

ASHTON PRIORY.

ASHTON PRIORY:

A N O V E L.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

BENEDICTA AND POWIS CASTLE.

VOL. III.

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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M DCC XCII.

ASHTON PRIORY.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

A sudden Resolution.

THERE was, perhaps, no woman in England, of Charlotte's education, accomplishments, and youth, who possessed so small a share of vanity as herself, or to whom the idle distinctions of rank and splendor appeared with less allurements.—The shock which her fortune had sustained, when considered with reference to herself alone, could therefore have no power of destroying her peace of mind; and, when a little time had seconded Mrs. Danby's kind exertions, she would pleasantly descant on the subject of her misfortunes, which, she said, had deprived her of nothing really valuable.—“The convenience of a carriage, blest as I am with health and youth, would be a mere bagatelle, and what thousands, whose age and infirmities require it, do without; and, as for those acquaintances who pay more deference to *éclat* than merit, it is certainly a privilege to be released from them, and I am now pretty sure of seeing none but such as really regard me.”

In this tranquil situation the two ladies had for a considerable time enjoyed a satisfaction which the rapacious spoilers of her fortune could never deduce from their parsimonious acquisition; but even this humble scale of happiness was not to be long allowed them. Mrs. Danby had, during her widowhood, subsisted partly on the interest of a small sum in the funds, and the rest of her very moderate expences had been generously supplied by an annuity constantly granted her by a maiden gentlewoman, who was a distant relation. It is highly probable this good lady intended by will to place her beyond the reach of pecuniary distresses, but unfortunately, at this period, she expired suddenly, and her heirs seizing the whole of her property, Mrs. Danby was consequently deprived of further assistance from that quarter, and her income reduced to the small sum arising from her funded property, which was scarcely considerable enough to preserve her from the pressure of absolute indigence; but, though the misfortunes of her daughter-in-law had sensibly affected her, she bore her own without complaint, and scarcely appeared touched with the loss she had sustained.

Charlotte, on the other hand, considered this event as putting her under a necessity of doing something to procure her own support, rather than meanly share that pittance which was scarcely sufficient for the maintenance of one person. “Is it not enough said she to herself) that I have brought ruin on my poor George, but must I embarrass his mother also?”

Some hints of this kind she had dropped to Mrs. Danby, who always heard them with displeasure. “There is enough (said she) left, thank heaven! for the support of both, my Charlotte. We know how to bound our desires, and consequently may yet be rich, in spite of ill fortune. I will never consent to your leaving me, except I should see a prospect of your enjoying a more eligible situation than it is in my power to procure you.”

Convinced by this that she must either remain a burden on her mother's narrow circumstances, or quit her in a clandestine manner, after much painful reflection she determined on the latter, and therefore, rising one morning very early, she expressed the reasons of her conduct in a short but affectionate billet, which she left for Mrs. Danby on the table, and then, taking the little money she was mistress of, and a small part of her apparel, got into a hackney-coach, and was set down in Pall-mall. From hence she traversed several streets before she could discover a bill of lodgings to her mind. At length she met with rather a retired situation, where, at the window of a cook's shop, she read, 'A second floor to be let,' and, on farther enquiry, found the apartments, consisting of a ready-furnished dining-room and bed-chamber, so much to her satisfaction,—that is, so consonant to the state of her finances, that she immediately agreed for it, intending to subsist entirely by her needle, in which she was an excellent proficient.

During the time of her conversing with the mistress of the house, she observed the woman to eye her with a good deal of attention, who at last took the liberty to ask if she knew any of the name of Overbury. "What is your reason, pray, for that question?" replied she, a little confused. "Only, madam, because I think you particularly like the family."

"Why, did you then ever know that family?"

"Perfectly.—The greatest, and I am sure the happiest, part of my life was spent in their service. I was house-maid to Mr. Overbury at the time he died, and a better master no one ever had. Thousands of tears have I shed for him, and I would give the world to see either of his children."

Charlotte was instantaneously dissolved in tears.

"I think, (said she, after considering the woman more attentively,) I recollect something of your person.—Were not you called Betty?"

"Yes, Betty Holmes was my name; and, if it was not for that I know it cannot be, I should think you, madam, were my sweet Miss Charlotte, who was but a little thing then, though the best-natured child in the world."

Charlotte, however, did not satisfy the good woman at that time, though she could not but think it an instance of good fortune in having her abode with one who professed so great a respect for her family; nor was it long before she fully discovered herself, though under promise of inviolable secrecy, of which she had no cause to repent, for Mrs. Bates thought it impossible to pay her too great an attention and respect; and, as the former kept no servant, willingly rendered her those little assistances without which she must have felt her condition very disagreeable.

The plan which Charlotte had fixed on was that of earning a living by plain work; but she was soon convinced, that mode of subsistence was already in too great a number

of hands for her to expect much encouragement. Mrs. Bates, who much better understood those matters than herself, advised her rather to commence milliner, which, she said, was both a lighter and pleasanter employ, and she doubted not but that, as she was pretty well respected in the neighbourhood, it would be in her power to recommend her to some good customers, adding, "My husband is a careful good creature, and we make shift to live, but that is all: however, if you, my dear young lady, will condescend to accept our humble fare, there will be no necessity for you to work at all, for you should be as welcome to us as our own child." Charlotte acknowledged this benevolence in the manner it deserved, but told her she would only trouble her to do what she could in procuring her business, which the other readily promised, not without a little self-consequence in her air.

Our heroine now entered on a scene of life, altogether new to her, and, like most other young adventurers on the same voyage, flushed with hope, and believing every thing easily practicable which a lively imagination presents,—the idea of being able by her own industry to acquire subsistence, without becoming burdensome to any one, was exceedingly pleasing, though, perhaps, the practical part of the scheme was not quite so easy as the theory; and of this it was not long before she was forced to admit some suspicion; for, however zealous Mrs. Bates might have been in the service of her old master's daughter, the ability for that purpose was not so great as she had flattered herself.

Her first application was to the wife of a neighbouring tallow-chandler, who, having two or three smart daughters, no doubt could be entertained but that this would prove an excellent house of work to our milliner; accordingly, a whole bundle of matters were dispatched, with orders to let them be executed with particular neatness, which, on opening, proved to consist of some yellow gauze caps, (which had already employed the clear-starcher's dexterity more than once,) a quantity of ribbands, and some old white sarsenet, all which it was expected, when washed and made up, should enable the young ladies to rival their neighbours in the splendor of new finery.

Charlotte, having been accustomed to genteel life, and to have her own things made by the most fashionable milliners, would not have been at a loss in trimming a hat or cap with elegance and taste, which was the very reflection that determined her to embrace that mode of employ.—But here was a trial to which she was by no means equal. However, with all the ardour of a mind intent on pleasing, she sat about the task, and the tattered finery was sent home, as might have been expected, not altogether rivalling the whiteness of new-fallen snow.

Within a quarter of an hour afterwards, a female voice was heard on the stairs, bawling most vociferously, that she wondered how her neighbour Bates could suffer her to put such valuable articles in the hands of one who knew nothing at all of her business. Immediately the door opened, and discovered poor Charlotte at the other end of the room, whom Miss Cotton thus accosted. "Here is the money,—but mama says you do not deserve a farthing for it. I wonder, and so does every body, how you could have the assurance to pass yourself on genteel people for a milliner.—Here you have spoiled a cap

which cost half a guinea but a twelvemonth ago, and I am sure it was not so dirty but you might have made it look tolerable, for this is only the third time of its being washed.— You creature, you,—here are my ribbands, and—”

“Take back your money, and be satisfied,” returned Charlotte, hurrying into the next apartment, where, having shut the door, she left the enraged belle to vent her indignation, while she indulged her own feelings in a flood of tears.—Merely to be poor was a circumstance which many had borne, and she as well as they could also bear with fortitude, but to be thus treated by vulgar and illiberal minds was a reflection which stung her sensibility to the quick.

C H A P. XXXIX.

Success not equal always to Abilities and Application.

SO mortifying a stroke to a young beginner was sufficient to have damped a larger share of effrontery than was possessed by Charlotte. The millinery-scheme was now entirely given over, and Mrs. Bates again gave her advice, which was, that, for a person of genteel education, there could be no mode of subsistence so eligible as the keeping a school; adding, that she was certain of being able to procure her twenty or thirty pupils immediately. Her sanguine expectations, somewhat dashed by the late success, Charlotte readily overlooked every thing disagreeable in the plan, and, pursuant to the advice given her, from that period commenced school-mistress.

Certain it is, that no one could be better qualified for the undertaking than herself, as, besides the advantages of a liberal education, she possessed that equanimity of temper, which in this station perhaps is more necessary than in any other. She therefore opened her academy with five pupils, for the rest of Mrs. Bates's twenty were, it seems, ideal ones, or rather what she could have wished than actually procure; and, after three months waste of money, time, and patience, another was added to the number; but, as all of mortal race are not born geniuses, so it unfortunately fell to Charlotte's lot to have but two who had any pretensions to that endowment, the other four were incontrovertibly the greatest dunces that ever tired the patience of a teacher; hence it happened that the parents of these bright luminaries became jealous of the improvements of the others, and roughly upbraided her with negligence in their tuition.

Charlotte simply remarked, in her defence, that all children were not endowed with equal capacities for improvement; but, as neither of these sagacious people would suppose it possible the deficiency laid in their precious offspring, the consequence was that they were taken from under her care with every mark of contempt and low spite.

But this was not the worst consequence which had attended this scheme. For nearly half a year she had devoted her time to this little school, the emoluments of which being by no means sufficient for her support, her finances were become miserably deranged, and her privy purse yielded no more than one solitary half-guinea for the payment of considerable arrears to her landlady and laundress.

In this dilemma she was obliged to have recourse to a pawn-broker. Taking her watch from her side, and dropping a few tears as she held it in her hand, she determined on pledging it, as an article less really necessary than some others. The broker advanced her twenty guineas, which, with a sigh, she dropped into her purse, and hurried out of the shop, without noticing a young man who had observed her with a very particular attention during the time she had been in it. She had not been long at home before she was told that a person desired to speak with her, who proved to be no other than her late servant, Richard Sanders.

The poor young fellow was so much affected on entering the room, that it was a considerable time before he could speak. At length, with tears in his eyes, he entreated her to pardon the liberty he had taken in waiting on her, but that he had seen her in —— street, and had now come to present her with some money, which the Captain, her brother, had left in his hands for her use.

“How can this be, Sanders? You can have no money of my brother’s.—Come, come, (perceiving his confusion,) there is more in it than this.—What money do you mean?”

Sanders here, dropping on his knees, besought her to forgive his presumption in hoping he might have it in his power to tender a trifling service, but confessed that the money he had offered was the Captain’s donation to him, which he declared he had no use for at present; and, since she would accept it no other way, begged at least she would borrow it of him, as it would be safer in her hands than his own.

It was impossible to remain unmoved on such an occasion. She, however, refused the offer in suitable terms, and then, drying her eyes, told him to sit down, for she had much to enquire of him. He replied, that he would wait her commands, but hoped he knew his duty better than to sit in her presence. After indulging her emotion a few minutes, she asked several particulars relating to Mrs. Danby, &c. and found by his replies that he had left that lady’s house soon after herself, and was now in the service of a nobleman, waiting the return of the Captain or of his dear master;—that, on her departure, Mrs. Danby had been inconsolable, and for some time was much indisposed through grief, and, though now better, was incapable of enjoying any amusement or satisfaction;—that letters had been received from Mr. Danby, but his return was not expected yet. “And can you tell (demanded she) whether those letters have been answered yet?”—He believed not. “I am glad of that, (resumed she,) as I would not have his worthy heart distressed by the relation of painful circumstances.”

In fine, Sanders, after she had charged him not to reveal the place of her retreat to Mrs. Danby, departed with a respectful melancholy air, and Charlotte once more took up her pen to write to her mother, as she had often done since her departure from her house, though she carefully avoided the representing any thing as disagreeable in her present situation, as well as giving any hints which might lead to a discovery of where she was, for she was fully resolved, however poignant her own distresses might be, never to augment the pecuniary difficulties of her mother.

C H A P. XL.

Mortifying Rebuffs.

IT has been one of the valuable acquisitions of genius to discover that misfortune and imprudence are synonymous terms, by which, no doubt, these speculative gentry have opened a most consolatory source of reflection to the unfortunate of their own species; but, as Mrs. Bates was only a person of ordinary capacity, this charitable maxim had not entered her head, she therefore loved and pitied our heroine the more for the disappointments her late endeavours had been attended with; and, as her *derniere* resource, advised her to apply for work to a mantua-maker's of eminence in the neighbourhood. Here, indeed, she met with better success.—The expedition with which she managed the needle rendered her a desirable assistant in that branch; the only disagreeable circumstance which attended it was the being frequently obliged to attend at the mantua-maker's house, where one day, as she was sitting, two ladies suddenly rushed into the parlour from a carriage, one of which she immediately recognized to be Miss Grimstone.

Confused at so unwelcome a meeting, she would have hid her emotion by turning to the window; but that lady was too polite to suffer so delightful a rencontre to pass unenjoyed, and therefore, running up to her, exclaimed, "What, Charlotte Overbury! or, rather, Mrs. George Danby! my dear child, where is it possible you can have been concealed so long?—Why, one never meets you in any place of genteel resort, nor even at the theatre, so much. Surely you resolve to bury yourself alive?—But, my dear creature, we are to have the sweetest *fête champêtre* next week, at my Lady E—'s country-seat, imaginable;—shall I tell her ladyship you will be there?"

Charlotte, disdainingly reply, gave her a look, which, if we mistake not, penetrated her ungenerous soul, and then with a majestic air retired; but what use Miss Grimstone intended to make of this interview will best appear by the following incident. Returning one day to her lodgings, Mrs. Bates ran up to her with a countenance of rapture, exclaiming, "O my dear young lady, all will end well at last!—I am sure it will.—Here has been the handsomest gentleman in the world to enquire for you; aye, and in a grand coach too, I assure you."

"I hope, then, you denied my residing here."

"Why, I did at first; but he said he was certain this was the house; and then, seeing my little boy, he slipped five guineas into his hand,—true, as I am alive,—and bid him be a good boy, and he would do more for him another day."

"Well, and then you told him the truth," interrupted Charlotte, in a tone of displeasure.

“Why, to be sure I did, madam; but not before he had assured me that he was recommended to call on you by a friend of your’s; and so I thought it would be wrong to keep him in the dark about it:—as perhaps he may do you a piece of service.”

“But I will not accept of it, and therefore I charge you, whoever he may be, to deny me if ever he calls again.”

The woman on this retired, not perfectly pleased with the reception her good offices had met with, and some few days after Sanders was again announced, who came into the room, bearing a large parcel in his hand, with a letter inscribed to Mrs. George Danby. “O madam, (cried he, before she had time to demand his business,) you are betrayed! Some ill-minded person has discovered you to my master, who has sent me with these presents, as I guess they are; but, pray, good madam, do not touch them, for, if you do, you are ruined.”

Astonished at the incident, she enquired what farther he knew of this business; on which he replied, that, some little time ago, Sir Bevil Grimstone had been with his lord, who, a few hours after, ordered his coach to Bates’s house;—that he, being footman, had attended. “At that time, (pursued Sanders,) I thought nothing of it; but yesterday my lord ordered me into his dressing-room, and asked if I had not once lived in your service, madam. I said I had: on which, putting a guinea into my hand, he bade me be an honest fellow, and he would do well for me. He then told me to carry you this parcel with a letter, adding, I would have you see her yourself, and take notice how she looks:—you understand me, my lad. And now, madam, though I know my bread may depend upon it, I was resolved to tell you all. My lord has a wife in Ireland, and therefore can mean you no good; and I am sure I had rather die than see you, madam, insulted.”

It required no uncommon penetration to discover that Miss Grimstone was at the bottom of the affair. She had, indeed, with a triumphant envy, acquainted the baronet with the circumstances of her meeting with Charlotte; but her feelings so far gratified, she had indulged them no farther, except it was by revealing the same to some ladies of her acquaintance;—the rest was the product of Sir Bevil’s fruitful brain, who, recollecting that he had some nights before lost a large sum to Lord S—, prudently hoped a piece of service might be accepted in lieu of specie. Lord S— was a professed debauchee,—Charlotte a young and friendless beauty, whose present situation presented her as come-at-able. Thus there might be some money saved, (the Baronet concluded,) and no great harm done.

Charlotte, without a moment’s deliberation, resolved on returning the parcel unopened, and Sanders departed with tears and prayers for her safety.—The next day, Mrs. Bates, dressing herself as fine as possible, went out with a servant in rich livery, and did not return till the evening, when she came up stairs, saying, “Well, lady, I have heard and seen the finest things to-day!—You must know I have been at my lord’s, and I can tell you he adores you.”

“And what would you infer from this, Bates?”

“Why, madam, my heart aches to see such a lady as you live in so poor a manner, and for a husband who, if ever he comes back, has it not in his power to make things better. Now my lord is as generous, aye, and as rich too, as a prince, and he says he will settle on you, for life, whatever you choose:—for life, only consider,— and is not that better than —”

“No more, I insist.—You have either mistaken my character or I have your’s.—However, offend me not by the mention of my lord any more.”

