, could not help whispering in her ear, that she hoped her malady was not of the most desperate kind; to which she received no other answer but a deep blush.—During the remainder of the journey, Eliza observed a profound silence, and so painful was the sense of shame excited by this ridiculous incident, that, had not this mental disease taken deep root, we believe it must have now met with an effectual remedy.—Whether this was actually the case, the subsequent part of this history must demonstrate.

C H A P. XV.

*Introduces such Characters as the Reader may
find any where.*

AMONG the first visitors at the Priory, on Mrs. Butterfield's return, were Mr. and Mrs. Martin;—the former a petty-fogging attorney of the neighbourhood, who for some years past had officiated as amanuensis to Mr. Butterfield. The knowledge which this worthy gentleman possessed of the law was exactly such as served the purposes of a narrow, selfish, and irascible disposition. He knew enough of it to be a rogue whenever occasion served, but either from dulness of parts or baseness of soul had never been able to catch any thing of its spirit, by which, rather than the letter, the welfare and happiness of society is promoted. It rarely happened but he had entangled in his net some unfortunate being or other, and had actually been the ruin of several petty farmers in the neighbourhood, who chanced not to be sufficiently submissive to the tyrannical oppressions of the little great around them, to whom Martin's activity and genius was often peculiarly useful. In consequence, he became the scourge and terror of the peasantry for twenty miles round, and was dreaded much more than the justice himself, to whom the judicial character appertained, but the real power was lodged in this limb of the law.

The same ascendancy which Mr. Martin's abilities acquired in respect of Mr. Butterfield, his wife, by singular address, had obtained over his lady. This woman possessed a most artful disposition, some knowledge of the world, and withal that busy restless spirit which is never at ease but when interfering with the affairs of its neighbours.—The latter trait, which in some persons is the effect of an idle inquisitiveness, in Mrs. Martin was the result of a temper sordid and malignant, which is ever watching opportunities of employing the weakness and foibles of others to selfish mercenary purposes. Mrs. Butterfield was a weak illiterate woman, very opinionated, fond of flattery, and of course credulously open to the designs of every one who offered it. This the other perfectly well understood, and therefore her business was not to affect the possessing any superior talents herself, but on all occasions to suppose the existence of such in her neighbour, by which means she had contrived to become the *primum mobile* of the family, nothing of moment being ever transacted at the Priory that had not first obtained her sanction. We are not however to suppose that the lady's views were merely those of empty honour; for, besides dining two or three times a week at the justice's table, her own was pretty well supplied from his larder with fish, game, or other rarities of the season, not to mention the frequent presents of apparel, &c. which she received from the generosity of Mrs. Butterfield.

On her introduction to Miss Overbury, the latter could not avoid seeing that she seemed to eye her with particular scrutiny, which was indeed the case. Mrs. Martin was not entirely satisfied whether the residence of that young lady in the family might prove so desirable a circumstance. There was something in her looks she did not like,—an air of intelligence and penetration not altogether pleasing. Eliza was a sweet girl, so ductile,

so soft; but in the other she could discover nothing of so hopeful a disposition. The two elder ladies having withdrawn to look over the London bargains, Charlotte made some enquiries respecting Mrs. Martin, to which Miss Butterfield replied, "I assure you, my dear, she is the sweetest woman in the world,—so good humoured, and withal so sensible. Mama never does any thing of consequence without consulting her. Her knowledge is really universal. She is the best companion imaginable. I should never have been able to sustain this solitude but for her. Then she seems to enter into one's feelings with so ready an apprehension; were she but a few years younger, she would make an excellent confidante. As it is, Mrs. Martin and I have always been on very intimate terms, and I verily believe she loves me as well as she could have done a daughter of her own."

While Eliza was thus indulging the panegyric strain, Mrs. Martin was exerting herself much in the same way, though not with equal sincerity.

"I have been fatigued to death, my dear Martin, (said Mrs. Butterfield,) since I saw you last,—so much business on my hands."

"I do not doubt it in the least. You are not one of those who would miss a good opportunity, and I dare say have well employed your time."

"You must judge of that. To be sure I have bought a few articles, and you shall now give your opinion whether I have been imposed on."

"That I'll be sworn you have not. No, no, Mrs. Butterfield, I know you too well for that."

By this time they were got into a large spare gallery, where the various purchases laid in a promiscuous huddle, as it required some study, furnished as was every apartment already, to dispose conveniently of so vast an acquisition.

