

CAROLINE;
OR, THE
DIVERSITIES
OF
FORTUNE:
A
NOVEL.
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOLUME FIRST.

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CAROLINE,

OR THE

DIVERSITIES of FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

Description of a Family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER II.

Unexpected good Fortune.

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

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

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

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

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

“SIR,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER III.

The uncertainty of human Felicity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV.

Another Description of a Family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER V.

An accomplished Beauty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VI.

Domestic Happiness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VII.

Chapter of Cross Accidents.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VIII.

A Short Journey.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IX.

A Declaration.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER X.

A Peep at the great World.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XI.

The Man of Taste.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XII.

A Removal.

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

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

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

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

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

“My dear Miss Ashford,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XIII.

A Winter's Retirement with an old Maid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

F. West.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XIV.

A Proposal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XV.

A Bustle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

END OF VOL. I.