Bates was at once put to silence by the solemnity of this reply. She durst say no more, though her heart was full of the subject.—To do her justice, she was a woman of too much simplicity to act the part of a procuress to perfection, nor did her principles really incline to such measures as she here seemed to recommend; but the truth is, she thought penury the greatest evil in nature, particularly when it alighted on those who had been accustomed to better days; consequently, that, to accept a settlement from a rich and generous lover was better than mourning the absence of an indigent husband, who, if he had sense, might improve by the incident; and, finally, that constancy in such cohabitations was not very remote from chastity itself.

Lord S—, on finding his present, which consisted of rich silks, contemptuously returned, had sent for Bates, and, by dint of liberality, brought her over entirely to his interest, especially as he made it clear that compassion for that unfortunate young lady was the motive of his attachment to her; but Charlotte, relying on the rectitude of her own principles, concluded she had nothing farther to apprehend from his lordship, much less from the people of the house where she lived, till one day the following note was brought her by the penny-post.

HONOURED MADAM,

Plots are forming against you. Mrs. Bates is not in your interest; and, if a poor servant may presume to give his opinion, you cannot be safe where you are.

From

Your faithful servant,

RICHARD SANDERS.

On receipt of this letter, as she pensively sat considering what were best to be done, she accidentally cast her eyes on a morning-paper that laid by her, in which was an advertisement for a private governess to a young lady. One would wonder how this mode of life did not present itself to her thoughts before;—it never did. However, she resolved now on applying for the place, and accordingly took coach, and drove to Stepney, but without discovering any thing of her intention to the people of the house where she resided.

The person who had inserted the advertisement had been once a cheesemonger, but now had retired from business, and with a wife and daughter lived in a snug box at the above-named place. On being introduced to the parlour, Charlotte found there a middle-aged man in a round wig and drab-coloured cloaths; his wife about the same age, though rather more gaudily dressed, and a girl of about seventeen, miserably thrumming a jig on the harpsichord, to which her fond parents seemed listening with great delight.

The subject of her visit being properly introduced, Charlotte was asked if she understood French, to which she replied in the affirmative;—"And Italian?"—"Yes." "Music, drawing, geography?"—to all which she answered as before. "It is too much to be true, I doubt, (said the mother.) Let James run, and tell our neighbour Stiles I want to speak to him."

In a few moments Mr. Stiles appeared;—this gentleman was, in plain English, a school-master, though, by a board over his door, he had been pleased to distinguish himself by the appellation of "Professor of the Languages and Mathematics." As to his abilities in the latter, they will remain unquestioned, by us at least, but, in regard to the former, he certainly had so vile a pronunciation, and his diction was so extremely ungrammatical, that it was with difficulty Charlotte could suppress her risibility as she passed her examination, for this it seems was the business on which he had been sent for. However, he was pleased to declare her a perfect mistress of French and Italian. She was now desired to give a specimen of her skill in music, which she did in a most inimitable manner,—not that any of the present company were judges in the science, but it was a mere matter of course, and they were satisfied.

"There is one point more, (said the old lady.) Pray what sort of a hand do you write, young woman?"

"By no means a correct one."

"But you can teach my girl that sort of a scrawling hand which the quality use, no doubt.—Do you know any thing of accompts?"

"I have some little knowledge of the four first rules,—nothing farther."

The father declared that was sufficient for a woman, and all were quite satisfied with the governess's abilities, for the due exertion of which they would give her *five guineas per annum*, which they assured her was a most extravagant sum. The salary was really no object in Charlotte's estimation, who only wished for a peaceable asylum till her husband's or brother's return, and doubtless would have accepted the situation, but madam happening to observe that she supposed she could bring a character of her honesty, Charlotte felt herself hurt at the intimation, and, forgetting the humility necessary to her new condition, replied that her character was sufficiently known.—"But you can recommend us to somebody of reputation for one?"

“None, madam, that I choose to apply to on this occasion.”

“Oh, ho! (cried the professor of languages) that will not hold water I doubt.—I thought these fine accomplishments had not been for nothing.—Child, will not your last keeper give you a character?”

Shocked at this cruel speech, our heroine burst into tears.—“You see, madam, (resumed the pedagogue,) I have touched the galled horse.”

“Yes, yes, (cried the lady,) I find it will not do.—Young woman, you may go about your business, for you will not do for me.—I will have nobody about me but people of reputation.”

Charlotte was about to reply, but the door was opened for her, and she immediately withdrew, though with an emotion hardly conceivable by any except such as have unfortunately experienced the like trials of delicate sensibility.

C H A P. XLI.

News from the Continent.

REFLECTING on the former incident, Charlotte began to suspect that she might have been hurried by a false delicacy to discover rather more hauteur than was suitable to the occasion;—that, although those sort of enquiries had in them something irksome to ingenuous minds, yet, nevertheless, they might possibly be common to such occasions, and therefore, as her present situation afforded nothing favourable to that purpose, she thought it best, instead of looking out for another lodging, to return once more to Mrs. Danby, whose character in life must infallibly facilitate any farther attempts she might make in this way.

As it was not necessary to apprise Mrs. Bates of this intention, she was supposed to have gone to some other lodging, and by that means was happily released from Lord S—’s farther pursuit for the present, much indeed to the concern of her former hostess, who thereby lost a fine opportunity of replenishing her privy purse.

On Charlotte’s unexpected arrival at Mrs. Danby’s, she found that good lady busied in looking over some letters, which instantly dropped from her hand at the sight of her lost daughter, and she fell back lifeless in her chair. In fine, on her recovery, tears of joy, tender reproaches, and maternal caresses, expressed the feelings of her heart. Nor were the transports of Charlotte less ardent or sincere, who with tears related more fully than she had done by letter the reasons which prompted her recent conduct. Mrs. Danby, though tenderly chiding her for the precipitancy of it, could not but admire the magnanimity of her sentiments. She then put a letter into her hand, which she had received the day before from her son, to whom she had given an account of Sir Bevil Grimstone’s procedure, though prudently avoided acquainting him with the step which his wife had taken in consequence of it, well knowing that the pain such a relation must have given him would have been as fruitless as intolerable. In this letter, addressed to his dear Charlotte, he touched on the subject of her misfortunes in the following manner.

“Had this event taken place two years ago, it could not have affected me. I should not then have experienced the feelings which harrow up my soul as often as I reflect that it is for my sake the dearest object of my affections is deprived of those accommodations which she has so just a right to enjoy. It was my temerity which provoked the unhappy incident.—I dwell on the dreadful thought till distraction seizes on my brain. Why were you not born to poverty?—then had there been no torturing remembrance to sting our peace. I could then have loved, and not been criminal.—You did not write to me, Charlotte, when my mother sent her distressing letter.—No, you could not; you must abhor the man whose culpable passion has reduced you to penury. It is natural you should do so, and I deserve it; but, to be hated by you, methinks I cannot bear that; and yet, could the banishing me for ever from your sight,—could the being loaded with ignominy, chains, and, what is worse than death, the certainty of being hated by you, restore you to the fortune our union has deprived you of, I would calmly bear it all; nay, I would

cheerfully embrace the fate I merit. But, O thou most amiable of womankind, is there no soft impulse in your breast which whispers we might yet be happy? Were it possible you could cease to regret the empty satisfactions of wealth and splendor, we might yet be blest beyond the conception of vulgar minds. We shall still enjoy a competency. I trust I shall acquire this; at least, I will deserve it for your sake much more than my own. With your love, my charming wife, I could deem the meanest cottage superior to the splendor of a court; yet, for my Charlotte I would wish for something more. Has she then fortitude enough to think with tenderness on him who is the author of her wrongs?—Something whispers me that she has, and we shall still be blest above the reach of fate. Transporting hope!—Wealth, fame, and splendor, what are the delights you offer, compared to this!

“Many tedious miles have I yet to pass before I can behold my soul’s beloved, but my thoughts are ever near her. O Charlotte, dearer to me, now penniless and stripped of all, than when in the possession of affluence, when shall we meet?—when shall I kiss the tear from thy lovely cheek, and whisper that thy Danby envies not the lot of kings?”

In the pleasing emotions which this affectionate epistle excited, Charlotte for some time forgot all her schemes and distresses.—As it appeared that this faithful husband could not be in England yet a considerable time, the plan of self-maintenance again was revived, and communicated to Mrs. Danby in a manner which demonstrated that no argument should prevail on her to relinquish it. Finding her so determined on the point, Mrs. Danby forebore expostulation, and contented herself with directing her to the most eligible mode of acquiring her favourite independence, and none certainly appeared more desirable, in the present case, than the one she had lately meditated herself. An advertisement was therefore inserted in one of the papers, which brought her proposals from the mistress of a boarding-school of some eminence in the country, which, after due consideration, was accepted; not only as such a retired spot was most congenial to her choice, but from the supposition that a teacher in a boarding-school would be exempt from many little circumstances attending the station of a governess in an opulent family, and which, circumstanced as she was, would perhaps have been somewhat mortifying; for Mrs. Danby rightly observed, that young women of quality are too often encouraged to treat their tutoresses rather as waiting maids, than with the respect due to the character.

C H A P. XLII.

An agreeable Surprise.

THE second separation being accompanied with none of those embarrassing circumstances which had attended the former, Charlotte took leave of Mrs. Danby with frankness and affection, who, on her part, poured the effusions of her soul in pious ejaculations for her welfare and happiness.

Animated by the proof she had recently received of her George's fidelity and affection, the former took her seat in the mail-coach with cheerfulness and alacrity, and in due time arrived safely at the place of destination, which was at a considerable distance from the capital, and about three miles from any market-town. So retired a situation was perfectly agreeable to her taste, and she entered on her new character with ardour and diligence. Perfectly qualified to initiate the younger part of her own sex in the principles of liberal education, it was impossible she could fail of acquitting herself with due approbation in the station she had engaged in, and the natural sweetness of her temper, in a short time, so entirely endeared her to her young pupils, as rendered the business of instruction a far less irksome and laborious task than it is often found to be.— Unfortunately for her, however, Mrs. P— was not calculated to promote the happiness of domestic life.— She had formerly been waiting-woman to a lady of quality, but the abject servility often necessary in that capacity was now exchanged for the other extreme of haughtiness, a quality which, in the middle class of society, more especially, proves the bane of all social satisfaction. Sordid, suspicious, and passionate, she could neither inspire respect nor shew any to others, except where her interest was concerned, and then indeed she could be as submissive as, on other occasions, she was supercilious. Without possessing one requisite qualification for the undertaking, she had opened a boarding-school, and, by the help of a pompous board over her door and some ostentatious advertisements, had contrived to fill her house with pupils, who, instructed to interlard bad English with a few French phrases, dress smartly, and move with affectation, had obtained her a tolerable reputation in that part of the world.

Such an assistant as Charlotte, it might be expected, would have been esteemed by her a valuable acquisition. So in fact she was; yet, as, in spite of all restraint, nature, long repressed, will now and then break forth, so she often discovered such sallies of temper as would have ruffled a mind not already regulated by the lessons of adversity; but, in fact, without aiming at the distinction, Charlotte was insensibly become a practical philosopher, and, galling as she undoubtedly felt many circumstances, she had learned to endure them all with equanimity of soul; and, in fine, comparing the present with the past, to think herself in possession of affluence and felicity, which ought undoubtedly to be reckoned as one of those advantages she had acquired in the school of misfortune.

Somewhat more than ten months had elapsed since her entrance on the office of teacher, when, sitting one day in the midst of a juvenile circle, word was brought that a gentleman below desired to speak with her. She was yet on the landing-place of the

stairs, when, glimpsing the profile of her beloved George Danby, she instantly gave a spring, and bounded into his extended arms. "My George!"—"My heart's dear Charlotte!" were severally uttered in the same extatic moment. They then entered the parlour, where we will leave them to express by mutual tears that joy which was too vast for the scope of language.

On his landing at Dover, Mr. Danby had left the care of his baggage and other concerns to his servant, and, taking post-horses, had set off the same hour for London, eager to surprise his lady by his unexpected appearance; but how great was his disappointment on not finding her with his mother! Here he learned those particulars which overwhelmed him with affliction and chagrin; yet, admiring, as he was compelled to do, that noble fortitude of mind which had prompted her conduct, he drew from it a most flattering presage of future connubial felicity. Without stopping to accept of any refreshments, he immediately repaired, or rather flew, to the school where his dear Charlotte resided, whom he would have that hour taken from so subordinate a situation, but her engagement with Mrs. P— had been for twelve months, and on no account would she be prevailed on to remove before the expiration of that period; for, though she had not always experienced from her the treatment due to so superior a merit, she would not ungenerously occasion a detriment to her school, by quitting it before a successor had been provided. Mr. Danby was therefore, however reluctantly, obliged to acquiesce, and content himself with seeing her as often as possible.

In one of these interviews it was, that a trifling incident discovered to him that extremity which Charlotte, from an unwillingness to give pain, had concealed even from Mrs. Danby. Having occasion to enquire the hour, he found that he had not his watch about him, and desired she would look at hers. The circumstance, trivial as it was, visibly embarrassed her, for she had not yet had an opportunity of redeeming the pledge, and the remembrance of that distressing period forced tears into her eyes. Too plainly he read their meaning, and exclaimed, "Surely this cannot be!—My dear girl cannot have been reduced to such an extremity of wretchedness! It is too plain she has. O Charlotte, (heaving a bitter sigh,) what hast thou suffered on my account!"

"Rather, my dear George, (interrupted she,) what have you yet to suffer on mine, who am destined to deprive you even of the comforts of mediocrity."

"Cruel girl! thus to wound my already-tortured heart with those tacit reflections."

"What have I said! (perceiving she had really distressed him.) George, my dear George, forgive me.—Indeed, I meant not to give you pain."

"Do you not know, my love, (pressing her to his bosom,) that the conscious breast is jealous of reflection? Knowing myself to have been the source of your wrong, I feel those expressions as the bitterest reproof; yet, at this moment, deprived as you are of your paternal fortune, I swear to you, my dearest Charlotte, that you are dearer to my soul than ever. We cannot want the necessaries of life, and these, with the supreme felicity of calling you my own, will, in my estimation, be a treasure superior to any the world can

afford, if destitute of that inestimable bliss. Be but you reconciled to ill fortune, and your George will exult in the opportunity of proving the sincerity and purity of his affection.”

C H A P. XLIII.

Court-Favour awarded to honest Merit.

DURING that period which remained unexpired of Charlotte's engagement with Mrs. P—, Mr. Danby diligently exerted himself to improve the interest he possessed with the great, and so well were his late services accepted by the Minister, that it was thought expedient to reward them with a sinecure of the value of about eight hundred pounds per annum.

Flushed with the happy success of his fidelity and zeal, he repaired to his beloved wife, who, being now at liberty, quitted her employment, and accompanied him to town. "Fortune (cried he, enraptured) still favours us, and now let the avaricious mind vainly seek enjoyment in ill-acquired wealth. Competency and love will secure us the possession of a happiness which the sordid knows not."

It would be in vain to attempt an adequate comprehension of the felicity of this amiable pair on so agreeable an event.—Their first visit was to Mrs. Danby, whose joyful emotions kept her long speechless as she pressed her children alternately to her heaving bosom. "It is enough! (cried she, at length,) My heart, long torn with anguish, is now at peace, and I have nothing left for the remainder of my life but to rejoice in your mutual happiness and virtue. My children, the purity and generosity of your attachment is rewarded, not indeed by what the world calls affluence, but with sufficient to afford you every real comfort, and I doubt not but your good sense and amiable dispositions will teach you its proper value. I need not say that riches are not essentially necessary to solid happiness. You are already convinced of that truth, and the fault can only rest within your own breasts, if you are not as truly happy as it is allowed mankind in the present state to be."

Referring the disposal of his emoluments entirely to the choice of his lady, Mr. Danby wished her to fix on the spot she would approve for their future residence, but she positively declared her resolution never to be separated from Mrs. Danby, who had, she said, an indisputable claim to all her gratitude, duty, and affection. "Alas! my dear Charlotte, (said that lady,) the disparity of our years might be expected to produce a dissimilarity of tastes not altogether favourable to social satisfaction. Enjoy, therefore, the pleasures suitable to your youth and condition, and leave me to those more serious pursuits which become my age.—Why should I be a check on your innocent enjoyments?"

"I should blush (replied Charlotte) to own a propensity which my amiable mother could not approve in herself. When our fortunes were more humble than at present, we found no dissimilarity of taste to prevent our mutual happiness; the hours we then passed together will ever yield me an agreeable reflection, and do you think so meanly of me as to suppose an unexpected emancipation from adversity will alter me so much for the worse, as to render me incapable of tasting the highest pleasure in your society."

At length it was determined that Mrs. Danby's small, though neat and convenient, mansion at Hackney should be the future residence of all three, and a happier trio surely the whole metropolis could not boast. Their domestic establishment, though not on an expensive plan, was yet settled with a proper regard to elegance and social comfort. Slaves to no passions, unambitious of splendor and ostentatious distinctions, the income they enjoyed was abundantly adequate to every purpose of their hearts, and perfect content appeared in every countenance within the happy dwelling. Mr. Danby, though possessed of talents sufficient to have rendered him a very popular character, was yet endowed with every qualification requisite to the promoting domestic felicity. Amiable in his temper, ever serene and cheerful, with a mind enlarged by liberal study and enriched by the knowledge of mankind, he was as eminently calculated to prove the polite and tender husband, the agreeable and intelligent companion, as he ever had been a most attentive and affectionate son.