"Look at this table, Martin; is it not *belegant*? These glasses, what do you think they cost me?"

To this interrogatory the other took care to mention about double as much as she supposed them to have cost, purposely to have a better opportunity of admiring the sagacity of the purchaser.

"And should you really think them worth so much? (with a smile of self-applause.) They stood me in little more than half that sum."

"You absolutely astonish me. Positively, my dear madam, I never saw your equal. Well may Mr. Butterfield be the envy of all the husbands around us."

"Pshaw! you jest."

Although this little word *pshaw* must be allowed, according to all the rules of verbal criticism, to imply disbelief or indifference, yet, in the present case, it actually meant no such thing. Mrs. Butterfield believed every syllable which the other had advanced; it was impossible to resist the impulse of the moment, and accordingly Mrs. Martin's profound discernment was rewarded with a piece of rich flowered silk, (not very modern indeed, but gaudy enough to cut a splendid dash in a country-church,) which, after due compliments, she condescended to accept. The conversation then turned on the young lady who now made one of the family.

"Don't you think Miss Overbury a *perdegis* fine girl?"

"She is very well."

"She is certainly a perfect beauty, Martin. We used to think Eliza a tolerable figure, but she must now yield to her companion."

"I beg your pardon there, my good madam. Miss Overbury has a good person, and as to height might have the advantage, but I cannot give up my sweet Eliza. In my opinion she infinitely exceeds in point of beauty."

"I own I cannot see that; but prithee, Martin, (affecting an air of pleasantry,) do you know any clever young fellow that we can pick out as a husband for Charlotte; you know she has a *commence* fortune."

It required no skill in the art of divination to be able to fathom the depth of Mrs. Butterfield's policy. Mrs. Martin had already cast the plummet, and therefore could venture to say, "Why, truly, madam, if I may speak my mind, I think you need not look far from home."

"That is the very thing I have been thinking of, between ourselves, Martin.—What is your opinion of such a scheme?"

"It has my approbation and warm wishes also, I assure you; not but Mr. Arthur's merits may demand the first lady in the land: but this would be making it quite a family-affair."

"Aye, so it would. The poor girl has no friends but ourselves, and if we could promote her advantage——"

"How benevolent is that reflection! Such disinterested goodness! Happy Miss Overbury! to have fallen into such excellent hands; but, pray, my good madam, when do you expect Mr. Arthur home?"

"I hope he will be here in the course of a week or two. It is best not to allow young people too much liberty of fixing their inclinations improperly."

“Right, perfectly right,” cried Mrs. Martin, which was the mark of approbation she seldom failed to bestow on the suggestions of her wise neighbour.

And here we must observe, that, though the above conversation may at first sight appear trifling, it must not be considered as unimportant to the design of this history. Great events are usually made up of trifling incidents; and, not to suppress a good simile this moment dropping from the pen, we would add, that an indifferent spectator of many of our manufactories would be apt to regard with inattention a minute wheel or a single screw, yet of such are composed those most ingenious machines which do honor to the mechanical heads of our countrymen; and this, by the way, may serve for an apology, if, in our domestic scenes, we should hereafter stand charged with descending to low or insignificant matter.

C H A P. XVI.

A Country-Mansion described.

ASHTON-Priory, as Sir Bevil Grimstone once rightly observed, had formerly been appropriated to religious retirement. The gothic air of the building clearly revived an idea of the gloom of the twelfth or thirteenth century, somewhere about which period it was doubtless erected: yet, durable as was then the architectural taste, it had, ere now, shared the fate of many structures in this kingdom of similar antiquity, had not successive proprietors, from time to time, added such repairs and supplementary erections as suited either their choice or convenience; insomuch, that this venerable fabric, in its present state, exhibited an appearance which would puzzle the best connoisseur in architecture to determine from which of the orders it ought to receive a denomination. The center was manifestly Gothic, as the pointed arches of the windows and front door fully expressed. In this part was the great hall, where the justice, in solemn pomp, exercised the duty of his function. This, with some gloomy apartments of smaller dimensions, vaulted passages, and long resounding ailes, composed the body of the building, which, with a sort of pious respect, was surrounded by some additions of a more modern aspect. Here a balcony, supported by Doric pillars, there a Venetian window ornamented by Corinthian capitals, emblazoned escutcheons, boars' heads, flying serpents, &c. exhibited an almost endless variety.