Richard Sanders, having quitted his late service, and accidentally hearing of the return of Mr. Danby, availed himself of the opportunity of waiting again on his benefactress. His application was readily accepted, and from him she learned that Lord S—, foiled in his attempts by her removal from Bates's, had given over all thoughts of pursuit, till Sir Bevil Grimstone was so kind as to remind him that it was probable the lady was with her husband's mother. Hither, therefore, his search was directed; but, by that time, she had gone into the country, where, choosing to assume a different name, the Baronet's civil intentions for once were effectually disappointed.

C H A P. XLIV.

Law and Equity a little at Variance.

SEVERAL months having passed in the most agreeable manner imaginable, Charlotte was led to expect an augmentation of her happiness by the presence of her brother, whose ship, she was informed, laid at Spithead, and shortly after the Captain arrived in town.

He was not altogether a stranger to the circumstances which had taken place respecting his sister in his absence, but he was far from considering the conduct of the guardians with the same passive resignation as herself; and though, for obvious reasons, Mr. Danby had not stirred in the business, the time was now come when the grounds of that transaction were to undergo a more exact scrutiny than hitherto had been the case.

Mr. Overbury's death having happened before either of his children had properly attained the years of discretion, the contents of the will had been taken on trust, in full reliance on the judgment and integrity of those gentlemen which had been nominated as the trustees thereof. Captain Overbury's first business was therefore to examine his father's testament, by which, according to the opinion of the best lawyers, it appeared that the forfeiture of Charlotte's fortune could only be for the term of her natural life, and that, on her decease, it must return to her immediate heirs, or, in default of issue, to the heirs of her brother. The design of the good old gentleman, by this, was unquestionably no more than to prevent the idle expenditure of his daughter's substance, should she unfortunately marry a spendthrift to the detriment of her posterity, his opinion of the guardians he had chosen being such as to leave him no shadow of doubt but that they would readily accede to her choice of a virtuous young man, abstracted from pecuniary considerations. This idea the preamble to the said clause fully expressed.—Mr. Butterfield's character led him to expect every paternal feeling for his child, and Sir Bevil he supposed to be apprised of his partiality to young Danby, for such it will appear he certainly entertained. In fact, the Baronet understood it perfectly well, and it was the very reason which induced him to consider that young gentleman with so restless a jealousy from the time of Charlotte's meeting him at the masquerade.

The case then being as above recited, Captain Overbury deemed it expedient to call a meeting of the guardians, supposing, from his own feelings, that men of honest principles would always distinguish between the letter and the spirit of legal right, and, as he had it in his power fully to elucidate his father's meaning, he could have no great doubts of prevailing on them to forego the claim. On the appointed day, the gentlemen, who, in complying, had probably paid only a respect to appearances, being met, Captain Overbury, in a sensible and manly strain of discourse, set before them the motives of his father's conduct, respecting the clause relative to his sister, in so plain and rational a manner, as must have prevailed over every feeling but that of avarice; and, as an undeniable proof of his arguments, produced a letter which his father had written to him in his last illness, and but a few days before his decease, in which his sentiments on this subject were expressed in the following words.

“As to your sister, my son, I have amply provided for her, and taken every precaution which a tender father could devise for the security of her future welfare. The persons that I have nominated in my will her guardians are men of integrity and property, consequently every consideration may be expected from them which is due to the child of a departed friend; yet, remember, it is yourself that I look on as the real guardian of her youth, peace, and honour. In this confidence, I will express a wish with which you only ought to be explicitly entrusted. In respect of marriage, I had rather she were happy than rich. Do not then direct her views merely to worldly considerations, but, should she place her affections on a man of real merit, though he may not possess a fortune equal to her own, let her not be deterred from making him her husband. In this description I confess I have one in my eye; the son of my respected friend Mr. Danby is the person I mean. From what I can discover of his disposition at present, he will prove the very husband I could wish for my dear Charlotte. Her fortune will be enough for both. Yet, even here, I would not have her inclinations biassed. Be careful therefore, and conceal my sentiments on the point. Sir Bevil Grimstone knows my attachment to the family, and that will be sufficient. Forget not, my dear son, that your sister, being several years younger than yourself, will naturally look to you for a protector and a friend.—I charge you, let her not seek in vain.”

“And now, gentlemen, (continued the Captain,) what is your opinion of this letter?”

“We have nothing to do with it, my dear Sir, (replied the Baronet with great coolness;) it is our business to go by the letter of the will alone.”

“Very well.—You have informed yourself though, I suppose, Sir Bevil, that your right to this money is only temporary, and that, in case of my sister’s death, it reverts to her heirs.”

This was a point which Sir Bevil had not indeed considered, nor would allow. However, as the gentlemen of the law, engaged by the different parties, were also present, after a short consultation, they unanimously gave their opinion, that the lady’s heirs would have a clear right to demand payment of the principle, though, as to the interest, during the intervening time, it might be a point of litigation. This decision could make no alteration in the sentiments of the Baronet, who only wanted a temporary supply, and, as it was not probable he should ever be called to account himself, he cared very little how his heirs and those of Mrs. George Danby should settle the affair hereafter.

“You then insist, Sir Bevil, on exercising this temporary right?”

“Certainly, my dear Sir.”

“And what says Mr. Butterfield?”

“All the same as Sir Bevil do, I zay, be it what it will.”

Here the company burst into a laugh, and one of the lawyers, smoking his character, had a strong propensity to roast the country-magistrate, as it is sometimes termed; but the Captain, resuming the subject, said, “That, since they were determined to adhere to the letter of the law, it was his duty to do the same; therefore, as the will gave them simply a right to the five and twenty thousand pounds bequeathed his sister, the interest of that sum, which, during her minority, had been accumulating in their hands, must be accounted for and refunded.” Sir Bevil, having been the principal cashier, did not much relish the intimation; for, to say truth, except the allowances which he had from time to time made to his ward, the remainder of the interest had annually circulated at the gaming-table, and, as this amounted to a very considerable sum, the twelve thousand five hundred pounds which came to his share would be sensibly diminished when accounts came to be duly stated. However, he considered that five thousand pounds would, to a man in his circumstances, be better than nothing.—As there was no more to be said on the subject, the conference broke up, the Baronet very politely expressing the pleasure he should feel in seeing Captain Overbury at his house; for, so long had he been accustomed to the routine of complimentary phrases, that they slipped insensibly from his lips, even when his heart was actually burning with rancour, as we suppose might have been the case on the present occasion.

C H A P. XLV.

The Case altered.

A Few days after the incident recorded in the former chapter, the friendly circle at Hackney were agreeably surprised by the receipt of a packet from Mr. Butterfield, containing a full and formal resignation of all right whatever to any part of Mrs. George Danby's fortune, together with a letter to the following purport.

To Captain Overbury.

DEAR CAPTAIN,

I cannot tell what bewitched me to have any thing to do along with Sir Bevil Grimstone, in taking your sister's fortune from her, 'twas a job I never thought kindly of, though my wife, that's dead and gone, would have it so;—but a word to the wise is enough, as the saying is. Howsomdever, this is to let you know, that I give up all title and claim to the matter, as you will see by the deed I herewith send, and which I got drawn up by a turney, and, if you don't think it sufficient, I will put my name to any other you may think better.—So, wishing the young couple a world of happiness, and yourself along with them, I rest

Your humble servant at command,

PHILIP BUTTERFIELD.

“And now, my dear sister, (said the Captain,) I congratulate you on the recovery of at least sixteen thousand pounds of your fortune; for I shall take care that Sir Bevil pays the arrears of interest in his hands, which, together with this moiety, will make it full the sum I have mentioned.”

“And I congratulate this gentleman, (replied she, looking at her husband,) on the acquisition which my brother's generous activity puts him in possession of.”

“Indeed, my dear Charlotte, (answered Mr. Danby,) I am not capable of receiving any additional happiness by the circumstance, except as it affords you pleasure, and gives me an opportunity of discovering a new instance of the Captain's friendship.”

“Very well, (replied she pleasantly,) you soaring minds may see those things with as much contempt as you please, as long as you leave us weak women to enjoy them in our way. I confess honestly, that, though I was perfectly happy before, I shall think the addition of these thousands no incumbrance;—but I am excessively puzzled though to account for the Justice's being in so relenting a mood.”

Now, as we think it must appear equally inscrutable to the reader, it is our place to account for an event, which, according to the common course of things, was scarcely to have been expected; and, in order to this, it is necessary for us to take a review of the Butterfield family once more.

Mrs. Butterfield, as the above letter has intimated, was no more. She had paid the debt of nature some time after the restoration of her son to his native dwelling, not so much to the affliction of any one, but that a little time was sufficient to conquer all the sorrow which might have been excited by the event. The Justice in particular, though not a man of letters, was observed to conduct himself on the occasion with true philosophic composure, and, feeling no propensity to enter the holy state of marriage a second time, began to turn his thoughts to the promoting of peace and unity in the domestic circle. Indeed, this scene presently began to assume a very different aspect;—no noisy brawls, no contests for pre-eminence, no selfish eulogiums, disturbed the quiet of his meals, or the repose of his nightly hours. He was at last permitted to be the master of his own house, and saw people about him ready to consult his satisfaction. Sally, whom Mr. Arthur had married, was a most amiable young person.—Her disposition was naturally placid and obliging; besides which, the good understanding she was mistress of pointed out to her the propriety of observing a submissive and dutiful behaviour towards the parents of her husband, for she had always treated Mrs. Butterfield with the highest respect, though her situation, during the life of that lady, was far from being a pleasant one.

The Justice, perceiving so agreeable an alteration in family-matters, seemed to have entered on a new state of existence. The natural goodness of his heart, no longer restrained, was apparent on many occasions; and, not only in his own family was he now loved and revered, but sincerely respected by all his tenantry, who, instead of the rigid landlord, found him to be their common protector and friend.

Mr. Arthur had more of his mother than father in his disposition; nevertheless, as he had married purely from inclination, and, happily for himself, a woman of good sense and prudence, there was a strong probability that the bias of his temper would in time be duly rectified. Sally, whom fortune had placed below the reach of liberal acquirements, was inclined to pay a profound deference to her husband's intellectual abilities, and really to esteem him the cleverest man of the age, as the preference he had given her to ladies of birth and fortune was a perpetual subject for her gratitude. From these circumstances we gather, that the choosing this young woman for his wife was both the best and wisest thing he ever did in his life, as certainly no other could have been so suitable to one of his character. Respect, affection, and submission, then being, on the one side, exerted in their fullest latitude, it was almost impossible that condescension and tenderness should not exist on the other.—Upon the whole, they were certainly as happy a couple as might at any time be found amongst that order of beings, who, being strangers to sentimental refinement, have no idea that happiness can be improved thereby.

Mrs. Arthur Butterfield's œconomical talents were no ways inferior to those of her late mother-in-law, though they were certainly exerted with less fuss and self-

sufficiency.—Every thing in the domestic line was managed with neatness, regularity, concord, and that degree of elegance which suited the rank of the family. The meanness of her original was totally overlooked in the respect which her equitable and becoming behaviour exacted from all the servants, and, through the propriety of her conduct, she was properly noticed by all the friends and acquaintance of the family. But that, which principally promoted those happy effects, was a resolution which we mention to her eternal honour,—of entirely discarding Mrs. Martin from the post she had so long held of manager, tale-bearer, and toad-eater, to the Butterfield family; by which prudent step, unanimity was secured at home, and justice, benevolence, and peace, attended the environs of the Priory. Much about the same time, and, perhaps, influenced by the example, Mr. Butterfield also found out that he could do without the services of a sordid, pitiful, pettyfogging attorney. Both the husband and wife were, therefore, much lowered in their consequence; but, in proportion as that took place, the happiness of the whole village gradually augmented.

But now, hoping the kind reader will pardon the digression, (if such it might be called,) we have to observe that Mrs. Arthur Butterfield, presuming on that high degree of favour in which she stood with the Justice, had endeavoured to prevail on him to abate something of the resolution he had taken with respect to Mrs. George Danby's fortune. "She could not bear (she said) that her own poverty and meanness should be atoned by any part of her dear young lady's property; and that, rather than this should be the case, she would be degraded to the footing of the lowest domestic of the family."—This topic she had often introduced whenever she saw her father-in-law in a humour to bear it, and, had it depended only on himself, she had certainly carried her point long before; but a step of this nature was not to be taken without consulting his son, and that young gentleman had not yet sufficiently shaken off the sordid rust as to be expected cordially to consent to the renouncing twelve or thirteen thousand pounds.—In fine, he peremptorily charged her to mention the subject no more, if she paid any regard to his displeasure:—but Mr. Butterfield's late journey to town had now thrown some new lights on the affair.

Arthur, how much soever he affected to regard money-matters with philosophical disdain, yet certainly thought the *having* and *holding*, though no subject of Longinus, had nevertheless in them something of the true sublime. But, as it now appeared this *having* and *holding* could only be for the term of Mrs. George Danby's life, and, from something which had dropped from Captain Overbury during the conference, might also be productive of a Chancery-suit, the case was materially altered. In short, Mr. Arthur at length consented that his father should make a formal renunciation of all claim in the affair, and the old gentleman with real satisfaction immediately dispatched the packet mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

C H A P. XLVI.

Contains various Matter in a little Paper.

ALTHOUGH the manner of life which Mr. Danby and his lady enjoyed with their mother at Hackney was such as might have excited the envy of those in far more elevated stations, yet the Captain did not think it attended with that degree of éclat which their merit deserved.

Looking over a paper one day, he saw the elegant villa of a certain baronet, lately deceased, advertised to be sold. The situation he knew was delightful, and not more than twenty miles from town, and the building in that style of architecture which unites simplicity, elegance, and convenience. The estate around it was one of the compactest in England, and contained an extensive park, well stocked with deer, on the borders of a fine river, and bounded on either side with wood and pasturage. The gardens were laid out in the most exquisite taste, and the whole calculated to give no imperfect idea of Elysium.

This agreeable purchase Captain Overbury made his own, or rather Mr. Danby's, to whom he soon after presented it; but, in the mean time, the transaction was conducted with entire secrecy, till the villa was completely furnished, and every convenience added which taste or usefulness could point out. Then, with a heart glowing with every fraternal and beneficent sensation, he one morning took his sister and her amiable husband, as on an airing, to the charming spot. Having examined every particular, they were both justly warm in their admiration of the whole, and Charlotte declared she thought it a terrestrial paradise.

“And such (cried the Captain, in an animated voice,) may it prove to you both, for it is your own!—Mr. Danby, the title-deeds are drawn up in your name: accept it as a proof of my regard. Charlotte, I purpose being your guest when in England, provided you are not too much in a hurry in filling this little mansion.”

This sly inuendo he had purposely made use of, in order to prevent that grateful flow of soul which he saw impending on her lips. As for Mr. Danby, his emotion had hitherto kept him in profound silence, and the Captain, seeing his generous distress, abruptly mounted his horse, and retired to London, leaving the happy pair for some time to recover their usual equilibrium of tranquil felicity.

Charlotte, when somewhat recovered from her pleasing surprize, immediately proposed to Mrs. Danby the accepting apartments in the villa, which the Captain's generous affection had placed her in possession of; but this she now earnestly declined, alledging, that the style of life, in which they were now indispensibly engaged, would be less suitable to her years and inclination than her little retirement at Hackney. “To be an occasional witness of my children's happiness, (added she,) will give energy to my

meditations when absent from them, and render my eve of life blest beyond what my most sanguine wishes could have aspired to.”

Respectfully acquiescing in her choice, Mr. and Mrs. Danby mutually agreed to settle on their beloved mother two hundred pounds per annum for her life, which, together with the income she already possessed, they knew would enable her to command every thing which she would really deem necessary to the comfort of life; and splendor, she had often said, would be considered by her rather as a burdensome incumbrance than actual enjoyment.

In the amiable beneficence of his heart, Captain Overbury had not overlooked Richard Sanders, the actual preserver of his sister’s happiness. Perceiving that he entertained a penchant for a young woman of virtue and reputation, he determined on facilitating the union, and therefore, possessing a small farm in Kent, he immediately stocked it; repaired a comfortable house which stood on the premises, in which, as soon as they were married, he placed the young couple, and then gave them a lease of the whole for life, Mr. Danby presenting them with a sum of money to begin with, and Charlotte undertaking to furnish the house, together with making suitable presents to the bride.

Thus, by indulging the nobler feelings of the soul, these worthy persons found the true secret of happiness, and enjoyed that heartfelt bliss which thousands seek in vain.

In due time, Charlotte became the mother of a lovely boy, who, at the Captain’s desire, was christened John Overbury.—Some little time having passed since this joyful event, Mr. and Mrs. Danby were sitting in the parlour, she at work, and he reading to her a new publication, when Captain Overbury returned from a short visit to the metropolis. After a desultory conversation of a few minutes, he drew a paper from his pocket, and, addressing Mr. Danby, said, “I cannot feel myself completely happy, my dear George, except you condescend to be the guardian of this deed, which will henceforth relieve my mind of every possible anxiety.”