This most extraordinary pile was situated in a deep valley, closely surrounded by hills, as though the very light of the sun had been an indulgence too great for the mortified beings who once inhabited there to enjoy, while the croaking of rooks, the dashing of a waterfall, and the gloom of overhanging woods, seemed well calculated to sooth that melancholy, which, in the idea of monkish superstition constituted that divine principle whose real existence dissipates every mental gloom, and diffuses serenity and joy through all the powers of the soul.

It will perhaps be thought improbable that a person of Miss Overbury's sprightly temper could possibly support existence in a situation so opposite to the one she had lately been accustomed to; but her vivacity was not that kind which is the result of levity, but a constant cheerfulness of mind, arising from unsullied purity of heart, and universal benevolence,—capable, indeed, of occasional exhilaration, but never of absolute depression. This, with a taste for literary pursuits, music, drawing, and other polite accomplishments, was the reason that the solitude of the Priory was not so utterly insupportable as once she had imagined it must be.—The Butterfields kept a good table, and visited the best company in the neighbourhood, among whom she met with some not altogether unworthy her esteem. It might also be supposed, that a young woman of fortune would not be wholly unacquainted with the pleasures arising from the exercise of pity and beneficence. In reality, Charlotte was eminently susceptible of what is called the milk of human kindness, and often enjoyed the satisfaction of alleviating the pressure of indigence, and restoring comfort to the miserable, in which delightful employ Miss Butterfield had an opportunity of sharing: for, however compassionate her disposition

might naturally be, she had hitherto been restricted from indulging it, in the latitude she wished, by the parsimonious temper of her mother, who valued herself too much on her economy to allow her daughter to squander money on vagabonds, the light in which she always considered those on whom the gripping hand of poverty had alighted.

One day, just as dinner was over, the justice was told that a certain person required his attendance to take cognizance of a theft which had been committed on his premises. "Very well, (replied he,) I will hear the case in a few minutes; mean time, run Tom, and tell Mr. Martin to step hither."—The case at length having been duly stated, Mr. Butterfield returned to the parlour in a violent pet, exclaiming, "the rascal, he cannot be above sixteen at most, but I'll do for him, I warrant." He then sat down to finish his bottle in profound silence, which nobody seemed disposed to interrupt. When Mr. Martin had drawn up a copy of the indictment, he sent it in for the justice's perusal, who, cursorily scanning it over, said, "Aye, aye, it will do well enough, I dare say;—let him go to prison."

Miss Overbury, curious to know the nature of the offence, took up the paper, and read the following words: "Richard Sanders, convicted of stealing, taking, and carrying away, five turnips from a field inclosed, in the parish of Ashton, the property of one Humphry Jones, without his leave and consent."

"Five turnips! (exclaimed she,) and will you send this poor lad to prison for so trifling an offence?"

"Will I?—aye, and for half a turnip too."

"You do not properly consider this matter, Miss Overbury, (said Mrs. Butterfield.) If the venal laws were not duly put in force, there would be no living for such pretty rogues. Besides, we magistrates are obliged to do our duty."

It is here to be observed, that Mrs. Butterfield actually considered herself as much a magistrate as her husband, and it is still a query with those well acquainted with the family, whether she were not more so. During this eloquent speech, Charlotte recognized the name of Sanders with a very interesting emotion, and, going instantly out of the room, found the culprit standing in the hall, expecting his fate with trembling apprehension, of whom she demanded the name of his father.

"William Sanders," was the reply.

"And what is his occupation?"

"He is a sailor.—It is but a few weeks since he came home so ill, that he could scarcely reach his journey's end. It was on his account, but not with his knowledge, that I did this thing; for mother had got a bit of mutton to make him some broth, and she said she wished she had some turnips to make it good. I asked farmer Jones here to give me a few, knowing he had a great many in his field, but he would not, and I thought there

would be no harm in taking two or three. I don't mind going to jail, no, nor being whipped neither, on my own account, so much as the grief it will be to my poor father;—it will be the death of him.”

Too much affected to make any reply, Charlotte hastened to the office where Mr. Martin was employed, to whom she observed, that it would be cruel to commit a poor lad to prison for a first, and that so trifling, an offence; to which he coolly replied, that the law must take its course.—“But surely, Mr. Martin, the affair might be compromised. I will pay for the damage myself sooner than he shall be sent to prison. Here (taking out her purse,) are five guineas, that is a guinea for each turnip: do, pray, Sir, take it, and prevail on the prosecutor to release the boy.”