“What is it?” cried Charlotte, curiously peeping at the margin.

“Not a marriage-settlement, (replied he, laughing;) you have had your day.”

“Ah! I guess it now. What melancholy whim is this, brother. I should rather have expected it had been a jointure to some happy lady.”

“I have done here that which gives me more satisfaction, sister. Nay, never look so gravely. A man is surely not the nearer death because he makes his will?”

Charlotte’s face was bathed in tears. She was incapable of enduring so painful a subject, and therefore immediately withdrew.—“Poor girl! (resumed the Captain, smiling,) her affectionate heart is full. But you, brother, must give me leave to acquaint you with the contents of this instrument, which I have had properly attested; after which,

you will be kind enough to take it into your care.” He then read the will, which contained a bequest of the whole of his estates, real and personal, to Mr. and Mrs. Danby for their several lives, and afterwards to their posterity.

“This must not be, (cried Mr. Danby earnestly.) I trust it shall not be. The intention alone, my worthy friend, is sufficient to render me more grateful than I can express; but you must marry, my dear Overbury, and experience, as I doubt not but you will, the happiness which, in so perfect a degree you have procured me.”

“Never, never! (with a gentle sigh,) once indeed I thought on the subject with pleasure; but persons of my disposition, George, can love but once with fervour.—I will never marry.”

“Not in your present frame of mind;—but this disgust to the sex is only a temporary consequence of the treatment you unfortunately met with, and must wear off with time. At least, I hope it will; for, as there are many ladies worthy of your regard, so I must give it as my opinion, that, in resolving on celibacy, you would be wanting to society and yourself.”

“That resolution, George, can only be culpable when originating in mercenary and selfish motives. It is possible to serve the interests of society in a single state.—As to my own part, I shall, by participating in your’s and my sister’s happiness, enjoy a far more exalted share of it than I should now be capable of, were I to engage in the marriage-state.”

“I can readily believe you susceptible of every satisfaction arising from the principles of philanthropy and benevolence; yet, as you are but a young man, it may——”

“Mention it no more! (interrupted the Captain eagerly.) My resolution is past, which nothing can possibly shake.—Let us go in quest of Charlotte.”

C H A P. XLVII.

An old Acquaintance discovered.

BUSINESS of a particular nature happening to demand Captain Overbury's presence in the City, he was hastily passing through a certain alley, when a young woman, dressed rather in the shabby-genteel style, stepped out of a baker's shop, the mistress of which instantly called her back, telling her that the sixpence she had just paid was a counterfeit. The young woman, with the air of one, who, by a long acquaintance with distress, had lost the acute sensibility of it, returned, laid down the bread on the counter, wiped off an intruding tear, and went her way. "I am not very hungry," said she, as she went out; but her meagre countenance, together with a profound sigh which she uttered, contradicted the assertion.

The voice struck the Captain as that of one he had known. It was, in short, Eliza's—that Eliza, whose idea was still precious to his soul. He followed her steps, and saw her enter a mean-looking habitation, and, as she turned to shut the door, had a clearer glance of that person which often he had beheld with rapture. Convinced of not being in a mistake, he immediately repaired to his sister, and acquainted her with the incident.

"She is distressed, Charlotte, I fear, (said he,) exquisitely so. I need not intimate, that, on this occasion, you would be a more proper assistant than myself."

Charlotte needed no stimulative to sympathy. Her heart already bled at the imagination of her friend's sufferings. In a word, she took a direction to the spot, and immediately drove to town. On enquiring for Mrs. Wilmot, she was shewn to a three-pair-of-stairs room, where, over a few dying embers, sat the pale emaciated shadow (for it was indeed but little more) of the once lovely and blooming Eliza. Her dress, the poor remains of former finery, was reduced to tatters, and her whole figure exhibited the extremity of wretchedness.

At a scene of distress so much beyond any idea she had been able to form of it, Mrs. Danby stood for some time at the door, incapable of speaking. Eliza, at length, suddenly turning her head, seemed to gaze at her with piercing attention, but without discovering any great emotion; then, moving towards her, said, in a languid voice, "I did not expect to see you here, Charlotte." Unable to utter her feelings, she could only reply by a flood of tears.

"Had I known (resumed Mrs. Wilmot, in a solemn and melancholy accent) of your intentions, I would have spared you the pain of this interview.—Do not grieve, my once dear Charlotte; I think I do not now myself.—But your presence has a little discomposed me."

"O my Eliza! (cried she, embracing her,) could I have expected to meet you thus?"

“Why thus, my dear? Can I have merited a better fate?—But you should not be so much affected. I deserve not pity from you nor any one,—except——”

Charlotte, concluding she meant her husband, said, “And where is that vil—?—What would I say!—Where is your husband, Eliza?”

“Do not name that sacred relation, (bursting at last into tears.) I would, if possible, forget it.—No husband, but the most unfeeling wretch that ever disgraced the human form.—I know not where he is.”

“No matter.—You must quit this place, and go with me to more comfortable accommodations.”

“No, never!—The world has now forgot me; at least, I would believe so, and it would be ill policy to force the recollection of my errors on its memory. You too are married:—are you happy, Charlotte? Yes, I see you are, and long, very long, may you remain so. You must not cloud the sunshine of your breast by retaining an anxiety on my account. This apartment shocks you, but it is familiar to me, and it will be well enough to die in, for I expect not to live, and surely cannot wish it.”

Charlotte had been for some moments buried in thought; at length she said, “I have one favour to ask of you, Eliza,—that you will promise, if I call on you to-morrow at this time, you will not be withdrawn, or take any steps to avoid another interview.”

“Whither should I go? (returned she sighing.) The spirit of adventure is long extinct. I shall assuredly remain here, yet I could wish you to visit this humble dwelling no more. It is not fit you should, neither can you, nor any human being, be of real service to me now.”

Too much affected to bid a ceremonious adieu, Charlotte could only press the emaciated hand of Mrs. Wilmot to her bosom when she withdrew; and, instantly hurrying into her carriage, gave orders to drive with speed to Hackney, where, at Mrs. Danby’s house, the Captain and her husband waited her arrival. The latter, meeting her in the lobby, enquired the particulars of Mrs. Wilmot’s unfortunate case, to the relation of which she added, “I cannot be easy, George, except this poor sufferer be placed where she may have the advantage of my own personal attendance, for she is extremely ill.”

“Indulge the amiable impulses of your heart, my Charlotte, in any mode you think expedient. Suppose we go instantly, and take Mrs. Wilmot to our house.”

“I fear (returned she) that might not be quite eligible. My brother has great sensibility.”

“A proper hint, my love. What if we were then to place her with my mother, who, I am certain, would cheerfully undertake the care of her. You might see her as often as you wish, and also supply her pecuniary exigencies.”

“Nothing in the world could be better, George.”

The Captain here broke in on their discourse, and they immediately acquainted him with the little plan their benevolence had suggested. “You have sensibly obliged me, (replied he;) that unfortunate woman shall find a friend in me; but, as some regard must be paid to appearances, as well as to the delicacy of Eliza herself, it would not become me to appear in the business; but you, sister, will oblige me by placing whatever expences you may find necessary for her present assistance and future support to my account.”

Mrs. Danby senior hesitated not a moment to second the measures so generously adopted, and it was finally agreed that Charlotte, on the morrow, should convey Mrs. Wilmot to Hackney. Eliza, for some time, rejected the kind proposal of her friend, declaring that her present accommodations were better than she merited, and, dreading a rencontre with any one who had formerly known her.—At length, however, Charlotte prevailed, and had the satisfaction of seeing her in Mrs. Danby’s comfortable and friendly habitation.

C H A P. XLVIII.

Fatal Catastrophe.

WHEN the carriage stopped at Mrs. Danby's, Charlotte, tenderly taking Mrs. Wilmot by the hand, presented her to that good lady, who received her with maternal cordiality; but it was too much for the feeble frame of Eliza to support.—She fainted on the bosom of her friend.

“Why this exalted kindness? (cried she, when recovered,) to one so little deserving it. I feel I cannot repay it even with due acknowledgment; and you, my kind Charlotte, should have left me to finish a wretched existence where I was, rather than have suffered me to become, as I fear I shall, a painful burden on this generous lady.”

“Be comforted, my dear Mrs. Wilmot, (said Mrs. Danby.) You shall experience here every regard your misfortunes ought to excite, for I am prepared, by some acquaintance with the cruel deception put on you, to love you as my child. Look on me henceforth as your mother.”

“Tender goodness!” exclaimed Eliza: but she could say no more, and was with difficulty prevented from fainting a second time.

After this, Charlotte constantly saw her every day, but with the painful conviction that her health, as well as peace of mind, was gone for ever. Neither change of air, nor the more than maternal assiduities of Mrs. Danby, could procure any rational expectation of her life. A constant hectic wasted the vital springs, and the physician which they had called in, declared there was not the least probability of her surviving long. She was, however, perfectly serene, and seemed to consider herself as having done with mortal things. In this situation, Charlotte one day asked her, if she would not wish her father to be informed of her condition, for she had already told her of her mother's death, to which Mrs. Wilmot replied,

“Why should I trouble my family any more? Their displeasure is too deeply rooted to be removed, and a farther proof of it would discompose me more than I could wish any earthly consideration should do. I have more than once solicited my parents' forgiveness, and, could it then have been obtained, it had been a cordial to a half-broken heart, which now is incapable of the sensation of joy from that or any other incident. I charge you, my dear friend, make no application on my behalf, but leave me to look forward with satisfaction to that state, where a defect of worldly prudence shall not be considered, I trust, as unpardonable.”

“Have you never made notes of your life for these last unhappy years? (said Charlotte.) Methinks I could wish to be acquainted with the sad particulars of my Eliza's sufferings.”

“I have, my dear Charlotte, and, while I have strength will arrange them for your perusal. They will give you pain, I fear, but they may perhaps serve to convince you that the errors of my youth have not been altogether unexpiated.”

From one of these melancholy visits Charlotte was, on an evening, returned, when she was informed that Captain Overbury was gone to town on a message from Sir Bevil Grimstone, which had arrived soon after she had set out for Hackney. As Mr. Danby and she were indulging their speculations as to the nature of the business, the Captain returned with an air of greater pensiveness than they had ever seen him discover.

“What is the matter, brother? (said Charlotte.) Has Sir Bevil been forming new plots against our tranquillity?”

“He will trouble you no more, sister.—Sir Bevil Grimstone is no longer.”

“On the message (pursued he) which I this morning received, I immediately sat out with the servant, who, on the way, informed me that his master, having had a remarkable run of ill luck at play, on the preceding evening, had been as usual out of temper, and in his heat let fall some reflections on one of the party, not of the most honourable kind. In consequence of which, a challenge was immediately given, and accepted by the Baronet, who went out early this morning, unknown to his sister, and soon after was brought home mortally wounded. Convinced himself that dissolution was at hand, the first words he uttered to his sister were, “Send for Captain Overbury.”

“On my arrival, (continued the Captain,) I was instantly shewn up stairs, where Sir Bevil laid, a shocking spectacle indeed!—He turned his eyes wildly on me, and, grasping my hand as I drew near the bed, said, “That I should send for you, Sir, on this occasion, no doubt appears very extraordinary; but I know of no one whose integrity I could so well confide in, or from whose generosity I had so much to expect. I have always honoured your character, though never solicitous of imitating it.”

“What would you wish of me, Sir Bevil? (replied I.) Be explicit, and assure yourself I am ready to serve you.”

“That is just what I expected.—You can forgive my sordid meanness then; but is it possible your sister can?”

“I will answer for her, that she can as readily forgive as I do, since you desire it.”

“That is great!—It is noble! Oh! you compel me to feel my own mortifying littleness.—But I must be brief. Life flows apace, and leaves me—to what?—Annihilation. Yes, I will hope so.”

Here he gave a dreadful groan, and paused some minutes. I made no answer, concluding, that, as no time seemed left for repentance, it would be wrong to awaken the horrors of despair. At length he resumed,

“I have sent for you, Captain Overbury, to disclose the sad state of my affairs. I have long known myself insolvent, and this event saves me only the trouble of finishing my own wretched existence. I empower you before these witnesses to make sale of all my effects, and to do justice as far as they will allow.—Will you undertake the affair?”

“I will, Sir Bevil.”

“That is kind, and may you be for ever blest! My sister’s fortune is sunk in mine, but she can have little cause to complain. There is something which afflicts me much more,—your sister’s injuries,—that part of her portion, which, in spite of the upbraidings of my own mind, in defiance of every sacred obligation to her father, I unjustly seized; for well,—yes, I confess it all,—well I knew the secret wishes of that good man; but my former profusion was the parent of avarice, and this, or rather the embarrassments in which I was involved, prompted the several actions of meanness which I have committed respecting that dear orphan, Charlotte.—Let her be repaid, I conjure you, Sir, as far as possible.”

“Concern not yourself on this point, Sir Bevil. My sister is rich enough. I will dispose of every thing with justice.”

Here the unhappy man appeared in great agony. Cold sweat bedewed his face, and every feature seemed writhed with excruciating torture. He grasped my hand as if he would implore help. “Save me!” exclaimed he, with a dreadful groan, and throwing his eyes distractedly about the room: “I will not die!—Infernal furies wait me!”——I drew the curtains close round the bed, and waited the event in awful silence. In a low and muffled voice, he uttered for some minutes the most shocking imprecations,—then with a furious groan expired.”

Mr. and Mrs. Danby were too much affected by this melancholy relation to speak, and the Captain for some time indulged his own feelings in silence. At length, he resumed, “Finding all was over, I enquired for Miss Grimstone, and was shewn into a parlour where she sat, resembling the picture of despair. She pointed to a chair. I sat down, and, after a little pause, told her, I was now come to give her every assurance of friendship and protection which her situation demanded, or it should be in my power to afford. Her eyes thanked me, but she could not reply otherwise than by a bitter flood of tears.—I then left her to give the necessary orders for the disposal of the corpse, and, having locked every apartment where I supposed any valuables were contained, I farther secured them by affixing my seal.”

“You have acted on this occasion, brother, (said Charlotte,) with a generosity peculiar to yourself; yet permit me to say, that you seem to have forgot one material point of benevolence; for, whatever Miss Grimstone’s disposition may naturally be, her feelings now must be particularly distressing, and therefore you should have given her the offer of this house till the unhappy affair should be settled.”

“I had not forgotten it, Charlotte; but purposely left my sister an opportunity of displaying her noble superiority to the resentment of injuries.”

“You leave me nothing in so doing, brother, but the imperfect reflection of your own virtues.”

Miss Grimstone certainly felt some repugnance to the accepting this friendly offer. Though not eminent for sensibility, the conduct of this worthy family could not fail deeply to affect her. Their generous contempt of resentments brought her own behaviour so forcibly to her remembrance, that she could not without the most mortifying sensations appear in the presence of Mrs. George Danby. From her, however, she received every endearing attention which the nature of her situation required, as also from Mr. Danby, who had often declared to his lady that he was incapable of entertaining any unfriendly idea of the Grimstones, since their conduct had happily been the means of putting him in possession of a felicity he dared not so much as hope for.

C H A P. XLIX.

Second Thoughts.

THE said remains of the unfortunate Baronet having been decently interred, Captain Overbury diligently applied himself to the settling his affairs, which he found in a far worse condition than he could even have imagined. Of the little which remained of a once-opulent estate, every acre was mortgaged to nearly its value. The town-house was also in the same case, and, of the splendid furniture it contained, a considerable part was yet unpaid for. The other debts were to a large amount. The first step therefore to be taken, in so disagreeable a business, was to dispose of every thing to the best advantage, which was immediately done with the greatest expedition, and after every one had received a proportionable dividend, it appeared that Miss Grimstone's fortune, originally five thousand pounds, was reduced to little more than three parts of that sum. Mr. Danby generously proposed to make up the deficiency from the interest of his lady's fortune, which Sir Bevil with much unwillingness had refunded; and the motion, being seconded by Charlotte, was approved by the Captain; but, when mentioned to Miss Grimstone, was rejected with a magnanimity of sentiment not to have been expected from her.

“No! (said she,) I cannot allow you in every respect this superiority of soul. I already feel it in a manner which I hope will be of happy consequences to my future conduct. The generosity of your behaviour, on this melancholy occasion, convinces me of the frivolousness of my own character.—It is time I should aim at something more.”

In fact, her situation had, for the present at least, a very salutary effect on her temper. She was mortified by the coolness which, since her alteration of circumstance, she had experienced from the generality of her former acquaintance, and assured, that some degree of personal merit was necessary to counterbalance the absence of affluence and splendor. “I am disgusted with the world, (declared she;) and, as the only favour I can farther accept from you, my generous friends, I would intreat you to look out for me some calm retreat, where I may spend the remainder of my life in atoning, by remorse, for the levity and faults of the former part of it.”

So rational a proposal promised the happiest effects to herself; and, not doubting the stability of her resolution, Mr. Danby diligently enquired for a situation in which she might enjoy the peaceful fruits of reason and recollection, nor was it long before one presented, much to the satisfaction of all. The widow of a clergyman of small fortune wished to board a middle-aged lady of character, partly with a view to assist her own narrow circumstances, and partly to alleviate the weight of solitude. The house she lived in was a small elegant retirement, some miles from town, and surrounded with every thing which could render a rural life desirable. Here it was proposed that Miss Grimstone should take up her abode; and, in order that she might be accommodated with every convenience to which she had hitherto been accustomed, the two gentlemen agreed on supplying any deficiencies which her small fortune might occasion.—Thus, unmolested

tranquillity, and even some degree of elegance, appeared in waiting to crown the remainder of her life.

But, as vicissitude is the grand characteristic of all sublunary things, it will appear no wonder that a lady's resolution should be subject to the same general law, or that Miss Grimstone, in the fiftieth year of her age, should exchange the plan of solitary retirement for the boasted pleasures of the conjugal state. The valet, whom we have already mentioned as the favoured Adonis of this antiquated Venus, having, by some means or other, heard that she had now a few thousands in her own possession, contrived to dispatch Cupid, in the form of a billet-doux, to rekindle that flame which of late had burned but dimly; and, so successful was the little urchin, that, on the very morning appointed for the lady to enter on her new mode of life, she met the happy lover in a church not far from the Strand, and there gave him a legal right to her person and fortune.

CHAP. L.

Paternal Relentings.

DURING these transactions, Mrs. Wilmot's malady rapidly increased; but she still remained immoveable in her wishes of finishing her unfortunate life undiscovered by her family. It happened, however, that the circumstances of her situation being known to Sanders, it immediately occurred to him, that it was now the duty of Mrs. Butterfield, his sister, to attempt something in behalf of that unhappy lady. He therefore determined on writing to her in the following terms.

HONOURED SISTER,

I hope you will not be offended with me if I take the freedom to put you in mind that the good luck you have met with in the world ought to make you of a tender heart to those who have not had so good a chance. Some, you know, are fortun'd to go up the ladder, and some down. You are got up; but the Justice's daughter has had the hard fortune to go down it;—and down she is, I can tell you; and, were it not for the charity of my good master and his worthy sister, must have wanted bread, as far as I can find:—and, after all, she was not so much to blame as some other people. I thought I would give you this hint;—so no more at present from

Your affectionate brother,

RICHARD SANDERS.

P. S. My wife desires to be remembered. If I were to see you, I could tell you such things of the Captain and the rest of that worthy family, as would make you bless them as I do.

This short letter was abundantly sufficient to answer the purpose designed, for Mrs. Arthur Butterfield possessed one of the best hearts in nature, and there needed no strains of eloquence to warm it with the tenderest feelings on this occasion. She was in tears when Mr. Butterfield entered the room to invite her to take a morning-ride. "Hey, hey! (exclaimed he, seeing her disorder,) what is amiss? Atty and you, I hope, have not been at cross purposes. I can tell him, if he behaves unkindly, he shall have none of my good will."

"I can complain of nothing on that score, Sir, (replied she) but the cause of my concern is the distress of a poor innocent young woman, who, having offended her parents by marriage, is now nearly perishing with want."

“Aye, that is hard.—Won’t they forgive her? I think they should:—but some folks have strange stony hearts.—Well, sweeting, do not grieve, and I will take care that want shall never be your portion.”

Sally resolved to improve the favourable moment. She threw herself at the old gentleman’s feet, and, sobbing, cried,

“O Sir, it is your own dear daughter that is this sufferer!—Your once-happy Eliza!”

Mr. Butterfield was moved. The tears stood in his eyes, yet he endeavoured to conceal them by assuming a look of displeasure. Sally, however, nothing intimidated, clasped his knees, and resumed, “Can you, my dear Sir, be possessed of one of those stony hearts? I will not believe you are. On my knees I implore your forgiveness for your poor unhappy child.”

“Forgiveness!—Why, I forgive her, if that is all.”

“But it is not all. Consider, Sir, she must perish for want if you refuse to receive her. I intreat,—nay, I will never rise till you consent to her returning home.”

The Justice could hold out no longer, but burst into tears. In fine, he consented to receive his daughter, who, he said, should be immediately sent for to the Priory. Elated with the success of her intercession, Sally flew to convey the good tidings to her husband, who, she supposed, would be no less gratified thereby than herself. But, in this, she was mistaken. He told his wife, with an air of sternness, that she had taken too much upon her. It was a matter in which she ought not to have meddled. “Perhaps, (replied she, with rather more spirit than was natural to her,) I should not if I had not been more regardful of your character in the opinion of the world than you seem to be yourself.”

This was certainly touching the right key, for Mr. Arthur, duly weighing the *fitness of things*, was persuaded that much of moral beauty consisted in bearing a fair reputation in the popular estimation; and therefore, taking the hint from his lady, that, by suffering a sister really to depend on the charity of those who were no ways related to her for a subsistence, would reflect no credit on his own character. He said, “That, although he did not approve of women’s making themselves so busy with matters which could not belong to them, yet he would give the affair some consideration.” Mrs. Butterfield, on this, retired not perfectly satisfied with this proof of her husband’s disposition to implacability. When the family met at dinner, the subject was revived, and Mr. Arthur, having by this time made up his mind thereon, declared, that, though he was of opinion some allowances might be made to his sister’s present distress, yet it was no part of his father’s duty to receive the person she had chosen for her husband; that, upon the whole, provided Mrs. Wilmot would come alone, with no incumbrances whatever, she might be permitted so to do; for, if she had children, (a circumstance he was in fact the most apprehensive of,) the father was by law obliged to support them.”

Mr. Butterfield, readily acquiesced in the propriety of the argument, and at length it was determined that a letter should be dispatched to Mrs. George Danby, desiring her to acquaint Mrs. Wilmot of the permission given her to return to the Priory, carefully signifying, however, that she would be expected to come alone.

While these things were transacting, Mrs. Wilmot, little suspecting the resolution taken in her favour, was meeting her fate with cheerful resignation, or rather, we should say, with joyful hope. At her particular request, she was frequently visited by a worthy divine, whose name will hereafter be more particularly mentioned in these memoirs, which, having duly arranged, she now, agreeably to her promise, delivered to Charlotte, and which we design shall be the subject of the ensuing chapter.

C H A P. LI.

HISTORY OF AN UNHAPPY MARRIAGE, BY MRS. WILMOT.

HOWEVER imperfect the present condition of human happiness and virtue, the mind is found to retain an idea of absolute perfection in both, which doubtless can only be an impression of Nature's forming hand, since it is in our earliest years we feel it most lively, and do not without unwillingness resign it, when the knowledge of the world forces us to a different persuasion.—Born in a station of life which called neither for the exertions of mind nor body, I had leisure to nourish the warm sallies of imagination; and, bred in retirement, which wholly excluded any opportunity of acquainting myself with the world, I naturally formed a sanguine and romantic notion both of the happiness and virtue to be found in it.

Fond of literary pursuits, yet not so happy as to be surrounded with any one sufficiently qualified to direct my studies therein, it is no wonder that the food of my mind was rather trash than profitable sustenance, or that the course of my reading should tend to inspire a set of chimerical ideas, detrimental to moral conduct. My sentiments were indeed refined, but my understanding was clouded, and I nourished a fictitious sensibility, which, like an embosomed serpent, served but to wound the heart which had cherished it. The common satisfactions of life were despised, because inadequate to my visionary expectations of happiness, and the most perfect characters sunk in my esteem as far below that romantic standard of merit I had created to myself. In proportion as the ordinary satisfactions of social life palled on possession, my sickly imagination still dwelt on unalloyed and extatic felicity, which I supposed somewhere to exist, and the course of my reading left me at no loss where to affix it. In fine, the mutual affection of the two sexes was the state in which I fancied this ideal bliss could be found, and absolute perfection, the basis on which it was to be built.

All the gentlemen of my acquaintance had hitherto discovered the common blemishes of human nature, and, as if I had been of a superior species myself, I viewed their manners with disgust, and despised the little attentions they shewed me. My mother's circle of acquaintance were still less to my taste. I shunned their conversation with contempt, and, as she always affected to treat me with austerity and reserve, I became enamoured of solitude, where I could indulge my own reflections, and pleased myself with objects which had no existence but in my own chimerical fancy. A lonely walk was my delight, and to recline on the margin of a brook, with a book in my hand, was luxury. In these amusements, no one thought of interrupting me, or enquiring into the nature of my employments; for, as neither my father nor mother had the smallest taste for reading, I was obliged to pursue my favourite entertainment as private as possible.

I could have been very well content to waste the whole of life in these soft pleasing dreams, without feeling any ambition to distinguish myself as a being of any use in the rank of society; but, at my entrance into my seventeenth year, when I had just

brought myself to conceive that mutual love was the ultimatum of human felicity, and represented it to myself as a pure involuntary sentiment, which had in it something too refined for vulgar apprehension, my mother began to speak of my marriage as a mere prudential affair,—a state which it was my duty to engage in, because she had found out a match for me which would, in every respect, be highly to my advantage.

All this was worse than Gothic barbarism to one of my turn of temper. I ventured to say something in opposition to the modern notions of love and happiness; but this was as incomprehensible to her. She told me I was a fool, and had nothing to do but to submit to her will. In this opinion, however, I secretly dissented from her, and that the more readily, as I had seen a young man more than once at church, who seemed to honour me with particular notice. The pew he sat in was the very next to ours, and I often heard him sigh deeply during the service. Sometimes I surprised him looking at me with great earnestness; but, whenever his eyes met mine, he would quickly withdraw them with a sort of emotion, which I inclined to believe arose from the consciousness of some tender sensations in my favour.

At length, my mother thought proper to be more explicit, and to acquaint me that Captain Overbury was the man of her choice. I had never seen that gentleman, nor heard his character from any body but herself. She assured me he had great merit, but I was not disposed to rely on her judgment in that respect, especially as the constant topic of her discourse was the prodigious fortune he possessed, and she generally concluded with telling me, that, if I discovered any repugnance to the match, I should instantly turn out of doors.

I pretend not to any excuse for myself, in relating the effects which this method of introducing a lover had on my sentiments. I mean only to mention the fact, which, with one of that turn of mind I was unfortunately endowed with, could scarcely have been otherwise;—namely, that I conceived a mortal aversion to the Captain, was prejudiced both against his person and character more effectually than if I had heard ten thousand unfavourable representations of both, and was led to dread his arrival as of that of a person who regarded me only as a convenient appendage to his wealth, rather than the object of a pure disinterested passion. I have only to regret that there had not been more delicacy and tenderness in the manner of introducing that subject, since it is more than probable, that the arbitrary mode of speech used to me on that occasion tended to precipitate me on my ruin.

Ruminating with horror of mind on this intended match, I went one morning to take my usual solitary ramble in a small wood, which I often frequented alone. I was going to seat myself at the foot of a tree, when I beheld a young man (the same I had seen at church) sitting close by, with a book in his hand. He was dressed in a chintz morning-gown, fastened round the waist with a pale-blue sash. His fine brown hair fell in agreeable negligence over his shoulders. In fine, a figure more romantically charming I had never seen: it equalled all which a luxuriant fancy could have painted. His person was certainly excessively pleasing;—I then thought it beautiful. He started at my approach, and instantly arose, made me a respectful bow, and retired.

On his retreating, I perceived he had left the book he had held in his hand on the grass. Curiosity tempted me to take it up, and, on opening it, a paper dropped out, on which was written neatly the following apostrophe. “O Cupid, thou hast amply revenged the slight I have hitherto offered to thy power! My heart, untouched and lighter than the summer-breeze, was used to mock thy efforts; but, alas! I am no longer that gay insensible being. Thou hast now robbed me of my repose for ever; for despair triumphs over my wounded heart, and hope, sweet hope, withholds her cheering ray.”

I perceived by these lines that the writer was far gone in the tender passion. Yet, as the object of it was not so much as intimated, I felt something uncomfortable about my heart. A passion so ardent, and, as I also supposed, as refined as that sentiment I had often languished to inspire, awakened my pity; yet I was in a painful uncertainty, till, on looking round, I saw my own name carved in several places on the trees around. This was sufficient to animate my breast with every warm and tender sensation.—How far preferable, thought I, is such an artless secret passion to those nauseous professions which I am soon to receive from the man of my mother’s choice! This, this is pure love!—not that unmeaning insipid attachment which subsists in mere common marriages, which scarcely deserves the name of sentiment. All must be energy of soul, all extatic bliss, in such an union of hearts as must spring from such a flame as actuates this unfortunate young man.

I confess my inclination, from that day, more than ever favoured that particular walk; yet I had prudence enough to avoid it, and several days succeeded without any thing happening to disturb my solitary meditations. One afternoon, as I was searching my work-bag, I met with a sealed billet, which contained the fullest declaration of love, from a person who signed himself Edward Wilmot. I could have no doubt but this was the name of my charming inamorato, and, I own, I read the contents of the note with eager satisfaction; yet, affecting some displeasure, I sternly interrogated my maid on the affair, who, I believed, had been the means of conveying it in this manner; but she denied all knowledge of it with so much simplicity and appearance of sincerity, that I was puzzled to account for the incident, except I should allow the paper to have been placed there by Mrs. Martin, who had been sitting with me in the morning in the same apartment,—a supposition I then scrupled to admit, though I have since had reason to conclude it by no means improbable.—However, I was that evening met by my incognito swain, not far from my father’s house. He was differently, yet genteelly, dressed, and, as I thought, handsomer than ever, and an *éclaircissement* took place, which was far from tending to render me more compliant with my mother’s measures.

My lover informed me that he was heir to one of the best families and estates in Yorkshire; that, happening to arrive in that part of the country on a shooting-party, he had accidentally seen me, and was instantaneously struck with my person, which he assured me was the index of an all-perfect mind,—such an one as he had long sought in vain to discover in the sex: from that moment he had no power to quit the spot, but, entirely to the surprise of all his family, had remained nourishing a secret flame at Ashton, though the motives of his stay the delicacy of his passion had never suffered him to reveal.

Ridiculous as such a declaration must have appeared to a person of sober sense, it was calculated to charm every sensation of my mind. The ardour and refinement of such an attachment were irresistible. He offered to reveal himself to my parents, but this I absolutely forbade, as a measure which must inevitably prove a barrier to both our hopes; and indeed, I believe that reply was exactly the one he expected, for I have since found he was no stranger to the plan adopted in the family respecting Captain Overbury long before I acquainted him with it, which I did on this occasion, and urged the improbability of my mother's acceding to any other proposal, however eligible. He appeared greatly agitated by this intelligence, and expressed the deepest apprehensions of his rival's success, though, from my manner of receiving his professions, he neither had nor could have reason to be seriously alarmed.

After this, we frequently met, and, as I firmly believed him to be a man of the nicest honour, I every hour became more enamoured of his person and conversation; but what gave me the most favourable opinion of the nature of his professions was the noble contempt he seemed to discover of wealth. I had taken care to convince him that my parents would never be brought to approve of our union, attached as they were to Captain Overbury, and that, consequently, by marrying me, he could expect nothing more than the five thousand pounds bequeathed me by my aunt, which I really judged too trifling a sum to be mentioned to one of his great expectations. To this he replied in terms which gave me the fullest conviction of his disinterestedness. In fine, I concluded myself to be loved with equal ardour and purity of passion, and, on such a basis, doubted not of erecting that ideal fabric of perfect felicity, which was drawn in glowing colours on my romantic imagination.

Circumstanced as we were, it was necessary that our amour should be conducted with all possible secrecy, which gave it so much the more the air of an adventure, that I verily believe it served to conciliate my affection for Mr. Wilmot. The only person, who ever discovered a suspicion of the affair, was my amiable and beloved Charlotte, who, though far from a dissipated temper, knew too much of the world to suffer her judgment to be misled in so equivocal a circumstance. Her remonstrances on the occasion were those of friendship and good sense, and so forcibly did she express them, that I began at length to suspect she had reason on her side.

In this posture of affairs, Captain Overbury arrived at the Priory; and, though prepared to hate, I found myself compelled secretly to acknowledge him to be a most amiable, intelligent, and accomplished young gentleman. He had not, indeed, that effeminate softness of manners which appeared in Mr. Wilmot, but there was a manly frankness in his behaviour which discovered both the man of generosity and good breeding, and I must here confess, that, had I not been previously prejudiced against him, by the arbitrary language of my mother, I could not have been insensible either to his merit or my own happiness.

In consequence of a promise I had given my kind mistress, Miss Overbury, previous to the Captain's arrival, I had not seen Wilmot for some time, and in that interim

reason began so far to exert herself, as to occasion me some very severe struggles of the mental kind, and doubtless would have been finally victorious, had not Mrs. Martin,—— but why should I seek an extenuation of my folly, or meanly wish to transfer the blame of my conduct on another?—Suffice it to say, that, at a period when I was very far from seeking, and still less desiring, an interview of the kind, I met Wilmot, whose situation of mind convinced me that I had gone too far to recede with justice to him or honour to myself.