Martin told her that the matter had gone too far for that, he feared: besides, the farmer loved justice better than money;—to oblige her, however, he would speak to him, for which she warmly expressed her thanks. Nothing, however, was farther from his intention than such a measure;—if it must be so, there were other ways of contriving it, and the five pieces would as easily slip into his own pocket as that of Jones; besides, as Charlotte appeared so much interested in the event, it would not be difficult to procure an augmentation of that sum. He knew Sanders would not want presence of mind to improve an opportunity of escaping, and therefore caused the farmer and his party to be invited into the kitchen to a jug of ale, who, supposing all safe, readily complied. The lad no sooner perceived his attendants withdrawn, than, concluding all ceremony might be dispensed with, he prudently took himself out at the front-door, choosing rather to trust to the swiftness of his heels than the lenity of the magistrate.

The news of this unhandsome retreat soon reached the parlour, not more to the displeasure of the justice than the satisfaction of Miss Overbury, who soon after took an opportunity of expressing her acknowledgements to Mr. Martin, on which he said that he would not have engaged in such an affair, had it not been purely to have obliged her; that he had found more difficulty in it than he had expected, for the farmer would not be prevailed on to listen to terms of pacification under ten guineas. Charlotte, on this information, readily reimbursed the other five guineas, and departed with a satisfaction that abundantly rewarded her benevolence.

It was not long, however, before she obtained an insight into the nature of the case; for, calling one day at Sanders's cottage, she found the poor lad was compelled to be an exile from his paternal dwelling; for, though he had luckily escaped the hand of justice, yet the affair was far from being settled as she had concluded it was. The circumstance, however, had prudently been concealed from the father, who now lay on the verge of dissolution. She desired to see him, and, on drawing near his bedside, tenderly asked how he did. “My bark, you see, mistress, (returned the honest tar,) has suffered a little by this gale, and, to say truth, cannot, I think, hold together many hours; but that would not be a matter of much concern, as I trust there is a good port at hand, were it not for the thoughts of leaving my poor wife and family.”

“Let not that disquiet you, my good friend. My brother and I will take care that they shall be comfortably provided for.”

“Blessings on your heart for this, young lady. What words of comfort you give a dying man!—but Dick, I fear, will do himself no good; not but that he is a good lad in the main, though, unluckily, his mother has put him to a trade which, I doubt, will not do for him.”

These apprehensions were too well founded; for Sanders’s wife, burthened with four children, had gladly embraced an opportunity of placing her son Richard apprentice to a shoemaker, which occupation was totally inconsistent with a genius naturally active; hence it happened that Dick was engaged much oftener at wrestling, foot-ball, &c. than in his shop at the last, which occasioned heavy complaints on the part of his master, who, in spite of his displeasure, would often affirm that a more generous open-hearted lad never existed.

“The name of Overbury, (resumed Charlotte,) has been dear to you. Your family shall have cause to respect it also. I will take your eldest daughter under my own care, and my brother will pay so much regard to the memory of an honest seaman as to provide for your son more suitably to his inclinations. Your wife shall be enabled to bring up the rest,—thus you may discharge all anxiety on this account.”

The sailor’s heart was full: instead of words, tears expressed his feelings. In fine, Charlotte, having done every thing which humanity prompted, returned to the Priory, and the next morning was informed that Will Sanders had breathed his last. Soon after, pursuant to her promise, she took the eldest girl to wait on herself, and also furnished the widow with a sum of money to set herself in a small way of business with her younger children. As for Richard, she deemed it best to leave him in his present situation till her brother’s return, very properly supposing that his feelings on the occasion would prove a salutary reprehension for his fault.

C H A P. XVII.

Pride and Pedantry exemplified.

AT length, the young gentleman, for whose arrival Mrs. Butterfield had been long impatient, appeared at the Priory. Mr. Arthur Butterfield had not received from nature any great portion of personal elegance. His stature was considerably above the common size, yet one would be apt to conclude him no ways satisfied with the superiority, as he appeared desirous of sinking to the ordinary standard of height by a remarkable stoop of the head, by which means his shoulders exhibited a rotundity not altogether consistent with our ideas of a graceful figure. His complexion was sallow, nor was there any part of his face that bore the least approximation to beauty, except the eyes: these indeed were black and sparkling, but most maliciously concealed, as much as could be, by the envy of a pair of protuberant cheek-bones. Little as this gentleman may be supposed indebted to nature, he was determined to owe still less to art, by manifesting, on all occasions, an utter disregard of those minutiae which are allowed to embellish a handsome face, and to improve a plain one. He was, in fact, a sloven in dress, not so much from insensibility to those things as from pride. His natural abilities being, at best, but very mediocre, he had gone to the university a blockhead, and returned a pedant, consequently deemed it beneath the dignity of literature to stoop to external trifles. During his residence at college, he had certainly merited the reputation of a diligent student; but his mental ability proving too weak to digest the substance of so many ponderous volumes, it is supposed that the heterogeneous matter, lodging in the pericranium, in defect of sufficient force to promote due concoction, had degenerated to a mere calx, the dry particles of which, affecting the optic nerve, produced at length that kind of malady in which the patient is incapable of discerning the most obvious degree of merit in another, at the same time he supposes no ordinary portion of it to be centered in himself. In other words, Mr. Arthur Butterfield was proud, conceited, and pedantic, a coalition of qualities infallibly adapted to inspire the ridicule and contempt of mankind. The chance, therefore, which he stood of acquiring the affections of Miss Overbury will, without much difficulty, be easily computed, who, not entertaining the remotest suspicion of Mrs. Butterfield's long meditated scheme, considered him as one, whose good or ill qualities could not be an interesting object to her, and therefore, though probably disgusted with his manner, thought civility to the family obliged her to conceal any secret contempt she might feel towards the heir of it. Some days after his arrival, the sagacious mother deemed it high time to set her plan in motion, and, seizing a convenient opportunity, accosted him with, "Well, son Arthur, I should be glad to know how you have passed your time at college."

"In academical pursuits you may be sure, madam."

"Aye, to be sure, *economical* pursuits.—Greek and Hebrew, I suppose. Very right! You will be a justice of the Quorum, and such things will be useful to help you to know the laws of your country; but, besides all that, a young man has other pursuits sometimes, Atty. What particular lady have you paid your court to?"

“The Muses, madam, have received my principal devoirs.”

“I am sorry to hear that;—bad women, son, will bring a man to ruin.”

“You misunderstand me, mother. I mean only the liberal sciences.”

“That is well; because I must tell you I have looked out a wife for you,—one to whom you can make no objection.”

“Indeed, madam, as much devoted as I am to philosophy, I have no mind to exercise my patience by the example of Socrates. We men of letters are apt to consider a wife as a disagreeable incumbrance.”

“Incumbrance, sirrah! Let me tell you that your father well knows a good wife to be no incumbrance.”

“Dear mother, do not be offended. I only mean that a single life leaves us more at liberty to pursue our favourite studies. I confess I have no inclination to marriage, yet, to oblige you and my father, I may perhaps consent, provided the lady is to my taste.”

“I’ll tell you what, Arthur, the Butterfields are a good old modern family, and it is your duty to take care that the name be not distinct. You can have no objection to the person I recommend, since it is no other than your father’s ward, and a fine girl she certainly is.”

“As to personal advantages (with a supercilious indifference,) we, who are accustomed to abstruse studies, do not make those an object of attention. Provided a woman is properly domesticated, and knows how to observe a proper distance towards her husband, we are anxious for no more.”

“I will engage she will leave you to your obtuse studies; but the main point is, that she will have as good as thirty thousand pounds to her fortune; therefore I hope you will not miss the opportunity which I have taken so much pains to procure you.”

“I shall take occasion to consider the lady more attentively, and, if I find her deserving, I may perhaps condescend to the measure, though I assure you, madam, I consider the affair of matrimony rather as a point of duty than choice,—a step which, with regard to moral fitness, may be proper, but in respect of inclination not at all desirable.”

Satisfied with this acquiescence, Mrs. Butterfield left him to determine the precise plan of procedure, which he resolved should be conducted on philosophical principles.—Love was a passion, he thought, could only govern women and fools, it was therefore beneath the dignity of wisdom to affect it, or to flatter the natural vanity of the weaker sex so far as to suffer them to suppose a wise man’s happiness could depend on them;

yet, in order that the lady might not be altogether ignorant of the favour he designed her, he would often present her with the finest fruit at the desert, or, if walking in the garden, present her with a nosegay. These were all the direct intimations he thought proper to give of his passion, but he had also another mode of shewing his regard, not quite so intelligible, which was that of contradicting her humour on all occasions, as a specimen of which we will, from a variety of such incidents, select the following.