Our connexion was now renewed more frequently, and with greater tenderness than ever, though still I was too much in awe of my mother to resolve on explicitly declaring the state of my mind to Captain Overbury. Not that I was apprehensive of any serious effects from my behaviour to that gentleman, as I supposed his addresses to proceed merely from my mother's contrivances, yet my heart was conscious of something wrong, since I industriously avoided the penetration of my dear Charlotte, whose counsels would undoubtedly have extricated me from my embarrassment, and saved me from dishonour and misery; but I weakly imagined her prejudices, in behalf of her brother, would render her less favourable to my inclinations than she prudently might be: but, in thus supposing her capable of a partial judgment, I wronged the candour of my noble friend, and in this instance, and that the only one, estimated her character rather by my own narrow feelings than the experience I had ever had of her frankness and generosity.

My mother now becoming more urgent for accomplishing my marriage with the Captain, Wilmot, of course, pressed his solicitations for a clandestine marriage with greater earnestness. This I could not immediately resolve on; however, something must be done to prevent the intended union with Captain Overbury, and I knew that could only be by making a full discovery of the state of my affections to himself. This I did, and the event fully illustrated both the generosity of his sentiments and the sincerity of his affection for me. Why was I thus infatuated? What evil genius forbade my real felicity? Why did I thus perversely shun the man, whose merit alone could have answered my high-raised expectations? But wherefore now these idle regrets?—Let me do justice to the worth I was then as insensible to as undeserving of.

Ill treated and injured by my duplicity, that exalted man disdained reproach, and, abruptly quitting the family, left my offended mother to fix the odium of caprice on him, who, of all persons, was the least capable of it.—Infatuated as I was at my imaginary advantage, I privately stole from my chamber, about midnight, to the arms of Wilmot, who, having a chaise provided at some little distance, conveyed me to the borders of Scotland, where I became the wife of the most worthless and the most ungrateful of mankind. Yet it was some time before I suspected this fatal truth, and considered myself as the happiest of women.—Wilmot, at this time, appeared to be all rapture and disinterested love; and I foolishly thought we had attained an elysium which never could have an end.

C H A P. LII.

Continuation of the same.

AT our return from Scotland, we unexpectedly met my father and mother at an inn on the road, the presence of whom I would have avoided, but for the persuasions of my husband, at whose request I summoned resolution to enter the room where my mother was sitting. The circumstance of my brother's marriage, which she had just acquired the knowledge of, tended, no doubt, to soften the natural violence of her temper, and procured me an opportunity of pleading my cause, which I did by assuring her I had married a gentleman and a man of large fortune. "Why, then, (replied she,) you have acted with more prudence than your brother has done." In fine, before we parted, I had obtained her cordial forgiveness, and a promise to interest my father in my behalf. I asked her permission to introduce Mr. Wilmot to her, to which she answered, that time would not now permit, as she expected my father to come in every moment, who probably would be too much enraged by the incident; but added, that she hoped ere long to secure us both a kind reception at the Priory.

Delighted with a success so much beyond rational expectation, I flew to Mr. Wilmot, weeping for joy. He assured me, that, though, for my sake, he could not but be pleased with the event, yet, had it been otherwise, I should have found a fond and kind protector in himself. These words dissolved me in an ecstasy of bliss. I said all which an affectionate and grateful heart could suggest.

He told me, at length, that he judged it not expedient for us to go to his family immediately, on account of his uncle's prejudices, who, having been crossed in a love-affair in his youth, had conceived so entire an aversion to the marriage-state, that he would never hear of his nephew's engaging therein; but, by the interest of his other friends, he doubted not but the old gentleman would soon be brought to think reasonably, and to receive me with the respect due to my family and merit; but, till this should be accomplished, he judged it advisable we should go to London.

We sat out, therefore, for the metropolis, where I own I expected to have been placed in a handsome house, or, at least, an elegant lodging; nor could I avoid discovering surprise, when he ushered me into a small, dark, dirty apartment in some obscure court. He read my sensations, and, tenderly taking me in his arms, said, "Although I am convinced that my father and mother will joyfully receive my beloved wife, yet, as I have taken this measure without their knowledge, and am not yet in actual possession of my paternal inheritance, it will appear an act of prudence for us to avoid making what is called a figure, till we have been properly received by them, and probably tend to give all my friends a higher idea of my Eliza's virtues."

This argument I thought so reasonable, that I readily assured him I would cordially forego every thing for the happiness of possessing him. Nothing could be more tenderly respectful than was the whole tenor of his behaviour. We went out, indeed, but

little together, but he had introduced me to a middle-aged lady, who, he said, was a person of high rank, and intimately acquainted with his family. With her I frequently passed many hours in his absence, for he often went out, and sometimes staid till a very late hour; but, as I supposed a young man of his fortune and connexions must necessarily have many gay acquaintance, I felt no anxiety on the account, and seldom troubled him with any enquiries.

Mrs. Merlin I understood to be a widow of a large independent fortune, and the splendor of her mode of living left me no room to doubt of it, for she had a superb house at the West of the town, kept her carriage, and a great number of servants.—She appeared to have seen a great deal of life, and was extremely chatty and affable; yet, though, in complaisance to Mr. Wilmot, I passed a good deal of time with her, I could not feel an entire satisfaction in her company, for her conversation was what I thought inelegant, and sometimes even vulgar; nor did the gaiety of her behaviour seem at all consistent with her years, for she could not be less than fifty, a period of life which I thought demanded rather more seriousness than she appeared to discover. However, I was induced to suppose her levity nothing more than the consequences of a town-education and an intercourse with fashionable people.

At her house, for the first time, I saw Lord S—, so well known in the polite world for a professed libertine; and, as I was not a stranger to his character, it appeared a little extraordinary that a single lady, who valued her reputation, should admit the visits of one of his lordship's description; but Mr. Wilmot assured me that there was not the least impropriety in it:—nobody in genteel life concerned themselves with making any remarks of that kind. Conscious of knowing nothing beyond the circle of my native village, I implicitly assented to all which his superior knowledge approved, and, continuing to visit Mrs. Merlin, was frequently obliged to endure the impertinent stare and fulsome adulation of that nobleman. I was led, however, to suppose it all a matter of course, and therefore never gave myself the trouble to examine the motive.

In the mean time, Mr. Wilmot, contrary to my opinion, had resolved on making a visit to the Priory, which I thought highly improper, till we should have received an intimation from my mother that such a step would be agreeable. He was, however, peremptory in the design, which I supposed proceeded from an ardent desire of promoting my happiness. I certainly did not suspect he would deem any other motive worth his attention.

At his return from Ashton, which was at the expiration of a few days, I met him with all the tenderness of a sincere affection; but I perceived him to be rather out of humour, from which I concluded that his precipitancy had destroyed my hopes of a reconciliation with my parents. He cared not, however, to speak on the subject; and, at length, changing his dress, took his hat and cane, and abruptly went out, nor did I see him till about ten the next morning, when he came home in a state of inebriety, and immediately went to bed. After some hours of repose, he appeared in rather a better humour, and I ventured to ask him what had been his success at the Priory, to which he replied in an accent which cut me to the heart, “Why, Bess, the old fellow was for having

me kicked out of doors, but I made him down with your aunt's legacy. Here it is, (shaking his pockets,) here is the coal, and now he may rave as he will!"

I could not refrain from tears at the indecency of his expressions. At last I enquired what reception my mother had given him. "Oh! d—n the old Jezebel, (cried he,) I never desire to see her more." I was now convinced that all was over, and could not help saying that I feared his precipitancy had ruined my hopes; at which, he lifted up his arm in a fearful passion, as if designing me a blow. I ran, and threw myself into his arms, and, tenderly embracing him, cried, "Thus, my dear Wilmot, let me atone for the ill treatment you have received from my parents."—But, uttering a dreadful imprecation both on myself and them, he roughly pushed me out of the room, and locked the door. I threw myself in an agony of grief into a chair in the opposite apartment, and my feelings, at that moment, were certainly little short of distraction. In about half an hour I saw him come out of the chamber, smartly dressed, and, without deigning to take the smallest notice of me, went gaily down stairs, whither, wiping my eyes, I attempted to follow him, but was told he was gone out.

Presently after, Mrs. Merlin's carriage drove up to the door. I went to receive her, and found her accompanied by Lord S——.

"What! in tears (cried she) so soon after marriage?—See here, my lord, the blessed effects of wedlock!"

"I will not believe (replied he) that a person in the world can be so void of sensibility, as to force tears into the finest eyes in the universe."

I affected to receive the compliment with as much gaiety as possible, and slightly replied, that the dissipation of a town-life did not agree with me.

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Merlin, ironically. Lord S— proposed a walk in the Park. "Will you honour me so far, ladies, as to give me your company?"

"If your lordship can prevail on Mrs. Wilmot, (returned the lady,) I am cordially willing."

I said I felt myself rather indisposed, and begged to be excused. "But, indeed, (cried Mrs. Merlin,) if I were Lord S—, I would not let you off so easily."

"As greatly honoured, madam, (replied he,) as I should esteem myself by Mrs. Wilmot's compliance, I cannot resolve to urge a point she appears so averse to."

"Then leave it to me, my lord; for my part, I resolve not to leave her a prey to this matrimonial demon, melancholy, nor shall she deny her company to your lordship and me."

In order to avoid farther importunity, I consented to go with them, though my heart was far from being attuned to amusement of any kind. We had taken a turn or two in the park, when a loud horse-laugh caused me to turn my head towards one of the benches, where, to my utter mortification, I saw my husband in company with five or six young men in liveries, with whom he seemed conversing very familiarly. I commanded myself sufficiently to take no notice of the incident, and passed on. At my return, I found Mr. Wilmot already there, and resolving, if possible, to conciliate his affections, I approached him with an air of perfect good humour, though he was sullen, which I affected not to observe. He would eat no supper that evening, and, snatching up a candle, went abruptly to bed. The next morning, at breakfast, as I supposed his having been in the company of footmen to proceed from an indiscreet affability, I thought an intimation that I had noticed the incident would be a proper and tacit rebuke, and therefore, with a smile, said, "My dear Mr. Wilmot, I should actually have believed I had seen you yesterday in the park, if the company had not consisted of party-coloured gentlemen."

He seemed hurt at my observations, and spitefully replied, "No matter who were my companions,—you had your gallant, and that is sufficient." This reply induced me to reflect whether there might not have been some impropriety in my walking with Lord S—. I thought I discovered something like jealousy in this speech, and determined to avoid the most indifferent action which could give him displeasure. It was my fixed resolution to visit no more at Mrs. Merlin's. Henceforth I shunned her as much as possible, and, having no other acquaintance in town, passed my time almost entirely alone, as Wilmot was now seldom at home, and, indeed, when he was, it was only to render me more sensible of his want of affection.

Distressing as that conviction was, I endeavoured to support it without upbraiding, firmly believing that the whole proceeded from youthful levity and attachment to fashionable company. A constant appearance of good humour, on my part, was, I concluded, the only means of finally reclaiming him. Hitherto, however, I could boast of but little success, as his temper every day became more intolerable, and his behaviour, from being sullenly cool, became at length actually brutal; for, happening, when he returned one night, to ask him in good humour if he had spent an agreeable evening, he immediately struck me a violent blow with his fist, and uttered such a torrent of opprobrious abuse, as I thought might only have been expected from the canaille. On this, as on other similar occasions, silence and tears were my only resource.

Ruminating one day on my unhappy fortune, it occurred to me, that, perhaps, the ferocity of my husband's temper might be occasioned by the disappointment he had met with in applying for reconciliation with my parents, and which might be too galling for a susceptible mind to bear with equanimity. I therefore privately resolved on addressing my mother by letter;—not to make complaint, for that I disdained, resolved as I was to bear the misfortunes I had brought on myself in silence, but merely to express the affliction I sustained under the sense of her displeasure; pleading the forgiveness she had once granted me, and, after extolling the merit of my husband, begged for permission to throw myself at her feet. To this letter I received such an answer as I do not choose here to insert. Suffice it to observe, that it was in the last degree severe, and concluded with

assuring me, that any future application I might make to her or any of the family would not be honoured with the least notice.

I was now five months gone with child, a situation which it might have been expected would interest the feelings of a man of common sensibility, yet it effected no alteration in the conduct of Mr. Wilmot, who continued to treat me with the same cutting neglect, to which, when heated with liquor, as was often the case, he added cruelty; but, in spite of my distress, I behaved with serenity, nor once upbraided him with the barbarity of his treatment, but I could perceive that the perpetual agitation of my spirits had a sensible effect on my health.

I had not seen Mrs. Merlin of a long time, when, one day, as I was sitting in tears, as usual when alone, she rushed into my apartment. "I will see you, my dear Mrs. Wilmot, (cried she,) although you so unkindly endeavour to avoid me;—and what can be the reason of your coolness? I protest I can assign no cause, except you have taken it into your head to object to Lord S—, who is so good as to visit me sometimes."

"I have no right (returned I) to make any objections to his lordship, or any other person whom Mrs. Merlin thinks proper to admit as her visitor."

"You country-ladies (resumed she,) are so prudish!—But, however this be, you may safely visit me now, as his lordship is in the country."

Whatever dislike I might have had to the company of Lord S—, it was by no means necessary she should be acquainted with it, I therefore waved the topic, and endeavoured to converse with cheerfulness, though not so successfully, I believe, but that she discovered something of the state of my mind. At parting, Mrs. Merlin pressed me so earnestly to pass the next day with her, that, wearied with the burden of my own meditations, I consented. In the evening, she took me out in her chariot, under pretence of calling on a person in business, but, to my great surprise, stopped at Drury-lane theatre. She knew my aversion to appearing in public, and had devised this expedient to draw me to the playhouse. "I cannot bear (said she) that you should lead such a moping life at home, without partaking in the amusements with which the town abounds. Be in no pain as to your appearance here, for we will get into the pit, and nobody will take any notice of us."

On this occasion, I can believe she was actuated by no motive but that of endeavouring to relieve my visibly-drooping spirits; and, as I was fond of dramatic works, was agreeably enough entertained, particularly as nobody noticed, or gave us any interruption. Casting my eyes round towards the boxes, I discovered Mr. Wilmot in one of them, with a female of a very elegant appearance, and not contemptible person. Such a sight a little surprised me, but seemed not to give me any pain, as I did not know but it might be some lady of fashion with whom he had acquaintance.

On our return to Mrs. Merlin's house, she pressed me to stay supper, which I declined; but she told me I might as well pass an hour or two with her as at home alone,

for she was pretty certain Wilmot would not return very speedily. I asked what reason she had for concluding so.

“Why, my dear, I think you saw him in the house with a lady.”

“Yes,—and I wonder who it was.”

Here, smiling significantly, she replied, “Whoever it was, you may be assured they will not part very early.”

I could not be at a loss to understand her meaning, yet, affecting an air of indifference, I said gaily, that one ought not to expect a young gentleman of Mr. Wilmot’s education and mode of life to be wholly exempt from fashionable levities. The only answer Mrs. Merlin made to this was, by reiterating the words *young gentleman* with an air of contempt and ridicule. I was irritated beyond patience, and declared I could no longer bear with a treatment which I supposed was meant purposely to insult me, and demanded what impropriety I had been guilty of by the expression.

“None that I know of, (replied she;) since every fellow now apes the foppery of his master, and, in this respect, Wilmot is as good a gentleman as the best.”

Perceiving me to be seriously offended, (for I arose to depart) she resumed, “Mrs. Wilmot, I assure you I did not intend you an affront, nor have I said any thing which he himself could have resented. Surely you are not till now a stranger to his rank in life?”

The submissive manner of this reply a good deal softened me, and I said, “Your discourse, Mrs. Merlin, appears to me totally inconsistent. What can you mean, for I am persuaded you know Mr. Wilmot to be a gentleman both by birth and fortune?”

“Poor child! (exclaimed she,) and dost thou think so? He was, madam, about fifteen months ago, a journeyman to my Lord S—’s friseur, and I assure you, that, except I had been convinced of your being of so respectable a family, I should scarcely have visited the wife of a fellow who has often dressed my hair.”

There could be but the choice of two motives to account for the conduct of this woman in giving me the above intelligence; namely, an interested or malicious one. As I do not think her an ill-natured person, I must solely impute it to the former, and, indeed, her behaviour since has sufficiently proved it. However, I fainted at the shock, and, on my recovery, entreated her to be both open and sincere in acquainting me with what farther she knew of the affair.

“To be plain with you then, (said she,) I knew of this adventure from first to last, having often seen the letters which Wilmot sent to his confidant, my lord’s valet, during the time he spent at Ashton.—Is not that the name of your village?”

I nodded assent.

“And had you not neighbours of the name of Martin?”

“I had.”

“Then you must know that woman is first cousin to your husband. It was at her invitation he went into the country, in order to make love to you in the character of a gentleman in disguise. I know not exactly the premium she stipulated for, but assure yourself, you were actually sold for the sake of some share in your aunt’s legacy.”

The horrible account, so circumstantially stated, left me no room to doubt the truth of it, as, indeed, the coarseness and brutality of Wilmot’s behaviour too strongly confirmed the lowness of his birth and station.—My feelings were now too severe to admit the common alleviation of tears: I sat stupid and motionless, and Mrs. Merlin again resumed:

“You are undone, my dear child, past redemption, and I pity you from my soul. I only wish I had known your merit time enough to have prevented the wicked scheme; yet, if you will now accept the offer of my friendship, I most sincerely tender it to you, and perhaps it may not be impossible for me to prove of real service.”