Charlotte's conduct towards the widow and family of poor Sanders was of a nature not to be long concealed. The whole neighbourhood resounded with applause of that beneficent action. To Mr. Arthur Butterfield was reserved the glory of proving it the result of a principle very opposite to that which the world generally supposed. He very freely told her such liberality was nothing more than selfish gratification. "Examine your own heart, (said he;) say, what were your feelings on that occasion?"

"Such (answered she) as I think the trifling sum I bestowed well employed in purchasing."

"Why, that confession demonstrates the truth of my preposition;—you bestow on the indigent purely to gratify a thirst of pleasure."

"I suppose then you would have one resist the best impulses of the heart out of mere self-denial."

"When, as in this case, they spring from a selfish motive, it is virtue to resist them."

"Do you call that a selfish motive which prompts us to the alleviating the miseries of a fellow-creature?"

"I say that the merit of all the melting hearted tribe is not worth a rush, since you all confess yourselves more than repaid in the luxury of your own feelings."

"Back to thy tub, thou surly Diogenes! (cried she, laughing,) and leave me to taste the pleasures which reason and nature scatter in my way."

Here, with a look of ineffable disdain, he reiterated, "Diogenes!—What a lamentable circumstance, madam, is it, that your sex should always be aiming to soar above their sphere. If you knew how unsuitably the wrinkles of study sit on your brows, you would be inclined to leave it to us, who are better adapted to such pursuits."

"Since, my good friend, (with an ironical air,) you seem to think ignorance the brightest of all feminine accomplishments, I trust you will not deny me all pretensions thereto, as it is possible that a woman may know something of the name and character of Diogenes without breaking into the stores of learned lore."

“True; but, as you find yourselves compelled to receive this sort of information at second hand, it certainly would become you better to let those subjects entirely alone.—Your heads, madam, are not formed for those things.”

“Of all the cants (interrupted she, stealing a little from Sterne) which are canted in this canting world, the cant of pedantry is most insupportable.”

Sometimes he would interrupt her on the most trivial subjects, with refutations borrowed from the Berkleian system, to which he was a zealous convert. He would tell her that external bodies had no real existence, and tease her for half an hour together with arguments drawn from that ideal philosophy, all which she generally cut short by some sprightly repartee, without giving herself the trouble to express the perfect contempt she entertained of his character.—At these kind of rencontres Mrs. Butterfield was frequently present, secretly congratulating herself on the abilities of her son, who, she was certain, was hourly gaining ground in Charlotte’s esteem. Often, with a smile of delight, she would whisper the justice, “Atty will gain the day at last. I am sure it is impossible for any girl to withstand him. I can see she is over head and ears in love with him already.”

C H A P. XVIII.

Unexpected Intelligence.

SUCH was the posture of affairs at the Priory, when Miss Overbury received the pleasing intelligence of her brother's ship being arrived at Spithead, and some days after received from him the following letter, though the contents of it were not perfectly agreeable to her expectations.

“My dear sister,

Though it is now six years since we have seen each other, yet I hope you have not forgot you have a brother. It were to be wished that his circumstances at this time were such as could cause you to remember him with pleasure; but a sailor's life, you know, Charlotte, is exposed to a thousand accidents which landmen are secure from; it may not then, perhaps, surprise you to find me in a condition to solicit your assistance; for, though at sea we have small occasion for l'argent, and certainly care as little about it as any people in the world, yet in port there is no doing without the needful.—The accident by which I have lost my fortune, and am compelled to apply to you, shall hereafter be explained by

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN OVERBURY.”

This epistle (the postscript of which contained his address) Charlotte ran to present to Mrs. Butterfield, exclaiming, at the same time, “Jack, my dear Jack, is arrived!” and then dropt lifeless on the floor. As soon however, as she was recovered, Mrs. Butterfield, having read the letter, returned it to her, saying, “I see no reason you have to be so overjoyed, Miss Overbury, at the captain's return, since he has reduced himself to this plight. Five and twenty thousand pounds, all sunk in wenches, I suppose, at every port he came to!”

This being a suggestion which had never entered the mind of the young lady, she hastily replied, “I cannot suffer myself to suppose he has dissipated it by any improper methods. A too benevolent or unsuspecting disposition, or else unexpected misfortune, has——”

“Be that as it may, (interrupting her,) it is a pretty story, indeed, that he should expect any assistance from you: he ought to take the consequences of his own folly. Let him go to sea again, for I do not know what he should do at home in this case.”

To this charitable strain Charlotte deemed no reply necessary;—immediately quitting the room, she went in search of her guardian, and, having briefly acquainted him with the misfortunes of her brother, desired he would be so kind as to advance her a hundred pounds of her next year's salary.

“A hundred pounds!—Odd zooks, for what?—to fling away upon a spendthrift. I hope you know better, child, than to think of such a thing.”

She doubted not, (she replied,) but that her brother had met with some of those adverse accidents which are too often the fate of the best people; but, by what means soever the misfortune had happened, it was both her duty and inclination to assist him.”

“You young people (resumed the magistrate) are wonderfully generous before you know the value of money: but I shall at this time prevent your imprudence, by assuring you, at once, that I will not advance a single shilling.”

Poor Charlotte, both disappointed and chagrined, now felt herself in a painful dilemma. Her disposition too strongly inclined to liberality to allow her the hoarding any considerable part of her stipend, and at this time her pecuniary store did not exceed ten guineas. Her friend, Eliza, she knew had it not in her power to assist her. After some consideration, she resolved on applying to Mr. Martin, though, for recent observations, he was certainly the last whom she would have preferred on the occasion. However, it was her dernier resource, and she immediately went to his house, where, having made known the purport of her visit, the attorney, after a short pause, told her he was extremely sorry, but really he had not such a sum by him.

“Perhaps you have forty or fifty by you. It is only for a present occasion, and, as my usual stipend will become due in a fortnight, I should then repay it with gratitude.”

Mr. Martin declared he had not ten guineas in the house, and very politely opened the door of his office for her to withdraw.—That instant appeared the attorney’s lady, who, to say truth, had been indulging a little innocent curiosity at the key-hole of the door. With extraordinary civility she pressed her to sit a few minutes in the parlour, where the conversation was so properly managed, that Charlotte readily disclosed the nature of her distress, which indeed the other had contrived to understand before.

“I know (replied Mrs. Martin) that my husband at present is short of cash, but I would not for the world so charming an impulse of benevolence should be checked, and therefore I will myself endeavour to procure for you such a sum of a neighbour.”

“Will you be so obliging, madam?”

“Most willingly. Call on me in about half an hour, and I hope things will be settled to your mind.”

Charlotte was no sooner gone, than Mrs. Martin stated the affair so clearly to her husband, that he was induced to fetch forty guineas from his scrutoire. “If I did not confide in thy prudence, Bet, (said he, on giving them to her,) I would not entrust thee with such a sum. Be sure, you baggage, you order things properly, or——”

“Leave me alone for that. What! I warrant I know how to manage a thoughtless young mad-cap before this time of day.”

At the appointed time, Miss Overbury returned, and, as her thoughts were entirely occupied by the business in hand, her first interrogatory was, whether Mrs. Martin had procured the money.

“I have, with much difficulty, my dear; and, had it been on my own account, I do not think I could have had the courage to have been so importunate as I have been; but, to accommodate Miss Overbury, what is there I would not do?”

“You infinitely oblige me, my dear madam. I will give you a note payable in a fortnight.”

“Pshaw! what signifies a note between friends; yet, as I see your delicate scruples will not be satisfied without that ceremony, I will humour them for once.”

She then wrote a promissory-note, the form of which she had just received from her husband; but, instead of forty, inserted the words fifty guineas, which Charlotte, in the ardour of her impatience, signed without looking over, and then departed with proper acknowledgments.—We will stop here to observe, that, within three weeks after this occurrence, Miss Overbury carried the forty guineas to the donor, who, affecting surprise, produced the note for fifty. “There must have been a mistake, madam; I had only forty.” Mrs. Martin at these words, with most astonishing effrontery, began to express both concern and resentment at the thoughts of being deemed capable of such a conduct,—threw out some reflections on the return she was likely to meet for her friendship, &c. when Charlotte, though convinced of her duplicity, in order to avoid altercation, put the specific sum on the table, flung her note into the fire, and departed, resolving to be more frugal in future, and dreading those pecuniary straits which could put her in the power of avarice and dishonesty.

But to return.—

Charlotte, together with as large a sum as she could raise on the occasion, dispatched the following letter to her brother.