“You can be of no service to me, madam, (I replied.) My case admits of none, except the poor comfort of confiding my sorrows in your bosom, for I should be still more wretched, should Wilmot ever suspect me privy to his deceit?”

“Why, will you not resent it as becomes a woman of spirit?”

“Whatever, Mrs. Merlin, may be his real condition, he is now my husband, and as such it ought to be my study to acquit myself in an affectionate and faithful manner.”

“Bravely resolved! but not so easily executed, I presume; especially as he is spending your fortune as fast as he can, and, in a few months, I will engage he leaves you to beggary.”

“Do you delight in torturing me?” cried I, bursting at last into tears.

“Far from it, my dear. I would assist you, and, let what will happen, you shall find me a warm and steady friend.”

I thanked her for this kind assurance, and then desired a chair might be called to convey me home. Wilmot, as she had prognosticated, was not returned, and I immediately went to bed, where I was soon after seized with strong convulsions, which continued till the following noon, and then ended in abortion, by which I was reduced to a condition more resembling death than life. In the afternoon Mr. Wilmot came home. I heard him say, as he came up stairs, “Is she dead?” He then advanced to the bedside, and, opening the curtains, said in a rough voice, “How do you find yourself, Bet?” I could

make no answer. Closing the curtains again, he went down stairs, and soon after left home for the space of two days, during which time I laid at the point of death, nor did he once send to enquire whether I were still alive or not.

Nature at length got the better, and I began to feel some signs of recovery. I frequently heard my husband's voice in the house, but saw nothing of him for near a fortnight, at which time I was able to sit up about half an hour each day. He then condescended to make me a visit, and I received him with the same apparent cordiality as usual; for, during my illness, I had deeply reflected on the nature of my situation, and, however mortifying I might be supposed to feel the deception so culpably passed on me, yet I had once loved him, and was convinced that, in spite of all I could yet do so, should he manifest an affection for me. To attain that point was both my duty and interest, and I was now firmly resolved never to intimate to him my knowledge of the case, nor to abate in the least of my solicitude to regain his love.

At this time he appeared more tender than he had been of a long season, spoke of my recovery with apparent pleasure, and then, for the first time, discovered to me the posture of his affairs,—I mean his finances. He said he had had his pocket picked as he was carrying money to a banker; that all he was now possessed of in the world was insufficient to support us, and then added, as I thought, in a most extraordinary manner, that he wished me well. Alarmed at these last words, I caught hold of his hand, and eagerly cried, "Surely you do not intend to leave me, Wilmot?"

"No:—but you may leave me, Eliza, and I should think you much to blame if you would not."

"What can you mean! (I resumed:)—leave you?—No, never, my dear Wilmot. I will share in your distress, be it what it may, and only ask the consolation of your love to make the worst supportable."

"Why, that sort of talking did well enough when we were at Ashton, but the case is altered now, and so I would have you bethink yourself what to do, for I have no great notion of this living upon love. I know a person who would be glad to take you, and you may ride in your coach, and be mistress of his whole fortune, if you play your cards well. I would advise you to take the offer, or, faith, you are likely to starve."

"Forbear, (cried I,) barbarous man!—I shall not long trouble you, and death now would be sweet."

Here he fell into a violent rage, giving me the most scurrilous language, and swearing I should either comply with the offer or starve. I heard not the whole of his horrid speech, for, excessively weak as my late indisposition had rendered me, I fell into fits, which rapidly succeeded each other for the space of nine hours, nor did any about me expect I should survive the relapse. Wilmot, I was told, had retired in a furious passion as soon as he perceived me insensible, and I saw him no more for three weeks.—Mrs. Merlin visited me constantly during my illness, and manifested so much sympathy and tenderness, as greatly endeared her to me. Indeed, to her care I believe it principally was

owing that I did not even want the necessary comforts which my situation required. I concealed from her, however, every thing which had passed between Wilmot and myself, though his indifference to me neither was nor could be unknown to her.

When I was able to bear the motion of a carriage, she often took me on an airing in her chariot, and sometimes stopped at her own house, where we generally found Lord S—, who expressed a more than common concern at my altered appearance. His behaviour was that of a tender brother, and I frequently observed him, after fixing his eyes on my pallid countenance, to turn from me and weep. In the most soothing accents he would ask how I felt myself, and what he could do to serve me. Such endearing sympathy excited my gratitude, and compelled me to admire the benevolence of his character.

Mrs. Merlin, either having, or pretending to have, a great deal of family-business on her hands, often left us together. On those occasions, his conversation was always in the liveliest strain of friendship, in which he commiserated my misfortunes, and offered me his assistance to procure me a redress of my wrongs.—I would not acknowledge that I sustained any, but he said he too well knew the nature of my situation. I could not help upbraiding Mrs. Merlin with having revealed more of my circumstances to Lord S— than was consistent with the friendship she professed for me; to which she replied, “I assure you, my dear, I have told him no more than I thought necessary to promote your real benefit. His lordship is deeply interested in your sufferings, and, if I were in your place, I would not hesitate to put myself under his protection.”

“Of what advantage, my dear madam, could this be to me?”

“What advantage?—Why, he would assist you in procuring a separation from the brute your husband; and, what is more, would support you as his own sister, for I am convinced he loves you as such. Do not you, then, my dear child, refuse the benevolent offers of the only friend you have.”

“I can make use of no friendship to the prejudice of Wilmot, Mrs. Merlin.”

“Do not deceive yourself. Your separating from him would be the only act to oblige him; and I am pretty certain if you do not resolve so to do, he will leave you ere long to your hard fate.”

“I will hope better things, madam; and, should so sad an event take place, it will then be time enough to devise expedients.”

“Well, (rather peevishly,) you must use your own mind, but remember I tell you, you will one day repent slighting the friendship of Lord S—.”

On my return home, I once more began to take a melancholy survey of all the distressing circumstances peculiar to my condition, and plain it was that I was not only regarded with indifference by my husband, but that he even desired to be released from

me. With this conviction, I again took up my pen to write to my mother, and in this second application set forth the nature of my sufferings, not with more feeling than unaffected contrition for my past conduct. Finally, I entreated her to permit me once more to return to Ashton, pleading that I would be content with performing the lowest offices in the family, might I be allowed to see again my paternal dwelling. Contrary to her former resolution, she deigned to notice the receipt of my letter, but it was in a manner which afflicted me more deeply than her silence could have done. She now upbraided me with much greater severity than she had done before; told me, she rejoiced in the account of my sufferings, and should still be more gratified with hearing I had perished on a dunghill:—that, I remember, was the cruel expression, and from this time I resolved to trouble her no more.

As I was sitting one morning at work in my own chamber, Wilmot entered it, conducting a porter, and, without speaking to me, directed him to a chest containing my linen, which the man immediately conveyed out of the room. I demanded the reason of this procedure, but was answered by Wilmot with horrid oaths and imprecations, that it was none of my business. I could only conclude that he was about either to sell or pledge my apparel, which indeed was the case, and instantly burst into tears, at which he raved, stamped the ground with his foot, and swore, that, since I were so squeamish as not to accept the proposal he had made me, I must take the worst, adding, “Do you think your fortune could last for ever? I must get money how I can; and, as for you, madam, do not suppose you are to sit at your ease as when in the country.—Folks in London must work or starve, and I would advise you to see about getting some washing to help you to a dinner now and then.”

“I will submit to any thing, (I replied,) to which my imprudence has reduced me, but this mode of support I doubt I am not capable of undertaking. There are other means of subsistence;—the needle, for instance.”

He then cursed my delicate hands, as he called them, and said he had better have married an orange-wench.

I could not forbear saying that I wished he had, which enraged him so much, that, snatching up the poker, he levelled it at my head, but I escaped the blow by getting out of the room.

C H A P. LIII.

Mrs. Wilmot's Story concluded.

I Dared not again venture into my husband's presence; but, when he was gone out, I found my whole wardrobe stripped, and all, excepting a very small part, entirely removed. It was at this period that I meditated a design, the recollection of which fills me now with horror. To one accustomed to the comforts of affluence, the apprehension of pecuniary distress is formidable; yet was not this the idea which principally irritated my sensibility? To be convinced that I was regarded with indifference, if not absolute hatred, by the man for whose sake I had forfeited all the endearing satisfactions of life;—to consider myself as under the dreadful malediction of my parents, and that the whole world afforded not one friend to whom I could fly for consolation in my distress, were reflections so intolerable, that I resolved to rid me of a wretched life.

With this dreadful purpose, I went to a shop, in order to procure, with almost the only shilling I was mistress of, that fatal potion which only could give relief to my sorrows; but, hesitating in the choice of the means to die by, I first asked for arsenic, then for opium, as supposing the effects of the latter to be less violent. The manner of my expressing the errand, together with my wild and haggard countenance, probably excited suspicion of the design, and prompted the druggist to refuse selling me either. On leaving the shop, I perceived myself followed by an elderly gentleman, dressed in black, who had seemed to observe me with particular attention as I stood in the shop. I walked pretty fast, and soon turned down the Temple-cloisters. Here it was that the benevolent stranger, coming up with me, desired I would not be alarmed, for he intended me no harm. "I am afraid, (added he,) young woman, by the errand you have just been on, that you are meditating some dreadful deed. If so, stop, I beseech you, before it be too late:—pause, ere you forcibly break open the tremendous doors of futurity."

The solemnity of this address deeply affected me, and forced me immediately to burst into tears. He took hold of my arm, and led me into the Temple-garden. I was glad to sit down on the first vacant seat. The stranger placed himself by my side, and, finding I was not disposed to speak, resumed his discourse. "My conjecture, I find by those tears, was not ill founded. Suffer me then, in a few words, to give you my advice, nor think the worse of it for proceeding from a stranger,—a preacher of that gospel which affords solid and sublime consolation for every woe, but that into which you are rashly determined to precipitate yourself."

Although, in the transports of grief and despair, I had actually meditated the horrid deed, I had not with cool deliberation reflected on the crime of suicide, nor was I capable of thinking of it, when thus awfully represented, without shuddering. My soul was aghast at the dreadful idea. Deeply I sighed, and wept afresh.—He pitied my distress, which, he said, he perceived to be great, and then proceeded to expatiate on the irrecoverable misery of those who choose to die by an act of rebellion against the dispensations of heaven. "But I have no reason (I replied) to suppose that my misfortunes

are the effects of those dispensations, but rather the natural consequence of my own folly and rashness.”

“It is thus (resumed the good man) that the over-ruling hand of Providence is concealed in the agency of second causes. We suppose ourselves to be the carvers of our own condition; hence, in prosperity we are arrogant,—in adversity we despair. It is true, we act from the impulse of the will, and are often left thus to do, in order that infinite wisdom may deduce good from evil, and which, if it be not your own fault, will be an advantage still attendant on yourself.”

I did not at first comprehend the meaning of this discourse, for, though our family had seldom failed to appear at the parish-church once every Sunday, to hear a few moral sentences tacked together by way of a sermon, yet this was all the religion judged necessary: it is therefore no wonder that I should have been at a loss to apprehend the nature of any advantages besides those of a mere temporal kind; but the pious minister soon gave me to know, that there were others, and those of a more permanent and valuable nature; such as the benefits of self-knowledge, humility, trust and dependance on a divine Wisdom, which were often (he said) the happy fruits of temporal misfortunes, and always intended to be such.

After some farther serious exhortation and consolatory counsel, he invited me to accompany him to a chapel, where he was then going to preach. I accepted the proposal, and had an opportunity of hearing the most comfortable truths of religion enforced with a clearness, solemnity, and earnestness, which I had hitherto been unacquainted with. The worthy pastor delivered an extempore discourse from the words, “Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee.” From that hour I felt a source of consolation unknown to me before,—a consolation far superior to earthly satisfactions.

When the service was over, the reverend Mr. Curtis gave me his address, earnestly desiring me to call on him, or demand his attendance, whenever I should find occasion for either his counsel or assistance; and I must not here omit to mention, that I often obtained the most important benefit from both, during my succeeding distresses; for, not content with directing my perturbed mind with a truly pastoral care, he also procured for me the contribution of his charitable friends, at periods when I should otherwise have perished beneath the double weight of sickness and indigence.

But to return to my story. I had never seen Mr. Wilmot since the day on which he thought proper to deprive me of my apparel, till one morning he returned, and began to employ himself in packing up every thing of value he could find, which I supposed was destined to the same disposal. He then went out without speaking, and from that hour I saw him no more.—In about two hours after, the apartment was entered by a couple of ill-looking men, who, shewing me an inventory, required me to produce the several articles of furniture therein specified, which they said they had just purchased of Mr. Wilmot. I left them to act as they chose, and retired to a small closet adjoining, where I heard them stripping the lodging of every thing, even to the bed I slept on.

The woman of the house, understanding their errand, came up to me, and, resting her hand on her prominent sides, exclaimed, "Why, mistress, mistress, how happens this? You are left in the lurch, I find; but I cannot afford to lose my money, and therefore should be glad if you would pay me for the use of my house." I told her, I made no doubt but Mr. Wilmot would speedily return and satisfy her, but that it was not in my power to do it at present.—"But you have a watch, and those sort of things, and, to oblige you, I will take them." I replied I had no such thing, (for, indeed, Wilmot had privately taken my watch.) On this, she desired I would then turn out immediately, and began to rail bitterly at people who set up for gentlefolks without the means. In the midst of this strain of invective, Mrs. Merlin's chaise drove up to the door, nor could any thing at that juncture have been more welcome to my breaking heart.

"You must come along with me, (said she:) this place is not fit for you." Without enquiring how she had received the intelligence of what was passing, or, indeed, at that time thinking about it, I gladly quitted that scene of wretchedness. She led me to her carriage, and, soon after we were seated, said, that, believing a country situation, for several reasons, would be the most eligible for me in the present case, she would accompany me to a friend's villa a few miles from town, where, as the family was not at home, she hoped I should recover my exhausted spirits.

As to the disposal of myself, I was wholly indifferent about it, nor did I recover from my melancholy reverie till the carriage drove into the court-yard of an elegant mansion, into which my companion led me with the air of a proprietor rather than of a visitor.

We were shewn into a superb apartment, and Mrs. Merlin seemed to consider herself as perfectly at home, issuing her commands with an authority to which the servants seemed not unused. Dinner was served, of which I was unable to partake, but at her importunity swallowed a few sweetmeats and a glass of wine, and then desired leave to retire. She conducted me herself to a handsome bed-room, and, desiring me to endeavour to take some rest, left me alone. Nature, exhausted by the conflicts it had lately sustained, sunk into repose, and I slept some hours more soundly than I had done for a considerable time. At length Mrs. Merlin came to enquire how I did, and I replied that I felt myself much refreshed. She then sat down by the bed-side, and, taking my hand very affectionately, said, "My dear Mrs. Wilmot, I now congratulate you on the happy turn your affairs are likely to take.—You have seen the end of your afflictions, and all before you is happiness." I assured her that I did not at all comprehend her meaning.

"No? (resumed she:) then give me leave to inform you, that this noble mansion is your own; at least, it is at your command, as is also the generous owner of it, Lord S—."

My heart sunk within me at these words, and, emotion preventing my interrupting her, she went on thus, "You do not, I believe, entirely suspect the villany of Wilmot, yet from it you may derive the most happy consequences. Know that, from the time of your marriage, you have been destined to the arms of Lord S—, who certainly is the best and most generous of men. Foreseeing the consequences of your rash connexion, he

concerted the means of your deliverance, and has actually purchased you of your husband for the sum of five hundred pounds, with which he is gone to the continent, and will never more give you any disturbance.”

“Purchased me! (cried I, with indignation.) What power does the law afford for so vile a transaction?”

“Softly, my dear girl, and do not trifle away your own happiness. The purchase I mean is rather a premium to restrain the wretch your husband from giving any farther trouble to your benefactor, and, since you are now actually in his power, I would, as a friend, advise you to secure the best terms, which can only be done by sweetness and compliance. You have no means whatever of escaping, nor will his lordship easily be duped; but by kindness you may render him really your lover,—your slave.”

The whole of this deep laid plot was now apparent. I saw clearly the part which my supposed friend, Mrs. Merlin, had so long been acting. This woman, I have since been informed by Mr. Curtis, is one of those abandoned creatures, who, having passed the flower of life in licentiousness, subsists at present by acting as the procuress of vicious pleasures to the debauched; or, in other words, ensnaring and training up unfortunate girls for the purpose of prostitution, for filling which infamous department, she is liberally supported by a set of abandoned youth of quality and fortune. Having already taken so active a part in the horrid scheme, I could not doubt but her diligence would be now equally exerted in accomplishing it. It was in vain, therefore, I perceived, for me to express any sense of virtue to one who was lost to every sentiment of the kind. A resentment of my injuries must have proved wholly fruitless, and possibly have frustrated the means of my deliverance; yet, secretly I determined to encounter every distress, even death in its most dreadful form, rather than sink to a level with the basest of all rational beings, I requested that I might be left to my repose, on which that artful woman immediately bade me adieu, and quitted the room; but, as she went out, I heard her lock the door, and have reason to think she herself slept in the next apartment.

I was no sooner alone, than I implored the divine aid, to enable me to escape the hands of these vile people, and preserve unsullied the purity of my soul, for I was no stranger to that source of all consolation, prayer. I felt myself, as it were, animated with fortitude. To those, who believe their help is at hand, every thing is possible, and despondency flies from before them. Religion only can be the parent of true courage. When I thought the family were retired, I rose from my bed, and examined the windows, which I found were grated, yet not so closely but that, being slender, I could pass through them; nor did the height from the ground intimidate me, the chamber where I was being only on the second story. Having thus laid my plan, I dressed myself as speedily as possible, and, fastening the sheets to the bars of the window, got safely down into a court-yard, the gate of which I found locked. It was not a time for deliberation, nor could I possibly dread any danger but that I was partly escaped from, I therefore immediately climbed the gate, which, though set on the top with iron spikes, I passed unhurt, and without farther difficulty got into the high road, where it was my intention to travel on

foot to town, but fortunately at that instant I heard the sound of a stage-coach, which I hastened to meet, and got a seat by the side of the coachman, in which situation I arrived in London, and was sat down in Piccadilly.

But here, like a miserable outcast from society, I knew not where to go, nor of whom to implore protection; at length I recollected the worthy minister I have mentioned before, and, having about me his address, I went strait to his house. A servant from the chamber-window demanded my business at that unseasonable hour, but Mr. Curtis, hearing my voice, ordered me immediate admission, and rose himself to meet me in the parlour. I told him, in a few words, the circumstances I had escaped from, and he, in the most friendly terms, assured me of a paternal asylum in his house.

The first step he advised me to take was, to solicit once more the forgiveness of my parents. This I knew would be of little avail; yet, that I might not appear to be wanting in what he thought both my duty and interest, I complied, and penned a letter to my mother in the humblest and most pathetic terms, which Mr. Curtis accompanied by one from himself, in which he urged my contrition and sufferings, and enforced the whole by arguments drawn from the example of heavenly mercy. As a sequel to this incident, I will only add, that the return of the post brought the same letters back again; not indeed unopened, but inclosed in a blank cover, addressed by my mother's own hand.

Convinced there was nothing to be hoped for from this quarter, Mr. Curtis began to think of some plan for my future subsistence, his own income being too small to promise a sufficient support, independent of other means. I was for my own part desirous of retiring to some obscure village, but to this he objected, as thinking I could no where be so secure from the pursuit of Lord S—, or the interruptions of my husband, as in town, where concealment could be more easily effected; besides, being on the spot, he should have it in his power to assist me with occasional helps from the affluent part of his congregation, to whom, he assured me, he would instantly apply for employment for me, as I had proposed subsisting by my needle.

I was recommended to a very neat and comfortable lodging, but, in the humble and contrite state of mind I was then in, I would not be prevailed on to take up with any other apartment than the attic story.—It was here, for the first time, after a long and painful period, that I beheld my ever-amiable Charlotte. Every thing about me was indeed mean, compared to the accommodations I had been accustomed to; but temporal things were now beneath my concern, and in this obscure situation I enjoyed a peace of mind which no sublunary gratifications can bestow,—comforts, to which I had, during the most prosperous part of my former life, been unacquainted with.

But my mind was no sooner released from the anxieties and perturbations which it had so long sustained, than I sensibly felt their fatal effects on the animal frame, which now was so much disordered, that all intended efforts of industry were become impracticable. In fine, I was thrown on the bed of sickness, a violent fever brought me to the verge of dissolution. On this occasion, the mistress of the house attended me with true Christian benevolence, and the reverend Mr. Curtis assisted me both by his charity and

pious counsels. The violence of the malady at length abated. I recovered, though slowly, from the fever, but my constitution was broken by my former sufferings, and I became sensible of a gradual inward decay, which convinced me that the taper of life was approaching towards its final extinguishment.

The unmerited goodness of my dear Charlotte has now prevented me from being any longer burdensome to the excellent people before mentioned, yet, while I live, must I ever remember their kindness, their true Christian charity, with gratitude. My span, I believe, is short, but I look forward with transport to the awful event, and am thankful for those sufferings which, in the hand of Providence, have been made the instruments of an advantage which will follow me beyond the grave.

How contemptible now appears all the delight so eagerly sought by mankind! Had I been more fortunate in my connexions, I had been less happy. Had I abounded with wealth, I could not have possessed so amply that treasure which I would not give in exchange for worlds.

C H A P. LIV.

Repentance sometimes comes too late.

WHEN Mr. Butterfield's letter arrived, Charlotte eagerly sat out to impart the unexpected contents to Mrs. Wilmot. "I congratulate you, my dear friend, (said she,) on your reconciliation with your family, which some good soul, unknown to me, has brought about; but, whoever it was, may blessings attend the benevolent agent."

Mrs. Wilmot received the intelligence without discovering any emotion,—nor earthly joy nor sorrow could affect her more. "The event (said she) pleases me more for my poor father's sake than my own. It elates not me; yet, to have known his child had gone unpitied, unforgiven to the grave, must, sooner or later, have been a source of keen affliction to him; and, in this sense alone, my dear Charlotte, I rejoice in this token of my father's forgiveness."

But that permission, which had been solicited in vain by a distressed and penitent daughter,—that permission, which but a few months before would perhaps have saved her from an untimely grave, was now given too late. Mrs. Wilmot was much too weak to endure a removal from the friendly mansion where she now was. "I cannot hope to see my father, (said she,) neither have I strength to thank him for this kind invitation. Do you, my good friend, assure him of my gratitude, and implore for me his solemn benediction, while I can be sensible of it."

Charlotte, convinced there was no time to be lost, immediately took up her pen to write to Mr. Butterfield, which she did in a style that, to Eliza, (had she seen it,) would have appeared too much of the acrimonious nature; but she was irritated to the quick by a sense of her friend's injuries, and of too frank a temper to palliate her abhorrence of an implacable disposition, which is all that can be alledged in excuse to those who would plead for less asperity of diction.

TO PHILIP BUTTERFIELD, ESQ.

"IT is an instance of good fortune, my dear Sir, which (excuse me) I hardly think you deserve, that you should have been informed of your injured daughter's condition time enough to prevent, by some shew of relenting, that weight of remorse, which, in the course of things, must have been accumulating for you. It is, however, too late to be of service to her, though it may possibly be some to yourself, and those of your family who possess an equal clemency with yourself. She is too ill to be removed, much less to bear such a journey, and a few days will perhaps remove her to that state where the error of a young and uninstructed mind will not be considered as a crime too heinous for mercy. But she asks, and, remember, it is her last request, that you will, by a line under your own hand, give her your blessing, and ratify her forgiveness. Her prayers are for your welfare: her dying lips implore blessings on your head; for I can assure you she is too much an angel already to remember that those who gave her being left her to consume it in misery.

I am, Sir, &c.

CHARLOTTE DANBY.”

It was not the keen reproach which this letter contained that occasioned Mr. Butterfield, on the receipt of it, to sink into a state of agony which must have excited the compassion even of Mrs. George Danby herself. No:—it was the dreadful certainty of Mrs. Wilmot’s fate; for, from the letter which Sanders had sent to the Priory, he had only gathered that she was involved in mere pecuniary distress, a consequence he deemed extremely natural, and which the invitation he had given was calculated wholly to redress:—but to know that his child,—that child to whose contrite supplications he had long been deaf, was really on the point of death, and that it was not probable he should any more see her alive, was a reflection too excruciating to be conceived.

He immediately ordered a post-chaise, and, taking Mr. Arthur’s lady along with him, sat out post for the capital, bitterly condemning his inflexibility, and declaring that the future peace of his mind depended on his poor Eliza’s recovery.—We must do the old gentleman the justice to acknowledge, that he had certainly been, in this cruel affair, the least culpable of the family. His late lady had not only concealed from him the last application which she had received from her unfortunate daughter, but actually reported to him many false assertions which Mrs. Martin had propagated to the scandal and prejudice of that virtuous sufferer, which, whether he really credited or not, was nothing to the purpose; for, since Mrs. Butterfield herself chose to believe them, it was sufficient to prevent any effort of compassion on his part, had he been disposed to shew any; and that, we must think, was the case, for, though a weak man, he by no means possessed a malignant heart.

The morning was just dawning, when Mr. Butterfield and his daughter-in-law rapped at Mrs. Danby’s door. “How is my child? (cried he;) is she alive?—Shew me to her,—this instant let me take her in my arms!”

“Compose yourself a few minutes, my good Sir, (replied Mrs. Danby,) and I will step up stairs, and prepare her for this blessed sight.”

She did so, and, approaching softly to the bed, where Mrs. Wilmot laid in blissful expectation of the last moment, gently took her hand, kissed it, and asked how she felt herself. After taking every prudent precaution to prevent any fatal effects from surprise, Mrs. Danby acquainted her with her father’s arrival. A glow of satisfaction once more lighted the closing eyes of Eliza.—“And now (said she) I have received the completion of every thing desirable on earth. I die blest.”

“But you will live, I trust, my love, to enjoy the smile of paternal love.”

“No, (replied she, faintly,) it is past, and this unexpected joy hastens, I feel, the approach of dissolution; but I die full of gratitude and——.”

Here the transient glow which had been excited on her cheek began to disappear,—her eyes regained their former dimness,—she sunk exhausted on her pillow. Mrs. Danby flew to conduct the old gentleman to the room, who, as he approached the door, exclaimed, “Where is my long-lost child, my blessed Eliza?”

“O precious sound!” cried Mrs. Wilmot, and immediately, reclining her head on the bosom of Charlotte, with an extatic smile, expired.

Motionless as a statue, and exhibiting all the marks of unutterable anguish, the unhappy father stood suspended for some moments over his departed child,—his arms folded across his breast, his haggard countenance the image of wild distraction. It was thought expedient to remove him from the painful scene. In a sort of wild stupidity, he seemed insensible to every thing around him, and without opposition was conveyed back to the parlour.

Mr. Danby and the Captain, having been apprized of the awful event, at length arrived. The latter was not in a state of mind to suggest arguments of consolation, but Mr. Danby exerted every friendly endeavour to calm the anguish which seemed to pervade the soul of the wretched parent, yet in vain. He paid no attention to any thing that was either said or done, but sat with his eyes rivetted on the ground, sometimes heaving a dreadful groan, which was the only effort afflicted nature was observed to make for her relief.

Charlotte, informed of his deplorable condition, could no longer indulge a resentful feeling. She entered the parlour where he sat, and attempted to forget her own emotions in offering consolation to the venerable mourner, but without the least success. He remained in the same insensible attitude during the remainder of the day.

Towards evening, Mrs. Arthur Butterfield desired to see the corpse, which, now dressed in the habiliments of the dead, was placed in the coffin. Charlotte and Mrs. Danby accompanied her to the apartment, where they beheld Captain Overbury standing by the side of the coffin, pressing the cold hand of the lifeless Eliza to his lips, and bedewing it with tears. He started at their entrance, put his handkerchief to his eyes, and, without speaking, hastily retired. Charlotte, heaving a profound sigh, as soon as her brother was gone, exclaimed,

“How innumerable are the sources of affliction to a mind capable of sympathy! In vain we seek the aids of reason to sooth our own sorrows, while those of the friends we love pierce us no less deeply. What inauspicious fate forbade the union of two amiable hearts, which must have found the most sublime felicity in each other.—Surely something is amiss in the moral constitution of things.”

“But it will all, ere long, (replied Mrs. Danby,) be put on a better issue.”

C H A P. LV.

AT that instant, Mr. Butterfield's voice was heard raving in all the wildness of despair. The ladies hastily quitted the melancholy scene to prevent his viewing again what could only serve to augment his distress. "Sally, Sally, (cried he, in hollow accents,) take me back to Ashton! No,—stay, I will not go!—I will die here with my child!"

Mr. Danby, fearing the consequences of his affliction, was of opinion that it would really be best to convey him to the Priory, where, he said, he would take care to have Mrs. Wilmot's remains conveyed, in order to be interred in the burying-place of the family. This appeared to give him some little comfort, and he consented to return. "But, what! (said he,) must I tear myself from my murdered child?—aye, murdered by my cruelty! No, no, I will stay here, and we will be buried together." Finding he was about to relapse into his former melancholy condition, Mr. Danby gently took him by the arm, and led him to the carriage, where the duteous and afflicted Sally followed, endeavouring by every effort of tenderness to sooth the perturbations of his breast.

As nothing circulates with greater velocity than news in a country-village, the knowledge of this sad event was soon diffused throughout the whole parish of Ashton and its environs. Eliza, for the sweetness of her temper, had been the object of general esteem, and her fate now drew tears from every eye. Mrs. Butterfield's memory being universally execrated among them, her character was now lashed anew with the greatest severity. "Those (cried the tenants) who had no feeling for their own flesh and blood, could not be expected to shew kindness to others."

On the appointed day for the funeral, the road through which the hearse was to pass was lined, for a quarter of a mile, with the inhabitants of every house and cottage around. The solemnity of the minute-bell seemed to aggravate their sorrows and resentments, and, while some deplored the untimely fate of Eliza, the rest were uttering bitter imprecations on the cruelty which had promoted it. At length, a procession of the principal people in the neighbourhood, dressed in deep mourning, proceeded to meet the hearse, which now appeared, followed by Mrs. Danby, Captain Overbury, Charlotte, and her husband, together with the reverend Mr. Curtis, whom Eliza had particularly requested might perform the funeral obsequies, which he did with a solemnity and emphasis that caused tears to distil anew from every eye. When the corpse was deposited in the vault, by the side of that of the late Mrs. Butterfield, Charlotte could no longer repress her feelings, but, as she leaned on her brother's arm, exclaimed, "Cold, cold are thy resentments now, thou most implacable mother, and death gives thy injured child that place, which, when living, thy hard heart denied her."

Just as the solemn rite was finished, a commotion was observed among the common people, who had crowded in vast numbers into the church. A general hiss was heard, and a cry of "Away with her to the horse-pond!" The fact was, Mrs. Martin, whose conduct had been fully known in the village, had imprudently mingled amongst the spectators of the melancholy scene, and her presence on such an occasion excited the

indignation of that class of people who are usually seen to be warm in their resentments of whatever militates against their uncultured ideas of honesty and uprightness of heart. They had already seized that vile woman, and were actually proceeding to put their ducking scheme into execution, when the interference of Captain Overbury and some other gentlemen repressed, in some degree, their fury; but, though, by these means, she rather escaped their hold, yet no remonstrances could prevent them from following her, as she fled, with a shower of stones and dirt, till she took shelter in a cottage, the door of which was already open, or it is probable she would not there have been readily granted a retreat.

Mr. Butterfield had been incapable of attending the remains of his child to the grave, and Mr. Arthur thought best, for certain reasons, to absent himself also. At the request of the former, Captain Overbury, and the rest of that amiable party, consented to pass a day or two at the Priory, in which time the discourses of Mr. Curtis had happily succeeded in diffusing the mild beams of pious consolation through the tortured bosom of the afflicted parent. “Be comforted, Sir, (said that good man,) and disengage your views from the present scene of things. All yet is right,—is best. Your daughter, suffering, dying by the consequences of her own mistakes and your severity, (humanly so to speak,) is more advantaged than if she had still reclined in the fond bosom of ease and kind indulgence. It is thus we are permitted to act under the influence of depraved nature, and, by our corrupt passions, throw misery and confusion over the moral scene, but it would not be so allowed, were it not certain that the whole should terminate in a future glorious state of order, harmony, and beauty.”

Mr. Butterfield was so much enamoured of the piety, good sense, and Christian virtues of that reverend gentleman, besides, animated by the liveliest gratitude for his benevolent conduct to Mrs. Wilmot, that he was very desirous of detaining him constantly with him, and to that end offered him the possession of a very valuable benefice, to which he had then the right of presentation. But Mr. Curtis declared, that no prospect of emolument should ever tempt him to desert his flock in town, amongst whom, he said, he trusted that his labours had not been wholly unsuccessful. However, he promised to see the poor old gentleman as often as opportunity should give leave, and, in the mean time, if his counsels and exhortations should appear of service in alleviating the force of sorrow, he would, from time to time, convey such by letter as the nature of the case required, and his own humble talents should suggest.

In fine, Charlotte and the rest of that worthy company returned to their respective homes, to enjoy, in their several situations, those rich rewards which never fail to crown the philanthropic heart. Mr. Butterfield was in time, and by the correspondence he held with Mr. Curtis, brought to submit to the afflictive stroke of Providence with patience, humility, and resignation; but, having himself felt the force of mental anguish, his heart was ever after open to the distresses of others, and rendered him a sympathetic friend to every son or daughter of affliction.

The character of Mr. Arthur was softened into an approximation to virtue, by the recent incident which had taught him, that it was possible even for a profound

philosopher to err in the common obligations of social life. By degrees, he descended from the unamiable heights of pride and narrow self-love, and was convinced, that, though the acquisitions of literature and study may very properly adorn, yet active benevolence alone is that which imparts real dignity to a human being.

FINIS.