“Your misfortunes, my dear Jack, affect me no otherwise than as they have been the subject of pain to yourself. It is impossible that the loss of fortune can lessen my affection for you. I know not if I am not even gratified by the circumstance, since an opportunity is thereby afforded me of testifying the sincerity of my love. The little pittance I here present is all in my power to do at present; but the time is not far off (would it were now arrived!) when I will convince the best of brothers that I despise a good which he does not share;—in other words, we will divide the fortune bequeathed me by our dear deceased father.—But have you unkindly resolved to leave England without giving me an opportunity of seeing you?—Tell me, my ever beloved brother, where I shall find you, that I may fly on the wings of sisterly affection to enjoy your

company, if but for one half hour. Do not deny me this happiness, which so long has been impatiently desired by

Your affectionate

CHARLOTTE.”

To this letter Miss Overbury, by return of post, received the following reply.

“Pardon me, my dearest sister, if, although I came to England prepared to shew you the true affection of a brother, I yet endeavoured by this trial of your temper to find a proper basis for that kind of esteem which is not found always between persons so nearly related.—The success of my experiment exceeds even my expectation. You are a noble girl, Charlotte, and henceforth I shall glory in my sister. I am happy in telling you that my distress was only feigned, in order to make full trial of your disposition. My fortune is rather augmented than otherwise, and that as well as life itself, if requisite, shall ever be sincerely devoted to my dear Charlotte by

Her affectionate brother,

JOHN OVERBURY.”

Eager to wipe every unfavourable aspersion from the character of her brother, Charlotte hastened to unfold the contents of his letter to Mrs. Butterfield, who, assuming a smile of good humour, cried, “Well, I declare, this is the pleasantest joke;—the matter is just as I thought it. I had too good an opinion of the dear captain to believe his case could be as bad as you concluded.—Charming fellow! send him word this instant that we long to see him at the Priory’

“I think, my dear, (said Mr. Butterfield,) it would look better if I were to do it.”

“No, (returned she hastily;) it would look better if I were to do it. You know, Mr. Butterfield, you are nothing at all at a pen.”

“No, truly; I do not practise it child, for I think you have not permitted me to send a line out of my own house these twenty years.”

“And are you not obliged to me for taking pains that you may not *repose* yourself? Letter-writing requires a great deal of labour and study I assure you.”

“Pardon me, madam, (said Charlotte,) I have always been told that familiar letters should bear nothing of this tincture.”

“Those who told you so did not understand it. I have wrote a cart-load of letters in my time, and I assure you they were always admired for expressing the *confusions* of the mind.”

Charlotte, not to offend by discovering a smile which it was impossible to repress, retired, and Mrs. Butterfield sat down at her writing-desk, where, after having scratched and blotted two sheets and a half of paper, she produced in about a couple of hours this finished epistle.

“Dear Captain,

We are all *contaminated* with the most *deleterious* feelings, at hearing you are safely returned to England. We should not do justice to the great affection we bear you as the *predecessor* of that worthy man your father, did we not desire you to consider Ashton Priory as your home, as long as you shall remain in England. You must be assured we are very desirous of having you constantly at home with us, and therefore hope that some happy she will so *pre-engage* your affections, that the *preceding* part of your life will be spent in a state less *concoctious* to danger than that which is past. I dare say you are not at a loss to *misconstrue* my meaning.—We all join in hoping a few days will bring you to the Priory, and I beg you to believe me, dear Sir,

Your most *obstreperous*

And most *devout* humble servant,

A. BUTTERFIELD.”

“What do you think of my letter?” said the lady to her husband, with a self-applauding smile.

“I dare say, sweeting, it is vastly clever, though I cannot pretend to say I understand much of it.”

“How should you?—You know nothing of fine writing; but did you observe the hint I gave respecting matrimony? Was it not dexterously brought in?”

“To be sure; but I should have thought it time enough for that.”

“You should have thought!—People who know how to express themselves, with propriety, may say fifty things which another durst not touch on, because they do not know how to skim the subject as one may say; for instance, now, if some folks had been to write on such a matter, they would have said downright, I design you shall marry my daughter;—but you see how I have managed it, eh!

“Yes, love, I zee it. But pray, now we are talking of them there things, how does Atty’s affair go on? Does her give him any encouragement?”

“As much as a prudent young woman ought to do. They are ever at cross purposes, and, when he comes near her, she puts on a frown, which you know was the very manner of my shewing my regard to you.”

“True, my dear, and, like a good wife, you continue these tokens of fondness to this present day.”

As it may not be necessary to pursue this matrimonial *tête-à-tête* farther, we will leave the justice and his lady to themselves, only observing that the latter, seeing every thing just in train as she could wish, resolved to have some discourse with her daughter, the substance of which will appear in the following chapter.

E N D O F V O L. I.